

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin February 2023



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



Henry Hodges
1937-2022

We are deeply saddened this month to report the passing of two of the mainstays of the Society, and of Chepstow life, over many years.

Henry Hodges was our Secretary for over thirty years, and had been Mayor of Chepstow several times.

Trevor Evans was a founder member of the Society, a teacher and an authoritative botanist, and our President for many years.

Both will be very sadly missed.
Brief tributes are on other pages.



Trevor Evans
1924-2023

Our next meetings

Wednesday 15th February

Aneurin Bevan and the start of the NHS – 75 years on

Talk by

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP

Nick is the MP for Torfaen, a former university lecturer, and the author of several books, including a biography of Aneurin Bevan.

Wednesday 15th March

Village Witchcraft and Magic

Talk by Prof. Ronald Hutton

Ron Hutton is Professor of History at Bristol University, and a world expert on British folklore and pre-Christian paganism.

**Our monthly meetings start at 7.15 pm,
at the Drill Hall, Lower Church Street, Chepstow NP16 5HJ**

All welcome Members £1 Non-members £3

HENRY HODGES



Henry Hodges passed away on Christmas Day 2022 at the age of 85. He was Secretary of the Chepstow Society for over thirty years, and more recently our President.

Henry was born in Magor and grew up in Rogiet. He attended Larkfield Grammar School in Chepstow at age 10, and later undertook National Service in the Royal Air Force.

He worked at Llanwern Steel Works until his retirement, and then studied for an Open University degree in History. He was also a board member of the Civic Trust for Wales, and a governor for Thornwell Primary School.

He became Secretary of the Chepstow Society, and reported to it regularly on local issues, for over thirty years, from 1988 until 2020, when he became our President in succession to Trevor Evans.

He was a town councillor for over 25 years, and Mayor in 2000-02, and 2011-12. As Mayor, he oversaw the granting of the freedom of Chepstow to 1st Battalion The Rifles, after their service in Afghanistan.

He was a friend to many of us, a mainstay of the town, and will be sadly missed by all.



As Mayor in 2011, taking the salute when 1 Rifles received the freedom of the town



On leaving the Town Council in 2012

TREVOR EVANS



With writer Alexander Cordell in 1971, when the Museum moved into the old Board School.



Receiving the MBE from Her Majesty the Queen in 2012

Trevor was born in Portskewett but lived in Chepstow from boyhood. He grew up knowing all the hedgerows, woods and meadows in the area, often being accompanied by his childhood sweetheart and later wife, Thelma.

He went to school in Chepstow, and then to teacher training college, before becoming a science teacher at the secondary school, later Kingsmark School and now Chepstow School.

Comments left on Facebook by some of his former pupils and colleagues reflect the esteem in which he was held - "well liked by all staff and pupils", "a lovely man", "one of the best", "such a good teacher and a very nice man".

He was a founder member of the Chepstow Society, and the secretary of its Natural History section. He became Chairman of the executive committee in 1974, for three years, and then became President of the Society for the

first time in 1977. He wrote about the history of the Society for its 50th anniversary publication, *Reflections*, in 1998.

In 1984 he retired from teaching, which allowed him more time to spend with his botanical studies. He was a Recorder for the Botanical Society, and was actively involved in setting up the Gwent Wildlife Trust. His *magnum opus*, "Flora of Monmouthshire", was published in 2007. It describes more than 1,800 plants found in the county, and tells of the many changes seen during his lifetime.

In all, he was Chepstow Society President for 29 years, most recently in an unbroken stint from 2002 to 2020. He maintained his interest and involvement in Society affairs well into his nineties, and many of us remember his stories of his recent plant discoveries on forays around the county – or, sadly, musings on what we had lost.

In later years, Trevor lived at Severn View care home. He passed away on 11th January at the age of 98.

Keith Underwood remembers...

The passing of Henry on Christmas Day has brought to an end an era during which he became the indispensable General Secretary of the Chepstow Society.

A good friend of Ivor Waters, Chepstow's renowned historian, and his wife and daughter, Mercedes and Linda, he was one of the last links with them. Ivor had of course been the founder of the Society in 1948.

On January 11th came the death of its recent President, the botanist Trevor Evans, another great loss. His magnificent book, *The Flora of Monmouthshire*, has become a significant reference book, earning him an MBE.

Henry came from an old Caldicot family closely connected with the railway, in which he always retained a keen interest.

He and his devoted wife, Rosalie, had wide interests, particularly in art, architecture and history. They rarely missed the Society's outings, covering the whole country – and Scotland and Ireland – run by the late Eileen Grassby and Keith Underwood. His interest in art was not passive, since he was also a watercolour painter.

It was his intimate knowledge of the town of Chepstow that made him such a successful Amenities secretary, being an absolute ferret in tracking down undesirable developments.

It was not always completely appreciated by members how much the Society owed him in the amount of time and energy he expended.

This civic interest drew him into politics, unwillingly it has to be said, and he served for many years as a Liberal Democrat councillor, several times becoming Mayor.

It was in this capacity that he oversaw the giving of the freedom of the town to the Rifles Regiment, which gave it a wonderful weekend of march past and fireworks. He handed the parchment to the Regiment below the Castle where he often guided, and which was an essential part of his life.

He and his late son Stephen were eagerly drawn into the 1983 Pageant, and later Son et Lumiere productions, in the earliest of which he was the lone, solitary actor, playing his favourite role as Henry Marten.

He will be greatly missed by us all, but particularly by Rosalie and his son William, with whom our prayers and thoughts are warmly given.



Geoff Sumner adds:

My contact with Henry started when I became Chair of the Chepstow Society in 2008. I was aware that he was a very important figure in the Society but did not realise that he became Secretary as long ago as 1988.

I also did not realise as I stepped into the unknown as Society Chair what a kindly and helpful man he was.

He was one of the most knowledgeable men about Chepstow, and for many years contributed to meetings with an unrivalled knowledge of what was planned about our town.



EXCURSION

OUTING TO WORCESTER TUESDAY 28th MARCH 2023

- Visit to Royal Porcelain Museum, with expert talk
- Free time to wander around Worcester city centre
- Visit to Worcester Cathedral with expert talk

Cost: £41

or £38 if booked before 15th February

Please advise the number of seats required together with your remittance and contact details to:
excursions@chepstowsociety.co.uk

Please note that this outing is subject to a minimum of participants, so please book as soon as possible.

**For online payments:
Sort code: 20-60-58
Account No: 73276457**

**For details, please contact:
Patrick Gale - 07760 452629
excursions@chepstowsociety.co.uk**

DRILL HALL MEETINGS

Because of problems that have arisen, we are in discussion with the Drill Hall management committee to try and ensure that meetings at that venue can be accessed satisfactorily via Zoom.

We will keep members informed.

MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

We have submitted the Society's comments on the latest set of proposals in the Monmouthshire RLDP (local plan).

Though we support many of the principles in the plan – and, in line with Wales Government advice, are content that the total housing figure for the area has been reduced – we are still concerned about the effects that the suggested development of a further 145 houses, north of the Bayfield estate, would have on the town's already overstretched highways and other infrastructure.

The full response is linked from our website at <https://www.chepstowsociety.co.uk/planning/>



The Friends of Chepstow Priory

is a small but growing band of community volunteers aiming to increase the utilisation of the Priory to be a versatile thriving centre for the whole community.

We plan to host a number of exciting community and family events through this year and beyond, so please like or follow our Facebook page for future updates.

If you would like to know more or join The Friends of Chepstow Priory, please use the contact details on our page.

We will also be seeking community volunteers to assist with events and/or working parties to maintain this historically important Chepstow landmark that has stood since 1071.

The Priory Friends wish to develop a thriving community space that can be passed on to future generations as it has been for the last millennium.

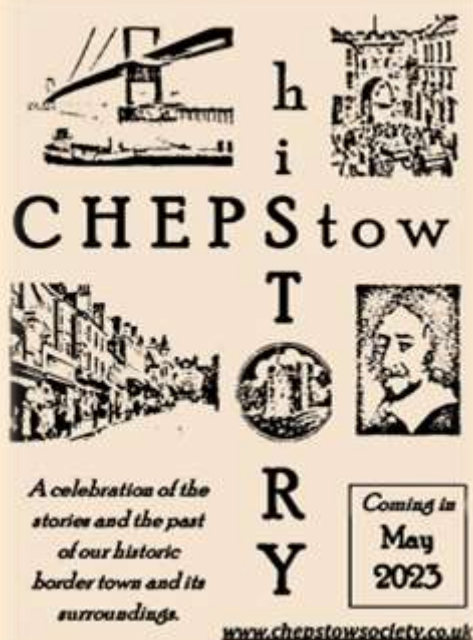
www.facebook.com/chepstowprioryfriends

MORE DIARY DATES

Wednesday 19th April
Naylor Firth
*Chepstow in the
Second World War*

Wednesday 17th May –
Sunday 21st May

HISTORY FESTIVAL



More information next issue!
Our AGM will be on 17th May

Wednesday 21st June
Owen Gower
*Dr Jenner of Berkeley –
pioneer of vaccination*

Wednesday 19th July
Janet Karn
Chepstow Notables

Autumn details to follow...

75 years ago...

A New Society

I HAVE been asked by a number of people interested in Chepstow's history, buildings, customs, etc., to take the first steps towards forming a district historical or field society. A meeting for this purpose will be held at Tudor Cafe, Beaufort Square, Chepstow, at 7 p.m., on Friday, March 12, and an invitation is accorded to anyone interested in any of the following, which I suggest are likely to be the principal objects of such a society: Lectures or talks on local history, etc.; visits to places of interest in the neighbourhood; preservation of books, pictures, old records, and objects of local interest, with the ultimate object of setting up a Chepstow Museum and Archives; to publish brief monographs on particular aspects of Chepstow history or customs; preservation of the early recollections of old inhabitants; celebration of important centenaries by exhibitions of books, pictures, etc., of local interest; to encourage gifts to the town of material of local interest.—Yours, etc., IVOR WATERS), 41, Hardwick Avenue Chepstow.

Ivor Waters' letter published in the Weekly Argus, March 1948

OLD PHOTOS OF CHEPSTOW

The Chepstow Society was founded 75 years ago. As part of our anniversary History Festival celebrations in May, we are hoping to include a display of old photographs of the town – to help stimulate memories of Chepstow as it was between the Second World War and the 1980s.

We would also be interested to see photos of past excursions and other Society events.

Do you have any suitable photos that we could scan and perhaps enlarge for display?

If so, please contact Guy Hamilton,
chair@chepstowsociety.co.uk,
or on 07786 500609