

# FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

Newsletter Issue 2  
December 2009

*Sharing the Past with the Future*

## Matthew Boulton Discovery Day at Aston University

17th September 2009  
By Paul Finegan.

The Friends took the opportunity to have a stand at one of the latest Matthew Boulton Bicentenary events in Birmingham. Hosted by Aston University,

the event featured a variety of lectures supported by a number of displays and interactive workshops held in the University's Great Hall.

Between events, participants had the chance to visit stands and displays set up

by among others the Birmingham Astronomical Society (which is based at Aston University) and the Jewellery Industry Innovation Centre from Birmingham City University School of Jewellery. This team were responsible for the replica Boulton Candlesticks which featured in the recent exhibition at the Gas Hall. Representatives from Soho House Museum were also on hand to answer questions about Boulton.

The Friends stand gave participants the opportunity to promote Friends membership, the MA in West Midlands History and the popular day schools programme for 2009/10. A number of new members were recruited to our ranks as a result of this publicity. Interest in the day schools was high, both in terms of those who have attended in the past and wished to know what schools were running in the future, and those who were unaware of the day school programme. A number of suggestions for topics for future day school events were received.

Copies of the Friends newsletter were also available and proved to be very popular judging by how few were left at the end of the event!



*Pictured above at the Matthew Boulton Day are (from left to right) Graham Fisher MBE, Professor Julia King, Vice-Chancellor, Aston University; Dr Malcolm Dick, Sue Tungate and Barbara Fogarty, University of Birmingham; and Dr Michael Jepson, previously a Visiting Fellow at Aston University.*

### The Death of Matthew Boulton 1809

As Matthew Boulton's commemorative year is coming to an end, it seems fitting that the legacy of 2009 continues with an event which looks at his death. On 21st January, Dr Malcolm Dick will be presenting a lecture entitled 'The Death of Matthew Boulton 1809: Ceremony, Controversy and

Commemoration'. This presentation is a joint activity between the contemporary Lunar Society and the Centre for West Midlands History.

The evening will begin at 6.30pm for refreshments, and the lecture will start at 7.00pm. The occasion will be held in Lecture Room 3 of the Arts Building, Edgbaston Campus, University of Birmingham B15 2TT. Parking on the

University campus is free after 6.00pm. There will be a charge of £5.00 for a variety of refreshments.

Please book in advance by sending a cheque for £5.00, payable to 'The University of Birmingham' to Dr Malcolm Dick, School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT.

*Are you reading this but are not a member of the Friends? If you would like to join contact Dr Malcolm Dick, Centre for West Midlands History, School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT or email [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) for further information.*

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# Book Reviews

## *'The Historic Gardens of England: Staffordshire'*

By Tim Mowl and Dianne Barre  
Published by Redcliffe Press,  
priced £19.99.

This is the ninth volume in the Historic Gardens of England series, and it looks at some 90 gardens in the county, ranging from Elizabethan to modern. The book includes the well known Shugborough, Trentham and Biddulph Grange gardens and important, but little known lost gardens such as Gerrard's Bromley, Ingestre and Fisherwick.

The authors reveal that there is much more to 18th century landscapes than Capability Brown parks. The book features examples of gardens that include mock naval battles, automated hermits, Chinese pagodas and classical grottos. The Earl of Shrewsbury's huge and eclectic 19th century gardens at Alton Towers still have amazing temples, an orangery and pagodas today, but the site is perhaps better known today for its somewhat brash theme park!

As Staffordshire potters became wealthy they and their families created gardens at Etruria, Maer, and Hawkesyard. Later, Clarice Cliff made a colourful flower garden near Stoke - on -Trent. Even today modern entrepreneurs continue the tradition, as can be seen with the folly garden at Consall Hall. In short, the book reveals that Staffordshire has a wealth of unusual and unexpected features in its many historic landscapes.

The authors hope that local historians should find much of interest and new material here, for example many of the maps and illustrations have not been printed before.

## *A Lost Landscape: Matthew Boulton's Gardens at Soho*

By Phillada Ballard, Val Loggie and Shena Mason  
Published by Phillimore, priced £16.99.

Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) was one of the leading figures of the early Industrial Revolution. His Soho Manufactory in Handsworth, on the outskirts of Birmingham, produced silverware, ormolu, buttons and, 'toys'; the small metal objects which were characteristic of Birmingham's industry. He was responsible, with his business partner, James Watt, for supplying steam engines for Britain and Europe, and as far afield as Australia and the Americas. He also developed revolutionary minting processes at his Soho Mint and sent coins, medals, tokens and mints to all parts of the world. Flocks of early industrial tourists were attracted to his works as part of their 'Grand Tour'.

Boulton's interests ranged far and wide over the natural sciences and the arts. He was particularly attracted to the new fashion for landscape gardening, and from the 1760s he set about creating his own landscape near his Manufactory and home at Soho House, with water features, garden buildings and walks, woodland, lawns, colourful flower beds and borders.

After his death his son, Matthew Robinson Boulton, continued to develop the garden. His notebooks contain much of interest to historians and to growers of early varieties of many fruits and vegetables. Following his death, Joseph Chamberlain attempted to turn Soho's gardens into a public park, but the idea was rejected in favour of building leases, and bit by bit Matthew Boulton's landscaped park was eaten up, as Birmingham's industrial heartland spread outwards. A number of drawings and watercolours made by John Phillip in the 1790s provide the only surviving contemporary visual evidence for how the garden once looked. In the 1990s Soho House and the remaining small garden were restored and developed as a museum. This book, the first history of the garden, throws surprising light on a lost and intriguing aspect of the city's heritage.

Sue Tungate

## Next Friends' Event

On 10th December 2009, guest speaker Graham Fisher MBE will give an exclusive talk entitled 'More Miles than Venice' for Friends of the Centre, which will reveal the story of canals in the West Midlands.

Graham is an excellent and exciting speaker as well as a broadcaster on the local radio station 102.5 FM 'The Bridge'. He is also an Outreach Worker at Broadfield House Glass Museum and took part in one of the successful Black Country History Days at the University of Birmingham.

The event will take place in Lecture Room 2, Arts Building, University of Birmingham, from 6:30pm until 8:30pm. The talk will be followed with time to chat with other Friends of the Centre. Mince pies, wine and soft drinks will be served.

This event is free to 'Friends' but anyone who wants to join is also welcome, and can become a member on the day. Non-members will be charged an admission fee of £2.

Please let Elaine Mitchell know if you intend to attend.

If you require further information please contact:

elainemitchell@blueyonder.co.uk or call 0121 427 8163; suetungate@blueyonder.co.uk; or Dr Malcolm Dick at m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk.



Graham Fisher MBE

# Introduction to the Friends' Committee

*We look forward to meeting you at forthcoming events.*

Dr Malcolm Dick is Director of the Centre for West Midlands History at The University of Birmingham.

Dr Sally Baggott has been involved in heritage in the Jewellery Quarter for five years. She is currently Curator at the Birmingham Assay Office and Vice-Chair of the Jewellery Quarter Association.

Roger Bruton qualified as a chartered accountant in 1971 and spent almost 30 years in financial management in industry. In 2000, he pursued his interest in history by undertaking a BA via distance learning with Exeter University, which he completed in 2007. Roger recently completed the MA in West Midlands History at the University of Birmingham and is now interested in undertaking PhD research.

Paul Finegan has a degree from the University of Birmingham in Family, Local and Community History. He has previously worked with the Staffordshire Regiment Museum and is currently engaged as a Visitor Assistant with Birmingham City Community Museums. Paul is a committee member of the Bartley Green and District History Group for whom he has written various articles and pamphlets. He is currently undertaking research on the War dead of the area from both World Wars.

Sally Hoban is a specialist in late 19th and early 20th century art and design in Birmingham and the Midlands. She is currently engaged in PhD research at the University part-time. Sally lectures widely and is the author of the book *Miller's Collecting Modern Design*.

Christine Mann worked in the NHS in administrative roles for over 20 years. The combination of full-time work and family commitments left her little time for study until she enrolled on a part time local history course at the University of Birmingham. This eventually led her to complete a BPhil and MA. She now works part-time for a local charity but continues to enjoy study days, reading and local and family history.

Elaine Mitchell has recently graduated with a BA in Combined Humanities from the University of Birmingham and is now pursuing her studies on the MA in West Midlands History. She has a particular interest in Garden History and 18th century Birmingham, two areas she combined in her dissertation on Birmingham's Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. When not researching or writing essays, Elaine is the Administrator for the Birmingham Civic Society.

Sue Thomas is currently a student on the MA in West Midlands History. She has lived and worked in Handsworth for 30 years so not surprisingly is interested in the history of the area and its diverse communities. She also has a longstanding interest in labour and trade union history.

Sue Tungate is co-curator of the exhibition *Matthew Boulton and the Art of Making Money* at the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham. The exhibition is open until May 2010.

## ARTISTS IN BIRMINGHAM AND THE WEST MIDLANDS, 1800 TO THE PRESENT

By Christine Mann

On Saturday, 10th October a group of almost 30 people enjoyed five illuminating insights into the lives of local artists. Research student Connie Wan began by demonstrating how instrumental the Lines family had been in the establishment of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Curator Brendan Flynn followed Connie's talk with an account of how teaching at the Municipal School of Art became focused on art with function, whereby the students' skills could be transferred to the city's many trades such as stained glass manufacture, metalwork, book binding and printing.

The careers of some of the female students at the Municipal School were described by Sally Hoban while contemporary artist Robert Perry revealed his inspirations and how his work has evolved over time.

The final contribution by research fellow Martin Killeen left us with a mystery to ponder. He has only been able to locate examples of the artistic output of WL Sherwood in issues of the *Southern Cross* journal, the magazine of the 1st Southern Cross Hospital Birmingham, which was based at Birmingham University's Edgbaston campus during World War One. Martin's appeal for any information on this artist led to a question and answer session with all the contributors, bringing a very satisfying, educational day to a close.

This day school provided a fruitful interaction of professionals who are experts in their fields, research students and artists and resulted in an excellent example of knowledge exchange and transfer at the University which was also extremely enjoyable and accessible.

### ***New Chair for Birmingham Civic Society's Heritage Committee***

The Birmingham Civic Society is pleased to welcome Sally Hoban as its new Chair of the Heritage Committee.



Sally is a specialist in late 19th and early 20th century art and design in Birmingham and the Midlands. She read History of Art and English at the University of Birmingham and is currently engaged in part-time postgraduate research at the University. Sally lectures widely and is the author of the book *Miller's Collecting Modern Design*. She also writes for *The Birmingham Post* and edits the newsletter of the Friends for the Centre for West Midlands History.

If any Friends would like a copy of the Civic Society's magazine, *Birmingham Perspectives*, or further information about membership, please contact Elaine Mitchell at [info@birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk) or call 0121 236 8110.

## War and Society in the West Midlands: Annual Conference of the Centre for West Midlands History

On 20th March 2010, the Centre for West Midlands History will hold its annual conference in the Large Lecture Theatre in the Arts Building at the University of Birmingham. The day will run from 10.00am to 5.00pm and will consist of the following presentations:

- Dr Steven Bassett, School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham: 'Fortifying Mercia: Public Defences in the West Midlands in the Anglo-Saxon period.'
- Dr Malcolm Hislop, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham: 'Military Architecture or Military Chic? Medieval Castellated Buildings in the West Midlands.'
- Dr Andrew Hopper, Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester: 'Divided War Efforts: Factional Infighting and Garrison Warfare in the West Midlands, 1642-1646.'
- Peter Rhodes, Express and Star, Wolverhampton, 'Zeppelins and Bayonets: West Midland Civilians and Soldiers in the Great War.'
- Dr Stephen Parker, University of Worcester: 'Keep Praying Through: Religion on the Home Front in Birmingham in World War Two.'
- Jahan Mahmood, Community Historian: 'Birmingham's Muslim Communities and Muslim Soldiers in World War II.'

The cost for this event is £29, but Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History are entitled to a discount of £5, making £24 in total. If you are interested in booking for this event, please complete the enclosed form and send it to Sandra Ilott as indicated. Please write at the top of the form: £5 discount - Friend of the CfWMH. If you are a full or part-time student associated with the Centre for West Midlands History, you are entitled to a further discount. Please contact [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) for further details.

### West Midlands History Research Group

At our winter event on 10th December 2009, we will be launching a research group for postgraduate students and others who are investigating the history of the West Midlands. The aims of the group are to create networks between those with an interest in the history of the West Midlands, and to develop group projects such as seminars, publications, workshops and exhibitions and to enhance skills, some of which will help in gaining employment. It is possible for postgraduate research students to apply for funding to develop projects. Even if you are not registered as a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, but you have a serious interest in investigating the history of the West Midlands region, we will be very interested to hear from you.

The members of the organising committee of the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History are looking for a small group of individuals, including postgraduate students and others who would like to help in taking this group forward. If you would like to help, please contact Malcolm Dick at [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) or 0121 415 8253.

## Inaugural event for the Friends of the Centre for West Midland History

By Maggie Brocklebank

The first dedicated Friends' event took place on September 12th, when we visited Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Museum.

The event was organised by Elaine Mitchell, and we were met in the entrance hall by Olga Baird, one of the museum's curators, who had kindly agreed to guide us around the recently completed Victorian Galleries. These were light and well set out and the pictures and artefacts were accompanied by clear and informative labels. They reflected a number of aspects of Victorian life including social, political, military and colonial. We were able to look at them whilst listening to Olga who put them into context, linking them to Wolverhampton and the West Midlands as well as the wider world. Our two hour talk passed very quickly (Olga never flagged but one or two of us were glad of the well placed chairs at times!)

We then enjoyed a break in the excellent café, including cups of tea and coffee with delicious cake (the carrot cake is to be recommended!). The afternoon was completed by a tour of the Georgian gallery which Olga was also responsible for. Although much smaller than the Victorian Galleries, this has a varied collection of paintings alongside objects that visitors are encouraged to interact with to hopefully give them an insight into Georgian life.

This was a very successful first outing for the Friends, our special thanks are due to Elaine for her efforts in organising the afternoon. We would also like to thank Olga Baird who gave so generously of her time and shared with us the benefit of her extensive knowledge and experience.

The Friends Committee is planning to build on the success of the visit to Wolverhampton Art Gallery with a range of events for 2010, including visits in the Birmingham area as well as others further afield in the wider West Midlands. Further information about the programme will be published in the next newsletter.

Video footage of the launch of the Friends and the visit to Wolverhampton is available at [www.cbamh.bham.ac.uk](http://www.cbamh.bham.ac.uk).