

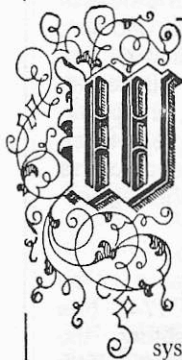


# AMBLECOTE HISTORY

Number 16

The Newsletter of Amblecote History Society

October 2006



elcome to the new style Amblecote History, designed to beat the changes to postal rates which mean that larger envelopes now attract higher charges than smaller ones. Indeed, the British postal

system is currently undergoing a number of historic changes, not least the introduction of downloadable 'bar-code' stamps. Whether or not these bar codes will become as collectable as the famous Penny Black of 1840 we don't yet know. What is certain is that their appearance is slightly less elegant; and that a basic letter now costs the equivalent of around five shillings and eight pence!



## CONTENTS

**MIDSUMMER WALK**  
Remarkable survivals on the waterworks trail.

**EARLY PEOPLE OF THE STOUR VALLEY**  
Borough Archaeologist John Hemingway talks to the Society.

**BOTTLED HISTORY**  
A wonderful find recalls an Amblecote glass making family

**GLASS FESTIVAL 2006**  
Society involvement in this important event.

**BAT WALK**  
A gothic evening in search of Amblecote's fantastic flying mammals.

## GOOD NEWS

Good news comes in the shape of an assurance by Dudley South Primary Care Trust that the pathway between the old Corbett Hospital entrance and the new road entrance to the Corbett site will definitely be reopened, and will remain open as a right of way, once building work is completed on the new PCT centre. Many thanks are due to all members and friends who filled out the fairly impenetrable 'right of way' forms that were submitted to the Council in support of efforts to retain this important and traditional Amblecote pathway.

## EVENTS

All at the Church Hall  
**November 8th**  
The Green Corridors of  
Amblecote & The Stour Valley  
Brian Draper

**December 13th**  
Christmas Social  
**January 10th**  
AGM (Notice hereby given)



# BOTTLED HISTORY

A REMARKABLE FIND  
IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN



Some recent finds in the Vicarage garden (formerly the grounds to the eighteenth century Harrington House demolished in the 1970s) provide a fascinating connection with past residents and prominent Amblecote glassmakers, as well a glimpse into the life lead by the better off two centuries ago.

Amongst a number of glass objects uncovered by Clare Tongue are two glass bottle seals – impressed letters that would be moulded onto a bottle as part of its manufacturing process. Such bottles were highly prized by those who could afford them as symbols of importance and wealth, as well as identifying their wine in the days when this was generally supplied by merchants from wooden casks.

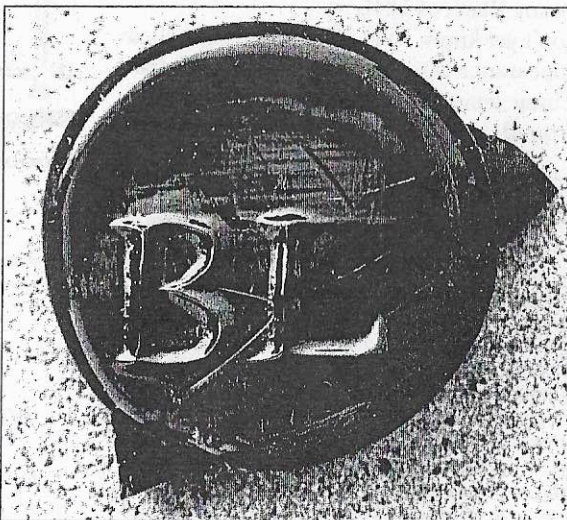
The seals found by Clare are impressed with the letters 'BL' and although one is incomplete

the other is in perfect condition. Slight differences in font design show that this was no 'one off' run; and that 'BL' was important enough to order at least two batches, probably many more, of marked bottles.

'BL' almost certainly stands for Benjamin Littlewood, two of whom, father and son, successively owned the Holloway End glassworks in the very early nineteenth century. At least one of them, and possibly both, also lived at Harrington House which was the 'Masters' residence of this important and long established glassworks.

## Benjamin Littlewood

A Benjamin Littlewood appears in an Enville estate document of 1748 (the Earls of Stamford administering the Manor of Amblecote from Enville Hall) listing various property 'lives' (rent agreements across several generations). Benjamin, described as son of Thomas, along with his wife Mary paid a rent of three shillings on property valued at two pounds ten shillings. On a map of 1769 Benjamin Littlewood is shown as possessing a property adjacent to The Fish, and



'BL' bottle seal found by Clare Tongue in the vicarage garden. Almost certainly from the cellar of Benjamin Littlewood



in 1780 was renting property for the same amount which is described as a blacksmiths. Jason Ellis in his authoritative book *Glassmakers of Stourbridge and Dudley* describes Benjamin and his second wife Sarah (Grazebrook) administering Sarah's mother's estate in 1771, and their son Benjamin being baptised at Old Swinford in 1769.



Above: Harrington House in the 1970s shortly before demolition. Right: & Below: Map and schedule of 1841. Harrington House (118) was owned by Benjamin Littlewood. The Holloway End Glasshouse (106) was operated by Littlewood & Berry.



Whatever Littlewoods' blacksmithery interests he obviously moved into glass before the turn of the century and was involved in a bottle making business at

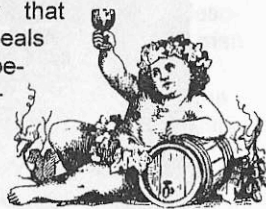
Coalbournhill (perhaps these seals were made there) with the famous Hill family of Dennis Hall. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century he took over the Holloway End Glasshouse and at some point moved into Harrington House.

Benjamin Littlewood senior died in the early 1830's and was succeeded

by his son Benjamin and another son Thomas. However, Benjamin junior retired from the business in the same year and Thomas went into partnership with John Berry. An Enville map and schedule of 1841 shows B. Littlewood in possession of Harrington House and 'Littlewood and Berry' operating the Holloway End Glassworks.

With such strong associations between

the Benjamin Littlewoods' and Harrington house, it seems unlikely that the bottle seals could have belonged to anyone but them.



(Continued on page 4)

No on Plan	Description	Proprietors
118	House Highhouse Yard Garden &c	B Littlewood

"To Mr. Rawlinson's where I saw my new bottles, made with my crest upon them, filled with wine, about five or six dozen of them" Samuel Pepys. *Diary 1663.*

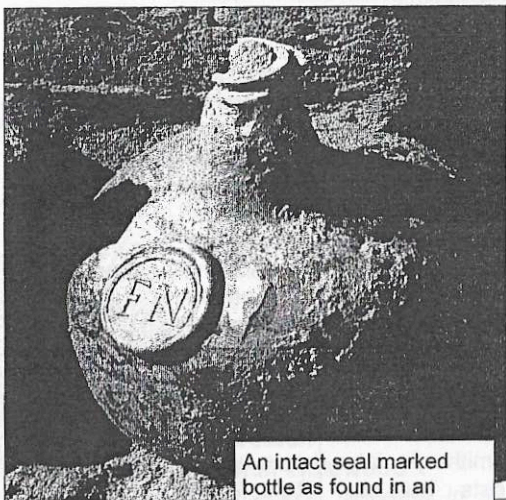
(Continued from page 3)

Whether it was to one or both it is difficult to say, except that sealed bottles tended to belong to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rather than the nineteenth, by which time status drinking would have been done using decanters rather than bottles. Thus the inference is that the bottles would have been earlier rather than later and may have belonged to the elder Benjamin.

However, this account is merely an introduction to these remarkable finds and the Society would be delighted to hear from any of our glass experts with their thoughts on any of these matters.

#### Why Seal Mark Bottles?

Wine bottles in England were manufactured from around 1630 and seal marking began a decade or so later. A small

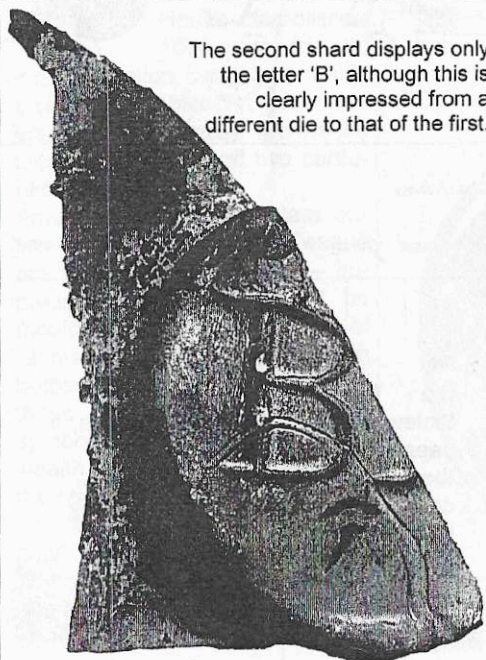


An intact seal marked bottle as found in an archaeological site in North America.

gather of molten glass

would be placed on the bottle shoulder into which a metal, clay or wooden die was impressed. There were several reasons for the practice. Firstly, bottles were expensive objects and their owners, either private individuals, tavern keepers or wine merchants were keen to mark their property. Secondly, sealing was an advertisement; both of business and status, and it soon became *de-rigour* for gentlemen of means to mark their bottles with crests or initials. It should also be remembered that the bottle was a secondary container – wine came in casks – and was decanted into bottles either by a merchant or, for the even better off, the butler (from 'bottler'). Placing a bottle with a seal on the table was a 'high status' action designed to impress. Naturally, as glass technology improved and bottles became everyday objects so those of quality moved on and began to serve their wine in cut and engraved crystal decanters.

The second shard displays only the letter 'B', although this is clearly impressed from a different die to that of the first.





# EARLY MAN IN THE STOUR VALLEY

## A TALK BY JOHN HEMINGWAY



**F**ifty-nine members and guests gathered at the church hall on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September to hear a talk by Borough Archaeologist John Hemingway on 'Early Peoples of the Stour Valley'. This is the third time John has spoken to the Society, and he was welcomed with the usual enthusiasm.

John illustrated his talk with slides of artefacts found within the Stour valley, many from a site near Lutley between Halesowen and Wollescote, where a variety of stone tools and pottery have been discovered.

### Archaeology & Geology

John began by pointing out the vital importance of geology and geography to archaeology and history. He showed a stone hand axe which had been discovered within the Borough that has been dated to around 700,000 years ago – well before the last ice age, and a remnant of our humanoid ancestors whose existence can be reckoned as being within 'geological time'. At this time the Stour valley simply didn't exist, the landscape being that created by previous geological events, with a large river running west/east out into what is now the bed of the North Sea. Nevertheless humans, albeit unlike ourselves, were present and this precious axe provides a remarkable link with their existence.

The last ice ages created the Stour valley although, as John illustrated with several maps, in a form we would not recognise today. As the deep ice – in places over a mile thick – retreated it deposited great banks of sand that in effect dammed the watercourses, creating considerable lakes. The Stour valley may well have been a one of these with Amblecote, Lye and Wollaston underwater. As the climate improved so the land surrounding

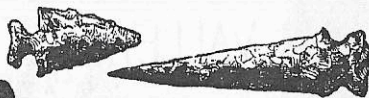
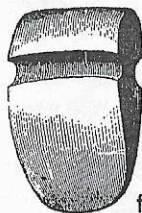
the lake would have come to resemble the African savannah of today, with exotic animals such as lions, hippos and hyenas as well as the proto-human who hunted them.

Eventually the lake would have worn away its sand dam and the water level dropped to form the Stour valley as we understand it. The temperature also dropped once more and, although the ice sheet never again extended as far as Amblecote, the savannah and its animals retreating south to be replaced by a cold steppe of permafrost. Humans nevertheless lived here in the shape of the enigmatic Neanderthals who were probably responsible for a collection of Palaeolithic scrapers found at Lutley. Unfortunately for the local Neanderthals they were no match for 'modern man', *Homo sapiens sapiens*, who moved into the area when things once again warmed around 10,000 years ago. As a 'niche species', climate change and apparently quicker thinking opposition saw the Neanderthals off, and the long occupation of the Stour Valley by modern humans began. A vast number of Mesolithic flints (many thousands) found at Lutley attest to their presence in the area.

### The Importance of Lutley

John took time to explain why he thought Lutley was the focus of so much material. On fairly high ground, yet with standing water, he feels that this area would have served as an ideal meeting place for different groups. 'Social' gatherings would have formed an important part of Mesolithic life for, although early modern man was probably no less prone to rivalry between 'tribes' than we are today, the absolute requirement of small communities to exchange genes would have driven the cultural need to greet and meet.

*(Continued on page 6)*



(Continued from page 5)

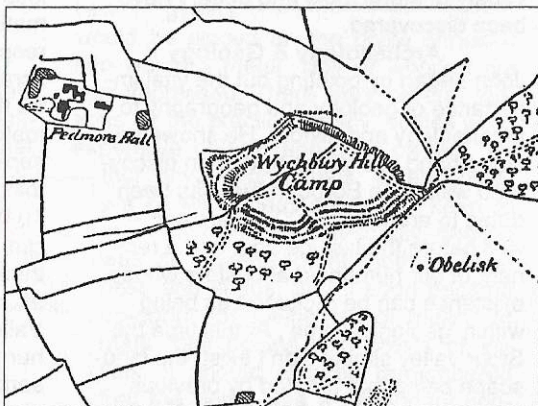
Further proof of the nature of these small wandering groups is illustrated by the diversity of stone tool finds, many mere 'microliths';

tiny slivers of flint, some with dual purposes, and indicative of a nomadic hunting based society whose possessions had to be both durable and portable. It is therefore doubly interesting that some flints in the same area are rather large, being 'cores' from which other tools would have been split. That there is no naturally occurring flint in the Stour valley, combined with the fact that these cores had plenty of working life left in them when they were discarded, indicates that raw materials were commonly carried to the Lutley site; suggesting yet again that this was a place of meeting and trade.

### The Neolithic Period

John now introduced some artefacts from the Neolithic period, or 'New Stone-Age', when humans first began to settle and farm. A more static lifestyle encouraged a diversity of manufactured goods, and the Neolithic farmers of the Stour valley would have possessed houses, woven cloth and pottery as well as a wide range of stone and wooden tools. This was the period of the great megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge, and John is convinced that standing stones would have once been an important feature of our own landscape, although sadly we now have only a hint of these in place names containing the word 'stone'. Unfortunately for archaeology any traces of Neolithic habitations would have been 'ploughed out' very early on by subsequent farmers with better equipment.

However, John still exhorted us to keep looking in our gardens for traces of stone-age men, noting that an 'in situ' polished stone axe head had been found in the Stourbridge area by a householder constructing a new pond. Indeed the context of this axe head – clearly deliberately buried, and with a broken edge – tends to confirm a theory that these highly worked items, which are found all over England in various sizes, are in fact ceremonial objects. John suggested that the fact they are often found broken (as opposed to worn through use) and buried, tends to indicate they were somehow associated with a person and their life-status, and may have been deliberately smashed and buried when that individual died.



The Bronze/Iron Age 'Camp' at Wychbury (now hidden by a dense wood). There is every reason to believe that a smaller satellite settlement existed on the heights of Amblecote

The more settled nature of society from this time is reflected in a predominance of pottery over stone tools, with decorated ceramics having been found in the area. Rope designs are common, making it obvious that this material was well known to stone age people.

### Bronze & Iron

As the Stone Age merged into the Bronze Age so the population of the Stour Valley would have continued to



rise and John described the huge, possibly Bronze Age, certainly Iron Age, hill 'fort' on Wychbury Hill, just to the south of Amblecote. Using a drawn survey of the construction, which is unfortunately nowadays hidden by a dense wood, he described how, in his opinion, this considerable earthwork was in fact a corral for cattle rather than a defensive work. Indeed, counter intuitively (for a fort) the gentler side of the hill is less well defended than the steeper side, an error that wily bronze/iron age man would not have made. Thus John is of the opinion that Wychbury was a 'customs post' watching over the important road coming out of the Severn valley and extracting 'dues' in the shape of cattle from travelling tribesmen. The heights of Amblecote are so obviously in the line of site of Wychbury that even the merest hints of early occupation (which there are) makes it almost unthinkable that Amblecote did not begin life as a bronze/iron age outpost under the eye of whosoever held Wychbury Hill. Sadly any hard evidence would have been destroyed during the open-cast mining that utterly altered the high ground of Amblecote thirty years ago.

### The Romans

Moving on to the Romans, John noted that although the Stour Valley was certainly Roman territory it was highly unlikely that, apart from the initial conquest period, most local Britains would have ever seen a Roman. Nevertheless those indigenous peoples who lived there would have become 'Romanised', adopting Roman ways, using Roman goods and of course contributing to the trade and wealth of the Roman Empire. Once again it is pottery that reveals the presence of people living in the Stour valley at this time, with shards of both British (Coarse Ware) and imported fine goods (Simian Ware) being found in our locality. One interesting point about the former is that examples have been found from both the manufacturing centres of

the Thames and the Trent valleys – inferring once again that the Stour valley and its surrounding heights were a major crossroads for travel and trade. As far as the high quality imported is concerned, John noted that the examples found in Britain tend to be of 'seconds' quality!

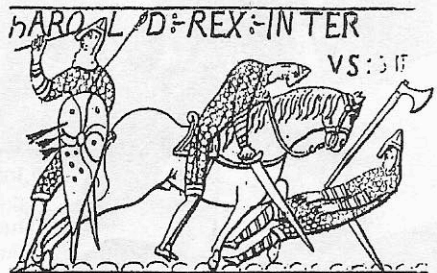
### The Angles

When the Romans left, the Britains were, after three hundred years of Roman rule, unable to defend themselves from incoming Germanic invaders. Indeed the Romans had quite deliberately 'de-militarised' their subject nations in order to prevent sedition; and as a consequence left them unable to resist even modest force. The invaders of the Stour Valley would have been Angles (*not* Saxons, John pointed out), eventually creating *Angle-land* or England, divided initially into its several Kingdoms and later to emerge as the great Anglo-Saxon state of the eleventh century. It is just possible that the seventh century King Penda gave his name to Pedmore.

### The Norman Invasion

The Anglo-Saxons of course gave way in turn to the Normans who, under William the Conqueror, invaded England in 1066. Much of the Stour Valley was ultimately acquired by a Norman Baron named William Fitz-Ansculf and by the time of Domesday vast swathes of the west midlands centred around the castle of Dudley belonged to his son, also William.

With this, John brought us to the medieval period and the beginning of modern history.







# INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF GLASS

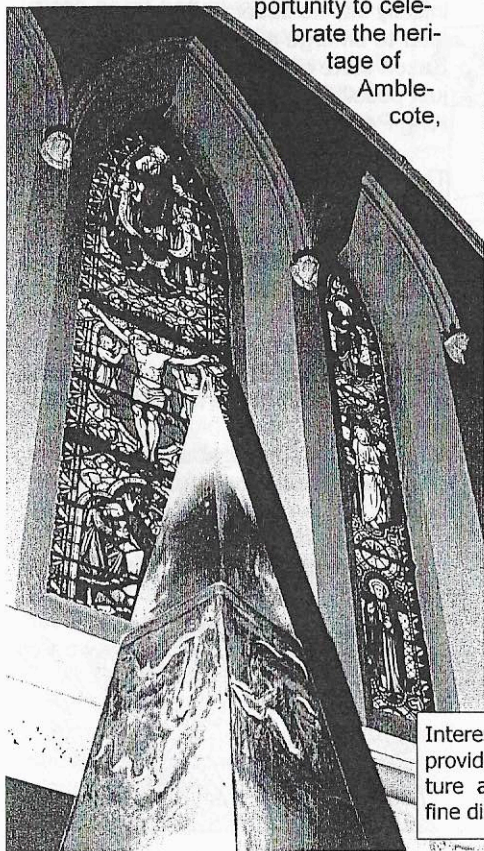
**T**he International Festival of Glass, which took place over the August Bank Holiday weekend, provided a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the heritage of Amblecote,

with the Society and Society members fully engaged in a number of events.

## Heritage Walks

The Society organised a number of guided heritage walks around the area. The first, which was carried out twice daily on Friday and Saturday, took visitors around the 'lowlands' of Amblecote. Beginning at the Ruskin Centre in Wollaston Road – a main focus for festival events – the walk followed a route up Collis Street, across the playing fields, around the Corbett hospital estate to Holy Trinity Church, and via Canal Street and the Canal Arm back to the Ruskin. The walk enabled a wide ranging introduction to Amblecote's past, present and future, beginning with its possible Iron Age settlement and ending with the residential redevelopment of the Stour valley; and – because this was a glass festival – special emphasis was placed on the numerous historical glass connections in the area

The second walk, on Monday, took the same route as the annual sponsored Amblecote Rogationtide walk, which many members will have followed. This



Interesting Juxtapositions. Holy Trinity Amblecote provided a wonderful exhibition space, its architecture and traditional stained glass complimenting a fine display of contemporary glass art.





Historical walkers pause at Dennis Hall, an important Amblecote glass heritage survival.

highly impressive pieces were displayed to great effect against the 'backdrop' of the church, which proved rather more than simply an exhibition space; blending its own architecture, history and function into the event. The Wolverhampton students also provided an additional bonus with one exhibitor taking advantage of the acoustics to provide a superb (and subsequently further requested) singing performance.

comprises a five mile hike around the border (more or less) of Amblecote parish, encompassing a number of green corridors and impressive views of the Severn Valley from the top of Amblecote Bank.

In all, around one hundred individuals took part in the five events. Indeed the 'five miler' attracted 34 people!

The walks introduced a largely new audience to the heritage, both natural and historical, of Amblecote. A number of locals enquired about joining the Society, whilst those from further afield were left with a lasting impression of Amblecote's long history of which glassmaking was and still is a vital part.

### Church Exhibition

Meanwhile, many members of the Society also assisted with or visited a special exhibition of glass held within Holy Trinity Church which also enabled important heritage connections to be made. The exhibition was by MA glass design students from Wolverhampton University, who took the opportunity to present work from their final projects. A number of

With coffee and home-made cakes provided by church members Holy Trinity established itself as a 'must see' venue within the festival, with many visitors making a stop there *en-route* from other sites along the 'festival way' between Broadfield House and The Bonded Warehouse. The visitors book during the festival period showed over a thousand entries with home locations in all five continents.

**Leaflets and Histories**

To coincide with the festival Clare Tongue produced a leaflet outlining the history of the church, and in conjunction with the Society produced two more; one on the specific history of its stained glass and another about important individuals associated with the glass trade buried in the church yard. The latter leaflet was complimented by floral decoration of the various graves, sponsored by the Society and organised by the flower arrangers of Holy Trinity.

*(Continued on page 10)*

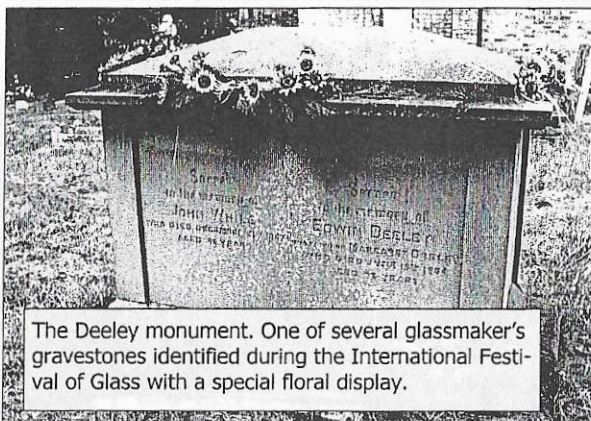


*(Continued from page 9)*

Inevitably, all three leaflets attracted comment and (welcome) controversy! Throughout the four days of the festival a number of experts assisted in enhancing the knowledge they contained, something that will result in expanded second editions. Indeed inclusion of those 'left out' of the churchyard characters means that this must inevitably grow from a leaflet to a booklet if the idea is to be repeated in the future!

Meanwhile at the heart of the Festival the British Glass Biennale provided a stunning display of contemporary glass craft. Whilst displays of glass and glass making at venues all along the 'festival route' from Broadfield House to The Bonded Warehouse were complimented by everything from street performers to a festival real ale.

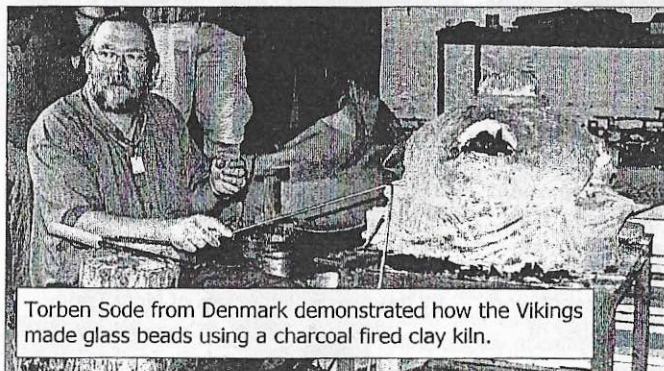
The second IFG, as well as celebrating the history and heritage of glass, provided a superb showcase for contemporary manufacture and design. That the Festival is located in Stourbridge and the old 'glass quarter', is a wonderful acknowledgement of the past and continuing importance of glass in our area.



The Deeley monument. One of several glassmaker's gravestones identified during the International Festival of Glass with a special floral display.

**Copies of the three heritage leaflets produced for the festival are still available from the table at the back of Holy Trinity church.**

The great glass industry as we understood it twenty years ago has now passed - and we are left in a 'post industrial' phase with manufacturers and designers required to innovate and innovate again to remain competitive against formidable foreign opposition. The Festival provides a focus for glass craft and craftsmen (which is, after all, what Amblecote's Huguenot glassmakers of four-hundred years ago were), and a great hope that the future of Amblecote glass may be as sparkling as that of its past. The organisers of the Festival, and especially Janine Christley from the Ruskin Centre, are to be congratulated on their hard work and vision. We all look forward to 2008!



Torben Sode from Denmark demonstrated how the Vikings made glass beads using a charcoal fired clay kiln.





The Society's mid-summer walk took place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> of June. The route encompassed some old and new ground enabling members to view both historical survivals and the latest Amblecote developments. Beginning on the church car park the most startling of the latter was the reduction

of the former Corbett Hospital Out-Patients department to rubble. The way in which demolition teams can turn a familiar and solid landmark into pieces of broken brick in a few days is certainly impressive.

The party then passed into through the church yard to view the 'gas works' developments from atop the church yard cliff. Mike Perkins was able to point out the entrance to the WW2 air-raid shelters, explored by Mike and Nick earlier in the year. Leaving the church yard via the west entrance Father Paul observed the gate post cap 'stones' which, it turns out, are not stones at all but cast iron; thus complimenting the magnificent cast iron railings erected by James Foster in the 1850's.

Walking down the Holloway past the latest excavations adjacent the Church Cottages, observation was made of tarpaulin sheeting now covering the exposed earth, dug – unwisely it would seem – from the cliff face beneath the church yard. Whatever else may be planned (or rather is without planning) for this area, it has certainly achieved major eyesore status.

Turning left into Gasometer Lane (now, we know, also at one point called Collins Lane), it was sad to note the ongoing demolition of the old hotchpotch but full-of-character wall on its north side. Fortunately the contractor has contacted Mike

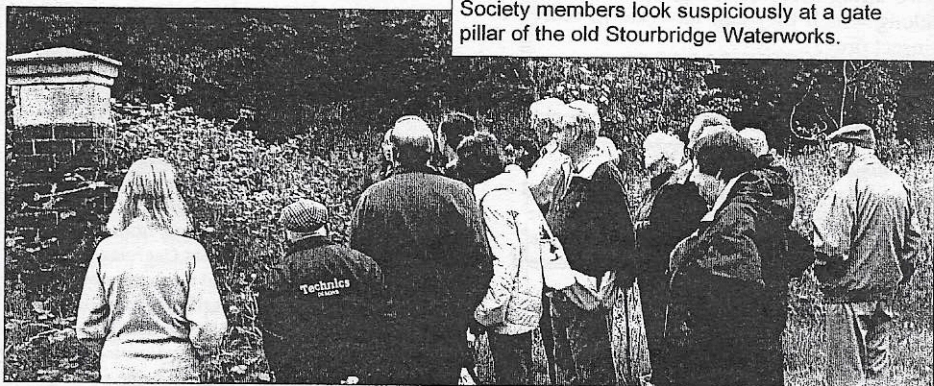


Perkins when the section that contained a variety of vintage fire bricks was levelled, and Mike has transferred several of there to local brick expert John Cooksey. Turning right just before the top of Gasometer Lane the party followed the east side of the old service railway track that once linked the GWR goods yard with the Stourbridge Gas Works. The bridge over which Gasometer lane passes can still be made out, with the (ever depleting) remnants of some impressive Staffordshire Blue Brick facings and copings.

At the bottom of the old rail track there was a pause to admire a rather special historical survival. Standing adjacent to a piece of redundant ground is one side of the old entrance to the Stourbridge Water Works, with a gatepost and large capstone carved with the words 'Water Works' and date '1856'. Apart from a few odd pieces of wall nothing else remains of the buildings that were once here, housing a pumping station which was used to pump water up to a covered reservoir situated in the grounds of Amblecote Hall. Even as the walkers marvelled at the continued survival of this remarkable piece of Amblecote and Stourbridge history so there was a reminder that there is no such thing as 'waste land' these days, with the emergence of a somewhat belligerent local resident (and presumably owner of the land) who

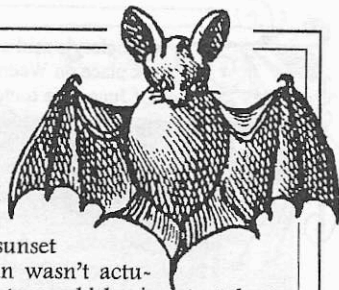
*(Continued on page 12)*

Society members look suspiciously at a gate pillar of the old Stourbridge Waterworks.





# Going Batty in Amblecote



Wednesday August 24<sup>th</sup> saw members take part in a bat walk organised by Society Conservation Officers Clare and Helen. Beginning shortly before dusk in The Holloway, two members of the local branch of the Bat Conservation Trust first made a short presentation on British bats, and the need to protect them.

## Seventeen Species

There are seventeen species of bat in the UK, all of which are protected by law because their numbers have decreased so dramatically. The Bat Conservation Trust is promoting the idea that bats and humans can live in harmony, co-existing within a managed urban environment. They made the point that bats are more likely to inhabit modern buildings than ancient ones, and that even the underside of a roof tile will provide a comfortable roost for smaller species.

## Bat Detectors

The bat group provided a number of electronic bat detectors; small hand-held devices that receive and amplify the ultra-sonic sounds made by bats in order that these might be heard by the human ear. The detectors can be set to different frequencies, thus identifying different species by their characteristic sounds. Some impressive facts revealed that bats can detect and intercept insects on the wing, whilst this 'radar' capability means that bats favour a run between two straight rows of trees, or even houses, along which they can navigate in search of insect prey.

Equally impressive was the emergence, at 8.16 PM precisely, of our first bat of the evening; just as one of our experts an-

nounced that as it was now sunset (though the sun wasn't actually present) bats would begin to take to the air. Right on cue, 'Batty' sped between the trees behind him.

After a few minutes 'tuning in' on this bat (which was a Piperstrell) the party moved down the Holloway to the canal where it was hoped to detect bats-a-plenty. And indeed, once the old wharf buildings had been cleared, there was a veritable clamour of bat activity. Only occasionally glimpsed against the rapidly darkening sky, the detectors nevertheless revealed the presence of several bats in flight, making runs up and down the canal picking off insects as they did so.

## Thunder & Lightning? Very Frightnin'

Unfortunately, along with darkness came a tremendous downpour and, as all self-respecting bats sought shelter, so the bat party was also forced to retreat - the way being lit by some impressive lightning.

Bats, thunder, darkness, pouring rain and lightning - our bat walk was experience was made complete when, as the party emerged from the gloom of Canal Street, it startled two teenage 'Goths' - who were compelled to wonder out loud "Where all these people have come from...? *Mostly from the past—how scary is that!*

Many thanks are due to Clare and Helen for organising the bat walk. We also hear that at least one bat detector has been purchased off e-Bay and another is under amateur construction. Perhaps the Society should start its own Bat Group?

*(Continued from page 11)*

came out to tell us that we were all trespassing! Possible one or two, who had gone to view the back of the gatepost, were, technically, off the right of way; and thus in the interests of peace if not reconciliation we decided to move on...

Crossing under the ring road via the magnificently maintained underpass (Dudley Council really should be proud of this, such an eclectic mixture of dilapidation, graffiti and vandalism must be difficult to sustain on a tight budget), the walkers

entered Canal Street for a reconnaissance of the demolitions being carried out there. Once again development seems to be something of a double edged sword, with the emergence, from amidst the demolitions, of the magnificent Georgian foundry on the old Bradley's site, and the good news of its preservation plan by the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust; countered by the horrific proposals submitted for seven story apartments to surround it! Mind you, we put up with the subway...