

St Mary's church and the Bridgwater newspapers

By Tony Woolrich – 12/07/2021

Part 1-1831-1833

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Bridgwater & Somerset Herald

This newspaper, the first to be printed in Bridgwater, was published between 1825 and 8 August 1831, when it was re-titled as *The Alfred*, which ran until 1833. The latter newspaper was edited by John Bowen, a St Mary's churchwarden, and was one of a chain of papers which were funded by the Conservative cause. The bulk of the copy was sent pre-printed from London, with the local news being on the front and back pages

The British Museum volume of *The Alfred* has bound in the front a run of *The Bridgwater and Somerset Herald* from 5 January 1831, until its cessation, and this set, indexed here, is the only one known to have survived in Britain.

1831

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| 30 March | Letter complaining about the state of St Mary's churchyard and the dilapidated state of the church. |
| 6 April | Brief report of the vestry meeting at which it was resolved to buy property in the South West flank of the churchyard and demolish it to allow the churchyard to be enlarged. |
| 2? April | Letter about the forthcoming meeting to fence and enlarge the churchyard. Mentions the disgraceful state it had fallen to. |
| 18 May | Report of steam engine set up at Middlezoy for drainage under supervision of Mr Easton. |
| 1 June | Leader about confirmation by the Bishop in St Mary's — 612 children! |
| 15 June | Letter about the need to build a new church to cater for the increased population of Bridgwater. |
| 20 July | Report of opening of the catholic chapel at Court House, Cannington. |

The Alfred 10 August 1831-on

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| 29 August | Note of sermon preached at St Mary's. |
| 19 September | Letters about the Civil War in Bridgwater. Mentions somebody researching the Kingsmill family and the monument in St Mary's church. |

1832

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| 13 February | Text of prayers directed to be read in ail places of worship to alleviate the spread of cholera |
| 12 March | Boundary of Bridgwater defined in an Act about Parliamentary constituencies. Full text published |
| 23 April | Note about the forthcoming vestry meeting to elect wardens. |
| 30 April | Leader about the Churchwardens election in St Mary's. Done on party lines, with heckling. Very aggressive, noisy and violent. Louts brought in from the brickyards and wharves to intimidate voters. Bowen, as one of the contestants was on the receiving end of this, and made the most of his editorial pen to abuse his opponents afterwards. |
| 14 May | Report of trials before the magistrates of people in Bridgwater for non-payment of poor-rates. Much evidence of bribery in the recent Vestry elections. |

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21 May	Note of meeting of Corporation, where it was resolved to build a gallery in St Mary's for charity children. Part to be for the use of Dr Morgan's school in perpetuity. Corporation's contribution to be £30.
4 June	Report of Vestry meeting to agree to get a faculty for the erection of galleries for Charity children at St Mary's.
1 October	Leader 'Another disgusting instance of Radical Brutality'. This relates to another violent vestry meeting, this time on the election of waywardens. 3 of the wardens were active radicals, opposed by Bowen, the Tory;
26 November	Account of the trial before the magistrates following the violent scenes at the recent Vestry meeting. Defendant had been appointed in charge of the parish fire engine. Letter about this. Evidently appointments to minor parish appointments, such as the Parish Clerk and the minder of the fire engine was now being done on party lines, to the anguish of those turned off.
17 December	Detailed account of the riot at John Bowen's house in Friar Street.
1833	
7 January	Note that cholera had disappeared; public meeting called to give solemn thanks for the abatement of the cholera. Text of resolution printed.
8 April	Detailed report of the trial of the Bowen rioters, (see Dec 17 previous)
22 April	Trial report — continued
27 May	West Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry went to service at St Mary's. Sermon by their chaplain; Letter about the parish rating — implies fiddling by the rating officer to ensure he paid less!
3 June	Letter about parish rating
10 June	Letter on Parish rating - List of ratepayers in this shows that Dr Woollen resided then in Castle Street.
22 July	Sermon preached in St Mary's and collection in aid of the Infirmary; Meeting of the Bridgwater Branch of the Bible Society; Meeting of the Bridgwater Branch of the Church Missionary Society (Dr Woollen attended).
5 August	Leader that the copyright of <i>The Alfred</i> had been transferred elsewhere and that Bowen was resigning as editor forthwith.
16 September	Leader with an account of the investigations of the Commission on corporations into the activities of Bridgwater Corporation. Lovibond in the radical camp then.
14 October	Leader saying that Evening service started to be held at St Mary's on 29th September previous.
21 October	Account of Magistrate's Court case of Trevor (rating officer) v Churchwardens and overseers re rating and his activities.
28 October	Letter from Dr Toogood about smallpox; Interesting and detailed article about the economics of the Port of Bridgwater (part 1)
9 December	Leader with account of a vestry meeting to erect more galleries in St Mary's to accommodate increased numbers. Meeting instead decided it would be more sensible

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to build a new church; article on the port— (part 2)

23 December Leader and letter about proposed church, says that £800 had been raised in subscriptions already.

30 December Leader saying *The Alfred* was to amalgamate with the *Dorset County Herald and Somersetshire Gazette*. Says it had been originally set up to oppose Radical Societies; note that the fund to build the new church had then reached £1300.

No newspapers were published in Bridgwater until 1846