AROUND KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD PAST AND PRESENT

The Journal of the
Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society
Series 2. No. 16. 2016

AROUND

KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD

PAST & PRESENT

Contents; -

Journal Edited & Produced by Brian Vowles.

Published by the Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society.

Cover illustration;

Clearing White's Mead in preparation for allotments in the 1920/30s. This is now the entrance to the Memorial Park opposite the War Memorial on Bath Hill.

Details of any of the Society's publications can be obtained from the society's website; www.keysalthist.org.uk

The Chairman's Notes

The year since the previous issue of this journal was published seems to have passed very quickly. It has been a successful one for the Society and we have played a full part in raising awareness of the area's history, which is one of our main aims. Keynsham is growing quickly at the moment; new housing is bringing new faces to our community and the opportunity to involve more people in recreational activities of all kinds. It is a pleasure to be able to welcome some of these newcomers to the ranks of our membership and I hope that in due course they may play an active part in the Society.

One activity that seems to be enjoying something of a resurgence is country walking and we are very fortunate that the countryside on our doorstep is so beautiful and very accessible. Whilst some walkers are content to savour the fresh air, exercise and scenery, others like to learn more about their surroundings whether it be the wildlife or the rich variety of history and archaeology hidden in the landscape. Our Society has a role to play in revealing the latter. It was about thirty years ago that some members of the Committee, led by the late Len Coggins, produced a set of leaflets so that walkers could follow one of several routes and learn something of the local history along the way. As one of our 50th anniversary projects, the current Committee decided to develop a series of equivalent leaflets, but with more detail and produced to modern standards. Like all such projects this has turned out to be a bigger task than we anticipated but these leaflets are now available and are a credit to those who have put a lot of effort into compiling them. We hope they will become well used, in both print and electronic form, by local walkers of all ages.

This volume of our Journal contains a wide variety of contributions, some of which feature places and events that you

may recall and others relating to earlier times. One article of note arises from the contact that our editor has established with our sister society in Keynsham's twin town of Libourne. I know that some of our members are active in the Twinning Association so, whilst possibly stretching the boundary of "local" history in the geographical sense, in terms of personal contact and knowledge it is a step forward to be able to add a strand of history to the links between our two communities.

Other headings in the list of contents remind us of several buildings and features of the town that have disappeared over the years as a result of the changing tastes and requirements of the community; it is important that we use this publication to make a good record of these for future generations. An interesting footnote is that the disappearance of the Keynsham Coffee Tavern was merely the start of a prolonged hiatus. Today our life-style and growing population support as many coffee shops as public houses! That is a good reminder that the local historian can never predict where the path of future development and interest will lead.

Richard Dyson

Chairman

A Keynsham Tragedy and Revolting Navvies

by Brian Vowles

We are appalled when we read of searing stories such as the fate of Baby P, the murder of Victoria Climbié and other recent high profile cases of neglect and cruelty to children and we tend to assume that these take place as a result of our modern life styles. So were things very different in the "Good Old Days"? But when we recall the exploitation of the infant chimney sweeps, child mill workers and young coal miners we are reminded that then life was even cheaper and our generation does not have a prerogative on such crimes. Although our awareness of the acts of cruelty and neglect towards children has increased and our sensitivity towards these issues has been heightened, we can still be appalled by some episodes from the past.

One such distressing tragedy occurred in Keynsham during the winter of 1837-8 when the death of a five year old girl, Jemima Davis, shocked its inhabitants. She lived with her mother and stepfather near the Rising Sun Beer House in a cottage in the area known as "Cheapside" at the top of Bath Hill (now the site of the "Market Way" development). She was the illegitimate child of a Rachel Yeates and a man called Davis and apparently following her birth Davis had placed her with another woman to nurse but then unfortunately he died eight months before the following events took place.

Two and a half years previously in Nailsea, her mother, Rachel Yeates had married a labourer called William Williams who, when he gained employment on the Great Western Railway being constructed between Bristol and Bath, moved to Keynsham to work on that stretch of the line. Whilst they were at Keynsham, Davis, Jemima's father, died and as the source of her maintenance dried up her foster mother returned the child to her grandmother, a Mrs Weaver, who then kept her for a

further three months. But no longer being able to afford to feed the child herself, she in turn packed her off to her stepfather Williams in Keynsham who, all the time, was led to believe that she was the child of his wife's sister rather than his wife's illegitimate offspring.

At that time she was a healthy active little girl but a few months later a fellow navigator (navvie) working on the railway let slip the true facts of her birth and Williams' attitude towards the girl suddenly changed dramatically. The treatment she received from both him and her mother quickly deteriorated and their neighbours noticed how very thin and weak she became. She was frequently heard to scream, cry out and seize every opportunity to beg bread and other food from them.

She had become more and more emaciated before her death and when that occurred the same neighbours, convinced that it was due to the cruelty to which she had been subjected, contacted the Keynsham Coroner who instigated an inquiry.

The inquest was held at the Lamb & Lark Inn and the jury when sworn in, proceeded to view the little child's corpse. They were shocked to find that it was indeed greatly emaciated with wounds to the head and marks on her body indicating that she had been beaten shortly before death.

A witness, Louisa Crane, who had lived in the same dwelling, stated that five weeks previously Williams had locked the poor little girl in a room at four o'clock on a Saturday and did not return until Sunday evening but even then did not open the door until the following day. During that time the girl cried bitterly but when the witness asked her twice why she was crying she was unable to answer. Although she was aware that the prisoners beat the child for begging bread, the mother had told her that she was a voracious eater and was never satisfied. The witness noticed that the child was wasting

away but when she pointed this out to the mother she replied that she was…

"in decline and Mr Edward's (surgeon) assistant said nothing could be done for her".

John Morley, a baker, who lived next door, said she often asked him for bread and water and, believing that she was deprived of food, always gave it to her. His assistant John Thomas recalled seeing the child standing at the back of her mother's premises in a heavy snowfall without any covering and heard the prisoner say that the child had committed some offence and she had turned her out to punish her. He noticed that her arm was bleeding at the time.

When Mr Edwards the surgeon gave his evidence following the post mortem he noted several wounds and bruises on the head and face but concluded that these were unlikely to have caused death. From the left foot two toes were missing as a result of frostbite and the lungs were diseased. The stomach contained three quarters of a pint of fluid but no solid food and his conclusion was that *"death was due to want of proper management and sufficient food"*. He had been called by the prisoners on the night before Jemima died but by then it was too late and he could do nothing to save her.

Not surprisingly it only took a quarter of an hour for the jury to return a verdict of wilful murder against the couple who were both present at the inquest. Although Rachel Williams appeared to be in good health, William was in the last stages of that scourge of the age, consumption (or tuberculosis).

When the unfortunate child was buried in St John the Baptist church yard it was as *"Jemima Yates alias Davis"* rather than Williams.

A few months later on 2 April 1838 the trial of *"W. Williams and R. Williams charged with killing and slaying*

Jemima Yates alias Davies" took place at the Crown Court. William Williams was duly sentenced to twelve months in prison but no mention was made of any punishment for Rachel – possibly because she was pregnant at the time.

Was this justice? As in so many of these cases why on earth did no one act to halt the suffering of this child before it was too late?

Sadly in Britain the first legal action to protect animals rather than children began with the passing of the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act 1822 followed by the 1835 Act which amended the existing legislation to include (as 'cattle') bulls, dogs, bears, goats and sheep so as to prohibit bear-baiting and cockfighting.

But it was not until 1889 that the first act of parliament for the prevention of cruelty to children - commonly known as the "children's charter" was passed which enabled the state to intervene for the first time in relations between parents and children. Police could now arrest anyone found ill-treating a child, and enter a home if a child was thought to be in danger. The act included guidelines on the employment of children and outlawed begging. But surprisingly, even today, there is still no statutory obligation to report alleged child abuse to the Police.

As there were several deaths of individuals named William Williams recorded in Keynsham in 1839/40 it is difficult to determine when he finally succumbed to tuberculosis.

<u>The Coming of the Railway</u>

Williams was one of those lawless bands of men who were known as 'Navigators' or 'Navvies' for short. With the advent of the railways and the railway mania that followed from the 1830s to the 1850s, thousands of miles of railway tracks were laid down across the country employing countless

numbers of these itinerant labourers in their construction; many driven to this way of life by hunger in those savage times.

Using only their muscle power and simple tools, spades, pick-axes and wheelbarrows, the work was very exhausting without the use of mechanical aids. Although they were rewarded with higher wages than other labourers it was a hard life that produced hard men.

They lived in temporary camps, tents, or lodged in nearby houses; some, as in the Williams case, even took their families with them. They had a reputation for drunkenness, immorality, fighting and crime and their presence often had a very disruptive effect on the areas upon which they descended like a plague.

The 1837 minute book of the Keynsham Baptist Church thundered …*"We cannot but wonder at the long suffering patience of God towards us. The state of society around us is inexpressibly deplorable. Satan seems to have established his seat among us. We have long been considered infamous for immorality, but since the commencement of the Great Western Railway wickedness has greatly increased. Drunkenness, swearing, Sabbath breaking and other vices which generally accompany these are presenting a most alarming aspect and many who used to pay some outward regard to religion have cast off all restraint and have become impudent in their crimes."*

The line from Hanham to Keynsham was a particularly difficult section to construct. A thirty foot high embankment was raised across the Hams and tunnels had to be burrowed through rock beds. It was during the excavation of one of these, No 3 or the Fox's Wood Tunnel (it was on the estate of the founder of the Brislington Lunatic Asylum, Edward Long Fox, now the Long Fox Manor apartments) that a series of disturbances erupted.

The Dorset County Chronicle (printed a month after the Williams Trial) was one of the newspapers that carried the story. On Thursday 3 May 1838 it reported…

<u>SERIOUS RIOT</u> – On Monday a great number of navigators working on the Great Western Railway, amounting upwards of 300, principally natives of the county of Gloucester, tumultuously assembled, and made an attack on workmen employed at Tunnel No3. Keynsham who are most of them from Devonshire and the lower part of Somerset. The ostensible motive for the attack was that the latter were working under price: to this was added a local or county feud as the rallying cry was "Gloucester against Devon". The result was a regular fight with ready dangerous weapons at hand, such as spades, pickaxes and crowbars & c. The contest was long and severe in which several were dangerously hurt with one man obliged to be taken to hospital but no-one was killed.- On Tuesday the same parties came down again and after more fighting succeeded in driving the Devon men from their labour and work was at a standstill - Wednesday the same insubordination continued. – During the conflict on Monday a portion of the combatants entered Bristol in battle array and were only parted by the police when several were taken into custody and brought before the magistrates on the following day; two men of the names of Thomas Cross and Fred. Biffen were committed for breaching the peace: some others not engaged in actual affray were discharged. As soon as the Magistrates were apprised of the riot they sent to Mr Bishop, the superintendent and in half an hour that active officer had mustered 150 policemen, well-armed, who were ready to attend any requests the County Magistrates might make compatible with the defence of the city to which of course the policemen belong. The County Magistrates have, we understand, applied to the commanding officer of the district and detachments of troops quartered at Bath, Frome and Warminster are held in

readiness to suppress all rioting, uphold the laws and to protect all those who are disposed to return peaceably to their work. A portion of the Dragoon Guards stationed in Bath proceeded to Bristol on Wednesday.

This response by the magistrates was understandable as it had only been seven years since the catastrophic Bristol Riots of 1831 in which 11 people were killed and 45 injured. Then the rioters had numbered about 500 or 600 young men and the riot continued for three days, during which the palace of the Bishop of Bristol Robert Gray, the Mansion House, and many other private homes were destroyed and property looted, along with demolition of much of Bristol Gaol. Work on the Clifton Suspension Bridge was halted and even Isambard Kingdom Brunel was sworn in as a special constable.

Finally it required the dragoons stationed at Keynsham to be called in to restore order. In this current crisis the magistrates were taking no chances and the reappearance of these much feared dragoons seems to have settled the matter.

After all, memories were still fresh of the events of 16 August 1819, when armed cavalry charged a peaceful crowd of around 60,000 people gathered to listen to anti-poverty and pro-democracy speakers in St Peter's Fields, Manchester, when it is estimated that 18 were killed, and over 700 seriously injured (the Peterloo Massacre).

Shortly afterwards the men returned to work and Tunnel No.3 was completed - although the winter of 1839/40 was very wet and flooding added to their problems. In an attempt to complete the rest of the line on time the navvies worked in relays around the clock with no rest on Sundays and with huge fires illuminating the scene. This must have confirmed the opinion of local residents that hell swarming with foul-mouthed hard drinking savages had invaded their rural peace – although of course this was not a view shared by

CONTRACT FOR WORK.—TUNNEL.

Great Western Railway, Bristol.

NOTICE is hereby given, that the Directors will receive at their Office, in Bristol, on or before FRIDAY, the EIGHTEENTH of OCTOBER next, at Twelve o'clock, TENDERS for the Execution of a SHORT TUNNEL (about 200 Yards), being part of Contract 15 B., with the Masonry of the Tunnel Entrances.

Plans and Specifications may now be seen at the Engineer's Office, Bath, where Printed Forms of Tender may be obtained.

The Directors will not consider themselves bound to accept the lowest Tender, and they expect the several Parties to attend at the Office, at One o'clock, on the 18th October.

CHAS. A. SAUNDERS,
THOMAS OSLER, } Secretaries.

Office, Corn-Street, Bristol, September 20th.

A newspaper Advertisement for contract work on the G.W.R line

(5th October 1839)

the proprietors of the local hostelries. However on 21 August 1840 four G.W.R. committee members and Isambard Kingdom Brunel at last made the ten minute journey from Temple Meads to Keynsham and the line was opened to the public with great acclaim ten days later.

The Western Times was able to report on 5 September under the headline…

OPENING OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY BETWEEN BRISTOL AND BATH. Bristol 31 August 1840:

The portion of the line between this and Bath was opened to the public this morning and the day has been kept as a public holiday in this and the other city. Long before the time fixed for the starting of the first train, eight o'clock, large numbers of persons had congregated in the vicinity of the

works; and throughout the course of the railroad every place that could command a view of the trains was crowded with spectators.

The first engine that left was the Fireball made by Jones, Turner and Evans of Newton. The necessity of proceeding with caution, a number of workmen being still employed in finishing the works, preventing the attainment of any great speed, and the performance of the distance, twelve miles, occupied including four minutes lost stopping at Keynsham, thirty six minutes. The Arrow, the Meridian and the Era also plied during the day; the trains in which more than 300 passengers were accommodated, being full at nearly every trip. In the course of the day the distance was accomplished in about twenty minutes. There were ten trips made each way."

It went on to add the business done on Monday had exceeded all of the most sanguine expectations with 5889 passengers taking the train and the sum of £21.14s taken at Keynsham. Understandably by the following day the number had dropped to 3381 with Keynsham takings standing at £9.19s.4¼d.

The 1st Class fare from Bristol to Keynsham was set at 1s6d and that of the 2nd class at 9d. From Bath to Keynsham the cost was 2s and 1s respectively.

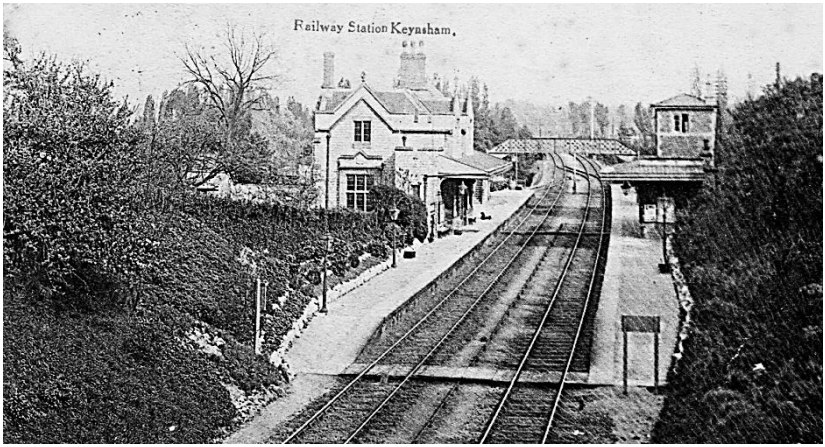
However this was not to be the end of the town's disruption as in 1874 the anarchy returned once more when the GWR decided to add a third standard gauge line to the broad gauge then in use. To get the work done quickly hundreds of labourers worked in shifts 18 out of every 24 hours and were paid 1s3d a day for rations with unlimited quantities of an 'oatmeal drink'! (No such provisions were deemed necessary for those involved in the recent electrification works).

Now fresh produce could be sent to market before it rotted and parcels dispatched great distances. Workers could

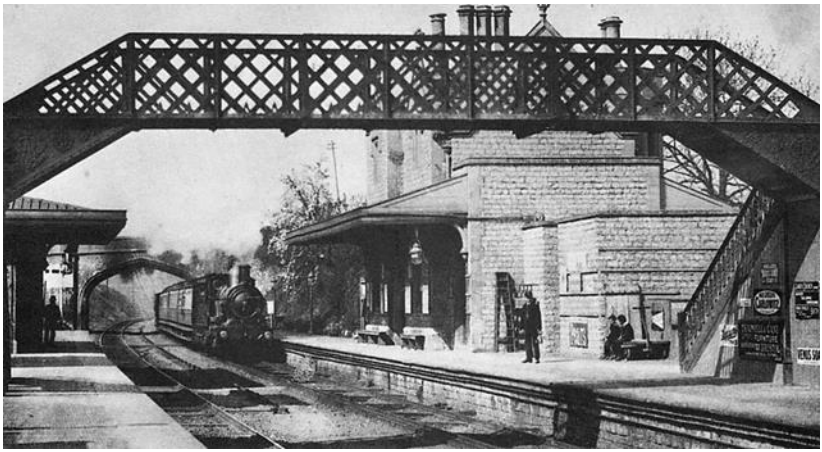
travel daily to the factories of Bristol and Bath and the more affluent could move out of the crowded cities to build properties in the country and commute to their businesses. When the Chandos estates at Keynsham were being sold off in 1858 the newly founded Western Daily Press quoted that…

"to those engaged in mercantile pursuits at Bristol what more could be desired than, by a journey of some fifteen minutes per rail at the expense of half a cab fare, to exchange the city, its business, and its cares, for the pure air and fine scenery of that charming locality, where the wearied merchant could not fail to restore his energies for the next day's battle of life?"

Life in the village would never be the same again.



An old postcard showing Brunel's original station buildings erected in 1840. Sadly these were found to be surplus to requirements by British Rail and demolished in 1970.



Keynsham Station c. 1870

The station in 1909.

The footbridge received a roof during improvements made the previous year. It was dismantled in 1970 and sold to the Dart Valley Railway and is now, minus its roof, at their Buckfastleigh station

The Making of 'Son et Lumière' in 1970

How the Town's many talents brought sound and light to the Parish Church by the late Jim Allen

St John the Baptist Church, Keynsham was celebrating 700 years of its history in the 1970s and every month there was a specific production of some aspect of Church life i.e. flower festival, choral concert etc.

I had seen two very impressive Son et Lumières at Cathedrals and thought we had plenty of Church history to present a Son et Lumière in Keynsham. The Cathedrals' presentations had been in vast Cathedral closes with seating for the audience in the open air. This was not possible around St John's, so any presentation would be indoors. With the blessing of the Vicar Reverend John Burgess I proceeded and by limiting the audience to the nave and using the aisles, chancel and tower for lighting and sound, it could be done.

There was plenty of history of local and national events to choose from, and I chose 14 episodes from the first mention of Cawinne's Hamme in 871AD through to the great storm of 1968. The historical sequence was straightforward, but in my script I tried to trace the vicissitudes of the Keynsham man.

NARRATOR: I *am the Keynsham man. I have lived here through the centuries. My feet trod the rough paved road that led to Aquae Sulis. I tramped the grey dusty lanes of Saxon* England.....I *stalked silently through the Burnett woods in search for game. I left my footprints in the muddy swamp of Charlton Bottom as I drove the swine to feed on acorns. The*

quiet cloisters of Keynsham Abbey echoed to my passing. The County Bridge rang to the jingle of my Ironside armour. I blew the organ for a musician named Handel. Along the pavement beside this Church, I hurried from Mafeking, from Flanders fields, from Alamein. I've been serf and freeman, swineherd and farrier, brass founder and railway man, chocolate factory worker and clerk. Down this aisle I've escorted many brides.....for in this Church I've worshipped for 700 years. I am a man of Keynsham.....hear my story.

The key man to the whole venture was Gwynne Stock who lived in Keynsham. Gwynne was a Harlech Television Sound Recording Engineer. He introduced me to Dilwyn E Davies who was the established narrator for the Annual Armistice Service in the Colston Hall, Bristol. Dilwyn became our narrator and recorded his contributions of my scripts separately.

Gwynne was a perfectionist who during the great storm of 1968 recorded it outside in the rain. He was also an innovator. For the effects of the fall of the Church's northwest tower in 1632, he piled bricks in his garage and triggered their fall which he recorded by amplifying their fall many times and by introducing the clang of a bell he produced an almost deafening sound effect of a falling tower.

Gwynne, too, recorded all the spoken words on Sunday afternoons on the Church hall stage behind closed curtains. The spoken words for the most part were entrusted to members of St John's Amateur Dramatic Society, augmented by other Keynsham dwellers notably John Falser and Bert Taylor, who was an established BBC Broadcaster as one of the members of the comedy programme "*The Luscombes"*. In the Church, Gwynne, by the judicious use of speakers, was able to transfer sounds to the sites in the Church where the action was taking

place i.e. reading the names from the War Memorials at the south door.

Music came from the Keynsham Orchestra conducted by Mary Trewin and the organ played by Peter Gibbons. The lighting was in the hands of the Durley Hill members of the South West Electricity Board. They used hired floods and spots. Interior lighting was in concealed places in the aisles, the chancel and tower. It was necessary to illuminate the east window from outside and this, after experimentation, was achieved by using a white tarpaulin (loaned by British Rail) rigged on scaffolding in an arc by Tom Tookey and the 1st Keynsham Scouts. Electricians also arranged extra power from a nearby sub-station to augment the Church's power circuits.

The sequence of 14 episodes in the Church's history was straightforward but some of the episodes were based on legend. Handel's playing of the Church organ, for instance, was never verified though the association with the Bridges family and the Dukes of Chandos (Handel's patrons) led to the story.

Yes, I let legend and history intermingle for dramatic effect in my scripts for Keynsham's Son et Lumière and hoped my imagination would be matched by those who came to St John's on those September evenings in 1970.

Narrator: Dilwyn E Davies

Voices:

John Falser	Mary Allen
Bill Hockey	Alan Cox
Mary Green	Naomi Hunter
Jack Allen	Douglas Deft
Eric Roberts	Adrienne England
Bernard Humphries	Christopher Sullivan
John Burgess	Bert Taylor

Roy Heginbotham	Mervyn Stanton
Ron Brett	Bob Fishleigh
Neville Jacobs	Frank Booth
Jim Allen	Jane Deft
John Ruffle	Pat Lloyd

Lighting Engineers:

Pat Wilson	Ken Lloyd
Reg Virgin	Jack Beaumont
Ted Morgan	Dave Bendall
Ted Stocks	Bob Chubb

Synopsis of Scene: the action is continuous

1 Healmund comes dead to Cawinne's Hamme c. 871

2 Lord William, Earl of Gloucester, approves Abbey plans c.1170

3 This church begun and a settlement of tithes c.1304

4 The Black Death 1348

5 The destruction of Keynsham Abbey 1539

6 The Great Storm and Charles I's brief 1632

7 Cromwell in Keynsham 1645

8 News is brought of the Bloody Assize 1685

9 Handel's first visit to Keynsham *c* 1720

10 Keeping the Poor Accounts 1759

11 Wesley causes a stir c 1765

12 The Victorian restoration 1861-3

13 The 20th Century wars

14 The Great Storm 1968

The Charlton Cinema, Keynsham

by Brian Vowles

On the left is the Keynsham Picture House of 1908

Keynsham's first cinema was in a property that had been originally two cottages on the High Street before their rebuilding in 1904. It opened in 1908 and it charged 3d (1d for matinées) to sit on hard wooden benches. Although initially a success, by the autumn of 1914 it had passed into the hands of a Mrs. A Williams. She and her daughter had little experience of running such a business and in desperation she turned to a more experienced operator, Mr W Rowland who had far more knowledge of running a 'cinematograph' entertainment. The first suggestion was that he should rent the premises from her and work the show himself. However an alternative was put forward that he would serve as her manager and she would work the enterprise. This was finally agreed upon and

according to him he would be paid £2 a week plus 10s for the use of his 'bioscope' machine.

The show opened on 12 September 1914 but only ran for six weeks at a loss. One of the reasons given at the time was that the weather was too fine but surely the recent declaration of war may have been partially responsible for the poor attendance.

THIS DAY.
PRACTICALLY WITHOUT RESERVE.
TO CINEMA & MOTOR GARAGE PROPRIETORS, BUILDERS, AND OTHERS.
IN THE CENTRE OF KEYNSHAM.

STANLEY ALDER & PRICE

Have received instructions to SELL by AUCTION, at the LAMB AND LARK HOTEL, KEYNSHAM, TO-DAY (WEDNESDAY), October 20, 1915, at Seven o'clock in the Evening,

THE PICTURE HOUSE,
KEYNSHAM, Near BRISTOL.

Occupying a most prominent position in the Main Street, comprising Commodious Building, with a frontage of about 27 feet 6 inches and a depth of about 53 feet, now fitted up as a Cinematograph Theatre, with two Exits in Lane at rear. Gas and Electric Light laid on.

The Property is subject to an Annual Ground-rent of £12.

Keys may be obtained of Mr Hobbs, Plumber, Keynsham; and further Particulars may be obtained of the Auctioneers, 23, Clare Street, Bristol; or of

Mr L. KENDRAY ARCHER, Solicitor, Orchard Street, Bristol.

An advertisement in a local newspaper on 20 October 1915.

The Picture House's publicity bill announced that Mrs Williams was the proprietress and Mr Rowland was the manager. Having assumed that the business was a joint venture Mrs Williams was of the opinion that, as it did not pay, neither party would take any money from the partnership although she did give Mr Rowland a £1 towards his out-of-pocket expenses.

Dissatisfied with this settlement Mr Rowland sued Mrs Williams for the £15 he claimed she owed him and the case was heard at the Bristol Tozey Court on 7 January 1915. Mrs Williams' married daughter Evelyn Glover who assisted at the pay box, was called to give evidence and said that she had heard Mr Rowland say that he was going to give his services free for a couple of months. The jury retired for about ten minutes and on their return found in favour of Mrs Williams. Ten months later the Picture House was put up for auction at

the Lamb and Lark Hotel and sold to a Walter Beak who turned it into a motor repair garage.

In spite of this lack of success, the demand was still there and on Friday 6 November 1920 at the Keynsham Petty Sessions an application was made by a Mr Phillip Hunter to use the Drill Hall at Keynsham for cinema performances. Speaking against the application Supt. Ford pointed out the hall did not comply with requirements under the act and he did not think the building at all suitable for such performances as the exits were inadequate. The Chairman, Mr Cooke Hurle, in stating that the application was refused, said that the bench did not consider the hall was suitable for such performances until structural alterations had been made. This was in spite of the fact that many theatrical performances and other public events had been held there since the Drill Hall had been erected. So Keynsham would have to do without a cinema for the foreseeable future.

None the less the desire for a cinema was still pressing as throughout the land the popularity of the silver screen was growing all the time and the townsfolk had to travel into either Bath or Bristol for their entertainment. The demand increased even more when that wonder of the age, the first feature film presented as a talkie "The Jazz Singer", was released in October 1927.

At the Keynsham R.D.C. meeting in May 1931 the Plans Committee announced that drawings had been received for a proposed cinema theatre at Charlton Road, Keynsham. These were duly approved subject to the requirements of the Town Planning Committee and to the surveyor being satisfied that the plans complied with the by-laws. But constructing it was not to going be as easy as it first appeared as a fortnight later the council received a petition, presented by a Mr Calvert, from sixty seven residents of nearby Charlton Road, West

View Road and Park Road asking the authorities to prevent the erection of a cinema in the vicinity.

However, Mr W Hill made a strong appeal on behalf of the youth of Keynsham (one that still resounds today).

"Now we get the young men and girls parading up and down the main streets night after night. If we had a cinema they could go in there; but as it is now, they have nowhere to go", he said.

Mr Hill also pointed out that the police had stated that the site proposed was the finest one in Keynsham because a crowd leaving the cinema would be broken up before it reached the main street. As to be expected the council decided to adjourn discussion of the subject until its next meeting.

At that next meeting, a fortnight later in June, a letter from Mr Calvert was read out containing another petition with a further eighty five signatories protesting against the erection of the cinema. Mr E W Brock, being interested in the erection of the project, retired during the discussion (which is hardly surprising as it was later revealed that he was the architect of the proposed building and became a founder member of the company established two years later in 1933 to promote the scheme). Mr C Willoughby, determined to get the scheme rejected, reminded them that at the last meeting Mr Hill had said the police had approved the site but having inquired at the Police Station he found it to be nothing of the sort. He charged *"You spoke to a common constable yet you said the police approved of it."*

After further discussion Mr Willoughby moved that the council considered the Charlton Road unsuitable and they should not grant the application. Seconded by Mr Golledge, that motion was narrowly lost by six votes to four. In July the surveyor stated that he was in possession of the complete plans for the cinema and it was resolved that the plans be approved.

In August 1931 the Western Daily Press commented that the plans showed a very attractive building built of Bath stone throughout. On the first floor there was to be a spacious lounge and a café. It would hold about seven hundred with a motor park giving accommodation for about a hundred cars at the side. *"The approach to the entrance is spacious and will be laid out with rock gardens with plants, flowers and pools presenting a very charming appearance".* It was hoped that the building would be completed by the end of the year.

But for some reason it wasn't! Whether there was a problem with finance or the objectors had their way is unclear but in April 1933 the following newspaper advertisement appeared…

"WANTED SITE FOR CINEMA. - Keynsham and District. Syndicate prepared to purchase outright. Full particulars to BM/W4W London."

Whether there were any replies is not known but a company, Keynsham Picture House Ltd, was formed in 1933 to revive the project.

Mr Wise laying the first concrete and steel foundations for the new picture house at Keynsham.

Then at last on 31 January 1935 it was announced that work would begin on laying the foundations of the new cinema. The ceremony was led by Mr T Wise supported by Miss Gwendoline Wills a member of the Wills tobacco family and Chairman of the

directors of the company. Also in attendance was the previously mentioned Mr E W Brock the architect, promoter and secretary of the company plus an array of local worthies.

In his address Mr Wise said that he felt that the cinema was one of the greatest mediums of entertainment and education of the present day, and would remain so for many years to come.

The construction of the cinema in 1935

He congratulated the promoters for their foresight in providing for the needs of the growing town of Keynsham and he hoped that the new venture would be a great success and become a social centre. He thought that in the past village life had been neglected with the result the population had moved into towns. Miss Wills thanked Mr Wise and said that the directors had been very anxious to start this work and she

hoped that the inhabitants would do all that was possible to make the venture a success (and presumably make profits for the company).

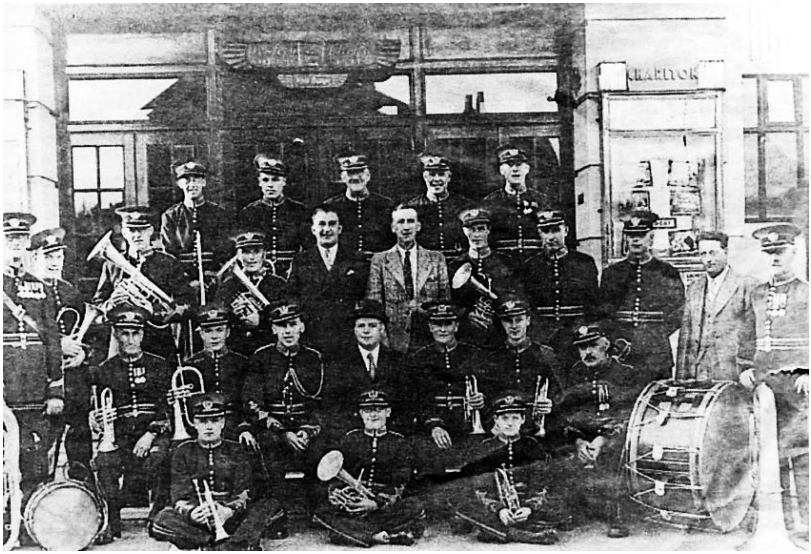
Building took some time to complete and it was not until 21 August 1936 that a cinematograph licence, applied for by Mr F Wiltshire on behalf of the Keynsham Picture House Ltd, was awarded to the cinema. By then the building was practically complete and the manager Mr F Wheeler, who had previously run the Regent in Highbridge, was appointed.

Two weeks later on Monday 7 September came the moment that all of Keynsham (with the exception of the residents of Charlton Road, West View Road and Park Road) had been waiting for.

Long queues formed before the advertised time on the opening night and soon every one of the 879 seats in the building was occupied, 330 on the balcony and 547 on the ground floor. As the art deco curtain went up Mr Wheeler introduced Miss Gwendoline Wills as the Chairman of the company.

In addition to performing that role Miss Wills was one of Keynsham's most prominent social workers and a J.P. She had twice travelled around the world and extensively through Europe. She was president of the Keynsham W.I., chairman of the Keynsham Hospital Management Board and President of the Keynsham Branch of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association in addition to being a governor of Bath Hill School. She lived at Longreach House on the Bath Road (later to become the home of the infamous Horace Batchelor and now flats), the gardens of which she often opened to the public. She died thirteen years after the ceremony on 12 December 1949. In the following year, when her properties were sold they included the perpetual rental of £30 per year for the cinema and the land it was built upon.

Miss Wills pronounced the cinema open and said they had been given a building worthy of Keynsham. Not only was it a splendid building outside, but they were assured that *"in every way there was safety, comfort and beauty inside".* The Keynsham Town Band played and the first film, a now long forgotten *"Mr Cohen takes a walk"* starring Paul Graetz and Chili Bouchier and supported by a 'B picture' *"Here comes trouble",* was projected. The programme was to be changed twice weekly and on the following Thursday, Friday and Saturday Warner Baxter appeared in *"The King of Burlesque"* and George Carney in *"Hyde Park".*



The Keynsham Town Band at the opening of the Charlton Cinema on 7 September 1936.

All this happened two years before its rival, the Ritz Cinema at Brislington, opened on 8th October 1938. For the next thirty years the cinema continued to show all the notable 'flicks' of the day and people would come from miles around to see a film - even through pouring rain or snow storms.

An added attraction on Friday 24 November 1939 was the attendance of the stage and movie stars Ivor Novello, Isobel Jeans and Dorothy Dickson who were appearing at the Princes Theatre in Bristol.

With its wonderful art deco frontage it was used in 1982 by the BBC to film a war time series

'Picture going' twice a week became the regular thing to do and the back row was a favourite haven for courting couples seeking refuge from prying eyes. But those seats cost more than those at the front and it was a regular practice for those paying for the cheaper seats to visit the toilets and then return to the more expensive ones hoping the usherette would not notice! In fact often patrons would pay nothing at all if by a previous arrangement an accomplice would visit the toilet and open the adjacent fire exit at the same time to let in their friends.

Films were not the only attraction at the Charlton and it served as a public meeting place for other functions as it had a 30 feet wide proscenium and a 20 feet deep stage with four dressing rooms On 29 January 1937 at the Keynsham Police Court, the justices granted a theatrical licence for twelve months for the performance of stage plays to the manager, Mr F Wheeler enabling Mr F Whittuck to transfer his company's comedy *"Aren't We All"* from the Drill Hall on 14 February. The proceeds went to the Keynsham and Saltford District Nurses Association and many other productions on the cinema's stage were to follow.

For three nights commencing on 9 December 1937 "The Thirteen Players" of Bristol performed another comedy *"The Lord of the Manor"* in aid of the Rugby Club's efforts to obtain a new ground at the Manor Road Playing Fields. They renewed their charitable contributions on 8 December 1938 when they presented a comedy entitled *"Call It A Day"* again in aid of the Keynsham Rugby Club plus the Confectioners' Benevolent fund.

Musical events were staged there as well. On Sunday 13 December 1936, after the evening church services, a community carol concert was held with singing conducted by Mr Lawrance, the parish church organist. One of the vocalists was Miss Beryl Chappell who two years later, on 12 December 1938, arranged a concert in aid of those areas of the world where the march of fascism was already causing great distress. Proceeds were donated to the Czechoslovakian and Abyssinian Refugee Fund, the International Peace Hospital in South China and the National Joint Committee for Spain.

The cinema could not remain unaffected by the war when it came and in addition to its morale boosting films it became the focal point for a number of war effort activities.

For example Saturday 7 June 1941 saw the opening ceremony by Lieut. Commander R Fletcher of the *"War Weapons Week"* at the Charlton and on Saturday 14 March 1942 a similar ceremony heralded the start of the *"Keynsham War Ship Week"* at the same venue. On 14 April 1942 a film on bomb recognition was shown by a member of the bomb disposal squad to instruct civil defence personnel and two years later Mr George Chappell who had been so opposed to the building of the cinema presided at the opening ceremony of the *"Salute the Soldier"* week on 15 April 1944.

The Ministry of Information gave a free showing of a number of films on 14 January 1945 whilst a Major D.S. Sole,

the commander of a company of the 2nd Border Regiment who had recently returned from Burma, gave a talk on the war in the jungle. On Sunday night 13 May 1945 Mrs Mavis Tate, the local M.P., addressed a packed audience at a non-political meeting with an account of her visit to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp and the many horrors that she had recently witnessed there.

After the war the boom in cinema-going continued with many of the classic films attracting large audiences. Both of the colour films of the Coronation and the Ascent of Everest were screened in 1953.

On Sunday 29 January 1950 the Keynsham and District Combined Choirs Festival presented the Messiah at the cinema and raised £77.15s which was donated to the Keynsham and Saltford War Memorial Fund.

By then the cinema was operated by the Cardiff-based Jackson Withers circuit and in the 1960's people queued all the way down to the High Street to see the latest Beatles films.

For many years smoking in cinemas was normal practice and the projected images floated on the clouds of nicotine vapour; when the lights went up for the interval you could barely make out the usherettes selling ice creams through the blue haze.

No longer a cinema, the Charlton Bingo Hall on 24 July 1997 prior to demolition.

However, with the rise of television and the availability of films on video, inevitably audiences gradually melted away. Operated by an independent operator, the Charlton Cinema was

closed in 1984 with the film *"Terms of Endearment"* despite a massive 10,000 name *"Save our Cinema"* petition but as a spokesman said at the time *"The proprietors haven't made a penny out of it since it opened in 1936".* When people stopped going to the Charlton the owners tried hard to keep it going by converting it into a bingo club but even that closed in 1998.

The building then stood empty until 2005 when it was demolished and flats were built on the site.

The end of the Charlton on 13 April 2005 and below right, the flats which have replaced it.

(Photos from the Russell Leitch collection0

My Wartime Childhood Part 2

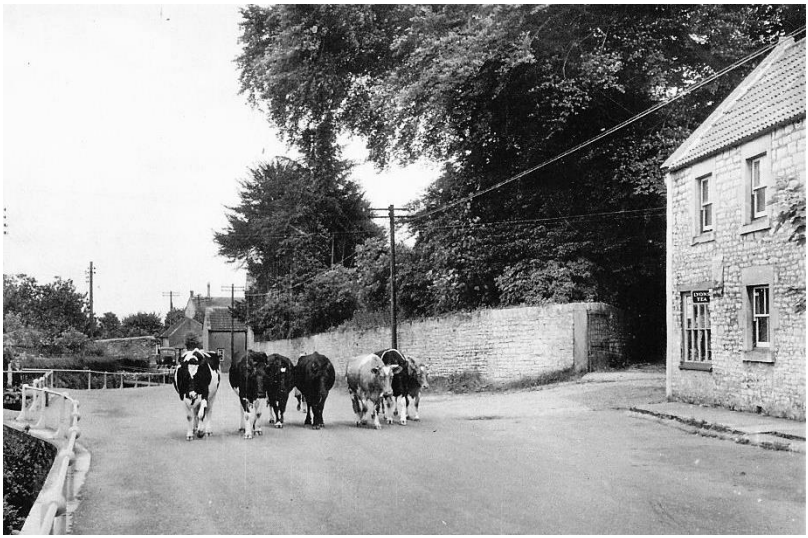
Memories of a different world - by Brenda Stone

Following her article in last year's journal Brenda has recorded more of her wartime memories. As she previously related during the war she was "evacuated" to her grandparents Albert and Hilda Marsh at Coalpit Heath Cottage in Farmborough. Her father had gone off to war and her mother kept his butcher's business going in Brislington. Her granddad was a ship's engineer and travelled daily by motor bike and side car to Avonmouth to keep the ships working. (Ed.)

Farmborough School

Having started school at Farmborough (Mr Barrett was the Headmaster) I remember vividly my first day. At playtime in came the crate of milk full of little bottles which everyone

was expected to drink. They came in from a cold porch and I don't know whether it was the cold or the condensation, but it slipped out of my hand down onto the floor making a lovely white puddle around my feet. I don't think my teacher, Mrs. Reakey could believe it as she turned an alarming red colour and with the words *"You ungrateful child"* stood me in the corner after I had mopped up the mess I had made. Not a good start! Having been taught by Gran to knit 'socks for soldiers' – or for Granddad for his wellies, I had to learn how to turn a heel so playtime saw me sat on an upturned crate to turn heels, it seemed, for everybody.



The Street, Farmborough. On the right Mrs. Hall's Sweet Shop and the entrance to the Old Rectory.

Another school event which was quite sad for me was that when you were five you had to hand in your Mickey Mouse gas mask. So one morning we 'crocodiled' our way with our teacher along the street, past Mrs. Hall's sweet shop, to the old rectory (no longer there but replaced by houses). I

did not want to part with mine for a boring adult one which smelt awful. That night I sniffed my way along the lane after school to have a good sob to Gran when I got there.

The other thing that would reduce me to tears was the ritual of having the rags taken out of my hair – all to get ringlets in my pump-washed locks to emulate Shirley Temple. Each evening torn strips of fabric were wound around my hair and tied at the bottom and uncomfortable nights then followed trying not to lie on the 'lumpy bits'. Then, of course, next morning the rags had to be extricated. All the torn sides caught in the hair and it was very painful. The trouble was that if it rained the new curls didn't last very long and I knew I had to endure it all over again before the next day. However one day I arrived at the solution. Having decided that as I didn't need curls anyway, I would cut it all off. So I leaned forward, brushed the hair over my face so I could see what I was doing, got the sewing scissors and cut it neatly across. Problem solved and I went down stairs to face a stunned silence until I explained what I had done! I think it was the only time I had the hazel cane on my hand and was forced to wear the knitted 'pixie hood' for the next two weeks to let the hair grow back to a respectable length before it could be seen in public again.

Jobs done at home were so different from today's housework too. The cane carpet beater on the rag rugs over the line, no electricity to plug in the vacuum cleaner, and the socks scrubbed on the washboard with a lump of green 'fairy' soap. The blue bag whitened the sheets, starch was mixed to a silky smoothness for the men's collars and the mangle squeezed every last drop out of the newly washed laundry. Then of course the ironing, when it was dry, was another different process. No plugging in the steam iron - instead out would come the heavy flat irons which would be placed on a trivet in

front until hot. With a good wedge of fabric you rubbed the face to make sure it was clean and with a quick spit to test the heat you went into battle. Two irons were needed to alternate as they cooled very quickly. If the sheets were too dry it was necessary to 'damp them down'. This was achieved with a quick spray with water from an old medicine bottle with a perforated lid before being rolled up to make it ready before applying the iron.

Then of course there were the usual daily chores of raking out the ashes from the black-leaded grate, collecting and bringing in the sticks to put into the hearth to dry overnight so that the next morning's fire would light easily. Granddad always did this so that Gran and I could come down to a warm kitchen with a kettle hot on the trivet. Drinking water was fetched from a well a field away and although I was never allowed to lower the bucket, I usually went with my little galvanised buckets. By the time I arrived back I often had wet socks in my wellies from the slopping water. Hair washing and filling the bath was done from the rain water butt as drinking water could not be spared for those functions. Another chore was filling the oil lamps and cleaning the wicks. The bigger lamp in the sitting room, which had a round glass shade over its tube, had a mantle which you dare not touch or it went into holes. These were in short supply and difficult to replace. One benefit however was that there was little insomnia as everyone was tired at the end of the day. Once a month Gran would announce that we were going to Bath. I was always thrilled to hear this because apart from the bus ride I would be treated to a special present if I was lucky. Next to the Silver Thimble (the sewing shop where Gran bought her embroidery threads) stood a book shop and if they had any I could have the latest Enid Blyton Nature Reader paperback. Each book had two stories all about the countryside and its wildlife. I loved reading them so

it was such a treat to get a new one. There were thirty books in the series and although they were published fairly regularly I never did get all of them. However I have twenty which I still treasure and which I have subsequently read to my children and grandchildren. Although much dog-eared I won't part with them for anything as they meant so much to me in the days when toys were non-existent.

One funny bedtime story I remember happened one summer night. I had gone to bed (sharing with Gran) and was fast asleep. The window was left on the latch as it was a hot night and I was awakened by Gran furiously shaking my shoulder. *"Brenda help me! Open the window wide there's a bat flying in here"*

I awoke to find Gran sat up with a brolly opened over her and waving a garment round and round with the other hand to keep the bat at bay. The poor bat was whizzing around at great speed but I had no hand in ridding the room of its unfortunate visitor as it found its own way out. I couldn't go back to sleep as I was too busy laughing at the vision of Gran brandishing her umbrella although she couldn't see the funny side of the event. However the biggest laugh occurred next morning when her knee length elasticated bloomers were found to be missing. Despite removing the sheets, blanket, quilt and eiderdown (no duvets then) they eventually came to light stuck to the bedsprings when we turned the mattress. It's amazing what we do in moments of panic!

One day a lone bomber* flew over the cottage. It sounded very low so Gran and I went to the kitchen door to investigate. Normally this would be followed by *"It's O.K., it's one of ours"* but this time we could see the face of the pilot and… the SWASTIKA! Until then I had never heard my Grandmother swear but she shouted out *"My God it's a bl…. German".* She was not a strong woman normally, having

survived a double mastectomy, but I was lifted off my feet and thrown under the kitchen table. Needless to say following this she needed a strong cup of tea and I a generous dollop of Arnica cream for my bruises. We later learned that a lone bomber had flown under the radar and off-loaded its bombs on Radstock. This took place at the end of June 1940. Some property was destroyed but fortunately there were no casualties.

I remember, as we walked the dogs in the evening, we saw the searchlights over Bath making arcs in the sky. As a child, of course, the full implications of these things were not apparent, but only now as an adult and a grandmother do I appreciate the trials endured by those 'keeping the home fires burning'. I owe a very happy childhood with simple pleasures and wholesome food without frills to my grandparents. I loved them both dearly and hope my grandchildren will remember me with such affection.

**Note - The Somerset Guardian in 1940 carried a brief story about several bombs being dropped on a "small open town". For fear of conveying information to the enemy no place names were ever mentioned, but the description of a small town in the South West on that occasion referred to Radstock which, on a Saturday night at the end of June in 1940, received its first raid. Bombs fell in a line from Haydon Hill across towards Coombend and the Victoria Hall; premises in Fortescue Road and at the bottom of Bath Hill still bear the scars caused by flying debris. The report at the time recorded that there was a good deal of minor damage in the form of broken windows, ceiling and roofs, but there were no casualties. The windows of the Methodist Chapel in Fortescue Road were all broken, but on the following morning there was a notice outside announcing "Services as usual", which was the usual reaction to such wartime incidents. (Ed.)*

Ancient Happenings in our Twin Town

In 1977 a twinning association was set up between Keynsham and Libourne. As we are linked I thought the readers of the journal would be interested in this article "The Black Prince and the Treaty of Libourne" written by Christian Martin, the vice president of the Societié Historique et Archéologique de Libourne.

The French town has a population of 22,500 and lies on the River Dordogne surrounded by miles of vineyards which make a major contribution to the town's economy. It has a fascinating history. It was founded as a bastide in 1270 by Roger de Leybourne (of Kent) who was an English seneschal of Gascony under the authority of Edward I.

When Eleanor Duchess of Aquitaine married the future King Henry II of England in 1154, the area became an English possession, and the cornerstone of the so-called Angevin Empire. Aquitaine remained English until the end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453, when it was annexed by France.

Bastides were founded during the Hundred Years War between England and France, mainly in South-Western France. Bastides were originally walled towns, centred around a market square, with the houses set in narrow streets, often to a grid layout. Fortified to protect the inhabitants from outside attack, they were new towns, mainly set up on frontier and disputed lands to establish a border and a defensive presence. People were subsidised to settle there, in a manner very similar to the modern kibbutz settlements in Israel.

Libourne was one of these. (Ed.)

The Black Prince and the Treaty of Libourne

by Christian Martin,

By 1337 the bastide of Libourne had been established for 67 years. Previously in 1328 at the death of Charles IV, the third son of Philippe the Fair and the last of the Capétiens without descendants, Edward III Duke of Aquitaine and King of England and himself grandson of Philippe the Fair laid claim to the French throne. This is the start of what became known as the Hundred Years War. His son Edward Prince of Wales, known as the Black Prince because of the colour of his armour, having won battles at Crecy and retaken Calais, continued the offensive into Aquitaine and won the Battle of Poitiers where in 1356 he captured the King of France Jean II known as Jean the Good.

Edward Prince of Wales, the eldest son of Edward the third, was born in Woodstock on the 15 June 1333. He regularly stayed at the Chateau de Condat, which is near Libourne and which was a personal possession of the Dukes of Aquitaine. It was one of the main residences of Edward's wife, the Princess of Wales, who preferred to be near the Dordogne rather than in the Palace of Ombrière in Bordeaux which was the seat of government of the area which later became known as Aquitaine.

After battles in 1355 and 1356 the Black Prince reclaimed the Duchy of Aquitaine as it was during Eleanor of Aquitaine's time, (from Poitiers to Limoges and Montauban). At the same time, in Spain, the crown of Pierre, the young king of Castille, (and nicknamed the" dispenser of justice") was being claimed by his illegitimate brothers. After assassinating two of his brothers Pierre the First became known as "Pierre

the Cruel". He then confronted his last half - brother Henry of Trastamare, who was also known as Henry the Magnificent.

Helped by the famous knight Du Guesclin, who had been sent hastily to Spain by Charles the Fifth to rid the French kingdom of scoundrels and looters, Henry of Trastamare succeeded in taking the throne of Castille. As a result the defeated Pierre the Cruel embarked for Corunna with the aim of entering Aquitaine to seek help from the Black Prince. On 23 September 1366 a treaty was signed in Libourne between the Black Prince and Pierre the Cruel. In this treaty it was agreed that the Black Prince and Charles the Bad, King of Navarre, would support Pierre the Cruel with military and financial aid. For his part Pierre the Cruel would reimburse his allies for all expenses incurred in the war and give them extra territories once he had regained his throne.

Pierre the Cruel even left his three daughters as collateral in Saint Emilion. He also gave the Black Prince a giant ruby which to this day adorns the imperial crown of the kings and queens of England and which can be seen amongst the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. We shall see how this ruby was all the Black Prince was able to salvage from the Treaty of Libourne…….

During the spring (for at this time war became nothing more than a seasonal " leisure activity") the Black Prince's forces crossed the Pyrénées at Roncevau and on Saturday April 3 1367, between Najera and Navarette near Logroño, the armies of Henry of Trastamare and Du Guesclin were defeated by the forces of the Black Prince. This was one of the first "exchanges" between Libourne and Logroño *(another of the town's exchanges like Keynsham)*. Happily these days these are rather more peaceful ones!

Du Guesclin, prisoner of the Black Prince at Condat.

Du Guesclin was taken prisoner by Jean du Grailly, Thane of Buch, and taken into captivity in the Chateau de Condat. It is extremely likely however that this was an amicable period of captivity between gentlemen. Indeed it is possible to imagine Du Guesclin even dining at the same table as the Black Prince.

This was actually the second time that Du Guesclin had been the Black Prince's prisoner. Five years earlier the King of France had paid a ransom of £100,000 (40,000 florins) in order to free him. This time however Du Guesclin himself set his ransom at 60,000 golden florins. This was an enormous sum, greater even than a king's ransom. The Prince of Wales was further amazed to hear Du Guesclin declare that the French king would pay this sum and that if he didn't every woman in France who knew how to weave or embroider would wear out her fingers doing so until the amount was raised! However the ransom was duly paid, with the help of some of the noblemen of Brittany and also the Pope. It was a transaction that England would later come to regret.

An army to pay

Back in Spain Pierre the Cruel had regained his throne and had duly subjected himself to a rite of purification, suffering until he bled. This appalled the Black Prince and caused a rift between the two men. More importantly Pierre the Cruel defaulted on the promises he had made in the Treaty of Libourne and left the Black Prince in financial difficulties with an army waiting to be paid. Returning ill from Spain the Prince tried to rectify the situation by creating the "states of Aquitaine" in Saint Emilion on 16 October 1367. He thanked

his vassals for their help in the campaign and gave them a payment in advance of the full sum owed them.

But in order to do this the prince had to create a new tax known as the “fire tax” (every time a fire was lit a royalty of ten sous had to be paid). Not surprisingly this was rejected by the noblemen of Armagnac and Albret and they began to plot against him with the support of the King of France himself.

In 1368 war was again declared between the Black Prince and the French King, who had found new allies in Aquitaine. In addition to the Lords of Albret and Armagnac, the Counts of Périgord and Comminges were included in the alliance.

Tomb of the Black Prince (Edward of Woodstock), Canterbury Cathedral

But by then the Black Prince was so ill that he could not face this new war. He returned to London where he died in 1367 and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral where his tomb still stands.

As he had died before his father he was never declared King of England and so it was his son Richard, born in Bordeaux in 1367, who would succeed Edward the Third to become Richard the Second.

In 1377 Du Guesclin took the town of Libourne and razed to the ground the chateau of Condat where he had been held prisoner ten years earlier. Tradition holds it to be true that he voluntarily spared the chapel at Condat but the ruins of this chateau were eventually completely destroyed in 1453 following the battle of Castillon which brought to an end the Hundred Years War and the English hold on Aquitaine.

Henceforth Libourne would be under the mantle of the crown of France.

The Hôtel de Ville and the square typical of a 'Bastide', Libourne
(from an old photograph)

Note - Even today, as visitors to the region will have discovered, association with the Black Prince (le Prince Noir) remains an important brand name or selling point for many different products in the region and many restaurants, apartment blocks etc. bear his title. (Ed.)

The Victoria Fountain

by Brian Vowles

At the top of Bath Hill East at the junction of the Bath Road and Burnett Road (now the Wellsway) there once stood the Pound, a fenced off space where loose animals could be corralled until their owners claimed them but at a Parish Council meeting on 16th March 1897 a discussion took place as to whether the Pound should be removed. A suggestion was made that it should be retained but an ornamental railing and trees be placed around it with a drinking fountain.

An amendment was then carried to make arrangements with the lord of the manor to remove the Pound and replace it with an ornamental lamp and drinking fountain in commemoration of the Queen's long reign and as a result the Pound was moved to land behind the New Inn. However Victoria died on 22 January 1901 before the Diamond Jubilee fountain could be erected.

So on 18th June 1902 the council voted to take over the plot of land near the Police Station for the erection of a drinking fountain as a "Queen Victoria Memorial" instead and to supply drinking water at the expense of the parish.

By then her son Edward had taken the throne but a week later on 27th June 1902 it was reported in the Western Daily Press that at a hastily convened meeting of the Keynsham Committee the planned Coronation festivities were to be cancelled because of the illness of the new king.

Edward's coronation had originally been scheduled for 26 June, but two days before on 24 June, he was diagnosed with appendicitis. Appendicitis was generally not treated operatively and carried a high mortality rate, but developments in anaesthesia and antisepsis in the preceding 50 years made life-saving surgery possible. Sir Frederick Treves, with the support

of Lord Lister, performed a then-radical operation of draining the infected abscess through a small incision. The next day Edward was sitting up in bed, smoking a cigar and two weeks later it was announced that the King was out of danger. Treves was honoured with a baronetcy which Edward had arranged before the operation (as insurance?) and appendix surgery entered the medical mainstream.

A postcard wrongly captioned as the fountain had become the Victoria Memorial fountain following the Queen's death.

In spite of this, two of the planned events were to go ahead; a service at the parish church and the unveiling of the Victoria Memorial Fountain. So on Thursday evening 26 June the united service was held led by the vicar of St John's Rev. Hatchard. Rev. Mann represented the Baptist Church and Rev. Sarah the Wesleyan. Following the hymns *"O God our help in ages past"* and *"Oh comfort to the weary"* the vicar addressed the congregation. He spoke of the sad news of the illness of the King and referred to the anxiousness of all his subjects; how they watched for the telegrams and how that night those

present had met to offer prayers on their sovereigns behalf and to thank God for such favourable reports concerning him.

The congregation then processed to the top of Bath Hill where the fountain had been erected. Opening the ceremony one of the organisers, Mr. Bath, said he was very pleased to see such a large assemblage. He referred to the 60 years' beneficent reign of the late queen, adding that the fountain was a tribute to her worth: and if she could only be present he thought she would approve of the form of the memorial. Mr. F.E.Whittuck also spoke of *"Victoria as a model queen, wife, and mother, one who was beloved as no woman was ever loved before".*

The fountain in situe (the house on the left has since been demolished.

His wife Mrs. F.E.Whittuck then unveiled the fountain and was given a glass of water which she bravely drank. The Rev. Hatchard said he would only say a few words owing to the lateness of the hour and the heaviness of their hearts. He dealt

for a few minutes upon the large amount of work the late queen got through. She was no figure head but a splendid stateswoman. The Rev. Mann said they were met under very different circumstances from what they had hoped. Having also remarked upon *"the noble qualities of our late beloved Queen"* the National Anthem was sung and a vote of thanks to Mrs.Whittuck was proposed by Dr. Harrison and seconded by Mr. Carter. Cheers were given.

By 10 o'clock the function was over and the crowd melted away.

The fountain continued to function for the next two decades but as the volume of motor traffic increased its position at the junction of three busy roads made its existence more vulnerable.

The fountain was still in place in 1922 when this photo was taken.

At a Parish Council meeting in May 1928 the subject of street lighting arose and the Lighting Committee suggested that…

"it was proposed to do away with the stand pipe, direction post and lamp standard and utilise, if possible, the fountain for a lamp standard and to carry the direction arms."

It was eventually decided that the committee should go ahead with its proposals but as the fountain had been built by public subscription a parish meeting had to be called to sanction the changes.

At the July meeting the Lighting Committee recommended that steel tube be inserted in the fountain shaft so that it could be used as a lamp standard and for carrying signs. Also three lamps be placed nearby so as to illuminate the direction signs. These signs, it was recommended, should be of the studded reflector type so they could still be seen when the lamps were unlit.

Whether this was done is not clear but at another Parish Council meeting two years later in February 1930 …

"A proposal to convert the Queen Victoria Fountain into a lamp standard for the Bath Hill district was referred to the Parish Council with powers to deal with the matter."

When the final blow came for the fountain came is not known but by the 1940's it had disappeared from the street scene in a series of improvements to the road junction and its fate is unknown.

An Article from the Past

One of our members, Bunty Dunford, used to write the occasional item for the old Keynsham Chronicle. One of these concerned a character named "Tarpaulin Joe". He was a man who described himself as a "ragged historian" and she wrote an article about him in 1981. Although she can't remember the precise date of the article, she still has her rough notes and recently she did find a copy of the letter she had written asking if she could talk to him. Harford Richmond was just a worker at Frys, not educated, but he contributed to the Somerdale magazine under his pseudonym and was very interested in the Roman remains at Somerdale. She found Harford both interesting and humorous and she thought that she would revive the article so that this little piece of local history wouldn't be lost (Ed.)

Tarpaulin Joe by Bunty Dunford (written in October 1981)

Last week I met ""Tarpaulin Joe". I had been intrigued by this name since I found it on an envelope in Fry's archives which contained a beautifully written account of the discovery of the Roman remains at Somerdale. "Tarpaulin Joe" was the pseudonym of Harford Richmond, a worker at Fry's for 45 years who had a great love of history and writing. Harford is now 79, living at Hengrove and he is a fascinating character with his own philosophy and humour. He was born at Sandholme Road, Brislington, the sixth of the seven children of James Richmond. The drunken midwife who delivered him charged two shillings and sixpence and his father said it was the worst half-crown's worth he'd ever spent.

Harford's father was for 62 years the steeple-keeper at St Nicholas Church in Bristol. His duties included ringing the curfew at nine o'clock each evening. He rode his bicycle four miles each night to perform this custom which started in

medieval times and was only stopped at the outbreak of war. The ringing took 8 to 10 minutes and included the day of the week and month of the year. James Richmond was a strong disciplinarian and a Christian. When his beloved church was bombed and he saw the bells on the floor, there were tears in his eyes. (During the war, like several other churches in the city, St Nicholas was devastated by fire during the air raid of 25th November 1940, with the loss of most of the furnishings and ancient documents. The church subsequently became a museum).

At 14 Harford left school and worked briefly at a shipyard where he had a nasty accident to his hand. He was 15 when he went for an interview at Fry's and one of the questions he was asked was whether he went to Sunday school! What they wanted, he said was "elbow grease and a willingness to work".

For ten years he worked as a *"sawyer's help"* taking three steps forward and three back lifting timber. The men he worked with were deeply religious and he learned to respect the bible. So in 1928 Harford went to work at Somerdale and became interested in the Roman excavations. He described himself as a *"ragged historian"* but many of his theories were proved right by experts. He was particularly interested in the two stone coffins which held the remains of a man and a woman. Romano-British, he said, buried as Christians. The coffins had been found before Harford went to Somerdale but he was on hand when the base of the statue of Sylvanus was found.

During the war the Home Guard took over the small museum at Fry's and the collection of objects including the bones were put elsewhere. Meanwhile Harford had joined up in the RAF police.

Above- The discovery of the Roman coffins 22nd May 1922

Below - The interior of the lodge museum that stood at the entrance to Fry's factory grounds

After the war and his return to Somerdale he wondered what had happened to his *"beloved bones".* They were safe but in bits and the task of putting them together again was a daunting one.

Harford asked permission to enlist the help of his friend Ernest Brown to lay the bones on sand under glass. This they did and that is how the bones remain today *(N.B - by the start of the 90's the factory museum had closed and Roman and mediaeval material was moved to a council store at Pixash Lane where they languish today)*

It was during the 1930s that Harford wrote for the works magazine under the name of 'Tarpaulin Joe'. He took that particular name because he was, at the time, sheeting down railway wagons with tarpaulin but for many years nobody he worked with knew that he was the writer.

The Fry's aeroplane.

Harford loved every moment of his working life at Fry's and has many anecdotes to tell. He remembered the visit of

Haile Selassie to the factory about 1930; he remembered the Fry's aeroplane and the packers being told by the pilot that the load was to be evenly distributed. Sadly the pilot, a Mr C.W.A.Scott, was killed during the war. He also remembered a principal boy, Gladys May, from one of the first Fry's pantomimes, splendid affairs that took place in the huge No. 5 dining room at the Bristol factory. Charlie Ellis took part too; he was a tinsmith and every bit the professional.

Harford retired early to nurse his sick wife who sadly died in 1972, but between visits to her in hospital he got into the habit of attending the law courts in Bristol and has done this, in the winter ever since. It gives him, he says, *"a knowledge of life".* He observes both the first offender for which a court appearance is a shattering experience and the type for whom *"crime is a way of life".* He knows the policemen and court officials; he has seen solicitors become barristers and then judges and he commends it as a pastime and says more people should take an interest in the works of the courts

Harford's purpose in life is to make people laugh - *"anyone can make you cry".* He has smoked since he was nine but doesn't drink alcohol. He has just the right humour for every occasion and uses it as a weapon for criticising anything - cracked paving stones, the bus service - "slipshod and Bristol fashion".

He carries a note book and writes in it most days observing life, passers-by, anything. None of Harford's five children is fond of writing but there's every hope that among his sixteen grand-children and 14 great grand-children a writer with his flair will emerge.

Note - Harford Richmond was born in 1903 and died in 1983 (Ed.).

The Closure of the Keynsham Fire Station

By Dennis Hill

The closure of Avon Fire and Rescue Service's Station 13, located in Temple Street, Keynsham, on 18 October 2015 means that for the first time in more than eighty-six years there is no longer an operational fire station in the town centre.

Early firefighting apparatus in the yard of the Lamb & Lark

It was in 1928 that Keynsham Parish Council opened a one-bay fire station in a converted coach house situated in the town's High Street. This fire station remained in use until 1965 when the recently closed two-bay fire station in Temple Street replaced it.

The High Street fire station (in use 1928 to 1965) decorated to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935.

At first the High Street station housed only a hose cart. If needed a lorry was available for hire to take firemen to out-of-town fires. Within the town the firemen were dependent on

sufficient water pressure from hydrants to supply firefighting jets.

All that changed in 1929 with the purchase of a Ford motor chassis on which Mulletts, a Bristol firm, built a fire tender body capable of carrying ten men, ladders, standpipes, hose etc.

Keynsham Fire Brigade pictured in 1932 with their 1929 Ford Motor Tender.

At the same time a new Merryweather two-wheel trailer pump (trp) capable of pumping 250 gallons of water per minute was acquired. The motor tender and trp served the town well until replaced by a new Leyland limousine pump at the outbreak of the Second World War. At this time the strength of Keynsham Fire Brigade (all part-time) was thirteen.

Leyland limousine pump, in Keynsham Urban District Council markings, photographed in April 1940,

The Leyland continued to occupy the High Street station throughout the war, while other premises in the town were acquired on a temporary basis for a larger Auxiliary Fire

Service (AFS) (later National Fire Service (NFS)) contingent with several utility appliances.

With the scaling down of the NFS at the end of the war, the old High Street station was again considered adequate for peace time fire cover, although in the event of a two-pump initial attendance being needed, a second pump was readily available from another nearby NFS station.

The Fire Services Act 1947 saw the setting up of Somerset Fire Brigade, with Keynsham being designated Station A9, and staffed by twelve retained firemen. Turnouts were controlled from 'A' Division HQ at Weston-Super-Mare. 'Over-the-border' support for initial two-pump attendances came from the City and County of Bristol Fire Brigade's Station 4, Brislington. Occasionally the Keynsham crew reinforced Bristol Fire Brigade, most noticeably at the sixty-pump Avonmouth oil fire in September 1951.

A Bedford fire engine replaced the Leyland in the early 1960's and following the move to Temple Street the station was upgraded to two pump retained, with the introduction of a second Bedford. Following the setting up of the County of Avon Fire Brigade on 1 April 1974, the station received a new Dodge fire engine to replace the first Bedford but then the station was downgraded to one-pump status, and the second Bedford was withdrawn.

For a number of years the station's second bay housed a preserved Dennis fire engine (ex-Somerset Fire Brigade) that was used to assist with charity collections.

In more recent years and up to the closure in October 2015 a Fire & Emergency Support Service (FESS) vehicle crewed

by Red Cross volunteers has been kept in the second bay, and this vehicle will continue to operate from the new Hicks Gate station. Two of the eleven retained fire fighters serving at the Temple Street station retired when it closed. The remaining nine have transferred to whole-time firefighting duties within Avon Fire & Rescue Service. Thus there were no compulsory redundancies as a result of the closure.

Tailpiece

Preserved ex-Somerset Fire Brigade Dennis fire engine standing in the second bay of the Temple Street fire station.

Keynsham Fire Station was first threatened with closure almost forty years ago! On 7 October 1976 the Keynsham Weekly Chronicle newspaper ran the headline 'FIRE STATION FACES THE AXE?' over an article about the County of Avon Fire Brigade needing to trim £70,000 from its annual operating costs.

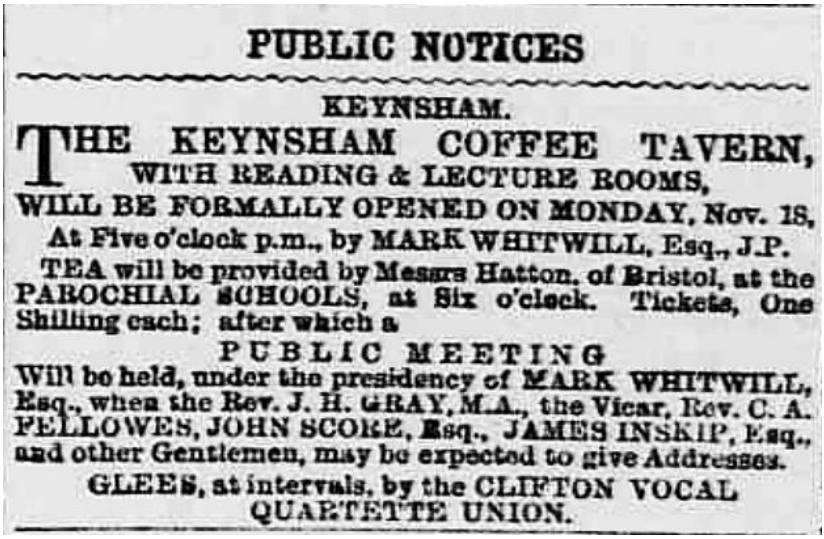
Five fire stations - Severnside, Pill, Wrington, Banwell and Keynsham were all considered to be at risk.

In the event Severnside, Wrington and Banwell fire stations closed soon afterwards. Keynsham, of course lasted a further thirty-nine years and at the time of writing, early in 2016, the one-pump station at Pill (staffed by retained fire fighters) appears to have a secure future. A new fire station serving the Keynsham and district area has been built at Hick's Gate.

The Keynsham Coffee Tavern

By Brian Vowles.

Life was hard for the lowly working man during the 19th Century. Land enclosures and the increasing use of machinery led to poverty for the thousands who then flocked to the cities in search of food and shelter. All too often drunkenness was seen as the last refuge from the miserable conditions under which they lived and too often their hard earned wages were spent on achieving oblivion. A reaction to this arose and the temperance movement led by the non-conformist churches came into being - to fight the social degradation of the poor and restore some dignity to the inebriated by saving them from *"the demon drink"*. For example on 23rd September 1864 the Keynsham Temperance Society held a public tea at the Primitive Methodist Chapel (later the Zion) when *"a large and respectable company sat down. After tea a meeting was addressed by Messrs. Olave, Turvey, Fairbetter, Walker and*



PUBLIC NOTICES

KEYNSHAM.

THE KEYNSHAM COFFEE TAVERN,
WITH READING & LECTURE ROOMS,
WILL BE FORMALLY OPENED ON MONDAY, Nov. 18,
At Five o'clock p.m., by MARK WHITWILL, Esq., J.P.

TEA will be provided by Messrs Hatton, of Bristol, at the PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS, at Six o'clock. Tickets, One Shilling each; after which a

PUBLIC MEETING

Will be held, under the presidency of MARK WHITWILL, Esq., when the Rev. J. H. GRAY, M.A., the Vicar, Rev. C. A. FELLOWES, JOHN SCORE, Esq., JAMES INSKIP, Esq., and other Gentlemen, may be expected to give Addresses.

GLEES, at intervals, by the CLIFTON VOCAL QUARTETTE UNION.

Announcing the opening of the Coffee Shop on 16th November 1878

the Rev. W Mottram. The Rev. W C Pratt also occupied a seat on the platform. The chapel was crowded to excess and was tastefully decorated with flowers, evergreens and mottoes".

On 4th January 1865 a further meeting was held at the parochial schoolroom when the chair called upon a Mr T Rogers to fully explain the principles of the Permissive Bill (a bill introduced into Parliament several times between 1864 and 1877, intended to give each parish the right to refuse the issue of licences to sell intoxicating liquors).

As well as banning the sale of alcohol another of the initiatives devised by the reformers was to provide alternatives to the countless public houses which lined every street. In the last quarter of the 19th Century there existed at least sixteen public houses in the village of Keynsham serving a population of 2000, all of which sold copious amounts of beer and cider and so a move to provide an alternative social centre was proposed.

On 18th November 1878 a 'coffee tavern' was opened opposite the church in what was formerly known as 'West End Villas'. The front room on the ground floor was fitted up as a refreshment bar with a marble topped counter and neatly decorated walls. The first floor apartment was turned into a reading room well supplied with local and London papers and other periodicals. Next to it was a smaller room where members could smoke or amuse themselves with a quiet game of chess, draughts or dominoes. On the second floor was a bagatelle room with a slate bed table. Members had to pay a small quarterly fee but visitors introduced by a member needed to pay just a penny. However the committee insisted on a strictly enforced rule that no betting, gambling or playing for money was to be permitted. On the ground floor at the rear of the building a lecture room was constructed from corrugated iron lined internally with stained and varnished deal with an

insulating layer of felt in between. The committee went to great pains to state that the lecture hall was not to be confused with the public hall proposed at a meeting several months previously (this was to become the Drill Hall on Bath Hill).

Funds to support the coffee house included a performance of Handel's "Messiah" on 27th January 1879 at the church schoolroom lent by the vicar for the occasion. The large audience enthusiastically applauded both the soloists and the choir but no encores were permitted as they had to leave for Bath on an early train. The vicar in his closing remarks mentioned that he had never heard a better concert in Keynsham and there was something peculiarly appropriate in its performance there as that was the place where Handel composed his great work (a fact since shown to be erroneous).

On 30th May 1879 the Keynsham Coffee Tavern was advertising refreshments at very moderate charges and use of the lecture room which was capable of accommodating over 130 persons.

But then after ten years of flourishing, the national Coffee Tavern movement began to fail and by 1886 only a few establishments were left and those that were still open were short of customers.

So why did such a brilliant scheme fail? One of the reasons was the standard of the coffee itself and too often the watered down, muddy-brown beverages tasted like *'horse-beans, rotten dates and burnt figs'*.

In addition the men wanted more filling meals than just soup, especially when they had to return to hard manual labour. Newspapers were fine for those who could read but they also wanted magazines and literature like modern novels. Although women made up half the population, they were barred from the coffee houses unlike the more convivial alcoholic drinking establishments. Smokers didn't like to be segregated in a back

room away from the rest of the patrons and in order to provide a calm atmosphere, loud boisterous conversations weren't allowed. Some managers posted signs at the entrance which read, *"No Bad Language Permitted"* and went so far as to forbid group discussions and in so doing deprived the men of the gossip of the day. Taken together, these negative aspects and patronising approach contributed to the downfall of the public coffee house movement.

On 13th January 1886 an advertisement in the 'FOR SALE' section of a local newspaper hinted at the end of the project as it read *"For sale, capital COUNTER, with marble top, two Coffee Urns, 2 and 6 gallons.- Proprietor, Coffee Tavern, Keynsham.* Also the 11th February 1888 saw rooms being offered *"with good cooking and attendance*" at West End Villas as the building reverted to being a boarding house.

However this was not the end of the Coffee Tavern as such as by 1894 the rather misnamed Alfred Beer was running his own non-alcoholic establishment on Bath Hill until about 1904.

Alfred Beer's Coffee Tavern, Cheapside, Bath Hill.

No Longer with us

Michael Fitter

Too late to be included in last year's journal came the announcement of the death of Michael Fitter who died on 20th May 2015 aged 87 at home after a short illness.

His funeral took place at the Victoria Methodist Church in Keynsham on Monday 1st June 2015.

Michael C Fitter 1928- 2015

He was for a number of years a member of the Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society and at one time served on the committee.

He was born in London and grew up in Hayes, Bromley, South London during the war years. A retired primary school teacher and an amateur historian, Michael's researches of the town's past included that of the medieval, Tudor and Stuart periods.

He wrote about life in Keynsham both during the war and more recent times and performed a very valuable role in recording the memories of many of its inhabitants before they passed on and their stories were forgotten.

In addition he investigated aspects of the architecture of Keynsham, which had been his home since the early 1960s.

His six books included "Keynsham in Grandfather's Day", "The War over Keynsham" and "Old Keynsham in Stone".

Jim Allen

Jim Allen 1919- 2016

Also it is with great sadness that we report the recent death of Jim Allen on 6th March 2016. Jim, who was 97, was well known and respected and had been a warden at St John's for many years.

He had a deep interest in local history and was for many years a member of the society contributing a number of articles to this journal.

He died peacefully after celebrating his 97th birthday at SS Philip and James retirement home in Priory Road, Keynsham on 25th February.

His funeral took on Monday 4th April at St John's Parish Church where he was churchwarden for 11 years and for whom he edited the parish magazine 'Contact' for almost 20 years. This was followed by a cremation at Haycombe Crematorium.

Jim was a father of three and who had seven grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. He and his wife Winifred lived in Cranmore Avenue, Keynsham for more than 60 years.

Only two years ago when I visited him he was keen that I include his article "*The Making of 'Son et Lumière' in 1970"* in this edition.