

October/November



Blagdon Life and Times

The Newsletter from Blagdon Local History Society



Autumn clicks closer as the days peel away from the calendar....

Yet the year seems to have hardly got into gear. It is the effect of the pandemic of course, the enforced 'lockdown' and the subsequent slow emergence from the enforced isolation and 'social distancing'. It is a situation so extreme that there cannot have been anything of equal historic significance since World War II, affecting life both socially and economically. I am sure that the repercussions will be felt for decades to come.

How might they have coped in the past? Here we have cuttings that may give us a clue, with tales about floods and pandemics of the past. But if these cuttings reveal anything, reaction to them seems purely practical with very little emotional concern.

If that is too much, there are stories here to amuse and distract from the present crisis. Some are seasonal: stories that show a vibrant community woven to the land and what it could produce. Yes, it has been the season of the harvest and its celebrations. But also, in the past as the community's focus moved away from agriculture and horticulture over the years after WWI and WWII, local entrepreneurs moved in to make a 'killing' to build on farm or orchard land. The fortunes of these business men rose and fell with ebb and flow of village life and the effects brought about by the national economy. Here is the story of one such man R.C.Cock. >>

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PLUS links to WRINGTON ARCHIVE and the astounding story of Dr H. A. Bell. Also, a video link to Ken Parson's fascinating online talk - *Somerset Against the King*.....20

Compiled by Sheila Johnson, Jacky Kerly and other members of the Blagdon Local History Society. Edited by Peter May. With source material from the Western Daily Press, the Wells Journal, Addicott Archive, The John Gallop Collection and the BLHS Archive.

More articles, news about events and pictures can be found on the new website BlagdonLHS.com or the Facebook Group page: [Blagdon Local History Society](https://www.facebook.com/BlagdonLocalHistorySociety) and ask for an invite to join at blagdonlocalhistorysociety@gmail.com.

>> Looking back on his story, it could form the basis of a script that would easily eclipse any other 'Every Day Story of Countryfolk' or TV costume drama.

And so it came to pass.....

Excerpts of a talk to Blagdon History Society several years ago by Mike Adams, about the possible effects of the Black Death on the village of Blagdon.

The Black Death in Blagdon by Mike Adams

The Black Death came first in the years 1348-50 and was to return in 1361-64, 1368, 1371, 1373-75, 1390 and 1405. It is thought to have started in Asia and to have been carried to Europe by the fleas living on rats which infested merchant ships. Between 30% and 60% of the European population was wiped out and it took centuries to properly recover.

Locally, it is said that the famous Sheep Fair moved from Wells to Priddy in 1348 because of the Black Death. It has been held there every year since, with the exceptions of 2001 and 2007 because of foot-and-mouth disease.

We had no reference to the plague in Blagdon until society members >>

>>Neil Bentham and Sheila Johnson attended a talk given by James Bond for the Langford History Group entitled Medieval Somerset Villages.

In the course of discussion there was a reference to the manor of Blagdon [Blakedone] in 1353 where James Daudele had acquired various tenements by the death of tenants from plague.

Olga Shotton deduced that James Daudele was in fact James D'Audley, Lord of the Manor. James Bond kindly supplied the reference and Olga found the volume in Bristol Reference Library (see box below). It is one of the earliest descriptions of Blagdon and also provides some useful information regarding the rights of the Rector.

Inquisition. Blakedon, co. Somerset. 4 June.

There are a capital messuage called Blakedon manor very well built for the residence of a great person but of no yearly value beyond outgoings; two gardens; a croft with pasture and fruits; land, meadow, and wood; a wood called 'Foulotteshey'; pasture; rent of freemen, bondmen, and other tenants; divers tenements, which fell into the lord's hand by the death of the tenants during the plague; and pleas and perquisites of Court.

The rector of Blakedon shall have *housebote* and *heybote* in the lord's wood, and a horseload of the wood daily; an oak at the feast of St. Mark and another at Christmas; 8 oxen and 6 cows in the lord's pasture; all his pigs in the lord's wood without pannage; all his animals in the common pasture; and a ploughbeast with those of the lord.

These profits are valued at 20s., and the reeve's stipend is 5s. Value 46*l.* 14*s.* 11*½d.*

In this document the name of our village is spelled Blakedon; in the Domesday Book 1086 it was Blachedone. Whichever way, it means in Old English - black/dark down/hill. It is quite likely that the wood called 'Foulotteshey' in the document is 'Fullers Hay' today, on the south side of The Coombe between Blagdon and Rickford. In 1353, the rector changed - the names of rectors are recorded in a framed list hanging on a wall in St Andrew's Church. From 1347-53 it was Hug de Nywehalle, followed by Rog Magot and Will Heyworth until 1417.

The *housebote* award gave the rector the right to take timber for buildings and equipment and *heybote* allowed him to take a quota of wood for fuel and fencing.

**Floods and Storms that could have been mistaken for the 'Wrath of God'.....
Blagdon has certainly had its fair share of scary weather.**

Bristol Mercury
14th November 1894

DAMAGE TO BLAGDON RESERVOIR.

In consequence of the continual rain for about 21 hours which commenced on Sunday evening, the river Yeo on Monday overflowed its banks, and the fields adjacent, as well as several roadways, became inundated. But the most serious damage was at the Waterworks in course of construction, the water rushing into the "puddle gutter," which averages nearly a hundred feet deep, and is 12 feet in width, with about half a mile in length. Such was the volume of water that the gutter soon became filled at its lowest level, all of which will have to be pumped out before operations can be resumed, which will throw a large number of men out of work for some little time. At the adjacent village of Batcombe a family named Croker had to take refuge in the upstairs rooms, the basement of the house being flooded, and their furniture floating about in the water. There has not been such a serious flood in this neighbourhood for several years past, and what made

Unknown
July 1927

the moral tributes were daily and beautifully
TERRIFIC STORM.—In the early afternoon of Monday this parish experienced what is believed to have been the fiercest storm in the memory of the proverbial "oldest inhabitant." Indications would seem to suggest that the Wrington Vale was the "brewing" focus of the great storm which afterwards wreaked such devastation in Bristol. Be that as it may, there was such torrential rainfall that well over an inch was registered in an hour, while intermixed with it was a terrific hailstorm. Many of the stones were of the size of a pigeon's egg, and the power of their descent was such as to perforate two-ply felt which was placed on a building in course of erection. Peculiarly enough nothing of the storm was experienced on Mendip top.—On Tuesday evening another storm of great violence and magnitude swept over Blagdon with devastating effects. The artillery of the thunder and the vivid forked flashes of lightning caused much dismay and terror, while the waters swept down over Blagdon Hill with all the force and suddenness of a tidal wave, bringing with it tons of stone and dirt, demolishing houses and shops to a depth of three feet, and causing much damage. So huge was the volume of water that a wall some four feet thick at Depland Batch was swept away like tissue paper, and huge cavities and culverts were made in the public roads and the unprecedented rainfall registered two inches within an hour. During the height of the storm the dwelling houses of Mrs. Mercy Monk, Blagdon Hill, and Mr. Fred Harris, East End Town, were struck by lightning, and in both cases very considerable damage was done to the roofs. At Score, and Studley the rushing waters swept down with such force and velocity that Mr. James Bath, who was driving his horse and cart had great difficulty in keeping the horse upon its feet and from being drowned. Huge hailstorms again perforated the roofing felt of some new houses in the course of erection, and all telephonic communication was put out of order.

Shepton Mallet Journal
8th March 1900

BLAGDON.

DURING the thunderstorm on Friday a flash of lightning struck the church tower about 20ft. from the ground and dislodged about 1 cwt. of the stone work; and passed into the church and shifted some of the flooring. Some glass at the rectory was also broken.

West Somerset Free Press
March 1895

BLAGDON CHURCH STRUCK BY LIGHTNING.

A very severe hailstorm passed over Blagdon on Sunday afternoon, and during the storm there was an extremely vivid flash of lightning. It was not known that any damage was done at the time, but later, when the ringers at the parish church were chiming for evening service, they were considerably surprised to see sparks falling down on them. On opening the trap-door in the ceiling they found that one of the beams in the third floor was smouldering. They immediately informed the sexton, Mr. James Gadd, and he, together with Messrs. F. Fear, G. King, and F. Board, succeeded in extinguishing the fire before any serious injury was done. The beam, which was very old, had burnt nearly half-way through. It was evident that the lightning had struck the tower in the afternoon and ignited the beam. The tower is a fine specimen of the Perpendicular style of architecture, and was built about the year 1400. When certain work was performed in the year 1822 the tower was fortunately left in its original state; the body of the church, however, was treated in the style common to that time.

Western Daily Press
16th August 1917

BLAGDON.

HEAVY THUNDERSTORM.
A storm of exceptional severity visited the village on Tuesday. The streets were covered with water to a depth of several inches, and many houses were flooded. A large portion of the wall at Mr Lawrence's house was washed down, and the roads were torn up in all directions. The thunderstorm lasted a little over an hour.

Western Daily Press
5th November 1924

Following a week of torrential rain, the unprecedented sight of a flood in Blagdon Coombe was seen, and cottagers at Street End, 550 feet above sea-level, had the alarming experience of water rushing in at their back doors and out through the front, flooding their living-rooms.

And there's more.....

Western Daily Press
4th January 1926

Blagdon.

The torrential rains and gales have caused much damage and inconvenience in the Blagdon and Wrington Vale districts. Immense volumes of water have poured down the hillsides into the valleys below, flooding the low-lying dwellings, and making the roads impassable. The bus services were greatly impeded, and motor-cycling and car driving was exceedingly dangerous and in many cases impossible. In parts of Langford and Churchill the main London to Exeter road has been cut off.

Wells Journal 20th
June 1924

BLAGDON BLOTTED OUT

A strange feature of the visitation at Blagdon was that the whole of the Wrington Vale and Chew Valley was blotted out, and the village plunged into inky darkness. The parish church was not discernible, and at the height of the storm, at 5.40 p.m., the lightning effects over the lake were vividly beautiful.

The storm culminated in a terrific crash of thunder and a flash of lightning which struck the roof of Highbridge House, the residence of the Misses Ainger, totally destroying the chimney pots, running along the leaded ridge of the house, tearing it like paper, and displacing the slates at the further end of the house. The debris of the chimney fell with a crash into the sitting-room greatly, to the alarm of the occupants, but fortunately without anyone sustaining injuries.

Hailstones as big as pigeons' eggs fell on the corrugated iron roof of the Fisherman's Hut, on the side of Blagdon Lake, and the noise was terrific.

The effects of the storm deneutralised the magneto on the omnibus of Mr. J. Lyons, the Blagdon carrier, and brought the vehicle to a standstill at Redhill, causing a delay of some two hours.

Memories by Benjamin James of the 1851 Blagdon Floods reported by Anne King

Richard Baker (1808-1885) was a Blagdonian from the Street End Lane area. In 1838 he married Eliza Hallett of the Seymour Arms. They soon settled in a small cottage in the little coombe not far from his old home. Benjamin James was born in 1841. His family must have used his second name as he was known as 'Uncle Jim', much loved by all young relatives for the fun and treasure hunts he made for them.

By 1861 Jim was working as a coachman and soon afterwards he left Blagdon for Bath. He worked and became the first librarian of the original free library. At various times he was a relieving officer, registrar, and school attendance officer. He brought his family up to enjoy education and love the countryside.

This is an extract from an article he sent to a newspaper published November 21st 1925, when he was an old man of 84. At the time of the flood he was a young boy of ten living with his family of seven. They lived in a cottage lying across the upper end of the coombe, which divides the village of Blagdon into two parts. The two districts are known colloquially as *Isentown* and *Wosntown* [Eastern town and Western town]. The coombe extends upwards from the lake about half a mile at a right angle to the slope of the Mendip range, and is ordinarily very dry. The baby in the cradle in 1851 was his younger brother, the second of the family to be named Benjamin, and always remembered as Uncle Ben. Ben survived, worked on the railways, and eventually retired with his wife to *The Sheiling* in Sladacre Lane.

21st November 1925 (written by Benjamin James - Uncle Jim).

'Cradle Floats away'

"In the late afternoon of a July day in 1851, a very heavy and long continued thunderstorm occurred, and the surface water became diverted into the coombe. The torrent of water quickly rose on the upper side of the cottage and by its pressure broke>

(Cradle Floats away- contd)

> the ground floor window of twelve or fourteen panes, driving the cradle with an infant brother across the floor, splashing, but not wakening him. The water seemed to be fairly warm, and the child was rescued later floating in his cot. He was none the worse for his experience.”

Terrifying Experience

Mr Baker’s father returned from the hayfield just in time to assist in saving the family, removing all to the bedroom floor. The furious thrust of the water closed the door, and the ground floor became a huge sink. The water now rose to within two steps of the bedroom floor, the family’s only refuge.

The stout rubble walls of the cottage resisted the pressure until the water broke through an opposite window and poured down the valley doing further damage. The current continued passing through the house until late in the night.

At some period during the flood the partition below, partly supporting the bedroom floor, gave way with a crash. The floor sagged a little but happily continued to hold and all were saved after a terrifying experience. The cause of this calamitous flood was said to be a cloudburst high on the hillside. The water charged with hay and debris became diverted into the coombe.

Newspapers of July 1851 have reports of hail and thunderstorms mid-month, and a violent thunderstorm in late July. Blagdon is not mentioned, but Bath, Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare were all affected. Blagdon suffered another flood in July 1968 but there lies another story....

The Virulent Scarlet Fever Epidemic of 1843

A mind shudderingly pertinent illustration of how our ancestors DID NOT deal adequately with an epidemic. In immediate retrospect there was a lesson that was learnt, the hard way. Or at least resolutions were made for any future epidemics. Sadly, that lesson was completely forgotten.

From the back of the burial register...

“Died From Fever - chiefly Scarlet of a very virulent kind - if another visitation of a similar kind shd ever befall the Parish, it is hoped that public & prompt measures fully be taken to prevent infection spreading - It shd be taken up by the Parish at once, & the most stringent means employed to keep the sick separate from the healthy, & the relief shd not be left to the efforts of private charity - DW”

Forty children between the ages of 9 months & 12 years died, all but one between March 29 and November 25 1843.

Twenty three families lost children: Hale (4), Baker (2), Lawrance (2), Field (1), Panes (2), Carpenter (2), Vowles (2), Addicott (1), Derrick (1), Hurley (3), Durbin (3), Simmons (1), Williams (2), Hellier (1), Ogborne (1), Bartur (2), Podger (1), Emery (1), Jefferies (2), Maybee (1), Tedball (4), Thatcher (1), & Wilson (1).

Ed: This brings tears to my eyes every time I scan through it. But at least in our modern pandemic we have not left it to “private charity” – at least we have the NHS. But we still have not learnt the lesson that ‘public and prompt’ measures need to be taken - locally.

Let's lighten things up with something seasonal....Last issue we had the haymaking, now it's time for the grain harvest. Then cider making follows with a visit to some of the pubs.

The Blagdon Harvest - from Addicott's Archive and 'Bygone Blagdon'



Albert Sampson, Harry Cobb and others are harvesting wheat in the old and laborious way - grasping a bunch of stems in the left hand and cutting them with a reap hook. A twist of straw was used to tie the corn into sheaves, and then eight sheaves would be propped against each other to form a stook - *shown in the photo.*

When they were really dry, the sheaves would be built up into a mow on top of a staddle of thorn. The staddle would keep the corn up out of the wet, and the thorns would, it was hoped, stop the rats from getting into the mow. So the corn would be stored like this until threshing time.

(Bygone Blagdon)

Well-earned refreshment was taken from the cider jar.



And thinking of alcoholic beverages leads us into an aside of a brief history of drinking in Blagdon - or at least, here are some things that you never knew about some of the drinking establishments in this fascinating village...

BLAGDON INNS

By Sheila Johnson

The alehouse as it was commonly known, has been a part of English life since Roman times, but few records exist until the mid-sixteenth century when a national system of licensing was first introduced. Under the Alehouse Act of 1522 no-one was allowed to sell beer or ale without the consent of the local Justices of the Peace. Each person licensed by the justices had to enter into a recognizance, or bond, to ensure that good behaviour was maintained in each alehouse and the licensee pledged to abide by the rules or risk payment of a fine or even the loss of the licence. These recognizances had to be certified at Quarter Sessions and were kept on record.

An act of 1729 gave formal approval to the practice of only granting licences annually at special licensing sessions known as Brewster Sessions, and the Licensing Act of 1753 stated new licences could only be granted by persons producing certificates of good character usually signed by upstanding members of the community.



... there were also a great many orchards in the village and thousands of gallons of cider were produced. Labourers often received part of their wages in beer or in the village cider as depicted in the photograph.

(Addicott's archive)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were three inns operating in the village – the Bell Inn, the George Inn, and the Seymour Arms. They all offered stabling for horses, had large rooms available for events such as property auctions, ploughing match dinners, friendly society celebrations etc, and offered rooms to let. The role of licensee was not a full-time occupation and landlords often had other jobs.

The *Beerhouse Act of 1830* provided the opportunity for several smaller hostelries including the New Inn, the Live and Let Live and the Queen Adelaide – more about these beerhouses in the next newsletter

Bell Inn, Bell Square (formerly known as The Sun)

A very early 'victualling house' - recognizance records show John Allen as inn keeper in 1753, but the Bell was well established before this date. The inn was still active in the early 19th century and local newspaper reports show auctions were held in the upper room. Perhaps one of the most notable was the auction of the manor of Blagdon in 1764.

In the 1770s Hannah More recorded having breakfast at the Bell Inn with her sister Sally before joining the service in the parish church. The vestry used the Bell Inn for a meeting in 1823, but after this date its use as an inn seems to have declined. Landlords include Allen, Dyer and Reeves. The tithe apportionment of 1842 shows the building was owned by the lord of the manor Henry Seymour, and the 1841 census lists the premises as a lodging house run by Ann Foord.

The blocked outlines of some of the original windows and door openings of the Bell inn can still be seen in the north-facing stone wall that forms a part of the boundary wall of the property now known as Old Bell House in Bell Square.

Amongst the papers in the BLHS 'Dissenters' archive file is a handwritten note by Kathleen Rose Jones, née Gallop (1897 – 1993), who lived in Clennon House, that says:

In 1850 a request from believers in Blagdon was sent to the Bristol Baptist Society, to organise regular services in the village. The Club Room of the Old Bell Inn was hired and Worship was continued there every Sunday for the next 25 years. It was approached by an outside flight of 26 stone steps. There was no pulpit, but if the preacher needed support, he could lean upon a sack of meal standing in the room... often the room was very crowded. It was very low, and to farmer William Derrick (my great grandfather) very awkward, as he stood to give out the hymns, with a request to his daughter (my grandmother) to 'pitch the tune Polly'.

In 1871, land was secured to build a new Chapel and a request was made to their friends in Bristol to help to raise funds to meet the building costs. The Chapel was built by local builder John Clark at a cost of £475. It was said John Clark *got little profit but great pleasure out of the work*. It was opened in 1875 and named the 'Jubilee Chapel' to commemorate the Jubilee of the Bristol Baptists Itinerant Society. It is worth noting that after the opening service some six hundred persons sat down to tea in a tent in a field nearby kindly lent by Capt. Newnham of Blagdon Court.

George Inn – now George House

The inn was situated in the High Street in the centre of the village in a prime location opposite what is now The Village Stores. The George had a large strip of land attached (OS 447) – formerly an orchard, which ran parallel to the High Street up to the junction with Street End. We know the inn was operating in 1766 from land tax records but have yet to discover when it first opened.



OS map 1883 High Street (redrawn by Rob Marley) showing the George Inn, Seymour Arms and a building listed as 355, which presumably was the Bell Inn. This was listed as 315 on older maps and by the 1960s it had disappeared. What is remarkable is the amount of land planted with orchard trees. Those backing the George were owned by the landlord of the inn.

There was no Police station or lock up in the village so prisoners were taken to the George Inn and handcuffed to the large grate in the Tap Room and then taken on foot the next day to Axbridge Court House (*Joan Lyons*).

The inn had a number of owners including Rev Whalley of Mendip Lodge and John Bailey, a wealthy teazle dealer, who lived in what is now The Old Parsonage. The inn was auctioned in 1858 (*see advert for auction - right*), and the premises included the blacksmith's shop and penthouse occupied by Henry Heale - now the car park of George House. Henry supplied metalwork for the 1821 church and built wrought iron gates for the entrances to the churchyard. The business was later taken over by Ernest Humphries who subsequently moved to the new forge built by W H Wills in Street End when George Monk retired.

From 1875 the *Court Pride of Blagdon*, *Ancient Order of Foresters* adopted the George Inn as their Club house. The members paraded through the village wearing full regalia, headed by a brass band and mounted foresters representing Robin Hood and Little John. A marquee was erected in the grounds of the inn and host Ephraim Thatcher provided a meal for more than 100 club members.

Walter Brunt took over as landlord after Ephraim Thatcher, and he was followed briefly by Jacob Lyons who subsequently lost his license. John Lack came to the village from Northamptonshire to work as a bricklayer but by 1911 he was landlord of the George - it was said he was good at handling the navvies who had come to the village to work on railway and reservoir. It was an inn enjoyed by locals - Boer war veterans Lieut Col Charles Philips (retired) of Blagdon House Lodge, and local postman George Addicott used to enjoy reminiscing about the war in the George Inn (Jane Venner-Pack).

In 1926 the George orchard was sold at auction to builder Rowland 'Charlie' Cock, former landlord of the Seymour Arms, for £170. He subsequently built Glen Shean for William Lyons and possibly Valley View (?).

In the 1930s there was an active Thrift Society which distributed funds amongst its members at Christmas.

The inn was popular with fishermen and in 1927, when the innkeepers Sylvia and Maggie Thomas retired after 15 years, they were presented with a silver rose bowl from the anglers and boatmen of Blagdon Lake.

Mr and Mrs Tom Frise took over and when local press reported the sudden death of Mrs Leah Frise in 1940 it was said she was *known to fishermen from all parts of the kingdom who visited Blagdon Lake*.

All good things come to an end and the George Inn closed its doors for the last time at the end of 1958. It is now a private house named George House and the bracket for the inn sign can still be seen on the front of the building. The photo on the next page was taken shortly after it had been closed.

Lot 2. All that old-established and well-known PUBLIC-HOUSE, called *The George Inn*, with Brewhouse, Clubroom, and Stables, and Garden and Orchard adjoining thereto, which are now, and for many years past have been, in the occupation of Mrs. Jenkins, widow, and which in the Tithe Commutation Map of the said Parish of Blagdon are thus described:—

No. on the Tithe Map.	Premises.	Cultivation.	Quantity.
208	The George Inn and Orchard	A. R. P. 1 1 7

And, also, all that BLACKSMITH'S SHOP and PENT-HOUSE thereto belonging, in the occupation of Henry Heale, and adjoining the said Inn and Premises. At a nominal expense it may be converted into a Dwelling-house.

Lot 2 is Freehold. It adjoins the Turnpike-road, is situate in the centre and best part of the Village for business, and the Orchard frontage is well adapted for Dwelling-houses, Shops, or other building purposes.

17 July 1858, the George is advertised with orchard and 'Brewhouse'.

THE NEW LICENSING ACT. BREWSTER SESSIONS. AXBRIDGE.

The annual brewster session was held at the Town Hall, Axbridge, Monday. Colonel Wm. Long, C.M.G., was in the chair. The annual report of Superintendent Brown showed that there were 56 fully licensed houses, 49 on beerhouses, two off beerhouses, and 11 grocers and other licensees. The population of the district was 28,760, so that there was one licensed house to 209 inhabitants. Forty-one males and two females had been convicted of drunkenness, as compared with 43 males and four females in the period of 1901, showing a decrease of two males and two females. Six of the persons were non-resident. Ten licensees had been convicted. In reply to the chairman, Superintendent Brown said there was a decrease in drunkenness despite the fact that the report covered a period of 17 months. Colonel Long said the report was very satisfactory. There were no applications for new licences, but the police objected to the renewal of the licence of the George Inn, Blagdon, kept by Jacob Lyons, who was charged with permitting drunkenness on January 8th, and with supplying a man with drink whilst he was under the influence of liquor. Mr. F. W. Bishop appeared for the police. Mr. J. L. Dickinson defended, and pleaded guilty to serving the man. Mr. Bishop thereupon withdrew the first charge, and defendant was fined 10/- and costs, and the renewal of the licence was deferred until the next meeting.

Shepton Mallet Journal
3rd Feb
1903



The George Inn c 1959 and 2005
(Photograph Jenny George)

Children's phrase to name the
pubs in Blagdon:

*"The Queen said unto the George
let's Live and Let Live and
Seymour at the New Inn"*

(David Lock)



The Seymour Arms

This remains a bit of a mystery!

The manor of Blagdon changed hands frequently throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Benjamin Hopkinson bought the manor towards the end of the 18th century. The manor house (Blagdon Court) was let as Benjamin and family lived in the Royal Circle in Bath. Benjamin died in 1801 leaving his daughter Jane as his only surviving legitimate heir. In 1817 Henry Seymour married Jane Hopkinson and inherited the title and the estate. They made their home in Knoyle House in Wiltshire.

The Seymour Arms is reputed to be named after the Seymour family, but we don't know the age or the history of the building. The inn had an upstairs room for functions, it could seat over 100 for events such as ploughing match dinners, and the friendly society known as *The Pride of Blagdon Buffalo Lodge* used the room as its Club house during the 1920s.

In 1845, whilst writing the *Rural Rides of a Bristol Churchgoer* for The Bristol Times, Joseph Leech left his 'quadruped' in the Seymour Arms before walking to the church.

Bygone Blagdon (published in 1986) records the building is dated 1905 on the Street End gable. R C Cock, a builder from Wells who had been landlord of The Globe, worked on the refurbishment of the building and subsequently became the landlord in 1912. The half-timbered style resembles other buildings in the village which were designed by Sir Frank Wills as part of Lord Winterstoke's grand plan for his 'model village'. The decorative plasterwork was by H Allen. However, all did not go to plan during the refurbishment. In 1912 the owners, Oakhill Brewery Company, had had the place redecorated and provided hot and cold running water as well as an acetylene gas installation. There must have been an escape of gas which filled the space above the first floor. The gas caught fire and the subsequent explosion tore up flooring, blew out several windows and brought the ceiling down. The force of the explosion blew workman Arthur Venn over and scorched his face and hair - fortunately there were no other casualties.



Before...

The Seymour Arms as it looked probably about 1890.

Joseph Leech claimed to have stayed there in 1845, but apart from that we can only guess its age.

Although it is probably in need of some refurbishment, nobody would have expected the change that was going to be wrought in 1905.

After.. (c1920)

The Sir Frank Wills inspired faux-Tudor woodwork, with ornate plaster work and a bath stone facing, was carried out by R.C. Cock in 1905. The was a new porch and side entrance added. One of the windows has disappeared along with the railings and the shrubs. The chimneys have been rebuilt and the out buildings have been changed – probably in the process of being repurposed and there being less need for overnight livery.



From **Bygone Blagdon** compiled by **Andrew Addicott** with respect to the above image: *The motor with Fred King leaning against it belonged to Nordrach Sanatorium up at Charterhouse. The pony and trap belonged to Bill Day who is standing to the right of the door. His son Sydney is seated in the trap. It is likely there had been some function in the village and the vehicles were waiting to take people up the hill to Charterhouse.*

The door to the right is now closed up. It led to the off-licence, known as the 'jug and bottle'. On the left of the building were the stables, now converted into garages [and smoking area].

Behind the main building were some sheds where Theo Saint carried on his business as a carpenter and undertaker.

In the 1920s there was a thriving Meccano Club led by Kath Day (*see right: from the Meccano Monthly July 1925*).

"During WW2 the upper room was used for entertainment – lots of concerts. There was Evelyn Maude and her concert party from Bristol. Also well-known singers like Reginald Fry, Harry and Cyril Royall, Cynthia Glover came later. Marigold Chapman held dance classes (ballroom) in the upstairs room. Love Harris and her all-girls band were really good." (*Rosemary Hodges*)

Famous visitors to the inn include Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout movement and Frankie Vaughan, singer and entertainer from 50s ("Give me the moonlight...") – both of whom came for the fishing. More famous visitors will be revealed in the next issue.

The Seymour Arms has undergone several more refurbishments over the years and is still going strong!



Drink up 'ee zider....un' get 'e down thy kecker !

To say that Blagdon was awash with cider at certain times in the past would be but a mild exaggeration. There were always several houses that could be guaranteed to serve cider, both licensed and unlicensed.

When you consider the fragile mortal thread by which people held onto their existence at any time previous to the introduction of national pensions and social security, it seems logical that many folk in their dotage, disablement or widowhood might invest a small 'nest egg' in setting up a soft drink and sweet shop, a tiny convenience store for groceries or even recycled clothing. Many others however may be tempted to invest in a barrel or two for financial gain by the piecemeal distribution of their contents. This was not necessarily premeditated purely for profit after all, we all know the social aspects of consuming the amber nectar. This was capitalism with a sociable smile.

It is hardly surprising that there was so much cider. Looking at the old maps you can see orchards everywhere and these were primarily planted with cider apple trees (interspersed with a few dual-purpose fruits like Bramleys, Newton Wonder and Blenheim). These orchards not only surrounded all the villages in the vicinity, but filled all the green spaces within them. At this time of year, in October, the orchards would serve to produce cider, much of it being sold and consumed locally. Liz Copas in *A Somerset Pomona* says: "...in Victorian times, most farm labours were being paid in kind with bread and cheese and cider. A typical labourer got paid 3 to 4 pints a day as part of his wages, 6 to 8 pints during haymaking. Some farmers rated their >>

16th June 1873 - Cider for sale

RICKFORD, BURREINGTON, SOMERSET,
About Two Miles from Wrington.
MESSRS. DAY & WILCOX will **SELL** by
AUCTION, on **WEDNESDAY** Next, June 25,
About 200 GALLONS of First-class Old and New CIDER,
In Lots to suit Purchasers;
Also, TEN CROSS-BRED HOG SHEEP, in their Wool;
A Double-screw CIDER PRESS,
A Double-rod APPLE MILL and TROUGHS,
The Property of Mr. Hugh Brown.
Messrs. Day and Wilcox can highly recommend the above
Cider to Innkeepers, Farmers, and others, and can assure them
that it is mild and suitable for town and country purposes. The
Cider can remain until the 1st of August next, if required, upon
the usual deposit of 10s. per 100 gallons, to be paid at the time
of Sale.
A Conveyance will be in waiting at the Yatton Station on the
day of Sale, to meet the 11.10 a.m. train from Bristol, to convey
purchasers to the Sale, and return to meet the up-train in the
Evening.
Refreshments will be provided at One o'clock, and the Sale
to commence at Two sharp.
Dated Yatton and Oldbury-on-Severn, June 1st, 1873. (869)

(left) Cider barrel delivery at Fir Tree Farm

BLAGDON, SOMERSET.
MR. JOHN SWEARSE will **SELL** by
AUCTION, on the Premises, on **WEDNESDAY** Next,
20th of May, in convenient Lots,
About 200 Gallons of CIDER,
Of very excellent quality, which may remain until the 1st of
June next, upon payment of a deposit of 5s. per Hogshead.
The Property of Mr. Samuel Young.
Sale to commence at Three o'clock in the Afternoon.
Dated May 8th, 1889. (889)



>> labourers by the amount they could consume. 'A two gallon a day man was worth the extra drink he drank,' said one farmer. Cider might constitute about a fifth of their 'pay'. Parliament tried to put a stop to all this by the Truck Act in 1887. This prohibited the payment of wages with alcoholic drink. Cider 'truck', the unfair exchange, was made illegal, or at least according to London, but the law found it difficult to reach>>

>> the deepest parts of Somerset and 'Truckle' was still part of the way of life right up until the outbreak of the Second World War."

When it came to harvesting....

"Generally the cider fruit was allowed to ripen and fall naturally, before being collected up into sacks and leant against the trees until the time for cider-making approached.....Cider is the best way to store apples in times of plenty, and a consolation in times of shortage." (*Liz Copas 2001*)

Roland 'Charlie' Cock : a man who made his mark on Blagdon

He has been mentioned twice already in this newsletter and his name and influence will be come up regularly in numerous tales of recent Blagdon history. Here is some of what we know about him - a story of rags to riches and back again.

- He started off as a builder in Wells. But by 1906 he was publican of the Globe Inn, although he continued to live in Wells until 1911.
- He worked on the refurbishment of the Seymour Arms and took over as landlord soon afterwards.
- Bought the George Inn Orchard at auction in 1912 for £170 with the intention of building houses.
- He ran the Seymour Arms until 1924 when Gilbert Day took over as landlord.
- Daughter Gwendoline married Fred Boyd in Blagdon in 1922 - Boyd's orchard was subsequently developed and renamed Garston Lane
- Built *The Chalet* on land adjoining the Methodist Chapel in Street End and moved there in 1924. The yard adjoining was used for his construction business
- He converted 'The Barn' in Sladacre Lane to living accommodation in about 1926. He also built the big corrugated iron-clad building in his yard in the 1920s to accommodate the Bristol Bus overnight.
- Built Glenshean for William and Flo Lyons, probably also Chayfern and Valley View.
- In 1930 he was awarded a diploma and silver medal when he was elected as an Associate Member of the Institute of British Engineers (M.Inst.B.E.)
- In 1930 he sold some of the George orchard land to Cecil Payne who went on to build Waterdene

Charlie got into financial difficulties and suffered a breakdown in the mid-1930s. He retired in 1938 and his estate was sold - it included two three bedroomed houses in Newfields, Myrtle Cottage in Post Office Lane, land on Blagdon Hill and a cottage in Street End. He sold the business to Cecil Payne who had worked for him as a carpenter.

Charlie went to live with his sister, a retired schoolteacher, Elizabeth Cock, who lived in 'The Hut' near Dipland Farm. He bought a railway carriage which he often used as a potting shed type of retreat. It was thought if he'd managed to carry on until after the war his business may have survived.

As it happened it was Cecil Payne reaped the benefits of the post war building boom in Blagdon. Charlie died in 1942 aged 72.



The Chalet

This was an ex-army portable building. The wooden hut was then covered with wire netting and stucco with square asbestos roof tiles hung in a diamond pattern.

There were several timber and asbestos buildings built in the village in the 1920s and 30s.

The last occupiers were Mr Francis Pope and his wife, he was another former landlord of the Seymour Arms. It was owned by Terry Lyons and leased to Dennis Taylor of Taylor's Patio. It was demolished in January 2004 and Taylors left the site at the end of February 2005

Letters to the Editor: there's only one, and it has come from a long way away.

In the last newsletter we had a mystery photo, the location for which needed identifying. Identification came most positively from the 'outback' of Australia!

On 28 Jul 2020, at 05:23, Belinda Nurse wrote

Hi Peter, Pip and Blagdon Local History Society,

Ben recently emailed me a copy of the June/July edition of your very interesting magazine! I did so enjoy reading it, and could relate to so many of the sights and names mentioned.

One name in particular stood out above all others, being my Grandfather, Mr. Warren Jane, (my late mother, Pam May's father). He was the Chairman of the bench at Axbridge Magistrates Court. This concerned your story on the *Blagdon Alien Fined at Axbridge*.

You were also wanting some assistance with identifying where the photo of the cabbage growing was taken, featuring Chum Ash and Bert Stone (ex Stone's Cottage). I believe it was taken from what became the bottom of our garden at Hillside, Station Road, the home of the late Christine Wogan. The widow of Warren Jane, Jessie Jane bought the house in the early 1950's, and I lived there with my parents for the first 10 years of my life.



The field belonged to John Gallop, and in the distance to the left can be seen the train station. The two houses to the right are the two houses further down Station Road, the lower one now occupied by John and Angela Smythe.

Always interested in hearing any snippets of news and willing to help out with your research where I can!! Thanks for your entertaining bulletins.

Regards,

Belinda Nurse (née May) - Perth, Western Australia



(Left) The same scene today. When you are there you can tell the land was cultivated to grow more than just grass just by the range of wild flowers within the sward.

Sheila Johnson added: All these photos in John Gallop's collection were taken by Charlie Jones in the 1920s. Charlie was married to Kathleen Gallop, sister of Bert. In John Gallop's notes he called it Apple Tree field, Garston.

The Gallop Country Scrapbook: A miscellany of images from the Gallop collection that help illustrate the importance of market gardening in Blagdon and the influence that certain figures, in this case John Gallop and his family, had on village life. This will lead us onto the huge spectacle that the Blagdon and Butcombe Flower Show became.



They grew raspberries and blackcurrants and employed local women as pickers - they even had an annual fruit picker's outing on Lyons coaches. After the war workers from factories came to stay in Brockley Combe (ex POW camp possibly?) and had a working holiday as fruit pickers. There's a photo of Tate and Lyle workers picking fruit at Gallop's. John said they gave up the fruit sometime in the 1950s due to the shortage of sugar for jam making.

(Above and right) These two images are not good quality, but they do give some idea of the scale of the fruit and vegetable growing enterprise.

The Gallops were tenants. When John gave up farming, Sir John Wills allowed him to purchase the farmhouse and the Estate kept the land.

Also, if there were any doubts about the quality and quantity of cabbages that the land could produce then take a look at the small ad from the Western Daily Press, 6th May 1929



CHURCH LANE SEEDS.
LAWNS greatly improved with a sprinkling of Brown's Finest Dwarf Evergreen LAWN GRASS SEED, 2/- per lb., and 1 lb. per square yard of their Special Lawn Manure, 14 lbs 2/6, 28 lbs 4/6, 56 lbs 8/6.—Brown and Sons, Seedsmen, Bridge Street.
BAMBOO FLOWER STAKES. Straight and durable: 2ft 2/-, 3ft 4/-, 4ft 6/-, 5ft 12/-, 6ft 12/6, 7ft 15/-, 10ft 25/- per 100. Raffle for tying 1/6 per lb. Gardening Baskets, Tools, and Sundries. Largest stock in the West.—Brown and Sons, Seedsmen, Bridge Street.
FOR SALE GRASS FEED, 1½ acre field.—Withey, opposite Church, Dundry.
TO GREENGROCCERS.—15,000 Spring CABBAGES for Sale: ready for cutting.—Gallop, Blagdon
CHOICE CUT FLOWERS: 2/9 large bunch delivered.—Donoghue, Gardener, Grove Lodge, Wrington
DEWHURST'S Celebrated "HUMUS MANURE" superior and replaces stable manure. Cwt 16/6, 1 cwt 5/6 delivered. — James Dewhurst, P.R.H.S. Manure Works Lower Park Row, Bristol. Phone 7306.



Tate and Lyle workers that have come to pick the raspberries for jam. Once more this looks like the very same field below Hillside.

The Blagdon Flower show

The first flower show by the *Blagdon and Butcombe Cottagers Horticultural Society* was held in the grounds attached to Coombe Lodge in August 1885.

The Society was founded by W H Wills (later Lord Winterstoke) of Coombe Lodge to encourage *cottagers and amateurs* in Blagdon and the surrounding area to *cultivate a taste for flowers and gardening*. To this end he headed the subscription list with a substantial donation and the scheme was met with generous support from leading members of the community.

W H Wills was elected president, with Rev Gilbert Lyon as the chairman of the committee and Benjamin Panes hon. treasurer and secretary.

In addition to the categories for flowers and vegetables, there were prizes for the neatest and best kept gardens and allotments. There was a class for decorative arches which had to be erected on the day - five entries were placed at various points on the road leading to the show. Most of the exhibits were housed in a spacious marquee which included a splendid central display of stove and greenhouse plants selected by head gardener Henry Seaman from the glasshouses of Coombe Lodge. During the afternoon the crowds were entertained by a band from Brislington.

The show became a HUGE event for the village with sideshows, sports and fancy dress for the children in the afternoon and dancing in the evening. In 1903 Sir W H Wills suggested the secretary confer with Mr Chick the stationmaster to see whether an excursion train could be arranged with tickets which would admit the holder to the show. He also said he would have no objection to roundabouts and he would pay for a new tent if the Society would pay him back a certain amount each year.

BLAGDON COTTAGERS' HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY.

THE FOURTH
ANNUAL EXHIBITION
Of this Society will take place on
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15TH, 1888,
IN A
FIELD OF BLAGDON COURT,
Belonging to Captain Newnham, which he has kindly placed at the disposal of the Society.
The **BAND OF THE 1st GLOUCESTER (WESTERN COUNTIES) ENGINEER VOLUNTEERS** has been ENGAGED.
There will be **DANCING** in the **EVENING.**
REFRESHMENTS will be PROVIDED by **A. BIRD,** Winscombe.
ADMISSION:—From Two to Three o'clock, 2s.; Three to Five, 1s.; after Five o'clock, 6d.
N.B.—The Village of Blagdon will be **DECORATED** with **FLORAL ARCHES**, for which **PRIZES** will be Given.

(Above) The advert for the 4th Blagdon Flower Show indicates the event had moved to Blagdon Court.

The images of the early flower (below) are difficult to date precisely. It is definitely in Blagdon Coombe, therefore it is definitely not 1888. Costume experts, please help us out.



Butcombe withdrew after the 1887 show and the Society changed its name several times over the years; In 1920 it became *The Blagdon and Charterhouse Horticultural and Industrial Society*. Industrial classes included needlework and handwriting. The show mostly took place in Menlea or the Coombe until the 1920s when it moved to The Recreation Ground [The Mead].

The tents were lit by electricity for the first time in 1933, using the supply from the Baptist Chapel.

The show went from strength to strength, running every year except for the war years, with the odd cancellation owing to bad weather.



(Above and below left) *The Show in 1937.*

A newspaper from 1937 reported: - *Blagdon has gained a reputation for staging one of the best flower shows in Somerset and on Saturday it fully lived up to that high standard, an 11-pole marquee containing some thousand entries of the finest fruit, flowers and vegetables. The cottages classes produced some wonderful exhibits. W J Saint, Wm Harvey, Frank Horler and Reg Lyons were close competitors throughout ... In the domestic section there was a tempting array of bottled fruits and cakes in which both married and single ladies were close competitors. The children's section included a display of white butterflies amounting to a display of some 3,000 specimens.... Lady Wills and Mr Sidney Hill [of Langford House] were also large contributors, their fruit displays being excellent, and a very rare fruit - an English pineapple was shown by Lady Wills...*

The 60th anniversary was celebrated in 1945 when the show opened again at the end of WW2. The number of entries described above for 1937 was not exceptional - in 1947 1000 entries were recorded in 161 classes. Photography for amateur photographers was included for the first time in 1959, and in 1965 colour transparencies were added.

By the late 1960s the pattern of village life was changing, fewer people gardened and entries were falling. The costs, particularly of the marquee, were becoming prohibitive for dwindling returns. In 1967 the Society was renamed *Blagdon and District Horticultural Society*. The last show took place in 1970 - when the secretary Dick Wood retired nobody could be found to take his place and the Society was wound up by the trustees in the 1970s.



Schedules - the challenges for the exhibitors

In 1886 there were 69 classes - 34 vegetable, 17 flower and plants, seven fruit, two for children, four for needlework, one special class sponsored by Suttons seeds for vegetables, three for honey, one open class for a bank of greenhouse plants and one for decorative arches to be erected on the day of the show.

In 1970, the 85th show, there were 26 classes for vegetables, six fruit, 11 pot plants, 28 cut flowers, nine flower arranging, 23 food including dairy, cakes etc, five in the industrial section including woodwork, knitting, embroidery and pottery, five photography and 30 children's classes. Honey classes had disappeared but homemade wine had arrived!!



(Above) 1930s show with the same judge and contestant from the image from page 18. Who are they?



(Above) 1949, a young John Gallop proudly presents his display of produce.



(Left) The Gallop helpers and flower show committee.

(Right) The judging of the fancy dress competition at the flower show, but when? Any ideas please let us know.

The contestants look embarrassed enough as it is, but would it have made it worse for them to know that they would still be seen at least 70 years later?



Wrington ARCHIVE

Dr Howard Alexander Bell

an appreciation collated by Steve Taylor for *The Bristol Buzzer*
the Bristol Water newsletter for fly-fishermen



He conducted post-mortems on thousands of trout that were caught at Blagdon, to see what they were eating, and then he tied flies to resemble these creatures. If he hadn't been such a private and reticent individual, Dr Howard Alexander Bell would be as famous and revered in the history of still-water fly fishing as Halford, Skues and Sawyer are in the annals of river fly fishing.

Not just the inventor of a few good flies - to his credit are the Amber Nymph, the Grenadier, the Blagdon Buzzer - but a pioneer who realised that, by imitating insects that the trout of his beloved Blagdon expected to see and eat, and by presenting them in the way they were expected to behave - moving very slowly indeed, he had arrived at vastly superior method of catching fish. Just as he left an indelible mark on the development of modern still-water trout fishing, so those for whom he was first and foremost the local GP in Wrington, Blagdon and surrounding villages remember him with deep affection as a remarkable and original man.



If you would like to read more about this fascinating man who featured in the lives of all the local villagers, click on his name at the top of the page. If you click on the 'folder icon' it will take you through to the complete Wrington Archive of all the characters that lived in or around Wrington and events from over the last few decades. [Or click this link.](#)

Blagdon Local History Society online lecture:

Somerset Against the King

By Ken Parsons: [get the link here](#)

Back on Wednesday 7th October 2020
Ken Parsons gave a lecture on Zoom
about the Monmouth rebellion

Charles Crawford wrote: *A most interesting and thoroughly researched talk, Ken, Thank you.....* You may not know but 2 bishops of Bath and Wells played important roles during and after the rebellion.
The first, Peter Mews (1673-84) is sometimes referred to as the 'Bombardier Bishop'. A staunch royalist he fought with Charles I at Naseby and was wounded and taken prisoner. The portrait in the palace shows him flaunting his 'war wound' clearly visible on his cheek

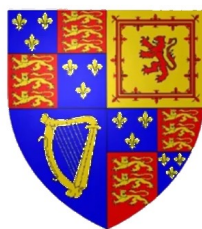
He was translated to Winchester (richest see in the country) in 1684 but during Monmouth's retreat from Keynsham, he decided to follow their movements and on the night before Sedgemoor he went spying on them and realised the Royalist army artillery was pointing in the wrong direction in relation to the likely attack. He informed Churchill and then unhitched his horses from his carriage in order to help re-position the guns. Later although remaining a supporter of James, it did not prevent him from becoming one of the '7 bishops' imprisoned in the Tower for signing the Declaration of Indulgence. His distinctive banner hangs in the Quire and is emblazoned with cannons in recognition of his military connections.

The second, was his successor, Thomas Ken. Ken who is considered perhaps the most saintly of past bishops ministered to the rebel prisoners during their internment in the cloisters. He also ministered to Monmouth in the Tower on the eve of his execution and attended him on the scaffold. A man of great principle (he had come to the notice of Charles II due to his refusal to provide accommodation for Nell Gwynne during a visit to Winchester by the king. Ken was at the time chaplain to the bishop). He was deprived of his bishopric in 1691 due to his refusal to sign the oath of allegiance to William and Mary on the grounds he has already done this to a monarch who still lived. This was to him an unbreakable point of principle notwithstanding as a staunch Protestant he was no fan of James.

During the march towards Keynsham when Monmouth's army passed through Wells, some of the rebel soldiers billeted themselves in the cathedral and did further damage to stained glass and statuary which has survived the Civil War

Somerset against the King

1685



Any comments, articles or points of interest can
be sent to: blagdonlocalhistorysociety@gmail.com