



Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association Autumn Newsletter 2026

Dear Members,

It has been a very long summer. When I last wrote we were preparing for the Annual General Meeting, and I was hoping for a summer break before tackling a long list of jobs in the garden, catching up on stalled archaeological work, and doing all those “Life” tasks that always seem to get left to one side. Well, I still have most of that to do, and now the grass is growing so there will be another task in the garden! I hope you have all taken full advantage of the warm weather and recharged your batteries. There is a lot happening around the county in the months to come – but more of that later.

The summer has been dominated by some sad news. The death of our Chair, Professor Ray Howell, I think took us all by surprise. As you will know Ray had been poorly for several years, having suffered a series of mini strokes. I think we had got used to his infirmity, so his death was sudden and very much a shock. He was determined to soldier on with his involvement in the Association, and also as advisor to groups in the county. His quiet, wise counsel will be sorely missed. Some of us attended his funeral, which true to his wishes was a celebration of his life, and reflected the various aspects he held closest to his heart. He was accompanied to his grave by the goddess Anwen from Welsh mythology, two carnyx players, a band of Silures warriors and an escort of Roman soldiers. As requested, the mourners dressed according to how they were connected to Ray, so many were in rugby kit or dressed for excavations. We offer our deepest condolences to Jadwiga and to David and Ray’s wider family. They will remain part of the MAA family and in our thoughts. A fuller account of Ray’s life and work will appear in the next edition of *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, which will be published very soon.

Those of you who attended the Annual General Meeting will have heard our President, Jeremy Knight, explain that he was about to reach his 90th year, and consequently he had decided to retire as President. Behind the scenes, plans were made for his succession. Sadly, with Ray's death, these plans needed to be changed and after brief deliberation we have a new president.

I am pleased to announce that Professor Maddy Gray has agreed to become the 12th President of the Association, and the first female president we have ever had. The first thing I asked her to do was to introduce herself, so here are her words.

Born and brought up in the western valley of what was then Monmouthshire, I did a History degree at Bangor. My training as an archivist began under the stringent but supportive eye of Bill Baker in the old (old) Monmouthshire Record Office. After my Ph D, I taught for a while for the Extra-Mural Department at Cardiff, then in 1998 I was appointed as a lecturer at the late lamented University of Wales, Newport. There I taught a bit of everything, from early human society to everyday life in the late twentieth century. My main research has centred on religious belief and practice in the late medieval and early modern period, with a particular focus on visual and material evidence. Readers of the Monmouthshire Antiquary will know that in recent years I have been working on tomb carvings in medieval and early modern Wales. It is an immense honour to be invited to serve as your President. I am aware that I am treading on the shoulders of giants: I can only hope to be a worthy successor.

I am sure that Maddy will bring all her energy and knowledge to the Presidency and will prove to be a proactive and supportive advocate for the Association. I am sure you will join me in welcoming her and wishing her well in the role.

In August we held a lunch at the Priory Hotel in Caerleon to present Jeremy with a gift from the Association. A group of trustees and invited guests from the Society of Antiquaries gathered to celebrate his tenure as President (from 2013 to 2026) and his entry into his 10th decade. Jeremy's valedictory remarks will be presented in the next edition of the journal. We have been blessed to have such an erudite and knowledgeable President. I am sure he will use his retirement to continue his many interests in the history and archaeology not only of Monmouthshire, but of Wales. I have a feeling we will be seeing more of him too.

News Updates

We are pleased to welcome Mrs Jo McCrum as a committee member. Jo is well known in the Wye Valley as the leader of the Lower Wye Valley Buildings Preservation Trust. The LWVBPT's current project is to make St Mary's, Llanandras, Tintern, safe for visitors, and the group also carries out work on the slipway near the Wireworks. Jo comes from a background of publishing and uses her connections to bring interesting speakers to the many fundraising events at Tintern Village Hall. She is also learning a great deal about the care and conservation of Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Since the AGM we have co-opted another committee member, Dr Neil Gunther, who was a pupil of Ray Howell at the University of South Wales. Neil specialises in Heritage at Risk and has many skills to share with our community. He is interested in bringing community archaeology to Newport. He will be leading a series of sessions on GIS in October (details later in the newsletter). Welcome Neil.

Our treasurer, Mr Simon Tee, has agreed to act as chair for committee meetings until such time as a new chair can be found. If any member would like to consider joining the committee, please get in touch with me by phone or email. No experience is necessary, but an enthusiasm for local history and archaeology is essential, as is a willingness to get stuck in.

We expect the report of the **Trostrey** assessment soon. Dr Marion Shiner has spent the summer looking at the material and her report will give us a "road map" from which to work towards future publication. The full report will be published on the website when it is available. If you would like to support this initiative, please go to the website where you will find a Donate button on the home page. Once we have a plan in place we will need to raise funds to carry the plan through, so any donation, however small is greatly appreciated.

Events

The annual report of all events and meetings will be published in the forthcoming volume of The Monmouthshire Antiquary, which should be with you before Christmas. However here are some highlights from this summer.

Jeremy Knight and Gwilym Hughes (formerly of Cadw) teamed up to lead a walk around Caerleon. This was a joint event with Cambrian Archaeological Association and MAA. There were over 40 walkers, and the event lasted all

day. Jeremy provided many anecdotes and everybody was awed by his exceptional memory. Gwilym explained his role in the Caerllion Rufeinig project and talked about how this partnership project will help to develop Caerleon as a visitor destination whilst being sympathetic to the community. We are grateful to Amgueddfa Cymru for allowing us to picnic in the Roman garden at the Legionary Museum. The day ended with a visit to the Roman baths, courtesy of Cadw.



Another walk, this time at Tintern included visits to three churches all dedicated to St Mary. This was a joint venture again with Cambrian's and included some walkers from the Forest of Dean Local History Society. The walk was punctuated by a welcome stop for refreshments in Jo and Mark McCrum's beautiful garden.

You can see from the pictures of the walkers hiding in the porch at Penterry, that it was a hot, fine day. A longer account of the walk is included in the journal.



In July we held a very successful study day in Pontypool where the local knowledge and enthusiasm of Pontypool Local history society came to the fore. The event was held in Torfaen Museum and was well attended, with over 100 people present. My thanks to Lindsay, Linda and Jane from Pontypool Local History Society, to the speakers, and to the legion of others who helped on the day.

You may remember that in the last newsletter there was a link to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales **Capeli Cymru Project**. If you would like to contribute to the chapels census and have not yet done so, it closes on September 30th. Here is the link

<https://rcahmw.gov.uk/projects/capeli-cymru/capeli-cymru-census/>

Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association Events to February 2027

In **October**, new committee member Neil Gunther is running a skills course on using QGIS software. This is a tool used by researchers in many disciplines and is especially useful for archaeology and social geography, but it has many other uses. If you would like to join the course, which is entirely FREE, it will run on Saturday afternoons from 2.00 to 3.30 at a venue in central Newport. The dates are 10th, 17th and 31st October. You do not need to attend all sessions, but the first one is essential. No experience necessary. Help and support will be given, including assistance with your personal projects. There are a few places left. If you would like to join in or need more details please email me on Secretary@maa.wales.

November Our November activity is a walk in Wentwood on Sunday 15th November. Meet at Cadira Beeches car park [ST422948, What3Words //skirt.president. animated] at 10.45 for an 11.00 start. Bring a picnic. The walk is in two parts, so you can do just the first half (about 90 minutes) or the whole walk, about 3 hours including a break for lunch.

The walk will explore the bronze age barrows and the more recent history of the woodland. Some steep bits, but mainly level. Great views and hopefully the café will be open for refreshments. No booking necessary, but if you would like to come along, please email me.

December Our new president is leading a visit to Llangovan Church. Dates to be confirmed (we have to work around the lesser horseshoe bats!). This will be a rare opportunity to visit this small church in the care of the Vincent Trust. Some of the ledger stones will feature in the forthcoming paper in the journal. The visit will fall between the third week of December and the middle of January as the church is opened over that period for Christmas services. More details nearer the time.

Tuesday 19th January 2027 A zoom lecture from the comfort of your own living room – author and historian **David Pilling** would like to share his most recent work.

The Forgotten Rebel: Morgan ap Maredudd and the Struggle for Medieval Wales

Morgan was one of the more remarkable political survivors of thirteenth-century Wales: a descendant of the lords of Caerleon who rebelled against the

dominance of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd before eventually becoming an ally of Edward I. His career provides a useful way of exploring the complex loyalties and rivalries of native Welsh society during the decades leading to Edward's conquest.

Look out for details, including details of the Zoom link and how to purchase a copy of David's book on the website, <https://maa.wales/event/the-kings-welshman-the-strange-case-of-morgan-ap-maredudd/> .

Wednesday 24th February 2027 Dr Andrew Seaman (Cardiff University) has embarked on another exciting project called *Pushing the Boundaries of Early Medieval Wales*. This project uses early charters to look at land use and population before the Norman conquest. It is exciting to know that a group of these charters looks at the area around St Arvans. We will be holding a seminar afternoon to study these charters and to allow the academics to speak with local people about the area. *Details of programme and venue to follow.*

Out and about in Monmouthshire

Once again, I spent part of the summer hosting an American friend, and we explored some of the quieter corners of the old County. I can highly recommend a visit to St Cybi's well at Llangybi. Be sure to drop into the church to see the recently revealed wall paintings. A real treat. I am hoping that we can arrange a talk about these with the conservator in the spring.

Whilst at Llangybi I picked up a small book prepared by the Heart of Monmouthshire Ministry Area. This sets out a pilgrimage around 20 churches mainly in the centre of the county, from Mamhilad in the west, north of Wentwood and as far east as Wolvesnewton and north to the Raglan to Abergavenny road. Each church has a stamp provided for visitors to collect in the book.

I was fortunate enough to visit the church at Kemys Commander recently, which is one of the churches on the route. My next plan is to drop into the churchyard at St Andrew's at Tredunnoch to see the memorial to the Franklin expedition. I might even get my boots on and walk some of the routes between the churches, but all are equally accessible by car. Drop into any of the churches to pick up a booklet and start your stamp collection.

Other events that might interested you

Saturday October 3rd – Chepstow Archaeology day

Chepstow Archaeological Society are hosting a number of local groups including MAA at the Drill Hall, Chepstow. Lots of stalls and societies will be represented. Free entry. Public entry from 10.00 until 3.00.

At 4.00 Professor Mark Horton will be giving a talk. Tickets £5

Sextus Julius Frontinus : The architect of Chepstow's first Roman bridge?

These events are part of a weekend of events which include a showing of "The Dig" film on Friday evening, and a walk around Piercefield park with Simon Maddison on Sunday. See full details on the poster on the MAA website events pages.

On the same weekend there is an event in Monmouth.

MAA member Rob Jones has asked me to let you know that he is speaking at this weekend of **storytelling, myths and legends**. It includes a piece on The Chartists, and a talk on the "Battle of Monmouth" by Rob. Venue details, programme and tickets can be found here <http://gather-round.uk/>

A couple of events from the **Lower Wye Valley Buildings Preservation Trust** – click on the [links](#) for tickets sales – you might need to be quick

[An Evening with Rowan Williams](#), Friday 2 October 7.30pm, Savoy Theatre, Monmouth doors open 7pm.

[Professor Miranda Aldhouse-Green - Enchanted Wales](#) Friday 6 November, 7.30pm, Tintern Village Hall, doors open 7pm.

Gwent Archives have several events coming up. On **Tuesday 6th October**, 6.30 – 8.00 pm, there is a free lecture at Llanhilleth Miners Institute, NP13 2JT. The title is "Beyond the Pit – Llanhilleth Miners Institute and the Arts 1918 – 1939". Pre-booking is not necessary.

The second event is on **Monday 19th October** from 2.00 to 3.30 pm on Zoom. This is a free event aimed at family historians and is being presented jointly with The Society of Genealogists. Booking information and details about the speakers can be found by following the link.

<https://portal.sog.org.uk/Event/view/2829875>

Thursday 8th October ***From Home Remedies to the Creation of the NHS***
11am – midday at Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale. This talk explores the health and healthcare records held at Gwent Archives. From 17th century common place journals to workhouse records and the establishment of the NHS. If you're interested in the history of health, be sure to come along. To book a place, email enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk

Wednesday 18 November ***Depositing Digital Records*** 1.00 – 2.00 pm GA are always pleased to discuss new collections that tell us about Gwent and its people. Did you know we also accept digital deposits? Come along to this informative session to learn more about how to deposit your digital collections with us. To book a place, email enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk

MAA is a member of the **British Association for Local History**. They have a programme of monthly lectures online and a conference coming up in October. The conference is called **Rebellion and Protest**. It is at Digby hall, Sherborne on Saturday 17th October.

You can access the conference and all lectures at members prices using the MAA discount code at the check out. The code is **F-37862C**.

You can find a full list of events using this link <https://www.balh.org.uk/events>.

You can also sign up for your own newsletter which will keep you up to date with all the BALH lectures if you wish.

Many of you will know Pat Jones - Jenkins who has recently published a commemorative volume about **Ruperra Castle**. There is a review in the forthcoming journal. The Ruperra Castle Preservation Trust has a weekend event coming up in October, where no doubt the book will be available to purchase.

Commemorating 400 years of Ruperra Castle: free exhibition and talks, 15th- 17th October at Bedwas Workmen's Hall, Old Newport Road, Caerphilly CF83 8BJ.

Ruperra Castle was built by Sir Thomas Morgan of Machen and completed in 1626, 400 years ago! Join us to celebrate 400 years of the only pageant castle in Wales, a magical scheduled monument, sadly at risk of collapse.

Exhibition open to the public 1-6pm each day – just turn up. The programme of talks is available from the booking website. [Booking is essential for free performances and talks.](#)

Another of our members, David Osmond, has published a book - **Radical Printer: Samuel Etheridge of Newport 1778-1852**. It is available at £12 from the Six Points website, www.sixpointscardiff.com

Samuel Etheridge was many things: printer, writer, radical campaigner and Chartist were just some of them. He was a friend and mentor to John Frost, and he played a significant part in Newport life for more than forty years following his arrival in the town in 1810, tumultuous years which saw the tiny borough grow into a major seaport as a result of the booming iron and coal industries of the Monmouthshire valleys. This book tells the story of Etheridge's life against the background of the rapid development of his adopted home.

David has also sent notice of the next **Newport Chartist Convention**, which is at the Mercure Hotel, Newport on Saturday November 7th. You can get tickets and find out about all the Newport Rising event by visiting the website <https://www.newportrising.co.uk/lineup>



NEWPORT CHARTIST CONVENTION

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THE MERCURE HOTEL NEWPORT

SATURDAY 07 NOVEMBER 2026

10.00 to 4.00pm

Speakers include

Katrina Navickas

Judy Cox

Tony Evans

David Osmond

Ray Stroud

Stuart Broad

Topics will include- Lady Insurrectionists: Women, Reform and Revolution in Victorian Britain; Chartism and public space; the Nantyglo round towers; radical Newport printer Samuel Etheridge; Iniquity, the forthcoming film about Dic Penderyn; and Epic Theatre's production The People's Fire.



**Tickets available from
newportrising.co.uk**

There certainly is a lot going on before the end of the year! My diary is already filling up for next spring.

2027 is the 180th anniversary of the founding of the Caerleon and Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association. We are planning a bumper year of celebration, which I will share with you in the next newsletter which will be out in time for Christmas.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of the Association you will find my contact details at the bottom of the page.

Your secretary,

Jan



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