

# FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

## THE COFFIN WORKS

**Newman Brothers Coffin Fitting Works provided a backdrop to Birmingham history for nearly ten years after being brought to the public's attention on the television programme, Restoration, in 2003. Since then, Birmingham Conservation Trust has embarked on a painstaking campaign to raise funds to preserve and transform the site into a visitor attraction. This September, that goal will become a reality as The Coffin Works opens its doors once again and embarks on a new chapter as Birmingham's latest heritage attraction.**

Newman Brothers was purpose built in 1894 for the manufacture of coffin furniture, which included everything from coffin handles, breast plates, decorated ornaments to screws and hinges. The company prided themselves on making 'coffin furniture of every description', appealing to a wide demographic, rich and poor. The former group included the likes of Joseph Chamberlain, Winston Churchill, the Queen Mother and allegedly, even Princess Diana. But it was changes in the coffin furnishing trade from the 1960s onwards that saw the business and product line begin to contract and the financial inability to upgrade machinery, particularly in the manufacture of plastic furniture, finally saw Newman Brothers close its doors in 1999. Luckily for us, almost everything was left behind: the machinery, the stock, sales ledgers, tea and even a bottle of whisky, and there lies The Coffin Works story: the survival of a company archive that will now live on as a new visitor attraction.

The site is currently undergoing a major fit-out which will see half of the building transformed into a heritage space, where visitors will be able to step back in time and experience the factory as it looked and operated in the 1960s, almost identical to how it was discovered in 1999, in fact. This will be reinforced by the intermittent sounds and voices, along with 'Workers' Playtime' streamed through the factory tannoy. Memories from previous workers will also lend a hand in telling Newman Brothers' story as visitors are guided around the museum on their pre-booked tours. Above all else, it's this sensory experience aided by the opportunity to handle a selection of Newman Brothers' objects that really underlines the heart of The Coffin Works experience. The other half of the building will serve as rented workshop and studio spaces, which will support the long-term maintenance of the project, and it's this dual function that endeavours to make The Coffin Works a sustainable and forward-thinking development. You can keep up to date with the progress of this project via Birmingham Conservation Trust's website: <http://www.birminghamconservationtrust.org> and by visiting The Coffin Work's Facebook page.

**Sarah Hayes, Collections and Exhibitions  
Manager, Newman Brothers' Coffin Works**



# Edward – The “Forgotten” Cadbury

Everyone has heard of the Cadbury's chocolate firm and on 29th January 2014, John Kimberley talked to a well-attended group of the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History about Edward 'the forgotten Cadbury'. John discussed British labour management as seen from the Quaker background of the Cadburys, covering mainly the years between 1899 and 1919.

Birmingham had a tradition of strong relationships between employer and employees. John's premise was that Quakerism was important at Cadbury's in their interactions with their workers. They were driven by altruism, and concern about how an individual should grow and behave. Education was important; and many of the family taught in adult schools

Brothers Richard and George Cadbury managed the chocolate firm, which moved to Bournville in 1879. Edward, George's eldest son, born in 1873, worked there from 1892, starting first on the factory floor. Edward became responsible for women and girls, and exports. He carried out extensive research on working-class women and the conditions in which they lived and worked. He interviewed over 6000 women in Birmingham, especially those in the poorly paid and insanitary 'sweated' trades. This resulted in two books *Women's work and wages* (1906) and *Sweating* (1907). It was relatively unusual for an employer of this period

to be concerned about women workers, and the ways in which the lives of working women might be improved.

As Quakers, the Cadburys emphasised scripture, evangelism and good works. In general they supported various welfare reforms by the Liberal government, such as Old Age Pensions and Labour Exchanges introduced in 1908, and some limited unemployment pay from 1911.

Democratic and egalitarian relationships were characteristic of Quakerism, with a stress on hard work, lack of waste, careful use of resources, service to others and opposition to exploitation. Edward evaluated industrial and social conditions and their impact on the physical, mental and moral conditions of workers. He wrote a further two books *Experiment in Industrial Organisation* (1912) and *Case against Scientific Management* (1913). Edward considered scientific management to be inhuman and unfeeling, and left out care for workers. He shunned mere paternalism, favouring an 'atmosphere & spirit of cooperation & goodwill' with his workers, and he encouraged and supported trade union membership. Julia Varley (1871-1952), a Bradford mill worker, was invited to form a branch of the National Federation of Women Workers at Bournville in 1909.

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## Voices of War and Peace

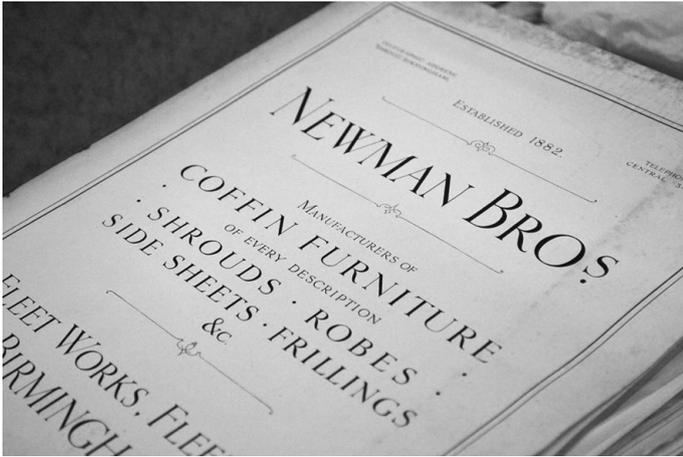
'Voice of War and Peace: the Great War and its Legacy' is one of five new First World War Engagement centres funded by the AHRC in partnership with the HLF. A University of Birmingham-led initiative, the local centre also involves academics from Birmingham City University, Newman University, the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Worcester, and is based at the Library of Birmingham. The Centre is led by Professor Ian Grosvenor, the Centre Coordinator is Dr Nicola Gauld, and there are seven Co-Investigators from the five partner institutions. In addition there are over 30 cultural partners including the Cheltenham Festivals, the BBC and YMCA England.

As well as exploring the impact of the Great War on communities in Birmingham and the Midlands, the Centre will focus on themes of national importance. These include

Gender and the Home Front, Belief and the Great War and Commemoration. The legacy of the War is also of importance, so the Centre will not only explore what happened between 1914 and 1918 but also the impact that the War continued to have during subsequent years. The Centre is planning a series of workshop events for community groups and members of the public. These will cover a wide range of topics around the First World War and its commemoration, and we welcome ideas for future events. We're looking forward to meeting with groups that are already working on First World War-related projects and also with groups that may have ideas for projects but would like guidance and support.

Website: [www.voicesofwarandpeace.org](http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org)  
Email: [voices@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:voices@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

# GOING TO MEET THE MAKER: NEWMAN BROTHERS COFFIN FITTING WORKS



Benjamin Franklin said there are only two certainties in life, death and taxes. Most of us don't give much thought to our own funeral, far less what we should be wearing when we 'go to the Lord'. Coffin fittings are just coffin fittings, aren't they? Shrouds are just shrouds. Absolutely not!

Our party met at Newman Brothers, a world famous, purpose-built factory set up in 1894. It was run by Alfred Newman and his sons, Horace, George and John, in Birmingham's Fleet Street. The factory closed in 1999, remaining intact, until it was sold in 2003. The contents are currently being stored and catalogued in Erdington. Many funeral companies still hold stock from the factory and Newman Brothers fine quality products adorned the Queen Mother's coffin.

As privileged guests we entered through the door reserved for office staff. Manual workers used to enter through the cart entrance. Our purpose was to witness a heritage building during restoration. The three storied red-brick works now has a new slate roof protecting it from the elements but we saw much evidence of drying in progress.

Suitably clad in hard hats and high-vis jackets, we dodged piles of timber and coils of wiring to gain an insight into the manufacture of electro-plated and resin coffin handles, stamped back plates and ornamental crucifixes.

Guided by Simon Buteaux and Janine from the Birmingham Conservation Trust, we learned how Birmingham stampers were paid on piece work, often lost fingers in the manufacturing process and how buxom female workers could polish a coffin handle held in their cleavage.

Coffin linings and shrouds were manufactured here from the mid 20th Century onwards. Upstairs, the sewing machines were installed by the windows to ensure maximum light. The frosted bottom panes prevented the seamstresses from gazing onto the street below. Later shroud catalogues catered for Aston Villa and Birmingham City fans (apparently a sizeable unsold stock remains for anyone interested). There was also a number in peach satin. There is not a lot of walking when you are dead, so scalloped edges sufficed instead of hems.

All dirty processes took place in the courtyard. The footprints of the 'dippy shed' and coke store remain. At the far end there used to be large gas turbine engine to power the factory. The men's toilets, sited on top, vibrated to its rhythmic thud.

The factory is just at the beginning of the Jewellery Quarter. Eight newly refurbished work spaces will encourage new businesses to develop, bringing the building to life once more. The unique preservation of this historic building and contents offers a better understanding of manufacturing processes in the area and a unique insight into changing funerary rituals over the years. The Coffin Works will open to the public this summer.

Gill Alleeson

# Centre for West Midlands History Annual Conference: Landscape and Green Spaces – Garden History in the West Midlands

## Report on keynote speech by Professor Timothy Mowl

In a lecture theatre filled with a hundred and fifty garden and local historians, Timothy Mowl's message was clear. 'Go outside,' he said, 'go outside and find things.' In a paper called 'Muddy wellies and dusty archives – towards the real garden history,' Mowl provided an entertaining whistle-stop tour of the historiography of gardens, from Horace Walpole to John Dixon-Hunt via Humphrey Repton, Christopher Hussey, Dorothy Stroud and Miles Hadfield. Citing Nikolaus Pevsner and John Betjeman as two of his own biggest influences, Mowl exhorted us to focus on 'Pevsnerian' facts and 'Betjemanish' atmosphere in equal measure.

Using English Heritage's recent recreation of the Elizabethan gardens at Kenilworth Castle as an example, Mowl pointed out that a garden historian must, like any other historian, make sure their facts are right before anything else. A careless misreading of an archive document led, in the case of Kenilworth Castle, to the centrepiece marble fountain being recreated as a series of Atlas figures holding up a globe, rather than – as it should have been – a series of Atlants holding up a bowl. ('Thanks, Simon,' added Mowl in a little dig

at English Heritage's somewhat controversial chief executive, Simon Thurley). Mowl's advice was plain: read your documents thoroughly. Look at maps and engravings, and find the truth there.

But it's not enough simply to get your facts right, warned Mowl. A garden historian must ensure that his or her work evokes the *genius loci* of a garden; it is the stories of people and places that make garden history so compelling. Mowl displayed a series of images of dilapidated eighteenth-century garden buildings – ruined temples, overgrown grottoes, abandoned cascades – photographed during his own (sometimes illicit) forays into the gardens of historical elites. 'That's how you do garden history,' concluded Mowl, 'you get out there and you find things.' By his own admission, though, garden history today is still rooted in the experiences of the patrician rather than the plebeian, and this was an idea that was developed further during the post-paper questions. And from the discussions that continued after the paper, it would appear that the 'real garden history' these days is taking a distinct urban and non-elite turn.

Zoe Crisp

*If you would like to contribute to our next newsletter, please send editorial and news items to Kate Iles at [kate\\_iles@hotmail.com](mailto:kate_iles@hotmail.com). Please note we do reserve the right to edit material.*

# Birmingham: its people, its history Engaging with Communities

On 13 March 2014, museum and heritage professionals gathered at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery for a seminar about the community engagement programme accompanying the new Birmingham History Galleries, (opened October 2012). The Chair was Chris Kirby, Head of Collections and Learning at Culture Coventry.

Dr Viv Golding, of the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies, in a keynote address, spoke about the 'creolisation' of museums. She argued that 'diverse minds, bodies, emotions and histories' should be welcomed in the museum. Open dialogue 'can provide a context for creative connections with diverse communities and establish points of contact across differences'.

Henrietta Lockhart, Curator of History said the aim of the community engagement programme was to integrate the contributions of Birmingham people fully into the displays and interpretation. Engagement fell into five categories: group engagement, oral histories, contemporary voices, contemporary collecting and consultation.

Case studies highlighted three of the community engagement projects.

David King, freelance film maker, produced two films with young people from Bordesley and Hodge Hill examining their feelings about their area. David's youth work experience was invaluable in gaining the confidence of two very different groups. Freelancers with particular expertise can vastly extend what the museum is able to do with communities.

Bob Manning, formerly Senior Lecturer on the BA(Hons) Fashion Design course, Birmingham City University, and Jo-Ann Curtis, Curator of History, outlined the Make Do and Mend project. Fashion design students studied the museum's wartime dress collection with the Birmingham Air Raids Remembrance Association (BARRA), and created garments based on 'make do and mend'. The wartime recollections of BARRA had been deeply moving for the students and brought the period to life.

Sarah Hayes, Collections and Exhibitions Manager at Newman Brothers Collection and formerly Freelance Curator for the History Galleries, spoke about the Moving Here project. A diverse group from Birmingham School of Acting worked with a freelance script writer and film

maker to create short films on medieval and 17th-century migration. Sarah emphasised the need for forward planning, detailed timetabling, and the need for early intervention if a problem arises.

The three advisory groups were represented in a panel discussion by Dr Malcolm Dick, Director of the Centre for West Midlands History, University of Birmingham; Wendy Cooke and Henrietta Lockhart. The Historians Advisory Group had met with curators regularly but had also given their time individually. The Community Action Panel had been consulted throughout the process and the results of those consultations could be seen in the finished designs. The Schools Advisory Group had advised on topics which would be useful at key stages 1-3 and helped to inform the development of a varied and successful programme for schools.

Mariyam Ali, Collections Support Officer, and Adam Jaffer, Curator of World Cultures, discussed the major community collecting project which had created the Your Birmingham gallery. Consultation had led to the choice of themes and topics. Donors were sourced through the press, sessions at libraries, community groups and other institutions and contacts. Challenges included dealing with sensitive topics and ensuring that the diversity of Birmingham's community was represented.

Sally Fort, freelance consultant, evaluated the three year community engagement programme against five audience development principles (community engagement, access, representation, social impact and organisational development). Methodologies included feedback from participants, freelancers and staff, demographic monitoring, observation sheets, focus groups and visitor surveys. Participants gained new skills and confidence, while the legacy for the organisation included adventurous displays, raising the profile of local history, increasing provision for families, gaining new visitors, improved access, inclusivity, and organisational change.

Henrietta Lockhart

# Friends of Birmingham Archives and Heritage (FOBAH)

Members of FOBAH help promote and support the work of Birmingham Archives and Heritage in making their historical collections available to as wide an audience as possible. They attend meetings, talks, visits and social events relating to Birmingham and Midland History, including private views of archive material. The organisation has also been acting as a pressure group since June 2009, representing the views of FOBAH members through meetings with senior staff, to influence the development of the new Library of Birmingham.

FOBAH has also been supporting an important project, run by postgraduate students, called 'Digbeth Speaks'.

For further information about FOBAH, visit the website [www.fobah.org](http://www.fobah.org), or contact Rachel Macgregor, Birmingham Archives and Heritage, Library of Birmingham, Centenary Square, Birmingham B1 2ND

## 'Digbeth Speaks' Report

A member of 'Friends' of the Centre for West Midlands History, Carly Hegenbath, an Art History PhD student, was involved in a successful Heritage Lottery Funded project, 'Digbeth Speaks'. Under the auspices of the Friends of Birmingham Archives and Heritage (FOBAH) she obtained a grant of £9,700 to create an audio-visual capsule of

Digbeth in 2013. Her team organised a group of seventeen volunteers, mainly postgraduate students from the University of Birmingham, who were involved in gathering oral histories. A further ten volunteers, including early career heritage professionals, created an exhibition which was held in October 2013 in the Custard Factory. It received over 400 visitors during the ten days it was held. The results can also be seen at [www.connectinghistories.org.uk/digbethspeaks/](http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/digbethspeaks/)

A cross section of community groups, musicians, residents, artists and businesses located in Digbeth were studied. Short Vox Pop interviews were conducted, to find out what Digbeth meant to people. Thousands of photographs were taken, and three short films made, in partnership with the Birmingham Irish Association, St Anne's Roman Catholic Church, the Chinese community, the Polish Association and others. Events such as workshops for children and a 'Gangs of Digbeth' walk were also held.

'Digbeth Speaks' received publicity in the regional press, on Radio WM and on Midlands Today television. The project has been nominated for an award by the Heritage Lottery fund, which are also using it in their training sessions as an example of good practice. Carly and her team are to be congratulated on such a magnificent undertaking.

# FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT: THE BIRMINGHAM SUFFRAGETTES

The legacy of the suffragettes received much attention in 2013, 100 years after the death of Emily Davison. And while most people might be familiar with the names Davison and Pankhurst, there has often been less focus on the campaign for suffrage outside London and Manchester. Fight for the Right: the Birmingham Suffragettes aimed to re-dress the balance by exploring women's voting history from a local perspective, focusing specifically on the activities of the Birmingham suffrage movement in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

A group of young women aged 12-15 from two local Birmingham schools, Waverley and Kings Norton Girls', felt that this subject was an important part of their heritage. They came together with Birmingham Archives & Heritage to explore material held in the collection relating to the militant and non-militant activity that took place in the city. Fight for the Right, which was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, investigated

social and political change through local eyes, exploring ways of campaigning and protesting, and focused on ways of researching, interpreting and recording Birmingham women's history by young women living in the city today.

The project planned to interpret the knowledge gained through workshops and archival research where discussion, debate, campaigning and protesting were key points of focus. This led to the students scripting and filming a short historical re-enactment film that interpreted the Birmingham story and featured the activities of both the suffragettes and the suffragists. The film was premiered at the Library of Birmingham in November 2013 and is now being submitted to film festivals.

Website: [www.birminghamsuffragettes.wordpress.com](http://www.birminghamsuffragettes.wordpress.com)

Nicola Gauld

## DATE FOR YOUR DIARY: CANAL WALK WITH GRAHAM FISHER

**Sunday 29th June 2013**

**Cost: £7.00**

Graham Fisher MBE is a science graduate and a lecturer in adult education, with a lifelong love of canals. He has strong Black Country roots and been active in many waterways-related groups. He has published several books on the Black Country canals and also on the glass industry in Stourbridge. He has numerous television and radio appearances to his credit and hosts his own radio show. Those lucky enough to have heard his presentations to 'Friends' of the Centre for West Midlands History, will know that he is an excellent and entertaining speaker.

Graham will be leading a walk along the canal in the historic Stourbridge Glass Quarter on Sunday 29th June 2013. We will meet at the Bonded Warehouse, at 09:45 and finish at the Red House Cone Museum at around 11.30-12 noon. The Bonded Warehouse is a grade II listed building, with the earliest parts dating from 1799. The Red House Glass Cone was built at the end of the 18th century

and was used for the manufacture of glass until 1936. Reaching 100 feet, today, it is the only complete Glass Cone in the Stourbridge area and one of only four left in the United Kingdom. Between the two is a fascinating stretch of canal, with many historical sites associated with the Glass industry.

For those of you wishing to make a day of it, lunch is available at the Red Cone Museum, and Broadfield Glass Museum, very near, is open till 4pm. The walk is suitable for all reasonably fit adults, but the road at the Bonded Warehouse is cobbled and therefore uneven, making access troublesome for wheel chair users and people with walking difficulties. The canal towpath may be slippery if it is raining.

**If you would like to reserve a place, please contact Sue Tungate at [suetungate@btinternet.com](mailto:suetungate@btinternet.com), or by mobile 07810 325315**

## BOOK REVIEW

*Dr J.A Langford  
(1823-1903): A self taught  
working man and the sale  
of American degrees in  
Victorian Britain.*

by **Stephen Roberts**

Published by Authoring History, £5.99  
paperback, available from Amazon and  
other booksellers

Many students of Birmingham's nineteenth-century history will be familiar with one or other of J.A. Langford's histories, *A Century of Birmingham Life* and *Modern Birmingham*. Thanks to Dr Stephen Roberts we can now find out much more about this interesting Birmingham individual, an autodidact who moved from life as an artisan to one as a respected author and school board member. Along the way, he collected a degree from Tusculum College, Tennessee.

Dr Roberts explores the story of Tusculum College's degrees and the controversy that surrounded them. We also learn about Langford's long-standing friendship with minister and politician George Dawson, originator of Birmingham's 'civic gospel', and the many tasks that Langford took on for him. Langford was a busy man; he wrote prolifically for the local press, worked for the Liberal Party, supported adult education and enjoyed long walks. One feels some sympathy for his second wife Mary Ann – Langford was 'rarely at home in the evenings' and spent his days shut away writing. However, we do learn that Langford supported Mary Ann in her role as secretary of Sparkbrook Women's Liberal association. Indeed Langford supported Women's Suffrage and many other causes dear to liberal hearts, siding with Gladstone against Chamberlain over Irish Home Rule.

Langford's history volumes may, as Dr Roberts suggests, be 'the work of a collector rather than a writer', but they are a great help to modern historians, and often fun to read because Langford 'had an eye for a good yarn.' The Birmingham volumes were followed by *Staffordshire and Warwickshire Past and Present* and various other compilations. The book includes a full list of Langford's works and several examples of his sketches and poetry.

Stephen Roberts' affectionate and clear-eyed portrait of Langford is a welcome addition to our growing knowledge of the many fascinating individuals who made up Victorian Birmingham.

Sue Thomas

# Staffordshire History Day 2014

The third Staffordshire History Day, a collaborative meeting organised by Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive Service, Keele University and the Centre for West Midlands History at the University of Birmingham, once again provided examples of wide-ranging research currently taking place within the county and opportunities for networking.

To launch the day, four students from the University of Birmingham and Keele University gave short presentations. Cathal Rogers began with the influence of landed families on urbanisation in Walsall and Longton. His research compares and contrasts the Potter family, agents of the Earls of Bradford and the focus of his presentation, with the agents of the Sutherland estate at Trentham. Then, using papers of the Waterfall Friendly Society which was established in the 1830s, Gill Marchment showed how regular payments from subscribers supported a fund for sick pay and financial support to those in need in a predominantly agricultural area where quarrying was a major employer. Graham Martin reminded us of Labour's win in the 1990 Mid-Staffordshire by-election with a video, and he illustrated how that event changed the way politicians interacted with the electorate. Finally, Victoria Rowe demonstrated how the local history group in Hollinsclough engaged with the wider community through its website, talks, tours and a 'family tree day'.

The keynote speaker for the morning session was Kate Iles whose subject was "Lunatic Ladies in Staffordshire", a reference to the Lunar Society. Kate commented that, as the men of the Society were not born as fully-fledged entrepreneurs or scientists, her current research aims to identify possible influences from their family background. Her studies so far indicate that women, and particularly mothers, motivated the successful men of the Darwin and Wedgwood families.

Two County Council representatives Debbie Taylor of Staffordshire Historic Environment Record and Joanne Terry, head of Archives and Heritage, followed with a résumé of current and forthcoming projects undertaken by their respective departments. During the breaks, there were opportunities to view the stands of many county organisations including local and family history groups and publishing societies and to exchange information. After lunch, Nigel Tringham explained his research and record keeping methods during the early stages of a new volume of the Victoria County History then Malcolm Dick provided an update of the History West Midlands magazine.

The afternoon keynote speaker was Dr Paul Carter who gave a fascinating insight into pauper letters following the New Poor Law of 1834. Using a vast archive housed at the National Archives at Kew, he showed how paupers complained about local conditions to the national Poor Law Commission. He used examples of correspondence from the Burslem and Wolstanton Poor Law Union to explain the range of grievances, and how a brief comment written by the recipient on the reverse of the letter was drafted into a reply. Joanne Terry concluded with a summary and thanked everyone who contributed to an interesting and enjoyable day.

Catherine Cartwright

# CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY ANNUAL CONFERENCE: LANDSCAPE AND GREEN SPACES – GARDEN HISTORY IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

After Tim Mowl's pace-setting start, delegates were plunged into three papers that took them from the little-known contributions to plant genetics and classification by Nehemiah Grew and John Ray, through Shenstone's influences in creating his ferme ornée at The Leasowes, to the 'sublime' landscape of Coalbrookdale and the Sabbath Walks laid out by the Quaker ironmasters. Ian Dillamore, John Hemingway and Harriet Devlin respectively gave us insights into important figures in garden history rarely explored, as well as sites that deserve to be better known.

After lunch, Dianne Barre intrigued with her pursuit of grottos sparked by Widow Spinks' entrepreneurial activities encouraging the paying public to visit one such elaborate garden building behind her business premises, whilst Katy Layton-Jones peeled back the layers of conventional wisdom to reveal the way in which public parks celebrated the materials of the industrial age. From bandstands to drinking fountains, brick and metal defined these highly complex public spaces.

Demonstrating that very little changes, Maureen Perrie highlighted disagreements over matters of taste between neighbours on the suburban estates of south Birmingham. Those neighbours were Joseph Chamberlain and Richard Cadbury and the approaches to landscaping at Highbury and Uffculme took different turns – curving lines in Chamberlain's case but, despite a little neighbourly advice, decidedly straight in Cadbury's. Curving lines are very much part of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's landscapes and these sites will receive much attention when the tercentenary of his birth is celebrated in 2016. Although probably the best-known landscape designer in English history, many aspects of his career and legacy remain under-researched.

Barbara Simms outlined plans for the 'Capability' Brown 300 celebrations ([www.capabilitybrown.org](http://www.capabilitybrown.org)), and the online records catalogue to be collated by volunteer research teams which will be hosted by Parks & Gardens UK ([www.parksandgardens.org](http://www.parksandgardens.org)).

The day began to wind up with an unusual aspect of garden history: the therapeutic landscapes of convalescent homes and other institutions associated with the open-air movement in England during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Often associated with sanatoria for the treatment of TB, Clare Hickman examined the role of these institutions and their grounds as well as looking at convalescent homes, orthopaedic hospitals and schools. Finally, Joe Hawkins sent delegates away with their heads spinning following a whistle-stop tour of the restorations at Hagley Park. Celebrated for its beauty in the eighteenth century, Hagley's charms were disappearing after a century and a half's neglect but a major restoration led by Joe is reinstating the Park to its former glory. Cascade after cascade appeared from beneath the diggers and the mud revealing a landscape with roots firmly embedded in early English landscape traditions.

The day confirmed not only a great interest in garden and local history but also that the West Midlands provides fertile ground for exploration.

Elaine Mitchell

# OBITUARY: SHENA MASON



*Shena Mason with her husband Colin*

Shena was working for the Archives of Soho Project in Birmingham Central Library, when I first met her, over ten years ago. These archives, which contained the business and family records of the Boulton and Watt dynasties, are one of the most important anywhere for the history of the Industrial Revolution. Shena's extensive knowledge of the history of Birmingham in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was invaluable for the success of this project. Shena had already published a history of jewellery making in Birmingham (1998) and assisted Jenny Uglow in writing her book, *The Lunar Men*, which was published in 2002. The next few years were extremely productive. She wrote a biography of Matthew Boulton's daughter, Anne (2002) and contributed to several books which were published in connection with the Matthew Boulton 2009 project, which commemorated the 200th anniversary of his death. The most important was the massive catalogue for a wonderful exhibition, *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires* (2009), which she edited. This beautifully illustrated and scholarly publication reflected her skills in co-ordinating the work of contributors and her extensive knowledge of Boulton himself, his family life and achievements. Shena's writing was based on accurate research and an ability to communicate to a wide audience.

These traits were revealed in a series of informative and accessible guidebooks for several of Birmingham's museums, including Soho House and Weoley Castle.

I got to know Shena well when she joined the part-time MA in West Midlands History programme at the University of Birmingham in 2012. She was intending to use the course to build up her academic skills and knowledge and to support her writing about the history of Birmingham. She was unwell during the first year, but she attended her classes and performed very successfully in all three of her assignments in 2013. She looked forward to completing a dissertation in 2014. Shena was unassuming but determined and keen to learn. She was an ideal student: committed to her course, supporting other students in their work and displaying a range of abilities that were necessary for distinction-level success. I have enormous respect for Shena as a person and as a scholar of local history. Her work is an example to those of us who are committed to understanding the changing experiences of Birmingham and her publications remain as a permanent legacy of her commitment to and engagement with the history of a great city.

Dr Malcolm Dick

# CWMH FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History will be informed of further details when they are available. Everyone is welcome to attend these events and there is **no need to book and all events are held at the University of Birmingham unless stated otherwise**. Contact Malcolm Dick to register your interest for events indicated by\* via [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) and details will be forwarded to you. If you are not on e-mail, contact Malcolm by phone on 0121 415 8253 to leave your address. The best way of keeping in touch with events is via the Centre's website: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/cwmh/index.aspx>

➤ Monday 28 April  
People, Places and Things Seminar, 4.30-6.30pm  
**Professor Robert Swanson (University of Birmingham): 'Insights on a fifteenth-century parish: the Hartlebury court book'**. Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

➤ Wednesday 7 May  
Historical Association Eric Hopkins Memorial Lecture, 6.30-8.30pm  
**Dr Jonathan Atherton (Newman University): 'Obstinate juries, impudent barristers and scandalous verdicts? Compensating the Victims of the Birmingham Priestley Riots of 1791'**.  
(Jonathan recently completed a PhD on the Priestley Riots and won the Midland History Essay Prize in 2013. He offers a new interpretation of an important event).  
Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

➤ Thursday 15 May  
CWMH Seminar, 6.30-8.00pm  
**Professor James Measeell (University of Birmingham): 'Harry Northwood: from Stourbridge to the USA'**.  
In September, James gave a stimulating talk on the Stourbridge School of Art. Harry Northwood was educated at the School and became the premier designer and manufacturer of glass tableware in the USA. Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

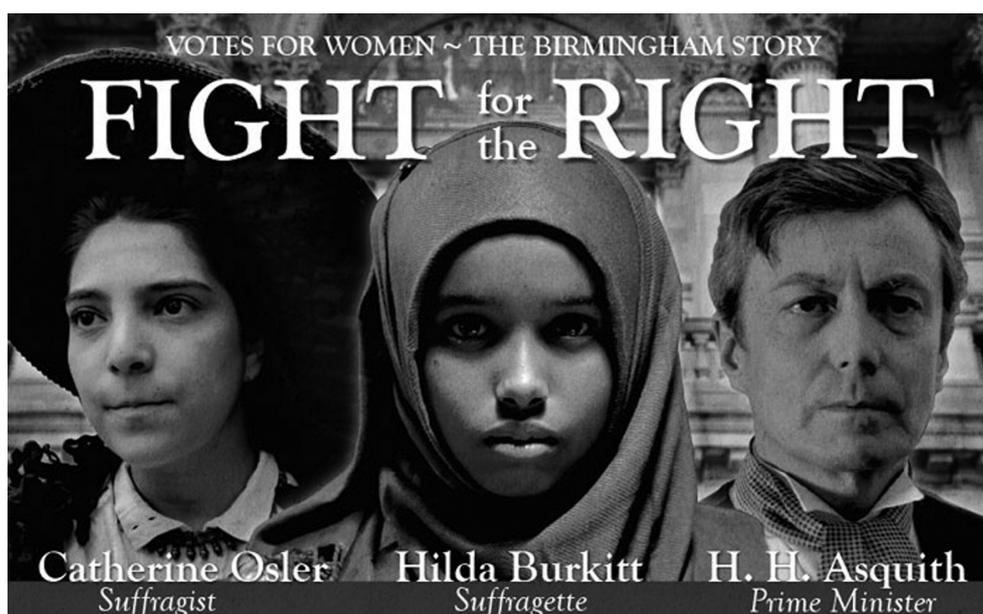
➤ Monday 19 May  
People, Places and Things Seminar, 4.30-6.30pm  
**Professor Richard Cust (University of Birmingham): 'A Rutland puzzle resolved: the county's petition in defence of episcopacy in 1641'**. Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

➤ Monday 2 June,  
People, Places and Things Seminar, 4.30-6.30pm  
**Harriet Devlin (International Ironbridge Institute for Cultural Heritage, University of Birmingham): 'Coalbrookdale: an eighteenth-century landscape of philanthropy'**. Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

➤ Wednesday 18 June  
CWMH Seminar, 6.30-8.00pm  
**Joe Hawkins (Hagley Hall): 'The Contemporary Restoration of Hagley Park'** Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

➤ Saturday 21 June  
Jewellery Quarter Day School with The Assay Office, Birmingham, 10.00am-4.15pm. Various speakers.  
**'Art and production in the Jewellery Quarter: past and present'**. Lecture Room 6, Floor 2. Please book a place via the leaflet. Contact [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) or 0121 415 8253 if you need a leaflet.

*Future Dates for your diary. Details will be circulated in September.  
Saturday 18 October, Black Country History Day & Saturday 22 November, Birmingham History Day*



Birmingham Archives & Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund present "Fight for the Right" starring pupils from Waverley School and Kings Norton Girls' School Richard Albutt Don Hazzard & Archive support Nikki Thorpe DOP Chris Keenan Sound Billy Bannister Music James Mulvale Drama Practitioner Juliet Raynsford Project Manager Nicola Gauld Directed by Sima Gonsai