



Balsall Heath  
Local History Society

# The GAZETTE

APRIL 2016

**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. 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.*

## A FILM STAR FROM MARY STREET!

## BIRMINGHAM STAR TO COME HOME IN TRIUMPH

The story (right) appeared in the Evening Despatch of 17<sup>th</sup> February 1939. Peggy Bryan was an up and coming young actress who appeared in eleven stage roles and five feature films. Two of her film roles were for Ealing Studios – the first being a co-lead role in the George Formby film “Turned Out Nice Again” in 1941, and best of all she appeared in the classic Ealing film “Dead Of Night” in 1945. In the latter film she is part of the light relief comedic segment about two golfers (Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne) vying for the affections of Mary (Peggy Bryan).

The story here is the only reference I have ever seen about her connections to Balsall Heath. A look at Kelly’s Trade Directory and the Electoral Roll for 1939 reveals that they were living at 221 Mary Street, just before the junction with Hallam Street. Her father, George Bryan, was running the Pembroke Garage from the premises. Next door to them at 219 is the intriguingly named Temperance Hotel run by Mrs Eleanor Glynn-Jones!

Peggy (born Margaret) Bryan married the cinematographer Wilkie Cooper, with whom she had three sons.

**(Below) Naunton Wayne, Peggy Bryan and Basil Radford in the fabulous film Dead Of Night**



**P**EGGY BRYAN, 22-year-old daughter of a Balsall Heath garage owner, will return home in triumph when “Glorious Morning,” now running at the Whitehall Theatre, London, goes on tour.

I understand that tentative arrangements are being made to bring the production to the Theatre Royal on 12 June. What a blow to the doubters! I remember Peggy when she worked in one of the big stores in Birmingham. Since she was chosen to play Puck before the King and Queen in 1937 she has never looked back... “April Clouds” and her work at the Open Air Theatre made her reputation in the West End. She took over the role of Leda in “Glorious Morning” from Jessica Tandy, who had received an urgent call to go to New York.

\* \* \*

The play is a modern version of Joan of Arc—only in this case the Joan is Leda, a girl student who—seeing visions—leads a revolt of belief against a dictatorship which holds the State to be all-in-all.

Belief in God is high treason in Zagnira and Leda has to pit all her divine inspiration against the bullying of General Gurgani, played by Reginald Tate.

Around Leda and Anton Veerkind (the grandfather won over by her) centres the whole action of the play.

\* \* \*

Peggy Bryan trained at the Midland Institute and it was from there she got the scholarship which sent her to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art for twelve months.

Other plays to come at the Theatre Royal are the “Student Prince” with Harry Welchman; “Rose Marie,” with Billy Merson, Derek Oldham and Tessa Deane; “French Without Tears.”

## NEXT MEETING

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May 7:30**

The Venture  
(Malvern Street by the farm)

**The Holbech(e) Family of Warwickshire**  
by Laurence Ince

This should be a fascinating talk on the Holbeche (Holbech) family of Warwickshire. The family's originated in medieval times at Holbech in Lincolnshire where they were knights and landowners. They relocated in late medieval times to Warwickshire, where they rose in local society.

The family is associated with many Warwickshire locations including Fillongley, Solihull, Knowle, Warwick, Maxstoke, Stoneleigh, Farnborough and Sutton Coldfield. They have important links to Oliver Cromwell, Charles I, the British monarchs of the eighteenth century, Cambridge University and the London distilling industry.

Their story illustrates many of the religious changes undertaken by the country after the English Reformation initiated by Henry VIII. It stretches from the battlefields of the Wars of the Roses until Victorian times. The family also includes the only person to record the beginnings of rugby football and the exploits of William Webb Ellis.

## A NIGHT AT THE MUSIC HALL

The Good Old Days are returning in May as the Birmingham History Theatre Group presents three performances of old time variety at its best.



The shows are inspired by the old BBC show *"The Good Old Days"* (memorably hosted by Leonard Sachs, above).

There will be three performances at St Paul's Trust on Hertford Street:- Friday May 13<sup>th</sup> (7:30) and Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> (2:30 and 7:30). Ticket cost is likely to be £5 on the door. Come and see a wide variety of acts, along with some classic as well as newly written homages to the music of the period.

## BERT HACKETT

Sad news that Bert passed away recently. Bert grew up at 94 Sherbourne Road in Balsall Heath and went on to join the Birmingham Mail for whom he drew topical news cartoons under the pen-name of Gemini.

Bert's cartoons were a great help when we put together our acclaimed production *"Life's Rich Pageant"*. As a youngster he had visited the 1938 Birmingham Pageant and his cartoons, as below, were an inspiration.



We extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to Bert's family.

## READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Local library celebrates 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary...

### From The Iron Room – Archives Reports from Library Of Birmingham

You discover some odd things while looking into the Birmingham Free Libraries Management Sub-Committee minutes. In January 1896 it was recommended that 'noiseless chair pads' be attached to the chairs at Balsall Heath as they were regarded as very satisfactory in the School of Art. The first Librarian appointed in October 1895, a Mr Shuttleworth, left within a month to go to Rotherhithe and the post was re-advertised. A Mr Mould was then appointed, previously a librarian at Harborne, aged 23 and a half, with 8 years of service and a good exam result. His starting salary was 30 shillings a week.

The first cleaner appointed in February 1896 resigned within a month on health grounds, and the second, Mr Whittle, appointed in March 1896, also resigned within a month. He already held the job of caretaker at the Wesleyan Chapel, Moseley Road, and the Chapel authorities would not give permission for him to hold another post. A previous candidate, Mrs Annie Smith was therefore appointed at 15 shillings a week, to find all her own materials and necessary assistance. This was 5 shillings less than the sum offered to Mr Whittle. According to the Visitors' Report made after a visit on 29th April 1896, just ten days after opening, there were complaints of disorderly conduct by the School Board children at Balsall Heath *'which will doubtless disappear as the novelty wears off.'*

By July 1896, there were already complaints about the noise from the door springs caused by the number of people going in and out, which was distracting to readers. A printed catalogue of the books at Balsall Heath was produced and could be purchased for 4 pence. Those entitled to borrow books (those who were resident in, employed in, or ratepayers to the City of Birmingham or those whose names were on the Parliamentary Register) were invited to submit at least a dozen titles from the list to avoid disappointment. Special notice was to be taken of any scribbling in the books so that the offender could be traced and punished.

At the opening on 18th April, speeches were given by the Lord Mayor, Sir James Smith; Councillor Charles Green; J. Powell Williams, M. P.; Councillor Baker; Mr Howard Shakespeare Pearson and Mr John Thackray Bunce, and the occasion was well attended by members of the public. There had been some difficulty finding a suitable site for Balsall Heath Library but eventually, the Libraries Committee joined with the Baths and Parks Committee, as at Small Heath, and jointly purchased 670 square yards of land for Library and Public Baths from Mr John Bowen and Mr Aaron Jones. The Corporation of Birmingham had offered to provide a Free Library and Public Baths for Balsall Heath as an inducement to the district to join the city of Birmingham in 1891. The architects were Cossins and Peacock, and the cheapest tender for building, £4750, was accepted from Mr R. Fenwick of 40 William Edward Street, Birmingham. The memorial stone was laid on 18th May 1895 by the Lord Mayor.

By 1898 the Visitors' Report on 2nd June noted: *'The pressure is very great on the Assistants at Balsall Heath on Saturday evenings – at 7 o'clock last Saturday the Reading Room was crowded and a constant stream of book applicants poured up to the counter. I counted as many as 23 waiting at one time. Is it possible to give extra assistance at such times?'*