

A Word from the Editor...

So, here we are in June — already halfway through the year.

In last month's newsletter I mentioned the challenge of finding fresh material, and our treasurer, Graham, made a very sensible suggestion: why not revisit some of our earlier articles, especially as many of our newer members will never have seen them.

With that in mind, this issue includes a piece from June 2021, written in the middle of the lockdown by our late Chairman, Don Vincent. In it, Don looks back on his youth as a trainspotter — a warm, personal glimpse into a world that shaped so many enthusiasts of his generation.

I've expanded the original article by adding a selection of additional photographs from the period, so even if you remember reading it the first time, the visual material will be new.

The feature runs across three pages, from page five to page seven.

I hope you enjoy revisiting Don's memories as much as I did.

June Meeting

For our June meeting we saw another good turnout: 34 Members, including one new member and one renewal, and 4 Visitors, making 42 in total. We now have 59 fully paid-up members with. Hopefully, a few more renewals to come. Once again, we were delighted to see the Redditch Standard feature us with a great article, thanks to Pat's press release.

Our June speaker, Emma Hancox, was County Archaeologist at Worcestershire's Explore the Past Archaeology team. She told the story of how the discovery of a human skeleton buried within an embankment of the Worcester, Bromyard and Leominster Railway



Line in 2021 resulted in an archaeological detective story to uncover its history with an unexpected twist.

This was a fascinating and informative exploration of archaeological methodology.



Exhibitions and Events

Exhibition: *Wed 3 June to Sun 12 July 2026*

STORIES OF THE BOWERBIRD
An exhibition by Stephanie Redfern



Sat 20 and Sun 21 June 2026:
10.00am to 4.00pm
BLADES, BOWS AND BLACK POWDER: A MEDIEVAL WEEKEND



Details of events and activities at the Museum including costs involved can be found at

<https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/> 'What's On'



Next Meeting – Monday 13th July
Local Law and Order and Popular Protest pre-1850
by Richard Churchley

Industrialisation and the Agricultural Revolution brought with them a range of social issues that led to protest. As machinery replaced manual labour, people found themselves in hardship and this led to protest and the emergence of revolutionary, radical, ideas.



In his usual thoughtful way, Richard will be taking us through this turbulent period in our history with examples of the various protest movements and their successes and failures.

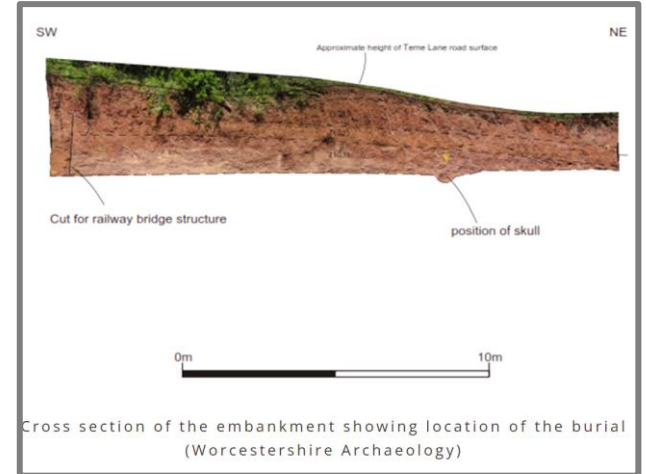
In this intriguing and informative presentation, Emma Hancox, County Archaeologist with Worcestershire's Explore the Past team, explored the story behind the human skeleton discovered in 2021 within an embankment of the former Worcester, Bromyard and Leominster Railway line. In doing so, she offered a fascinating insight into the processes behind an archaeological investigation. Human remains are usually uncovered during planned excavations, but in the summer of 2021 work began on a housing development near Riverlands Farm in Leigh, west of Worcester.



The Broad Dingle viaduct, just north of Alfrick, still stands on the parish boundary with Lulsley as a testament to the hard work of the navvies. Our man may have been involved in the construction in the months before his death.



the location of the burial in 2021, and how the site looked when the Worcester to Bromyard Line was still in use (1902 Ordnance Survey)



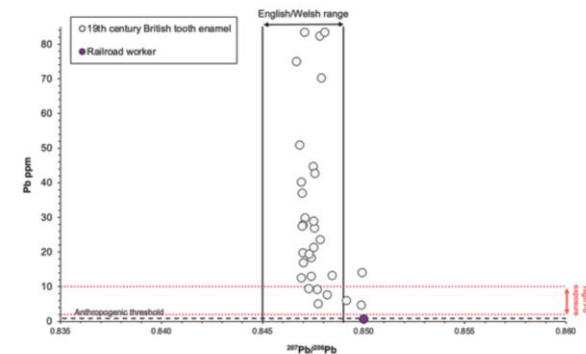
Cross section of the embankment showing location of the burial (Worcestershire Archaeology)

The old railway line once curved across the site. In July, while removing the remains of the embankment, a machine driver pulled back the excavator bucket and, along with the soil, brought out part of a human skeleton. The construction company immediately notified the police and the archaeology department.

When the Worcestershire Archaeology field team arrived, only the feet and lower leg bones remained in situ; the rest had been disturbed by the machine. The archaeologists recorded what was left in place and collected the dislodged bones for analysis. The remains were then sent for a full osteological assessment to establish age at death, sex, stature, and any signs of illness or injury. The initial working theory was straightforward: the individual might have been a labourer working on the construction of the railway who had died through accident or illness and been buried informally within the embankment.



Well healed fracture of the left second metatarsal, a bone in the foot. Below it is a normal right second metatarsal for comparison (Ossaafreelance)



A plot of the lead concentration. The purple dot at the bottom is our body, the grey dots are all tooth enamel lead concentrations in 19th century individuals from Britain – as you can see most have much higher levels than our individual. (AIPRL, Durham University)

The first stage of analysis was carried out by osteoarchaeologist Gaynor Western of Ossaafreelance, who examined the bones and took samples for scientific testing. These were sent to Durham University for isotope analysis, to SUERC in Glasgow for radiocarbon dating, and to the Crick Institute for DNA sequencing.

Early results seemed to support the railway worker hypothesis. The skeleton showed evidence of a physically strenuous life, and isotope analysis suggested a childhood spent in a rural, inland area. His diet in both childhood and adulthood appeared limited in variety, pointing to a lack of wealth.

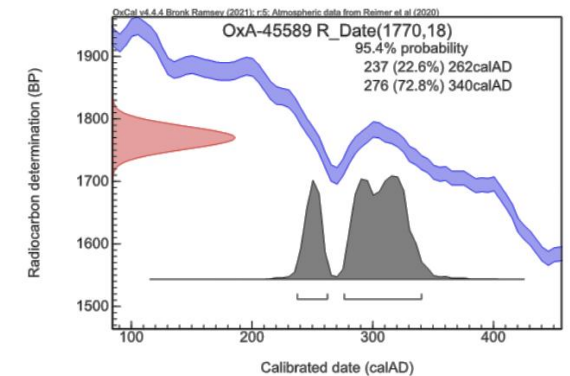
Then came the plot twist. The radiocarbon date from SUERC placed the individual not in the 19th century but in the 3rd or early 4th century AD – firmly within the Roman period. To rule out error, a second sample was sent to the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, which returned the same result. Scientific analysis also showed that the man had not grown up in Worcestershire and was unlikely to have been of high status. His presence raises intriguing possibilities: might he help illuminate how ordinary people moved around Britain – and perhaps the wider Roman Empire – during the Roman period?

Whether further insights will emerge remains to be seen, but this discovery comes at an exciting moment in research into Roman Britain. Each new dataset, whether from a large cemetery or a single isolated individual, contributes to a richer picture of life, movement, and identity in the Roman world. This unexpected find now forms part of that growing body of evidence.

This summary can only hint at the detail of a presentation that kept our audience captivated throughout. It is exciting to welcome such a wide range of expert speakers to our meetings.



The lower jaw showing the very worn teeth, caries and one of the abscesses.



The calibrated radiocarbon result from Oxford University's Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit (ORAU)

Reminiscences of a 'Trainspotter' by Don Vincent (1 of 3)

I suppose I was a Trainspotter (It should, of course, be Locomotive spotter) from the end of WWII until I started at High Duty Alloys (HDA) roughly 1945 –1952.

Even then as the chemical laboratory at HDA was built at the east end of the site it had a clear view of the embanked railway line. I spent some time, when the gaffer was not about, educating my workmates in the different wheel arrangements. In 1945 one still had the three main railway companies. London Midland and Scottish (LMS); London North Eastern Railways (LNER); Great Western Railways (GWR); and Southern Railways (SR). These would be nationalised into first British Railways (BR) and in 1965 British Rail. I was concerned with LMS and GWR for obvious reasons, with BR later.

If I remember correctly a few of the lads from Ipsley St Peter's club decided to start a trainspotter club. I think 'Bunty' Stewardson was the main instigator, we used to meet at his parent's house.



S 3892 MIDLAND RAILWAY STATION, REDDITCH.

Above –Redditch Station

Below – Aerial View of railway goods yard and station



My trainspotting started as might be expected at a local level.

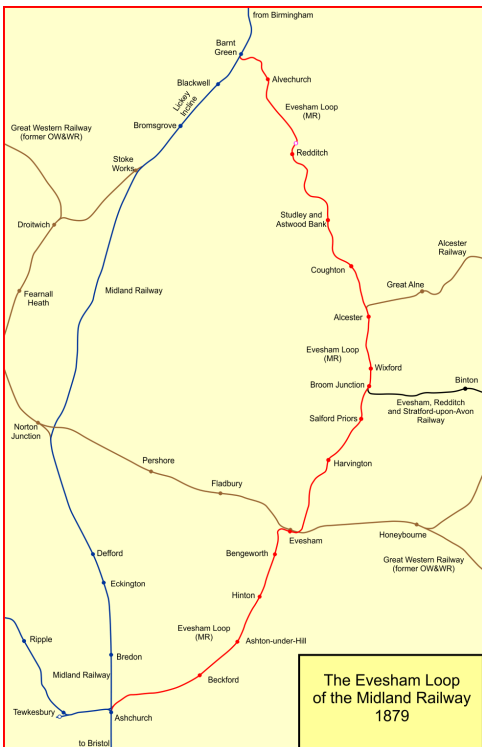
In those days Redditch was on the Gloucester loop which left the Bristol- Bradford line at Barnt Green before rejoining that line at Ashchurch junction. The object, apart from serving local communities, was to cut out the notorious Lickey Incline for goods traffic. The line served the following stations Barnt Green, Alvechurch, Redditch, Studley, and Astwood Bank, Coughton, Alcester, Wixford, Broom Junction, Salford Priors, Harvington, Evesham, Bengewoth, Hinton, Ashton under Hill, Beckford, and Ashchurch Junction. Saturdays, and particularly Sundays, the trains were packed with Brummies going fishing. Two different lines would run into Alcester station, while Evesham had an LMS station and a GWR station next to each other. Now only Redditch to Barnt Green via Alvechurch is open.

Reminiscences of a 'Trainspotter' by Don Vincent (2 of 3)



Above
*photograph of
goods yard
and metal
pedestrian
bridge*

Left
*The
'Gloucester
Loop' leaving
at Barnt
Green and
rejoining the
main line at
Ashchurch is
shown in red*



The mention of goods traffic is interesting because the railways, then, were the main carrier of all sorts of goods not as is today the roads.

Redditch had its own marshalling yard. All sort of industrial material such as timber, coal, cement would end up there for distribution to the local destinations.

One could witness virgin aluminium ingots being transported down Studley Road to Reynolds Tube / British Aluminium. They used to come down on a trailer pulled by a Scammell Mechanical Horse later by a Scammell Scarab. Loads would be 3 or 6 tons. When I finished at HDA our virgin aluminium came in twenty-ton lorry loads from the smelters, Anglesey Aluminium. Redditch had its own gasworks.

It was no accident that HDA and Redditch Gas Works were cheek by jowl 'the Alloys' used gas like it was going out of fashion.

The gas works had its own sidings for use by the coal trucks of the railways. The coal truck would be shunted onto a frame and then turned 180 degrees sending the coal down a shoot to a hopper ready to be hoisted to the top of the retort house.

However, as interesting as the local railways were the wide world beckoned., well the local wide world.

One of the favourite places, to bike to, was halfway up (or down) the Lickey Incline. Follow the road past Hewell Grange over the crossroads and just where the road dips under the railway there is a little pull off to the left. Here one could get close to the lines. It was always interesting to see what the banker was that day. The incline is so steep that trains needed great assistance to get up it and sometimes additional braking to come down. This assistance was provided by bankers kept just the other side of Bromsgrove station. Favourite was 'Big Bertha' a 0-10-0-wheel arrangement loco purposely built for the job, if this was not available it would take some three smaller locos to replace her.

Reminiscences of a 'Trainspotter' by Don Vincent (3 of 3)

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*Above – Train near Oakenshaw Farm
Below – Lapworth Station*



Another beauty of this spot is that one passed Dixon's orchards. I once stole a pear that I was still eating when we got back to Redditch.

If it was a nice afternoon/evening John Kettle and myself might decided to ride over to Wood End to see what was on the front of the Cornish Express. Riding over to Wood End just to see a locomotive? Happy days. In school holidays we might spend the day at Lapworth station.

Lapworth is on the GWR Birmingham to London mainline, used to get some serious machinery coming through there and at speed.

However, it was not just local.

One or two of us might decide to go to Tamworth. The reason being is that Tamworth station has two levels. The afore mentioned Bristol-Bradford line runs over the top and at right angles to the West Coast Main Line, both in the early days being LMS. A side benefit of the train ride was that the train went through Saltley marshalling yards and train shed. One could not write the numbers down quick enough. We even embarked on a trip to Crewe. Can you imagine catching a train in Redditch changing at Birmingham to go to Crewe? Whatever were we thinking? It did not end there. Once one returned home the Ian Allen Trainspotter's book was got out and the relevant numbers collected that day underlined in the book.

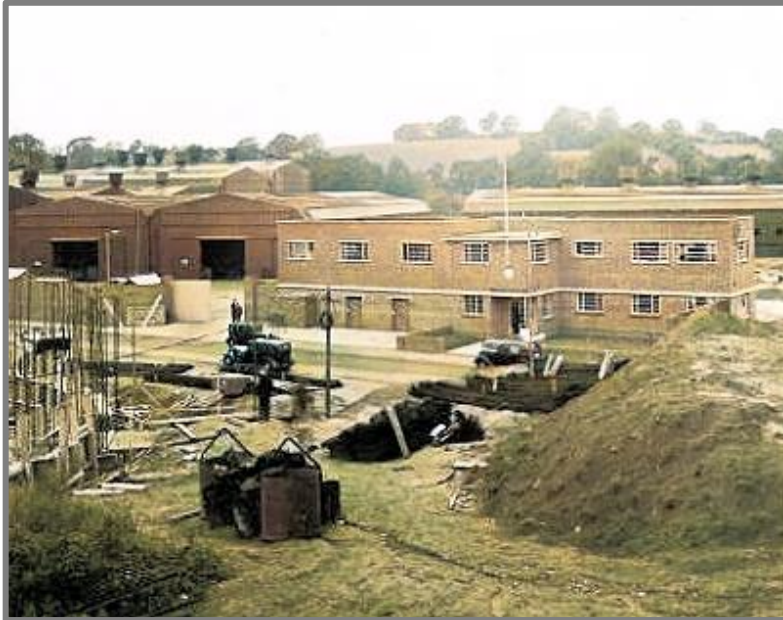
One had to be dedicated, adult, well off and preferably mad to travel the country to collect all locos in any one class as some did.

It all faded away perhaps because of nationalisation, perhaps because of work, perhaps because steam was phased out.

However, it never really leaves the blood. How many of us enjoyed heritage steam trains, most, I guess?

and finally.... **High Duty Alloys – early days**

As Don mentioned the High Duty Alloys in his railway spotter article I thought I would show a few pictures of the Windsor Road site. It was built specifically for the war effort and opened in October 1938. By 1941, it covered nearly 26 acres and employed 1,553 people. Post war this increased to over 2,500 and operated six days a week.



Construction in 1938



Aerial view showing factory and gasometers



The 'big press'

*This Newsletter is edited and published
by Anthony Green, Society Secretary,
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