

MARCH & APRIL 2016 MAGAZINE

Welcome to the March & April 2016 edition of our Magazine. This issue runs from 1st March to 30th April.

Reports include:

March Main Meeting—An Introduction to Wine

Memory Course in March

SNATTs meeting 11th March—Fred Dibnah

April Main Meeting—The Sheldon Tapestries

SNATTs meeting 8th April—Trip to Birmingham Jewellery Quarter

Walking Group—April walk around Shipston

Last update: 18th April 2016



Canoeing on the River Avon, Stratford-upon-Avon, with the Rowing Club in the background

March Monthly Meeting

The Wonderful World of Wine by Rob Price

Rob Price of the Birmingham Wine School gave a very interesting and informative talk about wine from all around the world. He posed a question "where are the oldest vineyards in the world?". He put forward several countries for our consideration—France, Italy, Germany, USA, Spain, Portugal, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, amongst others.

He then went on to discuss grape varieties and their influence on taste of the wine. In most countries, wine is drunk as part of a meal—it is rarely drunk on its own as we do in Britain. Thus the taste of the wine must enhance the dining. Particularly with red wines, salt in the food can have a very marked influence on the taste balance between the wine and food. This may be one reason why chefs add much more salt to dishes than we might do at home and why it might be difficult to reduce salt in restaurant food.

The top fifteen wine producing countries are given in the chart opposite and include the expected candidates.

Wine taste is influenced by many factors, including grape variety, soil conditions, position of vines in landscape, weather during growing and ripening seasons, fermentation process and conditions, storage conditions. Much science has gone into the production processes during the last 50-100 years and, generally, quality and flavour have improved.

Rank	Country	Production (tonnes)
1	<u>France</u>	4,293,466
2	<u>Italy</u>	4,107,370
3	<u>United States</u>	3,217,000
4	<u>Spain</u>	3,200,000
5	<u>Chile</u>	1,832,000
6	<u>China</u>	1,700,000
7	<u>Argentina</u>	1,498,400
8	<u>Australia</u>	1,231,000
9	<u>South Africa</u>	1,097,200
10	<u>Germany</u>	840,900
11	<u>Portugal</u>	630,800
12	<u>Russia</u>	573,200
13	<u>Romania</u>	410,000
14	<u>Greece</u>	311,530
15	<u>Brazil</u>	273,100

During the late 19th century the phylloxera epidemic destroyed most of the vineyards for wine grapes in Europe, most notably in France.

Australia escaped the epidemic and can claim to have the oldest vineyards in the world, although some isolated vineyards in Greece and in France can also claim that distinction.

UK production is tiny compared to other countries, but some nice varieties are produced.

"Help our Memory" Course run in March

Athena Roderick ran a four week course on the subject of "Help our Memory" during March. The text book used was that produced by the Aughton & Ormskirk U3A who are based on the edge of Lancashire and Merseyside.

The course consisted of 4 two-hour sessions, one per week over four weeks.

The course went through principles of memory, how our memory changes as we age, ways to help us remember things and people. The second week we looked at chronological versus biological age, types of dementia, blood supply to the brain, diet, In the third session we looked more into dementia, activities and long term memory, sleep, stress. In session 4 we reviewed

the course to pull out the important things for us and what to do for the future.

Pictured below are five members who completed the course with Athena and helper, Edwin.

Athena hopes to run another course in the future so keep an eye on the Newsletter for details.

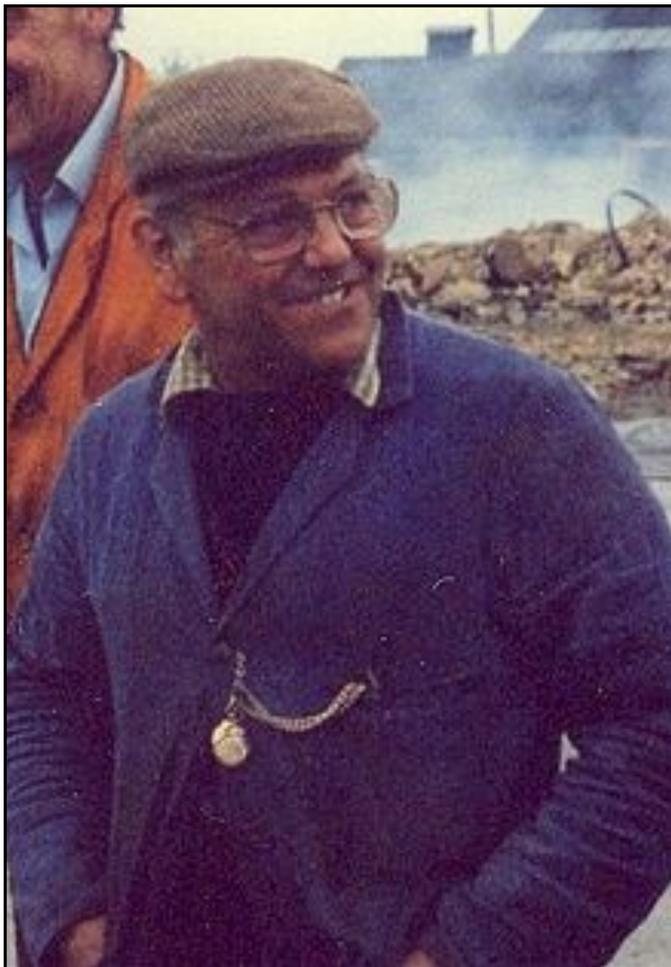
Athena did point out at the beginning of the course that she had deviated slightly from the U3A Memory Course by making it less academic and more life style oriented, hence the different title. All on the course agreed with the idea and spoke about how much they had got from the course.



Science, Nature and all Things Technical Group

Illustrated Talk about Fred Dibnah—Friday 11th March.

Geoff Bridgewater gave an illustrated talk about one of his heroes—Fred Dibnah, pictured below in about 1985..



Fred Dibnah was born in 1938 in Bolton, Lancashire, and lived all his life in the same locality. After finishing school he started work as a joiner—his father insisted on it. However, he had always admired the steeplejacks who maintained the local mill chimneys and church steeples and he had a fascination of things mechanical. One of his heroes was Isambard Kingdom Brunel, chief engineer of the Great Western Railway.

After finishing his National Service, he went into business as a steeplejack and he soon got known after he had worked on the steeple of Bolton Parish Church. The vicar of the church proved a good friend and recommended Fred to many of the local churches and businesses.

Over the course of many years he either repaired most of the mill chimneys for miles around, or demolished them. Sometimes he was called on to reduce the height of a chimney, which he did by dismantling them brick by brick.

Fred was married three times, but his concentration on work and hobbies—he was fascinated by steam engines—proved too much at times for his first two wives. He filled his backyard with workshops, part finished projects (he restored a traction engine which took several years) and later he installed a colliery winding gear and started to dig a mineshaft under it.

Fred died in 2004 after suffering from cancer.



Pictured above is Fred's former home which is now the Fred Dibnah Heritage Centre.

April Main Meeting—Thursday 7th April 2016 “The Sheldon Tapestry Map” by Maggie Wood

The Sheldon Tapestry Map of Warwickshire was commissioned in the late 1580s by Sir Ralph Sheldon for his new house, Weston House, near Long Compton in South Warwickshire. It was one of a set of 4 tapestry maps - the other three were of Worcestershire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. They were very large tapestries measuring about 5 x 5 metres each.

After the death of Sir Ralph Sheldon the tapestries went through several owners. Warwickshire Museum acquired The Warwickshire Map in the 1960s. The other three maps did not survive as intact as the Warwickshire one. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has a version of the Oxfordshire map but woven at a later date as a replacement.

It is thought that the tapestries were woven in England by mainly Flemish weavers who emigrated from the Low Countries to England to work in the royal tapestry repair department in London. Some may have been employed by the Sheldon family in a tapestry weaving venture at one of the Sheldon family's manor houses at Barcheston in Warwickshire. In 1570 Sir Ralph Sheldon's father, William Sheldon, made provision in his will for William Hyckes (probably a Flemish weaver) to have the manor house rent free provided he wove tapestries and other textiles.

Maggie Wood worked a number of years in the Warwick Museum and looked after the Shel-

don Tapestry Map. The tapestry has recently undergone a two year exercise to clean, stabilise and conserve the tapestry. Since being returned it has been exhibited at the British Museum during the 2012 Olympic year. Currently it is in store awaiting the finish of the refurbishment of the Warwickshire Museum. It is due to go on



display in Warwck Museum at the end of 2016, possibly during November.

This page is far too small to allow a a reasonable image of the tapestry. If you want to see it please wait until later in the year and visit the museum.

Science, Nature and All Things Technical Group

Trip to The Coffin Works and to the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter

Friday 8th April 2016

Twenty four members of the group gathered at Stratford Station just after 9.00am to catch the train to Birmingham Snow Hill Station. From the Snow Hill we walked the few hundred yards (or metres for those so inclined!) to the Coffin Museum.

The name Coffin Works is a slight misnomer as the company never made coffins. They made or supplied all the furnishings (fabrics, shrouds, handles name plates, etc) to the undertakers who made up the coffins as part of their service.

Newman Brothers were established in 1882 by Alfred Newman and his brother Edwin. The company were brass founders making cabinet furniture (locks, hinges, etc).

In 1994 they moved to the present site on Fleet Street where they built a new factory building. They also changed their product range and began to make and supply all the furniture for coffins, rapidly becoming one of the biggest companies of their type in the country. They continued in business until 1998 when they ceased trading. The work force and management simply walked out of the building one Friday afternoon and left everything as it was.

The last owner of the business, Miss Joyce Green, wanted the company and building to be a museum and she worked for several years until she sold out to Advantage Restoration. There

were many slips and uncertainties before secure funding and a sound business plan resulted in Birmingham Conservation Trust being able, with the help of a grant from Birmingham City Council, to buy the building from Advantage West Midlands in June 2010 and set up a professional team to in 2012 to manage the museum. Joyce Green died in 2009 before she could see the fulfilment of her dream.

We were able to visit some of the workshops that make up the factory—The Stamping/press shop and the Shroud shop were two that we went into.

Stamping/Press shop made metal name plates and other decorated metal ware. There were 4 belt driven heavy duty drop forge presses and several smaller Fly Presses used for smaller items. The other shops were Barrelling, where small metal items had their rough edges removed by being tumbled in a revolving wooden barrel;



casting where the brass items were cast; Plating

where metal and, later, plastic handles, etc., could be plated with a shiny finish.



Entrances to workshops.



Stamping Shop—heavy presses.

Pictured opposite top are the lighter weight presses in a row on the left hand bench.

Opposite bottom are examples of metal ware produced—handles, name plates, etc.





Above are more examples of coffin furniture.
 Pictured below is the Shroud Workshop.



Above is a typical coffin with metal furniture and fabric adornment. The coffins were usually fully lined and the body was restrained by padding so no movement during handling would be heard.



Lunch was taken at an Italian restaurant near St Paul's Square on the edge of the Jewellery Quarter.



The afternoon visit was at the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter. Some of us had been before but there is always something new to see or find.

The museum was another Victorian factory that was left intact as a time capsule for future generations. The owners of the Smith & Pepper Jewellery factory decided to retire after 80 years trading and simply locked the doors one Friday evening.

The factory produced large batches of jewellery, mainly from 9 carat gold, and sold to wholesalers or to large jewellery shops. They had equipment for all of the processes necessary, from casting down to tiny hand tools. They went to great lengths to clean up all the scrap metal in clothing, mats, across the floor, in wooden blocks and benches where filing was done. This was all melted down and cast into ingots and sold back to bullion dealers from where they bought the original gold.



Charles Smith and Edward Pepper, founders of the company.

Below is a typical work station for the jewellers. Much of the work was manual and required good eyesight and skill with hand tools, such as files, hand drills, etc.

The second picture is of the office—the most advanced equipment was an electric comptometer.



Above a fairly modern piece of equipment for shaping metal.

Many of the processes were operated by an ancient over head belt system, which had been updated with an electric motor. The noise level with the belt drive working along with the ventilation system must have been appalling. The picture be-

low shows the belt drive system



Above is a hand operated fly press.

Below is a close up of the press tool.



Above—the demonstrator showing a process.

The metal furnace and casting plus a waste processing plant were situated in the basement, which we could see through a glass floor but could not get down to view.

Walking Group—Wednesday 13th April 2016

A 5 mile walk around Shipston-on-Stour

Fourteen members of the group met in the car park by the river bridge in Shipston on a very beautiful spring morning. There was hardly a breeze and the sky was clear with beautiful sunshine. It was a pleasure to be out in the fresh air. We walked over the bridge towards Barcheston and continued walking on paved surfaces, path or road all around the walk. We passed Bar-

cheston and Willington and the stopped briefly in the new churchyard at Burmington for refreshments before continuing on back to the car park. We saw lots of spring flowers, some oil seed rape blooming in a field, some lambs and chickens.

It was a peaceful and enjoyable I forgot to take photographs until nearly back in the car park.

Thanks Fred for leading.

