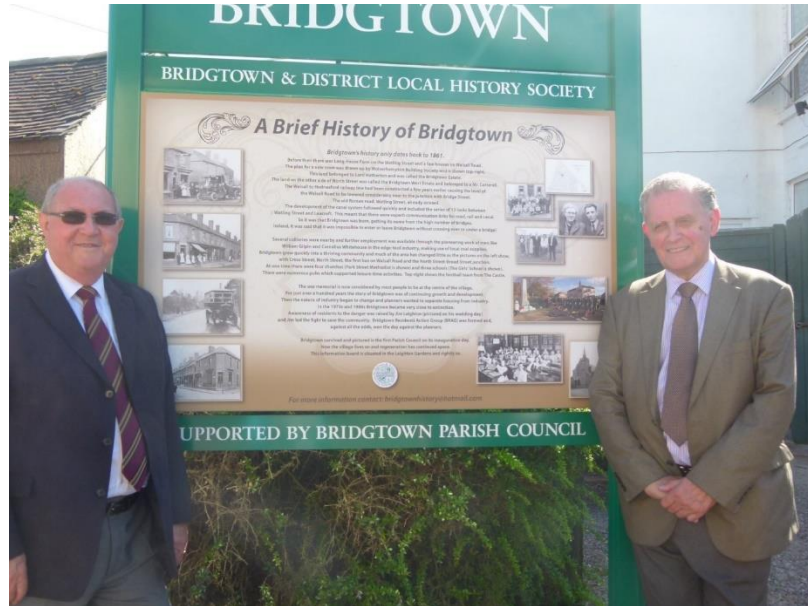


□



SUMMER 2018

Editorial

Here is our magazine for Summer 2018 and what a summer it has been so far, weeks on end of glorious weather. It has been a good period too for Bridgtown & District Local History Society. Since our last magazine appeared we have erected two new information boards on our planned Heritage Trail.

Our front cover shows our joint chairmen at the unveiling ceremony of the new “centrepiece” board in the Leighton Gardens at the bottom of Union Street on June 24th. This board sets out a brief history of our village and is intended to be the starting point for the Heritage Trail once it is completed. There is more information to be found within the pages of this magazine.

Back in April we had also unveiled an information board on the grass verge outside Longford House. It is another double-sided board with plenty to look at and stir your memory. One side has 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 has information about the original Longford Crossroads which eventually gave way to Longford Island.

The beginning of May saw the launch of the first book in a set of six books which will set out a definitive history of the Bridgtown area. These books will all be appearing between now and the end of 2020.

We have also had some very interesting talks. In May John Devey launched the first book in the new series with an interesting talk about the involvement of Bridgtown men in the dark days of World War One. June provided a talk about the recent earthquake in New Zealand with the personal reminiscences of Graham Bowman. The July talk was given by Bridgtown man Patrick Corfield where he shed a great deal of light on the history of the Bridgtown area before the village was actually built and also enlarged our knowledge of the military history of Cannock Chase. It was a fascinating talk where those present learned a great deal.

David Williams

24th July 2018

HERITAGE TRAIL - LONGFORD HOUSE



On Wednesday 18th April a ceremony was held to unveil our new “Heritage Trail” board outside Longford House. Have you been down there and had a close look at the board for yourself?

In the picture above we see the unveiling ceremony which is being carried out by Katherine Page and Barbara Battersby. Most of the information we have about Longford House has come to us via Barbara’s late husband David. The house had been the family home of the Gilpin family who had such an influence on local industry and on the growth of Wedges Mills. Katherine has also had a great interest in the house and helped David in some of his investigations.

The board has been funded by the Marion Glover Trust. Without that donation it would not have been possible to erect this board for many years yet.

One side of the board gives information about Longford House and the Gilpin family. The other side features Longford Island, such a busy feature of life today. The board displays pictures of when there was no island but just a crossroads with a very iconic finger-post on the corner. There are even pictures further back in time as, in the days before motor traffic, it was just simply a country scene and roads were simply tracks without kerbstones. This was true even for such a nationally recognised thoroughfare as Watling Street.



Pictured on the day are Fred Pritchard, Eddie Smith, John Devey and David Williams

WALKMILL LANE

Some thoughts from Katherine Page

There is an old saying “What’s in a name?” That set me thinking about Walkmill Lane. The average person passing along the road today probably doesn't give it a second thought. But let us think back a few hundred years. Watling Street was originally a Roman road, a road of significance through the centuries. Walkmill Lane will have been a track down to the mill which used to stand down there.

In times gone by woollen clothes were made and cleansed at such places. The process was called fulling or tucking or walking. In Scotland the process was called waulking (as shown in the engraving on the next page). The process made the cloth cleaner, eliminated oils, dirt and other impurities and made the cloth thicker. The worker who did this job was called a fuller, a tucker or a walker. These are now common surnames in our country.



Sometimes back in Roman times stale urine was used for the cleaning process but, by medieval times fuller’s earth was used instead. The cloth was placed in a trough of water with the fuller’s earth and it would be walked upon by a number of people. After this was finished the length of cloth would be stretched on wooden frames known as tenterhooks and held in place by tenterhooks. From this comes the phrase “being on tenterhooks” or being held in suspense.

As time went on, a water wheel was used to drive a machine which lifted timber

lengths and dropped them on to the cloth to pound it. I don't think Walkmill ever advanced to a fulling mill so there would not have been a mill pool and a water mill at that time.

There are records of the mill being there in 1775 and in 1843 it was in the ownership of Jonathan Stokes. In 1841, the year of the first census, the miller is one Thomas Gripton and this family are still in the area in 2018. Thomas went on to be the miller until the end of the 19th century. He also owned the Furnace Tavern, which was later rebuilt as the Vine Inn, which was kept by his son, also Thomas. We believe Thomas left the mill in the late 19th century and moved to keep the steam mill at the top of Churchbridge, opposite Leacroft Lane. Coppice Colliery later purchased the mill and the manager of the brickworks at the colliery lived there for a time. Later Coppice Colliery built their standard gauge railway line from the colliery, around the Bridgtown side of the pool, to the main line from Walsall to Cannock. The mill and the mill pool were then filled in and the land built up to road level for the line to be laid.

Another mill: this time at the area you will know as Cannock's Mill Farm

K. + S. 2.2.74

Farmer's will gives £50,000 to charities

Cannock farmer, Mr. Reuben Noden, has left nearly £50,000 in his will to charities. A widower, he had no children. He died last October after living more than 40 years at Cannock Mill Farm, site of a water mill with the last working machinery of its type in Staffordshire.

The property and land is owned by the National Coal Board. Cannock Chase District Council may buy the mill to preserve it in some form.

Mr. Noden left £51,029 gross, £50,880 net, willing about £2,000 in personal legacies.

The rest goes equally between the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Church of England Children's Society, Dr. Barnardo's Homes, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and The Imperial Cancer Research Fund.

Mr. Noden was survived by a brother and two sisters, all associated with farming in the Cannock Chase area.

The family settled near Cannock in 1897 and Reuben farmed at Rumer Hill and Streetway Farm, Kingswood, before concentrating his farming and gardening at Cannock Mill.

From the ***Express & Star***, 2nd February 1974

A HISTORY OF THE BRIDGTOWN AREA

Here is a reminder of the small books which will form the definitive History of Bridgtown. Volume 3 is already available. The next book to be published is Volume 2, Its Industrial Heritage, which should be completed by our October Open Day. The whole series should be available before the end of 2020.

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 VILLAGE EVENT

Sunday 24th June 2018 was the day chosen by Bridgtown Parish Council to celebrate the thirtieth birthday of its inauguration. This inauguration came after the Bridgtown Residents Action Group (BRAG) had saved the village from extinction. This story will be retold in Volume 6 of our “History of Bridgtown” series, a book which should be available next year. The original Parish Council are shown in the photograph below.



On 24th June our new Information Board (as shown on the front cover of this magazine) was unveiled and dedicated, along with a new bench commemorating the Bridgtown men who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

The new Information Board is planned to be the starting point for our Heritage Trail when it is completed. It is different from the other boards in that it attempts to illustrate the history and development of our village. If you have not visited this board yet, then you surely must. It will be worth your while.



Here are two further photographs taken on the day.



EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

- Sugar enjoyed a good press in those days and was regarded as being white gold.
 - Lettuce and tomatoes in winter were just a rumour.
-

Opposite is a press cutting from one of the local newspapers. It was published in 1982 and it tells its own story. It was passed to me as a result of the recent death of Christine Wilcox. Some of you may be interested to see it.

This magazine takes no blame for the spelling mistakes and punctuation mistakes within the article.

Christine bows out gracefully



Primary School favourite, Christine Wilcox, is bowing out despite a campaign to keep her in the classrooms, Mrs Wilcox who has seen generations of Bridgetown youngsters through their early school days, fell victim to education cuts, Her full-time post as a welfare assistant was reduced to part-time working as education chiefs tried to save cash, Even a 300 signature petition collected by parents was not enough to force a change of heart at County Hall, And Mrs Wilcox, who has worked at the North Street school for 24 years, decided to take early retirement, "We never thought Mrs Wilcox would leave, she has become so well known and trusted among the mother's" said petition organiser, and parent representative on the school's board of governors, Mrs Sandra Perry, "She was the sort of person mother's could turn to for help even with problems that did not concern school, Bridgetown County Primary headmaster Mr David Williams agreed; "Mrs Wilcox was excellent in her job and had all the qualities needed to be a teacher" Mrs Wilcox, aged 50, worked mainly with reception classes at the school, "I was really responsible for the infants needs and helping them to adjust to school life" said Mrs Wilcox, "Unfortunately school rolls are dropping and my job eventually had to be affected, I would like to find another job but failing that I shall do some sort of voluntary work" she added, Pictured, - Mrs Wilcox receives a bouquet of flowers and gold necklace from Mr Williams,

The following poem was written by Jeanette Cartwright in 1986. The battle by BRAG to save the village was almost won and people started to hope for a better future

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 yester-year!

Those that've 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 batterings 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.

E-MAIL:

bridgtownhistory@hotmail.com

WEBSITE:

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

HERITAGE TRAIL

Our front cover shows the new Information Board at the bottom of Union Street. There are now 5 such boards in the area with quite a few more planned. Where would you like to see such a board? We are keen to ensure that future generations shall celebrate the heritage of this area and be proud of it.