

# Newsletter

## Newsletter of the **Broseley Local History Society**

*Incorporating the Wilkinson Society*



November 2003

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### Society News

#### Annual General Meeting

At the AGM in October proceedings were kept to a minimum with chairman John Freeman giving a brief resume of the past year's activities. The most significant of these had been the varied programme of talks and events. This had obviously proved attractive as both membership and attendance had increased. Welcome links had been forged with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust and a joint venture with the latter to gather and record the economic and social history of Benthall Edge had created a great deal of interest.

Membership now stood at 134 and included overseas members. Membership fees, which are now due, would remain at £3.00 a year.

The existing committee were unanimously re-elected and John Freeman paid tribute to Neil Clarke who, with 32 years' service, was the longest serving committee member.

Vin Callcut, a relative newcomer to Broseley, was elected for the first time. He and his wife Hilary came from St Albans some eighteen months ago and say that they chose to retire to Broseley not only because of its historical interest and significance but because of the many happy holidays and business trips they had enjoyed in this area. Having spent a lifetime in the copper industry, Vin is now carrying on this interest by writing a book on domestic copper and brassware. Since joining the Society he has also found time to index all the Society's Journals and is currently working on putting copies of these and the Newsletters onto CD. He will be a welcome member of the Committee.

#### New Members

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs P S Cattel, Weymouth, Dorset  
Ms Eve Madeley. Ms Madeley is curator of Benthall Hall

### Meetings

Meetings of the Broseley Local History Society are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm at the Broseley Social Club, High Street, unless otherwise announced. Car parking is available at the back of the Club. Members are requested to be seated by 7.30 pm to allow speakers a prompt start.

### Programme

- 3 Dec Annual Christmas Dinner, details on p 2
  - 7 Jan Memories Evening, *Pubs of Broseley*
  - 4 Feb *The Wenlock Branch Railway*, Ken Jones
  - 3 Mar Annual Wilkinson Lecture, *The Quarrel of the Brothers Wilkinson*, Frank Dawson
  - 7 Apr *Our moving Valley*, a report on the geo survey of the Severn Gorge by Neal Rushton and Alan Robinson
  - 5 May *Thomas Beddoes, a man of Science*, Sylvia Watts
  - 2 Jun Summer event
  - 12 Jun Coach trip to the Taff Valley, S Wales, led by Steve Rowson
  - 7 Jul Summer walk
- For further information contact Neil Clarke at 01952 504135.

Mrs Regina Pastore, Nanuet, New York.

Mrs Pastore is the granddaughter of a Broseley man named Shaw who emigrated to New York

Mr & Mrs Pountney, Broseley

Rev Colin Shaw, Haddenham, Aylesbury, Bucks

Mrs June Thomas, West Deeping, Peterborough

### Subscriptions

Subscriptions are now due. If you have not already paid, please complete the form on page 7 and return to Janet Robinson, 26 Coalport Road, Broseley, TF12 5AZ.

### Christmas Dinner

Date: 3 December

Time: 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm

Venue: Lion Hotel  
High Street, Broseley

Cost: £15.95 per head

Always a lot of fun, this is a great chance to network with those you don't always get to see at meetings. To book your place please complete and return the form on page 7 to Janet Robinson, 26 Coalport Road, Broseley, TR12 5AZ by not later than 30 November. Cheques should be made payable to the Broseley Local History Society. Please indicate your choice of starter and main course from the menu on the form on page 7.

### Previous Meetings

#### Memories of Benthall Edge

*"Take three old ladies, round three cups of tea,  
And they'll talk of more scandal than you ever did see!"*

*Actually, these three ladies, l to r, Kath Morris, Betty Lake and Elsie Philpott have been reminiscing about what went on in Benthall Edge in 'the old days'*



The Memories Evening in September was a follow up to the field trip along Benthall Edge organised in cooperation with the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust in July. The Trust is keen to tap into local knowledge about the social and economic history of the Edge and will be issuing a trail guide on this area.

Some of the reminiscences which emerged emphasised the importance limestone quarrying had played in the local economy. Records show that the earliest activity began in the 13th century but demand only reached its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries. By the end of the 1930s, however, it had virtually ceased - one person present at the meeting recalls having a house built at the bottom of Patten's Rock with the last lime to be quarried. A railway, the route of which can still be seen, had taken the limestone from the quarries along Spout Lane to the Mines.

Other memories were of the blasting powder storage house. This was because the ironmongers in Ironbridge, Beddoes, were not allowed to store it in the town. So they built a powder house on the Edge with very thick walls and a flimsy roof, so that any explosion would go upwards.

The recollection of the dropping of three bombs in the area in 1941 caused a great deal of interest, as did the piece of shrapnel which was handed round. In 1944 there had also been great excitement when an American Thunderbolt had crashed in the vicinity.

Tina Owen, now in her nineties, told of living in what used to be known as the Old Workhouse and is now Bayliffe's House on the very edge of the wood and of having to carry water from the Spout for their

*A section of an 1830 map showing Benthall Edge and the Lime Quarries, as well as the railway which carried the limestone out to the Mines. The Old Workhouse Building would have been on the edge of the wood*



everyday needs. Her family later moved to another cottage nearby, supplementing their needs by gathering firewood, keeping chickens and selling fat hens for the table for 2/6d each. She also recalled swimming in the river and the embarrassment of the unfortunate girl who had to wear a knitted bathing suit!

The woods had also been used for timber. This had been cut in the late 1920s and again during World War II and one person said that as late as 1950 he had bought six oak trees for rafters for a house he was building. There were still some trees to be found marked with an X which for some reason had escaped the axe.

Following this Memories Evening we received this letter from Jim Waterson of the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

*Many thanks to all who attended the Memories evening in September. We were treated to a tremendous evening of local knowledge and memories, with a wonderful mixture of stories, tales and first hand accounts of both ordinary and extraordinary events. The evening confirmed for me what an unusual and culturally rich community Broseley is and how generous people are with their knowledge and interest. It is a real pleasure to be included in the Society's work – thanks again for that.*

*The information and stories harvested at both the July field meeting and the September Memories evening will help us greatly as we work during the winter to produce a field guide and walks booklet for Benthall Edge. We hope to have a draft of this ready by December or January for your comments and suggestions.*

If anyone has any further memories of past activities on Benthall Edge, they should contact Jim Waterson on 01952 433880.

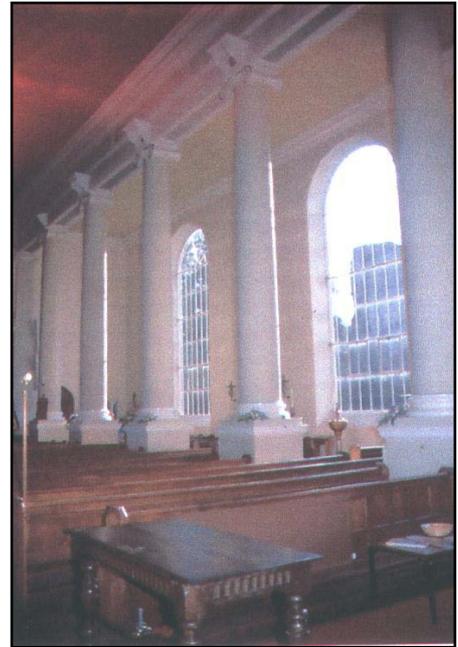
### **Thomas Telford in Shropshire**

In October Anthony Crowe, a former county librarian for Shropshire, gave a talk on Thomas Telford and his work in and around Shropshire. Telford's first job in this county was the renovation of Shrewsbury Castle, the residence of the local member of parliament William Pulteney. His work evidently made such an impression that he was subsequently appointed surveyor of public works for Salop although he never became involved in actual building work, confining his considerable abilities to design, planning and estimating.

*The Church of St Mary Magdalene in Bridgnorth is a fine example of Telford's new thinking in church design.*

*The large windows and slender pillars give a feeling of spaciousness which is not always present in older churches*

*Photograph courtesy Anthony Crowe*



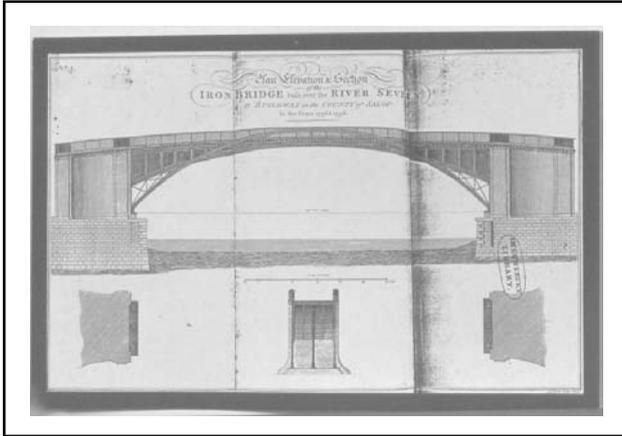
He was particularly interested in the design of churches, being responsible at the turn of the 18th century for building St Mary Magdalene in Bridgnorth, St Michael's in Madeley and St Leonard's in Malinslee. The design of St Mary Magdalene was most unusual, being almost square; the idea was to bring the congregation closer to the altar. To give the interior a light and airy appearance the supporting columns were kept as slender and unobtrusive as possible while the windows were unusually large. The impression on entering this church is one of spaciousness and elegance, in contrast to the sometimes oppressive air of older churches.

Telford built many bridges in the county, his first being the Montford Bridge over the Severn. Built in 1792 of Nesscliffe stone, he was paid the sum of three guineas for his plans and £200 to supervise the construction.

*Built by Telford after the floods of 1795, the new Buildwas bridge was the second cast iron bridge in the county*

*Photograph courtesy Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust*





Plan, Elevation & Section  
of the  
Iron Bridge built over the River Severn  
at Buildwas in the county of Salop  
In the years 1795 & 1796

Source: Telford's "Atlas"

As well as stone bridges he also designed ones using cast iron. The first of these was a new bridge at Buildwas which replaced the original one washed away by the floods of 1795. This new bridge was the second cast iron bridge in the county and although 130 feet across weighed less than half that of the Iron Bridge itself. It was in constant use until 1905, when it was decided to replace it. It says much for Telford's original design that only the steel girders were replaced, the original abutments being retained. One example of Telford's cast iron bridges still remains, however. Cantlop Bridge, which is now closed to traffic, crosses over Cound Brook on the Shrewsbury to Acton Burnell road.

He was also responsible for the roads within the county, his most important work being in relation to the improvement of the A5 from London to Holyhead. So meticulous was he in his planning that he even designed the milestones – all 106 of them.

*Cantlop Bridge, now closed to traffic, is the sole remaining example of Thomas Telford's cast iron bridges*



Photograph courtesy Anthony Crowe



Photograph courtesy Anthony Crowe

*This aqueduct at Pontcysyllte near Llangollen was the largest civil engineering project of its day and took ten years to complete*

Telford was also actively involved in the design and construction of canals, being responsible for the aqueduct at Pontcysyllte near Llangollen. Built over a ten year period from 1795, this aqueduct was the largest civil engineering project of its time. In an effort to avoid locks the aqueduct was built with piers 127 feet high and was 1007 feet long with an approach embankment of 1500 yards.

Subsequent to this talk, Steve Dewhirst sent us an article from a 2 September 1905 edition of the *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News* mourning the Passing of Buildwas Bridge. Here are some extracts:

*Is there no one to sing a dirge on the passing of Buildwas Bridge? No one among those into whose affections it entered many seasons ago, when the world was younger and less water had passed down Buildwas ford; among those who, finding early that the river was the most companionable of all inanimate things, have turned, instinctively, their steps towards the bridge, in leisure hours, year in and out, and have grown old in its company? . . .*

*. . . Buildwas has owned a bridge from a very early age, the first one being built for the monks at an uncertain date. . . . It survived the fall of the monastery and played a little part in the great Civil War. James Lacon, the Buildwas squire and zealous Royalist, ingeniously fortified the bridge with iron spikes, and prevented the passage of the soldiers of the people for a time. It was lost to the King, however, in 1645, and getting too full of infirmities for public safety it was pulled down in the year 1690. Its successor seems to have been built without due regard for the possibilities of the future. Its low stone arches were an impediment to navigation during the latter part of its life, for*

*the masted barges were about this time rapidly increasing on the Severn. When the great flood of the spring of 1795 swept down the valley, and the surging waters tried their strength against whatever opposed them, Buildwas Bridge succumbed to superior might and was swallowed up in the torrent.*

### **William Reynolds**

At the November meeting Neil Clarke gave a talk on William Reynolds at the Tuckies. A resume of this will appear in the February issue of the Newsletter. In the meantime Neil has been busy with a series of presentations to other organisations. His talk to the Wrekin Masonic Fellowship on *Historic Buildings of the Telford Area* included references to Benthall Hall, the Lawns, the Willey Furnace site and the churches of All Saints', Broseley and St Mary's, Jackfield. The early wooden waggon ways down to the river and the Severn Valley Railway formed part of a talk to the Shifnal Society on *The Railways of East Shropshire*, while his lecture to Pattingham Local History and Civic Society, *King of the Ironmasters*, surveyed the life and achievements of John Wilkinson, particularly his work in this area. He also gave a presentation to the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club entitled *The History of Broseley and its Buildings*.

### **The Great Iron Race**

*The Society's Committee recently received an invitation from the BBC to take part in an Adam Hart-Davis programme to be filmed at Enginuity in Coalbrookdale and screened in November. The event proved to be something of an experience for all concerned. David Lake, a member of the team, gives his impressions of the day.*

As well as myself, Dot and Eric Cox, John Freeman and his family had all volunteered to take part in what promised to be an unusual day. It was not long, however, before certain unexpected aspects of the BBC's organisational skills started to show, John getting a terse message to say they had miscalculated numbers, there were too many of the fairer sex, and could John appear without his family. The answer was no.

So just the three of us went to the pre-competition briefing. The BBC had asked Vicky Jones from Coalbrookdale to coordinate things, but this proved somewhat difficult as contradictory information she had received resulted in them not turning up. So we arranged our Broseley trio, along with some

volunteers from Ironbridge and a coach load from Newport Girls' High School, into what we called the Greater Ironbridge team, but still with very little knowledge of what the next day's competition would actually require of us. John Challen from Enginuity tried to help and eventually someone called Alom arrived. This gentleman claimed to represent the BBC and to be able to explain the requirements of the competition to us. We believed the first claim but became very doubtful about the second.

It transpired next day that the actual competition was to be a matter of building models of material handling machinery to carry 'iron ore' – which for the purpose of the day turned out to be popcorn! But BBC executives, all wired up with microphones and earpieces, were so busy talking to each other they forgot about us, the poor infantry, and we remained totally ignorant of what to do. Eventually Adam Hart-Davis got things sorted and it was to be Greater Ironbridge against a colourful team from Woodside.

There was no question but that our designs worked better and Adam was very knowledgeable and complimentary. But our Achilles heel was the BBC linkman detailed to carry our loads of precious popcorn between our little machines. This, alas, was the hapless Alom who hadn't a clue – first he tipped our stuff in the wrong place and then, on the second attempt, spilt it all over the floor. So we lost.

But it was good for Woodside morale and for us very educational in the ways of the media. Dot and the girls from Newport got their revenge, however – at the end of it all, Alom was unceremoniously picked up and dumped in the water feature!

David Lake subsequently received this letter from Adam Hart-Davis.

*Thank you so much for the splendid biography of John Wilkinson and for the extra material from Janet Butler's thesis. Wilkinson is one of my great heroes, and I am delighted to have more information about him. He gets a mention in almost all my lectures and I am always delighted to be able to improve my knowledge.*

*I was glad to meet you last Sunday, but must apologise for failing to talk to you – or indeed to anyone else. The day was a bit hectic, and my time seemed to disappear.*

*Once again, many thanks to you and the Society. I am most grateful.*

## Obituary

*News has recently reached us of the death of Dennis Mason, one of the founder members of the Society. David Lake remembers:*

Although Dennis Mason spent his latter years with his daughter Bronwen in Bayston Hill, he was a Broseley and Benthall man through and through.

Dennis was great friends with Jack Owen when they were both at Legges Hill School. He went on to teach in Trench, Dawley and Bridgnorth and was a formidable member of the former Wenlock Borough and subsequently Bridgnorth District Council.

Always knowledgeable about Broseley history he was, with Ralph Pee, a founder member of this Society, and his *Memories of a Shropshire Lad* give us a real insight into Broseley life. The following extract takes us back to the poverty and desperation of the 1930s.

*Broseley district was overlaid with poverty before the Depression arrived. The wages paid in the local brickyards and tileries and the encaustic tile works (representing four fifths of local industry) were starvation wages and nine tenths of the population lived from hand to mouth.*

*If one was in utter poverty there was the Board of Guardians, which would grant a voucher for a few shillings. Most people had to have children on the verge of starvation before they would be seen knocking on the door of Mr William Edge, the Relieving Officer.*

*The unfortunate Means Test Officers, who had to be appointed to administer this execrable piece of legislation, must have been the most unpopular men in Britain – except for ours. We had the most aristocratic Means Test Officer in the person of Sir Charles Buckworth-Herne-Soame, 13th Baronet! The estates and fortunes of this ancient family had long since disappeared and the present holder of the title was a working man who, like many other working men, hadn't a job. Charlie (he hated being called "Sir Charles") was far too kind a man for such an odious post and I don't think he held it for very long. Charlie's interpretation of a searching inquiry into the slender means of his 'clients' usually took the form of a shout through the open front door; "Same as last week?"*

A Labour party member of long standing Dennis, however, was something of an individualist. He was once called to Labour headquarters in London

to receive a special award for service to the party. But we do things differently in Broseley – on his return Broseley Labour party expelled him for not toeing the Broseley line!

## Did you know?

Did you know that next year we are planning to bring you history on the hoof? Chatting to some of our members this year has made us realise just how much history is all around us in the form of personal memories and experiences. So, by painting a series of cameos in forthcoming Newsletters, we hope to attract the attention of the younger generation and give them an insight into the personal side of world events. Watch this space!

## Friendly Bus

Many of you will already know of Broseley and Much Wenlock's Friendly Bus Service which provides door to door transport where there is no public bus service, or if you find buses difficult or impossible to use. So if you would like to attend Society meetings but have trouble getting there, why not give Liz Mars a ring at the Friendly Bus Centre. Her number is 01952 881145 and the cost is £1.00 a trip.

## Mailbox

Beryl Brown of Shifnal, who members will recall discovered the remarkable Wrockwardine Wood Poor Law papers, asks if memories remain in Broseley of apothecaries, chemists or doctors by any of these names:

Thursfield  
Stanier (from Wroxeter and Uppington)  
Yate  
Onslow  
Belton

Please contact David Lake on 01746 762813 if you can help.

Nice to know we have fans in far places! Graham and Rosemarie Turton recently emailed us from New Zealand.

*Your August Newsletter is a cracker!! The layout and colour photos are a professional effort. Keep up the good work. We are always checking your site for current updates.*

So if **you** want to see the latest issue in glorious technicolor, visit our website, [www.broseley.org.uk](http://www.broseley.org.uk).