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# OUR AGE

HEREFORDSHIRE LORE : LIVING LOCAL HISTORY

Issue 67  
Spring 2023



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Subscription time - £15 per year

# Welcome

## It's subscription time!

Reminders are enclosed for those whose subscription is due. We are grateful for your support: IOA costs around £5000 to produce. However, we've agreed to freeze prices for another year (details on the back page) partly because of your many generous donations – almost £750 in 2022!

The pandemic reduced our subscriptions by almost a third and we now have around 300 (70 from Ross, Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Kington districts, the remainder from Hereford). So, if you can persuade a pal to subscribe please do!

Now, for those absent-minded drivers (like myself) who've put diesel in a petrol tank or vice versa, here's Hereford tailor Percy Pritchard's experience with that famous Herefordian, Alfred Watkins, in the early 1900s. (Percy was one of the first of nearly 200 face-to-face interviews we've done since 1989.)

Percy was taken for a spin in Watkins' new toy, his Gardner-Serpollet steam car. "We got down the Abergavenny Road, flames coming out from the burner, you know! It was the most thrilling thing."

When the car ran low on water near the Three Horseshoes at Allensmore, Percy was dispatched to top up the water tank. Afterwards the car refused to start – Percy had, by mistake, put the water into the paraffin tank.

It took hours to drain the tank and find extra paraffin. "We got back home about midnight, but I'll say this for Alfred Watkins, he didn't blow his top. He said: 'It was my fault. I should have told you so.'"

Thanks for your support and keep your stories and photos coming in. Tell your friends, family and old Herefordians of our little living history magazine and encourage them to join too!

*Happy reading, Bill Laws, Associate Editor*

# Cover Story

## Steam train arriving at Hereford Train Station

Headlines in local papers in August 1963 announced November 18 as the date fixed by British Railways Board for the closing of passenger services on the Hereford-Ross-Gloucester railway line. Riverside parishes between Hereford and Ross, where the train was a most reliable form of transport, were badly hit. Mrs Pember, wife of the licensee of the British Lion in Fawley, told a reporter how upset she was: "We shall miss the train very much in this area," she said, "in fact we shall be completely lost without it."

*Editor's note: We would love to hear your stories of life, travel and work on the railways now long gone. Get in touch.*



# Herefordshire Lore

Herefordshire Lore launched in 1989 and has been collecting and publishing your memories ever since. We are: chair Julie Orton-Davies, secretary Eileen Klotz, treasurer Harvey Payne, webmaster Chris Preece, proofs Sandy Green, associate editor Bill Laws, editor Marsha O'Mahony, and committee: Joyce Chamberlain, Keith and Krystyna James, Rosemary Lillico, Jean and Peter Mayne, Chris and Irene Tomlinson, Linda Ward and Betty Webb.

# Italian Prisoners of War attend Ledbury wedding

Herefordshire was home to several Prisoner of War camps during the Second World War. Italian and German prisoners of war (POWs) were held in camps at Ledbury, Tupsley, Hunderton, Wormelow and Peterchurch, or billeted on farms. They were a much-needed labour force during the harvest across the county. Though these camps were not heavily fortified, there were camp guards on duty. Among them was Londoner, William Farren, who was posted to the POW camp at Ledbury.

His son David Farren, who was born in Bosbury in 1947, remembers him: "Although I grew up in the southeast of England and live in Kent today, Ledbury has always remained my spiritual home."

"My dad was a guard at the POW camp in Ledbury, having been posted from London. He met my mum, Loraine Panting while he was stationed there. She worked at Ledbury station so it's possible they met there. They got married at the old Catholic Church in Ledbury in 1944. Several of the Italian prisoners from the camp, with whom they had become friends, attended the wedding. No doubt there are still some descendants of those prisoners in or around Ledbury."



*The wedding day of William Farren and Loraine Panting. (Photo credit David Farren)*

Among the Italian prisoners at the wedding was Emilio Ponti, a well-known name in Ledbury today. After the war he remained in the county, spending the rest of his life in Ledbury.

David's maternal grandfather, Walter Panting, also worked on the railways. "He was killed in a railway accident in the 1950s," said David, "and his wife Alice Panting (nee Davis from Leigh Sinton) came to live with us in London. I would be very interested if these names or events mean anything to anybody!"

# Redundant POW huts become home for locals after the war

Jean Fishpool, 89, mum to nine children, has been a social housing tenant all her life. No stranger to hard work, she and her husband, along with many other families, squatted in former POW huts at Ross. It wasn't much but it was home.

"After the war, my first husband, Jack Downing, returned home to Ross after serving in Burma. He had been captured by the Japanese and weighed just six stone. He was the youngest serving soldier from Ross in Burma, just 17. We had nowhere to live, so we squatted in the POW huts on the Wolf Tools estate. All the prisoners had gone by then so

a load of us with families went in and just squatted there. That's what you had to do in those days because there was no private accommodation going. They were tin huts, not posh, but they were our home. You had a little stove and a partition, with two bedrooms. It was concrete floors and very very cold in the winter so just kept the stove going all night. And we used to make furniture out of orange boxes from the greengrocer. You'd put a piece of cloth around them and that'll be your dressing table, and another for saucepans. I'll tell you something, the community there was great. I'll never get neighbours like that again."



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## The Great Freeze - Spectacle of the century as Wye ice breaks up



So screamed the Hereford Times headline from February 1963. It went on to describe, "18-inch ice floes breaking up in the upper river". A householder close to Victoria Bridge was woken up at 3am 'by a noise that sounded like a lorry load of bricks being tipped outside the front door.' This was the sound of ice crashing into the pillars of Victoria Bridge.

In Ross-on-Wye, the river froze from bank to bank for a month at the Hope and Anchor. The Ross Gazette reported on a soccer match in the same spot. "Twenty young men playing football with a beach ball on a pitch stretching across the river. Others circled the 'pitch' on bicycles." Howard Copping, also of Ross, found it the perfect skating spot and fortunately had a pair of skates tucked away in a cupboard.

At Whitney on Wye, the ice over the river was 18" thick, as Tom Henderson of Brillley can say with certainty: "Me and my father took a sledgehammer to the ice and couldn't break it. He said, 'Come on Tom, let's go across for a cup of tea.' We tested the ice and walked down the bank and across the river, up the other bank, had a cup of tea with a neighbour and then came back the way we came. No winter like that since. We were defrosting everything."

Gary McCleod of Hunderton, whose dad was landlord at the Vaga Tavern, 'walked on water' that winter. "I used to drink at the Lichfield Vaults. I was walking home with my mate, Teddie Skinner, the hairdresser, and he said, 'I'm not walking along the bridge. Come on, let's walk across the river.' Of course we had the booze in us, so we went down to the rowing club and got in there. Teddie was in the centre jumping up and down on the ice. We went under the railway steps and got off at Preedy's ferry steps. As it happens my old man's lights were still on at The Vaga, so we knocked on the door and told him that we had walked across the water. All he could say was, 'You prats!'"



Photos (far left clockwise): The River Wye at Ross-on-Wye frozen, with old club house in background; Maurice Edge with his dogs outside Hereford Rowing and a frozen River Wye; a steam crossing the Wye at Goodrich; Tom Henderson at Whitney on Wye; Snow ploughed up at Whitecross; and Dorothea Edge and her hound standing on the Wye near Hereford boat club.

## Local history books new to the market

### The Last Happy Children – Memories of a Herefordshire Childhood by Norma Tompkins

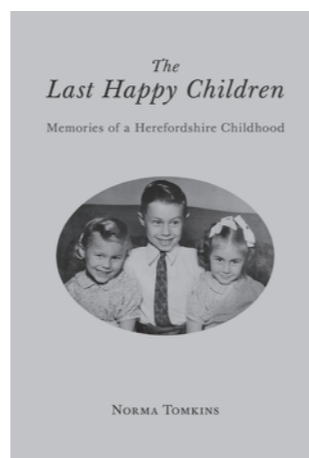
Norma's book is a look back at her blissful childhood in Dinedor and Weobley. It will be of interest to everyone with a fond affection for those simple days.

"My parents were no different to many others in our area and were always on the look-out for a way to earn some extra money. One of the easier ways was to sell the surplus fruit from one's orchard. With the whole family at hand it was easy enough job and in no time at all the bags of fruit would be stacked outside the gate waiting for the lorry to take it into Hereford and beyond.

"Sid Wright's in Hereford used to send a man around the country areas in the spring to persuade cottagers to sign a contract allowing them to take all their fruit at a noted price. This kind of agreement usually suited the cottager and the wholesaler very well. That is except for one year when we and every other family had such a glut of damsons on our trees that the branches almost broke under the weight.

"Sid Wright's immediately went into action knowing that they could not cope with such vast quantities of fruit. An employee arrived to count the bags that we had stacked at the gate and then gave my mother a chitty for how much they owed her. She was then told to throw all the fruit away.

"My mother and father, who could not stand to see good food go to waste, looked for someone to take all this fruit for free and, on seeing an advert in a local paper, sent them by freight train to an orphanage in West Wales. Whether this fruit got to its destination is a matter of question as they had no letter of any kind to say that it had been gratefully received. Hmm?"



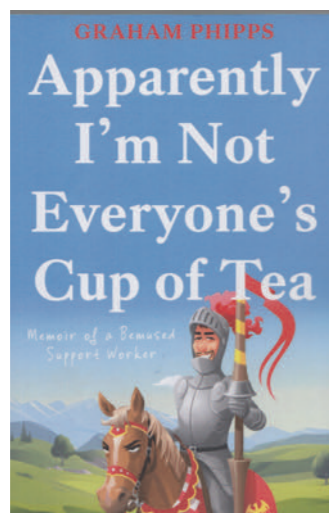
Copies are £25. Please enquire with Herefordshire Lore and we will put you in touch with the author.

## Books available from Herefordshire Lore

Looking for a special gift? Don't forget that we have a number of books for sale (see back page for further details). By buying direct from us you are helping us continue our work. Thank you.

### Apparently, I'm Not Everyone's Cup of Tea: Memoir of a bemused support worker by Graham Phipps

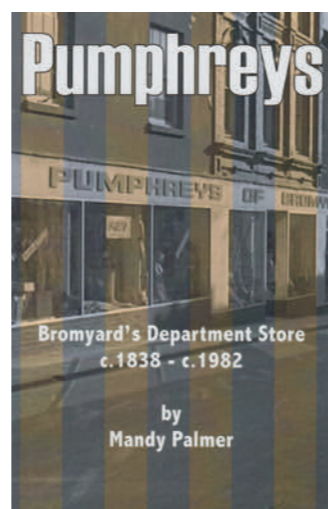
Graham's working life started at Denco in the late sixties, then based in Holmer Road. Alongside Denco, there were other large engineering firms, including Smart & Brown, Painter Brothers, Saunders Valve and Wiggins. Graham said: "As a qualified engineer there were often numerous vacancies one could apply for, but sometimes it was better the devil you knew, and so I stayed at Denco for over 25 years. Initially, life as a production engineer was good, it was almost a pleasure to go to work, that is until automation became more common." In 2003 he volunteered for redundancy, and so began the second chapter of his working life in the social care sector.



Graham's book costs £9.99 and is available from Hereford Tourist Information, Oakchurch, Pengethley, Radways, Ledbury Books and Maps and The Hop Pocket Shopping Village, Troubadour Publishing and other major booksellers or can be bought for £0.99 as an eBook through Amazon.

### Pumphreys: Bromyard's Department Store c.1838 – c.1982 by Mandy Palmer

The latest release from the esteemed Bromyard History Society, authored by Mandy Palmer, is a fond look at Bromyard's department store, Pumphreys, that closed in the 1980s. It sat on the market town's High Street for nearly 150 years. Ms Palmer describes it as Bromyard's very own version of Selfridges of London or Rackhams of Birmingham, with a wide array of departments. Everything from clothing, textiles, furniture, and hardware. It's a lovely trip down memory lane, packed full of photos, facts, and some first-hand accounts from former staff members. Available now from the Bromyard History Society. To purchase a copy email: [bromyardhistory@btconnect.com](mailto:bromyardhistory@btconnect.com) or call 01885 488 755 online at: [bromyardhistorysociety.org.uk/publications](http://bromyardhistorysociety.org.uk/publications)



## Noel Gordon of Crossroads fame opens races in Ross-on-Wye

Ross-on-Wye's resident historian, Mary Sinclair Powell, wrote in with this lovely photo of the star of seventies motel soap, Crossroads. A TV series about her ignoble departure from the show is on TV now starring Helena Bonham-Carter.

Mary said: "It was wonderful to see a picture of my late mum Ann Powell serving tea to the bikers in the pits tent (issue 62). I spent many happy hours on Howle Hill with my parents, grandparents and brother from quite a young age. My dad Ron Powell was Noel's escort for the day. I remember her getting splattered in mud very well - dad did tell her to move but she wouldn't listen !!!!! Very happy days of my childhood. The other photo (in that issue) shows all our "aunties" selling programmes. So many "aunties and uncles" within the Motor Club - we were all one very big and very happy family.

"In this photo, Noel is standing with my dad Ron Powell (left) and Geoff Lancashire (right) on that 'fateful' day just before she started the first race. Dad was explaining to her what would happen when she started the race and how to do it and - gallant as ever - did not laugh when she got splattered. But luckily he always had a clean handkerchief



Noel Gordon with Ron Powell (left) and Geoff Lancashire (right) (Photo Mary Sinclair Powell)

to hand and offered it to her after the event. Bless him. Geoff Lancashire owned the Chase Hotel where Noel had rooms where she lived when she was staying in Ross away from filming in Birmingham - before she bought Weir End House near Wilton."

## Letters Letters Letters Letters Letters Letters Letters

### Austin Origins

One of our readers has identified where the Austin featured in Issue 66 came from: "The Austin/Morris 1100 featured at Castle Green was registered in Pembrokeshire sometime between August, 1969 and July, 1970." Robert Green.

### Photographer Marjorie Wight

"I am writing in a follow up to an old article that I read in your magazine, dated Summer 2008 – issue 9. In there you profiled a photographer, Marjorie Wight. You noted that she was the daughter of a Staffordshire solicitor, Hollyoak Wight, and that she was born in 1889 and died in 1975. I am possibly quite late to this but we have recently been trying to do a bit of research on the Wight family, as Holyoake (spelled differently to how you have it in your magazine) bought our house in Hartlebury in the late 19th century and we believe Marjorie grew up there as a young girl. In our research at the Hive, Worcester we found that Marjorie had photographed our house. She would only have been a young girl at the time. However, these are the only photos of Miss Wight's of the house that we have found in Worcester and would love to explore more of her collection to see if there are any more of our house there, particularly of the internals. We would love to hear from any surviving relatives of Marjorie's, particularly if they have any more of her photos, that would be absolutely amazing. Any help would be gratefully received. Chris and Sarah Powell [cipowell42@googlemail.com](mailto:cipowell42@googlemail.com)."

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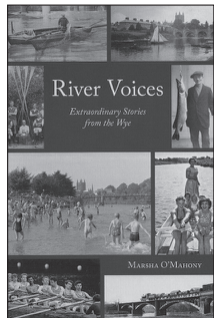
# Ross Livestock Market



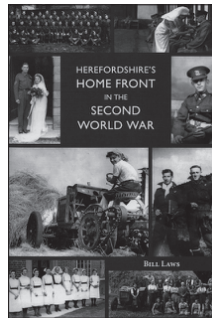
Before the war, John Brookes of Sellack used to drive livestock there, on foot.

“I used to drive the cattle to Ross, three or four of us, drive it into the pen and the boss would sell them and then he’d say let’s go and have a cup of tea and a doughnut or a Chelsea cake. And he’d pay for us for that, maybe four pence for the tea and doughnut for each of us. There was a café in the market. You took the cattle in and when they sold them the boss would say come and have a cup of tea. We would drive them into Ross. Might bring six cows in or ten. Varied. You never knew. We never brought anything back. My boss when he took anything in he never brought anything back. He didn’t like to bring things back from any market.”

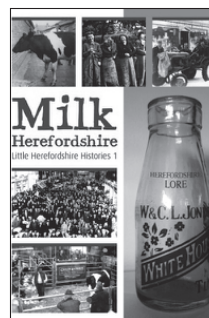
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