Dursley walk on Sunday 7 September 2025

Ray Wilson

About 15 members and friends joined our guide, fellow GSIA member, Andy Barton at the Dursley Heritage Centre which he has managed for many years on a voluntary basis. Andy had kindly opened the centre beforehand, so members were able to see the surprisingly wide range of exhibits in what is a relatively small space. Of particular interest was the "Dursley Pedersen" bicycle which incorporated an unusual lightweight design with a triangulated frame supporting a hammock saddle. It was designed by Mikael Pedersen, an inventor from Denmark who was recruited to work for the world famous firm of R.A. Lister & Co. Ltd. who were particularly known as manufacturers of diesel engines. Another key exhibit is a Lister Auto-Truck, a small tractor designed for moving light loads around factories, railway yards, and similar sites. "Listers" were for many years the largest employers in the town. When their site was finally vacated in 2014, the society was instrumental in rescuing minute books, photographs and other records which are now in Gloucestershire Archives. While the emphasis of the walk was naturally on industrial heritage, we welcomed the fact that Andy frequently shared his extensive knowledge of the wider heritage of the town.

Adjacent to the Heritage centre is Joseph's House, built about 1751 and lived in by Jacob and Elizabeth Stiff, prominent residents of the town at about that time. This house was associated with the woollen industry and is now the offices of Dursley Town Council. Across the Market Place we saw the Town Hall, built on pillars in 1738.

Proceeding down the side of the church we reached The Broadwell with its open water which gives the area its name. One ancient building there has had many uses in the past, including a nunnery, a tavern, and a veterinary surgery and is now in residential use. Walking down Water Street we passed the site of the former swimming pool that had been privately operated in the late 19th century by Mr Ayliffe. Further down is the former Howards Upper Mill, which had been a pin mill and at one time the Pedersen cycles had been made here. It was converted into residential use some years ago by The Salvation Army Housing Association.

In Long Street we stopped outside various interesting buildings including the Old Bell Hotel, a historic former coaching inn and Raglan House which had been the home of Mikael Pedersen between 1897 and 1918. The site of one of the town's two carpet manufacturers is now a car park but until fairly recently, it was the offices and print works of the Bailey Newspaper Group. Local newspapers from a wide area were printed here in the late 20th century.

The imposing building at the bottom of Long Street, known as The Priory, bears the date 1520 and the initials EW of Edward Webb, a wealthy clothier. Nearby is the site of Townsend Mill, a former cloth mill and now occupied by an attractive row of houses, Chestal Terrace, built by William Phelps in 1892. Across the lane, we viewed Dursley Bowling Club's green which is overlooked by the entrance to a former icehouse.

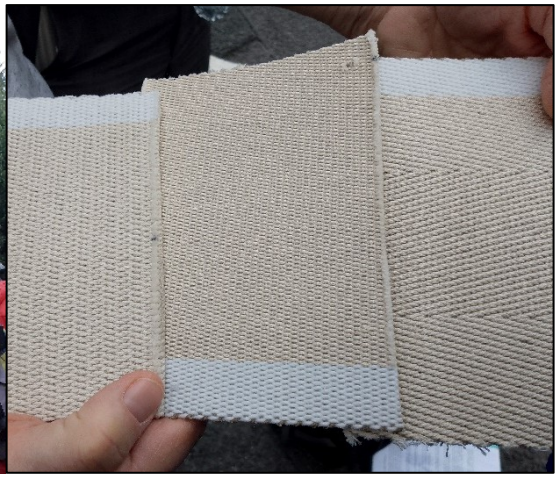
At Ferney, there was nothing visible of New Mills which had been a very large cloth mill and now the site is occupied, in part, by Kinver Grange. On reaching the main Uley road, we visited the site of Rivers Mill. This was originally a cloth mill powered by the Caswell stream and later a paper mill. Wire cards for the woollen industry were made here at one time. In 1907 the site was taken over by Mawdsley's, a notable electrical machinery company, operating until 2000 and specialising in making dynamos and DC motors.

A stop was made at the churchyard at St Mark's Church in Woodmancote to visit the graves of George Lister, the father of Sir R. A. Lister, and Edwin Beard Budding, the inventor of the lawn mower in about 1830. Finally, a detour was made via Upper Poole Road to see a very early council housing scheme dating from 1914 and from there, the site of the Union Workhouse. A site on Hunger Hill known as The Old Rope Works had been the base of a firm called Harrolds who under a different name and now at Cam, are still producing specialist woven industrial belts. These are used for transporting biscuits and a variety of other products during their manufacture. A short walk brought us back to the Market Place and Andy was thanked for a most informative and enjoyable afternoon.

BrBroadwell (Ray Wilson)

Howards Upper Mill (Ray Wilson)

Howards Upper Mill (Sue Constance)



Biscuit belting (Sue Constance)

The Priory (Ray Wilson)