

BLAKE NEWS

Winter 2021 & Spring 2022



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

by Stewart Richards

The museum has been open on Saturdays for visitors and the book sales since the end of normal opening hours at the beginning of November. The numbers that have visited have been good and the book sales have realised a substantial income for the Friends. Many thanks to all those volunteers that have helped making this so successful. Opening hours will return to the pre-pandemic timetable 10am to 4pm Wednesday to Saturday, we are a little shorthanded at the moment for volunteers to cover the museum, so if you know of anyone interested, please let Rob Gardener know. A recruitment drive is underway, and we shall be having a table in Angel Place during the morning of the 1st of April, to present to possible volunteers what we are all about.

Let's hope that we can exceed our total visitor numbers of 3629 that came through the door in 2019 in this upcoming year

The garden looks an absolute picture with all the new daffodils adding to the previously planted tulips. A big thank you to Steve Pope and his grandson Tom who have repainted the railings in the garden and stained the tables and benches to give them added protection from the weather.



Photographs by Stewart Richards

Finally, many of you will know of the passing of Jane Woolrich, Tony's wife. I would just like to note my total appreciation for what Jane contributed to the museum, She was a

true stalwart and her positivity and commitment to the well being of the museum over many years was immense..

Thank you, Jane you will be sorely missed by lots of people and me in particular, RIP.

CURATOR'S REPORT

By Mike Searle

At last, we can get back to some degree of normality and to this end I can announce that the museum will be opening for the season from 6th April until 5th Nov 2022, Weds – Sat, usual times of 10.00 – 4.00 with last entry at 3.00. Tuesdays are now reserved for school and group visits or any other special event.

The bespoke case for the permanent 'Grotbags' display is now installed and can be found up on the Gallery. The case has been funded by FOBM.



Photograph by Mike Searle

A conservation mannikin has been purchased for the display of a Victorian mauve dress that we have had in storage for quite a number of years. The mauve dress (circa 1860) is a rare example as the dye used usually fades over time. There is only one other we know about which is in the Science Museum. The dress will be found in the Bygones Room.

CLEANING

As we approach the official full-time opening of the museum on Wednesday 6th April 2022, we have a deep clean scheduled for Thurs 31st March: all those that can attend are welcome. But regular cleaning is on-going, of course, and volunteers are always welcome.

NEWS

There will be no Museum Fayre until Christmas.

Band concerts will run from Sunday 7 July to Sunday 21 August.

BOOK SALES

This winter we have taken £450 - 475.

VERY IMPORTANT

The Coffee Mornings are now held on the first Tuesday of each month.

OBITUARY



Jane Woolrich, 1932-2022

Photograph by Mike Searle

She died on 15 February 2022, following a fall at home five months before. After a private family cremation, her funeral at St Mary's church, on 18 March, was attended by about 100 people from the Friends, St Mary's Church, and our wider acquaintance. Most stayed for the Wake afterwards in the Swan Transept and reminisced.

Donations in her memory for the work of the Museum Friends raised around £1000. The wreaths from her coffin were afterwards placed on the wall of the upper garden of museum, where her ashes were later interred.

Her mother, Winifred Powell, was a regular Museum Custodian from the Museum Society days, and when she died Jane just took over her slot.

She was a very good cook indeed and baked for a great many museum events. All the bread in the photograph was made by her.

She often had sessions instructing new custodians in the practicalities of the place and then acting as their mentor, and she wrote a code of practice for the custodians, the key-holders and the shop team.

Jane took a course to learn proof-checking, and was very meticulous indeed in checking the Museum's leaflet series.

Stewart Richards wrote: *Jane was always a tremendous support to Tony and was a very able and enthusiastic custodian. How many people would have suffered walking to Taunton Road from Huntworth in all weathers to catch the bus to carry out their chosen duties at the museum. To say that Jane was enthusiastic about the museum and it's well-being would be an understatement. She may be on the bus talking to somebody and suddenly pull out a museum leaflet to encourage the person to visit the museum. So as a custodian, museum promoter, baker and willing volunteer for fairs and band concerts she will be sorely missed.*

BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

by Dr Miles Kerr-Peterson & Tony Woolrich

Work continues on the Street Names project, filling in the blanks missed on the first pass and moving on to the tangled histories of the various courts. These seem to have been referred to by a number of designations over the years. To take one example, 'Jones Buildings' was a small row of cottages behind 19 North Street. Named as such on the 1887 25" map, but called 'Kitch's Court' on the 1871 Census and 'Gibb's Buildings' in the 1937 Whitby Light and Lane town Directory. Working on these will

take some time and any help would be appreciated.

We continue to publish the digitised copies of the *Bridgwater Alfred*, aiming to upload each issue the same week 190 years on. We're also publicising a series of Bridgwater magazines relating to Dr Morgan's School and the Cellophane works, part of the collection of Brendon Russ, kindly supplied to us by Dave Russ.

Recent articles published on the site include a history of the stained glass of St Mary's; an exploration of the supposed lost church of St Bridgit; notes on Horsey Chapel; a reconstructed plan of the houses demolished around St Mary's Churchyard; an occupation history of Halesleigh Tower (the Quantock Gateway); a prosopographical study of midwifery over the nineteenth century; and another about burials in Wembdon Road Cemetery of folk who died by accident in the Parrett.

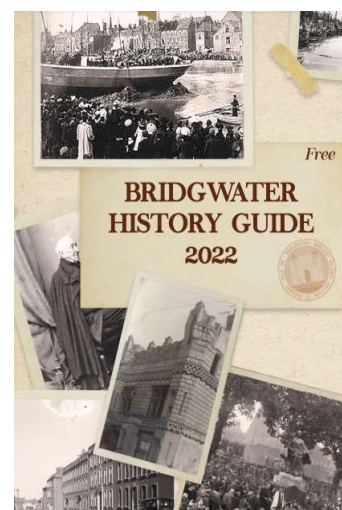
A history of the 'Blue Anchor' in North Street and the South Gate Almshouses, two of the town's oldest brick buildings; notes on the history of coronation celebrations in the town;

A large section has been created exploring the histories of the town's docks and ships. It is to inform the forthcoming project to restore the docks. £4 million has been allocated from the Town Deal Fund for this and consultants are working up business plans. The Council aims to run it via a Community Interest Company. It includes a section about relevant material in the Museum collection, and material about the Telescopic Bridge, and the steam mud drag *Bertha*.

Continuing the note in the last issue of *Blake News*, work proceeded examining Bridgwater Poor Law. The entire text of the evidence given to the House of Lords Select Committee of 1838 investigating the Bridgwater workhouse scandal was digitised and placed on the website to accompany John Bowen's pamphlets. All the files relating to the project were later deposited in the museum library. A video about this was scripted for the Town Council's History day, last November.

Of most interest to the Friends of the Museum, many new materials and transcriptions relating to John Chubb have been published on the site. Included are the transcriptions of Chubb MSS, made by members of the Museum Friends when the collection was acquired in 2004 and not published then. A new project has just begun to write an illustrated account of the monuments in Saint Mary's church.

We also made another video for the last Town Council History Day, about last year's work in the Wembdon Road Cemetery, – 'Fire, Cheese and Corsets', and we produced much of the text of the Town Council's new tourism guide, which highlights the town's past.



Photograph by Brian Smedley