



Staffordshire Centre

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Trust**

NEWSLETTER ***May 2025***

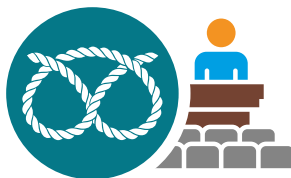


Arcadia

(See page 30 for details)

What we do

Talks



Walks



Car Visits



Coach Visits
& Holidays



Sponsor the
Bookshop



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Your Committee

**Chair
& Talks Coordinator**
Margaret Winfield

**Treasurer, Webmaster
& Publicity**
John Willis

Membership Secretary
Joan Jobling

Secretary
David Brass

Member
Jean Alden

Member
Peter Jobling

Member
Sue Willis

Member
Ruth Williams

Newsletter Editor
Nigel Holmes:

New Members

We welcome the following new members
to the Staffordshire Centre:

Mrs E. Crisp (Stafford)
Mrs D. Parton (Slindon)

Mrs C. Pickard (Stafford)
Katie Taylor (Dunston)

General Enquiries: info.ntstafford@gmail.com

Editorial

Welcome to this May issue of the Newsletter, which is my third as editor, but perhaps it's your first, if you've only recently joined the Staffordshire Centre. In an effort to reduce postage costs, we've opted to distribute copies at the first talk in May and November. If you've just collected your copy of the Newsletter, thank you for supporting us.

Our committee aim to provide an interesting programme of talks. Our May talk 'RAF Stories - Women in Aviation', is presented by Jess Boyden-Jukes.

Jess will share stories of ladies as aviators, long before the first woman pilot (Julie Gibson) officially received her RAF wings in 1991.

Personal stories will give insight to unknown women who made a difference and without question saved lives.

We hope that you enjoy our talks, which are a major source of income for the centre, thus enabling us to continue to support Shugborough.

If you weren't able to attend last month's AGM, then you can read all about it in the following pages.

The necessary formal business at our AGM, is always completed in a timely manner, and then we get to hear about the latest projects at Shugborough, and how our donations are being spent... plus it's free to attend!



Jess Boyden-Jukes

News

AGM Summary

Formal Business

Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

A copy of minutes from the previous AGM were made available to all attendees, along with a summary of accounts. Various members had submitted their apologies, which were noted, and there were no matters arising from the minutes.

Chair's Welcome & Annual Report

Margaret Winfield opened the meeting, by welcoming everyone to our 51st AGM, with a special welcome to our retiring President; Haydn Poulson, and Hayley Mival from Shugborough.

Margaret then thanked the committee, for their hard work over the past year, and for providing us with an interesting programme. She went on to say that, we had not been successful in recruiting any new committee members, but the present committee have indicated that they will be prepared to carry on for another year.

She thanked Nigel Holmes for taking over publication of the Newsletter, and offering to join the committee, and also thanked John Willis, our Treasurer, who has been producing the Monthly Bulletin (in addition to his many other duties). Margaret then continued with her report as follows...

This year, with the help of members and friends, we have once again been able to run our displays in the Midden Yard at Shugborough, giving us the opportunity to create awareness of the Staffordshire Centre, the events we organise, the results of our fundraising over recent years and Supporter groups in general.

As well as generating a good deal of interest, we have been able to promote the work of our Centre and also to attract new members.

There are still so many NT members, who know nothing of the work undertaken by Supporter Groups such as ours. Please spread the word! As you know, in the past we provided funds for the second-hand bookshop, and were delighted to be informed that to date it has raised a staggering £250,000.

During the year, we offered a varied programme of interesting walks and talks, a coach visit to the King Richard III Centre at Leicester, a Fish and Chip Cruise to Acton Trussell from Parkgate Lock, Penkridge, and a Car Visit to Harvington Hall. Our next visit, is a talk and tour around the Forest Garden at Shugborough, led by Head Gardener Caroline Beacall and Lizzie Pellowe.

Our Annual Holiday in May was to Kendal in the Lake District, arranged by Committee members, in particular Philip Grainger, in conjunction with Daish's Holidays. 40 members had an enjoyable time with a variety of excursions.



Our Annual Holiday to the Lake District in May 2024

It has not been possible for the Centre to arrange a holiday in 2025 with such a small committee, but as you will know, this year's arrangements have been made for a holiday in conjunction with the Arts Society organised by Regent Travel.

Talks have been particularly well attended, and we have had a variety of speakers on many, and varied topics. We didn't exceed the record of 107 attendees as at one talk last year, but have had numbers well up in the 60's and 70's.

To date, we have 140 paid members, plus one honorary member. Several people have not renewed their membership this year, although I am pleased to say that we have welcomed some new members. Our President, Haydn will be retiring this year after many years of service to our Centre. We are so pleased that he is able to be with us today.

This year, again, we are pleased to be able to present a cheque to Hayley for one of this year's projects, which we have chosen to support. In the mansion house, there are 21 watercolour paintings mostly by Dall and Griffiths, depicting the mansion, the landscape and the monuments, which adds greatly to the knowledge of how Shugborough was originally designed. These have faded over time, and work is needed to protect them. A selection will be sent to the NT conservation studio at Knole.

My grateful thanks to everyone who has arranged such interesting walks and visits throughout the year and to all our speakers. I hope that the next twelve months will prove as enjoyable and successful as the last.

Margaret Winfield

Treasurers Report

John Willis ran through the accounts. He stated that 2024 was another successful year for the Centre, and thanked Keith Palmer for auditing the accounts again in 2024.

Subscriptions - showed a small drop compared to 2023, reflecting a drop in members renewing, but membership is more stable than in previous years. John thanked all of those who helped on the stand in the Midden Yard last year, and stressed the need for more people to

help organise events. This was impacting our ability to organise walks, visits and the annual holiday.

Events - Income from the programme (excluding the holiday) was effectively flat in 2024, (£5,100).

Holiday Income - nearly tripled in 2024 to almost £16K, as the 2024 Kendal holiday was organised by ourselves, while the 2023 Ilminster holiday, was arranged through Regent Travel. In fact, most of the 2023 holiday income came from deposits for the Kendal holiday.

Expenses for the programme – Expenses, (excluding the holiday), reduced significantly to nearly £3k - from £4k in 2023, in spite of an increase in speaker costs for the talks. This was mainly due to the extra non-profit making events for the fiftieth anniversary in 2023.

Holiday costs increased due to the change from an outsourced, to an in-house holiday. However, costs were significantly down on the last in-house holiday (to Eastbourne) in 2022.

Fixed Costs – rose significantly year on year - to over £1.3K, in spite of the fact that 2023 costs, included over £400 for exceptional publicity costs. This increase was primarily due to greater printing & postage costs, as prices for paper and stamps have soared recently.

Membership fees are intended to cover the cost of administration of the Centre, and it has been decided that from 1st September, subscriptions will be raised from £8 to £10 per annum.

Overall, the Centre showed an operating surplus in the year, of almost £1,300 in 2024, and after allowing for items to be carried over from 2023 (primarily Kendal holiday profits), the Centre were able to donate £6,000 to Shugborough. This included an extra £2,000 from reserves, to allow the Centre to fund the renovation of a very important part of the Shugborough collection, which depicts the Shugborough Estate as it was originally designed in the mid-18th century.

John Willis

Election of the Committee

The committee stood down, and were duly re-elected, unopposed. Nigel Holmes (*your Newsletter Editor*) was also elected to the committee, and will continue in his current role.

Shugborough Updates

The Shaping of Shugborough

Presented at the AGM by Hayley Mival (General Manager)

The 'Designing for a sustainable future' project, was developed from an acknowledgement, that in order for the estate to be able to thrive, it needed to be able to grow its visitor business, increasing financial stability and improving access to the estate for all. And, an acknowledgement that there were significant challenges to this, not least the junction at Milford, and the location of the existing car park.



Aerial view of the car park creation works

This led to a piece of work to look at the whole of the estate and reconsider where key infrastructure is located with a view to allowing

growth, and to consider what conservation benefits could be realised while delivering this.

After a lot of work, and a lot of consulting with many different stakeholders, a plan was agreed and planning permission granted. Our main contractor, O'Brien's, started work on site in January, reinstating the lost Lichfield Drive, which will bring all our visitors through a little-known area of the estate, in to a new car park which is almost twice the size of the existing one.

From there, all visitors will pass through a new range of visitor welcome buildings, including Visitor Reception, a café, toilets and a changing places unit. From here, you will be able to pick up paths, or a visitor shuttle taking you to all parts of the estate, including a new play area, and two new gardens surrounding the walled garden. All visitors will exit on a new road past the edge of the walled garden before joining the existing exit drive and leaving the same way you do now. We anticipate opening in Spring 2026.



Artist's impression of the new visitor centre

Preserving a Vital Piece of the Shugborough Art Collection

For 2025, we are donating £6,000 to Shugborough to fund the conservation of part of the Shugborough art collection. These are 21 really important watercolour paintings. Mostly by Nicholas Thomas Dall and Moses Griffiths, with one by Edward Jones, they are a really significant part of the Shugborough collection. They depict the mansion, the landscape and the monuments, adding greatly to our knowledge of how Shugborough was originally designed.

Currently displayed along the ground floor corridor of the mansion, they have faded over time, and work is needed to protect them. The project will include sending a selection of them to the National Trust conservation studio at Knole, to assess how much they have faded, and how much more they may do so. They will then be removed from their frames, high resolution digital photos taken, any conservation work needed done, and then they will be reframed and rehung in the corridor.

The images will then be used to interpret them to visitors, and to create interpretation in the outdoors.

Nicholas Dall (c.1777) did a number of oil paintings of Shugborough in the 1760s. These watercolours are the studies for the oil paintings.



Exhibition of landscape paintings by Nicholas Dall, of Shugborough, c1768

Moses Griffiths (1747 – 1819) travelled with Thomas Pennant (a Welsh naturalist and travel writer) carrying out drawings and engravings during his tours of England, Wales and Scotland. Griffith's work was used in Pennant's publications.



The Chinese House by Moses Griffith

Edward Jones (1752-1824), was a Welsh harpist, and friend of Thomas Pennant, who may have travelled with him and Griffiths to Shugborough.

This collection of watercolours, by all three artists, gives a pictorial record of the Mansion at Shugborough, and the follies and monuments of the time. Some of these monuments are now lost, like the Cascade and the Palladian bridge. They give a vital glimpse into the landscape and house designed and created by Thomas Anson.

They are especially important in our understanding of the development of the estate. The watercolours have been displayed in the Veranda Corridor for a long period of time. Due to their watercolour medium, it is vital that they are conserved and recorded for future reference.

It is hoped that the watercolours can be conserved, to make sure that they are cleaned, and in acid-free mounts. Micro fading testing will also be carried out, to understand how the watercolours may have faded over time. They will then be photographed, for future use, in interpretation, and better understanding, of the pieces.

One of the watercolours by Moses Griffiths, which depicts the Chinese House, has already been photographed in high resolution. This image was incredibly useful in the understanding of the original

design, and decoration of the building, as faint notes could be seen about building details and colours.

House and Collections Manager, Gema Roberts said:

"We are extremely grateful to the Staffordshire Centre for this donation, which will allow us to undertake vital conservation on these incredibly important pieces of the collection".

"We are excited to be able to perform some micro fading testing using new technology and working with the Knole Conservation Studio. The high-resolution images will enable us to share the evolution of Shugborough, in picture form, to our visitors for many years to come."

"It's great to be able to tackle this really important conservation project at Shugborough, protecting paintings that show us how the parkland was designed to be, and especially wonderful to be able to do this through the ongoing support of the Staffordshire Centre".

Hayley Mival, (General Manager)

Presentations



John presents a cheque to Haley

Following Haley's slide presentation, a cheque and acorn, was presented to Haley Mival, by John Willis, on behalf of the Centre, to help to fund the conservation of the Shugborough art collection (see previous item).

And finally, Margaret Winfield presented a gift to Haydn Poulson, our retiring Hon. President (and life member), as a token of our appreciation, along with one very large acorn!



Margaret presents a gift and special acorn to Haydn

Bookshop Report

Yet again, the Shugborough bookshop (solely sponsored by the Staffordshire Centre) had a record-breaking turnover for the year ending 28th February 2025.



*View inside the book storeroom
(at the start of a shift)*

The total was £64,793, well over our own internal target of £1,000 per week. The March figure was £5,304, so a good start to the financial year.

The cabinet, paid for by the Centre, continues to surprise. This cabinet holds donated books, that we feel are rare and of more value than the regular supply.

Prices tend to start at around £10 upwards, depending upon the rarity and condition of the book. A highlight from the year, was the sale of a book on the Battle of Waterloo, which sold for £300!

When Hayley Mival, General Manager at Shugborough, gave her presentation at the AGM, she told us that the turnover figure since the bookshop opened, was an incredible £255,514, and explained how the money raised goes to fund Shugborough based projects.



Our favourite part of the shop - the easy chairs

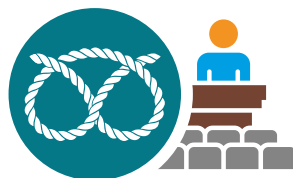
Thanks to the Centre for the sponsorship and your continued support, and don't forget about the book fair in June, where the centre will have a stand.

Phil Grainger

Upcoming Events

Talks

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



Unpicking The Thread

Shaun Farrelly – 10th June

We are all so familiar with sewing machines that we probably cannot imagine a time when all sewing, dressmaking and tailoring was done by hand.



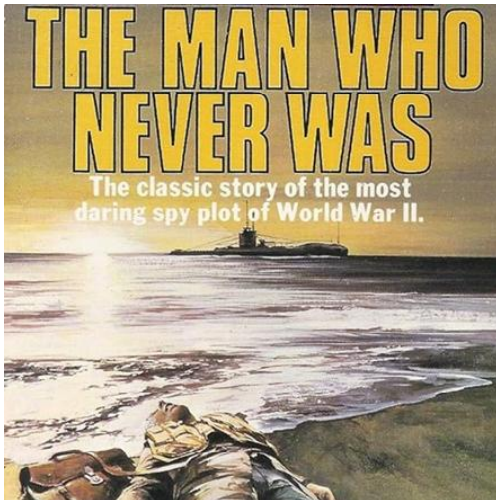
The invention of the sewing machine changed all that, and heralded the age of the clothing industry as we now know it.

Whether you're a sewing enthusiast, a history buff, or just curious about how things work, this engaging talk will have you hooked. Who really invented the sewing machine?

Join us to find out – you might just be surprised!

The Man Who Never Was

Andy French - 8th July



Andrew French will reveal the truth about Operation Mincemeat, the secret operation intended to deceive the Germans and allow allied troops to return to mainland Europe during WW2.

Discover the true story of this attempt to trick Nazi Germany into weakening Sicily's defences in 1943, by making them think that the invasion was going to be in Greece.

They used a dead man with fake papers, bringing about the phrase "The Man Who Never Was".

However, the talk develops into a possible government cover up and conspiracy, that still holds firm today. Original documents from 1943 are used to prove what really happened, turning this piece of history into a "personal one" – it has a direct French family connection.

Future Talks

Here's a list of other planned talks through to October

August 12 th	Staffordshire Gems Ruth Williams
September	Every Night Something Awful Dean Nixon
October	Aboard The Jam Butty Wild Side Preserves



For details of future talks, please see the website:
ntstafford.org.uk/events/talks

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?).



Future Walks

Here's a list of proposed walks for the next few months:

May 29th	Sandon Estate (4.5 miles) Lunch at The Dog & Doublet
June 19th	Swynnerton, Beech, Tittensor Chase (5.5 miles) Lunch at The Fitzherbert Arms
July 17th	T.B.A.
August 7th	T.B.A. Lunch at The Hollybush, Seighford

For details of future walks, please see the latest bulletin, or the website: ntstafford.org.uk/events/walks

Visits

St. Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Including lunch – 25th June

St Bartholomew's Church at Tong, is renowned as a 'treasure house', it's historical and architectural significance being well documented. It is a Grade 1 listed building, because the present church has remained almost intact for 600 years, with only one later addition, the chantry chapel – called 'The Golden Chapel' because of



its rich colouring and magnificent fan-vaulting. The church, together with a priests' College (now disappeared) and Infirmary (ruined) were the inspiration of Isabel de Pembrugge, in the early 15th century. The misericords in the chancel testify to her desire for 13 poor people to be cared for by 5 clergy, provided that they prayed there 3 times a day and said masses for her deceased husbands.

It has a superb collection of medieval alabaster tombs and effigies, original carvings and brass work. The church is unusual, as it has a central square tower that becomes octagonal, just above the roof level, with an octagonal spire on top. It houses the Great Bell of Tong, the largest swung bell in Shropshire, dating from 1518.



The tour will take us around the church, and it's surrounds and tell of its literary connections (Shakespeare and Dickens), as well as royal historical associations: Henry Tudor, Catherine of Aragon and King Charles II, following his escape after the Battle of Worcester, when he hid at Boscobel nearby.

The tour will be followed by lunch in the Parish Rooms.

Meet: Tong Church – near Weston Park, Weston under Lizard, at 11.15am

Sat Nav: TF11 8PW **Organiser:** Ruth Williams

Booking deadline: 15th June

Price: £17 pp – includes lunch of meat and salads, dessert and tea/coffee

(please specify any special dietary requirements when booking).

For details of future visits, please see the website:

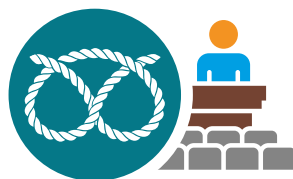
ntstafford.org.uk/events/visits

Reflections

Talks

History With Dividends

Ned Williams – November



Our speaker didn't have far to travel to give his talk, coming from Wolverhampton... However, when he discovered the roadworks south of Stafford, he made the mistake of following the diversion signs, and almost ended up back where he started!

Meanwhile... back at the village hall, we'd set up a projector, in readiness, awaiting Ned's arrival. Fortunately, Keith Alldritt (a member of our group, and a volunteer at Shugborough), kindly agreed to give an account of the work going on at Shugborough, in preparation for Christmas (see the November Newsletter for details).



Ned Williams

Ned started his talk by asking us if we could remember our Co-Op dividend numbers (I could, '176567'). He explained that co-operatives started in the 1840s and that our local society (Stafford and Stone) was formed in 1860, by which time, there were societies across the country, from Banbury to Newmarket (not just in the north). Advertising was aimed mainly at women with people such as Gracie Fields, with the slogan "Stop and shop at the Co-Op"

The first Co-Op (the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society) was formed in 1844, by 13 original members (unemployed weavers), having saved £45 between them.

The idea behind a co-operative society, was to buy goods in bulk, at wholesale prices, and pass on the savings to the members. Any profits could then be shared with members in the form of a dividend - initially paid out at a central cashier's office, and eventually at the local branch.

Sometimes there would be disputes over how much dividend members were entitled to (these disputes were dreaded by the staff!).

Whilst this arrangement should have been mutually beneficial for everyone, some wholesalers thought that their profits would be eroded by these societies, so they refused to sell to them.

The solution, was to source and manufacture their own brand products, and in the 1860s the Co-operative Wholesale Society was formed – 'Co-Op' Cornflakes and Ketchup (not Kellogg's or Heinz). Eventually, they also branched out into dairies, bakeries, laundries, funerals, shoe shops, banking, holidays and more.

By the 1930s anyone working for the Co-Op was considered to have a 'job for life', and by the 1940s, marketing started to be directed towards more affluent middle-class families, with an advert describing a 'happy co-operative family', who had just bought a new sewing machine, with their dividend payout. Sales were originally recorded in a passbook, from which the dividend could be calculated (and passbooks are still used by some building societies today).



An early advertising poster

In 1944, the Co-Op celebrated its centenary, and over 300 members attended, from all over the world. In 1947 the red Co-Op logo was adopted nationally, and soon after, the first self-service stores were introduced.



In 1965, the logo was changed to the familiar turquoise version (above), and in 1974, trading stamps were introduced, that could be redeemed against goods and services in the same way as the traditional dividend.

The Co-Op celebrated 150 years in 1994, when people came to Rochdale Town Hall, from all over the world, to mark the occasion (some no doubt, descendants of the founders). The original Rochdale store is now a museum, and true to tradition, it closes at lunchtime and on Thursday afternoons.

Speaking of traditions, the Co-Op has, in the past, sponsored the arts, brass bands, and various youth organisations etc.



The co-operative department store, Stafford

It's impossible to cover everything that Ned told us, about the Co-Op, as his knowledge is vast. But suffice to say, I can confirm that Christmas at the local Co-Op department store was always special, and there's nothing that you couldn't buy there... even on Christmas Eve! Our thanks go to Ned, for his interesting and informative talk.

Nigel Holmes

Christmas Box

Mervyn Edwards – December

Mervyn comes from Newcastle, and many of his tales of Christmas's past, came from his own experiences, or from those he had interviewed, in industries in and around the Potteries. However, he began with photos of snow, and talked of the 'mini-Ice Age', which meant that skating could take place on the Thames for decades, with the first Frost Fair being held there in 1608.



Skating on the Thames

Our (fairly) local beauty spot, Rudyard Lake, became so frozen, that 600 people took to their skates and a band were able to walk from one end of the Lake to the other.

He spoke of times when lives were much simpler, and Christmas began only on Christmas Eve, when the tree would be decorated and the one present for each child would be put underneath. The large tree in Newcastle's Tower Square was denuded of its lower branches, as the families who could not afford their own tree, would nip a branch off to take home.

It was in Castle House in Newcastle, that Merv had his big debut into show-biz, as he took on the role of Santa in 1985 – aged 25! He relished the task, wearing Mum's blusher; white poster paint on eyelashes and brows, and a pillow down his tunic. This was clearly enjoyed by all participants, as subsequent stories revealed.

Mervyn is also a cartoonist and he showed us some of his Christmassy themed works. Plus, some ceramics decorated with Christmas trees and baubles, made in the local factories in earlier times.

All tales were themed for the festive season, and concluded with the singing of carols and Christmas songs, which duly continued, after the applause for Mervyn, with mince pies and a cuppa.

Thanks to Margaret once more, for organising our sociable afternoon's entertainment.



Santa Claus

Judy Brass

Crafting with Digital Cutters

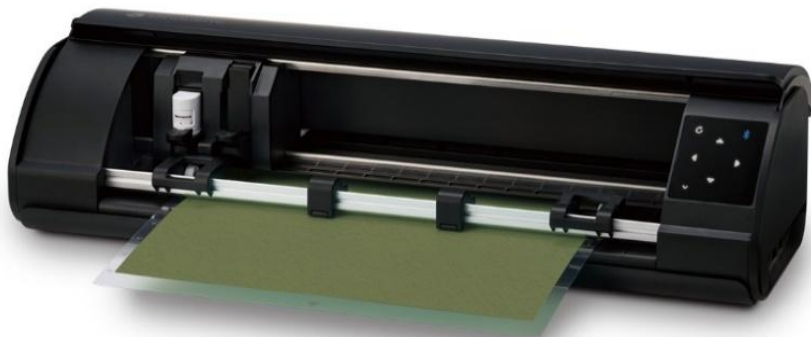
Edward Holmes - January

Our speaker and demonstrator, was well-known to us, as we had enjoyed a previous demo from him, so the attentive audience were eager to hear and see more from Edward.

He told us that he had long been a "crafter", his first eye opening experience was gleaned from an Open Door event, at Lichfield Cathedral, when he was 10 years old. He was shown how to make geometric shapes from a sheet of card. This led to him joining the British Origami Society in 2011 to pursue and perfect his skills.

More recently, Edward purchased a Silhouette Cameo 5 digital cutter (other brands are available!). Having researched what suited him best, he ended up spending an equivalent amount on additional accessories, when he realized what it could do (e.g. an electrostatic mat).

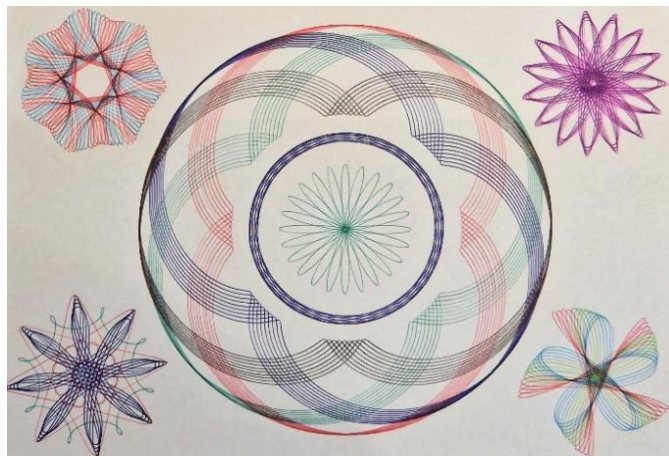
He has made a number of 3D cards with envelopes, a 24-drawer box Advent calendar, and many other items, all of which he had on display.



Silhouette Cameo 5 digital cutter

Edward explained what could be cut by the machine, including card, vinyl, cork, EVA foam, magnetic paper, (for fridge magnets), Heat Transfer Vinyl (for T-shirt printing), and fabric. Depending on the density of the material, the Cameo 5 has a cutting depth of up to 3mm.

In addition to cutting simple, through to complex, and intricate designs, the machine can also be used for scoring, embossing, drawing, calligraphy (with a chisel-tipped pen affixed) and foiling.



Spirograph patterns created using the digital cutter

Software is used to instruct the cutter on the chosen speed, force etc., deemed appropriate for the design. These can be found on numerous web-sites, or with time and expertise – created one's self.

He also demonstrated how it was possible to draw Spirograph patterns, by putting a pen in one of the tool holders.

In the latter part of the talk, he showed us the machine cutting and scoring a small “Favour” box, which we all subsequently went on, to make for ourselves, by following Edward’s very clear directions and on-screen demonstration.



24-Drawer Advent Calendar

Heartfelt thanks to Edward, for putting on a faultless display. Everyone left with a smile on their faces, clutching their wee favour box, having enjoyed an excellent hour’s instruction/entertainment.

Judy Brass

Medical Detection Dogs

Aimee Atherton - February

In this talk, delivered by Aimee, we learned about the 15-year-old charity, which is funding Bio-Tech research, and the training of Medical Alert Assistance Dogs, to aid many people across the country.



Jess and Douglas



Training Bio Detection Dogs

Its CEO is Claire Guest, a scientist and animal behaviour counsellor, who began her work after her remarkable Labrador dog Daisy, alerted Claire to her own breast cancer. She headed-up a project which proved that dogs can detect certain conditions, by sniffing the breath or urine of affected people, with conditions such as Parkinson's

disease, prostate cancer, bowel cancer, malaria and certain bacterial infections. If these conditions can be detected early, without the need for invasive treatment, then more people are likely to present themselves, thus saving lives and costly NHS treatment.

A chance claim from a will, which had left £800,000 to be given to a "worthy cause", meant that the work could begin to move into a purpose-built premises, and train 200 assistance dogs, who save the lives of their clients daily, as well as the medical detection dogs who work in trials and research projects. The dogs are fostered by volunteers whilst in training, and the Bio-Tech dogs live with them during their working lives Monday to Friday.

It takes from 18 months to 2 years, to train from a puppy; costing up to £29K; 80% are Labradors, plus spaniels and one or two smaller breeds, who can aid children with certain conditions.

The Medical Alert Assistance dogs are trained to alert their owner to oncoming medical episodes, giving them time to get to a safe place; or lie down and/or take medication. Those living with Addison's Disease; severe allergies; blood glucose and other conditions, can be helped – 15 different conditions to date.

The Bio Tech Dogs have taken part in many studies – often run by universities over several years, proving positive detection of a high rate. A Parkinson study showed an 80% correct diagnosis.

In a Covid trial, the dogs showed 92% sensitivity, and peer-reviewed acceptance. It's a worthwhile venture which should/could be increased for the benefit of many, and vast savings to health budgets. This was a very interesting and thought-provoking talk.

Judy Brass

Trot on Regardless

Stefan Wild - March

Stefan, treated us to some history, lots of anecdotes, and shared some fascinating facts about the Birmingham City Police Mounted Section.

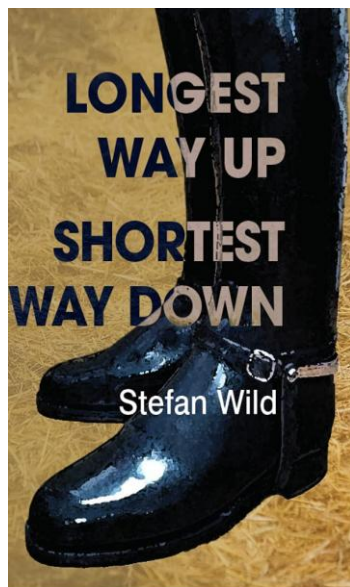
Our Speaker (AKA 'Steve') joined the Force in 1976, aged 16, and although retired now, it was clear that he remembered his time being involved with the horses, with both pride and pleasure.

He told us lots of anecdotes involving his work, his colleagues, and of course, his horses. He has also written a book 'Longest Way up Shortest Way Down', which catalogues his early years in the Mounted Police.

When he began his career, he had never ridden a horse, but in a flat cap and hacking jacket, he was soon put through his paces, and learned horse husbandry and management in the classroom.

The Police Mounted Section was founded in 1924 by William Hall - a former Cavalry Officer. At this time, most of the new recruits were taken from the army, and could already ride. They began with 24 horses that were mainly stabled in Tewkesbury.

The mounted police were trained especially to deal with lots of situations, including crowd control; protest/strike management and



Steve's Book

large-scale disorder. Their horses needed to have a calm and gentle temperament, and to be happy to be ridden by a variety of officers. These same horses would, in a Public Relations role, take part in displays and many shows – including the Windsor Horse Show and our own County Show, with one horse in particular becoming famous, by winning many shows and accolades. In 1974, 'Grey Sky' aged 20, with rider Sgt. Cooke, won for the 4th consecutive year – "Best trained Police Horse in England & Scotland".



The Mounted Section in 1999 (just before being disbanded)

Unfortunately, that era also saw the build-up of football hooliganism, where heroic action was shown by both horses and riders, on a weekly basis, at local football grounds. More recently, they have been seen back at Villa Park, Wolves and Birmingham City, where they are proving popular with the fans.

The section moved from their traditional stables at Tewkesbury in 1983, to new purpose-built premises, and by 1990 they had built up to a 40-horse force, which included women mounted officers. However, in 1999, it was deemed no longer required, so was disbanded, and the building has since been demolished. Hopefully though, in the not-too-distant future, a local (West Midlands) Mounted Section is due to be reinstated.

Many thanks to Stefan Wild (Steve's pen-name) and to Margaret for organising this special talk.

Judy Brass

Walks

Christmas at The Rag

December



A dry but misty day greeted the group of 15 of us, who met at The Rag at 10.30, ready for a short walk, as an appetiser before lunch. Strict orders to be back at the pub for 12.00 so no time to dally.

The walk started on roads and a quiet lane gently up-hill until the edge of the woodland started. Here we left the road on a good dry path to the edge of Castle Ring. A few steps to climb then we were on the top. All up-hill so far, so should be down-hill on the way back. A group photo opportunity, but only with the mist as a backdrop, and not the hoped for views as far as the Weaver Hills.



A circuit of the old hill fort round to the main carpark took us back to the road that we followed as far as the entrance to the Scout and Guide camp. Here we left the road and followed some paths for a while before re-joining the road to walk back to The Rag. We arrived back at exactly 12.00, ready for a good meal.

David Brass

Pirehill and Aston-by-Stone

April

I'm pleased to say, after somewhat changeable weather in early April, that the sun was shining, when 10 of us set off from the Star. First through Westbridge park, before crossing the Trent via the old Walton (stone) bridge, which would certainly not have been sufficiently wide, or strong enough to support modern traffic. The new, parallel (concrete) bridge was built in 1984. As we walked towards Cherryfields, we discussed how the river levels were regulated by the flood plain, and the perils of building on such areas!

We then crossed the A34 via another modern bridge, towards Tilling Drive, pausing to view the tall Sequoia trees on Redwood Drive, and the top of Pirehill, with its mast and wind turbine, before noting the aptly named 'Shoemaker Place' on the other side, which is, of course, a nod to Stone's shoe making past. Pirehill First School and Walton Priory Middle school share the same large site, and were built to accommodate children from the Walton and Stone areas, which have seen a huge growth in housing, over recent years.

At this point, one of our group decided, that it would be best to avoid fields and stiles, so opted to take a more direct route to Aston Churchyard instead.



Below Pirehill Farm

After winding our way up through Beacon Rise (presumably a beacon would have been sited on Pirehill), the rest of our group followed Pirehill Lane, which soon turned into a track, and a gradual ascent to North Pirehill Farm. After passing the farm we turned left into a field, where we paused for a short break, and a group photograph.

The footpath led us down to a stream where we needed to negotiate a bridge, plus a couple of stiles and electric fences (in quick succession), before a gradual climb took us up to the old Staffordshire Fire HQ (now a training facility). It was at this point, that I rescued a distressed lamb, who had somehow managed to end up on the wrong side of the fence!



A larger group for the last section of the walk

We then began our descent towards Aston-by-Stone, carefully crossing the A34 by a house, which was formerly the 'Crown Inn' (sign still in evidence), before joining the route of

the 'Two Saints Way' (Chester to Lichfield), and meeting up with our other walkers at Aston church yard (time for another group photo).

Sixteen of us, then began our walk back to the Star, via the Trent and Mersey canal towpath, where we joined other non-walkers, for a well-earned lunch!

Nigel Holmes

Visits

Arcadia

Shugborough's Forest Garden - April



My visit with the Staffordshire Centre, on 10th April, to the forest garden at Shugborough was a real treat. We were met by head gardener; Caroline and Lizzie, who is the lead on the forest garden. They explained why they were calling it Arcadia, which stems from the Anson's promoting Shugborough achievements such as Park Farm, being a leading innovator in agriculture at that time.

Lizzie explained that every tree and plant is a perennial, and each has to work to help sustain the others around it. Their purpose, is either for food, medicine or well-being, and they originate from all over the world. It is a 'no dig system', so the soil can retain the carbon and phacillia (a green manure), which will be sown to help retain moisture in the soil.

The idea, is that the garden supports itself, without being watered. We asked about weeds... Well, a dandelion is OK, because it puts down nitrogen, which helps plants around it (just remove the

head before it seeds). Who knew that achillea is good by apple trees? We asked about ivy, and that too can sometimes be acceptable. It is their intention to inspire people to grow food, and



The new Forest Garden taking shape

garden in a similar manner. There will be a series of small, demonstration gardens, showing how this can be achieved.

It is a lovely area, it is fresh, calm and uplifting - full of bird life and insects. From the woodland edge of Arcadia, overlooking the Medicinal Minds area, there are stunning views to be had across the estate, from the sensory area, towards the Triumphal Arch. There will be a long, curved bench to sit on, and admire the view, once it's been installed, or you could go to the contemplation area, and lie on a bed surrounded by bamboo wafting in the breeze.

This visit was an eye opener for all of us; the scale of the undertaking itself - all designed and constructed in-house by Lizzie and the garden team, and is in fact, a first for the National Trust.



A group photo, taken at the end of our visit

Everyone was impressed with both Caroline and Lizzie; their ability to impart their knowledge, particularly in the explanation of the science of Forest Gardens, with such passion

and enthusiasm. And, knowing that the volunteers, who give up so much of their free time, are being used to harness their strengths, and tackle the many and varied tasks required to complete this project. I would certainly like to visit again.

A message of thanks goes to all those who provided feedback, which helped to create this article.

Pat Alldritt

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