

CAERWENT HISTORIC TRUST

History does not stay the same!

It's true that we can't alter what has happened in the past, but our knowledge of it can change a great deal. This applies to Caerwent in that 100 years ago the Roman Town was thoroughly excavated, but views about Caerwent and its relationship with the surrounding area have had to be considerably revised. Just over 50 years ago the known history was collected by our predecessor, the Caerwent Local History Group, and presented in their "Caerwent Scrapbook". It's now quite out of date – no, I mean, it's now history.

A big disappointment over the last year has been the demise of the Heritage Visitor Centre proposal which was based on the old school. The Community Council did everything possible to advance the proposal but in the present climate of public expenditure the time was not right. Perhaps it never will be right, and stuff from Caerwent will fester in obscurity for decades to come. But it makes more important the work of our Historic Trust, to keep abreast of new discoveries and to stimulate advances in understanding with some prods of our own.

Secret Army – The story of the British Resistance Organisation in Gwent

In 1940 Winston Churchill stated that:-

"The regular defences require supplementing with guerrilla type troops, who will allow themselves to be overrun and who thereafter will be responsible for hitting the enemy in the comparatively soft spots behind zones of concentrated attack"

In all, there were 8 Auxiliary Units or patrols as they were known, in old Monmouthshire. Each had biblical names such as Jonah (Llanwern), Moses (Bassaleg), Esau (Usk), Abraham (Chepstow), Lucifer (Raglan), Jephtha (Abergavenny) and Isaac. Each patrol consisted of between 6 and 7 specially selected local men, stationed in secret Operations Bases (OB's) across costal areas of Monmouthshire.

Deep in Wentwood Forest at Coed Y Caerau, above Langstone lie the remains of Jonah Patrol's OB. It lies off a wooded path, hidden underground and cleverly disguised by trees and vegetation. From the brow of the hill, eleven counties and the Bristol Channel can be clearly seen. This is no doubt why this location was ideal.

The OB was sunken underground to about 4 metres and measured approx 4 by 3 metres. Ingenious ventilation pipes were installed and a hollow tree trunk utilised as a chimney. A brick built entrance shaft was constructed with an iron ladder for easy access. This shaft was covered by a wooden soil filled trough hinged in the centre, and planted with vegetation. The main chamber was fitted out with bunks for 6 men, a table, cooking stove, kerosene lights and a chemical toilet. Stoves were provided to try and resolve the condensation problem, but apparently they never worked. The 60 foot escape tunnel came out in a nearby disused quarry. There were food rations for 7 men for 1 month. A gallon of rum was also issued for use only in dire emergency!

Among the members of Jonah Patrol was Les Bulley, a Founding Patron of our Trust in the year 2000. In 1955 Les was Chairman of the Caerwent Local History Group and is shown here presenting a copy of the Scrapbook to the Chief Librarian of Newport. The setting is The Institute, Caerwent, demolished in 1995. The above information is provided by his granddaughter Sallie Mogford. More to follow!

