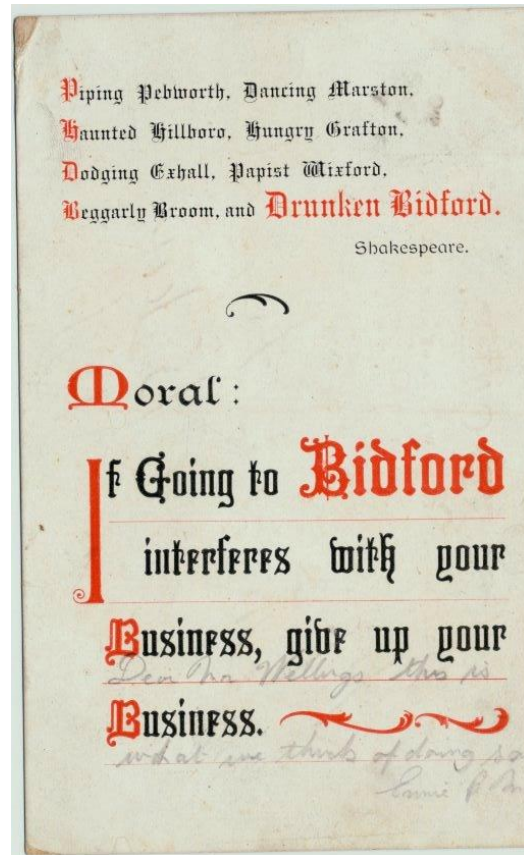


BIDFORD RIVERSIDE TOURIST RESORT





For over half a century Bidford on Avon was a popular inland tourist destination. This booklet draws on resources of Bidford and District History Society to outline how visitors occupied themselves in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Text researched by Dr. Roger Leese

Illustrations provided by Rodney Crompton

Edited by John Alexander-Head

An electronic copy of this booklet can be downloaded from www.bidfordhistory.org.uk, under publications tab.

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Bidford Riverside Tourist Resort

BIDFORD A GOOD PLACE TO GET TO

Why people came to Bidford, Arrow and Salford Priors

Before the introduction of paid holidays in 1937, many working people could only afford one or two days holiday. A pleasant day's excursion from Birmingham to riverside Bidford and other villages with a river aspect was an attractive proposition.

Bidford looked to attract the wealthy and respectable as well as the lower classes, evidenced from coloured postcards from the first decade of the twentieth century featuring smart, fashionably dressed ladies.

The November 1901 edition of the Parish Magazine referred to 'the hundreds and at certain times thousands' of visitors who poured into Bidford during the summer months.

From Evesham Journal, 31 May 1890

Bank Holiday: 'Bidford has become quite a favourite resort for holiday makers and on Monday last hundreds of excursionists came here to spend their time in boating and rambling along the pleasant walks which are to be found in the vicinity of this quiet little town'

How people arrived

Many visitors travelled to Salford Priors Station (on right). The 5 trains from Birmingham on Saturday and 1 on Sunday took just 80 minutes. The legs of visitors would not have been challenged by a 1 mile walk over the then steep Marriage Hill. (The hill crest was lowered for the road in the 1930s). Rodney Crompton recalls how as a boy he would stand in front of his father's garage on the Salford Road on a Saturday and watch what looked 'like a row of ants coming down the hill from Salford Station'.



Other visitors travelled on the same route to Broom station to enjoy the local river fishing there.

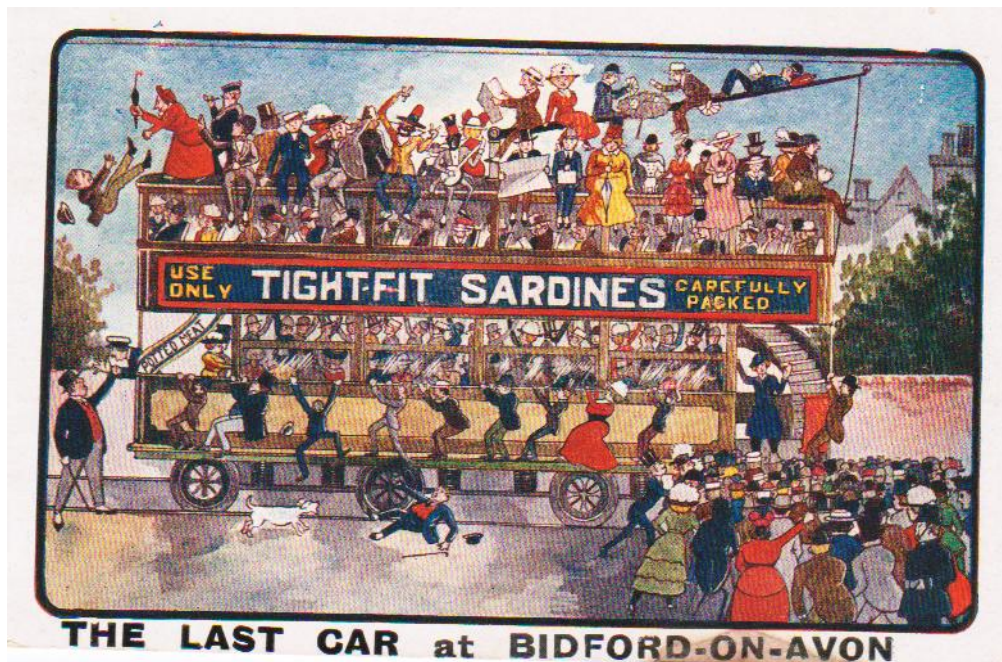
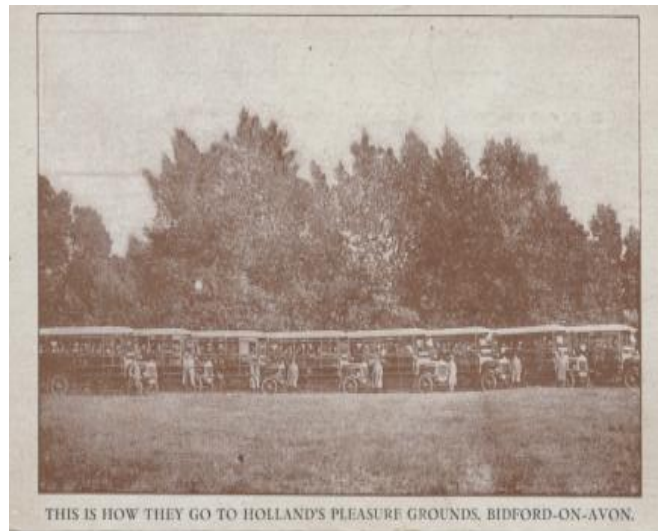


Table 263 BIRMINGHAM, REDDITCH, EVESHAM, and ASHCURCH									
Work Days					Sundays				
Stn	Time	Time	Time	Time	Stn	Time	Time	Time	Time
Birmingham New Stn	8.00	9.00	10.00	11.00	Birmingham New Stn	11.00	12.00	13.00	14.00
Redditch	8.10	9.10	10.10	11.10	Redditch	11.10	12.10	13.10	14.10
Evesham	8.20	9.20	10.20	11.20	Evesham	11.20	12.20	13.20	14.20
Aschurch	8.30	9.30	10.30	11.30	Aschurch	11.30	12.30	13.30	14.30
Salford Priors	8.40	9.40	10.40	11.40	Salford Priors	11.40	12.40	13.40	14.40
Broom	8.50	9.50	10.50	11.50	Broom	11.50	12.50	13.50	14.50

In the 1920s there were reductions in railway services, but by this time road transport was developing.

Even before WWI charabancs brought visitors to Bidford. After WWI, charabancs and coaches were increasingly important as they brought growing numbers of trippers into the village.

Bidford publicised its popularity, by showing just how uncomfortable the journey home might be!



JOHN BARLOW AND THE WHITE LION

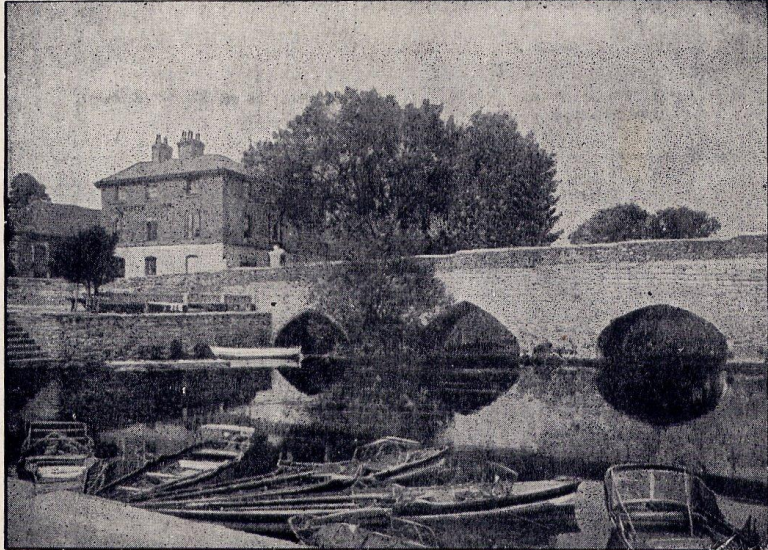
John Barlow is the man who 'made' Bidford. He was licensee of the White Lion from 1877 until his death in 1895. His promotion of his hotel and of the attractions of Bidford was energetic and he earned many press reviews. He was succeeded by William Butler up to 1912, as shown on this promotional card.

Railway Stations—Salford Priors and Broom Junction. Bidford Siding, E. & W. Junction.

**Pleasure
Boats.**

Posting.

**Easy Terms
for
Week End.**



**Large or
Small Parties
Catered for.**

Billiards.

Fishing.

White Lion Hotel, Bidford, S.O.

Telegrams:—
"Lion, Bidford."

Proprietor—WILLIAM BUTLER.

Advertisement Birmingham Daily
Post 24 Dec 1877

From Alcester Chronicle, 27 July 1889

A PLEASANT OUTING:

'Messrs B and G Shorthouse. Rolling mills, Eyre St, Birmingham, gave a day's outing, on Saturday last, to their employees to Bidford. The party (c.140) arrived by the fast train in the morning, and partook of lunch, dinner, and tea at Mr Barlow's White Lion Hotel, the intervals between each being occupied in boating, fishing and other amusements. Mr Barlow's boats were placed at the service of those who had a liking for river scenery and its accompanying mishaps, four young men in one boat happily escaping with only a ducking. In the evening the company adjourned for a short time to Mr Barlow's Assembly Room, where conviviality was indulged in until train time. Before departing, there were 'three hearty cheers' for Messrs Shorthouse and Barlow. 'All departed thoroughly pleased with the very enjoyable day they had spent at Bidford.'

Good fishing, pike, perch, chub and bream in strictly preserved water in the River Avon, one and a half miles in length at Hilborough, near Bidford.

J BARLOW, WHITE LION HOTEL, BIDFORD having purchased the Right of Fishing in this good water. Tickets can be obtained at the above-named Hotel at 1s per day.

Conveyances, Boats, Bait etc found if required.

Bidford is situate one mile from Salford Priors Station (Midland Railway), five miles from Honeybourne (Great Western) and within easy distance of Birmingham, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Worcester, Malvern etc.

John Barlow had remarkable organisational and catering skills judging from the number of visitors he catered for on July 4 1891.

From Alcester Chronicle, 11 July 1891

'On Saturday last, the trip from Birmingham brought a large number of visitors as usual. A party of over 600 from Messrs Lloyd and Sons of 47 Princess St, and under the guidance of Mr Percy Goode, consisting of about 50 of the members of the Aston Choral Society, were catered for by Host Barlow at the White Lion Inn; the first-named were entertained at dinner, the latter celebrated their annual visit and tea...Large numbers of trippers were also provided for at the Mason's Arms and Pleasure Boat and other establishments.

From Evesham Journal, 10 Aug 1895

Funeral of John Barlow.

During his residence in Bidford he has undoubtedly done more than any other individual to make known the beauties and attractions of this now popular pleasure-seekers' resort. He was an ideal host and during his residence at the White Lion his hotel has become famous among the Inns of the Midlands. He suffered a very long and painful illness to which he succumbed on 31st July.

Of course the White Lion continued as an Hotel for another 60 years. It acquired a Tudor style (painted) for some years.

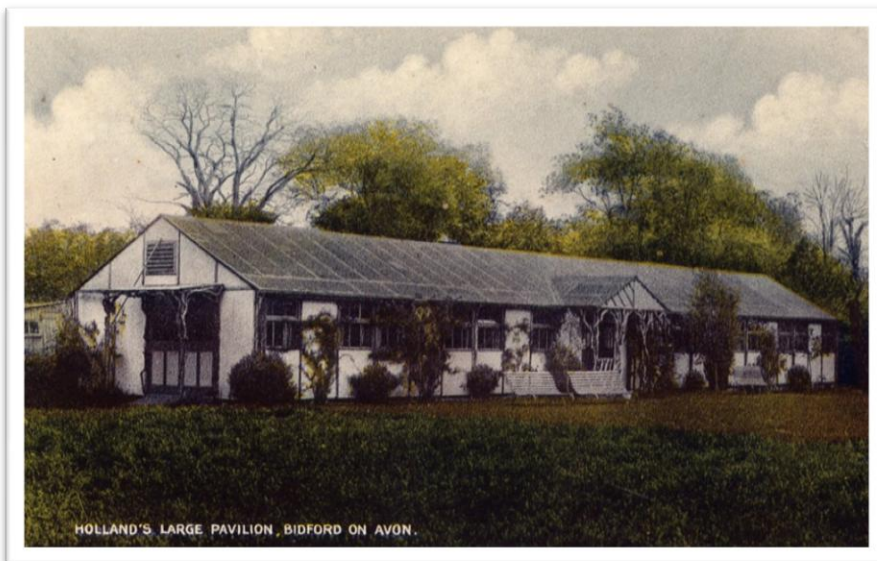


The building now exists as a plain rendered apartment block.

HOLLAND'S GROUND

While the White Lion catered for a mass market, Holland's Pleasure Grounds sought somewhat more middle class customers. 'Daddy' Holland's Pleasure Grounds was one of Bidford's major attractions for nearly half a century.

Set among trees at the end of The Pleck, Holland's Pleasure Grounds consisted of a Pavilion, a garden and a small quay with boats. The garden provided a smart area in which Tea could "be Taken" in spacious surroundings. The boats available included small steam gondolas for conducted tours of the river, individual rowing skiffs and punts.



Holland's Pavilion



The Gardens showing staff on left.

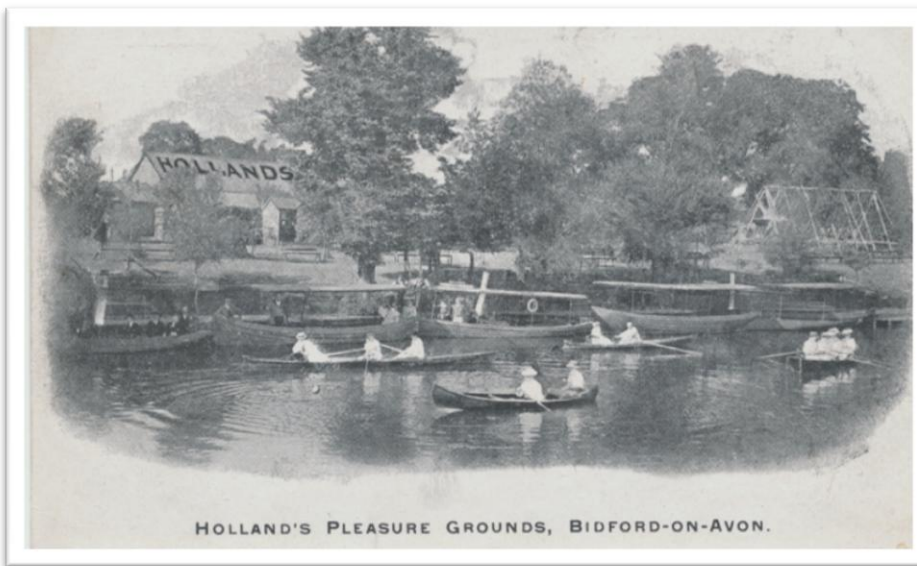


Taking Tea in the Garden

Other pictures show women dressed in a 1920's style

Visitors and Locals alike found the gardens to be a magnet. Peggy Griffiths had happy memories of her visits there:

"Whenever I could get away [from the Post Office] for an hour I would take my small daughter, in her pushchair, to these delightful gardens. There were several double wooden swingboats, prettily painted, a small roundabout and a tea shop. This latter was managed by two of Mr Holland's sisters, Mrs Dalton and Mrs Hammond. "

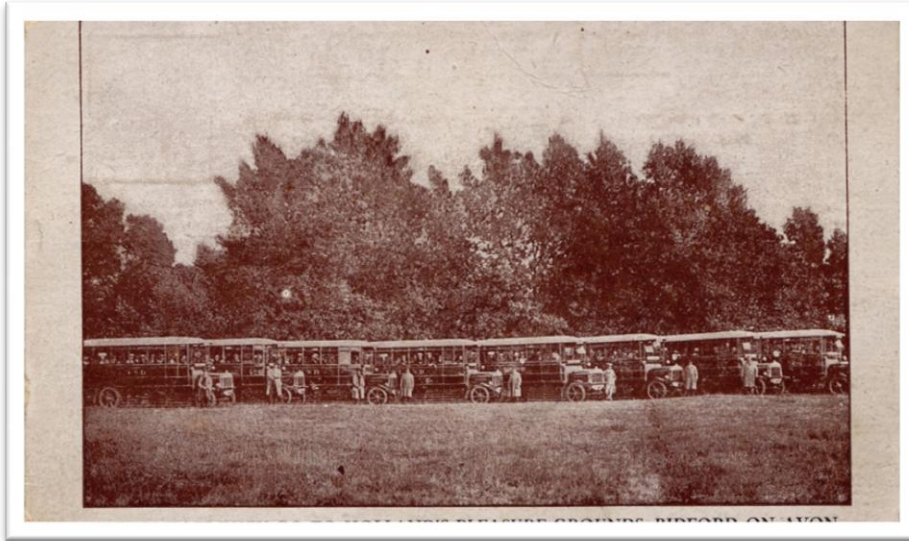


This publicity card shows the Grounds from the River Avon. At the landing stage are three small steam powered gondolas.

The picture implies a busy river scene. The photograph may have been touched up to give this impression!

The steamer trips under Captain 'Skipper' Jones were especially popular. For Marjorie Kidson:

"One of the nice trips we had was on one of those Holland's boats down the river to Cleeve Prior. When you got there it was off the boat and into the café. If you fancied it you could walk along the plank across the river. There was only a metal rail to hold onto on our side and nothing on the other. Changing places was fraught with difficulty but I don't remember anyone falling in. "

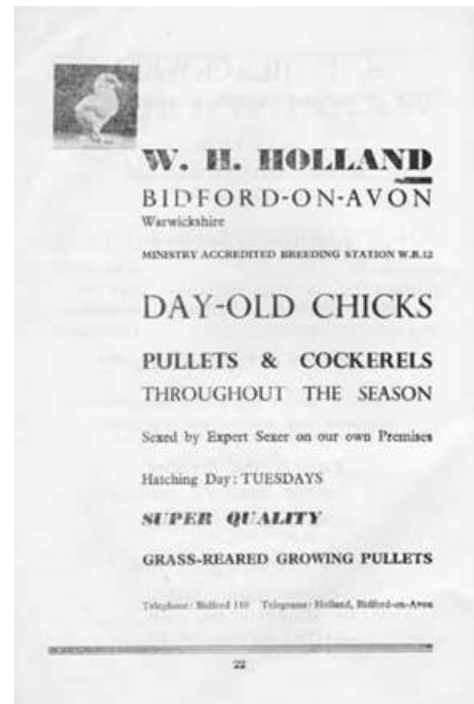


This picture suggests a fleet of buses bringing customers. It is unlikely that Holland's could have coped with so many customers.

The enforced closure of 'Daddy' Holland's Pleasure Grounds during World War II, because of a shortage of fuel for the boats, marked the end of an era. 'Daddy' Holland gave up the boat trips, the tea shop closed down and he turned his hand to producing battery chickens which covered the boatyard and the landing stages. For some years he also kept exotic ornamental fowls in large cages.

Finally, when he could no longer manage to look after the birds, he sold the land.

Despite the demise of the Pleasure Grounds, boat hire and boat trips remained a crucial part of Bidford's continuing appeal. Bidford Boats is still in business today.



MESSING ABOUT BY THE RIVER

"Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing—absolute nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats". *The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame, 1908*

The River Avon provided great attractions to visitors from urban areas. Boating, fishing and bathing were embraced together with social interactions ashore.

'The Bidford of the 20th century would be a quiet place indeed, were it not for the visitors who frequent it.Visitors will find every comfort and attention at the excellent hotels, among which may be mentioned the White Lion, the Mason's Arms and the Pleasure Boat'. The Fisherman's Rest gave out fishing tackle. 'During recent years Mr Holland has established some excellent pleasure grounds near the entrance to the town, and here he can cater in first-class style for large or small parties; steamers and pleasure boats can be hired'. *'Souvenir of Bidford by Arthur W Wade, 1906*

There is no doubt that boating was a great attraction with three proprietors offering a variety of boats for hire.

Boat Hire

Boats could be hired from the White Lion and Holland's Pleasure Grounds.

Alongside Holland's Grounds was The Pleasure Boat Inn. This establishment provided boats, skiffs, punts and coracles for hire.

PLEASURE BOAT INN, BIDFORD-ON-AVON
BOATS and PUNTS for Hire by Hour or Day

ANSELL'S
Finest
ALES, WINES
and STOUTS.

—
Luncheons
and Teas.

○

CHOPS
and STEAKS
at the
Shortest Notice.

—
Phone 52.

○

Large and Small Parties
Catered for.

C. WILSHAW,
PROPRIETRESS
(late Soho Road,
BIRMINGHAM).

Home Fed Ham and
Egg Teas a Speciality.

This picture includes a telephone number and is from the period between 1932 and 1940 when Clara Wilshaw was the Proprietress.



Skiff with 6 aboard passing Holland's Grounds.



Sail powered canoe



A skiff, everyone relaxing, in front of Bidford bridge.

Not all the boat hire was in Bidford. Further downstream on the right hand bank there was boat hire in Salford Priors.

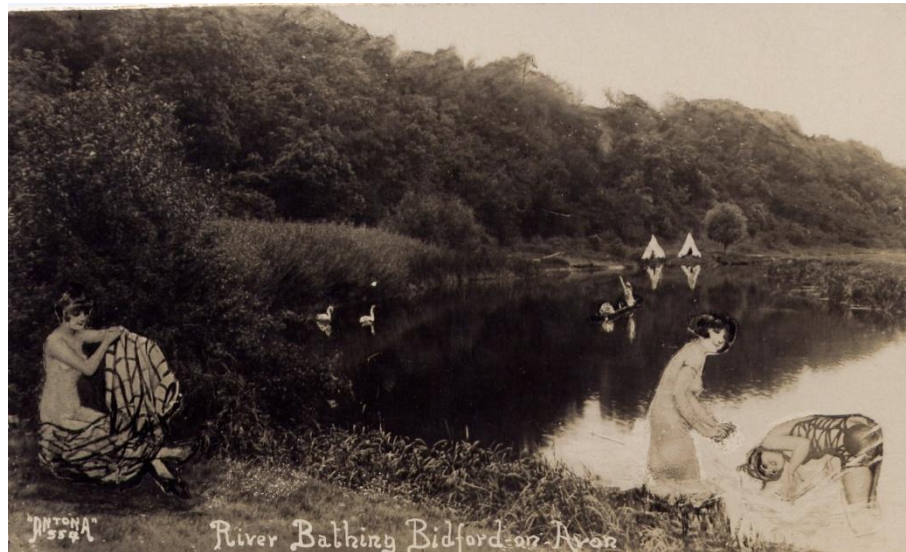


There are reports of visitors falling accidentally into the river.

Swimming

Some people chose to swim in the river. At a time when access to swimming pools may have been limited, there was an interest in open water swimming. We know that the Avon current can be strong so locations may have been chosen with care.

This photograph taken at what is now the southern end of the Shakespeare Way appears to have been "doctored".

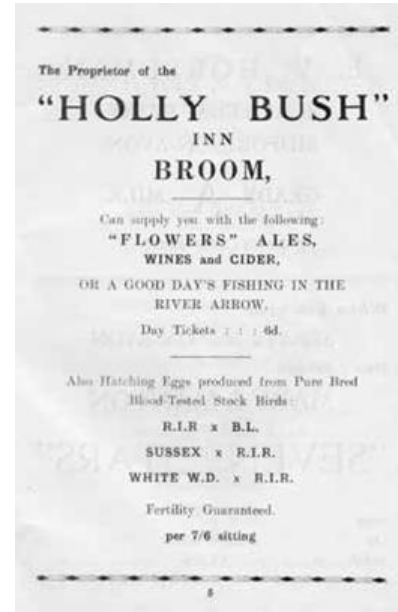


Fishing

Fishing was an early attraction first advertised by John Barlow in 1877. It was not limited to the river banks in Bidford.

The River Arrow provided also good fishing at Broom. Broom advertised accommodation and fishing in the River Arrow, all quite close to Broom Junction railway station.

To this day, Birmingham anglers continue to fish our river waters.



PRIVATE TIME

Bidford promoters recognized the appeal of a rural village for younger people intent on developing relationships in privacy.



'Immediately round the corner at The White Lion is the bridge, and this is a lively corner on a Saturday night, as it is the congregating place of the weekend holiday-makers, who swarm upon the bridge and sit upon the parapet or adjoining wall and block the roadway...Never was better court paid to ladies by men than that paid here, either upon the bridge, or in romantic promenades in the moonlight (or the starlight, failing the moon), along the Roman road that runs from the Bridge foot away into the country, or up the Stratford Road or the Evesham Road, or down by the river side, and across the meadows to Barton or Marlcliff....

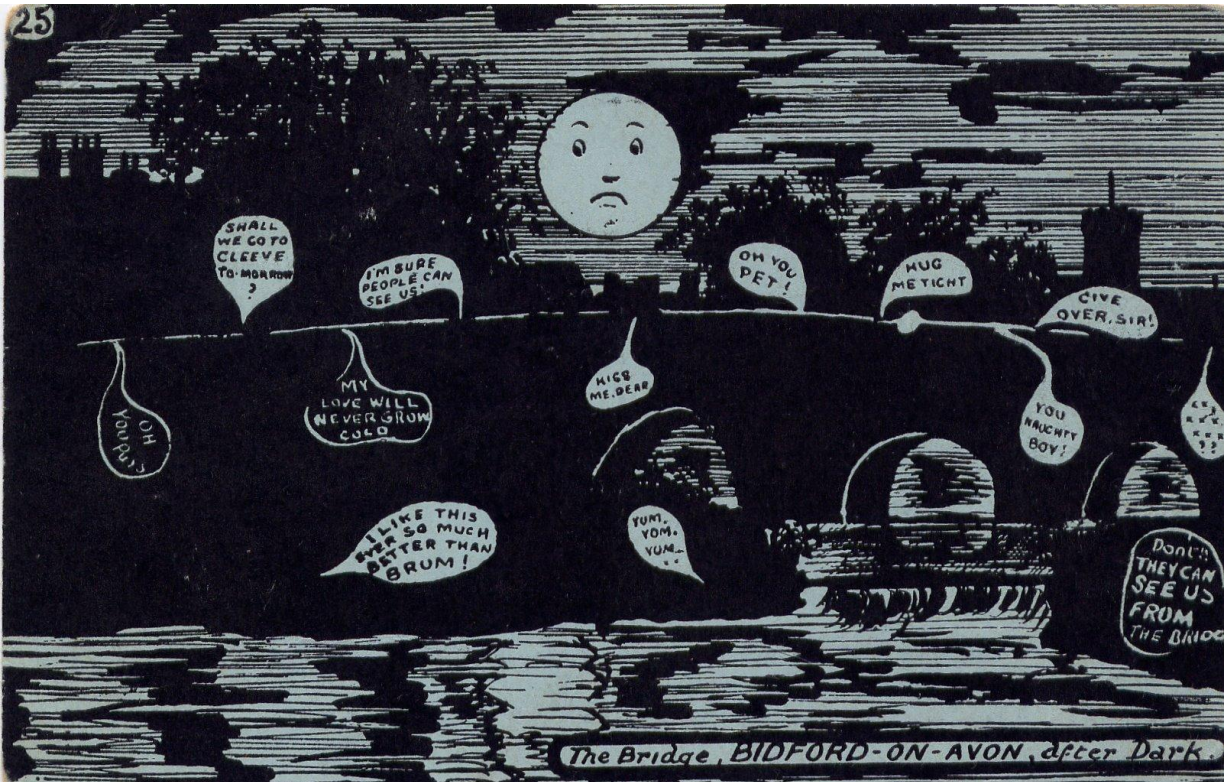
John Henry Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906)



The pull of Bidford seems to have had some success!



Humour was much in evidence



SHARED TIME

The White Lion is crowded with people in every department both up and down stairs; you cannot move anywhere without rubbing shoulders with them. Both here and at the Masons' Arms opposite, discussions and conversations are being carried on with vivacity, and persons from the great needle-manufacturing town of Redditch, and from Birmingham and elsewhere, are making hearty recognitions of each other with inquiries as to how things go in the cycle-trade, or the enamelled-iron trade, or in whatever trade it is to which the one remembers that the other devotes his time and energy. Sports are freely mentioned – the cricket of the present, and the football of the past or the next season – with approbation or the reverse of the Aston Villa team, or some other well-known or little-known local athletic club. Politics are discussed in a minor key, and it is only at a late hour, and after much refreshment, that a wrangle commences over the merits of the Member of Parliament for West Birmingham.

There is profit and pleasure to be derived by making acquaintance with these sons of Tubal Cain, artisans or artists – call them as you will...Various men they are: men vary in every class. Some of them are of ordinary appearance and some of refined type, artists born and bred. And here they are, from their studies and laboratories that lie beneath that forest of dark, tall chimneys we remember in the great, grimy metropolis of hardware manufactures and its neighbourhood – here for their weekend outing, for change and refreshment of every sense in the green land of Avon'.

John Henry Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906)

To feed the large crowds at Bank Holidays Spectacles were arranged.



This image advertises The Bidford Flower Show and Sports for August 1899. The poster was a standard library image (catalogue no. 15) produced by Williamsons of Ashton-under-Lyme.

The races were genuine as we can see overleaf.



This illustration shows a very substantial crowd; far more than could be assembled from a village with little over 1,400 men, women and children.

Another equine attraction to entertain visitors was donkey polo.

NOT EVERYONE WAS HAPPY.

The novelist Barbara Comyns, writing as an impressionable child, prone to exaggeration, painted a very negative picture of visitors to Bidford in the years following World War I:

Awful people called trippers used to come to our village on Public Holidays in the Summer...They hired boats from Holland's...They couldn't row or punt, but splashed, screamed, showed their braces and got drunk, they sweated and got sick and fell in the river, we didn't help them out with a boat hook, we just hoped they would drown, sometimes they did...Maybe we were rather hard on the trippers, but they really were beastly and were always giving the village girls babies and making an awful noise, the babies as well as the trippers.

Well if that is what you think, then I'm off Home!

