Welcome ...

... to Issue Six of Wellingtonia. You’ll now be aware that our quest for further funding from Awards For All and other organisations giving grants has been unsuccessful. We’re still trying, so if you know how we may obtain a substantial donation to enable us to produce the magazine in paper format, please get in touch.

Of course, we’re most grateful that we were given the opportunity to produce such a well-received magazine and, at popular request, we hope to continue publishing them in electronic form until such time as we can pay for printing.

Although we won’t necessarily be able to reach everyone we’d like, at least Wellingtonia is publicly available, so we’d ask you to pass on either electronic or printed-off copies to friends, relatives and associates ... in fact, anyone whom you think might be interested in discovering more about our area’s illustrious past.

All is not doom and gloom ... we continue to give free-to-attend public talks: our 2010 January to June season has begun and is already proving a success, with encouraging attendance figures.

We are also very pleased to announce the arrival of our dedicated web site at:

www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com

We are most grateful to the two volunteers who have spent a considerable amount of time putting it all together.

The front page of the site is shown below; there are a couple of things you should know when accessing the site.

The first is: please bear in mind that this is our first venture into the mysterious world of the web site, so bear with us if not all functions work correctly. The second is that some of the content is held in fairly large files, so may take a little longer than you’re used to appear on your screen. The third is that we recommend installing the latest version of Adobe Reader, or you may not be able to read this or other articles saved as ‘pdfs’.

Please take time to explore the site and let us know what sort of things you’d like to see featured (no promises, mind!). Above all, spread the word ... oh, and help us by giving us details of your own family or general research and copies of photographs, etc., which will help us understand more about our district’s history.

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Visit us at www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com
We all know people who live far from our favourite little mountain, who seize the first chance when they’re home to climb The Wrekin Hill and revel in the view from the top.

It’s a pilgrimage.

We of the Wartime generations, coming home on leave from war zones, made a point of climbing the hill as soon as we had seen family and friends. It was quite an emotional experience.

A pilgrimage up The Wrekin has been a local custom all my life and for many centuries before. There’s a tradition of celebrating Easter, kept up by local churches. There’s a legend that the Needle’s Eye had been formed at the same moment as the curtain of the temple in Jerusalem was torn apart at the Crucifixion.

Probably, centuries before the Roman invasion, The Wrekin was regarded as a Sacred Mountain, partly because of the magic Calendar Stone, marking the Spring and Autumn Equinox and the east and west gateways which point to sunrise on the longest day and sunset on the shortest. That must have led to a tradition of making the pilgrimage several times a year.

Let’s go for a walk the way nearly everyone goes ...

We start at the big gate opposite where the Forest Glen Pavilion used to be. On fine weekends we will be joined by crowds, mostly in small groups. There will be many families, some of three or even four generations. The smaller children will be running and stopping, excited and noisy; they’ll get tired later on. Some will need to be carried further up.

Some families and many groups will have dogs, mostly running free, others on leads. Most dogs will be friendly; though a few puppies will want to play with other dogs and people they meet on the way.

Quite a few people regard the walk as physical exercise and time themselves. Some are joggers of various kinds including the fit and lean and others feeling the need to burn off their excess weight.

Most mountain bikers are sensible folk who ride carefully and respect the rest of us, especially on the way up. A most annoying few, however, come charging down with a surfeit of reckless abandon, deserving accidents.

Say, ‘Morning,’ or ‘Hello,’ and almost everyone, except those plugged in to electronic gadgets, will reply. The answer often tells you where they come from. There’s ‘Ado’ from locals, ‘All right?’ from Brummies and various other versions.

At weekends the Halfway House is opened by Tom and Phil Bolger for ice cream, chocolate bars, tea and coffee; and very welcome that is, especially on the way down. Tom has carved several seats from logs, both inside the small courtyard and out along the way for use when the café in closed. Often their dog, Junior, challenges visiting dogs to play with him.

After the Halfway House comes the ‘First Top’, followed by a slight level stretch, where a medieval fair used to take place annually until excessive drunkenness persuaded the magistrates to ban it. This is also the boundary of the Orleton Estate, most of which is deciduous woodland, and the Raby Estate, dominated by planted conifers. There are boundary markers each side of the path but they’re difficult to find.

The next rise is to Hell’s Gate (or Hell Gate if you like). It’s the most difficult bit, where an ancient chap fell over, dented his skull and had to be rescued by ambulance. Hell’s Gate is the first entrance to the ancient Hillfort and there is a notice at the bottom by Shropshire Wildlife Trust explaining its function. Do use your imagination and see it as it was two millennia ago.

Inside the first enclosure the slope is gentle again. On your right is a wood between Hell and Heaven Gates, humorously called Purgatory Wood. If you don’t get the joke, ask the nearest Catholic.

Then there’s a little climb up to Heaven’s Gate, after which it’s almost level to Wellington Rotary Club’s Toposcope and the Ordnance Survey’s concrete Trig Point, both on a small artificial rise, with the Old Top to the north near a copse of pines.

Here most people stop for the view, aided by the Toposcope, also having a snack, take pictures and, if locals, drink the health of All Friends Round The Wrekin, before wandering back down the hill again.

Who says this shouldn’t be called The Pilgrims’ Way?

* * *

Edwardians take a stroll along the main pathway up The Wrekin.
It’s hard to believe, considering how old Wellington is as a settlement, but I have never come across any reports of significant archaeological discoveries in the town.

Many people have grumbled about Telford & Wrekin Borough Council’s plans to create a new Civic Quarter in Wellington in a much-needed quest to revive the town’s business economy. I am more than grateful for this … without it, exciting discoveries behind Edgbaston House in Walker Street (above) may never have come to light.

While land behind and alongside the buildings which comprise Edgbaston House (until the 1850s The Sun Inn) was being cleared, sample pits were dug by professional archaeologists from SLR Consulting Ltd of Montford Bridge. The company had already carried out a historical building survey and discovered many features of architectural interest.

Although these pits don’t seem particularly impressive, they reveal an awful lot of information and, as is so often the case, raise many more questions. It would be most helpful if the Borough would sanction and pay for further investigation while we have this unique chance to find out more.

This is what the finds indicate.

The site was once part of a Medieval burgage plot extending westwards from a frontage building on what is now Tan Bank. It was separated from adjacent properties by ditch and sandstone boundaries (below).

Within the plot, another pit revealed the existence of a timber-lined well or cesspit (above and bottom right. I presume its users knew its precise purpose). There were also two rubbish pits alongside the well, one of which contained Medieval pottery.

Furthermore, large quantities of horn-cores were also found. Horn-cores are strong evidence of tanning as well as horn working. Bearing in mind that the bodies of leather-producing beasts (mainly cattle) had to be rendered (completely dismantled: not a job for a vegetarian like me), this sort of activity would have taken place on the outskirts of the town.

Meat was passed on to butchers at The Shambles for cutting and sale. Horns were ‘cored’; the soft insides removed so that the horns themselves could be sold to carvers who would make, for example, combs, bolt nuts for crossbows, etc.

The hides formed the basis of the tanning trade, including hide preparation and dyeing in vats before finished goods, such as clothing, bags, belts and saddles, were made by skilled curriers.

At some point in later Medieval times, it appears that Walker Street itself was laid out and a row of terraced houses (including the eastern part of Edgbaston House) built on what had been the tannery plot, now absorbed into the town proper and no longer adjoining farmland on its outskirts.
It may come as a surprise that our area has two personal links to the war between the Spanish Republican government and the conservative nationalist forces of General Franco (above).

Jack Edwards, who fought on the Republican side in the Spanish war, lives in Regent Street, Wellington. He received Spanish citizenship and a new passport at a special ceremony at the Spanish Embassy in 2009 to honor his contribution to the struggle for democracy.

His childhood in Liverpool must have seemed quite ordinary. He left Chatsworth Council school at fourteen to go to work as a cabinet maker and later as a motor mechanic.

However, one thing was different. He was a member of an active political family. His father was a Communist party member and his first employer, a Russian Jewish emigre called Mr Shinofski, was also a communist. He joined the Young Pioneers, as soon as he could, standing outside Lime Street railway station selling the Daily Worker and Challenge newspapers on a Saturday morning. He got to know all the well known figures in the party locally and attended the big speeches by their national leader, Harry Pollitt.

General Franco, who had been Governor of the Canary Islands and Spanish Morocco, invaded mainland Spain in 1936 and tried to depose the democratically elected republican government to restore the power of the traditional landowners and the Catholic church. Hitler and Mussolini both supplied him with men and equipment. In support the Germans established the ‘Condor Legion’ to fight in Spain. Josef Bercholt (bottom right) was an officer in the Legion. His son now lives in Ketley. Colonel Bercholt went on to fight at Stalingrad and subsequently suffered in Russian prison camps.

When Jack was twenty-two he determined to join the war to fight for the Republic. He went to see his local communist party organiser in Liverpool, Leo McGree, who was a bit doubtful about his request to go to fight in Spain as Jack had no military experience. In the end he just said, ‘Leave it with me.’

Jack joined up with a group of seven volunteers. They booked a weekend trip to France because no passport was needed. When they got to Paris, they were met by members of the French Communist Party. The group, which now numbered 50 men from all over Europe, caught the train to the border town of Perpignan and crossed over into Spain at Figuras.

Their French comrades all had military experience so initially they took the lead. Later they were separated into national groups training on old Colt machine guns and long barrelled rifles from a much earlier age! Later in the war they got new rifles with a ‘Made in Mexico’ stamped on the side. They all knew where the rifles came from and it was not Mexico. They said a quiet thank you to Joseph Stalin.

Volunteers came from many countries including USA, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the Slav countries. These foreign volunteers were organised into ‘International Brigades’ named after famous leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Garibaldi and Ernst Thalmann.

Jack’s new headquarters were at Albacete, attached to a Transport Unit because of his motor mechanic skills.

The first few days were very hard. He was a novice at war. It all seemed totally chaotic. Jack was wounded in the leg on his third day at Jarama, defending a machine gun site on a sunken road. Strangely they hardly ever saw the enemy, just felt the power of their shells and bullets. Despite different backgrounds and nationalities they all felt a sense of solidarity against a common enemy.

After he was wounded, Jack was taken to hospital in Barcelona and then to Valencia for rest and recuperation. When fit, he was...
sent to an auto unit at Tetran on
the Tervel Front driving their lorries to the front with ammunition and food for the troops.

The hardest part of the war was on the Ebro front near Madrid. He was with an artillery unit. The fighting got so close it turned into hand to hand and house to house. It was tough. He was not frightened, firmly believing nothing would happen to him. However when his comrades were killed he felt a deep sense of shock and loss. Perhaps the best word he used to describe feelings was ‘lost’.

The colonel called them all over one day. The League of Nations had passed a resolution asking all foreigners to leave Spain. They were to go home to England. Their enemies, the volunteers from Germany and Italy did not go. They stayed until Franco had won.

Jack felt there were two reasons the Republicans lost. There were divisions among the government and the military leaders and secondly the equipment they had was no match for the modern arms supplied to Franco by Germany and Italy.

Jack sailed from Valencia to Barcelona and marched the rest of the way out of Spain into Perpignan, France, where he caught a train to Paris. The British Embassy kindly gave him a ticket home to London (the Foreign Office later sent him a bill!). The Cooperative Society was more generous and gave him a new suit.

The Second World War broke out shortly afterwards in September 1939. Jack joined the RAF and was posted to the Aleutian Islands and Iceland building runways. In his view it was just a continuation of his Spanish War. Throughout the war, he felt he was not fighting for ‘King and Country’ but to defeat fascism and right wing dictatorships everywhere. He wanted to establish a more egalitarian socialist society.

The shadow of the civil war still hangs over Spain. Franco died in 1975, but the Republic was never re established. Franco ensured that King Juan Carlos succeeded him and Spain became a monarchy. The memory of what happened all those years ago still divides their country.

Colonel Bercholt was eventually released from the Russian Prison camp and came home to Bavaria, dying there in 1956. The German government gave all those from the Condor Legion a special ring to commemorate their service.

* * *

Many of us over a certain age remember when every town in the country was filled with small businesses where family members lived in rooms behind and above the shop. The Frost bakery and grocery (below) in New Street was typical.

Our chairman is always grateful when folk let him copy photos of businesses associated with their own families; they help to paint vivid pictures of what life in Wellington was like. Sometimes they also show their proprietors and a customer or two, as the 1890s photo of Thomas Keay’s ‘fashionable hairdressers’ (barber’s and cane furniture repair shop), also in New Street, shows. It stood on land (now part of the ring road) next door to Harry Edwards funeral directorship.
When we sold goods we had to hand write a receipt with a carbon copy that was sent to the head office in Nottingham, and we were paid an annual bonus on our performance. I remember well that we had to count out tablets in the dispensary and put them in cardboard boxes with the customer’s name, address and the dosage written on a label.

A lot of medicines were made up into big Winchester bottles and we had to pour it into smaller bottles of different sizes which were measured in ounces and then labelled. Customers usually returned empty bottles to the chemist, which were then sterilised and reused. Recycling is not new idea.

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We were allowed twenty minutes for tea in the morning and the same for the afternoon, with one hour for lunch. We had a lovely tea room which looked straight up New Street; you could see all the fashions go by. In fine weather, we could sit out on a flat roof which overlooked the market entrance and the Dun Cow public house at the back of the premises. We found it most interesting watching people going past.

We had two porters, John Woodall and John Riley, who carried all the goods to and from the store room; they were firemen who worked on their days off from Wellington Fire Station in Haybridge Road. Prior to them we had a full time porter Sid, he was a kind lovely man. One day he was told to dispose of some tins of cat food which had blown. He did, we didn’t realise he had thrown them in the boiler until the manager appeared all covered in cat food. Everybody in the shop asked, ‘What’s that dreadful smell?’ and our reply? ‘It’s only the Manager.’

I worked for five wonderful years at Boots and enjoyed every minute. When I got married in 1965, I had to re-apply for my job as Boots did not normally employ married women.

I left in 1966 to have our first baby but still have very fond memories of the girls I worked with and the happy days at Boots.

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WASHING MACHINES

A few years ago I wrote a history of the Wellington Laundry, known at one time by as the Wellington Sanitary Steam Laundry in an effort to appeal to the sensitivities of a discerning public.

As is all too often the case, no sooner had the book been published than more old photos of this illustrious establishment come to light. The one on the right shows the size and complexity of one of the machines installed by ‘young’ Willy Bentley who began the business in 1893 with his wife Martha, initially operating from a corrugated iron shed in Prince’s Street. The photo below shows the size of the water boiler, an essential piece of equipment, together with one of the young lads employed in the business. William’s father, William James Bentley was publican of the Duke of Wellington in New Street sometime before 1869 and, as the business expanded, realised there was a demand for a large-scale laundry service in the town.

Although my book is now out of print, I still have a few copies left; please contact me by email or telephone to check for availability if you’d like one before they disappear for good. They only cost £4.50 plus a contribution towards postage.

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Pauline Whalley, Tot and Trevor Jones a relief drug counter assistant who came from Oswestry every Thursday.
The Wrekin stands proudly above Wellington; there are few local people who at one time or other haven’t walked to the top. It is one of the famous landmarks of Shropshire, Staffordshire and beyond. We first became acquainted even before we met – a college tutor when she learned that I was to become a teacher in Shropshire remarked ‘If I can see The Wrekin from my home in Staffordshire then it’s going to rain, if I can’t see it, it is raining.’

Why is it so popular, and indeed has been for so many centuries? The answer probably lies in the fact it is a wild, untamed place, it is as nature intended. Not quite true but to today’s urban population it is raw nature. Added to this, what glorious views you get from the top, from the tower blocks of the West Midlands in the east, Welsh Hills in the west, Clee Hills to the south, and the Shropshire and Cheshire plains to the north – yes a view to enjoy; and in winter it is really a ‘wild place’.

There are other ‘wild places’ about Wellington, or at least before agricultural developments of the last few hundred years there were and the ‘Wild Moor’ to the north was such a place. Not a ‘wild place’ now and never has it been a view point, no hoards of people on Bank Holidays, or any other days! But this doesn’t mean it hasn’t got a history, and a turbulent one at that.

The extent of the ‘Wild Moor’, known through history as Wyldmore, and now Weald Moor, is somewhat in doubt but it is the low lying area to the east of the Wellington-Whitchurch road and to the north of the modern Queensway road at Apley, stretching some would say as far as Newport.

On the map the ‘Wild Moor’ is subdivided into separate named portions, for example Eyton Moor; Tibberton Moor; Wappenshall Moor.

From this chart the whole area is seen, and clear evidence that the roads generally pass round the perimeter the Moor connect the villages of, Eyton, Crudgington, Kinnersley, Preston and Wappenshall with one road via Kinnersley cutting the moor into two portions.

A geologist would have an explanation for the wet peaty moorland, but sufficient to say that the underlying rock provides a waterproof basin into which thousands of years of decayed vegetation collected to build up a soggy mass of peaty soil. Elizabeth Charlotte Eyton in 1867 began an article in the Geological Magazine, ‘... the Wealdmoor of Salop is an ancient lake-basin about seven miles in length, by four in width. The centre of the basin is filled with peat, containing remains of oak and hazel trees, very much decayed, and matted together by thick layers of fibrous roots, and in the lower part, by a species of moss. This peat attains a thickness of about six feet. Some years ago, a bronze celt of fine workmanship, and which is considered to have been manufactured since the commencement of the iron age, was found embedded in it.’

This water-logged soil provided a living for people who were able to build their settlements on the drier ‘island’, many of these places exist today and have a long history; Preston, Kinnersley, Eyton and Wappenshall. Indeed there is evidence of ‘ancient peoples’ living at Wall, to the north of Kynnersley, where the natural island had been improved by raising embankments, or enclosures, the remains of which can still be seen today.

More recently the moors gave up another of its secrets; a ‘burnt mound’. These have been found on the fringes of swampy lands in Ireland, Northern Britain and more locally, south of Birmingham, in 1998 one was found at Rodway on the Weald Moors, a short distance west of Wall, and what is more significant it has been excavated in some detail and carbon dating has placed it about 1000BC. These ‘burnt mounds’ are believed to be remains of ancient cooking sites; stones heated on a hearth would be dropped into water, to heat that up, so that meat could be boiled. The stones would break and be discarded, so over time, together with the fire remains, would make a mound.

As early as the fifteenth century the owners of the lands, Leversons and Eytons, were encouraging their tenants to clear the scrub growth and improve the land for crop and pasture use, often granting long term leases with the first few years rent free whilst land was improved.

Even so when the Rector of Kynnersly took up his position in 1673 he wrote, his parish ‘... was surrounded with a large morass overflowing in Winter, and that you could not come into the Parish any

The 1930s Ordnance Survey map below shows the whole area; and clear evidence that the roads generally pass round the perimeter the Moor connect the villages of, Eyton, Crudgington, Kinnersley, Preston and Wappenshall with one road via Kinnersley cutting the moor into two portions.

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Even so when the Rector of Kynnersly took up his position in 1673 he wrote, his parish ‘... was surrounded with a large morass overflowing in Winter, and that you could not come into the Parish any
way upon arable land ...... All that vast morass was called Weald Moor, or the Wild-Moor'.

He describes the Wild Moor, ‘I have been assured from aged People, that all the wild Moors were formerly so far overgrown by Rubbish Wood, such as Alder, Willows, Salleys, Thorns and the like, that the Inhabitants commonly hanged Bells about the Necks of their Cows, that they might the more easily find them. These Moors seem to be nothing else but a Composition of such Sludge and Refuse as the Floods left upon the Surface of the Ground, when they drained away, and yet this Sediment is full three or four Foot thick; so I have observed, that the Black Soil cast up by Moles, or dug out of the Ditches, was a mere Composition of Roots, Leaves, Fibres, Spray of Wood, such as the Water had brought and left behind it. ... The Soil is peaty, and cut up for Fuel in some part of the Lordship; in the Bottom of these Peat-Pits, they find Clay, sand and other Sorts of Earth. ... that great Tract, ..., is now by draining become good Pasturage, and yields a considerable Rent. It yields great Quantities of Hay ...'

This poor land supported a few crops where it had been cleared and drained but for most part it was pasture, grazing animals; the Wild Moor was mainly a stock-fattening area and thousands of sheep. Much land was 'held in common', being open to all villagers to graze their animals; these rights were claimed by many, including people from Wrockwardine.

The land was removed from common use to become 'enclosed fields' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but there were problems for the inhabitants who depended upon the common land for their livelihood.

Even in those days direct action wasn’t uncommon. The inhabitants of Wrockwardine on a night in May 1579 gathered together and cut down hedges of the enclosures and filled in a ditch. Not content, they returned a couple of nights later to finish the destruction.

This led to a law suit when the inhabitants of Wrockwardine disputed the enclosure of land so impeding their right of ‘free passage of their animals on the moor’. The counter argument was that people of Wrockwardine had no rights, as no part of the moors lay in their manor and they had no houses within miles of the moor.

Land continued to be enclosed and by 1653 hundreds of acres had been enclosed; however the inhabitants of Wrockwardine still tried to insist on their common rights over land on the Wild Moor. Inhabitants of Wrockwardine destroyed a bridge across the Black Dyke which gave the people in Kynnersley greater access to the moors. This period is littered with numerous disputes of this nature.

One important outcome of these arguments was the need to have a map of the disputed lands. Many of these, often crude, survive today and are important because there is no one complete map of the Wild Moor of the time, or indeed for many generations to come. Maps of the area were only drawn for the benefit of the landowners, they wished to delineate their property and prevent encroachment by neighbouring owners.

In the fullness of time maps of possessions became almost a work of art. These later maps provided a source of pride to the landowners and at a practical level delineated their lands, boundaries which had been consolidated over many years through many legal disputes, and dynastic marriages.

Enclosing the land had an effect not only on the rights of villagers but upon the quality of the agriculture. However fences and hedges weren’t sufficient on the Wild Moor, they didn’t improve the drainage of a boggy fen-like scrubland. Ditches on the moor were used for the purpose of draining the swampy land and to enclose the fields. Ditches, or drains, fulfilled the purpose of taking water off land which could then be used for agriculture.

Improvement of the agriculture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had served a dual purpose – wealth to the landowner and greater self-sufficiency to a country at war.

The Wild Moor is ‘wild’ no more, agriculture has taken over, and if we pass by today we see field of potatoes, rape, and perhaps maize, yet very few animals. All seems serene but when we see it in the winter floods a different picture emerges, the swampy, boggy ground hasn’t been completely tamed; on a recent visit I noticed pheasants, partridges, herons and a pair of buzzards all within a few feet of the roadway; yet over all the centuries one thing has never changed, The Wrekin still watches over all.
The “Wrekin” is Mr Taylor’s property, and the repast which he and Mrs Taylor had arranged was a charming one including, of course, grouse and the other delicacies “suivante la saison” with wines – hock, sherry, champagne, port – of premier character and vintage. The service was prompt, and methodical, and the entertainment was an undeniable example of the catering qualifications of host and hostess.

Dr White (medical officer of health for Wellington Urban District) proposed ‘Success to the Baths’, and referred to the importance of swimming baths being provided in every town. Boys and girls, he said should learn to swim as early as possible, and facilities for that were provided in Wellington by the enterprise of the Urban Council. (Hear, Hear.)

Councillor Taylor, who replied, described progress made in various matters connected with the improvement of the town.

Mr H. Shepard (the former chairman of the extinct Wellington Commissioners) proposed the health of the Urban Council and referred to the various improvements made in the town in recent years.

Councillor Taylor, responding, said that although Urban Councillors were criticised by ratepayers they took this as their motto: ‘Our intentions are good, and we have honesty of purpose.’ (Applause.)

The company then proceeded to the baths, where there was a large and representative assembly, in which ladies were very prominent. Dr Hollies in calling upon Mrs Taylor, wife of the Chairman of the Urban Council, to declare the baths open, said – The possibility of public baths being provided for Wellingtonians was given their own Baths.

The new public swimming baths were opened at Wellington yesterday evening by Councillor T. Taylor (Chairman of the Urban Council) in the presence of a large number of townspeople. The baths have been erected in a central part of the town, in Walker Street near the Free Public Library, and will supply a long-felt want to the town and district. As the Journal has previously described, the cost of the baths was about £2,700 which includes furnishing, etc., the builder’s contract being £2,021 and that for the boiler and heating apparatus £340. There is a laundry being built and five slipper-baths have been provided for ladies and four for gentlemen. There are 24 dressing boxes, and the whole of the work has been carried out most satisfactorily, the architect and engineer being Mr G. Riley (surveyor of the Urban Council).

The provision of the baths is the outcome of a memorial signed by about 300 residents and ratepayers of the town which they presented to the Urban Council in 1906, though the water and sewerage schemes delayed until now the carrying out of the undertaking to which the members of the Council pledged themselves.

Prior to the opening ceremony the members of the Urban Council, officials, Chairman and officers of other local authorities were handsomely entertained to luncheon by Councillor Taylor at the Wrekin Hotel.
Wellington must have been in contemplation for upwards of 50 years, as in the Wellington (Salop) Improvement Act 1854 it is provided that baths might be erected by the Improvement Commissioners and the expenses paid out of the general improvement rate. There is no record of any steps having been taken to provide public baths until the year 1876, when it was proposed to purchase the property on which the present Urban Council Room and Fire station stand for the purpose of erecting baths, but the proposal was not favourably received, the present Council Office and Fire Station were ultimately erected thereon in the year 1877. At the time of the coronation of the late King Edward, the provision of baths was one of the schemes proposed, but received less support than the scheme for providing a Public Library. In 1906 the Council received a memorial signed by nearly 300 persons in support of the provision of the public baths, but in consequence of the Council having in hand a large sewerage scheme, the question was deferred. The Council was then faced with a water scheme, and in considering this the question of a sufficient supply of water for the proposed public baths was considered. This water scheme has now been sanctioned by the Local Government Board, and is in progress, so that the Council felt in a fair position towards the provision of public baths. The Council were owners of a piece of land fronting Foundry Road, but which had no outlet into Walker Street, and last year an opportunity occurred for purchasing four cottages fronting Walker Street between the Guardians' Officers and the Public Library [see to the left in photo below] and, with a view to some day enlarging the Library and gaining an access to the Council's land in Foundry Road, the Council determined to purchase the four cottages for £490, on which three cottages (valued at £286) were allotted to the Library scheme, and the remaining cottage and part of the gardens (valued £204) were allotted to the baths scheme. The Council obtained the sanction of the Local Government Board for the use of part of the Foundry Road land for the baths, and the matter has gone on step by step since January last, until the present baths are now erected. The amount of the loan sanctioned by the Local Government Board (exclusive of the value of the land) is £2,759 but it is not expected that the whole of this will be spent. The money has been borrowed on the security of the rates at 3¾ percent interest, and the repayment extends over the period of 30 years.

Mrs Taylor then declared the baths open, and afterwards, on the proposition of Mrs G. W. Harvey, seconded by Mr J W Clift, a hearty vote of thanks was accorded her.

Very interesting swimming contests and exhibitions followed. Stafford Janes (the 12-year-old son of the superintendent of the baths) swam four lengths of the bath, and his young sister (aged 10) swam two lengths. Members of the Wellington Swimming Club gave an admirable example of obstacle racing in water, as well as attractive examples in other branches of the natatory art. Messrs C. Gough (Captain of the Wellington Swimming Club), H. Slade, Winton Wigley, H. Duffrey Griemer, T. Prestwood, C. Allison and B. Richards (Secretary of the Swimming Club) engaged in competitions. The general impression was that the opening of the baths was a distinct success, and that their future benefit and prosperity are assured.
Many people consider that Dr Richard (later Lord) Beeching, first chairman of the British Railways Board, decimated the country’s railway network in the mid 1960s. They point to his report of 1963, The Re-Shaping of British Railways, which had proposed the closure of some 2000 stations and the withdrawal of some 250 train services, on strictly economic grounds. Others see what he did as a streamlining exercise, necessary in view of the declining use of railways and the increasing use of road transport in the form of car, bus and lorry. This area felt the impact of the axe when it fell; but the process of rail closure had started well before the implementation of the Beeching Report.

The railways radiating from Wellington and other lines serving the East Shropshire Coalfield area had been opened over an 18-year period in the middle years of the 19th century (see map). Begun as a result of local enterprise, the developing network was soon in the hands of two large railway companies, the Great Western Railway and the London & North Western Railway (later to become the London Midland & Scottish Railway). By the end of the 19th century, with direct services to a wide variety of destinations, both local and national, Wellington had become the Clapham Junction of East Shropshire.

The first closure came as early as 1915. The passenger service between Shifnal and Much Wenlock was withdrawn initially as a wartime economy in 1915 and then, after a brief restoration, finally in 1925. This led to the closure of Madeley Court station. The line remained open for freight traffic and today still carries coal trains to Ironbridge Power Station. A new, enlarged power station was built on the site of Buildwas Junction, following the closure of the railway along the Severn Valley between Shrewsbury and Bewdley in 1963.

The first rail service to be lost by Wellington was the ‘Coalport Dodger’. The last passenger train between Wellington and Coalport ran at the end of May 1952, leading to the closure of five intermediate stations, and goods traffic ceased in 1964. Today, the southern link of the Silkin Way follows the course of the railway between the Town Park and the River Severn, and the former station building at Madeley (Market) has survived intact.

Another pre-Beeching closure was the passenger service between Wellington and Much Wenlock in September 1962 (trains to Craven Arms had ceased 11 years earlier). Freight working ended two years later, but the line between Horsehay and Lightmoor remained open for outgoing heavy loads from Adamson Butterley works until 1979. Telford Steam Trust, based in the former goods yard at Horsehay, has begun an exciting project to restore part of the line.

The Wellington to Crewe passenger train service was withdrawn in September 1963, the connecting service from Market Drayton to Stoke having closed seven years earlier. Both lines were still used for freight traffic between Crewe and the West Midlands until 1967. Today, the northern link of the Silkin Way follows the course of the railway between Wellington and Bradton.

The implementation of the Beeching Report began in earnest in 1964. Included in the closures were the local passenger service and stations on the line that had been the first railway to be built in this area - that between Shrewsbury, Wellington and Stafford, which had opened on 1 June 1849. Passenger trains serving the following stations ceased on 7 September 1964: Upton Magna, Walcot, Admaston, Hadley, Trench, Donnington,
However, in spite of the consequences of the Beeching Report, things have picked up in recent years and the future of the area’s railways looks bright. An additional station to serve Telford – Telford Central – was opened in 1986; a frequent local service between Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Chester and Aberystwyth is provided by London Midland and Arriva Trains Wales operating companies; there has been a revival of freight traffic carried by rail; and, perhaps most encouraging of all, a direct link with the capital has been re-established by the enterprising Wrexham & Shropshire Company’s service to Marylebone.

I recently came across this 1741 map of Shropshire markets and the days upon which they took place.
You never know when something will turn up which casts new light (and casts a few more shadows!) on the history of Wellington and its surrounding areas.

Shropshire Archives has several volumes containing sketches and highly detailed heraldic illustrations crafted by David Parkes, a schoolteacher who worked in Shrewsbury and spent holidays travelling the county with his sketchbook, apparently during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. A paper silhouette of Parkes, made at a time before photography became commonplace, is shown above.

Although some of his drawings take advantage of ‘artistic license’ to shuffle buildings around to make a more pleasing picture, there is no doubt that many can be regarded as fairly accurate by comparing them to drawings made by other artists around the same time.

The sketch of All Saints parish church (bottom right) shows how secular buildings have been relocated within a scene. The lower one of those on the left is believed to be the old town lockup; those on the right can only be properties located a hundred yards or more away in King Street.

However, his sketch of William Withering’s birthplace (below) is considerably more straightforward and, for that reason alone, there’s a strong case for accepting it at face value.

Although created long after Withering (right) had left the town, it was drawn at a time still within living memory.

The only problem we have is that we haven’t a clue where in Wellington it was located. Not even Peter Sheldon, author of The Life and Times of William Withering: His Work, His Legacy, nor any other experts who have researched Withering’s life, know.

The few facts we can be sure of include that Withering was born here in 1741. His father Edmund had married Sarah Hector in Shifnal in 1734 and moved to

William Withering is arguably Wellington’s most famous son. We have an illustration depicting his birthplace ... but where was it? Have you any idea? And can you prove it?
Wellington where he worked as an apothecary, although we do not know whether he worked from home or occupied separate business premises. Another interesting point recently discovered by Geoff Harrison is that the ‘Withering’ surname was, at the time of William’s birth, ‘Witherings’ ... with an ‘s’ at the end.

When William went to the University of Edinburgh in 1762 to study medicine, he had already served four years apprenticeship, possibly under his father. Again, we don’t know for sure.

But at least we now know what his birthplace looked like, thanks to David Parkes, even though its precise location remains a mystery.

In relatively recent years, claims have been made that the site of Withering’s birthplace is in Market Square, more precisely where the shop called Shoes in the Square (above) has latterly been trading.

 Sadly, the facts simply do not support this assertion, which seems to be based on the assumption that there has always been a chemist’s (or apothecary’s or druggist’s) shop on the site.

Presumably this is based solely on the fact that Bates & Hunt had a shop here. Well, yes, Bates & Hunt did have a shop here ... but has there been a chemist’s here since 1741?

So, the contention that there has been a chemist’s or druggist’s or apothecary’s shop on this site since the time of Withering’s birth isn’t true. Further examination of the Tithe records together with the 1841 Census shows that the town had three druggist’s at that time: two (Charles Bradbury and John Beeston) operated in New Street, while the third (Edward Williams) occupied a property next door to the White Lion Inn in Crown Street.

If anyone feels so inclined, I should be interested to know (with proof rather than wishful thinking) who was the first chemist to trade in Market Square, and the date his business began. We do know that James Bate traded from a shop in New Street sometime before 1870 and later went into partnership with (Frederick?) Hunt during (I believe) the twentieth century, but it would be useful to have more accurate information.

There used to be a plaque fixed to the wall of the Shoes in the Square premises stating it was Withering’s birthplace. We now know this was a mistake. We can justifiably erect a plaque in memory of him and his birthplace being Wellington but no one can honestly say where his birthplace actually stood. To do so would be unforgivably misleading to the people of Wellington and visitors to the town.
Woolies arrived in Wellington in the early 1930s, possibly in 1932. The first store to open in Britain was at Church Street, Liverpool (the ‘second city in the British Empire’) in 1909. When the chain ceased trading in January 2009, there were over 800 locations throughout the country.

The firm was founded by Franklin Winfield Woolworth, who opened his first ‘five [cents] and dime’ store in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1880. He was an Anglophile, whose ancestors apparently went to America from a farm, appropriately enough, near Wooley, Cambridgeshire.

By 1914, F.W. Woolworth & Co. Ltd. had 40 stores in England and Ireland, selling items for either 3d or 6d, the Sterling equivalents of five cents and a dime. Of their staff, 57 enlisted to help the war effort; most died in service.

New stores continued to open after the Great War ended, even during the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, helped by the fact that items maintained their low price structure. Some items, like tools, were dismantled into component parts so that customers could buy them separately over a period until they had the complete item and could assemble it. Woolworth’s management understood what customers needed and could afford, and did all that could be done to satisfy expectations. The quality may not have been the best available but it certainly wasn’t the worst. The success of any business relies upon the fact that customers have to have a reason to return to make another purchase. And Woolworth’s met that need.

It’s hard to believe Wellington Woolworth’s store closed at the end of January 2009. Here’s a little article to jog memories.

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Over the years, the company created its own brand names (such as Winfield in 1963) and acquired others (Ladybird clothing in 1984 and Chad Valley toys in 1991).

Sadly, adverse trading conditions and an inability to adapt to increased competition ultimately contributed to the company’s downfall. Woolworths in Britain was acquired by Paternoster Stores (forerunner of Kingfisher plc) in 1982. When Kingfisher demerged its businesses on 2001, Woolworths Group plc was born.

British Woolworths was renowned for the quality of and caring for the welfare of its staff, even ‘Saturday Girls’. The friendliness of counter assistants and a willingness to please used to be an essential part of every ‘customer-focused’ enterprise. In fact, I remember during the mid-1960s that a trip round the tills in Woolies on a Saturday afternoon would usually result in one of the girls saying, ‘Yes’ to the offer of a date that evening.

But that’s a part of my history not for general consumption ...


Final staff, January 2009. Back row, from left to right: Joanne Shepherd, James Green, Vanessa Wieczorek, Patricia Rogers (Lead Store team leader), Hayley Tipton. Middle: Karen Caswell, Daniel Lewis, Julie Price (Store Manager), David Beck, Soubia Parveen. Front: Carol Grey, Julie Hill, Denise Green (Store team leader/entertainment specialist).
Finding individuals can be easy particularly if their family name is uncommon, or a common one with more details about their age, (date of birth) where the event, birth, death or marriage took place. But you need to be very aware that names could be spelt differently from the one you imagine.

The spelling of family names didn’t become ‘fixed’ until the middle of the 1800s, until indeed most people could read and write. It was not until 1870s that school attendance became compulsory for all children, and with a concentration on the ‘3Rs’.

Another problem with the spelling of names is that when somebody else writes down another’s name; as would happen when a birth, marriage or death was registered or data collected in a Census. Not only was reading and writing uncommon, regional accents in speech were often quite pronounced.

Just to confuse the family historian even further when details are copied from an official source, be it a Parish Register or any other official document, the handwriting is not always easy to decipher; such transcriptions are very often copied inaccurately. Not only spellings but dates and ages can be subject to such ‘transcription errors’. Even modern records suffer in this way – to look at the Index of the General Registry Office for our marriage we find it recorded as Morrison not Harrison!

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Recently we were asked to find the birthplace of William Withering, born in 1741. The obvious place to search for a birth, more correctly a baptism was in the Parish Records of All Saints Church. This would have been the only record of his birth at this time before the institution of Civil Registration in 1837.

The local archive in Shrewsbury hold filmed copies of the church registers, and the baptism of William, son of Edmund and Sarah Witherings was recorded on 13th April 1742. A further search revealed that he had two sisters Mary baptized 3rd September 1739 and Sarah, baptized 13th February 1750. In all three baptisms the family name was Witherings. Perhaps that was the interpretation of the clergyman recording the events. However in other records it appears that both William and his father used the name Witherings on a number of occasions.

The moral of this is do not rely upon one source, names do change over time. In this case a simple “dropping of the ‘s’ at the end of the name”.

To return to our investigation of Sarah Braddick – once we had found a family with approximate ages we searched the GRO (General Registry Office) Indexes of Births, Marriages and Deaths, often abbreviated to BMD. These are arranged in quarters and provide details of the name, Registration District, volume and page. Searching these can be tedious and you need to persevere.

Once we found the birth of Sarah in first quarter of 1897 and noted the district, volume, page, year and quarter it was possible to purchase a copy of the original birth certificate, by quoting the details found in the Index.

This family is a wonderful example of name changes, we found members of the family with names; Bradick; Braddick; Bradack; and even Braduck. The use of one or two ´d´ was it appears optional !!

Perhaps this article will provide some ideas as to where to begin the search into YOUR family, and a few of the potential problems.

Remember to record what you find and where, and to question everything, looking at other possible interpretations.

* * *

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CATCH ’EM YOUNG

Our chairman gave an illustrated talk last autumn to Brownies who meet at New Street Methodist Church.
2009 was the Centenary of the Guides movement, so the talk showed photographs of what Wellington looked like and how ordinary people lived 100 years ago in 1909.

Allan Frost also spent an afternoon in December with teachers and pupils at Crudgington Primary school who had been studying what might have happened when the Romans came face to face with members of the Cornovii tribe living on The Wrekin Hill.

As part of their project, they made models of The Wrekin and devised strategies for attack and defence. Allan revealed more about the weaponry and battle tactics of that period before giving the children free copies of his novel for all ages, Wrekin Wraiths, Rebels and Romans.

Pictured in this Shropshire Star photo are teacher Audrey Leppington with pupils Emma Stanway, Ellis Greenfield and Connor Esslemont-Hill.

PUBLIC TALKS
March to June 2010

All talks will start at 7:30 p.m. in the Civic Offices at Wellington except where shown.
Admission is free but donations are invited after each lecture.

* * * Tuesday March 16th: George Evans WILLIAM WITHERING

* Tuesday April 20th: Neil Clarke WELLINGTON AND CANALS
Note: This talk will take place at the usual time but at New Street Methodist Church.

* Tuesday May 18th: Phil Fairclough HOMES FIT FOR HEROES?

* Tuesday June 15th: Allan Frost WELLINGTON’S MARKETS AND FAIRS

* * *
Be sure to attend Wellington’s Midsummer Fair in the churchyard at All Saints on Saturday 19th June 2010

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