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## My Town

Last updated: 24 November 2005

Nowhere else on earth comes close to Hay-on-Wye, according to **Eric Lewis Pugh**. Born and brought up in the town, he's written this personal portrait of the place he knows so well.



"My family's connections with Hay go back over 150 years. Great-grandfather, Thomas Pugh, was born in Llandeilo Graban in the Welsh county of Radnorshire. He married Mary Lewis from Aberllynfi, Breconshire, in St. Peters Church, Glasbury, in 1853. Thomas was a skilled shoemaker. They came to live and work in Hay in the August of that year.

Consequently, I was born in Hay into a family that had been involved in local commerce throughout the ensuing years. My father and mother had a confectionery and tobacconist shop on 'The Pavement' and almost all of my relations, on both sides of the family, were involved in some way or another in local business in the town.

Hay is my home town, and, naturally, there is nowhere else on earth that compares. It may have changed over the years but it still retains its nostalgic charisma.

The town is steeped in history with its Norman Castle, the remains of a mediaeval town wall and many other places of antiquity. This feeling of historical attachment pervades the town and gives rise to my own great interest in local history.

When I was a little boy, the Second World War had not long been underway. By the time I had begun to recognise the world around me, it seemed to be filled with young men in uniform who were temporarily stationed in Hay and in transit to their overseas postings. Naturally, they frequented my parents shop for their cigarettes and sweets.

I remember one local lad, who was home on leave from the Royal Navy, bringing me a banana, which I proudly carried to school where most of the children - including myself - had never seen one, let alone touched one before. Unfortunately by the time I got it home it had become quite inedible.

Hay was a quite different town then. Everyone knew everyone else (and everyone elses business, too!). Most of the populace had been born and brought up within the town. The shops never seemed to change their proprietors or their trades.

In these immediate post-war years the place had become a little rundown, although it was still very busy for Market Day on Thursdays and, especially on the twice yearly Fair Days. The town on a Thursday was filled from early morning with local farmers and their wives, who had usually walked into town laden down with heavy baskets filled with produce to sell, and then reloaded with enough groceries to last the following week. Market stalls filled Castle Square and

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stretched all the way from the Town Clock right down Broad Street. These stalls sold everything from buckets and churns to ducklings, chicks and eggs.

The increased use of the motor vehicle eventually saw the decline of busy Thursdays. The farmers and their families could easily jump into their car, or even a tractor, and pop into town for their needs at any time during the week.

I had to leave my beloved Hay after my schooldays. I left to attend college in London, completed my National Service and then had to travel many miles every day from Hay for employment.

Many of my contemporaries had to do the same, some having to leave home completely. I was lucky in of my chosen trade that early in the 1960s there seemed to be an opening in town to service the rapidly expanding usage of television. I opened my own shop in Hay in 1963.

During this period another young man from Cusop, which is almost part of Hay, came home and decided to start a second-hand bookshop in the town. He seemed to have a flair for attracting publicity. When he declared Hay's Independence from the rest of the UK, the town suddenly became host to visitors and press from all over the world.

Since then the town has changed enormously. It is now busy and bustling throughout the year. Richard Booth certainly put Hay on the map and it is now known throughout the world as the 'Town of Books'.

These visitors brought a new prosperity and encouraged new residents, who had been attracted by the atmosphere of our quaint old market town with the Black Mountains within walking distance, the River Wye flowing through and the beauty of the surrounding countryside. These new locals have brought a fresh vigour to Hay and we have welcomed their contribution to keeping the town alive and busy. It is very unusual now to see an empty shop or a poorly-attended function.

Naturally, some resent the passing of the old times and the more sedate and quiet way of life which existed in Hay in earlier years. Most, however, recognise that life everywhere has changed and so has Hay. Old locals are now inclined to accept it gracefully and make jokes about our hordes of visitors throughout the busy summer months. Recently I was greeted by a local inhabitant who exclaimed 'Well, how are you? It's a nice change to meet someone I know!'

Popularity does bring its problems, however, and Hay is no exception. There is a sad lack of affordable housing, as any property within the town and district is way beyond the means of young people. Unfortunately they still have to move away to find more substantially affluent employment, which in a town the size of Hay is not available. Not surprisingly, though, when they reach retirement age they do their utmost to return home to spend their later years.

Visitors now come to Hay throughout the year, and we have an enormous influx for the annual Festival of Literature, when the town becomes almost a no-go area for people from the immediate district. The town is always busy, especially during bank holidays. Unfortunately, many visitors do not seem to realise that Hay is only a small market town of some 1,450

souls. They seem to think that we should have the facilities of a small city, especially during the ten days of the festival.

This small annoyance apart, they are usually welcomed so well and become so enamoured with Hay that they keep returning year after year. Long may this continue."

**Written by Eric Lewis Pugh from Hay-on-Wye.**

- Take a look at Eric's collection of **old photos** of Hay-on-Wye.

#### your comments

##### **Eric Pugh from Hay**

Hi Christina Jones I have just seen your request. Your great, great grandfather, J.P. Jones is mentioned in Geoffrey L. Fairs book "A History of The Hay" published by Phillimore in 1972. Unfortunately this is now out of print but I do have a copy. If you would like to go to my own website about Hay in old photographs [www.OLDHAY.CO.UK](http://www.OLDHAY.CO.UK) and get in touch via the contact page I will send you the details and how to get to the farm.

Sun Jan 24 19:16:09 2010

##### **Christina Jones**

My great great g-father was born near Hay I believe in Cusop. His parents were Tom and Mary Pugh Jones. They left Wales @1829 for the US and John Percival Jones became a successful silver miner and US Senator (30 Years. My siblings visited his birthplace in the 1970's and now it is my turn to go after all these years but they don't remember the directions to the cottage/farm although then it was owned by the Samuels family they believe. Would anyone help with more information? I also wonder if many of us on this chain are distant cousins.

Mon Jan 18 09:08:48 2010

##### **Roger Williams from Tring**

I have been researching my family tree and I was therefore interested in the message from John McQuaid (way back in 2004) as George F Williams is my great grandfather and although he lived in Hay for many years he was not born there. This of course would make Charles P Williams my great uncle and I did not know that we had a murderer in the family. Please contact me John to see if we can exchange further information. Incidentally my grandmothers maiden name was Clara Elizabeth Pugh (her father was Henry Pugh) and lived in Nantyglo she married Arthur Williams from Hay, does anyone know of them ?

Mon Nov 30 15:09:41 2009

##### **Martin Jones Builth Wells**

Crossing the new Hay bridge, and seeing how much the level of the road had been elevated, I wondered what the old bridge at Hay might have looked like?

Tue Jul 28 08:59:42 2009

##### **Mavis Jarvis: Yorkshire**

In 'Comments' in 2006 I replied to a comment by Peter Marwood, who was looking for cousin Cyril Marwood's "WISPS OF HAY". After searching for a few years I have finally found a copy. Last year, when I came to the Hay Festival I tried to find Peter Marwood, both in Hay and

Brecon, but with no luck  
Sun Apr 12 20:00:09 2009

**Cynthia Hole Torpoint, Cornwall**

i lived in the second cottage over the old Hay bridge on the Clyro side from 1947 to 1951. I attended Hay junior school before moving to Cardiff. Magical time. If you know me please get in touch.

Wed Oct 1 09:30:49 2008

**Dawn, Hay on Wye**

I know this is not the correct site but can anyone help me out i am looking for a D v d of old photos Hay on wye i know there were some about at one time

Mon Feb 25 16:59:36 2008

**Jill Preston from Hay on Wye**

I was wondering if i place this here Mr Eric Pugh may see it and be able to shed some light to my question about Donald Hume (the question is on the page titled your say) i would be so grateful for any info on this subject.

Sat Feb 16 17:46:56 2008

**geoff weaver**

Hi I have been lookin on the net for any photos regarding the 'hay poisoner' I don't know a lot about the case. I have now moved to Scotland but my gran told me that it was my great grandfather who arrested him. He was chief constable at one point in the 1920's. I was also told there was a plaque some where in hay. Any information would be great if you know of any photos as well if poss.

Sun Feb 10 22:24:21 2008

**Carol Thomas from Manchester**

My G grandmother was Sylvia Lloyd b1870 in Hay. Her parents were Thomas and Mary Ann (Pembridge) Sylvia she married my grandad John Shopland in Cardiff in 1888. If anyone has any info I would be grateful.

Tue Jan 29 10:39:53 2008

**Barry Maund**

My great grandfather Ernest was born in Wyeford Road and his father John worked for the railway board helping to build the Brecon to Hereford Railway. John and the rest of the family lived in Broad Street in 1901 he was married to Charlotte first then he married Sarah at St. Mary's church.

Fri Jun 29 09:18:07 2007

**David Meale Newtown Abbott**

To Dorothy Fermor. Re shop on Glasbury Bridge...my grand parents owned and ran this shop until the 1960/70's, I was part of that shop !

Mon Apr 23 17:44:48 2007

**Dorothy Fermor**

Would anyone know any information regarding the main local shop 1950/1960 on Glasbury Bridge run by Bert Meale & his wife Annie Also there was a bakery at the back that baked daily bread run by Mr E Leighton

Tue Mar 20 10:37:50 2007

**Mcichelle Randle**

Some great information here. Really gives an insight to life in Hay. My great great grandparents were George and Catherine Wood. They lived at 14 Castle Street from around 1880 until the early 1900s. I believe George was a postman for many years. My great grandfather Egbert also grew up in Hay. If anyone has any information on my family I'd

appreciated you emailing me.  
Thu Nov 16 14:24:17 2006

**Mavis Jarvis, N. Yorkshire**

In answer to Peter Marwood's letter. My brother has a copy of "Wisps of Hay" sent to him by Cyril and I have been looking recently for a copy for myself. See my letter to "Childhood memories" on this website. I have just spent two nights in Hay after walking from Pandy to Hay, a part of the Offa's Dyke path that I missed in May. I met Phyllis Morgan just coming out of chapel where she still plays the organ at the age of 99 years. A wonderful lady, who remembers my dad's cousin Cyril.

Thu Sep 28 09:45:31 2006

**Gwillim Poole Dorset**

My father was born in Llandeilo graban. I would be grateful if anyone has any information about his grandparents James and Mary Nunn who I believe lived in Llandeilo graban and were school teachers.

Thu Sep 21 11:20:05 2006

**Tony Whitchurch, originally from Glasbury-on-Wye**

It was a delight for me to find Eric Pughs' writing. I knew Eric when he was a youngster, eventually attending the Marconi Radio Officer's college I believe, at the same time that I joined the Royal Navy as a radio operator. I well recall each Thursday going to his Mum's sweet shop on the Pavement - what joy! I lived in Glasbury-on-Wye in those days, but when I left in 1955 to join the RN it was only on leave that I went back home. Eventually I emigrated to Canada, and now live in Maple Ridge, which is a suburb of Vancouver, B.C. I was fortunate enough a few years ago to visit the area, staying at Ffordfawr, and took the opportunity to visit Hay, and actually meet Eric again and discuss old times!

Mon Sep 4 16:29:29 2006

**Peter Marwood from Brecon**

I am desperate to find a copy of my uncle Cyril Marwood's "WISPS OF HAY". My mother had the original copy before she passed away, but it got lost, somehow. Do you have any idea as to where I could purchase a copy.

• **Can you help?**

Wed Aug 2 11:18:04 2006

**Roderick (Roddy) Williams from Talgarth**

I am Hay born and bred, so was my father and his father before him. Great grand father came from Newent in Gloucestershire. My late father had been the Hay's postmaster from the later WW2 years up until 1963. I like the town of Hay but it is very different than when I was a boy there. The bookshop era was started by Mr Booth about 1963/64 I believe. A border town although neighbouring Cusop is in Herefordshire it was very much part of Hay. When my father moved to Cusop one Hay resident described it as the Acropolis of Hay. I think perhaps the far end of Cusop Hill is my favourite place of all on a warm summer's day where you can gaze over the Black Mountains and down as far as Hay.

Sat Dec 17 08:42:46 2005

**Brian Griffiths. Pontardawe**

Hi, I remember my grandfather Samuel Pugh talking a lot about Hay and Brecon. He would go all misty eyed and tell

me stories of his father and grandfather, Thomas Pugh-(Jnr &snr) A part of me belongs there by association and blood. I, too, have a strange attachment to the area and easily understand other people's affection for this lovely part of Wales. Regards, Brian  
Wed Sep 7 23:17:21 2005

**Tom / Rochester NY**

An excellent article Mr Pugh. I too have frequently visited Hay 10 years ago and fortunately purchased a half doz books on Welsh history while there. On a cold winter night in New York, "they" do wonders to warm the heart. One of my fondest memories was standing at the base of the castle in the village and pondering how much money and effort it would take to renovate the place. Did anyone ever attempt it? And then of course driving the single lane road to the top / watching dogs herd sheep along the way, and of course a moment to stop at the large burial chamber along the way ( or was that chanber prior to entering Hay? ) Enjoy Tom  
Mon Aug 29 23:00:56 2005

**Mike Pugh Whitby Ontario canada**

Hi I am researching my family history, and they all seem to come from Llandiello Graban, maybe we are related? My GG Grandad was Sam Pugh born 1840 at Middle Argoed farm,(brothers John, Roger and david, mother elizabeth ( widow). I do not know the name of her husband.  
Sat Jul 16 23:46:26 2005

**Elizabeth Keefe(nee Jones), Newfoundland, Canada**

Mr. Pugh: My deceased dad was Oscar Jones and my deceased mum was Gladys Jones, my sister is Eileen Bufton and my brother is Tref Jones ('Tref the post' as was) from Hay. I don't know if you remember me but I sure remember you and your shop. Anyway, I digress. I love reading about the history of Hay and it is heartwarming to see familiar photos. I am writing as I was hoping that BBC Wales would maybe interview Eileen and Tref to bring awareness of their sight problem known as Retinitis Pigmentosa to the public. As you know being blind has not changed Eileen much, she is still very active in fundraising etc. in the town. What do you think? Anyway, keep up the good work with Hay and its memories.  
Fri Apr 15 21:19:17 2005

**Colin Rosenberg B.C. Canada**

I was in Hay-on Wye in the late 50's for the funeral of my grandfather. My greatest memories are of fishing (my first time)& of a castle or manor house.  
Mon Feb 28 02:54:35 2005

**John McQuaid from Melton Mowbray**

I am researching a case of murder which occurred in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, in 1901. Charles Philip Williams, a native of Hay, shot his paramour in the head as she lay beside him in bed. He then killed himself. His father was a Mr G Williams, a butcher of Lion Street, Hay. I was looking to see if someone could do some local 'digging' for me.  
Sun Jul 25 20:28:38 2004

**This site is now closed and cannot accept new comments.**

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## Old Photos

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From a May Fair in 1880 to the advent of the motor car in 1923, local historian and businessman **Eric Lewis Pugh** has put together a fascinating album of old photos of Hay-on-Wye. If you've got any shots of the town in days gone by, you can [send them](#) to us and we'll add them to the website.

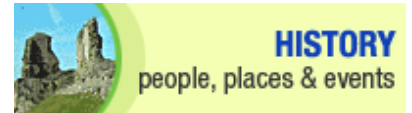


Castle Street 1870

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

This is one of the earliest photographs taken in Hay. It shows Castle Street as it was in 1870 when the diarist Francis Kilvert would have known it.

- *Eric Lewis Pugh has also written a [profile](#) of Hay-on-Wye where his family have lived for more than 150 years.*



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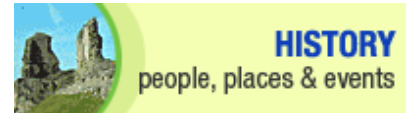


May Fair 1880

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

The May Fair in Broad Street in 1880. This photograph was taken from the building which now houses the local council offices.

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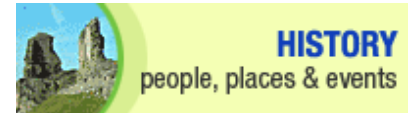


Town Clock 1911

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

1911 at the Town Clock when the people of Hay in County Huron, Canada, presented a flag to the people of Hay, Breckonshire.

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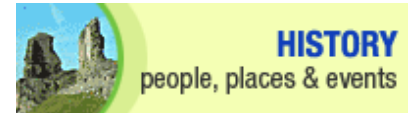


High Town 1870

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

High Town before 1870 when the buildings on the right occupied what is now Castle Square. Just the peak of the still-existing Chees Market can be seen in the top middle distance.

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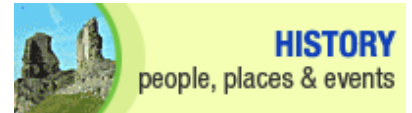


High Town 2002

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Before and after... the same view as the previous photo of High Town in 2002. All the shops in the middle of the photograph above were demolished in the 1870s.

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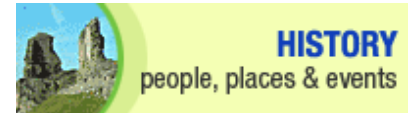


Railway Station 1920

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

The Railway Station at Hay. Looking west towards the bridge over the river Wye in about 1920. The line from Hereford to Brecon was demolished under the Beeching "axe" in 1963.

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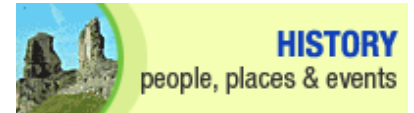


Broad Street 1875

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Broad Street in 1875 - the site of what was to become the Crown Hotel. The part of the building on the extreme right-hand side with the bay window became the present Rose & Crown Inn. The Seven Stars is the building above the double gates.

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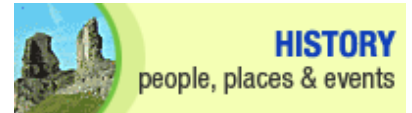


Hay's 'Firefly'

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Hay's 'Firefly' hurtling down Broad Street early in the twentieth century. This steam driven horse drawn pump was purchased in 1901 and remained in use for over 40 years.

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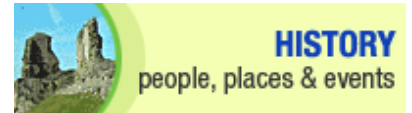


Hay Bridge 1933

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

The freeing of the tolls on Hay Bridge which spanned the River Wye and connected Breconshire and Radnorshire in March 1933.

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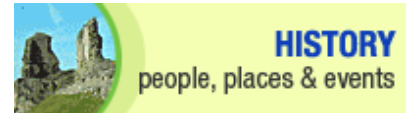


1911 Coronation Celebrations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Castle Street decorated for the Coronation of George V in 1911.

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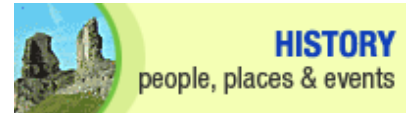


Market Day 1890

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Market day in Broad Street in 1890.

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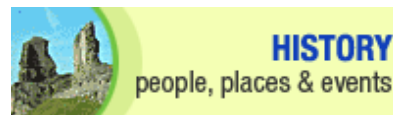
Market Day 1923

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Market Day in Broad Street in 1923. Now cars have started to appear.

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