



Corsham Spotlight

Magazine of the Corsham Civic Society

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From the chairman

I write this on March 1st, St. David's Day, and with January and February behind us, we can look forward to a year of organised talks and visits. We welcome Alison Warren to take on the post of Programme Organiser. She has already started to form a programme for 2023. Thank you, Alison, for stepping in and taking over from Pat Whalley. We are now looking for another volunteer to replace John Holmes as Social Organiser. We wish John well in his new home and thank him for all the social events he has organised during his term in office. Last month's Civic Society lunch at Guyers House, for instance, was a great success. Thank you, John, for organising the event. I am also pleased to welcome Stuart Boydell to the editorship of this magazine.

Michael Rumsey

Membership News

Our Constitution states that we not only have a responsibility to care about historical matters related to the town, but also the environmental and social needs of the population. So please, if you agree that these subjects are important, perhaps you will consider donating 6-8 hours a year to encourage the development and enhancement of our town. We are currently looking for volunteers for two roles.

The Civic Society has a long-standing interest in promoting the need for a railway station in Corsham. Consequently, the Town Council has set up the Corsham Railway Station Town Team to work with Michelle Donelan MP and other local interested parties to bring this proposal to a satisfactory conclusion. It is important that the Society is part of this group. In October 2021, we learned the WCC had made a successful bid to the Department of Transport for developing a feasibility study for a new station. We know that this continues to be a long process. Consequently, we are looking for a volunteer who would be happy to attend 3 or 4 meetings a year to help keep us up-to-date on this valuable item. If you think you would be interested, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Similarly, the Society considers it important that it is involved in local discussions and planning which impact on our environment. The Town Council took the lead by establishing an Environmental Group of which the CCS is a member. Its first project is tree planting. Readers may have seen that trees have already been planted at Coppershell in Gastard, and at Ladbroke Cemetery. Again, it would be helpful if someone would be willing to represent the Society at this forum.

Pat Whalley

From the editor

It's been fun challenge putting together my first issue of *Spotlight* in my new role as the magazine's editor. It is an exciting time for Society with a number of new Committee members and vacancies for other key roles as Michael Rumsey and Pat Whalley explain in the opposite page.

Although John Maloney won't be responsible for pulling the magazine together anymore, he continues to be a central figure within the CCS and we will continue to see his contributions to this and future issues.

I want to take this opportunity to thank John for his five years as *Spotlight's* editor and for his help in making the transition of editorship a smooth process. I also want to wish him luck with the Pickwick book. I look forward to buying a copy from Corsham Bookshop in due course.

We might not be completely out of the pandemic yet but Spring is definitely here, and with it we have another packed issue of *Spotlight* to enjoy. As with all previous issues, the articles reflect the interests and knowledge of its many contributors.

I hope you find the issue informative and entertaining with its balance of articles detailing aspects of Corsham's past and themes affecting Corsham today.

Stuart Boydell
Editor

Post boxes: Front Cover [images are numbered from top left to bottom right]

1. The earliest Corsham post box: 'V R' in Monks Lane
2. The early version of 'E VII R' at the farm by Hartham Park
3. The later version of 'E VII R' at Neston
4. The 'G R' post box at Westrop
5. The 'G VI R' pillar box at Pickwick
6. The 'E II R' post box at Easton
7. 'E II R' pillar box outside the Post Office in the High Street
8. The double 'E II R' pillar box in Pickwick Road
9. The new-style 'E II R' pillar box in Stokes Road

In Article p.15

10. The 'V R' wall box at Lower Wadswick in the parish of Box
11. The 'E II R' pillar box at the Leafield Industrial Estate with the ugly parcel box
12. The design for the first pillar box, Guernsey, 1853 (Crown Copyright)
13. London's first pillar box, Fleet Street, 1855 (Post Office Copyright)

Photos by Stuart Boydell

CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY NEW YEAR LUNCH

The Corsham Civic Society New Year lunch on Friday 11th February 2022 was very well-attended and the atmosphere was most certainly welcoming, friendly and enjoyable for members and guests. It provided a long awaited opportunity to meet and catch-up on the news with fellow members.

Michael also presented a certificate of the Corsham Civic Society Honorary Membership to John Maloney for his impeccable service as editor of the Spotlight Magazine. I'm sure everyone will agree John is a most worthy recipient.



The attentive staff at Guyers House and the service provided together with a superb presentation and quality of food made for a memorable, palatable and enjoyable experience.

Apart from his welcome speech our Chairman, Michael Rumsey, took the opportunity to offer a celebration toast for the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's reign. I, for one, and I'm sure many of those who attended the lunch, will look forward to attending next year's event at Guyers House. In fact, I personally enjoyed it so much I'll be booking a table soon to once again enjoy the offerings of food, service and welcoming environment.

Finally, on behalf of everyone who attended the lunch a sincere *thank you* to John Holmes for organising the event.



**Photos: top & middle - Larry St Croix.
Bottom - John Holmes**

Larry St Croix

RNLI Mollie Mitford

I have pleasure in announcing that one of our former members is being recognised for her generosity by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution by naming a lifeboat, the 'Mollie Mitford'.

Mollie was a member of the CCS for 15 years until her death in January 2020. She had supported the RNLI all her life having spent 40+ years in Solihull being the branch Secretary and Treasurer helping to raise thousands of pounds to swell the coffers of this institution.

I had the honour of being one of the executors of the Mitford estate and Mollie gave the bulk of her money to the charities and organisations she had supported all through her life and the RNLI received the lion's share of this kind gesture.

The £2.5m 'Shannon' class all weather lifeboat will be based at Great Yarmouth and Gorleston-on-Sea in the second half of 2022 and I look forward to visiting there one day to see the boat in action.



These photographs are taken of a model of the type of Royal National Lifeboat which includes RNLI Mollie Mitford.

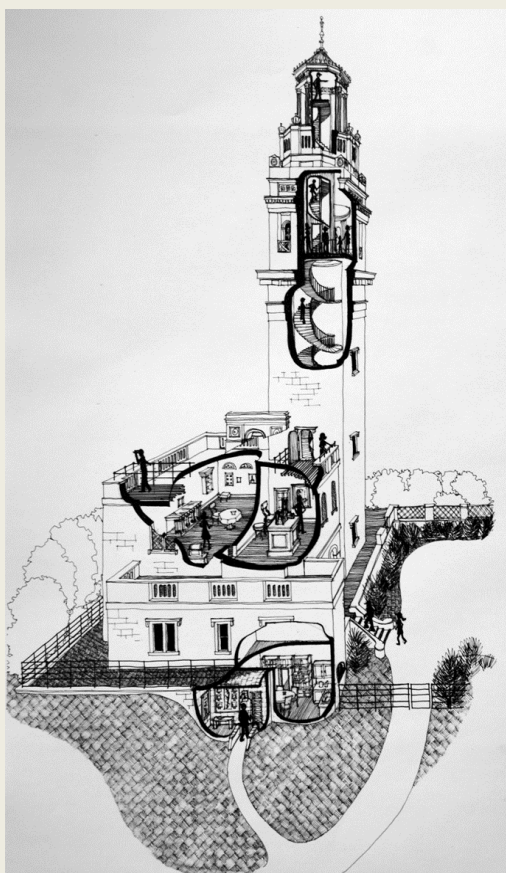
Photos by Michael Rumsey

Michael Rumsey

BECKFORD'S TOWER PROJECT

The Corsham Civic Society outing to Beckford's Tower in Bath took place in Autumn 2019.

At that time, the tower had just been added to the Historic England 'Heritage at Risk' register and the Bath Preservation Trust, who own the tower, had applied for a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.



This illustration was produced by John Holmes BA to accompany the lottery application, and shows ideas for extending the visitor spaces inside the tower.



Bath Preservation Trust recently announced that design work has commenced on a £3.3 million repair and improvement project funded by, Historic England and the National Lottery, together with donations from the public.

The project will bring new parts of the tower into use and also mount school and community programmes interpreting the story of Beckford's life, his travels and the sources of his wealth.

Article continues next page...

In addition, the historic paddocks surrounding the site have been saved due to a large private donation, and, therefore, will also be restored to ensure that visitors can experience William Beckford's gardens and grotto tunnel as they were almost 200 years ago.

Bath Preservation Trust has announced that architects Thomas Ford & Partners have been appointed to lead the design work for the £3.3 million *Our Tower* project.



The *Our Tower* plan, which is funded by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, will address urgent repair and conservation works required to the almost 200-year-old Grade I listed Beckford's Tower, that stands above the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bath and is the only museum dedicated to William Beckford in the world.



Photos by John Holmes

Our Tower plan will bring new parts of the tower into use, and upgrade services and visitor infrastructure. BPT will also use the project as an opportunity to develop the visitor experience, engage audiences and reconnect the Tower with its lost landscape, through new experiences, interpretation and access.

A development grant awarded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund is also enabling Bath Preservation Trust to re-examine the way in which they share the story of William Beckford's links to the transatlantic slave trade.

The project is scheduled to be complete in winter 2023.

John Holmes

The Old Vicarage, 40 High Street

The Corsham Civic Society archive material which is held at the Swindon & Wiltshire History Centre in Chippenham is a treasure trove of artefacts and documents chronicling the rich history of the town. Most of the collection has been donated by local residents who understand the importance of preserving our rich heritage. The set of four postcards opposite is just one of the many gems the Society holds in its collection.

The cards clearly depict Corsham at different points between c.1900-c.1920 but curiously were used as notelets to write one continuous letter from Margaret Sawbridge, the parish vicar's wife. The postcard-letter is dated, Tuesday 10th September 1940.

There is little need for a long write-up as the cards speak for themselves. Suffice it to say, however, the sense that the war couldn't continue much longer seems tragically inappropriate coming only four days after Hitler had announced the Third Reich's policy to attack London and its civilian population. Little did the author or its American recipient know that the attacks in London and elsewhere had barely begun.

The cards' value as a historical artefact lies not so much in the misplaced optimism but in the ordinary routineness described in the recount. The message offers a reassuringly positive insight into domestic and family life in Corsham as people continued to live as normally as possible during the worryingly dark days of late 1940.

The mystery surrounding these cards, however, is how they came to be back in Corsham after having been posted out to the States. If anyone can throw some light on this, please do email the Society or *Spotlight*.

With a bit of digging I was able to learn a bit more about some of the people mentioned in the text. Unfortunately, Margaret Sawbridge, has been difficult to trace but I have found out a few interesting details about her husband and her son, Hugh.

Margaret was the wife of Rev Hugh Fabian Frere Sawbridge, who died 60 years ago this month and is buried at St Denys The Minster, Warminster. Rev Sawbridge was attached to Infantry Brigade during the First World War where, as Captain Sawbridge, he was awarded for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Records describe him in the trenches attending to the wounded and having rescued a wounded man while under heavy fire.

The "wonderfully brave" Hugh, who only cried "a little" at having to endure stitches in his head, became Lieutenant Colonel Sawbridge. In the Queen's New Year's Honours of 1989, Lieutenant Colonel Sawbridge was awarded an OBE.

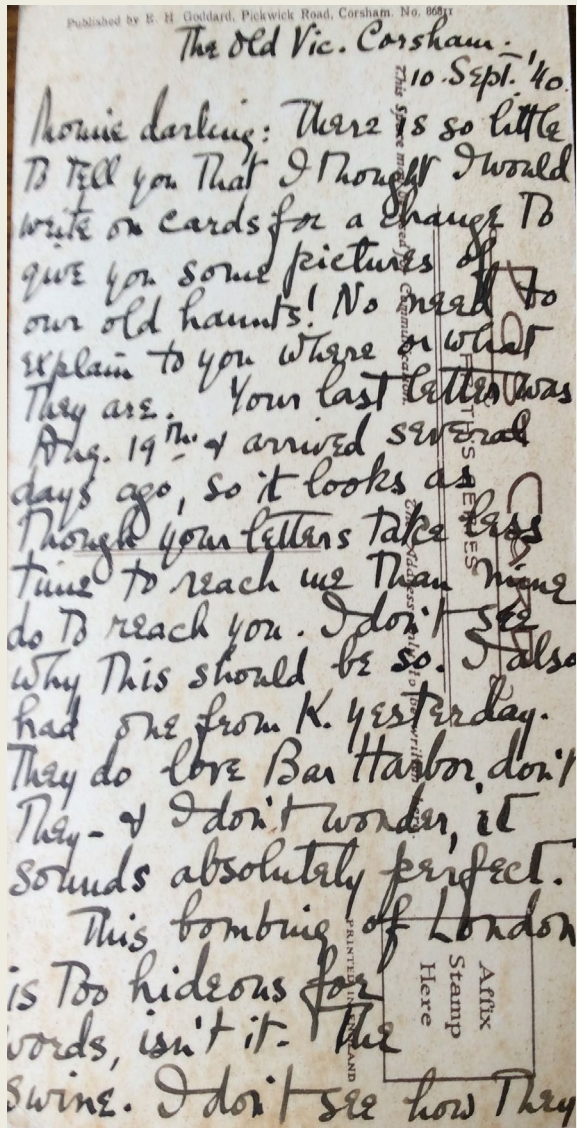
Sources:

PRO: WO373/181/157; PRO: WO 372/17/179618

***Supplement to the Edinburgh Gazette*, 27 November 1916, p.2206.**

Article continues next page...

Top left and right: post card 1. Bottom Left & right: post card 2



can keep it up very long at the rate they are losing planes. I still have a feeling that we won't foresee the end until it suddenly comes through an absolutely unexpected cracking up somewhere in their brassy system. It is difficult to see ahead at all. We are continually told it will be a long war, but I don't see how it can be long at its present pitch. I suppose the Germans will shift the scene when they get tired of this. I think Adolf must be having an awful headache. I do hope you are not too worried about us. Try not to be. It must

Top left & right: postcard 3. Bottom left & right postcard 4.



be awful hearing about it all at such a distance, & so many times a day!

You ask if anyone we know has been killed or hurt - No Thank Heaven. Mrs. Appleford (who runs that nice Mary's Kitchen) heard yesterday that one of her two sons in the Air Force has been killed, poor thing. The Beaumont boy is to have the Distinguished Flying Cross! He has brought down two German planes in one dive, twice running. Has there ever been anything so grand as those boys. It is all so terrible that I just can't take it in. I can't believe it is really happening.

I had a letter from Hilma

at last the other day, but she told me nothing.

The children are all very well. Hugh got his head cut open with a croquet mallet yesterday, & had to have two stitches in it, but he says it never ached, even & isn't a bit sore! He was wonderfully brave, & only cried a little at the first stitch & never murmured at the second. He kept up a witty running commentary meanwhile. Dr. Wheeler himself put his knee out playing tennis & is hobbling on two sticks, so it was a strange performance altogether. Hugh goes back to school on the 24th.

I am so glad there are people you know at Monquitt. Reg Smith & his wife are spending a few days with us. Loads of love, Momie darling. I think of you always. Margie.



Stuart Boydell

Quarrymen of Corsham

After reading, or rather browsing through David Pollard's extensive history of quarrying in Corsham and the surrounding area - *Digging Bath Stone: a Quarry and Transport History*. I was reminded of my own small family connection in this huge enterprise. Although its heyday was during the 19th century following the arrival of the railway in Corsham it has been present in Corsham since Roman times and continues to this day.

Research into my family, has revealed that in the 1700s the Saye family were farming on the Mendip Hills in Somerset. They have a road and farm named after them. Presumably, there were some landholdings there too. It seems that by the early 1800s the farming business was no longer viable. And we see the extensive family starting to migrate towards Wiltshire where, presumably, they had heard that there was plenty of mining work. Consequently, we find my g. g. grandfather, and my g. grandfather living in Box in the nineteenth century. Between 1872 and 1893 twelve children were born in Corsham. On reaching working or marriageable age, however, 1 boy and 3 girls migrated to Canada, and another boy took himself off to Wales. Only two of the remaining brood decided to work underground in the stone mines.

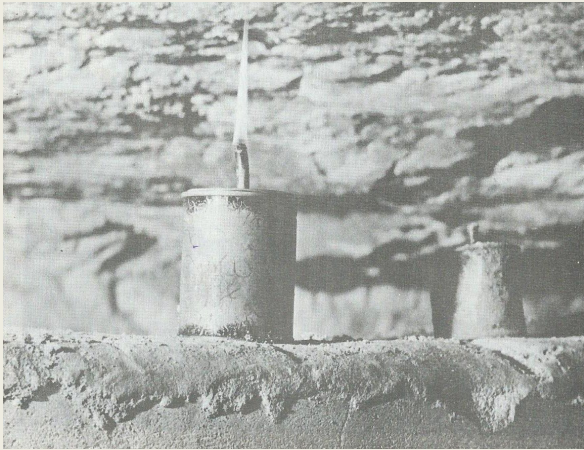
Alfred, my g. father, worked at the Copenacre (Hartham Quarry) where, having served some time hacking out the stone, he finally became a foreman, which probably eased his working conditions. In his earlier years he had worked in the Welsh coal mines, so was probably well-suited for the task. My g. uncle Frank was a worker at the Copenacre stone yard, as evidenced in a photograph in David Pollard's book which shows 26 men with their foreman. I wonder whether the headgear was a sign of status. Did the masons wear trilbies, and the lower orders wear flat caps? Perhaps someone can tell us. (see David Pollard's book page 474)



Article continues next page...

What was it like to be a stone miner?

They started their day carrying a small benzoline lamp to progress along the mine seeking a wall of stone which was free of cracks. The roof was tested as the men advanced by striking it with a hammer; if it gave off a dull, dead sound, it was safe, but if it gave off a hollow sound the layer was faulty. They started their work by 'picking' out a recess on 3 sides of about 5ft. A large saw of 6-7ft in length was then used to cut the face into three sections about 10ft in width. Then the block had to be 'chipped and wedged' away at the back, and was finally hauled away from its bed by a crane. The blocks were then taken out through the tunnels on carts or narrow-gauge trucks pulled by horses. All that in relative darkness!

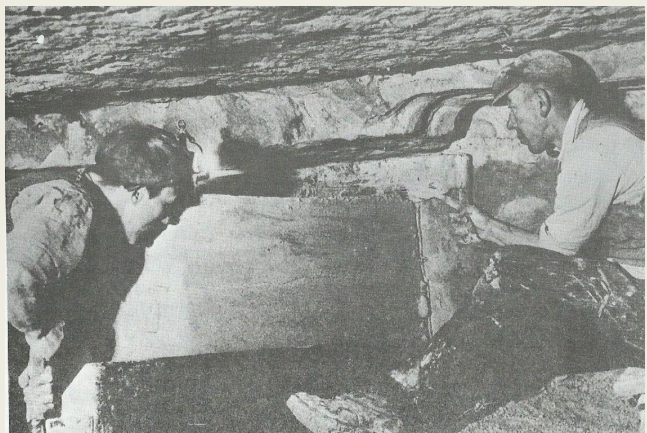


It is said that if their lamps went out, they had to find and hold onto the nearest pony's tail to guide them out.

Family events such as births, marriages and deaths as well as religious texts, and not so religious comments were scratched on the pillars that held up the galleries - a social history all of its own.

We would say: What a way to make a living? But in those days, it was probably considered a good job with regular work, and pay to maintain families – hardship, and backbreaking work was the norm.

Thank goodness for electricity and Health and Safety legislation!



Photos

Overleaf:

My paternal grandparents, Frank & Rose Saye,
My great-uncle Alfred Saye with his family c.1916,

This page:

A benzoline lamp. Quarrymen working. The images are taken from Pat's book *History of Royal Naval Store Depot, Copenacre*. Original permissions to publish came from Tom Brooks, manager of the Monks Park Mine, and Kingston Minerals Ltd.

80 Years This April.

Eighty years ago, on Saturday April 25th and Sunday April 26th, the City of Bath suffered a concentrated bombing raid by the German Luftwaffe in Hitler's so called 'retaliation of our bombing of the medieval city of Lubeck'.

It is believed that Hitler looked for significant cultural British targets by studying a pre-war copy of *Baedeker's Guide* to Great Britain. Hitler, and his staff, chose 5 English cities, all of them cathedral cities and each with many fine buildings. The chosen cities were Bath, Canterbury, Exeter, Norwich, and York. It was expected that the destruction of so much of the country's heritage would deal a blow to British morale. Exeter suffered first followed by Bath.

After just 3 raids during that one weekend in April 1942, Bath had lost 417 people with a further 1,000 people injured. In total, 19,000 buildings were affected including 1,100 which were either seriously damaged or destroyed and 218 of buildings of significant historical or architectural interest.



At the time, my father was stationed at the Royal United Hospital as a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps. He recalled those 2 nights vividly. To him, it seemed that the Luftwaffe were not only aiming at destroying buildings of architectural and cultural interest but were also aiming to destroy the railway viaducts and embankments of the GWR, Stothert & Pitt's works and the Admiralty establishments.

Article continues next page...

According to my father, the gas works was bombed first. The explosion from which resulted in illuminating the whole city for a few seconds in, what he described, as a brilliant-white light. Consequently, there was no gas in Bath or the surrounding area for three and a half weeks.

Several areas of the city suffered terribly including Oldfield Park, Kingsmead Street, Avon Street and Beechen Cliff. The Assembly Rooms were burnt out and the parts of the Paragon, Queen Square and Royal Crescent suffered badly too. Two parish churches were destroyed and New King Street Methodist Church, opened by Charles Wesley in 1779, was so badly damaged it was demolished - in the 1950s the Percy Boys Club was built in its place.

One of the city's fireman, Harry Patch, famous for being the last surviving frontline British Army veteran from World War 1, recalls in his biography the time he spent fighting fires in the Bear Flat area of Beechen Cliff.

Of course, eighty years on little can be seen of the damage thrown at Bath other than two important memorial plaques to remind us of those 2 nights in April 1942.



Photos

Previous page:

My Mother & Father, Evelyn & Stan Rumsey.

Above:

The Royal Army Medical Cops Christmas production, 1941 *Cinderella* at the Royal United Hospital.

Michael Rumsey

Mayors of Bath

At the last meeting of the Civic Society on 28th January, Edward Barrett gave a talk about his time as Mayor's Officer for the mayors of Bath which he held from 1993 until his retirement in 2002.

His duties seem to have been many and various from controlling the civic diary, arranging receptions, visitors, delegations etc, to fostering Bath's twin cities, to being guardian of the civic silver. He showed us images of the civic insignia, all of which are used today: a mace dating to 1708 which replaced an earlier one of 1631, a two-handed sword, staves and robes of the sword-bearer, mayor, vice mayor and aldermen. His mayors have been both men and women (though women mayors are also addressed as Mr Mayor) and of different political persuasions.

During his time in office he met many dignitaries and was involved in many a drama. One of his most memorable events was in 1994 when the mayor asked him to 'make a collection' to help victims of the massacre in Rwanda. He responded by organising a street concert which raised an impressive £38,000 in just nine days. He ended his interesting and entertaining talk by picking out for us the high and low points in his career in the mayor's office: that of receiving Sir Yehudi Menuhin at a reception and then doing the wash-up afterwards.



Above: Edward Barrett [right] assisting the Lord Mayor

Cath Maloney

The Post Boxes of Corsham

Among the ugly clutter of late 20th century road signs, advertisements and 'street furniture' of various sorts that increasingly litter our environment, some older more elegant artefacts still stand out providing a splendid touch of colour and a dash of brio to our urban and our rural landscapes.

The strikingly scarlet post boxes of the General Post Office, in their various formats, still stand out, as they have for over a century and a half. They continue to provide visual evidence for the spread of literacy, for a developing sense of a national, and an imperial and a global sense of belonging to a world wider than just the old face-to-face society of the village or small town.



Image. 10

It is revealing as we approach the remarkable platinum anniversary of 'E II R', the long reign of Her present Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, that we have this everyday reminder of her reign and the reigns of her father, her grandfather, her great-grandfather and her great-great-grandmother. These six reigns – Queen Victoria (1837-1901), King Edward VII (1901-10), King George V (1910-36), King Edward VIII (January-December 1936), King George VI (1936-52) and Queen Elizabeth II (since 1952) – are commemorated every time we post a letter or catch a glimpse of the splash of red in the urban or rural landscape.

There are examples of post boxes of every reign to be seen in the parish of Corsham, apart from the short reign in 1936 of Edward VIII (later HRH, the Duke of Windsor). A small number had begun to be provided before his abdication, and some are still to be seen, but there are none in Wiltshire. (I wonder how many people in Corsham will have admired the almost unique Edward VIII, 1936 stone on the old Post Office in Bradford-on-Avon, opposite the excellent bookshop).

The earliest for Corsham is the Victorian wall post box at the top of Monks Lane, opposite the so-called 'Whore's Pond' at the beginning of the road along the Ridge to Neston (1). It sits quietly in the wall of a modest cottage there as it has for the last 150 years or so with its 'V R' heading.

Article continues next page...

I thought Corsham had a second Victorian similar rural post box in the wall of a cottage a mile or two away at Lower Wadswick, but I find that this example belongs to the parish of Box (10). We should, however, note the Edward VII rural post box on the wall of the farm next to Hartham Park, getting close to Biddestone, but still in the parish of Corsham (2). When I went with Stuart Boydell to photograph this the other day, we found the postman in his van – not something his Edwardian predecessor had – sitting waiting for 4.15, the time announced for the emptying of the box. His Edwardian predecessor would have known of the need to keep to the time, but he would not have known of the digital inner workings which now have come to monitor the time the box was emptied.



Image. 11

The other Edward VII post box from the 1901-10 period with a fancier version of the logo is to be found in the middle of Neston (3). When George V came to the throne in 1910, the rather fancy 'E VII R' logo was replaced by a neat modern 'G R'. Perhaps it was thought that the 'V' for fifth could be confusable with the 'V' of Victoria? The 'G R' box can be seen in Westrop in the wall of a cottage next to the entrance to West Park Farm (4).

Only one post box dating from the reign of George VI is to be found in Corsham, and it is the fine pillar box slightly hidden away in the middle of Pickwick (5).

Most of the other post boxes in Corsham date from the reign of the present Queen, that is to say from 1952 onwards. There are pillar boxes, wall boxes and boxes on posts. The classic pillar box is outside the present Post Office in the High Street, missing its sign on the top indicating the direction to the Post Office, evidently dating from an earlier location not quite so close to the present Post Office (7). Another is prominent on the relatively recently created Valley Road. One can be found on the Leafield Industrial Estate, next to a quite ugly 1970s attempt to create a post box for parcels (11).

A bumper size pillar box with two apertures can be seen in Pickwick Road, opposite the Mansion House (8). Such double pillar boxes originated in London, the apertures for 'Town' and 'Country' respectively; it is not clear what their purpose was in Corsham.

Article continues next page...

These pillar boxes were all directly descended from the design adopted in 1879 and little changed until a re-design a century later in 1979 produced a modernised version, which is to be seen outside the old Post Office Sorting Office in Stokes Road (now the Willows Nursery School) (9). The original design for the pillar box is improbably to be found in the Channel Islands in 1853 (12), and the elegant classical design (and the red paint) was thankfully taken to be the model for the whole country rather than the unattractive early London boxes in various colours (mainly green) before red was agreed upon (13).

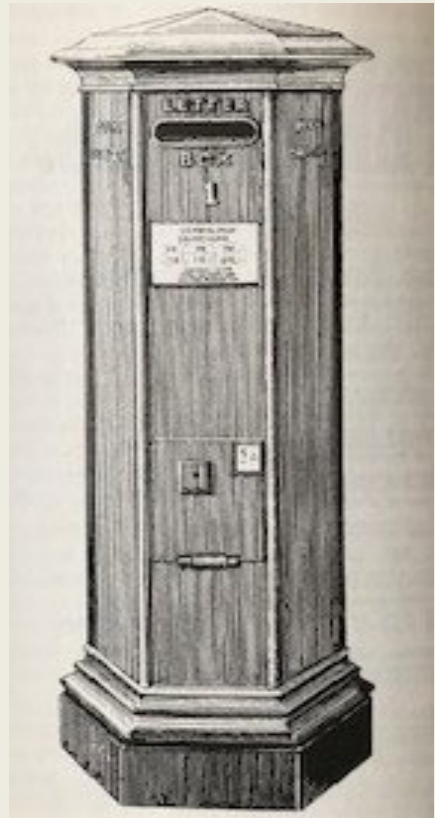


Image. 12

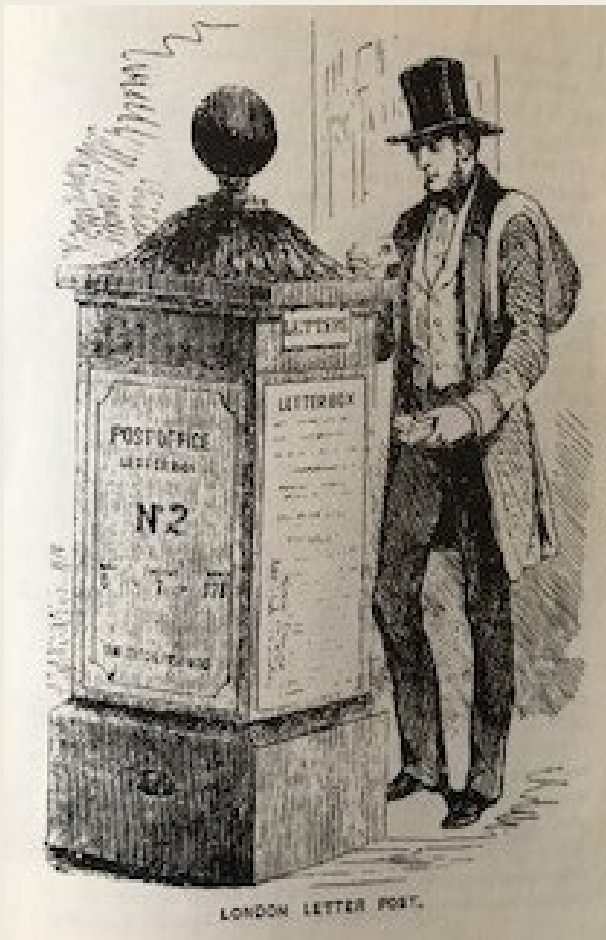


Image. 13

All these still-used archaeological artifacts are constant reminders of the rapid rise of a literate society in the early nineteenth century that reached beyond the booming industrial centres in London and the north of England into the rural south where commercial agriculture was threatened by transport improvements that opened up eastern Europe and western America for the supply of foodstuffs. Corsham was rescued by stone quarrying, which expanded with the coming of the Great Western Railway in 1841.

Life was also enhanced by the coming of the penny post in 1840. The state had established a postal system after 1635, and the turnpiking of roads after 1700 enabled letter writing to spread. But letters had to be paid for by the recipient, and this did not encourage their popularity. Receiving a letter was expensive. The coming of the national system of the pre-paid one-penny stamp in 1840 was a revolution. Post offices multiplied, the railways carried mail in hours while the coaches and horses had taken days, schools mushroomed, literacy rates rose, and people wrote letters – and after 1902 postcards – in increasing numbers.

In Corsham, the Post Office did more and more business in Victorian times. It moved location several times from its coaching days at the Methuen Arms (where the Post Office name can be seen on a good day above a window alongside the old coaching road). By 1889, Kelly's Directory listed five pillar boxes, besides the Post Office. They were at Station Road, Pickwick Road, 'Priory Road, Pickwick Street', Corsham Side and the Harp & Crown, Gastard. They all had three collections a day and one on Sundays, apart from Gastard which had two a day on weekdays and none on Sunday. (The pillar box presumably near the station has gone, as have those at Corsham Side (Neston) and Gastard – now a wall box and a post box respectively – I am not sure what is indicated by 'Priory Road, Pickwick Street' – presumably replaced by 5).

These frequent collections, and as many deliveries to every address per day (despite the absence of house numbers before 1939, other than in Pickwick Road), meant that communication was speeded up. The coming of the postcard especially after 1902 meant that you could write to invite someone to dinner and get a reply on the same day. The postcard was the Edwardian equivalent of an email. The mass literate world of Victorian and Edwardian England was a new world.

The material evidence for this new world still decorates our environment. It is, however, becoming part of an old world. Letters and postcards are increasingly being replaced by emails and digital texts, and deliveries are increasingly of parcels rather than messages. Will post boxes go the way of the other scarlet icon, the telephone box? Emails and texts come through the ether; deliveries come by vans that clutter up the roads, and perhaps in the future by drones that will clutter up the skies. None of these changes will leave any material archaeological record for future generations to admire or reflect upon.

Negley Harte

Bibliography: Jean Young Farrugia, *The Letter Box: A History of the Post Office Pillar and Wall Boxes* (1969) is standard and detailed, if unexciting. Two shorter books provide many photographs: Jonathan Glancey, *Pillar Boxes* (1989) is interesting on design; Martin Robinson, *Old Letter Boxes* (2nd ed., 2000) provides nerdy details. All three books ignore Wiltshire.

Dr Negley Harte is an Hon. Fellow of University College London. He is President of the Wiltshire Record Society, and an Hon. Vice-President of the Corsham Civic Society.

Response to the book reviews published in *Spotlight* vol 18, issue 2, Autumn 2021

John Kenneth Oatley, *Corsham My Story: memories and changes in the Lives of a Corsham Family* (2021), 158pp. Printed by Corsham Print; published by the author.

Clearly, my book presented a challenge to this Corsham Historian. My one page brief historic introduction, took him three pages to totally destroy any credibility, regarding my efforts in the creation of this book. The brief introduction was taken from various sources and records including the Societies own published books on the subject.

For the record, I accept total responsibility for the entire work, including the layout, pictures, and graphics etc, in fact the entire creation was down to me, prior to its excellent printing. Indeed, so demoralising was his book review, that I am surprised it was ever published for general circulation in the Spotlight. It has had the effect of destroying possible sales opportunities, without question.

I would state that I am not a historian, I am not an author, I responded to a request to record my life and that of my family in Corsham. It has been written to illustrate how the original village changed so dramatically during my lifetime, additionally the part my family played during that period, indicating how it effected all of us during that time.

Whereas I appreciate the academic side of such records are important to some, of course we all know how history takes various twists and turns so who is the one who actually knows - what or where and at what time certain events happened. Hence my strongest of objections to the way this particular review has been handled by the Trust. I fortunately, have only received excellent reports and comments. Regrettably, I feel like a student that hasn't handed his work in correctly.

The other Spotlight review [by Cath Maloney] sets out to portray a much more respectful tone, indicating notes to possible reader what to expect from such a book. Taking an approach that would interest many who have very little knowledge of how Corsham changed and developed, particularly during the difficult times in WW2.

Ken Oatley

Response to the book reviews published in *Spotlight* vol 18, issue 2, Autumn 2021

John Cuthbertson ed., *Memories of Corsham: Old Picture Postcards from Brenda Cuthbertson's Collection* (2021), 173pp. Printed by Corsham Print; published by the author.

I am aware that a book review does not normally get a response from the author, however, on this occasion I believe it is warranted.

While there is a great deal I could say about Dr Negley Harte's review of my book: *Memories of Corsham*, which you published in the Autumn 2021 edition of Corsham Spotlight, I will limit my comments to three specific points.

First, I fail to understand Dr Harte's opening comment. He says: "Memories of Corsham, sadly, does not live up to its title." The book is subtitled *Old Picture Postcards from Brenda Cuthbertson's Collection*, because that is what it is - a book containing reproductions of some 229 postcards. Dr Harte calls them "nice" and observes that many of them have not been reproduced before. However, rather than comment in any meaningful way on the postcards themselves, his review focuses on the few pages of text that I included.

Second, Dr Harte says that: "such historical information as is given is distressingly inaccurate" and "one can only wonder where Mr Cuthbertson sources his information..." While Dr Harte derides my brief comments about Corsham Court and the Flemish Weavers' Cottages he says nothing about the quoted sources for that information.

If my book had been subtitled something like: "A definitive history of Corsham" then some of Dr Harte's comments might have been warranted, but the book does not purport to be a history of Corsham.

Finally, leaving aside Dr Harte's comments that *Memories of Corsham* is "really very poor" and "slapdash", I find his concluding statement that my book does not justify being published to be particularly upsetting.

My aim in publishing a book of postcards of Corsham was threefold:

- as a tribute to my late mother, the collector of those postcards.
- to give a wider audience an opportunity to see her fantastic postcard collection of Corsham. I hoped its publication would evoke the same sort of happy memories of Corsham in others that my mother had had when she looked at her postcards.
- to raise some money for two local charities.

I have received some very positive feedback about *Memories of Corsham* and, despite Dr Harte's views, I remain very pleased that I produced it. I have not made a single penny out of this self-publishing venture as all profits are being donated to two local charities.

John Cuthbertson

STOP PRESS!

After the magazine had gone to the printers, the great news came in that the Care UK proposed care home development appeal [on the Bath Road opposite Priory Road] has been dismissed by the Planning Inspector! As the person who had got the ball rolling against this scheme by summoning the scheme's planning consultant and a developers' representative to attend a public meeting in Pickwick, I could not be more pleased for the local community and the Pickwick Association who led the fight. After also seeing off the proposed Gladman development on the Bath Road site opposite St Patrick's Catholic Church, this is another formidable achievement!

John Maloney

BOOK REVIEW

James Holden, *Wiltshire Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses: A Guide and a Gazetteer* (Hobnob Press for the Wiltshire Buildings Record, viii +326pp. 2022).

The Wiltshire Buildings Record is an admirable little organisation based in the History Centre at Chippenham. Small it may be, but it packs a big punch. Since 1979 it has published a number of excellent books on buildings in Wiltshire, including in 2018 the 'guide and gazetteer' for gate lodges in the county, those charming often fanciful buildings which mark the entrances to great estates. We have several fine examples in Corsham around the Corsham Court estate and the former Dickson-Poynder domain at Hartham, with others at Bowood and Grittleton.

That highly recommended book was produced by James Holden who has now produced another excellent book, this time on nonconformist chapels in Wiltshire. We have at least ten of such buildings in the parish of Corsham, some modest, some fine, all elegant in their way. Three of them are outstanding pieces of architecture: two in the town, the old Congregational Chapel (now a café, overshadowed by the back of the Martingate Precinct), usually dated to 1790, but Mr Holden says 1793, and the handsome Baptist Chapel (1828) in Priory Street, as well as the modestly impressive Monks Chapel on the way to Gastard and/or Neston.

Monks Chapel was built by Quakers in 1662 and became Congregational by 1690, and it survives as a very fine and virtually unchanged interior from the late seventeenth century, as does the schoolroom of Lady Hungerford's Almshouses of 1668 on the edge of the town, and virtually unchanged too from the same period. These two buildings, fossilised since the 1690s, are the historical wonders of Corsham.

Mr Holden does not solve the mystery of Chapel Knapp, but he is a very good guide to the cul-de-sac of the experience of nonconformity in the 18th and 19th centuries that left its monuments in stone to be found all over Corsham, and indeed all over Wiltshire. He has a good mind in the libraries as well as a good eye with his camera. There are excellent pictures as well as the well-researched text.

Mr Holden's tongue is never in his cheek. He is careful to avoid comment on the bitter theological rivalries that lay behind the antagonisms of the ardent groups that built their rival chapels, remaining physical evidence for the deeply felt dottiness of a society increasingly literate but deprived of the outlets of commercialised football, cheap newspapers, secular education, films or television. Mr Holden does not speculate. He shows that an 'amateur' historian can produce 'professional' quality work, armed with intelligence and application. His book deserves a place on our shelves alongside Julian Orbach's new edition of Pevsner's *Buildings of Wiltshire*. It is hard to think of higher praise.

Dr Negley Harte

Some Corsham street signs and new businesses, Part 1

Corsham has a fine variety of street signs for its existing shops and businesses:

inevitably, those on public houses tend to be the most colourful and noticeable. Also, the CCS and some members have a good collection of images of the High Street and other areas in former times, of which one of the most interesting I have come across is a CD of some nearly 90 images entitled

Corsham Civic Society in association with English Heritage and the National Trust present Corsham in the 20th century and there is a veritable treasure trove of images in the images in the CCS photographic collection at the Wiltshire & Swindon

History Centre in Chippenham [all properly archived and catalogued].

In the collage [**Above, bottom right and enlarged on the next page**] is a barely visible sign 'Post Office' above a window lintel [below] which is part of The Methuen Arms restaurant fronting the Laycock Road. It is a faded remnant of the first Corsham post office of the early 1800's which was established in the Methuen Arms and was called the *Commercial Inn and Posting House* [Julian Carosi, *Corsham Revealed*, p.166].



Above: selection of Corsham street signs ~ collage by John Maloney



Article continues next page...



The Corsham Gallery opened in January in what was formerly the John Parker Gallery, 15 Martingate [Spotlight, Summer 2019, pp. 9-10]. Seven artists are the founding members and they sell a variety of artwork and other gifts. The aim of The Corsham Art Gallery is to be a gallery for local artists. Guest exhibitions started on 2nd March with Candice Rouse, who predominantly paints animals inspired by her childhood holidays sent in the 'African wild'.

Some Diary dates ~

- **1st April** – Summer exhibition submissions open, forms and details available in the gallery or via email
- **30th April** – Summer exhibition submissions' closes
- **1st-30th June** – Open Summer exhibition



Above: The Corsham Gallery, recently opened [see previous page].

Kettlesmith Brewing is an award winning independent micro-brewery in Bradford-on-Avon which has recently opened a new shop and beer bar in Corsham, in No.1 Pickwick Road [on the corner of Pickwick Road and High Street]. The beer cellar installation involved a 10m 'python' of beer lines from the 2nd floor to the ground floor bar. Provision of 8 taps allow for a variety of beer together with a range of craft beers from local, national and international breweries, plus Kettlesmith's own brand cans are available as a 6 pack (15% off can price) or 12 pack (25% off can price), together with mini-kegs and a reusable 'growler' pack and there is a delivery service. Cider, gin, wine, tea, coffee and [locally made] cakes are provided.

For further details and opening times see ~

<https://kettlesmithbrewing.com/collections/shop-now>

Article continues next page...



Left: the beer bar and shop and **Above:** part of the ground floor interior ~ there is an upper floor bar as well.

Postscript ~ the former No 21 [Pickwick Road] restaurant has closed and is to be replaced by an Italian Bar and Restaurant and the former pet shop in Post Office Lane is being refurbished, apparently as another fish and chip shop!

John Maloney

Catherine Eden RIP

Catherine died on Wednesday 18th March at her home, The Garden House, Pickwick, just short of 102 years old [*Spotlight*, Spring 2020, p. 16].

Catherine was born in Flax Bourton, North Somerset, on 29th April 1920. In 1938 she went to Somerville College, Oxford, but when war was declared in 1939 she went to work with the Land Army and later at Kew Gardens which gave her a 'good grounding' when she later set about creating her garden at No. 23 Pickwick. At the very end of the war she joined the International Voluntary Peace Service and went to Berlin. She met Robin Eden in London and they married there in 1946. They both, had a 'very good eye' and this led them to opening their first antique shop in Bradford-on-Avon, moving it to Pickwick in 1952 when they bought No. 23 Pickwick. No. 23 Pickwick was well known for its splendid walled garden and annual garden fete which raised money for charity ~ sometimes there were as many as 300 visitors. Robin was a founder member of Corsham Civic Society and served as President 1980-1992.



Catherine was a staunch Catholic and has been a regular worshipper at the local St. Patrick's Church for nearly 70 years. Even at 85 years of age she still cycled to Mass and down into Corsham! Catherine leaves behind her six children - Matthew, Thomas, Rose, Anna, Felicity and Alice – who have been regular visitors in her later years, looking after her in exemplary fashion.

John Maloney

Planning round-ups

Corsham Neighbourhood Plan

Given the fact that the Core Strategy is in the process of being revised (and will become the Local plan) and the uncertainty with the relevant Government White Paper, the Town Council decided not to review the Neighbourhood Plan at the moment.

Pickwick Conservation Area Appraisal

The PCAA 'sailed through' the public consultation process and last year was endorsed by Corsham Town Council and the Corsham Area Board last year which 'Resolved' that the Board write to Wiltshire Council recommending that the PCAA be adopted. The next stage in its progress for adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance [SPG] is that it needs to be supported by the Northern Area Planning Committee. If it gets that support it can be referred to Georgina Clappitt-Dix, Head of Spatial Planning at Wiltshire Council, for assessment. If approved, it would be passed to the Planning Inspectorate and an Examiner appointed to vet and, hopefully, verify its suitability as SPG.

Gladman Developments Ltd.

Nothing further has been heard from GDL about their proposed development of some 150 houses etc., on the north side of the Bath Road, opposite St. Patrick's Catholic Church, since the Planning Inspector formally rejected their appeal against Wiltshire Council's continued refusal to allow the scheme. However, it has been announced that GDL has been acquired by Barratt Developments PLC [house builders] for £250 million and will operate as a stand-alone business within the Barratt Group.

Care UK Pickwick care home scheme

The result of the Public Enquiry last December into Care UK's appeal against Wiltshire Council's decision to reject its proposal is expected by the end of March.

The Old Brushworks, 56 Pickwick Road

There was an application for 'Prior Notification under Class O for a Proposed Conversion of Existing Office Premises to Create 9no. One Bed Residential Studio Apartments with 9 Parking Spaces and Associated Storage for Refuse, Recycling and Secure Bicycle Storage' which was refused in April last year. Nevertheless, due to recent changes to permitted development rights the proposed scheme may yet go ahead!

24 Pickwick

Permission was recently granted for interior alterations to connect two parts of the property at first floor level, removal of three modern staircases and construction of two new staircases to improve the layout. Also, a number of other alterations were permitted details of which can be viewed at ~

<https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0i3z000016rMcvAAE/pl202110606>



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CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2022

All meetings are at the Pound arts centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Members £1, Non-Members £3. Guests are very welcome. *Please note from June 2022, fees will become Members £2, Non-Members £5.

25 Mar	Ian Caskie, The SS Great Britain
22 April	David Dawson, Director of Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, The Making of the Kingdom of Wessex
27 May	AGM - meeting followed by a social gathering with cheese and wine.
24 Jun	Hannah Severn, Stourhead, Life & Work of Sir Richard Colt Hoare
22 Jul	Wendy Reynolds, Falklands Today
Aug	No Meeting
23 Sept	Stuart Burroughs, Director Museum of Bath at Work, The River Runs Uphill – the Kennet & Avon Canal
28 Oct	Ben Thomas, Reader in History of Art at Kent University, How Should Art be Displayed
25 Nov	John Maloney, Corsham High Street Project
Dec	No meeting

- *Please note that the Programme may be subject to changes*
- *NB new attendance fees and tea/coffee costs*

Corsham Civic Society was founded in 1963 to represent the people of Corsham in all aspects of conservation, preservation and the promotion of this delightful Wiltshire town. The Society is a registered charity, a member of ASHTAV (Association of Small and Historic Towns & Villages of the UK). It is our aim to promote high standards of planning and architecture, to create a wider awareness amongst the local population of environmental issues, the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area, and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of features of public amenity and historical interest, in Corsham and the surrounding countryside.

Corsham Civic Society, 91 Tellcroft Drive, Corsham, SN13 9JQ, Wiltshire. Registered Charity No: 275321