



Balsall Heath  
Local History Society

## THE GAZETTE *NOVEMBER 2013*

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*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.*

### VALENTINE'S DAYS

By Michael Dillon

The History Society gets many enquiries about Balsall Heath and most are connected with family history.

Michael Dillon has kindly sent several articles and pictures for our files – the first of which are featured here.



This photograph shows the wedding of Frederick Percy Redfern to Amelia Rosetta Higgins, my Grand Aunt. It took place at the Moseley Road Congregational Chapel on 27th April 1916. The head of the Redfern family was the elderly gent just left of centre at the back. He had the memorable name of Valentine William Howlett Redfern. His wife was Sarah, born Sarah Ann Foster, and she is in the front on the right.

Valentine Redfern was born in 1849 in Stoke on Trent, the son of a builder. By February 1872, he was appointed to Birmingham's Committee of Enquiries, at the age of 22. When he married Sarah (daughter of a Wire Worker from Aston), on 12th December 1874, at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Moseley Road, he described himself as a Sanitary Inspector and the family were living in Oak Tree Lane, Selly Oak (then described as being in Northfield). He must have been an ambitious man because, in February 1876, he was shortlisted for the post of 'Surveyor to the Rural Sanitary Authority' in Aylesbury. He then stated his current job was 'Inspector of Nuisances'.

He didn't get the Aylesbury job but he did find a new appointment that same year and he was appointed Rural Sanitary Inspector at Rugby. Over the years he seemed to add other job titles – Inspector of Nuisances, Surveyor and, by 1891, Inspector of Canal Boats. His job was to deal with 'public nuisances', mainly dealing with public health issues and summoning people to court to resolve the nuisance:

*In 1876, 'Abel Musson was summoned at the instance of Mr Valentine Redfern, Inspector of Nuisances for the Rugby Rural Sanitary Authority, for allowing a nuisance, injurious to health, and caused by insufficient privy accommodation to exist on premises at Willoughby... The Inspector said there was only one privy to four cottages, and this was in a most dilapidated condition, and very often could not be used'.*

The Bench made an order for the work to be done in 14 days, and for costs 8s.6d.  
*Leamington Spa Courier: Saturday, 4 November 1876*

The same year, William Durham, labourer,... 'was summoned for allowing two cottages to be so filthy and dilapidated, as to be a nuisance and injurious to health'.

The Inspector said the thatch on the cottages was so bad that the rain poured in on the beds.  
*Leamington Spa Courier: Saturday, 4 November 1876*

The same year, 'Thomas Thornton, labourer, .....was charged with keeping a pig so as to be a nuisance and injurious to health.....The landlady built the hovels, as they were called, on purpose that the tenants might keep pigs, and he (Mr Roche, for the defendant) thought the labourers should be encouraged to do anything that they could to help in maintaining their families, and keeping them off the parish.'

**Northampton Mercury: Saturday, 21 July 1877**

In 1879 he gave evidence against a Thomas White who was convicted for selling meat unfit for human consumption.

*'The meat in question was seized by Valentine Redfern, Inspector of Nuisances for Rugby Rural Sanitary Authority.'*

**Leamington Spa Courier: Saturday, 6 December 1879**

A similar case in 1880, against William Cooke, butcher to the Rugby Co-operative Society.....'for having on his premises the carcass of a sheep, cut up for sale, the same being unfit for human food'.

**Northampton Mercury: Saturday, 28 February 1880**

By now in his 40s and with his family complete (in 1892), Valentine and Sarah left Rugby and returned to Birmingham. This probably took place by 1893 since Rugby had a new Rural Sanitary Inspector by that year. They were at 8, Willows Road, Balsall Heath by 1901, when Valentine was a Solicitors Clerk (his younger brother, Francis, was a solicitor in Colmore Row, Birmingham) and they moved to 3, Lime Grove by 1904. By 1911 he was presumably retired and living by 'Private Means'.

Valentine and Sarah had a typically large family – 9 in total (7 sons and 2 daughters) but, unusually for Victorian times, they all survived infancy. Apart from Frederick Percy Redfern, the groom, the photo shows 4 other sons, who I think are: Robert Robins, George Valentine, William Arthur and John Ellis. Frederick Percy, the groom in the photo above, was born in 1888. He was a Viewer in a Motor Works in 1911. He visited his brother Hyla in Canada in 1912, returning to England for his marriage, in 1916. He fought in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War and also worked on the Canadian railways. He died in Boise, Idaho, USA in 1950. His wife, Amelia Rosetta (Higgins) died in Oregon, USA, in 1980.

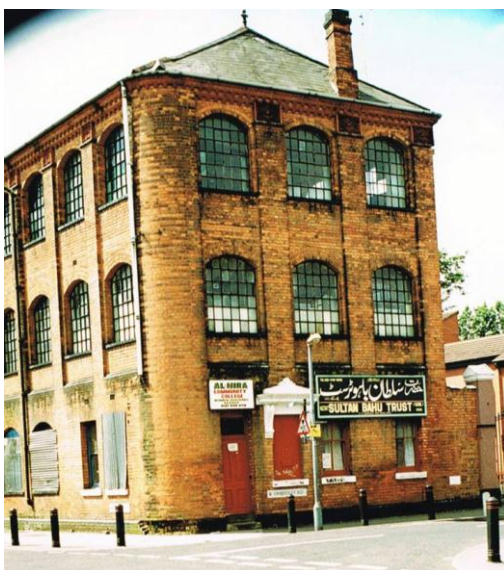
All the Redfern sons were successful through their own efforts. They were mostly hard working, self- improving, professional men, brought up in the Methodist (or Baptist) faith. Three of them had the confidence and independent spirit to start a new life in Canada.

Valentine was still living in Lime Grove in 1927. By then his children had, by and large, left home and only his son, George Valentine Redfern was left. His wife, Sarah, had died in 1918 just over 2 years after this photograph was taken. Sometime after 1927, Valentine Redfern left Lime Grove and he seems to have spent his later years with George at their home in Haslucks Green Road, Shirley, where he died in 1937, aged 88.

## THE SAME BUILDER

One of the more unusual businesses in Balsall Heath must have been Sames' at 21 Ombersley Road on the corner of Woodfield Road (right). They were a firm of Pianoforte Makers who traded at these premises for decades. A piano was a feature in many households of the day, though still obviously as a luxury item.

In 1935 it was known as William Sames & Co and the then current owner lived at 79 College Road.



Anthony Collins got in touch with the news that his great-grandfather John Bowen built this factory. Bowen's yard was in George Street, and we know of many buildings he has built, but the list for Balsall Heath was felt to be much fewer than it should be. Now we have one more from him in Balsall Heath. The finest for me remains the Moseley and Balsall Heath Institute. Still missing from any list of Bowen buildings are domestic residences in Balsall Heath and one suspects there must have been some.

**Next Meeting:  
Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December  
7:30**

The Venture  
(Malvern Street by the farm)  
**All Hat No Rabbit**  
By Neil Roberts

The annual Christmas meeting is here again, hopefully with a mince pie and a glass of wine.

Neil is here talking about the world of magic and the history of the art, from the medieval itinerant conjurer to the spectacular illusion shows of Las Vegas. Make sure to come along for a magical evening in Balsall Heath!