



Staffordshire Centre

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Trust**

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NEWSLETTER ***May 2024***



Harvington Hall

17th April 2024

(See page 30 for details)

ntstafford.org.uk

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What we do

Talks



Walks



Visits



Holidays



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Haydn Poulson

New Members

We welcome the following members, who have recently joined the centre:

Pamela Dunning (Stafford)
Dawn Roads (Stafford)

Royce & Kay Farr (Stafford)
Jane Walton &
Richard Ogborne (Crewe)

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Editorial

A warm welcome to our new members (listed opposite), your support is very much appreciated. Even if you're not a new member, I hope you'll find something of interest in this issue.

Newsletters are published in May and November each year, so you can see what the committee have organised for the coming months, and put some dates in your diary. Talks, Walks, Visits and Holidays can all be booked via the website, so please use this facility, if you can (from any device that can access the internet). You can also read about the events that have taken place since the previous issue, in the 'Reflections' section.

This is the first issue of the Newsletter that I have edited, having only joined the organisation myself, post-Covid. Prior to this, Philip Grainger produced the Newsletter (in addition to being an active committee member). He opted to step down from the committee this year, to take a well-earned break, but he'll still be busy, working in the background, supporting and facilitating the centre's activities. On a personal note, I'd like to thank Phil for all his hard work, and ensuring a smooth handover to the 'current editor'.

As with any organisation, we rely on volunteers, to keep things running smoothly. So, if you feel that you can 'lend a hand', in any way, then please have a word with a committee member.

Nigel Holmes

News

The news in this issue, centres around our AGM (where a change was made to our constitution) and the presentation by our guest speakers: Caroline Beacall, and Arry Cain, from Shugborough. In addition to our annual donation, the centre also sponsors the bookshop at Shugborough, so please take a look at David Goacher's report (on page 9).

AGM Summary

Our 50th Annual General Meeting was held on 9th April. Although 2023 was the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Staffordshire Centre, the pandemic meant that this was our fiftieth AGM.

Formal Business

Margaret Winfield opened the meeting, by welcoming everyone, and gave a special welcome to Caroline Beacall, and Arry Cain from Shugborough.

Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

David Brass dealt with apologies, and Margaret stated that unfortunately, Haydn Poulson (Hon. President) was unable to attend, as his wife was unwell, and wished her a speedy recovery.

The minutes of last year's AGM were formally accepted and there were no matters arising.

Chair's Report

Margaret Winfield thanked the committee for providing an interesting programme of events over the past year, and gave special thanks to Philip Grainger and Nicola Woodhouse, who have now retired from the committee. The remaining committee agreed to stand for another year.

The annual holiday to Ilminster in May last year, was enjoyed by all that went (see the November Newsletter), but it was noted that coach visits aren't always viable, due to the high cost of coach hire.

Instead of a speaker, in June last year, Edward Holmes gave an Origami demonstration, which we hope to repeat. And in July, we celebrated our 50th Anniversary in the Lady Walk Tea Rooms at Shugborough (with a free buffet provided by the staff) and again

in August, with a Canal Cruise from Teddesley Lock, including a fish 'n' chip lunch (which we hope to repeat in July this year).

In August, an event was arranged, where members were invited to put their ideas forward to the Centre (which was followed by tea, scones, and a beetle drive).

During the year we've advertised our talks more widely. In February, the Stafford Film Archives talk, attracted 107 people, and we almost ran out of chairs (see 'Reflections' section for details).

The Newsletters and monthly Bulletins have continued to be well received. Our thanks must go to Philip for all the brilliant work he has put into these (and thanks also to the many contributors).

Margaret finished, by also thanking those that have arranged such interesting walks and visits, and thanked all our speakers. And finally, she expressed her hopes for the next 12 months, to be 'as enjoyable and successful as the last'.

Treasurer's Report

John Willis ran through the accounts... He stated that 2023 was another successful year, for the Centre, and paid tribute to John Collier, who had now retired from auditing the accounts, after many years of service, and thanked Keith Palmer for auditing the 2023 accounts.

Subscriptions - Subscriptions showed a significant increase over three years, up to almost £1,300 in 2023, but annual changes were distorted by a number of other factors, including the 2021 subscription holiday.

Membership is stabilising, John thanked all those who helped on the stand in the Midden Yard last year and appealed for more people to help organise events.

Income from the programme (excluding the subscription holiday) nearly doubled, from 2022 to 2023, (£5,300). This was partly due to special events for our 50th anniversary, such as the 'chippy cruise', but helped by extra talks last year, and a full programme of visits.

Holiday Income - The Eastbourne holiday in 2022 (which we organised ourselves), brought in nearly £20k, but was matched by high costs (nearly £19k) in the year, whereas the £5.4k income in 2023 was mainly for deposits for the Kendal holiday in 2024, with expenses (of £1.7k). The Ilminster holiday, was arranged through Regent Travel, and made a profit of £900.

Expenses for the programme - Expenses (excluding the holiday) were also up significantly (nearly £4k) - up from £1.5k in 2022. This was partly due to the increased volume of events, and also the cost of non-profit making events for the fiftieth anniversary, such as Christmas at the Rag - which isn't intended to make a profit.

The only other significant cost, was publicity (up from zero to £460 in 2023), for new display boards and six-page recruitment leaflets.

Overall, the Centre showed an operating surplus in the year of almost £5,400 in 2023, and after allowing for items to be carried over to 2024, the Centre was able to donate a cheque for £2,500 to Shugborough.

Change to the constitution

This proposed amendment to the constitution, was to open up membership of the Centre, to non-members of the National Trust (in response to feedback from our meeting in August 2023). The amendment was voted in, by a majority show of hands.

Election of the committee

The committee stood down, and were duly re-elected, by a show of hands. An appeal was then made by Margaret, for members to consider joining the committee (with a promise of tea and cake!).

Thanks to retiring Officers

Margaret formally thanked Philip Grainger and Nicola Woodhouse for their service, and they were presented with gifts, as a token of our appreciation.

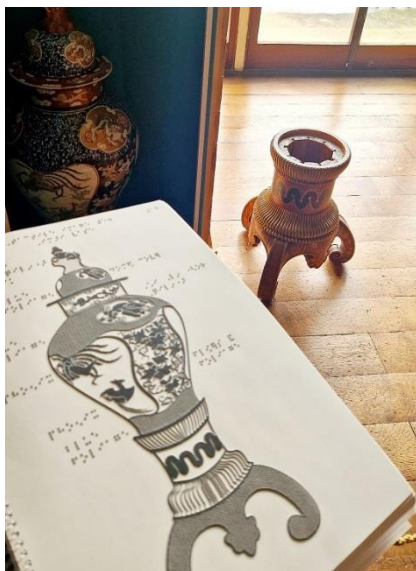
Presentation

Caroline Beacall (Head Gardener at Shugborough) and Arry Cain (Participation and Partnerships Manager at Shugborough), were then invited to deliver their presentation, on what's been happening recently at Shugborough...

Update on the Touch to See books

Last year, part of our donation to Shugborough, was used to fund a project to help visually impaired visitors to 'see' and 'read the story' of Shugborough, with the aid of 3D pictures and braille text.

The following, is an extract from an email sent to us by Arry, who has been project leader on the Touch to See books at Shugborough...



I'm just emailing to update you on the Touch to See books for the Shugborough Mansion... We have just taken delivery of the books and they are wonderful!

Arry and Caroline brought a book to the AGM for us to see, and Arry, has since, kindly provided us with a further update:

Thanks to a generous donation from the Staffordshire Centre, we have been able to produce a 'Touch to See' tactile guide to the Shugborough Mansion,

to support visitors who are blind and partially sighted. The house team and I have worked with the RNIB to create incredible tactile books. We selected 10 items from the collection that help to narrate the journey through the mansion, and the story of the Anson brothers. The books have been produced in both braille and large print, and contain labelled, tactile representations of the images. The Imari Vase, the Furietti Centaur sculpture, a Portrait of Thomas Anson and an image of the mansion itself, all feature in the books. Visitors that wish to use these books will be welcome to take a seat at the table in the Room of Imaginary Landscapes, and soak up the atmosphere, whilst experiencing the journey through touch. We have already had a visit from somebody who kindly volunteered to test the books, and we are implementing their valuable feedback to shape how we present the offer, and support visitors to use them.

In addition to these books, visitors are now also able to borrow braille and large print information booklets about the wider Shugborough Estate, from Visitor Reception.

During her presentation, Arry covered various changes that are taking place at Shugborough, to make it more accessible - for example, matting, to provide level access to the toilets at the farm, and quiet spaces for people with Autism/Dementia. Also, a new play area is planned as part of 'Shaping Shugborough' - designed in conjunction with access consultants and the accessibility group, this new facility, will be inclusive for children and adults with disabilities.

Update on the Shugborough Estate

Caroline talked about the effects of climate change, and how this has affected both the mansion and the gardens. Prolonged heavy rain, combined with debris had washed into the gutters in a part of the

mansion, causing a build-up of water, which resulted in the ceilings below collapsing! It would seem that 1-in-10-year weather incidents, are now happening on a far more regular basis. Whilst at other times of the year, steps are needed to protect vulnerable plants from drought.

A number of long-term projects are underway, where possible, selecting plants that are able to co-exist, and cope better with both warmer, and wetter weather than we are used to. There will also be less planting of annual flowers, and more planting of perennial flowering shrubs, in the gardens.

Another long-term project, is the Forest Garden, and establishing a new orchard. Work continues on the Chinese house and tennis courts. A series of organised events and experiences, held in the grounds, have been good fund raisers, with a record 269,515 visitors last year, and £1 million taken in Food & Beverages sales. And, overall, the best retail sales in the region.

Volunteers have put in 42,000 hours over the last year and the bookshop (sponsored by the centre) has raised £58,400 over the last year! Caroline also said that, due to the internal governance process in the National Trust, it was necessary to get sign off on the plans for the new visitor facilities and vehicle entrance. If all goes to plan, then work will start later this year.

Caroline also reminded us of two other local places maintained by the trust, namely Downs Banks (woodlands and heath) and Hawksmoor (ancient woodland, with its 'leaky dams' to control flooding) - both are worth a visit.

Presentation of our donation

A cheque for £2,500 was then presented by the Centre, and



accepted by Caroline, on behalf of the National Trust. The money from our donation, will be apportioned as follows:

Weather station - £800

This is a solar powered, wireless, weather station, using the latest technology. It will be located within the Walled Garden, specifically in the Forest Garden, which is an environmental and edible food forest, focused on creating a garden for a changing climate.

From this central weather station hub, up to 100 orbital sensors will be placed across the Forest Garden and within the Walled Garden. This will enable us to capture data such as rain fall and intensity, soil moisture and temperature, air humidity and leaf moisture, UV and photosynthesis, or wind direction and chill factor.

This valuable data will equip us with a data set to factually monitor the impact of climate change in different garden settings and measure the impact of gardening techniques on climate change.

Hedge Laying - £1,700



This donation will be used to fund hedge laying training, for staff and volunteers. This traditional skill can then be used across the portfolio, to rejuvenate hedge rows which act as vital wildlife corridors, linking habitats, and providing valuable shelter and food sources, to a wide variety of birds, insects and other wildlife. It is a vital, but dying skill, that is seen less and less in the countryside. Investing in the skills base of our team, will help to keep these skills alive, for many years to come, and will be open to all of our outdoor teams.

Bookshop Report

The Bookshop has continued its growth this year (year ending February 2024), and we are pleased to announce that our year-end figure is £58,400, which is a fantastic achievement for the 53-volunteer team, that manages the bookshop, 364 days each year.

This latest figure, compares favourably with last year, when we took £51,000.

Surprisingly, we have just had our busiest March (£5,198, which is £1,500 more than last year), and taking into account the very poor weather, that is amazing.

Our bookshop has put itself on the map, as one of the busiest, and most profitable, NT bookshops in the region. Our rare book cabinet has again contributed to this total, with several high-value books selling at good prices.

The proceeds will continue to support a number of Shugborough based projects. Many thanks, once again, to our sponsors, The Staffordshire Centre.



David Goacher
(Lead Bookshop Volunteer, Shugborough)

Upcoming Events

Talks

All talks are held at Walton Village Hall, Green Gore Lane, Milford, ST17 0LD, and start at 2.30pm.



The Violin

Natalie Cummings - 14th May



This is the story of how Abraham, music tutor to the Tsar's children, fled with his family and his violin from St. Petersburg to Odessa, to escape the Bolshevik revolution.

The violin passes to

his daughter, Rosa, violinist with the famous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Arrested by the Nazis on Kristellnacht 1938, she is sent to Mauthausen Concentration Camp, and then to Auschwitz, where her musical talent sees her forced to join the Women's Orchestra and saves her life.

Rosa's brother Israel, inherits the violin after her death and finally it comes to his daughter, Natalie. Unplayable due to damage sustained during its arduous history, it remained silent for 30 years, until it was famously brought back to life, in the BBC's Repair Shop.

Through The Eyes of a Magician

Peter Turner - 11th June



This is a fascinating & intriguing talk, light hearted, informative and delivered with humour. It is full of twists and turns and it's definitely different!

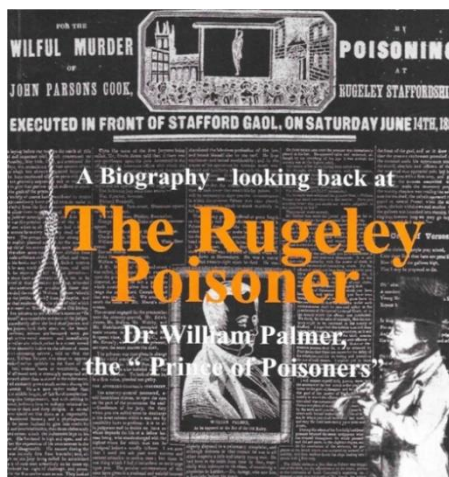
There is a 'Mysterious World' out there, and Pete will give you a taste of it on a fascinating journey of the unexplained. Using the 'Science of Perception', Pete will demonstrate how you can see something that is not there. I know, it all sounds a bit crazy, but seeing is believing, and until you experience the unknown in a logical world, it will open a new dimension, on how you perceive the impossible. Also, you will discover the psychological mind games used by magicians to convince you that what you're seeing is actually happening right in front of your eyes.

The Rugeley Poisoner

Dave Lewis - 9th July

Dave Lewis, author of 'The Rugeley Poisoner', explores the life of Dr. William Palmer, whose effigy stood in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, London, for 127 years.

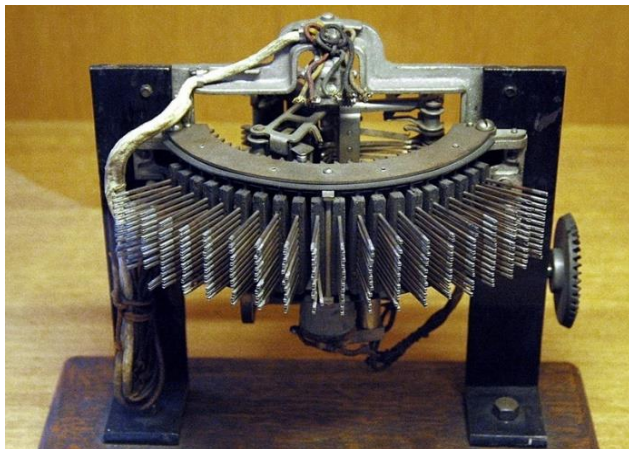
In 1855 Palmer, a country doctor and owner of 17 race horses, at the age of just 31, was hanged in front of Stafford Prison, before a crowd of over 30,000 people.



He was found guilty of murdering friend, and racegoer, John Parsons Cook. The press, however, labelled him as a serial killer. Explore most of the suspicious deaths - 'The Rugeley Tragedies'... not so much a 'who dun it' as a 'did he do it?'

The History of Telecommunications in the UK

Nigel Holmes - 13th August



Those of you that came to my 'Technology Through Time' talk last year, may recall that I've always been interested in 'how things work', which is probably why I ended up working in telecommunications.

When I started work as an apprentice in 1975, telephone exchanges were noisy places, with electromechanical switches, and you could still make long distance calls via the operator. When I retired in 2018, all exchanges were digital and noise free, but in the process of being replaced, as they were now obsolete!

We all rely on communication and information technologies in the 21st century, but where did it all begin? How did we get where we are today? And, who was Almon B. Strowger? If you come to this talk, you'll find out.

Dates for Your Diary

Tales from the Classroom

John Hibbs (ex HMI) - 10th September

My 50s House

Joanne Massey (alias Lola Lamour) - 8th October

History with Dividends

Ned Williams (tells the story of the Co-op) - 12th November

Christmas Box

Mervyn Edwards - 10th December

Walks

Walks (typically of 5 miles, or less) are organised by centre members most months, when conditions are suitable. These gentle, morning walks, are a great opportunity to meet and chat with other members, then have lunch afterwards (or just join us for lunch, if you like?).



Bluebells at Hem Heath

2nd May - 4 miles

We begin at the Toby Inn, walking along the Longton road initially, up to an entrance to Hem Heath Nature Reserve.

There are no stiles on this walk, and only one slight incline, as we walk along the towpath near Trentham Lock, which is after we've been through the reserve - hopefully having seen lots of bluebells!



Then, we go past the back of the Wedgwood Centre, onto the Trent & Mersey Canal towpath, and back to the Toby Carvery for lunch. Please join us for lunch if you are able.

Start: Toby Inn, 206 Longton Rd, Trentham

Satnav: ST4 8BU

Time: 10.30am

Lunch: Toby Inn

Organisers: Janet Leek & Pam Page

Future Walks

And, here are some other walks that we have scheduled...

June:	Whittington
July:	Rudyard Lake
September:	Fulford & Moddershall

Note: Walk locations and details may need to change. For further information, and to book a place, please go to the website:

ntstafford.org.uk/events/walks.

Visits

Fish & Chip Canal Cruise

12th July

Following the success of our 'Chippy Cruise' last year, we've booked a two-hour Canal Cruise with a Fish & Chip lunch on 12th July.



We will set off from Parkgate Lock and cruise down to Acton Trussell. Tea and coffee are included in the price, and the Georgie Kate is fully licensed, so there will be an opportunity to order other drinks and/or desserts on board.

Car parking is available at Parkgate Lock.

Meet: 11:45 at Parkgate Lock, Teddesley Road for a 12:00 start

Sat Nav: ST19 5RH

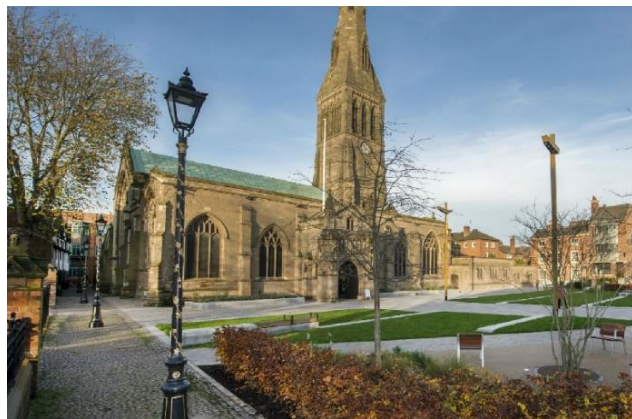
Price: £25.00 per head

Booking Deadline: 12th June - To allow numbers to be confirmed

Organiser: Margaret Winfield

Leicester Cathedral & King Richard III Visitor Centre

18th September



Leicester Cathedral reopened after an extensive 2-year restoration in November 2023.

King Richard was re-buried in the Cathedral in 2015.

We will have a 30 minute "Richard III"

tour with a guide, and then time to explore the Cathedral at our own pace.

The King Richard III Visitor Centre, just opposite, was built over the site of the Grey Friars Priory where King Richard's remains were buried 500 years ago, following the Battle of Bosworth.



The Centre houses amongst other things, a Dynasty exhibition, which tells the story of his rise to power and also a new exhibition entitled 'Murder, Mystery and Mayhem'.

It is suggested that we will need at least an hour and a half in the

Centre. We will need to divide into two groups and there will be plenty of time for coffee, lunch etc. There is an on-site cafe and many other places to eat within walking distance.

Editor's note: The Richard III back story, is told in the 2022 film "The Lost King", Written by Steve Coogan and Jeff Pope, starring Sally Hawkins as Philippa Langley. The film is based on the 2013 book 'The King's Grave: The Search for Richard III', and well worth watching (IMHO).

Pick up: Stafford Station 8:40, Wildwood Shopping Centre 8:50

Price: £32.00

Booking Deadline: 18th August

Organiser: Margaret Winfield

To book a place on either of these visits, please go to the website: ntstafford.org.uk/events/visits.

Note: All visits must be paid for in advance.

Reflections

Talks

You Can Get It If You Really Want

Nigel Holmes - October



Jamaican sound systems, first operated in the 1950s, in Kingston.



DJs would load up a truck with a generator, turntables and huge speakers, and set up street parties, as they were barred from dance halls uptown, by colonial rule.

Ska and Reggae music was brought to the UK in the late 60s and early 70s, by the

Windrush generation, and has influenced British pop music ever since.

50 plus members and friends came to see and hear Nigel, a member of the Centre. Looking at the audience during the talk, it was clear this music has many admirers.

Sometimes, when one attends a presentation, it's easy to think that the words just roll out from the speaker with little effort. But rather than list the songs presented, if you look at the statistics of this one, you can see the efforts made to present the complete journey.

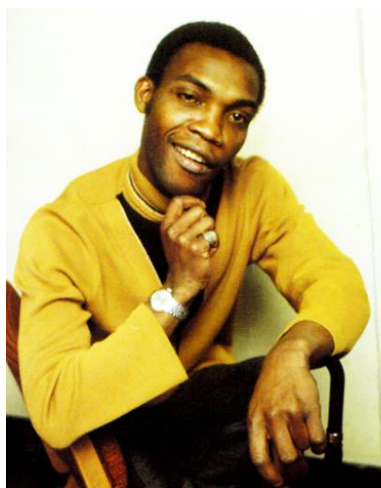
Somehow, Nigel managed to play one minute 15 second clips from 25 songs, as well as explaining the background to each song and artist, all neatly put together, whilst taking us on this journey.

Just for the record, some of the voices we heard, were Bob Marley (obviously), Amy Winehouse, Jimmy Cliff, Madness and of course Desmond Decker (below, right), performing the talk's title song.

It was interesting when the Q&A session took place, that two of the audience had memories of one particular stall in London, where this music was sold.

No write-up can be a substitute for actually being there, to listen and join in, so next time...

Thanks to Nigel for a great show, and it was noted that, when asked about repeating the performance with other genres, I thought I heard a 'Yes'.



Philip Grainger

Gadgets and Gizmos

Kath Reynolds - November

55 members and friends attended this presentation. Kath's collection of 'Gadgets and Gizmos', consisted of either picture, or actual examples. There were too many items to list, but here are some of the items she covered, along with comments about their usefulness (or not).



Kitchen gadgets included a hand operated Food Processor, a Table Spoon (a basic measure for all things food), a Knife Grinder,

a Multi Sharpener (described as 'worse than useless'), followed by an Electric Knife (does anyone still use one? - no). Then, a Mincer for meat leftovers (useful, but modern table tops can't take the weight), and a new Spin Slicer (the end fell off), however 'Spiralisers' can be used instead. Home gadget producers included: Ronco, Pifco and K-tel, who made the Chop-O-Matic, Veg-O-Matic (which 'slices and dices') and Burger-Matic, which basically flattens meat (but you can easily do the same with your hands).

Kath then showed some 'mystery objects', including a pressure cooker valve (with examples of disasters given by the audience). Remember wall mounted tin openers, with a magnet to hold the lid (but no one trusted it to hold the can), milk bottle holders (where kids would change the dial to 'Please Ring!'). And 'Teasmades', supposedly to make tea, but more often used for the light, or as an alarm clock. Tupperware parties? - apparently, the best seller was the 'plastic cruet set with lids'. Pyrex dishes with matching lids? - sometimes bought with Greenshield stamps (and mainly used today as casserole dishes). Also, Pyrex measuring jugs (which are useful).

Other household items that got a mention, were home bars with Soda streams that took sparklets bulbs, ashtrays with a spinner, cylinder vacuum cleaners (versus uprights) and the Ronco 'Miracle Broom' (battery operated and useless).

In late 50s/early 60s, TVs had only 9-inch screens, and people often rented from Rediffusion (an early 'cable TV' provider). Transistor radios eventually replaced valve wireless sets and stereo radiograms came into vogue (more as a piece of furniture).



Kath finished off with a few more mystery objects: a record vacuummer (that scratched the records whilst cleaning them), a Trimphone with a dial lock and a manual hair clipper with attachments.



The final photo was of a 'Prefab' house. These were built as an emergency measure, and expected to last for 10 years, however some are still here today.

This was a fascinating look back at some of the items we used (and often

regretted using) in the past. Our thanks to Kath, for a nostalgic trip through our household 'Gadgets and Gizmos'.

Philip Grainger

A History of Jabez Cliff

Cliff Kirby-Tibbits - December

Our speaker, Cliff Kirby-Tibbits, introduced himself by saying that he had lived in Stafford and attended Shooting Butts School!

His 18th century ancestor, was making boots back in 1750, in Stafford, but then this leather-worker, and his family, left to make their fortune in Walsall.



Cliff, moved into bridle making when George got his indentures as apprentice bridle maker in 1793. His son Jabez, the only surviving child of six, carried on the family tradition. Another Jabez, began his own saddlery business in Portland, St, Walsall in 1873.

In 1881 typhoid took Jabez and his two sons, leaving his widow Mary to carry on the business. She later married Mr. F. Joseph Tibbets', who helped the firm become larger, move into bigger premises, and amalgamate with the renowned saddle makers JA Barnsby & Son. They expanded the range of leather goods into travel and sports goods.

The early 20th century saw the Olympics, and four FA Cup finals were played with a Cliff-Barnsby named ball.

The sewing machine, especially the "long-armed" one, greatly helped the production methods and increase in output for these goods, including the sewing of torpedo covers, as leather cut down the fire risk when transporting, and in storage.

Our speaker's grandfather took over the company in 1903, and established good trade links with Russia, and at its peak, the company was employing 650 workers on two night/day shifts, to complete their commitments. The company took orders for military equipment for both World Wars, and subsequently in 1982, the Falklands War. The terrain there demanded something other than motor transport, so mules were used and the Ministry of Defence turned to the same company, to urgently produce the necessary tack.

Latterly, regimental leatherwork continued to be made – an example was passed around the audience – 'foot reins' for a horse in the Household Cavalry. Ceremonial items for the funeral of Princess Diana and wedding of William & Kate were also made by the company. Cliff included some anecdotes at this juncture, about royal visits made, and enjoyed.

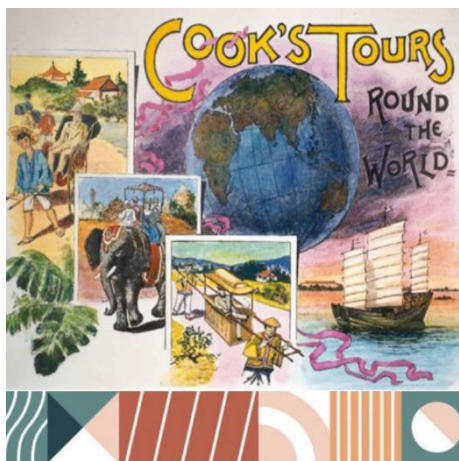
Our speaker was clearly proud of the six generations of his hard-working ancestors, and the part they had played in supporting their country. And quite rightly, his father was knighted and the Royal Warrant was granted to this world-famous company. Cliff himself, retired in 2011.

Judy Brass

Cook's Tours

Danny Wells - January

50 members and friends attended the first talk of the year.



Danny gave an extensive talk on the life of Thomas Cook. As well as showing photos of some of the posters used during the talk (on the screen). Danny had laid out a display of some of them on a table, for the audience to study at the end of the talk.

Thomas was born in Melbourne, Derbyshire, in 1808. He was brought up as a strict Baptist, and was a keen member of the temperance movement. In fact, his first ever 'day trip' was arranged to take a group of temperance campaigners from Leicester, to a rally in Loughborough, some 11 miles away.

Spurred on by this success he decided, at the age of 36, to organise a pleasure trip as a commercial venture. He charged 15 shillings for first class, and 10 shillings for second class holiday makers. He took around 570 passengers to Liverpool, so this was the beginning of accessible holidays for the less well off. It was so successful he made the same trip two weeks later, with those people who couldn't get on the first trip. However, the success of these ventures did not make Thomas any friends within the upper class, who showed signs of annoyance at 'lower-class' seeing the same sights as themselves.

This didn't stop Thomas, and he embarked on his next venture 'Tartan Tours' - visiting Scotland, and created guide books for the areas to be visited – the forerunner of the modern-day brochure we all see today.

By 1850, he was organising trips abroad, starting with a 'grand tour' of Belgium, Germany and France. By 1865, he had premises in London, and by 1872, he formed a partnership with his son and renamed the travel agency 'Thomas Cook & Son'.

This turned out to be a poor move by Thomas, as his son John Mason (who was a very astute businessman) wanted to stop all non-profit making tours, which went against Thomas' philosophy of cheap travel for all.

John opened up the market to Egypt, with the quote 'now you can summer with us all year round'. Then in 1873, the company organised the first 'Round the World' tour, lasting 222 days, and covering 25,000 miles. He moved the offices to Ludgate Circus, which included a Post Office, Telegraph Office, Waiting Room and Reading Room.

Conflicts of interest between father and son were resolved when the son persuaded his father, Thomas Cook, to retire at the end of 1878. He moved back to Leicester, and lived quietly until his death in 1892, having been afflicted with blindness in his declining years. His bank balance, at the time of his death was £2,731.

John continued to expand his empire, but he died seven years after his father. John's three sons took over the business, and were more successful than their predecessors, but the company was sold in 1926, bringing to an end the family connection with the travel business.

The presentation ended with a Q&A, and people studying the posters on display.

Philip Grainger

An Illustrated History of Stafford

Ray Johnson MBE - February



Our February talk was attended by over 100 people - our most popular to date!

Ray started by saying that he would take us through some of the history of Stafford's industrial past, with Staffordshire Film Archives, so we could see visually what it was like to work in the industries that made Stafford what it is today, rather than just being told the history.

We started with old footage of Stafford Railway Station, from the 1940s, showing the steam trains in operation at the time. This led onto English Electric, and we were able to see men working in the various departments. English Electric was incorporated in 1918, by amalgamating five businesses, which during the war, had been making munitions, armaments and aeroplanes, and was renowned for its electrical products, including generators, transformers and switchgear, which were used both here and abroad.

In the film we saw the creation of the first diesel electric (Deltic) locomotive, the LMS No. 10000. The latter, and LMS 10001, were some of the first mainline diesel locomotives built in Great Britain, at the Derby works, using an English Electric 1,600 hp diesel engine, generator and electrics. The 10000 was also presented at Euston on 18th December 1947. The LMS 10001 followed in 1948, and the two engines, coupled together, travelled to Scotland. The Brine Baths were shown next. These became known as the Royal Brine Baths, after they were opened by the Duchess of Teck, in 1895.

The baths, used brine, recently discovered under Stafford Common (during the search for a good water supply), in 1877. Bathing in brine was all the rage in Victorian times. In 1893, the Stafford Salt and Alkali Co.

was founded on Common Road. This company opened a second works in 1894, at Baswich, operated by the open pan method of obtaining salt.



The film showed employees working, in various ways, to harvest the salt. In 1948, a vacuum plant was erected, replacing the open pan method, which was closed in 1957. However, the brine pumping method caused subsidence in the north of the town, and the company were sued by Lotus Shoes, whose factory and stock were damaged by a collapse. Salt production was thus banned in 1970. All that remains in this area of Baswich now, is an industrial estate and a caravan park.

The next part of the film archive, focused on happenings around Stafford, like the carnivals, pageants with floats, and crowds of people lining local streets, to see them pass by. The old Post Office was featured. Known as the Post House, a Georgian town house, it was once occupied by William Chetwynd, 3rd Viscount, former MP for Stafford, who supported William Horton. The latter, built the first boot and shoe factory in Stafford. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the playwright often stayed here, and is said to have written "School for Scandal" there.

The Lotus shoe factory film showed us the different ways of making footwear. The factory was incorporated in 1903, with the purpose of selling readymade shoes, and exporting to customers all over the world. They were very innovative in their designs, and had great success.



However, in 1996, the greater part of footwear manufacture was transferred to Bridgend, and the factory was demolished in 1997 and replaced by houses. This ended Stafford's long association with footwear production, which had been a major industry through the 19th and 20th centuries.

The film-show finished where we had begun, with later footage of Stafford Railway station circa 1960's, showing diesel trains, not the steam engines we had seen earlier. For those interested, Ray suggested his website which he founded, and has developed:

filmarchive.org.uk

Janet Leek



The History of The Gatehouse

by Keith Harrison - March

Keith gave an interesting talk, telling the story of how Stafford's former Borough Hall was refurbished and converted to an entertainment venue.

It was reopened by the Duke of Gloucester, in January 1982, as

the Gatehouse Theatre, and became one of Britain's most successful provincial venues, hosting a range of successful plays, pantomimes and entertainers, including, on several occasions, the late comedian and singer, Ken Dodd!

Every theatre is reputed to have its own ghost, and true to form, the Gatehouse has a lady. She has been witnessed several times. No one knows her identity, but the staff prefer not to work in certain areas alone. Keith assured us that to date, everyone has stayed safe!

Ruth Williams

Walks

Great Haywood

October



Graham Ferry organised this walk from the Clifford Arms, as an alternative to the 'Walk along the River Sow', which had become impassable, due to recent heavy rain (thanks Graham).

We entered the Shugborough estate via the Essex Bridge, and commented on the magnificent trees, that appeared to have held on to their leaves, despite it being half-way through October. We took in the view across the river Sow, towards Tixall, and admired the ornate tunnel entrance, where the West Coast Mainline passes under the park. Apparently, the 710m tunnel was dug by hand, in just 18 months (1846-47), with only one fatality!

After a coffee stop at Wimpy, we joined the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal towpath. At 'The Broadwater' an impressive gatehouse came into view. This is all that remains of Tixall Hall, which was demolished in 1927. Fortunately, the gatehouse is now a grade one listed building.



We then passed under bridge 108, named 'Swivel Bridge', (however it doesn't swivel anymore - replaced by an arch bridge at a

later date). At bridge 109, we stopped for a 'windswept' group photo (taken by David Brass), before joining the Trent and Mersey towpath for the short distance, back to the Clifford Arms in good time for an enjoyable lunch, where we were met by several others.

Nigel Holmes

Christmas at the Rag

December

This walk, which preceded the Christmas meal at The Rag, was a gentle stroll in the fresh air to improve the appetite.

It began at the pub itself, in dry and chilly weather. Led by Dave Brass, the walk took lanes up to Castle Ring; a "lap" of the fort; a return through the village, past Nun's



Well, then back to The Rag, for a meal with friends.

Judy Brass

Cannock Chase - Sherbrook Valley Walk

March

We met at Springslade Lodge Café, which was the start and end-point for our walk around the chase, organised by Bob Whitehouse.

This circular route, was a little 'soggy under foot' at first, which is hardly surprising, considering all the recent rain. However, as we started to climb 'Anson's Bank', things improved somewhat. We continued across 'Brocton Field' until we reached the 'Glacial Boulder' a leftover from the ice age, found in Scotland, and conveniently mounted on a plinth.

Shortly afterwards, we stopped for Coffee and Bob took a photo. We then made our way towards 'Coppice Hill', and down into 'Sherbrook Valley', where we took another coffee stop, then followed the



'Sher Brook', returning via the 'Heart of England Way', pausing to view the Polish ('Katyn') War Memorial.

Bob explained, during our walk, on parts of the 'Heart of England' and 'Staffordshire Way', that it encompassed an area used for trench warfare training and aircraft bombing target practice in the first world war.

Lunch at the Springslade Lodge Café, was most enjoyable, with an extensive (but not expensive) menu. Thanks to Bob Whitehouse for organising.

Nigel Holmes

Visits

Harvington Hall

April



If you haven't visited Harvington, then you've missed a gem!



In a welcome respite from the rain, 16 centre members, were blessed with sunshine, when they visited Harvington Hall near Kidderminster. Our knowledgeable guide Angie, took us on a tour of this remarkable building.

Surrounded by a moat, it is known as 'The House of Secrets', because new finds are being discovered all the while, giving historians a unique insight into life at a manor house from 15th century onwards.

Formerly in the ownership of a Catholic family, it's an Elizabethan house, but the moat and artificial island, can be traced back to the 13th century. In the 16th century, Sir John Pakington bought the property, but only when his great-nephew, Humphrey Pakington, inherited the estate, did it come into being. Humphrey was a Catholic, and therefore subject to the harsh penal laws of the Elizabethan age. Because Catholic priests were illegal in England, Humphrey equipped Harvington with seven priest holes, some of which, were the work of master carpenter Nicholas Owen (later bestowed with a sainthood by the Pope).

There's an unusual water supply in the kitchen... Angie lifted a cover in the floor, to reveal a well with a bucket, that when immersed, filled with water from the moat, and used for cooking, cleaning and washing (ale was brewed for drinking).

Here's where we were shown slipware (recovered from the moat, and restored) and our first priest hole - located above the bread oven, within the chimney stack. This hide is 2' 7" wide, by 3' 9"s, but only 5' deep, and entered via a narrow trapdoor in the privy.

In another room, there's a 'swinging beam hide'.

Originally, the wall would have been covered by panelling, forming one of the three walls of the book cupboard. This priest hole, is only 1' wide at the entrance, widening to 3' by 8', again just 5' deep.

Neatly hidden behind the stairs is yet another unlikely hide. Original oak panelling, and Elizabethan wall drawings, can be seen around the walls, but the original stairs were removed, and now grace nearby Coughton Court. However, the replacement staircase is a close match.

There is a secret chapel at the top of the house, next door to a larger room, with yet another hidey hole in the floorboards, where it is thought communion vessels and altar pieces were put, out of sight from searchers. There are so many rooms that one can easily become disorientated - the Family Room, Great Chamber, Library, bedrooms, Nursery and Chapel, all containing their own treasures.

Our tour took over an hour, but even so, we only heard a brief history of this lovely manor. Harvington now belongs to the Archdiocese of Birmingham, being gifted by Mrs Ellen Ryan Ferris, who bought it in 1923. It is open to the public during the summer months, from Wednesday to Sunday, and Bank Holidays, and is well worth exploring.



Ruth Williams

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