

September 2023 - Meeting

Hi All,

We had an excellent turnout at our September meeting with a total of 46 made up of 35 members and 11 visitors. We had 2 apologies from members who were unable to attend. Our paid up membership now stands at 54 which is still short of our pre-pandemic numbers but is still encouraging for the future of the Society.

I was particularly pleased with the number of visitors who came to the meeting because of their interest in 'the Batteries'. Although it closed 30 years ago, there are still many people in Redditch with fond memories.

With regard to this Newsletter.....

On page two 'Coming Events' section.

I have given details of our next Meeting on Monday 9th October 2023 which is 'A Walk around Redditch using Old Postcards' Looking at the areas off the Main Road - a presentation by Chris Jackson. In this section I have also given the details I currently have on the Worcestershire Local History Forum Day and of the final Forge Mill Needle Museum exhibition for 2023 which runs from Wednesday 18th October to Sunday 26 November 2023 and is STORIES CAPTURED IN THREAD, by Eclectica.

On Pages three and four we have a report on the September presentation: 'REMEMBERING THE BATTERIES' Nickel-cadmium industrial battery manufacturing in Redditch from 1918 to 1993 a presentation by 'yours truly' Anthony Green - Secretary, Redditch History Society.

On Pages five and six is the second, of a three part story, of the roads in Redditch which covers the period when the Birmingham to Pershore Road turnpike road transformed the road system in the town.

On Pages seven and eight is a report on the Heritage Open Day at Forge Mill National Needle Museum on Sunday 17th September. This is something which we have been involved in for 10 years, and it has increasingly become an 'event' in the town.

You may have noticed, or not, that this Newsletter was produced entirely by myself, and, as there were so many things going on in September, is a bit later than usual.

I can always find something to write, but I would love items from members and supporters so don't hesitate to send me copy.

Next Meeting...

Our next Meeting is on Monday 9th October 2023 which is a 'A Walk around Redditch using Old Postcards' Looking at the areas off the Main Road - a presentation by Chris Jackson. The meeting will be, as always, at the Oasis Christian Centre starting at 2.00 pm.

Anthony Green, Society Secretary

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Coming up

Next Meeting Monday 9th October 2023 'A Walk around Redditch using Old Postcards'

Looking at the areas off the Main Road - a presentation by Chris Jackson

Last September, Chris gave a fascinating presentation entitled 'From Granny Locke's to the Royal Oak' A Journey through Redditch using early Postcards'.

Chris is a local philatelist specialising in the Postal History and Postcards of Redditch and the county and he has a substantial collection of local postcards, some of them very rare, which he has collected over many years.

This year, Chris has extended the presentation to cover roads which lie off the main road which runs through Redditch.

There are 93 original postcards in this presentation and this is an interesting opportunity to see how roads, many of which still exist today, have changed in the 100+ years which have passed since the peak of the popularity of local postcards.



Worcestershire Local History Forum Day

Is hosted by the Bromsgrove Society and will be on Saturday, 11th Nov 2023 from 9.30 pm to 4.00 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre, Stratford Road, B60 1AS.

Topics and speakers for the day will be:

- **The Bromsgrove Guild's Great War: Quintin Watt.**
- **Bromsgrove at War on the Home Front: Pat Tansell.**
- **Broadway - Worcestershire's Poshest Village: Julian Hunt**

There are no 'tickets' for the day - it is pay on the door £10 each, which covers the day and tea and coffee etc. The small 'cafe' run by the church staff will be open for snacks, but there won't be any lunches served. There are plenty of cafes very close by for lunch or people could 'bring their own'.

Forge Mill Needle Museum Exhibition October/November

The final exhibition for 2023 runs from Wednesday 18th October to Sunday 26 November 2023 and is

STORIES CAPTURED IN THREAD

An exhibition by Eclectica who are back at Forge Mill with a new body of work.

These artists, who are all based in the Midlands, are bound by a love of fabric and colour. In this exhibition they showcase their talent, creativity and skills to produce an amazing array of vibrant contemporary stitched textiles.



<https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/events/>

September Meeting Report.

'REMEMBERING THE BATTERIES' Nickel-cadmium industrial battery manufacturing in Redditch from 1918 to 1993.

Presentation by Anthony Green - Secretary, Redditch History Society

It is quite difficult to review a presentation which you have given yourself - other, of course, than to say it was brilliant (joke!) - so, I will do the review in the first person, rather than the third person.

This was version 9, and possibly the final version of the presentation. Members know I like to have videos and, this time, for the first time I have included videos with sound.

This is a story of particular interest to me. I worked at Alcad in Redditch for 12 years, from 1976 to 1988. This was the period of the Chloride developments, the sale to Marathon and finally the sale to Saft.

I then moved to their new owner Saft's Technical Headquarters in Bordeaux and, moving to their Marketing Department in Paris continued to take an active role in the industry for another 20 years.

However, this is not my story but the story of this Redditch Company.

In 1899, Waldemar Jungner of Sweden created the first nickel-cadmium battery, the only direct competitor to the lead acid battery, which had been invented 40 years earlier, in 1859, by the French inventor Gaston Planté. The Swedish NIFE-Jungner company expanded rapidly throughout the world and, shortly after World War 1, a young engineer, Martin Dybeck, was tasked with opening a subsidiary, in Redditch, at Hunt End.

I was fortunate, in 2010, to be contacted by Maurice Dybeck, the son of the founder Martin Dybeck, who saw the publicity for the exhibition which I was producing at Forge Mill Needle Museum in 2010.

He visited me several times including the exhibition and provided much of the material which I gave related to the Hunt End site.

Meanwhile, in 1929, the German company Varta established a new battery manufacturing company, Britannia Batteries Ltd in Redditch.

The reasons for the choice of Redditch when they had a manufacturing site in Halifax, is not known. They brought with them several brands. including Britannia, Alklum and Pertrix.

In 1936, as WW2 approached, Chloride purchased the Varta UK interests including Britannia Batteries Ltd as the German company divested itself of UK interests. This gave them the Union Street plant and the Britannia and Alklum brands.

The lead-acid activities were gradually absorbed by other companies in the Chloride Group, and they disposed of the Pertrix dry battery section. They began the production of alkaline cells mainly of the tubular type, using active materials produced by the Alklum Company (Swedish origin) of Halifax. This active material manufacture was eventually moved to the Union Street factory.

In 1938 Batteries Limited in Hunt End changed the company's name to NIFE Batteries Limited. In the same year, arrangements were made for the Hunt End plant to take active material supplies from the Britannia Company (Alklum) at Union Street. This was because Sweden was, as always, neutral in wartime and so there was a risk of supplies from NIFE Sweden.

Active material was expanded at Union Street to ensure supplies for both sites. During WW2 both sites expanded production to three shifts to satisfy the needs of the war office. So, there were 1200-1300 workers occupied on the two sites during the war years.



September Meeting Report cont....

In 1947 Nife and Britannia were merged to form Alkaline Batteries Ltd., operating from the Union Street site. The names of Nife Batteries and Britannia were retained for commercial use. Chloride continued to invest in the company. In 1966 Alkaline Batteries Ltd. began using the Alcad brand name and the Company was now employing over 1,000 people with factories in Redditch, Southampton (Bardic) and Ponthenry (S. Wales), and with local assembly in Australia and South Africa. It had sales offices and distributors in almost every country in the World. The factory buildings at the Redditch plant had, apart from some exceptions, little changed from the time of Britannia Batteries. There was no logical workflow through the plant. The owner, Chloride, was a major UK enterprise which was involved in lead acid car battery manufacture, lead acid industrial battery manufacture, battery systems and chargers, emergency alarm systems, plastic mouldings, and various unrelated activities.

I joined Alcad in 1976. I was recruited to help develop new product ranges which, if necessary, required new manufacturing processes.

During this time the site developed an innovative double needle perforation and a new multi-cranked hardware which gave significant performance improvements to the highest performing product ranges. At the same time, we moved to the European 'Din' standard with metric threads and standard dimensions, and, with the new plastic box materials, the opportunity was also taken of using a blue lid and blue logo. This defined a product image for all time and is still used today.

There was a very large investment in the buildings. The old buildings were swept away and replaced by a new set of buildings which allowed a more systematic workflow.

This was very successful for the Redditch site, but, by 1982, Chloride had financial difficulties and sold the Chloride Alcad site to Marathon Batteries. Marathon Batteries were based in Waco, Texas, and produced sintered nickel-cadmium cells. They were owned by Marathon Engineering a major US company.

Marathon retained ownership for 5 years. However, they were forced to sell many of their acquisitions, including Alcad in 1987.

In 1987 the company was acquired by the French specialist battery company Saft and the Redditch company then operated under the name Alcad Ltd. Saft embarked on a major transfer of all their pocket plate manufacture from their site in Bordeaux and Redditch became the primary manufacturer of nickel-cadmium pocket plate cells for the Saft Group.

I was soon offered the post of Development Manager for Industrial Batteries at the Technical Centre in Bordeaux and I moved there in 1988. I continued to liaise with the technical team at Redditch to co-ordinate developments.

In 1991 Saft acquired the Swedish company NIFE AB who were in financial difficulty and its brand name was changed to Saft-Nife. It was the descendant of the Svenska Ackumulator AB Jungner which had started the original Redditch company in 1918. The writing was then on the wall as the Swedish company was larger and more automated than the Redditch plant and, in 1993 the Alcad factory in Redditch was closed and the production of the Alcad products moved to the Swedish factory in Oskarshamn.

The announcement in June 1992 that Alcad of Union Street was to close completely in March 1993 shocked a town that had already seen too many redundancies in the current recession. Alcad - popularly known as "The Batteries" - had been a major employer in Redditch for 70 years, with a workforce totalling 800 in better economic times. However, Alcad was not going to close with a whimper and the management and workers organised a 'wake' to mark the occasion. So, the main site remained empty for some time, and it was eventually cleared, contaminated soil taken away and the area was 'repurposed'. All that is left is the original Eadie Manufacturing Company gate dated 1896. The gates and fencing were protected and can still be seen along the Union Street boundary.

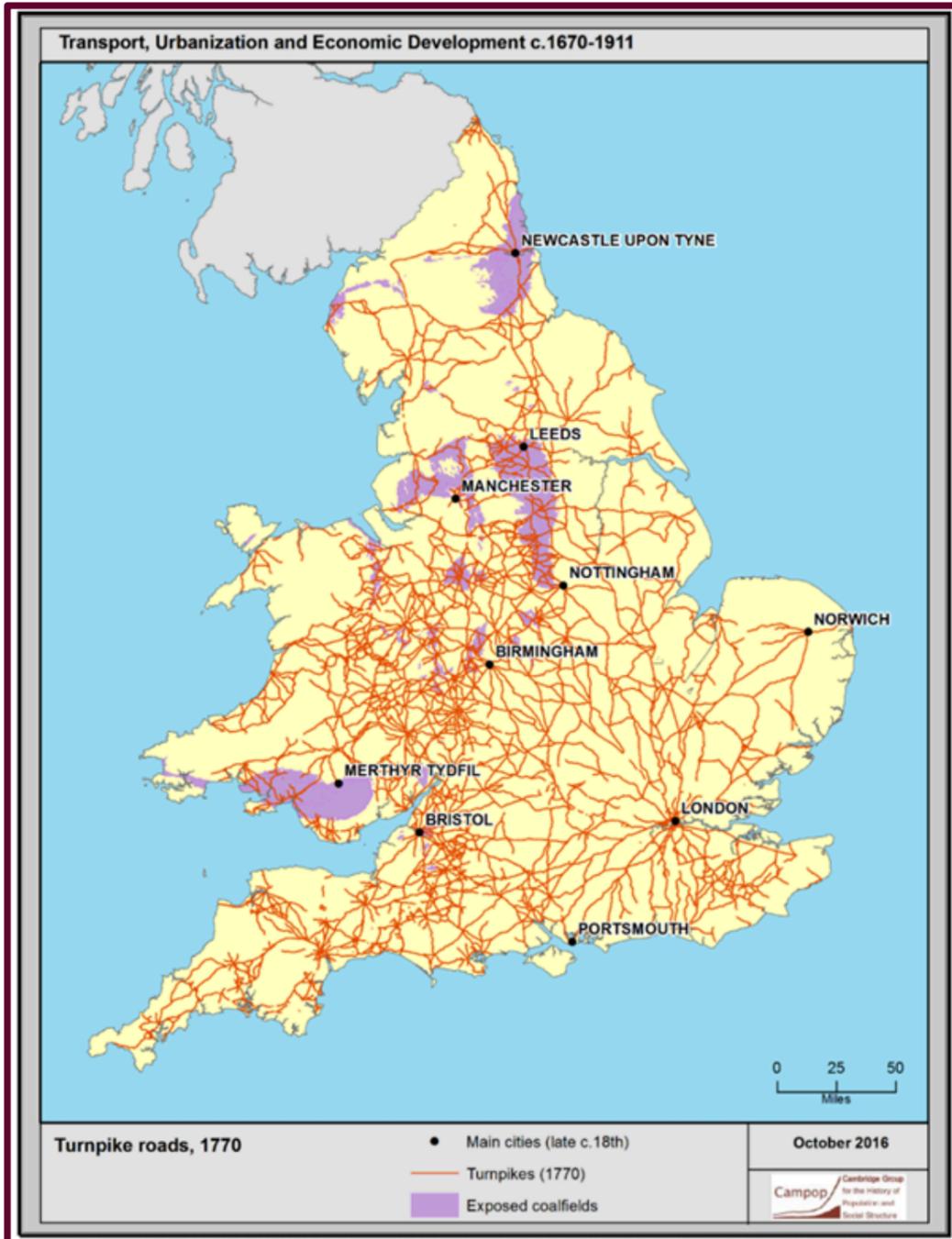
Ten years ago, on the 23rd of March 2013 we had an Alcad Reunion at the Foxlydiate Hotel with over 100 ex-employees, and wives of employees attending.

Although Alcad closed in 1993, 30 years ago, there are still many people, including me, who remember its heritage. I enjoyed preparing and presenting this talk as it is very much a part of my life. I was pleased that quite a few people came to our presentation who had a similar interest in the company. Although the 'batteries' was largely unknown in the town, it was the second largest manufacturer in the world and exported most of its products. It had a dedicated workforce, and it is important to keep its heritage alive.



Redditch Transport System - Anthony Green

Roads part 2 - The Turnpike Road : Pershore Road



Creating a network of well-maintained roads was one major achievement of 18th century England.

These highways simplified the rapid and efficient transportation of goods and passengers throughout the Kingdom.

They linked the major centres of population by highways which were, in principle, reliably financed and operated for the benefit of long-distance commercial traffic.

With the development of Redditch, after the 12th Century, there would have been links to Feckenham and other areas, but before the 19th century there were no regular road services to Redditch.

By about 1820 there were coach services to Birmingham, Alcester, and the canal at Tardebigge.

Redditch was not on any important coach route so it was not included in the initial expansion of the system.

However, the turnpike system steadily extended beyond long distance passenger/postal journeys to more commercial local journeys and, in 1826 the turnpikes came to Redditch when the Pershore Road turnpike opened.

This was originally planned to run from Birmingham to Pershore and the Vale of Evesham to primarily to provide transportation to carry produce to feed the growing city. Within Birmingham the Pershore Road ran parallel to its competitor the Bristol Road for several miles and was, in total, 15 miles long.

Due to financial problems the Birmingham to Pershore turnpike was never completed and ended at Dunnington Heath where there is, not surprisingly, a right-angled bend (and a toll house/gate).

However, despite this setback, it provided a major improvement to Redditch access roads and provided a direct and convenient route from Redditch to Birmingham.

The Turnpike Road cont....



**Route of Birmingham to Pershore Turnpike Road
(now A441) base map pre-1960**

This followed the route of the original Birmingham to Pershore Turnpike Road and, south of Redditch, it still does today.

The route to Bromsgrove in the West was via Bromsgrove Road or Birchfield Road.

The route south through Studley was along Studley Road, the route East to Henley in Arden was along Watery Lane and Icknield Street was still a route for vehicles.

It would not be until the arrival of the New Town Development Corporation in the 1960s that there would be any further major changes to the Redditch road system.

The turnpike roads had gates across the road at strategic points to collect tolls from travellers from outside the Parish.

Small lodges or cottages were built to house the toll collectors.

The Birmingham to Pershore toll road had six main gates and two side gates.

In Redditch there were two toll houses, one at the northern entrance at Bordesley (see below) and one at the southern exit at Mount Pleasant.

The life of the turnpike road through Redditch was relatively short lived as most turnpike trusts were wound up under the General Acts of Parliament between 1873 and 1878.

The transfer of resources and sale of assets to repay loans were supervised by the Local Government Board which acted as arbiter for disputes.

Tollhouses were sold, gates torn down and responsibility for the main roads passed to Highway Boards.

Bondholders were paid off with any residual funds.

After the 19th Century there is little of importance to add in terms of road changes in the town.

The main Birmingham Road, A441, still passed through the town centre (Evesham Street), continued through Headless Cross, Crabbs Cross, Astwood Bank and then to Evesham.



**The toll house at Bordesley (known as Granny Lockes
due to the elderly resident)
Sadly, demolished by the RDC in 1960s.**

Heritage Open Day - Forge Mill Needle Museum

Sunday 17th September 2023: 10.00am to 4.0pm

It is now ten years since the Redditch History Society and the volunteers at Forge Mill Needle Museum (the organisers being mainly the same culprits!) began our involvement with the National Heritage Open Days Event and it has now become a regular annual event.

It was not obvious at the beginning, but we had tremendous support from the staff at the Museum and, from the start we set out to involve local community groups. We also tapped into the resources of the National Heritage Open Days organisation, who supplied bunting, banners and other marketing aids as well as inclusion in a national advertising campaign.

Although we have not reached our level of visitors before the Pandemic (over 550), we achieved a very respectable 400 visitors on the day.



At this event, we had new contributors including the Redditch Photographic Society, who presented excellent work by their members .

This exhibition showcased work by members of the the Society and, I understand, that Forge Mill Needle Museum have offered them space in the exhibition area for 2024 - Great News!



Regulars, such as Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and the Royal Enfield Owners Club were there and, WWT had a good day with new members and promoting wildlife in the area.

The Royal Enfield Owners Club always attracts many visitors due to its historic links to the town and, although they are in much demand during the Heritage period they always give us support.



The tours of the Needle Museum and Bordesley Abbey, provided by the museum volunteers were very successful and well attended.

The Royal Shakespeare Company outreach group, had examples of costumes worn in their productions at Stratford.



Heritage Open Dy cont



Indigo Arts put on a preview of their production of Oliver, which was very entertaining. You can find more concerning the production at <https://tickets.ruddockpac.co.uk/sales/events/studio-theatre/indigo-presents-lionel-barts-o>. The talented Violettes were also there to entertain the visitors.

History Society member, John Newey, and his colleagues in the Little Radford Model Boat Club can always be relied upon to give a good display of their meticulously built model boats. They are all working models but, sadly, we do not have a suitable pool to demonstrate them in.



Arts in Redditch (AIR) are a local charity run entirely by volunteers, promoting and supporting individuals and groups to help them get creative in many ways.

They had their display in the meeting room showcasing art from various members. They also had a children's activity.



We were there, the Forge Mill Volunteers and the Redditch History Society, and the volunteers had a successful gardening stand to support the work on maintaining the plants and borders on the site.



We also had the 6 minute long video of the Queen's visit to Redditch and the opening of the Forge Mill National Needle Museum in 1983, which was continuous running in the visitor centre and it always had an audience.

There was, of course, free entry to the museum and the current exhibition.