

## Newsletter May 2025

Hi All,

We had another successful meeting, the first after the Annual General Meeting, with a good attendance comprised of 45 members and 19 visitors, so a total of 64.

With our excellent range of speakers, and a good venue, the Society seems to be going from strength to strength.

However, the idea I had, to save myself some work, by not having a physical agenda and putting it on the screens, has not really been successful and so we will be reintroducing a printed agenda from the next meeting.

We also have a situation that our increasing number of visitors, who do not know the venue, tend to sit towards the back of the large hall. This is not conducive to good sound and vision, and we will therefore use the printed agenda to make recommendations.

Members, who have not yet paid their 2025/6 subscription, have until the next meeting to update their membership without having to complete a membership form.

On the remaining pages of the Newsletter, we have:

**On page two** is the 'Coming Events' section.

Our next meeting is on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2025 and is 'Surgery in the Nineteenth Century.' and is given by Louise Robinson. Also, we have the latest information on events/exhibitions at Forge Mill Needle Museum.

**Page 3** Is a report on the Hewell Grange presentation given at our May meeting.

**Page 4** has pictures of the Forge Mill Needle Museum 'Forties Day'..

**On pages 5 to 8** we have a fascinating article 'Rookery Boy at the Shops' by William Purser.

### Next Meeting...

Our next Meeting is on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2025 see page 2 for more information.. Our meeting will be, as always at the Oasis Christian Centre starting at 2.00 pm.

Anthony Green, Society Secretary

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# Next Meeting

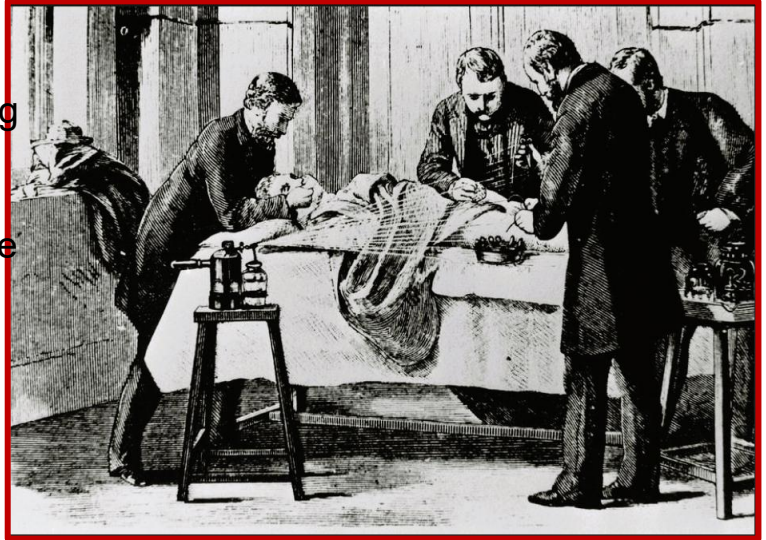
Our next meeting is on Monday 9h June 2025 and is 'Surgery in the Nineteenth Century.' and is given by Louise Robinson

Join Louise Robinson BSc (Hons) Anatomical Studies, on a journey of discovery through 19th century operating theatre practice, from a time before anaesthesia and antisepsis.

**\*\*Content warning\*\*** .The talk will include reference to surgical tools, surgery, bodies, blood, death and dying.'

Last year (also in June), Louise gave us a fascinating talk on 'History of Death Masks and Phrenology'.

This year, with her background in anatomical studies, explores the evolution of surgical techniques and the societal attitudes towards surgery during the 19th century, emphasizing the importance of understanding this history to appreciate modern medical practices.

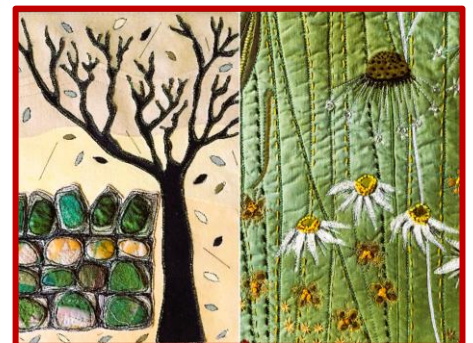


The latest Forge Mill exhibition runs from Wednesday 30 April to Sun 1 June 2025 and is MIXING IT UP, an exhibition by Eclectica. The textile group are back at Forge Mill with a vibrant new exhibition which showcases their diverse approaches to contemporary textiles. Creativity and individuality are expressed through a range of techniques from mixed media to quilting, and traditional practices to quirky innovations.

Following on from this, and running from Wed 4 June to Sun 13 July 2025 is CURIOSITY, an exhibition by The 98 Lace Group. The 98 Lace Group are creative lacemakers with members throughout the UK. They aim to challenge the traditional view of lacemaking by giving it a contemporary twist and demonstrate the relevance of lace as an artform.

Details for both exhibitions at

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





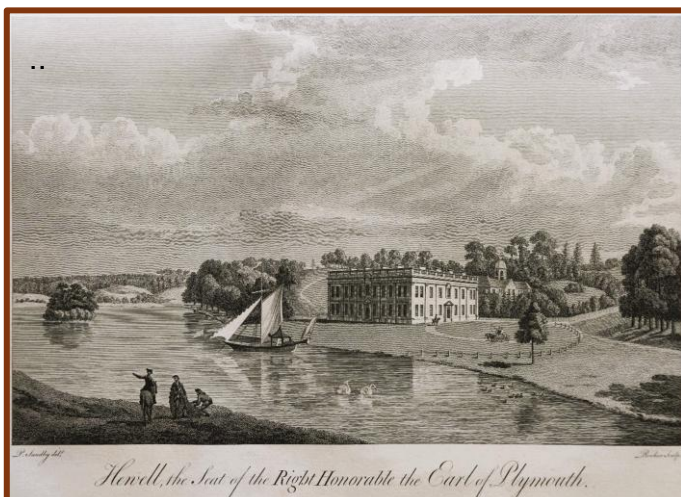
## 'Hewell Grange: Is the landscape worth the 2\* designation given by English Heritage?'

by David Whitehead, Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust.

David's talk centred around the the house, the family and the landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries and, from the point of view of the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust, the restoration of the Quarry Garden and the future potential here for the parkland and gardens.

Hewell in the Middle Ages was a grange of Bordesley Abbey on the Batchley Brook, a tributary of the River Arrow. It is assumed that the lake started life as a monastic fish pool and sometime in the Middle Ages a mill was established.

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries became the property of Henry VIII. Henry had always fancied Lord Windsor's manor at Stanwell in Middlesex, and he decided that Lord Windsor would exchange this for the Hewell estate. You did not argue with Henry VIII and so the bargain was sealed in 1592. The initial house would have been a Tudor mansion, but this was replaced by the Old Hall, which was constructed on the same site in about 1711-1712.



*Hewell Grange, (Old Hall) painted by Paul Sandby in c.1780, reproduced in Nash's History of Worcestershire (1782). 'Capability' Brown had been redesigning the lake and planting in the 1760s.*

David took us through the history of the changes and described the way the landscape had changed over the centuries of occupation by the family. In particular, the involvement of some of the most important landscape specialists of the period, including Capability Brown.

He also explained the involvement of the Hereford and Worcester Garden Trust in working with the prison authorities in finding and restoring some of the hidden landscape.

He had some amazing colour drawings produced by Repton in 1812, of how it currently looked and his proposals for change.



*The current Hewell Grange was built in 1884-1891, well away from the problems of subsidence due to the lake.*

David gave an very detailed and interesting talk which was well received by the audience. I have made no attempt to reproduce the vast detail he gave us.

If you are interested in delving further into this history, I have the following recommendations:

Wikipedia has a good history of Hewell Grange at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hewell\\_Grange](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hewell_Grange) which covers the period from the Monastery to the present day.

Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust have an excellent newsletter a on their site at

<https://hwgt.org.uk/publications/newsletters> If you go to Newsletter 59 (Summer 2022) there is an article on Hewell Grange Restoration.



# 1940s Weekend – Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th May

## Forge Mill Needle Museum

I had an empty page to fill and so I thought that I would put in some pictures of the excellent 1940s weekend which took place in glorious sunshine and had a large number of visitors. There were good writeups in our local papers, with pictures, so I thought I would take a selection of pictures from the Forge Mill Museum Facebook page.

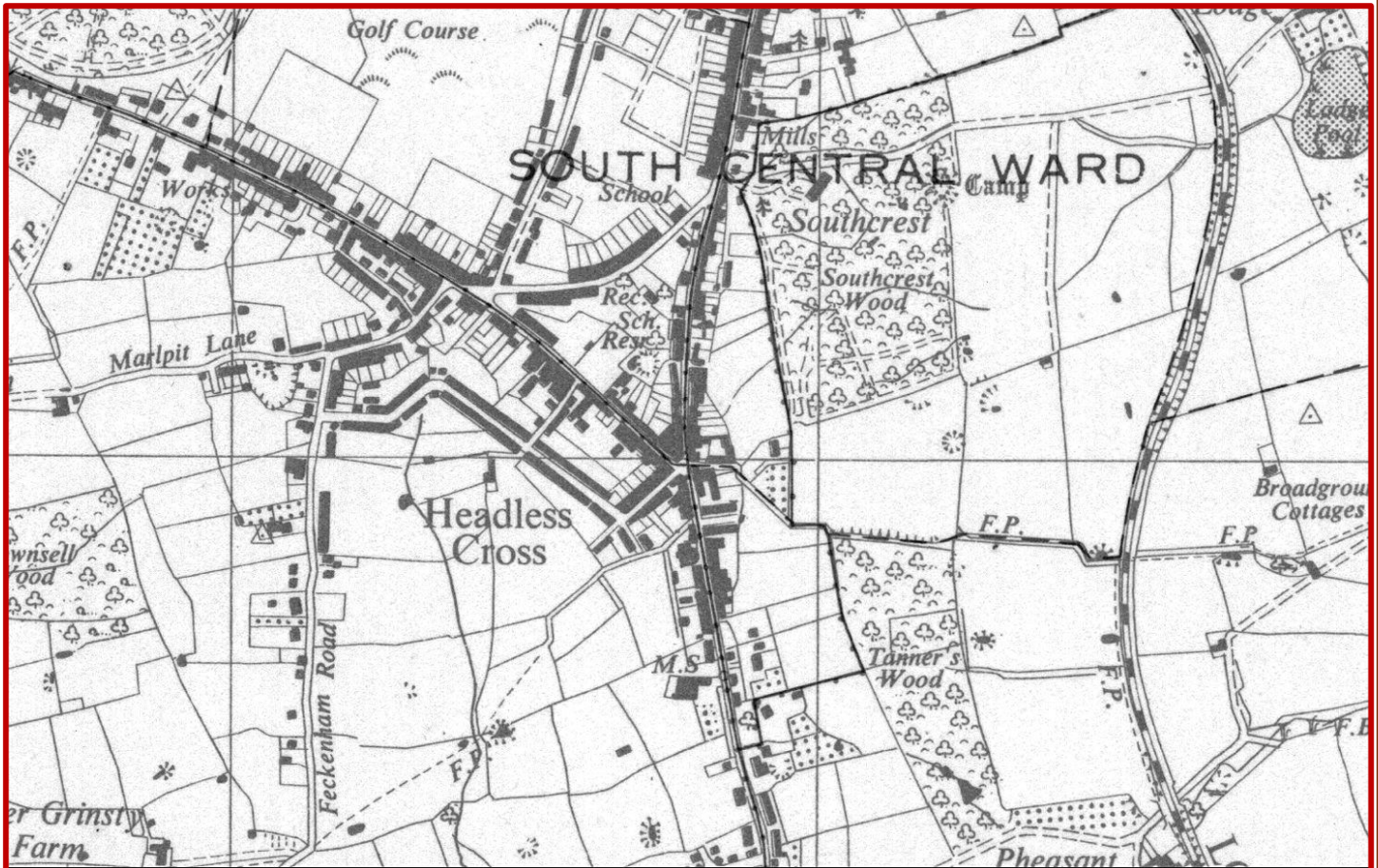




## Headless Cross – Introduction to article by William Purser

Headless Cross grew up on the ancient British route along the ridgeway (now Evesham Road) and was at the junction of another ancient route climbing from the valley from the west (now Birchfield Road).

The name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon, heao, leah, heath clearing. This then became Hedley, then Hedley Cross, Hedleys Cross and finally Headless Cross. (from The Place Names of Worcestershire, English Place Names Society Volume IV)



William grew up in Headless Cross during the war and the early post war years, and left the area when he was 18, never to return, except for the occasional visit.

The map above is an image from the Ordnance Survey 2-inch map of 1947 and is therefore very much of this period, when Headless Cross was relatively separate from Redditch.

At that time, the buildings, and shops, in Headless Cross were mainly around the junction of Evesham Road and Birchfield Road and the large housing growth we know today was only a glimmer in a developer's mind.

For reasons unknown to me, there are very few photographs of Headless Cross, and I am very grateful to Chris Jackson for allowing me to use three from his collection.

William now lives in the north-east of Scotland but remembers vividly growing up in Headless Cross and produced another fascinating tale of the period.

He would love to hear from anyone who remembers him and this period, and I will happily pass on any contact details.

## Rookery Boy at the Shops – by William Purser

The shops in Headless Cross offered a small boy a variety of adventures; there were too many to be visited all on the same expedition and some items could only be bought when the shop had them, when they were "in".

Bread was perhaps a daily purchase but did not have to be shopped for. It was delivered by the baker, Mr Bonnacher, who arrived in a small black van hauled by an equally small horse. The boy liked his loaves which nearly always had a black crust over the top.

The nearest "shop" was Mr Bridgeland's, the butcher. Small, approached by two steps down into a gallery hung not with pictures but sides of beef, pig carcasses, great loops of sausages and most fascinating of all, trays of dark, squishy things known as offal. Hanging along one wall were knives and axes sufficient to begin a small war, all shiny bright. Customers waited while their order was sawed, chopped, sliced, weighed and wrapped so the boy had lots of time to see them in action and enjoy the sounds they made.

The tiled floor was covered in thick sawdust, presumably to absorb the odd blood splash.



*This is a classic view of Headless Cross centre. Directly ahead is Evesham Road in the direction of Redditch.*

*To the left is the beginning of Birchfield Road.*

*There was no need for an island or traffic lights, just a lamp post in the centre. Most of the shops in Headless Cross were in and around this centre.*

*(Thanks to Chris Jackson for the image)*

A later memory is that of the elder Mr B marching through the town, up Mount Pleasant to his shop resplendent in his trade-mark starched blue and white striped apron ahead of his son, Cliff, who would be leading by the nose that year's champion in show, a massive bull, garlanded with his prizes. Small boys then enjoyed the spectacle and did not speculate on what happened next.

On the corner between Birchfield Road and Evesham Road was the greengrocers, run by Daisy and Noah Gardener.

Once inside what would now be called an "open plan" shop the smell of root vegetables - damp, mold, and green leaves, mostly cabbage probably, took some getting used to.



## Rookery Boy at the Shops – by William Purser cont.....

Everything was piled in heaps here and there so being served called for a sharp eye and nimble feet as Daisy, who was no ballet dancer, swerved around customers and heaps, usually accurately. Each item was placed in a big metal scoop then weighed, using brass weights which the Boy was allowed to place on the scale.

Since everything was seasonal the choice at any time was limited; summer was the best time to be in the shop when the fruit was in season and boys might be given a strawberry or two if they waited their turn and didn't get in the way.

Perhaps the high spot of any such expedition was a trip to the grocers, an Aladdin's cave of smells and even tastes if one's favourite assistant was behind the counter.

"Dry goods" such as fruit, sugar, tea, flour were in wooden bins along one wall, scooped out into "sugar paper" bags and weighed to one's request. Butter was sliced and patted with two wooden spatulas, weighed and slipped into grease-proof paper according to how much was asked for.



*Rectory Road made a triangle of roads around Headless Cross, running from Evesham Road (Mount Pleasant) to the junction between Plymouth Road and Birchfield Road.*

*It was mostly residential properties with the exception of the 'famous' fish and chip shop.*

*(Thanks to Chris Jackson for the image)*

This was all very well and good, but the best was yet to come.

Boy could never decide which order he looked forward to most: cheese or ham.

Great cheeses stood like a small mountain range along the wall behind the counter; once chosen - were they not all Cheddar? - one would be heaved onto a board and a great wire would be drawn down through the block.

The wire fascinated: it ended in the handle, a slice of wood at right angles to the wire, the fixed end of which was hidden, attached to the board somewhere.

It was the sight of a wedge of cheese falling away from the block onto a sheet of grease proof as the wire sliced its way through which intrigued.

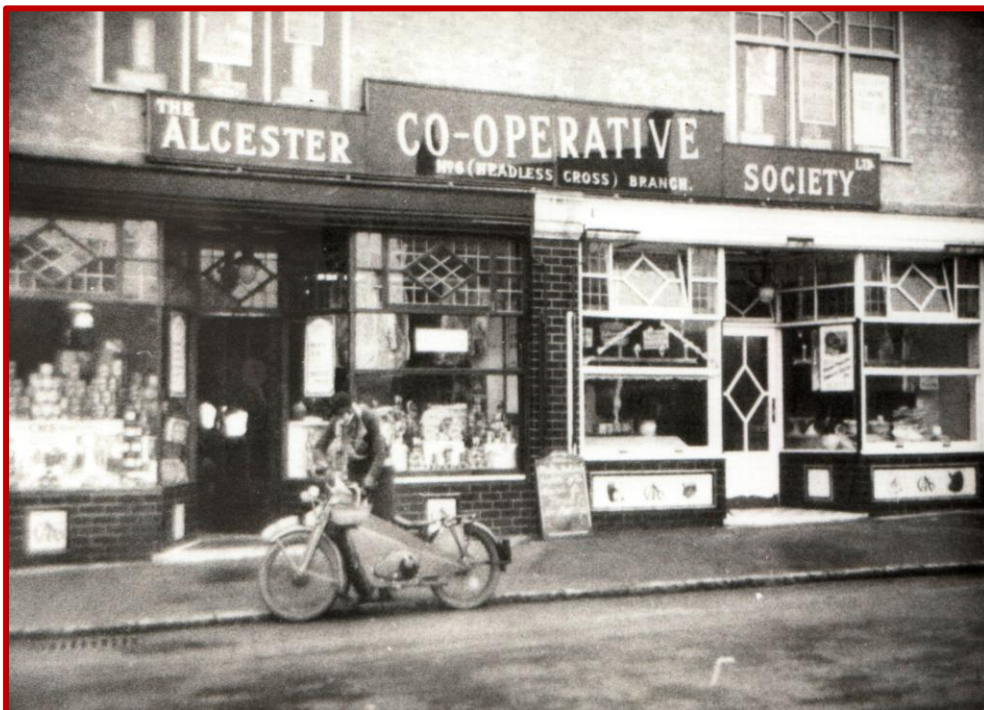
However, the ham and bacon slicer surely took the prize. The ritual began by the customer being interrogated: "smoked or plain", "thickness?"

Then a great wedge of ham would be hoisted onto the machine and the necessary adjustments made as to thickness. Then the ceremony began.

With a gentle whine the razor-sharp blade whirred and ham-or-bacon slices were tidily cut off the big piece which was steadied by the assistant. The smell of freshly sliced ham lingers on.

Cheese and ham operations took place a few inches from the nose of the boy and fragments of both fell conveniently close, to be tidied up.

Close to the grocers, on the same side of the road, was a fish n chip shop where hot fried fish and heaps of chips would lie in wait for customers, all at small boy height. To watch ready-peeled potatoes being chipped into a bucket was an extra treat. A cone of scratchings for a penny (240 pennies to a pound) or three-pennorth of chips were a treat, doused in salt n vinegar and almost too hot to hold. Larger orders came wrapped in an outer layer of newspapers; it was from these that Boy learned of the wider world and aspects of it which his parents preferred him to remain ignorant of.



*The co-op, which was the Headless Cross branch of the Alcester Co-Operative Society, was probably the largest shop in the area. This was actually a publicity photograph from Royal Enfield, for a 'ladies' bike', which I believe is the 148cc Cycar introduced in 1932. For its time Cycar was an extremely modern design and predated post war bikes such as the Ariel Leader.*

*(Thanks to Chris Jackson for the image)*

The one shop which the Boy never entered was the Co-op; quite why not he never fathomed, although he often heard the phrase ".and she shops at the Co-op.."

Perhaps it was only for enemy aliens, another phrase which he often overheard and wondered about...

The community was well-served with pubs which of course Boy never entered, officially; a school friend introduced him to the mysteries of the public bar and beer engines made by Gaskell and Chambers, Birmingham.

The names intrigued: the White Hart - what on earth was that? The Gate Hangs Well, the Scale and Compasses...

Each shop did more than sell essentials. They were places for news to be exchanged, gossip to be nurtured; they were a sort of face-to-face internet. And for small boys, with a list in one hand and the urgent need to get to the best conker tree in the neighbourhood before the Chapel Street gang, they could be purgatory.