

FOREST OF DEAN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

news
November 2018



LEST WE FORGET



THE GREAT WAR
LEGION



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November 2018

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Editors Notes

Obviously November 2018 is a significant month in our country's history, as we look back 100 years and remember the armistice which ended the dreadful conflict which was World War One. The arresting image on the cover caught my attention as I was strolling through Bathurst Park Memorial Garden in Lydney, and I thought it was appropriate to share it with you in this edition.

Taking World War One as a theme, you can see some of the fruits of the Society's research into how the local population was affected by World War One at the Dean Heritage Centre, during the WW1 Exhibition which is being held there between 16th November and 30th December. I guess we tend to take the Heritage Centre somewhat for granted, but it was not brought into existence without a struggle. Without any support from local authorities the struggle continues to keep the Centre going. The part time staff there, Joanne Clarke and Nicola Wynn, hardworking ladies both, fully deserve our support as they continue to find ways to make the Centre viable for the future.

The Society's World War One research, mentioned earlier, was expertly assembled into a book by the editorial team of Cecile Hunt, Cheryl Mayo and David Harris, and you are again offered the opportunity to buy a copy of the book ("The Forest at War") at members preferential rates via the order form you will find elsewhere in this edition. It would certainly make an excellent Christmas present for anyone interested in the history of our fantastic local area!

Finally on the World War One theme, in this edition we feature the story of a 'A Forester at Passchendaele'. Former Chair Ron Beard recorded his father, Jim, speaking about his traumatic experiences there, and they are shared with you on the back cover. Additionally the story is also available on our website as the 'Featured Article' under the 'News' button (<https://enquiries.forestofdeanhistory.org.uk/>). You can actually hear Jim recount his experiences online as we have uploaded an audio file with the text.

Finally, elsewhere in this edition you will also find an order form for our journal. Having had chance to read some of the articles in the latest New Regard, my eye was caught by David Mullin's comprehensive and really interesting article "How Foresters Got The Vote". Having previously researched Reform Bridge (SO627108), David's article certainly filled in more than a few gaps in my knowledge, and reaffirmed my gratitude to those in the recent past who struggled to assert universal suffrage.

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 - *with Mary Sullivan*

So, another AGM has come and gone. Thank you to those who came to support the AGM and hear the reports of how the Society is progressing. We have had a very busy 70th anniversary year with excellent talks, visits and the grand anniversary dinner. I have enjoyed it all enormously and I hope you have too. I want to repeat my thanks to all the committee members who have worked so hard to make all our activities successful. In particular, I want to thank Sue Gordon-Smith for the 16 years of hard work she has given the Society selling our publications. This has involved not only standing behind the publications desk at meetings but also travelling around many retail outlets who sell our journals and posting off many more. All of this also generates a lot of paperwork but has provided the Society with a lot of income over the years. We owe her a lot.



Sue Gordon-Smith at a recent meeting

I also wish to offer my sincerest congratulations to Averil Kear who, for the first time ever, has won both the Cyril Hart and Scott-Garrett awards in a single year. This clearly demonstrates the dedication Averil puts into her historical research. We are very lucky to have her as our Enquiries Officer and one of our dedicated Vice Presidents.

Those at the last meeting also heard my talk about what I've discovered about the original founders of the Society. We looked at the 8 people on the original steering group of 1949. They were a mixed bunch of both Foresters and incomers, all with responsible positions in the Society of the time, but from very different backgrounds. They varied from a Viscount to miners' sons, and included a sanitary inspector and a teacher. But what they had in common were two things. They all thought the history and heritage of the Forest area were unique and worth studying and preserving. They were also strongly in favour of education for working people. The Workers Educational Association featured several times in my talk.

Although times have changed so much in 70 years I believe there is a strong similarity with current members of the Society. Surely we still believe that the Forest history is unique and fascinating and we want to learn more.

To round off this eventful year, in December the indefatigable duo of Cheryl Mayo and Di Standing are arranging a 1948 Christmas experience. I'm not quite sure what that will entail but I'm sure it will be fun. The afternoon will also include an auction of a few special Forest history books, more details to follow. Do come along.

Finally, the usual plea. We need more people to take part in organising all the events we enjoy and participate in. If you are willing to offer a little bit of help please let a committee member know.

I hope to see you at an event soon.



Multiple award winner, Society Vice President. Averil Kear

Mary Sullivan



MEMBERSHIP

Need for forms if you pay by Standing Order please!

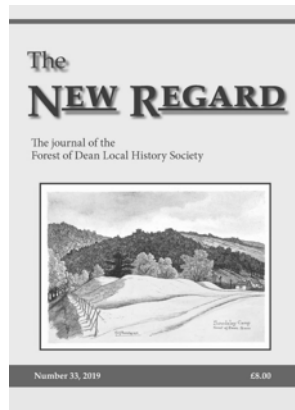
I will start with a warm welcome to the following new (and in one case re-joining) members: Ollie Keys, Iain Baird, Philip and Susan Cull, Jeff and Jean Hewlett, Richard Edge and Margaret Fuller, Valerie Boxley, and Allan and Cheryth Shout. We hope you enjoy your membership of the Society for many years. As at the end of September, the Society had some 330 members. My other important job is to say a huge thank you to everyone for your uncomplaining and in many cases very prompt compliance with the GDPR regulations requiring you to send me a form with your renewal. By the time the membership year commenced on 1 October, I had already over 50% of renewals. Thank you!

BUT - many of you who pay by Standing Order have not sent me a form. We need you to do so, please. Also, a number of the SOs are out of date still - the fee for single membership was raised to £12 and for two at the same address to £17 last year. If you believe this applies to you, please call me on 01594 510 533 or email membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk to arrange to make up the difference. Thank you again!

Cheryl Mayo, Membership Secretary

***The New Regard* No. 33 - out now!**

'Deer: It appears that the usual annual demand for deer on account of the crown, is four bucks and four does, but it frequently happens that the number is not completed ... in consequence of the scarcity of these animals.' So reported Thomas Rudge as *The Present State of the Forest*, in his History of the County of Gloucestershire in 1803. I wonder if Her Majesty would these days be willing to take some venison off our hands and perhaps a few choice boar as well? This is one of the several fascinating articles in the latest *New Regard*. Closer to current times is Pete Ralph's memoir of his time at the Forestry Training School at Parkend in the early 1960s, while somewhere in the middle is an account of how (at least most of) the inhabitants of encroachment plots in the Forest were able to get the vote in the mid 19th century. Then there's archaeology, and ancient trees, and a full history of the saving and conservation of Whitecliff ironworks, and more. A full list of articles can be found on the order form included in this newsletter. This year we have gone for colour, which makes the journal an even more attractive Christmas present proposition. Best of all, the price is still only £6 for members - remember to use the member code in the newsletter if you are ordering online. Happy reading!



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 10th November - 3pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
Ian Standing - "Words from the past: the Forest observed 1200AD to 2012 AD"

Saturday 8th December - 3pm - West Dean Centre, Bream, GL15 6JW
"Christmas 1948 - Rationing & paper chains"



A request for Christmas event help!

For our Christmas event on Sat 8 December, Di Standing and Cheryl Mayo are planning a '1948' Christmas as part of the Society's 70th anniversary celebrations. They've been doing some research into what went on in the Forest in that year – besides the formation of the Society, which was well reported – but we would love your help:

First, if you have memories or family stories of those post war Christmases when rationing of nearly everything was still in place, and you would be happy to share them with us, please call Di on 01594 562122 so she can arrange to chat to you.

Secondly, if you have Christmas decorations, cards, toys etc from that time and would be willing to bring them on the day to be part of our exhibit, please call Cheryl on 01594 510533 or email her at membership@forestofdeanhistory.org.uk. That's so we can prepare cards for them to tell their story.

Finally, on the day itself we **would like all members to bring along a small Christmassy non-perishable food gift** for under the tree, which we will donate to a local food bank. No wrapping needed. There will also be an auction at the Christmas meeting of some of the rare and duplicated books which have been in the Society's library and which we would like to go to good homes. Some will have reserve prices. Watch the website for further details.



Home Front Dean : WW1 exhibition 16th November – 30th December

To tie in with national commemorations of the end of the First World War, DHC is putting on an exhibition including panels with information produced by LHS members, WW1 objects from our collection and a display by Dene Magna pupils.

Christmas

Our Victorian themed Christmas will feature Father Christmas in our cosy decorated cottage with a real fire and Christmas crafts, Gallery trail and activities for children. Father Christmas will be visiting on the 15th & 16th and 22nd & 23rd December between 11am and 3pm

Café

The café is now under the management of DHC. The new manager Jo is busy setting up a new team to run the café and will be developing a new menu which will be rolled out over the coming months. The DHC will be working with an exciting new partner which will be announced next month. If you would like to be the first to know sign up to our newsletter.

Oral History project update

DHC is taking part in the Foresters Forest programme to digitise our collection of audio cassette tapes in order to preserve them for the future and to make them more accessible. We have now digitised and almost finished cataloguing Elsie Olivey's collection of recordings of Foresters. This has revealed fascinating stories of life in the Forest in the early 20th century. We have sent the 2nd batch for digitisation and will soon be cataloguing these as well.

Mushet project

Many thanks to LHS members who kindly contributed towards purchasing and restoring the painting of David Mushet. Thanks too for Roger Deeks and Ian Standing for organising the campaign. The painting is now with a professional art restorer for a couple of months. We also have the very good fortune to be offered some letters written by David Mushet and passed down through the family. We aim to create a new display about David and Robert Mushet using these new items and hopefully to work with local schools to promote the importance of the Mushets contribution to the industrial revolution.

For further information or any enquiries please see our website www.deanheritagecentre.com or contact Collections Officer Nicola Wynn email Nicola@deanheritagecentre.com

Cold War Bunkers in the Forest of Dean

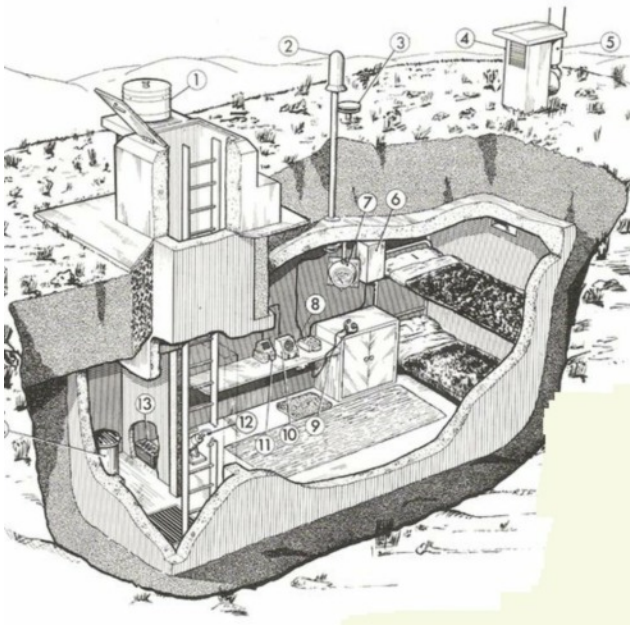
by Paul Stephens-Wood

In 1983 the Forest writer Louise Lawrence published her novel "Children of the Dust". She wrote about survivors in a Forest destroyed by nuclear war. It reflected real fears that after the Soviet Union went nuclear in 1949, the unthinkable could happen. The British Government made contingency plans. In 1957 the Home Office funded the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organization (UKWMO) tasked to provide data about nuclear explosions and forecasts of likely fallout profiles across the country in the event of war. The field force was provided by volunteer members of the Royal Observer Corps (ROC). Previously the ROC had plotted enemy aircraft attacks during the Second World War. Now they became the eyes and ears of Civil Defence in the event of a nuclear attack.



Broadway ROC monitoring post

Between 1956 and 1965 an extensive network of underground monitoring posts were constructed across Britain at roughly 15 mile intervals. Altogether 1,563 bunkers were dug 15 feet deep into the British countryside. Of the seventeen posts in Gloucestershire, three were sited in the Forest of Dean. The monitoring post at Blakeney has been completely destroyed and no trace of it remains, but the posts at St Briavels and Westbury on Severn remained as weathered concrete and steel structures sticking up a few feet from the ground. They were there in 2009, but haven't been checked since.



Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Post

Key

1. Ground Zero Indicator
2. Fixed Survey Meter, Geiger Muller Tube
3. Bomb Power Indicator Baffle
4. Air Vent
5. Bomb Power Indicator
6. Fixed Survey Meter
7. Stand-by Radio Set
8. Loud Speaker telephone
9. Carrier Receiver
10. 12 Volt Battery
11. Chemical Toilet
12. Pump for Pneumatic Aerial
13. Pneumatic Aerial

Cold War Bunkers in the Forest of Dean



St Briavels ROC post - exterior view

In June 1961, in a small rectangular compound on a field boundary in St Briavels the first ROC monitoring post in Dean was constructed. It remained operational for thirty years. Subterranea Britannica, an organisation that records man made underground structures, noted its condition in 1998. They reported that the hatch was locked and all the features were intact but rather weathered. When they gained access in 2009 a chemical toilet and a few standard issue cupboards and work surfaces remained.

The post at Westbury on Severn, built in 1963, and closed only 5 years later, had not fared so well. Subterranea Britannica reported that the post was open. All surface features were intact but the ventilation

louvres at the top of the ventilation shaft and the hatch were missing. There had been unauthorised access and internally there was fire damage and rubbish on the floor, with only a partly disassembled bunk remaining.

Throughout their working life these monitoring posts were manned by three ROC volunteers, well trained, and with a high level of commitment. In reality, the bunkers would not have been strong or secure enough to actually survive a nuclear strike, and the members of the ROC who manned them knew this. Their job was to monitor the equipment - a fixed survey meter to measure radioactivity, a pinhole camera to capture the nuclear flash and a BPI (bomb power indicator) to measure the strength of the blast. They would report their observations to the area command post at Bath where the Civil Defence response for the area was co-ordinated. Several major war exercises were held each year where realistic material was provided for real time simulations of a nuclear attack. Only once, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, were the posts put on major alert. The St Briavels post was the only one operational in the Dean at the time.

The majority of civilian volunteers in the Royal Observer Corps were stood down on 30 September 1991 after the Defence Spending Review 'Options for Change' celebrated a new era of post-cold war organisation. Any nuclear explosion and fall out detection was to be automated using remote sensors. Human observers were no longer needed. The nuclear monitoring posts were abandoned, and ownership of the bunkers reverted to the landowners.

Most of the Cold War infrastructure was abandoned or dismantled. In recent years a few of these underground bunkers have been restored and opened to the public. The nearest to The Forest of Dean is on the Cotswolds at Broadway. As all ROC monitoring posts had standard equipment is gives a good idea of what the Forest posts would have been like. Meanwhile, some of our local ROC posts remain as silent and decaying witnesses to those times of immense international fear and stress.



St Briavels ROC post - interior

Iron Production in the Dean (Part 4) by Cecile Hunt



The remains of Titanic Steelworks at Gorsty Knoll

In this article Cecile Hunt reminds us of the memorable tour, (Iron Industry in the Forest), that she and Averil Kear guided in 2014.

Continuing on from Darkhill works we made our way back past the car park, and coach, to the remains of the Titanic Steelworks.

After the death of David Mushet, Robert Mushet, one of his sons, started trading as R Mushet and Co opening an experimental steelwork behind Darkhill in 1848 called Forest Steel Works. A short walk brought the group to the site of the Titanic Steelworks which was opened in 1862. Rather overgrown, and even more derelict than Darkhill,

remnants of buildings can still be seen. For many years Robert had been carrying out many secret experiments on metals, and now he hoped that his efforts would pay off. The site covered a total of two acres, and 300 men were brought in from outside the forest to work at this site. Secrecy of producing this new type of steel may be the reason why there is not a lot of information available about these works. More on Titanic Steelworks can be found in Hart, C, *The Industrial History of Dean*, (1971), pp 168 – 170 and Webb, K, *Darkhill Iron Works Walk*, (1999). It is worth a visit but better to go when foliage has died down.

Titanic works were producing by mid 1800s self-hardening tool steel which was known as ‘R Mushet’s Special Steel’ and was apparently much in demand in Sheffield. Next door to the Titanic works was a brickyard which contributed in its way to some of the raw material for the steel making process – the brickyard is still discernible between Titanic Works and Darkhill works.

The first steel railway line was produced at Titanic Works; the rail was sent to Derby rail station for a trial period where it was found to be far more hard wearing than the iron rails of the time. The new rails lasted around 10 years rather than the few months of iron rails.

Titanic Works were closed in 1871, and the company voluntarily wound up in August 1874. More on the works and its location can be found at: <https://historicingland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1020804>.

Back to the coach for tea, coffee and cake at Clearwell Caves. Jonathan Wright, owner of the caves, gave everyone gathered an overview of how his father had battled with local authorities, and the local council, on getting permission to open the caves up as a visitor attraction; the authorities were not at all keen but perseverance paid off and the caves educated people on iron in the Forest. The caves still produce ochre which is sold around the world. On the walk back to the car park, on the right behind a hedge, is the remains of a ‘squatters’ cottage probably built and used by an iron worker/manager at the caves in the 1700s.

On leaving Clearwell the tour went in search of other sites related to iron working in the Forest. Past Puzzle Wood and Forest House, home of the Mushets near centre of Coleford. On to Hopewell Colliery, previously Cannop Foundry, continuing past the site of The Cannop Chemical Company (charcoal works) established about 1835. George Skip had, in 1841, eight retorts distilling wood for pyroligneous acid; steam engines, buildings in an extensive yard and two workmen’s houses. By 1881 the works were recorded as making sulphuric acid using sulphur from Sicily. They supplied the acid to local tinplate works for the removal of ferric oxide and other impurities on the iron plates, before they were tinned.

Next time: So much to see, onto Geomap, Furnace Valley...



The Annual General Meeting

noted by Chris Sullivan

If it's the first Saturday afternoon of October, it's probably the Society's Annual General Meeting (AGM), when we conduct the formalities of the Society, and when we report back to you on the year's achievements.

So Members assembled at the West Dean Centre half an hour earlier than our normal indoor talk start time for this purpose. Secretary Chris Sullivan read out the names of those who had sent apologies for absence. Members offered several more names. The Minutes of the 2017 AGM were in the hall, and members who had asked for information by e-mail had been sent them, together with the other AGM papers. The 2017 Minutes were approved.

Next, Mary Sullivan gave her first Chair's Report. The Committee had sought to make our 70th Anniversary year a special one. Our Vice-Presidents and Steve Blake, Chair of the GLHA, were among those who had spoken at our indoor talks. We also had enjoyed church visits with Simon Moore, Di Standing's talk inside Clearwell Caves, the annual coach trip and literary events. A highlight had been our Anniversary Dinner, graced by the Lord Lieutenant as after-dinner speaker and our President Baroness Royall. Mary drew attention to the Society's recently-published book of essays on World War One topics, well received by local shops and an ideal Christmas present. "New Regard" Number 33 was just back from the printers, price held, though now with colour printing. Both items were for sale at meetings as well as in shops and on our website. Members had worked hard on displays for the Gloucestershire Local History Association's History Day. Our 2017 award-winning display had just gone on show for three months at Gloucestershire Archives. Our 2018 display was in the hall's foyer. Mary thanked all the Committee for their work, but particularly Sue Gordon-Smith who had over 16 years built up the Publications Officer job to being a significant contributor to Society funds and a key way in which the Society was visible to the wider public.

Cecile Hunt gave her Treasurer's Report on the Accounts for the year ending 31st July 2018. With membership slightly rising despite the last subscription increase, membership income (£3741) was now above the basic costs of running the Society (£2755), though the Committee and others freely gave of their time to achieve those low costs. Overall, the Society had made a £275 profit rather than an £855 loss last year. Despite good attendance at meetings, income from teas and raffle tickets was down a quarter. Members were encouraged to pay for these items at meetings, since they contributed to Society income. The Members' price for the Anniversary dinner had been subsidised. In general, speaker fees were going up, though a number of Society Officers had spoken for free. A change of printing arrangements – thanks to David Harris – had nearly halved our printing costs.

Mary presented the Scott-Garrett Award for the best talk in 2017-18 to Averil Kear, for her talk on the North Foreland School's wartime move to Lydney Park. Mary presented the Cyril Hart Award for the best Article in New Regard no 32 to..... Averil Kear, for her article on the National Dockyard at Beachley. We thought this was the first occasion on which a winner had scooped both prizes.

The existing Officers were re-elected, being Mary (Chair), Roger Deeks (Vice-Chair), Cecile Hunt (Treasurer), Chris Sullivan (Secretary), Keith Walker (Newsletter Editor), Cheryl Mayo (Membership), Simon Moore (Conservation), John Powell (Publicity), Jo O'Hanlon and Sue Middleton. The Committee had co-opted Caroline Prosser and Liz Rudge (Meetings Secretaries) and Di Standing. The three were elected as Committee Members. New Committee members were always welcome, on a no-obligation basis. Valerie Mitchell was approved, with thanks, as our charity Independent Examiner. There being no other business, the AGM concluded.

[It was followed by Mary Sullivan talking on the Founders of the Society in 1948 -reviewed below by John Powell rather than Mary's husband!]

Meetings in Review *with John Powell*

The Society's annual summer charabanc excursion on Saturday, August 12, proved yet again to be an informative, enlightening, entertaining and friendly occasion. Guided as usual by Cecile Hunt and Averil Kear, a broad brush was applied to **'Forest People and Places'** and we made a cracking start. No sooner had the Lydney lot taken their places, Mrs K was at her notes telling us of people who had made their names and reputations in science and engineering. It took less than a mile to make the first stop as Grindle's indomitable driver, Michael, nosed his way into the car park at Lydney's open-air Bathurst Swimming Pool. It was the first of many times he had to 'nose' into tight corners!



Having devoured a little about the fabled Tolkien, who had worked at Lydney Park making Roman finds with the great archaeologist Mortimore Wheeler, it was on to pretty but traffic-bound Newnham. There was lots to see and plenty to learn for this is a place that, around every corner, drips history. The schedule, however, had to be maintained and more adventures lay ahead with the next stop — an unusual one for a cup of tea — in the lovely and impressive church at Highnam. We were treated to a potted history and a quite moving rendition of *Jerusalem* performed on the organ by a society member whose identity, for the moment, remains elusive.

An excellent lunch followed in Newent, a prelude to a journey up and down the Leadon Valley. Churches were visited and explored with plenty to see and learn. But perhaps the highlight of the day was the visit to Snigs End and the engaging and eye-opening story of the Chartist movement. It was a subject many of us were familiar with but few had delved into the detail and were surprised to see so many of the little land holdings and properties still easily identifiable to this day.

Robert Tipping, the main contractor involved in the early 19th century plan to dig a tunnel beneath the Severn at Newnham, had a rough passage to endure when the project went wrong. His home at Tan House Farm, Ruddle, was pelted with stones while a gun was also fired, shot from which caused Tipping and his wife some minor injuries. We are in the dark as to whether or not the attackers were frustrated miners who had received no payment for their part in the dangerous under-river project or, indeed, a gang hired by one of the parties who had backed the failed venture and blamed its demise on Mr T.

However, two hundred and more years on, and adding insult to injury, Tipping found himself under close scrutiny yet again when, at the first autumn meeting of the History Society held at Bream on September 8, our man was unceremoniously put on trial charged with deliberately sabotaging the tunnel project — a scheme for which he had quoted a price to complete for much less than would be the reality. Detective Supt Keith Walker led the case for the prosecution but for all his passion and prose, there was no wool to pull over the eyes and ears of the Society's jurors. When push came to shove the evidence against Tipping proved insufficient. He was found not guilty! Indeed, just three from a three-figure audience took sides with DS Walker who is now rumoured to be about to receive a permanent switch to all-night duties at Wigpool.

Seriously, this was good stuff, illustrating exactly how a couple of paragraphs in an old newspaper can rapidly develop into a meaningful and worthwhile research project and one that has already featured on television and in, of course, *The New Regard*. Keith has uncovered the skeleton of a great story here but finds still finds there is more to be exposed. It will be great to see where next he turns.

Me? I'm off to St Peter's churchyard to find Robert Tipping's final resting place and to read his headstone. You never know

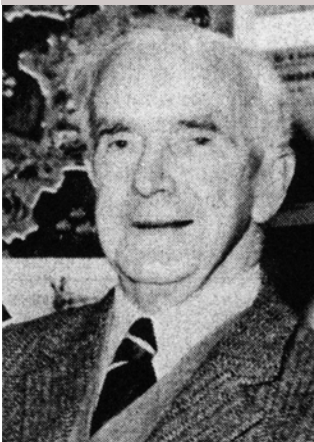
There's much still to find out about our Forest of Dean ancestors. For sure they were a mysterious lot, leaving behind some tempting artefacts to prove they were here: but where? Not a bean, not a bone has been discovered. Nothing. What exactly the Forest was like before the arrival of the Romans is still beneath a cloud. Despite the multiple discoveries revealed by the spy-in-the-sky LiDAR system that has, seemingly like magic, removed the tree coverage to record what is hidden in the soil beneath, the hard fact is that we have yet to find a settlement or a burial site.



This is not just a puzzle for we lesser beings, but also for county council expert Jon Hoyle who addressed 50 or so members in the second of our September meetings, this one held in Blakeney Village Hall on Wednesday the 19th. Ever popular with the Forest's history contingent, Mr Hoyle was at a loss to explain where our ancestors were hiding, but revealed some of the finds that might point us in the right direction. For instance, finds at Ruardean pointed strongly to people living there, while at Tidenham there was almost overwhelming evidence of pre-Roman activity. Meanwhile places like Welshbury, a hill fort where you can to this day 'feel' the atmosphere, still hangs-on tenaciously to its secrets.

Mr Hoyle outlined recent research and future directions for archaeology locally, and pointed out many of the areas of greatest interest. They were many and stretched all across the Dean. What about Blakeney where we had spent such a pleasant evening? Mr Hoyle said: "Anywhere you dig a hole in Blakeney you will find evidence of iron working." So next time you are strolling up the Straits and pick up a piece of rusty old ware look at it twice before throwing it away!

Mulling over Mary Sullivan's October talk introducing members to some of those who founded the Local History Society, one was struck by two things: 1, the great age they achieved; 2, the fact that most of them were men! Seventy years on, and dealing in a sentence with point 2, it feels as though the boot is now on the other foot! Point 1, however, sends out a clear message that to win the fight you have to have an interest and, it seems, that interest should be in affairs of yesteryear. Perhaps we should be allowed membership by prescription! Those of us who have lived in and around the woods for any length of time were familiar with many of those who did the ground work required for the roots of the society to spread deeply and strongly into the community. It's fair to say we are now a fixture!



*Former FODLHS President
Tom Bright*

For your reviewer, it was particularly interesting to meet up again with Harold and Tom Bright, and to listen to Mary outline something of the history of our local newspapers mentioning such a great warrior as the late Vernon Jones, of Yorkley, who was, for so many years, editor of The Three Forest Newspapers — the Mercury, Guardian and Observer. Between them they probably knew almost every family in the district and would certainly have access through the local vicar or policeman to more information than they ever revealed.

My own memories as a cub reporter is of copy holding for Tom Bright, reading never-ending sticks and galleys of proofs for errors. Tom was a stickler for initials: W Jones was never enough for someone with such a popular name. For a funeral report it had to be W (Bill) Jones to distinguish him from (say) W E F Jones. Vernon himself was S E V Jones; some things you never forget.

I suspect I and many others will be particularly interested in part two of Mary's talk to be given in the New Year.

A Forester at Passchendaele *by Ron Beard*



Gunners in Chateau Wood near Hooze on 29th October 1917. Photo by Frank Hurley.

We last encountered Jim Beard as one of five boys from Cinderford Bridge who had joined up in the Severn and Avon battalion of the Worcestershire regiment in the Autumn of 1915 (as described in the May 2017 newsletter).

After seeing action in the Battle of The Ancre Jim was taken ill with fever. Having spent time in hospital he was convalescing in Waterford, Ireland where Sinn Fein were active. The experience was so frightening that Jim volunteered to go to France, so was transferred to the 1/8th (First Eighth) battalion of the Worcestershire regiment. The battalion was sent to take part in the fighting at Passchendaele where towards the end of the campaign they were ordered to the front line to capture

the German Pillboxes which were preventing British troops from advancing. The plan was that the men were to go forward into shell holes from where they would join the attack. The following is Jim's account of the 'Battle'.

They was in these here pill boxes look and our lot would say that they was going to capture them. Generals at Ypres, terrible that was, a terrible mistake our Generals made there I reckon.

While we was waiting there we had to lay in water up around our necks.

It wasn't that deep but where we was laying down we was covered in these shell hole. One got killed, him wanted to get out and get into another and got killed in my arms, fell back in my arms dead as a nit, shot right through.

One or two more got wounded had to be took from there look. It wasn't safe for the stretcher bearer or anybody to go over the top look.

When we did go over the top 'we failed' Men was being hauled down because we had to get over the top look. Well they'd got these machine guns and these pill boxes and mowing them down like flies, well we failed of course. Stopped there all night until these here balloons come up, we didn't know where we was and we had to wait till the balloons come up look, just before daylight or just as it was getting daylight, to tell, because the German balloons were a different shape to ours. So then we made a dash for it, several of us...

Oh my clothes was ripped to pieces when we got back to the battalion they'd had the roll call and there was about 17 left out of 220.

Only 17 left and we was reported missing like, or would've been reported missing, but any how like I said we got back and it wasn't but two dozen, it was battalioners that was coming back all t'others got killed.

The battle took place on 8th/9th of October, the 1/8th were in support of the 1/7th. The following is a summary of the account of the battle in "The Worcestershire Regiment in The Great War Vol 1"

The heavy rain of Oct 7th led to a postponement of the move up to the line...had the move been made early, the attacking troops would have had 24 hours in the front line to rest and examine the ground. (The advance on the 8th) was made in indescribable difficulty. The heavily equipped troops sank to their waists and their armpits in the mud.

The attack was led by the 1/7th battalion with the 1/8th in support. The 1/7th were unable to make any impression on the German pillboxes and machine guns, 212 men and 10 officers were killed or wounded. The 1/8th were then sent forward. They too failed to make an impression and the attack was called off with the loss of a further 109 men and 3 officers.