

FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

Tours of Warstone Lane and Key Hill Cemeteries by Christine Mann



23 'Friends' assembled at Warstone Lane to meet Richard Beardall, representing the Friends of Key Hill and Warstone Lane Cemeteries. Set up in 2004 in response to the neglect of these sites, volunteers spend many hours, not just maintaining the physical environment of the areas, but also researching, promoting, educating, arranging events, leading tours and generally raising awareness of the issues involved in protecting and conserving these important, historic sites.

So Richard guided us around Warstone Lane and then Key Hill, both of which were established to ease the shortage of burial space in the first half of the 19th century. Both were landscaped on sloping ground with catacombs and impressive chapels - the latter long gone. We saw many beautiful, artistic and unusual memorials, some bearing such familiar names as Chamberlain, Gillott, Tolkein, Bird, Martineau, whilst Richard filled in the background stories of many lesser-known mortals, like Dr John Postgate, whose

efforts to stop the adulteration of foodstuffs led to the first food safety legislation in the world.

Not forgetting the poorer citizens of Birmingham, Richard pointed out the public graves, where one small area alone held the remains, in stacked coffins, of up to 1,000 bodies.

Whilst relating the histories of the cemeteries and the people buried there, Richard also described the frustrations of dealing with the various statutory bodies responsible for the care of the sites, as well as the constant struggle for funding. Given these problems, it was inspiring to see what the 'Friends' have achieved, and to hear about their continuing projects. We were all entertained and educated and would encourage anyone interested in the history of Birmingham to take a guided tour, which are available monthly on the second Sunday. Have a look at the website at www.fkwc.org for full details.

BLACK COUNTRY HISTORY DAY 2011

BY JUDITH WATKIN

Well-known local historian, Dr Terry Daniels opened this year's day school with a lively run through the history of the Manor of Oldbury from the time of Roger Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, after the Norman Conquest, past Sir John Dudley, later Duke of Northumberland, executed by Elizabeth I for trying to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne, to the Scottish Allen-Fraser family before ending up with the Trustees of a Scottish Arts organisation.

Terry was followed by Dr Jean Debney who has investigated the career of Mary Macarthur, the charismatic leader of the 1910 Women Chainmakers' strike in Cradley Heath, from her comfortable upbringing in Scotland, through to her founding of the National Federation of Women Workers and her unsuccessful candidature as an MP for Stourbridge. Mary was as aware of the importance of media coverage of the strike as any modern politician and ensured the oldest chainmakers were photographed wrapped in the chains they produced, as part of their campaign for the right to a fair wage.

Roger Bruton described the intellectual networks existing in the Black Country and the Severn Valley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, covering not just the Lunar Society, which included James Keir, who set up a chemical works in Tipton, but also itinerant lecturers and agricultural societies and mechanics institutes which educated the artisan class. Finally, Trevor Harris examined the impact of the 1870 Education Act in Smethwick and Harborne, illustrating from

contemporary documents the rivalry between the Church and State in the education of children.

The day school was chaired by Dr Malcolm Dick, Director of the Centre for West Midlands History and organised in partnership with the Black Country Society:

<http://www.blackcountryociety.co.uk>, founded in 1967, when it was felt that much which characterised the area was being swept away and that the Black Country did not receive its fair share of recognition for its great contribution to the industrial development of Britain and the world. Its aims are 'to foster interest in the past, present and future of the Black Country with regard to historical, social, cultural and environmental matters; to promote a high standard of planning and environmental design, and to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic interest in the Black Country'. Its voice, calling for the establishment of a local history museum in 1968, helped to provide an impetus for the setting up of what has now become the Black Country Living Museum.

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.

CWMHRG RESEARCH SHOWCASE SEMINARS:
'NOT AS THICK AS THE TEN-YARD SEAM'
– INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY IN THE BLACK
COUNTRY IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND
NINETEENTH CENTURIES' WITH ROGER BRUTON
BY GUY SJÖGREN

'Just like London buses, you wait for ages for an orrery and then three come along together.' This was just one insight into his research that Roger Bruton revealed to a satisfyingly large audience at the September showcase seminar. As many readers will know, Roger graduated from the Centre for West Midlands History MA programme and is now in his second year of doctoral research. His research topic is intellectual activity and networks in the Black Country and the Severn valley during the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and it was an overview of his research to date that he shared with his audience.

Roger's talk was wide-ranging in its scope. Not surprisingly, the Lunar Society, and the disparate backgrounds and interests of its individual members, figured prominently. However, whilst the Lunar Society formed a nucleus of intellectual activity in the West Midlands, Roger introduced us to lesser known groups and individuals who were responsible for the dissemination of knowledge and ideas in the region. Groups included the county agricultural societies, such as the Herefordshire Agricultural Society formed in 1797, and the mechanics institutes. Roger drew particular attention to the latter, emphasising the significance of the institutes in the development of artisan education. Mechanics institutes were inaugurated in the 1820s by professor of medicine George Birkbeck and were to become established in towns such as Wolverhampton, Dudley and Wednesbury. Individuals also played their part, whether as

itinerant lecturers or - as in the case of James Loch, the Duke of Sutherland's agent - as promoters and disseminators of ideas.

Roger's talk was very well received, with the question-and-answer session that followed lasting for over half-an-hour. Roger repeated the talk to an equally receptive audience at the Black Country History Day in October. Like London buses, you wait for ages for just such a lecture and then two come along together.

NEXT EVENT:

RESEARCH SHOWCASE
AN EVENING WITH...

SUE THOMAS

'BIRMINGHAM RADICALISM AND
THE NEWHALL HILL MEETINGS OF
1817 AND 1819'

THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2012
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

CWMHRG RESEARCH SHOWCASE SEMINARS:
'DUDDESTON'S 'SHADY WALKS AND
ARBOURS', BIRMINGHAM'S VAUXHALL
PLEASURE GARDENS 1745-1850'
WITH ELAINE MITCHELL

BY SUE THOMAS



There was a good turn-out for the Research Showcase event on November 10th and the attendees were treated to an entertaining presentation from Elaine Mitchell entitled: *Duddeston's 'Shady Walks and Arbours', Birmingham's Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens 1745-1850.*

Elaine is interested in garden history, a field which, as became clear from her talk, is about a lot more than gardens! The story of Birmingham's Vauxhall Gardens told us a great deal

about the changing tastes and leisure pursuits of Birmingham residents.

The pleasure gardens on the site of the Duddeston manor estate were opened to the public in the mid-eighteenth century, and were modelled on the idea of London's Vauxhall Gardens, hence the name adopted. Diaries and travel journals tell us how the gardens were appreciated by residents and visitors alike and advertisements in *Aris's Gazette* tell us about the musical entertainments laid on. By the 1830s, as more Birmingham residents had the time and resources to afford the entrance fees, the Gardens may have moved down market. At the same time the elite were retreating to their own suburban gardens.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the ever-expanding town was encroaching on Duddeston. The Vauxhall gardens closed in the 1850s and the land was soon built on. The Vauxhall Gardens disappeared but wonderful town parks eventually replaced them, continuing to provide some much needed greenery and fresh air for Birmingham residents.

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

Midland History Postgraduate Conference 2011

by Pete Bounous

Nottingham Trent University's Clifton campus was the venue for this year's Midland History Postgraduate Conference on Saturday 12 November, and it proved to be a most enlightening day with a diverse range of papers focussing on locations throughout and beyond the Midlands, under four broad headings.

The first panel, entitled Women in the Midlands, was opened by Stephanie Appleton who presented a paper illustrating how her study of wills and inventories has shed new light on the lives of the women of early modern Stratford Upon Avon and challenged many common perceptions of social networks, gender roles and material culture. This was followed by John Goss's paper that, using evidence from the Wolferstan diaries, endorsed the accuracy of Joseph Wright's enlightenment paintings which are controversial for their uncommon depictions of the presence of women and children at scientific demonstrations, in contrast to the generally accepted view of attendance at such philosophical events. Subsequently, Jennifer Aston's investigation of female-owned businesses in the second half of the nineteenth century used a diverse range of sources to establish the extent of their existence in both Birmingham and Leeds, and to compare their natures. Significantly, in so doing, she was able to legitimately call into question the current understanding of gender and occupation in the later nineteenth century.

The second panel, entitled Land, Housing and the New Town, began with James Bowen's paper on the governance and management of common land in Shropshire. Using maps and other evidence, he examined the formal and informal local mechanisms of governance of such land between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and, by placing his findings in a wider context, illustrated how his work illuminates legal, economic and social aspects of the locality at this time. Also in this panel, Philip Broxholme evaluated the success of Tory-led interwar municipal housing policy in Nottingham, and Robert MacKinnon examined the development of Telford's material spatiality in its context as a 'new town'

After an informal lunch, Jonathan Atherton began the Local Politics and Reform panel with an illuminating paper on the 1791 Birmingham 'Priestly riots', proposing that the impact of the riots on the Dissenters of Birmingham was far less marked than has previously been suggested and that they recovered surprisingly quickly. This was followed by Richard Jones's examination of the public provision of gas and water in late nineteenth century Birmingham, under the mayoralty of Joseph Chamberlain, as a specific development of socialism. Jones set Birmingham events in their wider economic and political contexts and evaluated the relationships between, and the extent of, both national and local influences. Michael Tedd concluded the panel with a paper examining the impact of three nineteenth century land societies at Anstey in Leicestershire.

The final panel, broadly encompassing Leisure in the Midlands, comprised of two papers, both focussed on the east of the region. Andrew Wager's paper explored the use of the railways in nineteenth century Derbyshire by individuals and organised groups of walkers. Subsequently, Geoffrey Blackwell examined the largely unsuccessful commercial photography businesses of Nottingham in the nineteenth century and proposed a series of reasons why this had been the case.

Having been promoted as a friendly conference, ideal for those giving their first paper, the event certainly lived up to these claims. Its small size and convivial atmosphere were conducive to relaxed academic discussion and ensured an ample opportunity not just for the asking and answering of questions, but also for suggestions and recommendations from the audience on how to shape or refine their research further. I found this to be a well organised, efficiently managed, enjoyable conference which I strongly recommended to anyone with an interest in midlands history and especially to those who may be considering presenting a paper of their own. My thanks to all of those involved in the organisation and delivery of a stimulating and informative day out.

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

by Sue Tungate

Sue Tungate has just gained a PhD in History, which will be awarded in the December 2011 graduation ceremony after three years of full time study, based in the History Department at the University of Birmingham, and nearly two years in writing up. It just goes to show what can happen to a science graduate, who became interested in local history over twenty years ago. Sue first participated in a variety of local history courses, based at the University of Birmingham and achieved an MA in History in July 2003. She was fortunate enough to be awarded a doctoral award in October 2006, so being a full time student was a great contrast to her science teaching career.

The topic of Sue's AHRC-funded research was the Soho Mint of Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), the eighteenth-century Birmingham industrialist. He was the founder of Soho Manufactory, the steam-engine business of Boulton and Watt, and the Soho Mint. A collaboration between the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and the University of Birmingham History Department, was set up to catalogue and research the coins, medals and tokens of Boulton's Soho Mint. There was also input from the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, and from the Department of Antiquities and Archaeology. The combination of science, art, numismatics, museum and archive studies was fascinating, and offered a multitude of new experiences. Sue was able to participate in activities associated with Matthew Boulton's bicentenary celebrations in 2009, including an international

conference, and exhibitions at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.

In addition, Sue has played an active part in the Committee of the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History, which is designed to bring together people and organisations interested in the region's rich history. The group is suitable for, but not restricted to, active scholars, postgraduate students, heritage professionals or local historians. If you are interested in joining the committee please contact Dr Malcolm Dick via m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk.



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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>

Thursday 8 November 2011

John Ash Lecture by Professor Simon Szreter (Cambridge):
Birmingham University and the Public Health History of the Nation

4.30pm to 6.00pm

Leonard Deacon Lecture Theatre,
Medical School Building,
University of Birmingham

This lecture is open to all and there no need to book. The lecture will finish in time for friends of the Centre for West Midlands History to attend the Christmas Social at 6.30pm (see below).

Thursday 8 November 2011

Christmas Social

6.30pm to 9.00pm

Lecture Room 3, Arts Building,
University of Birmingham

We will be following the very successful 'show and tell' format for our event in 2010. Individuals brought an object which has some relevance for the history of the West Midlands and described it in about 5 minutes. There will be a raffle with book prizes. Please contact Malcolm Dick a) if you would like to attend and b) if you have an object to describe; e-mail: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or telephone: 0121 415 8253.

Monday 23 January 2012

6.30pm to 8.30pm.

Centre for West Midlands History Annual Lecture by Dr Connie Wan (Royal Birmingham Society of Artists):
'A Provincial from Birmingham': The Career of Artist and Archaeologist Henry Harris Lines (1800-1889)

Lecture Room 3, Arts Building,
University of Birmingham

Please contact Malcolm Dick if you would like to attend; e-mail: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or 0121 415 8253.

Thursday 2 February 2012

6.30pm to 8.30pm.

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History Research Seminar with Sue Thomas (PhD student):
Birmingham Radicalism and the Newhall Hill Meetings of 1817 and 1819

Lecture Room 3, Arts Building,
University of Birmingham

Please let Connie Wan know if you would like to attend via cwmhrg@hotmail.com or telephone Malcolm Dick on 0121 415 8253.

Saturday 4 February 2012

10.00am to 5.00pm.

Staffordshire History Day

Three Friends members are giving talks: Catherine Cartwright (Staffordshire's Tinplate industry); Malcolm Dick (James Keir) and Kate Iles (Sabrina Sidney). See the leaflet in the newsletter for booking details.

Friday evening 30 March to Sunday 1 April 2012

Centre for West Midlands History Annual Conference: *The Emergence of the West Midlands, 1779 to 1918: Culture, Communities and Change 1779 – 1918*
Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

A full programme will be published early in 2012. Please provide Malcolm Dick with your contact details if you are interested in receiving more information; e-mail: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or 0121 415 8253. A call for papers is on the Events section of the Centre for West Midlands History website: www.cwmh.bham.ac.uk

Newsflash... The 2012 annual conference of the Printing Historical Society [PHS] will be held at the Birmingham Institute of Art & Design at Birmingham City University, 11-12 September 2012. The theme for this event is Printing in the Midlands. A call for papers will be announced on the PHS website: www.printinghistoricalsociety.org.uk, and will also be published in the next issue of this newsletter.