

Newsletter

Newsletter of the **Broseley Local History Society**

Incorporating the Wilkinson Society



August 2003

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Society News

Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM will take place on 1 October. The agenda will include the re-election of existing committee members, all of whom will be standing for a further year. However, we are always looking for new blood, so if you know of anyone interested in joining the committee, please contact the secretary Dot Cox on 01952 883568 for a nomination form. As usual we shall keep the formalities short so we can focus on our speaker, Anthony Crowe, who will be talking on what promises to be an interesting subject *Thomas Telford and his work in and around Shropshire*.

Meetings

Meetings of the Broseley Local History Society are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm at the Broseley Social Club, High Street, unless otherwise announced. Car parking is available at the back of the Club. Members are requested to be seated by 7.30 pm to allow speakers a prompt start.

Programme

- 3 Sept Memories Evening - Benthall Edge. This is the follow up to the field trip made in July in conjunction with the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust.
- 1 Oct Annual General Meeting, followed by a talk by Anthony Crowe *Thomas Telford and his work in and around Shropshire*.
- 5 Nov *William Reynolds at the Tuckies*, talk by Neil Clarke
- 3 Dec Annual Christmas Dinner, details to be announced
- 7 Jan Memories evening
- 4 Feb *The Wenlock Branch Railway*, talk by Ken Jones
- 3 Mar Annual Wilkinson Lecture, given by Frank Dawson (title to be announced)

For further information contact Neil Clarke at 01952 504135.

New Members

The Society would like to welcome Mrs Janet Daniels of Willey.

Summer Events

Golding Hall



Golding Hall was once the home of the Langley family

The first of these events, held in early June, was a visit to Golding Hall where Richard and Sue Hartley had invited members to see their beautiful 17th century house and garden. From 1668 to the early 1900s this house had been the home of the Langley family. In 1934, however, Richard's family moved in and Richard has lived there ever since.

The house itself is set on a hill with stunning views across to Caer Caradoc in the far distance. The gardens, however, are on several levels and are backed by high Elizabethan brick walls which glowed in the evening light. A perfect suntrap, they were happily growing plants normally only seen in warmer climes – we certainly had not expected to see bananas in Shropshire! Nor, come to that, an old cattle truck which the Hartleys had turned into a highly individual summerhouse.



This highly individual summer house used to be a cattle truck

The extension to the house which Langley carried out is dated 1668, but no one knows how much earlier the main house was built. When Richard's family went there all the rooms had been lined and the ceiling beams enclosed; when he took over in 1985 the first thing he did was to strip this all out and reveal the original beams. Since that date, years of hard work with a wire brush, dedication and vision have restored this house to its original beauty.

Richard's knowledge of the house and its construction is extensive and he took us on a highly instructive tour of the house, explaining its original design and the alterations which had since been carried out. He also showed us the cellars which, it had turned out, were not cellars at all but the original ground floor.

*"Put three old men, round three pints of beer, and they'll talk of more work than they'll do in a year!"
Frank Selkirk, left, David Lake and Steve Dewhirst*



Richard shows some of the Roman coins which have been picked up on his land

He is also a great collector. Not only has he an assortment of roman coins picked up in his fields, he has complemented his antique drawing room furniture with such unusual items as a musical photograph album and a pianola, which he was more than happy to play for us while we sang along!

As if this was not enough in itself, the Hartleys' hospitality extended to drinks and snacks in their lovely farmhouse kitchen, an unexpected pleasure which rounded off a truly great evening.

One of our members writes:

Golding Hall is a house that hides its charms. From the road it is obscured by farm buildings and appears rather stark. Once inside, however, it is full of surprises, an historical building which has been sensitively restored to its former glory. It was a pleasure to meet the owners who were not only knowledgeable about the background of the house but were real enthusiasts. Their modern additions were in keeping with the whole atmosphere. Please thank them for their hospitality and for a most enjoyable evening. We were all made very welcome.

In reply to chairman John Freeman's letter of thanks, Richard and Sue wrote:

We were delighted to have your group visit us and are pleased they enjoyed the evening. From the sale of plants and cakes you contributed £25.00 to our parish church, St Peter's, Cound, money which we will combine with that made from our garden open day.

Richard playing the pianola



Willey Hall

Our next visit was to Willey Hall where we were welcomed with a glass of wine and given a fascinating insight into the history of the house and its contents. Built in 1816, the house had seen many changes before the present Lord Forester succeeded his father some 30 years ago, and he and Lady Forester set about restoring it to its original splendour.



For those fortunate enough to have been given a guided tour of Willey Hall, it was an evening not to be forgotten

In one beautiful room Lady Forester described how they had replaced silk wall hangings with material specially woven in Italy to the original pattern, but were still looking for suitable fabric with which to recover the chairs. The carpet, however, needed no attention – laid down when the house was built, it was still in perfect condition.

Another room of interest was the library which again had a story behind it. When the house had been requisitioned by the government during the second world war, the books had been hastily boxed for storage with no regard to their order. According to Lady Forester it had been a daunting task indeed to sort, catalogue and return them to their proper places. The result, however, was certainly worth the effort, for the room had a richness and warmth which was very appealing.

The hanging staircase and the gallery which runs round the upper floor are very attractive features of this house, giving a feeling of spaciousness, and as we went through the different rooms Lady Forester pointed out how the portraits of the various members of the family reflected not only their history but also their interests – the predominance of horses and dogs was very marked, although there were some wives too! There is also an impressive collection of china, much of it as old as the house itself, although the chance sight of the chairs used by the previous Lord and Lady Forester at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II makes one realise that history is not just the past but is all around us .

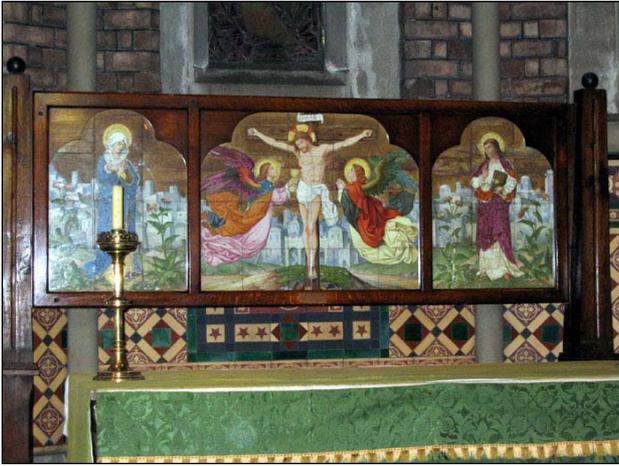
From Lady Forester's extensive knowledge of the house and its treasures, it is obvious that she has devoted a large part of her life to researching their provenance and restoring them to their original condition. We can be grateful to people such as herself and Lord Forester for their dedication in preserving a small piece of England's heritage – and, just for a brief moment in time, allowing us to share it. Thank you.

The “You try and stop me!” Summer Walk

When asked if he would like to lead a Summer Walk around Jackfield, Ron Miles' quick response was “You try and stop me!” So we didn't, and what a fascinating, whistlestop walk, embellished with odd snippets of information, it proved to be!

First up was the Church Hall built in 1930, then on to the Church of St Mary the Virgin, built by friends and neighbours in 1863 as a memorial to George Pritchard. Designed by Sir Henry Bromfield, it has an unusual rose window and a pulpit and font which came from the old Red Church in Broseley. For some reason not too clear the font is now buried outside the church. (According to Ron, the Red Church was built by a Lady Blythe so she did not have to get her skirts wet crossing the Severn to go to church in Coalport!)

Other shots of information were that the church was built of Jackfield bricks, the reredos was made from tiles manufactured by Craven Dunnill, the organ



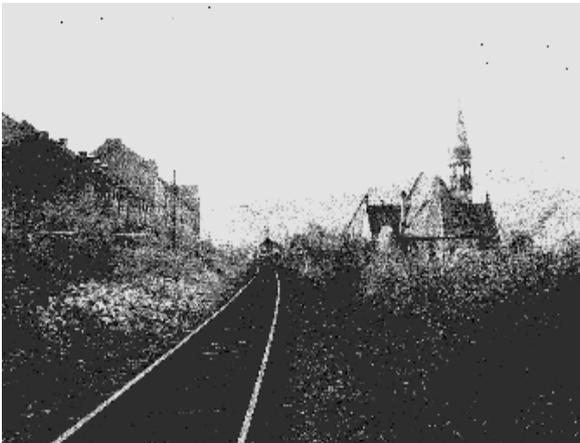
The reredos in Jackfield church was made of tiles from the Craven Dunnill tile works

was donated by the Anstices of Madeley Wood Hall and the memorial plaque inside commemorated Alexander Brodie, ironmaster of the Calcutts. Also the top half of one of the stained glass windows was sited back to front, the reason given being that only God made things perfect. Ron preferred to think it was just a mistake!

Further on we took some convincing that an ivy covered heap was actually an old grocery shop, until some parting of the greenery revealed a boarded up front door.

We then checked out the route of the old railway, built in 1862, and the sites of the two crossings, both of which had a story to tell. It was at the smaller of the two, Baynham's crossing, that a tragedy occurred in 1952 when Mrs Baynham, noticing that one of the gates had not closed properly against the road traffic, ran out to secure it. The catch, however, was faulty and as she tried to slam the gate

Looking towards Baynham's Crossing, the scene of a fatal accident in 1952. Craven Dunnill's tile works are on the left with Jackfield Church on the right



Photograph, c1960, courtesy of Ron Miles

it bounced out of its lock, knocking her into the path of the oncoming train. The other's claim to fame was that it had the widest gates on the old Great Western Railway and a fortuitously sited gatehouse which acted as a buffer to trucks coming too fast round the corner! In common with many other railways, this route was axed by Dr Beeching in 1963.

On past the old Jackfield tile works which had been in operation from 1875 to 1950. Now a museum, the building is undergoing renovation and due to reopen next year with an art centre above. Across the road was the old school which, during the second world war, had to find room for some 200 pupils, most of whom were probably evacuees.

Back up to the Calcutts, we stopped in the area of the Brodie cannon factory where we had another quickfire resume of the past; the very first railway had gone through just here; the concrete posts put in during WW2 were a tank trap in case of invasion by the Germans; there had been over 20 kilns at this junction, some making tar and others coke. As for The Calcutts House itself this was built in 1755 and had been the home of the Earl of Dundonald; more recently it had been used as a hospital during the cholera epidemic of 1848.

From there down to the river, in which leats from a waterwheel could still be seen, on along the path bordered by the stone wall of the old Brodie factory, past Smoky Row to the Half Moon, once one of 12 pubs in Jackfield. There is no sign now of the houses or the post office which once formed a square here.

From the river path, once the main road before the Jackfield slip of 1952, several old boilers which we could see in the river turned out to be cupolas from Smith's foundry which had been built on the site of Brodie's cannon factory.

By this time dusk was falling and Ron began to relate the story of the 'man who disappeared'. One evening in 1961 Thomas Headley of 142 Jackfield had set off for the Half Moon. There he had had his usual pint, filled his jug with ale, said goodbye to his friends . . . and disappeared. Tracker dogs found nothing. The police, convinced he had drowned in the river, stopped looking. A body washed up in Bewdley could not be identified. So what had happened, where was he? Rumour had it he had

been murdered – by someone with a grudge – but no body was ever found.

In the village people talked about it in hushed whispers; was there a murderer on the loose, or could there a simpler explanation? No one was sure. Forty years on and still no one knows the answer. So the case remains open, but the mystery of the disappearance of Thomas Headley is unlikely now ever to be solved.

After that there was nothing for it but to go down to the Boat Inn for a pint of our own, but not before John Freeman had presented Ron with a picture of Rock House, with the Red Church in the background, painted by a Coalport china painter.

Thanks, Ron, for a fascinating evening, we look forward to chapter two next summer!

Proceeds from this Walk realised £41.20 which will help augment the money being raised to resite the Alexander Brodie memorial mentioned above.

Under the auspices of the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, Ron Miles will be repeating this guided walk on 30 and 31 August as part of the Jackfield Festival activities. The walks will start each day at 2.00 pm outside the Boat Inn and will last approximately two hours and cover a distance of about two miles. The terrain will be varied, so wear boots or walking shoes. There will be a break mid-way at Jackfield Village Hall, where refreshments will be available. Anyone interested in further information on the walks or in the Trust should phone 01952 433880.

Benthall Edge Field Trip

Jim Waterson, Manager of the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust



Many thanks to all who came on the field trip to Benthall Edge on 14 July. The evening was memorable for all the right reasons – excellent weather and a large number of interested and knowledgeable people of all ages and backgrounds.

We have clearly tapped into a rich vein of local knowledge and memories judging by the discussions held in and around the woods and we look forward to continuing this at the Memories Evening on 3 September.

The contacts and information produced by these events are immensely helpful to us in managing these important areas of local countryside for public benefit. It is, as you will all appreciate, difficult to plan for the future without understanding the past. The help and assistance of Broseley Local History Society is much appreciated.

A Walk on the Edge

A personal view by Dot Cox

On a beautiful sunny evening in July, 50 or so interested members and other likeminded people gathered at Benthall church for what promised to be an interesting walk around Benthall Edge. The walk had been organised by Jim Waterson of the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, together with the Society, to glean knowledge of the area's past before it was lost forever. Of great help in this was octogenarian Ray Johnson, who certainly had the longest memory of us all. We also had an international contingent, a group from the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers, who were part of a working party repairing some of the paths in the wood.

The group followed a former coach road down to the edge of the wood, where Ray remembered seeing corncrakes in his youth (now a very rare bird in this country). Ron Miles took some of the group to see an old gravestone set into the outside wall at the far end of Benthall Edge Cottage. The stone commemorates the death of one Corhelia Corbett, who died on 7 May 1669, probably some time before the cottage was built. She is thought to have died as a result of a riding accident when her leg was broken.

When the whole group met up by the Red Pool, a little further through the woods, there was speculation as to why the pool should have that name. Was it due to the colour of the weed covering the surface, or was there a link with the aforementioned unfortunate lady, falling from her horse at this point and staining the water with her blood?

At Patten's Rock, while the party admired the view Jim explained the policy of cutting down some trees to open up vistas, and described the improvements being made to the steps leading down to the railway from that point, courtesy of the volunteers who were with us. Ron Miles showed some of his excellent photographs of the view about 70 years ago from the opposite direction looking into the quarry, clearly

showing railway sidings and an inclined plane reaching up to near where we were standing. Ray recalled how as a boy in the '30s he would play around the quarry workings and once found some sticks of gelignite which were passed around his playmates with no memorable ill effects.

Continuing up through the woods, Jim pointed out a wild service tree, which could be identified by the chequerboard pattern on its trunk, and showed us areas that were fenced off to prevent deer from eating the young plant growth.

We left the woodland on the path leading out towards the Mines, which now has a ditch to the right of it, and a small brick built arch over the ditch. It was recalled that there were rails going along there and under the arch back in the 1930s, linking up with the system going down the Mines towards Bridge Road, while the arch was to carry a path going towards Benthall Edge Cottage.

We then made our way along the path back to Benthall church, enjoying the very pleasant evening and assimilating the information learnt on this fascinating and informative tour. Thanks are particularly due to Jim Waterson and some of the more mature members of the group who had shared their memories with us.

A follow up to this walk will be the Society's Memories Evening on 3 September at the Social Club when those who could not make the walk will have their chance to participate in this project. So make sure you come along to this first meeting of the season, bring your friends, and share your memories of this area.

William Reynolds Bicentenary

*Permit the muse, ye worthy minded few,
To pay a tribute that's to merit due.
'Tis obligation guides the pensive lay
And generous friendship aids the bold essay.
Ah! Weep my muse, the general loss deplore,
The humane gen'rous Reynolds is no more.*

By an old workman



This poem, mourning the death of William Reynolds, was found by Michael Pooley under the floorboards of his house in Cherry Tree Hill in Coalbrookdale. It formed part of the exhibition of documents, pictures, maps and artefacts on display at the William Reynolds bicentenary conference.



Some of the people who came from all over the country to attend the William Reynolds conference



Orgnaiser Neil Clarke, centre, with two of the delegates in front of the Coalport china factory's kilns. David Anstice, left, had travelled down from Scotland while Simon Rathbone had come from Norwich to attend this conference

Neil Clarke reports.

Several members of the Society participated in a series of events organised in June by the Wrekin Local Studies Forum to celebrate the life and achievements of William Reynolds, the East Shropshire ironmaster, scientist, inventor and canal builder, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his death.

The first of these events was a cheese and wine reception at the Long Warehouse, Coalbrookdale, hosted by the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Musuem, which was followed by an illustrated talk by David de Haan on portraits of William Reynolds. This, in turn, was followed by a short walk to the Quaker Burial Ground, Reynolds' final resting place. Unfortunately, because of a clash of events, members of the Society were unable to take part in the walk around Longdon-on-Tern led by Neil Clarke on the following evening, which focused on



Ketley Hall was one of the places visited on the coach trip

the iron canal aqueduct designed by Thomas Telford and cast at Reynolds' Ketley ironworks.

The major event was a two day conference held over the weekend of 14-15 June attended by over 70 people, some from as far afield as London, Norwich, South Wales and Scotland. On the Saturday, a series of illustrated talks on various aspects of Reynolds' life and achievements were given by Dr Barrie Trinder (overview), John Brown (the Ironmaster), Dr Hugh Torrens (scientific and technological interest), Dr Ivor Brown (tunnels), Paul Luter and Neil Clarke (tub-boat canals), Marilyn Higson (development of Coalport) and Roger Edmundson (ceramics). An exhibition of documents, pictures, maps and artefacts was on display during the conference.

On the Sunday delegates were taken on a coach trip to buildings and sites within the Telford area associated with Reynolds, including the Reynolds' family houses at The Bank and The Hall at Ketley and The Tuckies at Jackfield; the canal inclined planes at Ketley, Wrockwardine Wood and Coalport; and the industrial sites of Wrockwardine Wood glassworks, Coalport pottery and Bedlam (Madeley Wood) furnaces.

It is hoped to publish the full proceedings of this conference.

Trains and Boats – but no Planes!

The latest issue of the *Journal of the Railway and Canal Historical Society* (No 185, July 2003) contains two articles by Society members.

Steve Rowson, who gave a fascinating talk on the Taff Valley to the Society in April, outlines how the

tramroad that was built from the ironworks in the Merthyr Tydfil area to the Glamorganshire Canal at Abercynon (and on which Richard Trevithick's steam locomotive ran in February 1804) later became erroneously known as the Penyarden Tramroad.

Neil Clarke's article on *The Archaeology of Navigation on the Upper Severn* surveys the remains of wharves, towpaths, barge gutters, navigable tributaries, river crossings (fords, ferries and bridges) and boat building to be found on the 'unimproved' section of the river above Stourport and mostly in Shropshire.

Reference copies of these articles are lodged with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library and may be viewed by appointment, contact 01952 432141. Copies of the Journal may be available from The Secretary, The Railway and Canal Historical Society, 3 West Court, West Street, Oxford OX2 0NP.

Mailbox

Hilary Callcut would like to thank Society members for their good wishes during her illness. The warmth of the welcome, and sympathy, that we have received in and around Broseley is very much appreciated. She is making good progress and hopes to be able to climb the stairs, happily for the first meeting of the new season.

Vin Callcut

We have received these requests from people looking for information. If anyone can help please make contact direct.

I have just spoken to Pauline Bradburn and she suggested I e-mail you regarding becoming a member. I thought if I became a member I might find something of interest in your newsletter.

I am researching my family tree, the Williams from Broseley and the Mullards also from Broseley. Pauline is also tracing her Williams' line from Broseley, we are hoping to find a link which would be very nice.

I did purchase the CD with History of Broseley on it, which I found very interesting.

Sue Cattell at suecattel@yahoo.co.uk

I am trying to trace any information on my great grandfather, Edward Newman Firmstone, who

came from Broseley and travelled around the world (he worked as a clown in Barnum and Bailey's circus in America) before settling in Leamington Spa. I believe he died in 1953. Can you help?

Chris Woodcock 01386 833308

I don't know if you can help but I am trying to find a poem, unfortunately I don't know who wrote it. My Mom recites a verse from a poem that she says is called "The Young Hero", she learned it as a young girl and she is now 79.

She seems to think that it was a true event from the Broseley area but of that she isn't sure.

It is about two boys and one falls and is being held by the other boy. In order to prevent both of them falling the one boy lets go and falls to his death. I think the first lines are this:

*"Tis a strange and simple story
That I have to tell to you
But it has this charm about it
That at least the tale is true"*

My father died two weeks ago and finding this poem seems to be the focus of my mother's attention. I would be very grateful if you could use your many contacts and find it for me or point me in the right direction.

Bev Nicholls at Msbanicholls@aol.com

Erratum

Apologies to the descendants of Edward Blakeway, whose name appeared wrongly spelt in the report on Steve Rowson's talk on the Taff Valley in the May 2003 Newsletter. Incidentally, Edward Blakeway was a draper from Shrewsbury (Blakeway Close in the Tileries is named after him). He was one of the investors in New Willey with John Wilkinson and a shareholder in the Iron Bridge. He also had a pottery at Jackfield before he set up the Coalport porcelain works with John Rose.