

# BLAKE NEWS

## Autumn 2020 Double issue



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### HISTORY DAY



Bridgwater people are extremely proud of their history and for the past 4 years 'Bridgwater History Day' has been an important part of the town's heritage calendar playing to full houses at the Bridgwater Arts Centre. This year we're not going to let a global pandemic stop the march of time and so we're hosting the event online!! On Saturday SAT 28TH November from 1030 to 1pm you can tune in to our Open Zoom link and Live Stream on the Town Council's Facebook page and join in the history!

### THIS YEAR'S PROGRAMME

1030 Welcome by the Mayor of Bridgwater  
 1035 *The Bridge in Bridgwater* (Part 1) *The old stone bridge* by Miles Kerr-Peterson and Tony Woolrich  
 1050 *Bridgwater in Pictures* Paul Bovett dips into his popular collection of photos of old Bridgy.  
 1105 *The Somerset Stop Line* Brian Smedley looks at World War 2 plans to stop a Nazi invasion right here along the River Parrett- Did the British Government really have plans to bomb the West Side of the town?  
 1120 *The Bridgwater and Taunton Women's shirt and collar workers strike of 1912* by Socialist author and Trades Union activist Dave Chapple  
 1135 *Emelia's Tale* A story from the Workhouse by Val Bannister  
 1150 *The Singer Susie Clark* -Female singer from Bridgwater who wrote 'The Press Gang' told by Voice of

the People Choir Leader Yvette Staelens  
 1205 *Bridgewater in Massachusetts* Chair of the Historical Commission Stephen Rogan joins us live from the USA  
 1220 *The Bridge in Bridgwater' (Part 2) the first iron bridge* by Miles Kerr-Peterson and Tony Woolrich  
 1230- 1300 Open ended historical discussion chaired by Cllr Glen Burrows

### Join us on Zoom here

Topic: Bridgwater History Day  
 Time: Nov 28, 2020 10:30 AM London

### Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89114775594?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89114775594?pwd=WmdOcGd0TnVnK0poaldyanBiMmpRQT09)  
 pwd=WmdOcGd0TnVnK0poaldyanBiMmpRQT09  
 Meeting ID: 891 1477 5594  
 Passcode: 881076

### CURATOR'S REPORT

BY

### MIKE SEARLE, HON CURATOR

Hello everyone, I do hope that you are all keeping safe and well in today's troubling times.

I expect that some of you may be asking when the museum may once again open its doors to visitors. I only wish I could answer in the positive, but sadly we are to continue closed until further notice. I am really hoping that things will have improved by next spring to a degree that will allow us to reopen, albeit in a restricted mode.

Whilst we have been closed, donations continue to come into the museum, and I have some news to tell you. About 3 ½ years ago Carol Lee Scott aka 'Grotbags' passed away at the age of 74. Carol lived at Spaxton not far from where she was born at 'The Pines'. Her early stage debut was while attending Spaxton School and of course the Bridgwater carnival concerts. We were contacted by the executors of Carol's will stating that Carol had bequeathed her stage costume and various items to the Blake Museum. Having accepted the donation, I was about to collect the costume when we received a phone call to say that the will had been contested and so it was put on hold. I am pleased to announce that we are now in possession of the items that Carol had bequeathed to the museum. As it turned out there were two costumes along with all her stage props and make-up box. I am now in the process of obtaining a quotation for a special display case to be made. I am sure the 'Grotbags' display will make a great added attraction. Here is her Wikipedia page :

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol\\_Lee\\_Scott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Lee_Scott)

She featured with Rod Hull and Emu from 1982 on *Emu's World* and then *Grotbags*. Here is a short video clip:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix9xB8p7ado>



ABOVE: COSTUMES  
LEFT: AN ADVERTISING CUT-OUT

Other items donated to the museum include 20 boxes of books from the Bridgwater library. They are mainly reference books, some will be put into the museum's library whilst the rest will go to the Friends' book sale and possibly shop.

Included was the Museum's copy of the album containing the photographic record of the Bridgwater Pageant held in 1927, the year after the Museum opened. At that time the Museum was curated by the Borough Librarian, and much historical archive material was stored there. Some has since been retrieved, but it is not known what is lost. Here is a link to the Museum's web page about the Pageant: <https://www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk/museum-collections/1927pageant.htm>

I took in from Sedgemoor District Council a number of items relating to the old Bridgwater Rural District Council, plus some paintings and various items. Cllr Julian Taylor has donated papers concerning the disinterment of bodies from the site of the Roman Catholic chapel in Gordon Terrace on re-development. Also some papers relating to the Cellophane works.

The Museum Facebook page, Bridgwater History, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk/>, now has more than 3,400 members.

## FINANCES

BY

**LESLEY WITHERS, HON. TREASURER**

As Friends know, most of our income comes from the Spring Fair through to the end of August, however for the first six months we made an overall profit of £3575. This does not affect the finances as we have a considerable balance in hand.

## THE TOWN MILL PROJECT

BY

**STEWART RICHARDS, FOBM CHAIRMAN**

The restoration of the Town Mill; is in a state of dormancy due to the current pandemic, as much at David Mears (Town Clerk) and I would like to be progressing the project. Although important, it is not on the top of the list of things that David needs to attend to these difficult times. Rest assured that as soon as things return a little to normal we will be pursuing the project with architects and consultants, appraising options. I will let you know when things move forward.

## THE MUSEUM GARDEN

BY

**STEWART RICHARDS, FOBM CHAIRMAN**

With the kind help of Elizabeth Ives, Tony Aspey and Brian Withers we have spent one day a week over the last 5 weeks getting to grips with a very overgrown Blake Museum Garden. We have generated over 40 bags of garden waste half of which were removed by Sedgemoor Clean Surroundings a couple of weeks ago. I will be contacting them again to remove a further 20 bags in the next week or so.

### SO WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

- ✦ Raised border outside the office has been totally cleared with the exception of the well established shrubs and the one rose at the office end.
- ✦ 4 bags of well rotted manure have been added to increase the organic matter in a very impoverished soil.
- ✦ 180 tulips have been planted in the raised border outside the office and a further 20 have been planted in the raised border adjacent to the rear courtyard gate. The tulips were purchased by the Friends.
- ✦ Daffodil bulbs from pots have been planted in the border with the vine in the lower garden.
- ✦ Wisteria has been substantially pruned and totally removed from where had become overgrown and was covering the shed roof.
- ✦ Grape vine in lower garden has been pruned extensively and removed from where it had made its way up into the trees in the Blake Gardens rose garden.
- ✦ All leaves have been gathered up; however this will be an ongoing exercise over the autumn.
- ✦ Branches from the birch tree that overhung the mill have been removed.
- ✦ All ivy on the back wall has been removed.
- ✦ Accessible vegetation in the mill has been removed.
- ✦ A start has been made on removal of the vegetation between the dividing fence and Durleigh brook in the lower garden.
- ✦ We will be planting daffodil bulbs supplied from SDC in the lower garden in the wooden planters made by Roger Blackburn.
- ✦ In addition the Friends will be purchasing five fragrant roses for the raised border and one a climber for

the raised border by the courtyard gate to grow up the shed wall.

✧ In the spring we will look to plant perennials that are in keeping with the age of the museum and I am currently researching suitable candidates.



The tulips already planted.

## BRIDGWATER HERITAGE GROUP

BY DR MILES KERR-PETERSON  
& TONY WOOLRICH, CO-EDITORS

You'll find many updates at:

<https://bridgwaterheritage.com/wp/> including a fully digitised edition of Arthur Herbert Powell's 1908 *Bridgwater in the Later Days*, and two digitised directories for the town dating to the 1780s and 1790s. Keeping with the eighteenth century, Peter Eslea MacDonald of the Scottish Tartan Authority cast his expert eye over a tartan shawl, worn by Bridgwater bookbinder George Cass, (c1780) in an article on one of John Chubb's watercolours, which also explores the Cass dynasty. Mr Macdonald produced a design based on it. There are two other Chubb images with people wearing similar design garments in tartan, so it might have been a local fashion.

There are two detailed articles on the history of the organs of St Mary's Church, as well as an additional paper on the medieval rood screen. You'll also find a short article on the mysterious Masonic memorial on the north west buttress of St Mary's Church tower, and a full article on the history of the Swan Inn on the Cornhill (now the site of the Cornhill pub).

There is an account of the sad saga of the Russian Gun, presented to the town after the Crimean War and sent for scrap in 1940. Another is about the discovery of the location of the site of the mysterious Cockmoyle C17/18 town prison, where the Market House is now.

The writings of our Victorian poets are featured, when poems were written and published for recitation at social events or round the parlour fire, often with local themes

As part of the Chubb project (see below), the text of articles by Mary Chubb, John Chubb's great-great-great granddaughter, who wrote about the collection, have

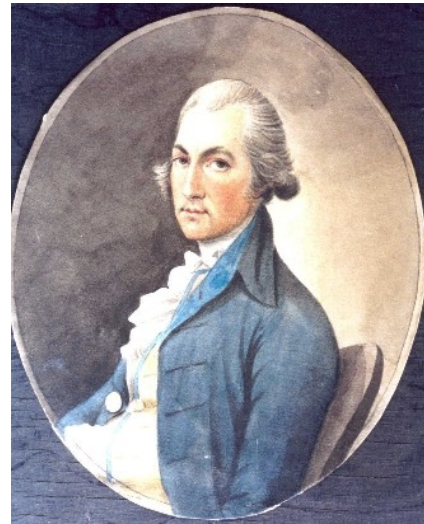
been added.

An on-going project is to research the histories of Bridgwater gas and electricity works.

The transfer of material from the old website is continuing apace, with old articles being updated, one by one. We're hoping to have the complete transfer finished by Christmas.

## THE CHUBB FAMILY MANUSCRIPTS

BY  
TONY WOOLRICH



The Chubb collection of local portraits, purchased in 2004, includes several series of letters: Morley/Luttrell; of the C17; the Chubb family C18 / early C19 and Chubb family late C19, as well as several commonplace books. Between 2004-7 volunteers transcribed the letters and created an illustrated database of the people Chubb drew, with notes from the Borough Archives and other sources. Jonathan Chubb's memorandum book of c1750 was also transcribed, but John Chubb's other commonplace books, containing examples of his often satirical verse about Bridgwater folk, were not. The un-edited work was stored electronically for the museum at the SDC server in Bridgwater House.

All was stopped in 2007 on the District Council announcing it was to close the Museum and disperse the collection. It is not known how much of the letter transcription had been done: it is likely it is incomplete.

After protracted negotiations the Museum was formally handed to the Bridgwater Town Council and has been managed since by the museum volunteers.

At the handover of the Museum to the Town Council, in 2010, the Museum's computer files were wiped and so the electronic files of the research correspondence, letter transcriptions and the biographical research project were lost, leaving print-outs of the work in the museum library. The Town Council's team were not allowed to access the museum's computers beforehand, (on the grounds of confidentiality), but were allowed (under supervision) to place copies of the photographed portraits on memory sticks to make CDs for the use of the museum and fortunately emails with

the letter transcriptions were also sent to the Town Council team, and also had been kept by the volunteers who made them 2004-7.

A hard drive with the Museum's catalogue was found to be corrupted, and it took Dr Cattermole several weeks' work to correct it. But that is another story.

The Corona virus lock-down gives the opportunity to re-visit the files of transcripts, create properly sorted and edited texts, and place them on the museum's website. Special software will be used to read the print-out of the research notes to re-create the text which can be used for further work. Once the lock-down is over, maybe a new generation of volunteers might come forward who can visit the Heritage Centre archive at Taunton, check the originals and add anything missing, so completing the project that had begun almost twenty years ago.



Mr Samuel Stuckey (banker).  
Elected a free burgess in 1784  
BWRAB : 2004/1/208

## FRIENDS OF THE WEMBDON ROAD CEMETERY.

BY  
DR MILES KERR-PETERSON

The Friends continue to publish little videos on the history of the town and its inhabitants, the most recent series exploring Bridgwater and the Sea, with the stories of how the town tried to tame the Parrett over the centuries, a daring rescue at Burnham on Sea which led to the first Lifeboat station there, and even a short video on General at Sea Blake. For the 11 videos so far, see: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUCerzE4qf3fS6Qz mhF6argb> The Friends volunteers' hard work in the cemetery, although drawing down as the weather closes in, presses on to keep the place respectable, and recently concentrated on a cluster of Dunsford family memorials, which remembered a terrible fire in the Bridgwater Mercury offices in 1883. The Friends' new website is up and running at [wembdonroadcemetery.com](http://wembdonroadcemetery.com)

## Museums in Somerset during the Summer:

by  
**RACHEL BELLAMY,**  
**COMMUNITY HERITAGE AND MUSEUM  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER FOR SOMERSET**

Museums across the UK were given the go ahead to open from early July. The picture in Somerset since then has been mixed, as across the whole of the South West and the UK, with museums opening where possible, but many not being able to open because of the continued threat of infection.

The Helicopter Museum in Weston Super Mare and Glastonbury Abbey were two of the first to open, both having extensive space which allows for social-distancing. A small number of community museums re-opened in August, for example, Crewkerne Museum which opened their temporary exhibition space only. Chard Museum introduced booked guided tours, and Dawes Twine Works started to hold open Sundays on their open-air site.

Many community museums in Somerset remained closed over the summer. In several cases the size of museum has not allowed for sufficient social distancing, and trustees have also been concerned for the safety and comfort of volunteer stewards. Although this has been incredibly disappointing for those teams whose museums have not been able to open, trustees and volunteers have used the time to take forward other pieces of work. Sixteen museums have taken part in training on how to market their museums online led by the Museums in Somerset group. Blake Museum is one of the participants.

Two larger museums in Somerset have used the lock-down period to carry out development work: The Helicopter Museum in Weston-Super-Mare has recently opened a large new space and new café, and Haynes International Motor Museum is opening this month after completing a new development project. The experiences of those museums which have re-opened this year are being captured in a survey later in the autumn, and the resulting report will be shared before Christmas.

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**WEBSITES:**

FRIENDS: [WWW.BLAKEMUSEUMFRIENDS.ORG.UK](http://WWW.BLAKEMUSEUMFRIENDS.ORG.UK)  
MUSEUM: [WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.ORG.UK](http://WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.ORG.UK)  
RESOURCES: [WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.INFO](http://WWW.BRIDGWATERMUSEUM.INFO)

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