

Brislington Community Museum News

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William Winchester's topographical and commissioned postcards

This prolific photographer lived in Brislington and expressed his art in several ways, including studio portraits, commissioned studies (both places and people), and commercially published topographical postcards. It's from the latter two types that the examples presented here have been drawn.

Ken Taylor, chair



A detail from the postcard looking up First Avenue (page 5, upper). A workman has propped his bicycle against a convenient tree, set his ladder against the arm of a lamppost, and paused for a moment.

Contact us

Email us - secretary@brislington.org - to enquire about any of our community museum's exhibits, to provide feedback or new information etc about them, or to contribute items for this newsletter. Our publication schedule is flexible so we can react quickly to important events (also, during quiet times we can focus on other matters such as out-reach activities and sourcing and researching new exhibits).

W A Winchester - biographical notes

William Albert Winchester isn't the only postcard-producing photographer who lived in Brislington but, so far, he's unique in having a studio here (hopefully, examples of his studio portraiture can be published in due course).

The 1881 Census shows William aged 7 living at Grafton Street in St Phillips & Jacob, Bristol, with his parents Thomas (aged 31, working as a labourer), and Emily (29), and three siblings. Everyone in the family was born in St Phillips.

A decade later the next Census shows the family had grown by two further children and the father was now working as a labourer in galvanising, and William worked as a wire net maker.

In Sept 1899 William married Florence Lewis at the parish church of St Silas, Bristol. Florence was aged 24, a spinster living at Kingsland Road, and her father Alexander Lewis worked as a Clerk. William was aged 26, a bachelor employed as a wire worker living at 4 Langton Court Road, St Anne's, Brislington, and his father now worked as an engine driver.

Florence was born to Elizabeth and Alexander Lewis in August 1875 and was baptised in a Wesleyan-Methodist church later the same month. The family's address was given as Paulton (Somerset). The following month, Florence was received into the Church of England in the parish of Paulton, where the parish register records that she had been privately baptised. The family's address was given as Totterdown, Bristol, and her father worked as a clerk.

The 1901 Census shows William and Florence occupying three rooms in a shared house (1 Langton Road, Brislington). His occupation is given as manager of a photographic company.

The 1906 edition of *Kelly's Directory of Bristol* says William worked as a photographer in Wick Road, while residing at 4 Langton Road, New Brislington.

The couple had six children, of which four daughters survived to be recorded in the 1911 Census - these four were all born in Brislington and baptised in the parish church of St Luke:

- Ann was baptised in March 1902.
- Evelyn was baptised in February 1904, at which time the family lived at Fairfield House, Wick Road, Brislington, and William's occupation was given as photographer (Evelyn wrote the informative *History of St Anne's*).
- Elsie was born in October 1905 and baptised the following month, at which time the family lived at 4 Langton Road, St Anne's Park, and William was still employed as a photographer.
- Dorothy was born in October 1907 and was baptised the following month. The family still had the same address and William's occupation was unchanged.

The 1911 Census shows the family still at 4 Langton Road, and that William's occupation was still photographer, adding that he was an employer.

The 1914 edition of *Kelly's Directory of Bristol* lists William as a photographer at 4 Langton Road.

The 1939 national Register shows the couple living at 4 Langton Road along with their daughters Evelyn (who worked as a pharmacist) and Dorothy (school teacher). William himself worked as the manager of a general stores, while Florence was occupied with unpaid domestic duties.

Sadly, William died in Sept 1941 while still living at 4 Langton Road. In May 1963 Florence died while living in Wick Road. The couple have a monument in Arnos Vale Cemetery (Ordnance Survey map grid reference ST 6080 7160) where William is described as having been a Justice of the Peace, an Alderman, and the Lord Mayor of Bristol in 1938-9.

Postcards

All these photographs were printed as postcards and some contain clues that can help us put them into chronological order (at least approximately).

The first three all have a particularly wide margin, which was a common feature of early postcards created when post office regulations insisted that the whole of one side was reserved for the address (and it carried a printed text stating that). That restriction meant the sender could only write a message on the side with the picture - the wide margins were specifically to accommodate this.

Confusingly, the printing on the back of these three postcards does allow a message - a freedom introduced in 1902. This isn't too unusual, and may suggest the photographer had composed the picture for the earlier format, and the buyers were still comfortable with the old and familiar style of wide margins (or, perhaps, these are reprints using more modern card stock).

Following those three postcards, are six that probably were intended for sale to the general public. These all have titles, which was usually expected of such postcards - the titles assisted the visitor and their recipients in identifying the location (a postcard printed on commission for a private person usually wouldn't need a title as everyone would know precisely what the picture shows).

Of these six, the first three have handwritten titles (possibly by Winchester himself), perhaps as a way of exploring the market while minimising expense. Two of these show a row of houses on a newly built street - perhaps Winchester planned on selling the postcards to the residents (a common-enough sales tactic).

The other three have professionally printed titles and, uniquely in this collection, were not printed as real

photographs but were mass produced (relatively speaking) using the collotype method.

The other photographs commemorate social events, or appear to be private commissions paid for by householders, businesses or organisations. Such postcards could be given away to friends and family, or to publicise a particular event or brand, but of course they may also have been produced privately to sell as a fundraising venture.



This stone humpback bridge spans a stream - probably Brislington Brook - with a man wearing a cloth cap seated on the low wall nearest the camera.

The low wall suggests this would have been a packhorse bridge, built to accommodate horses laden with panniers on each flank that would snag on the walls if they were higher.



The United Methodist Church, now demolished, stood on Langton Road, on the corner between the railway bridge and Salisbury Road. In order to capture the whole facade of the building, the photographer had to set up his camera in the playground of the school opposite - the entrance arch has a small wall to set it safely aside from the activities within the school grounds.



A donkey ride for two children in the garden at what's believed to be Winash House. The house originally stood among open fields, but the site now lies between Dixon Road and Clothier Road on Brislington Industrial Estate. This family home was demolished in the 1960s.



This postcard titled 'FIRST AVENUE ST' ANNES PARK.' looks uphill and shows the older houses near the top of the hill, on the north side of First Avenue, St Anne's. These homes, each with unique style, were part of a proposed development in St Anne's, that began with First Avenue. An enlarged detail is on page 1. Earliest known picture: posted before 3 June 1918.



Titled 'FIRST AVENUE ST' ANNE'S PARK', this shows the same short row of houses as in the picture above, but looking downhill. Some of the trees lining the street are still staked, and none have yet been subjected to the pruning that has become so noticeable. Earliest known picture: posted before 3 June 1918 (when the postal rate increased from a halfpenny to a penny).



The hand-written title 'ST ANNE'S PARK STATION' suggests this is an early postcard but the earliest known postmark on this postcard is 16 Sept 1913. Photographed from the eponymous Newbridge Road, we see a steam locomotive on its journey from London to Bristol. The tunnel entrance in the distance can still be seen, even though the station itself is long gone.



Titled 'Nightingale Valley, St. Anne's Park.', this shows St Anne's Terrace. Today, woodland covers much of the scene. The closest house has its door in the corner of the building which, locally at least, is the hallmark of a shop. Because this was printed using the collotype method rather than as a real photograph, we can't see clearly what is stocked in its window. The earliest known postmark for this postcard is 1 Jan 1912.



The picture is titled 'St Anne's Church, Brislington. Between the gate piers at the entrance to the church (at the junction of Salisbury Road and Langton Road), is a large placard advertising 'The Old Castle Carnival' at Arnos Castle (the only building from that complex still surviving in Brislington is the Castle public house). The earliest known postmark is 15 Feb 1909.



This panorama - 'A Peep at Brislington.' - looks southeast toward School Road. The footpath in the foreground of this open field has become Sherwell Road. The text on the end of the building reads "1ST. VOL. BAT'TN. P. A. SOM. L. I. DRILL HALL." - volunteers of the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's). This postcard was printed before 3 June 1918.



A garden party at Brislington Hall (demolished in 1933) for Belgian refugees, hosted by Squire Alfred Clayfield-Ireland (near the middle of the front row, holding a bowler hat). In the back row, fourth from our right-hand side, is the monumental mason and Brislington-based postcard publisher Frederick West (wearing a bowler hat).



Here we see a relaxing moment in the home-life of the family residing at Brooklea. The house is demolished but some traces of the garden remain in what is now woodland near the Brooklea Health Centre (whose name commemorates this lost building).



In this photograph we see soldiers on horseback with the horses harnessed to a gun carriage bearing a draped coffin. The procession has halted, and more soldiers line the route, presenting arms. Several carriages are at the rear, each driver wearing a top hat. In a foreground among the crowd is a child wearing naval uniform.



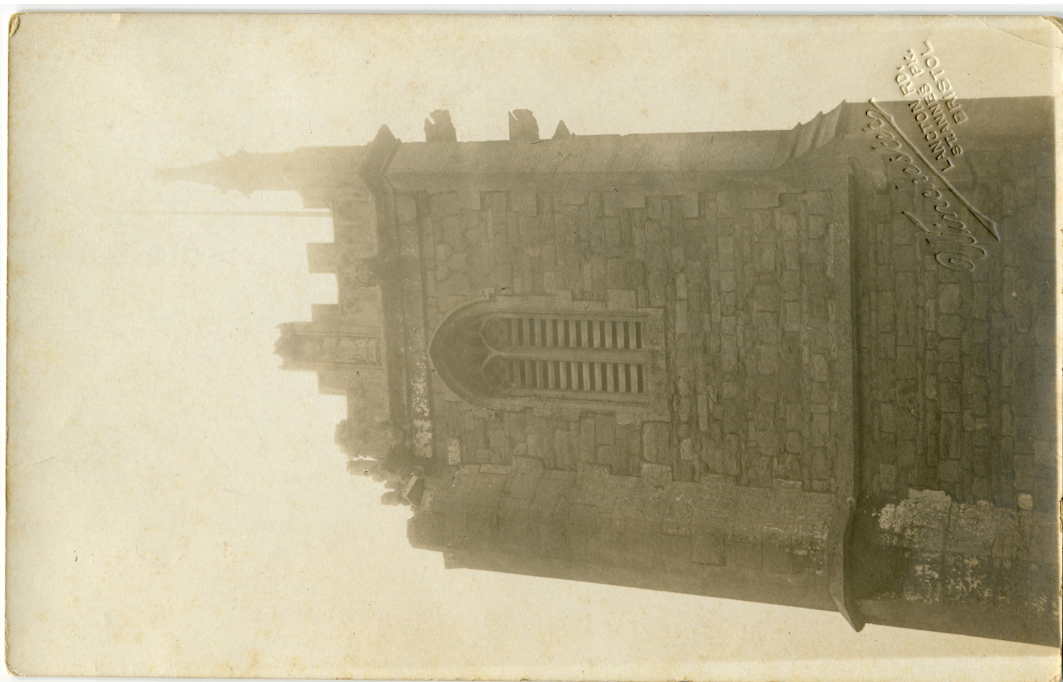
Soldiers march along Langton Court Road, with the Langton Court Hotel to our left. Each bears his rifle in the 'reversed arms' position (the weapon is held under the arm with the barrel pointing to the ground behind them) which is customary for a funeral. Several horse-drawn carriages bring up the rear, with each of their drivers wearing a top hat.



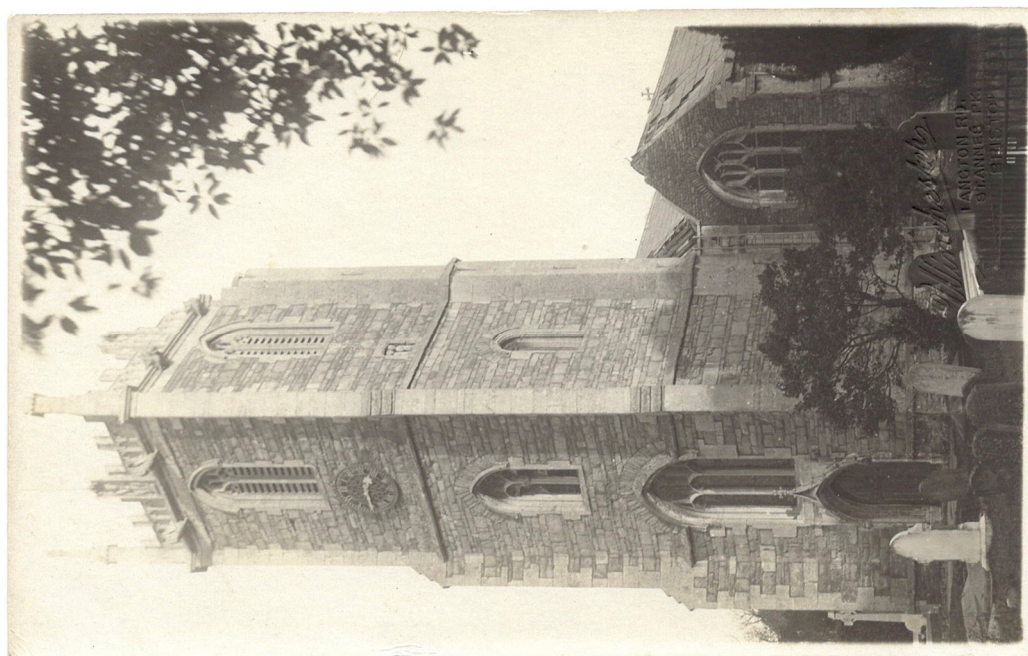
At the lower centre of this photograph is a football on which is written 'Grove Institute 1912-3'. The ball is held by one of a team of eleven footballers in white/pale shirts, with five other people - including one woman - in the group.



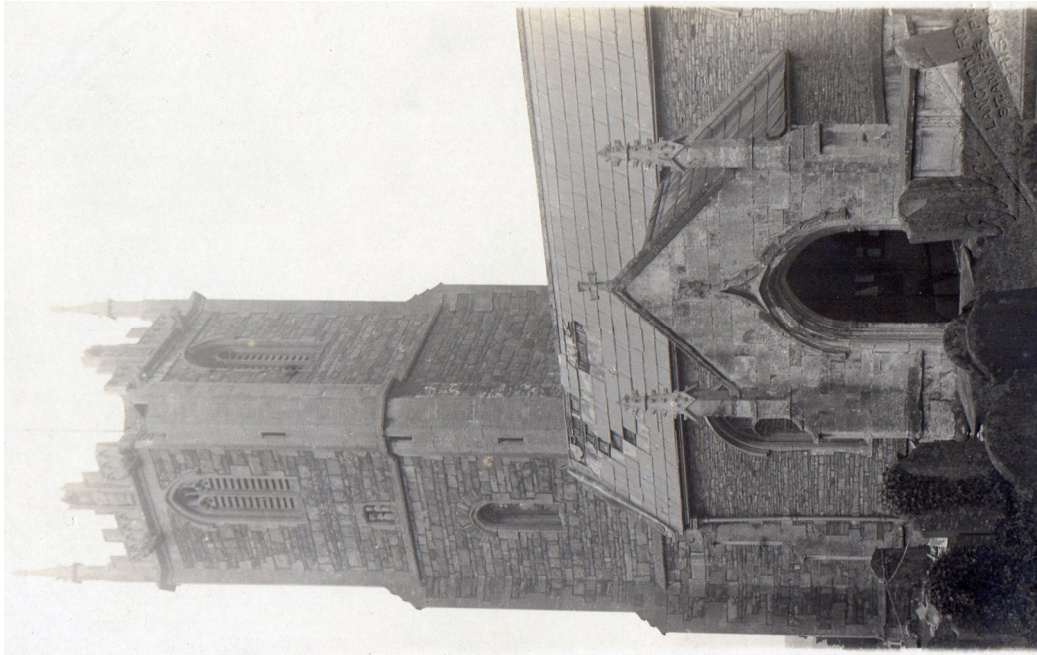
We look to the northwest in a field where a couple of workers at Robertson's factory are sitting. Behind them, one of the Robertson's buildings has a balcony, and further back is the factory (all since demolished, a Tesco superstore occupies the site). The hedge behind the two women marks the position of Water Lane. To our left is a stately elm tree, of which there were many in Brislington prior to the devastation of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960s/70s.



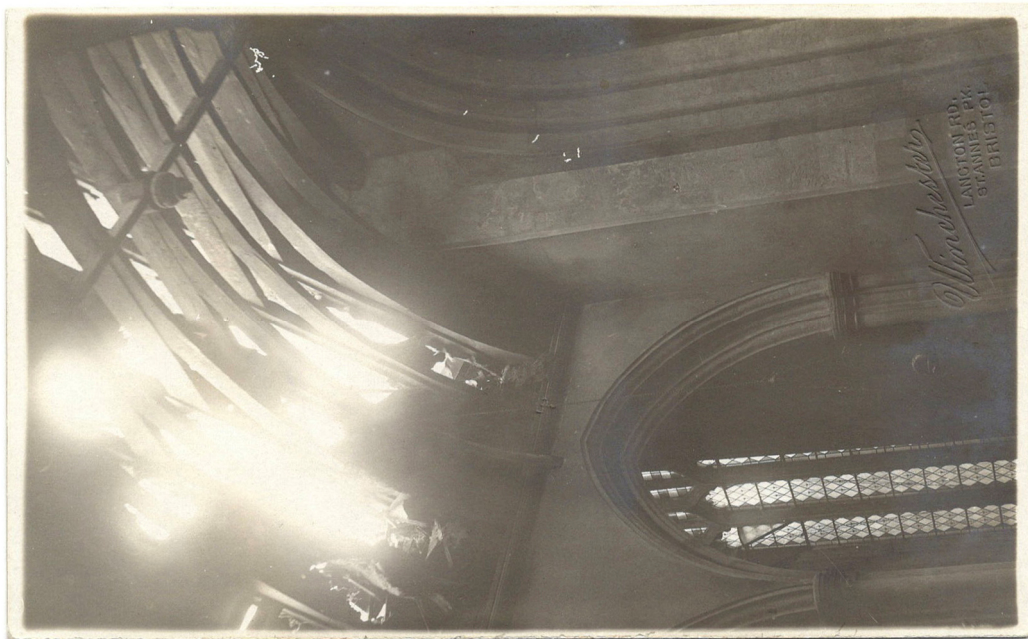
The tower of the church of St Luke was struck by lightning on 24 December 1919. This photograph is one of a series documenting the damage, and shows the top of the tower with its miniature spire at the southeast corner missing. This spirelet was considerably larger and taller than the pinnacles at the other corners as it gave access to the roof from the stair turret.



Here we see the damage to the slate roof of the nave below, and also to the south aisle, caused by falling debris. The tower clock shows the time as a quarter to four, but the shadows falling across the west windows indicate this photograph was taken earlier in the afternoon (perhaps the clock stopped at the time of the event).



Here we see the damage to the slate roof of the south aisle, caused by falling debris. The six pictures we have in this series may not be complete but it still provides a remarkable insight into this event. Mrs Stowell and Mrs Glanville were in the church at the time and had a narrow escape (Small et al 1979, back cover).



In this photograph we see the interior of the church and the damage to the ceiling of the nave, with its exposed roof beams and bright sky beyond. The large arch on the right-hand side is the tower arch, which stands between the tower and the nave. The window glimpsed through the arch on the left is at the west end of the south aisle.



Here we see the interior of the nave in the foreground, with the south aisle behind. Masonry fallen from the top of the tower is strewn among fragments of ceiling plaster and wooden panels from the roof. Some of the pews are standing at odd angles but they have survived well - a testament to their sturdy construction.



In this photograph we see the fallen masonry has been laid out in the churchyard beneath the tower. The window to our left is at the end of the south aisle (undamaged, and probably the oldest stained glass in the church), and the south porch is to our right. Note the gargoyle in the lower right-hand corner of the picture (enlarged on page 14).



Enlargement of the gargoyle shown in the lower postcard on page 13 - it is of course very unusual to see its face from this angle. This stone beast has been reinstated and once again plays its important role in protecting the fabric of the church - a pipe in its open mouth projects rain water away from the stone of the tower.

Bibliography

Small, A, G Strange, R Davey 1979, *Brislington Not So Long Ago*, Privately Published.

Credits

Contributors of text and images retain copyright of their work.

All photographs were taken by William A Winchester. We're particularly grateful for the following scans of postcards that have been provided by Andrew Palmer: pages 3, 4 both, 5 lower, 7 both, 8 both, 9 both, 10 upper, 11 lower, and 12 both; and also for postcards loaned by Jonathan Rowe (chair of Brislington Conservation and History Society) for us to copy, illustrated on page 11 upper, 13 lower, and 14. All other illustrations (and text) provided by Ken Taylor.

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