

*Abergavenny and District Civic Society  
Preserving the best, improving the rest  
A great place to live, work and visit*

Dear members

What a busy year we have had from September 2016 including a very special afternoon celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary – more of that later. Another varied programme ensured that we always had a good crowd of members present along with visitors, some of whom subsequently joined as members.

Will McClean, then Head of Policy & Partnerships for MCC, started our programme of talks with an insight into how the Council is seeking to engage with residents and involve them in the decision making process. The new Wellbeing of Future Generations Act influences this process and every future Council decision will have to pay due regard to things such as making the area as prosperous as it can be, as environmentally responsible and developing cohesive and more equal communities. A number of consultations were promised to inform the Council about the priorities of its residents which will result in future Council policy and decision making.

At our AGM Professor George Nash gave an illuminating and amusing talk called 'Those naughty parliamentarians and the mystery of the North Wall of the Lewis Chapel'. Such presentations make us all look at old buildings and churches differently, searching for stories behind the changes that have taken place over the centuries! At a packed question time format meeting in November to consider whether our high street and market are thriving or declining as people's shopping habits change, members and visitors listened to the views of an excellent panel of local business people. A special December treat was provided by Daniel Morden, local story teller, who held his audience of adults spellbound.

An informative few meetings followed at the start of the year with Jeff Cuthbert, PCC outlining key issues and his priorities for Gwent Constabulary, then Mark Hand, Head of MCC's Planning Department giving an insight into the different aspects of the County's planning brief. Rob Yorke gave a provocative but thought inducing presentation on 'Elements of rewilding', considering whether Britain's uplands, especially the Black Mountains, would serve wildlife – and us – better if left to nature rather than being farmed and managed. Our very own team of experts Dick Cole and Tony Konieczny concluded the programme with a final report on the 'Exploring Abergavenny' study undertaken over the past 4 years describing the distinctive characteristics of the town's buildings and spaces with the aid of some excellent photographs. The whole body of work will be displayed later this year in what was formerly Janus, Cross Street, now being used as a pop-up community display space.

Grateful thanks go to all our speakers who give so generously of their time to provide us with such a fantastic programme and thanks to Kath and Clive Bransom for providing tea and coffee at meetings.

New members are welcomed and encouraged to get actively involved. To continue to thrive, our society wants people with new ideas to keep Abergavenny a bustling and vibrant town. The executive committee always welcomes suggestions, new ideas and new members and we definitely need someone to become Vice Chair to learn the ropes before stepping up as Chair in two years time. Want to get involved? Please get in touch at [abercivsoc@gmail.com](mailto:abercivsoc@gmail.com) or phone for a chat with Ruth Coulthard (07528 2257510 or Tony Konieczny (01873 858912). If a project inspires you let us know and get stuck in. Don't be shy, it can be great fun and you will learn a lot on the way!

**And on the social side ..... Kath Bransom**

In December Daniel Morden, local story teller, again held his audience spellbound for our sociable meeting where festive nibbles were washed down with the now traditional non-alcoholic punch.

In January we celebrated our Winter Lunch once more at The King's Arms in Nevill Street. Members enjoyed a superb meal in excellent company and our grateful thanks go to the staff who ensured that all went smoothly. We aim to patronise local businesses so if you have a suggested venue for a future gathering please get in touch and let us know.



## CELEBRATING 50 GOLDEN YEARS!

Members old and new gathered on Saturday 22 April to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Abergavenny and District civic society!

Vice Chair, Tony Konieczny, opened proceedings and welcomed members to the historic event. Tony gave a brief history of the Society and its many achievements over the past years. It was amazing to hear about the various projects and activities that have had a positive impact on the environment of Abergavenny, and bring to life the Society's motto, "Preserving the Best and Improving the Rest".



The list of practical activities and achievements of the founder and later members is considerable, many of which we now take for granted including:

- The restoration of the Holy Well
- Planting 25 trees for the Silver Jubilee in Bailey Park
- Commissioning the building of flower beds on Monmouth Road
- The Millennium Walk project in Linda Vista
- Writing a book called 'Abergavenny in the twentieth century'
- The Good, Bad and Ugly photographic competition
- Landscaping and planters at Fairfield car park
- Recent support in acquiring the Gunter Mansion
- Supporting a youth project at Abergavenny Museum
- Completing the 'Exploring Abergavenny' study with a display and publication to come

Officers and members of the Executive Committee meet regularly and review and positively comment on planning applications, enhancement projects. They liaise with Town and County councillors and officers to discuss improvements for the Town as well as linking with other like minded organisations who contribute to our unique environment.

Speaking of which, a highlight of the meeting was the presentation of a Certificate of Commendation to Alun Griffiths, one of the Town's most influential citizens who has positively contributed to the beautification and character of the Town's historic and important buildings. The commendation read "To mark our appreciation of his special contribution to the enhancement of Abergavenny by the conservation of key buildings".



The guest speaker for the event, Frank Olding, gave an informative, entertaining and surprising talk on "The Lost Pubs of Abergavenny". One would think we were a boozy Town with over 80 drinking establishments coming and going since the 15 century. Breweries, Coaching Inns, front rooms, converted Chapels - and visa versa, supplied thirsty travellers, visitors, market traders and residents with a variety of beers as it was safer than drinking water!

Frank's talk was also a reminder of what has been lost in the town, as the relentless march of progress resulted in the demolition of what would now be considered a fascinating collection of heritage buildings. The Society intends to do all it can to preserve the remaining 'best' of Abergavenny.

It was interesting listening to the memories of some of the founder members, who saw in 1967, the need and opportunity to preserve, maintain and improve Abergavenny's heritage and future.

It was indeed a very well attended historic occasion and much enjoyed by both its longest serving and new members, who reflected on the past and are now looking to the future.

**Stan Pochron**

## A tour round Gunter Mansion with **Andrew Sanders**

As part of the anniversary afternoon, there was a raffle of the 'rewards' given to the Civic Society for the money we gave to the crowd funding. Society member Andrew Sanders was the lucky first prize winner which included a tour round the Mansion and a tea at the Angel. Here is his account.

"As you will all know, the Gunter Mansion in Lower Cross Street has been rescued for future generations and is now in the care of the Welsh Georgian Trust, thanks, in part to the support of the Civic Society. The Society pledged money and as a result was awarded, as well as others who made pledges, a package of visits and mementos related to the Mansion. These were raffled at the Golden Anniversary party and I was fortunate to win the First Prize which included a visit and tea at the Angel Hotel. Second Prize was won by Shirley Shirley, who unfortunately was unwell so her visits were offered to me. I jumped at the chance to view the Vestment collection associated with the Gunter Mansion and Saint David Lewis and the artefacts in the Abergavenny Museum as well as visiting the Mansion itself.

So, on Monday 22 May, I duly turned up at the Gunter Mansion in Lower Cross Street at 1pm to meet Amanda Peters, Chair of Friends of Gunter Mansion. There were 5 of us present including Amanda and Andrew Beckett, chair of the Welsh Georgian Trust. We began with a tour guided by Andrew. It was clear once inside, that the building is in poor condition and will need extensive work to restore it so that it can sustainably support itself through shops on the ground floor and accommodation on the first floor. This process will be undertaken by the Welsh Georgian Trust with expert help. Walking through the building one could feel it exuding its history. There have been many changes over the years but we were able to view the beautiful plaster ceiling in the main room on the first floor, decorated with 48 cherubs. Elsewhere there are other examples of historical decorative plasterwork. In the attic which has been subdivided in recent years and includes a TV repair workshop – it must have been quite a challenge for the repairmen to get old fashioned heavy TV sets up the steep narrow stairs to the attic workshop! – we were shown the chapel in which David Lewis celebrated Mass before his arrest and execution in 1679. In the Chapel can be clearly seen markings which were made on the walls a long time ago, in the time of Thomas Gunter. The building is so full of history and it is to be hoped that all these precious features can be conserved or restored so that the public may enjoy them in the future.

We then walked over to the Abergavenny Museum where we were shown The Adoration of the Magi – a fresco painted on plaster. This is certainly worth seeing, even though it is not in good condition. From those parts which are still clearly visible one can see that it must have been, when newly created, an impressive and beautiful piece of work. I was interested but somewhat saddened to discover that it is not complete as parts of the fresco were cut off when it was removed from its frail wall in the Chapel for its own protection. It will be interesting to see if the missing parts come to light in the Chapel when the building restoration is undertaken. Other items associated with the Gunter Museum which we were shown by Rachael Rogers, Monmouthshire Museums Manager included a very old wooden door with beautiful iron work fittings on it and a collection of documents including letters.

We were then taken over to Our Lady and St Michael's Church where we met Peter Evans, the Lead Officer for the OLSM project to conserve and display the collection of vestments used by Priests at the Mass, some at least of which were worn by St David Lewis. Probably the most striking vestment, in my opinion, is a red chasuble, embroidered towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Elizabeth of York, wife and queen of King Henry VII (a Tudor and closely associated with Wales).

On completion we were entertained to a traditional afternoon tea at the Angel Hotel by Andrew Beckett and Amanda Peters where we were able to hear more about their plans for the restoration of the Gunter Mansion. So good and generous was this tea that when I finally arrived home I had to "pass" on dinner!

I count myself very lucky to have been able to experience the Gunter Mansion and the associated visits.”

## **Gunter Mansion**



Now that this iconic building has been saved for generations to come, members of the Civic Society have been actively involved in preparing the shop area as the ‘pop-up’ display space and helping out with the historical research. A Heritage Lottery Fund application will be submitted by the Welsh Georgian Trust to restore the property. The right e-mail to 'join the Friends' mailing list to receive regular news updates is [newsletter@thegunterproject.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@thegunterproject.org.uk)

The shop is open on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 10.30 until 4pm so do pop in and take a look. If you want to help out in the shop please contact Ann Payne, volunteer coordinator, at [volunteer@thegunterproject.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@thegunterproject.org.uk) There are at least two volunteers in the shop at a time. Tony and Dick will need volunteers from the Civic Society to look after our very own ‘Exploring Abergavenny’ exhibition in the autumn so watch this space. If you are able to help out please contact us at [abercivsoc@gmail.com](mailto:abercivsoc@gmail.com) so we can get a list of names together in preparation.

## **‘Exploring Abergavenny’ and Planning updates from Dick Cole**

### **Exploring Abergavenny**

At the end of 2016 we contracted Dr Matthew Griffiths, former Director of the Civic Trust for Wales, to use his desk publishing skills to present our 36 character area reports in an attractive form for exhibition and on our web site. This lengthy task should be complete by the time you read this, and we aim to hold the exhibition at the Gunter Mansion pop-up shop (formerly Janus) this autumn, dates to be confirmed. We will be asking for volunteers to help us staff the shop. As we said last year, 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.

Dick Cole and Tony Konieczny gave the audience a taste of what we have learned at an open meeting in June, and our better understanding of the town’s buildings and spaces continues to inform our comments on planning applications.



Dick has also drafted a booklet that describes the changes in building style, layout and materials at Abergavenny over the years since Grofield was started in the 1830s. We hope to publish this before the end of our Golden Jubilee year.

### **Civic Trust Cymru**

We were saddened to learn at the end of 2016 that Civic Trust Cymru, the recently reconstituted Civic Trust for Wales, had been forced to close by an inherited pension deficit and unsuccessful efforts to resolve the situation. The loss of this advisory and networking body to Wales’ heritage ‘industry’, especially civic societies and other volunteer groups, was great, and this Society, in liaison with Anna Leron and some former CTC board members, sponsored a workshop in March to consider the scope for maintaining some of the CTC services via a new heritage organisation. Chaired by Sue Essex, a former Welsh Government minister, the event was well-attended by people from all over Wales and a ‘task and finish’ group is now giving further consideration to the opportunities identified at the workshop. Inevitably substantial human and at least modest financial resources are key requirements if a viable new organisation is to be formed.

### **Planning**

In November 2016 we objected at some length to new proposals for the Morrisons store on the former livestock market. The application was effectively a revision of the plans approved in 2011 and our objections to the layout of the site repeated those made at that time. The building design was new: a less costly bland flat-roofed box clad in white sheeting that was markedly less satisfactory than the earlier proposal, paying even less respect to its situation just outside the Conservation Area. Our concerns received good press coverage and were presented to the Planning Committee by Patrick Hannay on behalf of several groups, but unsurprisingly the plans were approved without alteration. We reiterated our concerns when the applicants submitted ‘reserved matters’ in March 2017.



Construction of the Morrisons store has made little progress at the time of writing this report. Like most in the town, we want to see an end to the long-running saga on this site and accept that the store can strengthen the town's retail provision. But we are hugely disappointed that the County Council, as landowners and planning authority, have wasted a unique opportunity to ensure that the site contributes buildings and uses that add quality to our historic town. The Design Commission for Wales has been critical and we have been prepared to compromise, but the developers have been required to make very few amendments.

Otherwise we have felt the need to respond to few planning applications during the past year. We unsuccessfully objected to the release of land at Grove Farm, Llanfoist, for housing as it was not allocated in the Local Development Plan and not justified in landscape terms. The release was against a background where the county fell short of the required five-year supply of housing land because allocated sites such as Deri Farm at Mardy had been delayed.

We also objected, mainly on design grounds, to proposals to remodel and extend Newbridge House (Job Centre) on Tudor Street as housing. This has yet to be determined, as have developments adjoining the ATS building near Aldi and on the Heronhurst site on Brecon Road, both of which have been improved since our objections last year. We have recently been critical of proposals for a larger shop at the Hereford Road service station and of an application for a dramatically modern restyling of a beauty salon at Mardy

The hotel and refreshment developments at Westgate, Llanfoist are now well-advanced on the ground, with an elevated prominence in the setting of the Blorenghe that may be felt to vindicate our objections. Unfortunately the earlier decisions that led to this development were taken when the Civic Society was less active. Some tree planting may soften the impact in time.

We await sight of proposals for the redevelopment of the Magistrates Court/Police Station site on Tudor Street. Some initial design thoughts have been passed to the planning officers via the Enhancing the Environment group that has been set up in the context of the unfinished Team Abergavenny planning exercise for North Monmouthshire. Also awaited are proposals for 17-23 Brecon Road, the derelict site on which we have made several representations.

Major planning applications must now be the subject of 'pre-application community consultation' mainly through the town or community council. As we could be unaware of such consultations, we and the Abergavenny Transition Town group are seeking a closer working relationship with these councils in dealing with these consultations and planning generally.

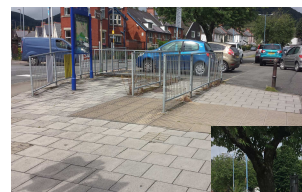
Through the Enhancing the Environment group and the Moving Around group we will be engaging with the County Council proposals to enhance Frogmore Street and Lion Street before April 2018.

It seems that the Local Development Plan review will start early in 2018 when details of the scope and timetable will be available.

**Dick Cole - August 2017**

### **Fairfield Improvement project – Tony Konieczny**

At the time of writing we are waiting to hear from MCC about our outline plan to improve this area. MCC has agreed in principal that they would like to work with us to further improve the area that has already been enhanced by the addition of 3 planters.



These colourful displays are tended throughout the year by Anna Petts. Offering a welcome seat for a few minutes they are much appreciated by visitors and residents alike. It is amazing what a splash of colour can do to lift the spirits and make small corners of our town feel special!



## Finances and 100 Club – Ian Vicary, Treasurer

It has been a quiet year for the finances with minor outlay of a contribution of £300 to Friends of Bailey Park to replace the cherry tree that was vandalised and buying an inexpensive laptop for the Society.

However, we are waiting for the outcome of ongoing discussions with Abergavenny Town Council and MCC regarding stage two of the Fairfield car park improvements. We will also have some quite large expenses to meet to get the booklet being finished by Dick Cole printed along with the Characterisation display boards to be go in to the Gunter 'pop-up shop' (formerly Janus) in October or November, the date yet to be confirmed. Examples of these excellent boards were seen at our June meeting.

We sold 96 numbers for the 100 Club which has helped to boost the finances. For the upcoming year it has been decided to slightly change the prize distribution for the Christmas draw as follows:

	<u>New</u>	<u>Old</u>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> prize</b>	£100 x 2	£200
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> prize</b>	£50 x 2	£100
<b>runner up prizes</b>	£20 x 5	£20 x 5

You will note that the total prize money remains the same but there are now four first and second prizes instead of just two, giving you more of a chance to win big.

100 Club numbers for 2017 – 2018 are now on sale. Just contact the treasurer Ian Vicary at [ianvicary@outlook.com](mailto:ianvicary@outlook.com) to buy your number(s) or of course you can set up a standing order, a facility also offered for payment of subscriptions. Contact either Mike, Membership Secretary on **855263** or Ian on **854929** for more information.

## Membership - Mike Foden, Membership Secretary

Individual Membership has increased once again this year. 9 members resigned for various reasons but we made up this loss with 14 new members joining over the year. Some joined after attending some of our public meetings and others came on the night to see what we get up to, enjoyed the evening and signed up. At present we have 114 paid up members and 17 affiliated members.

We are hugely grateful for all the support given to us by the following businesses:-

**Abergavenny Music, Angel Hotel, Celtic Computer Systems, Emmelines Homebaking, The Hardwick Restaurant, Homemakers Recycling, Jaybee Soft Furnishings, Judd Brothers, The Kings Arms, Owen Davies Consulting, Red Builders Ltd., Catherine Roberts & Steven Harris (Achitecture & Energy), Robin Elt Shoes, Serendipity Hair Salon, Smiles Better Dentists, Taurin Taylor Associates, and The Wool Croft.**

As we write this newsletter Abergavenny Music are closing their doors. We wish to pay tribute to the superb service this wonderful shop gave over many years to its customers as well the support offered to the business community and local people as well as to the music making community. It has been a joy having such a shop in our town staffed by knowledgeable and helpful people and we will miss it.

Subscriptions for the coming year 2017 - 18 are due on 1 September so please pay by cash or cheque to the **Membership Secretary, Mike Foden, 3 Lansdown Drive, Abergavenny, NP7 6AW.**

Collecting subscriptions this last year took 9 months despite initial requests, email reminders and follow ups. If as a member you are not planning to rejoin the Society then please advise Mike by email at [mikejudy@talktalk.net](mailto:mikejudy@talktalk.net) and we will update our records. Why not consider arranging to pay by Standing Order which makes things even easier. Get forms from Mike on **855263** or Ian Vicary on **854929**

**Under 65 £10**

**Over 65 £8**

**Student £1**

# Programme of meetings to run up until June 2018

**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.

## **11 September - Patrick Hannay - Architecture: State of the Welsh Nation**

Following devolution in 1997 how has Wales done with regard to commissioning fine architecture since that time? Patrick Hannay who has been editor of Touchstone, the magazine for architecture in Wales, takes an illustrated overview of a remarkable story.

**9 October - AGM followed by Richard Suggett – Senior Investigator of Historic Buildings at The Royal Commission** and also active in the Civic Movement, Richard Suggett will look at Medieval Wall paintings of Wales with some stunning local examples plus the work of the Royal Commission.

## **13 November – What will a '21<sup>st</sup> Century school' look like in Abergavenny?**

A chance to hear from, and talk with, Will McLean, Chief Officer of Children and Young People, who will discuss plans for Abergavenny as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools project.

## **11 December – 'Grandma's gadgets' with Don Balkwill**

Local legend and regular Abergavenny Chronicle contributor Don Balkwill joins us with his collection of wonderful yet unusual objects. Don will be asking members to guess the use of these intriguing objects, informing and entertaining as he gives the proper explanation. Mulled fruit punch and seasonal nibbles will provide festive cheer.

## **January 2018 – an opportunity to get together and socialise over lunch – date tbc**

**12 February - Professor George Nash**, internationally renowned Archaeologist, returns to entertain us on the amazing finds that were uncovered beneath the market hall including indications of a Bronze Age Settlement and links to Roman Abergavenny.

**12 March - Alan Bowring, Brecon Beacons National Park's Geologist**, will explain more about the fascinating geomorphology of the landscape and what the past changes of the landscape can point towards what might happen in the future.

## **9 April –Abergavenny Food Festival**

Aine Morris, Chief Executive of Abergavenny Food Festival will talk about the 20th Anniversary Festival and present a view of the future.

## **14 May – What does the future hold for our museum?**

Rachael Rogers, Manager of Monmouthshire Museums Service, will enlighten members on the recent project to develop outdoor events at Abergavenny castle and the future of the museums service if it becomes part of an independent trust.

## **11 June – How an idea can take wings and fly – Bettina Reeves**

Visitors to Abergavenny market hall audibly gasp with delight when they look up and see the wonderful, awe inspiring art installations. Bettina Reeves, a theatre designer and costume lecturer combines her love of textiles, puppetry and sculptural elements in her work and, helped by a small army of volunteers, delights us with new 'hangings' every year. Come and learn how this magic is created.