

In Our Age

Herefordshire Lore : Living local history

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Winter 2018



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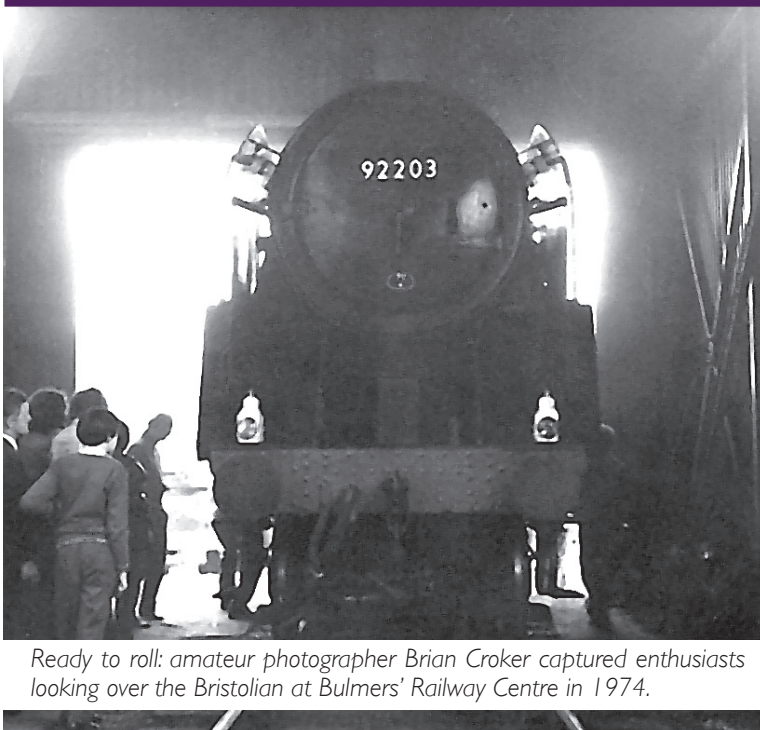
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Ready to roll: amateur photographer Brian Croker captured enthusiasts looking over the Bristolian at Bulmers' Railway Centre in 1974.

A Fantastic Journey

The Ross to Hereford railway was a lifeline for Hugo Mason

In 1959 I was about to leave Ross Grammar School without a job. Further education was out of the question. I considered carpentry, but tools were too expensive. I'd worked weekends for travelling shop owner Eddie Davies of 10 Ladyridge, Brockhampton and he mentioned that Kings Caple architect, John Hook, might need an assistant.

John came to our house, 8 Ladyridge, interviewed me and gave me the job on trial for 25 shillings (£1.25) a week. Lacking an office, we set up two drawing boards in John's living room until the post of diocesan surveyor, then held by Maurice W Hobbiss of Birmingham's Holland W Hobbiss, passed to John and me in 1985. Now primarily responsible for managing the parsonage houses for the Hereford diocese, we soon moved to 12 Castle Street, Hereford.

With the daily journey to Hereford I bought a new, drop handlebar Raleigh bicycle on hire purchase and every morning, rain or shine, cycled the two miles to Fawley Station with my sandwich box, often hearing the train coming from Backney Halt, when I was still cycling past Fawley Court. Fortunately, the station was downhill and, leaving my bike round the back, I'd run across the line to catch the train.

The return fare was 17/6 (87.5p) per week, which, from my 25 shillings, left virtually nothing for emergencies and so I earned additional money doing plans ('foreigners') on the side and carving wooden house signs. I travelled this way for three years until I bought an old Vauxhall Wyvern (LAP 429) from Biggs Motors of Fownhope.

The rail journey took me through Fawley tunnel and across Aramstone viaduct, downstream from Carey Islands (a very special space on the Wye where I spent hours fishing and wildlife watching and where I once, many years later, caught a 22.5 pound salmon). Then it was on to Ballingham and Holme Lacy stations and Hereford, just eight miles from Fawley. Within a few years Dr Beeching had put an end to this fantastic journey.

British Railways chairman, Lord Beeching, axed the passenger rail link between Ross and Hereford in November 1965.

Herefordshire Lore

At Herefordshire Lore we've been collecting and publishing your memories since 1989. We've no staff or office, but we have produced 90 newsletters and published reminiscences on markets, munitions, milk, and our latest project, the River Wye. We launched Age To Age in 1993 with Vi Thomas, Roy Kennett, Alf Evans, Vi Woolaway and Jim Thomas (below) and now, thanks to this digital age, you can read, research and download them for free! Check out www.herefordshirelore.org.uk

Herefordshire Lore today: (front, left to right) Joyce Chamberlain, Chris Tomlinson, Julie Orton-Davies and Rosemary Lilico; (second row) designer Lisa Marie Badham of Pink Sheep Design and proofreader Sandy Green, Irene Tomlinson, Peter Mayne; (third row) Jean Mayne, our administrator Eileen Klotz and Linda Ward; (back) web manager Chris Preece and editor Bill Laws. (Missing that day: Chair Mark Hubbard, treasurer Harvey Payne, Betty Webb and the RiverVoices team Marsha O'Mahony, Heather Allan, Kate Bower and guest Vicky Connaught.

Do you have a story to tell? Call us on 07845 907891, info@herefordshirelore.org.uk or drop us a line at Herefordshire Lore, Castle Green Pavilion, Castle Green, Hereford, HR1 2NW.



Front cover: Reg and Ella Tomlinson with twins Raymond and Christopher – see page 6.

One Woman's War

From kitchen maid to regimental police woman

Former domestic maid Kit Gower (now Hodges) collected her military uniform and started training with the Auxiliary Training Service (ATS) in 1942. Leaving Hereford for the first time in her life she joined the regimental police at South Wigston, later serving in Leicester and Guildford, leading parades, controlling traffic ("even double deckers"), escorting prisoners and even disarming one young women armed with a knife: "It turned out that the poor kid was suffering because her Mum had just died."

Kit had some sympathy with the girl. Herself one of eleven children, she'd left Tupsley school and been put in service when her own mum died. She served as a kitchen maid – "up at five in the morning scrubbing floors until eleven o'clock at night" – but left following a dinner party incident. "The parlour maid was on holiday so I took the food in and, I know I shouldn't have been listening, but when the lady of the house asked a question, I gave the answer.

'Mind your business!' she said, 'and get on with your work.' I thought: I'm not having that." Biding her time until she was old enough, Kit made aircraft parts in a Withington workshop until at seventeen and a half she was old enough to join the ATS.

Kit was proud of her work and her appearance. "I'm not being big headed, but when the commanding officer went past on inspection she'd say: 'Perfect.' I used to think: This uniform gets pressed so much it's unbelievable." Kit was chosen to model the uniform (opposite) for Swarbrick Studios. They planned a film about the ATS starring Phyllis Calvert and while the movie was never made, Kit remained proud of her achievements.

It's 100 years since Herefordshire women first voted in a general election and since then many women have made their mark on local history. Let us know who inspired you.



The Whittern Way Cork Club

Newsagent John Hyde opened for business in 1967

The Whitehouse pub opened on Christmas Eve 1966 on Whittern Way, Hereford, writes **John Hyde**. It stood on land once part of Whitehouse and Prospects farms, purchased by Herefordshire Council to house people moving from Scotland, Wales and Birmingham to work at Henry Wiggins factory (featured in IOA 46). The pub was an instant success for landlord Mr Keen. "On a Sunday morning you would be shoulder to shoulder in the bar and to get another drink you passed your glass and the money from customer to customer."

Sundays were also devoted to the Cork Club, "a sort of charity," explains John: "You paid half a crown to join and were given a cork with a number on it. If you challenged a fellow member to show you their cork, they paid a fine if they couldn't find it. Also on Sunday mornings there would be a challenge such as wearing two different shoes. Once again those caught out paid a fine." The funds were devoted to a members' Christmas meal and a seaside trip for youngsters from the Folly House children's home. "Up to five coaches were needed," recalls John.

He opened the first shop on Whittern Way, a newsagent's at 16 Chilton Square, in July 1967 with his first employee, Val Preece, and the support of customers like Betty Talbot, then in her eighties, who brought him a coffee at 6.15 a.m. every morning. He also became sub-postmaster the next year, his appointment delayed by the Head Postmaster's concerns over his ability to manage the Christmas rush: "I realised why the following Christmas – the quantity of cards and parcels posted required a postman to collect the full sacks every fifteen minutes."

John retired in 2003 – "a sad occasion for me" – and a rejuvenated White House opened as a community centre in 2016.



John steps down in 2003 from Whittern Way post office with (from left) Dot Cameron who served here for 28 years, Ann Thomas for 23 years, Kaye Morris around 20, Mary Smith and Brenda Watts around 30 years between them.

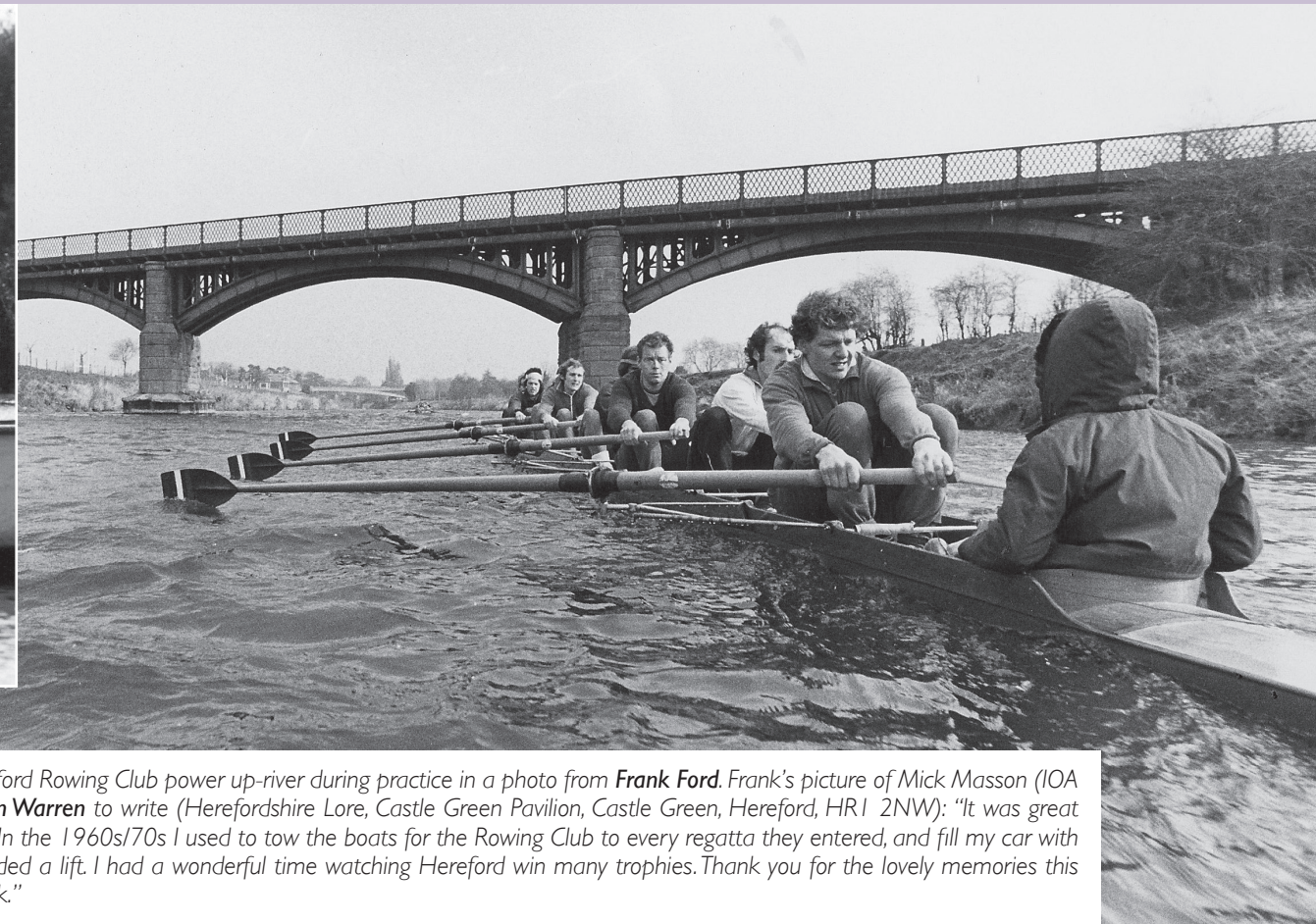
From My Album: *Val Hughes, Frank Ford, Vic Gammage*



More memories from Britain's first non-denominational, local authority-run institution, the Hereford Teacher Training College. First year student **Val Hughes** (5th row, 3rd from left) who went on to teach at Kingstone and Thruxton Primary School, joined the choir for this concert party in the College Hall in 1959. Standing, centre, is music lecturer Dorothy Owen.



Close to the wind: intrepid young sailors race one another at the 1993 regatta on Bodenham Lake, then run as a sailing centre by Herefordshire County Council and now a wildlife reserve. (Photo: Vic Gammage)



A party from Hereford Rowing Club power up-river during practice in a photo from **Frank Ford**. Frank's picture of Mick Masson (IOA 45) prompted **John Warren** to write (Herefordshire Lore, Castle Green Pavilion, Castle Green, Hereford, HR1 2NW): "It was great to see the photos. In the 1960s/70s I used to tow the boats for the Rowing Club to every regatta they entered, and fill my car with any crew that needed a lift. I had a wonderful time watching Hereford win many trophies. Thank you for the lovely memories this photo brought back."



It looks like the St John Ambulance Brigade during an inspection in front of the College of Art and Craft on Hereford's Castle Green. Can you shed any light on the picture?



Ford in a flood: the driver of a Ford Consul struggles to reach Bredwardine Bridge after the river broke its banks in 1963. (Photo: John and Hannah Pickford).

Plane spotting

I was looking after my sister outside the Commercial Road post office in Hereford in mid-1942 when an aircraft came over very low, recalls **Michael Young**. "It's a Wellington," I exclaimed to the astonishment of the post office crowd and the approval of an airman nearby. I seemed to be able to recognise all the aircraft, from the ineffectual Blackburn Roc, Fairey Battle and Whitley to the 'Mozzy', our three heavy bombers and so on.

To keep us safe from enemy bombers an Anderson shelter had been delivered to our house, No. 2 Barrs Court Terrace, the previous year. Made of heavy gauge corrugated steel it came in pieces with a construction manual and a hand tool. Dad, accomplished with a pen, but not so proficient with a half-inch Whitworth spanner, drafted in 'Uncle' Tom Oakley (no relation) from No. 1 and Uncle Bob (a time-served cooper) from No. 3 to install the shelter on our front garden. Set in a hole two feet deep by 40 square feet and covered with surplus soil, it was snug inside, fitted-out with benches and seemingly secure. I asked a nurse, billeted with us, if Jerry dropped a bomb on top, would it come through? She said that it would. Mum and Dad, aghast, quickly reassured me that it would bounce off.

When the air raid siren warned of approaching enemy aircraft, my sister and me, swathed in blankets, would be hurried into the shelter. The sight of a mass of bombers in formation overhead and the noise, the heavy low frequency thrum, thrum, thrum from a hundred engines, was menacing and unforgettable. I was in my first year at All Saints School and the next afternoon our teacher Miss King would put us on camp beds for half an hour to catch up on our sleep. I never could.

One Sunday shortly after the war Dad and I rode our bikes to Madley to see a Short Stirling that had been installed at the entrance. Its size was staggering to an impressionable boy like me.



A bi-plane performing tricky stunts over Shobdon, photographed by the late Brian Croker

London to Llanwarne

During the last war Reg Tomlinson worked for Barronia Metals in West London making vital aeroplane parts. When the firm relocated to Hereford – the factory was destroyed by a German bomb – London Reg, his wife Ella and their twin boys left their comfortable Twickenham home and moved in with Shire Horse breeder Mr Spode at Hill Farm, Llanwarne.

"With a four-seater toilet down the garden, no mains anything and a twin paraffin burner for cooking, the move to Llanwarne came as a shock to Ella. When Mrs Spode died in November 1941, Mother had to become a pseudo farmer's wife," writes **Chris Tomlinson**.

"She learned to make cheese and butter (surplus milk could not be sold due to rationing regulations) and prepare rabbit, chicken and the home-killed pig. (I remember the salted bacon side hanging from the kitchen ceiling hook: when wriggly things started falling from it the bad part was cut off and we ate the rest. No Best By date in those days.)

"Father rode his bike the ten miles to work while Mother managed

the pony and trap to town. When the pony was turned for home it needed no guidance: one time when Mother had got out to shut a farm gate the pony set off with the trap door open, one wheel in the ditch and my brother and I screaming the place down. Mr Spode heard our screams and waved his trilby hat, which stopped the animal in its stride. The pony was always good with children, but I cannot remember any adult, however good a horse person, who did not walk back without that pony."

Chris Tomlinson's and Michael Young's wartime memories feature in Herefordshire Lore's Herefordshire's Home Front in World War Two, due out later this year. Send your memories to Herefordshire Lore, Castle Green Pavilion, Castle Green, Hereford, HR1 2NW.



Around & About



Brian Croker's photo of Hereford's All Saints Mission prompted Charles Weston's letter, below.

St Owens School

"I was a pupil at St Owens Elementary Boys School from 1950–54," writes **Charles Weston** from North Yorkshire. "In 1953 on Saturday June 6 I took part in the Coronation Fair organised by the city schools on Castle Green. The school log notes that 10,000 people attended. I was one of those perched on the back of the dray, creating a tableau portraying the creation of the Coningsby Hospital on the site of the Blackfriars Monastery in Widemarsh Street. We wore rough smocks and were gathered around

a crudely made preaching cross, a replica of the one in the garden of the St John Medieval Museum and Coningsby Hospital.

"The young man in the photograph in IOA 46 was 15-year-old student Michael Blackford who transferred from St Owens to Hereford High School that September. He wore a black hooded cape appropriate for his role as one of the friars."

Charles' father A.C.E. Weston was head teacher at St Owens.

Dorstone

Listen for the ringing of Dorstone's church bells on Armistice Day in November. Their oldest bell, re-christened the Armistice Bell, dates from around 1350 and is due to be re-hung with the three others from the mid 17th century and two gifted bells in time for the Armistice Day centenary. Meanwhile villagers are looking at those who served in the First World War. **Penny Platts** writes that when the Methodist chapel closed, the village roll of honour board passed to the church. Alongside the 37 who served are 19 wounded men and four who died: T. Beavan, C.N. Blainey, W.E. Dallow, and E. Sillince. "We are trying to trace the families," explains Penny who is especially interested in the families of Blainey, Dawes, Davies, Montague and Pikes. Write to us or email Penny: pennyplatts@outlook.com.

No. 2 Nissen Hut, Grandstand Road

Officially opened in June 1958, the Hereford Judo Club is one of the country's oldest, reckons **John Hyde**. Founded by Ralph Preece, Darrel Morris, and Keith Peckham (soon to be joined by Lyndon Preece), the Club started in Ralph's garage at Newton Farm, moved to a stable nearby, the Lads Club and the Co-op Hall in St Martin Street. "We left after complaints we caused dust to fall into the shop below", recalls John. 1968 saw them settled at Number 2 Nissen Hut on Grandstand Road where, thanks to a popularity boost for the martial arts triggered by actress and judo champ Honor Blackman, the Club ran busy sessions every night of the week including weekends. Hosting the World Judo Federation national championships in

1969 the Club took over both the Shire and Town Halls. In 1985 the Nissen Hut was closed and the Club moved to Hereford Leisure Centre. "We gave the first display in the new building," recalls John.

Health and wealth

The National Health Service celebrates its 70th anniversary this year and IOA wants to join in the festivities with your memoirs. Liz Glover, for example, was born prematurely in July 1943. Baby Elizabeth, as she was named by medical staff ("They told my father, we've named her, but she's not likely to live") survived, thanks to the efforts of a Dr Schofield. But the expense crippled the family finances. "In those days you paid for your medical care and my parents, Jeanne and John Ryan, had to give up their home and move in with my grandparents." The photo, from the Hospital Estates Department, is thought to feature Hereford General Hospital's Victoria ward for children.



Generous readers

Thanks to more than 300 readers who renewed their subscription, IOA is set to sail through 2018. Many gave donations too, including Mrs Barrat, Mrs. M. Bedford, Megan Bennett, Mo Burns, Martin Colman, John Davies, Pat Gwynne, Vera Hadley, Caroline Hawkins, Iain Maclean, John and Hannah Pickford, George Pribe, M. Rees, Lynn Spruce, Ann Stoakes, Keith Taylor, Ruth Thomas, Mrs. Wakefield-Jones, J.H. Williams and Michael Young.

Eeling in Herefordshire

With eel populations in free fall, Marsha O'Mahony looks back on a bustling cottage industry

The eel population of the River Wye has fallen by 95% in 30 years. A dramatic drop. Work is going on to halt the decline. But, in its day, the eel was a reliable food source for working families, and fishing for eel was an enjoyable sport. Unlike salmon fishing, it didn't involve large sums of money. All you needed was a rod and line and anything rotten.



Bruce Wallace of Breinton used a sheep's head: "What you do is you get a sheep's head and you put it into a sheaf of corn, at the narrow end, at the end where the grain is, and you tie it to keep it in there. You'd then leave it there overnight and in the morning you'd have eels."

Gary McCloud of Hunderton had no problem landing eel. "We used to go eeling down on the ferry steps, at the end of Villa Street, Preedy's ferry. We used to come out of the pub at night, get two flagons of GL cider or something, and we'd be there all night eeling, and you'd come back in the morning and you'd have a whole bag of eels. You'd bring them home and mum would do them: skin them, cut them up, put them in the oven. I'd take them across the road to the Vaga on a Sunday. And all the lads in there said they didn't like the eels but I'll tell you what there wasn't much left when they started on them. All you had left was the bone and you'd suck that, the meat off the bone. I'd bring a big bloody tray over to the pub and they'd get stuck in. and they'd buy me a pint!"

The sheer number of eel could be a nuisance, as **Adrian Howard** of Crocker's Ash discovered. "The Garron used to be full of eels. We went down there once after a thunder storm and we caught 18 in three-quarters of an hour. We run out of worms then and we broke the last worm in half and we had an eel each on that."

Gunther Matthes arrived in Ross by way of a prisoner-of-war camp. Born in Germany, he joined the Luftwaffe at the outbreak of WW2, but was shot down and sent to the camp in Weston under Penyard. He never returned home and eventually became a ghillie on the Wye. He loved eel fishing, and when his family visited from Germany in the 1960s, it seemed the obvious thing to do.

Catch Marsha O'Mahony's illustrated talk, River Wye Stories, at The Barrels, Tuesday March 6, 7.30pm.



Where is it?

Ann Morgan recognised Brian Croker's Hereford portraits (IOA 46). The top picture is Edgar Street with the Red Lion pub in the distance, below is the Victoria pub, opposite the Red Lion, with Bewell Street (left) and Edwards' hairdressers (also recalled by Ken Griffiths and Griff Loydd), and Eign Gate (right). Rosemary Lilico noted the remnants of Davies the chemist while Robin Woodward and Vera Hadley recalled that the city's first traffic lights were installed at the crossroads. "I love these old pictures," says Vera: "Keep them coming." Can you identify this one from Ron Hodges?



River Voices: Stories from the Wye, is a Heritage Lottery-funded project brought to you by Herefordshire Lore. This oral history of the River Wye records and celebrates life along its route. Interviews with over 40 people tell wonderful stories of swimming, fishing, eeling, canoeing, poaching, rafting, walking, ferrying, falling bridges and snorkling. Herefordshire life at its best and most colourful. We look forward to the book being published in September 2018, and project exhibitions in June and July this summer. There is still time to get involved. Please contact project manager

Marsha O'Mahony on
07989 733870 or
riverwyvoices@gmail.com



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In Munitions Group (www.rotherwasmunitionshereford.co.uk) Barrie Mayne (chair).

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