

## The Blake Museum, Bridgwater

Our last visit on Friday was to the Admiral Blake Museum in Bridgwater. Who was Admiral Blake? It was shaming to discover how few of us knew that he was one of the most important English commanders of the seventeenth century, whose successes were comparable to those of Nelson. Much of his history has been overlooked as he was on the parliamentarian side in the English civil war. He was elected to parliament for Bridgwater in 1640, but lost his seat during the period of

the Long Parliament, at which point he began his military career, first in the army and later in the navy, of which he is often referred to as the father. His greatest achievements were recorded in the Anglo-Spanish war of 1656.

He was born in 1598, reportedly in the building which now houses the museum. At first sight, it looks like a small sixteenth-century inn and, as we entered, the welcome cry of "Who wants tea?" heightened the illusion. One room, formerly the hall, is given over to the story of Robert Blake's life and achievements. Items noted were a seventeenth-century portable drop-front desk in leather, possibly Spanish, and a sixteenth-century oak chest, said to be Blake's sea chest.

The rest of the museum is given over to items relating to the history of Bridgwater. We saw a number of longcase clocks by Bridgwater makers, B. Cockings, Abraham Birch and Caleb Butler; a large set of scales inscribed Borough of Bridgwater, made by de Grave & Co., London; large copper weights stamped Borough of Bridgwater 1836 and the delivery cart of Connibeer & Crocker, Painter & Decorator, 2 Blacklands, c.1910. Next to it the Corporation Chest is plain, covered in iron studs, but with three very impressive key plates on the lid.

The upper floor is approached by a staircase created in the nineteenth century replacing the original stone staircase. The late medieval roof is more or less original and is comprised of six bays carried by three jointed-



Admiral Blake's Museum, Bridgwater. The iron-studded Corporation Chest, used to store the ancient borough records, with three impressive key plates on the lid, and behind it the delivery cart of Connibeer & Crocker c. 1910.  
*Photo Linda Hall*



A built-in bed with a rather attractive ventilation grille above the door. *Photo Linda Hall*



Longcase clock by B. Cockings of Bridgewater, interestingly spelled with an 'e' in the middle. *Photo Linda Hall*

cruck trusses. What is now known as the Battle Room contains a large diorama of the 1685 Battle of Sedgemoor, and a copy of the Glastonbury Chair, one of many we encountered during our travels. This one is labelled as by C.H. Baker, carver, Bridgewater, 'Manufacturer of the Celebrated Glastonbury Chair'.

This is a fine example of a small provincial museum displaying an extensive selection of items relating to the history of Bridgewater. The building is next to the Bridgewater Town Mill and there are plans to open this as an extension of the museum.