

## **Newsletter Summer 2024**

### **Chairman's Report**

As a committee we are always pleased when our programmes and ideas are well and widely supported. Membership remains high as does your collective loyalty. As ever, you are invited to make comments and suggestions: these will be carefully considered. One thing we are thinking of, having listened to the opinions of some of our members, is whether we should host just one history "conference" a year or continue to have two. This is not primarily for financial reasons as, thanks to our Treasurer, we normally make a modest profit! Comments are invited. We have some super ideas for forthcoming events and look forward to seeing you at every one. With renewed thanks for your encouragement.

*Elizabeth Baker.*

### **Visiting the Castle**

Members are reminded that the Castle is open on Sundays and Bank Holidays from Easter to the end of September. Opening hours are 10.30 am to 4.30 pm. Admission is £4. Free to members and children. From September to Easter the castle may be visited on request (contact Rosie Humphreys on 672563). We have found by experience that Sunday was overwhelmingly the most popular day. Many thanks to Anne Handisides and her team of volunteers for looking after our visitors.



### **AGM**

The Annual General Meeting was held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March. The accounts were approved and the Committee was re-elected. Two new members of the Committee were appointed, Huw Mitchell and Richard Goddard (co-opted). After the formal business was completed we had a very enjoyable quiz on local history.

## Spring History Meeting

We were fortunate in having three academics from Swansea University who were all experts on women in medieval life.

**Dr Laura Kalas** who has recently edited a book on Margery Kempe, a well-known mystic who died in 1440, gave us a talk on medieval women and mysticism. Pine cones were a central feature of her talk! They were thought of as being omniferous, bearing all, and associated with the heart and with Christ. There is a huge bronze statue of one in the Vatican which is believed to have been mentioned by Dante.

**Dr Emma Cavell** talked on Medieval Women in the Anglo-Welsh Borders. She argued that aristocratic women, particularly Maud Mortimer, were influential in the fall of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and the domination of the English.

**Prof Liz McAvoy** spoke about women and anchorism in the middle ages. Many widows of noblemen found safety in being an anchoress. Dedication to the religious life provided peace and security for them at a time of turmoil. As a pathway to heaven it was a superior female alternative to male warfare.



I have copies of the lectures by Laura Kalas and Emma Cavell and a summary of Liz McAvoy's lecture and would be happy to email them on to any member who is interested. [collarddavid@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:collarddavid@yahoo.co.uk)

**Comment** *The academic quality of the papers was much appreciated. However, comments by members afterwards suggested that having three speakers in the morning was too much. I agree. Mea culpa. You can have too much of a good thing! Another issue is whether we should have just one serious history conference a year or two.*

## Autumn Event

Following our very successful event at the Castle to mark the coronation we are organising a similar day on **September 15th** . There will be medieval costumes for children (and grown-ups!) to try on as well as posters about the Friends' activities and documents about the Castle. It should be a happy and relaxing day. More information to follow.

## Alison Neil



We were treated in May to another of Alison Neil's brilliant one-woman shows. Her title this time was Mrs Baker's Company. As you will see from the poster it was A Tale of Rogues and Vagabonds Her performance was as usual both funny and poignant. Alison has now completed her run of plays. We did discuss with her whether she could revive one of her earlier plays. One possibility is her performance of The Fossil Lady which will be considered at our next committee meeting.

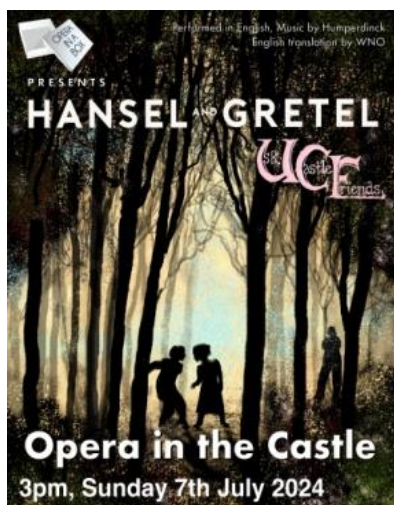
Following the performance we enjoyed tea and cakes. Many thanks to the cake-makers! After tea Alison asked for questions and an informal and enjoyable conversation followed.

## Teddy Bears' Picnic

This has become a popular regular event at the Castle for young children and their parents or grandparents The parachuting of the teddies from the Treasury Tower has been excellently organised for several years by Meirion Howells and Rupert Humphreys. They are now handing over to Laura and Tom Humphreys. So we look forward to many happy years ahead. The date for it this year is Friday 5<sup>th</sup> July from 11 am to 2.00pm. Teddies will be given certificates to mark their bravery, signed as last year by King Para and Queen Chute. Soft drinks will be provided by Usk Castle Friends.



## Opera in a Box



We have enjoyed three performances from this young and energetic company; L'Elisir d'Amour, Tosca and Don Giovanni. Their production this summer is Hansel and Gretel by Humperdinck. This is a late nineteenth century work (1892) and the only opera by Humperdinck regularly performed. It is based on the fairy tale by the brothers Grimm and has dark undertones.

It will be performed at the Castle on **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July at 3.00 pm**. Wine and soft drinks will be provided by the Friends.

### Ticket information

Tickets at £15 (half price for children) are available from Barry Morse. Co-operative Bank Sort Code 08-92-99, a/c no. 65049750. Or tel. 01291 673233. Or email [morse.usk@gmail.com](mailto:morse.usk@gmail.com) (ref opera)

### Committee members 2024-5

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Margaret Barford

Stella Collard

Richard Goddard

Rosie Humphreys

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Huw Morgan

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