

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY



Members Bulletin February 2021

www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

Notes from the Chair

In my last piece I mentioned the talks that we have lined up for the first three months of 2021, and I would now like to mention the talk that I would like to arrange for April.

I have asked historian Peter Crowhurst to talk about the life of Cecil Rhodes. The only connection that Cecil Rhodes has with Chepstow that I know of is through me in that I went to the same Oxford college as Rhodes which is the college that has the

statue of Rhodes that the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign wants to tear down.

This isn't entirely a self-indulgent talk but we are all interested in history and there is much discussion at the moment about the preservation or otherwise of symbols of our past.

However, if any members feel that a talk about Rhodes would be too controversial at the moment then please let us know.

To bring us back from controversy, in May, as it is a 70th anniversary, I am showing a video presentation of the Festival of Britain 1951 which I remember visiting on the South Bank in London as an excited 7 year old.

Do many of you remember it too? If so let us know.

Finally I have noticed how members greet and talk to each other when they join the meetings. At present I switch on the computer at 6.50 pm before each meeting so if you want to join and chat before the meeting please do.

If this catches on I could start the computer at 6.45pm so that members can have a social quarter of an hour before the meeting. Up to you – I'll see how many sign on before 7pm next time.

After hearing the dire warnings about Covid-19 coming from the government at present I do hope that all members will follow the rules and keep themselves safe.

Next Zoom Meeting

David Scaysbrook

THE SECRET PLANE CRASH IN THE FOREST OF DEAN, 1942



Wednesday 17th February

at 7.00 pm – via Zoom

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 562 383 2571

Passcode: Waters

Geoff Sumner

Future Zoom meetings

Wednesday 3rd March

Civic and Amenity meeting with local councillors see next column >>

Wednesday 17th March

Dr Rhian Morgan

**The King's DNA –
The Discovery of Richard III**

Wednesday 22nd April

Peter Crowhurst

Cecil Rhodes

Wednesday 19th May

Annual General Meeting, 2021

On 21st January, some 30+ Society members heard and saw, via Zoom, a fascinating talk from Richard Hoyle on the development and work of the Chepstow Coastguard Rescue Team based at Beachley.

Last year the team had 83 separate emergency missions – on search, water and mud rescue tasks, in the Severn, Wye and Usk, covering a wide area stretching from Newport up as far as Gloucester and Bigsweir.

A REMINDER:

Volunteers are needed, each month, to write a brief summary of each talk, for inclusion in the bulletin - so that those unable to attend via Zoom can see what they missed!

Please let me know if you are able to provide a brief (300 words or so) summary of one of the forthcoming talks, for our members.

Guy

CIVIC AND AMENITY GROUP

- Along with this bulletin, you should see notes on **current planning applications** in the town, which have been put together by Simon Maddison. Hopefully, this is the first of a continuing series of reports - maybe monthly, or more occasional - that Simon will prepare for the Society.

Of course, where there are development proposals about which we as a Society have concerns, we will make our views known.

- We have also forwarded, to Monmouthshire County Council, our comments on their recent **Local Development Plan** consultation document – for which we are very grateful to Nicky Bailey in particular.

Our view, in summary, is that the housing figures suggested by the County Council are too high, but we support the proposed pattern of distribution across the county. When further details emerge in later stages, we will certainly express our views about how any future development should be distributed within and around the town.

- **Following on from our very useful Zoom session with local councillors and others in December, we will be holding another session on 3rd March at 7pm. All members are of course welcome to take part, and we will circulate more details beforehand.**
- Our new “civic and amenity group” is getting off to a good start. Of course, we would love to see more members being involved – especially as, perhaps as soon as March, we hope to see the new draft Chepstow Place Plan being prepared for the Town Council, and we will need to be actively involved in that process.

We would welcome your thoughts on anything that is happening in the town – or that isn't, but should be happening!

**For more information, please contact
Guy Hamilton – ghmyrtle@gmail.com or
07786 500609 – in the first instance.**



In the Bayeux Tapestry, commissioned by Bishop Odo, William FitzOsbern may be represented by the red-bearded figure, second from the left, with King William next to him and Odo in the centre.

WILLIAM FITZOSBERN, EARL OF HEREFORD

Monday 22 February 2021 is the 950th anniversary of the death of the founder of Chepstow Castle (and several other castles in Wales), Chepstow Priory (St Mary's Church), and the Norman town of Chepstow (then called 'Striguil') - mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as founded by **Earl William FitzOsbern**.

The Domesday Book of 1086 says of Chepstow (Striguil) that the Castle was made by Earl William (FitzOsbern) and that by 1086 there was a town - *'The Castle of Estrighoiel was made by Earl William and in his time he paid only 40 shillings from ships going into the forest. In the time of Earl Roger, his son, this town paid £16.*

William FitzOsbern was the joint second in command of the Norman invasion of 1066 and, with Bishop Odo (who later commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry) was in command of England and parts of South Wales when William the Conqueror was back in Normandy.

William FitzOsbern was created 'Earl of Hereford'. He was responsible for the western defence of the new kingdom and building castles up the Wye Valley, starting with Chepstow.

FitzOsbern also founded the priory at Chepstow in 1067. It was attached to the Abbey of Cormeilles in Normandy, which he also founded, and where he

was buried in February 1071, 950 years ago this month.

With the new castle and priory, William FitzOsbern effectively founded the Norman town of Chepstow. The Castle, and the nave and west door of the priory, together with the central street plan, remain as key features of the town.

William FitzOsbern was in northern France in 1071 and was killed at the Battle of Cassel (near the Belgian border, 20 miles SW of Ypres) on 22 February 1071. His body was taken 150 miles south west to Cormeilles in Normandy where he was buried.

Almost nothing remains of Cormeilles Abbey today, unlike Chepstow Priory which still has its superb original Norman nave and arches.

The Chepstow–Cormeilles Town Twinning Association founded in 1975 is also testimony to the links between the two towns. Chepstow and Cormeilles have one of the oldest links between towns anywhere in the world, and in 2017 the Mayors of Cormeilles and Chepstow shook hands in front of the Norman tower of the castle, to celebrate the 950th anniversary of the link between the two towns.

John Burrows

THE SEVERN PRINCESS



Tim Ryan writes:

In these difficult times, perhaps we can offer some optimism regarding the last of the River Severn ferries, the Severn Princess, in spite of some pauses caused by lockdown.

She sits, high and dry, next to what was Brunel's famous Tubular Bridge in Chepstow.

Unfortunately for the general public she is not accessible at this moment due to housing developments in the Riverside area.

However, the Ferry Project has taken some significant steps forward recently.

Firstly we are now formally established as a Registered Charity, the Severn Princess Preservation Trust.

This was a painstaking process but we feel it shows that the relevant authorities believe that our aim to cosmetically restore the boat is an achievable and worthwhile one.

Where she currently rests is close to the end of the Wales Coast Path and we believe she would be the perfect "museum piece" at the end of that Path.

The establishment of the trust has attracted some new and energetic trustees, and in recent months not only has there been considerable work behind the scenes but also some very pleasing and rewarding physical work on the ferry itself.

Another very pleasing addition to what we are doing is a weekly "Ferry Story" on the "*Chepstow: A Great Place To Go*" Facebook page.





We have also put up some fantastic old photos of the boats and the old cars as well. A real “journey through the past”, and some of these stories have had more than 3,000 visits.

That tells us that there is real interest out there and a will for us to succeed.

So what is in the pipeline?

Firstly, we have a programme of work we would like to be carried out as soon as possible, but clearly lockdown doesn't allow. This includes the removal of the decking timbers and the sealing of the metal deck itself to prevent any deterioration.

Secondly, we hope to have a ferry-dedicated Facebook page and website up and running in the

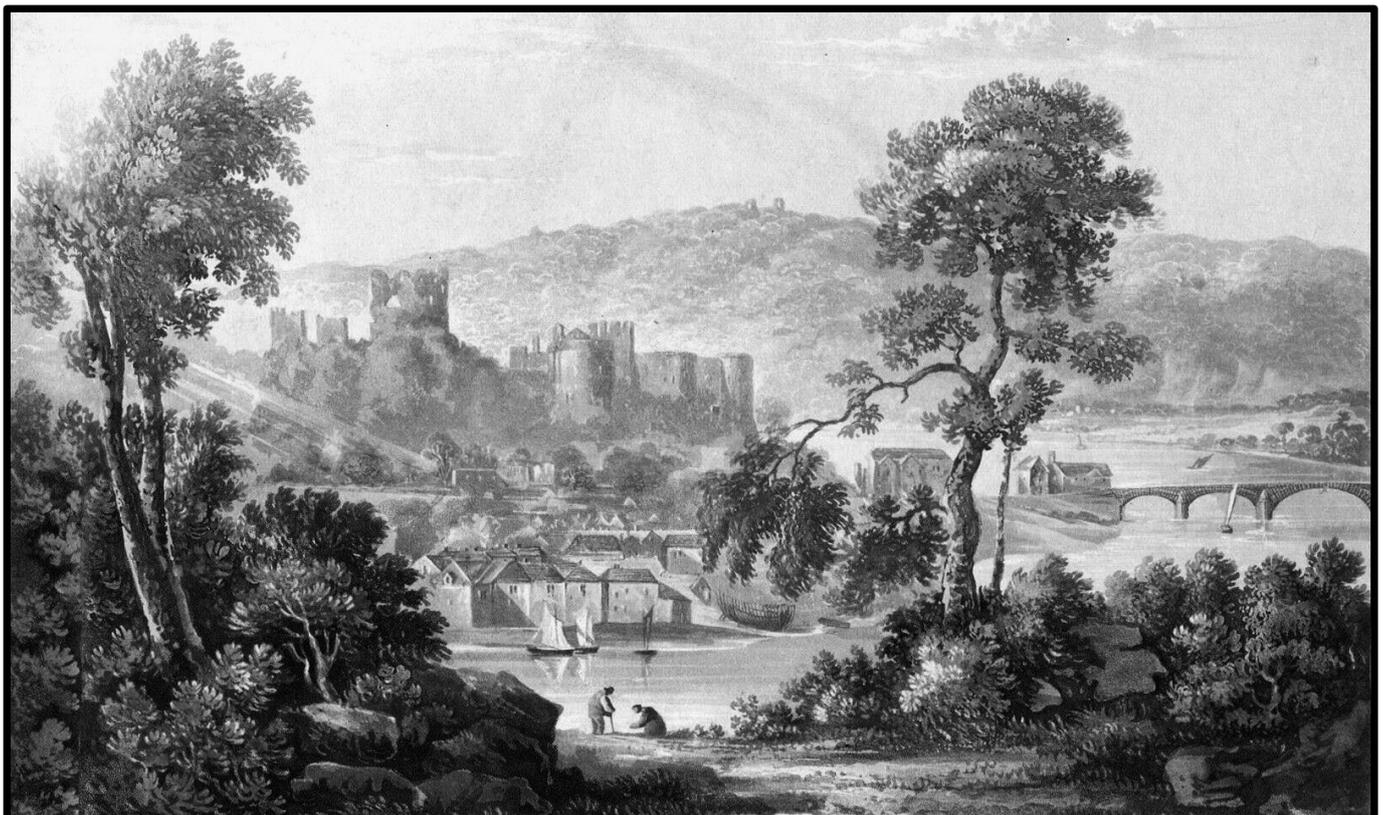
near future and we are giving thought to the possibility of putting the Ferry Stories into a book for publishing for the Project.

Thirdly, we have commissioned greeting cards from popular local artist Susie Grindey which will be available at the Chepstow Tourist Information Centre when possible.

They are available at present on Susie's website - www.susiegrindey.co.uk/the-severn-princess.html. We are really chuffed with the design.

We are also in preliminary discussions with another interested party.

In short then, we are very optimistic about the future, and we thank you for your continued interest.



The castle and bridge, as pictured in 1821