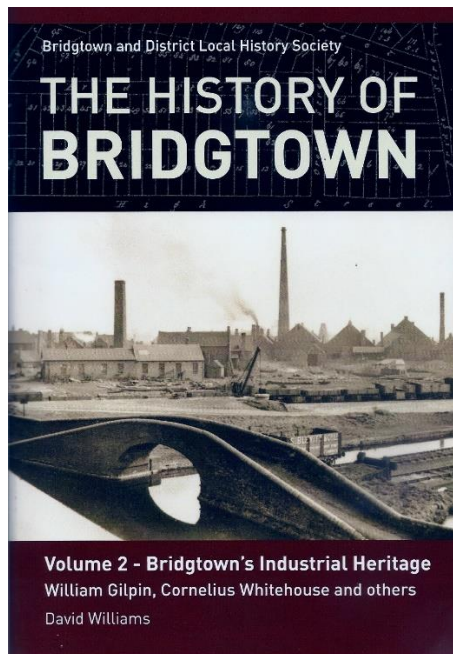




# ***THE BRIDGTONIAN***

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## ***AUTUMN 2018***

**Members : Free**

**Non-Members : £1.75**

## **Editorial**

Your magazine for Autumn 2018 is a few weeks late but here it is at last. Your editor has had a difficult time putting together the society's latest book. Even more difficulties have been encountered trying to get it printed. However, success has come eventually as a glance at the front cover of this magazine will confirm.

The book is, of course, the second volume in the "History of Bridgtown" series and deals with our Industrial Heritage. It all started with the edge tool industry. Without the edge tool industry there would probably never have been a Bridgtown in the first place. The book will be on sale at our Open Day on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

I hope that we shall be seeing most of you at our Open Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Look for more details within this magazine. Don't forget that this year it is at ~The Bethel". We have discovered quite a lot of new photographs for you to see and, as we will be in December, refreshments will include mince pies this year!

I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to Katherine Page for rescuing the society in its times of need this year. Twice she has "stood in" when we have found ourselves without a speaker and she has also taken over from David Battersby in fulfilling the role of finding our regular monthly speakers for the future. This is a difficult and unrewarding job, but Katherine is doing well at it and she has almost completed the 2019 programme already. Thank you Katherine.

*David Williams*

*18<sup>th</sup> November 2018*

## **Woolam's Boiler & Tank Works**

One of the earliest businesses and employers in Bridgtown was a company that made water tanks and boilers. We know that the company was based on the corner of Park Street and East Street but it has been difficult finding out much more than that.

*As you're walking down Park Street*

*A boiler yard your eye will meet,*

*Where Woolams make them all complete*

*At Bridgtown.*

Those were the words that appeared in the old poem. It was a small company and, as such, does not appear in the new "Industrial Heritage" book, but this is what we now know.

On 21<sup>st</sup> February 1874 Thomas Woolam purchased 1,198 square yards of land. This was in fact 6 house plots, with each house plot selling for approximately £40. There is no record at all of where Thomas came from, but it is generally assumed that he came from the Black Country somewhere.

There is no record of there ever being any large buildings on this land and it is thought that he mainly made water tanks. There would definitely have been a blacksmith's shop as it would have been necessary to crop to size the sheets of steel and there was a necessity for a hearth to heat up the rivets used to put the tanks together. There was probably a store on the site where finished products could be kept and painted.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December 1886 the firm passed to his son James Aston Woolam. A trade directory of the time states that the company also made chain. This could only have been done on a small scale but there was a great demand for chain from the heavier industries and from the coal mines.

The company was wound up around 1924 when the site was purchased by Cornelius Whitehouse & Sons, who used it as their coke store and car park.

## The Machin Family

The Machin family were in business in North Street for three generations, covering more than one hundred years. It started when Charles Richard Machin, who had been born in Ludlow in Shropshire, opened a “Bootmaker and Pawnbroker” shop somewhere around 1901. This was at number 66 North Street, premises which were later to become Dudley’s Sweet Shop.

Machin’s moved across the road to number 33 North Street and, on the death of his father in 1927, Edgar took over the running of the business. Edgar had been born in 1901 and had married Alice Pearce from Hednesford in 1925. She had been born in Wolverhampton in 1899 and was a nurse at St. Matthew’s Hospital in Burntwood. Over the next half century Edgar and Alice went on to become important figures in the local community and in village life.

Edgar played football for Hednesford Town and for Bridgtown Traders until he broke his leg. He was also a member of the local Buffs and was often seen enjoying a cigar. Alice was well-known for raising considerable sums of money for local charities.

In the late 1940s the family business moved to the double-fronted shop at number 42 North Street. The larger premises enabled Alice to considerably extend their range of shoes and boots.

Alice and Edgar died within weeks of one another in the early part of 1979 and the business was taken over by their children Wendy and Geoffrey. Geoffrey moved the business to Union Street but it closed down in 2001 on his death at the age of 71.

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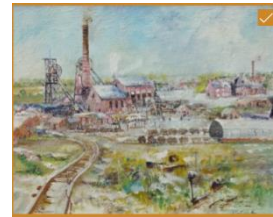
**You know you are getting old when.....**

- *Complete strangers feel comfortable in calling you Old Timer.*
- *Conversations with people your own age usually turn into a bout of “ailment duelling”.*
- *When you are visiting a friend in hospital and a member of staff comes toward you with a wheelchair.*

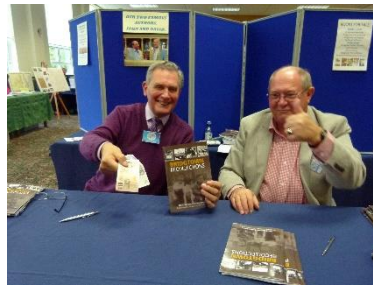
BRIDGTOWN AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## ANNUAL OPEN DAY

## CELEBRATING BRIDGTOWN



**SUNDAY DECEMBER 2<sup>ND</sup>, 10.30am to 2.30pm.**  
**BETHEL CHURCH; UNION ST.**



(New books by David Williams and John Devey)  
World War 1 and Industries

**Signed Copies available.**

**EVERYONE WELCOME.      ENTRANCE FREE.**

**Christmas refreshments available**

# **THE HISTORY OF BRIDGTOWN**

## **Volume 2:        Bridgtown's Industrial Heritage**

In about 1763 a man named George Bradney was drinking in a pub called The Red Cow in Wolverhampton on a cold and stormy night. A well-to-do stranger came in and the landlord asked George to move away from the fireplace so that a “gentleman” could get warm. George felt hurt and upset.

*What has the above incident to do with Bridgtown? How did it bring about the beginnings of industry in the local area?*

Buy this new book when it is launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> December and then you will find out!

## **Volume 3:        The Great War**

When Gavrilo Princip shot dead Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austro-Hungary on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914 it set off a chain of events which led to World War One.

*Not many people in Bridgtown realised that the assassination had taken place, nevertheless it was to affect their lives dramatically.*

This book had a low-key launch back in May. Did you get a copy?

**BOTH THESE BOOKS ARE PART OF A SET TELLING**

**THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF BRIDGTOWN.**

## **Cornelius Whitehouse**

In the newly published book there is a chapter about the business run by Cornelius Whitehouse and how important it was in the birth of Bridgtown as a community. There were, however, many more facets to this man. His hobbies and his personality also greatly affected the growth and development of Bridgtown.

In addition to being the man who built up the famous edge tool works that bore his name he was also an accomplished musician and composer. He had a wonderfully flexible bass voice and he was often called upon to delight audiences throughout the district. Initially he learned to play the organ by ear and was renowned for his skill in remembering and reproducing any piece of music he heard. Later he learned the technical side of music and wrote music for the poems written by Frances Ridley Havergal of Shareshill.

Later he wrote his own compositions and the pubs and clubs of Cannock Chase would often re-echo with the Whitehouse versions of Hark the Glad Sound (sometimes called the Gates of Brass), Christians Awake! and Crown Him Lord of All.

One of his lesser-known activities was collecting and recording scraps of local history. He wrote a number of newspaper articles and, in one of them, he lists the members of Cannock Band. The founder of the band, Mr J Fasfen, died in 1818. He writes about the members of the band in 1812, the year of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. The leader was W. Benton and the other players were W Brooks, E Birch and Joseph Trubshaw (clarinets), R Bailey and W Biddle (bassoons), John Trubshaw (serpent), William Stringer and Thomas Hill (French horns), Mr Chackett (tambourine and triangles) and W Cook (bass drum and cymbals).

Cornelius goes on to say that before these men formed themselves into a choir and an orchestra for St. Luke's Parish Church that a barrel organ was used to lead the singing! He then wrote "But the box of tricks very often failed to perform its part to the annoyance of the congregation."

He goes on "About the year 1820 the Cannock Band appears to have become famous and was often called upon to contest with other country bands in order to prove which was the best."

Mr Whitehouse mentions that in 1811 the parish of Cannock had only 244 houses and 1143 inhabitants. The Bridgtown neighbourhood had only one house compared to the 400 that existed at the time of his writing.

He then says "The first Sunday School in Cannock was opened while the Rev Thomas Bradburn was vicar and was held in what is now the Yew Tree Inn in Mill Lane." (He means Mill Street.) After a time the Sunday School was moved to an old building at the back of the Swan Inn in Market Place, which was then called the King's Arms.

In about 1815, the first Non-Conformist preaching services were held in a house "which stood backwards to Walsall Road, near to the current Trinity Methodist Church." (This is no longer there but would be opposite the current Aldi supermarket.) The Congregationalists were the first active Non-Conformist group in the parish but their headquarters were in Wedges Mills not in Cannock. Cornelius then confirms that a Scotsman, Mr Buttaux, was the first Non-Conformist preacher, officiating both at Cannock and at Gentleshaw. As the cause spread the Cannock group converted a barn, situated between Old Penkridge and New Penkridge Roads, into a preaching room until the present Congregational Church in Stafford Road was built in 1824. (This is now closed.)



## J. WOOD & SON

### "BROOKFIELD", BRIDGTOWN

Oliver Wood was born in 1901 in Norton Canes. His parents, together with an older brother and sister, had earlier emigrated to Australia and spent several years there before returning to the family roots. Having built a house in Norton Canes, Oliver's father eventually started a grocery business in Heath Hayes. Following a Grammar School education, Oliver served as an apprentice with another local grocer and suffered losing part of a finger whilst operating the bacon-slicing machine. Later, he joined with his father and their business prospered. After a while they began a wholesale business as well as a retail one.

**A tasty hearty meal!**



**Libby's**  
Corned Beef  
- so satisfying!  
Ready when you are  
- keep a tin handy



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BRIDGTOWN, CANNOCK Telephone 3107

Oliver married Ruby Simcox who was a Heath Hayes butcher's daughter in 1929. Ten years later, now with three children called John, Barbara and Gillian, the family moved to Bridgtown. Initially they rented "Brookfield" from the Wootton family.

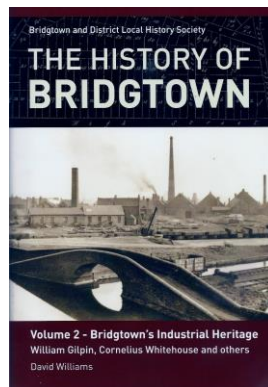
The war came along and with it came severe rationing. However, the business slowly expanded despite having to share "Brookfield" with army officers. The end of the war came and, eventually, the end of rationing. Oliver's business acumen now persuaded him to move into the Cash 'n Carry business. What had been a small family business now began to expand and, under the guidance of general manager Reg Maddox, and with Oliver's son John moving into the business the growth continued. They catered for an ever-widening area and the distinctive J. Wood & Son vans became a regular feature of the local scene.

Oliver was a prominent member of the Cannock Business Community. He served for many years as a magistrate and a Justice of the Peace. He was a very able musician and organised many fund-raising concerts for Forces Funds during the war. Subsequently, this extended into many church and charitable causes. He was a staunch Rotarian and a regular golfer, gradually leaving the running of the business to his son John. However, the grocery trade changed dramatically with the growth of larger and larger supermarkets and the business ceased to trade in the mid-1980s.

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*This magazine is a little smaller than usual this time. The editor is running out of suitable material with which to fill it. If you have stories or news of anything related to the history of the Bridgtown area please do not keep it to yourself. Pass it on to one of the society's organising team for inclusion in a future edition.*

## THE HISTORY OF BRIDGTOWN



The latest book is now on sale. In a few months time Volume 6 of the series will be published. It will be called:

**“BRAG and all that”**