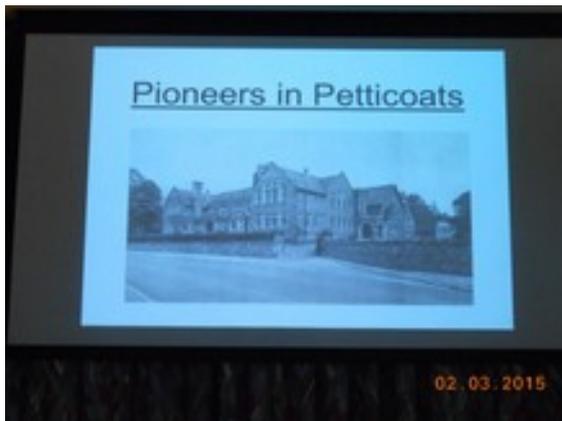


## Jo Roche - Pioneers in Petticoats.

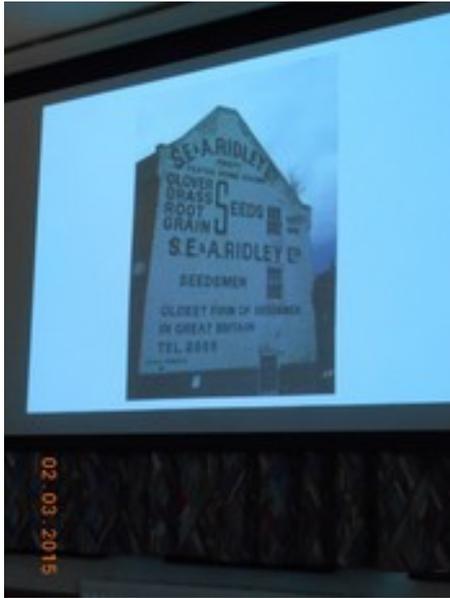
A full hall welcomed Jo Roche to the March History Group Meeting on a return visit. Her previous talk had been on Abberley Hall, and this had been followed up by a visit to the School.

Now, Jo continued her exploration of historical local education by presenting the story of two second cousins, Miss Catherine Bennett and Miss Elizabeth Frances Ridley, and their contribution to education in Kidderminster.



The PowerPoint presentation, which contained many contemporary documents, vintage photographs and period posters, of medicines and remedies - some a bit gruesome or unpalatable by today's standards, kept the audience engaged as they followed the detailed 'journey' of these two cousins from their first school in Broomfield Hall, Franche to Hillgrove on the other side of town.

The Ridley story also involved the Ridleys of Bridgnorth who were established seed merchants, and their distinctive hoarding can still be seen in Low Town, on the side of a building near the bridge.



The three Ridley girls, of whom Elizabeth was one, were governesses. Contemporary opinion said governesses were weak, feeble, hopeless and purposeless. The attitude to girls' education at the time was to provide a social education to prepare a girl for marriage. Academic education for girls was unfitting and unnecessary. In fact it was many years before girls were allowed an equal education to boys at University level. Elizabeth was to fight against this attitude.

Through various circumstances, Miss Ridley opened a school with 5 boarders and some day pupils. All such education at that time was to be paid for (private); there was no provision for state education. Catherine, aged 21, joined her as a Teaching Assistant. The school was established in Broomfield Hall, off the Franche Road and later nearby 'Needwood' was added as the pioneering ladies expanded into Nursery Education, influenced by Freidrich Froebel the German educationalist, who is best known as the originator of the 'Kindergarten'. They also pioneered co-education for young children in the area.

Jo continued her presentation with the development of the school run by the Misses Ridley and Bennett, until its transfer to Hillgrove, on the other side of Kidderminster. She included in the talk such well known educationalists as Miss Beale and Miss Buss and engaged the audience with her humour, authoritative delivery, detailed research, contemporary quotes and old maps of the environs of Hillgrove and Broomfield. The addition of old documents also enhanced the talk. The audience appreciated that a lot of detailed research had gone into the presentation and talk, including nostalgic photographs of the old Hillgrove School Hall, Science Lab and Gymnasium of the era when Hillgrove School became a Girls' Grammar School.



It was gratifying to discover that two local ladies did indeed become 'Pioneers (of education) in Petticoats.

Heidy Hague