



Lickey Hills Local History Society

2026 N E W S L E T T E R

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Programme for 2026/27

The Committee

Chair: Brian Gould

Secretary: Nicky Stanley

Treasurer: Peter Harvey

Committee Members:

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White and Susan Whitehand

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Editor: Jill Harvey

Contributors:

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DS: Di Smith

DW: Di White

JH: Jill Harvey

NS: Nicky Stanley

HERITAGE WEEKEND 2026

SATURDAY 19 & SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER, 11am - 4pm
The Visitor Centre School Room, Warren Lane, Lickey

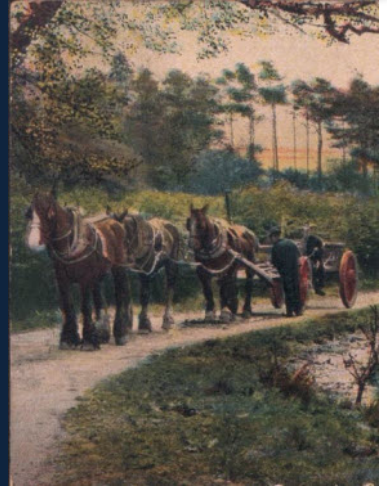
*This Year's theme: Everyday Histories:
Exploring daily working life through the ages.*

*Results of our Research Projects on Mapping our WWI
War Dead and Lickey's Burials from Rubery Asylum*

Guided walks and much more! See page 16 for details

*Warren Lane Quarry will have guides to show you the WWI
Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range and the Lickey geology*

Free and open to everyone.



Hunters Hill College Destroyed

On the night of 8-9 June 2026, Hunters Hill College in Blackwell was destroyed by fire.

Hunters Hill was one of two open-air residential schools situated in Blackwell but administered by the City of Birmingham authorities. Cropwood was the other, just across the road from Hunters Hill.



Photo: Hereford and Worcester Fire Service

Opened in 1933, the school aimed to improve the health of 120 boys from the slums of Birmingham who were suffering from the effects of poverty, poor nutrition and the city's polluted environment. Cropwood opened in 1922, serving the same purpose for girls, in the adapted Victorian house, once the home of Barrow and Geraldine Cadbury.

Hunters Hill School was a purpose-built school erected around a square inner courtyard with open wooden verandas and sliding screens. Only the sick bay and administration parts of the school were built more conventionally. The school was very successful at improving the health of the boys, being open to clean air in all weathers, summer and winter. The boys had plain, nourishing food, regular outside exercise, again in all weathers, and a disciplined educational routine. Many boys thrived in this environment but others were homesick and ran away or were removed by their parents.

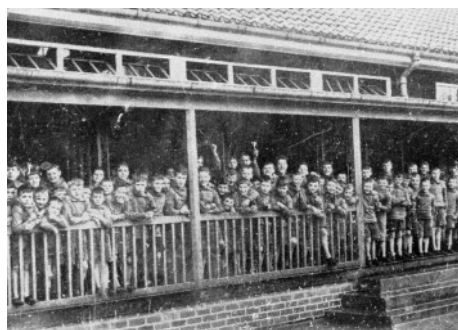


Photo: St Catherine's Church Archive

In later years the school remained residential but, as poverty became less of a social problem, some children from Birmingham had more complex social, mental health and behavioural needs and the school successfully adapted to accommodate them. Cropwood School was joined to Hunters Hill and together became Hunters Hill College for boys, but it was expensive to run, and its resources and benefits to the boys became difficult to maintain. After a poor Ofsted report, the school closed in 2021. Since then, the buildings have been abandoned and neglected, while decisions were awaited about its future.

For more on the history and original success of open-air schools, see '*A Breath of Fresh Air – Birmingham's Open-Air Schools 1911 – 1970*', by Frances Wilmot and Pauline Saul, which contains testimonials from staff and pupils of the schools.

SM

The page end quotes are from local newspapers of 100, 80 and 50 years ago.

Review of the 2024-2025 Programme

September

Northfield – a village in music by John Smith

To do justice to John's presentation would require a recording machine, as 75% was music. To introduce the different items he used Northfield's local and social history.

It was arranged by subject matter, starting with churches. Several were listed including the 12th century Parish Church of St Laurence (cue marriages and music from *The Sound of Music*). Next shops; near the Bell Inn was a shoe shop where his children had their feet X-rayed ('Cobbler's Song' from *Chu Chin Chow*); then some garages ('Get Out And Get Under').

Pubs included the Travellers Rest, Black Horse, Great Stone Inn and Old Red Lion ('Drinking Song' from *The Student Prince*).



The Travellers Rest. Old postcard.

John mentioned public services such as gas, electricity, telephone, fire and police ('The Laughing Policeman' by Charles Penrose). There are about 100,000 trees in Northfield many on Victoria Common ('Country Gardens' by Percy Grainger).

Businesses included banks, estate agents and solicitors ('Family Solicitor' from *Me and My Girl*). In the 19th century there were about 60 farms, many survive in local place names ('Chicken Farm' by Leroy Anderson). Northfield Cinema opened in 1929 and demolished in the 1960s ('Alexander's Ragtime Band'). Health care took in the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, a centre of excellence (the theme from *Doctor Kildare*). The Station opened in 1870 ('Steam Up Polka' by Strauss).

A different evening, but entertaining. **BG**

October

Every common's gone and traps are set to kill: enclosure in the English Midlands by Richard Churchley

Richard again gave us an interesting and informative talk (the title is from John Clare's poem 'Remembrances') on what agriculture was like in the Midlands, prior to the 1700s when the enclosure of land began. Enclosure around Bromsgrove occurred between 1750 and 1799.

From medieval times up until enclosure, a system of 'strip farming' was the normal way of growing a variety of grains and some vegetables. Richard described in

detail how successful this farming system was for the small farmers who farmed them on hedge-less open land. He showed photos where the remnants of the strips can still be seen across the Midlands.



Surveying land for Enclosure. From Henslow map.

Enclosure changed the look of the countryside as hedges were laid to mark boundaries which had been set following Acts of Parliament. This gave landowners the power to enclose their land and so deprive villages and small farmers of their rights of access to land to grow food and to graze their animals. Often landowners laid traps that would injure and maim those who trespassed onto enclosed land.

Richard explained the consequences of enclosure and the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. Needless to say, in spite of protests in many areas, enclosure resulted in poorer people losing out to the profit for landowners. **SM**

November

Rycknield Street & getting around the Roman W. Midlands by Mike Hodder

Mike dedicated his talk to Peter Leather who died in July (see page 17). He led the Birmingham Roman Roads Project in the 1990s, which George Gascoyne joined.

Mike said that there were roads before the Romans came to Britain. At Sharpstones Hill in Shrewsbury a 2nd century BCE road was found under a Roman road. But the Roman roads were better engineered. They used a rod and a device called a groma to achieve this.



Sutton Park's Roman road.

Sutton Park's surviving stretch of road is rare, as the agger (top surface) and ditches are well preserved. The earliest description of it is in William Dugdale's *The Antiquities of Warwickshire* of 1656. Birmingham historian William Hutton described the road's gravel pits in 1762.

The earliest Roman roads in Britain were military roads. Rycknield Street joins Wall

to Metchley Fort, which was abandoned early on, so was an early Roman road. Settlements developed along these roads.

Kings Norton has evidence that it was a livestock collection site, Perry Barr has a 2nd century pottery kiln, and Wellhead Lane in Perry Barr, and the Pershore and Bristol Roads are originally Roman in parts.

A fascinating talk with special relevance for our Roman road. **JH**

December

Christmas Plays at the Birmingham Rep by The Rep Team

Our speakers, Linda and Mel, explained that Barry Jackson, founder of the REP, had happy memories as a child of seeing pantomimes. So when he founded his theatre company he put on Christmas shows to celebrate the festive season.

Using research carried out in the REP's archive, Linda and Mel gave a rundown of the top ten Christmas shows produced both at the original theatre in Station Street and at the current site on Broad Street.

Cinderella was put on in 1914 even though many of the company and staff had joined up. In true theatrical tradition, the show went on! It was also put on in 1981, and *Puss in Boots* was first shown in 1916.

There have been four productions of *Treasure Island* including in 1965 when a real parrot trained in Bromsgrove took part. *Christmas Party* was produced five times at the theatre in Station Street.

Alice in Wonderland was put on five times between 1918 and 2006, whilst *Peter Pan* was put on in 1994, 2002 and 2007; it will also be The Rep's Christmas production in 2026. *The Wizard of Oz* has been produced at least three times, whilst *1066 And All That* has been produced six times.

The top three most popular Christmas productions are *A Christmas Carol* (seven times), *The Snowman* (nine times) and *Toad of Toad Hall*, ten times between 1933 and 2013. It was interesting to hear how popular plays changed over the years.



Matthew Douglas as Toad in 2013. Photo Birmingham Live

Our thanks to Tony for the hot punch, to accompany the chocolates and mince pies provided by the Committee. **NS**

150 Years Ago: 29/7/1876 - Mr George Sanger's monster hippodrome and circus returned to Pritchett's field, Bromsgrove. The *Champion* balloon was of great interest, majestically sailing towards the Lickeys. The aeronaut safely landed at Barnsley Hall.

February The Monarch's Way by Howard Robinson

Our speaker was a retired science teacher, distantly related to Cromwell. This probably inspired his interest in history. His enthusiasm for his subject came over well.

Charles' escape after the Battle of Worcester in September 1651 could have been a routine travelogue, but Howard made it into an adventure with Charles nearly being caught on several occasions. It lasted 42 days, and covered 625 miles. First he went north through Droitwich, Stourbridge and Kinver Heath. At White Ladies Priory he changed into peasant clothing and tried to get into Wales, walking 14 miles to the River Severn, but could not cross. So he returned to Boscabel House, about a mile from White Ladies. Here he hid up an oak tree but spent the night in a priest hole in Boscabel House; next to Moseley Old Hall where Thomas Whitgreave saw off some Roundhead soldiers.

After that he headed to Bristol on horseback via Bromsgrove, Alcester, Stratford upon Avon and the Cotswolds, disguised as a servant to Jane Lane for part of the journey. He aimed to sail from Bristol and found no ship, so moved on to Charmouth, but still no ship! No luck in Portsmouth, eventually sailing from Shoreham in Sussex to France. He was there for nine years, until the Restoration on 29 May 1660.



Moseley Old Hall in 1908. Painting Alan Fea

An epic journey, very well told. **BG**

March Nineteenth Century Rogues and Villains by Vanessa Morgan

Vanessa's talk covered five local crimes with surprising detail from press coverage.

The first was of William Stanley Warner, a bank clerk who, in 1844, walked off with £1200 in bank notes and 10 sovereigns. He then fled via a number of pubs, ending up blind drunk in a cell in Chester. He was sentenced to be transported to Tasmania.

Thomas Cox stole a cash box from a train, throwing creosote at the guard's face. But the smell of creosote on his clothes and evidence of its purchase gave him away. He served 18 years' penal servitude.

The third case was the brutal murder of Maria Holmes by her husband Charles, as

told by Di Smith in our 2024 newsletter.

Next was Rebecca Hodges who shot her employer after he sacked her for unreliability. She was found to be insane. After her release she set fire to some hay stacks and sentenced to death, later commuted to transportation to Australia.

Jonah Wilkins started his life of crime aged 15 in 1875 by damaging telegraph insulators with a catapult. He regularly served sentences of hard labour for theft, assault and poaching in the Beacon area.

Vanessa concluded with the murder of PC Davies in Icknield Street, Beoley in 1885. He was believed to have come across a poacher, and Moses Shrimpton, notorious in the area for such crime, was found guilty of the murder and executed. But was he guilty?



Moses Shrimpton

In true Crimewatch style, Vanessa signed off: *Meanwhile, don't have nightmares.* **JH**

April The Working Countryside by Robin Hill

Robin's talk was on the extensive range of work carried out in the countryside and covered the period roughly between the advent of photography to the end of World War II. The talk was illustrated by fascinating photographs, many of which had been collected to illustrate a book written by Robin and his colleague, Paul Stamper.

The authors put out requests to the public for suitable images of rural life. They came in large numbers, from people's attics and photograph albums, to once more see the light of day. The book largely covers the Shropshire area, but it is easy to imagine similar scenes in the countryside across the country.

The photographs show examples of many different types of work in the countryside, including hop picking, tenant farmers, smallholders, milkmen, postmen on horseback, smiths, wheelwrights and farriers.



Haymaking in South Shropshire. Illustration from *The Working Countryside*, Robin Hill's book

Fascinated by rural and agricultural life from an early age, Robin's talk also featured the images of amateur photographers

such as Marjory L. Wight (1889-1973). Born in Worcester and working mostly in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, she has been described as 'an enthusiastic recorder of rural crafts and disappearing agricultural practices' (source: *The Museum of English Rural Life*).

Many of the images taken by photographers such as Miss Wight have been a great help to historians and makers, particularly those images that show skills thought lost, such as spale basket making.

We also learned about the effect various historical events, e.g. the repeal of the corn laws, improvements in machinery and two world wars, had on rural life and the people that lived it. **NS**

May The History of Aston by Jim Harrison

The speaker, from the Lickey Hills Country Park Rangers Team, said that he intended to outline the history of Aston from the first Ice Age to modern times in one hour – and he succeeded. The Ice Age was relevant because it left aquifers, exposed mineral deposits and rich soil, all helpful when the industrial revolution arrived.

The Romans were active in the area, establishing roads and camps at Wall and Metchley. By 1086 the Domesday Book records Estone (East Town) being worth 80 shillings, whereas Birmingham was only 20 shillings.

However, the history of Aston was largely linked up with the Holte family, starting with John de Holte in the 13th century. Profiting from the wool trade, they purchased large parts of Duddeston, Nechells, Bordesley and the manor of Aston. The most famous were Sir Thomas Holte (1490-1546), and his grandson, another Thomas (1571-1654), who became very rich and bought a baronetcy. He built Aston Hall, which was completed in 1633.



Aston Hall From The Park by Charles Ashmore, 1891

The Holte line died out after Sir Clobery Holte's death in 1729, though his brothers still lived at Aston Hall. Queen Victoria opened Aston Park in 1858, and Birmingham Corporation bought the Hall as a museum. Some of the Park was lost to Spaghetti Junction in the late 1960s. Aston is of course also famous for Aston Villa FC, founded in 1874. **BG**

The Society Out and About

The Heritage Weekend

As the Visitor Centre cafe was still closed we again used that larger space rather than the School Room, so we had more display space. The weather was better than forecast with rain only on Saturday.

The official Heritage Open Days theme for 2025 was *Architecture* so we had displays on notable buildings and structures in our area, especially those listed by Historic England. We worked together with Rev. Sheri Gidney so that Holy Trinity Church, Lickey could be open to visitors with a guide on site on both afternoons.



Sandra Mason and Sandra Smith admire Brian Gould's watercolour painting of the 19th century architect's drawing of the church. Photo Keith Woolford

We had a major display on The Lickey Hills in the Second World War, marking the 80th Anniversary of the end of the War. It covered topics such as war work, Civil Defence, local bombing raids and plane crashes, our POWs in Japan and Italian POWs here, a spy from Barnt Green, an evacuee's memories of her time in Blackwell, and the ground-breaking work of Northfield Military Hospital (Hollymoor and Rubery Hill).

We also had displays on Rubery's WW1 war dead, with our new map showing where they had lived, alongside the stories of some of those from Rubery Hill Asylum, buried in Lickey Churchyard.

Warren Lane Quarry was open for the two days. Carole Burden and Joy Bourne gave guided tours of the WW1 site. Dave Green and Malcolm Coghill, Geochampions, showed the site's geology and led a walk. Steve Hinton led WW2 History Walks on both days.

Our special thanks to the Rangers, the Habitat Heroes who tidied the Quarry, the volunteers who created displays and our guides over the weekend. Without them the weekend would be impossible.

We would appreciate more help at next year's event, as we could not lead walks this time. No special knowledge required, just a friendly face. **JH**

Bromsgrove on the Home Front

To mark 80 years since the end of the Second World War, the Bromsgrove Society hosted a free drop-in event at the Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre on Saturday 15 November. The aim was to tell the story of life in and around Bromsgrove during 1939 - 1945.



Jenny Ryder and our display. Photo NS

Fortunately the research we had done for the Heritage Weekend was just right for this event!

Bromsgrove Society's display included research done by their Vice-Chairman Pat Tansell. Other displays were from the Norton Collection Museum, Bromsgrove Royal British Legion, Avoncroft Museum, Worcestershire Police History, Remember the Fallen, and Bromsgrove School.

The event was made possible by grants from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Andrew Harris Charitable Trust. In all there were 247 visitors. The Bromsgrove Society was delighted with the day. **JH**

□

Bromsgrove U3A Visit Lickey

In May Holy Trinity Church welcomed a small group of members from Bromsgrove U3A, on a visit to hear about its origins and history. On behalf of the church, Rev. Sheri Gidney gave the visitors a warm welcome and members of the church offered refreshments.

A short talk on the history of the church was followed by a tour of the church, highlighting its features and memorials to past parishioners who have contributed in many different ways to the development of the church and local community. The crypt was of particular interest with its vaulted ceiling and brickwork, and its current use as a meeting place for teenagers.

Another curiosity was the recently discovered slate panel found in the old boiler room of the church. Its faded decoration and wording, covered in dust and dirt, caused much speculation and comment.



Research is ongoing to discover the origin of the panel and, following advice from experts and the Diocese, efforts will be made to clean and preserve it.

Holy Trinity Church appreciated the group's interest and is happy to welcome other visiting groups to promote its history. **SM**

Photo: SM

□

Our Website

Around 20 years ago our first website was set up. Tom, my son, volunteered to do the job and has kept it running since then. He is not a member, and has only a passing interest in local history, but knows rather more about computers than I do. Recently we have discussed updating it, as website design has developed over the years.

Step in the next generation! Ben, my grandson, recently graduated from the University of Birmingham - in maths and **computer studies**. He has, perhaps rashly, agreed to take on the task. So hopefully we will fairly soon have an updated website!



Tom and Ben preparing for the task in hand.

If you are interested in getting involved in the project, please contact us. We welcome your thoughts. **JH**

The 2026-7 Programme

In April last year members responded to our questionnaire showing that they would prefer not to have January meetings and to extend the season of talks to May. After trying this, the feedback from members has endorsed this decision. So future meetings will run from September to December, then a one month break, resuming from February to May.

If May meetings are poorly attended, this may be reconsidered. **LHLHS Committee**

The Rubery Hill Asylum Burials Project

An update on this year's research by Sandra Mason and Diane Smith to identify and document the 106 patients from Rubery Hill Asylum buried in Lickey Churchyard between 1882-4.

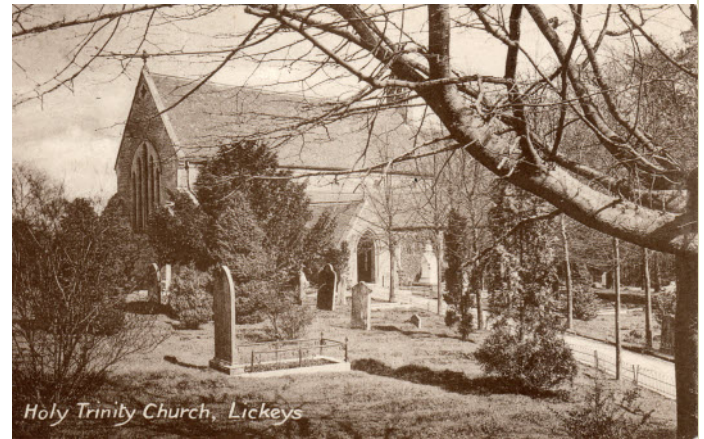
Most of the medical notes for the men from Rubery Hill Asylum have been typed up and work is continuing with the notes from All Saints Hospital, then known as Winson Green Asylum. The names of the old medicines were a problem, but the George Marshall Medical Museum at Worcester has helped explain them. It is hoped that we can arrange a visit there, as they are researching the patients at Powick Asylum. A former psychiatric nurse has helped them with some of the medical terms.

The medical notes for the women from Rubery Hill have been lost, as we reported last year, but we have managed to find some records for them from All Saints Hospital. These are being typed up, and information from the censuses is now being collected and recorded.

We gratefully thank the Bromsgrove Society who awarded us a grant of £350 to enable us to pay for the death certificates

of the patients and confirm the causes of their death.

Below is the story of one of the patients of the Asylum. **DS**

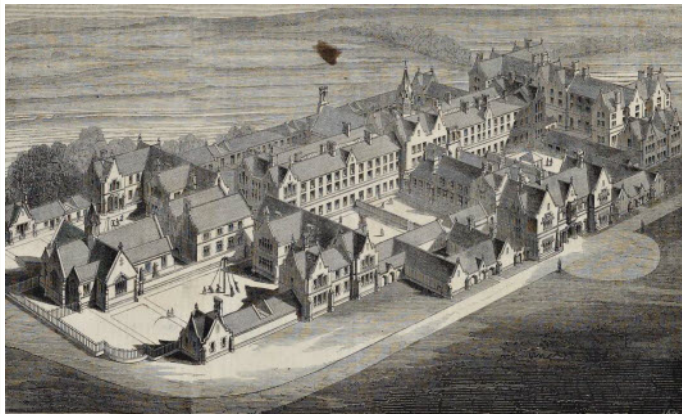


The Sad Life of Mary Jane Skett

Mary Jane Skett was born on 26 February 1865 to parents Ann and William who lived in Vere Street, Nechells, Birmingham.

On 26 January 1882 the Birmingham Mail reported that an enquiry, conducted by Mr Henley and Dr Mouat, had opened into the ill treatment of two paupers, one being Mary Jane Skett.

Mr Hill, Master of the Workhouse, said Mary Jane was admitted on 20 July 1877. The complaint against Dr Simpson, the Medical Officer, was not that he ordered shower baths but that he omitted to record them in the punishment book. It had not been reported to him that she had been punished. Asked what punishment was given, Mr Hill said shower baths and blisters.



Birmingham Workhouse c.1852.

Mary Jane said she had been in the workhouse for three years and had been under the care of Nurse Giles and had nothing to complain of. She had received the shower baths but said that she had deserved them. The first bath she had was in July 1880 when she was in the bath for several minutes. She received another bath in the same week and a third a fortnight later. The first bath was given for her swearing and the second for tearing towels and the third for trying to strangle herself. She had another on 8 October 1881 for 'carrying on'. Nurse Giles said Mary Jane had received three baths and thought she deserved the blisters as they took some of the 'nonsense' out of her. She was in bed for only one day. She had been put in the padded room, not for punishment but for when she had fits.

Mr Henley said that the only entry in the punishment book was for 8 October. When he asked Nurse Giles if it contained all the entries of punishment, he had always been told it did. It appeared to him that her memory was failing her. Nurse Giles said that she did not have much trouble putting Skett into the bath and she regulated the time by her watch. But Mr Henley said that Skett had told them a different story and that she was forced into the bath by Nurse Giles.

A witness said that the shower bath and blistering was a threat by Nurse Giles and considered a punishment. She had not heard any other officer use such a threat. Giles had never used the threat in the presence of an officer, only the witness. A former medical officer at the Workhouse said that a shower bath and blisters were proper treatment for disorders such as Skett's. He had never known them to be used as punishment. Mary Jane was put on a low diet, not because of the doctor's orders but because she refused to work.

Records from Winson Green Asylum show that Mary Jane was admitted there from Workhouse on 12 April 1882, age 17 years because of insanity and epilepsy. She had twice attempted suicide by strangulation. Her mental state on admission was quiet. She answered questions sensibly, and did not appear to labour under any delusions, unless it was that people were all against her at the Workhouse.

On 12 August it was reported that she had tried to strangle herself three times that week by holding her throat until she was black in the face. She said that she didn't mean to kill herself and if she was forgiven she would not do it again. During September 1882 she had suffered 12 fits and was being treated with Potassium Bromide.

On 22 January 1884 her records state that her general health was good, and she was removed to Rubery Hill Asylum. Three months later, on 29 April 1884, she died and was buried at Holy Trinity Church. **DS**

N.B. Medical blistering, or vesiculation, raised blisters on the skin, and was thought to be effective for certain medical issues, including hysteria and insanity. In the early 19th century, showers were used to cure the insane. Cold water showers were prescribed to cool inflamed brains, and to instil fear to tame impetuous wills. Showers were later used in asylums and prisons.

150 Years Ago: 6/11/1876 - A report from Birmingham's Lunatic Asylum Committee considered the purchase of an estate at Rubery Hill, comprising about 150 acres of freehold land, for the purpose of an asylum for imbeciles and epileptics.

The Map of Our War Dead Project

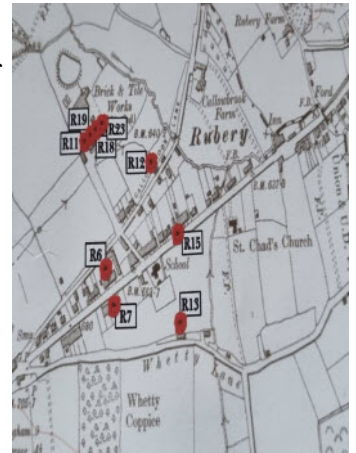
An update on this year's work by Sandra Mason and Nicky Stanley to identify the homes of our WW1 dead.

In 2025 LHLHS Research Group members commenced work on a project to try to record the home addresses of all the men who served during the First World War, and who are commemorated on our local war memorials. Starting with the Rubery war memorials, members carried out research on all the service men recorded there, adding to the huge amount of information that Jeff Taylor and Sandra Mason have already amassed.

The Rubery map was completed, and it was exhibited at the Heritage Open Days at the Visitor Centre last September and was displayed at LHLHS Tuesday evening meetings.

We then moved on to researching the names of the servicemen on the war memorials at Blackwell, Barnt Green, Cofton Hackett, and Lickey.

We are pleased to say that we are now nearing the closing stages of this project, and we hope that the final two maps will be available to view at the next Heritage Open Days weekend in September. The three maps together will help to show the impact of World War One on our local area. Men from all walks of life, and from all our local areas, enlisted to help fight for freedom and we can only imagine the impact their loss had on families and communities.



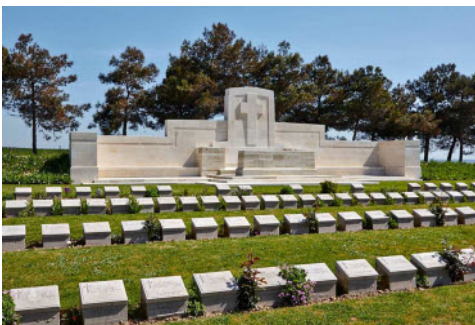
Extract from the Rubery map

As names of roads have changed over the years it has sometimes been a struggle to accurately pinpoint exactly where these servicemen lived. For example, Brickyard Lane can no longer be found on local maps, and did you know that Cock Lane, Northfield, later became Frankley Beeches Road?

It was originally thought that we might extend the Project to cover the servicemen who died in World War II, but at the moment that is still under discussion. Watch this space!

If you have any information about any of the service personnel commemorated in our area, please do let us know. **NS**

Remembering Gallipoli



9 January 2026 marked the 110th Anniversary of the end of the disastrous First World War's Gallipoli Campaign, fought against the Ottoman Empire in Turkey. Fighting took place from April 1915 until January 1916.

Historians vary on the exact figures of those who died during this campaign. But during these eight months around 43,000 British troops, 11,000 Australian and New Zealanders and 1,500 Indian troops were killed, wounded or died from disease. Only 11,000 of these have known graves. Amongst those who died were three men from this area. See below.



Private Norman Duggins from Linthurst in Blackwell who died from wounds he received on 7 August 1915, aged 20. He was buried in Lancashire Cemetery, Turkey



Private Albert George Hall from Blackwell Station Cottages, Blackwell. Died 30 September 1915, aged 29. Commemorated on Helles Memorial, Turkey.



Private George Willian Eustace Harry Peabody from Brickyard Cottages, Rubery. Died on 6 August 1915, aged 24. Commemorated on Helles Memorial, Turkey.



Private George Hill, also originally from Rednal Hill Farm, received severe bomb wounds to his right leg in July 1915. He made a slow recovery only to die from multiple shell wounds in November 1916, aged 23.

Private Norman Duggins



Two brothers from our area had emigrated to Australia and fought in the Gallipoli Campaign with the Australian Imperial Force. Both were wounded during the fighting.



Lieutenant Alfred Thomas Hill, from Rednal Hill Farm originally, was wounded at Gallipoli. He recovered but was killed in action in France on 30 May 1918, aged 28. He was awarded the Military Cross for his gallantry and devotion to duty.

All Australian and New Zealand war dead are remembered on Anzac Day, held annually on 25 April. **SM**

100 Years Ago: 22/9/1926 - Albert Perkins was sentenced to a month's hard labour for stealing a pair of gloves from a Midland Red motor omnibus. A passenger changed seat between Rednal to Blackwell and left her gloves, which were later found at Perkins' house.

Remembering the Battle of the Somme

The Battle of the Somme commenced at 7.30 am on Saturday 1 July 1916. The battle was intended to relieve the pressure on the French troops involved in the Battle of Verdun in the Meuse Valley some 180 miles south of the Somme. The Allies' plan was to attack on an 18 mile British front from Maricourt in the south to Gommecourt in the north, using 12 British Divisions and a Brigade.

Prior to the attack, the German Front Line was bombarded by shell fire for 24 hours a day for 8 days, some 1,600,000 shells having been fired. Five mines were exploded under the German Front Line at 7.28 am before the commencement of the battle to signal the attack.



Whistles were blown at 7.30 am as the signal for the troops to 'go-over-the-top' and the carnage began. Approximately 160,000 men were involved in the attack, and at the end of the day there had been a loss of some 60,000 men, approximately 21,000 men were killed and 40,000 were wounded, missing or captured.

This was the greatest loss of life in a single day in British Military History.

The battle continued until 20 November 1916 by which time the total British and Commonwealth casualties were approximately 400,000. It is estimated that the French and German armies lost a similar number of men.

1 July 2026 marked the 110th anniversary of this battle.

We remember the men named on our local war memorials who lost their lives.

 **Major Lionel Kerwood** from Watling House, Barnt Green, of the Worcestershire Regiment. He was killed on 21 October 1916, aged 31. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

 **Captain George Bryson** had lived at Gorse Meadow, Barnt Green. He was killed on 30 July 1916, aged 21. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

 **Private Hubert Richards** from Linthurst Cottages. He was killed on 17 July 1916, aged 21. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

 **2nd Lieutenant Joseph Hull** from 84 Bristol Road, Northfield. He was killed on 19 October 1916, buried in Dartmoor Cemetery, France, and remembered on Blackwell War Memorial.

 **Private George Hill** from Rednal Hill Farm. He died of wounds received on 17 November 1916, aged 23. He was buried at Bernafay Wood British Cemetery.

 **Private Thomas George Clements** from New Road, Rubery, was killed on 13 August 1916, aged 20. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

 **Private Percy Cooper** from Leach Green Lane, Rubery, was killed on 2 November 1916, aged 23. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

 **Lance Corporal William Depper** from 371 Bedlam Lane, Cock Hill, Rubery, was killed in action on 18 July 1916, aged 23. He was buried in Pozieres British Cemetery.

 **Private Arthur Edward Marlow** from Leach Green Lane, Rubery, died on 23 July 1916, aged 26. He has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing holds the names of 72,000 men missing and who have no known graves as the result of The Battle of the Somme.

SM



50 Years Ago: 7/12/1976 - The death of George William Smith was reported. He was prominent in the field of radiography. During WW2 he worked at Hollymoor Military Hospital, and later in the medical department of British Leyland in Longbridge.

Everyday Histories:

Exploring daily working life through the ages

Working on the Land



Detail from Low Hill by Elijah Walton c 1852 © BMAG

The establishment of farms on and around the Lickey Hills came about when land was enclosed in the 17th and 18th centuries. The area was once part of the great Forest of Feckenham, a royal hunting reserve. Local people managed the land for the game. Even after deafforestation in the 17th century, this continued.

The geology of the area meant that much of the land was of poor soil for agriculture. 18th century records show Lickey Common as being 3,000 acres covered with "heath, jungle and forest"! Many areas were boggy and unusable. By the 1790s, population expansion, especially in cities like Birmingham, meant that more food production was needed. Many landowners saw this as an opportunity to enclose land, drain bogs and set up farms. Mr. Carpenter at Chadwich Manor drained an extensive bog and added 500 acres to his holding. The last piece of common land on the Lickeys was enclosed in 1883.

In 1854 the Board of Trade carried out a survey of farming in England and Wales. In Bromsgrove, which included the Lickeys, farms were relatively small, averaging 47 acres with a good proportion of grassland. They mainly kept a few cows and grew wheat, peas and potatoes, sold by seasonal auctions on site. Almost all were farmed by tenant farmers.

There were a few larger farms as well, such as Barnt Green Farm of around 250 acres. Here, Thomas Baldwin, a tenant of the Earl of Plymouth, grew arable crops as well as rearing prize winning sheep and horses. He grew barley and brewed beer, and had a dairy herd and made cheese. He employed six labourers as well as a live-in dairy maid, a cowman and two carters. Significantly, he was equipped with the latest machinery.

Big changes came after WW1. Farms had lost workers to the army and struggled to keep going. Many estates were being sold and developed for housing. Some smaller farms were sold as 'pleasure farms' - to industrialists who were keen to move out of the city - and some became market gardens, selling their produce locally and in Birmingham's markets.

JH

Quarry Workers

Both Lickey quartzite and sandstone were quarried in this area and provided work for local people.

The ridge comprising Cock Hill, Rednal Hill, Bilberry Hill and Cofton Hill are of Lickey quartzite, and there are several quarries along its length. The stone is hard but brittle so is unsuitable

for building but ideal for roads. The quarry at the bottom of Rose Hill was shown on an 18th century map as being designated for Cofton Hackett parish for road repairs.



Detail from Gravel Pit, Rednal by Elijah Walton c 1852 © BMAG
Sandstone was quarried from Alvechurch Quarry, which was in Sandhills, Barnt Green. Its stone was used for Holy Trinity Church, Lickey and the lychgate on Twatling Road.

JH

Nailmakers



A nailor's work shop. Mill Pool Hill, Kings Norton. By Henry Pope © BMAG

Nail making was Bromsgrove's main trade in the 18th and 19th centuries. By 1851 there were 10,300 employed, both men and women. It was unregulated work, so whole families would be working long hours, including children. Working conditions were hot, smoky and dusty with hot ashes nearby. No health and safety in those days!

Nail making was a cottage industry done in small workshops with an unglazed window and a central hearth and often attached to living accommodation. Nailers could rent a cottage and forge from a Nail Master who supplied the equipment. Iron was taken home and when the order was complete the work was returned to a middleman.

A good nailer could produce 24,000 per week. The trade flourished mainly due to being close to raw materials. The River Severn links to the sea and close to coal and iron.

The Industrial Revolution saw its decline as machine-made nails and imports became cheaper. By 1907 hand wrought nails accounted for less than 10% of the total nail production in the region.

There is a nailers cottage at Avoncroft Museum.

DW

Everyday Histories:

Exploring daily working life through the ages



Wheelwrights

The work of the wheelwright was highly skilled. It demanded a great knowledge of the properties of different timbers, of making the wheel - and often the wagon itself. The skills were handed down from father to son, or learned as an apprentice. The timber had to be cut at the correct time of year - winter for ash, beech and elm, oak in late spring. It would not be sawn till winter, and seasoned for at least five years.

Metal hoop tyres came into use towards the end of the 18th century. To put on these tyres, or strakes, a blacksmith was needed. The tyres had to be just the right size, neither too tight nor too loose. The heated band already with nail holes was placed on the wheel and nailed into place as it burnt into the wood, then turned and plunged into water. As the metal shrank it pulled the wheel into the right 'dish' shape. This process was called 'shoeing' the wheel.



In the 19th century the Harris family were wheelwrights for several generations in Rednal, originating in Clent. This is probably their premises. As motor vehicles developed, wheelwrights often turned to become car mechanics. JH

Coachmen



For many middle-class households in the 19th and early 20th centuries, coachmen were an essential part of the domestic

team, helping to maintain the family's horse-drawn carriages and driving the family to social engagements or to the station. As times changed these men were often also required to take on additional roles, such as helping in the gardens, to ensure that the man was fully employed. Men such as William Day, who lived at The Lodge, 'Leahurst', Green Hill, Blackwell, who was a coachman in Sparkhill before moving his family to Blackwell and was employed by Henry Thomas Taylor, the owner of Linthurst Brick Works, Burcot. NS

□

Austin Motor Company

Herbert Austin started the Austin Motor Company in 1905, employing skilled craftsmen, and in 1906 made 120 cars. Many nailmakers, as skilled metal workers, joined. The factory steadily increased in size, especially during WW1 as part of the war effort, so that by 1918 there were around 20,000 employees mostly women.



At the end of the War the Company had little work and the work force was reduced. The factory returned to producing cars and by 1925 it was able to expand. It employed 8,000 workers in a variety of roles in the foundry, forge and machine shops. There were body pressing, assembling and painting plants, erection shops building engines, gearbox, rear axle and steering, as well as the final assembly of the finished car. In WW2 the factory again supplied the war effort, producing everything from steel helmets to aircraft.

In the 1950s it employed 21,000, producing over 193,000 vehicles annually. It was a good place to work, with its own Health Department, including X-ray apparatus, two medical officers, two dentists, eight Ambulance stations with 25 nurses and a Rehabilitation workshop. There were 16 dining rooms and four snack bars, employing 215 staff. It employed 69 Works Police along with 33 Firemen. The internal Post Office employed 11 postmen. JH

The Heritage Weekend



The theme of the Heritage Open Days for 2026 is *Everyday Histories: Exploring daily working life through the ages*. So we have been researching this for our area. These are just a 'taster' and there will be many more at the Heritage Weekend.

If you have a suggestion, or would like to contribute, please get in touch - our contact details are on page 20.

100 Years Ago: 1/12/1926 - An explosion in the foundry of the Austin Motor Works yesterday resulted in the death of John Bentley. He was killed trying to save a Miss Shaw from injury. Other employees suffered from shock and partial deafness.

Charles Clark: A Frustrated Builder

Mr Charles Clark, a retired builder living in Rubery, responded to a Government request in 1943 to increase the rate of house building by submitting his patented design for a pre-cast concrete house built within a metal frame.

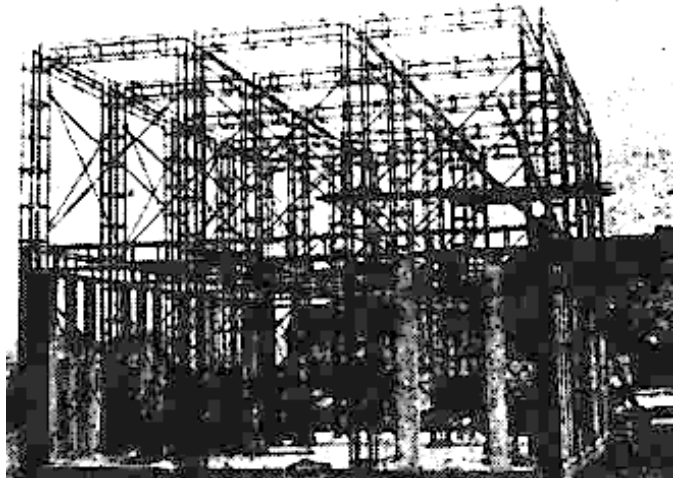
He built a portion in his back garden to prove he knew what he was doing but the Ministry's experts rejected it. So at a cost of £140 he built a scale model and sent it to London. It was returned after three weeks.

In 1945 he re-submitted his plans but they were turned down again. Even Bromsgrove Urban District Council refused to give him permission to erect his dream house on his own property.

Mr Clark used his life savings and spent nearly 12 months travelling between Birmingham and Coventry where he built a complete house on Kenpas Highway, but the Government said it was impracticable to build and it became a show house. He claimed that his houses could be built by unskilled labour using the jigs and framework for less than £1,000. The walls were double, the outer skin being concrete slabs and the inner fibrous plaster. They were built up by fitting into slots in the frame pillars. Floor and ceilings dropped into grooves in the beams and



the roof fitted on like a lid. In the building he incorporated novel ideas and many of the materials he used were his own invention.



Mr Clark felt the answer to urgent demand for inexpensive houses lay in pre-cast concrete but he knew existing methods were slow and expensive. He therefore devised an economical way of casting where he was turning out slabs on site at the rate of one a minute.

One of the reasons the Ministry experts gave in 1945 for refusing approval was that it was too strong, but Bromsgrove Council declared it too weak!

Charles Clark died in 1967, an embittered and disillusioned inventor whose great contribution to homelessness had been quietly killed at birth. **DS**

A Brief History of Rubery Cinema

Rubery Cinema opened on 29 May 1939. The Evening Despatch dedicated a full page to the event, complete with adverts from the suppliers. It extolled the large foyer with its semi circular paybox in walnut and ebony with amber tinted-glass, the tasteful colours of the rubber flooring, the Lloyd Loom chairs and settees and the various plants.

The rapture continues with the cinema itself - decorated in gold and red, carpeted throughout, with velvet covered seating with pillow rubber arms. It had the latest electric ventilation system, and queues could wait undercover.



The first film shown was *If I Were King* starring Ronald Colman which ran for three days.

Two months later, the owners let one of its offices be used to recruit ARP volunteers as the Second World War became more likely.

The cinema had a comparatively short life, being closed by 1962 and, the ultimate humiliation, converted into a bingo hall in 1964.

This was not successful and plans were made for a proposed development of 10 shops and maisonettes. In 1969 the cinema was demolished, though not without further drama. In February 1969, during the demolition work, a man fell 40ft from the roof and was rushed to Birmingham Accident Hospital, where he was reported as 'fairly satisfactory under the circumstances'.

The site has since been developed and Rubery Co-op, Kennedys and Harrisons, along with other shops, now occupy the site. **BG & JH**



50 Years Ago: 15/1/1976 - Actress Margaret Leighton died on 13 January, aged 53, after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. She was born at Twatling Road, Barnt Green, and joined the Birmingham Rep when she was 16.

Ivy Greaves – A Midlands Missionary

On 7 April 2026 a post appeared on Rubery Past Facebook Group seeking information about Ivy Greaves, who had been a deacon at Rubery Congregational Church in the 1960s and early 1970s. The enquiry was from a PhD student and historian at the University of Oxford who was studying church history. Intrigued, I started to research to see if I could find any more information about this lady.

Ivy Lucy Greaves was born in Aston on 8 July 1893, one of seven children born to George and Lucy (nee Marston) Greaves. George had his own house-painting and plumbing business. By 1901 the family were living in Handsworth and were members of the Lozells Congregational Church. Ivy and her sister Olive were both pupils at Edgbaston Grammar School. Ivy then went on to Teacher Training College. Whilst she was there, she was encouraged to join the Ministry as a missionary.



Ivy as a young woman

At the time of the 1921 census Ivy was a student at the Carey Hall United Missionary Training College for Women in Selly Oak (Weoley Park Road) and in 1922 she was sent to Peking by the London Missionary Society. She attended Peking University for two years and learned to speak Mandarin.



Carey Hall, Selly Oak. Photo from JB Archive

Ivy worked as a missionary in China for over 30 years, spending her furloughs in England travelling around the country speaking about her experiences in China and raising money for the London Missionary Society. Members of her family remember that they were given collecting boxes which they kept at home to put their loose change in, 'to help Ivy'.

In 1939 Ivy was living with her father and sisters at 'Mayfield', 150 Leach Green Lane, but then headed back to China to continue her missionary work, where she was later imprisoned by the Japanese in the Pootung Internment Camp. This was a makeshift prison housed in dilapidated tobacco warehouses near the Huangpu River which, from February 1943 to August 1945, held over 1,500 Allied civilians—men

and later women—enduring hardship, hunger and cruelty (source: Pacific Atrocities Education website). The camp was liberated in 1945 and Ivy returned home to recuperate.

During her time in the Internment Camp, Ivy lost her glasses but met a fellow camp inmate who introduced her to some eye exercises, with the result that by the time she was released her eyesight had improved significantly.

In 1946, apparently undaunted by her experiences, and at the age of 53, Ivy headed back to Japan on the SS Empress of Scotland, to continue her missionary work until 1951. She then spent 10 months teaching at a college in Tiger Kloof in South Africa.

Ivy adopted a daughter, Ai-Chen, who came to the UK in the 1950s. She trained as a nurse and during her time at Great Ormond Street the family story is that she nursed Princess Anne who was there to have her tonsils out.

The family continued to be based at 'Mayfield' on Leach Green Lane for some time before it was sold. Family members remember the house as being large, with a tennis court or croquet lawn. The house is still there on Leach Green Lane, tucked behind a hedge.

When Ivy returned to the Midlands, she was ordained as Minister of the Congregational Church in Bournbrook and later became a deacon of the Rubery Congregational Church. When Ivy died at her home in Groveley Lane in 1975 newspaper reports called her the '*Gladys Aylwood of Rubery*'. She had a collection of Chinese costumes which her family donated to Birmingham Museums Trust.

Bob Sawyer, a member of Rubery Congregational Church (now the Beacon Church Centre) for over 80 years, remembers Ivy as a '*lovely woman*' who used to participate in services quite frequently and hand out Sunday school prizes. He remembered that Ivy and her sister Mrs France later lived in Groveley Lane and both attended the church. I wonder if he had any idea of the interesting life of this woman. **NS**

With grateful thanks to family members Chris Wilson and Simon Bradbury. Photos of Ivy courtesy of Chris Wilson.



Ivy in China in 1938

150 Years Ago: 15/1/1876 - Mr Hunt proprietor of the Old Rose & Crown gave his usual tea party on Plough Monday. A monster Christmas tree was introduced loaded with useful articles for each person in the room. The day was brought to a close by dancing.

Grade II Listing for St Chad's Church, Rubery

In January this year Historic England added St. Chad's Church, Rubery, to the list of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The church, in the centre of Rubery, opened in December 1959, replacing a wooden church that had stood in Rubery since 1895. Although only 66 years old its architectural features have led to the listing.

The church was designed by Wolverhampton-based architect, Richard Twentyman, renowned for his modernistic building designs. In St. Chad's he created a simply designed building with a beautiful open, light space for worship and community events. Built of concrete and brick, its special features include the campanile at the west end of the church with a sculpture by Geoffrey Clarke of the arms of the Diocese of Birmingham. The octagonal Lady Chapel to the south east of the building has a metal finial in the form of a Chi Ro Christogram.



The interior of the church is described as being '*light, elegant and inviting*'. It also has underfloor heating, good acoustics and can seat 400 people.

The church cost £40,000 to build, money that was given by local subscription and by the Diocese of Birmingham. It was opened by Princess Margaret, Queen Elizabeth II's sister, and was a great affair for the small village of Rubery. It is still fondly remembered by older members of the community.

It is a warm and inviting space, welcoming the local population and visitors to a variety of events. Details are on the church website: www.stchadsrubery.org where these photos of the Church can be found.



Richard Twentyman

SM

170 years of Holy Trinity Church, Lickey

Holy Trinity Church was consecrated on 6 June 1856. Its simple design was created by Henry Day, a Worcestershire architect, and the sandstone of which it was built came from a quarry in what is now Barnt Green. The land was given by Lady Harriet Windsor-Clive of Hewell Grange and the building cost £2800, which was raised by public donations and the fundraising efforts of local people. The church could seat 300 members of the local community, who were mainly poor, exploited nail-makers and agricultural workers, and was built over the road from a school which was opened in 1855.

The church has seen many changes in its lifetime including alterations to the inside and the outside of the building. It stood proudly through two world wars and has seen changes to the society and environment that surrounds it, witnessed over the years by the church's 13 vicars who have ministered to the local population and celebrated marriages and births with churchgoers, as well as offering solace to those suffering grief and sadness.

Holy Trinity has always been a community facility, not just offering religious ministry. In its early years it supported those in poverty with clothing clubs, coal clubs, providing outings for the school children and entertainment in the monument grounds just across the road. The fortunes of the

local population may have changed, but today's community is welcome at a variety of Church Services, coffee mornings, lunches, entertainments and, in its 170th year, a party! This incorporates celebrations of eight members of the church community who celebrate their 80th birthdays during 2026. During June the church was open every Sunday afternoon to welcome visitors for tea and cake while they browsed the history displays around the church, some bringing their own memories and stories to add to its history.

SM



The original drawing of the Church by Henry Day, the architect.

100 Years Ago: 20/12/1926 - St Andrew's Church of England School in Barnt Green was opened by the Earl of Plymouth. A dedicatory prayer was offered by the Archdeacon of Birmingham.

The Henry VIII Bible of Cofton Church

Cofton Church is the proud owner of a copy of The Henry VIII Bible and it was on display there at the Daffodil Weekend held in March. Usually kept in controlled conditions away from the church, safely under lock and key, it is only displayed on special occasions. How the Bible came to Cofton is not known, but it is one of the original 9000 copies printed in France between 1538 and 1545 on the orders of Henry VIII.



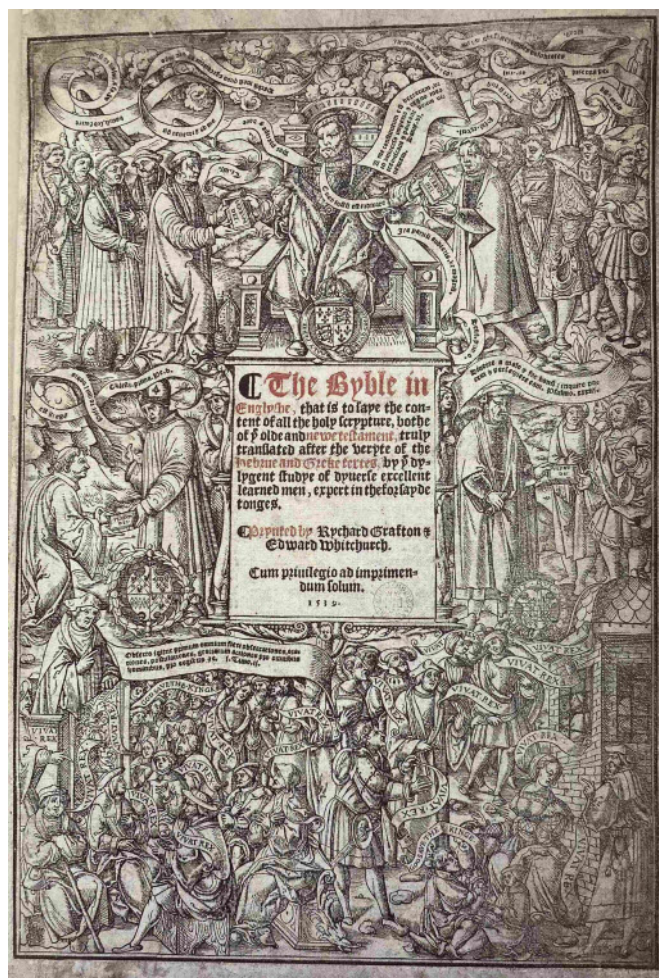
The Henry VIII bible safely stored in a locked case. Photo SM.

In 1536, having split from the Roman Catholic Church, Henry decreed that an English Bible, written in the 'language of the people', should be placed in every parish church in England and Wales. Prior to this all bibles were written and read in Latin and available only to priests.

The English translation was prepared by Myles Coverdale, and Thomas Cromwell was directed by the King to ensure every parish purchased their copy and made it available on public display, securely chained. It was to be read from, in English, at every church service. These large, cumbersome books became known as 'The Great Bibles', and preceded the better known 'King James Bible' published in 1611.

A dedication to Henry VIII was inserted into every bible and the front cover was heavily illustrated depicting Henry distributing the bibles to Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cramer who then distributed them to the population, with the rich and

poor showing their appreciation of Henry by shouting 'God save the King'.



The political and religious turmoil following Henry's death resulted in the loss of the majority of the Henry VIII Bibles, so it is amazing that Cofton's Bible has survived. **SM**

St Andrew's School Centenary

This December marks the official opening of St Andrew's Church of England School in Barnt Green 100 years ago (see the end quote on page 12). It replaced Cofton Hackett Church School, which had become too small for the increasing population of the area, and was more central in the village.



Cofton Hackett Church School House. The school was to the left of the photo.

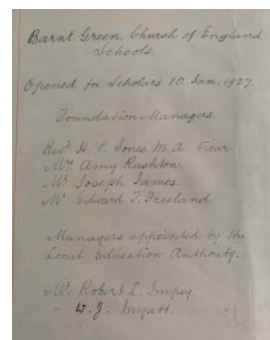
So it also marks the centenary of the closure of Cofton's School, which had educated local children for at least 86 years. It was

probably the oldest school in our area. The earliest known reference to it was in 1840 when the School House, Cofton Hackett, was used as a local smallpox vaccination centre as part of the 1840 Vaccination Act. It is not known whether it was in the same building then but, by 1869, when Vestry meetings were held in the Schoolroom, it was at Kendal End. It remained there, at the junction of Cofton Church Lane and Kendal End Road, until its closure when St Andrew's School opened.

I have not found an early photo of St Andrew's. But it was described as 'a red brick structure conspicuous for its simplicity of line ... Built to accommodate 140 pupils'.

The School opened to pupils on 10 January 1927. The headteacher was S.E. Finney with Miss O.G. Sanders as an uncertified assistant. 55 children were registered, 30 boys and 25 girls. The Vicar, Rev. Jones, opened the school with a prayer and address.

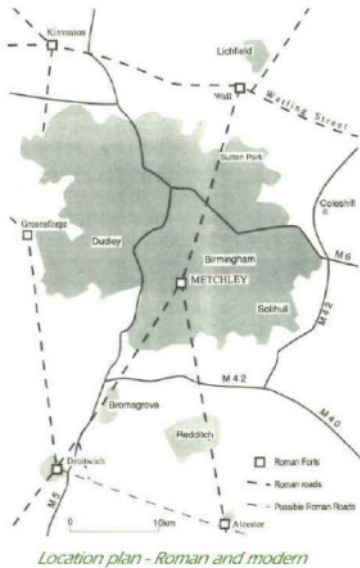
JH



Page 1 of St Andrew's first school log book. Photo Joanne Rao

50 Years Ago: 3/5/1976 - Members of the Chalet Country Club presented a cheque for £131 towards the general restoration of Cofton Hackett Church (the equivalent of over £1,000 today).

Following a Roman Salt Road: from Salinae to Letocetum



Location plan - Roman and modern

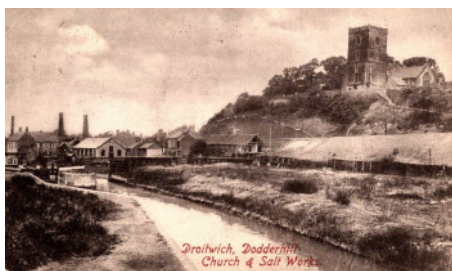
The Roman Salt Roads

Britain's mineral resources were one of the main reasons for the Roman invasion. Copper, tin, gold, silver, iron, lead, and salt, were already being mined - materials in high demand in the Roman Empire. Mining was one of the most successful activities in Roman Britain.

Salinae

Salt was essential and Droitwich's brine springs had been exploited since at least the Iron Age. Salinae was its Roman name and it became a very important town, with a villa (Bays Meadow) and salt works extracting salt from the brine springs. Water was boiled off, producing industrial scale quantities of salt. A gallon of brine yielded over a kilo of salt.

Little can be seen of the Roman town, but the sites of Bays Meadow villa and the forts are known. A large early Roman fort was constructed, but was soon abandoned. A second fort was built following the Boudiccan revolt in 60-1 AD at Dodderhill, where St Augustine's Church now stands.



St Augustine's Church and Victorian salt works

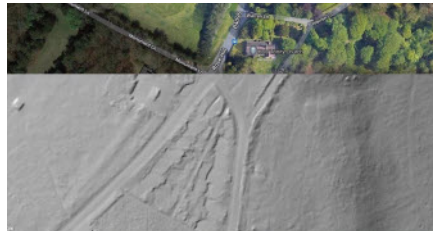
The Droitwich Heritage Centre has displays of the Roman discoveries and the 2000 year history of its salt industry.

Visitor information:
www.droitwichspaheritagecentre.org.uk

A journey along the Roman salt road running through our area to places anyone can still visit and glimpse the past.

Salt roads to Roman towns radiate from Droitwich - south to Worcester, north to Wroxeter and east to Alcester. Our road runs north east, roughly on the old A38.

Monument Grounds, Lickey



The Society's 2023 newsletter had an item on the Roman road at Lickey. It crosses the Country Park twice. The best place to see it is in the Monument Grounds.

Metchley Fort

The Roman route through the Birmingham conurbation is hard to follow but it surfaces again at Metchley in Edgbaston.

The site is occupied by two first century campaign forts. The first was a large fort dated to the mid 1st century, built during the early Roman military campaigns in Britain, possibly before 50 AD as part of the advance into Wales.

It fell out of general use soon after and around 80 AD was replaced by a smaller fort, lying wholly within the earlier defences. The site underwent many changes, and a small civil settlement or *vicus* developed in the area outside the fort. Part of it can still be seen by the QE Hospital.



Visitor information:
www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/4262/roman-fort-metchley-leaflet

Sutton Park

The salt road continued through north Birmingham and to Sutton Park. The road here is called Ryknield Street and crossed the 465 acres of Sutton Park's heathland which existed before the road was built.

It was a military road joining the forts at Metchley and Letocetum as part of the conquest of the West Midlands, soon after the Roman army arrived in 43 AD. It

entered Sutton Park near Banners Gate. The road is best seen near the Royal Oak Gate off Chester Road North.

The most noticeable part of the road today is the agger, the main road surface, about 8m wide. Consisting of compacted gravel, it never had a paved surface. The intermittent ditch each side, was not for drainage but as a layout line to show where vegetation should be cleared. Beyond the ditches are pits where the road gravel was dug.



Visitor information:
www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/405/sutton-park/4

Letocetum

Ryknield Street runs north until it reaches Wall, the Roman settlement known then as Letocetum, where it joined the major road from London, Watling Street.

The name Letocetum derived from the Iron Age word *leto* meaning grey, and *cetum* meaning wood - so grey wood. Its modern name of Wall came from the visible remains of Roman walls.



Roman remains at Wall. The cottages mark the line of Watling Street which runs through the village. JH

As at Salinae and Metchley, soon after the Roman invasion a temporary fort was set up here, followed by a permanent fort in the early 50s AD for troops advancing north and west on campaign to Wales. It was abandoned by the end of the decade.

Boudicca's revolt in 60-1 AD led to a new fort on a site where St John's Church now stands. Later the fort was demolished. There were two later forts, both smaller, suggesting sporadic military activity.

As Letocetum was on two major Roman roads it would have been very busy. JH

Visitor information:
<https://wallromansitefriendsofletocetum.co.uk>

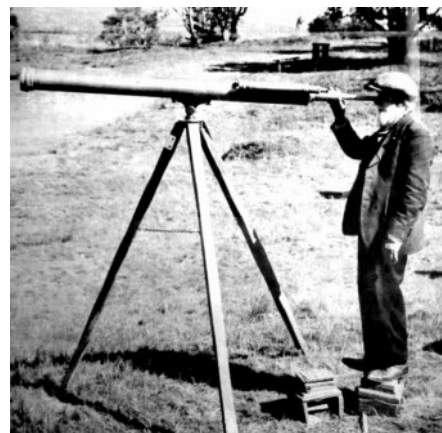
The Toposcope (not the Monument, nor a castle!)

It is widely believed that the Monument in Monument Lane is not the large obelisk dedicated to the memory of the 6th Earl of Plymouth, but instead the stone 'castle' on Beacon Hill - officially known as The Toposcope. The real Monument can be seen for miles, but when travelling along Monument Lane it is hidden by trees, which could explain the confusion.

However, the story of the Toposcope is interesting in its own right. In September 1902 it was suggested during discussions about how to use the unspent funds raised by public subscription for the Edward VII Coronation celebrations - about £40. But the estimated cost of a toposcope was over £75.

In 1907 Edward, George jnr, and Henry Cadbury presented 34 acres of Beacon Hill to Birmingham for the people of Birmingham to enjoy, followed soon after by a drinking fountain there - see our 2023 newsletter for details. Then in

In the 1930s an added attraction was Thomas Hancock, known as the telescope keeper, who would show visitors the sights of Birmingham, including the new Austin Aero factory. This photo is from 1936 when he was 80.



The restoration and refurbishment work to create the castle as it is now was undertaken by Manpower Services Commission and Birmingham City's Department of Recreation and Community Services in 1987-8 as a local Community Project.



1911 they added the Toposcope - or Indicator.



A letter to the Birmingham Mail in 1925 bemoaned its dilapidated state. Trees obscured half of the view and the dial was corroded and hard to read. This postcard shows the trees.



Work on the castle. Photo by Anthony Warr, Rubery Past FB

The official opening - 10 months over-schedule - was by Christopher Cadbury, son of George Cadbury jnr, and WM radio presenter Ed Doolan in July 1989.

Nearly 40 years later, more renovation work is planned - some landscaping and repair work - financed by Section 106 money from the recent Longbridge development. **JH**

Researching Hillside House/Cafe on Rednal Hill

While researching for the page end quotes in local newspapers we recently found the advert - see below. We knew where Hillside House once stood, on the west side of Rednal Hill, just off Drovers Way bridle path, but not that it had once been a cafe in the Lickey Hills Park. Researching further, the Cofton Hill and Hillside Cafes were later both advertised as York Jones Cafes. Society member Keith Williams sent us this postcard to use for which we thank him.

Hillside House was probably built in the late 19th century, perhaps when plots on Rednal Hill were sold. In the 1901 census till his death in 1917 Alfred Smeaton Johnstone and his family lived there. He was described in his obituary as intellectually one of the most versatile men in Birmingham, distinguished in literature, science and art. He worked as an analytical chemist for Evans & Askin who were nickel and silver manufacturers.

It had come into the possession of Birmingham City before 1926. By the 1940s the lower storey was a Park depot with the upper

floor used as a flat tenanted to a Park employee.

It became dilapidated over time and was sold in 1979. It was then demolished and three houses were built on the site. **JH**



100 Years Ago: 30/10/1926 - City of Birmingham Parks Committee invite tenders for the privilege of supplying refreshment at the Lickey Hills Park - Bilberry Hill Tea Rooms, Old Rose and Crown, Cofton Hill Tea Rooms and Hillside Café.

Gallimaufry: a hodgepodge

A Rubery Chemist



Those of you with a good memory may recall this photo from our 2021 newsletter of A. Grosvenor Chemist in about 1920. Research has revealed that the shop was originally run by Llewelyn Hughes, who was also the local photographer. The building is now The Ruby, Cantonese Restaurant as Grosvenor's moved to number 110 - now the Age Concern charity shop - on the other side of New Road and was open until the 1960s. The name Grosvenor can still be seen painted on the side wall.

We are interested in the history of local shops, so if you know more on the subject, please let us know.

□

100 years of the red phone box

In 1926 the red telephone box appeared on Britain's streets. It was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Cathedral, Battersea Power Station and Bromsgrove School's Memorial Chapel.

Emblazoned with a crown, the red phone box - officially known as K2 - is a British cultural icon. In 2006, it was voted one of Britain's top 10 design icons, and in 2009 was chosen by Royal Mail for its "British Design Classics" stamp issue.

Numbers have reduced in recent years. When I was on Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council we bought the phone box on the Old Birmingham Road (opposite Marlbrook Lane), for the price of £1 to save it from being removed. BT would no longer keep it as a payphone as usage was too low. It was freshly painted the correct shade of red and now houses a defibrillator and a book exchange.

Photo: Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council newsletter



LtoR: Gareth Hodson/electrics, Cllrs: Janet King & Nick Forknell, Jean Whitehead/librarian, Ron Smith/shelving and Keith Woolford/signage

It is also 150 years since Alexander Bell became the first person to obtain a patent for an 'apparatus for transmitting vocal or other sounds telegraphically' in 1876.

Avoncroft Museum's National Telephone Kiosk Collection is well worth seeing. Visitors can explore the history of the public telephone service with a working telephone network connected to four telephone exchanges and every type of telephone kiosk from 1912 to the present day.

□

Two Local Museums Saved

When Kidderminster's Museum of Carpet announced its closure last year the local community reacted against this, with the result that Wyre Forest District Council agreed to a grant of £50,00 over two years to enable the Museum to refocus its activities and develop new audiences.

The Museum has always been entirely volunteer run, with no previous Council funding. The Society had a visit there in 2015 and, to quote Val Hunt's report: *Besides the working looms there are films, displays and lots of exhibits, all well-laid out, making the visit well worthwhile. This is an impressive place and a credit to the carpet industry in Kidderminster.*



Photo: LHLHS newsletter 2015.

It also holds a nationally important textile design archive, with original art by designers such as Charles Voysey.

The Museum is now open on Saturdays and Tuesdays between 10am and 2pm.

More good news is that Walsall Leather Museum has recently been saved from closure due to public pressure.

We really urge you to visit local Museums which are hidden treasures, or engage with them on social media as future funding is dependent on demonstrable support.

□

Milestone Ground in Broadway

Last year's newsletter reported on the dig at Milestone Ground in Broadway. A team from Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service (WAAS) had uncovered an exciting variety of finds covering 8,000 years of human history, from prehistory to the medieval period in Broadway.

This year it was revealed that an extraordinary artefact had been found - a late Roman bone box so unique that it fea-

tured on BBC Two's *Digging for Britain*.



Carved bone box with sliding lid. Photo: WAAS.

The well-preserved box made from roe deer bone had a sliding lid and had been carefully placed in the grave of a young woman. The ring and dot decoration suggested a late Roman date, which was confirmed by radiocarbon dating. The box measures 68mm long, 33mm wide and 30mm deep. It may originally have held an ointment or similar substance. Nothing quite like it has been recorded before.

The dig was funded by Wychavon District Council. Specialist research is now underway. The finds and records will eventually be stored at the county museum.

□

St John's Church Spire

Some members may recall the Society's around St John's Church, Bromsgrove, guided tour in April 2019 which was led by Simon Henderson. The more energetic of us climbed the 50 steps to the bell-ringing chamber and then to the top of the tower which, with the spire, is 190 ft high, the tallest in Worcestershire. It was worth it as the panoramic view was excellent.

However since October 2024 the church bells have not been rung as the spire had serious cracking and it was covered in scaffolding. Now a new 2.5m top section has been made of Locharbriggs sandstone from a quarry in Dumfries and Galloway, put in place and tested. So once more the bells can ring out.

St John's Church was the parish church for a large part of our area for over 800 years, being replaced by Lickey Church in 1858.



The old spire top. Photo JH

JH.

50 Years Ago: 28/4/1976 - Mr David Bate of Ashill Road, Rubery became the first recipient of a free travel pass to help disabled people in Birmingham get around the region more easily.

Gallimaufry: a jumble of unrelated things

The Retriangulation of Britain

90 years ago in 1936, the Ordnance Survey (OS) undertook to update the original triangulation of Britain (1783-1853) to make map measurement more accurate. Concrete pillars (trig points) were erected on prominent hilltops across Britain - the first being at Cold Ashby in Northamptonshire on 18 April 1936.

Designed by Brigadier Martin Hotine, they are 4ft in height with a flat top inset with a brass plate for a theodolite to take line-of-sight measurements. Over 6000 of the original 6,500 survive. The Twentieth Century Society (C20) has branded them 'heritage in high places'.

Now rendered obsolete by satellite surveying systems, the OS planned to remove them. But campaigns by the Ramblers Association and other groups led to the OS launching an adoption scheme in 1992, encouraging local communities to take over basic maintenance.



'Trig-baggers' now aim to visit them all. My grandson has bagged five in Worcestershire, starting with the one on Beacon Hill. Tree growth since 1936 makes it of limited use for line-of-sight measuring!

□

Long Wave Goodbye

On 27 June the long wave transmitters at Wychbold were switched off. The iconic masts, which dominate the Worcestershire countryside for miles around, ceased transmission after 92 years of service.

Completed in 1934, the Droitwich transmitting station transformed communication across Britain as, for the first time, the BBC Home Service could be transmitted across the whole of the United Kingdom. The site was chosen for its central location. It cost £200,000 - about £20m now.



On 6 September 1934 the first thing the country heard on Long Wave was composer Eric Coates' *The Merry Makers*.

It would go on to play a vital role during the Second World War when it was used to send encoded messages to Allied forces in Europe during major operations.

The Twentieth Century Society and local historians have called for the masts to be listed, due to their 'historical importance'.



Image from Marconi's 1934 press release

□

The Old Espalier Pear

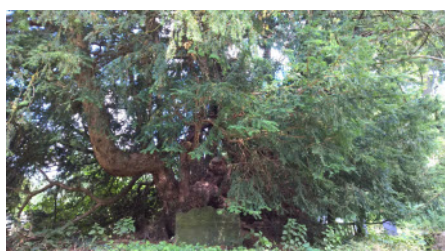


Fallen branch. Photo Nina Smith

In one of last winter's storms a branch of one of the old espalier pears was damaged in the Old Rose and Crown grounds. This made us wonder about the age of the trees. The postcard below from c1935 shows the trees as well established - see centre left. So they are probably over 100 years old.



This is a mere sapling when compared to the old yew in Cofton Hackett churchyard, reputed to be over 800 years old!



Beaverin Away

Last year we reported on the successful reintroduction of a family of beavers to the Wyre Forest. Beavers were once widespread in Britain, but were hunted to near-extinction by the 16th century. This year the family has increased in numbers, when three kits were born there in June.

Wyre Forest Rangers reported that the animals have built many dams since moving into the enclosure, including one stretching 30 metres, with about eight smaller dams, helping to reduce flooding.

Not far away another pair of beavers were released in February last year into a 15 acre enclosure along the River Clun in the Shropshire Hills. A new hide has been specially built with one-way glass so visitors are not visible to the beavers along the waterway, allowing a rare chance to observe beavers in the wild.



A pair of beavers on the River Clun in Shropshire. Image: Andrew Fusek-Peters / SWNS

□

Peter Leather

Sadly Peter Leather died last year in France where he lived for over a decade. He worked at the ArAr Laboratory for Archaeology and Archeometry in Lyon and was President of GAROM (Friends of museums of Gallo-Roman civilization).



For over twenty years he worked as a Birmingham historian including at the University of Birmingham's School of Lifelong Studies. In the 1990s he was part of the Birmingham Roman Roads Project, working with our former Chairman, George Gascoyne, on our local stretch of Roman road. His report can be found in *West Midlands Archaeology* 41, 1998.

JH

150 Years Ago: 21/10/1876 - Lost: Large black dog (between Retriever and Newfoundland) named *Roger* last seen near the Lickey. Any person bringing the dog to the Brewery Bromsgrove will be rewarded, any person detaining same after this notice will be prosecuted.

In Remembrance

Lesley Penfold

We were very sad to hear of the death of Lesley in July 2025. She was a member of the Society for many years and a committee member for four years, from 2018 until 2021, when she moved from Blackwell to Worcester with Bernard, her husband. She was very involved in our Heritage Lottery funded WW1 Project. This photo is from one of our workshops, taking detailed measurements of the surviving buildings. She was also active in Blackwell, being the Chairman of Governors at Blackwell School.

During the Covid pandemic restrictions she was one of our 'Gang of Four' who met regularly by Zoom to create the monthly Bulletins the Society issued for members. In tribute, and in fond remembrance, we re-publish below one of her articles from March 2021, Bulletin No 8.



Cranberries on the Lickey Hills

The cranberry is a small red berry which comes from a group of small evergreen shrubs. The British cranberry is called *vaccinium oxycoccos*, but in north America, where the majority are grown to eat with traditional meals such as Thanksgiving, the native cranberry is *vaccinium macrocarpon*. They are both related to bilberries, blueberries and huckleberries. Cranberries, the *V. Oxycoccos* variety, however were growing a lot closer to home, in the Lickey Hills.

A Dr Parton from Alcester records *V. Oxycoccos* growing on the Lickeys in *The Midland Flora* in 1817-21. Edwin Lees, writing in 1867, says, 'These [Lickey bogs] nourished the cranberry ... I have gathered *Narthecium* [bog asphodel] and *Viola palustris* [bog violet] at the southern base of Rednall Hill up to 1834, but the cranberry has long since disappeared.'

He also says, 'An old maiden lady named Barford (now dead) who was a confectioner, at Birmingham, more than thirty years ago, informed me that she used to make Cranberry tarts with berries from the Lickey Hills; and I have met with Bromsgrove persons who testified to eating the Bromsgrove cranberries. An old inhabitant of the Lickey once pointed out a spot to me where, he said, the cranberries used to grow. The enclosure of the country destroyed them.'

The mention of cranberry tarts suggests that they were quite prolific, but Humphreys, in his talk to the Bromsgrove Institute in 1900 suggests that the cranberries 'had all gone half a century ago'. Presumably the bogs dried out when the land was drained as a result of enclosure.



Lesley Penfold 2021

Christine Ince 1946 – 2025

Christine was well-known to those who live and work in and around the Lickey Hills. She was a single lady, with no near relatives, who had lived in Warren Lane all her life, in a small nailers cottage which had been in her family for generations. The cottage is now Grade II listed.

At her funeral it was revealed that Christine had been well educated and in her younger years qualified as an archaeologist. She had participated in many 'digs' including as a volunteer when Channel 4's Time Team programme came to Birmingham in 1997. For part of her working life she was employed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, working to preserve their textile collection. She was an active member of the community and of Holy Trinity Church.

In her later years she was an independent, hard-to-help lady, supported by Social Workers and regularly seen trundling around the area with a shopping trolley full of goodness-knows-what! But she was willing to share her knowledge of local history and life on the Lickey Hills with anyone who would listen.

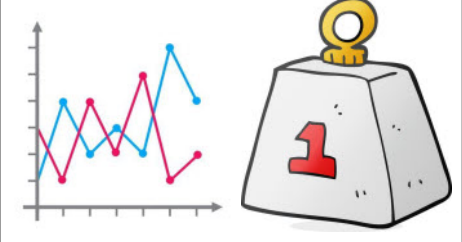
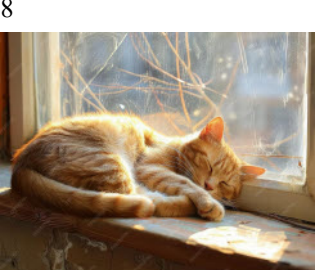
Following her death in July 2025, her ashes were placed with her parents in St Michael's and All Angels graveyard at Cofton.

SM



Name That Place Quiz

Can you find the place names from these clues - say what you see! Answers below.

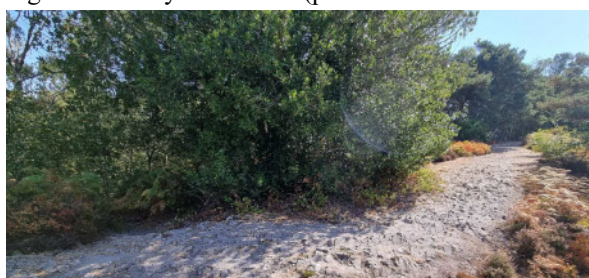
1 	2 	3 
4 	5 	6 
7 	8 	9 
10 	11 	12 

What's in a name?

It is fascinating to note that some of our place names date back over two millennia to at least the Iron Age. The oldest surviving names are those of rivers, hills and forests. These names are often early Indo-European ones, such as the Stour (strong one) and the Tame (dark one). Iron Age river names, linked to modern Welsh, include the Avon, Arrow, Severn and Wye.

Hill names with early origins include Penn (hill), Malvern (bare hill), and Bredon Hill (hill, hill, hill!). This last gives us a glimpse into how names evolved - *bre* (Celtic), *dun* (Anglo Saxon) and modern Hill. Saxon settler to British local 'What's that huge lump over there?' Brit replied 'Oh that's the hill'...

Lickey may (or may not!) fit into this group. It could be derived from Celtic *llechi* (stones, stony) which is a fair description, or Old English Leckhey from 1255 (place at the forest enclosure).



Bilberry Hill - Llechi or Leckhey? Photo: JH.

Other Celtic forest names include Wyre (spreading) and Arden (high - similar to the Ardennes). The old name for Wall, Letocetum (grey wood - see page 14), evolved into the name Lichfield.

There are many names coming from Anglo Saxon and Old English. Rubery for example means 'rough hill' referring to its poor soil. Gannow derives from 'gamen ho' - the ridge where games are played. Lydiate Ash comes from Old English *hljdegat* meaning a 'swing gate' where there was a gate between arable and pasture land or a roadway, and near to an ash wood. Waseley and Wast Hills are defensive sites, their names deriving from *weardsetl* or watch tower.

Some names seem obvious - *whetty* means a 'wet enclosure'. But other names are not what they seem. Hopwood for instance is a wood of wild privet trees - no hops! Longbridge does not refer to the 19th century railway tunnel, but is much older. The long bridge here carried the Bristol Road across the River Rea and its marshy surrounding and was probably built for the Bromsgrove Turnpike in 1727. Longbridge also had a tollgate and milestone showing Birmingham as seven miles distant, and Bromsgrove eight miles away.

Finally, Gunners Lane in Rubery was not a military reference, but an engineering one. Coal and peat seams were mined for fuel. In 1275 engineering brothers Thomas and Adam le Gynor lived there and a 1452 document records *Gynnors Lane*. **JH**

Quiz Answers: (1) Wychbold. (2) Longbridge. (3) Grafton. (4) Lydiate Ash. (5) Blackwell. (6) Stirchley. (7) Kings Norton. (8) Catshill. (9) Cotteridge. (10) Weoley Castle. (11) West Heath. (12) Dodford.

Lickey Hills Local History Society

Programme for 2026-2027

Heritage Weekend

September 19 & 20. 11am-4pm at the Visitor Centre School Room, Warren Lane, Lickey B45 8ER.

This Year's theme is Everyday Histories:

Exploring daily working life through the ages.

Results of our Research Projects on Mapping our WW1 War Dead and Lickey's Rubery Asylum Burials

History of the Country Park and Cofton Park; Lickey as a Mediaeval Royal Forest.

Elijah Walton's watercolours of the area in the 1850s

A model of the WW1 Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range; the tithe map and maps from our collection... and much more!

Guides to show you Warren Lane Quarry with its WW1 Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range & fascinating geology

Lickey's WW1 and WW2 History Walk on Saturday 19 at 11.30am and Sunday 20 at 1.30pm

Lickey Geology: 'A Walk Through Time' on Sunday 20 at 11am

Free and open to everyone

Tuesday Meetings Programme

2026

- **September 15: A.G.M.** followed by **'Rogues, Villains and Peaky Blinders'** by **Corinne Brazier**
An exploration of the Lock-up Museum's 125 years of records to discover some of the criminals held there.
- **October 20: 'Clive of India'** by **Max Keen.**
From Tearaway Youth to Empire Builder.
- **November 17: 'The Jewellery Quarter... Still Birmingham's Gem?'** by **Andy Munro.**
Its history and transition to the present day.
- **December 15: 'Breaking the Brass Ceiling: The Life and Legacy of Professor Dame Hilda Lloyd PRCOG'** by **Professor Jonathan Reinarz**
The pioneer in obstetrical care. With seasonal refreshments.

2027

- **February 16: 'Saving the Worcester news newspaper archives from the skip'** by **Chris Wilkinson.**
How Worcester Civic Society members saved over 250 bound volumes of Berrows journals.
- **March 16: 'The Austin Village'** by **Hazel Griffiths** of the Austin Village Preservation Society
The history of the unique residential community of 200 red cedar pre-fabricated bungalows
Followed by a guided walk round the Village on April 10th
- **April 20: 'Rediscovering Hartlebury Castle'** by **Tim Cornah**
How an archaeological dig in 2024 unearthed the history behind a Civil War bastion at Hartlebury Castle.
- **May 18: TBC**
- **May/June:** Visit to a place of historical interest.

Tuesday Meetings are at the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES

Doors open from 7pm for refreshments and socialising. Talks start at 7.30pm

Annual subscription: £20. Non members: £4 per meeting