

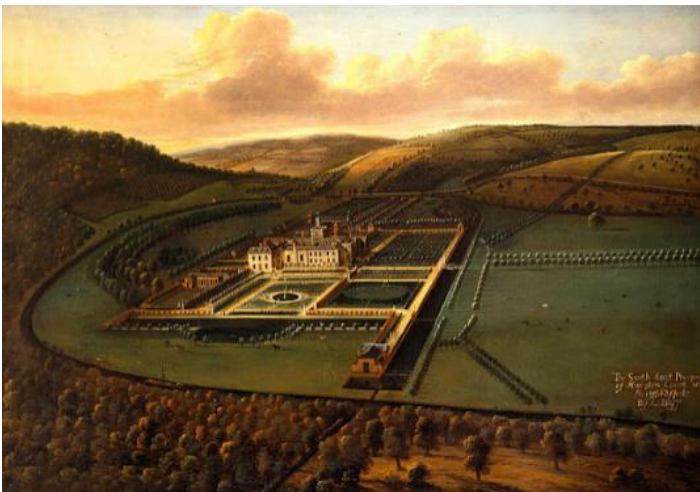
Ross-on-Wye and District Civic Society: Newsletter June 2024

Here is a brief synopsis of our activities over the last months, and my first months as chair.

In **December** we met at the Harewood Inn for our Christmas Lunch. Everyone present had an enjoyable time and we would like to thank David Dawson for organising it.



In **January**, we had an illustrated talk by Rhys Griffiths based upon the fascinating Hampton Court archives held by Hereford Archives and Records Centre (HARC).



Although the Hampton Court can be traced back to fifteenth century, when money from the release of French prisoners following the Battle of Agincourt paid for the initial construction of the castle. The talk followed the rise and fall of the two significant families: the Coningsby's and The Arkwright's who owned it for over 400 years and whose lives are documented in the HARC archives.

Henry Coningsby (of Neen Sollars) bought the estate in 1510. Thomas Coningsby built the Coningsby Hospital for old soldiers in 1614 which was used by soldiers returning from battles in Ireland. It is thought Nell Gwyn remembered their red uniforms, which influenced Charles II to have

red uniform for the Chelsea Pensioners. Hampton Court became a centre of arts and music and remained in the Coningsby family, until the early 19th Century when the estate was purchased by Richard Arkwright from Derbyshire, the son of the famous inventor and who amassed a fortune from cotton manufacture and was said to be the wealthiest commoner in England. He also brought industrial methodology and accounting into agriculture on the estate (and left HARC with excellent estate records). Richard Arkwright's son, John, then commissioned the remodelling of the house and gardens between 1830 and 1840s. The Arkwright's lived at Hampton Court Castle until 1912.

In **February** Dr Andy Rogers gave us an insight into weather and the Ross-on-Wye weather station. This followed the work of two prominent people Henry Southall and Fred Parsons who took weather readings for an amazing 105 years.

Henry Southall had already set up the weather station in 1859, but later that year weather forecasting and storm predictions became a matter of national importance after 800 lives were taken, 133 ships were lost, and a further 90 severely damaged in what became known as "the Royal Charter storm". This great loss stimulated a national effort to improve weather forecasting, with Ross already submitting data to Robert



Fitzroy at the new Meteorological Office, transmitted by the new electric telegraph. Data from Ross was at the forefront of storm predictions. Southall also wrote papers on flooding in the West Midlands.

Frederick James Parsons arrived in Ross in 1912 having previously had his own amateur station when a child. He met up with Southall, and established his own station at Chase Dale. In 1914 he was made a Fellow of Royal Meteorological Society but due to the outbreak of war he enlisted and became one of the first five meteorologists in the army, primarily studying the effect of winds during gas attacks. While Fred was away, records were taken by Mrs Purchas (the landowner and his landlady). On his return he

continued to take daily readings 6 or 7 times a day, until 1964, when he retired at the age of 72.

In **March** we watched the film 'Herefordshire Life through a Lens'. A carousel of fascinating films of Herefordshire between 1945 and 1975



Derek Evans, former photographer with The Hereford Times, gave his collection of photographs and film to the HARC archive. The film mixes stunning photographs with film taken at the same time. The work covered the School for the Deaf at Wessington Court, Woolhope, the Hereford May Fair and involvement of the Bishop, football at Edgar Street with Ronnie Radford's amazing goal against Newcastle, and the Fownhope Heart of Oak Society, including the Club Walk and decorated sticks.



Have you ever wondered what would it be like to see a photo of Hereford after the siege in the English Civil War? Well, in **April** we were treated to a visit by Jason Hodges a talented digital artist and photographer and his 'TimeLapse' – reconstructing Hereford's history.



We were visually transported from the present day, back 300 years, to imagine what Hereford would be like after its lowest point following the siege of Hereford. The focus was particularly on the gates within the walls of Hereford. Based upon paintings and accounts from that time, and using authentic material from Hereford Museum, actors from re-enactment groups and authentic handmade props, he was able to bring that era back to life. Most of the town walls and gates were removed at the end of the 18th century, after the threat of war had passed.

In **May** Heather and Mark Sanderson led a walk in John Kyrle's footsteps commemorating 300 years since he died; a tea at St Mary's Church followed. This was much enjoyed. In **June** there was a guided tour of Monmouth's Shire Hall but the visit inside the Monmouth Bridge Gate House was not possible.

On **10th July** we have arranged a Visit to the Norton Recycling Centre near Worcester (WR3 8QA) to see how our waste is recycled and then back in The Larruperz Centre for a talk on Catholicism and Priest holes on **11th September**. The **9th October Talk** is not yet confirmed. After our AGM on **13th November** we will hear Matthew Hall tell us about his experience as a practising barrister before becoming a full-time screenwriter and novelist. The Christmas Lunch is set for **Wednesday 11th December**.

We hope you can join us,

Mark Eardley (Chairman)