



Dear members

2015 - 16 has been a hectic year with a varied programme which saw the welcoming Methodist Church Hall packed with members but also with visitors, some of whom subsequently joined as members. After learning about the many complex issues facing the Canals and Rivers Trust that looks after and maintains the many miles of the Monmouthshire and Brecknock canal in September, our AGM speaker Robb Merchant, gave an inspirational talk about building up his hugely successful business at White Castle Vineyard which started out as just a dream several years ago. Definitely worth a visit!

We had superb meetings about the challenges of working the uplands and managing the commons with Alvin Nicholas, Commons Development Officer and then in the New Year officers from the National Trust and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority explained the many and various aspects of their work caring for most of our beautiful countryside in and around Abergavenny. In March a group of students from King Henry VIII school gave an excellent presentation of their vision for the town and their concerns. We hope to be able to work with them on some of these ideas in the future.

Fen Turner from Natural Resources Wales was joined by Tom Jolley to give us information on the health of the River Gavenny that gives our town its name. We hope that this little gem of a river will eventually be made more accessible to the public, forming a green corridor for all to enjoy. Simon Bradwick from the Living Taff project also told us about their own achievements in cleaning up this river for the wider enjoyment of residents and visitors.

'Saints and Sinners' was the sensational title of the thought provoking and interesting presentation about the 350 year old Gunter Mansion in Cross Street by Amanda Peters. We hope to hear more from Amanda as the fundraising starts in earnest to preserve this wonderful iconic building for future generations. Our programme was brought to a conclusion by Edward Holland demystifying the topic of how and which buildings are listed. As always we are grateful to all our speakers who give so generously of their time to provide us with a truly fantastic programme. Huge thanks must also go to Kath and Clive Bransom for providing tea and coffee at our public meetings.

We extend a warm welcome to our new members and encourage you to get actively involved as we need new ideas to keep Abergavenny a bustling, vibrant, relevant town for generations to come. If a new member is interested in being on the steering committee please get in touch with Ruth or Tony the current Chair and Vice Chair. If a project inspires you please let us know and get involved. Don't be shy, it can be good fun and you will learn a lot on the way!

Fairfield Car Park Strip Improvement – Anna Petts

The Fairfield Planters - Tall or small? As the tragic Dane once muttered, "That is the question." Do we dig in tall plants, which inevitably get a bit battered in the prevailing westerly wind sweeping along the adjacent A40, but which are handsome, enduring and striking to the eye from a long way off - or do we pop in small plants, which are neat, safe and reliable, but which are often just a bit ordinary and 'municipal'?

In the end it has been the inevitable compromise - but as yet nothing has been vandalised, the plants are still alive and growing, (though requiring a daily watering in hot weather), the slab seating around the planters has been well-used by passers by, and it has been a welcome bit of colour in an otherwise rather dismal environment.





HOWEVER - the 'dismal environment' - the obsolete bit of ground by the crossing - is due for a face-lift at some point in the future, as the Society works with landscape designer Mick Petts in partnership with a generous and civic-minded member of the society along with MCC where legal or procedural advice is needed. We are hoping to remove the old trolley-park railings, re-place the map notice board in its correct orientation near the other board by Gingers' railings, purchase some 'special' bench-seats, plant one (or two?) small trees for shade, and have an attractive planter of flowers somewhere amongst this.

We hope this will provide a much more welcoming space to all the visitors and townspeople who use the car park and crossing at this point. We are also appreciative of the tree maintenance that MCC carried out to the mature flowering cherries and for the two new trees that arrived earlier this year, funded by and planted on behalf of the Civic Society.

Donation from Abergavenny Business Club – Janis Davies

Sadly, Abergavenny Business Club recently disbanded due to lack of support. We were, however, pleased to receive a donation from them for £2,933. This was donated for the benefit of the town in the belief that as a society, we really get things done and make a difference.

Gavenny Project – Tony Konieczny

This ambitious project has been slow to get off the ground with a few obstacles still to overcome but there have been some positive developments this year. The beginning of a wider coalition of partners is now taking shape. Leading this new group is our Project Officer Fen Turner of National Resources Wales (NRW); she will oversee a proposed six year programme to improve the water quality of the River Gavenny. Fen will be leading the work on improving the quality of the river in the urban area of the Gavenny catchment. Some problems are due to the use of dishwasher tablets and washing detergent so for anyone using these wonderful machines, you can buy low and 'no' phosphate tablets and detergents. As we are in a very soft water area you will also find that half a tablet does the wash just as well as a whole one, something advised to us by an engineer who told us that too much detergent damages washers – save money and cut down on pollution!

NRW has commissioned the Wye Usk Foundation (WUF) to identify and undertake the improvements to the rural catchment of the river with Tom Jolley leading this work. Fen and Tom gave an excellent presentation of their work at our April meeting which was very well attended.

We need to monitor the river more closely to gather data on the chemicals in the water and record the invertebrate life and will be asking for volunteers to assist with this work which will only take a couple of hours each month. Training and materials will be provided. Please get in touch with Tony Konieczny at t.konieczny@btinternet.com or on 01873 858912 if you want to be involved or would like more information. We are also hoping to work more closely with Cardiff University who are running a research project on the Signal Crayfish, an invasive species, in the River Gavenny.

We have identified the need to create a complete review of priorities for improving the river quality and habitat. This will require some fundraising to commission this research but the overall plan will give us a focus on the achievable priorities.

Fen and I met up with Fergus Collins, editor of the BBC Countryfile magazine, and spent an enjoyable couple of hours walking up the river from its confluence with the Usk to the top of Swan Meadows. Fergus interviewed us during the walk and you can listen on the Countryfile podcast he made using the following link - <http://www.countryfile.com/podcast/wildlife-wildlife-stories/wade-welsh-river-search-wildlife>

Exploring Abergavenny – Dick Cole

Early in 2016 we finally completed our characterisation survey of Abergavenny and Mardy beyond the town centre. We have now mapped and described in some detail over 30 'character areas', each with a short history of its development and an account of the distinctive features of its buildings and spaces.

In the coming months we aim to display all this material, with some photographs, for public comment. We need residents to tell us what we have missed, what we have got wrong, what memories they have and what they feel about the areas in which they live. We also expect to make the information available via our web site and to invite comments by email.

When the project ends we will have a much better knowledge of the town that we love and want to improve, and we hope that we will also have raised residents' awareness and appreciation of their surroundings. We would be particularly pleased if some are motivated to become active in the Society.

Another objective is to produce a publication celebrating the varied character of the town in the year of our Golden Jubilee.

The merit of our characterisation work was recognised during the year when Dick Cole and Tony Konieczny accepted an invitation from Civic Trust Cymru to deliver seminars at Cardiff and Conwy. Using Google Streetview we took participants through parts of Chapel Road, Avenue Road and Stanhope Street describing the characteristics we noted, encouraging them to survey their own towns. Tony also chaired these events, managing some convincing Welsh in his welcomes. A very recent and mutually useful meeting with Mark Hand, Head of Planning, has also brought forward an invitation for us to deliver a seminar to his staff on our characterisation work in Abergavenny.

Planning – Dick Cole

The 'Exploring Abergavenny' work is strengthening our response to planning applications, as, when appropriate, we seek to improve the quality of new development and ensure that it respects and reflects the character of the town. Sometimes our views are heeded and shared by the planning authority; sometimes they are not. We hope that more pre-application consultations will enable our views to be taken into account before firm plans are submitted. We have responded to such consultations regarding a nursing home at Llanfoist and extensions to the Welsh Water sewage treatment works.

Perhaps our greatest disappointment was the approval of the demolition of the Coed Glas mansion and 51 houses being put in its place. We felt that this fine site, owned by the County Council, deserved a much more interesting development, perhaps of modern architecture, with a real 'sense of place' rather than an estate similar to others across the land.



Another regret is that an otherwise creditable development at Beili Priory, (at the back of Cross Street off the small lane that runs alongside the Tithe Barn to the bus station), was not slightly reduced to enable a better future setting for the Gunter Mansion. The Society is supporting a fundraising campaign to purchase and restore the Mansion.

Our objection to McDonalds at Llanfoist on policy and aesthetic grounds also failed. Time will tell whether the Council's response to our persistent efforts to secure a belt of woodland on the frontage is sufficient to mask the developments at this site.

More successful was our objection to redevelopment proposals at the Heronhurst site on Brecon Road; much more sympathetic proposals have now been submitted. The outcome of our concerns about new houses in the grounds of Ty'r Morwydd (Mulberry House) is awaited.

Approval has recently been given to 36 new homes, with the addition of another 8 by conversion of existing buildings at The Hill. The plans needed only cautionary comments from the Society; those regarding traffic generation were largely overruled.

We have submitted broadly sympathetic views and suggestions on proposals for 250 houses at Deri Farm, Mardy (a site already allocated in the approved Local Development Plan). Unresolved matters such as the method of undergrounding power cables mean that this is unlikely to be reported to Planning Committee for a few months.

Another undetermined application on which we made critical comments is that for a new retail building between the ATS premises, next to Aldi, and the Gavenny river.

We have made representations to MCC regarding the derelict condition of 17-23 Brecon Road, on the junction with Merthyr Road. Conversely we welcome the owners' fine restoration work on 43 Cross Street and the former George Hotel as well as the street improvements in High Street, Nevill Street and St John's Square, though at the time of writing we have concerns about details in the Square.

Following public consultation and with our support the County Council amended the boundaries of the central Conservation Area and adopted the Conservation Area Appraisal as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It is hoped to consider the designation of parts of the Hereford Road area in the future, and we have offered to assist with this.

The coming year is expected to see the start of the process leading to the roll-forward of the Local Development Plan. We anticipate an interesting, perhaps controversial, debate about the future of Abergavenny, Mardy and Llanfoist.

Civic Trust Cymru - Anna Leron



Civic Trust Cymru currently has three main areas of work. It supports a network of local civic and amenity societies across Wales, including Abergavenny and District Civic Society. We do this through regular contact with the Committees of Societies, a quarterly Bulletin for societies, email updates plus regular meetings which this year included a conference in South and North Wales (more on this to follow). In addition to this the Trust coordinates the Wales Heritage Group, an alliance of 13 statutory consultees and voluntary national organisations active in the conservation of the built environment in Wales. The Group meets quarterly and responds to issues of shared concern about heritage in Wales. For the recent Assembly elections the Group produced a 'Manifesto for Heritage'. For more information see: http://civictrustcymru.org.uk/?page_id=35.

The third area of the Trust's main focus of work is characterisation or 'Exploring your town'. The Trust's work on this began with Abergavenny and District Civic Society. Without the work of the Abergavenny group, led by Dick Cole and Tony Konieczny, it is unlikely that we'd have the continuously impressive outcomes from Abergavenny, Newtown and District Civic Society, Rhiwbina Civic Society, followed by Caerleon Civic Society and Porthcawl Civic Trust. I'd like to say a huge thank you to all those who have been involved and who have provided support to the group for this marathon of a project. While I have stepped back from regular involvement in the project in Abergavenny I have been following the progress and am looking forward to seeing the final outcome and what can be achieved with it. I am also very pleased to report that the work on characterisation is going to be supported greatly by the recent heritage guidance published for consultation (Technical Advice Note 24) by the Welsh Government which recommends that local authorities should undertake characterisation studies and encourages them to adopt them as supplementary planning guidance.

As part of the Trust's work to share the immense knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm found in societies across Wales we organised two conferences for societies in Cardiff in March and in Conwy in

May 2016 called 'Pride in Place'. There was a great turn out from Abergavenny and District Civic Society – you were represented by Ruth, Tony, Sue, Dick, Clive and Kath, who brought with them an exhibition about the Society's 'Good, Bad and Ugly' photo competition. Dick and Tony kindly agreed to run a workshop (in both locations) for other civic societies about Abergavenny's experiences of 'Exploring your town' which received strong positive feedback. The Trust was also very fortunate to have Tony's skill and enthusiasm both days in Cardiff and Conwy as he kindly agreed to chair the days. Furthermore he has recently joined the Board of Trustees of Civic Trust Cymru. The Trust is constantly working to strengthen its links with Societies, and also to become more resilient, sustainable and proactive as an organisation, and will therefore be taking full advantage of Tony's skills and expertise on a regular basis.



The office of Civic Trust Cymru is on the first floor of the Morgan Arcade, Cardiff but I am an Abergavenny resident (and civic society member) and am always interested in hearing people's views on Civic Trust Cymru, and the civic society network. Please do bear in mind though that the Trust consists of a Board of Trustees and me, the Interim Director, only, although on August 8th I am looking forward to welcoming Amanda Brake as a new part time Project Officer for the Trust.

Anna Lerman

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Gunter Mansion – Amanda Peters

More than 100 donations were received towards the purchase and restoration of the Gunter mansions in Cross Street Abergavenny, via the on line Crowdfunding appeal that took place in August. Over £10,000 was raised, with donations being made from all over the UK. The appeal, which is one of a number of fundraising activities being undertaken by the Welsh Georgian Trust (WGT), was designed to generate interest within the Catholic community, for whom Gunter Mansion holds particular significance, via the links with St David Lewis. The Trust was able to benefit from the publicity generated by the Eisteddfod (and in particular the History and Faith tents) and secured interviews on S4C and Radio Wales as a result. The Crowdfunding appeal ended on August 24th, but 'old fashioned' donations are still welcome! (See www.welshgeorgiantrust.org.uk for contact details)

In September the Welsh Georgian Trust will find out if their applications to a number of specialist Trusts, for the purchase costs, have been successful. Andrew Beckett, Chair of WGT, would like to thank all those who donated, and in particular the Civic Society for its practical and financial support. You can keep up to date with progress on the website, as above. Anyone with a particular interest in this project, who would like to get more directly involved, is welcome to contact Andrew or Amanda on info@thegunterproject.org.uk.

News from Abergavenny Castle and Museum – Rachael Rogers, curator

Abergavenny Museum has been working with pupils from the Eco Council at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni to



produce a 'Nature Guide to the Castle Grounds'. Pupils participated in 'Take Over Day', an initiative supported by Kids in Museums, to encourage young people to make key decisions in our museums. Pupils were responsible for devising the activities and agreeing the design of the booklet. The project has been supported financially by Abergavenny Civic Society and The Happy Museum. If you would like to participate in the activities, which are suitable for all the family then you can pick up a booklet for 50p in the museum shop. The museum is open Monday – Saturday 11-1 and 2-5 and Sunday 2-5. The grounds are open at all times unless closed for a specific event.



And on the social side Kath Bransom

Members enjoyed two fun events during the otherwise dark and cold winter months. Abercafella, the all male branch of Chrys Blanchard's singing group Abercapella, (brilliant name by the way!) entertained us in December, raising the roof of the Methodist Hall with a number of lively renditions. A bit of arm twisting was all that was required to cajole some of the enthusiastic audience into joining the line-up, with the rest of us happily supporting from our seats.

In January we celebrated our Winter Lunch at The King's Arms in Nevill Street. The event was very well attended and, as always, was a very sociable occasion, demonstrating yet again that Civic Society members do know how to enjoy ourselves! We always aim to patronise local businesses for these events, so please let me know if you have any ideas for future venues.

Finances and 100 Club – Ian S Vicary, hon treasurer

This year we surpassed ourselves by selling ninety-five tickets, raising approx £ 1,390 for the Society. A very big thank you to all who purchased tickets and also to those who helped to sell them.

This fundraising has enabled us to contribute money to various projects: £300 for the ongoing work on the corner of the Fairfield Car Park and £500 to the Museum towards the cost of children's activity literature which helps them learn about the Castle and its history.

We have also committed to part fund a replacement cherry tree in Bailey Park in autumn and have made a contribution to the appeal for funds for the Welsh Georgian Society to purchase the Gunter Mansion which is under threat of serious deterioration unless major work is carried out soon.

We are also looking for ways to encourage the younger generation, the teenagers, to become more involved in both the Society and in the town. We hope to report further on this in our next newsletter.

All this has been made possible by your generosity and we hope that this will continue for 2016 - 17 and that this time we can reach our goal of selling all 100 tickets. Application forms will be circulated shortly but you don't have to wait, just send your payment - £24 per ticket – together with your contact details and any lucky numbers you would like to me at **17 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW** or pass your information on to one of the Committee.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Membership - Mike Foden, membership secretary

Individual Membership has again increased overall this year. 10 members resigned but we made up this shortfall with 15 new members joining after attending some of our interesting public meetings. At present we have 109 paid up members and 17 affiliated members.

We are hugely grateful for all the continuing support given to us by the following businesses:-
Abergavenny Music, Angel Hotel, Celtic Computer Systems, Emmelines Homebaking, The Hardwick Restaurant, Homemakers Recycling, Jaybee Soft Furnishing, Judd Brothers, The Kings Arms, Owen Davies Consulting, Red Builders Ltd, Catherine Roberts and Steven Harris(architecture & Energy), Robin Elt Shoes, Serendipity Hair Salon, Smiles Better Dentists, Taurins Taylor Associates and The Wool Croft.

Subscriptions for 2016 -17 are due on 1st September so please pay by cash or cheque to the Membership Secretary **Mike Foden, 3 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 AW**. As it took 9 months to collect all the subs last year, despite many email reminders, please consider paying by standing order which makes everyone's life a little easier. Just contact Mike on **855263** or Ian Vicary on **854929** for a form.

Under 65 £10

Over 65 £8

Student £1

Affiliated membership £20

Programme of meetings to run up until June 2017

Venue – Methodist Church Hall, Castle Street, unless otherwise stated, starting at 7.30 pm

Once again we find ourselves with no shortage of topics to choose from for the coming year's programme of meetings. We hope you like it and, if you have suggestions for other topics, please let us know. As always some flexibility is required to accommodate issues/topics that arise.

12 Sept - Engaging with our council: Will McLean, Head of Strategic Partnerships

A chance to hear from, and talk with, Will McLean who is heading up plans for a new form of engagement between the council and its residents.

10 October - Our annual **AGM** with guest speaker Prof George Nash and a talk entitled "Those naughty Parliamentarians and the mystery of the North wall of the Lewis Chapel, St Mary's Priory Church"

14 November - Abergavenny: Declining or Thriving? - Speakers TBC

Given a recent statistic quoted in the SW Argus of a 56% decline in shoppers coming to Abergavenny in 2005 to 2015, a chance to hear from traders who seem to be bucking the trend.

12 December – Another festive treat with drinks and nibbles and the ever popular storyteller Daniel Morden providing some entertainment at our final meeting before the Christmas break.

January 2017 – time for our Sunday lunch and social get together – date and time TBC

13 February – Jeff Cuthbert, Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent Constabulary

A chance to meet and discuss the key issues in crime facing Abergavenny and the commissioners plans for the future.

13 March – Planning – Mark Hand, Head of Planning

Mark will be talking about and answering questions on 'reviewing planning policy and managing development'

10 April – 50th Anniversary of Abergavenny and District Civic Society - guest speakers TBC

A special, sociable meeting to look over the past 50 years of life in Abergavenny to celebrate the existence and work of the Society. What was going on here in the 1960s? Did you see the Beatles here?

8 May – "Elements of rewilding" –Rob Yorke, notable speaker on rural issues.

Many environmentalists argue that Britain's uplands, especially the Black Mountains, would serve wildlife – and us – better if left to nature rather than farmed. Rob joins us to discuss what might be possible.

12 June – 'Exploring Abergavenny' - Dick Cole and Tony Konieczny

After the completion of the characterisation survey of Abergavenny, here is an opportunity to look at some of the more interesting character areas that have been discovered.