

## April 2021 Issue

Hi All,

When we had our last meeting at the Oasis and when I did my last guided tour at Forge Mill Needle Museum and Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre I was 76 years old. When I expect to resume both activities, I will be 78!

I think that this says all...

In terms of the Newsletter, it may seem odd that we are now into volume 3, number 1. This is because we would normally have had our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in April, and this would be the start of our new membership year.

However, 2020/21 is not 'normal' and, due to the pandemic, we had an AGM online and by post and the results were published in our November 2020 Newsletter. Resolution 13, which was unanimously agreed, stated that the results of the AGM would apply until we have a 'physical' AGM in 2021.

The current situation is that we cannot yet plan our AGM for 2021. This agreement allows us the flexibility to recommence meetings with presentations without requiring the first meeting to be an AGM. However, we are determined to meet our requirement to have an AGM each year.

I thought that it was useful to make clear the current organisation with a list of officers on page 2.

We will continue to provide an enhanced monthly newsletter to maintain contact with our members/supporters.

On page 2 I have also given the current timeline for reopening Forge Mill Needle Museum and the excellent news, that Forge Mill Museum has received a well-deserved grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enhance their facilities for visitors.

On page three and four our Chairman Don Vincent has produced an article which looks at Redditch New Town and how this has changed the perception of the town. As always with Don this is an informative analysis of the changes.

On pages five and six Brian Thomas has a commentary based on an article in the Redditch Indicator on the 23rd of January 1976 concerning the opening of the new library.

There were so many hopes for the future related to this, but, due to the cuts in public services which have occurred everywhere, it now has less staff and services than when it was opened.

On pages seven and eight, we have an article by Bryan 'Tommy' Thomas, who lived in Redditch from 1938 to 1965.

Tommy has kindly supplied me with his memoirs of this period and has given permission to extract anything which I find interesting. I have extracted a specific story which I hope you will find amusing.

I am sure that copyright is not a consideration for many contributors, and no-one has even mentioned it to me. However, as they say, I take this very seriously and, to make it clear, any contribution, whether it is text or images, remains the copyright of the contributor. The only copyright we claim is the design and format of the Newsletter, i.e. our logo etc.

I hope that you find this issue interesting, I really appreciate the help from members and supporters and, if you have a short article which you consider may be of interest to members, please do not hesitate to contact me.

To mark the sad death of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on the 9th of April, I will be putting some pictures of his visit to Redditch in May 1978 in next month's Newsletter.

Take care and stay safe.

Anthony Green, Society Secretary

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# Our Organisation

It is now 2 years since we had a physical Annual General Meeting. Last year in October, published in November, we had an on-line/postal AGM in order to meet our obligation to have an annual AGM and it was agreed by the membership that this would continue until we can have a physical AGM in 2021. This will not necessarily be our first physical meeting of the year.

I thought that it would be useful for members to review our current 'management' of the Redditch History Society as agreed at our 2020 Annual General Meeting.

<b>Chairman:</b>		Don Vincent
<b>Secretary:</b>		Anthony Green
<b>Treasurer:</b>		Graham Smith
<b>Newsletter Editor/Website and Social Media/Meetings Organiser:</b>		Anthony Green
<b>Management Committee:</b>	as above plus	Elizabeth Simpson Pete Harris David Spyer
<b>Accounts Examiner:</b>		Gil Barlow

If all things go to plan this year, we will be able to have physical meetings, a truncated range of talks and will be able to have a physical Annual General Meeting.

Hopefully in 2022, we can return to a full program of talks and an Annual General Meeting on the 'correct' date in April.

## Road Map for re-opening Forge Mill Museum

Forge Mill Needle Museum will be gradually opening, all things going well from the 12th of April 2021.

From the **12th April to 16th May** the grounds, including play area will be open Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday 10am to 4.30pm.

There is no entry charge for the grounds/play area and tea/coffee will be available.

The **17th May to 11th July** will be as above, plus the Museum will be open. This also applies to Monday 31st May (half term)

From the **12th of July** onwards, the Museum will be open as normal.

This, of course, depends on the current Covid related restrictions at the time.

More details can be found at: <https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/hours/>

Although there are currently, as we publish the Newsletter, no activities in the way of Exhibitions and Events on the website, we understand that there are two outdoor theatre events planned and, of course, the Heritage Day on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September <http://www.redditchmuseum.org.uk/thisyear.htm>

A National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £35,700 has been awarded for the 'Forging Forward' project at Forge Mill Needle Museum. The project looks towards making some exciting developments to the site following its year of closure. It is also supported with a financial contribution from the Worshipful Company of Needlemakers.

'Forging Forward' looks to make some immediate changes to benefit local people with the introduction of Forest School activities at both the Museum and the Arrow Valley Visitor Centre.

Improvements will also be made to the museum's small function room to welcome back both community groups and private hirers.

The project will also benefit those who live further afield with the addition of an online catalogue to the museum's website. This will enable researchers to search the wide ranging archives held by the museum and request copies.

Looking to the longer term recovery and resilience of Forge Mill some comprehensive consultation will be carried out with residents to inform developments to the site and form the basis of a five year business plan and strategy.

<https://redditchstandard.co.uk/news/bumper-lottery-grant-for-redditchs-forge-mill-needle-museum/>

# A Look at Redditch New Town

## by Don Vincent

What does Redditch mean to you? Seems a strange question. However, is it so? We might also pose 'have your feelings towards the town changed over the years?'

If your answer to the first question is 'nothing' or 'very little', then we might examine answers to the second question. Perhaps your answer might be along the lines of 'it used to be a nice town but now there is no soul in it'. If it is, then is this typical of all towns or just redeveloped towns such as Redditch?

With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident that Redditch Development Corporation (RDC) made some glaring errors.

Although one was evident from the start. That being the decision to locate the Kingfisher Shopping Centre in the middle of the old town. One suggestion was that it would help to preserve the historical centre of the town. They destroyed more than they saved. Building it on the side of a hill enabled the bus station to be built so that it resembled the fabled Stygian gloom. This single act tore the heart out of what we knew as Redditch. Here was a chance to create a new shopping outlet on the fringes of old Redditch leaving the original town untouched. Which is of course what is happening now. However, it is too late to rescue the town. The act of forming little townlets, such as Winyates, Matchborough, Church Hill etc. further fragmented the populous. People now lived down blind closes that lead nowhere. RDC also created three quarters of a ring road.

Against such arguments we must allow that RDC saved the Palace Theatre, gave us Forge Mill Needle Museum, and promoted work on Bordesley Abbey.

Without RDC what would Redditch have become?



*Early Picture of Evesham Street  
Photograph from booklet by Hodges Photographic*



*Early redevelopment of Town Centre by Redditch Council  
Walford Street, Photograph by Vincent Green*

Towns, cities, villages have always changed over the years. Sometimes these changes are violent such as Redditch. Sometimes more slowly and gradual. Locally we might look at Alcester, once an industrialised needle making town, as well as a market town. Now I would suggest it is a dormitory. Bridport in Dorset was once a centre of rope making and the manufacture of netting. Evidence can be gained by the wide straight alleys leading off a wide main street. Now all gone and many of the houses are owned by second homeowners from the Home Counties.

At this point you might well say 'so what'.

It is the historians' lot to chart these changes, to explain them and to note the effects these changes have had on the towns and their inhabitants.

Above we may have noted that RDC wanted little townlets, Places where people would do their shopping etc. locally. They also planted many, many trees. Some reports suggest nine million, which seems an awful lot to me. Why? One idea was to screen these districts from the pollution both exhaust and noise caused by increasing traffic. Trouble was that when the seeming inexhaustible supply of government money dried up, the local council could not afford to maintain said trees.

## A Look at Redditch New Town... contintued

However, RDC were ahead of the game with regards to pollution. Above I said that the Kingfisher Shopping Centre was built in the wrong place. It was almost as though they decided to build the bus station and then added a shopping centre. However, one good factor was the multi-storey car parks. Yes, the spaces are not big enough, a lack of forward thinking. However, one thing that is correct is that when ascending the floors, one passes more spaces than when one is descending. Clever!

Some forty plus years ago I went on a caravan holiday with some friends we chose a site near Runcorn. Runcorn had a population of some 62,000 in 2011. So, it is about the size of Redditch. It was also an industrial town. Runcorn was designated a new town in 1964, its Shopping City opened in 1972. Of course, we just had to go and have a look see. As we drove down the ring road to the Shopping City some two miles out there signs saying e.g., Woolworth's (it was a long time ago) 'use car park so and so'. Marks and Spencer's 'use car park so and so'. Not like Redditch where one has no idea where anything is. The centre was also served by 'buses. Guess what! The buses came up a ramp, to a stop and shoppers could walk on the level straight into the concourse. The difference between the Kingfisher Centre and Shopping City was like chalk and cheese. Of course, the planners of Runcorn, like town planners (there is an oxymoron for you) everywhere made a bit of a bog up of some of the housing. The important bit is that they did not destroy the town centre, even though the Chief Architect wanted to do just that.

So, what was the difference between Redditch and Runcorn? Both were of a similar size, both were industrial. Both were in the shadow of a major city (Birmingham and Liverpool) that contain many slums, and which had suffered during WWII. It would seem that Redditch fell between two stools. The planners wanted to keep the country market town feel while housing more and more residents. The Kingfisher centre has had make over after making over and is still poor. Now the thought is let us remake the town centre, Money is available let us spend it before someone takes it back. Let us have a market. Let us have two platforms at the railway station. Come on. That smacks of 'We must do something. X is something. Let us do X'.

I mentioned above Alcester and Bridport. Like them Redditch employment has changed. Needlemaking has gone. The big employers, HDA, Royal Enfield, BSA, Terry's, ALCAD, British Aluminium have either all closed or trundle on with a vastly reduced workforce. At HDA we had more people on the nightshift than the entire present-day workforce of METTIS. Having a large workforce encourages a community spirit through sports and social clubs. Many of those listed had football teams playing in the local league. The same went for cricket, bowls, darts, snooker etc. Where people lived also played a part. How many people living on Batchley worked at HDA. It all fostered an interest in the town. Now it takes next door neighbours all their time to speak.

I am afraid the world has changed since the Seventies and seeking to reinvent Redditch town centre is a lost cause. The die was cast when the decision was made to build the Kingfisher Shopping Centre in the area it now occupies.

*Right*

*Redditch Town Centre*

*Scanned image by  
Anthony Green from*

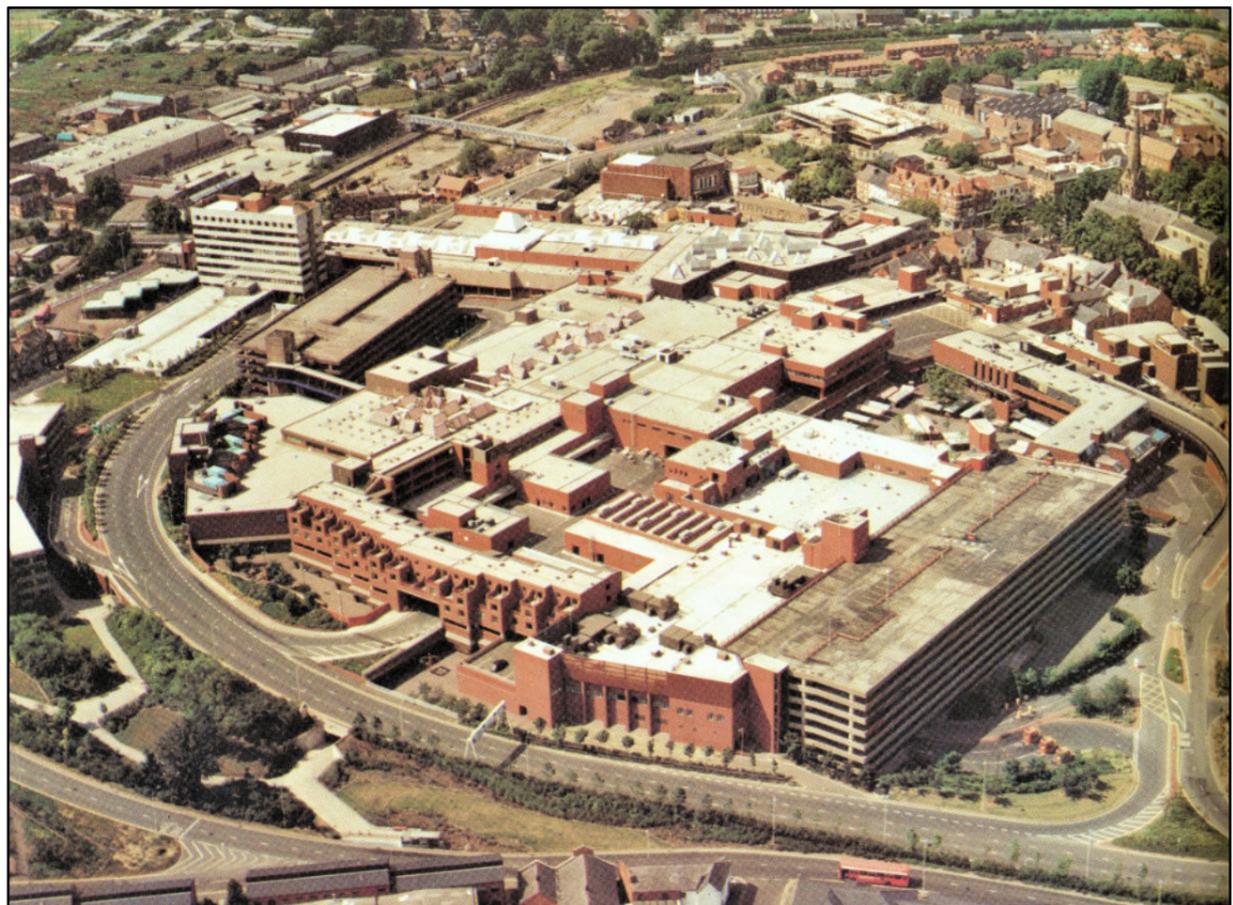
*The History of Redditch  
New Town 19674 - 85*

*Gordon Anstis*

*Board Member of  
Redditch Development  
Corporation 1965 -85*

*Published 1985*

*ISBN 0 904928 19 5*



# LUXURY LOOK FOR BOOKS IN NEW LIBRARY

by Brian Thomas based on an article in the Redditch Indicator 23rd January 1976

"I think it's quite the best new building in Redditch" said Mr Roy Vann the town's chief librarian. "It is about seven times the size of the old one next to Smallwood hospital".

The new library has over twice the shelf space of the old library, the great gain is that things can be laid out properly and has space to see and classify all the contents of the library. When first envisaged in about 1968 it was estimated the library would cost £300,000.

The library has shelf space for 80,000 books and there are at least 100,000 manuscripts in the archive. We are informed that the photographic book checking out system is the same system as that used by bookmakers to photograph betting slips.

This system has been in place for 9 or 10 years said Mr Vann, it only requires 1 person behind the counter checking out books instead of 3 or 4. The need to save money wherever possible is obviously paramount as the price of hard back books is going through the ceiling with some textbooks costing £8.

The library is described as airy and open with a fresh yet functional feel to it. It has lots of bare brick walls and the ceilings have a sort of rough cast honeycomb effect. We are told the building is big enough for its present requirements. It will eventually need to serve as the main library for a town of nearly 90,000 i.e., over 40,000 more than in 1976.

The library has 21 full time employees, 7 of these are full time librarians.

We are informed that the library has a strong room where documents are stored, including a complete set of the Redditch Indicator, with copies going back to 1859. Some of these editions of the Indicators are stored on microfilm.

Mr Vann comments that some of the materials in the archive cannot be replaced hence they are protected from fire by an automatic heat and smoke sensitive carbon dioxide system.

The third floor of the library has an area devoted entirely to local history, part of this floor is taken up by a two bed roomed flat for the caretaker and a staff room with a rooftop view over the town centre.

In the basement there is a small meeting room suitable for the children's "story hour" or for societies to use. Also in the basement are more book stacks, including a set of huge shelves which can be moved together or apart on electrically operated rails.

## Right

*Redditch Library 'today' (photograph Anthony Green)*

*By the John Mabin Design Group 1974-5, a strongly modelled brick design. Three stories, the top one windowless. Rectangular pillars allow a covered walkway along the street, becoming free-standing at the S E, entrance, end, here the top floor cant out above two square oriels. Within, an access ramp like a narrow sloping open courtyard, and further special delights: views in from the NW stairs, and from windows in unexpected locations. (The Buildings of England - Nikolaus Pevsner 2007)*



## Left

*The Local History Department in the New Library.*

*(Photograph Philip Davis)*

*Philip was the Local History Librarian and was regarded as an expert in the history of the Redditch area.*

*Sadly, due to cost cutting by Worcestershire County Council, all professional librarian posts at the Library were eliminated and the Local History records were moved into the basement and are not easily accessible.*

## Redditch New Library... continued

Another news item in the Indicator states to avoid the estimated £500 bill that equipment moving specialists would charge to move books and equipment from the old library to the new library, the library will use its own staff to move items from the old site to the new site.

Transfer of the ten tons of materials would take one week, with the old library closing on Saturday 17th and reopening at the new site on Saturday 24th.

Transcribers note in 2020 the Redditch library is still in the same location, it has been refurbished at least twice and now houses many computers as well as an extensive collection of printed materials. The third floor now houses Job Centre Plus.

When chief librarian Roy Vann stated "I think it's quite the best new building in Redditch" he was probably correct, other buildings in the town have not, in the opinion of the transcriber, stood the test of time and look rather jaded. Mr Vann was obviously proactive regarding the future of the library in Redditch.

The February 13th, 1959 Redditch Indicator states that Mr Vann commented that the library committee lacked a clear objective regarding future policy for the library, he listed problems facing the library and said that things needed to improve sooner rather than later adding that if nothing was done the library would soon fall into disarray.

The old Redditch library has in more recent years been used as office accommodation. It is now on sale, in 2020, with an asking price of £1 million plus VAT, it is described by the estate agent selling the property as having potential for residential or leisure, subject to planning permission.

### **Right**

*The old Library 'today'.  
(Photograph Anthony Green)*

*The former library was built as a Literary and Scientific Institute by GH Cox of Birmingham in 1885.*

*It is in Gothic style in brick with gables above the first floor windows. The steep pyramidal turret was built at this time.*

*It was extended in the 1930s in the same style as the original building when it became the town library.*

*The original entrance was in Church Road and the extension changed the main entrance to Church Green West.*

*This 'built like topsy' construction created a ground floor of variable levels which was not compatible with modern needs and led to Redditch Council agree that it needed to move to a modern purpose built building.*



# A Little Drummer Boy

## Tommy Thomas

Today's young musicians have a Global university at their disposal on the internet. As a callow youth in 1950's Redditch I was utterly baffled how to become one.

A carnival Jazz band or the Army cadets seemed to be the only options.

**Right:**

*Typical Kazoo Band in Redditch Carnival (1960s) passing through Headless Cross.*

*Photograph from Don Vincent.*



'Raggadaggadum, rumdiggadum', that's all you have to do" she said, handing him a pair of drumsticks. The young lad stared at the somewhat crude homemade sticks then repeated the rhythm on the kitchen table, "You'll do fine" said the woman.

Peggy Cotterill looked after the drum section in the Redditch Jazz band and her father? who made and sold the drumsticks led it enthusiastically throwing and twirling a baton.

The young lad was not quite sure how or why he had been summoned to the Cotterill house for an audition and had stood in the rain behind a hedge full of tension for half an hour trying to muster up the courage to knock on the door.

He was a strange lad, a mixture of shyness and much ego and as the door opened, he blurted out, "I'm Bryan Thomas and I don't want to play a kazoo". "That's alright son," said Peggy, "We need a drummer. "All that tension and here he was, a drummer in a Jazz band and it had been so easy.

It was not a conventional Jazz band but a street parade or carnival marching band.

The usual instrumentation of such a Jazz band comprised some twenty or so kazoos and about eight drummers. A kazoo is a short cylindrical tin instrument of musical torture with a stretched paper membrane that buzzes when the player hums a tune into it.

There are various sizes in a band and when enthusiastically blown by twenty or thirty, not necessarily musically gifted people, produce a cacophony of mind-numbing magnitude.

## A Little Drummer Boy.....continued

During the 1950s Jazz bands were a colourful and popular feature of carnivals, sports days, and various other social events of that time.

Fortunately, when I joined the band it had a full complement of Kazooists and so, after that short audition I was chosen to play a drum, candidly my ego would never have allowed me to play a kazoo. After repeating the required rhythm correctly on Peggy's kitchen table, I was informed that I would have to pay sixpence a week to the band fund and sixpence immediately to her father for the sticks and to attend band practice in the nearby Scout hall on Monday night.

Clutching the sticks, I ran all the way home, once there it was nearly impossible to contain myself and I 'Raggadaggadumed' on anything that remotely resembled a drum almost driving my parents to distraction. Monday evening came at last; a broad leather sling was draped over my shoulder and a shiny brass shelled drum with red and white rims attached to it. 'Some have greatness thrust upon them'! It was love at first sight, a defining moment. I was positioned in one of the ranks of the band and off we went, marching and countermarching up and down the hall.

**Right:**

*Proud as punch, the drumming admiral.*

*Photograph from Tommy Thomas*



A week later the band boarded a coach and we left for the village of Inkberrow to play at a sports day and, resplendent in a uniform reminiscent of the Patagonian Merchant Marine I marched enthusiastically round the field thumping my drum to the raucous sound of the kazoos as they destroyed 'When the Saints go marching in'.

This was it, show business and I was on my way. My debut with the band was to have been commemorated for posterity by my mother proudly following the band round the field with her Brownie box camera, unfortunately she accidentally exposed the film.

Utterly devastated at her carelessness I descended into darkest petulance refusing to speak to her all the way back home.

Determined to mollify me she took me to be immortalised on this photo at a local studio spending the then exorbitant sum of seven shillings and sixpence. (35P).

I stayed with the band for a few months but the rhythmic limitation of 'Raggadaggadum' was creatively stultifying and I had already been ticked off several times by Peggy for improvising my own drumbeats, a predilection that would eventually lead me to jazz, what I really needed, but did not know, was a drum kit!