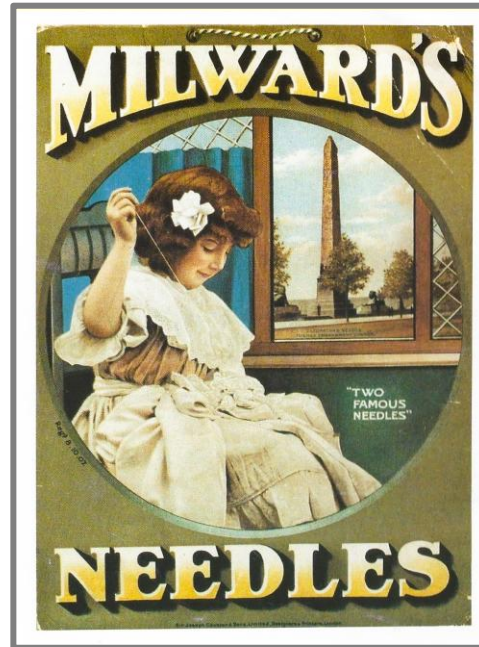


November Meeting

We were delighted to welcome another strong audience for our November presentation, with 40 Members and 19 Visitors joining us — a total of 59 attendees. This encouraging turnout was once again boosted by an excellent article in the Redditch Standard, thoughtfully crafted from Pat's press release.

Our November speaker was Richard Churchley, who gave a fascinating talk on the Needle Industry from 1640 to 1940, focusing on its development across Worcestershire and Warwickshire. His engaging presentation shed light on the social and economic impact of this vital local trade. You'll find the full report on pages 3 and 4.



A Word from the Editor...

This month's featured article, spanning pages five through seven, presents another captivating chapter from *Rookery Boy* William Purser. In this instalment, William reflects on his childhood in Headless Cross and Redditch, tracing his journey from Headless Cross to Batchley and then to the Mayfields. He shares vivid recollections of his school days, culminating in his final year of Junior School at age eleven.

When William first reached out, his hope was to reconnect with people who might remember him from years past. So far, one person from Headless Cross has come forward, but now that his story has moved into his school years, perhaps more readers will recognise him and be interested in getting in touch.

🔒 To protect privacy and avoid spam (those pesky bots are relentless—I speak from experience!), I won't publish William's email address online. However, if you'd like to contact him, just let me know and I'll be happy to put you in touch.



**The final event of 2025 is the Christmas Craft Fair
which is 10.00am to 3.00pm on
Sunday 30 November and 7 December 2025**

In the historical surroundings, enjoy the festive atmosphere whilst you browse amongst a variety of craft stalls to choose unique Christmas gifts. A variety of over 20 stalls. Traditional music, Father Christmas, Children's craft activities.



A traditional Christmas event for all ages! **ADMISSION FREE**

Further details and visits to Father Christmas at:
<https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/events/>



Our 2025 meeting on Monday 8th December by Max Keen is Richard III: Hero, Murderer or Loyal Brother?

Was Richard the monster that Shakespeare would have us believe? Was he the rightful King of England after his brother Edward IV? Not only that was EDWARD the rightful king?

All set against the complexities and horrors of the Wars of the Roses. Complete with armour, chain mail and weapons of the period!

We previously had Max for an excellent presentation in March last year on the English Civil War and we are very pleased to have him back for our Christmas meeting (mince pies included!).

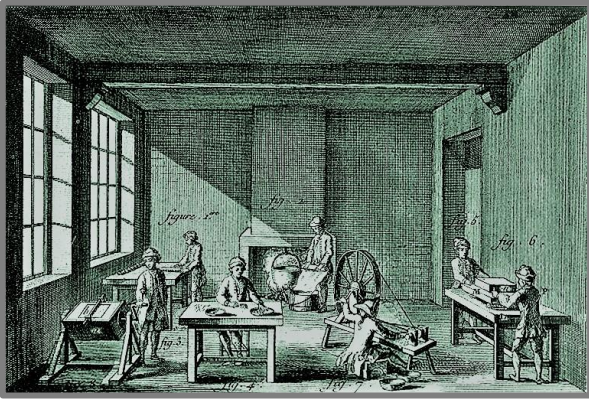


Report by Anthony Green
Meeting on Monday 10th November
'Needle making in Worcestershire and Warwickshire 1640 - 1940'
by Richard Churchley (1 of 2)

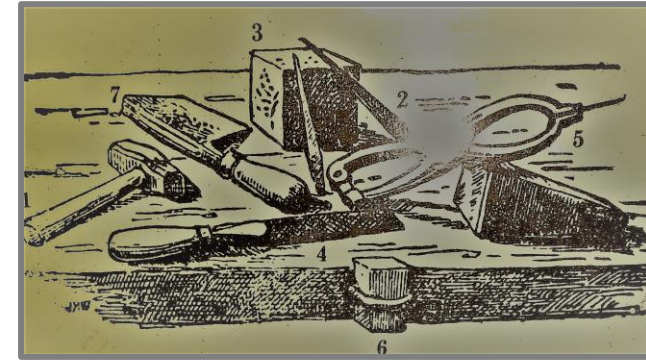
In just under an hour, Richard guided us through three centuries of needle industry development in the Redditch district. His presentation was rich with fascinating detail — far too much to replicate here — so what follows is a brief summary of the key points.

At the start of this period, needle manufacture was beginning to spread beyond London into other parts of England. It remained a cottage industry, relying on simple tools and often carried out part-time to supplement household income. Around 20 needle makers were still based in London, with only small numbers operating elsewhere.

As the industry grew, a more industrialised system emerged. Production became standardised, and a new method was introduced that began by making two needles at once — a significant step toward mass manufacture. The initial expansion of the Redditch needle district began in Sambourne, gradually spreading to surrounding areas from Alcester through to Redditch.

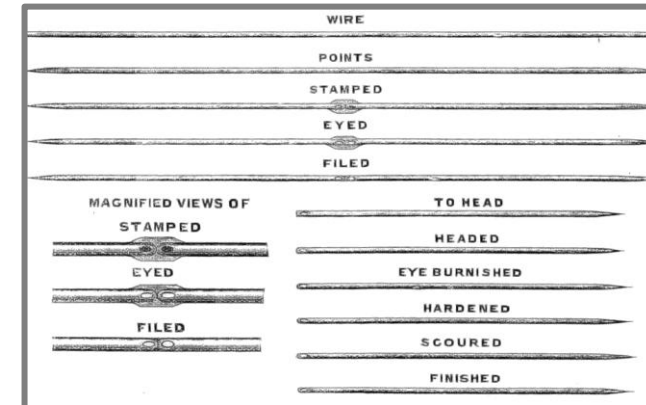


Above: Needle Manufacture from a French technical encyclopaedia of 1751-72
Below: Principal manufacturing areas in the 18th Century (Forge Mill Museum)



Above: Tools used in hand manufacture of needles prior to introduction of factory production.

Below: Stages in the manufacture of a needle in the 19th Century
(both images from Forge Mill Needle Museum)

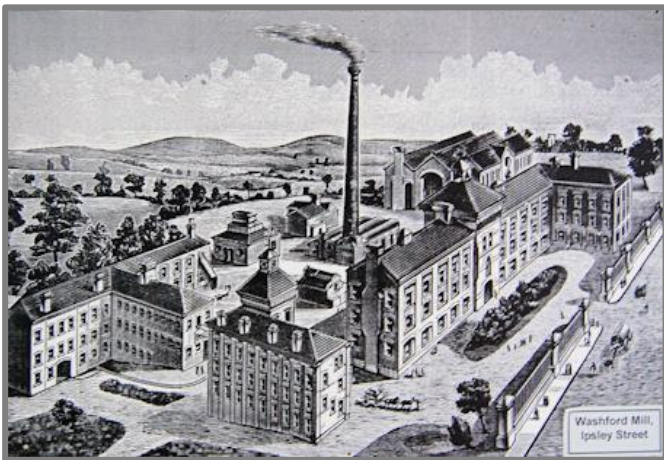


*Report by Anthony Green
Meeting on Monday 10th November
'Needle making in Worcestershire and Warwickshire 1640 - 1940'
by Richard Churchley (2 of 2)*



Above: Exhibit of manual eyeing at Forge Mill Needle Museum.

Below: Engraving of Henry Millward factory 'Washford Mills' in Ipsley Street, Redditch



With the onset of the early industrial revolution in the 19th century, water-power became vital for the demanding process of needle scouring. As a result, water mills along the River Arrow were steadily converted into dedicated scouring mills.

Two of the earliest scouring mills were Washford Mill — originally a corn mill — and Forge Mill, which had previously operated as a forge. By the mid-19th century, the banks of the Arrow were lined with a multitude of scouring mills.

The rise of factory production in the Redditch needle district brought improved quality and lower costs, establishing the area as the global centre of needle manufacture. By the end of the 19th century, Redditch was producing 100 million needles a week — an astonishing 90% of the world's supply.

This summary barely scratches the surface of Richard's richly detailed and engaging presentation. Unsurprisingly, he was surrounded by interested audience members afterwards.



Above: Exhibition needle display from William Hall (Forge Mill Museum).

Below: Abel Morrel pointing department



It cannot have been long after my father returned from the war when we moved out of the Rookery and into one of the council houses then being built on estates around the town.

Our first house was on the Batchley Estate; I can recall the roads being built by Italian ex-prisoners of war, perhaps waiting to go home themselves, and Batchley Brook flooding and then freezing over. It was a short stay, perhaps less than a year, before we moved to the Mayfields estate where we remained until I left home.

My first school was Bridge Street, presumably named after the long footbridge which crossed the railway goods yard from Windsor Street to Bridge Street.



Above: Bridge Street School from a prewar photograph. Until the mid 1950s the school was separated into girls and boys with a large wall splitting the playground.

Left: The metal footbridge over the railway line and the railway which ran from Bridge Street to opposite the bottom of Bates Hill,



After a few months the move to the Mayfields brought me back to Headless Cross and St Luke's infants' school, familiar ground again.

The Mayfields estate was still being built when we moved in. I have a vivid memory of my mother, returning from hospital with my just-born youngest sister, being carried shoulder-high on a stretcher by workmen through the heaps of mud and gravel where a road was to be.

William Purser

Rookery Boy goes to school (2 of 3)

The school was opposite St Luke's church, perhaps a late 19th century building with added bits as the population grew. The Headteacher was a Miss Thomas which reminds me of a saying common then that Wales exported coal, choirs - and teachers. A classroom in the original building was straight out of Cider with Rosie, or Lark Rise, stories of rural life a few generations before me. A large high-ceilinged room with windows too high for anyone to see out of and a big ugly stove against one wall, protected by a metal guard upon which on wet days everyone's mac would hang steaming gently into the coke-smelling air. At age 7 we were all promoted to the Junior School on Rectory Road, still called St Luke's.



Again, an older structure with added bits so it was no thing of beauty. Some classrooms were on the opposite side of the road, next to the Memorial Hall. Perhaps the older children used these because I can more easily recall them - horrid, dark and ugly, built from concrete blocks and, again, with windows carefully designed not to be looked out of. Regular school assemblies were held in the Memorial Hall.

My first Headteacher was a Mr Lampitt; he was followed by Mr Anstis, who eventually moved into secondary schools, first to Bridley Moor and then to the new Ridgeway secondary. Perhaps the names of the teachers might stir a few memories; I have good memories of those years spent with Mr Middleton, Nicholls, Sadler and Misses Holloway, Harries. (Female teachers had to leave the profession on marriage...) I imagine we had one teacher for a year who taught us for most of the time but there were specialists: Mr Sadler taught gardening! Although surrounded by tarmac - perfect for "drill" lessons, with lots of running about followed by arm-waving while "deep breathing" - the school had a garden. We were encouraged to germinate, nurture and observe the growth of vegetables and flowers. Remember this was not long after the War when people who could were encouraged to grow their own. The great attraction for many of us was the Pond, surrounded by willows which I can remember being taught how to pollard. The air raid shelter - they were everywhere then - was the classroom and a wooden shed stored the tools. The pond provided lessons in analysing jars of pond water, the life cycle of the frog and how to recognise different varieties of dragonfly and newt among other things.

Rookery Boy goes to school (3 of 3)

Perhaps it's necessary to add that all tools had to be scraped and wiped with an oily cloth before being put away in their proper places - a habit which has failed to leave me even though stainless steel has been around for a while.

The garden was the setting for a performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream at the end of the summer term, 1953. I think. Everyone in the school had a part in it, somewhere. We performed on a newly built wooden stage, but did we only do one performance? I cannot remember.

Earlier that year, perhaps at the end of the Spring term, a group from the top class spent four days in London.

We visited all the tourist sites - the Tower and Crown Jewels, the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace and a trip on the river. We had tea on the terrace of the House of Commons with the MP for Redditch, Michael Higgs; (MP for Bromsgrove constituency 1950-55, this predated the Bromsgrove and Redditch constituency 1973- 1984, and finally the current Redditch constituency 1984 to present time). I have a photo of us all and will gladly send a copy to anyone who thinks they might be on it. We stayed at the Royal Hotel, Woburn Place, (how can I remember that?) in single rooms and travelled about in a coach. I have forgotten how we got to London and back; it must have been by coach?

As a student of politics seven years later I visited the Houses of Parliament several times; on one occasion I really did have tea on the Terrace again.

The coronation of Elizabeth in June 1953 was celebrated by a sports afternoon on the Birchfield Road recreation ground, called the rec, or was it wreck? We were all presented with a Coronation mug, empty as I recall.

In a room stuffed with family members from far and wide I watched the ceremony - or as much of it as could be seen on the small screen set in a wooden cabinet. I was convinced for years afterwards that the queen was crowned in a thick fog, surrounded by people who all had odd voices. That was the telly in 1953.

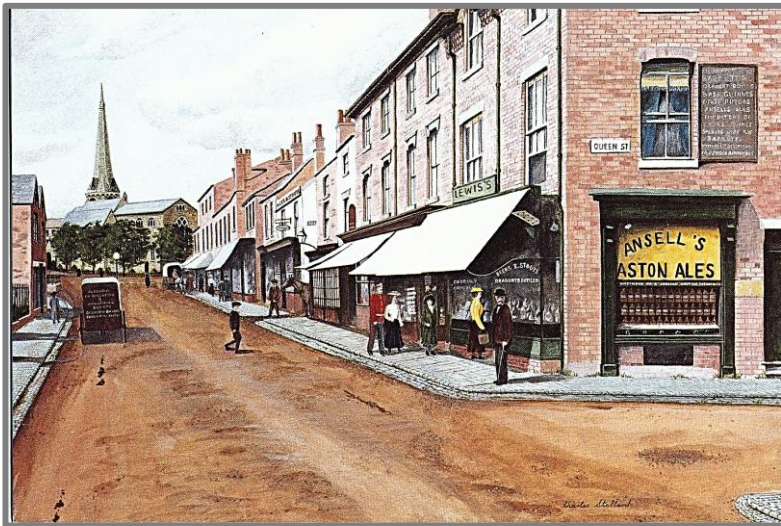
Writing this I am reminded of the adage that "school days are the happiest days of your life".

I walked to school and back each day four times - I went home for lunch. I know memory is selective and can smooth out the nastier bits of life but writing these few words has only brought back happy memories.

and finally....

Three Paintings based on Early Postcards

Charles 'Charlie' Stallard worked at the BSA on Studley Road during and after the Second World War. He was an enthusiastic amateur painter, known for recreating old photographs of the town in his artwork. His daughter, Lynn Elise, kindly made a selection available by printing a limited run of postcards. Below are three examples — and I may share more in future.



*Looking up Alcester Street towards Church Green.
The road on the right is Queen Street.
Very little of this area now exists.*



*A very active Redditch market in Market Place.
Some of the shops on the right still exist and the
Church lies behind the trees on the left.*



*Looking down Prospect (Fish) Hill towards the
north. None of the buildings left or right now
exist.*

*This Newsletter is edited and published
by Anthony Green, Society Secretary,
Redditch History Society and is produced
on behalf of the Society.*

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