

WELCOME 2010

The past year, 2009, was a good year for Stourport as the effects of the basins' regeneration started to have an impact on the town. The opening of The Windlass cafe/restaurant with its adjacent heritage room has created a base in the historic core of the town which can be used as a focal point for events. We have also received national recognition through the National Lottery award for the best heritage project of 2009. I think it is not without significance that a small town in Worcestershire was able to beat two projects based in large cities (Liverpool Slavery Museum and Brockwell Lido, South London). It does show both the strong local loyalty to our town as well as the enthusiastic support we have received from outside.

Those of you who have visited the basins recently will have noted the considerably improved appearance of The Tontine which will soon be occupied once more. The Barratt development is progressing rapidly and 2010 will see what was once a neglected, run-down part of our town becoming a very attractive residential setting.

Sadly 2009 was not a good year for local shops as the combination of bad weather in the summer months together with the roadworks in Gilgal and Mitton Street meant much trade was lost. However this didn't prevent the local shopkeepers coming 7th in a survey of shopping provision in more than 60 towns and the Location Project awards were presented to local shops at a ceremony at the Civic Centre in November.

We now have to build on our strengths. The opening of a Heritage Room in York Street in March provides another strategic base from which we can advertise the history of our town and local events. There will be a number of activities taking place in the basins' area including a visit from the Lady Hatherton, a historic boat which acted as the floating boardroom for the Staffs/Worcs Canal Company. During the summer months Stourport Forward hope to run regular canal boat trips from the Basin.

My dream is that one day on the exit roads from the M5 there will be a new brown sign to "Historic Canal Town" alongside the existing "Steam Railway" and "Safari Park" signs.



We know we live in a magical place- let's spread the news !

Pauline Annis

The Civic Award 2010

Once again Thomas Vale have kindly agreed to sponsor our biennial Civic award. We will be issuing a press release early in the new year and the closing date will be early March. A number of interesting potential entries have been identified but do let us know of any projects which you think are worthy entries.



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Thomas Vale Construction

David Millis has kindly offered to co-ordinate the Award and will deal with any enquiries.

Programme Update 2010

- JANUARY 7th:** **Annual Festive Event- Cancelled due to weather**
We plan to arrange a similar social event later in the year
- FEBRUARY 11th:** **Meet the Planners**
Your opportunity to find out about future plans for Stourport and to question a representative of Wyre Forest planners.
- MARCH 11th:** **The Restoration of Droitwich Canal** Ivor Kaplan
An illustrated talk outlining the main stages in the restoration of Droitwich Canal which has involved major tunnelling work underneath the A449.
- APRIL 15th:** **Uncovering a Hidden Landscape** Adam Mindykowski
An illustrated talk based on the LiDAR survey of Wyre Forest which explores the prehistoric and historic land-use of Wyre Forest and surrounding area.
- MAY** **A combined guided tour of Cleobury Mortimer and Mawley Hall is planned.**
The hall is not open to the public so this promises to be an interesting outing. Watch this space for details!
- MAY 13th:** **Annual General Meeting and Civic Award**
- JUNE 10th:** **The Gunpowder Plot and Worcestershire** John Sparry
An entertaining guide to the people and places in Worcestershire associated with the Guy Fawkes' Plot.
- JULY 8th:** **Idle Women** Vince Williams
An illustrated talk exploring the role played by women in keeping the canal network moving during World War Two.
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Hartlebury Castle

The Church Commissioners have now recognised the Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust as the preferred purchaser for the Castle. The valuation and purchase price have not yet been announced so until these have been received by The Trust no further announcements can be made.

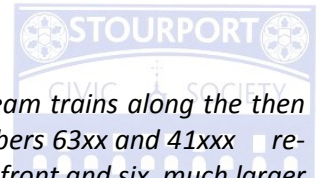
The Church Commissioners are talking about a two-year period during which the Trust will need to raise the required funds. They will be allowed some use of the Castle during that period for fund-raising events. In the meantime negotiations have opened with Heritage Lottery who are the most likely provider of funds but at the level of funding we are discussing there is only a 32% chance of success so other funding bodies will be approached. Stourport Civic Society has given written support for the application.

The Trust will probably need to raise in the region of £500,000 itself as match-funding so will be looking for local support for various fund-raising events.



Photo© Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust

As from Monday



This article was written in 1971 by Tony Barfield, a locomotive fireman who worked steam trains along the then British Rail route from Alveley to Worcester through Stourport and Hartlebury. The numbers 63xx and 41xxx relate to the class of engine and 2-6-0 the configuration of wheels, two little wheels at the front and six much larger coupled "drivers" behind these.

During the late nineteen fifties the scheduled workings of goods trains were frequently altered as different goods yards and branch lines were closed, and poorly maintained locomotives finally gave up the struggle! Sometimes the workings were changed because some bright young planner worked out a beautiful time table on paper, where everything worked perfectly. On one occasion the Severn Valley Line was subjected to such a timetable. As they say in all the best books, the following actually happened, and only the names (except my own) have been changed. I handed the tool box keys and lamps across to the storeman, and walked across to George, my driver, who was reading the notice board. "Bloody hell!"

This explosive oath was followed by George striding forcibly straight into the shed foreman's office, leaving in his wake a sheaf of scattered papers that were hurriedly picked up by a pale and rather frightened looking clerk. From within the office came sounds of further oaths and lurid details of what George would do to the young upstart who had diagrammed that job. Full of curiosity, I studied the notice board to see just what job had caused George to blow up. I soon discovered the cause. It was a notice stating that, as from Monday, the afternoon coal train from Alveley, diagrammed to work through to Worcester, would be worked by 2-6-2 tank locomotives of the 41XX class, instead of the usual 63XX class 2-6-0 tender loco. Apparently this move was designed to cut out having to turn the locomotive at Worcester, and consequently cut out our overtime!

George was famous for his outbursts of fiery temper, and by the sound of it the "coddie" (foreman) was having the full force of it. The office door burst open, and George's final volley echoed around the shed. "Come to summat when we've got bloody babbies in nappies telling us how to run a railway!"

Panes of glass rattled as George slammed the door shut. He glowered at the notice board, then suddenly turned to me with an evil grin on his face. "Mate, bring plenty of grub on Monday, and don't arrange to go out anywhere on the night, I'll show the flaming intelligence department how to run a railway".

Monday found us on 2-6-2 tank 4175 making our way to Stourport- on-Severn to pick up our train of empties. Before coupling up we topped up the water tanks, and George had a quick check around with the oil can. The board (signal) came off, our guard gave "right away", and after ensuring that we had the correct single line token, we slowly trundled over the level crossing and headed towards Bewdley and our destination, Alveley Colliery. Our loco was working well, the sun was shining out of a blue sky, and our journey was the usual steady trundle, although it was briefly highlighted as we waved to bikini-clad beauties on the banks of the Severn as we crossed the Victoria Bridge. We stopped at Highley to pick up a few empties, and minutes later, after climbing strongly, dropped down to Alveley Sidings. The next hour or so was spent shunting the empties and assembling our train of loaded wagons. This completed we joined our guard for a cup of tea. "Where's the regular engine, George, boiler washout is she?" he asked.

In great detail George went on to tell him about the so-called planners who had worked it out that they could cut out our overtime by using a tank engine. "But", concluded George, "those clever sods are going to have a nasty surprise, they have forgotten one very important thing, and that's the card I've got up my sleeve.

With a touch of our whistle to warn some miners who were crossing the track, we eased out of the sidings and set back along the branch line so as to get a run at the bank. I had built up a good fire, the steam pressure was just on the red mark and there was three-quarters of a boiler- full of water. George soon got the train on the move, and rolling fairly fast, but as we climbed up the short steep gradient towards Highley, the speed decreased, and the exhaust beats became more pronounced. The loaded wagons of coal were now hanging heavy, the exhaust grew louder and was a deep separate "whoof", and the whole footplate lurched like the deck of a ship in a storm, as the con-rods slowly but purposefully drove the wheels forward.

At each deep "whoof" the footplate would shudder, the fire would leap up and down in the firebox, and the needle on the pressure gauge would wildly leap backwards and forwards across the clock.

At a little less than walking pace we crawled over the top, dropped down through Highley, then sailed on towards Bewdley. The planners were determined to see that everything ran smoothly, the boards were off at Bewdley and the signalmen at both boxes were waiting ready with the tokens. Strongly we climbed up to the short tunnel at Mount Pleasant and with a warning blast on our whistle for the Burlish Crossing, dropped down towards Stourport. "And this, mate", said George, "is where we snooker them".

Once again all the boards were off and we could see the signalman hurrying out to change the token. But George was slowing up, and he brought the train to a halt alongside the signalman. "What's up, George?" he asked, "Keep her going; you've got the road all the way to Worcester today, according to the new timetable".

George looked at the signalman.

"Sorry, mate, but I'm stopping for water".

"What do you mean water? You've never stopped before! "

"Arr, but that was when we used a tender loco. I'm not going to risk going through with a tank engine without topping her up ! "

I had to hand it to George, the planners may have seen a way to cut overtime, but they had certainly forgotten that vital and important thing - water - but George hadn't!

By the time we had replenished the tanks, we had missed our "clear road" at Hartlebury Junction and after waiting in the loop for a considerable time, we were eventually allowed to continue on to Worcester. However, all this hanging about and waiting had diminished our water again, so before heading home we stopped to top up yet again. Eventually we arrived back at Kidderminster Shed four hours later than we should have done!

Needless to say that the sequel to this episode was that next day we were back with our regular 2-6-0 tender loco 6382. Honour was satisfied, George had proved his point, the foreman settled down to a few days quiet living, and the planners happily got back to their drawing boards and desks to work out another perfect time table!

Many thanks to Don Giles for providing this item. Don is a Severn Valley Railway guard and railway enthusiast. He would welcome the chance to share his knowledge and experiences with members who would like to know more.

Stourport Town

Bill Hughes, one of the volunteers at the Heritage Room in the Old Stables, wrote this poem in 1991 at the time of major traffic alterations in Stourport:

1770 saw the dawn
Stourport was about to be born
Navvies digging sweating all day
The canal was dug to show the way.

Canal boats plied up and down
Houses appeared so did the town
The railway next with engines galore
Knocked the canal trade through the floor.

Still the town continued to flourish
Men and women with kids to nourish
They filled the schools to overflowing
Seeds of education they were sowing.

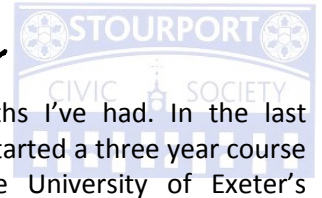
The Gregories, Roland and George
Kids' education began to forge
Eddie Jones and "old" Pop Gill
Continued to teach us with great skill.

Time passes and we all grow old
So now this story must be told.
We're all proud of this old town
Though all the chimneys have been knocked down.

The town is gleaming bright and new
The Severn Bridge is painted too.
A one-way system helping traffic flow
And a little painted island takes a bow.

Stourport Town will live on and on
Even after we've all gone
So stand up now and shout out loud
We love this town, it's done us proud.

From Stourport to Falmouth



Well what an exciting few months I've had. In the last newsletter I explained I have just started a three year course studying applied Geology at the University of Exeter's Campus in Cornwall, which is just outside Falmouth. Well back for Christmas I aim to bring you up to date with what I've been up to:

I moved in the last weekend in September to my flat on campus. I shared with 4 other people a modern flat with large rooms and a communal kitchen. We are all studying different course (i.e. Zoology, English and Digital Animation) but we all get on really well. We've done a lot together including learning to cook, wash and iron although the latter is still pretty scary!

The first two weeks were called "Fresher's weeks" which is when the first years have a lot of events put on to help us meet new people and settle in. Also included were tours of the campus and how to use the computers and library systems. A number of parties were organised for the evenings including a 'Pirate Party', 'Horn's and Halo's Night' finishing with a spectacular Fresher's Ball complete with champagne and canapés! Other events have been organised since meaning I'm never short of good nights out with some amazing people.

I have had to do some work this term and to be honest, its been harder than I expected! Lectures can start at 9am in the morning (very early for a student) and some may not finish till 6pm (Each lecture is either 1 or 2 hours in length). I've studied modules in Mathematics, Basic Chemistry, Surveying, Basic Geology, Field Skills and Personal Development and IT and these are examined in January.

Those who know me know I'm quite involved in scouting at home (now an assistant scout leader) and I have been able to continue this in Falmouth. I've also joined the local St John Ambulance unit so am now trained as a basic first-aider, progressing to an advanced first-aider next semester. Perhaps the most unique (or most insane depending who you talk to) is sea-swimming. Every Sunday at 1pm about a group of 30 students go for a swim in the sea. Wetsuits are not allowed so particularly at this time of the year its just a little bit cold. Still it's a fantastic experience and one I wouldn't get anywhere else!

Falmouth itself is an amazing place to live. Our campus is approximately 3 miles outside the town in a small town called Penryn. Falmouth is roughly the same size as Stourport (population about 22,000) but in terms of its size has a lot more shops and facilities, due to the remoteness of some areas of Cornwall. There are very few large towns so where they exist they have loads of shops. Falmouth is quite touristy in the summer and there are a fair few surf shops, but there are lots of individual shops, cafes, pasty shops and restaurants. However there are plenty of pubs, two clubs and other bars to keep the students happy. The town winds around the harbour (which is the 3rd deepest in the world) leading to dockyard areas where there is still some boatbuilding. Recently the RFA Argus—a navy supply and hospital ship was refitted by the dockyards. After Pendennis Point, home to the castle, you reach Gyllynvase beach which is where I go sea-swimming. In the summer this is the main tourist beach, but in December, strangely enough it is relatively quiet!

In all, I can honestly say I have so far had the best three months of my life, sure the work has been hard and some lectures dull, but really I've loved every minute of it! I'm studying a great course, with brilliant classmates. I live in one of the nicest places in the UK and live with the best flatmates anyone could hope for. I'm 20 minutes from the sea but from our geology teaching lab we look out over the Fal Estuary.

Stourport will always be home to me, but wow, living in Falmouth is something else.

By Stephen More (Acting Editor)

Searching for Monica Baldwin

Part Three

The story so far: Monica Baldwin, wealthy debutante and second cousin to Stanley Baldwin, entered an enclosed convent in Belgium at the age of 21. She remained there for 28 years before leaving in 1942.

Nowadays anybody re-entering the world after 28 years in an enclosed convent would be offered counselling. Monica clearly had great difficulty adjusting to her changed circumstances. Her book records doubly contrasted experiences: 1) adjusting to the outside world after the convent and 2) making sense of the considerable changes which had taken place between 1914 and 1942. Monica herself said:

"My standards were all pre-1914. And even these had been badly blurred by the passage of time".

She had been in the convent during the great changes which occurred after the First World War. The Wall Street Crash and worldwide depression which followed had passed her by as had the rise to power of Mussolini and Hitler. Together with these political events had been the great changes in society and manners. In describing a visit to London she graphically described her feelings:

"I felt like a small and dithering mouse that had strayed in among the turbines of some gigantic engine-room."

One of the practical difficulties encountered was difficulty understanding currency:

"...instead of the nice, bright, golden sovereigns that I remembered, I found dirty banknotes and some tinny-looking florins and half-crowns".

This one-time debutante was particularly shocked at seeing women without hats. Clothing was to be a problem, Lorna Baldwin having to introduce her to the idea of wearing a bra.

Initially Monica stayed with her aunt, Amy Bickerton until January 1942 when she went to stay at Astley Hall with Stanley and Lucy Baldwin. It is interesting to note her comment that they had to ask her to make more noise as her ingrained habit of moving noiselessly about the house and opening doors quietly was frightening some members of the household

Her Baldwin cousins, Diana Kemp-Welch and Margot Huntington-Whiteley introduced her to her new world. Cousin, Hugo Huntington-Whiteley took Monica to her first cinema, accompanied by Kiloran Howard (Lorna's son). The younger members of the family clearly took a delight in helping to bring Monica up-to-date.

From the first Monica was determined to try to be self-supporting and this meant finding employment. Her first job was working as a Land Girl for Mrs Batley at Astley Town (4 days) and for Mrs Cornish with whom she lodged, for 2 days. She received the official Land Army wage of £1.18s of which £1 went for her keep. The mention of Astley Town is interesting as there is a photograph in the Baldwin family photo album showing Arthur Baldwin's carriage and horse parked outside Astley Town in 1890. Whether he was visiting or the then tenant is unclear. The nearest Catholic Church which Monica could attend was in Stourport. She referred to this church "crammed to bursting point with Welsh and Irish factory hands". This sounds more like the former debutante than ex-nun.

Monica had difficulty coping with the physical demands of working on the land and realised she would have to find something she could cope with more easily. In April 1942 she moved to London to work in a drawing office and stayed with an aunt and uncle who lived in Portland Place. It was during this stay in London that Windham Baldwin (son of Stanley) took her out for a meal.

In the years after leaving the convent Monica never stayed very long in any one place. During the course of 1942 she went to Scotland for three months to stay with her friend "Nikki" in Cueil Bay. Nikki's husband was Laird of Duror of Appin. Many of the acquaintances Monica stayed with in her later years were the result of contacts formed during her years in the convent.

Later in 1942 Monica worked for a brief spell in a hostel for munition workers in Wigan. It is clear from her account of this that it was an unsuitable job for which she was ill-equipped. She then worked for a short time in a flower garden but left in November 1942 to return to her aunt and uncle in London.

By December 1942 she had moved to Wisthaven to work in an army canteen but problems with fleas in the accommodation provided soon sent her on her travels again. The year 1943 saw Monica working as a librarian at The Royal Society of Medicine. During these years she was clearly a very restless soul looking for a role, determined to support herself.

In places the chronology becomes confused. From February to May 1945 she worked at the Prisoners of War Department of the War Office in Curzon Street. She mentions social visits to friends Gay and Barbara in South Audley Street, but by mid-June 1945 she was staying with her aunt in Hove. This is when she started to write her book.

It seems to have been about this time that Monica acquired a deep desire to live in Cornwall, seeing such a move as her salvation. She referred to Cornwall as "the enchanted country on the other side of the Tamar" and she seems to have been reading tales of Cornish folklore. She made several visits to Cornwall during the months which followed: staying as a paying guest with a vicar and his wife in Mousehole who introduced her to "Trevelioc". (Lamorna Cove). A return to London was followed by a stay in Southwick in a bungalow owned by "a kind cousin". It was here she met the artist Douglas Grey and his wife. Monica sat for him and the portrait produced was exhibited at the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. Where is it now, I wonder?

A further visit was made to Cornwall in the summer of 1945 followed by a stay with Lady Anne Lytton at Porlock Weir. In a third visit to Cornwall she stayed at Trebah. In early 1946 following visits to relatives in Hereford and Sussex she went to stay at Goran Haven with a vicar and his wife, followed by a seaside bungalow at Trevone. In November her prayers were answered when a cousin sent her details of a cottage to buy at "Trevelioc".

By February 1946 she had moved into the cottage in Lamorna Cove.

"Looking back on it today, I see it chiefly as the place in which I lost my latch-key into the world of fantasy." (Goose in The Jungle)

However, the magic of Cornwall did not last and was followed by four months in Ireland. Then five months with her sister, Freda, who worked at the BBC.

" My sister's friend- our former governess- with whom she had been living since her husband's death (and who had fiercely disapproved of my reappearance in the world) had died: my sister, therefore, now at last opened to me the door of her London flat." (Goose in The Jungle)

By June 1949 Monica was living in a caravan at Pinner. She referred to it as Grail Meadow:

"because Yvonne Bosch van Drakestein of the Ladies of the Grail-(a former pupil of mine when I was a nun)- had very kindly given me leave to be there. I was grateful, for I simply had not money enough to pay for it." (G in J)

It was clear that by this time Monica was having financial problems. She mentions that this was due to Kenricks announcing no further dividends. (In the late C19 Kenricks had taken over the Baldwin Iron Works in Stourport but family members had remained shareholders. Monica's father had been one of the main beneficiaries of the

sale some 60 years earlier). In *Goose in the Jungle* she describes the two carpenters-Fiddle and Bodge- who came to her rescue by carrying out essential fitting work to the caravan she had bought. Monica refers to the education' they gave her: how the black market operated; cinema films she should see and books to read including *Dracula*.

Shortly before the move to the caravan, Monica had decided to record her memories of life in the convent. While writing her book she stayed with popular author and distant relative, Angela Thirkell in Pembroke Gardens, London. Angela introduced her to Rachel Ferguson. Monica went to Pembroke Gardens to help open it up after the war.

"The intellectual standard of Angela's circle was so much above my level that I soon gave up any attempt to be more than an admiring listener and looker-on....I think my happiest hours beneath her roof were spent in the society of Me Wang, my newly acquired Siamese cat."

She had first met Angela c1912 with her newly-wed husband at Astley Hall. (Angela Thirkell's first husband was James Campbell McInnes. The marriage produced three children but ended in divorce on the grounds of McInnes's adultery and cruelty.)

During the course of 1949 Monica's famous book, *I Leap Over the Wall, A Return to the World After Twenty-Eight Years in a Convent*, was published. by Hamish Hamilton. The serialisation of her book in *The Sunday Express* brought fame and some money but also led to sensationalist headlines such as "*Former Nun Niece Of The Earls of Baldwin Lives in Caravan Near Pinner.*" She learnt the hard lesson of how easily her words could be distorted.

"Since then, I have discovered how useless it is to become agitated about what reporters do to you. They cannot help it, for a terrible blindness afflicts their minds." (G in J)

At this stage she was receiving between 50 and 100 letters of fan-mail a day. (It is interesting here to note the sensationalist *Sunday Express* headline at the time of her death some 26 years later). Escaping for a weekend of peace to a Benedictine Abbey guest house she realised the result of the sensationalisation of her story as one monk fled from her presence, fearing contamination.

The book became a best-seller and sold half a million copies making her around £20,000. She said of it:

"One fact I must make clear from the outset. I describe the religious vocation from the point of view of one who had no such vocation. The alternative title of this book might well be "Impressions of a Square Peg in a Round Hole."

By February the Grail Meadow had become a swamp due to heavy rainfall and Monica decided it was time to move on again. In 1950 she received an invitation to share a house with "a lady in Devon who apparently knew, slightly, somebody that I knew." (G in J) Having checked her credentials in *Who's Who* and ascertaining that she was an MBE, JP and Gold Medallist of the Horse Society, Monica decided to accept the invitation and her two carpenters escorted her caravan to Devon.

Monica tells us nothing of her time in Devon but, one suspects as so often in her life, she did not stay very long.

The Final Years will appear in Part Four.

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www.unlocking-stourports-past.co.uk
www.stourporttown.co.uk/civic_society.htm