

EDAS FIELD TRIP JOURNAL

9th – 16th June 2018

The Welsh Marches:

Power and authority along and across the border



Geared up for going underground at the Big Pit with Russell

Compiled by Vanessa Joseph



EAST DORSET ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

EDAS – Annual Field Trips

No.	Year	Organisers	Place
1	1989	John and Della Day	Hadrian's Wall
2	1990	John and Della Day	Anglesey
3	1991	M Crabtree	Dartmoor
4	1992	Graham Adams	Penwith, Cornwall
5	1993	S. Church	Leicester
6	1994	Alan Hawkins	Cardiganshire
7	1995	S Church/M Roebuck	Glastonbury
8	1996	Mo & Mal Houghton	East Sussex
9	1997	John and Della Day	Derbyshire
10	1998	Graham & Susan Adams	Kelso
11	1999	Keith & Denise Allsopp	Shrewsbury
12	2000	Mo & Mal Houghton	Canterbury
13	2001	Keith & Denise Allsopp	Forest of Dean
14	2002	Graham & Susan Adams	Cotswolds/Gloucester
15	2003	Keith & Denise Allsopp	East Anglia
16	2004	Peter Walker	Hadrian's Wall
17	2005	Gill Broadbent	Lake District
18	2006	Steve Smith	Worcester
19	2007	Graham & Susan Adams	North Yorkshire
20	2008	Brian Maynard	Dartmoor, Devon.
21	2010	Mo & Mal Houghton	North Wales
22	2011	Andrew Morgan	Pembrokeshire
23	2012	Alan Hawkins	Exmoor
24	2013	Graham & Susan Adams	Penwith, Cornwall
25	2014	Brian Maynard	Lincolnshire
26	2015	Keith & Denise Allsopp	Cambridgeshire
27	2017	Lilian Ladle & Mark Corney	Hadrian's Wall
28	2018	Geoff Taylor & Andrew Morgan	South East Wales

Acknowledgements

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Mark Lewis: Senior Curator, National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon

Eric Long: Curator, Monmouth Castle & Regimental Museum

Louise Mees: Regional Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Archaeology (South East Wales), CADW

Sue Miles: Curator, Nelson Museum and Local History Centre, Monmouth

Chris Parry: Community Liaison Officer, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum

Adele Thackray: Education Manager (North Wales), CADW

Richard Turner: Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Wales (retired)

Huw Williams: Adult Learning Wales; Lecturer, Swansea University

Stuart Wilson: Project Director, Lost City of Trellech Project

Background

This year's EDAS field trip to the Welsh Marches was organised by Geoff Taylor and Andrew Morgan who put in considerable time and effort and did a brilliant job of arranging a varied, informative and active trip. Twenty-four doughty travellers plus one dog enjoyed South Wales at its best. The weather was glorious, our guides were entertaining and informative, everyone was hospitable, and we got a true flavour of the history of the place from Neolithic to modern times; a history often very different to that of England.

I managed to recruit a few volunteers as correspondents and asked them to cover specific days in the itinerary. The only keen volunteer was Lilian who opted to write about the Roman elements of the trip; the rest had their arms twisted.

Here we have the EDAS field trip 2018 to the Welsh Marches. As you will see, a great time was had by all. Many thanks to our EDAS correspondents for documenting the trip for posterity. I hope you enjoy reading the journal.

Vanessa

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Saturday: An introduction to the Welsh Marches: Offa's Dyke Path, by Vanessa Joseph



To whet the appetite for the days ahead, a keen group of walkers and Aimee the dog joined the optional walk on the Offa's Dyke Path prior to our evening rendezvous in Caerleon. Although Geoff had not done the walk in his recce, he had done his research on this section of the path and presented the group with information and amusing anecdotes as we wandered along looking for the dyke.

Offa was King of Mercia from 757 to 796 AD and ruled the area between the Trent/Mersey rivers in the north to the Thames Valley in the south, and from the Welsh border to the Fens. At the height of his power he was effectively an early King of England and was also influential in international affairs. It is believed that Offa was the first monarch to introduce the 'penny' into England and his silver pennies were probably the most artistically accomplished coins produced anywhere in Europe at that time.

Offa's Dyke is a linear earthwork which roughly follows the Welsh/English boundary for about 150 miles, from Sedbury near Chepstow to Prestatyn on the Welsh Channel. It consists of a ditch and rampart constructed with the ditch on the Welsh-facing side. The rampart was originally about 65 feet wide and over 10 feet high, appears to have been carefully aligned to present an open view into Wales from Mercia into Powys and Gwent. As originally constructed, it must have been about 27 metres wide and 8 metres from the ditch bottom to the bank top. The Dyke appears to have been a response to issues between the Kings of Mercia and the Princes of Powys, but whether it was an agreed boundary, a defensive structure or for some other use, is not clear.



Geoff preaching from the Devil's Pulpit

We walked about 3 miles of the trail and although we had problems identifying the Dyke itself we think we found it in the end. There remain debates about construction dates and whether it was all built in Offa's reign, with few excavations giving clues.

For me the highlight of the walk was the Devil's Pulpit, a wonderful limestone outcrop which, on a clear day, has fantastic views down to Tintern Abbey. It is said that the Devil sat on the rock and preached to the monks in the Abbey to try and lure them away from Christianity.

Miss Grace and her Lane were mentioned frequently by Geoff but remained a mystery as we learnt little or nothing about her during the walk.

During the evening, the whole group convened at the Snug in Caerleon for the First Supper. Before the meal, we wandered round the interesting and somewhat eclectic sculpture garden where some amazing tree carvings and sculptures were displayed. Wales has a rich heritage of magical and mystical tales including the Mabinogion and the Arthurian legends and many of the sculptures were inspired by these stories. The great meal and convivial atmosphere set the tone for the week to come.

Sunday: Gelligaer Common, Roman Fort, Caerphilly Castle & Twmbarlwm by Andrew Morgan

Traditionally on the first full day of an EDAS field trip we organise a walk. Because over the years our legs seem to have worn shorter we decided to limit it to a morning visit to Gelligaer Common on the Gwent Uplands, between the Taff and the Rhymney valleys. It is an important archaeological landscape with many features especially from the Early Bronze Age. But the area was abandoned around 1500 BC when a deteriorating climate forced people to leave the higher lands, as also evidenced on Dartmoor and Exmoor. The ever helpful CADW had suggested Dr Edith Evans of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust who kindly acted as our guide.

The weather was perfect and immediately we set off the benefit of having Edith with us became apparent as she found a succession of prehistoric features that had eluded us on an earlier recce of the area; albeit we had been hampered by an unseasonable snow storm in March. In particular she found a number of ring cairns, which are ephemeral features which can only be discerned under expert guidance, a degree of faith, and favourable conditions. Edith suggested that the ring of stones would have been upright when constructed and she explained there is no evidence of associated burials. There is a thought that these may have functioned as the local equivalent of henges. We crossed the landscape towards an early medieval memorial stone, now slumped to 45 degrees. It once featured an inscription that read: "NEFROIHI" - the stone of Nía-Fróich. Edith explained that the inscription had eroded away naturally but is typical of the sixth century. The stone also stands within a ring cairn and it is possible that it may have had a prehistoric significance. As we walked towards the top of the hill, we crossed the Roman Road that linked the important Roman forts at Cardiff and Brecon, via a succession of auxiliary forts at Caerphilly, Gelligaer and Penyardren. By carefully looking at the skyline the cut made for the road could be detected and traces of the ditches either side of the once cobbled agger became apparent, running south towards the fort at Gelligaer.

The landscape is dominated by the Bronze Age cairn of **Pen Garnbugail** a circular mound surrounded by a kerb of large slabs now laid flat. A shallow burial chamber sits within the mound and is capped by a large slab. Nearby lies a second burial chamber positioned in a slightly less prominent position. None of the monuments in the area have been excavated to modern standards but all bear the signs of being ransacked by Victorian antiquarians. Unfortunately, no records remain of their efforts. Further on, we were led to a large horizontal stone with a cup-shaped incision near its centre: "*a rare example of rock art*". Edith gently rebuked any scepticism explaining it has been verified by the eminent Dr George Nash. The final features we explored were the **Dinas Noddfa** medieval house platforms built on the western slopes of the ridge with one half cut into the slope and the other constructed with the extracted material. The remains of collapsed walls could be made out that once formed a large enclosure around the site.



Robert "helps" Vanessa into the tomb

We were all quite saddened that the area suffers from the scourge of fly-tipping, a growing threat to all secluded places, even in Dorset.

After offering our warm thanks to Edith we made our way to the Roman auxiliary fort at Gelligaer. The site is located perfectly on the ridge between the Taff and Rhymney valleys and it would have commanded this upland region, overlooking the heavily wooded valleys. It was once part of a military network across Wales to defeat and control the native Celtic tribes with a series of auxiliary forts each positioned about 20kms (ie. one day's march) apart.

The site features the earthwork remains of two forts. The first was of timber and built at the time of the Roman conquest of Wales in AD 74-8. A later fort, constructed in stone, is almost square and occupies an area of 1.4ha (3.5 acres) with corner and interval towers and four double-arched gateways. The men lived in six barrack blocks, one for each century of 80 men and their centurion. Outside the fort on the south-east side was a walled extension containing a bathhouse. Attached to the fort was the parade ground. The date of construction is confirmed by a stone inscription found near the south-east gateway which suggests a date of between AD 105 and 117 during the reign of the Emperor Trajan. Recent research indicates that the garrison was probably withdrawn at the time of the Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-38), by which time the difficult Silures had been pacified.



In the afternoon we moved down valley to visit the rather splendid Caerphilly Castle. Located in a very modest town, this is one of the great medieval castles of western Europe and a revolutionary masterpiece of military planning. It is a clear reaction to the size of the threat posed by the Welsh. It was built quickly between 1268-71 by Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan, and one of Henry III's most powerful barons, to prevent south Wales falling into the hands of the Welsh leader Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, who controlled most of mid and north Wales. After he had failed to destroy the castle Llywelyn retreated northwards. By 1283 Edward I

had removed the current threat of Welsh independence and the need for Caerphilly had gone. The last action that Caerphilly saw was in 1321 during the war between the notorious Edward II and Isabella his queen. By the time of the Civil War the castle was unusable and thankfully was not blighted by the protagonists. The site was bought and restored by the Bute family (local coal barons) and the imaginative re-flooding of the lakes achieved by the state in the 1950s. The castle is now used regularly for filming historical dramas and often features in Dr Who episodes.

After a well-earned tea and a quick homage to Tommy Cooper (his place of birth) some of us set off for the final and optional leg of a long day. Twmbarlwm is an iconic site, an Iron Age hillfort set on a prominent hill top position with the motte of a Norman castle at one end. It is not easy to get to and involves a drive along an overgrown single file lane, avoiding cattle and reckless quad bikes.

It has always been a special place to the locals and several boisterous but respectful young people still make the pilgrimage and congregate there in the evening. Thankfully a few of us made the journey and we climbed the steep slope up to the top to enjoy views across the channel and salute the end of a great day.



It was definitely worth it



No Tommy it's..... 'Just like this'

Monday: Caerleon and Caerwent – getting up close to the Romans, by Lilian Ladle

Caerleon

Caerleon claims to be one of the largest and most important military sites in Europe – and it did not disappoint. In Roman Britain there were three legionary fortresses: Caerleon (*Isca*) with the II Legio Augusta, York (*Eboracum*) with the Legio VI Victrix and Chester (*Deva*) with Legio XX Valeria Victrix. Unlike York and Chester, Caerleon does not lie beneath a modern city and as a result some of its major archaeological remains can easily be seen.



Mark explains how the Roman Army was organised

Mark Lewis, Senior Curator of the National Roman Legion Museum, knowledgeably and enthusiastically guided us for the day. We began at the museum where there are stunning displays depicting life in Roman Caerleon, both military and civilian.

What was quite surprising were the links with Dorset. Large quantities of Poole Harbour Black Burnished Ware pottery were used

by the military, most likely shipped around the coast and up the Severn Estuary. Kimmeridge shale platters (example shown here) and bracelets and fragments of Purbeck limestone are further testament to thriving trading links.



The fort itself was massive (20 ha/50 acres) with a garrison of about 5500 men and was founded around AD 75. Initially built in wood, the buildings were rapidly replaced by stone counterparts. It had the usual layout with perimeter defences, military headquarters, grand residences for high-ranking officials, baths, stores and barracks for the soldiers. Legio II Augusta were stationed at Strasbourg prior to the invasion of AD 43 and were commanded by Vespasian (later emperor). They conquered Dorset and about half of the legion was based for a time at Lake Farm, south of Wimborne. By AD 55, they had moved to Exeter. Twenty years later a further deployment to Wales was instigated by a need to conquer the difficult, powerful and warlike Silures. Caerleon was an ideal site with excellent facilities on the River Wye and good road links with minor forts in Wales and the south west. The legion was based here until AD 287.

Tour of the archaeological remains

Modern excavations began in the 20th century and were spearheaded by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, then director of the National Museum of Wales who persuaded the 'Daily Mirror' to sponsor excavation of the amphitheatre which was subsequently donated to the nation. Through small-scale excavation and more recently through geophysics a more-or-less complete plan of the site has been made. Although only four areas are accessible, they vividly bring Roman Caerleon to life.

The amphitheatre

Located outside the fortress and built of stone in the late 1st century, the amphitheatre has the usual elliptical shape with two major entrances. The sunken arena provided earth for the tiered seating which was faced and strengthened back and front by stone walls. There were a further six minor entrances which had access to both seats and the arena. This was unusual and is only found in military amphitheatres where the arena was used primarily for training exercises; gladiatorial and wild animal entertainment was the exception rather than the rule.



This must be the finest amphitheatre in Britain. Sir Mortimer Wheeler installed a railway to take away the spoil (lucky him!!!)

The fortress barracks and fort wall



Barracks with latrines in foreground, centurion's house in centre and oven bases on right

Four barrack blocks excavated in the 1920s are on view – there were 60 in total. The blocks faced each other and offered 12 pairs of rooms, housing eight men to two rooms. At the end of each block was office space, accommodation for a centurion and other junior officers.

The defensive wall around the fort was originally constructed of clay and turf but was soon replaced with stone walls which still survive in places to a height of 3.5m (12ft). Close to the wall and opposite the excavated barracks are a series of stone-built ovens and the remains of a cookhouse. Cooking and fire-related activities were prohibited within the barracks for obvious reasons. A latrine is built into the western corner of the fort; this rectangular room probably accommodated about 12 'sitters'. Water flushed away the soil into a large drain which ultimately emptied into the River Wye.

The fortress legionary baths

A modern museum building covers only part of this complex. The baths were an integral part of Roman life and as befitted their importance, were constructed in stone c. AD 75-77 as the fort was being built. The complex was huge and consisted of an exercise yard with an open-air swimming pool (91m/135ft long), an exercise hall and a conventional bath suite of changing room, cold, warm and hot rooms. Visitors today are presented with impressive projected images which fill the pool remains with Roman bathers. Information panels and displays of finds help to bring this Roman 'leisure complex' to life. The baths were in use until the end of the 3rd century and some of the structures survived until the early middle ages.



The swimming pool of the legionary baths with its 'magical light show'

Caerwent

Caerwent, now a small, peaceful village was once Wales's major city; it was always small, only 18ha/44ac, but never-the-less contained all a Roman city needed to function. Our afternoon visit took us around some evocative remains and Mark Lewis, who has the good fortune to live here, brought the town back to life.

'*Venta Silurum*' – the market of the Silures had civic buildings, baths, temples, shops and houses and was enclosed by massive stone walls in the 3rd century. Our tour of the town took us first to the parish church of St Stephen where Roman stonework is visible incorporated into the fabric of the building. Within the porch is a statue base commemorating *Tiberius Claudius Paulinus*, commander of Legio II Augusta (AD 211-217). The native Silures honoured him with a statue (now lost), the inscription charts the commander's career and highlights the role of the civilian governing administration.

The Town Walls

These are the finest in Britain with a circuit of just over one mile and stand to a height of over 5m (17ft) but were originally even higher at 7.5m (25ft). The current main road through the village enters and leaves by the east and west gates. Throughout Roman Britain, major towns erected strong defences as a response to growing threats from outside the empire.



The Forum/basilica



Entrance to the Forum. The paved market area is to the left and the aisles and nave of the basilica are centre and right.

The buildings of the market place and civic centre were in the middle of the town and consisted of an open, paved market place with shops on three sides and civic buildings on the fourth side. The largest and grandest of these was the basilica, 80m/260ft long and 56m/182ft wide comprising a nave and two aisles with roof supported by colonnades. The building was used for public meetings and ceremonial occasions. Smaller rooms were used by local magistrates and dignitaries to conduct civic business. There was also a town shrine where statues of deified emperors and local gods were worshipped. The lay-out replicates civic centres all over the empire, but particularly in the southern Mediterranean.

The Romano-Celtic temple

Close to the forum are the remains of a large mid-4th century Romano-Celtic temple. The complex originally consisted of an apsidal-ended entrance hall, a sacred enclosure, where worshippers gathered and the temple building itself. Later a number of rooms were added to the entrance hall. This is a very late date for the construction and use of such a building at a time when Christianity was flourishing; there was however, no evidence for the deities which were worshipped here.



Shops and houses

We looked at the remains of some shops and associated buildings which represented several centuries of use and alterations. Excavation revealed that throughout this time, the premises had been used for iron-working and blacksmithing. The foundations of two large courtyard houses are particularly well-preserved; however, parts of these buildings lie under private gardens and remain un-investigated. This type of house is Mediterranean in style with inner, private courtyards and rooms ranged around. On forts, the commander's house was always designed like this, but in an urban British setting the design is very unusual. One of the houses had two courtyards, in one was a corn dryer which may indicate either an agricultural emphasis or that the occupants brewed their own beverages. A raised floor on stone sleepers, similar to that of a military

granary, may have been a store for dry goods. It is likely that these grand houses belonged to local tribal aristocracy or retired military.

After the Romans....

The town begins to deteriorate in the late 4th century and after the Romans withdrew in c. AD 410, the town quickly contracted and deteriorated. By the 6th century, the kingdom of Gwent had been founded, its name probably derived from *Venta Silurum*. There are numerous burials dating from the 5th-9th centuries as well as coins and metalwork. However, when the next great invasion (1066) happened, the Normans chose Chepstow as the strategic capital and Caerwent reverted to pasture and farmland.

Tuesday: The early Christian Church: St. Illtud's Church, Llantwit Major, by Judith Purcell

The clamour of crows and the rustle of the trees were the only sounds that filled the air in a small hollow where St Illtud's Church has been nestling for 1,500 years. The Church that stands there now in its flowery garden dates from the period AD 950 to 1400. It was described in 1777 by an impressed John Wesley as "... abundantly the most beautiful church in Wales."



Llantwit Major is named as the site of the main church of Illtud, one of the founding Saints of the monastic settlements of the 5th century AD in Wales. At its height this was a major centre for education and evangelism, its influence reaching through Cornwall and Devon to Brittany and beyond, led by the students and successors of Illtud: St. Samson of Dol, Gildas the Wise and St. Paul Aurelian. Of the nearly thirty churches dedicated to Illtud, almost half are in Brittany.

Illtud came to this sheltered valley of Hodnant late in the 5th century. On the Ogney Brook, a mile inland from the sea, close to the site of the present church he founded his monastery. For the history of the present building and its subsequent development we have to start with the Norman occupation of Wales. The tithes of the rich lands of Llantwit Major were seized by Robert Fitzhamon, the Lord of Glamorgan, and vested in the newly formed Abbey of Tewkesbury. The first Norman structure was a simple cruciform building without a tower. This appears to have been built on the foundations of an earlier church which might date from Illtud's period.

For almost one thousand years Llantwit was a rural backwater controlled by a small number of wealthy families. They left behind the principal houses of the town, the Ham, Boverton Place, Old Place (all ruined) and some smaller but inhabited survivals namely Great House, Plymouth House, the Court House, and two public houses, the Old White Hart and the Old Swan.

The monastery that predates the church is said to have housed the oldest college in the world, which was attended by more Celtic saints than I could count, until the year AD 986 when the Danes attacked and destroyed it. They were followed by the Normans in the 11th Century, who wrought their usual havoc.

Following her talk on the early development of the Christian Church, our lovely guide, Jeanne James, took us around the Church and pointed out the additions and alterations made over the years. The west church itself was largely restored in the 14th century, including the reconstruction of the upper walls of the South porch and the impressive Irish oak collar beam roof. A chantry priest's house (badly damaged by a German bomb in August 1940) stands on the south side of the churchyard.

After the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry, St. Illtud's became the Parish Church. The period which followed saw a Puritanical destruction of many wall paintings and statues, until a major reconstruction in the 1900s found and restored many of the features of the Church.

Inside the Church are many memorial stones to local families and



Medieval wall painting of Mary Magdalene

aristocracy, as well as features including the Royal Standard of King James (1604), Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary on the walls of the Chancel and St Christopher circa 1400. In the southeast corner of the nave are the sculptured Jesse Niche and the restored Alter Slab. Other features include squints (hagioscopes), stone benches, a carved stone altar screen, and roof level markings on the tower, which tell the story of the development of the east church. The organ, donated to the church over 100 years ago, was once played in concert by the composer Gabriel Fauré.

At the entrance to the church there are several inscribed Celtic memorial stones: a wheel cross commemorates Houelt ap Rhys, the 9th Century ruler of Glamorgan; the Sampson Cross and the Sampson pillar are dedicated to Abbots Sampson; and Artmail and Ithel (the 9th Century King of Gwent) respectively.

All traces of Illtud's monastery have gone, but the place still leaves one with an overwhelming feeling of peace and solitude.



A fine collection of Celtic memorial stones dating from the 9th and 10th centuries

Tuesday afternoon: In further pursuit of Welsh heritage, by Vanessa Joseph

After this peaceful interlude, we travelled back in time and visited two fine examples of Neolithic burial chambers. Often known as dolmens or cromlechs, these communal tombs are found in every corner of Wales. The burial chambers involved the communities that built them in major efforts of planning, organisation and construction. Archaeological excavations have produced evidence of successive burials and ritual activities.

Tinkinswood

The burial chamber was constructed around 6,000 years ago and is a fine example of a Cotswold-Severn tomb, with an enormous capstone weighing about 40 metric tonnes and the biggest found in Britain. The long wedge-shaped cairn contains a rectangular stone chamber where the bones of up to 50 individuals were discovered.



The slabs used in building the main chamber could have been obtained from a quarry nearby, but it is possible that some, at least, already lay exposed on the site. Finds from its excavation included a large quantity of human and animal bones representing at least 50 individuals of which 8 were certainly juvenile, 21 female and 16 male. Pottery found with the bones included fragments of bowls of Neolithic ware, while fragments of a vessel in Beaker style indicated comparatively Late Neolithic use of the chamber. Stone implements included a flint lance-head from the original surface under the cairn. Later use of the chamber, at least for shelter, is suggested by a bone gaming die

of early Iron Age type and by Romano-British and medieval pottery.

Local legend: Being at Tinkiswood the night before May Day, St. John's Day or Midwinter Day could result in death, madness or turn you into a poet!

St Lythans

This burial chamber was originally protected by a vast mound of earth and faced east to the rising sun. Over the centuries the mound eroded and today only the stone skeleton of the tomb survives. Excavations in 2012 revealed that the original burial mound was 12m wide and 30 m long. It is similar to Tinkiswood and many others across Wales and South West England.

The dolmen itself consists of a huge capstone - easily 3m in length and over 1m in thickness - balanced on four uprights, and there are a pair of smaller stones set in the ground at one end. This design must have held great significance to the ancient builders. The tomb's local name is *Gwal y Filiast* (Lair of the She-Wolf or Lair of the Grey Hound Bitch) which might relate to the Culhwch and Olwen in which King Arthur leads a hunting party with dogs on an epic chase across South Wales after a monstrous wild boar.



Just trying it out for size!

Local legend: They say that wishes whispered into the tomb on Halloween will be granted. But it also stands in the "Accursed Field" and it is said that on Midsummer's Eve the capstone spins round 3 times and the stones go down to the river to wash. I just wish we had been there on that day to watch this momentous event!

St Fagans Welsh National Museum of History

The last port of call on this busy day was St Fagans National Museum of History which was established in 1948. Central to its development was the emphasis placed on rescuing, reconstructing and displaying the houses and workplaces of ordinary people from different social backgrounds and from different periods. The museum has over 40 original re-erected buildings in its grounds.

Buildings on show included Bryn Eryr, a small reconstructed Iron Age farmstead based on original houses excavated in the eastern corner of Anglesey; St Teilo's Church, believed to have been built during the late 12th or 13th century with walls covered in paintings copied from medieval originals; the Oakdale Workmen's Institute built in 1917 to serve as a focus for social, educational and cultural life within the coal mining community; Rhyd-y-Car Terrace Houses, a small terrace built around 1795 to provide housing for the workers in an iron-ore mine; and Gwalia Stores, a typical general store from the south Wales industrial valleys.



Enjoying a well- deserved ice cream



Even archaeologists enjoy more recent history - the general store and shops brought forth many reminiscences from members of the group of the "I can remember when we used to buy xxx in a place like this in my town" kind whilst the tiny terraced houses shocked us into appreciating just how much living conditions have improved.

Wednesday: Chepstow and the Wye valley, by Vanessa Joseph

Chepstow



The first rendezvous of the day was just outside the castle with Geoff. Chepstow Castle has a spectacular and strategic setting perched on a narrow ridge overlooking the Wye (best viewed from the English side) and it dominates the southern route into Wales. The long shape, hugging the cliff edge, shows many stages of development from its early Norman beginnings, through Tudor, the Civil War and the 18th century.

Geoff explained the complex history of the castle, some of which is summarised here. Its owners and builders were some of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the country, with lands across England and Wales; Normandy and Ireland. The oldest stone structure, the Great Tower, was built by William fitz Osbern (born c.1020 and incidentally Earl of Wessex) on the orders of William the Conqueror. Originally

a rock-cut ditch, the tower contains Roman tile recycled from Caerwent and was probably used for ceremonial or judicial purposes. In the 12th Century, under William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke and, for a few years, regent to the young Henry III, the whole castle was remodelled to match the most modern military techniques and make a comfortable home. In the 13th Century it was turned into a palatial stronghold under Roger Bigod, 5th Earl of Norfolk and the large, self-contained 'Marten's Tower' included luxurious guest apartments and a private chapel. The castle played its part in the Civil War. By the 18th century it had become an industrial estate with the hall used for blowing glass for wine bottles.



Spot the Roman tiles



Judith refused to cross the bridge back into England

We were free to wander through all this wealth of architectural heritage. Some of us explored the service passage with steps leading to an elegant vaulted wine cellar (the Earl was entitled to an eighth of all the ale brewed locally) and we all admired the magnificent castle doors which are around 800 years old and believed to be the oldest in Europe.

Chepstow means marketplace (from Old English *ceape stowe* = a trading place). Following the visit to the castle, Geoff led a walk around the town, showing us the best parts of the city wall and explaining more about its history. Main early settlement seems to have been a little to the south, moving here in Saxon times, with the walls and original grant of a market from the 13th century.

St. Mary's Priory Church was worth a visit with its notable tombs and memorials as well as a pipework organ dating from the 17th century. The Regency road bridge has carried traffic from Chepstow to Gloucestershire since 1816.



The Worcester Tomb at St. Mary's Priory Church

Coming up to date, JK Rowling lived at Tutshill, just across the river in England, from age 9 to 18. Many characters and places in Harry Potter were inspired by people and places in Chepstow. As a Harry Potter fan, I found this interesting but do have to admit that Dave and several other members of the group were singularly unimpressed. There was time to wander round or visit the local museum and have lunch before our afternoon rendezvous.

Tintern Abbey

Roofless and windowless: when you walk through the outer buildings into the great Gothic ruin, you can't help but look up to the heavens and exclaim in wonder at the sheer magnificence of this place of worship.



Tintern Abbey was founded by Walter de Clare, Lord of Chepstow, in 1131 with monks from L'Aumône Abbey in France. Situated on the Welsh bank of the River Wye, this remains the best-preserved medieval abbey in Wales. Started around 1136, it was originally a simple stone church with about 20 monks and 50 lay brothers. Tintern was always closely associated with the lords of Chepstow, who were often generous benefactors. The most generous was Roger Bigod, 5th Earl of Norfolk and grandson of William Marshal's daughter Maud; his monumental undertaking was the rebuilding of the church in the late 13th century. In gratitude the abbey put his coat of arms in the glass of its east window. Tintern Abbey was surrendered to King Henry VIII's officials on September 3, 1536 by Abbot Wyche, thus ending a way of life which had lasted 400 years.

Having fallen into ruin, Tintern had an unlikely comeback in the 18th-century as one of the first tourist attractions in Wales. The great abbey church that is seen today has a cruciform plan with an aisled nave; two chapels in each transept and a square ended aisled chancel. The Decorated Gothic style represents the pinnacle of architectural achievement of its day. It is very difficult for modern day visitors to understand that no member of the congregation would have actually experienced the building and its craftsmanship as we do now. The walls would have been painted with bright colours and partitions would have segregated different echelons of the congregation, meaning not everyone could see the altar or the east and the west windows. It would have been an extremely noisy place where commerce and trade discussions often replaced quiet contemplation and prayer.



Monmouth

That evening, we were at Monmouth Museum for drinks and to meet Steve Clarke MBE and members of Monmouth Archaeological Society. The Society has been instrumental in many excavations in and around Monmouth, particularly the Bronze Age lake dwellings and a log boat from around a long-lost lake close to the town. The drinks element was slightly more rushed than expected as we had to change venues and walk to Shire Hall for Steve's presentation on Monmouth archaeology. We sat in the infamous court room where the charterists involved in the Newport Rising of 1839 were convicted and were the last defendants to be sentenced to a traitors' death (to be hung, drawn and quartered), later commuted to transportation for life. The talk was unfortunately punctuated by the sound of a Zumba class taking place elsewhere in the building. Geoff's frustration at not being able to close the doors due to fire regulations was obvious to all (a big sorry from Geoff).



EDAS members act as judge and jury in the Court House



Steve Clarke explains about the lost lake of Monmouth



Alan took this photograph from the road to Trellech looking back at Monmouth. It clearly shows how a lake could have formed in the valley.

Thursday: The Industrial Revolution, by Alan Dedden

Cyfartha Castle Museum and Ironworks, Merthyr Tydfil



Thursday dawned with the outer fringes of Storm Hector reminding us we were in Wales. However, it has to be said that this was the gentlest of reminders and the rain had gone by the time we gathered on the steps of Cyfartha Castle. The Castle is set within Cyfartha Park, which has a certain alliterative link to what I always regarded as an overlong and rather tedious late sixties one hit wonder by Richard Harris and that may be appropriate for what is an over-elaborate C19th folly.

As our guide for the morning, Huw Williams, was delayed, one of the Community Liaison Officers, Chris Parry, stepped in and gave us a brief tour of the museum. He proved a highly entertaining and informative guide.

Cyfartha Castle was built by William Crawshay II in 1824/5, had 70 rooms and covered an acre. William took over control of Cyfartha ironworks in 1813 following the death of his grandfather Richard in 1810. Richard had lived in Cyfartha House (built by Anthony Bacon, the founder of Cyfartha

ironworks) next to the ironworks in the bottom of the valley but William chose to build in an area high on the valley side overlooking the ironworks. Cyfartha Castle was built as a family home although the family eventually moved away to their estate at Caversham Park, Reading in 1889. The house was closed until 1908 when it was sold to the local community following overtures from the local newly emerging middle class. It was originally re-opened as an art gallery but donations of a wide range of artefacts by that new local middle class turned it into a permanent museum and art gallery by 1910. Another part of the building was opened as separate boys' and girls' schools in 1913, which combined into a grammar school in 1945, but closed in 2014. Whilst the museum and art gallery remain (and are due to be extended into the school rooms) the Castle and grounds are now home to a range of attractions.



Chris has a captive audience



Huw gets animated on the iron bridge

When Huw arrived, some of the group set off for the ironworks. We crossed the Taff River over the Pont y Cafnau iron bridge built in 1793 to serve the ironworks site with trucks on rails pulled by horses. This is believed to be the earliest industrial iron bridge in the world.

Cyfartha Ironworks, started by Anthony Bacon and opened in 1765, grew using the potting and stamping process. When Richard Crawshay took over around 1786 with four partners he adopted the puddling process to purify the iron. It took five years to perfect the process, by which time the four other partners had left, leaving Richard Crawshay in sole ownership. Around this time, John Guest introduced coal to replace charcoal in the furnaces at his Dowlais ironworks. This was also adopted at Cyfartha and the use of

the new processes and lucrative contracts to supply cannon during this time of conflict allowed Crawshay to improve and enlarge the ironworks. Business continued under his successors, peaking in the 1820s to 30s. Cyfartha had become the largest ironworks in the world around 1790. However, by the 1860s, steel had taken over from iron and the fortunes of the ironworks declined. After several disputes under Richard's great grandson Robert Thompson Crawshay, the works closed in 1875. They were converted to produce steel but this came too late. Following numerous re-openings, the works finally closed in 1919, by then having been bought by GKN (the "G" being a descendant of John Guest of Dowlais).



Cyfartha Ironworks today

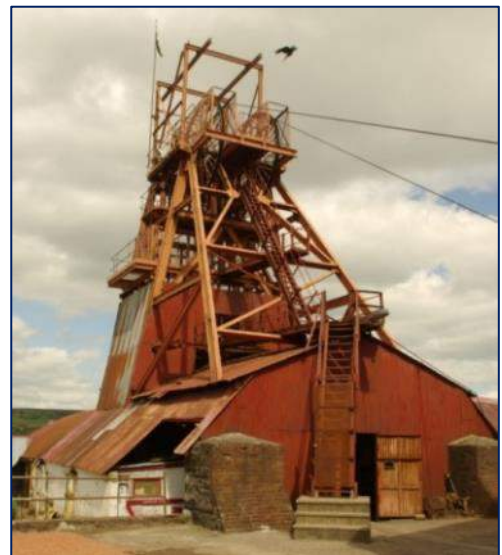
Today the remains of six furnaces survive and are the largest and most complete of their type within the Cyfartha Heritage Area. Due to the proximity of Blaenavon, where investment has been made in preserving the heritage of the blast furnaces, the Cyfartha site is badly in need of a plan for the future.

Blaenavon Big Pit and Ironworks

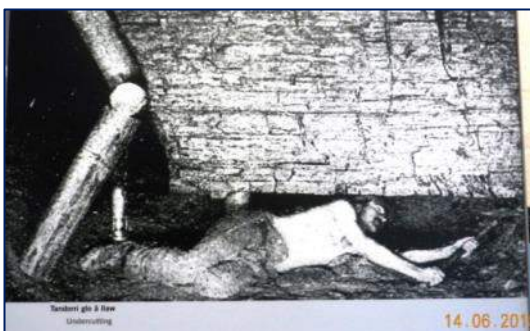
Following an enjoyable buffet lunch in Crawshay's office, the group travelled to Big Pit at Blaenavon. The pit opened in 1860 but mining on the site had been carried out since at least 1812.

As was normal at that time the mine workers included women and children, some as young as 5 or 6. This may sound extreme, but at that time children worked on farms and in factories which were both as dangerous as mines, so it was seen as normal.

However, the conditions were exposed by the Children's Employment Commission of 1840. The public outrage allowed the Earl of Shaftesbury to get the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842 through Parliament. Despite this, children under the age of 10 continued to work underground illegally until 1880 when school attendance up to age of 10 was made compulsory. After women were outlawed from working underground, horses were used to pull the carts instead. These were mainly Welsh Cobs at Big Pit, but other types were also used. Horses continued to be used at Big Pit until 1972 and were used in other mines until 1999.



Big Pit winding gear



The brutal reality: a miner undercutting a narrow seam at the coal face

Miners were paid by the weight of coal produced - if stone was found in a cart, the whole load was rejected. It is believed that stones were sometimes planted to avoid paying the miners. Some owners paid the miners in tokens (this also happened in iron and steel works), but the tokens could only be redeemed in shops run by the mine owners - and prices were high. The use of canaries to detect gases in mines is well known and continued to be used until 1990 despite modern alternatives being available.

Dressed in the appropriate gear, the group descended into the Big Pit in a "dram" (the cage hauled by the winding gear). Guided by a former miner, we walked through various tunnels to see the coal faces, the later electric winding power for the carts, conveyor belts and the horse stables. Horses remained underground permanently until nationalisation in 1947 brought in compulsory 2 weeks miners holiday which allowed the horses to be brought to the surface. There are no pictures of the tour because batteries are banned underground so all mobile phones, watches, cameras and anything else battery-powered had to be surrendered (except pace makers!).



Ready for a shift down the mine!

There was time to visit the excellent "above the ground" exhibitions and displays housed in the original colliery buildings which gave a real insight into the coal mining industry in Wales and the people and society it created. The showers in the bathhouse were particularly well done; the sound of a miner whistling "Delilah" brought a smile to many faces.



Blaenavon Ironworks

The final visit of the day was to Blaenavon Ironworks. This is a compact site conserved or restored from 1974, where many of the components of an ironworks can be seen. The site includes the almost complete remains of 3 furnaces and lesser remains of at least 2 others, the foundry, casting house, the balance tower (to lift fuel and ore to the level of the top of the furnaces) and a close of ironworkers' cottages and the company shop. These are all impressive structures but it is difficult to get the true impression of the heat and noise of the works in full operation, despite a very good audio/visual display set up in the casting house building.

Several of the cottages have been furnished to show them as they would have been in different periods since they were built in 1788 and last occupied in the 1960s.



The company shop early 19th century.

Friday: Monmouth, by David Long

On our last full day, we returned to Monmouth and its environs. We gathered outside St. Mary's Priory Church and, following an introduction from Geoff, were free to explore the church.



The surviving Norman pillar

Its origins date back to the 11th and 12th centuries but the present church is largely Victorian having undergone various re-buildings over the years. Part of one Norman pillar survives. To our disappointment, the medieval tiles dating from the 14th and 15th centuries were hidden by carpet.

The tower, which was constructed in the 1300s, is topped by a spire added in 1743 – the whole rising to a height of about 200 feet. In the churchyard is a Grade II listed gravestone upon which is carved an acrostic puzzle (this was the second one we had come across on our trip).

A beautiful oriel window is the only medieval trace remaining in the Prior's lodgings building behind the church.

We proceeded to Monmouth Castle where only the ruins of

the Great Tower and the Hall remain. The castle is sited in a strategic position guarding crossings of the Wye and Monnow rivers and was probably started in the 11th century. Its end (as a castle) came during the Civil War when, as recorded in an inhabitant's diary, the soldiers and townspeople began pulling down the Great Tower. This was located where Great Castle House now stands which was built in 1673. In 1875 the house

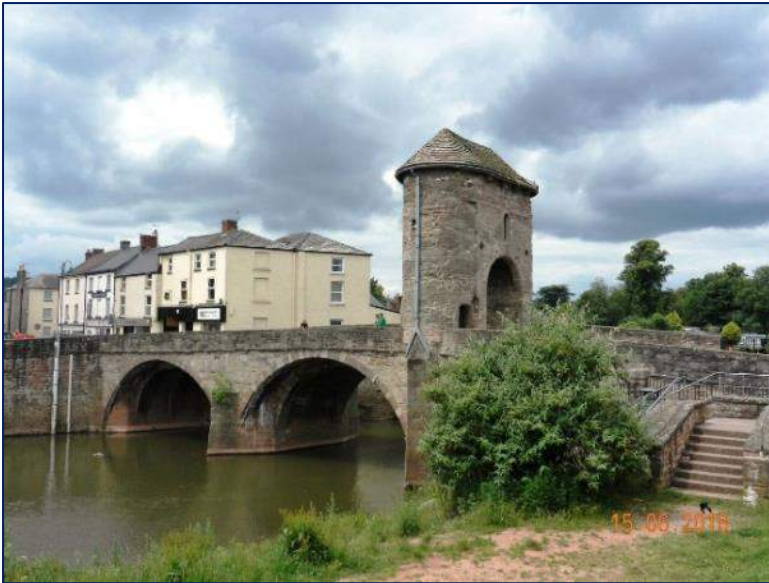


became the headquarters of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia) and the regimental museum is also situated here. We were fortunate to be allowed inside the museum and to be given a guided tour of Great Castle House. Like so many buildings of its age, it has had many uses including as a court house. It also includes some magnificent plastered ceilings.

Time for coffee and cake followed by a stroll around the town before meeting up at the Monnow Bridge Gatehouse which is the only remaining medieval fortified river bridge in Britain. Prior to the construction of this stone structure in the late 13th

century there had been a Norman timber bridge which was burnt down during the baronial uprising of 1233. We were met by Charles Boase from Monmouth Archaeological Society who very kindly unlocked the gatehouse door to allow us to venture inside. He provided much interesting historical information about its origins and many and varied uses over time including a residence and a prison.





Left: Monnow Bridge and Gate. Right: Huddled inside the gatehouse, hard to imagine a family lived there.

Friday afternoon: Trellech, the “lost city”, by Vanessa Joseph

Trellech, spelt in many different ways, claims several interesting sites and sights: the Lion Inn, completed in 1580; the Church of St. Nicholas, mostly 13th/14th century; ‘Tump Terret’, the motte of a Norman Castle which had disappeared by 1301; The ‘Virtuous Well’, said to have curative properties; and ‘Harold’s Stones’. However, the main purpose of our afternoon visit was a guided visit of the excavations of the “Lost City” with Stuart Wilson, Director of the Lost City of Trellech Project, archaeology graduate and proud owner of the land where the city lies.

It all started in 2002 when a farmer told the Monmouth Archaeological Society about pottery that had been found in molehills on his land outside the village. The search started for the 378 “burgages” or houses listed for Trellech in 1288 and over the past 15 years Stuart and a band of volunteers have painstakingly unearthed what they believe to be the remains of a sprawling medieval city with high street, settlements and a manor house. A little further away is a hill called Coplands where Stuart thinks the slums were located. Aerial photography and LIDAR across the area show lines which are possibly indications of burgage plots.

Locals have commented: “No matter how much stone is taken out, there’s always more”. The stone buildings of the ‘Lost City’ date from the early 13th century when the town was reorganised and built in stone after attacks by both English and Welsh forces. Evidence of this earlier town has been found below some of the buildings and occupation on the site may have started 100 years earlier.

We started our tour on the main high street of the lost village and Stuart told his story. Trellech, like Merthyr Tydfil 500 years later, was born for the single purpose of manufacturing iron. The city was most likely established by the de Clare family, lords of Chepstow, Caerleon, etc., to exploit local supplies of iron ore, charcoal and water. As bellows had not yet been invented, iron making relied on wind power. The de Clares needed the iron to provide weapons, armour and iron work for their military advances in Wales, including the building of Caerphilly Castle. A lot of iron slag has been excavated showing that industrial activity took place on the site.

By the later 13th century Trellech was probably the largest urban centre in Wales. Stuart believes the city was once home to about 10,000 people, perhaps a quarter of the size of London’s population at the time. This figure is believed to be just in the “borough” itself excluding the slums and the burgages. However, the city did not last long as a major centre. It was attacked by enemies of the de Clares and struck twice by the Black Death, leading to its decline from around 1400. By the time Owain Glyndwr attacked Trellech in the early 15th century it was probably a shadow of the community it had once been. Most traces of the once dynamic community disappeared beneath agricultural developments and the picturesque modern village of Trellech.



There is evidence of at least eight buildings but the most spectacular remains are those of a manor house, situated on a rise and thought to have included two halls and a courtyard. Stuart believes that the first phase of the house dates to 1250, with a forge added in the 1300s. The building then became a more substantial manor house with chimney stack fireplaces and drains. We could see an area for a “high table” where the lord of the manor might have sat. It is currently believed that the manor house was last occupied around 1650.



The artist's impression shows the manor house including a large hall with annexe, a courtyard, a well, and a round tower. The tower is thought to have been 2 storeys with a high-pitched roof and would have acted as a watch tower to protect the manor house and town. Stuart then led the group around the site pointing out the various areas of the house. The 18 feet deep well was impressive and beautifully excavated. It was cut into bedrock (sandstone) and pieces of wood, bone and leather were found there.

Apart from structural remains, finds to date across the site include sherds from jugs and cooking vessels, pottery, coins, pewter and shoe buckles. A group of volunteers, led by Stuart, will continue excavating the site in the summer. Who knows what else might be revealed?

Following the visit to the Lost City, the group dispersed to look at some of the other sites. Some went to see Harold's Stones, an alignment of *three roughly aligned large monoliths made of quartz conglomerate or 'pudding stone', probably from the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age and perhaps the remnants of a longer line.* It is said that Trellech takes its name from these stones: Tri (Welsh for three) and Llech (meaning a flat stone).



Bryan waxes lyrical

And finally ... the Last Supper

The Last Supper is the traditional opportunity to bring everyone together to share stories about the trip and to express our thanks to the trip organisers. Speeches were given and gifts presented before we all settled down to Robert's picture show. As Robert reserves the right to show what he considers appropriate, this proved to be great fun, with everyone making the usual sort of inappropriate comments about the smiling victims. A great evening was had by all before we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.



Thanks again Geoff and Andrew for arranging such a great field trip.