

FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

Environment and Experience: Engaging with the History of the University of Birmingham

Dr Malcolm Dick has succeeded in gaining funding from the University of Birmingham's Annual Giving Programme, which distributes money generously raised from the alumni (former students of the University), to support good causes in the institution. The money Malcolm has received will be used during 2011 to support a project exploring aspects of the history of the University of Birmingham with students, staff, alumni and former University employees. There are existing histories of the University, but this project will add to the modern archive and begin scoping for a new history.

Students, alumni and staff will, amongst other things, interview alumni about their lives at the University; produce histories of buildings or collections and biographies of former scholars; provide an archaeological history of the University; survey student experiences, create a photographic record of University life and look at the changing relationship between the University and the city. There will be three filmed workshops; a campus tour to explore the physical landscape of the University; a Special Collections session to investigate the University archives and a session exploring its collections.

The project has a number of aims: to develop the skills and knowledge of students and staff through investigating the University's history; to encourage students and staff to engage with the University's Collections, landscape and heritage; to communicate with individual alumni and record their experiences of the University and to create a multi-media archive of the University for Special Collections.



Faraday, Eduardo Paolozzi, 2000.

Outputs will include a multi-media archive for the University Archives, written and illustrated material for the University's website, a leaflet on the University's history and a scoping study for a new history of the University.

There will be an initial event in the summer term to begin planning. More details will be provided later. If you are a current or former student or a current or former member of staff and would like to work with the project group, please contact Malcolm Dick on m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or 0121 415 8253.

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.

Friends West Midlands Object Event

16th December 2010 - Some Highlights!



Glass Discs by Janet Hope

These five glass discs are the hop scotches I played with in my 1950's Black Country childhood. The largest is 7cms in diameter, the smallest 4.5 cms and simple patterns are impressed on their top surfaces. The green and orange ones must have been the most favoured; they are chipped around the edges and scratched along the bottom.

It was my great uncle Tom who gave them to me. He worked at Chance Brothers, a huge local glass manufacturing concern which was established in Spon Lane in Smethwick around 1824 and continued there until 1981. Throughout its history the company had been at the forefront of major technological advances in the manufacture of glass: not only window glass (they produced the glass for the Crystal Palace in 1851), but also coloured and ornamental glass for stained glass windows (1845 to circa 1866), and optical glass which included lighthouse lens and binoculars. They pioneered the first dark lenses for UV protection, manufactured some of the first cathode ray tubes and produced glass thin enough to make into syringes. In later years they made some very popular ranges of domestic glassware.

The assembled Friends were asked to speculate how the hop scotches might have arisen from a glass manufacturing process; this was a question I had often asked myself. Some imaginative suggestions were made, nevertheless it seems that they will continue to remain something of a mystery and, who knows, there could be hundreds of them out there waiting to be dug up by future archaeologists!

'The Box' by Sally Davison

"Bin It Mum! It's just an ordinary old cardboard box", said my son - but to me it is anything but 'ordinary'. The box is about 18"x12"x2" and dates from the early fifties (possibly 1950, which marked my mother's 40th birthday). It arrived in a distinctive van from (what for us) was the 'poshest' shop in Birmingham - Marshall and Snelgrove on New Street, opposite The Odeon.

It was sent to Mum by her sister in London. Inside there were seventeen layers of tissue paper revealing what I think was a scarf (I find it significant that I remember the delivery, the box, the tissues and the excitement but not the present itself!). As all but myself have passed on, this will never be resolved. Also of significance is the fact that Mum actually kept the box - she was never a hoarder (unlike me!). She kept photographs, my fathers love letters to her, and the front page of the *News Chronicle* announcing Edward VIII's abdication - and the box. All, it would seem, from important times in her life.

So, an iconic box from an iconic Birmingham store, but what to do with it? Binning is no option and I am moving house so don't have any room. However, at the Friends' Christmas get together, Dr Sally Baggott fell in love with it and I was more than happy to pass it over, knowing it would be in safe hands. Thank you Sally- literally a case of 'a friend in need, is a friend indeed'!

Percussion Cap by Christine Mann

As a centre of weapon manufacture, it could have been expected that Birmingham would also produce ammunition, and from the 1830s to the end of the century, the town led the country in the production of percussion caps. Numerous small firms sprang up, usually in converted houses, in the residential areas of the town centre, from Whittall Street in the Gun Quarter to Graham Street in the Jewellery Quarter.

Given the risks involved in packing these tiny metal containers with volatile ingredients, it is not surprising that accidents were commonplace, some resulting in minor injuries, but many in fatalities. As most of the workers were women and children, they suffered the most.

As legislation increased to protect the vulnerable, and firearms, and thus ammunition evolved, so the producers disappeared or merged until, by the early 1900s, only one or two remained, the largest and most significant being Kynoch's at Witton.

THE CASE OF THE BURNE-JONES BROADWOOD PIANO

BY MICHAEL JONES

In June 1978 I was privileged to give a short piano recital on the so-called 'Burne-Jones Broadwood' grand piano in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery for the Friends of the Gallery AGM that year. Nobody realised at the time that this occasion would turn out to be the very last time this piano would ever be heard in public. But first, how did the piano come to form part of the Burne-Jones Collection at the Art Gallery?

Mark Hambourg (1879-1960) was one of the most famous concert pianists of the first part of the 20th Century. Originally Russian-born, his family emigrated to England during the 1890s when young Mark's concert career took off with the greatest success. Much later, he published two volumes of autobiography, and in his second volume: 'The Eighth Octave' (Williams and Norgate, 1951) he tells the story of how the Burne-Jones Broadwood came into his possession - through his wife's family. Known as "La Dollie" and a fine violinist, she was the daughter of Lord Muir Mackenzie, High Bailiff of Westminster, but her maternal grandfather was William Graham - a rich Glaswegian businessman who enjoyed collecting old Italian paintings. William thought their plain-looking Broadwood grand piano too ugly for a drawing-room and as they were great friends with Edward Burne-Jones, Graham persuaded him to decorate the case. Hambourg describes it thus:

'Burne-Jones designed a lovely light wood case, elegant in shape and covered all over with a pattern of leaves and flowers in raised gesso work and gilded ornamentations, whilst the lid was painted bright red on the inside. The instrument

itself was a Broadwood of sweet, mellow tone upon which it was pleasant to play Scarlatti, Bach, and Mozart, for the sound had an eighteenth century flavour...'

Hambourg went on to say:

'For many years this unique piano adorned my studio, but after sitting watching it all through the 1940 blitz, and thinking every bomb was coming straight for it, I decided that the responsibility was too great, and I presented it to the Birmingham Museum. There it lives on, happily surrounded by other examples of the art of Burne-Jones, though its voice, alas, is silent.'

It is believed that this presentation took place in 1941. From then it remained silent until my piano recital of June 1978, when we were all astonished by how well the piano stayed in tune and also how reliable the piano mechanism was after nearly 100 years! Its tone, true to Hambourg's description, had a light, sweet sound and rang clearly as a bell in the resonant acoustic of the Gallery to the sounds of Scarlatti, Haydn and Schubert.

Sadly, this recital was not sonically recorded, and 33 years later, when the subject of a repeat recital was under discussion to celebrate the Friend's 80th Anniversary, the Museum authorities flatly vetoed the idea as impracticable. Perhaps sometime in the future this piano's sound may come to life again, but to quote what I wrote in the Birmingham Post of 11th June 2008:

'Musical instruments of this quality deserve to be played - to bring the Gallery to life, not just displayed as dumb, lifeless exhibits.'

Centre for West Midlands History Research Group (CWMHRG) Research Showcase Evenings

The Kynoch Press: Typographical Trendsetters of the Twentieth Century

with Dr Caroline Archer By Roger Bruton



George Kynoch (1834-1891)

Dr Caroline Archer was the latest member of the research group to share their research interests before an assembled throng of members and she rose to the challenge with a professional presentation centred upon the Kynoch Press.

Interweaving her personal and family associations with printing into the history of a company that maintained a significant presence in the regional world of printing, she kept the audience riveted to the point where security were threatening to leave the keys for us to lock the building ourselves! The lecture was illuminated by portraits of a series of charismatic managers and illustrations of an incredible range of printed material output by the company.

NEXT EVENT:

'TWO WEST MIDLANDS ARTISTS'
RESEARCH SHOWCASE
AN EVENING WITH...

AILEEN NAYLOR:
'INTRODUCING
MR W. J. WAINWRIGHT R.W.S.,
R.B.S.A. (1855-1931)'

AND

ELAINE WILLIAMS:
'FLORENCE CAMM:
THE BIRMINGHAM MUNICIPAL
SCHOOL OF ART AND BEYOND'

WEDNESDAY 25 MAY 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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Midlands History Research Group'!

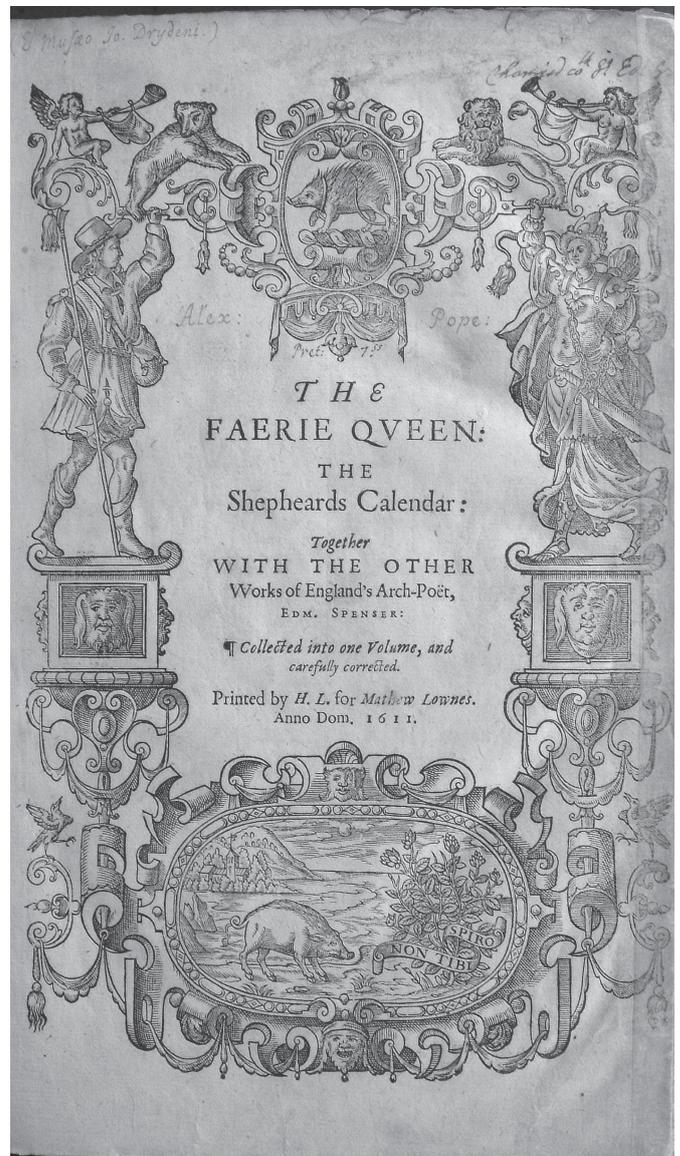
Centre for West Midlands History Research Group
(CWMHRG) Research Showcase Evenings continued...

Chris Penney: *Bishop Hurd
and his Library* by Roger Bruton

Chris Penney is known to many of the academics at the university as the former head of University of Birmingham Library Special Collections but she is now based in no less a glorious setting than Hartlebury Castle in Worcestershire. As librarian of the Hurd Library, located at the current home of the Bishops of Worcester, Chris presented the most recent of the CWMH Research Group's Showcase Evenings on 10 March 2011.

Upon his death in 1808 the Staffordshire born Bishop of Worcester, Richard Hurd, bequeathed his library of books and contents to his successors in perpetuity, and the collection has remained in its original purpose-built location, since 1781. This unique collection now consists of approximately 4,500 works, some dating from the 15th century, and it reflects the wide range of Hurd's interests, including not only religion, but medicine, natural history, science, art and social issues. Having spoken upon Hurd's life-history, Chris whetted the appetite for a forthcoming Friends' visit to Hartlebury with illustrations of examples of the contents and its wonderful setting.

The decision of the Church of England to sell Hartlebury has placed great uncertainty over the future of this delightful element of our national heritage and it is to be hoped that the efforts of the trust established to care for the well-being of the library can secure its future in its original home.



Have you got something interesting that you would like to share? The CWMHRG 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

EXHIBITION REVIEW – ‘THE POETRY OF DRAWING: PRE-RAPHAELITE DESIGNS, STUDIES AND WATERCOLOURS’

BY ELAINE WILLIAMS

The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) website proudly states: ‘This major exhibition is the largest survey of Pre-Raphaelite drawings and watercolours ever staged.’ BMAG are rightly proud of this exhibition. It includes works from the museum’s vast collection and works loaned by public and private lenders. The array of work on display demonstrates the vital role of drawing in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. The exhibition aims to demonstrate that drawing was a vital tool for these artists to explore their individual creativity. It highlights the radical nature of their work and the way that they broke away from the art establishment in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood formed in 1848 and later artists who were inspired by, or were followers of Pre-Raphaelite art all have works on display in this exhibition. It includes textiles, ceramics and stained glass.

A prominent work is Rossetti’s *Mnemosyne* of 1876, which is displayed in public for the first time in this exhibition. This work depicts Jane Morris, wife of William Morris and Rossetti’s later muse. The drawing remained in Rossetti’s studio until his death and has been in a private collection ever since. Holman Hunt’s *Study for Claudia and Isabella* of 1850 equally evokes Pre-Raphaelitism, albeit in different ways. *Mnemosyne* is a sensuous, sultry and brooding beauty whereas in *Study for Claudia and Isabella*, Hunt illustrates a scene from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, a moment when Isabella may lose her virtue to save her brother’s life.

The exhibition enables the viewer to understand how each artist tackled the stronghold of the academy in a variety of ways. Ford Madox Brown’s *Discobolus*, 1845 is arguably a depiction of an idealised heroic figure whilst *Study of a Male Nude Posed as a Sculptor* is a work that comments on the physical nature of the work of the artist. These contrast with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Study of a Male Nude for Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*. In this work, the artist depicts the figure of Dante as lean and sparse, with an intense gaze that is suggestive of his intellectual strength. It is a rare treat to see on public view Ford Madox



Study for The Last of England, Ford Madox Brown, 1852.
© Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

Brown’s *Study for The Last of England* of 1852. It highlights the circularity and interconnectedness of each figure as they are huddled together in their emigration to a new life. The Madonna-like female figure is central to this interconnection and this is demonstrated in the depiction of her hands. Her gloved hand holds her husband’s hand and her ungloved hand, beneath the shawl, holds the tiny hand of a child.

For myself, one highlight of this exhibition is the inclusion of works by artists who were influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and Pre-Raphaelite artists, in particular the work of Smethwick’s own Florence Camm. The panels from her stained glass masterpiece *Dante and Beatrice* of 1911 are displayed alongside the preparatory cartoons for the finished work. Florence Camm’s attention to detail and finesse of figure composition are both evident in this work, which was awarded the Grand Prix at the Turin Exhibition of Industry and Labour in 1911.

It is only possible to give a small taste of this exhibition here, so go and see it for yourself. It really is a delight to have such a vast range of works on display in the centre of Birmingham. The exhibition runs until 15th May.

Book Review:

Michael F. James
Neville Chamberlain's
Domestic Policies
(New York, Edwin
Mellen Press, 2010,
£74.95)

by Stephen Roberts
Honorary Senior Research
Fellow in Social History,
School of History & Cultures

Neville Chamberlain's reputation was utterly destroyed with the German occupation of Prague in March 1939. Appeasing Hitler, though motivated by a desire to avoid another terrible war, had proved to be a disastrous policy. In little more than a year Chamberlain was ousted as Prime Minister, dying soon afterwards. Yet the events of 1938-9 came at the end of a long political career which had begun when Chamberlain was elected as a Unionist councillor for the All Saints ward of Birmingham City Council almost thirty years earlier. During the years that preceded his appointment as Prime Minister, Chamberlain served as Lord Mayor of Birmingham (1915-16), as MP for Ladywood and then Edgbaston (1918-40), as Minister of Health (1923, 1924-9, 1931) and as Chancellor of the Exchequer (1923-4, 1931-7). Deeply influenced by his father, Chamberlain entered public life to do something for working people and he undoubtedly drove through important social reforms. The author of this book seeks to ensure that Chamberlain the reformer is not entirely overshadowed by Chamberlain the appeaser.

For members of the Centre for West Midlands History the most interesting part of this book is likely to be the chapter which discusses Chamberlain's activities in Birmingham. Here Chamberlain, after an unsuccessful spell supervising his father's sisal plantation in the Bahamas, achieved a great deal. As chairman of the town planning committee, he pushed through house-building programmes to relieve the overcrowding and insanitary conditions that were so prevalent in the city. He also created, in 1916, the Birmingham Municipal Savings Bank which, with 24,411 accounts and £600,000 in deposits by 1919, was able to provide the government with valuable loans during the war. The Bank continued to operate after the war – there must be hundreds of its home safes tucked away in cupboards in Brummie homes to this day - and was eventually absorbed by the Trustee Savings Bank.

Michael F. James' book is based on a thorough examination of printed primary sources and the expected secondary sources (though, curiously, he seems unaware of Peter Marsh's biography of Joe) with some forays into manuscript sources. It is very well written, and clearly a labour of love, the author is determined to rescue Chamberlain's reputation as best as he can. However, this book is only of marginal significance. Though James provides some additional detail, much of what he has to say has already been said by Chamberlain's biographer, David Dilks. EMP aim their books at university libraries – but, in truth, this book cannot be regarded as an essential purchase, even here in Birmingham.

Read an inspiring book lately? Share it in the newsletter! Send your review to Sally Hoban via sally.hoban@btinternet.com. Please note we do reserve the right to edit material.

Health, Illness and Inequality in the Midlands by Christine Mann



The annual conference of the Centre for West Midlands History, chaired by Dr Malcolm Dick, saw over 90 people participating in a varied and illuminating day of presentations relating to medical history.

Three PhD students provided an indication of the breadth of different approaches to the subjects of health, illness and inequality. These presentations set the scene for a fascinating, rigorous and accessible conference. **Janet Sullivan (Centre for West Midlands History)** looked at the nature and impact of nineteenth-century pollution in the Black Country, **Alistair Ritch (History of Medicine Unit)**, explored the experience of the aged and infirm in the Birmingham Workhouse 1852-1910 and **Helen Smith (Centre for Quaker Studies and Birmingham Archives and Heritage)** considered the role of Dame Elizabeth Taylor Cadbury in the development of Birmingham's school medical service in the early twentieth century.

We went on to learn about Birmingham's schizophrenic responses to appeals for welfare during the first half of the nineteenth century. Using the valuable resource of pauper letters, **Professor Steven King from the University of Leicester** showed how the decision-makers were

generous with assistance for emergencies, children or the lunatic poor, but were generally extremely harsh on the elderly, sick, or poor.

Dr Alannah Tomkins from the University of Keele described some of her investigations into 'Doctors in Distress'. She revealed that many doctors in the second half of the nineteenth century experienced disappointments such as thwarted ambition or poverty, which often led to bankruptcy, mental ill health and suicide. Interestingly, she had found that, whilst the professional response was muted when reporting such occurrences, public reaction was generally sympathetic to the doctors.

Following lunch, **Dr Catherine Smith from the University of Northampton** examined the provision of charity to the different classes of society at a time when it was considered desirable that charity and health care should reflect the social strata. Thus, the middle classes were keen to support their peers and so prevent them suffering pauperism. Such variety in charitable assistance was visible within asylums where inmates could purchase a level of care to match their place in society.

Continuing the theme, **Dr Rebecca Wynter's (University of Birmingham)** research on Staffordshire County Lunatic Asylum confirmed the class rankings. These extended to work activities, treatment and leisure, with the poor having parties, whilst the better off enjoyed sports and sightseeing expeditions.

Finally, **Dr Jonathan Reinartz**, who is **Director of the Medical History Unit at the University of Birmingham**, led a panel session summing up the themes of the conference and leading into questions from the floor to close the event.

This joint venture between the Centre for West Midlands History and the History of Medicine Unit has set a high standard for future collaborations. The varied and lucid presentations educated and entertained from start to finish.

Graduation celebration!

By Roger Bruton

Students from the MA in West Midlands History celebrated their graduation on December 15th 2010. Seven students graduated from the course, which continues to be one of the Department of History's most successful postgraduate programmes.

The course is studied over two years, with three Saturday day sessions a term. This pattern allows a wide range of students to attend and complete the course. Most of the students who graduated this year had been out of education for quite a few years before embarking on the programme, but all found the support from staff and fellow students invaluable. Several are planning to continue their studies at the University.

To find out more about the MA in West Midlands History, visit the Centre's website at <http://www.cbamh.bham.ac.uk/> or contact the Director of the Centre, Dr Malcolm Dick at m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk.

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Jahan Mahmood, *Building community cohesion and the Anglo-Indian experience*

20th January 2011

By Barbara Fogarty

Jahan Mahmood is a community historian who effectively uses the knowledge of history and contemporary affairs to tackle issues of identity within Britain's Muslim community. He came resplendent in Pashtun dress, setting up a formidable machine gun and using a rifle as a pointer to navigate his slides. He reported that the disarmed weapons are useful for engaging young men in debate and this was demonstrated by the people who flocked to handle the weapons at the end of the lecture.

The history of the involvement of the Indian army in the First and Second World Wars is one which is little known today, although at the time the pivotal role of the Indian troops was recognised by generals and politicians. The volunteer forces were predominantly recruited from the martial races of the Punjab and

North West Frontier consisting of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu troops, of which the largest proportion was Muslim and Hindu. The totally volunteer forces numbered 1.3 million by the end of WW1 and a staggering 2.5 million in WW2. Jahan showed us individual stories of heroism culminating in the award of twelve Victoria Crosses in WW1, and heart-rending photographs of very young mainly Muslim volunteers and their gravestones. The stories of heroism included Noor Inayat Khan, an Indian American Muslim who volunteered for the Special Operations Executive and was the first female radio operator to be sent to German occupied France. She was eventually betrayed and imprisoned and executed at Dachau Concentration Camp. For her bravery she was posthumously awarded the George Cross and French Croix de Guerre.

Jahan then related how he used this history to change the perceptions of young British Muslims who were previously unaware of their connection to Britain. Challenging perceptions of racialism had extraordinary results in empowering young men to feel they had a right to be proud of their British Muslim heritage and enabled them to use argument instead of force to defuse racial confrontations. Jahan has advised the Imperial War Museum on the interpretation of their photographic records of the Indian troops and he has also been consulted by the government on his unique knowledge and insight.

This was an informative and well illustrated talk about neglected areas of the two World Wars, but above all it was inspiring to see history being used in practice to such positive effect.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

To book a place on these events, contact Malcolm Dick on m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk or 0121 415 8253. Information about visits will also be circulated to members in due course.

'A Life of Dissent: Dorothy Thompson 1923-2011'

Thursday 2nd June

Large Lecture Theatre, Arts Building, 5.30pm to 8.00pm

Admission free

Dorothy Thompson, who lectured in History at the University of Birmingham, was a world-class social historian and a political activist and campaigner. This event is a celebration and commemoration of her life, led by several of her former research students. It includes the showing of a TV documentary, which focuses on the contributions of the lives of Dorothy Thompson and her husband, E. P. Thompson.

Annual Lecture by Paul Long (Birmingham City University)

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

Monday 20th June

Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 6.30pm to 8.00pm

Admission free

An exploration of how film and television have illuminated the history of the West Midlands.

'Black Country History Day'

Saturday 15th October

Large Lecture Theatre,

Arts Building

10.00am to 4.00pm

Fee TBA

This event is jointly organised with the Black Country Society and includes presentations by academics, research students, authors, leaders of local history projects and heritage professionals.

'Birmingham History Day'

Saturday 26th November

Large Lecture Theatre,

Arts Building

10.00am to 4.00pm

Fee TBA

This event includes presentations which celebrate the rich and varied history of Birmingham and its surroundings.

Annual Conference of the Centre for West Midlands History:

'The Emergence of the West Midlands:

**Culture, Communities and Change
1779-1918'**

Friday 30th March
to Sunday 1st April
2012 Fee TBA

This major international conference explores social, economic, political, scientific and cultural developments in the region. Further details to be announced.