

# FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*news*  
August 2018

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August 2018

**Editor:**

Keith Walker  
51 Lancaster Drive  
Lydney  
GL15 5SJ  
01594 843310  
[NewsletterEditor  
@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:NewsletterEditor@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Chair:**

Mary Sullivan  
01594 860197  
[Chair  
@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Chair@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Treasurer:**

Cecile Hunt  
01594 842164  
[Treasurer  
@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Treasurer@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Secretary:**

Chris Sullivan  
01594 860197  
[Secretary  
@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

**Website:**

[forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](http://forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

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## Editors Notes

Occasionally you attend an event that is so good it resonates and stays with you for a long time. Di Standing's remarkable talk. "A History of Underground Dean", was one of those rare events. Set in the highly appropriate location of Clearwell Caves, Di entertained her audience with a wonderful talk and film. Cheryl Mayo's cover photograph captures the atmosphere whilst members socialised over tea, cider and bread and cheese! As always John Powell has provided a warm, concise and expressive review of the event which you can find towards the back of this issue. What John has refrained from telling you is that those who helped set up the event down in the Caves 'enjoyed' the end of a bizarre Harry Potter convention, complete with a party of 70 from Germany who were appropriately dressed as Harry, or dragons, or monsters!

Further thanks are due to John Powell for sourcing the interesting article in the centre pages which features a walk taken locally in Victorian times.

Many of you will have attended the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner held recently at the Speech House. I was there along with my camera to capture the event. On reviewing my work the next day, I found to my horror that not a single shot had been saved to memory. Thanks are therefore due to Cheryl Mayo who also took photos at the dinner. You can see the results of Cheryl's 'snapping' on the back page together with a short report about the event.

Cecile Hunt continues her series of articles by recalling the recent memorable coach tour she organised with Averil Kear which focused on iron production in the Forest of Dean. Part three of Cecile's article leads us to Parkend and Ellwood to learn about connections with iron production there.

One of the advantages of subscribing to one of the family history web sites is that access is given to historical newspapers. The old newspapers can be a fantastic resource in providing unexpected stories about your local area. Sporadic corn and grain shortages in the eighteenth century caused much civil unrest in England. I recently chanced upon some contemporary reports in the Derby Mercury (of all newspapers!) about the piratical actions of certain Foresters at that time. Driven by desperate hunger they apparently intercepted trows sailing down the Severn and helped themselves to the corn and grain being carried by the vessels. The authorities were outraged and were never going to allow them to get away unpunished. See what happened in the feature "Food Riots in the Dean in 1756".

*Keith Walker*

*Short pieces of news, views, and opinions for the Newsletter are always very welcome. Every effort will be made to reproduce articles as presented but the Editor reserves the right to edit as necessary. The Editor will assume that all necessary authorisation for attachments, photographs etc has been obtained and the FODLHS will not be held liable in the case of a subsequent query.*

## Chair's Eye View - with Mary Sullivan



*Mary and Chris Sullivan  
photographed at the GLHA  
Local History Day in April*

Earlier this year in April, Chris, myself, and other committee members attended the Gloucestershire Local History Association Local History Day. It was a fascinating event, which provided a platform for three very good speakers who explored the theme of "Between the Wars: Life in Gloucestershire 1919 – 1939". The Society also supplied a display which featured Memorial Halls and Recreational Grounds which were established in the Dean in the inter-war years. As we won the display competition at the GLHA day last year, we were excluded from this year's competition, but as winners last year we provided a judge (Chris!) to identify this year's winner. And talking of winners, on behalf of the Society I would like to congratulate Mary Atkins who was runner up in the Bryan Gerrard Award for the best article in a Gloucestershire local history publication. Mary won her accolade for her article about Clanna House which appeared in New Regard issue number 31.

Our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year is flying by. Already we have enjoyed some good talks, a visit to local churches, events in St Briavels and our anniversary dinner at the Speech House. It was lovely to see so many of you there and to share the day with our president, Jan Royall. The

after dinner talk by Dame Janet Trotter was fascinating. I had never realised how many Royal visits a Lord Lieutenant has to organise! By the time you read this we will already have enjoyed the unusual event of a presentation on Underground Dean in Clearwell Caves. I'm really looking forward to that. And then it's another Cecile and Averil coach trip. They are always a great day out. Thanks to all the people working to make these events a success.

Here's another way we are planning to make this year special. At each of the indoor talks from September onwards this season we will be having a one-day sale of just one volume of past New Regards at the knock-down price of £2.50. I hope this will give some people a chance to build up a set. Or for new members, maybe act as an encouragement to read a New Regard and find out how fascinating they are. I'm sure you will then want to go on and collect the other 31 past volumes over time.

Membership renewals are due at the end of September, so please act on the request from Cheryl, our indefatigable membership secretary, with regard to the enclosed membership renewal form. Committee members have worked long and hard to meet the requirements of the new GDPR regulations. All you have to do is fill in the form, tick the necessary boxes and return the form to Cheryl with your payment. Otherwise you will no longer receive regular news and updates by email. You can, of course, always choose to opt out of these, but whatever you do the important thing is to fill in the form and return it.

I look forward to seeing you at the coming events and indoor meetings.

Best wishes

*Mary Sullivan*



*Mary Atkins receiving her prize from Bryan Gerrard at  
the Local History Day.  
GLHA Chair Steve Blake looks on.*



## MEMBERSHIP

People keep joining! This quarter we are pleased to offer a warm welcome to the following: Jennifer Francis, Sue Pawling, Jocelyn Gardner, Nicky Prior, Colin Davies and Aubrey Knowles. Welcome to the Society, and we hope you're enjoying all that this busy 70th anniversary year is offering.

Now for the **very important** technical stuff:

Renewals are due at the end of September and this year we must be compliant with the new GDPR regulations. In the May newsletter I heralded the need for a form from every member in order to achieve this. Please read the letter enclosed with this newsletter along with a renewal form, and ensure that you either

- post me a completed form with your renewal cheque; or
- have the form with you if you renew at a meeting; or
- email me the completed form downloaded from our website if you pay by BACs.

Essentially, I need a form. Email me at [membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk](mailto:membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk) or call me on 01594 510 533 with any queries. And thank you all in advance!

*Cheryl Mayo, Membership Secretary*

### PRIZE GIVING AT WYEDEAN SCHOOL



Earlier in the year, the Society invited Wyedean School to host a competition to write about an aspect of the history of the Forest of Dean as part of our 70th anniversary celebrations. The students were enthusiastic and we received and judged a number of entries. On Wednesday 4 July, Chair Mary Sullivan presented prizes to the Year 7 and 8 winners of the competition.

They were:

Bethan Rees (winner) - Bethan's article on education in the Forest can be seen on the opposite page; with Beth Davies, Issy Chapman and

Lily Ballinger, and Ryan Gulyas receiving commendations for their work. Here they are with their certificates with Mary and Cheryl Mayo.

It was lovely to be with these energetic young people and to share the platform with author Sarah Franklin who talked to the students about her WW2 novel *Shelter*, set in the Forest of Dean. Sarah, who was raised in the Forest and is passionate about its rich heritage, was there as part of the Coleford Festival of Words.

Many thanks to Wyedean and especially to head of English, Lucy McManus for organising it all, and to school librarian Angela Friel for hosting the event. We are looking forward to working again with the staff and students of Wyedean School.

*Cheryl Mayo*

# Education In the Forest *by Bethan Rees*

## First Forest Schools

### Education in the Forest

The educational system in the forest of Dean started off with a day school in M. Proctor's New Chapel at Berry Hill in 1813. Six years later, 1819, a similar school was opened by Henry Poole. He also provided schools for Parkend in 1814 and Bream in 1830. By 1874, the Educational Department had established there were 10 districts in want of schools. By 1875 there were 5 schools built. In 1879, another 1,150 places were needed so two schools were reopened and three new ones were built in the 1880's. The country later took over the voluntary schools and after World War Two they replaced older buildings with new ones.

### Schools in the World Wars

The Forest of Dean schools in the World Wars had double the amount of children; most of them were built to house 100 places. This meant each school shared each other's desks and the classrooms were crammed with London folk. More money had to be paid by the Government and parents had to contribute if they wanted their child to have a consistent education. Regular air-raid drills took place approx. every two weeks. The terror must have been unbearable, not knowing if the drills were real or not. Various children – that are adults now – tell people how their nightmares used to last forever and how they thought the war will never end; some still have flashbacks. Each school had an air-raid shelter somewhere in the grounds which was big enough for only the teachers and children. It was hard enough without the new evacuees.



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August - Coach Tour - Contact Cecile Hunt - 01594 842164**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September - 3 pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW  
Keith Walker - "The First Severn Tunnel"**

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September - 7'30 pm - Blakeney Village Hall, GL15 4DY  
Jon Hoyle - "Archaeology in the Dean, recent research & future directions"**

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October - 2'30 pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW  
Annual General Meeting, followed by  
Mary Sullivan - "Founders of the Forest of Dean Local History Society"**

# We're Not Telling!

## Foresters have nothing to say when visitors come calling!

It was a first for the accomplished London publishers Ingram, Cooke and Co. Previous to 1853, no-one had attempted to publish in a single volume a book on England's forests and forest trees. The publishers had noted many works on individual forests as well as a string of books on trees, but none offered, as they put it, "a comprehensive overview, a historical, legendary, and descriptive account" of all the kingdom's rapidly disappearing woodlands.

The idea quickly took root and in the year following the opening of the Gloucester to Cardiff railway in 1852 steam engines were puffing into Severnside halts carrying passengers on a mission to explore "a really good specimen of an old English forest and at the same time enjoy some of the finest scenery in England." The chapter on the Forest of Dean published in *'English Forests and Forest Trees'* contains much of general interest and includes the following account of a day-long walk from Newnham . The name of the author is unknown.



Passage House, formerly the Bear Inn, Newnham  
cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Jaggery - [geograph.org.uk/p/3194948](http://geograph.org.uk/p/3194948)

It was a wet afternoon in the end of summer that we disgorged from a broad-gauge carriage of the South Wales Railway at a station called Newnham. We had been told that the town of Newnham was a delightful and convenient point from whence to start to explore the forest, and to deliver some introductions for information we had brought with us. But no town of Newnham was to be seen. There was a dreary roadside "station", looking more dreary in the rain, and that was all. On emerging, however, through some gates and clambering up muddy paths, we found two or three superannuated cabs, which appeared to have been licensed before the earth was burdened with an iron road. On the best looking of these was painted in letters evidently old, "Bear Hotel, Newnham". So we immediately sprang out of the wet and were

soon rattling on to "The Bear." After as many turnings and windings as would have almost admitted one to Rosamund's Bower, we suddenly pulled up at an old, substantial respectable-looking inn, standing with only its own outbuildings near it, facing at a few hundred paces the river Severn, and commanding a fine prospect for miles of the opposite shore. Here we were soon comfortable; but as we had been in Cheshire in the morning, it was with some difficulty that our ears become familiar to the new dialect.

Wishing to get all the knowledge we could of the forest before we started next morning, we began the study of a large map that was hanging in the room. but soon found that our own "ordnance map", which we knew almost by heart, was far better. The next step was to question the people in the house about the forest, whether they had any books about it, whether they had even a directory; whether they knew anybody who did know; all of which questions we had the lively satisfaction of receiving answer in the negative. There was, however, a bookseller's shop and a circulating library in the town, and thither we repaired in high hopes. The people were very civil but the invariable answer was "No." To prosecute further inquiries seemed hopeless. There might be some "Doctors Dryasdust" in the town but for them we did not take the trouble to inquire, and so, returned to the warm embraces of "The Bear", we made up our minds to "trust ourselves alone" and with Colonel Colby's excellent ordnance map.

Next morning there was a bright sun and a balmy air. The Severn seemed empty, a mere mass of sand-banks through which a few shallow streams were running. In less than half an hour up came the “bore” from the Bristol Channel, rushing in at a fearful rate, and bearing heaps of small craft impetuously before it. The waters made a loud tumult and reminded one of that very expressive but very alliterative line: “*The sullen surges of the Severn sea*”. The river was very soon full; and we believe there is no other river in England where the tide comes it with such fearful rapidity.

Leaving Newnham, we walked south along a delightful shady road near the banks of the Severn in the direction of Blakeney, a little village on the outskirts of the forest. The forest itself looked down on us the whole way from a high ridge. This was completely covered in trees, except where a



*View over Blakeney with the Severn beyond*

house or cottage peeped out, or there appeared indications of the working of a coal-mine. At one part of the road it was crossed by a most primitive railway; one of those tramroads that existed long before the days of George Stephenson, and which we could see for a long distance until it was lost in a dark tunnel. This road, wrought by horses, had an immense traffic, its ramifications extended through a great part of the forest, and here it terminated on the banks the Severn at a wharf or “pill” as it is termed in those parts, at which a number of small vessels were taking in cargoes of Forest of Dean coal.

Passing through Blakeney, a pretty little village, we ascended a road that promised to lead into the forest. In a fine recess of this road stood a Maypole, looking, of course, rather a little faded at that season of the year, but which gave pleasant indication that the Blakeney people kept up, with much enjoyment to themselves we hope, the old English celebration of May-day. The roadway was very steep, but its windings made it easy. We came to a spot marked on our map as “Dead Man’s Cross” and this place we thought must have some legend indicated by its name. There was, however, no cross at the place and the sum of the answers we got about the legend amounted to this, that a dead man must some time have been buried there and a cross erected over his grave! Again, there was another place called Gibraltar. This must, we thought, have been founded by some hero of the memorable siege, but there was no such romance about it; the name had been given as a mere fancy. We shall see many more curious illustrations of Forest of Dean names as we get further into the forest.

From the point we had now reached the view was most lovely. The high ridge which bounds the forest on the east stretched far away in one unbroken mass of beautiful green, the wavings of the tree-tops in the breeze being hardly discernible amid such dense foliage. Below was a peaceful valley in which nestled the village of Blakeney; and casting the eye further, the broad Severn could be seen moving on like a mass of molten silver; while beyond the view was shut in by the hills girding the horizon like a great chain.

Turning the elbow of the ascent we had mounted, another lovely view burst on our eyes. We had turned our backs on Blakeney and the Severn and now the densest part of the forest appeared. The high ridge that we have mentioned, sloped down on its western side into a deep valley and another ridge arose on the other side. The sides of these elevations and the whole valley were entirely covered with trees, the only breaks being a few roads and paths the appeared from our point of view more like pieces of rope than good travelling roads. The whole of this was gently undulating; the prevalent colour was dark green, but in some places a variety was given by a clump of trees of a lighter hue, and the whole formed a picture of tree scenery, so massive, so picturesque, and so perfect that we thought nothing else was wanting, and could have lain down and gazed for hours on the grand spectacle.

## Iron Production in the Dean (Part 3) by Cecile Hunt



*The old engine house at Parkend*

Pulling up in Parkend, all onboard the 'Iron' tour heard about how industrial the village was long before coal came to dominate the Forest. The engine house is the best preserved example of its kind to be found in the United Kingdom

During the 17th century Parkend had been, at different times, the location of two charcoal-fired Crown furnaces, known as the King's Ironworks; In 1612 James I contracted the Earl of Pembroke to build and run a blast furnace and forge at 'Parke End', bringing with it the first real settlement at what was to become the village of Parkend. The furnace was destroyed on the orders of Parliament, during the Civil War, in 1644. After the war, in 1653, Parliament instructed that another furnace should

be built, a short distance downstream from the first. Control of the furnace returned to the Crown after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. It ceased production, and was demolished, in 1674.

Local Forest of Dean coal did not produce coke that was ideal for smelting and Forest ironmasters were reluctant to invest in the new technology. It was not until the last decade of the 18th century that coke-fired furnaces began to make an appearance, with Parkend being built in 1799. It was the third coke-fired ironworks to be built in the Forest of Dean, Cinderford and Whitecliff being the others built almost simultaneously. Parkend ceased production around 1807 due to continuous technical problems. Most of the works were demolished between 1890 and 1908 - the iconic chimney stack beside the engine house was felled in 1908. Moses Teague, around 1820, discovered a way to make good iron from local coke, while working at Darkhill Ironworks. To exploit his discovery he formed the 'Forest of Dean Iron Co' and re-opened Parkend Ironworks in 1824.

Cannop lower pond was built in 1825 to provide a constant supply of water, and a 1.5 mile long leat constructed to transfer water to the top of a waterwheel, which was installed in 1827 to supply power for the blast. A second furnace was erected in 1827. The supply of water proved inadequate and in 1828 a 90 horsepower steam engine and engine house were constructed alongside the works. A year later, a second pond at Cannop was also built to boost the water supply.

Parkend was growing; by 1835 the site had grown to include workers' cottages, casting houses, blacksmith's and carpenter's sheds, a counting house, offices, a beerhouse, and many other ancillary buildings. In 1849 a second steam engine was added. In 1871 a third furnace was added; a 'hot blast' design which was the very latest technology at that time. Four years later, a recession hit the iron trade; the ironworks closed in 1877.

(The book, 'Parkend' by Ralph Anstis gives a really good insight into the industrial side of the village).

Moving on to Ellwood, time to stretch legs and get off the coach. From the view point on the old railway track, now a cycle track, an overview of Darkhill works was given. David Mushet, in 1818/1819 built a coke-fired 'experimental furnace' at Darkhill, this was the start of the industrial site now in ruins. Significant quantities of iron was produced, and sold, the majority of the works were used for research and experiments. Darkhill was conveyed to David's three sons; they quarrelled and six weeks after David's death tried to sell the works in July 1847, it never sold, the partnership was dissolved and the furnace was never again in blast.



*Mushet's Darkhill Ironworks*



## Food Riots in the Dean in 1756

There were many food riots in England during the eighteenth century, but those which occurred during 1756 and 1757 were probably the most severe in extent and intensity. Severely inclement weather conditions in early 1756 continued throughout the summer causing deficient harvests, which then caused grain prices to rapidly rise. In the West of England and Wales the ports, including those of Severn-side, were often affected by riots as mobs attempted to prevent grain supplies from being exported.

The Derby Mercury of 26<sup>th</sup> November 1756 carried a somewhat lyrical report from Bristol complaining about the amount of grain being used by local distilleries; *“Where then is our Corn? Why swallowed by Monsters of our own Make, or turned into Spirits, and conjured away. Oh! ’tis surprising to think what a devouring Sphynx this Distillery is. Her jaws upon the River Severn, and in Bristol here, consume to the full almost seven thousand Strike of Grain every Week. And how sadly this is prostituted and abused by being turned into Gin.....but for these Monopolists to make a Sort of artificial Famine, and wantonly to drive us to this Extremity, they certainly are in the literal Sense, Rogues in G R A I N.”*

Never slow to defend their interests, local Foresters stopped river traffic on the Severn and seized what grain and flour they could to feed themselves and their families. The Derby Mercury of 28<sup>th</sup> November 1757 reported on the consequences of their actions; *“Last Thursday and Yesterday an inquest was taken at Newnham in this County ( before William Jones, Thomas Crawley Boevey, and John Guise, three of His Majesties Justices of the Peace, and Charles Wyndham, High Sheriff, assisted by many of the neighbouring Gentlemen) of the Riots and Outrages lately committed at Newnham aforesaid, and other Places upon the Rivers Severn and Wye, by Numbers of People who assembled themselves in Bodies, and unlawfully obstructed the Navigation of the said Rivers, by stopping the Trows as they passed, and seizing and carrying off the Corn, Meal, etc found therein, under a mistaken Notion that such Corn, Meal etc was forfeited by Law; and fourteen of the said Rioters being found guilty by a Jury of twenty-three of the substantial Inhabitants and Land-holders within the Forest Division, were severally fined in considerable Sums for the said Offences. And we are informed from the same Place, that Warrants are issued by the said Justices for apprehending many others of the said Rioters for felonious Acts by them committed in the said riotous Meetings.”*

No doubt aware of just how close they were to more serious insurrection, the great and the good of the locality decided they would have to act. The same issue of the Derby Mercury of 1757 went on to report; *“The Gentlemen of this City and Neighbourhood have begun a Subscription for raising a Fund, to purchase, in distant Markets, a considerable Quantity of Corn, which, during the present high Price of Grain, will be sold at a cheap Rate to the Poor of this City, and such other Places as the Subscribers shall appoint.”*

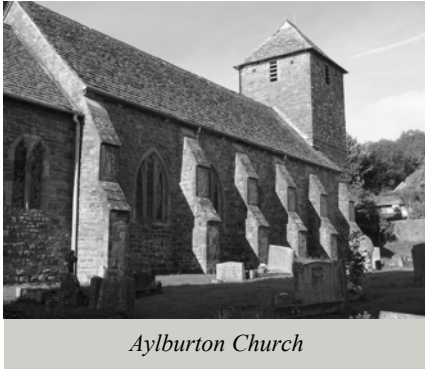


*Severn trows navigating the River Severn at Gloucester*

You can learn more about this dangerous period in our history, and particularly the circumstances in the Forest of Dean, by reading Christine Martyn’s excellent article focusing on later riotous events and tragic consequences; “The Bread Riots of 1795”. The article is available to download for 75 pence from our website:

<https://www.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/publications-for-sale/reprints/product/new-regard-vol-15-p14-to-p16-the-bread-riots-of-17>

## Meetings in Review *with John Powell*



*Aylburton Church*

A lovely day, the good company of fellow history enthusiasts, and the knowledge of a speaker who knows his subject well, made for a grand start to the society's 'outside' events marking the beginning of the summer season.

Simon Moore, our conservation officer and immediate past chairman, 'reads' churches well. Those of us who struggle with our Saxon and Norman arches, telling the age of stained glass windows or dating the carpentry skills of men who worked at their art without the aid of a power drill, were soon put at ease as we gratefully escaped a blistering sun for the calm and comfort of the lovely church of St Mary's at Lydney. This was the first of four

medieval churches visited that day. Easily the largest, Simon outlined its history and not only spoke of the fabric of the church but of the way its congregation would have viewed religion in the past. It was fascinating info.

What was dominating was that in each case — at Lydney, Aylburton, Woolaston and then Alvington — so much restoration has taken place. It left your reviewer with the thought that much of interest has been lost and that it might be productive to remove some plaster to see if there was a painting underneath! (that's only a joke, Simon). Fascinatingly, Simon told the story of how the church at Aylburton had actually been moved stone-by-stone from a point further up the lane to its present location nearer to the village. And why was Woolaston church where it is? If you had to walk, it would take a pretty good sermon to get you there. But, of course, we were told that in the old days there were many more houses thereabouts. For those with a head for heights the highlight was a commando-style visit to the top of the tower of St Mary's from which there are splendid views over the town and down to the Severn estuary. Little wonder the church steeple was once used as a navigation aid. The last port of call was Alvington, an understated and pretty little church well worth visiting and one at which we gratefully enjoyed a splendid cuppa.

And finally, overheard in the nave at St Mary's, Lydney; *Question:* I wonder why they always have cockerels on the top of spires? *Answer:* (Ernie Hale, Blakeney) We started off with a hen, but we had to change her because we couldn't find anyone to collect the eggs!

The unwritten aim of the most skillful of writers is to bring to life and shine a light on social history. Dickens is perhaps the best known. He relentlessly revealed the hardships and struggles endured by the downtrodden lower classes, pricking consciences with word pictures that endure to this day. So what of the Forest of Dean? Whether by accident or design, some of our best writers have made their marks by portraying our ancestors as oppressed, harshly ruled and exploited. And, of course, some were. Alas, it is true to say the poor will always be with us. These days there is a move to realign local history and to point out that many Forest folk lived on the edge, but were not half as badly off as their city and town-dwelling cousins. Big families were often shoe-horned into two-up two-down cottages (call them cots if you want to paint them as poverty stricken) but they had the advantage of large gardens, ample firewood and, often, a couple of sheep, and the obligatory pig. They had a certain independence and were neither humble and definitely not subservient.

This was the basis of a conversation which followed the airing of 'A Fortunate Man' the film made to follow up on the famous book of the same title written by John Berger and first published in 1967. It tells the story of Dr Sassall, in reality Dr John Eskell, the GP who lovingly cared for those who lived in the scattered community centred on St Briavels. Soudley Hall was the venue for this thought-provoking June Friday evening organised by Roger Deeks and Jason Griffiths, two men doing a splendid job under

the banner of the Foresters' Forest project, to illuminate the work of writers who have published material relating to the Dean.

The film (for those who stayed for the second showing) was revealing and both funny and moving, with but one professional actor and a cast of local people from the Soudley and Blakeney areas. Indeed, Mrs Byett's Blakeney Hill Sunday School scenes were real gems — I wonder how many of the audience sang 'I'm happy and I know it and I really want to show it' on the drive home? Admired, loved and appreciated as much as he was, Dr Eskell was, in the end, a tormented man. However, as the book and the film revealed, he was a man with a mission going way beyond his remit as the local doctor to help people he believed to be in genuine need. The book is still held in high regard in the medical profession but Foresters who, in those distant days, were happy with their lot, might be excused for thinking 'Here we go again'.

'*A Fortunate Man Revisited*' was the subject of a highly successful weekend of events in St Briavels and included a tour (organised by Di Standing) and talks attended by many society members.

The bravery of the teams of courageous divers who manufactured the miraculous escape of a dozen youngsters trapped on a ledge in the dark belly of a mountain cavern in Thailand took on a new meaning for society members when they visited Clearwell Caves for their July meeting.

In the society's 70-year history this was surely the most intriguing gathering point ever selected. Deep beneath the chilly bowels of the Forest, society members made a cautious entry to the main cavern guided only by sparse lights and candles. It was a shade daunting for those used to light on demand, but there was no escaping the fact that we were at a venue awash with atmosphere...a

location in which it was impossible not to feel somehow closer to those, who long years ago, earned their crust in these ancient old iron ore workings.

This very special occasion was the brainchild of society committee member Di Standing who combined her incredible organisational skills with the knowledge obtained from years of Forest caving, to produce a couple of hours of totally absorbing facts and photographs never previously available to other than cavers. In short, we were treated to an underground adventure.

But last things first! Di, who was at great pain to explain that the whole would not have been possible without contributions by her fellow cavers, closed her talk by revealing film of Forest divers exploring huge areas of flooded passages in existence this day and — if we are at our regular meetings venue at Bream Community Centre — probably beneath our very feet! It was mind-boggling stuff: so absorbing you could hear a pin drop as every one of the 120 or so watchers were captivated and deep in their own thoughts. This was a unique event and so successful the film will certainly have to be screened again. If you missed it make sure you are at its next showing, especially if it is in the Caves again.

Old men have often said there was more going on underground than on the surface of the Dean. This outstanding event examined a little geology, and then explored caves, mines for iron ore, coal and stone, and even railway tunnels.

In every respect '*A History of Underground Dean*' was an outstanding success, and special thanks are due to all those involved and especially Clearwell Caves owner Jonathan Wright who does much to foster and encourage the growing interest in local history



*Di Standing and her expectant audience!*

# FODLHS 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner



*Chair Mary Sullivan talking to Society President Baroness Jan Royall*

On a blazingly hot Saturday evening in June, members of the Forest of Dean Local History Society gathered at the Speech House's brand-new Edwin Tauber suite to celebrate the Society's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

After pre-dinner drinks, Society President Baroness Jan Royall, started proceedings. She spoke of the long history of the Forest of Dean and praised the Foresters for their stoic determination to stand firm in their defence of the Forest. Jan went on to thank Chair Mary Sullivan for her work in organising the dinner. Every Society committee member who had stepped down from office since the previous

anniversary dinner (in 2008) then received praise for their contribution to the Society.

Following the three-course dinner, the guest speaker was introduced. Dame Janet Trotter is the current Lord-Lieutenant of Gloucestershire and, with the able assistance of Society Vice Chairman (and Deputy Lieutenant!) Roger Deeks, Janet explained exactly what her role entails. Plucking the 'letters-patent' from a large box, Dame Janet showed her letter of appointment, complete with the great seal dangling precariously from the bottom of the letter. She explained that although the Forest has a longer history, Lord Lieutenants have been around since the 1540's. Next her badge of office was shown. The enamelled badge depicts the Tudor rose surmounted by a crown outlined with pearls, on a court bow of the Lieutenancy colours, white and magenta. Whilst male Lieutenants wear a military-style uniform, lady Lord Lieutenants simply wear the badge of office on their regular clothes whilst acting as the representative of the Queen in Gloucestershire,



*Dame Janet Trotter with Vice-President Ian Pope*

Dame Janet explained the four main aspects to her work. The primary function is to organise royal visits to the county. Not only does Dame Janet accompany the royal visitor on the day, she is involved with two 'recce's' prior to the visit. In the first six months of this year she said there have been 27 royal visits to Gloucestershire, so very time consuming when the additional 'recce's' are added in! Being involved in the Honours system and in particular presenting Queens Awards and British Empire Medals also occupies much of her time. Supporting the military organisations and the armed forces in the county is also a very important facet of her work. She also works to encourage volunteers in civil society.



*Members enjoying a convivial moment*

Dame Janet finished her speech by congratulating the History Society for reaching it's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and encouraged it to go on for another 70 years!