

The Green Metal Box on Red Lion Bank

As a regular visitor to the Malvern Book Co-op in St Ann's Road, I can't think how for the last four years I had never noticed the tall green metal box-like item on the wall opposite the book shop entrance. It had a fancy design on the front and looked as if at one time it had been an attractive something or other. But what? It had a keyhole too and on the carpark side a plate with the word Leices (Leicester?) with another word above. It was very firmly attached to the adjacent walls.

I went back into the shop to ask what it was. "You are not the only one to ask" came the reply and "if you can find out, please let us know"



My keyword skills, usually Ok for internet searches, failed me so I contacted Cora Weaver and sent her a photo. Cora soon came back with a reply from Claire Vaughan at the Malvern Hills District Council. "It's a Lucy Box" she told me. I was none the wiser but at least here was a term to google. Cora also kindly passed on further information from Brian Iles and Peter Smith and from the box's nearest neighbour at the Malvern Cellar, Angus Macdonald. What follows is a combination of their information and my research.

It is all about electricity.

Brian told us that the box is the last remaining one from Malvern's early electricity supply. I suspect it would have been difficult to remove from the two adjacent walls when it went out of use. Peter added that it was an early electrical distribution box and that it had played a small role in the Council's bid to the Heritage Lottery fund for the Route to the Hills project. Angus had agreed to paint it in what is believed to have been its original colours.

My google search revealed further information and examples. There were some Lucy Boxes in Wolverhampton, where I grew up. Perhaps it was a distant memory of these which made me think the green colour looked familiar. The colour originally was used to match the railings around electricity substations. Further investigation took me to "I spy Lucy Boxes" ...and there are quite a few about. The Wolverhampton ones may have been associated with getting power to trolley buses or tramways.

But why Lucy? Could it be in memory of a dear departed relative or a favourite mistress? (I think this is the influence of the bookshop!). No. It is from the name of William Lucy. This man took over in the mid-1850s William Carter's brass and iron foundry which started in Oxford in 1803. The company originally manufactured metal casings and went on to specialize in electrical equipment for large scale and domestic use with its headquarters in the Eagle Works in Jericho, Oxford. W. Lucy and Co. continues today- some manufacturing is carried out in Dubai (Wikipedia, search date 19/7/22). The Lucy Boxes were manufactured by other companies, perhaps our example was from a company in Leicester, (under licence?). They had presumably the prime function of housing electrical switch gear. Our current telephone switch boxes are often referred to as "the green box" and I suspect may have been originally made by the same manufacturers.

As well as the Wolverhampton and Malvern examples, there is one in the Black Country Living Museum. Although green seems to have been the original colour, the MEB at one time painted theirs silver and other areas have painted them black to match more recent street furniture.

In Malvern at the end of the nineteenth century, there had been a move to introduce electricity resulting in a provisional order, The Malvern Electric Lighting Order of 1890. In 1900 when the order came up for renewal newspapers reported the comment "Malvern is a dull, sleepy place and it could be to the credit of the place to have the electric light." But cries of "We don't want it" followed. The public meeting of ratepayers was attended by

1500 people. There was much discussion and further heckling from the floor. The resolution was proposed that it was not desirable under present circumstances that the Council should undertake the supply of electric lighting to Malvern. So that was that...but not for long.

In 1903 Mr Maybury, the town surveyor produced a different (brilliant, even) scheme. At the old gas works, they could build a "refuse destructor". The steam produced by this could be used to produce electricity. A chimney was built and 15 miles of cable laid. An early example of waste management. There was a grand opening ceremony in 1904...

But by 1906 only 112 people had subscribed.

And Malvern's love affair with gas lighting continued. I blame C. S. Lewis!

I am still not sure of the date of our Lucy Box. Can anyone throw any further light on the subject?

Jan Condon

With thanks to Cora Weaver, Brian Iles, Angus MacDonald and Claire Vaughan.

Other Sources:

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

for The Worcestershire Chronicle (3rd Feb 1900, 2nd May 1903), Birmingham Daily Gazette (25th March 1904), Abingdon Free Press (1st April 1904) (search date 19/7/22)

www.wikipedia.org

for W. Lucy and Co (search date 19/7/22)

for timeline of the UK electricity supply industry (search date 20/7/22)

www.historywebsite.co.uk

for other examples and I spy Lucy Boxes (search date 19/7/22)

I understand that Malvern Museum has accounts and pictures of the 1904 opening ceremony.

This article first appeared in Newseum: Malvern Museum's Newsletter September-December 2022.

Black Horse Days in Kidderminster.....



John 'Mac' McConaghy, a founder member of the Kidderminster Carolians RFC, now resident in New Zealand, has shared some more recollections of pre 1969 rugby in Kidderminster. In those days he played for the Town club which was long based at the Black Horse in Mill Street and has many memories of the good times there..

"There were two changing areas at the B H. The first team had a small changing area under the hotel's Ballroom, complete with a concrete bath . The third team changed in a part of the covered car park , screened off by tarpaulin type curtains. People were very trustworthy in those days as we left all our gear and money on hooks in the car park. It was quite a sight to see a large group of rugby players clad in their playing gear running up Mill Street and onto the ground off Franche Road. I don't think today's referees would have appreciated the worn leather studs, affixed by three brads, worn sharp by running up the streets!"

Licensing laws were very different to today's and even in the mid 1960's the rugby club needed a special license to open the Ballroom bar at the end of games, before 6.30 pm, the official opening hour, when everyone decamped to the main downstairs bar or other licensed premises.

Being based in a hotel it was obviously essential that good relations were maintained with the management. Kidderminster were very lucky when in 1947 Edward Samuel Rowbottom was appointed manager. A native of Marple in Cheshire, Jimmy as he was affectionately known as, was an Old Millhillian and passionate about sport. Before coming to Kidderminster, he had been based in Tonbridge and worked in the textile industry and knew the carpet trade well. His particular sporting interests were rugby, cricket and golf and he was a great supporter and member of many local clubs. When he tragically died aged 41 a nation wide appeal was launched for a memorial in his memory. From the funds raised the Rugby Club were presented with 15 half pint Silver tankards and one 4 pint jug suitably engraved "Jimmy Rowbottom Memorial fund" and were presented to the club at a dinner on the 27th. February. They were also presented with a new Score board which was unveiled following a fixture with Moseley RFC on 10th. March 1956. Incidentally Kidderminster C C were presented with new sight screens from the fund with the presentation taking place during a match between Kidderminster and The Worcestershire County side on the 28th. April 1956. Mac remembers the tankards being used well into the 1960's and it would be interesting to know what happened to them subsequently. Are they tucked away in the club's archive somewhere?

The Black Horse continued to be the club's base until the late 60's by which time Joe Steadman was in charge.. Under his management the B H established a reputation for exquisite bar snacks. Mac comments, "The game pie was superb!" On Saturday nights the bar was manned by a tall, statuesque, heavily made up woman with a face that "only a mother could love." " If anyone remarked that she was "not that bad looking" they were immediately recognised as being drunk and sent home. However, despite the club promoting fund raising dances on Saturday evenings which helped the finances of both partners, the relations with Mr Steadman deteriorated and in the end the rugby club was shown the door.



Changing at the Black Horse.

The first team changed through the door on the right, just past the two large windows and the third team in the space in the car park beyond that door. Hardly the Sports England standards expected today but this is where young Colts like Nogger Knowles, Brain Garrett, Bruce Lawson and I began our rugby careers. Believe it or not we changed in worse places and at least at home you had the consolation of the wonderful pitches at Franche Road, even if sometimes you had to walk up Mill Street to get there!

As Mac relates, " It's not generally known but the third XV's of Kidderminster and the Old Carolians formed a combined team long before the clubs amalgamated. If either club were unable to field a full XV for home games a combined team would play one of their opponents and the other fixture would have to be cancelled. For away games the 1st and third teams travelled by Whittles coach but the seconds always went in cars. In those days the KRUF 2nd XV was a mystery, ruled by 'Baron' Ron Powell as his personal fiefdom. At selection meetings on Monday evenings, if a replacement was needed for the 1st XV the man in that positions in the 2nd's was the obvious choice firmly declare that this player was not ready for the 1st's so a player would be promoted from the third's, which is how I became an occasional First team player. Likewise, if a first team player was dropped, he went straight to the thirds." The real reason that Ron's team never changed was that he needed the players with cars!

Ron was also organiser in chief and MC for the weekly fund raising dances at the Black Horse which were such an important source of funds to keep the rugby Club going. He was also in charge of security and was officially commended when a handbag thief was caught in the act. The Chairman of the magistrates (Councillor James Ferguson) commented, "The magistrates would like to thank you. We appreciate your conduct in bringing about the arrest of this man." Clearly Ron, pictured front row with the ball at his feet, with one of his beloved 2nd teams, was not a man to be crossed!



THE HOUSMAN FAMILY

This year, the Housman Society celebrates its 50th anniversary. The society was founded by Joseph Hunt and John Pugh in 1973.

The 36th Bromsgrove Society's Annual Lecture this year, presented by Julian Hunt, Joseph's son, will celebrate **'The Housman Family Story'**. It will take place on Wednesday 19th April at 7.30 p.m. at Routh Hall at Bromsgrove School B61 7HP. It will be in conjunction with The Housman Society. Tickets for this are £7.50 including a complimentary drink afterwards.

Local historian and Housman enthusiast Julian Hunt will present the lecture featuring the Housman Family and their connections with Bromsgrove. The Rev. Robert Housman first came to the town in the 1790s to visit his brother-in-law, John Adams, manager of the worsted mill in Watt Close. In the 1830s Adams, then living in Perry Hall, helped his nephew, the Rev. Thomas Housman to become the first curate of Catshill. On Adams' death in 1858, the Rev. Thomas' son, Edward Housman, moved into Perry Hall and soon became a leading figure in Bromsgrove and a popular speaker at Court Leet dinners. Edward's eldest son, the poet Alfred Edward Housman, grew up at Perry Hall, as did his brothers and sisters, including Laurence and Clemence, whose major role in the campaign for women's suffrage is only now being fully appreciated. They also contributed much to the literary world. The lecture will also include much about the famous poet of the town, A.E. Housman and his intriguing life story.

Another event celebrating the Housman Family will take place on Monday 10th July again at Routh Hall at Bromsgrove School. This will be the **Housman Celebration Concert**.

Bromsgrove's leading arts organisations and institutions are planning the concert, that will include reading of Housman's poems and magnificent settings of his works to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ian Venables.

The groups behind this event include the Bromsgrove Society, The Housman Society, Bromsgrove WORDS, Bromsgrove Concerts, Bromsgrove District Council, Bromsgrove Arts Alive, Bromsgrove Festival, Friends of St. John's and Bromsgrove School.

Musical accompaniments will be given by some of the UK's foremost classical artists, including The Dante Quartet, pianist Benjamin Frith and BBC New Generation Artist, tenor Alessandro Fisher. The programme will include the Housman settings by Ian Venables, Songs of Eternity and Sorrow and Ralph Vaughan Williams' 'On Wenlock Edge'. Also, a selection of poems will be read by BBC Midlands Today presenter Nick Owen who is a long time Housman enthusiast.

The concert will be preceded by a reception including wine, soft drinks and nibbles at 6.30 p.m. with the concert starting at 7 p.m..

Tickets for this are £25, with students free of charge.

Tickets for both events are available from www.bromsgrove-school.co.uk/boxoffice or telephone during office hours on 01527 579679 ext. 616.

Chris Nesbitt, The Bromsgrove Society

Report on Redditch History Society Presentation November 1922

'The story of the Gatehouse Chapel at Bordesley Abbey' by Don Vincent, completed and presented by Anthony Green.

Don Vincent (19th November 1935 to 23rd July 1922) was a stalwart of the Redditch History Society and the Forge Mill Needle Museum, and, in recent years he was the Society Chairman.

I first met Don 17 years ago when I volunteered at Forge Mill Needle Museum. He was already a volunteer there. He was then seventy-one and I was sixty-four.

Don had an amazing knowledge of local history, particularly needles and Bordesley Abbey and for this year, he was planning to give a talk on the Gatehouse Chapel at Bordesley Abbey.

Sadly, he died before he was able to produce his presentation, but I was not happy to delete him from our programme and I obtained the work to date which he had done.

So, with support from Forge Mill Needle Museum, particularly Jo-Ann Gloger, I added much additional information and images produced during the excavations by Reading University.

So, I was able to present a presentation, as a tribute to Don, at our meeting in October 2022.



This is the most difficult presentation I have produced, and it concerns the Gateway Chapel at the entrance of Bordesley Abbey.

This story began with the Abbey, continued after the dissolution, and finally arrived, as the Chapel on the Green, in the centre of Redditch.

It is not that complex, but it was begun by Don Vincent, our Chairman, who sadly died earlier this year and I have used his notes as much as possible, which I then incorporated with additional information supplied by Forge Mill Needle Museum, images which I have obtained from various sources and additional inform

However, it has been a fascinating exercise and the text I used in giving the presentation amounted to over 4,500 words, so here I give a brief outline.

It is worth noting that the Cistercians did not go in for elaborate gatehouse such as Kirkham Priory. Hailes Abbey church is an example of how St Stephens chapel could have looked when it was the church for Redditch people.

1244 was the first reference to a chapel of St. Stephen at Bordesley and places the building under the ecclesiastical control of Tardebigge.

In 1301 there is reference to the Chapel as "the parish church of Bordesley" suggesting a widening of the building's function.

An illustration by Woodward painted about the time of his mid-19th Century excavation of the Bordesley Abbey site shows the Gateway Chapel at the entrance to the Abbey precinct. He would have based this on examples of Cistercian Monastery ruins which existed in a more complete state than the ruins at Redditch.

The archaeologists found that the chapel was extended five times until the last phase of the post-Dissolution modifications.

The Samuel and Nathaniel Buck drawing of about 1730 shows the north and east sides of St. Stephen's Chapel as it would have appeared after the dissolution.

On the 23rd of September 1538 we have the dissolution of the Abbey and the sale, and we have now moved on to another phase in the history of our little chapel.

When Thomas Habington visited the Chapel. In his "Survey of mid Worcestershire" he described it as a decaying chapel, and Nash, writing in 1799, reports that the building declined to a barn or place for cattle to shelter in.

In 1687 the people of Redditch successfully petitioned Lord Windsor to repair the Chapel and in 1688 the Chapel reopened. In 1712 we have the benefaction of Nathaniel Mugg and a brass plaque commemorating this is still in St Stephen's Church.

In 1863 James Woodward surveyed Bordesley Meadows, and in 1866 he planted a Giant Redwood in the Chapel graveyard in commemoration of his work.

The gatehouse chapel of Bordesley Abbey and parts of its accompanying graveyard excavated and consolidated by a



Community Programme Project from 1983-8, overseen by Reading University.

So how was our 1244 Chapel constructed? First the chosen site sloped dramatically from north to south and from west to east. Vast amounts of infill were required to level the site. The foundation raft shows the building had external measurements of 20 by 8.3 metres and an internal area of 17.2 metres by 7 metres.

I was fortunate to have access by Forge Mill Museum to a range of 35mm slides taken at the time of the excavations of Bordesley Abbey which I was able to use to illustrate the excavations.

The graveyard itself was post-medieval in date. The randomness of the graveyard at St Stephens was typical of 18th Century graveyards and it is unusual to find such an arrangement visible today. It was fortunate that the Graveyard was abandoned before the Victorian period as that was an age of compulsive graveyard tidying.

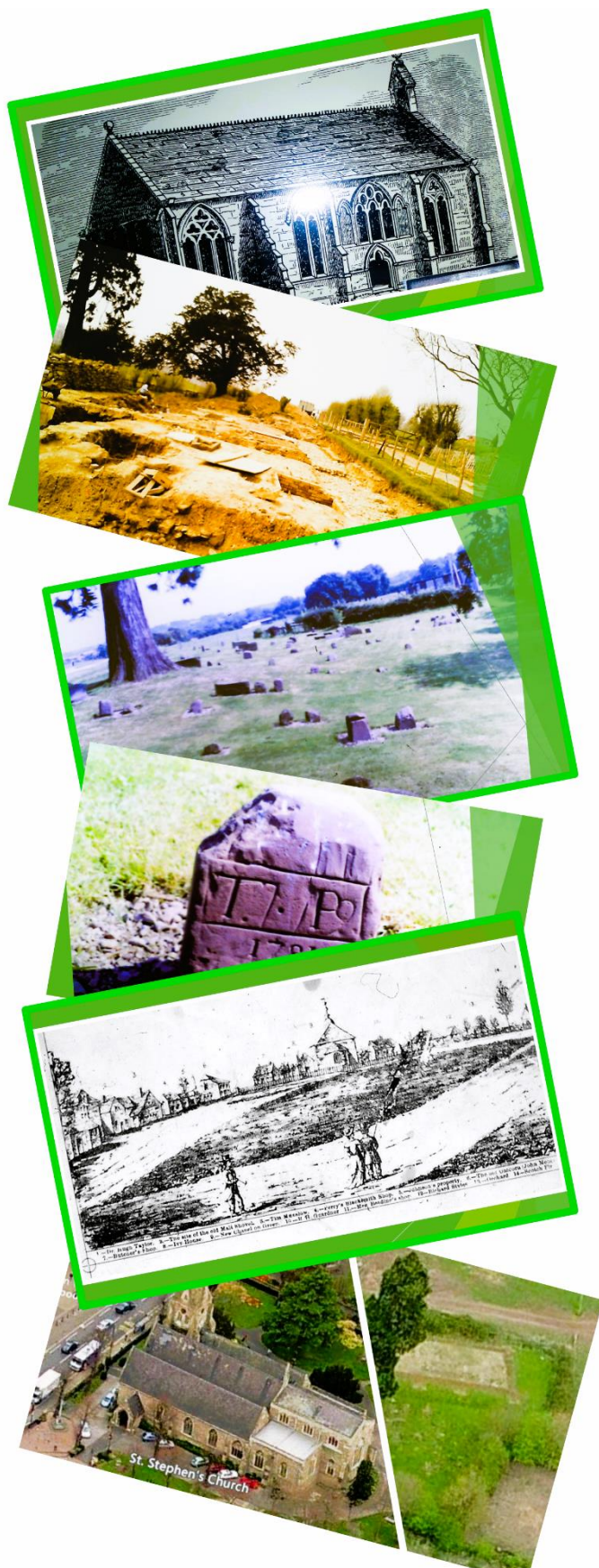
Graves found during the excavation indicate that when the Chapel was moved the graves were not moved with it.

There were over one hundred gravestones found, and the majority were small homemade examples, rare today, but arguably far commoner in the early 18th century. Many were simply remnants which had been brought up from the abbey ruins and a date and initials very simply carved on. In earlier times, when many ordinary people survived on a daily basis, recycling was a way of life rather than a lifestyle choice.

Our little chapel has had a fascinating history. It began as the Gateway Chapel of the Abbey, after the dissolution it continued as the parish church for Redditch residents until, in 1805, it was demolished and using much of the stone, it was rebuilt in the town to become the Chapel on the Green. It expanded to respond to the increasing population until, in 1855, our current parish church, St Stephens was consecrated. So, one thousand years on, St Stephen has seen many changes and is still looking on over the town. Is not that amazing....

I am pleased to say that the presentation was appreciated by the audience and there were 15 minutes of questions before we went to tea in the Reeves Room.

I like to think that Don would have been happy with my attempt to present an area of history which was very dear to him.



'SWEET' MEMORIES BLUE BIRD TOFFEE FACTORY - PART 2

You may recall seeing this factory chimney as you drove through Hunnington between Romsley and Halesowen or from the M5 as you travelled north. It was a sad day when it was finally demolished some years ago as we then had to rely on Satellite Navigation for our journeys home!



Many more memories have been evoked by the news of the development of the factory site.

These include the specially built twenty-eight houses forming the Garden Village and occupied by members of the workforce and their families.



The canteen building and immaculately kept gardens were used for so many different activities – a large kitchen and separate dining rooms for the male and female workers allowed hot meals to be served on the premises. The women workers dined in the main hall.



Dances, wedding receptions, film shows were also held in the main hall and visitors were invited to many of these functions. There was even a room given over to church services once or twice a month. Summer Fetes and Christmas Fayres were also held in the hall and grounds.



The factory gave employment to so many people over the years and not just to residents of Romsley and Hunnington. So many people have fond memories of working for Blue Bird's, visiting the village stores, attacking the toffees with the little hammers or just driving past the factory.



The smell of the toffees wafted across the rooftops. The toffees were sold in the village stores



The management also provided recreational facilities for the workers and villagers alike.



These photos are all taken from "Growing Up in Blue Bird's Garden Village", a recently published hardback book by Romsley & Hunnington History Society.

Wolverley and Cookley Historical Society completed their exhibition for the 250th anniversary of the consecration of the new church in Wolverley which occurred in September 2022. The exhibition was on display in the church until the end of the year. The information from the exhibition is now being converted into a book which will be available in the church for visitors.



St John's Church, Wolverley

Tradition claims there was originally a Saxon church, and a priest was recorded for Wolverley in the Domesday Book in 1086.

In 1769 the Churchwardens of Wolverley recorded that money had been raised "for the purpose of repairing the Parish Church of Wolverley" but the "said Church hath been viewed and examined by workmen with an intent to be repaired but upon such examination the same is found to be so ruinous that it is necessary to take down and rebuild the said church."

A replacement church, then consisting of a new chancel and nave attached to the east side of a stone built tower of the earlier church, was consecrated on 20th September 1772. The church was built in the Italian style, the main benefactor being Edward Knight.

The base of the church tower is probably the only visible surviving part of the original church built in 1174 because the old tower was kept and then encased in brick.

