

# October 2024 Newsletter

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## Some Dates for Your Diary

In October we are featuring some of the history of one of Colwall's famous former residents – the nationally acclaimed artist Dame Laura Knight, R.A.

On **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October** between 10.00 a.m. and 12.00 p.m. we will be hosting a display about **Laura Knight and her associations with Colwall**. The venue is Colwall Library.

Two days later, on **Monday 21<sup>st</sup> October**, local historian - Heather Whatley of the Dame Laura Knight Society - will be giving a talk about **Laura Knight**. Heather is an expert on Laura's life in this area and is the author of the book *Laura Knight in the Malverns*. The venue is Colwall Village Hall and doors will open at 7.00 p.m. with the talk starting at 7.30 p.m.

## Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025: A Munitionette's View

Angela Williams from Rotherwas Together will be talking about the dangers, the dramas and the day-to-day routine at Rotherwas Royal Ordnance Factory in WWI and WW2, where several people from Colwall worked. Please note that this is an extra talk not shown on the Colwall Village Society Member's Card.

## Coals to Colwall by Andy Ball and Jean Giess

Before the railway came to Colwall in 1861 coal would have been expensive to transport to the village. It was a fuel that only the rich could afford, and most households would have relied upon wood for space heating, production of hot water and for cooking.

During the early years of the industrial revolution, it was the canal networks that were used to transport coal in bulk quantities. Nearby, in Ledbury as part of the proposed Hereford and Gloucester canal, started in the early 1790s, the canal had reached within one mile of Ledbury, from Gloucester via Newent, by 1798. However, the canal company then ran out of money, and it was not until 1832 that the canal was extended into the town to serve the Ledbury gas works. The gas works were a major user of coal, and their custom helped bring temporary financial relief to the struggling canal company and enabled the businesses and residents of Ledbury to buy cheap coal.

The people of Colwall had to wait for the village railway station to open before coal became a more affordable commodity. The railway engineer Stephen Ballard ran a train carrying 50 tons of coal for the hundred or so cottages in the parish as part of the celebrations of the arrival of the railway to Colwall in August 1861. This foretold the economic importance that the railway would subsequently bring over the next 100-year period.

Once Colwall railway station opened to regular traffic, later in 1861, amongst those who immediately took advantage of the business opportunity of supplying coal in both Ledbury and Colwall was John Meates (recorded as Meats in some records). He was born in 1817 in Wellington, Herefordshire. On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1844 he married Ann Tempest in Duffield, Derbyshire and by 1851 the family were tenant farmers at Barton Farm in Colwall. The couple had eight children, all born between 1845 and 1858. From signage visible on a 1960s photograph of the former Meates premises at Ledbury railway station (taken by D J Norton, Ledbury) it seems that the coal business was established there in 1861.



The Ledbury area listings in *Slaters Directory of Glos, Herefs, Mon, Shrops & Wales*, published in 1868, recorded several coal merchants and dealers in Colwall. Amongst these were 'Williams John, Colwall' and 'Meats, John, Railway stations, Ledbury & Colwall – James Greenway, agent.' Another listing gave a clue to where at least some of the coal originated from - 'South Wales Coal Co. Railway Wharf and Colwall & Ashperton – William Williams, agent, Ledbury.' In Colwall the main coal depots would most likely have been at the railway station.

John Meates' tenure of his business did not last long. He drafted a will in October 1877, and he died on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1878. His will recorded his occupation as a coal merchant, and he left his coal business to two of his sons - Henry Meates (b. 1852) and Thomas Tempest Meates (b. 1854). The bequest included '*...all stock, Book debts, house and coal at Ledbury...*' Separate provision was made for his wife and other children.

In the *Colwall Collection* penned by Stephen Ballard III mention is made that Stephen Ballard I sold land in Stone Drive to Henry Meates who built a grand house there called 'The Haven'. That now exists as two dwellings under the names of 'Queenswood House' and 'Little Queenswood'. Nearby, another property initially called 'Burley', but later renamed 'Burleigh', first appeared on a map of Colwall in 1886. That property was probably built by the company, or Henry Meates. The date of all of this is slightly unclear but in the 1881 national census the widow Ann Meates was living at 'The Court', Colwall together with Henry and Thomas Tempest, both listed as 'Coal Merchants'. In 1897 Henry Meates was listed on the Electoral Register as living at 'The Haven'.

In December 1897, for some unknown reason, according to a notice in the *Gloucestershire Echo* the business partnership ceased. '*Partnerships dissolved— H. and T. Meates, trading as John Meates and Sons, at Colwall and Ledbury, Hereford, and Newent, Gloucester, as coal and salt merchants and dealers in building materials.*'

Shortly afterwards, in 1898, Thomas Tempest Meates married Mary Sandford in Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A. At the time he was living at 'The Haven' with his occupation recorded as a retired coal merchant. Perhaps he was a victim of ill health as he died a few years later on 15 May 1901. He had a service and burial at St. James the Great church in Colwall. The mourners included many of the local dignitaries of the time including Fred, Stephen and Ernest Ballard and members of the Pedlingham family. The service was officiated by the Rev. G. Custance and '*the bearers, who were employees, were Messrs. G. Johns, J. Banfield, Moss, Sadler, C. Coulson, H. Barnett, and G. Williams.*' Note the name 'Sadler, of which more follows on later.

At around the turn of the century Henry Meates was a prominent member of Colwall society and a report in the *Hereford Times* from Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 1899 records how he had been recently re-elected to both the Rural District and Parish Councils. Previously in 1895 in his role as a parish councillor he wrote a report on the state of the numerous Colwall charities. This included reference to the Lowbridge Bright Charity and the Elizabeth Rosetta Peyton Coal Charity, both of which aimed to relieve fuel poverty by the distribution of coal. Income from the former '*was directed to be laid out in coals, to be distributed among the honest and industrious labouring poor natives of the parishes of Colwall and Coddington, not receiving parish relief, as the trustees should think fit and judge proper*' whilst that from the latter were to '*be applied annually, in the month of November or December, by the Rector and Churchwardens of the said parish, in providing and distributing good coals to ten of the most poor and infirm cottagers in the said parish.*'

As well as coal being used for domestic purposes other coal customers around this time were the Colwall Brick and Tile Works and the Colwall Gas Company Limited of which, perhaps opportunistically, Henry Meates was one of the first directors.

An article from the *Cheltenham Chronicle* in 1908 helps illustrate how the company operated from different coal depots based at various locations. John Meates & Sons Ltd brought a debtor case against Charles Sadler, their former agent at the Newent depot. In 1885 he had entered into an agreement with Messrs. Meates & Sons Ltd to sell coals, slates, lime, and tiles, the firm paying him wages of 10 shillings per week, with a commission of 1 shilling per ton on goods sold by them at Newent Station. In September 1905, the 10 shillings a week was cut down to 6 shillings as trade slackened off due to a general drop in business and Sadler's shortcomings as an agent.

Shortly afterwards John Meates and Sons underwent business restructuring as recorded in an article in the *Gloucestershire Citizen* dated Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1910. *'Local Company. JOHN MEATES AND SONS, LTD. This company has just been registered with a capital of £7,500 in £1 shares (2,500 pref), to carry on the business of coal, coke, breeze, lime, oil, fodder, timber, and builders' merchants, colliery proprietors, etc., to acquire the business formerly carried on at Ledbury, Colwall, Ashperton, Herefordshire, and at Newent, Glos., as John Meates and Sons, and until recently by H. Meates. The subscribers are H. Meates, Ledbury, director 1 pref., A. G. T. Banks, Ledbury, agent 1 ord. Private company. The number of directors is not to be less than two nor more than four. The first are H. Meates (chairman and permanent director, special qualification 1,000 shares) and R. Down (permanent, subject to holding any of the first issue of debentures). Qualification £5. Remuneration one guineas each per meeting attended.'*

By 1911 Henry Meates and his family had moved to Bournemouth, with his occupation described as 'Private means'. He died in Cheltenham in 1934. A series of prominent adverts in *Tilley's Ledbury Almanack* during the 1930s confirm that the firm continued to trade with retail depots at Colwall, Ledbury, Ashperton, Withington, Dymock and Newent railway stations but it's likely that the Meates family were no longer directly involved. The company dealt in a wide variety of bulk goods including not only coal and coke but also salt, lime, tile, glazed pipe, cement, brick and peat moss litter. The 1932 *Tilley's Ledbury Almanack* entry includes contact details for P.O. Orders and Telegrams as 'Meates, Ledbury' or 'Meates, Colwall'.

As late as the early 1970s John Meates & Sons Ltd were still placing newspaper adverts as Coal, Coke and Anthracite merchants at number 1 Bye Street, Ledbury and High Street, Newent. The railway station depots would have disappeared with the closure of former stations at Ashperton, Withington, Dymock and Newent but it's not currently known precisely when the Colwall and Ledbury railway depots closed.

As a point of interest, it is still possible to get coal delivered to Colwall. A Google internet search reveals that Charlton Whitehouse Fuels Limited offer to supply fuel to the Ledbury area from their coal yard base in Oldbury, West Midlands. Their website proudly states that the coal comes from Columbia. How times have changed...!

Although coal is now little used, an affordable source of energy for heating and cooking is of ongoing importance. The direct successor of the Lowbridge Bright Charity and Elizabeth Rosetta Peyton Coal Charity mentioned above is the present day Colwall Parish Charity, that discreetly helps those in need in the parishes of Colwall and Coddington, continuing the support that goes back centuries. It achieves this by issuing supermarket vouchers and, with the help of *Provisions of Colwall*, energy top-ups.

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is the Rector of Colwall and Coddington, The Revd. Preb. Melanie Horton.

During the months of October through to December this year, the Colwall Parish Charity has received an offer from a local, private donor of "matched funding", up to the value of £1,000. Any new donations, up to a limit of £1,000, made to the Charity during this period will effectively be doubled.

You can contribute by contacting the Charity by email at [thecolwallparishcharity@gmail.com](mailto:thecolwallparishcharity@gmail.com). They will be pleased to hear from you and help you with your donation.

## Colwall 'Home Front' Project

The Colwall Village Society is working on a project to record the lives of people living in Colwall during the Second World War. The project will produce a booklet about the Home Front and culminate with an event in the Village Hall on Saturday 17th May 2025.

We would welcome as many people in the village to be involved in the project as possible. Do you have memories of being a child in Colwall during the war? Or did your parents tell you stories of that time? Do you have any photos of Colwall in the 1930s or 40s? Or would you like to help us look through the records of the time?

We are also looking for someone who would be interested in helping us design an eye-catching poster that we can put up around the village. If you feel that you could help in any way, please contact Liz Hill



## The Hill Institute during the Second World War by Liz Hill

The Hill Institute was housed in the lower part of the building which used to be the Church of the Good Shepherd in Upper Colwall. The minutes of the Hill Institute from 1910 – 1961 are held in the Village Society Archives. They give an insight into the Village Life during the Second World War. The Institute stayed open for most of the war period but closed for 6 months in April 1942.

In November 1943 the Institute was used by:

Monday 7pm – 8pm: Cubs

8pm – 10pm: Men's Club (Entrance 3d, Billiard Table 1/- per hour)

Tuesday Night: Home Guard

Wednesday Night: Boy's Club (hire 2/6)

Thursday 7pm – 10 pm: Men's Club

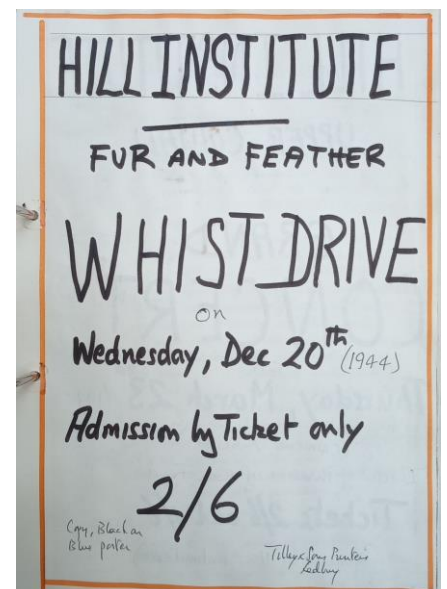
Friday Night: Social Club (hire 5/- exclusive of fires)

Saturday 7pm – 10 pm: Men's Club



In addition to the regular events, fund raising social events were also held. On September the 12<sup>th</sup> the minutes record: *'It was decided to commence again the 6d Whist Drives on Wednesday Dec 10<sup>th</sup>. Also that we hold a Fur and Feathered Whist Drive on Wed Dec 18<sup>th</sup> at a charge of 1/6.'*

The phrase "Fur and Feathered" at first conjures up images of ladies wearing their best furs with a feather boa slung around their shoulders, but it turns out that "Fur and Feather Whist Drives" were a common occurrence across the country especially around Christmas time. The prizes would include rabbits and chickens.



The Institute continued having Christmas Fur and Feather Whist Drives as shown in this 1944 poster. Does anyone in the society have memories of such Whist Drives continuing into the 50s?

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