

June 2024 Meeting Report

Hi All,

Our June meeting continued with our aim to produce a wide and diverse range of talks for anyone interested in history. In our talks we have an excellent mix between talks on local history and a wider diverse appreciation of history.

For our June meeting we had an attendance of 35 members and five visitors, so a total of forty, and we had a fascinating presentation from Louise Robinson entitled the 'History of Death Masks and Phrenology.'

On the remaining pages of the Newsletter, we have:

Page two is the 'Coming Events' section.

Our next Meeting is on Monday 8th July 2024 and is entitled 'All roads lead to Rome: The story of Roman Roads in Britain' a presentation by Alan Godfrey.

Also, on page two is an 'advert' for our book sale at the next meeting, and a mention of the latest exhibition at Forge Mill Needle Museum.

Pages three and four

Is a report on the presentation from Louise Robinson the 'History of Death Masks and Phrenology.'

Pages five to eight

continues the new series of articles entitled 'Redditch - Our Farming Heritage' which will run over four or five issues. In the next issue, July, I will be looking at the farms which existed before the expansion of the town both postwar and the New Town development.

Next Meeting.

Our next Meeting is on Monday 8th July 2024, details page 2.

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

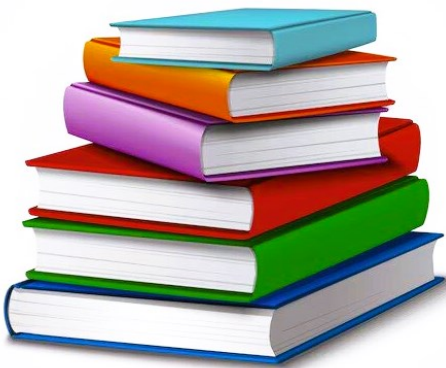
Next Meeting Monday 8th July 2024

All roads lead to Rome: The story of Roman Roads in Britain
Presentation by Alan Godfrey

In this presentation Alan, who is the Chairman of Alcester History Society, explains how the Romans built their roads and the importance of road communications in Roman Britain. The Roman method of road construction ensured the rapid communications that the Roman Empire relied upon. The 2,000 miles of metalled roads fell into disrepair after the Romans left in the fifth century and Britain had to wait until the 18th century for the roads to get back to the same standard.



Book Sale at July Meeting



We are having one of our occasional book sales next month, July, which will take place during the refreshments in the Reeves Room. There will be a wide range of titles including Redditch Local History, other non-fiction books and holiday reading. If you would like to donate books to the sale, please bring them along. All income from the book sale goes into the Society's funds.

Forge Mill Exhibition: Wed 5 June to Sun 14 July 2024

NOW AND THEN: An exhibition by Tangent Textiles

The focus of this new body of work from the creative skills of the Tangent Textile group is the diverse and unique history of both Forge Mill and the medieval ruins of Bordesley Abbey. Historical motifs, textures and colours are beautifully incorporated in their work. The group exhibit an exciting fusion of techniques which illustrates their unique style, expertise and creative strengths.



‘History of Death Masks and Phrenology’ by Louise Robinson.

For our June meeting Louise Robinson gave us a fascinating and incredibly detailed illustrated talk on the history of death masks and phrenology.

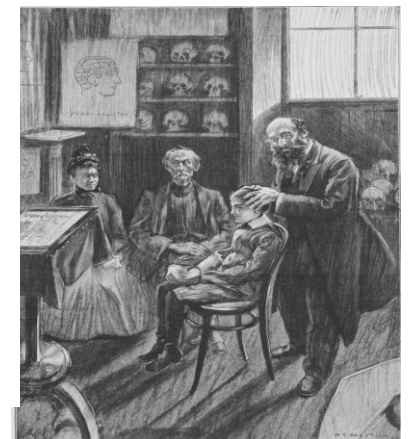
It is quite amazing how much information can be imparted in an hour and, although I began taking notes, I decided that it was not possible to give a summary of such a detailed presentation. So, I have decided on a general overview.

Louise has been a volunteer at the George Marshall Medical Museum -- a small museum based in the Charles Hastings Education Centre, on the site of the Worcestershire Royal Hospital — for more than a decade.

She graduated with a BSc (Hons.) Anatomical Studies, from Birmingham University in 1982. It was there, during her studies, that she first encountered the pseudoscience of phrenology, when it was mentioned, in passing, during a neuroanatomy lecture. It caught her attention, but her interest soon dwindled and was not rekindled until she became involved with the museum, when it suddenly took on new significance.

The museum has a fine collection of splendid death masks on display and, as soon as she realized their connection with phrenology, her interest was rekindled and grew from fascination into something more like obsession!

George Marshall Medical Museum exhibits the collection of former surgeon and GP Mr. George Marshall, showing how medicine and health care have developed over the last 250 years (ish). It has a collection of death masks of hanged criminals, a reconstructed apothecary shop and Victorian operating theatre.



Top: Classic Phrenology Head showing sections. Middle: ‘The Phrenologist’
Bottom: Display of Death Masks at George Marshall Museum



'History of Death Masks and Phrenology'..... continued

Phrenology began in the dying days of the eighteenth century when a German doctor investigating brain function, made a correlation between intelligence and bulging eyes...!

A new science was born.

Phrenologists believe that the human mind has a set of various mental faculties, each one represented in a different area of the brain. For example, the faculty of "philoprogenitiveness", from the Greek for "love of offspring", was located centrally at the back of the head.

These areas were said to be proportional to a person's propensities. The importance of an organ was derived from relative size compared to other organs. It was believed that the cranial skull—like a glove on the hand—accommodates to the different sizes of these areas of the brain, so that a person's capacity for a given personality trait could be determined simply by measuring the area of the skull that overlies the corresponding area of the brain.

Phrenology, which focuses on personality and character, is distinct from craniometry, which is the study of skull size, weight and shape, and physiognomy, the study of facial features.

True death masks had been around since the late Middle Ages, but the numbers being made increased dramatically when they became a vital scientific tool for the phrenologists, and studying the death masks of criminals became a particular fascination for both the phrenologists — and the wider public, who were especially keen to learn how to identify the 'criminal type' of head shape.

Phrenology endured into the twentieth century — but, by then, it was already on the bumpy road to scientific disgrace. But, if you know where to look, you can still find the odd death mask maker, even today...

This was a fascinating and unusual talk from Louise and was possibly outside our normal style of subjects. It was certainly appreciated by the audience and Louise had many questions following her talk on this overlooked subject -- which once touched so many aspects of daily life.

PHRENOLOGY CHARACTERS[®]



GOOD WIFE



GOSSIP MONGER



WEAK SPIRITED



CRIMINAL



QUICK TEMPER



RESPECTABLE

Redditch - Our Farming Heritage

by Anthony Green

Part 2 – the landscape to WW2

The Enclosures Act prompted a great spurt in hedge planting, mostly around the English Midlands. Many hedgerows separating fields may have been in existence for hundreds of years as the system of enclosures in North Worcestershire and Warwickshire was generally over by the end of the 18th Century.

In modern Redditch there are two factors which have protected hedgerows so allowing us to have an indication of the history of the local landscape.

- Local farms were mostly pastoral due to the quality of the land. As a result, there was none of the 'grubbing up' of field boundaries to increase field size for crop production which occurred with more productive land.
- The Development Corporation had learnt from earlier 'New Towns' that building across field boundaries caused subsidence, and so incorporated the original hedgerows into their development landscape.

So, it is possible to look at field boundaries within the new developments and compare these to early maps of the town, before the 'New Town' development.

At the beginning of the 20th Century the population of Redditch was around 14,000 and it was a small compact town surrounded by farmland. However, as we moved into the 1920/30s the town began to expand physically as the demand for more desirable houses, mostly semi-detached with gardens, emerged.



Two images from town guide of 1928/29
Left:
Foxlydiate
Right:
Ipsley



By the end of the 1930s, as WW2 approached, there were more than 30 farms in the area which is now Redditch. These were quite small, usually 200-300 acres, i.e. about 1 sq.km or one third of a square mile.

Redditch - Our Farming Heritage Part 2 – page 2

At the time of the Second World War, Redditch was very much a small town (population about 25,000) which was in middle of the countryside.

As the maps show, the names which are familiar today as districts of the town, such as Woodrow, Batchley, Winyates, Lodge Park, Greenlands, etc., were, in fact, local farms.

With the formation of the Women's Land Army the town had its influx of young ladies prepared to do their best to support the war effort and the need for Britain to become self sufficient in food.

The WLA recruits sent to Redditch worked on local farms but often would not have lodged there. Generally, they lived in the town in accommodation for war workers drafted into the town. These included several large houses in the town (men and women had different hostels) and the Abbey Hostel, which was built in the early 1940's. (This was on the site now occupied by Sainsbury's.).

By the end of 1943 Britain was far less dependent on overseas supplies as the work done by the WLA was sufficient to keep Britain in food.

The WLA continued in existence even after the war had ended. Food rationing continued after the war and the WLA was not disbanded until 1950.



Two images from WW2

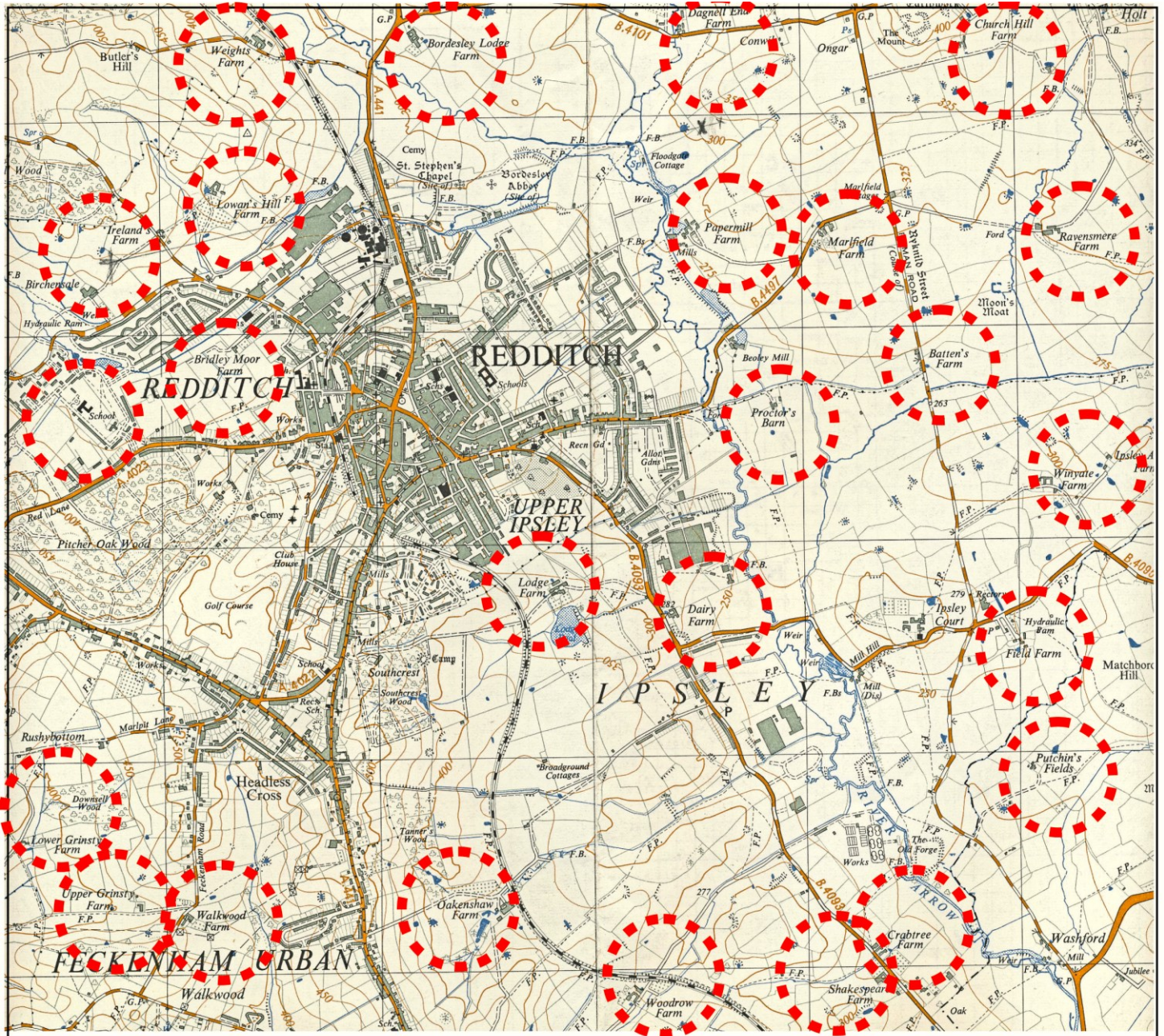
Left: Redditch Land Girls in photographed in Church Green

Right: Parade in support of agricultural workers held in the Market Place

During the time of its work, the WLA had provided 90,000 women to work on the land and had kept Britain in food for the duration of the war. Although Britain had rationing, a good, sufficient, if limited, diet was maintained - a testament to the WLA.

Image below...

Farms which existed in post-war Redditch identified by orange circles on an Ordnance Survey Map of the 1950s



The 1950s postwar map shows that the development of Batchley Estate had begun. During WW2 there would still have been a farm there, roughly where the school is marked. Bridley Moor Farm still existed at this time and the farm gate was at the top of the road, which was a cul-de-sac.

If you zoom into the pdf file using your browser it is possible to see the detail on the map.

Redditch - Our Farming Heritage Part 2 – page 4

Following WW2 there was an extensive expansion of house building by local councils to replace old, decaying and war damaged properties.

Greenlands Farm was an obvious new site as it had extensive lands each side of the Studley Road (the area now known as Greenlands) and so work began on the Greenlands Estate shortly after WW2 as part of the growth of housing development in Redditch. This also included Batchley Estate, which had begun in the late 1930s and was built on Batchley Farm and the extension of Bridley Moor Road into the Cedar Road/View complex of 'prefabs' which was built on Bridley Moor Farm. Bridley Moor Farm became Batchley Club and part of the farmhouse can still be seen today.



Bridley Moor 'Road' post WW1. The Royal Enfield had moved to Hewell Road in 1907 and at this stage the main office block had been completed as had many of the assembly buildings. However, the housing along Hewell Road (Hewell Lane at this time) terminated shortly after the Royal Enfield main block and what became Bridley Moor Road was simply the farm road leading to Bridley Moor Farm. Bottom left on the image shows the location of the local open air swimming pool on Batchley Brook. This was essentially the limit to the town and beyond was farmland.

After the post war boom in council houses there began an expansion in private housing and Ipsley Lodge Farm became the location of the Lodge Park estate. The farmhouse has long gone, but Lodge Pool continues to be a valuable environmental resource for the local population.

The farm names which existed at this time were adopted by the New Town Development Corporation as the names of the newly created districts. Thus Woodrow, Oakenshaw, Winyates, Church Hill etc are more familiar now than they would have been when they were farms. This was not a new idea for the town. Areas such as Batchley and Lodge Park were equally named after farms which existed on their sites. The age of these names often pre-date the farms, Batchley, for example was first recorded in 1464 and means 'Valley Clearing' (beac, Leah).