



Members : Free

1

Non - members : £1.00



The front cover of this edition shows the Methodist chapel which stood at the top of Park Street. The site now holds an apartment block shown below.

A chapel originally occupied the spot from as early as the 1850s and the building we all remember was the third chapel to be built

there, being completed in 1907. The small spire had to be removed for safety reasons about 40 years later.

After 1932 it was called Park Street Methodist Church but to all true Bridgtonians it will always be called the “big chapel” or the “top chapel”.

Chairman’s Comments

As I write it is the middle of February and I am sitting warm and comfortably. I look out of the window at the remnants of a snow flurry and see the interesting variety of birds who are enjoying nuts, seeds and balls of fat that have been liberally provided by you know who.

Our first presentation of 2013, which itself coincided with inclement weather, provided us not only with the clarification of the emergence of Methodism but also an explanation of the situation within our own village. We came to understand why, in the tiny village of Bridgtown, we had three separate chapels which were all, in their own time, very successful. All this in addition to our Church of England Parish Church of St. Paul. We were a funny lot!

Now that Bethel is the only chapel left, as a minor local historian, I wonder why so little was done to retain, or even record, as much history as possible from the Church and Chapel buildings before they were so brutally destroyed. Looking further afield, just think what stories and, no doubt, artefacts floated away with the demolition of The Longhouse on Watling Street. Certainly, at least 300 years of intimate history was gone without the slightest thought! Likewise the three Toll Houses that disappeared from the village roadsides. Is it too late to consider any potential resurrection? Without doubt we were born into an industrial society with a foundry, two edge tool factories and a coalmine.

We now see the emergence of a fine housing site at Churchbridge where William Gilpin plied his trade and, no doubt in due course, the same situation will apply on the old Cornelius Whitehouse site alongside East Street. What about Hawkins Tileries or even “The Monkey Muck”? Is it too late to even

attempt a serious bit of archaeology? Could we even include Middle Hill and the old army site? I for one would be very excited to be part of a team involved in such activities. What about it? Any ideas anyone?

*Tony Pearson
12th February 2013*

From the Local Papers

(Chase Courier in August 1985)

TOOL PLANT SHUTDOWN: 57 JOBS FACE AXE

More than 50 workers at one of Cannock's oldest firms face redundancy because of a manufacturing shutdown. Fifty-seven jobs are to go at William Gilpin Co. Ltd., hand tool and forging manufacturers of Churchbridge. Twenty-two workers have already left and a further 35 will join the dole queue at the end of the month.

The firm, launched in the West Midlands in 1763, is to cease manufacturing operations on the site off the A5. The company has been crippled by a drastic cutback in orders and a general decline in the hand tool industry.

Redundancy talks have already been held with Transport and General Workers' officials representing the employees. Sheffield hand tool manufacturers, Burgon and Ball, have bought plant and machinery from the Cannock site. Only two management staff will be transferred from Cannock to Gilpin's sister company in Halesowen.

Recession

Company secretary, Mr Kenneth Peters, said today "We are ceasing manufacturing operations on the site, and the operation is virtually complete. Announcements have already been made to customers and suppliers. The remaining 35 workers will be made redundant at the end of this month. We have been a victim of declining orders and the general recession hitting the hand tool and forgings industry in recent years." He added "It is very sad as the

company was founded in 1763 and has been operating on that particular site for over 100 years.”

Two shopkeepers in Bridgtown were talking:

“Ow’s business?” says the first.

“Shockin” says the other, “Even them as doh pay ‘ave stopped buyin’!”

Hardwick’s Grocery Store

Jeanette Cartwright recently talked to Kath Collins (nee Preece) of Cheslyn Hay about when she worked in Hardwick’s Grocery Store in North Street.

Kath was born in Cheslyn Hay and married Cyril Collins, a popular and athletic young man from Mosswood Street. I first met Kath when she came to live in Bridgtown at 28 Union Street. Her front room was a wool shop and I went in to buy some knitting wool. She had two children, Malcolm and Susan, who both went to Bridgtown School and were regular attenders at Bethel Sunday School. Kath now lives near Malcolm in Filey while Susan moved to the Coventry area.

Kath started work at Hardwick’s in 1949 when she was 21 years old and continued to work there until 1956. The other assistants then were Mary Millington and Phoebe Gray, both of whom lived in Cannock.

Kath now takes up the story:-

“The shop was a lovely long shop with four windows and two entrance doors. Three of the windows were always filled with tins and packets of groceries but the fourth, nearest to Lloyd’s Greengrocery Shop next door, was the cake window. It had every kind of cake you could mention because Hardwick’s made their own cakes! At the back of the shop there was a bakery and every time I went anywhere near it the smell of the baking was just too good to be true. I would have to go and get a cake! The bakers were Mr Till and Mr Richards. I just loved their Swiss Tarts, so they would put extra raspberry jam in the middle and plenty of icing sugar on the top! In 1950, when I got married, they made my wedding cake. Ken & Joyce Hardwick’s daughter Sandra was one of my bridesmaids. She was about four years old at the time and was the prettiest little girl you ever saw. Hazel Davies came to the shop to

work and, from the moment we met, we became friends and have remained so ever since.”

“One day while I was working, I think it was a Wednesday, Hazel got on her bike and went to fetch the orders in for Ken to deliver at the weekend. She found a wage packet on the floor and realised that it belonged to Mr Elsmore who lived in Broad Street, who had recently been in the shop. He was so relieved and pleased when she went after him with it.”

“The rear of Bill Lockley’s Butcher’s Shop in Church Street almost backed on to the rear of Hardwick’s premises. There was a slaughter house there and I can remember the sheep and lambs when they were brought in for slaughter. You could hear the poor things bleating. One day a few sheep lost their way and came into our shop kitchen where we had a roaring fire. Two of the sheep got too near the fire and their wool started to singe and burn. The sheep suffered and so did we the smell was awful!”

“In the shop we had a special place called ‘*under the counter*’ as, at this time, there was still food rationing. It was where we kept such things as best red salmon and tinned fruit. There was also a counter for ‘*special customers*’.”

“I was living in Cheslyn Hay at this time so I used to stay in the kitchen at lunchtimes. When it was nice weather I used to go to the park in Walkmill Lane to sit and eat my lunch there. At Hardwick’s Friday was ‘pay your bill day’. The women used to come with their lovely clean wrap-over pinafores on after the men had come home from the collieries with their wages.”

“The people on Bridgtown then were the kindest, friendliest people you could ever wish to meet. Oh, happy happy days!”

Food in the “Good Old Days”

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

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> * Curry was an unknown entity.

> * Olive oil was kept in the medicine cabinet

> * Spices came from the Middle East where we believed that they were

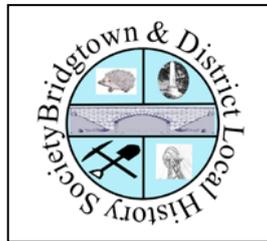
> used for embalming

>

- > * A takeaway was a mathematical problem.
- >
- > * A pizza was something to do with a leaning tower.
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In the First World War Lord Kitchener said that “Your Country Needs You”



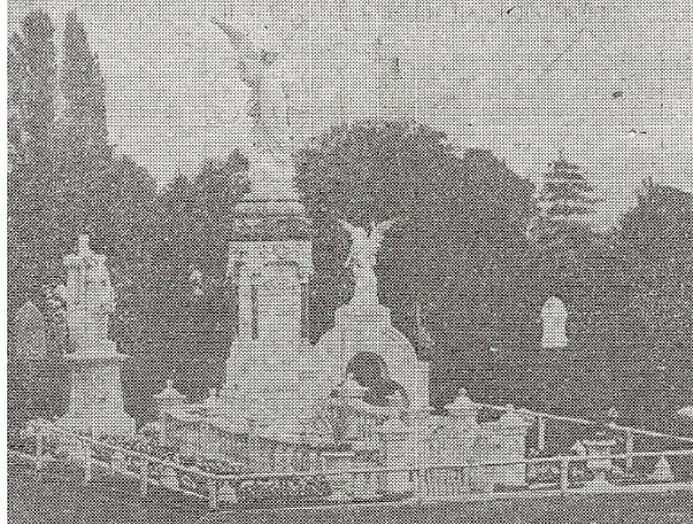
In 2013 Bridgtown & District History Society says “Your Society Needs You”

Our society wants to bring together the best of the past and use it to provide a worthwhile future for Bridgtown citizens of tomorrow. We would like to provide a Heritage Centre in Bridgtown, somewhere where we can keep and display all our information, photographs and artefacts, somewhere that would become a centre for Bridgtown activities. We really believe that this can be achieved by applying for substantial grants. However, in the first place we need to raise money to get our ideas off the ground. Please look out for, and then support, our forthcoming fund-raising activities

From the Local Papers

(Cannock Advertiser: 7th February 1948)

BRIDGTOWN SHOWMAN’S GRAVE



AFTER BRINGING A FAIR TO BRIDGTOWN TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO, MR GEORGE HAMER, OF NEW STREET, RETIRED FROM HIS SHOWMAN'S BUSINESS AND HAD BUILT, FOR HIS WIFE, A MODERN BUNGALOW.

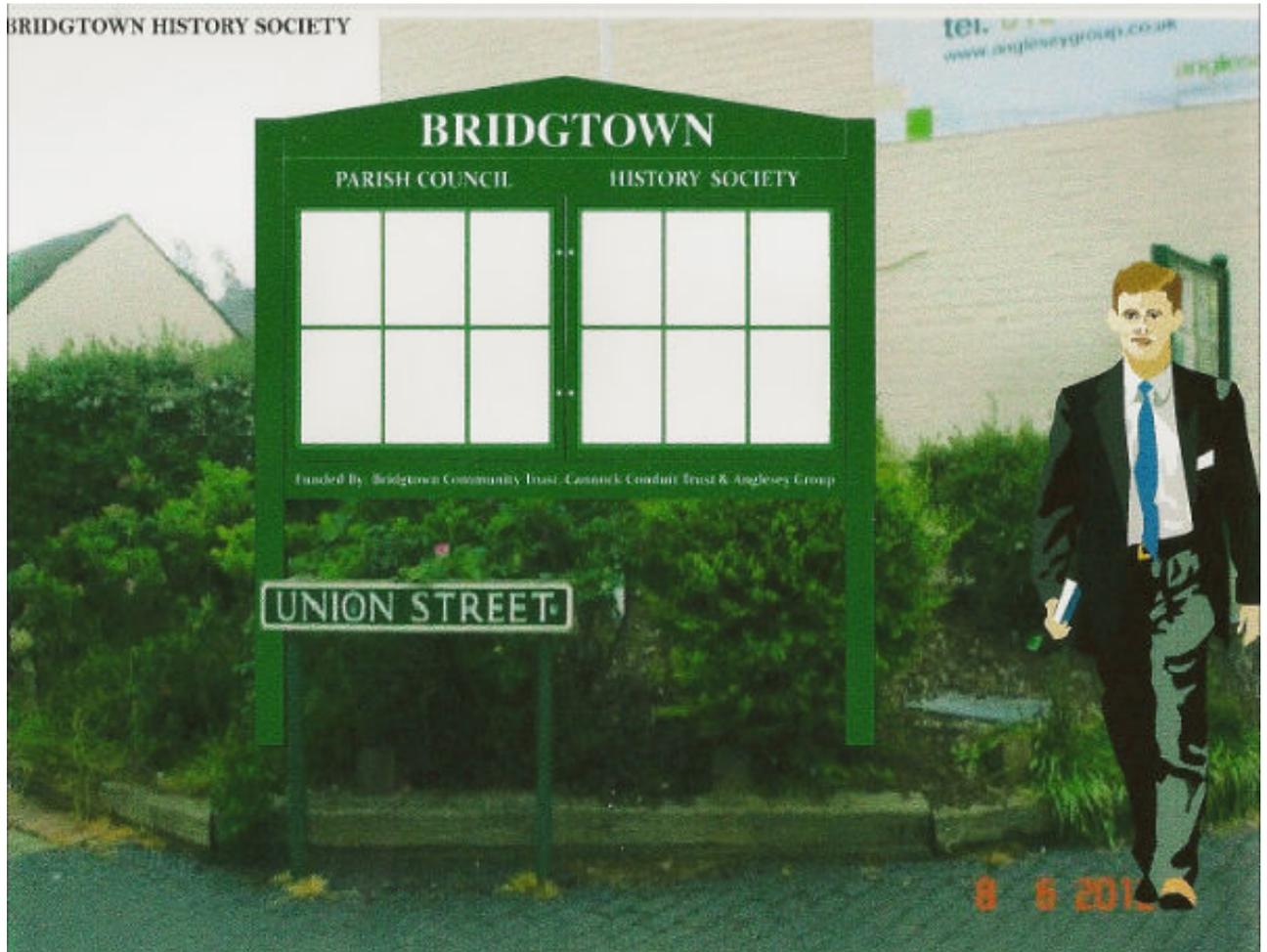
Mr Hamer, however, remained faithful to the caravan in which they had travelled the country for forty-five years. He used the bungalow only for his meals and other daytime purposes and slept in his caravan every night for the twenty-one years.

Mr Hamer died in his caravan bed, to which he had been confined for the last six months. He was ninety-six years of age. A miner in his younger days, Mr Hamer helped sink the Conduit Colliery in Norton Canes. Later, through setting up an extensive showman's business, he became a close friend of the late Mr Pat Collins, one of Britain's principal showmen.

Mr Hamer was born at Leicester and leaves a wife, nine children, forty grandchildren and forty great grandchildren. He was buried at Derby in his first wife's grave.

NEW NOTICEBOARD FOR BRIDGTOWN

In our last edition we featured a proposed new noticeboard for Bridgtown. These plans came to fruition on Tuesday 12th March 2013 when it was erected at the corner of North Street and Union Street. Pictured below is the final drawing of the plans, but by now you should be able to see the real thing!



This noticeboard means that we will be able to advertise all our forthcoming events in a central place in the village. We are very grateful to the three organisations who have funded the purchase and erection of the noticeboard. They are:

Bridgtown Community Trust

Cannock Conduit Trust

Anglesey Group

The preparation and organisation has been a joint effort between Bridgtown Parish Council and our society.

Mr John Boden

“He was a true gentleman.” This was the first description of John Boden quoted by his many friends after hearing the sad news of the death of one of the village’s former leading businessmen.

John, aged 87, and his wife Eileen, were members of the Society virtually since the beginning, but their links with Bridgtown go back much further.

Born in Hednesford he began work in local colliery offices and eventually became secretary to the manager, before later moving to a similar position in Bridgtown with Burgess Brothers Limited. The company made paper cash bags and later paper note bands for banks, private companies, local authorities and public utilities throughout the UK and John began his long career there after marrying Eileen, the daughter of founder Charles Burgess.

But if he ever thought it was going to be an easy ride – a thought that really would never have crossed the mind of such a hard-working and diligent employee – he would have been in for a shock. For before office duties his father-in-law insisted he should understand every facet of the business from the shop floor to caring for customers. And the lessons learned then were to stay with him for the remainder of his business life during which he and Eileen became directors with her sister Joan and husband, the late Gordon Edwards.

After the business closed in 1993 John enjoyed retirement with his hobbies. His passion for golf – he was a member of Beaudesert and Brocton Hall – was shared with Eileen and both also spent many hours walking in the countryside and bird watching.

John died on Christmas Day after a short illness. Our thoughts are with Eileen, daughter Jane, son-in-law Derek, and granddaughters Bryony and Rowen.

How Our Society Started

Most of you know that Bridgtown & District Local History Society started with meetings early in 2009. But how did that come about? One of the reasons was an article written by our chairman Tony Pearson. It was sent to Professor Carl Chinn and part of it was published in the Express & Star in September 2007. The first three parts of that article have been printed in previous editions and the fourth part is reproduced below and on the next page.

“The Hole in the Hedge” by Tony Pearson

Memories and Reflections of a Bridgtown Boy

As a boy there were occasions when high spirits played their part. In summer it was primarily knocking on doors and running away, though I do remember one particular “dare” when I was persuaded to release some pigs from a sty behind the Five House Row in Watling Street. Our uncontrolled laughter alerted a certain Mrs Reeves and she chased us off with promises of Borstal and even worse. Thereafter “our gang” was aware that Bobby Beeston, the local lovable PC, was on the lookout. That was enough! We knew that he would cuff us if caught, but worse that he would inform our respective fathers! That would mean a real thrashing.

Winter with dark nights (there were no street lights) and wartime blackout was both strange and spooky for, remember, we knew little else at our young age. Above all I remember that it was cold, very cold. True, we normally had a coal fire in one living room but there was only one in the front room for Christmas, Boxing Day and, maybe, Easter.

I remember the coal merchant Albert Handley always had a “cuppa” when he delivered the normal six sacks into the coalhouse. Although we did have a fire grate in Mom and Dad’s bedroom it was only used if someone was seriously ill, such as when I had Scarlet Fever and was away from school for over six weeks.

In winter it was normal to wake up in the morning to find your nightly cup of water was frozen solid. Those cold nights nevertheless had compensations as we all gathered as close to the open fire as possible. Remember that, as working class families, TV was not even a distant dream. Radio was the entertainment magnet. As children it was vital to be home for Children’s Hour between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. on the Home Service. We all got to know Uncle Mac, the presenter, as if he were part of the family. At 6.45 p.m. it was “Dick Barton – Special Agent” a sort of modern Scotland Yard and S.A.S. all rolled into one. Other highlights were “Monday Night at Eight” and Tommy Handley in “ITMA”. By then it was 9 p.m. and probably time for toast followed by Rowntree’s Cocoa and bed, hopefully with the stone hot water bottle.

As always winter passed into spring and the hardships and difficulties melted away. About this time one of our neighbours, a sailor returning for leave after

three years away, bounced into a joyous reception. I could hardly remember him (his name was Bob Bates) but he it was who gave me something very special – a banana! I was surprised that it was green but popped it on to the grating over the coal fire and, after a few days, it tasted like nectar. I thought Bob was a hero after that.

1945 brought victory in Europe. This was met with huge rejoicing and throughout the land we organised street parties. Although rationing was still in full force our Moms, Aunties, Sisters and friends produced untold “goodies”. We sat down to tables in the middle of the road on the Watling Street and ate, drank, sang and danced for what seemed a thousand years. It truly was a most glorious memory.

To add to this wonderful time, within a few days of celebration I became my Mom’s special hero. Sometime in 1942 she had lost her wedding ring while helping Dad in the garden. Well, miracles do happen, even when there are no haystacks to find a needle. I was helping to cut our little back lawn with Dad’s shears when I spotted a shiny object in what was long grass. It immediately registered about Mom’s ring and Eureka! It was! My Mom was deliriously happy and so was I.

Tony’s article is not only a wonderful personal record of his early life but is a compelling Social History account. We have now published all that appeared in the Express & Star but there is some that has never seen the light of day! We look forward to reading more of it in our next edition. Ed.

Longford Lane OR Longford Road?

In our last edition Derrick Middleton asked the question about the name of the road. His opinion was that it used to be Longford Lane up as far as Swift’s Garage but then it changed to Longford Road. Several other people who lived in Bridgtown thought the same.

*However **Mike Dawson** has been in touch and he has a different viewpoint!! He says that his recollections “throw a small spanner in to the works!”.*

“As lads, we in Lilac Avenue frequently walked and ran our way up to Hatherton Road and Shoal Hill. Up Longford Road to Swift’s Garage and across the old Wolverhampton Road into Longford Lane, and thence to the wonderful open spaces.”

“The housing, shops and other buildings along Longford Road meant that there were properly constructed footpaths as far as Mosswood Street, but once across the Wolverhampton Road it was grass verges and fields most of the way. We scrumped, mushroomed, collected conkers and roamed all over Hatherton and Shoal Hill, and quite rightly got into trouble for playing on a haystack! Ask Brian, Len and David Gethin. Ask David Brookes and Frank Rogers.”

“Perhaps those who lived in Bridgtown remember sections of the roadway by a different name, as some of you obviously do. I think that many from our estate and further out will have a different version.”

“I’ll end by referring to the brief booklet I wrote about my brother John. It was prepared a year or so ago before I read your piece about the road names. In that I mentioned that he ‘... attended Bridgtown Infants School, a daily walk from Lilac Avenue, turning left into Longford Road where the prefabs were to spring up’.”

*So now we know. Or do we? What do you think?
Get in touch. Give us your views. Ed.*

*Also, we would love some information about **the prefabs**. Do you have any?
We are especially looking for photographs. Ed.*

Food in the “Good Old Days”

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

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>> * Bananas and oranges only appeared at Christmas time.

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> * The only vegetables known to us were spuds, peas, carrots and
> cabbage, anything else was regarded as being a bit suspicious.

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> * All crisps were plain; the only choice we had was whether to put the
> salt on or not.

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> * Soft drinks were called pop.> * Coke was something that we mixed with
coal to make it last longer.

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> * Rice was a milk pudding, and never, ever part of our dinner.

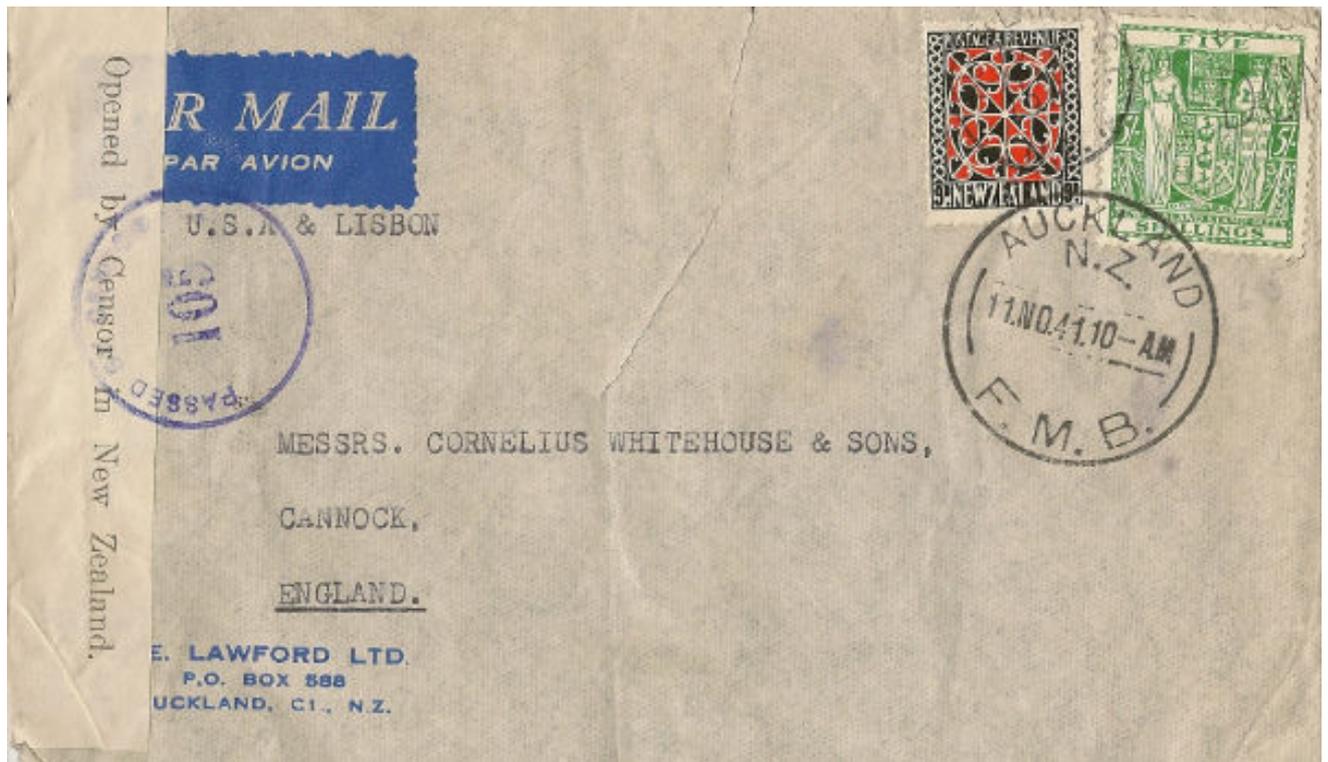
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BRIDGTOWN & DISTRICT, EARLY ON

We have just discovered that another member of our team is a poet. Here is one of his latest poems:

Did this all start in sixty one (1861)
With streets laid out a map upon?
Wolverhampton Building Society had this found
And with foresight bought the ground.
Longhouse was there before this date.
A farm, an inn, charged a lower rate.
Some houses Walsall Road upon
Had been there from times so long gone.
The mill in Walkmill very old
Could not date and rarely sold.
At one end Wedges Mills so fair
Founded before Gilpin landed there.
Churchbridge at the other end,
There was no church for us to defend.
Between the two ran Watling Street,
Many years of Roman feet.
New Street and Church Street not on map
The stories of these two do rap.
Later Longford Lane did grow.
Children galore to school did go.
Mosswood Mission, St. Barnabas
Through her doors many folks did pass.
Jellyman's was on one extreme,
Castings made which produced steam.
Green Lane for country the place to go.
Watch out for Bobby Beeston though!
All in all this is the place
To settle down and start your race.
In life the folks so friendly were,
We know that some in life did err.
Three cheers for Bridgtown that I say.
We're pleased it will last for many a day.

Old Batt



Jean Fellows was looking at her old stamp album recently when this old envelope fell out. She had obviously saved it for the stamps but it highlights many interesting things:

- The year was 1941. It was wartime.
- Look at the address. That was all it took to reach its destination.
- The postage was 5 shillings and 9 pence. That is approximately 29p to send it Air Mail from New Zealand.
- On the left hand side we note that it had been opened by the censor in case there was anything untoward enclosed.

“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 reproduce an article from the Summer 1934 Edition.

This is the first time we have included an article about someone’s hobby. It is a hobby that was shared by many Bridgtown people.

PIGEONS

by Harry Reaney

My favourite hobby is rearing pigeons, and I think I should be very miserable without them for they occupy most of my time in looking after them. They are not very profitable birds but, to balance that, they are not very expensive to keep as corn forms their chief diet. I have six pigeons and they are looking very well indeed, for they have just had their new feathers after the moulting season. Some pigeons have most wonderful plumes and, when flying in the sun, they look like flashes of light. My own pigeons are very daintily coloured and I find great pleasure in looking after them. Another interesting thing about these birds is that, when a male pigeon is wooing a female, he swells out his chest and trips around her, and commits such funny antics that even a dull person would laugh.

In April, when all the male pigeons have found a mate, they think about making a nest. This is made of sticks, straw, old potato roots or even feathers from their own bodies. At first they pick the place where the nest is going to be. When that is done the hen bird sits there while the cock bird brings the materials for the nest and places them on her back. She then arranges them around her body to make a lovely home. When the home is finished it is left by the birds for four days, and after that time the female pigeon lays her first egg, and two days later her second and last.

Then the birds brood over their eggs for sixteen days, after which two baby pigeons come into the world. The old birds do not feed their young till they are twenty four hours old and, when they do feed them, they do it in a most peculiar manner. The parent pigeons, first of all, eat some food and half digest it. Then they go up to the young and place their mouths into their own and bring the food back from their own bodies to their children's bodies. They continue in this fashion till the young are four weeks old when they are able to peck small pieces of corn for themselves. After six weeks they are able to fly, and then people begin to realise what wonderful birds pigeons are.

The basket I always carry my birds in is just a covered-in box only, instead of being made of wood, it is constructed of sticks and thin canes. First of all, I go on a bicycle and take my young pigeons with one old one for short flights. This is to get them used to their home surroundings. The last flight for which I use my cycle is from Walsall, and then for all other journeys I send them on the train. Some of the stations they have to go to by rail are Dudley, Aston, Barn Green, Gloucester, Bath, Worcester, Weymouth and Salisbury. After they have visited all these places they have to travel across the sea to Rennes and Nantes, which are in France. The two longest flights a pigeon is allowed are from Rennes in France and San Sebastian in Spain, but they have been known to fly from Rome. That a bird only a few pounds in weight can fly hundreds of miles,

and often carry secrets concealed on its leg from place to place isa wonderful thought.

Here is an anonymous joke from the same edition:

It was the music lesson. The teacher asked what ‘f’ meant over a bar of music.

“Forte” came the reply.

“Then what will ‘ff’ stand for?” asked the teacher.

After a pause there came the triumphant answer “Eighty”!

BRIDGTOWN & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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