



# AMBLECOTE HISTORY

Number 15

The Newsletter of Amblecote History Society

June 2006

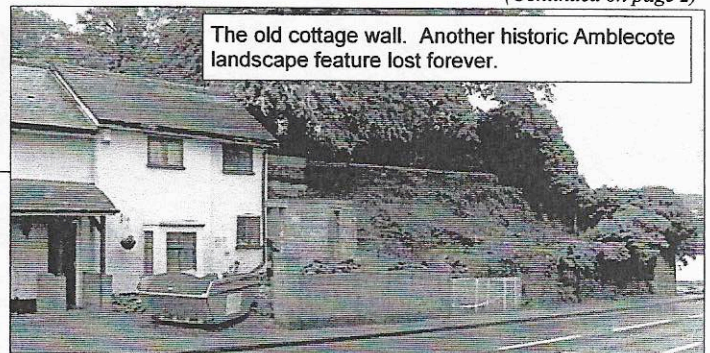
## HOLLOWAY ENDING

### A LOCAL LANDMARK LOST

Many members have noticed (often whilst squeezing past illegally parked vehicles, or risking life trying to negotiate the closed footpath) the changes taking place to number 72 High Street, otherwise known as the 'lower cottage' built against the sandstone cliff below the church. Certainly amongst Amblecote's oldest buildings (there are dwellings shown here in a map of 1769), and at one point the location of a toll bar, these cottages have served as a reminder of the old Holloway End for many years. Both are locally listed by Dudley MBC.

One feature of the lower cottage was an extensive furnace waste wall supporting a terraced garden. This complimented the (much newer) wall on the opposite side of the road, built in the 1920's as part of the War Memorial Athletics Ground scheme.

*(Continued on page 2)*



The old cottage wall. Another historic Amblecote landscape feature lost forever.

**GLASS FESTIVAL 06**

The weekend of August 25<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> sees the second International Glass Festival, organised by the Ruskin Centre in Wollaston Road. The first of these in 2004 proved to be a massive success with events held across several local venues, ranging from glass master classes at Plowden and Thomson to a spectacular pyrotechnic finale at the Ruskin Centre. The Society assisted by organising a talk by Jason Ellis on the history of the Coalbourn Glassworks.

This year the Society will be hosting a number of history walks from the Ruskin Centre that will focus on the glass heritage of the area. Meanwhile an exhibition by students of glass design from Wolverhampton University will be held within Holy Trinity Church. Plans are also well advanced to produce leaflets outlining the history of Holy Trinity's own stained glass windows, and several important glass makers and manufacturers whose monuments are within the churchyard.

### FORTY YEARS UDC COMMEMORATION

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> of May the Society hosted a commemorative social event at Amblecote Primary School to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of Amblecote Urban District Council and its absorption into Stourbridge and Brierley Hill. Some sixty members and guests attended, including Doug Wooldridge the former and final Treasurer of the UDC and Marion Wass wife of the late Tom Wass the last Clerk to the Council (Marion is also a former Headmistress of the School). Those present were welcomed by the Headmaster who conducted a tour of the school. This had been chosen as the venue for the event as a result of its connections with the UDC. In its hall is preserved the Chairman's board, listing past Chairs of the UDC, which the school inherited when the old school building, which latterly served as a civic hall for Amblecote, was demolished. Father Paul welcomed everyone and recalled the history of the UDC, and Nick Baker drew a 'lesson from history' by comparing the political and bureaucratic events that led to the UDC's demise with comparable current events that may (unless we vigorously protest now) lead to the Black Country becoming part of a 'Greater Birmingham'.

**CONSERVATION MATTERS**

Clare Tongue

After a two day heat wave in May we seem to have lost spring again. With hail, thunder, lightening and torrential rain in the last few days you can't help wondering if our climate really is changing. Yet there are still signs of summer. May blossom was very prolific this year, as has been the cow parsley. The swifts are back and we have already seen ten or more feeding over the Corbett. The buzzards, though not as frequent, are still being seen - and Helen quite often sees the female perched in the meadow. In fact as of today (May 22<sup>nd</sup>) I have a new and very exciting sighting in Amblecote; a Peregrine Falcon! It wasn't identified by me but the ecological consultant I was standing next to (more of which later). It flew quite low from the churchyard to the horse chestnut straight over our heads. The black head and moustache were clearly visible but it didn't seem as pale in colour as the Peregrines I've seen before. This set me thinking it could have been a Hobby which I know some society members from Platt's Crescent have seen before. So keep your eyes peeled.

### BATTY GOINGS ON AT THE VICARAGE

Another sure sign that summer is on its way is the feeding of bats each evening at dusk. This year we first noted them flying in the last week of April. Bats are now thought to be on the increase in urban areas and contrary to the folklore of bats in the belfry and ancient buildings they actually prefer modern houses! Bats have long been regular visitors to the Vicarage garden feeding in the still air between the house and the garden wall. We noted their presence with interest this year as, vitally, a bat roost can have very important consequences for developers. It was thought by ecologists that given the age and extent of the old vicarage wall bats may be roosting either within the wall or the dense ivy cover. Two

*(Continued on page 7)*

**Contents**

- Local Landmark Lost. Unfortunate demolition of the Holloway wall.
- Forty Years UDC Commemoration.
- Nature Notes. Bats, Holly, Birds and More.
- Corbett Concerns. Rights of Way, Plans—What Plans?
- Naming the Gas Works Development. (Possibly—it depends on Dudley Council!).
- Caroline in the Cornfield. An Amblecote Murder a Century on.
- Former Amblecote POW.
- Canal Trust Talk.

(Continued from page 1)

Several months ago part of the old wall was demolished to be replaced by a modern red brick one, and the lower cottage was altered by the removal of outbuildings and partial erection of replacements. This work was being carried out without planning permission, and stopped pending a retrospective application. This (Dudley MBC Ref:P05/2288) was for "Front and side extensions to create covered yard and garage". In effect, a high brick wall was proposed along the footpath with a yard and parking space behind it. Unsurprisingly this was rejected by the Council. The reasons cited being summarised as follows;

*"The development, by virtue of its height, scale, massing, materials, design and position relative to the public highway would appear dominant and incongruous within the streetscene and would have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the area, the locally listed building, setting of the listed building and highways safety. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies AM3 (Strategic Highway Network), DD1 (Urban Design), DD4 (Development in Residential Areas), DD6 (Access and Transport Infrastructure), HE5 (Buildings of Local Historic Importance) and Planning Guidance Note 17 (House Extension Design Guide)."*

Since then a further application (Dudley MBC Ref:P06/0915) has been made for 'Demolition and rebuild existing outbuilding and retaining wall'. This will be considered by the Council sometime after the 5<sup>th</sup> of

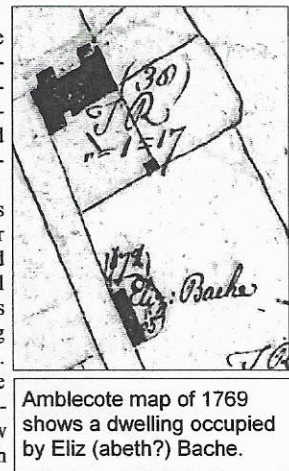
June which allows the requisite 28 days for comment by interested parties. However, as many people will have noticed, demolition of the

wall commenced even before the application to demolish it was registered (along with a highly dangerous footpath closure which, according to the council was a registered with them as a 'footpath narrowing')

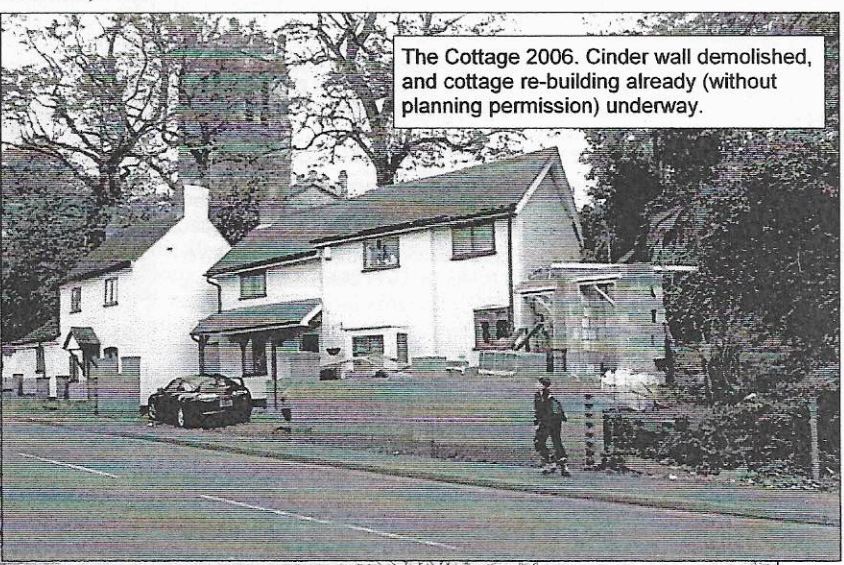
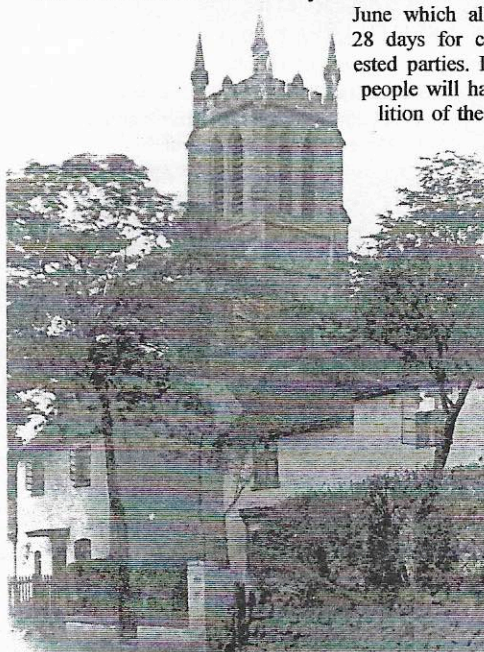
The proposal before the Council is to replace the existing wall (or rather by now where the wall used to be), with a new retaining wall composed of "welded mesh baskets filled with locally sourced gas slag 2.0m high from the footpath". Changes are also proposed to the cottage itself, including reconstruction of the outbuildings and a new bay window "reproduced to match photographic records."

These latter alterations are to be applauded. However, it is a great shame that the furnace waste wall, a long standing feature of the historic landscape of the Holloway and an integral part of these highly visible historic buildings, has already gone - and is likely to be replaced by a construction more suited to a motorway embankment!

**Whether Amblecote's pedestrians get their footpath back, and no-one is injured in the interim, is another matter...**



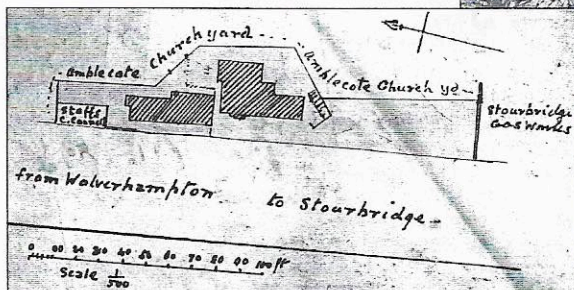
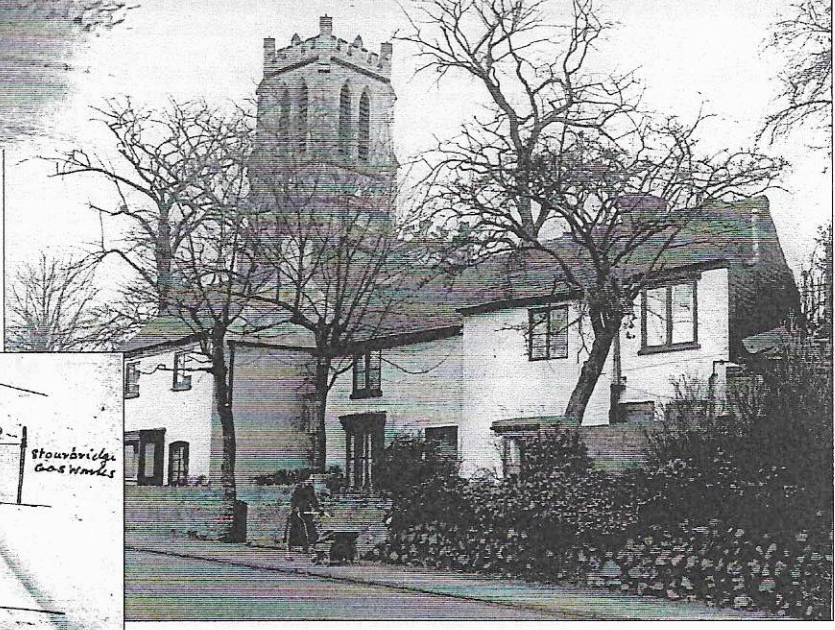
Amblecote map of 1769 shows a dwelling occupied by Eliz (abeth?) Bache.



The Cottage 2006. Cinder wall demolished, and cottage re-building already (without planning permission) underway.

Above: Cottages C. World War 1—note tram lines and church pinnacles. Right; Same view about 1950 - tram lines gone but still no traffic!

Below: Plan of the cottages C.1920. Note the old bus shelter which was the property of Staffordshire County Council.



# CORBETT CONCERNS



**SAVE OUR FOOTPATH!**

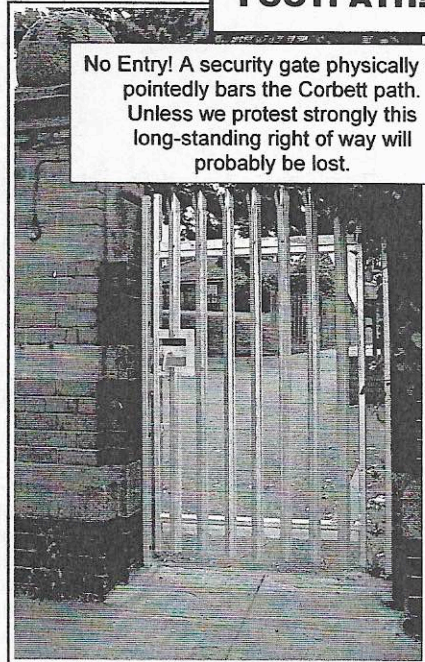
**A** lively meeting of the Society in February was give over to a presentation by representatives of three parties involved in the demolition of the old Corbett Out-Patents block and its replacement by a new Primary Care Centre. These were Infracare, the private company that will run the building on behalf of the relevant Dudley NHS Trust, Mowlem the builders and Gould Singleton the Architects.

The presentation included a resume of the building work and its timescale, the design and function of the new building and the responsibilities of the private company that will run it on behalf of Dudley health services.

Of course, most of this is fairly uncontroversial - only the pathologically reactionary would argue against the improved health services that will result. Although of course the public private partnership (PPP) between Infracare and Dudley HA is (and especially in the light of developments in PPP car-parking at Russells Hall) another matter!

However, what was of major local and heritage concern were changes to the infrastructure of the area both in the short and the long term; in particular the closure of the foot-path between the sub station in Vicarage Road and the old hospital gates in High Street. This is both an access used by visitors to Hollybush House as well as a long-standing and well established short-cut and alternative traffic free route across the corner of the busy Vicarage Road/High Street junction.

It would seem from the meeting and further developments that there is every intention to close this route permanently. Consequently a campaign has been launched to save it and members are being encouraged to fill in a Public Right of Way Evidence Form. These are available during the day from the table at the back of Holy Trinity Church and completed ones can be dropped through the Vicarage letter-box in The Holloway.



**No Entry!** A security gate physically and pointedly bars the Corbett path. Unless we protest strongly this long-standing right of way will probably be lost.

## PLANS - WHAT PLANS?

**S**everal members who attended the February meeting were shocked to see that the plans being worked to by Mowlem are significantly different in one important respect to those shown to them

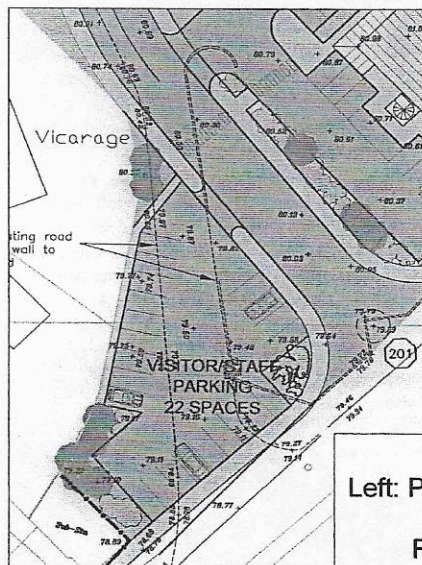
during a visit to the Planning Department in October 2004.

The former showed an area of car parking on the left of the new drive into the new development. This was welcomed as a replacement for the old out-patients car park which has been traditionally used as an out of hours overflow for many local public activities (though it was accepted that access to it might be another issue). Indeed, members may recall that *Amblecote History* No.9, November 2004, contained a specific mention of this area of parking and an illustration of the plan.

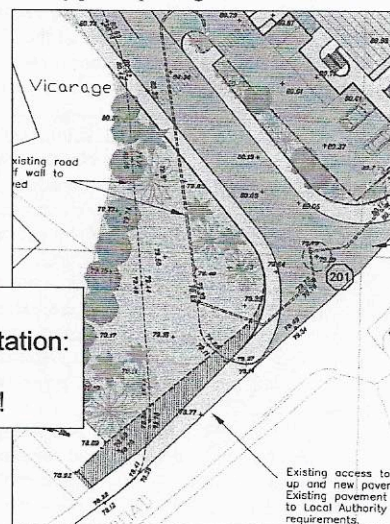
How is it then, that the plans made available by Dudley Council for public consultations are different from the final plans? When this question was put to the representatives at the February meeting a number of excuses were offered including less car parking to encourage use of public transport (whaaaaat!), doubt over ownership

of the land and that it was the Council's fault. A cynic might say that the more likely scenario may be that Infracare do not want responsibility for a car park separated from their property by an adopted road (which the drive must eventually become).

The 'bottom lines' here are that Dudley MBC presented public consultation plans that were different to the final plans and that a useful area of hospital and potentially public parking has been lost.



**SPOT THE DIFFERENCE!**  
Left: Plan made available at public consultation: 22 parking spaces.  
Right: Final plan: No parking spaces!



### What's in a name?

A rare chance to re-instate a very old Amblecote place name.

Members will be aware of the development being undertaken by Taylor Woodrow on the former Stourbridge Gas Works site. Provisionally called 'Trinity Mews', a suggestion has been made by Dudley Council that the apartments should be permanently named 'Trefoil Gardens'. The reason and logic behind this being sited as follows in Dudley MBC's own words; *"The Holy Trinity Church, Amblecote was an important part of the setting of the above development and thus, it is thought appropriate to represent the Trinity Church in some way. The name Trefoil comes from an architectural design, from the church, composed of the outline if three interlocking circles representing, the Trinity".*

The Society has suggested, via our local Councillors, an alternative of 'Coney Close' simply because this is the oldest name for the area that can found on maps. The earliest definite date for this name is 1769, but it is certainly much older. A 'Coney' is a name for a rabbit and 'Close' and enclosure, and the area would have been a rabbit warren; many of which were established on the edge of villages in the early medieval period.

Of course, on current form, the chances of the Council taking any notice are probably somewhere between slim and nil with a leaning towards the latter!

# CAROLINE IN THE CORNFIELD

Searching for the Truth a Century on.



**J**une 2006 sees the centenary of an Amblecote event that shocked the Black Country. This was the murder, almost certainly on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1906, of Caroline Pearson - closely followed by the suicide, in Cradley, of Enoch Cox who a few hours before had attempted to murder his estranged wife Amy.

### Request for Information

**A**mblecote History recently made a request for anyone with knowledge of the murder, and whether or not this was related in any way the famous Murder Bridge, to come forward in the hope that more might be discovered about what actually happened and, whether in fact, the bridge was named after the event. The result has been a number of fascinating contacts, including several from individuals related to Caroline Pearson, and a mass of information that is simply too great to publish in a regular *Amblecote History*.

However, in view of the centennial anniversary of the event and the superficial nature of some recently published commemorative accounts, the Editor thought it appropriate to publish an overview of the murder and some additional facts that have so far come to light.

It must be emphasised that this investigation is far from complete. In particular the genealogy of Enoch Cox and his family is proving somewhat complex, and once unravelled may provide further important information.

Thus, what follows here is a summary outlining the events which eventually became known as the 'Caroline in the Cornfield Murder', as well as some additional facts that may help place the tragedy into a better (and hopefully more sympathetic) context. Also included are some of the imaginings associated with the murder, themselves entirely valid within a folk-memory context. In addition a number of locations closely associated with the Amblecote parts of the story are also identified, a remarkable number of these having survived (given the current propensity for demolition) in a more or less unaltered form; whilst others - including the actual location of the murder - have not.

Meanwhile, the question about the Murder Bridge has become even less clear with another rival, and so far un-researched, murder having emerged during the investigations. All this research is therefore still open with the intention of publishing a wider account at some point in the future, possibly as part of a more comprehensive history of the area.

### Press Reports and Adaptations

The murder, attempted murder and suicide were widely reported in the press at the time. These press reports have repeated since, slightly adapted, in the *Black Country Bugle* first in 1974 and most recently in the May 4<sup>th</sup> edition this year. A recently published book *Foul Deeds and Suspicious Deaths Around the Black Country* also contains an account of the murder, although with certain facts somewhat confused.

The original press reports were inclined to present the story - which most certainly involved sexual impropriety - in as salacious a manner as decorum made permissible at the time, whilst the *Bugle* reports were directly adapted from these cautious if titil-

ating Edwardian journalistic texts. The result is that the crux of the matter - the motives of the individuals involved rather than their ultimate actions - has been ignored in favour of sensation, sentimentalism and some (now somewhat retrospective and outdated) moral judgementalism.

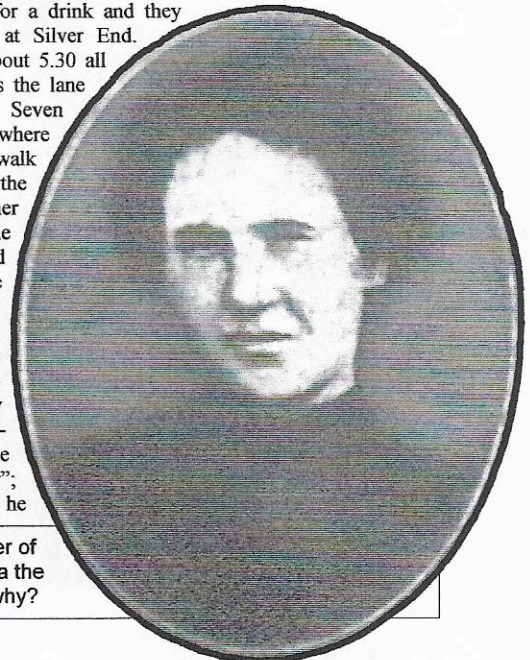
Finally it has to be said that the Caroline in the Cornfield Murder represents something that much popular published Black Country history tends to ignore. This is, that life in the region during the industrial period was not all 'cheerful toil and chapel outings', but that many individuals - then as now - lived their lives amidst a complex melee of emotions and motivations, often against a background of drudgerous labour, that in certain cases boiled over into a dangerous frustrated mixture of extreme passions and regrettable actions exacerbated by a culture of heavy drinking.

### Murder, Attempted Murder and Suicide

The events immediately surrounding the murder of Caroline Pearson and death of Enoch Cox took place between Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> of June and Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1906. These are very briefly as follows.

Caroline Pearson, an unmarried twenty five years old brickyard labourer of Turner's Lane, Brierley Hill, left work at Harris and Pearson sometime after 5.PM accompanied by a work-mate Alice Westwood. Walking towards Brierley Hill they were met by Enoch Cox, a twenty five years old Cradley chain maker who knew Caroline. Cox was estranged from his wife Amy (knee Hingley) who was living with her family in Dudley Wood. Cox invited both women for a drink and they went into The Vine at Silver End.

Leaving the pub at about 5.30 all three walked as far as the lane which leads to the Seven Dwellings Bridge, where Cox suggested they walk across the fields to the Birch Tree for further drinks. Earlier, in the pub, Cox had produced a large folding knife and now whilst they talked in the road Cox drew from his pocket several revolver cartridges and, apparently jokingly, asked Caroline if she would like some of these "in her"; whilst also intimating he



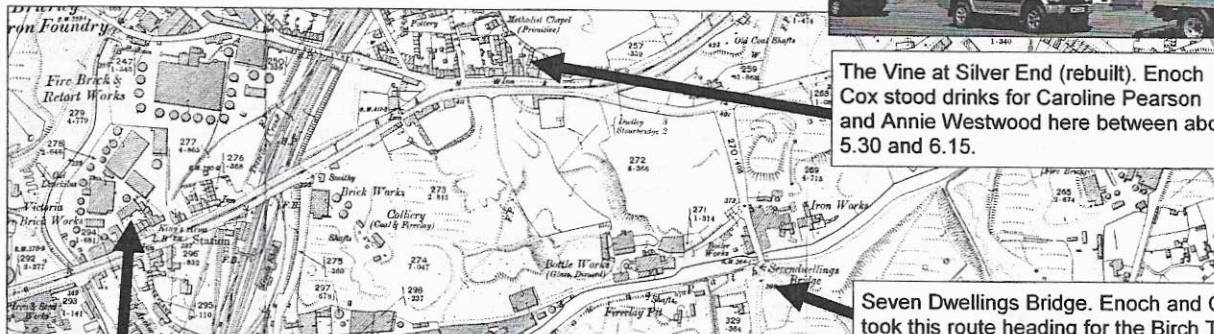
Caroline Pearson, a twenty five years old brickyard worker from Turners Lane and mother of two small children, whose relationship with Enoch Cox, a chainmaker from Cradley, lies at the centre of a century old Amblecote mystery. Cox almost certainly did kill Caroline - but why?

# Landscape of Murder

The events of early evening June 26th 1906 took place across the valley that divides Amblecote and Brierley Hill. This map of 1903 shows how some locations have survived almost unchanged, whilst others have been swept away by open-cast mining and urban development.



The Vine at Silver End (rebuilt). Enoch Cox stood drinks for Caroline Pearson and Annie Westwood here between about 5.30 and 6.15.



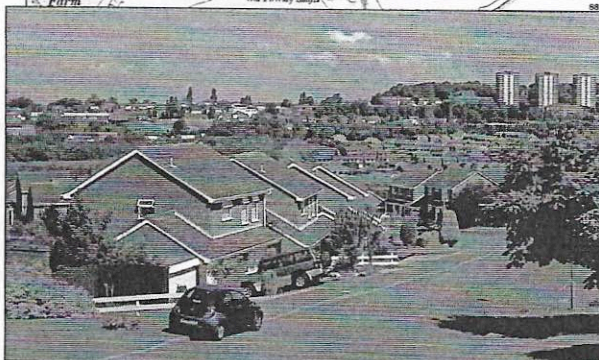
Harris & Pearson's Brick Works. Caroline Pearson left work here at about 5.30pm. The works have gone but the office buildings have been restored.



Seven Dwellings Bridge. Enoch and Caroline took this route heading for the Birch Tree after leaving Annie Westwood.



The site where the body was found (somewhere near the modern Sandringham Way) has been utterly destroyed by open cast mining and housing development.



The Birch Tree. Enoch and Caroline left the pub at about 9.30pm.



About two hours later Cox appeared suddenly and violently at the home of Margaret Priest in Dudley Wood where his wife Amy was staying. He attacked Amy with the knife and fired shots from a revolver before making off. Amy was badly wounded, but not fatally.

The Police (in an operation that would be creditable to-day!), cooperating across the Dudley/Worcestershire borders, began a search for Cox. A constable kept clandestine watch near Cox's home in High Town, Cradley, where his father, his two small children and a woman, possibly named Brooks (apparently cohabiting with Cox) were living. At around 3.30AM Cox returned to the house. His father let him in, and upon warning him that the police were looking for him, Cox drew the revolver and shot him-

(Continued on page 6)

## CAROLINE IN THE CORNFIELDS



Searching for the Truth a Century on.

ment (given that in which he had been involved) along the lines of "I have done for her and now I have done for myself."

Needless to say the events caused a sensation in Cradley where the Cox family and family situation were a source of great interest, disapproval and gossip. The 'other woman' (who apparent had struck up a relationship with Cox since assisting in the home during the birth of Amy's third child - which subsequently died - in April), leaving in some haste.

However, it wasn't until that evening that Caroline Pearson was reported missing and the story of her earlier meeting with Cox revealed. A search was initiated. Unfortunately adverse weather in the form of a tremendous widespread summer rainstorm (it actually made the record books) complicated matters, along with a reluctance of the police to trample across fields of standing crops.

An inquest on Cox held at the Old Crown in High Town Cradley the following evening (Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> June), returning a verdict of suicide. His funeral the following Monday at St.Peter's was accompanied by an undignified mob scene which was only prevented from deteriorating into a riot by some subtle local policing.

The search for Caroline Pearson continued throughout the 29<sup>th</sup> and canals were dragged, but nothing was found. Finally, on Tuesday July 10<sup>th</sup>, a fortnight after she had gone missing, her badly decomposing body was discovered in a field of rye on the south side of the valley behind the Birch Tree pub, its position betrayed by an awful smell.

Again there was sensation in the district, with a large crowd gathering to witness events, although they were prevented by police from entering the field. The body was examined in situ, as was then standard practice, by Dr. George Gifford a Brierley Hill GP. Unfortunately a combination of extreme decomposition and lack of forensic techniques made this largely futile and no cause of death or other injuries could be determined. In effect Caroline Pearson was identified by her possessions and clothes.

An inquest was held the following day at the Eagle Inn in Turner's Lane - a few yards from Caroline's home - and returned a verdict of 'found dead'. Much was made during the proceedings of the disarrangement of the woman's clothing; her corset was undone and skirt lifted on one side. However, despite the press' best (if somewhat coy) attention to these details, even the most amateur of witness to the scene - Joseph Woodridge, Harry Wilcox and Arthur Skelding, who had originally investigated the smell - could not be persuaded to see signs of any struggle. Besides, after a fortnight in an open field and under extreme climatic conditions at the height of a spell of hot and stormy weather, the significance of the body's position and arrangement of clothing would have been a matter for the sort of forensic investigation that was simply not available in 1906. As it was the scene wasn't even photographed, and quite understandable the main concern of the officials involved was to remove the remains as soon as possible. A temporary coffin had been quickly made by carpenters at the nearby E.J & J Pearsons works and taken to the stable of the Eagle Inn in anticipation of the inquest.

Caroline Pearson was buried the following day (Thursday July 12<sup>th</sup>) at St.Michael's, Brierley Hill with a large crowd in attendance. The vicar, Rev H.H.Dibben was in no doubt, both at the graveside and during a sermon the following Sunday, that the evils of modern society, particularly in the shape of drink and immorality, were to blame for the tragedy. He probably knew more than he was letting on.

#### Further Understanding

In order to understand more about the murder it is vital to appreciate some basic facts which were either ignored or glossed over at the time, and have hence not been repeated in subsequent accounts.

#### Caroline Pearson

The first concern Caroline Pearson herself. Various portrayed in press and subsequent popular myth as either an

self through the forehead.

He died half an hour later having uttered a rather ambiguous statement (given that in which he had been involved) along the lines of "I have done for her and now I have done for myself."

innocent victim of a predatory male or a common prostitute, the truth is probably that she was neither. Born in 1881 she was one of several children of James Pearson, a coal miner, and his wife Selena who lived at 40, Turners Lane. By 1906, the year of the murder, James had died and Selena was re-married to William Knight, though still living at 40 Turner's Lane. Caroline, now 25, also lived at the house along with her two illegitimate children aged four and one. Clearly Caroline's life was far from that idealised by the social mores of the Edwardian age, but then so was her job as a brickyard labourer a world apart from the middle class who promoted these. The brickyard was a place of hard graft and tough people, and notorious for impropriety of a distinctly ungentle nature - providing those who worked there and were so inclined with an early introduction into the theory if not practice of casual sex. Caroline Pearson was, by all accounts both written and remembered, a very good looking girl and would undoubtedly have attracted considerable male attention. Why and how these did not lead down the usual 'respectable' route of pregnancy followed by marriage it is difficult to say; but it did not, and by 1906 with two illegitimate children Caroline Pearson would have been most definitely branded a "black sheep".

#### Enoch and Amy Cox

The Cox family have proved less easy to research (perhaps because any decedents are understandably less willing to talk) with some considerable work yet to be done on the exact nature of the relationships between them, although this would seem, in the generation before Enoch, to include a double family possibly involving two sisters and one husband. However, Enoch Cox certainly married Amy Hingley, both of them chain makers, in mid 1901 and by 1905 they were living in Cradley with two children aged five and one. A third child, born in about April 1906, died after a few days and it is from this point that the disastrous series of events that culminated in the tragedy of June 26<sup>th</sup> seems to date.

In May 1906 Amy left Cox and went to live with her extensive and extended family in The Pleck, a now demolished area on the Dudley Wood border with Newtown. The children were left with Cox and his father in High Town, along with a woman who had been hired as a help by Cox, but with whom he had formed a liaison.

Needless to say these tangled relationships would have attracted considerable attention in the 'village' that was Cradley at that time, and it is obvious from all accounts that the women of the district, many of them also chain makers, sympathised with Amy Cox in her estrangement from Enoch. However, it is equally clear that as a man in his working prime Cox was able to 'tough out' his position, providing for his children and maintaining the 'other woman' as well as drinking, presumably in the company of other men, in the area. In a time when it was easily possible to starve a family to death through neglect, maintaining food on the table for dependents, no matter how unconventional the situation, counted for a great deal.

However, it is obvious from a careful analysis of the various reports, that the week beginning the 25<sup>th</sup> of June brought Cox's precariously balanced life to a crisis point. On Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> he and Amy went to Dudley on a "legal matter", presumably involving separation. On Tuesday Cox failed to go to work, and was seen pacing up and down The Pleck and later on a disused pit bank adjacent to it. Whilst on the latter he saw his wife and called to her; but she ignored him. That afternoon he met Caroline Pearson coming out of work and the events which led to her death, the attack on Amy Cox and Enoch's own death began.

#### Enoch and Caroline

Key to understanding the murder is the relationship between Caroline Pearson and Enoch Cox. A century has now passed, and whilst there certainly remain clues within family recollections and contemporary reports which point to this being something other than casual, the exact circumstances may be beyond reach.

#### Inconsistencies

Furthermore, the story as reported in local newspapers of the time - the main source of subsequent accounts (including it has to be said this one) is riddled with minor inconsistencies. The police and coroner, clearly satisfied with Cox's guilt, were happy to 'open and shut' the case. It could be that more careful examination of the facts may provide further clues to what actually happened.

In particular, as previously stated, some genealogical work still

In particular, as previously stated, some genealogical work still remains to be done which may provide an insight into how a chain-maker from Cradley was sufficiently well known to a brickyard labourer living in Brierley Hill to have formed a relationship that, whatever else it might have been, most certainly ended in disaster.

#### Myths and Folk Memory

One additional aspect of the Caroline in the Cornfield murder is the way in which it entered the psyche of the people of Amblecote and as time went by re-formed and metamorphosed across the generations. These deviations from the fact should not to be dismissed as nonsense. The gradual change from fact to myth demonstrates a continuum of community and an engagement with the events, land and landscape that reflects the lives of those who lived, worked and grew up in Amblecote during this time

Of course, there is no one left alive who can remember the murder and hence the most directly descended recollections are via people who were told of the event, usually as children, either one or two generations removed. There isn't space here to mention all the permutations submitted to the Editor. However, these include grisly embellishment such as the victim's head being found in a crow's nest, blood staining on the snow (it was summer), nothing remaining of the body (of a farmers wife) except a damp patch on the ground, and the body being carried to the Birch Tree on a table.

Two separate correspondents remember the victim's name as Maria, and one recollected seeing (and being scared to enter) a 'red barn' in which the body had been concealed. This, in fact, relates to the case of 'Maria Martin and the Red Barn Murder', a celebrated crime that occurred in 1827 in Suffolk that became the subject of much early Victorian melodrama. Clearly, the Maria Martin murder became so 'fixated' in the public mind that elements of it were still being drawn upon by Amblecote locals over a century later (although in an interesting coincidence, Maria Martin, popularly cast as an innocent victim of the predatory William Corder, is now known to have born two separately fathered illegitimate chil-

dren before allowing Corder to seduce her!).

#### The Murder Bridge

Finally there is the Murder Bridge itself. The Editor has received a considerable amount of correspondence on this, including detailed descriptions of the bridge and opinions on its connection with a murder (though not necessarily that of Caroline Pearson). Proposed victims include a nurse, prostitute and children. Forms of despatch include strangling, stabbing, hanging, pushing off and even 'falling on'. Embellishments include dismemberment and a 'permanent blood stain'. Occasional elements of the Caroline Pearson murder are also included, particularly extreme decomposition of the corpse.

As with the transformation of the Caroline Person murder, all these stories - no matter how untrue or implausible - are important folk memories; an entirely valid part of the 'sense of place' which once existing in Amblecote, and has now been destroyed by mining and urban sprawl.

#### The Rowbottom - Millward Murder

However, two correspondents did mention a second murder, and one about which the Editor would be very interested to hear more. This is dated sometime between about 1925 and 1935. The victim was woman named Rowbottom and the killer a man by the name of Millward

**If you have any knowledge of the Rowbottom - Millward murder then the Editor would be delighted to hear from you on 01384 894446. Meanwhile any further stories relating to the Caroline Pearson murder; and especially ones 'handed down' over the generations are also welcome.**

*The Editor wishes to thank those many individuals who contacted him, and especially descendants of Caroline Pearson and her family for their vital and candid contributions.*



This 1930's views of the valley, taken by coincidence from the Vine, shows (ringed) the site where the body was discovered by Joseph Wooldridge, Harry Wilcox and Arthur Skelding. From their description this can be deduced as being towards the bottom of a large field on the south side of the valley. A footpath ran along the hedgerow. This picture, taken in August 1933, shows the field freshly ploughed; in June 1906 it was full of standing corn. An equivalent picture today would show Sainsbury's to the left of the murder site.



*(Continued from page 1)*

ecologists have now spent three evenings and extremely early mornings watching for emergence of bats. We will keep you posted - I remain to be convinced about the actualities of environmental protection policies!

#### HOLLIES ON THE MOVE

The more observant amongst you may have noticed that two of our ancient holly trees on the Corbett site have moved. Though the pruning looks brutal I think we have to see this as a triumph for local nature conservation. When the plans for the PCT centre were first put in we feared that over half of the shrubbery on the corner at the site would be completely lost. Even council officers told me the plans had been passed and there was nothing we could do. Though a small and seemingly insignificant piece of land it has largely been left to nature and as a consequence forms part of a vital green link between the churchyard and the Corbett grounds.

Miraculously, perhaps even as a result of the last *Amblecote History* article, word got back to whoever that the hollies were over 100 years old and part of an ancient shrubbery. Plans were redrawn and the route of the new access road altered to cause minimum disruption to the wall, horse chestnut and hollies. Two hollies were eventually moved back 3 or 4 metres to the area where the laurels were cleared from. Perhaps the developers can be tamed after all!

#### BIRD'S NEST HALTS DIGGING

The relocation of the hollies was even held up by an extra week while a nest of chaffinches fledged! Interestingly it is an offence under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to disturb nesting birds; meaning in theory nobody should touch trees, ivy or shrubs where birds are suspected of nesting. In the pouring rain on May 8th with chainsaws attacking the laurels around us an ecologist working for Mowlem, and myself searched the shrubbery for nests. About four were found and miraculously the chainsaws fell silent and the JCB's were sent away. We had found a beautiful chaffinch nest (small tight ball of moss and hair) lodged in a fork in one of the hollies. Even the builders

*(Continued on page 8)*



# P.O.W. STORY

A number of members recall the prisoner of war camp that was constructed during the Second World War off Woods Lane. Although strictly speaking outside

Amblecote, the camp and its inmates were naturally a part of the history of our district. There are suggestions that the facility was originally built as a contingency for housing American troops, however, later in the war it was certainly used for Italian prisoners who were employed as labour on surrounding farms. After the war the camp seems to have held POWs who were being transhipped from various parts of the globe back to their homes countries (it should not be remembered that it took several years to repatriate all Prisoners of War).

Marj Perks has very kindly allowed *Amblecote History* to reproduce this picture which belonged to and shows her father, Bill Reinfelder, who was held at the camp after the war and finally settled in the area. Bill was captured on the Russian front and, under circumstances she would like to know more about, was eventually taken to the west coast of America where he worked as a prisoner-cook for US forces. One recollection of his was of the sheer waste of food in the USA, something a soldier from Europe (from either side) would have found obscene.

Bill was brought to Britain in about 1946 and worked in and around Amblecote. In 1947 he married Marj's mother Eva Shaw, and consequently was allowed to stay. In one of those dreadful stories with which war abounds, Marj told how Bill had previously been married in Germany, but his wife Fryeda and their small daughter had been killed during the bombing of Nuremburg.

Marj would be particularly interested in any information relating to the circumstances which led to Bill Reinfelder being transferred from Russia to the US, and any information about his German army unit that might be gleaned from the photograph. If anyone has any information or further recollections of the POW camp and its inmates please get in touch with the Society.

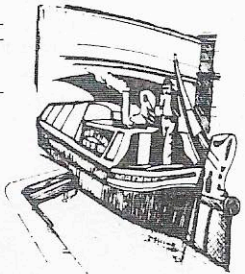


An unknown German unit in WW2. Bill Reinfelder, who was first a prisoner in Woods Lane and later settled in Amblecote Road is on the far right. Can anyone identify these uniforms?

Fifty eight members and guests gathered at the Church Hall on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April to hear Chris Dyche make a presentation on the history of the Stourbridge Canal Trust.

## TRUST IN STOURBRIDGE

Beginning with a brief history of the Stourbridge Canal, and particularly the Stourbridge Arm, Chris outlined the development of the trust from its origins within the Staffs and Worcester Canal Society and the Inland Waterways Association to the present day. The Stourbridge Canal Arm was constructed in 1776. By all measures of canal activity the navigation was a success, only succumbing to redundancy in the 1950's. However, as Chris made clear, a canal that is not used will quickly decline, and by the early 1960's the Stourbridge Canal was virtually impassable and the arm almost wholly so. Indeed by the 1960s the brief of the British Waterways Board was to close canals, and with planners eagerly viewing the direct routes offered by the canals for road use (the arm was seen as a spur off the ring road) the future looked bleak. Fortunately amateur canal enthusiasts decided to make a national stand over the Stourbridge Canal, and despite threats of legal action held a rally there. Known as the 'Battle of Stourbridge' this proved a turning point for canal restoration in England with a recognition from that point on that the old waterways had a valid post-industrial use. However, as with most battles the really hard work came after the victory and Chris outlined in detail the gargantuan efforts, and occasional gargantuan setbacks, that characterised the following forty years. The Trust has invested thousands of hours of volunteer effort and raised millions of pounds for the sympathetic development of the canal arm from Wordsley Junction to the Bonded Warehouse. The Warehouse itself was saved from a state of almost total ruin to become a valuable community asset, as were the old Canal Company offices on the opposite side of the road. Canal street has been cobbled (using sets from the old Cradley goods yard) to a condition that makes many less aware residents think this is original. Whilst the canal itself has been turned from a "stinking ditch, at times no more than a series of pools", into a vibrant well used waterway and a valuable 'green finger' that links the centre of Stourbridge to the countryside at Stourton. Finally Chris expressed fears about the future. As we all know massive developments are planned for 'Stourbridge Wharf' as the area of redundant industrial land from the Stour bridge to Sunrise Medical is known. Currently plans are before Dudley Council for a scheme that involves six-story apartments adjacent to Canal Street (with Canal Street as a main access!), whilst future plans may well turn the Canal arm into a 'concrete canyon' between high rise buildings. The canal will not disappear of course – its presence is too valuable as a 'landscape asset' – but unless development is carefully controlled its present character, use and function as a green corridor may well be sacrificed to developer's profits.



(Continued from page 7)

seemed quite impressed, and for the next four days the hollies remained as the young were fed frantically by the adult birds. No one saw them fledge but we hope they all survived. Meanwhile the chances for the relocated hollies are slim but significantly better than clearance of the whole area.

As part of this work the horse chestnut has also had several branches taken out and the cable ties which have supported the tree for many years have been replaced and added to. It looks hopeful for the conkerors of the future.

### CANAL SIDE CORRIDOR UNDER THREAT

The other main area of concern at the moment is the Stour valley. Many of us enjoy a stroll around 'our bit' of the canal and particularly the tranquillity of this haven in the middle of a busy town. The canal corridor as we saw in Chris Dyche's talk has been drastically improved over the last 30 years and now forms a significant green way through Amblecote for walkers and boaters alike. It looks increasingly likely that this will be the latest wild area under threat. Plans are now at the council to put up 4 apartment blocks and associated hard landscaping between the Bonded Warehouse and the Managers house (Planning ref PO6/0001). The plans talk of "exploiting the canal" and increasing access. The emphasis is firmly on high density urban regeneration and takes little or no account of the rich existing wildlife. Outline plans for the area suggest the opening up of the north bank of the canal with buildings right down to the canal side. It is the undisturbed bank of the canal that has attracted birds such as Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails and even mammals such as Otters. Surely an asset such as the canal should be treasured and enhanced and any development should be sympathetic to the habitat that already exists.

Take a look at the plans – let the planners know what you think!