



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.

BALSALL HEATH'S BLUE MONDAY

The Civic Society honours John Bowen

It was a very proud day for Balsall Heath on Monday 22nd September when John Bowen was remembered and honoured with a blue plaque. Bowen (1844 – 1926) was a builder with premises in George Street. He made rapid progress as a contractor, carrying out large and important works of various descriptions, including schools, churches, shops and, arguably his most impressive achievement, the Victoria Law Courts. Bowen remained a local man to Balsall Heath. He built a house in 1883 at the corner of Strensham Hill and Edgbaston Road which he called 'Rochford', after the village of his birth, and where he lived until he died.

He was a committed public servant. His record of service in Balsall Heath alone is impressive. He was elected (in 1880) as a member of the Balsall Heath Local Board. He served on all the committees in turn and officiated as chairman of the Heath Committee In 1883 he was returned at the head of the poll and was elected as chairman. In the 1886 election he was returned unopposed after six years valuable services by Balsall Heath ratepayers, but two years later he resigned his seat on the local board because of differences over litigation in which the board were involved.

On the formation of the Worcestershire County Council he was elected, in January 1889, as councillor to the Balsall Heath South Division. Having rejoined the Board John Bowen remained a member until the absorption of Balsall Heath under the Greater Birmingham scheme in 1892. At that time he was elected an alderman for the County of Worcestershire. In 1916/17 he occupied the position of High Sheriff of Worcestershire. He was actively interested in Moseley and Balsall Heath Institute serving one year as President. He joined in 1882 and was elected a vice president in 1893 and was instrumental in obtaining a grant from the Worcestershire County Council of £400 in 1892. He was president from 1916 -1918 and a trustee from 1896.

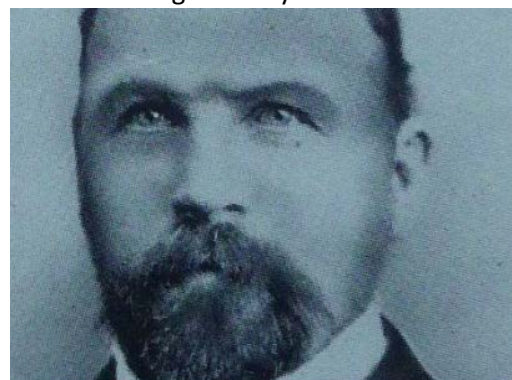
For more information on the life and work of John Bowen visit: <http://johnbowen.org/bowen-history.html>



There for the launch alongside many members of the History Society were three High Sheriffs, Bowen's descendants and children from Heathmount and Ark Tindal Schools. Ark Tindal had been chosen as the new site for the plaque – a school built by Bowen, close to the location of his former home.

The day was about celebrating the man and his work and this was covered in engaging fashion by Anthony Collins, a great-grandson of Bowen who has devoted considerable time to researching his life. Bowen was brought to life for the occasion by Anthony's narrative and slideshow presentation. It proved the perfect build up to the grand unveiling of the plaque itself, which will be installed at Ark Tindal School later this year.

One wonders what John Bowen would make of it all? The History Society is extremely proud to have played a part in bringing the plaque to Balsall Heath in recognition of him and his lasting achievements. Birmingham's expansion and progress in the Victorian era is evidenced in the impressive buildings still to be seen today, and John Bowen was responsible for erecting so many of them.

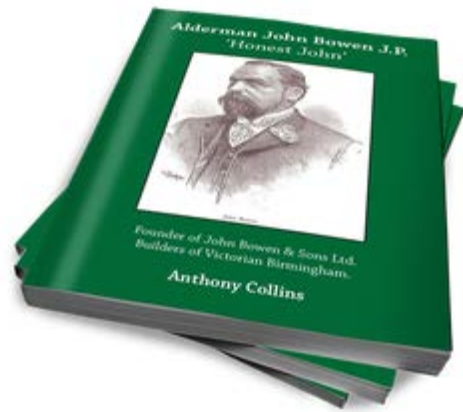


THIS WILL GO NICELY ON OUR WALL!

Pictured right at the John Bowen Blue Plaque launch are pupils from Ark Tindal School with Tim Watts (High Sheriff for the West Midlands). Both pictures from the launch were taken by Peter Cole from St. Paul's Trust.



"HONEST JOHN" IS RELEASED!



Anthony Collins' book about his great-grandfather is now available direct from his website ([address on front page](#)). Payment is accepted by credit card and Paypal. Cost is £5 plus £1.25 postage and packing. It is an absolutely splendid book and well worth adding to your library. Full of fabulous pictures of the iconic buildings by John Bowen, many of which you can go and admire to this day.

WENT THE DAYS WELL



For the annual Heritage Open Days Weekend we put on a WW2 themed display along with sessions in the World War Two classroom...

Jenny Lloyd (who took these pictures) reports: "It was a very successful weekend. Those who attended seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. They liked the displays and the interaction with History Society members and of course, the WW2 classroom was very popular and very well carried out by Bron, Pat & Pete".



CANAL WALK POSTPONED

Sadly we have had to postpone our intended historical walk along the Birmingham to Kings Norton canal till early next year. We had already postponed it till 5th October due to ongoing work on the canal towpath to improve it for bicycles.

When we went to check on the progress recently we found it has been extended and will not complete till mid-October. Apologies for the disappointment. A new date will be announced when we have one, along with details of the walk itself.

A VINTAGE DAY OUT

On **October 12th** there is the **Moseley Retro and Vintage Fair**. This is at the All Services Club on Church Road and we will be having a stall there. All are welcome to come along. No time details but previous fairs have opened at 12 and stay open all afternoon.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 30th October 7:30

The Venture

(Malvern Street by the farm)

Rogues, Villains & Thieves
by **Vanessa Morgan**

A collection of stories of bank robbers, train robbers and poachers etc. from the 19th century brought to life by Vanessa.