

- Press Release -

Exhibition on disaster goes out with a bang

10th January: For immediate release

Since October the Dean Heritage Centre has been hosting the exhibition *The Night the River Burned: The Severn Railway Bridge Disaster*. The exhibition has been extremely well received by visitors from both the Forest of Dean and further afield, including tourists from Canada. The exhibition comes to a close on Sunday 16th January to make way for a new exhibition called *Cameras in the Dean* which will open on Saturday 29th January.

To celebrate the end of the popular exhibition, local author Chris Witts will be giving a talk on his book *Severn Bridge Disaster* at 2pm on Sunday 16th January. The book has been on sale in the DHC shop since the summer and has become its best seller. Shop Manager, Kathryn Ashcroft, said: 'I've been absolutely taken aback. I knew it would be a popular title given the 50 year anniversary of the night the fateful accident occurred but I've struggled to keep it in stock they've been selling so fast!'

Chris Witts was a teenager who had just started working on tanker barges in 1960 and the significance of the accident only sank in later. He explained: "As a lad of 16 years old and a deckhand on one of the tanker barges out in the river on that fateful night of 25th October 1960, I was one of the last men to speak to fellow deckhand, 17 year old Malcolm Hart before he was killed in the explosion." The event made a huge impact on Chris and for the fiftieth anniversary he vowed to write an account of what is now known as the Severn Bridge Disaster.

Chris Witts said his talk will "concentrate on what it was like out in the river off Sharpness that night. Then what it was like to have as my skipper following the accident, one of the survivors, Capt. George Thompson of the ARKENDALE H. He was a hard man yet treated me like a son and changed me from a boy into a man."

Tickets are included in museum admission but numbers are strictly limited. Please call 01594 822170 to reserve them in order to avoid disappointment.

For more information or if you would like a photograph to illustrate the article please contact Kathryn Ashcroft on 01594 822170 or email: kathryn@deanheritagecentre.com

Visit: deanheritagecentre.com

Notes to editors

- The Dean Heritage Centre is dedicated to protecting, preserving and promoting the unique history and heritage of the Forest of Dean.
- The Centre is based in five acres of scenic woodland and is home to the 'Museum of the Forest'. It tells the story of the Forest of Dean and its' people spanning 10,000 years of history, from the ice age to present day.
- It is open 363 days a year and offers a full diary of events, activities and exhibitions.
- The Museum is a centre of education and offers tailored educational workshops and activities to tie in with the school curriculum. For more information please call 01594 822170.
- The Centre has been awarded the accreditation of Quality Assured Visitor Attraction.
- The Dean Heritage Museum Trust (DHMT) is a company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity.
- In March 2007 the Centre was awarded the accreditation of Quality Assured Visitor Attraction