

June 2022 Meeting

Hi All,

We had an excellent talk by Pat Witherspoon entitled 'The Wag Woman'. This was a relatively light-hearted perspective on education and the problems related to school attendance.

We had 31 at the meeting which included 25 members and 6 visitors.

Sadly, I have two comments related to the general 'Health' of the Society.

1. Our membership and support, at the moment, is insufficient to maintain our overall costs. We are currently running at a deficit and using our reserves to keep the Society in positive territory. We have never tried to build up big reserves as we have always tried to maintain the best value for members and have also relied on members to give talks which, obviously gives no cost to the Society. However, we are all getting a bit older and it is becoming more difficult to maintain this balance. We are certainly OK at the present time and into 2023. However, it is likely that, at this time next year, we will need to review our funds/current situation to see if we can continue into 2024.
2. During the 'lockdown' I steadily increased this Newsletter from 2 pages to 8 pages, and I had much support from members and supporters in maintaining this level of document. However, this has become increasingly difficult and it now a problem for me to find material to fill eight pages. I have managed it for this edition but future editions may be reduced to four to six pages depending on the input supplied,

On the remaining pages of the Newsletter, we have:

On page two is the 'Coming Events' section.

- Next months presentation : Is a talk on Monday 11th July 2022, by yours truly, Anthony Green, entitled 'Queen Elizabeth II, the Royal Family and Redditch - 70 years our Queen'.
- Forge Mill Needle Museum - Sat 9 July 2022m - a fun activity - THE ABC OF WINE
- Bromsgrove Summer School 12th to 14th July. This is newly restarted after the pandemic.

On page three and four

Pages three and four is a report on the June presentation by Pat Witherspoon entitled 'The Wag Woman'.

On page five and six

This article concerns the mystery of the Royal Enfield Room (Band Hut) in Langley. It comes from Chris Flood, who is the CEO of the Sandwell Irish Community Association, and he is researching the history of the Band Hut for the purpose of obtaining a grant to renovate the site and provide a wide range of facilities.

On page seven and eight

June 2nd was the Queens platinum jubilee and it is worth remembering the Her Majesty The Queen visited Redditch in July 1983. This month I have put in some images of when she opened Forge Mill Needle Museum.

Next Meeting...

Our next Meeting is on Monday 11th July and the meeting begins with a talk by, yours truly, Anthony Green, entitled 'Queen Elizabeth II, the Royal Family and Redditch - 70 years our Queen'.and there is more on this presentation on Page 2.

The meeting will be, as always at the Oasis Christian Centre starting at 2.00 pm.

Coming up.....

Next Meeting is on Monday 11th July at 2.00 pm

A presentation by Anthony Green entitled:

Queen Elizabeth II, the Royal Family and Redditch - 70 years our Queen.

This has been a very special year for our Queen, who has celebrated 70 years as our Monarch and, of those of us not so young we have memories of the day that she became Queen and the celebrations that took place at the time.

In this presentation I have looked at how Redditch has celebrated and has been involved in these events from when Elizabeth's father, George VI became King, and activities related to that, to wartime, and on to the Coronation celebrations of 1952.

We had an important visit by the Queen's sister Princess Margaret to Redditch in 1962, when she visited the new Redditch Council development of Abbeydale and the British Needle Factory in Victoria Street. This was captured on film by Midlands News.



The ultimate accolade for the town was the Queen's visit to Redditch in 1983. She visited the newly opened Kingfisher Centre, walked down Alcester Street to the Town Hall for lunch, opened the National Needle Museum at Forge Mill and visited Hymatic.

This presentation looks at the story of the Queen from birth to today and incorporates Royal visits and activities in the town during that time.

Forge Mill Needle Museum - Sat 9 July 2022m - THE ABC OF WINE

Join the team for a fun and engaging wine tasting experience within the atmospheric covered cloisters area.

The ABC of Wine – not only an introduction to wine tasting, but reference to the phrase 'Anything But Chardonnay'. This wine tasting will challenge your preconceptions of wine and include some top tips for your next supermarket visit as well as help you pair the right wines with the right foods.

Tony Elvin of the Wine Events Company will coach you through the basics of tasting, looking at quality, aromas and tastes.

You'll taste six different wines including examples of grape varieties from different countries, discovering the impact that climate, food and production methods can make on the taste of the wine in your glass. Info at <https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/events/>

Bromsgrove Summer School 12th to 14th July

The Bromsgrove Summer School makes a welcome return, offering courses over three days, 12-14th July, celebrating the rich agricultural, industrial, architectural and cultural history of Bromsgrove and district.

This year's topics are

- Alvechurch – a Market Town. Tutors Prof. Chris Dyer and Dr. Stephen Price
- The Talbots and Grafton Manor. Tutor Jenny Townshend
- Redditch - Needle-Land. Tutor Julian Hunt

See website <http://www.bsoc.co.uk> for further details

or book via Eventbrite.



Report on June Presentation by Pat Witherspoon

'The Wag Woman'

A light-hearted perspective on the history of Education.

When I do a presentation, I rely on a large number of images to talk to, and I am impressed by those who can stand in front of an audience with just a few notes and just talk.

This presentation by Pat Witherspoon was such a presentation, where she kept her audience's attention for nearly an hour talking about her experiences as an Education Welfare Officer.

This was living history and after giving some history of the origins of the post in education Pat launched into entertaining tales of her experiences in the role.

It is very difficult to make notes during such a presentation and so I asked Pat if she could provide me with any notes, which she did. These are the outline notes and do not illustrate the range of stories in the presentation. I will mention those at the end....

During her talk, Pat mentioned, and showed examples of, school attendance medals. These were popular in Victorian and Edwardian schools - largely fell out of fashion after the First World War.

They are collectors items and I found some examples on the web (right)



Pat's Story.....

'It took me a while to discover a career I ended up loving.

Here is a little history, the 1870 Education Act introduced the 1st truancy officers and we were/ have been called many names: in South Wales= the whipper-in; in Tipton = the trotter man/woman; but mostly the school board man and the WAG MAN/woman.

The 1st Truancy officers were called 'visitors' and collected information about families and the lives of the poor, they were seen as a symbol of interfering officialdom, nothing has changed in some areas.

In the 1870's researchers revealed poverty which severely jolted optimism e.g., Agricultural workers earned about 14/6 pw; bread and potatoes were the staple diet.

Workplace accidents/injuries were frequent, there was no state support, no wonder children were not at school= they worked or younger child minded.

There was no segregation of pupils by age, sex, ability, and parents paid 3d – 9d, plus books, shoes etc.

Truancy schools were established at about the same time, in 1886 12,000 summonses were issued in London alone! Not much changes.

I became an Education Welfare Officer in the 1970's, transferring from Housing management where I had dealt with tenancy problems, strangely enough I found I was dealing with the same families.

Report on June Presentation cont.....

I had no knowledge of truancy (hands up if you have) I had never played the wag. When I told my 11yr old son about my new job he burst into tears saying he would not be able to face his mates.

I was learning!!

My first school was Cape Hill, Smethwick opposite M&B's brewery, on Tuesdays the air was filled with the aroma of hops and yeast. I loved it.

The comparison with the previous century could not have been closer. Surrounded by poor housing, unemployed and low paid workers, poor health and hygiene, education was not everyone's priority.

There were also large numbers of immigrants mainly from the Indian subcontinent.

A definition of truancy is absence from school without permission only a Headteacher can authorise, NOT a parent. Absence because of illness with parental agreement preferably by letter is ok. I finished my career, working as Head of service in Solihull.

I said nothing has changed not strictly true. There is more publicity about truancy, fines are bigger and some on the spot, there are Parenting Orders and Education Supervision Orders,

I took out the 1st Supervision Order and Parents can be imprisoned. I guarantee there will always be truants, but we must never give up, we owe it to all our children.

There was/is humour in the job occasional sadness and some success.

Over many years myself and other Education Welfare Officers have collected absence notes and messages I would like to share with you.'

Pat then treated the audience to a range of the notes and messages which she had accumulated during her career, some funny, some sad and, some both.

She also mentioned meeting some of her troublesome charges later in life who had succeeded quite well despite having a bad start. This included Paul, an habitual truant, who, when on holiday in Tenerife, she found him successfully running a bar

At the end of the presentation Pat suddenly said that she had missed something that she intended to mention. This concerned a visit to Buckingham Palace.

I made some notes at the time and I have reproduced below what I managed to write.

It is a bit 'dry' as it does not have all Pat's many asides, but it is nevertheless an interesting addition to the story.

In 1989, there was an event at Buckingham Palace to mark one hundred years of state education. Pat was asked to represent Education Welfare Officers nationally, and, although there were Education Welfare Managers, she was the only officer.

She received a telephone call asking who to address the invite to. Pat was not married to John at the time, and she said her name was Mrs Fenton and her partner was John Witherspoon.

She was told that was not possible to have partners it had to be one name. Obviously, she was quite annoyed, but she later received another call saying the matter had been resolved.

When the envelope containing the invite came, she was living in Smethwick at the time, and it was addressed to Mrs and Mrs J Fenton Witherspoon.

It was Princess Anne at the event, and she had already met her when Princess Anne did a drug programme at Chelmsley Wood, and Pat really liked her. Pat and John were therefore introduced to her on this occasion and as Mr and Mrs J Fenton Witherspoon.

THE BAND HUT - Langley

Royal Enfield Room (Band Hut)

It is really fascinating to have contact from organisations outside our region with completely unexpected requests.

This comes from Chris Flood, who is the CEO of the Sandwell Irish Community Association, based in Langley park, and is researching the history of the Band Hut for the purpose of obtaining a grant to renovate the site and provide a wide range of facilities.

If you have any information which can help to explain why the 'hut' in Langley should be called the Royal Enfield Room, that would be fantastic!

The Langley Band used to rehearse in the old Royal Enfield Room but vacated it about 7 years ago and now meet elsewhere.

Chris Flood writes....

'We have always referred to this building as the band hut, but we have recently been made aware of the original name of the building.

Langley band was established in 1888 and were responsible for the building's construction in 1908.

The majority of band members were all local tradespersons and were a powerful group of individuals, it is rumoured, it was built without permission, but this group of individuals had such influence that no complaints were raised when it was in place.

The design of the building would have been revolutionary at the time, as it includes a Belfast roof. For the band this served two purposes one it provided a larger space to rehearse and two it allows for excellent acoustics which exist to this day.

The original design was to be used for aerodromes, as it did not need pillars and therefore provided larger working space.

It's worth remembering; in 1908 powered flight was still in its infancy, so this building; historically, is unique.

We are looking at the history of why the Royal Enfield room is so named. We are examining to see if there is a link with the Royal Enfield motorcycle company, which was formed in 1901 by Albert Eadie and Robert Walker Smith.

We are also exploring any links, there may be with Lee Enfield rifles, as we believe Albert Eadie was also one of the directors of the Birmingham Small Arms company, which made this weapon.

Our hope is one of the owners had been a band member or had a significant link with the group.

This is a structural refurbishment, which will consist of a sympathetic renovation of the external and internal structure of the building.

The restoration will be matched as closely to original spec as we can.

We will carry out a full life cycle analysis (LCA) to map carbon and other product use, it will provide a cradle to end project scrutiny and help in product choice and sustainability.

This is an acknowledgement of the importance of the building, and historical values of this structure. The goal is making it fit for purpose and to future proof its existence.

We do have photographic evidence owned by a former Langley band member, which we will use towards our sympathetic restoration.

THE BAND HUT - Langley Cont....

We have consulted with several groups' individuals, and the local authority there is a strong consensus to restore the building and bring it back into community use.

We will continue to consult with the community to make sure project stays relevant and as many people as possible are part of the decision-making process.

The outcomes of those conversations we have held so far; has helped us formulate several ideas for the possible uses of the former Langley band hut, (Royal Enfield room), base at Langley Park: these include.

1. Oral history hub

This will create a permanent centre to hold recording and collated stories of the reminiscences of Sandwell.

Voiced by local people, it will show how each community has impacted the changing cultural landscape, it will contribute to a regional and national archive of recorded sounds and dialect 'from the Osses mouth'.

It will highlight the ever-changing demographic of our area, shining a light on the rich tapestry of cultures, and our communities, sharing their journeys and exposing their importance to Sandwell and our diverse histories.

2. A recording facility for choirs, songwriting, poetry and radio plays etc...

Utilising the beneficial aspects of the 'Belfast roof' it delivers an exceptional auditory space with good, natural acoustic, the building provides a unique working area creating an opportunity to cater for more 'Roots' artists, musicians, although not exclusively acoustic, it can cater for more niche markets which include spoken word or folk music/art.

We have undertaken research and there are plenty of studios around with the standard 'rock' or 'electro' live room/control room set up. With this idea it will add another unique aspect to our plan and provide a facility for a broader range of user.

3. Radio Jingles, Talking Books, sound fx, Information/Translation Services.

The space can provide a multiple variety of provision and services.

4. FOLEY work for film makers/videographers.

This will provide a unique opportunity to learn a transferable skill in filmmaking and theatre; we would look to work with our local provincial theatre group to help share these skills.

Foley is the reproduction of everyday sound effects that are added and used in films, video, and other media in post-production to enhance audio quality. footsteps to squeaky doors and breaking glass. flying overhead, and traffic noise.'

The visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Redditch on the Tuesday 5th July 1983

A Step back in History - the official opening of the Forge Mill Needle Museum



It was over 600 years ago the last reigning monarch visited Redditch. That was in 1328 when Edward III came to see Cistercian monks at Bordesley Abbey

But in 1983, 655 years later, the Queen could have almost retraced her predecessor's steps as she officially opened Forge Mill, which is only yards from the site of the Old Abbey.

It was a double celebration for all connected with the historic needle-making mill for on Wednesday just a day after the Queen forged another link in the town's history, the museum's doors were opened to the public.#

PLAQUE

The Royal guest opened the mill and museum by unveiling a plaque and then rang a bell to set the water wheel in motion. The plaque reads: "National Needle Museum, opened July 5 by Her Majesty the Queen."

She met all those who had put their time, hard work, and effort into getting the buildings ready, including museum manager Bryan Gee. Forge Mill guide Mr John Luty, Redditch Amenity trust development officer Mr Jim Martin and trust chairman Derrick Higgs.



The visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Redditch on the Tuesday 5th July 1983 cont....



Mr Luty explained some of the static displays in the museum to the Queen before chairman of the Forge Mill Trust company. Mr Tony Jeffs presented Mr Oliver Gray and his two sons who told how they restored the old water wheel and its drive.

NEEDLES

The Queen saw scouring shop with scouring beds operation and met Les Jakeman, a former employee of Forge Mill who used the machinery years ago, Mr Bernard Lee, who is well-known for his associations with the old needle industry, and Mr Stan Wright, a relative of the previous owners of Forge Mill.

EXCITING

Mr Bryan Gee, museum manager explained how busy he and others had been in preparing for the big day.

Just hours before the Royal guest was due, he said "the Queen's visit was proving very exciting.

"It is a once-in-a-lifetime happening and I am confident everything will be ready on time."

Mr Gee added he had plenty of 'experience in this field. "I get a gut feeling if there is anything wrong, but I have opened enough places like this to know that this time, we are home and dry."

All text from the Redditch Advertiser Report of the visit.

