



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.

TAXI TOUR EXCELS!

Our attention was drawn recently to the My Route Taxi Tour Lottery funded project, for which the Stratford Road area is explored via the luxury of a people carrier. As this covers quite a section of “our” area we duly booked ourselves onto a trip.

Our tour guide was Dharmesh, who grew up around the area and was able to add a personal touch with his own recollections. The driver, Daud, did a good job of navigating the route at a speed mostly allowing one to see the buildings focussed on in Dharmesh’s commentary. The tour took many diversions off Stratford Road which added more interest to the route. We finally finished with a starter meal at Al Faisal’s which went down very well indeed. A tour well worth taking...and it is FREE!



Dharmesh and Daud in Al Faisals

MY ROUTE

by Katy Wade

My Route is Sampad’s community heritage project, exploring the changing history of the people, landscape and culture along Stratford Road in Birmingham since the 1940s.

The My Route Taxi Tour is an interactive theatrical and sensory experience that will take you on a journey along Stratford Road to explore how the landscape has changed over the last 70 years.

Join us to relive the history of this fascinating road through the decades as you experience the sights, sounds, smells and stories of another time and space!

The tour allows you to immerse yourself in the heritage of these local neighbourhoods, offering a memorable and fun learning experience ending with snacks at a local eatery.

My Route is a Sampad project supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Taxi Tour is produced by Sampad and delivered in partnership with Excel Cars.

For further Information: info@sampad.org.uk
0121 446 3260



Ready For The Off!

SECOND WORLD WAR SCHOOLDAYS AT THE OLD CLIFTON SCHOOL



The weekend of 13th / 14th September is the annual Heritage Open Days Weekend and we are taking part!

Here is your opportunity to visit the World War Two schoolroom. It is the day before evacuation so the children will be preparing. They need to practice their handwriting on a postcard to be sent home and be told what they need to bring the next day. Classes will be held on Saturday and Sunday. There will also be an exhibition relating to the Second World War. Rationing is in force so only appropriate refreshments will be served. The event is suitable for children, families and other adults. **Opening Times: Saturday 13 September and Sunday 14 September: 1100-1600; Class session at 1100 & 1400. Address: St Pauls, Clifton Rd, Balsall Heath, West Midlands, B13 9TD**

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The outbreak of The First World War gave every government a problem with their immigrant community. What to do, if anything, with those whose allegiance might be questionable. The 1914 Aliens Registration Act made mandatory the registration of all aliens over the age of 16 with the police and to demonstrate a good character and knowledge of English They had to provide details of name, address, marital status and employment. Photographs were often included. This included ALL foreign nationals, even those whose countries were allied with Britain.

Along with (out of date) information from the 1911 Census, the government now had reasonably accurate information concerning migrants in terms of numbers, places of residence, occupations and race. In total 28,744 aliens were repatriated at the outbreak of war, of these 23,571 were of German origin – many of whom were Jewish and had fled persecution to come to Britain. Camps were set up for “Internees” in parks and at race grounds, and eventually on The Isle Of Man. Wives and children born in this country were included in those rounded up.

In the Balsall Heath area two incidents illustrate the situation. The story to the right is from the Birmingham Daily Mail of 24th October 1914. **Sergeant Henry Fischer** lived with his wife, Gabriele at 19 Eastwood Road. Both were born in Kiel in Germany. In spite of his responsible position and character he had little choice but to resign due to his nationality.

at this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature *Henry Fischer*

Postal Address *19 Eastwood Rd, Balsall Heath*

Fischer's signature and address on the 1911 census

Robert Speerli was a tailor who moved to Birmingham from Switzerland. His British wife, Emma Lloyd, had one child, Mabel in 1906, and then became an invalid. By autumn 1914 Emma was in the city infirmary and Speerli found his customers dropping away because of his Germanic origins. Robert and Mabel struggled to get by in a set of rooms at 42 Henley Street (off Stratford Road near Camp Hill Circus). Speerli sold the furniture piece by piece to get food and heating. By January 1915 Mabel was sick. On 3rd January they spent the evening with a friend, Mrs Panter, in Long Street. The following day Speerli wrote his farewell letters. He said he had tried for work but his nationality went against him.

By now the gas had suffocated Mabel but the draughty windows kept Robert alive and after several hours he realised he would have to find another means of suicide. Speerli went out and covered some distance. At Haunch Lane, Yardley Wood near the canal Thomas Dent found

him by a night-watchman's fire soaked to the skin. Dent called the police.

Speerli stood trial for wilful murder of his daughter Mabel. Here it came out he had been absent for much of the first seven years of Mabel's life, spending time in Glasgow with a married lady. His defence counsel claimed Speerli was insane and there was no absolute proof he had killed Mabel. He was sentenced to death but the jury recommended mercy because of his insanity. He spent the rest of his days in an asylum dying aged 61 in 1935. His wife, Emma, died in hospital in 1929 aged 51.

FISCHER'S PRICE

PROCEEDINGS IN BIRMINGHAM. POLICE-SERGEANT'S RESIGNATION TENDERED AND ACCEPTED.

This morning Detective-superintendent Daniels and a small force of detective-sergeants and detective-constables removed to the concentration camp at Newbury sixty-five alien enemies who had been arrested in Birmingham during the past day or so. This is by far the largest contingent of aliens sent away from the city. They left Snow Hill Station at 7.30 a.m., a number of carriages on the London train being reserved for the foreigners and their escort. Since the declaration of the war something like 150 Germans and Austrians domiciled in Birmingham have been arrested under the Safety of the Realm Act, and placed in concentration camps at Newbury, Queensferry, near Chester, or Lancaster.

Sergeant Fischer, of the B Division of the Birmingham Police, who is of German extraction, has resigned his position in the force. It appears that, in consequence of the high feeling now not unnaturally running against Germans in this country, his official position has become of late very irksome and painful, and so he has, acting on the advice of his friends, tendered his resignation, and we understand that it has been accepted. Fischer, although a German by birth, has lived in this country since he was three years of age, and he has served for fifteen years in the City Constabulary, and during the last three years has held a sergeantcy. His superior officers speak of him in the highest terms. He speaks German fluently, and this has been of advantage to him when requested to act as an interpreter.

CANAL WALK: Sunday 5th October

We will be conducting another “walk through time” – from the University to Kings Norton – with historic interludes, music and a canal boat. Start time is 2pm with the start location to be announced shortly.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 25th September 7:30

The Venture

(Malvern Street by the farm)

Moseley's John Avins by Janet Berry

Janet Berry visits from the Moseley History Society for a talk on one of the major philanthropists from the village. His house still stands on Church Road.