

May 2018

At some time in our lives we have voted in some kind of "Election" but never given a second thought to anything other than the cross on the ballot sheet.

Gill filled in all the questions that we had never asked, we learnt so much.

- The electoral register lists the names & addresses of everyone who is registered to vote
- To vote in a UK general election you must be registered, aged 18 or over, be a British citizen and not subject to any legal incapacity to vote
- If you don't register to vote you could be fined £80, unless you have a valid reason not to.
- Every year you are asked to check your entry on the register which will then be published on 1st January.
- There are procedures in place for adding and deleting names from the register
- In the UK there are 6 types of Elections: House of Commons, Devolved Parliaments and Assemblies, European Parliament, Local elections - 3 types - County Council - District Council and Parish Council; Mayoral elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.
- Our most used voting system to find the most preferred candidate/s is First-past-the-post.
- By elections are called if a councillor dies, leaves the area, resigns or is disqualified.
- Any resident of a ward can call a by-election
- To stand as a candidate in a local election, you have to be resident and work in the area and be over 18
- Each political party has their own system for selecting candidates. If standing as an independent, just apply to the Electoral office of the local council for an application form.
- People from all over the country can apply to their political party to be considered as a Member of Parliament candidate, and a selection process will be followed
- Residents can vote once for yourself in your ward and have 2 proxy votes in any other local constituency wards. In a General Election you are allowed 1 vote for yourself and 2 proxy votes.
- There are strict rules about the costs of a local election candidate's costs which are paid by the candidate or via the local party
- Local political parties get their monies from, membership subscriptions, donations and fundraising events
- Local by- laws dictate where election posters can be displayed. In Wyre Forest, only on private land, in people's gardens, windows and in people's cars
- In all elections the Ballot is a secret ballot and no-one can find out how you voted. The people who sit at the polling station wearing a coloured rosette and ask for your voting card number, are only there to check that any resident has said they were a supporter of their party has turned out to vote. Voters are some times contacted and encouraged to vote especially in a ward where the vote could be very close.
- Council employees and paid members of various occupations and volunteers are responsible for counting the votes in the local elections
- If a vote is very close candidates or agents can request a recount
- The result is announced by the Returning Officer, who is usually the Chief Executive of the local Council
- The Police have the legal authority responsible for the correct submission of election expenses, which have to be submitted 28 days after the election result declaration
- These days a much higher percentage of recorded postal voters vote than people who vote at a polling station.

There was much member interaction going on during Gill's talk, I think we understand a bit more about what is something that is very important in our local area and in the UK.

We have a member, Pauline who for 20 years acted as a Poll Clerk, which is the main roll to support the Presiding Officer in the Polling Station.

Poll Clerk's Responsibilities:

- On duty from 6.30am until 10pm, no breaks for meals
- Setting up the polling station, putting up notices of candidates to help voters
- Stations open at 7am
- Voters are asked to state their name and address, if a voter brings their voting card, they must take it away with them and not left in the room.
- The clerk checks the electoral register and makes a mark alongside the name. They tell the Presiding officer only the number of the voter, which is written on a separate sheet against the list of ballot paper numbers.
- At the end of the voting time the clerk helps to secure all boxes of voting papers, to be taken to the counting hall.
- On a personal side, the clerk needs to take clothes for all temperatures in the polling hall, cushion for hard chairs, food and drink for the day, as they are unable to leave the building. Reading matter, puzzle books useful for quiet times.

Pauline carried out her duties before retiring in 2017 in Birmingham and said that there, the numbers of voters using the polling station were on the increase over the last few years.

Now to the actual candidates not all of whom might be accepted to stand for office in 2018!!

Moira told us about Albert Grant who was Kidderminster MP from 1865 - 1869.

Abraham Gottheimer was born in 1831 in Dublin was the son of a poor Jewish Pedlar from Central Europe. The family moved to London where the father became a partner in a fancy goods exporting business. Abraham was educated in London and Paris and assumed the name "Albert Grant" prior to his marriage to Emily Isabella Robinson in 1856. He entered employment as a clerk later becoming a travelling salesman of wines.

In 1859 Albert established the Mercantile Discount Company and the Credit Foncier & Mobilier of England; which were both used to launch a number of ventures.

But this was not a man you would want to buy a 2nd hand carriage from!! Neither would you want to invest in any of the following: Cadiz Waterworks, Central Uruguay Railway, Labuan Coal Company, City of Milan Improvements, Imperial Land Co of Marsilles, Russia Copper Company, Varna Railway and the Emma Silver Mining Company.

Grant actively courted investors by using directories and targetting financially naive groups such as members of the clergy and widows. All of the above companies collapsed in controversial circumstances. The investors ended up penniless but not Kidderminster's MP, despite the allegations of fraud made against him.

So just how did Albert Grant become our MP, he was chosen as the Conservative candidate to stand against the Liberal Colonel Luke White. Despite the whole of the electorate being told that Grant was a "fraudulent adventurer" he was proposed and seconded by 2 local carpet manufacturers, who defended his reputation! And so Grant was elected as M P.

Three years later at the next election Albert Grant did not stand and the seat was regained by the Liberals.

In 1873, Albert Grant bought a piece of land for the people of London, Leicester Square, all legally paid for, with the deeds being give over on 3rd July 1874.

You might have thought that was the end of Albert's political career, but no, In the 1874 election

Grant stood again as the Conservative candidate in Kidderminster and won by 111 votes in January but in February a petition was lodged by a number of local men. They alleged that Grant and his agents were guilty of bribery, making corrupt promises of money, drink, provisions and other reward to electors in exchange for their votes. About 50 local public houses offered free drinks to customers wearing the Conservative colours and put their names on Grants "list of supporters" Although Grant contested the petition, the evidence was compelling and he was unseated and ordered to pay court costs.

From 1876 Grant was pursued by creditors in the courts, and eventually was declared bankrupt in 1877 but attempted to regain his fortune by establishing a new bank!! This failed, so back in the bankruptcy court in 1885 and a receiving order was made a few days before his death. He spent his last years in poverty and died of heart failure near Bognor in August 1899 aged 67

Albert Grant a most colourful Victorian politician of Kidderminster and one of the Rogues of the 19th century.

Some of the more interesting politicians who stood and became the Member of Parliament in the Bewdley constituency 1605 - 1950, when it then became part of the Kidderminster Division, as told by Rose.

Richard Young MP elected in 1605 and 1624. He was involved in many corrupt dealings and traded in ivory and slaves. In the early years of the Civil War his assets were impounded but in 1647 still could afford to pay a fine of £47 for illicit dealings. In 1649 he defaulted on a mortgage and was committed to Fleet prison for debt and died there in 1651.

Thomas Foley MP for the Convention Parliament in 1660 but in 1673 was MP for the Cavalier Parliament. Thomas built Witley Court and in the late 1660s founded a Blue Coat school in Stourbridge for 60 boys from poor families, now known as the Old Swinford Hospital School.

Sir Ralph Clare served as the MP for Bewdley between 1624 and 1629. He stood for re-election in 1640, but as he "did not take arms" for Charles¹ his election was declared void. He lived in the small castle, Caldwell Hall and is buried in St Marys and All Saints church.

Phineas Bowles MP from 1735 - 1741

His son William Bowles took over and became MP from 1741 until 1748. He owed the Vauxhall Glassworks in London and with his wealth bought the Burford estate in Shropshire and built Burford House just outside Tenbury Wells.

Thomas Lloyd a Liberal was elected to be MP for Bewdley in 1868 but lost the election which was marred by bribery and declared void. The same had happened to Lloyd in Barnstable when he stood in 1863! You would think the people of Bewdley would have chosen someone more suitable!

Sir Richard Alwood elected in 1868, was a very wealthy and successful Telegraphic cable manufacturer, but was unseated in 1869 due to his corruption.

Lieutenant-Colonel The Honorable Augustus Henry Archibald Anson VC served as MP from 1869 - 1874. He won his VC in the Indian Lucknow Battle. There is a memorial plaque to him in Lichfield Cathedral

Enoch Baldwin was the last MP 1880 - 1885 to serve while Bewdley was still a borough. First cousin of Alfred Baldwin, he lived at the Mount in Stourport.

Now named Bewdley County Division, Sir Edmund Anthony Harley Leckmere served from 1885

- 1892. He was a pioneer of the Red Cross and was a founder of the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital.

1892 - 1908 saw Alfred Baldwin as MP. He and Enoch were connected to the Wilden Iron and Tinplate company, later becoming Baldwins Ltd. He lived at Wilden House and was also Chairman of the Great Western Railway. He had paid for the construction of Wilden Church which was consecrated in 1880.

Stanley Baldwin, son of Alfred followed on and served from 1908 until 1937. During his political career, he was Prime Minister three times whilst serving Bewdley as MP. He has the distinction of serving under three monarchs; George V, Edward VIII and George VI. One of the stained windows in Wilden Church designed by Burne Jones shows Stanley setting out on his political journey accompanied by a guardian angel.

Elected at the by-election in 1937, Sir Roger John Edward Conant held the Bewdley seat until it's abolishment for the 1950 General Election.

Having heard about the types of people who become Members of Parliament, the educated, the aristocratic, the criminal minded, the do-gooders all MEN

Eileen showed us a different side of one of only two women who have stood for election to be MP for Kidderminster.

Her name was Jessie Stephen, born in April 1893. The eldest of 11 children, her father a tailor. Jessie has been described as "virtually the only Scottish working class Woman's Social and Political Union member whom anything was known". She had won a scholarship to study as a teacher, but the family's income was so low that she could not afford to pursue her aspiration to become a teacher. Instead, at the age of 14 she became a domestic worker.

Her father was a founder member of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, and by the age of 16, his daughter Jessie was vice-chair of the ILP and a militant member of the WSPU. She would go around the wealthy homes in Glasgow, knock on back doors and enlist the maid servants to fight against exploitation. Working in the front line of the suffragette movement Jessie mixed with the likes of Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Jessie went into the provinces to rally yet more troops to the cause of female emancipation. She seemed not to be bothered with the constant police surveillance at her rally gatherings. Jessie believed that mass canvassing via open-air meetings was a way to reach the working women, who felt intimidated when attending more formal political meetings.

But Jessie and so many of her working class sisters are excluded from the vast majority of suffragette histories. It was only through her work with trade unions that brought about the recognition of her suffragette work.

At the age of 29 in 1931 Jessie Stephen stood as Labour candidate for Kidderminster, but did not succeed. What an opportunity the people of Kidderminster and Stourport missed! Her work took her all over the globe, even in the US where she explained the trade union position to workers. She spoke to groups including immigrant workers from Europe, the National Union of Mineworkers, the Socialist Party of America and was a founder of the Canadian Union of Domestic Workers.

Back in the UK Jessie became a freelance journalist, set up a secretarial agency and joined the National Union of Clerks. By 1944 she was appointed the first female area union organiser of the National Clerical & Administrative Workers Union; and it was this role that brought her to Bristol, where she would become the first ever woman President of the Trades Union Council. Jessie was elected as a Bristol city councillor in 1952, and used the opportunity to speak widely and loudly about birth control.

Jessie Stephen, suffragette, trades unionist, politician, pacifist, woman's rights campaigner, the woman was unbreakable. She received in MBE in 1978, but died of pneumonia and heart failure in Bristol Hospital on 12th June 1979 aged 86

A truly remarkable woman who achieved so much from a humble background.

I wonder what kind of difference could she have made to our locality had she been elected as our MP.

Thanks to all who contributed to such a fascinating afternoon, of what was and what might have been in what is now Wyre Forest.