

FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 20

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

MATTHEW BOULTON FINALLY GETS THE RECOGNITION HE DESERVES

On Friday 17th October 2014 Matthew Boulton's major contribution to British and world history was acknowledged at a service in Westminster Abbey, attended by hundreds of people, including the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, faith representatives, dignitaries and members of the Centre for West Midlands History (CWMH).

The request to dedicate a plaque to memorialise Matthew Boulton's achievements was formally presented to the Dean of Westminster by Marion Roberts, Chair of the Matthew Boulton memorial advisory board and CWMH member, who along with Celia Potts and others, had been responsible for the idea. The plaque lies in the Chapel of St Paul, near the shrine of St Edward the Confessor, alongside an existing memorial to his business partner James Watt, which was erected in 1825. It is the first in the Abbey to be made entirely of cast iron, reflecting Boulton's achievements as a metal manufacturer. It reads: "Matthew Boulton FRS 1728-1809 - Pioneer of the Industrial Revolution." The inscription is written in the Baskerville font which was developed by Boulton's friend, John Baskerville.

Boulton was born in Birmingham in 1728, the son of a buckle and button maker. He built the Soho Manufactory in Handsworth in the 1760s, the first purpose built manufactory in the world. At its height here over 700 people made a whole range of goods including 'toys', in a variety of metals, including silver, ormolu (gilded copper) and Sheffield plate.

In 1775, with James Watt, he founded Boulton & Watt to design and produce steam engines. He also established the Soho Mint in 1788, the first steam powered mint in the world, and produced over 600 million coins, medals and tokens which were sent all over the world. Marion said: "It was the driving forces of both dedication and collaboration which allowed the two great engineers, Matthew Boulton and James Watt, to give to industry what it most desired – steam power - and which, in turn, would lead to the Industrial Revolution and to the modern world."



Boulton was also a founder of the Lunar Society, an informal society of industrialists, intellectuals and scientists, including Erasmus Darwin, Joseph Priestley and Josiah Wedgwood, which had a major role in the Industrial Revolution. Their meetings at Boulton's home, Soho House, gave them the opportunity to share their ground-breaking scientific ideas. His many other achievements included helping to set up Birmingham's Assay Office in 1773, The Assay Office continues to test and hallmark millions of precious metal items each year.

Boulton would have loved the pomp and ceremony of the Westminster service, with its procession, cross and candles held aloft. He would also have enjoyed the singing of the choir and the organ trumpeting forth. Prayers were led by Councillor Ian Ward, Deputy Chairman of Birmingham City Council, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Chairman of the Sikh Gurdwara on Soho Road, Birmingham, Muhammad Afzal, chairman of Birmingham Central Mosque, Colin Brown, Director of Engineering at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, and Sir Nicholas Goodison gave a brief history. The City of Birmingham flag flew above the Westminster Abbey throughout the day, and the service ended with the bells ringing a peal of celebration.

Sue Tungate

Birmingham History Day 2014

by Sarah Hayes

The miserable weather didn't dampen the spirits of the 114 people who attended this year's Birmingham History Day. As usual, there was an impressive and varied line up of talks and presentations reporting on the latest heritage projects taking place in the City, as well as the impact of past projects over the last year.

The First World War was very much the theme of the morning. **Dr Nicola Gould** began with her talk 'Suffragettes Project/Voices of War and peace: the Great War and its legacy'. The presentation focussed on the 'Birmingham story', revealing the history of women's rights closer to home.

Collections Curator, **Rachel MacGregor**, continued with the First World War theme talking about the success of Voices of War exhibition at the Library of Birmingham and then **Jo-ann Curtis**, Curator of History from Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, brought us up-to-date with the Museum's current collecting phase, presenting just some of the objects that have been acquired over the last year.

These include the medals, photos and letters of Birmingham men who enlisted during the First World War, providing a personal and sometimes poignant insight on a local level.

Dr Betty Hagglund gave a fascinating insight into the involvement of the Quaker community in Birmingham and how they became central to helping interned aliens in Birmingham and even on the Isle of Man.

Norman Bartlam and The News Team were back to present their annual round up of projects documented throughout the year in the History Show DVD. This included features on a recent trip to Ypres, Remembrance Day in Centenary Square and the recently opened Newman Brothers at The Coffin Works.

The lunch break spelled a change of theme as we stepped away from the First World War and moved in to more general territory. **Dr Malcolm Dick** began by introducing David Encill's new book, *Chance Additions: the History of Domestic Glassware from Chance Brothers*.

We next took a 'trip' along the River Tame, as **Jenni Dixon**, Heritage Officer for the Tame Past Present Future project gave a visually stimulating PowerPoint presentation. The central aim of this project is to highlight the importance of the River Tame and the industries that were sited there, the people who worked there, and how this activity shaped the surrounding communities.

Doug Wilks, Chairman of The Jewellery Quarter Research Trust (JQRT) updated us on the research activities taking place in the quarter and highlighted the local collaborations the Trust is involved with such as Birmingham Conservation Trust, most recently in the research of Newman Brothers' Coffin Fittings Factory.

Jane McArdle, Heritage Manager at Birmingham Cathedral spoke about the 300-year history of the Cathedral and in doing so reminded us of the forthcoming plans for the Tercentenary project.

After recently retiring as the City's Planning Archeologist, it seemed appropriate for **Dr Mike Hodder** to focus his presentation on 20 Years of Archaeology in Birmingham. His enthusiasm for the subject was the perfect note to end the day on and equally inspire greater interest in upcoming projects.

Special thanks to Dr Malcolm Dick, Director of the Centre for West Midlands History, who chaired the day.

COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILE: SALLY DAVISON



I have been a member of the Friends almost from its conception in 2009, and felt 'at home' from the very first meeting. I have always found the range and variety of seminars stimulating, as are the people who attend. To be asked to join the committee is just the cherry on top of one of Connie Wan's cupcakes (remember those?)!

On a personal note, I have three children, (Tessa 47, Lucy 45, Miles 43) and three grandchildren (Alyson 21, Thomas 18, Connor 16). I obtained a BA with the Open University in 1986, choosing to study such diverse subjects as popular culture, the history of Ancient Greece and Rome, and the histories of mathematics, calculus and 17th Century England!

My working life was just as diverse - civil service, ground hostess at Birmingham Airport (1963-1967 and am still in touch with five or six of 'the girls'), telephone booking clerk for Horizon Holidays and then a market researcher.

As well as the Friends, I am on the Sutton Coldfield Archaeological Society committee, secretary of Cannock Wood WEA, a member of Lapworth and District Tangent (the older half of Ladies Circle/Round Table), and a group travel organiser. I am a Midlander through and through having lived in Sutton Coldfield, Olton and Knowle and now back in Sutton. If you are still wondering who I am - look for the person bent over the recycling bins at day schools - it will more than probably be me!

If you would like to contribute to our next newsletter, please send editorial and news items to Kate Iles at kateiles@outlook.com. Please note we do reserve the right to edit material.

JENNY UGLOW: 'IN THESE TIMES'



On 30th October, Jenny Uglow provided a tantalising glimpse into what it meant to live 'in these times'. As she explained, during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of 1793 to 1815, this phrase became common shorthand for the fears and worries that beset the British nation. The queue that formed afterwards to buy her new book of the same title showed an audience clearly inspired to find out more.

'How did the wars affect the lives of people in Britain, not just those who fought, but those at home looking on, waiting, working, watching?' This is the question posed in both her talk and her book. In response, she showed that, far from being distant events 'over there' on the continent, the wars affected the British on a day to day basis.

Using contemporary paintings, diaries, books and newspapers, she described a nation eager for news, variously fearful of invasion and riots, or inspired by Thomas Paine's Rights of Man. For instance, the often unnoticed incursion of the wars into Jane Austen's seemingly domestic novels reflect an underlying anxiety about the fate of her two naval brothers. Meanwhile, Thomas Rowlandson's pictures illustrate both the lighter and the darker side of life. Taking his image of the hustle and bustle of Portsmouth harbour in 1808, Jenny pointed to a woman embracing her departing husband, supply boats, press gangs and even a telescope trained on drying pantaloons!

By the end of her talk, she had taken us on a fascinating 20 year journey across the length and breadth of the country, and introduced us to all sections of society. If you were not lucky enough to find Jenny's splendid book under your Christmas tree, it may instead solve the conundrum of how to spend your book tokens!

Sarah Bradley

BLACK COUNTRY HISTORY DAY 2014

by Judith Watkin and Guy Sjögren

Ash banks, urns and obelisks; gas-light, 'Goodwill' and a garden; tunnels and tar, poets and parks, Batman and bombs on Bradley. They said it couldn't be done; but how wrong they were! In the space of a few hours, the 130 or so local history enthusiasts attending the ninth Black Country History Day were treated to a full and fascinating programme of presentations that covered ash banks and airships, super heroes and...well, all of the above.

Paul Fantom, currently completing a PhD at the University, supervised by Carl Chinn, started the day by considering the Zeppelin raids on the Black Country during World War One. Paul focused on Zeppelin production, their commanders and crew before describing the devastation caused to local homes and families when L21 and L19, on bombing raids to Liverpool, became lost in low cloud and fog, and, mistaking the canals for docks, dropped their bombs on the Black Country townships of Tipton, Bradley, Wednesbury and Walsall.

George Demidowicz, previously Head of the Conservation and Archaeology team at Coventry City Council, has had a long standing interest in the Soho Manufactory and Mint in Handsworth, as well as the Soho Foundry in Smethwick, the first purpose-built steam manufactory in the world. Established by the second generation Boulton and Watt, James Watt Jnr and Matthew Robinson Boulton, with William Murdoch as its genius engineer, the site was later taken over by Avery Weigh-Tronix. George's lecture explored the chronological development of the foundry and intriguing parts of the building which deserve further archaeological investigation.

By the 1960s, Rubery Owen was the largest family-owned engineering group in Britain, employing 17,000 people worldwide, with 5,000 skilled workers at its site in Booth Street, Darlaston. The afternoon session began with Joanne Krawec, many

of whose family members worked at the Darlaston factory, explaining her research using the company's newsletter as a social history resource. A. E. Owen was a pioneer of industrial welfare with Rubery Owen providing a staff dining room, tennis courts and an Institute, a tradition continued and further developed by his successor, Sir Alfred Owen. Joanne's lively presentation was well received by the audience, which included Sir Alfred's son, David Owen.

The final speaker, John Hemingway, known to many from his career as Dudley Metropolitan Borough's Archaeological Officer, detailed his investigations into the landscape of the Leasowes in Halesowen, during its restoration. Designed by the poet, William Shenstone in the eighteenth century and created from farmland, it became one of the most influential of the period, much visited by those seeking to emulate his work. John detailed the famous circuit walk and its surviving features he uncovered, treating the audience also to extracts from Shenstone's poems.

The day was chaired by Dr Malcolm Dick and in drawing the proceedings to a close, Malcolm thanked not only the speakers but also the logistics team (drawn from both The Black Country Society and the Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History) for their splendid efforts throughout the day. Those attending then departed, looking anxiously towards the sky for signs of rain...and Zeppelins.

‘BEWITCHED, BOTHERED, BEWILDERED’ – THE SIREN SONG OF DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

Finding ample original source material to support a research thesis is both rewarding and exciting. But photographing it all creates a false sense of achievement: the sudden realization that there are 28,000 pages of relevant sources to work through is daunting. How will it be possible to cope with the volume of potential data and will it in fact be meaningful? Can valid conclusions be drawn from disparate sets of data and applied to the whole period under research?

At a well-attended People, Places and Things seminar, current PhD student, Robert Hodge, considered this very question. Robert demonstrated that taking a research approach which mixes qualitative, quantitative and interpretative methods, with extensive use of information technology in a highly structured way, not only satisfies those uncertainties but leads to a greater set of conclusions and further research questions than might otherwise be the case.

The first step is to create a wide ranging, structured prosopography which records factoids about all the individuals encountered, allowing analysis of the sum of data about any one, the types of connection between them and how they operated within and upon poor law institutions. Social network analysis helps to disambiguate the individuals, reveal relationships and suggest cogent questions which can further examine the prosopography.

Textual analysis of notes, minutes and correspondence can uncover the richness of the sources and help make sense of the context of the time, whilst the technique of memo-writing (drawn from the principles of grounded theory) elaborates the conceptual framework of the research as it progresses.

The prosopography is the first step and this is being published as it is built – www.pocmu.uk.

Robert Hodge is a current PhD student at the University of Birmingham researching the Poor of the Cleobury Mortimer Union, 1770-1870

‘I wore out my eyes with gazing ...’ Hagley Park Preview Visit

Friends who came to his seminar last year, as well as the Garden History Conference, will remember the enthusiasm with which Joe Hawkins, Head of Landscape at Hagley Park, talked about this famous eighteenth-century landscape, his research into its history for his PhD and his part in uncovering and restoring George Lyttelton’s creation.

Although Hagley Park is not yet open to the public (this is scheduled for 2016), Lord Cobham has been holding a series of fundraising open days for charity and in September, Malcolm Dick, Roger Bruton and I took the opportunity to visit on the Charity Preview Day for St Basils (stbasils.org.uk). This long-established charity works to prevent youth homelessness and is a cause particularly dear to Joe’s heart.

Although I had visited the Hall, the Park was only known to me from scholarly articles – I had never walked the landscape. It is a tribute to the work of Joe and his team, as well of course to Lord Cobham’s vision and investment, that what is now being revealed speaks of something very special indeed and underlines why Hagley was amongst the most famous and most-visited of eighteenth-century landscapes.

I was struck not only by the extent of the site, but also how effectively it used the natural topography to be at once intimate and yet magnificent in its use of the wider landscape beyond to The Malverns and Clee Hill. Had Horace Walpole not coined it before me, I might have written that, ‘I wore my eyes out with gazing ...’ for there is so much to gaze at. The perfect Palladian Bridge now fully restored, the Pool (once again stocked with glittering fish) and Main Cascade, the view from Shenstone’s Urn back towards the Bridge. Climbing up and stopping to take in another view from the Rotunda, a small herd of delicate deer obligingly scampered by, completing the sylvan scene.

When open in 2016 this English Heritage Grade 1 listed landscape will repay a visit, although I do hope I might be able to arrange a visit for Friends before then. In the meantime, visit Hagley’s website for some photographs more beautiful than I could take, the history of the site and news on work in progress.

My final task must be to complete Walpole: ‘I wore out my eyes with gazing, my feet with climbing, and my tongue and vocabulary with commending’.

Elaine Mitchell

CWMH FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History will be informed of further details when they are available. Everyone is welcome to attend these events and there is **no need to book and all events are held at the University of Birmingham unless stated otherwise**. Events are held at the University of Birmingham, unless otherwise indicated. Seminars at the University are free. Note the different times of the events on Monday (People Places and Things seminars) and Tuesday (Historical Association talks). For some events booking is required and a fee is payable. Contact Malcolm Dick to register your interest for events indicated by* via m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk and details will be forwarded to you. If you are not on e-mail, contact Malcolm by phone on 0121 415 8253 to leave your address. The best way of keeping in touch with events is via the Centre's website: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/cwmh/index.aspx>

- Tuesday 13th January
Dr Mike Hodder (formerly Birmingham's Planning Archaeologist), 'Beyond Boulton: the archaeology of Birmingham's industries'. Lecture Room 7, Arts Building, 4.30 to 6.00pm. 
- Monday 19 January
Dr Jens Röhrkasten (University of Birmingham), 'Law and Politics in a Time of Political Crisis (1258-1267): The Activities of Royal Justices in Warwickshire in 1262'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 4.30-6.00pm.
- Thursday 29 January
Pieta Greaves (Birmingham Museum Trust), 'Conservation and Research of the Staffordshire Hoard'. A joint event between the CWMH and the Birmingham Metallurgical Association, the Small Lecture Theatre (GD20) on the Ground Floor in the School of Metallurgy and Materials, 6.00pm buffet for 6.30-8.00pm.
- Tuesday 10th February
Stephen Bourne (Historian), 'Black Poppies - Britain's Black Community and the Great War'. Lecture Room 7, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm
- Monday 23rd February
Jenni Dixon (PhD candidate), 'A Cabinet of Curiosities: Birmingham as the Toy-shop of Europe'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 4.30-6.00pm.
- Wednesday 25th February
Claire Fitzgerald (University of Warwick), 'Arts and Crafts Children's Books: Birmingham Women Illustrators'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm.
- Tuesday 10th March
Dr Kehinde Andrews (Birmingham City University) and Dr John Narayan (University of Warwick), 'Malcolm X and Marshall Street, Smethwick: 50 Years on'. Lecture Room 7, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm
- Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 March
Annual conference of the Centre for West Midlands History with the Baskerville Society: 'The Beauty of Letters: text, type and communication in the eighteenth century'. Lecture Rooms 3 and 1, Arts Building, Sunday and Saturday. Fee payable.*
- Monday 23rd March
Professor Suzanne Schwarz (University of Worcester) 'Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: Sierra Leone Company Policy, c. 1791-1807'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 4.30-6.00pm.
- Saturday 28 March
Staffordshire History Day (held in Stafford). Fee payable. Contact Matthew Blake, Staffordshire Record Office for booking details: matthew.blake@staffordshire.gov.uk or 01785 895035
- Tuesday 14th April
Donna Taylor (University of Birmingham), 'To the Bull Ring! Policing and the early Chartist Protests in Birmingham'. Lecture Room 7, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm
- Wednesday 29th April
Nick Benbow (Independent Scholar), 'The Birmingham Book Club, 1745 - 1900: an influential but little-known society at the heart of Birmingham life'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm.
- Tuesday 12th May
Eric Hopkins Memorial Lecture, 'Fortunes of War: the West Midlands at the Time of Waterloo' Launch of a new History West Midlands publication to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, with various speakers. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm
- Tuesday 14th July
Elaine Williams (University of Birmingham) 'Ways to Remember: The First World War through the lens of Florence Camm's war memorial windows'. Lecture Room 3, Arts Building, 6.30-8.00pm