

## A Word from the Editor..

**So, here we are** at the end of another successful season of History Society meetings, and next month we move into Volume 8 of the Newsletter.

**The Society was formed** 17 years ago, in 2009, and although much has changed over time, we remain in a very healthy position. The Newsletter, in its current form, began at our AGM in April 2019 and has continued—almost without interruption—on a regular basis ever since.

**I say almost** because the lockdown arrived just after our March 2020 meeting, and we didn't gather again until August 2021, a full 15 months later. During that period, we worked hard to stay in touch with our members, and our modest two-page Newsletter blossomed into eight pages, which has been its size ever since.

**I am currently working on a new website**, which I hope to launch at the April AGM. The version I produced ten years ago is beginning to look a little dated, so my aim is to bring it up to modern standards. In particular, I want to make it easy for anyone with an enquiring mind to browse our past newsletters and explore the Society's history.

## March Meeting

**For our March meeting** we had another excellent turnout of 50 Members and 16 Visitors, making 66 in total. This equals our best attendance this programme year. Once again, we were delighted to see the Redditch Standard feature us with a great article, thanks to Pat's press release.

**Our March speaker**, Philip Bowen, delivered a fascinating and informative presentation, offering a fresh look at The Gunpowder Plot, which he described as “the most audacious terrorist plot in our history—very much planned and located in our region.”

His presentation was a lively blend of local history and vivid detail, shedding new light on a nation defining event with an enduring legacy.

My write-up, which, obviously, does not do justice to the wide presentation, can be found on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.



# Coming up....



## **Forge Mill Needle Museum is now fully open**

The MUSEUM, SHOP and VISITOR CENTRE every day from 10.00am to 4.00pm, the GROUNDS and COFFEE BAR from 10.00am to 4.30pm and, from April to September inclusive, there will be GUIDED TOURS of Forge Mill every Tuesday. Normal museum entry charge applies. The current exhibition in the gallery running from Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2026 is SHAPE IT MODERN - An exhibition by Bristol Modern Quilting Group. Details of events and activities can be found at <https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/> and their leaflet, outlining events/exhibitions can be obtained at the museum, our reception desk and various local outlets.



## **Our next meeting is on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026. and is our ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Annual General Meeting is, in many ways, the most important gathering in our calendar. It is here that we elect our Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and members of the Executive Committee; we also agree the programme of events for the coming year. Without these essential actions, the Society simply could not function.

The meeting will follow the usual format. The current Chair (Elizabeth Simpson), Secretary (Anthony Green), and Treasurer (Graham Smith) will present their annual reports, followed by the election of officers for the year ahead. I am pleased to report that all current officers and committee members are willing to continue in their roles.

Once the formal business is concluded, we will show two short films relating to local history. Please see pages 5, 6, and 7 for the supporting documents for the meeting.

*The Gunpowder Plot – A Midland Uprising by Philip Bowen (1 of 2)*

Our speaker for the March meeting was Philip Bowen, an historian with an interesting and varied background. He has worked for the Ministry of Overseas Development, helping to establish schools in North West Zambia, and later served for 26 years as Deputy Headmaster at Bromsgrove School. He is also a keen ornithologist who has published widely on the birds of Africa, and he is a Reader in the Church of England.

In a fascinating and informative presentation, Philip offered a fresh look at The Gunpowder Plot, which he described as “the most audacious terrorist plot in our history—very much planned and located in our region.”

When King James VI of Scotland also became James I of England in 1603, many Catholics hoped for greater freedom of worship under his rule. However, in 1604 James introduced new laws that imposed even harsher restrictions on Catholics.

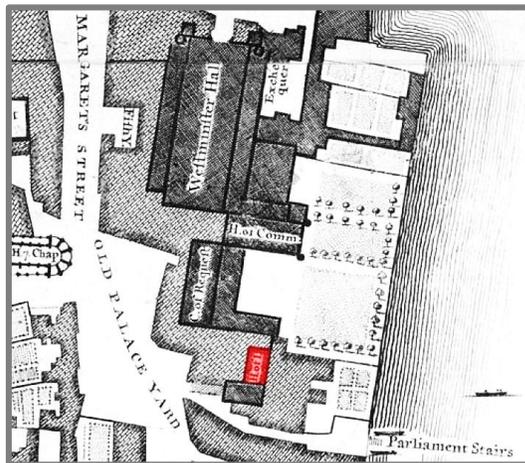
The Gunpowder Plot was a conspiracy by English Roman Catholics to blow up Parliament—and with it King James I, the queen, and the heir to the throne—on 5 November 1605. The leader, Robert Catesby, and his four principal co-conspirators—Thomas Winter, Thomas Percy, John Wright, and Guy Fawkes—were zealous Catholics angered by James’s refusal to grant greater religious toleration. They believed that the chaos following the destruction of the king, his ministers, and Parliament would create an opportunity for Catholics to seize control. Their plan included sparking an uprising in the Midlands and using James’s nine-year-old daughter, Princess Elizabeth, as a figurehead to restore Catholic rule.



*Above – the ‘plotters’*

*Below left – Robert Catesby*

*Below right – the Houses of Parliament at that time*



Our meeting on Monday 9th March 2026.

## The Gunpowder Plot – A Midland Uprising by Philip Bowen (2 of 2)



Above left- the 'famous' letter

Above right – Guy Fawkes discovered in the cellar.

Below: Guy Fawkes brought to King James for  
interrogation



Guy Fawkes, one of the thirteen plotters, was tasked with filling the vault beneath the Houses of Parliament with around 36 barrels of gunpowder. Born in York in April 1570, Fawkes converted to Catholicism in his youth. At 21 he left England to join the Catholic Spanish army, fighting in the Eighty Years' War and becoming an expert in explosives. During this time, he adopted the Italian form of his name, becoming known as Guido. The plot began to unravel when an anonymous letter warning of the danger reached Robert Cecil, the king's chief minister. A search of the Parliament vaults followed, and Fawkes was discovered and arrested. He was taken to the Tower of London, where he was tortured until he revealed the names of his fellow conspirators and was forced to sign a confession.

The remaining plotters initially escaped but were soon pursued by government forces. Several, including Catesby, were killed in the fighting. Fawkes and the surviving conspirators were found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered—a brutal punishment intended to deter any future Catholic rebellions during a period of intense political and religious tension.

In the aftermath, James I introduced even stricter measures against Catholics. The Popish Recusants Act of 1606 required Catholics to swear an oath of allegiance to the monarch and to attend Church of England services or face fines.

Philip's presentation was a lively blend of local history and vivid detail, shedding new light on a nation defining event with an enduring legacy.

What I haven't been able to cover in this short summary is the nativity of the plotters, the efficiency of the intelligence service under Lord Cecil and the enormity of the plot in terms of its potential effect on English history. This was just a brief overview on what was really a showstopper, in fact!

As we did at last year's Annual General Meeting, we will not be producing a fistful of paper in terms of an agenda. The printed agenda will follow the normal format for a monthly agenda, with welcome, apologies, next meeting etc. On the reverse of the agenda there will be a copy of the 2025 accounts.

The minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting will not be printed but they are available on pages 6 and 7 of this Newsletter.

The **agenda** for the meeting will be presented on screen and will follow this sequence:

**Results of the previous 2024 AGM** meeting (printed in March Newsletter). Comment, Acceptance, Vote

**Reports:** Chairman's Report, Secretary's Report, Treasurer's Report including Annual Accounts for 2025.

**Election of Society Officials.**

**Executive posts – Nominations, seconders, vote.** Chair (currently Elizabeth Simpson willing to continue)

Secretary (currently Tony Green willing to continue), Treasurer (currently Graham Smith willing to continue)

**Non-executive posts - Nominations, seconders, vote.** Newsletter Editor (currently Tony Green willing to continue)

Speaker Organiser (currently Pat Bushaway willing to continue), Website Administrator/social media (currently Tony Green willing to continue), Refreshments Organiser (currently Graham Smith) but always looking for volunteers to support this activity!

**Management Committee** The Management Committee consists of the 3 executive members, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer plus non-executive posts, Speaker Organiser, and additional elected members. The current member representative, Richard Watson was willing to continue as a member of the Committee but we are always looking for more volunteers to give their input.

**Accounts Examiner:** Malcolm Acton is willing to continue in this role.

### Annual Reports

The meeting began with the annual reports from the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. The treasurer also presented the accounts for the financial year ending December 31st 2024.

In 2024 the Society made a surplus of £641.25. At 31st December our bank balance was £2264.52, and we had £40.72 in petty cash. Total society funds were, therefore, £2305.24.

The accounts and the minutes of the April 2024 AGM were approved by the meeting.

### Election of Officers:

All the current officers and committee members are willing to continue in their current roles and so, election of officers becomes something of a formality. We are grateful that the membership has confidence in our organisation and our direction. However, none of us are getting any younger and there is no barrier to anyone involving themselves in the organisation of the Society.

### Executive Posts

Chairman -Elizabeth Simpson was re-elected unopposed.

Secretary - Anthony Green re-elected unopposed

Treasurer - Graham Smith re-elected unopposed

### Non-executive posts:

Newsletter Editor - Anthony Green re-elected unopposed.

Speaker Organiser – Pat Bushaway re-elected unopposed.

Website Administrator/Social Media - Anthony Green re-elected unopposed.

Refreshments Organiser - Graham Smith re-elected unopposed. Graham, as always, is looking for volunteers to support this activity and there are a number of members who are prepared to help.

### **Management Committee**

The Management Committee consists of the 3 executive members, Chairman Elizabeth Simpson, Secretary Anthony Green and Treasurer Graham Smith plus non-executive posts, Speaker Organiser Pat Bushaway, and additional elected members .

The current member representative, Richard Watson was willing to continue as a member of the Committee and was formally elected.

This brings the Management Committee to five members.

(Note that there is no limit to the size of the Management Committee, so if anyone wishes to be involved, please let us know).

### **Accounts Examiner:**

Gil Barlow is standing down, and we wish to thank him for his work over the past few years. We are pleased to announce that Malcolm Acton has agreed to take on the position.

### **Any Other Business**

There were no additional motions and there was no action brought up in 'Any Other Business'.

### **Film Show**

The meeting concluded with a film show under the heading '80 years on...' – the end of WW2 May 8th, 1945' using original film, easily found on the internet, such as newsreels and official information films.

The film lasted about 35 minutes and was well received by the meeting.

# *and finally...*

## **The changing face of Church Green East**

Church Green East contains some of the oldest surviving buildings in Redditch town centre, and it's striking how little they have changed once you look above the garish modern shopfronts. What I wanted to highlight here, though, is the changing traffic pattern. The first image, on the left, comes from a collection of local photographs produced by Hodges around 1900. This was before mass transport, when the area was still quietly residential. The second image, taken in 1967, shows the chaos caused by the town's antiquated road layout before the new town road system was built. The third photograph is one I took this century, after the road had been pedestrianised. The original two images were, of course, monochrome, but I've used AI to render them in colour.



*Church Green East about 1900*



*Church Green East 1967*



*Church Green East about 2020*

*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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