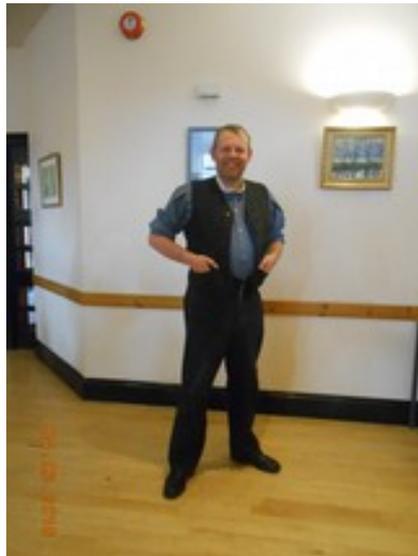


Paul Harding - The Victorian Era.



Paul Harding.

Paul, a regular Speaker at the History Group, gave another lively presentation on the theme of 'The Victorian Era'. He explained that this was a period of fast-paced change in both the domestic and the industrial spheres and cited some examples, eg transport and health. He named some important contributors, including Worcester physician Sir Charles Hastings, who founded the British Medical Association. Hastings also documented the variation in environmental health of the different classes, an important contribution to community health. John Lionel Stretton, a Kidderminster man discovered iodine.



Sir Charles Hastings



John Lionel Stretton

Paul also stressed the disparity between the upper classes and the lower classes of the time. Charles Booth, a Victorian London mapmaker, colour-coded the dwellings and streets of the capital by social class and noted the differences in lifestyle. Paul highlighted the grim realities of being lower class compared to the affluent mode of life enjoyed by the upper classes. Some of the details were extremely gruesome and as Paul said: 'It makes a grim read'.

Another facet of Victorian life emphasised by Paul was the foibles of Victorian morals, when even table legs were covered for modesty!

Many aspects of society were standardised at this time, for instance education and domestic tasks. Mrs Beeton became a household name, influencing many upper class homes in the spheres of household management and cookery. This was also a period of many inventions, such as tinned food (purely for military use), tin openers, 'Lucifers' (matches) and Bird's custard.

Mass production began at this time and catalogues were produced to show off the vast number of household products that could be had by the wealthy. By contrast, the children of the lower classes were sent out to work in the most appalling of conditions, such as chimney sweeps, in factories and laundries or cleaning privies. Paul took great pains to contrast the lifestyle of the affluent upper classes with the medieval living conditions of the lower classes, where human life was cheap.

Paul's presentation was very well researched, and he used many artefacts as illustrations. He spoke with humour and gave detailed statistics on many aspects of the Victorian Era. As Elaine said in her vote of thanks: 'We've laughed with Paul, we've shuddered with Paul and we've learned a lot'.

Heidy Hague