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If you have something to say, a question to ask, a view to promote, please contact:

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Forum Newsdesk

Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn 2012 edition of Hanes. For those of you who don't know, Sally has been off for the past few months awaiting a hip replacement operation. The operation took place recently and she is now on the road to recovery. We wish her all the best and are looking forward to seeing her back at work in the Library around December.

Introducing The Forum

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POWYS COUNTY ARCHIVE OFFICE

The Brecknockshire and Abergavenny Canal Extension

The leading inhabitants of Hay-on-Wye and the middle Wye valley in the 17th and 18th centuries looked for improved bulk transport which in those days meant by water either along rivers or canals. It was just possible to bring bulk loads up to Hereford but there after the Wye had proved difficult to modify by straitening or removing impediments to navigation. The river was extremely temperamental, with variable water levels. A number of schemes had been put forward and much money expended but the river won in the end. For example the quay at the mouth of the Dulas Brook at Hay was liable to be obstructed by shingle. Today there is a wide beach between stone fronted quay and the main river.

Roads, in Wales, were mere tracks for pack animals. Certainly wide ways existed down which the herds of cattle and flocks sheep and geese moved towards London but these were not suitable for waggons. The turnpikes at the end of the 18th century were expensive with regular tolls payable at their many gates. The proprietors of these private companies disliked heavy waggons as they cut up the road surfaces. The construction of the Brecknockshire and Abergavenny canal to Brecon was the final link in a chain of canals that led from Newport and brought in coal and took out local produce. The price of coal and coke and similar heavy products fell sharply when the canal was completed in December 1800. Falling from £1.3.4d per ton to £0.15.0d.

The question then arose, was how to extend the canal system out of the Usk Valley into that of the Wye. Consideration was given to the construction of a branch canal but this offered engineering problems that were excessively expensive in a rural area which did not support any major industry. If a canal extension was not deemed practicable the issue of improved transport did not go away.

In 1805 a subscription list was opened at the Brecon bankers Wilkins and Co. to support the cost of a survey for a tram or rail road to Hay and western Herefordshire. At that time the network of canals in south Wales had short supporting tramway feeders to reach the mines, quarries and industrial premises in their areas.

Alternative routes from Brecon were considered. In the end the route selected was that proposed by the established tramway engineer John Hodgekinson (1773-1861) who surveyed possible routes for a horse drawn system. Hodgkinson's task had been to seek a route that followed the contours of the land with the minimum of adverse gradients. A rising grade needed more horses and a down grade required adequate breaking. The final route out of the Usk valley was by a tunnel at Tal-y-lynn.

The Hay Railway was typical horse drawn line with a space between its rails of 3ft 6inches. The rails were of cast iron in "L" shaped form, the iron wagon wheels running on the base of the L and kept in line by the upright element. Rails were only 3 feet long secured to stone blocks. As time went by the rails became more sophisticated with various locking mechanisms to hold them in place.

It was not until 1810 that a meeting of interested parties was held in Hay to support the projected long distance line from Brecon. Naturally there was diversity of views as to which communities the line should serve. In Brecon there were alternatives as to where the new line should reach the canal but finally this was agreed to be at the Watton and its various canal side wharves.

The promoters of the Hay Railway secured Parliamentary Act 23 May 1811. Under its Act the Hay Railway was established as the provider of a specialized road along which anyone could transport goods on payment of a toll. In practice a number of contractors, based on local wharves, offered a service paying tolls to the Company. These contractors had to provide horses and suitable wagons to fit the track. Wharves, a canal term in use for what in subsequent steam railway terminology became "Stations". Wharves were established at Tal-y-lynn, Talgarth, Glasbury, Hay, Whitney, Winforton and Eardisly. The latter point was reached in 1820. It was here that connection was made with the tram line being constructed from Kington.

This was an important link as from Kington and then Burlingjob quarries came traffic in limestone and its derivatives. Lime was needed for industrial processes and for land improvement. Lime was also used as weatherproofing white wash on the outside of building and inside as a decorative cleansing agent. Limestone blocks made good building material which hardened on contact with the air. Quick or burnt lime was a caustic agent for burials of decomposing remains of animals and humans. It was also used in building work and agriculture.

There developed a passenger service but travel in unsprung carts with iron wheels grating on iron "L" rails must have been both hard on the body and excruciatingly noisy. It appears that some specialist double wagons were developed for moving timber.

Many of the contractors had adequate resources for example the Meredith Brothers of Kington ran a fleet of some 90 tram wagons and Benjamin Trusted of Hay employed 500 horses. Other men were in partnerships with external financial backing and they and their families played an important part in the development of the area throughout the 19th century.

The operation of a line without signaling was simple,

according to Captain FB Ellison, in a paper presented to the Newcomen Society in May 1935, and published by the Woolhope Club He suggested traffic flowed from east to west one day and west to east on the next. This may well have reflected the practice of certain contractors whereas others may have followed the Kington Railway system of using passing loops with a flow of traffic in both directions. The development of steam hauled railways led to the closure of the Hay Railway it being bought and supplanted by a standard gauge line from Hereford to Brecon in 1860. Much of the route was along that of the Hay Railway. The tunnel at Tal-y-Llyn was enlarged to take the replacement standard gauge line.

Suggested reading:

Coles, H. The Kington Railway, *Transactions of the Woolhope Club 1964 - 65*

Ellison, FB. The old tramroad from Brecon to Hay, Whitney, Eardisley and Kington. *Transactions of the Woolhope Club. 1935*

Ellison, FB. The history of the Hay Railway, *Transactions of the Woolhope Club 1937.*

Hughes, S. The archaeology of an early railway system. The Brecon Forest tram road. *The Royal Commission on ancient and historical monuments in Wales 1952*

Rattenbury and Cook's The Hay and Kington Railways. *Railway and Canal Historical Society, 1996.*

Smith, WH. The Hereford, Hay and Brecon branch. *Kettering Railway Museum publishing, 2008.*

Stephen Hughes book although not directly linked to the Hay Railway contains a wealth of detail on the construction and operation of an extensive tramway system.

I am indebted to Mark Robinson, Hay-on-Wye, for bringing to my attention the publications of Coles, Ellison, and Rattenbury and Cook.

Our thanks to Mr Karl Showler for this article.

A WEEKEND CELEBRATION OF CRICKHOWELL HISTORY

The Crickhowell area has a fascinating history, in part stemming from its location in the Usk valley, a major routeway used by the Romans and Normans as they pushed into central and western Wales, and also having within its hinterland the industrialised north-eastern corner of the South Wales coalfield. The strong connections between the towns of that area – Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar – continue today.

The Crickhowell & District History Society

There has been a History Society in the town since the 1950s, the minute book of the society held by the Archive Centre recording what appears to be the first AGM, undated, but probably in October 1958. The first Chairman was Mr Joseph Evans of Gwernvale but he shortly afterwards stepped down in favour of Mr F J Hurley, the County Surveyor (father of Mr Louis Hurley, architect, who died in his 99th year earlier this year, and was renowned for his knowledge of the town's history). There is record of the programme of talks and visits in these early years. In 1965 Mr F J Hurley (by then in his 91st year!) became the society's first President, the solicitor Mr Roy Davies being Chairman at this time.

Unfortunately, by the 1980s the History Society seems to have become defunct and eventually, on the recommendation of Mr Roy Davies and the Revd, Cyril James, the collection of historical documents and photographs which it had collected, were passed into the care of the Civic Society, which had been formed in 1972.

Louis Hurley, who by this time was a committee member of the Civic Society, no doubt had a hand in this decision. In 1980 the first of two mimeographed volumes was produced entitled *Crickhowell Heritage: Historical Notes of Crickhowell and District*, the two being brought together in 1983 under the same title in a single volume under the editorship of Mr Doug Muir of the Library. In this there is a note that it was "compiled and published by Crickhowell and District Civic Society, which incorporates Crickhowell Historical Society".

The Crickhowell & District History Society was re-established in 1997 and continues with a programme of monthly illustrated talks and an annual guided walk.

The Crickhowell District Archive Centre

The Archive Centre is a more recent creation, established with Millennium funding in 2000 by a group of local senior citizens wishing to see the records of the area preserved and accessible within the town. Amongst the earliest documents to come into its care were those of the History Society, deposited by the officers of the Civic Society. It is, we believe, unique in Powys and much of Wales for a town of the size of Crickhowell (population ca. 2,000) to have its own archive centre. Staffed entirely by volunteers, it is open to the public (mornings only) for six days a week.

Until recently the activities of the History Society and the Archive Centre were essentially independent of each other whilst recognizing their overlapping areas of interest. In a joint meeting in 2011 it was decided that the time was ripe for collaboration in the cause of developing understanding in the community of the rich historical legacy of the area and raising the profile of both the Centre and the Society. Nearly a year of planning will culminate in a **Crickhowell History Weekend** for the town and district at the end of next month (28-30th September). Events will be spread between the Conference Room of the CRiC Building (where the Archive Centre is located) and the neighbouring Clarence Hall.

During the weekend there will be three main events. The first is an exhibition of documents, maps and photographs relating to the local area which will be held in the Conference Room of the CRiC Building. The opening of the exhibition and of the weekend's activities will be carried out by the Lord Lieutenant of the County (and President of the Archive Centre), The Hon Shân Legge-Bourke, on Friday 28th September at 4 pm. That evening, at 7.30 pm in the Clarence Hall, there will be a photographic presentation by local historic photograph enthusiast Chris Lewis. This will be in two parts, the first focussing on Crickhowell's shops and businesses (with a commentary by John Webb) and the second looking at life in the surrounding villages, with particular reference to Cwmdru and Tretower, Llanbedr and Llangattock, including contributions from long-standing local residents.

As 2012 was also the bi-centenary of the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal it seemed appropriate that this should also be highlighted so on the Saturday (September 29th) there will be a day-long event, '**Talk and Walk the Canal**'. Speakers in the morning are Peter Morgan Jones, Chairman of Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum, who will focus on the history of the canal and Bernard Illman, Chairman of the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust (and an Archive volunteer), who will look at the transformation of this former industrial waterway into a valued recreational amenity. In the second half of the morning Robin Williams of the History Society and Geoff Williams of the Archive

Centre, will provide an illustrated background talk to the walks, based on Gilwern and Llangattock respectively, that they will lead in the afternoon. An alternative walk will also be on offer in the afternoon for those who want to consider something other than the canal: this will explore Crickhowell's historic past and will be led by Clive Ralph of the History Society.

The exhibition in the CRiC Building will be open throughout the weekend, closing at 4pm on Sunday 30th. Tickets for the Friday night photographic presentation and for events on Saturday are available from The Archive Centre (mornings 10-12.30), Webb's the ironmongers, and Harris's Carpets. Entry to the exhibition is free, although donations towards costs will be appreciated.

Geoff Williams

Chairman, Crickhowell District Archive Centre.

Community Archaeology in South Powys - Llangynidr Local History Society

Volunteers from Llangynidr Local History Society enjoyed two weeks of excavation at Penygae Roman vicus in June this year. In 2011 the society funded two weeks of excavations supervised by archaeologists from Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT). As a result of this collaboration Cadw felt that investigations should continue this year, and CPAT asked the society to provide a workforce. The 2011 excavations were reported in CPAT's Autumn newsletter which can be viewed online at their website, <http://www.cpat.org.uk/index.htm>.

This year volunteer numbers were swelled by members of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association and Brecon U3A archaeology group. Surprisingly over ten days of field work only two half days were lost to poor weather. A total of three trenches were opened exploring an industrial complex identified in the 2011 season and a series of street front buildings located by geophysics.



Finds included a range of ceramics, glass and metal work and quantities of metal working waste. It is hoped that examination of the finds will give a more accurate date of occupation of the site and answer questions about how this fortlet fits into the bigger Roman picture in the middle Usk Valley.

Thanks are extended to the volunteers, landowner and supporters in the local community, to Cadw who funded the excavation this year and to CPAT who supervised the work. A full report is forthcoming and will be available from

Dates for your Diary

Wednesday 5th September. Breconshire Local and Family History Society. *Railways into Brecon.* A talk by Tudor Watkins about the various railway companies who brought trains into Brecon and the social history around the people who worked for them. Brecon Library 2pm.

Tuesday 11th September 2012 *Welsh Country Furniture* Philip Havard will discuss this topic at Aberyail, Llangynidr (John and Elizabeth Gibbs' house): Light supper included. 6pm. Please book with John Gibbs (01874 730747 or gibbs@keme.co.uk)

Wednesday 19th September. Crickhowell & District Historical Society. *Roaming with a camera in the Brecon Beacons.* Crickhowell Scout Hall, Castle Road, 7.30pm.

Thursday 27th September. Talgarth & District Historical Society. *Memories of a Barrow Boy*, talk by John Kirk. Gwernyfed Rugby Club 7.30pm to conclude with refreshments.

Friday 28th – Sunday 30th September 2012. *Crickhowell History Weekend.* A full weekend of activities and exhibitions on Crickhowell town and surrounding area including the Canal.

Wednesday 10th October. Breconshire Local and Family History Society. *Using Tithe Maps in Research.* John Ball will discuss how to extract information from Tithe Maps, many of which are available at Brecon Library and Powys Archives. Brecon Library 2pm.

Thursday 11th October. Builth Wells & District Heritage Society. *50 years since the moat lane to Brecon railway line closed a talk by Brian Poole.* Greyhound Hotel, 7.30pm.

Tuesday 16th October. Brecknock Society and Museum Friends. 2.30pm *Welsh lands of Dore Abbey, and the Lordship of Brecon (History of Llaneglwys Area)* Charles Gordon Clarke will tell us about his research.

Wednesday 17th October. Crickhowell & District History Society. *Local tram roads-Llangattock, Brynmawr and Blaenavon talk by John Evans.* Crickhowell Scout Hall, Castle Road, 7.30pm.

Thursday 25th October, Talgarth & District Historical Society. *Manufacturing Fine Bone China*, an illustrated slide talk by David Woodliffe. Gwernyfed Rugby Club 7.30 to conclude with refreshments.

Thursday 1st November 'BIG DRAW'

Join us for this year's *Big Draw* at Brecon Library on Thursday 1st November 10.30am-4pm. Our theme is 'Chinese Lines', taking inspiration from the exhibition of work by Chinese artists which will be on display in the Library during October and November. Artist Rob Davies will be on hand from 11am-12.30pm and 2-3.30pm to invite participants to draw using a mixture of media to explore lines and contours. There will also be lots of other fun art & craft activities for all ages. FREE drop-in event. Children under 8 years should be accompanied by an adult.

Wednesday 7th November. Breconshire Local and Family History Society. *History of Abercamlais House.* Susan Balance will give an illustrated talk about the history of her house and its occupants over the years. Brecon Library 2pm.

Thursday 8th November. Builth Wells & District Heritage Society. *The Book committee – Progress of 'Memories of Builth Wells in WWII'.* Greyhound Hotel, 7.30pm.

Monday 19th November 2012. Brecknock Society and Museum Friends. *"A dozen things you did not know about the Canal."* Talk, light lunch and a walk, lead by John Norris starting at 11 a.m. More information can be obtained from 01874 711484.

Wednesday 21st Nov Crickhowell & District History Society. *From the Stones to the Beatles – A History of Abergavenny in 50ish Objects a talk by Racheal Rogers (Curator of Abergavenny Museum).* Crickhowell Scout Hall, Castle Road, 7.30pm.

Wednesday 2nd Jan 2013 Breconshire Local & Family History Society. *Starting Family History.* Hints, tips and ideas. 2pm Brecon Library.

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Library Service.**