

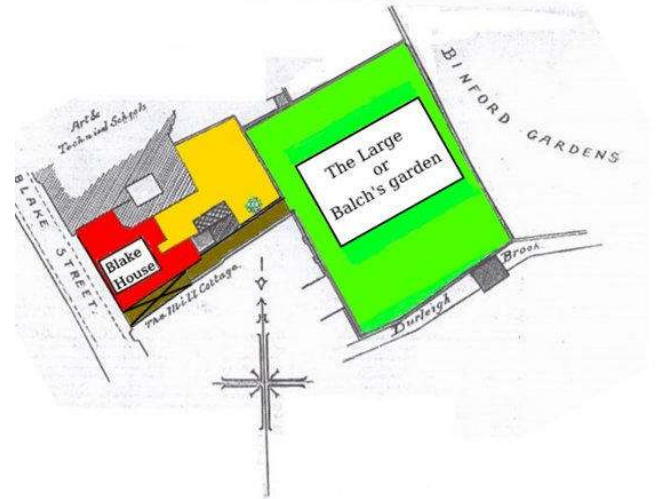
BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL BLAKE MUSEUM



MUSEUM HISTORY

The Museum has its origins in the Brighter Bridgewater project of Mayor Walter Deacon, the goal of which was to increase pride in the Town by celebrating the Town's past. Events included a vast celebration on Cornhill in 1926 of the granting of the town's first Charter by King John, and the Bridgewater Pageant, held in June 1927.

A private house, Blake House, No 5 Blake Street was acquired. This also had extensive gardens



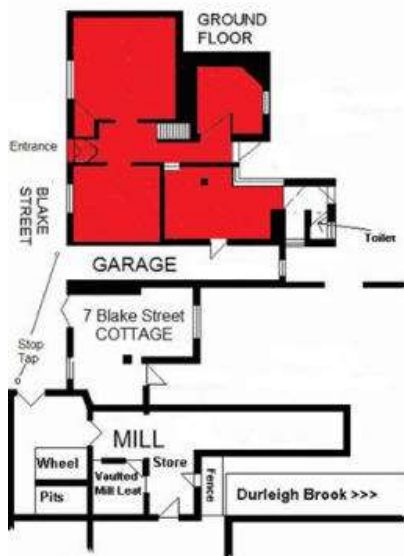
Blake House and garden, 1926



Looking up Blake Street



The Mayor, Alderman Walter Deacon, speaking at the opening of the Museum, 15 April 1926.



Ground plan of Blake House and neighbouring buildings, 1926. The Museum is in red.

The museum was opened by Col M. Locke-Blake, a co-lateral descendent of Admiral Robert Blake, 1599-1657, on 15 April, 1926, and was owned by the Borough Council. The first Curators, Gerald Cuzner, followed by Angus Dunn, were also the Borough Librarians. The early displays largely concentrated on Admiral Blake and the Battle of Sedgemoor. Over the years the Museum expanded to include a cottage, adjoining the Mill.

In 1974, the Museum became the responsibility of Sedgemoor District Council, and was managed by John St John

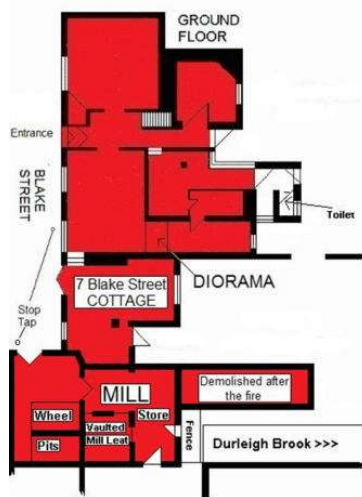
Earl and then Nick Nicholson, with assistance from volunteers of the Museum Society. Later, the District Council appointed Museum Officers – Sarah Harbige, succeeded by Jessica Vale.

The Town Mill, at the end of Blake Street, was acquired through the efforts of the Bridgwater Museum Association Trust, with the aim of expanding the Museum into it, but the Mill was damaged by fire in 1995, and the plans came to nothing.



The Mill mid-20th century

The Town Council has since agreed to explore the feasibility of restoring the mill and using it as an expansion of the Museum' facilities



The Museum property today

The Friends of Blake Museum began in March 2000, with the aim of supporting the museum practically and financially. In 2007 the District Council announced that funding for the museum would cease in March 2008. After protracted negotiations it was handed over to the Town Council in 2009, which now funds it, and from then on the Friends have run the museum guided by the honorary curators, helped by the Museum Mentors of the South West Heritage Trust.

An ambitious programme of refurbishment, under the direction of the late Dr. Peter Cattermole, began in 2009 (with funding in part contributed in the first four years by the District Council and topped up by the Town Council) and has continued during annual winter shut-downs ever since, so the Museum has been completely overhauled. It has been re-decorated and re-wired throughout. Most galleries have modern display cases with low-energy LED lighting. The Museum is fully networked with computer access in most rooms. The gardens have been transformed. Several displays are changed annually.



Moving a cheese press in 2009



Dismantling the wooden display cases from the Archaeology room, (now the Blake room)



Bernice sanding-down



New floorboards being laid



Dismantling the Monmouth room



Ready for visitors



The re-opening 2009

*L-R – Cllr Graham Granter, Mayor, Mrs Kaye Granter
Mayoress, Mr David Sebborn*

Hon Curators

Dr Peter Cattermole 2010-2012

Tony Woolrich, 2012-2018

Mike Searle 2018 onwards

Recent developments

The Museum was closed in 2000 because of the Covid epidemic, and re-opened in the autumn of 2021, but initially with reduced hours. The museum now opens Wednesday through to Saturday. Tuesdays are now set aside for Schools and Group Visits and the Friends Coffee Mornings, (on the first Tuesday of every month) as well as any other event. For up-to-date information regarding opening times, please visit our website, below.

As well as financial support being given by being a member of the Friends, there are a number of volunteers involved in the day to day running of the museum ranging from front of house custodians, welcoming visitors and running the shop, to cataloguing objects, cleaning, gardening, painting and decorating, a learning team, web-site management, display design, fund-raising and business management. Overall control is in the hands of the Museum Steering Group of the Town Council.

The Friends donate several thousands of pounds a year to the museum which goes towards various projects and improving the museum, this is raised by membership fees,

various donations, coffee mornings, two fairs, a series of winter book sales, the Quayside Festival and teas sold at the summer band concerts in Blake Gardens.



The Museum garden, maintained by the Friends

More volunteers and Friends are always welcome. Please call at the Museum to pick up a leaflet.

www.blakemuseumfriends.org.uk

Blake Museum is owned by Bridgwater
Town Council
and managed by volunteers
from the Friends of Blake Museum.
(Registered Charity 1099815)

www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk

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Websites: