

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
August 2023



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- Book Review - 'Escheators' Inquisitions'
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Editors Notes

You will see that this edition has a different look, in that this time the inside pages are printed in colour rather than black and white. I took this step (after delicate negotiations with the Treasurer!) because there were an unusual number of colour photographs and other images being offered for publication with the accompanying texts. I (and no doubt the Committee) would be interested in any views you might have about a more 'colourful' newsletter. However, the change has come at a cost and I expect to revert to black and white inside pages next time.

Please take note of Ian Gower's reminder in his membership report that membership renewals will be due on 1st October. Membership renewal forms are available in the pull out section in the middle of the newsletter.

Elsewhere Sue Middleton, our Vice Chair, reports on the re-launched Schools' History Prize competition. Using her previous contacts with the schools, established during the Foresters' Forest project, and her extensive project management skills, Sue managed to cajole a reasonable number of entries for this years competition. Hopefully even more schools will take part next year. The front cover shows the overall winner of the schools contest Jessica Smith, Mrs White, head teacher of her school (Coalway Junior), and John Lane holding Jessica's winning entry.

Cecile Hunt poses some interesting and thoughtful questions about how we take photographs these days, and more to the point how we review and store those photos. She then draws parallels with an early pioneer of photographic curation, namely Francis Frith. See how she knits all this together in her article 'Photographs - What do you do with yours?'

Following on from my article in the May newsletter, 'Starting Your Own Local History Research', I have received a number of suggestions for further useful research resources, which I will feature in a future edition. Thanks in the meantime to those of you who emailed me with your suggestions.

Thanks are also due to Chris Sullivan for his book review (back cover), for which he has painstakingly distilled local Forest references from the latest BGAS Transaction's article on 'Escheators'.

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.

Views from the Chair by John Lane

The interval between writing these notes seems to me to be decreasing rapidly, I'm sure it was only last week that I wrote for the May newsletter!

Since then, the Committee have been meeting regularly to ensure the Society continues to function in its various guises.

The ever-popular summer meetings continued with a visit to Goodrich Castle where Dr Rob Jones enthralled us all with, not only his knowledge of the Castle, but his enthusiasm for history. We hope to harness Rob's passion on further visits, watch this space!



During the same weekend, members of the Committee set up a display of Forest of Dean history at the Chepstow Society History Festival in the Drill Hall at Chepstow. It was an fascinating day and gave us the opportunity to not only learn about historical events of our near neighbours, but also to pass on some of our facts and figures from this side of the River Wye.

You will see in the centre section of this newsletter some 'pull-out' pages, one of which is the membership renewal form for 2023 -2024. Yes it is that time of year again! I know times are hard, but please continue to support the History Society. Also, whilst this will not apply to all our members, I would urge those that are still working or still paying tax, to consider completing a Gift Aid declaration when paying for your annual membership.

As a registered charity, the Forest of Dean Local History Society is able to claim an additional 25p for every £1.00 that is given by way of membership fees. Such munificence from H.M Government is to be encouraged and, more importantly, taken advantage of! Our Membership Secretary, Ian Gower would be happy to receive your Gift Aid forms.

In the May Newsletter, I mentioned the History Competition which we are keen to promote to younger Foresters, (further details elsewhere in this newsletter). I'm pleased to report the competition produced some excellent entries, although not perhaps, as many as we had hoped for. Never the less, the Society intend to build on the success of this first year, and will continue to run the competition in future years.

Our Membership Secretary, Cecile Hunt, is busy putting together our programme of speakers for the coming Autumn/Winter. Details will be released in due course but I wanted to thank Cecile for all her work in arranging a diverse, interesting and engaging range of speakers for the Society. We have not forgotten the interest in having the talks available 'on line' and we are still researching how this might best be achieved

Another member of the Society to whom sincere thanks are due, is Averil Kear, who is our Enquiries Officer.

Averil regularly receives requests from members of the public interested in some facet of local history, often they need assistance with tracing family members or finding details of their house etc. Averil utilises her skills as a former archivist, to collate details but, as often as not, she will point enquirers in the right direction, be it to the appropriate book, map or archive. I know her work is greatly appreciated by the people who contact her and, I too, am grateful for the work Averil does on behalf of the Society.

I wish you all well for what remains of this summer and look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our indoor meetings.

John Lane



MEMBERSHIP

Summer is now well underway, the indoor meetings have finished for the season, and members have turned their attention to our programme of summer walks and visits. Last week I joined the fascinating walking tour of the murals in the Coleford area by the artist Tom Cousins and as I write this, the walk around

Staunton is about to commence. I hope you also have been able to enjoy some of the outdoor events over the last few weeks.

Please keep an eye out for my emails to keep you informed of any additional events and activities from the Society and other organisations of interest. To that end, please let me know if you change your postal or email address, or if you would like reminders to be sent to an additional email address.

Although our indoor meetings have finished for the year, new members have again increased since the last newsletter, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to Dot Oakes, Stephen Waters and Barry Embling.

Finally, the new membership year will start on October 1st, so please take this opportunity to renew your membership in good time. A membership renewal form can be found within the newsletter, or you can download one from the Society's website and email it to me at the address below.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your summer.

Ian Gower (membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk)

During the third weekend in May, the History Society attended the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Chepstow Society.

A History Fair was held in the Drill Hall in Chepstow, and members of our committee ran a stall there to sell our literature and answer questions. The photograph shows Vice-Chair Sue Middleton rapt in conversation, whilst Chair John Lane (partially obscured) is similarly occupied.

The Chepstow Society was formed in 1948 (same year as the History Society) by Ivor Waters, who was a widely published local historian and poet.



FODLHS FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday 22nd September - 7pm
ZOOM MEETING

(Details will be sent by email)

Dr Rose Hewlett - "Sea Walls of the Severn"

Saturday 2nd September - 3pm
West Dean Centre, Bream
Dr Simon Draper - "Place Names in the
Gloucestershire Landscape"

Saturday 7th October - 2'30pm
West Dean Centre, Bream
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
followed by

John Putley - "The Medieval Barber-Surgeon"

Members Visit to Gloucester Archives reported by Mary Sullivan

On Thursday 15th June, members of the Society travelled to Gloucester Archives for a pre-arranged tour of the facilities, hosted by John Putley.

John and his colleague Gemma made a great effort to put on an interesting tour, which also encompassed the new strong rooms. The group was shown a variety of Forest related artefacts, including the 18th century map which the Society had contributed towards the purchase of.



Gloucester Archives have recently made available a really useful leaflet summarising what you need to know if you are planning a visit there.

Download the leaflet via their home page:

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/



DHC News from Nicola Wynn

Conservation work: Following advice from a professional conservator thanks to an AIM grant, the collections team is carrying out much needed tidying, cleaning and conservation on items in the agricultural shed over the summer and autumn.

40th Anniversary of Dean Heritage Centre 12th - 17th August: Dean Heritage Centre opened in 1983 so this year we will be commemorating 40 years with a display on the highlights and the following activities: Summer Fair – 12th & 13th, Guided tours – 15th, Craft days - 15th-17th, Kids go free – 16th.

Backstage at the Gage Wednesday 13th September (Heritage Open Day) and 4th October: Get closer to history with an in depth look at an object from our archive. Collections staff and volunteers will give a 10 minute talk on an object and answer questions. Objects will include maps, diaries, oral history recording, books, photographs and objects from our collection.

Discover Late Summer Dene Saturday 9th of September: Guided walk with Alex Knight to learn about the history, plants and wildlife of the Dene in late summer. Booking required.

Changing Fashion of Costume 16th September – 31st December: Exhibition by Lisa Jayne Smith of historical costumes hand-sewn onto small models, made after years of extensive research that tell the story of the 'Change in Fashion from 1066-1980's. There will be a selection of the models on display at Dean Heritage Centre. They tell the journey of fashion changes from: Saxon, Medieval, Renaissance, Tudor, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Carolean, Puritan, Restoration, Stuart, Georgian, Victorian, Edwardian, 1920's, 1930's, 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, 1970's and up to the 80's. There are a wide range of different looks, colour, shapes and culture and so reflect the real- life diversity of population.

Halloween & October Half term 28th October – 5th November: A range of activities and spooky fun for the whole family.



Schools' History Competition 2023

Some of the creative geniuses of the future won prizes in the Forest of Dean Local History Society History Competition this summer. There were four categories for the competition and any KS2 pupil in the Forest Primary schools could take part. The challenge was to create something to portray an element of Forest History.



Overall winner, Jessica Smith's 3D model

The most popular category was to create a 3D model and the winner was Jessica Smith with her model of the Union Pit Disaster at Monument Mine.

The judges appreciated the level of detail that Jessica had put into the work and the 'setting of the scene' with the trees and the coal. Jessica won £25 herself and won £100 for her school, Coalway Junior, who reported 'All of our staff and Headteacher Mrs White were very impressed with her dedicated attitude to her work.'

See the photograph on the front cover of FODLHS Chairman John Lane making the presentations to Mrs White, Headteacher Coalway Junior School, and Jessica Smith, overall winner of the competition.

The writing category also represented our Freemining heritage as Cam Breeze from Yorkley school won £25 with his 'First Time Miner' story of danger and suspense. See a following page to read Cam's story.

Leo Agnew of Ruardean Church of England Primary School won £25 in the PowerPoint category, portraying the changing wildlife in the Forest over time.

Ruardean also produced the winning video entitled 'It's only a Bear!!' created by Daisy Chilton and Grace Watkins who shared the prize money, winning £12.50 each.'

The video was then played to the whole school, who enjoyed it immensely. (No bears were injured in the making of the video!)



Sue Middleton Vice Chair of FODLHS, Grace Watkins, Daisy Chilton, Leo Wright, George Vanhegan, of Ruardean C of E Primary School

There were other 'Highly Commended' entries from Ruardean which were for Leo Wright and George Vanhegan (for their 3D models of weapons inspired by Andy Seed's 'The Story of the Forest' book) and for Isabella Giaquinto's writing entry (which summarised the History of Freemining).

Schools' History Competition 2023

History Of The Forest In 3 Animals



Shown left is the first slide from the winning entry of Leo Agnew (Ruardean) in the PowerPoint category.

Shown right is a clip from the winning entry of Daisy Chilton & Grace Watkins (Ruardean) in the Video category.



Local places of interest were celebrated as Paige Freeman from Clearwell School (left) was 'Highly Commended' for her model of Clearwell Caves.

A whole team of pupils from Yorkley were 'Highly Commended' for their version of the stained-glass window on the Sculpture Trail.



All of the children received oak leaf badges to recognise their hard work in creating their entries and these were colour coded, so Green was for 'Highly Commended', Yellow was for winning a category and Orange was for the Overall winner.

The funding for the cash prizes was provided by a legacy from Dr John Jurica of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society through the Gloucestershire Local History Association. This means that the History competition will run for the next four years and the Forest Of Dean Local History Society looks forward to receiving many more entries in the future. Congratulations to all the winners!

Schools' History Competition 2023 - Winner - Writing Category

"First Time Miner" by Cameron Breeze



Cam Breeze of Yorkley
Primary School

"Dad!" Elmer asked, "I don't want to be late for my first day on the job!"

"Stop shouting," John whispered, "I'm right behind you."

"Ahh," Elmer jumped, "God sake."

"Language," Jim exclaimed.

They all gathered around the dining circle eating breakfast happily but swiftly. They were eating gruel, disgusting gruel but they were used to it, a daily thing for them.

They finally finished their breakfast, putting on their wet shoes. They all strolled down the stairs grabbing their lunch closing the door behind them.

Screech! Bang! Click! As the lift lowered into the mine.

"Ow bist ol butt," Morgan whispered.

"Hi!" Elmer announced enthusiastically, "I'm Elmer it's my first day down here, what do I do?"

"Come right this way ol butt." Morgan replied. Elmer followed him past the stables and down to the hodder. Elmer could see nothing. All round was pitch black and Elmer was anxious. "Ere is a Nellie and a candle, pop it in your mouth like me, it will light your way, while you pull the Hod."

Elmer gripped the Nellie between his teeth, it was uncomfortable, but he was reviled that he could now see where he was going. Morgan held the straps and Elmer stepped into them then Morgan slipped the second strap over Elmer's head. "This isn't that heavy." Elmer said.

"Just wait till I fill it with coal my boy!" Morgan chuckled. Elmer then started to pull the hod cart, as they travelled further into the mine he had to bend

down more and more. Eventually he was on his hands and knees, he could feel the hard rough ground below him.

Slowly, the flame on his candle started to shrink and flicker, "What's happening to the candle, Sir?"

"Alright son, the oxygen is starting to get low, its bad air. Remember at all cost if it goes out, then get out!"

Elmer kept a watchful eye on his candle as he got further and further into the mine. Suddenly there was a flash from Morgan's pickaxe as it struck the coalface and Elmer's candle went out...

Next thing Elmer heard was Morgan shouting "Get out quick, move over boy out my way!" Elmer was shoved against the floor as Morgan pushed passed. Elmer started to crawl back towards the entrance his arms started to give out and he was finding it harder to pull the hod. He was beginning to feel dizzy, he tried to get out of the harness but was too weak, with a struggle he managed to unclip it from the hod. The release of the weight meant he could move faster. He began to see a faint light at the entrance but then everything blurred, and he passed out just before he got there.

Hearing the voice of his brother, Jim, screaming at him woke him up and with the little power he had left he open his eyes, thankful to be alive. "Thank god you're alive."

"Language." Elmer murmured.

Photographs

What do you do with yours?

By Cecile Hunt

It is so easy now to take a photo, no need in most cases to have a camera. Mobile phones take their place in many households. When taken what do you do with your photos? Since WWII one camera per family was a luxury. Buying films, taking photos, getting it developed and then...pour over the pictures before storing them in a draw or old biscuit tin or, sometimes, mounting them in a photograph album. Taking the photos out occasionally to show to visitors or family members. A record of family life, events, holidays et al captured for posterity and easy to access. How do you view them now?

More photos are taken now than ever before. How easily will future generations view them, look back at events, happenings, family ancestors, who married who etc?

Modern technology is a wonderful thing. We have computers, and the cloud, to store all our memories on. Easy for future generations to access and look at, or not? Vast amounts of data have been electronically stored over the last few decades. Not all can now be accessed due to software and applications having become obsolete.

How old are some of your photographs that you can currently look at, handle, and reminisce over? Can they be handed on without too much problem? There are not many in this world who do not like looking at images of the past and present. As someone interested in history, either researching it or reading about it you will have, at some point, come across photos and postcards attributed to Francis Frith and/or The Francis Frith Collection.

Francis Frith was a man with great foresight and a brilliant business acumen. Not long after the invention of photography in 1839 Francis saw a business opportunity and from that initial start The Francis Frith Collection grew, it now has an archive of 300,000 photographic images.

Born in Chesterfield, Derbyshire in 1822 Francis Frith started up a wholesale grocery business in Liverpool which, selling it in the mid 1850's, it '...made him the equivalent of a multi-millionaire today'. Before selling his grocery business he had founded a photographic publishing company (1860). He made trips to the Middle East during 1856 and 1860 using his glass plates, cameras and equipment he took photos that established him as 'an outstanding pioneer photographer'. Sales of the photographs taken on these expeditions totalled over £3 million in today's value.

In 1860 Francis married and settled in Surrey, where he started F Frith & Co. After his expeditions abroad Francis decided to concentrate on the British Isles. He was in at the start of modern tourism; the burgeoning railway system meant more people could get to the seaside and other holiday destinations easier; more people who wanted a souvenir of their holiday. In the 1870's Frith & Co's market expanded even more. Bank Holidays and half-day Saturdays were, in 1871, made obligatory by an Act of Parliament.

Frith & Co created a 'photographic record of Britain'. Their 1886 catalogue of souvenir prints ran to 670 pages. Retail stockist's ran to over 2,000. His sons continued the business after Francis Frith died 1898. In 1902 the Post Office approve the use of postcards; Frith & Co become the leaders of postcard development. The collection was nearly lost, and destroyed, in 1970s; eventually saved for the nation and, ironically, now digitised for accessing via the internet at <https://www.francisfrith.com/> - But the originals are still available to handle! Find out more information on the website including many photos of Forest towns and villages.



*Francis Frith, Public domain,
via Wikimedia Commons*

Meetings in Review *with Chris & Mary Sullivan, and Sue Middleton*

Dr Rob Jones, a past speaker on William Marshal, guided a visit of some 17 members to Goodrich Castle on a beautiful afternoon on May 21st. He led in a 'walk a bit, talk a bit' style and wisely did not take us up spiral staircases. After the talk, many of us explored as our limbs allowed.

Goodrich Castle is on a headland that controlled two old crossings of the Wye, with a ford as well as the current Kerne Bridge. It was not placed in the front line of invasion from or into Wales. Possibly there was some pre-Norman defence here, but later works have obliterated all evidence of this and most evidence of the initial castle apart from the cold, dark Keep. Like later work, this is of local stone. Much of what we see is late 13th-century. After owners including the Marshal family, William de Valence, a half-brother of Henry III, gained the castle and launched a major refit, with large fireplaces and windows. At this stage, the castle



Dr Rob Jones, with attentive members, in the courtyard at Goodrich Castle. 'Roaring Meg' is in the foreground

was not garrisoned. It was not a dangerous place to live. Instead, it had a significant domestic staff. Valence's widow Joan may even have had a garden outside her private apartments.

Its design was as much about theatre as military defence. While very defensible, it was mainly used for power statements between nobles, and architecture such as staircases supported that use. By the 15th century, further changes were made in rooms and roofing, reflecting a trend to give the servants separate quarters.

The original castle well was 166 feet deep. As part of 16th century further

improvements to accommodation, running water was piped in from a nearby hill. The castle fell out of favour. In 1646, with the tide of the Civil War running strongly away from King Charles, Sir Henry Lingen garrisoned the castle against Colonel Birch, who cut the piped water and slowly set about reducing the defenders by cannon fire. Locally-cast Roaring Meg was the biggest mortar of the war. Its 200-pound explosive charges broke walls and resistance. The castle was slighted. When it came to the Ministry of Public Works in 1910, there was perhaps 10 feet of debris in the courtyard. A wall collapse prompted stabilisation measures in 1925.

Members said they appreciated how Dr Jones had brought the castle and its inhabitants back to life. **C.S.**

On Sunday 25th June dozens of members from different local history societies around the County descended on Blockley village hall for the annual GLHA summer afternoon. The Blockley society put on an excellent event for their guests. A welcoming cup of tea or coffee was available whilst taking a first look at the extensive and expansive displays around the hall, featuring interesting women of the past, old shops that had been in the High Street over the past century, the lovely old church and the history of Northwick Park stately home.

At 2pm events began with a welcome from Steve Blake, Chair of GLHA, and a presentation on the history of Blockley by their President, Jeremy Bourn. After that people divided into 4 groups to undertake their previously chosen activity – a tour of the Church; a walk down to Snugborough Mill; a walk along the main street to hear about the history of shopping in the village; or for those not wishing or able to walk out, a talk on the Northwick Park estate. All the activities were interesting and led by knowledgeable members of the local group.



*St Peter & St Paul Church.
Familiar to those who watch
'Father Brown' on BBC1!*

The site of the church dates to Saxon times. The current building, which is quite large, light and airy, still retains some features from its Norman and later iterations. The group visiting the mill had a pleasant walk and were very impressed by what they were shown by the current owner. Whilst the “shoppers” were well entertained by hearing about the old shops.

Eventually everybody returned to the hall for a veritable banquet of sandwiches, savoury snacks and a variety of delicious cakes with more tea/coffees. A thoroughly enjoyable afternoon. We were all very impressed by the planning and delivery of the afternoon by the Blockley group.

Next June our Society will be hosting a similar event in the Main Place in Coleford. To achieve as successful an event, we are planning already, and will need support and help from some of our members. Anyone interested in getting involved or who has old photos or memories of past Coleford they could share, please contact Mary at publications@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk *M.S.*

Huge thanks to Tom Cousins from everyone on his guided walk around some of his murals in the Coleford area on Tues 11th July. This walk was originally devised by Di Standing as part of the Coleford Area Walking Festival and I really enjoyed it, so Tom reproduced it for FODLHS. We gathered at Coleford clock tower and looked at the first mural of David and Robert Mushet. Tom explained the the consultation process that he completed with local businesses in the town as the design had evolved and improved because of this.



We moved on to the Reading the Forest mural which celebrates Forest authors on this side of the Forest and then the refreshed town centre mural, which is roughly opposite the King's Head. The mural on the roof above Reckless Designs was for 'Frack off our Forest', but is getting worn away by the weather. We walked up to Broadwell to see the wartime mural on the outside of the Memorial Hall and then inside Tom explained how he'd re-created the mural originally devised by Italian prisoners of war. We then moved on through Forest tracks, via Jugshole Pond, to a series of murals in Coalway which included the 'Parliaments New Chainsaw' mural. We came back to Coleford, via the golf course and down Rock Lane to Whitecliff, calling on the Fonz and Marilyn Monroe on the way.

It was fascinating the hear the 'behind the scenes' story of each mural, and how Tom had created them. *S.M.*

Book Review *by Chris Sullivan*

ESCHEATORS' INQUISITIONS FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND BRISTOL, c.1260-1485

Volume 37 is the latest of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society (BGAS) Gloucestershire Record Series, a series where someone - here Matthew Holford – ploughs through ancient manuscripts full of abbreviations and translates them for us, so we can gain insight into past ways. Under feudal law, if land or assets became vacant through death without heir, or became forfeit by felony, they reverted to the feudal lord or the Crown. Volume 37 is about the cases where value might have been due to the king, if only for a period. Escheators were charged with sniffing this out. Their enquiries, or 'inquisitions', tell us quite a lot about the assets involved. Their records tell us how the stories started, but rarely how they ended.

Pages of this Volume give detailed descriptions of the widespread assets of Thomas, Duke of Gloucester after his fatal falling out with Richard II. Assets in 1397 at St Briavels Castle include extensive kitchen equipment; expensive silks, linens and bedspreads; arms such as baleen crossbows with 'quarrels'; many items for being horrid to prisoners – and a Romance novel. Much smaller sums were being withheld by his former staff - 'la Newelonde' rents and court revenues by William Kere, 'Smythrente' and the court fees of 'Wodespeche' by Thomas Staure as beadle of the forest.

Even in 1361, Normandy abbots were still a law unto themselves. The abbot of Cormeilles sold land in Newent, given by the king, without king's licence. Worse, the abbot was supposed to be giving doles of mixed grain to Newent paupers for the souls of the king and his progenitors. Similarly, in 1398 it was found that the monks of Grace Dieu Abbey (now in Gwent) had for a decade stopped saying daily Masses for the king's family at 'Stowe' in the forest, despite having been given a couple of Dean farms to fund this.

William Gybons of Ruardean was outlawed for felony, but the vicar of Welsh Bicknor would not give up 40 shillings worth of goods and chattels Gybons had passed to him. On Christmas Eve 1415, Peter Howle, a 'colyer' of Blaisdon, did various felonies. He did a runner, despite having £20 of household goods, clothing and farm animals. Outlawry was also applied merely to debt. James Hyet, 'yoman' was outlawed for debt in London despite having a well-equipped farm in Lydney, with silver spoons as well as pots, pans, linen and blankets.



Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester
Public Domain

John Teynton, a servant of Ralph Greyndour of Mitcheldean, was drowned in 1396 in a stream at Littledean, *'riding a horse of Ralph's of 'bay' colour towards pits called 'colputtes' in the forest of Dean. The horse was the cause of his death and is worth 6s 8d.'* This is an example of a 'deodand', where murder weapons and the like were forfeit to the king. A rather arbitrary 'Health and Safety' fine.

And more like it, comprehensively indexed! The Society keeps the Record Series at its Lydney store.

Articles in BGAS Transactions Volumes 1-132 (up to 2014) are available to download in pdf format from the BGAS website: www.bgas.org.uk/resources/bgas-resources/search-past-transactions