

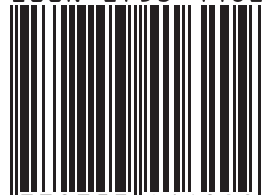
Tamworth

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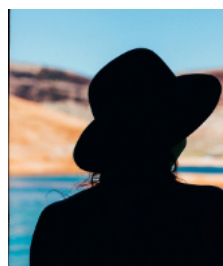
Preserving the Past, Recording the Present
Safeguarding the Future

Tamworth Heritage Magazine

The magazine is produced four times a year, Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn, by **Tamworth Heritage Magazine** for the public with an interest in Tamworth Heritage and history.



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Assistant Editor **Could this be You?**
THM is looking for an Assistant Editor
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If you are interested contact the Editor

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Tamworth Heritage Magazine Editorial Board

The Editorial board assists production of in house articles and checking of submissions.
This board currently comprises:

Jill Gadsby of the [Tamworth Genealogy Group](#) who has access to all sorts of databases on genealogy, history and newspapers. With a background as a legal secretary her research is thorough and precise.

Diane Wells, of the [Tamworth History Group](#) who has a lot of experience in local Tamworth history coupled with many years teaching in Tamworth.

Chris Hills BSc FRGS, FRSA, RPS A published author for 45 years on history, culture, travel and related topics. He also runs [Tamworth Digital Archive](#).

Anthony Poulton-Smith Ba, A well known speaker and author on things historical having written numerous books on historical subjects.

Dr Simon Peuple Ba, PhD (History) who has held a history teaching post at Princethorpe Collage and the post of Research Fellow at Birmingham University. He has published several history books and is a former Mayor of Tamworth.

Preserving the Past, Recording the Present
Safeguarding the Future

Welcome from the Editor Progress has stopped!

Despite this issue being over 40 pages we need more articles. We are happy with short articles as well as longer ones. So have a go!

Anything on local or social history from the 1950s on-wards would be good. This is a period we should be recording *now* because it is in living memory, and easier to get the photos of! We can also do video interviews.

On which note does anyone have any pictures of the Rathole music venue in Church street (above what is now bonds).

We have a couple of articles lined up for the autumn issue but there are several that are still in the research phase, for example the article on the fire service. The information we got, on the Castle Inn fire of 1838, as we went to publish the last issue of the magazine posed as many questions as it answered! We won't compromise the research for copy dates!

There is a review of the book: Are the Wenches Out? The Castle Inn fire in this issue. If anyone knows the author, **Sue Wood**, PLEASE contact [the editor](#). Another one that is being elusive, and complex, is the history of the Tamworth branch of the Royal British Legion.

If you can't write an article, then write a letter to the Editor with information, or asking a question. You would be surprised at the obscure information readers come up with when asked. One thing the Magazine can do, as it has been asked several times recently, is to take care of artefacts, photos and heirlooms. These we record digitally, catalogue and where appropriate pass on to a relevant museum. We could also digitise for the archive things you still want to keep.

On that note we would like to Interview some of Tamworth's older residents to build up a living history of Tamworth. This is happening with the Glenn Cottage Story, The Moathouse, The Old



Stone Cross where we have interviewed the oldest living members who can talk about the history as they lived it. In 100 years' time this will be invaluable. It's fascinating even now.

We would be interested in doing the history of any of the local pubs. Well the ones with history!



I thought it might be good to have a gathering of THM contributors and readers sometime, well those who are local. We have readers and contributors across the world! However, for those that can get to Tamworth UK I thought a Christmas Party but "everyone" does those and everyone is busy. So I thought how about something in January or February when things are less hectic and we could actually get a venue. What do you all think?

A Heritage Magazine networking event in January or February? [Email the Editor](#) and if enough people are interested we can organise something.



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The First Reliant

by Elvis Payne

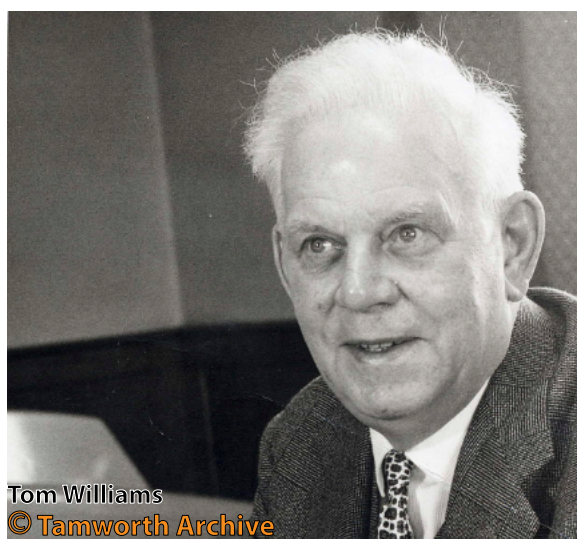


One of the first Reliant's © Elvis Payne

When it comes to 3-wheeled cars, especially in the UK, the Reliant Robin is perhaps the most infamous, love it or hate it, there is no doubt that this little Tamworth made 3-wheeled wonder has made its mark in history and to this day retains an allegiance of enthusiasts.

For those who have walked down the Kettlebrook Road in Tamworth you may have noticed a blue plaque at Bro Dawel detailing that it marks the birthplace of the first Reliant.

Bro Dawel was formerly the home of the Oliver family and it was their daughter, Ellen, who, in 1922, married a Mr Tom Williams. Williams then moved into her family home living with Elen and his parents-in-law.



Tom Williams
© Tamworth Archive



Bro Dawel, home of the first Reliant in 1922

© Elvis Payne

At that time, Williams was the chief draughtsman at Triumph motorcycles and following a short spell at Dunelt motorcycles started a new job at Raleigh bicycles in 1930. Williams' main responsibility was to set up a new motoring division and he obtained the rights to build the 3-wheeled Ivy Karryall van, which, with modifications, was re-branded as the Raleigh LDV (Light Delivery Van) a year later. Following marginal success with the vans, in 1933 the Raleigh Safety Seven was announced which was a rather neat open topped, 3-wheeled car of which Williams was the chief designer.

Jumping ahead just a few months, it seemed that Raleigh's feelings towards such vehicles soon changed. They no longer saw a future for its motoring division and announced that they

would cease production of all vehicles to concentrate solely on bicycles. Williams wasn't a happy chap, he firmly believed that there was a future for a 3-wheeled light delivery van and, not convinced with their decision, left Raleigh to produce his own vehicle, allegedly taking a number of Raleigh LDV parts with him.

Now sitting in his little brick shed at the bottom of the garden with a box of tools, and hopefully a mug of tea, in August 1934 he started to build his new vehicle. In October of the same year, he was then joined by Ewart "Tommo" Thompson, who also left Raleigh believing in Williams' 3-wheeled vision of the future.


Whilst much of the work was completed in their shed, for larger tasks Williams and Thompson used the engineering facilities of a small garage in the town called Tamworth Motor Garage at 7 Aldergate, Tamworth. The garage was run by the Johnson brothers, John and George, who were motor and cycle engineers and said to be quite adept at building vehicles. Sadly, the actual building was dismantled in the 1960s and these days the space is currently occupied by an Indian restaurant.

Johnson Bros where the first Reliant was

assembled © Elvis Payne

JOHNSON BROS.,

MOTOR AND CYCLE ENGINEERS,



**Recommended
Repairers to Motor
Union and A.A.**

**Dunlop Motor Tyres
— in Stock. —**

Petrol and Motor Oils.

Accumulators charged.

Vulcanizing.

**AGENTS FOR
B.S.A. & HUMBER**

**7, Aldergate,
TAMWORTH.**

TELEPHONE 51.

Upon completion of the prototype, legend has it that Williams and Thompson then discovered, to their dismay, that it was 4 inches too wide to fit down the narrow passageway at the side of the house and had to be dismantled to get it out onto the road. Given they were both engineers, they perhaps both already knew this rather than stand there trying to push it down the passageway, scraping the bricks either side and saying, "Yes, it is definitely too wide". The prototype was dismantled in the back garden and then taken out to the front drive and loaded into Thompson's Morris Bullnose truck whereupon, it was then taken to Tamworth Motor Garage when it was reassembled back into a van.

Once the prototype was completed, Williams then had to think of a name for it and given that it had a number of Raleigh parts on it that were stamped with R, it had to be a name beginning with R. It is said that Williams picked up a dictionary and flicking through the R section came across Reliant, meaning dependable, and so the prototype now had a name, the *Reliant*.

Reliant promotional literature from the 1950s and much material since then details that the first Reliant was registered on January 1st 1935, although the actual date it was registered as a vehicle with Staffordshire County Council was on January 3rd 1935 when they registered "Reliant" as a motorcycle and bestowed it with the registration plate RE-8109.

The first Reliant was a single seater in which the driver sat motorcycle fashion astride the engine, in this case a 600cc (6hp) J.A.P (J. A. Prestwich Ltd), air cooled, side valve, single cylinder motorcycle engine fitted to a 3-speed (plus reverse) Burman gearbox. The transmission from the gearbox to the rear axle was achieved by a large twin-roller chain.

The chassis was constructed with channel steel side sections connected by channel cross members and large tubular



The Reliant prototype with Ewart Thompson at the wheel with his daughter Pat. © Elvis Payne

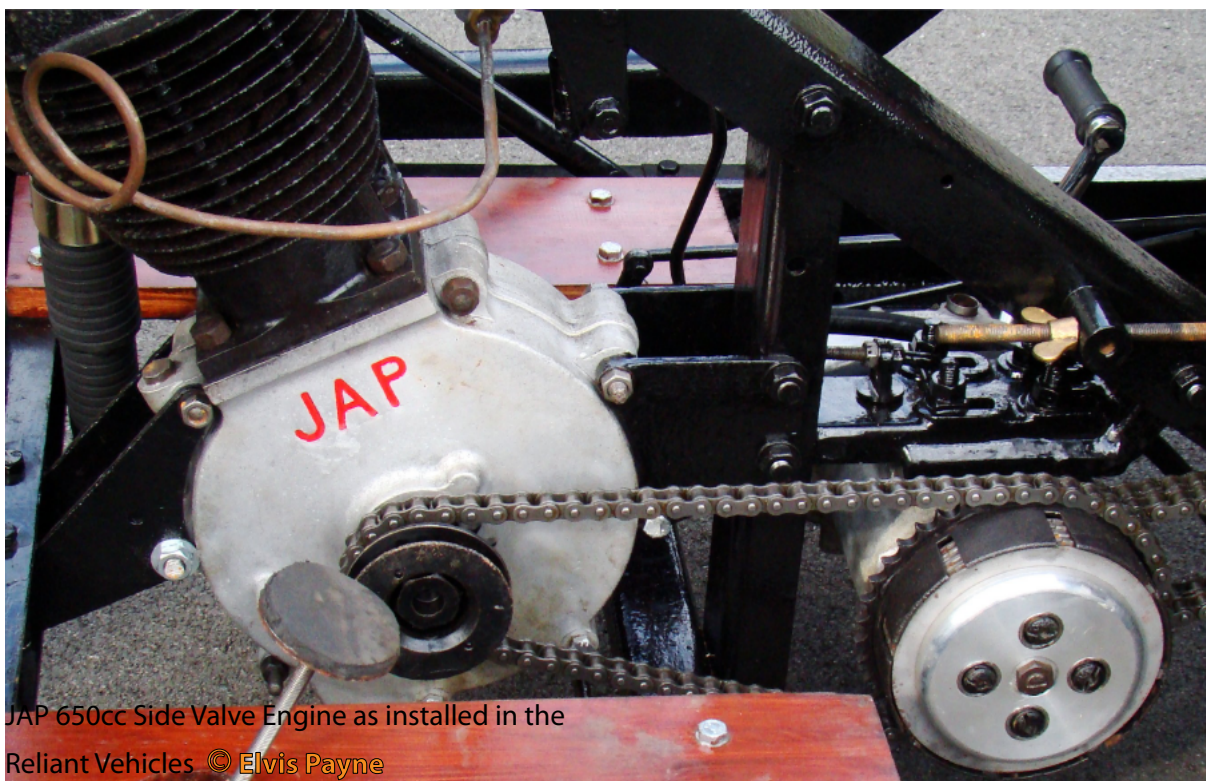
front and centre members that helped to form a very rigid construction. The body consisted of an Ash frame attached to a channel sub-frame and was clad with aluminium panels with the roof being covered with a weather resistant material. Whilst there is no documented evidence to support this, there are ancient whispers that as the prototype was largely based on the Raleigh LDV, it was initially fitted with handlebars.

Perhaps alarming for the modern motorists was that just ahead of the handlebars were two small fuel tanks with a total capacity of 3.5 gallons, both mounted inside the vehicle, one on either side.

Now fully road worthy, the Reliant was lent out to a number of local companies in and around Tamworth so that they could test it

and hopefully place an order when the vehicle reached production. One of the main requests from these trials was that the van was fitted with a steering wheel so that it was more car-like and thus, the prototype was then modified and fitted with a steering wheel.

Being car-like was something that Williams really took on board for future vehicles, especially with engines, when Reliant switched to the Austin A7 engine in 1938 before making their own version of this in 1939.



JAP 650cc Side Valve Engine as installed in the Reliant Vehicles. © Elvis Payne

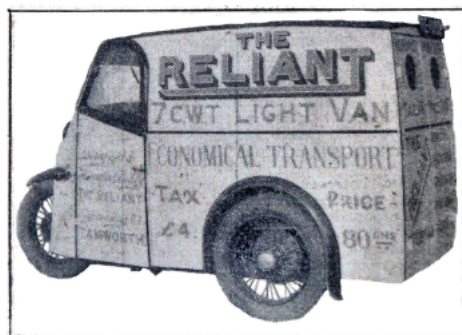
GET DETAILS OF THE NEW FORM OF TRANSPORT.

Simplicity—Economy—Reliability

SUITABLE FOR ANY AND EVERY TRADE

Price from £84-0-0.

Insurance
from
£3/10/0



Annual
Tax
£
4

Manufactured by . . .

The RELIANT ENGINEERING Co.,

Watling Street, TWO GATES, TAMWORTH.

Local Dealers—

**FORD & ROWLEY, GUNGATE WORKS and
CASTLE GARAGE, TAMWORTH.**

Reliant's First advert, appearing in the Tamworth

Herald Saturday 6th July 1935. © Elvis Payne

In the 1930s there were several 3-wheeler manufacturers to compete with and so it's a testimony to the Reliant that it was said to have impressed everyone who tried it. Amongst those was the Commercial Motor magazine who drove it around Grendon and Polesworth pushing the van to its limits. Looking for a steep hill they drove the vehicle to Grendon to attack Boot Hill which is around 3/4 of a mile long with a gradient of 1 in 8. Whilst they reported a healthy top speed touching 40mph on a flat road, driving up Boot Hill the vehicle slowly but surely climbed through the steepest parts at 9mph.

Wishing to now put the Reliant into production, Williams started to look for a place to build his new vehicles and soon came across an old Midland Red bus depot (formerly John Thornburn's Omnibus garage) situated on the south side of Watling Street in Two Gates. Despite being old and draughty with a leaking roof and inadequate facilities, Williams took out a 14-year lease which also included the use of a derelict flour mill that was adjoined to the building and

during World War 1 served as a shoe and boot factory.

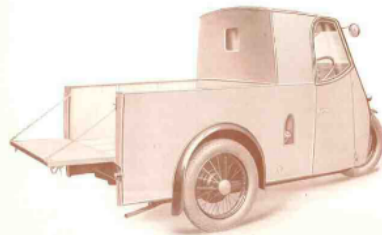
The new company was then formed and named, "The Reliant Engineering Company (Tamworth) Limited" and Williams and Thompson set about building wooden offices and a production track. Employing a handful of men, Reliant's first employee being Baden Powell (not he who founded the Scouts) production of 3-wheeled vans soon commenced with the 600cc Reliant now being the Reliant 7cwt model, the first vehicle being delivered on 3rd June 1935. It is believed that the prototype was now used for advertising purposes and adorned with sign writing informing all who saw it of the new Reliant 3-wheeler. A "new form of transport" that could be purchased for just £84 with an annual tax of £4 and insurance from £3/10/0.

Initially Reliant struggled to find buyers for its new 7cwt vehicle and after discovering a 1,000-gallon fuel tank under the building, purchased 2 fuel pumps and managed to just about stay afloat selling petrol. For a couple of years things were rocky although due to continued perseverance, by the 1970s Reliant had become Britain's second



Restored Reliant Van
© Elvis Payne

THE TEN CWT RELIANT —WITH EVERY GOOD FEATURE



LEADING FEATURES OF VAN AND TRUCK

Up to 40 per annum.
More than equal to half-ton loads.
Size fits all body space in use.
Load doors open full width on van and have permanent handle.
Wide doors at each side of cab hang from the front for safety.
Extra strong frames and construction throughout on and off highways.
Bodies of seasoned ash framing and best possible materials throughout.
Safety glass screens and extra large rear windows.
Large accessible battery and convenient petrol filler on side.
Weather, comfort and convenience for driver and passenger.

INTERNAL DIMENSIONS

STANDARD VAN		
Maximum length (rear door to dashboard)	7 ft. 3 in.	
Body length (floor)	5 ft. 8 in.	
Width on floor	4 ft. 2 in.	
Maximum width	4 ft. 4 in.	
Maximum height	7 ft. 9 in.	
Rear door opening—height	5 ft. 4 in.	
Width	3 ft. 8 in.	

OPEN TRUCK		
Length of body (floor)	4 ft. 1 in.	
Maximum width on floor	4 ft. 2 in.	
Height of sides and tailboard	1 ft. 7 in.	
Width of tailboard opening	2 ft. 8 in.	
Length inside with tailboard down	10 ft. 8 in.	

OVERALL DIMENSIONS OF VAN AND TRUCK

Length 10 ft. 10 in.	Width 4 ft. 10 in.	Height 5 ft. 8 in.
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SPECIAL BODIES

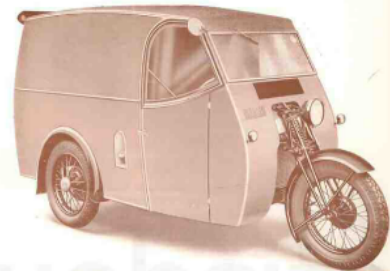
We can build any special bodies to order and are always pleased to quote. For example we can offer splendid bodies for cycle and milk deliveries and a most useful day-carrying body for road deliveries.

WHY A "RELIANT" FOR YOU?

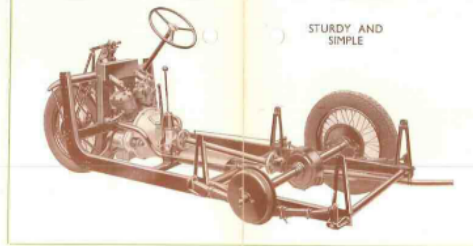
The many advantages of the three-wheeled commercial vehicle are so well proved as to be beyond question.
Compared with a four-wheeler at anything like the price, the RELIANT provides double the carrying capacity, vastly greater body space, 24 per annum tax as against a minimum of £10, low insurance, minimum consumption of petrol and oil, simple sturdy construction and consequent long life, marked ease of handling and quietness. The RELIANT can be turned round in a road 24 ft. wide and a lad of 16 is eligible to drive.

YOU WILL LIKE THE "RELIANT" BECAUSE IT HAS —
Water-cooled twin cylinder engine—for quietness and long life.
Rear petrol tank—for safety.
Large inter-connected brakes on all wheels—essential for modern conditions.
A cylinder capacity of 747 cc.—giving great power and outstanding economy of petrol and oil.
No other three-wheeled van has all these features.

YOU CAN DEPEND UPON THE "RELIANT" BECAUSE —
It is built by engineers who are responsible for having designed and produced the most popular and successful three-wheeled commercial vehicles on the roads. There are thousands in use and all that experience is behind the RELIANT.



The 10 cwt. "RELIANT" CHASSIS



STURDY AND SIMPLE

PRICE AT WORKS, STANDARD VAN OR TRUCK £106-10-0

TAX 24 PER ANNUM PRIMING GREY FINISH

CHASSIS FEATURES WHICH MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Water-cooled twin cylinder engine.
Oil control in large sump.
747 cc. cylinder capacity giving great economy of petrol.
Car type shaft drive.
Spiral level rear axle with full differential.
Valveless progressive semi-elliptic rear springs.
Electric and handle starting.
Large brakes to all wheels—inter-connected.
Interchangeable and detachable wheels—space wheel included.
Car type steering—driver's controls on right.
Rear petrol tank with pump feed and reserve supply.

THE WATER-COOLED TWIN CYLINDER POWER UNIT

A perfect unit for commercial work—twin cylinders giving large working area and bearing, air-fuel-water-cooled for quietness and long life—entirely unit-made car type lubrication system—oil control in large sump—detachable cylinder heads and oil sump—easy to clean—steady three speed and reverse 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This season's significant dates and events

collated by
Tony Poulton-Smith



Bibbldy Bob (Bowker) © Jamedia

4 July 1645 - Scots army are said to come to Tamworth

5 July 2009 - the first items from what would be known as the Staffordshire Hoard is unearthed at Hammerwich.

13 July 1649 - Oliver Cromwell's Council of State orders Tamworth Castle be dismantled or destroyed (nobody bothered)

16 July 1934 - Fire at Pooley Hall Colliery, two fatalities

18 July 1861 - the transmitting mast at Hints, all 1,006 feet of it, began operations. It replaced the tower which was dismantled the following year and sent to Jersey in the Channel Islands.

21 July 1947 - five killed as all but one of the 16 coaches on the London to Manchester express are derailed.

23 July 1852 - Matthew Noble's Peel statue unveiled in front of the Town Hall

25 July 1920 - Fazeley's war memorial unveiled.

2 August 1885 - Ethelflaeda is born, this the daughter of Thomas and Frances Cooke who lived at Tamworth Castle.

4 August 1839 - on completion of the nineteen arches viaduct the Birmingham to Derby railway is complete and George Stephenson is at the controls as the first engine, appropriately named Tamworth, crosses the biggest man-made structure in the town.

9 August 1875 - several Tamworth streets flood as 0.6ins of rain fall in 20 minutes during a thunderstorm

14 August 1680 - death of John Ferrers, English politician, his monument still adorns St Editha's church.

30 August 1884 - birth of English conductor and organist Appleby Matthews.

1 September 1801 - death of Robert Bage, businessman and novelist, who set up a paper manufacturing business in Elford.

1 September 1967 - Friends of Tamworth Castle and Museum are officially constituted.

5 September 1949 - birth of David 'Clem' Clemson rock guitarist best known for his work with Humble Pie.

15 September 2014 - Dale Belford departs as manager of Tamworth FC, to be replaced by Andy Morrell.

16 September 1964 - local band the Vipers and their first performance at the Children's Night at the Miners Welfare Club, Polesworth were billed as "Children's Own Rock and Roll Group".

19 September 1942 - birth of Brian Jenkins, MP for Tamworth 1997 to 2010 Below we have Brian Jenkins MP Maiden Speech from 1996

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Unveiling the Layers of Glen Cottage: A Collaborative Family Chronicle

By Rebecca Jewkes
in collaboration with
Andrea Lawson

In the intricate tapestry of local history, the threads of collaboration and shared memories often weave a richer narrative, unveiling the hidden stories of our heritage. Such is the case when my article about Glen Cottage was published in the previous issue of Tamworth Heritage Magazine and it was read by Andrea Lawson, Connie Hastilow, nee Baxter's daughter.

As you can tell from my surname, Jewkes, I am from a different branch of the family being the great-granddaughter of Margaret Baxter, who married Ernest Hastilow that went on to move over the road at Thomas Street, and as such, our family ties loosened to the point of me only knowing Connie's children by name. I did however, used to visit Connie when I was younger where I would sit in the front room of Glen Cottage and she used to tell us stories of years gone by but unfortunately, her children were all grown and living their own lives by the early 2000s.



Glen Cottage © Angela Lawson

Andrea contacted the editor to add more information to the history of 13 Thomas Street, or 'Glen Cottage' as it is known, and to ultimately pass on information about our family. I am very grateful that she did so as it has enriched our

Connie, George-Norman and Margaret

© Angela Lawson



understanding of our relatives and fleshed out stories that have been passed down.

While the previous article was based on sources such as census', union membership records and obituaries, some of the information was passed onto me from my family, and between sources not always being one hundred percent accurate and stories becoming muddled, the following information about Glen Cottage was recalled to me via e-mail exchanges with Andrea and I have added in further information from family records such as newspaper clippings and military records.

The first recorded residents of Glen Cottage on the 1921 census were Joseph and Annie Baxter. Joseph had worked on the building of much of Thomas Street and East View in Glascote as he was a carpenter. He worked alongside his brother, Thomas, who was a builder.

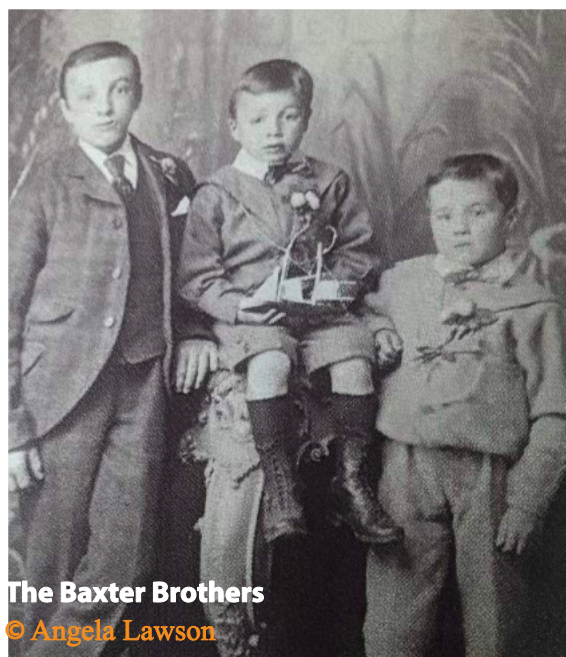
Andrea recalled her mother, Connie, joking that the reason the door frames in the house were never straight was because of Joseph's



Joseph and Annie
© Angela Lawson

workmanship. Joseph and Annie went on to have six children: three boys and three girls.

All three of their sons, Arthur, Harry and George fought in the First World War. Arthur died in conflict and Joseph paid for his body to be repatriated and buried in Glascote Cemetery. Harry died later of shrapnel wounds. George was the only survivor. Joseph's daughter Priscilla was an important figure in the history of Tamworth in her own right as she worked at the



The Baxter Brothers
© Angela Lawson

old Girl's Grammar School with her husband, James Day, after returning from Canada, where she emigrated in 1906 at the age of 20. They ran a market gardening business in Winnipeg for nine years before returning to Tamworth just after the start of the First World War (Tamworth Herald, Friday 2nd October 1987).

At one point in the 1980s and early 1990s she was the town's oldest resident, having her birthday celebrated in the Tamworth Herald each year, which she thoroughly enjoyed reading. She passed away at the age of 106 in 1992. I'm sure some of the readers of this magazine will remember her well.



Priscilla
© Angela Lawson



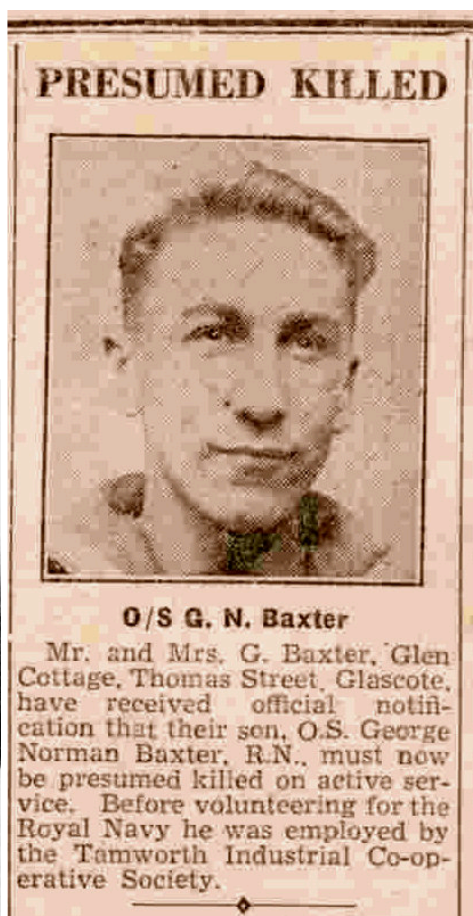
George Baxter, George-Norman Baxter and Arthur Baxter © Angela Lawson

George and May Baxter were next to live in Glen Cottage, according to the 1939 Register where they lived with Joseph and looked after him as he got older. They always thought they would inherit the home. Glen Cottage, like many homes of the past, were not immune from bearing witness to tragedy. Unfortunately, their daughter, Joyce, passed away at the age of seven after contracting scarlet fever. Scarlet fever was the leading cause of death in children during this period and no doubt left its mark on the family to the extent that my Granddad, George's grandson, only knew he had an aunt who died of the disease as a child but

did not know her name.

George and May would then experience more heartbreak in August 1944, when their eighteen year old son, George Norman Baxter was killed aboard HMS Loyalty when the minesweeper was targeted by a U-boat in the British Channel and sunk within three minutes.

Even more heart breaking is the fact that, like many servicemen, his body was never recovered to be buried in the town and the notification of him being presumed dead was published in the Tamworth Herald in November 1944.



Priscilla aged 102
© Angela Lawson

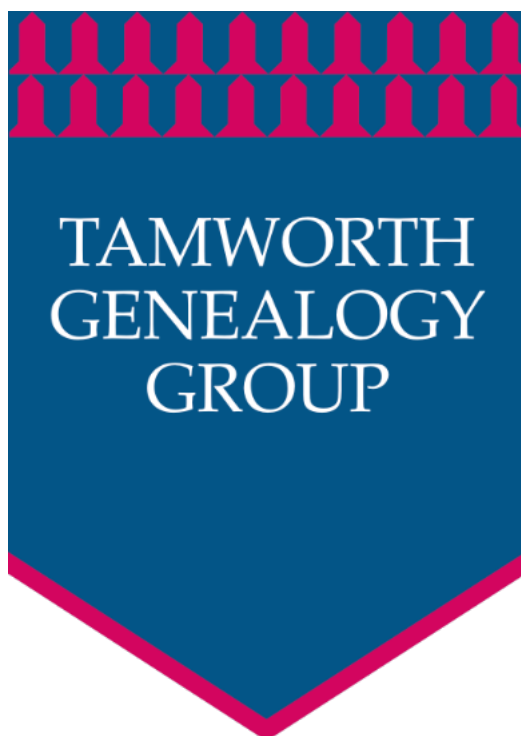
As the years went by Glen Cottage remained a happy home for the Baxter's until, to May Baxter's shock, her father-in-law, Joseph had put the house up for sale to go and live with his daughters. Fortunately, a relative of the Hastilow side of the family bought the house and rented it back to George and May.

However, Joseph ended up not enjoying living with his daughters and went back to Glen Cottage, where he was looked after by May. Connie and her husband moved into a flat in Ferrier Road with their daughter Lynda but Connie's love for her childhood home led her to buying the home back into the family in 1955. Connie and Doug bought the house for £600 where they raised their children and it no doubt held many happy family moments, including my visits as a little girl.

This tale of family collaboration, made possible through the pages of Tamworth Heritage Magazine, highlights how the simple act of sharing stories, information, and memories about a slice of our shared history, not only within the family but also within the town, can unveil numerous narratives. It stitches together a broader tapestry that enriches our understanding of the place we affectionately call home.



Priscilla and Husband James
© Angela Lawson



Following on from Rebecca and Angela's kind remarks the Editor would like to invite all current and former Tamworth Residents to write about their family lives in Tamworth especially with family photographs before these memories and are lost to time.

The Magazine works with Tamworth Genealogy Group (see www.TamworthGenealogy.org.uk) who can help guide research.

The Magazine is also video recording interviews with residents who can remember Tamworth pre 1960s. Actually from an period! These family histories and interviews will help build a solid picture of the real people of Tamworth.

There is a lot more to Tamworth than a string of dates, Lords, Vicars and Mayors. That is already well documented. Real life and what was important to people is far less documented. So contact the Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk to discuss writing your family history. For that matter the history of the pub,shop or school.

The Railway in Tamworth (NSW, Australia)

by Val Leet, Secretary, Tamworth & District Family History Group



Tamworth station 1912

© Northern Daily Leader

The railway service to Tamworth was a long time in the planning and for many reasons a long time in its construction. The route chosen was not an easy one. It began at Newcastle on the east coast, about 280kms/175 miles away) and while the early miles were reasonably flat, the latter miles wended their way along the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range until a tunnel would be required north of Murrurundi to bring the rail line out onto the Liverpool Plains.

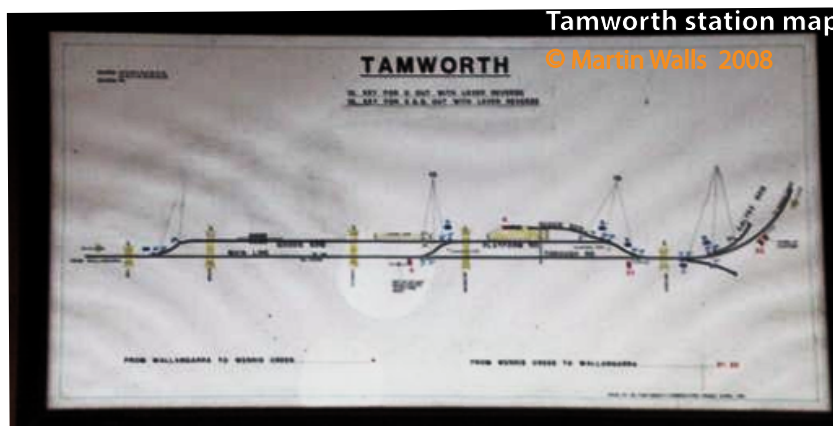
The first sod had been turned at Newcastle on 8 November 1854. By March 1857 the line had reached East Maitland (about 35kms/22 miles west). It took another six years to reach Singleton, and there a major bridge was needed to cross the Hunter River. Another three years passed before the line reached Muswellbrook and by 1870 it had reached Scone. The next stage to Murrurundi was completed in April 1871.

Two more years of planning were needed before extending the line beyond Murrurundi. A tunnel was required to allow the rail-line to pass through the mountain range. The resulting Ardglen Tunnel is 483 metres/528 yards long and was completed in 1877. The elevation of the tunnel is 659 metres/720 yards. The rail extension to Quirindi

was completed in August of that year. From Quirindi the landscape returns to plains so work on the extension to Tamworth continued at a steadier pace. The line ended at what is now West Tamworth, possibly early in 1878.

Although in use for several months, the rail-line was officially opened on Tuesday 15 October 1878, with a large crowd of around 6000 witnessing the event. Interestingly, the opening was delayed by some hours, due to the late arrival of the trains bringing people from as far south as Maitland for the occasion. Lateness seems to be still the one annoying factor of public transport today.

The event was to last for three days. Aside from the official opening by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Hercules Robinson, there was a grand procession from the Railway Station



Tamworth station map

© Martin Walls 2008

stretching down Peel Street (now Bridge Street), across the Peel River to Peel Street, East Tamworth. At that time the town was divided by the river, the western side having been developed by the Australian Agricultural Company, the eastern side developed by the Government. Eventually, the town became one, and duplicated street names on the west side were given new names.

In the evening two bullocks were roasted to feed the crowds. On Wednesday there were side shows, competitions and sporting events, and in the evening a grand fireworks display took place. Also on the Wednesday evening was a grand ball. To round off the celebrations a monster carnival was held on the Thursday.

To complete the line into Tamworth a bridge was required to cross the Peel River and the surrounding low-lying land including the main street, Peel Street. The resulting bridge and viaducts were constructed of steel and timber. The total length being 2672 feet (890 yards/814 metres). The structures were completed in late 1881 and the new station on the eastern side of town became Tamworth while the earlier station became West Tamworth, and is no longer in use.

Major flooding in 1908 and 1910 weakened the wooden viaduct and between 1917 and 1929 the timber was replaced with steel. Over the last hundred years our treasured green bridge and viaduct have carried thousands across the river and current sporting fields, and during times of severe flooding in the area the trains have been used to move people from east to west and vice versa when the roads have been under water.



Tamworth Viaduct

© Ann Ware



Tamworth Viaduct from Cab of train

© Peter Leary 2003

Article extracted and condensed from "*Jim Hobden's History of Tamworth*", published in 2005 by Val Leet. The late Jim Hobden was a local school teacher and passionate historian.

For more information on Tamworth Station and NSW railways in general see <https://www.nswrail.net/locations/show.php?name=NSW:Tamworth#>

Tamworth Station 2008

© Martin Walls 2008



For more information on Tamworth & district Family History Group see <http://tamworthfamilyhistory.org/>



Staffordshire County Flag

Its history and use.

by Margaret George, Staffordshire Heritage Group

This is the story of the official County flag of Staffordshire, its origins and action to promote its historic design. County Flags are an important visual symbol of our regional and national identity. Over 50 British counties have a registered county flag, but Staffordshire did not until 2016

In 2015 Staffordshire County Council (SCC) released its own banner of arms for general use and applied to the [Flag Institute](#) (FI) for registration of their design as the official county flag of Staffordshire. The FI is the UK's national flag charity maintaining the register of official flags and works with county organisations to come up with suitable designs.

Staffordshire County Council Banner



Applications for county flags must comply with the FI conditions for inclusion on to the UK Flag Registry. They may represent a city, town, urban district, village, historic county or traditional regional area, island or province. Only flags that are freely owned and used by the local community it represents, and *not subject to copyright restrictions*, may be used. **They exclude flags of modern local authorities.**

The SCC application came to the attention of the [Staffordshire Heritage Group](#) (SHG), which acts as an umbrella organisation for historically related groups within the county. The SHG did not feel that the SCC banner fully represented the historic county of Staffordshire.

County Flags must be based on their old historic counties, which for Staffordshire would encompass the Potteries, Wolverhampton, The Black Country, and other areas that fall outside the SCC's area, who now administer to around only 40% of the modern county. Therefore, the SHG felt that the proposed banner of arms did not represent the much larger historic county of the past.

SHG's main objection was that the flag design put forward by the SCC includes a blue strip, or "chief", overlaid with a large gold lion. This represents the council's authority, as handed by the crown and is an extremely common emblem used on local authority flags and arms nationally and globally, which while serving well as a local council banner, does not represent a unique symbol for our county. This "chief" has been removed from other county council arms, so allowing their own traditional historic county emblems and patterns greater prominence and simplicity of design, which works well visually when flown.

However, the indisputable county emblem, the unique Stafford Knot, lacks prominence on the SCC design and is hardly visible when the flag is flying from a pole. Also, SCC Knot is not only the wrong way round, but the shape of it has been altered from the traditional recognised version.



SCC knot

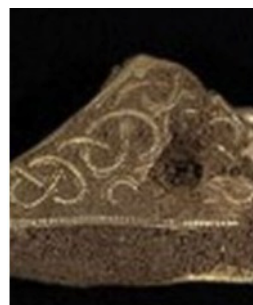
The SHG, along with the Association of British Counties, conducted a campaign to bring these deficiencies to people's attention. The SHG submitted an alternative design, using the pattern of chevron and knot found on the 17th century John Speed map as the actual design for the county arms and associated with the county for centuries.



Why the Stafford Knot and Chevron and what are their origins?

The gold background and red chevron comes from the coat-of-arms of the De Stafford family and used in connection with the county from at least the 17th century.

The knot has a long history as an ancient symbol unique to Staffordshire, with a number of stories relating to its origin. A very early example of the Stafford Knot can be found on an artefact amongst the famous Staffordshire Hoard, which dates back to the 7th century indicating a



link with the Knot within the county for at least thirteen hundred years!

The knot is also found on the shaft of an Anglo-Saxon stone cross within in the churchyard of Saint Peter Ad Vincula (Stoke Minster)

Ethelfleda, eldest daughter of Alfred the Great, defended strongholds (Burhs) that she established at Stafford and Tamworth in 913AD. She removed her girdle saying to the local lords: "With this girdle, I bind us all as one", symbolising the joining of three local areas into the newly created region of Staffordshire.



It is also suggested that that the Knot forms the shape of a double 'S' representing 'Staffordshire'.



The Stafford Knot is found on the seal of Joan Stafford, Lady of Wake, a descendant of Hereward the Wake, she possibly inherited the so called "Wake Knot", which is now housed in the British Museum.

When Joan died childless in 1443, her nephew, Humphrey, Earl of Stafford adopted the Knot, to be known as the Stafford Knot, as his badge, probably just before his creation as Duke of Buckingham in 1444. The Knot is coloured gold on his standard.



Earl of Stafford's Shield and Staffordshire knot of the period



John Speed, a renowned map maker, published his Atlas of Great Britain in 1611, which included a map of Staffordshire inset with a



plan of the county town of Stafford featuring the De Stafford family arms, gold background with a red chevron, including the family badge, a gold Stafford Knot

of the county including the townsmen of Stafford, "liegemen" of the de Stafford family.

The knot continues to be the undeniable symbol for Staffordshire and today is used by many organizations, including the Staffordshire Police, Fire Service, Army, Scouts, sports clubs, Ambulance, many shops, Burgesses and more.

Well-preserved carvings of

the Knot can be found situated either side of the medieval stonework fireplace within the great hall at Stafford Castle.

With the growth of civic organisations and liberties the Stafford Knot was increasingly adopted by the Citizens, Freeman and Burgesses



Local tradition holds that “there are no leftovers in Staffordshire”. This refers to the orientation of the Knot and which way it is displayed. Some historic images can be inconclusive, but the medieval stone carvings at Stafford Castle still survive as a clear image, which is also displayed on the SHG design as the accepted traditional orientation.

There is also a popular, but rather grisly, tale told that the story of the Knot originated when a Stafford County Sheriff devised a single noose into three loops to enable him to hang three criminals at the same time. Only being equipped with one piece of rope, he felt that it was only fair to hang all three at once rather than give precedence to any one of the condemned! Sounds dramatic in the telling, but the surviving historic evidence is probably much more convincing.

Eventually the FI received two applications, for a proposed county flag for Staffordshire. One from the SCC and a second from the SHG. As a result, in March 2016 the FI hosted a public vote on its website allowing the people of Staffordshire to choose which design they preferred as their county flag.

Despite having had very little time to discuss the design and publicise the vote, the design put forward by the SHG was declared the winner on March 28th, having achieved 72.84% of the vote and was recorded in the Flag Registry as the *official* County Flag of Staffordshire.

DESIGN CHOSEN BY THE PEOPLE OF STAFFORDSHIRE IN 2016

The SHG thank the [Association of British Counties](#) (ABC) and all who supported our campaign and those who helped in the design of our new flag. Details of the nation's county flags, including the one for Staffordshire, can be viewed on the Flag Institute's website www.flaginstitute.org

The Staffordshire County Flag as it appears in the Flag Institute Register is in the public domain and *needs no one's permission to use it*. The SHG has written confirmation that *the county flag is copyright-free*.

The SCC design will, of course, remain *the Council's* own banner and they will understandably proudly fly their own banner on

Council buildings. However, the SHG are concerned that this is often mistaken, and sold, as the official county flag. Our members do their best to promote the county flag both personally and within their own communities i.e. churches, clubs, parish offices, village halls. The SHG would also like to see your official county flag flown from public buildings in the county, especially within Stafford as the county town.

Many people fly the county flag all year round or on regular occasions. However, there are significant dates in the calendar to remember. Fly the flag in the month of May, especially Staffordshire Day on the 1st May when we celebrate and highlight all that is good within our county. In addition we have [Historic County Flag Day](#) on the 23rd July.

In 2014 the ABC conceived the idea of '[Historic County Flag Day](#)', to celebrate the nation's historic counties through the flying of their flags. The inaugural “County Flags Day” was Wednesday, 23rd July, 2014, the anniversary of the [creation of the flag of Devon in 2002](#), which started the modern concept of a county flag. The idea was approved by the FI and [the Government](#) and inspired annual displays around Westminster.

County Flags flying at Westminster

Finally, our Staffordshire County Flag, as defined by the FI represents the great people and unique identity of our ancient county from the Potteries to the Black Country.

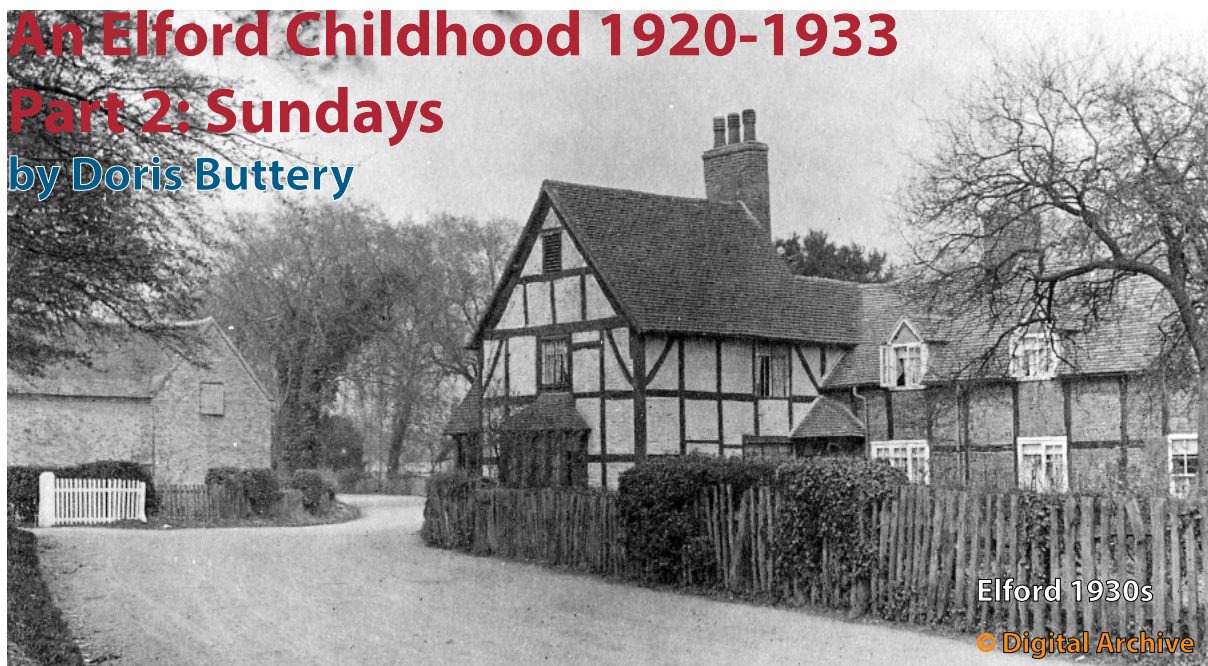
The “Chevron & Knot” design offers an elegant and distinctive flag which you, the people of Staffordshire, can fly with pride!



An Elford Childhood 1920-1933

Part 2: Sundays

by Doris Buttery



Sunday was always a day of rest in our house. No unnecessary work was ever done. We children attended church in the morning. In the afternoon, Sunday School took place in the village school, for children between the ages of four and seven, whilst the older children went to church for catechism with the rector.

Doris, the author, lived with her family – two older brothers, Bill and Frank, and her parents Jack and Lizzie – from her birth in 1920 until they

moved away in 1933. It was a world far removed from the one in which we all now live.

On a Sunday evening, Mother, Dad and I either went to church or, if the weather was especially pleasant, went for a long walk. There were some lovely walks around Elford and, of course, comparatively little motor traffic to spoil the peace of the countryside.





Frank, Bill, Lizzie and Doris Buttery c.1924

© Ann Nibbs



Lizzie Buttery c.1930

© Ann Nibbs

Sometimes we would walk along Green Lane, which was rather like a bridle path, running from the road at the back of our house right round onto the main Tamworth road. It was a fascinating place to wander along. At one point, where the path widened, a pond provided the perfect spot for us children to take our nets to fish for minnows, which we put into jam jars. But not on Sundays, of course.

These tiny fish never lived long after we got them home and I couldn't understand why I was not allowed to keep them in a soft water tank!

The countryside provided endless bounty. Blackberry briars came richly laden with berries in late summer. The wildflowers were, of course, a joy, and all kinds of birds built their nests in the hedgerows and bushes. We delighted in finding that the thrush, yellowhammer, blackbird, and more had returned to the same spot year after year.

Another favourite walk took us across the fields to Harlaston. This route involved crossing a railway line, so we took great care after climbing the stile. We mounted the steps up the embankment, stopped to look both ways along the line and to listen carefully. The path across the fields had been a right of way long before the railways came, so it had to be preserved and was, in

fact, well used. In all the years we lived in Elford, there was never an accident. No child would have dreamed of loitering whilst crossing the line, let alone playing there.

I travelled along that railway line a year or two ago (probably in the early 1970s – Ed.). It is now

electrified and the stiles on either side of the line have disappeared. Possibly some other arrangement has been made for people wishing to walk over the fields, but more probably the right of way lapsed as more and more people acquired cars.

The walk from the railway line was entirely over grazing land and brought us out into the centre of the village of Harlaston. One Sunday we set out that way, but our progress was barred by notices warning of an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease. We went by the road and, as we came alongside the meadows, dead cattle were being dragged into a huge pit, dug for the purpose. It is a sight I will never forget, and I think, even now, some townsfolk do not fully appreciate the horror of that devastating disease. It is not only the loss of valuable beasts but the effect on a farmer of seeing, what is probably, their life's work disappearing in a few short

hours. That particular farmer lost an entire pedigree dairy herd.

On arrival in Harlaston, we would usually call on Mrs Inkberrow, the lady with whom Dad had lodged briefly when he first joined his present employers. She was a silvery-haired lady and always made us very welcome.

Then we would sometimes cross the road to the White Lion where we would sit at a table in the garden. Mother and I would enjoy a glass of refreshing lemonade whilst Dad had a pint of beer. He would usually buy a small packet of biscuits for me and that was a real treat, especially if they were custard creams, because we only ever had Marie or Arrowroot biscuits at home. After our little rest for refreshment, we would wend our way homewards, going by the road for a change of scenery.

Once home, Mother would bustle about, cutting a slice of bread on which she thickly spread dripping from the Sunday joint. This was my Sunday supper, washed down with a cup of milk. I still enjoy bread and dripping, and toast and dripping is tasty too.

If Mother was feeling a little less energetic, our Sunday night walk would take us through the wood near our home. We made our way along the bottom path where, in places, there was a sheer drop to the river. I was not supposed to venture along here on my own. I did, of course, but never when heavy rain had made the going treacherous, and I always used tree roots as handrails while carefully picking my way along, but I don't remember ever walking the entire length of the bottom path alone until I was about eleven years old.



l-r: Jack, Lizzie and Doris Buttery c.1931

© Ann Nibbs

When we reached the end of the wood, we returned along the safer top path. This wood was carpeted with bluebells in spring, and, on a bank between the wood and the road, sweetly scented wild violets grew in profusion. One had to search for them amongst the fallen leaves, but the effort was well worthwhile.

There was one other favourite walk of ours. We crossed the ancient river bridge along a narrow winding lane through the hamlet of Fisherwick, until we came to a canal. We usually went this way when blackberries were in season because the canal-side banks were covered with brambles. In no time at all, our baskets would be filled with large, juicy berries. Because it was Sunday, we always took our walks wearing our best clothes, so had to be particularly careful not to get stains on them. Despite our best efforts, we often found tell-tale purple marks somewhere when we got home.

On summer Sundays, most of the little girls in the village wore white dresses and yellow straw hats, secured on our heads by narrow elastic under our chins. Gloves were essential. As we grew older, we were allowed to wear pastel colours. Our clothes were usually home-made but, if we were lucky enough to have a 'bought' dress, we really felt like 'somebody'. Mother used to make my light summer coats, and I hated the colour, which was always fawn.

Our Winter Sunday best was more varied. I can remember having a pink coat and hat trimmed with fur, but quite often, my winter coat was navy blue frieze cloth, with a black velour hat. My dress would be either woollen - hand-knitted - or blue serge with a silk collar. I once had a Saxe-blue sun-ray-pleated skirt and matching woollen jumper. A lot of the girls wore dresses of golden-brown velveteen, and I was very



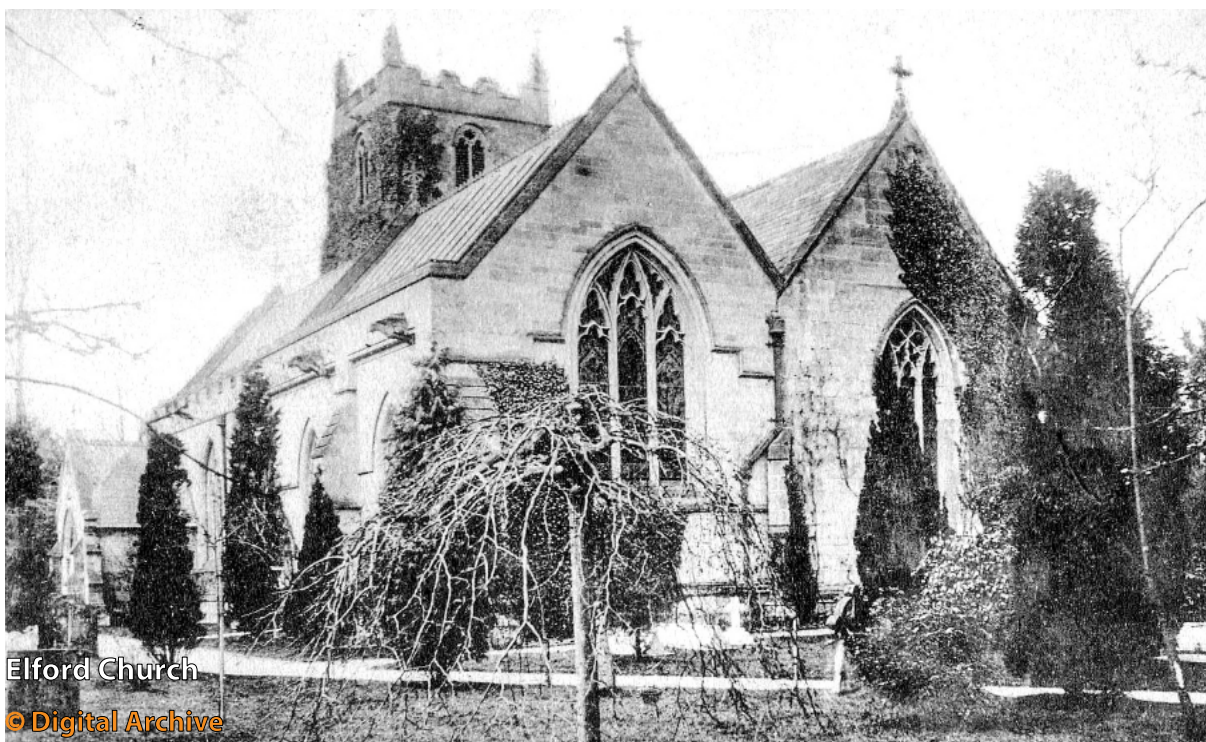
Approaching Elford 1930s

© Ann Nibbs

envious, but Mother thought it too impractical. I had to have something which could be washed!

Mother was very strict on Sunday observance. No games of any kind were allowed, whether they were ball games or card games. Even ludo and draughts were forbidden. When I was six, Mother, Frank and I went for a holiday to Rhyl – my first visit to the seaside – but I was not allowed to build sandcastles until the Monday as we had arrived too late on the Saturday for playing on the beach. I felt very badly used.

Even after we were all grown up and married, none of us would have dared to suggest playing cards in a Sunday, nor would I or my sisters-in-law have brought out our knitting. The only sewing allowed was in emergency, such as replacement of a button.



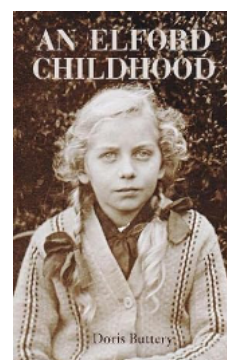
Elford Church

© Digital Archive

It sounds ridiculous now, and yet perhaps it wasn't so silly. It gave us all time to read, and write letters, or just relax generally. Not a bad thing, after all, especially after a hard week's work.

Next time: Holidays – and how a rather small cat made a big impact!

This extract is taken from '*An Elford Childhood*' by *Doris Buttery* published by Umbria Press, price £9.99 and available from Ann Nibbs by contacting her on Ann.nibbs@gmail.com.



Elford Hall

© Digital Archive

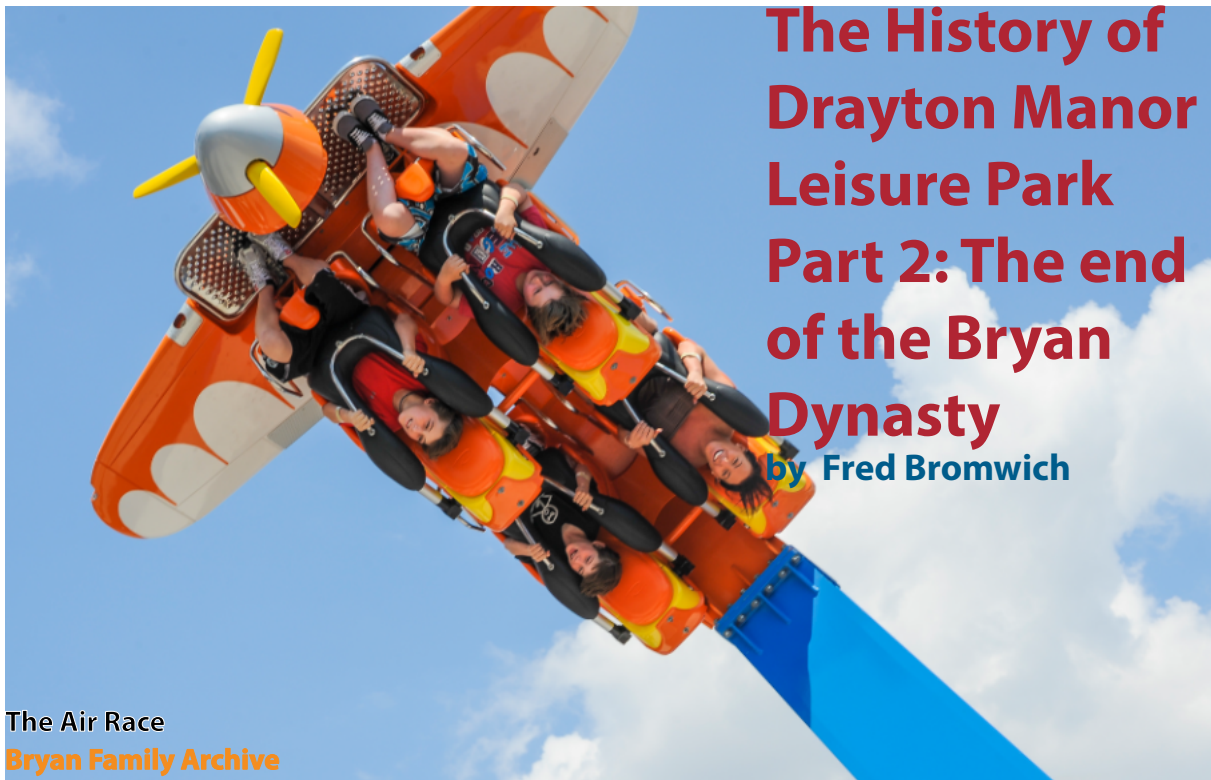
Doorway to Tamworth

Where is this doorway in Tamworth? Each issue will feature a door in Tamworth town Centre. Some will be well known, some historic, some quirky, like this unmarked door. It is in a main shopping street in the town centre. But do you know where?



Last Issues Doorway:
Entrance to Sync Studio (is it still going?) between the vape shop and Helping Hands, east end of George Street.

Photo © Jamedia



The History of Drayton Manor Leisure Park Part 2: The end of the Bryan Dynasty

by Fred Bromwich

The Air Race
Bryan Family Archive

Seventy years of Drayton Manor Theme Park being in family ownership ended when it was acquired by an overseas operator. Here Fred Bromwich reviews the last few years of the popular leisure resort before it was taken over.

Since 2020, Drayton Manor Theme Park has been owned by one of Europe's leading leisure operators – the French-owned Looping Group, whose 15 attractions across eight European countries lure in more than 6.2 million visitors every year.

Not that the Group was a stranger to the UK, for it already owned the West Midlands Safari Park in Worcestershire and Pleasurewood Hills, located near Lowestoft on the east coast. But what Looping's further involvement in the UK leisure sector signalled was an end to a family dynasty which had created and developed Drayton Manor since 1950.

George Bryan, and his wife Vera (both of whom died in 2014 after a marriage lasting 71 years) founded Drayton Manor

Theme Park, turning the derelict Peel Estate into a family-friendly attraction which is now spread over 280 acres.

Today, incredibly life-like bronze busts of George and Vera, created by internationally-renowned Staffordshire artist Peter Walker, are located in the park as a lasting legacy to the co-founders of Drayton Manor.

It was their son, Colin, who stepped up to become chief executive in 1987 when George took over the role of chairman. In turn, Colin



George Bryan, William Bryan, Colin Bryan and Helen Pawley
Bryan Family Archive

would eventually become chairman and it was his son, William, who was managing director at the time of Looping's acquisition.

William, who heralded the move as an "exciting and positive new chapter" for the park and welcomed Looping's "commitment towards a very ambitious investment plan," relinquished his role two years later, ending the family's long-standing relationship with what had become one of the top inland leisure destinations in England.

William was originally appointed managing director in 2015 and had acted as Colin's deputy after being identified as his successor in 2013.

But to go back a few years.....

Before the take-over, Drayton Manor was a multi-award winning attraction (and it is still winning accolades today), renowned as an extraordinary success story and being visited by more than a million visitors a year.



In fact, in 2016 it achieved a *magnificent milestone* welcoming the 50th million visitor since opening its doors to the public at Easter 1950 and winning a clutch of awards including "gold" for Staffordshire's Best Tourism Launch of the Year for the unveiling of its Thomas Land extension.



However, as I will relate in due course, disaster and tragedy, would take their toll in the run-up to the acquisition.

Under Colin's stewardship the foundations of the business created by his visionary parents became the platform for further growth and, in turn, his vast experience and sector knowledge ultimately helped his sons, William and George, and niece Helen, to take their place as next-generation directors of the park.

To say that Colin was immensely proud of the park's success is an understatement; more so in the light of it being a family business. Indeed, from his parent's dream of creating somewhere magical for people to visit after the war, to becoming a top inland leisure resort, the park was "the whole family's life works."

With Drayton Manor entering a period of major investment (that included the development of an £18.5 million, 4-star 150-bedroom hotel within the grounds of the park), it introduced in 2008 a massively popular family attraction – Thomas Land. Today, packed with rides based on Thomas and Friends characters, it is more popular than ever, pulling in thousands of excited youngsters– and their grandparents!

For those wanting to extend their day out, the theme park took the Thomas & Friends immersive experience one step further in 2012 when it opened the four-star Drayton Manor Hotel, giving

The Hotel
Bryan Family Archive



families wishing to turn their trip into an overnight or weekend break the option of staying in one of the 15 incredible Thomas and Friends themed rooms. More than 73,000 guests booked into the hotel during its first year of operation, consuming 3,185 burgers, 9,000 children's meals, 54,000 teabags, more than 6,000 fruit drinks and six-and-a-half tonnes of baked beans!

But it turns out that not everyone wants to book into four-star accommodation, tucking into scrumptious quality meals while being served by friendly, attentive staff. Which is why another of the park's facilities – a ten-acre full-facility camping and caravan site – has turned out to be a roaring success.

Opened in 2012 and operated in conjunction with the Camping & Caravanning Club, it is used by visitors not just for making the most out

of the park's leisure activities but also as a springboard to visit nearby Lichfield and Tamworth and other tourist attractions in the Midlands. It's easy to see why the site is such a magnet. It's conveniently positioned just a couple of minutes walk away from the park facilities but surprisingly sits in an oasis of calm and tranquillity – a buffer of trees and shrubs shielding it from the shrieks and screams of big-ride thrill seekers.

Small wonder then that the site was awarded a four-star rating by Quality in Tourism, the assessment service for Visit England, the country's national tourist board.

When it is full to capacity, the site can take 90 touring caravans as well as numerous campers, including those looking for a "glamping" experience



10 years of Thomas Land
Bryan Family Archive



Brownies on the Troublesome Trucks
Bryan Family Archive

It had always been the Bryan family's mission to help create family fun memories – and the on-going development of Thomas Land (which boasts the world's largest Thomas Land retail shop) certainly helped strengthen their commitment to keep everyone entertained, come rain or shine. Winning "gold" in Staffordshire's "Best Tourism Launch of the Year" for the unveiling of a £3.2 million extension to Thomas Land was a richly-deserved accolade.

But the theme park is much more than just a major leisure attraction which, year in year out, continues to win a raft of industry awards.

Significantly it became an integral part of the economic life of Tamworth, working with local suppliers and proudly presenting commemorative silver salvers and silver photo frames to 30 organisations and individuals at a lunch held to mark the park's 65th anniversary.

Over the years, it has also provided employment for thousands of local families (at least one of which proudly proclaims five generations having worked at the park) – and contributed enormously to the near-£2 billion annual value of tourism to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. And it was also recognised as a major supporter of various charitable institutions such as the annual Rotary Clubs-sponsored Kids Day Out.

For Colin, Drayton Manor was not only a business -it was the home where he grew up. Just fancy – a theme park in your own back garden!

"When my parents took over the estate, it was an overgrown jungle. There were giant brambles everywhere; lakes had been blocked up by all kinds of rubbish and old army huts survived as a stark

reminder of when the site had been occupied by the armed forces during the war. Not that I remember that exactly – I was just one-year-old at the time! But I do remember the years of backbreaking hard work that went into turning my parents dream into a reality. A reality that, I am so proud to say, has over the years brought so much pleasure to literally millions of people."

"I do have lots of happy memories of growing up in a theme park, however, like driving my mother's Ford car around the grounds at the age of nine – and becoming the proud owner of my own Austin 7 when I was just 14 years old!"

Right from the age of ten, Colin knew that he wanted to be involved in the running of the park and its future. And he still recalls the catering staff teaching him the art of frying chips – and helping his mother serve endless afternoon teas to seemingly endless queues of children!

After leaving college in 1967 Colin began his career at Drayton Manor as an assistant catering manager, going on to work full-time at the park for well over half a century. It was under Colin's management when, in 1981, the park introduced its first white-knuckle ride, the log flume – to be followed later by such breath-taking attractions as Shockwave, Maelstrom, Pandemonium and Apocalypse, the world's first stand-up tower drop, which opened in 2000.

Early days: clearing the land

Bryan Family Archive



10 years of Thomas Land
Bryan Family Archive



But the park – loved by the [Roller Coaster Club of Great Britain](#) which voted Shockwave the Best Stand-Up Roller Coaster in the World - has always been more than just the Big Rides. And less scary attractions enabled it to offer the perfect mix – catering for both families and thrill seekers. That’s why its appeal is enduring.

Recalling some of his earliest memories, Colin said: “When I was three years old, I was a proper little “Bob the Builder,” moving bricks and rubble about in a children’s wheelbarrow as my parents set out to transform a derelict site into what was to become one of the region’s leading leisure attractions – five years before Disneyland opened in 1955.

“But my earliest vivid recollections of childhood are of a pretty Spartan existence.

“My parents had made a flat on the upper floor of the former Peel estate office, in the grounds of the park, and it was here that we lived for ten years. It was anything but grand. Central heating was unheard of. We had to cope with paraffin lamps – and in the winter it was so cold the bedroom windows iced up on the inside as well as the outside!

“We moved away for three years when my parents bought a house at nearby Hopwas. It was a lovely property with a fascinating look-out tower where the previous owner kept an eye on his acres of woodland in case of fire. And there was a deep well in the garden where it was rumoured that Queen Elizabeth I had lost some jewels. But they’ve never been discovered – that’s even if they existed.

“I never wanted to move away from Drayton Manor, however, and even at the age of ten I knew I wanted to succeed my father in running the theme park. So I was well pleased when we eventually moved back to Drayton Manor, where my early- unpaid – duties included emptying the cash from the cigarette machines and counting the half-crown pieces.

“Over the years, I have worked in nearly every department and, after studying at Birmingham College of Food, now University College Birmingham, I qualified as a chef to really understand what made the park, and its catering company, the success it was.”

Troublesome Trucks in full flight
Bryan Family Archive





Zila on the prowl
Bryan Family Archive

For a time, Colin also worked as an animal handler at the park's ever-popular zoo – and received the scratches to prove it! Be he found romance there as well – dating one of the keepers. Lynne, who he later married and who has been his wife since 1971.

Other happy memories include welcoming numerous distinguished guests, including the Princess Royal, but one occasion stands out – when the park, in 2016, welcomed its 50 millionth visitor, 27-year-old Jamie White, from Pembrokeshire. That was quite a milestone – especially as it was the park's 65th anniversary year when it also achieved a record-breaking attendance figure of more than 1.2 million.

Another not-to-be-forgotten moment came just a year later, in 2017, when Her Majesty the Queen awarded Colin the OBE for his ongoing contribution to tourism and in recognition of his own charity work, acknowledging fund-raising activities that had raised millions of pounds for deserving causes. It was an honour richly deserved, underlining the passion and drive he had for the park, its employees and the people it served.

"Giving back" was always paramount in the minds of Colin's parents and Colin himself was proud to continue to invest time and money in helping those less fortunate. Indeed, as part of a

l o n g - t e r m commitment to charitable causes, Colin launched the Drayton Manor Park Foundation, raising funds for organisations such as the Midlands Air Ambulance, St Giles Hospice (of which Colin's father was its first president) and Alzheimer's Research UK.

Sumatran Tigers in the zoo
Bryan Family Archive



Shockwave
Bryan Family
Archive



Stormforce
Bryan Family Archive

But then, an unforeseen tragedy and two “natural disasters” catapulted the park to the brink of closure.

It was in 2017, during a visit by a group of schoolchildren from Leicester, that the park endured probably what was its darkest day, with the death of an 11-year-old girl, who drowned after falling from the Splash Canyon rapids ride.

An inquest jury, in 2019, concluded that the girl died accidentally but, after a lengthy investigation into the circumstances of the accident, the Health & Safety Executive, in 2021, successfully prosecuted the operators of the park for breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

A major calamity occurred in February 2020. Storm Dennis caused havoc across the country and severe flooding, worsened by the park’s main lake bursting its banks, resulted in the

closure of the attraction at a time when thousands of schoolchildren would normally have been enjoying half-term treats at the park. To make matters worse, a severe fire damaged a changing block in the Thomas Land area.

All in all, it was a financial disaster – heightened by the park’s planned reopening being delayed as Covid 19 took its toll. All factors which exacerbated the park’s cash flow problems, ultimately forcing it into administration.

For the Bryan family, it was a devastating, unimaginable end to a 70-year old family business.

But they should always be proud of having created one of the most popular inland tourist attractions in England.

The Bryan legacy will be forever woven in the history of Staffordshire and the leisure industry.



Maelstrom
Bryan Family Archive

Book Review

Are the Wenches out: The Castle Inn fire of 1838

by Sue Wood

Published privately 2010

The Castle Inn Fire of 1838 is often talked about in Tamworth yet most only have a sketchy view of it. Also many details are misunderstood like Chinese whispers. This book by Sue Wood, published in 2010 is the answer but it raises some more questions her detailed analysis brings to light.

The core of this 40 page book is the evidence from the inquest documents. As this is sworn testimony given in open court shortly after the fire it can be considered accurate. Which is why there are more questions, as reading it with hindsight the author and the reader, will want to fill in a few areas not mentioned. Much of it will be "taken as read" by the people at the time or simply not questioned.

One aspect of the book that is very useful is the floor plans and elevations showing the windows, and who was rescued from which window. Along with the testimony of who was where when the fire started. Though there are still some answered questions here. Including where Mary Ann/ Ann/Caroline was at the start of the fire and her route to where she was found dead. Not to mention the three different names for the same person and why she was taken away shortly after the fire to be buried in an unmarked grave in Wigginton. The memorial near where she is apparently buried was only put up 23 years later on the death of her father. There is room here for some more investigation.

Also why was the Landlord's Mother-in-Law staying with them? The reason given seems a little unusual for the period. Another question is why was Harriet Buswell's father not staying at the Castle Inn that night?

Another point is the book mentions in passing is that this fire caused the first professional full time fire service in Tamworth. What most people miss is that there had already been a volunteer fire team and fire engine(s) in Tamworth for many years before.

Whilst this book is the best and most comprehensive account of the fire, indeed the Castle Archivist says this is the best researched

Are The Wenches Out?

The Castle Inn Fire of 1838



SUE WOOD

account there is of the fire, as the author herself says there are more questions to be answered.

The author, Sue Wood published this privately and 14 years on it is very difficult to find a copy. I am indebted to Mark Harper' at the Castle Hotel' who knew someone who used to work at the Castle Hotel with a copy. **So the Editors plea is if anyone knows Sue Wood, or knows anyone who knows Sue please ask Sue Wood to contact the Editor@tamworthHeritage.org.uk**

Finally it should be noted that: building, hotel and fire regulations have improved somewhat since 1838!



In Search of the source of St Ruffin

by Johnny Gillett, The Journeyman



In my years of collecting stories, I've always been amazed at the amount of times I chance upon someone who is able to provide me with a gem of knowledge and lift the lid on some topic I've been busy puzzling over.

Some 12 years ago my storytelling path crossed with that of David Pott, a deeply dedicated advocate of the pilgrimage path known as the Two Saints way. I don't really recall how we first met, but I do remember spending one Good Friday morning with him visiting some of the key sites associated with a few of the saints of Mercia, namely Chad, Wulfad and Rufin. We of course stopped off at Stone, where the railings at the meeting of the High Street and Station Road tell of these young martyrs being buried by the local people's building of a cairn.

Previous to this we had been to see St Chad's cave, complete with Werbode's spy-hole, in the woods outside of the village of Salt. Then we had stopped off at Burston, where we parked up at the little church of St Rufin, to make our way through the fields that led to the canal. There, surrounded by a fence, was a square body of water, which looked to me to be an ideal watering hole for horses or cattle, but David assured me that this was Saint Ruffin's Well.

Whether I tell tales from the kingdom of Mercia, or from the rain-forests of Malaysia, I do, wherever possible, like to visit the sites associated with stories. This allows me to pick up something of the atmosphere of the place. Its sights, smells and sounds are all captured in my mind, giving me a real experience the provides a

well of inspiration for me to draw from. So it was with my visit to this pool in Burston. The scene as I remembered it was woven into my story, so becoming one of several dramatic moments in my narrative. I thrilled school children across the country as I regaled them with my retelling, which I eventually put into my book for The History Press under the title of The Story of Stone.

"Whether from his tears or from the sudden exertion, Rufin was as dry as stone. He therefore stopped at a small spring outside the village of Burston, where both he and his horse could drink. Kneeling down, Rufin plunged his hands into the cool clear water, cupping the drink to his mouth, and washing his head and face. He breathed a sigh of relief and rested for few short moments, until there was the sound of a twang behind him. A thud in his back juddered through his body and a pain pricked his heart. In this brief moment of solace, the warriors had caught up with their prey. A second arrow quickly joined the first, and the prince fell forward; his lifeless body welcomed by the spring."

However, many years after these adventures I heard of another location sporting the name of St Ruffin's Well. This time with two f's and situated in Tamworth. I was somewhat confused and to add to this I saw that this so called 'well' had no water. It seemed to have dried up and been replaced with raised flower beds. A charming spot for sure, but nothing like David Pott's pool of water in Burston. Yet, on the outside wall of Ankerside Shopping Centre, a sign declared the spot's holy heritage.



St Michael's Church in Stone is a [Grade 2* listed building](#) of the Gothic revival that dates from the 1758 but is on the site of an earlier Augustinian priory. It is in this, now gone, priory that the brothers Wulfad and Rufin are reputed to be buried.

In 2000 the Church became St Michael's and St Wulfad. It has the above window showing both brothers Wulfad and Rufin.

Some may feel aggrieved that Rufin was overlooked in the new name, but the Church of St Rufin is only a few miles further south in Burston.

The church has the most Charles Kempe Windows in Staffordshire though the East Window is by Ward and Hughes. More information can be found from <https://stmichaelschurchstone.co.uk/st-michael-st-wulfad/> and also here <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/3522/service-and-events/events-all/>

"According to tradition, this well was dedicated to St Ruffin, the martyred son of Wulfhere, who was king of Mercia in the seventh century."

Looking again, I noted something. The sign said, "this well was dedicated to St Ruffin". It did not say "this well was visited by St Ruffin" nor "this well was the site of St Ruffin's martyrdom."

Of course, in my years of tracking down folk tales, I have often found that a number of different locations will make a claim to the key events of a single story. Take the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight which has locals from Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire and the Wirral all swearing that they have Bertilak's castle and the fabled Green Chapel within their own lands. In the same way, some may claim that the young prince did meet his end at Tamworth, but to me a claim from Burston would be stronger. It sits between Stone and Salt, the other key sites in the story, and there is a total distance of little more than 5 miles. The three are also arranged in a straight line, and although this line admittedly continues on with little deviation to Tamworth, the total distance to the castle town is more like 30 miles. Of course, I am assuming that modern Stone and Salt are the true locations of events in the story.

In fact, we are not sure if the story itself is entirely factual. We are talking about those misty days of early Mercia and according to some historians this tale of the martyred prince was composed much later by a Norman monk in Peterborough, who was keen to give a good story to the supposed founder of their abbey; namely one King Wulfhere, who according to the story is the father of Wulfad and Rufin.

Still, it is not uncommon for a well to be named, after a well-known saint, even if they never personally visited the site, as is obviously the case with such deductions to Saint Mary or Saint John. It is also not unusual to find a saint's name given to two or more holy wells, even within the same region. Take Saint Chad for instance, who has 4 wells within the county, which probably indicates something of his perceived significance in the rise of Christianity within Mercia. Yet, despite his links to St Chad, Rufin is much more obscure, and I am not aware of any miracles associated with him. I therefore wonder why the additional dedication to St Ruffin at Tamworth. If it's due to town's relative proximity to Stone, then why is his brother Wulfad not also included?

In pondering Rufin's possible significance, I did some googling, and it seems that this name is a derivative of Rufinus, which in itself gives us Rufus. The rendering of a person's name can slide about as stories circulate through the centuries. In this, I am reminded of Bertram, the founder-saint of Stafford. Or should I say Beorhthelm? Either way, you don't have to travel far to find the very same holy man referred to as St Bertoline, or even as St Berteline in Runcorn. And then there is the biblical Saint Bartholomew, with whom our man from Staffordshire has often been confused. This is not helped by the fact that Staffordshire's only church dedicated to Saint Bertoline stands in the village of Barthomley; a name too close to that of the New Testament missionary. And I'll just add here that a certain Saint Bartholomew's Church in the moorland village of Longnor hosts a beautiful rendition in marble of figure labelled as Saint Bertram.

Now, with Rufin I came across at least 10 other similarly named saints. Although the details of many of these holy men have slipped into obscurity, one of our saint's near namesakes is in the Bible, just as with Bertram. In fact, this Rufus appears also to be the younger of two brothers.

The 15th chapter of St Mark's Gospel states:

"A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross."

Then there is a further mention in St Paul's Letter to the Romans:

"Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too."

Some say that this Rufus became the Bishop of Thebes, and in the Eastern Orthodox tradition he is not only listed among the 70 (sometimes 72) missionaries to the nations referred to in Luke's Gospel, but he is also mentioned in some Orthodox hymns.

"Let us praise in hymns the six-fold choir of Apostles:

Herodion and Agabus,

Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon and holy Hermes.

They ever entreat the Trinity for our souls!"



St Rufin's Church © Jamedia



St Rufin's Church window © Jamedia

St Rufin's Church, in Burston, built in 1859 sits behind a cottage within sight of Rufin's well across the field behind the church. A real well, that was there prior to the canal next to it, Burston being a Saxon village. This is where brothers Wulfad and Rufin are reputed to have been killed. Rufin killed whilst kneeling at prayer.

Though as "Bura's Farm" Burston is probably older as roman remains have been found. Due to the landowners wanting a deer park in the 1700s, the canal and railway following on Burston and Sandon are somewhat dispersed and the modern A51 effectively by-passes Burston.

The somewhat modern stained glass windows date from 1953, a century after the original building, and are quite simple in keeping with the interior creating a light and airy church, Many thanks to Peter and Carol for the guided tour.

More information can be found here. <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/4473/>



St Rufin's Well © Jamedia



This of course cannot be the Mercian Rufin, but it needs to be said that the name Rufin is in fact Norman in origin and not Saxon. Is it too much to wonder whether an 11th century monk writing in Peterborough drew on a name that he had some familiarity with, one that had some Christian credence to it, when he penned his story of King Wulfhere?

So what about this well of Ruffin, with the two f's, referred to in those gardens outside Ankerside Shopping Centre? Further googling brings up on the screen the photos of an intriguingly substantial structure with high brick walls, paving slabs, steps, pillars and maybe even a manicured lawn surrounding a pool. This is nothing like the other holy wells found throughout the county, which often sit in obscure overgrown corners surrounded by moss covered stones. Such places do evoke a misty Saxon past, or even that of earlier days of pagan sacred springs, but these monochrome photos of St Ruffin's Well in Tamworth almost suggest a public paddling pool with enough flat space to play host to an outdoor performance re-enacting the tale of martyred princes.

A little more googling will bring you to a Facebook page dedicated to the resurrection of St Ruffin's Well, and includes two photos of people dressed in period costume. One picture looks to be from the 1960s and I wonder if these young women sitting at the water's edge were part of some festivities that took place when the restored

well was opened. After all, the sign I referred to earlier did have a little more information.

"The restoration work was carried out to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the accession to the Mercian throne in 757 AD of King Offa whose royal palace stood in the northern part of these grounds when Tamworth was the capital of that kingdom."

Could there have been the staging of some historical pageant here as part of these celebrations?

It is more difficult to date the other picture. Could it be from the 1990s with some celebration of 30 years since the restoration of the well? Either way, the troupe look to be enjoying some medieval merrymaking.

Although much of these glory days seem to have been lost, it is interesting to note how far back in time the sacred site actually goes. A description from 1928 talks of a pool enclosed by high walls and covered with a pitched roof, despite Robert Hope's "Legends and Lore of Holy Wells" of 1893 saying how the site suffered severely from a fire in 1559. And if this wasn't far enough back, there is a reference from 1276 which talks of access to St Ruffianus' Well being blocked.

There is no doubt that the spring that feeds this spot has endured a long but uneasy life, leading us to its current state of apparent non-existence.

It seems that once, and within living memory, Tamworth's St Ruffin's Well was a place where people could gather, chitchat, have a laugh, and dip their feet in the water. Why not again? Efforts to resurrect the place did gain some momentum about 10 years go, judging from the Facebook page. However, this campaign reached a stalemate. Initially it seems that the Borough Council was open to the idea, but then they would not grant permission for any ground-work to begin investigations into the lost spring. Such paradoxes are common in local politics, the stuff of sitcoms even, but meanwhile another generation of Tamworthians grow up with little if any knowledge of the stories that permeate their landscape, and they are denied the opportunity of an unusual and centuries-old community feature.

St Ruffin's Well could be a place to for the generations to gather together informally and share stories of life in the town and its surrounds. The location may provide some colour as a garden, but I feel that Tamworth has lost something quite special. The well that once dwelt here did so under the name of a young man who suffered from a conflict with the older generation, namely his own father. It ended in the death of the boy, and his brother, but like the ending of Romeo and Juliet, this tragic loss brought about a change in the elders. The story tells us that the violent end of this pair of siblings, whose feast day is on 24th July, caused a redirection in the religious trajectory of Mercia, which in turn provided the foundations for the Staffordshire we know today.



Whether the story is one that really happened or is the fabrication of a monk in Peterborough, it's a tale that has been woven into the fabric of this land. I hope it has the chance to spring up again.



Johnny Gillett (The Journey Man) is a professional storyteller who prefers telling tales in the live setting, but will write things down occasionally. He was commissioned to write two collections of folk tales for *The History Press* during his time living on the Welsh borderlands of Mercia. These are *Cheshire Folk Tales* and *Staffordshire Folk Tales*. His *Story of Stone*, which he refers to in the above article can be found in the Staffordshire volume, as well as tales of St Bertram, St Werburgh, St Modwen and St Editha. Of course, there are stories of dragons, devils, giants, fairies, ghosts and witches in there too!

Letters to the Editor



Marmion School, Spinning Lane
Tamworth Digital Archive

I am not sure if this is Letters to the Editor or School Report! Read on and you decide!
Editor.

Dear Editor,

I have enjoyed sharing the articles and memories of Tamworth from the past. I moved to Tamworth in September 1978 to begin my career in teaching. I along with many other newly qualified teachers came to Tamworth as new schools were built in the expanding town.

I recollect that many of new comers were housed by TBC in flats on the developing Stoneydelph Estate, are there any readers who have similar memories? One hour bus service from Stoneydelph to Tamworth, half day closing on Wednesday, Thursday late opening of the Banks (so we could get cash out for the weekend) life before Ventura, the list goes on... It would be fantastic to hear from any of those 1970's NQT (Newly Qualified Teachers) and share a few memories!

Regards
Ed

Editor: Hi Ed, this could get confusing! Your email prompts two thoughts. First, we would love to hear anyone's reminiscences of Tamworth in the 1950's to the end of the

1980s when Tamworth changed completely. Especially with any photos that add faces to the names. As well as what was fashionable at the time!

Second you mention school:. Tamworth Heritage Magazine would love to work with any retired Teachers who could help pull together school histories for the magazine. We can help with the research on this and make documents for the Tamworth Digital Archive so the history is not lost.

Dear Editor

Thanks for the magazines, they are much appreciated .

I was born in Spring Gardens (now a car park) in 1945, [Does anyone have a photo of Spring Gardens? **Editor**] left there and went to live Gilway until 1972 when I moved to London .

I went to Marmion School and the Grammar School and became a Chartered Accountant in 1968 .

In 1972 I went London because my brother was already there living in a flat with other people from Tamworth. [Any names? :**Editor**] He went

to the LSE and became an economist and also lives in Wimbledon.

My father was a coal miner as were most of my family. We did not have a camera when we lived in Spring Gardens and little seems to have been written about it .

The only photo we can trace is when it is being knocked down! If you know of anything relating to it: it would be greatly appreciated.

Regards
James Congrave

Editor: Well there is a challenge to the THM readers! Does anyone have any photos of Spring Gardens, or who the Tammies were in that flat in London? Likewise, James would you like to write down as much as you can remember? We can turn that into an article for the Magazine (assuming people turn up some photos) or even a standalone PDF "book"

Hi Editor

Looking at the picture in Winter 24 edition on page 36 of the School photo, I have thought long and hard about my days at Bolehall Boys School during the 40's, and can think of very little. It was over eighty years ago !

I have only a few very vivid memories. One was the Headmaster was Mr Brown, to me a

terrifying man, but very fair. It seemed so strange that something like forty years later I was somewhat on an equal footing when he was chairman of the Tamworth Music Festival. I spent a short period on that committee with this man that I had been in awe of in years previously.

Another noticeable thing during my time at the school was being taken to school one morning by Fred Carter, a local builder of repute, on the crossbar of his cycle. This came about after he saw me crying on my way to school because I wanted to stay at home with my Dad. He was home on leave from the army.

Finally the highlight to every week to me was Friday afternoon. Football at Bolehall Park just down the road by the Nineteen Arches. No goalposts, just jackets etc piled high. None of us had proper kit during the war years, but we certainly had fun.

Regards Ray Jones

Editor: Well there are some memories. It would be nice to have a chat on video so these memories are not lost. We can do that to preserve the history from 80 odd years ago if you are interested Ray; actually we would be interested in doing that for anyone with memories of old Tamworth If you are interested email

Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk



Next Edition

Autumn 2024

Publication Date: 1st October

Copy Date: 13th September

Articles on anything relating to Tamworth will be happily accepted. Articles should be 800-2000 words. Letters any length under 500 words.

Please submit any articles, letters or ideas to Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk

Copy Date (to in send article) 13th March

However please give as much advanced notice as possible. So we can allocate space or just in case there is more than one person writing on the subject.

Please send in article/letters in text, RTF, MS doc or docx, we can even accept odt format.

Any images to be sent separately NOT embedded in the text but please indicate in text approximate placement for each image. Images as high quality as you can manage in PNG, tiff or JPG. We can scan or convert most other formats. **Also any video. We can link in Video**

The Editorial Team can help with research, finding documents, scanning items, finding images (we have a photo library of over 20,000 images). We can take new photos if you need help with photography

Being a PDF magazine: We can also link-in web site links and video or audio files. **We can also produce video and audio if required.** Just contact the Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk

NOTE Any long articles may be shortened for the Magazine but also could be expanded and turned in to stand alone THT books. Contact the Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk



In the Next issue

The Next Issue is Volume 2 Issue 2 and we hope to be a little more organised with what is in these issues than we were for volume 1.

Several articles we hoped to have in this (and a previous issue) are proving longer to research and complete than anticipated. The History of the Tamworth Branch of the Royal British Legion for one! As we progress we should get a better process and schedule in place. As long as we get the input from the readers!

Volume 2 Issue x A Fascinating Article!

Written by YOU! If no one contributes there will be nothing to read.

If you don't want the **next issue to be the last one** the editors need articles. The Editors, the History, Genealogy, Archive, and Castle groups can all help with research and information. Email the Editor@TamworthHeritage.org.uk

Tamworth

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