

March 2023 Newsletter

Hi All,

Our March meeting, was opened by our Chair, Elizabeth Simpson who welcomed members and visitors.

Our March presentation was by Tim Bridges of the Victorian Society who gave a well researched illustrated talk on Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of Redditch Bromsgrove and Birmingham.

We had an excellent attendance of forty-three members and thirteen visitors making a total of fifty-six at the meeting. This was one of our best attendances for a very long time and is nearing the limit for the 'Reeves Room'. If we continue at this level, we may be able to afford the additional cost of moving back into the main Church for our presentations.

On **page 2** We have information on forthcoming events including our next meeting on Monday 13th March 2023 which is our Annual General Meeting, a tribute to Pat Witherspoon, who sadly died last week, and an overview of the current exhibition at Forge Mill Needle Museum.

Pages 3 and 4 Is a report on the March presentation on 'Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of Redditch Bromsgrove and Birmingham' by Tim Bridges who is Conservation Adviser to the Victorian Society covering casework on Victorian and Edwardian buildings in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

On **page 5 and 6** Graham Smith has produced part 2 of a series of three articles which are inspired by the BBC television series by David Olusoga 'A House Through Time'. In this latest part Graham reveals his choice of house and begins the story.

On **page 7 and 8** I have produced an editorial using an article concerning the description of Redditch in 1776 by Joseph Monk by JM WOODWARD (1832-1899) in 1886. This is not Monk's description but describes the work required in turning Monk's archaic English into the 'modern' 19th Century version. This is complementary to Graham's fascinating series.

If you think that there is something that should be mentioned in the Newsletter, forthcoming events, for example, or you have a short article you could produce, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am sure that members have items of interest to other members and those interested in the history of our town.

Take care, stay safe and look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

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Coming up



Our next meeting on Monday 17th April 2023 is our Annual General Meeting

The annual general meeting, which is probably the least interesting of our meeting for many members is, in many ways, the most important.

It is here where we elect our Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and members of the executive committee, we decide our programme of events for the next year, and, obviously, without these actions the Society could not exist.

The format for the meeting is that the current Chair (Elizabeth Simpson), Secretary (Anthony Green) and Treasurer (Graham Smith) give their annual reports and this is followed by the election of officers for the current year.

Our current officers have agreed to continue in their posts and Pat Bushaway is happy to continue as speaker organiser. The other elected members of the management committee, Sue Tatlow and David Spyer are prepared to continue in their roles.

Our Independent Accounts Examiner, Gil Barlow, is also happy to continue in his role.

Of course, if anyone is interested in being involved in the management of the Society we are pleased to welcome them. There is no limit to the size of the Management Committee, so we can add more members, and if anyone wishes to put their toe in the water we can create deputies for all the roles, Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Social Media, Website Manager, Newsletter Editor, Speakers Programme. You name it - we have it!

The Annual General Meeting will be followed by some short films related to the history of our town.

Pat Witherspoon - Sad News

Sadly, Pat Witherspoon has passed away.

She was an active and very supportive member of the Society and everyone so enjoyed the presentation which she made to us last year about the 'Wag Woman'. She was in our thoughts this week, at our meeting, when we had heard that she was unwell.

She has been a very positive influence, for many years, about the heritage of the town and often attended events at Forge Mill Museum to provide support for the work of keeping the history of the town alive.

She will be sadly missed by the Society and our thoughts are with her family at this time.

We have sent a card of condolence to the family from the Society.

Forge Mill Needle Museum and Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre



Latest Exhibition: SOCIAL QUILTS – QUILTS FOR CAUSES

Friday 10th March to Sunday 16th April 2023

In this exhibition, Jane Corbett shares her wonderful collection of quilts that were made for specific causes.

These quilts offer a fascinating glimpse into a previously unexplored area of quilting social history.

We see how the early 19th century missionaries influenced certain applique and patchwork motifs in Hawaiian quilting, and how a Canadian Maritime Women's Club used quilting to make a lasting historical record of the group and its members in the 1930's.

:MAIN SEASON - 1 MARCH TO 31 OCTOBER 2023 - OPENING HOURS

MUSEUM, SHOP and VISITOR CENTRE Monday to Sunday: 10.00am to 4.00pm, GROUNDS and COFFEE BAR Monday to Sunday: 10.00am to 4.30pm

For further information and details of the exhibitions for 2023 please visit <https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/exhibitions/>

Entry to Forge Mill Needle Museum includes three free return visits. So that you can see four exhibitions for the price of one.

March Meeting Report

'Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of Redditch Bromsgrove and Birmingham' by Tim Bridges

Our speaker today was Tim Bridges, who is Conservation Adviser to the Victorian Society covering casework on Victorian and Edwardian buildings in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Originally from Warwickshire, Tim read history at the University of Exeter for a BA and medieval studies at the University of York for an MA.

The Victorian Society campaigns to preserve and promote interest in Victorian and Edwardian architecture and heritage built between 1837 and 1914 in England and Wales.

The Society was founded when, in 1957 Anne, Lady Rosse, the granddaughter of Edward Linley Sambourne, summoned a group of thirty-two of her friends, who included John Betjeman and Nikolaus Pevsner, to consider the possibility of founding a Society for the preservation and appreciation of Victorian architecture and the arts. Despite the chosen name, the Society would also have within its remit the Edwardian period, up to the outbreak of the First World War. John Betjeman became the first secretary.

Equivalent organisations to the society for the protection of the heritage of earlier and later periods are the Georgian Group (for buildings erected between 1700 and 1840) and The Twentieth Century Society (for post-1914 buildings). Tim mentioned that the 20th Century Society is particularly concerned about the destruction of our iconic Public Library to create a 'plaza'!

Right from the start, the Society strove to avoid over-emphasis on London. Throughout the UK, the great Victorian cities were under perhaps even greater threat than the capital.

Predating the current political trend for regionalisation by some forty years, Regional Groups were set up, initially in Liverpool and Manchester, to carry out casework and mount their own campaigns; we now have eight such groups, giving the Society its distinctive federal character.

After the initial failures at Euston and elsewhere, the tide gradually began to turn in their favour. When British Rail wanted to knock down St Pancras Station in 1966, the station was instead listed at Grade I. In Liverpool the Albert Dock was saved and converted.

The Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham was made a Conservation Area in 1981. As the shortcomings of the brave new planning of the 1960s became all too apparent, people began to regret the loss of the terraced streets and of the communities that had lived in them.

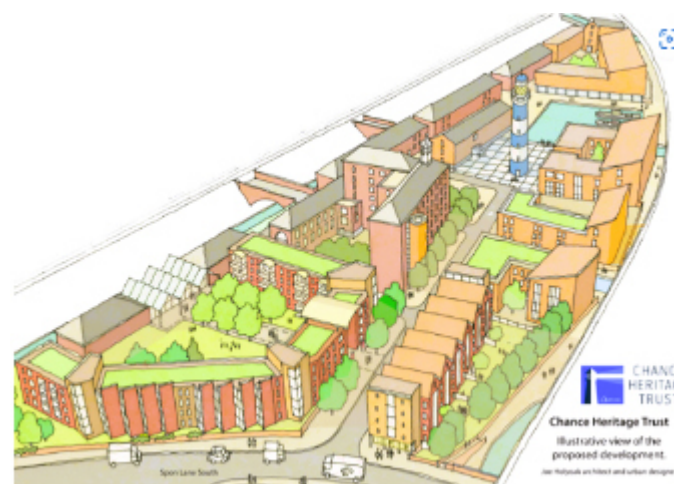


Above: An early loss - Euston Arch, London. Demolished in 1962 despite a campaign to rescue it. A trust is now looking into rebuilding it!

Below: St Pancras Station rescued from demolition and restored. Now the terminus for the Eurostar and other mainline services.



Below: The Chance Heritage Trust have ambitious plans with a heritage-led regeneration of the Chance Glassworks site in Smethwick. As this is a large and complex site Trust is breaking down the activities into phases.



March Meeting Report cont.....

Tim gave many examples of building which have been protected, or not, in the local area. An amusing example was the original Victorian Birmingham Library which was opened in 1865 and rebuilt in 1882, it was demolished in 1974 and was replaced by a new purpose built library with 'state of the art' facilities designed by John Madin Associates, the designer of Redditch Library. This was then closed on 29 June 2013 and was replaced by the new Library of Birmingham. This illustrates the continually changing landscape for good or bad.

However, this summary, may appear a bit negative as Tim gave many examples of successes for the Society in the West Midlands.

These included industrial, commercial religious and public buildings.

There is a tendency to see Victorian architecture as the 'gothic' period, but there are many 'arts and crafts' examples of architecture which have been protected and, as Queen Victoria had such a long life, the architecture over the time had many changes.

In terms of our own town, the preservation area encompasses Church Green and Alcester Street.

There are some attractive buildings within the area. St Stephens Church, for example, was designed by Henry Woodyer (1816–1896) an English architect born in Guildford, Surrey, England, Whilst at Oxford, he became involved in the Anglican high church movement and throughout his career he saw his work as an architect as a means of serving the church. The old post office and the old library in Church Road are fine examples of Victorian architecture.

Church Green also includes Church Green East, and Graham has part 2 of his story of a house in Church Green later in this Newsletter.

It is difficult to listen to the presentation, make notes and produce a summary. The more interesting the presentation the more difficult it becomes and this review is very much what I took from the presentation.

Clearly, in this short overview of the presentation I have found it difficult to do justice to the breadth of information supplied. Tim was a very knowledgeable speaker, after answering many questions, he spent time talking to individuals after the presentation. The audience appreciated his presentation.



Above: Redditch 'Old Library' was originally The Literary and Scientific Institute building and built in 1885. It was extended forward in the 1930s when it became Redditch Library. It ceased that function when the New Library was opened in 1976.

Below: Smallwood Hospital, built in 1894, was the town's hospital until the Princess Alexandra Hospital was opened in 1985.

Both these buildings are part of the town's heritage and currently need a new purpose.



Above: St Stephen's Church completed and consecrated in 1855 dominates the town centre and is a landmark which can be seen from many miles around.

A House Through Time

A Series of three articles by Graham Smith

Part 2: The Early Days of Number 17

In the last newsletter I shortlisted three properties on Church Green East with one to have the House through Time treatment.

Beech House at the northern end was occupied by one family – the Warrins – from its creation till the 1930s and so does not qualify.

Edwin Smallwood's house is too small and he was the main occupant for most of the 19th century and is, therefore, also ruled out. That leaves Webb House and that is the one that I have chosen



Webb House is a Georgian style house with three floors and a basement.

Today it is number 20 but it was number 17 in the nineteenth century.

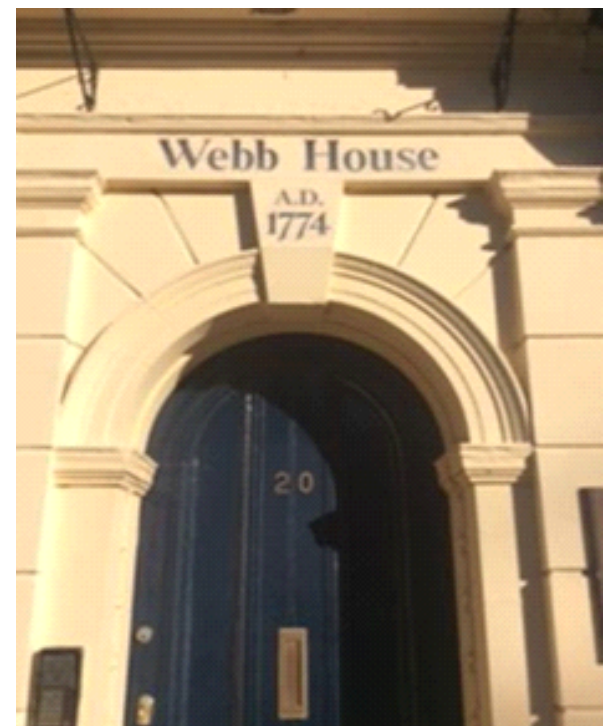
It was named Webb House when it was modernised in the 1980's as a tribute to the Webb family who had occupied it in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The construction of the building is given as 1774 if the date over the door is to be believed.

A source of proof lies in the 1776 account by Joseph Monk, a primitive Methodist preacher and needle maker, who toured the town and later wrote down all the buildings and people he saw. Monk wrote: "...

Leaving these there was no house till we come to Mr Peakman's house where was a Wire Drawing Mill". In the 1980s Norman Neasom used Monk's description to draw the famous sketch of the town which placed Mr. Peakman's house where Webb House stands today. (See partial sketch later in article).

Wire drawing was the first process in the making of needles and fish hooks. Coils of iron wire from the Black Country or Sheffield would arrive at Mr Peakman's mill.



The wire had to be drawn down to the correct thickness and this was achieved by winding the wire through a series of holes of diminishing diameter in a metal block known as a worple plate.

This was a highly dangerous task because as the wire got thinner it could snap and recoil to cause serious injuries.

It is likely that Peakman also cut the thinned wire to the required lengths which is always that of two needles.

Peakman clearly made substantial money from his work as he owned, and was later able to sell off, blocks of land from behind his house. Today, this road is Peakman Street.

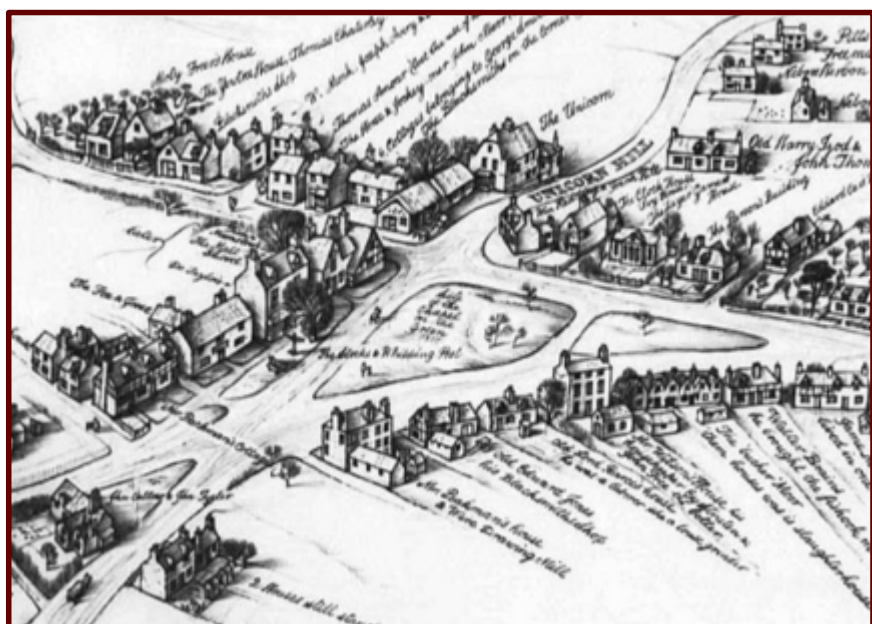
A House Through Time Part 2 cont.....

Peakman died in 1839 and the house then became the property of Benjamin Sarsons. By this time the house was number 17. Sarsons was a maltster and corn merchant. Like many of the businesses on the Green Sarsons' home was also his business premises.

A maltster's job is to use cereal grain to make malt. The grain is soaked in water where it is allowed to sprout; it is then dried by laying it out over a floor and placing in a kiln which stops further growth. Malt is used in brewing beer, making whisky and in certain foods. There were a number of maltsters in the town at this time, providing malt and beer for the local taverns.

The Beerhouse Act of 1830 allowed any ratepayer to brew and sell beer on payment of two guineas (£2.10). It was passed to increase competition between brewers and to encourage beer drinking instead of spirits such as gin. It was thought that the price of beer would fall as a result of increased competition. The Act became very controversial as local magistrates lost their lucrative control of regulating the trade in alcohol. Also, the Act did not apply to existing public houses and it was said that it led to more drunkenness.

Redditch in the 1820s and 1830s was quite a lawless place and drunkenness was a serious problem, and it is arguable that the Act contributed to this situation. The Act was passed during the reign of William IV and this resulted in many taverns being named after him. He remains the most popular monarch among pub names.



Left:

Part of Neasom's sketch showing Peakman's House, the Fox and Goose, the Malt Shovel and the Unicorn.

Sarsons would have had no problem acquiring barley and oats for his business.

Redditch was surrounded by farms and Easemore Farm's top field came up to where Archer Road is today, just a stone's throw from his business.

He would also have no problem selling the malt or beer as there were many public houses close by. The Fox and Goose Inn was a few yards away, the Malt Shovel at the end of Chapel Green South and a little further on was the Unicorn Hotel and, after 1860, the Unicorn Tap.

At some time in the 1870s Sarsons retired and moved out of number 17 to live with his blind sister. He remained the owner of the house and business and employed a series of managers.

The census of 1881 shows that a W. J. Palmer was living at No 17 and managing the business. By this time he was described as a baker, which suggests that the nature of the business had naturally progressed from corn to bread.

All seemed to be going well until we get to 1887 when events at Number 17 are to cause shockwaves across the town. The final edition next month will reveal all.

Article concerning the description of Redditch in 1776 by Joseph Monk by JM WOODWARD (1832-1899) in 1886.

I have a tiny book entitled 'Notes and Queries' which was published in 1886. It is sadly, in a very sorry state. I believe it was edited by JM Woodward. In the book there is an article by Woodward who describes how he managed to decipher Monk's text to produced the document which is the first description of Redditch town centre. This is not a copy of the description, but an overview by Woodward.

The following account of Redditch in 1776, is the first appearance in print of a M. S. pamphlet, written , by Joseph Monk, a Primitive Methodist preacher, who died some years ago at an age upwards of 90.

Old Joseph Monk was a soft worker, living in the Round House for a considerable time; and afterwards in a little cottage in Blind Lane, near to the turnpike.

At the request of Mr. John Johnson (now living at Hunt End), he set down in writing this catalogue of all the houses in the Redditch of his early days, together with the names of those who inhabited them, and the M.S. itself is in the possession of Mr. T. O. Johnson, of the Linthurst, Park Road, by whose kind permission I am favoured , with a copy.



Above: Redditch Town Centre today - The layout has not changed much from the Norman Neasom map based on Monk's description in Graham's article (page 6)

To decipher the original has been no easy task— the handwriting is small and crowded, the spelling can get whimsical and vicious, capital letters, too, often recurring in the middle of some words, and being omitted at the beginning of others where their presence was due.

Joined to all this is the absence of punctuation, and an occasional blot which sometimes throws a doubt as to the letter or letters which it refers. Even now some words remain a mystery, though they have been submitted to several eyes and several magnifying glasses.

Redditch, in Joseph Monk's early days, seems to have consisted of a few houses scattered along the four roads leading from the Green. He first takes the right-hand side of the road from the Unicorn as far as the White Hart, then turns and keeps to the other side of the road back to the Green.

Redditch in 1776 cont.....

From this point he passes by the Fox and Goose and Muto Bredon, and from Bredon returns by the Quakers' Meeting House, and the "Fountain," and continues by the "Fish House," to the bottom of the town.

Here he again turns back and takes the other side of the Fish Hill, by the Crown to the Clock House, and then turns down into Littleworth.

Bate's Hill and the Back Hill are not mentioned as existing, nor indeed does any thoroughfare seem to be known by a name, except Harbut's (Herbert's) Lane.

Old Joseph Monk mentions five public-houses but speaks of no building for public worship (except the Quakers' Meeting House), as actually existing in Redditch.

There would of course be old St. Stephen's Chapel in the Abbey Meadow, but his perambulation did not extend so far as that.

The ' Sunday School which he names would probably be one in connection with his own religious body, then no doubt meeting for service in private rooms instead of public buildings.



Above: Norman Neasom produced a model of Redditch based on his drawing of the 'Monk map' He took a bit of 'artistic licence' as the chapel was not moved to the Green from Bordesley until 1806. The model is stored at Forge Mill Needle Museum and is displayed from time to time.

Many of the names now generally known and respected in Redditch do not appear in the M.S. pamphlet, while others are still of everyday occurrence.

The Long Crendon names are wanting, and the Welsh names are rare, but we meet with such as Ireland, Merry, Avery, Izod, Chatterley, Court, Hurst, etc. Hemming and Holyoake occur but once.

There is the name of Bartleet, too, but the Millwards are spoken of in several places, also the Moore's, and Johnsons.

The name of Sheward is now, we believe, extinct, and Peakman is in a fair way of becoming so. Of lawyer Guardner's family, only one representative exists, and the Chillingworth's have ceased to be an influential name.

From this M. S. account some families may consider themselves as belonging to the early days of Redditch, whilst others must acknowledge themselves to be immigrants.

JM WOODWARD 1886