



THE BRIDGTONIAN



WINTER 2017

Editorial

Time flies so much more quickly these days, or so it seems. Already it is time for the winter edition of your magazine and time to wish everyone the compliments of the season. The picture on the front of your magazine was taken at the ceremony of lighting up the Christmas tree in the school grounds.

It is only two and a half months since the last magazine but they have been a busy time for our society. In October we had our annual Open Day. Most people seemed to be pleased with the new way we had arranged the room and our little "cinema" went down well. We have been wondering whether to change this event for something else instead of an Open Day next year. What do you think?

In November Derek Davis provided us with a fascinating quiz about the local area, showing many photographs demonstrating just how much the area has changed in our lifetimes. The photos sparked much interest and discussion.

Our plans to develop a Heritage Trail around the Bridgtown area have taken yet another step forward. Arrangements have been completed for the erection of our next information board. 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!

John Devey's new book "A walk into Cannock and back" has also brought forth many memories and reminiscences for those who have read it. The book is selling really well. The price is excellent value at £6. Have you got your copy yet? It would make an excellent Christmas present for someone.

David Williams

10th December 2017

LIFE IN 1930s BRIDGTOWN

*In our last edition we published the ninth and final extract from the memories of **Norman Seedhouse**, son of Howard Seedhouse. We thought you might be interested to read some background information about Norman. So here it is.*

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Norman Seedhouse

Norman lived in Bridgtown in the 1930s and 1940s and gained a scholarship from Bridgtown Boys School in 1944 to be educated at Queen Mary's Grammar School in Walsall. He progressed to Oxford University and London and then joined the Colonial Education Services and went to Rhodesia to help manage education in African Schools.



This photo was taken when he was acting Principal at a small private boarding school for six months. He lived in this brick built house with a tin roof in a rural area with no electricity, but it did have running water pumped from a nearby local stream. Cooking was by wood fire and lighting by paraffin lamps.

He came back to England when the political turmoil in Rhodesia closed down the education project. You will remember it as a very turbulent time. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe and eventually Robert Mugabe came to power.

Here is Norman when he was in Africa, holding sugar cane.



Following teaching posts in Birmingham and Wolverhampton he moved into Education Administration for Shropshire, then Oxford and was eventually Deputy Education Officer for East Yorkshire and then Divisional Education Officer for Humberside when it was formed under reorganisation.

Norman first met his wife Vencke when they were on a work-camp in Norway. Later they met up again and were married. Norway is where they now live.



Illuminating Facts

The following collection of facts have been put together for us by Katherine Page.

Now the days are at their shortest we often automatically reach out to put on the electric light. It reminds of the speed of change if we remember that the oldest member of our society was born before any electric lights were to be found in anyone's home.

It was in 1876 that the Cannock Chase Colliery Company began to generate a supply of Direct Current electricity. We believe that the generator was constructed by the firm of Bumstead & Chandler and that it gave out about 100 volts. Three years later the same firm installed electricity at Brereton Collieries, owned by the Earl of Shrewsbury. The lamps in that day were a kind of sausage shape but wider at the bottom than at the top; the light they gave out was like a bright reddish glow.

Cannock Gas Works began to generate electricity a little later but again it would be Direct Current. The new Cannock Urban District Council took a supply from them and a few electric lights were erected in the town centre. Do you remember the two tall lamp standards that stood in the town centre on that elongated island in front of Burtons the Tailors? Each standard had two lamps and they were the first to be erected. They remained in place until the 1950s.

In Bridgtown the firm of Cornelius Whitehouse built a plant to make coal gas. This was used to power several machines but also drove a Direct Current dynamo for electric lighting. When the new Park Street Chapel was built in 1902 it was lit with electric lights powered from the Cornelius Whitehouse works. We can be pretty sure that the Whitehouse family home, The Poplars, was lit by electricity when it became more generally available in 1925. The council set up an Electricity Department and purchased their supply from Wolverhampton Power Station in Cleveland Road, Wolverhampton.

As usual Bridgtown was at the forefront of new developments in those days!

A North Street Shop

Sandra Assi (nee Cliff) tells the story of her family.

My parents, Florence and Harry Cliff, moved to 20 North Street in 1926 to start a business. Their shop sold groceries, confectionery, newspapers and also homemade ice cream. Both my parents came from large families. My father was the eldest of his family and his parents, Alice and George Cliff lived across the street at number 19 North Street. Ours was very much an open-house family, with people often popping in and out.

Early in 1940 my father became Sub Postmaster, taking over from Mr. Rushton who retired. The ice cream counter was removed and a new counter was set up for the Post Office. Two of my father's younger brothers joined the Forces. Sam was in the Navy. Fred was in the Army and became a Prisoner of War. My sister Avery joined the Wrens in 1943. My father was Chief Air Raid Warden, with the Warden's Post in a side room of our house. The Wardens were all volunteers.

In May 1948 my grandparents celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. My Aunt Nellie came over from Australia especially for the occasion.

My father organised and took part in many concerts for War Charities. After the War he formed the Bridgtown Welfare Club for pensioners. I remember wanting to watch the coronation in 1953 on television, only to be told by my father that he had promised to lend our television set to the Pensioners' Club! I did manage to watch the coronation in the end.....at a neighbour's house.

EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

Hot dogs were a type of sausage that only the Americans ate.

Cornflakes had arrived from America but it was obvious that they would never catch on.

The phrase "boil in the bag" would have been beyond our realms of comprehension.

The idea of "oven chips" would not have made any sense at all to us.

Reminiscences

A few years ago these reminiscences were written by Carrie Summers (nee Norman). Apologies to Carrie for taking so long to getting round to printing them. At the time they were written as shared memories with her husband Norman, who sadly is no longer with us. Nevertheless I have left her words as she wrote them at the time.

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Norman and I both recall memories of playing in the field which led from Longford Road to Watling Street, near to the shop which Norman would later keep. "Their lot!" used to dam up the stream so that they could swim in it and paddle in it. But that meant that "our lot" didn't get any water at the Watling Street end. So, in the end, we all joined together in the field at the back of Mr. Whitehouse's Dairy (which was in New Street opposite the fish and chip shop.) Mr. Whitehouse's cows would come up to see what was going on and then, eventually, we all got into trouble.

Norman says that his Grandma came to supervise them. He and Harry Madeley and Chic Shelley used to carry a chair down for her to sit on. She used to do her knitting. She wore a great big hat, held on by a big hatpin. The boys all left school at 14 and poor Chic Shelley only worked in one of the factories at Churchbridge for a short while before he was tragically killed. His coat got caught in one of the machines. Harry Madeley is still alive and Norman communicates with him still. Norman himself was actually allowed to leave school while he was still 13 years of age. His 14th birthday was on August 19th but Mr. Croft, Headmaster of Bridgtown School, allowed him to leave a few weeks early. This was because Norman's father had died and his mother needed him to help her in the shop.

I remember playing on the recreation ground (behind the Watling Street bungalows) with Sheila Pearson, Tommy Horton and his sister Elsie, Margaret Partington and Barbara Belcher.

Barbara had an older brother called Kenneth and he played a xylophone. I played the accordion, and we also had an organ in our front room which was played by Les and my Dad. There was also a friend called Norman who played the saucepan lids as if they were drums, and also played a guitar. We had a lot of fun amusing ourselves like this. I went on to play at lots of various places during the war.....that is until my brother sold my accordion without my permission!

During the war, in 1941, I remember quite a few of us standing on top of the monkey cage. The monkey cage was a big climbing frame built like scaffolding. From there we watched the bombing of Birmingham and a train going along while it was on fire! In the field next to the recreation ground a special event used to take place. On one special day there was a parade round Bridgtown which ended up on that field. We all used to dress up in fancy dress. I think the dresses were made out of coloured paper mainly. I am pretty sure that the event was organised by a Mr & Mrs Parbrook but I really cannot remember what it was all in aid of. I can remember decorating my "fairy bike" and a doll's pram.

Sometimes we used to go to a field at Middle Hill where the brook ran out of the clayhole. There we would pick wild flowers, arum lilies and suchlike. Unfortunately the clay in the water stained all our clothes. On one such day I got a good hiding as I was wearing a white dress and white socks which had to be thrown away. We were really poor then which was why my Mom was so annoyed.

We also played a lot around the reservoir – too often with very sad consequences. Several young children were drowned in trying to swim across it! Just under the surface there were patches of "fronds" which would wrap themselves round a body and drag it under.

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We are about half way through Carrie's reminiscences and the other half will be published in the next magazine

Your Stories -- A Request

On the previous pages Carrie Summers has written her memories for us. We are so pleased to be able to print them. Her story is interesting in its own right but, hopefully for some of you, you will be reminded of your childhood and what you used to do.

Why don't YOU write about your life? It could put you in touch with people you used to know and call friends. It doesn't matter whether you write a lot or a small amount. If you only write a small amount we will probably print all of it. If you write a lot we reserve the right to edit it according to how much available space we have.

Some people won't write because they are worried about their spelling or punctuation. Don't let that put you off. Everything printed will appear as it should be.

Please let us have your stories. Don't think others won't be interested. They will. Honestly!

BRIDGTOWN LINGO

Bridgtown Lingo	Meaning
Nipper	Small boy or brother
Bostin	The very best
Doolally	Stupid
Corker	Good result
Round the Wrekin	Using too many words
Our kid	Brother or a good friend
Tarrar	Cheerio
Gotcha	Caught out
Cocky	Arrogant
Jay What?	Pardon me?
Shifty	Dodgy
High Fallutin	Posh or better than me
Flicks	Cinema

THE HISTORY OF BRIDGTOWN

I think most of you now know that we intend to write the history of Bridgtown in a series of books which can later be placed into a box to create a boxed set. We have already planned the broad outline of the eight volumes that will comprise the set. These volumes will appear one at a time over the next three years, with an estimated completion date of November 2020. Here is the outline:

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| Volume 1 | The story of the Bridgtown area in former centuries, leading into how and why industry came to this area. |
| Volume 2 | The story of local canals, roads and railways, leading to the birth of a new town and a new community. |
| Volume 3 | The importance of founding industrialists like William Gilpin and the Whitehouse family. |
| Volume 4 | The growth and development of the village from the 1860s through to the Great War. |
| Volume 5 | The Great War and its effects locally |
| Volume 6 | How the village changed and the events leading up to, and including, the Second World War |
| Volume 7 | Victory celebrations and the new Post-War Bridgtown, telling the story through to the 1960s. |
| Volume 8 | The dark days, the formation of BRAG, the recovery of the village with its own parish council into regeneration and a bright future. |

There is, as yet, no titles for any of these books and they will not be published in order, but as they become ready. As it will shortly be 100 years since the end of the First World War, the first book to appear will be Volume 5 in just a few months from now. All the books will contain as many relevant photographs as we can find.

THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITOR

In most magazines I have asked for the thoughts of you, our readers. Occasionally I receive a minor response but usually I get no response at all. As far as I know we are the only History Society who produces a magazine like this. It is very difficult to continue to produce a magazine unless I have information to put in it.

A few people have written some very long articles that I have been able to serialise over many magazines. Others have regularly written about special events or about special people that they remember well. To all of those who have contributed in any way I am enormously grateful. They have made my job as editor a straightforward one.

It may surprise you to know that this is the 35th edition of what started off in 2009 as our newsletter and very quickly became "The Bridgtonian". That is a lot of words and a lot of information. About three years ago I had a folder full of articles and comments that people had sent me. As each edition came round I was able to look through my folder and choose what I considered to be a balanced and interesting content for that particular time. Now my folder is looking rather thin and sorry for itself I cannot produce many more magazines unless I receive an influx of new material.

If you like the magazine and would like me to continue to produce it then I need your help. Make an effort to write something for me or urge someone else to do so. Do you have some interesting photos you would like me to share with others? Everybody has something worthwhile to say or to share. It is my job as editor to choose what goes into the magazine and sometimes I have to add a further explanation and sometimes I have to cut out parts that might be offensive to others. But that is my problem, not yours.

If I continue to receive little or no feedback then I shall reluctantly come to the conclusion that the magazine is no longer needed or wanted. Yet I know that there is still loads of information out there. Come on! Help me out please.

David Williams

Every year Bridgtown continues to have its own Christmas tree on view to everyone. Every year there is a special event to mark the switching on of the lights followed by refreshments in Bethel Church. Our front cover shows a photograph from this year's event. Below shows Rev. Edwin Myers at Bethel afterwards.



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