



# Lickey Hills Local History Society

## NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2024

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*The page end quotes are from local newspapers of 100 and 50 years ago.*

## HERITAGE WEEKEND 2024

SATURDAY 14 & SUNDAY 15 SEPTEMBER,

11am - 4pm at the The Visitor Centre,

Warren Lane, Lickey B45 8ER

*This Year's theme: Routes, Networks & Connections*

*Plus the History of the Lickey Hills Country Park*

*and much more! See page 16 for details*

*Warren Lane Quarry will have guides to show you the WW1*

*Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range and the Lickey geology*

*Guided walks showing the Country Park's geology;*

*its WW1 and WW2 sites; and Lickey history*

## Free and open to everyone



## 100 Years Ago - the First Tram to the Lickeys

On Monday 14 April 1924 the first Birmingham to Rednal tram service began from Navigation Street. It was scheduled to run every 10 minutes from 5.37 am to 11.30 pm with extra services at bank holidays and weekends. Tickets cost 5d, child's fare 2d, for the 50 minute journey. The Birmingham Gazette reported that: *Once past Selly Oak the ride is glorious along a road which, when completed, will be one of the finest in Birmingham.*



*Easter 1924 tram queue. Photo Birmingham Gazette*

The next weekend was Easter. The weather was fine, especially on Easter Monday, and the numbers carried on Birmingham trams was record breaking – 3 million over the four-day holiday with 1 million just on Monday. The queues in Navigation Street started at 7 am, but it was 4 pm before they ended. Trams ran at about one car every minute, carrying about 5,000 people an hour.

The next day the Gazette reported that *The hills have never seen such crowds as there were yesterday. The people "Lickeying" must have numbered anything between 80,000 and 100,000. They stormed the hills by motor, by bicycle, on foot, by "sharry" and by train - but mostly by tram. ... One could not see the hills for people. They even flowed onto the private ground – fields in occupation of Rednal farmers. ... They took possession of the [golf] course, camped out on the fairways, and picnicked on the greens and allowed their children to make mud pies with the sand in the tee boxes. The course had to be closed and the golfers had their fees refunded.*



*Rednal tram terminus. Painting by BG*

Eventually, trams were replaced by buses. The last tram ran on Saturday 5 July 1952.

To commemorate the centenary, on April 27 the Lickey Hills Society (LHS) unveiled an information board to tell the story of the trams and Rednal. It is appropriately sited by the former tram terminus toilets, now Lai Ling Restaurant. Nearby are the only remaining in-situ Birmingham tram tracks accessible to the public, which Society members have been keeping clear of weeds for some years.



*The information board team. Photo Tom Harvey*

A YouTube video has interviews with Joe Fletcher (owner of *Joe Joe Jim's*) and his mother, Baden Carlson the LHS secretary, and Marie Maxwell whose father drove the last Rednal tram in 1952. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU1censgRrs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU1censgRrs)

JH

## 2023-2024 Programme Review

**Our September meeting was deferred to May.**

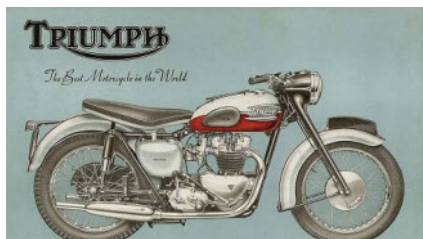
### October

**The Spirit of Triumph** by Ray Sturdy

The speaker said that he was a motorcycle enthusiast, has owned a number since his youth and still rides today.

Two Germans, Siegfried Bettmann and Moritz Schulte, set up a company in Coventry in 1883, initially to sell bicycles. In 1902 they produced their first powered cycle, fitted with a Belgian Minerva engine; three years later they built their own engines. By 1907 they were entering their bikes in TT races. In the 1914-18 War the army purchased 30,000 motorbikes.

In the 1920s Triumph went into car production. Motorcycles were developed and improved under Chief Designer, Edward Turner, including the Speed Twin 500cc and trials machines, which were very successful. A new factory was built in 1942 at Meriden after the Coventry site was bombed. 35,000 motorbikes were supplied to the War Office, 10,000 of which were returned to the UK for refurbishment after the war. Subsequently the Thunderbird and Bonneville models were built, both of which sold well in the USA following record-breaking runs at Utah Salt Flats.



*Triumph Bonneville Advertisement.*

Competition from Japan and other problems led to the closure of the business in 1984. However, a local businessman, John Bloor, bought the site and built a new factory in Hinckley in Leicestershire. In the 1990s many new and improved models were produced and exported world-wide again. A remarkable success story. **BG**

### November

**Timber Framed Buildings - the Original Pre-fabs** by Ian Bott

With numerous slides illustrating a variety of buildings, including many from the West Midlands, Ian gave a detailed analysis of timber framed buildings. He described the developments in construction techniques, such as king posts and queen posts and cruck and box frames. The amount of timber used generally indicated class - the more timber used, the higher the status of the building.

Upper floors could overhang the street,

creating more space in the upper floors, by means of jetties supported by brackets, often beautifully carved.



*Harvard House, Stratford upon Avon*

A particularly fine example shown was of a carved devil on a property in York. Jettying had the side effect, however, of darkening the streets below.

Many houses were identified as homes of famous people, such as Dick Whittington. Many more were associated with visits of famous people including royalty.

In the latter part of his talk, Ian showed examples of where the timber framing had been covered up with brick as fashion changed. But, when renovated, the timber framed building beneath was revealed. Many examples exist on Bromsgrove High Street. **PH**

### December

**Christmas Songs through the Ages** by Richard Churchley

Richard staged an entertaining evening which had us singing, with the history of the songs thrown in. There were carols sung at Christmas from mediaeval times to the present day. He accompanied his songs with music played on a cittern, a metal, lyre-like instrument, and accordion.

The evening began with the mediaeval *Boar's Head Carol* and we sang the chorus in Latin, followed by a 16th century Welsh carol which we fa-la-la-ed along to.



He told the history of some familiar carols and a few with local connections. For example, the 16th century Coventry Carol, funnily enough, originated in Coventry.

The carol *Jingle Bells* originated in America in 1857, as did *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, written in 1939 by Robert May

to cheer up an ill child suffering from a red nose. Of course, the ever popular *White Christmas* also came from the US in 1942.

The evening ended with our hearty voices singing *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* originally sung by mummers.

Richard reminisced about a founder member of the Society, Margaret Mabey, who had inspired his love of local history and his pleasure at returning to us once more for our Christmas meeting. **SM**

### January

**The Origins & Development of HMP Birmingham** by Professor Stephen Shute.

For centuries punishment was perpetrated on the body and our speaker gave several examples of the gruesome punishments that were meted out, including the rack, as well as the use of the stocks and pillories. We also learned of the transportation of criminals (first to America and later to New South Wales) and also of the use of prison hulks.

In 1835 the Prison Inspectorate was created as a result of concerns around the number of smaller prisons across the country and the poor conditions in which prisoners were kept whilst awaiting sentencing.

Winson Green Prison, later HMP Birmingham, opened in 1849, taking over from Moor Street Gaol, and initially housed about 50 prisoners. The architect, Birmingham-born D R Hill, also designed All Saints Hospital (previously Winson Green Asylum). Based on the 'Pentonville model', it had a number of Governors, some more 'lenient' than others.



*Winson Green Prison*

Infamous inmates of Winson Green included Dorothea Waddingham "the poisoner nurse" and Charlie Wilson, one of the Great Train Robbers. Winson Green also had the dubious honour of being the first prison to implement the force feeding of Suffragettes. We also heard about the more recent prison riots and, in consequence, the introduction of the new law of 'prison mutiny'.

An interesting question and answer session completed the evening. **NS**

**100 Years Ago:** 23/4/1924 - Walter Smith (28) of 92 Aston Road, brass polisher, was remanded for a week on a charge of loitering at the Rednal tram terminus for the purpose of picking pockets.



## February

### King John: the Worst or Most Useful King? by Max Keen

As usual, Max appeared appropriately dressed as Sir William Marshall, a Marcher Knight and King John's contemporary.

John was born in 1167, the youngest son of Henry II. Following the deaths of his brothers, Geoffrey, Henry and Richard (king from 1189 to 1199), he was crowned in 1199. He already had a reputation for being ruthless and of unreliable character.

At one time allied to King Philip II of France, he later went to war against him and lost most of the extensive French territories he once controlled.

At home he indulged in over-taxation and selling charters to towns. After being excommunicated by the Pope, he seized the revenues from Church properties. He was also cruel, starving his enemies to death, including Matilda de Braose (the wife of a Marcher Baron) and her child.

Eventually the Barons rebelled, and this led to the Magna Carta, which John sealed under protest at Runnymede in 1215. A civil war followed and a French army landed at Thanet. After being trapped in the Wash, John died at Newark in 1216. He was buried in Worcester Cathedral.



*King John's tomb in Worcester Cathedral*

John was educated (he spoke French and English), intelligent, liked music and was well-travelled, but was pitiless to those who opposed him.

Max's presentation was as entertaining and informative as ever. **BG**

## March

### Small Pits, Big Ideas: Investigating Worcestershire's Medieval Villages by Nina O'Hara

The Small Pits, Big Ideas project started in Autumn 2021 and was completed in the summer of 2023. The project aimed to research rural medieval settlements across Worcestershire with a special focus on deserted medieval villages. In response to a community archaeology project in East Anglia, archaeologists here wanted to find out what the impact of the Black Death had been on Worcestershire's rural areas.

Over 400 participants, including local volunteers, dug test pits in six villages. All

mentioned in the Domesday Book, the settlements chosen were Beoley, White Ladies Aston, Wichenford, Badsey, Wolverley and Bewdley. 96 test pits were dug across these sites with each test pit giving a snapshot of how people lived.

The project revealed over 29,000 finds, including a fragment of a green pedestal glass goblet at Beoley, counterfeit coins at Wichenford, a medieval peach stone at Bewdley and a surprising amount of Roman pottery in Badsey. There was also a wide range of pottery fragments found. Whilst the impact of the Black Death appears not to have been as great as first thought, what was clear to the archaeologists was that each village had its own individual characteristics.



*Children digging a test pit at Wichenford*

Although this particular project has finished, our speaker hopes that there will be similar projects in the future across other sites in Worcestershire. Meanwhile reports on the findings of the six villages mentioned here are available at [www.explorethepast.co.uk](http://www.explorethepast.co.uk). **NS**

## April

### Broadway, Worcestershire's Poshest Village by Julian Hunt

Julian's talk was provoked by a visit to Broadway Museum, where he questioned what was portrayed as Broadway history. Inspired by childhood visits to the picturesque village (where the cafes were "too expensive"), he determined to research its history for himself.

Broadway is ideally situated, having both fertile Vale of Evesham land and good upland sheep grazing. It has been a wealthy area for centuries, actually gaining in value after the Norman Conquest, as the Domesday Book records. Half of the parish belonged to Pershore Abbey, giving the Abbot and monks a comfortable living.

In 1251 Broadway was granted a charter for a weekly market. Burgage plots were laid out facing the market square and a back lane created to the rear for access. Julian asserted that this proves that this was always the main road to London, not the alternative as was proposed by the Museum! The main road was turnpiked in 1728, and slightly altered to improve the

very steep descent in 1820.

There was a tradition of skilled stonemasons in the area, who had worked in the vernacular style for centuries. This was appreciated by lovers of the Arts and Crafts style in the 19th century making the new building and extensions of the period hard to distinguish from buildings built hundreds of years before.



*The rear of the Lygon Arms, Broadway*

Thanks to Julian, we are keen to revisit the village with fresh eyes! **JH**

## May

### From Royal Palace to HM Prison by Anne Owen

Anne had researched the fortunes - and some misfortunes - that led generations of the Windsor family to live at Hewell Grange in Tardebigge.

Her story started in 1042 when Walter Fitz-Other of Florence travelled to England for the coronation of Edward of Wessex (Edward the Confessor) and never left. Ann had listed all the dates of events that led to them being given the name of Windsor in 1086 when they occupied the Manor of Stanwell. Generations of the family became part of the Royal Court, holding various positions, increasing their lands and wealth and awarded the title of Baron in 1529 and the Earl in 1682.

Henry VIII appropriated Stanwell for one of his mistresses and as compensation the Windsor family were offered the manor and lands of Bordesley Abbey near Redditch. Not having much choice in the matter, the family vacated their home at Stanwell very quickly and moved to a much smaller manor house at Tardebigge known as Hewell Grange. It was where the



family remained until the 1940s.

*The old Hewell Grange*

This was an evening full of facts and information that was new to us all and



## The Society Out and About

### The Heritage Weekend

This was our most ambitious yet. We registered with Birmingham's Heritage Open Days and had visitors from the wider area.

Warren Lane Quarry was open, with a Geochampion and WW1 Project members to explain the site's geology and history.



*Carole and Joy explaining the gun butts to visitors.  
Photo Keith Woolford.*

We ran children's activities and continued our project to collect people's memories of the Lickeys. We spread into the Visitor Centre from the School Room with more displays than ever. These were on: local writers, composers and artists including Elijah Walton's watercolours; our Roman road; the Great Court at Lickey; Agatha Stacey; Flight Lieutenant Bill Townsend's blue plaque; our local war memorials; Lickey Monument and the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry; Beacon Hill drinking fountains; and Trams and Fairs.

This year we ran four guided walks - two round the WW1 and WW2 sites led by Steve Hinton; a geology walk by two of the Geochampions; and a Lickey History walk run by Society members.



*Sandra explaining the history of the Trinity Centre on the Lickey history walk. Photo Keith Woolford.*

As always, our special thanks to the Rangers, the Tuesday Volunteers who tidied the Quarry and toilet block, the volunteers who created displays and our guides over the weekend. Without them we could not run the event. **JH**

□

### Bromsgrove U3A - Twice

In October, we hosted 30+ enthusiastic members of Bromsgrove U3A for a guided

tour of Holy Trinity Church, Lickey. They were welcomed by Rev. Sheri Gidney who told of the church's community activities.

We talked of the church's origins, from its planning in 1853, to its opening in 1856, and how it has changed over the years.

We named people who had contributed to the life of the church and local community, and how the church had worked with the community and its school over the years.

We toured the church to show the history of the gifts made to the church which are now part of the fabric of the building.

We ended with tea and cake provided by Jenny Ryder, which everyone appreciated.

We must have done something right as in May we once again had a group from Bromsgrove U3A for our Lickey History walk. The weather was kind and it didn't rain! Though there was mud to negotiate.



*Bromsgrove U3A on the Walk. Photo SM.*

The Rangers kindly opened up the WW1 Gun Butts for us - an unexpected bonus.

The group ended their walk with coffee back at the Visitor Centre. **SM**

□

### Cofton Manor Open Day

In September we were invited to take part in Cofton Manor's Open Day. We had a display of old postcards of the area and collected more postcards of memories.

Both residents and staff gave us a warm welcome and invited us back. **JH**



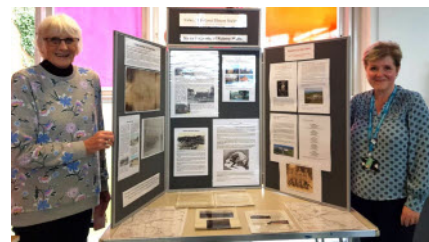
*In Cofton Manor's Garden. Photo JH*

□

### Come & Love Rubery Week

As part of *Come and Love Rubery* week, the Society worked with Rubery Library

staff to put on a display of *Some Snippets of Rubery History*.



*Our Sandra and Vicky from Rubery Library. Photo JH.*

The 'snippets' included the turnpike road, the short-lived railway station, the Rubery soldier killed on D-Day, and the 1955 Tank Disaster (see page 14). **JH**

□

### Visit to Birmingham

On 29 May members of the Society met our guide, Kevin Thomas of Birmingham Heritage Walking Tours, outside BM&AG. The tour covered about one and half miles, lasting about an hour and a half.

We learned about the history of several streets and how they got their names. We learned that Needle Alley was the home of needleworkers, that Birmingham was once home of extensive cherry orchards surrounded by green spaces and leafy dales, and that at one time rabbits seem to have played quite a large part in the lives of Birmingham residents.



*Kevin & our LHLHS tour, Birmingham. Photo NS*

Kevin told us about the Birmingham Workhouse, about the founding of Lloyd's Bank in the city and how the preaching of William Murphy led to the worst riots in the history of Birmingham. We also discovered that the Colmore family were Huguenots who fled from persecution in France and how they had a huge influence over the layout and naming of the streets of Birmingham as we see it today.

Against the backdrop of current building and road works, which are changing the city again, the group also reminisced about the Birmingham that they remembered - whether that was through shopping in the city, working there or the many bars and nightclubs that they had frequented in their youth.

A thoroughly enjoyable tour.

**NS**

**100 Years Ago:** 25/8/1924 - The Rubery Horticultural Society held its annual show on Saturday when the attendance was adversely affected by the bad weather. The show was opened by Sir Herbert Austin M.P.

## Jane Bigwood: Matron of Blackwell Sanatorium

Jane Eliza Stokes was born on 3 March 1827 in the small village of St Catherine in Somerset. Her parents were John Stokes, an auctioneer, and his wife Elizabeth. On 28 August 1851 Jane married James John Bigwood, the son of a publican, in the parish church of Lyncombe and Widcombe near Bath. They were both about 24 and James' occupation was recorded as a Manager's Clerk. The couple lived in Bath for a time and then in 1853 they were appointed to the posts of Master and Matron of the Union Workhouse in Chard, an establishment 'capable of containing 330 paupers'. They then moved to the Union Workhouse in Martley, near the Malvern Hills. The couple had two children during this time, neither of whom survived infancy.

On 8 January 1858, James 'suddenly and without cause' disappeared. Jane remained on as Matron at Martley, not knowing what had happened to her husband. The couple's third child, Ernest James, was born at Martley Workhouse on 3 April 1858, three months after his father's disappearance. Jane was 31.

A year later Jane received a letter from her husband, now living in Dover. She travelled to see him and found that James had enlisted in the 60th Regiment of the Line. She told him that she wanted to remain with him and accompany him on his travels but James refused and ordered her to return to her post at Martley. Jane was forced to do so because James refused to support financially either herself or son Ernest. In Pigot's Directory of 1860 she is listed as Matron of the Union Workhouse in Martley, and the Board of Guardians has appointed a new Master of the Workhouse.



*Martley Workhouse. Photo Explore the Past website*

Jane continued to support herself and her child for another 11 years when it came to her attention that her husband, now in Aldershot Barracks, had committed adultery "with diverse females on diverse occasions". We don't know how Jane was alerted to her husband's activities but we do know that it prompted Jane to file for divorce. The divorce was granted in the courts in London on 24 November 1870.

After she left the Martley Workhouse she spent some time as Matron at the Yorkshire County Hospital and was for seven years Matron at the Birmingham General Hospital. She worked hard and was able to send her son to school; the 1871 census shows Ernest at the Portland House School, Soho Hill, Handsworth.

By 1873 Jane was Matron at the Blackwell Sanatorium and in the 1881 census she is listed as Lady Superintendent

there. There is a short description of Jane at Blackwell Sanatorium recorded in the Bromsgrove and Droitwich Messenger after the Sanatorium received a visit from its trustees, and she is described as "kind-hearted but maintained thorough discipline". There are many reports in the Bromsgrove Messenger of the concerts that were laid on for the patients in the Sanatorium and the efforts made by Jane Bigwood for their care.



Blackwell Sanatorium (also called Blackwell Convalescent Home and Blackwell Recovery Hospital) was founded in 1866 and was on Station Road, Blackwell. During World War 1 it served as a recovery hospital for wounded soldiers. Later, Birmingham children were sent there to recover from the ailments of the day caused by poor diet, soot, smoke and poverty. It was demolished in the late 1980s.

Having worked hard to support herself and her son for many years Jane retired in 1890. By 1891 a new lady Superintendent called Flora Gardner had been appointed at Blackwell Sanatorium (by then renamed The Birmingham and Midland Counties Sanatorium) but Jane, now in her late 50s, obviously couldn't stay away because she is recorded there as a Visitor at the time the census was taken, and "living on her own means". Incidentally, the census records Flora Gardner's place of birth as Martley, the village where Jane had been Matron at the Workhouse (I wonder if there was a connection).

By the early 1900s Jane was living at Hillside in Blackwell and her telephone number was Barnt Green 4. Her son Ernest, an auctioneer like his grandfather, was living nearby in a house he had built - The Berrow, Barnt Green.

Jane died on 11 October 1906, aged 79. She is buried in the churchyard of St Michael's Church, Cofton. **NS**



*Jane's grave. Photo NS*



## D-Day, Operation Overlord and the Battle of Arnhem

**2024 marks the eightieth anniversary of D-Day, Operation Overlord and the Battle of Arnhem. We commemorate three local men killed in the struggle to liberate Europe.**

### Killed on D-Day

#### Lieutenant Michael Joseph Dowling



Michael Dowling was born in Wandsworth, London on 4 October 1919, to parents Joseph and Mary Dowling. In 1939 the family were living at 162 Leach Green Lane, Rubery. Prior to the War, Michael worked as a chief engineer at the Austin Motor Company, Longbridge.

In 1944 he was a lieutenant in the 9<sup>th</sup> (Essex) Battalion of the Parachute Regiment Airborne Assault Company, Service No: 237706. He was part of Operation Tonga, the code-name for the airborne operation which was part of Operation Overlord, the D-Day Landings.

It was during this operation on 6 June 1944 that Lieutenant Michael Dowling lost his life, aged 34. The circumstances of his death are not known and his body was never retrieved.

He is listed on the Bayeux Memorial, Calvados France, Panel 18, column 1 and the British Normandy Memorial, column 5. He is also commemorated on Rubery War Memorial, St. Chads War Memorial, and The Beacon Centre War Memorial.



### Killed in the Battle of Caen following the D-Day Normandy Landings

#### Lance Corporal Frederick George Best

Frederick George Best (Fred) was the oldest child of William and Eliza Best born on 13 May 1913. He was baptised in June of that year at Holy Trinity Church, Lickey. He had lived with his family at The Avenue, Callowbrook Lane, Rubery. Prior to the outbreak of the War, Frederick worked at the Austin Motor Company.

It would appear Fred had joined the army at the start of the War as he was recorded as a soldier when he married Edith Violet Barley in the autumn 1940. The couple lived at New Buildings, Bromsgrove Road, Bromsgrove.

He was in the South Staffordshire Regiment, 2/6 Battalion, Service number, 4922615. Lance Corporal Frederick Best lost his life on 8 July 1944 aged 31, during Operation Charnwood, part of the larger Operation Overlord, that began on 6 June 1944, D-Day. He was buried at Cambes-en-Plaine War Cemetery, Row A Grave 19.

He is listed on the British Normandy Memorial, Column 142. He is also commemorated on Rubery War memorial and on St. Chad's Church War Memorial, Rubery. On both of these memorials he is mistakenly recorded as T. Best.

### Killed in the Battle of Arnhem

#### Lance Corporal Leonard Plant



Leonard Plant was born on 14 September 1922 at Stoneleigh Villas, Church Lane in Aston, Birmingham, the home of his maternal grandparents. For most of his childhood he lived with his family at 75 Kendal Rise Road, Rednal. He joined the Army in the spring of 1939 at the age of 16 ½, having given his date of birth as 1920 - the army therefore considered him to have been 18 ½ years old.

He was in the 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Coy of the Royal Army Service Corps, No.1 Para-troop Platoon, Service no. T/83849. Leonard's platoon was part of Operation Market Garden the code-name for the air-drop near the town of Arnhem which was part of the Allies invasion of German-occupied Holland.

Having successfully landed by parachute at the planned target, Leonard's platoon were ambushed by the enemy and he received fatal gunshot wounds during the encounter. He died on 18 September 1944, age 22 years, and was buried in Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery, Grave 15/A3.

Leonard is not listed on any local war memorial.

**SM**



### Recording Local WW2 Sites

The Society wants to record local WW2 defensive sites. We already know of one in the Country Park, part of Steve Hinton's walks in past Heritage Weekends, and a barrage balloon site in Barnt Green Road Quarry.

Recently several Society members took part in a walk with Stuart Smith in which he told us about his childhood memories of post-war Cofton and places where he and his friends played, including a possible observation post and barrage balloon site. If you have any memories, information or photos relevant to the local area in war time, or would like to be involved, please contact us.



**100 Years Ago:** 11/7/1924 - The annual sports of the Princess Mary's Convalescent Centre, Rednal took place yesterday afternoon. The competitors were all disabled ex-service men, some good times were achieved.

# The History of the Lickey Hills Country Park

## How the Country Park Came About

The Lickey Hills Country Park covers 524 acres of mainly Worcestershire countryside. It came into being in a piecemeal way over decades through a mixture of donations and purchases - thanks largely to Thomas Grosvenor Lee, Robert Windsor-Clive, and members of the Cadbury family.

### Visiting the Lickeys

William Hutton, the Birmingham historian, described the turnpike to Bromsgrove in 1781 as "so confined, that two horses cannot pass without danger; the sun and the wind are excluded, the rivers lie open to the stranger, and he travels through dirt till Midsummer." The Lickey Hills were still a wild area with relatively few inhabitants. But things were about to change.

On the Lickey Hills there were four major Inclosures - Chadwich in 1791 with 600 acres of the wastes and common in the Etchy, the Lickey, and the Wildmoor; Bromsgrove in 1799; Bonehill or Bunhill (the Beacon Hill area) in 1810; and Cofton Hackett in 1817. New farms were created, taming the landscape. But this also restricted where visitors could roam.

As Birmingham grew, conditions of overcrowding and pollution were such that people looked to the countryside for recreation. The first day-trippers came by carriage, horse or foot and, after the opening of Barnt Green Station in 1844, by train from further afield. Often they were middle class and members of societies and clubs visiting sites of special significance for natural history, geology and historic buildings. An advert for the Rose and Crown in 1869 boasted of *A conveyance kept for fetching and taking Special Parties from or to Barnt Green Station. Catlin's Four-Horse OMNIBUS leaves Bull Street EVERY SUNDAY at 2.30pm.*



*In the garden of the Rose and Crown, by Elijah Walton c 1852. BMAG*

In 1871 the Bank Holidays Act increased public holidays from four (May Day, Good Friday, All Saints Day and Christmas Day) to eight (Easter Monday, Whit Monday, the first Monday in August and Boxing Day). This encouraged more people from the City to go on day trips.

The Old Rose and Crown came on the market in 1880 and was bought by Mr A.E. Wenham as a private residence. He started to fence off areas from the public. On Easter 1881 thousands came to the Hills. Rednal Hill was fenced and keepers and police were there in force to keep people away. So the crowds turned to Cofton Hill but were forced to keep to the lanes.

In 1883 the area around the Rose and Crown was inclosed. There was no longer any common land on the Lickey Hills.

### Rednal Hill

By 1887 things were coming to a head. The fences may have been destroyed by protesting visitors – Thomas Grosvenor Lee, a Birmingham solicitor admitted to being one of them – but, on 4 August, 13 acres of the Rubery end of Rednal Hill were auctioned as 13 building plots and 11 were bought.

A letter from the '*King of Rednall [sic] Hill*' in the Birmingham Post on 8 August, entitled *The Complaint of Rednall [sic] Hill*, wherein the writer claimed to be the Hill itself bewailing its fate at the hands of the 'landjobbers', led to a flurry of letters criticising the sale and the loss of the Hill as open space. One letter writer, who had bought one of the building plots, even offered to donate it to the public.

On 13 August, Mr Grosvenor Lee, the self-confessed trespasser who was also Honorary Secretary of the Birmingham Association for the Preservation of Open Spaces and Footpaths, wrote to the paper stating that in 1881 he had tried to buy the Hill by means of public subscription but the owners refused. Moreover, he added that he understood the remainder of the Hill was to be sold in the autumn.



*Thomas Grosvenor Lee. Photo Whitlock*

The Association was spurred into action. When the remaining 25 acres came up for sale in September the clamour against *Land Grabbing in the Midlands* even reached the Pall Mall Gazette. So, before the auction took place, the indefatigable Grosvenor Lee had negotiated with the owners to buy the land himself for £1000 and reimburse it by public subscription.

Finally, on the afternoon of 19 May 1888, the Mayor of Birmingham travelled to Rednal for the official opening. The weather was fine, the remaining fences had been removed and the Midland Railway Company had even organised extra trains for the following Monday for the expected crowds.

But Grosvenor Lee had not been idle. Working with Robert Windsor-Clive, Lord Windsor of Hewell Grange, who owned much of the Hills south of Rose Hill, Bilberry Hill was leased to the Corporation for 21 years for an annual rent of £5 - which Lord Windsor was to pay himself. So both Hills were opened that day and became the basis of today's Country Park.



*Rednal and Bilberry Hills from Church Hill. Messenger Series postcard*

**50 Years Ago:** 15/1/1974 - Rednal Hill was declared the highest point in the City boundary at 821 feet above sea level. The highest inhabited is Quinton High Street at 736 feet and the lowest is Chester Road at 267 feet.

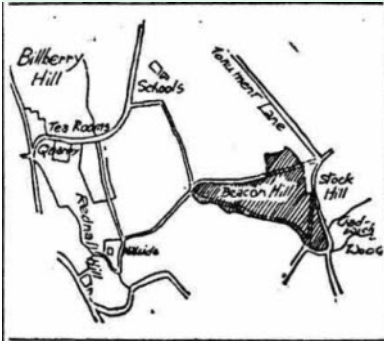


# The History of the Lickey Hills Country Park

## How the Country Park Came About - into the 20th Century

### Beacon Hill

The Cadbury family was already known to be local benefactors. Richard Cadbury was among the largest donors to the fund to buy Rednal Hill and, in 1904, Mr and Mrs Barrow Cadbury had built and furnished the Bilberry Hill Tea Rooms. In October 1906 the three brothers, Edward, George Jnr and Henry Cadbury, offered 34 acres of land, which included the top of Beacon Hill, to Birmingham Corporation. They had recently bought it from Christ Church College, Oxford who had held it for 350 years.



Plan of the land. Birmingham Daily Mail

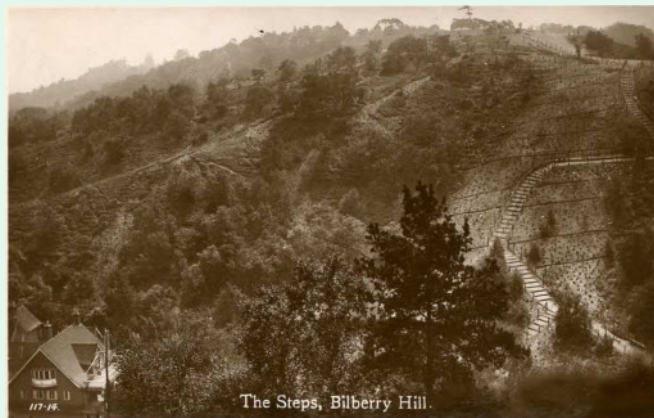
The site was linked to Rednal and Bilberry Hills by a number of footpaths. The land was to be kept as natural grassland and hedges, so that the famed views could be enjoyed by visitors. True to their Quaker beliefs, there was one condition: no alcohol could be sold on the land.

Birmingham took possession in March 1907, with the official opening in October, taking the total open space to 116 acres.

### Purchase of Bilberry Hill

When the lease on Bilberry Hill was due for renewal, Robert Windsor-Clive, by then Earl of Plymouth, did not want to renew it but preferred to sell the land instead. The suggested price was £3,400 and would include a few extra acres.

The Corporation did not want to lose the well-loved Hill which it had managed for 21 years. So the sale was agreed in July 1913 and the Hill's future was secured.



### Cofton Hill, Lickey Warren and Pinfield Woods

After the end of WW1 the Earl of Plymouth decided to sell off the outlying portions of his estate including several local farms and Cofton Hall. Also offered for sale were Cofton Hill, Lickey Warren and Pinfield Woods. - 198 acres in all. Birmingham's Lord Mayor, Sir David Brooks, provisionally agreed to buy them for £19,000, a decision which was unanimously approved by the Parks Committee on 24 September 1919, two days before the sale was due to take place.

The Park, with this decision, more than doubled in size. The purchase included the important concession of a strip of land to provide a footpath from Barnt Green Station to the Hills,

still a well used entrance to the Park. This new addition was opened to the public on 27 March 1920.



Photo the Evening Despatch - Monday 29 March 1920

### The Rose Hill Estate

In little over a year, on 7 May 1921, the Park had another welcome extension. The Lord Mayor and other dignitaries, along with members of the Cadbury family met at the Old Rose and Crown for yet another opening - this time of the Rose Hill Estate. It consisted of 129 acres and had been bought from Mr A.E. Wenham, at a cost of £12,500 to give to the Corporation. The Common Good trust (a charity set up in 1917 by George Cadbury Jnr) donated £5,000 with the remainder provided by Edward and George Cadbury Jnr.

Ambitious plans had been drawn up for the site - tennis courts, a bowling green and a 9 hole golf course. On 12 July 1921 the golf course was opened by Edward Cadbury who drove the first ball. The Cadbury brothers leased a strip of land to the Corporation and gave £1,000 to extend the course to 18 holes, which opened in July 1922. The Park was then 456 acres, 194 of which had been given by the Cadbury family.

### The Last Pieces of the Jigsaw

A map from of the Park from 1924 shows its boundaries almost as it is today. Two pieces of land were included, though the exact dates I have yet to find.

The fields around the Old Vicarage on Rose Hill were gifted to the City by the Birmingham diocese when a new vicarage was built in Lickey Square, probably in the early 1920s. The Bishop had not wanted the land to be developed for housing.

The Monument Grounds were, according to earlier LHLHS research, bought by the City from the Earl of Plymouth in 1947. The fact that the land was included on the map possibly shows that there was a lease agreement prior to the sale, as had happened with Bilberry Hill.

The last piece of land to be added to the Park was, again a Cadbury gift. In 1958 the Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust gave three acres of land adjacent to the Park behind a house called Hill Crest in Monument Lane.

In 1971 the Lickey Hills were designated a Country Park under the 1968 Countryside Act. **JH**

**100 Years Ago:** 8/1/1924 - Over 150 fir trees on the Warren side of the Lickey Hills were felled due to an attack by "wood wasps", and replaced by young trees from the Park Committee's plantations. Two years earlier 200 trees were similarly lost.



# The History of the Lickey Hills Country Park

## From Parks Police and Foresters to Rangers

The policing of Birmingham's parks has evolved. Originally the Birmingham City Police did the task. Worcestershire's borders at the time included the large parish of Kings Norton which stretched north from Rednal to Edgbaston, Yardley and Balsall Heath. In the early 1880s Birmingham asked the Worcestershire Constabulary to help patrol Cannon Hill Park as it was mostly used by Worcestershire residents.

In 1883 the Corporation appointed park keepers with police powers. The need for this was due to the levels of crime in the parks, especially against women and children.

In 1909 Balsall Heath was ceded to Birmingham, followed by Yardley and Edgbaston in 1911. This enlargement probably led, in 1912, to the creation of the Birmingham Parks Police. The force did have a noticeable effect on reducing the levels of crime. During the War years many women replaced conscripted men, which was helpful in work with children.



*Birmingham Parks Police badge. Photo West Midlands Police Museum*

The service was replaced in 1963 with Birmingham Parks Rangers. The powers of arrest were removed. The service had 84 Rangers and patrolled 406 parks, golf courses and other Corporation property. The change was not popular as it was felt that it diminished their authority and would lead to an increase in vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

In December 1965, a petition signed by over 400 people was presented to Birmingham City Council asking for the now 70 strong Rangers to have re-instated police powers and the old uniform. By 1969, the number of Park Rangers had reduced to 49 and proposals were put forward to replace the Rangers with a new mobile patrol force.

**Our February talk will be on the topic of The History of the Lock-up – and will look at the Birmingham Parks Police. See details on page 16.**

### Hugh Munro: Lickey Hills Head Forester

Important though the policing of parks were, managing the Lickey Hills was the responsibility of Foresters. The aims of this management has evolved over time. Nowadays, much more importance is given to managing the Park for biodiversity. In the early days heathland was planted with trees and grassland close mown. But the essentials were the same - to run the Hills for the benefit of nature and the human visitors.

Over the decades there have been many dedicated people working on the Hills, and to epitomise them all, here I will concentrate on just one - Hugh Munro, an Edinburgh born Scot, Head Forester at Lickey for 22 years from 1931 to 1953.

When he looked back on his career for an interview in the Birmingham Post, he reflected on the delicate balance of managing the park for nature and people. He came to the Park after the war years had led to a decline. There was over growth and a lot of litter. So paths were cleared, litter picked, new woodland walks created, and the hill top views restored. 15 acres of Cofton Woods had been cut for the war, and larch

planted for use as rafts and lifeboats. But he recalled how the Parks Committee had fought for and saved many oak trees.

A keen bird lover, he had created three bird sanctuaries and identified 80 species as well as discovering the first example of polyporus schweinitzii in the county - a plant pathogen that attacks conifers. He commented that the steepness of the Hills and poor soil created difficulties for the foresters. Much of this the current rangers would recognise today!

In May 1968 he met the Queen at Windsor Great Park and was made an honorary life member of the Royal Forestry Society after being a member for 50 years. He died in 1976 aged 88 and is buried in Lickey Churchyard Extension.

### Forty Years of the Birmingham Ranger Service

Birmingham's parks had another crisis in 1977 when their budget was slashed. No work was done in parks for a year - not even litter picking or mowing. This led to a public outcry and a threat of court action before change happened. But it took a decade for things to return to where they had been.

The growing problem of vandalism in the City's parks, culminated in the hacking down of 14 trees planted for autumn colour in Pype Hayes Park. So in August 1984 a new Ranger Service, consisting of 20 rangers, was set up. Two rangers began work alongside the Lickey Hills foresters. In 1990 the Lickey Hills Visitor Centre was opened.



*The Visitor Centre opening. Photo - the Ranger Service*

The next few years saw big changes. Activities with the public became more important, working with schools, disadvantaged groups, with artists, writers and crafts people, with naturalists and historians and with the NHS. Nature conservation was prioritised and a new management plan drawn up.

In 2016 the Service had 42 staff: 5 senior rangers, 11 rangers, 6 ranger wardens, 4 ranger support staff, 7 patrol staff and 9 nature centre staff. They managed 9898 acres including 591 parks and 6 country parks, one being a national nature reserve.

As we were planning to mark its 40 years, Birmingham has had to make drastic cuts. Now only 20 Rangers work across the City, mainly in deprived areas and on safety issues.

For the past 140 years Birmingham's parks have been a roller coaster with dips when neglect, crime and vandalism reigned, followed by high periods of positive action, reaching their potential for improving the lives of residents. Their value was revealed with record numbers of visitors during the covid lockdowns. Let's hope it will not be too long before the Ranger Service is back to full strength. **JH**

**50 Years Ago:** 25/4/1974 - A puppy found wandering on the Lickey Hills was taken to Birmingham Dog's Home. Staff called the puppy Readybrek because he was always ready to eat.

## The History of the Lickey Hills Country Park

### 190 years of the Lickey Monument

**This local landmark has stood at the top of the Lickey Hills for the past 190 years. Sometimes known as the Obelisk, some visitors pass by without seeing it behind the hedge and think that the 'Monument' in Monument Lane is the Toposcope on Beacon Hill.**

The monument was built in 1834 to commemorate Other Archer Windsor, 6th Earl of Plymouth, the Commander-in-Chief of the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry, and whose home was at Hewell Grange in nearby Tardebigge.

Other Archer Windsor died suddenly at the age of 44, on 20 July 1833, and must have been very well thought of by the men of the Worcestershire Yeomanry who, with the help of some public subscriptions, funded the monument in memory of their leader. A total of £800 (£130,311 in today's money) had been collected.



Coloured engraving of the Monument. Copyright Keith Woolford

The foundation stone was laid on 15 May 1834 by Lord Lyttelton of Hagley Hall in the presence of a large gathering of local dignitaries, and the officers and men of the Worcestershire Yeomanry. It was completed by October 1834. The monument was built to be seen, standing 91 feet 6 inches tall, (almost 30 metres) It has a hollow brick core and is unusual as its pedestal has 'battered' sides; in architectural terms, its sides have an intentional slope inwards.

The monument is linked to the building of Birmingham Town Hall and erected at the time the Hall had almost been completed. The stone for both of these buildings came from the Penmon Quarry on the Isle of Anglesey, North Wales, brought to the midlands along canals.

The monument is now owned by Birmingham City Council and the area around it managed by Lickey Rangers. Over time the monument has needed some repair and restoration, the last time in 1995 when the cost was £85,000 - a great deal more than the original funds collected to build it.

What did the Earl do to deserve such a large monument? And where did his unusual name originate? Why the title 'Earl of Plymouth', when we are so far from Plymouth? What was the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry?

These questions and more will be answered at the Heritage Weekend!

SM

## How Cofton Park Came About

Birmingham has been lucky with its philanthropists. Cofton Park was bought with another donation, this time from a less well-known benefactor - William Walter Hinde.

Born in 1851 to Mary Ann and Thomas Hinde, a silver spoon maker in St Martins parish in Birmingham, William became a manufacturer of gold jewellery. He married Laura Amelia Lancaster in 1893 and they lived in Oakfield Road, Selly Oak. They had no children. He retired to Paignton, Devon whilst in his late 50s. He died in December 1928 and his estate was valued at £17,000.

His will stated that his widow was to have £300 per year (or £100 if she remarried), Dr Barnado's Homes £1,000, and the residue to go to Birmingham Corporation "for the purchase of land to be kept for ever as an open space for the benefit of the people of Birmingham". The will, however, was contested by the executors - his widow and two nephews - so it went to the Chancery Division to be decided. The judge ruled that Birmingham should be paid immediately, and Dr Barnado's after the widow's death.

Considerable thought was put into what land to buy. The will stipulated the "the land should not be bought in an undesirable district which the residents were glad to get away from ...but if possible be on high ground from which some view of the surrounding countryside could be obtained".

Eventually, in April 1933, the purchase of the Low Hill Farm Estate, Rednal was agreed, at a cost of £10,640 for 135 acres of pasture, meadow and arable land. There were questions as to whether land nearer the built up areas of Birmingham would be preferable, but its proximity to the Lickey Range, with sweeping views to the hills, won the debate.



Low Hill, by Elijah Walton c 1852. BMAG

The official opening of the farm, now named Cofton Park, took place on 14 October 1936, with sports grounds laid out, changing rooms, tea rooms in the former farmhouse and a mess for the workmen.

JH

**100 Years Ago:** 29/3/1924 - Golfers at the Lickey have been provided with a shelter on the course, in case of rain. The Corporation spent £200 on it, half of which sum was given by Alderman George Cadbury Jnr.



## 1984-2024: Forty Years of the Lickey Hills Society

**The Lickey Hills has been geologically stable for millennia, but 40 years ago, an “earthquake” occurred that shattered the idea that the beloved Lickeys was inviolable. The Lickey Hills Society Secretary explains.**

The “earthquake” was a proposal, by Birmingham City Council (BCC), to construct a dry ski slope in one of the loveliest parts of the hills. Ironically, that threat led to the creation of the Lickey Hills Society (LHS) which has championed the conservation and improvement of the Lickey Hills Country Park (LHCP) and its environs for over 40 years.

In opposition to the ski-slope proposal, an ad hoc committee of local people was set up. However, it was realised, as other developments were in the offing, that the Hills were vulnerable. So it was decided to form a permanent body, ready to respond to any threat to the Lickeys, at a public meeting on 5 November 1984. The Lickey Hills Society was born.

The Society learned from several sources that BCC, with the backing of a ski-ing club, was determined to push through its proposal without any consultation. BCC, a large authority, was used to getting its way. Although held in trust by BCC, the Lickey Hills Park was mostly situated in Worcestershire under the planning control of the small, under-resourced Bromsgrove District Council whom BCC rarely consulted. The only local parish council focused on Rednal and Cofton.

No one body exclusively represented the Lickey Hills which, from the 1950s, had been suffering from benign neglect. The newly formed LHS took up the mantle and, as an elderly lady described it, became “the guardians of the Lickey Hills”.

The LHS understood that the people of Birmingham and North Worcestershire regarded the Lickeys as part of their rightful heritage, and they resented any attempt to alter its essential natural character. It was, after all, the ordinary people of Birmingham, not BCC, who funded the first land purchase of Rednal Hill, followed by later generous Cadbury donations. This land was entrusted to BCC for the people of Birmingham, but it seemed, that BCC was betraying that trust.

Marshalling this feeling and sentiment, the LHS led the successful campaign against the ski slope which was finally won in March 1986 when BCC cancelled its plans.

Once this goal had been achieved, the Society did not fold for it was not, as its detractors maintained, a nimby movement: it had plans. It began a programme of talks and walks realising that the Hills would be better protected if the public valued its natural history, geography, history and cultural heritage.



*Thursday walking group which started in 2014. Photo JH*

Recognising the need, the Society campaigned for a visitor

centre, pointing out that Waseley Hills, a smaller and less frequented park, had a visitor centre and resident rangers.

Although at first some of BCC officers were wary of the LHS and its intentions, it gradually became clear that some things it was arguing for were being welcomed by other officers. In 1984, for instance, two rangers began work alongside the Lickey Hills foresters. At Easter in 1990 the Visitor Centre was opened from which the rangers operated and began some of the kinds of activities that the Society was doing.

Prior to this, BCC responded to the LHS's desire to work in partnership with them by setting up the Lickey Hills Consultative Committee in October 1986. This committee included other park users, such as ramblers, cyclists, horse riders, residents, and a representative of the Cadbury family.

The LHS's role in protecting and improving the hills was recognised and encouraged by several benefactors. A local man, John Murdock, of whom they had never heard, donated £25,000 to be used by the Society to encourage older walkers to use the hills. The Midland Adult School Union and other individuals gave sizeable amounts of money to be used for various projects on the hills. These donations enabled the Society to publish books, improve paths, bridges, information signage, and to purchase equipment for the Ranger Service.



*Making the duck houses, paid for by the Society. Photo JH*

Although the Society has always focused on the LHCP, it has not confined its activities within its boundaries. Over the last 40 years it has engaged in projects to improve, and in public enquiries and campaigns to protect, the wider Lickey area. From its beginning, the Society scrutinised planning applications to guard against unsympathetic developments but this role was gradually undertaken by the new parish councils.

Looking back on forty years, the Society and its loyal members - many of whom have been members from its start - have much to be proud of.

However, for the LHS its 40th anniversary year, began, like its first year, with a shock. The cuts to the Ranger Service, in their own 40th anniversary year, was wounding. This dedicated group of people, with whom the Society has worked side by side, has made such a difference to the Hills, and the public's experience of them, that it is difficult to envisage the Hills without their presence. However, the Society is determined that the Hills will not return to the state of benign neglect of 40 years ago and will work with others to preserve the Lickey Hills we all cherish. The struggle goes on. **BC**

**50 Years Ago:** 21/5/1974 - British Leyland apprentices at Longbridge designed and built a hang glider with an aluminium frame and sailcloth wings, costing around £50. The maiden flight was to be in June 1974 from Beacon Hill.

## A Shocking Murder at Eachway

On the night of Thursday 7 March 1872 Charles Holmes, a labourer who worked at the stone quarries in Rubery, got very drunk. His wife Maria fetched him home from the New Rose & Crown where he had been fighting with another man. When they got home they had quarrelled and neighbours said that he had tried to strangle Maria in the garden. He was heard to say that he would make her fit for a coffin if she didn't get his supper.



*The New Rose and Crown, Rubery.*

Neighbours described him as a decent man when sober, but very quarrelsome when drunk. It appears that the couple had for some time lived on 'unfriendly' terms since the magistrates had fined him for beating her. Previously, Maria had left Charles and returned to live with her mother. She was described as one of the better class of nailers and earned a fair wage, so the couple were comfortably off. Charles blamed their unhappiness on the interference of his mother-in-law.

The next day Maria and her four year old son Arthur, went to stay with her mother, Mary James, in the Eachway. During the day Charles visited the house on several occasions asking Maria to return home, but she refused. The last time he called was around 5pm, Maria was about to go upstairs with her son. Charles asked if Arthur would like a penny and, as the boy held his hand out, Charles pulled out a razor and cut his wife's throat. Mrs James, whose view was impeded by a door, did not realise what had happened until Maria fell onto the floor bleeding.

Charles ran from the house back to his own cottage, locked up and went to his parents' house where he told them that he had put an end to it. His eldest child by a former wife was staying with his parents. He gave the son 2s, kissed him and said goodbye, before heading off in the direction of Birmingham. Police at Northfield and Bromsgrove were alerted. On hearing that he had a brother living in Selly Oak, the police went to the house. They found Charles lying on the floor with a razor wound to his throat. A surgeon was called and the wound was found to be superficial. The next morning he was taken to the police station in Bromsgrove awaiting the Coroner's inquest.

The inquest was held at the New Rose and Crown before R. Docker Esq, the Coroner. The principal witness, Mary James, was too ill to attend so the Coroner and Jury went

to her house to take her evidence. She never recovered from the shock of her daughter's death and died on 17 June.

William Erdmun, who lived in the Eachway, testified that Mrs James had come to his shop and told him what had happened. When he arrived at the house he found Maria lying on the floor in a pool of blood gasping for breath. When Constable Nehemiah Holmes arrived, he found her dead. The Coroner addressed the jury who did not deliberate long and found the death of Maria Holmes was a wilful and deliberate murder by Charles Holmes.

On 22 July 1872 at Worcester Assizes, before Mr Justice Grove, Charles was indicted for the murder of his wife. Mr Motteram for the defence urged that the conduct of Maria Holmes amounted to provocation and the charge should be reduced from murder to manslaughter. The judge went through all the facts leaving it to the jury to decide and, without retiring, gave a verdict of guilty of wilful murder. His Lordship, having assumed the black cap, sentenced him to death. Charles was removed to Worcester gaol.



*Mr Justice Grove*

A petition from Worcester and Bromsgrove was sent to the Home Secretary in favour of a reprieve but this was refused.

Charles never denied the crime and was said to have behaved in a becoming, quiet manner paying attention to the ministrations of the prison chaplain Rev. G.C. Salt. He expressed deep penitence and was resigned to his fate. He was visited in the condemned cell by Mr G. W. Hastings, JP for the County, his parents, brother, sister and his eldest child.

The scaffold was erected in the central yard of Worcester prison and the execution was carried out on Monday 12 August at 8am by William Calcraft. About 300 people waited outside the prison. George Edwin Hyde, Surgeon at Worcester prison, signed the official certificate of death which was posted on the doors of the prison.



*The County Gaol, Castle Street, Worcester*

Charles was buried at the prison between the treadwheel house and the boundary wall. Maria Holmes was buried in an unmarked grave at Holy Trinity Church, Lickey in the presence of a large number of spectators.

**DS**

**100 Years Ago:** 4/4/1924 - A letter from George Cadbury Jnr called attention to the bad connection to the Rubery Exchange: ...it is impossible to get calls through without a considerable wait. It is a frequent occurrence to wait half an hour to get a connection.



## Was there an IRA Cell in Rednal?

On 3 May 1939 there was a series of explosions in the back bedroom of 84 Cliff Rock Road. The house was occupied by Mary Anne Furlong (77), Emily Mary Furlong (38), Evelyn Mary Furlong (28) - who all went by the assumed name of Higgins - and a lodger Martin Patrick Clarke (26).

There were three explosions and a 'mystery man' was seen standing at the French window throwing debris into the garden. When a neighbour asked him if he should call the fire brigade, he was told it would not be necessary. Mr Pugh (Prosecutor) contended this was because he knew the explosions had been caused by his illegal activities.



*Birmingham Mail - Thursday 04 May 1939*

The fire was so serious that the fire brigade was called. When they arrived they found that Clarke's bedroom had been wrecked and two holes blown in the floor. Clarke had told Emily Furlong to "Get out of the house. The gas fire has blown up." When she looked in the bedroom she saw that his mattress was on fire.

When the police arrived they found that Clarke had been injured. On checking his bedroom they found rubber balloons, pipettes, grey powder, 58 sticks of gelignite, time fuses, detonators and a pro IRA Irish newspaper. He told the police that he was responsible for the items and that the Furlongs had nothing to do with it.

All four suspects were arrested and charged with possessing explosives with intent to endanger life, cause injury to property and people and conspiracy with an unknown person to cause an explosion. When the women were arrested, Emily Furlong was searched and down the front of her blouse were two sticks of gelignite. When asked what they were she said "I don't know I just put them down my blouse in the rush, I found them among the debris and thought they were sugar sticks that my sister often brings for my mother".

A further search of the house revealed: a 5lb box of gelignite hidden among the springs of an armchair; two 2oz sticks of gelignite in a dustbin; and fuses under the bed in the women's bedroom. Mary Furlong said that she had no idea there were explosives in the house and would not have been comfortable had she known that she had been sitting on 52 sticks of gelignite. These were all the ingredients for making over a 100 bombs.

The three women denied knowing what was going on but the prosecuting counsel said it would have been impossible for anyone not to have known what was happening. It was suggested that the house was the headquarters in the Midlands for manufacturing bombs.

The trial opened on the 13 July 1939. A local nurse testified that, when she had gone to help Clarke with his injuries, there had been another man in the house. By the time the police arrived the 'mystery man' had disappeared and was never found. All the suspects denied that he was ever there.

Mr Pugh (prosecuting) revealed that the Furlongs were planning to move house. Evelyn had left her employment at the Co-operative Society, suggesting that the conspiracy was reaching fruition. When Emily Furlong was asked why her mother had two £10 notes in a bag, she said a friend had given them money to return to Ireland.

In Court, Martin Clarke declared that he was a soldier of the Irish Republic and refused to plead guilty. He received 20 years penal servitude. All the women were found guilty of conspiracy. Emily Furlong was sentenced to 5 years, Mary Furlong 3 years penal servitude (served at Aylesbury Prison), Evelyn Furlong 2 years imprisonment.

Clarke had been employed by three companies in Birmingham. He was known to Police as an active member of the IRA. Mary Furlong had kept a boarding house in Ireland and was known to the IRA as a safe house. The police knew she harboured men and that her house had been used as an ammunition dump. The Furlongs had previously lived in Perry Barr and the year before it had been searched by police for explosives.

This was not an isolated incident, but was part of what was known as the S-Plan or Sabotage Campaign, a campaign of bombing and sabotage against the civil, economic and military infrastructure of the United Kingdom from 1939



*Seamus O'Donovan. Photo BBC*

to 1940, conducted by a group of members of the IRA. It was planned by Seamus O'Donovan at the request of IRA Chief of Staff Seán Russell. There were around 300 explosions or acts of sabotage during the course of the campaign, many of them in Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country, which led to 10 deaths and 96 people being injured.

**DS**

## The Gallimaufry Page

### Local Moated Manor Sites

Lidar is a great tool for revealing historic sites. Here is a long forgotten moated site in Cofton Hackett, probably one of the three recorded manors in the small parish – Groveley, Cofton Hackett and Cofton Richards, most likely the last named. At the top right is Cofton Primary School with Groveley Lane and Nuthurst Road running diagonally at the left. Other local moated sites include Gannow, Hawkesley, Weoley Castle and Baddesley Clinton.

Originally constructed for defence and possibly social status, by the 15th century the use of gunpowder and cannon dramatically altered the effectiveness of moats.



Photo [www.archiuk.com](http://www.archiuk.com)

**Our September talk will be on the topic of Feckenham Moated Manorial Site – see details on page 16.**

□

### The Venus Rosewater Bowl

The Wimbledon Women's Championship trophy, won by Barbora Krejčíková this year, is known as the Venus Rose Bowl, and was made by the Birmingham firm of (George) Elkington and (Josiah) Mason, leading manufacturers of silver electroplate objects. The trophy is highly decorated with classical mythical figures and needed considerable skill to create it.



The Venus Rosewater Dish

The trophy is a replica of the top of a rosewater table given to Queen Victoria by Prince Albert in 1850 as a birthday gift. It is on display at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. The trophy is displayed at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum and

each winner is given a small replica.

Descendants of George Elkington lived for many years at the Tower House in Cofton Hackett, and his great-grandson, Thomas, was killed in WW1, and is named on the Cofton Hackett War Memorial.

□

### The 1955 Rubery Tank Disaster

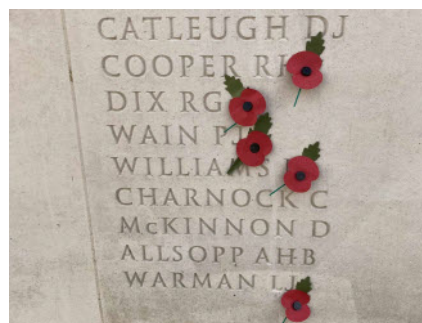
On 18 August 1955 five men from the Rubery and Rednal area were killed in the Rubery Tank Disaster. They were from the Queens Own Worcestershire Hussars, a regiment of the Royal Armoured Territorial Army Corps.

The Regiment was on a training exercise with Charioteer Tanks, at Tileshead on Sailsbury Plain. During the early hours of the morning, one tank became free from its brakes and jolted into two other tanks. These two tanks then rolled down a hill and over the bivouacs where the men were sleeping. Four were killed and the fifth died in hospital later. Eight other soldiers were injured. The five men killed were:

**Roy Cooper, Ray Dix, Peter Wain, Ivan Williams and Len Warman.**

The names are recorded in the British Legion's Rubery Memorial Garden.

We were unaware that their names were also included on the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas. But, on a recent visit, their names were located with the help of volunteers, and a remembrance poppy was placed by each.



A small gesture from the LHLHS to remember men from Rubery who, while training to defend our country, tragically lost their lives.

□

### Bromsgrove Local Listing

Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) is making a Local Heritage List to include heritage assets which contribute to the local character of our area. These assets can include buildings, structures, landscapes or places associated with significant local, historical events, important people, trades or industries, craftsmen or locally distinctive buildings.

These Heritage assets will not have the

same protection as those on the national List, however Bromsgrove's District Plan supports the retention of locally listed heritage assets. The List is being created area by area. Draft lists for four parishes including Alvechurch finished a six week public consultation this July. Work has begun on Lickey and Blackwell Parish and nominations for buildings or structures are invited for consideration. Here is the link: [www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/policy/planning-policies-and-other-planning-information/conservation/local-heritage-list](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/policy/planning-policies-and-other-planning-information/conservation/local-heritage-list)



**Our January talk will be given by BDC's Principal Conservation Officer, Mary Worsfold, on the topic of Barnt Green Houses – see details on page 16.**

□

### A Request for Help

A volunteer for HF Holidays, formerly the Holiday Fellowship, contacted the Lickey Hills Society asking for information. They could not help, so asked more widely.

*"In the 1930s HF put metal signs in a number of beauty spots around the country with humorous poems on them asking people not to drop litter. We know of just three that remain. However, a list someone found from 1930 says there was one on Beacon Hill on the Lickeys. I suspect it has long gone and I have no recollection of seeing it on many visits. But does anyone in your organisation have any recollection of it?"*



This is of one of the remaining signs at Rowardennan Hotel, Loch Lomond. If you know anything about the one on Beacon Hill, please contact us. The message still rings true!  
**JH & SM**



# How good is your Memory?

These questions relate to this season's talks. See pages 2 and 3 to prod your memory! Answers below.

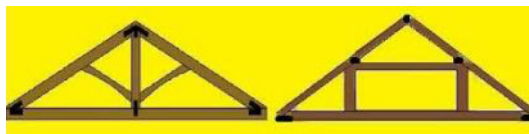
## October

- 1). Why did Siegfried Bettman and Maurice Schulte set up their business in Coventry?
- 2). Which American film star rode a Triumph motorcycle in *The Wild One* (1953)?



## November

- 3). Which of these is the queen post?



- 4). Which Grade 1 listed Black Country manor house was saved from demolition by the Council in 1949?



## December

- 5). Which is the oldest known Christmas song?



- 6). *In the Bleak Mid Winter* was written in 1874 by Christina Rossetti. Where was she staying at the time?

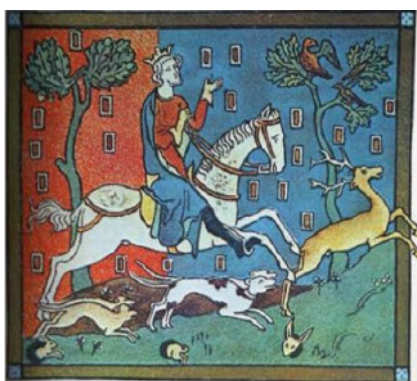
## January

- 7). 'The Duke of Exeter's Daughter' was the nickname for which form of gruesome punishment?
- 8). Which Great Train Robber escaped from Winson Green Prison in 1964?



## February

- 9). Over which part of the kingdom was John given authority by his father early in his career, and seriously abused his powers?



- 10). In which way did Max Keen think that King John was a useful king?

## March

- 11). The East Anglia community archaeology project was led by which Time Team archaeologist?
- 12). The Domesday Book was completed in 1086 at the behest of which English King?



## April

- 13). Who is the patron saint of the original church in Broadway?
- 14). Lady Coventry had Broadway Tower built so that it could be seen from her house about 22 miles away, near Worcester. What was her house called?



## May

- 15) From whom did the Windsor family name of Other originate?
- 16) Who was responsible for the Windsor family occupying Hewell Grange?



**Quiz Answers:** (1) Coventry was the centre of the cycle industry. (2) Marlon Brando. (3) The right hand image (left is a king post). (4) West Bromwich Manor House. (5) Jesus Refusit Omnium (4th century). (6) Ipsley Court near Redditch. (7) The rack. (8) Charlie Wilson. (9) Ireland. (10) His reign led to Magna Carta, giving many important rights to people. (11) Carezza Lewis. (12) William I (the Conqueror). (13) St Eadburga, granddaughter of Alfred the Great. (14) Croome Court. (15) Walter Fitz-Other of Florence. (16) Henry VIII.

# Lickey Hills Local History Society

## Programme for 2024-2025

### Heritage Weekend

September 14 & 15. 11am to 4pm at the Visitor Centre, Warren Lane, Lickey B45 8ER

*This Year's theme is Routes, Networks & Connections*

*Plus the history of the Lickey Hills Country Park*

*Trackways to Roman road to saltway to turnpike; Canals and reservoirs; Trains and the Lickey Incline;*

*First Tram to the Lickeys 100 Years Ago; How the Country Park and Cofton Park became;*

*Operations Overlord and Market Garden - local soldiers; A matron, a murder and a bomb plot;*

*Elijah Walton's watercolours of the area in the 1850s; The Tolkien Connection*

*A model of the WW1 Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range; the tithe map and maps from our collection... and much more!*

*Guides to show you Warren Lane Quarry with its WW1 Bilberry Hill Gun Proof Range & fascinating geology*

*Guided walks on: the Geology of the Lickeys; the Country Park's WW1 & WW2 sites; and a Hilltop History Walk*

**Free and open to everyone**

## Tuesday Meetings Programme

### 2024

**September 17: A.G.M.** followed by **'Feckenham Moated Manorial Site'** by Jen Cary and Cate Statham

*How the Community Archaeology Project rescued the site from Historic England's 'At Risk' Register*

**October 15: 'The Gunpowder Plot. A Midlands Rising'** by Philip Bowen

*What caused the plot, how close it came to success and its long-term legacy*

**November 19: 'In Search of the Bromsgrove Guild in the West Midlands'** by Quintin Watt

*Find out where you can still see examples of their work in our area*

**December 17: 'From Christmas Past to Christmas Present'** by Mary Bodfish

*The history behind Christmas. Plus mince pies and hot punch!*

### 2025

**January 21: 'Barnt Green Houses'** by Mary Worsfold.

*The work of Birmingham Architects (and others) in late 19th and early 20th Century Barnt Green*

**February 18: 'History of the Lock-up'** by Corinne Brazier.

*Find more about the Grade II listed Steelhouse Lane Lock-up, home to West Midlands Police Museum*

**March 18: 'Palaces for the People: the story of prefabs.'** by Ned Williams

*How prefabs come in many shapes, sizes and materials to help solve housing crises*

**April 15: 'Bromsgrove on the Home Front'** by Pat Tansell

*Stories about life in the town during both World Wars, as well as the Boer War*

- **May/June:** Visit to a place of historical interest

Tuesday Meetings are at the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES

Doors open from 7pm for refreshments and socialising. Talks start at 7.30pm

Annual subscription: £20. Non members: £4 per meeting

For more information:

Phone. 0121 445 6261

Website: [www.lhlhs.org.uk](http://www.lhlhs.org.uk)