

BLAKE NEWS

Spring 2021 Double issue



CONTENTS

Curator's Report. Mike Searle	1
Obituary Maggie Sampson	1
Brian Britton	2
Sick List Brian Withers	2
Heritage group Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich	2
Friends of the Wembdon Road Cemetery Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson.	3
Newsletter of the Victoria County History – Somerset	3
Some pictures from the past	3-4

Curator's Report.

Dear all, I hope you are all keeping well. By now, most, if not all of you will have received your Covid-19 vaccinations – if you elected to take it of course.

I am pleased to announce that we have been working on plans to get the museum open to visitors once again. But before we can re-open, certain measures have to be put in place to fulfil the Covid Secure requirements. We must also be able to manage the NHS test and trace requirements, complete a Risk Assessment, and fulfil our Duty of Care expectations. In agreement with the Town Council, all the above has been achieved.

Rob Gardner has been making contact with the key-holders and custodians with a view to returning to the museum. If you have not yet been contacted, do not worry as it takes a bit of time to reach everyone on the list. I am pleased to announce that the response has been most positive, and it will be great to welcome you all back.

To open, we need to adopt new methods of how we operate, so in this respect the old ways are no more I am afraid. Movement into the museum will be kept to an absolute minimum so as to manage Covid Secure requirements.

I can announce therefore, that as of the 20th May, we will open on just three days a week, which will be Thursday, Friday and Saturday of each week. This is going to be a trial period leading up until the 21st June when more government lockdown restrictions are due to be lifted (fingers crossed), and as I write this, there is news that the 1+metre social distancing rule could be scrapped on the 21st June. This trial period will allow us to iron out any problems that may arise.

These are the main points:

- The reception will be temporarily moved into the meeting room.
- Visiting the museum will be by appointment only.
- There will be just three sessions per day. 10.00 –

12.00, 12.00 – 2.00, and 2.00 – 4.00. This will be 1 ½ hrs visiting time and ½ hr allowance for over-run and cleaning after each group.

- A maximum of four people in a group in each session.
- There will only be a key-holder and one custodian on duty.
- No other volunteers will be allowed in the museum on the days open to visitors.
- The Friends' shop will be temporarily closed.
- The toilet will not be available to visitors.
- Refreshments will not be offered to visitors.

The finer points will be discussed with the key-holders and custodians in due course.

This is all from me for the time being. Keep well and stay safe.

Mike Searle — Hon. Curator



Tulips in the newly planted upper garden

Obituary

Maggie Sampson

Maggie died on 5th April aged 81. Margaret Doris Hall was born in an army barracks in York in 1939. She spent her early years living in Germany as her father was a sergeant major in the army and was involved in the Nuremberg Trials; she later found out he worked for the secret service. They were consistently on the move and she attended 16 different German schools and therefore spoke fluent German. After her father finished his service they moved to Puriton where her father was a military policeman at the R. O. F.

She then began work as a shorthand typist at the British Cellophane Co. She married, in 1961, Tony Sampson, who was an accountant by profession and they had a son. They were founder members of the FOBM in 2000. Over years Tony served as Treasurer and then as Vice-Chairman of the Friends, from which post he stepped down just before he died in 2009.

Maggie was a pillar of the Museum and of the Museum Friends, being a Committee member, Chairman for a spell and Trustee. She helped with all manner of events, such as the fund-raising fairs, assisting at talks, as well as being a long-standing Custodian, welcoming visitors.

One of the speakers at her funeral said:
Cherish her memory and let it live on.



Jane Woolrich writes:

We shall greatly miss dear Maggie, who did so much for the Museum, both under the "old regime" of SDC, and latterly with the Town Council. I joined as a custodian quite a few years ago, when Maggie and Tony were then well-established. I used to enjoy her company when we were both on duty or over a cuppa in the museum café. She was involved in all aspects of our activities, from transcribing letters in the Chubb Mss in the archive office at Taunton, to cake-making for band concert teas, to washing up and putting away the wine glasses after an evening event.

Small local museums like ours depend largely on the talents and goodwill of such people, and so we need continual replacement.

Many thanks Maggie's grandson, Jake, for news about her early years



Tony and Maggie Sampson at a museum event

Brian Britton

We are saddened to learn of the death on 12 April of Brian Britton, husband of Brenda Britton, a long-standing Friend and custodian. She by was often accompanied by him when in the museum.

Sick List

Brian Withers was admitted to hospital and subsequently joined the 'pacemaker' club. He's home now but not out of the woods yet. We wish him and Lesley all the very best.

Recent updates by the Bridgwater Heritage Group

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich

Visit bridgwaterheritage.com. Throughout the winter we've published a regular stream of material on the heritage website, covering a wide range of topics.

The largest body of material related to the controversies over the implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in the Bridgwater area, which was something of a humanitarian disaster. A House of Lords Select Committee took evidence from 43 witnesses over 19 days in June-July 1838, and the testimony occupies over 800 printed pages. The Committee heard from some Guardians; local doctors; from John Bowen, a Bridgwater wine merchant; who conducted a pamphlet war against it; various paupers, and even the washer-women who did the laundry.



Jessie faints before the Guardians. an illustration from *Jessie Phillips* by Frances Trollope, 1844

It relates to the events at the old Bridgwater Poorhouse, at the East Gate on Taunton Road, which was used during 1836-7 while the new Union workhouse at Northgate was being built. About a third of the inmates died from dysentery caused by gross overcrowding, bad sanitation, inferior diet and neglect by the Guardians.



Oliver asks for more, an illustration from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, 1837

There is much incidental information about rural poverty as well as topics such midwifery practice in the 39 other parishes which comprised the Bridgwater Union. It was most thoroughly indexed, and it is an important resource for local historians.



A labourer's cottage.

A decrepit rural cottage

The texts of many of John Bowen's pamphlets are being posted on the website to accompany the inquiry documentation.

The '*Lost Bridgwater*' section of the website has new articles on the 'Blacklands' fields, now remembered by the street name; the Old Armoury in Friarn Street, built as a school and burial ground for the Unitarians, then converted into an armoury, then a garage and derelict until its demolition in the 1990s; the West Street Ragged School, a remarkable institution for the poor children of the borough; the Lower Bath Road Market of the 1930s; the Crimean War trophy Russian cannon; the Cockmoyle Prison, which stood on the site of the Cornhill market and finally the Swan Inn, now the site of the Cornhill pub.

In notes on historic buildings we have small articles now on the imperilled Penlea House of c. 1850, the opening of the Monmouth Street Methodist Chapel in 1911, and the opening of Westfield House in 1965.

In literary and artistic matters we have been delighted to publish articles on John Chubb, two being general surveys of his life, and another exploring the musical background to some of his works. Related to Chubb, there is also an article on the afterlife of some of his watercolours and the lithographs made from them, one set by the noted C19 illustrator T. H. Hair. Finally we have published in full John Bowen's rich biography of William Baker of Eastover, a noted self-taught natural historian of the early nineteenth century.

In terms of objects and artifacts, we have published small articles on the Rood Screen of St Mary's Church, the belfry chimes of St Mary's and the remarkable Cole-Anstice clock now housed in the Museum of Somerset.

Notes from the Wembdon Road Cemetery

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson.

We are delighted to report that with the easing of restrictions, not only have the volunteers been able to

return to resume work on the old burial ground's conservation, but Fine Memorials have also been able to visit to carry out the repair of a handful of memorials. The volunteers have continued to improve the memorial database and continually tweak and improve the transcriptions of burial registers, with more transcriptions to follow shortly.

Within the members' section of the website a wealth of biographies have been published, covering many individuals from Victorian Bridgwater, from the tragic stories of humble paupers, to tradesmen, e. g. hatters, commercial travellers, drapers, industrialists, mariners and soldiers. Surnames of individual biographies researched over the winter include LEAR, CORNISH, DILKS, SPILLER, MARLER, HONEYBALL, JARMAN, WOODWARD, BENNET, KEMMIS, DYMENT, FORD, MEARS, BOULTING, HARRIS, PRING, NEWSWAG, SAUNDERS, MANTLE, HURFORD, ONION, TOMLIN, WILLS, PERRETT, COOK and SHARMAN.

Newsletter of the Victoria County History – Somerset

The next issue will be out in a few weeks, and will be entirely about Bridgwater. The Heritage Group has been asked to contribute to it. Papers have been written on the Poor Law documentation, and on a new research project about making a database on the origin of Bridgwater's street names

To be added to the mailing list, please email vch@swheritage.org.uk



Some pictures from the past



Goodby to the SDC staff



As we found the upstairs office



Reconstruction



The opening



Paul Besley and Alison Cook working to prepare the new garden beds



When we did re-enactments:
Robert Blake and friends



Blake Gardens Centenary, 2002



The Bryan Gillard memorial picnic table dedication



Victoria Western and Lynn Tyrell at the Museum display at a Docks event

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WEBSITES:

FRIENDS: WWW.BLAKEMUSEUMFRIENDS.ORG.UK

MUSEUM: WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.ORG.UK

RESOURCES: WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.INFO

BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP:

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