

# BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER NO. 5 JULY 2021

### Up-coming events

There being no scheduled BHS talk for July this Newsletter contains an essay on the finding and provenance of the Axehead found in Bradwell by Edwin Hall. In addition Colin and Derek Biggin have added more information about Mrs Sissons reported in the previous Newsletter. The BHS is also asking for volunteers to help with the setting up and staffing of its tent from 10.00 am on Carnival Day Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> July. There is also an invitation from Stoney Middleton to attend a plaque unveiling followed by a guided walk around the village.

### Correspondence

Colin and Derek Biggin have reported that indeed Mrs Edith Helen Sissons did live in Oswald House on the Hills. The house was bought by Dr Lafferty who in turn sold it to Colin and Derek's father Arthur.

### The Bradwell Axehead

By Christine Skerrow (née Hall)

A Neolithic Axehead lay in marshy ground near Bradwell Brook for 5-6000 years, until it was found by my grandfather, Edwin Hall. Like many men of his age in Bradwell, his formal education in the village school ended early, but his skills and interests ranged far and wide. As old technology gave way to new in the early years of the twentieth century, Edwin turned the family smithy at Hall's corner into a motor engineering business, built his own car and radios, ground lenses and mirrors for an astronomical telescope, bought and used a microscope, and collected an impressive array of well-thumbed books on science and archaeology.

He often took solitary walks looking for artefacts, and I can still hear his distinctive way of saying this word: art-te-fact! Knowing that I shared his enthusiasms, Granddad entrusted the axe to me in the 1960s and I've kept it ever since, even taking it to America for four years, as a precious link to very deep roots!

The axe is small, about 9cm long, and considering its age is in remarkably good condition. It is made of a dark greenish-grey volcanic greenstone, with bands of lighter mottling and some rust-coloured streaks. Factual description and photographs can't convey the tactile qualities of this beautifully worked piece of stone - in the hand it feels heavy, smooth and warm, and it's a delight to handle.

Surprisingly, the most likely origin of the axe is not Derbyshire but Cumbria, where such axes were produced in large numbers at a 'factory' in a spectacular location on Langdale Pike. Polished greenstone axes from Langdale are found throughout Britain but were especially popular in Lincolnshire and the East Midlands. They were roughed out first by knapping, then laboriously smoothed and polished by grinding against harder rock. It's been estimated that the polishing process, which wasn't essential to the production of a functional tool, would have taken nearly 100 hours.

There are intriguing parallels between the Bradwell axe and polished greenstone axes found elsewhere. Many are found in wetlands, like the marshy ground by the Brook. And some, like the Bradwell axe, have lost a large flake, in a way which is not typical of ordinary wear and tear.

Archaeologists<sup>†</sup> interpret this information to suggest that some polished greenstone axes were more than mere tools. They were traded over considerable distances and their possession probably conferred status. In some cases, their fate was to be a ceremonial offering, perhaps to the spirits of ancestors thought to live in water, after being defaced to emphasize their separation from common use. The idea that such damage was deliberate, and significant, is further supported by the finding of flakes from greenstone axes carefully interred with other valuable goods.

The Bradwell axe has a story to tell us. It's entertaining, especially for those of us from old Bradwell families, to speculate about relationships to the individual who was important enough to acquire this desirable status symbol. After all, DNA analysis has recently linked the bones of

an ancient Briton found in the Cheddar Gorge to a teacher who still lives nearby!

Coming back to earth, we can say with some certainty that the axe is evidence that the community of this 'Bradwell' man was not isolated in its remote Peakland valley, but was linked into a network of trade and beliefs spread throughout Britain in the Early Neolithic.



### **Carnival Day Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> July**

The BHS will once more be running a tent on Carnival Day. From it we will be selling our various publications and the DVD of Newspaper cuttings about Bradwell mainly from 1911 to 1951. We will also be challenging visitor to stick a pin in a map to show where they believe a person to have lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This means that we will be grateful for help erecting and later packing away the tent. We would also like to set up a rota of members to look after the stall during the day. Please let us know of which parts of this process you would be willing to help in.

Now that the Covid precautions have been extended to 19<sup>th</sup> July it is possible that plans for the day will have to be amended. We will keep you informed of any changes that may be necessary.

### **Unveiling of Blue Plaque at Stoney Middleton 24<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

From: Steve Bond 07765 503587 or [steve.bond@pop3.poptel.org.uk](mailto:steve.bond@pop3.poptel.org.uk)

#### **COME AND JOIN US TO COMMEMORATE THE BOOT AND SHOEMAKERS STRIKE 1918-1920**

A ceremony to mark the installation of an historic plaque in Stoney Middleton.  
Passing our heritage down the generations. All welcome!

**STONEY MIDDLETON**

'The Grove' Gardens (next to the Toll Bar Fish and Chip shop)

Saturday 24th July 2021, 11am

The unveiling of the plaque will be followed, for those who wish to join, by a short guided walk to see sites in the village associated with the strike.

**BOOT AND  
SHOEMAKERS' STRIKE  
1918-1920**

In tribute to the women and men of Stoney Middleton and Eyam who were on strike for over two years and set up their own co-operative factory. They sought the reinstatement of sacked colleagues, shorter working hours, a war bonus and recognition of their trade union, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Their action inspired workers in other local industries to join unions, and paved the way for better wages and working conditions for later generations.