

*in*

# OUR AGE

HEREFORDSHIRE LORE : LIVING LOCAL HISTORY

Issue 71  
Spring 2024

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# Welcome

Happy New Year to our loyal readers. We are looking forward to hearing more of your wonderful stories. We are always delighted to record them and make them a permanent part of the local historical record. All of Herefordshire Lore's archives are lodged with the Herefordshire Archives & Records Centre (HARC). Your recollections, no matter how small, are important, and are available to researchers for generations to come. We want to give you advance notice of our second Hereford History Day which will take place at the Town Hall on Saturday, September 21st. Free entry. More information in the coming months. In this edition, please find your subscription renewal letters. Like so many organisations, we have been forced to increase our rates to meet the demands of ever-rising costs of print and distribution. Please continue to support us in our work. We remain grateful for every single subscription.

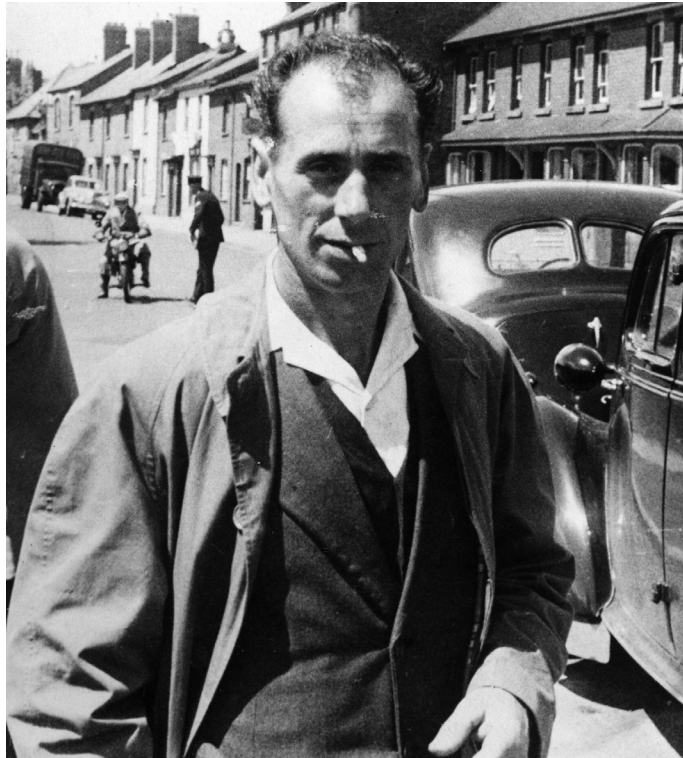
*Marsha O'Mahony, Editor*

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## Cover Story

### Italian POWs at Leominster

Many people in the county will be familiar with Dennis Schiavon and his good work with the Music Pool. Less known, perhaps, is that his father, Virginio Schiavon, first arrived in the country as an Italian POW. He is pictured here, on Etnam Street in Leominster, after the end of the war. He was one of several POWs who elected to remain here and make Herefordshire their forever home.



Virginio (b.1913 – d.1975) was from Zero Branco, Treviso, near Venice. Before joining the Italian army as a young man, he was a farm labourer. He served in Ethiopia and the Middle East campaign, where many POWs were captured. He served in a Bersaglieri regiment. The Bersaglieri had a reputation for being fast-moving, sometimes even carrying bikes on their backs. After his capture, he was sent to Britain, where he was judged low risk. He worked on Mr. and Mrs. Thomas' farm, Wintercott Farm at Ivington, where he proved particularly good with livestock and integrated well.

*More on Virginio's story on page 5.*

*Editor's note: do any of our readers have POW stories/photos/anecdotes? We would love to hear from you.*

## 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 and Linda Ward.

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# Herron's Skin Yard, Commercial Road

**It operated as a water mill, complete with a well-stocked mill pond. David Warnes' father was appointed manager there in the late 1950s.**

David Warnes' father was appointed manager of Herron's tannery (located where Morrisons is today) in Hereford in the late 1950s. The business purchased sheep skins locally, some from Wales, and as far away as New Zealand. The finished hides were sold to glove makers and the cleaned wool to blanket and carpet makers.

David said: "At 16 I left school and joined the business as I wanted to earn money. I fished the mill pond a lot in my spare time; it was full of roach, some trout, small minnows, and sticklebacks. It was a lovely area with trees looking onto the garden of the old Blackfriars Monastery. It was a big pond about 40 to 50 feet wide and probably twice as long. The water went through a sluice gate and over a waterwheel into the Eign Brook which was much lower than the pond.

"The back half of the factory was all the leather works. Its

buildings were very ancient. Downstairs there were stone arches around the factory and an upstairs gallery with arched rooms made of sandstone.

"Everything was very old-fashioned they still had a horse and cart to move the bales around Hereford. The first job was fleshing the hides, they would take off the bits like ears, and legs and scrape all the fat off, then the shearers would have it and shear all the wool off, and then the hides would go into the tanks to be cured.

"The piles of flesh and bits stank and were full of maggots, the health inspectors were regularly down there following up complaints about the smell. The maggots were scooped up and sent to Fred Perkin's fishing tackle shop on Commercial Road close to the bus station."

*Part two of David's interview will appear in the summer edition. In it, he describes the amazing subterranean passages found behind a bricked-up door at the mill. This wide-ranging interview will appear in two parts. Thank you to Andy Tatchell for permission to feature it.*



Herrons' Skin Yard (Photo credit: Ray Williams)



# D-Day - 6 June 1944 - was the largest amphibious invasion in the history of warfare

The Allied landings in France in June 1944 were the stepping stones to Hitler's defeat. The Herefordshire Regiment arrived in Normandy on June 13 and gradually fought their way through to Antwerp, but former Bulmers executive **Peter Prior**, who had been involved in the secret plans for the Allied landings working with the 3rd Canadian Army, landed on D-Day itself.

"I reached Juno beach soaked and seasick and armed with a .38 pistol ... an inadequate weapon for an initial assault!" Once he found a Bren gun he was "ready to sell my life dearly but was instead greeted by a beautiful 18-year-old French girl who threw rose petals at me and shouted, inappropriately in my case, 'Vive les Canadiens'."

Also on Juno was Londoner **Bob Rayner**. He'd been stationed at Whitney Court and only recently married Hazel Evans at Whitney church. That night the town of Bernières filled with gunfire and Prior "mounted a loud hailer on my jeep and went round the place shouting in English that people should stop

firing. I pointed out that the Germans would not understand what I was saying and therefore, if the firing stopped completely, it would prove that our troops were shooting at each other."

D-Day came as no surprise to those in Herefordshire. The build-up to the attack had seen Indian troops (possibly Rhajputs) camped out on Hereford Racecourse and Bryngwyn Park, Wormelow; and there were US army units at Foxley, Leominster, Hereford Barracks and the Racecourse: "All nationalities were there, but the black and white Americans were strictly separated," remembered **Katie Causer**. "The blacks were on the Roman Road side; the whites on the Grandstand Road side and the two sides could never cross."

**Michael Young** remembered his dad telling him about American engines at Barton shed (Hereford's locomotive depot) which would be sent to Europe after D-Day and **Jim Thomas** recalled the drivers who ferried essential supplies to the ports staying at Redhill Hostel off the Ross Road. While photographer **Doris Kershaw** was busy processing military identity photographs, **Joan Foggin** noted how, on the morning of D-Day all the soldiers had disappeared "just like the May Fair slips away in the night".

**Reg Robbins** was in the thick of it. He had enlisted at the Hereford Barracks (aged 16 – he lied about his



Reg Robbins enlisted at the Hereford Barracks

age) and now found himself face to face with the enemy: "I came across some German prisoners. I signed to their officer to hand over his papers and he spat in my face. I was ready to land one on him!"

Later his best friend was killed in a mortar attack and his brother Edward was badly injured in a fire. Shrapnel injuries left Reg disabled - he lost the use of his right arm - for the rest of his life. In 2016 93-year-old Reg of Guthlac Street, Hereford was awarded the Croix de Guerre: "To be honest the medal isn't for me, it's for the mates I lost," he told IOA.

*How Herefordshire Survived D-Day – An Illustrated Talk*

*Black GIs in town \* Indians on Hereford Racecourse \* Mule trains in the Black Mountains \* and Tinned Peaches*

*Herefordshire Lore's Bill Laws mines the June '44 archives for an illustrated talk. Please get in touch to book him now.*



Maureen Beauchamp pictured by her father, Tony Williams, with Indian troops at Bryngwyn Park Wormelow

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## Italian POWs decide to stay

By 1948, POWs were allowed to return home, but Virginio Schiavon was one of a small group who decided to remain.

The Second World War cost farmers a quarter of their labour force. In 1947 they were hit by the worst winter in living memory. It left Britain struggling to feed the people.

Salvation came from an unlikely quarter: former prisoners of war. Take Virginio Schiavon, born in northern Italy in 1913 at Zero Branco near Treviso and, by 1939, a proud member of the fast-moving Bersaglieri regiment. In 1942 Virginio was captured and taken prisoner during the North African campaign. He was brought to England and five years later was managing the livestock on Mr and Mrs Thomas' Wintercott Farm near Ivington.

His son Dennis Schiavon takes up the story: "Virginio, 'Nino', could have returned home to Italy, but like many POWs he chose to remain. And then by chance another Italian, Gismonda Leonardi, known to her English friends as 'Monda', came to work at Wintercott. Monda was an economic migrant from the Parma region.

"Whilst working on the farm together Nino and Gismonda got married, and subsequently moved to other farm jobs and their tied accommodation around the west of the county, before moving in 1960 to 223 Whitecross Road." Nino started work at the Painter Bros factory: "He was obsessed with hard work and home ownership and they soon moved on to nearby 8 Ranelagh Street and paid off its mortgage very soon after."

The hard work took its toll, however, and Nino died of a series of strokes at 62, in 1975. Monda went on to become an auxiliary nurse eventually working at the Victoria Eye



Dennis Schiavon picture in the same spot on Etnam Street as his father on the front page. (Below) Virginio, on the left, in the Italian army before his capture.

Hospital. "Like the NHS now," says Dennis, "the service contained enclaves of diaspora minority groups." She died in 2011, aged 84.

Nino, Monda and others like them helped the nation during one of its darkest hours since the war. Yet there are few records of the estimated 100,000 Italians, many like Monda classed as 'volunteer co-operators' or the 25,000 German POWs who elected to stay and help Britain get back on its feet after the war.



**Dennis Schiavon died at the end of January after a long illness. Our love and thoughts go to his family.**

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## A dip into Herefordshire Lore's archives - 70 Years Ago

**From Food Rationing to nuclear Armageddon – with a little love thrown in.**

We learned many things in 1954, from how to survive a nuclear attack to the identity of the new head at Hunderton Primary School. It was Miss Savade; Mr. Webster, the headmaster of the junior school which opened two years earlier, remained in charge there.

Rationing finally came to an end, much to Rosemary Lillico's relief: "I remember walking into Hereford from Breinton and going shopping with my mother. Up 'til then meat, cheese, dried milk, and even tea was all rationed."

1954 also saw the growing threat of nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the West. Civil defence was high on the national agenda and former Rotherwas munition worker Joan Clements now found herself called upon to advise on surviving a nuclear attack. Working with police inspector

Harris at a special chamber on Burcott Road "we'd practise with gas masks, and I'd lead people through fire, crawling along to keep out of the smoke."

Despite all the problems, there was romance in the air, at least for Arsenal's football captain (1954-56) Joe Wade. He explained to IOA: "When I was stationed at RAF Credenhill, Tom Price, secretary of Hereford United, invited me to play for them. In the years 1945-46 I played many games for Hereford." Guest players included Gage (Fulham), McPhee (Dundee and Scotland), Bowyer (Stoke City), Broome and Shell (Aston Villa), and "my favourite, Charlie Thompson (Sheffield United). It was a joy to play with such talented players.

"I fell in love with Hereford where I had the good fortune to meet my wife Kathleen who was in the Women's Land Army and whom I married in 1945."



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# Discover your links to Rotherwas munitions

The county archives hold the national munitions collection featuring paperwork of munitions workers from WW1 and WW2.

A new project hopes to help people discover their family links to the former munitions factory. The area changed dramatically in 1916, as farmland and the former Rotherwas House estate were transformed into one of the biggest munitions factories in the UK; ROF Rotherwas.

The 'Exploring Rotherwas Then and Now' project is run by the Rotherwas Together community group thanks to funding from the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Community historians Clare Wichbold MBE and Angela Williams will be working with volunteers and the staff at Herefordshire's Archives to create a database of information about the people who worked at the site and their lives in the county.

Tens of thousands worked at ROF Rotherwas during the First and Second World Wars filling shells for the Allied forces. The workers were mainly women who travelled into Herefordshire daily from the Forest of Dean, Worcestershire, and Wales.

Many more people moved to Hereford to work at the factory, living in boarding houses, lodging with local families and even living in tents in gardens.

Nicola Goodwin, Secretary of the group, said: "We want to explore the lives of the people who worked at Rotherwas, hear their stories and bring their experiences to as many people as possible. We'll be leading history walks, holding regular events and taking the project out to schools, clubs and businesses."

"Thanks to the heritage team at ROF Glascoed and BAE Systems, we are now able to help former munitions workers and their families apply for a recognition badge, to thank them for their work. If you, or your relative, worked at Rotherwas or another munitions site, please contact us and we'll help you to apply."

The group is also erecting a new sculpture, the Rotherwas Angel, on the road leading to the Shell Store. Events will be held on March 8th and 9th to remember the past workers and to mark International Women's Day.

If people would like to find out more about the project, or search for information about a relative or friend, please email the group at [Rotherwas@hotmail.com](mailto:Rotherwas@hotmail.com) or go to the website [www.Rotherwas.com](http://www.Rotherwas.com)



An exhibition called *Factory Fashion*, which explores the overalls worn by the workforce in WW1, is on display at HARC until March 10th. (Top) WWI Canary Girl, (Below) Rotherwas worker, WWII.



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## LETTERS

### Felsted School

I received a Christmas card from my old friend who lives in Northumberland. He wrote: "Many thanks for your snippet from *In Our Age* about Felsted in exile in Herefordshire. My housemaster was there during the war and loved it, living in several fine country houses. Much nicer than Essex, he would often say. My school, Aldenham, played hockey, soccer and cricket against Felsted. As a scorer in cricket, I looked forward to Felsted teas – much better than those of Aldenham.

*John Kinross, Hereford*

# Beeching's cuts lead to withdrawal of railway passenger services



## The end of the Wye Valley and Brecon lines

The much-threatened scrapping of many rural railway services came to reality on November 2nd, 1964. It was the end of the line for the well-used halt at Weston-under-Penyard and stations such as Ross-on-Wye, Fawley, Ballingham and Holme Lacy.

A young Hugo Mason travelled daily by rail from his home in Brockhampton, to Fawley station and on to Hereford.

"Having to travel to Hereford daily was a big thing to me and I took out a Hire Purchase agreement and bought a brand new drop handlebar Raleigh bicycle from Hereford.

Every morning I would cycle from home to Fawley Station with my sandwich box, often to hear the train coming from Backney Halt, when I was as far away as Fawley Court! Fortunately, it was the downhill part of the journey.

When I got to the station some two miles from home, rain or shine, I had to leave my bike behind the station and run across the line before the train pulled in on the other side. Sometimes, in adverse weather conditions, I would be very cold and/or soaking wet and it was some time before I acquired a decent waterproof coat.



Ballingham Station on the Wye Valley Line. (Left) The last passenger service on the Hereford to Brecon line passes through Whitney-on-Wye, 1964.

There would only be a handful of passengers on the train, with plenty of room for us all, including some freight.

The return train fare was 17/6 (87.5p) per week, leaving virtually nothing for emergencies. I made additional money in the evenings and at weekends by carving wooden house signs and doing plans (foreigners) on the side.

The train had to travel through Fawley Tunnel immediately after leaving the station. It would soon travel across the viaduct on the Aramstone side of the hill.

This is a very special and spectacular space. I spent many hours just upstream at Carey Islands fishing and wildlife watching. A remarkable, unspoiled corner of England.

When travelling across the viaduct, little did I know that within ten years Dr. Beeching would put an end to this fantastic journey. He was fortunate enough not to see the dramatic increase in articulated vehicles and congestion that we all

have to live with today. Some 30 years later, I managed to catch a 22 ½ lb salmon from this very spot.

Just beyond the viaduct was Ballingham Station, where we were joined by Sandra. We all travelled to Holme Lacy Station and then Hereford, just eight miles from Fawley.

I travelled to Hereford in this way for almost three years by which time I bought an old Vauxhall Wyvern (LAD429) from the local garage, Biggs Motors of Fownhope. Something I would try to repair myself from time to time."



# Future of Churchill House & Gardens Uncertain

A recent report in the Hereford Times revealed Herefordshire Council is considering selling Churchill House. In 1964 Mr. Wood-Power, owner of the house and parkland, died and stipulated in his Will that the people of Hereford should have the first chance of buying the estate at the District Valuer's price. Led by Councillors Derek Evans and Sam Beaumont, the entire property was bought for £42,000. Chairman of the Estates Committee and Mayor of Hereford Councillor Sam Beaumont soon announced its renaming in honour of the great statesman. At 7.00 pm on Thursday 8th July, 1965 with a trumpet fanfare, folk dancers, and a campfire by Herefordshire scouts, guides, and cubs, Churchill House and Gardens were formally opened by the Mayor of Hereford Councillor Sam Beaumont. In 1974 Marjorie Hatton agreed to part-finance a new gallery extension at a cost to herself of £23,000 but only on condition that at any one time three walls of the gallery had to show the work of her late artist brother Brian Hatton. The Hatton Gallery joined the extensive

costume collection and the world class Edwin Banfield collection of antique barometers and was open to the public. In June 1998 the newly created Unitary Authority seemed determined to close the museum and in the summer of June 2000 the doors finally shut. Churchill House and the Hatton Gallery were then occupied by Herefordshire Art College before surrendering the building to Hoople, Herefordshire Council's arms-length administration company. Since Hoople returned to Plough Lane, Churchill House has remained empty, Keith James, former chairman of the campaign to save Churchill House museum, is warning that selling the house on the open market would be a betrayal.

"In 1964 Hereford City Council was an honourable assembly whose elected councillors whole-heartedly endorsed a generous opportunity willed by one man to benefit all citizens of our city. Churchill House is a valuable asset that should be brought properly into community use like The Grange in Leominster or the old Art College on Castle Green."

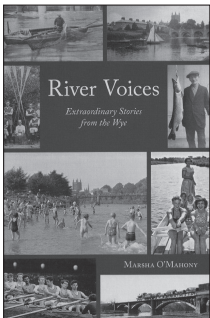


# Market day at Leominster's livestock market

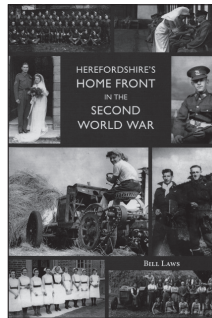


Market days in the county's market towns were busy affairs. This image from Leominster livestock sales in the mid-1950s captures the atmosphere. This herd arrived by cattle truck, but drovers were a common sight right up to the 1970s bringing their stock to market.

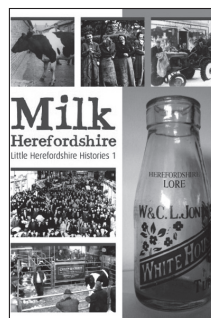
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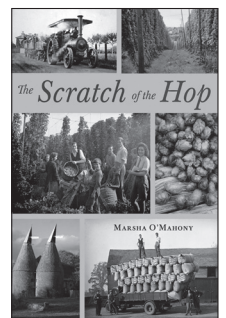
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