

Chairman's Comments

Well, Autumn has come and gone, though those magnificent leaves continued until quite recently to play their part in the wonderful colour exhibition of nature. We too held our own Annual Exhibition in October, together with the successful publication of our third book "Bridgtown Born and Bred". As always it was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion, though tiring of course for our progressively ageing "Team", but rewarding in every other sense. So many old friends return to activate special recollections and add to our growing archives of Bridgtown's Industrial Heritage and Social History.

Thinking of archives, we have reached the stage where we must address the difficulty of housing the increased volume of memorabilia and administration documents. It can no longer be viable to use our own personal facilities, whether that is in the garage or in the loft! So far we have been fortunate enough to beg or borrow equipment to facilitate our Exhibitions or External Presentations. Consequently, we have judged that the provision of society equipment and its consequent housing, together with suitable storage facilities for memorabilia and archives, should become a more formal objective of our society.

Inevitably the above decision has far-reaching financial implications. To achieve it requires a great deal of specific thought and intention. We will keep you informed of our deliberations as our plans emerge. Meantime, an exercise to improve the communication of news about the society's activities and of our allegiance to the greater Bridgtown community has come to fruition. We are pleased to announce the acquisition and placement of a new substantial Noticeboard to be placed at the junction of North Street with Union Street. We shall share the display space with Bridgtown Parish Council and the funding has been raised by the combined efforts of both parties. The significant funding has proved the value of collaboration with other interested partners. Details will be acknowledged in the near future.

Looking at our Programme of Events we look forward to our Christmas Celebrations on 12th December when St. Stephen's Singers will provide seasonal songs and carols, and Reg Fullelove will return with some more "Old Time" fun. Beyond that we have a real mix of local and general presentations well into the New Year.

More>>

Chairman's comments continued>>>

I know that we are all currently aware of the national deep feeling of austerity and the worldwide concerns about economic downturn. However, let us do our best to try to capture the opportunity to share in making 2013 a much better year. A very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year to you all.

Tony Pearson
25 November 2012

XX

When did Longford Lane Become Longford Road?

Derrick Middleton asks the question and then gives some pointers to an answer.

When I was growing up I cannot recall anyone ever talking about **Longford Road**. Everybody always talked about **Longford Lane**. In my view everybody knew that **Longford Lane** went all the way up to Swift's Garage and, only after then, did it become **Longford Road**.

In the late 1880s the maps all clearly show that there is a road there but there is no name shown on any of them! On those maps there were houses or cottages both before and after New Street but no buildings on the other side of the road. Presumably those houses had an address, but was it **Longford Road** or was it **Longford Lane**? We haven't yet found out.

Between 1938 and 1949 a lot of official documents have been researched to find out the names of people living in those houses. In all those documents the road is clearly called **Longford Road**. However, all the postal addresses used by people living there then use **Longford Lane** as their address! This surely proves that people still called it **Longford Lane** whatever any official document might say.

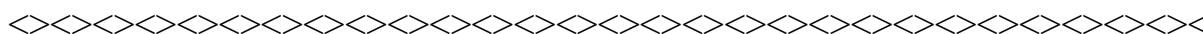
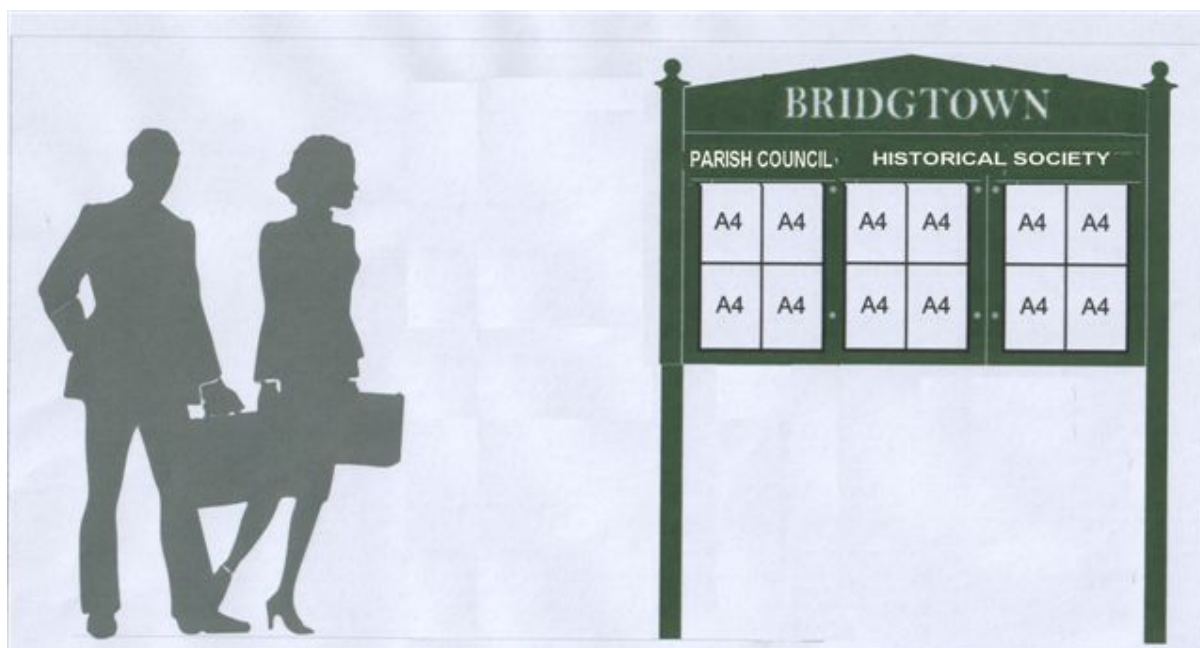
Was it always Longford Road officially? Or, did a change occur on some date, and, if so, when was that? Do you know anything different?

New Noticeboard for Bridgtown

In our *Chairman's Comments* you may have read about a new noticeboard for Bridgtown. This project has been a combined vision between Bridgtown Parish Council and Bridgtown & District Local History Society. It is due to be erected in the near future, subject to planning permission being approved. It will be erected closer to the footpath than the existing smaller noticeboard, at the junction of North Street and Union Street.

The picture below shows an early picture of what has been planned but, hopefully, it won't be long before you can see the real thing. It will give our society the opportunity to advertise our events and information in a readily-visible and central place.

The funding for this project has been acquired by the joint efforts of both the Parish Council and ourselves. In due course we shall be pleased to announce how this funding was acquired and give due recognition and thanks to all those involved.



You know, someone actually complimented me on my driving the other day. They left a little note on my windscreen. It said "Parking Fine". So that was nice!

I believe I was about ten years old when, with my two best friends, we intended to have an adventure around the “Razza”. This was a large reservoir feeding the local canal system and, at our age, was forbidden territory. On route we passed the large gates which formed the entrance to “The Monkey Muck” works, where we noticed two heavy Shire horses. Fascinated, we ventured in, managing to avoid any workmen. We quickly found our way to the blacksmith’s “Smithy” where the smell was wonderful, “horsey” would describe it. The sparks were flying and Mr Tantrum, the huge blacksmith, was initially unaware of our presence. He eventually turned round. We were petrified but this huge man smiled and understood both our excitement and our fear. He beckoned us forward and invited us to help use the bellows stoking his fire. Wow! He became our friend and immediately won our respect. All of us subsequently had many happy hours in that smithy. He also took us to see the process of providing chemicals from animal remains. This we accepted as very “grown up” and thereafter felt proud of our privileged position.

The cinema was now beginning to be an important part of my life. Yes – Sundays were Church (and in those days Choir Practice was two days a week) but Saturdays were dedicated, yes dedicated, to the cinema. We had the choice of the “Picture House”, the “Forum” (bugs and fleas) or the “Danilo” (quite posh). On Saturday mornings the favourite was “Chums’ Club” at the Danilo. The cost was 4d (old pence) and of course there was always a serial to make sure you came week after week. Coming out we would head for the baker’s shop, usually Stanton’s, and we would tuck into a huge bread cob and devour it long before we reached Jellyman’s Brook on our way along the Walsall Road to Bridgtown. While Saturdays without doubt were the highlight of the week Sundays, even with Church, had its moments, particularly in the summer months. Girls were now beginning to become more interesting and, after evening service, it was the custom to go walks, often heading for the Razza. Remember, in those days, the Recreation Ground was also “taboo” on Sundays. It was locked and bolted on Sundays, not merely the outside gates but also the swings, the roundabouts, etc. We often walked as a group of eight or ten and had wonderful fun.

*Tony’s article is not only a wonderful personal record of his early life but is a compelling Social History account. There will be more of it in our next edition.
Ed.*

Without a doubt, just about everyone needed to use the services available. I was kept busy dealing with all the following:

- Postage, insurance and savings stamps.
- Postal orders and money orders.
- Pensions and allowances.
- Post Office Savings Bank.
- Parcel post.
- Telegrams and a few other odds and ends.

Unlike today all we had to help us in our calculations was a Ready Reckoner Book! No automatic tills or calculators in those days!

There was no Sunday trade of course but every other day was very busy and our half day on Thursday was very welcome. Saturday was our “Balancing Day”! I couldn’t go home until the “balancing” was done and I well remember that I was hardly ever on time for any social event held on a Saturday evening.

An afterthought!

I wonder if there are still about any gentlemen of “a certain age” who liked to “lark about” in the telephone box outside the Post Office. I used to have to keep the telephone box clean and tidy and their “activities” used to cause me extra work in a job which I greatly disliked doing. If so, are you feeling sorry about it now after all this time?

Peggy Greenway

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I had a ploughman's lunch the other day.
He wasn't very happy!

I went to buy some camouflage trousers
the other day but I couldn't find any!

I bought some HP sauce the other day.
It's costing me 6p a month for the next two years!

12

The information on this page is neither news nor history but it might be something that you do not know. It concerns an event that took place just over six years ago. However, it might be interesting to tell the story. Editor.

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At 2.30 p.m. on Thursday 19th October 2006 an event took place on the roof of the yet-to-be-completed Ramada Hotel in Bridgtown. The hotel was still surrounded in scaffolding and the internal stairways were not yet all in place.

I was one of a group of people who made their way to the top of the building via a builder's hoist external to the building. I remember thinking that people would pay for such a ride at Alton Towers! We went to the top of the building in order to put in place a metal time capsule, sealed with nitrogen to prevent corrosion. The plan was to leave the time capsule there with a view to it being opened up after fifty years, in 2056. Most time capsules are buried in the ground but this one is placed on top of the tallest building on Cannock Chase!

Photographs in the capsule included Victorian and Edwardian shots showing Bridgtown with its canal and locks up to Leacroft. There were photos of the old White Lion Hotel which stood the other side of the railway line and of The Anglesey Arms, which later became the Stumble Inn. There were also some aerial photographs taken at the time. (The local landscape has already changed considerably in the six years since then.)

Bridgtown Parish Council provided a plaque and other items came from Bethel Church. The children from Bridgtown Primary School put together a group of

items and comments. Hopefully some of those same children will be around when the time capsule is reopened. The Ramada building is officially named Lion Point to mark its connections with the White Lion, and Councillor Eddie Smith presented a shield to Fred Pritchard with a view to this being placed within the building. Cannock Chase Council provided the then-current Economic Development Guide and a set of plans of the whole Orbital Plaza development.

The time capsule was placed and then concealed in the spire mount at the top of Lion Point. Not many of us will be around to see the re-opening but hope that in 2056 those who do will be reminded of the “old days”, whatever that might mean to them!

David Williams

13

Alec Mitchell recalls his memories of Cliff Parkes and would love to hear from anyone who can provide more information.



CLIFFORD JOHN PARKES

In his adult years Cliff Parkes was something of an enigma and it was a great pity that he should pass away before he became better known as a talented international professional musician. His gift to the world of opera was his bass voice, although he was multi-talented, playing many instruments particularly brass and keyboards.

He was a good friend of mine and the photograph shows him as best man at my wedding some fifty three years ago. At the time he was single and worked in a local factory as an electrician. Eventually his talents were recognised and I believe that he was offered sponsorship which took him to the Guildhall School of Music in London. He was there studying for four years until his graduation, living in a small town to the east of London

As always, it was a stroke of good fortune that launched him permanently into the world of opera and light opera, such as Gilbert & Sullivan. He was “spotted” on a television programme and was offered a contract with the D’Oyly Carte Opera Company in 1965 and, in 1966, appeared in the film version of “The Mikado”.

14

He soon discovered that the world of professional entertainers is very different from that seen from the front of stage and Cliff moved on to sing with The Royal Opera at Covent Garden in August 1969. He was very happy with this company, performing not only in this country but also in Canada and the United States. One of his fellow performers came from Dudley and I am told that they used to have great fun telling Aynuk and Ayli stories. This, of course, was like a foreign language to most of the cast and to the Royal Opera technicians. His final performance with “The Royal” was in 1972, making a recording entitled “Gilbert & Sullivan For All”.

Cliff now had considerable experience and looked towards Eastern Europe where he joined up with a Danish operatic troupe and then with a similar German group. He performed with great success at Manheim, which is the prestigious centre for German Opera and Leide. Cliff used to amuse me by tempting me to sing in foreign languages, particularly German. I formed the impression that he was not too fond of his employers at that time.

Eventually Cliff “defected” to the Dutch National Opera based in Amsterdam where he set up home with his second wife Pat, Unfortunately one day I had a phone call from Cliff’s sister Irene, telling me that Cliff was seriously ill in an Amsterdam hospital. I was quick to telephone and was connected to a phone at his bedside, but this turned out to be my last conversation with him. He passed away that night.

Alec Mitchell

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Alec Mitchell invites you to add any additional information, or to correct lapses in his memory. Alec particularly would like to hear about Cliff's first wife as there was a period where there was little contact between them, when Cliff was in London while Alec pursued a career in Birmingham.

Alec's email address is mitch.g4ice@gmail.com

15

In January 1912 the Cannock Chase Courier used to publish small items of news entitled:

“Bits from Bridgtown”

- The young ladies of the Wesleyan Church are working for a Social evening to be held in the Schoolroom in a fortnight hence. One member of the Church stated on Thursday that the ladies' effort will be worth patronising seeing that they are taking much interest in their work. It is stated that a tea will be provided to be followed by an entertainment and social, the proceeds to be devoted to the Chapel fund.
- Judging from the entries and the attendance of the Annual Show of the Castle Flying Club held on Saturday last, it would appear to be one of the most successful shows held since the club was formed. The Committee are anticipating a most successful season this summer.

It is important that we remind ourselves from time to time of the threat that hung over Bridgtown in the 1970s and the 1980s. Here Ernest Charlesworth expresses in verse how things seemed in 1983. How bleak the future looked in those days.

A few years later BRAG had won their battle, but even then they would not have imagined the developments that were to come and that Bridgtonians today can look forward with optimism to the future.

How it was in 1983

The houses tumble, still they fall.
First the roof, now a wall.
And this is the work, or so they say
Of those who plan a better day,
A day with Bridgtown homes no more,
Just Unit One, or Forty Four.

When that day comes, if come it must
And homes we know no longer stand,
What will these happy people say,
These councillors with the guilty hand?
They will raise a glass and say "We won.
We destroyed them all, one by one!"

Ernest R. Charlesworth

In January 1912 the Cannock Chase Courier used to publish small items of news entitled:

"Bits from Bridgtown"

- An amusing incident occurred at Churchbridge on Wednesday evening. It appears that a horse and trap was proceeding up the Walsall Road, and when near the works the driver of the vehicle evidently lost his head, or rather mind, and drove the horse into the post, which is situated at the junction of Walsall Road and Brownhills. On his cart were a few boxes containing some herrings and other oddments which the man had left from his day's hawking. He related at a certain hostelry later on that it was a very dark night.
- The promoters of the Whist Drive and Social, which was recently held in St. Paul's Schoolroom, in aid of the Day Schools have cause to congratulate themselves upon their efforts. On Friday evening a settlement was made and the results have turned out most satisfactorily for over £5 has been realised. The Committee decided to hold another similar event in the near future, so that the debt on the Schools, may be reduced. The Curate-in-charge the Rev. A. Kirk has decided to hold again the usual Mission Services during Lent. It appears these services were most successful last year, and it is by special request from friends that the Rev. gentleman will continue the services during Lent.
- It was a very dark night on Tuesday, with a dense fog and a curious incident occurred at the foot of the Wharf Bridge. As some pedestrians were coming from the Reservoir way to the township they came in contact with a cyclist who had a poor light, and with the fog could scarcely see a yard in front. The rider dashed into the pedestrians, pitching him into the palings which are near the foot of the Bridge. It was found that the unfortunate fellow was proceeding to his work at the Old Coppice Colliery, but he received such shocks, that he returned to his home at Chadsmoor. The pedestrians at first complained, but when they saw the cyclist was hurt they showed sympathy with him, and helped him with his machine which was also slightly damaged.
- Mr. Leonard C. Philpot, Auctioneer and Valuer, Walsall, has within the last week, sold by private treaty, Two Freehold Houses at Bridgtown, which formed part of the Estate of William Bird, deceased.

GOD'S VOICE MAIL

Contributed by Maureen Hill

Be grateful that God doesn't have voice mail.
Imagine praying and hearing the following:

“Thank you for calling Heaven (Jeremiah 33:3)

Press 1 for Requests

Press 2 for Thanksgiving

Press 3 for Complaints

Press 4 for All Other Enquiries”

“I am sorry, all our angels and saints are busy helping other sinners at the moment.

However, your prayer is important to us and we will answer it in the order it was received. Please stay on the line.”

“If you would like to speak to:

God, press 1

Jesus, press 2

The Holy Spirit, press 3.

If you would like to hear King David sing a Psalm whilst you’re holding, press 4.

To find a loved one that has been assigned to Heaven, press 5 and then enter his or her National Insurance Number followed by the £ sign.

For reservations in Heaven, please enter John 3:16

For answers to nagging questions about dinosaurs, the age of the earth, life on other planets, where Noah’s Ark landed, which came first the chicken or the egg, please await arrival in Heaven when all will be revealed.”

“Our computers show that you have already prayed once today, so please hang up and try again tomorrow.

This office is now closed for the weekend to observe a religious holiday. Please pray again on Monday after 9.30 a.m.

If you are phoning after hours and need emergency assistance, please contact your local minister of religion.”

(The above was taken from the April issue of ACE, Association of Church Editors.)

“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 articles from the Winter 1937 Edition.

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Every edition had an article called by the following title. The headmaster was of course Joe Croft and this is some of what he had to say in 1937:

FROM OUR HEADMASTER

Keep fit! That is the watchword today, and it seems to me to be a very good watchword too. Unless we feel well we cannot do our work well, we do not feel inclined to join in games, we feel miserable and make those around us miserable too.

There are many ways in which even small boys can keep fit. One important way is by being clean – inside and outside. Washing as much of the body as possible each day, brushing the hair, cleaning the teeth, using a handkerchief, keeping the nails clean are all valuable ways towards keeping well and strong.

Then there is the oxygen problem – fresh air. It is important that windows should be open in the bedroom. Remember that more than a third of your life is spent in your bedroom and unless you are breathing good air during that time you cannot hope to be well.

Most boys like games, and those that are played in the open air are a good help towards fitness.

Every boy wants to be strong. Make it your New Year Resolution – “I will be fit by being clean, by having plenty of fresh air and by joining in games.”

To everyone I say “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year”.



Our other item on the next page is a story written by Douglas Williams who was also editor of the magazine. In 1937 it was a great story but it would be totally unacceptable today. Doug is well known to most of us and this was his story:

SAVED BY A THIEF

Dawson, the trapper, slowly wended his way to each of his traps, his face darkening as he came to the sixth empty one in succession. He saw the tail of a silver fox, perhaps the most valued animal for its pelt, wedged firmly between the steel jaws of the trap. All around were signs of a struggle. The fox, hampered by the trap, had been carried off by the lynx. This animal continually

robbed the traps and although the trapper kept a careful lookout he had never caught the beast unawares. Twice he had shot at the wary creature but the thief was always out of range. Sadly, the trapper baited his trap, muttering as he did so, then straightening his back he plodded his way to the next.

Five more he examined. Three showed signs that the lynx had been round but had disdained to touch the small snow-rabbits they contained. The fourth held a marten which still lived, and when Dawson approached, this fierce little beast bared its teeth and showed fight. The trapper did not shoot the animal, for that would have meant damaging its valuable fur. Instead he took out his small steel-tipped truncheon which he carried for such an emergency, and gave the marten a blow which laid it senseless. Adding the marten's pelt to the three he carried, he trudged with a lighter heart to the last trap. After visiting this, which proved to be empty, he started on his way back to his lonely shack.

As he trudged along his mind was on the furs he carried. But for the lynx he would have had more. Suddenly his speculations were interrupted by a sharp clang. A searing pain shot up his left leg. Instantly he realised what had happened. The day before he had lost the location of a new trap, and now he had stepped into it. He bent down and, taking a key from his pocket, he freed himself. But the trap had done its deadly work. He could walk only slowly and painfully.

He had begun to stagger on his way when an eerie howl rang out, and he glimpsed several forms, grey and dog-like, slinking after him through the woods. Timber wolves! He broke into a blind, staggering run, but slowly they closed upon him. Propping himself against a tree he fired. The leader gave a dismal howl and rolled over dead. Immediately the others tore him to pieces. Dawson was able to gain several yards before they again began to follow him.

Suddenly a dark shape flashed past him. It was the lynx. A pandemonium broke out behind him as the four remaining wolves hurled themselves upon the cat. The lynx turned into a fighting devil, and the last Dawson saw of him was a spitting, snarling, tawny shape, surrounded by wolves.

He reached his hut and dressed his wounds and, today, there hangs on his cabin wall the snarling mask of the lynx that robbed his traps yet saved his life.