



THE BRIDGTONIAN



SPRING 2017

Editorial

Your editor has had difficulties putting together this your latest magazine and apologises that it is the first one you have had this year. Hopefully, now things are back to normal and there should be no more problems.

In December a good number of people attended our Christmas Festivities when we were entertained by St. Stephen's Singers from Cannock. A good time was had by all. In January there was quite a contrast. We had a talk from Peter Cadman about World War One. We were reminded in pictures and in poetry about the horrors of that war and the sacrifices made by so many people. There was a reasonable attendance and the talk was well appreciated by everyone present.

In February David Battersby gave us the benefit of his great knowledge about William Gilpin, a man who greatly influenced the development of Bridgtown. Your author was unable to attend the talk but reports confirm that it was an interesting and informative meeting.

Our March meeting again was led by one of our own, Derrick Middleton. This was another session full of interesting information which stimulated much thought and discussion. Thank you Derrick.

Finally, I will ask again if you will talk to one of our team and tell them what sort of things would you like our society to arrange, what talks you would like to hear and what do you want to see published in this magazine. It is your society and your ideas are important to us.

Hopefully your next magazine will be along in another couple of months or so.

David Williams

15th April 2017



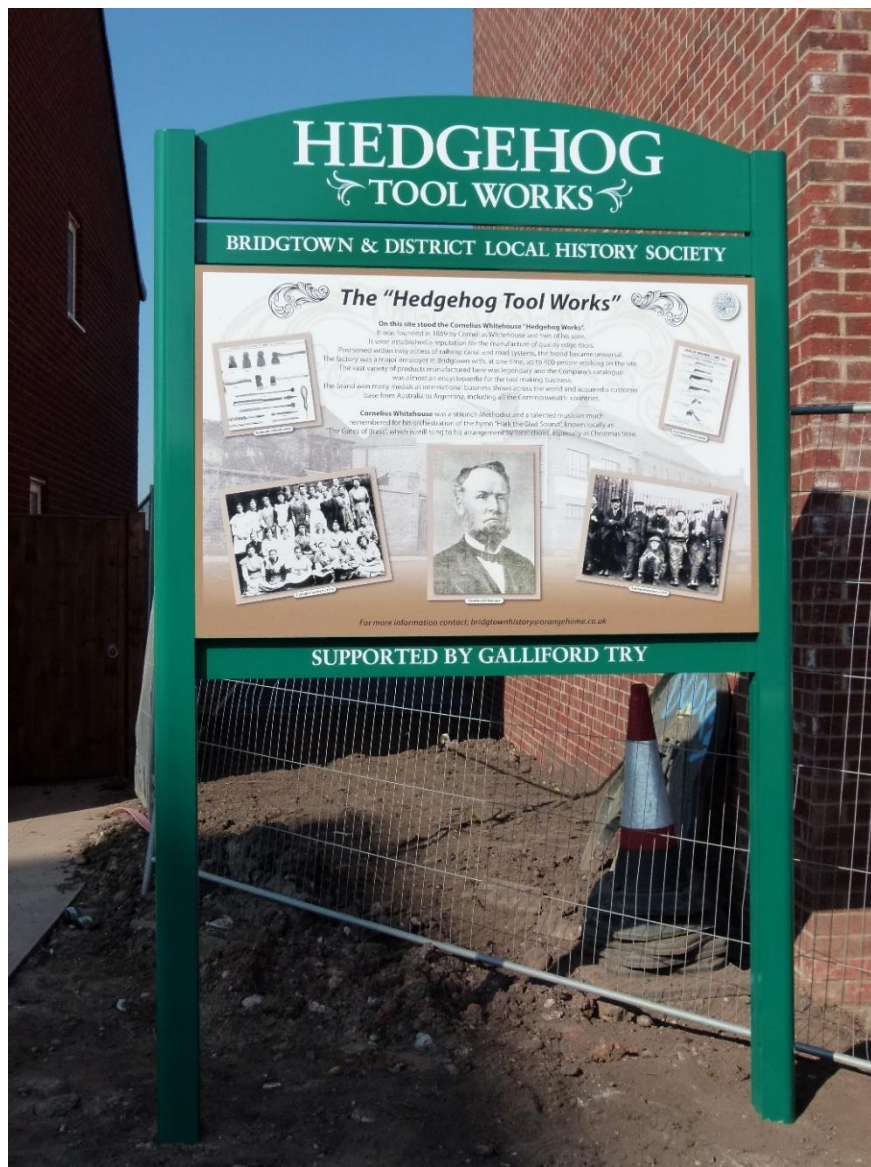
The regeneration of Bridgtown continues.

Bridgtown is a fast-growing place again now, just like it was 150 years ago. This time around the planning is different and the technology is different but the end result is similar. Bridgtown is growing and new people are arriving in the village into new housing. Above is a photograph of Walkmill Lane (or Vine Lane as most people seemed to call it). The building which was once The Vine public house stands in the background but otherwise everything is all-change in that area, a process that is due to continue for some time yet on both sides of the road.

People are also now moving into the new properties where Cornelius Whitehouse's Hedgehog Works once stood. Your society prepared a little booklet of welcome for those new residents. We plan to do something for the new residents in the Walkmill area too. Elsewhere in this magazine you will find news about the new information boards that are appearing around the Bridgtown area. We hope that the proposed Heritage Trail will make new residents aware of the village's proud history.

Building a Heritage Trail

Below is a picture of our new information board on the site of the old Cornelius Whitehouse Hedgehog Factory. The photograph was taken just after the board was erected. By now the land around it should have been landscaped.



On Wednesday 19th April there will be an official unveiling ceremony and we hope that there will be more of these boards appearing around the area to form a Heritage Trail. It will bring back memories to older residents and be a source of information to Bridgtown's new residents and to visitors.



Here are more photographs taken during the latter stages of the building of the new development on the Cornelius Whitehouse site. Above is the development from the inside and below is the Park Street view. The face of Bridgtown is ever-changing.

LIFE IN 1930s BRIDGTOWN

*In our last edition we published the sixth 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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Picnics

Sunday tea was always special, but it was even more exciting if we went on a picnic. We would walk down to the reservoir at the edge of the village to picnic at the side of the water, watching bathers and others enjoying their free day. If we had more time and really fine weather was promised we would take a longer walk up to Cannock. We would go to Shoal Hill to sit and eat our salmon and cucumber sandwiches. We really enjoyed exploring among the heather and the bracken.

Starting school

In April 1938 Grandmother Wright took charge of us boys in her home at Great Wyrley. I was nearly five and my brother Ken was 9 months old. Mother had to have a thyroid operation which was followed by a recuperation period in Sandon Sanatorium. Here she was to make a good recovery, but in the meantime it was decided that I should start school at the local Landywood Infants School. After one term there, mother had recovered and we could all be together again in our house at 44 Union Street. So, this time I started school in Bridgtown at what was then called Bridgtown Girls and Infants School.

Even though there were only six classrooms the school was much bigger than the Landywood School where I had spent my first term. It was a redbrick Edwardian building which housed Mixed Infants as well as both Junior and Senior Girls. The more modern Bridgtown Boys School was further along the road. Situated at the crossroads at the bottom of Union Street it was a short distance and simple route to get to school. There were no distractions on the way other than the one little shop where we could buy a small bag of broken biscuits for a halfpenny. For one old penny we could have boiled sweets scooped out by the shop owner from one of the large glass jars standing on her counter.

Playing marbles was a popular pastime both in the school playground and along the street gutter as we made our way home. Rolling, hitting and winning those little glass balls could result in heavy bulging pockets and envious looks at the end of the day. In the autumn there were similar competitions to see who had the best and hardest conker (horse chestnut seed). There was a boy who lived almost opposite me and we often ran to school or home together, skidding with our studded black boots to see who could produce the most sparks. It was no wonder that father was often at his shoe last knocking in a fresh set of studs. He did all our own shoe repairs, cutting leather soles and heels, nailing them on and then adding steel heel and toe tips or studs. He also used to cut my hair with a pair of hand clippers.

At school we were rigidly disciplined. Before school started we ran around in the two playgrounds, boys in one, girls in another. When the bell rang we lined

up and were then marched into our classes. In the classroom there were alternate columns of boys' and girls' desks. There were probably about 50 children in the room altogether. I remember receiving a new slate for arithmetic, much better than the old one with a broken frame that I had had at Landywood. For practice writing we were given double-lined copy books. As with all exercise books we were given a list of ten "Don't do....." rules. These were printed on the back cover of each book but it was many years before I had learned enough to understand what these actually meant!

Playtimes saw us running around in our separate tarmacked areas or visiting the open-air toilets at the far side of the yard. Beyond the yard were the green playing fields where we went for Games and Physical Training. For this we stood in long columns or rows, swinging our arms in unison or throwing a ball along over our heads or under our legs. Nobody wore any special P.T. kit.

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In our next edition Norman will tell us about the arrival of electricity and about the Second World War. We look forward to that. Ed.

HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

The society team is very concerned about the fall in membership of the society. If we are to continue to be a thriving organisation we need the support of everyone. If you know anyone who has not renewed their membership and has stopped attending our meetings please tell them that they are important to us and we would love to see them again.

We are all still working hard to record the history and development of the village we all claim as our spiritual home.

Currently there are two aspects to this side of our activities. Firstly we are pressing ahead with our plans to write a proper history of Bridgtown so that future residents will know and understand our proud heritage. We hope that this will be published early in 2018. All of "the team" are working on this long

term project. The book, when it is written will catalogue the growth and development of our village and include many stories from days gone by. We are hoping to produce a proper hard-back book.

The other aspect of our plans concerns the making of a heritage trail around our district so that locals and visitors alike are reminded of our heritage. We shall be continuing our practice of erecting information boards around the area so that new residents and visitors are informed about Bridgtown's proud history.

On page 6 was shown our new sign in Walsall Road on the edge of the new housing development on the site of the Cornelius Whitehouse Hedgehog factory.

In the future we hope to erect another sign near the Watling Street end of North Street. This will commemorate the former factories and shops in that area. A further two signs are planned down Walkmill Lane. After that we are looking at further signs for the Walsall Road end of North Street and on the Watling Street by B&Q.

Where do you think signs should be erected? Let us know

Remembering Jim Leighton

Jim Leighton will go down in the annals of Bridgtown history as the man who sparked the village into fighting for its very existence. Here is a photo of Jim laying a wreath at the village war memorial, something that was very important to him.



It was in 1976 that Jim Leighton notified every house in Bridgtown of an impending disaster. The heading on the leaflet he sent out was “Did you know? ... All our houses are under threat!”

A meeting was held at The War Memorial Club, a club that was very popular with the people and where Bridgtown’s own 213 Old Comrades used to meet. The place was absolutely packed and all standing room taken. Everyone was eager to play their part in saving Bridgtown from the bulldozers! It was decided that in view of the large numbers of people then the next open meeting would be at the Social Club. The room there was much bigger and committee meetings would continue at The Memorial Club.

The consensus view of everyone there was that our strength was in the fact that ordinary people were involved, and that everyone wanted to help. The ladies decided to start a Fundraising Committee. Amy Charlesworth, Rhona Startin, Betty Thackham, May Pidgeon, Brenda Fisher and Jeanette Cartwright formed this committee. Events were arranged, starting with Bridgtown Concert Show Band. Huge successes followed. There were shows, concerts, rummage sales, cheese and wine parties, etc. There were also evening outings, in fact anything that would keep the community together and interested.

A huge support in the village came from Tom Holliday. He was the printer who really took our fight for Bridgtown to his heart. Jeanette would write out the monthly newsletter and, the very next day, Tom would have it ready for members to distribute to every household so that everyone knew what was happening in the village. This really brought people together. Some started to write things that were put into the newsletters and these became very popular. In the first year of B.R.A.G. Jim Leighton did the newsletter himself and had them printed by Ken Thomas, a local printer on the Walsall Road. It was during this time that Jim brought in some of his students from Leicester University. These students had a great impact initially but they were rather too radical for most of the local residents.

Barry Cartwright had the unenviable task of asking them to leave. Villagers had to be vigilant to make sure that all planning applications for Bridgtown had to be opposed. This was an enormous task and feelings ran high, particularly when

some local politicians seemed to be supporting the council rather than the people who had elected them. Such is politics!

All the above information is taken from an article with the title

“A BAKER’S DOZEN”

written by Jeanette P. Cartwright.

We need to be grateful to B.R.A.G. and all village residents of that era for saving Bridgtown. Ed.

Wendy Owen

*Much has been written in previous editions of this magazine and in the society’s published books about Des Owen. That is rightly so as Des has had a wonderful career in Show Business. However we have been remiss in not publishing information about other members of the Owen family. We must address that issue. We start today by writing about Des’s sister Wendy, whose stage name was **Wendy Osborne**.*



Wendy was born in February 1944 and, at the age of 4 years, she enrolled at the Sheila Groom Academy in Wolverhampton. She was too young to appear on stage until she was 5 but won a number of competitions. These resulted in her moving to the Helena Leminski Dance Academy in Birmingham. She soon was to appear in pantomime at the Alexander Theatre and appeared on stage with Arthur Haynes, Joe Baker. Sonnie Hale, The Jones Boys. Joan Savage and many

more, all of whom were stars at that time. The following year the same pantomime appeared at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, but Freddy Frinton had replaced Sonnie Hale. The season lasted for three months.

At the end of the Grand Theatre season Arthur Haynes told Wendy that she should go professional as a solo singer. She did this and travelled all over the UK and Germany entertaining the troops. Some of the stars she later appeared with are Eartha Kitt, Diana Dors, Warren Mitchell, Bob Monkhouse, Tony Bruce, Yana, Bernard Manning, The Rockin' Berries, Alvin Stardust, the Dallas Boys, P.J. Proby, Robbie Williams, Father Pete Conway and David Whitfield. In fact David Whitfield became a very good friend of Wendy and her husband.



On the left Wendy is seen with David Whitfield and, on the right, she enjoys a tea break with Yana.

After having a good career touring the clubs, Wendy gave it all up to have a family. She had a daughter Kimberley and a son Wade. Later on she chose to do some further work and appeared on a number of TV programmes including Crossroads, Angels and Muck & Brass. She and her husband are now retired and live by the seaside at Conwy in North Wales.

Scent Cards

Are you old enough to remember one of these?

It is a scent card, so-called because it was a small perfumed card used in local churches to advertise forthcoming events. Scent cards were often sold at

Sunday Schools to advertise (and provide funds for) the Sunday School Anniversary, just like the one pictured here.



This one really was special because it was the last one ever to be issued by Park Street Methodist Church. The following year, 1964, the church did close as did Trinity Methodist Church in Walsall Road Cannock. The two churches were replaced by one brand new church built in Bideford Way on the new Longford Estate. The new church came to be called St. Stephen's and it is currently enjoying its 50th anniversary, as all its buildings were not completed until 1967. Those people who had worshipped at Park Street had the choice of going to St, Stephen's or going to Bethel Methodist Church in Union Street.

Email addresses

Do you have an email address?

Whether or not you use it much it would be useful for us to know it!

Sometimes we need to get information to members.

If an event has to be changed or moved at the last minute we can send you an email..... but only if we have your email address.

Please let our membership secretary know your email address.

Bob Brevitt is membership secretary and his phone number is 01922 411942

Or, better still, send an email to bridgtownhistory@hotmail.com

and it will be forwarded to Bob.

Please note that our email has changed!!

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EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

Indian restaurants were only found in India .

A seven course meal had to last a week.

Brunch was not a meal.

Cheese only came in a hard lump.

The photo on the front of this magazine used to be The Vine public house.



For years Bridgtown fought for new housing.
Now it is arriving in abundance.

