

Newsletter

Newsletter of the Broseley Local History Society

Incorporating the Wilkinson Society



February 2004

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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

- 4 Feb *The Wenlock Branch Railway*, Ken Jones. Ken's interest in the Wenlock Branch Railway goes back to the days when he worked on the footplate of the locomotives that ran on the branch. His book on the history of the line was published by Oakwood Press in 1998.
- 3 Mar Annual Wilkinson Lecture, *The Quarrel of the Brothers Wilkinson*, Frank Dawson. Frank, who lives in Castlehead, Cumbria, has been researching the life and work of John Wilkinson and has been in touch with the Society on a number of occasions. He is about to publish a book on his research.
- 7 Apr *Our moving Valley*, a report on the geo survey of the Severn Gorge by Neal Rushton and Alan Robinson.
- 5 May *Thomas Beddoes, a man of Science*, Sylvia Watts. Sylvia researched market towns in Shropshire, including her own town of

Shifnal, for her doctoral thesis. Shifnal was the birthplace of Thomas Beddoes, friend of William Reynolds and destined to become a chemist and physician of some note.

- 2 Jun Summer event
12 Jun Coach trip to the Taff Valley, S Wales, led by Steve Rowson
7 Jul Summer walk
For further information contact Neil Clarke at 01952 504135.

Happy New Year!

A New Year's message from John Freeman

Welcome to our first Newsletter of 2004. As always this contains interesting articles and news items as well as details of some of the exciting talks and events to which we can look forward this year.

One of these is sight of the first draft of the booklet on Benthall Edge which is being compiled by the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, the result of the joint project undertaken last year by the Society and the SGCT. Another is the official launch of the Secret Shropshire website which is being set up to record items of historical, archaeological and environmental interest throughout Shropshire.

We are also introducing a new column, which I hope will appeal to both younger and older members, whereby we are looking to sketch a series of cameo portraits on how significant events have affected the lives of some of our members. The idea for this column was prompted by the fact that my daughter Jessica recently had a school project to interview someone who had been in the war. She chose to interview Betty Lake on 'What she did in the War' and we both found her story so fascinating that I realised there was a real opportunity here to bring history alive to Broseley's younger generation. Betty's story appears in this issue, others will follow.

It has come to the attention of the Society that extracts from an article in the Journal, which was

based on a talk given to the Society, have been reproduced in the press without the permission of either the author or the Society. This is in clear breach of copyright and the publication concerned has been made aware of this. We should like to reassure members that the copyright on any articles published in the Journal rests with the author and the Society, although we are normally happy to allow reproduction provided permission is first requested.

May I wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year!

John Freeman
Chairman

New Members

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Lisa Cashmore, Broseley
Philip Mountford, Broseley
Susan Boden, Ashington, Northumberland

The Society is sorry to hear of the death last year of Basil Aldridge of Twickenham. Mr Aldridge had family connections with Broseley and once managed to attend one of our meetings.

South Wales Trip

Date: Saturday 12 June
Cost: £12.00

This coach tour of sites associated with the industrial and transport history of the Taff Valley will take place on Saturday 12 June. This is a follow up to the talk given to the Society last year by Steve Rowson on this area and is being organised in conjunction with the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum.

The coach will leave Broseley Square at 8.00 am and Ironbridge Square at 8.10 am. Final arrangements will appear in the next Newsletter but places may be booked now. Send your cheque, made out to the Broseley Local History Society, to Neil Clarke, Cranleigh, Wellington Road, Little Wenlock, TF5 5BH, indicating your choice of pickup point.

Previous Meetings

In November Neil Clarke gave a talk entitled *William Reynolds at the Tuckies*. In 1800 the Ketley ironmaster William Reynolds moved from his home

of many years at Bank House, Ketley, to the Tuckies at Jackfield. Why did he make this move and for how long did he live at the Tuckies? Before answering these questions Neil looked at the background of this house, which dates from the early 16th century and which belonged to the Langley family until the mid 18th century, and of Reynolds himself.

By the 1790s Reynolds had become one of the most respected industrialists in the country as a result of his achievements in iron making, canal building and in the world of science. His decision to move to the Tuckies was based on the need to supervise more closely his developing interests at the eastern end of the Ironbridge Gorge. These included the promotion of new manufactories for tar, porcelain, chains, rope, lead and timber products and the creation of an integrated transport infrastructure. The result was Coalport.

At the Tuckies Reynolds constructed a balcony across the front of the house, linking the two wings, to give him a better view over Coalport and the Gorge. However, intermittent illness appears to have prevented the implementation of his most ambitious project – the construction of a large chemical works at Coalport in conjunction with Lord Dundonald; his subsequent death in June 1803, at the relatively early age of 45, curtailed the far-reaching experiments in high pressure steam power that Reynolds had encouraged Richard Trevithick to carry out at Coalbrookdale.

After Reynolds's death his wife and children returned to Bank House – the family had spent only three years at the Tuckies.

The full text of this talk will appear in the next issue of the Society's Journal.

In December, members enjoyed their traditional Christmas dinner at the Lion Hotel, after which Vera Francis shared some entertaining memories of Broseley residents and Ron Miles kept the party



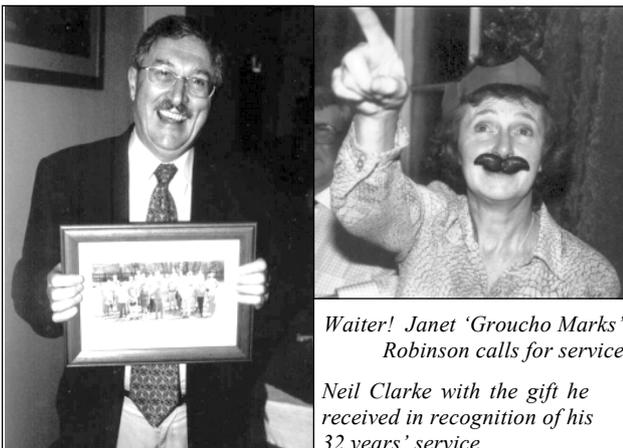
Vera Francis shares some anecdotes of old Broseleyites.



Ron Miles always has something amusing to say



Christmas dinner at the Lion Hotel



Waiter! Janet 'Groucho Marks' Robinson calls for service

Neil Clarke with the gift he received in recognition of his 32 years' service

amused with extracts from old parish magazines. John Freeman paid tribute to Neil Clarke for his 32 years' outstanding service to the Society and presented him with a group photograph taken at last year's successful William Reynolds bicentenary weekend which he had organised.

At the Memories Evening which took place in January members were able to reminisce about *The Pubs and Inns of Broseley*, of which apparently there were a fair number.

David Lake opened the discussion by explaining that it had been the Duke of Wellington's Beer House Act of 1830 which had prompted the proliferation of so many ale houses. This Act had permitted householders, on payment of two guineas, to turn a private house into a public house for the sale of beer and cider. For one guinea it could sell cider only. Both places had restricted hours.

No one seemed clear how many ale houses there had once been, but it was certainly a great number, particularly in the King Street area where every third or fourth building seemed to have been a pub. Most of these concerns brewed their own ale although beer from outside breweries was starting to become available by the end of the 19th century.

Both the King's Head in King Street and the Forester Arms on the Bridgnorth Road had been used for conducting inquests, while the New Inn in Bridge Road was for many years the headquarters of the pigeon fanciers. The story was told of how Jack Owen as a boy had been a runner for these enthusiasts. His job had been to clock in the birds as they returned to their lofts and then run back to the New Inn to report their arrival. Speed, of course, was vital.

The Lion in the High Street was once the principal inn in Broseley and had posting stables and loose boxes. Gill Pope, who claims she was the last person to be born in this inn, said that her grandfather, Archibald Oswell, had moved there in 1923. The previous owner had been Tom Instone, whose wife was reputed to have drowned in the water tank situated on the top floor – presumably the main source of water at the time.

Once the inn stopped brewing its own ale, the barrels of beer were shipped in to Ironbridge station from where they were brought by horse and dray up to Broseley, each carrier receiving a free pint.

The inn had a club room which was used by the Willey Estate agent to collect rents. Annual flower shows were also held there and during the last war hops had been stored for the brewers William Butlers of Wolverhampton.

Another well known establishment was the Pheasant Inn which was the meeting point for the pack of hounds run by the present James Hurdley's father.

Among others, the meeting referred to a book just published by Society member Joan Griffiths, *Broseley, the People and the Past*. This is available from Joan, 01952 883074, at a cost of £12.99.

So what *did* she do in the War?

Most people interested in English industrial history are aware of the important part Broseley played in the development of England as an industrial nation. Indeed, the Society exists to promote and preserve this contribution and to share this knowledge with interested parties.



Betty Lake was once a plotter in the WAAF

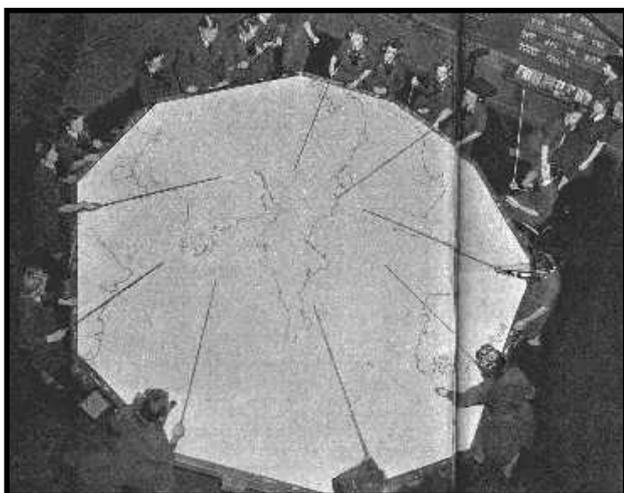
But there is another more personal aspect of Broseley's history which we should not forget, and that is the way in which events more recent than the industrial revolution affected people's lives, and how those people coped with the unexpected circumstances in which they found themselves.

Take the Second World War. Did you know, for instance, that Society member Betty Lake was in the Women's Auxilliary Air Force (the WAAFs) and that she was one of the people involved in plotting all aircraft movements on the top of a huge table – just like you see in the movies! And it wasn't just chance that took her there.

When Betty left school just after war started she joined the public service as a library assistant, a reserved occupation from which she could not be called up. Feeling, however, there was more to the war effort than stamping library books, she applied to join the WAAFs, her first attempt being foiled when they found out she was too young at 16. Eighteen months later, however, they finally accepted her and from boot camp at Gloucester she was billeted in a condemned workhouse at Leighton Buzzard, before going on to 10 Group Fighter Command station at Rudloe Manor, Corsham in Wiltshire, the second most important station in the country.

There she worked as a plotter in the Operations Room, the nerve centre of the station, where information from the radar stations on the flight paths of all aircraft was received by the filter room, which in turn sent it through to the plotters. Betty and her colleagues were then responsible for

Betty, just right of centre, plotting fighter aircraft returning to base. This photograph was taken in 1944 and for security reasons the actual plotting map was obliterated



positioning markers on the plotting table, forming a dynamic scenario which changed by the minute as fresh information was received. These markers showed which direction the aircraft were heading, whether they were hostile or friendly, how many there were in a raid and at what height they were flying. This vital information was continuously interpreted by the controllers and sent through to the various fighter stations, which could then direct their resources to intercept enemy aircraft.

Betty was later transferred to a fighter command station at Manston in Kent where several fighter squadrons were based – Group Captain Douglas Bader of Battle of Britain fame was in charge of one of them. Here she worked on flying control and as this station was also an emergency landing place she says it could be quite exciting at times.

After Betty was demobbed she was offered a job in the control room of London (now Heathrow) Airport but reluctantly decided she could not afford to live in London on the salary offered. So it was back to stamping library books!

The Operations Room at Rudloe Manor where the plotters carried out the important task of keeping track of all aircraft movements. In the gallery above sat the controllers who interpreted this changing scenario and were in constant contact with the fighter stations. Up in the gods sat army and navy personnel who kept in touch with their gun emplacements



Acknowledgements are made to the publishers of The WAAF in Action, 1944, in which these pictures appeared

So why did Betty choose to join up when she could have spent the war in the comfort of the public library? Well for one thing, she says, she wanted to be able to stand tall when she told her grandchildren what she had done in the War. And why the Air Force? Well, that was the youngest and most glamorous of the three forces – and just think of all those handsome young airmen!

Although Betty does not have grandchildren to whom she can tell her stories, there is no doubt that she can still, even after so many years, be proud of her part in the war effort. Thank you, Betty, for sharing your experiences.



This column was prompted by the fact that John Freeman's 13 year old daughter Jessica was given a school assignment to interview someone with Second World War experience. Knowing that Betty had been in the WAAFs during the

war, Jessica asked her if she would be her interviewee. Here she tells why she found it such a fascinating experience.

We had been reading Second World War literature in English at school which I had found very interesting. We were then given an assignment to interview someone with war experience to broaden our knowledge of the war.

Although my grandmother had been evacuated from the Teignmouth dock area with her whole school to Bishop's Castle I knew someone with a more interesting war experience. Most people interviewed their grandparents who were evacuated during the war time. But I interviewed Betty Lake, a plotter in the WAAF at just 17.

I had met Betty when we had been invited to lunch at her house about a year ago. She had shown me her war memorabilia and explained what she had done in the war. She was such an inspiration. She laughed off the fact that her mother thought she shouldn't be doing work like that and shouldn't be leaving home to work at the centre of the war.

She was obviously a great believer in 'girl power' and thought it was going to be a wild adventure, escaping from everything she knew – she had never actually been to England before, she was brought up in Wales!

Interviewing Betty has really made me interested in World War II. The way the whole country pulled together like that really amazed me, nothing like that ever happens now, and the way Betty was so keen to help has really motivated me to do things that I believe in, and throw myself in at the deep end!!

The war really interests me, it was not all that long ago, but yet so little is talked about it, some are very proud of what they contributed to their country and so they should be, but some are very modest and so little is known about them.

I know a few other people with war experiences. Many of the people alive today were evacuees, but some of my other family members played important parts in the war too. An employee of my dad fought in North Africa and the Battle of Crete, where he became a prisoner of war. Sadly, he died recently. My great uncle Christopher was a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm and was shot down in the sea by the Japanese. My great uncle Ken was a Japanese prisoner of war, he survived but sadly I never knew him. My great grandmother drove a fuel tanker in World War II but I never knew her either. Many other family members have fought in the wars, but most of them are men, just showing Betty really was a pioneer in her time.

Forthcoming Events

Annual Coalbrookdale Archives Lecture

Date: Friday 26 March

Venue: Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Coalbrookdale

Time: 7.30 pm

Neil Clarke will be giving a lecture entitled *An East Shropshire Industrial Settlement: the Aqueduct revisited*, to the Friends of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum on Friday 26 March.

This will be followed up, on Sunday 25 April, with a walk around the Aqueduct. Meet at the Britannia Inn in Aqueduct at 2.00 pm where there is plenty of parking. Distance is about two miles and further information may be obtained from Neil at 01952 50413.

Industrial Archaeology in Shropshire

Date: Saturday 26 June

Venue: Shirehall, Shrewsbury

Cost: £10.00

This one day meeting will review recent developments in the industrial archaeology of the county. There will also be a field trip on Sunday 27 June which may include the Ironbridge Gorge and extractive sites in south Shropshire.

Provisional subjects covered will include barytes mining, the charcoal iron industry, lead mining before the industrial revolution, Shropshire clay pipes, and water mills in Shropshire.

Further details available from David Poyner
136 Hoo Road, Kidderminster, Worcs, DY10 1LP
email: David@D-Poyner.freemove.co.uk.

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

Last year the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust worked with the Society in a project to collect information on Benthall Edge. This took the form of a walk along Benthall Edge in July and a Memories Evening in September. The information gained from these two events will form the basis of a trail brochure to be published by the SGCT. The first draft of this should be ready by February.

Another project undertaken by the SGCT was to encourage wider use and enjoyment of the Coalbrookdale Woodlands at Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill. Their focus was the network of paths formerly known as the Workers' Walks or Sabbath Walks, which had been developed and enhanced in the late 18th century by Quaker ironmaster Richard Reynolds. In an 1801 account of the Dale there are extensive references to these walks and the spectacular views they afford across the valley as well as references to benches and other features along the routes.

The project involved local groups designing and building long lasting wooden benches to be placed along the walks, while careful tree surgery and some limited felling would recreate views down into the valley through the existing dense woodlands. The five groups involved in the project were Care Community Ironbridge, Green Wood Branch Coalbrookdale, Madeley Court School, the Social Seat Group and the Woodside Families Group. Designed by the groups themselves, the benches



Members of Care Community Ironbridge who designed and built one of the five seats placed along the Workers' Walks in Dale Coppice and Lincoln's Hill

were built using locally sourced sweet chestnut or oak. Many of the people involved in this project had never previously worked with wood, so the guidance and support of the project coordinator and woodworking assistants was invaluable. At the official unveiling in late September over 80 people, including friends and families of the makers, as well as people who use the walks, were present when the five very different and distinctive new benches were revealed.

This project was assisted by grant aid from the Local Heritage Initiative which is administered by the Countryside Agency.

For further information contact the Trust on 01952 433880 or, better still, take a stroll through the Dale woodlands and find the five benches for yourself.

Ed. Jim Waterson has now left the SGCT and has joined the teaching staff of Harper-Adams College. The Society wishes him well in his new career.

Secret Shropshire

Last year the Newsletter reported on a website which was being developed to make archive material, records, images and documents about the archaeology, natural environment and local history of Shropshire easily available.

Although this website has been active for several months, it is to have its official launch on 23 February by which time the site will be fully functional.

Secret Shropshire is a New Opportunities Fund (NOF) project and some of the learning zones

already in place include a journey along a 16th century map of Shropshire, a delve into coal mining in East Shropshire, crime and punishment in the 19th century, the Battle of Shrewsbury and a sail along the River Severn. Log on to their website www.secretshropshire.org.uk and see what is in it for you.

Old Photographs

About a year ago the Society made up an album of old photographs of Broseley showing local events and people during the 1900s. While some of those people in the pictures have already been identified, the Society is anxious to be able to put even more names to faces and would appreciate the help of the public. This album is on view at the Library and if anyone can help in this respect please pass any information on to the Librarian.

Mailbox

We have received the following email from the West Midlands Ghost Club looking for information on the ghost reputed to haunt the Old Red Church.



The spooky interior of the old Red Church which is reputed to be haunted by a young girl wearing a bonnet and flowing cloak and carrying a lantern.

Acknowledgement is made to the Shropshire Star for the use of this photograph, which is dated 1939

Following a recent visit to the site of The Old Red Church at Jackfield, I was wondering if you knew of any references to the ghost which allegedly haunts the area? (A girl in a bonnet and flowing coat carrying a lantern, apparently!). Any information on this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Nick Duffy

West Midlands Ghost Club

Tel or txt: (Mob) 07944478708

Email: Wmghostclub@Blueyonder.co.uk

The Society has also received several telephone calls asking for help.

Yvonne Owen (her maiden name) is looking for information on the children evacuated from Liverpool to Broseley in either August or September of 1939. She had been one of these children and would like to find out if anyone knows the exact date on which she would have arrived.

She apparently stayed with Tom Roberts's mother, whom she called Aunt Lil, while her brother Billy stayed with Lil's sister Florrie Snow. Later during the war her mother came to Broseley and stayed with the Braziers in Barber Street. The whole family eventually settled in Broseley where Yvonne's sister Marie, now Marie Hark, was born.

If anyone can help, they may contact Marie on 01952 883381.

Cheryl who lives in Bridgnorth would like to find her three half sisters. Cheryl's father, Dennis James, was born in 1933 and lived at Lower Shirlett Farm and later at Woodside Farm. He was married several times, first to Betty with whom he had a daughter Priscilla, and then to Clare with whom he had three daughters Marilyn, Sheridan and Jennifer. It is these three whom Cheryl would like to trace. Cheryl herself, along with her brother, is the product of Dennis' third marriage.

Cheryl may be contacted at 01746 766583.

Mrs Boden from Northumberland has been researching her husband's family and has found out that his great great great grandfather's name was Benjamin Boden. Benjamin had a son named William who was a waterman and lived in Jackfield. William's son, George Boden, was born in 1891 and lived in King Street. He was a tile worker making roof tiles.

Mrs Boden believes that some members of the Boden family were drowned in the Severn whilst working as boatmen between 1828 and 1836.

If you can provide any information please contact 01670 855741.

Ed. If anyone does respond to the requests for help we receive from time to time, please send a copy to the Newsletter so that we may share the information with all our readers. The address is steve@broseley.org.uk.