Marjorie marks 102nd birthday

A woman celebrated her 102nd birthday just weeks after switching on her local Christmas lights.

Marjorie Hadley was chosen to switch on the lights as the oldest resident of St Georges in Telford, and has now celebrated a remarkable milestone.

Mrs Hadley, who lives in Birkdale Care Home in St Georges was surrounded by friends and family on her special day.

Her daughter Sandra Downes said: "She had a lovely time. She was made a big fuss of all day at Birkdale and she had a birthday cake and all sorts."

Mrs Hadley was originally from Birmingham, where she lived with her husband Arthur. The pair ran a greengrocers when they were first married and Arthur later worked on the roads.

Marjorie Hadley

They had one daughter, Sandra, and moved to Leegomery around 30 years ago.

When Arthur died, Mrs Hadley moved into a bungalow in Stirchley where she was very active in the local community, enjoying joining the Wednesday Club.

Mrs Hadley was also paid a visit by The Gower Heritage and Enterprise Group, who brought her a bunch of flowers and a card. She helped the group when they held the first Christmas lights switch-on in the town for many years.

Rotarians raise over £7,000

Rotarians are celebrating after raising more than £7,000 for good causes during their annual Christmas appeal.

The Rotary Club of Whitchurch has raised £7,527.60 after Father Christmas visited the town and surrounding villages during December.

It means people have helped raise a total of £147,193 since the scheme was launched about 40 years ago.

About 1,500 children visited Santa on the float, with more than 35 members of the Rotary, Inner Wheel and Round Table volunteering their time and support.

All the money raised over the festive period goes to Rotary-assisted charities and will enable Whitchurch Rotarians to maintain community work, especially for the elderly and the young. Walter Schafer, who organised the float, shared the driving duties with past president David Hewitt, while other leading contributors included Rotarians Howard Jones, Bob Thompson, Mike Nimmo, Greg Watson and Peter Williams, with several averaging seven stints.

Meanwhile, the Rotary club's Tree of Light, which started in 1998 and is situated in Sainsbury's and Whitchurch Civic Centre, has to date raised £1,593 this year.

Dick Whittington to be 2016 panto

Dick Whittington has been announced as Birmingham Hippodrome's 2016 pantomime.

Matt Slack will be returning for his fourth apperance, playing Idle Jack, with more celebrity names to be added to the line up soon.

It will run from December 19 to January 29, 2017.

Produced by Qdos Entertainment, tickets are on sale now starting at £15.50 with concessions and group discounts.

Michael Harrison, managing director of Qdos Entertainment's pantomime division, said: "Dick Whittington promises to be another unmissable Christmas show at the Hippodrome, the home of Birmingham pantomime.

"There is no doubt it's one of the most popular panto titles, with a great story packed with fun and adventure We look forward to bringing Birmingham audiences another blockbuster Christmas show."

Panto tickets, gift vouchers and Friends memberships can all be purchased on 0844 338 5000 or online at birminghamhippodrome.com

Archaeology group to look at hidden history

A history and archaeology group begins its programme for 2016 next week with a talk on hidden houses.

The Oswestry and Border History and Archaeology Group will meet in the town's Memorial Hall at 7.30pm on January 8 with speaker Simon Simcox, who says that often the structures of the past are their builder's only memorial.

The building surveyor and historian will investigate how construction details can indicate the shape, colour and size of the homes of our predecessors. He is the author of The Hidden Houses of Gwynedd, 1100-1800.

There will be three further talks before the group's summer visits start in May. These will be Monastic Military Orders with Roger Cooper on February 12; the annual meeting and Presidential Lecture – Historians of Oswestry with John Pryce Jones on Friday March 11; and Digging for Britain: outstanding archaeology as featured in the recent BBC 4 series with Matt Williams on April 8.

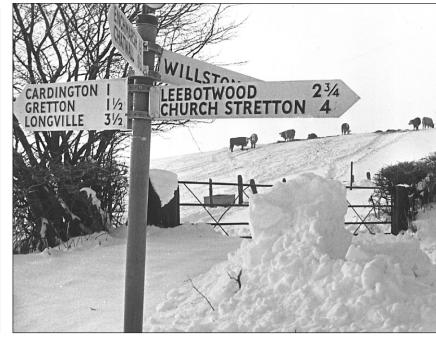For full details of membership or to get involved in the group's activities, please call (01691) 653355.

FACT OF THE DAY

Guy Fawkes, the explosives expert of Gunpowder Plot fame, who was a 17th century terrorist, was named the 30th Greatest Briton in a poll conducted by the BBC in 2002.

SPECIAL REPORT

Not long before this 20th century view the village was still called "Higley"

Pointing the right way – Shropshire place names are a fascinating field for research

It's all change for county place names

Report by Toby Neal
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The late Margaret Gelling complied six volumes of county place names

Dr John Baker who is part of the research team

HIGHLEY was, until at least the 19th century, pronounced Higley. Monk Hall in Monkhopton parish was once called Muck Hall, before being "rebranded".

Lostford tells us that lynxes once roamed Shropshire. And while Broseley is opaque, all becomes clear when you know that its first recorded spelling in 1177 was Burewardeslega.

It is the rich and wonderful world of Shropshire place names. But work to pick apart those names, research them, and try to understand fully their origins, is only half done.

Now a major project is under way to complete the work which was started by researcher and leading scholar Margaret Gelling around 1960 who, by the time of her death in 2009, had completed six volumes of The Place Names of Shropshire, mainly covering the northern and eastern parts of the county.

That leaves around half the county still to do and a team of experts has got together.

It has given talks to local societies and groups across Shropshire, and is running a travelling exhibition on Shropshire place names, the next of which will be at Ludlow Library and Museum Resources Centre from February 15 to March 31.

"Over the next few years we will publish the remaining volumes of the survey. There will probably be six more in total, including a substantial introductory volume. We hope, in due course, to make the material available online," said Dr John Baker, who is part of the research team.

Medieval

John says place names are a significant source of historical information, giving an insight into how the medieval environment was viewed and understood, and also into local dialects and the early languages of England.

"For instance, Buildwas consists of the Old English words bylde ("surging") and wæsse ("place that floods and drains with dramatic swiftness"). With the problems of flooding faced in Britain today, knowledge of this place name might still serve a purpose!"

John is a senior research fellow at the University of Nottingham and works in the Institute for Name Studies, and has been researching and teaching place names for the last 10 years.

For 90 years, the English Place Name Society, whose offices are based in the INS, has been carrying out a survey of English counties. The aim is to provide extensive material and reliable interpretations for those interested in local history, and for use by dialectologists, landscape historians, archaeologists and others in related fields.

In 2012, the INS in collaboration with The Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth successfully applied for a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to complete the survey. The team is led by Jayne Carroll, with Paul Cavill, Sarah Beach and John Baker, David Parsons, Helen Watts and Emily Pennifold (CAWCS). The Welsh input reflects the fact that parts of west Shropshire have Welsh place names.

"This is the first time that a team of researchers has received funding to complete a county survey. Most other counties in progress are being worked on by scholars in retirement or in their spare time," said John.

The Shropshire team will be building and expanding on the work of Margaret Gelling and her team of local volunteers.

"In order to understand place names, we have to find their earliest attestations. For instance, a name like Broseley is opaque in its modern form, but its earliest recorded spelling is from 1177, Burewardeslega. Along with other early spellings, this allows us to identify the elements of the place name as Old English burh-weard ('fort-guardian') and lēah ('open woodland'), so this is 'open woodland of the fort-guardian'."

Shropshire offers a fascinating field for research.

"There are some interesting patterns. For example, politically and linguistically, Shropshire is on the Anglo/Welsh boundary, which is why we get Welsh place names in the west. One intriguing observation made by Margaret Gelling is that Shropshire has a very high number of what might be called bureaucratic place names.

"Rather than describing the local landscape, these names are more like labels imposed by administrators, such as Acton ('settlement with a role in supplying oak'), Wootton ('settlement with a role in managing woodland'), Eaton ('settlement with a role in managing a river') and so on. These and similar compounds occur multiple times in Shropshire – there are eight Actons, four Woottons, and six Eatons – and may have been imposed by Mercian administrators in the 8th century, rather than arising in local speech like most place names do.

"Place names can help us to reconstruct earlier landscapes, telling us where wetlands and woodlands were, but they can also tell us about the wildlife that inhabited the landscape.

Evidence

"Lostford near Hodnet contains the Old English word lox 'lynx', and means 'lynx ford'. This tells us that, in Anglo-Saxon times, the lynx still frequented this part of Shropshire.

"Until recently, it was believed that the lynx had become extinct in England before the Anglo-Saxon period, but archaeological remains are also beginning to corroborate the evidence of this place name, showing that the lynx survived until at least the 6th or 7th centuries."

John says Shropshire differs from other parts of England. There are those Welsh names in the west, like Llanymynech ("church of the monks") which straddles the border, but it does not show the evidence of Viking settlers that is seen in the east Midlands and northern England with Old Norse names like Grimsby or Skegness.

"Many Shropshire place names would have been pronounced very differently in the past. The early spellings reflect pronunciation. Sometimes the changes are the result of normal attrition, sometimes they are encouraged by folk-etymology – that is to say, local attempts to understand the meaning of place names can influence the way those place names are pronounced.

"Monk Hall in Monkhopton parish is a good example. It probably meant 'nook infested by midges' (from OE mycg 'midge' and halh 'nook'), and its earliest spellings (e.g. Muggehala 1182) point to a pronunciation such as Mug Hall. But the origin of the name would already have been obscure by that time, and it wasn't long before the 'g' developed to a 'k' sound. To a modern ear, however, Muck Hall isn't a very appealing name. Add to this the fact that there was a longstanding connection with Wenlock Priory, and it isn't very surprising that, in the 19th century, the name began to be remodelled again, and became Monk Hall. But this seems to reflect the polite pronunciation –18th and 19th-century field-names still call the place Muckall!

"Highley was pronounced Higley at least until the 19th century. It was originally Huggan-lēah 'Hugga's open woodland'. It was reinterpreted, locally, as meaning 'high open woodland', perhaps aided by its high position and the proximity of another settlement called Netherton, 'lower settlement'. The reinterpretation of the name has caused the pronunciation to change."