

Chairman's Comments

The very essence of our History Society is that we frequently meet with long-time friends and colleagues; and inevitably reminisce about the realities and myths of the “old days”. What we sometimes overlook, however, is that it is we who created that history of 50, 60 or 70 years ago. We continue that very same process each and every living day.

I believe that it is vital that we individually create activities and facilities to make things happen, thus ensuring that Bridgtown is a positive place for future generations. Long gone now are the majority of churches and chapels, together with their associated societies such as cubs, brownies, scouts, guides and youth clubs. Also long gone are those local pubs and clubs with their fishing and shooting societies and their pigeon clubs. Also long gone are the associated games and sports clubs for dominoes, darts, bowls football, cricket, etc. These associations facilitated opportunities to create specialist skills, aspirations to perform at a higher level and sparked that inner spirit of camaraderie and team building. In the past all these things combined to make Bridgtown a vibrant community.

In a small way, we in Bridgtown & District Local History Society have retrieved a little of Bridgtown's proactive past. In doing this we have also taken on the mantle of re-awakening our somewhat dormant village. As Bridgtonians we believe that our re-emerging village must have a local provision to re-establish local activities. We have already initiated an outline plan but now the real hard work begins; we are striving to enable the provision of a facility that will accommodate all those activities needed to bring back satisfaction and pride to our growing village.

*Tony Pearson
1st June 2013*

Hardwick's Grocery Store

In our last edition Jeanette Cartwright talked to Kath Collins (nee Preece) of Cheslyn Hay about when she worked in Hardwick's Grocery Store in North Street. Since then this photograph has come to light. In it we see Kath Collins on the left and Hazel Robson (Davies) on the right.



In this edition we look back to the same shop in earlier times. Jean Fellows was born Jean Smith. Nearly three years ago she wrote an article for us about her New Zealand connections. This time her recollections are based firmly in North Street.

LIFE AT THE SHOP

By the Grocer's Daughter

1933 was an important year in my life. It was the year I started my education at St. Paul's School in Church Street and it was the year my father, Archie Smith, became a grocer. For many years he had worked as a hardener with Cornelius Whitehouse & Sons but, with the worldwide recession after the financial crisis of 1928, trade in edge tools was much reduced. My father became redundant and decided that he would go into the grocery business. As a result of this I spent the next 12 years at 25 North Street, living behind the grocer's shop. Initially the shop seemed a frightening place. It had sides of bacon, covered in muslin, hanging in the window and a lethal-looking bacon slicer on the counter. There were great rounds of cheese which had to be cut with a sharp wire cutter and large blocks of butter waiting to be cut to the required size. There was so much there that I **must not touch** that it seemed quite scary!

The other side of the shop was very different. Here were bags of sugar all standing neatly in their blue paper covers on the shelves. Sugar came in one hundredweight sacks and had to be weighed and packed into blue bags. Biscuits came in large tins and were weighed according to the customers' requests.

Father had a bicycle with a large basket at the front and, using this, he would deliver the groceries, all neatly packed in brown paper parcels to houses in the village and further afield. This was typical of all the local provisions shops, butchers, bakers, greengrocers, etc. Even milk was delivered to your house by the milkman with his horse and cart, the milk being ladled from the churn straight into your jug. These days many supermarkets are offering a delivery service as if it was something new. Little do they know!

At 25 North Street we were well placed for our own shopping. Our neighbour at no. 23 was Richards' Bakery, selling bread, cakes, etc. all made in the bake-house at the back. I was able to pop out of our back gate with a plate and some pennies to buy raspberry buns straight out of the oven – a great treat! At no. 21 was Will Wiggins' greengrocery shop and, round the corner, was Lockley's butcher's shop. I still remember the scratchings that Mrs. Lockley made!

Our neighbour at no. 27 was Mrs. Tom Smith who lived with her son. She sold haberdashery and ladies' underwear. Later Bob Linnell took over the shop and sold electrical goods and radios, etc. At no. 29 was George Cotton's home and butcher's shop. One of my favourite shops was Harry Cliff's sweet shop. I have fond memories of the lovely "yellowy" ice cream they made – it looked

like frozen custard, perhaps it was! The shop window had lines of large jars of sweets at the back and, in front, all sorts of tempting morsels – dolly mixtures, sherbet dips, Pontefract teacakes and Packer’s chocolate drops, etc. It was the chocolate drops I loved most although the flavour I enjoyed was due to the fact that they were stale – they were certainly a funny colour.

This quiet life continued, interspersed with carnivals, Sunday School Anniversaries, days playing by the brook in the fields and enjoying the “Rec” and the “Rezzer”. Then one Sunday morning I came back from church to hear that war had been declared and life was never quite the same again.

Jean’s wartime recollections will follow in our next edition. Ed.

*My wife and I had words,
But I didn't get to use mine*

A man was lost in a hot air balloon over Ireland . He looked down and saw a farmer working in the fields below him, so he shouted down to him:
“Where am I my friend ?”

The Irish farmer looked back up at him and shouted back:
"You can't fool me. You're up there in that there basket!."

One resident poet has put together this ode about the people who run your society!

THE BRIDGTOWN TEAM

Who was it that this group began?
Why, “Nutty” Pearson that’s our man!
Got together a team so bold,
On Bridgtown wished the story told.
Kath Page she is so good and true,
Will see each task completely through.
David Williams is book editor
Burns the midnight oil and more.
Barry Cartwright, stout and sure
Will deal with task and ask for more.
Jeanette she is his wife you know
He was so lucky as a beau.
Sheila Jackson, our secretary,
How come this gem did never marry?
Tony Bullock, camera in hand
Records it all round Bridgtown land.
Peggy Greenway is so dear,
Cross her path? Get a flea in your ear!
Jeannie Dace, a petite lass,
When she was young could run like flash.
Michael Helps, very quiet you know,
Sings like a bird, deep like a crow.
Derrick Middleton, well what can you say?
Most should be left for another day.
Pat Evans, pearly blonde, so bold,
Married fifty years. Can’t be that old!
John Devey takes the church to heart,
His sermons are so very smart.
Bob Leighton, ramrod with his military stance,
At War Memorial won’t let us prance.
Bob Brevitt, quiet, sound and true
Will help in any way, right through.
Tony Bibb, of very large frame,
Is as you know of Wedges Mills fame.
And that just leaves Dave Battersby.
Let’s leave him where he is, shall we?
That is the ditty of the Bridgtown Team.
It’s coffee time, so get up steam!

Old Batt

Time to Groan!

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me.

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.

Why were the Indians here first? They had reservations.

12

Hilton Baugh

Hilton Baugh was one of the founder members of our History Society. Sadly he died in March after a long illness. Derrick Middleton reflects on Hilton's life:



I knew Hilton for more than 50 years, originally as a work colleague but, more importantly, as a friend. I had the honour of presenting my memories of him at his funeral.

He supported Arsenal Football Club. A couple of years ago when I visited him in hospital it was the day after Arsenal had beaten Wolves. I presumed he wouldn't know about the result but, before I could sit down, he was pointing at the newspaper.

Hilton's great strength was his loyalty and not only to Arsenal. He was very loyal in his working life, spending it all in the employment of British Coal, a major part of it at the Computer Centre in Bridgtown. He retired in 1984.

He was also very proud of the school he had attended as a boy. After he retired he attended as many functions as he could at Bridgtown School.

Bethel Church also benefitted from his support and, when it was threatened with closure, he was the first to make a generous donation to their appeal for help.

The Story of the War Memorial

The Bridgtown branch of the British Legion was formed after the 1914-18 war. The members suggested a War Memorial to honour the fallen. Ideas were discussed for an Obelisk, a memorial Club, a playing field with wrought iron gates or a Memorial Hall.

The suggested site for the playing field was between the railway line and Bridge Street, where the Ramada Hotel now stands. This ground had formally been a marl hole until it was filled in with dry ashes from Gilpin's.

The British Legion did not have the necessary funds and so a public meeting was called. At this meeting many people favoured an Obelisk and a committee was duly formed to raise the required funds. The committee was chaired by Councillor W. Whitehouse, supported by A. Gale, B. Davenport, H. Linnell, H. Cliff, W. Collins, G. Cotton, W. Rouse, J. Bradley, E. Brough and C. Taylor. The obelisk was built by Mr. P. Hill, a stonemason from Cannock, with names enscribed of all the forty men who had lost their lives. It was unveiled at a public ceremony in due course. Although our society have photographs of this occasion we do not have the exact date when it occurred. If anyone can supply this to us we would be grateful.

The fund raising continued even after the unveiling ceremony until all costs were met. It was only a short while afterwards that World War II broke out and another group of Bridgtown men and women were called up to defend their country. Unfortunately ten more names were added to the memorial at the end of this conflict.

After World War II the local British Legion branch became much stronger and were able to achieve their wish of opening a War Memorial Club. This was opened in Union Street in May 1952.

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Food in the "Good Old Days" EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

A Big Mac was what we wore when it was raining.

A Pizza Hut was an Italian shed.

A microwave was something out of a science fiction movie.

17

The Old 'Rec

Bridgtown's old Recreation Ground used to be behind the bungalows on Watling Street, the site that became Lucas's factory and is now part of the Lakeside Park housing development. Although many of our members can relate to many happy hours spent there, not many photographs have come to light. Here is one of them:



This photo shows a young Ray Griffiths and was taken in about 1935. Do you have any old photos that include the 'rec? If you have we would love to see them.

“The Bridgtonian”

Our magazine is called “The Bridgtonian” after the school magazine for Bridgtown Boys’ School in the 1930s and 1940s. In previous editions we have reproduced a wide variety of articles from those magazines. This time we return to the edition of Christmas 1935. For the first time we are including the Editorial of the magazine.

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EDITORIAL

Double figures at last! This is The Bridgtonian No. 10. We who help to produce the School Magazine are feeling justly proud of this achievement. This issue brings to a close our first five years of magazine production. If you still have a copy of The Bridgtonian No. 1, take it out and compare it with this number. You will be surprised at the strides we have made.

There are two items of interest in connection with school activities that we should like to record. On Monday 2nd December we held Parents’ Day. There was an exhibition of school work in the hall, and the classrooms were thrown open for the parents to see the boys at work. During the afternoon School Attendance Certificates were presented to the boys who had merited them. It appeared that the visitors enjoyed the afternoon very much.

Then there is the outstanding performance of the School Football XI of which you will read later. The team is to be complimented on its remarkable successes.

To Mr Croft, our headmaster, and to Mr Farmer, a member of our staff, we offer hearty congratulations on the happy events which have recently taken place in their respective homes.

We offer hospitality in the columns of this number to a new contributor. We refer to “Pebble” who is the author of the article on Malta. To him, to “Cruiser” and to all others who have contributed to this magazine we tender our best thanks.

And now we have the jolliest holiday in the year to look forward to. It will soon be here. Have a good time and help others to have a good time. To this end we give you the Season's Greetings.

A Merry Christmas!

Finally we include an extract from the article on Malta referred to in the Editorial above.

REMINISCENSES OF MALTA

by "PEBBLE"

During the Great War I served in the Royal Army Medical Corps and spent most of my time in the East. I was stationed at Malta in the Mediterranean Sea for a considerable period, and these are a few of the impressions of the island that I am about to recall.

I remember vividly how often the sea round the island was perfectly smooth. Sometimes from its exquisite blue surface there emerged a school of porpoises, jumping so to speak out of the water in their peculiar fashion. When I first saw them I thought they were showing off. Another amusing yet interesting sight was the species of fish who, after swimming for a while, would take it into their heads to have a fly. These, of course, were flying fish.

One of the most conspicuous landscapes of Malta from the sea is the spire of an English church. When one has left the homeland this is an encouraging sight as it suggests the possibility of friends and comrades on a foreign soil. But as the vessel nears the harbour this scene is forgotten in the confusion of other sights, the round domes of Maltese churches, other large buildings, and the funnels and aerial masts of ships anchored in the bay. It is a picture which defies description in words. The Maltese are most proud of their large and magnificent harbour. The name of this port is Valetta.

It is a great naval and military base, and a coaling station. It is also a happy hunting ground for the Maltese children who welcome every ship that docks there, and dive into the water for coins that the passengers may be disposed to throw to them.

(The above is just the beginning of a long article. Ed)

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