



MERRY CHRISTMAS



We had an excellent turnout for our December meeting with an attendance of 43. This consisted of 41 members including 3 new members who joined on the day, and 2 visitors.

We were not able to have our planned speaker, Ron Gallivan, due to illness, but Graham stepped in and gave us an excellent seasonal talk on Christmas Traditions.

I am really pleased to say that Elizabeth has volunteered to be our new Chair. It is not good for the Society to have one person doing multiple roles, particularly when they are the principal officers. Elizabeth is currently one of the signatories of our cheques so that means that the signatories will now be Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.

We do not have a meeting in January 2023 and our next Meeting will be on Monday 13th February 2023 and the presentation will be 'Wayside Wonders and Country Curiosities – local items of historic interest which people overlook' by Dr. Richard Churchley. Richard is an excellent local speaker, and this is a good start for our 2023 programme.

This will be our last meeting in this room. Oasis have found that, with the cost of energy, that they cannot maintain the preferential terms that they have given us, and the cost of this room will increase beyond our resources. However, they are keen to support a community group such as ours, and have given us preferential terms for the 'Reeves' room for our meeting. This room, where we have our post meeting refreshments, has an overhead LCD screen for presentations, suitable audio equipment and seating for 50+. It also has, obviously, tea and coffee facilities.

On **page 2** there is, yet again, a copy of next years programme. If you have not picked one up at our meetings, it is at our website at <http://www.redditchhistorysociety.org.uk/meetings.htm>

On **pages 3 and 4** there is a review of the December presentation by Graham.

On **page 5 and 6** is an essay by Sue Tatlow on Private George Fredrick Irish (27465) of the 14th Gloucestershire Regiment.

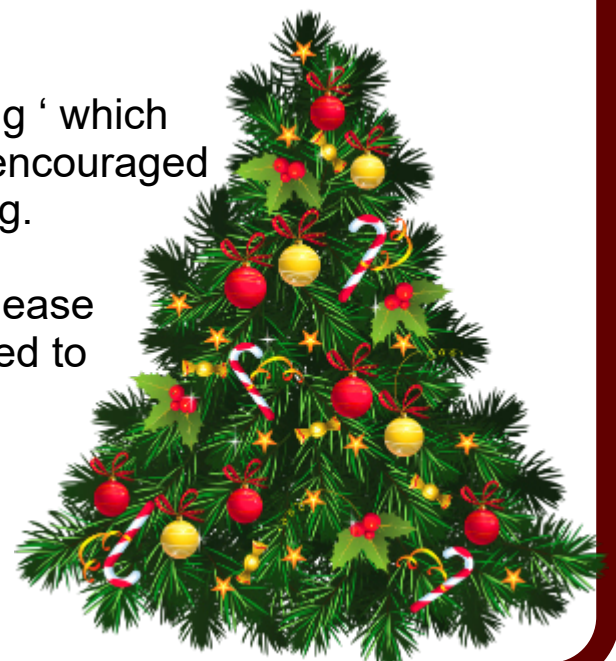
On **pages 7 and 8** is an article 'Redditch Library - An Iconic Building' which looks at the history of Redditch Library and I hope that you will feel encouraged to support retaining our library/archive services in the current building.

If you have stories, reminiscences, memories related to the town, please contact me. I am happy to turn this into an article which can be shared to anyone interested in the town.

Take care, stay safe and have a Merry Christmas.

Anthony Green, Society Secretary
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Coming up



Programme 2023

13 th February	Wayside Wonders and Country Curiosities – local items of historic interest which people overlook	Dr.Richard Churchley
13 th March	Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of Redditch, Bromsgrove and Birmingham	Tim Bridges, The Victorian Society
17 th April	Annual General Meeting plus local history film(s)	Society Executive
15 th May	Winterbourne House and Garden, Edgbaston A general introduction and history	Henrietta Lockhart, Curator (Museum Collections)
12 th June	Exploring the past – the Excavations in Beoley in 2021	Nina O'Hare, Learning and Outreach Manager,
10 th July	It's Not about Shakespeare: Aspects of ordinary life in Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1775-1915	Val Horton, Author
14 th August	From Brum to Bringsty Common: Tales of a Wartime Childhood	Bill Machin
11 th September	'Remembering the Batteries' Nickel-cadmium industrial battery manufacturing in Redditch from 1918 to 1993	Anthony Green
9 th October	A walk round Redditch using old postcards: Looking at the areas off the main road	Chris Jackson
13 th November	From Common to Posh: The History of Church Green to 1900.	Graham Smith

Our meetings take place at the Oasis Christian Centre, 4 Plymouth Road, Redditch, B97 4QB

Meetings begin at 2.00 pm and last for approximately 2 hours, it begins with a presentation, which lasts about one hour, and this is followed by refreshments and society business, event news and project reports.

Non-members are welcome for whom there will be a £3 entrance charge. This is refundable against the membership fee if subsequently joining the society the same day.

if planning to attend a specific event, please check our web site, our Facebook page, or monthly Newsletter for meeting details and any changes.

For further details of the Redditch History Society visit: www.redditchhistorysociety.org.uk

E-mail: contact@redditchhistorysociety.org.uk or telephone the secretary at 01527 61434

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Report on December presentation 'The Story of Christmas Traditions' by Graham Smith.

Graham Smith gave an entertaining talk entitled 'The Story of Christmas Traditions'. In a well researched presentation he looked at the history of 10 Christmas traditions including Christmas food, trees, cards and crackers. The ten Christmas traditions described by Graham were.

1. Mince Pies
2. Christmas Dinner
3. Christmas Pudding
4. Christmas Crackers
5. Christmas Cards
6. Christmas decorations
7. Christmas Trees
8. Carol singing
9. Pantomimes
10. Father Christmas

Graham illustrated how many of these traditions were either pagan festivities which were absorbed into the Christian tradition, were imported from outside cultures or were the creation of the very active Victorian 'entrepreneurs'.

As an example, among the wide range of examples illustrated by Graham, the first Christmas Card was actually produced on behalf of the post office and cost 1/- shilling. They sold 1000, but only 21 exist today. They cost ½ d (d is one old penny!) to post.

Graham, included in his presentation many questions for the audience, both obvious and obscure, to keep everyone entertained. Some answers were obvious, but others, certainly, not so clear.

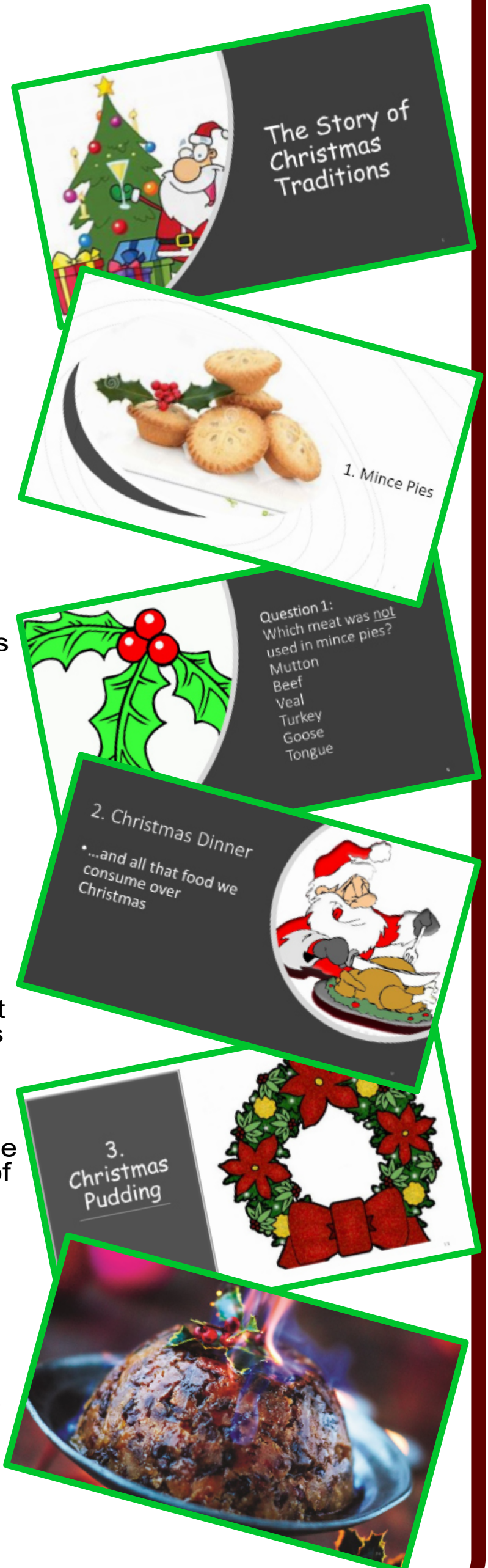
It is generally recognised that our Christmas is based on the vision of Christmas created in Victorian times. It is true that Victoria and Albert, coupled with the stories involving Christmas by Charles Dickens produced our typical Christmas image.

Graham spent some time on Dickens, who became known as 'The Man who invented Christmas' due to the many books he wrote which involved Christmas. It is of interest to note that A Christmas Carol, a novella by Charles Dickens, was first published in 1843, which was the same in year in which the first Christmas card was published.

To illustrate Dickens, Graham gave a reading from Dickens short story 'Mr Pickwick's Christmas' which I have reproduced on page 4.

However, as Graham admirably demonstrated there is much more to the story of Christmas than our modern commercialisation.

This was, as we have come to expect, a well researched presentation from Graham which was well appreciated by our audience.



Report on December presentation cont.....

From the centre of the ceiling of this kitchen, old Wardle had just suspended with his own hands a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same branch of mistletoe instantaneously gave rise to a scene of general and most delightful struggling and confusion; in the midst of which Mr. Pickwick with a gallantry which would have done honour to a descendant of Lady Tollinglower herself, took the old lady by the hand, led her beneath the mystic branch, and saluted her in all courtesy and decorum. The old lady submitted to this piece of practical politeness with all the dignity which befitted so important and serious a solemnity, but the younger ladies not being so thoroughly imbued with a superstitious veneration of the custom, or imagining that the value of a salute is very much enhanced if it cost a little trouble to obtain it, screamed and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated, and did every thing but leave the room, until some of the less adventurous gentlemen were on the point of desisting, when they all at once found it useless to resist any longer, and submitted to be kissed with a good grace. Mr. Winkle kissed the young lady with the black eyes, and Mr. Snodgrass kissed Emily; and Mr. Weller, not being particular about the form of being under the mistletoe, kissed Emma and the other female servants, just as he caught them. As to the poor relations, they kissed everybody, not even excepting the plainer portion of the young-lady visitors, who, in their excessive confusion, ran right under the mistletoe, directly it was hung up, without knowing it! Wardle stood with his back to the fire, surveying the whole scene, with the utmost satisfaction; and the fat boy took the opportunity of appropriating to his own use, and summarily devouring, a particularly fine mince pie, that had been carefully put by, for somebody else.

Now the screaming had subsided, and faces were in a glow and curls in a tangle, and Mr. Pickwick, after kissing the old lady as before-mentioned, was standing under the mistletoe, looking with a very pleased countenance on all that was passing around him, when the young lady with the black eyes, after a little whispering with the other young ladies, made a sudden dart forward, and, putting her arm round Mr. Pickwick's neck, saluted him affectionately on the left cheek; and before Mr. Pickwick distinctly knew what was the matter, he was surrounded by the whole body, and kissed by every one of them.

It was a pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick in the centre of the group, now pulled this way, and then that, and first kissed on the chin and then on the nose, and then on the spectacles, and to hear the peals of laughter which were raised on every side; but it was a still more pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick, blinded shortly afterwards, with a silk-handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into corners, and going through all the mysteries of blind-man's buff, with the utmost relish for the game, until at last he caught one of the poor relations; and then had to evade the blind-man himself, which he did with a nimbleness and agility that elicited the admiration and applause of all beholders. The poor relations caught just the people whom they thought would like it; and when the game flagged, got caught themselves. When they were all tired of blind-man's buff, there was a great game at snapdragon, and when fingers enough were burned with that, and all the raisins gone, they sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs to a substantial supper, and a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary wash-house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible.



Private George Fredrick Irish (27465) 14th Gloucestershire Regiment by Sue Tatlow

George was born in 1891, According to the Census in Redditch to Joseph and Elizabeth Irish he had an older brother John and a sister Alice. Joseph Irish was a Labourer his father John Irish had been a Blacksmith on Church Green in 1875.

George's mother was original from Gloucestershire and had married Joseph in the Winchcombe Wesleyan Chapel in 1882, Joseph died in 1905 leaving Elizabeth a widow. In 1911 census show the family were living in a back-to-back in Britton Street. Elizabeth is a laundress while Alice is a fishhook bender. The two boys and the Lodger Victor Cull where carters, they may have all worked for Fredrick Irish who lived in Edward Street the next street along and he had a shop. In the 1911 Census he is described as a Shop Keeper and Huckster; the later probably meant he bought to resale.

On 27th of April 1913, George was working near where the new school was being built in Bridge Street when some young boys ran up saying that they were playing and a boy who had been with them had fallen into a deep ditch.

George ran to the spot and jumped into the 14-foot deep and 2-foot-wide water filled excavation he found the boy and managed to hold him above the water until help arrived. The boy was given artificial respiration and survived.

George was awarded the Albert medal for life saving on land, this was a forerunner of the George medal, he travelled down to London where he was presented with the medal by King George V himself at Buckingham Palace.

The Carnegie Trust also presented him with a watch for saving the life of the boy, both medal and watch are still the family they are now in the care of Alice's grandson.

In 1914 when the war broke out George and his brother was working as carters, George. In 1916 conscription was brought in to supple more men for the war effort.

Military tribunals were set up to hear appeals against conscription into the armed forces. The man or employer could appeal either that they were doing work of national importance or for domestic reasons to be exempt from military service.



Above: The Albert Medal for Lifesaving was a British medal awarded to recognise the saving of life. It has since been replaced by the George Cross.

The Albert Medal in gold was abolished in 1949, being replaced by the George Cross, and the second class of Albert Medal (in bronze) was only awarded posthumously. In 1971, the Albert Medal was discontinued (along with the Edward Medal) and all living recipients were invited to exchange the award for the George Cross. From the total of 64 eligible to exchange, 49 took up the option.

Below: Bridge Street School in 1913. This provided schooling for the local area. The name was changed to Holyoakes Field School which was based on the name of the Methodist Chapel financed by local needle manufacturers of that name. The Chapel was demolished in the 1960s and a new school has opened with the same name in the Brockhill area.



Private George Fredrick Irish (27465) cont....

George Irish was called up, his case was presented at the Redditch Military Tribunal on March 13th, 1916, his employer Fredrick Irish appealed for an absolute exemption, but this was 'not allowed' by the tribunal, and George was given to the 30th of March to join up.

There is no mention in the 'Redditch Indicator,' of the case, however Fredrick Irish appealed against the verdict, the appeal would have been heard near the end of March but by that time George had already joined up. The tribunal report in the 'Redditch Indicator' of March 25th says,

"An appeal came up for a hearing in respect of a carter employed by Mr Irish, Redditch. It transpired however that the man had already enlisted."

George had joined the 14TH (Service) Battalion of Gloucestershire Regiment; they recruited in both Bristol and Birmingham. This was a Bantam Battalion, recruiting men who would have been rejected for being too short earlier in the war.

Few of Georges military records survive so we can only piece together his short service record from the fragments. After he did his basic training, he was sent to France. George would have arrived during the Battle of the Somme which had three phases the last the Battles for the woods. The Battalion was part of the 35th Division, which took part in an unsuccessful attack on a German post near Arrowhead Copes on the 22nd of August 1916.

This is the Date that George was killed in action, it may have been here that he died but without records it can't be certain.

Like so many others his body was never identified or found to be given a named grave in one of the many Commonwealths Cemetery's that are in the region. However, his name is on the Thiepval Memorial pier5A and 5B and on the memorial cross outside St Stephens Church in the Centre of Redditch. He is remembered in the family as Alice's much loved little brother, before George went to France, he visited his sister and held his new baby niece in his arms.

The family story has always been that as George was in a reserved occupation he should never have been called up and that his employer had made an error when filling in the form.

Georges Medals have been passed on to Alice's Great grandson and he will continue to tell Georges' story.



George Frederick Irish AM



Redditch War Memorial

Redditch Library - An Iconic Building

Anthony Green

The original public library in Redditch was established in the 1930's using the buildings of the Technical and Scientific Institute originally built in the 1850's. By the time we reached the 1960's Redditch Council decided that a new building was required to support the increasing size of the town and, after, looking at a multitude of options, they chose the John Madin Design Group, to produce a design for a new purpose-built library in the centre of the town.

John Madin was a significant figure of post-war Birmingham architecture. John Madin's work, however, extends far beyond the bounds of Birmingham, including projects as diverse and far afield as the master plan for Telford new town, the Yorkshire Post and Mail Building, the radio and television complex (in association with Marconi) in Zagreb, and the Wardija Hill Top Village in Malta.

There is an excellent overview of John Madin <http://www.john-madin.info/> which has a link to a free 132 page illustrated downloadable pdf book which can be found at

http://www.john-madin.info/downloads/John_Madin_Architect_Planner_ebook.pdf

This is an excellent introduction his work and achievements. Using John Madin illustrates the pride that Redditch Council had in the town at this time and how they wanted the best for the town,

So, Redditch Council wanted something that would reflect the needs of the town. They wanted to create a building which would support the heritage and educational needs of the town well into the future and allow further expansion of the facilities.

The site chosen was in the area of the old 'Regal' cinema close by the junction of Alcester Street and Red lion Street. It was constructed over the period 1974 to 75.

Meanwhile, the Local Government Act of 1972, which came into law in 1974, moved control of libraries from local councils to county councils. Fortunately, the contact had been agreed and the design and construction of the new Redditch library continued as planned.



Above: photograph of Redditch Library (probably by Local History Librarian Philip Davis) shortly after opening in 1976. As can be seen on the left the road still continued in Red Lion Street and the Town Hall had yet to be built.

Below: two images from the e-book 'AN ILLUSTRATED RECORD JOHN MADIN ARCHITECT & PLANNER'. Please see text for details

1971-76

Central Library

Redditch, West Midlands

Client: Redditch Urban District Council

Public Services & LG Appointments: 1975 Feb 25

Architects Journal: 1975 April 2

The Times: 1976 March 16

Redditch Indicator: 1976 September 17

Building Design: 1976 November 5



Fig 5 - Redditch Central Library (c1976)



Fig 6 - Redditch Central Library

Redditch Library - An Iconic Building cont.....

Pictures by Philip Davis

Top: the entrance with the inclined ramp for disabled visitors.

Top -1: view from the 'check-in' desk of the lower floor fiction and popular non fiction area.

Middle: View of the middle floor non-fiction area.

Bottom +1: View of the local history department.

Bottom: Story time in the basement meeting room.



In the Pevsner Architectural Guides: Buildings of England, Worcestershire, it is described as a strongly modelled brick design. Three storeys, the top one windowless. Rectangular pillars allow a covered walkway along the street, becoming free-standing at the SE entrance end; here the top floor cant out above two square oriels. Within, an access ramp like a narrow sloping open courtyard, and further spatial delights: views in from the NW stairs, out from windows in unexpected locations.

When it was opened Redditch Public Library was one of the most advanced in Worcestershire. It had a Children's Library, a Music section, a Local History section, a Fiction and popular non-Fiction section, and a Fiction section. Each with their own dedicated area and librarian. The Local History section, in particular, had a fireproof muniment room where important archives were kept.

Over time, of course, with restricted local government funds, these facilities have been reduced and since the Cameron/Osborne austerity government of 2010, this has accelerated. Since 2010 Local Government spending power has reduced by nearly 20%, at least 846 libraries have closed and tens of thousands of professional librarian posts have been lost..

The area of the building used by the Library has steadily diminished and large areas are sublet to other organisations. The local history section closed and all archives were moved to the basement storage area.

Today, there are a group of enthusiastic volunteer archivists who are unearthing the cornucopia of Redditch history which resides in the basement. These archives need to remain in the town as the 'Hive' have made it clear that that do not have the storage available.

In my view it would be tragic if the Redditch Library building was to be demolished and there appears to be no good reason to do so.

Worcestershire County Council, who own the building, are currently asking for residents views. Please visit:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/redditchlibraryconsultation