

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2011

Colwall Village Society
Revealing Our Heritage

GOING WITH THE FLOW; How Colwall Stream Reaches The River by Rebecca Roseff

Running along the edge of our garden in Colwall is a small stream, which though low in summer never actually runs dry. This is surprising as its source, a marshy area on the west side of the Malverns, is hardly half a mile away, you wouldn't think there would be enough rain in that small amount of ground to keep it going throughout the year, but there is. I have always been intrigued by this stream because it takes what seems to me a contrary route. Rejecting the direction of all other streams in Herefordshire that go south, towards the Wye, this stream takes the opposite direction; north and into Worcestershire. To do this it has to make its way across the low lying area between Colwall and Mathon that geologists say had once been a glacial lake and then somehow find a gap through the steep hills around Suckley. Once past these its way is clear and it continues east along lower ground to the Teme five miles west of Worcester.

I promised myself I would walk its whole distance one day, to see what fields and woods it passed, what mills it had powered and houses serviced along its 15 mile course to the end. So one fine May morning I set out with my walking companion, equipped with water and sandwiches, to follow its route. We left the house just after eight allowing ourselves a whole day to complete the task. I had calculated we could do it, there were footpaths all the way that followed, crossed and re-crossed our stream and, if we timed it right, we could catch the 417 bus back to Ledbury and from there the train home to Colwall.

For the first part of the route we were on familiar territory; we had often walked it, but it still never fails to interest. Near our house the stream is little more than a ditch and goes as it should, south, but unlike a ditch the water flows fast, it is clearly coming from and going somewhere. Very soon though, in the middle of Colwall, it takes its first perverse turn, a right hand bend to the right. It whooshes under the road at the frequent flooding spot and appropriately named Brook House and then onwards towards its first mill, Upper Mill, which though it no longer grinds corn, is still a house. By now the stream is already in a deep cutting that needs a bridge to cross it, but the



Beanhouse Mill is a late 19th century watermill and one of the last to be built in Herefordshire. It is also known as Archer's Mill, after one of the early millers. The mill was last used for milling in the 1960's or 70's.

water level is low, indeed you would scarcely get your ankles wet if you struggled down the banks to wade through. We wondered for the first of many times that day how this little stream had the energy to power Upper Mill and the many other mills we passed, but it must have. Indeed only 500m away we found a mill stone wedged into the bank of a dry leat, presumably all that remained of the long disappeared Lower Mill. It was here we noticed another peculiar thing, the stream got smaller. It had turned into a flowing ditch again. Where had all the water gone? Below ground or diverted to the sewage works 300m away, or to another mill somewhere else at some distant time in the past, we could only guess. It is at the third mill by Colwall Church, that the stream, though still no more than a flowing ditch gains a name, the

Cradley Brook and takes another decisive turn directly north on its way to the impressive Colwall Mill. This mill has a pond beside it to store the water showing it was a more serious affair than the upstream mills, for, when it was in use; it had reserve water to ensure against low flows.

After this mill the stream continues north along a now wide, shallow bed through quiet flat country where beef cattle graze in big fields, it has reached the glacial lake territory, but here it completely disappears, into a complex of ponds and mounds, the remains of a gravel quarry. The gravel derived not from this little Cradley Brook but from the glacier that sat upon the land half a million years ago. Looking at the grassed over mounds and bush-obscured pits we reckoned the quarry had been abandoned for about 20 years. It had destroyed the stream, but, in nearby fields, we found it again, in its old stream bed, continuing as though nothing has happened at all. From here it flows through the middle of Mathon and Cradley. For sure these villages owe their very existence to the brook. The lord of the manor would have placed his settlement around its safe banks way back in the early Anglo-Saxon period after that mysterious time when the Romans had left and the country went wild again. He chose this spot, utilizing the grazing, hay meadows and free water to provide his villagers with sustenance and power.

So far we had seen no-one, we passed only through fields with damsel flies dancing, but at Cradley we met the busy Worcester-Hereford road where motorists unknowingly whiz over the Brook in a sharp dip and bend across a bridge. We stopped at the pub by the bridge for coffee and home made cake, perfect timing, it was 11 o'clock. Continuing onwards across the road, we quickly left the noise of traffic and followed the stream north through orchards and grazing fields. After one mile we reached a path that countless villagers had trod before us, over the brook to Beanhouse Mill, a magnificent 18th century building with attached medieval house set in a wide meadow. This mill is currently being renovated and restored to use and was one of the highlights of the walk, made all the better for being so unexpected. Passing it we continued our way above the river through Bearswood Common and down again to yet another mysterious Tudor mill that lay at the end of a lane, closed to traffic but open for pedestrians to continue, closely following the brook on steep wooded cliffs into Worcestershire to Suckley. Here we crossed a quieter road; bought ice creams from the Post Office and ate sandwiches by the stream side.

After Suckley the stream sharply changes direction for the final time turning to the east and led us into what was probably the prettiest part of the whole walk. The path sometimes teeters on the edge of steep cliffs and sometimes goes so close to the water you have to hold onto branches to stop falling in. We went past medieval houses, through meadows and woods and across a long wooden bridge into Knapp Meadow and Peppermill Wood Nature Reserves. As we opened the gate to the reserve a family of thrushes flew over the anthills of the meadow while blue tits chased each other in and out of the ruined farm on its edge. Two glossy black Dexter cattle could hardly keep up with the grass in the meadow and had left orchids and bluebells behind as they moved off munching. Leaving the meadow the path led into a lime woodland whose straight closely packed trunks blocked out the sky and led the eye upwards so we felt we were walking through a vast cathedral. Below we heard the river and another time we will look for the remains of the paper mill which must be down there somewhere. Emerging from the wood we crossed the river yet again which by now was just that, small yes, but a river nevertheless rushing along on a stony bed. The way continued through meadows, and along an exceptionally steep cliff with the river almost vertically below us.

We knew we must be getting near the end but we didn't actually see the magnificent brick-built Leigh Manor House and Tithe Barn still less the Teme which flows invisibly below the fields, until we had almost reached them. Here was our journey's end where the stream, now called the Leigh Brook, joins the Teme about 100m from the Tithe Barn. Unspectacularly it flows quietly into the bigger river, if you didn't know it was there you would certainly miss it. We lent over the bank and made sure we saw it flowing into the Teme.

We had finished the journey but still had to get home. Between Leigh Church and the river is a disused railway line which follows the course of the Teme to Worcester. We followed this through woodland for about a mile as far as a footpath which took us out to the A4103 at Bransford. We reached here at 4.40 and our bus was due at 5.05. The road is busy so we sat on a bench at Bransford Golf Club and ate the last of our provisions, taking up bus catching position with five minutes to spare. At exactly 5.05 the 417 whizzed round the corner and drew to a halt as we hailed it down. We were so grateful that it was real and had stopped that it seemed churlish to complain to the driver about his loud radio. Instead we joined the five other passengers huddled at the back as far from the noise as they could get. The bus zoomed us to Ledbury station where we caught a train to Colwall arriving home at 6.00, 10 hours after we had set out on the journey.

Notes: Maps Explorer 190 and 204. Food and drink at pub at Stifford's Bridge 11 a.m. till late and Suckley Post Office and tea shop 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Bus and train times from www.travelinmidlands.co.uk. Distance about 12 miles. Easy going. If you do this walk you may want to check on the rights of way status of the railway line.

The Bright Family In Colwall by Elizabeth Lloyd

Henry Bright (1562-1626) of Broadwas, who was Master of King's School Worcester and also a canon of the Cathedral, bought in 1600, from the Walwyn family, the Brockbury estate in Colwall. His second wife was a Berkley of Spetchley. They had 3 daughters and a son Robert (1617-1665). Robert was a staunch supporter of the Parliamentary faction but his wife's family, the Cresset of Shropshire, were staunch Cavaliers! (Her father was killed at the battle of Bridgnorth.) She died in 1646, having had 5 children. He then married Frances Walwyn (of Ye Hoar or The Hoe) and had 8 more children. In 1657 he applied for a Grant of Arms from the College of Arms, which are rumoured to have been granted, though no record of this exists as all such honours granted during the Commonwealth were rescinded by Charles II after the Restoration. Robert Bright II (1642- ?) inherited the Brockbury property. He married a Sarah Mason from Pixley. He also had rebellious inclinations and in 1683 he transferred all his property to his son Robert III (1664-1749). The inference is that he had been implicated in the Rye House Plot to assassinate Charles II and his brother James Duke of York and thus perpetuate a Protestant succession to the throne. Robert fled to Staffordshire and later married Sarah Sykes. He changed his name to Sykes. Robert I and his second wife had a son Thomas who inherited his mother's property, Ye Hoar. He had a son, also Thomas, to whom there is a memorial in Colwall Church. Thomas II had no sons and so Ye Hoar was inherited by his daughter who married a Peter Harcourt (from Colwall). Robert I and Frances also had a son John who went to fight for Monmouth at Sedgemore. He was taken prisoner there and tried before Judge Jefferies, and sentenced to be transported to the West Indies. It is not thought that the sentence was ever carried out. Family legend has it that his wife rode pillion to London to intercede with the King and get him pardoned.

Robert III (1664-1749) married Joyce Cliffe from Mathon as her second husband and they had 8 children. Robert had been educated at a University and was described as a barrister, but never practiced. He lived all his life at or near Brockbury and after Joyce died in 1718, he went to live with his daughter at The Hoar, he made the Brockbury property over to his son Henry (1692-1726). He then made further property over to Henry in 1722. Henry Bright married Mary Hill of Wellington in Herefordshire in 1713. They had 5 sons and 1 daughter. Unfortunately Henry died in 1726 aged 33. Mary had a very difficult time with so many sons to launch in the world and very little money. Robert the eldest son was apprenticed to a Bristol merchant, although for a time he may have studied law. Henry the second son was apprenticed to a partnership in Bristol, Meyler and Hall, and Allen the 4th son to a firm of pewterers. Robert claimed his inheritance at Brockbury married Dorothy Lowbridge of Worcester and proceeded to spend much money on improving Brockbury where he laid out large gardens.



Brockbury Hall, Colwall

Robert's life was a disaster, he was one of the big spenders always sure that new ventures would come good. He was nearly bankrupt several times, his brother Henry tried to sort him out, but eventually in 1756 he fled from his debts to the West Indies. The ship he was to catch was held up in Bristol so he caught another from Holyhead to Cork where his brother William was trading as a ship's provisioner and waited there until he was able to board his original ship which had his possessions on it. This ship, having set sail was boarded by French pirates (the 7 years war was raging) and Robert was taken prisoner. He was released after 3 days but he lost all his possessions including his law books (he was intending to practice law in Jamaica). He eventually got to Jamaica and only stayed there about a year, longing to be back in England and 'eating Herefordshire beef and drinking cider within sight of the Malvern Hills'. However he caught a fever and after a few weeks died.

Henry, Robert's brother had to a large extent cleared up the mess that he had left behind, certainly settling off his debts and making sure that Brockbury stayed in the family. He married Sarah Meyler, the daughter of the head of the family firm of Meylers, they had a son Richard who went into partnership with Robert's son Lowbridge. Henry had taken Lowbridge to live with his family in Bristol to be educated and in turn saw that he was set up as a merchant in Bristol. Allen had bought the Castlemorton property from Robert's estate but later sold it on to Henry. Lowbridge never lived at Brockbury, although he was proud of his Colwall property and built himself a small house in what is now Malvern Wells, called Knoll Lodge. Mary, after Robert inherited Brockbury went to live at Flapgate, she had been left the income from the Cummins after her husband died, and she remained a widow until her death over 50 years later, writing endless letters to all and sundry and her son Henry in Bristol with money worries, business worries and local gossip.

To be Continued...

Two Plaques In Six Weeks!

On 10th August 2011, a plaque was unveiled at Colwall Cricket Club pavilion in honour of Elizabeth "Betty" Snowball, an English Test Cricketer who for 50 years held the record individual score in Women's Test Cricket. Betty scored 189 in 222 minutes against New Zealand in 1935. She was a prolific opening bat and outstanding wicket keeper who played for England from 1934 to 1949. Betty was an exceptional sportswoman who also played lacrosse and squash at international level. At the end of her cricketing career, she came to live in Colwall having been invited by Michael Singleton (a Worcestershire and Colwall cricketer), then headmaster of The Elms School, to teach maths and, of course, cricket. Betty died in Colwall in 1988, aged 80, and is still well remembered in the village.

The plaque was unveiled by Sue Redfern, National Development Manager for Cricket in England and Wales.



Sue Redfern and Michael Milne by the Plaque

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On September 24th 2011 the Village Society had another plaque unveiled, this time in memory of Bruce Bairnsfather.



Mike Warby and our Chairman by the Plaque

Bairnsfather was a celebrated WWI and WW2 cartoonist. He fought with distinction in WWI at Ypres, only to be wounded and diagnosed as suffering from shellshock. He subsequently created the famous character 'Old Bill' whose humour appealed to the public at large and to members of the armed forces in particular. Bruce lived in Colwall at Kempsey Cottage (which he renamed Dial Cottage - now called Little Orchard) from 1951 to 1954 and visited Colwall frequently up to his death. He enjoyed the atmosphere of the Colwall British Legion and sketched cartoons on its bar doors, which have since been framed. The British Legion has also preserved a collection of Bairnsfather memorabilia.

The plaque was unveiled by Mark Warby, an avid Bairnsfather fan, who read a letter from Bruce Bairnsfather's

daughter, Barbara Littlejohn, who said how thrilled she was that his memory was still being kept alive and celebrated in Colwall where he lived and painted until ill health meant he had to move away.

Future Talks

NOTE CHANGE OF DATE!!

30th January 2012:

David Lovelace: 'The Battle of Colwall Park'

23rd April 2012 [AGM]:

Duncan James: 'Some Old Properties in Colwall'
Amongst those covered may be: Peatty's Cottage, Maple House, Winterslow and Upper House Farm.

29th October 2012:

Tim Bridges: 'Coddington Church'

28th January 2013:

Mark Archer: 'The Restoration of Perrycroft'

Finally ...

My thanks to our contributors. Articles on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome.

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Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are CONTRIBUTIONS!

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