

Trowbridge Civic Society NEWSLETTER



Summer 2019

In this issue:

Woolston Villa

Stone Mill

Recent Meetings

Member of Wiltshire Building Record, ASHTAV and BALH
Registered charity number 276765 Website: www.trowbridgescivicsociety.org.uk

Sir Isaac Pitman Walk - 18 April

Led by Glyn Bridges

Here are some photographs of the walk during which Glyn led us to many of the buildings associated with Pitman



Calendar of Events 2019 -2020

Wednesday 21st August - Trip to Gloucester Cathedral and Docks

Saturday 14th September - Heritage Day Various sites open - see website for details

Tuesday 29th October - Trowbridge Through Kevin's Lens by Kevin Hartley - The Supper Room, Trowbridge Town Hall at 7.30pm

Thursday 29th November - Public Lecture - Crossing the Brick Threshold - the story of brick and tile in the Medieval and post Medieval period in Wiltshire by Mike Stone (former curator of Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre) The Supper Room, Trowbridge Town Hall at 7.30pm

2020

Tuesday 7th January - New Year Social with Quiz The Supper Room, Trowbridge Town Hall at 7.30pm

Tuesday 10th March - AGM and Talk The Supper Room, Trowbridge town Hall at 7.15pm

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

We welcome two new members to the editorial team this issue. Mike Johnson will take over the setting up the newsletter and prepare it for printing and Petra Birkett is going to help in the collecting and collating of articles and photographs for publication.

Petra has written an article about her house for this issue. We have had several issues recently which have dealt with some of the "grand" houses in the town. It is a nice change to look at houses built for the less well-off and to hear about the families that lived in them. In the next issue we will print the second part of Petra's research which looks in more depth at some of the local residents.

On one of the society's walks which toured the village of Bratton, a local resident, Dennis Gardiner, who once taught technology at the John of Gaunt School, gave us a short talk about the Reeves' ironworks. We have printed his article about this fascinating subject. It is difficult to believe that some of the picturesque villages and towns we visit were once "hives of industry".

We also publish a short history of Stone Mill, that large imposing building by the side of the Shires shopping centre.

TROWBRIDGE CIVIC SOCIETY INFORMATION

- President: Kenneth Rogers
- Vice Presidents: Michael Marshman;
Wende Maunder;
- Chairman: Glyn Bridges, 4 Alma Street, Trowbridge. Tel 755784
- Vice Chairman: Margaret Howard, 52 Avenue Road, Trowbridge. Tel 764691
- Hon Secretary: Celia Russell, 18 Churchlands, North Bradley. Tel 754668
- Hon Treasurer and Membership Secretary:
Janet Carpenter, 2 Chepston Place, Trowbridge. Tel 752770
janet_carpenter@btinternet.com
- Committee members: Sue Glover; Kevin Hartley;
Jonathan Hawkes; Diana Ingram
- Newsletter: Jennifer & Peter Collier
Tel 761270
pcollier@blueyonder.co.uk
Sue and Kevin Eames
Mike Johnson
Petra Birkett
- Photographic Recorder: Kevin Hartley
- Web Site: Jonathan Hawkes
- Subscription Rates: Single £6, Joint £10, Corporate £30
New members welcome - please contact Membership Secretary

From the Treasurer

If you haven't yet paid your subscriptions for 2019, please send them to Janet at the address above or pay directly to our bank account Lloyds 30-98-97 AC No: 46956860 using your name as a reference.

Deadline for next issue - 28th August

Margaret's cheesy biscuits

By popular request we are printing a favourite recipe of ours - Margaret Howard's cheesy biscuits. Perhaps we could make this a regular spot of members' recipes!

- 2 ounces plain or wholemeal flour
- Pinch each of salt, pepper, cayenne pepper or other seasoning
- 2 ounces cheddar cheese - grated
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese - grated
- 2 ounces butter at room temperature

Method

Heat oven to 190° centigrade, gas mark five

- Lightly grease a baking tray
- Put all dry ingredients into a bowl
- Rub ingredients to a crumbly consistency
- Bring together and then roll out to about 3 mm thick
- Use the cutter of your choice
- Arrange on a baking tray and cook for 10 to 12 minutes
- Cool on a wire rack



From the Chairman

Glyn Bridges

There are several instances of workshops in Trowbridge that were converted into houses in the past. Examples can be found in Yerbury Street and The Halve. Ken Rogers writes about these and several others in his book *Clothiers' Workshops in Trowbridge*. In more recent times we have seen the former cloth warehouses in Stallard Street converted into flats. It is good to see some of our historic buildings repurposed for 21st century use. Presently, Courts Mill at the end of Pole Barn Road is being converted into seven town houses and part of the factory in St George's Works off Silver Street is also being converted into flats with the addition of a modern block beside it overlooking the park. There are still sites in the town, notably the Bowyer site, awaiting development. Three other sites are former schools which will, hopefully, soon be developed for housing these are the Margaret Stancomb School, Roundstone School at Courtfield House and the Ashton Street Centre. Another 'brown field' site is the former District Council Office site in Bradley Road which is being developed for more housing.

Obituary

Members will be saddened to hear of the death in March of Helen Rogers who had been, with Ken, a member since the foundation of the society forty years ago. Before her illness Helen was a regular supporter of all our activities and events.

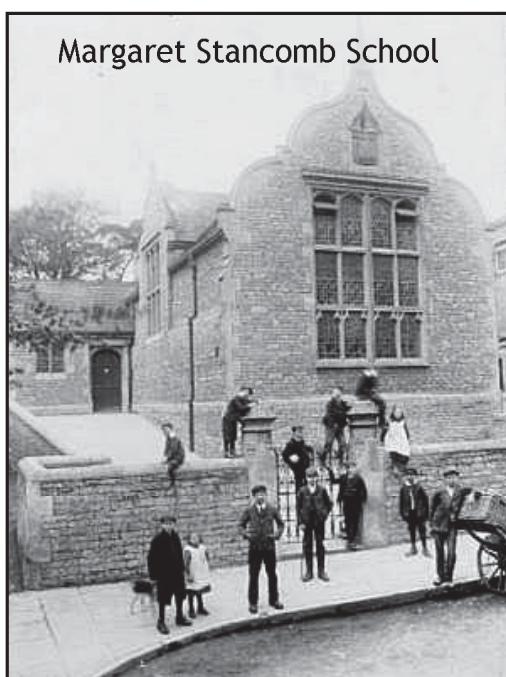
Planning Matters

Sue and Kevin Eames

The first decision of interest (18/11203/FUL) relates to 19/19a Stallard Street where number 19, a former shop is to be incorporated into the existing residential property 19A. One of the conditions interestingly states that; *'The accommodation hereby permitted shall not be occupied at any time other than for the purposes ancillary to the residential use of the host dwelling, known as 19A Stallard Street and it shall remain within the same planning unit and not be leased or sold off or sub-divided into a separate residential unit. REASON: The additional accommodation is sited in a position where the Local Planning Authority, having regard to the reasonable standards of residential amenity, access, and planning policies pertaining to the area, would not permit a wholly separate dwelling'*.

Planning permission has been refused, however, for a new single-storey dwelling, parking and associated works on land to the rear of Ethandune Court, Hilperton Road (19/00913/FUL), as explained in this extract from the decision document:

'Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special regard be given to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. The application is silent on proposals for the curtilage-listed wall to the western boundary of the site, and shows the construction of a close-boarded fence inside the wall alongside the proposed dwelling, leaving no access for maintenance, whilst the most dilapidated section is proposed to be separated from the new plot via a hedge. Further deterioration of the wall is likely to be rapid given the stage that the wall has already reached, and it is inevitable that the proposals will result in the eventual loss of this curtilage-listed structure. The loss of a part of the listed building, which contributes to its special interest, should be seen as causing a notable level of harm'.



Permission has been granted for 21 dwellings with parking and landscaping on the former Margaret Stancomb Infant Longfield Community Centre Weavers Drive has been granted change of use from Community Centre to a mixed use as a Community Centre and Driving Test Centre (19/03470/FUL).

R & J Reeves & Son - Bratton Iron Works

Dennis Gardner

Bratton was at one time a very industrial village with several woollen mills along the stream, a blacksmith's shop and, occupying a prominent position in the centre of the village were the factory buildings of R & J Reeves & Son. The site is now the village green, and the only obvious reminder of the firm is the commemorative plaque, unveiled in 1993 by Kathleen Reeves.

The works dominated the village, and became the largest employer in the area. Bratton was ideally suited to serve the needs of farmers on Salisbury Plain (sheep) and in the vale to the north (arable). The firm manufactured a tremendous variety of agricultural implements and machinery, almost entirely from raw materials.

There was a foundry (adjacent to 'The Duke') for making castings in iron and other alloys, a smith's shop for wrought iron work, a fitting shop for machine and bench work, a tinsmiths shop for sheet metal

components, and a large timber works - seasoning sheds, saw mill and carpenters' shop - the latter running parallel to the present Carpenters Lane. A boiler house, with its tall chimney, provided steam power for machinery, and a large two storey office building stood to the left of the main entrance opposite The Butts. Several large houses in this road were purchased or built for important members of the Reeves family:- The Wilderness, The Butts and The Elms.

The firm achieved national and international fame, exhibiting at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park in 1851, and won many awards all over the country. Their largest machine was an elevator - for raising straw and hay on to a haystack - and the troughs could be folded for travelling. It was designed by Henry Reeves in 1896. The iron casting on the plaque is one of a pair which formed part of the trough raising mechanism - they can be clearly seen in the elevator picture. It was one of their largest items to be cast using a sand mould.

After the Second World War Reeves were not able to compete with the larger international firms, and never really updated their products - elevators were still being built in the 1950's to the original design! Final receivership was in 1970, and the whole works was demolished in 1973.

Those with sharp eyes can still find Reeves items around - some road drain gratings, cast iron name plates, and a few preserved implements in gardens. We also have Reeves to thank for the installation in 1904 of a gas main pipe from Westbury, still in use for many households.

Marjorie Reeves' book, 'Sheep Bell and Ploughshare' is worth a read - it contains a chapter on Bratton Iron Works. Ken Rogers' book 'Warp and Weft' gives much information on the local woollen industry.

Dennis Gardner's book - Bratton Ironworks (An illustrated record of RJ Reeves & Son) is available from the Bratton Historical Society.



Reeves 'Advance' elevator, with troughs raised. Chains are driven by a Fairbanks Morse portable oil engine, through belt drives. The two-storey building in the distance houses the carpenters' shop (ground floor) and tinsmiths' shop above. Circa 1912



Sawmill. Note the railway to bring uncut tree trunks in from outside. Circular saw is at far end of the floor-mounted rollers, on the right.

Woolston Villa The Down

Petra Birkett

We bought our house in February 2014; not long after we moved in I began to research the history. I was interested to find out why our house and its neighbouring two properties looked different to the others on the street.

Woolston villa was built with a front room (parlour), a separate kitchen (now the dining room). Evidence of the old cast iron range was found when we opened up the chimney to fit a wood burning stove. What is now the kitchen was originally a 'scullery' and food preparation area, with a large storage cupboard, now the downstairs cloakroom. The back door has been moved and was further down the kitchen when the house was first built.



The hallway has geometric Victorian tiling that is original and has been restored to its former glory and stained glass windows in the front door that have been restored by a specialist. The front garden would have had iron railings over the wall and an iron gate. The front wall is original but the gate post would have had an iron 'acorn' on it which can be seen in old pictures.

The house is over three floors and was built this way with two large bedrooms on the second floor. The bathroom is now upstairs. There was one when first built in an outhouse in the garden and possibly a bathroom of modest means at the end of the 'scullery'.

The attic would have been a bedroom entered by a small door on the lower landing walking straight into the room, with its own 'private' stairway. This has since been opened up to allow more light and space going up to what is now the master bedroom, originally the sleeping space for the servants that resided at the house in times gone by. This room now has a large dormer window overlooking the rear of the house. Originally this would have only been a small attic window similar to what is still in place at the rear in Crandon Villa. The room would have been a very cold room. We have found no evidence as yet of a fireplace in the attic although the chimney runs up through this room and can be seen in the loft space, possibly giving a small amount of heat to the servants who slept in this room.

Woolston Villa is one of three bay fronted Victorian terraced houses on The Down. The three houses are all built in the same style, slightly different in size. The other houses on the Down range in age from the Old Toll house, the Georgian ranks of terraces, late Victorian alms houses and houses built from the 1930's onwards.

Research, using Ancestry and the Swindon and Wiltshire History Centre Archives along with the paperwork we managed to acquire from the previous owner when we purchased our house, has helped me to establish who had the three houses built and the residents of our home throughout the years. I hope you find this glimpse into those people of our towns history as interesting as I did!

Originally the land the houses were built on was part of what was known then as *The Trowbridge Downs*. The land associated with our house is referred to in the abstract of title for the sale as 'ancient pasture land', part of the 'Downs estate'. The land was owned by *Henry*

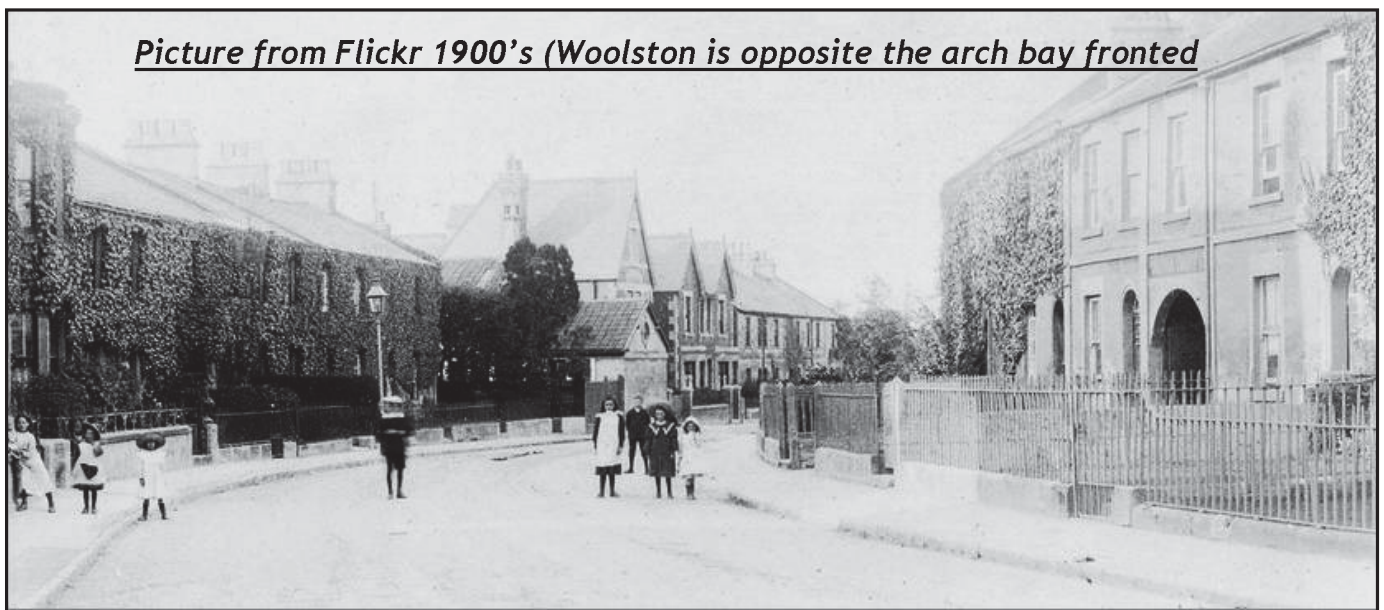
Allen at this time while he lived in one of the terraced Georgian houses on the Down.

Henry was born in 1787 in Cambridge, Gloucestershire. On the 1841 census he is recorded as living on the Down and his profession is 'weaver' as was the case for many of the town's residents in this period. By 1851 Henry had become a 'Common Brewer', and later he became an inn keeper and the founder of the **Brassknocker Inn**, now number 13 The Down. 13 The Down is first named Brassknocker Inn on the 1861 census although Henry Allen is listed in local directories as beer retailer from 1842. It was fairly common in this time for people to brew their own beer and sell it from their homes.

When Henry Allen ran and lived in Brassknocker, the land that the terrace of three was some years later built on was behind Brassknocker and fronted onto The Down. There was just one property, now 11 The Down, separating the inn from this land and I imagine the gardens were all open access at the rear. It does not seem that Henry also owned number 11 in between the Brassknocker and the land.

Henry died in February 1866 -the land was sold by auction at the Woolpack (where Knees department store used to be) on 4th April 1876, with other properties owned by Henry at 'Sea Corner' Hilperton. At the time of sale there was a house on the land and also a stable block. The rest of the land was used as a garden and included in the sale with the tenant Isaac Long remaining in situ. The auction is referenced in a later edition of the Wiltshire Times 8th April 1876 as attracting over a 100 people. The total sale of the estate of Henry Allen raised £920!

This leads us on to who bought the land. It was purchased for £245 by John Thomas. At the time of the auction, John Thomas was the owner of the **New Inn** in Silver Street Trowbridge, He lived with his wife, Emma, and they had two sons - Ernest Ralph George Thomas, and John Bartholomew Thomas.



John Thomas was born in 1833 in a place called Woolston, Bicknoller. His father was George Thomas and his mother Sarah Court, and he grew up with his father as a shopkeeper living with his two brothers and sister. John's father died when he was 10 in 1843 and his mother remarried a Methodist, Reverend George Pulling in 1858. John lived in his family home until 1851. After this he is recorded on the census as staying with his Uncle, his mother Sarah's brother, in Somerset, working as a farm labourer. He then married his wife Emma who is from Dilton Marsh and they moved into Roundstone Street. At this time John was following in his father's footsteps and was a grocer and baker before becoming the owner of The New Inn in Silver St.

It is unclear why John and his wife did not move into the villas they had built straight away and I am still unable to find any details of plans for the build. The land tax records list the area as fields in 1876 and 1877 but by 1878 it is listed as houses. Interestingly in the land tax records a John Thomas has signed with others the records book. He is listed as '*overseer of the poor*'

and the signature matches that of John Thomas of the New Inn on his will.

Overseers of the poor in this time were often reluctant appointees and unpaid for their duties. Estimate of how much poor relief money was needed in order to set the , collect the poor rate, distribute poor relief, supervise the poorhouse. Across England the title of overseer of the poor and their duties was changed following the Poor law amendment act 1834 , changing the title to 'boards of guardians' although here in Trowbridge Overseer was used for some years following this.

John must have been a well known member of the town running one of the town's inns would have brought him into contact with many of the local townfolk. His will shows he was a wealthy landowner, owning at his death in 1884 the New Inn on Silver St, two cottages and a shop on Stallard St, land named Adcroft, comprising six acres and the three houses I referred to with



the two others out the back on the Down in Trowbridge. John also owned a farm named Crandon Farm in Stockland in Devon and 5 cottages in his birth town of Woolston. This is where the name of our house and its neighbouring houses came from. Ours is **Woolston Villa** (number 9) **Crandon Villa** (number 7) and **Stockland Villa** (number 1).

The two houses that were at the back of our house were known

in more recent years as 3 & 5 the Down, although at the time the villas were built this little 'close' of houses is referred to on the census as 'Downs Yard'. 3 & 5 were auctioned for Sale in the 1950's and since have been demolished. If you walk along The Down there are no numbers 3 & 5. On this plot of land now there is a single modern house accessed from Palmer Road. The old entrance to these houses can be seen in the wall at the back of our house. The main access following the villas being built would have been through the Victorian terraces from the Down. This would have been a little community of its own with the common thread of John Thomas being the owner. There is still a sense of this with the three villas to this day with the shared access and closely aligned gardens. Isn't it funny how the feel of the original layout often remains for years to come?

John passed away in 1884 just six years after the villas were built. At the time of his death, he and his wife Emma and their two sons George Ralph Ernest and John Bartholomew were still living in the New Inn. Following John's death, Emma and her sons then moved into the largest of the terraces, Stockland Villa. The other two were rented out and stayed in the family for many years. At John's death, his estate amounted to £1,138 4s 2d. This does not seem much, but in £100 in 1884 is worth over £12,000 today!

Through the wonder of Ancestry I was kindly sent a photo of Emma Thomas and her two sons by a family ancestor who is living in Australia.

Welcome to new members:

Peter Brook, Gill Cooper, Eric Lamdin

Stone Mill

There was a mill on the site of the present Stone Mills in the 14th century linked to Trowbridge Castle, but in 1544 Alexander Langford, “a great clothier”, owned the land. At the beginning of the 17th century the land had passed to William Reade by which time there were two water grist mills called Castell Mills. A grist mill is where farmers brought their own grain and received back ground meal or flour, minus a percentage called the “miller’s toll”.

In 1742 the mill was owned by John Wereat who was a fuller. Fulling was a step in woollen cloth making which involves the cleansing of cloth (especially wool) to eliminate oils, dirt, and other impurities, and to make it thicker. By 1758 the mill was also used as a braying or scouring mill.

In 1742 a grist mill and fulling mill were leased to John Wereat, a fuller. The next owner was John Clark who built the eight bay section of the current building nearest the river. From this time the mill was referred to as a braying mill.

In 1817 the mill was sold to Webber and Strang who were dyers and who had earlier built the nearby brick factory and in which they installed a 14 HP Boulton and Watt engine. Another four bays were built on to the building in 1817. These were higher and wider so that they were able to install another steam engine - a Boulton and Watt 36 h.p steam engine.

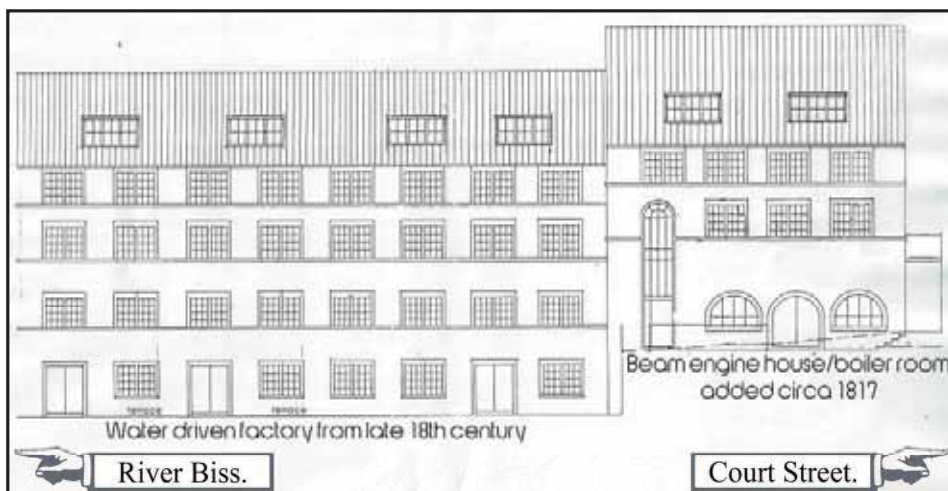
Webber and Strang let out their machinery to other companies who ran their own machinery in the factory. For example, J & T Clark, between 1832 and 1834 used the power to drive several gigs and washers. Gig Mill - a machine with a rotary drum covered with teasel heads, used for raising the nap on woollen cloth.

In 1849 Clarks took over the whole factory on a 21 year lease. However, it was not used after that for 3 years until it was bought in 1873 by Joseph and William Walker.

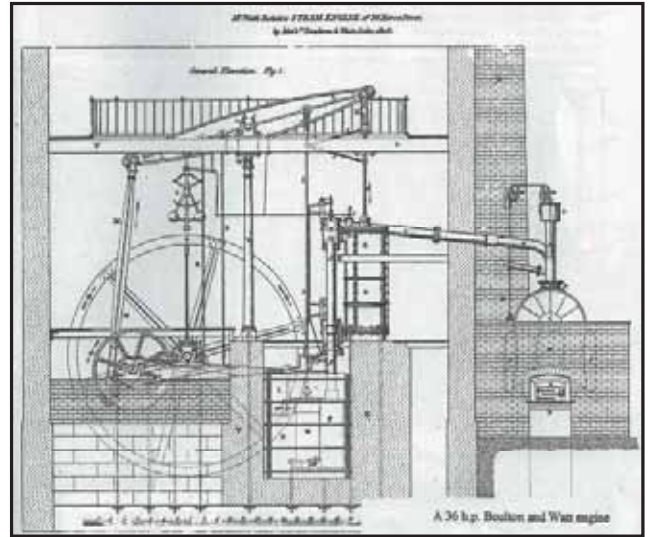
These two also ran the Yerbury Street Mill as part of the same business. In 1906 the business closed and the machinery was sold off. The next owner was Samuel Salter and Co, who also ran Home Mills next to it. Much of the Stone Mills site was then used for storage until 1968 at which time machinery was installed again.

The accident books from the 1920s reveal the risks involved in working in a cloth

factory - dermatitis from contact with the wool and chemicals and chrome poisoning from the dyes in addition to the risk of being hit on the head by an escaped shuttle or injured by machinery. The Enfield Cycle Co, who ran a wartime underground factory in Westwood making gun control equipment, occupied parts in 1946 and may have stored military motorcycles which were being refurbished for civilian use. HJ Knee bought part in 1950, when the Main Building is described as a Cloth Warehouse, the Wool Sorting Shops have been extended for use as a



refurbished for civilian use. HJ Knee bought part in 1950, when the main building is described as “a Cloth Warehouse, the Wool Sorting Shops have been extended for use as a Slaughterhouse, and part of the wool drying shops has become a hide and skin warehouse”. The mill head is still shown between the dye house and the wool drying shops. In 1971 Salters established a retail outlet in the main building under the name of the Upton Lovell Manufacturing Co and this continued until 1982.



The main building and engine house, together with the dye shops and most of the wool drying and bumble shops, survived when the Shires Centre was developed in 1991. Redevelopment of Stone Mills included the removal of the chimney for the beam engine boiler and the lift shaft. Change of use was obtained to restaurant, retail and office uses. A new footbridge and canopy

provided access from the Shires Centre. In 2001 plans were approved for a public house and a market hall. The planned public house never actually opened for business,. Nearing the peak of the property boom in 2005, it was sold to an investment company which subsequently went into liquidation. In 2011 it was bought by its current owners, Giles UK Ltd and is now houses a gym and fitness centre together with other businesses.

[This information and some of the accompanying photographs have been taken, with permission, from the Giles Properties Ltd website]

RECENT MEETINGS

Guided Walk around Bratton 21st May

On a still, beautiful Spring evening, about 20 members were taken round the streets and lanes of Bratton by Mike Manson of the Bratton History Association.

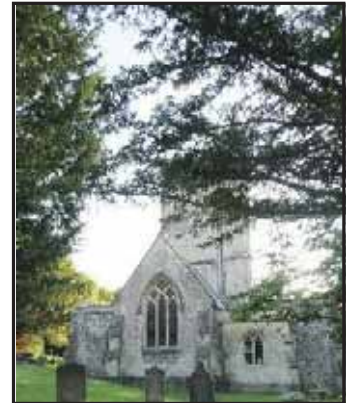
There are four Grade Two star listed buildings in Bratton, the Baptist Chapel, the Church of St James, Bratton House and the Court House and Mike led us past all of them.

Once we had sorted out the parking arrangements at the Duke we were led first to the imposing Bratton House. Our guide then took us down a narrow lane to Stradbrook and then up the road to St James’s Church where volunteers are doing a great job of keeping it in a good state of repair, despite several thefts of the roof lead. St James’s church seems a long way from the centre of modern Bratton, but at one time there was quite a thriving community here, perhaps disappearing during one of the outbreaks of plague. Another narrow lane took us to the Reeves’ Orchard, a community orchard where are planted many varieties of apple trees that once grew in Wiltshire.

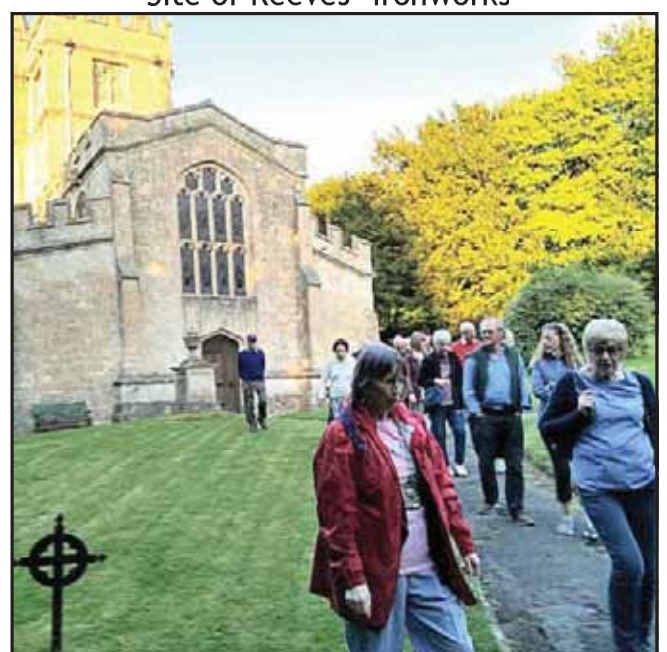
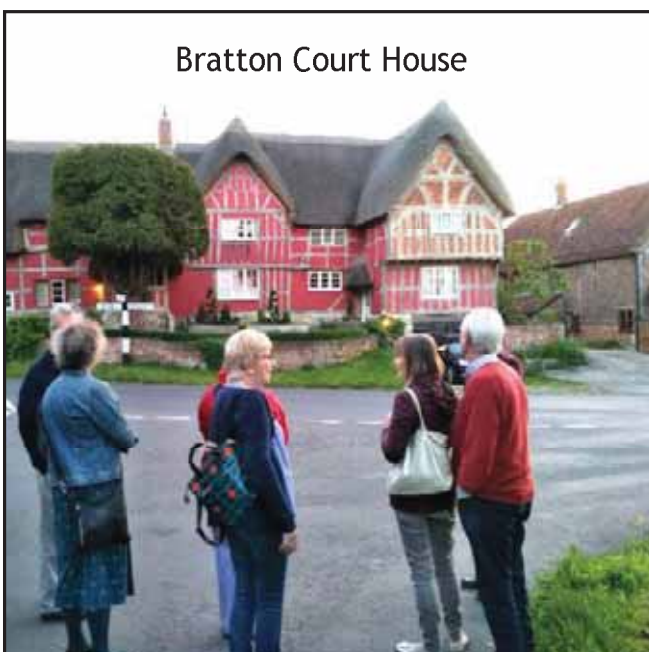
It was a short walk from there back to where we started and the memorial to Reeves’ iron works. Here, Dennis Gardiner, an ex-teacher who has done extensive research on the subject, gave us a potted history of the Reeves’ iron works which stood next to the Duke. Some members decided to take a break in the pub, while the rest of us carried on past one of the chapels, along another of Bratton’s many lanes to view the splendid Court House, parts of which date

from the 14th century. I had not realised that the glorious pink colour of the building was probably its original colour. Bratton Court House was the court house for Bratton manor, which dealt entirely with local organisation of the inhabitants of the manor. Such courts functioned under the general jurisdiction of the lord of the manor, who was much less powerful than is generally supposed.

As dusk was now closing in, the remaining members of the group returned to the car park - and the pub.



Site of Reeves' Ironworks



Stone Mill



Arc where barring plate was mounted



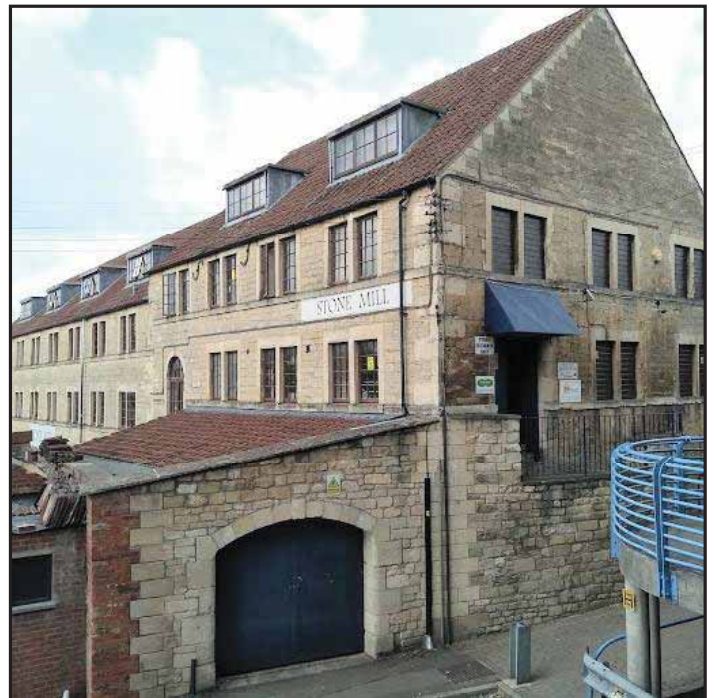
OS map mid 19th century



1985



2011



2019

Corporate Member: The Trowbridge Museum