

Bridgwater Heritage Newsletter Autumn 2025



BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

by

**Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony
Woolrich**

It has been a relatively uneventful summer for the Heritage Group, with only three major items added since the last Blake News, although various small tweaks have been added to various older pages, such as adding further notes on courts and terraces to the street names database. Terraces on Taunton Road for example include Alfred Terrace, Halswell Avenue, Halswell Terrace, Ivy Avenue, Lyndhurst Terrace, Parkstone Terrace and Willow Cottages.

The most substantial article added on two properties that were called **Castle Bailey House**, one in York Buildings, and one in Northgate. The one in York Buildings is the older, dating to around 1800 and is the plain Georgian building adjoining the back of NatWest bank in the direction of King Square. The builder is unknown, although the names Humphries, Ford and Symes are associated with the property in the years around the turn of the century. From about 1866 for at least a hundred years after the house was home to a succession of G.P.s and served as their practice.

The other Castle Bailey House was within eyesight of the first in Northgate. This grand house looks to have been built around the 1820s. Ownership of the property has been hard to trace, the earliest being a James Shattock, timber merchant in the 1870s. Afterwards it was bought by the Bond family, and appears to have been divided into flats. It was ultimately demolished in 1966 as the site of the new police station.

Emanuel Green's Bridgwater Bibliography These are the entries about the town extracted from Green's *Bibliotheca*

Somersetensis, 3 vol 1903

Short stories, added to the page on **Artemis Aglen Dowty**. Dowty was a prolific author of comic short stories. A few examples have been extracted from *Hood's Comic Annual*, for 1877.

We have scripted a couple of videos for the next Town Council History Day. Miles describes how the name **Bridgwater** has been spelt over the years, and Tony has described the **town's first waterworks**, the pump of which was housed in the **Town Mill** for the whole of the eighteenth century.

FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY

Since the last *Blake News* the Friends have published the following biographies. These have been meticulously researched by Clare Spicer and Jill Trethewey.

Eliza Ann Day (née Baker, c.1850–1944). Born into a poor Somerset family, her early life was shaped by her father Uriah Baker's repeated imprisonments during the harsh years of the Corn Laws. Despite these hardships, Eliza and her sister Ann found work as housemaids and in 1866 Eliza married James Day, a coach trimmer for the railway. Settled in Bridgwater, Eliza raised ten children, though some died young or faced difficulties, such as her son Frederick, who spent much of his life in an asylum. Several of her children emigrated to Canada or the United States, and others served during the First World War. Her youngest son Wilfred joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force, while Harry and a son-in-law served in the Royal Flying Corps. Widowed in 1920, Eliza remained in Angel Crescent, where she had lived since the 1880s. Independent into her nineties, she resisted leaving her home. After a fall in 1944, she died in hospital aged about 94.

Mary Pyne (née Raphael, 1757–1852)

is the oldest person buried in the Wembdon Road Cemetery, in terms of being born at the earliest date. Born in Wellington, she likely came from a Raphael family involved in the cloth trade. In 1781 she married James Roberts, a serge maker, with whom she had one son, William (1783–1866). James disappeared from records soon after, leaving Mary widowed young. She remarried in 1792 to William Pyne, with whom she had two children, Betty and John. At this time, the family struggled in poverty, even entering the workhouse during years of famine and high bread prices caused by war and poor harvests. They may have benefited from Quaker mill-owner Thomas Fox's charitable efforts to provide affordable food and employment in Wellington. By the early 1800s, Mary's son William Roberts had moved to Kidderminster for weaving work, later settling in Bridgwater, where his son John became a coachmaker. Mary remained in Wellington until at least 1841, living independently into her eighties before joining William's household in Bridgwater. There she narrowly avoided a cholera epidemic and lived as a former needlewoman supported by family. Mary died in 1852, remembered as a resilient survivor of hardship, poverty, and famine. Her Roberts children would go on to be the well-known Roberts family of coachbuilders and early car makers.

Mary Woodrow (née Crandon, c.1761–

1854) lived to the age of 93. She was born into the long-established Crandon family of Bridgwater, likely the daughter of John Crandon and Catherine Trott, and grew up in a town still marked by medieval features such as the ruins of Bridgwater Castle. Educated enough to sign her name, she married relatively late, at 35, to James Woodrow, a baker fourteen years her junior. James was the son of Matthew Woodrow, a Devon-born settler in Bridgwater, and had strong family ties through the Habberfields and Woodrows, which helped him establish his business. Mary and James married in 1796 and had four children, though only two daughters, Catherine and Lucy, survived infancy. The family lived in Penel Orlieu above the bakery, where Mary adapted to the demanding lifestyle of a baker's household. James became a respected tradesman and property owner, before his death in 1840. Mary, widowed, continued life with her

daughter Catherine, witnessing major changes in Bridgwater including the arrival of the railway. She died in 1854 at North Street, remembered as a "gentlewoman," after a long life spanning nearly a century of change.

Elizabeth Ann Creedy (née Gilling, 1846–1944) lived a long life, shaped by poverty, resilience, and family. Born into a working-class family in Bridgwater, she grew up in Albert Street, a poor and crowded area. With no access to schooling, Elizabeth began working in a brickyard at the age of seven and later found work as a domestic servant and milkmaid. In 1866, she married Charles Creedy, a mariner-turned-labourer, and together they raised nine children, though only six survived to adulthood. Despite hardship, Elizabeth later taught herself to read and ensured her children received education. The couple remained in Albert Street, living next to Elizabeth's parents for decades. Tragedy struck with the sudden death of their teenage daughter Emma and the eventual deaths of her parents in the 1890s. During the First World War, both her sons served, and Elizabeth was relieved when they returned safely. Charles died in 1921, and Elizabeth spent 23 years as a widow, still working as a charlady until she was 85. A respected figure in her community, Elizabeth became a local celebrity in her later years. She died at 98.

William Herbert Ponting (1872–1921)

was a skilled carriage body maker who worked for nearly 30 years with the Great Western Railway. Born in Swindon, he came from a large, civic-minded family and began his apprenticeship with the GWR at age 13. His father Edward was a bricklayer and active in local temperance and Friendly Societies. In 1898, William moved to Bridgwater and married Edith Mary Allen, whose father Edwin worked in the local brickworks. The couple had one daughter, Ivy, born in 1904. In Bridgwater, William remained active in church life and the local rugby club, where his first aid training proved valuable. He contributed to the war effort by continuing his railway work, receiving first aid training, and joining the Allotments Association to support food production during WWI. William died suddenly in 1921 at age 49 from a bacterial infection. His funeral was held at Holy Trinity Church, and he was buried alongside Edith's parents. His death was deeply mourned in the community,

with the local rugby team wearing black armbands in tribute. Edith lived until 1956, remaining in Bridgwater and was buried with William and her parents.

Dr. Henry Sharland Pope (1865–1923) was a prominent Bridgwater physician, public health officer, and community leader. He was raised in Sandford, Devon, where his father, Rev. Henry Pope, a nonconformist minister and schoolmaster, instilled strong values of education and service. After attending Crediton Grammar and Cavendish College, Cambridge, Henry earned medical degrees and trained in several London hospitals before working as a ship's doctor. In 1897, he settled in Bridgwater, the home of his sister, taking over a local practice and becoming medical officer for the borough. His practice was in 'Castle Bailey House' in York Buildings, not to be confused with a house of the same name in Northgate. For over two decades, Henry played a key role in local healthcare and public welfare. He reported regularly on vital statistics, disease outbreaks, and housing needs, and served as school medical officer, police surgeon, and expert witness. A committed Liberal, he was also elected to the town council and School Board. His public service intensified during the Great War as he shouldered increased responsibility. Henry died suddenly in 1923, following poor health and depression likely due to post-surgical pain. His death, from a morphine overdose, was ruled accidental. Remembered for his kindness, integrity, and dedication to the community, he left his estate to his siblings and was succeeded by Dr. Cromie at Castle Bailey House. Appended to his biography is his fascinating report on the health of the town in 1915, detailing the impact of the war on health, hygiene, housing. A must read as a perspective on the town at the time.

James Palmer 1859-1915 was a dedicated builder and volunteer militiaman in 19th-century Bridgwater. He learned his building trade from his father Joseph, eventually running the family business and passing it to his son. Alongside his civilian career, James served for 56 years in the West Somerset Yeomanry, a local mounted militia. Joining in 1850, he became a skilled marksman, winning over 40 shooting prizes, and eventually rose to the rank of Trumpet Major, responsible for bugle training and coordination. He was a

familiar figure at annual training camps and ceremonial parades. James married Eliza Sharman in 1856, and they had four children. The family lived and worked around the docks, running inns and shops before settling at 2 Myrtle Villas, Wembdon Road. His sons joined the business, while his daughters married and moved away. After retiring in 1906, James suffered a fatal fall in 1915 and was buried in Wembdon Road Cemetery. Eliza, widowed and living with her daughter Emily in later life, died in 1925. Their son Tom died young from tuberculosis in 1903, and their daughter Lizzie and her husband James Millier were later buried in the family plot.

Joseph James Palmer (1859–1931) was a builder and cycling enthusiast. His father James was a builder and a keen member of the West Somerset Yeomanry, passing on bugling skills to Joseph. After leaving school, Joseph worked in the family building and decorating business. In the 1880s, he became an enthusiastic cyclist, joining the Bridgwater Bicycle Club and competing in local races alongside his brother Tom. The club was active socially and competitively before declining in the 1890s with the rise of the Bridgwater Cycling Club. By the 1890s, Joseph lived at 2 Myrtle Villas and ran the family business with his father. In 1899, he married Bertha Gillbanks, the youngest daughter of a police superintendent. Joseph took over the business after his father's death in 1915. A close friendship with cyclist Walter Stevens endured for decades, and Walter eventually lived with the Palmers. Joseph suffered health issues later in life, likely related to dementia, and died in Bristol in 1931. He was buried in Wembdon Road Cemetery next to his friend Walter Stevens.

Louisa Phillips (née Jennings), born in 1824 in North Petherton, was the illegitimate daughter of Betty Jennings and was likely raised by her grandparents. Being born outside of marriage was harshly looked down on at the time, but Louisa seems to have prospered regardless and trod her own resilient, independent path. She lived a tough but independent life, raising four illegitimate children—Elizabeth, George, Thomas, and Charles—before marrying labourer John Phillips in 1857. Together, they had six more children. Louisa worked tirelessly as a washerwoman and later in a grocer's shop to support her large family, spending only

brief periods in the workhouse around childbirth. Despite hardship and poverty, Louisa and her husband remained resilient, living in Albert Street (then Ropers Lane). John became a tile maker and later a road labourer, working into his 70s. He died in 1906. Louisa continued to live independently and remained close to her eldest daughter. In 1914, she was photographed with her daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, and great-great-granddaughter—five generations of strong Jennings women. Louisa died shortly before Christmas 1914 at nearly 90 years old (though mis-recorded as 77), and was buried alongside her husband.

Walter John Stevens (1871–1925) was an entrepreneurial and passionate bicycle manufacturer from Wiltshire, best known for his successful “Flying Dutchman” racing bicycles. Born to elderly innkeeper John Stevens and his much younger wife Matilda Daniells, Walter was raised in Upton Scudamore. Orphaned young, he trained as a mechanic and developed a love for cycling while working in Kingswood, near Bristol. Turning his passion into a business, he began manufacturing bicycles in 1892, naming them after the famous Great Western train. His Flying Dutchman cycles won many regional racing prizes and were promoted heavily through advertising. Walter married Laura Rosina Wookey in 1895, and they had six children, though three died in infancy. His growing business expanded to multiple premises and continued successfully into the 1920s. His close friendship with fellow cycling enthusiast Ernie Brain, who later developed the Bleriot bicycle, endured through the years. Health issues forced Walter into early retirement, and he spent his final years in Bridgwater with friends Joseph and Bertha Palmer. He died in 1925 at age 54. Loyal to the end, Ernie Brain later married Bertha and maintained ties with Walter’s children, honouring the memory of his lifelong friend and fellow cycling pioneer.

Lavinia Duddridge (née Knight, 1791–1877) was the wife of mariner James Duddridge and spent much of her married life managing the household alone while her husband was at sea. Born in Spaxton, she moved to Bridgwater, where she married James in 1816. Together they had six children, including three sons who

all became master mariners. Life was often financially uncertain, especially in James’s early seafaring years, but improved as he became captain of the *Union* and later the *Blessing*. Education for their children was a priority, and the family was active in the Zion Independent Chapel in Friarn Street. The family faced several hardships, including the controversial marriage of daughter Eliza to a Catholic Frenchman, which could have led to social ostracism. Later, son James Jr., after becoming disabled, lost his schooner *Lively* in a storm, causing financial distress. Lavinia’s husband died in 1861, followed by James Jr. in 1863. Despite tragedies, Lavinia remained surrounded by family and supported by the Congregational community. She lived to see the opening of the new Fore Street Chapel in 1864. After further family trials, including a grandson’s severe railway accident, Lavinia died in 1877 aged 85, remembered as a resilient matriarch devoted to family, faith, and community.

John Stoodley (1778–1862) dedicated 31 years to the 1st Somerset Militia, rising from a boy fifer to sergeant. He joined in 1793, just two weeks after France declared war on Britain, and served through decades of conflict including the Napoleonic Wars. Like his father, Sgt. Benjamin Stoodley, and two brothers, John embraced a life of military service. He was stationed across Britain—in Cornwall, Dover, Ipswich, Ireland, and locally in Bridgwater—training soldiers, manning coastal defences, and helping to guard prisoners of war. John’s military duties were far from routine. In 1814, his regiment helped suppress an attempted mass prison break at Dartmoor, a tragic and controversial event. He also served during key moments of national importance, including garrison duty while King George III was in residence at Weymouth. John’s leadership grew with his promotions, playing a crucial role in training new recruits during Britain’s expansion of the militia. It was in Bridgwater that he met Martha Leaker, daughter of local innkeeper Charles Leaker of the *Fleur de Lis*. They married at St Mary’s Church in 1803 and raised a large family, with several of their children born in the town. Discharged in 1827 with failing health, John lived on his pension until his death in 1862.

Published by the Friends of Blake
Museum
5 Blake Street, Bridgwater, TA6 3NB
Registered Charity No 1099815
©September 2025
Tel:01278 456127
TW – 22/06/2025

Websites:

Friends:

www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk/friends

Museum:

www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

Bridgwater Heritage Group:

[www https://bridgwaterheritage.com](http://www.https://bridgwaterheritage.com)

**Friends of Wembdon Road
Cemetery**

https://wembdonroadcemetery.com/