

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin

February 2022



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



Notes from the Chair

Members,

By the time that you read this we shall only be a few days away from the 70th anniversary of the start of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on February 6th. To mark this Platinum Jubilee year I am delighted to inform you that Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Gwent, Brigadier Robert Aitken CBE has accepted my invitation to come and talk to us about his role, especially in this historic year. He will visit us on July 20th

The next speaker 'in person' will be on 16th March when local speaker Nancy Cavil will talk to us about Martha Gellhorn. This lady, about whom I confess I had never heard, was the third wife of Ernest Hemingway and, more relevantly, has been described as 'one of the great war correspondents of the twentieth century'. She reported apparently on virtually every major world conflict that took place during her 60 year career, and spent her later years in a cottage near Devauden which now bears a plaque to her.

Which brings me to a problem with which your Executive Committee is now struggling. Zoom or the Drill Hall? With the weather improving and the Covid rates declining there seems no reason why our March talk should not see a return to the Drill Hall talks, but we appreciate that some of our more senior members have become used to watching talks from home.

Unfortunately, technically, to have 'hybrid' meetings is not very satisfactory, and it has been suggested that in future we hold our winter meetings (say from November to March) online and the remainder in the Drill Hall. We would appreciate your feedback, so please contact me or Guy Hamilton with your views. I can be reached on chair@chepstowsociety.co.uk or 01291 624758, and Guy on secretary@chepstowsociety.co.uk.

Geoff Sumner

**Wednesday
16th February
7.15 p.m.
via Zoom**



**Simon Waterfield
presents
a dramatic monologue**

The Agincourt Archer

*"a story about war and remembrance
centred round a fourteenth century
archer and his experiences in France at
the Battle of Agincourt"*

<https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID:

562 383 2571

Passcode: **Waters**

Forthcoming Chepstow Society meetings

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

and talk by Guy Hamilton on

James Stephens - Chepstow's Chartist

Wednesday 15th June, 7.15 pm

Peter Strong

Crossing the Severn

Wednesday 20th July, 7.15 pm

Brigadier Robert Aitken CBE

The Lord Lieutenant of Gwent: my role

Wednesday 21st September, 7.15 pm

Rebecca Tyson

William fitzOsbern –

founder of Chepstow Castle

Meeting arrangements

Your committee meets on 17th February, via Zoom, to go through its usual but essential administrative business.

We especially want to consider the way forward for our monthly meetings – how much we should rely on Zoom meetings, and when and how we should return to the Drill Hall.

There are also issues around charging for meetings, and about how we can attract more new members.

We would very much like to hear your views before we meet!

Please contact Guy Hamilton on 07786 500609 or email secretary@chepstowsociety.co.uk

CIVIC AND AMENITY

The next Zoom meeting to discuss civic and amenity issues with local councillors and others will be on

Wednesday 2nd February, at 7:15 pm.

Matters to be considered will include the expectation (not yet fulfilled) of public consultation on the High Street. We now know that a zebra crossing is to be installed between Coffee #1 and Superdrug.

Work on the Chepstow "Place Plan" – now involving MCC as well as the town council – is continuing. Last year's consultations are summarised at www.futurechepstow.co.uk

A reminder...

The Chepstow Society is not just about its meetings, excursions and publications.

There are several areas in which we would like to do more to stimulate awareness of local history and amenities, in line with our charitable aims and objectives.

These include:

- stimulating more interest in local history among younger people
- having more input into local environmental issues
- possibly developing an oral history project on Chepstow in the 1950s-80s

To make progress, we need more volunteers to help out in developing these areas of work.

If you have ideas that might help us, or experience in grant applications, or you might be interested in helping – or know someone who might – please contact our secretary, Guy Hamilton, for a chat!

07786 500609

secretary@chepstowsociety.co.uk



HOLIDAY

Plans are well in hand for the itinerary for the Society's holiday in Kent, for the week from 25th April.

We have one vacant place – single or double - for the holiday. Could anyone interested please contact Keith or Sallie as soon as possible.

We are arranging a range of exciting and interesting days out. We will send out the details to those going in the next few weeks.

The costs of these visits have increased over the last couple of years, but we are hoping to keep the costs within the budget. Once we have finalised the visits we will notify those concerned of the final payment.

DAY TRIPS

We have some ideas for days out, and hopefully we can organise these for the summer and autumn.

Keith and Sallie James

01594 529713 kp.james@btinternet.com



This photo shows the Jubilee Stone in Parsons Allotment at Tidenham Chase, which was erected in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Liz McBride from Tidenham History Group has done some research about the Stone. This has led to Tidenham Parish Council planning to clear the ground around the Stone, erecting a plaque, installing a bench and holding a civic ceremony later this year.

If any member of the Society is interested in visiting the Stone, Keith and Sallie are happy to take you.

Beachley Old Boys
HERITAGE CENTRE
Army Apprentices

Re-opens on the
2nd of February 2022

Situated inside the
Beachley Gate

Come along and enjoy
local history

Bring a friend
entry is free



<https://armyapprenticecollegechepstow.co.uk>

On Wednesday 19 January, members of the Chepstow Society were treated to a Zoom talk, "Remembering the Great War", by our secretary, Guy Hamilton.

The talk focussed on the men from the 1914-18 war who are commemorated on the Chepstow War Memorial, and included research that Guy had done at the time of his earlier booklet on the history of the shipyard.

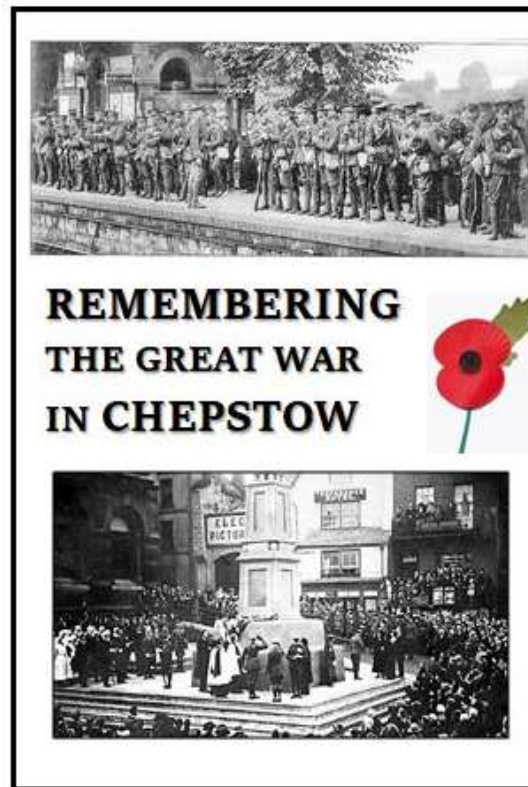
A map of Chepstow from the early 1900's showed a compact town with most houses, shops, and businesses clustered in the High Street and adjacent streets. The Bridge Works by the river provided the main local employment.

With perhaps one quarter of the population of present-day Chepstow, families would have been well acquainted and often closely involved with each other. There would have been some poverty and the frequent tragedies of illness and early child mortality that were accepted as normal. This was as nothing compared to what was to come.

In 1914, mobilization of the local armed forces caused great excitement with men parading in the town and in Newport and being sent off to the Front. Reports of wounded and fatal casualties came soon after, the first from Ypres. The litany of names continued steadily throughout the war.

The talk added a lot of detail, and in some cases put faces to the names of those who fell that are inscribed on the memorial – such as the Curtis brothers, whose family owned a shoe shop beside the Arch; Lt.Col. Bircham of Gwentlands; and Alfred Lewis, the young nephew of Herbert Lewis, of shop fame.

There are eighty-three WW1 names of men from Chepstow and some of the local villages on the War Memorial. Of these thirty-eight were under twenty-five years old when they died, and forty have no



known grave. The collective and individual effects of this in the close-knit Chepstow community cannot easily be imagined.

When the War ended in November 1918 there was widespread rejoicing. Local businesses closed temporarily; flags waved; church bells rang; children had time off school, and at least some of the German prisoners-of-war kept at Beachley cheered as well.

By 1918 Chepstow had expanded considerably and the size and shape of the modern town was becoming evident. The new government shipyards had spread along the banks of the

Wye; thousands of workers had migrated into several new housing estates and a large hospital had been built. Thoughts now turned to the provision of a suitable memorial for the dead.

Previously memorials had usually been small, individual, family affairs but these alone were nationally regarded as not adequate given the huge death toll, and plans for community memorials were considered in most towns and villages.

Chepstow's version, designed, funded and built locally, was unveiled in Beaufort Square in 1922, together with the gun from a captured U-boat donated by the Admiralty to commemorate the VC won posthumously, in Gallipoli, by Able Seaman William Williams.

A full list of the names recorded on the War Memorial and many extra details omitted here can be found in Guy Hamilton's thorough and well-presented booklet of the same name.

The booklet is available from Chepstow Books and Gifts, price £4.50.

Harry Middleditch