

Bridgwater Heritage Newsletter Summer 2026



BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

by

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Most recently we have added a history of the **Bridgwater Iron Works** in Colley Lane (now the site of Tregenna Close, Hazeley, Helena Court and part of Appledore Drive). The iron works was in operation from the 1840s through to 1878, and is notable especially for its iron lighthouses and bridges, several of which still survive, with one in Australia.

A new page is being planned about **Bridgwater's Architects**. As well as articles about Bridgwater-based concerns, such as Thomas Hutchings, Richard Carver, the dynasty of the Down family, Charles Knowles, and Basil Cottam, it will also note, (with web links), those active in the villages of area of Bridgwater Rural District Council, as recorded in Pevsner's *Buildings of England – Somerset: South and West*, edited by Julian Orbach and Nikolaus Pevsner, 2014.

We have added a history of **Dampiet House** (the house attached to the Dampiet Street Car Park). This is an enigma of a building, with what looks to be a medieval core facing George Street, with later extensions. Its reputed that the fireplaces within were made from a prehistoric standing stone from the levels – if anyone has seen them we will be glad to hear from you. The house is mostly associated with the Pain family of local solicitors.

A biography of **William Baker, Artist and Painter, 1817-1875** has been added. Although Baker was a noted and prolific portrait painter in his day, we only know of two examples of his to survive – a portrait of Robert Blake kept in the museum (with moustache and

probably not Blake) and another kept at King John's Hunting Lodge in Axbridge. We know of three more portraits that were in the Town Hall (Mayor Browne, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert), which seem to have just disappeared in the 1960s, then another that was in Holy Trinity in the 1860s. Hopefully one day more will emerge.

Blake Museums. Alex Dunn has very kindly supplied a biography of **Angus Dunn**, Borough Librarian and Museum curator from 1956 to 1974. Dunn was a remarkable man, who did much for the town, and was especially pleased with the extension to the library of 1970.

David Sutcliffe has contributed an article on the folk song collector **Cecil Sharp and Bridgwater**, which has been supplemented with appendices about Folk Dance and Sea Shanties. Sharp visited the town several times and collected songs from the old folk in the community.

Research on people buried in the Wembdon Road Cemetery by Clare Spicer and Jillian Trethewey (read more below), has yielded some interesting broader research on the town.

They have provided potted histories on **two ships called Hope**, which operated from Bridgwater. One was a smack of 23 tons, the other was a sloop of 40 tons, which was wrecked in a storm in 1877, and all three crew members drowned.

They have also provided a list of all the non-military **Brass Bands in Bridgwater**, which saw a boom in popularity in the 1880s. Only the Salvation Army band survives today.

Most inspirationally, they have provided a list of **Royal Humane Society Awards** to Bridgwater residents. Thirteen men in total were awarded this prize for bravery, mostly from saving people from drowning in the Parrett, or

in the brick ponds, between 1859 and 1914.

Neil Squibbs kindly donated to the Heritage Group a bundle of ephemera and a scrapbook relating to **Frederick Harold Allen (1869-1941)**. It covers his year in office as Mayor of Bridgwater in 1922-1923. We're still working through all this, but so far we have published notes on:

The **Unbuilt Bridgwater to Watchet Railway 1923/4**, which was hoped would capitalise on the shale oil scheme at Kilve.

Notes on the **Mayoress's Chain of 1928** (which was stolen in 1977 and had to be remade), which Allen with fellow former mayors Masding and Ker, presented to the town in memory of their wives.

The **Bridgwater Amateur Operatic Society's HMS Pinafore, 1933**, which was a roaring success.

Among the Allan papers were some unrelated notes on the **Town Hall Tapestries**. These had been donated to the town in 1836 by Alderman John Chapman of Hamp House, but were ultimately sold in 1969 as the town did not have enough funds to look after them. Chapman had acquired them from the sale of the contents of **Enmore Castle**, and the history of that magnificent building, one of the pioneers of the Gothic Revival, is also explored. It is a great shame so little of the castle survives, and a shame we no longer have the tapestries.

Finally, two historical sources have been added:

A complete account of the **unveiling of the Blake Statue** in 1900, which includes extensive notes on the statue (revealing exactly what exactly Blake is pointing towards), all the speeches given and the civic parades and receptions, which went ahead despite rain.

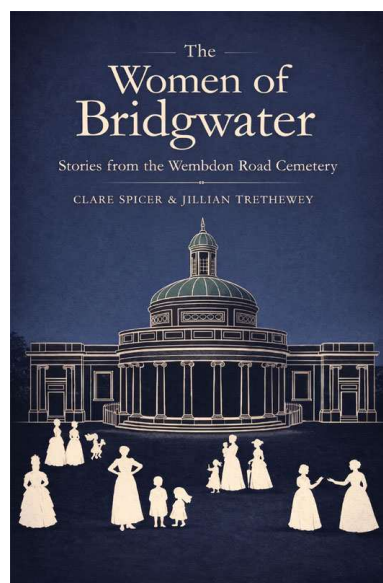
The second account is a wonderfully chatty tour of **Bridgwater in 1883** by a journalist called 'Eregen'. This contains charming observations, such as being bothered by urchins in Eastover, or the idle folk on the Cornhill.

FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of **Hilary Southall**, who died peacefully on 13 May 2026. Hilary was, for many years, a dedicated researcher for the Friends. Alongside Jillian Trethewey and Clare Spicer, she contributed a great many biographies to our archive, helping to preserve and share the rich history connected with the cemetery. What began as research into their own family ancestors soon grew into a wider passion for uncovering and telling the many fascinating stories of those laid to rest there. Hilary's work, care, and enthusiasm made a lasting contribution that will continue to benefit future generations. Although Hilary lived far from Bridgwater, she was delighted to be able to visit in May 2023, on a bright sunny day. She will be warmly remembered and greatly missed by all who knew and worked with her.

The friends' volunteers, principally Jillian Trethewey and Clare Spicer, continue to research individuals buried in the cemetery. Their **book on the Women of Bridgwater** is nearing completion, and we hope to have that out in the next couple of months.

It is some 400 pages long and the price is to be determined.



HERE ARE THE RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE WEBSITE.

Lewis Willie Nurse (1865-1936) came from a long line of Gloucestershire

mariners and ship owners whose livelihoods were tied to the River Severn, canals, and coastal trade. His grandfather, Captain John Nurse, worked the Severn trows carrying coal and goods between South Wales, Gloucester, and Stroud. Lewis's father, David Nurse, expanded the family shipping business after moving from Saul to the thriving port of Bridgwater in the 1860s, adapting to changing trade routes and increasing railway competition. Raised in Bridgwater, Lewis followed the family tradition and became a master mariner and ship owner. He married Ida Davis in 1888, and they had one daughter, Selina. Lewis captained the ketch *Sunbeam* from 1886 to 1900, transporting coal, bricks, salt, and other cargoes around Britain and Europe. In 1900 the *Sunbeam* was wrecked on the Goodwin Sands during a severe blizzard, though the crew survived. Lewis later commissioned and captained the *Sunshine*, earning a reputation as a skilled and daring sailor. The Nurse family endured many hardships, including the drowning of Lewis's brother John in 1891 and the decline of the sailing ship trade during World War I, when U-boats and mines threatened coastal shipping. Lewis eventually retired from sea life and became active in Bridgwater civic affairs, serving as a town councillor, nautical assessor, and member of shipping organisations. He defended the importance of sailing ships during an era increasingly dominated by steam and rail transport. Lewis died in 1936 after a stroke, while Ida lived until 1956.

James Pursey (1825–1899) and his wife Jane Nation Pursey (1829–1912) lived through a period of major industrial and social change in Somerset. Born in Taunton, James was the son of an ostler and was first apprenticed as a harness maker. At 17 he briefly faced an assault charge, but afterwards rebuilt his life and trained as a skilled cabinet maker. The arrival of the railway opened new opportunities, and by 1851 James was working in London before returning to Somerset to marry Jane Nation in 1853. Jane came from a struggling family after her mason father died, and she likely worked in domestic service before

marriage. The couple settled in Ilminster, where James worked as a journeyman cabinet maker and Jane later earned money as a glover. Together they raised seven children. As the family grew, their daughters entered the expanding shirt-collar industry in Ilminster and Taunton. Through this work, daughter Margaret met businessman William Masding, who set up the Tone Vale Manufacturing Company. In 1897 several family members moved to Bridgwater to help establish the new collar factory there in Bailey Street. James died in Bridgwater in 1899 after only a short retirement. Jane remained close to her children and grandchildren until her death in 1912.

Pursey Short (1894–1917) lived a short but dedicated life marked by service to both his community and his country. Born in Taunton, he grew up in a working family, leaving school at sixteen to work in a cardboard box factory. By the early 1910s he had moved to Bridgwater to live with relatives, likely finding employment through family connections. Short was deeply committed to the Scout movement, becoming Scoutmaster of the 4th Bridgwater Sea Scouts and earning the prestigious Silver Wolf award for exceptional service. His role involved training boys in maritime skills and contributing to wartime coastal watch duties during the First World War. Eager to serve militarily, Short initially faced repeated rejection due to not meeting physical requirements. Nevertheless, his persistence paid off when he successfully enlisted in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in November 1915 as a signaller. After training at shore bases, he served aboard the French steamship S.S. *Maine*, which transported supplies across the English Channel. On 21 November 1917, the ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat and sank, with the loss of nearly all crew, including Short, aged 23. He is commemorated on memorials in Newhaven, Plymouth, and Bridgwater, remembered for his service and sacrifice.

Richard Snow (1854–1877) was a Bridgwater mariner who rose from poverty and lack of formal education to become a ship's Mate by his early twenties. The son of William Snow, a

mariner, and Ann Gunningham, Richard grew up in a busy port town. His father died when Richard was four, leaving his mother to support five children through poorly paid work. Despite hardship and limited schooling, he could not write his name, Richard followed his father to sea. Beginning as a “boy” on coastal trading vessels, Richard learned seamanship through hard physical labour and experience. He sailed on ships such as the *Specimen*, *Triad*, *Rapid*, and *Mary Emma*, steadily gaining skill and responsibility. By 1876 he had become a Mate, second in command, a notable achievement given his background. In 1875 he married Mary Jane Arberry, but their infant son died shortly after birth. Two years later, in October 1877, Richard was serving as Mate on the sloop *Hope* when it was lost in a severe storm with all hands. His body was later recovered and buried in Bridgwater. Richard’s story reflects both the opportunities and dangers of maritime life. His widow, Mary Jane, remarried, tragically losing her second husband to drowning as well.

Tom Frank Jones (1863–1895) was a hard working nineteenth-century sailor from Somerset who rose from humble beginnings to become a ship’s captain. Born in the rural village of Moorlinch, his early life was marked by tragedy when his father died by suicide, leaving his mother to support the family. She moved them to Bridgwater, where Tom attended school and was soon drawn to the nearby river and maritime life. Beginning as a ship’s boy in the 1870s, Tom steadily advanced through determination and skill, becoming an able seaman, then mate, and eventually master of small coastal trading vessels. He worked long, dangerous hours transport-ing goods such as bricks and coal around Britain and nearby European ports. Despite the insecurity of casual employment, he gained a reputation as a reliable and capable sailor. Tom married Alice Winslade and had several children, though their family life was marked by hardship and the loss of two infants. By 1894, he had achieved his ambition of becoming captain, commanding vessels for local coal merchants. In March 1895, while captaining the ketch *Active*, Tom

was caught in a violent storm off Burnham-on-Sea. Despite attempts by a lifeboat crew to reach the stricken vessel, the *Active* quickly foundered. The ship sank, and all aboard were lost. His body was recovered weeks later, leaving behind a widow and young family.

Alfred Peace (1844-1912) rose from modest beginnings to become one of Bridgwater’s most energetic and influential businessmen. Born in the rural hamlet of Beach near Bristol, he was one of nine children and benefited from a solid education encouraged by his father. Beginning as an apprentice railway carrier in the early 1860s, he developed a strong understanding of transport and logistics that underpinned his later success. By 1871, Peace had already established himself in Bridgwater as a general merchant, carrier, and ship owner. Through hard work, careful investment, and business acumen, he built a diverse enterprise spanning rail, sea, and road transport. His ventures included steamships, warehousing, removals, and agricultural trading, as well as roles in food production businesses. Railways remained central to his work, and he played a leading role in promoting the Bridgwater Railway, helping to break the monopoly of larger companies and improve local trade. Beyond business, Peace was deeply involved in civic and public life. He served as mayor of Bridgwater twice, contributed to educational initiatives, supported the local hospital, and took part in agricultural and technical education. A man of strong religious conviction, he was active in both Wesleyan and later Anglican circles, and his faith informed his commitment to social improvement. Mary Aglen Dowty, his wife, played a steady and supportive role in his life and success. Married in 1868, she came from a local Bridgwater family and helped raise their children. Sharing his Wesleyan background, she supported religious and community life, and endured personal loss, including the death of young children. Despite personal tragedies and business risks, Peace remained diligent and community-minded. He died in 1912, remembered for his industry, leadership, and dedication to public service.

George Henry “Harry” Bradbeer (1867–1945) was a lifelong schoolmaster and devoted community figure in Bridgwater, alongside his wife Mabel Kate “Katie” Bradbeer (1870–1939). Born into a musical family, Harry showed early promise, becoming a pupil teacher and later training at Exeter College. Harry held the position of senior assistant master at Eastover until 1928, when he retired owing to failing eyesight. He had been a pupil and then a teacher at Eastover for 51 years, not counting his four years in Bristol. He was also deeply involved in education beyond the classroom, leading the ‘Evening Continuation School’ for 35 years. Harry contributed widely to local life through committees such as the National Union of Teachers and the Allotment Association, and supported wartime relief efforts. A talented musician, he could play the piano, piccolo, violin, organ and cornet. In 1921, he made a notable historical discovery by uncovering remains of a Franciscan friary, which are now in the museum. In retirement, he remained active in church, gardening, and sports, particularly cricket. Katie Bradbeer was an active community volunteer, especially in supporting Bridgwater Cricket Club. She helped found and run the ladies’ committee, organising teas, whist drives, and social events to raise funds. Also involved with the National Union of Teachers locally, she was known for her dedication, sociability, and sustained contribution to community life. During World War II, Harry continued public service through food production initiatives. He died in 1945, remembered as a respected teacher and community leader.

Lieutenant William “Willie” James Bradbeer (1888–1920) was a Bridgwater schoolteacher whose life combined education, music, and military service. He was the youngest of eight children born to Alfred Bradbeer and Jane Priddle, a family with roots in North Curry. His father worked as a carriage trimmer at the Great Western Railway’s Colley Lane works and was also an accomplished musician, serving as bandmaster of the local volunteer brass band and earning a Long Service

Volunteer Medal. William inherited his father’s musical talent, becoming a tenor singer active in concerts and church music. William was educated locally, winning a Junior County Scholarship in 1900 to attend Dr Morgan’s School. He later trained as a teacher, first as a pupil teacher at Albert Street Boys’ School and then at Exeter Technical College, where he gained distinction in mathematics. Returning to Bridgwater, he taught boys aged eight to thirteen, covering subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and physical education, while also contributing to school singing. Outside the classroom he sang in St Mary’s Church choir and served as deputy organist at All Saints’ Mission Church. In 1911 he married Selina Nurse, daughter of a Bridgwater mariner. During World War I he joined the Devonshire Regiment, later training with the Royal Garrison Artillery and being commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1919. After the war he returned to teaching, but ill health—following influenza—led to his death in 1920, officially from a cerebral tumour.

Thomas Souden Parminter (1836–1895) Born in Appledore, Devon, Thomas Souden Parminter was the eldest son of a maltster-turned-shoemaker. Raised in Bridgwater, he benefited from schooling at a time when many children worked young, reflecting his parents’ ambition for him. After his father’s death in 1857, Thomas pursued a career in the grocery trade, marrying Mary Ann Clatworthy in 1859. Beginning as a clerk and later a grocer’s traveller, he gained valuable commercial experience before establishing his own business at 13 Fore Street by 1881. His enterprise expanded into wholesale and retail groceries, wines and spirits, and imported Italian goods. As a respected businessman, Thomas became active in civic life: he supported the Bridgwater Early Closing Association, served on the grand jury, joined the Somerset Agricultural Association, and contributed generously to local charities, the YMCA, and volunteer organisations. In 1889 his firm suffered internal theft by a junior clerk, leading to a court case that caused local embarrassment but likely strengthened his business practices.

Despite setbacks, Thomas remained industrious and family-oriented. He died in 1895 from oesophageal cancer, aged 58, and was widely respected in Bridgwater. His funeral was well attended, marking the loss of a self-made Victorian tradesman who had built a substantial commercial and civic legacy.

Mary Ann Clatworthy Parminter (1837–1919) Born in North Petherton to a tailor and Wesleyan lay preacher, Mary Ann grew up in a large, religious household. She married Thomas Souden Parminter in 1859 and supported him throughout the building of his grocery business, raising five surviving children while often managing the home alone during his travels. After Thomas's death in 1895, she oversaw the sale of the business and properties. She endured the deaths of her son William in 1909 and her eldest son Thomas William in 1915. Mary Ann died in 1919 aged 82 and was buried with her husband and son in Bridgwater.

Thomas William Parminter (1860–1915) was born in Bridgwater, Somerset, the eldest son of Thomas Souden Parminter and Mary Ann Clatworthy. Raised in a hardworking grocer's family, he joined his father's Fore Street business once old enough, learning the trade in a well-stocked shop. While travelling for the firm, he met Laura Richmond "Laurie" Harrington of Essex, daughter of a shipbuilder. They married in 1886 and settled at 1 Kepler Villa, Wembdon, where they had four children. A keen poultry breeder, he won local prizes before moving the family to Ipswich in 1894 to establish his own grocery. Tragedy struck in 1896 when his five-year-old son Edward died after his nightclothes caught fire in a domestic accident. The coroner found no neglect, but the loss strained the marriage, which eventually broke down. Thomas emigrated to Illinois, working at Western Electric's Hawthorne Works in Cicero, near Chicago, and began a second family. On 24 July 1915, Thomas and his sixteen-year-old daughter Anna died when the excursion steamer *SS Eastland* capsized in the Chicago River, killing 844 people. They were buried in Illinois, and Thomas is commemorated in Bridgwater.

Bessie Williams (née Parminter) was born in Bridgwater on 19 January 1862, the surviving twin daughter of grocer Thomas Souden Parminter and Mary Ann Clatworthy. Her twin sister Annie died in infancy. Raised in Polden Street, Bessie left home by her early twenties to work as a draper's assistant in Frome, showing early independence. In 1886 she married John Thomas Williams, a Welsh colliery manager and committed Anglican, and moved to Aberystwith (now Blaina) in South Wales. By 1889 they had settled in Cwmtillery, where John rose to Assistant General Manager and later became chairman of Abertillery District Council. Their three children—Janet (1891), Margaret "Meta" (1892), and John Ivor (1898)—were born during these prosperous years. By 1901 the family lived in Cwmtillery House with live-in servants, reflecting John's status. As an Anglican in a largely Nonconformist mining community, Bessie's social circle may have been limited, though St Paul's Church was established locally in 1891. She managed a busy household, later caring for her elderly father-in-law. Widowed suddenly in 1916, Bessie carried on, supporting her children as they married and pursued medical careers. She spent later years in Ilford and with Somerset relatives. Bessie died in 1946, aged 83, and was buried in Bridgwater.

William Clatworthy Parminter (1873–1909) William, the fourth child of Thomas and Mary Ann Parminter, was born in Bridgwater and initially helped in the family grocery business. After his father's death, he chose a different path, moving to London to work as an outfitter or tailor's assistant. In 1906 he married Minnie Eliza Hooper, and they lived in Hammersmith. William contracted influenza during the severe 1909 epidemic, which developed into pneumonia. He died aged 35 after a brief illness. His body was returned to Bridgwater for burial in the family plot. His widow later remarried.

Gertrude Annie Baker née Parminter (1883–1920) Gertrude, the youngest child of Thomas and Mary Ann, grew up in Bridgwater and worked as a draper's assistant. After her father's

death she remained with her mother until marrying journalist James Alfred Baker in 1909. The couple settled in Barnes, Surrey, where James built a successful career, later working for the Daily Telegraph. Gertrude's life was cut tragically short in 1920 when an ectopic pregnancy caused fatal peritonitis. She died aged 37 at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, and was buried in the Parminter family plot in Bridgwater.

George Haysham (1854–1908), a Bridgwater bricklayer and stonemason, earned local fame in January 1881 for an act of remarkable bravery. Descended from a long-established Bridgwater family of craftsmen, he was the grandson of George Haysham (1789–1881), a plasterer whose steady life was briefly marred by a court case in 1833 following a dispute, shortly before his wife's death. The family remained rooted in the town, working as shoemakers, bricklayers and builders. On 13 January 1881, fifteen-year-old William Bovett fell through thin ice on Browne's Pond, a flooded clay pit near Hamp. Hearing cries for help, George rushed to the scene with a rope. He tied it to a broom and ventured onto the treacherous ice, but it cracked and he plunged into the freezing water. Climbing out, he persisted, fetching ladders and planks. Working with other men, he helped lash ladders together and slide them across the ice, enabling William—who had clung to the edge for twenty minutes—to be pulled to safety. For risking his life, George received a Royal Humane Society testimonial and a sovereign from the mayor and magistrates. He later returned to bricklaying, raised a large family with his wife Emily, and died in 1908, remembered for conspicuous gallantry.

Published by the Friends of Blake
Museum

5 Blake Street, Bridgwater, TA6 3NB

Registered Charity No 1099815

© May 2026

Tel: 01278 456127

TW – 21/05/2026

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www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

Bridgwater Heritage Group:

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

Friends of Wembdon Road Cemetery

<https://wembdonroadcemetery.com/>