# THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

***Members Bulletin*** **July 2025**

***www.chepstowsociety.co.uk***

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## Wednesday 16th July

## CHEPSTOW'S SHIPYARDS

**Talk by**
**Guy Hamilton**



***No meeting in August – but plenty of town walks ! – see later in bulletin***



## Wednesday 17th September

Talk by Angela Dunsby

of the John Moore Museum, Tewkesbury

## Unusual Cures, and Blood Galore!

- the world of Tudor and Stuart medicine

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**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**

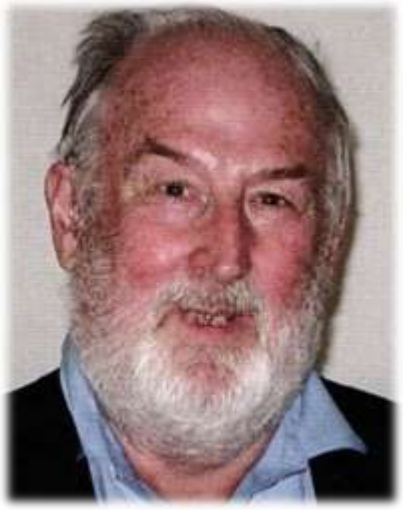
**All welcome - Members £1 - Non-members £4**

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

**Meeting ID: 513 005 1668 Passcode: Waters**

# PATRICK GALE

## 1945-2025



Members were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of the Society's Excursion Officer on 29th April, following a short illness.

Although a relatively new member of the Society, joining in 2022, Patrick was a valued member of the Executive Committee. He took on the role of Excursion Officer from Sallie and Keith James, and used his knowledge and experience of the travel business to arrange many trips to many interesting locations and venues.

His funeral on 12th June was very well attended and was a lovely opportunity to find out more about Patrick and share stories with his friends and family.

Patrick moved home many times, both with his family and throughout his adult life, before settling in Chepstow, via various London boroughs, Peterborough and Stamford, Chelmsford, Bishopswood and Ross-on-Wye. No wonder he developed a love of travel!

Patrick loved cars, trains and ship: trains and boats featured large in his travels. He remained a keen traveller throughout his life, not only as work, but for his own interest. He travelled far and wide. and was due to spend this summer travelling across Northern Europe, before so suddenly falling ill.



*Patrick with other Society members in Tewkesbury, March 2025*

It was clear that Patrick was an independent spirit who followed his own path in life.

After leaving Marlborough College he studied at Bristol University, specialising in languages. He joined Thomas Cook, the first step on a long and satisfying career in the travel business. He was very interested in history and was a long-standing member of the Royal British Legion (RBL), and a founder member of the Colditz Society. His interest in Colditz and its history was sparked by arranging trips to the site for ex-service personnel and their families. Indeed, Patrick had plans to arrange a visit to Colditz, for the Society. Another organisation he directly supported and helped raise funds for was the Parkinson Society: Patrick himself lived with Parkinson's Disease.

The overriding impression was that Patrick was a kind and loving friend, whose faith was particularly important to him, throughout his life. He was generous with his knowledge and friendship, and was always happy to offer his help in all the activities of the Society. He will be much missed.

Patrick's cousin, Jonathan Dickson, wrote this poem in tribute to Patrick and kindly gave permission for it to be included in this newsletter.

*Marion Huckle*

TO PATRICK

'Twas such a sad day when
Desktop's landline did bell
That Patrick, dear cousin
With your Maker must dwell
For here was a man, who.
With love to your friends,
Did give to all freely,
So regardless of end.
You finished in Chepstow,
And before, Ross-on-Wye;
In Cheltenham mother;
Prior Teddington's sky.
You spent many hours
As you guided on tour
Around Chepstow's localities,
Showing beauties galore
The time you awarded
For your charities smart.
Especially the Legion,
Was so dear to your heart.
And touring you loved so
In particular trains;
And freighters o'er oceans,
So relieving life's strains.
To Europe you travelled,
Multilingual declared,
Fluent German and French,
Like a native you aired.

I pen these dear mem'ries
Of this man we'll ne'er forget,
Such a well-cherished colleague,
We are all in your debt!
As heaven doth beckon
And your life her is o'er,
A life so well covered
IN your love for all other.
So, bye-bye, dear Patrick,
May you rest in my prayers,
Your friendship e'er valued
Throughout many years.

*Jonathan Dickson*



# NAYLOR FIRTH

We are saddened to report the recent death of Naylor Firth.

Dr Firth was a very well respected member of the Society, who over many years contributed talks on a wide range of topics, including Chepstow in the Second World War, the Severn ferries, and "Monmouthshire Oddments". He travelled widely, and was also a founding member of Chepstow male voice choir.

A native of the town, Naylor trained and worked as a geologist, at Bristol University and throughout South Wales. At one point he was a member of the team studying the rock samples brought back from the moon.

As a local historian, he published a compendium of short articles of local interest, *Twigs from our Branches of History*.

He will be greatly missed.

# LAST CHANCE

**If you have not yet renewed your subscriptions for 2025/26, please contact Angela Middleditch, Membership Secretary chepsocmemb@gmail.com The annual subscription rate is £12.**

# Operation Overlord

## and the events leading up to D-Day 1944

**Ian Ratazzi and Bruce Rawlings** - the two speakers at our May meeting - gave a fascinating presentation about the planning and preparation for the D-Day invasion, the largest amphibious invasion in history. They also talked about the importance of ongoing support for Allied troops after the Normandy landings and the essential contribution of logistics to modern warfare. Numbers featured throughout the presentation: hearing the size and scale of the operation was overwhelming. This brief report highlights some of the stories and details revealed in the presentation.

The talk was copiously illustrated with film and news clips, some of which are exceedingly rare: they made the story of the events leading up to D-Day and the D-Day landings even more powerful and moving. The footage was drawn from general and specialist sources, such as BBC Archive footage, You-tube, Imperial War Museum and from overseas archives. Also included were scenes from two well-known feature films, The Longest Day and Saving Private Ryan.

I was delighted to find out about the crucial role of women, without whose input the invasion of Normandy could not have been accomplished. The Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) was set up at the start of World War 2 to carry personnel, mail, and medical supplies. 1 in 8 of the pilots were women and they flew 147 types of aircraft flying without radios, flying instructions and at the mercy of the British weather. By 1944, there were more than 75,000 servicewomen, many performing vital roles in the planning and execution of Operation Overlord. (Operation Overlord was the name given to the totality of the Allied invasion of NW Europe of which D-Day -"Le Debarquement" - denoted the landing phase).

The Special Operations Executive (SOE) was set up in 1940 and, at Churchill's instance women were eventually enrolled to take part in espionage, sabotage, and reconnaissance in German occupied France in readiness for the invasion. Of the SOE's 40+ female agents serving in France 16 did not survive and 12 were killed or executed in Nazi concentration camps, enduring horrendous torture.

The speakers emphasised the astonishing numbers and challenges involved in planning for D-Day, everything from sourcing and transporting the materials needed for weapons and support structures, gathering and housing the invasion force and support staff, supplies, sourcing vessels to carry everything across the English Channel in absolute secrecy.

Planning of the operation began at in 1942 and the journey from 1942 to June 1944 was an intensive period of planning, discussion, invention, manufacturing, and training. There were hiccups along the way, such as the discovery that American soldiers were not trained for an amphibious invasion, leading to the development of a short intensive programme of swimming lessons off Woolacombe beach!

Naturally, much of the practical preparation and training was conducted in locations across the UK: D-Day assault craft were built in the Chepstow dockyards.

During the first half of 1944, approximately 9 million tonnes of supplies and equipment crossed the Atlantic from North America to Britain. Over two million troops from more than twelve countries had gathered in England to prepare for the invasion Primarily British, American, and Canadian troops, the force included Australian, Belgian, Czech, Dutch, French, Greek, New Zealand, Norwegian, South African, Rhodesian, and Polish naval, air and

ground support, an epic example of international cooperation.

Along with the astonishing numbers the speakers shared some surprising and little-known stories.

We are all familiar with the names of the five landing beaches: Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah. Originally, however, there was to be a sixth beach, Band. It was never used on D-Day because the area inland had been intentionally flooded by the Germans to deter gliders from landing in an airborne attack.

During the spring of 1944 Allied troops commenced a systematic bombardment of the road and rail infrastructure in Northern France in advance of the invasion. Part of an operation to deceive and mislead the German high command as to the true location of the invasion involved dropping 500 three feet tall dummy parachutists, made of straw and hessian in the Pas de Calais area as well as in Normandy. The dummies were nicknamed 'Rupert' (by the British) but were called 'Oscar' by the Americans.

On D-Day itself, 156,000 troops landed on the Normandy beaches comprising 73,000 troops from the USA and 83,000 from Great Britain and Canada. The force was supported by 6,800 vessels, 11,590 Aircraft, 3,500 Gliders.



*Some of the "Mulberry Harbour" works for the D-Day landings – parts of which were constructed in Chepstow.*

The success of the post D-Day invasion depended on the successful transport of huge quantities of supplies, through the ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre, which remained in enemy hands. Invasion forces required ammunition, fuel, food, water, clothing, medical supplies, and weapons, along with vehicles, construction and engineering materials, explosives, and chemical supplies. Churchill suggested that it might be possible to build floating piers for use from open beaches. In a little over 6 months, a workforce of 55,000 managed to construct two floatable harbours code named Mulberry, each one about the size of the Port of Dover. The Mulberry Harbours landed 2.5 million men, 500,000 vehicles and four million tons of supplies.

Following the invasion efforts were concentrated into ensuring the delivery of supplies inland. Key to success was the Red Ball Express. This was a completely new railway line from Avranches (on the coast) inland to Le Mans (135 miles) that was completed in just 75 hours in August 1944 by 10,000 men. There is a lesson there for HS2!

It was shocking to learn that without the thorough and effective logisticians and the efficiency of the Allied Supply System, providing support after D-Day, it is possible that the Allies would have failed to claim any German territory, and the Soviet Union would have claimed the whole of Germany!

The speakers concluded by reminding us that modern war cannot be won solely by military might. Excellent logistical support is crucial to success and that caution is better than over-confidence.

This was an impressive and, at times, moving account of the activities and collaboration that played such a decisive part to the outcome of the Second World War.

***Marion Huckle***

## From the Duchess of Beaufort

BADMINTON ESTATE

Many apologies for not getting back to you sooner about our wonderful trip to Chepstow at the end of last year.

As you so rightly say (and can see from the photographs) we really did enjoy ourselves. It was great to meet everyone involved in the celebrations and to learn more about Chepstow and my husband's ancestors.

I fully intended to write to you after our visit but as you may know my husband's brother, Lord Edward Somerset, died two days after our visit and events took over. You have all been on my mind.

Please will you pass on huge thanks to everyone involved and also to the choir and the schoolchildren, all of whom made it feel like we really were being welcomed into the community.

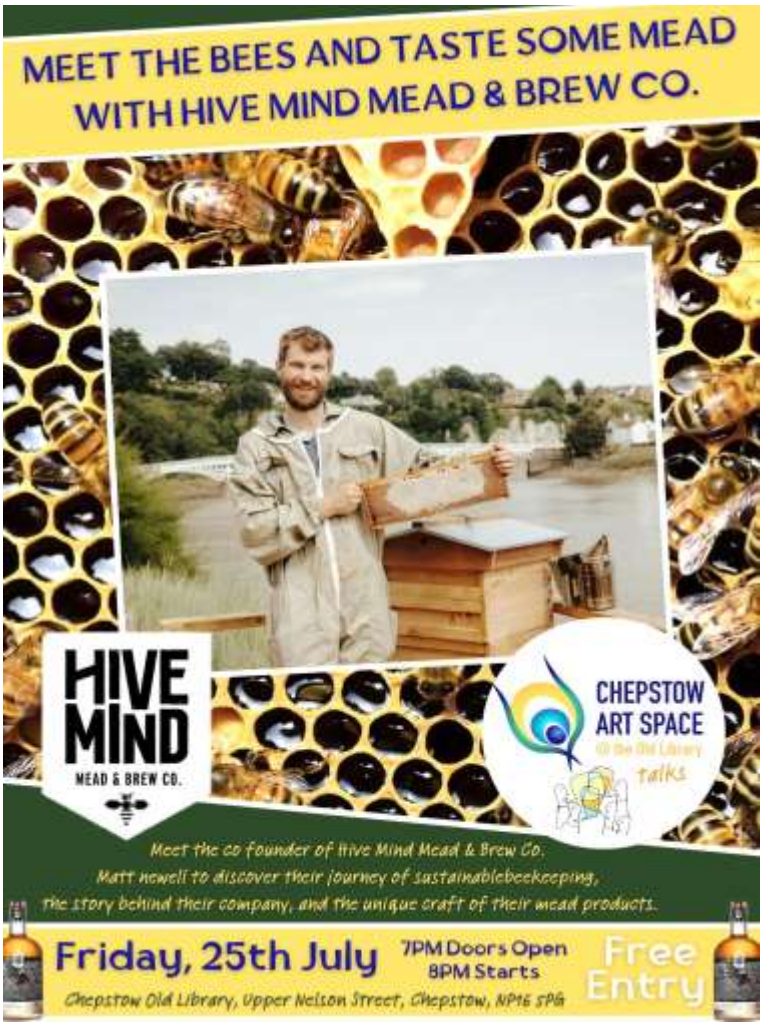
Yes please, we would like to receive a copy of your quarterly bulletin.

With all good wishes,

Georgia Beaufort
5 June 2025

chepstow festival of arts



THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

# TOWN WALKS 2025

***Come and find out more about the fascinating history of Chepstow over 950+ years, on one of our gentle and informative walks, led by members of the town's civic and historical society.***




***This year we have several walks around the old centre of Chepstow, as well as three special walks in different parts of the town.***

## Monday 7 July – 6.30 pm
**THE PIERCEFIELD ESTATE – HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY**
*With Simon Maddison*
*Meet at Piercefield park entrance – opposite Piercefield Ave. – NP16 5LX*

## Monday 21 July – 7.00 pm
**UPPER CHEPSTOW – THE TOWN GATE AND BEYOND.**
*With Tim Ryan*
*Meet outside the Gate House, by the Arch.*

## Weds. 6 August – 6.30 pm
**THE STATION TO THE SHIPYARD AND THE "*SEVERN PRINCESS*"**
*With Tim Ryan*
*Meet opp. Station Rd car park, by Tesco*

## TOWN CENTRE AND RIVERSIDE

**Monday 30 June – 7.00 pm**

**Monday 14 July – 7.00 pm**

**Monday 28 July – 7.00 pm**

**Weds. 13 August – 6.30 pm**

**Weds. 20 August – 6.30 pm**

**Meet outside the Tourist Information Centre in Bridge Street – NP16 5EY**

**<u>To book places,</u>**
**<u>please text 07786 500609</u>**

**£3 per person**
**Cash only – payable at start**

**Numbers are limited – please book ahead. We cannot guarantee to accept people who turn up without prior booking.**
**Well-behaved children and dogs welcome!**

**The walks should take about 60-80 minutes.**

**www.chepstowsociety.co.uk**