



THE CHEPSTOW SOCIETY

Members Bulletin **January 2025**



www.chepstowsociety.co.uk

Wednesday 15th January

Talk by Roger James

The Story of Rolls Royce



Wednesday 19th February

Talk by Mike Barker

***Tramways of the
Forest of Dean***

Wednesday 19th March

Talk by Alan Knight

Iron Working in Dean



Our meetings and talks are usually held on the third Wednesday of each month at The Drill Hall, Lower Church Street, Chepstow NP16 5HJ

Tea and coffee from 7 pm. Talk from 7 30 pm

All welcome - Members £1 - Non-members £4

When possible, the meetings are also streamed via Zoom <https://zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 513 005 1668 Passcode: Waters

MONTHLY TALKS PROGRAMME 2025

15th January
The Story of Rolls Royce
Roger James

19th February
Tramways of the Forest of Dean
Mike Barker

19th March
Iron Working in Dean
Alan Knight

16th April
Oliver Cromwell
Prof. Ronald Hutton

21st May – AGM
Approaching D-Day
Ian Ratazzi

18th June
The Bowmen of England
Nigel Packwood

16th July
Chepstow's Shipyards
Guy Hamilton

17th September
Unusual Cures and Blood Galore
Angela Dunsby

15th October
The Gwent Wetlands
Nicky Bailey

19th November
The Vikings and the Severn
Prof. Mark Horton

All dates and details are subject to final confirmation

The Chepstow Society presents

President's Spring Luncheon

at The Beaufort Hotel on
Saturday
18th January 2025
1.00 for 1:30pm

Roast Chicken and trimmings,
with apple pie and ice cream for
dessert.

Vegetarian option available

Cost £20 per person
cash only, payable in advance please

Entertainment to be provided



HISTORIC DAY FOR CHEPSTOW

2nd December 2024

**500th anniversary of the
Town Charter and Town Arch**



On 2nd December 1524, Charles Somerset, the Earl of Worcester and our Marcher Lord, gave Chepstow a new Town Charter, and the rebuilt Town Gate and Arch which we still have today.

Exactly 500 years later, on 2nd December 2024, Henry Somerset, the 12th Duke of Beaufort, whose titles include the Earldom of Worcester, visited Chepstow at the invitation of the Town Mayor, Cllr Tudor Griffiths, and the Chepstow Society, to commemorate the event.



The Duke and Duchess visited the 500 year old 'Worcesters' tomb in St Mary's Priory Church. They then walked up St Mary Street past the Beaufort Hotel into Beaufort Square, and finally to the Town Council's offices in the Gatehouse. They stood inside the room above the road inside the Arch given to the Town by his predecessor.

After meeting councillors and representatives of the Society and community groups, the Duke and Duchess presented the Mayor with a commemorative parchment prepared by Keith Underwood, local calligrapher and Society member.

During lunch at the Gatehouse the Duke and Duchess were entertained by the Chepstow Male Voice Choir, and with a background slide show of the town's Tudor Day on 18 May 2024.

In the afternoon the Society arranged a visit to Chepstow Bookshop for a book signing of the Duke's new memoir, and then a visit to Chepstow Castle - owned by the Duke's family for over 500 years - and a walk along the riverfront.

A very successful day, organised by the Chepstow Society together with the Town Council.



The Tudors: How Welsh Rebels became English Kings

We tend to know and hear a lot about Richard III and Henry VIII but far less about the monarch in between, Henry VII, the founder of the 118 year Tudor dynasty which encompassed five monarchs, two of them amongst the most famous in English history. That gap is one which Nathen Amin's work seeks to fill and was the subject of his fascinating talk on 11 December 2024 entitled 'The Tudors: How Welsh Rebels Became English Kings'.



Henry VII

Henry was descended on his father's side from Ednyfed Fychan, who while the renowned Chancellor of Llewellyn the Great, founded one of the most powerful families in 13th-14th century Wales. The children of his many sons formed a wealthy aristocracy serving the princes of Gwynedd which would play a key role in the repeated attempts to create a single Welsh principality. The family's Welsh heritage and the accompanying loyalties led them to take part in the last major rebellion against English rule, the Glyndwr Rising, in the early years of the 15th Century.

Henry's great grandfather Mareddud ap Tudur was a first cousin of Owain Glyndwr and with two of his brothers openly supported the rebellion which failed. He was pardoned in 1401 but revolted again in 1405 and then disappeared from history. His son, known in Wales as Owain ap Mareddud ap Tudur, fled to England and anglicised his name to Owen Tudor. He joined the English court and secretly married Catherine de Valois the widow of Henry V. Their two sons, Edmund and Jasper, therefore became half-brothers to Henry VI and were well treated. Both were made senior earls and received influential positions in the English parliament. Edmund was also granted the medieval palace of Baynard's Castle beside the Thames in London.

In the summer of 1453 Henry VI (a Lancastrian King) had a mental breakdown which lasted 17 months during which squabbles for power occurred. Rather surprisingly the Tudor brothers supported Richard Duke of York who sought to become Protector of the Realm. When Henry VI recovered there was hostility between the parties which led to the start of the Wars of the Roses.

Edmund Tudor married Margaret Beaufort, a grand daughter of Edward II, in 1455 and was sent to Wales to fight Welsh rebels in the name of the King by the Duke of York (Henry VI having been captured). Henry VI retook power and the Duke of York sent Yorkist soldiers to Wales who imprisoned Edmund in Carmarthen Castle where he died of bubonic plague.

His son, the future Henry VII, was born 3 months later at Pembroke Castle. He was raised by his uncle Jasper (a Lancastrian), and William Herbert, a supporter of the Yorkist branch of the house of Plantagenet spending 10 years at Raglan Castle.

During his early years his uncles and Lancastrian forces fought a series of civil wars against the Yorkist claimant Edward IV. After Edward re took the throne in 1471 Henry spent 14 years in exile in Brittany escaping from Tenby through underground passages which led to the harbour.

In 1476 Henry narrowly escaped a plot implemented by Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor, who was bribed to return him to Edward IV. The king died in 1483 and the House of York collapsed riven by disagreement driven by those who did not support Richard III. By the end of 1483 Henry was the last hope for disaffected Yorkists who agreed to support him in a claim to the throne if he would marry Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter. In 1485 Henry launched an invasion through Pembrokeshire supported by France, Scotland and Wales. Some 2-3000 Welshmen joined him on his march through Wales. He took as his banner the red dragon (the standard of Cadwallader) superimposed on his family colours of green and white giving birth to the flag of Wales to this day.

At the Battle of Bosworth Field on 22 August 1485 Henry defeated Richard III and took the crown, fulfilling a bardic prophecy repeated in Wales for hundreds of years that a Welsh man would be crowned in London and brought the Wars of the Roses to an end through his marriage to Elizabeth of York.

Nathen Amin's new book 'Son of Prophecy The Rise of Henry Tudor' tells the whole story.

Nicky Bailey

GOODRICH CASTLE

October's meeting saw **Alex Knight** give an entertaining and enlightening talk on the topic of Goodrich Castle. Many of the Society's members had visited the castle, located strategically above the River Wye between what is now Monmouth and Ross-on-Wye, but a small number of attendees were unfamiliar with the building, whilst many were unfamiliar with the history.

Alex, who had studied at Bath Spa University and then subsequently at Bristol University, was familiar with Goodrich as he had worked there for a number of years, the castle being maintained by English Heritage. For those yet to visit the castle, it is one of the most picturesque medieval ruins with stunning views. None other than William Wordsworth, the poet, described Goodrich as "the noblest ruin".

Although now a ruin, Alex carefully picked his way through the history of the site, cheerfully admitting that the lack of documentary evidence meant that much of the "history" of Goodrich can be best informed speculation. Although Goodrich is a fine example of a Norman Castle, Alex went back further in time and suggested that aerial evidence would suggest that the site had previously been an iron age hill fort, and then subsequently there is evidence of a Roman era settlement nearby.

Moving on to the castle itself, Alex explained that the name had morphed from Godric's Castle into what we know now as Goodrich Castle. The first part of the castle to be built was the keep, and I was surprised to learn that what I had fondly thought was a moat was in fact a quarry from where the stones for the original keep had been taken. There is some speculation as to who built the first keep, but the original castle is attributed to Godric Mappeson, dating from approx. 1101. The original timber built castle was seized by Baderon during the Anarchy and then given by King Stephen to the de Clare family. From about 1148, Richard de Clare strengthened the Castle, building the Keep that remains in existence until today.

On Richard's death, the Castle passed to the Crown. A murmur went around the Drill Hall as the well-known figure of William Marshal entered into the narrative as he was gifted the Castle by King John, Marshal had married Isabella de Clare. Marshal had already vastly extended and modernised his border castles at Chepstow and Usk, and probably began to update the buildings at Goodrich too around this



time. He most likely upgraded its defences, creating new curtain walls and towers in stone. The Coronation of Henry III at Gloucester Cathedral was masterminded from Goodrich by Marshal. However, the Coronation banquet was interrupted by news of marauding Welsh invaders attacking Goodrich.

After Marshal, the castle passed into the hands of the de Valence family. With the aid of several photos taken by himself, Alex pointed out the parts of the current castle built by William de Valence, both fortification of the walls and also the complex interior residential buildings, making Goodrich one of the most comfortable castles of the era. After the death of Aymer de Valence, the Castle passed by marriage to the Talbot family, who were responsible for the modernisation of the residential parts of the Castle. Although Goodrich was lost in the Wars of the Roses, Talbot soon recovered the Castle. The Talbots became the Earls of Shrewsbury and by Tudor times the Castle was not occupied by them, but more likely tenanted out.

One such tenant, Richard Tyler was involved during the English Civil War using Goodrich as a base to aid Parliament until the Castle was seized by Royalists under the leadership of Henry Lingen. The Castle came under bombardment from the mortar known as "Roaring Meg" as the Parliament army set siege. Finally the Castle was surrendered, and the Parliament forces slighted the castle ensuring it could no longer be used.

During the 19th century, the Castle moved into its current role as a venue for tourism in the Wye Valley. Alex explained the role English Heritage has played in the expansion of the castle as a visitor destination, the various refurbishments made, and even told the story of finding an unexploded bomb on site. With a range of questions following the talk answered to the satisfaction of Society's members, it was clear that many were planning a visit to Goodrich in the near future. Thanks to Alex Knight for a fascinating talk.

Marcus Keppel-Palmer

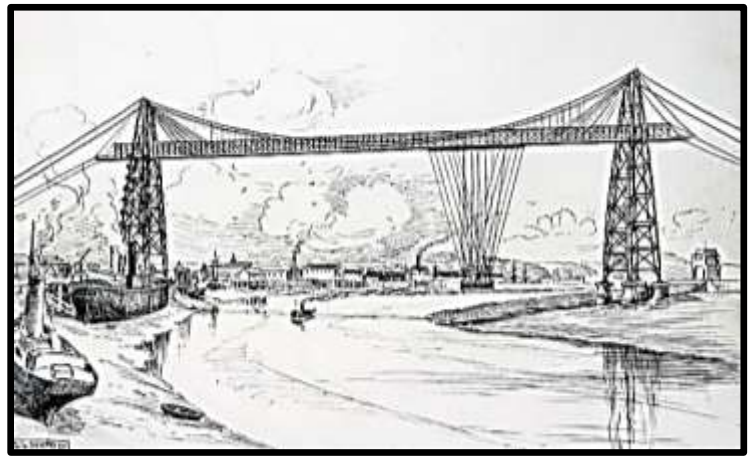
THE NEWPORT TRANSPORTER BRIDGE

Braving storms and gales, the November meeting of the Society saw an unexpectedly large turnout in the circumstances, and we were treated to a very entertaining and impassioned talk by **Jeff Grosvenor** on the topic of the Newport Transporter Bridge. Jeff is a member of the Friends of the bridge and together with the local authority, they are working hard to re-open the Bridge with a Visitors Centre telling of its long and storied history. Jeff had grown up with the Bridge as a play area and then place of employment and commute, and his talk was therefore part history and part first hand experience.

An early show of hands indicated that most in the audience had used the Transporter Bridge to cross the river, either in the gondola or on foot, so there were plenty of personal experiences shared after the talk.

With Newport originally a small market town built around the Usk river and a population not exceeding 8000, the single bridge, the Town Bridge, was all that was needed for pedestrian and horse and carriage transport. However, with the Industrial Revolution, Newport grew rapidly in the 19th century as the docks grew and King Coal led to an increase in manufacturing and other businesses. In the 1840s the Newport Town Docks opened, able to take the largest ships (then with sail), and the town grew south of the Usk with new residential areas such as Pillgwenlly. Although new railway bridges over the Usk river were constructed, by 1900 it was clear that a new road bridge was needed to enable the population south of the river to access the workplaces north of the river and vice versa.

As the bridge needed to be constructed nearer the Severn Estuary, logistically it needed to be capable of withstanding the tidal rise and fall associated with that area, be capable of allowing the tall ships to pass safely underneath, and also be built sturdily enough at the depths of the river at the time. With the opening of Lysaght's Orb Works in 1898 as a major employer, the town council needed to act, and act fast. One further constraint was the cost – the town council looking for the cheapest option.



Jeff, who illustrated his talk with a multitude of drawings and photographs, as well as plans of the bridge, explained that Robert Haynes recommended to the Council that they build a Transporter Bridge on the design of Ferdinand Arnodin who had built such bridges in Bilbao and in Rouen, where the Town Councillors went to see the bridge in operation before deciding on the design. The bridge (or aerial ferry as Arnodin originally described it) was built with four towers, two on each bank, a steel walkway crossing the river, held in place by many cables, and a suspended gondola that crossed underneath the walkway carrying motor vehicles and foot passengers for a toll. Jeff explained that during construction, there were no fatalities amongst the workers, and despite over a century of use the gondola remains the original one.

The bridge was opened in 1906 by Lord Tredegar and amongst the luminaries using the bridge (apart from members of Chepstow Society) included royalty and an elephant. Although tolls were charged, the bridge always lost money, and cost of repairs put a strain onto Council finances. The bridge – aped in design by the transporter bridge in Middlesbrough – took on further iconic status when it appeared with Hayley Mills in the film *Tiger Bay*, although it was misplaced to Cardiff in the film.

Jeff concluded his talk with a discussion of the status of the bridge as a tourist attraction, there being so few bridges of this design left in Europe, and the redesign of the visitors' centre that is currently in hand. The new centre will include a virtual walk across the walkway and is expected to open in Spring 2025.

Our thanks to Jeff Grosvenor for an informative and engaging talk about one of the iconic landmarks of South Wales.

Marcus Keppel-Palmer

Chepstow's Roman River Crossing: Day School

Saturday 19th October 2024

The Day School on the Roman Crossing of the Wye was a tremendous success. Over 160 enthusiastic attendees packed the Drill Hall throughout the afternoon for presentations and discussion.

John Burrows opened with a thorough analysis of the engineering and military challenges of building the crossing, to explain why it was where it was, and why later crossings were located differently.

Simon Maddison then described the history and investigations of the spectacular timber bridge pier, 12m x 6m, constructed of substantial oak beams. This is located near the low tide mark, limiting access to under 2 hours, even at springs. There are timber piles on the English side, investigated in 2003. Simon concluded with some ideas as to how the bridge might have looked.

Professor Nigel Nayling summarised the scientific dating of these timbers, setting them clearly in the Roman era, 1st Century AD, similar to the piles dated in 2003 from the English side.

Lynne Davies rounded off the first session with a detailed description of the approaches to the site on both sides of the river, including CAS excavations on the 400m long, 7m wide engineered trackway that runs down to the bridge site from the School, at a slope of 1:10. Further excavations are planned this winter to try and find datable material and establish what relationship it might have had with the Piercefield Walks. Lynne also showed the work done by Extreme Archaeology on the agger in the meadow on the English side in 2003.

Following the break, **Professor Mark Horton** showed the drone surveys that he had made of the site and speculated as to the route of the access road to the north towards Gloucester. According to Mark, there is no sign of the road continuing beyond Newnham, where it turns to a known crossing of the Severn, joining with the Via Julia through Arlingham on the other side.

Boldly he speculated as to whether there might have been a Roman bridge across the Severn at this point!

Dr Mark Lewis then dug deep into the evidence of Roman itineraries, mapping, tithe, LiDAR and other inscription data to identify the likely route of the roadway from the bridge to Caerwent, all in the context of crossing the Severn and how that might have worked. He further described the accumulating evidence of Roman material from within Chepstow, and the speculations over possible Roman settlement and fortifications there, as well as the possible form of the bridge by comparisons with other Roman bridges, and the old bridges in Chepstow itself.

Finally, **Dr Toby Driver** presented the fast-growing evidence of Roman military and settlement activity all over Wales, established from the swelling corpus of aerial photography that he is responsible for. In particular, the more detailed site evidence that is emerging for the progress of the military invasion of south Wales, with more exciting candidates emerging for field investigation.

The afternoon wrapped up with a lively open discussion between the presenters and the audience, with many probing questions and speculations as to further work and interpretation of the evidence that has been gathered. As ever, more questions than answers were raised, but unquestionably, the work going on is of national importance and steps as to how it might be further progressed were tentatively formed.

Many thanks to all the speakers for an excellent and informative afternoon, and to the audience for their interest and enthusiasm! The first sections presentations are now available on the CAS website and the remainder will be added shortly.

Simon Maddison