THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin **October 2026**

www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

Wednesday 21st October

(postponed from September)

Creating the Newport Wetlands Reserve

Talk by Nicky Bailey



Wednesday 18th November

Local History from the Broadcast Archives

Talk by Bec Howarth (Gwent Archives) and Sian Lloyd Jones (Wales Broadcast Archives), illustrated with local examples from historic broadcasts

WEDNESDAY 9TH DECEMBER

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

TALK BY PROF. RONALD HUTTON



Our meetings and talks usually take place 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

Chepstow Racecourse, Wednesday 4th November, race meeting, talk, tour and tea

Due to a few people dropping out, there are now some spare tickets available for £49 each. If you are interested, or if you have any non-member friends who would like to join us as guests, please contact:
sallie_james@btinternet.com

EXCURSIONS

Hi everyone. Following the summer break I'd like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention two trips. Tickets remain available at the moment. For further details please contact me on ***07708 881168***

Steve Spokes

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK SWINDON

Our trip to the Technology Park on **Friday 20 November** is almost here, and we still have a few tickets available!

This is a one of a kind journey through a storage facility of the Science and Technology Museum with over 300,000 objects held in store.

A tour guide will lead us to explore the objects close-up - everything from an X-ray telescope to the costume of a Cyberman from Doctor Who.

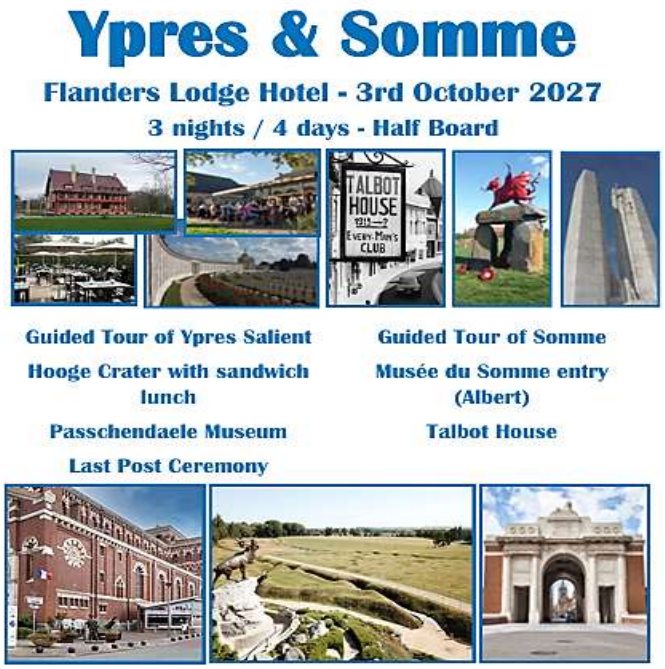
The tour brings together items from science, technology, engineering, medicine and the media under one roof.

If you haven't signed up yet, here are the quick details:
• Departure: Friday 20th November 2026 at 8.45 from Chepstow Leisure Centre public car park.
• Highlights: Guided tour in the morning. Afternoon free time - at GWR museum or Retail Designer outlet or both

Cost: £50
Registration closes strictly on October 30th

Secure your spot now by replying to this mailing or signing up on Chepstow Society web page. We will contact you.

Don't miss out!



GREAT WAR TOUR

October 3rd to October 6th 2027

Only 38 tickets are available – open to members and guests

Total cost £519 per person
with £100 deposit pp needed by 30th October

Uncover history where it happened on this deeply moving 4-day journey through the most iconic battlefields, trenches, and memorials of World War I.

Plenty of free time is being built in to the tour.

Tour Highlights:

- **Walk historic trenches**: Stand in the preserved frontline trenches.
- **Hear the Last Post**: Experience the emotional nightly tribute at Menin Gate.
- **Explore the Somme**: Visit the towering Thiepval Memorial and Lochnagar Crater.
- **See elite museums**: Discover immersive exhibits at Flanders Fields Museums.

Edwards coaches are the tour agents acting on our behalf.

THE SEVERN BRIDGE

60 YEARS OLD, SEPTEMBER 2026



The talk by John Burrows for our September meeting marked the 60th anniversary of the incredible Severn Bridge – *'the bridge that changed the world'.*

The Severn Bridge can be seen from all parts of Chepstow and is the badge of Chepstow School - it is very much *'Chepstow's bridge*' although technically it is entirely in Gloucestershire. The bridge leads to Chepstow and the bridge deck, which makes the bridge of **world** significance, was assembled in Chepstow at Fairfield Mabey's yard and floated out to the Severn Bridge site.

The talk looked at the history of attempts to cross the Severn from Roman times to Victorian times, from the ferries to the railways, and noted that world-leading bridge builder of the time, Thomas Telford, suggested a suspension bridge from Beachley to Aust in 1824 – 142 years before it was done!

The talk looked at the planning of the bridge and the need to by-pass Chepstow's Town Arch and the narrow iron arch road bridge in the 1920s and 1930s. By the time it was built, the priority was the need to link South Wales to England with the M4. The Severn Bridge was planned in 1947 when it would have been the world's third longest span after the Golden Gate Bridge and the George Washington Bridge, both in the USA - but it wasn't started until 1961 by which time it would be the seventh longest centre span.

The talk looked at the construction of the bridge from 1961 to 1966, using pictures from the TV film made in 2016 supplemented by pictures from Tim Ryan's collection of ferry pictures.

In the audience was John Evans who was in the film and was an engineer on the bridge in the early 1960s!

What made the bridge so special is that it was **the first** long span bridge **in the world** to use a thin aerodynamic box girder deck which was copied all around the world, and especially in China where most of the very long span bridges are today.

The Severn Bridge is now the 60th longest span in the world - but that is a *''Chepstow success story'* because, of the 54 bridges built after the Severn Bridge that have longer central spans than the Severn Bridge, **two thirds** of them use the UK deck design first developed for the Severn Bridge at Chepstow and first built at Chepstow!



The new sleek aerodynamic deck was light, strong, less expensive, and looked far more elegant than the heavy metal truss decks which were being used in the USA and Japan before the Severn Bridge changed all that.

The Grade 1 Listed Severn Bridge is one of the most beautiful bridges in the world, and one of the most significant in world bridge building history.

Chepstow's Roads

– from prehistory to motorway

There was another packed house at the Drill Hall in July for our talk. Everyone believes they understand the local roads around Chepstow, but in fact they are a mixture of ancient, Roman, medieval, turnpike, 19th century and modern 20th built roads.

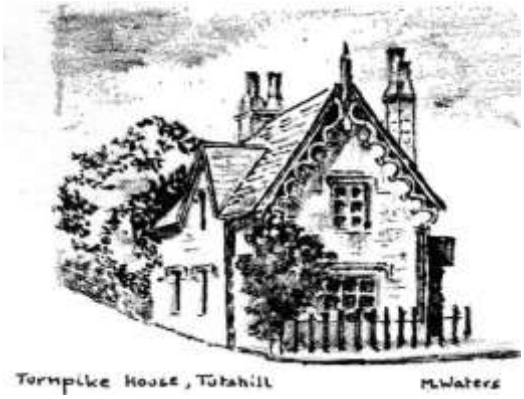
Guy Hamilton gave an insight into these roads with the careful use of maps, illustrations and old photographs. They all helped to explain the complex patchwork of roads around Chepstow.

The first trackways in the area would have been on the higher ground, originally following animal pathways and later connecting farms and ports. Roman roads were built for military use, and linked the area to Caerleon and Gloucester. It is likely that Newport Road, Vauxhall Road and perhaps the High Street were once Roman roads, and there was a river crossing about 500 metres upstream from the existing 1816 Wye bridge.

Once the Romans left, roads were maintained locally by the parish, from packed earth at the lowest cost. Tintern Abbey maintained the best roads between parts of their estate. In 1555 the Highways Act was passed to improve the infrastructure for the benefit of trade, and a local highways surveyor was appointed. Households were expected to give up 4/5 days a year to maintain the roads, but in practice too many people evaded this duty and the roads remained almost as track ways. This situation remained until the C19.

Chepstow as a town had a set of roads leading into it as it was a crossing point of the river and a harbour. The streets interconnected around the market at its centre. Early maps





show the town was being used by farmers as a centre of trade, though Monmouthshire had notoriously bad roads for wheeled travel and cargo was still moved by pack horses.

Turnpike roads developed from the 18th century. Valentine Morris, the owner of Piercefield House, set up the Chepstow Turnpike Trust and was a prime mover in establishing turnpike toll roads around the town and beyond. Seen as a means to generate funds, they also moved traffic away from his fine house and estate.

Chepstow became a postal town and had coaching inns, the Beaufort and George Hotel. Chepstow was now linked to the Midlands, the South West and the rest of South Wales. By the early C19 the roads around Chepstow had improved, aided by the demands of the Napoleonic wars and the need for steady movement of goods for the war effort. New roads including Mount Pleasant, Castleford Hill, and the road to Tintern past Wyndcliff were built at that time.

More emphasis was placed on local government to maintain, develop and construct roads, and the turnpike trusts were abolished by 1872. Better materials, eventually including tarmac, made wheeled transport speedier and easier.

The next leap forward in Chepstow roads came in the 1920s. Many of the existing roads were now widened and improved for cars to travel, and linked the racecourse to the railway station and the wider road network.

As traffic grew Chepstow became a bottleneck and the town Arch prevented the free flow of traffic. Solutions were developed which included a Severn Bridge, first proposed in the C19 and finally opened in 1966. Several by-passes have been suggested. In 1972 the inner relief road was started, and completed in 1988, but with any solution to traffic congestion now above £75 million, Chepstow is not likely to have a new road for many years to come.

Steve Spokes

DONATED BOOKS

The Chepstow Society is very grateful for several recent generous donations of old books and booklets, mostly secondhand, about (or relevant to) Chepstow and its surrounding area.

These have now been added to our list of secondhand and donated books available for purchase, below. Please note that we only have single copies of some of these. Prices take account of condition and scarcity. Other books and booklets are available.

If you would like to purchase any, please contact Guy Hamilton, ghmyrtle@gmail.com or text 07786 500609

£70 - Ivor Waters, "The Town of Chepstow" (1975, revised and consolidated hardback edition)

£70 - Grahame Farr, "Chepstow Ships" (1954)

£40 - Cyril Fox, "Offa's Dyke: A Field Survey" (1955)

£30 each - Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, "Monmouthshire Houses" (three volumes, 1951-54)

£25 each – Ivor Waters hardback books

- **Inns and Taverns of the Chepstow District (1949)**
- **Chepstow Parish Records (1955)**
- **Chepstow Miscellany (1958)**
- **The Unfortunate Valentine Morris (1964)**
- **The Prisoner of Chepstow Castle (1976)**
- **Chepstow Street Literature and Ephemera (1979)**
- **Chepstow Notebook (1980)**
- **Chepstow Printers and Newspapers (1981)**
- **Folklore and Dialect of the Lower Wye Valley (1982)**
- **Chepstow Packets (1983)**
- **The Moss Rose Press (1985)**
- **Poems (1987)**
- **Wye Into Severn (1989)**
- **Chepstow Street Literature (1989)**
- **The Port of Chepstow (1989)**

£25 - Dennis Potter, "The Changing Forest" (1962)

£25 - Thomas Birbeck, "Sword and Ploughshare: The de Bohuns and Caldicot" (1973)

£20

- Brynmor Pierce Jones: From Elizabeth I to Victoria: Newport, Mon.,1550-1850 (1957)

£12 each

- Ivor Waters: A Chepstow and Tintern Anthology (hardback, 1948)
- : About Chepstow (1952)
- : Collected Verse (1977)
- Mercedes Waters: Changing Chepstow (1970)
- : Chepstow Sketches (1973)
- Thomas Birbeck – The History of Chepstow Rural District Council (1974)
- Cyril Fox – Pattern and Purpose – Early Celtic Art (1958)
- Robert Gibbings – Coming Down the Wye (1942)
- Rev. Edward Davies: Chepstow, A Poem (1992 reprint of 1786 poem, hardback)
- Iorwerth Peate – Clock and Watch Makers in Wales (1960)

£8 each

- Ivor Waters: Inns and Taverns of Chepstow and the Lower Wye Valley, Part 1 (with map, 1976)
- : Impressions and Versions (poems, 1973)
- : There was a young lady from Gwent (poem, 1976)
- Ivor Waters (trans.): Sunlight and Scarlet: selected poems by Antonio Machado (1973)
- Thomas Birbeck – The Foudroyant (1966)
- : Caldicot Castle (n.d.)
- S B Rogers: An Early Victorian Severn Bridge (Merlin Bookshop, 1974 reprint of 1845 pamphlet)
- E. T. Davies: A History of Mathern (Chep Soc, 1950)
- Rev. K M Denison: Mathern – History from the Parish Registers (Chep Soc, 1977)
- Christopher Jordan – Severn Enterprise (1977)
- Between the Severn and the Wye – poems selected by Johnny Coppin (1993)



PROGRAMME

FRIDAY 2ND OCTOBER

7.30pm Showing of the acclaimed fim "***The Dig***" at The Drill Hall. Doors open at 7.00pm. **FREE ENTRY** - doors will close when full!

SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER

10am - 3pm Archaeology Fair at The Drill Hall. Stalls and activities include **hands-on** clay pipe making, crafts, musical instruments over time, drones and archaeology, medieval tile-making, examining pottery and ancient bones. Other stalls include Bronze Age metal working, tapestry making, copper engraving, archery, fishing net mending and underwater finds, along with various local history groups and other organisations. Roman and civil war soldiers will also be on patrol. **FREE ENTRY.**

4-5pm Talk at The Drill Hall by well known TV presenter, writer and archaeologist, **Professor Mark Horton**. £5 per ticket.

SUNDAY 4TH OCTOBER

10.30am -2.00pm Guided walk around Piercefield Park and to the Piercefield Hill Forts led by Simon Maddison. See website to book a place. **FREE.**

WWW.CHEPSTOW.ORG.UK

www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

2027…

January
President's Lunch
Beaufort Hotel
(details to be confirmed)

Weds. 20 January

Richard Clammer –
Steamers on the Severn

Weds. 17 February

Geoff Booth –
The history of Mabey Construction

Weds. 17 March

Max Moebus -
The Old Railways of Monmouthshire

Weds. 21 April

Prof. Ronald Hutton -
Modern Paganism

More to follow…..