



Balsall Heath  
Local History Society

## THE GAZETTE JULY 2012

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### On The Right Lines – Joe's continuing improvements



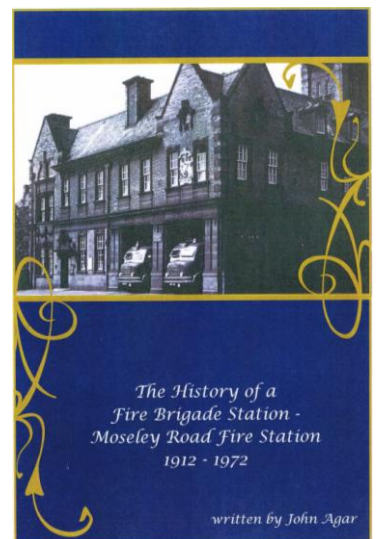
In June Balsall Heath Forum planted some shrubs and trees on the grass verge by Clevedon Road. Invited along to do the honours were the Lord Mayor, John Lines and his illustrious predecessor Mayor Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain's rousing speech about civic pride and progress in Birmingham was picked up by the Lord Mayor who said we had a lot to thank the Chamberlain family for and that this was a small part of the continuing improvements that had started during their time in Birmingham.

**Rain stopped play at Balsall Heath Carnival.** Sadly it was postponed due to the awful weather. No new date has been set, and the latest I hear is that it might not happen this year. More news as we have it.

### MOSELEY ROAD FIRE STATION

Just arrived is a wonderful new book by John Agar of the Community Heritage Group of the West Midlands Fire Service. John's book *"The History of a Fire Brigade Station – Moseley Road Fire Station 1912- 1972"* is a well written account making plenty of use of official documents and papers. John keeps it light and entertaining though with some nice profiles and anecdotes of the characters that worked there. John himself was stationed there in the 1950s and 60s. It wasn't all fighting fires though as John recalls, *"There was a routine on the station that on each shift a man would be designated as "first aid". It really was quite a busy task and it led me to ask why so many people would call at the station for treatment. The answer was that it dated back to pre-National Health when the local populace found that if they had some minor ailment or injury that they should visit their doctor, maybe go to the chemists, then they would have to pay – call at the fire station and it was free!"*


John was there as the large houses in Balsall Heath became used for multiple occupancy, largely due to growing immigration. This led to an increase in paraffin heater fires, heaters that were easily knocked over while alight. Later problems came from the derelict housing as much of the area was bulldozed. The derelict sites were fertile grounds, as John puts it, for starting fires and these would quickly get out of control. Adding to the danger was that the ruins were often home for the homeless or anyone seeking a temporary shelter.



The station survived long enough to celebrate its Diamond Jubilee in 1971 but only just. Les Wills recalled, "If I remember correctly Moseley Road needed to be rewired and when the estimate came in it was on the high side...the next thing I knew was that the station was being closed." In fact plans for a replacement had been mooted in 1969, the new and current station opened in 1972. John's book also contains a handy appendix listing everyone who worked there. It is available for consultation in the History Bay here at the Venture or you can try obtaining a copy from Community Heritage Group. Contact is Colin Lamb 0121 380 6071, or by mail to Colin at Fire Service Headquarters, 99 Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7 4HW.



- Smiths Imperial Coaches on Stratford Road 5<sup>th</sup> June 1959. Whatever the summer was like in 1959 it can't have been worse than this year.



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(above) A less appealing trip could be taken from Longmore Street...

In June we worked on a Second World War Evacuation Experience with Tindal Street School. Chris Sutton and Venture Staff "evacuated" children, with their gas masks and name tags from the school to a safe place in the country. "We are taking you to Malvern", Warden Sutton told them. There they picked potatoes, visited the shop, cooked egg bread and fed the farm animals. All returned home safely with a sobering souvenir for the school. The picture (right) of when their school was actually bombed in October 1940.



NEXT MEETING: 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

ENGINE BUILDING AT SOHO

There is no meeting in August so the next one is a talk by Laurence Ince in September. Laurence is coming to talk about the Boulton & Watt engine works which supplied equipment for manufacturers all around the country. Start time is 7:30 at The Venture.