



# Celebrating the Chartists

## NEWSLETTER

### Council Pledges to Safeguard City's Chartist Heritage

At its November meeting, Newport City Council adopted "the Chartist heritage in its entirety" and pledged to "safeguard this at all times in the future"

Our voluntary Chartist Anniversary Committee has responded positively to this promise. Last week, it set up an Education Sub-Committee to push ahead with ambitious plans for 'Chartism and Democracy' curriculum projects in local schools. Established in 2007, the Committee coordinates the annual 'Chartist Celebrations', including the recent Newport Chartist Convention attended by Michael Sheen.

Elin Jones, who chaired the group which prepared the recent report on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and History for the Education Minister, has joined our committee. Elin hopes that as we approach the 175th Anniversary next year "every school in Newport and the neighbouring valleys will want to investigate the history of the south Wales Rising as part of their work in history". For Pat Drewett, the Committee's Chair, and champion of the Children's Chartist March down Stow Hill, "investing in our young people today is the best safeguard for our future heritage".

The Chartist Anniversary Committee has held discussions with the Newport Civic Society and other groups about Chartist heritage developments in Newport. Advice from professional bodies such as the Wales Arts Council and the Civic Trust for Wales is being sought. The city abounds with ideas and we plead that sufficient time and genuine consideration is given to their evaluation. We hope that the Council will give

encouragement and assistance to the proposed Chartist Commission. The Commission needs to encompass comprehensively 'the spirit of Chartism' and engage imaginatively with the people of Newport and the City's visitors in celebrating and remembering not only the Chartists, but also their legacy. It is vital that the City respects and honours the efforts and sacrifices made by the Chartists, but we must also take the story of the struggle for democracy beyond the Chartist era. In Michael Sheen's words, we need to **"focus on how we can celebrate the past, connect it to the present and look hopefully toward the future"**.

This year's Chartist Convention honoured the memory of Margaret Thomas of Llanwern House – a campaigner for women's rights – whose story was so ably told by Professor Angela John. We discovered an important local female hero to place alongside John Frost. During question time, Jane Bryant asked who were the Newport Suffragettes, who stood beside Margaret Thomas? We will pursue this strand at the 175th Anniversary and have invited Dr. Ryland Wallace to reveal his researches concerning the local Suffragettes and Suffragists. In the 1920s, Margaret Thomas (by then Viscountess Rhondda) refocused her campaigning on the social rights of women and their children. Her concerns reflected an important extension of the meaning of democracy, a process hastened by the economic crisis of the 1930s and personified locally in the personality of Aneurin Bevan. It is important that we heed his advocacy of a welfare state and creation in 1948 of the National Health Service. How far does genuine and meaningful political democracy depend upon social inclusion, equal access to services and resources and a just distribution of income?

The City Council is clearly seeking to turn over a new leaf. **Let the dialogue commence.**

## Council Apologises

Regarding the demolition of the Chartist mural, the City Council (26th Nov) passed the following resolution ....

*"The Council adopts the Chartist heritage in its entirety and pledges that it will safeguard this at all times in the future and whilst recognising that the demolition of the Chartist Mural was ordered by the previous council administration, expresses the sincere regret to the residents of Newport regarding the handling of its removal and appreciates that this should have been dealt with more sensitively, and is sorry for any hurt this may have caused.*

Welcomes the establishment of a chartist memorial commission which following consultation with residents and interested parties will consider proposals for an appropriate suitable future memorial."

## Welsh Heritage Schools' Initiative

This annual competition for schools' work on local and Welsh history and heritage provides an opportunity for schools to showcase their achievements, and win prizes ranging from £1,500 to £100. It is open to all schools in Wales, and there are great opportunities here for Chartist based Projects!

**Here is the invitation on the Initiative's website, [www.whsi.org.uk](http://www.whsi.org.uk).**

"Dear Headteacher,  
We would like to invite your school to participate in the initiative for 2014 (Any work undertaken from April 2013-April 2014) by entering a heritage project for the competition in Wales.

There is a very wide and varied scope for schools in choosing what topic they would like to focus on. However, we would welcome more projects relating to the heritage in science, technology, industry, finance, commerce, sport and the role of women in history.

We look forward to receiving your entry and we hope to see your school represented at the Awards ceremony at the Caerleon Campus, University of South Wales on 7th July 2014  
Carolyn Hitt, Chair, WHSI"

Why not enter this year for a practice run to explore the potential of participation?  
OUTLINE PROPOSALS MUST BE IN BY JANUARY 31st 2014  
Pupils' work is judged later during the first three weeks of the Summer term.

If your school is not ready yet, concentrate on 2013-2014. FOR FURTHER DETAILS and ADVICE contact Elin Jones  
[elinphillips3@btinternet.com](mailto:elinphillips3@btinternet.com) or go to [www.whsi.org.uk](http://www.whsi.org.uk).

## Events in 2014 – The 175th Anniversary

### Art Exhibition with 'Chartism and Democracy'

Looking for a venue and dates TBA  
Send your ideas to Kim Colebrook  
[kim@candoteam.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:kim@candoteam.wanadoo.co.uk)

### 21 March: Chartist Drama

Performance by Glan Usk School, Newport at the Riverside Theatre Newport

### 1 November: Annual Chartist Convention at Newport

**3 November: Chartist 'Night Out'**  
performance at the 'Stute', Stow Hill

**4 November: Childrens Chartist March**  
from Stow Hill to Westgate Square

**MORE TO FOLLOW! – see next newsletter**



LONDON DAY COACH.

**THE RETALIATOR,**

*An Elegant and Expeditious Day Coach,*

## One Hundred And Seventy Five Years Ago–1838 ©Les James 2013

During 1838, Britain was entering the depths of the most serious of a series of trade cycles that had occurred since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Demand for goods was declining rapidly and many shopkeepers, tradesmen and merchants faced ruin. This economic crisis coincided with a period of worsening weather conditions and poor harvests in many parts of western Europe, notably Wales.

The fast growing, increasingly urbanised, population of Britain was still overwhelmingly dependent on its agrarian economy in terms of employment and produce. Wages of agricultural workers and traditional craft workers were falling as farmers struggled to pay rent. The emerging industrial and mining communities of the North of England, Midlands, south Wales and the Scottish lowlands experienced rising prices and shortages of food.

As trade and sales spiralled downwards, economic confidence collapsed and no sector of the economy was free from depression, including the burgeoning coal, metallurgical and textile industries. Construction projects, such as the Newport Town Dock (started 1835), were placed on hold as investors pulled out. Building craftsmen and labourers became idle.

The greatest suffering was amongst handicraft workers, whose numbers had expanded to meet the needs of growing industrialisation, but now in a time of recession, many found themselves in direct competition with new technology. The 'outdated' gave way and workers were left redundant and stranded. Throughout the country, 300,000 hand-loom workers and their families were struggling for existence, as were the numerous 'hammerstriking' nail makers in industrial areas such as the 'Black Country'.

Declining sales meant hardship in the Monmouthshire coalfield, where most workers

worked in 'contract gangs' organised by the 'butties' to meet tonnage prices for 'sale coal', iron pigs and iron bars determined by a cartel of Bristol-Newport merchants. By mid-winter 1838, underemployed colliers and ironstone miners were getting desperate.

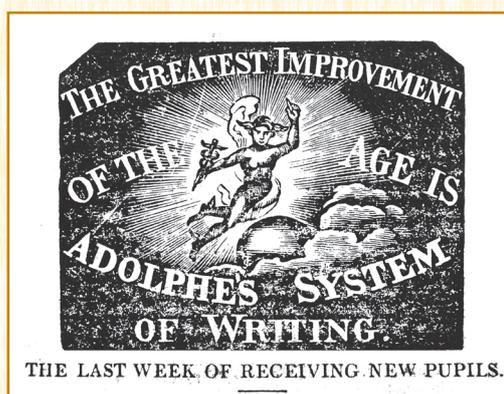
This crisis peaked in 1839 and lasted into the next decade, which was known ever after as the 'Hungry 40s'.

**8 May 1838** The Peoples' Charter with its 6 Points for political reform was published by William Lovett on behalf of the London Working Men's Association. The six points were not new – they had been advocated as a programme by the radical leader, Major John Cartwright in 1777.

**21 May** 150,000 people attended a meeting at Glasgow Green in support of the 6 Points and demanded that rather than an accumulation of local petitions, there should be a National Petition for the People's Charter.

**16 June** The Northern Star newspaper, owned by Feargus O'Connor and printed at Leeds, published the full text of the People's Charter with a preamble written by Robert Douglas, a spokesman for the Birmingham Political Union and editor of the *Birmingham Journal*. This became the National Petition. Read out loud at meetings, its language electrified audiences.

**July** A branch of the Working Men's Association was established at Newport by William Edwards, a local baker. Branches already existed at Carmarthen (Autumn 1836), Newtown (Nov 1837) and Pontypool (Jan 1838)



**October** John Frost, in his position as a local magistrate, called a meeting at the Parrot Inn, Newport to promote the Peoples Charter and gain support for the National Petition

**Xmas Day** Morgan Williams, who had established a WMA branch at Merthyr in October, organised the first great meeting of the south Wales coalfield on the commons at Penrheolgerrig to the west of Merthyr. It was attended by Hugh Williams of Carmarthen and attracted up to 10,000 supporters of the Charter, mostly from Glamorgan. The National Petition was circulated in both Welsh and English.

## The National Petition 1838

### PREAMBLE

We, your petitioners, dwell in a land whose merchants are noted for enterprise, whose manufacturers are very skilful, and whose workmen are proverbial for their industry.

The land itself is goodly, the soil rich, and the temperature wholesome; it is abundantly furnished with the materials of commerce and trade; it has numerous and convenient harbours; in facility of internal communication it exceeds all others.

Yet, with all these elements of national prosperity, and with every disposition and capacity to take advantage of them, we find ourselves overwhelmed with public and private suffering.

We are bowed down under a load of taxes; which notwithstanding, fall greatly short of the wants of our rulers; our traders are trembling on the verge of bankruptcy; our workmen are starving; capital brings no profit, labour no remuneration; the home of the artificer is desolate, and the warehouse of the pawnbroker is full; the workhouse is crowded, and the manufactory is deserted.

The energies of a mighty kingdom have been wasted in building up the power of selfish and ignorant men, and its resources squandered for their aggrandisement.

Required, as we are universally to support and

obey the laws, nature and reason entitle us to demand that in the making of the laws, the universal voice shall be implicitly listened to. We perform the duties of freemen; we must have the privileges of freemen. Therefore, we demand universal suffrage. The suffrage, to be exempt from the corruption of the wealthy and the violence of the powerful, must be secret.

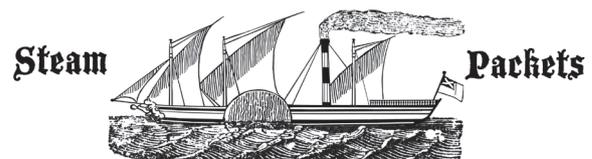
## Michael Sheen at the Newport Chartist Convention (2 November 2013)

asked us:-

*"to listen to the voices of those on the very edges of our community and help them with their struggles, those at most risk of being lost and forgotten about, of dropping out of sight, of no longer being represented.*

*.....if Chartism is indeed 'a knife and fork, a bread and cheese question', as it was once described, then the shocking fact that in 2011 one in six children in Neath/Port Talbot, that's 16 percent, were suffering from severe poverty, must be galvanizing. If 4000 children in that one area (Sheen's home town) alone are going to sleep at night hungry and cold, something is terribly wrong.....If a depiction of something is lost, let it allow us to focus on renewing the vision it was inspired by, and as well as committing to creating a new symbol, a new remembrance, let us commit to acting upon what that original vision reveals about who we are today and what it is we need to address.....The ancient Greeks said, 'Live as though all your ancestors were living again through you.' Let us remember the Chartists, let us celebrate what they struggled for, what they died for and what they achieved, but most importantly, let us live as though they are all living again, through us."*

*Bristol, Chepstow, Newport, Ilfracombe and Tenby*



WILL SAIL NEXT WEEK

## This XMAS 2013

Over 60,000 people in Britain, three-times more than last year, will visit a foodbank to collect food, because they can't afford to feed themselves or their families.

The Cardiff Foodbank has fed 7254 people over the last 12 months; all of these are living in households - this figure does not include the feeding of those living in hostels or the 'street homeless'. In Britain today, more than half the adults in poverty are working. **CAN YOU HELP?** Give time as a volunteer - spare food - donate money.

Contact:

**Newport Foodbank** c/o Tony Graham  
[info@newport.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@newport.foodbank.org.uk)

**Ebbw Vale Foodbank** c/o Amanda Davies  
[info@festivalchurch.co.uk](mailto:info@festivalchurch.co.uk)

**Cardiff Foodbank** c/o Ian  
[projectmanager@cardifffoodbank.org.uk](mailto:projectmanager@cardifffoodbank.org.uk)

## Women and Chartism

To mark 'Parliament Week 2013', which this year was focussed on Women in Democracy, two events were organised by Newport Museum & Art Gallery on the 20th and 21st November. Steffan Ellis presented a lunch time talk at the Museum concerning 'Women Chartists and the Newport Rising' and an evening discussion session on Chartism in his 'Local History Down Your Local' series at the Lyceum Tavern on Malpas Road. He showed his pub audience a helmet from the Museum's collection, thought to have been worn during the Rising.

Councillor Debbie Wilcox, Cabinet member for leisure and culture at Newport C.C. commented that *"Newport played an important part in the struggle for democracy so I am especially pleased that the Museum and Art Gallery is spotlighting the forgotten role of women in*

*Chartism. I encourage anyone interested in the Chartists to pop in and view the extremely informative exhibition in the Museum".*

At the museum, Steffan talked about the important contribution women made to the Chartist movement, yet how few are named in the secondary texts written by historians. There is clearly scope for further research to be undertaken.

If you are interested in finding out more about the individual women and men involved in the 1839 Rising, why not volunteer for the '**Trials to Trails**' Project and help transcribe some of the recently digitised depositions collected by the magistrates at Newport in preparation for the Monmouth Treason Trials in January 1840. Your findings will be tagged to digitised versions of the tithe maps produced in the early 1840s.

For more details of this Heritage Lottery funded project contact Colin Gibson (Gwent Archives) [colin.gibson@gwentarchives.gov.uk](mailto:colin.gibson@gwentarchives.gov.uk)

EDITOR: Les James [les.james22@gmail.com](mailto:les.james22@gmail.com)

If you missed Newsletter no 1 (Nov 2013) – DON'T PANIC! It can be sent FREE on request by email. Contact [les.james22@gmail.com](mailto:les.james22@gmail.com)

Please circulate the Newsletter to family and friends – send to Les James email addresses of persons whom you know will be delighted to receive FREE copies by email.

SEND your requests and ideas for content in future NEWSLETTERS

Your comments and views are welcome.

If you are organising a Chartist Event in 2014 – please let us advertise it.

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