

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

January 2022



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

**Wednesday
19th January
7.15 p.m.**



A talk by Guy Hamilton
on

Chepstow's War Memorial

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID:

562 383 2571

Passcode: **Waters**

Notes from the Chair

This Bulletin is being written at a time when we have celebrated Christmas and are approaching 2022. This is traditionally the time for New Year's Resolutions, so here goes:

I personally resolve to try even harder to provide you with talks on interesting topics, hopefully relevant to our area. As I said last month, this will be easier to achieve if I know on what topics you would like to hear speakers. So please let me know.

We also resolve to resume as many face to face meetings as possible, although this will of course, depend on the dreaded Covid virus. We know that a large part of the enjoyment of our meetings used to be the social interaction of members over tea and biscuits at the Drill Hall. We will continue to monitor the situation each month to see what is suitable.

Again, as far as they are able, given government restrictions, I am sure that Keith and Sallie, the tour organisers, will arrange trips to places of interest to members.

I resolve also to ensure that the Society marks the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty in some fitting way as this is a unique event in our history.

Finally I resolve to try even harder to raise funds for the statue of William Marshal!

Happy New Year to you all!

Geoff Sumner

EILEEN GRASSBY, 1929-2021



I am saddened to tell you that Eileen passed away on December 22nd, in Forest Hill, London, after a short illness. All her family were with her at the end.

Eileen and I first came to know each other when we joined forces initially to run excursions for the Chepstow Society and the U3A. It became a regular business after the U3A withdrew its support, and not only was there a monthly excursion, but an annual holiday in April, going as far as Scotland and Ireland. We were also involved in arranging Christmas functions and several successful summer garden parties.

I knew of Eileen – in fact she had played Britannia in the 1983 Pageant, singing to welcome Lord Nelson. It was an early instance of our knowing that she had a mind of her own, when she steadfastly refused to wear the elaborate helmet!

The next time I saw her, some years later, was her sitting in the Drill Hall, waiting for the Society evening to begin. She sat in the middle of an otherwise empty row of chairs, without communicating. She was probably testing the water before she decided to become a member. It is an image that no-one would now believe!

In fact, inwardly she was a shy person, and as a singer and an actress she was not alone in having to take the stage with an intense initial fear.

She was, from an early age, a lovely singer, and often appeared in the productions of the Chepstow Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society in the old Public Hall, and in the hall of the Royal Navy Propellant Factory at Dinham.

Not many people know that she was a Tiller Girl! Her greatest triumph was to join the chorus of the Welsh National Opera Company. She freelanced and travelled widely, often on her own. In fact she was prepared to take great risks. One of her commitments was to Caldicot Castle, where she sang in the once-popular mediaeval feasts.

Born Eileen Reece in Shirenewton, she married Peter Grassby, from the family of monumental masons whose yard was once in Station Road. They had a son, Stephen, a sculptor who sadly died before his time, and a daughter, Juliette, an actress who appeared in several films.

Eileen brought up her children virtually single-handedly at Lower Hardwick House, a fine Georgian building which became a focus for music and social activity.

Her final home was Sunflower House, which took over this role, and many will remember the garden parties and musical evenings there.

A life member of the Society, she had for a long time served on the executive committee, allowing her house to be used for meetings.



As she grew older, her home and beloved garden proved too much for her, and she reluctantly moved to Forest Hill in London to be with her family.

After she left Sunflower, the heart went out of the lives of many of her friends, for whom the house had become the centre of their social world.

I shall always value our friendship. We miss her vitality, companionship, and smile, and will continue to value our very many happy memories.

Keith Underwood



REMEMBERING THE GREAT WAR IN CHEPSTOW



The Society's latest publication is now available for purchase, price £4.50.

Because we are unable to meet in person at the moment, you should buy it from Chepstow Books and Gifts, in St Mary Street – www.chepstowbooks.co.uk, tel. 01291 625011. They are happy to do mail order.

The 44-page booklet has been put together by Guy Hamilton to commemorate the centenary of our War Memorial – which will be celebrated on 8th January.

The booklet sets out what we know about the 83 men who are named on the War Memorial as having given their lives during the First World War. Most were from local families – all had some connection with the area, and came from all levels of society.

Though most fell on the Western Front in Belgium and France, the names include those who died as far away as India and Egypt, as well as those who died at Gallipoli, including Able Seaman William Williams, V.C.

The illustrated booklet also summarises the history of the War Memorial itself, and the story behind the naval gun that has sat beside the memorial in Chepstow's town centre for the last century.

CIVIC AND AMENITY NEWS

The Welsh Government has asked Monmouthshire Council to lower its housing targets, amid concerns that it would conflict with the nation's wider strategic growth plans.

Allocations within the county's emerging Replacement Local Development Plan – which runs from 2018-2033 – would see the county build a total of 7,605 homes during the period.

However, the Welsh Government has proposed a "maximum" growth of between 2,610 and 4,275 homes only. This is broadly in line with the representations made by the Chepstow Society.

If the county council accepts the Wales government figures, this will obviously have Implications for Chepstow, as the fields to the west of the A466, which have been suggested for new housing, may not be required for development over the plan period.

The next Zoom meeting to discuss civic and amenity matters with local councillors and others will take place on Wednesday 2nd February, at 7 pm. Details will be circulated nearer the time.

MARY BRYANT

Mary died on 7th November, aged 76 years.

She was an active member of the society for many years, and particularly supported the excursions and holidays, as well as many other events and meetings.

She will be missed by all her family and friends.

Keith Underwood

Happy New Year !



Forthcoming monthly meetings

Wednesday 16th February, 7.15 pm

Simon Waterfield

The Agincourt Archer

Wednesday 16th March, 7.15 pm

Nancy Cavill

Martha Gellhorn –

legendary journalist and local resident

Wednesday 20th April, 7.15 pm

Paul Barnett

RMS Carpathia and RMS Titanic

Wednesday 18th May, 7 15 pm

Annual General Meeting

Chepstow Society Committee 2021/22

President:	Henry Hodges
Vice President:	Chris Penrose
Chairman:	Geoff Sumner
	chair@chepstowsociety.co.uk
Vice-Chairman:	Keith James
Secretary:	Guy Hamilton
	secretary@chepstowsociety.co.uk
Treasurer:	David Nicholls
Membership:	Angela Middleditch
Programme:	Geoff Sumner
Civic and Amenities:	Simon Maddison
Excursions:	Sallie and Keith James
Publications:	Guy Hamilton
Museum:	Anne Rainsbury
Gwent CHA:	Chris Penrose
Natural Environment:	<i>Vacant</i>
Additional committee members:	
	Nicky Bailey
	Harry Middleditch