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# PENNANT



THE LOCAL HISTORY JOURNAL OF  
**BACKWELL, NAILSEA, TICKENHAM  
AND WRAXALL**

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## Editorial

This copy of Pennant brings to an end two years of development of a publishing project that has been a new (ad)venture for the Nailsea and District Local History Society. As the Editor I wish to take this opportunity to thank Adroit Printers and Pam Leggate (ASAP Secretarial Services) without whom it is unlikely that the journal, or the Editor's sanity, or maybe both, would have survived the trauma of producing 8 journals and three booklets in the space of 24 months.

For many years the Society has ploughed a lonely furrow with considerable time spent on preservation and conservation. While these projects do not fall totally within our objectives there has been nobody being available at the time who was willing or capable of doing the work. Much of the responsibility fell upon the shoulders of Margaret Thomas and Trevor Bowen. They acquitted themselves well and future residents will have much to thank them for.

The theme of conservation and preservation is continued elsewhere in this edition of PENNANT where news is given of the launch of The Nailsea Society which we hope will shoulder some of our burdens and will bring new blood to consider the future development of our town.

In addition to bring the saga of The Glassworks site to what we hope will be a successful close Trevor Bowen describes from first hand experience the problems that have been overcome and explains the situation as it now stands.

In a general sort through the accumulation of papers hoarded during 18 years of living in Nailsea I came across an open letter from me to members of N&DLHS in 1980, it included the following paragraph

"The expansion of the last few years has placed an immense burden on your Committee whose members have ensured that your Society is second to none in the area. However my view is that in this period of expansion we have tended to lose sight of our objectives. As a Local History Society how many of our members are actively engaged in the administration of the Society and the groundwork necessary to reveal the past. Regrettably I know the answer is very few. This cannot continue if the future of your Society is not to be placed at risk."

Is Trevor's good news the indicator that at last the N&DLHS can return to being a Local History Society? I hope so but I still feel that more of our members would find a more active involvement in our affairs enjoyable. None need fear being compelled to involve themselves in activities that they do not enjoy nor being required to spend more time than they can afford. Other members would be happy to show them how they could help. We have more and more tasks that can be carried out in the comfort of your own home. As an example all our publications need proof reading. If you think you might be interested contact any member of the Committee or the Editor for advice and information.

## **TWENTY YEARS ON**

**by Trevor Bowen**

Could it be that with the proposed development of land between the High Street and Scotch Horn, the saga of the glassworks site is at an end?

In 1975 or thereabouts - a year before the Local History Society was established - I began "field walking" the undeveloped areas of the former six acre site. Photographs in the Friendship and Royal Oak Public Houses; measurements and sketches of the

buildings and walls that remained; correspondence with Pilkingtons and Chance Brothers; an 1870 large scale plan of the Works - all culminated in the building of a model for the " People and Places " exhibition at Woodspring Museum in 1977.

In Nailsea and the surrounding villages, public interest was being aroused with exhibitions and slide talks, an interest that was to be of vital importance following an announcement by Avon County Council in 1979 that the southern section of the Nailsea Ring Road was to be constructed and would obliterate the foundations of the New House Cone adjacent to the Royal Oak Garage. Parts of these foundations had been exposed by casual excavation over a number of years by a Mr Charlton who rented a bungalow on the site.

By 1982 the Draft Nailsea Town Centre Plan had been produced for consultation, and, through the efforts of Nailsea and District Local History Society (N&DLHS), backed up by a report prepared by Bristol Museum's Field Archaeologist, it had recommended the excavation of the New House Cone prior to development. Excavation commenced in Spring 1983 and in the Autumn the first of four "Open Weekends" was organised. At this some 1300 visitors were given guided tours of the first archaeological excavation of a glassworks in the Bristol region, and 800 signatures gathered on a "save our glassworks" petition. Excavations continued spasmodically until the end of 1985 at which time a Public Inquiry was held to discuss the glassworks and other local sites in dispute between Avon Planners and Nailsea Town Council. As a result of this Inquiry, the Nailsea Town Centre Plan was amended to acknowledge the importance of the glassworks and its possible tourist potential. *"Any scheme for the redevelopment of this site (Site 6) shall incorporate some form of memorial to the Glassworks acceptable to the County and District Councils"*. The plan outlined a suggestion for a single- storey development based on the circular foundations of the cone, which could incorporate a museum or restaurant. Most

importantly the Ring Road had been diverted around the site - and our suggestion for a museum had gained official recognition.

In 1987 N&DLHS objected to a proposal to build blocks of elderly person's flats on the site, and our objection was supported by both Town and District Councils so that the planning application was refused. At the same time it was thought necessary to form the "Nailsea Glassworks and Museum Committee comprising representatives of the Town Council and the N&DLHS. Its terms of reference were to ensure that Site 6 was developed broadly in accordance with the provisions of the Nailsea Town Centre Local Plan, with a sympathetic development incorporating a museum and preserving the archaeological features. Meanwhile Woodspring Leisure Services had put forward proposals for a branch museum in Nailsea. Since Messrs Robert Hobbs Limited owned the greater part of the land likely to be developed, the joint committee wrote to them expressing the hope that the historic Royal Oak Garage could be retained, along with the Parish boundary wall abutting Scotch Horn; and that the excavations would be preserved for the benefit of future generations and visitors alike, and a museum or Heritage Centre provided.

Since then two further development schemes have come and gone, the first providing 3000 square feet of museum space and landscaping the excavations, the second (the Waitrose Supermarket) only contributing financially towards the fitting out of a museum.

This then is the background to the present development by Hobbs Holdings Limited, which has been described both as imaginative and exciting. Sadly the excavated foundations and internal working areas will be built over but will remain substantially intact for a later generation to rediscover. But the Royal Oak Garage (in the 1860s village concerts were staged

here for upwards of five hundred people) will be retained as vehicle workshops; as will the Parish boundary wall between the glassworks and the playing fields. A circular car showroom will occupy the site of the New House Cone, with a tiled roof surmounted by a fibreglass or similar representative cone. This feature will be repeated over the restaurant to be built over the Old House Cone, with the Ring Road passing between the two "cones". For residents and visitors it will be a reminder of the important part glassmaking played in the development of Nailsea. The museum will be located off the Brockway section of the Ring Road, adjacent to the present Sports Centre.

With the future of the Scheduled Middle Engine Pit (The Elms) now secure the new development when complete will enable our long-awaited Heritage Trail to be implemented, centred on the Museum, and the undoubted tourist potential of Nailsea to be realised.

Just twenty years after its formation the work of the Nailsea and District Local History Society may well be entering a new and exciting phase.

## LETTERS

### VILLAGES AT WAR

I have had a number of humorous letters from John Christiansen who was evacuated to Backwell with the North Hammersmith School. In his latest he writes "*Any joy yet with the Civil Defence map of Backwell. I bet there is something lurking somewhere under a pile of dust.*" I have heard that an old dog eared map still exists but cannot remember who mentioned it to me. Can any reader help? He has also sent other information which I hope to publish soon.

## HOME GUARD

In No 7 I mentioned that Mr Jeffrey Wilson of Langport was trying to build up an archive of photographs of every Home Guard Unit in Somerset. Richard Cornish from Backwell has written "*I have a few (photos) which may be of interest to him plus a couple of wartime groups of similar vintage. The negatives are almost all full plate glass ones so therefore the prints would have to be contact ones of that size. They are of good quality and would reproduce well; maybe you could use one for Pennant?*" I shall take up this kind offer soon.

## LOCAL SCHOOLS

I am trying to gather together reminiscences of life in local schools around the 1950's and would appreciate anyone with such memories contacting me. I am especially interested in events leading up to the establishment of local schools. In this edition I have started with the FAIRFIELD PNEU School Backwell where recently I was afforded an opportunity to see some of the cuttings and scrapbooks. By chance I came across a cutting relating to a marriage of one of the ex-pupils. Dr Elizabeth Garrad (daughter of the Rev. E C Garrad Vicar of Barrow Gurney for 20 years from about 1936) married another Doctor T D Anderson a former Olympic Pole Vaultler. Among the records there is a lovely picture of Elizabeth Garrad as she was when at the school.

Reading the cutting took me back to a day at the White City Stadium probably in the late 1940's or early 1950's when I was one of a small crowd that gathered at the pole vault. The competition went on long after seemingly after the other events had finished. I was one of many hoping to see T D Anderson



successful in his attempt to set a new English Native Record of 12ft 10in.

I believe he was successful but does anyone know for sure? How strange that research in Local History should bring back such a personal memory! For younger readers the pole vault in those days used a pole that bent very little. A pole vaulter "rode the pole" and was not "launched into space". I often wonder what would be the current record if technology did not help.

## **FAMILY HISTORY**

Phyllis Horman is standing down for about a year and Phil Barclay has offered to take her place carrying out research for enquirers.

I was looking through the Genealogical Research Directory 1994 when my eye caught sight of the name WEDMORE. It was an entry by a Mrs Freda Hewitt a resident of Bucklands Beach, Auckland, New Zealand which read:-

" WEDMORE Hannah pre 1841 Bromley Kent and Nailsea Avon".

To cut a long story short I wrote to her and with Phyllis's help provided some information. Her reply included a photocopy of a rubbing? of a brass plate in the Church of St Peter and St Paul Bromley Kent which is reproduced elsewhere.

## **WHERE IS PENELOPE'S BODY?**

You will see if you examine the illustration that it states "Here lyeth the Body of PENELOPE the wife of the aforesaid John Coombs who departed this life the 25th June 1769 Aged 83 years".

In our list of Monumental Inscriptions published in 1979 and shortly to be re-published in the "Nailsea Records" series we find

the MI which states:- "Also Here lyeth the body of Penelope the wife of the aforementioned John Coombs who departed this life 25 June 1769 aged 88 yrs".

Other well known Nailsea names included in Freda's family tree include

BRIANT, GODWIN, HOUSI\*, VIMPANY, WEDMORE.

## **MILLS ON THE LAND YEO**

This booklet has proved very popular and its publication has brought forth further details about the mills so well described by Martin Bodman.

Letters have been received from Phyllis Horman about another mill at Wraxall; Jane Lilly providing information about a mill at Clevedon; Norma Knight about the Mill at Backwell and Ruth Poole about Kincott Mill and Gatcombe Mill.

Editor's Note: Having received information from various sources I had some trouble in deciding how to present it to readers. Some of the information was brief while some contained explanations of actual fieldwork. In the end I decided that I would ask Martin Bodman to prepare a supplement using the new information that has been forthcoming in a style as near as possible too that of the original volume. I decided to use the article provided by Phyllis and Wilf as it seemed the only practical way of making available the information in the indenture.

My apologies to the others who provided information in that some time may elapse before their contribution sees the light of day.

# THE OLD WRAXALL MILL

by Phyllis Horman and Wilfred Rew

Quite a few years ago Wilfred and I spent a day at Trowbridge Record Office looking through the "Calley Papers". Among these was an Indenture dated 10th September 1709, between John Codrington (of Wraxall Lodge later Court) and Joseph Emery, which contained a lease of premises.

"Granted by late wife Elizabeth (Codrington) before her inter-marriage, by her then name of Elizabeth Gorges of Wraxall, unto Thomas Emery, his executors, administrators and aforesigns for the term of fourscore and nineteen years, determinable on the several draughts of the said Thomas Emery and Mary his wife and Jane Emery his daughter, who are still living. As in consideration of the rents, heriots, covenants for building and other reservations and agreements herein after received and contained on the part of the said Joseph Emery, his executors and administrators to be paid, observed and performed and for diverse and other considerations, the said John Codrington---- to Joseph Emery all that water Grist Mill commonly called or known by the name of Wraxhall's Mill, situate and lying and being in the parish of Wraxall aforesaid, and also the dwelling house thereunto, now or lately belonging on the (loft?) or plate where the same lately stood. The same dwelling house having been lately burnt down and consumed by accidental fire. And all ways paths, passages, water courses, ponds, ffloudgates, (stanks?), banks, commons and all other appurtenances to the said Mill and premises belonging --- For fourscore and nineteen years to the aforesaid Joseph Emery, Elizabeth his wife and Thomas their son now aged about two years, ---- yearly and every year the sum of eight shillings of lawful money of Great Britain, on the twenty ninth day of September and twenty fifth of March in every years by equal portions. And also by paying

to John Codrington, his heirs etc and upon the decease of them Joseph Emery, Elizabeth and son Thomas, the sum of sixteen shillings like money, for and in the name of an herriott. If they shall be behind with either or both by the space of twenty one days, they shall become one and ought to be paid as aforesaid, being lawfully demanded, and no other distress to be had or taken on the premises, sufficient for the levying thereof. Then and in such case it shall and may be lawful for the said John Codrington ---- to re-enter the same and re-possess to his former estate. Anything herein contained to the contrary thereof, in anywise, notwithstanding. Joseph Emery doth covenant, promise and grant to John Codrington to pay from time to time the rents etc also to rebuild the said late dwelling house, or erect and build a new dwelling house in the room and stead thereof, with such outhousings and conveniences as he shall think proper. And complete in a firm and substantial and workmanlike manner and roof with tile and not with thatch, straw or helms, and keep all buildings tiled and not suffer to be thatched and keep all buildings, banks etc. in good and sufficient repair".

This intrigued us, so we decided to try to find where this mill had been. We studied old maps and found that the marked river did not correspond with the present day one. We walked the field on the east side of Wraxall House because we remembered from our childhood that there were two small stone bridges in the middle of a field, seemingly with no real purpose. In fact the bridges are over an old dried out river bed. We traced this back to the present river, found where the old one had been blocked and a new bed created. This is raised several feet above the original floor of the field to the south. Presumably, when the mill was built at the side of Wraxall House, this new raised bed gave enough power in the flow of the water forth overshot wheel which powered the mill.

There is of course the possibility that the new mill cottage was built on the site of the one that was burnt prior to the lease of 1709, and the mill buildings moved to this site which would account for the river diversion.

Further back in the river bank is a flood hatch and some of the water still runs into a channel which flows to the boundary of Wraxall House and continues through. At a time when the house was unoccupied but was being prepared for use as a residential school for mentally handicapped young people, Wilfred and I were given permission to go to the bottom of the grounds where the river runs. Here we found two pieces of machinery that had controlled the sluice for the water flow. There is an ornamental lake nearby which could have been a mill pond, also a bridge over the end of the lake and where the leat begins. This bridge leads from the House grounds to a field and also to various out-buildings. From these buildings there was a large, high wooden door leading onto the main road. The door has been replaced by a smaller one and a metal gate. This older mill would almost certainly have had an undershot wheel. Near the House are at least two old mill stones but from which mill they came from, we do not know.

We made a second visit to the site taking Margaret Thomas with us. She and Wilfred measured the leat, took photos of the remains of the controls and estimated the size of the wheel by what seemed to be a bearing in the bank, using this as the approximate centre of the wheel and measuring to the bed of the leat.

With reference to the maps that we had studied. It seems that Day and Masters shows the old river bed. Greenwood 1822 shows the new bed, and The Wraxall Tithe 1837 shows both. It could be presumed by this that the new mill may have been built somewhere between, say, 1780 and 1820. We have wondered if the reason for the flood hatch being built into the river bank was

to allow both mills to run in conjunction for a while or only to provide water for the lake once the old mill had ceased to be worked. There's a photo by William Ravenhill Stock of the lake which would date from the mid 1800's.

As a matter of interest, the Wraxall Churchwardens Accounts mention occasions when the bridge by the mill was repaired, one date being 1726, and in 1764 "Paid Godwin Stanbury making two bridges below the Mill £4-11s-2d" There was also a Mill Lane mentioned when Chas Bull was paid in 1727 for mending fallen banks by order of Colonel Codrington.

Mr Bodman refers to some of the millers. The Emery family definitely ran the older mill and probably William Curtis did as well. William Vowles and John Day would have been at the new mill. Two more millers can be named. According to the Wraxall parish registers, in April 1656 John Wallis of Wraxall, miller married Ann Jones, and in March 1693 "old King Cable of the mill" was buried. Incidentally it was Mrs Griffin and not Mrs Griffiths who sold sweets and tobacco from the mill cottage.

## **SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS ON GEORGE LEE OF "TICKENHAM VIOLETS" FAME**

**By Jean Burrows**

Those members who heard my talk on George Lee and his Clevedon / Tickenham violets will recall that I showed slides of the large Bristol nursery where George trained in the 1830s. It was called Durdham Down or Clifton Nursery, then in its heyday under John Miller, the surviving partner of the earlier firm of "Sweets and Miller". John Claudius Loudon called the firm "the most extensive garden tradesmen in the West of England".

My researches into the Durdham Down Nursery have revealed its remarkable activities and contributions to the horticultural and social life of Bristol and neighbourhood. More tantalising are the glimpses of the owners' personal lives and so I have begun making family trees of both "Sweet" and "Miller" families.

Oddly enough there is a Tickenham connection! John Sweet a founder in 1786, had a sister Sarah, whom he mentions in his will of 1822, together with her daughter Mary. I recently found Sarah's obituary in the Bristol Mirror of March 27th 1847:-

DEATHS - "March 14th at Tickenham, aged 78 years, much respected, particularly by the poor, to whom she was a ready friend in time of need, Mrs Sarah Miles, for nearly 40 years a respectable inhabitant of that place and sister of the late Mr Sweet of Durdham Down Nursery."

Where did she live, I wonder? Both her and her daughter were buried at Tickenham. If her daughter married are there descendants living today? Miles is a common name, but I hope to find out one day.

A second connection is linked to George Lee himself. We know from his long obituary that George went to school in Tickenham:- "He spent his early years in Clevedon, which was then a very dull and uninteresting place, with a sparse population and with no shops or schools. The nearest school was at Tickenham Batch, whither he repaired, the only one here (Clevedon) being known as a dame's school".

George was born in 1817. In the 1820's, Tickenham had no church School(today's village school). Miss Fisher of Jacklands tells me of the dame school, run by Molly Basset in the tiny building surviving in her garden behind the Trout farm -- but we know George did not attend a dame school. I believe it is more likely that he attended "Jackland House Commercial School".

The Bristol Mirror of January 7th 1837 has this advert:-  
JACKLAND HOUSE COMMERCIAL SCHOOL TICKENHAM

"J COTSELL begs leave to inform his friends and the public that his school will be open on Monday 16th inst. J.C. begs to assure those who may please to favour him with the care of their children that it will be his constant study to adopt the best means of developing the physical and mental faculties; and to promote the health morals and comfort of his pupils.

TERMS under 10 years of age 25L per annum, including English grammar, Geography, the elements of Geometry, and Algebra, Reading Writing and Arithmetic etc. Jackland House is situated about 8 miles from Bristol on the road to Clevedon." A similar advert appears later that year, adding:- "No extras. Mr Cotsell is able to impart instruction with the least degree of coercion... Bristol and Clevedon coaches pass the house morning and evening JACKLAND HOUSE" Where is this I wonder?

The coaches referred to were also frequently advertised, e.g. "Clevedon Coaches leave the Bush House, Corn Street and The Plume of Feathers, Wine Street, as follows:-

THE BEE, every morning at half past 8  
THE BUTTERFLY every afternoon at a quarter before 5  
Inside fare, 2s, outside, 1s Townsend & Son, proprietors.

### **Editor's note**

*The illustration shows "The Nailsea - Bristol carrier at Wraxall c1870." from a postcard originally published by the Nailsea Local History Society. It is now believed that it was not taken at Wraxall. If anyone has a suggestion as to where it was taken please write to the Editor.*



# **A SHORT HISTORY OF FAIRFIELD SCHOOL, BACKWELL**

**as presented to the parents and friends of the school  
before retirement July 1965 by B Lambert**

*Taken from a typewritten draft and published by permission of  
the headteacher Mrs Nosowska*

I came to Backwell in September 1934 to teach the two children of Mr and Mrs Esmond Robinson, who were then living at Rodbury, Station Road. Mr and Mrs Mervyn Reeves' son Andrew joined us for lessons each day.

In the course of the year it became obvious that larger premises would have to be found if I was to take the children whose parents wanted them to join us. After much thought I decided to start a school of my own.

So it came about that in September 1935 Fairfield School was started as an independent school, with nine pupils, in the old National School at Farleigh, which I rented. This had been the building used by the original Backwell School until 1862, and had been used for many purposes since then.

*(Editor's note: for the National School's earlier history see "Early Schools in Backwell" by Norma Knight and cover illustration in the Autumn 1992 edition of Pennant)*

By 1938 the number of children was increasing, so it became necessary to have another teacher, and Miss French arrived to take care of the younger children. Although our quarters were rather cramped very much hard work and enthusiasm was

shown and today (1965) many of our old boys and girls who come to see us say that the blue and white check curtain which divided the room into two is one of their most vivid memories.

World war II brought its difficulties but the school carried on with fluctuating numbers and often under very difficult conditions. I rented the house "Fairfield" so that I might be near the school and we carried on. Many families were evacuated, but others came into the district so numbers soon increased.

We built a blast wall and wired up the windows and stuck strips of paper over them and during air raids sat under our desks! After one daylight raid in 1940 one little boy said "Oh Mummy we had a lovely raid this morning".

In 1947 Miss Fayle entered into partnership with me and in June we bought Linemere, from Mr Martin, whose sons had attended the school. On September 17th the school started in its new quarters and an "Open day" was held for parents and friends and 25 excited children showed them round their new school. School lunches were started by Miss Fayle who has continued to run the domestic side of the school since. A Parent / Teacher Association was started and has continued to flourish. The school Brownie Pack was started by Miss Fayle, later run by me and subsequently by Mrs Field.

Gradually as the number of pupils grew more staff were engaged. Miss Christine Davis came to take Speech, Drama and Music and has given many memorable productions. Mrs Carne - Ross arrived in 1950 to take charge of the youngest children. In 1953 Mrs Sidwell who lived at The Old Rectory joined us and later Mrs Gornall from Nailsea.

After many requests by parents it was decided to keep girls up to the age of eleven. In 1953 the first "11+" examination was

taken by our pupils and Grammar School places were gained and since then this examination has been taken regularly.

In 1956, celebration of the 21st anniversary of the school took place. By this time there were 64 children in the school and 200 past pupils. A Commemoration Service was held on April 28th in our lovely Backwell Church, and the late Prebendary H S Urch returned to give the address. The Church was packed with past and present pupils and their parents. The children had a happy party at Blaise, near Bristol, and the highlight was an enormous birthday cake decorated with the school badge, the Skylark, and 21 daisies in place of candles.

In 1958 after a three day inspection by H.M.s the school was granted "Recognition" by the Ministry of Education. The numbers have grown until the school now has 77 pupils among whom are some of the second generation and there are 355 old boys and girls!

As age of retirement grew nearer Miss Fayle and I began to wonder what would be the future of the school but Mr Charles Clarke came to see me with a proposal on behalf of a group of parents who have now formed an Educational Trust and in September of this year Miss Mears will join the school as its new Headmistress.

Miss Fayle and I have lived at Linemere for 18 happy years and I have spent 31 of my teaching years in Backwell and have many wonderful memories of the kindness and friendliness we have received from Backwell people.

Some years ago I was paid the greatest compliment I have ever received when an old resident said to me "You are one of us now", and I felt proud and happy to have been accepted as a native of Backwell. Miss Fayle and I will always remember our years in Backwell and all the kindness and goodwill extended to us and above all shall treasure the memories of worship for so

many years in the lovely church of Backwell. To everyone we would like to extend our best wishes and thanks for many happy years.