



THE BRIDGTONIAN



AUTUMN 2016

Editorial

This is the "Autumn" edition of your magazine. It is rather late this year. It is normally available before our Open Day in October. Unfortunately, your editor was unable to compile it as usual due to the sad demise of his computer. Now the "piggy bank" has been raided and I have new equipment on which to prepare this magazine and other documents.

Our Open Day was a little bit of a disappointment to us this year as attendance was much lower than usual. There were several reasons for this, mainly to do with communication and weather. Despite all our usual efforts (and more) local newspapers did not publish any articles about the day or the new book until two weeks after it had taken place. Your magazine did not appear to provide a reminder. Although many posters were prepared, they did not seem to find their way to prominent places for display. Also, on the morning itself there was torrential rain for several hours. Altogether the fates seemed to be against us. Nevertheless many people still did turn up and they made many favourable comments about the new layout of the room and about the displays to look at.

The History Society Team who organise events for you have discussed all these things fully but would like to hear from YOU. What do think of our Open Days? What else could we do to make them more appealing? Would you like us to arrange something different for a change? If you don't tell us how will we know what you would like.

Our other problem is that our team is now reduced in size, mainly through health-related issues for its members. We would desperately like some more help from interested people. Why not join us? Your only commitment would be to come to one meeting a month to make your contribution to our plans and ideas. Anything else you do will be completely voluntary on your part.

Our next magazine will not now appear until January 2017. Therefore I would like to wish you a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year for 2017.

David Williams
12 November 2016

KNITTING AND SCARECROW FESTIVAL



In October our society joined in this festival run by Bridgtown School. There were some lovely scarecrows around in the village (see page 7) and photos of many of these appeared in the local press. Less publicity was given to the knitting side of the event so we are publishing the above photograph for those who did not see it. It shows our noticeboard at the North Street / Union Street junction. It is decorated with knitted bunting and features a large knitted version of the society's logo, knitted for us by our team secretary, Sheila Jackson.

KNITTING AND SCARECROW FESTIVAL



Previously, there was a photograph of some of the knitting at this festival during October this year. There were also many wonderful scarecrows on display. This one was on display outside the newsagent's shop run by David Preece. David is a great supporter of our History Society, always selling our books and keeping us informed about the views of his customers.

LIFE IN 1930s BRIDGTOWN

*In our last edition we published the fifth extract from the memories of **Norman Seedhouse**, son of Howard Seedhouse. Norman now lives in Norway but has sent us memories from his childhood. Here is the sixth extract from those memories.*

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Money

There was not much money around. Father's weekly wage was about £3 a week in pore-war days. Every Friday he handed over his wages intact to mother who was responsible for all the household expenses. I believe she opened the little brown envelope and gave him a half-crown (2 shillings and sixpence) as his personal spending money – his pocket money! He had a savings box and into this he always put his brass threepenny pieces, though what he eventually did with them I do not know. Every week mother put aside money for the Prudential insurance man, who used to call at the door to collect his 3d or 6d. I found out later that this was to cover funeral expenses and provide a decent burial should the worst happen.

I had my own savings box. It was a cast iron black and red money box which depicted the head and shoulders of a black man with a broad smile and an outstretched hand. I would put a coin in his hand and press a lever at the back so that his arm raised depositing the coin into his mouth. With this encouragement, I had quite a collection of pennies, halfpennies and farthings in my box, together with a few silver coins too. At that time these were made of real silver and not of nickel.

Sundays

Sundays were special. In those days it was a countrywide non-working day with all the shops closed. We wore our best set of clothes to attend Sunday School or Church. For father it was his one free day from work though a large part of this free time was spent at Bethel Church. The Methodist chapel, as it was more humbly called by most people, was situated near to the bottom of Union Street. It was a square redbrick building dominated inside by a large pipe organ in the

centre of the front wall. The pulpit stood in the corner on one side and the choir benches were placed on the other. The congregation sat in pews of solid sturdy benches, which I found surprisingly comfortable to sit on, even when the sermon was long. The church building is still there although the interior has changed.

When I first knew the church, it was heated by coke boilers in the cellar under the building. It was part of the caretaker's job to light and stoke the boilers. These passed the heated water, by convection not by pump, into the heavy cast iron pipes and radiators into both church and schoolroom. This system was replaced by a more modern one after the war

The organ too required some muscle power as the wind for the pipes came from large bellows which had to be pumped by hand. The yard-long wooden handle stuck out from the back of the organ through the wall into the vestry where someone had to be detailed to heave-ho with both arms. After the war an electric pump was installed instead.

Sunday was also special at home. This was the day when visitors might come for tea or we go to them. At lunchtime, as I have already said, father put on his white apron, sharpened the carving knife on his steel with a rasping noise, and sliced the Sunday roast. What we did not eat then was used in different ways during the following week. When minced meat was required I had the privilege of turning the handle of the mincer, which was clamped to the side of the dining room table. When Sunday teatime came mother laid the table with better china, serving white and brown Hovis bread. There was also Sinutro, a kind of malt loaf, various homemade jams, small tarts or cakes, together with the larger cake she had baked on Friday. If we had visitors we ate in the front room and the tea was supplemented with cold meat, canned fruit and jelly or trifle. Our tea drink was always Barrington's Liverpool Tea bought from Summers' grocery shop.

In our next edition Norman will tell us about his early schooldays. We look forward to that. Ed.

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

- Calories were mentioned but they had nothing at all to do with food.
- The only criteria concerning the food that we ate were ... did we like it and could we afford it.
- People who didn't peel potatoes were regarded as lazy so and so's.

HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

The society team is very concerned about the fall in membership of the society. If we are to continue to be a thriving organisation we need the support of everyone. If you know anyone who has not renewed their membership and has stopped attending our meetings please tell them that they are important to us and we would love to see them again.

We are all still working hard to record the history and development of the village we all claim as our spiritual home.

Currently there are two aspects to this side of our activities. Firstly we are pressing ahead with our plans to write a proper history of Bridgtown so that future residents will know and understand our proud heritage. We hope that this will be published early in 2018. All of “the team” are working on this long-term project. The book, when it is written will catalogue the growth and development of our village and include many stories from days gone by. We are hoping to produce a proper hard-back book.

The other aspect of our plans concerns the making of a heritage trail around our district so that locals and visitors alike are reminded of our heritage. We shall be continuing our practice of erecting information boards around the area so that new residents and visitors are informed about Bridgtown’s proud history.

Our next sign is now awaiting erection and will be placed in Walsall Road on the edge of the new housing development on the site of the Cornelius Whitehouse Hedgehog factory.

Following that we hope to erect another sign near the Watling Street end of North Street. This will commemorate the former factories and shops in that area. A further two signs are planned down Walkmill Lane. After that we are looking at further signs for the Walsall Road end of North Street and on the Watling Street by B&Q. See below for two of our planned sites.

NEW HERITAGE TRAIL NOTICEBOARD SITES



We are hoping to be able to erect a new board close to this site on Walk Mill Lane.



We are hoping to see a new sign at this site very soon.

THE BEGINNING OF METHODIST CHAPELS IN BRIDGTOWN

In the early days of Bridgtown a group of Methodists used to meet in a small building in Bridge Street. In those days it was common to find various forms of Methodism, each with their own variations of services and practices. Sure enough the group began to show their slightly different allegiances and decided that they must split into three groups. Now let the local press take up the story of one of those groups:

From the Cannock Advertiser, 22nd May 1897

After the Bridge Street Methodists split into the three groups they all raised money to build their chapels. In the case of Carmel they built a small chapel to the rear of their plot of land in East Street. This was fine at the start but as the village grew and congregations got bigger there was a need for more space and the congregation decided to build a new chapel at the front end and to the right of the old chapel,

Fund raising went on and, by 1897, there was enough money to start the build. The architects for the chapel were Hickton & Farmer from Walsall and the builder was Mr A Williams from Great Wyrley. The contract was for £720, but with extras for furniture and fittings the sum would rise to £790.

On the day of the stone laying various local and well-known people took part after making £5 donations to the fund. Miss R Beddows, Mrs A Williams, Mr Handel Whitehouse, Mr Henry Whitehouse, Mr George Gallatley and Messrs Hickton & Farmer (Architects £5 each) were each presented with silver trowels engraved for the occasion. A large number of bricks were laid after donations of either one guinea or one pound.

After the event those present adjourned to the New Connection Schoolroom (later Park Street Church) which had been kindly lent for the occasion. It was announced that the sum of £121-0s-2d had been raised on the day which would bring the total raised to date to £321-0s-0d, but they were expecting a large donation which would go well towards the final amount. A name that cropped up as making a donation on the day was Councillor A Stanley. This was Mr Albert Stanley who came from a family of miners in Shropshire but now lived in West

Hill, Hednesford. He was well-known for his work for the Cannock Chase miners as union representative. He later became Liberal MP for North West Staffordshire. It was good to see both branches of the Whitehouse family together on the day, although it has been said that the brothers were at loggerheads over a tool patent.

For many years afterwards the different groups went their separate ways. The ones who worshipped at Carmel were called Primitive Methodists. The Wesleyan Methodists worshipped at Bethel while Park Street was home to the New Connexion Methodists. In 1932 there was an agreement of Union when all Methodist Churches came together again as one group.

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Do you remember Churchbridge when it used to look like this? When that first mini-island appeared could we have imagined that it would be replaced by the “silly isles”?



Audrey Hawkins (Nee Moreton)



Audrey has been a Bridgtown lass all her life. She was born to Bob and Dolly Moreton who lived at 32 Park Street and her mum was part of the Sneyd family. Audrey grew up living there with her older sister Doris, and Grandma Sneyd. She went to St. Paul's School in Bridgtown and became head girl there.

She started work at 14 in Mrs. Brooks shop at Jellyman's and only ever had the one job. When Mrs. Brooks was giving up the shop Audrey took it over and for many years lived on the premises. She married Sid Hawkins who was a miner, and they had fifty plus years together before he died. When she retired they left the shop, which has since been demolished, and went to live in Forrest Avenue.

Audrey and Sid always enjoyed their holidays starting with ones in Blackpool and Weston Super mare, but eventually going on coach tours to Scotland which they both loved. But they always returned to Bridgtown.

She died on 27th August and her funeral took place at Cannock Church on 26th September. She will be sadly missed by all her family and friends.

This edition's front cover features a scene at our open day in October. You can probably recognise everyone in the photograph. Each year we try to do something different at our open day alongside the essential showing of old photographs.



We are looking for new ideas to make the day more interesting. Please tell us what you would like to see at next year's event.