

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

August 2021



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



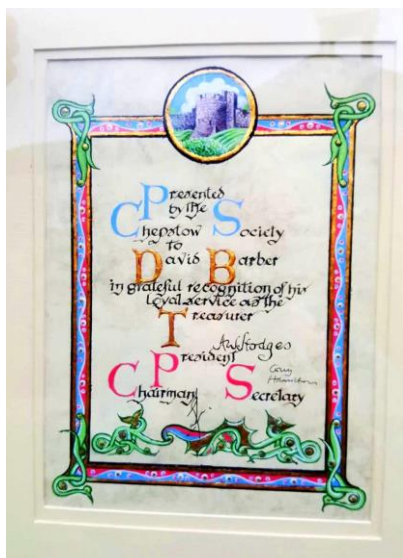
PRESENTATION TO DAVID BARBER



Several committee members met at Sedbury Park at the end of July, to present a well-deserved commemorative scroll to David Barber.

David was an active member of the Society's committee for many years, including stints as Chairman (2005-09) and Treasurer (2012-20).

The beautifully designed and framed scroll, hand drawn by Keith Underwood, was signed by officers of the Society, and was presented to David and his wife Janet by our vice-chairman Keith James.



Notes from the Chair

At their meeting in July, your Executive Committee spent some time considering when we should reverting to 'in person' meetings as opposed to Zoom meetings.

We quite appreciate how much members enjoy the meetings in the Drill Hall, but, as far as we can see, the present regulations do not permit meetings which are not socially distanced, and any socialising with or without tea or coffee would be practically impossible.

We have decided therefore to continue the Zoom meetings until the October meeting at least, to see if conditions improve.

The 20th October date at this stage is very much a target and, as I read about the worrying increase in Covid infections, and the government warning about a possible 'flu epidemic this autumn - and bearing in mind the (forgive me) rather advanced age of many of our members - I feel that we should proceed very cautiously and possibly stay with Zoom until 2022.

We would however very much like to know what members feel about the time to return to the Drill Hall, and would like as many members as possible to contact us, to let us know your views.

Ideally, please contact myself on geoffcesumner@gmail.com or 01291 624758, or the Secretary on ghmyrtle@gmail.com, or any member of the Executive Committee before our next committee meeting on 30th September.

In the meantime, have a good summer, keep safe and we'll meet up again in September.

Geoff Sumner

RON KINSEY

One of our members, Ron Kinsey, passed away recently.

Chris Penrose writes:

Rosemary and I first met Margaret and Ron some 25 years ago, regularly walking with U3A, often on a challenging walk led by Margaret.

Following Ron's amazing recovery from a near fatal fall, walking along the cliff path at Sedbury some years ago, his activities were restricted, but we enjoyed his company at Chepstow Society meetings and film nights at the Drill Hall.

We continued to arrange regular house meetings until fairly recently, for tea and a cake, and Margaret and I still meet for a chat and to exchange past memories.

Ron had a dry sense of humour and I shall always cherish a comment he made during a walk where the number of gentlemen matched the number of ladies. This was an almost unprecedented event! When I pointed this out he commented "It only needs one lady for a majority!"

Ron was a good friend and we will miss him.

Marian Thomas adds:

Ron and Margaret were keen walkers not only with local groups - Ramblers and our U3A group - but doing long distance walks too. For many years they raised funds for Amnesty International by giving illustrated talks about their travels.



EXCURSIONS

Holiday, 25th April 2022 - update

First of all, thank you to everyone who has paid their deposit for next year's holiday to Kent.

At the moment, everything is looking very positive that the holiday will go ahead, but in these 'strange' times nothing is guaranteed.

Our aim was to get 40 members to book and we have 34 confirmed at present, so we need another six to secure the reduced rate. So please tell your friends, relations and colleagues and help to make this venture successful.

Anyone requiring more information, or booking forms, should contact Keith James -

01594 529713 or

kp.james@btinternet.com

MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to those of you who have responded to last month's request to rejoin or update your membership details.

I am hoping to do a complete audit of memberships this month, and will then be sending out a gentle reminder to those of you whose details are not complete.

One of our members, Mr B W Thomas who lives in Wrexham, has indicated that he would like to be in touch with any member who knows him. If you would like to phone him, any morning, please get in touch with me - chepsocmemb@gmail.com - and I can give you his number.

Angela Middleditch

JAMES STEPHENS, 1821-1889

August 8th 2021 marks the bicentenary of the birth of one of Chepstow's most influential and notable – if now largely forgotten - sons.

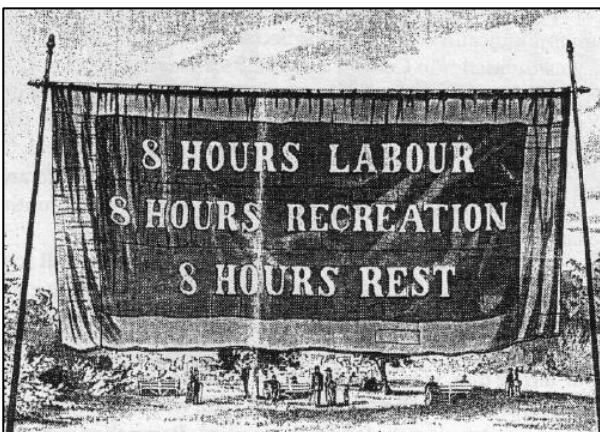


James Stephens was born in 1821, in Davis Court (or Davies's Court) – an area of tightly packed housing next to the Montague Almshouses in Upper Church Street.

The second son of a stonemason, he followed his father's trade and went to work in Newport, where he was injured in a fall from 30 feet. He became a follower of the Chartist movement, seeking rights for working people, and was involved in the 1839 rising when soldiers opened fire on the crowd of protesters outside the Westgate Hotel in Newport.

Stephens escaped, and found work as a stonemason in London. He was fired from his work on Windsor Castle when his political sympathies became known, but remained active with the Chartists and worked on the new Houses of Parliament and other buildings. In London, he married and had two sons.

But the lure of the gold rush in Australia called him, and with his family he emigrated to Melbourne, arriving in 1853 in time to help build the booming city there. Again, he became involved in activism. He became one of the leaders of the movement there for an eight hour day – “8 Hours Work, 8 Hours Recreation, 8 Hours Rest”.



While Stephens did not start the Eight Hour Movement, he led it to a successful conclusion in the state of Victoria, achieving the movement's aims in 1856 – eight hours work, for the same pay as the stonemasons had previously had to work for ten. Soon, the movement for an eight hour day spread around the world.

His biographer, writing in the 1940s, described Stephens as **“the man to whom, more than any other individual, Australians owe the conditions under which they live today.”**

Stephens later fell out with some of his colleagues, his work diminished, and he became frail and impoverished, though in his final days the trade unions mounted a successful financial appeal to help support him and his family.

He died in 1889, and his activities were largely forgotten – both in Australia, though the success of the campaign itself was celebrated in annual marches for many decades, and in his home town of Chepstow.

In more recent years, his grave in Melbourne has been restored and, in Chepstow, a road on a new estate in Thornwell bears his name.

I am being helped by some of James Stephens' descendants in Australia in finding out more about his life.

The Chepstow Society is now hoping, with Ned Heywood's assistance, to prepare and install a commemorative plaque close to Stephens' birthplace in the coming months.

Guy Hamilton



The top of the 12 metre tall Eight Hour Day monument in Melbourne

BITS & PIECES

- The Society has supported recent campaigning by the town council for the reopening of the Minor Injuries Unit at Chepstow Hospital – but, the signs from the Health Board are not promising, and there are wider concerns about the future of hospital facilities in the town.
- Our suggestion that the Union Jack on the opposite site of the river, next to the Gloucester Hole, should be repainted, is being taken up by the town council. The flag was first painted for George V's silver jubilee in 1935, so it would be appropriate to have it repainted for the Queen's platinum jubilee in 2022.
- We have made suggestions to the town council for clearer signs for the public toilet opposite the bus station in Thomas Street.

TOWN WALKS 2021

Our informal and informative walking tours around the historic riverside and town centre continue every Wednesday in August.

Tell your friends!

Weds. 4th August, 6 30 pm
Weds. 11th August, 6 30 pm
Weds. 18th August, 6 30 pm
Weds 25th August, 6 30 pm

Meet outside the Tourist Information Centre, opposite the Castle - £3 per person, payable by cash only, at the start of the walk.

Please book in advance if possible – text or call 07786 500609

PLEASE LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS

about the possibility of meeting again in the Drill Hall – whether, and when, you would feel comfortable with doing that.

As the regulations in Wales ease, it may be possible to meet in coming months – subject to any continuing restrictions over social distancing, mask wearing, etc.

Or, would you prefer to continue with Zoom meetings through the autumn and winter?

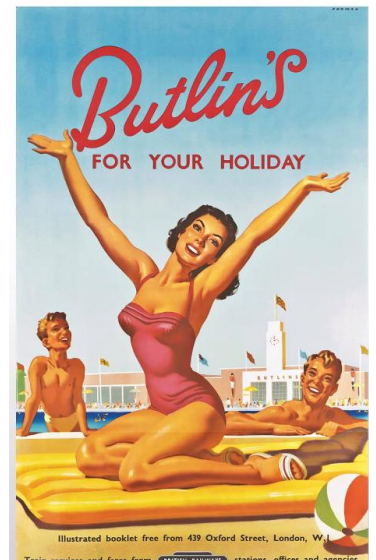
Your thoughts are welcome – to Geoff Sumner, geoffcesumner@gmail.com or 01291 624758, and/or to Guy Hamilton, ghmyrtle@gmail.com or 07786 500609

Our monthly Zoom talk on 21st July came from Stephen Wells, a one-time Butlin's Redcoat who became responsible for booking some of the biggest star names in show business for the holiday company.

He took us through the history of the company, from the time when Billy Butlin, born in South Africa, ran his first hoopla stall in Bristol after the First World War, through to the 1950s – when Butlin's sold 20% of all the holidays taken in the country, ran nine massive holiday camps, and hosted many major stars of the era.

Stephen told us, via Zoom, informative anecdotes of the people he had encountered in his career, including such stars as Des O'Connor, Ringo Starr, Max Wall and Josef Locke.

A most entertaining talk, enjoyed by all.



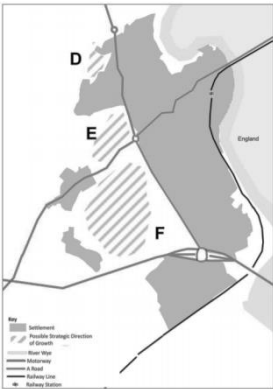
CIVIC AND AMENITY NOTES

The last month has seen the start of consultations on the Preferred Strategy stage of the **Replacement Local Development Plan** (RLDP) for Monmouthshire. Comments need to be made to the County Council **by the end of August**.

<https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/plan-preparation/preferred-strategy/>

New development is proposed to be focused on the towns – Chepstow, Abergavenny, Monmouth, and the Severnside (Caldicot/Magor) area.

The proposals include 1521 new dwellings at Chepstow, 2018-33, of which 580 are already built or committed, 212 are assumed on small or windfall sites, and 729 would be on new sites.



Three possible areas for new housing development are considered:

D - north of the Bayfield estate (10 ha.)

E - between the Bayfield estate and A48 (i.e. St Lawrence) (33 ha.)

F - between the A48 and M48 (i.e. Wyelands, etc.) (c.100 ha.)

The RLDP report says:

Future growth of the town...is constrained due to a range of local and national environmental and heritage designations and its location on the River Wye / border with England. Chepstow's landscape sensitivity to residential development is high and high/medium to the north and south of Chepstow with medium sensitivity recorded for an area of land to west of Chepstow. The area immediately north of the town lies within the Wye Valley AONB. Land to the west of the A466 is currently protected in the Adopted LDP by a "green wedge" policy to ensure the town's physical separation from Pwllmeyric and Mathern, although current green wedge designations will be reviewed as part of the RLDP process. South of the A48, the undeveloped land is also within a conservation area and, in part, within

a designated historic park and garden. There are also highway capacity issues which will need to be addressed as part of any future development proposals....

There are of course many other policies and proposals in the document, and there is also a "Self-Assessment of the Preferred Strategy against the Tests of Soundness".

The Society will be putting together its response over the next few weeks, and members' thoughts are welcome – by email to me, or of course directly to the county council through their website.

Meanwhile, the town council's "place plan" – **Future Chepstow** – is moving on in parallel following its last round of consultations. An initial report summarises all the points raised by members of the public, and further community involvement is promised in the autumn.

<https://www.futurechepstow.co.uk/post/july-15th-feedback-is-important>

Similar work on "place plans" has been taking place elsewhere in Wales, for instance at Newtown (Powys), Carmarthen, and Abergele in north Wales.

I have "Zoomed" at a couple of recent events discussing these, and it is clear that, firstly, many town centres are undergoing similar problems to Chepstow, as many shoppers turn away from smaller towns; and, secondly, Chepstow has unique issues stemming from the absence of a bypass, the diversity of views as to how town centre traffic should be managed, and the particular problems that arise from its location, including sitting on a national administrative border.

All these issues, and many more, I'm sure, will be discussed at our next Zoom meeting with councillors and others on local issues, on Wednesday 1st September at 7 pm - details to follow.

Guy Hamilton
ghmyrtle@gmail.com 07786 50060

DONATED BOOKS FOR SALE

The Society has received a number of generous donations of secondhand books and booklets of local interest – including those listed here.

If you would like to purchase any of these, please contact Guy Hamilton, ghmyrtle@gmail.com or 07786 500609

£40 each

- Ivor Waters: The Inns and Taverns of the Chepstow District (hardback, 1949)
- Ivor Waters: Inns & Taverns of Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley (hardback, 1976 – revised version)

£25 each

- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Street Literature and Ephemera (hardback, 1979)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Printers and Newspapers (hardback, 1981 – revised version)

£15 each

- Ivor Waters: About Chepstow (hardback, 1952)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Parish Records (hardback, 1955)
- Ivor Waters: Chepstow Miscellany (hardback, 1958)
- Ivor Waters: Henry Marten and the Long Parliament (hardback, 1983)
- Nathan Rogers: Memoirs of Monmouth-shire (1978 reprint of 1708 booklet)

£12 each

- Ivor Waters: The Port of Chepstow (1977 – original booklet)
- Ivor Waters: Impressions and Versions (poems, Chepstow, 1973)
- Ivor Waters: There was a young lady from Gwent (poem, Chepstow, 1976)
- Fred Hando: Out and About in Monmouthshire (1958, reprinted 1974)

Future meetings

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

All talks start at 7 pm and are subject to change, depending on circumstances.

NO MEETING IN AUGUST

Wednesday 15th September

David Williams

*City of London tour guide,
journalist and film-maker*

**“Goodbye to the
High Street... ?”**

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