

Tree Tale

Twirling away from my mother tree my seed came to rest in a field not far from a babbling brook and in view of the tree lined ancient Old Taunton Road next to the river Parrot. The only building in sight was the old St. Saviours Chapel and the only visitors were birds, wild animals, cows and the occasional horseman riding up the lane. I grew and I grew and on Sundays I could hear the church bells. Romantic poets sometimes walked across the fields from the distant port town to sit under my shade. Each year I heard the coming & goings up the lane with the distant sounds from the annual fair. But otherwise undisturbed with plenty of nutrients, water & sunshine I was just reaching for the sky.

The winds of change blew, men came and built a coach house with stables. I was no longer alone they built a yard around me, Horses pranced and whinnied. Lads whistled, coaches clattered and life became interesting. The stable lads played snow balls in the winter and cricket in the summer. The business of coaching went on for many a year. I was well used to the commotion going on below me I guess I should tell you that I developed not one but three trunks and that I am a Sycamore tree.

Once I was full grown the men built another building next to me a long low tiled roofed shed for the smaller carts they buried the brook underground I spread my branches over it all. The distant town is getting closer & in the late autumn when my leaves are a turning, a great procession winds its way, all lit up with torches and fireworks brighten the sky. I can hear canal gangs singing across the fields as the men work and a new Taunton Road is built with large villas along each side. There's a brick yard between the river and I and hearty singing can be heard nearby from the new overflow church Holy Trinity.

Oh no the horses have gone, builders have moved into the coach house, Hark is that the steam train whistles of the railway I hear. The builders do what builders do and terraces of red brick tiled houses appear all up & down the Old Taunton Road. New builders buy the coach house and transform the upper floor extending it to the wall making a large overhead workshop and undercover yard.

It seems that many famous people have taken an interest in our prospering town sprouting public baths, new hospitals, the art centre & colleges. Brunel designed the station, Carnegie built the library next to the river and Blake gardens announced its arrival with a brass band playing on the bandstand.

The air is thick with the smoke from chimneys, the many coal fires burn to keep men warm and fuel the engines of industry. Gas works are very visible off the Old Taunton Road and the terraces now light up at night. Steeple jacks come to get the long ladders for St Marys steeple that are kept down the long shed.

Things change dramatically my beautiful Skys are disturbed, Spitfires & hurricanes fly over me & all the lights are turned off at night so I can again admire the stars. Wardens walk the streets and bombs fall from the sky noisily blowing up houses on the Old Taunton road horrifically lighting up the sky with flame and sending dust into the atmosphere.

Progress marches on houses gain a brighter steady light and the builders install electric lights in the coach house. Street lights adorn both the old & new Taunton roads. Where horses pulled carts automobiles completely take over more & more of them queuing silently poring there noxious pollutants into the air if that's not enough another new road cuts across closing in the road triangle that surrounds me. Bringing big lorries & the annual carnival spectacle brighter, louder & closer.

Moving rapidly Meteor Jets occasionally fly over high in the sky leaving white vapour trails behind them and when the east wind blows a strange unpleasant smell wafts over mixing with the exhaust fumes as a petrol station is built between me & the broad new road. Its not only air pollution its lights on 24/7! Just across the New Taunton road I can hear chanting, roars & cheers every Saturday from the football ground.

On the corner of Taunton Rd & Broadway is built a big square pool of water which the children love. I hear there excited squeals and happy playful splashes all summer long. A squirrel comes for a rare visit as the builders leave. The carpenters have arrived, they block up the open cart shed with fence panels & can be heard on occasion fetching wood from the store, rats make their home there.

Far from a quiet gentle hammering the Coach house Screams with the sound of electric saws and other big wood working machinery as they make good use of the first floor space in the making of stairs, windows and doors. Oxman and Walker was the name of the firm, they didn't have much use for the yard and it was abandoned. One day the new gable end of the upstairs workshop almost fell out and was rebuilt with new windows. People visited with orders, flatbed trucks came & went. I heard the local choir once a week practicing in the workshop.

One of my seedlings has since developed into a small tree I am bursting with pride as I watch the sapling grow, worryingly it is so very close to the noisy building. Warmer winters and dry summers make me worry more. Ivy begins to take over growing vigorously across the yard, up the fence panels, the wall and buildings then alarmingly even grows up my trunks.

The east winds blows fresh air across my leaves no more nasty smell and the sound of the football crowd and excited children ceases as a supermarket takes their place. Car numbers seem to be ever increasing the garage changes to an Esso petrol station and one day there was an almighty bang and the corner wall came crashing down!

The carpenters having been on site for more than forty years retire & leave the Old Coach house workshop, so the owners put it up for sale. Bridget who walks by everyday on her way home from work worries that it will be all torn down to make way for modern flats that makes her so sad. She makes enquires and pays a visit looking all around the site asking about the broken wall backed into by a tanker, she gets a surveyor to take a look too and after much sole searching, negotiation & following the loss of her husband she bought the old coach house and began the phased restoration project transforming the premises into 'Bridgy Gallery.

A group of people, Bridget's family & Friends with a well behaved dog spent hours below me in the yard clearing the ivy from the ground, the walls ,the fences and freeing my trunks as well. A welcome relief I rewarded them with my shade on those hot summer days. `One lovely lady sorted out the piles of tiles and roof slates she found stacking them tidily.

The insurance company paid out for the wall and Bridget engaged the builder who fixed the wall back stronger than before and rebuilt the end of the long shed then I saw him working on the roof of the coach house , they came out in the yard for lunch breaks. Tree surgeons visited and cut down my unfortunate offspring so near the building and removed lots of dead wood. The builders made a bench from part of the felled trees trunk. There was the occasional hammering & work noises but very gentle compared to the earsplitting sawing noises of old!

The roads went so quiet, almost no planes flew overhead but the builders worked on & Bridget came and worked on the building too. I saw the builder working on the the house next door he used the tiles from the yard to cover the extension he had built, he and his helpers dug a drain, cut up slates, demolished part of the low wall and put in a gate using a shaped stone step found in the yard & moved the shed.

Security was increased with bars at the lower coach house windows and Bridget re-varnished the double doors putting up cameras & a sign saying Bridgy Gallery. The old long shed was showing its age the wood keeping up the tiled roof was wavy like a large snake making its way down the 100 foot yard. The occasional plane still leaves white trails high in the sky above me, a new phenomena helicopters and drones can be seen in the sky too. On an ever increasing frequency the blue flashing lights accompanied by 'Be Ba Be Ba' noises from the roads.

Piles of sawdust from the coach house were deposited in the yard turning it into almost a desert with a dunes landscape. The builders having finished their internal works came back to work on the yard they brought in a digger and scraped it all back and took down the long shed preserving the tiles, tall concrete fence posts all down the garden like a coliseum they put back the roof using the old tiles, putting in reclaimed doors and windows some plastic some from the old coach house.

They chased off the rats, laid down a patio and added mindfulness reclaimed winding brick paths to Bridget's design, clad the breeze block wall in left over timber ending at the far end with a lawn, small stage and smoking shelter/wings. A tree stump sculpture was made, then the builder and a woodsman built the horseshoe shaped, Oak topped brick bench around my trunks and filled the beds with earth.

Light from the long gallery windows spilt over the garden illuminating the plants a garden had been transplanted, rescued and other plants added with neighbours helping donating soil & plants. Bridget grew flowers from seed introducing red sunflowers and roses that first year, the garden sprouted white ox-eyed daisies from the mystery transplanted garden. Carpet balls were sewn with moss and succulents. A trellis was invented made of the poly pipe left over from the build and the wood protected with upside down guttering. A Fungi garden of old logs a dancing bee circle sculpture and Alice through the looking glass in the trellis.

A party was held to open the garden I could see the Mayor looking around, people milled about talking and a three piece jazz band played brilliantly all afternoon. On display were many willow sculptures by Amanda Web including swallows hanging on the white extension wall, leaping hare, dragonflies, sheep that that thought they were goats up on the tree stump sculpture stand a Mum & her child with a balloon sat on my seat and a highland cow grazed in the rose bed.

Among the flowers were real bees, butterflies, spiders and ladybirds. That summer children came and drew with chalk on the patio stones, people visited the long gallery and garden, parties and award ceremonies one marked out by a spectacular double rainbow in the sky. Later as my leaves change colour I was turned purple part of Twilight walk around Bridgwater and in the gallery garden little ultra violet torches could be seen shining through the long gallery windows as people found the art in the DarkLight exhibition, then for Halloween I had giant spiderwebs attached to me and skeletons sat on my bench with ghouls and grave stones on the lawn.

Over by the Coach house is a peaceful zen garden and the gate is a bit like a Tori gate there's a totem pole like centrepiece an old beam from the house next door with big pebbles taken from the footings of the old buildings no doubt left over ballast from our port activities of old. I did see the birds one early evening fly down on to the lawn and hop over to the glass doors to get a look at the person responsible for the beautiful singing she literally charmed the birds from my branches.

Following Bridgwater's Cultural Festival I proudly bear my new name Triquetra.

Written by Bridget Penn-Berkeley 21/06/2026

