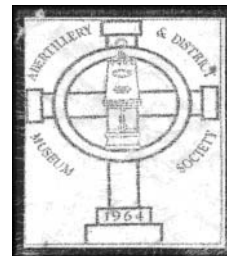


# ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

January 2010



**New Year Wishes** – We wish all our members and supporters a healthy and happy New Year and look forward to seeing you at the Museum, the lectures, and at fund-raising and social events. It is a credit to everyone that our community Museum has proved so successful. However, the Museum needs money and manpower – lots of it - hence our regular reminders for helpers. If you'd like to be more actively involved please call at the Museum for a chat. Can I also please remind everyone that membership subscriptions of £5 are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January so please be sure to pay promptly. Will you also please encourage family and friends to join our 100 Club which is a useful source of regular income – at one time we were able to offer 4 prizes and it would be good to be able to get back to that.

### Contact Names

Mrs Peggy Bearcroft, Chairperson	01495 213806
Mr Don Bearcroft, Curator	01495 213806
Mr Ron Selway, Vice Chairman	01495 215775
Mr Dennis Roles	01495 214313
Mr Bernard Jones, Treasurer	01495 213185
Mrs Enid Dean, Fund raising Secretary	01495 212880
Mrs M Gilson, Schools Liaison	01495 212413
Mrs M Selway, Programme Sec	01495 211960
Mr Roy Pickford, Social Events Sec	01495 213377
Mr Bernard Hill, Asst Curator	01495 212864
Mrs Jen Price (Newsletter)	01633 482851

### Museum opening times

The Museum is open to the public, **free of charge:**

**Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 1pm 2pm - 4pm**

**Friday & Saturday 10am - 1pm**

Museum phone number **01495 211140.**

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome so please call in as often as you can.

### 100 Club December

1. No.88 Matthew Price £25
2. No.70 John Selway £10
3. No.51 Janet Pickford £5

### Annual Dinner Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January

Once again this will be at the Top Hotel – always a popular venue. Please contact Roy Pickford (01495 213377) or call at the Museum tin case there are still places available.

**Archaeology Course** – a reminder that Frank Olding will be running another of his popular 6 week archaeology courses, this time on the archaeology of Gwent, starting on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January, at the Museum. The cost is £15 for the series or £3 per individual lecture. Frank is the Heritage Officer for Blaenau Gwent and the Curatorial Advisor to our Museum and those who have heard him before will know that he is a natural communicator with a gift for bringing his subject to life.

### Diary Dates

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010** – First of a series of 6 lectures on *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Gwent* by Frank Olding. £3 per lecture or £15 for all 6 sessions.

**Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010** – *Annual Dinner* at the Top Hotel, Llanhilleth

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2010** – *Going Down the Pit* by John Evans

Lectures start at 7.00pm in the Metropole Theatre, with teas and a chat downstairs in the Museum afterwards. Entry is £2 and the public are most welcome.

Please call at the Museum for more information or watch the Newsletter for coffee mornings and other events.

Email address: [abertillerymuseum@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:abertillerymuseum@tiscali.co.uk)

Web: [www.abertilleryanddistrictmuseum.org.uk](http://www.abertilleryanddistrictmuseum.org.uk)

Details of coffee mornings etc are posted on the notice board at the Museum or at the following websites where you can also read the Newsletters:

[www.cwmtilley.com](http://www.cwmtilley.com)

**Fund raising December - £269** of which £89 was raised at the Craft fair and a similar amount at the Christmas raffle.

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### The Poor Law

Individuals and families were responsible for their own support in the nineteenth century. Put simply, if someone had no income, they were expected to work and that expectation extended not just to the able-bodied but also to those whose disability or age (young or old) still left them with some capability of working. The unemployed or destitute could turn to the Poor Law but they could not expect to be sympathetically treated. The policy was to make life sufficiently uncomfortable on Poor Law that it encouraged those able to work to find work, including by offering a standard of living lower than could be achieved in the least well paid employment. The Poor Law Commissioners laid this down in 1834 when they said *"The first and most essential of all conditions is that the situation of the individual relieved should not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class"*. For the unemployed this test was implemented through the insistence that relief be given only in the workhouse, or through the application of a work test such as stone-breaking, before relief was given outside the workhouse, and through low rates of pay whether in cash or kind.

The Poor Law was administered locally and so this harsh policy was not uniformly applied. There was some recognition that people often found themselves out of work through no fault of their own but at the same time there was a fear that if life on Poor Law were not harsh, it would encourage people to turn to it rather than to their own resources. The Poor Law Commissioners said in 1837 *"The distress which actually ensues is always accompanied by a demonstration of a large amount of fictitious distress, and the idle and the fraudulent are forward to avail themselves of the sympathy which is then called forth. It is, therefore, of the highest importance that the operative classes should be taught lessons of frugality and forethought at those times when they are able to earn more than is actually necessary for their immediate support, and that they should then save up the surplus to meet emergencies like the present"*.

The Local Government Board which succeeded the Poor Law Commissioners expressed a similar caution but the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a gradual narrowing of the categories expected to work for their own support. Laws were brought in which made the employment of children illegal and education compulsory. At the other end of the age spectrum, old age pensions were introduced in 1908 for those over 70 and from 1925 for those over 65 (though

not everyone qualified). Widows had to wait until 1925 before they received a pension but where they had dependent children the duty to work was not usually enforced after 1914. Other lone parents such as separated wives remained subject to the Poor Law but commonly were not required to work while they had children under school age. Those wholly unable to work through disability could receive an allowance, (provided they had paid the necessary contributions), supplemented by the Poor Law but the situation remained difficult for the partially disabled who were still classed as able to work.

The reports on poverty by Booth and Rowntree in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growth of working class movements and the development of socialist and economic theories are among the factors which effected a shift away from the Poor Law. Although there were many who espoused the view that the normally hardworking poor were victims of economic forces rather than workshy idlers, a 'cautious' approach was adopted to the introduction of Employment Insurance in 1911 and the later National Insurance Bill. The war years provided high employment levels and a healthy surplus in the employment fund but the difficult economic circumstances of later years saw high unemployment and led successive governments to adopt a variety of measures aimed at avoiding throwing large numbers of unemployed on the Poor Law.

The approach to unemployment in the years following the First World War is too complex for a brief resume here but if one of our readers would care to contribute a short article on the topic it will be welcomed.

Source: Policy Studies Institute

### Brockweir Quay

Conservationists have been hard at work in the Wye Valley to stabilise Brockweir Quay and return it to its original appearance. It was once an important port as the river is tidal to this point. Large sea vessels would unload goods onto smaller trows that could be hauled upstream by bow hauliers (teams of men walking along the bank pulling the boats by a rope fixed to the mast). The stone quay is believed to date from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century although there were probably earlier timber or stone structures at the same spot. The wharf extended along the bank and was also the location of a boat-building shipyard. Over the years the quay had become covered with silt and weeds, and mortar and cobbles had eroded away. The restoration work now under way, part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, will ensure the long term future of this historic feature.

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#### Poet's Corner

##### AGE OLD LOVE

His friends old and new  
were unaware of you,  
Or that episode in his past  
known by so very few.

When passion ruled to allow  
the only time he had strayed,  
Until you stopped its progress,  
and left him where he's stayed.

For many years then reconciled,  
while back in his marital home,  
His loyalty was plain to see,  
until he was left all alone.

You heard and felt the need again.  
let your love and compassion flow.  
to make remaining years so sweet,  
in ways only you would know.

Together now until life's end,  
Friends pleased to wish you well,  
Hoping that his health will last,  
as your love surely will.

Gordon Rowlands September 2008

#### Poetry thoughts

In the October Newsletter we printed a poem by Jack Wanklyn which prompted the following response from Mike Jones.

Time has passed since I first read it.  
It stays in my thoughts.  
The words and lines are so true  
The memories they bring are so clear  
The images of the skies over the Vale  
The colour of the river at the Beeg  
Christchurch, where I was wed those short years  
ago.  
It's still there.  
Alas the Six Bells pit with its painful memories is  
not.  
Many thanks to you Jack it's a pleasure to read  
Yes it was a Long Long time ago.

Michael L Jones Abertillery technical 1948

#### Vice Presidents (Annual Subscription £25)

Mr Keith Dykes	Mr Carl Jones
Mrs Esme Heal	Mr Glyn Saunders
Mrs Kathleen Davies	Rev. R Watson
Mrs Margaret Herbert	Prof. Gerwyn Griffiths
Mrs Carole Brooks	Mrs Jeanette Fulton
Mr Arthur Lewis OBE	Mrs Thelma Griffiths

#### Book Corner

**Pigsties and Paradise – Lady Diarists and the Tour of Wales 1795-1860** by Liz Pitman, published by Gwasg Carreg Gwalch at £7.50

This tells the story of a number of intrepid English gentry women who travelled around Wales between 1795 and 1860, initially by coach and carriage but latterly by train. They came to explore the scenery and customs in an area that felt very foreign to them, travelling on poor roads, climbing mountains on horseback or foot, and staying in inns that ranged from 'pigsties' to 'paradise'. They wrote enthusiastically about their experiences and their writings are brought together in this illustrated paperback.

#### Owain Glyndwr

Some twenty years after Owain Glyndwr's disappearance Italian scholar Tito Livio wrote that he had died on the top of Lawton's Hope Hill in Herefordshire, local people having recalled the event. Owain Glyndwr was a legendary figure; descended from Welsh princely stock he was proclaimed Prince of Wales in 1400 and was successful in leading uprisings against King Henry IV in mid-Wales and near Knighton where he captured Edmund Mortimer. More successes followed with the capture of castles in West and North Wales and he was at the height of his powers in 1406 when he was crowned in his parliament house in Macchynlleth. He signed a treaty with the Earl of Northumberland and Mortimer with the aim of dividing Henry's kingdom among themselves but a failed march on Worcester marked a turning point. Mortimer died in a siege of his castle at Harlech and several of both his and Glyndwr's close family members were taken to the Tower of London where Glyndwr's wife and two granddaughters later died from neglect. Owain's declining influence and the deaths of his loved ones had a profound effect on him. By autumn 1415 Owain Glyndwr was living in fear of his life and sheltering in rough shelters and lonely caves. However, he obtained some comfort from visits to his daughters Margaret and Alice who lived in Herefordshire. Shorn of his distinctive forked beard he was said to have shuffled between his daughters' homes at Kentchurch Court and Croft Castle in a friar's grey cowl or disguised as a shepherd. Livio records that drained of his strength and living in a makeshift hut, Glyndwr fell ill on the slopes of Lawton's Hope and was unceremoniously bundled into a cart by his retainers who took him to his final resting place somewhere in the Golden Valley. Source Gareth Lawson, *The Herefordshire Times* 6<sup>th</sup> August 2009

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### **Museum Matters January 2010**

*This year I have been curator for 19 years and during this time I have always been surprised by the willingness of people to donate personal family items to our museum, 2009 was no exception. When my old Art Teacher Mr Garry Snelgrove came into the museum to see me he brought his father's medals and told me the story that goes with them.*

*In the May 2005 Newsletter I wrote of James Henry Finn VC who is on the Abertillery Salvation Army's Role of Honour. His and other stories are in the warfare information point in the museum.*

**Captain W J Snelgrove M B E (Military) TD** fought as a Private with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in World War I 1914-1915. He joined at the age of 17yrs which was under age but was accepted by the recruiting sergeant. In the summer of 1940 after World War II had broken out the L D V. (Local Defence Volunteers) was formed, later known as The Home Guard. W.J. Snelgrove was one of the first volunteers and was promoted to the rank of Captain under the command of Lt Colonel J.J. Lewis \*(his Presentation watch on display in the museum). They assembled at the old Territorial Drill Hall, increased rapidly in numbers and became the Local Regiment. These men consisted of mostly World War I Veterans.

They were given lectures by regular army officers and it was after one of these lectures given by a regular Bomb Disposal Officer stationed at Newport that Captain Snelgrove began working closely with this branch of the British Army.

He was trained to deal with unexploded German bombs mostly in the Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea areas. If any report came in of an unexploded bomb a Police car would pick him up and race him to the destination. Having first made certain that the area had been cleared he would then proceed to disarm the bomb by extracting the detonator.

This was dangerous work as the Germans constantly modified their bombs and one of his colleagues from Newport was killed attempting to disarm a bomb. The top brass of Western Command heard about his work with the regular army which was way out and above that required by The Home Guard. The Western Command immediately recommended that Captain Snelgrove should be given a decoration for outstanding bravery and in 1942 he was awarded a Military M B E. for the work that he had carried out which saved civilian areas from complete devastation.

In 1947 Captain Snelgrove applied to take up a permanent commission with the Territorial Army. He was accepted as a Lieutenant and promoted to Captain, and was awarded the TD Medal (Territorial Distinction).

**Kenneth Jones Military Medal** together with his other medals, picture and insignia. His **Military Citation** states: 2335806 Signaller Kenneth Jones Royal Corps of Signals On the 22nd of March 1943, the 65th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery was ordered into action in the Chet Meskin area with one battery forward. The line to this battery was down a forward slope in full view of

and 2,000 yards from the enemy positions. This line was under heavy shell and mortar fire. Signaller Jones spent two hours in the open under the heavy fire repairing the line and succeeded in keeping communications through to the battery. Signaller Jones constant disregard of personal safety, his coolness in working under fire, devotion to duty and courage were of a high order. **Chet Meskin - Tunisia**

**Jack Coles Beach Commando Knife** on display.

Jack Coles served in North Africa he was trained as a Beach Commando, their job was to land on an enemy beach the night before an invasion by the regular forces. It was a dangerous job mapping enemy positions, obstacles, clearing and marking a way through the enemy minefields.

He was involved in the landings at Sicily, Italy and was brought home to Britain to take part in D-Day, landing on the French coast the night before. After the invasion of Europe by the Allies, he was sent to take part in the invasion of Japan. Unfortunately he did not reach his destination as the Troop Landing Craft (A large troop transport) was sunk by Japanese Kamikaze Aircraft. Jack was one of the few survivors spending time in hospital. While he was there the two Atom Bombs were dropped on Japan resulting in their surrender. Jack was part of the occupying force in Japan for two years where he saw the result of Japanese atrocities on Prisoners of War. This made a lasting effect on him.

**The Practice Hand Grenade** belonged to **Fred Howells**.

He was called up for the army during the WW II, when the army found out Fred could drive he was directed to Transport Command as a driver.

He was sent to North Africa where he drove Lorries carrying men and supplies for the army and also Officers to meetings in the desert with General Montgomery. He then fought in Italy, and during the invasion of Germany Fred was part of convoys carrying supplies over the Alps. To avoid German Air attacks the convoys travelled at night using shaded headlights to avoid detection. Fred recalled seeing the rear lights of the lorry in front of him disappear over the edge of a precipice down into the valley. In Germany Fred was involved in the relief of Belson Concentration Camp taking food and transporting the survivors.

I am both pleased and proud that their relations choose to donate these items in memory of their loved ones.

**Don Bearcroft Curator.**