



Weldon
Village
Academy

History Newsletter: May 2026

No1.

Hello,

The aim of this magazine is to highlight some of the wonderful local history in the area plus the students work and interests at Weldon Village Academy . This magazine is an opportunity to bring new historical writings to you in the hope it may encourage students and parents, guardians, grandparents etc to discuss and write about local, family and /or school history. The History Review will be co-authored by teachers, academics and students at Weldon Village Academy but we welcome articles from the wider community.

Our school Journalism Club visited the local church of St Mary. The students learnt about the amazing history in the building but also the connections, particularly WW2—and surprisingly the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805! Did you know why the church has a stained glass window from the US airbase. What is inscribed on the bells of the church. What about striking modern art—paid for by a local Weldon resident!

Trafalgar Day: 21st October

The students are hoping to celebrate Trafalgar Day which was a tradition at the church before Covid. Did you know that there is a clear connection between the battle and the church and the town?

A massive THANK YOU to

Mrs Sandra Whitlam, Mrs Janet Player and all the staff at St Mary's

Journalism Club members: Noah, Kaiden, Kitty, Klaudia, Lily and Marcus.



Shoes, Corporatism, and Local Politics:

The British Union of Fascists in Northampton, 1932-1940 by Will Cox: Review by Gary McDonagh

William Cox was a student from Latimer Arts College, Barton Seagrave and is now an award-winning student at the University of Nottingham. William's dissertation is about a fascinating period of history that spanned our area but also international events. The British Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed by Oswald Mosley in 1932 and supported the Fascist governments of Italy (Mussolini from 1922) and the Nazis from 1933 – 1939. The BUF wore paramilitary uniforms and were called the 'Blackshirts'. Mr Cox's dissertation examines how the national aims of the BUF's 'national ideology and corporatist economic vision failed' in Northampton. The shoe industry in 1930's Northampton was undergoing industrial turmoil and strife, and the BUF policies were claiming to be the solution to Britain's and Northampton's societal and employment problems.

Northamptonshire was the global leader in shoes and boots production at the turn of the century, but in the 1930's was coming under increasing pressure from Bata, a shoe company from Czechoslovakia. The BUF national idea of 'corporations', industry wide groups that would be protected 'from foreign imports and competition' was tested out in areas like Northampton. Mosley was lead speaker at three meetings in the Guildhall, Northampton between 1935-39. The first meeting in July 1935 saw Mosley speak to an audience of over 500. The mixture of economic problems was blamed on the government, trade unions and foreign companies as an attempt to recruit for the fascist cause. Debates with BUF hierarchy were also held at St Paul's Memorial Hall. Tommy Moran, a leading Blackshirt was appointed as local representative for the BUF, as they felt that Northampton 'could provide fertile ground for ideas of economic self-sufficiency and national protectionism'. Mr Cox examines the BUF newspapers, *Blackshirt* and *Action*, and how they used Northampton's difficulties as recruitment for the BUF, nationally and locally. The focus on Northampton, foreign companies like Bata or arguments over contracts for boots for Fascist Italy did not lead to any political or social breakthrough for the BUF. Mr Cox investigates the reasoning at a local level to help understand the national policy failures of the BUF.

Mr Cox looks at responses from the trade union, with Northampton having two branches of The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO) consisting of over 12 000 members in 1935. Market Square was a flash point between local speaker for the BUF and the anti-fascist activists with the Police insisting on a rota system to ease tension. The banning of loud-speakers and attempts to ban paramilitary uniforms highlight some of the pushback against the BUF in Northampton. Mr Cox looks at the failure of the BUF in the 'Battle of Cable Street' on the 4th October 1936 when BUF paramilitary groups were successfully blocked marching into a mainly Jewish area of East London by trade unionists, Jewish council and anti-fascists. The image of the BUF was weakened by the events (and national banning of paramilitary uniforms in 1938) but even in local Northampton elections the BUF polled poorly, the national and local were both disappointing.

The social democracy of the trade union and local distaste at the local actions including fines for painting slogans on private property ensured the failure of the BUF in Northampton. The start of WW2 led to the arrest of Mosley but also the raiding of Northampton's BUF office and subsequent arrest of local leaders. Mr Cox points out the need to examine further the causes as even though Northampton 'had a strong labour tradition, and a population that was not necessarily drawn to authoritarian solutions despite strong sentiments of economic anxiety', this is not an argument that Northampton or any equivalent town was immune from fascist arguments. The dissertation highlights the need to understand local, regional positions in helping us expand understanding of a national and/or international event. The parallels of challenges to social democracy were and are plentiful, the determination of people in Northampton and other areas to resist fascism is worth examining and celebrating.

Interview with William Cox, University of Nottingham

What sparked your interest in history?

History has always been a subject of great interest to me as I've grown up. I have grandfathers that fought in Cyprus and Korea respectively, but the real 'penny dropped' when I started my A-Levels in 2020. I had a brilliant and inspiring teacher that saw potential in me, and he introduced me to a lot of the topics I have continued to study at university. He would recommend me certain books to read outside of the school textbooks we were given, and I think things just took off from there. I would not be the historian I am today without his passion for learning, and I take that into everything I do. The importance of teachers and educators has been a massive reason as to why my interest has sustained (and the reason why I am studying history at university too!).

Why do you choose to look at Northampton in this pivotal time of 1932-40?

I can trace my research of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) back to when I was completing my A-Levels. While revising for my exams on Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, I started to think about ways that these extreme ideologies might have affected Britain during the same period. That was when I stumbled across Dr Philip Coupland's piece about the BUF in Northampton, published in 2000. In his article, he first revealed the existence and presence of the movement in the town, but much more needed to be explored. He was writing at a time when historians were beginning to look at ways the movement existed outside of London, but they have since moved on. I wanted my biggest essay during my undergraduate to pay homage to my family too. My family has long roots in Northampton and the wider county and, as the first person to attend university in my family, I wanted to incorporate a bit of home into my historical interests. What I didn't know at the time was how important the town and its shoe-making industry was to the BUF's national policy aims.

You use your evidence of events in Northampton to feed evidence into the national picture, but don't classify it as local history, can you explain the benefits of this hybrid approach?

Yes, I don't class my research as a piece of 'local history' in the strictest sense. Of course, choosing to research Northampton does give the research a local feel, but I was keen to explore ways that Northampton fitted into BUF's national project and wider economic policies. I thought it was important to not view the town in a vacuum and instead look at party leader Oswald Mosley sought to integrate Northampton's anxieties into tangible national propaganda. This is a project about the BUF as much as it is of the town, whereas local history would primarily look at the story of Northampton. Historian John Brewer took a similar approach in his book about the BUF in the West Midlands, analysing the support for the movement by looking at their activities in local areas. You can get a richer sense of the scale and nature of the BUF by looking at towns as case studies, and how their national goals were manipulated across Britain.

Can you give a brief outline of the British Union of Fascists policy?

The British Union of Fascists were a far-right political movement created by Sir Oswald Mosley (former Conservative and Labour MP) in 1932. Much of their policies can be found in *The Greater Britain* (1932), but the party primarily proposed an authoritarian shift to end parliamentary democracy and abolish the House of Commons. They wanted to create a 'Corporate State', where society and the economy is organised into groups based on profession and industry, to effectively end trade unionism, insulate trade (autarky), and gain greater state control over economic affairs. The BUF were also antisemitic at its core and promoted conspiracy theories blaming Jewish people for issues such as the Great Depression, increased foreign trade and imports, unemployment, and for start of the Second World War. The term 'Britain First' was a message pedalled out from the Headquarters, and it summarised their stance on war, economic, and policy.

In medieval period industry was controlled by guilds was this like the 'corporate state'?

In some ways, yes. The Corporate State would have divided the different economic sectors into recognisable groups that were controlled by the state. Medieval craft guilds worked in a similar way, but at a more local level, and tried to include anyone involved in the specific industry of the guild. They were more decentralised than what was being promoted by the BUF (state-supervised groups that served the interest of the nation).

Do some people find it uncomfortable that there were levels of support for fascism and Nazism in the period 1932-40 in the UK?

The BUF had a peak of 50,000 members in 1934, and they were supported by the *Daily Mail*, but this quickly diminished following frequent outbursts of street violence and a public antisemitic stance, so the level of support was always on the fringes. You would, of course, like to think that support for fascism and Nazism in any country is uncomfortable given the horrific nature of the atrocities associated with these ideologies, but neo-Nazi groups continued to arise following the Second World War. Again, groups like the Union Movement (Mosley's post-war political movement) or The National Front were on the fringes, but they nevertheless left stains on British democracy. In my experience of researching and discussing British fascism with people outside of university, it is quite common for people to have never heard of the BUF or of Mosley (unless they have watched *Peaky Blinders*), so many are indeed shocked.

You describe the tension in Northampton's shoe industry in the 1930's due to challenges of 'foreign imports and competition'. How did the BUF try to use this issue?

Northampton's interwar population averaged around 90,000 people, and half of the town's manufacturing employment was occupied by the shoemaking industry. During the same period, Czechoslovakian shoemaking firm Bata were becoming an increasing problem for the town due to rising importation of their cheaper products. For the BUF, this was an opportunity to promote their vision of a Corporate State, criticise the incumbent government, and stress the need for economic self-sufficiency. Mosley's speeches at Northampton's Guildhall made direct reference to the situation in the town, and party's weekly newspapers *Blackshirt* and *Action* regularly featured articles (usually hyperbolic in tone and content) about the plight of Britain's shoemaking industry.

You describe the attempt to ban political uniforms in Northampton in 1936? Why was this local move important?

In many ways, I think the Council and the Town Hall Committee were quite brave in trying to ban the uniforms in 1935. The 'Blackshirts' were indeed a menacing presence across Britain, and their speeches in the town often came with trouble. It showed that local government were concerned with the activities of the fascists in the town, and that they were willing to act quickly in order to reduce this threat in order to protect the people. Though it was ultimately unsuccessful at a local level, until the Public Order Act 1936 was passed in Parliament to ban the wearing of political uniforms across Britain, towns like Northampton showed the importance of reducing fascist power and presence by stripping them of their identity.

In the dissertation, the Trade Unions play a strong role in countering fascism; do you think their role was underappreciated following WW2?

I think many historians of British Fascism tend to look back on the role that the public played in defeating fascism and the BUF. The Battle of Cable Street of 1936 (where the local community of London's East End, including Jewish members and groups, clashed with the Blackshirts in quite violent street brawls) has arguably been the biggest story that has come out of post-war retellings of anti-fascist activity. I think the role that Trade Unions played at local and national level is something that needs exploring more, because it was often these groups that gave people a sense of identity when politics turned violent and divisive. Northampton made up a large amount of members to the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, and it is in these smaller stories where we can understand why fascism failed in Britain.

They say history does not repeat itself, but do you feel a better understanding of past events could help ease/resolve present tensions?

I think there is still a lot of work to be done. The more we examine fascist and neo-Nazi groups in today's increasingly fragmented world, the better we can understand the political climate in today's world. Educating ourselves on the dangers posed by those who hold, or indeed express, extreme views can certainly inform our society about ways that we can overcome hatred and violence. It may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes, and I think it is vital that we spot similarities early.

Searchlight 'investigates and opposes fascism, antisemitism and racism in Britain and abroad'. It was a monthly magazine 1975-2025 and is now on-line. Its archives are held in Northampton University. How important is it to have this resource based in Northampton?

I have had the privilege of visiting and exploring the material at the Searchlight Archives at the University of Northampton during my research, where I met archivist and historian Dr Daniel Jones who oversees the collection. It is one of the largest archives of its type in Europe and offers unique materials that cannot be found elsewhere. Northampton has become an academic 'hotspot' of sorts for students and researchers who wish to learn more about fascism and far-right extremism in Britain and Europe, not only because of this archive, but as a result of the historians working at the University. Dr Paul Jackson, Professor of Radicalism and Extremism and a prolific academic who has written about topics like the BUF, teaches in Northampton. The archive goes hand-in-hand with the innovative Extreme Right Research Network that is located at the University, and they run many events to understand challenges posed by the extreme right. It is fantastic that Northampton is home to this collection, and I think we have reason to be proud of the efforts made by those at the University to improve our understanding of how we, as a society, can combat extremism.

<https://searchlightmagazine.com/about/>

A big thank you to Will. If you have a local book or item you would like us to review then please contact gmcdonagh@weldonva.org.

Form the University of Northampton website:

All of our students can access the collection, and it has been very popular for researching major projects like dissertations. Since it opened in 2013, the archive has hosted many visiting researchers from a range of other universities. We also have several doctoral students using the archive for the basis of their research.

To find out more about the collection, please go to the University of Northampton Archive catalogue.

For information on the collection please contact its archivist Dr Daniel Jones.



In GCSE history, one of the modules is the history of Native Americans. Many students' question why we seem to study things that are so distant in time and place. I was researching for the lessons reading about the Plains Indians and the expansion of the transcontinental railway from the 1870's. The end point of the Plain Indians resistance was the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, and Kicking Bear allegedly was the last Lakota to surrender to the Federal government forces.

In history lessons we always teach students that any source is either primary or secondary; you should always look at all the evidence. Photography was common from 1850, that is why we have so many pictures of the American Civil War (1861-65) and of the Plains Indians. I found a photograph of Kicking Bear – simple enough but look at the small print that it was taken in Dennistoun, Glasgow!



https://dennistounconservationsociety.org.uk/uploads/062_Surrounded-1_m.jpg

I remember something my uncle had said about Native Americans in Glasgow so off I went down the rabbit hole of history to find out why a Native American had his photo taken at a studio where I used to walk to get to my aunts. Dennistoun is near the centre of Glasgow and is full of large sandstone tenements with a cinema at the Alexandra Parade where on a Saturday me and my cousins watched the afternoon matinee while my mum and her sisters went shopping. Many of those films would have been cowboys and Indians and this why our view of Native Americans is confused. Something the students must do is unlearn stereotypes before we can learn the real context of history.

Like the notion of the Highlander, once a population is defeated, they become a curiosity. Most people think of Scotland as kilts and tartan, but they were banned in 1746. The ban was seriously enforced after the Jacobite Rebellion and the last pitched battle on UK soil at Culloden in 1745. The ban was lifted in 1782 by which time they had become reduced to a symbol of fashion not rebellion. This pathway was similar was to many Native Americans who after Wounded Knee became part of the famous Wild West shows. These shows travelled across urban US cities and across to Europe showing the Native Americans as noble savages and how they were defeated. For many, like Kicking Bear this was a demeaning but one of the few ways they could earn money.

William Frederick Cody (1846-1917) was better known as Buffalo Bill. His nickname was due to the number of buffalo he killed for sale to feed the railway workers. After a military career in the Indian Wars, he was part of a show but then formed his own Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. These massive shows featured around 1 200 performers featured horse riding tricks, daring shootings and ghost dances from Native Americans. Large re-enactments of events like the Battle of Little Big Horn (1876) in which the brave General Custer has his Last Stand against the savage Native Americans simplified the history to goodies against baddies (The Native Americans called it The Battle of the Greasy Grass). These shows travelled around Britain and Europe. The weird twist of history is that Queen Victoria commanded a royal performance on June 1887 in which her son, future King George V and her grandson, the future German Kaiser Wilhelm II were guests.

In the return visit of 1891, the show after running for three months in London headed to Glasgow. The Native Americans and the crew camped on Vinegar Hill in Dennistoun. The show at a converted 7 000-seater theatre in Dennistoun ran from November 1891 to February 1892. The cast featured over 100 Native Americans; a female sharpshooter called Annie Oakley and a herd of buffalo. The shows were very successful but while entertaining they dismissed the Native Americans as uncivilised and as curiosities of the past. The Plains Indians of the show were only a small part of Indian nation in the USA which has many tribes with completely different in custom, language, clothes and ceremony but the success of the show and later cinema would convince many, including a young me, that they all wore feathers and danced around fires, performed tricks on horses, made hollering noises and attack stagecoaches with bows and arrows.

The show was to ensure that people knew that civilisation had conquered heathens, but the small print is sometimes more interesting. Before leaving Glasgow in 1892, a charity match was held at Celtic Park between the 'Cowboys' and a local team. In 2006 a statue of Buffalo Bil was erected on the site of the theatre as a centrepiece for a new housing estate. In 2022, the Kelvingrove Museum returned 25 items to the Oceti Sakowin, commonly called the Sioux that were sold to the museum in 1892 by a character with the show called George Crager. Interestingly, Crager was attacked by a Sioux Lakota called Changing Thunder in an argument at the time and had to serve 30 days in Barlinnie, an infamous jail in Glasgow. After the Manchester shows in 1903, Changing Thunder settled in Manchester raising a family with relatives who a still proud of their history.

This is the great part of history something you think is so far away, is connected to your own life in ways you never stopped to think about. I have walked down the same streets as Lakota warriors from the Great Plains of America. It gave me an opportunity to listen to uncle's stories of growing up in Glasgow of his childhood and the interconnected threads of history.

Proof of the statue and that it doesn't always rain in Glasgow!

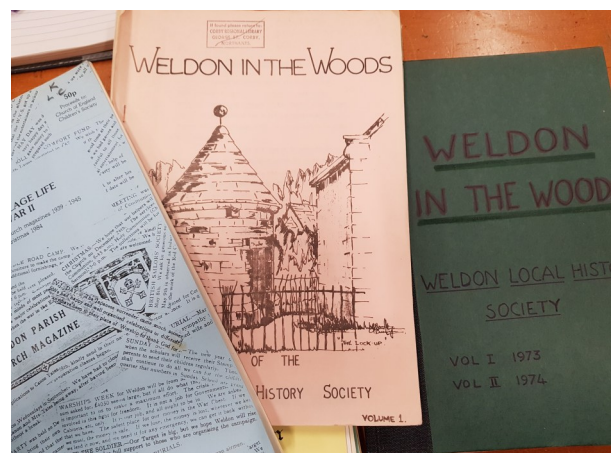


File:Buffalo Bill statue crop, Dennistoun, Glasgow.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/annie-oakley>

Weldon in the Woods

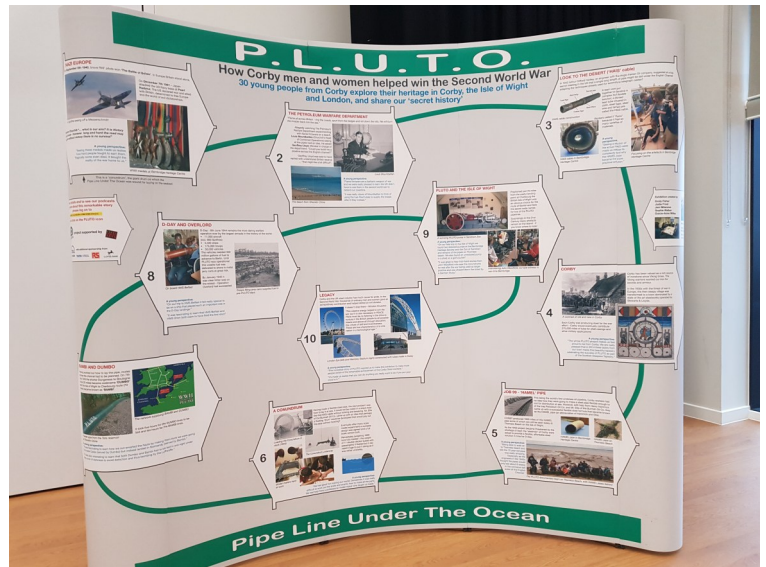
In Corby Library is a collection of magazines that was edited by Mr V.R. Sismey. The first edition came out in January 1973 and the library has many editions up until the 1980's. Our original idea was to borrow the editions and digitalise them for future students and locals but the library are concerned about copyright (we claim no copyright). If anyone has copies they would like to loan us then we will return them once we have digitalised them. We are happy to share with the Parish Council and any local history groups.



PLUTO: The Pipeline Under the Ocean

Mr Billy Daziel, the Corby Heritage Centre Officer has kindly loaned WVA a display and information board about the Steel Works involvement in a top-secret part of the D-Day landings.

The need for a secure fuelling solution when the troops landed in France led to pipes being made in the Steel Works, as no where else could complete the specialised and complex process. The Steel works produced over a 1000 miles of pipe called HAMMEL, after the engineers who designed it. The pipeline had to be flexible enough to be wound round containers could a conundrum. The conundrum was that could then be dragged across the channel by tug boats laying the pipe.



A model of a conundrum is displayed in our library showing the size and difficulty of the operation. The conundrum cost £30 000 each, there was 6 of them, and could hold 90 miles of pipeline. The code names of planning the route of the pipes was DUMBO and BAMBI. The pipeline was a supplement to oil tankers which could be bombed by Nazi aircraft. The planning and technical expertise can be highlighted as the first test of the pipeline took place in the Bristol Channel in 29th December 1942.

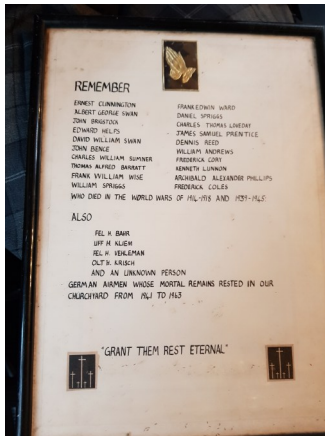
DUMBO covered 30 miles from Dungeness in England to Boulogne in France. BAMBI was crucial as it went 70 miles from the Isle of Wight in England across to Cherbourg in France, a vital target on D-Day. The D-Day invasion took place on the 6th June 1942 but heavy fighting meant that BAMBI did not start pumping until the 25th July. DUMBO started pumping on the 26th October and was used until the end of the war.



Mr Daziel also gave a talk to our Year 10's on careers in the Heritage Sector. Many students were surprised at the impact of computing of heritage. Many roles now involve computing programming, 3D visualisation and gaming skills. The talk is part of our work with the local council to encourage students to explore the wider opportunities arising in Weldon and the local area. Many local companies have skilled jobs that we encouraging students to aim for in the future.

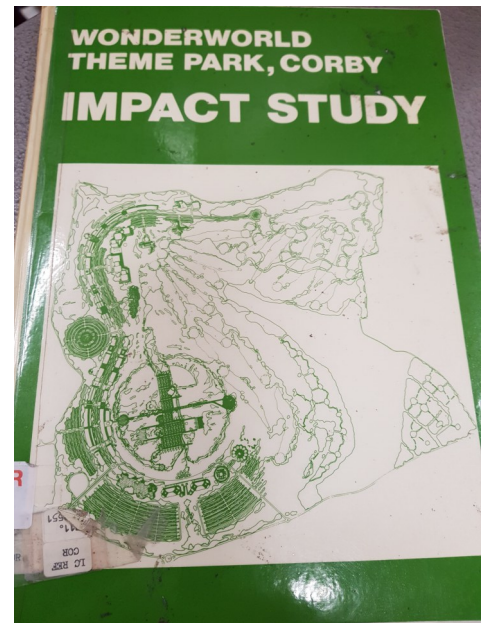
Contact details for Mr Billy Daziel
billy.daziel@northnorthants.gov.uk

Around the Houses: items for next issue



I will be interviewing Mr Mike Murray about the shooting down of a German bomber. The plane crashed in Weldon and the bodies given a full ceremony at St Mary's. As you can see from the photograph of the memorial in the church names 5 people but the aircraft only flew with 4 !

In the 1980's - Weldon was to have a theme park based on Disney based on its doorstep, it was called Wonder World. In the end the joke was 'Wonder When!'. But the plans and studies were all made, the impact would have been tremendous—visitor numbers, housing, jobs. So what went wrong?



Rosie, a student at WVA was helping her grandparents decorate when they came across coins stuck in the beams of the attic. Why were they there, what coins are they are? What can it tell us about customs and habits of Weldon?

Weldon has 5 Houses, all named after important figures in history. Can you guess the names from the House symbols below?





Weldon Village Academy

Please contact gmcdonagh@weldonva.org if you wish to contribute any topics or suggestions to the review.

[Weldon Village Academy – A new school for the community of Weldon, provided by CMAT](#)

www.weldonva.org