THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin **April 2025**

www.chepstowsociety.co.uk



Wednesday 16th April

Talk by

Prof. Ronald Hutton

Oliver Cromwell

Wednesday 21st May

Annual General Meeting

followed by

OPERATION OVERLORD – PREPARING FOR D-DAY

Talk by Ian Ratazzi and Bruce Rawlings

Wednesday 18th June

Talk by Nigel Packwood

The Bowmen of England



Our meetings and talks are usually held on the third Wednesday of each month at The Drill Hall, Lower Church Street, Chepstow NP16 5HJ

Tea and coffee from 7 pm. Talk from 7 30 pm

All welcome - Members £1 - Non-members £4

When possible, the meetings are also streamed via Zoom **https://zoom.us/join**

Meeting ID: 513 005 1668 Passcode: Waters

Chairman's Report

Anne Rainsbury has retired from the Museum, after over 40 years service.

Setting up Chepstow Museum was the first major project of the Chepstow Society when it was founded by Ivor Waters and colleagues in 1948.

The Museum celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2024. Annie has been the Curator since 1983, for over 41 years – more than half the life of the Museum!

We shall mark this incredible achievement, and Annie's long association with the Society, in some way soon.

I hope Annie will continue to be active in the work of the Society and the Town, and her phenomenal knowledge of the history of the town will still be available for us.

There are as a consequence some changes in personnel at the Museum. With Keith and Sallie James, I met with Rachael Rogers of Monmouthshire County Council last week.

As we would expect, it would take at least three people to do what Annie did! On matters of Policy and overall management Rachael Rogers is the contact. Rachael is based at Monmouth but works between Monmouth, Abergavenny, and Chepstow. On Collections, Megan De Silva is the contact. On Research, Lise Brekmoe is the contact.

The Society's Executive Committee met in January and March, and will meet again on 7th May, 2nd July, 3rd September, and 5th November. If any members want anything to be considered by the Committee, please let Marion Huckle (Secretary) or myself know, at least a week before those dates.

Our recent talks have attracted a good number of new members – welcome! So far this year we have had talks on Rolls Royce (in view of the Monmouth connection), Tramways of the Forest of Dean; and Early Iron Mining in the Forest.

I did visit one of the ironworks in the Forest, albeit one which was later than the speaker's talk - Darkhill Ironworks and Titanic Steel Works near Coleford.



The works are still there, hidden in the forest like a Mayan temple, and Robert Forester Mushet's name remained on high quality hard steel for machine tools produced in Sheffield through to the 1980s.

Later this year it is the 200th anniversary of the world's railways, which began with the Stockton to Darlington Railway which opened in September 1825 - although we know the very first steam engine in the world to pull a passenger and a freight train on a railway happened 20 years earlier in South Wales between Merthyr Tydfil and Abercynon in 1804.

Chepstow too has a connection with the birth of the world's railways, and I will be speaking on this subject later in the year as our contribution to celebrating the 200th anniversary of world railways.

Next month we have Professor Ron Hutton talking on the subject of Oliver Cromwell - who among other things stormed through Chepstow's Town Gate in 1648. It took his men several weeks to breach the external walls built by William Marshal 400 years earlier!

The 21st May meeting is preceded immediately by our AGM, so if anyone wants to get more involved in the Society this is the time to do it. The talk immediately following the AGM will be about the events leading up to D Day, which is topical as we remember the 80th anniversary of VE Day in May.

John Burrows

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS 2025/26

The time has come around again to renew your membership to the Chepstow Society.

Thanks to all those who have renewed already.

If you are intending to renew could you please aim to do so by April 30th.

If you are not planning to renew, it would be very helpful if you could email to let me know, so that I can remove your name from our lists.

The annual membership rate is £12 per person.

You can pay by the following methods:

- **Standing Order** (please check the amount is correct)
- **BACS payment**
  Account Name: Chepstow Society
  Sort Code: 30-98-9
  Account Number: 18173668
  Reference: Your membership name
- **Cheque** by post sent to
  Angela Middleditch,
  Pen y Morfa,
  Mathern,
  Chepstow NP16 6J
- **Card** payments are possible at monthly meetings
- Payment can be made at a meeting with cash or cheque **(please put the exact cash amount in an envelope with your name on it).**

Any member who has joined since January 2025 has membership until April 2026

If you have any difficulties or queries, do please let me know.

Thank you very much

Angela Middleditch
Membership Secretary
chepsocmemb@gmail.com

MONTHLY TALKS PROGRAMME

2025

16th April
Oliver Cromwell
Prof. Ronald Hutton

21st May – AGM followed by
Operation Overlord – Preparing for D-Day
Ian Ratazzi and Bruce Rawlings

18th June
The Bowmen of England
Nigel Packwood

16th July
Chepstow's Shipyards
Guy Hamilton

No meeting in August

17th September
Unusual Cures and Blood Galore
Angela Dunsby

15th October
The 200th Anniversary of the Railway – and its links to South Wales and Chepstow
John Burrows

19th November
The Vikings and the Severn
Prof. Mark Horton

All dates and details are subject to final confirmation

Excursions

TUESDAY 24TH JUNE

PUB LUNCH CRUISE ON THE RIVER AVON TO HANHAM MILLS

Price per person from £20.50 (Concessions)
Adults £23.50

Leave: 10.45 Bristol Packet Ticket Office* (Wapping Wharf, Gas Ferry Road)

Arrive (Approx.) 14.45 Bristol Packet Ticket Office*

** Parking is available nearby at SS Great Britain Car Park or at Long Aston P&R. (Car sharing recommended). The T7 bus runs approximately hourly from Chepstow from 06.50 to Bristol. If numbers permit we will organize transport from Chepstow.*

Our Autumn cruise on the River Avon was cancelled due to poor weather, and we have resurrected it in June 2025.

Leave the city behind and enjoy a leisurely cruise upstream along the picturesque River Avon before traversing the Hanham Lock to Hanham Mills.
There will be a 90 minute stop at Hanham.

Lunch will either be at the Lock & Weir or the Chequers. Lunch is to your own account. The whole river trip is planned to be approximately four hours. The boat will return to the departure point.

Please book as soon as possible with the number of seats required, together with your remittance and contact details:

Contact:outings.chepstowsociety@outlook.com OR gale.p.mr@gmail.com

or in writing: Patrick Gale, Flat 33, Wye Apartments, Chepstow, NP16 5FG

Mobile: 07760452629 (for text messages)

Please note: We have changed banks and is now as follows for electronic transmissions:
Lloyds Bank: Sort Code 30-54-66. A/C: 11461460

This outing is offered by Bristol Packet Company whose conditions of booking apply which are available on: www.bristolpacket.co.uk The Chepstow Society is acting as booking agents.

CRUISE THE BRISTOL CHANNEL ON THE PADDLE STEAMER "WAVERLEY"

DEPARTURES FROM PENARTH AND CLEVEDON BETWEEN JUNE 3 AND 23



The old lady is back again and paddling out of Penarth with some sailings as well from Clevedon.

There are a multitude of interesting destinations, be it the Exmoor Coast, the Holm Islands, Under the Severn Bridge, Lundy Island , Woolacombe Bay, Ilfracombe and the Gower coast.

For those interested in Steam, visits to the West Somerset Railway or the Brecon Mountain Railway are included in their offers.

The two evening cruises will surely be of interest, one supporting the old-timer, MV Balmoral.

There is one departure with a connecting bus from Chepstow (June 12) which visits the North Devon Coast.

There is also a special offer for certain mid-week departures, where if one Senior traveller books, another can come along free. See website for conditions and availability.

With such a plethora of sailings, we have decided not to pick one departure specifically for the Society, but allow you to book their wide range to suit your choice directly and online with Waverley Cruises at https://waverleyexcursions.co.uk

You should mention that one of your party is a member of the Chepstow Society, using Code: **CHEPSTOW15**

Enjoy your Cruise!

All arrangements are valid as at March 2025. All bookings are subject to availability and the Waverley conditions of carriage

Visit to Tewkesbury, 6 March







On Thursday 6th March 2025, Patrick Gale organised a visit for Chepstow Society members to Tewkesbury, for an informed tour of the many alleyways in the town and their history, purpose, conditions in the past, and tales of medieval life.

Some of us took the train from Chepstow to Gloucester and then bus to Tewkesbury and others arrived by car.

Our first stop in Tewkesbury was to see an amazing residential hall dating back to 1380 which is most unusual for a domestic building. The hall was part of The Royal Hop Pole pub and was used for accommodation for an inn that existed on the same site over 600 years ago.

At 11am we began our guided tour of the alleyways of Tewkesbury and learnt about the land use and functioning and organisation of life down each of the many narrow alleyways in the town.

After two hours of walking in and out of Tewkesbury's alleyways on our guided tour we made a visit to the riverside and then the abbey at Tewkesbury.

For those on the bus and train we arrived back in Chepstow by 5pm after a very interesting visit to Tewkesbury, and a pleasant train ride from Gloucester down the side of the scenic River Severn and estuary.

John Burrows











Tramroads of the Forest of Dean

The February meeting of the Society saw a very full audience intrigued to hear from Mike Barker of the Coleford Railway Museum who had come to the Drill Hall to talk about the tramways of the Forest of Dean. As a prelude, Keith James invited the assembled audience to join him and others from the Society and the Sealed Knot to travel to Coleford for the re-enactment of the Battle of Coleford.



The last working tramway, at Bixslade near Parkend

Mike Barker was then introduced and I was swiftly disabused that this talk would be about trams and tram travel in the Forest of Dean as Mike explained that tramways were inverted rails to allow horses and carts to drag coal and iron ore from the mines in the Forest to the waterways (the Wye and the Severn) for onward transmission of these valuable cargoes to trading ports.

With the topography of the Forest of Dean being unsuitable for the construction of canals, then the primary means of cargo transport, and the roadways being too muddy and troublesome for swift transport by horses with fully laden carts, tramways proved the answer, even if only shortlived as the tramways were superseded and replaced by railways. As Mike explained, and illustrated with his full powerpoint slides, many traces of the old tramroads remain, sometimes as footpaths following a trackbed, or as remains: stone sleeper blocks, earthworks, bridges and other structures.

The first tramroad constructed was done unofficially by James Teague which ran northwards from his colliery to the Wye at Lower Lydbrook. Although this was unsanctioned, it showed the dean officialdom what benefits tramways could bring to the coal and iron industries and around 1810, three tramways were approved and built which criss-crossed the Forest. The first route constructed was the Severn & Wye tramway which ran from Lydney to Lydbrook.

The second was the Bullo Pill Railway which ran from the Cinderford Valley (there was no town of Cinderford at the time) to Bullo Pill on the Severn. Mike explained that this route was championed by the landowner at Bullo Pill, who was able to levy tolls.

The third and final one to be constructed was the Monmouth Tramway which ran from the collieries at Howler's Slade in a circuitous route around Coleford to join the Wye at Monmouth. In his talk, Mike enlightened the audience about the method of construction of the tramways and the blocks laid to support the inverted rails. The tramways tended to meander to avoid steep inclines and several bridges were constructed through which horse and cart could only narrowly pass. Both the stone arch tramway bridge at Redbrook and the very narrow Newland Tramway Tunnel were discussed in depth.

Although tramways were constructed and worked well in carrying cargo, ultimately the initial investment was short-lived as the era of the railway ushered in the obsolescence of horse and cart. As Mike explained, the three tramways were bought out by new railway companies which then used the tramway tracks to construct railways which would prove a more efficient method of cargo carriage. Indeed, whilst the tramways lasted a mere twenty or so years, the railways would last until well into the 20th Century.

The packed audience of Society members gave a thoroughly deserved round of applause to Mike Barker following his well-researched and detailed talk about a fascinating if little known subject. This talk will be a good complement to the March talk on Iron working in the Forest of Dean.

Marcus Keppel-Palme

REMEMBERING ERIC WILES

Eric was a stalwart member of the Society, becoming both Chairman and President in the 1990s. He farmed Thornwell, before serious vandalism obliged him to sell up. He was connected with the Sharp family of Newhouse which gave way to the extensive warehouse development.

Few now remember the agricultural character of Chepstow, with its twice a week cattle market (now beneath Tesco and its carpark). Eric was not only a good and individual farmer in the County of Monmouthshire, he was an antiquarian in the mould of George Ormerod and insisted on preserving the Iron Age remains at Thornwell before he left. He sold up and moved to Pen y Bryn, the house at Tutshill with the ancient stone tower in the garden (the Folly, Watchtower or Windmill).

He and his wife, Olive - a Chepstow girl, whose father had been a policeman - spent many happy years in the house. He died on March 12th 1998, and Olive sadly passed on January 27th 2025. They had two children, a son who tragically died in a local car crash, and a daughter, Sara who married Peter, the son of Walter and Pat Manson. Pat also sadly passed on recently.

Eric was very active, not only with the Society, but with the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association and the Tidenham Historical Group. An approachable and friendly man, he did not suffer fools gladly however, erudite and environmentally understanding and concerned.

In 1985 Eric wrote a pamphlet in the Ivor Waters' tradition on "Chepstow and the Chartists", published by the Society and printed by Fred Comber in St Mary Street, another vanished keystone in the Town's fabric.

Keith Underwood

THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

Pursuant to Clause 7(a) of the Chepstow Society's Constitution, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held in the Drill Hall, Chepstow, on **Wednesday 21st May at 7:00 pm**.

Members are advised that at this meeting the business will include the election of Officers of the Society, the appointment of appropriate auditors, and the consideration of annual reports by the appropriate Officers of the work done by or under the auspices of the Society, and of the audited accounts.

A President and Vice President for the year 2025/26 will also be elected at this meeting. For those positions, nominations must be received by the Secretary **no later than Wednesday 23rd April**.

Nominations for officers of the Society - that is, Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer - as well as for other committee members, and for auditors, may be given at the Annual General Meeting.

A full agenda for the AGM will be circulated nearer the time.