



# AMBLECOTE HISTORY

DECEMBER 2003

## NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Amblecote History Society, will be the inaugural **Annual General Meeting** and will take place on **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2004** at 7.30pm at Amblecote Church Hall. For details contact Father Paul Tongue on 01384 394057 or Nick Baker on 01384 894446.

## CONSTITUTING SUCCESS

**A**t a General Meeting of the Amblecote History Society on November 12th, attended by around 40 people, it was decided to place the Society on a slightly more formal footing. Therefore an **Annual General Meeting is to be held in January 2004 (Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 7.30pm at the Church Hall).**

As a matter of principle the content of the constitution will be kept to an absolute minimum with only three named officers, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and no requirement for a committee structure – all meetings being 'general'. However such a move will enable the Society to open a bank account and apply for grants, as well as interact more conventionally with other groups and institutions.

### Membership

As previously agreed membership to the Society will be by an annual subscription (set at £3), which will be due at the AGM. **Please note that until now the newsletter has been distributed to anyone who has given their name and address at a meeting, but in future will only be distributed to members.** Please come along to the AGM to ensure you remain 'connected', or contact Nick Baker (01384 894446) or Father Paul (01384 394057) if you would like to be a member but can't make the meeting.

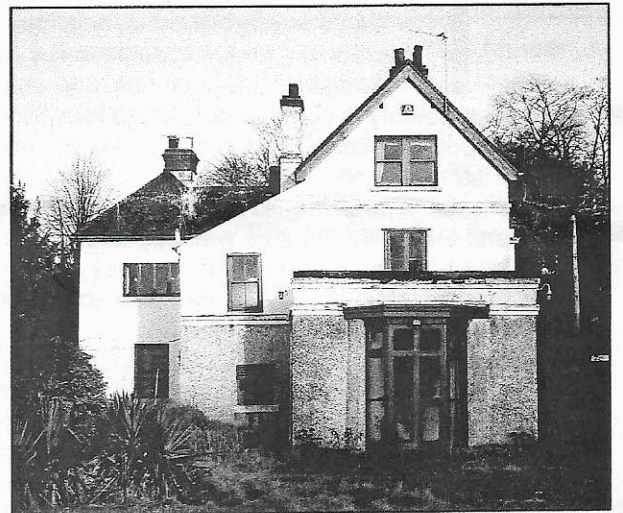
## GEOFF HILL DONATION

The Society has received a generous donation of £100.00 from the Geoff Hill Charitable Trust. Very many thanks to Geoff, whose long established electrical business is, of course, an Amblecote institution. The cheque will prove 'just the ticket' for opening the Society's new bank account in January, and go some way to offsetting the cost of photocopying and postage. Meanwhile if anyone can think of other likely sponsors – be nice to them, and if you need a toaster for Christmas buy it from Geoff!

## MORE ON SANKEY HOUSE

Sankey House, the large (presumably Victorian) building in Amblecote High Street, currently standing empty and up for auction, has aroused an amount of interest over the past few weeks. Quite apart from the fact that its fate will probably be demolition its history has come to the fore in an unexpected way. The *Black Country Bugle* of Novem-

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Sankey House in High Street. Awaiting sale and probable demolition*

## THE GLASSBLOWER Beating the Vandals?



ost people will be aware of the rather pathetic state of the Crystal Mile glassblower statue situated at the Fish, his blowpipe perennially drooping due to vandal attacks.

Although it could be argued that this accurately reflects the demise of the glass industry (!), the fact is that it reflects ill on Amblecote as a whole. The subject of the statue was raised at the November meeting, wondering if "something can be done".

Even a specially constructed pipe made of titanium steel sponsored by a local firm has proved unable to resist attack by vandals who, whilst they are not to be admired, should at least be respected for their persistence, strength and ingenuity.

Therefore, given that vandalism is a sad fact of life, it was mooted that the statue might somehow be altered so that it is vandal-proof. As a result Councillor Pat Martin is taking the matter up with Dudley Council on the Society's behalf. Further reports to follow.

## MEMBERS INTEREST

Stourbridge Member of Parliament Debra Shipley has written to Amblecote History Society wishing it well and indicating that she would hope to attend one of its meetings in the New Year.

Amblecote folk may not possess the level of political engagement they once enjoyed during the heyday of the Urban District Council, but a visit from Ms Shipley would certainly present a welcome opportunity to express views on matters of local heritage interest.

## DENNIS HALL COMMEMORATIVE

There is some very positive news for the project to include a commemorative plaque or sculpture within the refurbished Dennis Hall. Tony Stapleton, Director of Dennis Hall Developments Ltd contacted Nick Baker to register the company's great interest in a plaque or sculptural form within the refurbished entrance hall, and their willingness to sponsor this.

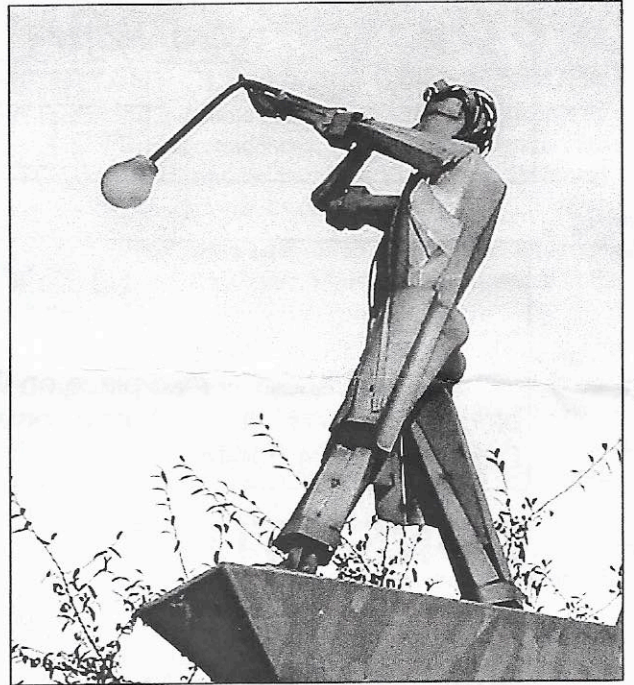
The Society is going to cooperate with the Glasshouse College and Ruskin Glass Centre, through Andy Cope, to develop the project, and in the meanwhile would like to invite ideas from members of Amblecote History Society as to the form a commemorative object could take.

Discussions at the November meeting focused on the fact that the Dennis Hall served as both a home to Iron and Glass Masters, as well as the offices of a glass works. The Hill's who built the hall in the eighteenth century derived their money from glass and made their fortune in iron, whilst during its time as the offices of Thomas Webb it was associated with some superlative glass designs including cameo and rock crystal.

The meeting thus felt that a sculpture involving both glass and iron, and commemorating both the domestic and corporate inhabitants of the hall, would be appropriate.

If you have any ideas please let Nick Baker or Father Paul know as soon as possible – the development is scheduled for completion in February and ideas need to be in place well before then.

Many thanks by the way to Councillor Pat Martin who facilitated the initial contacts between the Society, Dudley Council and the Developer.

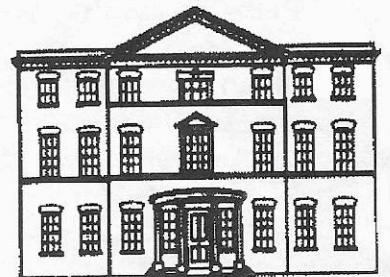


*The Crystal Mile Glassblower. Can something be done?*

*(Continued from page 1)*

### SANKEY HOUSE

ber 20<sup>th</sup> printed an article from a Mrs. Betty Lane (nee Road). She recalled, as a pupil of Crabbe Street Infants School, Lye, travelling with a group of dancers to their teachers home, a large house in Amblecote. This was around seventy years ago, and the teachers name was Miss Gittins. Could the house have been Sankey House? A dance school was operated from the house in fairly recent times by Irene Watkins – but was a previous owner a Miss Gittins, and did she indeed live at Sankey House? If you know, please let the *Newsletter* know.



# OBITUARIES AND INSCRIPTIONS

A very practical start has been made by the Society towards enhancing our knowledge of what may be described as the most important aspect of Amblecote's past – a better understanding of its former inhabitants.

Following discussions at the November meeting several individuals have formed a small informal group with the intention of better recording information relating to Amblecote's past residents through monumental inscriptions and obituaries.

A list of the former for Amblecote Churchyard was compiled around twenty years ago by the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry. However this now requires updating and Doreen Easthope and Avril Williams are happy to pursue this.

In addition back issues of the *County Express* are to be trawled for obituary records relating to Amblecote and the results kept on file. In many (though of course not all) cases these two sets of records will cross reference, providing a useful and informative record for both genealogical and general use. The beauty of the obituary project is that it can be pursued at any pace, with researchers requiring



An example of the kind of historical information the Obituary and Inscriptions project can generate is the case of Elizabeth Fletcher. An obituary in the *County Express* of May 12<sup>th</sup> 1928 mentions Mrs E. Fletcher of Woodbine Cottage, Amblecote Road who died aged 87. Predeceased by her husband Thomas Fletcher "who died 27 years ago". She left no fewer than 6 sons, 4 daughters, forty seven grandchildren and sixty great-grandchildren (they don't make 'em like they used to). Her gravestone (Ref. E.184) shows Thomas as having died in 1898, making either the stone or the *County Express* incorrect; just the sort of detail local historians and genealogists thrive on! Meanwhile, where was/is Woodbine Cottage, and what place do the Fletchers (of which there were and must be many) have in Amblecote history?



Gravestone of Elizabeth and Thomas Fletcher

only an occasional hour in Stourbridge Library reference section, whilst the records themselves need only be copied by hand, or pinned if photocopied, onto a card. Nick Baker is coordinating the project (to ensure that no-one covers the same time period twice!), and if you would like to help please get in touch.

## WAR MEMORIALS

Closely related to the Memorials and Obituaries project is a dual research initiative that also emerged from the November meeting. Nick Baker and Ian Williams discovered not only a mutual interest in researching wartime service-

men and war memorials in Amblecote, but that their efforts actually overlapped! A little coordination has ensured that their interests are now complimentary, with Ian researching the individuals named on Amblecote's memorial (he has already done a very fine job indeed for Wollaston), and Nick pursuing the politics and construction of the Amblecote memorials. Information has already been traded to good effect. The outcome will be a

publication and presentation during 2004.

Meanwhile Ian would be pleased to hear from anyone with memories or knowledge of relatives who were casualties of either the Great War or the Second World War. He may be contacted on 01384 371064.

## MIKE PERKINS ON 'STAND BY' FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

Society member Mike Perkins would like to remind everyone that he is on 'stand by' to photograph buildings and other objects in Amblecote that are in danger, or in the process of, demolition, removal or being covered up.

Please remember that photographs are often the only record of how things used to be, and recoding modern scenes is just as important as ever. In addition the removal of a building can often open up a vista that has not been seen for centuries ( the demolitions at

the bottom of Brettell Lane that allowed a view across the Stour Valley for example), and that these are often temporary as new buildings take the place of old.

Therefore if you spot anything of interest that needs recording please call Mike Perkins on 01384 824894. He won't mind!

## VISITS AND TALKS 2004

Part of the expansion of Society activity during 2004 will include a planned programme of visits and talks. However, the idea is to keep these as relevant to local Amblecote history. Suggestions so far include a guided visit

to the Broadhouse Glass Museum, a talk by Ian Langford on the Monarch's Way footpath (the escape route of Charles II from Worcester) which passes through Amblecote, and a talk by Jason Ellis author of *Glassmakers of Stourbridge and Dudley*. Indeed the latter has already been arranged as the Society's contribution to the International Glass Festival to be held at the Glasshouse College in August. This event, which will replace the current Dudley Glass Festival, will be highly significant, placing Amblecote at the heart of both the historical and modern glass worlds. A full programme of events will be announced in detail in the New Year, hopefully at the AGM.



## VICARAGE HISTORIES

### AND AN IMPORTANT OLD AMBLECOTE RESIDENT

Father Paul Tongue is carrying out some research into past incumbents of Amblecote Parish and their various residences. These include Dennis Hall, a house on the site of Queens Close, and the previous Vicarage in Holloway End now replaced by the current one and its close of houses.

Of special interest is the fact that James Kier (1735 – 1820) was apparently one time resident in the Holloway End house whilst he experimented at the nearby glass house.

Kier was a renowned 'Natural Philosopher' of the day and a leading light in the Lunar Society along with Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood. His residing in Amblecote in the 1770's-80's raises the intriguing possibility of these famous individuals having visited the area. Kier's experiments into crystal formation at the Holloway End works formed part of an important early understanding of crystallography.

Indeed Kier is emerging as a major historical figure in Amblecote's industrial history, and Father Paul's researches will no doubt form the basis of much more work to come.

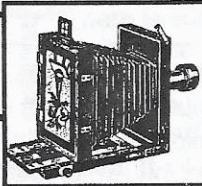
*James Kier, an important scientist, industrialist and member of the Lunar Society. Resident in Amblecote in the late 18th century*

## BBC WW2 MEMORIES PROJECT

Many people will be aware of the BBC's WW2 People's War Project. This initiative encourages individuals with stories to tell about the Second World War (their own or others), to record them with the BBC via a special web site. The project will provide a comprehensive 'national memory' of the war that will be of vital interest both now and in the future.

When the subject was discussed at the November meeting the point was made that not everyone has access to or knowledge of the Internet. However the BBC is aware of this and as part of the project is encouraging local history groups to register as collaborative entities so that those who possess the necessary computer skills may assist those who do not. In addition, collaborative participation will also encourage contributions from those who think it's a good idea but may not actually act upon it alone.

Amblecote History Society would very much like to encourage members to submit memories to the People's War project, and if anyone has a story they would like to submit, from (to quote the BBC) "the Home Front to the Front Line", then please get in touch with Nick Baker and a means of recording these can be arranged.

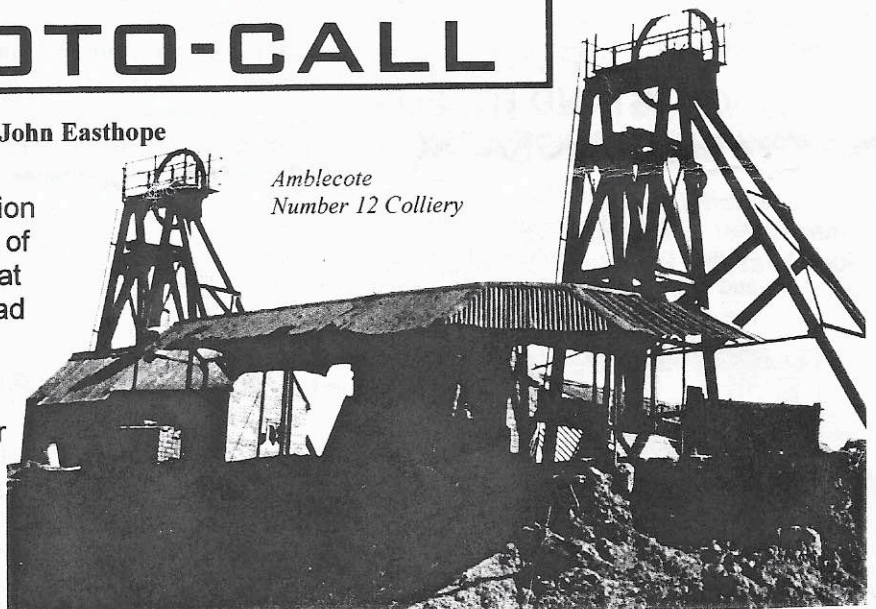


## PHOTO-CALL

With thanks to John Easthope

This photograph, from the collection of John Easthope, is one he took of Amblecote's Number 12 Colliery at the old junction of Amblecote Road and Vicarage Road around thirty years ago.

Once standing roughly at the rear of the Birch Tree pub, all traces of the pit, pithead and most of Upper Vicarage Road were removed during the open cast mining of the nineteen seventies.



*Amblecote  
Number 12 Colliery*