

Brian Draper – The River Wye: Part 1

Brian Draper returned to the History Group to give a presentation on the River Wye, the first of two talks on this subject. In this talk he spoke about the river, from its source to the City of Hereford. The River Wye starts only a few metres below the River Severn, in the Plymlimon hills as part of the Cambrian Mountains and the terrain is boggy and desolate.



The River Wye.

As with previous talks, Brian delivered the presentation in a lively and brisk manner, and displayed his trademark humour with mildly risqué stories, giving the History Group a very engaging afternoon.

The first village through which the Wye flows is Llangurig, which was the first place of Christian worship in Wales and has a fine 15th Century Church, with Royal connections. The A44 follows the course of the river and leads to Rhayader, the first town along the Wye. Rhayader is home to the spectacular dams and reservoirs of the Elan and Claerwen Valleys and is also very close to Gigrin Farm, where there is a daily spectacle of Red Kites feeding.

Many famous people lived along the length of the River Wye, among them James Watt the engineer; Sir Francis Kilvert the diarist and Canon Charles Gorton, a close friend of Sir Edward Elgar and one of the 'Enigma Variation' dedicatees. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle got his inspiration for 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' from the Baskerville Hall Hotel, where he stayed.

Beautiful churches adorn the villages along the way, some being built or enhanced by luminaries such as Pugin or Sir George Gilbert Scott.



Llangurig Church.

There are many historic and interesting bridges crossing the Wye, including a Toll Bridge which is still in use, near the little town of Hay-on-Wye, famous for its secondhand bookshops and the annual Hay-on-Wye Music Festival.

Bridge at Bredwardine



and

Victoria Footbridge



Some inns along this stretch of the River also lay claim to fame. The Erwood Inn was the inn where Punch Magazine was first thought out. The Rhydspence is a 14th Century Country Inn situated on the Welsh border of the Wye Valley, and is a former drovers inn that enjoys magnificent views of the Welsh hills and picturesque Herefordshire countryside.

The Rhydspence Inn, near Hay-on-Wye.



Brian concluded his 'travels' on the River Wye in Hereford which has many historic and fine buildings, including the Cathedral, the home of the Mappa Mundi and the Chained Library, The Old House and the Great Wye Bridge.



The Old House Hereford.

Brian illustrated his talk with his own excellent photographs and many local stories as well as folklore tales and anecdotes. We look forward to hearing the concluding part of this presentation next year.

Heidy Hague.