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HMS NAILSEA - A ship too late for war

by Dave Sowden

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The First World War saw an unprecedented growth in the number of British warships, with hundreds of vessels of all types being built, and a consequent pressure on the Admiralty Ships' Names Committee of the time. Even though ships were built in common-named classes by this time there were cases where the policy had to be altered and the intended name was changed before a ship's completion. An example of this can be seen in the Aberdare, or later Hunt, class of minesweepers of 1917-1919 which were originally given the names of seaside towns. However it was realised that the names of coastal or harbour towns could result in confusion in signals and several names were changed to those of inland towns and villages. One such was NEWQUAY, under construction by A & J Inglis of Glasgow, which was renamed HMS NAILSEA on 25th June 1918, Nailsea being a small village in North Somerset, some 9 miles SW of Bristol.

The ship was ordered as NEWQUAY on 17 July 1917 and the keel laid down on 29 September 1917 as Inglis's yard number 322. Erection of hull framing was commenced on 1 October and completed on 21 December; plating of the hull started on 10 December and was completed on 13 May 1918. This was well before hull plates were welded and riveting was the only method of fixing plates to the frames. HMS NAILSEA was launched on 8th August 1918 and the boilers installed on 14 August with the engines being shipped eight days later. With the machinery in place fitting out of the rest of the ship could take place. This was completed at the beginning of November 1918 with the engines

being steamed for the first time on 4 November. Sea trials started on 14 November in the Clyde, during which a measured mile would have been run to assess the ship's performance and to ensure that the speed specified in the building contract was achieved. The Admiralty number assigned to HMS NAILSEA at this time was 4356, but by early 1919 T.A7 was allocated, finally changed to T.18 by the end of that year. Trials were satisfactorily completed on 21 November 1918 and the ship commissioned - ten days too late for war! Many other ships then under construction had completion delayed or were cancelled as a result of the cessation of hostilities on 11 November 1918, but minesweepers such as HMS NAILSEA were badly needed to help clear both Allied and enemy minefields to make the seas safe for shipping of every nation. During WW1 British ships lost to mines alone included 44 warships, 225 auxiliaries, 259 merchant ships (1493 men lost), 578 fishing vessels (98 men lost) while 84 ships were damaged by mines with the loss of 64 men.

HMS NAILSEA is first found in the Navy List of January 1919, nominally based at Devonport under the command of one Lt Cdr J P Gibson RNR, with two sub-Lieutenants and a Chief Mechanical Officer; the intended complement was some 74 officers and men. It would appear that the ship was engaged on minesweeping duties in the North Sea between her completion and October 1919, at a time when many ships were being laid up immediately on completion. In September 1919 NAILSEA visited Lervik and Stavanger in Norway before returning to Rosyth on 1 October where she remained until paying off from Mine Clearance on 17 October. She left Rosyth the same day for Harwich where she arrived on 19 October. Nailsea then remained at Harwich laid-up under care and maintenance until 27 October 1921 when she was towed to the Medway for a refit at Sheerness. This commenced on 29 October and was completed on 25 November, NAILSEA being towed back to Harwich on 6 December to continue lay-up for a further year.

On 28 October 1922 NAILSEA returned to Sheerness where she was to stay until 4 February 1924 when refitted at Chatham, completing in early March. These short docking periods would have included boiler cleaning and any essential repairs as well as other small defect rectification. This was followed by repairs and alterations between 16 and 23 May 1924, also at Chatham, prior to re-commissioning with a Portsmouth crew at 0800 on 10 July 1924. The commissioning, probably for the summer Home Fleet exercises was short-lived for, following visits to Portsmouth, Margate Roads, Sheerness and Deal, NAILSEA was again reduced to reserve at Chatham under the control of Commander-in-Chief Nore on 21 August. During this lay-up the ship underwent annual refits, but was listed in the July 1925 and January 1926 Navy Lists as tender to the depot ship BLENHEIM; the following year BLENHEIM having gone for disposal, NAILSEA was listed as tender to ARK ROYAL, a former seaplane carrier then acting as a depot ship. NAILSEA'S role was shortlived as during 1927 she was listed for disposal and taken in hand at Sheerness on 22 June in preparation for her sale, completing on 2 July. A Dockyard Acquaint of 29 September states that the ship was ready for sale, while Captain of the Port's Acquaint no 775 of 6 December shows that the ship was sold on 25 November 1927 to Hughes Bolckow Shipbreaking Co Ltd, Battleship Wharf, Blyth, Northumberland, for breaking, after a short and relatively uneventful career.

The Aberdare, or later Hunt class, was a modified version of the Hunt class twin screw minesweeper, altered to permit mass production using mercantile type construction. Originally 56 were ordered, but by November 1918 the number had been increased to 131. Of this number 35 were cancelled on 17 December 1918 and completion delayed on others, with many sold early on to civilian owners for conversion to coasters, replacing merchant ship war losses.

The class had a displacement of 800 tons, a length of 231 feet overall (220 feet at the waterline), a beam of 28.5 feet and a draught of 7.5 feet. Power was provided by two-shaft triple expansion steam engines, with two coal-fired Yarrow boilers developing 2200 ihp and giving a maximum speed of 16 knots; bunkers of 185 tons of coal were carried. The intended armament was a single 4-inch gun on the foredeck and a 12 pdr anti-aircraft gun aft although, as many ships were completed after the war it is probable that few were so fitted. The class were flush-decked compared to the earlier Hunt class which had a break at the quarterdeck. Sweep gear was deployed over the stern using "Quixo" patent davits, though activities were not restricted to minesweeping as the class could also be used as escorts to larger ships if required.

Nailsea's one and only warship had a very quiet career being in commission for only some twelve months of the eight years she was in naval service. At the time of her disposal the prospect of further hostilities was deemed remote and the state of the domestic economy meant that scarce defence resources had to be channelled into the building of battleships, the standard against which the naval strength of a nation was measured. As a consequence many smaller ships, such as HMS NAILSEA, had to be scrapped, a move that meant that only twelve years later, with war again looming, the Royal Navy would be desperately short of minesweepers to combat the new German threat. Although during the 1939-1945 naval construction programmes the names of other class members were re-used, NAILSEA was not amongst them and this shortlived minesweeper remains the sole warship to have borne the name of our home village.

THE COUNTRY BAKER

by John Brain

To those of us who grew up in the Backwell of the 1930's the main characteristic of village life was its unchanging pattern. The big houses, their occupants still sometimes referred to as "the gentry" by older parishioners, the church, then with its greatly loved rector Prebendary Urch, the village school, and the tradespeople and professional men and women who lived and served the parish from the doctor at birth to the undertaker at death- the village in those days was largely self sufficient. My grandfather came to Chelvey in 1888 with his wife and their four young children; he was in the engineering line and spent his working life working for the Bristol Waterworks Company at Chelvey pumping Station, mainly as an engine driver, although his skills with machinery were called upon to deal with all sorts of problems in the station.

Grandfather was instrumental in setting up my father and uncle in business and about the turn of the century bought the bakery from a Mr Viner, which was then situated near to the bottom of Hillside Road, in West Town. The premises ultimately became a dairy, operated by a Mr Green, and subsequently by Donald Owen and his wife, until it reverted to its present day private ownership.

Meanwhile grandfather had a new bakery built opposite the New Inn; the two young men Arthur and Bert became the proprietors and thus "A & H Brain, Bakers" was born, and was to serve customers with bread for almost 50 years, until they retired in 1947. It was not only bread that we sold; the shop attached to the premises sold all manner of groceries, sweets, ham, and a hundred and one other things, as all village shops did; in addition we sold maize, corn and bran, bearing in mind that in those days

most people kept chickens, so there was a ready market for all these commodities.

The country baker, and indeed most tradespeople in those days were not in business to make money [not at four old pence for a 2lb loaf!](for younger readers that is roughly 2p for 1Kg) They were there to serve the community, and that was it, and that meant calling on them all, not like today where the customer has to come to the shop for his bread.

We had two extensive rounds to do: "Backwell" from the shop eastwards, to include the whole parish including Backwell Common, Farleigh, and Flax Bourton, as far as the "Jubilee" AND the other "Cleeve" which took in Chelvey and Brockley, up to Backwell Hill House, the whole of Cleeve, right down through Claverham almost as far as the junction with Yatton High Street, then back along Claverham High Street to outlying houses and home via Brockley Elm. And remember we did those rounds every day until the war came, and petrol shortages cut the number of deliveries. As country bakers the work was unremitting. My father was up and gone by 6am, and seldom home at night before 10 o'clock; my mother would work in the shop with my aunt, and then go out bread delivering, and I would do the same throughout most of my teens.

The customers, though, were our friends, and we never at any time let them down, even to the point of baking and delivering on a Sunday morning if we had run short on a Saturday night. Sunday was the oasis of the week - not for mother of course, who would have to provide Sunday dinner, but it was the one day in the week we would look forward to, and mother and I would go to church morning and evening, giving me an insight and love of church music and a membership of Backwell church choir which has lasted from 1935 to the present day - but that's another story. Of course in pre war days there were families who

had little money and not much work, and the inevitable bad payers. The difference between then and now was that you never dreamt of "chucking them up" as we termed it. They had to eat, and invariably they were given stale bread, which they accepted, and now and again they would pay 2/6d [12p] off the bill and that's how it went on. I once remember my father telling one bad payer who owed £6 [a lot of money then] that we shouldn't call any more. This produced 1/6d [7p] and a promise of the rest, but we knew that was just a story - needless to say we still carried on serving them!

Easter was always an exciting time for me although not for the family. Father and Uncle and their wives were up all night on Maundy Thursday making Hot Cross buns; I used to sleep at the shop that night and get up about 6 o'clock Good Friday morning and go on the Cleeve round delivering the buns. We used to finish and be home to breakfast by 9 o'clock, which gave me good time to have a nap and then go up to church for the morning service at 11am. Parents were hard at work making Easter cakes (a Brain's speciality I might say) and baking enough bread to allow us to have an extra day off on Easter Monday, after an exhausting week end.

There were many other aspects of our trade which come to mind; cooking doughnuts every Wednesday; selling stale cakes at 8 for 6d to itinerant gypsies - real ones in those days; cooking weekend joints in our ovens for neighbours on a Saturday night; bringing in buckets of coke for the ovens, and killing crickets which loved the warmth of the bakery - what would the health inspectors say today!, and so much more.

My abiding memories of bread delivering were the differences in the seasons, the country colours and flowers of spring and the maze of stars delivering during winter nights. Uncle Arthur and I knew a number of the star constellations by name and we would

chart their paths across the sky as winter progressed, and think of how many houses were left to call on before that thankful arrival at West Town Bakery, a roaring fire, tea, toast and butter, whatever time it was, but seldom much before 9 o'clock - we weren't known as the "Midnight Bakers" for nothing.

In my kitchen at home an old clock hangs on the wall. Instead of figures it bears the legend H-O-V-I-S B-R-E-A-D SOLD HERE, and for many years it hung in our shop at West Town. It is a constant reminder to me of that hard working, and yet more honest and more gentle time in our village, and one of which I am so thankful to have been a part of, and still remember with great affection.

WRAXALL AND FAILAND SCHOOLS

by Phyllis Horman

When the Rev. E P Vaughan was Rector of Wraxall he wrote a diary with many interesting items including:-

"There was a small dame's school in 1801 kept by Betty Bowles, in a cottage below the rectory. She taught the Criss Cross [the alphabet in the shape of Christ's Cross] and to sit still. Later, another school was kept by a Mrs Dyer, again in a cottage below the Rectory. "

Wraxall's first real school is the building in the churchyard known as the library. Mr Richard Vaughan of Wraxall Lodge (now Wraxall Court) had it built at his own expense in 1809, the builder was Mr John Weeks. The oak timbers used for the joists and the beams came from an old "man of war" which had been broken up in Bristol.

The school teacher's cottage at the entrance to the churchyard was built on waste ground by the Rev James Vaughan with money left by the will of Richard Vaughan and partly at the rev James Vaughan's own expense.

The boys' school was built in 1856 on a piece of ground given by Sir Greville Smyth of Ashton Court, the expenses paid by Mr William Gibbs.

The present school, once the girls' and infants' school was built more or less on the site of the village pound in 1886. Once again the land was given by Sir Greville Smyth and expenses paid by Mr Anthony Gibbs. Extensions were added at a later date.

The first school master was a Mr Knight and the Rev James Vaughan sent him to be trained at a school near Bridgwater. In 1813 it would seem that Joseph Crane had taken his place as master, whilst John Allen was a school usher.

During the 1820s Samuel Gallop and George Down [who by 1832 was at Wrington] were mentioned as masters. James Jones appears in 1838 and in 1841, according to the census for Wraxall of that year, George Goff was a master. Probably just before 1840 Jesse Talbot opened a school for boys of middle class parentage at Failand Lodge and this continued for 41 years. There was a schoolroom of some kind at Failand as early as 1839 but the main school building at Failand was erected by Wraxall Church in 1847. [Failand Church was not built until 1887] During the 1840s and into the 1850s Moses Curtis was the school master.

Back to Wraxall. In 1846 and into the 1850s the schoolmaster was John Hill and from 1858 to the mid 1860s Thomas Carne who died September 1866 aged only 41 years. His wife Mary A Carne was school mistress at Failand by 1871.

The first mention of a school mistress at Wraxall is from the 1851 and 1861 Census returns. This is Mary Hartwell classed as "National School Mistress". It must be mentioned that some of the school masters' wives were termed teachers, sometimes of the infants.

By 1870 Maynard Colchester had taken over and from 1872 onward George Tidcombe. He taught well into the 1890s. Then came "Banger Brown" followed by William A Haining.

At Failand, again during the 1890s was Henry Adams.

Quite probably there were others whose names are unknown. As the known names are taken from the registers and the Census Returns, the persons who have been named could have been in office before and after the dates given. Unfortunately up to the 1890s one cannot know at which school one person was teaching.

At the girls' and infants' school during the 1890s Mrs Cook was head mistress with one or two assistants. Later Miss Baker was head mistress with her sister Winnie Baker and Mrs Darby [infants teacher].

By the 1930s Mrs Cowles was headmistress, with Mrs Long and Miss Davis [later Mrs Stevens] as infant teacher. There were supplementary teachers after Mrs Long retired two of whom were Miss Loney and Miss Gold.

The information given is only up to the second World war and so now many more names could be added to the list.

DO YOU REMEMBER

1. MEMORIES OF TICKENHAM 1935 to 1956

by Miss E. M. Weekes

Miss Weekes was born in Reservoir Cottage Barrow Gurney and went to school there. She remembers among her teachers Mr Lee and his wife and their daughter who was the monitoress. She also remembers Mrs Durbin and Mrs Jones. When she left school she went into service working for one member of the Gibbs family amongst others but eventually went to work for Mrs Durbin. This then is her story:

My employers and I went to live in the Main road near Orchard Avenue in Tickenham in 1935 and we lived there until 1956. As it was a new bungalow named "Alvernon" the first couple of years were spent in getting the garden laid out "ship shape and Bristol fashion" as the saying goes.

In those days almost everything we needed was delivered, Holders from Nailsea delivered soap, paraffin and other hardware goods. The newspapers were brought from Nailsea. The baker came from Clevedon, also the groceries, [the order for groceries was taken on a Monday and delivered a few days later]. We had a postal delivery from Clevedon twice a day. Milk was brought and measured out with a ladle at the door by a local farmer (H Shipp). There were no bottles then. Our doctor was at Nailsea (Dr Gornall) so it was a cycle ride or the bus to see him. Of course there were some things we did not have, there was no main drainage and no salvage collection, we had a large garden so the rubbish was dug in and the drainage etc went to a cesspit in the garden.

We did not have the telephone for several years so we had to go to the public phone near the post office, the only shop was at the post office otherwise we had to go to Clevedon for some things. I used to cycle to Kings Hill Nailsea to get some lovely farm house bacon. [I wish we could get some now!]

We had a few years peace and then came World War 2 with all its troubles and shortages. First of all came the evacuees, we had two sisters Margaret and Gladys Hodgson who came from Barking Essex. They stayed with us until 23 June 1945. I believe that they were the last to go home from the villages around us. In fact both of them went to work in Clevedon, Margaret went to Sibleys (grocer) in Hill Road and Gladys also worked in a shop in the same road.

The girls had their bikes sent from home and we took them all around the villages when it was quiet enough to do so, the first months of the war were quiet and one day we took them shopping in Bristol. Whilst we were there the sirens went and I suppose it made Margaret think [she had just turned 12 years]. She said to Mr Durbin "Pa? If anything happens to our Mum and Dad will you keep us for all time?"

In time all their family came for weekends Father, Mother, Gran, their twin sisters and their husbands, they were only too pleased to have a quiet week end after the noise of London.

When the war started we had to get whatever we could to make blackout curtains and the windows had white material about 2 inches wide stuck on to make squares squares. The idea of this was to stop any glass from flying about should there be any bomb blast. We were fortunate and did not experience any bombs very near us. In time we were all issued with gas masks and identity cards which we were told to carry with us at all times wherever we went. I must not forget the ration cards

without these we could not get any food all of which was in short supply.

If we went anywhere we made sure we were home before blackout time as we did not have to show any cycle or torch lights. As I have already mentioned the first part of the war was very quiet but once the guns and searchlights started and the planes came over it was a different story. We had friends in Bristol who were bombed out so they had our bedrooms and we (five of us) slept in the passage for a time then the folks bought an Anderson shelter, a galvanised affair which we let into the ground and covered with soil and shrubs. We went down steps to it and had makeshift bunk beds; we felt a bit safer at night. I remember coming out one morning very early after the all clear sounded. It had been a very noisy night and to my surprise the nightingales were singing one over the other. It was lovely to hear them after the guns.

Another morning we could hear a bell ringing and thought that the Germans had landed somewhere [as we understood that the church bells would ring if they did land] however the ringing turned out to be a bell buoy in Walton Bay over the hill from us. At the end of Court Lane Clevedon there was a stone shed and this had holes around its walls so that guns could be fired should the enemy have come, this was never needed.

Our air raid warden was "Joe Haskins" a market gardener who lived near us. There were two brothers working in their market garden when the planes came over that did so much damage at Filton aerodrome. As the brothers realised that they were German planes they took to their heels, jumped our garden gate to try to get some shelter as by this time guns all around were firing at the aircraft. These planes took us all by surprise.

By this time we were wondering how many more people we could put up in our beds. As I have mentioned we had our friends from Bristol, then a couple came from Clifton, finally a lady and her little girl came from London when the doodlebugs came over. Her husband came for weekends. I think I am right when I say there was a searchlight and I believe a gun at Mr Courts farm at Nailsea West End and search lights at Lower Failand.

We had a German prisoner of war camp at Sixty Acres, Failand and somehow three of them got to know that my father was ill in bed. They came to see if they could sit with him and one of them came regularly. He was a barber and he used to cut Father's hair and shave him and would sit at his bedside until it was time to go back to camp. Three of them were at Father's funeral. They were not all bad, but had to fight the same as our own men did whether they wanted to or not.

Some of those days were not without their humorous side; for instance one night it became very noisy so off we went to the shelter. One person was missing; an elderly lady relative. We went back indoors to hurry her up and, would you believe it, she insisted on using a torch so that she could see to put her hair tidy. When we finally got her away from the mirror she said "Blast and seize old Hitler I wish the old fellow [meaning the devil] had him".

On another occasion I was at my parents, home at Failand. As tea was in short supply I used to take a spoonful with me so that I could have a cup before returning to Tickenham. However this time it was not tea in the packet, but some special onion seed for my brother. "Guess what"? Mother made me a cup and that was the end of the onion seed, my fault for putting it in a tea packet. The time came when all the girls belongings were collected by the railway van and taken to Clevedon and off they

went. It was like losing sisters when they went home. They soon came back with their boy friends for holidays. It was a lot of work at the time but we had some happy times.

I left in 1956; there was still no main drainage in Tickenham although this has been put in since.

The years roll on and I am still in touch with Margaret and Gladys. Both of them are now grandmothers and the eldest a widow; they will I hope be writing their own memories but these are mine.

2. THE WRAXALL POLICEMEN

by Phyllis Horman

The Policeman before WW1 was probably Mr Gollege, then Mr Hiscocks during WW1 and probably well into the 1920s. Next was Mr Bull. The earliest I remember was Mr Lombard whose son John was at school the same time as myself, this could be until perhaps 1935. Next Mr Pardy, one of his sons, Jack, I think with two or three other young men of the parish started a small dance band, this was probably about 1937.

Lastly Mr Howard Duck who became Wraxall's LAST policeman just before WW2 and through the 1939/45 war. When he retired the village came under the Nailsea beat. The dates I have given may not be absolutely correct but I think the names are in the correct order.

This information amends the information given to David Chappell and repeated by him in good faith in his article in an earlier edition of Pennant.

FAMILY HISTORY

by Phyllis Horman

More queries about the history of local families.

A lady from Santa Barbara USA was interested in the SUMMERELLS of Nailsea. She and her husband came to England three or four years ago and so to Nailsea where we met in the Library one afternoon.

I contacted a lady at Tickenham whose maiden name was Summerell and she was most interested to come and meet the American couple. It so happened that both ladies stem from the same family and not only that both are named Dorothy.

The RIDGE family was wanted by a lady at present in San Antonio, Texas. She and her then husband (since parted) came to England a year or two ago. I met them at 9am as they were moving on elsewhere that morning. Claire had done a great deal of research before coming over and we still write to each other. About three or four years ago, Ian from Australia wrote to the then Rector of Wraxall enquiring for information on the ROGERS family. The Rev. David Payne told my brother and me and immediately I said "He's one of ours!"

I wrote to Ian and he and his wife Marjorie came to England and one evening came to visit us, my brother came to meet them as well. We had a most interesting two or three hours-they were moving on next day-and I was thrilled though not surprised that our ancestors George Rogers (mine) and Nehemiah Rogers (Ian's) were brothers way back in the earlier 1700s. I have a photo of my great grandfather William Rogers the second and the likeness to Ian was most striking I thought, but according to Marjorie the

photo was (in her own words) "The living image of Ian's brother Bill".

They really were a lovely couple and it was just like two of the family coming home. Sad to say Ian died in the January of 1992 of cancer, I felt sad as if he had been a very close relation. I'm so glad we were able to meet, Marjorie has asked that we still keep in touch.

Two people have asked for the WARFIELD family of Nailsea and Tickenham. One is a sergeant in the Forces stationed in Europe. As he remarks he doesn't get the chance to do research for himself at the moment. He has now sent me a tree of his family.

A lady in Weston super Mare has an interest in the STOKES of Wraxall. Having done these before it was a pleasure to go through these again as I knew one family of that name and was at school with a daughter, in fact on rare occasions we meet again.

My most amusing contact is a gentleman from Bishopsworth, Bristol. Initially he wanted a family of PRICE who were glassworkers at Nailsea. We write to each other at times, phone, send odds and ends of interesting items to each other. We must be related somewhere along the line! We have the same sense of humour, the same love of keeping the local dialects.

He has sent me a very amusing tape he has made. One side is the story of John Cabot discovering America, the other side items of life in the "Dings" old St Philips when he was young, all told in a lovely broad Bristol accent. Believe me you need to know the old West Country dialect to understand it! Despite all this we have not yet met - One day maybe?

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

A new section where readers can provide information that they feel may assist others and the Editor can pass on useful snippets of information. Books of general interest may also be mentioned. Brief contributions are welcome.

British Telecom Archives from David Chappell

The offices of BT Archives and Historical Information Centre is housed in the old headquarters of the National Telephone Company at Telephone House 2-4 Temple Avenue, London EC4Y 0HL (071-822- 1022). This is on the corner of the Embankment and Temple Avenue, about 5 minutes walk from Blackfriars tube station.

Apart from historical records and pictorial material of telecommunications functions of the Post Office and its predecessors going back to the early part of the nineteenth century, the Archives hold what is probably the largest collection of UK telephone directories in the country (dating from 1880), and do so on behalf of the Public record Office.

The usual research facilities are available on site, but it is best to make contact before visiting the office, as some records are stored elsewhere, but can be called up.

Possible landscape audit from Peter Wright

The Feb edition of The Local Historian, which is the Journal of the British Association for Local History mentioned in its pamphlet Local History News that The Countryside Commission has recently announced a pilot research project to take place in the South West which may eventually lead to a landscape audit of the whole of England. The project has been designated The New

Map of England and according to the preliminary publicity, it will "attempt...to define the key countryside characteristics of a region and the landscapes within it".

Bristol Record Society Vol XLIV 1993 TUDOR WILLS PROVED IN BRISTOL 1546-1603

Edited by Sheila Lang and Margaret McGregor

This latest volume of the Bristol Record Society provides abbreviated texts of all surviving wills proved in the Bristol Consistory Court during the period 1546-1603. The information it contains will be an invaluable source for students of all aspects of Bristol's history during the 16th century. The material has been carefully presented, with a scholarly and informative Introduction and a complete Glossary; Editors are archivists at Bristol Record Office. As well as providing the names and family relationships of nearly one thousand 16th century Bristolians, the wills also give details of their places of origin, trades, tools, possessions, household furnishings, religious beliefs and a host of other information about the trade, crafts, industries and business which flourished in the busy port and capital city of the west of England.

The volume is available from: The Hon Secretary, Bristol Record Society, Department of Historical Studies, 13 Woodland Road BRISTOL BS8 1TB Price £10 + £1-50 p & p from Sec Bristol Record Society

IT MUST BE TRUE; IT WAS IN THE PAPER!

AN ACTION FOR DAMAGES TO A FARM HOUSE AT WRAXALL

HOWELL V RODBARD AND OTHERS c1850

with commentary by Peter Wright

This was an action to recover £1,000 for damages done to a farmhouse at Wraxall by the operations of the miners of the defendants, who constitute a Coal Company at Nailsea. Howell was the mortgagee in possession of the farm and house which was held by a yearly tenant named Davis.

[Davis was the licensee of the Royal Oak and the farm was behind the public house.]

Samuel Davis the occupier of the farm stated that when he took possession of the Farmhouse in March 1846 it was in good condition and had recently been repaired, when he left at Christmas (which he did because he could not stay any longer) the walls were cracked in some places to a width of 6 inches (15cm) - the roof was very bad- the water went from the cistern and the stones of the kitchen opened an inch to an inch and a half

The article goes on to state that :-

"a person named Morgan came to live there in the early part of 1847; he sank a shaft on his farm, about 300 yards from the farmhouse, where they had two engine houses; they had cut off an acre and a half of his land and when he asked for compensation Morgan had offered him a sovereign."

[Some confusion is caused by the reference to "there" which does not refer to Davis' farm house but to where Morgan came to live. From other evidence "there" is the area around "The Elms" colliery as we know it today just behind the Golden Valley Veterinary Hospital.]

Mr Ashmead, surveyor of Bristol, (who on cross examination would say that he had a little experience in mining operations but was not what was termed a mining surveyor) stated that two and a half years ago he visited the middle pit with Messrs Ashman; Morgan, the bailiff, took them down the mine and showed them the workings; in passing along they saw openings, which they afterwards found, on laying down the plans, to be in the direction of the house; the bailiff said they were mere air holes; at another point he was shown a place where the "water was tapped;" he thought the water which had been withdrawn would have supported the farm-house above; the getting rid of it, in his opinion, would have a tendency to bring down the earth and weaken the foundations of the farm-house; on a subsequent occasion they went there again but were refused admittance to the mine; had seen the damage done to the house - there was a crack right through the house, barton, and cow house, about two inches wide; the expense of building a new house (for it could not be repaired) he estimated at £994; the restoration of the land to its original state he estimated at £140.

In cross examination he agreed that nothing prevented him from going up the air openings, only that they could not have gone all over the mine in a day.

The Jury returned a verdict that no injury had been done to the property by the Company's works; and as respected the trespass, they found a verdict for the plaintiff with £140 damages.

[The extract concludes with a remark that I find confusing, immediately after the statement in the preceding paragraph the report goes on to say]

"This is a verdict for the defendants upon the question of injury; and a verdict for the plaintiff, with £140 damages, if the Court above shall be of the opinion that the mining lease of the Company does not justify the sinking of a new pit upon the Plaintiff's farm.

[The final sentence caused me to wonder why they bothered to report the case at all]

"The case lasted all day, and was of a very uninteresting nature "

[Maybe the difficulties that arise in interpreting the report were because the reporter had 40 winks!]

LOCAL FLOODS 1894

Bristol Observer Newspaper 17th December 1894

The effects of the recent heavy rainfall have been inconveniently evident in and about the village of Flax Bourton. Near the Union offices the road was impassable, and brisk trade was done with a horse and cart in conveying people across the submerged part of the road. The houses near the railway bridge were inundated and the inhabitants had to seek temporary shelter. As usual the railway experienced the brunt of the storm. The cutting through which the railway runs forms an artificial valley in a natural one, thus the line becomes the drain of the neighbourhood. The water rose so quickly that in less than one hour the rails were quite under water for a distance of a mile, the rush of water in its course tearing up the wood crossings at the end of the platform. A nasty landslide occurred near the station, which caused the traffic to be worked cautiously passing the spot.

Every precaution was used and the watchmen were out for the night in case of any further slips taking place. Towards night the water began to subside, and thus relieved the minds of many of the officials.

The recent continuous rain had the effect of submerging all the low lying parts of Nailsea district. The land on each side of the railway was completely covered with water and looked like an immense lake while the road and approaches to the station were completely blocked. A stream of water three or four feet deep was flowing across the road and caused much inconvenience to passengers. Nailsea Moor presented the appearance of a vast sheet of water with here and there a tree or two and the floods stretched nearly to Clevedon. At Ivy House, Kings Hill and Jacklands extensive floods prevailed and the roads were impassable except to vehicular traffic. In one place a stream of

water rushed right through the houses, and the residents had to take refuge on the second floor.