

## BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### NEWSLETTER No.47 January 2025

#### Upcoming events

Once again the main date for you to write in your diary for January is our AGM to be held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024 at 8.00 pm in the Methodist Hall. To help cut down on paper usage we will have again taken the step of posting most of the papers relating to the meeting on our Website : the minutes of the 2024 AGM, the agenda, reports by the chairman and treasurer and the programme for the coming year. Later in the month you can view the first four of these by going to [www.bradwellhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.bradwellhistoricalsociety.org.uk) and after selecting the 'about' option go to [AGM 2025](#). You will find the programme for the coming year on the 'home' page. After the formal business part of the meeting we are hoping to open up the two cupboards with archival material for investigation .

Later in the month there will be a meeting for the new Committee on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January at 7.30 pm in the Shoulder of Mutton. The agenda for this will be emailed to Committee Members after the AGM.

In January it is the time to renew your annual subscription. The Committee has once more agreed to maintain the membership fee at £10, although this will need to be formally ratified by you members at the AGM. It would be most convenient for our treasurer Andy Smith if you could arrange your payment via BACS transfer. The payment should be made to the Bradwell Historical Society and the details are as follows - Sort code: 16-15-15 Account number: 10004599. Please make sure when you make the transfer that you are clearly identified as the person who is making the payment. Should this not be suitable for you the treasurer will accept cash (preferably) or a cheque. The Committee is also recommending that the fee for attending a meeting as a non-member remain at £5 and also should such a visitor attend a second meeting in that year and pay a further £5 they will then become full members for the rest of that year and entitled to a free copy of *After Seth* (worth £10).

In our continuing portraits of people with Bradwell connections this month we describe the life and times of Bill Mather.

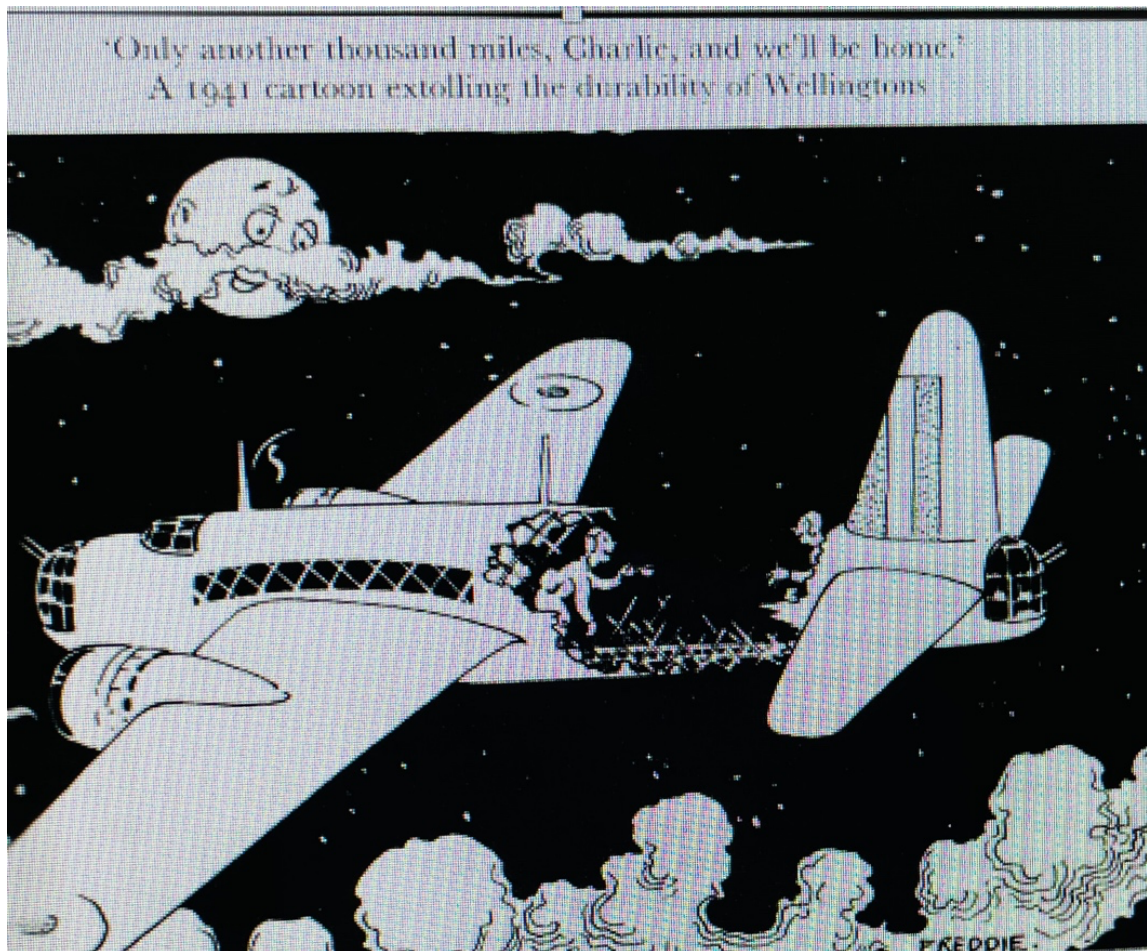
## William (Bill) Mather

William (Bill) Mather was born in Totley, Sheffield in 1920 the eldest of the five children of Samuel and Elsie (née Hall) Mather. Bill was educated at All Saints Church of England School also in Totley. On leaving school he became an apprentice mechanic at Laycock's Engineering Company of Sheffield. In data collected in 1939 Bill is shown living with his parents and is described as a "Capstan Lathe Hand". The capstan lathe was a type of machine tool used for precision machining, particularly suited for high-volume production of small to medium-sized parts. At that time Samuel Mather's occupation was given as 'Butcher's Assistant' and Bill recalled that before the war he would help his father in his work that included the slaughter of pigs (graphically described). Later in 1939 Bill joined the R.A.F. initially as a mechanic but later transferred to Air Crew as a Tail Gunner, serving with Bomber Squadron 37, that were at the time flying Wellington bombers but by 1944 they had transferred to American B 24 Consolidated Liberators. Bill used to pronounce the motto of his squadron with relish '*Wise Without Eyes*' in reference to their night time role. By 1944 computers (analogue not digital computing) were beginning to be employed in the tracking of Bill's tail guns.



Blazon: A Hawk rising ,wings elevated and addorsed belled and jessed all or legged Gules armed Azure hooded Gules/Azure

In the London Gazette of 13<sup>th</sup> August 1944 Bill was gazetted as a Flight Sergeant with the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM). In later years Bill kept a cartoon by 'Freddie' on the resilience of the Wellington showing how precarious was the life of 'Tail-End Charlie'.



After the war Bill received copies of the Air Gunner's Association magazine and one day he came rushing out of his cottage at the bottom of Smalldale with a copy of the magazine in his hand and turned to the page that showed aerial photographs taken in 1944. Bill had also brought out his RAF log book covering that time. The record was immaculately kept: in red ink for daytime sorties and in black for those undertaken at night. The record showed an attack at night over the northern Adriatic and tucked in the pages were two copies of aerial reconnaissance photographs one before the attack and one after. These were identical with the ones in the magazine. They ought to have been top secret but when asked how he came by them he said with a twinkle in his eye 'my pal was the one who processed the photographs'.

In the post war years lasting friendships formed between RAF aircrews and the Dutch people who knew that the airmen had done so much for the liberation of their country. Bill was 'adopted' by Jan Rozendal the mayor of the town of Dronten in the Netherlands and his wife Géke. Since 1980 Bill made a yearly 'pilgrimage' to Dronten for their Remembrance day on the 4<sup>th</sup> May. Bill became godfather to two of Jan and Géke's sons Gert-Jan and Alwin. Bill was able to take a photograph of the two boys laying flowers on the grave of



George Fletcher at Oosterbeek War Cemetery. Bradwell-born George lost his life at Arnhem during operation Market Garden in 1944.



Gert-Jan and Alwin Rozendal

On leaving the R.A.F. Bill worked at the button factory in Hathersage (had previously been used for wire drawing), then at the Newburgh Engineering Company in Bradwell, before ending his working career at Edward Pryor's of Sheffield. The company specialised in techniques for marking equipment for its traceability. Bill's ability as an engineer is well illustrated in his stories of how he solved in minutes problems his customers had wrestled with for days. But he never told them how quickly he'd come up with the answer but delayed so that they would not be so upset about the time they'd taken!

Bill met Eileen Spencer at the button factory and they married in 1947, living with Eileen's family at the old Shoulder of Mutton by then Lyndale House. They shared the house with members of Eileen's family. It happened that Bill's mother Elsie had passed away as had Eileen's father Richard (one of the Charles family who lived on The Hills). Bill explained that only a year after his own marriage to Eileen their two surviving parents themselves married each other. This meant that the lady who was his mother-in-law also became his step-mother. When Bill went to work at Pryor's he and Eileen moved to Greenhill, returning to Bradwell in 1976. Eileen died a few months after.

In his last years Bill lived in the cottage at the bottom of Smalldale one of whose previous occupants had been Marshall Elliott. For a long time Marshall had played his bugle as part of Remembrance Sunday in November. Another story told by Bill (with his usual twinkle) was that on every 11<sup>th</sup> November Marshall's ghost appeared at the top of his stairs to play the 'Last Post'.

When Bill moved into Smalldale Bottom cottage the building was extended towards the road. Unfortunately the road had an adverse camber (and still has) causing larger vehicles to tilt towards the cottage. This meant on several occasions a drainpipe, guttering or even chunks of masonry were brought crashing down.

Bill was delighted when Peter Wallis and Emma Norling moved next door to him at the bottom of Smalldale especially when their son Angus came along.



Bill with a young Angus Wallis

Bill enjoyed walking, acting in the village pantomime, yarning with anyone who would listen and playing bowls. Even after he had finished bowling for quite a while opponents as far away as Wirksworth asked about him.



Bill (middle) with Joyce Armstrong and Austin Hindmarch in Robinson Crusoe about 1950

When he passed away in 2008 Bill left a daughter Christine, a granddaughter Michelle, sisters Dorothy and June and brother Samuel Vernon. .The funeral, followed by cremation took place at Hutcliffe Wood (not far from where he had his first job) on 10th February. A service of thanksgiving was held later in St Barnabas Church

Bill was very proud of his younger brother Vernon (1931-2018) who was a lay preacher at Beeley and Edensor Churches. Vernon once preached to Charles, then Prince of Wales, on the Prince's visit to the Duke of Devonshire. Vernon was awarded the MBE in 2000 for service to both villages. In the memorial service for Bill Mather on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009 brother Vernon read from Revelations 21 1-7 and led the congregation in the Lord's Prayer.