



Balsall Heath From Above

A new website from English Heritage contains over 16,000 views of Britain from the air. The photographs are from the period between 1919–1953 and were taken by Aerofilms. It is the ones from the earlier years which obviously hold the most interest due to the lack of aerial pictures from those days. There are dozens of Birmingham tagged images but only one I can find of Balsall Heath, which is this one of the tram depot on the Moseley Road in 1921. The depot is in the immediate foreground with Moseley Road running top to bottom at the left of the picture. Also visible is the post office and the Institute. The website is free to use and can be found at www.britainfromabove.org.uk.



Last Orders at The Clifton

Sad news in the Birmingham Mail in September with the announcement that the Clifton pub has closed. The pub has been serving the locals for over 100 years but landlord Sam Morrison explained to reporter Paul Suart that a decline in trade coupled with a proposed rent hike had forced him to call it a day.

"There's no drinking community here, it has disappeared. I've been here for 13 years and there's been a steady decline in regulars and new faces."

The sad news offered up one curiosity in that the pub was described in the Mail as a former Victorian farmhouse, thus explaining the agricultural fittings inside. We, however, have no records of a farmhouse on the site. I contacted Carl Chinn for his thoughts on this but he too was perplexed: *"In all my research I have never come across the fact that the Clifton was a farm house. There were three farms locally that I know of: one called after the Stoney Lane with its house close to where Brunswick Road would be cut out; another named Ladypool Farm, owned by the wealthy Simcox family and near to the bottom end of what would become Saint Paul's Road; and the last known as Old Farm, by Alder Road on the edge of Moseley."*

The premises are for sale from Andrew Thompson and Co Ltd, Freehold available for £325,000.

Next Meeting: 29th November – Back To Back Houses in Birmingham

Mac Joseph has been a stalwart of the Birmingham Local History scene for more years than he probably cares to remember. He is chiefly noted for his books on Ladywood and his website www.oldladywood.co.uk. This year Mac's enthusiasm for Brum saw him launch a new website featuring photographs of Old Birmingham – at www.oldbirmingham.co.uk.

Mac's talk on the back to backs is sure to be an entertaining and nostalgic one and very relevant to Balsall Heath.

Happy Trails To You

The Theatre Group is planning a Ladypool Road trail for 2013 – along the lines of last year's well received Moseley Road Trail where an audience were guided by Val Hart along the route, with scenes from the past brought to life. Ladypool Road offers interesting buildings and fascinating stories to enact. If anyone wishes to join in future performances then please contact me or Val Hart (val.hart@stpaulstrust.org.uk).

Diamond Balsall Heath

The first two objects for discussion and anecdotes in this project are **The Lightbulb** and **The Rubik Cube**.



The question of who invented the incandescent **lightbulb** is open to some debate. Current thinking seems to point to Humphry Davey (he of miners' lamps) back in 1802 but the popular credit for their widespread use in Britain goes to Joseph Swan who obtained British Patent 4933 in 1880 thus "lighting" the way for the transfer in Britain from gas to electric illumination. The first place in Britain to be electrically lit was the (appropriately named for us) Mosley Street in Newcastle upon Tyne on 3rd February 1879. Despite the progress to electricity it might come as some surprise to know that gas lighting does remain in use to this day. A few streets in central London, the Royal Parks and the exterior of Buckingham Palace remain gas-lit as well as almost the entire Covent Garden area. This though is by choice and probably for the nostalgic effect. Quite a different story to Balsall Heath which Pat Johnson recalls as still having gas

lighting into the 1960's – and not for the nostalgia!



Rubik's Cube is a cunning puzzle invented in 1974 by Hungarian Erno Rubik. It achieved massive popularity after it was marketed for worldwide sale and hit a peak in the 1980s as a "must have" toy. It is still available to buy today and is reputed to be the world's best selling toy ever made- spawning several variants. In the original classic Rubik's Cube, each of the six faces is covered by nine stickers, each side is one of six solid colours (traditionally white, red, blue, orange, green, and yellow). A pivot enables each face to turn independently, thus mixing up the colours. For the puzzle to be solved, each face must be returned to consisting of one colour alone. For me and may others there were

countless hours clicking and twisting to little avail – successfully, and satisfyingly, completing one or two sides! Doing slightly better than me was the world record holder. Australian teenager Feliks Zemdegs set a new record in 2011 when he completed a mixed up cube in 5.66 seconds!

At the recent Venture Farm Open Day we had several objects on display and the Rubik Cube constantly attracted and drew children keen to have a go. It also drew Joan who, while her grandson tried the cube, found herself (*left of picture*) in the prize winning Heathmount Netball team from the 1980s. But what could Joan tell us about the lightbulb and Rubik's Cube...



"Even to this day my mum, she's 64 (June from Upper Highgate Street), will not change a lightbulb because of the electricity factor. She won't even plug a new appliance in, I have to plug a new appliance in if she's bought a kettle or a Hoover or something. She will not plug it in, I have to plug it in first. When my dad was here he did it or it was me. It would be, "Eh, the lightbulb's gone!" One time we got back after being out doing something for the day, I was about 14 at the time, and she was sat in the dark because she wouldn't change the lightbulb."

...and on the Rubik Cube

"Every single person in school at break time was sat, like they are with mobile phones now, doing the Rubik Cube. Eventually I did do it (complete it). Me and somebody else took it in turns having a go and it took us months but we did do it. There was a lad did it on the television and then there were lots after him and it was about the timescale – how quick you could do it. I think, to be fair, we got our clues for doing it from the book that came out on how to do it."

Over to you the readers now. Do you have any stories about these two items you would like to share? We will be featuring the best in future Gazettes and other outlets.