

## SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Second meeting of the 2014-14 season

Simon Hancock: Haverfordwest down the Ages

Our guest speaker sought to develop his theme of Haverfordwest down the Ages by describing the history of the county town through a short study of some thirty artefacts shown in a series of slides.

Founded around 1110 by Norman and Flemish migrants, though no doubt with its position as a ford of the Cleddau it was likely to be on the site of earlier settlements, the town can cite some 900 years of recorded history and as a port of significance it traded widely. The town seal was granted in c.1290 and refers to governance by the council of the lordship of Haverford; it was not until 1394 that the name Haverfordwest was first recorded.

The influential Augustinian Priory in the town was lost during the dissolution of the monasteries after 1536 but some artefacts have survived, in particular a wooden mask of the green man to be seen in the parish church of St. Mary.

The town's first charter dates from 1207 and confers the important, and lucrative, right to hold a market. Later confirmatory charters of 1479 and 1532 established the form of governance – mayor, sheriff and councilmen.

A letter of 1648 from Oliver Cromwell shed light on the civil war in Pembrokeshire; in taking some time off from the siege of Pembroke he instructs the corporation to slight its castle. Three years before a Parliamentary force has besieged the castle and its Royalist defenders. Worse was to follow for in 1652 plague visited the town.

Views of the stocks and gaol in the castle were followed by posters and newspaper extracts showing what a great sporting and social event horseracing at Portersfield had become in the eighteenth century.

The first full image of the town was revealed in Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's print of 1748; it presented an important and largely self-contained urban centre in west Wales.

A long case clock of 1844 reflected the range and diversity of businesses in Haverfordwest at that time – by the mid nineteenth century over 400 different businesses were trading there; many of them would have been supported by local banks such as the Haverfordwest Bank, founded in 1783, and the Union Bank of Haverfordwest.

The arrival of the railway in 1853, as elsewhere, would change the dynamics of the local economy. Where self-sufficiency had been the norm now manufactured goods from larger urban centres would appear but in turn giving rise to the modern shop and a greater element of choice and competition. Nevertheless, as images of a milk churn, the iron foundry and a violin showed, many local industries survived.

Slides of the mayor's chain and civic regalia reflected corporate pride; William Owen, architect and builder, held office on four occasions and local man, Admiral Stokes, had been the surveyor on board Darwin's Beagle.

Over the centuries the town had played host to many notable figures: Lord Nelson had received the freedom of the town in 1802, Mrs. Pankhurst lectured on votes for women in 1908 and David Lloyd George championed Haverfordwest's Liberal credentials in 1923.

The meeting closed with two images of the world wars; a china Zeppelin bearing the name and crest of the town and the surviving tail fin of an incendiary bomb dropped on Haverfordwest in 1940.

The speaker was warmly thanked on behalf of the Society by Mrs. Rosemary Hayes.

The next meeting in the Society's programme of lectures will be held in the Regency Hall on 19 November at 7.30 when Mr. David Dando will describe 'The Nina Hamnett Story.'