

FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

History Detectives News

David Callaghan

In May, the Sparkbrook Caribbean & African Women's Development Initiative's 'History Detectives' was one of 10 heritage projects from 870 applicants to be nominated to go to the finals of the National Lottery's Good Causes Awards at the end of the year and voted for by the public. Despite a big promotion push by the group and its supporters they were unfortunately unsuccessful in making the final three. It was still an achievement to be given the chance and hopefully the group can go one further with its next project, creating a Black History Trail around the West Midlands.

Since January SCAWDI have been building on their research of the early Black presence the region and organising small visits to many of the locations linked with this history from museums to pubs, parish churches and country estates. A selected few will be published in a guide book to encourage others to visit these places and appreciate their diverse histories. A walking trail of Birmingham's early Black history will also be included.

This will be published in September when a launch will also be held at The Friends Institute in Highgate. More details to follow.

For more information contact David Callaghan
david@scawdi.co.uk



If you would like to contribute to our next newsletter, please send editorial and news items to Sally Hoban via sally.hoban@btinternet.com. Please note we do reserve the right to edit material.

DOROTHY THOMPSON AND BIRMINGHAM BY PENNY CORFIELD

INTRODUCTION BY STEPHEN ROBERTS



Dorothy Thompson, who died in January 2011, was an historian with a world-wide reputation. The doyen of Chartist studies and author of the seminal *The Chartists* (1984), she taught in the School of History at The University of Birmingham from 1970 until 1987 and also held numerous visiting professorships in the USA, Canada & China. Dorothy's work was rooted in local history, particularly that of the West Riding, where she and her husband, Edward, lived and worked for many years. On 2nd June many of Dorothy's former students and colleagues gathered at the University to remember her life and achievements. Former colleague Penny Corfield paid the following tribute ...

Dorothy Thompson (1923-2011), known to her many friends as Dotty, was a wise and wonderful person. Her great qualities and her lifetime partnership with her extraordinary husband, Edward (E.P.) Thompson, have already been recognised in full obituaries in the *Guardian* (7th February 2011) and other national newspapers.

So this comment focuses specifically upon Dorothy and The University of Birmingham. She lectured in the History Department in the 1970s and 1980s, long before the inauguration of the Centre for West Midlands History in 2006. But there is no doubt that she would have supported it enthusiastically. Her philosophy as a historian, which she shared with all her postgraduates, was to 'ground' research not only in authentic data from the archives but equally in an empathetic understanding of the brute realities of daily life. An ideal way to achieve that was to undertake a local or regional study, making the West Midlands the natural focus for Birmingham's historical research centre.

The University was never an ultra-fashionable one. But that suited Dorothy. She sought neither the flummies of Oxbridge academic life nor the claimed trendiness of the post-1960s new campuses nor the exhaustingness of London. The calm authority of Birmingham as a well-established civic redbrick matched her own cool style. And she was amused, not deterred, by David Lodge's quip about such places on page nine of *Changing Places* in 1975: Rummidge University [Birmingham in very light disguise] was a disgruntled institution, 'having competed strenuously for 50 years with two universities chiefly valued for being old, it was, at the moment of drawing level, rudely overtaken in popularity and prestige by a batch of universities chiefly valued for being new.'

DOROTHY THOMPSON AND BIRMINGHAM (CONT'D...)

What Dorothy wanted in Birmingham was her own academic base, validating and valuing her scholarship as an independent historian in her own right. She had remained at home to bring up her children, as was considered proper at the time. But she wanted a career too. And that she found. She particularly enjoyed the Thompsons' lengthy collegial friendship with fellow-Marxist historian Rodney Hilton (1916-2002). She also savoured the academic companionship of many other esteemed colleagues, with whom she shared agreements and disagreements. She loved teaching undergraduates, and she especially valued her cohorts of research students, to whom she was devoted and who repaid her devotion.

Her special responsibility was to run the Joint Honours degrees, which – like all systems designed to multiply choice – multiplied the complexities. Dorothy handled the resulting administrative chores with great efficiency and nonchalance, displaying her impressive quality of inner calm. She was a superb role-model as the up-to-date female academic: a feminist with charm, intelligence, commitment, tenacity, a streak of combativeness, and a lively sense of humour.

As joint beginners there, we were both amused and amazed at the micro-politics of academia. People were unofficially grouped into friends or foes according to intricate disputes, both academic and political, that dated from years previously. We newcomers were pre-allocated into the left(ish)-wing team, who were nice to us. So it took some months to find that not all our official friends were heroes and, simultaneously, that some of the right(ish)-wing enemies were really quite decent chaps. Dorothy, who with Edward, had lived through bruising arguments within the Communist Party and on the post-communist Left, was much less fussed. Indeed, when we discussed these squabbles later, I realised that she rather enjoyed being immersed in a scene that was absorbing without being fundamentalist, although, like all research academics, she became less enchanted with university life as it got ever more bureaucratised.

Birmingham was therefore 'within' Dorothy as well as Dorothy 'within' Birmingham. Not as a special set of values. There is no doubt that the overwhelming intellectual and emotional importance in her life was her partnership with Edward. Those who knew her well would say that she more than held her own in this relationship. She was good at putting down-to-earth questions to Edward, anchoring him in his rhetorical flights. For example, they both told me that a significant closing section (pp. 258-69) of his *Whigs and Hunters* (1975) was written in response to Dorothy. If, as Edward was arguing, the law was being used as an instrument of class oppression, then, she asked, what was the value of the rule of law? He replied that it was good to have community-shared standards and values, which could be used to challenge bad or partial laws. Edward and Dorothy as public campaigners did just that.

But it is hard, within partnerships of two entwined individuals, when all the public praise, attention, and indeed criticisms, fall upon just one of them. The charismatic Edward Thompson fully deserved his fame. At the same time, however, Dorothy needed her own form of public acknowledgement. The University of Birmingham gave her that accolade. Lecturing there helped her to find her voice and style, whilst providing a further stimulus for her historical research into Chartism. Her books came slowly; but, when they came, they were rightly applauded.

Edward was always awash with admirers. As a charming woman with an intriguing mixture of reserve and zest, Dorothy attracted admirers among the younger chaps. Homage was good for Dorothy too.

When deciding how to conclude, I thought about saying that Birmingham History was a 'rock' or even a 'lifeline' for her. But I quickly realised that such terms would be far too extreme. Dorothy was never desperate for external support. She was a very self-contained and self-reliant person. A truer conclusion is that Birmingham gave Dorothy the invaluable accolade of public recognition and her own academic flag to fly.

PhD Student and Friend of Centre for West Midlands History Wins Prize!



The University of Birmingham's Graduate School hosted the University's fifth Annual Research Poster Conference on Wednesday, 15th June in the Great Hall of the Aston Webb building.

111 posters were entered, illustrating an incredible range of research being carried out at the University. The standard of posters was high, with presenters from every College.

First and second prizes were awarded to the two posters judged to be the best under their College headings. The first prize in the College of Arts and Law was awarded to Janet Sullivan (Centre for West Midlands History in the School of History and Cultures) for her poster illustrating her PhD research into the effects of industrialisation on the Black Country town of Oldbury. Many congratulations to Janet!

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Annual Lecture of the Centre for West Midlands History 20 June 2011:

Midlands History in Media Sources (and Media History in Midlands Sources)

By Dr Paul Long, Reader in Media and Cultural History, Birmingham City University

My lecture explored issues presented by using media sources to inform local history. Newspapers, radio and television in particular have had a role in defining the Midlands, as institutions and chroniclers of current affairs but also as producers of an imagined Midlands. I suggested that while the historian needs to pay attention to the particular qualities and conventions of media forms, they offer us a rich resource for making sense of everyday life. In addition, and while insisting upon the everydayness of media, the region has also been the site of some considerable innovations in media representations, in particular for the way in which BBC drama and documentary responded to post-war migration. These resources offer opportunities and challenges for exploring midlands history.



For further information see: <http://paullong.posterous.com/>

Sutton Park Reveals History

By Roy Billingham

I have been conducting this survey over the three year period of 2009-11 and hope to conclude it shortly by surveying Streetly Wood, one of the ancient Seven Hays, or Hursts, within Sutton Park. My interest in this topic of local history was sparked by a remark made by Dr Mike Hodder, Birmingham City Council Planning Archaeologist (including Historic Environment Record), that he suspected that each woodland within the Park had its own sawpit site. The outcome has been that I have discovered in five of the surviving six hays (Lady Wood was sold for housing development for the Four Oaks Estate in the 1880s), and Westwood Coppice, over 100 sawpits where tree trunks or larger branches were sawn either for sale to provide income for the old Warden and Society (Borough Council) or for use as boundary fencing for the Park and its woodlands.

The survey has involved recording the Ordnance Survey coordinates for each pit, measuring the major axes, and preparing a detailed map of sawpit sites and spreadsheet for each woodland. These have been submitted to Mike Hodder who is, when other duties allow him, attempting to incorporate these details onto the local Historic Environment Record. I am well-advanced in preparing a text to accompany this information.

Many of these pits are very well-preserved and give us another aspect to the historic management of these ancient woodlands. The large number of pit sites is very unusual; we have no means of putting an age on them but the existing Minutes of the Warden and Society do list from circa 1700 onwards the year, the specific woodland and the number of oak trees felled, so many of these pits will have some antiquity.

Discovery of Earthworks to the West of the Pool Hollies

In early 2010, I discovered a series of 13 pits and mounds within an isolated area of Sutton Park's heathland measuring just 100 metres by 100 metres. Over a period of three months, I recorded the Ordnance Survey co-ordinates and dimensions of each ground disturbance and plotted these on a map. In April 2010, Mike Hodder made a visit with me to inspect the site. He could offer no explanation for the presence of these disturbances but thought that the site bore certain similarities to the ancient encampment site between the Bracebridge car park and the railway embankment.

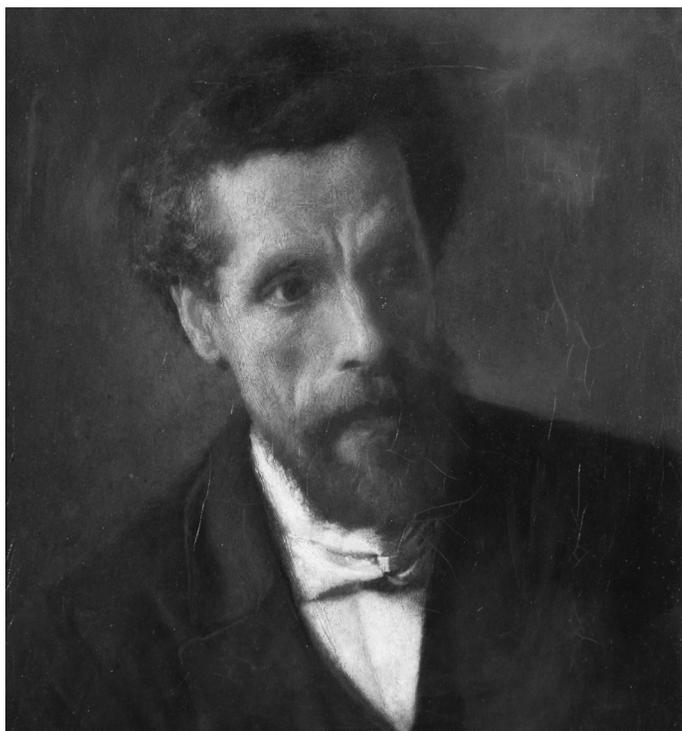
High Level Stewardship Programme in 2011 Reveals 19th-Century Military Archaeology in Longmoor Valley

The Heathland Clearance Programme undertaken at the start of 2011 in the Longmoor Valley area of Sutton Park has revealed a large number of bell tent drainage rings that were dug by the various militias and early territorial units that held their annual training camps in the late Victorian period near to the firing range that once existed in Sutton Park. Although the local council banned the use of the Butts in 1890 because of concerns for public safety, the local militias and territorial army units continued to hold exercises and annual camps in Sutton Park up to World War I.

At the time of writing, I have found 77 tent rings including drainage channels for a large marquee and two smaller rectangular tents. Again I have recorded the O.S. details and dimensions and prepared a map and spreadsheet to be submitted to Mike Hodder for inclusion on the Historic Environment Record.

CWMHRG RESEARCH SHOWCASE SEMINARS: 'TWO WEST MIDLANDS ARTISTS' WITH AILEEN NAYLOR AND ELAINE WILLIAMS BY SUE TUNGATE

W.J. Wainwright, John Keeley, Oil on canvas, RBSA Permanent Collection



The talks on 25th May by Aileen Naylor on Introducing Mr W.J. Wainwright R.W.S., R.B.S.A. (1855-1931) and by Elaine Williams on Florence Camm: The Birmingham Municipal School of Art and Beyond were very well received by an audience of over 30 Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History, plus four visitors.

Elaine described the history of Florence Camm (1874-1960), who attended the Birmingham Municipal School of Art and then worked as an artist and professional designer within a family firm in Smethwick. Camm studied at the school intermittently from 1892-1912, and whilst there she worked in all media, very much in the Arts and Crafts tradition which flourished at the School. In the early 1900s she was taught stained glass design by Henry Payne and was awarded the highest honour, a Silver Medal from the Government Board of Education at South Kensington for her work. She left to concentrate on the family firm of T.W. Camm, working in stained glass. Her art education played an important part in the development of the firm, established by her father in the 1880s and continued after his death by Florence and her two brothers, until her own death in 1960. Her output was vast and commissions spanned the globe, yet, she is little known today.

Elaine questioned the extent to which the artistic influences from The Birmingham Municipal School of Art guided the studio of T.W. Camm, a company that was an important part of the artistic communities of Birmingham and Smethwick. Also was Camm's determination to succeed within the firm of T.W. Camm allied to the idealism of socialist work practices advocated by the Arts and Crafts Movement? Or is her career reflective of the zeitgeist of the time that heralded social and political change for women?

Historical focus on Smethwick has generally concentrated on its links to the Industrial Revolution, overlooking the role of the arts, which provided opportunity and employment in the town. Camm exhibited design work at the Royal Academy, at Arts and Crafts exhibitions, and internationally at exhibitions of industrial manufacture. With the onset of World War I and its subsequent memorialisation, the depiction of a soldier's body was to become a recurrent theme in Camm's work. She produced numerous works that depicted soldiers in a variety of ways, where the body is used to represent courage, redemption, self sacrifice and a soldier's journey to salvation. They could also be read as symbols of a sanitised version of war, death and the crucifixion. An example of her work, the Nativity Window at Old Church Smethwick of 1932, reflects the influence of Arts and Crafts, with figures set in a naturalistic landscape containing trees, leaves and flowers. The colours are vivid, and the detailed portrayal of the figures evidences skills she learnt at the School of Art. Florence Camm deserves to be better remembered, and Elaine's work will help with this.

Aileen's talk was about the work of William John Wainwright R.W.S., P. P. R.B.S.A. (1855-1931). In 1928, the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists presented the first exhibition in its long history consisting entirely of the work of a living member. The artist was Wainwright and he was also the Society's first president elected from its own membership. Aileen discussed the main events in the life of this significant Birmingham figure, who was honoured in his lifetime, but who is now not widely known. She is also leading the RBSA's Archive Team curating an exhibition at the R.B.S.A. to be held from Monday 24th October to Saturday 5th November. The exhibition will consider William Wainwright's continental artistic training, his interest in costume and Catholicism, as well as his connections with Walter Langley and the Newlyn artist colony. Further details to follow.

CWMHRG RESEARCH SHOWCASE SEMINARS:
'THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE
BIRMINGHAM CUT-NAIL TRADE,
C. 1810-1914' WITH GUY SJÖGREN
BY ROGER BRUTON

Guy Sjögren



The baton of the Research Group's monthly showcase was handed to Guy Sjögren for July and was skilfully and assuredly handled before one of the largest audiences of members and invitees to date.

Guy, who is a distinguished graduate of the Centre for West Midlands History Research Group's MA programme, offered a fascinating insight into what was the subject of his groundbreaking MA dissertation concerning Birmingham's Cut-Nail Trade. Structuring his presentation around the theme of Philip Larkin's concept of "a beginning, a muddle and an end," he set out the challenges and successes encountered in his search for sources of information on a previously little-documented Birmingham manufacturing activity and concluded with a discourse on the trade and its principal participants. Overall, this was a talk full of insight and information and no little humour.

NEXT EVENT:

RESEARCH SHOWCASE
AN EVENING WITH...

ROGER BRUTON

'NOT AS THICK AS THE TEN YARD
SEAM - INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY IN
THE BLACK COUNTRY IN THE 18TH
AND 19TH CENTURIES.'

WEDNESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2011
6.30-8.30PM
LECTURE ROOM 3 (FIRST FLOOR),
THE ARTS BUILDING,
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

TO CONFIRM YOUR ATTENDANCE OR TO JOIN
OUR MAILING LIST PLEASE CONTACT
CONNIE WAN AT CWMHRG@HOTMAIL.COM



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for 'CWMHRG'!



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Midlands History Research Group'!

Have you got some interesting research that you would like to share? The Centre for West Midlands History Research Group is always looking for new speakers! If you're interested in giving a 20-45 minute talk about your research in an informal environment, get in touch with Connie Wan via CWMHRG@hotmail.com

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History Committee Members - Who Are We?

by Connie Wan

The Committee of the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History is made up of dynamic and proactive individuals with a passion for sharing and engaging people in the rich and diverse history of the West Midlands area. As Committee Members we all try our best to attend as many of the Centre's events as possible. However, sometimes academic, work and personal commitments get in the way. So, we thought it was time we featured ourselves in the newsletter so you can get to know us better, and also so that you know who to approach if you have any queries or suggestions.

I have been on the Committee for 2 years and although I have been shying away from attending lectures and visits lately (I have been finishing my PhD!), I take an active role in designing the newsletter and coordinating the Centre's Research Group showcase seminar evenings. I enjoy being part of the Centre where everyone is so dedicated to their research interests, and enthusiastic about sharing it. I currently work part-time at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA) and have just established myself as a freelance art historian, researcher and curator. I suppose I should also mention that I like to bake, A LOT. It is highly likely that you have had some of my cakes at the showcase seminar evenings!

Although I am now an art historian, my background is in graphic design having previously studied and worked as a freelance graphic designer. I discovered the joy of research and art history during the last year of my undergraduate degree and went on to complete a Masters degree in History of Art at the University of Birmingham in 2006. The Masters was the hardest and most intense course that I had experienced, but I fell in



love with the Barber Institute of Fine Arts and was adamant that I would return one day to continue my studies. A year later, I applied to undertake a Collaborative PhD with the University and, luckily, I was offered the place.

My Collaborative PhD was in association with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), University of Birmingham and Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA). My thesis and catalogue have been the first academic study of nineteenth-century Birmingham artist and drawing master, Samuel Lines (1778-1863), a Founder Member of the RBSA. The eminent careers of Samuel's sons have also formed a large part of my research. I curated my first exhibition in 2009 entitled: *Rediscovering the Lines Family: Drawings of Birmingham and Beyond in the Nineteenth Century* as part of the doctoral award.

Being on the Committee is extremely rewarding and you get the opportunity to meet many other like-minded people. *If you are interested in joining the committee, get in touch with Malcolm Dick at m.m.dick.bham.ac.uk*

CWMH Forthcoming Events

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History will be informed of further details when they are available. 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>

>> 4th September

Visit to Middleton Hall, Near Tamworth

Booking is essential. Contact Roger Bruton on rnbruton@tiscali.co.uk or call 0121 308 3508.

Monday 19th September

FOBAH Event

6.00 - 7.30pm, Archives Room, (Floor 6)

Birmingham Central Library

The Making of Greater Birmingham 1911

Display and discussion of archive material connected with the expansion of Birmingham.

>> 28th September

Book Launch:

New Directions in Local History since Hoskins

5.00 - 6.00pm, Lecture Room 2, Floor 1

University of Birmingham

Edited by Christopher Dyer, Andrew Hopper, Evelyn Lord and Nigel Tringham, this is a major new book on the writing of local history. It contains articles on approaches to the subject, including one by Dr Malcolm Dick.

>> 28th September

Centre for West Midlands History Research Group

Research Showcase Evening

6.30pm to 8.30pm (after the book launch)

Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

Arts Building, University of Birmingham

Presentation by Roger Bruton: *Not as Thick as the Ten Yard Seam - Intellectual Activity in the Black Country in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Email Connie at CWMHRG@hotmail.com to confirm your attendance.

>> 15th October

Black Country History Day

University of Birmingham

Programme and booking details to be announced.

>> 2nd November

Launch of Special Edition of Midland History

History of Ethnic Communities in the Midlands

4.30 - 6.00pm

University of Birmingham

Edited by Dr Malcolm Dick and Rajinder Dudrah, this large collection of articles explores ethnic history and experience in the region. There are also contributions by others including David Callaghan and Ian Grosvenor. Details of venue to be announced.

>> 5th November

Dugdale Society Annual Lecture

University of Birmingham

Speaker: Dr Malcolm Dick, title to be announced.

>> 12th November

Midland History Postgraduate Day Conference

Nottingham Trent University

This event is open to postgraduate students who are researching into the history of the East and West Midlands. If you would like to offer a 20 minute paper or attend, please contact Richard Cust:

R.P.Cust@bham.ac.uk and Nick Hayes:

Nick.Hayes@ntu.ac.uk.

>> 26th November

Birmingham History Day

University of Birmingham

Programme and booking details to be announced.

>> 23rd January 2012

Annual Lecture of the Centre for West Midlands History

6.30 - 8.30pm

Lecture Room 3, Floor 1

Arts Building, University of Birmingham

Speaker: Connie Wan. Title to be announced.

>> 4th February 2012

Staffordshire History Day

This is a new event which is organised by the Centre for West Midlands History, Staffordshire Archives and Keele University. It will be held in Stafford, venue and booking details will be announced later this autumn.

>> 30th April - 1st May 2012

Centre for West Midlands History Annual Conference

The Emergence of the West Midlands:

Culture, Communities and Change 1779-1918

Programme and booking details to be announced.

See the new website of the Centre for West Midlands History for more information about the Centre and the Friends: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/cwmh/>.
Contact Malcolm Dick: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or 0121 415 8253 for more information.