



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.



Website: voicesofopw.org



...is a website featuring oral history accounts from former employees of Butcher's Print Works on Moseley Road.

The project makes use of several recordings, which focus on the memories and cultural tradition of the building.

Butcher's is an imposing, Edwardian factory of architectural merit and listed grade II status with many original features. It is easy to find, situated opposite Balsall Heath Baths and Library. For further information send an email to: info@voicesofopw.org

GHOST STORIES FOR CHRISTMAS FROM BUTCHER'S

"In the top loft (two storeys above the Ort Café) we had a young man that worked here, Ricky, who was an amateur boxer. Charles Savage, our handyman, fixed up a punch bag for Ricky in the loft. Ricky who was a fit and able boxer used to go up there some lunch-times to work out. One day he came down and we spotted he looked beside himself. He was literally shaking and we asked what was the matter and he said, "I've just seen a ghost". He said he saw a man in a cloak upstairs in the top loft; he never went up there again.

In the (Ort) café area June and Betty who worked there had an old chair that used to belong to the former Works Director, George Bates. Sadly he died before he made retirement and his chair was moved into the section where June and Betty were. I remember walking in there one day and saying good morning to them and Betty replying, "Oh hello, George has just been". I said, "George who?" And they said, "Mr Bates, who do you think?" I said, "What do you mean?" and they said, "Well the chair has just turned". After some laughter Betty said, "It's absolutely true, we know that George visits us. We can tell when he's annoyed because the chair will turn a couple of times if something's gone wrong in the factory".

You realise these stories you hear about in places become entrenched and you never know the real truth but it IS true that Butcher's has ghost stories". **Tony Elmes**

BALSALL HEATH SOLDIER PUZZLED BY CIVILIANS' INDIFFERENCE

Corporal Maurice Tyler, who is attached to the 7th Brigade Headquarters, 3rd Division, in a letter to his mother at 70 Longmore Street, Balsall Heath, says:—"We shall be in the trenches for Christmas Day, but we shall go with the full intent of enjoying ourselves to the full. Owing to the number of troops here now we get plenty of rest from the trenches, generally three days in and six out.

"During the rest period one can hardly realise that one is on active service. But for the sound of the 'heavies' it seems that we are on manoeuvres back in Old England. Although within an hour's march of the firing line the civilians continue their duties in an indifferent manner. And closer still to the trenches are folks living in scattered houses, and when one wishes them 'Bon Soir' one cannot help but think that surely some of these are spies. When one thinks that they are continually in danger of a 'visitor' similar to the uninvited guests of Scarborough recently, it is a puzzle to discover an honest reason for their close proximity to the danger zone.

"We are to receive ¼lb. of Christmas pudding on the 25th, together with Princess Mary's gift, so we shall live in an atmosphere of Yuletide, almost as if we were at home. After all the trenches will be quite all right, and someone will discover an idea for the entertainment of each other. Last Sunday evening I attended a service given by the brigade chaplain, and the boys sang with real enthusiasm. The address—"The spirit of Christmas in the trenches"—was delivered by an officer of my own regiment, who carried our thoughts with his words from our billets to our homes, from our homes to the trenches, and even into the homes of our enemies."

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES

The newspaper story above is from the Birmingham Daily Mail of 5th January 1915. That day's front page featured several stories based on letters received from the front which were written in the days leading up to Christmas.

MOSELEY ROAD TRAIL

The trail through time along Moseley Road on November 30th was a success with a happy throng braving the "bracing", but fortunately dry, conditions.

The trail was part of the Ort Café's Hidden Water exhibition and the motif of water loomed large throughout the trail via the Board of Health, typhoid in watered down milk, stirrup pumps for incendiary bombs and a landlady only allowing baths on Fridays! Pictures of the trail follow in the next issue.

BIRMINGHAM PROVIDENT DISPENSARY.

The memorial stone of the new Provident Dispensary, to be erected in Sherbourne Road, Balsall Heath, was laid on Wednesday by Dr. Heslop. The Dispensary, extending the whole width of the site, is to be of Gothic design, and built of red bricks, with stone jambs and finishings to doors and windows. On the ground floor will be a waiting hall, 34ft. by 22ft.; two consulting rooms, 14ft. by 14ft.; dispensary and office. The front portion of the building is to be carried up three storeys, accommodation being provided for a resident dispenser, with sitting room, offices, and three bed rooms; vaults are also to be provided in the basement. The work is being carried out by Mr. J. Bowen, builder, of Balsall Heath, under the superintendence of Messrs. Bateman and Corser, architects. The contract for the work is about £1,100. Amongst those present at the ceremony were:—Dr. Heslop, Rev. W. H. Colmore, Rev. H. W. Crosskey, Dr. Dickinson; Messrs. Lawson Tait, W. Charley, B. Weekes, T. Parsons, A. Godlee, J. Bowen, J. Bigwood, Joel Cadbury, D. Baker, Howard Lloyd; Mrs. Lawson Tait, &c.—Mr. Lawson Tait said that institution was the second of three which would be erected and endowed, to a certain extent, under the will of the late Mr. Sands Cox.—The stone was then laid by Dr. Heslop, after which the Rev. W. H. Colmore offered prayer.—Dr. Heslop said it gave him very great pleasure to be present that day, to lay the memorial stone of the Provident Dispensary at Balsall Heath. (Applause.) They were engaged in a very great work, and he believed that the future historian of Birmingham would say that no better work was done in the last quarter of the 19th century than the work one portion of which was now being done. (Applause.) Every day it became clearer that organisations which promoted self-help and self-dependence were infinitely more valuable to the community than what were called charities. (Hear, hear.) These provident dispensaries had been managed with so much skill and public spirit, the managers had brought to bear upon them so much persistency of purpose, that he believed in a very short time provident dispensaries would be seen in all parts of the town. Provident dispensaries depended upon satisfactory regulations, and upon a due firmness of administration, and he believed that in separating the legislative from the official staff the very best course would be taken to ensure the permanence and good government of the dispensaries. (Applause.) On the other hand, he desired to say something in respect of the future recipients of the benefits of the provident dispensaries. It had been held by many people, who, he thought, ought to know better, that provident dispensaries would be abused by persons becoming members who ought to be obliged to obtain medical advice from their private resources. He trusted the managers of the dispensaries of Birmingham would see their way not to lay down too serious restrictions in that matter. Persons rather above the position of the working classes, by joining the provident dispensary, showed a most excellent example to their neighbours; and others who were in a fair position in early life could not be sure that they would be in as good a position in their old age, or that they would not require the assistance of a dispensary. To impose restrictions so as to prevent some people joining the dispensary might be mutilating the great aim for which dispensaries were set up. A large number of things could be done at the dispensaries if only a sufficient sum of money was obtained, and if a number of persons in a certain position of life became members of the dispensary with no intention of employing its resources, their subscriptions would enable the managers to supply nurses, apparatus, &c., otherwise beyond their power to provide. He trusted, therefore, that the managers would not look too nicely or exactingly at the social position of those who endeavoured to become members of the dispensaries. (Applause.) There was no ground, he urged, for other organisations to be jealous of the dispensaries. The success of the dispensaries would show that there was a tendency on the part of the general community to become thrifty and self-dependent, and therefore the more successful would be the friendly societies and other similar organisations. (Applause.) If the dispensaries became as

organisations. (Applause.) If the dispensaries became as successful as he anticipated they would, in a very short time the managers would be able to knock at the doors of the great charities in the town and ask them to reconsider the mode in which they performed their work, and also to leave to the dispensaries the management of the ordinary cases which now filled the hospitals so improperly. (Hear, hear.) Those who proceeded to knock at the doors of the hospitals to ask them to reform abuses before better organisations were set up took an obviously erroneous course—(hear, hear)—but when the dispensaries were thoroughly established in every section of the town, then they would be entitled to ask the governors of the existing charities to consider whether, by the system they adopted, they were not doing more harm than good. (Hear, hear.) In conclusion, he expressed a hope that the dispensary would be very prosperous. (Applause.)—Mr. Parsons proposed a vote of thanks to Dr. Heslop for laying the memorial stone, and said the dispensary was one of those institutions so essential for the development of self-reliance, and necessary for the well-being of the community at large.—Mr. B. WEEKES seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.—Dr. HESLOP having replied, the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. W. H. COLMORE, and the proceedings then terminated.

BALSALL HEATH'S DISPENSARY

This article, from The Birmingham Daily Post of 21st May 1881, is an extensive feature on the laying of the memorial stone for the new Provident Dispensary. It was built in Sherbourne Road by John Bowen & Sons and is a newly discovered "build" by them.

The growing list of prestigious buildings by the firm always left one wondering how many more there were on their home patch in Balsall Heath waiting to be discovered. The Dispensary certainly enhanced the work and reputation of the local Board of Health. It is located at number 109 in the Trade Directory – just up from the junction with Orchard Road and Moseley Road. It shares the site with the local School Board offices. A Miss Rosa Phillips was the dispenser in 1896. By 1935 it is no longer listed in the directories at all though it seems the School Board offices were retained. So far we cannot find it on any old pictures of Sherbourne Road, so it would be lovely if someone out there can locate one.

SOCIETY TRIP

Thursday 29th January

The West Midlands Police Museum Stratford Road

The museum is located in a wing of Sparkhill police station, which was formerly a courtroom. The main part of the collection relates to Birmingham City Police. The museum houses comprehensive archives of the West Midlands Police and its predecessors dating back to the formation of Birmingham City Police in 1839.

The archives contain records of all police officers who served in the area of the present West Midlands Police.