



The Balsall Heath Local History Society was founded in 1979 with the aim of promoting interest in our local history. We feel pride in our area and value its strengths – past and present. To meet our aims we work with local schools and community groups organising exhibitions and events. We have also produced several publications. We are a registered charity and rely on grants and donations to achieve our aims. For more information on our work or to volunteer and help please contact us.



DIAMOND BALSALL HEATH
**THE NEIGHBOURS FROM
HALF A DOOR AWAY**

Mick Fitzpatrick was born to a family housed in 127 Mary Street Balsall Heath during the 1940's. There were seven kids in a two bedroomed house and probably with some relief they moved to a bigger home in Sherbourne Road in the mid 50's – a house with a unique difference. That house had the number one hundred and four and a half. Mick recalls very clearly that he often had to deal with people who didn't readily believe him when he told them his address. Many found the 'half bit' of the number hard to take on board. 'Surely' they would say, 'you mean 104a, or b or something'.



It was 1968 when the family had to move again due to the clearance taking place in Balsall Heath. During that clearance period Mick found himself nearby Sherbourne Road and on a whim decided to take one last look at the old homestead. He found himself looking at rows of housing boarded up ready for demolition and was drawn to look again at that special number. At that moment he decided to 'lift it' from the door for posterity purposes.

By Jim and Mick Fitzpatrick

Harry's Pain

When a shoemaker gave the war the boot

Harry Payne (1884 – 1890) built up a large shoe repairing business in Birmingham. He left school in Northampton at the age of eleven and had already taught himself to repair boots when he went into the boot-making trade. Northampton had a surfeit of boot makers and so Harry thought Birmingham would be a good place for a business instead. He found a small house with a shop in Longmore Street, Balsall Heath. He got married on 26th February, 1908, and on the same day moved to Birmingham and took up residence. Two days after moving in, he and his wife were able to open the shop for business, with a homemade bench and fittings. With careful management they made a success of the business, and the following year they were able to take on a "benchman". By 1914 the business was well established with three shops and full time employees. The Paynes now had three children, Annie, Margaret and Jack. The family attended Moseley Methodist Church.

In 1914 Harry supported the aims of going to war but he saw bayonet practice taking place in a park and thought that it could not be Christian to do this, even to a German. He went home and talked it over with his wife, and decided that whatever the consequences, he would never go into the Army. The time came when he was called up and in 1916 he went before a tribunal and declared that on Christian grounds he would not assist the war effort. His petition was rejected and he replied acknowledging that it was in their power to put him in the army, but it was beyond their power to make him fight. He was drafted and refused to obey orders, and he served his time in prison throughout the war, and was not free until January, 1919.

Harry had a great deal to think about in prison, and he decided he would try to run the business, when he could get it expanding again, on Christian lines. Meanwhile, Mrs Payne had struggled to keep going, running the shops with great difficulty as some men had gone into the forces, as well as looking after the children. *(continued overleaf)*

(Harry Payne continued)

Back at work, Harry introduced profit-sharing and paid holidays. New shops were opened, and in 1924 the firm became a private limited company, Harry H. Payne Ltd. All the family were now working in the business, the girls in the office, Jack in a supervisory role. He was later made Managing Director of the company and later, Chairman. Harry had now joined the Society of Friends, the rest of the family were loyal and active members of Moseley Methodist Church. For Harry his Christianity depended more upon sense and reason than on faith.

Annie Payne married Harold Burnett, who ran the Boys Brigade at the Church, and Harold eventually joined the Company and became a director. He helped organise Payne's charitable work and was secretary of the Harry Payne Trust. Harry also became a member of the committee of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. In and around 1953 he made a series of donations to augment the orchestra, amounting to nearly £11,000.

Harry Payne was renowned for giving better service at lower cost than the opposition. This he achieved due to the loyalty of his profit-sharing staff. He lived to the grand old age of 96. By this time the business, which had been his life's work, had been sold to a competitor.



*Front and back of 99 – 109 Mary Street.
Since demolished and replaced with new housing.*



April Meeting: Thursday 25th 7:30
The Venture (on Malvern Street by the farm)
The restoration of Soho House

Our speaker **Frank Brophy** is a RIBA Chartered Architect with Brophy Riaz & Partners. Their work on Soho House was recognised at the Birmingham Design Awards in 1997. Soho House was given a makeover and re-launch last year and is well worth a visit. It was the home of industrialist and entrepreneur Matthew Boulton from 1766 to 1809. This Georgian house has been carefully and sensitively restored and features period room interiors with fine collections of ormolu, silver, furniture and paintings.

Soho House was once a regular meeting place for some of the greatest minds of the 18th century. Boulton was a founding member of the Lunar Society, a group of great thinkers and inventors who met regularly at his home at Soho House. His guests included James Watt, Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, William Withering and Joseph Priestley. Soho House was also the setting (in absentia) for the last play by the Birmingham History Theatre Group. "Eclipsed" was a lighter look at the Lunar Society where the servants came to the foreground and events took a turn to the dark side...

The Lunar Room where the Society gathered



ECLIPSED: Messers Guillotine, Watt and Boulton watch as Withering gets the wrong end of things

