

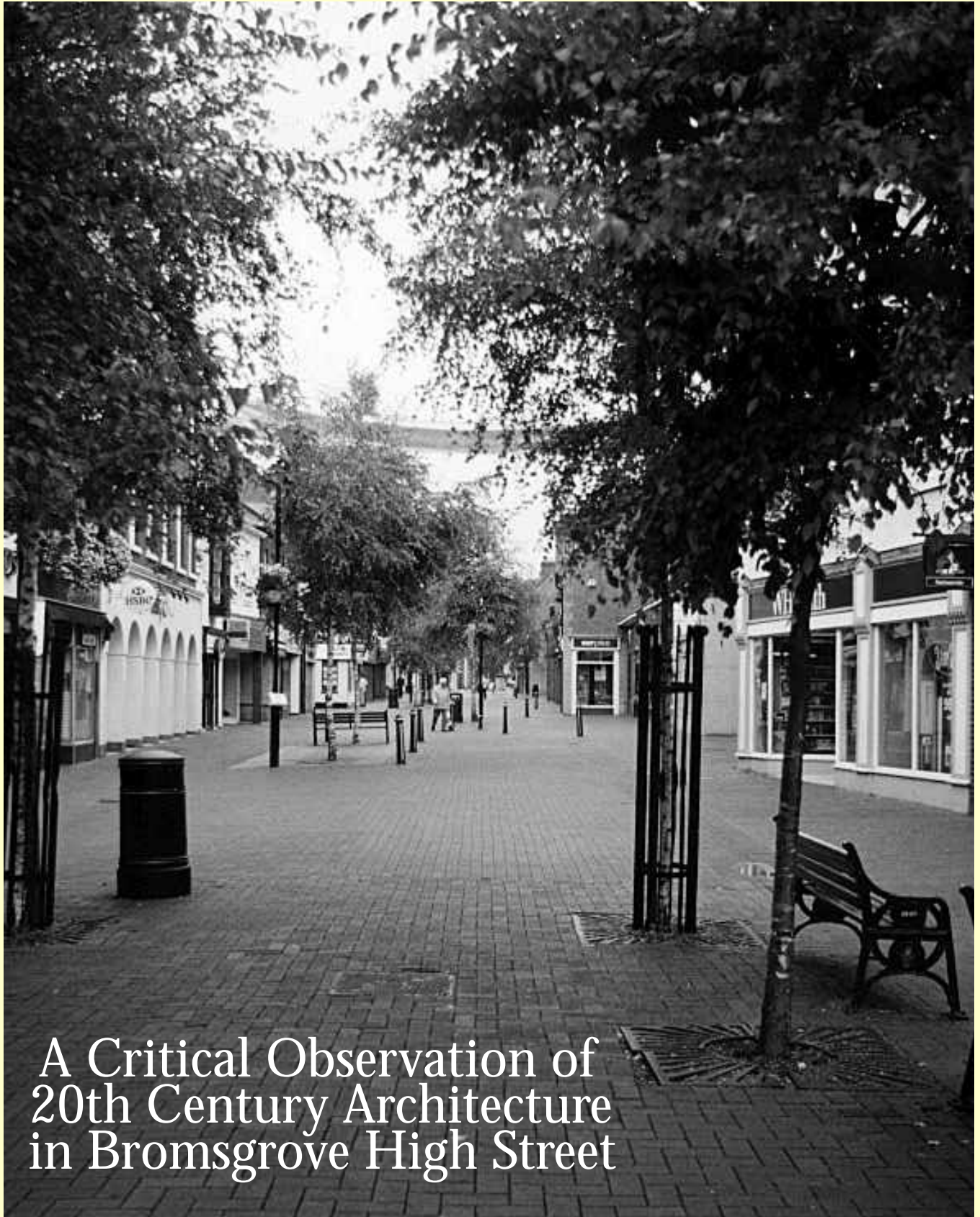


# The Bromsgrove Society **NEWSLETTER**

Volume 19 No. 3

September 1999

75p



A Critical Observation of  
20th Century Architecture  
in Bromsgrove High Street

# *The Bromsgrove Society*

Reg. Charity No. 510542

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## *Subscriptions*

Individual Membership	£4.25
Family Membership	£7.75
Pensioners & Students	£3.25
Pensioners Family Membership	£4.50
Corporate Members	£15 Minimum

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The Newsletter appears three times a year in March, June and September  
The Editor welcomes letters and short articles on topics related to the  
Society's aims and interests. Please submit copy (typed if possible) by the  
last day in January, April and July for each respective issue.



**Lloyds  
Bank**

*The Society wishes to record its  
grateful thanks for the ongoing  
support afforded by its bankers,  
Lloyds Bank PLC of Bromsgrove*

# *From the Editor*

Greetings to the residents of the “last bastion of Middle England” ,which is how Sir Robin Day described Bromsgrove at the Court Leet 800th Anniversary Dinner. However you may care to interpret this, we certainly have a strong identity which we protect jealously.

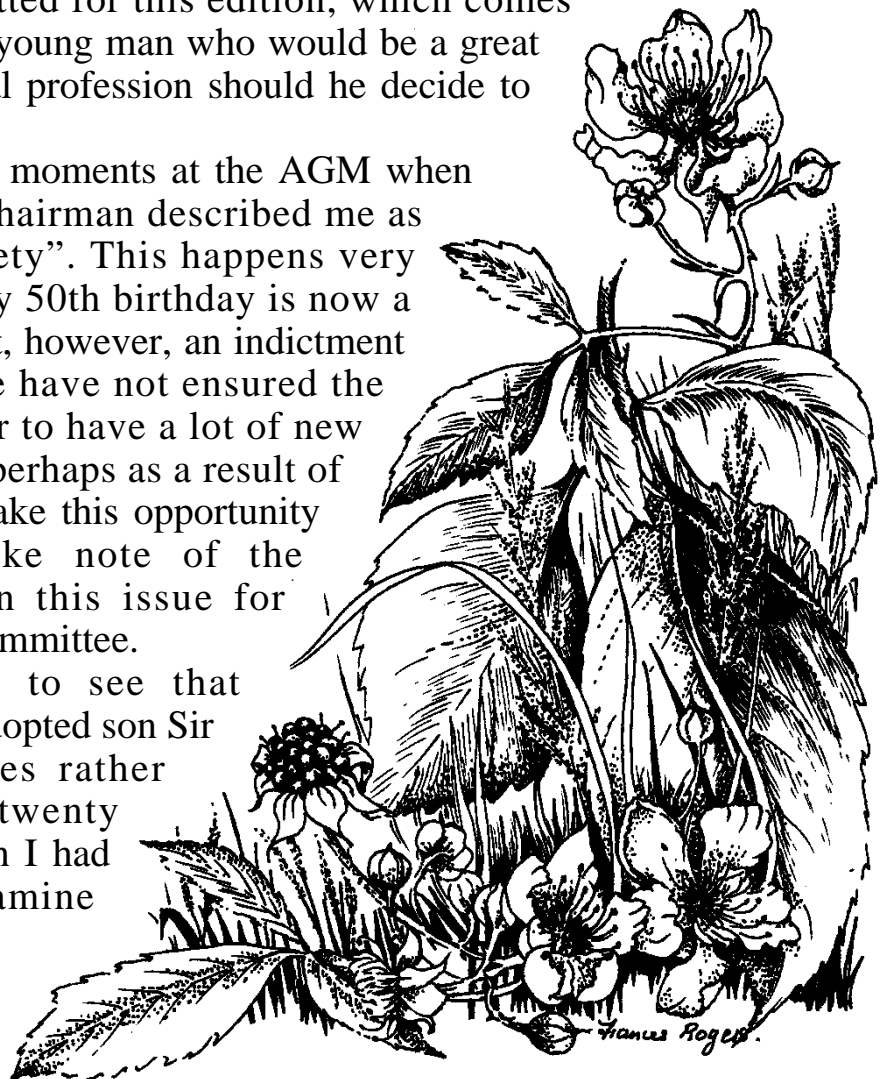
I was forced to miss the launch of the Bromsgrove Guild book as I was hanging on to a wet tent at a Duke of Edinburgh training camp, but I understand that it was very well attended. My congratulations go to Quintin Watt and his team for an excellent publication and I look forward to the outcome of their further research. Don't forget that although the sun may be shining at the moment, you will soon be turning your thoughts towards Christmas presents and the book would be an excellent gift. If you need persuading, Dr Simon Penn's review should convince you of its quality.

At the AGM, John Yate of English Heritage spoke about the work of their society and gave an interesting insight into his organisation's criteria for saving buildings. Bromsgrove High Street would perhaps have benefited greatly from such intervention, as what was thought to be innovative building in its day seems to be soulless, even to the younger generation . This leads me nicely into the main article submitted for this edition, which comes from a very perceptive young man who would be a great asset to the architectural profession should he decide to make it his career.

I had a few golden moments at the AGM when Jean James our new Chairman described me as “the baby of the Society”. This happens very rarely these days as my 50th birthday is now a happy memory. Is it not, however, an indictment on the Society that we have not ensured the succession? We appear to have a lot of new members this quarter, perhaps as a result of the book launch, so I take this opportunity to urge them to take note of the Chairman's appeal in this issue for volunteers to join the committee.

I was impressed to see that Bromsgrove's almost adopted son Sir Edward Elgar features rather grandly on the new twenty pound note. I only wish I had the opportunity to examine the picture more often. Have a good read.

*Fran Rogers.*



# *Letters to the Editor*

*Dear Editor,*

*I recently purchased from our local market hall a stoneware beaker/mug which had a brown glazed band at the top, the glazing going half way down the handle. On the front was a badge showing the words " Bromsgrove Flying Club" with an aeroplane impressed in the centre of the badge. Our fountain of knowledge Bill Kings was puzzled by it. Can one of your readers identify it?*

*Yours truly, Sheila M Armshaw, 26A Ednall Lane, Bromsgrove.  
Tel: 01527 874973*

*Dear Editor,*

*Can anyone help me to find information about my grandfather? He was Leslie George Taylor who worked for the Bromsgrove Guild at some time between 1930 and 1950. He was born in 1916 and lived in Shaw Lane, Stoke Prior, then moved to Collis Close, Charford. I understand that he had a bad accident before the war while working for the Guild and was badly burned by hot lead. He died in 1984. I would like to know what his work for the Guild involved and which pieces he might have worked on. My mother told me that he might have helped to make the gates of Buckingham Palace, and she has given me a photograph of him as a young man as he would have looked when he started working for the Guild.*



*I would be very grateful for any information and can be contacted on 01527 877067, Yours Sincerely, Tom Court*

## *From The Membership Secretary*

We welcome to the Society the new members who have joined during the last quarter.

They are: Mr Albutt, Mr & Mrs. Austin, Mr & Mrs. Biggs, Mr. J Bostin, Mr. M Bostin, Mr Bott, Mrs. Chester, Mr. Clements, Mr & Mrs. Dunn, Mr & Mrs. Edge, Mr. Edwardson, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs Greenslade, Mrs. Greenwood, Mr. Hall, Mrs. Johnson, Mr & Mrs. Keeling, Mr & Mrs. Kingsley-Curry, Mr. Kimberly, Mr & Mrs. Lambe, Mr. Maddox, Mr Massey, Mr & Mrs. Mountfield, Mr & Mrs. Quance, Mrs. Peach, Mr Pugh, Mr. Rea, Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Spalding, Mrs. Thomas, Mr & Mrs. Walters, Mr. White.

Also a new corporate member: R&S. Antiques.

# *From The Chairman*

Having been elected Chairman at the Annual General Meeting on the 8th. July, I will do my utmost to further the interests of The Bromsgrove Society during my term of office.

I would like to welcome John Rowlands as your new Honorary Treasurer. I feel sure he will enjoy being Treasurer as much as I did over the past 12 years. I would also like to record my personal thanks to the recently retired Membership Secretary and Newsletter Distributer, Gillian Ford, for all the help she gave me whilst I was Honorary Treasurer with particular reference to the collection of covenanted subscriptions. On your behalf I welcome Gillian's successor, Jill Palmer, who, I am sure, will receive the help and co-operation of all the Members in the performance of her task.

I performed my first duty as your Chairman on Sunday, 11th. July, when I presented a cheque for £1,000.00 to the National Trust towards their Appeal for funds to enable them to restore the Chartist Cottage known as "Rosedene" at Dodford. "Rosedene" is unique in being the only Chartist Cottage in the Country which has remained virtually unchanged since it was erected and still stands in its original 4 acres of land. During the ceremony County Councillor Carpenter presented an original 1842 print depicting the procession through London of the Chartist movement when they presented their Charter to Parliament, the print to be hung in the Cottage when it is restored. Mrs Florence Crane, who was born at Rosedene, made a cake which was decorated with strawberries - a crop which was grown at the property when she was a little girl. At the conclusion of the ceremony Mrs. Crane cut the cake which was shared amongst all present. The National Trust have expressed their very grateful thanks to The Bromsgrove Society for the donation.

On a more sober note, may I make a special plea to those members of the Society in their mid to late 50's or early 60's who have retired from full employment to come forward and take an active part in the running of the Society and its committees. The Bromsgrove Society is soundly based and it would be a tragedy if it was allowed to become run down through lack of support. We need members who are prepared to take office. Please do not hesitate to contact me at my home address or telephone number if you are interested.

Finally, may I extend the Society's good wishes to Dr. Tony Cowan who is moving to Yorkshire and welcome Desmond Clarke and Robin Shaw as new members of the Executive Committee.

*Jean F. James. Chairman. July, 1999.*



# *The Bromsgrove Guild*

## **an Illustrated History, Edited by Quintin Watt**

*Book review by Dr Simon Penn,  
Director, Avoncroft Museum of Buildings.*

This latest publication from the Bromsgrove Society is the first comprehensive history of The Bromsgrove Guild of Applied Arts - probably the most famous business ever based in the town.

It has been written by members of the Bromsgrove Society's Local History Group, under the editorship of Quintin Watt, from the germ of an idea in 1994. The result is not only a 'must' for anyone interested in Bromsgrove's history, but an impressive example of the sort of collaborative effort which characterises the work of the more enthusiastic and active local history groups in this country.

There really is something in this book for everyone. Following a brief introductory section on the origin of Guilds, Jenny Townshend provides a detailed chronological description of the key events, personalities and projects which shaped the history of the Guild from the late 19th century onwards and explains some of the reasons why the Guild obtained an international reputation for the high quality of its craftsmanship. As something of a case study of the Guild's work, Quintin Watt offers an assessment of the important maritime work carried out by the Bromsgrove Guild. One wonders how many Bromsgrovians were aware of the link between their town and both the 'Titanic' and the 'Lusitania'! For those interested in actually seeing the many varied examples of surviving work produced by the Guild - whether it be in lead, bronze, wood, brass, wrought iron or stone - Marlene Goodwin and Thelma Lammas have compiled an impressive gazetteer of the Guild's work throughout the West Midlands. It is clear from this list that ecclesiastical commissions represented only one part of the Guild's work.

As a social historian, rather than a craftsperson, this particular reviewer's main interest is in the people themselves - the individuals whose creative ambitions and abilities made the Guild what it was. On the face of it one might here feel a sense of disappointment in that the Bromsgrove Guild does not appear to have kept systematic records of its work. Because of this lack of documentary evidence it is, therefore, not easy to piece together the history of the organisation, and the contributions made by those involved. However, the authors are able to compensate for this shortage of written evidence by utilising the important photographic archives scattered amongst a number of repositories. Most significantly, the book also includes transcripts of interviews with Guild workers which provides an important social dimension to Marlene Goodwin and Jenny Townshend's section on the Bromsgrove Guild workers.

Finally, a few words about the quality of the publication - which is excellent. The photographic reproductions, both colour and black and white, throughout the book are first class. The authors have provided us with a well researched, high quality book which is a fitting testimony to the high quality work produced by an organisation which, more than any other, helped to put Bromsgrove on the map.

*Editors Note: The Bromsgrove Guild is published by the Bromsgrove Society and is priced at £11.95. It has 160 pages and contains over 100 illustrations, 25 of which are in colour. It can be purchased at W.H. Smith, Ottakars,*

*Avoncroft and Bromsgrove Museums, Jinney Ring and Webb's Garden Centre. We can also post the book in a padded envelope to any address in the U.K. Please send a cheque for £13.50 to include postage and packing, made payable to the Bromsgrove Society. Send to J.C. Weston, 20, Sunningdale Road, Bromsgrove B61 7NN.*

*Over 250 sponsors attended the launch of our new book about The Bromsgrove Guild held in June at Avoncroft Museum. Many have written to say how much they enjoyed this event and we are most grateful to all sponsors for their generous support.*

*At this event an extra display of photographs, many not in the book, aroused considerable interest. For those who missed out on the launch, the photographs will be on show at Bromsgrove Library between September 6-29. (closed on Thursdays) The display will then be going to County Hall, Spetchely Road, Worcester where a local history fair is taking place on October 2nd and 3rd. The Bromsgrove Society in the shape of the Local History Group will be having a table at this event.*

*John Weston*

## ***A Letter From the Past***

The content of a letter which came into the possession of Bill Kings so long ago that he can't remember who gave it to him! It refers to a huge flood and interestingly it was written on the very last day of 1900. Let us hope that our Millenium celebrations are not marred by a similar experience.

The Letter Reads as follows:

*On the last day of the old century when people got up in the morning to go to work the first thing they saw was their furniture floating about in their houses, in some places the water rose to a depth of 6ft in Birmingham the water rose as high as the arms of the lampposts, one policeman who wanted to reach his home to see if his wife and family was quite safe had to swim a distance of 10 yards across the street with his clothes on, almost every river in England overflowed its banks, the water running out of the rivers soon found its way into the streets and villages, people who had to go to work found it almost impossible to get out of their houses to earn their daily bread. The River Spadesbourne which runs through Bromsgrove overflowed its banks, the water rushed down Worcester Street & Watt Close & soon found stopping places in houses etc. Messrs Russell & Vinings Boot factory became flooded, a pigsty in Gas Square was washed away & its occupant had to swim on all fours down a running stream it being rescued from drowning after much difficulty. Almost hundreds of Rabbits, fowls etc were drowned in the stream.*

*T. Powell, Dec 31 1900*

# *A Critical Observation of 20th Century Architecture in Bromsgrove High Street*

## by Dean Postans



If in the preceding centuries style and design in the High Street has awoken and reached maturity, in this century it dies. The slow build-up of the street with each century slotting more and more pieces into its architectural jigsaw culminates in what appears

to be a desperate attempt to fill in the gaps. This century dominates; there are vast sprawling sections of the street dedicated exclusively to this twentieth century style. This is 1960's architecture, the very worst embodiment of what you could term either functionality or utility. Whether this is the result of 'the idea that beauty arises from fitness for function', or whether this design is motivated more by economy than principle, the result is still the same.

We have a collection of box shaped, ground hugging buildings that are entirely out of proportion with anything else in the street. Woolworth's is a prime example. It struggles desperately to justify its own bulk, it is boring and repetitive, and yet it overlooks the main approach to the town. Fittingly enough an equally dull building mars the other main approach, namely A Plan Insurance (formerly Bromsgrove Books). These buildings appear to just squat in place. With its flat roof A Plan Insurance could be a poorly painted cardboard cut-out. Yet if we look to the left of this building we see the edges of that 'engaging piece of architecture', the Market Place Post Office. It is this playing off of old against new that causes such problems: were these unsightly monoliths better integrated perhaps it could be forgiven.

If we look at the progression from numbers 74 to 78, we can see a considered shift towards a more modern style. The transfer from eighteenth (74) to twentieth century (76 and 78) is not the painful leap it was before. The three buildings are a progression. They grow in size and become more modern in appearance, but at each stage they discard some element of the last. The second building discards the quoins and the glazing bars of the sash windows, but keeps the same exaggerated frames and the dormer windows of the first. The third discards the dormer windows and the exaggerated frames, but keeps the sloping roof of the second. While this is a 'dulling down', it is considerably done.

Another approach to this is imitation of a period style. The Golden Cross Hotel does this well. In this case the style is Georgian, as are the buildings that

surround it. Although this is emulation of a style, it is still recognisably modern, and still proudly bears the date 1932. It combines the existing Georgian style, with its own Art-Deco Feel. The pilasters are close set and undecorated, and the entablature they support simplistic and geometric. Similar sparks of decoration appear in the gold designs set between floors and the elegant border beneath the narrow fascia. The entrance too is fittingly considered, and while it contrasts the structure above it also supports the design.

The Golden Cross is perhaps one of the only exceptional twentieth century buildings, exceptional in that it is neither dull nor strikingly out of place. It is a pity that other attempts at introducing new concepts are not done so well.

The NatWest building is an interesting concept; this is a graphic use of perspective in an effort to elongate the building. However it is poorly explored, and in this environment would perhaps have worked better vertically. This element of lying horizontally across the street is something that should be detracted from, not accentuated. Particularly when we consider its placement next to such a prominent set of buildings as numbers 130,128 and 126. It is as a result of this horizontal emphasis that such a remarkable building appears grossly out of place.

What NatWest does manage to do is maintain some consistency between the ground floor and the architecture it supports. As a statement it has survived intact, but I would question whether this was a statement worth preserving. Perhaps it isn't in this case, but in others surely it was.

The overriding theme of the twentieth century seems to be monotony: sticking to a tired, formulaic response to the problem of building. Flat roofs on rectangular box shaped buildings, an overemphasis of the horizontal, or simply a lack of any architectural features other than a wall and windows has led to the twentieth century contributions being lifeless and dull. The sheer extent of this architectural disease, which oppresses all the buildings it surrounds, is a tragedy for the street.

The council claims that the 'more recent buildings and shopfronts in the modern idiom are firmly contained within the overall appearance' I don't believe that this is the case.

The use of the High Street has changed drastically since its inception however many countless years ago. It is no longer the home of the wealthy, the people who run and own the shops do not live there. It is instead part of an entirely different society, the consumer society, in which the dull and the bland can be overlooked in favour of economy and ease. The design of the buildings in the street is no longer a labour of love, as it once undoubtedly was, it is a means to an end, and that end is to produce





cheap functional buildings. To see this we only have to look at the stretch of buildings spanning numbers 99-108, and then back to Lloyds Bank, Baylis or Peacocks.

An extension of twentieth century architecture is that of the adaptation of older buildings for modern use, the most noticeable aspect of which is shopfronts.

The council produces lengthy guidelines aimed at clarifying their position on the design of shopfronts, in this they outline their preference towards ‘a contemporary, innovative and well-designed scheme which uses traditional elements carefully related to the building, its age and its surroundings’

The advice they give is more or less common sense, and seems more wishful thinking than a conscious effort to safeguard the appearance of the High Street. This

assumption is certainly borne out in practice by the widespread use of ‘relatively cheap materials and the standardisation of shopfront designs’ that the council seems keen to deter.

This ‘standardisation of shopfront designs’ refers to this trend towards replacing brickwork with expanses of plate glass. By removing walls and windows you are in effect stripping away any opportunity to individualise your building. Woolworth’s is so nondescript that it could be any shop anywhere. There is virtually no style in this design; this is the sort of response a computer would come up with, not a human being. The visual effect it has on the building is to leave it apparently floating in mid air. The brickwork suddenly stops, and below that there is nothing but glass. How can that hold the eye? A building that is so dull to begin with needs special attention paid to the shopfront in order to bring it to life, otherwise we have what looks like nothing more than a warehouse.

The effect of this sort of design on a building that deserves attention is far more devastating. Peacocks, ‘the most elegant Georgian frontage in the town’ graphically illustrates the problem of disregarding the building you are adapting. By applying this generic design, the shopfront creates an uncomfortable contrast with the robust grace of the upper floors by appearing too weak to provide any form of structural support. Just like Woolworth’s it hovers above the street. The design undermines the building, and detracts from the existing architecture. Walking along from our pedestrian viewpoint the shopfront drags our eyes across the plate glass, when it should be forcing them towards all that elegance.

The vast majority of shopfronts follow this design of stretches of glazing with very little variation. Certainly in terms of style and proportion very few respect the building they inhabit. This leads to the emphasis of the street being

orientated almost solely towards the ground floor. They are designed to keep the eye from wandering away, but my complaint is not that they emphasise themselves, but that they emphasise themselves at the expense of the architecture above.

This is quite a broad generalisation, but the point I want to stress is that although there is this ground floor emphasis, the vast majority of what I term as attractive architecture is above this level. If we scour the street it is possible to find shopfronts that are sympathetic to the buildings they occupy and in the rare example even those that complement and enhance their environment. The Midland Bank (now HSBC), makes good use of some impressive white arches to create a pleasant enclosure. This allows the front of the bank to get away with the bland expanse of plate glass, because rather than being a focus it is a background. At the same time those rising columns pull our eyes up to the Georgian architecture above.

If we consider the street as a composition, from the point of view that each building was designed to be seen in the context that it is set, then how successful is it? The buildings themselves work to some extent, but there is a definite struggle between the cohabitation of the past with itself, and the need for definition that exists in the twentieth century. This is exaggerated somewhat by the composition of the street; frequently buildings have survived in groups, leaving a pleasant gathering of architecture surrounded by monotony and drudgery.

The street divides neatly into three sections. The upper end, which includes Baylis and The Golden Cross, has survived as a statement to how the street might have been. In this end the older architecture dominates the new, and it does so with a vigour and power that manages to shine through the prosaic shopfronts such as McDonalds.

The middle section charts the deterioration of this coherency. The stretch of buildings from W.E. Dawes onwards gives quite a pleasant scene aided by the variation of different styles and heights. In contrast the stretch from Superdrug is dull, almost depressing to look at. In this same stretch we find Rainscourt and Lloyds Bank; the contrast between the mundane, the pleasant and the impressive is detrimental to them all.

The upper end is almost completely twentieth century. The stretch of buildings 99-108 sets the trend for a succession of dull box shaped buildings. Amidst these we find Peacocks and numbers 126-130, two stylish buildings overwhelmed by mediocrity.



The High Street scans as a degeneration, and not only in terms of buildings; the further you go the more charm and character you seem to lose.

This degeneration towards vulgarity is displayed in the street decoration. In the lower end we have tangled trees carving their way up from the pavement. Standing out against the straight lines of the windows and rooftops behind is a network of branches that captures the eye. These brief bursts of detail and samples of decoration provide us with an often much needed supplement of interest to keep the stretches of buildings alive. Even the quaint hanging signs such as the one above the Red Lion and the clock above Boots have a childish charm about them that appeals.

Decoration in the upper end is reduced to burglar alarms and junction boxes attached to the side of buildings. The protruding signs are as unbecoming as the shopfronts. There seems to be a lack of care in the decoration. The conclusion of our street is a cluster of benches, bollards, phone boxes, bike stands; the entirety of the public utilities seems to have been condensed in this one area.

Appropriately one of the few attempts at ostentation in this area is the sombre Housman Statue. Erected in 1983 the 'poet of despair' stands disapprovingly in front of numbers 99-108.

It is this decline that makes the street so hard to judge. There is no coherency, in places it is dull, even ugly, while in others it is striking. My personal feelings of this street, shaped by a decade of walking through it, a decade spent in these shops and these building, is that it is neither one thing nor the other. Or rather it is both. It is dull, and yet it is striking. It lies so close to the boundary between the two that it would take very little to push my opinion to either one conclusion or the other. On a dull rainy day it is a depressingly grey place, boring and uninspiring, but in the summer when the sun floods the street it can be a pleasant place, full of all those little intricacies it is impossible to chart; discoloured brickwork, bright green moss poking from the guttering, the way the sun might catch a certain window.

The street it is not a single statement but a jumble of conflicting statements that argue the values of decoration, utility, economy and flair. And as always it is the viewer's personal opinion shaped as it may be by personal experience that decides individual perception of the street. There is no coherency, but it is precisely this lack of coherency that lends the High Street this ambiguity and individuality.

*Editor's Note:*

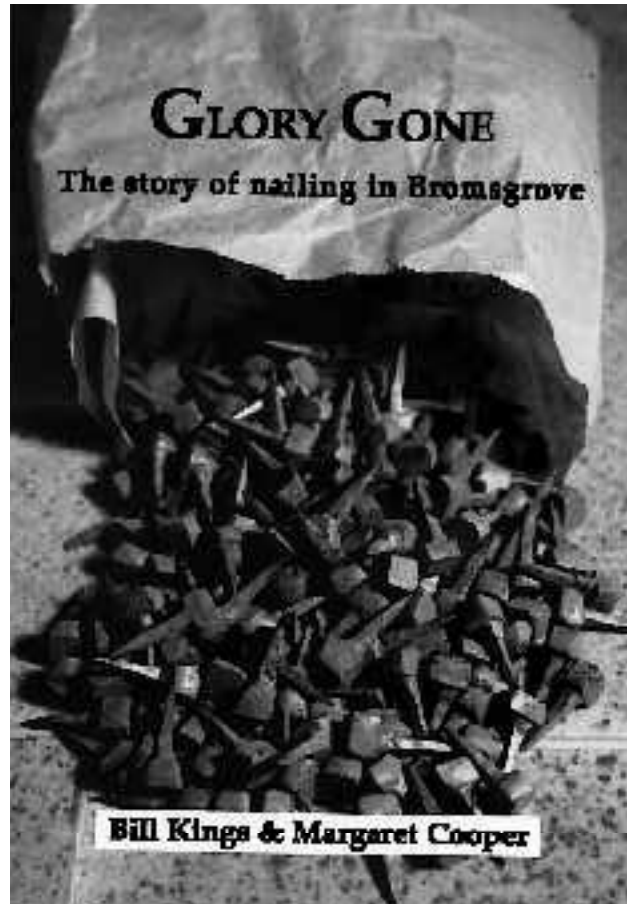
*This article is part of a larger critical study of the architecture of Bromsgrove High Street through the centuries which was written as an A Level Art project and which Dean was kind enough to allow me to use. What appears here are excerpts from the final chapters which I felt would give an interesting slant on the street, but I would like to emphasise that it is a very personal response. Dean does not pretend to be an architectural expert: rather he is an intelligent young man representative of his generation.*

# *Glory Gone- Available Again*

GLORY GONE: The Story of Nailing in Bromsgrove is a thoroughly researched and detailed account of the industry in which so many of the area's men, women and children toiled from dawn till dusk. It was first published in 1989 and received excellent reviews.

It has been out of print for some time but continued requests from all over the country, especially from those interested in industrial and local history, have prompted us to reprint it. This new paperback edition has 144 pages, over 40 illustrations and costs £8.95. It contains some minor revisions and has a completely new cover.

GLORY GONE is now available from all bookshops or direct post free from Halfshire Books. You can pay either by cheque - to Halfshire Books, 5 The Green Cutnall Green Worcestershire WR9 0PW Tel/Fax:01299 851335 - or by credit card.



## ***Bromsgrove Guild Research Project*** **We Still Need Your Help**

The Bromsgrove Guild Research Project is continuing. If you know anything about the history of the Bromsgrove Guild which has not been included in our book, we would very much like to hear from you. We are particularly keen to discover:

- the whereabouts of descendants of Walter Gilbert and William McCandlish
- any written records relating to the Guild - letters, receipts, invoices, advertisements, press cuttings etc
- the locations of Guild work in Great Britain and abroad
- photographs of Guild commissions and personnel

If you think you can provide any information about these or any other aspects of the history of the Bromsgrove Guild, please write to us at the address below. Thank you for your assistance

Co-ordinator: Quintin Watt, M.A. 22 Tollhouse Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. B60 3QL Tel. 01527 870266

# *Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Bromsgrove Society held at the Guesten Hall, Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove, on 8 July 1999.*

There was an attendance of approximately 50 members and invited guests at the 19th Annual General Meeting of the Society.

## **1. APOLOGIES**

The Secretary reported that apologies had been received from Mr M Durkin, Dr C Elliott, Mrs P Fellows, Miss J Kirkbride MP, Mr & Mrs G Long, Mrs K Thomson, Dr & Mrs M White and Dr & Mrs R Wilkinson.

## **2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 JULY 1998**

The Chairman moved that the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 9 July 1998 be adopted and this was unanimously agreed.

## **3. CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR**

Mrs Jarrett said that the Society had continued to carry out the aims and objectives as set out in the Constitution.

The finances, as set out in the Annual Accounts, showed an extremely healthy state. Money had come from subscriptions, well-attended Local History Group meetings, sales of publications and interest received on investments. The promise of £2,000 to Avoncroft Arts Society remained a commitment.

Executive meetings had been well attended and Panel Chairmen had kept the Executive well informed of their progress and plans for the future. Jim Griffith had taken over the Buildings and Environment Panel and had made useful contacts with the Council. He had attended a meeting at County Hall to learn about the projected building requirements for the District. Tony Cowan had the Millennium Project in hand and was looking into ways of improving the environment around the town. John Weston's committee had continued to find fascinating speakers for the Local History Group, ranging from the Birmingham Registrar to chain-making. Fran Rogers, who volunteered to become Editor of the Newsletter 12 months ago, and whose artwork graced its pages, produced an 'interesting read' each edition. Jenny Townshend, the Editor of the Rousler, provided a bigger and better edition each year. She thanked them all.

Last May the Officers had attended a service at Bringsty Chapel at Avoncroft and seen the brass plaque noting the Society's contribution to the landscaping of the site. The Chairman and Secretary had attended the Civic Sunday service at All Saints Church and the Officers had supported the Court Leet parade on Fair Day.

At the last AGM the Architectural Awards were given and it was hoped that more awards would be given in the future. The Society had had good publicity for the

awards and this featured in an article about the Bromsgrove Golf Club. A very enjoyable Christmas function was held at the Club which had been organised by Gillian Ford and thanks were expressed to her for this and also the Summer Outing. The Society had appointed an Honorary Life Member- Bill Kings. This was to mark his 80th birthday and to show appreciation for his written and verbal knowledge of the town. The evening's proceedings were recorded and Bill received a framed certificate.

The Society were delighted that Graham Reddie, a former Chairman, had been awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours List. He is currently Secretary of Midlands MASA.

The Lecture was not held during the financial year but the figures could be noted in the Accounts. Thanks were given to the Bailiff and the Court Leet for their joint sponsorship of the 1999 John Foster Memorial Lecture which was planned 3 years previously.

Society membership continued to grow and stood at 590.

The Guild book proved to be a more detailed undertaking than originally envisaged. So much material came to light that it was thought prudent to delay production - obviously a wise decision.

Mrs Jean James, Treasurer for 11 years, tendered her resignation with effect from 5 April. On members' behalf she was thanked for her diligence, efficiency and wise investments. Mr John Rowlands had been appointed as her successor and he was thanked for his involvement.

#### **4. COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN'S REVIEWS OF THE YEAR**

##### *(a) Buildings and Environment*

Mr Griffith said that in the March Newsletter he had stated that Norman James, his predecessor, would be 'a hard act to follow'. As the year rolled on he began to realise, more and more, just how much hard work he had put in on behalf of the Society over many years.

Since the last AGM the Committee had met on 5 occasions . Some 800 Planning Applications had been monitored and observations on 125 of them passed back to the Planning Department.

Several topics had been discussed, including the on-going saga of the Recreation Ground development and proposed Worcestershire County Structure Plan, both of which Norman had reported on at the previous Annual General Meeting.

The development proposals for the Recreation Ground had been aborted by the newly-elected Council, who were proposing to reinstate it to its former use. The Worcestershire County Structure Plan had gone out to Public Consultation and Committee members had attended meetings at Worcester County and Bromsgrove District Council offices to hear their respective views on the proposals as published.

A sub-committee had met and a reply was being formulated for submission to the County Council by 15 July. It was still felt that a new 'country village' could be developed in the southern part of the county even though the County Council were against such a proposal. It was also considered that an Integrated Transport Strategy Policy should be developed with the utmost urgency.

It was also important that Bromsgrove District be dealt with as a single unit and

not split into Bromsgrove and Hagley as currently suggested in the Structure Plan. Other planning matters being monitored closely were the proposed developments at 'The Oakalls', Barnsley Hall and Whitford School.

Members had also attended Bromsgrove's Second Development Conference and a meeting arranged with the Director of Technical Services to discuss future traffic management proposals for Bromsgrove.

Mr Griffith ended by thanking all members of his Committee for their hard work, support and tolerance during this his first year. Their help was most appreciated.

#### *(b) Landscape*

Dr Cowan said that during the year the Landscape Committee had pursued the ideas put forward last year but with little to show for it yet. The metal sculpture which was planned for Windsor Street had been denied that site. Another site had not yet been found though the District Council had an idea which might answer the problem.

In the course of seeking a site it transpired that a number of people would like the old horse trough brought back from Sanders Park to its original site outside the offices of Thomas Horton, solicitors. Since one of the people was a District Councillor, perhaps this would be done.

The Highways Department of the Council had been extremely negative about our tree planting plans for Kidderminster Road though there was still a chance that planting on a smaller scale may yet take place. He was very pleased to report that the Planning Department was much more positive than Highways and the plans to redevelop Whitford Hall showed that all the major trees were to be retained. This was also apparently true for the Barnsley Hall site.

Plans for Crown Close had been modified slightly and presented informally to the planners but there was no further progress to report to date.

It was understood that the District Council had plans to refurbish the steps up to St John's Church and it was hoped that this would be undertaken soon and the work done to a high standard - no concrete blocks this time!

John Davies, the Vicar of St John's, had shown Dr Cowan the bell which used to hang in the old town hall and now stood on the floor of the church. He had asked for ideas about where it should go. The same question had been asked of the Executive Committee and of Malcolm Griffiths, chief planner, with no result. Anyone present, or reading this report, was invited to make suitable suggestions.

The Committee had started to look at the possibility of planting more wild flowers on some of the road verges, possibly in conjunction with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

Finally, Dr Cowan announced that he was moving to Yorkshire and so would be standing down from this Committee and the Executive Committee but he was pleased to report that Robin Shaw, who was a real enthusiast for landscape in general, and trees and wild flowers in particular, had agreed to take over. Dr Cowan recorded his appreciation of the support he had received from the Secretary and members of the Landscape Committee and from the Chairman of the Society.

#### *(c) Local History*

Mr Weston reported that during the year to 5 April the Local History Group had

arranged 7 meetings, all of which had been well supported. Thanks were due to the speakers, especially to Bill Kings who led a conducted tour of St John's Churchyard and followed it with what he said would be his last talk. Entitled 'Bill's Swansong' it was attended by about 130 people and afterwards our Chairman presented him with Life Membership of the Society. Needless to say, Bill has continued to give talks (he can't say No!) and he was sure to be well in demand as long as he drew breath. Other talks had covered the Severn Valley Railway, the History of Civil Registration, Salt Production at Droitwich, Chain-making and the Chartist Movement. The last event also attracted an attendance of over 100 and proved to be a timely introduction to the various events taking place at Dodford.

A number of events had been arranged for the coming year starting on 21 September when Barbara Middlemas would talk about the History of the Chateau Impney. She was the joint author with Jo Hunt of the book about John Corbett who, before he moved to Impney, lived at Avoncroft Grange. Leaflets detailing all the forthcoming talks until next April were available.

The Bromsgrove Rousler went from strength to strength and more copies of the current edition had been sold than ever before. Thanks were due to Editor, Jenny Townshend, who put in so much hard work.

The major project which had occupied the LHG for over 5 years had been the book about the Bromsgrove Guild. Although publication took place only in June and this report should be about events which happened up to 5 April Mr Weston hoped he would be forgiven a brief transgression. The book launch at the Guesten Hall was attended by 250 people many of whom had been kind enough to say that it had been a success. The book itself had also been well received and was selling well in local shops. Copies would be on sale after the meeting. On 7 December, Quintin Watt, the Editor of the book, would be speaking about the Bromsgrove Guild.

Finally, Mr Weston thanked his Committee for their considerable help in what had been a busy year. It was very rarely that anyone was missing from a meeting and their enthusiasm was there for all to see.

#### *(d) Newsletter Report*

Mrs Rogers said that she had produced 3 magazines since the last AGM and extended her thanks to everyone who had submitted such interesting articles. She gave her apologies to those people who had not seen their articles appear immediately, but she had tried to produce a well-balanced and varied read and had sometimes had to juggle with the timing of articles. Specific thanks went to John Weston and her long-suffering husband, John, who had helped to proof read, and to Dave Webb of Performance Print for his willing co-operation and his excellent bank of old illustrations which did much to enhance the content. Special thanks also went to Gillian Ford who had given much help, had contributed much material, and had organised the Newsletter's distribution so efficiently in her position as Membership Secretary.

She appealed for more articles, and for members to bear in mind that these need not necessarily be about the past. Although this was always interesting, the Bromsgrove Society was about the past, present and future of Bromsgrove and she felt the Newsletter should reflect this.

Throughout the year only one letter of criticism had been received from a reader who disliked the comments regarding the French market. The editorial was non-political but she reserved the right to express her views and those of the majority of people whom she regularly encountered, including the pupils of her school who should be regarded as the members of the future.

Through producing the Newsletter she had been privileged to speak to, and correspond with, many interesting people. It should not be thought that any contribution would be too trivial to print; it was often the more modest person who had the better tale to tell. All submissions were valued and much appreciated by the Society.

## **5. TREASURER'S REPORT AND ACCOUNTS**

Mrs Jean James, Past Honorary Treasurer of the Society, presented the Annual Accounts for the financial year ended 5 April 1999. After answering a question regarding the healthy state of the Society's finances by explaining the need for income producing investments, Mrs James proposed that the Accounts be approved. This proposition was seconded and carried. Mrs James further proposed that Mr Stephen Priddey be appointed Honorary Auditor of the Society for the ensuing year. This proposition was seconded and carried. In answer to a question regarding the wording of a portion of the Report, Mr Priddey said that it followed the standard of the accounting bodies of the United Kingdom and there was no suggestion of anything whatsoever amiss with the control of the money.

## **6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Mrs Jean James was unanimously elected as Chairman, Mr Roger Brazier and Mr Tim Harris as Joint Vice-Chairmen, Mr John Rowlands as Treasurer, Mrs Joan Sykes as Secretary and Mrs Jill Palmer as Membership Secretary.

The following were approved as Executive Committee members for the following year:

Messrs J Griffith, R Guest, N James, Mrs I Jarrett, Miss J Longmuir, Messrs R Meredith, G Reddie, Mrs F Rogers, Messrs T Turpin and J Weston with new members Messrs D Clarke and R Shaw.

## **7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was announced that the next John Foster Memorial Lecture would be given on 6 April 2000 by Mr Christopher Jones, retired Political Editor for the BBC.

Mr John Yates, Director of Historic Buildings for the West Midlands Region, gave a most interesting talk, illustrated with slides, of the work of English Heritage in the local area.

Mr G Reddie thanked the retiring Chairman, Mrs I Jarrett for her years of unstinted service to the Society.

The new Chairman, Mrs Jean James, invited everyone to enjoy a glass of wine.

# *The Bromsgrove Society*

## **Officers and Members of the Executive Committee 1999-00**

### **Officers:**

<b>Chairman:</b>	Mrs Jean James, 19, Hawthorne Road, Norton, Bromsgrove B61 0EN	877814
<b>Vice-Chairmen:</b>	Mr Roger Brazier, 36 Harvington Road Broom Park, Bromsgrove. B60 2BA	878889
	Mr Tim Harris, Church Green Cottage, 44 Church Road, Bromsgrove. B61 8QH	872451
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Mr John Rowlands, 34 Pine Grove, Rednal, Birmingham. B45 8HE	0121 445 3017
<b>Secretary:</b>	Mrs Joan Sykes, 51 New Road, Bromsgrove. B60 2JU	872479

### **Committee:**

<b>Mr Desmond Clarke,</b>	19, Alvechurch Highway, Lydiate Ash, Bromsgrove. B60 1NZ.	0121 453 3034
<b>Mr Jim Griffith,</b>	(Chairman - Buildings & Environment) 24 Ragley Crescent, Broom Park, Bromsgrove. B60 2BD	833252
<b>Mr Richard Guest,</b>	(Secretary - Landscape Committee), 36 Church Road, Bromsgrove. B61 8QH	831580
<b>Mr Norman James,</b>	19 Hawthorn Road, Norton, Bromsgrove. B61 0EN	877814
<b>Mrs Isobel Jarrett,</b>	28 Alvechurch Highway, Lydiate Ash, Bromsgrove. B60 1PA	0121 453 2100
<b>Miss June Longmuir,</b>	Hill Farm, Woodcote, Bromsgrove, B61 9DY	832288
<b>Mr Ray Meredith,</b>	“Hillborough”, Stoke Pound, Bromsgrove. B60 3AX	831083
<b>Mrs Jill Palmer,</b>	37 Fordhouse Road, Bromsgrove. B60 2LU	871341
<b>Mr Graham Reddie,</b>	41 East Road, Bromsgrove. B60 2NW	872055
<b>Mrs Frances Rogers,</b>	(Editor -Newsletter) High Barn, Walnut Lane, Finstall, Bromsgrove. B60 3BU	872109
<b>Mr Robin Shaw,</b>	(Chairman - Landscape Committee), 78, Kidderminster Road, Bromsgrove B61 7LD	831426
<b>Mr Tony Turpin,</b>	89 Stourbridge Road, Bromsgrove. B61 0AL	876659
<b>Mr John Weston,</b>	(Chairman - Local History group), Breakback House, 20 Sunningdale Road, Bromsgrove. B61 7NN	873483

### **Ex-Officio Committee Member:**

The Bailiff of the Court Leet

# *Dates for Your Diary*

**Tuesday 21 September**  
**The History of Chateau Impney**  
**Mrs Barbara Middlemas**

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**Tuesday 19th October**  
**Parish Churches of the Bromsgrove Area**  
**Tim Bridges**

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**Tuesday 16th November**  
**Ghosts, Murders and Scandals**  
**Mrs Anne Bradford**

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**Tuesday 7th December**  
**The Bromsgrove Guild**  
**The Editor, Quintin watt will speak about**  
**our latest book.**

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**All the talks listed above will take place at the**  
**Methodist Centre, Stratford Road,**  
**Bromsgrove at 7.45 p.m.**  
**Members £1. Non-members £1.50**