



THE BRIDGTONIAN

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Doris "Ma" Pardoe

SPRING 2018

Members : Free

Non-Members : £1.75

Editorial

Recent times have been very sad for our society following the tragic loss of David Battersby. He has been a stalwart of our society since its initial meeting back in 2009. His knowledge of the Bridgtown and Cannock areas was legendary. He was an “expert” in so many areas; local industrial roots, the Gilpin family and Wedges Mills to name but just a few. He was also a very helpful and supportive man. He did so many things for our society without ever being asked. Life is going to be so much more difficult without him. Tony Pearson has written a tribute to him and this appears on the next page.

Arrangements are now in place for the erection of our next information board on our Heritage Trail. It will be placed on the grass verge outside Longford House. It will be another double-sided board and there will be plenty to look at and stir your memory. One side will have information about Longford House which was built originally as the residence of the Gilpin family, so important in the history of Bridgtown. The other side will have information about the original Longford Crossroads which eventually gave way to Longford Island. The old photographs of that spot are so striking! The unveiling will take place on Wednesday 18th April at 11a.m.

We have made some changes to our plans for writing a definitive history of the Bridgtown area. It will now be in the form of six short books, more details within this magazine. You will also read about the publication of the first of these books which has already gone to the printer’s in preparation for a grand launch in the near future.

Many changes have also been made to our planned events for this year, so please look closely at page 10 as this replaces the list of events produced for the last magazine.

David Williams

1st April 2018

A Tribute to Reginald David Battersby

From Tony Pearson, 20th March 2018

“Batters” to me was, above all, a precious, unique, faithful and talented friend. We first met some 77 years ago at Bridgtown Boys’ School and, other than maturing and of course growing old, his character never changed. He was generous, endlessly willing, courteous, sometimes obstinate, but always capable of overcoming worry and disappointment with a “belly laugh” and a new joke. His many talents reflected his widespread interests: it was cricket in the early days, later it was “Rotary”, “Probus”, stamps, bees and of course Local History. We at Bridgtown History Society were especially fortunate to be the recipients of immense quantities of factual and informative photographs and data.

After our “school years” David and I re-ignited our lifelong bond, serving together in the Royal Air Force, having holidays with our respective girlfriends and, inevitably, he was Best Man at my wedding in 1956. Though tragedy struck early in David’s married life with the loss of his wife Pat, he stoically battled on and proved a wonderful father to son Andrew and daughter Julie.

Slowly, but positively, David’s career blossomed, revealing genuine leadership qualities and, ultimately, the reward of a directorship with local employer F. W. Linford.

While huge distances interfered with our respective families’ time together we always maintained regular contact, enjoying special times and anniversaries. It was a particular joy when David married Barbara Eccleston (nee Hopley) and followed this by creating his dream home at “Three Trees”.

Come 2009 and the formation of Bridgtown and District Local History Society, David was a prominent founder member. He has served loyally and continuously as a Management Team Member until his recent passing. His determination, drive and passion, coupled with his knowledge, willingness and warm personality, cannot be replaced.

Thanks David and God Bless You!

OUR FRONT COVER

There is a legendary pub in the Black Country known as Ma Pardoe's although its real name is The White Swan. We have recently discovered a link to Bridgtown.



Doris Jones was born in 1898 in Bridgtown. Here is a photograph of her outside her father's shop. You can probably recognise where it is.



Doris Jones married in 1923 and with her husband took over the White Swan Public House in Netherton. For the next 40 years she brewed beer at the rear. She became a legend across the Midlands and was known to everyone as Ma Pardoe. Here is a copy of the poster produced to advertise their business.



Reminiscences

This is a continuation of an article started in our last edition. The reminiscences are those of Carrie Summers (nee Norman). They were written a few years ago when her husband Norman was still alive. Nevertheless her words have been left as she wrote them at the time.

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I have a brother five years older than me. He once swam across the reservoir with me on his back for a “dare”. When my mother found out he had a good hiding. He also disturbed a swan’s nest one day and the father swan chased him down the high bank which surrounded the reservoir and he fell. The swan hit him with his wing and broke his arm. Another good hiding took place for that! My cousin, Arthur Evans, walked down the path between the marlholes from Cheslyn Hay to show us his first suit with long trousers – unfortunately he would insist on “walking the reservoir wall” (something we all did) but he fell into the

water which was about 5 feet deep. His suit shrank by about 4 inches and his mother was not amused!

It is amazing how much time we spent away from home in this way during the school holidays – armed with a bottle of water and sandwiches!

My father was friendly with Mr. Westwood who drove the goods train from the colliery to Churchbridge sidings and he would give us a ride on the train, over the canal bridge and up to Churchbridge. We were absolutely thrilled with this and very proud that we were the chosen! Also we used to meet the barges which carried the coal on the canal. They were pulled by horses and, when they got to the Walkmill canal bridge there was not any towpath, so the horses and a man had to walk over the bridge. Sometimes they would let us lie down on the roof of the barge (instead of one of them) and “paddle” it under the bridge with our feet. If anyone was coming from Cheslyn Hay who knew Les or me another good hiding would ensue, as my Mom said that the bargees were gypsies and would run away with us!

I lived on the Watling Street opposite to Astbury's garage. The Astbury family lived in a big house just down the road but they eventually moved further down the Watling Street at Gailey. A man moved into their old house, a Mr. Chiltern, and there were fields at the back which he seemed to farm. There was a big building behind the house – a barn which had hay etc., and a loft and there was a horse in the field adjoining the barn. My brother had a “gang” and their headquarters were up in the loft. I had to follow them but they would not let me join as I was a girl and, even though I tried very hard, I could not “pee” high enough up the wall!!! They used to “dare” one another to do things – one dare was to jump out of the loft on to the horse's back and ride him round the field. If Mr. Chiltern heard us he would chase us and fire his shotgun at us. No Health & Safety rules then!

The Scouts Hut was in the next field and was well used by Guides, Cubs and Scouts – until it burned down!

There was also a nice tennis court on this field, opposite Brown Owl's house (Mrs Smith). I enjoyed playing there very much until they closed it and we had to move to Grasmere Courts at Cheslyn Hay.

It is hard to imagine in this day and age, where travelling is so easy, that often you did not know many people on the other side of the village.

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Thank you Carrie for sharing your reminiscences. They will have brought back happy memories to lots of people, as they have to me. Ed.

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

The world had not yet benefited from weird and wonderful things like Pot Noodles, Instant Mash and Pop Tarts.

We bought milk and cream at the same time in the same bottle.

A HISTORY OF THE BRIDGTOWN AREA

We have revised the content and order for the small books which will form the definitive History of Bridgtown. The books will not be published in this order but as they become finished. The whole process should be completed by October 2020. The first book to be published is Volume 3 with its launch at Bethel Church at 10.30am on Wednesday 2nd May.

Volume 1 Birth of the village.

The story of this locality in former centuries. How the development of canals, roads and railways led to the birth of a new town and a new community. How this community developed from 1861 to 1914.

Volume 2 Its Industrial Heritage

The importance of founding industrialists like William Gilpin, the Whitehouse family and others.

Volume 3 The Great War.

How the Great War changed village life.

Volume 4 A thriving community.

The heyday of the village and how this was changed by the Second World War.

Volume 5 Post War Life.

Victory celebrations and the new Post-War Bridgtown, telling the story through to the 1960s.

Volume 6 BRAG and all that.

The dark days, the formation of BRAG, the recovery of the village with its own parish council into regeneration and a bright future.

A Royal Visit to Bridgtown

Not many appear to know that there was an International Royal Visit to the area in 1913 at a time when the Country and Bridgtown was in preparation for going to war. In August the area was honoured with a visit from King Daudi Cwa II of Buganda. Buganda was the most important and largest kingdom in present-day Uganda, comprising of all the Central Region.

The King, who had just turned 17 the previous week, was described in the local press as a tall handsome young man who spoke English perfectly. King Daudi would have certainly caused a stir arriving at Birmingham New Street Station wearing his National Kanzu attire, a white garment with a black alpaca coat with his four Native Chiefs wearing similar outfits with crimson fezzes. Three of the Chiefs could speak fluent English, whilst the eldest was unable to.

The King visited a number of sites in the West Midlands area including our very own Rosemary Tileries where the workforce predominantly came from either Bridgtown, Cheslyn Hay or the Great Wyrley area.

The local press reported that;

“On Wednesday there was a considerable interest at Rosemary Tileries when the King paid a flying visit to inspect them. His Majesty was welcomed by the manager Mr Knox who was accompanied by Reverend W. Rowley O’Keeffe. The Royal Party was conducted by the courtesy of Mr. Knox throughout the Tileries and they expressed their greatest satisfaction at the inspection. There was one kiln which contained 125,000 tiles which was being opened just as the Royal guests arrived. A pleasing feature of the visit was a boy named Whitehouse who was dared to make salute to the King as he passed by in his carriage. The boy did so in true military style and as his Highness passed he noticed the boy and returned salute, and then handed the boy, in a graceful manner, half a crown. His Majesty then went with the manager around the various kilns and after inspecting the work expressed his appreciation of what he had observed. He remarked that the work was



carried out in a systematic manner and he was quite pleased with his visit. On leaving the Royal Guests expressed their pleasure at the courtesy of the manager Mr. Knox and thanked him for the information he offered respecting the Tileries, for he, (the King) said he had not seen a better Tile works. It may be added that the King has an extremely retiring disposition. He shows a lively interest in motors and informed the party they were much used in Uganda as the main roads were in good condition. The visit was most successful from a business point of view."

It is interesting to hear about his motor interest as this was at a time when the majority of roads in England would have been of dirt construction and as regards to the question whether the King drove at the age of sixteen the answer is unknown, but who is going to tell a King he is too young! Does anybody know who lucky Whitehouse was? Half a crown was a lot of money to a boy in those days?

King Daudi continued as King until his death at the age of 42 years where he is recorded to have fathered 36 children (20 sons and 16 daughters). The fifth of his sons became the first President of Uganda.

Patrick Corfield Local Historian



"Lightning Lou"

Previously we had no photographs of Lou who will never be forgotten by those of us who lived in the village in the 1940s to the 1960s, by which time he had moved to North Street.

*I have found out a piece of writing given to me by **David Battersby** which records his thoughts about his schooldays in Bridgtown. The article is a little longer than I usually publish in one go, but in the circumstances I have decided to do so. Ed.*

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Why (you might ask) did I attend Bridgtown Schools when I was born and lived at Dartmouth Avenue in Cannock? My mother informed me that, at the time, I should have gone to John Wood School but they had impetigo and scabies there, so she registered me at Bridgtown instead in July 1938.

I commenced in September 1938. In the Infant classes I believe that I went into Mrs Scott's class first but others who attended at the same time say they went into Gertie Murtagh's class first. All I can remember about the first day at school is that Reg Astbury was upset and was crying for most of the day. I could not understand this because he only lived just across the Longford Lane. I also remember that the girl sitting next to me filled her pants. I was horrified! I do remember her name but would not dream of giving you this information.

When I first attended school my mother had bought for me a satchel which was just to contain my lunch and, to me at that time, a most frightening experience happened. For many nights on my way home I was stopped on Jellyman's Brook bridge by lads whose aim appeared to be just to look through my satchel to see whether or not I had left any sandwiches. They never did me any harm but just examined the satchel and ate the contents. I never told a soul.

The headmistress in 1938 was one of the Miss M Whitehouses but which one I am not sure because one Miss M Whitehouse followed the other as headmistress while I was there. The next class I went into, I believe, was Gertie Murtagh's who ultimately became my aunt when she married my Uncle Tom. I never forgave Gertie because, when we were to have a band on one occasion, I wanted to play the drum and she gave me a triangle. What a let down! The third class in the Infants was taught by Agnes Arthurs and I think that everyone enjoyed her year. Of course, she was a true part of the Bridgtown scene. The three Infant classrooms all faced on to Longford Lane.

I do not remember there being a hall at the school and the girls who stayed on there after age 7 went into the three other classrooms. It appears that they stayed there until they were at least eleven. How this worked out I have never been able to understand as there were at least 30 boys went into the Boys School each year. So how they coped with space for the girls I have never ever been able figure out.

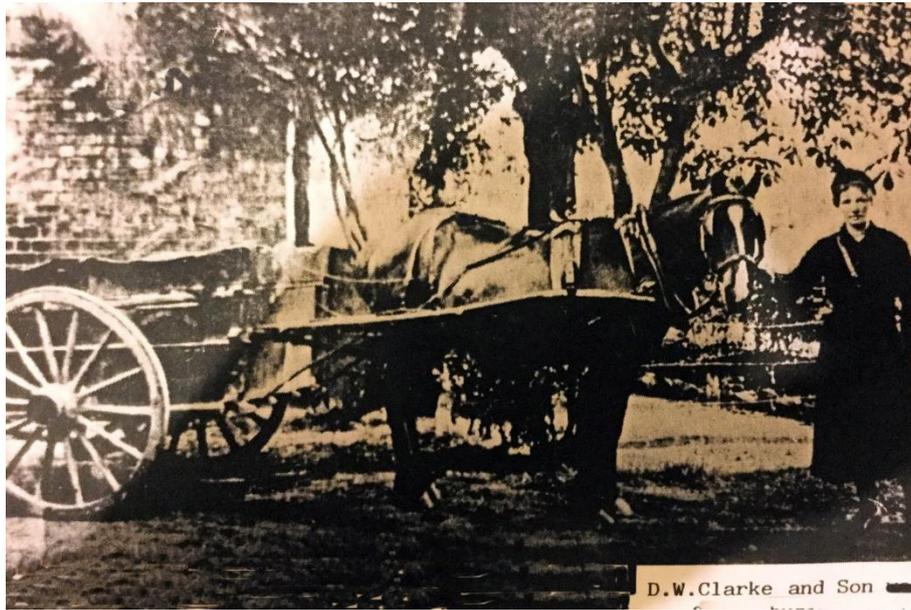
Whilst in the Infant classes the war commenced but I cannot recall it affecting us very much, other than we always had to carry with us our gasmasks. Each one was in a thick cardboard box which could be carried over your shoulder with a thick cord to support it.

At age seven the boys went to the Boys' School and my teacher in the first class was Mrs Dean. Adjacent to the classroom was a cloakroom and toilets which, if I remember correctly, was heated. So wet coats which were left there in a morning at least had a chance to dry out before you went home.

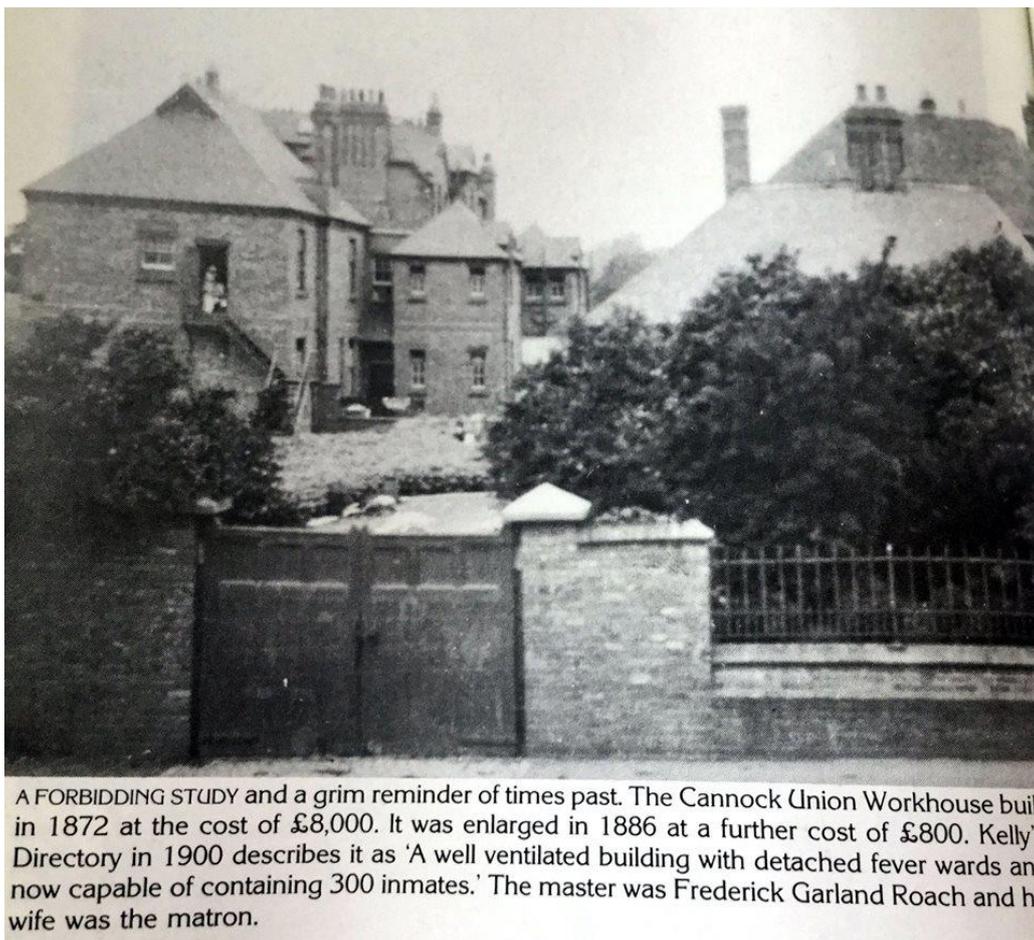
The Boys' School consisted of six classrooms with three each side of a large hall, a staffroom and the headmaster's study. At each end of the school there was a cloakroom. The teacher in the second class of the school was Dicky Holt for part of the year only. Dicky had a nervous twitch where his forehead skin moved up and down regularly. He taught us for about half of that year and was then replaced by Bill Jones who taught us for the rest of the year. The only fact that I can remember about that year was that Bill's son took on Ray "Gasser" Segeant from Wedges Mills in a scrap one day. Everyone knew that "Gasser" was the "cock" of the school and nobody, unless they were suicidal, took him on. Needless to say he finished up a bloody mess, but I believe he was looked up to after that for at least "having a go".

I believe that it was about this time that air-raid shelters were built on the school playing fields at the rear of the school. They were underground. We had to have air-raid practices occasionally and the shelters were damp. They smelled of damp and invariably the masks had a habit of fogging up on the part through which you were expected to look. God only knows what we would have done if there had been a gas attack. The shelters had timber-made benches in them.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REMINDERS FROM THE PAST



The very first delivery vehicle of D W Clarkes, the Cannock Department Store.



A FORBIDDING STUDY and a grim reminder of times past. The Cannock Union Workhouse built in 1872 at the cost of £8,000. It was enlarged in 1886 at a further cost of £800. Kelly's Directory in 1900 describes it as 'A well ventilated building with detached fever wards and now capable of containing 300 inmates.' The master was Frederick Garland Roach and his wife was the matron.

E-MAIL:

bridgtownhistory@hotmail.com

WEBSITE:

<http://www.bridgtownhistory.co.uk>

Our front cover features the Black Country legend Ma Pardoe.

Why would we put this on a Bridgtown magazine?

Turn to pages 6 and 7 to find out.

Then come to our meeting on 20th June to find out even more!