Isn’t it odd to think that history is a never-ending facet of our lives, whether we like it or not?

One of the most predictable comments I hear from people of all ages (including, sadly, school children) is ‘history is boring.’

However, when asked what they are interested in, the answers are always (not just sometimes or occasionally, but always) subjects which are, in themselves, just a small aspect of history in its widest sense (cars, sport, ‘media studies’, fashion, ‘culture’ and so on).

When it’s pointed out that everything concerning man- (and, yes, woman-) kind that just happens to be written down is, er, history, it can take a while for the implication sink in. And it’s quite reassuring to see that little spark of understanding when the message hits home. So yes, I would say that everyone who is interested in anything is, one way or another, an historian, whether they like it or not.

Every event or development, from family (mis)fortune to global disaster, from hair styles (it’s a while since I had one but I have a good memory) to clothing fads (as a teenager, would you have been seen sporting a manufacturer’s label in public? Certainly not!) and even where and how often you do your shopping … it’s all history.

So, as long as humankind is able to communicate, history will always be with us. Hoorah!

The Five Towns Wrekin Trail is the latest booklet to be issued by Wellington Local Agenda 21 Group.

It includes basic historical details and other information for those energetic souls wishing to take a cycle tour of Telford conurbation’s main traditional settlements: Wellington, Oakengates, Dawley, Madeley and Ironbridge … and not forgetting The Wrekin Hill, of course.

Copies of the booklet are available free from local libraries. For information of LA21’s other booklets, visit www.wellingtonla21.org.uk

Visit us at www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com
Initially opposed to the idea of vast sums of public money being spent on ambitious projects in long-established towns (for example, Madeley, Dawley and Wellington), the reinstated Labour administration at the Borough now seems keen to make greater use of Wellington’s Civic Quarter building by relocating additional council staff there than was originally conceived.

This can only be good for Wellington’s economy, in theory at least, if only because a larger number of employees is expected to spend at least some of their hard-earned salaries in the town.

Of great significance is the impending opening of a new library in the town, the first for almost 110 years. The former building in Walker Street incorporated remnants of the 1840ish union workhouse extension, plus a glass and concrete extension opened in 1962 by former librarian Philip Larkin.

Recent economic trends have been well and truly bucked not simply because libraries are being closed and their budgets severely slashed throughout England but also because the new premises in Wellington will feature some innovative concepts and the most recent technological facilities.

The intention is for there to be easier and more readily available access to information for those engaged in family and local history research than has previously been possible.

The above photo (reproduced here by courtesy of building contractors G F Tomlinson was taken a few months ago, and shows the new library segment of the civic complex towards the top left.

The public should be able to make use of these significant buildings by the end of November. Make sure you pay a visit! Oh, and while you’re in that area, see if you can spot the former 1910 Wellington Baths date stone.

Our new season of public talks began in September when group chairman Neil Clarke (above) led a large contingent of enthusiasts around places in Ketley (once part of Wellington parish) associated with ironmaster industrialist William Reynolds (1758-1803).

In October, Allan Frost spoke about internationally-famous Wellington writer Hesba Stretton at the town’s annual Literary Festival. See opposite for our schedule of forthcoming talks.

New Chair

Geoff Harrison (bottom left), takes over as our chairman in November. He came to Wellington in the early 1970s to teach at a local secondary school. He always had an interest in history and has done much research over the years, and continues to do so.

‘I began to look closely at history, like a lot of people, through family history, a interest shared with my wife, and this developed into leading courses in Researching Family History.

‘Locally, in particular, I am interested in the history of the Weald Moors; this has been nurtured by regular attendance at St. Catherine’s church and led to the publication of A Family – A Manor – A Church a couple of years ago, attempting to give a story of the parish and its people.

‘I believe that history is about people and how they have influenced events and locations through time. To study this, it is necessary to ‘dig beneath’ stories and ‘granny’s tales’ to find out the ‘true ’ happenings (as far as this is possible) but to admit, at times, that the ‘story’, plausible as it may be cannot be confirmed as ‘fact’.

LOCAL NEWS

A major development in Wellington is almost complete. The project has met with some criticism and has certainly changed the face of the town centre south of Walker Street ... let’s hope for the better.

NOTICEBOARD

THANK YOU
for donating £330 to our SUPER BOWLS APPEAL, especially Wellington Civic Society, Wrekin Historical Group and Wrekin Museum Partnership, and those who gave anonymously. A cheque has now been sent to the archaeologists and we’ll report again when the preservation work on the artefacts unearthed during excavations behind Edgbaston House in Walker Street has been completed.

Visit to Shrewsbury on Monday 14th November
SHROPSHIRE ARCHIVES AND ROWLEY’S HOUSE MUSEUM, SHREWSBURY.
Places are limited and need to be booked in advance. Call 01952 402459 to book and for details of arrangements.

WREKIN LOCAL STUDIES FORUM
An indication of the popularity of local history in the Telford and Wrekin area is given by the number of groups involved in exploring and promoting the Past. Wellington History Group is just one of many others and supports the work done by the Wrekin Local Studies Forum.

The Forum is a group that meets quarterly to share information, expertise and resources and to plan joint ventures. Its members represent local history, family history and civic societies, reminiscence groups, museums, archives, libraries, colleges and the local authority.

One of the most useful aspects of Forum activity is an updated six-month Calendar of Events which includes meetings and talks due to take place in the Telford & Wrekin area. A published version of the Calendar is available from public libraries and can be accessed via the Forum’s web site at www.wlsf.org.uk, where further information on history and other history-based societies can be found.

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www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com
In recent months many people throughout the country have been dipping into their pockets to secure the Staffordshire Hoard for the nation, so that our lost history is not lost to a foreign culture. The discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard fired the public imagination – real ‘treasure’ found quite locally.

No such ‘fanfare’ greeted the finding of the Preston Hoard almost 200 years ago, but then again it was not a treasure of gold and jewels but a collection of five bronze age axes.

“These ancient implements were found in a field by a man named William Pickering, a farm labourer, when digging there about 48 years ago. The exact spot where they were dug up is about 20 yards south-east of the culvert where the Crow Brook crosses the main road from Kinley Wick to Preston. One of the celts was shown to me by Mr Hooper of Kinnersley.” This is from a report, dated 1880, in the Ordnance Survey records. The location is marked on early maps of the area.

The reference to ‘celt’ perhaps needs some clarification; what you and I would describe as ‘axe heads’ are classified by archaeologists and given names such as palstaves, celts and axes. Here I will stick with the general term of axe.

A few years earlier, in 1871, the Rev. W Houghton gave a talk and stated “this celt which I hold in my hands, and which Mr Hooper, of Hadley Park, has kindly allowed me to show you, enables me to throw some little light. This interesting relic of a remote age was, with 4 others, found about 38 years ago by a man when digging a drain in a field near Preston; it was about 4 or 5 feet from the surface, not on the moors, but on the confines. The implement is of bronze, and must have belonged to some very ancient inhabitants of this country...”

There can be little doubt about the find, Rev Houghton was Rector of Preston-on-the-Weald Moors and Mr Hooper was a farmer at Kinnersley, more than likely the tenant on whose land the hoard was found, later moving to Hadley Park. The Census of 1871 identifies a John Hooper, farmer of 120 acres employing 3 workers, born at Kinnersley, living at Hadley Park. John was only a child of 6 in the Census of 1841, so he would have been the son of George who farmed with his brother Thomas at Kinnersley, enumerated in 1841 Census.

William Pickering, the discoverer of the hoard, is also enumerated in the 1841 Census, as an Agricultural Labourer aged 25, apparently living with his mother Elizabeth (aged 60) in Kinnersley village.

The story of the Preston Hoard gets misty from here on. Charlotte Eyton in her book ‘Geology of North Shropshire’ in 1869 writes about ‘celts’ found on the Moors. “Some bronze celts, of artistic workmanship, were found in draining near Preston. They are now in the possession of Mr Cooper of that place.” It is more than likely that Charlotte made an error with the names Hooper and Cooper. This is undoubtedly the Preston Hoard.

After the registration of the find to the Ordnance Survey in 1880 the Hoard seems to have disappeared. Unfortunately these records of OS were destroyed in the blitz of 1940 as they could well have ‘shed more light’ on these
objects. The record quoted earlier was in correspondence to Lilly Chitty and identified the find as being ‘registered’ by Rev. Houghton, Mr Hooper and J Anslow Esq, all men of some standing in the area so there can be no doubt of the authenticity of the find; but where is it now?

There are some clues.

In 1952 Miss Chitty visited Eyton Hall, then the home of Capt. A.C. Eyton and previously the home of Charlotte Eyton his niece, and sister-in-law of his late wife. A previous Eyton, Thomas Campbell a well known naturalist and friend of Darwin, had built onto the Hall a ‘museum wing’ to house his extensive collection of specimens, including skeletons and fossils and other historical artefacts collected over the years.

Amongst these artefacts Miss Chitty found “a handsome bronze palstave: no label was attached or associated and there was nothing to suggest its source or history, but I had brought with me a tracing of the OS drawing of the Preston axe, and on this it fitted almost exactly, though differing in minor details.” Miss Chitty on measuring the length found it to be the same as that of Mr Hooper’s axe but it appeared to be 4mm narrower. Again “If the face of the Eyton axe were portrayed in outline perspective, the general effect of the side-view would be almost identical with the Preston drawing.”

Before we go any further perhaps a short biographical note about Miss Lilly Chitty would be appropriate. She was an amateur archaeologist well known for her work on prehistoric sites particularly in the west of England and the Welsh Marches. She lived with her family in the Pontesbury area of Shropshire, and in the 1920’s met a number of well-established archaeologists and through them developed her interests in the subject especially in recording and documenting finds from the area she grew to know very well in Shropshire and the Marches. She gained honours being elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1939 and later awarded an OBE in 1956. She lived to the grand age of 99 dying in 1979.

With regard to the axe at Eyton Hall, Miss Chitty is not convinced that the axe she saw and studied quite closely is part of the Preston Hoard; “One can only regret that an element of uncertainty as to its history must remain until some label, drawing or description can be found to prove its identity beyond question. If it is not to be accepted as one of the axes from the Preston on the Wealdmoor hoard, the natural surmise is that it was found somewhere locally on the Eyton estate.”

A comment from the Discovering Shropshire’s History web-site interprets Miss Chitty’s observations as “It seems likely, therefore, that the axe at Eyton Hall was from the Preston Hoard, …”

Although there have been ancient finds in the region of Eyton there is no evidence of the discovery of any other bronze axes in the area.

Consider for a moment, the chronology Preston Hoard found about 1840; discussed by Rev Houghton 1871; registered with the Ordnance Survey 1880; Miss Chitty studies and describes the Eyton axe in 1925 and the Eyton Estate dispersed between 1950 and 1956; is it at all possible that new evidence will be revealed?

The answer must be ‘not much chance’, unless you know differently!

It would appear that the axes, or the majority of them were in the possession of the Hooper family in the 1880’s, perhaps one became the property of the Eyton family. When the Eyton estate was dispersed much of the content of the personal ‘museum’ was transferred to the Shropshire Museum Service. One must assume the unlabelled axe was one item in this transfer. Indeed there are quite a number of bronze axes in their inventory that are not labelled in any detail.

Has the Preston Hoard been dispersed, a small part ‘hidden’ in the Shropshire Museum collection but the rest still in the possession of the descendents of the Hooper family?

Will we ever find an answer?
Pains Lane Races and Wellington Connections

Jim Cooper

Pain’s Lane Races, held in what became St. George’s, were closely associated with the annual Oakengates Wakes. This article looks at the involvement of people from the parish of Wellington. The races were first held in 1840, but it was not until 1842 that anyone was named in newspaper adverts or reports.

From 1842 to 1849 the Clerk of the Course was John Millington, a builder and saw mill proprietor from Ketley. His home, View House, still stands today. By 1849 the railways were coming and in August that year he won the contract to build offices, goods warehouses and stables in Shrewsbury and Newport. A contract to build the Smithfield at Wellington followed and in 1854 he moved his steam sawmills to Oakengates. Millington went on to erect some of the finest buildings in the area; Oakengates Church was built in 1854, St. Georges Church of England Schools in 1860 and the first Lilieshall Co. Cottage Hospital in Gower Street, St. George’s in 1873. (That this fine building is now so dilapidated is much to the shame of Telford’s leaders.)

The expansion of his business must have been a significant factor in Millington relinquishing the duties of Clerk of the Course following the 1849 meeting. His final tour of duty should have been one for celebration but with less than two weeks to go the race committee cancelled the event. The country was gripped by the fear of cholera, prayers were made in the churches and medical men all over the country were on alert. In Bridgnorth, where 62 deaths occurred in the seven weeks up to 15 September, a newly formed Committee of Health met seven times in the space of two weeks to discuss the situation. In Ketley, the bodies of Bessy Kelfort and her mother were found in each others arms on 20 September. That same day the authorities cancelled the race meeting. Millington did not sever all involvement with the races; in 1854 he was one of an eleven man committee set up to raise funds and commission a portrait to honour the founder of the races, Joseph Taylor Phillips.

Each year the race committee and their friends enjoyed an ordinary (a dinner) at the George Inn when they appointed the Race Steward(s) for the following year. The Steward was little more than a figurehead, though he might be called upon to adjudicate in the event of a dispute. In 1844 one of two stewards was 31 year old Dr. George McKnight from Mossey Green. The following year it was a close neighbour of his, John Williams of Ketley Hall. Williams was a partner in the Ketley Co. and his father Henry had been the right hand man of William Reynolds who built the Ketley inclined plane. The Steward in 1848 was St. John Chiverton Charlton (above) of Apley Park, Wellington. He was the owner of over 3,900 acres in and around Wombridge, and a prestigious member of the race committee that...
year. Both of his sons were to fill the same roll. In 1851 William St. John Charlton (above), heir to the Apley Estate, was a young steward at just twenty years of age. His brother Thomas (below) officiated in 1858 and again in 1861, though by then he had adopted the surname Meyrick in order to inherit his mother’s family estates.

Thomas Campbell Eyton had the Stewardship in 1856; he had only recently inherited Eyton Hall and had been resident for some years at the Vineyard in Wellington. He was a founder of the Wellington Waterworks and Wellington Coal & Gaslight Co. He was also a distinguished naturalist and corresponded with Charles Darwin for many years. He held a commission in the South Salopian Yeomanry Cavalry and acted on behalf of the Sheriff of Shropshire, the Earl of Powis, during the 1842 Chartist riots in the east Shropshire coalfield.

Identifying those who attended the races, but who were not officials, is largely a matter of luck. They were rarely mentioned in newspaper reports unless they were involved in some incident of interest. However, in 1851 one newspaper, the Shropshire

Conservative, published a splendid report that named twenty nine of those who sat down to the ordinary at the George Inn. Among them were two notable Wellington men, John Slaney and John Barber. Both were very capable business men. John Barber the auctioneer has been well documented by Allan Frost but John Slaney is not so readily recognized, unless the name ‘Slaney’s Vaults’ springs to mind. Like Barber, Slaney had founded a family business that outlived himself. They were friends and he relates in his diary how in 1848, he ‘Went to Manchester with Mr Jno Barber to settle for a lot of Railway Shares I have bought. Put up at the Clarence Hotel kept by Miss Laidlaws.’ His diary also reveals that he was at the Pain’s Lane Races again in 1852. ‘Attended

Pains Lane Races, a miserably wet day, the Grand Stand very full & in the midst of the Races it broke down without a moments notice: I escaped very well but many had bruises & one poor man that was under nearly killed.’ In 1888 John Slaney’s son William married John Barber’s daughter Sarah.

Another longstanding family business in Wellington during the time of the Races was that of John Houlston, printer, binder, bookseller and stationer. John Houlston’s first involvement at the races was the printing of race cards (see example below) detailing the races, the runners, the jockeys and their colours. A new service, that of Auctioneer and Appraiser, was advertised by John Houlston in 1842, and in 1864 he was auctioning two horses at the Races.
1961 Groups

Jason Thornfall

Left: New Street Methodist Youth Club occupied a school in Paignton, Devon, for their annual holiday in 1961.


Right: Children at the Vineyard Children’s Home staged a Nativity Play, ‘The Lovely Lady of Bethlehem’. Taking part were Vera Hemsworth, Ann Hutchinson, Jennifer Cleaton, Douglas Price, Mary Page, Leslie Harris, Phyllis Pugh, Edith Ralphs, Arthur Broadhurst, Michael Evans, Ronald Mullinder, Colin Mullinder, Raymond Owen, J.Lloyd, Roy Fox, Anthony Roberts, Roy Mullinder, Jean Cleaton, Sheila Bursnell, Susan Payne, Christine Davies, Jennifer Davies, Miss Parsons, Miss Page, Elizabeth Hemsworth, Tommy Glaze, Barry Pugh, Michael Power, Christopher Harris, Raymond Smith, Ronald Fox, David Smith, Ronald Boustred, Norman Davies and Diane Smith.

Members of Wellington Girls’ High School Choir, 1961
Which is the second highest hill in The Wrekin forest? Most local people would answer, ‘The Ercall’ and be wrong, because Maddocks Hill, south of the Ercall is actually higher, despite the huge amount of rock extracted from it, though not so well known.

However, the Ercall (see aerial photo on page 1) certainly seems to be the second hill of The Wrekin range, especially when seen from Wellington or anywhere else to the north.

Most us think of Ercall woods as the area between Ercall Lane and Wrekin Golf Course, bounded in the west by the Forest Glen road and in the south east by the M54.

That is the area I am writing about. It includes the Ercall hill and also the smaller Lawrence hill to the west of the Ercall. Nearly all this area is wooded, much of it ancient coppice oak but some is much more recent, the resurgent forest that has replaced quarrying.

The woods to the north of the Ercall ridge are owned by Telford & Wrekin Borough council, inherited from Wellington Urban District Council and Shropshire County Council, except for a small patch opposite Buckatree Hall Hotel, which is the hotel’s property. The rest, including Lawrence Hill, was bought by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust from Lord Forester with a lot of local help a few years ago.

There was great consternation in the 1980s when Lord Forester, who owned most of the wood, proposed building holiday chalets in the quarries which were just beginning to recover from the extraction of millions of tonnes of rock to provide hardcore for Telford’s roads and buildings. The plans were greatly disapproved, especially by local dog walkers, of whom there are many. Eventually, after much argument and protest the council rejected them.

Although the woods seem to be wild apart from many pathways and quarries there is a long history of use of the rocks. There seem to be traces of the beautiful pink Granophyre that is sometimes called Ercallite in the surfacing of the Roman Watling Street and also in Thomas Telford’s reconstruction as Holyhead Road.

Both appear to have used Granophyre chippings as a top dressing and these were extensively used for gravel drives in big houses – Apley, Orleton, Dothill and Sunnycroft, among others – in Victorian times. It was then referred to as Ercall Gravel.

The much softer Tuff rock, a mixture of volcanic ash and lava, is at the east end of the hill and is cut through by the M54.

This rock was designated as too soft to provide hardcore for the motorway; though I have been told it was, in fact, used for some of the roadway embankments, surreptitiously. Trucks carried off the rock excavated from the cutting, turned at a road island and returned to deposit it for the embankment. So I am told. Tuff was also sold years ago as a cheaper substitute for Granophyre.

The other main rock to be found in the area is Wrekin Quartzite; this has been the target of the huge quarries on the Ercall and Lawrence hills for the construction of Telford New Town’s superstructure.

The enormous destruction of the hills, the vegetation and wildlife is the price this beautiful landscape has had to pay for the construction of Telford. Was it worth it?

During operations the quarry workers discovered traces of gold in the quartzite. Excitedly they examined it and wondered if it was in economic quantities. To their intense disappointment they found, after some calculation, that the cost of refining the gold was more than the price for it at local jewellers’ shops.

There are also iron deposits and at one point is an ‘ochre spring’, where rusty red water emerges to join the brook through the Ercall/Lawrence quarries that empties into the Buckatree pool.

In a few places there are deposits of Rhyolite, Lower Comley Sandstone and the fossiliferous Shineton shale. The particular interests of geologists, however, are the unconformities between Cambrian and Precambrian rocks and wave marks in the Quartzite.

This is a very complex and interesting area and is frequently visited by students of geology, confirmed by its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Some of the vegetation is regularly cleared so that the rock formations can be examined.

One of the important early explorers of the area was Charles Callaway, a Doctor of Science in Geology who investigated this and other places in nineteenth Century and wrote about it.

He taught at Hiatt’s Ladies College and was buried in our local cemetery. Dr Calloway’s life and times have been studied by Wendy Palin, Wellington History Group’s Treasurer; I hope she will write about him some time for Wellingtonia.

The Shropshire Wildlife Trust and their volunteers work hard to preserve and protect the vegetation and creatures of the woods.

To some of us the most fascinating aspect of the whole area is the way Nature has fought back and the natural forest has been recolonising the quarries, gradually turning the ‘moonscape’ back to its natural beauty.

Resurgence of Nature is a quite wonderful yet little appreciated occurrence. Unfortunately the term ‘scrub’ is too often ascribed to it, suggesting waste land. It is really ‘baby forest’ and will develop anywhere, especially in our gardens, where it can be a delight or a pain depending on our attitude to wildlife.

These woods are quite unique and some of the most diverse and complex places on Earth.

Although used frequently by local walkers they are insufficiently appreciated.

THE ERCALL WOODS

George Evans

Wilde apart from many pathways
The Eytons and the Shrewsbury Canal

Neil Clarke

The landed classes played a leading role in financing the building of canals in this country in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. A local example is that of the Eytons of Eyton Hall and Wellington, successive generations of whom were involved in the promotion, construction and management of the Shrewsbury Canal.

The Eyton Estate

Thomas Eyton, born in 1753, inherited the Eyton estate on his father’s death in 1776. This comprised land at Eyton upon the Weald Moors, Wellington, Wrockwardine and Kynnersley. Although the family’s ancestral seat was at Eyton itself, Thomas’s father had moved with his family c.1760 to a mansion in Wellington which was apparently more commodious than the family home in Eyton that had never been fully restored following the depredations of the Civil War. The new Eyton family home, later described simply as ‘The Mansion’, was on the then northern edge of the town.

A gentleman of the county

Like his father, Thomas Eyton was to play the traditional role of landed gentleman in the social and political life of the county, and he took up a number of county posts after he succeeded his father. But first, he had to marry: his wife Mary was the daughter of John Rocke, who owned property in Trefnanny, Montgomeryshire and in Shrewsbury. Thomas became High Sheriff of Shropshire in 1779 and later Deputy Lieutenant; and in 1791 he was Mayor of Shrewsbury. From 1795 to 1809 he was Captain of the Wrekin Company of the Yeomanry Cavalry and was called out to help deal with the occasional outbreak of disorder by industrial workers on the Coalfield in times of hunger and distress, as at Madeley Wood in 1795 and Coalbrookdale in 1800. He appears to have exerted a patriarchal influence over local affairs and was sympathetic to the Anti-Slavery movement in its early years.

Canal promotion

Thomas was involved in setting up banks in Shrewsbury and Wellington; and, presumably because of his financial acumen and social standing, he had in 1787 been appointed Receiver General of the Crown in Salop, with the duty of forwarding to the Exchequer taxation collected in the county, such as the land tax. He had shares in the three canals built in Shropshire during the ‘Canal Mania’ – the Shropshire (1788-92), Shrewsbury (1793-97) and Ellesmere (1793-1805); but although the first two paid a steady return on investments, it was not until after the Ellesmere Canal was amalgamated with the Chester in 1813 that its first dividend was paid. All three of these Shropshire canal companies banked with the Shrewsbury bank of Eyton, Reynolds and Bishop. These three partners were fellow canal shareholders; and they were joined as partners in the bank in 1793 by the ironmaster John Wilkinson and a little later by Eyton’s brother-in-law, the Rev. John Rocke (Vicar of Wellington), both of whom were also fellow canal shareholders.

Canal management

Thomas Eyton not only promoted and invested in local canals; he was also involved in their management. He chaired several of the annual general assemblies and the management committee meetings of both the Shropshire Canal (which was built from coal mines and ironworks in the Oakengates area down to the River Severn at Coalport, with a branch to Coalbrookdale) and the Shrewsbury Canal; but he had a more sustained involvement in the latter. Perhaps this is not surprising, since he had a far bigger stake in this 17-mile canal - he had sold some of his land to the company for the construction of the canal; he was likely to get a better return from the greater number of shares he held; and the canal would directly help the development of his Eyton estate. Thomas was elected to the management committee at the first Annual General Assembly in July 1793, held at the Talbot Inn in Wellington, and he regularly attended committee meetings during the canal’s busy construction years from 1793 to 1797; thereafter his attendance was more erratic, but he rarely missed the annual general assemblies. The earlier meetings of the canal
company were held at the Talbot, Haygate (Falcon) and Cock inns in Wellington and the Talbot at Atcham, but after 1798 all meetings up to the time of Eyton’s death (1816) were held at the Bucks Head, Long Lane.

The Shrewsbury Canal had a number of notable features and, as a committee member, chairing many of the crucial decision-making meetings during the construction years, Thomas Eyton can at least share some of the credit for the decisions to build structures such as the inclined plane at Trench, the series of eleven guillotine locks between Trench and Eyton, the aqueducts over the rivers Tern and Roden, and the tunnel at Berwick. The committee had originally appointed Josiah Clowes as engineer (‘under William Reynolds’) but, on his death in early 1795 and with the work on the canal incomplete, Thomas Telford was engaged to finish the job of construction. Thomas Eyton has been credited with the idea of suggesting the use of iron for the completion of the aqueduct over the Tern; but it seems more likely that Telford and the most experienced of the committee members, William Reynolds, who were aware of the developments that were taking place in the use of iron at the time, convinced Eyton of the practicability of the material for the Longdon aqueduct. It then appears that both Telford and Reynolds were involved in the design of the structure, the cast-iron parts for which were made at the latter’s Ketley ironworks.

Fall from grace
Rents from his estate and profits from his investments, including those in canals, had helped to make Thomas Eyton a rich man. But, with his main source of income affected by the agricultural depression that came with the defeat of Napoleon, Thomas’s financial affairs took a turn for the worse. To maintain his style of living he had apparently been embezzling funds in his role as Receiver General; and it seems certain that, threatened with exposure by the Exchequer, he committed suicide on 22 January 1816. Newspapers simply announced his death as ‘Monday, at his seat in Wellington, after a few days illness, Thomas Eyton Esq.’ But a contemporary diary reveals that he had fired a pistol down his throat; and this was presumably done with the intention of leaving no external injury to the body and so attempting to avoid the scandal of suicide which might ruin his family and cause a run on the banks where he was a partner. It also seems likely that he took his own life because he could not face members of the Hill family of Hawkstone and Attingham who had stood security for him in his financial undertakings and who now, following his exposure, faced a massive demand from the Exchequer.

Financial consequences
However, immediately after his death, all but Thomas Eyton’s settled estates was seized by the Crown and, following an injunction on 6 and 7 February at the Falcon Inn in Wellington, this was sold to recover his debts. His canal shares were sold as part of this process. On hearing that the Eyton & Rocke bank in Shrewsbury was having to suspend business, the committee of the Shropshire Canal switched their account to the Wellington bank of Reynolds, Charlton and Shakeshaft; but the committee of the Shrewsbury Canal did not take such drastic action.

When the bank reopened, with three new partners joining Thomas Eyton junior and Rev. John Rocke, the committee made the latter treasurer of the Shrewsbury Canal, and this appointment was confirmed at the canal’s General Assembly in October 1816. So now, following the death of his father and the loss of family assets, Thomas Eyton junior left the family’s Wellington residence and returned to the ancestral land at Eyton. It was left to the Hill family ‘bondsmen’ to negotiate with the Exchequer a reduction in the amount they had to pay to settle Thomas Eyton senior’s debts – and this took four years.

The new squire
The new squire of Eyton soon set about restoring his family’s fortunes. Within a few years he had established a new mansion and in 1825 commissioned a survey of his estate that would reaffirm his landed rights. Following in his father’s footsteps, he had been a shareholder and committee member of the Shrewsbury Canal since 1810. He was absent from meetings immediately after his father’s disgrace, but was back on the committee by October 1817.

Thomas Eyton supported a plan first mooted in the mid-1820s for a canal from Norbury, through Newport, which would link with the Shrewsbury Canal at Wappenshall and provide the county town and the East Shropshire Coalfield with an outlet to the national canal network. This was to be a branch of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal, authorised by Parliament in 1826, with Telford as engineer. Eyton was present at the committee meeting of 9 October where the plans were given the final stamp of approval:

For Shrewsbury to benefit fully from the link, the Shrewsbury Canal, built as a tub-boat canal, would have to be improved from Wappenshall to the county town, to enable the larger main-line...
boats to use it. Eyton was in the chair at some of the meetings in the early 1830s when the required improvements to the Wappenshall-Shrewsbury section of the Shrewsbury Canal were discussed. It was agreed that eight bridges would need to be rebuilt and the two locks at Eyton upon the Weald Moors widened.

Work was completed by the end of 1834, and early the following year the main line of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal and its Newport Branch were opened. An immediate improvement in the prospects of the Shrewsbury Canal and its shareholders was acknowledged at the annual General Assembly in October 1835.

**A third generation**

At this time a third generation member of the family became involved with the Shrewsbury Canal. Thomas Campbell Eyton, born in 1809, was the son of Thomas Eyton and nephew of Charles Montgomery Campbell (a partner in the Salop Old Bank and treasurer of the Shrewsbury Canal from October 1824). A friend of Charles Darwin, he was himself to become a distinguished naturalist, and when he inherited the Eyton estate on the death of his father in 1855 he established at Eyton Hall a museum to house what was widely regarded as one of the finest private natural history collections in the country.

Thomas Campbell Eyton joined the committee of the Shrewsbury Canal in 1836, and like his father and grandfather he played an active part in the management of the canal. In its last decade as an independent company, he occasionally chaired meetings; and in July 1845, he was one of three committee members deputed to attend meetings with the Ellesmere & Chester Canal Company (which had absorbed the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal two months earlier) to discuss amalgamation and railway conversion. The Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Company was formed the following year, with the Shrewsbury Canal as a constituent member.

[Thomas Campbell Eyton’s interest in railways will be examined in a subsequent article.]

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**GAS WORKS**

One of the earliest references for gas production in Wellington dates back to February 1852 with an advertisement for ‘Coal for sale’ at the Gas Works on Mill Bank. Sadly, I’ve been unable to find out more about this concern. It’s possible that the advert should have stated ‘Tan’ and not ‘Mill’ Bank; we may never know.

At Gas Works was already in existence on Tan Bank since the late 1820s. With premises roughly where the entrance to the car park opposite Landau Court now lies, gas was produced and distributed by blacksmith William Edwards.

At that time, the firm supplied lighting around the town centre and the acceptance of gas as a means of providing light received a boost in 1841 when St. John Charlton of Apley Castle paid for gas to be used to illuminate All Saints parish church.

Demand must have grown over the next few years because, in 1851, a new gas works was built (see notice below), apparently ‘between the top of Tanbank and the Wrekin road’ ... possibly in Foundry Road. Thomas Campbell Eyton (see photo above) was one of the driving forces behind the venture, named Wellington Coal and Gas-light Company.

Some time before 1868, the business seems to have relocated to the Great Western Goods Yard in the west of the town, thus enabling coal (from which town gas, as opposed to today’s natural gas, was extracted) to be transported easily to the works.

By 1882, gas was stored in two holders (see plan below); a third

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was added by 1902, and a final fourth by the 1920s, and indication of rising demand. At least one of the holders (seen below, as seen in a company brochure) was constructed by C&W Walker of Donnington.

Gas was not only used as a source of lighting streets and public buildings, it eventually replaced oil lamps and candles in many homes. As the extent of underground pipework grew, so did the range of equipment which could use gas as a source for power and heating.

The advertisement in Hobson's Directory for 1905 (bottom right) emphasised the benefits of gas in the home ... how could any diligent husband refuse to provide 'Labour Saving Devices' for his wife or domestic servant?

The gas office (later 'Showroom and 'Gas Service Centre') opened in Market Street (below). The premises were previously used by Wrekin Brewery and Ensor's Mineral Water Works.

Private gas companies were nationalised in 1949 and controlled by gas 'boards': Wellington came under West Midlands Gas Board . The full extent of the Gas Works can be seen in the above 1951 photograph.

In 1968, after Natural Gas replaced Town Gas, parts of the Wellington Gas Works were demolished although gas holders remained for several years longer.
Is there a pauper burial area in Wellington town cemetery?

Strictly, no. As far as we've been able to ascertain, paupers tended (i.e. if no relatives were able to pay for a separate grave plot) to be interred in unmarked graves in the cemetery alongside one of the boundary hedges to the workhouse which eventually became Wrekin Hospital. This workhouse on Holyhead Road was opened in 1875 and replaced the original workhouse in Walker Street.

Records of all deaths, whether pauper or 'ordinary', are held by the Registry Office in Wellington. In some cases (but not necessarily those who died as workhouse inmates), records may also indicate approximate or precise burial plots. However, bear in mind that not all plots benefit from the provision of a headstone.

Where was Cart Road?
It was the name previously given to Bank Road which links Mill Bank to Regent Street; see the map above. A shop, a grocer's run by Mrs. N. Walters in the 1930s, still exists.

In 1937, the road boasted a Billiards Hall run by T. Jordan which closed sometime between then and 1950, leaving only the Billiards Hall in Tan Bank for devotees of the game.

It was during this period that the road was renamed Bank Road, for reasons we have not been able to ascertain; presumably it has to do with Mill Bank, but why did someone think Cart Road needed to be renamed? Do you know?

On page 11 of Wellingtonia 10, Park Junior school is mentioned as now being called Wrekin View Primary school.

Why did the name change?
Periodically, local authorities need to assess their education provision attempting to match provision with expected numbers and managing their school buildings with regard to the efficient provision of schools.

Around 2001/2 there were serious questions raised about the structure of the buildings of Orleton Lane Infants school, serious enough to suggest that there may be the need for a complete rebuild.

Wrekin & Telford Education Authority decided to amalgamate Orleton Lane Infants and Park Junior schools in extended buildings on the North Road site – the new school would be a Primary School providing for children from Early Years (incorporating the Nursery unit established at Orleton Lane) to 11 years old.

After due consideration, the Education Authority accepted a suggestion to adopt 'Wrekin View Primary' as the name for the amalgamated school, which opened its doors to pupils in September 2004 with a new Head teacher Mrs Kathy Hobbs and a staff which included some from both of the original schools.

Which is the oldest pub still in business in Wellington?
If we include pubs currently up for sale, could it be the White Lion in Crown Street? Or the Dun Cow in Duke Street (after all, the lane in which it lies was once named after it)? Or the Raven (now called Raspugins) in Walker Street? Or the Beacon in Market Square, originally called the Bradford Arms and subsequently Slaney’s Vaults)?

Perhaps it’s the Cock Hotel on Holyhead Road, the Swan Hotel in Watling Street, the Plough in Plough Road or the former Red Lion (ex-Wellington Arms and now Stellings Sports Lounge) on Whitchurch Road.

According to trade directories, all seem to have been in existence in the 1820s. However, at least one has been entirely rebuilt (the Swan), so perhaps it should be ruled out.

Some appear older than others, but looks can deceive. For example, the original White Lion occupied a mere third of its present building (the bit on the left when viewed from Crown Street) until it expanded into premises on its right during the early 1900s.

The short answer is, sadly, we simply don’t know. Until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, property deeds and other official records were not as precise as we have come to expect. So, unless you have proof, it could be any one of these.

Or somewhere else ...
I had felt a warm glow of satisfaction when I had found Ellen Lunn and her sister Ann Prichard living in two of the above houses on Mill Bank.

Census details and book dedications (see Ann’s signature below as written in 1856) had led me to believe that the sisters were my Great Grandfather, Henry Lunn Turner’s aunts, and that Ellen had been the cause of his unusual middle name, but I needed more concrete proof.

My G-G-Grandfather, Thomas Turner (b.1811) and his brother Richard (b.1822) listed their birthplace as Stone, Staffordshire just like Ellen and Ann. I began to look at the records from Stone, but Turner is a very common name and it is difficult to be sure that you are following the correct line. Eventually I found Richard listed on the International Genealogical Index (IGI) with father James and mother Elizabeth Shipley, but it took a trip to Stafford Archives to pin Thomas to the same parents.

The IGI came up trumps for Ellen Lunn and gave me a marriage on 25th November 1819 of an Ellen TURNER to Vincent Lunn at St Michael’s in Stone. (Sister Ann was also a Turner, having married George Prichard in 1834.) The pieces were coming together.

Searching a little closer to home the Pigot’s Trade Directory (these were the Yellow Pages of the day) of 1828-9 listed Lunn & Moore as Grocers, Tea Dealers, Druggists, Ironmongers & tallow chandlers, located in the Market Place, Wellington. By 1835 Vincent was listed as gentry, living on Mill Bank while Samuel Moore was running the business alone. Then Vincent disappeared off the radar completely.

My mother had contact with the lady who keeps the records at All Saints parish church; with her help it became clear that Vincent had died in 1836. We were also provided with all the death dates for the Turner family that were buried in their vault in the churchyard.

Reviewing all my information, I felt a little uncomfortable about the birth date of the eldest Turner sister, Ann, as this was around 1792 and that would have meant the mother was bearing Richard (surely her last child) thirty years later in 1822. Not impossible but, with no time to spare to solve this enigma, it would just have to wait.

In the end, the answer came to me in an unexpected way.

The phone rang and I found myself speaking to a lady from New Zealand who had been researching my Turners and had been put in contact with us by the very kind and obviously efficient record keepers at All Saints.

As she spoke I hastily scribbled notes. Ann and Ellen had an older sister, Mary, who had married Mr George Bennett. Their only daughter, Ellen, who was baptised at St John’s, Burslem, Staffordshire had, by 1841, ended up an orphan, and was taken in by her aunts from Mill Bank.

This young girl had married John Barber, a near neighbour, in 1847. The details poured out and more and more new names were revealed. However, I still had no clear picture of where Ellen Lunn fitted in exactly. Then my caller said it: ‘All the details are laid out clearly in the Wills.’

I was flabbergasted. So far, in my family research, I had found plenty to do without looking for Wills, and in all honesty I would not have expected to find any. The four Wills, when they arrived from New Zealand, did indeed solve the mystery.

The key details were held in the Will and two codicils of Ellen Lunn that covered nine pages. The secret is revealed in the short, simple phrase: ‘The children of my said late nephew Thomas Turner.’

So Ellen Lunn was Great-aunt to my Great Grandfather, one generation further back than I had placed her. She was not the sister to my G.G. Grandfather Thomas Turner but to his father James.
January
The Ratepayers’ Association have been successful in getting a special cheap day return railway ticket from Wellington to Oswestry – a reduction from 9s to 7s.

February
Wellington Rural Parish Council decided to increase the salary of their Clerk, Mr A. E Phillips, from £72 to £100 a year.

* Wrekin’s Hospital £60,000 scheme. A new outpatients block is being built at the Wrekin Hospital Wellington at an estimated cost of £60,000 and is expected to be completed by the end of June.

The new building will consist of 3 main sections – orthopaedic and physiotherapy, X-ray and consultative departments ... It will completely absorb the clinics at present on Haygate Road.

* Members of the Wellington Electrical Association for Women have been learning how to mend that fuse, and how to do various repair jobs to electrical equipment.

They are receiving tuition in washing machine and vacuum cleaner maintenance so that the man of the house will have a little competition and perhaps a few more moments of free time!

* Work is to start on extensions to Wellington’s public library ... it will be extended onto the site of cottages cleared some months ago and a new feature will be a gallery structure which will shelve the reference and technical sections. When extensions are completed the children’s library which was opened at a site 50 yds along the street from the adult section 2 years ago will operate from the present ground floor at the library.

March
Over the last few years more and more Shropshire traders have opened their shops on Good Friday, an increasing tendency which local clergymen this week described as ‘very regrettable’.

April
Wave of Hooliganism hits Wellington – children’s merry-go-round vandalized, and later removed by Parks Committee as it couldn’t afford to foot the bill for repairs.

An outbreak of hooliganism in Wellington in recent weeks came to a head this weekend with wanton destruction believed to be on a scale never before experienced in the town, and left in its wake shattered shop windows and street lamps.

This vandalism has led one shop keeper to ask the local Urban Council for shutters to protect his shop front. Wellington police issued an appeal this week for members of the public to notify them without delay if they see hoodlums causing damage.

Most of the damage was committed on Saturday night. A plate glass window at the Maypole shop premises in New Street was smashed, in High Street a brick was thrown through the window of the site offices of McAlpine Limited who are engaged in building new blocks of flats and it destroyed a model of the flat.

Mr John Twinney’s cobbler’s premises at 97 High street were smashed. Mr Twinney, who has carried on his business for the last 38 years, will be moving into a new shop shortly as his present premises are required for redevelopment.

A cigarette machine outside a newsagents’ shop in Mill Bank was badly damaged and 6 gates outside houses in Dawley Road were taken off their hinges and thrown into gardens. In recent weeks as many as 24 street lamps have been smashed and the ones that received the most attention from hooligans are at Ercall Lane and Orleton Alley.

£40 worth of damage had been done to play equipment at the O D Murphy playing fields in the last 3 weeks. New public conveniences at Walker Street have had fittings ripped out by hooligans.

June
Constitution Hill Infants’ School, where over the last 100 years, thousands of Wellington children have been educated will officially close at the end of July. The 48 children will then be transferred to Orleton Lane School or the new school at Dothill.

For the time being however and while their new school at North Road is completed, Roman Catholic children who have been receiving their education at the adjoining youth centre will transfer to Constitution Hill.

Records of Constitution Hill date back 100 years and it was in 1876 that the National School, as it was known then, was transferred to the School Board.

* Cllr John Lovatt heard the word ‘Go’ from the new Chairman of the Wellington Urban District Council, Mr George Evans – and the spacious paddling pool at the Bowring Recreation ground was opened.

As it was a cold and damp afternoon, children removed shoes and socks for the opening ceremony and after splashing to the other side of the pool they were each rewarded with an ice lolly – including Cllr Lovatt!

July
Pedestrians only in Wellington’s main shopping area. Talks of a scheme to relieve Wellington’s traffic congestion and gradually convert the main shopping area of the town to a pedestrianised shopping precinct are going on between Salop County Council’s Planning Committee and Wellington’s Urban District Council.

The Committee says that the preparation of a scheme to relieve traffic congestion and set the
Kop. In the midst of the fighting he was standing a few feet from his Colonel Riddell who was fatally hit by a bullet.

Above: dead British soldiers after the Battle of Spion Kop, near Ladysmith, Natal.

Town Planning Adviser to Civic Trust - Mr Tim Rock spoke to Wellington traders on street improvements. Mr Rock, an authority on the external painting of premises, said “We are going through an awful khaki stage at the moment”.

He had some pithy things to say about some Wellington premises. He described one building as “an example of Victorian folly”, another as “an amusing building in the Gothic style” and generally left the traders in no doubt at all that a lick or two of paint would make a great difference all around. It was hardly surprising then that the shopkeepers voted unanimously for the improvement scheme to go ahead.

August

Spion Kop veteran – 91 next week. Probably only man still living who took part in the battle of Pieters Hill (February 1900) during the South Africa War, George Poyser of 17 Herbert Avenue – veteran of the Boer War who still potters about in his garden – had some interesting reminiscences, including leading a section of men to the top of Spion Kop. In the midst of the fighting he was standing a few feet from his Colonel Riddell who was fatally hit by a bullet.

Above: dead British soldiers after the Battle of Spion Kop, near Ladysmith, Natal.

October

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November

New Methodist Church for Wellington? The two Methodist churches in Wellington – New Street and Tan Bank – are likely to be sold and a new church to serve both congregations will probably be built on a site that has yet to be defined. New Street Church was built in 1882 and about 12 years ago several thousand pounds were spent on a modernisation scheme and it has a membership of 174. Tan Bank, only about 50 years old, has 126 members.

It is not likely a church will be built for several years, even if all hopes of the amalgamation are borne out.

At a Methodist Conference held in Manchester 5 years ago a directive was issued in which it was stated that consideration should be given to amalgamation when there were two or more churches in a particular area, and the Wellington circuit is obviously falling in line with this directive.

Above left: Trophy winners at the Wellington Smithfield Fat Stock Show, the first to be held by Messrs. Barber & Son following foot and mouth restrictions. Farmer W. Lawton’s 18-months-old bullock won the championship and subsequently sold for £141.

Above right: Wrekin Ladies’ Circle held a Cowboys and Indians birthday party at the Forest Glen Pavilion. The event was advertised as a Wild West Night.

Right: 52-years-old Fred Abel and his ‘one man circus’ passed by Wellington. The Journal reported: ... passing through Wellington on Monday was a rather different type of circus, consisting of one man, two donkeys and a variety of dogs and rats. The only music came from bells on the donkeys’ ears.
One day in 1961, while I was chairman of Wellington Urban District Council, I had a message from Reuben Rushen, the Town Clerk, that he wanted to see me in his office as soon as possible. He had before him the many sheets of paper that made up the conveyance document, transferring the ownership of the whole Dothill estate to the council. This was the final part of the takeover of the land and needed the chairman’s signature and the council’s seal to complete the legal procedure.

Reuben explained the whole process and witnessed my signature on a document involving far more money than I had ever dreamed of. Then he heated sealing wax, dropped a blob on the paper and set up the small press that applied the official UDC seal. The council had negotiated this sale several years before and had actually owned the land since 1956; all we were doing was putting the finishing touches to an arrangement that had been long agreed.

The vendor was Harry Hodgson, a Canadian, who was Managing Director of Joseph Sankey & Sons of Hadley Castle Works. He sold it to the council as ‘agricultural land’, at a much lower price than if there had been planning permission for the housing and development we were intending. Not only the treasurer, Ollie Leighton, but also the two councillors who were chartered accountants, Sidney Parker and Graham Murphy, assured us that this was an excellent deal and I’m sure they were right.

Dothill was one of Wellington’s ‘berewicks’ at Domesday, nearly 1,000 years ago. Giles of Erdington, lord of Wellington, (who obtained the market charter in 1244) leased it to John de Praeares for the service of one sixth of a knight’s service. Lord Forester owned it for some time, until by 1922 it was owned by Ernest Groom (the great timber merchant, remembered in Grooms Alley). Later ownership passed to HF Hodgson mentioned above. He sold 197 acres and the house to Wellington UDC in 1956, by which time I remember him living at Hadley Park House. He later built a house in Lilleshall, called ‘Hi’.

During the Last World War Dothill, like Admaston, was defended against all enemies by the Home Guard and I well remember roaming over the fields and round the pools on duty or exercises. Don’t laugh too loudly at my Dad’s little army – at least they kept all the Nazi hordes from invading Wellington throughout the War without hurting anyone. In those days a man we called ‘Jock’ (I never knew his proper name) farmed the land.

By the time I signed the conveyance, the UDC had many plans for Dothill and so had Shropshire County Council, including Park Junior School, St. Patrick’s Primary School, Dothill Infants and Junior Schools and the Girls’ Secondary Modern School. Also we had built the houses on North Road and what was then Hawkstone Court (seen being built, below) and Haughmond Court, the tall blocks of flats.

Part of the land was sold to the Shrewsbury firm of Fletcher Estates, which began planning and building many houses and the local shops. The money from Fletchers paid for the rest of the land, as it was so very much more valuable with planning permission for building than it had been when we bought it as ‘agricultural’ land. This is the secret of the financing of Telford – buying agricultural land and selling it as building land brings in a huge profit.

Many new street names were needed and the UDC was looking for a whole lot of suitable names. As chairman of the planning committee I was asked to make out a list and sat down with the Ordnance Survey maps of Shropshire, noting suitable river and stream names, followed by village names. So if residents of the Dothill area don’t like their addresses, they should blame me.

The north part of Dothill could not be developed until the Sewage Works had been moved, as there would not have been sufficient ‘fall’ for the sewers to operate. This happened much later and the names there are not attributable to me. Severn Drive was intended to be much longer but someone decided it had to be cut in two; otherwise it would have been much easier to get to Shawbirch from Wellington town centre than it is now. That, I think, was a mistake, causing some Shawbirch people to consider themselves not part of Wellington town.

During my lifetime Dothill, previously the residence and estate of the Lords Forester, has changed from a large farming area to what seems a comfortable, reasonably well planned part of Wellington. House prices reflect the view that it is a pleasant place to live.
As a fair few people know, I have a rather large collection of images relating to the history of our area. It’s taken several decades to reach its present size, thanks mainly to so many people who have lent me treasured paper memorabilia for me to copy.

These images have enabled me to piece together countless aspects of Wellington’s past. Importantly, they also provide visual interest to what could, without care, turn history into a topic drier than a waterless wadi in the Sahara Desert. Pictures are essential in attracting attention.

However, pictures often need explanation, which is where it can be a challenge to ascertain the ‘proper’ story behind them. In an ideal world, a picture should be accompanied by, at the very minimum, a caption which contains accurate information.

I was very pleased when the prospective tenant of the Wrekin Inn (above) in Wrekin Road asked for about twenty illustrations-with-captions to adorn the walls of the bar when the pub reopened.

I was given free rein to choose the pictures, so I concentrated on a few old maps, The Wrekin Hill, the Wrekin Brewery and the pub itself as, given the pub’s name, they seemed appropriate.

More recently, after J.D. Wetherspoon realised authoress Hesba Stretton’s name was utterly inappropriate for a pub (although, sadly, one or two town councillors couldn’t see a problem with it), they decided to call their new hostelry in New Street ‘The William Withering’ (right and below).

Their design consultants Art For Industry approached me to provide a series of information and images (some probably never seen before by the general public) relating to the history of the town and The Wrekin Hill. I have to say, they’ve done a remarkable job in decorating the walls with a wonderful display.

Having completed this work, I was surprised when another firm (1 Media Ltd of Kirkby Lonsdale) asked me for a series of Before, After, In Between and other unusual scenes based roughly on those in Wellington Through Time and Telford Through Time.

I strongly advise you to pay a visit to the upstairs toilet. Take a few minutes to look at the picture frame above the stairway. I won’t say why, but several people seemed to spend an awfully long time sitting on the stairs, avidly watching it.

There’s an identical picture frame on the right hand wall when entering the pub from New Street. It shows William Withering. ‘Not particularly special’, I hear you say. Well, keep a close eye on it while taking refreshment and all will be revealed. Watch it long enough, and you’ll see even more. History has its humorous moments!

I have to admit, it’s good to think someone out there is interested in discovering more about our town and seeks to promote its past in a meaningful way. OK, despite being warned, Wetherspoon designers made the mistake of saying William Withering was born in Market Square on one of their plaques, but the rest of the information seems fine and very well presented.

Both the Wrekin Inn and The William Withering are well worth a visit. Have a coffee or something stronger and take your time to examine the wonderful array of illustrations and historical information.

I’m sure you’ll be impressed, and leave a little wiser.

www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com
Here's another selection of photographs to stimulate the little grey cells (or, if you prefer, your memory).

They show (clockwise from top right):

New school at Dothill, near Dothill Pool, 1961/62.

The Cock Hotel junction, 1962.

Fletcher Estates office and building work, 1961, on part of the Brooklands Estate.

Looking over the churchyard towards The Green, with the impressive Barclays Bank building at the junction of Church Street and Queen Street, 1961. The bank building was demolished later that year and replaced with a concrete and glass utilitarian edifice.

The Plough Inn, on the corner of Plough Road and King Street, 1961.

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HELP!

As always, we should appreciate it if you would get in touch with our secretary (contact details on page 3) if you have any old photos, event programmes or any other paper memorabilia to do with Wellington’s past so that we can take copies.