

The Historians' meeting on 27 June welcomed Mary Bodfish, who gave an interesting talk on James Keir (in place of the advertised talk on Richard III). James Keir was born in 1735 in Scotland and became a chemist, geologist, industrialist and inventor. He was also a lesser known, but important, member of the Lunar Society in Birmingham. He had met Erasmus Darwin at Edinburgh University. After eleven years in the army, he eventually came to live in West Bromwich and devoted himself to chemistry and geology. He leased a glassworks near Stourbridge, then took charge of Boulton and Watt's engineering works at Soho, Birmingham. Keir's inventions included an alloy of copper, zinc and iron, then he moved on to soap manufacturing and worked on the properties of gases with Joseph Priestley. He was also interested in the local geology and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1785. Despite his house burning down in West Bromwich, he lived on to the ripe old age of 85 in 1820.