

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

June 2021



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

Notes from the Chair

First I must express my thanks to the members for re-electing me to the position of Chair of your Society. I realise that there is not exactly a queue of applicants for this position but I hope it means that you are reasonably happy with the running of the Society and the speakers that I arrange.

Much credit must be given to the Executive Committee members who all work hard to make the Society the success that I believe it to be, and especially to Guy Hamilton, our Secretary, who has been the driving force this year in revivifying our Civic Section.

Members will note that I have altered our June programme by replacing the video presentation on the Festival of Britain with a talk by author Heather Hurley on Herefordshire's River Trade. It is becoming harder to find interesting talks on local topics and as this talk became available I thought that the Society should hear it. The video about the Festival of Britain will be shown at a later date.

We finish our programme before our summer break with, appropriately, a talk on Butlins.

I don't know how many of us have been to the traditional British holiday camp, but they were a very important social innovation after World War II in the 1950's and I well remember the Butlins camp on Barry island which ran from 1966 to 1996.

Finally I would mention that the Executive Committee will meet on July 16th when one of the items on the agenda will be how and when we can resume meetings in the Drill Hall.

While these are now permitted with some restrictions, particularly on the total numbers allowed, I am anxious not to place our members, most of whom are not in the first (or even second!) flush of youth, at any risk and as many of our members have mastered the intricacies of Zoom, it may be that our return may be delayed – particularly in view of the Covid variations now circulating.

If any of our members have any thoughts on this issue, please contact the Secretary or me.

Geoff Sumner

JUNE ZOOM MEETINGS

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 562 383 2571

Passcode: Waters

Wednesday 2nd June, 7 pm

**Civic and amenity meeting
with local councillors and
others**

Wednesday 16th June, 7 pm

**Talk by Heather Hurley
Herefordshire's River Trade –
Craft and Cargo on the Wye and Lugg**



EXCURSIONS

With lockdown beginning to ease, we are starting to look at excursions and holidays.

Firstly, carried forward from 2020 we have arranged a visit to UBB, Gloucestershire Energy and Waste facility.

This is booked for the morning of 11th November. At the moment we are planning to 'self' drive and then decide if members want to meet up for lunch.

For 2022, we would like to arrange a holiday in the spring, working with Majestic, who were excellent at refunding monies from the cancelled holiday to Belgium.

At the moment we are looking at locations in Kent and have pencilled in 25th April for 6 days, 5 nights.

The cost would be approximately £350 per person based on 40 people travelling. This includes admission costs and sundry expenses.

In order to move this forward we need some idea of numbers interested.

We would appreciate it if you can let us know by 3rd June, if you are interested.

However, this is still in the very early stages and nothing is set in stone.

Also, we are looking at a day trip to Brooklands transport museum for early summer 2022.

Obviously everything depends on COVID and government advice, but hopefully we can start looking forward to the future with confidence.

Keith and Sallie James

01594 529713

kp.james@btinternet.com

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

**Angela Middleditch, Penymorfa,
Mathern, Monmouthshire NP16 6JD**

or if it is easier to pay by direct transfer, please contact our Treasurer, David Nicholls,

david.m.nicholls5@btinternet.com

Chepstow Society Committee 2021/22

President:	Henry Hodges
Vice President:	Chris Penrose
Chairman:	Geoff Sumner
Vice-Chairman:	Keith James
Secretary:	Guy Hamilton
	ghmyrtle@gmail.com 07786 500609
Treasurer:	David Nicholls
Examiner of Accounts:	Chris Penrose
Membership Secretary:	Angela Middleditch
Programme Secretary:	Geoff Sumner
Civic and Amenities:	Simon Maddison
Excursions Secretary:	Sallie and Keith James
Publications Secretary:	Guy Hamilton
Museum:	Anne Rainsbury
Gwent CHA:	Chris Penrose
Natural Environment Secretary:	Vacant
Also committee members:	Nicky Bailey
	Harry Middleditch

Annual General Meeting 2021

The Society's 2021 AGM took place via Zoom on 19th May – on schedule, but only seven months after the last AGM, which was delayed in 2020 because of the pandemic.

Officers reported on actions over the year, most of which have already been reported in this bulletin.

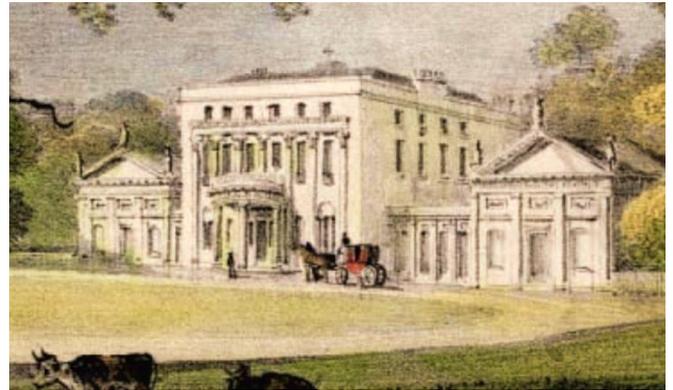
David Nicholls summarised the Society's financial position, which has obviously been affected by the decision not to charge subscriptions last year, and the lack of physical meetings, but remains healthy.

Most of the existing officers were re-elected unopposed, and Simon Maddison and Nicky Bailey have been confirmed as committee members, mainly involved at the moment with the Society's reinvigorated work on civic and amenity issues.

The main change to officers has been Marian Thomas's retirement, after fifteen years as Membership Secretary. As a token of thanks to Marian for her work, Keith James and Angela Middleditch – who now takes over as Membership Secretary – visited her before the AGM to present a bouquet of flowers, with the committee's best wishes and thanks for all her hard work in helping to keep the Society running smoothly.



After the AGM, Anne Rainsbury gave a thorough and fascinating talk covering her research on the background and life of Nathaniel Wells of Piercefield.



Wells was born in St Kitts in the Caribbean in 1779 - the son of a Cardiff-born merchant and sugar plantation owner, William Wells, and one of his slaves, known as Juggy.

Unlike many children born from similar relationships, Nathaniel was supported by his father, who sent him to school in England, and soon afterwards he inherited his father's property, including his slaves.

Nathaniel Wells bought Piercefield House in 1802. He lived there in grand and extravagant style, and became active in local society, but also got into serious debt. He became a Deputy Lieutenant, JP, church warden in St Arvans, and, in 1818, High Sheriff of Monmouthshire.

He still retained slaves in his estates in St Kitts until he accepted compensation payments from the government for releasing them, at a time when, through his second marriage, he had become connected to the family of William Wilberforce.

Eventually Wells sold Piercefield and moved to Bath, where he died in 1852. There is a memorial to him in St Arvans church. Many of his descendants live around the world, and were unaware of his background until research uncovered his parentage.

Anne was thanked for her excellent and revealing talk. Her research into Nathaniel Wells has been published as a chapter in a 2020 book, *Britain's Black Past*.

CIVIC AND AMENITY NOTES

High Street

There has been much discussion about the measures recently introduced by Monmouthshire county council (MCC) to pedestrianise the High Street, block off the access under the Town Arch, and remove the pelican crossing in Station Road (Coffee #1 / Superdrug).

The Society wrote to the town council (CTC) in mid-May to express its concerns over these changes; over inadequate public consultation; and over the effects of the closure of the High Street on the A48, and in particular on Moor Street and the junction at Hardwick Terrace. The letter can be downloaded from our website (under Civic and Amenity).

The changes are supposed to be temporary,, and were made as part of Wales-wide measures to allow town centres to recover from the pandemic - but it is clear that many CTC councillors feel the same way as the Society over the poor consultation, and over the consequences of the closure. Some councillors feel that what was originally proposed is not what has now been put in place, and in fact is more dangerous and discouraging to shoppers than the previous traffic arrangements.

A special meeting between the town council and representatives of MCC, including the cabinet member responsible, and officers, took place on 19th May (the same night as our AGM). It was both fractious and enlightening, but there were no changes emerging. The county council still insists that the removal of the pelican crossing allows safe passage for pedestrians, when it clearly makes crossing more dangerous for those with limited mobility or sight.



The knock-on effects of the road closure on traffic in Moor Street, and the possibilities of introducing either time-limited pedestrian-only use of the High Street, or a one-way system in both the High Street and Moor Street, will not be considered until the end of the current “experiment”, at some time later in the year.

Since the meeting, the work seems to have paused, with no zebra crossing painted at the crossing point, and a new cafe seating area in the middle of the High Street, as well as wooden planters.

This whole issue will come up again at our Civic and Amenity meeting via Zoom on 2nd June, when you will be able to put questions to local councillors and county council officers.

Future Chepstow place plan

Consultative focus groups on the “place plan” being led by CTC with outside consultants have now been held. The Society was represented at both the stakeholder groups, and a range of interesting ideas came forward. The Future Chepstow website – www.futurechepstow.co.uk – remains open to all, for comments to be made, for instance by adding pins with suggestions onto a plan of the town.

The consultants will now put the ideas together into a report to CTC, and come back for further consultations over the next few months – the dates are not yet certain.

Minor Injuries Unit

The Society has joined with the town council in appealing to the Health Board to reinstate the Minor Injuries Unit in Chepstow, which closed in 2011. The situation may now worsen with the closure of facilities in the Forest of Dean, which would leave no provision in the 50 miles or so between Newport and Gloucester.

We have also been consulted by the town council over improving the signage for the public toilets opposite the bus station in Thomas Street.

These and other matters will be discussed at our next quarterly Civic and Amenities meeting, via Zoom on Wednesday 2nd June at 7 pm. All members are invited.

Guy Hamilton

ST MARY'S PRIORY CHEPSTOW

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

St Mary's is at serious risk of closing within the year!

We are starting a **Friends of St Mary's** to help ensure its long-term future.

If you are interested in helping St Mary's to remain open we are holding a Public Consultation **in St Mary's & via Zoom at 7.30pm on Thursday 10th June 2021**

To register your attendance in person or to receive the Zoom Link please email revphilipaveray@gmail.com

You may be aware that the financial responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of St Mary's currently falls solely on the congregation members of the church.

Given the considerable cost of maintaining such an ancient building we will need to close the building by the end of this year unless we can gain the financial support of the Chepstow community.

Therefore we are holding a public consultation on 10th June to see if the Chepstow community wish to keep St Mary's Priory open and form a Friends of St Mary's to raise money for its ongoing maintenance and future improvement as prime venue for the whole community as well as a place of ongoing for worship as it has been for the last 950yrs.

We are hoping as a result of the meeting on 10th to identify several people willing to form the Friends committee and establish the Friends of St Mary's as a registered charity and begin seeking memberships and organising fundraising.

Rev. Philip Averay

Forthcoming Society 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 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