

Bridgwater Heritage Newsletter Summer 2025



An engraving of Bridgwater Bridge, after John Chubb

Heritage material has been regularly added to the Museum Newsletter, *Blake News*, for several years. But the amount of copy means they can be over-long. This Newsletter will be produced at the same time as Blake News – Spring, Summer and Autumn, and each will be emailed at the same time.

Tony Woolrich. *Blake News* editor

Bridgwater Heritage Group **Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich**

The most recent addition to the website has been a history of **Bridge House, 4 East Quay**. This is the grand Georgian building that is currently derelict. It dates to the early eighteenth century, and was modernised in the early nineteenth, when the adjoining warehouse was added to its northern side. For many years it was the offices for Wilkinson and Leng.

Another building explored are the two **Hope Inns of Taunton Road**. The first was a late medieval cottage, while the second was the Tudor Revival building demolished under unfortunate circumstances only a few years ago. A highlight of this piece is an attempt to reconstruct the original Hope Inn, when it had a thatch. This article was written to compliment the biographies of the Barrows recently written for the Friends of the Wembdon Road Cemetery (see below). Likewise, activity in the cemetery prompted additional notes and pictures by various contributors added to our page on St Margaret's School.

Notes on Artemis Aglen Dowty, (1846-1906, known as 'O.P.Q. Philander-Smiff', a Bridgwater-born Victorian Humourist. He was a Civil Servant and a prolific journalist,

contributing to a number of Victorian humorous magazines.

Others are

Museum Reminiscences by Tony Woolrich

A sketch history of Bridgwater's Heritage Organisations.

A sketch history of Bridgwater's Fire Brigade has been added, prompted by the contribution of a 1930s photograph, kindly supplied by Debra Maczi. This charts the story from the gift of the town's first fire engine in the 1720s (which may still have been in use into the 1880s), through the steady establishment of a volunteer fire brigade, the town's first fire station in 1906 in Clare Street, behind the town hall. That station was demolished in 1954. At some point prior to 1956 a fire station had been established at the Cattle Market in Bath Road. The lease was due to expire in 1962 and a new site was earmarked in Salmon Lane, where it has been ever since.

Of special interest has been the contribution of **'Clay Recollections: a memoir of growing up by one of Bridgwater's brickyards'** by the late **Colin Symons Cooper**, reproduced with the kind permission of his sons Ben Cooper and Dan Cooper. These reminiscences take in a lot of detail of Colin's childhood at Crossways Brickyard at Somerset Bridge, his Symons relations as well as the ketch the Irene. Colin Symons Cooper (1927-2012) was a grandson of Clifford James Symons (1857-1943), partner in the brickmaking firm of Colthurst, Symons and Co., which owned yards at Bridgwater. His father Frederick Arthur (Tom) Cooper was Joint Managing Director of the firm. Frederick was born in Birkenhead and moved to Bridgwater

with his family, remaining until 1940, when they moved away.

This focus on the brickyards has also been supplemented by a survey of the town's **Brickyard Strikes** between 1886 and 1896, which has been kindly supplied by Clare Spicer and Jill Trethewey. This article was composed to give greater context to the lives of brickyard workers who lived through it, and especially to compliment biographies of those buried in the Wembdon Road Cemetery, including Stephen Lee Duddridge 1845-1919 (see below). The Bridgwater brickyard owners all knew each other, so they were able to form unofficial coalitions to regulate wages and working conditions. Occasionally the owners would decide that they needed to reduce the already meagre wages even further, and the desperate workers would attempt to strike. The men called this action a 'lock out' as the owners shut their premises while the men would not agree to their conditions, but the owners called this a 'strike'. In 1886, for example, the strike lasted 8 or 9 weeks and the workers achieved little.

In terms of additions to the digitised collections, we have added a catalogue for the **1948 Bridgwater Industries Exhibition**, which details the operations and histories of some the prominent firms in the town at the time, such as Cellophane, Clarks and the Somerset Trading Company.

FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson

The following biographies have been added to the website's database, all, except the biography of Cook, having been supplied by Clare Spicer and Jill Trethewey:

William Henry Facey 1881-1943 and Blanche Facey nee Parsons 1881-1964, his wife. Their lives reflect working-class resilience, social activism, and adaptation amid the industrial and wartime changes of early 20th-century Britain.

Mary Ann Godden (née Stone, 1841-1923). Mary was a nurse, wife, and mother whose life was largely quiet but marked by compassion and

resilience. Mary Ann spent her final days in the Bridgwater workhouse and died in 1923, aged 80. She was buried with Charles.

Emma Day (1788-1855), born Amy Hewlett Routley in Stogumber, Somerset, led a modest but industrious life, typical of many 19th-century working-class women whose stories often go unrecorded. Emma collapsed and died in the station's booking office from apoplexy (stroke).

The **Barrows of the Hope Inn on Taunton Road. James Stacey Barrow (1860-1942) and his wife Sarah Maria Barrow (née Holding, 1864-1928)** spent most of their lives running the Hope Inn in Hamp. . The original inn was demolished and replaced by 1930. That in turn demolished quite recently.

Edith Mary Dukes (née Pope, 1862-1898). Edith was an educated and progressive woman of Victorian England, notable for her academic achievements and public advocacy. Her legacy lived on through her children, three of whom achieved national prominence. Edith was remembered as intellectually gifted, compassionate, and committed to both faith and reform, a woman ahead of her time.

Priscilla Heard (née Parker, 1796-1866) lived a turbulent life marked by poverty, heavy drinking, and frequent clashes with the law. Her final years were spent in the workhouse, where she died in 1866. Priscilla's story illustrates the harsh realities faced by poor women in 19th-century England, and her life—recorded in court and newspaper reports—offers rare insight into the experiences of working-class women entangled with poverty, addiction, and the justice system.

Amelia Bennett, the first burial in the Wembdon Road Cemetery, whose story has been looked at again. Her burial location in the cemetery is a mystery, just described in the register as 'Border'. Amelia's mother Ann had married a Thomas Stoneman and later emigrated to Geelong, Australia, seeking a better life. They had ten children, but tragically, only two survived to adulthood. Despite these losses, Ann lived a long life, dying in 1907 at 89,

while Thomas became a respected public figure and mayor.

Maria Farrance née Brewer (1835–1887). Maria lived a life marked by poverty, loss, and hardship in Victorian Bridgwater. .

Lucy Stevens (1852-1854) a Bridgwater workhouse child. Lucy Stevens, born in the Bridgwater workhouse in 1852, was the daughter of Charlotte Stevens, a single mother from a struggling working-class family. She contracted whooping cough and died on 1 December 1854. The poor soul probably rarely if ever saw much outside the walls of the workhouse.

Mary Symes Plowman (1840–1854), a sad story, but one all too common for the time. Mary Symes was the daughter of Thomas Plowman, a saddler, and Mary née Smith, part of a prosperous family in Bridgwater, Somerset. Her maternal grandfather, Richard Smith, was a wealthy grocer and alderman. Mary later attended school in Bridgwater and was eventually sent to the prestigious Northampton House in Islington, London, indicating her parents' ambition and means. Tragically, she died of pneumonia at just 14, shortly before the summer holidays, and was buried back in her hometown. A life cut tragically short, and an all too common story for the time.

Sarah Ann Cotton was born on 14 October 1851 in the Union House workhouse to Mary Ann Cotton, a single mother struggling to survive in Bridgwater. Sarah Ann suffered from marasmus, a severe form of malnutrition, and died on 31 October 1851 at two weeks old. The poor conditions in the workhouse, including inadequate food and medical care, likely contributed to her decline.

Florence Farrance nee Smith 1874-1919. Florence Farrance was a dedicated Red Cross volunteer during WWI, recognized as "one of our best workers." When the war began, Florence devoted herself to the Red Cross, using her skills to sew garments for hospitals. She worked in the Bridgwater Red Cross workroom, where volunteers made essential hospital items such as pyjamas, dressing gowns, and operation

gowns. Her expertise ensured that garments were sewn to a high standard. Florence continued volunteering until just days before her death from heart failure and pneumonia in 1919 at the age of 43. She was buried in Wembdon Road Cemetery.

Completely revised and updated biography of James Cook 1835-1911. Cook was a prominent solicitor, civic leader, and philanthropist. Born into a working-class family, he overcame humble beginnings to become Town Clerk of Bridgwater and a key figure in many local causes.

Kate Trevor (1859-1934) was a prominent figure in Bridgwater, contributing to the Church, the Conservative Party, and various charities. . Her life reflected dedication to family, community service, and political involvement, though she never took a public stance on major issues.

The Duddridge family. Stephen Lee Duddridge was a skilled handmade tile maker who worked at the Crossway Brickyard in Bridgwater, owned by Colthurst Symons. Born in 1845, he grew up in a working-class family, where children often started labouring at an early age due to economic necessity. Stephen passed away in 1919, and Louisa followed in 1923. **Their son, William John Duddridge was born in 1865 in Somerset Bridge, son of Stephen and Louisa Duddridge.** Initially working as a brickyard labourer, he enlisted in the Royal Marines Artillery in 1885, seeking adventure and stability. He trained as a gunner and served aboard various ships, part of Britain's Channel Fleet. His service coincided with peacetime, but he took part in naval exercises and fleet reviews. William returned home in 1897, and He resumed working in the brickyards until WWI, when he re-enlisted in the Somerset Light Infantry at age 49. Attached to the Royal Garrison Artillery, he died of heart failure in 1915 while on active duty in Dover. Honoured with a military funeral, he was buried in St. James's Cemetery, with his name memorialised in Bridgwater's Wembdon Road Cemetery.

Mary Louisa Counsell (née Wheatley) (1860-1942) and William

Counsell (1854-1924) were a transatlantic couple whose lives reflected the movement and ambitions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mary Louisa was born in Yorkshire into a family with a strong history of emigration. Her grandparents had journeyed to the U.S. in search of opportunity, and several of her siblings later settled in Iowa.

After her father's death, she worked as a governess before purchasing land in Iowa, likely as an investment. Meanwhile, William, a Somerset farmer, sought greater opportunities in America. Inspired by newspaper advertisements promising fertile farmland, he emigrated in the 1890s, likely settling in Iowa and Minnesota.

The couple met in the U.S. and married in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1893. However, they soon returned to England, possibly due to economic difficulties in America and family obligations. They settled in Nether Stowey, Somerset, bringing with them their orphaned nephew, Bertie Wheatley. William's father passed away soon after, and by 1901, the couple had moved to a comfortable home in Bridgwater, where William continued farming while Mary Louisa managed their household. William remained an active farmer into his later years, but in 1924, while picking apples, he suffered a serious fall, leading to internal injuries. Delayed medical attention resulted in his death at the age of 67. He was buried in Wembdon Road Cemetery. Mary Louisa continued living in Bridgwater before retiring to Torquay. She passed away in 1942 but was laid to rest beside her husband. Their story is one of ambition, resilience, and the enduring ties between England and America, shaped by the opportunities and hardships of migration.

Florence Ada Waddon (1870-1915). Florence was born in Bridgwater into a prosperous business family. She had a passion for painting and lace-making, excelling in both. Though she never married, her legacy as an artist and volunteer remains significant in Bridgwater's history.

Jane Jefferson Williamson Thurnham (1867-1923) composer and schoolmistress and Alice Maud Mary Thurnham (1872-1960) schoolmistress. Jennie (Jane) and Maud (Alice) Thurnham were accomplished educators and pioneers in women's education. In 1918, they moved to Bridgwater to lead St Margaret's Girls' School. Unfortunately, Jennie was diagnosed with breast cancer soon after their arrival. Despite her illness, she continued teaching until her death in 1923. Maud carried on running the school, overseeing its relocation and modernization, before retiring in the 1930s. Maud lived in various places before settling in Clevedon, Somerset, where she passed away in 1960. The sisters were buried together in Wembdon Road Cemetery. Their legacy lies in their contributions to women's education and their dedication to their students, which continued even through personal hardships.

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www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

Bridgwater Heritage Group:

www.https://bridgwaterheritage.com

Friends of Wembdon Road Cemetery

https://wembdonroadcemetery.com/