



GUARDIAN ANGEL

NEWS FROM BRADFORD ON AVON PRESERVATION TRUST

Notes from the Chair

Like everyone reading this I think Bradford on Avon is a lovely town and a brilliant place to live. Everywhere has its problems: for many people living here, it's traffic. But it seems to me that whatever happens, the numbers of vehicles crossing the Town Bridge will be the same. If we were a small Italian town there would be cars parked on pavements, loud scooters ridden by youth would be noisily weaving in and out of both pedestrians and traffic. There would be tables and chairs all over the place and flurries of waiters with trays of drinks and food and nobody would see it as a problem.

Similarly, I don't get too bothered about car parks – or the perceived lack of them. We are a small town and many of the parked vehicles are ours – lots of us could just walk. And if we all paid a couple of quid a week there could be a frequent, free, electric bus service on a decent route – something the Town Council is looking at supporting, if there is sufficient interest. Personally, I would love to see the Library car park become a winter ice rink and perhaps an occasional seaside in summer.

I do care very much about the hideous war in Ukraine. None of us can do anything about it but there are now more than 130 Ukrainians staying with host families in Bradford. Please read the piece on page 13 by Caroline Kay, former chair of Bath Preservation Trust. She and her husband, Jim Heffer, have a family staying with them and

are part of the group looking after everyone

Some sad news, I'm afraid: we have lost three much-valued members of the Trust over the past few months. Christian Penny, born and bred Bradfordian and driving force behind the rebuilding of the West Barn, died at the end of September. The following month, Janet Repton, artist, town councillor, mayor and life member of the Trust, passed away at the grand age of 92. At her funeral there were no fewer than four mayors – one current and three former. Donations in Janet's memory were collected in aid of the Trust and in her will she left us a collection of books and paintings. And then, in January, we were so sorry to learn of the death of Jo Parkes, who, with her husband David, has been responsible for several years for the distribution of *Guardian Angel*.

On a much lighter note, my chum Ralph Oswick, former artistic director and star performer of The Natural Theatre Company, former Bradford resident and life member of the Trust, has written his first piece for *Guardian Angel* – it appears on page 16. He has an endless supply of stories from near and far, so we look forward to his future contributions. And with that thought, I hope it's not too late to wish everyone all the very best for 2023.

John Potter

Chair, Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust

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The sober truth about temperance

A distant family connection prompted Ivor Slocombe to look at the history of the temperance movement in 19th century Bradford on Avon

I was somewhat surprised to find that, when the White Hart Temperance Hotel closed in 1908, the tenant was a Mr W Slocombe – almost certainly a very distant relative. This prompted me to have a wider look at the temperance movement in Bradford on Avon in the 19th century.

Drunkenness was rife at that time and one response was to form societies which were actively opposed to the consumption of all alcoholic liquors. This was greatly influenced by what was happening in America and some of the societies first started there, such as the Independent Order of Good Templars (IOGT.). Others included the Independent Order of Rechabites, while the Band of Hope was specifically designed for children. The movement was particularly sponsored by the nonconformist churches but there was also the Church of England Temperance Society. The movement spread rapidly in towns across the country, including Bradford.

The first reference I have found for Bradford is a report in the *Wiltshire Independent* for 21 March 1838. A meeting of the Society for Abstinence from all Intoxicating Liquors was held in the British Schoolroom. It commented that the cause was going on in the town although the progress was slow. Then, in March 1839, much greater progress was reported with a newly formed society that had nearly 200 members. This was linked to the celebration of the opening of the 'Bradford Temperance Hotel' with a tea meeting in the Wesleyan Association Chapel. This seems to have been an institution serving non-alcoholic refreshments rather than a hotel as such.

The normal activity was to hold a meeting with a series of 'sermons' on the evils of drink. Some of these were held in public spaces such as the Market Square. In July 1882, for instance, there was a special mission based in the Town Hall and planned to last for 15 days. On Sunday morning a special united prayer meeting was held in the Zion Chapel schoolroom. Later in the day there was a service in the chapel and, in the evening, a temperance sermon was preached in the parish church with the consent of Canon Jones. In July 1868, between 50 and 60 young members of the Band of Hope met with the Bradford Temperance Society in Mr Everett's room. After several addresses the children dispersed and the others assembled in the Market Yard to hear a lecture on 'Strong drink at war with Health, Wealth and Prosperity of the people'.

The organisers of the movement recognised that it was also important to introduce some forms of entertainment and display in order to attract members. At Christmas 1866 there was a Temperance demonstration in the town. There was a display of banners and flags and a procession by the Band of Hope and Temperance Societies through



Sladesbrook Primitive Methodist Chapel became a Temperance Hall towards the end of the 19th century

the streets led by a fife and drum band. There was also a Bradford amateur Brass Band which played at local functions. In October 1874 members of the Bradford temperance societies put on a concert at Hilperton with readings, recitations and melodies 'of a superior order'.

The biggest occasion was a massive outing by train to Bournemouth on August bank holiday Monday 1884, organised by the senior and junior temples of the IOGT. This seems to have been a deliberate alternative to the Bradford Leigh Fair, which the temperance movement considered to be a place of drunkenness and bad behaviour. A total 937 tickets were sold, 736 adults and 202 children, with about 300 coming from Trowbridge. This necessitated the train being split in two with 29 coaches in all. The day started at 5.30am, with the band playing in the Market Place and around the streets to 'arouse the sleepers'. The first train left at about 6.30am, closely followed by the second – with each engine decorated with wreaths. At Salisbury the GWR engines were replaced by locomotives from the London and South Western Railway (LSWR.) The journey continued through Downton, the New Forest and Poole, and on to Bournemouth. From there some went to the Isle of Wight, some to Swanage and others to Poole. The band, which had gone with them, struck up and marched through the town followed by a concert on the pier.

The physical presence of the temperance movement in Bradford was marked by two buildings. Some time between 1885 and 1890 the old Primitive Methodist chapel in Sladesbrook was closed and became a Temperance Hall. It still stands now as a private house.

The most important building, however, was the White Hart Temperance Tavern and Hotel in Silver Street. The old public house was purchased in 1879 by Mr Thring, perhaps with the support of a consortium of businessmen. The old building was pulled down and a new one, designed by C Adye and built by F Long, was erected in its place.

This was described as a handsome building of freestone from the Winsley quarries. Inside the front entrance was a lobby, with a bar window at which customers could be served. It was well lit with an eight-light gas pendant. The floor was covered with floorcloth. On the right were a coffee room fitted with tables and benches, and a bagatelle room. On the left a passage led to the kitchen, which was fitted with one of Flavell and Co's patent kitchen ranges. Adjacent was the bar. On the first floor were three bedrooms for short-term lodgings and a manager's sleeping room. Another spacious room was intended as a reading room and was planned to have a supply of leading newspapers. There would be a fee of 1s 6d a quarter for the use of this room. The building was fitted throughout with Zidmer's patent automatic bells. The total cost was over £1,000.

The hotel was leased to the Bradford branch of the



White Hart Temperance Tavern and Hotel

Church of England Temperance Society for five years at a moderate rate, which had been guaranteed by a number of gentlemen. The committee responsible for managing the hotel was chaired by Canon Jones with the Rev Meredith as treasurer. The hotel was eventually closed in 1908 and sold to Messrs Knees for a hardware store. The building was demolished in 1967 to make road improvements.

The temperance movement in Bradford seems to have died away towards the end of the 19th century. The Temperance Drum and Fife Band still existed in 1903, when it played at the Calne Band of Hope fête, and in 1904 the Temperance Hall held a bazaar to try to pay off its outstanding debt of £50. But nothing is reported in the press after that date.

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Poverty and protest: the dark side of the industry that enriched Bradford

Rosie MacGregor discusses the events and themes that inspired her latest book: *Remnants and Yarns* – Poverty and protest in the woollen industry in Bradford on Avon

The inspiration for *Remnants and Yarns* came from a talk about Thomas Helliker given by Adrian Randall, Emeritus Professor, Birmingham University History Department. Dr Randall grew up in Bratton and attended school in Trowbridge, where he first heard the tragic story. It became his starting point for a career in history.

Thomas Helliker, for those who don't know, was born in 1783 to a family of cloth workers in Trowbridge. It was the custom in such families to share the same trade and Thomas, the second youngest of eight sons born to Thomas and Elizabeth Helliker, was apprenticed to clothier Thomas Naish as a shearmen at the age of 14. Shearmen didn't shear the sheep, as the name might imply, but dressed the finished cloth to produce a fine, even sheen – the most skilled of all wool trades.

Naish's workshops were in the run-down Conigre, an area of tightly packed industrial buildings and poor quality and poorly maintained terraced housing – of which little remains today apart from the fine buildings of the former Conigre Parsonage and Westcroft House. This part of Trowbridge was largely demolished in slum clearances. Unlike Bradford on Avon, the county town did not have a Preservation Trust to fight the wholesale demolition of some of its historic buildings.

Thomas was hanged on his 19th birthday – 22 March 1803 – at Fisherton Gaol in Salisbury, for allegedly burning down Littleton Mill at Semington. Unlikely to have been guilty, he nevertheless steadfastly refused to name those who set fire to the mill. His body lies in the churchyard of St James, Trowbridge.

This was a period of great industrial unrest over the introduction of machinery – in this instance the shearing frame, which could do the work of 10 skilled shearmen.

After hearing the talk I thought there must be similar stories of unrest in Bradford on Avon, other than the only one of which I was aware, the riot at Westbury House in 1791. This occurred when some 500 angry workers assembled at the home of wealthy clothier Joseph Phelps and were fired on, killing three people, including a child. The so-called 'mob' then burnt the hated scribbling frame on the town bridge. The coroner's verdict after this incident was to award Phelps £250 and record the deaths as 'justifiable homicide'.

I had just retired and began to research whether there had been other incidents of disputes, clashes, violence and death in our town. It took years of reading relevant books, visiting libraries and museums, and making copious notes. I filed these and set them to one side, half forgotten.

Then along came Covid and lockdown – at which point I decided to look at the notes and assemble them into book



Rosie at the West Barn launch of *Remnants and Yarns*

form. It proved to be a harder task than first imagined but finally, thanks to advice from numerous sources, it was ready for publication.

I discovered that the production of woollen cloth – from the shearing of the sheep to the finished product – was highly labour intensive. There was an unlimited source of water and labour to produce the finest broadcloth in Bradford on Avon, but reliance was placed on a workforce paid poverty wages while the clothiers grew rich on the profits. The Bradford on Avon we know has become a desirable place to live and work, but it wasn't always the case.

It was not uncommon for angry disputes to arise between the cloth workers for whom life was a constant struggle and the clothiers who employed them. Matters came to a head when machinery was introduced, along with the realisation that one machine could carry out the work of 10 or more labouring men and women. In the book, I expose the gaps between those who produced the cloth, who lived impoverished lives, and those who gained wealth and power as a result.

I dedicated *Remnants and Yarns* to my history teacher, Godfrey Curry, at the former Ernest Bailey Grammar School in Matlock, Derbyshire. He made history accessible with an unerring energy and enthusiasm, which inspired my life-long love of history and the historic environment. His teaching of the A-level syllabus, including British political history 1815 - 1914, was so vivid and memorable that even after half a century it served me well in the background to compiling the account.

Matlock, where I grew up, was surrounded then by working wool and cotton mills as well as the ruins of Cromford Mills, widely acknowledged as one of the birthplaces of the Industrial Revolution, the source of the factory system and home to Sir Richard Arkwright, inventor of the mechanised spinning frame. The mill complex built in 1771 is now a UNESCO World

Heritage site and was the world's first successful water powered spinning mill.

The book also reveals the scant regard paid by employers to the wages and conditions of their employees. The first documented riot in Bradford on Avon did not take place until November 1726, in a dispute over increased work for reduced pay. There were at least two further major riots in Bradford on Avon in the 18th century, the first in 1787 over weavers' wages. It seems almost inconceivable that the clothiers promised not to erect further, even larger, loom shops – provided that the weavers would accept a reduction in rates of pay. The introduction of machinery at Staverton Mill resulted in a prolonged campaign of harassment against Jones, a wealthy clothier and quarry owner from Bradford on Avon who was shot and suffered a facial injury in 1808 as he rode home from Staverton to Bradford.

Although the early clothiers flourished and made huge profits, this was not the case in later years. There had

been greater resistance to the introduction of machinery in the west country in comparison to Yorkshire. By the mid-19th century Bradford in West Yorkshire was known as the 'wool capital of the world', with more than 300 textile mills in operation, while Bradford on Avon and the woollen towns of West Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire were in decline.

This decline was not helped by the failure of the Hobhouse, Phillott & Lowder Bank, which occupied prestigious offices in Church Street. The failure had far reaching effects, with clothiers going bankrupt and many workers left destitute. There was a brief revival of the industry in the middle of the 19th century: Abbey Mill was the last wool mill to be built, in 1875, but production of cloth ceased in 1902. Greenland Upper Mill, which closed in 1906, was the last factory to manufacture woollen cloth.

● *Roger Jones's review of Poverty and Protest appears on page 17*



Hobhouse, Phillott & Lowder Bank's former premises in Church Street. The bank's failure sounded the death knell for Bradford's cloth industry

Town's secret gardens prepare to open this summer

After a three-year break forced by the Covid pandemic and its immediate aftermath, Bradford's secret gardeners are planning to open their gates to visitors once again this summer.

Gardens large and small are set to open on the last Sundays in May and June – 28 May (late spring bank holiday weekend) and 25 June – from 2-6pm. Organisers Alison Miller and Joceline Bury are keen to recruit more garden owners, whether they are Secret Gardens veterans or new participants. Joceline said: "We're delighted that

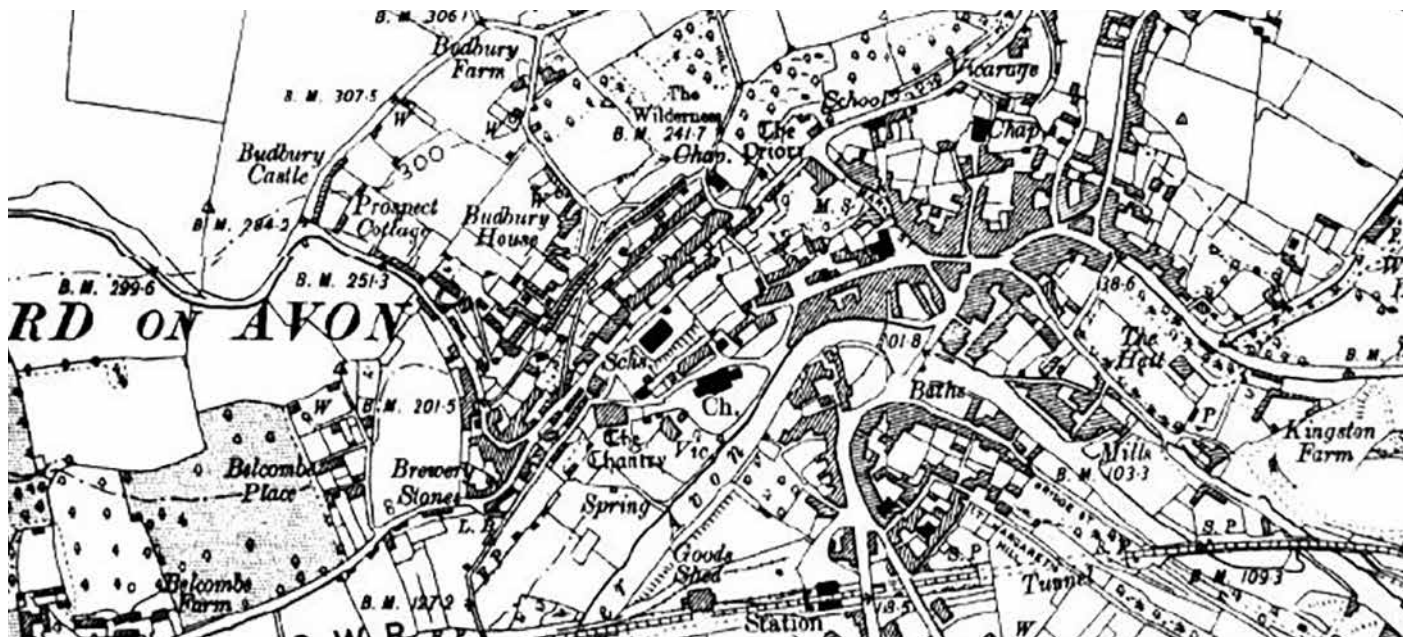
Bradford's Secret Gardens will be on show again this summer, after such a long break. We're encouraging people from all over town to take part, however large or small their garden – as long as they are 'secret', that is, not easily visible from the street."

The event raises funds for local good causes, including the Preservation Trust.

● *If you are interested in taking part, please contact jocelinebury@mac.com or alisonandjohnmiller@gmail.com*

Water wars: a long and murky tale

Two reverend gentlemen, disputes about sewerage and an outbreak of typhoid: Anne Willis unravels the tangled history of Bradford's public water supply



The Bradford on Avon map of 1900 shows the area around Church Street affected by the 1877 typhoid outbreak, including the Vicarage, The Chantry, the National School and Abbey House

In the summer of 1877 Canon Jones, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, and his two younger daughters, Agnes and Bertha, contracted typhoid. A severe contagious disease, typhoid is caused by the intestinal pathogenic bacterium *Salmonella typhi*, which is carried by sewage-contaminated water. Symptoms include a high fever, headache, a cough, extreme fatigue, abdominal pain and constipation followed by diarrhoea ¹.

All three recovered but the Canon and one of his daughters, probably Agnes, suffered from the after-effects for the rest of their lives. The cause was the contamination of the Vicarage water supply by sewage. There was no clean piped water in Bradford on Avon and the only provision for the town's sewage was a very old drainage system in the centre of the town, the remaining area relying on cesspits or open ditches.

The problem was very long-standing. In September 1871 a letter in the *Trowbridge Advertiser* had drawn attention to the appalling sanitary state of the town, particularly with a view to the 'Asiatic Cholera' which was comparable to bubonic plague in its devastation.

Bradford had avoided an outbreak of cholera in late 1831 by setting up a local Board of Health which divided the town into six districts. Each was supervised by a committee of four who visited homes to enforce personal cleanliness, ensure the ventilation and whitewashing ² of homes, and the clearance of cesspools and middens. But after the Thanksgiving Service for Deliverance from Cholera in January 1832 the committees were disbanded. The Town Commissioners, set up in 1839,

were responsible for draining the town and enforcing sanitary regulations. In 1872 they became a sanitary authority under the powers of the 1872 Public Health Act with powers to provide public health services and appoint Medical Officers of Health. The duties of the health authorities were not specified and most health boards were unwilling to spend the required money on radical reforms, such as an adequate sewerage system and a cleaned, piped water supply. In October 1872 Mr Estridge, the engineer of Trowbridge Local Board, was appointed engineer to the Bradford board and invited to draw up a drainage scheme for the town and to prepare a plan. The sewer was to serve Bearfield, Tory and Middle Rank, Newtown, Wine Street, Huntingdon Street and Christ Church Road plus a part of Trowbridge Road. The sewage was to be discharged into the river near Barton Orchard ³.

Some work on sewers had been authorised earlier, including Sladesbrook, Morgans Hill and the Ladywell area. The latter was at the behest of the Rev JC Thring ⁴, who lived at The Chantry and, according to the *Trowbridge Chronicle*, had a deep interest in the welfare of Bradford ⁵. In August 1872 he had persuaded the board to put down a properly constructed sewer drain at the back of The Chantry, presumably Barton Orchard ⁶, but it was later decided to include this with the other works. The Local Government Board confirmed that a rate exceeding 2/6d [12½p] in the £ was permissible under the 1872 PHA for Sanitary purposes, and that proper measures for sewage ventilation and purification before it enters the river must be taken.

After his 1877 attack of typhoid Canon Jones campaigned for a safe, piped water supply for the town. The 1875 Public Health Act ⁷ had consolidated all previous public health legislation and local authorities were now obliged to provide an adequate water supply, drainage and sewage disposal.

In August 1877 the Town Commissioners held an inquiry into the outbreak of typhoid earlier that year. Ironically, the installation of the sewer system was considered by Dr Thorne from the Local Government Board ⁸ to have contributed to the outbreak. North Bradford is built on porous oolitic limestone which must have been saturated with polluted water from privies. The inevitable soil and rock excavations necessary to install the sewer would have disturbed the water table and contaminated water supplies. One attempt above The Chantry to replace privies with pan closets connected to the sewer *had to be abandoned because of the large amount of spring water ... flowing through the privy pit and disappearing into the rock* ⁹. Around 2001 a builder working on a house on Wine Street that had been condemned as unfit for human habitation told the author that he had no idea where the sewage went ¹⁰. (It is now a pleasant home and presumably the sewer problem was solved.)

The 1877 outbreak of typhoid included some severe cases and there were several deaths ¹¹. The affected area was Church Street including the Vicarage, The Chantry, the

National School and Abbey House, all of which took their water supply from Ladywell. (The occupants of the other houses probably collected their water from the public well adjacent to The Chantry or the tap adjacent to the school.) Not only were Jones and his daughters (one of whom nearly died) affected but there were also 10 cases in the Thring household in The Chantry next door to the Vicarage and one at Abbey House, while 20 of the schoolchildren, plus the mistress, assistant mistress and student teacher, contracted the disease.

The Chantry was supplied from a small reservoir above which spring water could be seen oozing from the ground and mixing with stable and privy drainage before sinking into the ground again. The water supply for the Vicarage, Abbey House and a tap near the school came from the old fish tank or bath situated beneath the priests' room in the Chantry. It was supplied by springs from Ladywell, and Dr Thorne had established that this supply was *polluted by means of the soakage of an old stone sewer ... which received the contents of two of The Chantry's water closets which had been recently diverted into it* ¹².

The practical results were that Jones had to *send out for drinking water ... the poor were deprived of their public supply* and the tap near the school was shut off. In June 1878 Jones was refused permission to reopen this school tap *as the water was impure 18 months ago* and the tap was still closed three years later. The Thring family were

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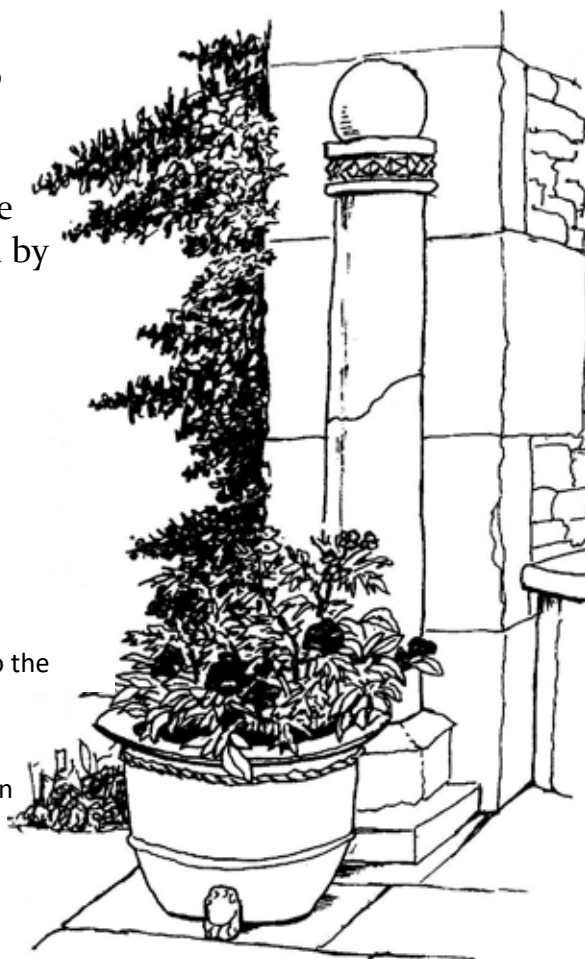
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permitted to collect water from the spring owned by Well Close House ¹³, and were still doing so in 1884.

Dr Thorne also commented very unfavourably on the town's water supply; the scarcity of water in some areas; the polluted springs; the difficulties arising from having to carry buckets of water up steep hills. Carrying water has always been a woman's task, and still is in many parts of the world. One woman told Dr Thorne *that the difficulty of carrying a scant supply up the steep incline to her house was such that one bucketful had to serve the purposes of her household for several days*. Many people complained that cleanliness was almost impossible under such circumstances.

Bertram Niblett ¹⁴ describes how his grandmother, who was a servant on Tory, had the daily task of carrying water for the household up the hill from Pippett's pump in Market Street. In the 1820s John Britton described how households in Chippenham paid 6d a barrel for water from the Avon to use for washing, it being considerably softer than the water from most of the town wells ¹⁵. Whether Bradford households did the same is not known, but the women from the Almshouses in Frome Road used the Avon for washing themselves and their clothes¹⁶.

Bertram Niblett describes how his grandmother, who was a servant on Tory, had the daily task of carrying water for the household up the hill from Pippett's pump in Market Street

The Commissioners' response to Dr Thorne's report was rapid and a public meeting on 21 August 1877 resolved that the Town Commissioners summon an engineer to examine the whole question of a water supply.

At first the Commissioners favoured the Trowbridge Water Company (which had originated in Cambridge and had supplied Trowbridge with piped water in 1874), to supply water to Bradford via an Act of Parliament. This was unpopular to say the least and on 12 January 12 1878 there was a stormy meeting concerning this proposal. Jones was there and successfully proposed a resolution that the ratepayers present objected to the bill. The Trowbridge Water Company spoke at a second meeting on 2 February, but Jones urged people to think before they acted. Bradford would be beholden to a *foreign company* and they potentially had their own good water supply. The Town Commissioners were anxious to avoid litigation and a town poll favoured local water works, as opposed to the Trowbridge Company, by 647 votes to 75. By 9 March the Commissioners had passed a formal resolution to oppose the Bill involving the Trowbridge water company.

Jones attended the House of Lords when Trowbridge

Water Company's bill was being debated and *was obliged to explain* that the Trowbridge Water Company was wrong in implying that Bradford wished to use a polluted water source (Ladywell). By 22 June Major Tulloch of the Royal Engineers had held a government inquiry about the various Bradford water schemes. Jones spoke at the inquiry of the need for – and his support for – a local water works, and urged haste. Tulloch did not recommend the Trowbridge Water Company.

Suggested sources for Bradford's water included Budbury, Ladywell and water from the Avoncliff area. Ladywell itself was not polluted; the pollution originated from an old stone sewer which received the waste from two WCs in The Chantry. The Rev Thring and William Long backed Ladywell, as did Canon Jones. He had advocated the Ladywell scheme in the House of Lords, and wished it had been adopted. He did not think that the royalty of 1d per 1,000 gallons was mentioned at the time, but he would not have supported the scheme if this was the case.

The Avoncliff source was ultimately preferred, although it is no longer used ¹⁷. In early 1879 the Town Commissioners had successfully employed John Mullins, *the Wiltshire water spring discoverer* to find springs in Avoncliff and Westwood areas ¹⁸, and Mullins stated that there was enough water for Bradford, Trowbridge and Westbury. Jones' and Thring's reluctance to accept this source may have been the use of a water diviner; it was not a practice the church entirely approved of ¹⁹.

The water pipes were reported to have arrived in May 1880, but the arguments about which source to use continued. In January 1882 Jones wrote to the *Trowbridge Advertiser* calling for a truce and to let the Town Commissioners get on with it. Thring replied by backing Ladywell. By early March the Town Commissioners had received permission to borrow £250, part of which was for the Avoncliff water scheme, and work finally commenced in September 1882.

A handsome pumping house was built at Avoncliff to take the water up to a reservoir at Winsley. This reservoir is still in use and the pumping house is now a private dwelling. There were considerable arguments about the use of superior Westwood stone versus Bradford stone for the pumping house, but eventually it was built with stone excavated from the reservoir, with Westwood stone for dressing and quoins.

On 18 August 1883 the water pressure was tested near Holy Trinity and was sufficiently high to carry the water *up to the tower battlements*, but there were concerns that a new fire engine might be needed. On Wednesday 3 October, after six years' work at a cost of about £12,500 [about £1.5 million today] ²⁰ Miss Amy Hobhouse officially opened the town's water supply watched by a happy crowd of several hundred people who had gathered in the Market Place. There were parades; the Town Band, without which no public rejoicings are complete in Bradford ²¹ entertained; a temporary fountain played opposite the end of Church Street and the Fire Brigade

demonstrated that they could throw water over the tallest buildings. In the evening there was a public dinner and celebrations continued on the Thursday evening, probably without the aid of Adam's Ale.

While campaigning for a clean water supply Jones was involved in a lengthy dispute with his neighbour the Rev JC Thring concerning the pollution of the Vicarage water supply. Thring had been a master at Uppingham School but had decided not to live at the school after a dispute with his brother, the headmaster. He lived in the Chantry (then just the one house) from around 1864, but may not have lived there permanently until 1870, when he was appointed curate at Alford, Somerset²². Between 1875 and 1891 he was Chaplain to the Bradford Union. The Town Commissioners' inquiry into the 1877 outbreak included a very public argument between Jones and Thring.

During his first 20 years at Bradford Vicarage Jones and his household had enjoyed *a good and abundant* [supply of water] *famed for its purity*. This supply had been installed when the Vicarage was re built in 1841 by the Rev Henry Harvey, who made use of the fish-tank²³ beneath the Priests' Room in the southern wing of The Chantry. Such a tank was quite common in large country houses and would have been well supplied with fresh, clean water in order to 'cleanse' fresh-water fish before eating as they would otherwise have had a muddy taste²⁴. The custom had probably largely died out by the 19th century. Any implication by Thring that this 'bath' was a tub where people washed themselves would have been misleading. This tank/bath was the 'small reservoir' for the Vicarage, Abbey House and the National School to which Dr Thorne referred in 1877.

Just after 1870 Jones had started to notice impurities and at one point he had shown the Town Commissioners a bottle of the Vicarage water which looked as if it contained *a multitude of putrid fish and smelt horribly*. The Board *left him to find his own remedy* (this was before the 1875 Act). This pollution continued *from time to time* and Jones claimed the source was the Chantry, and that although Thring would allow Jones to put in a pipe for pure water at his expense, he did not think it would bring in pure water. Jones also claimed that Thring was using the water for a fish hatchery and it stank so he could not wash his hands in it.

In reply, Thring admitted that around 1875 *he had put in the bath room*²⁵ ... *a number of salmon fry and [later] my children [put in] some fish caught in the river. These were removed as soon as the complaint was made. I promised no more should be put in and none have ever been put in again.*

In November 1878 the Vicarage water supply was analysed by Mr Stoddart of Bristol who found an *excess of nitrites and nitrates* [and] *a small quantity of animal matter*. There was no comment on any sewage contamination and the water was not used for drinking purposes.

The arguments were resurrected at a further inquiry in 1881. Thring denied that the pollution that had

contributed to the typhoid outbreak originated from the Chantry, despite Dr Thorne's evidence in 1877 and claimed that all the drainage put down since he came into possession of the house had been done under the inspection of the surveyor. By this time something was obviously seriously wrong. Mr Rossiter had repaired Jones's water tank the previous year, and when the water was turned back on *it was quite white and looked like soap suds*. Jones's gardener had taken *particular notice of the water about a fortnight ago, and it looked like blood*. An explanation would be that the Thring household bathwater used the same pipes as the sewage that had been deemed to cause the 1877 outbreak of typhoid.

Thring was not the best neighbour where either water or drains were concerned. In 1872 he and the Town Commissioners had argued about access to the public water supply near the Chantry, and in January 1878 he complained of a stench arising in his kitchen from a surface drain ... to the great annoyance of his servants and whence he had had the disagreeable task of extracting a dead cat ... and give it a decent interment. This may have been the open water course near the Chantry which the Town Commissioners subsequently requested Thring to cover. In 1884 Thring had allowed his cistern pipes to overflow onto the pavement where the water froze, making the steep path between Church Street and Barton Orchard even more hazardous. When asked to connect the pipe with the drain he was not co-operative.

In February 1882 Jones's son Osborne wrote to the Town Commissioners on behalf of his father regarding the pollution of the Vicarage water by the Chantry²⁶. He drew attention to the fact that the nuisance complained of by his father came within section 91 of the Public Health Act and that the Town Commissioners had a duty under section 299 of the Act to investigate the matter and restore a wholesome supply to the Vicarage. The Board decided to write to the Local Government Board saying that the Vicarage water passed through Thring's property, and querying whether the supply was a private matter between the two.

Jones did not immediately install a public water supply to the Vicarage; it took two more cases of typhoid there in 1884 before the work was done. Jones was away at the time but the curate, the Rev Farrow, authorised the work, and he and Jones had paid a bill of £17 or £18 [about £2,000]. The authorised pipes had been used but in 1885 there was a leakage *caused by the sudden concussion of turning off the taps* and Mr Batten was instructed to cut off the supply. At their monthly meeting, the Town Commissioners felt they could do nothing about the matter, blaming it on bad workmanship and materials and whether the maid had turned taps on properly. The situation was explained by the fact that the water pressure was so high (*120 lbs to the square inch*) that a *sudden check* could fracture the pipe. The question of whether the pipe had been sufficiently tested and could withstand the pressure was argued over, and it was claimed that Jones felt *he had been rather hardly used in some way or other*.

The modern solution would be a pressure-reducing valve, something still necessary in some parts of Bradford.

There was obviously bad feeling about the matter. Jones was not pleased; he had paid his rates and he expected water. But by 31 October 31 1885 it all became irrelevant. On that day Canon Jones collapsed and died.

The long-term after effects from untreated typhoid (no antibiotics in the 19th century) include heart, kidney and digestive damage and mental health problems. Agnes's marriage was childless and she died in 1912 aged 50 from 'asthma of the heart', a condition arising from

damage to the left ventricle which would have left her unable to sustain a pregnancy²⁷. Jones himself may have suffered kidney damage leading to high blood pressure which would have contributed to his fatal stroke in 1885. Vaccination, clean water, adequate drains and good hygiene can virtually eliminate the disease. All waterborne intestinal pathogens are killed when held above 65°C for at least five minutes, so tea, coffee and beer are much safer drinks as the water used must be boiled beforehand.

The author would like to thank Ivor Slocombe and Pam Slocombe for their assistance

Notes:

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/typhoid-fever/causes/>

² Whitewash has antimicrobial properties and aids sanitation by coating and smoothing over rough surfaces. Successive applications of whitewash build up layers of scale that flake off removing surface debris. Flaking can be avoided by adding milk to the mixture of quicklime and water.

³ Ivor Slocombe, personal communication

⁴ The Rev JC Thring (1824-1909) was a clergyman and teacher who contributed to the development and rules of the Football Association. He lived at The Chantry between 1864 and 1891, and in 1866 captained Bradford Football Club in a match against Trowbridge. His obituary in The Essex County Chronicle described him as a *kind-hearted and generous clergyman*. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Charles_Thring and https://thereaderwiki.com/en/John_Charles_Thring

⁵ *Trowbridge Advertiser* 26 October 1872

⁶ WSA G13/1/3; Bradford Town Commissioners' minutes October 1872

⁷ For a summary of the Public Health Acts between 1848 and 1875 see <https://navigator.health.org.uk> and <https://victorianweb.org/history/chadwick2.html>

⁸ The Local Government Board was the Government Supervisory body overseeing local administration in England and Wales from 1871 to 1919. See <https://navigator.health.org.uk> and <https://victorianweb.org/history/chadwick2.html>

⁹ *Trowbridge Chronicle* 15 October 1881

¹⁰ The Town Commissioners' minutes in the 1880s frequently include addresses where WCs were not connected either to the water supply or the sewage drains. Property owners were requested to make these connections. Presumably this particular Wine Street house has slipped through the net.

¹¹ *Trowbridge Advertiser* 4 August 1877

¹² *Trowbridge Chronicle* 10 September 1881

¹³ The position of The Chantry public well is uncertain. The Well Close supply probably originated in the fields (now a garden) opposite the top of Wine Street and flowed under Sandy Leaze (now built over). The walled-up well arch can still be seen opposite 6 Belcombe Road

¹⁴ Niblett, p 13

¹⁵ Britton, John: Topographical Collections for the Hundred of Chippenham, County of Wilts, p92ff

¹⁶ *Guardian Angel*: Autumn/Winter 2021, p 9

¹⁷ Wessex Water confirmed that the Avoncliff borehole is no longer used. Winsley reservoir and the Cumberwell reservoir are supplied by two boreholes in Holt. (With thanks to Sarah Melis, Customer Relations, Wessex Water)

¹⁸ https://www.h2g2.com/approved_entry/A3373175

¹⁹ *Deuteronomy 18:9-19* and *Leviticus 20:6* are cited by <https://rcg.org/questions/p204.a.html> Another website states that water divination is 'a God-given gift'.

²⁰ The 1875 Public Health Act permitted the Town Commissioners to borrow the money which was repaid over 30 years at an interest rate of 3.5 per cent.

²¹ *Trowbridge Advertiser* 2 March 1872

²² Thring was born in Alford near Castle Cary, Somerset, and held his first curacy there. Alford Halt was not opened until 1905, so Thring would have had to travel the three/four miles from the station to the village by road.

²³ This was *the curious fish tank, or bath, below the small priest's room or place of concealment in [the Chantry's] southern wing*, mentioned by John Beddoe in his revision of Jones's History of Bradford. Jones/Beddoe 1907, p 162. A sale advert of 1836, when it was occupied by Miss Timbrell, mentions *cold bath and green house*, and a lease advert of 1864 states *Bath room under breakfast room with never failing stream of spring water*. This tank is about seven feet deep and situated in a semi-basement room with large windows on the east side. It is constructed of large ashlar stones set in the floor on a level with the garden outside and was fed by a spring, which is one of the many streams flowing from Ladywell in Newtown. There are two inlets for water on the north side near the northwest corner and an overflow outlet close to the southeast corner of the tank. The present owner told the author that there is no longer an inlet. With grateful thanks to Pam Slocombe and the owner

²⁴ Ivor Slocombe, personal communication

²⁵ By 'bath room' Thring was referring to the fish tank as above.

²⁶ *Wiltshire Times* 25 February 1882

²⁷ Cardiac asthma is caused by congestive heart failure and leads to asthma-like symptoms, such as wheezing, coughing, and trouble breathing. One primary cause is kidney failure, and Agnes's attack of typhoid in 1877 could have damaged either her kidneys or her heart, or both. The condition would have left her unable to sustain a pregnancy. <https://www.healthline.com/health/heart-disease/cardiac-asthma#what-it-is>

²⁸ <https://hometuff.com/water/what-bacteria-survive-boiling-water-how-long/>

A 'deplorable calamity' on the River Avon

A family day out that ended in tragedy: Geoff Andrews recounts the sad story of George Tanner's doomed 'paddle steamer'

George Tanner was what we would now call to his face an early adopter; behind his back a nerd or eccentric.

In 1856, a well-known and 'highly respectable' trader in hardware in Bradford, and apparently well-liked, he was a bit of a whizz at engineering, inventions and steam power. The recently launched *Trowbridge Advertiser* said he had "a considerable mechanical genius" and "within the past few months had devoted much time to constructing an engine to propel a small boat. Having accomplished his desire in this respect he has frequently of late used this steamer as a pleasure boat on the River Avon."

This was the very early days of the explosive growth of local newspapers following the abolition of the prohibitive tax on every copy, which had made them uneconomic except in big towns and cities.. The *Trowbridge Advertiser* – established a couple of years earlier – was, as its title suggests, an ad-sheet, rather than a newspaper. Barely a column of local news appeared each week; its content mainly consisted of such items as a précis of a local vicar's Sunday sermon. Some weeks, the owner apologised for the lack of news "because of the pressure of advertising".

So news of the incident here described is, at best, hazy, with only the threadbare facts printed locally to help with joining the dots.

According to the records, George was 40 years old, originally from Dorset, and married to Mary Ann (37), who had lived before marriage in Calne. They had two daughters – 13-year-old Fanny and Kate, three – and a four-month old son. George had served an apprenticeship



George Tanner's 'paddle steamer' may have looked something like the illustration above; below, the stretch of the Avon where the Tanners' disastrous outing began

as a tin plate worker and then saving up to open his own shop, living in a thatched cottage in New Road, Calne. The shop in Bradford would have sold a mixture of stock bought in and items he had made in his own workshop.

Probably his paddle steamer was based on a conventional rowing boat. It would have had a boiler topped by a chimney, and a bench seat aft. It would have been propelled by paddles on either side. A new-fangled invention for Bradford – but steam powered? Fatal accidents with steam boiler explosions were a frequent occurrence at the time.

Friends strongly advised that if he was intent on messing about in steamboats he should at least learn to swim. George was not persuaded.

Mary didn't like the boat and when her father had visited in August that year she told him about her fears, and recounted a dream in which one of their children was drowning. But on Saturday 19 September, the weather looked good so, despite her fears, George set his mind on



a family outing on the boat. Kate would come with them and the infant boy would stay with Fanny.

That afternoon, George closed the shop early, fired up the boiler and loaded up a reluctant Mary and Kate for a trip to Staverton woollen mill, as far as they could go between weirs. The boat must have been moored above the Greenland Mill weir, probably in the leat by Sully, on the Kingston Mill development.

The first challenge for Mary Ann, with her fear of drowning, would have been crossing the Main, a swimming place where the river is very deep. Improbably, some old Bradfordians maintained well into the 20th century that the river at that point was bottomless.

The family would then have travelled past the marshes on the south bank where snipe used to nest, and the mouth of the Widbrook. On the north bank there was a flock of sheep watched over by a seven-year old boy near the edge of Bradford Wood as the river makes a long bend, and so on to Staverton.

They turned round at about 5 o'clock and, with the current in their favour, quickly passed under the new, and as yet unused, railway bridge, and the mouth of the River Biss, smelling of the waste dumped in it from the Trowbridge mills. Then something happened.

Without the eyewitness evidence of that child shepherd the rest of the story would have been even more of a mystery. He told the Coroner that when the boat was near him he saw Mary fall overboard, and then – in trying to reach her – George and Kate also fell into the water. It seems the boat capsized because it was top-heavy, or 'crank' as it was described at the time.

The shepherd boy 'too young and feeble to render assistance' was the sole witness to this 'deplorable calamity' and 'after a short struggle the father, mother and child sank to rise no more.' A shooting party nearby heard their cries, but by the time they reached the spot the three were dead.

First reports reaching the town said the boiler had exploded and killed them, but the inquest verdict was that they drowned. When the boat capsized the hot boiler may have burst when it was immersed, giving rise to that account.

News of the tragedy was carried by dozens of local papers from as far away as Aberdeen over the next week or so, and even *The Times* carried almost as much information – or as little – as the newly-launched *Advertiser*, forerunner of the *Wiltshire Times*. No addresses, no mention of first names, only a hint of his trade and his age, which they got wrong.

This illustrates another element of the story: that although it was a tragedy sufficient to 'spread an air of gloom across the town' (Bradford) the local paper (boasting its motto 'weekly newspaper for the million' on the front page) seems to have relied solely on hearsay and market day chatter to write its account.

After the inquest the funeral for the three the following Thursday was followed by interment at 'the new cemetery' in Holt Road and a memorial sermon preached at 'the independent church', which must have been one of the many free churches and chapels in the town.

As a sign of respect the shops in the town closed and put up their shutters for the day.

Homes for Ukraine in Bradford on Avon

Have any *Guardian Angel* readers considered hosting or renting space to a Ukrainian person or family? Dozens of Bradford on Avon households are now accommodating Ukrainian guests and the community is now more than 100 strong. New hosts, landlords and volunteers are now being sought to help our Ukrainian guests in the next stages of their stay in the UK.

Hosts or 'sponsors' originally signed up for a six-month commitment under the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme, and while many have decided to continue hosting their guests beyond this period, some are not in a position to do so, with the result that more spare rooms are needed. Hosts receive a £350 monthly payment from Wiltshire Council to help with costs, for up to 12 months from the guests' arrival in the UK, and there is plenty of support locally from other hosts and others working with the community.

One Bradford on Avon host said: "Being a host inevitably involves giving up some space and experiencing some uncertainty. But the positive side is that you are providing a safe haven to people who desperately need it and who are typically keen to make a contribution to the community and to their households. Many hosts have

found it to be a very positive experience."

If you want to talk to someone about the experience of hosting a Ukrainian family or individual, the support group can put you in touch with a current host who can discuss all the details with you.

Landlords are also being sought to provide accommodation for Ukrainians who can afford private sector rentals. This can include people renting out one room under the Government's 'Rent a Room' scheme, under which you can earn/charge up to £7,500 a year tax free, or Airbnb hosts who would be prepared to move from short lets to a longer-term relationship with a tenant.

If you can do none of these things, please consider donating to the dedicated fund for supporting Bradford on Avon's Ukrainians, held in the Bradford on Avon Town Council account (sort code 30-98-75, a/c 01236757, ref Ukraine 581). This fund is completely ring-fenced, managed by volunteers and used for activities such as English lessons, social events and assistance with transport.

● *If you would like to discuss any of these options, please do get in touch at boaukrainegroup@gmail.com*

Planning matters

Rosie MacGregor, chair of the Trust's Planning Committee, considers the government review into short-term tourist accommodation, and what that means for Bradford on Avon

The Preservation Trust Planning Committee agreed to respond to the government review into tourist accommodation.

We acknowledged that Bradford on Avon is an attractive town to visit and as a base for a holiday, given its history and location close to major tourist centres such as Bath, the Cotswolds and Longleat, but this must not be at the expense of the community and local need.

The extent of tourist accommodation available as short-term holiday lets in Bradford on Avon is already large and likely to increase given that many cottages homes in the town are often advertised by estate agents as ideal second homes or tourist accommodation. We have observed a significant increase recently in the number of holiday lets and Airbnb accommodation available in the town and an increase in attractive properties becoming holiday lets.

This harms the balance between permanent homes and holiday accommodation. Ultimately this would damage the local economy if such properties stand empty during winter months, squeezing out local people who need permanent homes, especially those who cannot afford to buy a home and need affordable accommodation to rent.

Furthermore, there is an adverse impact on the supply of houses and the rapid rise in house prices. There is a need, not for tourist housing, but for more housing available to buy or rent as permanent homes.

We need to limit the number of holiday lets and there must be greater control such as a registration system, changes to Council Tax and any other means by which the number of tourist accommodation for rent can be limited and inspected.

We have seen the impact this has had in other towns in the west country, not only affecting the local economy but creating unsustainable environmental impacts including an increase in travel, congestion, pollution and noise nuisance.



Daydreams and gardeners at The Hall

I eagerly accepted an invitation to represent the Preservation Trust at a meeting with The Hall volunteer gardeners and builder Michael Lintern one sunny early autumn morning. They all wore hiking boots or wellingtons; I wore entirely inappropriate sling-back sandals. Cold, wet feet did not prevent my enjoyment of what proved to be quite a long walk through lawns and woodland.

Michael, whose recent autobiography was reviewed in the autumn 2022 issue of *Guardian Angel*, worked at The Hall for Dr Alex Moulton – carrying out a variety of building works including restoring and stabilising the rock garden with its cliff face, pond and gazebo.

It was an absolute delight to walk around the gardens and see the work now being undertaken by the volunteers in tending these beautiful grounds and to hear some amusing anecdotes from Michael about his time working on the estate.

I took a photo of The Hall bathed in mellow sunlight as a few clouds gathered. Those clouds were perhaps a metaphor for what the future might hold for this important Elizabethan Grade I listed building – which is already beginning to show signs of disrepair – and its equally important grounds, registered as a Grade II Listed Historic Park and Garden.

The Hall, despite the golden hues of the photo, is beginning to look a little sad these days and in need of some care and attention, but it will be costly. Buildings like this require enormous amounts of money, love and commitment to ensure their future, made even more difficult these days without sufficient grant funding. The band of volunteer gardeners are deeply committed to maintaining the grounds but despite their knowledge, enthusiasm and pride in their work, the gardens are a massive undertaking.

I fear for the long-term future of this magnificent building and its setting if a viable use and funding cannot be found. The layout of the building is not ideal other than as a family home, although The Hall trustees may of course disagree. I've always been a daydreamer. I mused that possibly one of the multi-millionaires created by those Euromillions lotteries might like to put in an offer... but on one condition: that he or she is a public-spirited benefactor who understands historic building conservation, has a genuine love of the property and allows the local community to enjoy visiting the estate from time to time. I wish!

Rosie MacGregor

Lottery grant for Christ Church project benefits all ages

The Trust was delighted to hear that the community project Discover Christ Church! has been awarded almost a quarter of a million pounds by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Here is how it all happened ...

In November 2022, Christ Church, Bradford on Avon, was awarded a £239,761 grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a community project to explore, restore and celebrate the heritage of this fine Victorian building.

Announcing the award, Rector of Christ Church the Rev Ann Keating said: “We are absolutely thrilled to receive this Heritage Fund grant, thanks to National Lottery players, for the Discover Christ Church! project. This is a quantum leap forward in realising our vision of Christ Church as a community hub fit for the 21st century, with a restored and brightly lit interior, a gleaming and functioning spire clock and much improved habitat for wildlife across the churchyard. We very much look forward to welcoming people of all ages together from across the community in Discovering Christ Church! and its hidden heritage.

“The Heritage Fund grant, along with other grants and generous donations from the community means that the Discover Christ Church! community project can now move from idea to reality!”

Christ Church is a landmark in Bradford on Avon – sitting at the top of the hill, with its spire visible throughout the town and for miles across the surrounding countryside. It is also a nationally important building – the chancel and fine scheme of wall paintings having been designed and overseen by Sir George Gilbert Scott (architect of the magnificent St Pancras Station Hotel and the Albert Memorial) and upon his death by his son John Oldrid Scott. Historic England has highlighted the rarity of the survival of Christ Church’s wall paintings and the exceptional completeness of its scheme of late Victorian and Edwardian fittings.

The church, along with its neighbouring former school buildings, provides a visible record of the importance of the Victorian period to the evolution and development of Bradford on Avon.

The Discover Christ Church! project will engage with the community to explore, restore and celebrate the rare Victorian heritage of this special listed building including:

- An 18-month programme of intergenerational and inclusive community activities co-designed with young people,
- Restoring, regilding and restarting the spire clock,
- Conserving and cleaning the nave walls and rare wall paintings, with the large paintings of archangels on the west wall to be restored to their former glory and for the first time lit for all to see,
- New energy-efficient lighting,
- Repairs to the spire and tower, and
- Biodiversity enhancements to the churchyard.

Work is planned to start early in 2023, for completion in early 2025, with ‘Open House’ throughout – welcoming people in for community activities, events and celebrations as well as to see the restoration works in action. The ‘Open House’ will be both in the church and online and will enable people, wherever they are, to see the restoration works in action.

The Preservation Trust is among a number of local and national organisations that have also contributed to the project, with a £7,500 grant towards the conservation of the nave wall paintings and the restoration of the spire clock. Other support includes £4,000 from ChurchCare and the Pilgrim Trust towards the restoration of the nave wall paintings, and £5,000 in other donations received so far from the Pilgrim Trust/ChurchCare, the community and the Parochial Church Council.

Fundraising continues to raise the last £5,000 for this project, plus the £148,500 needed for a separate scheme to update the church building so that it at last has an on-site kitchen and toilets, as well as flexible open spaces for community use, an office and storage.

Two years of public consultation in the run-up to the Discover Christ Church! project made it clear how important the building is to the local community – including young people from Christ Church Primary School. Acting headteacher Helen Rutt said: “We are so excited to hear that the input from our Year 5 and 6 children has contributed to the success of the Discover Christ Church! project in securing a grant from the Heritage Fund, and that this project can now become a reality. We very much look forward to all our children and as many of our families as possible becoming actively involved in discovering and exploring Christ Church – we know they have lots of ideas and will be thrilled to hear that they can put them into action!”

As part of the project a community outreach officer will be appointed to work with young people and other key stakeholders an inclusive programme of activities, events and workshops – bringing together people of all ages and abilities with skilled craftspeople, contractors and practitioners.

Tim Farrer, headteacher at St Laurence School, added: “The Heritage Fund grant provides a fabulous and unusual opportunity for St Laurence School students to have their voices heard and make a meaningful contribution to the planning and design of community activities and making the hidden heritage of Christ Church accessible and engaging for all.”

● *For further information, please contact Gillian Ellis-King (gillellisking@btopenworld.com) or the Rev Ann Keating (rev.ann.keating@btinternet.com)*

Barton Orchard remembered

Our new regular columnist, Ralph Oswick, looks back (fairly) fondly to his days as a resident of Bradford on Avon

I had the pleasure of living in a delightful cottage in Barton Orchard for about 16 years. I loved it there, and to tell you the truth I only moved because I kept banging my head.

My bijou residence was right by the gate leading into that semi-private street. The gate kept nothing in and nothing out, but we residents were incensed if a wayward motorist left it open. The sound of tyres on gravel had me rushing to my upstairs window, ready to glare. Every time I bent to look out, I would bash my head on the solid stone. Every time. In the end, fearing permanent concussion, I moved to high-ceilinged splendour in Bath.

Because of the sloping land, the cottages are somewhat eccentric in their layout. The back entrance is on the second floor, with each level joined by an open spiral staircase. The polished wooden treads would often deposit me unceremoniously into the ground floor lounge.

This cosy room was graced with an alcove containing a well. A desirable mod-con in the 1700s. I fitted the alcove with one of those lights favoured by cannabis growers and installed a weeping fig. Approached from the direction of Church Street of an evening, the bright light and the green foliage really did look like I was indulging in nefarious horticultural activities. Much comment in the alleyway!

I still have that shrub nearly 40 years later, which must be a record for a pot plant.

Quaint period feature the well may have been, but I foolishly decided to clean it out. Shortly after, I was in Germany performing in a Christmas show with my Natural Theatre chums. On Boxing Day, I phoned my friend John (yes, our esteemed chairman) only to be told by his wife Alison that he was round at my place, mopping it out. "I wasn't supposed to tell you," she said. Someone had spotted water pouring under my front door, and by the time I got back a week or so later my expensive reclaimed Russian oak parquet flooring had turned into a veritable herringbone dome.

If the current residents are worried by this revelation, don't fret, the insurance company paid for a complete overhaul of the drainage system. And the inestimable Terry the Tiler managed to seal the floor and lower the wooden dome back to a more convenient plain.

It was a very friendly neighbourhood and we would usually have a communal Christmas Day dinner. My cooking skills are zilch so I oversaw the cheese. One year, the country's relationship with our Gallic neighbours was at an all-time low. "We don't want anything French!" came the cry from the redoubtable ladies of the batch. So, I purchased a trolley load of Budgen's best continental selection and spent a pleasant couple of hours peeling



the labels off and replacing them with substitutes saying 'British Brie' and 'Somerset Camembert'. I think enough time has passed for this misdemeanour to be revealed!

Some of you will know me by my alter-ego Lady Margaret. She is a grande dame with a penchant for declaring things open. At the time, she was a regular guest on Mile's Kington's weekly chat show on Radio 4. Her Ladyship was required to deliver a topical homily and occasionally sing a satirical ditty. As the programme was recorded with live guests, I was obliged to wear the full outfit, floral frock *et al.* Which is a bit like Peter Brough, who along with his dummy Archie Andrews, was the first, and probably the last, radio ventriloquist!

Once, I was due to go on tour and unable to attend the studio recording, so the BBC sent a sound man to Barton Orchard to record Lady Margaret's latest rant. For the life of me, I couldn't get the voice right. After many takes, I remembered I had one of Margaret's hats under my bed (like you do). I popped it on, and lo! The voice came out perfectly.

At that point, a neighbour came round with a message. One look through my front window revealed me, in normal clothes, a huge feathered Ascot creation perched on my head, with the sound man kneeling at my feet, holding up an enormous furry microphone. All backed up by what appeared to be an illuminated whacky baccy plant!

They beat a hasty retreat.

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

Book review

Remnants and Yarns

By Rosie MacGregor

This latest book from singer, trade union activist and Preservation Trust planning committee chair Rosie MacGregor describes the surprisingly well documented record of 'poverty and protest in the woollen industry in Bradford of Avon', to quote the book's sub-title.

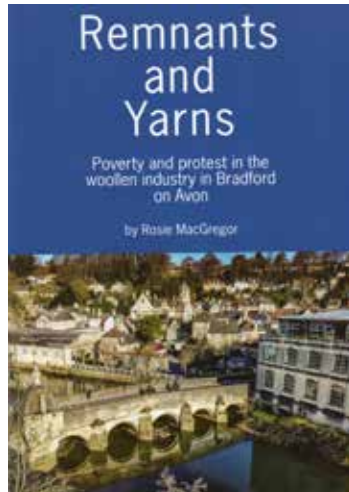
The author outlines the various stages in the production of woollen cloth, from sheep shearing to processing the shorn wool by the laborious tasks of carding and fulling. Next came the spinning (mainly the work of women and children) and weaving (men's work), at first taking place in cottages and sheds and later in factories beside the Avon. While the workers were exploited, the clothiers grew rich and built many fine houses which are dotted around town.

Lest the reader fails to get the message, Rosie begins her fourth brief chapter: "There is clear evidence that the clothiers exploited their workforce." Thus she discusses how the workers organised to protest against poor conditions and meagre wages and how they were harshly dealt with.

Inevitably, full recognition is given to Thomas Helliker who allegedly organised a protest ('riot') in Trowbridge in 1803. He was arrested, tried and put to death. His grave in St James's churchyard in Trowbridge is maintained by the Trowbridge Trades Council and a commemorative wreath is laid on the tomb every year.

Equally well documented is the riot in Bradford on Avon when the hated scribbling horse, a machine which threatened livelihoods, was hurled from the town bridge into the river. The wealthy clothier Phelps, who lived in Westbury House, fired on the rioters with the result that three of their number were killed and others injured. (This formed the theme of the town's much enjoyed community play, *Under the Fish and Over the Water*, which was staged in 1990 at St Laurence School). Phelps himself later received compensation for the loss of his machine but the rioters nothing – an interesting parallel with those engaged in the slave trade who received compensation after the abolition of slavery while the freed slaves themselves received no recompense.

The author goes on to describe the ups and downs in the fortunes of the woollen cloth industry during and following the Napoleonic wars when, among the workers, there was latterly some sympathy for Napoleon and his



cause. Rosie quotes one or two of the contemporary ballads which speak of the resistance of the workers in those hard times.

Rosie's view of history, particularly how it affected ordinary folk, is much enhanced by her appreciation of the oral tradition. This lends her account a special perspective and throws fresh light on events. She finally cites the collapse of Bradford's local bank in 1841 when the "once prosperous cloth industry was brought to a standstill". Decline was rapid, although there were some periods of revival. Greenland Upper Mill closed in 1906 and was the last factory to manufacture woollen cloth.

Bradford's rubber industry replaced woollen cloth and that has been well documented. Rosie's book about its predecessor is a most welcome addition to the town's social and economic history.

Roger Jones

● *Remnants and Yarns* is published by White Horse (Wiltshire) Trades Council and can be purchased locally from Ex Libris, price £7.50; it is also available at £10 (including postage and packing) from www.watermarx.co.uk

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Obituary: Christian Penny, 1936 - 2022

Life-long resident of Bradford on Avon and long-time member of the Preservation Trust, Chris Penny, died peacefully on 28 September 2022, aged 86 years. Chris was a true Bradfordian. He was born on 8 March 1936 at 4 St Margaret's Steps, just off Bridge Street, the youngest child of the large family of Florence and George Penny.

Chris was educated at Canning's College in Bath. Following a short spell playing football for Bristol Rovers, he went into local government and spent his career at Wiltshire Council. He married Monica in 1957 and settled in Trowbridge Road. They had two daughters and three grandchildren.

As a passionate Bradfordian, it was of great importance to him to make a contribution to the life of what he referred to as "this very special town". Chris was a founder member of the Bradford on Avon Lions Club, to which he gave dedicated service for 52 years. He was a member of Bradford on Avon Museum and the Wiltshire Family History Society, volunteering to digitise records and help others with their research.

He loved local history and Bradford on Avon in particular. His rich knowledge of the town's history was highly valued and he conducted interesting tours of the town and gave talks. Many authors of local history books consulted him and used his considerable knowledge to inform their own work. He had a great memory for



Chris Penny and the West Barn

The old West Barn burned down in 1982 and was in danger of disintegrating altogether. Having bought the Barton Farm buildings in 1997, the Preservation Trust began the lengthy, complicated and demanding business of rebuilding the West Barn, keeping the few remaining features at the same time as creating a building suitable for modern use.

As the building began to near completion, we were delighted when Chris volunteered to join the Trust's Council of Management (CoM). Born in 1936 into a

the people and places of Bradford on Avon, recalling many stories and events.

An active member of the Preservation Trust, he managed the West Barn for 10 years in his retirement. He took great pleasure in seeing the barn put to use, especially for weddings and celebrations – including his own 80th birthday party! The rebuilding of

the barn was a project of which he was immensely proud and actively involved in. On behalf of the Trust, he was honoured to collect design and eco awards for the building and at the official opening was delighted to be presented to the now King Charles III.

As a teenager in the late 1940s, Chris helped his friend clear a building in a garden in Frome Road, across the railway bridge from Prospect House. They came across a pile of unsigned Victorian watercolour paintings and saved them from the bonfire. Chris kept them safe until 2016, when he and his daughters decided to exhibit them for sale to raise funds for the Iron Duke restoration project. The artist is unknown but was likely to have been a resident of Prospect House.

Chris and his wife Monica thoroughly enjoyed Preservation Trust talks and social events. He liked to take photographs and captured many wonderful images of Bradford on Avon throughout the seasons. He also collected postcards and artefacts related to the town.

In recent years, ill health had an impact on Chris' ability to actively participate, but he always took a keen interest in all the campaigns and projects with which the Trust were involved.

Chris was such a positive presence in many lives and very recognisable in Bradford. His absence will be sorely felt.

Alison Penny and Caroline Stoley, Chris's daughters



the summer." We were somewhat startled by this news. But it was obvious that it was a brilliant, innovative idea and we warmly welcomed it.

Chris explained that he had been approached by a young couple who asked if the West Barn would be available for their wedding; he had liked the idea so he had gone ahead, met all the legal requirements and fixed a date. He had done all the necessary work, which made it easy for us to agree.

It was such a beautiful setting that it became a very popular wedding venue. Chris continued to manage this new use of the barn. He was loved by all the brides and

grooms and he himself thoroughly enjoyed supporting them through their special day.

English Heritage required us to open the barn free of charge to visitors two days a week during the summer months. Chris played a very full part in the stewarding arrangements, even keeping his private collection of Bradford on Avon photographs available in the barn for display to visitors.

Chris continued to play a part in the Trust's affairs and he and Monica came to the Stewards' Lunch at the end of the 2019 season. He was a good friend and I miss him.

Maggie Dobson

Obituary: Janet Lindsay Repton, 1930- 2022

Artist, world traveller, local councillor, Janet Repton passed away peacefully at Wiltshire Heights Care Home on 16 October. A former mayor of Bradford on Avon, and town and district councillor for over 25 years, Janet will be greatly missed by her cousin June, family members and her many friends worldwide.

Vicky Landell-Mills writes: Janet Repton died in October at the age of 92, having lived in Bradford on Avon since the early 1980s. She loved the town.

Although many will remember her as a feisty Bradford town councillor her first love was for the arts. After graduating from art college in London she taught the subject at some of the grittier schools in North London – this experience did nothing to dim her love of the arts or

indeed of young people.

She always lived on the north side of Bradford – initially on Tory, and later just off Huntingdon Street – where there were far-reaching views over the town.

It was after the death of her husband, Gareth, that she became involved in local affairs, becoming a West Wiltshire District Councillor as well as being on Bradford on Avon Town Council. It is probably fair to say that her strong visual sense was important and valuable in her consideration of planning matters.

Far from being parochial, while she could, she travelled far and wide, and was a great campaigner for Bradford's rail services. Above all, Janet will be remembered for her enormous enthusiasm and zest for life.

Geoffrey M. Saxty

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Here we come a-wassailing

Any nasty bugs and evil imps hanging around the Hens' Orchard were well and truly sent packing at the end of January, when hundreds of Wassailers gathered to bless the apple trees and drive out the baddies with a mighty hullabaloo.

Despite being let down at the last minute by the cider provider, we were able to serve hot drinks, juice and some delicious home-made appletcake in the West Barn – and everyone was splendidly entertained

by Highland piper Ruby Derbyshire, the Bells' Angels women's morris side from Holt, Widcombe Mummers, the English Session musicians and the Birch Tree Folk Choir.

Huge thanks, as always, to Nick Nicholls for organising and MC-ing, to the Trustees and helpers for stewarding, baking and serving refreshments, and to everyone who came along on a chilly January evening to make merry. Waes Hael!

● *Next year's Wassail will take place on Saturday 27 January. See you there.*

Dates for your diary

May will be a big month for the Trust: as well as the Coronation of King Charles on 6 May, we'll be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the West Barn restoration over the weekend of the 26 and 27th. The then Prince of Wales was the guest of honour at the opening of the restored barn back in 2003, and many Trust members have vivid memories of that very special day.

As part of our celebration, we are planning an exhibition of words and pictures detailing the restoration work as well as the opening ceremony. If you have any photos or memories that you would like to share, please get in touch as soon as possible at admin@bradfordheritage.co.uk or phone 01225 865733 and leave a message.

The Bradford on Avon Flower & Produce Show will this year take place at St Margaret's Hall, on Sunday 3 September from 2-4pm. Schedules will be available at the end of April – and 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.

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We welcome contributions from Trust members and non-members. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of the Trust's Council of Management. **Please send typed, drawn or photographic contributions, in electronic form, to the editor, Joceline Bury, at guardianangel@bradfordheritage.co.uk, by Tuesday 9 May** for inclusion in the spring/summer 2023 issue of *Guardian Angel*.

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Bradford on Avon Preservation Trust welcomes new members. Please contact Joceline Bury, Membership Secretary, Silver Street House, Silver Street, Bradford on Avon BA15 1JY (01225 865733 – this is an answerphone) or go to the membership page on the Trust's website: www.bradfordheritage.co.uk

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