



THE BRIDGTONIAN

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SUMMER 2017

Editorial

Welcome to the summer edition of your magazine. These are busy times for Bridgtown & District Local History Society. Make sure you look carefully through the magazine so that you are up to date with all the latest news and information.

In April this year we had the unveiling of the information board in Walsall Road marking the spot where Hedgehog Tools used to be. Over the course of the next few years there will be many more of these impressive boards to mark the development of our historic village. Look through the magazine to find out more.

In May the speaker at our monthly meeting was our own Katherine Page who told the story of what this area was like before Bridgtown was built. It was an interesting meeting and everybody learned something new. Another one of our own members, Bob Brevitt, was our speaker in June. Bob reminded us of the horrors of Paschendale and the First World War. We all benefited from Bob's knowledge on this subject and we thank him for it.

Many of the newer families in Bridgtown today are astounded by the fact that there were once thirteen locks on the canal between Churchbridge and Leacroft. In July Derek Davis spoke on the subject of the canals in the area. He also presented two interesting videos on the subject. If you missed these they are well worth seeing and a second opportunity to do this will be provided at our Open Day in October. Look through your magazine and you will find that this year's Open Day will be different from those of previous years, while still retaining the opportunity to see new "old photographs" and meet up with old friends.

David Williams

Building a Heritage Trail

In our last magazine there was a photograph of the information board which has been erected on the site of the old Cornelius Whitehouse factory in Walsall Road. On the morning of Wednesday 19th April we held a special unveiling ceremony to which everyone was invited.

On the morning of Wednesday 13th September there is to be another such ceremony. This time the venue will be in North Street on the corner by the traffic lights with Watling Street. In other words, it is where Wynn's Foundry used to be. Again, everyone is invited and there will be refreshments afterwards in Bethel Church. Please come along.

During the next few years there are plans to erect many more of these information boards around the local area, somewhere between ten and twenty of them. The exact number will depend on attaining the necessary funding and planning permission for each site. The society is determined that Bridgtown's proud heritage will be remembered in years to come.

Did you know that changes have been made to Bethel Church so that it is more suitable for community activities as well as for worship? If you come along to the sign unveiling you will be able to look at these changes for yourself. Also come along the week after, on Wednesday 20th September, to get a preview of the society's new book to be launched at October's Open Day. This meeting is also at Bethel Church. John Devey will talk about the new book which is to be called "A Walk into Cannock". Come along and find out the reasons for the title. This is our normal monthly meeting date.

Everything changes



Here is a photograph of the new houses which stand where the Hedgehog Tools factory used to stand. The photograph was taken from the fourth floor of Virage Tower in Walsall Road.

..... but everything stays the same.



Here is a photograph of the houses that used to stand in Longford Road. Bridgtown is now a very different place from how it used to be, but still the washing needs to be done as life goes on!

A Special Day



Recently the team had a surprise for our co-chairman John Devey. He has had a special birthday. No, John is not trying to burst a football with a knife. The football is a birthday cake. It was a surprise from our team at one of our meetings. Here John is cutting the cake and, later, we all enjoyed a piece of it with our tea or coffee. Why a football? Well, John supports Stoke City and has to withstand regular banter from those of us who support a different team!

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

- A bun was a small cake back then.
- A tart was a fruit filled pastry, not a lady of dubious standards
- The word " Barbie" was not associated with anything to do with food.

LIFE IN 1930s BRIDGTOWN

*In our last edition we published the seventh 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 next extract from those memories.*

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Electricity

At some time at the end of the 1930s the landlord had decided that our house should be wired for electricity. I was at home when the men came to lay the cables and fit the lights; and I watched them with avid attention. Sometime later I had the idea that my rabbits in the hutch outside on the yard, under my bedroom window, would also like to have an electric light. With a small torch bulb at one end I led a wire from the hutch, through my bedroom window, to one of the new cables so recently fixed to the wall. I scraped off the rubber insulation and wrapped my wire round the bare wires within, quite ignorant of the significance of the different colour coded coverings. Of course, all the lights in the house fused. Uncle Ken was called as he was regarded as the family expert in all things electrical. He traced the fault and I was in trouble: father told me in no uncertain way that what I did was dangerous and was never to be repeated. Mother reasoned with me more gently that my rabbits did not want an electric light at night because they wanted to sleep!

Second World War

Internationally the threat of war was apparent. Orders were given to prepare for blackout. Father took up his saw and hammer and made sets of plywood shutters to go over the windows. The noise of other men sawing and hammering could be heard all down the street. At my new primary school gas masks were issued to us all and we had strict instructions to carry them with us at all times, packed in a black tin can with a string round our necks.

In 1939 we were given a long summer holiday. Air raid shelters had to be dug and built for all schoolchildren before we could be re-admitted. These shelters or dug-outs were dug half into the ground and covered with turf. Inside the walls were lined with timber, with corrugated tin and timber struts holding up the roof. Planks along the sides formed simple benches on which we could sit. The shelters would not provide protection from a direct hit but were intended to protect us from shrapnel and flying debris. The playing fields were the only place to put them and, later, the rest of this area was turned over to vegetable gardens under the slogan "Dig for Victory".

At the outbreak of war father decided to volunteer for the Royal Engineers. He reckoned that conscription would come anyway and that he might not then have a choice of regiment. To join the infantry was not to be contemplated – a look at the long list of fallen in the First World War on the memorial board in the church, on the memorial in the village, and indeed on every war memorial up and down the country, made sombre reading. Away he went. After his initial training I remember seeing him turning the corner of the street, fully dressed in khaki and full service marching order with all his packs, gas mask and rifle. On this first leave the situation for the country was so insecure that he had to be prepared to report for duty anywhere at a moment's notice.

On returning to school we had regular shelter rehearsals when we were marched quickly out of our rooms, across the playground and into the dugouts, dark and frightening as there were no lights. We learned to recognise the alert siren of short urgent blasts and, afterwards, the long wail of the all-clear. No bombs were dropped on the school but we did see formations of German bombers crossing the sky in the early daylight raids. We lived in the middle of a mining and industrial area so there were targets enough to attract a bombing raid. Later, when one German escort fighter was shot down almost intact, it was put on display in Cannock centre. I went along to see it and actually sat in the cockpit. The pilot had made a forced landing and was then a POW, prisoner of war, quite possibly interned in the POW camp established on Cannock Chase.

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Our next edition will see the end of Norman's reminiscences. They have been fascinating and we are grateful that he has shared them with us. Ed.

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

- Eating outside was called a picnic.
- Cooking outside was called camping.
- Seaweed was not a recognised food.

10

THE REGENERATION OF BRIDGTOWN

The number of new houses in Bridgtown continues apace and the nature of the village continues to change. As a History Society we welcome these changes as they ensure the viability of the village for decades to come. We are acutely aware of the dynamism of the early days of the village from 1861 up to 1900. The first half of the twentieth century was a difficult time financially for many people but it was at that time that Bridgtown's tremendous community spirit came to the fore. This spirit kept the village going in the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s. BRAG saved the village and the twenty first century has witnessed the gradual re-birth of the village.



Here are some of the newest houses on the Lakeside development off Walkmill Lane. We are trying to make new people in the area aware of Bridgtown's past and, at the same time, wish to join with them in creating a good future for our village.

BOOKS ABOUT BRIDGTOWN

Since our society was formed we have written a new book every year.

Bridgtown Memories

Bygone Bridgtown

Bridgtown Born and Bred

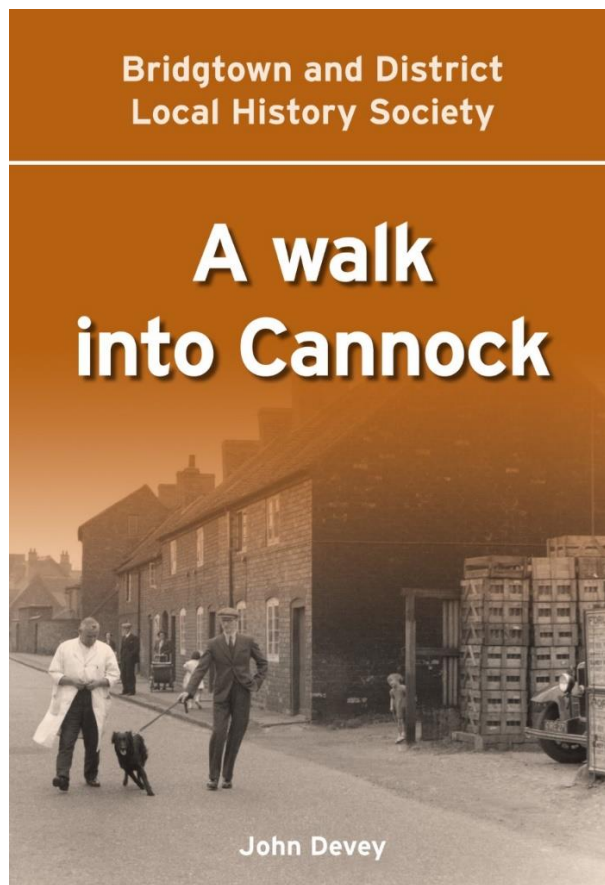
Bridgtown and Beyond

Bridgtown's Older Brother, Churchbridge

Bridgtown Bits and Bobs

Bridgtown Recollections

This year our new book is called "A Walk into Cannock". Look out for it.



Future Books

For some time we have been telling you that we have started to record an official history of Bridgtown. We thought we might get lottery funding for this but that prospect now looks unlikely. We are hoping that lottery funding will support our Heritage Trail plans. As far as history books are concerned we now have changed our ideas. Over the course of the next few years we are going to write a series of books on specific aspects of the history of Bridgtown. When these books are completed they will be put together to represent a complete history of the village from its birth to the present day. Anyone who has bought all of these books will be able to put them together as a boxed set. A new book will become available every few months rather than one a year as in the past.

The books are going to be digitally printed rather than using the more traditional printing processes used until now, However they will still be of a good quality and none of them will cost more than the current books do. Some may possibly even be cheaper. As next year is 2018 the first of the new books will celebrate the ending of World War One with a book about life in Bridgtown at that time. This book should be available somewhere in the region of next Easter.

Other books will then follow at regular intervals, each concentrating on a different aspect of Bridgtown life. Some will concentrate on the world of work and industry. Some will have a story to tell such as how BRAG saved Bridgtown from extinction. Some will concentrate on a particular facet of Bridgtown life like education, church life or the story of the many pubs and clubs. Eventually we will try to have covered everything there is to say about Bridgtown, its people and its development.

All ex-Bridgtown residents remember "The Monkey Muck" but I suspect that very few of them will know the history of that company. The correct name of the company was Cannock Fertilisers Ltd. They were a very successful organisation and traded all over the country. In the following article Katherine Page delves into the history that preceded the birth of the company as we all knew it.

The Patent Urban Manure Co.

The Patent Urban Manure Company was formed in 1860 for the purpose of making a simple but very effective fertiliser which could easily be applied to the fields. The company needed a site near to a canal as large amounts of sulphuric acid were needed in order to carry out the process. The site in Walkmill Lane suited the company's needs perfectly but there was a small soap manufacturer on that site. The soap factory, called Bancroft & Co, was duly purchased. The manufacture of soap was allowed to continue but a new factory was built alongside.

On the upper floor of the new factory there were large lead-lined vats into which large amounts of animal bones were placed. The vats were then filled with acid, which was left to digest for a period of time. The resultant products were tallow for the soap works, size for glue manufacture and digested bones. The bones were dried out and taken down to the ground floor. They went into a machine called the disintegrator which ground them down to a fine meal. This meal was wheeled in barrows up a ramp to the roof space, taken along some planks before being tipped into 300 ton storage bins below.

The process described above was invented by a German chemist by the name of Von Leibig and the resultant fertiliser is known as phosphate. (Von Leibig is famous as the inventor of Marmite.) Another form of fertiliser was invented in 1842 by a farmer and this was called

superphosphate. This replaced animal bones with a fossilised organic substance, initially mined near Cambridge but later imported from Morocco.

When the factory was fully functional the plant comprised a Cornish boiler, a 120 feet chimney stack, a steam engine, two bone-digesters and

a bone grinding mill. The phosphate dust, together with sulphuric acid, was fed into horizontal tanks. Mixing and cooling then took place before being dug out by hand by men stripped to the waste. It was warm work. These were the men who wheeled the phosphate away into the large storage bins.

Later this superphosphate was mixed with other materials according to a secret formula. This was all ground into a friable powder and then packed into hessian sacks.

Soon after the formation of this company they employed a young man by the name of Henry Hart as a clerk. He was to rise very quickly through the ranks and became manager of the works. Henry had a passion for farming and, in particular, for breeding Shire horses. He went on to purchase the Longhouse Farm and he developed a stud farm there, providing both loose boxes and stables in the process. He also built a row of cottages in Walkmill Lane for the workforce, where a blacksmith's shop also came into being. The blacksmith worked for the general public as well as looking after the factory horses and the Shire horses.

Katherine Page

This research has brought together into one logical account lots of isolated bits of information known to the editor. Now the whole story makes sense. I am sure many people have appreciated it, just as I have.
Ed.

In the early pages of this magazine there are many words about the regeneration of Bridgtown. It is worthwhile to think back 40 years when Bridgtown was on the brink of extinction. We all have so much to thank BRAG for. In 1986, at the conclusion of the battle for survival, Jeanette Cartwright penned the following poem. It was a message of hope for the future. How satisfying it must be to consider those words today.

Desire for Peace

It must be quite a shock
To folk who have been away,
When they come back to Bridgtown,
The demolition and the decay!

There's every street that's battered
And factories built here and there.
Empty homes that are left
Like ghosts of yesteryear.

Those that's taken the brunt of it
Are the dedicated kind,
Knowing that it's all been wrong,
That planners have been blind.

But now that all the battering's done
They have the thought in mind
To build up a new Bridgtown,
The very best of kind.

And all of us are praying
That it will all come true,
In better homes and cleaner streets
And peace for me and you.

Jeanette Cartwright (1986)

Bridgtown Lingo

A few months ago Tony Pearson suggested that it might be interesting to remind ourselves of the local language that we used as children. He gave me a list of suggestions. The idea is to compile such a list. Some of his suggestions are below but I have saved some to put in the next edition. Can you make further suggestions to include in the next magazine?

Local word	Meaning
Guzgog	Gooseberry
Tayta	Potato
Swag	Swede
All round the Wrekin	Using more words than necessary
'Oss	Horse
Razza	Reservoir
The strap	Weekly bill owed to shopkeeper
The Dan	The Danilo Cinema
Piggy bus	Small single-decked bus
I ay sin im	I haven't seen him
Wum	Home
Nipper	Small boy or brother
Gotcha	Caught out
Flicks	Cinema
The cut	Canal
Tarra	Goodbye

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The front of our magazine holds a photograph of an iconic building that used to stand on Walsall Road. It was opened in 1942 by the Duke of Kent and was originally the offices of Cannock Associated Collieries Ltd. Later it became the education offices for the Cannock Chase Division of Staffordshire County Council. It ended its life as a Teachers Centre, putting on training courses for teachers.



The building that replaced it is called Bridgtown Children's Centre and provides services for all children under 5.