

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin December 2021



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



Members will be aware that, for obvious reasons, we have not been able to have any form of Christmas celebration as we used to do - so this year we have arranged an evening's Zoom entertainment by Stephen Wells - who gave us a most entertaining talk earlier this year on Butlins holiday camps.

**Wednesday 15th December
7 p.m.**



Stephen Wells presents..

A Magical Celebration of Christmas

Featuring Christmas Fun, Comedy, Music, Live Magic from a **Magic Circle Magician**, Christmas Carols, a Christmas Quiz and some video performances of big stars including **Morecambe and Wise, Bing Crosby, Andre Rieu, Michael Buble, Neil Diamond, Bryn Terfel, London Symphony Orchestra**, and many others

We hope that members enjoy this extra presentation and that next year we can all meet up for a live Christmas celebration!

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 562 383 2571

Passcode: Waters

Notes from the Chair

Members,

Your society held two important events in the month past.

The first, at which I was, alas, not able to attend, was the presentation of a commemorative plate to our President, Henry Hodges to mark his years acting as the Society's Secretary since 1988. Although I have only known Henry during his later years as Secretary and also as Civic Officer, I am well aware of the tremendous amount of service that he has given to the Society and that he well deserved this presentation.

The next event was the first 'hybrid' meeting where the speaker was speaking to us via Zoom and was viewed by 'remote' members in their own homes as well as those members in the Drill Hall. Both audiences were able to enjoy a fascinating talk by Dr Frances Hurd on the early years of the English Parish Church.

At our recent Executive Committee meeting we decided that, as the Covid situation is so uncertain, and until the lighter spring evenings arrive, we would decide on a meeting by meeting basis, whether to hold purely Zoom meetings or hybrid meetings. We hope that this is acceptable as attendance at the Drill Hall for the recent meetings has been disappointing.

I would hope to maintain Zoom communication because we are able to enjoy speakers from all over the country, indeed the world.

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In this connection, because we are able to trawl a huge network of speakers, I would like to know on which subjects you members would like to hear speakers. As I book speakers please let me have suggestions for future talks. I do my best to find interesting subjects but your ideas would be very much appreciated.

The talks I have at present lined up are as follows. In the New Year we have a speaker on the Centenary of our War Memorial in Chepstow; in February a talk by Simon Waterfield on the Agincourt archer; and in March a talk by Nancy Cavill on Martha Gellhorn. She was the second wife of Ernest Hemingway and was an amazing woman who was one of the greatest war reporters during World War II, and who spent the later years of her life in Kilgwrrwg near Devauden. In April we have a talk by Paul Barnett on the 110th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic about RMS Carpathia, the ship that sailed to the assistance of the sinking liner.

We also have an extra event on December 15th by way of a Christmas present – an entertainment for the festive season.

So far as the William Marshal statue is concerned: I am at present waiting to hear from CADW(!) but Keith Underwood is being very supportive and has now suggested making a maquette of the statue which would be very helpful.

Finally, I hope that you all have a safe and Happy Christmas and we look forward to a Good New Year!

Geoff Sumner



Special Christmas Offer !

It's that time of year when everyone dashes around trying to find gifts for people that are impossible to please.

Why not surprise your friends, loved ones or neighbours with a subscription to the Chepstow Society?

They will be delighted to receive a monthly newsletter which is full of interesting articles about the town, entranced by the variety of talks (which they can often access via Zoom, for the occasions when they are unable to get to the Drill Hall), and perhaps enjoy trips and excursions to places they would not otherwise have a chance to visit.

Extra gift offer!

Join in December 2021 and the membership will run until April 2023..
plus you can choose a free copy of either "The Chepstow Story" or the "Town Trail" booklet to enhance your gift.

All of this for just £10 per person!
Gift vouchers can be supplied.

To take advantage of this offer, please contact the Society's membership secretary, Angela Middleditch,
chepsocmemb@gmail.com





HENRY HODGES

In early November, the Society was delighted to be able to present Henry Hodges with a small tribute for his many years of work and service, to the Chepstow Society in particular, and more generally to the community of Chepstow as a whole.

Henry was our Secretary from 1988 until last year, and was also a town councillor for over twenty years, and town mayor for three of those years.

Members of the Society's committee, with Councillor Jez Becker representing the town council, presented Henry with a beautifully designed and made commemorative plate, designed and printed here by Ned Heywood.

Henry is currently president of the Society, and we wish him and Rosalie many more years of enjoying what the town has to offer.



Tim Ryan of the *Severn*

Princess Restoration Trust showed Society members around the ferry in November. The ship is currently being carefully restored next to the Brunel railway bridge, in preparation for its role as a centrepiece of the new development on the former Fairfield Mabey engineering and shipyard site.

The boat was one of Enoch Williams' three ferries, operating between 1931 and 1966, that provided the only means of crossing the Severn for road traffic before the Severn Bridge was opened, so avoiding the 55-mile round trip via Gloucester.

On board the *Severn Princess*





St Laurence's, Bradford-on-Avon – a rare Saxon foundation

THE ORIGINS OF THE ENGLISH PARISH CHURCH

Dr Frances Hurd, from Chichester, was our speaker at the November meeting, again held via Zoom but with some members in the Drill Hall, where for the first time for twenty months we enjoyed our tea and biscuits!

Dr Hurd gave us a potted but rigorous history of the Christian church in England from Roman times until the coming of the Normans. Though early religious meetings were held outdoors or in private buildings, monasteries began to be established, and the arrival of missionaries from the continent in Kent, and the conversion of pagan kings – and with them their subjects - led to churches being built. Many were next to old Roman or pagan sites of worship – facing the rising sun in the east – but increasingly they were built close to the homes of local lords and landowners.

Without large windows, and lit by tallow candles, early churches were dark and smelly! All community and family events took place there – they were not solely for worship. After the Norman conquest, many were rebuilt in stone with larger windows, and in the twelfth century. there was a fad for some to have their own hermits, living in walled-up s adjoining the church building.

All in all, a fascinating talk.

CHARTIST CONVENTION 2021

There was a good turnout at the annual Chartist Convention held in St Woolos Cathedral in Newport on 6th November.

We heard interesting presentations about the Colston statue in Bristol and its toppling last year, as well as various aspects of radical history in the early and mid-19th century.



The Society had a stall at the Convention for the first time.

There was interest in our new leaflet about our own Chartist and trade union campaigner James Stephens, born in Chepstow just over two hundred years ago, and about whom more will be said and heard in coming months.

CHEPSTOW COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

NOMINATIONS FOR NEW GROUP

The town council has suggested that the Chepstow Society should be represented on a new stakeholder group looking at ways to improve the services provided by Chepstow's community hospital.

The new group - the South Monmouthshire Health Care Exploratory Group (HCEG) – would look at providing the Aneurin Bevan health board with “potential cost effective practical ideas... building on existing community health services”, with the objective of “increasing the local footprint of services... whilst reducing environmental impact.”

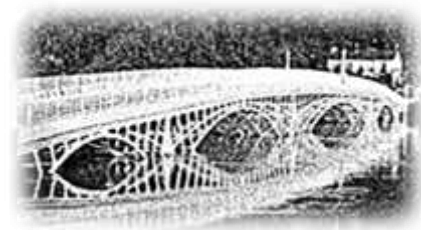
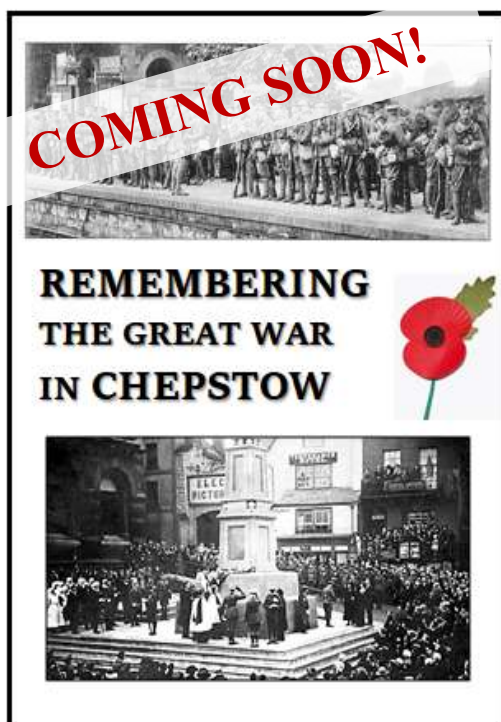
Could any members – particularly, members with health service experience – who might be interested in becoming part of this group, please contact me. I can then forward the full terms of reference of the group, and any other information I have (which, at present, is very little!)

Guy Hamilton

ghmyrtle@gmail.com, or 07786 500609

Please note that the talk at our meeting on 19 January will now be about Chepstow's War Memorial – erected one hundred years ago, in January 1922.

More details about the talk, and the booklet, will follow.



CIVIC AND AMENITY NOTES

The Society has submitted comments on the town council's Future Chepstow issues report, on which consultation has recently closed.

We support many aspects of the document, but are concerned about the lack of clarity over who will be responsible for implementing its findings – though there are reports that the county council and town council now intend to work together on a “masterplan” for the town centre (perhaps extending into Bulwark).

The Society's detailed response can be seen on our website (in the Civic and Amenity section)

In other news:

- Proposals have been submitted to turn the old Livox quarry between Tintern and Chepstow into a holiday and activity centre
- Chepstow's Barclays Bank will close in February. It is not yet known what will happen to its unloved building.
- Further work is to be carried out to repair cracks in the 1816 Chepstow bridge over the Wye, which will result in some temporary road closures.

Finally, please note that **the next Zoom session with local councillors and others to discuss civic and amenity issues will take place on Wednesday 2nd February.**