

BLAKE NEWS

Autumn 2023 ≈ Double issue



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

by Stewart Richards

So, the nights are drawing in and the clocks went back in October signalling the approach of another year end. A year that has been very successful for the Friends in lots of ways. The first is a very successful year for fund-raising, more than £9000 pounds was raised with an expenditure of around £3000 for items purchased for the museum including a new projector and book scanner. In addition, £600 was spent in the garden for planting, repair of the raised bed wall in the courtyard and gravel that was added to the lower garden to provide a level area for the long-awaited raised bed to be installed. The industrial Co-Op weathervane and the raised bed should now be installed early in the New Year after it's installation was agreed by the Conservation Officer. We have also increased the reserve on the accounts for a potentially large contribution to the mill restoration in 18 to 24 months.

Visitor numbers continue to increase and currently visitor numbers to the end of October are 9.5% higher than for the whole of 2022. These numbers continue to be enhanced by school and group visits and I have been told by Patsy Robinson our Visits Coordinator we have several potential visits for 2024 being looked at.

As previously reported our membership was nearly back to where it has been at about 70 members, it will be interesting to see how we fair for 2023-24. Not leaving anything to chance Steve Austen and I will be holding a recruitment afternoon at the museum 22/11/23 between 2 and 7pm, so if you know of any friends or acquaintances, please let them know and they can then get a taste of what we do in the 'The Friends'.

The mill project is continuing, and currently we are in the process of appointing a fund-raising consultant. The consultant will identify sources of funds

and help with applications for those funds, a process that can become very complex hence the need for the services of a consultant.

Your committee members were all re-elected at our recent AGM held in October and I am honoured to serve as chair for a further year and will try to fulfil the trust that has been placed in me. I also would like to thank the other committee members who work tirelessly to achieve the realisation of a successful charitable organization, 'The Friends'.

It now just leaves me to thank you all for being members of 'The Friends' and to wish Seasons Greetings for the upcoming festive period.

CURATOR'S CORNER

by Mike Searle

The museum is now on winter hours of Saturdays only from 11.00 - 3.00 with last entry at 2.00, up to and including the 16th December.

It is closed completely over the Christmas period, and Reopens on Sat 6th January.

The annual book sale commences after the Christmas Fair on each Saturday that the museum is open.

The museum is closed for viewing on Sat 25th. November

The museum is not closed for Coffee mornings which continue on the first Tues of the month. Next Coffee Morning will be 5th December and the first one for 2024 will be 2nd January

OBITUARY

Sheila Wills

With her husband John, she has been a Custodian for over 20 years

Colin Hall



Colin has been a long standing member of the Friends, and was much involved on the refurbishment done when the Museum was returned to the Town Council in 2007. Latterly, with his wife Monica, he has been a regular Custodian.

HISTORY DAY – NOVEMBER 18 2023

Bridgwater Arts Centre Doors open 10am

- Welcome by Mayor of Bridgwater Cllr Mick Lerry 1030-1035
- Brian Smedley "Bridgwater Past, Present and Future" –1035-1100
- Suzanne Hannay – Breaker Morant 1100-1130
 - David Sutcliffe "The Songs of Cecil Sharpe" –• Robert Turner "Westonzoyland Airfield" –1200-1230
- 1230-1330 Medieval Lunch (Lesley Gates)
- John Strickland "Wreck of the Nornen" – 1330-1400
- Dave Chapple "'Killing Yourself to Keep Yourself: the social and political struggles of Somerset's Coal Miners" 1400-1430
Then in an ante room
- Crypts and Tombs and memorials of St Mary's (Pt 1) & (Pt 2) (20 minutes each) – Miles Kerr-Peterson/Tony Woolrich 1430-1530

Bridgwater Heritage Group Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich

Since the last issue the main additions to the Heritage Group website have been the adding of primary sources.

A short history of the Monmouth Street Methodist Chapel by J.A. Harris from 1952 has been digitised and added. This is an

impressively comprehensive account by a gentleman who was present for the building and opening of the chapel in 1911. This also includes notes on the other methodist chapels in town, including the Polden Street Bible Christian Church and the United Methodist Free Church in St Mary Street (now Bar 27).

A collection of ephemera that belonged to the late Veronica Osborne M.B.E., sometime Housing Manager for Brigwater Borough and later the District Council, have been digitised. These include the commemorative booklet on the opening of Westfield House in 1965, and programmes for the opening of the YMCA in Friarn Avenue in 1969 and twinning ceremonies with Schwalm-Eder (1979) and La Ciotat (1982).

For the town's built heritage, we've added the lease for building 33 and 35 Devonshire Street from landowner Edward Urch Vidal (who developed that whole area east of St John Street towards the railway) to builder James Abbot in October 1870. We've also digitised an extensive auction catalogue for the disposal of the properties once owned by John Board and Co. in 1960.

For the wider district, we've digitised a rental survey for the rectory of Otterhampton of about 1861, which includes detailed notes of all the properties and fields, along with ownership and rental details, which will hopefully be of use to anyone researching the village.

In terms of research, notes have been added on the 14th century effigies on the north transept of St Mary's church, and an article has been added on the Black Death in Bridgwater. The Black Death arrived in England in June 1348 at Weymouth via Gascony. It reached Somerset in October and hit Bridgwater more or less immediately. There is no first hand account of the Black Death in Bridgwater, we can only get an impression via other means. Two vicars died in the six months the plague ripped through the town

Update from the FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson

The Friends post regular updates of work within the cemetery on the website under 'diary' or on Facebook. This year we completed the repair of seven memorials, including those of the Randall family of

timber merchants; the family of Augustus Marinus Thomas Newswag, 1866-1900, a Royal Marine and Policeman; Isaac Harris a shoemaker of Friarn Street; James Jenkins a butcher, farmer and Baptist deacon; George Crocker, accountant and administrative clerk to the Poor Law Union and a couple of others. Most touching, however, was the memorial to Emily Skinner. On the first of April 1869 Emily gave birth to a healthy girl, but Emily succumbed to infection, as so many women did after childbirth and died. Our working assumption is that her unusual small obelisk memorial was home-made by friends of her husband Thomas Skinner, who worked as a carpenter.

The Friends research volunteers include 'the Laver Cousins' who live outside of Bridgwater, but do incredible genealogical work on the families in the cemetery. All the biographies are on the website, but are only viewable by members. Recent additions include Bridgwater's last shipbuilding dynasty, the Carvers; the Jones sisters of Carrickaderry in Ireland (possible landlord refugee from the land wars there); and Arthur Cottam, a noted astronomer and naturalist.

Most ambitious have been a series of biographies centred on the Browne brothers, which even includes their dynasty of servants over several generations. There were three Browne Brothers, George, William and John. John was the lead figure despite being the youngest, and was Mayor of Bridgwater five times and a major brick and tile manufacturer. William Browne, who seems to have been a thoroughly good chap, who also served as Mayor, but was also a leading figure in building good-quality worker's housing. Finally we have George Lewis Brown. He was a naval officer and flag lieutenant on board HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. When Nelson asked him to hoist the signal 'England Confides that Each Man Will do his duty' George changed it to the more famous version ENGLAND EXPECTS.

BOOK REVIEWS

BY

TONY WOOLRICH

Susan Orlik, *Decorating the Parish Church in Post-Reformation England*, 2022, 370 pp, £35, ISBN 978-1-915744-03-3,

At the Reformation, parish churches

were stripped of much decorative material, such as painted windows and sculpture, but then came a period when some replacement was made. Susan Orlik has made a detailed study of churches in Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset, – in particular of pews, pulpits, the display of Royal Arms, screens, fonts, communion tables and rails.

Of particular relevance to readers of *Blake News* is her account of changes within churches covered by the Museum's collecting area, which was that of the old Rural District Council

These are:

- The Corporation Pews in St Mary's church, Bridgwater built in 1620, and the wooden Tudor communion table there.
- The Wroth family pew over the South Porch at St. Mary's church, North Petherton, 1623.
- The elaborate carved doors of the St. Peter's church at North Newton, which showed the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, plus much other woodwork, 1637.
- The carved and signed bench ends at St. Mary's & All Saints church, Broomfield, mid C17.
- The early C17 font cover, pews, screen, and communion table. The 1634 pulpit with 4 carved images at St Giles, Thurloxton

The following drawing by Frederick Ashworth, c1845, shows the position of the Bridgwater screen by the Chancel arch before the Victorian alterations. Note the Galleries

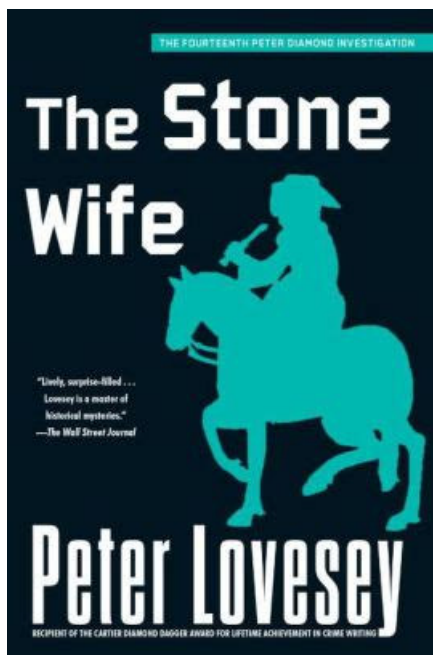


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Ref: P&D15001

This is a very well researched and written book, and is profusely illustrated in colour. Sadly the author died of cancer as the book was about to be published: it is a most fitting memorial to her.

Peter Lovesey, *The Stone Wife* 2014 ISBN-13:978-1-616953-93-5



Google Images

No 14 in the Peter Diamond series

Just as the bidding gets exciting in a Bath auction house, three armed men stage a hold-up and attempt to steal Lot 129, a medieval carving of the Chaucer's Wife of Bath from, *The Canterbury Tales*. The highest bidder, appalled to have the prize snatched away, tries to stop them and is shot dead. Peter Diamond, head of the Bath murder squad, soon finds himself sharing an office with the carving, and to his extreme annoyance the lump of stone appears to exert a malign influence over him and his investigation. Refusing to be beaten, he rallies his team and begins finding suspects and motives. The case demands that someone goes undercover. The dangerous mission falls to Sergeant Ingeborg Smith, reverting to her journalist persona to get the confidence of a wealthy local criminal through his pop star girlfriend. And soon, murder makes a reappearance.

The carving had been put up for sale by the Blake Museum, to fund necessary

renovations. As well as the Museum, the Arts Centre is also featured in the story.

It was supposed it have originated in the C18 Stradling Collection at Chilton Priory, having been found at the site of the Forester's house at North Petherton where Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400), was appointed Deputy Forester of the Royal Forest there towards the end of his life.

The Peter Diamond series is set around Bath, and are all amusing. Much local history is featured in them.

COFFEE MORNINGS IN AID OF FOBM FUNDS

**FIRST TUESDAY OF EVERY
MONTH**

10.30-12 NOON

**PLEASE BRING A SMALL ITEM TO
THE COFFEE MORNING FOR THE
RAFFLE**

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Museum

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Websites:

Friends:

www.blakemuseumfriends.org.uk

Museum:

www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

Bridgwater Heritage Group:

<https://bridgwaterheritage.com>