
**November Meeting: Tuesday 12 November 2019
Mountsorrel Memorial Centre at 7.30pm**

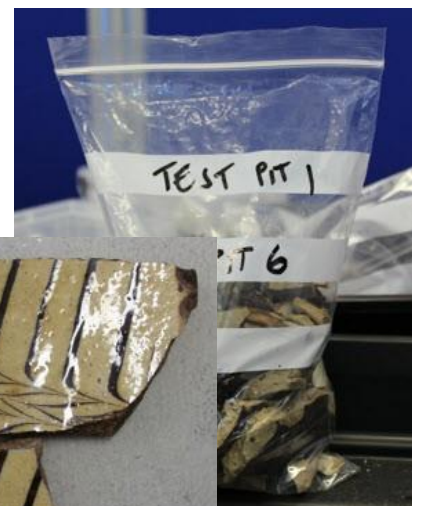
**Castle Hill:
In Search of the Knights Hospitallers
Presented by Mathew Morris**

In Castle Hill Country Park at Beaumont Leys, is a large enigmatic rectangular earthwork. Speculation about its use has suggested that it was an Iron Age encampment, whilst more recent research indicates that it may be a medieval manorial site associated with the Knights Hospitallers.

Mathew talks about recent excavations at the site and what they tell us about the monument's fascinating history.

Castle Gardens Archaeological Test Pits

Peter Liddle has been and looked through the finds from the Castle Gardens test pits. They will be displayed in the museum.



Mountsorrel Prefabs

We recently had some feedback on our website from Mr Janusz Ostrowski. He starts “Your site has fascinated me all afternoon - I've got nothing done!”, he continues to talk about his memories of living in the village, particularly mentioning the prefabs. Following this, one of our trustees, Linda Tyman remembers being at school with Janus and agreed to write the article below. As is my wont I checked the internet and discovered that there actually exists a Prefab Museum!

Many people are unaware that Mountsorrel ever had any prefabricated accommodation since nothing now remains of these single-storey buildings. Their story begins during the Second World War. The Alvis factory which pre-war had manufactured cars and aircraft engines in Coventry, was commandeered by the Government to produce munitions, principally aircraft parts, but was severely bombed during the Coventry Blitz in November 1940.

Consequently, production was moved to ‘shadow factories’ situated in various parts of the country. Clarke’s Box factory in Linkfield Road was one such factory requisitioned by the Government and the Alvis workers were transferred from Coventry, along with whatever machinery could be salvaged from the bombed-out factory.

This group of workers, the largest single influx of people to move into Mountsorrel in its history, needed somewhere to live. When the Alvis employees began to request that their families be brought to Mountsorrel too, something had to be done to ease the accommodation problem.

The solution was to build a number of simply- constructed red-brick bungalows. These were situated in Church Hill Road which back then followed the present Church Hill Road and turned left into what is now Martin Avenue before opening onto Halstead Road.

These bungalows were semi-detached with a small front garden and a larger back garden. Many of the occupants used both front and back gardens to grow fruit and vegetables to supplement their weekly wartime food rations. The inside walls of the bungalows were unplastered so people painted them to improve their appearance. The roofs were almost flat with just a slight pitch to ease drainage.

As war production increased, Alvis No.2 factory was built behind the existing factory and more employees arrived in the village. To accommodate this new wave of people, a second phase of building took place and Martin Avenue came into being. This road followed what is now Glebe Close and the top part of the present Church Hill Road, before opening out onto Halstead Road.

This second phase comprised of prefabricated white concrete single-storey, semi-detached houses commonly called ‘prefabs’, with roofs covered in black tarred sheeting and again having a very slight pitch for drainage (see photo).



British Concrete Federation Huts in Mountsorrel
Photo courtesy of John M Green and the Prefab

The interior accommodation of both types of bungalows comprised a kitchen accessed by a door to the side, a good-sized living room with windows to the front and side, a large bedroom to the front, two other bedrooms at the back, and quite luxurious for the time, a separate bathroom and toilet. The front door led into the hall from which the other rooms opened.

The metal window frames let in fierce drafts and people who lived there remember particularly how cold the houses were during several very cold winters in the 1940s. There was no gas on site and heating was provided by a coal fire in the living room. At the back of the fire was an oven that opened into the kitchen and was used for cooking and for heating water as there was only cold running water in the kitchen and bathroom. Some families had an electric copper which was used to boil water during the summer when the fire wasn't lit. In the garden was a brick shed which was useful for keeping bikes etc in and a coal bunker.

After the war some Alvis employees returned to Coventry and the vacant prefabs were then occupied by other workers who had moved from London and other areas to find work. The prefabs continued to be occupied until the late 1950s when new council houses and flats were built on the site and the old buildings were demolished.

During their short life, these brick bungalows and prefabs provided much-needed accommodation for people who had to re-locate for work and in some cases, had lost their homes to bombing. Whilst quite basic by modern standards, they were a more than adequate stop-gap until more permanent housing was built. This was a small community of neighbours who also worked together and people who lived there as children remember the freedom of playing in the fields beyond the prefabs, providing happy memories of their life in 'the prefabs'.

Written by Linda Tyman

**With thanks to Sylvia Stanton, Connie Hudson
and Janusz Ostrowski**



Sylvia & Wendy Mackay at the rear of
61 Martin Avenue



Sylvia, Wendy & Ann Mackay with evacuee John Grant

The Granite Boot Company

Another query via the website came from a lady researching the history of James Arthur Smith.

She asked if we had a photo of a house called Inglenook where James Smith lived in 1911. We did and she supplied us with the following information.



James Smith

(Image courtesy of 'Shoe & Leather News 1916)



Inglenook, Loughborough Road

In 1909 James Arthur Smith dissolved his partnership with his father, Cornelius Smith, and left the family business in Anstey. He went into partnership with Arthur Garner who had a boot & shoe factory in Mountsorrel, almost certainly in the 'scout hut'. They had two companies, the Granite Boot Co on the Green and the Midland Leather Company in Leicester. In 1911 the partnership with Arthur Garner was dissolved and James became the sole proprietor of both businesses.

In 1914 the company secured orders from the government to supply army boots.

In 1915 in parliament, Mr Ramsay Macdonald asked the Financial Secretary to the War Office whether he has received complaints from the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives that the Granite Boot Company in Mountsorrel, which is executing Government orders, is withholding money due for two months to its workpeople, that it has failed to pay a bonus agreed upon by manufacturers in the trade, that in its employment of boys it has violated the boy labour award, that the wages it pays to women are below the recognised standard; whether he has been informed that this firm definitely declines to negotiate with the representatives of the men's union; whether, in consequence of the failure on the part of the men to get this firm to accept the responsibilities of Government contractors, men have left their work; whether the trade union has requested the War Office to intervene and what has been the result?

Mr Baker replied that he had received complaints and would investigate.

The Granite Boot

Co. Ltd.

MOUNTSORREL
Near LOUGHBOROUGH
Telephone : ROTHLEY 22

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Boys', Youths' and Men's
: FOOTWEAR :
and FOOTBALL BOOTS
(Wholesale and Export)

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EXCELLENT WEARING QUALITIES
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**BOYS' SCHOOL BOOTS
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By 1916 the Midland Leather Co had moved from Leicester to the Green and the Granite Boot Co to another site in the village.... but where did the Granite Boot Company move to, from its original site on the Green?

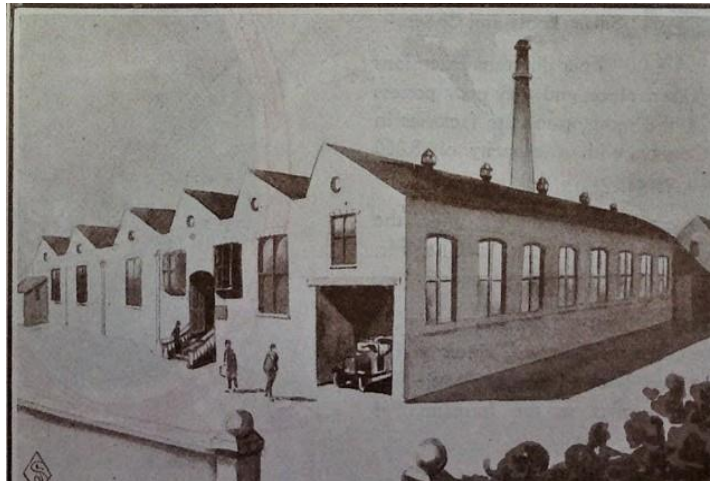
Noel Wakeling recorded- '1860s: James Smith founded the first factory proper in the village named the Granite Boot Company making heavy boots for quarrymen and later the Army. Employing over one hundred women and men. In 1967 this became Morris Shoes, making shoes for men and children closing in 1998.'

This appears to be right [except for the date], but the 1929 OS map calls it a Hosiery Factory?



Morris Shoe Factory
1970's

Granite Boot Factory
1916
(Image courtesy of 'Shoe & Leather News 1916)



Female Workers in the Machine Shop at the
Granite Boot Company 1930s

The Employees of a Mountsorrel (Shoe Factory)

Front Row	Middle Row	Back Row
12	14	11
P. Whitehouse	Kate Kitchen	M. Lawton
N. Hawkins.	B. Woolstone	S. Kirchin
V. Warner.	H. Jayes	B. Watson
I. Taylor.	H. Taylor	J. Allen
G. Harding.	D. Sharman	A. Clark
I. Allen.	E. Smith	F. Waite
G. Baum.	L. Darby	E. Dawel
???????	M. Davie	D. Newby
E. Thornton.	K. Kendall	H. Rue
G. Smith.	?????????	R. Liggins
P. Liggins.	E. Smith	N. Bignall
Mrs Wykes.	R. Knight	
	Mrs Wardle	
	??????????	

Does anyone recognize any names or faces?

Peace Garden

Thank you to all those who came along to help on 30 October, the Peace Garden now looks ready for Remembrance Sunday (10 November) and the Armistice Day Service on 11 November. All last year's wreaths and crosses have been cleared away and for a few days the memorial will look somewhat bare but neat and tidy.

Final work party for 2019 will be the morning of Wednesday 27 November : general tidying up and some light pruning.

Wildlife

The almost continuous stream of westerlies have so far meant there has been little evidence of the arrival of the winter migrant birds in the village area or even in the county. There is the odd report of a Waxwing and a Short-eared Owl in the north of the county but that's it for the moment. It will interesting to see if we get anything on Broad Hill now that the Halstead Rd development is looking almost complete. In the past this was a reliable spot for Redwings and Fieldfares.

The recent heavy rain has at least meant that the Mountsorrel Marshes have had a real soaking, not that they are ever totally dry!



27th October 2019 – Mountsorrel Marshes