
Audley St George's News

Incidental bits and pieces from our Audley community

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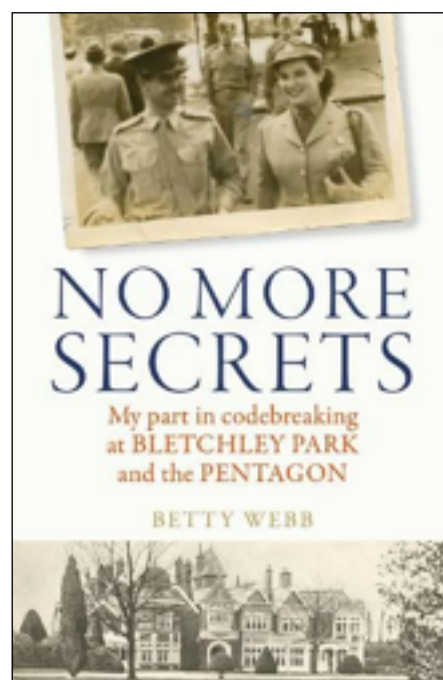
Talk by Bletchley Park heroine

One of the amazing women who helped to crack the Enigma code during the Second World War will be the guest speaker at the second of our newly-introduced monthly talks at Audley St George's next month.

Betty Webb worked at Bletchley Park during World War II and was later posted to the Pentagon in Washington DC to assist the Americans with the war in the Pacific. At the age of just 18 she joined the British Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. Betty said: "I wanted to do something more for the war effort than bake sausage rolls." She grew up with a German au pair before becoming an exchange student in Germany. When she arrived at Bletchley Park, and because of her knowledge of the language, Betty was given the task of cataloguing encrypted German radio messages intercepted by the British. This played a major part in helping to break the German cipher Enigma. During her time at Bletchley she also worked on intercepted Japanese messages which led to the posting to Washington. Betty Webb was appointed an MBE in the 2015 Birthday Honours "for services to remembering and promoting the work of Bletchley Park." In 2021, she was also recognised by the government of France, with her appointment as Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Betty has even appeared on the front cover of the National Geographic Magazine as part of their story to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the ending of WW2. Arrangements for Betty Webb to speak at Audley have been made by **Peter How** who is a long-standing friend. There will be no charge for the talk, at 7pm on Monday 10 June, but donations for the Bletchley Park Trust would be gratefully received. Betty may even have copies of her latest book for sale.

The introduction of monthly talks at Audley St George's will make use of the dining room on quieter nights following requests for more recreation space. The first talk will be given by **Tony Brett Young** on his early life in outback Australia, and family links with the birth of QANTAS, the world's second-oldest airline. That talk will be at 7pm next Monday, 13 May. If you have a story, or career, you'd like to share at a future Monday talk, or know someone who would be prepared to speak, please contact Tony or **Kesaven Cuniappen**.



Thomas Attwood's intriguing Audley connection

Our favourite Birmingham statue is the one of Thomas Attwood MP, which reclines on the Chamberlain Square steps in the shadow of Town Hall. Attwood was once described as the most popular man in the British Empire. And quite by chance we discovered recently that he has an interesting connection with a nearby Audley village. So who was he, why was he so popular, and what is the Audley connection?

Thomas Attwood was born in Halesowen in 1783 and attended the Wolverhampton Grammar School. By 1800 he had moved to Birmingham to work in the family bank. From the experience he gained working with local businesses he developed ideas about reforming the currency and advanced sophisticated economic theories on money and trade. Dubbed in his own time as 'the very first economist of the age', Attwood became involved in politics when he joined the campaign against the East India Company. He believed the company's actions were severely restricting foreign trade. As many local businesses depended on the export trade, the company was blamed for growing unemployment in Birmingham. In 1812 Attwood was partly responsible for

convincing the House of Commons to restrict the company's monopoly on foreign trade. Thomas Attwood then began to take an

interest in wider economic matters and in 1815 put forward a policy that he believed would reduce unemployment. Attwood's economic theories were popular in Birmingham but he failed to convince the government. Although he managed to persuade 40,000 people to sign a petition advocating currency reform, the Duke of Wellington and his government refused to consider the proposal. He gradually developed the view that the House of Commons needed more people with



business experience and knowledge of economics and led the

demand for large manufacturing towns like Birmingham to be represented in Parliament as they had no MPs at the time. The only interests represented were the landed gentry, the church, the law and finance. In 1829 he took the lead in establishing the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) to campaign for franchise reform and for representation for manufacturing towns. Support for the cause gained impetus and a meeting in Birmingham's market district was attended by over 80,000 people. Attwood became an overnight hero in Birmingham and sales of medals and mugs depicting 'King Tom' flourished. For the next two years Attwood was one of the main leaders in the campaign for parliamentary reform. When the Reform Act was eventually passed in 1832, Attwood

was installed as a freeman of the City of London in recognition of the important role he had played in the fight for the vote. In the general election held in the autumn of 1832 Attwood and another leading member of the Political Union, Joshua Scholefield, were elected unopposed as Birmingham's first two MPs. Attwood worked hard to convince the House of Commons of the wisdom of his economic ideas. However, he was unsuccessful and he eventually came to the conclusion that a further reform of Parliament was needed. In May, 1837, the Birmingham Political Union was revived. In June a new list of demands were drawn up, including: currency reform, household suffrage, triennial parliaments, payment of MPs, and the abolition of the property qualification. In June 1839, Attwood presented the first National Petition to the House of Commons. Although it had been signed by over 1,280,000 people, the Commons rejected the petition by 235 votes to 46. Bitterly disillusioned and in poor health, he resigned his seat and took no further part in politics. He once described the House of Commons as a seat of 'ignorance, imbecility and indifference'. Later, after his experience as an MP, he was asked if he still stuck to that opinion. "Not at all", he



replied, "I now realise it was actually much worse than that."

Between 1823 and 1846 he lived in a Georgian house, The Grove, (above), in Harborne that was unfortunately demolished in the 1960s. The site is now part of Grove Park, one of our popular Thursday walks.

And the connection with one of our neighbouring Audley villages? On the cottage at the entrance to Audley Ellerslie in Great Malvern is a plaque which reads "Here Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham political reformer, died in 1856". He was 72.

Visit by St George's students

A group of students from St George's School next door recently visited Audley St George's as part of an intergenerational project. It was the first of what's hoped will be regular meetings, and invitations to Audley owners to visit the school, and the opportunity to make use of some of its facilities for such activities as art. The students, boys and girls of mixed ages, told owners about the project in which they are encouraged to meet people in their local community. Another group visited Metchley Manor next door. Topics discussed ranged from the use of information technology, art and football. At the end of the visit they were given a tour of our village, and were particularly interested to see what their school looked like from our vantage point.

Cody's travel adventures

We do admire the adventurous attitude of so many young people today, and their willingness to try out new things. We were in the bistro for Happy Hour recently and were chatting with **Cody Newis** when she told us about the day trips she takes on her days off. Now if you think we're talking about outings to Weston-super-Mare or even to London, think again. No, Cody's journeys are to places like Paris, Barcelona and Madrid. She said that by using a search engine called Skyscanner she can find flights as cheap as £20 with Easyjet and Ryanair. "I do have to leave quite early in the morning," she said. "But if I set out at 5.30am I can be in Barcelona at 7.30." She travels with friends, or sometimes on her own, and has some time for sightseeing, meeting local people and for a good meal before returning later in the day. Cody said March was a good time to travel for cheaper fares, and when the warmer weather is returning. She did alert us to the fact that such day trips are becoming extremely popular, and adding to the congestion that has plagued Birmingham Airport for some time. She was delayed recently on a two-day trip to Madrid. However such hiccups don't seem to daunt Cody, and she now has plans for a day-trip to Ireland.



Cherry blossoms in full bloom

