



Issue No. 100

Spring/Summer 2023

GUARDIAN ANGEL

NEWS FROM BRADFORD ON AVON PRESERVATION TRUST

Notes from the Chair

At last, the longest, coldest and most horrible winter has ended, never – we hope – to return. And as summer begins, Bradford on Avon is coming back to life with all kinds of celebrations and events: including this issue of *Guardian Angel* – our 100th edition. This bumper issue kicks off with the town's Coronation celebrations – a joint effort between the Preservation Trust and the Town Council. Heavy rain rather spoiled the actual event but afterwards everything went swimmingly.

The Coronation picnic in front of the Tithe Barn – organised by Paige Balas, Kate Larard and Kate Nottage with a team of helpers – was a huge success: a proper picnic with lashings of cake and refreshments which only ran out at the very end. Music from Mike Daniels Quintet featured everything from *The Dambusters' March* to *The Teddy Bears' Picnic* and all on a perfect summer's afternoon. Thank you Clive, Glenys, Gillian, Joan, Anne, Alex, Ros, Anne, Lindsey and Alison.

There were queues of children to make crowns and have their coronation photo taken sitting on a splendid throne (pictures on page 3). They were preceded by a community police officer who, having turned her hat into a pretty

good crown, went off to find 'Mr Daniels', her old music teacher. I last saw her wearing her crown, on the stage with Mike and the band clutching a trombone. Oh for a photo of that moment!

Just a couple of weeks later we were back at the West Barn with a Whitsuntide bank holiday weekend of celebrations to mark 20 years since the restored building was opened by the then Prince of Wales. Margaret Dobson's account of the nail-biting weeks leading up to the royal visit, originally published in the autumn 2003 issue of *Guardian Angel*, is reproduced on pages 11-13, along with some classic photos of the occasion. Who can spot themselves among the crowd?

By the time this is with you the Trust will also have played host to Jack in The Green, with his partner Jill, who began and ended their day-long journey during The Green Man Festival, accompanied by musicians, wired beasts and some pretty wild dancers. Thousands of people packed the town for this jolly event – a splendid addition to Bradford's entertainments calendar.

Our editor, Joceline Bury, is one of the small team behind this year's Secret Gardens – another popular event, back after a three-year Covid-induced break – held on the

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last Sunday in May and the last one in June. The gardens opening this year include a fantastic woodland project at Bradford on Avon Station - read all about it on page 15.

Saturday 1 July will see me helping to organise Holy Trinity's Street Market, which is held in the churchyard and inside our beautiful Parish Church. It's a great day: lots of stalls selling everything from secondhand tools and plants to books and jewellery - and there will be tea and cakes, of course. At this point I will say thanks very much Holy Trinity for the loan of all those gazebos at the Coronation picnic. We are all hoping that we won't need them in July. Whatever happens, it just can't rain as much as it did last year!

Joc Bury and I are on the very small committee of the Flower & Produce Show, which this year will be held in St Margaret's Hall on Sunday 3 September. Details and entry forms (the schedule) are available now from the Town Council offices and the TIC. There are new categories to enter and three new cups to win.

Graham, at Bloomfield's fruit and veg shop in The Shambles, is sponsoring the Marmalade Cup, which I know will be hotly contested - as will the Compost Cup which has been put up by the Preservation Trust. I'm having another go at the heaviest tomato, for which the Town Council has provided the third new cup. The picture on the seed packet shows a tomato of such a size and weight that it is being held in two hands!

A new category at the show is 'the best dahlia in my

garden this morning' - a concept that we have blatantly nicked from a contributor to *Gardeners' World*. There really is something for everyone.

As always, tea and cakes of all kinds will be provided by Save the Children, who are celebrating 50 years in Bradford and have raised just short of £500,000 so far. It would be fantastic to see them hit the half million, so even if you're not competing in the show, come and have a look round and enjoy a generous slice of coffee and walnut sponge!

There is a lot of interest in the project to replace the canopy on the railway station footbridge. You may be surprised to know that the charity behind the plan includes four present and past members of the Preservation Trust's Council of Management on the board. Although it is a small project, it is treated in the same way as all other schemes in the vast world of Network Rail - there are no short cuts to safety here, and quite right too.

We are now at an exciting point where we have provided all design and engineering plans and we are waiting for agreement that we can carry on to detailed design from our architects and engineers. At that point we can invite tenders for the job - so it's down to supplying a bit more detail and a few queries to be solved and, fingers crossed, we will get there.

John Potter

Chair, Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust

Planning matters

Rosie MacGregor, chair of the Trust's Planning Committee, reports on proposals affecting The Bear in Silver Street and Woolley Grange Hotel

The Bear, Silver Street

We were disappointed when permission was previously granted last year for the change of use of this vibrant traditional pub to residential use as flats. It represented the loss of a much-loved local hostelry. We would not have objected to retention of the pub on the ground floor and conversion of the upper floors to flats.

Worse was to come in the subsequently granted permission this year for a single dwelling with six en-suite bedrooms and annexe. We felt it was questionable in this location with no parking, limited external amenity space and no garden. Indeed, the layout has the appearance of a guest house, B&B accommodation, or a house in multiple occupation. If used as tourist accommodation it would be a loss to local residential need.

Woolley Grange Hotel

The Preservation Trust Planning Committee considered that revised plans failed to overcome its

objections. Objections continue to be on the grounds of disproportionate additions to the host building and significant loss of openness of the Green Belt through a sprawling linear extension, plus arrivals building and poolside bedrooms, and a huge car park for 95 cars - all contrary to national Green Belt Policy.

There would be significant harm to the historic environment contrary to policies to protect and preserve the character and setting of the Grade II* Listed Building; damage to the rural character of the surrounding area resulting from the urbanising impact; increase in traffic harmful to highway safety; and harm to protected species. The manor house would no longer be the primary focus.

The committee considered that the relaxed ambience and charm of the hotel would be lost and instead of being a pleasant country house hotel it would be akin to a holiday camp. The proposals need a major rethink together with a significant reduction in scale.

A day crowned with sunshine

King Charles III's Coronation Day may have been a washout as far as the weather was concerned, but it was a very different story at the Trust's family picnic on Sunday 7 May



Families flocked to Barton Farm Country Park for the celebration picnic on 7 May, enjoying cake and crown-making – and some very welcome sunshine



Kate Larard, Kate Nottage and Paige Balas reigned over the children's crown-making workshop, while John Potter and the Mike Daniels Quintet welcomed the crowds

Her reign, my rain

Seventy years on, Geoff Andrews remembers another damp and dreary day – for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II

Queen Elizabeth was sitting on the Stone of Scone in Westminster Abbey, surrounded by more pomp and gold than anyone, seven years after the end of World War II, could remember. At the same time I was sitting in a puddle in the bottom of an old punt somewhere downstream of Barton Farm. It was 2 June, 1953. Coronation day.

I don't know about Her Majesty's thoughts, but I chose to be uncomfortable in the drizzle in that boat. The alternative was joining the grown-ups hunched around the radio as they listened to interminable stuff about the ceremonials. The river wasn't a dream destination but I was in a teenage sulk and this was the best way I could think of to display it.

Nobody was around. Who could blame them? It was unseasonably cold as well as wet, and they had television to watch.

But we didn't have a television. Probably because it was too expensive but my parents said they thought it would stunt my education anyway, so it was another three years – until I left school at 16 – before we joined the ranks of the couch potatoes.

I was one of the two coxes at Bradford Rowing Club, and one of my privileges was to be able to use at any time the skiff, two punts and a canoe that were tied up there. I didn't have a key, so the club must have been unlocked (apart from the bar) and there was no rule saying I needed to wear a lifejacket. Or couldn't be alone in a boat, come to that.

One of the duties of the cox, I was told, was to make sure the river between Barton Bridge and the weir at Avoncliff was kept clear of flotsam that could hinder or damage the fours and doubles that were the only racing boats the club had at that time. Perhaps I thought I was carrying out that useful task, but in truth I was enjoying being miserable, so I lay in the bottom of the punt feeling the gentle rain fall on my face, as the boat drifted

downstream. It was probably hunger that stopped the sulk. In any case, I returned the punt to the mooring and went home to tea.

There were no street parties near my home in Trowbridge Road that I recall, or was I too old to be invited? Just a commemorative crown – a five shilling bit – which I was forbidden to spend.

My day had started at 6.15am with the arrival of the daily papers at Young's shop in St Margaret's Street, and the astonishment, when we cut the string of the parcels, at the headlines that declared Edmund Hillary had conquered Everest. Some small credit was paid to Sherpa Tensing, his climbing partner, but this was without doubt a triumph for the British Empire.

The astonishing thing from today's perspective is that we, the paper boys, were the first to read the heroic story – at least in Bradford. We have learned since that Hillary and Tensing's achievement was news-managed so everyone would hear it on the morning of the Coronation. The climb had been completed a few days before, but it took some days to get the pictures back to London, and the national papers made the most of the delay to give us a front page splash worthy of a momentous day.

IFORD MANOR GARDENS

The Cartwright-Hignett family welcomes you to Iford's Grade-I Italian-style gardens, famous for their tranquil beauty. Home of the Edwardian designer Harold Peto from 1899-1933, the unique and romantic hillside landscape is characterised by terraces, ponds, sculptures & spectacular views.

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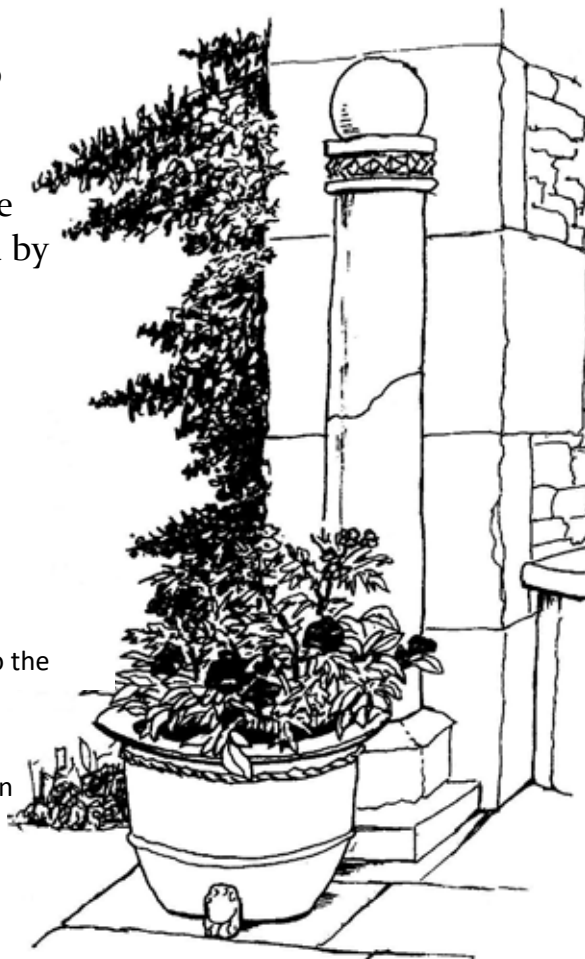
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Your country needs your house and garden ...

... but it might not be that keen to give it back to you! Glenys Lunt traces an extraordinary decade in the history of Lynchetts and its spectacular garden



Summertime in the sculpture garden at Lynchetts

At the outbreak of World War II provisions were made for relocating key parts of government and other important central services. Throughout the country many large houses and other properties were requisitioned under the Emergency Powers (Defence) regulations 1939 and the owners had to find alternative accommodation.

The chronometer division of the Royal Observatory was one such key service. It had the responsibility for maintaining, repairing and calibrating all naval ships' clocks and was initially relocated to a site in Bristol. From 7 September 1940 to 11 May 1941, an intense bombing campaign, the Blitz, was undertaken by Nazi Germany against the United Kingdom. For eight months the Luftwaffe dropped bombs on London and other strategic cities across Britain. Bristol was one of the cities targeted and for that reason, in February 1941, the Chronometer Division was moved to Bradford on Avon.

On 26 February 1941, following the enforced removal from Lynchetts of the owner, Mrs Phibbs, a comprehensive government inventory was made of the house and grounds. In addition to a detailed report on the interior of the house, references were made to garages, harness room, fruit room and potting shed. A pre-war map of the garden denotes vegetable and flower borders against the lovely stone walls, a tennis court, clipped box hedging, espaliered fruit trees and a rose garden beloved of Mrs Phibbs.

There was a clear understanding that once the war was

over owners of requisitioned premises would be allowed to return to their properties, which would be handed back in the same condition as when first requisitioned. Mrs Phibbs found accommodation in Devon and stayed there for the next few years, being paid what seems like a paltry sum of rent for the house, garden, gardener's bungalow and outbuildings.

As we shall see, the post-war return of the properties to their owners was far from straightforward.

At Lynchetts the Admiralty first occupied the entire house and the gardener's bungalow, which was at the top of the drive on the left, but the workload was so great that eventually a large workshop was built on the tennis court. Eleven people worked in the building, supervised by Mr Ricketts, head of the team. He was housed with his wife and two daughters in the bungalow. Throughout the war a steady stream of ships' clocks was delivered to Lynchetts and were returned in pristine condition to naval vessels.

By November 1945 the war was over and much of the admiralty equipment had been moved to Herstmonceux, in Sussex, but Lynchetts remained under the control of the Admiralty. At that time the requisition order was in part transferred to the Ministry of Health. The asbestos bungalow, recently replaced by a modern house, was retained by the Admiralty, as was the tennis court and the large brick workshop. Planned derequisition of Lynchetts was published in the local press in October 1948 and Mrs Phibbs requested that the main house, garages, garden and her right of access up the drive and through

the garden should be returned to her. Under the terms of partial release, with some continued occupation by the Admiralty, she would be paid £40 per annum rent for the bungalow and £135 per annum for the retained garden with the hut.

The estimated costs for redecoration of the house were £638 9s 11d and the redecoration would consist of repainting, distempering and removal of a 14in thick blast wall, which had been built in the front garden protecting the downstairs dining room windows. Fortunately the iron railings at the front remained intact but the daughter of Mr Ricketts remembers the beautiful iron gates being removed from the drive; they have never been seen again!

Mrs Phibbs had returned to Bradford and was staying at Clifton House, Bath Road. In November 1948 she informed the Urban District Council (based in Westbury House) that a friend, Sybil Peech, would like to buy Lynchetts if possible, but if the UDC would not approve that, she herself would like to move back and make a home for herself, her son Richard and grandchildren Giles and Jemima. She explained that she could not afford to live at Lynchetts as she had done 10 years previously, employing staff, but would like to create a flat for her family, another for a caretaker/handyman and one on the top floor for a family selected by herself. She claimed that this would be providing essential accommodation. The UDC replied saying that because of the importance of the brick hut to the Admiralty the property had not yet been derequisitioned and so she could not have the house back. It appears that the UDC considered the house suitable for rehousing council tenants.

Mrs Phibbs' son pointed out that the house had been under requisition for more than seven years, longer than the duration of the war, and that if the whole estate was released he would grant a sublease to the Admiralty for the hut. Mrs Phibbs maintained that people other than council tenants needed housing and that she would find suitable tenants if allowed to return to the house. "As

for that dreadful brick building on the tennis court," she would let the Admiralty keep it!

The Ministry of Health told the UDC that in view of Mrs Phibbs' co-operation, she should be given the opportunity to occupy part of her house and questioned why the premises could not be released in its entirety. The UDC responded by saying the house and garages could be released at once but the bungalow would be kept for the time being and that "derequisition was at Mrs Phibbs' request on the understanding that the house would be converted into flats and she would occupy one and the others could be occupied by families selected by the council" but she had changed her mind saying there would be three units, not four, that the unit intended for council-recommended tenants would not be provided, and that her use of the garden would be spoiled by the proposed conversion of the 'hut'. The UDC commented that the garden was large enough for everybody.

In December 1948 Mrs Peech approached the UDC directly and asked if she would be allowed to buy Lynchetts from Mrs Phibbs, and saying that she wished to accommodate a chauffeur plus wife and a gardener plus wife, thus providing a home for four people. She was told that under the conditions of release that would not be allowed. The UDC indicated that their predominant issue was about rehousing Bradford people who had been displaced because of the demolition of slums.

Mrs Phibbs sought a compromise and told the UDC that she would live at Lynchetts and it would not be sold in her lifetime. She said she would accommodate a council tenant on the ground floor, rent free, in exchange for general services. She expressed concern about the hut and was wondering how long it would be there. She also complained about the state of the grass in lawned areas of the garden which had been burned off by council workmen. The UDC apologised and explained it was proving very difficult to get things done properly.

In July 1949 Mrs Phibbs, in a further attempt to get back her house, agreed, under pressure, to the conversion of the hut into two housing units and said she would allocate a piece of garden for the occupants. However, after consulting with her younger son she changed her mind. In spite of this, plans were submitted by the UDC for conversion of the hut to provide one two-bed unit and one three-bed unit at a cost of £400 per dwelling. Decoration would be minimal and the interior clay bricks would not be plastered. Also in 1949 Mrs Phibbs submitted plans for the creation of flats in the main house. Meanwhile, the hut remained.

Permission for flats in the main house was approved but the planned conversion of the hut was turned down and in February 1950 the UDC wrote to the Ministry of Health:

"The council is directed to express disappointment for the ministry not to approve the proposal of the council to convert the hut into two units and would the ministry therefore be prepared to increase the allocation of houses to the council for 1950 by two houses in order



Quince are among the fruit trees still grown in the garden at Lynchetts



“... the amazing view over the town makes working in the garden always a tremendous pleasure”

to compensate for losses of accommodation which the council had been led to expect would be available. “

This must have been agreed as by May 1950 the hut was removed and repair of the garden began. This involved trimming of the shrubs, removal of weeds, covering the tennis court with 6in of good topsoil, reseeding and removal of all the posts that had been installed for overhead power lines.

Mrs Rebekah Wilbraham Phibbs died in December 1952; the estate was valued at £11,115 and probate was granted to her son, Richard Owen Neil Phibbs, writer. The Rev Walker, then living next door at Moxhams, took ownership of the property, completed the conversion into flats, and eventually gave the property to the Preservation Trust.

The tennis court has never recovered its pre-war condition and during hot weather a double line of post holes marking the location of the Admiralty hut are quite clear. During the time of requisition and in subsequent years some of the retaining stone walls around the back of the tennis court collapsed so when we bought the house in 1997 we decided to take the remaining stone which was retaining the slope, use it to rebuild the front edge – which had almost completely collapsed – and plant the yew hedge. This has grown rapidly on the limey soil and gives a good screen from the top garden, needing clipping just once a year. Prior to the requisition the garden was very well maintained. There were many fruit trees and references made to rose borders along some of the walls. The pre-war gardener, Mr Gunstone, made a quite comprehensive garden plan on which many of the trees were noted. A few of these old trees on their original big rootstocks remain and we have tried wherever possible to plant new trees of the old varieties. The small apple trees along the front of the tennis court, which have

replaced long grown out espaliered trees, are on dwarfing rootstocks but most are the original varieties. We now have apples from August, later varieties being stored in the wartime brick air raid shelter where they keep in good condition until mid-March. There are a couple of big old pear trees in the far part of the garden that are probably old perry pear varieties but were also labelled on the original garden plan as ‘pear rootstock’. The fruit is barely edible but obviously the trees provided material for grafting more useful varieties and also as pollinators. There is reference in the Admiralty requisition inventory to a greenhouse with apricots and nectarines but all traces of that have gone.

The soil in the garden is alkaline and as in much of Bradford the topsoil lies on a layer of broken limestone – brash – and below that there is rather solid limestone. The stone acts like a storage radiator, as do the surrounding stone walls which help to keep frost at bay. The soil dries out very quickly and the water rapidly soaks down into the many water courses that run down Bradford’s hillsides. With regular applications of compost and some careful watering in the dry seasons the garden is productive both for flowers and vegetables. Whether everything is growing well or not, the amazing view over the town makes working in the garden always a tremendous pleasure so it’s very easy to forget about the odd crop failure and just look out over Bradford on Avon! If the hut had been converted into living units the outlook would be very different and, possibly, a large part of the garden would have been built on. I think this large green space was, and is, worth preserving!

● *Glenys and George Lunt will be opening the garden at Lynchetts on Sunday 25 June, as part of this year’s Secret Gardens of Bradford on Avon.*



In search of the Hens

Kate Nicholls gathers recollections of the 'China Hens' – the two remarkable women who played a crucial role in the creation and development of Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust

Hens' Orchard – “a most fitting legacy”

I have been managing the Hens' Orchard for several years now and it's become a very popular place for visitors to Barton Farm, to stop and look around, have a picnic or sit on Simon's bench to stay a while, enjoying the surrounding trees.

On the noticeboard there's a notice that reads:

This orchard was planted in 2014 by Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust in celebration of its 50th Anniversary and in honour of its two founders Elizabeth Stephenson and Katherine MacKean.

But who were these two people?

I knew the names well and had seen a photograph of 'the Hens'. I understood their importance to the Trust, but very little about the women themselves.

A chance, brief conversation with Glenys Lunt and Liz Harris led me to wanting to know more about them and to share my findings with newer members and remind longer-standing members of their important role.

On the Trust's website you can read about its origins – looking at Bradford today, it's hard to imagine the slums described here:

“After World War Two, the atrocious condition of the working-class housing in Bradford on Avon achieved national notoriety. One Government enquiry described Bradford's slums as being 'as bad as the worst inner-city slums in the north of England'. The worst areas included St Margaret's, Tory and Middle Rank, and Wine Street.”

The Preservation Society was formed in 1959 to rescue these areas and reverse the Urban District Council's

policy of pulling them all down and rebuilding.

Fairly early on, two different views emerged of how the Society should develop: those that favoured a more hands-on approach were led by Elizabeth Stephenson and Katherine MacKean, often referred to as “The Hens” after the name of their antique shop, The China Hen. Number 9 Woolley Street was their home and where they ran the shop.

Everyone who contributed to this collection of the Hens' stories has confirmed that Elizabeth Stephenson was a formidable, forthright and determined lady – and it was she who acquired the Priory Barn, built at the end of the 15th century, and by the 1950s a ruin.

Together, she and Katherine MacKean set about raising funds for restoration of this building, and the Preservation Trust was set up in 1964 to manage the venture.

The 1970s, Andrew Jenkins relates, were great years for planning and restoration. When the Trust acquired Silver Street House, worries about restoration costs were brushed aside by Elizabeth – she organised an auction to raise funds, telephoning “the great and the good” to donate pieces. Andrew vetted the items and George Lunt and Elizabeth arranged the auction in a packed out St Margaret's Hall – it was financially a great success.

Delving back into the archives of *Guardian Angel*, Dorna Daw and Glenys Lunt found the obituaries – firstly, that of Elizabeth, who died in 1993. In her obituary John Teed wrote: “I first met Elizabeth when she and Katherine MacKean came to buy Robin Eden's antique business in

Silver Street, forty years ago [1953]. I was asked to meet them as my antique shop was almost next door – and so hatched ‘The China Hen’. I was slightly intimidated by Elizabeth when we first met. She had a severe, straight hairstyle, drawn close back in a large bun at the nape of her neck. Very like a St Trinian’s school mistress, but it didn’t take long to realise that there were sterling qualities to be discovered. She was generous, appreciative and fastidious in her taste. Her manner sometimes forthright – a little too much for some perhaps – but you always knew where you were with her and it was thoroughly well worth knowing. I remember saying several years ago, that if ever I were in real trouble, Elizabeth Stephenson was the one person I would go to before anyone else, as she would move heaven and earth to help one, whatever it entailed.”

Memories of both Hens’ kindness are endorsed by Glenys Lunt. She recalls: “One day in the late ’70s Katherine knocked on our door on Sladesbrook and handed over a huge Black Forest cherry cake which had been sent to the Hens by their German friends and which she said they would be unable to eat. As a then hard-up young family it was a delicious and welcome gift. These small acts of kindness and generosity do stay in one’s mind!”

Katherine died in 1996 – and her obituary (in *Guardian Angel*) reads: “She was Scottish and educated in Edinburgh and then went to Edinburgh University where she gained a first class degree in German. While at university, she enjoyed sailing and supported Scotland at Rugby Union internationals at Murrayfield. After university she took up teaching in Manchester and later in Carlisle. During the war she was called on to teach German to officers and men training to take over military government when the war ended. In the early fifties she and Elizabeth retired from teaching, moved to Bradford on Avon and opened their antique shop. “

There aren’t many photos of the Hens, but Dorna Daw remembers Katherine as “to quote Alexander McCall-Smith, ‘traditionally built’, and like many Scots, had a sweet tooth. She had wavy, grey hair and a handsome face, good bone structure and just a hint of her Scottish

origin in her voice. They both wore subdued colours – and always considerate and caring of each other.”

Dorna continue: “Elizabeth was slim, with a very straight back and wore glasses. Her hair was a rich brown, thick and amazingly its colour stayed for the rest of her life.”

Andrew Jenkins first met the Hens in 1963 when he and his wife Vibeke opened Avon Antiques. “Elizabeth spoke abruptly and sometimes put many people off or annoyed them, but we found that if you ‘gave back’ as good as you got, Elizabeth liked it and respected you.

“Katherine was quieter and firm, but she always got her way with Elizabeth!”

Andrew relates that after complaining about the conditions of town properties and alterations, Elizabeth told him she had arranged for him to be co-opted onto the Trust’s Council of Management. Meetings were on Wednesdays at 5.30pm and ended abruptly at 6.30pm so the Hens could return home and cook dinner. Any outstanding agenda items were put off until the next meeting.

In the 1970s Andrew and Katherine formed the Planning Committee and visited the Urban District Council offices in Westbury Gardens to check planning applications. “Katherine almost bullied the staff to allow us to see *everything*.”

George Lunt (who moved to Bradford with his wife Glenys in 1971) remembers the Hens well:

“We heard that the Preservation Trust had some allotments for rent to members so we joined the Trust. The allotments were in the garden of Lynchetts and we learned that the house and garden had very recently been given to the Trust. The house was not in good shape and had some sitting tenants. As new members of the Trust and new allotment holders we were invited to meet Katherine McKean and Elizabeth Stephenson. I remember well the first greeting from Elizabeth – ‘Oh, Dr Lunt, we were expecting an elderly gentleman!’

“Katherine was a very keen gardener and took a special interest in hydroponics. She had a small greenhouse, behind what was then the fruit store in Lynchetts’ garden,



Elizabeth Stephenson (inset); Katherine MacKean, far left, with (seated) Toby Couzens, Angela Adams, Jenny Bird, Shirley Gibbs and Peggy Cussins, and (standing) Andrew Jenkins, George Lunt, Malcolm Webb and Admiral Lawson, in December 1977



which was equipped with a water supply and growing lights. Elizabeth was not a hands-on gardener but that never prevented her from telling us exactly what we should and shouldn't be doing on our allotment. I recall her telling me in no uncertain terms that I had been far too severe in cutting back some of the shrubbery alongside our allotment strip.

"Before long, the China Hens had recruited me to the Council of Management of the Trust. Katherine was excellent at networking with a wide variety of bodies in the area of building conservation. Lynchetts was on the one hand a valuable asset but also a great liability; it needed some serious maintenance work and also had tenants that demanded management time. The concept of a 'revolving fund' emerged, whereby Lynchetts would be sold on a long lease and the capital then used to fund another restoration project.

"Katherine had already established a strong relationship with the then owner of Silver Street House, which was in a very sorry state of repair. The Council of Management was a little wary of embarking on such a plan but encouraged by Katherine in her own very quiet way and being very firmly told by Elizabeth to stop worrying and get on with it, the doubters were persuaded! The sale of Lynchetts proceeded and the restoration of Silver Street House proceeded. Katherine again excelled in bringing together various grant-giving bodies whereby we had access to interest-free loans, repayable on the sale of the newly refurbished flats in Silver Street House.

"The then President of the Trust, Alex Moulton, was a great friend of the China Hens. Interestingly, he shared

many characteristics with Elizabeth, absolutely single minded, little time for those that did not agree with him but very respectful of anyone who put forward well-documented and sound arguments against him. He had no doubts that the Trust was doing exactly the right thing in its plans to put its capital funds to work."

Bradford on Avon has, naturally, changed and grown a lot since those early days of the Trust and so too the Trust has moved on. We now have different challenges and opportunities. But I leave it to George Lunt to sum up the vital contribution made by Elizabeth Stephenson and Katherine MacKean: "It's no exaggeration to say that the China Hens made a truly remarkable contribution to Bradford on Avon. In the late 1960s they were leading lights in the campaign that put an end to the local authority's incredible plans to demolish Tory and Middle Rank and build 'modern dwellings' on the site. As the Preservation Trust grew in standing in the town, they each in their very different ways encouraged and instructed it to take on ambitious projects and venture into quite new areas of property development. The Trust and the town owe a great deal to the Hens and the orchard that bears their name is a most fitting legacy."

I must thank the many contributors who have provided me with their memories: Dorna Daw, Andrew and Vibeke Jenkins, George and Glenys Lunt, Mary Ashton and Richard Nadin.

I'm sure that many of you have lasting memories of the Hens. Perhaps there's scope for a History of the Hens, Part II? I'd be interested to hear from you.



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Twenty years on: the day the Prince flew in

The town turned out in force in early May to celebrate the Coronation of Charles III – but the same month saw a significant anniversary for the Trust, the town and – possibly – the King himself. Twenty years after the then Prince of Wales officially opened the newly restored West Barn, we re-publish Margaret Dobson's entertaining account of the events leading up to the royal visit, first seen in the Autumn 2003 issue of *Guardian Angel*

It seems that until 23 May 2003 HRH The Prince of Wales had never been to Bradford on Avon. So for the Preservation Trust to be the recipient of his first engagement in the town was a unique and particular honour. It looked so simple and informal on the day that no onlooker could guess the amount of planning required to achieve that effect. A brief diary of just a few of the machinations leading up to the event may therefore be interesting.

1999-2001

Following a strong suggestion that Bradford might soon have three developments worthy of a royal focus on the town – a new community hospital, a fresh town centre site at Kingston Mill and our Barton Grange Farm project – we began, with the help of Vicky Landell Mills, negotiating along these lines. What optimism! The first two sites still remain as they have been for years and it is of some considerable credit to the Trust that we have gone on to complete the third improvement to the town, which has involved the restoration of the entire farmyard area as well as the rebuilding of the West Barn.

2002

Having lost two earlier possibilities of a visit from another member of the royal family, new negotiations get under way through the initiative of Lt Gen Sir Maurice Johnston, the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire.

2003

17 January: I am given the news that HRH Prince Charles will probably be with us on 23 May. For security reasons, this has to be a very closely guarded secret until just before the event.

January-March: Many restless nights thinking through the logistics, particularly since the West Barn is not yet quite ready for the close inspection of such an august visitor. The little kitchen is still an empty shell. Can we get the information panels agreed and created in a way that is suitable for permanent display in a damp barn? Will the decorative banners (which have technical difficulties) ever be completed? When can I tell the Council of Management (CoM) what is in store? What do you tell Trust members and guests who need a decent amount of notice and usually like to know what the invitation is for?

Complications over the amount of totally secret preparation required for a very public event become more and more apparent. Send draft wording for a commemorative plaque to the Lord Lieutenant's office

where it is altered, and sent on to St James's Palace where it is slightly altered again. Revised wording eventually returns by same route. But how can we get someone to make this item without giving him any of the necessary information which has to go on it?

Early March: Some more of the kitchen fittings go in. Three of the four banners go up but one quickly comes down again. Anne and Patrick Scarborough consider the topcoat for the kitchen woodwork and begin preparations.

9 March: Patrick Scarborough and I meet with Sir Maurice and his very helpful assistant clerk with preliminary questions on protocol and procedure. He will be in charge of the line of high civic dignitaries usually referred to, I discover, as "the chain gang". After that, "the Prince of Wales is in your hands, Mrs Dobson".

15 April: We continue to plan the information panels. I put together a proposal for the visit and begin (secretly of course) a provisional list of tasks to distribute later amongst CoM members perfecting the West Barn, banners, information panels, catering, site enhancement, liaison with tenants and neighbours, car parking, flowers, stewards, security, press photographers, etc, etc. Correspondence with St James's Palace and the LL office continues.

23 April: Meeting with HRH's Assistant Private Secretary and ten other important people from the Wiltshire constabulary (one of whom is a Chief Inspector) takes place in the West Barn. Fortunately there are four of us to slightly balance the numbers. All aspects of Palace protocol, press management and security are fully explored. The preliminary proposal for the visit is considerably amended and the entire site is scrutinised for security. The important word is "sterile". Thus it is decided HRH's helicopter will land in the Victory Field so there is a second "sterile" field to walk through before he reaches us.

Naturally St James's Palace wants written information about the Trust and biographical details on those to be presented to HRH. The draft invitation card will not do. It must not give any hint of who will be opening the West Barn because we are not to reveal the name of our honoured guest until 9 May. Yet that is the very date by which St James's Palace wants a list of all invited guests so that every name can be vetted for security. Picture the problems! Every communication to anyone regarding 23 May (e.g. letters to those to be presented, invited guests, Trust members, press releases) must first be sent to the Lord Lieutenant's office, thence to St James's Palace for clearance, returned to the LL and then back to me.

Timing suddenly becomes very difficult and outside our control.

26 April: A very strangely worded card is sent out at great haste to some 65 people so that we will have a list of acceptances to give to the Palace on 9 May.

28 April – 6 May: More and more meetings, some on site, some sorting out protocol and security in even greater detail with LL's Clerk and Sgt Bob Young. Although the very few so far involved can only talk about it in hushed whispers, frantic work continues on guest list, banners, information panels and on the West Barn. Anne and Patrick Scarborough continue painting the kitchen.

7 May: List of those to be presented is finalised. But the draft letters to all concerned have still not been returned from St James's Palace. Chris Penny is continuing to have further meetings on the security issue.

8 May: At the CoM monthly meeting I can finally announce the visit and give out details of all the tasks for what now seems a mammoth operation.

9 May: after several telephone calls the various letters which had been sent for vetting to St James's Palace are returned by e-mail. Every draft letter has been slightly altered. But now at least we can start the process of writing them out and arranging hand delivery to all local Trust members.

10 May: Another amended timetable from St James's Palace. Everything has now been put forward by fifteen minutes. The plaque must be in an open space where the public can see it. Does anyone have an easel?

14 May: Someone tells me a royal visit is "great fun". I consider this comment carefully while scouring Bath for a suitable Visitors' Book for the occasion. WH Smith does not stock such things and the salesgirl does not know what one is.

15 May: Long meeting at the West Barn re: how the Barn will look for the visit. It must be empty of tables and chairs while the Prince is there, but completely furnished for a Reception Tea for 65 guests immediately he has departed. A refrigerated van will have to be housed unobtrusively somewhere very close at hand. We rehearse arrangements for stewards and the press, and plan outside seating for invited guests and Trust members. I totter home to write a complicated sheet of information for everyone involved.

16 May: Meet the *Wiltshire Times* reporter at the West Barn. Spend about an hour and a half showing her the barn and the entire project site, as well as talking about the Preservation Trust, in the full expectation of considerable Trust publicity to follow. Nothing comes of it.

18 May: Heavy rain.

19 May: Heavy rain.

20 May: Dull grey cloud interspersed with heavy rain.

21 May: Everyone will have to be at the site at least 30 minutes before HRH arrives... in heavy rain??? Chris and Monica Penny with Patrick and Anne Scarborough finish hand scrubbing every inch of the West Barn floor and declare they have enjoyed it.

22 May: Detailed rehearsal. The beautiful flower arrangement is put in place in the West Barn. We decide to appropriate the Tithe Barn for members and guests if this rain continues tomorrow. All the narrowboats moored near to the Tithe Barn are moved away to keep the canal towpath area clear and easy to police.

23 May: The West Barn is inspected yet again and pronounced to be "sterile". Patrick has borrowed attractive white pillars and chains for "crowd control" on the grass and the entire site looks marvellous. Pound Lane is closed for the day and other access points are closed at 1.15. The Prince's helicopter is due at 1.40.

Daphne Hancock has inspected memberships and invitation cards and everyone is in place. At 1.30 the sun comes out.

This is only a brief resumé of some of what went on from my point of view: Patrick Scarborough, Chris Penny and others could write their own versions of the several months before the event.

After all the fuss, the visit itself seemed to go well. Prince Charles met a great many people during the course of his forty-five minutes with us, shaking hands with the nine people chosen to represent all aspects of the project, and talking to some of our own members, as well as many members of the public. Each person received his full attention. His interest in the Barton Grange Project and the West Barn was unmistakably genuine. The heavy security did not show much, the sun shone briefly, and a casual observer might have said that the Prince appeared to saunter in, saunter round and saunter off.

We discovered later he had already held an investiture at Buckingham Palace in the morning, before flying down to Bradford. After us, he went on to Bradford Wharf to open its new shop before his helicopter flight along the Kennet & Avon Canal to Devizes for further duties and celebrations.

We felt that the Prince of Wales had enjoyed his time with us. It was a happy and welcoming crowd and, being in the unusual position of walking close to him, the wave of interest and pleasure at meeting him seemed to me to be very genuine. This must be sustaining to a man who is so often the recipient of less than pleasant media attention. I liked the way he pulled the large red cloth off the plaque and waved it above his head in a gesture of princely abandon. We all worked very hard – but it was worth it.



"A gesture of princely abandon"



A small selection of the numerous photos taken at the event 20 years ago – who recognises themselves in the crowd?



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Landscape news

Bill Angliss Memorial Tree

This tree was pronounced dead not long after we planted it in 2020. Ashridge Tree Nursery, who had provided the tree, willingly sent a replacement when I sent the photos of the 'dead' specimen. However, a few months later it sprouted some green leaves and as you can see, three years on, it's become a flourishing little tree. I'm sure it will continue to grow. The replacement is tall and slender – and also doing well. Both trees can be seen at the far end (Belcombe end) of North Meadow (over Barton Bridge along from the Rowing Club)

Hens' Orchard

After a pruning session in the orchard in February, the trees began coming into blossom and they all seem to be growing healthily. I hope the weather doesn't get too extreme in the next few months.

Poulton Park

You may have noticed many new trees around Bradford. Chris Hogg (Green Spaces Officer for the Town Council) has provided the following information about them: "Over the past two years, the Town Council has consulted with local people on plans for Poulton Park and sought funding from the Forestry Commission to carry out improvements. On 25 and 28 March around 70 residents turned out to plant over 1,000 trees in a community planting event at Poulton Park. The trees planted included alder, silver birch, hornbeam, hazel, holly, dogwood, beech, hawthorn,

crab apple, English oak, sessile oak, bird cherry and wild cherry. Trees were carefully selected, so that the right tree is planted in the right place. One key consideration, in enhancing biodiversity, was in considering management of the wildflower meadow. This meant very few smaller trees with light canopies and leaves that won't add many nutrients to the soil were planted in the higher quality meadow. The council will continue to work to improve the flora of the whole meadow and the biodiversity, beauty and facilities of the park."

Barton Farm Sheep meadow

At the beginning of April, the Nature Volunteers helped out in Barton Farm Country Park by installing sheep-proof guards for the fruit trees just planted there. This again, is a Town Council initiative.

Chris Hogg wrote: "The field in the Country Park is seasonally grazed by sheep each year and we have been working with the grazier to introduce a system of agroforestry. Agroforestry is the practice of combining agricultural crops or livestock with trees and shrubs. We are doing this by planting rows of fruit and nut trees around which the sheep can graze. This provides shade for the sheep in the summer, and this shade also helps grass grow when it is very sunny and hot."

The Soil Association has an interesting feature about agroforestry on their website – soilassociation.org

Kate Nicholls



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Hidden treasure: the Bradford on Avon station woodland project

An eco-friendly woodland area is being created alongside the Bath-bound platform by the Friends of Bradford on Avon Station. John Baxter recounts the story behind the scheme

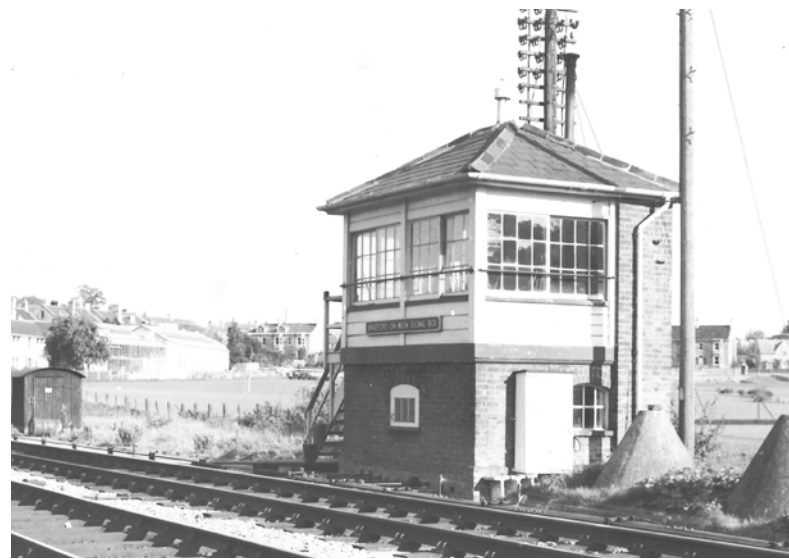
The Preservation Trust has had a long-standing association with its Victorian Brunellian station and recently we were fortunate to receive £500 from Trust funds towards an exciting eco-friendly community project, hidden away somewhat from the sight of the general public, but which the volunteers who work on the Bath-bound platform hope to open up shortly.

This is on former railway allotment land that we lease (at no cost) from Network Rail. British Railways had an historic association with allotments, allocated solely to porters and signalmen. The pride with which these men (apart from the war years it was predominantly a male-based profession) tilled the soil was often reflected in a keen rivalry between stations for the Best Kept Station Awards run by the Western Region.

Today, with a booking office only open from early morning to around 13.30, it is hard to believe that a station like Bradford on Avon would have boasted three signalmen working three eight-hour shifts, possibly with a junior signalman during daylight hours whose task was to note in the register the passing times of every train. In addition, it probably had three porters dealing with everything passing through the goods shed (only part of its wall still exists), plus a stationmaster, a couple of booking office clerks who would have issued tickets morning to evening, and two or three helpful porters dealing with stopping passenger and goods trains with myriad items passing through. All swept away in the name of progress and the closure of goods yards, parcel services and subsequently the signal box itself.

The downgrading of stations is still a threat and we are fighting the current government's proposals to shut our booking office, given they see no value whatsoever in providing a personal service to passengers, instead expecting them to use the internet and fend for themselves in buying tickets.

The decline of the station was something that the late David Walden, *de facto* stationmaster for many years, wanted to arrest, and he originally approached both the Preservation Trust and the then Regional Railways to help fund a set of newly formed gardens. The plaque commemorating that first association is pictured here, with the names of Trust members Mary Ashton and the late Bob Allen appearing alongside that of Dave Walden.



The old signalbox. The allotment area was just beyond the small hut on the far left

The current gardening team stems from David's fine vision and we have two memorial seats at the station, both recently restored and repainted that commemorate Dave's untimely death from cancer some years ago, but not before he appeared in one of Michael Portillo's fleeting visits in his *Great British Railways* series.

For a long time two of Dave's successors, Tony Green – a lifelong railwayman – and myself, have had a vision to try and extend the gardens by the creation of a bluebell wood but, until a fence was built to prevent egress to the running line, we had to content ourselves with a small area where we built compost heaps and some wild areas for insects. We erected some bird feeders but these were promptly demolished by some resident squirrels! We also planted more than 700 British bluebells but have had quite a job relocating the Spanish variety to prevent cross contamination – we may still not succeed.

Then the misfortune of ash dieback hit us quite hard and on one sad morning in early 2022, Network Rail's environmental team had to fell 18 trees to make the area safe – for us as much as anyone else. The good news was that the squirrels went to pastures new and we are trying to make it difficult for them to return by cutting out selected overhanging branches.

This has created a blank sheet for us to consider and we came up with a scheme that will see many more bluebells planted this autumn, an enhanced bird feeding station area, disabled access via pathways, a small community orchard (not quite as large as the Hens' Orchard by the Tithe Barn), a children's play area using felled trees and a rose bower using the felled branches, an area which will have insect and bee-friendly bushes (these will need to be in accordance with Network Rail's approved species but this is quite extensive so long as they do not encroach

on to the track area) and finally a homage, in old railway sleepers, to the former allotments.

We will have opened up the area to the public at the two Secret Gardens weekends this year – on 28 May and 25 June – and we will then work hard for a full opening this coming autumn, wherever we have got to and within what funding we have been able to attract.

Working in a place like this is very cathartic and excellent for one’s mental health and we are looking for more volunteers over the next few months – perchance to look after the allotment area, the orchard and the bower (this is three people’s worth not one!). We welcome anyone who can commit to one or two mornings a week (normally Tuesdays and Thursdays on the Bath platform but also on Mondays on the Westbury one – our team there will show you the ropes) and we will give some essential training in railway safety.

The current financial problems have seen the cost of raw materials rocket. For example, £100 of wooden borders three years ago now costs £200. We are therefore seeking more grant aid, alongside that which we have to bid for from Great Western Railway, to complete the project. Thus far we have spent around £1,500 specifically on this area and we anticipate further expenditure of around £5000 to cover what we need to open the area permanently to the community. The Trust’s £500 is thus a real investment in the future and we are very grateful for their valuable contribution to this local project.



The site after 18 trees were felled. Some can be seen recycled and used as path edging

1930s comedy crime caper features Bradford railway locations

Bradford’s railway line and station provided the locations for an exciting – if somewhat surreal – sequence in *A Fire Has Been Arranged*, a 1935 film directed by Leslie S Hiscott and starring Bud Flanagan, Chesney Allen, Alastair Sim, Hal Walters, Robb Wilton and Mary Lawson.

You can find the whole story at www.reelstreets.com but in essence the zany comedy concerns a trio of crooks who rob a jewellers’ and bury the loot in a field before being caught. However, when they return to the scene after a 10-year prison stretch, they find that a department store has been built on the land. The store is not prospering, and our ‘heroes’ are recruited by the dodgy owners to burn the building down so they can claim the insurance. Things then begin to go even more awry, as shown by the sequence of stills below.

1 Hurrying to stop Hal from setting the fire, Bud and Ches get trapped on a level crossing (captioned on *ReelStreets* as: Greenland Mill level crossing on Bridge Street



in Bradford on Avon, Somerset, with Greenland Mills in the left distance).

2 Bud and Ches enter a tunnel followed by the express (captioned as: *The eastern portal of Bradford Tunnel adjacent to Greenland Mill level crossing).*

3 With the bodywork stripped away by the train while passing through the tunnel, Bud and Ches arrive at a station (captioned as: *Bradford on Avon station on Station Approach off St Margaret’s Street in Bradford on Avon, Somerset).*

After leaving Bradford, the pair find themselves on a race track – in real life, the Brooklands Motor Circuit near Byfleet in Surrey, still clearly visible from the train for anyone travelling from Bradford to London Waterloo.

● Many thanks to John Potter and Peter Mann for bringing this splendid set of photos to our attention.

Textile town: the rise and fall of Nottingham's lace industry

Rosie MacGregor revisits childhood memories and discovers some parallels between the textile industries of Nottingham and Bradford on Avon

I remember as a child complaining of car sickness on the short journey to Nottingham, never on the way to anywhere else. My grandmother lived there. I dreaded our frequent visits. I'm unsure now if my feeling of sickness was genuine, psychosomatic or did I make it up in the hope that we might turn round and go home?

She reminded me of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* – although Grandma always wore *black* lace. Grandma never recovered from the day my grandfather ran off with his secretary when my father was 12 years old. Grandma sent my father off to boarding school and thereafter rarely left her house, which – like the woman herself – terrified me. It was large, gloomy, filled with dusty antiques and falling into disrepair. I did love the dark chocolate rose and violet creams she proffered on special occasions, but that sweet memory has never been enough to stave off the sense of foreboding associated with visiting Nottingham.

So it was with some apprehension that I accepted an invitation to appear at Nottingham Mechanics' Institute in March of this year.

Until the mid-18th century lace making was predominantly a cottage industry which began in the 16th century and was carried out by hand in different parts of England, notably Honiton in Devon, Olney in Bedfordshire, Marlow in Buckinghamshire and Helmdon in Northamptonshire. The technique was allegedly brought to England by Flemish Protestants fleeing the Inquisition.

Nottingham had become the centre of the global lace industry by the 19th century but, like the woollen industry in Bradford on Avon, lace making fell into decline as fashions changed. Lace production in Nottingham was highly mechanised. Mass production began after large weaving frames were invented in the city in 1760 – adapted from the stocking frames initially made to manufacture hose in the reign of Elizabeth I. Subsequently John Heathcoat invented the 'bobbinet' machine in 1808, after studying the hand movements of a Northamptonshire bobbin lace maker. Despite Luddite

attempts to destroy the new machines, progress was inevitable. Heathcoat relocated his Leicestershire factory to Tiverton in Devon after it was attacked by Luddites in 1816.

Machine-made Nottingham lace, as pictured on the left, is distinct from the fine handmade English bobbin and needle lace that only the wealthiest could



Impressive architecture and grandiose buildings in Nottingham's Lace Market reflected the status of the lace merchants and the importance of the industry to the city

previously afford. Yet machine-made lace soon rivalled the hand-crafted product for quality, ingenuity of design and cost, although it never quite compared to the intricacy or delicate beauty of the handmade article. However, produced in large quantities, it was a reasonably priced and affordable textile for clothing as well as household items such as tablecloths, bedding and the ubiquitous lace curtains or 'nets'.

The manufacture of the latter began with the invention of a lace curtain machine by John Livesey in 1846. His machine could rapidly produce yards of the lace that the Victorians popularised to ensure their respectability behind curtained windows.

Nottingham lace was made in factories throughout the surrounding area and brought to the Lace Market for checking and finishing by hand. This precise work was carried out by hundreds of girls and women working in the upper floors of buildings, known as 'top shops', above showrooms where the finished product was displayed for wholesale buyers to purchase and despatch around the world.

The Lace Market might be considered something of a misleading term because it wasn't a market in the conventional sense, with covered stalls and vendors





Nottingham's vibrant city centre; like Bradford on Avon, some areas faced demolition and redevelopment in the 1960s

shouting their wares. It was so called because it was the area of the city where lace was traded. The streets lined with impressive architecture and grandiose buildings were intended to impress the buyer – indicative of the status of the lace merchants and the importance of this industry to the city.

Like the clothiers in Bradford on Avon, the lace merchants thrived and became wealthy at the expense of their workers who fared less well, overworked and without rights. They ate a basic diet and lived in overcrowded back-to-back terraced houses with insanitary communal facilities. No wonder they needed lace curtains at their windows for privacy!

Unlike Bradford on Avon, where philanthropy towards the cloth workers was largely absent, some Nottingham manufacturers treated their employees with due care.

Notable among these employers was Thomas Adams, a Quaker, who opened a particularly grand warehouse building in 1855. Designed by architect Thomas Chambers Hine, it contained a library, schoolroom, washrooms, refreshment room and chapel.

From the mid-19th century, export of the lace – and business generally in the city – was enhanced by excellent rail transport links. The city's first station opened in 1839.

Some of the mill buildings in the surrounding area, including those in neighbouring counties, still exist and have been converted to other uses including residential. The only remaining local manufacturer of Nottingham lace is in Long Eaton, Derbyshire.

The fine buildings in the Lace Market had fallen into disrepair by the 20th century and, like parts of Bradford on Avon, were threatened with demolition and redevelopment in the 1960s. They have now been faithfully restored. This vibrant city centre area now boasts cafés, restaurants, clubs, art galleries, museums and businesses – including The Lace Market Hotel where I stayed.

I'm pleased to report that there was no incidence of sickness on travelling to Nottingham, just a little regret at leaving after only a short stay! I do have some fond memories of the city, including school trips to Nottingham Playhouse to see John Neville as Richard II and a young Judy Dench in *Saint Joan*, or as a teenager drinking at Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, built into the sandstone caves below Nottingham Castle and allegedly used by Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem in the 12th century.

The fairground rides at the Goose Fair were every bit as scary as Grandma though. As for the secretary that stole my grandfather's heart, she was a kind, well-liked and generous woman and their house in a town far away was warm and inviting.

'Lots of sheep and no wolves'

Rob Arkell's talk on the early woollen industry in the Bradford area kept a full house at the Priors Barn entertained and informed at the second of our 2023 lecture meetings.

This part of the West Country was known from Roman times for the quality and quantity of its wool – because, Rob explained, “we had lots of sheep and no wolves”. The native sheep were tiny, but their wool was of fine quality; later, selective breeding produced larger sheep, but coarser wool, ideal for the production of broadcloth.

The hard-wearing fabric was woven on broad looms: the largest recorded in this area was more than 8ft wide. The cloth was then fulled – sometimes by treading, but more usually in a fulling mill – to such an extent that the fibres felted together, losing the pattern of the woven thread and resulting in a smooth surfaced fabric much in demand for outer garments and military uniforms.

Cloth production was a protected industry in the large towns of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and east Somerset, but independent manufacturers set up in smaller towns and villages to take advantage of ever-increasing demand; it was recorded in 1577 that there was not enough wool in ‘the Shyre’ to meet the need for finished cloth.

With the help of well chosen illustrations, Rob took us through the processes and equipment used in woollen manufacture, explained the difference between ‘straight’ and ‘fulling’ teasels, introduced us to the clothiers – Yerburys, Hortons, Clevelodes and Baileys – whose names linger in street and house names across this corner of Wiltshire.

Declining demand for broadcloth meant that by 1650 local clothiers had begun to produce ‘Spanish cloth’ using imported Merino wool, and a new phase in the West Country woollen industry had begun.

Low bridges and dodgy sewers

Trust member Stephen Hills recalls some of the civil engineering challenges that accompanied the construction of Bradford's Southway Park development



Southway Park at the junction of Southway Road and the estate's spine road, Moulton Drive

My name is Stephen Hills and I was born in Bradford on Avon in 1947. I lived at Kingston Avenue for 20 years, close to both the Spencer Moulton playing fields and the area that became the Southway Park development.

I left Fitzmaurice School in 1965 and studied building construction, becoming an Incorporated Member of the Institute of Building. During my career I was regional engineer with Barratt Developments, based at Bristol, from 1978-1987. This was during the period when Barratts acquired Thorner Homes, which had gone into liquidation part way through the Southway Park construction.

Previously, Thorner had bought out the original



Driveway problems were solved

developer, English and Continental Homes, which had itself gone into liquidation during the construction of Fitzmaurice Close, Southway Park. At the time there was consternation because Barratts immediately put the price of the houses up substantially. However, the houses continued to sell at the higher price – suggesting that they had been undervalued by Thorner Homes.

Barratts inherited various construction problems created by both English and Continental Homes and Thorner Homes. For example, when I started work with Barratts, Palairt Close was in the process of construction with some properties sold. I carried out an inspection of the site and was surprised to walk along Palairt Close to find a parked car on its owner's drive, but sticking out over the full width of the footpath!

Alarm bells rang – so we carried out a land survey which revealed the roadway in Palairt Close was 6ft out. The discrepancy required Barratts to buy land from purchasers' front gardens on one side of the road and give back 6ft on the other side. This also involved moving all the services: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines and streetlights. This was of course a costly operation but carried out following meetings with the purchasers and Barratt's managing director. But the development was still very profitable and successful for Barratts.

Another problem concerned the canal bridge, which was designed to have a certain headroom for the canal barges and narrowboats passing beneath it. However, the

spine road – Moulton Drive – was designed and built to go over the canal at a lower level. Consequently the remaining part of the road had to be lifted to pass over the canal bridge. You can still feel the slight bump in the road now!

A number of issues with the infrastructure works arose from the fact that Moulton Drive, from Trowbridge Road to the canal bridge, was not adopted (where responsibility for a road and its maintenance is taken over by the relevant authority).

When the development was first designed and approved, the adopting authorities were Bradford Urban District Council for the sewers and Wiltshire County Council for the highways. By the time Barratts arrived on the scene Wessex Water had taken over the sewer adoption procedure and introduced higher standards of inspections, including CCTV surveys of all sewers. These surveys revealed many serious faults – including the collapse of the 3ft diameter sewer beneath the spine road.

At this point, Barratts considered two options: complete replacement of the 3ft sewer or a revolutionary repair system, which required a large-diameter plastic tube forced under pressure into the sewer and heated to a temperature whereby the melting plastic sealed all the cracks and holes. Barratts considered both options, but Wessex Water would not guarantee adoption if the second option was used. Therefore option one was chosen – which entailed closing the spine road for several months to carry out the works.

Many of the foul and storm water connections were wrongly connected to completed properties, causing smells

inside the homes. Barratt's had to trace the connections by placing dyes into the sewers to check which were working correctly. Where they were wrong, Barratts had to excavate front gardens and reconnect the sewers.

I recall very good relations with Wiltshire County Council and Wessex Water regarding adoption of the various phases of the development. (I also remember that the Wiltshire Clerk of Works was the welly throwing champion of England.)

Landscaping also came into the construction remit: Barratts was asked to build the wooden steps from the spine road to the canal which are still there today. The show complex was very attractive and the sales office was a great success, with good sales until the completion of the development.

The adopting authorities were fussy about adopting phases because they would then have to take on the maintenance costs. So until final adoption Barratts was required to cut the grass on verges, and was responsible for the maintenance of all roads, including snow clearing in the winter.

Barratts inherited the existing Section 106 Planning Agreement, S38 Highways Agreements, S104 Agreements, S 33 Open Spaces Agreements. There were at least eight phases on the development, which meant a total bond (to make sure that any works are completed satisfactorily before handover) of over £1 million.

I left Barratts as regional engineer in 1987. At that time I believe Phase 8, the last phase on the whole site, was being constructed and the due process of adoption was continued in an efficient manner.

Geoffrey M. Saxty

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The most written-about town in England?

Roger Jones considers the large number of books about Bradford on Avon published over the past century and a half, and wonders if the town holds some kind of record

Another four books of local Bradford on Avon interest were published in 2022, these being the latest additions in a remarkable record. This prompted me to reflect on the literary output of Bradfordiana (if such a word may be permitted).

The first printed items were the directories produced by local printers like Charles Rawling. His *Annual Household Almanack, Directory and Advertiser* of 1869 contains a wealth of local information and a cover illustration of Brown's Hardware, happily still with us.

Canon W H Jones (1817-1885), a former vicar of Holy Trinity, followed in the footsteps of many Victorian clergymen in becoming a keen antiquarian and is generally recognised as the 'discoverer' of the Saxon Church. The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society was founded in 1853; in 1859 Jones published his account of Bradford in the Society's annual journal. It was later produced as an offprint by local printer Charles Rawling, who also published Jones's *History of the Saxon Church and the Life and Times of St Aldhelm*.



Canon Jones, 'father' of Bradford on Avon local history

Jones's article was subsequently updated by J Beddoe and included notes on The Hall by Canon Jackson. This was produced in 1907 by Dotesio, a business that gradually overtook Rawling as the town's principal printer and bookseller. The book was entitled *Bradford on Avon: A History and Description*; sadly Jones did not live to see it. In 1913, Dotesio published Jones's *A Stroll through Bradford on Avon*. This had its origin in a manuscript handed to Charles Rawling some years previously.

I also have a copy of a landscape format, very thin, hardback book entitled *Bradford on Avon and Neighbourhood*. It consists of 20 very muddy monotone photographs. For a fuller description of the Rawling/Dotesio years and their publishing efforts see my *Bradford on Avon: Printers and Town Directories*, published by

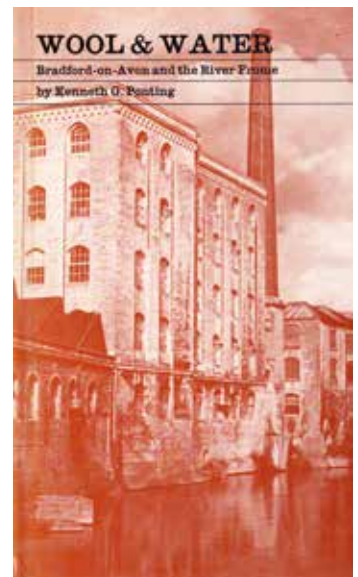
Bradford on Avon Museum.

Since that time the only additions to Bradford's literary record are town guides published by the Urban District Council. These contain quite copious but standard entries on items of note; their main interest is perhaps found in the many contemporary advertisements for local businesses.



I arrived in the town in 1980 to run Ex Libris Bookshop. I had previously been librarian at Newton Abbot in Devon and had published a book about the town in 1979 and another, the following year, describing local walks. I was naturally interested in my new surroundings but could find only two available books of interest. One was *Wool & Water* by Kenneth Ponting. Sub-titled 'Bradford-on-Avon and the River Frome', its first sentence reads: "Bradford-on-Avon is the most attractive small town in south west England".

In just 52 small, hardbacked pages, Ponting describes Bradford, its surrounding villages and Frome with the emphasis on the woollen cloth industry. Ponting himself formerly worked in the Trowbridge mills. *Wool & Water* was published in 1975 by Tony Adams from his home at 26 St Margaret's Street under his Moonraker Press imprint. Prior to this he had been based in Bath and published as Adams & Dart – mainly books on art and industrial history.

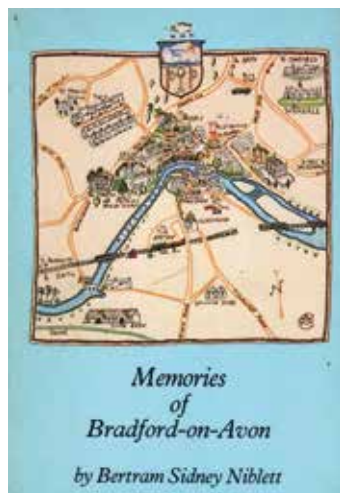


Also available at that time was *The Year of the Map*.

This includes a facsimile of the 1841 Tithe Map in which every field and property is located, numbered and may be found in the directory of owners. This was published in 1976 by Dorset-based publisher Michael Russell. It was a fine production with the large-scale tithe map folded and tucked inside the back cover. The author, Gee Langdon, had been a civil servant, latterly lived at Woolley Green and was the author of locally-based whodunnits and also wrote songs (*Guardian Angel*, Autumn 2015).

The venerable *Victoria County History* includes numerous volumes on Wiltshire with much detail on the town and on the many communities contained within the Bradford Hundred. An offprint from the Bradford on Avon volume (Vol 7 of the Wiltshire *VCH*) was published by Wiltshire Library in 1990 entitled *Bradford on Avon: A History to 1950*.

As the local bookseller, I was naturally keen to offer books of local interest. Although I had successfully published a book on Newton Abbot, I felt unqualified to write about my newly adopted town when there were so many keen local historians and the well established Preservation Trust.



The year after my arrival, in 1981, I was invited to the launch of a book entitled *Memories of Bradford-on-Avon* by elderly local resident Bertram Niblett, published by Wiltshire Library & Museum Service. In the same year a series of television programmes was being aired on BBC and presented by Alec Clifton-Taylor, rather in the spirit of John Betjeman. The second series, *Six*

More English Towns, included Bradford on Avon. The book of the series has an excellent account of the town's architectural attractions and how they are interlinked with its industrial history. I approached the BBC with the suggestion that the Bradford section might be produced as an offprint and published in its own right – I knew I had a ready market at Ex Libris Bookshop for such a publication. The Beeb showed some interest in the idea but it came to nothing.

In the meantime I'd been busy with my book of local walks, *Where Wiltshire Meets Somerset*, which I published under my Ex Libris Press imprint in 1982 and which, in 2023 and after numerous editions, is still in print.

In 1983 a publication arrived from the Netherlands-based European Library: *Bradford on Avon in old Picture Postcards* compiled by the late Adrian Powell and drawn from his personal collection.

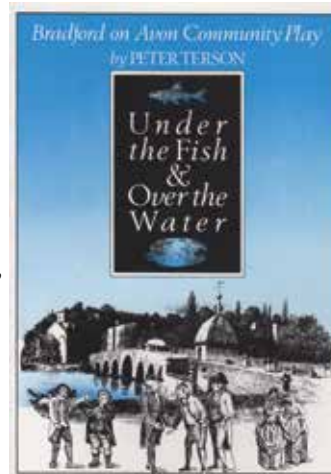
Two years after Wiltshire Library had published Bert Niblett's book, they brought out *Bradford on Avon: A Pictorial Record*, another example of the burgeoning trend to publish collections of old photographic images; this one was the work of Harold Fassnidge and Peter Maundrell. Some 20 years later, in 2003, another book in the same genre, *Around Bradford on Avon* by Paul De'Ath, was published by Tempus Books of Stroud.



I'd met fellow Quaker Harold Fassnidge, a retired diplomat who lived locally and was a member of the Historical Association. He'd won a prize in 1986 awarded by Wiltshire Library Service for his *History of Melksham Quakers*; in 1988, we published his *Bradford on Avon: Past & Present*. This established itself as *the* book about the town although, inevitably, it reflected the author's particular interests. A revised edition appeared in 1993. Harold died in 1996 and I published a further revised edition (with input from myself) in 2007, including details about the Roman Villa which was first unearthed

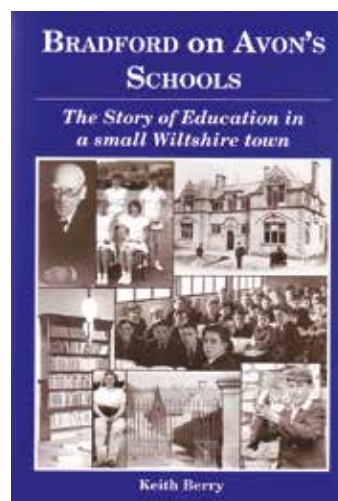
in 2002. The book has now been out of print for some years.

The town embarked on a major project in 1989 with the preparation of a community play. This involved hundreds of people, young and old, and funds were raised and a team of professionals drafted in, including playwright Peter Terson. A team of locals were engaged in researching the town's history with a view to focusing on a particular theme which would provide some dramatic tension and allow for a wide cast of characters. Thus it was that the play entitled *Under the Fish and Over the Water* came about. The book was published and ready for the last few days of the two-week run at St Laurence School.



With the prospect of entering a new century, indeed a new millennium, many publishers' thoughts turned to celebrating such milestones. So it was that we published Margaret Dobson's *Bradford Voices*, subtitled 'A Study of Bradford on Avon through the Twentieth Century'. A revised and expanded edition appeared in 2011 to include detail about the first decade of the new century; it reprinted in 2019.

In the wake of *Bradford Voices* we brought out *Bradford on Avon's Schools* by local resident Keith Berry. Keith had served as headteacher at John of Gaunt School in



Trowbridge and written its history, which I helped him self-publish. Keith's thoughts then turned to producing something similar on Bradford's Fitzmaurice Grammar School, which had closed in 1980. I encouraged him to expand his enquiry to include many more of the town's schools. Thus, in 1998, we published *Bradford on Avon's Schools*, sub-titled 'The Story of Education in a small

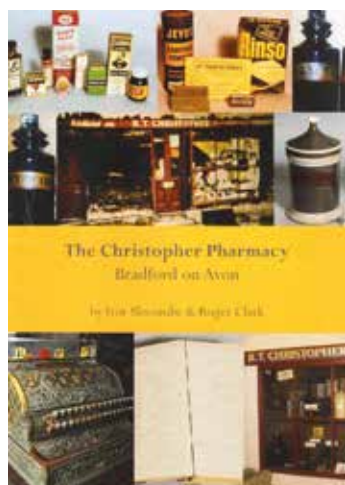
Wiltshire Town', an excellent record which has proved a ready source of reference for former pupils.



Bradford on Avon Museum Society was founded in 1990 and reflected a widespread interest in the town's history. A long-awaited new library was under construction and space reserved on the top floor to house a fledgling town museum. The long-established Christopher Pharmacy, formerly at the corner of Silver Street and Kingston Road, closed around the same time and was relocated as

the centrepiece of the new museum. The Museum Society published an accompanying booklet: *The Christopher Pharmacy*, co-written by Ivor Slocombe and museum curator Roger Clark. This was soon followed by Roger's *Lost Pubs of Bradford on Avon, a walker's guide*.

In 2011 A Museum Publications Committee met to plan further booklets on a variety of subjects. These were typically modest publications, around 28 to 32 pages in A5 format, though several had more pages and in a larger format. They were generally produced in full colour. The first title was *Abbey Mill*, since when more than a score titles have appeared. Nine have involved the authorship of either Ivor or Pam Slocombe, or both in tandem. Subjects include the Saxon Church, the pre-industrial woollen industry, geology and Bradford Leigh Fair. There are booklets dealing with the Anglo Saxon and Medieval periods and Bradford between 1500 and 1700, in addition to larger publications dealing with The Hall, Barton Farm and Budbury. The latest museum publication, *A Vanished World* by Margaret Dobson, is reviewed on page 25.



periods and Bradford between 1500 and 1700, in addition to larger publications dealing with The Hall, Barton Farm and Budbury. The latest museum publication, *A Vanished World* by Margaret Dobson, is reviewed on page 25.

A major museum project was a comprehensive and fully illustrated account of the historically important rubber industry by Moulton engineer, Dan Farrell. The first edition, *Riding on Rubber*, came out in 2017 and *Rubber Town*, a revised edition, in 2020. There is too an excellent book by Gill Winfield on the story of the town, with some colourful and lively illustrations, aimed at children, entitled *Whoosh!* Apart from the first two museum titles, I have dealt with the design and layout of them all, a task I generally enjoy.

Apart from being involved with the museum's publications and my own Ex Libris Press titles, I have assisted with the production of many other projects. For example, I helped produce no fewer than three books for their authors about Holy Trinity Church. These include *Storied Urns: an illustrated history of monuments* (1998) and *The Stained Glass Windows of Holy Trinity Church* (2004), both compiled by Rosemary Carr. The third is *Heard but not Seen: a History of the Bells of Holy Trinity Church* (2001) by Anne Willis – which weighed in at a remarkable 185 pages, illustrated and fully indexed. All three tomes are available for purchase in the church.

Two other interesting and very worthwhile projects were *Bradford-on-*



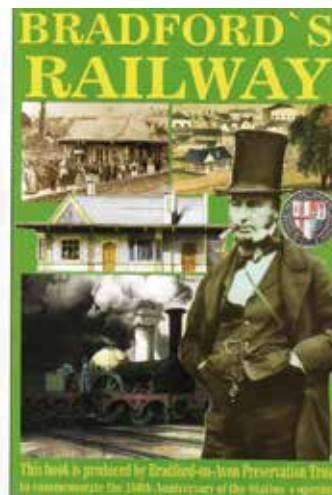
Two other interesting and very worthwhile projects were *Bradford-on-*

Avon: An Artist's Eye (2001) by Joyce Eales and *Bradford on Avon Millennium Embroidery* (2003) published by the Preservation Trust and Museum respectively. Both are landscape format booklets and both attractively illustrated with informative text. The Trust published a celebration of its first 50 years: 1964-2014.

To celebrate the rebuilding of the West Barn, opened in 2003 by the then Prince of Wales, *Barton Grange: Its History and Restoration* appeared in 2006, written by Margaret Dobson and illustrated by Gareth Slater. The town celebrated 150 years since the railway arrived in the town and the Trust produced a most useful booklet entitled *Bradford's Railway*, again illustrated by Gareth.

In 2015 the Trust published *Bradford Façades*, a collection of superb measured drawings by local draughtsman, the late Adrian Dark. Then, in 2016, the Trust brought out *Barton Farm: The Last Thousand Years*, co-authored by Margaret Dobson and Gareth Slater, and brilliantly illustrated by Gareth.

In 2002 an archaeological dig in St Laurence School's playing field revealed the spectacular remains of the mosaic floor of a Roman villa, a discovery which was a source of fascination for Bradfordians. I recognised a publishing opportunity and persuaded Mark Corney, the archaeologist in charge, to assemble an illustrated booklet about the discoveries. This we published early in 2003 entitled *The Roman Villa at Bradford on Avon: The Investigations of 2002*. I published a second volume describing the following year's dig. I remain hopeful that a description of the final 2004 dig, including the bath house, might one day be published, perhaps as an omnibus volume covering all three consecutive years' digs.



In 2004, Ex Libris Press brought out a much needed book on Avoncliff; this was *Avoncliff: The Secret History of an Industrial Hamlet in War and Peace* by Nick McCamley. Next, in 2012, a comprehensive account of the town's pubs and breweries, past and present. This was entitled, unsurprisingly, *Bradford on Avon's Pubs and Breweries*. The author was native Bradfordian, the late Jack Mock, who, in 1997, had self-published his reminiscences of the war years: *Bradford on Avon and District: The War Years (1939-1945)*.

Stephanie Laslett held an interest in the town's shops in the 1950s, a project which chimed with the Coronation of Elizabeth II. We agreed that there was a book in it and Stephanie's careful research resulted in *Brylcreem and Broken Biscuits*, sub-titled 'A Street Trail History of Bradford on Avon's Shops in the 1950s'. This appeared in 2013 and reprinted in 2020.

Apart from Ex Libris Press, the Preservation Trust and the Museum, more 'one-offs' from other sources include *A*

Small Town History in Maps: Bradford on Avon Delineated by John Seekings. This is an original approach to local history revealed in maps as they appeared down the years. John followed this with *Bradford on Avon: A New History* in which the emphasis was, refreshingly, on the economic and political development of the town from the earliest times to the present.

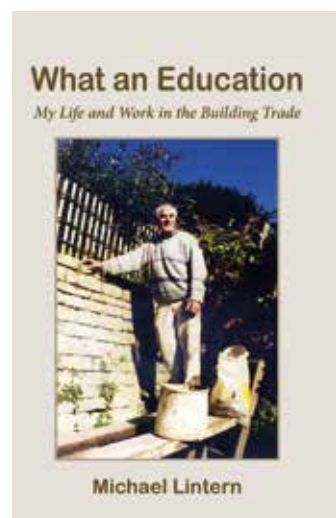
In 2005 I helped a former St Laurence School pupil, Vicky Ody, publish her account of the school's first 25 years: *St Laurence Story* and, in the same year, for Sean McGlynn and Elizabeth Tegetmeier to mark its 50th Anniversary: *The Catholic Church of St Thomas More*.

Local military historian Jonathan Falconer's *Names in Stone: Forgotten Warriors of Bradford on Avon and District 1914-18* was published by Bed & Bolster in 2010 and is a comprehensive description of the relatively large number of local men who served and died in the Great War. This was followed, in 1918, by his *The Great War & Bradford-on-Avon*.



Even fiction with a Bradford on Avon setting has been published. First was Gee Langdon's whodunnit *A Clue from the Past* in which Bradford on Avon is thinly disguised as Broughton on Avon. Later, in 2001, we had *Drinking Midnight Wine* by Simon R Green, a son of Stan Green who formerly owned the bicycle and toy shop in Market Street. Simon is an extremely prolific author of fantasy novels but I believe this is his only one set in the town.

Local journalist Stan Hey wrote a series of crime novels, the first of which, *Filling Spaces*, was published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1995 and which Ex Libris Press republished in 2004. The story features private dick Frank Brennan who "has spent six months of his life in Erlestoke prison ... retreats to Bradford on Avon, trying to rebuild both his working life and his ailing marriage..." It's an absorbing read, not least because it features a certain bookshop in The Shambles.



In addition to fiction, 2022 saw publication of the first Bradford on Avon-based memoir: *What an Education: my life and work in the building trade*, penned by local stonemason Michael Lintern. Michael has worked on many local properties during his working life.

Beyond the town lie the nine villages of the ancient Bradford Hundred. I've already mentioned our book on Avoncliff. In addition,

I've helped produce volumes on Turleigh, Westwood and Atworth – so plenty of scope for more.

A recent publication, *A Gem in the Avon Valley*, published by Bath Industrial Heritage Trust (2019), is a fascinating

account of Ancliff Square, that distinctive edifice just beyond the aqueduct at Avoncliff.

In 2019 I responded to a couple of requests for an inexpensive and handy guide to the town, its history and features. Thus I prepared *Bradford on Avon: A Town like no other*, a 32-pager with lots of colour illustrations which demanded reprinting in 2020 and 2023.

In the past two years I have pursued a few small projects of my own: in 2021 an eight-page leaflet entitled *An Environmental and Nature Walk around Bradford on Avon* and a walks booklet on Trowbridge. From sales of these I raised £1,000 for Oxfam. In 2022 I wrote and published a 36-pager on our neighbouring village of Holt and raised £600 for the UNHCR Appeal for Ukrainian Refugees. By now I am fairly addicted to creating books and enjoy preparing them for print.

As well as books and booklets, mention must be made of the *Guardian Angel* published by the Preservation Trust, now in its 100th issue and whose archive contains valuable articles on various aspects of the town's heritage, as does the museum's occasional *Museletter*.

Looking back through the titles cited above, I count more than 60 published items on the town (including 20+ from the museum). There are a few which I have omitted and I'm sure there will be more to come. This is surely a remarkable output for a relatively small community.

So, perhaps Bradford on Avon can claim to be the "Most written about town in England" – and surely a candidate for the *Guinness Book of Records*.



Just some of the Bradford on Avon books published to date – there are many more!

Book reviews

A History of Rowley-Wittenham Deserted Medieval Village and Lost Parish By Robert Arkell

Some of you will remember Robert Arkell's Preservation Trust talk in January 2020 about Rowley-Wittenham.

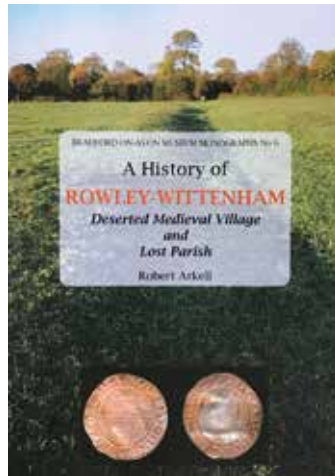
This latest monograph in the series published by Bradford on Avon Museum covers the same ground but also goes much further, with information on the building of the village, on what survives and what has disappeared, and on who lived there.

If you look at local maps you will see on the minor road which runs south-westwards from Westwood towards Farleigh Hungerford that a lost village called Rowley is marked, more or less where the road is crossed by a bridleway running north from Stowford to Iford. But this book will explain to you that the original village covered a much larger area and fell effectively into three parts. The westernmost part was Whittenham, with Rowley in the middle and over to the east was Freshaw, covering the area around Midway Manor, north of Wingfield and extending as far east as Trowle.

The centre of the village seems to have been in the area where the bridleway crosses the road, as much of the area east of that was taken into the Farleigh Hungerford deer park. Thomas Hungerford purchased much of Rowley-Whittenham in 1427 and in the following year he had the parish transferred from Salisbury diocese to Bath and Wells and the Rowley-Whittenham church incorporated into the parish of Farleigh Hungerford. You may have wondered why the boundary between Wiltshire and Somerset deviates eastwards of the River Frome in this area. The answer lies in this absorption of part of the village into Farleigh Hungerford and its deer park.

Much of the rest of Rowley-Whittenham belonged to the Augustinian Abbey at Keynsham, particularly the easterly areas of Freshaw, which the Abbey held along with land in Wingfield. The dissolution of the abbeys will have led to the splitting up of that holding. Before that the Black Death will have led to a major fall in population and the resulting labour shortage may have lured the remaining population of the village to more promising markets. It looks as if the church building, by then an outpost of Farleigh Hungerford church, fell into ruin sometime after 1534.

Potting the history of the village and its disappearance



into these three paragraphs has involved major simplifications and you should read this book to get a fuller version of the story. This also includes some nice examples of medieval sharp practice, as, for example, a tenant who regarded his holding in Rowley as worth £22 when claiming against others for damages but as worth slightly less than £10 for tax purposes; or a suggestion that Lord Hungerford, in suggesting in a 1428 survey of parishes, that there were fewer than 10 households in the parish may have massaged the numbers so that it would appear that few people would be affected by his annexation of the church to Farleigh Hungerford.

You will also get a survey of the present buildings within the area of the old parish, including Rowley Grange and Rowley Cottage and Midway Manor, information about families living and working in the parish, on field names throughout the parish, on recent archaeology and LIDAR research, and on many other things, all lavishly illustrated and excellent value for £8.

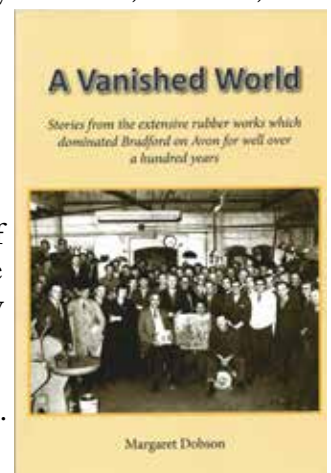
David Moss

● *A History of Rowley-Whittenham is published by Bradford on Avon Museum, ISBN 9781912020102, and can be obtained from the Museum and from ExLibris bookshop in The Shambles, £8*

A Vanished World By Margaret Dobson

This latest book published by Bradford on Avon Museum is subtitled "Stories from the extensive rubber works which dominated Bradford on Avon for well over a hundred years". And, in a sense, this says it all: for the history of the rubber industry in Bradford, you should look to the Museum's books: *The Iron Duke* by Roger Clark and *Rubber Town* by Don Farrell. This book is a social history, of what it was like to work in the rubber factory and, as so many in the town worked in or for the factory, of its impact on the life of the town as a whole. It is obviously of interest to those who know Bradford now but also more widely as an example of life in and around a works with a pretty enlightened management and a workforce drawn from a small town where people walked to work. There must have been hundreds of such towns across the country; they will all be changed by now. This book is a tribute to a lost way of life.

The first chapter is headed "The heart of the town" and that is just what Spencer Moulton or, later on, Avon Rubber was. Its main premises, the Kingston Mill factory,



was right in the centre of the town, with anyone crossing the Town Bridge having to go right past it and with its hooters heard all over the town. It both dominated and defined Bradford. Much of the population worked there: just about everyone must have known at least some of the workers. The workers depended on the local shops and the local shops depended on the workers. And when the factory was closed in 1992, although the workers were offered jobs at the company's other sites, the "effect on the town's shops and pubs and other satellite industries was a major blow".

We are told about how the factory was organised, with a Works Committee set up in 1918 "to give the workers a wider interest in the administration of the firm and to promote a closer feeling of mutual respect ... between the work people and the management". And as most of the management had worked their way up from the shop floor, everyone knew everyone else. There was a Suggestions Scheme, with employees at all levels encouraged to use their skills and ingenuity to devise better products or better ways of working, with financial awards made to those with good suggestions. And the gatehouse had a vital role, not just as the place where workers clocked on and off, but as a link between workers in the factory and their families without: "This was our link to our family member while he was at work. If there was a family emergency one of us would run down the hill to the Gatehouse and speak to Security who would fetch my Dad or pass an urgent message. They were good like that".

This last quotation illustrates a key feature of the book. It is built on the recollections of people who worked in the factory and their families, and extensive quotations help to bring vividly to life what the rubber industry in Bradford felt like. Naturally the works evolved during its century and a half's existence but the ethos seems to have remained – neighbouring families working there, a hardworking, skilled and versatile workforce; lots of camaraderie (despite some unfunny practical jokes); some tensions between workers and management, such as competing between workers and supervisors on how long it took to do a particular piece of work with the workers trying to spin the time out while the supervisors looked on cynically and checked with a different worker. Some work was varied, some (such as checking the bounce on each tennis ball) unimaginably boring.

Dirt was an unavoidable feature of the works, soot and carbon black. The canteen even provided a separate room for men covered in black powder, so that the grime would spread no further. Smoking in the workshops was dangerous and a sackable offence, but there would be cigarette breaks during which people would sit outside by the river. And there was an incident when people in Lamb Yard were surprised to see men "all stark naked and very agitated" bursting out of the main door – "they had just discovered a large snake in the showers and the result was panic".

This absorbing book completes its survey of life with the

rubber industry by looking at the social side, retirement events, Christmas parties, and particularly the Spencer Moulton Sports and Social Club. Support for various social activities was generous, as was the alacrity with which the Moultons accepted the philanthropic gift of land for the sports and social club and then subsidised both the buildings and their running costs. Employees were charged only six (old) pence a week for full membership, which they seem to have taken full advantage of.

The book really does give the reader a feeling of what life in the town must have been like when it was dominated by the factory. And it is lavishly illustrated – quite an achievement as cameras were not widely available at the time and photographs tended to be formal records of special occasions.

Angela and David Moss

● *A Vanished World by Margaret Dobson is published by Bradford on Avon Museum, and can be obtained from the Museum and from Ex Libris bookshop in The Shambles, £10*

Beatrice Valatin – A Portrait

Edited by Martin Valatin

Almost every photograph of Beatrice Valatin in this beautifully produced memoir captures her serene smile and gentle spirit. And every one of the art works reproduced in its pages demonstrates her considerable gifts as an artist.

Beatrice died in 2021, at the age of 91, having lived in Bradford on Avon since the death of her husband, John, in 1978. But her ties to the area go back to 1948, when she began her studies at the Bath Academy of Art, then housed at Corsham Court.



There, she studied with some of the leading artists of the time, including visiting lecturers such as Bryan Winter, Terry Frost and Peter Lanyon; many of her exquisite watercolours recall the work of earlier 20th century painters such as Winifred Nicholson, Christopher Wood and David Jones. Alongside her drawings and paintings, in both oils and watercolour, Beatrice produced a wealth of textile pieces, including woven and rag rugs, appliqué pieces and tapestry.

This book contains a superb selection of her work, from delicate family portraits and landscapes in oils and watercolour, to the wildflower studies that she continued to produce well into her later years.

● *Beatrice Valatin – a Portrait, edited by Martin Valatin, is published by Great Bradford Press and can be obtained from Ex Libris bookshop in The Shambles, £26.*

'A tin of flea powder and a brass monkey'

Regular columnist Ralph Oswick recalls some of the ups and downs of life in a five-storey terraced cottage in Barton Orchard

My tall, terraced cottage in Barton Orchard, where I resided for about 16 years, was rather unusually configured. It was a bit like living in a five-storey tower, with each floor connected by a twisting open staircase. All the nearby cottages were, and probably still are, laid out in a similar way, which was dictated by the steeply sloping site.

Starting from the top, there was an attic, below that a study-cum-spare bedroom. Then came the kitchen with a lobby for the back door which gave access to what we called our batch, an exotic – almost tropical – fern-lined cobbled alley leading to a defunct but picturesque pump. Below that was the master bedroom and bathroom, and finally at the bottom was the lounge with a front door leading out to the lane.

When I first moved in, I was in my study listening to *News at Ten* on the television when it dawned on me I had yet to get a telly. The sound from next door was like being in the same room. The reason was revealed when I investigated the attic and saw that the party wall only went up to ceiling level. You could see the open roof space along almost the whole length of the terrace. When I later restored the cottage, I had the attic removed, revealing what is called a cathedral ceiling, and the party wall extended up to the roof peak.

But before that, there was a near-disaster. Having returned from a three-week tour with my theatre company, I potted around for a day unpacking and doing my washing. At around four o'clock I became aware of a strange vibrating noise.

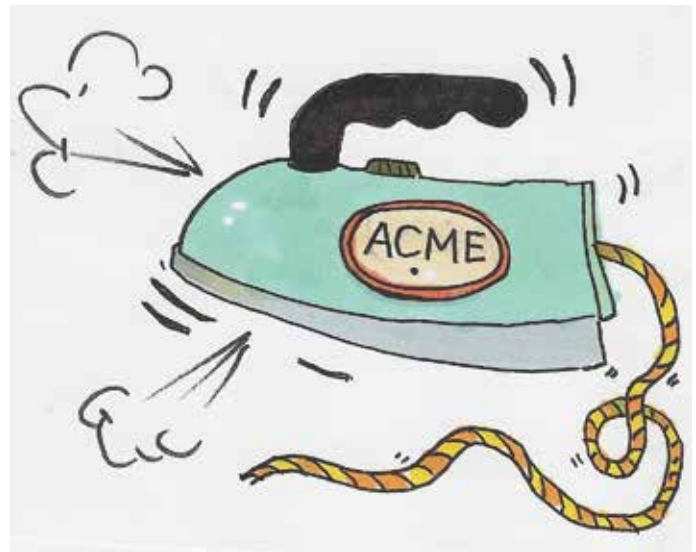
A search revealed that in the top room my iron was quivering violently on its board. In my hurry to meet the crew bus, I had left it switched on for three whole weeks! I think it was about to explode. With those open attics, I could have been responsible for the burning down of an entire Grade 2 terrace. Even to this day, I ritually pull the plug from the socket when I finish my ironing.

One day I came home to find I had been burgled. The felon had smashed a pane of glass in the back door and then made their wicked way down through the house, seemingly stealing nothing as they did so, as in those days, sadly for the perpetrator, I lived an almost Spartan life. There was basically nothing to nick!

Emerging from my front door, the thief obviously turned immediately right, broke into my neighbour's door and made their way up the levels, emerging from the rear entrance clutching various items of great sentimental value including jewellery. And so off down the batch.

I went to great pains to explain my theory to the policewoman who turned up, but – just like Miss Marple on many fictional previous occasions – I was told to keep my amateur sleuth's nose out of it.

The only thing that had been disturbed in my home, and which alerted me to the crime as I came in, was



that my kitsch statue of the Queen Mother was on my lounge sofa, whereas I normally kept it on my desk as a paperweight in my top floor study. When I questioned this with the WPC, she gripped the QM's body and, waving it threateningly, demonstrated that the solid plaster full-length Norman Hartnell dress would make a highly effective weapon.

I gulped as the *Western Daily Press* headline flashed across my mind: 'Local man clubbed to death by Queen Mother!'

Anyway, I filled in all the forms and expected to hear nothing more about the incident, until a few weeks later a police officer phoned me to say that a suspect had been arrested, and he wondered if he could read out the list of swag found on him. I explained once again that I had had nothing stolen, but the officer insisted, just in case it jogged my memory.

He then proceeded in a broad Wiltshire accent to read out a long and bizarre list of stolen items which ended, I kid you not, with "A tin of flea powder and a brass monkey". I knew I never possessed the former, as I had no pets or child of primary school age, but I did wonder momentarily as to whether I might have had a brass monkey amongst my meagre possessions!

"No," I said. "None of those. Though the burglar did weaponise my Queen Mother." He quickly made his excuses and rang off.

Ralph Oswick

● A long-term member of Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust, Ralph was Artistic Director of Bath's Natural Theatre for 45 years and is now an active patron of Bath Comedy Festival

What's on this summer: dates for your diary



All in Harmony performing at the Wiltshire Music Centre

Sunday 18 June Al Fresco at the Farm 2pm, Barton Farm Yard – All in Harmony Choir and the Broderick Duo. Free event. Bring your own chairs, rugs, drinks and picnics. Charity collection for Ukraine. Come along to Barton Farm (outside the Tithe Barn) and enjoy some lovely music for a summer's afternoon. You're welcome to bring a picnic and arrive before the music starts at 2pm.

Jess and Lee Broderick will kick

off the gig, performing a mixture of original songs and covers.

All in Harmony, Bradford on Avon's biggest and most fun community choir, will then take to the stage and perform pop, gospel, show tunes, world harmonies and anything else that takes their fancy! Led by renowned choir leader Chris Samuel, their motto is "Coming together to sing for fun" – we hope you'll see the fun in their summer set of songs.

The ever-popular Bradford on Avon Flower & Produce Show will take place at St Margaret's Hall on Sunday 3 September from 2-4pm. Schedules are available now from the TIC in Westbury Gardens and the Town Council offices in Kingston Road, as well as various shops and businesses around town, and online at the Town Council website. This year the Preservation Trust will be sponsoring a very covetable trophy for the winning Compost exhibit! As always, the show is free to enter and attend, thanks to support from Bradford on Avon Town Council.



The Secret Gardens of Bradford on Avon will be opening for the second time this year on Sunday 25 June. The first event, on 28 May, was a sunny success, with more than 400 people visiting 14 gardens around the town – including the wonderful woodland project at the railway station (see page 15). Tickets from the sales table in Westbury Gardens on Saturday 27 May, 11am – 3pm, and Sunday 28 May, 10.30am – 4.30pm; cash or card payment. Enquiries 865733 and leave a message.

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