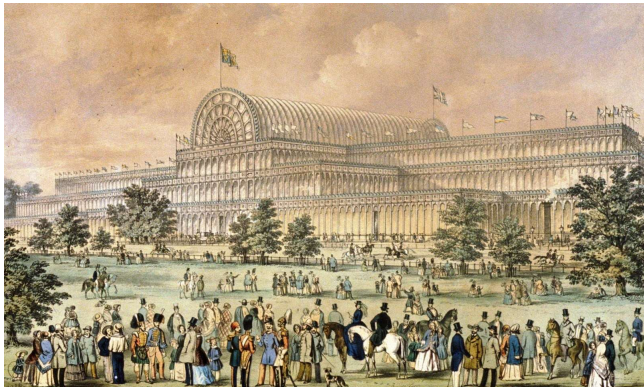


BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL BLAKE MUSEUM



BRIDGWATER & DISTRICT AT THE GREAT EXHIBITION, 1851

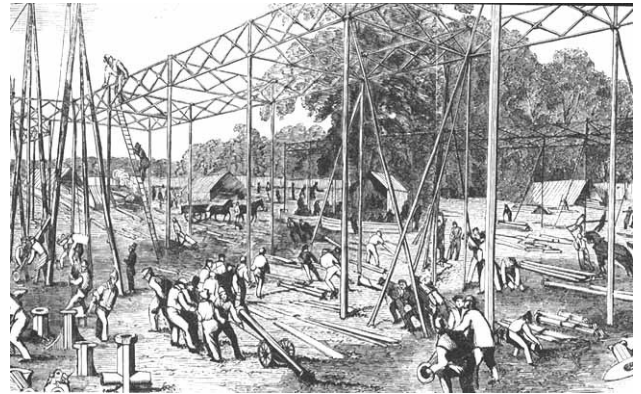


The Great Exhibition, Hyde Park, London, 1851

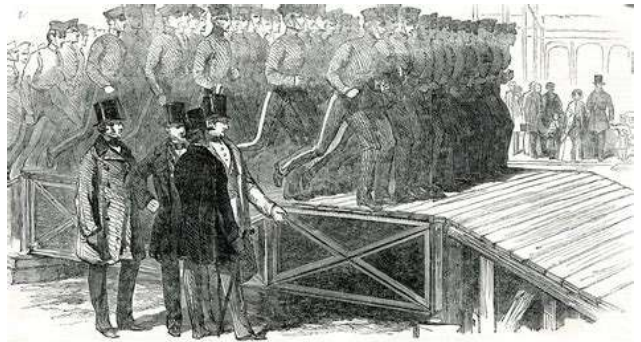
The first national trade exhibition in this country took place in London, 1756-7, but it was not for nearly a century that another occurred. It was the brain-child of the Society of Arts and took place in 1847 to much acclaim, and this led to the International Exhibition in 1851.

It was entirely funded by subscriptions raised by local Committees throughout the country. Bridgewater's committee was chaired by Robert Ford, Mayor in 1851, and the secretary/treasurer was R. Smith jr, a shop-keeper. It sent to London £23.16, and 5 local exhibitors came forward.

A prize was offered for a suitable design, which was won by Joseph Paxton, gardener to the Duke of Devonshire, whose greenhouse he had designed for Chatsworth. It was a building of a modular design made of a small range of iron castings and range of standardised glass sheets. It took 2,000 men just eight months to build, and cost just £79,800.



The start of the construction



Soldiers stress-testing iron castings

It took place in Hyde Park, London, from 1 May to 15 October 1851. Six million people—equivalent to a third of the entire population of Britain at the time—visited the Great Exhibition. The average daily attendance was 42,831 with a peak attendance of 109,915 on 7 October. The event made a surplus of £186,000 (£18,370,000 in 2015), which was used to found the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum. Many school parties visited London for the Exhibition, but none were recorded for Bridgewater.

The British part of the Exhibition was arranged in 6 main divisions and further

split into thirty classes.

The highly detailed catalogue ran to three volumes and there were two more volumes of jury reports



Inside the Exhibition

THE BRIDGWATER EXHIBITORS

Class 10 Philosophical, Musical, Horological and Surgical Instruments.

490 Akerman, William H. H., Bridgwater, Somerset — Inventor and Manufacturer. Pianoforte, with new improvement; a bevel action for the dampers, applicable to all kinds; intended to give precision of touch by the certain rising of the key. It preserves also the dampers by gentle instead of jerking movement. Octave action at pleasure, to use the octave of the key struck.

Class 27 Manufactures in Mineral Substances

130 Sealy, John, Bridgwater, Somersetshire — Inventor and Manufacturer. Patent double and treble channelled roofing tiles. Patent single channelled flat, or Roman roofing tiles. [No 9534 of 3 Dec 1842.] Ridge and hip roofing tiles. Valley roofing tiles. Corn and malt kiln tiles. Bakers' oven tiles and bricks. Paving or flooring tiles. Bridgwater scouring bricks, commonly called Bath bricks.

Glass jars, containing the waters of the River Parret; the scouring, or Bath bricks, are formed from the deposit of these waters. Bridgwater clays and slime.

The jury reports noted

Mr. SEALY, of Bridgwater (130, p. 776), an exhibitor of roofing-tiles and Bath bricks, is Honourably Mentioned, chiefly for the latter articles.

The scouring bricks, so called, were first brought into general notice by the house which he now represents, and he is still the principal manufacturer and exporter of the article, which is of great use for various purposes in the arts. The following account of the Bath bricks will be found to possess some interest, and is supplied by this exhibitor. It is probable that the finest silicious particles are derived from the destruction of infusorial animalcules at the meeting of the tide with the fresh water of the river, and it is not unlikely that a somewhat similar if not identical product might be obtained from the mud accumulating at the mouth of the Elbe and other rivers where such causes are known to act.

94 Bowen, J., Bridgwater — Producer.

Two figures in artificial stone — a Nymph, and Fidelity.

Class 28 Manufactures from Animal & Vegetable Substances.

157 Halliday, William, Chilton-super-Polden, near Bridgwater — Producer. Piece of carving in English oak, 3 feet long, 2 feet in width, and 7 inches in thickness. Subject, "The Canterbury pilgrims setting out from the Tabard." Executed by the exhibitor.

Class 29 — Miscellaneous Manufactures and Small Wares

244 Fletcher, W., Burnham, near Bridgwater — Manufacturer. Working models of filtering vessels. Model of Burnham lighthouse. Specimens of amber, jets, &c, found on the coast of Norfolk, polished.

NOTES

WILLIAM HENRY HINE AKERMAN was born in 1814 in Seaton, Devon, and lived on Fore Street. In 1843, he married Julia, daughter of brick and tile manufacturer

John Board, from Bridgwater. John was also a cement entrepreneur, and built a house for them in Bridgwater – Castle House in Queen Street (completed 1854). The house was unique in that it was built to show how cement could be used in the form of precast concrete. William was a manufacturer and seller of musical instruments. No patents have been traced under his name. William died in London in 1882 and Julia died in 1903. They were both buried alongside John Board at the Wembdon Road Cemetery in Bridgwater.

JOHN SEALY came from a long line of Bridgwater merchants. They were ship-owners and bankers, and they owned brick-yards at Hamp, and at Dunwear, on the opposite bank of the Parrett. They were active in local politics. John Sealy died 1864 aged 84, and was buried in Wembdon Road Cemetery. Soon after, the brick-making concern merged with Majors.

WILLIAM HALLIDAY, carver, was a self-taught craftsman and responsible for carving the benches at St Micheal's church, Othery and probably worked on William Stradling's Chilton Priory (built 1839).

JOHN BOWEN, (1785-1854), Engineer, Wine Merchant and Philanthropist. After a career erecting lighthouses and bridges in India, he returned to Bridgwater and became a road surveyor and wine merchant. He was architect of the Cornhill Market house and was much involved in exposing the Bridgwater Workhouse Scandal. He is buried in St John's Churchyard, Bridgwater.

FLETCHER, W., of Burnham on Sea. Nothing has been discovered about this exhibitor.



William Akerman's house – the Concrete Castle

SOURCES

The Exhibition Catalogues, digitised by the Hathi Trust;

William Akerman:

<https://sites.google.com/site/akermangenealogy/home>;

John Bowen:

<http://www.bridgwaterscientists.org.uk/bowen/>;

And Wikipedia.

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