

Picturesque



Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty newsletter

Edition 25 *Spring 2011*

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Welcome

to the Spring edition of Picturesque 2011.

We are now well in to 2011 and this will be a very special year for the Wye Valley AONB and Overlooking the Wye.

It is 40 years ago that our area was recognised for its unique landscape qualities by being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and this edition of Picturesque will be not only a reflection on the past but also a look forward to the future. In this more testing economic climate we will be looking at working more imaginatively with the inevitable restricted funding in order to keep up the same standards in our work with our partners.

One of the coldest winters has passed now and early welcoming signs of spring are appearing. We are really excited about organising our four free celebratory events which are detailed in this issue on the News page. Do please come along and support us there will be a range of family activities to enjoy.

The saddest part of this year is that the Overlooking the Wye team will be finishing at the end of 2011 and will be sorely missed. Three years goes by so quickly. They have accomplished so much in the renovation and conservation of over forty sites throughout the AONB and their report is found on page 10.

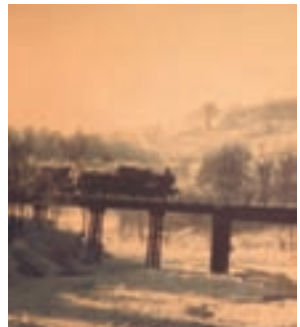
Lastly our new website is up and running with new information and a new look for our anniversary year. Do go online and find out what is on offer this year and please do let me have feedback on how you find it.

www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

Cover picture: The incredible front cover picture of Tintern Abbey by Linda Wright is being used this year as our special picture reflecting the landscape beauty, history and heritage and cross border partnership that reflects the work of the AONB.

page 2

40 years on



Images clockwise from top: Goodrich Castle watercolour, Coracle on the Wye courtesy of Monmouth Museum, Frozen river 196, Redbrook Industry, The Wye Tour, Tintern Abbey watercolour3

Why the Wye

Edited from 'Designation History Series - Wye Valley AONB' by Ray Woolmore

The Wye Valley was officially designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1971. But this article examines what happened in the years running up to that decision.

The ancient Silures tribes found the dramatic topography of the Wye Valley outstanding for incorporating into their hill forts, likewise for King Offa constructing his dyke and the Normans building their castles. The Cistercian monks found the tranquility and productivity of the Wye Valley at Tintern perfect for their first monastery in Wales whilst the complex geology offered powerful streams, abundant forest and copious minerals from which early industrialists forged the crucible of the industrial revolution. On the rich red soils and fertile floodplain a wealth of crops and livestock grew, which were traded down the Wye. Meanwhile artists and writers discovered picturesque, sublime and romantic views in the Wye Valley that have attracted tourists for 250 years. So it was little surprise that the parts of the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean were proposed by Lord Bledisloe and others when, in 1931, the Government, first considered setting up 'National Parks and other similar areas in England and Wales'. Consequently "A

section of the banks of the Wye" was suggested as a potential 'National Reserve Area' (areas selected because of their outstanding interest to the nation as a whole, where preservation was the primary consideration). Unfortunately the Government was preoccupied with a major financial crisis and economic depression so no designations were made. However, the Dean Forest and Wye Valley did become the first National Forest Park, established by the young Forestry Commission, in 1938.

In the same year the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales (CPRW) put to the Government a well argued proposal for National Parks. In response the Government, despite distractions of a World War, asked one of the authors, architect John Dower, to prepare an official report on National Parks in England and Wales. Published in 1945, the Dower Report included the 'Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Valley' in its list of 'Other Amenity Areas NOT suggested



Yat Rock Iron Age Hill Fort

as National Parks'. Following on, the Government published the Hobhouse Report in 1947 with the 'Forest of Dean and Wye Valley' on the list of 52 'Conservation Areas' (areas of high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value). Covering 232 square miles (601km²) it encompassed the whole Forest Park and extended up to the Woolhope Dome. (see the Designation Map overleaf).

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 established the National Parks Commission (NPC) and the legislation to create National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the latter it was recognised were to be based mainly on Hobhouse's



'Conservation Areas'. Initially the NPC was focused on establishing National Parks, but in 1953 the NPC drew up a shortlist of 12 possible AONBs with the Wye Valley (with no mention of the Forest of Dean) in 4th place, and ranked 3rd on a further shortlist a year later. However due to perceived differences between the local authorities the Wye Valley was dropped and 4 other potential AONBs were

progressed (Gower, Llyn, Quantocks and Surrey Hills). The Wye Valley and Forest of Dean were put forward again in 1957 and, following lobbying by CPRE and the Ramblers Association, the three County Councils (Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire) held a conference in Ross-on-Wye in 1960. The NPC secretary attended, one Harold Abrahams, the 1924 100m

Olympic Gold Medalist immortalised in the 1981 film Chariots of Fire. An agreement was reached to investigate drawing up a boundary map for a possible Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Valley AONB. However little progress was made and further lobbying by CPRE, drawing in Christopher Cadbury (President of the Wildlife Trusts / RSN), finally led to the NPC considering the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley again in 1967. In early 1968 the NPC recommended that the three County Councils set up a Working Party to prepare a preliminary map of the AONB, consult with the District Councils and consider the need for AONB policies and the establishment of a Joint Advisory Committee.

The local planning authorities felt that the Forest of Dean was a distinct entity and already "in good hands", being largely administered by the Forestry Commission and with enhanced powers for amenity and recreation from the new Countryside Act 1968. The NPC confirmed that the landscape of the Lower Wye Valley merited designation in its own right. Further submissions, negotiations and modifications followed over the boundary and in late 1968 the Countryside Commission, successor to the NPC, started informal consultations on the proposed boundary. Issues and queries raised during consultation included; why the upper Wye had been excluded, likewise the Forest of Dean, and extension to Wentwood, and also Aconbury and



Dinedor; whether designation would help with proposals for use of the recently disused railway lines; why so much agricultural land was included in Herefordshire; whether the Monnow valley and Golden Valley should be included or considered separately, likewise whether the whole Woolhope Dome should be included. However only minor modifications to the boundary

were made settling on an area of 124 square miles (325 km²). After Ministerial confirmation that two Designation Orders were required, one for England / Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, and one for Wales / Monmouthshire, statutory consultation started in 1970, European Conservation Year. The draft Designation Orders and boundary map were circulated

to the local authorities (3 County, 1 Borough and 8 District Councils), however a minor administrative error (omitting to consult with East Dean Rural District Council) meant the process had to be repeated. Ten representations were received relating to; again why the Forest of Dean was excluded; concerns over inclusion of so much agricultural land in Herefordshire, also fears of increased public access to such farmland; likewise to woodland in Monmouthshire and requests to exclude Stowfield Quarry. No modifications were made and the the Wye Valley AONB Designation Orders were signed by the Countryside Commission on 24th February 1971. Despite the change of Government with Ted Heath winning the General Election in May 1971, the orders were signed simultaneously by Secretary for State for the Environment and the Secretary for State for Wales. Thus after 40 years of wrangling the 28th AONB came into being.

It remains unique as the only cross-border Protected Landscape in the family of 13 National Parks and 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In the Autumn edition of Picturesque we will be celebrating some of the achievements in the AONB since designation.



40 years of wildlife winners and losers

We look at the ups and downs, gains and losses in the Wye Valley AONB over the last 40 years

Wildlife populations of any species will fluctuate over time and each species will have good years and bad years depending on environmental factors. Often these changes will be due to natural events, other times they are brought about by human activity either inadvertently or deliberately.

winners the otter ✓

The only otter species in the UK is the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*), one of a number of otter species worldwide.

Otters were widespread within the UK up until the mid 1950s when they went into a sharp decline across the UK and Europe. This decline persisted until the late 1970s at which point it was only found on 6% of waterways in the UK.

The decline was thought to be linked to the introduction of organochlorine pesticides such as dieldren. These pesticides were banned in 1976, and since then the otter has recovered at a slow but steady rate.

The River Wye was a stronghold for the otter where it persisted in the upper reaches in Wales throughout the national decline. However it was not until the 1980s that the otter re-colonised the English part of the Wye catchment. Subsequently, all catchment watercourses were occupied by 1993.

The Environment Agency has routinely monitored otter populations on the river since 1977 and has noted continuous improvement. The most recent report for England (Fifth Otter Survey of England Technical Report 2009-10) tabulates the results on the Wye and concludes that the otter is likely to continue to consolidate its range within the catchment.



the peregrine falcon ✓

The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is the largest British falcon, living in wild uplands and rocky coasts.

It is an impressive hunter, frequently catching pigeons in mid-flight. Peregrines declined through the late 19th and early 20th centuries through persecution however from the 1950s they went through a dramatic UK decline. Like the otter, this sudden decline was probably due to the introduction of organochlorine pesticides, particularly DDT

(dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). DDT accumulates through the food chain leading to high levels in top predators, particularly raptors and is thought to have caused thinning and weakening of the eggshells. Highly persistent in the environment, even 35 years after it's ban eggshells are still 10-12% thinner than before DDT was used. By 1963-64 80% of the UK peregrine population had been lost.

Peregrines have long been associated with Symonds Yat Rock in the Wye Valley and bred on Coldwell Cliffs until the effects of DDT in the 1950's. At the time of the AONB's designation in 1971 the site remained unoccupied and it wasn't until 1982 that they re-established themselves and now continue to return annually. The RSPB in partnership with the Forestry Commission keep an annual watch on the nest and guard against egg thieves which are still a threat.

Peregrines have since colonised other cliffs at Tintern Quarry, Wyntours Leap and Chepstow.

losers

salmon X

The River Wye was once one of the finest salmon fishing rivers in the UK. However in recent years the runs have declined dramatically.

In 1967 the rod catch was 7,864. Four years later, at the time of the AONB's designation, the catch was an impressive 5094. Even as

recently as 1988 it was 6,401. But since that time it has steadily declined, falling to a low of 357 in 2002 and since 1997 the total catch for the Wye averaged less than 1000 per year. 2010's figures were a low 451.

The reasons for the decline in salmon are numerous and include salmon netting in the estuaries, poor feeding in the North Atlantic, headwaters acidification, obstructions to migration and spawning beds in the river channel, siltation of spawning beds, over fishing, diffuse pollution and global warming.

Many of these problems can and are being addressed. The Wye and Usk Foundation have worked to remove river obstructions, modified river channels to improve water flow and temperature and liming of some headwaters to reduce acidification. Furthermore netting in the estuary has been bought out and national bylaws introduced by the Environment Agency make the catch and release of Salmon mandatory until the June 16. A voluntary catch and release incentive is in place after this date. Consequently the number of fish extracted from the river has decreased but numbers continue to remain low.



water voles X



The iconic 'Wind in the Willows' Ratty or water vole was once a common sight in well vegetated banks of slow flowing rivers, ditches, dykes and lakes.

A combination of habitat fragmentation and predation by American mink has resulted in a rapid and extensive decline in Britain; and is the most serious decline of any wild mammal in Britain in the last 100 years. Water voles have disappeared from 94% of their former sites, exceeding that of the other decline in the seventies.

Noticeably water voles have been holding on in small populations, particularly in complex drainage ditches on areas of grazing marsh and within reedbeds, where they can evade predation. Other 'simpler' watercourses such as the River Wye and its tributaries have been hit hard as mink systematically predate the voles to extinction and it is likely that they are the major cause for the decline. Water voles are currently absent from the Wye Valley AONB. There are patchy records for water vole from the mid-late 1970's at Llandogo and Lydbrook and later from Sellack in 1982. It is likely that it was once very common on all of the river and its tributaries and while mink remain on the Wye, the water voles are unlikely to return.

the special qualities of the

Wye Valley

What is special and significant about this AONB?

The AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 identifies the special qualities of the area. These form the focus for conservation and management for the life of the plan.

They help to both understand the designation and justify the landscape as being of international, national and local importance. The special qualities were identified from the public consultation process, originally for the first statutory AONB Management Plan 2004-9, and were refined for the current plan. These qualities relate to the area's landscape and scenery, its wildlife, its cultural heritage and the interaction of these features and attributes.

There are 29 identified Special Qualities under eight broad categories:-

Landscape: The overall outstanding landscape of the 16 Landscape Management Zones with their associated key features (separately catalogued in the Management Plan)

Biodiversity:

- Woodlands, particularly the diversity of Ancient • Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) including 35 SSSIs and the Wye Valley Woodlands SAC.
- The river and tributaries, notably the main river SAC and SSSI, and nationally important for water based recreation and one of the key reasons why people visit the AONB
- Small field pattern of un/semi-improved grassland, often bounded by drystone walls or old hedges
- Boundary habitat diversity and connectivity, e.g. between grassland and woodland, farmland and heathland, tidal river and ASNW, hedges and/or drystone walls, lanes, banks, verges and fields and woods.

Geological:

- Silurian Rocks, Devonian / Lower Old Red Sandstone, Quartz Conglomerate in Upper Old Red Sandstone, Carboniferous Limestone and Riverine geomorphology

Visual and Sensory:

- Picturesque, extensive and dramatic views with 72 viewpoints identified and 20 included in the Overlooking the Wye Landscape Partnership Scheme including four Scheduled Monuments at Piercefield.
- Overall sense of tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness / wildness

Historic Environment:

- Prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic (such as Arthur's Cave) to Iron Age, particularly the hillforts
- Roman and early mediaeval sites including

settlements and industry, and Offa's Dyke, the early mediaeval boundary of unique cultural and historical importance

- Mediaeval defensive and ecclesiastical sites and associated landscapes, such as Goodrich and Chepstow castles and Tintern Abbey
- Post-medieval industrial sites and associated landscapes, many in the Overlooking the Wye Scheme, including the Angidy valley, Redbrook and New Weir Forge, Symonds Yat West.
- Railway heritage
- Ancient trees and the significant numbers of ancient pollards and mature trees in hedges, woods and parkland
- Historic parks and gardens, with ten registered parks and gardens and forty eight of local significance
- Vernacular architecture of estate houses, commoners cottages and farmsteads, despite there being no one dominant style due to varying geology

Language:

Welsh language and accent; Forest of Dean and South Herefordshire dialects and accents

Environmental:

Air quality, soil quality and water quality and quantity (primarily linked to the river and tributaries)

Access and Recreation

- Old tracks: often in sunken ways and/or bounded by drystone walls
- Offa's Dyke Path National Trail
- Wye Valley Walk
- Access land, primarily on Forestry Commission holdings, but also Woodland Trust land and commons.
- Small commons; largest are Coppet Hill, Broadmoor, Staunton Meend, Whitelye, The Hudnalls

The purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. These Special Qualities make up a significant part of what is outstanding and 'naturally beautiful' about the Wye

Valley. The AONB Unit and the Joint Advisory Committee works with a wide variety of people including landowners, local communities, local authorities and governmental and non-governmental organisations to make sure that these are maintained. The AONB Management Plan is a key tool in achieving this.

You can view, download or order the AONB Management Plan on www.wyevallyaonb.org.uk



Images Header on opposite page Coldwell Rocks courtesy Linda Wright, Above: Bigsweir bridge courtesy Linda Wright. Top Right Redbrook Bridge Bottom Right Tintern Abbey courtesy Linda Wright

Overlooking the **wye**

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy

Overlooking the Wye is a £2.8 m Landscape Partnership Scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund within the Wye Valley AONB.

The aim of the scheme is to improve and promote enjoyment and understanding of the historic environment in the landscape of the lower Wye Valley. This involves projects at forty sites.

Whitecliff Furnace

Due to the careful management and budgeting of the Overlooking the Wye scheme, it is now possible to complete some essential conservation works at Whitecliff Furnace



This site was originally included within the scheme, but on a 'reserve' list as interpretation works only and has now been upgraded to include conservation works. The condition of the furnace has been a concern for many years but recently English Heritage classed it as a 'high priority' Monument at Risk. The Overlooking the Wye team are also hoping to source matched funding from English Heritage and the Forest of Dean Local

Action Forum to facilitate these important works.

Whitecliff Furnace is a large and impressive Coke fuelled Blast Furnace on the edge of the Wye Valley AONB near Coleford. It is a Scheduled Monument owned by the Dean Heritage Museum Trust and has been described by the Historical Metallurgy Society as follows:

'It is one of the best surviving examples nationally of a coke-fuelled and steam

blown blast furnace; the furnaces that formed the foundation of the Industrial Revolution from circa 1750 (when coke fuel became widespread) to circa 1830 (when solid masonry stacks were replaced by lighter metal-plated construction, and hot blast inaugurated a period of rapid change)'

This is one of the sites where David Mushet undertook some of the experiments that led to the development of a steel that could be used for constructing railways. His work prepared the ground for later industrial expansion.

The site is the next step on in production technology from the Angidy Furnace site at Tintern, which underwent conservation works in the summer of 2010.



Rope access survey of main furnace structure

the **team**



The OLV team of from left: Kate Biggs, Project Officer, Julie Godfrey, Finance Officer and Sue Middleton, Scheme Manager (pictured above)

Overlooking the **wye**

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy



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Learning opportunities in the Wye Valley

The Wye Valley AONB has an abundance of sites where students can gain an understanding of its history, geography and geology.

The Overlooking the Wye team is working with a number of partners to develop education packs about the Wye Valley for use by primary and secondary schools.

Redbrook Church of England primary school has recently embraced this learning opportunity. During the summer, 20 key stage 2 students went to Brockweir quay and Old Station,



Artwork produced by Redbrook student

Tintern. They explored intriguing aspects of the Wye Valley such as the tidal nature of the river, the different types of boats used historically and the Picturesque movement.

Hilary Evans, a teacher at the school, said:

'The students had a fabulous time and were able to evidence how the use of the landscape and the nature of the river have changed tremendously over time.'

Back in the classroom, the students worked on follow up activities. This included finishing off with paint, sketches that had been drawn while out on the river



Exploring the aspects of the Wye Valley at Brockweir

bank, much like the original 19th century Wye tourists did! When asked about their experience of the Wye Tour, students' comments were:

'I hadn't realised that the flow of water in the river changes direction with the tide.' (Charlie)

'There used to be smoky stuff like London and you wouldn't have been able to see properly.' (Alice)

The education packs will be finalised in the summer. These will be available from www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk or www.overlookingthewye.org.uk



Devil's pulpit

The iconic view of Tintern Abbey from Devil's Pulpit will be protected for future visitors by conservation works this Spring.

The viewpoint, on the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail is such a popular site that it has suffered severe erosion over the years. Offa's Dyke dates back to the 8th century when King Offa is said to have ordered its construction to divide his kingdom of Mercia from what is now Wales. Four centuries later Tintern Abbey was built and the legend goes that the Devil taunted the monks from the rock pinnacle overlooking the Wye and the abbey.

Forty years ago the National Trail was established along Offa's Dyke. The Dyke is now a scheduled monument and the works will create a 'new' footpath along the top of it. This will follow the contours

of the monument but ensure that future walkers will be wearing away the 'new' surfacing rather than historic material. Additional works has already improved the access to Devil's Pulpit from both the Forestry Commission car park at Tidenham Chase and up from Tintern.

As with many of the sites in the AONB and the Overlooking the Wye scheme, works are only possible due to the effective partnerships of organisations

working together. The design for this conservation work has been created by Opus International Consultants in liaison with English Heritage, Forestry Commission (England), Gloucestershire Archaeology Service, Gloucestershire County Council Rights of Way, Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, Forest of Dean District Council, Wye Valley AONB, local residents and landowners and the Overlooking the Wye team.



The National Trail has suffered severe erosion over the years

Overlooking the **wye** NEWS

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy



Lower Wireworks in Progress

The car park area at Lower Wireworks in Tintern is now much improved and open for use. However, works on the site will continue in Spring 2011 to create interpretive artwork that will portray the history of the ironworking industry in the Angidy valley.

Work Experience with Overlooking the Wye

James Fawcett from Lakers school came to join the Overlooking the Wye team for a week of work experience in November.

His verdict was, 'I have really enjoyed my time here (and the hot chocolate that I had every day!)



Kate Biggs with James Fawcett at Whitecliff Furnace

CPRE Award for Symonds Yat Rock

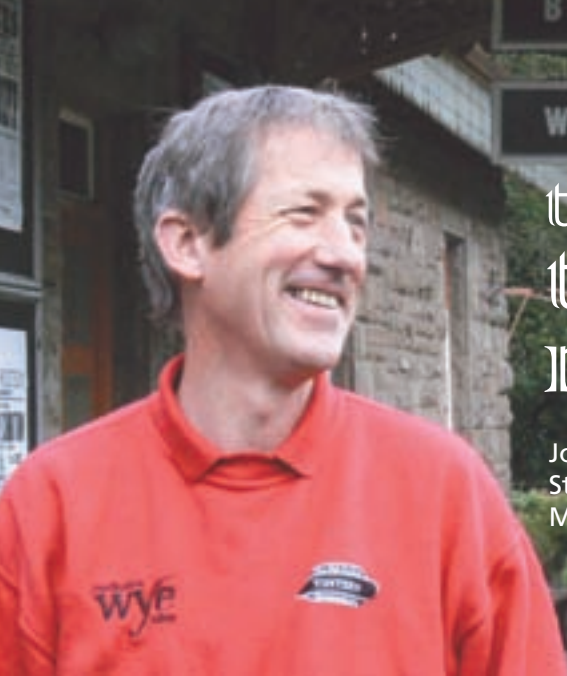


The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Gloucestershire Award 2010 has been given to Symonds Yat Rock in recognition of the works completed there under the Overlooking the Wye scheme.

'Citation:

For the enhancement of one of the finest viewpoints in England with improved access, site improvements and interpretation; and for making the experience available to everyone, including visitors with limited mobility and the very young.'

Photo: Elinor Gwynn (representing Heritage Lottery Fund), Andrew Blake (Wye Valley AONB Officer), Sue Middleton (Overlooking the Wye Scheme Manager), Phil Morton (Forestry Commission), Councillor Phil Cutter (Chairman of Overlooking the Wye Partnership Board), Hazel McDowall (Natural England).



the tourism manager

John Sterry has been managing Old Station Tintern for many years for Monmouthshire County Council

John Sterry's career background has made him ideal for the role of managing a popular tourist site.

Originally from Weston Super Mare, John studied hotel and leisure management and had a career managing several tourist attractions in Worcestershire and then worked in charity marketing.

When the opportunity came to manage the Old Station at Tintern, he felt his background could be used in improving its potential. John set about improving the visitor experience and making the station friendly and appealing to families. He has succeeded so much so that

the site has become one of the most popular attractions in the Wye Valley.

He feels that it is so important to listen to what the customer wants and by following this principle the visitor numbers have increased. The other important decision to

establish a programme of events for families at Old Station Tintern has attracted both tourists and local visitors who come to enjoy a variety of activities.

However he could not run this popular site without a reliable and hard working staff. John feels his staff are



Above: John Sterry, centre, with the staff dressed up for a Victorian Weekend in 2010

the most important facet in Old Station's tourism ethos. There is a good team spirit and a co-operation which help to produce successful events like Victorian weekends, Halloween walks, tea parties and Christmas celebrations which everyone enthusiastically joins in with. In 2009 and 2010 The Old Station received the prestigious Green Flag Award recognise and reward the best parks in the country.

The site features a riverside walk and meadows, children's play area, picnic site with barbecue, tearoom, souvenir shop, tourist information and a secluded basic camp site.

The signal box houses changing exhibitions from local artists and crafts people.

The newly refurbished railway carriages, funded through the Overlooking the Wye scheme, house the Destination Wye Valley exhibition and the Circle of Legends wood carvings feature local mythical or historic characters and form a series of trails throughout Monmouthshire

Carriages Tea Room at the Old Station is open for

breakfast, light lunches, home baked cakes and afternoon teas as featured in the AA Afternoon Tea Guide. It was voted one of the top twenty five tearooms in the UK by Country Living Magazine.

John is modest about the Station's success ' I think I have developed it into a family and community site which still reflects a Victorian culture.'

John also relies on a dedicated band of volunteers who help and have worked on a superb model railway. Formed in 2009 into the Friends of Old Station they offer valuable expertise and have helped in making Old Station look exceptional. Credit particularly goes to Sue and Laurie Pickard who spend a considerable amount of time in improving the grounds.

However John is not resting on his laurels he is determined that Old Station should receive national recognition and hopes to continue doing what Old Station does best - giving people a wonderful family experience in an historic setting. John also sits on the AONB Joint Advisory Committee representing tourism interests.



Old Station History

Built as a Victorian country railway station, the Old Station, Tintern was part of the Wye Valley railway and was once a bustling branch line station, Tintern station was closed to passenger traffic in 1959 and abandoned with the total closure of the line in 1964.

Monmouthshire County Council took over the site and has converted it into a charming place to visit for a quiet relaxing day out or to start your walk in the beautiful Wye Valley.

New for the 2010 season were two refurbished railway carriages which provide a new shop, tourism information and 'platform one' a multi-purpose education, meeting and exhibition space. They feature 'Destination Wye Valley' a new exhibition about the Wye Valley's landscape and history with lots of ideas on getting out and about.

The improvements have been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and are part of the Wye Valley AONB Overlooking the Wye Scheme which is investing £2.8m in historic sites in the Wye Valley.

If you would like to find out more telephone: 01291 689566 or visit the website for details of opening times and events.

www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/oldstationintern



Left: Picnicking at Old Station Tintern

TRADITIONS and CUSTOMS in the Wye Valley

For centuries the people in Trellech have possessed a unique well which some believe has magical powers.

Wells were very important to the Welsh people and our Celtic ancestors regarded them as the abodes of gods and entrances to the supernatural world. A range of ceremonies were associated with them and they remained dear to the populace and a place of pilgrimage. Gradually ancient pagan sites came to be associated with the early missionary saints and St Anne's well, which derives from Annis the celtic goddess of rivers, water, wells, magic and wisdom, became associated with Christian beliefs. Locally known as the Virtuous Well, it was first depicted on a sundial erected in 1689 by Lady Magdalen Probert which now resides in the churchyard of St Nicholas. The name 'virtuous' well in fact refers to its medicinal qualities and not to any moral virtues supposedly endowed upon those who partake of its iron-impregnated waters. According to an ancient Welsh manuscript, the healing water of the Bards



Above: St Anne's or the Virtuous Well with strips of fabric hung in the trees above

ran beneath the Caer of the Three Stones (Harolds Stones) and it has been suggested that this well was associated with the choice of Trellech for mystical Druidical rites.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the water was considered especially beneficial in the treatment of eye ailments and for treating 'complaints peculiar to women'. It was also used as a wishing well. Girls wanting to know when they were to be married would drop in a pebble and every bubble that rose counted as one month.

It was and still is used as a wishing well. To make a wish a small metal object should be thrown in. Many bubbles arising from it meant a rapid granting of one's wish, few bubbles meant that a long period of time would elapse before the wish came true and no bubbles at all meant the wish was not granted.

Fairies were believed to dance at the well and when a local farmer dug up a fairy ring

around it from then on, whenever he (and only he) tried to draw water, the well was dry. As soon as the missing turf was replaced the water flowed freely again.

On midsummer's eve, the fairies were said to drink water from harebells which were found strewn around on midsummer's morning. There was also a legend that nuns from Tintern Abbey had used a three mile long tunnel so that they could use the water unobserved historically however, there were only monks at Tintern.

Since medieaval times Virtuous Well has been famous for its cures and visitors to this day hang strips of cloth and ribbons on a nearby tree in the belief that by dipping a piece of your garment in the healing water, as the fabric rots away, so your symptoms will disappear. Offerings are also frequently placed on the ledge around the inside of the arched recess,

Canoe Access

The River Wye is one of a very small number of rivers in the UK that enjoys an undisputed right of public navigation.

The right of navigation extends from Hay Town Bridge to the mouth of the River at Chepstow. The Environment Agency is the Navigation Authority between Hay Town and Bigsweir Bridge, below Bigsweir Bridge the river becomes tidal and the Gloucester Harbour Trustees are the navigation authority. The River Wye is considered by many to be the finest canoeing rivers in the UK with an estimated 60,000 canoeist days per annum within the AONB stretch alone.

Despite the right of navigation there are difficulties in accessing the river, publicly accessible launch sites are often of a poor condition, unable to

cope with current demands and accessible only by the able-bodied.

Consequently the AONB has been working with the Environment Agency, Herefordshire Council and the Overlooking the Wye team to improve the canoe launch facilities at Ross-on-Wye and Kerne Bridge. Both of these sites are popular launch points already, however the facilities at both sites are ageing and in need of refurbishment.

In 2010 funding was provided through the Advantage West Midlands Natural Assets Fund administered by Natural England. The funding has been provided to support refurbishment of the two

canoe launches to a new 'enhanced disability' design which will enable more people to access the water. Furthermore the funding will allow new interpretive material to be produced including a canoeists guide book to the Wye Valley AONB, A new Canoeists Code of Conduct leaflet and two new interpretation boards.

During 2010 designs and plans for the launches were produced and planning permission for the two sites was granted. At time of writing the interpretive material is in production and will be ready for the 2011 canoeing season. Work to construct the launches is planned later in the year.





inside OUT

inside OUT continues to progress with more workshops at Bracelands and work on the new site at Whitestone, Monmouthshire

The insideOUT project is progressing well with participants from Gloucestershire enjoying several workshops including art, poetry, photography, drama and music.

At Bracelands work is underway to produce an artwork *About 22*. This has been organised, designed and produced by Wye Valley Information Officer Nikki Moore and creative practitioners Claire Robinson and Margaret Peckham who have been working with participants from Orchard Trust at Lydbrook.

The piece will be produced as a land art mosaic using natural materials, stone, brick and gravel. The brick has been generously produced

and donated by Coleford Brick and Tile and other materials by local suppliers.

At Whitestone, Monmouthshire, taster sessions have been going well with participants from the Alzheimers Society, and Mind enjoying sessions organised by Miranda Thomason. The sessions have included music percussion and poetry. Other groups to enjoy the creative sessions at the new Forestry Commission site are Young Carers and Waimon (Womens' Aid, Monmouthshire) and at the time of writing a celebration event is being organised with an exhibition of work undertaken during the workshops Bridges Centre and a visit to the site with land artist, Kate Ragget



Images Top: Members from the Forge Centre for the Visually Impaired get up close and personal with trees during a workshop at Bracelands. Middle Michael Church entertains during his Poetry workshop at Whitestone and a participant from Orchard Trust working on the About 22 artwork

book reviews

A regular feature of book reviews concerning the Wye Valley area, conservation and the environment

Deep Trouble by Sue Rawle

Publisher: Sundance Publishing

ISBN 9780956637208

Price: £7.99

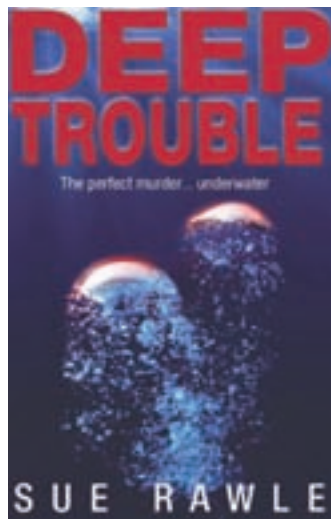
The Perfect Murder... Underwater, is set in a British dive club based in the Forest of Dean which is where the author's real-life dive club is based.

I don't know about Sue Rawle's own Forest Pirates, but as we learn more about the club members she has dreamt up, we realise that what initially appears to be a typical bunch of divers and their families is in fact an incident-pitful of deadly sinners.

Here is a book with three-dimensional characters, careful plotting, well-researched procedural passages and, most unexpected of all, consistently convincing dialogue. Best of all, the reader isn't battered over the head with involved explanations of diving procedure, which authors usually feel is necessary if they are to have a chance of winning a mainstream audience.

The story sweeps along like a rising tide and while not exactly a whodunnit, this book is crime fiction written with a deft enough touch to keep you turning the pages with enthusiasm. The Diving Diseases Research Centre in Plymouth, which does play a role, will receive 50p from each copy sold, so buy the book and put something back. I don't think you'll regret it.

You can obtain this book from local bookshops or by contacting Sue at suerawle@yahoo.co.uk or log onto www.deeptrouble.co.uk See back page to win a copy of Deep Trouble



The Green Lanes of Herefordshire by Heather Hurley

Publisher: Fineleaf Editions

ISBN 978 0 9557577 9 2

Price: £11.95

Heather shares her enthusiasm for the history of the county in this survey of Herefordshire green lanes.

Following an historical introduction she focuses on the history and development of ten green lanes, each researched thoroughly from sources dating from medieval to present day.

Each chapter includes a circular walking route incorporating present day lanes and paths.

The book can be obtained from local bookshops or from Fineleaf editions www.fineleaf.co.uk



If you have a book for review in our next issue please contact Nikki Moore, AONB Information Officer Tel: 01600 710846

KIDZ *stuff*

11 year old Omkar Khandpekar from India has written us a poem for the year 2011 which coincides with the international year of forests.

He is glad to share it with you



What do I expect from 2011

Welcome 2011, welcome, I expect a lot from you

I want to see a developed world

Like a shining piece of gold.

I want to see a green earth

On which everyone can take birth

I want the species of the endangered the species of animals to rise

And I want depletion in the vegetables price

I want the world to be less corrupt

And do everything honestly

I want the scientists to discover a cure for all diseases

So that the number of deaths in the world decreases

I want all the nations to live in peace

And the ice of the north pole to increase.

I hope you will fulfill my wishes

Before all my hope perishes

Do you have any photos, poems or artwork of the Wye Valley, its wildlife or landscape? Maybe pics of you and your friends and family having fun or maybe a joke or two.

If you would like to see them on the **KIDZ stuff** page then send to: The Editor, Picturesque, Wye Valley AONB, Hadnock Road, Monmouth NP25 3NG

or email them to information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

events

Any of the events below can be booked using the details below each event.

Open Farm Sunday

Date: Sunday, June 12

Time: 12.00 am - 3:00 pm

Join us as we celebrate everything agricultural down on the farm with the reigning AONB farmer of the year, Gareth Williams. Bring your own picnic and enjoy a great family experience

Location: Caplor Farm

Booking: Essential

Contact: Wye Valley AONB

Teddy Bears Olympics

Date: Wednesday, July 27

Time: 10:30 am - 12:30 pm

"Ready, teddy, go!" at the Old Station, Tintern. Get teddy ready for the teddy Olympics. Make the courses, help teddy take part in the races and make medals. Why not have a picnic with your teddy at the end? A fun filled morning for young families .

Location: Old Station Tintern

Booking: Essential

Contact: Old Station Tintern

Cost: £1 per child

Net a Pond Monster

Date: Wednesday, August 3

Time: 10:30 am - 12:00 am

Come and join us to explore the under water world thriving in the wildlife ponds at Gadr Farm. Great fun for all the family.

Location: Gadr Farm

Booking: Essential

Contact: Wye Valley AONB

Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer

T: 01600710844

E: community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Picture A



Picture B



Look at the Picture A of youngsters enjoying a Forest Schools event carefully then see if you can pick out the six differences in Picture B

What do you call a man with a tree growing out of his head ?

NEWS

from the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Celebrating the Wye

The 40th anniversary on the Wye Valley AONB heralds a series of free celebration events throughout the Wye Valley

Another cause for our celebration is the end of the Overlooking the Wye scheme which will mark the success of work on forty sites and reflect four themes of hidden industry, viewpoints, river connections and hill forts.

The first event **Hands on History** will be held at Old Station, Tintern, on Sunday, April 17 and will focus on the industrial history of the area. This will be followed by a look at the Iron Age and

Roman occupation with an **Iron Age Rampage** at the Iron Age hillfort, Symonds Yat Rock on Sunday, May 22.

The third event **On the Way to the Wye** is a Georgian Celebration planned for Ross on Wye on Saturday, June 18 and will feature an historical Georgian progression through the town led by local historian and author Heather Hurley. A Georgian jamboree will be held on Ross Riverside with re



enactors demonstrating various aspects of Georgian life. The final event will be a **Medieval Mayhem** event at Chepstow Castle in September tying in with the European Heritage Open Doors Project. All events are free and will be a great family day out.

Sustainable Tourism in the Wye Valley

Beside the news of Tourism Information Centres closing or moving, a new Sustainable Tourism Strategy and five year Action Plan is being produced for the Wye Valley AONB.

The Tourism Company from Ledbury, who have a long association with tourism in the area and who prepared the original AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy in 1996, have been appointed to prepare this new strategy.

Funding has been provided through Advantage West

Midlands Natural Assets programme with additional resources for visitor surveys and evaluations from the Heritage Lottery Funded Overlooking the Wye Scheme. Not only will this give a fresh focus for tourism in the area, but this new document will help the AONB to achieve the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (run by the Europarc Federation). This will result in all four of the Protected Landscapes along the Welsh- English Border being members of the Charter, enabling the Brecon Beacons National Park and the

Clwydian Range, Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs to share joint approaches to the development and experience of sustainable tourism along the corridor of Offa's Dyke.

The strategy will focus on the AONB, but be flexible enough to explore the interactions with neighbouring areas and in particular gateway market towns and service centres. During 2011 a number of consultation events will be organised for tourism interests to feed into the development of the strategy.

Sue scribes her way to success

What a talented lot we have within the AONB staff. Alongside a singer, a musician and an artist we now have a successful author in Sue Middleton or Rawle, as in her pen name. Sue is the Overlooking the Wye manager and has just had her first novel *Deep Trouble* published. She has been much in demand on the book signing circuit.

See a review of the book on page 19 with an opportunity to win a signed copy of this underwater murder mystery by completing the feedback form on the reverse of this page.



Walk this Wye proves a hit with walkers

A new publication Walk This Wye has been published with twelve new walks featured that can be accessed by public transport.

The walks, ranging from 2.5 miles to 10 miles have been researched by Wye Valley AONB volunteers, who celebrated at the launch of the publication at Brockweir Village Shop in November

Together with information about attractions to visit, public transport and with a map guide to each walk the booklet offers great value at £2.60 per copy.

To obtain your copy please contact the Wye Valley AONB at Hadnock Road, Monmouth NP25 3NG either by sending a cheque made out to Herefordshire Council for £2.60 to include post and package or telephone 01600 713977 to pay by credit or debit card.



Above: Wye Valley AONB volunteers celebrate the launch of Walk this Wye

Youth Rangers Project goes through consultation

Youth Rangers is a project that seeks to recruit young people aged 14 -16yrs to take part in a range of activities and increase their understanding of the Wye Valley AONB's heritage.

Over two years Youth Rangers will take part in a range of outdoor challenging educational activities which will lead to the attainment of the John Muir Award.

The consultation phase on this exciting new project is now complete. Sarah Sawyer Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer met with over 250 young people from Monmouthshire Youth Clubs; Tintern, The Narth and Llanishen and from three secondary schools; Lakers, Wyedean and John Kyrle.

The young people shared their ideas and completed a questionnaire designed to test what kind of activities should be included in a Youth Ranger Programme. A funding application has now been submitted and if successful, the project aims to start in 2011.



Above: Members of Narth Youth Club at the Young Rangers presentation

your feedback.

Please let us know your views on this issue and win a signed copy of Deep Trouble

All replies will be entered in a Prize Draw to be drawn July, 2011

Congratulations to G Purrier from Lydbrook winner of the Autumn draw. A copy of The Railway Story by Eric Rawlins is on its way to you.

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

..... Postcode:

Email:

Which feature interested you the most? please tick

Why the Wye Wildlife Winners Special Qualities of AONB

Overlooking the Wye The Tourism Manager

Traditions and Customs Canoe Access

Kidz Stuff inside OUT Book Reviews News

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Please return to: Nikki Moore, Information Officer, Wye Valley AONB, FREEPOST SWC4106, Monmouth NP25 3ZZ

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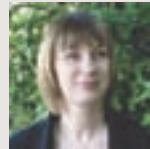
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Picturesque is produced at the Wye Valley AONB Office, Hadnock Road, Monmouth NP25 3NG Tel: 01600 713977 Fax: 01600 775421



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