


In Our Age

Living local history

Issue 46
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Herefordshire in the 1940s

Readers share their photos and memories

Aconbury

Shortly after war broke out young **Henry Moss**, whose father worked at Aconbury Court, was sent on a mission by the Court's owner Arnold Layton. He was to save the church treasures. Henry takes up the story: "One summer's evening Mr Layton asked me to take the chalice and collection plate for safe keeping, in a bag through the woods to Mr Payne at Merrivale Farm. The German invasion was expected and we feared that valuables seized by the Germans would be sent back to Germany. Mr Payne was going to block off half the cellar to store local valuables until after the war."

Henry's reward for saving the church plate was some biscuits from Mr Payne and a pocket full of silver paper he found on his way home. "We used it to make Christmas decorations – we didn't waste anything in those times."

Mansell Lacy

Meanwhile Canadian soldiers were settling in at Foxley Camp. The Camp, in the grounds of Foxley Manor near Mansell Lacy, would serve Canadians, German prisoners of war, two US army hospitals, Polish refugees and Hereford families with nowhere else to live.

One Canadian, Sapper Bob Knowles, was befriended by Ernie and Emily Evans who ran Mansell Lacy post office. (Ernie was also village blacksmith, cabinet and coffin maker and petroleum dealer.) After Bob's unit was moved out in 1941, his mother wrote from Foxbar Road, Toronto thanking the Evans for their kindness. Charlie, their youngest son, still has the letter.

"The people of Mansell Lacy seemed so glad to see Bob," she wrote. "He has been away a year and a half now and it seems there is no end to these troubles." Bob was killed on active service a month later.

By now **Charlie Evans**, having worked at the RAF Credenhill post office, reached enlistment age and signed on at St Peters Hall, Hereford. He was sent to Burma [now Myanmar], recently retaken from the Japanese and tasked with escorting Japanese prisoners of war to the Siam border (now Thailand).

Shobdon

Back in Herefordshire fighter pilot **Brian Davies** was training glider pilots at RAF Shobdon. Orders arrived sending him to RAF Abingdon to pilot bombers. The crew selection process was arbitrary: pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and rear gunners were shoved into a large room and given an hour to form crews. With 700 flying hours to his name Brian was a catch for any crew and he was soon recruited by four Australians.

Brian recalled the crew bonding on a visit to a nearby pub. "We walked in and shouted for six pints of bitter. The landlord grumbled: 'I don't know what you're coming up here for, drinking my beer. You've got plenty up the camp.' I knew we were going to be a good crew because the Aussie navigator looked at me and we each picked up our pints, drank about half and then turned them upside down on the bar and walked out. Not a word was spoken."

Our editor Bill Laws is working on Herefordshire Lore's book about the county during the last war. Get in touch with your own memories.



Land Army Girls: **Ami Hartland** loaned this picture of her great aunt Audrey Wilding (nee Lowe) from Derbyshire (2nd from the right 2nd row from the back). Do you recognise anyone?



Canadian friends: **Charlie Evans'** family, Ernie and Emily with their family and Canadian friend Sapper Bob Knowles. "There seems no end to these troubles," wrote the soldier's mother to Charlie's family a month before Bob was killed. Inset: Charlie revisits Foxley Camp.



Marooned in the 1990 floods, Frank Barton's Wye Invader barge was moored opposite Hereford Rowing Club. (Photo: Brian Croker – see back page)

returning with jugs of fresh milk, Jennifer supervised the cooking on two stoves.

Canoes, tents, pots and pans were transported back to Bredwardine by coal merchant Vic Powell of Luckshall near Fownhope who had painstakingly swept the lorry free of coal dust.

One canoeist, Kenneth Johnson, recorded the event in his diary (published by Jennifer Barwick in Parents Get Lost! The Man Behind Children's Adventure): "We arrived at Hereford Rowing Club steps and set off along Greyfriars Avenue, dressed as we were [and] attracting some startled glances, especially Peter clad in swimming trunks covered by a large jumper. We came to the Municipal Restaurant, a bleak but homely building, where we got an excellent lunch. On our way back, we stopped at the garage and bought half a gallon of petrol for our cooking stoves, which the assistant patiently poured into little cans."

Hole in the Wall

Lawrence's company eventually settled in Ross and Hole in the Wall where, in 1963, another intrepid boater took to the water: John Fishpool from Goodrich was in his teens when he launched his homemade plywood boat one summer afternoon at Foy (right). He carried the boat on the roof rack of his Morris 1000 and continued boating at weekends.

"I remember them dipping the sheep in the river and, on the other side of Backney Common, the boat hut of Mr Snell of Townend Farm. In those days, you wouldn't have seen any other boats on the river."

By now Cwmdare's **Karl Chattington's** favourite craft, the coracle, had largely disappeared from the Wye. Karl was inspired to take up the coracle after meeting Teifi coraclist Bernard Thomas who, in 1974, fortified only with two bottles of Lucozade and half a dozen raw eggs, paddled across the English Channel in a coracle. His protest paddle – he was objecting to legislation aimed at cutting the number of coracles on Welsh rivers – took over thirteen hours.

Each coracle was constructed to suit local river conditions, says Karl, who

reconstructed a Wye coracle with a traditional cleaved ash frame locked in place by a hazel gunwale and covered with pitch-painted calico. Karl's Wye coracle, based on old photographs and measurements taken from one held by Hereford Museum, now hangs on the wall of St Arvans church near Chepstow.

John Fishpool recalls one of the best ways to enjoy the Wye: "We used to swim at Foy – it was part of life, wasn't it?" A former student teacher, Gertrude Curson, recalled, in Hereford Training College records, their regular early morning river swims before the last war with "Miss Morris, who nobly rose at the same hour and met us promptly on the river bank".

Joan Lloyd, our cover girl and one of the Lloyd family who ran pleasure river boats at Hereford (see IOA 45), also enjoyed river swimming: "I always swam in the river, even when it was in flood." She still swims at the Halo Leisure Pool, but preferred the open water. "A friend has a house facing the river with a big lake which I used to swim in. It was absolutely beautiful."

River Sailors

From Hay to Monmouth: Marsha O'Mahony of RiverVoices recalls some intrepid river journeys

Peter Gordon Lawrence founded one of Europe's largest adventure holiday companies, PGL. However, his maiden voyage was a trip down the Wye in May 1957 with a fleet of canoes, nine nurses and his sister Jennifer on cooking duties. The nurses caught the Hereford train to Kinnersley and joined Peter and Jennifer at the starting point, Bredwardine, Peter having reconnoitred the route earlier on his sister's Vespa.

Each evening, having canoed ten miles, the party camped on the riverside and while Peter negotiated with local farmers for supplies, often



Ross readers **Mike Whittingham** and his sister **Dorothy Joyner** have been in touch regarding the photograph of Neville Chamberlain (IOA 45). Their father Jack Whittingham helped the former prime minister land his successful haul of salmon when the former PM was guest of Robert Pashley, 'Wizard of the Wye'. For 47 years, Jack was ghillie on the Goodrich and Hill Court Waters, and it was during his time there that he fished with Chamberlain, as well as authors and leaders of industry. It was the mid-30s that Chamberlain visited, achieving his personal best, catching five fish off one fly, thanks to Jack, who also helped Robert Pashley claim over 12,000 fish from the Wye.



Welcome

Welcome to our autumn issue. Loyal subscribers are invited to join again – just fill in the enclosed letter. Thanks for your support: we rely on you! We are still using cheques but should have an online payment system by next year.

I hope you enjoy Marsha O'Mahony's RiverVoices (opposite), Nick Jones' look at Wiggin's, Michael Young and Eileen Carpenter's school day memories (page 6).

Barbara Evans of Moreton-on-Lugg loaned this photo (right) from her husband Bryn's archive. It's believed to be No 14 Church Street, just down from our shop, Fodder. Barbara's research in Kelly's Directory for 1926 reveals "W. E. Turner, boot repairers, 14 Church St." Earlier, in 1914, there was a Turner E & Co, boot and shoe warehouse at 68 Eign Street.

Mark Hubbard, chair, Herefordshire Lore



Goodbye to Tiles and Cider

Readers' remember Henry Wiggin's

Special Report: Wiggin's

Although it has only been in Hereford for around 60 years, the Wiggin company's origins began in Birmingham in 1872, where it became hugely successful developing its nickel-chrome metal for the cutlery manufacturing industry. In 1953 the company moved into its purpose-designed Hereford plant: a 50-acre site at Holmer, constructed by the Ministry of Supply as part of a national programme of industrial modernisation. Seven years later Wiggin purchased the site from the government. The site (formerly Crossway Farm) and the construction of the 200,000 square foot factory cost the MoS £2 million (around £68 million at today's prices).

Wiggin's arrival was hugely significant, not only for the employment opportunities and the boost to the local economy, but because it dramatically changed the region's balance between

manufacturing industries (such as bricks and tiles) and agriculture-based enterprises (hops, apples and pears).

Before the arrival of the Wiggin workforce, the county's employment was predominantly agriculture-based (almost 30% as against the national figure of just under 6%); whereas nationwide, 11% of all men and women worked in industry, against only 3% in Herefordshire. As one

wag observed when news of the Wiggin decision was announced: "It's goodbye to tiles and cider!" By the late-1990s, Wiggin – along with H P Bulmer and Sun Valley – accounted for 57% of the city's manufacturing jobs.

Alderman Piggot

Competition from rival bidders Shrewsbury and Worcester had been intense. A tireless campaigner for the project was the Labour firebrand Alderman Bill Piggot. What may finally have swung the Ministry's decision in favour of Hereford was the council's promise that new houses would be built for the Wiggin workers being decanted from its Birmingham and Glasgow operations.



The curriculum of the Technology College was modified to include engineering courses, ensuring apprenticeships for the children of Wiggin employees. **Pip Clarke** (1969–72) throws an interesting light on the company's attitude to the fitness of its apprentices. "As well as making them go on a semi-compulsory 2 mile run every week, they were sent on week-long outward bound courses to Cumberland and Snowdonia." In the 1950s the Holmer plant was expanded to 100 acres, with its own railway sidings.

Prestigious metallurgical contracts undertaken by Wiggin over the years have included work on both the supersonic Concorde and de Havilland's Comet jet airliners; superalloy working parts for the Thames Barrier flood prevention scheme; and collaboration with NASA's Space Shuttle programme, to create heat-resistant clips for the ceramic tiles cladding some of the Discovery Mission's launch vehicles. Former engineering supervisor **Tony Chapman** (1954–87) – one of the lucky ones who were provided with council accommodation – remembers among the prestige contracts, North Sea oil and the trans-Siberian gas pipeline.

At its peak, Wiggin had a workforce of 3,800, though that figure has shrunk today to under 1,000. The company is now known as Special Metals Wiggin Ltd, part of Precision Castparts Corporation of Portland, Oregon, employing over 30,000 in 162 worldwide locations.

Christmas party

Wiggin's staff relations were part of the Company's ethos: there was a Christmas party for employees' children, the Summer Flower Festival, a Staff Sports Club (which included a bowling green for the Scottish employees), the quarterly staff newspaper (*Wiggin News*) and a host of activities in the Wiggin Recreational Club (now Holmer Park). It was not uncommon for three generations of the same family to work at Holmer.

Joan Clements retired from the wire mill in 1980. Employed at the tile works before the war, she was a

A Hawker Hunter jet plane over Shobdon in 1967, captured by amateur photographer Brian Croker. The prototype of Sir Frank Whittle's first turbojet engine, which made its maiden flight in May 1941 aboard a Gloster E28/39, had pride of place in Wiggin's reception for many years. Whittle collaborated with Wiggin's chief physicist Dr Pfeil on the formulation of the engine's turbine blades and most Rolls Royce-powered passenger airliners flying today have superalloy turbine blades based on that collaboration.



Melting moments: molten metal being poured from the Holmer furnace, captured by our own Keith James in the 1970s.

civilian armaments inspector at Rotherwas' munitions factory before joining Wiggin's. "I was inspecting blades for Rolls Royce aircraft then they changed them to carbon. We had to either go up the road or go to the wire mill so I chose to go and draw wire, through these different mills. I enjoyed it."

Virtually all ex-Wiggin employees remember the Christmas pantomime, originally performed in Hereford's Kemble Theatre, then later in The County Theatre in Berrington Street (now Gala Bingo). Legendary pantomime dame **Vic Herbert** (1955–81) recalls that some shows were so popular that the company's Drama Group would put on as many as 14 performances, attracting audiences from as far afield as Birmingham, Cardiff and Swansea. **Jenny Williams** (1969–81) remembers with affection her last performance in the group's 1981 production of Dick Whittington. "There was a cast of 16, supported by 6 dancers and a chorus of 15, as well as more than 25 production staff and it was performed in the Wiggin Theatre, which was located behind the staff canteen." **Margery Farr** (1957–66) worked as a technician in Wiggin's laboratories. Holmer's lab testing concentrated exclusively on quality control and traceability testing of the plant's high-grade superalloy output, much of it destined for the expanding aviation industry. Her husband **Norman** (1957–2000) was a senior metallurgist who began his career as a direct result of the ONC and HNC courses, which were available (through day-release) at the tech college.

Nick Jones

Thanks to the many readers for their reminiscences about working at Holmer. We couldn't publish them all – but keep sending them in!

Bill Piggot, alderman and herbalist (he ran a medical herbalist shop in Commercial Street, Hereford) campaigned for Wiggin to come to the city.



Memoires

The Friday Club

In IOA 44 Pam James recalled the 1950s where student teachers like herself were tasked with entertaining kids from the College Hill estate at the “dreaded Friday Club”. **Michael Young**, then a seven-year-old All Saints schoolboy, remembers being practised on by student teachers in 1943.

“We walked in crocodile fashion from school to the College where we sat cross-legged on the floor in one of the large, impressive college classrooms whilst a student teacher read a story or two and played some (jolly!) games. At going-home time we walked back to All Saints and, taking into consideration the return trips from home to school, I must have walked seven miles on those days. No school buses in 1943.

“The four All Saints teachers, like extensions of our own mothers, were the Misses Jones, Barnes and two Roseveare sisters, the elder being the head teacher.

“On occasions, a student teacher would come to All Saints and sit at the back of the class whilst Miss Roseveare took the lesson. The student was then invited to try her hand under her watchful eye. Confidence building if a little daunting for the student and a bit confusing for us young pupils.

“Living in Barrs Court Terrace (now Geldof Grove), my parents would leave the front door wide open to enable a waft of fresh air in on summery days with no thought of anyone up to no good entering. I have a clear memory of shrill female voices on Platform 4, north end, which attracted us all to the front step. College students, probably having completed successfully their training, awaited the 6.22 pm express to Cardiff and Plymouth, dressed in their distinctive green blazers.

“They waved their green and white striped college scarves, cheering, chanting: ‘Two, four six, eight, Who do we appreciate? H - E - R - E - F - O - R - D HEREFORD!’ By the staid and law abiding standards of Hereford at the time that could almost be classed as a riot.”

Eileen's Garden Retreat

In the last part of her memoire, Brummie evacuee Eileen Carpenter finally finds somewhere to call home

“The beginning of March a new ‘home’ was found for me. Someone knew someone who might take me. My Mom came to Hereford and we went to see the people, a young couple, Mr and Mrs Pasley, and a small boy, Robert, living near The Turnpike on Roman Road. I was still homesick, but settled in.

“I didn’t live near any of my school friends so it was lonely. I’d push the boy in his pram down to the River Lugg and on weekends went to Sunday School at Holmer. At night I’d sit by my window looking for the red glow over the Malverns: that meant an air raid and I worried about my parents in Birmingham. Many a night I’d cry myself to sleep.

“I could have gone hop picking with St Peters School but declined when I learnt that we had to sleep in a barn. But I did go hop picking daily from here and enjoyed it.



Riverside relaxation: trainee teachers Rosemary Whitehouse and friend, both students at Hereford College in the 1950s, on the banks of the Wye

“The house had a large vegetable garden and I was given a patch to grow flowers which I was allowed to sell for a penny or two. With the 6d Mom sent me each week I could save and buy presents with my own money.

“One day, after rumours that the Germans had landed in Wales, I noticed concrete blocks on the roadside and mine holes in the road. I immediately wrote to my Mom and asked her if she realised that I would be one of the first to be blown up? I would be safer at home! Needless to say my letter was ignored.”

Eileen was eventually reunited with her parents when war came to an end.



Around & About



Angus ‘Gus’ Brymer’s photo of the Caledonian, parked at Bulmer’s siding in Hereford, prompts railwayman and IOA reader **John Davies** to note the end of an era. In 1854 driver John Phillips of 34 Ryeland Street, Hereford drove the first Great Western engine with Queen Victoria on board from Shrewsbury to Hereford. A century later the Barton Yard sidings employed around 400 railway workers, mostly driver and guard crews. In 2017, says John, they have all gone, apart from a handful of station staff.

Kington

“I enjoyed Peter Holman’s *Jammy fried eggs and bananas*,” writes **Stephen Gilling** from Kington (IOA 45). “John Stimpson’s father was local artist Ray Stimpson. He and Arthur Dickinson, proprietor of the Picture House, were married to two French sisters. John’s mother Blanche (she who ‘served nettle tops for lunch’) led a double life. While her husband was away on army service Blanche was parachuted into occupied France as part of the Resistance. After her death Ray put an obituary notice in The Telegraph and was astounded to receive condolences from the French embassy who referred to Blanche as their ‘sister in arms’. Many years later a short wave radio aerial was discovered in the roof space over Mr Dickinson’s old home, undoubtedly used to make contact with Blanche.” IOA will feature Blanche and her double life in the next issue of IOA.

Whitecross

Students at Whitecross School are planning a film about Herefordshire’s post-war Polish community. The students, two Polish, two Romanian and one English, secured Lottery funding to explore the role of Polish pilots and soldiers during the last war. Shared Freedom – Shared Future will feature a bilingual film scheduled to be shown at The Courtyard in

Hereford next year. Groups of Polish people settled in Herefordshire after the war, the Foxley resettlement camp at Mansell Lacy becoming a focus for many families. Whitecross head teacher Tim Knapp: “I am delighted that the Shared Freedom – Shared Future bid has been successful and that Whitecross students will be involved in this unique opportunity.” Can you help with their researches? Contact KHorne@whitecross.hereford.sch.uk

Bartonsham

Following The School Run (IOA 45) **Frances Wilson** writes from her South Australian home about her time at St James School around 1941. Despite the war, life carried on as normal under headmistress Mrs Hall and colleagues Mrs Bradley, Mrs Davies and Mrs Jones: “Girls knitted dishcloths, boys made raffia mats, each class had its own garden at the back of the school and milk rations were dished out in beakers at break times.” There was maypole dancing accompanied on the school piano (Frances’ father was a piano tuner at Gilbert and Leslie Heins on Broad Street) and country dance performances on the Castle Green. Each child was allotted a gas mask and torch and given a house with a cellar to go to in the event of an air raid. Towards the end of the war “we were escorted through the vicarage grounds and into the General Hospital underground shelters when the sirens sounded”.

Oral Histories

Herefordshire Lore is offering free oral history training sessions through our River Voices: Stories from the Wye project. Marsha O’Mahony will lead the two-hour workshops designed to help people learn to listen, save, and share important community stories. Participants will discover interviewing and deep listening techniques, get to handle digital recorders and do some practice interviews. “Oral history interview skills empower us to record and engage the histories and stories of people in our local communities, and preserve those important narratives for future generations,” says Marsha. If you’re interested in booking a free workshop contact Marsha (07989 733870 or riverwyvoices@gmail.com).

Widemarsh Street

Well done to **Ann Morgan** from Hereford who identified Keith Taylor’s photo (IOA 45) as the Widemarsh Street garage A. Tanner and Son and to **Tilly Weobley** (the editor’s granddaughter) who spotted the school photo: “It’s the Reception at my school” (Scudamore, Hereford). Below: another view of Tanner’s.



From My Album: *Brian Croker and Elisabeth Nicolson*



The College, Hereford
That was the postal address used by Salford's Marion Marjorie Pearson, centre, one of the first students in 1904 at the Hereford Teacher Training College. As a non-denominational, local authority-run institution, the College was the first of its kind. Marion's granddaughter Elisabeth Nicolson writes from her Shetland Island home, Unst: "She taught in Hereford, Birmingham and around Manchester/ Salford and her description of conditions is amazing. Some of the practices would be looked on as cutting edge, even today."



The late **Brian Croker** of Folly Drive, Hereford was an ordinary working man with an eye for a good photograph. These three depict changing times in Hereford city. Can you identify where they are? And what the horse and dray carrying the cross is all about?



In Our Age

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