



Balsall Heath  
Local History Society

The **GAZETTE**

MARCH 2015

**CHRIS SUTTON:** St. Paul's Trust, Hertford St, Balsall Heath, B12 8NJ.  
**Tel:** 0121 464 1890 **Email:** [chris.sutton@stpaulstrust.org.uk](mailto:chris.sutton@stpaulstrust.org.uk)  
**Web:** [balsallheathhistory.co.uk](http://balsallheathhistory.co.uk) & [www.digitalbalsallheath.org.uk](http://www.digitalbalsallheath.org.uk)  
**Facebook:** Balsall Heath Local History Society

*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.*

## FULL STEAM AHEAD

### Balsall Heath's first Railway Station



Photo: D. J. Norton

**Camp Hill Goods** was originally opened by the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway in 1840 as a passenger station and the terminus for the line, until an extension was opened several months later to Curzon Street. The Station continued as a Goods only station with the extensive opening of other passenger stations on the line, including Camp Hill & Balsall Heath Station in 1867, and closed to all goods traffic in 1966. Above we see Camp Hill goods station in the distance with its distinctive grain warehouse dominating the skyline).

*Camp Hill Goods Station site today - off John Kempe Way, Highgate*



### SUMMER EVENTS WITH BHLHS

**April 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>:** Who Do You Think You Are? (Birmingham NEC)

**May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>:** When The Lamps Went Out (WW1 play at St Paul's)

**May 21<sup>st</sup>:** History Society AGM

**June 6<sup>th</sup>:** BALH History Day.

**June 11<sup>th</sup>:** History event at Lordswood School

**June 28<sup>th</sup>:** Birmingham Lives History Fair

**July 4<sup>th</sup>:** Balsall Heath Carnival

### TAKING THE TRAIN

There are two scenes in the Theatre Group play now in production – “*When The Lamps Went Out*” where a station is the setting. At the time of the First World War Balsall Heath was served by two stations – Camp Hill & Balsall Heath and Brighton Road. As the feature above details there was a station already at Camp Hill, before it was replaced for passenger service by the new Camp Hill station. In the play we have used Brighton Road as our station, as it was more central to Balsall Heath. Next month we will take a look at Camp Hill & Balsall Heath station, with some beautiful detailed images of the platforms.

## NEXT MEETING

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April 7:30

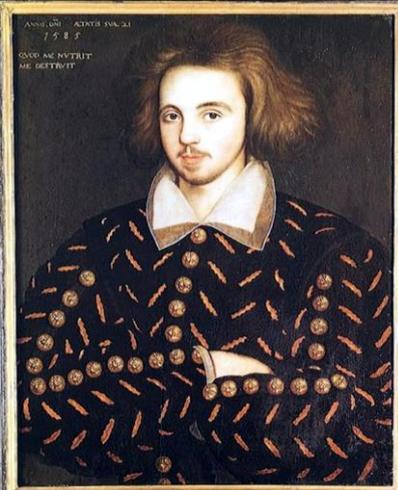
The Venture

(Malvern Street by the farm)

**The man who was William Shakespeare**

by Frieda Barker

Just after his baptism date, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1564, and his death date, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1616, Frieda Barker visits for a thought provoking talk. She argues that it was Christopher Marlowe who had written the plays and not Shakespeare. Marlowe was a scholar who had been to university. Also he was recruited into the Elizabethan 'Secret Service' and travelled abroad several times. No documents exist that prove Shakespeare was at school in Stratford or at Cambridge University. He never travelled abroad.



Although Christopher Marlowe (above) died in a fight, the Coroner's report showed him to be with several secret agents at the time and although a man was convicted he quickly received a pardon from Queen Elizabeth I. After Marlowe's alleged death Shakespeare's plays became very popular. Frieda proposed that the plays were written by Marlowe who could have been in exile in Italy to avoid arrest for political intrigue. Frieda will cover plenty more points to consider in making up your mind – Was it Shakespeare or Marlowe?

## A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVES

A "pirate" from Balsall Heath looks back...

When the hit British film *The Boat That Rocked* was released in 2009, there was renewed interest in the "pirate" radio stations of the 60's such as Radio Luxembourg and Caroline. One of the DJ's of the waves was Jill Embury from Balsall Heath. The following is from my research and a Sunday Mercury feature on her about her time with Radio 390.

The station didn't operate from a boat but from the former British Army Maunsell Towers, known at the Fort, located on the Red Sands sandbar in the Thames Estuary.

Sadly Jill, only made three programmes before the station was forced off the air by the Government in 1967. An injunction was granted by the UK courts to silence the station after allegations that it was broadcasting illegally within British territorial waters. When the tide was in there was no problem, the old network of defence towers was all at sea.,But as soon as the tide went out, the towers were left standing on dry land that was officially part of the British isles.

*"My radio career lasted only three weeks,"* remembers Jill, who used the stage name Samantha Leigh. *"I didn't even actually broadcast from the Fort – I recorded the programmes at the station's offices in London. It suited me because I was in London anyway to make records"*.

Jill was making a name for herself as a cabaret singer when she was signed up by Radio 390 supremo Ted Allbeury in the mid-1960's. *"He wanted a female singer for a 'sweet music' programme called Dinner At Eight,"* says Jill. *"Apparently he'd heard me sing and asked if I'd be interested in being the station's first female disc jockey It was an hour-long programme of middle of the road, easy listening music. The only thing I was worried about was my slightly Midland accent. But I was told not to alter it because they liked it. I think at that time radio was trying to attract people with regional accents."*

Jill says her programme was popular, although none of her family in Birmingham managed to hear it. *"We couldn't receive it here,"* she says. *"It was played to me in the office but I didn't hear it when it went out. The pirate radio station I listened to was Caroline, especially Johnnie Walker's shows. But my programme got a lot of fan mail. A lot of men liked the middle of the road stuff! To be honest, I had no real ambitions to be a DJ. You have to know about the records you play, and I was really only interested in singing"*.

Born in Balsall Heath, Jill attended Hope Street School, then Cropwood Open Air School near Bromsgrove. Jill began singing, using the stage name Bobbie Ember, with big bands at Birmingham city centre venues The West End and The Casino. Her husband Don – they were married on Christmas Eve 1956 – realised that his wife had talent and got her an audition for Opportunity Knocks. She was chosen for the show, but although she recalls that her rendition of the song *"Where Are You?"* was a triumph, she was beaten on the public vote by a man with a talking dog! All though was not lost...

*"I was spotted by somebody who wanted to manage me,"* she says. Two singles for Polydor and Parlophone were released – *Why Can't You Bring Me Home* (as Bobbie Ember) and *I Found My Love Today* (as Samantha Leigh). Unfortunately they were not hits because, ironically, they got little airplay on the radio.

