



# Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association Spring Newsletter 2026

Dear Members,

I hope you have enjoyed the warm dry weather over Easter. I have been motoring around the county since the New Year and have welcomed in turn the snowdrops, daffodils, primroses and celandines. Just this morning I spotted drifts of wood anemones on the verges along the road between Itton and Devauden. I am looking forward to the bluebells that will soon follow and turn the woodlands that unique shade of blue.



There is plenty to get us out and about in nature this spring and summer, so if you would like to join MAA for some activities in the fresh air there are plenty of opportunities to look forward to in the coming months.

There are **four** upcoming events that I would like to highlight in this newsletter.

The first is a walk at Tintern on **Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> May**. Called the Three Mary's Walk it takes in three churches all called St Marys, at Penterry, Tintern and finally the abbey church itself. There will be the opportunity for a cream tea. This walk is being held jointly with Cambrian Archaeological Association and lead by Jo MacCrum of the Lower Wye Valley Buildings Preservation Trust. Details for booking be found in the events section of the website.

The next event will be the Annual General Meeting on the evening of **Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> June** at St Cadoc's Church in Caerleon. The business meeting will start at 7.00 pm followed at 8.00 by a talk from Dr Marion Shiner of Cardiff University about work taking place under the umbrella of the "Making of the March" project. Her talk entitled "*Critical Locality in the early medieval frontier: A Making the March case study in the Lower Wye Valley*" is free and open to the general public. She will talk about recent excavations at St Arvans and Tutshill, and how these sites contribute to our understand of the foundation of the March of Wales.

**Annual General Meeting** papers and notices will be circulated at the beginning of May and will be available to view on the website. There will be an option to join in via YouTube, with provision for members who chose to join remotely to register their votes during the business meeting. If you do not receive your meeting papers by mid May please let me know.

A second walk, this time lead by our President Jeremy Knight and Gwilym Hughes of Cadw will be held at Caerleon on **Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> June**. Jeremy will be leading us around the town pointing out significant places, some of them less apparent to the casual tourist, and Gwilym will be speaking about the Roman Gateway Partnership of which Cadw is one of the three partners. Again, this is a joint venture with the Cambrians'. All details for booking can be found in the events section of the website.

Finally, our study day in conjunction with Pontypool Local History Society will take place on **Saturday, 18<sup>th</sup> July** at Pontypool Museum. This is likely to be a well-supported event so booking is essential. Tickets cost £15.00 plus a small admin fee and includes lunch.

If you wish to join any of these events or find out more, you will find them all on to the events page of the website. [www.maa.wales/forthcoming-events/](http://www.maa.wales/forthcoming-events/)

If you are unable access the internet and wish to know more about any of the events, please contact the secretary using any of the methods at the end of the newsletter for help.

### **The AGM and the Future of the Organisation**

We will take some time at the AGM to hold a discussion about the future of Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association. In 2027 we will be 180 years old, and it is probably time we started to think about how we are going to celebrate our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2047!

We really want to know what you think about the Association, and what we can do to make it attractive to new members. We have had some great successes with the Tintern Study day in 2024, and the Peter Guest's lecture in January 2026. Unfortunately, some events have been less well supported. There could be lots of reasons for this including being at the wrong time, lack of publicity, or the wrong topic. Frequently, members are telling us that they find walks and visits difficult for a variety of reasons. You may recall we sent out a questionnaire in 2023, but we had very few responses, and possibly the information we gathered is no longer valid as at the time we were all emerging from the pandemic. Aswell as the discussion there will be a questionnaire available at the AGM for members and non members to help us gather your ideas on a way forward. Please bring your own pencil.

### **Would you be willing to become a committee member?**

There are currently three vacancies on the committee, possibly more. In 2028 all but three of the current committee will be standing down under the 2 x 3 year rule in the constitution, so now might be a good time for aspiring committee members to come along and see what we do. There are 4 committee meetings a year, usually held at the Museum in Caerleon, and simultaneously online. You do not need to have a specific role in mind, but there are some skills we would be eager to gain from new members. These include the ability to develop and run social media feeds, minute taking, event management and planning, and strategic planning. Ideally new committee members can observe for a few months and then shadow any of the roles they feel they may be interested in trying. If you do not want to offer yourself, please can you encourage anybody who you think might be interested (member or not) and ask them to get in touch. If you would like an informal

discussion around this (without commitment) please email me on [secretary@maa.wales](mailto:secretary@maa.wales)

**Some good news** – MAA is grateful to receive of a grant for £300 from Gwent County History Association. This is to support the work being done by Marion Shiner to assess the assemblage and documents from the excavations done by the late Geoff Mein and the **Trostrey** Excavation Group. I mentioned this project in the last newsletter. We previously secured a grant of £2500 from Cambrian Archaeological Association to fund this work.

Several people got in touch to make donations for this project. I am happy to tell you that the “Donate” button on the home page of the website is now working. If you would like to donate, please visit the website and follow the link on the home page to make your donation by PayPal or credit card.

We expect that Marion (who is also our speaker at the AGM) will have a report of the work ready in the autumn, and we will then have a way forward to bring this important work to publication.

**Speaking about publications** - The next edition of our journal “*The Monmouthshire Antiquary*” will be printed in the autumn. The editor tells me there is a good range of material for the current edition. We can look forward to seeing out in time for Christmas, as has been the custom in the last few years. If you have anything that you would like to contribute to the 2027 volume do contact the editors so they can start planning the next edition.

I was recently made aware of an appeal by **St Teilo's church in Llantilio Pertholey**. You may remember that we held the carol service there in early 2025. They are looking for help to protect the church ground from further erosion after storm damage this winter. So far, they have raised just over £6,000 of a £45,000 target. If you would like to support them or are able to donate just a little, this is the [Just Giving Link](#).



Work will soon re-start on the **graveyard recording project** at St Peter's Church, Dixton. Last year a small team covered about 50% of the graveyard and we hope to finish the work by the end of 2026. This small church is beautifully situated on the banks of the River Wye just north of Monmouth. It is a great place to start a riverside walk. It is easily accessed from the Dixton roundabout on the A40. If you fancy a breath of fresh air and a quiet relaxing space, there is always room for more volunteers. No experience necessary. All training will be given. If you would like more details, please contact [secretary@maa.wales](mailto:secretary@maa.wales)

Many of you may be aware of a new project from RCAHMW, especially if you are members of or have an interest in our **local chapels**. If so, you may be interested in a census from the Royal Commission which is currently open. The Commission is gathering survey data on all of the non-conformist chapels in Wales, whether they are currently in use or not.

The webpage detailing the census and project is here:

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

The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and will greatly add to the knowledge about these important community and historic institutions.

## Photo competition

The theme of this years' photo competition is **“What is special about Monmouthshire?”** This is your opportunity to capture any aspect of the county in a picture and add a suitable caption explaining what you consider to be special about this glorious county. It could be a building, landscape, sporting or cultural event, or anything that you feel sums up the essence of the “old” County of Monmouthshire. Please get your entry to the secretary by the end of May. It can be sent as a paper copy or as a digital copy. Prizes will be presented to the winners at the AGM.

Here is my poor effort. I am sure somebody might be able to capture this iconic sculpture of a lave fisherman and a leaping salmon at Blackrock in better light.



A couple more things that may be of interest - First is the annual lecture of the Institute of Welsh Estates (Bangor University) which is taking place online on **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May** from 6.00 to 7.30. It is free to join online but you need to register. The talk is by **Dr Marion Löffler: 'Lady Llanover & The Reinvention of Wales'**. You can register your interest using this link [Click here](#)

Secondly there is a **Women's History Day School** run by **Women's Archive Wales at St Michael's Center, Abergavenny**, on **Tuesday 12 May** 9.30 - 3.30. There will be a range of talks by professional and amateur historians, on a variety of topics about the history of the women of north Monmouthshire, including Maria Jane Williams of Aberpergwm; Gertrude Jackson and Blanche Baker-Gabb; Ellen Fielder, the First Lady Guardian; Women's Suffrage; the 1924 Women's Peace Petition; Women and Sport: Wales; and the collections relating to women held at Gwent Archives. REGISTRATION IS ESSENTIAL.

Please register by emailing [info@womensarchivewales.org](mailto:info@womensarchivewales.org)

Cost is by a donation of £10, payable on the door. All are welcome.

### **Recent MAA events**

Our first talk of the year was at the suggestion of our president Jeremy Knight and Dr Peter Guest. Despite being a seasonally cold and wet Friday evening in January, a full house of over 200 people gathered at St Cadoc's Church in Caerleon to hear about Peter's 2012 excavations with Cardiff University. A further 150 people joined online to hear the lectures and to find out about the Caerleon Roman Gateway Partnership. If you missed it and would like to view the session you can find a link to the YouTube feed on the MAA website.

Our second talk took place on Tuesday March 24<sup>th</sup> at Pill Millennium Centre, Newport. This was a joint presentation from Sian Lloyd -Jones of Wales Film Archives/The National Library of Wales, and Rhiannon Phillips of Gwent Archives, hosted by Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association. Rhiannon began by telling us about the immediate area in which the meeting was taking place. She used maps, pictures and other records to tell us about the development of the area from swampy, riverside mudflats to urban workers housing and industrial hinterland. She explained how the economy of Newport and its development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century brought wealth to the town. Rhiannon also focused on the lives of individuals who turn up in census and court records held at the Gwent Archives.

One of the more poignant stories was of a young mother who was handed coal “picked” from a railway wagon by her two young sons, and ended up with the three of them spending time in Usk Goal. The sons served a few days and a few weeks each according to their age, but the judge decided that rather than receiving the stolen goods the mother was instrumental in the crime and was sentenced to a year’s hard labour. The record is silent on what happened to her sons while she served her sentence.

Rhiannon told us the story of Amelia Vella, who caused a scandal by running away to sea. She was only discovered after she was teased for crying a lot. Pictures in the archive show a young lady in fashionable dress, and also her dressed in her sailor’s clothes. She was very plausible as a young lad.

Another account pictured below was of an annual dog show held in 1909 on the old cattle market (where Asda now stands). The surprising thing is that many of the breeds we know today were on show, and the overall winner won 14 of the 17 prizes with her pack of St Bernard’s (she had seven or more) which she kept at home in a small, terraced house in Pill. Dog fans amongst you might spot a saluki, a West Highland terrier, a cairn terrier, a jack russell, a bulldog and surprisingly a Pomeranian.



After a short break Sian Lloyd Jones told us about a new project “Clic Cymru” which aims to make film and visual media held at the National Film Archive available to everybody at local archives and libraries. This includes material from BBC Wales, S4C and other documentary makers in both English and Welsh. Sian had prepared a film about the iron and steel making industry in Newport. Much of the content was a reminder of past times. Many people remembered the traffic jams in the town when 100s of lorry loads of shale were brought through the town for the building of the Spencer Works which opened in 1962 at a cost of £140 million. There was also a lot of film about the docks, which I found very moving as it brought back lots of memories of the 1960s when my father worked as a foreman on the dock. Other clips showed events like Newport Carnival, and there were news items about the closure of the Tube works, and other local stories.

The event was reasonably well supported with around 25 people attending, but sadly a straw poll revealed that only 3 of the audience were MAA members and the rest represented a range of other local groups including FONMAG, The Newport Ship, Oxford House Industrial Museum, Chepstow Civic Society to name a few (apologies to those I have not listed).

I have added a long list of events from the Lower Wye Valley Building Preservation Trust to the end of this newsletter. Please do have a look as there is a huge variety of talks covering a wide range of interesting subjects. All proceeds go towards the preservation of St Marys Church Tintern. My thanks to Jo McCrumb for sending it over.

To close, we are soon to be starting the summer excavation season for local groups who “dig”. I will try to forward any opportunities that come my way as they happen. I know there will be work at Buckholt and Chepstow to attract the “dirt” archaeologists amongst you.

If you wish to contact me 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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## From Lower Wye Valley Building Preservation Trust

This is a quick update to let you know that our 2026 Tintern Talks are completely programmed and are now live on [Ticketsource](#) or, for Rowan Williams, the [Savoy Theatre](#) (Monmouth website). 2027 is now being planned! The next quarterly newsletter (May) will have our latest progress with St Mary's and the Fryer's Wharf Slipway as well as details of our upcoming walks and tours. Every penny of profit goes towards rescuing St Mary's, so don't be shy to book!

**[Candida Meyrick - Novelist and Writer of \*Be More Bird: Life Lessons from a Hawk\*](#), Friday 24 April, Tintern Village Hall, 7.30pm, doors open 7pm.**

Candida Meyrick, highly regarded novelist (as Candida Clark) and author of *Be More Bird*, which tells the true story of her relationship with a Harris Hawk which she adopted whilst undergoing cancer treatment during the Covid lockdown. Set against the wild landscapes of Anglesey, the book describes the 'life lessons' about resilience, freedom and self-discovery that she has learned from her avian friend. The book has been praised by reviewers, including celebrated travel writer Paul Theroux, who describes it as 'a small masterpiece'.

**This talk is a must for anyone who has lost their pep, wants to find a new purpose, or who simply loved nature writing such as *H is for Hawk* and *Raising Hare*.**

**[An Evening with Award-Winning Writer Keggie Carew](#), Friday 15 May, Tintern Village Hall, 7.30pm, doors open 7pm.**

Keggie Carew is the much-praised author of *Dadland*, which won the 2016 Costa Biography Award. *Dadland* is a fantastic, funny read of wild adventure and madcap schemes - her unconventional father was an undercover guerilla agent in Burma during the 2nd World War - yet poignantly describes her relationship with him as he sadly lapsed into dementia.

Keggie's more recent books include *Quicksand Tales*, about the bizarre range of jobs she took as a young woman, and *Beastly*, which explores the 40,000 year old relationship between humans and animals and was shortlisted for the prestigious Wainright Prize. Keggie will also talk about how she got into writing and the 24 acres that she and her husband Jonathan

have rewilded at the Underwood Nature Reserve in Wiltshire.

**This talk will be enjoyed by those who love tales of derring-do such as *Operation Mincemeat*, is struggling with relatives with Alzheimer's, or is interested in nature and conservation.**

**[Professor Ronald Hutton - Pagan Religions of Ancient Monmouthshire](#), Tuesday 2 June, Tintern Village Hall, 7.30pm, doors open 7pm. SOLD OUT - returns only**

Our pagan past, with its mysterious monuments, atmospheric sites, enigmatic artifacts, bloodthirsty legends, and cryptic inscriptions, is both enthralling and perplexing. Who were these ancient pagans and what were they practicing in Monmouthshire?

**Ronald Hutton** is an engaging and acclaimed broadcaster, author and academic. He has written twenty books, ninety-six essays and sits on the editorial boards of six journals concerned with the history of religion and magic. As Professor of History at Bristol University he has won several awards for teaching and research.

**Ronald will return next June - date tbc - would you like more pagans or a new talk? Let us know what you'd like!**

**[Andrew Ziminski - A Life in Ruins](#), Friday 4 September 7.30pm, Tintern Village Hall, doors open 7pm.**

In his forty-year career, stonemason and writer Andrew Ziminski has worked on many of our greatest monuments. From the sacred - Neolithic monoliths, Roman temples, small parish churches and cathedrals - to the industrial, the engine houses, mills and aqueducts of the Industrial Revolution and beyond. Part archaeological history and part deeply personal insight into an ancient craft, Andrew's talk will reveal his favourite projects - those historical buildings that inform our landscape and link the past to the present.

**Andrew Ziminski** is a former SPAB Trustee and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. His first book *The Stonemason* was critically acclaimed. His latest title *Church Going* was a 2025 'Book of the Year' in The Times, The Telegraph, The Church Times, and BBC History Magazine.

**This talk is a must for anyone interested in the architecture and craftsmanship of the past.**

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

Rowan Williams returns to Monmouth for a special evening hosted by poet Pele Cox. Rowan will reflect on his life and work, sharing readings from his own poetry as well as pieces that have inspired him. Following a short interval, there will be an opportunity for audience questions.

**Rowan Williams** is a former Bishop of Monmouth, and for a decade, the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. He has taught theology in several universities and has written widely on theology, philosophy and contemporary issues. His poetry collections and anthologies include *A Century of Poetry*, *The Other Mountain*, *The Collected Poems of Rowan Williams* and *After Silent Centuries*.

**Pele Cox** has been the poet in residence at Tate Modern, Royal Academy of Arts, British School at Rome, and Keats-Shelley House in Rome. She is the co-host of Pele's Poetry Podcast with the BBC journalist Richard Uridge, and has written poetry-based performances for exhibitions at the Royal Academy and Courtauld Institute. In 2019 she was

commissioned by Eric Parry Architects to compose 'Cento', on 1 Grenadier Gardens, Chelsea, perhaps the longest verse inscription in the West.

**This uplifting event celebrates the enduring connection between poetry, nature and spirituality. It will help two charitable trusts concerned with heritage - LWVBPT and the Savoy Theatre Trust - Wales' oldest theatre, now community run.**

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

Miranda will guide us through the key stories of Welsh mythic literature, exploring not just their medieval texts but also their ancient roots - texts that question life and death, war and peace, and good and evil. We will meet a cast of heroes and tricksters, animals that can talk and change shape, and magicians and witches who can bring disaster or triumph to the people in their paths. There will be severed heads that speak, birds that can tell the future, cauldrons with magical properties, complex quests and ghostly underworlds where strange and frightening things happen to the humans who visit them.

**Miranda Aldhouse-Green** has written 26 books on druids, Iron Age and Roman Britain and is the Professor Emeritus at Cardiff University. A former President of the Prehistoric Society, she was the first recipient of the John Legonna Celtic Research Prize, awarded by the National Library of Wales in 1986.

**This intriguing talk decodes the folktales and its relation to the everyday lives and beliefs of our ancient ancestors.**