

Chairman's Comments

Well, it's started! Those lovely golden leaves are floating down outside and indoors, no doubt under duress, we shall depress the buttons to activate the central heating.

So, although winter is approaching, there is still very much that we can look forward to. Firstly, our fifth exhibition is upon us on Sunday 20th October and everyone in The Team has been working overtime to ensure that the usual exciting and intimate environment is maintained from previous years.

As we all look forward to seeing more new photographs and finding out new information, inevitably each year becomes more of a challenge than the previous one. We depend so much on our members to retrieve what they sometimes see as uninteresting photographs and paraphernalia. I urge you all to continue to let us see what you have. Let us have the chance to make our judgement about whether it might be interesting to other people. Our exhibition day will prove whether or not we have made the right decisions.

After the exhibition our next main event is the Remembrance Day Parade on Sunday 3rd November when our wreath will be laid at the Cenotaph, respecting those Bridgtonians who made the ultimate sacrifice.

We return to our normal programme on Wednesday 20th November when "Old Bridgtonian" Ron Darby will be providing some wonderful moments captured at the Flower Festival of 1977. Our 2013 book has been a little delayed this year but "Bridgtown and Beyond" will be officially launched the day after that, at a Coffee Evening at the Community Centre on Thursday 21st November.

Our Christmas Celebrations will be led this year by the Choir of Great Wyrley Townswomen's Guild. We hope to see you at the Community centre on Wednesday 11th December.

Have you yet thought about 2014? Do you have the interest to join our Team? If not, then share your ideas with us about how we might ensure our continued success. We are always here to hear from you.

*Tony Pearson
October 2013*



Above is a photograph of Muriel Heaton who was District Nurse in the Bridgtown area for some thirty years. Muriel came to live in Park Street in 1936 when she was a tiny child. There is more information about Muriel in Chapter 6 of our new book “Bridgtown and Beyond” which is published next month. Included here are some of Muriel’s other memories:

Shortly after the war we were awoken one night and taken out into the street due to a huge fire at Whitehouse Edge Tool Works. I believe that the Fire Brigade considered that there was a danger of sparks reaching our homes and causing further damage.

As children we attended Bethel Methodist Church where we participated in the Anniversaries under the supervision of Mrs Summers and the organist Mr Rollaston. There were also charabanc outings and picnics organised for our entertainment. Holidays were unheard of and, due to the rationing, even when visiting relatives we had to take our own food.

My father was a keen gardener and we supplemented our basic wartime rations with fresh vegetables from the garden and from an allotment at the rear of the Watling Street bungalows. There were even fresh eggs from a few hens which he kept in the back garden. As Secretary of the Bridgtown Allotments and Gardeners Association he organised several shows in the Walsall Road Club.

Another of his interests was First Aid and he served many years, until his retirement, in the St. John’s Ambulance Brigade. By that time he was then superintendent of the Rugeley Branch of the association. As children we joined the cadet division and this provided the incentive for me to choose nursing as a career.

Green Lane

One of the streets of Bridgtown that rarely gets a mention these days is Green Lane. Derrick Middleton has been gathering what information he can and here are some of his findings.

After going over the railway bridge there were four houses, one large house and three adjoining cottages. The big house was called “The Poplars” and stood in its own grounds. Mr & Mrs Richards lived there with their six sons and three daughters. There was a large garden where the family also kept poultry, pigs and geese.

Mr & Mrs Haywood lived in one cottage. They had two sons and one daughter. The one son had a fruit and vegetable shop and a coal lorry.

In another cottage lived the Lindley family. Their son Sidney was killed in the Second World War. When they moved out the cottage was taken over by Jo (one of the Richards girls) and John Meek, with their children.

The cottage was nearly always lived in but nobody seemed to stay there for very long.

None of the four properties had any gas or electricity. They all used oil lamps for lighting. The toilet was well away from any of the properties and was very basic. It was housed in a wooden building.

The properties were demolished to make way for opencast mining to occur. Can you remember the name of the opencast mining site? Yes, it was called The Poplars!

Footnote: Derrick says that the above information was supplied by Jo Meek who still retains fond memories of her time living there. Ed.

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Food in the “Good Old Days” EATING IN THE UK IN THE FIFTIES

- Brown bread was something that only poor people ate.
- Oil was for lubricating your bike not for cooking! Fat was what you used for cooking!



Train Crash at Hixon

On 6th January 1968 there was a train crash at Hixon and volunteers were needed. The photograph shows WRVS helpers from Bridgtown who responded to the call. From the left there is Brenda Fisher, Jeanette Cartwright, Betty Thackham, ?? and Rhona Startin.

A 120 ton electrical transformer had to be moved from the English Electric works at Stafford to a storage depot at the disused airfield at Hixon. The airfield was on Station Road near to the West Coast Main Line and approximately 3 miles north of Colwich junction.

The transformer was put on a low-loader transporter and was extremely slow moving. It reached the recently installed automatic level crossing at Hixon and, while crossing, was struck by an express train causing the death of eleven people.

The accident caused a national furore about the safety levels for automatic level crossings. Experts worked out that it would have taken more than a whole minute for the transporter to go over the level crossing and the automatic crossing system did not provide for this contingency. Following the crash new regulations were brought in for automatic crossings.

How Our Society Started

Here we continue the article written a number of years ago by our chairman Tony Pearson. It was sent to Professor Carl Chinn and part of it was published in the Express & Star in September 2007. We are now reading the parts of Tony’s article that have never before been published.

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“The Hole in the Hedge” by Tony Pearson

Memories and Reflections of a Bridgtown Boy

Life slowly but surely progressed and with it came victory over Japan. We celebrated but somehow it did not reach the “highs” of victory in Europe. One of my creature comforts was to read, often by the light of a candle in our bedroom. Very few books, other than Sunday School prizes, were available but I became almost addicted to newspapers at an early age. The truth is that I am still a “cover to cover” man. In those far off days it was the Daily Herald every weekday and the Reynolds News on Sundays. You will gather that my family were politically somewhat inclined to the left and, in fact, my Dad was adopted as Labour Candidate for the local elections; and he won handsomely. It was the start of a significant change in family life for, from then on, we lost Dad at least four to five nights each week! Even when he was at home the door knocker was persistently active with local people insisting on their priority for council houses!

Dad was still at it in 1947 when the weather came to his aid. We had the worst winter I can ever remember and it certainly depleted the visitors to our front door. The amazing snow and ice lasted for at least six continuous weeks. I recall that my school was closed for at least three weeks due to lack of the coal needed to fire the boilers. The reality was that the huge snow drifts brought normal rail and road movements to a total halt.

At home we had run out of coal and we all huddled around a one-bar electric fire in the living room. Not only was this inadequate but, intermittently, non-existent as the National Grid was frequently interrupted. An added difficulty was in using the toilet, or the lav’ as we knew it. While we were lucky to have the comparative luxury of a semi-indoor facility, next door to the coal house, more often than not the lav’ was frozen solid.

One of my earliest memories is being in a pram in York outside a wet fish shop. Fish have always had an irresistible fascination for me – I imagine that this is when it began. I don't remember actually taking the kippers but I do remember the search and my mother recovering them from my pram!!

THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

Life in the good old days
Was better than you think,
Even though we always washed
Our undies in the sink.
We piled the coal upon the fire
To keep us warm each day
And to heat up all the water,
For our baths after our play.
Entertainment was all different,
As our sheltered lives we led;
A sing song round the piano,
Before we went to bed.
Toys were few and far between,
Except those Grandad made;
A wooden desk to keep my books,
And a cot he painted jade.
We walked the mile long lane to school,
And of course we walked it back.
In classes of forty or fifty
We were kept on the right track.
Porridge was eaten to keep us warm
For that long trek each day;
School meals had lumpy gravy
We had to eat to keep hunger at bay.
But parties we had at Christmas,
And celebrations for birthdays too;
No shopping at Sainsbury's for quiches,
Just home-made cakes and jellies would do.
Now I am much older
I look back nostalgically,
At the life we led when younger,
Do I see it realistically?

Sheila Jackson

The Big Storm of 1931.

This extract is from our new book “**Bridgtown and Beyond**”, chapter one:

On 14th June 1931 there was a dramatic storm. Flood waters flowed down Walsall Road from Cannock with such force that they demolished the petrol pump that stood in front of Harold Jellyman’s garage. Jellyman’s Brook overflowed and the whole area was awash.

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Since going to press a lot more information has come to light about that storm. The relevant copy of the **Cannock Advertiser** was full of details about the resultant flooding which seems to have covered the whole area from the Pye Green Road junction with Stafford Road, all the way down to Bridgtown. The paper had this to say:

Cannock Gas Works was flooded. In the new part on the opposite side of the road to the works, and known as the coke yard, anything from twenty to twenty-five tons of coke, and a large number of empty tar barrels, were swept into Jellyman’s Brook, which flows at the foot of the embankment on which the coke and barrels were stored. Some of the barrels were carried as far as Rumer Hill Lane bridge. A large quantity of the coke, however, was carried a good deal further, and quite a lot was gathered by the children from the banks of the brook in Longford Road, Bridgtown.

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The paper was full of information about the floods which covered a very wide area of Cannock. Later the article goes on to say:

A “thunderbolt” is stated to have struck the railway embankment at Churchbridge and a large hole was made underneath the sleepers by the heavy flow of water on the line.



Laughterland Concert Party

The Laughterland Concert Party was a group of local entertainers who got together in the 1940s to entertain and to raise money for charity. Many of the group had a lot of Bridgtown connections. Does the photograph on the left bring back memories for anyone?

Reproduced below is a press report of one of their concerts:

“ON WITH THE SHOW”

Successful event for Comforts Fund

“On with the show” was presented by the Laughterland Concert Party on Monday at the Mill Street Methodist Sunday Schools, and it proved very successful. The event was in aid of the Comforts Fund, and it is hoped to realise about £18. The organisers were Mr. W. Barnes and Mrs. Street, and the show was compered by Mr. Oliver Wood.

The artistes were Miss Hazel Watson (soprano), Miss Doreen Bird (soubrette), Miss Beryl Hurley (piano accordionist), Mrs Grace Smith (comedienne), Master Dennis McConnell (violinist), Mr Frank Jordan (baritone), Messrs. Oliver Wood and Levi Humphries (entertainers), Mr Frank Thirlby (conjurer), Mr. Ken Smith (light comedian), Miss Dora Richards and pupils (ballet and tap dancing), Mrs Lily Street (accompanist), and the Embassy Dance Band.

BURGESS BAG FACTORY

Jeanette Cartwright reminisces about working at the Burgess bag Factory at the time of the change to decimalisation of our coinage in 1971.

An extra work shift was set up to meet the huge demand for new cash bags in order to get ready for decimalisation in February 1971. Sheila Bagnall, Gloria Stokes, Kathleen Stokes, Doreen Horton, Jeanette Cartwright, Josie Palmer and Carole Connolly were the girls that worked on this additional shift. Sometimes one or two of the daytime staff would also stay over as well.

The shift began as soon as the day shift ended and carried on until 9 p.m. at night. We were expected to go on to a machine as soon as it had been left by the previous operator. Our job was to continue and complete any unfinished orders.

Most nights the machines would run well. We might have to put on a new roll of paper, but if it was a bit crooked the machine would jam. If the paste had lumps in it these would spread out and cause the machine to jam up too, leaving all the bags sticking together. We couldn't afford not to concentrate but, in the main, it was not a bad job. I found that I had to keep my eyes on the end of the roll because it was surprising how quickly it could be reached. If you were too late spotting the end of the roll you had the job of rewinding the paper all through the machine, and most of the machines were different from each other.

It was a good atmosphere to work in. The bigger machines did seem intimidating but I actually preferred working on them, even though the rolls of paper were massive and took a lot of lifting. But help was normally at hand as there were two mechanics present.

Sometimes when we went in at 5.30 p.m. Mr. Burgess himself would be working on a machine. He was the founder of the company and, so it is said, was the designer of most of the machinery. He certainly seemed a lovely gentleman.

John Boden and Gordon Edwards we only saw occasionally but Jim Bevan, Tom Morris and George Walker seemed to take it in turns to make sure the machines kept working.

Cash bags and bands were all made of paper at that time. Later the change to plastic bags would bring further changes and Burgess paper cash bags became a "thing of the past".

“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 look at the first edition after World War Two. It is Summer 1946. Three extracts are included..

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FROM THE HEADMASTER

It is good to know that an edition of our School Magazine is to be published this Summer. The magazine has had many trials to meet since it was started some fifteen years ago but its quality has by some means always been maintained and from what I have seen of the “copy” for this number, the standard is as good as ever. We are indeed deeply indebted to the editors and contributors for their efforts.

Although the war has been ended for a year now we are still feeling its effects, particularly so with regard to food, clothing and those extras that give to our lives the variety and interest that mean so much to us. However, we have much to be thankful for and it is good to meet, as we go about, those people who are aware of this and show it by their behaviour and expression. Many boys are like that, and the contribution they make to the general happiness is probably more than they realise.

We have been happy to meet old boys who have come to the school when they have been on leave from the Forces or after demobilisation, or when they have had to have had to have “a day off” for any purpose from their work. We have noticed how they have grown from youth to manhood and how their experiences have made them self-reliant and characterful. We are always glad to see them.

Sixteen boys leave us for employment in July. I wish for them suitable work and happiness and success in it.

This year, as last, we have a long Summer Holiday. I hope the weather will be kind so that we can all be “out and about” and get the full benefit from it.

MICHAEL HELPS WANTS TO KNOW

Can you sort out the names of the following sports?

1. STINNE
2. IRCTECK
3. TALBLOOF
4. ROCSEALS
5. LEATLBN
6. CEKOHY

He goes on to enquire:-

Does a tailor have his work cut out?

Is a bus safe from lightning because it has a conductor?

Are cricketers cowards because they hit and run?

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WHAT TONY FORGOT

Tony glanced up at the bedroom ceiling and then looked at the alarm clock. It was warm in the bed, and soon he would have to go to school. Today something was going to happen. Tony couldn't remember what it was, and was too lazy to think. Thinking was strenuous work to Tony, and thinking about school work was the last word in cruelty. He looked at the clock again and slowly he got dressed. When he was washing himself Tony tried to remember whether it was neck day, for Tony washed his neck one day and missed the next. He decided against washing his neck and went to eat his breakfast. When he had gone half way to school he groaned aloud. Overhead the sun was shining brightly and the greenwood where he played at night was inviting. Tony decided to play truant and entered the wood. Here he played make believe. He was a pirate on a desert island, a Redskin, Columbus; but he soon tired of his own games. He wanted someone to play with. The time passed slowly, but at last he heard the church clock strike twelve. He went home slowly and on the way home he met one of his school friends, who asked him why he didn't go with the school to the Circus. "That" Tony thought savagely, "is what I should have remembered!"

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