

# In Our Age

Living local history

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# Hard-won holidays

## The Clements look back on a difficult war

Holiday making is not what it was. When, in the 1955, **Joan and Cecil 'Clem' Clements** set off for a week in Aberystwyth Joan carried daughter Carol on the back of her 50 c.c. while Cecil rode the tandem with son David behind and Robert in the sidecar.

"It wasn't so bad," recalls Clem whose bike was equipped with a small motor mounted on the rear wheel. "We'd do it in a day," remembers Joan recalling another day's ride from Hereford, this time to St Helen's 150 miles away.

The couple had reason to enjoy themselves. Clem, who became head cook at Hereford General Hospital, had several close shaves as a merchant seaman in the war.

He was a ship's cook on the Arctic convoys that were harried by German U-boats as they ferried supplies to Britain's Russian allies in Archangel and Murmansk. Clem's ship a Canadian-built lend-lease, the Fort Vercheres left Loch Ewe in December 1943 on Convoy JW 55B. The Vercheres carried explosives: "We would have needed parachutes, not life jackets if that lot had gone up." The convey scattered when the German Scharnhorst closed in, but the destroyer was attacked and sunk by the Royal Navy with over 1,900 men lost.

By 1944 Clem was ship's cook on the liberty ship, Samwake. "We were returning across the Channel after delivering 500 soldiers to France after D Day when we were hit.

"It was just after midnight and we had two torpedoes in us. She was going down slowly to start off and the captain and some crew went back on to try and salvage her." The Samwake could not be saved and she went down. "We lost the ship's cat, but the captain's dog was all right: he was first into the lifeboat!"

Clem also lost all his belongings. "We were picked up [from the lifeboat] and landed at Dover."

Joan, too, was involved in the war effort. After making tiles, first at Jeffrey's in Barrs Court Road and then Thynnes



Taking a rest on the way to Aberystwyth. Below, David, Carol and Robert, each born on St George's Day.

Tiles, she joined the munition works at Rotherwas as a Civilian Inspector of Armaments (CIA). "I was inspecting the land mines – anything wrong with them and I had to send them back."

The birth of David on St George's Day put paid to her work temporarily. Carol and Robert also were each born on St George's Day "more by accident than good planning," says Joan who worked at Wiggins until her retirement.

The Clements continued to enjoy their biking: "We often rode to the Cheltenham Lido for the day, the best pool for miles around," says Joan.

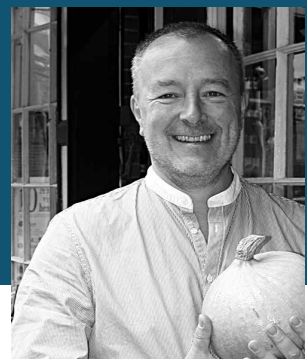


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Herefordshire Lore began in the early 1990s and we have an archive of over 2,000 photographs and many, many memories. With your help we will add to that in the coming year.

Chair: Mark Hubbard



## In Our Age

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Munitions Group ([www.rotherwasmunitionsheford.co.uk](http://www.rotherwasmunitionsheford.co.uk)) Barrie Mayne (chair).

**Front cover:** The county library van stops by. We are trying to identify the village. Can you help us? See page 4.  
(Photo: [www.herefordshirehistory.org.uk](http://www.herefordshirehistory.org.uk))

# The migrants' plight dominated headlines in 2015. IOA looks at back at Herefordshire's generous spirit

## The little refugee

Irene Stewart, right, was affectionately known as 'the Little Refugee'. She had fled Belgium with her mother Charlotte and a family called Verbeck in 1915. They were among the 250,000 refugees driven out by the Germans.

Hereford, the first city in England to offer hospitality to Belgian refugees, became home to several hundred Belgians (see right).

Charlotte and three-month-old Irene stayed at 88 Bath Street, Hereford before going to Malvern where Irene was placed in a refugee hostel while Charlotte went looking for work. She disappeared and Irene never saw her again.

Irene was adopted by a kindly couple, George and Ann Bishop, and became something of a local celebrity, not least because of her colour. As a child she met Edward Elgar, George Bernard Shaw and even the pioneering aviator Amy Johnson. Irene left school at 14 and went into service in Gloucester.

"My mother died this year having lived a long, happy and eventful life," writes **Stuart Dove** who has been exploring his family history and the role of Herefordshire in the refugee crisis. He discovered that his grandmother Charlotte was born, not in Belgium, but in Whitney-on-Wye. "It's a mystery how Charlotte, who was in domestic service, managed to find her way to Belgium where she met a black soldier from the Belgian Congo. He was killed in the war."



## Plucky Belgians

In 1914 Ross MP Captain Percy Clive of Whitfield wrote to Hereford mayor George Greenland warning him to expect fifty Belgian civilians from London, "of the better class of refugees".

Many offered help including Alfred and Amelia Hatton from Mount Craig, Mr Jay at Mordiford Post Office, cider makers H.P. Bulmer at Longmeadow and R.E. Ridler at Clehonger and Chief Constable Frank Richardson of Kilforge, Ballingham.

The first two families to arrive were outnumbered by a reception committee that included Mayor Greenland, Mrs Hewat of Aylestone Hill, Mrs E.C. Guerny and the Misses Newton from Hampton Park.

Soon more families came to stay in the county. One refugee wrote later: "We consider Hereford a paradise." In 1915 the Archbishop of Malines visited the city and presented Mayor Greenland with a ceremonial Belgian flag.

## Fleeing from Franco



In 1937 a 22-year-old Spanish woman arrived in Hereford with 19 bewildered young girls. The woman was Josefina Carmen Suñé (above) and her charges were mostly Republican refugees fleeing Nationalist forces under General Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

Reaching Southampton on board the SS Habana (designed for 800 passengers, she was carrying 3,800), the children were dispatched to different 'colonies' across Britain. Josefina's group was given sanctuary by Hereford's Catholic Sisters of Charity and went to school at St Francis Xavier's in Berrington Street.

Joan Clements was a pupil there. "They were all introduced to us. I was fascinated by them with their dark skin and nice black hair." She remembered Josefina and, despite the language barrier, learned all the children's names.

Josefina's daughter is **Lita Power**. "Some never returned home, either because their families had been killed or because relatives warned them to stay in England," she writes. Josefina stayed and married merchant navy man Jack Jones. When she died her Little Birch tombstone was engraved: Que En Paz Descanse. May She Rest In Peace.

Lita Power's memoir, *Beyond the SS Habana – A Family Story* is available from Lita (litapower2@gmail.com) price £11.50 plus postage.



## From My Album: *John Davies, Judith*



Two photos from railwayman **John Davies'** album: the Trades Council's Jim Lawes collecting in High Town, Hereford during the 1984 miners' strike when Herefordshire people gave generously. And John's wife Margaret (left) with WREN friend Francis Chant in High Town. Margaret had been working at Holme Lacy Hospital which opened in the 1930s as a women's psychiatric hospital.

Travelling librarian for the Black Mountains from 1972 to 1978, **Peter Holliday** remembers it as "a marvellous, if exhausting job – driving up narrow, winding lanes, visiting villages and farms in all weathers, but meeting so many wonderful country people. There were five vans in those days. Now there are none." (Photos: [www.herefordshirehistory.org.uk](http://www.herefordshirehistory.org.uk))



Train guard Bill Parker on a passenger train at Hereford. Like Johnny Davies who featured in IOA 37, Bill (middle row, 3rd left) spent his working life on the railways and served as a local magistrate. (Photo: **Sue Weaver**)



## *h Morgan, Sue Weaver and Michael Young*



Regular contributor **Michael Young** was at Hereford High School from 1946 and played occasionally for the Second XI before leaving to begin an engineering apprenticeship in Rugby. "I remember the open pavilion windows where the scorers, including myself, would sit recording the action." Here's Vivian of Hereford's photo of the First XI, 1951. Back row from the left: A.W.R. Morgan, D.J. Watkins, M.S. Preece, S. Catley, C. Gilbert, B. Savory. Front row: S.W. Stephens, R.C. Marchant, M. Powell, D.A. Luker, J.D. Mawson, P.J. Keyte, K.E. Pole (captain).



Judith Morgan loaned this photo of Pamela Davies' Christmas party at St James Parish Hall, Eign Road, Hereford in 1957.



# The house that Ron – and Edith – built

## Grand Designs Tupsley style

*“We borrowed the building books from Hereford Library”*

Like many newlyweds in the early 1950s, Edith and Ron Clark had nowhere to live when they married.

Edith and Ron had met while walking in the 1930s. “I did a lot of rambling,” remembers Edith who, as an 18-year-old started a Leominster ramblers club. “We thought nothing of going as a group and walking ten miles in a day. It was wonderful.”

Edith was on the Leominster bus, heading for an outing with the Hereford ramblers when Ron boarded her bus. “It was his first time. We were going on a ramble to the Black Mountains. There was snow on the ground and I noticed Ron was melting the snow to make a drink.” Her had come walking with sandwiches, but nothing to quench his thirst. Edith generously shared her flask of tea and romance blossomed.

For a while they stayed with Edith’s mother Clarice at the shop in School Lane, Leominster which Edith’s father, shoemaker Dick Young, had set up. Ron, who had built nothing bigger than a garden wall, decided to resolve the problem: he would build a three-bedroom bungalow.

Since both worked in Hereford, Ron on pump maintenance with Esso, and Edith at Morgan and Friends (later British Road Services) in Edgar Street, they looked for a site in Hereford. They found a plot in an old orchard in Tupsley and with Clarice’s help – she would come and live with them – they bought it for £400. In April 1957 Ron started on the foundations.

For the next two years they worked on the bungalow in their spare time. “We paid for it as we earned it,” says Edith. Ron, self-taught thanks to Hereford Library’s section of do-it-yourself books, did everything from building the brick walls to putting in the plumbing. “We would borrow the books from the library and Ron would read up on them before starting each job,” Edith recalls. “The only task that defeated him was the plastering.”

Once the house was finished, Ron also quit his job. Friends suggested teaching and Ron, who lacked any qualifications having left school at 14, approached Worcester College of Education. Thanks to a glowing reference, Ron gained a place, qualified and taught at Cradley primary school until his premature death in the early 1990s.



Clarice, left, on site while Ron digs the footings.  
Below, bricklaying and finally the roof is on.



## Pig in blue

**In 1956 meat as well as housing was in short supply. John Kinross continues our Eggs & Bacon series.**

Two cooks at RAF Credenhill decided to lift a pig from the freezer and sell it

in Hereford for some extra cash. They dressed it in uniform, put a cardboard face and a beret on the head and smuggled it into town on the village bus.

“They reached the butcher’s shop without any problem but, unknown to them, the weather had turned warm and the pig, released from the freezer, was beginning to leak. The sentry at Credenhill noticed a trail of

blood drops on the road as did the bus conductor who phoned the camp.”

The alarm was raised, the ‘red caps’ (military police) sprang into action and the butchers were searched until the pig was found. “The cooks, still clutching a wad of five pound notes were arrested and put in the slammer,” recalls John in his book *Those National Service Years* (see back page)



## Dr Bull's groom

**Julia Rose** was intrigued by Lorretta Jones's photos of 19 St Martins Street, Hereford (IOA 37). Her great-grandparents, Albert and Beatrice Matthews, married in 1897 and lived there for a time. Albert was groom to the naturalist Dr Henry Graves Bull from 1 St John Street, Hereford. Albert is seen here with Mrs Bull outside her home. His son Ronald Matthews served in the war and worked on the munitions at Rotherwas and at Hereford Cattle Market. His daughter Mary was an active member of St Martin's Church in Hereford up until her death in 2014, helping with the design and creation of many of the wall hangings that adorn St Martin's Church.



## Runner Bob Cole

**Eddie Thompson** from Allensmore remembers Bob Cole, the famous Peterchurch long-distance runner. ("Was he a conscientious objector?" asked Steve Herington, IOA 37). "When I was a pupil at Peterchurch School during the war Bob would appear at the school gates during playtime, scaring us by saying 'The Germans are coming' and muttering in what sounded like a foreign language. My late aunt Dorothy Wilding used to relate the tale that when, in the first war, the recruiting team came to the village, Bob hid up the chimney of the almshouse where his family lived.

"During the cycle grass track races of the 1950s, which I competed in, Bob was usually there. (He once told me my thighs were too big to race.) In later years he had a very nice Rover Racing Cycle, but he always seemed to be walking with it."

Eddie, who founded Mastercraft Cycles, also recalled the Italian prisoner of war camp in Wellbrook Road and an Italian called Reno.

## The Abosso mystery

Reader **Doug Emery** is mystified by the discovery of a pair of empty artillery shells embossed in copper with the name Abosso. The Abosso was an armed

merchant ship which in October 1942 carried 210 passengers from Capetown to Liverpool along with 3,000 tons of wool. She was sunk by a German U-boat and 362 of her crew and passengers died. Thirty-one people including 12 crew and one of the ten women passengers were rescued from their lifeboat by HMS Bideford two days later. Why, wonders Doug, have these commemorative shells ended up in Herefordshire? Was there a county connection with the tragedy?

## Foxley camp

"My father, Captain William Hawker was with the Polish Resettlement Corps at Fowley Camp after the war," writes **Wendy Cummins** from Wellington. The family were living in west London and William, who had enlisted in the First World War as an underage soldier was now serving in the Home Guard when he was posted to the camp at Hereford. "I wonder, does anyone remember him?" asks Wendy.

## Stanley Powell

A century ago in the First World War a 21-year-old tailor, Stanley George Powell of 16 Widemarsh Street, Hereford stood in High Town during the May Fair. He held a banner which read: "You don't have to enlist until you have thought it

well through." A month later Powell was fined £25 with five guineas costs for "prejudicing recruitment". That year 130 men enlisted for the army at the May Fair.

In 1916 Powell, along with some ten others, applied for exemption from military duties, combatant and non-combatant, on the grounds of conscience. "I believe in the brotherhood of man," he told the local tribunal. His appeal was refused. Two months later he was sentenced to two years hard labour by a North Wales court marshal. IOA hopes to find out what happened to Powell and other conscientious objectors after the war. Can you help?

## Wheeler and Conu

Angela Garner is searching for information on 40 Commercial Road, once the home of Wheeler and Conu, a motor cycle sales and repair shop. "It was unusual in that it had a large sales window, but we are wondering what was there before?" If you can help Angela email [dutton1948@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:dutton1948@hotmail.co.uk) or contact IOA.

## Send us your memories

In Our Age relies on its readers for stories of living local history. Keep sending them in!





## March past

Memories of a march past by the Royal Air Force Association (RAFA) in the mid-1960s comes from June Smith of Bridgend. "Watching the Battle of Britain anniversary took me back to the annual cathedral service and march past to St Peter's Square," writes June. "Together with a couple of sections from RAF Credenhill and a buffet put on by the ladies' group, the day was enjoyed by all. In those days, with its club in Aubrey Street, the RAFA was a going concern."

## RAF Credenhill

**John Kinross** (bottom right) served part of his 1950s National Service at RAF Credenhill.

"The typing course was very thorough. We were all trained on Imperial 'bash it hard' typewriters. They were strong and

needed to be. We learnt to type in rhythm, sometimes to music. Diana was my favourite tune, very different to the Lonnie Donegan and Elvis Presley played on the station radio full blast when it was time to get up."

On one occasion he missed the

appeared to collect Tiddles and left a dozen bottles of local beer with us."

John's recollections are published in *Those National Service Years*, (New Millennium Publication) available from Rossiter Books, Ross (01989 564464).



Commanding Officer's parade (which involved lots of polishing brass and ironing) because of a special mission: to deliver and return the flight sergeant's cat, Tiddles, to the vet at RAF Uxbridge in his MG. "The rest of the billet was highly jealous when I returned. They cheered up when the flight sergeant



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