

Bridgwater Heritage Newsletter Winter 2025



BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

by

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

Most recently our contributions to this year's Bridgwater History Day are now on YouTube. One is on the Lytil Mill and Bridgwater's First Waterworks, next to the Blake Museum. It was first a corn mill – one of the early town charters describes it as "Our Royal Mill". From 1694 it housed the pump which forced water to a cistern on Cornhill through bored tree trunks trenched in the road. This lasted until the very early nineteenth century, when it was abandoned. For the next eighty years there was no safe water supply, the town grew three fold and there were waves of epidemics of Cholera. When many died. But that is another story.

The second video is more light-hearted on 'How to Spell Bridg(e?)water'. This explores the vexed question of the proper spelling of the town's name.

The largest addition to the website has been an extensive piece on the history of the King James Grammar School, which was established in 1561 and ended abruptly in 1874. It was once held in the upper floor of the Mansion House, before moving to various houses around the town. The final school house was 11 Castle Street (now the Arts Centre) and 10 Queen Street. We've been able to trace the school masters from 1785 to the end, a succession of illustrious clergymen. Ultimately the revenues to support this school were folded into Dr Morgan's in 1888.

Notes on the *Pathfinder*, a ship which gave its name to *Pathfinder Terrace* have been added. This was a larger ship – too large to get up to the bridge, but could comfortably get to the docks. She was built in Pictu, Nova Scotia by John Crerar, William Grant Crerar and Peter Crerar in

1851, but purchased by Axford & Sons of East Quay. She made two emigrant voyages from Bridgwater to New York – via Canada, although this transatlantic route seems to have died out quite quickly, and the ship sold. What ultimately happened to her is unknown.

An Andy King has very kindly supplied an article on the case of Philip Lock, a hairdresser who attempted to shoot bootmaker George Bond in Fore Street in 1843. Lock was imprisoned on a prison hulk in Portsmouth and sentenced to Transportation to Australia. Remarkably, a petition in Bridgwater was raised for his release, which gained 69 signatures – the top of which was George Bond! The petition was successful and Philip was released.

Otherwise, additions have been made to old articles, specifically on Somerset Bridge School and the Hope Inn page, with pictures kindly supplied by Louise Kelly.

FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY

by

Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson

The friends' volunteers, principally Clare Spicer and Jillian Trethewey, continue to research individuals buried in the cemetery. The book on the *Women of Bridgwater* is nearing completion, and we hope to have that out in the New Year. Here are the recent additions to the website;

John Gratton (1834–1897) grew up in the rural village of Halse, where early experience with farm animals later helped him establish a dairy business in Bridgwater. After his father's early death, John entered service in a solicitor's household before becoming a sawyer and setting up home in West Street. He married Mary Jane Wills in 1860, and together they raised several children while enduring the losses of two infants. By the mid-1870s John was selling milk from his

own cows, gradually expanding the business despite a highly publicised court case in 1878 over milk quality. The dairy thrived into the 1880s, with sons Henry and Francis helping alongside other labouring work. Family life was close and multigenerational, with John's in-laws often living in the household. After the sudden death of eldest son Henry in 1894 and John's own death in 1897, Mary moved nearby and died in 1904. The dairy passed to Francis, and later to his sons, continuing for more than ninety years until the 1960s.

Henry James Gratton (1860–1894), John and Mary's eldest child, spent his early years in a busy West Street household supported by his mother's laundry work and the help of extended family. After schooling, he became a brickyard labourer, enduring strenuous and seasonal work. When John's dairy business expanded, Henry left the brickyard to work full-time with his father, managing cows, milking, and delivering milk. Known for his reliability and strong signature in his brother Francis's 1884 marriage register, Henry seemed destined to inherit the dairy. However, his life was cut short at 34 by sudden illness, and he was buried with his baby sister in Wembdon Road Cemetery.

Louis Henry Hayter (1865-1953) was a journalist and Conservative party agent. Minna Hayter (1879-1942) nee Trippe, was his wife. Louis was a pioneering professional Conservative Party election agent and journalist whose career spanned over fifty years. Born in Westminster to a long-serving Grenadier Guards family, he initially worked in politics in London, becoming a confident public speaker and Conservative activist by his early twenties. After editing the Westminster Times and managing several successful campaigns, his promising London career collapsed amid scandal — a bribery accusation and a divorce in 1902. Seeking a fresh start, he moved to Somerset, where he became the Conservative Party agent for Taunton and later Bridgwater, a position he held from 1906 to 1944. Hayter's work epitomised the rise of the full-time professional agent, coordinating campaigns, voter registration, fundraising, and propaganda for dozens of elections. His meticulous organisation helped secure Conservative victories in twenty of twenty-two contests. In 1920 he married Minna Trippe of Bridgwater, who

was active in Conservative women's groups until her tragic death by carbon monoxide poisoning in 1942. A respected local figure, Hayter was also known for breeding champion Rough Collies under the "Athelney" suffix. He retired in 1939, and died in 1953 aged 87, buried beside Minna in Wembdon Road Cemetery.

Albert Bowering, born in 1864 in Rumney, Wales, came from a long line of Bridgwater bakers dating back to 1780. His father James struggled in the family bakery, faced legal troubles, and eventually returned to Wales, leaving Albert determined to succeed. Albert took over the Bridgwater bakery, marrying Anna Maria "Nance" Nicholls in 1887, and together they ran the shop while raising thirteen surviving children. Life in the bakery was demanding, with early mornings, hot ovens, deliveries by hand barrow and horse-drawn cart, and constant work with dough, flour, and grain. Albert expanded the business into grain trading, installing a grist mill and speculating on grain prices, while Nance managed the household and shop with help from their maid, Ellen Hooper. Their children were involved in the business from a young age, assisting in the shop and bakehouse while attending school. Albert's dedication to work extended to occasional spa treatment for leg pain and strict supervision of his sons in the bakery. One son, Ernest, worked closely with his father but died young of tuberculosis after brief military service during World War I. Albert died in 1930, passing the bakery to eldest son Aldred, whose descendants continued to expand the business into Bowerings Animal Feeds.

Cordelia Grace Batten (née Parsons, 1840–1919) was a Bridgwater china, glass, and fancy goods dealer who ran a successful business for more than thirty years. Born in 1840 to Thomas and Elizabeth Parsons, she grew up in a family connected with the ropemaking trade. Two of her sisters died young, while her brother Isaac joined their father's ropeworks. In 1868 Cordelia married Henry Batten, a widowed accountant with four children. They settled and had a son, Thomas, in 1869. Henry opened a china and glass shop in 1871, which became well known in the town. He was active in local politics but suffered financial troubles and poor health, dying in 1884. Widowed at 44, Cordelia continued the business in High

Street, later expanding into fancy goods. Her son Thomas eventually took over, marrying Frances Watson and opening a shop in Burnham-on-Sea. Cordelia commissioned crested souvenir china between 1900 and 1905, examples of which survive today. Cordelia lived her later years in Wembdon with her granddaughter while Thomas engaged in business and public service. She died in February 1919, during the Spanish influenza epidemic, remembered as a capable businesswoman whose contributions were often hidden behind her husband and son's names.

BOOK REVIEW

Although not directly related to Bridgwater, former mayoress of Bridgwater, Ute Smeed, has written a thoroughly excellent book '*Silesia: A Homeland Lost - One German Family's Story of War and Survival*'. This tells the narrative of her remarkable parents before, during and after the Second World War.

Alfred Gebauer was revolted by the Nazis, but when the war broke out, having learnt to be pilot, he was drafted into the Luftwaffe. He spent the war trying to avoid being noticed, and stubbornly refused promotion, despite his obvious talents. Meanwhile his wife Mia tries to survive on the home front with a young baby, not knowing what the next day might bring, either bombs or bread. As the book goes on the family's situation gets increasingly worse, with the end of the war leaving them at the mercy of the Russians. The story has so many unexpected, remarkable and often harrowing turns, it is not worth spoiling them for you here. But wanting to know what happens next kept me wanting to read chapter after chapter. The story gets especially gripping as the war seems increasingly hopeless, and you will be absolutely hooked by the time the war ends – I was - and that's only half way through the book.

This is an excellent read, and well worth getting hold of. It is available for purchase online at the Great British Book Shop:

https://www.thegreatbritishbookshop.co.uk/products/silesia-a-homeland-lost?srsId=AfmBOpaL8gIeT4zTJFRK_vFf-IjwCMkYnn3PeU81bpZa_oebn61QpN

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Friends of Wembdon Road Cemetery

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