

# FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR WEST MIDLANDS HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST WITH THE FUTURE

## FROM THE BLACK COUNTRY TO THE BEACH 'EDWIN BUTLER BAYLISS: POET PAINTER OF THE BLACK COUNTRY' AT WOLVERHAMPTON ART GALLERY By Elaine Mitchell



Edwin Butler Bayliss, *Tipping the Slag* (detail), Wolverhampton Art Gallery  
© Christopher Bayliss

On a raw February day a well-wrapped up group of Friends stepped from the bitter Wolverhampton streets into the warm welcome of its Museum & Art Gallery for a tour of an exhibition of works by Edwin Butler Bayliss. Curator Dr Connie Wan was our guide to a collection of artworks that included many never previously on show.

Born in Tettenhall in 1874 Butler Bayliss, dubbed in 1918 by the *Birmingham Gazette* as 'the poet-painter' of the industrial landscape of the Black Country, was locally and nationally recognised, showing his work in exhibitions from London to Glasgow. His family-owned company; Bayliss, Jones and Bayliss, manufactured iron fences and gates, becoming one of Wolverhampton's most successful firms. And it was the Black Country that dominated the first gallery with works in oil, watercolour, charcoal and pencil capturing scenes that appear utterly bleak to the post-industrial eye. A panorama of chimneys belching out great plumes of smoke, slag heaps smouldering against a black sky and gins silhouetted in a grey dawn all spoke of a landscape of devastation.

But the images were compelling for the way in which they focussed the eye – and the mind – on the tough working conditions and the imposing, almost monumental, nature of the industrial buildings, many of which seemed almost alive. *Blast Furnaces*, *Night* roared with fiery life and *Sir Alfred Hickman's* portrayed a range of industrial buildings working like a machine. Some works though, such as *Spring Vale*

*Furnaces*, were tempered by outcrops of greenery and the odd lonely cow grazing and yet others included figures (always faceless) working or trudging through the landscape. These pictures are a powerful visual record of a landscape that has now largely disappeared.

From the smouldering gloom of the first gallery we stepped into the bright contrast of the second where coastal and country scenes dominated. From time to time Butler Bayliss exhibited seascapes painted on trips to the Welsh coast – Aberdovey, Tenby and Cemaes Bay. Not as popular with local patrons as his Black Country scenes, works such as *On the Beach*, were well-received and, with children playing happily in the sand, sometimes illustrate the domestic side of Butler Bayliss' life. This second gallery also included works showing more recent responses to the Black Country by current artists, including Robert Perry who continues to capture the culture and industrial heritage of the Black Country.

Connie Wan has curated a stimulating exhibition and gave us an insight into Butler Bayliss' work and his place as a skilled draughtsman, painter and etcher. Still available from Wolverhampton Art Gallery at £7.99 is Connie's book that accompanied the exhibition, *Edwin Butler Bayliss: Poet Painter of the Black Country*. Visit [www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/shop/](http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/shop/) and follow the link at 'exhibition catalogues' under Staffordshire Gifts.

CWMHRG RESEARCH SHOWCASE SEMINARS:  
PETE BOUNOUS - 'ONE MAN AND HIS MAP'  
JOHN PIGOTT-SMITH AND HIS 1828 PLAN OF  
BIRMINGHAM by Jonathan Atherton

In the latest Centre for West Midlands History Research Group research seminar, which took place on Wednesday 20 February, Pete Bounous gave an engaging talk on John Pigott-Smith's map of Birmingham from 1828. Pete is well-known to the Friends. He is an active member of the committee and is currently working on a PhD which examines commemoration in Victorian Birmingham. Pete was recently commissioned to write an introduction for a new edition of Pigott-Smith's 1828 map and used the seminar as an opportunity to share the findings of his research.

The talk was separated into two parts. The first half concerned the life and times of the man behind the map. Pete began by commenting that relatively little was known about Pigott-Smith, partly because he was a very private individual. Despite this, his contribution to Birmingham public life should not be forgotten. He was a skilled cartographer and produced two maps of Birmingham, one of Stratford and one of Warwickshire. Aside from this, one of Pigott-Smith's most notable achievements was during his time as a Surveyor for the Commissioner of the Birmingham Improvement Act, where he played an influential role in the development of Birmingham's roads. Perhaps even more significant was Pigott-Smith's role in the improvement of the Birmingham sewerage system in the mid-nineteenth century and contributed to the enhancement of public health in nineteenth century Birmingham.

The second half of the talk concerned Pigott-Smith's map from 1828, described by historian Conrad Gill as one of the best maps of Birmingham ever printed. The audience was provided with an insight into how the map came into being and its importance as a historical document. While the precise origins of the map remain unclear, Pete speculated that it may have been commissioned by the man it was dedicated to, William 4th Earl of Dartmouth. Some of the most significant features of the map were outlined including an inset of William Westley's map of Birmingham from 1731. Pete also shed light on two buildings labeled 'admittance refused', suggesting that one was a nail manufactory and the other a battery and metal working company. Both, it seems, were looking to avoid the perils of industrial espionage which was common in this period.

The seminar attracted a sizeable, attentive and well-informed audience who asked a diverse range of questions. These included queries as to why Pigott-Smith's sewerage improvements attracted opposition and why his map contained an inset of Westley's map from one hundred years earlier. I would like to thank Pete for a stimulating talk which shed new light on both a fascinating man and his map.

*Newsflash:* Pete has written an entry on Pigott-Smith for inclusion in the online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

# Kate Iles: 'The Lunar Ladies'

## - Joint Lunar Society and Centre for West Midlands History Annual Lecture

by Christine Mann

The Lunar Society were a gathering of intellectually thrusting men, whose ideas and achievements remain as lasting memorials. However, their very brilliance obscured those around them, particularly their wives and daughters. On 28th February Dr Kate Iles drew some of those women out of the shadows before a packed hall of Friends and, appropriately enough, members of the modern Lunar Society.

Having set the context as a period of enlightenment and industrialisation, Kate introduced us to eight women whose contributions to the lives, work and achievements of the heads of their households has not been fully recognised nor appreciated.

She revealed that Joseph Priestley chose practical, stoical Mary - who wasn't afraid of mice! - for his wife: a woman who supported and complemented her husband. Mary's home was completely destroyed in the Riots, but she designed and set up a new one in North America when Joseph felt unable to remain in England.

Josiah Wedgwood praised his 'helpmate', Sarah, who shared in the running of the business. Her strength of character was evident in their daughters Catherine and Sarah. Neither married

but put their energies into philanthropic causes, especially anti-slavery.

The role of Honora, Richard Lovell Edgeworth's wife, in the development of education, is little recognised. Her notebooks, however, reveal a keen interest and involvement in how children learned and she was clearly involved in discussion and decision-making. Feminine support was clearly valued by Edgeworth, since his daughter, Maria, later took on the role of recording the development of her siblings. Maria went on to write children's novels, as well as educational texts, championing female education.

Erasmus Darwin, too, demonstrated progressive ideas about education for girls. Having established a boarding school for his two illegitimate daughters to run, he produced a wide-ranging 'Prospectus' which included the teaching of science. His aims were to enable women to converse intelligently with their husbands and contribute to the education of children. However, this does suggest that he considered girls capable of learning and understanding science.

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## Baskerville Society Events

**Saturday 22 June**  
**Winterbourne House**

A visit to the letterpress printing workshop set in the Arts & Crafts splendor of Winterbourne House and a walk around the lettering sculptures set across seven acres of beautiful botanical gardens.

**Sunday 11 August**  
**Sion Hill House and Wolverley Village**

A guide tour around Wolverley Village, the birthplace of John Baskerville, and a visit to Sion Hill House, the home of Baskerville before his removal to Birmingham.

**Friday 11 October**  
**The Library of Birmingham**

A conducted tour of the new Library of Birmingham with particular reference to the Baskerville collection of books and ephemera.

**Sunday 15 December**  
**Two Towers Brewery**

A visit to Birmingham's only microbrewery, to see how the beer is made and sample a bottle of two of Baskerville Bitter.

**Further details of these events are available at**  
**[www.typographicshub.org/baskervillesociety](http://www.typographicshub.org/baskervillesociety)**

# Historical Association Seminar Series

by Sue Thomas and Jonathan Atherton

This year's seminar series organised by the Birmingham Branch of the Historical Association was a great success. Entitled 'Birmingham and Beyond,' the series covered a diverse range of topics but all with a local focus.

Jahan Mahmood kicked off the season with a riveting account of the participation of soldiers from the Muslim warrior races in the Second World War. Many families from that particular background are now resident in Birmingham, and Jahan is keen to uncover this part of the city's heritage.

Dr Jonathan Atherton shone new light on an aspect of the Priestley Riots of 1791. He looked in particular at the prosecution of the rioters - the fact that only four were convicted became a scandal at the time. Wide ranging questions testified to audience knowledge and interest.

Sally Hoban's talk on the 'Birmingham Girls' looked at the work of local women designers of the Arts and Crafts movement, centred around the Birmingham School of Art. Sally argued that the women artists of Birmingham should be as celebrated as the 'Glasgow Girls' of the same period.

George Demodowicz gave an insightful talk on Medieval Birmingham. Based on previously unused documents, the Borough Rentals of 1296 and 1344-5, George persuasively argued that Birmingham in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was considerably larger than historians had previously thought.

Guy Sjögren, who is currently studying the Birmingham cut-nail trade, used the example of John Reynolds and Son to examine the changes in a family firm over three generations. Guy had traced the firm's overseas trade and used a recent family visit to Australia to chase down some sources – and had the slides to prove it!

Finally, Dr Malcolm Dick rounded off the series with a wide-ranging discussion of local participation in the slave trade slavery and the abolitionist movement. . The talk examined the involvement of local businessman such as Samuel Galton with the slave trade in the late eighteenth century. Malcolm then discussed the prominent role played by Birmingham in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery with particular reference to the role of individuals such as Joseph Priestley and Joseph Sturge.

All the sessions were well supported with between 30 and 50 in attendance, a remarkable achievement considering the weather this winter. The Historical Association Birmingham Branch committee are already planning next year's series which will run from October 2013. Details will be published in the Friends' newsletter as well as on the branch programme section of the Historical Association website:  
<http://www.history.org.uk/index.php>

# CWMH Forthcoming Events

Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History will be informed of further details when they are available. There is **no need to book and all events are held at the University of Birmingham unless stated otherwise**. 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>

➤ Wednesday 1 May, 6.30-8.30pm  
**Dr Jennifer Aston, 'A Risky Business? Female Business Owners in Victorian Birmingham'** . CWMH Research Seminar, Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ Wednesday 8 May, 6.30-8.30pm  
**Eric Hopkins Memorial Lecture** (Historical Association), Anthony Peers (Architectural Historian), 'Birmingham Town Hall: England's Earliest Truly Civic Building'. Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ Monday 20 May, 4.00-6.00pm  
**People, Places and Things Seminar - Sarah Hayes (Freelance Curator, Birmingham History Galleries): 'Creating a Medieval History Gallery'**. Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ Tuesday 21 May, 7.00-9.00pm,  
**Book launch and talk, Dr Barrie Trinder, 'Britain's Industrial Revolution: the making of a manufacturing people, 1700-1870'**. Arts Large Lecture Theatre (Floor 1). Tickets £5.00 (includes free refreshments and £5 book discount). Booking is essential. Phone Carnegie, the Publishers to book a place: 01524 840111.

➤ Monday 3 June, 4.00-6.00pm  
**People, Places and Things Seminar. Maika de Keyzer (University of Antwerp), 'The common denominator: the regulation of the community of users within the Campine area of Antwerp during the 16th century'**. Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ Sunday 9 June, 11.00am-4.00pm  
**Birmingham Lives History Fair:** exhibitions, displays by history societies and books and photos for sale. Girl Guides HQ, Trefoil House, Brownsea Drive, Birmingham B1 1QL. Further details contact Keith Clenton on: 0121 602 3728 or [k.clenton@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:k.clenton@blueyonder.co.uk)

➤ Tuesday 11 June, 6.30-8.30pm  
**Dr Nicola Gauld (freelance curator and outreach worker), 'Dinosaurs, Knights and Riots: the Birmingham Pageant of 1938'**. CWMH Research Seminar, Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ Saturday 15 June, 10.00am – 4.00pm  
**Jewellery Quarter Day School** (Joint event with The Birmingham Assay Office): 'Made in the Jewellery Quarter: People, Place and Things', Talks by Sally Hoban, John Berkeley, Simon Buteux, Malcolm Dick, Sue Thomas and Sue Tungate. Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). Booking is essential. Contact Malcolm Dick on [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) or 0121 415 8253 if you don't have a leaflet.

➤ Tuesday 2 July, 6.30-8.30pm  
**Dr John Townley, 'James Pickard of Birmingham - Engineer and Entrepreneur or Pirate and Profiteer'**. CWMH Research Seminar, Arts Lecture Room 3 (Floor 1). All welcome.

➤ *Future dates for your diaries:*

Saturday 19 October: **Black Country History Day**.  
Saturday 23 November: **Birmingham History Day**.  
More details will be provided later in the year.

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*If you would like to contribute to our next newsletter, please send editorial and news items to [Connie Wan at cwmhrg@hotmail.com](mailto:cwmhrg@hotmail.com). Please note we do reserve the right to edit material.*

## Centre for West Midlands History

The Centre for West Midlands History (CWMH) in the School of History and Cultures at the University of Birmingham was created in 2006 to further the study of the rich history of the region from Anglo-Saxon times to the present. It explores the histories of the counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, the conurbations within the area and different approaches to local and regional history. Its activities include:

- Running a successful part-time MA in West Midlands History
- Supporting students who engage in advanced research by MRes and PhD degrees
- Encouraging high-quality publications on local and regional history: including the journal *Midland History*: [www.midlandhistory.bham.ac.uk](http://www.midlandhistory.bham.ac.uk) and the magazine *History West Midlands*: [www.historywm.com](http://www.historywm.com)
- Organising conferences, day schools and visits to places of interest
- Working with archives, libraries, museums, other universities, local history societies, the Historical Association and the Baskerville Society to promote the history of the region
- Providing a late afternoon seminar series and an evening programme of talks which are open to all

The Friends of the Centre for West Midlands History provides the forum for many of these activities and can be joined by all those who are interested in the region's history. This newsletter provides a record of recent events and an indication of forthcoming activities.

Quotes from members of the Friends

*'One of the delights and strengths of the Centre is that it is wholly inter-disciplinary: art, industry, technology, science, literature, social science all merge together under its umbrella.'*

*'The CWMH acts as a pivotal point bringing together diverse subjects, scholars and professions to forge unlikely links to produce new and stimulating work; for me, this is the beauty of the Centre.'*

*'There are a range of activities available to people not otherwise associated with the University but with an interest in the history of the region: conferences and day schools; research seminars; visits to places of historical interest; newsletters and magazines; and links with other institutions.'*

More information

See: [www.birmingham.ac.uk/cwmh](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/cwmh) or contact Dr Malcolm Dick, Director, Centre for West Midlands History, School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT. E-mail: [m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk) Tel: 0121 415 8253.