

BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER No. 61 March 2026

Up-coming events

The talk scheduled for March 2026 is to be given by Bradwell's own Margaret Morley. She will be telling us about 'Owd Bradda' based on a collection of postcards belonging to Sam Charles. Without giving too much away I think we can say that she will be coming appropriately dressed for her subject. The regular third Tuesday of the month (17th March) at 8 pm will see her presenting. We will be in St Barnabas Church with car parking available in the School playground.

Membership

At the January 2026 AGM of the Society members ratified the request of the Committee to increase the fee for joining for a year with all its benefits to £15. Once again it would be most convenient for our treasurer Andy Smith if you could arrange your payment via BACS transfer. The payment of £15 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 at the March meeting.

Request from new member

John Newborough has moved into the Old Vicarage in Bradwell and has set in place a programme of restoration and renovation of the property. This would be greatly assisted if he could have sight of old photographs (inside or out) that members might have or know of. Please contact us if you can help in this way. John is one of the newest members of the Society.

Clapper Bridges

We are very grateful to Ken West for him sending us a piece about Clapper Bridges and on the possible presence of one across the Brook in Bradwell. Ken writes:

For those of you inclined to lean on a railing and peer into Bradwell Brook, this is for you.

When the brook was dredged recently it exposed various features not identified before. One of these is intriguing because I think it is a clapper bridge. You can spot it downstream from the main road bridge, just before the first mill building. In Soft Water Lane, lean on the railing and stare at the water depth marker on the opposite bank at Dick's Yard. Emerging from beneath the wall enclosing the brook, and beneath the water, a series of limestone slabs are evident. These cross the brook at an angle, veering slightly left, then disappear under Soft Water Lane. If you follow its trajectory, a foot path would have run under where buildings now exist, and up to Bradwell Edge.

So, what is a clapper bridge and why would it exist below the water? It is an ancient type of bridge mainly built in medieval times of large flat stone slabs (clappers) resting on stone piers in the water or on the banks. It was for people and packhorses to cross streams and rivers. Another close-by clapper bridge is over the River Lathkill below Over Haddon. Such primitive bridges often washed away during floods or sank into the river or, as in Bradwell's case, the brook has changed dramatically over the years. If you imagine Bradwell in 900 AD. The brook was smaller because the later miners had not broken into Bagshaw Cavern. We can assume Bradwell existed as a village because the Mercian Grey Ditch was built at that time. A track from Castleton would have crossed the clapper bridge, and headed up Bradwell Edge using the ancient, muddy path that still exists to the left of Edge Lane. It was ideal for pack horses.

Jump 800 years to the lead mining boom. The miners broke into Bagshaw Cavern and far more water poured into the brook. This overpowered the clapper bridge. Entrepreneurial locals then realised that enough water now existed to power two mills on Soft Water Lane. They canalised the brook with stone walls and perhaps redirected it slightly. The clapper bridge was now inadequate for their carts that needed access to two mills. Consequently, they built a new bridge where the existing one sits today. This highlights how changes occur over many years and possibly have contributed to our current flooding issues. The extra Bagshaw water, the constraints on the walled-in brook, and the bulky mills themselves, obstructed the natural flow of the water. The clapper bridge was submerged but appears to have somehow survived in situ.



The measure in the background is known as a gaugeboard and the numbers appear to represent 10 cm sections. The height of the brook water is monitored to give early warning of possible flooding.