



REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS AND EVENTS

HARTLEBURY COMMON Monday 12th September

We enjoyed, with Martin Barnett, Worcestershire County Council Countryside Officer as our guide, an informative and interesting walk on a lovely early autumn evening. Meeting on the Tilton side of the common we walked gently towards the higher ground on the top of the ridge while Martin informed us of the plans to return the common to its natural state. The present common has deteriorated into a sandy scrubland area without any sustained direction for its future.

The common, which is designated as heathland, will receive much attention over the next thirty or so years. Many of the self-seeded trees, which have colonized the area, will be removed and rare breeds of cattle will graze the new growth which takes place. There is a small herd of cattle in situ and will soon begin to make a difference to the common. We saw the beginnings of the removal of non-native trees from the sandy upland area.

This very historic heathland, which has its roots in the distant past, is a vital part of the ecological jigsaw and really must be preserved as a link to our own past. We are indeed very fortunate to have this on our doorstep and I hope that we can leave it in good heart as a necessary part of local heritage for our descendants to enjoy.

It was a great shame that only four members turned up for this most interesting evening walk.

THE KIDDERMINSTER SKIRMISH Saturday 17th Sept

The re-enactment of the skirmish took place in the churchyard at St. Mary's. It took the form of a musketry display and the firing of blank charges for the sound effects. We were graced by the presence of 'HM King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria' suitably attired in period costume. 'Richard Baxter' attended and I'm sure must have preached a goodly sermon at some point. There were some very well behaved owls on display and these beautiful birds seemed to 'steal' the show.

BIRMINGHAM BACK-TO-BACKS. - Tuesday 11th October

In the King Charles Room we were privileged to hear a most interesting and entertaining talk by Derek Clarke RIBA, a retired architect. During his working life he was closely involved with The National Trust and English Heritage working on many prestigious projects such as The Perseus and Andromeda fountain at Witley Court and the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich. The subject for this evening was Birmingham's Back-to-Back houses. What a treat!

Derek, with the aid of many projected photographs, told us of the many pitfalls and triumphs which beset them during the nearly twenty years of restoration. There was such attention to detail on top of the major structural work which was needed to prevent the total collapse of the buildings. The careful reconstruction gives us an insight into the lives of ordinary working people in the nineteenth century in sharp contrast to the usual National Trust mansions of the rich and famous.

There were many snippets of human interest dotted throughout the talk where locals came forward, during the restoration, with their own reminiscences of living back-to-back in Hurst Street.

My wife and I were so inspired by this talk we went to visit the Back-to-Backs on 9th November. Well worth while! Ed

KIDDERMINSTER REEL HISTORY - 28th October

For all those who didn't get to see the Reel History of Kidderminster in the Library on Friday 28th October - shame, you missed a treat! This was one of the highlights of my year.

To see some of the footage of The Kidderminster I loved as a young man was so nostalgic. I wanted to keep 'pausing' the film, as one now does, at home, whilst watching TV or DVD's. There were so many scenes I would have loved to study more closely, particularly the shots of the town centre with all its long forgotten shops. Of great interest to me were the images of 'the youth club disco in Charles Talbot's cellar. I recognized so many of the faces and was really excited to see the late, great, Cliff Ward and the Cruisers performing live. The memories just flooded back. Can it really be 47 years ago? Seems like only yesterday! I wanted to buy the DVD there and then but alas, copyright laws prevent its sale. A great shame! I hope this film show might be available at some time in the near future for a re-run. Again, the first showing was poorly attended.

KIDDERMINSTER

Civic Society www.kidcivicsoc.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - November 2011

DATES FOR YOUR 2011/12 DIARY

DECEMBER - Monday 5th at 7.30pm

Christmas Social King Charles Room, Kidderminster Town Hall. The Kidderminster Charters will be on view. Seasonal Refreshments. Booking essential - £5 pp. Please use enclosed booking slip.

JANUARY - Tues 24th 2pm

To mark the 100th anniversary of the visit to Kidderminster Town Hall by Emmeline Pankhurst on 24th January 1912. Gay Hill of Wyre Forest Historical Research Group will give a talk on the subject "A Century of the Struggle for the Vote in the West Midlands" at the Corn Exchange, Kidderminster Town Hall to launch a display covering 100 years' struggle for the vote in the West Midlands. (NB Not a Civic Society organised event)

FEBRUARY - Tuesday 21st 7.30pm, Kidderminster Library. 'Managing a Superstore'. A talk by Lucy Denton, manager of Morrisons, Kidderminster

MARCH - Saturday 24th 11.00am.

A guided walk by Nigel Gilbert - details to be confirmed

LATEST NEWS - FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

KIDDERMINSTER COUNCIL PARISHING

The granting of Parish status is now within the power of Wyre Forest District Council. As many of you will know previous attempts to obtain this status foundered as central Government bureaucrats did not understand or at least appreciate the difficulties created for a town such as Kidderminster in not having its own council.

The granting of Parish status for the Town has long been a goal of our Society and the more local decision making should at last make this a realistic possibility. The Town's Charter Trustees are looking at a formal application, which may have to be by way of petition containing 10% of the Population on the Electoral Register, and will clearly need as much support as possible. We shall obviously be keen to lend our assistance and this may have to be of a tangible nature (such as delivering information or collecting signatures).

More news will follow but I thought members, first, would be glad to hear that this is now back on the agenda and has a good chance of now succeeding and, secondly, should please let me know if you are able to help next year. I cannot emphasise enough how important this is to the future of the Town especially as the Government's localism proposals will give more decision making powers with financial implications to such councils.

Nick Hughes

THE PROPOSED GREEN STREET CONSERVATION AREA

Have a look at WFDC website. Follow the links through planning to 'What's New in Conservation'.

Read through the interesting pages on the information about the proposed Conservation Area.

Not easy to find, but well worth the effort. Why such a limited area?

Sweet Memories

When I was a kid growing up in the 1940's, Lorne Street had its own boiled sweet factory, which was near the Offimore Road end. I don't know how long it had been there but sugar boiling was going on at a reduced level during and after the War despite sugar rationing.

My Grandma who lived at 48, held a spare key to the factory. Our family knew the sugar boilers very well, they were a Father and Son, I only remember the son, Bill Hodges, who also had a sweet stall in Kidderminster Market for many years. I believe Bill's son Peter, who was also a sugar boiler, ran the sweet stall for a time along with his mother Molly. The factory was owned by a Mr Smith and his son and after the war they had a corner sweet shop at the bottom of Prospect Hill.

I often used to visit the factory with my Grandma and was fascinated with the whole process of sugar boiling. I remember at the far end of the factory there were two furnaces, on top of these were large cauldrons into which was put sugar and glucose syrup, after a certain amount of time a sugar thermometer was used. When the time was right, these huge vats with the boiling mixture were lifted off and poured onto a long metal slab, this is when things really speeded up, as the boiling toffee had to be worked fast, once it had started to cool it would harden and become useless

For this job heavy canvas gloves were worn because of the heat, the mixture would quickly be divided into pieces then the colourings and flavourings were added. The pieces were then worked by folding them over and over again, these pieces were then taken across the room to a long marble slab. On one end of this slab was a type of small mangle with different moulds set in rollers which could be changed to suit whatever sweets were being made, there were rollers for pear drops, acid drops lemon and orange pieces, the toffee was moulded into sweets by being pressed between the rollers which were turned by using a handle. Afterwards the sweets were left to cool on the slab.

Rock and aniseed pieces were made in a different way.

Once the toffee mixture was ready to be divided, half of it would be flavoured and hand rolled into long thin strips [aniseed], the remainder was thrown over what looked like a meat hook until it turned white (rock) then rolled into long thin strips. Later, these would all be chopped by hand into small chunks ready to be bottled and sent out to the shops.

Bill Hodges was a kind hearted gentleman, who would often give us kids the odd bits and pieces of sweets which were left over. At Christmas he would make coloured walking sticks for our Christmas stockings. One story he often told me was, that there was a certain policeman who used to visit him while on his beat. Bill always gave him a few sweets, however, the policeman was never satisfied and used to take another handful from the slab as he left, this used to annoy Bill Hodges no end. One day, he decided to teach the young Policeman a lesson, the next time he boiled up acid drops there were a few extra special ones made, with a lot more of the flavouring, [citric acid]. These were left at the end of the slab. All went to plan with the Policeman grabbing an extra handful as he left, and popping one in his mouth, Bill followed him to the door and found him outside gasping from the shock of the extra flavouring, this apparently did the trick. After that episode there was no further attempt to help himself.

Back in those days health and safety wasn't like it is today. In the summer, the sweet factory was plagued with wasps, the accepted method of pest control was to leave a few of the large liquid glucose tins with a bit of the glucose left at the bottom, the wasps would go in after the sweetness then get stuck. Everything was done by hand, sweets weighed up and bottled, sweet jars cleaned and labelled. The roof used to leak, in several places. [No roofing materials available in wartime Britain]. Not even the luxury of hot water, just one cold water tap. Despite all this, sweets were still produced summer and winter.

Boiled sweets seemed to have lost their popularity in the 1960's. However, in the last couple of years, there are more and more, old fashioned sweet shops opening up. When I pass one of them, I often think of Bill, his boiled sweets and his market stall, and wonder what he would make of the prices charged in shops today?

Andra Kleanthous.

What memories are revived by this article. I can almost taste the sugary sweetness of the 'Troach' which my Grandmother bought for us children. Ed

The Shrubbery, Birmingham Road.

I have recently been contacted by an architect and a member of staff at the Shrubbery nursing home. They have discovered that this fine house, which is a listed building, once had a second-floor, but this was removed in an extraordinary example of downsizing after the second world war.

The historical importance of the Shrubbery lies in its link with members of the Lea family, who were among the wealthiest of Kidderminster's manufacturers. It is believed that the house was built, probably around 1785, by William Lea (1741-1801).

Lea's father, Joseph Lea (1711-1780) was a silk and worsted manufacturer, who lived in Church Street. He achieved the highest civic position in the town, that of Bailiff, in 1764. His will, dated 1775, contains financial bequests amounting to £10,500, which was a very large sum of money in those days. In today's values it would amount to something like £1.3m.

The silk and worsted industry was vital to Kidderminster, and it was not until after 1800 that the carpet industry took the leading role. After his father died in 1780, William Lea, as the eldest son, became a richer man than he was already. Also, the development of a fine cloth called bombazine in the years following 1780 gave the silk and worsted industry a considerable boost. William Lea may still have been manufacturing during this time. His will, dated 1799, made very considerable financial bequests amounting to £25,000 - £2.1m at today's values.

Like his father, William held the highest civic office in the town. He was Bailiff in 1777-8 and 1780-1.

After his death the house continued to be owned by the Lea family, but it was rented out at times. Charles Talbot was tenant in 1835, and in 1859 the tenant was John Brinton. The last member of the Lea family to occupy the house was William Lea's son John (1789-1858). He died at the Shrubbery in 1858.

William Henry Moore Esq is shown as living there in the Littlebury's Directory of 1879, and he owned the house at his death. Sales particulars for 16th July 1897 show that the Shrubbery was being sold by his executors. They confirm there was a second floor with "three bed rooms and a linen closet." A third floor contained "two servants' rooms and several attics".

It would be wonderful to restore the house approximately to its original scale, which would properly reflect the importance and wealth of the Lea family.

Does anyone have a photograph showing the original house with the second floor?

Nigel Gilbert 7.11.2011

Very latest news – Hot off the press!

Weavers Cottages Horsefair

There has been an important breakthrough concerning the weavers cottages in the Horsefair. It looks as if the diligent work for over a decade by Steve Bragginton and others in the Civic Society may yet pay off.

Agreement has been reached for the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust to apply for lottery funding to ensure the conservation of these important listed 18th century cottages. If all goes to plan they will be turned into modern residences, with extensions at the back. The initial application for the first stage of funding must be made by 13th December.

It remains to be seen whether it will be possible to build in a small museum area. This would complement the carpet museum, but it seems likely that an additional financial source will be needed to make this possible.

Nigel Gilbert 11.11.11

The Kidderminster Civic Society website is a magnificent testament to those who write historical reports with such great passion for our town's heritage. Please explore these pages. You will find unexpected nuggets of information here. History is not just big houses and castles but is the story of ordinary people living quite ordinary lives. We are losing our heritage quite quickly and in our lifetime the town has changed beyond recognition. Let our descendants see how this change has taken place. Join the Historic Kidderminster Project and help record what is left of our town's story. We owe it to those who follow to show that at least some of Kidderminster's residents have a sense of belonging. How many of those who swept away our inheritance in the 1960's actually lived in the town?

HERITAGE WEEKEND 10th & 11th Sept.

KIDDERMINSTER TOWN WALK

We started our walk from the new Museum and were very capably led by Melvyn Thompson who is very knowledgeable about all matters to do with carpet manufacture. After inspecting the exhibits, we started our walk by going to the conveniently provided map on the wall and checking our current position. We walked along Green Street noting the door fittings and the window pediments and, passing the offices, Elgar House, on the corner of Green Street and Dixon Street now only partly occupied, turned right and went along Dixon Street. We noted the particular offices with the tower at the top and observed the one last remaining dye house roof. Crossing over by the lights we passed the Caldwell Tower and saw the rear entrance to Tesco which was originally the front of the Brinton's Castle Street building. We noted the initials over the door; they were CBB, RSB, and GRW any guesses as to who they stood for? (Answers at the end)

We went on to the canal towpath at this point and walked along towards the piano building. At each place where the canal turned into the one-time offices and factory premises we noted the hump back in the tow path to allow the canal boats to pass underneath and into the basins. These are no longer there but the humps remain.

Leaving the canal towpath we now went to the boiler house – no longer a boiler house, but now Frankie and Benny's restaurant, originally containing steam engines which provided the motive power for all the factory by means of overhead shafting and many belts and pulleys. We then went to inspect the factory bell – later superseded by 'the Bul' which many people will remember. After visiting the Bull (still on display on the corner wall) we went along to the Husum Bridge which commemorates our unity with Husum and gently made our way back to Green Street via the town centre and the old Courthouse in Worcester Street. An hour well spent and a very interesting talk with a walk.

[Answers : CBB Cecil Brinton: RSB Reginald Brinton: GRW Richard (Dick) Woodward.]

Keith Shaw

The Norris Trout Collection and Memorial Inscriptions at St George's

I am currently assisting Mattie Underhill, a Parish Warden at St George's church Kidderminster, with two projects; recording and conserving the Norris Trout Collection of Victorian photographs and a survey of the memorials and inscriptions in St George's Churchyard. As part of Heritage Open Days, Mattie produced a display on these projects in St George's Church.

The Norris Trout Collection comprises around 150 glass plates, taken between 1888 and 1922, chiefly by C J Carter, a Kidderminster carpet designer. These plates were in the possession of the late Norris Trout. Sadly, Norris died suddenly this summer before printing and recording these photographs as he intended. Mattie and I are grateful to his family for allowing us to have the plates and complete this project in his memory. He was a dear friend to us both.

The photographs include pictures of Kidderminster and its environs, portraits and 'holiday snaps' taken further afield. There is a photograph of a group of men who also appear in Dwight and Clark (1980), 'Kidderminster in Times Past' indicating that Carter was associated with Albert Chambers whose photographic plates are stored at Bewdley Museum. When our research is complete, prints taken from the plates by Mattie, with commentary, will be lodged with Kidderminster Library. The plates themselves need careful conservation and we are investigating where and how this can best be done.

A survey of the memorials and inscriptions in St George's Churchyard was last undertaken in 1990. Shifting ground, together with wear and tear caused by the elements and, sadly, vandalism, require it to be updated. We meet in the churchyard from 9:30 to 12:00 on Friday mornings when there is also a Coffee Shop in the church. Depending on size, number of inscriptions and vegetation to be cleared, each person records on average four memorials per session. We are finding many more inscriptions than recorded in the earlier survey making it very worthwhile. We badly need more volunteers!

Mattie matches each memorial to the index of the Burial Registers she is currently undertaking. These records can be used by the Church and family historians who can contact her on maunderhill@blueyonder.co.uk or 01562 630560. I have discovered the graves of several prominent Farfield residents including the clockmaker, George Rocke.

We had a steady stream of visitors, most being interested in the Victorian photographs. The neighbouring

display by members of the Kidderminster Past Facebook page was also well attended with a considerable number of visitors bringing their old photographs to be scanned for display on the website. The afternoon was made all the more pleasurable by an organ recital by Tim Morris and members of the church kept us all well supplied with light refreshments.

Nicky Griffiths

TOUR OF THE TOWN HALL AND COUNCIL CHAMBER

We joined the queue? at 10am, in The Music Room. Just the three of us! After a short wait, just in case there was a sudden inrush of eager students of local history, we began.

Our guide was to be Bob, the Mayor's assistant. The first area to be visited was The King Charles Room. It was explained that this was a relatively new addition to the civic building simply bridging the gap between town hall and the old council chamber. This is where we saw the Town Charters granted to Kidderminster 375 years ago.

We then entered The Mayor's Parlour. This is quite a small room filled with much memorabilia. The antiques roadshow could have a field day! Many photographs and mementoes of Kidderminster's glorious past are on display.

The council chamber is certainly a place where the great and the good of our borough played out history and made our town what it is today. The chamber is now an anachronistic reminder of what was once the political hub of Kidderminster. We had been joined by another one or two additional tourists at this point.

Our progress to the court house followed with echoes of the dispensing of justice from petty thief to serious criminals. It's a pity that the cells below are no longer in existence. They have been replaced with the shiny new 'Worcestershire Hub'. Further evidence of the loss of our civic history. I would hope that if we had been blessed with a town council over the last few years our heritage would have remained intact.. Can we ever replace our lost past? Did anyone think to preserve the cells for possible inclusion in heritage projects of the future? Probably not!

We were privileged to be able to climb up into the clock tower and hear the clock bell at close quarters. In this roof space there was the setting of the last supper of some poor unfortunate who lived out his last few moments of life in this dusty garret. Little known history made in this building where history was all but wiped out during the last few inglorious years of our town.

A recital and demonstration on our famous music room organ was ably performed by Tim Morris. I regret that I was unable to stay for this part of the morning's entertainment.

Again, the poor response to the tour, reflects the towns-folks apathy to their historic heritage.

Stephen Bagust - Editor

SAINSBURYS NEW STORE

Has anyone else looked at the new Sainsburys store in Kidderminster? Are you, like me, appalled at the architecture? Whatever happened to the glorious brickwork which adorned the original building? How did this monstrosity get past the planning department? It looks more like a general hospital and totally out of place in the heart of the town. I believe that we all need to be vigilant in future to prevent this unsympathetic commercial development occurring again.

We will have to look very carefully at the plans for the replacement of Levine's and British Heart Foundation stores in Market Street. I would think that many voices objecting to inappropriate architecture would have the effect of making the planning department take note of concerned residents of the town. The other question which could be asked is, do we really need the buildings replaced? There are enough empty properties in the town to accommodate the two retail outlets lost in the conflagration. The vacant space could then be used as a free for 15 minutes, shopper's short-term car park..

If as many Civic Society members as possible looked at the weekly planning applications, then hopefully, we can prevent such unsympathetic designs getting past our local planning committee who do not appear to have the aesthetic appearance of our town in their thoughts. If we have to lobby each member of the planning committee to get this across then this is what needs to be done.

This is the personal view of the editor.

Alphonse Jacques Bouët and his Kidderminster Connections



This story does not start at the beginning but at the discovery, by Joy Marshall, of the medal shown here. Joy purchased the medal from a Dudley family whose two boys had recovered it from a skip together with its silk purse. The local council had just cleared the home of an elderly lady who had died shortly before.

The WW1 sterling silver British War Medal was engraved with the name Alphonse Bouët and Joy set out to discover the story behind this soldier and his medal. In doing so, she discovered a connection to Kidderminster and contacted the Kidderminster & District Archaeological & Historical Society.

The remainder of this account is a summary of Joy's findings supplemented by local Kidderminster knowledge.

Private 2955 Alphonse Jacques Bouët served in the 2nd/7th Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment and was killed on 5th December 1916 when his battalion was engaged in a trench above the Ancre river which runs into the Somme in Picardy. His obituary in the Kidderminster Shuttle describes Alphonse as 'Sniper Bouët' and states that he was 'killed by a shell and died instantly, being shot through the heart'. 'Died instantly' was often a euphemism used by officers in an attempt to spare a bereaved family the harsh

realities of death in wartime. In this case it seems unlikely to be true for 'Soldiers Died in the Great War' records that he 'Died of Wounds' which usually meant back in a field hospital or dressing station.

At the time of his death, Alphonse's family was probably living in Handsworth or Stourbridge but the family had strong connections with Kidderminster. Alphonse's father, Alfred Jacques, was born in Kidderminster, a son of Alphonse Joannin Bouët a French carpet pattern designer who came to Kidderminster from Nimes in August 1855. Initially he joined Brintons but later worked for Crabtree & Co. At some stage he apparently set up an independent practice: the Post Office Directory of 1860 lists: Bouët & Jones, Carpet Pattern Designers, 11 Church St. The 1861 census shows the family (wife Emilie Antoinette and sons Edmond Alphonse and Alfred Jacques) living at 'Verandah Cottage', Whitville which still stands (un-named) in Franche Road. By 1871 a daughter Eliza Sophie had been added to the family and they were living in Comberton Road. This was possibly French Villa but a later owner of French Villa recalls that the Deeds indicated that the house was built for Alphonse Joannin Bouët in 1872. Whatever, the carpet designer clearly had some input into the distinctive French architectural styling.



'French Villa'
18 Comberton Road
Kidderminster
21 August 2011

Alphonse Joannin Bouët died on 16th October 1877 and is buried in St George's Churchyard but Bouët's continued to occupy 'French Villa' for many years. In 1881 and 1891 Alfred and Edmond were still living at home and classified (like their father) as Carpet Designers. In 1901 Edmond had been married to Ann Hawkins for ten years and was still a carpet designer living in Chester Road; but by 1911 he had moved back to occupy 'French Villa' his mother having died in 1904. He remained there until his death on 14th October 1933 his wife predeceasing him in 1924. Locals say that Edmond had been a freelance carpet designer.

Meanwhile, Alfred had married Clara Inston in 1892 and had become a Commercial traveller of Foley Park by 1901. Apparently, his carpet design activities had been affected by the introduction of 'modern styles'. The family later lived in Hagley but by 1911 Alfred was widowed and a Manufacturing Agent for an asbestos factory and living in Handsworth. Also at home were sons Alphonse Jacques aged 18, a chemical assistant at a steel works, and Albin Samuel aged 16 who was not yet working. Alfred died at Wollaston in 1937.

Like his brother Albin Samuel Bouët served with the Worcester Regiment during WW1 but he survived the war and died in Birmingham in 1969. Neither Albin nor Alphonse married.

Apparently the Bouët family does not appear to have made much effort to remember, publicly, the WW1 exploits of Alphonse Jacques. Apart from a short obituary without a photograph in the Kidderminster Shuttle, presumably submitted by the Kidderminster branch of the family, no other obituary has been found in Stourbridge or Black Country local newspapers. Nor has an inscription of his name on any town or other WW1 war memorial been traced. Neither the headstone on his war grave in the Cemetery at Pozieres, near Albert in France, nor his record on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database, contain any reference to his family or background.

A mystery still exists about the discovery of the medal. There was the elderly lady whose possessions apparently contained this lone medal. Who was she? When Albin died there appears to have been no close family left alive: no sister's, brothers or other issue from either Alfred's or Edmund's branches. Alphonse would also have at least been awarded a Victory medal and his relatives the large 'Next of Kin' Plaque. Are those missing items still out there somewhere awaiting discovery?

I am grateful to Joy Marshall for the collaboration that has made this account possible.



Bob Millward, October 2011.
Page 4