



# Wellingtonia

FREE ISSUE!

Issue 2 : Winter 2009

Newsletter of the Wellington History Group,  
rediscovering the past of Wellington in Shropshire

## WELCOME ...

... to Issue Two of our quarterly magazine. Response to Issue One has been staggering, to say the least, with copies snapped up from Wellington and Telford libraries as well as shops in the town. We had a suspicion they'd fly off the shelves but were surprised by how quickly they disappeared!

We have been very pleased (and relieved!) to receive so many positive comments about its presentation and the quality of our articles. Some have come from as far away as Canada, America, South Africa and Australia, so either friends living in far away places have been sent a copy, or they've asked for a copy to be sent (free of charge) as an email attachment. We do our best!

Several readers have asked whether *Wellingtonia* is in direct competition with the *Wellington News* magazine. The answer is definitely not. We aren't in business, nor do we tend to report recent newsworthy events.

Our articles are designed specifically to emphasise Wellington's rich history and encourage readers to learn more, perhaps beginning their own lines of research into family histories as

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well as topics relating to the town itself. The possibilities are endless! Please see back page for our contact details and inside for information on the public talks we are giving in 2009.

We have been very fortunate and are most grateful for the grants we have been given by *Awards For All* and *Wellington Town Council*. The money has been and will continue to be used to produce four copies of *Wellingtonia*, as well as provide equipment enabling us to give public talks during the twelve months ending in September this year. What happens after then depends on many factors.

Recently, the Group has also made donations of magazines and books to local schools and colleges to help both teachers and students gain a better understanding of the area's past.

It's not easy researching history. That's why we need your support, and it's also why we ask you to get involved.

We'll do what we can to help you and hope you'll let us borrow items like old photos to give us the opportunity to increase our knowledge. Much of what we find out isn't discovered in old newspapers and books, it comes from people like you.

We are all, one way or another, historians.



Treasurer Phil Fairclough proudly displays the Awards For All cheque.

Produced with financial support from Awards For All



Sometimes, when with my friends of Wellington History Group, I feel like the odd man out, not only because I'm the most ancient but also because I'm a geographer rather than an historian, though I admit to having read many history books over the twenty years or so that I spent writing local history.

Maps have been a fascination for me over the years; I enjoy reading them and visualising the places on them. Someone said that history is about chaps and geography about maps and there's a lot of truth in that.

John Wood's map of Wellington in 1832 is a beauty and worth hours of reading. I have several versions, of which Allan Frost's is the best. His shows a few places later than 1832, like Christ Church (1838), and that's an advantage. It is the earliest accurate map of Wellington we have and shows our town as it was 167 years ago.

One important reason for making the map must have been the forthcoming railway so the ownership of the land was vital to Wood's sponsor, the Duke of Sutherland and his partners. Much of the land outside the built up area was the property of big local landowners like Lord Forester, St. John Chiverton Charlton, Edward Cludde and Thomas Eyton. Even in those days, the Lilleshall Company could not proceed without buying the land. We notice that Forester owned the land where both railway stations (passenger and goods) were built and the Shropshire Works, where the rolling stock and other articles were made (later Groom's Timber Yard).

The map shows Wellington as a small town mercifully free from any hint of planning. Roads radiate in a higgledy-piggledy manner from the Market Square as if made by the town drunk. Along

them are huddled hundreds of small houses with a few bigger ones and other larger houses set back from the streets. Behind many of the houses are long narrow gardens set out like medieval burgess plots for traders. Some of these plots are full of tiny houses for the poor. They must have been terrible places to live and were probably temporary accommodation until a better home could be afforded. Several nurseries are marked, presumably supplying vegetables for the town.

Many street names have changed, like Jarrats Lane (Glebe Street), New Town (Haygate Road), Water Lane (Wrekin Road), Back Lane (King Street), Butcher Lane (Market Street), and what the map calls New Street includes our High Street.

Market Square is very tightly built up. Barrie Trinder's idea that it used to include Crown Street, Bell Street and Duke Street looks quite correct. That's Crown Street, Dun Cow Lane and Swinemarket on the map. Barrie suggested that the buildings between these ancient streets were originally market stalls that became more and more permanent. The market hall is not marked; it was dismantled in 1800 but saved the rest of Market Square from becoming built up.

What became Lloyds Bank was our first bank; it's shown on the north side of Ten Tree Croft. This is surprising but John Wood is a

careful cartographer. Behind the bank, I assume, was Tenter Croft, where cloth was stretched on tenterhooks. Northeast of that, I believe, was the town's pond, probably where flax was retted for linen making.

North of the church is the public school that later transferred to Constitution Hill (Bellevue Road here) and later to Orleton Lane, becoming Orleton Park.. There's a foundry in New Hall Street (later Foundry Road, now disappeared) that I think was the brass foundry, where bells were made. Later there was a large iron foundry making bread ovens and called the Panification Works. To the southwest is the vicarage, later called the Priory.

Other large houses are the Vineyard, Parville House, Spring Hill House (now Priory Nursing Home), and Chapel House, once the Baptist Church in Plough Road.

Roads radiate, to the north towards Eyton and the Weald Moors, southeast to Watling Street, then a separate township, southwest to The Wrekin and eastwards to Shrewsbury, Wrockwardine and Admaston Spa. If older roads have more twists and turns, many of these are very ancient, with only a vague idea where to go. The map makes nonsense of any idea of defence; you just could not defend Wellington, it's not designed for it. The Home Guard found that out in 1939.

This is a fascinating map; one to drool over, to wonder about, to speculate on. It encapsulates the past of the town, making references to earlier days and pointing to the future – where we live. To a mapaholic like me it ranks with some of my favourite stories and poems.

Before they all go, if you really want to learn about Wellington's history, snap one of these wonderful documents up from Allan Frost. He only sells them at his talks, and they're a bargain at £5.00.



Here is the next historical problem we'd like someone to solve by providing us with definite proof: where exactly did King Charles I make his famous Declaration which heralded the beginning of the English Civil War?

### *The Mystery*

I have been unable to find any proof that King Charles I ever set foot in Wellington itself, but another myth has arisen over the last thirty or so years: that he made his Declaration of War in Market Square (or Market Place as it was then known).

### *Where did Charles stay?*

What we *do* know is that he and his troops stopped overnight from 19th - 20th September 1642 while on their way from Nottingham via Newport to Shrewsbury, where he hoped to receive offers of support and gain more troops.

There were then two main routes from Newport to Shrewsbury. The first was the old Portway, which passes through Shawburch; the second was the lane which ran through Trench towards Wellington where it joined Watling Street, then ran past Orleton Hall on its way to the County town. Both routes by-pass Wellington.

The Portway was the shortest and most direct route. It passes close to Apley Castle whose Charlton family at the time were Royalist supporters.

The Cludde family at Orleton Hall *could* have accommodated Charles and his soldiers with their tents, horses and artillery, and The Wrekin Hill may have provided a focal point for potential recruits to assemble, but it strikes me as more logical for the king and his army to strike camp overnight at a place offering him noble hospitality close to the quickest route, which was across The Weald Moors along the Portway.

Whichever site was chosen, it's unbelievable to think Charles would have allowed his 4,000-

*'I desire to govern by the known laws of the land, and that the liberty and property of the subject may be by them preserved with the same care as my own just rights. And if it please God, by his blessing upon this armie raised for my necessary defence, to preserve me from this rebellion, I do solemnly and faithfully promise in the sight of God to maintain just privileges and freedom of Parliament, and to govern by the known laws of the land to the utmost of my power; and particularly to observe inviolably the laws consented to me by this Parliament.'*

The King's Declaration

strong army of largely untrained and undisciplined soldiers anywhere near the centre of a small town like Wellington.

He needed to keep them in check. Even at this early stage, there was always the risk of desertion and rioting.

### *Where was the Standard raised?*

It is, however, possible that his standard was raised in the Square, even if he wasn't personally present; it might have been, and probably was, done as an attempt to recruit men to his cause in what was the recognised centre of the district: he had done the same thing in Nottingham a few days earlier.

On the other hand, recruitment was also done by inviting local knights and gentry into the king's presence and making a personal appeal for them to commit a number of men from tenants on their lands to his cause.

We also have to bear in mind that the king did not appear in front of the general public except in special circumstances. Monarchs preferred to stay away in more comfortable surroundings

and sent their underlings to do the dirty work.

King Charles I made the Declaration to his army to inspire and maintain loyalty for his cause; it was made immediately after military orders had been given to each of his assembled regiments. He couldn't have done that in the centre of what was little more than a village.

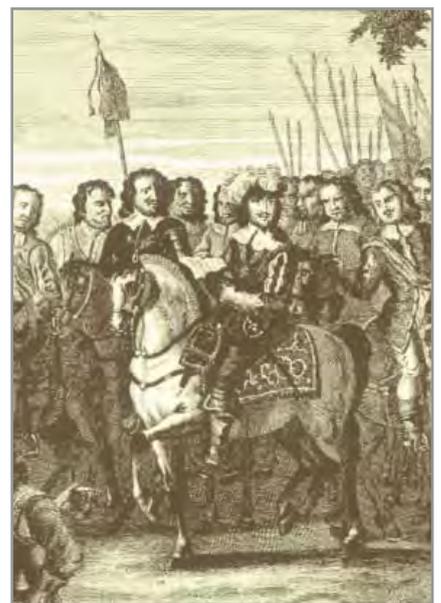
In W. Farrow's 1926 book *Shropshire 1642-49: The Great Civil War*, he states with regard to Wellington:

*'In the vicinity of that town, the King placing himself in the midst of his troops, made a speech that was warmly welcomed, not only by the army, but also by the people of the locality whose loyalty had been somewhat shaken by the propaganda of Parliament.'*

We must reach the conclusion that the Declaration didn't take place in Wellington itself, but rather on its outskirts, after which Charles and his army progressed to Shrewsbury where he recruited more troops and apparently accepted cash and military support from wealthy inhabitants in exchange for honours. He also had coins produced at the town's Mint.

Do you have any *definite* proof to shed more light on the matter? If so, let us know.

\* \* \*



*King Charles I addresses troops at Gay Meadow, Shrewsbury, 1642.*

Imagine the scene, a small band of pilgrims gathered by the parish church of All Saints in Wellington to prepare for their annual pilgrimage to the shrine at Holywell in Wales.

The great banner depicting Our Lady had been recently blessed by Cardinal Wolsey, the Papal Legate, and would be carried in front, showing the way forward. They could still hear the familiar rhythm of the Latin chant sung by a visiting group of monks from nearby Haughmond Abbey and smell the heady incense drifting from the candle lit church. They were proud that their King, Henry VIII, had just been awarded a new title by Pope Leo 10th to honour his rebuttal of the Lutheran heresy. The king was now 'Defender of the Faith' ... the Catholic faith.

In less than a generation from that time, a thousand years of Catholic tradition was to be swept away and that band of pilgrims would live to see the destruction of their faith and the forced imposition of new beliefs both on them and their children. They were all facing a much more life challenging pilgrimage than they could ever have imagined as they stepped forward on that day in the year 1521.

Some learned with dismay that the Pope would no longer be the head of the English church. The monasteries were to be stripped of all their valuables and land and their lead and stone used to build houses for rich landowners and merchants. No longer would church services be sung in Latin and the veneration of Our Lady and the Saints was discouraged. The 'Defender of the Faith' had proved to be its destroyer.

Times got harder for the dwindling group of loyal Catholics who still clung to the old beliefs. Heavy fines were imposed for refusal to attend the new protestant Church of England. Priests were hunted down and many were executed.

One, the Blessed Robert



Window depicting the Blessed Robert Johnson in St. Patrick's church.

Johnson, after whom our secondary school is named, was said to come from South East Shropshire, possibly from one of the parishes of Claverley, Halesowen or Worfield.

In 1572, at the age of 29 years, he left to study at the German College in Rome to become a Catholic priest. It was illegal to study for the priesthood in England and those wishing to follow this dangerous vocation were secretly smuggled out of the country.

Despite ill health and difficulties with study, Robert was ordained in Brussels in 1576. After a period of further study with the Jesuits at Louvain, he briefly visited England in 1579, before returning to Rome.

William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, Elizabeth's chief minister, had a very elaborate system of spies who monitored the movements of English priests training on the continent. One of these spies saw

Robert Johnson in Rome.

*'He is about 40 years of age, slender of body, somewhat hard favoured, his face full of wrinkles, the hair of his beard not cut, a flaxen yellow colour, wanting two teeth on his upper jaw on the right side. He speaketh Italian excellently'* (from Ansthruther Seminary Priests).

In 1580, he returned to England under the patronage of the Talbot family of Shrewsbury. Immediately arrested, he was sent to prison in the Counter in the Poultry in London. In December of that year he was transferred to the Tower of London for interrogation and torture. He was arraigned with the famous martyr, Edmund Campion and condemned to death on 20th November 1581. He protested at his trial that he had never even seen those with whom he was accused of plotting until they met in the court room! On 28th May 1582 his life's pilgrimage ended in martyrdom at Tyburn with two others, Thomas Ford and John Short.

It was extremely dangerous for Catholic priests to exist in England and they had to rely on a system of safe houses with secret priest holes to enable them to hide during the many raids. Some very wealthy aristocratic landowners still maintained the Catholic faith in their large manor houses, often supporting a private chapel where Mass could be said secretly for them and their household.

#### *The Catholic Crescent*

These aristocratic houses that supported the Catholics were spread out like a huge crescent surrounding Wellington. In the north was Longford Hall Newport, the home of the Talbots, Earls of Shrewsbury. To the east, Viscount Stafford lived at the Manor House in Shifnal. Southwards, the Brooke family who owned much of the iron and coal workings in the Gorge lived in Madeley Court near the Purcell family who owned Benthall Hall. Finally in the south west, at Acton

*Sketch of the original All Saints parish church, built for use by the Catholic faith. It was demolished in 1789 to make way for today's building.*



## WELLINGTONIANS

What makes a Wellingtonian? Is it someone who was born here? Or their family has lived in the town for a generation or two? Or someone who has moved here? And, if you go to live somewhere else, can you still be regarded as a Wellingtonian?

The answers to all these questions is 'yes.'

Since the beginnings of the town some 1300 years ago (probably founded, it has to be said, by a migrant Anglo-Saxon), the growth from farmstead to village to town has only been made possible by folk migrating to the area, settling down and having families. Not all were white indigenous 'English' or even British.

Over the centuries our population has seen the arrival of a wide variety of races and creeds, ranging from the Normans (whose origins lay in Scandinavia) during the eleventh century right through to Italians who settled here during the mid-nineteenth century.

The twentieth century witnessed an influx of new residents from all over the world. Some were refugees escaping from conflict, or political or religious persecution. Others were 'economic' migrants, who came in search of new jobs and sometimes began their own highly successful businesses.

Wellington has always been a mixed society and has, by and large, extended the hand of friendship to everyone, whatever their origins, language or colour of skin.

The town is all the richer for it. People are people, after all, with their own personalities, beliefs and ways of life. Just because we don't always like someone or agree with what they say or do doesn't make 'us' right and 'them' wrong.

A Wellingtonian is someone who has a deep affection for our town, its multicultural society, streets, buildings and people. Wherever they happen to live.

Burnell, lived the Smythe family.

In Wellington, Edward Forester of Old Hall, Watling Street, hereditary warden of the Wrekin Forest, sent his son Francis for ordination at the English College in Rome in 1592. The same family, who moved to Dohill Park in 1602, welcomed a French priest, Fr Stepen le Maitre, a refugee from the French Revolution, to Wellington's first legal Catholic Chapel in the Lodge at Dohill House in 1806.

More humble Catholics lived in their shadow and the few we can trace to these early times lived on Watling Street and were probably employed as colliers in the Steeraway lime kilns at New Works, owned by the Forester family. It seems certain that Madeley Court was the main religious centre and priests rode out on horse back from there to Wellington to minister to the needs of their tiny flock. They met in a humble shed behind the Duke's Head Pub in New Street and later in a nearby shop.

The heavy fines and persecution took a heavy toll and by the end of the 18th century Catholicism had virtually died in Shropshire. It has been estimated that there were only 90,000 Catholics left in the whole of England. They were concentrated in London, Lancashire, Staffordshire and the north eastern counties of Durham and Northumberland.

Salvation came from unexpected sources. The rising

prosperity associated with the Industrial Revolution pulled in workers and traders from all over. The first new Catholics to arrive in Wellington were from Italy and Ireland. The Cetti family from Lake Como established a jewellery business here in 1836 and by 1841 had been joined by two more Italian families. They were rapidly followed by waves of Irish immigration mainly from Galway, Sligo and Mayo, so many that a new church on Mill Bank was built in 1838.

By 1841 there were 188 Irish born people settled in Wellington. The expansion continued over the following century with immigration from Poland, Germany, Italy, France, Hungary, India and many other places.

The last congregational survey in 2005 at St Patrick's Church, Wellington, lists members from 33 different countries excluding those from Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. It really has again become 'Many Nations One Church', just as the church had been in medieval Europe.

Some things have always endured. There are still pilgrimages to Holywell. Throughout all the violent changes in religion over the intervening four centuries, small bands of people have continuously made their way to the Holy Well and kept faith with those early pilgrims who left Wellington in 1521 to begin their epic journey through turmoil and change.

THE late 1940s and early 50s saw significant housing development in Wellington, in particular the creation of the 'new' Arleston estate - not to be confused with the old Arleston estate which carried the derogatory local name tag of Little Russia.

This older part (Urban District Council houses completed pre-war), consisted of double-storey red brick semi-detached dwellings, to be joined, from 1947-1954, by 578 pastel coloured dwellings (houses and flats) forming the UDC's 'new' Arleston estate, down the steep hill and to the west.

My family lived in this new part from 1950 to 1962. New Arleston homes looked very different from their Little Russia counterparts. All were built, not of brick, but of *in situ* no fines concrete, their exteriors coated in a Tyrolean finish, rather like razor-sharp, rock-hard porridge. Experts have acknowledged that these swish-looking Wimpey productions, constructed in a combination of poured concrete and breeze block, were notoriously difficult to keep warm in winter.

But their design was streets ahead of the rather grim red brick

ones up the hill, and we and the other 577 families felt excited, and quite superior, to be moving in.

By 1950, the hardships of World War II were generally forgotten, although some food rationing remained. Clement Attlee's Labour Government were still in power (admittedly not for much longer) and at long last people's disposable incomes were growing.

This was evident amongst our neighbours. People began buying cars, bicycles, new furniture, new clothes - the wartime thumbscrews were off.

As young boys then (I was 10) we Arleston hamster pack members were rarely bored. There were things to mess up, such as the neat piles of sand being used by Wimpey to build the other half of the estate between 1950 and 1954, there were unoccupied upstairs bedrooms to jump out of (into the sand), timber to 'borrow' to make buggy cars, windows to break (accidentally), football to play in the street, building site night watchmen to drive nuts, etc.

Tourist park developers could learn a great deal from partly completed housing estates like ours. It was an absolute dream for kids, and Disney could have saved

himself millions in set-up costs simply by reproducing a half-finished Arleston Estate and charging admission.

Oddly enough, even though the ill-advised 11-plus scholarship system sent 82 per cent of children to secondary modern schools, as far as I can remember almost all the New Arleston lads I got to know went to the local grammar school. This placed us in each other's pockets morning, day and evening, especially in the school holidays with no homework to grind through.

We lived in Kingsland, the long, sloping thoroughfare that lay (and still lies) as the spine of the entire development, with, looking uphill, Dawley Road over to the right of us, and the seldom-visited Little Russia far to the left.

There were no recreational facilities such as grassed open space available on the estate, so we played our football and cricket, even tennis either side of an imaginary net, out in the street, plagued though we were on a regular basis by a local motorcycle policeman who would stop our games, lecture us about the dangers of playing on a street practically devoid of traffic, then ride away, only to appear minutes later after doing a loop to see if we had heeded his warnings. We never had.

Life on a new housing estate like New Arleston was an eye-opener for the majority of the tenants. Due to the primitive standard of municipal pre-war housing stock, a surprising number of homes had no running hot water, no separate bathroom, and both the coalhouse and the lavatory situated directly off the kitchen. New Arleston changed all that.

The estate had a refreshingly 'open' air about it - no front fences, and, as far as I recall, no side or back fences either, other than posts and two strands of wire. When we moved in, the builders had not even erected the



John Westwood's former home at 28 Kingsland.

posts and wire, and an uncle, dry of wit, stepped out back and remarked – ‘what a massive garden you’ve got to knock into shape’ (you could see a good 300 yards to the Dawley Road, prior to its own transformation some years later by ribbon residential development).

A major event for us boys (and girls of course) was the opening of the estate’s own shops. At the lower end of Kingsland where it joined Dawley Road, a substantial retail complex, with a flat above every shop, was constructed in the early 50s, featuring Alf Davies’ grocery, the Foskett’s bread and cakes, men’s clothing, a butcher, a florist, and, most important of all, Ernie Morgan’s sweet shop, which also sold ice cream.

Ernie was a former Midland Red bus driver of cheerful disposition (surrounded by sweets stacked to the rafters, who wouldn’t be cheerful?). He and his pleasantly quiet wife ran the shop together, and we boys were among their regulars. Thanks to the Morgans, we all put on weight. Walls ice cream, Cadbury’s chocolate, walnut whirls, chocolate éclairs – all got a serious a workout; Ernie could hardly keep pace.



Keen sportsman John was a member of the Grammar School Cricket Team in the late 1950s. Back row, from left, Norman Earle, Bill Smith, Tony Taylor, John Westwood, Peter Hughes, Neil Summerton. Front: -?-, George Benbow, Terry Woodward, Robert Purcell, Gilbert Band.

New Arleston became one of many bright feathers in the cap of the Conservatives’ minister responsible for the post-war housing rush, Harold Macmillan. He had promised to substantially increase the nation’s stock of affordable housing made short by neglect on the one hand, and the war on the other, and he succeeded, later to be rewarded with the prime ministership.

The other day, I was shown a recent photograph of our former house at 28 Kingsland. After nearly 60 years, it stands today (a semi-detached with bay windows) virtually as it was then, and, no doubt, so do all the other 577.

Long live municipal building!

*John Westwood now lives in Melbourne, Australia.*

## DON'T MISS OUR PUBLIC TALKS IN 2009!

A monthly series of talks on subjects relating to our area began in January when Allan Frost spoke about the history of our famous Wrekin Brewery. At the time of writing, Phil Fairclough is scheduled to talk about ‘When Europe Came To Shropshire, 1939-1950’ in February.

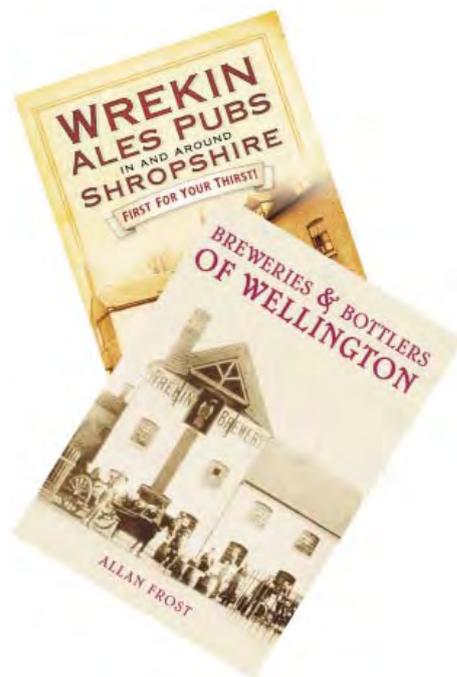
Please make a note of the following dates and projected topics, and do your best to give us your support. All meetings will take place in the Committee Room at Wellington Civic Centre, beginning promptly at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free, and refreshments will be provided.

- March 11:** George Evans: The Wrekin Forest
- April 15:** Neil Clarke: The Holyhead Road
- May 13:** Advice on Family History Research
- June 17:** Geoff Harrison: History of Eyton upon the Wealdmoors

Announcements on these and other events, such as evening walks-and-talks, will be made at meetings and in the local Press.

Our Group will also be hosting the **Wrekin Local Studies Annual Conference** on **Saturday 16th May** in the Parish Hall of All Saints church. The day’s event will include talks and (weather permitting) town walks, and your chance to vote for ‘*Who was the most notable Wellingtonian*’.

More details to follow.



To learn more about the history of Wellington’s breweries, pop and bottling firms, read these books by Allan Frost. Order them from all good booksellers.

Anyone researching their family tree may get a little confused when checking addresses in Census records of the mid nineteenth century.

For example, you may find that the house number is different for someone living in New Street in 1851 than is shown for 1861.

Similarly, an ancestor may be shown as living in New Street in 1871, but appears to have moved to a new house in High Street ten years later. The chances are that they haven't moved at all.

These anomalies may have nothing at all to do with people moving from one house to another (although the possibility shouldn't be ruled out) but rather the renumbering and subsequent division of New Street.

New Street was 'created' during the Middle Ages and ran from the southern end of Market Place (or 'Square' as the Victorians renamed it) all the way to the junction between King Street (formerly Back Lane) and Mill Bank (earlier called Windmill Bank).

When postal services became more organised after 1828, when authoress Hesba Stretton's father Benjamin Smith became Wellington's first postmaster, the amount of post delivered on a daily basis was minimal. However, the arrival of the railway in 1849 led to a massive increase and postmen found it increasingly difficult to carry overladen bags.

To begin with, none of the properties in New Street were numbered: there wasn't any need; a person's name and street were all that were required to ensure delivery ... we must remember that Wellington was only a small town and everyone knew everyone else, and strangers and new residents were quickly recognised.

A large number of poorer folk lived in substandard slums, many of which were tenement blocks or cottages around a central square with a communal wash house



*New Street ended and High Street began at the junction with Chapel Lane and St. John Street ('St. John' is pronounced 'Sinjun'). 1882 Ordnance Survey map.*

(often doubling up as a brewhouse); these grouped dwellings were usually named 'courts' or 'yards', and took the owner's name, like Keay's Court.

The Post Office needed a more precise way of sorting the mail, so introduced a system of numbering. Originally, New Streets numbers ran from Market Square in the order 1, 2, 3, etc., all the way along the northern side to the King Street corner, then crossed over the road to the southern side and continued until it arrived back at Market Square.

Problems arose when new properties were built, thus upsetting the order, so the present

system began, where properties on the left hand side were given odd numbers, those on the right even.

To cope with increasing amounts of mail, it was decided in the early 1870s to divide New Street into two, thus creating High Street, which commenced at the Chapel Lane/St. John Street junction.

High Street was given its own property numbers, although dwellings in yards or courts running off High Street weren't.

To add to the confusion, since a few years ago, New Street now ends and High Street begins at the Ring Road near the Methodist Church.

Reading about Wellington's history is all well and good but what could be better than going out and discovering it first hand?

We don't just want to let you know about the town's fascinating past: no, we want you to start telling us about it, too!

*The Gumshoe Trail* is a column designed to help do just that, detecting the most useful primary sources of local knowledge from the bewildering array of archive material in the public realm.

Marc Petty starts the ball rolling with yet another innovation of the Victorian age: district authority records.

#### *What are they?*

Local government papers. More specifically, the collected records of the Wellington Improvement Commission and its successor body, Wellington Urban District Council.

#### *What did they do?*

The 19th Century witnessed an enormous expansion of state intervention in everyday life, primarily in response to the huge public health problems created by the rapid industrialisation of Britain's towns and cities. Wellington was no different.

By 1854, the town's manor court (a dubious medieval anachronism consisting of the area's wealthier citizens) was losing the battle to stay abreast of these developments.

As a result, unhappy local taxpayers successfully applied for an Act of Parliament to establish an improvement commission—a democratically elected body, charged with enhancing public health in the area.

#### *OK, but why is this so important?*

Between 1854 and 1894, the fifteen commissioners probably did more than anyone else in Wellington's history to transform it into the modern town we know today: gas and water supplies were

improved, a new cemetery consecrated, streets were paved and regularly cleansed and some of the worst slum housing removed.

However, improvement commissions had been around long before the nineteenth century and were considered obsolete by the time Wellington adopted one. Fewer than fifty remained in existence by the 1880s, and they were all swept away when a nationwide network of modern councils was established in 1894.

As such, Wellington became home to both an Urban and Rural District Council; the former taking responsibility for the affairs of the town itself, with the latter administering the outlying areas to the north and east as far as Donnington.

This dual system remained intact until the local government reforms of the early 1970s.

#### *It all sounds a bit boring!*

On the contrary! These records present an unparalleled account of daily life in Wellington during a period of huge change.

Aside from recording regular council business, such as minutes of its various committees, the collection houses a vast number of files belonging to its chief administrative officer, the town clerk.

They shed light on a wide array of subjects, from civil

defence procedures in the case of a nuclear attack to the coming of Telford (or, as it was dubbed in 1965, '50 000 overspill population'—not a particularly catchy name for a new town!).

However, much had already changed in Wellington before this date and maps, photographs and newspaper cuttings all help to chronicle the major post-war redevelopment of the town.

#### *A bit random, isn't it?*

Absolutely! Wellington UDC certainly had an interest in the finer points of public life.

There are details of prestigious events, presentations to local notables and papers relating to a plethora of other bodies: from local theatre groups to the fire brigade and even the Pig Marketing Board!

#### *Where can I find them?*

The records of Wellington Urban District Council (which incorporate the papers of the Improvement Commission) are held at Shropshire Archives in Shrewsbury.

If you want to see them, you'll need to get a Reader's Ticket at the centre itself (a simple procedure that requires proof of identity and two passport-style photos).

If you're just curious and want to know what's available, there's also a catalogue of the records (reference number DA13) online on the Shropshire Archives website:

**www.**

**shropshire.gov.uk/archives.nsf**



*Wellington Urban District Council meeting, 1962, with George Evans (third from right) as Chairman.*

*Can you help us with copies of old school photographs, especially ones showing groups of pupils? If so, please let us borrow them to make computer copies.*

School photographs are wonderful things, especially ones taken before this age of political correctness. It's now difficult to obtain photographs of

children in the classroom or taking part in events for which they've spend a great deal of time rehearsing and preparing. It didn't used to be like that.

The history of school photos is a fascinating one. If nothing else, they can reveal what our ancestors looked like in an age when taking photographs was uncommon and the services of professionals who understood this dark art were essential in providing them.

Initially, photos were taken of classes, teachers and special events

and sports teams. Long panoramic photos of the whole school began in the 1930s and continued, albeit less frequently, into the 1970s.

Individual pupil photos seem to have been the norm from the 1940s to 1970s, possibly 1980s in some schools. They were often produced shortly before Christmas and mounted in foldover cards for parents to give away as presents or to adorn the mantelpiece and, as a by-product, help school funds for parties and subsidise day trips.

Sadly, schools do not always appreciate the historical or family importance of their photos and may not bother to make notes on what each one is about, or (horror



Wellington Mixed Modern School, 1960.



Wellington Boys' Grammar, 1962.



Wellington Girls' High School, 1963.

of horrors!) throw them away when, for example, a school is closed or merged with another, as happened when the former Secondary Modern school in Orleton Lane closed a few years ago.

Everyone (well, almost everyone) likes to see themselves or identify long lost friends in photos such as these. Quite often, they are the only record we have of our younger days.

Our chairman is trying to take copies of as many Wellington school photos as he can, so let him know if you have any so that he can borrow them. Please help him by getting in touch.



*Miss Hallan's Tutor Group at New College, c.1980.*



Most people in Wellington will know that within the town there are two Anglican churches, each being the centre of a parish. Christ Church is in the south of the town and began its life as a 'daughter' church (technically a Chapel of Ease) within the All Saints parish; the church itself, built about 1837, stands away from the noise and business of the town and is itself a parish church (see *The Story of Christ Church* by Allan Frost, 2007)

To Wellingtonians and visitors walking around the town, it is impossible not to notice the imposing Georgian building standing in the old church yard (a Garden of Rest since the early 1950s) – All Saints, the parish church of Wellington. Although locked for security reasons, it is open on Sundays and each morning early for prayer, and at lunch-time on Thursdays.

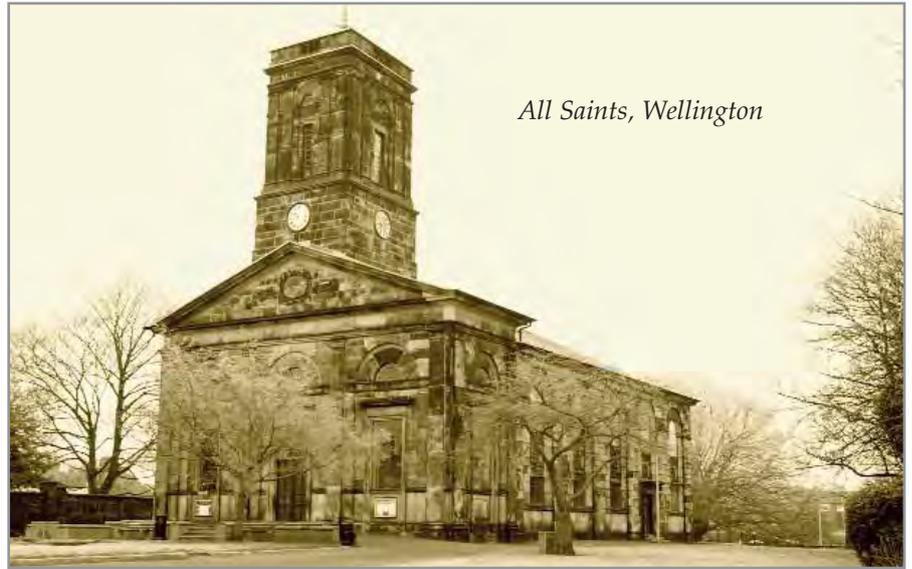
This is the parish church of the town but most Wellingtonians do not realise that there are two churches within the one Parish: look closely at the notices and you will see *'Parish of All Saints, Wellington with St. Catherine's, Eyton'*.

These two churches were constructed, probably on the sites of the previous buildings, in the Georgian period but are very different in appearance.

The present All Saints church is built of greyish Grinshill stone, similar to St. Chad's church, Shrewsbury, not surprising as they were designed by the same architect. The interior is typical basilican form with galleries supported by columns with cast-iron at their core. It was built in 1788-90.

St. Catherine's church, built in 1743, is very much smaller with a rectangular nave and semi-circular apse at the east, all built of red-brick with red-sandstone quoins. It has a west-gallery. The church is set in surrounding farm-land.

But why are there two churches in the parish?



*All Saints, Wellington*

At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1087, the village of Wellington had a church under the control of the Abbey of Shrewsbury. Just to the north was the hamlet of Eyton upon the Wealdmoors (variously spelt Wyldemor, Wildmoors) which was a manor with, it is believed, a small manorial chapel.

As time moved on through the Middle Ages, the church at Wellington became a parish with a Vicar, and at Eyton the manorial chapel became a parish with a Rector. Such distinctions relate to how the priest was supported – a Vicar only had 'lesser tithes', the 'greater tithes' going to the lord of the manor, in the case of Wellington originally to the Abbey at Shrewsbury and later after the Abbey was dissolved the Crown; whereas at Eyton the Rector received the 'greater tithes' from the Manor of Eyton.

In the mid sixteenth century, the patron of both livings, or parishes, was the lord of Eyton upon the Weald Moors, Thomas Eyton who acquired the right to appoint a priest at All Saints from the Crown. The patron of a living is the authority who 'appointed' the priest: consequently, during the period of about 200 years after 1560, the lord of the Manor of Eyton was instrumental in the appointment of the priests at both All Saints, Wellington and St.

Catherine's, Eyton.

By looking at the list of Vicars of Wellington and Rectors of Eyton, it is clear that the holder of each living was different: only very occasionally, usually when it was a member of the Eyton family, did the same individual hold both positions.

In the mid eighteenth century after St. Catherine's church had been rebuilt following the dereliction of the Civil War but before All Saints was similarly rebuilt, the two positions were formally joined together: the same individual would be both the Vicar of All Saints and Rector of St. Catherine's ... but the parishes would remain separate.

In the year of 1767, the two livings were so unified. What had been an informal arrangement now became formal but it had to be done correctly, legally and in perpetuity. That could only happen with approval of the Church and legal authorities.

A translation of the document may be viewed at the Lichfield Joint Records Office. It is a lengthy document of very turgid legalistic prose but a few extracts are worthy of consideration.

*'Frederick, by Divine permission Lord Bishop of Lichfield & Coventry ... Whereas Thomas Eyton Esq., the true and undoubted patron of the Vicarage of Wellington in the County of Salop ... and likewise of the Rectory*

of Eyton upon Wildmoors in the County & Diocese aforesaid, & Richard Smith Clerk, bachelor in Divinity, the legal incumbent of both the said Vicarage & Rectory, have by their joint Petition under their hands & seals bearing date the nineteenth day of August in the year of our Lord 1767, represented to us that the fruits, profits & ecclesiastical emoluments of the said vicarage of Wellington & Rectory of Eyton upon Wildmoors are scarce sufficient for the maintenance of a minister in such manner as the decency of his Clerical order requires ...'

After this declaration are further comments;

'... that there is no burying at the church of Eyton but the inhabitants of Eyton have from time immemorial been buried at Wellington, that the churches are within one mile distance of each other, ... Rev Stephen Panting some years ago for a considerable time ministered at the church of Eyton once a day only ... and for these two years past the duty has been performed by your Petitioner Richard Smith in the same manner, together with the duty of Wellington only one mile distant from Eyton.'

The formal petition concludes: 'Wherefore your Petitioners for the reasons aforesaid, the smallness of the Rectory of Eyton and the inconsiderable number of its inhabitants and its lying so contiguous to Wellington ... the present incumbent thereof & his successors humbly pray that the said vicarage & rectory may be consolidated in one united living.'

The legal document continues

identifying the Act of Parliament which permits union:

'by an Act of Parliament made in the thirty seventh year of King Henry VIII ... It is so enacted & established "That a union or consolidation of two churches in one, the one of them not being above the yearly value of six pounds ... and distant from the other above one mile in any place or places within the Realm of England" ... Wherefore we the said Frederick Lord Bishop of Lichfield & Coventry being credibly informed of the truth of, and having well weighed & considered the promises, have in pursuance of the said recited act ... decreed that the said vicarage of Wellington and the rectory of Eyton upon Wildmoors with all and singular the tithes, fruits, profits, revenues, obligations, rights and emoluments whatsoever to the same belonging ... be now held, and in all future times be presented to, called, held, esteemed taken and reputed as one benefice only. By the name of this vicarage of Wellington with the rectory of Eyton upon the Wildmoors.'

The legal document of union rambles on but concludes:

'In testimony whereof we have caused our Episcopal Seal to be hereunto affixed; Dated at Eccleshall the 8th September 1767.'

Although the living was united, the parishes were administered separately – two separate communities, one small and rural, the other a large market town. Each had their own Church Councils and Vestry Meetings, and duties to their Poor. The Parish was the local authority and its

transactions were recorded in Vestry Meeting Minutes and the Churchwardens' Accounts.

The Vestry was then the council chamber of the parish, which managed all the temporal affairs of the community.

Churchwardens' account books can be of interest. In general, many of these account books date from pre-Reformation times and disclose the changes which took place in the fabric of the church; they were usually kept with great exactness, and contained an accurate record of the receipts and expenditure for each year. Sadly, the records of both All Saints and St. Catherine's are not of such great value.

The joint living continued until the late twentieth century when the two parishes were united: they would subsequently be administered as one, but there had to be some safeguards. St. Catherine's would have its own administration within the Parish Church Council of the unified parish. As before, there had to be formal agreements through church and legal authorities. The process was reported to the local Parish Church Councils;

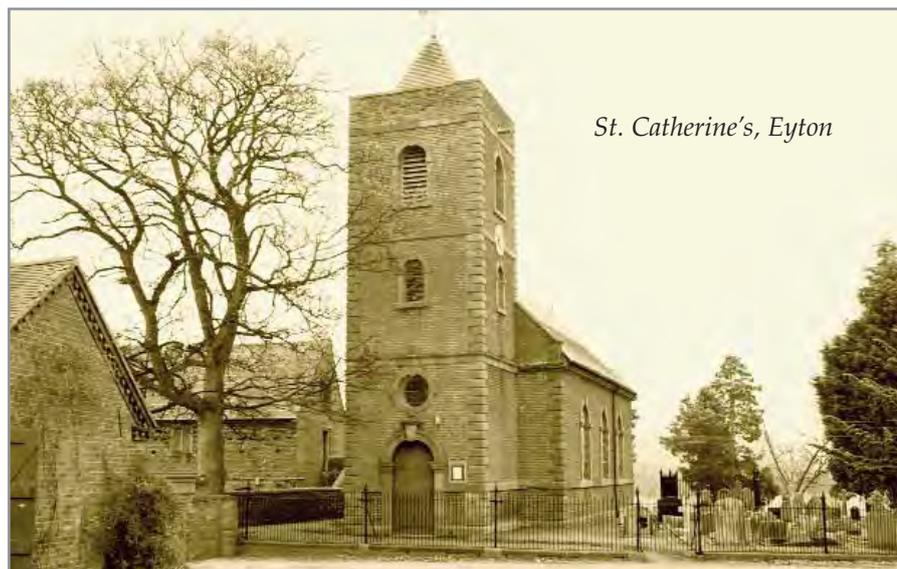
'The initial idea was made in April 1986 and was shared with the PCC's of St. Catherine's and All Saints in the ensuing months ... It found ready acceptance and the Working Party was asked to submit its plans ... The position now is that the plans are with the Church Commissioners who will draw up detailed maps and proposals for the approval of the parishes.'

and

'the Scheme for uniting the Parish of All Saints, Wellington and St. Catherine's, Eyton received the Royal Assent on 1st August 1989 and came into force on 1st September 1989.'

The ancient parish of St. Catherine's, Eyton upon the Weald Moors, became a 'daughter' church within the enlarged parish but its traditional rural form of worship was not lost.

It would be true to say that the two churches within the unified parish complement each other in their traditions and forms of worship.



St. Catherine's, Eyton

*It's surprising how many folk can trace their family roots to Wellington. Genealogy isn't just about collecting names and dates, it's about detail which often gets overlooked. This article shows how pieces in a jigsaw can be fitted together to form a family history.*

In 1841 Bridget Healy, born c.1820 somewhere in Ireland, was living at Lincoln Hill, Madeley with her older siblings George, Patrick and Ann. On 20 February 1846, at the Registry Office in Wellington, she married Matthew Welsh, born c.1813 in Ireland.

My great grandfather James arrived on November 7 1846 followed by Matthew in 1849, Mary in 1851, Ann in 1853, John in 1855 and two Georges, born in 1858 and 1860, both of whom died in infancy.

On 7 October 1864 Matthew Snr. died of an abscess on New Street where the family had lived since 1846. His oldest sons emigrated sometime before the 1871 census was taken: James to New York (NY) City and Matthew to Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Ann married Luke Childs, born in 1850 in Wellington to John and Susan Childs, at the Parish Church on 1 December 1870.

Their son James Michael was born 14 July 1871 and Matthew on 3 March 1873. Bridget, Mary and John came to NY City about 1872 and Ann Childs and her two boys followed, arriving on the Adriatic, 7 October 1873. Neither the Childs nor Walsh families know what became of her husband Luke. My family said he died in England before his wife and children emigrated but we can find no record of his death anywhere in the UK.

By 1880 Bridget was employed as housekeeper to a banker and Ann and her boys were in the household, on the site of part of the present day Rockefeller Center.

Mary had married Thomas Burke, born c.1838 in Mayo, Ireland, whom she'd likely known in Wellington. He was a son of Michael and Ann (maiden name unknown) Burke Carrane and half brother of John Thomas Carrane, a solicitor with in Wellington.

They lived in Pompton Township, New Jersey where Thomas worked as a gardener and farmer. James was living in Albany, NY with his wife Sarah nee McQuirk and Mary born c.1876, George c.1878 and Margaret on 9 September 1879. James Jr. followed in February 1882.

James Sr., a brick mason, fell off a scaffold from the eighth floor of a building under construction at Madison Avenue and East 52nd Street in NY City and died 29 May 1882. Soon after, Sarah and her children moved to Troy, NY to be with her family.

Ann Childs died 5 February 1887 and her sons lived with their grandmother Bridget and Uncle John, a building contractor, and his childless wife, Mary.

Bridget died on 26 March 1894 and John, while delirious, leaped to his death from his 4th floor apartment window on 17 December 1894 (see newspaper report aside). According to a newspaper article at the time, John and his wife had travelled to England that year, returning shortly before his death. About 1896, after the deaths of her mother and brother, Sarah and her children returned to NY City and Matthew Childs was living with them in 1897.

In 1903 he married his first cousin, Margaret. They had no children. Matt was also a brick mason, as were his cousins and brothers-in-law, George and James Walsh. Margaret died in 1966 and Matt in 1970.

For some reason I've yet to fathom Matt took on the Walsh name and is listed as Matthew Childs Walsh in the US censuses 1900 – 1930, on his 1918 WWI Draft Registration and his death certificate, although he did use his correct legal name when he married.

James and Sarah's daughter Mary married Albert Moore, a Canadian, in 1921. Albert died in 1926, having suffered a heart attack on a golf course, and Marie in 1960. They also were childless. James Jr., a bachelor, died in 1927.

Mary Burke nee Welsh died in 1913 and her husband Thomas in 1917, both in NY City. They had four children, all born in New Jersey: Cosmas Michael in 1881, John James in 1882, Ulick Matthew in 1884 and Ann Janette in 1888.

Ann had a brief marriage to Edward Blake Burke but there was no issue. Her brothers never married. Ulick was hit by a car and died in California in 1931. Cosmas and John died in NY City in 1958 and 1959 and Ann in Philadelphia, Pa. in 1960.

#### LEAPED FROM THE FOURTH FLOOR

**Builder John Walsh Probably Fatally Hurt  
in His Attempt at Suicide—His Mind  
Was Affected.**

John Walsh, a builder, thirty-nine years old, jumped from a rear window on the fourth floor of his residence, 295 East Eighty-fifth Street, at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon. He landed on a grass plot in the yard, crushed in his chest, broke several ribs, and sustained other injuries. He was taken to the Presbyterian Hospital in an ambulance by Dr. Voorhis.

Mr. Walsh had an attack of the grip about a year and a half ago, and has not been able to do any work since. His health has been permanently injured, and he has also been mentally weak since the attack. In the hope of regaining both Walsh went to England, and only returned about four months ago.

He came home about 4 o'clock yesterday very much under the influence of liquor, it is said. His wife induced him to lie down. Mrs. Walsh sat beside him, when suddenly, and without any warning, Walsh rushed from the bed and plunged headforemost out of a window, carrying the sash with him.

The physicians at the hospital do not think that Walsh will recover. He was placed in charge of a policeman, as he is under arrest on the charge of trying to kill himself.

*New York Times report of  
John Walsh's death.*

John J. Burke had also taken on another name, Arthur J. 'Jack' Decker, and travelled using that name, as evidenced by passenger manifests. His death certificate is for Arthur J. Decker aka John J. Burke and his sister Ann was the informant. She said the alias was for business reasons!

Matthew Walsh, a bachelor, died in Sydney on 12 March 1921. James Michael Childs, another brick mason, married Clara Henrietta Sand and they had a daughter, Clara Henrietta born in 1910, who became a Dominican nun known as Sister Maryanna Childs, O.P. She was a poet, author and professor of English at Ohio Dominican College in Columbus, Ohio and died there in 2003.

In 1907 George Walsh married Lillian Hagan Simpson, a widow born in NY City in 1879. John Francis was born 1910 and James, my father, in 1911. George died February 18 1927, his sons John in 1968 and James in 1995.

I and my sisters, Suzanne and Margaret, and their families all live in New York State. Our only brother, James, died in 1978.

John Francis Walsh, our cousin, is a Federal judge and lives in California. He has two sons, John Francis Jr. and James Matthew, and a grandson, Ryan Matthew born in 2007.

Of Bridget's siblings, little is known. Their father was Lawrence Healy and their mother, whose first name is unknown, was nee Kelly according to Bridget's death certificate.

Ann married John Long, a tailor, at the Catholic Chapel, Madeley in 1847 and lived in Wolverhampton in 1861.

In 1855 at the Manor Court in Shrewsbury, Patrick was convicted of thievery for the third time and was sentenced to one year at hard labour. George, who had been a witness to Ann's marriage, was godfather to Bridget's son George in 1858.

That's all I can discover about them and they are the brick wall I am trying to tear down.

\* \* \*

### Wellington Workhouse and Infirmary 1931 – 1938

The information in this article was provided by Edna Watkins (nee Wright).



Back in 1919, Mr. and Mrs. Wright, with their family, decided to move from Woodstock, Ontario, Canada, back to Wellington from where they had emigrated a few years earlier.

Their fourth eldest child was named Edna Kathleen. She was born in Canada on 23 February, 1913 (there would eventually be 9 children in the family, eight girls and one boy who was a twin to one of the girls).

At the age of 17, Edna took a job as a student nurse at Wellington Infirmary. The Infirmary was back to back with the Workhouse and, at that time, the Master of both the Workhouse and the Infirmary was Mr. Chapman. His wife was Matron of the Infirmary and it was she

who trained all the nurses. Edna was very happy working at the hospital and found Mrs. Chapman to be a very good tutor.

The hospital wards were mainly for medical or maternity cases. There were no resident doctors at the hospital although a list was kept of local GPs who could be called on if needed.

Edna worked from seven in the morning until seven in the evening, with every other Sunday off and only two weeks holiday a year. Food and lodging in the nurses' home was provided but uniform had to be paid for out of salary, which was £2 a month.

The Infirmary did not deal with accidents, emergencies, or operations, which were all referred to Shrewsbury Hospital. Its wards handled medical and maternity cases and there were also facilities for looking after cases which required isolation or special nursing, such as diphtheria, pneumonia and tuberculosis. For the latter, special 'shelters' had been built in the grounds. These were wooden buildings with a single bed in each and were open to the air on one side. If the weather was cold or windy, a half-door could be closed and the shelter revolved on its circular track to face out of the wind.

This necessitated the nurses visiting the shelters at regular intervals throughout the day and night in order to make any necessary adjustments.



Top: Edna Wright. Above: Master and Matron Mr. & Mrs. Chapman.

*Rail excursions from Wellington 50 years ago*

Advertisements in the Wellington Journal in the late 1950s give details of summer excursion trains which offered potential trippers a day at the seaside ... always an attractive proposition, particularly for those living in inland built-up areas, ever since means of transport first made it possible in the mid-nineteenth century.

Early railway companies were quick to exploit the potential market, and resorts such as Blackpool, Bournemouth and Scarborough took off as a result. This phenomenon can also be seen in the growth of Cardigan Bay resorts, particularly Aberystwyth, Barmouth and Pwllheli. Both the Cambrian Railways and later the Great Western Railway promoted holiday traffic to the coast.

Through services from Paddington began after the First World War and the title 'Cambrian Coast Express' was first used in 1927, disappearing during the second war but revived by British Railways in 1951.

A determined publicity drive in the mid and late 1950s, which saw the provision of excursion trains to the coast particularly on Summer Sundays and Bank Holidays, reversed the decline in holiday traffic.

Day trippers were prepared to travel up to 150 miles by train from the West Midland and South Lancashire conurbations, spending in some cases over four hours on the journey, in order to enjoy five or six hours at one of the Cardigan Bay resorts.

One such day was Sunday, 18 August 1957, when excursion trains from Ellesmere, Manchester, Birmingham and Worcester ran to Aberystwyth. The train from Birmingham called at Wellington (where I got on) just after 11.00 am and the Worcester train (the one advertised in the Wellington

**CHEAP RAIL TRIPS**

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11th  
To RHYL

Leave Codsall 9.30 a.m. (11/9), Albrighton 9.36 (11/6), Cosford 9.40 (11/3), Shifnal 9.47 (11/-), Oakensates 9.56 (10/6), Wellington 10.4 (10/-), Shrewsbury 10.25 a.m. (9/3).  
Also to CHESTER at cheaper fares

To HEREFORD 6/9. Leave Shrewsbury 12.15 p.m.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 18

<p><b>To BLACKPOOL</b></p> <p>Codsall 9.20 a.m. .... 13/3 Albrighton 9.27 a.m. .... 13/- Cosford 9.32 a.m. .... 12/9 Shifnal 9.40 a.m. .... 12/6 Oakensates 9.50 a.m. .... 12/3 WELLINGTON 9.57 a.m. .... 11/9 Shrewsbury 10.24 a.m. .... 11/9</p> <p>Light refreshments available</p>	<p><b>To LLANDUDNO</b></p> <p>Coalport (W.) 10.8 a.m. .... 13/- Jackfield Halt 10.12 a.m. .... 13/- Ironbridge 10.17 a.m. .... 12/9 Buildwas 10.24 a.m. .... 12/6 Cressage 10.32 a.m. .... 12/- Barrington S.V. 10.42 a.m. .... 11/6 SHREWSBURY 11.0 a.m. .... 11/-</p> <p>Also to RHYL and COLWYN BAY at cheaper fares</p>
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To WELSHPOOL 4/-, NEWTOWN 6/-, MACHYNLETH 9/6, BORTH 11/3, ABERYSTWYTH 12/3. Leave Wellington 11.42 a.m.

<p>Each Tuesday, Wed. and Thurs. <b>To LONDON (Paddington)</b></p> <p>SHREWSBURY *11.10 p.m., 7.30, 8.37, 10.42 a.m. 32/- Wellington *11.26 p.m., 7.45, 8.54, 11.0 a.m. 30/- Oakensates *10.38 p.m., 7.52 a.m. 29/3 Shifnal 8.0 a.m. .... 28/6 Cosford 8.6, 9.10 a.m. .... 27/9 Codsall 8.14 a.m. .... 26/9 (* previous night)</p>	<p>Each Weekday <b>To ABERYSTWYTH 17/-</b> Shrewsbury depart 7.55 a.m.</p> <p><b>To PRESTATYN</b> ..... 12/9 RHYL ..... 13/6 COLWYN BAY ..... 15/6 LLANDUDNO ..... 17/- Shrewsbury depart 7.44, *9.50, 10.42 a.m. (*9.38 a.m. on Saturdays)</p>
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FOR RETURN TIMES, further information, and details of other CHEAP TICKET FACILITIES, enquire at Stations, Offices or Agencies.

**BRITISH RAILWAYS**

*Advertisement in the Wellington Journal, 10 August 1957.*

Journal) picked up passengers at 11.42 am. The adult fare to Aberystwyth was twelve shillings and threepence (62p) and the journey took just under three hours.

After arrival at Aberystwyth, the day trippers (including myself) made the most of their five or six hours in the sun. The majority stayed in the resort, spending their time on the beach, strolling the mile long promenade or ascending Constitutional Hill (by foot or cliff railway), and patronised the local shops and cafes.

Some, however, managed to fit in a trip to Devil's Bridge on the narrow gauge Vale of Rheidol Railway. No doubt for all of them, the time for the return

journey home came far too soon. Returning Wellington passengers caught either the 6.45 pm Birmingham train or the 7.50 pm to Worcester, both journeys taking about three hours.



*The Birmingham-Aberystwyth train, behind 4-6-0 locomotive no. 7818 Granville Manor, taking on water at Welshpool.*



Advertisement in the Wellington Journal, 3 August 1957.

Other day trips by rail were advertised in the Wellington Journal at the time, one of the most popular being the 'Shropshire Holiday Express'. This train operated during August Bank Holiday Week (i.e. the first week in August) between 1957 and 1960, on each occasion offering five days travel to different destinations, mostly seaside resorts.

The advertisement above gives details of the destinations, week's fare and on-board facilities of the first such service. The train picked up at Oakengates, Wellington and Shrewsbury, and separate daily bookings were available from these stations. Four of the five trips on this first occasion were to Welsh resorts.

## WELLINGTON JOURNAL

One of the best sources for everyday information on Wellington is the *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*, which began life as *The Wellington Journal* in 1854 and continued until its demise in 1965.

In addition to the usual array of advertisements, which provide a wonderful insight into the types of businesses operating at any given time and the wording they chose to tempt customers through their doors, there are highly detailed reports on social and theatrical events, clubs, societies, sports, deaths, marriages, crime ... almost anything you can think of.

In 1958 the 'Shropshire Holiday Express' travelled to Southport, Gloucester/Cheltenham, Llandudno, Oxford and Morecambe; in 1959 to Southport, Weston-super-Mare, Rhyl, Stratford-upon-Avon and Blackpool; and in 1960 to Southport, Cardiff/Barry Island, Rhyl, Borth/Aberystwyth and Blackpool.

So, over the four year period, 17 of the 20 trips were to seaside resorts, the majority Welsh.



The Bank Holiday Monday 'Shropshire Holiday Express', restarting after a signal check at Glandyfi en route to Borth and Aberystwyth, behind 2-6-0 locomotives nos. 7309 and 7330.

And reports aren't confined to the Wellington area: all parts of what is now the Telford conurbation are covered, from Coalport to Admaston, as well as many other parts of Shropshire.

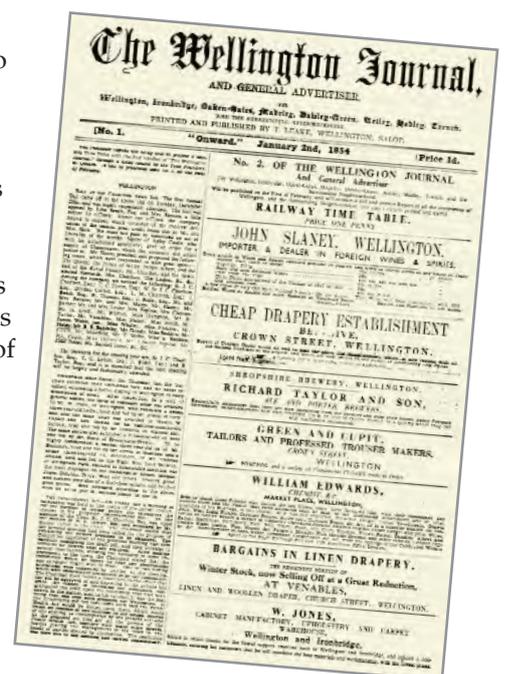
The standard of reporting, it has to be said, is in some respects much better than many of today's newspapers and can give hours of fascinating reading, especially when you're not looking for anything in particular.

Telford Library has these newspapers on microfilm (you need to book a microfilm reader in advance), and Shropshire Archives at Shrewsbury has actual papers from 1900 to 1965, which makes browsing easier.

With the increase in private car ownership and changes in holiday taste, fewer excursion trains were run in the 1960s.

The last 'Cambrian Coast Express' (from Paddington) ran on Saturday, 4 March, 1967, leaving the replacement Euston-Aberystwyth service via Wellington and Shrewsbury on Saturdays during the summer months as the only through service from the capital to the Cardigan Bay resorts; and this, too, was eventually withdrawn.

However, the revival of rail travel in recent years has seen day trippers from this area to the coast making use of the Birmingham-Aberystwyth service operated by Arriva Trains Wales.



Methodism began in Wellington when the Rev. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, preached in the town in 1765. A small 'society' was founded, meeting in a private house. In 1771 it was William Buttery's in New Street.

The society grew and the first chapel was built by 1797 in what became called Chapel Lane off High Street. By 1799 there was a congregation of 200.

These Methodists were closely linked to the local parish church of All Saints, worshipping there in the morning as late as 1813 because of the Evangelical Vicar John Eyton, who consulted the Methodist ministers and was consulted in his turn about which were sent to the circuit. Eyton met in a Methodist class, paid his Methodist class money and went to the Methodist chapel in the evening.

The circuit preaching plans show in 1813 no service in the morning and in 1818 one at 9 a.m. well before the service at the parish church. In 1823, which was the year of his death, there was a move first to 10 a.m. and then to 10-30. The chapel in Chapel Lane was enlarged in 1811 and Wellington became an independent circuit in 1817. Methodists continued to be baptised at the Parish Church. The Methodist Baptismal Register only began in 1827.

In the nineteenth century the growing Wellington society was dominated by the town's tradesmen and businessmen, such as the ironmaster William Ison of Steeraway. This growth led to the building of a new, much larger, chapel fronting onto New Street in 1834, with manse behind. Both still survive although the chapel has an ex-factory front and is now flats.

A leading Methodist was Benjamin Smith, printer and Local Preacher, who kept a book and printing shop in the town. He and his wife were buried in front of the 1834 chapel. Their daughter Sarah



*The Methodist Chapel built in the 1830s in the centre of this 2006 photo, with the Chad Valley frontage added in the 1920s on the left and the Sunday School building at a right angle between the chapel and the white-painted former Manse.*

was the popular children's author 'Hesba Stretton.'

In 1851 Wellington reported 107 members and congregations of 277 in the morning and 251 in the evening. In the 1850s growth continued with 250 members in 1862. The congregation helped to build a Wesleyan Day School in Prince's Street in 1857 and a mission for the poorer end of the town at Watling Street in 1861. This only had evening services and was never independent of the parent society, shutting under the pressure of war in 1940 (the building still stands). The New Street chapel added galleries in 1866.

These developments were financed by the Grooms, timber merchants, owning a large timber-yard at Groom's Alley by the railway to which wood was brought from all over Shropshire and much of Wales. Richard Groom (1778-1866), the founder, was converted under Eyton. His son Thomas (1816-1889) was a Local Preacher and a class leader in the society. Thomas's younger brother Richard (1818-1892) was a magistrate and Circuit Steward, Chairman of the local School Board, Chairman of the Guardians and a County Alderman. The brothers supported the Methodist John Bayley in 1880 when he ceased to be the Headmaster of Constitution Hill Board School to set up a private school

in Albert Road, the venture which eventually became Wrekin College.

In 1882 the brothers, supported by their sons, decided to move from the old chapel and build a new one. Ground further down New Street was purchased (the current site). The cost of buying the land, building the new chapel, and refurbishing the old building as a Sunday School was £4,000. The new building, designed by the Bradford architect Herbert Isitt, connected by marriage to Thomas Groom, had an imposing Italianate frontage. 82 feet by 52 feet and large balconies on three sides, providing 850 sittings and opened in 1883. It was filled in the morning, until the Sunday School went out, partly by them but also by the boys of Wrekin College (until 1907) and the girls of Hiatt's College, a private girls' school even closer to the church.

The Sunday School reached its peak in this period, being run by John Wesley Clift (1856-1939), a carriage manufacturer of the town



*New Street Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1920s.*

who married Harriett, daughter of the younger Richard Groom. In his 'model' Sunday School, each scholar had a card which was punched when they were away. As long as there were not many punches, they received book prizes. The school had 500 on its registers for most of the 50 years he was Superintendent.

The twentieth century saw a weakening of the financial strength of Wesleyanism in Wellington. The Grooms mostly moved away to Hereford. In 1908 the chapel was extended by building a 'new Church Room' behind costing £250. The First World War forced the trustees in 1916 to retrench by selling off the old chapel, previously used as Sunday School. Land had been bought in 1913 behind the new chapel off Glebe Street. In 1920 they erected wooden 'temporary' buildings to house the homeless Sunday School. Money was lost because of delay in a period of rapid inflation. The buildings lasted over forty years.

#### *Primitive Methodism in Wellington*

Primitive Methodism was the biggest Methodist offshoot in the nineteenth century, with no difference in doctrine but more emphasis on revival. Hugh Bourne, the founder of Primitive Methodism, held one of his earliest camp meetings on the Wrekin in 1808, having been staying with Mary Fletcher at Madeley.

However, the early Primitive Methodists did not return to the area before 1821. It is not clear when the first society was founded in Wellington, although it was probably around 1822-3. A chapel was built, or more likely converted from a house, on the corner of Tan Bank and Foundry Road in 1826. In 1834 there were three small societies listed: Wellington, Street Lane and Arleston.

In 1835 a slightly larger chapel was erected behind the first one,



*Tan Bank Primitive Methodist Chapel, c.1909, now a Muslim mosque.*

costing £256 with a large debt. In 1851 they reported a Sunday School of 50, an afternoon congregation of 160 and an evening one of 260. The membership was relatively small with only 41 members in 1865. At the end of the century the society, led by the Rev. William Hall and the Trust Secretary Albert Jones, decided to expand and build new premises.

Though with only 59 members in 1896, they bought land close by on the corner of Tan Bank and Jarratts Lane for £460. They then went on to build first a new Church and then a new school alongside. The Church, costing £2,000, was opened in 1898, and the school in 1906, both designed by Elijah Jones of Hanley.

#### *Methodism since 1932*

The two Methodist churches in Wellington remained separate until they were brought together by Rev. Peter de Visme in 1966. They decided to use the larger and more imposing ex-Wesleyan building premises for worship and Tan Bank for Sunday School and Youth Work, perhaps a mistake since a new building on one of the sites would have been possible.

The New Street building was twice remodelled to make it easier to use. The side galleries were removed and new windows installed in the first alteration in 1953. A new communion area was placed in front of the old. In the second alteration in 1974, the pews and floor were taken out and replaced for multipurpose use of the building. The vestry was

turned into a kitchen. The ceiling was successively lowered but it remained an old, too large, inconvenient building.

Membership of Tan Bank, the former Primitive church, increased up to 1960 when it reached around 150 and met the declining New Street numbers at a similar level.

This was partly because newcomers coming in to the town found Tan Bank

smaller and friendlier than New Street. The Rev Rex Hallam was minister of the united church from 1968 to 1984, longer than any of his predecessors.

His ministry was marked by the emergence of several Local Preachers, including Leon Murray, a Jamaican Methodist, who arrived at the nearby railway station at 11 p.m. on a Friday in September 1961 looking for a friend's lodgings, to which he was directed by the Methodist ticket-collector, George Miles. That Sunday he was welcomed at New Street by Bill Russell, who had known Leon's father in Jamaica earlier and George, who was a Door Steward.

Eventually getting a job at Sankeys, Leon, once a Local Preacher, was sent to Conference and became the first black Vice President of British Methodism in 1983. He has remained active in both local and connexional Methodism ever since. He also served as Chairman of the Telford New Town magistrates and Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire.

From the 1990s the problems of the New Street building became obvious to all and a building fund was started. The arrival of the Rev. Derrick Lander in 1999 led to carrying the scheme through with extra grants from the circuit and connexion. Leon Murray as Chair of the Building Fund also played a major part. In 2004 the new Church building was opened by the Rev. Rex Hallam. A multipurpose building with large storage and energy saving, it has been much in use by the whole community ever since.

## SCHOOLS BENEFIT

Over the last few months, Wellington History Group has contacted schools and colleges in the Wellington area and donated copies of our magazine to help students with their studies.

In addition to the magazine, our chairman Allan Frost has kindly donated, free of charge, over 550 copies of his popular novel *Wrekin Wraiths, Rebels and Romans* to encourage youngsters of all ages to read and take an interest in local history.

As we have mentioned before, the work our Group is able to do has been made possible by a generous grant from Awards For All, without which we could not have achieved so much in such a short time.

Our offer of help to educational establishments is not confined to providing copies of the magazine and books: we have also offered to give talks to class groups, assist in compiling source material and devise town walks for those teachers wanting our assistance.

Wellington's history over the last 1300 years or so is not only long but extremely varied. There is always something 'new' waiting to be rediscovered.

We hope everyone, from pupils to teachers, professional and amateur historians, town councillors and the public generally (and not forgetting family history researchers), will



*Pupils at Crudgington Primary School proudly display copies of Wrekin Wraiths, Rebels and Romans and Awards For All balloons.*

take an ongoing interest in our town's past.

And where better to start than when you're at school?

As well as offering help to schools, several of our committee

members give talks on a range of subjects to groups, societies and clubs in the Telford area.

If you're interested in booking a talk, please contact our secretary whose details are below.



*Blessed Robert Johnson College Reading Group enjoy Wrekin Wraiths, Rebels and Romans during their Friday lunchtime session.*

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