

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

May 2021



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

**Wednesday 19th May
7 pm**

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 562 383 2571

Passcode: Waters

Annual General Meeting

The business will include the election of Officers of the Society, the appointment of appropriate auditors, and the consideration of annual reports by the appropriate Officers of the work done by or under the auspices of the Society and of the audited accounts. A President and Vice President will also be elected at this meeting. Nominations for Officers of the Society may be given at the Annual General Meeting.

and talk by
Anne Rainsbury
on **Nathaniel Wells**
of Piercefield



CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Members,

For the second time this report has been largely dictated by the form of activity permitted by the government regulations to minimise the effect of the Covid-19 virus.

This has meant that the trips organised for members by Keith and Sallie James have had to be cancelled this year and the meetings in the Drill Hall or anywhere else for that matter have not been possible.

Instead we have experienced talks by the medium of Zoom and while the social side of the Society has consequently been somewhat limited members have been able to keep in touch with each other in the period before the talks start.

One of the good points about talks by Zoom is that we have been able to secure talks by speakers living a good way from Chepstow for comparatively little cost

Thus although in June we had a local speaker, David Scaysbrook talking about a plane crash in the Forest of Dean in 1942, in September we were able to hear Dr Sarah Barber on the life of Henry Marten; In October we heard Paul Barnett talking about the Mulberry Harbour, and we finished the year with a fascinating talk by Dr Gillian White on Henry VIII and the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

We started 2021 with a talk on HM Coastguard from the local coastguard officer Richard Hoyle and in March we had a particularly popular talk by Dr Rhian Morgan on the discovery and identification of the remains of Richard III in Leicester.

contd.

A somewhat controversial talk was given in April on Cecil Rhodes by author Peter Crowhurst and we are delighted that this is followed in May by a talk by our own Anne Rainsbury on Nathaniel Wells of Piercefield.

A noteworthy introduction to the Society's programme was introduced this year by our Secretary Guy Hamilton, who started a series of Zoom meetings under the Civic section of our Society with members experienced in this field and involving local Councillors. This filled a somewhat neglected part of the Society's brief and promises much for the future.

There has been another personnel change this year. Marian Thomas is stepping down as our Membership secretary after 15 years' service and while we are sorry to see her go, we thank her for all her years of service and are delighted that Angela Middleditch has volunteered to take her place. So a new person will be chasing you for your subscription if you forget!

Incidentally, although we waived the requirement for subscription payment last year because of the Covid crisis, now that we are able to present a full programme, albeit remotely, we feel that subscriptions should be paid once again.

Finally I must thank our Secretary Guy Hamilton for producing this Newsletter to keep all members in touch during this difficult period. I hope that you feel that it has helped and we'll keep it going until we can all meet again.

Geoff Sumner

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

for the year from 1st April 2021 are now overdue. They remain at the old rate of £10 per person for the year.

If you have not yet paid, please send a cheque payable to The Chepstow Society to Marian Thomas, 24 Severn Crescent, Chepstow NP16 5EA, or if it is easier to pay by direct transfer, please contact our Treasurer, David Nicholls, david.m.nicholls5@btinternet.com



EXCURSIONS

Thanks to the fantastic support we have had from our members, and the great service from Majestic, we have decided to investigate the possibility of a holiday to the Kent Coast next year – in the week beginning 25th April 2022, so please keep that date clear.

At this early stage we cannot give you many details as hotels are not fully open yet.

Ibis hotels are still promising us a refund on our Belgium trip. If we get it, we will refund the outstanding balance. This is annoying because they insisted we pay them way in advance before they would except our booking.

We are also looking at a couple of excursions for the autumn, if restrictions are eased.

Firstly, carried over from last year, the visit to the recycling centre at Gloucester...

And, possibly, a day trip to Brooklands Transport Museum in South London.

Hopefully we will have more information about these excursions in the next couple of months.

If anyone has any other ideas or would like to organise any other trips or visits, please let us know.

Keith and Sallie James

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kp.james@btinternet.com

SECRETARY'S REPORT

In becoming Secretary last year, I was conscious that the reason that the Society exists is to benefit our town and wider community.

That is, to advance the study of "local and natural history" in the area, to encourage its protection and enhancement, and to "stimulate public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of the area..."

Of course, the benefits we provide for our own members - the regular talks, excursions, these bulletins, and indeed the social aspects of the Society - are of vital importance.

We need to make sure that they continue, when we are able to do so. The monthly talks facilitated by Geoff via Zoom, have been invaluable in maintaining contact - though I'm very conscious that, for whatever reason, many of our members do not take part. Hopefully we will be able to reinstate our usual meetings quite soon.

But over the last few months my focus has been to try and connect the Society better with the wider world.

The quarterly "civic and amenity" Zoom meetings which we started last year have, so far, proved to be a useful way in which the Society can communicate with, and perhaps influence, local councillors, and liaise with other local groups that have overlapping interests with us. I hope those connections will develop and continue.

TOWN WALKS

We would like to restart our summer evening walks around the historic town centre this summer, taking current COVID guidance into account.

But, we *DESPERATELY* need one or two (or more) new volunteers to help lead the walks – so we can show groups of about 10, more or less, around the riverside and town centre and point out items of historic interest. Full training provided! (well, useful briefing note, at the very least).

If interested, please contact Guy by email or on 07786 500609.



We also communicate with the wider world – not so much through printed publications this year, but through our much improved website (www.chepstowsociety.co.uk), and our Facebook page. These bulletins are also available on our website.

I hope members do look at those pages. I use them frequently, as a public forum in which to pass on important updates and useful links. The Society now has some 400 followers on Facebook. Most are not (yet) paid-up members, but everyone who sees our posts is now aware of what the Society does, and where our interests lie.

Hopefully, that first step may eventually be reflected in an increased (and, dare I say, younger...) membership, and those who support the Society's underlying aims and objectives can take it forward into the future.

One difficulty, of course, is that others may not see much value in linking with us, unless we are seen to be doing something that is relevant to them.

Much more needs to be done to promote and develop the Society – in promoting interest in our local history, for instance - and if I stay as Secretary I'd welcome new ideas and support in taking them forward.

Finally, I must pay a brief tribute to Henry Hodges, whose time as Secretary lasted for at least thirty years (no-one can quite remember!). Henry is now our President, and when we are eventually able to reconvene in person I'm sure we will all show our gratitude for his unrivalled service to the Society.

I'm also grateful to Geoff and my other colleagues on the committee, for the support I've had over the last year.

Guy Hamilton
ghmyrtle@gmail.com

Committee News

The Society's committee "met" via Zoom at the end of April. Among other matters discussed....

Drill Hall

There is still no certainty on when the Drill Hall will be able to reopen for meetings, or what the arrangements will be – for instance, on the number of people allowed to be inside. We are keeping this under close review, and looking at whether "mixed" meetings (with some people physically present and others accessing it via Zoom) might be possible.

Town walks

We are looking at whether we will be able to reinstate the early evening guided walks around the riverside and town centre in the summer.

Videos

We are also looking at helping to prepare one or more short videos about the town's history, for our website, YouTube, etc.

Plaques

Through Ned Heywood and the Museum, we are hoping to sponsor some further plaques around the town, to commemorate notable local individuals and buildings of historic interest.

Museum and Tourist Information Centre

It is hoped that these will reopen in the summer, though the hours and visiting details are still uncertain.

If any members have any thoughts or comments about the Society's current activities, please contact Guy –
ghmyrtle@gmail.com or 07786 500609

Forthcoming meetings

These will be held via Zoom, until such time as we are able to meet in the Drill Hall again.

All talks are subject to change, depending on circumstances.

Wednesday 2nd June

Civic and amenity meeting with councillors and others

Wednesday 16th June

The Festival of Britain, 1951

Wednesday 21st July

Stephen Wells

The Story of Butlins

Wednesday 15th September

David Williams

The History of High Street Shopping

Wednesday 20th October

Philip Ashford

The Berkeley Plantation in Virginia, 1619-22

Wednesday 17th November

Dr Frances Hurd

The Birth of the English Parish Church

Wednesday 19th January 2022

Simon Draper

Surnames and Local History

Wednesday 16th February

Simon Waterfield

The Agincourt Archer

The Rise of Cecil Rhodes 1853-1902

A Flawed Colossus



At the Zoom meeting on 21st April, Society members saw and heard historian Peter Crowhurst give an overview of the life and career of Cecil Rhodes, the 19th century businessman and imperialist.

He made a fortune in diamond and gold mining before becoming prime minister of the Cape Colony. A favourite of Queen Victoria, he tried to develop British interests across most of southern Africa. But he held avowedly racist views, and helped entrench the segregationist policies that later became *apartheid*.



So, should
memorials that
were raised in
his honour be
removed in the
light of current
attitudes, or is
that part of a
“cancel culture”
that should be
resisted? Plenty
of food for
thought there,
and scope for

Peter Crowhurst’s website, where these issues are discussed, is www.britishempire.me.uk

Our apologies for the technical problems at the start of the meeting – if they persisted for you, for more than a few minutes, please let us know so that we can ensure that they are not repeated.

Welcome to Army Apprentices College and Beachley Old Boys Association



www.armyapprenticecollegechepstow.co.uk

This website has been built for use by all those who served at Beachley Camp, Chepstow.

It matters not whether you were an army apprentice, on the permanent staff or a member of the civilian staff. Please use the site to contact old friends, purchase goods from the BOBA shop, look at old photographs or keep abreast of what BOBA is up to.

I am an ex ‘Beachley Boy’ and like many others settled in the Chepstow area on retirement. I now live in the new development at Severn Quay.

The apprentice era (1923–1994) had a significant impact on the town. I, for example, was involved in the refurbishment of the castle gates in the early 60’s.

A group of local old boys have developed, on behalf of them all, a heritage centre by the old Beachley Gate.

A part of this development is a new website dedicated to this period.

Are you able to help us spread the word by making members aware of the new site?

Bill Nichol

FUTURE CHEPSTOW

Chepstow Town Council is working on a new initiative that will inform and shape the future development of our town - the Chepstow Place Plan.

They write:

“Though focused mainly on issues around planning, design and development, the Chepstow Place Plan can also highlight other issues of local concern and set priorities for addressing issues of well-being, including how funds are spent in the future for the benefit of the whole Chepstow community.”

“WHY A PLACE PLAN FOR CHEPSTOW?”

With challenges we face from Covid-19 to climate crisis, the work of planning for the future is more important than ever.

We need to understand our local priorities, challenges and aspirations in order to shape the content of our Place Plan.

Using a variety of methods over an 18 month to 2 year period, from workshops to online mapping, we want to engage with the people who live and work in Chepstow to inform the drafting of a Place Plan for our town.

In summary, a Place Plan:

- sets out local level planning guidance on the use and development of land;
- links into, strengthens and localises planning policies set out by Monmouthshire County Council;
- is written by local people who know an area well and can add more detail to the work done by the planners, and
- can include a non-planning part covering a wide range of local issues”

As well as stakeholder groups – in which the Chepstow Society will be involved – there are also “community focus groups” open to everyone locally. These are on

- **Saturday 22nd May, 10.30 am**
- **Monday 24th May, 7 pm**

For further information, please contact future@chepstow.co.uk

or see the website

www.futurechepstow.co.uk

Art History

One-off lectures online in May and June with MonLife Heritage Museums

For all lovers of art and art history there are some special sessions for the spring and summer ahead. Working with popular local art history lecturer Eleanor Bird, there are two one-off afternoon lecture sessions over the spring and summer.

In May the focus is on Albrecht Dürer, Sixteenth Century Superstar. Explore the work of the extraordinary German painter and printmaker, who was famous in all the courts of Europe by 1520 and was one of the first artistic superstars of the Renaissance. This talk - on **Monday 10 May or Saturday 15 May 2-4pm** - will also whet the appetite for the National Gallery's long-awaited autumn 2021 exhibition in London, *Dürer's Journeys*.



In June the spotlight is on John Constable. Constable – Capturing Light and Air will take a close look at the later work of one of the greatest exponents of the British landscape tradition. **Choose from Saturday 12 June or Monday 14 June 2-4pm.** An appetiser for the Royal Academy's exhibition, Late Constable, planned to open in London in October 2021

Booking is online only, please go to:

www.visitmonmouthshire.com/durer and
www.visitmonmouthshire.com/constable