AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT

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AROUND

KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD

PAST & PRESENT

Contents

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NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

‘YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU’

I am sure that we are all familiar with the recruiting poster that appeared during the First World War, bearing a picture of Lord Kitchener and the slogan 'YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU'. With the centenary of the outbreak of that war coming next year on 4 August, Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society (SANHS) has received a grant to research the impact that the war had on communities in Somerset.

SANHS is therefore inviting all its associated societies, including Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society, to help in the research either in their own communities, for example looking up local newspaper reports of the First World War period, or at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton, going through archive records held there.

Aside from this project, the committee of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society wishes to mark the centenary and the events of 1914 to 1918 with articles and photographs in next year's edition of our journal 'Around Keynsham and Saltford Past and Present'.

Please can you help? Not all of us will have had family members living in Keynsham or Saltford a hundred years ago. My own family were in Brislington at that time and there are poignant stories in our family archives of lives changed and lives lost during the cataclysmic years of the war.

The memorials in our local churches for example bear the names of many young men who went bravely and hopefully to war, but did not come home.

Those of you who received the 2012 edition of our journal may recall the article 'Robert Cantle - A Mystery' written by Gill Roberts, following her extensive research into her own family's history. Robert Cantle was killed by lightning during army training in 1917.

In her article Gill also drew attention to the book 'Writing up your Family History - A do-it-yourself Guide' by John Titford, who says 'Now is the chance to breathe new life back into your ancestors, to give their lives, however humble, a further touch of dignity and meaning.'

I hope therefore that at least some of you may be able to contribute articles, however short, to next year's journal. Photographs also would be much appreciated. Our editor Brian Vowles will be very pleased to hear from you if you are able to help.

If you feel able to assist with the research work for the SANHS project as outlined in these notes please let me know.

Just to recap –

'YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU'.

Dennis Hill

THE KEYNSHAM BY-PASS - MY FIRST JOB.

by Tim Martin

A by-pass for Keynsham was first proposed in 1938 when 5,000 vehicles per day were passing through the town and a public enquiry was held at the Fear Institute on 25th February 1939. The Ministry of Transport considered the three routes suggested and approved the one that now exists; although a width of 110 feet was specified, allowing for two 22 feet wide carriageways flanked by cycle tracks and verges. The plan was shelved during World War II but revived in 1958 when again, the present route was chosen after the three routes were reconsidered.

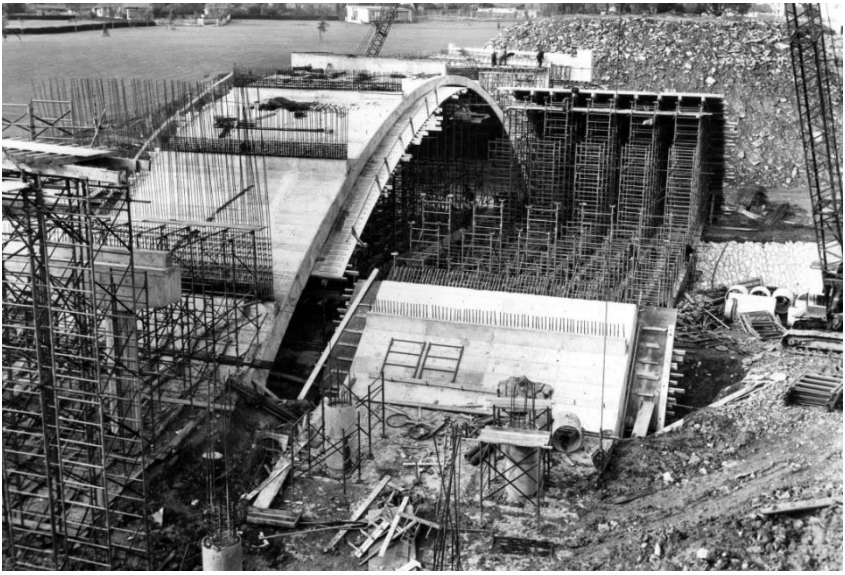
The Broadmead Lane roundabout

There were very few objections to these projects to upgrade the appalling transport infrastructure common across UK before the Motorway Programme**.** However this time, the total width was to be 88 feet with no cycle tracks or pedestrian paths. The lanes were to be 24 feet wide divided by a 15 feet wide grass central reservation and 12 feet 6 inch side verges**.**

Early in 1964 the contract for the construction was awarded to A E Farr of Westbury Wilts for a sum just in excess of £1,000,000. Farr's had completed many large Contracts in the South West including the Portway Tunnel system in East Bristol which was so large and difficult that it was built on a negotiated cost-plus tender and Chew Valley Reservoir which was of such a size and importance that it was opened by the Queen. Most of the skilled labour came from villages in the Chew Valley and were continuously employed by Farr's. Earthworks were well underway by the summer using the latest plant, - Caterpillar D8 22a series tractors towing 435 scrapers. These "Cats" could be fitted with a bulldozer blade as required and one was equipped with a Ripper which made short work of the lias and red sandstone, ploughing through the layers which were to be reused in the embankments. As a lad of 15, I was most impressed and had already decided to be a plant mechanic as the money was reputed to be very good and a boom in construction was planned for at least another twenty years (as my father said).

Having completed my exams at Broadlands Secondary School in the summer of 1965 there was the chance for me to find a holiday job. One of the lads in my class told me that at the By-Pass there was a job going as a "Chain Boy" which was role of the Surveyors assistant who was involved with setting out to line and level all the earthworks and structures to be built. The main Site Offices were at the end of Vandyke Avenue and so on

the next afternoon as I set off to inquire, I struck up a conversation with Walt Marsh, a section foreman who was walking in that direction as he was going to the office. He took me with him and introduced me to a couple of the engineers. Just a few words were passed *"Start Monday based at Station Road".*



Memorial Park Bridge. Arches constructed on Acrow Formwork moved over to complete second span. Concrete from a Stothert and Pitt Batching Plant in Vandyke Avenue. Placed into Shutters by *22RB* Cranes

Then, with full employment and simpler labour laws, it shows how quickly a "Start" could be secured. I was taken on with an hourly wage of 2s 9d (14p) per hour. The next 10 weeks were spent at Hicks Gate setting out the roundabout and dual carriageway to Euden Nursery. There was so much to learn so I just talked to everyone I could. A conversation with the surveyor brought up my ambition to be a plant mechanic.

"Well", he said, *"Ask Eric Smith the Plant Foreman if he requires anyone as they are always busy".* A short conversation ensued and a transfer to the plant workshop followed. All the plant was owned by the contractor with nothing being hired so what was available had to be repaired on site or the job would have to wait. This led to plenty of overtime and a full shift on Saturdays.

Repairs were carried out in a large Nissen hut type workshop at the western end of Station Road cutting. It was well equipped for the day's work but guarded by a mad dog which, although it had badly bitten several people, it was one of my tasks to take for a walk. Fortunately you were fairly safe if you wore him out by throwing stones which he loved to retrieve. The fitters were Tony Hart, Barry Parker Dennis Moss and welder Norman Curl who also repaired most of the small plant. I helped Norman fetching, carrying whilst being blamed for everyone else's shortcomings.

A big event was the arrival of the Ruston Bucyrus 54RB to be rigged as a face shovel to finish the bottoms of the cutting which had been found to be too hard for the Scrapers. It took two weeks to assemble having been delivered at Hick's Gate by Wynn's Haulage on a massive trailer with two extra tractors to push it up Brislington Hill. The "54" filled the Foden and Scammel Dumptrucks 4 or 5 buckets a load in a short time. The Scammel Trucks were the hardest to keep running as they were often out of action with gearbox or clutch problems. It was impossible to change the starter motor so they had to be pushed every morning. The operators of the big plant and the cranes did their own regular maintenance for which they were paid an extra 10 hours as there were plenty of grease nipples to attend to, clutches to adjust and oils to top up.

Much of the plant was fairly old, some of the machines were even pre-war and most had to be started by hand. The old D7 and D8 caterpillar tractors which towed the compaction rollers had petrol donkey engines which were started in this way and which, when revved up and pinion engaged, started the main diesel engine. Larger cranes also had a petrol engine pumping an air tank to 300psi which was let into the diesel engine. If it did not start, a wait of another15mins was necessary before trying again. Most plant was built in UK; excavators and cranes by Ruston Bucyrus - 19RB, 22RB, 38RB, 54RB, Stothert and Pitt batching plant, truck mixers and 72T rollers. Ford Thames 15cwt Vans, Thames Trader Tipper Trucks, Muir Hill 10B Dumpers, Holman Compressors and the two most useful machines ever built the JCB3 and the BDT6 Drott, with a four-in-one bucket.

Station Road Cutting with a Ruston Bucyrus 54RB Face Shovel loading a Scammel Dump truck. Garth Reed operated the 54RB

Above, Station Road cutting and below, the construction heading towards Saltford.

Every contract had a Drott, but only JCB is still in business today.

In July 1966 the contract was completed. Fortunately I was kept on and in March 1967 A E Farr were awarded the section of M5 motorway from Cribbs Causeway to Avonmouth. I stayed with them for many years specialising in tunnelling machines from 1969. Fantastic money was to be earned before the health and safety zealots took a hold with five men trying to stop every man working. There is no chance of buying a new BMW with six week's pay by tunnelling these days!

The firm of A E Farr was taken over by Bovis and was out of business within 12 years. With another employer now awaiting the start of the earthworks and tunnels for a power station in Somerset, this will be my last job before retiring.

22nd January 2013

LOOKING BACK, SOME THOUGHTS ON 'OLD KEYNSHAM.

By Cyril Wiltshire

Now I'm approaching my 81st birthday here are some of my recollections of growing up in Keynsham in the 30's, 40's and 50's. Latterly I lived in a house called 'The Homestead' on the Wellsway for a number of years and my three daughters grew up there till they left home and started families of their own.

In a previous article in the journal, the wartime R.A.S.C. camp at Rockhill House was mentioned but opposite the Homestead at the corner of Courtenay Rd was another army unit of the R.E.M E. It was a rag-tag sort of a camp - mainly Nissen huts. The Americans also had a depot in Keynsham. This was in Pixash lane and some of the big sheds are still in use today as part of the industrial estate. It was called a 'Buffer Depot' whatever that was, but that didn't stop us kids going along there and pestering the G.I.s for chewing gum and sweets etc. Our cries of "Got any gum chum" often brought a shower of 'Goodies' thrown by the soldiers over the gates. Several German P.O.W's were also kept there and we kids were surprised to learn that they were just like us and not the ogres portrayed in the press at the time. They wore navy blue uniforms with a yellow square on the back of the blouse and another patch on trouser leg below the calf. I think they were used to keep the place clean and tidy.

A wartime institution, the Food Office was situated in Wellsway behind the last one of those stone built villas on the right, almost opposite the New Inn. It was a wooden structure that housed the ministry staff responsible for dealing with ration books and handing out orange juice and cod-liver oil to mothers with

young children. I never knew what happened to it and it could be still there.

Another wooden hut was at the bottom of Bath Hill adjoining the Drill Hall and was something to do with the W.I. It was turned into a 'British Restaurant' where, for a couple of shillings, you could buy a hot meal and a sweet course in spite of food being rationed. I often ate there when attending the junior school further up on Bath Hill. The building was dismantled at about the end of the war and was re-built in Rock Road beside the Scouts Lane footpath. Opposite this hut, when it was in Bath Hill, where the park gates now stand were some tumble down cottages, one which was used by one of the Ollis's as a bake house and there was an oven fired by coal or wood. A small loaf cost a penny three farthings and my pals and I used to call in there and buy a loaf straight from the oven, tuck it into our shirt and eat it on the way home. It was delicious even without butter or jam.

Also at the bottom of Bath Hill was a mill called the Red Mill because it produced a red powder. The water wheel that powered the mill was preserved and is on view in the Park near the weir. But as it is 20 years or more since I was last there it may no longer be on view. At the bottom of Dapps Hill, beyond the cottages was another mill powered by a wheel and, known as the 'Logwood Mill', it made dye stuffs from huge logs. The wheel powered machinery pulverised these logs into chips to be used in the dye making process. Alas the wheel has fallen apart and is now derelict and the mill building used for other purposes. Also at the bottom of the hill was a small gas holder used to store town gas.

Where the Chandag Filling Station at the bottom of Chandag Road is now, was the garden of 'Ivy Lodge Hotel' where I also lived for a few years before it was sold to Esso for

redevelopment. On the corner of Chandag Road and Bath Road, adjoining the hotel garden, was a small engineering works called ‘Barton Motors’. This building originally was the coach house of the hotel before it was sold off to become the engineering workshop.

My parents kept the New Inn on Bath Hill for some 40 odd years and it’s where I spent my childhood, pre-war and during the war. I remember that then petrol was in short supply and the buses used to have gas generators which they towed behind on a two wheeled trailer. It looked like a metal dustbin on wheels with a funnel and a firebox which had to be stoked with coal every few miles to keep it going - great fun! The beer for the pub was delivered from Georges Brewery near Bristol Bridge by a cart pulled by two shire horses and sometimes by a ‘Sentinel’ steam lorry. Adjoining the pub in the yard was a blacksmith’s shop. The blacksmith was called ‘Bob Trott’ and his predecessor was named ‘Gallup’. Very apt names for the job you will agree!!

Whilst on the subject of names etc. next door to the pub was a small shop run by the Misses Vales. I never knew exactly what they sold but I used to go there for paraffin and to spend my ‘Saturday Penny’ on Five Boys Chocolate. The shop became the surgery of Dr Vera Dowling before she retired and it was taken over by Dr Bailey. Incidentally the letters ‘Fry's Cocoa’ remained stuck to the window for many years. Dr Bailey's son is the comedian Bill Bailey but although I lived next door for many years I never met him.

The New Inn, Bath Hill.

The Homestead was one of the premier properties in the area and now still stands incorporated in the modern scheme called Homestead Gardens. To my mind it was an act of vandalism to build houses there but that is the way of the world. It's a pity it cannot be seen as it once was as it was self-sufficient having its own well and sewage disposal together with stables, pig sties, cow sheds and a big kitchen garden. Alas no more.

4th November 2012

The Homestead above before the development and below with the new road and the houses leading onto the Wellsway.

MRS. BLANCHE WILKS, AMBULANCE DRIVER.

By Bunty Dunford

Mrs. Blanche Wilkes, the wife of the late Ted Wilkes, passed away peacefully in her sleep at St Philip & St James Residential Home on 28th August 2012. She was 96 years old but when she was a young woman in Bristol her brother taught her to drive a car. It wasn't very common for girls to drive in those days and the roads were far less crowded. She passed her test at the first attempt to the chagrin of the young men she worked with in a solicitor's office in Broad Street, Bristol. Little did she realise how useful her driving would become in the war.

Blanche and her husband Ted lived in creative retirement in Gainsborough Road, Keynsham. They enjoyed music, Blanche played piano and Ted was *"fiddling all my life",* but their wartime spent in Bristol was very eventful. Ted was a Special Constable and Blanche an ambulance driver and she told her story in her own words.

"At the time of the 'Munich crisis' in 1938 we were being urged to make preparation for war and, at the ripe old age of 22, I volunteered as an ARP Ambulance Driver. Then there followed a series of preparations, first aid lectures, gas instruction, etc. and although I had passed my driving test a few years before (driving tests were abandoned for the duration) I had to take four lessons on goods vehicles under the instruction of a Bus Driving Instructor.

I well remember my four goods vehicles, a Wills Tobacco van, a Willways Laundry van, a Co-op Furniture van and last but not least a Bristol Corporation refuse lorry The latter had been hosed down inside and out after its day's rubbish collecting but, as

we were in the middle of an August heat wave, the smell persisted and lingered with me for days afterwards.

On that fateful Sunday morning of 3rd September 1939, my parents having gone to chapel at Westbury-on-Trym, I stayed behind to hear Mr Chamberlain's announcement. As soon as he announced that we were at war with Germany, I cycled along Canford Lane to the chapel, where the minister gave my message to the congregation, and then I cycled on to Shirehampton to my Reporting Base. So within half an hour of the declaration of war I was ‘on call’

The winter of 1939 was a period of waiting for something to happen, but when the Bristol blitzes started in 1940 we felt we were at last useful, and saw plenty of action. We had been regrouped, and I was by now at the Clifton ARP Ambulance depot, just off Black Boy Hill. As time went by our fleet of ambulance cars, some commandeered, some donated, became more efficiently equipped and they had all been painted a silver grey.

Each ambulance had a driver and one medical attendant. We were not highly trained nurses, and our job was to convey the injured, as carefully as possible under air raid conditions, from bombsite to hospital.

Most Bristol people remember the "Good Friday Blitz" in April 1941, and we were kept at full stretch that night. I was sent to Park Row to take some casualties from a building next to the Prince's Theatre, opposite the Coliseum.

We had come down Whiteladies Road and Queens' Road but were halted by the University and told we could not enter Park Row as the Coliseum was on fire. Park Street was also ablaze and

while we were deciding what to do, the whole of the facade of the Coliseum crashed onto the road. If we hadn't been halted we would have been underneath all that falling masonry and burning timber.

We picked our way down Park Street, trying to avoid manholes, hosepipes and broken glass, across the Centre, up Colston Street and so up to Park Row. We took our casualties down to the Infirmary (the small old building in those days) but they were so inundated in their Casualty Department that they couldn't take us in, and we were sent all the way out to Southmead Hospital.

One of our casualties was pronounced dead there; a doctor came out to the vehicle to see the patient, wrote out a death certificate and we drove back with the body to the Bristol City Mortuary, at 2 o'clock in the morning.

The Blitz on Bristol 1940

We had our quiet times at the Ambulance Depot however, and had to keep up our lectures and inter-depot contests. A few of us formed a concert party for light relief At that time there was a programme on the wireless called "Action Stations" and our depot was invited to the BBC Studios, just down the road from us, to a recording session for transmission later. I remember seeing the ITMA people in one of the corridors, and Jack Train came over to us and showed us the way through the scaffolding and passages to the recording studio.

I made many friends at the Ambulance depot, and a group of them formed a guard of honour of splints at our wedding at Henbury Church in September 1941".

Mrs Wilkes was a very modest person and played down her wartime role but she had to admit that the two young women who acted as ambulance crew in those days sometimes had horrendous duties. In one case a patient deranged with pain had to be strapped down to keep him still. "We had the confidence of youth", she said, "and we coped" But this was in addition to a full-time job where the young men had been called up and women had to cope with exacting legal work in their absence.

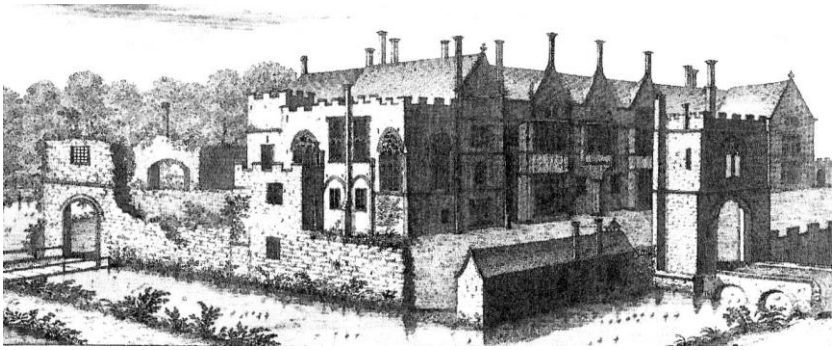
Later, her husband Ted retired from his job as a Probation Officer and they lived in Keynsham for a number of years.

OUT AND ABOUT WITH CELIA FIENNES,

A 17th CENTURY TRAVEL WRITER.

By Sue Trude

We are quite used to hearing about Sir Ranulph Fiennes' adventures but rarely do we hear about a 17th century member of the same family. Celia Fiennes did not travel the world to find excitement and new challenges but nevertheless her journeys were unique for that time - over 300 years ago. Especially for a young woman in her twenties travelling around England on horseback, accompanied by just two servants and sometimes a dog. There is a suggestion that the nursery rhyme 'Ride a Cock Horse' - should say 'Ride a Cock horse to Banbury Cross, Celia Fiennes upon a white horse.'

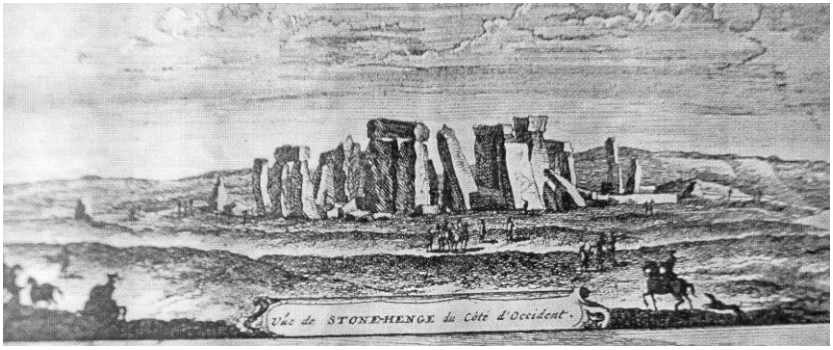


Broughton Castle

Celia Fiennes came from a family of Roundhead soldiers who fought in the Civil War. Her Grandfather was Lord Saye of Sele whose home was Broughton Castle near Oxford, her father was Colonel Nathaniel Fiennes whose home was the Manor House in Newton Toney near Salisbury. In 1682 Celia began

visiting places close to home but after her mother died she branched out and eventually visited every county in England. The following quotes are her descriptions and thoughts about places nearer home.

Stonehenge is just 2 miles from Newton Toney and *"is reckon 'done of the wonders of England how such prodigious stones should be brought there, no such sort is seen in the country nearer than twenty mile; they are placed on the side of a hill in a rude irregulare form, two stones stand up and one laid on their tops with mortices into each other,... but some are fallen down so spoyle the order or breach in the temple,... some think it was built in the heathen times; others think it the trophy of some victory won by Ambrosious, and hence the town by it has its name Amesbury".* Of the stones Celia wonders how they *"were brought thither or whether they are a made stone... they are very hard yet I have seen some of them scraped... to increase the wonder the story is that none can count them twice alike, they stand confused, but I have told them often and bring their number to 91"* (Evelyn made it 95, Lieutenant Hammond 90, Defoe 72).



Stonehenge from an old print

Again leaving Newton Toney Celia went to Salisbury which she refers to as Sarum but mentions Old Sarum where *"only the ruines of the castle is to be seen like a high wall with fortifications"* Many of the buildings in the *"new town"* she found interesting, the Market House with the Town Hall above and also a covered Market Cross for *"the constant market forfruite, fowle, butter, cheese and fish."* Next she visited the church, Celia obviously had a very enquiring mind and to satisfy her curiosity went in search of a guide to enlighten her. *"The Dean has a very good house and gardens so is the Bishop's house at the end of a row of trees, these houses are round the Cathedralle, the finest in England, it lyes low in a watry meadow so that the foundations is in the water made of faggots and timber, yet notwithstanding its want of riseing ground to stand on the steeple is seen many miles off the spire being so high it appears to us below as sharpe as a Dagger yet is in the compass on the top as big as a carte wheele."* The inside of the church is described in some detail especially *"the top of the Quoire is exactly painted and it lookes as fresh as if but new though of three hundred years standing"* (the pictures were washed out in 1789). One monument also took her fancy *"the Effigee in stone off a doctor that starved himself to death attempting to imitate our saviour to fast 40 dayes, but at 17 dayes end he became sensible of his evil and would have retrieved his life by eateing againe, but then by the just judgement of god could not swallow anything down his throate."*

When visiting Wilton House it is interesting to note that, when Celia viewed it, the south frontage was only some thirty years old. In fact many of the houses that she visited on her travels were comparatively new as were the gardens which were

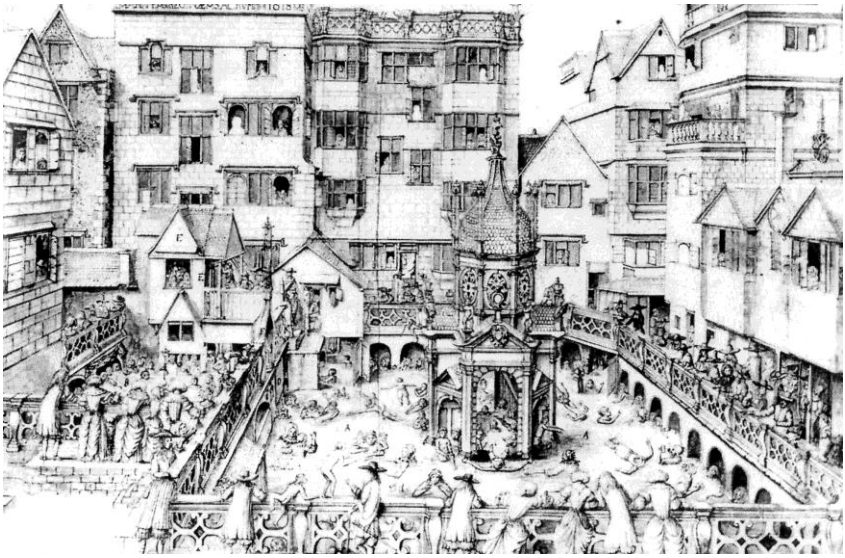
still in their infancy. The gardens at Wilton, as described by Celia, are not the gardens to be seen today as in each century they have had a makeover. Perhaps each new heir to the estate wanted to leave his mark. The feature I would have loved to have seen in the 17th century garden was the grotto. It was divided into rooms each with different features to lure the visitor in *"once in the room a series of pipes spouted forth water to wett the strangers."* In another room the water ran over the rocks, *"you see and hear it, and it is so contrived in one room that it makes the melody of Nightingerlls and all sorts of other birds which engaged the curiosity of the strangers to go in to see but at the entrance to each room, is a line of pipes that appear not till by a sluice moved it washes the spectators, designed for diversion."* Over the River Nadder there was just a wooden bridge, not the Palladian Bridge that we see in the gardens today. That was not built till some 30/40 years after Celia's visit.

On a trip to Wells and Glastonbury she stopped at Babington (Badminton), *"the Duke of Beaufforts House,stands on an advanc'd ground with rows of trees on all sides…and you may stand on the leads* (the roof) *and look 12 ways down to the parishes and grounds beyond all thro' glides or visto of trees"* Again this property was relatively new, built around 1628. Celia often stopped to view these stately homes much in the way Elizabeth Bennett and her Uncle and Aunt did when passing Pemberly.

And so to Bath to experience a visit to the King's Bath. *"Ladyes go into the bath with garments made of a fine yellow canvas, which is stiff and made large with great sleeves like a parsons gown , the water fills it up so that it is borne off that your shape is not seen, it does not cling close as other linings which looks sadly on the poorer sort that go in their own*

linings, the gentlemen have drawers and wastcoates of the same sort of canvas.

Once you come out of the water there is a guide to help remove your wet clothes and wrap you in a nightgown and flannel cloth and put on your slippers and help you into the sedan chair The sedan chair men carry you back to your lodgings and up to your bedroom where you go to your bed and laye in your sweate sometime as you please, your own maides and the maides of the house gets your fire and waites on you till you rise to get out of your sweat."



The King's Bath at the time of Celia's visit. C.1679

The mineral water comes out of the ground at a temperature of 46º Celsius. At the time of Celia's visit there were no health and safety issues as there are today when the water in the New Spa has to be cooled to 33º Celsius. No

wonder they had to lie down and sweat it out in the 18th century.

Her next stop on this journey was Bristol, via Lansdown and Kingswood, where she saw *"a great many horses passing and returning loaden with coals dug just there about; they give 12 pence a horse load which carryes two bushels, it makes very good fires."*

Arriving in Bristol Celia looks at the *"Cathedralle which has nothing fine or curious in it…There is one church* (St. Mary Redcliffe?) *which is an entire worke all of stone,…the leads are very high and large and neate kept, the tower 150 steps up, on which the whole city is discover'd there you see the Colledge Green in which stands the Cathedrall and the Doctors houses which are not very fine built of stone; there are 8 bells in this church, there is 2 men goes to the ringing of the biggest bell."* Celia then visited the docks and *"saw the harbour was full of shipps carrying coales and all sorts of commodityes to other parts…it is a very great tradeing citty, and is esteemed the largest next London;…the bridge over the Aven is built over with houses just as London Bridge is, but not so bigg or long. "* (It was an exact copy of the London Bridge and had been built in 1274. It was taken down in 1761). Celia considered the suburbs to have the better houses and more spacious streets and in another part of town she describes a *"noble almshouse"* financed by Mr Coleson (Edward Colston). Continuing her journey she passes Hotwells, Ashton Court and two other large houses built of stone on her way to Oakey Hole (Wookey Hole) which she decides to explore. There is no mention of a guide but she obviously had one and was guided round by the light of a candle going *into "a large cavity underground full of great rocks and stones,…there is a lofty space they call the Hall and*

another the Parlour and another the Kitchen, the entrance of each one out of another is with great stooping under rocks that hang down almost to touch the ground…the water congeales here into stone and does as it were bud or grow one stone out of another so it makes the rocks grow and meete each other in some places. They fancy many Resemblances in the rocks, as in one place an organ and in another 2 little babys, another the Porters head, they phancy one of the rocks resembles a woman with a great belly which the country folk call the Witch,…the rocks shine like diamonds or white alabaster and glisters like mettle and at the end you come to a water called the Well, its of a greate depth— it is very cold as ice almost when 1 put my hand in the cistern."

From Wookey Celia travelled to Wells which she *"reckoned must be halfe a citty, this and the Bath making up one Bishops See. The Cathedral has the greatest curiosity for carv 'dwork in stone, the West Front is full of all sorts of figures almost all round the church…The Bishops Pallace is in a park moated round, nothing worth notice in it."* It is obvious she did not spend long in Wells before continuing to *"Glassenbury, a pretty level way till just you come to the town; then I ascended a stony hill and went just by a tower which is on a green round riseing ground, there is only a little tower remaines like a Beacon; it had bells formerly in it, and some superstition observ'd there but now is broken down on one side; from this I descended a very steep stony way into the town."*

In Glastonbury Celia looked at the Abbey ruins and from her description these were very similar to the way they are today Of the vaults she *says "if you cast a stone into the place it gives a great echo, and the country people sayes it's the Devil set there on a tun of money, which makes that noise least they*

should take it from him." She also mentions the Kitchen as the only remaining complete piece of the Abbey. Celia then went to look at the Holy Thorn. *"growing on a chimney; this the superstitious covet much and have gott some of it for their gardens and soe have almost spoiled it."* So even 300 years ago the tree was having problems surviving. From there she returned to Newton Toney

At the time travel was hazardous business. Roads were unsurfaced tracks so dangerously slippery in wet weather and rock hard and rutted in dry weather. Her horses needed to be reshod frequently although she did praise one farrier who made such a good job that she was able to travel many more miles before having to find another blacksmith. There were no sign posts until 1697, no maps as such except for a road map printed by John Ogilby in 1675 for His Majesty Charles 2nd, so local knowledge was essential. Enquiring the way of a local would often take her across country towards some land mark, a church spire perhaps or a clump of trees atop a hill. There was also the added danger of highwaymen. Celia only mentions one rather dubious encounter when *"2 fellows all on a suddain from the wood fell into the road, they look 'd truss 'd up with great coates and as it were bundles about them which I believe was pistolls but thy dogg'dme one before the other behind,— but the Providence of God so order 'd it as there was men at work in the fields hay making, so they at last called each other off and soe left."* Despite saying she embarked on these journeys for health reasons I cannot believe there was much wrong with her, when she was able to climb on to the roofs of houses, up church towers and crawl through caves. I found her a very interesting young lady and a very determined one, but strangely Celia never mentioned the servants who accompanied her but I suppose I

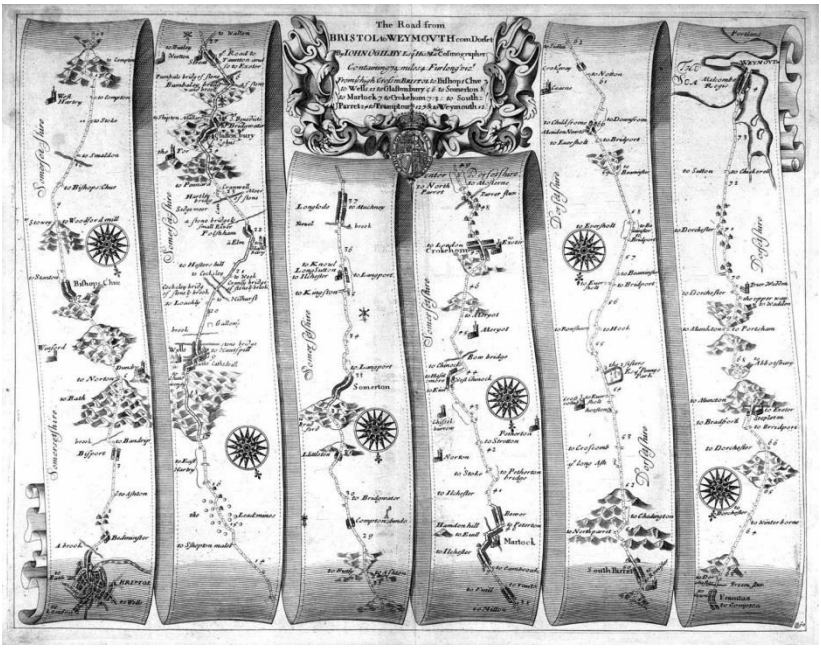
should not have been surprised she had very little in the way of feelings for those beneath her. Of the poor she says that it is all down to their laziness.

On completion of her travels Celia says she thinks ladies and gentlemen should learn more about their native land, the people around them, the buildings and the manufacturing etc. which would be a *"sovereign remedy to cure these epidemic diseases of the vapours, or should I say laziness? also these endeavours would perhaps spare them the uneasy thoughts of how to pass away tedious days and time would not be a burden when not at cards, dice or discussing fashions"* She then goes on to talk about those *"gentlemen in parliament serving their country should know and inform themselves about their land, their trades, their manufacturing but to their shame must be owned many if not most are ignorant of anything but the name of the place they serve in Parliament so how can they promote their good or redress their grievances"*

Acknowledgements –

"The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes c.1682-c. 1712" Edited by Christopher Morris.

"Through England on a Side-Saddle" Celia Fiennes. - Google.



The road from Bristol to Weymouth. John Olgilby's map of 1675

"A MYSTERY AT KEYNSHAM"

By Brian Vowles

This was the headline carried by the Bristol Mercury on Tuesday, 8th December 1891 and it went on to report that… *"Great excitement was caused in Keynsham on Sunday by the circulation of a report of the mysterious disappearance of a young woman late on Saturday night, and the fact that a man was in custody in connection with the affair confirmed the rumours".*

Throughout the next three months details of the case, the investigations, the inquest and subsequent trial with hints of jealousy, drunkenness and murder, were seized upon by newspapers throughout the land and put Keynsham in the spotlight for the next few months.

The victim was a 24 year-old domestic servant called Sarah Bateman. Her mother had been born Sarah Maggs and who, in 1864, had married a William Bateman in Bristol. Two years later their daughter Sarah Amelia arrived but in 1869 William died aged only 28 and by 1881 his widow had moved to Keynsham to live with her elderly parents. In 1890 she married a 48 year-old widower, farm worker Robert Honeyben and the couple were to live together in a cottage at Chewton.

Young Sarah Amelia (sometimes referred to as 'Minnie'), like many young women of the age, found work at first as a domestic servant in Clifton and then travelled to London (probably with the help of her relations) to continue in that occupation. However by April 1891 she had returned to Temple Street in Keynsham to nurse her grandfather Charles

Maggs who had fallen ill. Next door lodging with his brother-in-law was a 29 year-old labourer with the distinctive name of Wyndham Frankham. Later details indicated that the couple seem to have been "an item" for about seven years and he had the understanding that they were to be married soon. In October Charles Maggs died and his relatives arrived from London for the funeral. On 19th October Sarah Amelia's aunt, Mrs Etheldreda Maggs, was sitting in the house with her when Frankham, who had been forbidden by her uncles to enter the property, came in and sat down. Mrs Maggs inquired *"Are you young people going to get married or what are you going to do?"* He retorted *"If I don't marry Minnie (Sarah) it will be her fault!"* Sarah replied with the stinging words *"I want to marry a man who will keep me – not a man who spends all his money in drink".* At this Frankham exploded and referring to Sarah's Uncle Sam, swore *"It's him who has done this. I will have my revenge!"* When Mrs Maggs replied that the uncle didn't live there so could not be revenged, Frankham shook his fist and retorted *"Never mind that, I shall be revenged".*

Following the funeral Sarah went to stay with her mother and stepfather in the cottage in Chewton where she packed her suitcases in preparation for a return to London. For some reason there was a delay and her departure was then rescheduled for the day after Christmas. At some point, Mrs Honeyben later recounted, Sarah said that when Frankham heard that she was going back to London he had threatened her with the menacing words *"I would rather see you drowned than you should take that step"* although this was later dismissed as hearsay.

At six o'clock on Saturday evening 5th December 1891, Sarah, her stepsister Edith and her mother walked into Keynsham to do some shopping and at Barnes Grocers Shop

they bought 14lbs of barley meal which was packaged into two parcels. At about eight o'clock outside the Lamb and Lark Hotel they bumped into Frankham who seemed quite inebriated and annoyed that they hadn't met him any earlier but about an hour later when their shopping was completed he suggested that they go with him to the Talbot Inn to share a glass on their way home. But once there Frankham took himself into the tap room to sulk and when Ernest James, Sarah's stepsister's fiancée entered, he found the women all by themselves in the long room. He then went into the taproom to persuade Frankham to snap out of his mood and join them, which he did reluctantly. When James offered him a glass of beer he rejected it but after pouring out a glass himself he thrust it in Sarah's direction saying *"Give this to your fancy man"* - meaning James. Matters did not improve when after Frankham had taken a small white chrysanthemum from a vase to place in his buttonhole, Sarah took three herself and, presenting one to James, tucked the other two down her bosom. The couple continued to quarrel and between half past nine and ten when her mother and stepsister decided to make their way home, Sarah pleaded with them to stay. They were adamant about going but just as they were leaving they heard Frankham order more beer. Sarah then aggravated the situation by going to sit with James. He, seeing the way things were going, left and caught up with the two women whom he escorted back to their cottage in Chewton. There they went to bed at about half past ten leaving a light burning downstairs as often before Sarah had stayed out late with Frankham who used to bring her home.

Between one and two o'clock there was a sudden loud rapping on the door. When Sarah's stepfather opened it there stood a police officer and Frankham's brother-in-law Thomas

Godfrey who broke the shocking news that Sarah had been drowned in the mill race on the River Chew.

It appeared that after her mother's departure the couple continued to bicker before leaving the Talbot at about ten to eleven. They walked along the Wellsway where a man named Robbins was hiding behind a wall because he had previously lost a number of cabbages from his allotment and was anticipating similar when the pubs turned out.

As they passed he heard them wrangling with the man shouting *"I'll cord your box for you, you ***"* and the girl pleading *"Winnie, don't say that".*

The doorway into the plantation

The couple walked on down the hill towards Chewton but just after the little bridge over the mill race they entered a small plantation through a small door which still remains there today and there Frankham later admitted he had intercourse with her.

What happened next formed the crux of the case. Frankham's story was that as Sarah Amelia turned to leave the wooded patch she fell into the mill race. He claimed that he then ran out to the little bridge to try to save her but all in vain and the cut on his forehead he suffered was from the railings on the bridge.

The bridge where Frankham claimed he tried to save the young lady

As she struggled in the water he claimed she cried out *"I am gone, I am gone".* Then, instead of rushing to the gatehouse of Chewton Place or the cottages a few yards away for help or even to the police station, he walked the mile back to his lodgings two doors away from the Ship Inn on Temple Street (via the Wellsway and Rookhill Farm) where he woke up his brother-in-law Thomas Godfrey with the words *"Tom, come and help me pull Minnie out of the water!"* Leaving Frankham at the house, Godfrey ran to the police station and he and a P.S.Pratt hurried to Sarah's house at Chewton.

Finding that she had not come home they returned to Temple Street where Frankham was sitting smoking a pipe with a beer in front of him. The sergeant asked him *"What's the matter then?"* To which he replied *"There is nothing the matter"* but when pressed he blurted out *"Oh, it's all right; I'll tell you about it. Me and my young woman, Minnie Bateman, had been at the Talbot and had something to drink. We left there about five minutes to eleven together, and on the way to her home she missed her footing and fell into the river. I will come and show you".*

He and the sergeant returned to the shrubbery where Sarah had met with her death but, dissatisfied with his explanations of events, the police detained him on suspicion of her murder and he was sent to Horfield Gaol.

At first light on Sunday morning P.S.Pratt, P.C.Bale and a large group of men searched the river in the vicinity but it was not until the following morning that George Williams (my great grandmother's brother and his brother-in-law George Rayson) hooked the body with a grappling iron from a small boat in the middle of the stream under the bridge. Sarah's body was then taken back to her parents' cottage where Dr Harrison and his assistant examined the body for four hours and, apart from confirming the death was due to drowning, the only other injury they found was a small wound at the back of the head that might have been caused by a brick or a stick.

The inquest opened the next day at the Lamb and Lark Hotel and some evidence was produced but, because Frankham was in custody and unable to refute some of the details, the case was adjourned for a week on a point of law. When the inquest reconvened on 23rd December further evidence was submitted

concerning the condition of the terrain within the plantation and that a tree stump was close to where Sarah was alleged to have fallen into the water. There was little sign that the couple had been there but the ground had been thoroughly trampled during the search. Again the inquest was adjourned until the following Tuesday, 29th December when after a three quarters of an hour's deliberation the foreman of the jury Mr. Robert Thomas, the proprietor of the Albert Logwood Mills, returned a verdict of *"Wilful murder"* against Frankham.

A special session of the magistrates' court was held on the following day, 30th December with a Mr Clifton prosecuting for the Treasury and Mr Wansborough acting for the defence. After hearing evidence for seven hours the court adjourned until the next day. In his lengthy summing up Mr Wansborough completely ridiculed the accusations. He commenced by arguing that although the Honeybens had stated that the accused and the deceased had been niggling all night, the girl was the dearest thing to the prisoner in the world and any playful act that was perpetrated by her that evening was done with no desire to anger him. The girl had been instigated to go to London much against her will by her uncle. Although the deceased placed a flower in the buttonhole of James there was no animosity in the heart of the accused against him as he was engaged to the deceased step-sister.

He then poured scorn on the evidence of the allotment holder Robbins which he stated was a lie from beginning to end. It was to inflate his self-importance that he had spoken to the police about *"his cabbages – his miserable wretched cabbages. The police had asked him whether he had heard anything and then it had entered into his wicked mind to say what he had.*

The man's statement was untrue and he had come there to perjure himself".

What Robbins felt about this piece of character defamation is not recorded.

Mr. Wansborough continued that…

"He had no wish to dwell on what occurred at the plantation. The two did not go into the plantation for a virtuous purpose, but let it be to the man's credit that in the first place, until he was informed that he must tell everything, he was anxious to hide the fact from the police. When they went to go out, instead of looking towards the gateway, unfortunately they looked towards the gap in the laurels by the edge of the water and then this poor girl walked forward, tripped over the stump of a laurel and fell into the water. The deceased at the time was holding in one hand the parcel of meal (purchased earlier and weighing seven pounds) and in the other her umbrella and that being so, they could imagine that she could not catch hold of any of the overhanging branches".

When the taking of evidence was completed and in spite of Mr Wansborough's disparaging comments, the magistrates were still satisfied that there was a case to answer and committed the accused for trial at the next assizes on a charge of wilful murder.

When the charge was read over Frankham said *"I am innocent of the offence and I leave my defence in the hands of my solicitor".*

The Somerset Assizes were held at Taunton and the trial commenced on Monday 14th March 1893. Although what

initially had appeared to be an open and shut case based on a number of factors; the inebriation of the accused, the jealousy displayed, his frustration that the victim would not marry him but intended to return to London and his subsequent behaviour; the unlikelihood of the victim heading for the river instead of the little doorway and her cry as she drowned of *"I am gone"*, proceedings took a surprising turn.

The prisoner's counsel contended that he had no case to answer as he picked away at the testimony of witnesses and finally the Judge asked the jury whether they thought there was anything to show that the prisoner's story was not substantially true. Whereupon, the jury promptly replied with the opinion that the evidence was not strong enough for a conviction. Arriving at this decision was even more vital then than now, as there could be little room for doubt when, at that time, the penalty was death by hanging and the evidence was circumstantial, (although modern forensics might have provided more proof).

The case collapsed and a verdict of *"not guilty"* was recorded. At this some applause broke out in the gallery but Frankham appeared as cool and collected as he had been throughout.

Following his acquittal, understandably, Frankham left Keynsham and went to work as a labourer at Crews Hole in Bristol where he married Elizabeth Pugh in the spring of 1896. Soon afterwards Joseph, the first of their four children was born and he was later to emigrate to Canada in 1920.

By 1911 Wyndham Frankham was employed as a fireman (stoker) at a tar distillery in Bristol and he died in 1930 aged 67 having so narrowly missed the death penalty thirty eight

years previously, a very lucky man as the verdict could so easily have gone the other way.

In 1901 the Honeybens were still living in the cottage at Chewton with Robert toiling as a farm labourer on nearby Conygre Farm but his wife Sarah died in 1908. Robert survived until 1914 when he too passed on aged 73.

May 2013

BARBARA LOWE 1927 - 2012

Barbara passed away on 28th August 2012, aged 85. It's only possible to give a brief summary of Barbara's achievements here. She had a very wide range of interests and hobbies, which were always tackled in an energetic and professional way. Although Barbara was not a member of the society when it was initially formed in April 1965 (she was heavily involved in the excavation of the Keynsham Abbey ruins at the time) she did join soon afterwards. She made an immense contribution to its work taking on, amongst other roles, that of photographic archivist and president. She is well remembered for the books and pamphlets on the Abbey that she wrote detailing her finds and which provided some income for the society.

She was a very approachable person, always keen to help, making many friends over the years. She was a devoted mother and wife, with a keen sense of family.

So where does the story start? Barbara was born in Handsworth. Birmingham, but was educated in and around Taunton, to where her father had moved with his job. A lively and academically gifted girl, she won a scholarship to Bishop Fox Grammar School, achieving excellent grades, with Distinctions in Maths. When she was only 13, her father, who had been gassed in World War I, died of TB. To make ends meet, her mother Lottie had to go out to work, leaving Barbara to look after her younger brother, Arthur, in the school holidays. Household costs had to be cut to a minimum, mother and daughter making the family's clothes and soft furnishings, as well as growing vegetables and keeping chickens. Seamstressing and gardening became lifelong passions.

In 1946, Barbara won a scholarship for Teacher Training at Bristol University, where she studied for a BSc in Maths and Physics. Whilst at Bristol she met Francis Lowe, an ex-Bomber Pilot and POW, who had come from Oxford to Bristol to help run the family Tinplate Printing business. They married and moved into lodgings in Fishponds in 1948; their sons Peter and Philip arriving in 1949 and 1952. It was 1955 before they were able to move to their own, brand new, house in Keynsham, where they spent the rest of their days.

Barbara had become great friends with her landlady's daughter, Mollie, so to keep in touch after the move, they joined a weekly adult educational class in archaeology. This class had a very active offshoot, The Folk House Archaeological Club, which in the summer months undertook training 'digs' wherever voluntary assistance was required.

In 1961, a by-pass scheme was announced for Keynsham, passing through the site of what had been, at one time, the largest Abbey in England. The Archaeological Club was called in to carry out a rescue dig, Barbara playing a leading role, both in picking up items of interest as the bulldozers uncovered them and in excavating the rest of the site in subsequent years. She also took on collation of the results, for publication in the Proceedings of Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society. She developed a particular interest in the thousands of fragments of heraldic floor tiles found. These came from numerous 16 piece sets of tiles, each set bearing the coat of arms of one of the many benefactors of the Abbey.

She had always been keen on jigsaw puzzles, but this was in a different league by far! She spent some 15 years matching up the fragments and writing the definitive work on the Abbey, its history, buildings, floor tiles and artefacts. In recognition of this,

she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, an accolade rarely given to amateur archaeologists.

In 1962, Barbara entered the world of work as a Laboratory Technician at a local Grammar School then, after the boys had left secondary schooling, she left to study for a B.Ed. which enabled her to become a Mathematics teacher. At home too, she was forever busy, not just with the Abbey, but also with painting water colours and making chair covers, curtains, cushions, bedding, tablecloths, clothes and even wooden furniture. All this of course, was in addition to her beloved embroidery, crochet, knitting and gardening.

And then there were all the Committees, books and lectures! Barbara had always vowed she would not join Committees, but over the years she did, some 15 of them, all associated with local history or archaeology. She also edited various periodicals, was author of 7 books and co-author of another 10 books and reports. For 17 years she was an adult education lecturer and for 40 years gave numerous talks on the Abbey and related topics. Even a mild stroke ten years ago did not slow her pace. With typical determination, she managed to eliminate its effects within a year and carry on much as before.

However, the sudden death of her only sibling, Arthur, in 2004 hit her hard. Her sadness was intensified by the equally sudden death of Arthur's elder son, Julian, just two years later. In 2008 she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and then in 2009, both her daughter-in-law Catherine, and her husband for 61 years, Frank, died.

Last year brought the final blow, the death of her younger son, Philip

Still determined not to be a burden to anyone, she refused to give up and was able to continue living on her own and tending her garden, despite increasing mobility problems caused by the chemo-therapy, until only a few weeks before her death.

The above notes are mainly taken from the eulogy given at her funeral service which was held on Wednesday 9th September at St John's Church, Keynsham.

A number of her books are still available through the society: -

Keynsham Cameo - a Brief History **(**2000)

Images of England – Keynsham (with Margaret Whitehead 2003)

Keynsham Abbey - a Cartulary **(**2006)

Glimpses of Life in Keynsham Abbey (2008)

Keynsham Memorial Park - A History of the Site (2008)

Barbara Lowe