

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2015



Birmingham Road,
Alcester, 1930's

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

LAST MEETING: Our last meeting of 2014 struck an appropriately light-hearted but festive note with a humorous and nostalgic look back on the social history of the 20th century via the pages of the famous Kay's Catalogue – something that few homes were without at some or other during that time.

Our guide on this fascinating trip was **Bernard Mills**, making a welcome return visit and who, himself, worked for over 30 years at Kay's eventually becoming a director of the company. Now retired, he is also the official keeper of the Kay's archive – and what a rich source of fascinating information it is!

It is easy to forget that, in the early days of the 20th century, when the majority of people had limited access to transport, especially in country areas, the only way they had of buying larger items like furniture, carpets and even farm machinery and clothing, was by mail-order. Thus, Bernard Miles traced the buying habits of ordinary people through the pages of the catalogues, as they appeared every year. Ladies were able to buy underwear of all types, 'foundation garments' or, corsets, from Kay's and try them on in the privacy of their own homes. Men were also able to purchase suits at very moderate prices and, likewise, try them at home first.

Fashions for both sexes, shown in the pages of Kay's and shown on the screen must have evoked many fond memories in the audience – from the slender silhouettes of the 1930's to the mini- skirts of the 1960's for women, and double-breasted, wide lapelled suits of the 1940's to flared trousers and platform shoes, for men in the 1970's.

The fashion in models used to display the articles also changed over the years. Originally, line drawing and artist's impressions were used to sell, whereas later male and female models were used and photographed until in the 1960's and 70's minor celebrities and soap stars were often used, usually to sell the very latest fashions.

This was an altogether nostalgic and highly humorous look at our recent social history with a brilliant commentary by Bernard Mills and a really excellent visual presentation.

To carry on the seasonal theme for the evening we all enjoyed a delicious buffet in the interval and also a raffle.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Please note that subscriptions may be paid at either the coming, January, meeting or else at the February meeting. Whenever you choose to pay, please bring your money in an envelope bearing your name and address and hand it in at the entrance desk. Please do not hand in loose change. The membership fee will remain the same for this year, £3 per person, but we will have to seriously consider an increase in 2016.

2014 – ANNIVERSARY YEAR: The past year, our 40th anniversary year, can be looked back on as a great success in several ways. Membership of the Society now stands at over 200 and usually, at least half this number regularly makes up our audiences every month. In July we mounted a two-day photo exhibition in Alcester Town Hall which attracted almost 400 people over the weekend, excluding members who attended a preview buffet on the Friday evening. These numbers exceeded all our expectations. To mark our 40th anniversary we also re-published three of our Occasional Papers originally published over twenty years ago. These were completely revised and updated and printed using modern printing methods, using glossy paper and coloured photographs. It is gratifying to report that almost all have now sold out with one, **Needle Makers of Alcester, Sambourne & Studley**, currently being reprinted.

Additionally, our website www.alcesterhistory.org.uk, under the auspices of our webmaster, Steve Godfrey, has really come into its own and has, at the time of writing, had over 2000 'hits'!

NEXT MEETING 14th January: In this, the 200th anniversary year of the Battle of Waterloo, our first talk of 2015 is very fitting. Dr Paul Gray, an Alcester resident who, for many years, lived near the battlefield of Waterloo and gave guided tours of the site in addition to being a frequent lecturer on the subject, will give us the benefit of his knowledge in his talk entitled **The Waterloo Campaign – A Close RunThing** – Not to be missed!

Meetings are at the St Benedict's Sixth Form Centre commencing at 8.00pm – all are welcome to attend.

SUE FISHER