

SPECIAL EDITION

We are extremely happy to announce that the museum will be opening every Saturday 10am – 4pm commencing 22nd August.

COVID-19

In order to ensure that the building is “Covid-19 Secure”, certain measures have had to be put in place. We please ask that you help us by following them -

- All visitors will be asked to wear Face coverings, unless exempt - Please do not worry if you arrive without one, as they will be available from our volunteers at the front desk.
- All visitors will be asked to sanitise their hands before entering the building. There are sanitizing stations at all entrances and by the toilets.
- To adhere to the social distancing regulations, please follow the one-way system and ensure that some of the smaller area are empty before you enter.

Unfortunately, we are unable to open either the Sampler Room or the Library at the moment, but we hope this will change shortly.

EXHIBITIONS

Simon Latham's “**Lord of the Dance**” exhibition can still be seen in our First Floor Exhibition Room, while “**As I See It**” – an art exhibition by Brian Luker is on show in our ground floor Meeting Room.

If you have not yet had a chance to see them, there are several **virtual** exhibitions on our website by groups who were forced to cancel their shows this year.

PORTRAITS FROM THE PHILLIPS STUDIO COLLECTION



Box 61-640 Miss Wardle Milton.
© 1950s Phillips Studio

In our beautifully refurbished gallery on the top floor, there is an exhibition of the Phillip's Portraits, many of which have not yet been publicly displayed.

These portraits were originally on glass plates and saved for the City by Hilda Southwood and her son Alan in the 1950s, when Phillip's Studio in the Market Place closed down, and many of the original plates were destroyed.

The focus of this display is on children, with a display of toys from the museum archive, teenagers, the trades of Wells and district, builders, bakers, masons, carpenters, servants and domestics, publicans, travellers, wedding pictures as well as some of the stories uncovered by researching the people behind the portraits.

The exhibition shows the social history of the city and surrounding villages and apart from being superb photographs, carefully conserved into digital form from the glass plates by Allen Cotton and Steve Wilkinson, are a record of fashion, family and the working class of the city who would dress up in their very best clothes or cleanest working bib and tucker to have their picture taken.



Box 4-766 Mr Bryant. N. Wooton.
5424 Photograph 11116

MEMORIES OF A LOCAL MAN

Written by John Sealy at the age of 79 years

I was born at Green Ore, Nr. Priddy on an isolated farm in 1923. My grandmother, who lived in Wells about 4 miles away, was sent for. It was snowing and she had to walk all the way to reach us. Green Ore was a very small hamlet consisting of 3 houses and 4 farms. There was no electricity, telephone or other amenities.

There was no school at Green Ore so when I was 5 years old, I went to live with my Grandparents, Herbert and Mary Jane Sealy at Honey Hurst Farm, Rodney Stoke. I attended Draycott School until I was 10 years old. My sister Peggy, did the same so we were both brought up by very strict Victorian Grandparents.

How they managed their farm and house would be an eye-opener to the children today. At that time most young girls on leaving school were sent into "Service" to work in the large houses. Grandmother had 2 girls working in the farmhouse helping to make the cheese. I remember we used to play with them. They were allowed to visit their own mothers on a Sunday.



On Sundays, we had to attend Church three times a day. I sang in the Church Choir, along with five other boys and girls, three of which were killed in the 2nd World War. I continued with my love of singing and still sing in Westbury Church Choir at the age of 79. I have also sung with the Wells Oratorio Society in Wells Cathedral.

At 11 years of age, I went back home and attended Wells Cathedral School. During this time in 1937, when I was 13, we moved to Croft Farm, Westbury-sub-Mendip with the clouds of war on the horizon.

WESTBURY-SUB-MENDIP

My father, Frank Sealy, was actually born in Westbury and Grandfather, Herbert Sealy farmed at Old Ditch Farm. Before moving to Rodney Stoke, Great Grandfather Harry Sealy lived in Duck Lane, Westbury.

Westbury has changed out of all recognition to the time in 1937 when I came to live here with my parents. In those early years we seemed to know everyone so it was a very close knit community. Not long ago, when I was in our village post office, the Green Lantern Stores, the first 5 people who came in lived in the village but unfortunately were strangers to me. It was sad to think I did not know them but perhaps it was my own fault for not having made their acquaintance. I often wonder who they are, where they have come from and why they chose to live in Westbury.

We don't know their past and there is no reason why we should, but village life is different. We used to know all the villagers, their parents and their parents in a caring sort of way. We knew everyone! Now, some of our new villagers are just plain Mr. and Mrs. Someone, or that man who lives in old Mr. So and So's house. Many of them wish to remain "anonymous" and there are others who wish to mix in and become "accepted". We love to have them as they bring new ideals, new crafts and new cultures into the village. Anyway, I have survived the influx for the past 65 years so a few more won't hurt!

Westbury did not increase in population as some villages did after the war, or in the building of new houses as Wookey did for instance, simply because there was no mains water supply and hence no sewerage system. Mains water was installed in 1952 and the sewerage system in 1962. The original 12 council houses at Stoneleigh had no water supply. People obtained their water from a pump at the end of the road so you were very careful with the use of water when you had to fetch and carry it all in buckets.

The toilet arrangements were simply earth closets. The same applied to most of the top part of the village, except for the brook running down through the village which acted as an open sewer. The school had to use this as well so the children went to the toilet in the brook. Imagine the situation in dry weather when the brook almost ran dry!

The lower part of the village was more fortunate because the Church Commissioners, who owned most of the land and larger farms, sank a bore hole and built an underground reservoir at Green Cross. They then put in a piped water supply to their farms including Westbury House, Station Road and other houses thereabouts, the Village Hall and out as far as Furlong Farm at Hollybrook. This system still operates at Court and Croft Farm, Westbury House and houses in Roughmoor Lane.

When the main sewerage system was installed, it meant that building could really begin and 42 new council houses were built at Stoneleigh by the Wells Rural District Council, besides many new private houses.

FARMING

In 1937, I can remember there were 30 farms of one kind or another. There were farms with a few animals and poultry and others with herds of 20, 30, 40 cows which was considered to be a large herd. Now there are 8 farms, mostly on the outskirts of the village. These farms now have herds of approximately 100, plus different animals and sheep. With mechanisation and modern technology these 8 farms are producing more than all those 30 in 1937. In pre-war days, there was virtually no machinery and mechanisation did not begin until 1940 onwards.

The farms in Westbury in the 1930's

Old Ditch	Harry Phelps
Elm Tree	Gilbert Andrews
Poplar	Donald Tucker (who also had a milk round)
Old Ditch Cottage	Bert Andrews
Old Ditch	Reg Oatley
Drapple	Ted Phelps
Stream	Ed Weeks

Ash Tree	Ted Hole
Knyfftons	Forest Glanville
Coombe Hay	Arnold Sealy
Lower Hayes	John Stott
Hollow	Arthur Stott
Fir Tree	Albert Weeks
Hill	Ted Allen
Top Road	Henry Masters
Portway	Ted Weeks
Hollybrook	Albert Dennis
Home	George Phelps
Furlong	Robert Keen
Lodge Hill	Bill Horsington
Lodge Hill House	William Tyley
Court Farm	Robert Glanville
Crow Lane	Frank Hole
Stoke Road	Mr. Strickland
Well House	Frank Hole
Stoneleigh House	Tom Northam
Croft	Frank Sealy
Roughmoor	Mark Allen
Dairy, Wells Road	Johnny Carver
Hannah's Lane	Manning Tucker

Most of the men in the village worked on the farms and some worked in the Paper Mill at Wookey Hole and Clares and Wilts United Dairies in Wells. The village builders, H.J. Dennis and Sons employed men as carpenters, masons and labourers. A few worked "away" in Wells and some on the Railway. Some women worked part time on the farms, helping with the twice daily hand-milking of the cows.

Cider was the main beverage and if a farmer did not keep some good cider it was extremely difficult to get good regular workers and casual workers for hay making and harvesting.

THE SCHOOL

The school here in Westbury, St. Lawrence's C of E Primary School, was for children up to the age of 11 years. After that they attended school in Wells, travelling by train until the railway closed in 1961, when they began travelling by bus. During the war, the school roll increased with the incoming evacuees from London. These children were housed with families in the village.

THE RAILWAY

The railway was built in about 1850 and operated for 100 years. Westbury station was called Lodge Hill so as not to be confused with the many other Westburys, especially Westbury in Wiltshire. The railways were always kept in immaculate condition and the station here was surrounded with beautiful flower baskets in the summer and opposite the platform were the letters "Lodge Hill" planted out in flowers. It was also known as the Milk and Strawberry Line. In its heyday, it employed a Station Master, Mr. Pullin and 2 Porters. It transported many people and children from the village who used it to go to school in Wells. It was used to transport milk to Mr. Hodges Dairy in Easton, cattle to go to the markets in Wells or Shepton Mallet & coal for people in the village to use as there was no gas or electric in the early days.

THE FRIENDLY SOCIETY

The Friendly Society has always been a very strong organisation here in the village and Club Day was one of the great days of the year, and still is! It was always held on Trinity Monday and the dinner was held in a marquee in the Old Recreation Field opposite Stoneleigh House.

Members would always march from the Chairman's house behind a brass band. I can remember marching from Major Portal's house, Lodge Hill House. After a drink or two, we would march up to the Red Lion in Free Hill, have another drink or two and then stagger down to the Railway Inn for a couple more. After that all members were expected to attend the Church Service. I recall that the singing was very loud and the men would often disappear to attend to a call of nature!

SPORT

Rev. Barnes was a very keen sportsman and during the winter, when the Moors and lowlands were nearly always flooded (which was before the modern drainage schemes), he liked rowing his boat. He would allow people to use his tennis courts at the Old Rectory and he liked playing cricket when Westbury had a cricket team

After the war, Westbury had a very successful football team and won many of the knockout and league cups. They started playing at Furlong Farm, Holybrook but after a time found the field was unsuitable so moved to Croft Farm and played in a field in front of Roughmoor House which is still referred to as the old football field.

ENTERTAINMENT

In the war years there was the Westbury Spotlights and Concert Party who sometimes entertained us. There was a dance almost every Friday night in the Hall with Billy Lukins and his band. Sometimes, a social, as it was called, was held in the Village Hall.

When the bombing was very bad in London, some evacuees had their lessons in the Hall. There was a Debating Society under Mr. Baxter and the Home Guard held their drill in the hall 2 nights per week. The village had 2 pubs until 1969, the Red Lion in Free Hill kept by the Hole family and the Railway Hotel on the main road kept by Mrs. Dalwood and Mr. David.

The village now has Westbury Footlights, Mothers Union, W.I., Tea and Toys, Friendly Society, Friends of Westbury Church, Church Choir, the Robert Glanville Playing Field, and School PTA. There are still many things for people to do and take part in if they so desire.

COMMERCIAL

In 1937 in the village the following were available:

Mr. Fisher	Cycle shop on Wells Road
Mr. G. Dennis	General and Hardware Store and sale of petrol on Wells Road (opposite the Pub now The Old Stores)
Mr. Griffins	Butchers shop (next to the Railway Pub)
Mr. and Mrs. Hodges	Newsagents in Duck Lane

Stan Weeks	Small cycle accessory shop near Furlong Farm, Hollybro
Charlie Barnard	An Abattoir and butchers shop in the Square, Phoenix
Cot	
	Cottage
Granny Wickham	Sweet shop at the Rocks, in the Square
Arthur Classey	Post Office and Stores at Cross House, Duck Lane
Charles Curtis	General Store
Fred Holway	Bakery in Crow Lane at Redways
Mr and Mrs Bert Horlock	Grocery and Drapers Store, The Square,
Mr. C. Dennis	Builders, Wheelwrights, Undertakers
Mr. Hooper	Greengrocers (junction of Wells Rd and Station Rd)

The village was also well catered for with door to door sales of green groceries and fresh fish delivered by pony cart by John Classey (Moor View) and Mr. Cove (Nut Tree Cottage).

ST. LAWRENCE'S CHURCH

Originally, as well as St. Lawrence's Church, the village had a Chapel at Perch Hill which was always well attended. Rev. Barnes, his wife and 2 daughters, together with others were the dominant people in the church. Rev. Barnes died on Christmas morning in 1943 whilst preparing for the morning service. I remember it as if it were yesterday. He was the vicar here for 52 years. Following him was Cannon Wigman, Rev. Jones, Rev. Smith, Rev. Wynes and now Rev. Macpherson. I had served 15 years as Church Warden under Rev. Smith and Wynes, been on the PCC for 22 years and as a choir member for 25 years. The Church still stands today as a witness to all those people who through the years have been raised up to serve God here and to the calling of Christ and is so important, for many different reasons, to so many.

THE WAR YEARS AND HOMEGUARD

In 1940, the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) was formed which later became the Home Guard. This consisted of older men, many of whom had served in World war 1, and younger men who had not yet been called up or were in a reserved occupation. In the beginning, they had virtually no arms or ammunition except for a few rifles and shot guns. We were so unprepared for war that we carried out drill with picks and broom handles. Westbury's guard post was in a field at the end of the lane by the Chapel overlooking Hollybrook. Looking back at those years we lived in momentous times although, as a teenager myself, didn't realise it at the time. I was 16 when I joined the Home Guard.

I remember at that time, the Vicar of Easton, Rev. Buckingham, was the Sergeant in charge of Westbury and Easton Home Guard. This did not go down very well with the old soldiers of Westbury! We had parades and one drill in the New Hall on Sunday mornings and two evenings in the week. Our Guard Post was in a field in Perch Hill by the Chapel overlooking Hollybrook and 6 to 8 men were on guard duty every night. They took turns doing a 2 hour stint during the night. My night duty was a Thursday and our Corporal, Mr. Russel who kept the Post Office at that time, used to say "It's quiet tonight lads let's all hang about until dark and then turn in. The hut contained bunks and being the youngster I was told to sleep in the top bunk. Nearly all the men smoked pipes so you can imagine the smoke drifted upwards to me. It used to take me a week to recover before it started all over again!

One night when I was on duty, there was a certain Jim Shepperd in out patrol,

whom we called Scorcher. Jim worked at the paper mill and he was a wonderful character who loved having fun. He looked a bit like Norman Wisdom and sometimes wore his cloth cap back to front. He liked to play the spoons and would entertain us. On this particular night Scorcher was outside the hut when it was starting to get dark, about 11.30 p.m. in the summer. Sergeant Rev. Buckingham thought he would see what was happening and check up on us to make sure we were on duty. Scorcher spotted him in the twilight coming up across the field and when he was near enough he shouted out "Halt" 'afore I shoot thee with this 'ere broom handle!!"

Because of the disgruntled Westbury men and Rev. Buckingham leaving to join the regular Army, Lt. Col. Macdonald, the commanding officer of the Wells 9th Battalion, called a parade outside the New Hall. He appointed a man from Wookey Hole, Sgt. Arthur Packer, to take command of Westbury and Easton – you can imagine how the Westbury men liked that! They grumbled amongst themselves and decided that they should have a meeting about this. The commanding officer remarked that no force of any kind has ever been run by meetings and he said "I shall command". After this we became a very good section and became well drilled and well equipped.

In 1940 there was a Searchlight manned by a squad of soldiers of the Gloucestershire Regiment situated at the end of Yetmead Lane just off Roughmoor Lane. At midnight during air raids, they used to try and pick up the enemy aircraft as they bombed Bristol but they had no proper guns so couldn't really do much. The sad part was that when Hitler invaded Norway, these poor men were sent out from this quiet rural village to join the force that tried to retake Narvich which is where we lost so many brave men. Our forces were sadly beaten and these poor men all lost their lives which unfortunately is the reality of war. As well as the Home Guard, the village also had Special Police, ARPS, a Red Cross Nursing section and auxiliary Fire Service.

In 1940 the Auxiliary Army unit was set up. This was a secret organisation trained in the use of explosives and sabotage to work in underground resistance behind enemy lines, which would rise up as resistance fighters and take on the Germans if they ever crossed the channel. In 1941, some of us younger ones from our Home Guard were asked to become part of this unit and I was one of them, along with Bill Tyley and Francis Stott also from Westbury. We wore our Home guard uniform with 203 Som. Flashes

I was part of the 9th Wells Cell. I was in an underground bunker (approx 15ft down) situated in a forest on the Mendip Hills at Green Ore. The landowner was also sworn to secrecy and we came only at night. Our bunker had a hidden trap door – you would never spot the place once it was shut. We received secret training in guerilla warfare from all branches of the Army . We were trained in silent killing and booby traps and in our bunker we had stockpiles of knives, explosives, revolvers and tommy guns as well as bunk beds in our hideout. We studied local targets which we might one day have to destroy or sabotage. There were also 2 fall-back bunkers in case the main one was found. We never knew where any of the other Cells were situated – we were on our own. We were ready to be the secret army. We knew our own ground and would have made life hard for the Germans and taken a few of them down with us.

Whilst training, we would disappear for weekends and I remember my mother asking me where I was going all the time and what was I doing. I couldn't tell her because

if the Germans had got hold of her they could have tortured her. I found it very hard to keep thinking up different excuses! It wasn't until 1945 before I finally told her.

There was no glory for us, no medals. It was so frustrating. I was 17 and all my mates were in uniform and rushing off to the Army and RAF and impressing all the girls. I was actually accepted as RAF aircrew but then they sent me back here instead of letting me join – we were needed more where we were. I was highly trained and armed to the teeth but I still had to pretend I was just a plain old farm lad with a Home Guard uniform. I served in the secret army from 1st April 1941 to 31st December 1944 when we were ordered to stand down. I still have the programme dated 15th December 1944 when a "Stand down" dinner was held in Bekynton Cafe, Wells.

I have a letter written from the Colonel Commander of Auxiliary Units in 1944 and it says "I realise what joining this Auxiliary Unit has meant to you; so do the officers under my command. You were invited to do a job which would require more skill and coolness, more hard work and greater danger than was demanded of any other volunteer organisation. Unfortunately, in view of the fact that your life depended on secrecy, no public recognition will be possible." I was eventually awarded my Defence Medal in 1997.

I think our country was very united at that time. When you are in that kind of situation, and at night with bombs falling on Bristol and Weston Super Mare and around about here, you view one another with new eyes. The fellowship is intense, almost humbling, and when morning comes it is good to be alive.

Memory is the friend of older people,
It enables us to recall times of long ago,
Now looking to the future,
We look back with gratitude,
Look up with confidence,
Look forward with faith,
All will be well.

John Sealy

Post Script from Andrew and Jane Sealy

During the Coronavirus epidemic, starting in March 2020, and while in "lock down" we have had a chance to go through Dad's things. These memories were written down in dribs and drabs on different pieces of scrap paper so we thought we would collate them into a booklet. Dad was very fond of this village of Westbury-sub-Mendip and we have many scrapbooks of cuttings, pictures etc. he has collected. He started to research his Family Tree, which again we are piecing together and will continue with.

He saw the good in everyone and had a deep faith which never faltered whatever situation came along.

We know that if he had been here with us, he would be so proud that we still have that caring community, looking out for one another in these unprecedented times. We hope his words will enable you to visualise what our Village looked like many years ago. A lot of things have changed but the community spirit is still as strong as it was then.

CROWDFUNDING

The museum would like to thank everyone who donated in our emergency Crowdfunder campaign during the lockdown. To date we have raised £9,000 online from 170 supporters, with additional donations by cheque which are not reflected in this total. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of individuals and organisations, both locally and from further afield. Your contributions have been instrumental in getting us through this challenging time.

The kind comments that have been left on the Crowdfunder page show how much the museum is valued and have been a real boost to volunteers and staff. They are available to read on our website at: www.wellsmuseum.org.uk/crowdfunder. Although the campaign has ended, the Crowdfunder page is still open for donations, so please continue to spread the word. Donations can also be made by cheque or in the museum itself when we open on Saturdays. We look forward to welcoming you back to this special place.

www.crowdfunder.co.uk/support-wells-museum