

May 2021 Issue

Hi Everyone.

Are we nearly there yet

Well, it looks as though we may be, and we have begun the activity of reopening.

We are being cautious, and we are planning to recommence our meetings on Monday August 9th. It will then follow the normal pattern of the second Monday of each month for the rest of the year.

The meetings will, of course, be at the Oasis Christian Centre beginning at 2.00pm.

We do not have a speaker programme at the moment as we have not yet had a Management Committee meeting.

We plan to have this before the next issue when we can give a detailed programme for the rest of the year.

This is the penultimate edition of the 'lockdown' edition of the Newsletter and next month I plan to finish the 'lockdown' with a 'bumper' edition of the Newsletter. If you have anything which you wish to add. Please send it to me.

From July onwards, I plan to return to a more traditional Newsletter with an eight-page edition perhaps every three months. The July edition will obviously preview our August meeting and give more details beyond the June edition.

I hope that you have found that the expanded newsletter I have created during the lockdown to be worthwhile and kept you in touch with the history of the town.

As promised in last month's edition I have put in some images of Prince Philip's visit to Redditch in 1978 which you will find on page two.

On page three and four we have one of Pete Harris's inimitable stories. It is 'A Load of Old Cobblers' but always worth a read.

On pages five and six we have 'Growing up in Hunt End and Crabbs Cross' by John Braden.

As someone born and bred in Redditch, although I spent many years outside the town, and the country, I understand John's views, although I worry what would have happened to the town if the Development Corporation had not arrived.

On pages seven and eight, I have looked at the advantages of a modern technology, LIDAR, has for archaeology, particularly for those of us who are no longer able to do the physical activity.

I have described this specifically for our Bordesley Abbey site which is a scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 to be of national importance.

It is noticeable that articles in magazine of the Council for British Archaeology <https://new.archaeologyuk.org/british-archaeology-magazine/> often include LIDAR images these days as they are so useful.

Take care and stay safe and, if you want to contact me please do not hesitate by e-mail or telephone.

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Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, 1921 - 2021

His visit to Redditch in May 1978 - by Anthony Green

When Prince Philip retired from his royal duties on 2 August 2017, aged 96, he had completed 22,219 solo engagements and had given 5,493 speeches as the consort to the Queen.

Sadly, he died on 9 April 2021, only two months before his 100th birthday.

As part of his incredible effort in supporting the Queen, he visited Redditch in 1978.

The main purpose of his visit was to open the newly built YMCA at Church Hill Centre. This was close to his heart as he was patron of some 800 organisations, particularly focused on the environment, industry, sport, and education.

However, how could anyone of his importance come to Redditch without visiting our newly built Kingfisher Centre.

So this he duly did and did a circuit of the centre, of course, he was only 56 at the time!



After his visit to the Town Centre he was then taken down to Church Hill to open the newly built YMCA.

The amazing thing to take from these images is the closeness of the crowd and the limited number of police officers needed for 'crowd control'.

Obviously there would be some plain clothed security men around, but this illustrates how the Prince set out to make the Royal Family much more available to the people.



A Load of Old Cobblers

by Pete Harris

Way back in eighteen hundred and frozen to death, there lived a cordwainer in Cheltenham.

His name was Charles Messenger. He was very skilled and popular with the ladies. He made beautiful ladies slippers and shoes. He had nine children. Charles the eldest was run over by a fly.

(More of this later). George was another son who followed his father in the trade. In the 1860/70's Redditch was just starting its industrial expansion. The train had recently arrived from Birmingham and would later carry on the Ashchurch.

Now George being an enterprising sort of cove, hopped on the train to a new life of cobbling in bustling Redditch.

He liked the town which had more pubs per few yards than anywhere in the land.

Now Sarah Wilkes was a bonny lass with long hanging elephant like ear lugs, due to her habit of continually pulling on them.

They soon got together, married, settled into a house in George Street, and commenced increasing the population.

As George prospered, so followed a move up the hill to Beaufort Street where their brood became a total of ten.

Things improved again with a move to a large house on Mt. Pleasant.

Bringing up his family, George and Sarah had lost their first child as did all the females in the family.

Death was normal part of life.

George continued the tradition, and then there were nine. They lived happily together.

Her as a needle paperer, he making boots and exchanging what money he made at numerous watering holes around Headless Cross.

Sarah was constantly feeding him salmon every morning to sober him up.

Salmon was popular and much more common back in those days.



In the absence of the Kodak Brownie, family portraits and photographs were taken by a local photographer in his studio.

With great foresight George had the family group duly 'done' in 1900 to see in the new Millenium.

When Georger died in 1908 Sarah so disliked the picture that she filed it in the coal house, where it remained until being saved by a granddaughter, eventually becoming mine.

Sarah kept on their house in Mt. Pleasant and took in lodgers. She ruled the house with a wooden spoon which she used to good effect. Eventually nature took its course, and all three lodgers married her daughters.

Times were hard, especially for one of the sons. Having diluted his wages into hop flavoured liquid, he would often be so skint midweek that emergency rations had to be found.

This often involved a trip to his mate Spriggy Cox to beg a pound of Lard. Spread liberally on a chunk of Bonnaker's bread, the children had full bellies again.



A Load of Old Cobblers... continued

Next week Spriggy would be in the same boat so the process was reversed. A regular treat of the time would be a slice of Bonnaker's Hairy bread pudding, so named from the furry surface coating of something related to penicillin.

Aagh, no viruses in those days, with a natural resistance built up from childhood.

Daughter Elsie who married lodger and bicycle repair man James Wood, kept The Bell Inn at Headless Cross from 1921 to 1925. The Cherry Wake fair people, being late 'getter uppers', used to come around the back and have their breakfast in an old tin shack. The parents of the shop keepers from across the road came and lodged upstairs at the back of the pub.

The old tin bath hanging up at the back did sterling service, although the kitchen was out of bounds depending on whose bath night it was. Pubs in those days were full of characters.

One such local used to have a pint of Guinness into which he plunged a red-hot poker for extra enjoyment. In October 1925 Elsie's sister Ada and husband Alf Locke took over the tenancy for two years.

A list of fixtures and fittings appears in the Pub book by Alan Foxall, as does the eventual sale of the pub for £2000 by brewers Charringtons in 1926. Elsie had two daughter, Doreen (my mother) and Jessie.

This extract of my ancestry is but a thin slice of the cake.

I hope that you have enjoyed sharing it with me.

The memories of old Redditch are dying fast and must be recorded for those who follow.

Whilst in lock-down why not put pen to paper and record your story. Your work will not be marked out of ten and occasional mistakes etc only add to the authenticity and enjoyment.

The formation of a new Redditch Local History Museum is under way and plans to have drop-in sessions to record your memories.

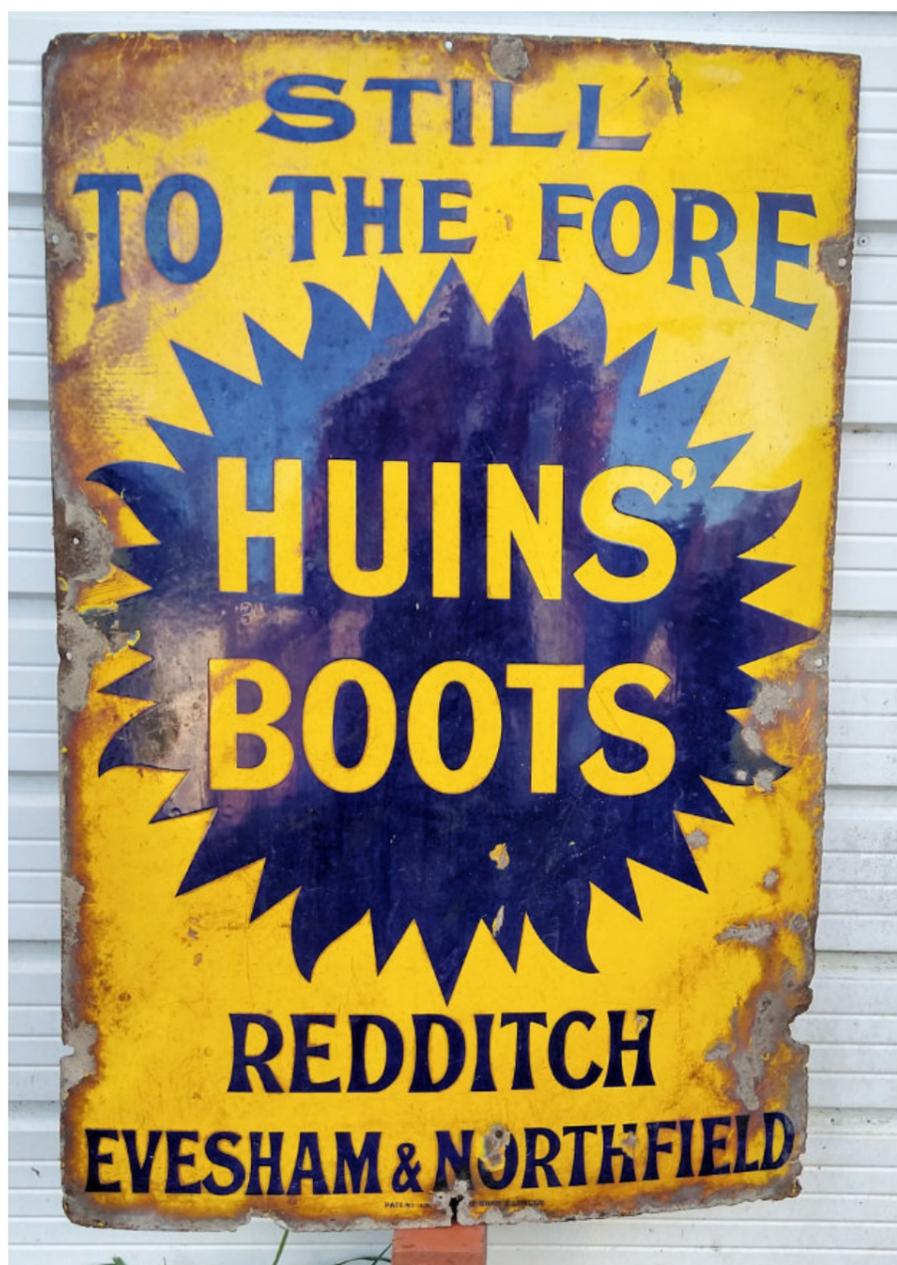
Whichever way, sharpen that biro now.

In Cheltenham on holiday, I called into a shoe shop named HUINS, yes part of the Redditch one.

The local paper was being digitised. Charles Messenger was in fact run over, (a Fly is a nippy horse drawn trap).

Taken home with the vicar present, he was thought to be dying, the next day he was up as bright as a button.

It was all in the local paper and made a great headline.



Growing up in Hunt End and Crabbs Cross

by John Braden

I was born in 1945 at Hunt End in a row of cottages called "Yew Tree Cottages". These were situated just down the road from Weavers Hill, which is opposite the Red Lion. You go down the hill that runs on from Weavers Hill. There is a house there now called Yew Tree House.

The Cottages comprised of a row of 4 and one at right angles with the row. We had shared outside toilets, except the one at right angles, they had their own. We used that one if we could, because it had a smoother seat. The soil cart used to come round in the early hours to empty them.

There was a Well in the front garden which we all had to use.

We had a grocery man called Harry Boycott used to come round every week in his van and a bread man in a car with all the bread stacked on the back seat.

At that time my Dad was working at the Royal Enfield until he got made redundant and then the Alkaline Batteries.



Batteries Limited in Enfield Road (1931)

Mother did various part time jobs over the years from cleaning to fishing tackle.

I went to Astwood Bank School, which was quite a walk, but in the summer months we took a short cut across fields past an Abattoir and came out just below the school.

Opposite the cottages were all fields and we looked out over them. All gone now, thanks to the Redditch Development Corporation.

Going up Enfield Road from the Red Lion was a small shop on the other side and opposite was the Dunlop Tyre factory. Opposite that was a row of Council Houses and opposite that was Brooke's wood yard.

Growing up in Hunt End and Crabbs Cross.... continued

Further on there was another small shop and Enfield Road ran on to Crabbs Cross Lane.

Turning Right the first thing encountered is the home of one of our famous residents, John Bonham of Led Zeppelin fame.

Further on was a Council Estate which I moved to when we left Hunt End, it consisted of Priestfield Road, Beech Tree Close, The Fearnings and Lee Croft Road.

We moved into the last Bungalow in Priestfield Road, again opposite fields which are now covered in houses, thanks again to the Development Corporation.

Going back to Enfield Road as you came out of it and went straight across was an area called Littlewood which ran up to the main Redditch to Astwood Bank Road by the Fleece Hotel. Going up at the beginning on the right were allotments and opposite was an Estate of prefabs built by German prisoners of war and towards the top is St. Peters Church where I was christened.

I went then to Crabbs Cross School, which is still there now. I then went to Lodge Farm Secondary School in Studley Road Redditch. (having failed my 11 plus) Oh dear!! I enjoyed most of my school days but was glad to leave.

I left school at 15 years of age and started my first job at a small printer called Redditch Printing Company in Littleworth, Redditch (a much less reported street) as an apprentice.

I had to do the menial jobs to start with, like cleaning the ink rollers and sweeping up. It was then owned by Ernie Gordon until John Tuckey of Studley who took over.

A little further down Littleworth was a larger Print Works.

I was a member of Astwood Bank Boy's Brigade for a few years, which was very enjoyable until I started to spend more leisure time in Redditch. We had three Cinemas then The Danilo, The Gaumont and The Regal (flea pit) we used these quite a lot then.

There wasn't much to do in those days so as soon as you were old enough (or a little younger) we tended to use the pubs and play Darts and Dominoes. Most of those establishments have gone now (thanks again to the Development Corporation)

I got married in 1967 and lived at the top of Mount Pleasant opposite The Park Inn, (very convenient). Next door to a Jakeman who owned Regent Motorways in the Town.

In 1970 we decided to move to Norfolk after we had seen what the Development Corporation were going to do with our lovely Town.

Having said all that I don't think the Town has changed for the better, but I think that would come from people like me who knew it as it was.

As you will notice after what I have written the Development Corporation have a lot to answer for. If it hadn't changed I think I would still be in Redditch, although I have not regretted moving to Norfolk.

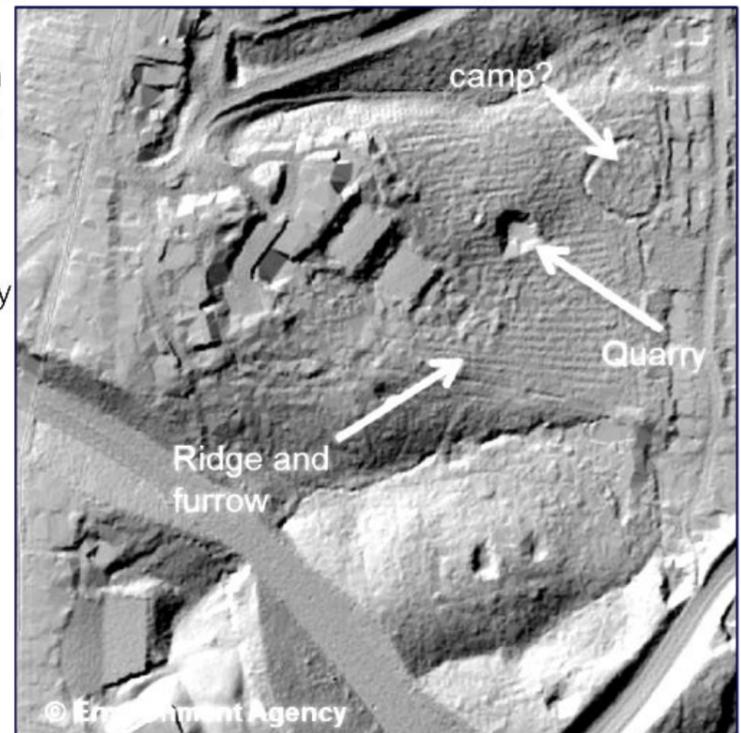
LIDAR Opening up the Landscape

by Anthony Green

Airborne LIDAR (light detection and ranging) measures the height of the ground surface and other features in large areas of landscape with a very high resolution and accuracy. Using laser Such information was previously unavailable, except through labour-intensive field survey. Because LIDAR uses light beams it has the potential to penetrate gaps in the canopy and so record the ground surface under trees and vegetation. This can reveal features that would not otherwise be seen, so providing archaeologists with the capability to recognise and record otherwise hard to detect features.

I first came across LIDAR when I was researching material for an exhibition/presentation I was producing on the history of the local area before Redditch existed i.e. from the last ice age, 12,000 years ago, to the dissolution of the monasteries, 500 years ago. At that time LIDAR was expensive to access and I was kindly allowed to use this image by Worcester University Archaeology Department.

However, since 2015, as part of a move towards open data access, the Environment Agency have made all the LIDAR data they have flown freely available through the government data portal. <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/f0db0249-f17b-4036-9e65-309148c97ce4/national-lidar-programme>



A big advantage of LIDAR for archaeology is that it makes the surface of an area more visible than any other method other than expensive surveys or archaeological digs. This makes it ideal for an 'armchair archaeologist' such as myself!

As a volunteer at Forge Mill Needle Museum and Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre, I give tours of the Bordesley Abbey site. This includes visiting the site of the gateway chapel, walking up to the viewpoint next to the boundary fence/ditch, and down to the Abbey Church site. This is, of course, only a small part of the site but does take an hour to complete. When looking across the site it looks very much like the Google Earth view below.

However, using LIDAR gives a completely different aspect of the area.....SEE OVER!

Right:

Google Earth view of the Bordesley Abbey precinct.

This covers nearly 100 acres and is one of the most important monastic sites in the UK.

Much of it has not been excavated and to most local visitors it will be seen as a large field with a few ruins.



LIDAR Opening up the Landscape continued

The image below gives more or less exactly the same view of the Google Earth view on the previous page. Forge Mill Needle Museum and Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre, Forge Mill Road, the River Arrow, the boundary/fence by the Redditch Cemetery, and the road leading onto the 'Sainsbury's Island' can be clearly seen.

What is really interested is how it shows the extent of Bordesley Abbey.

In the centre/left of the image is the exposed portion of the Abbey Church. Only a small part of this is currently visible, much more was excavated. But it is possible to see how extensive it was.

Below the Abbey Church can be seen the outline of associated buildings which included kitchens, refectory, infirmary etc.

To the right of this area was the industrial area and the triangular earthwork which contained the mill pool of one of the earliest metal working mills ever found in the UK.

Next to the boundary fence/ditch separating the precinct from the Redditch Cemetery can clearly be seen the 'ridge and furrow' field pattern typical of Medieval times. Examples of this is rare in Redditch due to modern developments. As this is high ground for the area, it is likely that farming was here before the Cistercians and, since it has been relatively untouched for 1,000 years there is still much to learn.

I have looked over the rest of the Arrow Valley Park using the LIDAR maps but there is nothing to see.

This is not surprising as the Redditch Development Corporation carried out much construction work.

In the central area they excavated an enormous area to create the Arrow Valley Lake, canalised the Arrow, and built car parks and a visitor centre. In the southern area they built the Bromsgrove Highway, Morrisons supermarket, a housing estate by Ipsley Church and scoured the surface to produce football pitches and leisure areas.

We are fortunate that Redditch Development Corporation understood the importance of the Bordesley Abbey site and set out to protect it from encroachment. It is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 to be of national importance.

