



GUARDIAN ANGEL

NEWS FROM BRADFORD ON AVON PRESERVATION TRUST

Notes from the Chair

By the sea all worries wash away, it says on the wall in the old fishermen's cottage in Buckie, on the Moray coast. While I am watching seals laze about on the beach, or walking above the peat brown, dark of the River Findhorn it's quite true but it doesn't quite remove the fear that today is the deadline for this piece and I haven't exactly started ...

Being away during a heatwave is a worry for a gardener, especially when the very large Big Beef tomatoes are quick to suffer blossom end rot due to irregular watering: the change in calcium levels causes horrid flat and very brown bottoms on the potential prizewinners. Luckily, I have two gardening friends taking turns with the watering cans (thanks Judith and Liz), so I still have great expectations for Bradford on Avon Flower and Produce Show on Sunday 5 September (and at this point I apologise to Vernon Burchell for misspelling his name last time, although I still hope to beat his heaviest tomato on the day).

The allotment is a bit of a worry. It will have to look after itself, but as everything is planted in the ground, rather than terracotta pots, it should be fine. The once splendid horse chestnut is not looking good especially when seen against the others in the row. Many of the leaves have dropped and quite a few have turned very yellow already. A tree person is coming to have a look soon;

perhaps it is just having some time off and all will be well next year. My neighbour, Terry, and I suffered sparrows destroying the little red flowers on the runner beans and he suggested Moonlight, a white-flowered variety. So far there have been no sparrows, I have watched as bees climb right inside the larger, slightly floppy, flowers – and the result is lots of tiny beans about to become my favourite vegetable.

Wiltshire Council has been collating the results of the Local Plan review consultation. Of the 3,000 responses from across the county, guess where almost 700 came from? Yes, it's Bradford on Avon again – where “significant opposition was seen on development of the old golf course due to ecological, traffic and impact on amenities”. It will be up to the Preservation Trust, Town Council and indeed all of us to persuade Wiltshire to pressure the relevant government department to accept that Bradford can and will provide the extra 80 houses required by 2036 without using any of our precious green spaces.

We are now ready to make a full planning application for the railway station footbridge canopy. All the materials have been agreed with Network Rail – and we have even found fireproof paint in the correct GWR shade for the wooden side panels up the stairs. We had a meeting recently at the station with The Railway Heritage Trust,

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which has agreed to fund 40 per cent of the construction costs, so that once we have planning permission we will be raising the cash to raise the roof. During this time the station buildings will also be repaired – restoring this architectural gem to the town.

The Trust has agreed with Wiltshire highways department that we will fund the restoration of the little footpath from Barton Orchard to the top end of Church Street. The old, horrid and cracked asphalt will be replaced with the original pennant slabs It's a small and simple project, but one that will last and make a significant improvement to a much loved corner of the town. We have suffered quite significant loss of income during the Covid 19 pandemic, such that we have suspended all grants from the Historic Buildings Conservation Committee, and although the footpath falls outside of that we would be very grateful for any contributions to help fund the shortfall for the project. The Trust has a store of some 10 square metres of pennant, a very generous member will donate a significant sum and Bradford on Avon Town Council has agreed an even larger sum. We are looking for about £1,000 at the moment. If you would like to help, please contact me at mrjohnpotter@hotmail.co.uk – thanks very much.

As part of The Great Big Green Week taking place all over the UK in September, Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon is putting on an exhibition in Westbury Gardens on 25 September. It will include a sewing bee, organised

by Jane Jones – which means it will be a good one. We are all invited to have a go at repurposing an old item of clothing into something new. I saw some old socks made into very funny and quite rude stars of a puppet show a few weeks ago , so anything is possible. To have a go, get in touch with Jane at janejones61@gmail.com

The Trust has a new treasurer. Daniel Wiltshire is a young, professional financial adviser with offices in Silver Street. He has a young family and lives in Bradford. Daniel worked in London for 10 years as an actuary before moving here and setting up Wiltshire Wealth, with the aim of helping individuals and small businesses gain perspective and make good financial decisions.

We would like to thank our outgoing treasurer David Cowles for all his work over the past four years. He will now have more time to spend on his huge allotment which is quietly hidden in a truly splendid spot in town. Thank you, David, and good luck with the digging.

And in another change, Joceline Bury takes over from Ann Dix as Membership and Admin Secretary. Big thanks to Ann for all of her hard work and support since May 2017.

I am now off to collect some seakale thongs from the head gardener at a Scottish castle. You really can't get posher veg than that.

John Potter, Chairman

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Planning Matters

Rosie MacGregor, chair of the Trust's Planning Committee, considers the pros and cons of dealing with planning questions during a pandemic, and provides an update on current and future grant aid to conservation projects

Midsummer has come and gone and so have any hopes that the pandemic might be over. It has made a huge difference to how the Preservation Trust Planning Committee operates. We have only been able to meet in person occasionally and most of our interaction is via phone and email. We are able to race through the planning applications more quickly but what we have gained in the ability to establish rapid recommendations we have lost in engagement and a fuller debate on each of the proposals. We haven't had too many applications to comment on in recent months which is all thanks to Covid and a huge back-log of applications waiting to be registered by a beleaguered local planning authority whose staff have been working under difficult circumstances.

Wiltshire Council has introduced a new and more complicated computerised planning system. Although I think I'm getting to grips with it now I hope nothing we want to comment on slips through the net. Even if something does I'm bound to be alerted to it by our ever-vigilant members. I really don't mind and I'd rather you did contact the Trust despite the inevitability that I'll get

a phone call or email just as I'm sitting down to enjoy my evening meal.

And people do phone up about the strangest things. I remember once, when I was working in development management, I had a call from someone to ask if their neighbour needed permission for a life-size dinosaur in their garden. I had to check the calendar to be assured it wasn't April Fool's Day.

As it happened it was a glass fibre dinosaur – scenery that had been used in a movie. After ascertaining that it wasn't fixed to the ground I explained that it didn't count as development, but was merely a chattel incidental to the enjoyment of the neighbour's garden – equivalent to something like an ornamental stone lion – and permission was not required!!

Speaking of dinosaurs, I have also been accused of being one. Let's be clear, I have no problem with well-designed modern development, but with the caveat that it must be in the right location, using high quality materials and appropriate details.

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This brings me neatly on to the Preservation Trust Design Guide, which we still haven't been able to circulate because of the pandemic. However, I will raise the matter with our Council of Management and hope that we can get copies out to local estate agents and some shops in the near future. I would be happy to hear from any volunteers who would be willing to help circulate it – please contact me via hello@bradfordheritage.co.uk

Grant aid and Christ Church community project update

The Preservation Trust has decided to revise its terms of reference for grant aid and eligibility for privately owned property. We will make it clear that grants paid through our Historic Buildings Conservation Scheme are discretionary. We have recently agreed to invite a small grant for works to a prominent listed building within the conservation area, but given our significantly reduced income as a result of the pandemic and its impact on our bank balances we have had no alternative other than to not offer any further grants through this scheme until next year.

However, this should not affect a potential grant to Christ Church towards restoration of its historic wall paintings and the church clock. A number of our members are keen that we should be involved in such an important project. The Friends of Christ Church have been working hard to secure grant aid from various sources, including the

National Lottery Heritage Fund. A consultation report detailing proposals for the works to the walls and wall paintings have been prepared and there is a full proposal for the clock repair.

Woolley Grange Hotel

Woolley Grange Hotel recently approached the Preservation Trust Planning Committee about proposals to extend and refurbish the hotel. The property is an important Grade II starred listed building situated within the Western Wiltshire Green Belt and in close proximity to the Conservation Area so we were pleased to be consulted by them. We had an initial meeting with them and their Architects and Planners last August and a second meeting in June of this year to look at revised proposals following their consultations with Historic England, County Highways, the Conservation Officer, County Archaeologist, Ecologist and others.

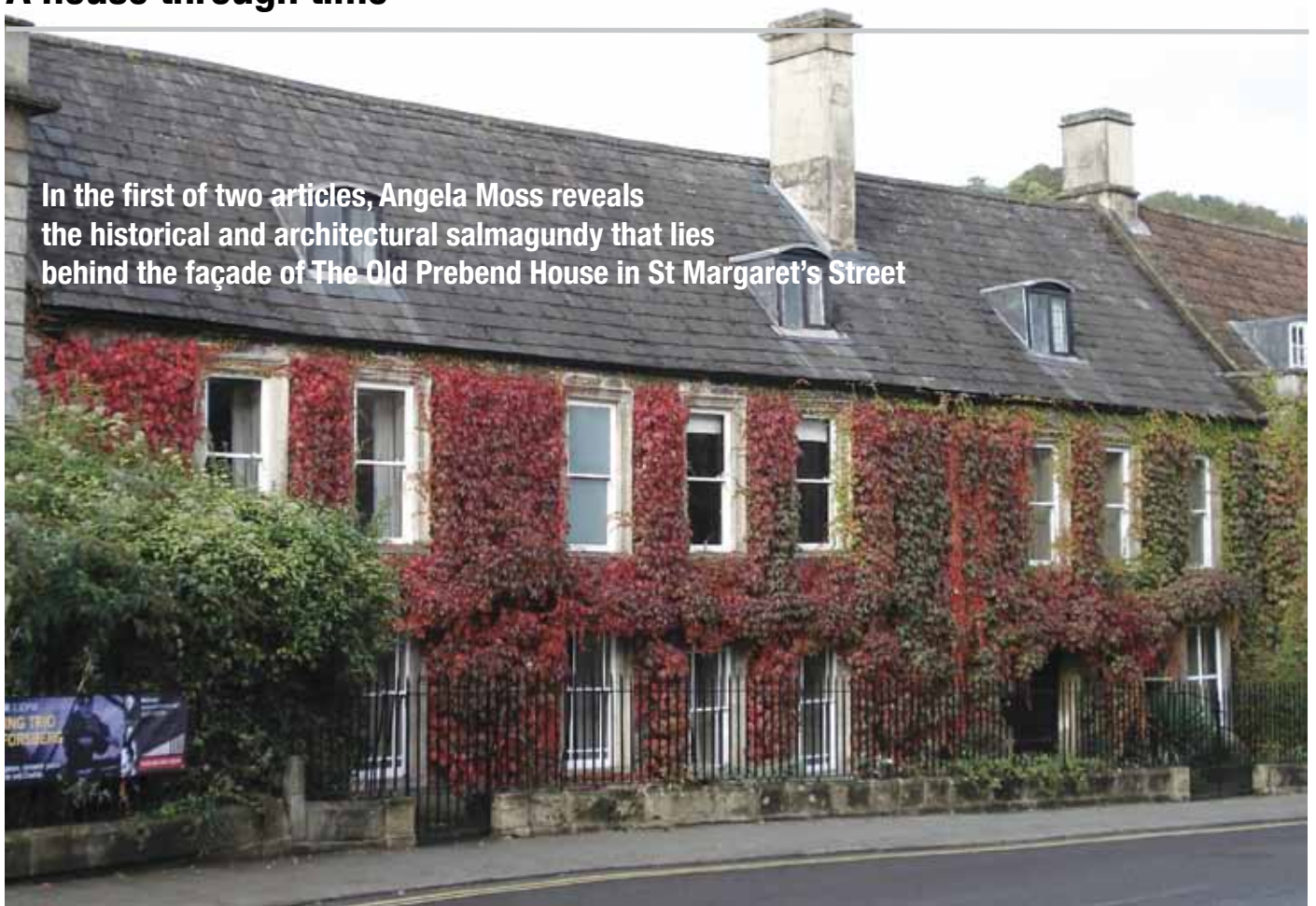
Once detailed proposals have been submitted to the Local Planning Authority, Wiltshire Council, we will be making our comments. I feel I could be accused of a conflict of interests because I'm a Spa member and regular user of the hotel and its facilities, so I won't personally make any comment but will rely on the observations of other members of our Planning Committee. This includes a mix of architects, conservation architects, town planners and local business people.

Rosie MacGregor



Woolley Grange is an important Grade II starred listed building

A house through time



In the first of two articles, Angela Moss reveals the historical and architectural salmagundy that lies behind the façade of The Old Prebend House in St Margaret's Street

The Old Prebend House – 47 St Margaret's Street – dates in part from the mid to late 15th century

You have probably been past this house in St Margaret's Street many times but have never really noticed it. If so, you are in good company. When in 1952 St Margaret's Street was block-listed (a sort of conservation area before Conservation Areas were invented) by the predecessors of Historic England, they described it as:

“Late C17 or early C18. Rubble, high-pitched slate roof, eaves, 3 cambered-headed dormers with leaded casements. 2 storey. Long, low frontage, 8 windows, double-hung sashes, no glazing bars, moulded architrave surrounds. Square-headed doorway 3 bays from right, with deep roll bolection moulding surround, wooden door with iron hinges and brass lion-head knocker. Modern angular bay window to right of door with slate roof.”

In 2010 it was described, cautiously, on the Bradford on Avon Museum website as:

“externally at least, [it] is of the early 18th century and seems to be a conversion from three houses.”

Both appear to be if not drive-by then certainly walk-by assessments and neither is quite right. It has always been one house, and according to Pam Slocombe of the Wiltshire Buildings Record, who prepared a thorough report on it for us, it is probably originally mid to late 15th century – though to be fair the front of the house

is younger. The Museum is mostly on the right track, though, in saying that it was:

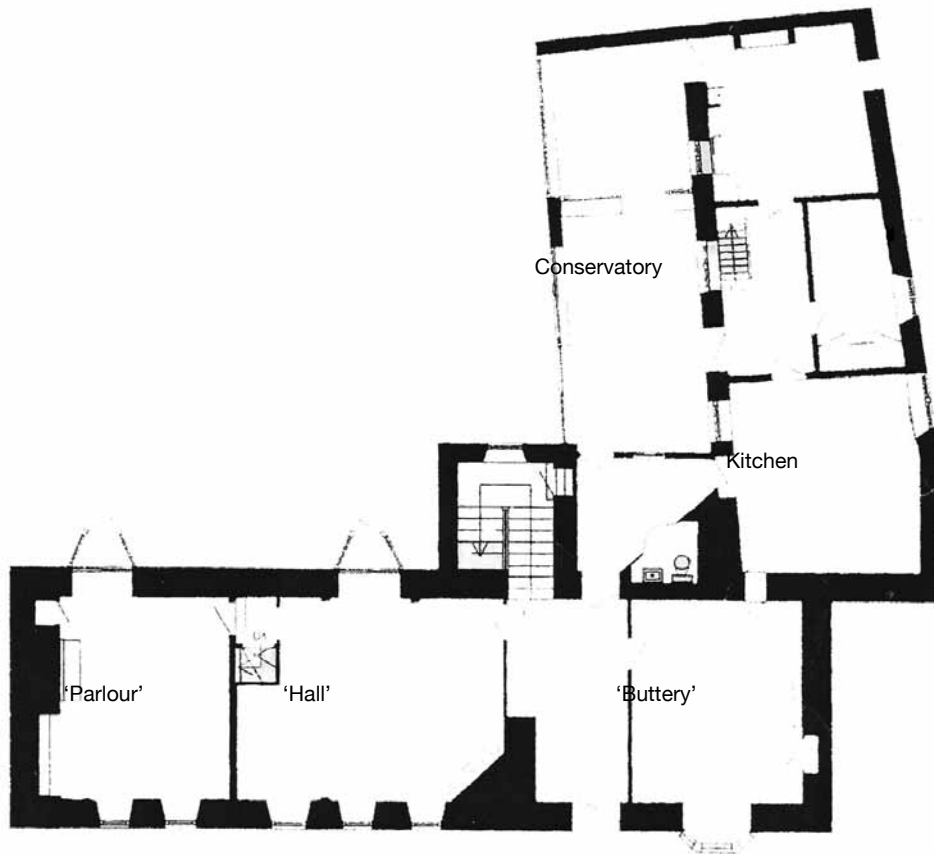
“built on part of Bradford that was given to Bristol Cathedral by Henry VIII in 1543 and was the manor house of the Prebendal, or Rectory Manor that held land all over the ancient parish of Bradford, especially in Winsley. The Dean & Chapter of Bristol sold off its remaining property in the 19th century.”

The house is, however, unlikely to have been the Manor House of the Prebend Manor. That was probably Parsonage Farm in Haugh, Winsley.

The new ‘Pevsner’ volume on Wiltshire (whose author, Julian Orbach, had the advantage of being inside the house) describes it as:

“... long and low, remodelled after 1700 but much earlier. Early C18 staircase in an Elizabethan stair-tower.”

We believe that the house was originally built by Shaftesbury Abbey for one of their officials, perhaps the bailiff or the reeve of that part of the Abbey lands allocated to the support of Bradford's church and rector. All the Abbey's land went to the Crown on its dissolution in 1539. Four years later the church of St Augustine's Abbey became Bristol Cathedral as part of Henry VIII's policy of creating new dioceses, and the Rectory Manor



◀ Plan of the ground floor

was granted as a prebend to Bristol's new Dean and Chapter to support one of their canons, or prebendaries – hence the name of our house.

The house was originally a 'hall house', a medieval design with the 'parlour' or private room for the householder at the south (or uphill) end with the cellar below it and the 'parlour chamber' above; the 'hall', open to the roof and with a fire in the middle, in the centre; then the access passage and finally the 'buttery' or kitchen at the northern end. Pam Slocombe's estimate of the age of the house was based on the thickness of the walls, which are up to 36in (91.5cm) at the back of the house. Interestingly they are only 30in (76cm) thick at the front, indicating a late 16th or early 17th century rebuilding of the front wall and the roof, which also introduced a full first floor: the attic floor was probably added later in the 17th century.

There is a back wing of the house, visible from St Margaret's car park, which was added later – the thickness of the walls (20in or 59cm) suggests an 18th century build. The three rooms on the ground floor of this wing may have been built one after the other as their floor levels are slightly different. The one adjoining the original house dates from at least the late 17th century and has probably been the kitchen since it was built. The three rooms above, which have wooden or plaster divisions between them, seem to have been all added at once. Two of them have windows on the north side set in openings which go down to the floor. They could originally have been taking-in doors, making it highly likely that the three rooms were originally a clothier's workshops, or one big workshop which has since been partitioned to make way for servants' or subtenants' rooms. Some of the south

facing windows of this wing have been partially filled in – had warmth become more important than light?

This wing is set at a slightly acute angle to the main building. The conservatory, which we had built to the plans of Martin Valatin, was tricky to design because of this oddity combined with a tapering of the space in which it was built, originally a yard. The result is a marvel of applied geometry which the carpenters found distinctly challenging.

Externally, the front of the house is as in the Historic England listing – but they did not notice the timber beams (which are admittedly difficult to spot) above the Georgianised sash window surrounds, the Victorianated bay window and the front door. They are all pecked so the house may once have been rendered.

The chief features of the rear are two matching French windows in bays leading off the 'parlour' and 'hall'. With their little slate roofs they are charming both outside and inside, as well as excellent places for Christmas trees. The windows are more miscellaneous than the ones at the front, with only two sash windows – one of the same rebuilding as the ones at the front, the other, on the staircase tower, of the early 18th century. Above it, lighting the upper half landing, is a casement window with a latch dated to about 1690.

The stone on the outside of the staircase tower is mostly rubble but the bottom third of the south facing wall is made of beautifully cut ashlar which Martin Valatin thinks might be Roman stones re-used. This is a lovely idea but Pam Slocombe thinks it is unlikely to be true. As she points out, the Romans were capable of cutting



◀ Back of the house showing part of the rear wing and conservatory, the staircase tower with the possibly re-used Roman stones and the French window in a bay leading off the 'hall'

but some of it plainer and Victorian. Ahead of you is the early 18th century staircase, which goes up to the attic in four half-flights. The handrail has a splendidly-named 'toad back' profile and is ramped – it swoops upward at the top of each half-flight. The local carpenters did their best but they could not work out how to relate this to the newel post for the next flight on the landing, particularly as there is a downward step between the two. So they just built the newel post to the height it would have been without the swoop or the step. It makes me smile whenever I look at it.

There are interesting details all over the house. In the 'hall' (now the sitting room) both doors have a little wooden balcony over them. Jocelyn Feilding was so intrigued by these that he did some research and found out that when they were built it was fashionable to put your bling (blue Delft or Delft-ish china) above your doors. The trouble is the spaces between the balconies and the coving allow only diminutive bling. We have put a couple of tin plates which give a vaguely Delft-ish impression up there to get into the right spirit.

stone this accurately and laying it with fine joints (for example at the baths in Bath) if a suitable type of stone was available, but Roman stones re-used would be more rubbed and damaged. Such fine joints were not seen again until the 19th century so that date is more likely. Good masons could always prop up parts of walls and underbuild as a repair.

Inside, the first thing to strike you is the panelling in the entrance hall, mostly of the early/mid 17th century



One of the bling balconies in the 'hall'

The room is fully panelled with the unusual addition of Victorian anaglypta wallpaper on the panels. We also have anaglypta on the ceilings of the 'hall' and 'buttery' (now the dining room) and on the inside of the shutters in the 'buttery'.

There are genuine Delft tiles in the fireplace in the 'parlour', along with a duck's nest grate. This room and the one above have bolection mouldings around the fireplaces, similar to those at Dyrham though much less grand. The walls are partly panelled (18th century – without anaglypta) but perhaps most interesting is a faint line on the floor dividing the room in two. This was the room which Dr Burnett – who lived in the house from 1931 to 1961 and ran her GP practice from it, as (presumably) did Dr Adye, her predecessor – used as both consulting



◀ The unusual join on the staircase. Spot the upside down baluster and the much later polished wood extra handrail on the lower flight



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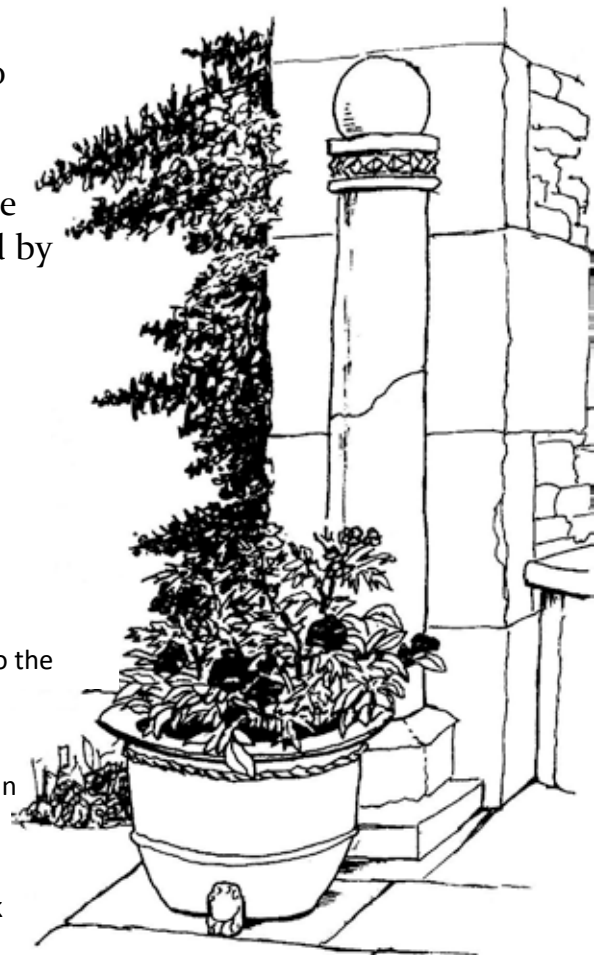
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room and waiting room, with a thin partition between. Margaret Dobson told me that when she was researching her book *Bradford Voices* she heard tales of patients coming in by the southern gate through the railings and either going through the door opposite (replacing a window, since restored) to the small waiting room or queuing outside. The consulting room was beyond and included the fireplace – the waiting room was presumably unheated. The other relic we have of Dr Burnett is the rather fancy surround to the two doorbells, the upper of which bears the legend ‘house bell’ and the lower ‘night bell’. The two bellpushes both still work: they are wired up together just inside the door.

“Whoever Georgianised the windows at the front was clearly puzzled by what to do with the old beam running across the room, which inconveniently ended just where he wanted to put a window. So he put up a strong iron hasp around the beam to support it and chopped off the end”

Two of the bedrooms in the main part of the house are panelled throughout and the third has panelling only over the fireplace, between the windows and, oddly, in a cupboard. Whoever Georgianised the windows at the front was clearly puzzled by what to do with the old beam running across the room, which inconveniently ended just where he wanted to put a window. So he put up a strong iron hasp around the beam to support it and chopped off the end. That was over 200 years ago and it shows no sign of strain.

Then there are the doors and their furniture. Most of the doors are panelled but a few are planked. Chief among these is the front door, which appears to have been cut down from a taller pointed one. It is made of what has been described as ‘medieval plywood – axe-proof’: thick planks which are vertical on the outside and horizontal on the inside. The massive hinges, dated to about 1675 and almost a yard long, are of the lift-off variety but there is no space above to lift the door off. I assume it was put in when the house front was rebuilt and avoided Georgianisation because it was impossible to remove. The single, equally massive hinge on the outside of the front door is now purely ornamental: there is neither a hinge pin nor anything to sit on it.

The internal doors have two, four, six or eight panels in a range of designs and sizes with few matches but there is a pair of slightly grandiose double doors to a small downstairs loo – one door is opened only to inspect the gas meter. Most of the hinges are conventional but some have nice fancy flourishes. The doorknobs are mostly brass but of varying designs. Three conventional latches survive, occasionally baffling to visitors, and one which you turn with a knob.

As a final oddity, there is a door off the first half-landing which once led up a short flight of stairs to a small room, now a bathroom. I can think of only two possible reasons for this: that the corridor which has been inserted at the back of the first floor had not been built or that the builder only had to cut his way through 20 inches of the staircase wall rather than through 30 inches of the medieval wall. Someone else later did cut through the thicker wall and the access from the half-landing was shut. It is now an airing cupboard and the stairs are still there – the lower ones make unusual but functional shelves.

I find this house fascinating – I could go on for much longer – but it looks frankly rather dull from outside and I wanted to give others some idea of its interest. In the words of Pam Slocombe it is “of considerable historic interest to the town and retains a great many features from different periods”.


I am planning another article in the next edition of *Guardian Angel* on the people and the land associated with the house.

I am very grateful to Pam Slocombe for her report on this house, without which this article could not have been written.

Angela Moss

Geoffrey M. Saxty

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Bradford on Avon and the canal that never was

Derrick Hunt and Liz Tuddenham discover the story behind the ill-fated Dorset & Somerset Canal, intended to link Bradford on Avon with Poole, in Dorset, as ‘canal mania’ swept Britain in the last years of the 18th century

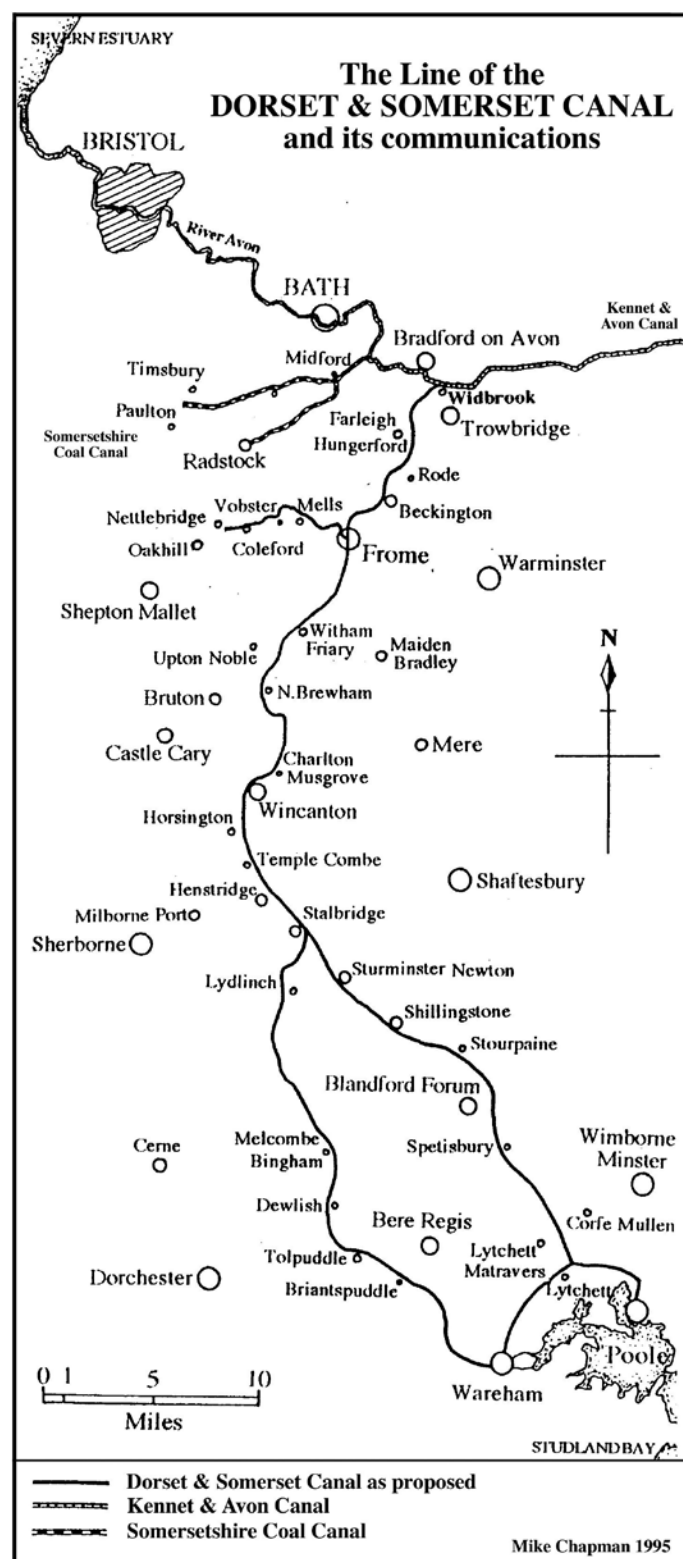
As you travel along the A363 from Bradford on Avon to Trowbridge, there is nothing to suggest that this area was once intended to be a busy commercial hub. Its pleasant rural nature now is not due to some slip-up in a planning department or the failure of some motorway-building madness scheme, it is due to a much earlier form of madness: ‘canal mania’.

In April 1794 the Kennet & Avon Canal received Royal Assent, the route was established and construction work soon got under way in Bradford. At the same time, another, less well-publicised canal was being planned and this, too, would have run to Bradford. This ‘Dorset & Somerset Canal’ as it was known, was carried along on a wave of canal mania and attracted many wealthy but incautious subscribers.

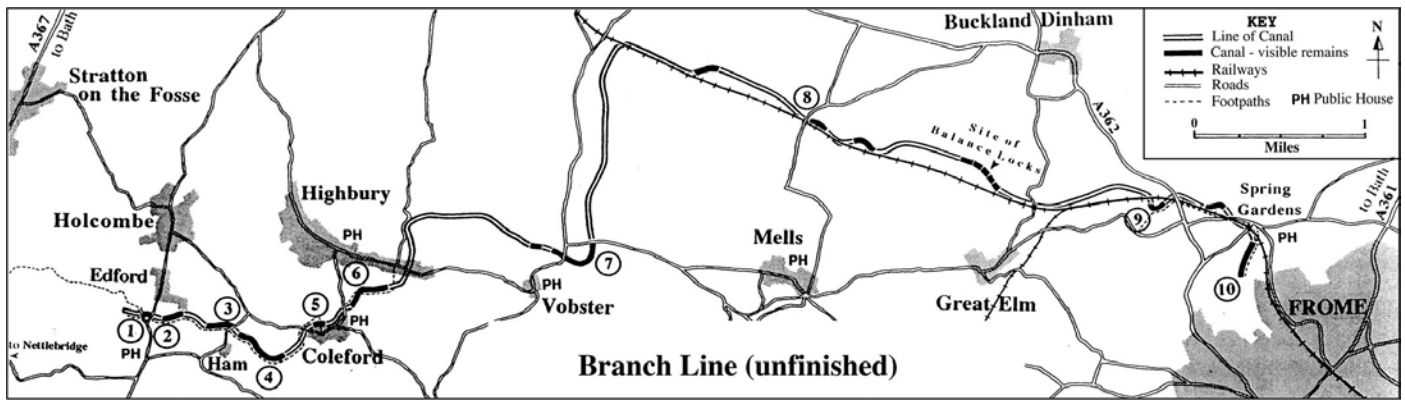
The idea behind the D&S Canal was to connect the Bristol Channel with the English Channel and bring the counties of Dorset and Somerset into the canal network. From the outset it was a dubious enterprise: whereas the K&A Canal connected two major centres of commerce, London and Bristol, this canal was planned to run to Bradford on Avon from Poole in Dorset. Both canals offered prospects of lucrative coal trade, but the K&A Canal would be connected by the Somersetshire Coal Canal to the highly productive coalfields around Paulton and Radstock, whereas the D&S Canal would have to build its own branch line to the less productive coalfields of the Mells valley.

The main line was planned to run from the Kennet & Avon Canal, southwards through Frome, Wincanton and Blandford to Poole. An alternative route, through the Piddle valley to Wareham, was also considered. The K&A Canal was planned to follow the contours around Bradford, which would have brought it looping southwards to cross the Trowbridge road near Widbrook Grange, some distance south of its current alignment. The junction with the D&S Canal was intended to be built just west of the road crossing at the site of Widbrook Grange, but there is no sign that any canal work took place in that area. The plans must have been changed at a fairly early date because the K&A Canal never followed this southerly loop; instead, it was built as two straight sections, joining at an angle near Bridge 170 (by the former Beehive pub), even though this meant the extra expense of a raised embankment. It is almost as though the K&A Canal proprietors were determined not to make any concessions to the D&S Canal, even though following the contour would have been the cheaper option.

“It is almost as though the K&A Canal proprietors were determined not to make any concessions to the D&S Canal”



The line of the planned Dorset & Somerset Canal



The branch line of the Dorset & Somerset Canal – an 11-mile stretch from Frome to Nettlebridge

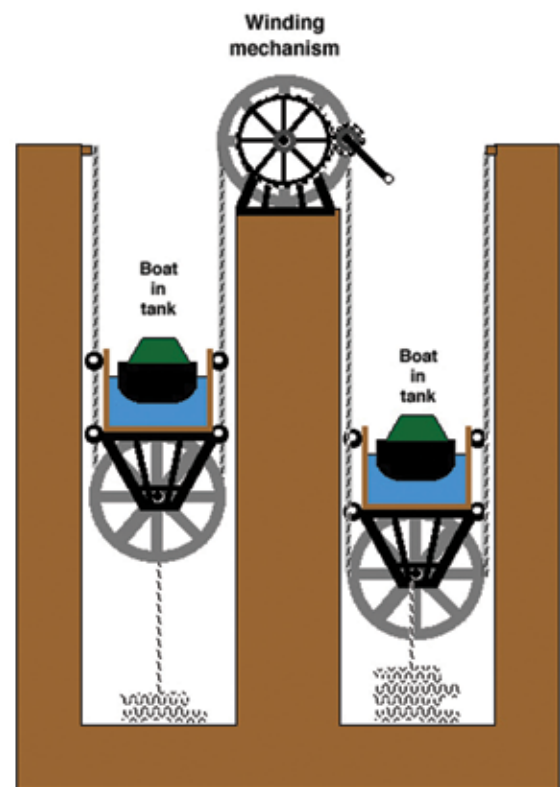
The route for the D&S Canal was authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1796 from Bradford on Avon only as far as Shillingstone, near Blandford, but including the 11-mile branch line from Frome to Nettlebridge. It contained the unusual stipulation that the branch line had to be built first.

The branch line of the D&S Canal was planned to run westwards from Frome up the Mells Valley, through Vobster and Coleford to Nettlebridge (on the Fosseyway, now the A367). There were many collieries along that valley and they were the source of the coal trade that would have generated the canal's main income.

“The collieries it was intended to connect struggled to develop into profitable enterprises and never really attained their full potential until railways eventually gave them the transport links that the canal had failed to provide”

Work commenced on building some 8 miles of this branch but it was never completed. During the construction period the branch line was badly affected by unplanned factors. The costs had been underestimated, insufficient funds raised and inflation (because of the Napoleonic Wars) devalued the company's capital. After unsuccessfully trying to raise more funds in 1803, work was finally abandoned. The collieries it was intended to connect struggled to develop into profitable enterprises and never really attained their full potential until railways eventually gave them the transport links that the canal had failed to provide.

How were so many wealthy people persuaded to put their savings into such a potentially disastrous enterprise? One factor was obviously the 'canal mania' prevalent at the time, but another may have been the grandiose nature of the parts of the canal that were completed. At Coleford a spectacular aqueduct, known locally as 'the Huckyduck', spans a valley. It is still impressive, despite its ruinous state, but when it was new with beautiful facing stone (which has since been recycled locally) it



FUSSELL'S BALANCE LOCK Transverse section

Cross-section of Fussell's trial boat lift

must have been a very persuasive showpiece, signalling that all was going well with the canal. The less lofty, but nevertheless handsome, aqueduct at Murtry was further lavish confirmation that no expense was being spared in the waterway's construction.

The biggest innovation on this branch was a series of boat lifts instead of locks. These were invented by James Fussell and one was built near Mells to test the viability of the design. The involvement of James Fussell (1748-1832), was particularly interesting: he was a shareholder in the canal and an ironmaster who had established an edge-tool works at Mells, not far from the line of the canal. He had a number of patents to his name and one, No. 2284, was worthy of special attention: it was for a "Balance Lock for Raising and Lowering Boats, &c.; applicable to other purposes". This was a two-tank boat lift – the very first



sloshed to one end and capsized them. The large masonry structure containing the tanks was divided into two chambers and let into a hillside where the canal changed level. The site of this Trial Balance Lock has been located and excavated; it must have been an impressive sight but it pushed the technology of the day to its limits.

The other lock chambers of the planned 'staircase' were started but never completed. Their remains are still visible, but on private land.

In 1803 the whole enterprise collapsed financially and the unfinished work was abandoned, in some places quite literally: the stonemasons working on a tunnel under Highbury near Coleford just left their half-finished blocks of stone in the canal bed and walked away. Those blocks were still to be seen lying in the undergrowth until quite recently.

The money wasn't the only thing that ran out – some of the directors of the company were last heard of living in America. Suspicions have been raised whether they ever intended building a working canal or were just using the concept as a way of feathering their own nests. In their favour, it appears that a considerable length of viable canal had actually been constructed and it seems inconceivable that this could only have been used for just one contractor's boat, as was commonly believed. The later flourishing of the coal mines in the Mells Valley is proof that, given a good transport system much earlier, they would have done very well for themselves and for the canal.

Apart from the two spectacular aqueducts, one at Coleford and one at Murtry, what else remains of the D&S Canal? At Spring Gardens, near Frome, there is a massive retaining wall that would have supported the branch line on its approach to the junction with the main line just north of Frome. In Coleford, completely invisible

One of the excavated lock chambers

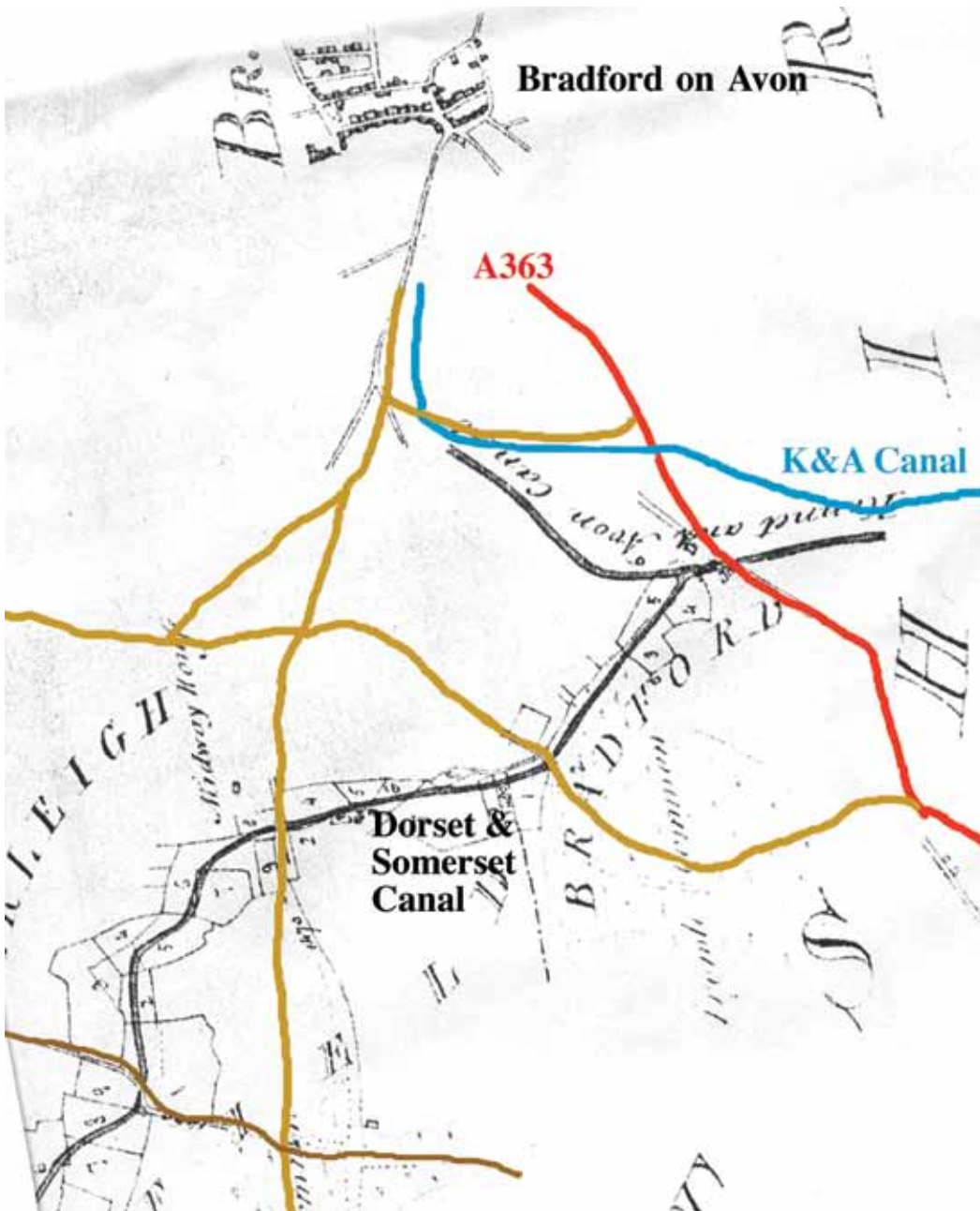
of that kind in the world. The two tanks, which carried the boats, were connected by chains running over large wheels, so that when one went up the other went down.

Fussell was a specialist chain designer and he hit upon the idea of using his newly invented sprocketed chain to synchronise the movement of both ends of the two long tanks of water. The chains ran over toothed wheels fixed to a single shaft, so that they always moved synchronously and the tanks stayed level. Without this invention, the tanks would have been unstable and the water would have



The canal tunnel under Coleford

Photo: Tony Comer



◀ Old map of the proposed canal junction south of Bradford, with modern roads superimposed

under the garden of a cottage, there is a length of canal tunnel that was discovered when the owner decided to investigate the supply of water to his well.

Far more visible in Coleford is a beautiful length of canal formation, sweeping around the hillside from the back of the old chapel in Church Street towards Highbury. Between Coleford and Edford, the public footpath runs alongside the route of the canal, parts of which have survived in water while other parts have been buried under a rubbish tip. At Vobster there is a short section of canal bed in a private garden and a bridge carrying the road over the canal and, of course, the massive remains of Fussells Trial Balance Lock on a private estate near Mellis.

What is there at Bradford? Nothing, nothing at all except a map showing what could have been if Napoleon hadn't devalued our currency; if Poole had developed into the

major port it was planned to be, and if Fussell's Balance Lock had proved to be a reliable and cheap way of lifting boats over obstacles.

But equally, there is nothing to stop you imagining what might have been. Next time you take the roads to Trowbridge or to Wingfield, imagine a busy canal junction at Widbrook Grange or one of those familiar hump-backed bridges over the D&S Canal near Oxstall Farm. Surprise your friends by pointing to the fields and telling them about "The Canal That Never Was".

● For more information about the Dorset & Somerset Canal see:

The Dorset and Somerset Canal by Kenneth R Clew
<http://www.dorandsomcanal.org>

Ropeworks, bandstands and the ties that bind

A question overheard on a wet autumn day in the TIC led to a family reunion and the discovery of a musical tradition, as Geoff Andrews recounts

A sodden stormy Saturday, 23 October 2010 wasn't good for trade in the Tourist Information Centre. Gill Bowden had only volunteered for the day because she was organising Christmas card sales with a stall at one end of the building and wanted to organise the display for the first day they were on sale.

With the centre bereft of customers, by about 3pm she had abandoned the card stall and was chatting to the other volunteer on the information desk.

The door opened and two very wet people blew in. Their question: "Did the TIC know anything about the history of the ropewalk?"

The volunteer on the desk apologised but said that the houses were already there when she moved to the town.

"No, not the houses, the ropewalk that existed before – because my great-grandfather owned it."

Gill, never a one to allow an error of fact to escape easily, interjected that there must be some mistake because *her* great-grandfather, George Hobbs, had owned it, and her grandfather had been employed there.

Both were right and everyone's jaw predictably dropped because this stranger, visiting for the day from Yorkshire, turned out to be a distant cousin.

Their great-grandfather and great-grandmother had been the last operators of the ropewalk in Newtown, in the last quarter of the 19th century. George Hobbs' wife Ruth is listed in a census as a twine maker and both sons – Joseph and George – had jobs there. Probably the advent of machine-made ropes and string robbed the enterprise of its market and both sons found other employment. Joseph went to work at Spencer Moulton and George became a blacksmith, possibly at the rubber factory, which later took him away from the town – and eventually led to the separation of the two branches of the family.

But before that, the brothers had both been recruited



The Hobbs' family home at 19 Coppice Hill

into the Bradford Silver Band, whose members at that time sported smart uniforms – embellished with liberal frogging – and peaked caps. In those late 19th century days the band was an integral part of any event for miles around. Both boys appear to have been cornet players initially, but subsequently Joseph played tuba.

The band seems to have been heavily subsidised by the Moulton family, who probably provided both the instruments and the uniforms. The *Wiltshire Times* ran a story about flooding in the town at about this time, which made reference to the water having damaged the band's instruments and equipment stored in the rubber factory.

Joseph continued in the band until at least the 1930s, by which time, judging from a group photo, they appear to have lost the uniforms. By then, George had long moved away, first to the West Midlands and eventually to East Yorkshire.



◀ Pictured from left, George Hobbs Sr wearing his Foresters' sash; Ruth Hobbs, née Hayter; George Jr – photograph taken after he left Bradford



◀ Band of brothers: Joseph Hobbs, far left, and George Hobbs Jr in the elaborately braided and frogged uniforms of the Bradford Silver Band

The interest in the band reflected a taste for music-making in the family that later led to George senior and Joseph building a pipe organ from scratch in the family home at 19 Coppice Hill. George died at 76, at his home near the ropeyard at 54 Newtown, in 1906. Ruth predeceased him by some years: she had died of bronchitis on New Year's eve 1891 at 14 Newtown.

Both father and son had taught themselves to play the home-built pipe organ and it was used for family singalongs. It was dismantled and sold to the Trowbridge Freemasons in about 1950 and may still be in existence.

The two wings of the family had lost touch with each other over distance and generations, and the strangeness of that coincidence reuniting them was compounded by several factors:

- Gill wasn't meant to be in the TIC that day;
- if the weather had been kinder she would have had customers and probably wouldn't have heard the question;
- and Katy Duggan only went to the TIC as a last resort in her quest for information, and only really to get a recommendation of somewhere to eat, because she had drawn a blank at Bradford on Avon Museum.

After the initial shock of the discovery the newly discovered relations swapped lots of information there and then, and subsequently developed an email relationship in which they exchanged further historic background and crucially photographs, some of which are reproduced here, and are destined eventually to augment the museum's archive of local people and industry.

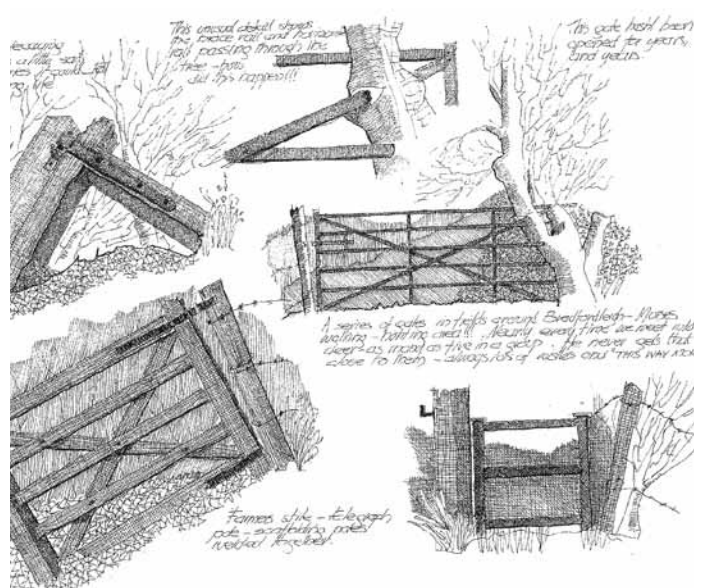
Walking the wheel for memory's sake

Adrian Dark's daughter Emily has been in touch again to update us on the progress of her fundraising walk. Adrian – well known in Bradford as an architectural draughtsman and artist, as well as a skilled painter and decorator – has suffered from Alzheimer's disease for some time and is now living in a residential care home. Emily and her son Reuben decided to raise money in aid of the Alzheimer's Society by completing the Bradford on Avon Walking Wheel.

Emily says: "We completed the outer circle of the 'Walking Wheel' on 2 April – we did it in four separate walks. We have continued to walk, completing the inner circle on 4 April. We are now doing all the interlinking spokes, three more to do and five already completed.

"The fundraising has been a great success, with a total of £670 on our Justgiving page and a further £443 in cash donations. Myself and Reubs wanted to say a massive thank you to the Preservation Trust members for their generous support. Dad would be so honoured and proud."

If you would like to support the fundraising effort, please get in touch with Emily on 01225 309359 or email emilymccumiskey@hotmail.co.uk



A page of drawings from one of Adrian Dark's sketchbooks, reproduced in the book *An Eye for Detail*, published in 2015 by Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust in association with Ex Libris Books

‘Green thought in a green shade’



Bluebells at Kingston Wood

Roger Jones made the most of the springtime lockdown earlier this year by finding out more about Bradford’s many and various environmentally friendly initiatives and weaving his discoveries into a new walking route

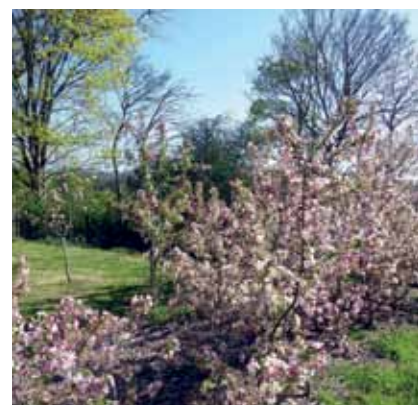
During what became known as ‘First Lockdown’ in April/May 2020 I walked from town to all nine villages in the Bradford Hundred. I wrote it up, with lots of photographs taken in those endlessly sunny weeks, as a hand-bound 66 page booklet and in an article in the summer 2020 issue of *Guardian Angel*.

I needed another project to walk away the further lockdown in the first three months of 2021. Two ideas occurred, one of which was a walk around Bradford to visit the many initiatives taken over the past decade in an attempt to combat climate change and the threat to biodiversity. When I began to list everything that had been achieved I was rather amazed. Such initiatives originated with Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon,

founded in 2006, the Preservation Trust and our progressive Town Council.

Another incentive was that the local Oxfam group has been short of funds – its largest single project is the Oxfam Quiz which takes place in November and regularly raises upwards of £1,000. Like much else, last year’s event was cancelled. In addition to a booklet on Trowbridge (see below) all the profits from the sale of my Walk pamphlet will be donated to Oxfam to try to plug the gap in funds. I am aiming to raise £1,000 through sales of both publications.

A walking route I had begun to favour was to head up Holt Road and turn into Benjamin Street. Next through



The ‘nature bench’ at Kingston Farm, new hedging near Woolley Street and crabapple blossom in Benjamin Street



Going wild in Holy Trinity churchyard, and with a vivid floral display at the top of St Margaret's Steps

the Kingston Farm development with its wide view across the Avon and on towards the Westbury White Horse. Bordering Cemetery Lane are fields which have been planted, furnished with footpaths and made accessible to the public.

There are undoubtedly lots of interesting and inspiring sites (and sights) to be visited in the course of an extended ramble, and never very far from the centre of town.

An early discovery was the intricately inscribed bench in the open area at the start of Kingston Farm, its seat engraved with a wealth of information about local wildlife. In Sladesbrook Park is a recently planted hedge beside the allotments and one of three water fountains which have been installed for public use. At Frankleigh there has been extensive tree planting; Ashley Road residents have erected nesting boxes to encourage migrating swifts. Holy Trinity churchyard has wilded a patch of land near the entrance.

Our river Avon encourages much wildlife and was famously the home of nesting swans earlier this year with the much anticipated hatching of a number of fluffy cygnets.

Major environmental projects have included the placing of solar panels on the roofs of St Margaret's Hall and all three of our schools and, of course, the water turbine on the mill leat.

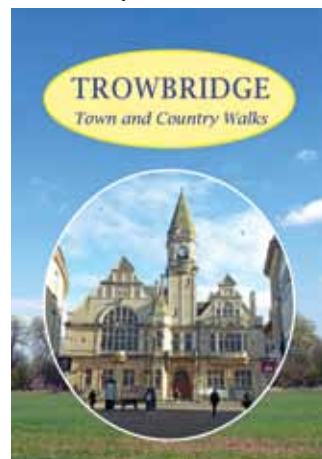
These are just some of the environmental and natural highlights of our town which is becoming slowly but surely more sustainable. Will electric vehicle charging points be next?

My walk, in total, is just over five miles in length. It begins at the town bridge and heads up river, through Kingston Farm, across Woolley Street, through Sladesbrook Park, along Leigh Park Road, across Bath

Road to Frankleigh. The route then continues across Ashley Road, along Huntingdon Street and downhill to the river via Holy Trinity churchyard.

An alternative mile or so takes you along the river to the Tithe Barn, back via Hens' Orchard, across Frome Road and beside Fitzmaurice School – a Forest School – and up Regents Place to The Strips area of woodland on the north-facing slope above the river.

Trowbridge, as we all know, is Wiltshire's county town though I have, very occasionally, heard it mentioned disparagingly by Bradfordians. It cannot be said that the landscape in and surrounding Trowbridge compares with Bradford's hills and riverside but it has an interesting history, reflected in its past industries and architecture. Indeed, it is often pointed out, particularly by Trowbridgeans, that the town has more listed buildings than Bradford itself!



The town also boasts a spacious and attractive town park, which itself leads on to the wonderful Biss Meadows Country Park.

I suggested to one of my authors, who lives in Trowbridge, that he might write a book of local walks. "Impossible!" was his instant response. Thus it seemed to me a challenge to compile one myself. The resulting 28-page booklet describes seven walks, ranging in length from one to six miles.

**Environmental & nature walk around Bradford on Avon £2.50; Trowbridge Town and Country Walks £4.50
Copies available from Ex Libris or from Roger Jones, on alternate Fridays, at the Artisans Market in Lamb Yard.**

Book reviews

David and Angela Moss find much to enjoy in the new Wiltshire ‘Pevsner’ and the latest addition to Ivor and Pam Slocombe’s series on Bradford through the centuries

WILTSHIRE

By Julian Orbach, Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry

Nikolaus Pevsner’s original book on Wiltshire in the Buildings of England series was first published in 1963 and David bought his copy in 1969. It was then an invaluable guide to virtually all the major and many of the minor buildings in the county. It, like its companion volumes, became a bit scruffy from being carried around in pockets. But, despite an update by Bridget Cherry in 1975, the original version became out of date: no new buildings, no new research. And its limitations in coverage became more obvious as so many buildings one wanted to know about were simply not covered. Ever since Penguin and then the Yale University Press began the huge (and presumably the hugely expensive) task of revising and expanding the entire series we have been waiting for this one.

We have not been disappointed: Julian Orbach’s new version is a triumph of cramming as much relevant information as practical into the space allotted to him while expressing himself with lucid and sometimes witty elegance. He has checked his facts carefully with local bodies such as the Preservation Trust, local experts such as Pam and Ivor Slocombe and with the occupiers of many of the thousands of buildings he comments on – although of course in a book like this some proofreading mistakes are virtually unavoidable. Pevsner himself made some howlers: we remember being puzzled by his comments on a church (not in Wiltshire) which bore little resemblance to what we stood in until we realised that he had misread his notes and inverted north and south. In fact we have only two, completely incompatible, criticisms of this book: one is that at 900 pages it is nothing like comprehensive enough and the other that it is not small or light enough to fit comfortably in a pocket.

The book follows the pattern of all the ‘Pevsners’ of an Introduction, including geology and prehistoric and Roman remains, followed by a much longer gazetteer. It is not the sort of book one reads from cover to cover but it is a good (and readable) history of architecture and building in Wiltshire plus a guide to all the buildings of note, which you can read before setting out on an expedition (the length of an article is a good indication of where to go), take with you to follow the ‘perambulations’ or simply indulge in covetous dreaming, helped by the illustrations and starting with the cover: like Pevsner, Julian has a photo of Stonehenge; unlike Pevsner’s, Julian’s is excellent, as are his other 118 colour photos.

When Pevsner got the vibe right Julian repeats it, for instance in the first sentence of the entry on Bradford:

“The excitement of Bradford is its position, with the



“Julian Orbach’s new version is a triumph of cramming as much relevant information as practical into the space allotted to him while expressing himself with lucid and sometimes witty elegance”

hills rising steeply to the N, houses appearing on top of houses and steps connecting the streets.”

But after that they diverge, the original going straight to the early 18th century and the importance of the cloth trade to the architecture.

Julian gives a short but much more informative paragraph of the history of the town and how it affected building styles. And where Pevsner can be quite rude about buildings, such as 33 Silver St: “The Co-op shop has ruined a monumental Early Georgian front”, Julian is more tactful referring to the building’s “missing ground floor”.

Or compare the two on Priory Barn. The original accepts that it is a small barn. Julian says it is a gatehouse and possible warehouse. Who knew?

The new edition retains Pevsner’s view of Wiltshire as a whole:

“[apart from Swindon] Wiltshire is a county of small towns, twenty-one in all; that is architecturally more characteristic of it than anything else.”

But it adds a comment on subsequent change:

“The most notable changes between 1975 and 2020 have been the slide of public and commercial buildings such as town halls, chapels, banks and shops into different use, not always to the benefit of the building, and the converse return of country houses from use as offices, schools, hospitals or care homes to private domestic use, generally to the benefit of the building.”

The new book is something that all interested in the county’s buildings will find invaluable and will want to refer to frequently. Although not cheap, it is likely to be

a worthwhile investment – and we can imagine that the county’s libraries will be inundated with requests for the volume on loan.

Angela and David Moss

Wiltshire in “The Buildings of England” series is published by Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0-300-25120-3. Price £45, it can be obtained from Ex Libris and other bookshops. We understand that a special offer price of £35 will be available until the end of September; if you order via the Yale website (www.yalebooks.co.uk), enter code Y2181 when prompted at checkout to apply the discount.

BRADFORD-on-AVON, 1500-1700

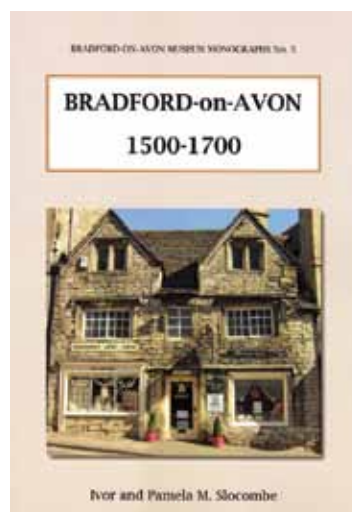
By Ivor and Pamela M Slocombe

If you have read Pam and Ivor’s *Bradford-on-Avon: the Medieval Town* you will be eager to follow the story in their new book which covers the 16th and 17th centuries. They describe this a “period of considerable growth and change leading to what was probably Bradford’s greatest period of wealth, the 18th century”.

We start with a section on ‘Ownership’, which is hardly surprising as the Reformation suppressed Shaftesbury Abbey, which had owned the manor of Bradford since 1101. Barton Farm and its lands were leased by Henry VIII to William Webb, while the remainder of the manor (apart from Bradford Wood) was leased to Sir Edward Bellingham. Expiry of leases and deaths without issue soon led to others being involved and the story becomes more complicated than it had been for the previous 400 years. There were also the two sub-manors (the Rogers Manor and the Hall Manor) which had emerged towards the end of the Middle Ages and the Prebend Manor described in Angela Moss’s article on page 5. There was also a smaller freehold estate centred on Leigh House (now Leigh Park Hotel) and several of the burghage plots were held freehold. The others were held by copyhold, a very common form of tenure at this period. If this all sounds complicated, it becomes more so when you realise that a significant number of men held property under a variety of tenures and that many of the properties were sublet to sub-tenants.

Bradford was not incorporated as a borough and so it did not have a borough council, but it had courts to deal with law and order and with commercial matters, as well as manorial courts for each of the manors, dealing mostly with property matters. But it still managed to be a flourishing commercial and market centre.

The book then examines the town’s many 16th and 17th century buildings, illustrated with lots of colour photos, before moving on to religious matters, noting the rise of non-conformity in the second half of the 17th century – meeting places for Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers were registered. Arrangements for providing for the poor were complicated: Bradford was expanding rapidly and needed to attract workers from elsewhere while at the same time the parish, like others, was reluctant to take on liability for people who might in future become



“... we should be grateful for – and hasten to enjoy - this absorbing book on the 16th and 17th centuries”

poor. This led to development of a practice by which a worker moving from one parish to another would need to bring with him a certificate from his own parish saying that they would be responsible for him if, at any time, he became chargeable on the parish to which he had moved.

Sickness was also a problem, with the plague endemic across the country for much of the 17th century, first mentioned in Bradford in 1609 and then again in the 1640s. The method of dealing with an outbreak was to shut off an affected town or village to stop the disease spreading. This was economically disastrous for the place concerned so the practice developed of raising a levy on all communities within a five-mile radius (formalised in legislation in 1665-66). This was a problem for Bradford because it is close to the county boundary, so the five-mile radius gave a much smaller area than for most other towns. This was remedied by an agreement to extend the levy to the whole of the Chippenham, Melksham and Whorwellsdown (which was south of Bradford and Melksham and northeast of Westbury). There is something to be said for dealing with these things nationally.

Pam and Ivor go on to consider the effects of the Civil War in Bradford and the development of the cloth industry, as well as the impact of other trades and industries, all with the same fascinating detail. And they finish with the observation that it was only in the very last decade of the 17th century that “Bradford really began to develop the sharp increase in population, ... growth of the cloth industry and ... building of new houses. This was the prelude to the 18th century – the heyday of Bradford and its wealth”. This suggests to me that they plan to follow up this book with one on Bradford in the 18th century, which is something to look forward to. For the moment, we should be grateful for – and hasten to enjoy - this absorbing book on the 16th and 17th centuries.

David Moss

Bradford-on-Avon 1500-1700, Bradford-on-Avon Museum Monographs no 5, is published by Ex Libris Press in association with Bradford on Avon Museum, ISBN 978-1-912020-80-5. Price £7.50, it can be obtained from the Museum, Ex Libris bookshop in The Shambles and from other bookshops.

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