

BLAKE NEWS

Autumn 2024

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

by

Stewart Richards

Well, almost another year completed. Thank you for placing your trust in me to act as your Chair for another year and I will endeavour to continue to try to strengthen and increase the number of Friends as we move forward.

Of the many small charitable organisations many would be envious of where we are, both in terms of membership and finances. Membership reached more than sixty which is similar to pre Covid days. We are fortunate to have a small band of active and committed volunteers who do all those many tasks such as organising the rota for museum opening, by Rob and Ann, coffee mornings taken care of by Jayne, Lesley and Monica, reorganising the band concert coverage organised by Steve Austen and assisted by Patsy and their teams, painting carried out by Steve Pope, your merry team of gardeners Ray, Peter, Tony, Roger and Steve Clapp (a lot of Steves in the volunteers) and John our shop manager with his inimitable style. Also, a big thank you to Lesley for keeping us on the straight and narrow with respect to our finances.

The talks program was reduced by one this year with the removal of the November talk which in the past has tended to be poorly supported. In general, the talks were well attended. Thank you to Ray for arranging the speakers.

Visitor numbers will be down on those of 2023 by approximately 12%, this is somewhat disappointing, but we are not alone and there are other small museums in Somerset that are really struggling to attract visitors. Analysis of our visitors shows that we attract a lot of visitors from Somerset not including Bridgwater and the rest of England with those visitors being 2.5 times those from Bridgwater itself. With the success of the D-Day event discussed later it appears that special events attract more local visitors. Therefore, we will be looking at events in 2025 at the museum to attract local visitors. Another action will be deciding new ways of promoting the museum locally.

School visits and group visits have been very successful in 2024 and have made a significant impact to our total visitors to the museum for the year, thank you to Patsy for coordinating this activity,

The garden was again magnificent with many comments from visitors about how pleasurable it was to sit amongst the beautiful floral displays. The raised memorial bed was finally completed, this also received many complimentary comments.

During the year we had a few special events, we catered for the Town Council led Spring Festival and we also organised a D-Day celebration with a singer of songs from the era and refreshments, this coincided with the exhibition for D-Day in the museum. Both events were financially lucrative, and the D-Day event also brought more than 250 welcome visitors to the museum.



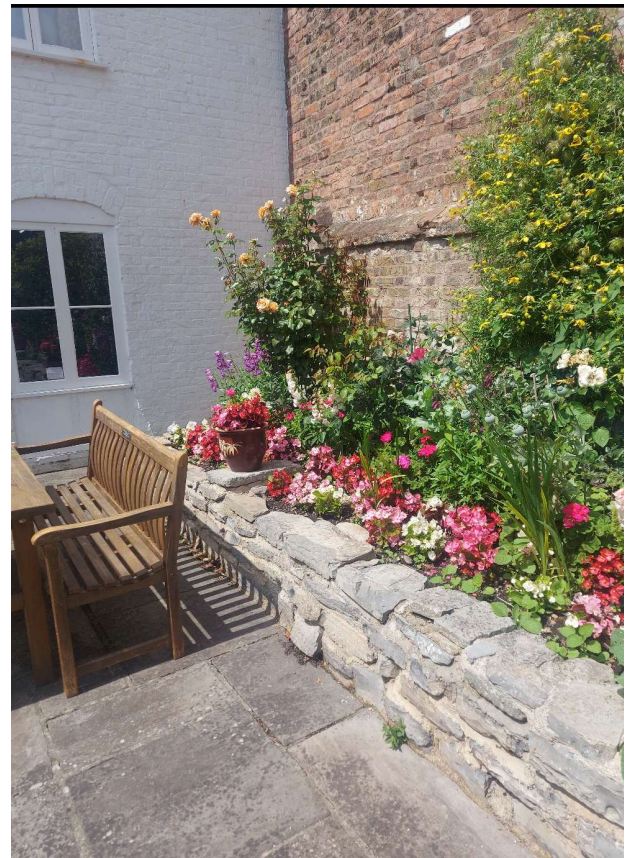
A very successful Spring Fair was held, and I look forward to seeing you at the Christmas Fair.

The mill project is currently on hold due to limited resource at the Town Council, the resource being involved with delivering the projects for the Town Deal. A Grants and Fundraising officer has now been appointed by the council and it is hoped in the New Year we can start to move the project along.

We have been successful in increasing the number of active volunteers that help to set up events but as always, we would like a few more.

In addition, we are always looking for Cake bakers so if you fancy baking cakes for our events and don't fancy the pressure of 'Bake Off' then please email secretary@bridgwatermuseum.org.uk, or a call to the museum on 01278 456127.

Finally, as we approach the season of festivities, I offer my best wishes to you and your families a Merry Christmas and Happy and Peaceful New Year to you all.



The Museum upper garden.

BRIDGWATER HISTORY DAY 2024

The Arts Centre,
Saturday 23 November



Compere for the 2024 event will be Bridgwater's Deputy Mayor Cllr Kathy Pearce.

1030 Opening by Mayor of Bridgwater Cllr Jacqui Solomon

1035-1115 Sam Astill (Chief Executive of Southwest Heritage Trust) will be speaking on "Harry Salter, the Bridgwater soldier who was 'shot at dawn' in Gallipoli 1915."

1115-1120 Film 'Who was John Chubb?' (Tony Woolrich) (BHG)

1120-1200 Bob Croft, County Archaeologist, will talk about "Archaeological discoveries at Hinkley Point" – Bob Croft (SWHT)

1200-1205 Film 'Bridgwater in the 1790s' – based on Chubb's Lithographs (Tony Woolrich) (BHG)

1205-1245 Sarah Ball, Bridgwater College History Lecturer will speak on "Bridgwater and the Civil War"

1245-1345 Historical Lunchbreak

1345-1425 Former Bridgwater Arts Centre Manager and archivist Dave Edney will present:

"The Top Twenty Club. – When Bridgwater was Fab." The story of the Town Hall Beat club of the 1960s

1425-1430 Film 'How big was Bridgwater Castle?' (Miles Kerr-Peterson) (BHG)

1430-1520 Brian Smedley, Town Council Leader, will do an interactive session on 'Bridgwater's Top 10 Radicals'

1520-1525 Film 'What's the Oldest Pub in Bridgwater?' (Miles Kerr-Peterson) (BHG)

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. The museum will be closed for the festive period from Saturday 14th December until Monday 13th January 2025. This extended time period is to allow me to make some changes to some of the exhibitions.

We have been gifted a Bell and Howell 16mm cine film projector, a power and sound pack, a film rewind machine, along with some large empty film spools. There are also some smaller reels with film on them, but having checked them there is nothing of importance. This equipment came from the estate of the late Robert (Bob) Squire who had the Palace Cinema in Bridgwater

and the Ritz Cinema at Burnham-on-Sea. Bob was an amateur film maker with the Burnham-on-Sea Cine Club. He also worked for a time with the Rank Organisation.

We also had gifted some items of clothing, books and other paraphernalia relating to the Dr Morgans Grammar School. I have also been offered some more items from another source.

I have taken in a large quantity of royal memorabilia in the form of small lead figures, coaches and horses, coronation chairs etc. There are some repairs needed but I am sure that they will make an addition to any future exhibition.

I am also due to receive a couple of small battery chargers from the former Crypton Triangle business on Bristol Road. These will go on display in the industrial section of the Bygones Room.

Temporary exhibitions for 2025. If anyone has any suitable suggestions for temporary exhibitions, please do make contact with me with your idea. There is one which is in the pipeline and that is celebrating VE day in May of next year. This will probably be on the same lines of the D Day event.

BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

by

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich

The website of the Heritage Group has seen some updates to old pages, including further notes on the history of Holy Trinity Church, which stood on the corner of Taunton Road and Broadway. It is still unclear what happened to the stained glass, and hopefully the new location will come to light one day.

We have digitised an 1834 report on the Borough of Bridgwater, which goes into good detail on how the town was run at that time. The role of mayor, aldermen, town clerk and so forth are defined, with outlines on the operation of the Court of Record, borough police and more. We have also digitised Thomas Bruce Dilks' work '*Charles James Fox and the Borough of Bridgwater*' which explores John Chubbs' connections to the Whig Party in Parliament.

Notes on the creation of St Mary's 1902 vestry have been added with newspaper descriptions of the stone laying and opening ceremonies.

We have scripted 4 videos for the Town Council's 2024 History day.

Clare Spicer and Jill Trethewey have contributed a timeline history of **Colthurst, Symons and Co**, 1840-1900 brick and tile makes, and the separate firm of **John Symons and Co**. This accompanies biographies on the Symons detailed below on the Wembdon Road Cemetery website.

The most extensive addition to the website is a history of **St Saviour's Chapel and House**. The chapel was founded in about 1500 and possibly stood by the Durleigh Brook just outside the Southgate. It seems to have survived until the very early nineteenth century, and seems to have been demolished in the 1820s when the Southgate was pulled down and the road widened.

By that time a grand house had been built adjoining it, St Saviour's House, in the fashionable gothic style, presumably meant to compliment the old chapel. The house saw a series of owners over the nineteenth century, mostly medical professionals. In 1892 part of the garden and an adjoining field were hived off to build St Saviour's Avenue, the Swimming Baths and Holy Trinity (St Saviour's) Church Hall.

In 1910 the Bouchier Brothers added a large extension which became a roller skating rink. However, when the First World War came it was converted into a

hospital, then after the war it was briefly used as a manufacturing workshop. In 1926 the town's Liberal Association converted old house and rink into the Blake Hall. In the 1930s the currant frontage was added along Old Taunton Road, although the old house remained within. Most of the old house seems to have been demolished by 1953, saving one portion which can be seen from the bottom of Blake Street. It is not clear if much remains within. The later history of Blake Hall needs to be written, and please get in contact if you can help with that.

UPDATE from the FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY

by

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson Friends of the Wembdon Road Cemetery

Numerous biographies have been added to the Friends website, including:

The Family of **Thomas Richard Richards** 1808-1884. He would become a Master Mariner and his sailing ship, the ketch *Star*, for many years made regular voyages between Bridgwater and Newport carrying cargo such as bricks, flour, hay and coal. Later Thomas was a coal merchant and shipowner of Bridgwater, living in North Street, then Northgate and finally St John Street.

The family of **Mary Taylor Richards** 1778-1857, née Dosson. Her husband was Captain **William Richards** (1768-1852), a master mariner from Kemeys Inferior, Monmouthshire, who settled in Bridgwater when he married Mary in 1806. They lived for many years in Little Chandos Street Mary's father was George Dosson, victualler and cheesemonger of Bridgwater. The business ventures of the Dosson brothers extended to London where Thomas Dosson was a wine and spirit merchant.

Next, **John Rodamond Symons** c.1831-1917, Fanny Lock Symons nee Badger 1832-1875, his wife, and Minnie Symons 1864-1901, their daughter. John was born, not so much with a silver spoon as a brick maker's trowel in his hand, being third child of the entrepreneurial and innovative William Symons. Fanny was the daughter of William Badger and his wife Frances nee Locke of Pawlett, where her father was in charge of a brickyard. As part of the firm of Colthurst, Symons and Co., life could have been very successful for John, but things didn't always work out as he would have hoped. He would break away to form his own brick and tile firm, John Symons and Co. in 1889 at Saltlands.

Related to John, **Percival Symons Peirce** 1864-1896. He was born in 1864, the seventh of eleven children of William Elstone Peirce and Mary Ann Symons. His father initially worked as a coach builder before becoming a brickyard foreman. Despite the family's ties to the brick industry, Percival pursued a career in chemistry, beginning as an apprentice in 1881. Percival's life was cut short when he contracted influenza and subsequently developed septic meningitis, leading to his death in 1896 at the age of 33.

A splendid survey has also been added on the **Dosson family of Bridgwater and Whitechapel**, spanning all the way from the 1740s to the 1920s, taking in the related families of Bryant and Nicholls. Told via just two memorials in the cemetery. Henry Dosson 1808-1870 was a currier, or leather worker, in Bridgwater. Although he was born in Whitechapel, London, both Henry and his wife Harriet had generations of Bridgwater ancestors. The Dosson family were innkeepers, victuallers and wine and brandy merchants in Bridgwater as early as 1754, and were particularly involved with the Ship Aground in Eastover, the Globe on the corner of Salmon Parade and Eastover and the Castle on the corner of Binford Place and Fore Stret. Descendants of the extended Dosson family by the

19th century included wine and spirit merchants, victuallers and cheesemongers in both London and Bridgwater. Along with the Bryant, Holloway and Hellier families, they formed a network of Bridgwater drapers, victuallers and liquor merchants who intermarried and who had property and business interests in both cities. Also in this plot are Harriet Bryant Dosson, nee Nicholls (1812-1875) Henry's wife; Sarah Hellier Young nee Dosson (1811-1897) his sister.

Henry Dosson's family continued in business in Bridgwater into the 20th century. **John Nicholls Dosson** (1833-1927) draper and tailor of Bridgwater; Sarah Dosson nee Sully (1840-1927) wife of John; and Derwent Leonard Dosson (1892-1894) their son. John was a draper and tailor for most of his career, though after WWI he tried farming for a few years. His two surviving sons and then a grandson continued the family businesses in the 20th century: Nicholls & Co drapers, the Fore Street Clothing Company tailors & outfitters and Dosson Bros tailors & outfitters.

Next, William Francis (1848-1927) wine merchant; Bella Francis (1843-1921) nee Seelie his wife and William Bell Francis (1881-1930) their son William Francis and his wife Bella came to Bridgwater as wine and spirit merchants, taking over the business of Charles Head. Their premises at 41 St Mary Street had an extensive wine and spirit cellar and the family lived over the shop. It was an era when wine and spirits were becoming more popular. Bella was the daughter and granddaughter of London wine merchants. Their son William Bell Francis and his wife Margie continued in business as a wine merchants in Bridgwater until 1954. The family business included three pubs: The Waterloo House at 41 St Mary Street, the Queen at 73 High Street; and the Vintner's Arms, Eastover.

The **Lott Memorial** is one of the grander ones in the cemetery. Now added to the website are the stories of Samuel Lott 1804 – 1888, Sarah Lott nee Harris 1807-1878, Isaac Lott 1843-1877 and Sarah Ann Lott nee Chedzey 1850-1930, Henry Lott 1852-1890 and Alice Lott nee Allen 1851-1918, kindly supplied by Clare Spicer and Jill Trethewey. In the early nineteenth century, the Lotts were fishermen of Steart, probably working Mud Horses on the flats of Bridgwater Bay. In 1867 a fire destroyed their home and they moved to Bridgwater, where Charles Harris Lott had established a drapery business that straddled Fore Street and Binford Place. Given their humble origins, their memorial expresses their great jump to prosperity.

We've also looked at the **Collins / Moyle / Roberts memorial**. Harriet Jane Moyle (1843-1911), originally from Bridport, had a Berlin Wool shop in Cornhill for around twenty years at the end of the 19th century. She came to Bridgwater as a widow and took over an established business as a means of supporting herself and her young son. Also in this plot are three generations of Roberts women: Ellen Roberts nee Collins (1846-1913); Winifred Roberts (1873-1946) and Jean Roberts (1919-1961). Ellen came to Bridgwater about 1876 to work in her sister's Berlin Wool shop in Cornhill. Her life changed when she married Bridgwater master coachbuilder William Henry Roberts. Winifred was Ellen's step-daughter, and had been born in Bridgwater on the 8th November 1873. Her parents were master coachbuilder William H. Roberts and his first wife Fanny Thomas. Winifred worked in the family coach-building business in Eastover all her career. Jean was born in Leeds in 1919 and was adopted by Winifred Roberts. She was a school teacher.

Jane Hutchings nee Barnes, 1823-1894, is an interesting story of cook and chapel keeper, Jane was baptised at Bridgwater on the 6th July 1823, the daughter of John Barnes, a tilemaker, and his wife Ann (Nancy) nee Badger. They were Unitarians. Jane was one

of three female servants in the Fore Street home of Captain George Lewis Browne R.N. (ret'd), magistrate, barrister and bank manager. Captain Browne served with Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. He was also a devout Unitarian and his wife may have employed Jane because they knew her family from church. Jane worked as a servant for twenty years or so before she agreed to marry Richard Hutchings in 1856. He, however, was lost at sea when the ship he was working on, the *Sarah Ellen*, sank. This left Jane with three young children. That was not unusual in the age of sail, but each widow then had to find a way to keep her family together if she could. Her faith and her friends at the Unitarian Christchurch helped her through. As well as working as a Cook, she was employed as chapel keeper.

Related to Jane was **Samuel Badger**, 1798-1871, Grenadier Guardsman. Samuel was a Bridgwater man, who worked for a few years as a mariner, before he enlisted in the army. He served with the Grenadier Guards for twenty-one years. His overseas service was in Quebec and closer to home his regiment did tours of duty in Ireland as well carrying out ceremonial duties in London and Windsor. He will have helped fight the great fire at the Houses of Parliament in 1834. Samuel was lucky to enjoy twenty years of retirement and would eventually move back to Bridgwater, living in West Street.

Also added are **Alfred Hall** (1857-1934) account-ant, timber yard manager and shipowner; Jane Annie Hall née White (1858-1932) wife of Alfred; Harold Alfred Hall (1897-1918) agricultural college student. Alfred's parents moved from their village to the town as did many others when rural employment declined. John Hall (1811-1894), Alfred's father, was a village carpenter at North Curry and then at Creech St Michael, near Taunton. John and his wife Harriet née Day (c1812-1872) had eleven children. They moved to the docks, so may have worked in the shipyard there. Alfred became an accountant for G.B. Sully, coal merchant and shipowner, and then for many years he was a timber yard manager and salesman for Hooper and Co., timber merchants of Church Street. Jane's father was a woodman and dealer in Berkshire, felling trees and selling timber, so Alfred must have met Jane through his work.

On spiritual matters are **Thomas Busby Waddell** (1841-1914) clergyman and schoolmaster; Sarah Jane Waddell (1837-1917) his sister and housekeeper, The Waddells came from a prosperous stagecoach proprietors of Birmingham. Rev. Thomas B. Waddell and his sister Sarah came to Bridgwater in semi-retirement about 1885. Thomas was a mathematics master at Durham Cathedral School for most of his career, with a brief time at Buxton Grammar School in Derbyshire. Thomas assisted with church services in and around Bridgwater when needed.

Finally and most recently, is the story of **John James Colsey** (1865-1929) draper; Elizabeth Jane Colsey nee Derrick (1867-1911) his wife, draper's assistant. John Colsey operated the Bristol Drapery Company in Bridgwater for about 20 years, alongside his wife Elizabeth, having extensive experience in the drapery trade. Born in Toddington, Gloucestershire, John was the son of Thomas and Eliza Colsey. John married Elizabeth Jane Derrick in 1892, and they initially lived in Bristol, where their first three children were born. Later, they moved to Bridgwater and established their own drapery business at 5 Fore Street. The couple had five children, but Elizabeth's health declined, and she passed away in 1911. During World War I, their children actively served: John W.T. enlisted in the Somerset Light Infantry and served in India and the Persian Gulf, George became a second lieutenant in

France, and Hilda joined the WRAF as a motor transport driver. John remarried Daisy Hooper, with whom he had three more children. John Colsey died in 1929 at age 64. His family moved to different parts of England, with his children pursuing various paths. The twins from his second marriage served in the army during World War II.

Christmas Fair

In aid of museum funds



At the Museum
5 Blake Street, Bridgwater
Sat 23 Nov. 10.00 – 1.00

*** Tombola & Raffle ***

*** Charity Stalls ***

*** Books ***

*** Bric-a-brac ***

*** Museum Shop ***

*** Homemade Produce ***

*** Refreshments ***

**** FREE ENTRY ****

**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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Websites:

Friends: www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk/friends

Museum: www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

Bridgwater Heritage Group:

www.https://bridgwaterheritage.com