



Balsall Heath Local History Society

THE GAZETTE

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Kitty's Shop

We had this letter from Jean about her life at her mother's shop on Sherbourne Road.



My parents Kate and Charles Percival, took an opportunity presented to them when, in June 1947, my father's aunt, Gladys Gardiner, wanted to retire from running her shop in Balsall Heath. They lived at that time at 63 Carrington Road, Small Heath, had 2 girls aged 5 and 3 years and a baby boy 2 months old! Dad had experienced the depression and World War One, he never wanted his family to be hungry as he had been, so they agreed to buy the shop and moved in in July 1947.

My father worked as a tool setter for The Rover company so could only help out in the evenings, life was hard for them in the early years as neither had experience.

Our downstairs accommodation was small, with a door directly from the shop into our living room which had an open fire, the only heating in the house, a white washed 'distempered' kitchen, no hot water (until Dad fitted an 'Ascot water heater later) and like many others there was an outside toilet in our yard, along with a tin bath hanging on the side wall. Up stairs was bigger and there were 4 bedrooms over 2 floors.

Our shop sold groceries, many varieties of sweets such as pineapple chunks, pear drops, Fry's and Cadbury chocolate, there were 1 penny and 2 penny bars back then.

In the early years the butter was delivered in barrels and Mom would cut it up to the size requested and wrap the portion in grease proof paper, the sugar was loose and also came in a barrel and was weighed into paper bags.

Eventually ready made packets of Golden Meadow rolls of butter took over, as did pre packed sugar.

We had a barrel of vinegar too which was dispensed into customers' bottles.

I used to hide as a child in the bundles of wood, which were sticks of kindling held together by a thick rubber band and stacked into piles, they made a great den and I would frighten awaiting customers by 'popping up' from my hideout. This was next to the crates of sterilised milk that we sold. Our ice cream was from Midland Counties and our wooden trays of white sliced bread from Bradford's bakery, (not a wholemeal in sight!) The eggs came in a large cardboard box stacked with trays and would be sold by any amount asked for.

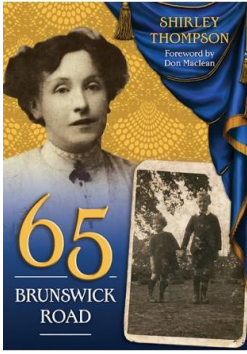
Times were hard for a lot of people and some would ask for 1, 2 or 3 cigarettes, usually Park Drive or Woodbines, Mom would split a packet to help them out. My mother couldn't get to wholesalers in those days so she ordered stock from the 'Travellers' which was the term for Reps and all was delivered.

I still have today 'The Wonder' meat slicer which was used to slice up the blocks of Corned Beef and Ham. Dad would have to 'bone' by hand, a large side of bacon which was half a pig, at night. He also helped with me as a baby as I came along in 1949.

My mother was known for her kindness and generosity and would treat the children of the road when she saw them looking longingly at the sweets sometimes, although she was taken for a ride too and one lad swiped a whole jar of Trebor sweets once! She allowed 'Tick' or The Slate as some called it and the queue on a Friday night to 'settle up' stretched right up the road.

Kitties, as the shop was called was open from 9am until 8pm (just like the Open All Hours programme) but as Balsall Heath and Sherborne Road was earmarked for regeneration, eventually all the houses around us started to be demolished, bit by bit the road became a ghost of its former self and we left the old shop in 1966 and moved to the Maypole.

My mother retired but for many years she missed being Kitty the shopkeeper.



65 Brunswick Road By Shirley Thompson

– Published by Brewin Books
Studley.

The blurb on back of this book by Shirley Thompson, says that it is 'A broadly based, extensively researched, personal Family Saga,

centred on the Balsall Heath area (of Birmingham)`. This it very much is.

Shirley traces the histories five families from the 18th century to the present day, and she does this in the unique format of a musical play. This is a mode of approach that brings rewards for both the author and reader. The consummate effort of doing the essential research as it has been here, could have just been regurgitated in a chorological form, giving us a list of persons whose life and times were being described in third party mode by the author. The musical format allows for the reader to hear, first, the researcher's voice and reaction to the discoveries made about their early ancestors. And second, the the voiced memories of Shirley's extended family, whose stories contribute directly to the recording of their own family history, and indirectly witness the life and times of 20th Century Balsall Heath.

For those of us who have that connection, these memories bring back to our minds these familiar street and place names, evoking thoughts of our past, spent in this place called Balsall Heath. Taking Moseley Road as its central North / South spine, in the east we find Brunswick Rd (of course), and Ladypool, Runcorn, and Brighton roads. To the west, Edward Rd, Linclon St, Bath Walk, Cheddar and Clevedon Roads on the approach to Calthorpe Park. These then just a few of the places remembered by Shirley's extended family.

We visit these places by way of the people who (like us) lived in and around them. Seeing again through their eyes, bringing a vividness beyond any other form by which we might relate to them. We meet the heroes and villains among these five families, the quiet and shy, the troubled and successful. Families then just like our own.

Additional info for Heathens : Val Hart and Chris Sutton are voiced in '65 Brunswick Road', making contributions to the sum total knowledge and history of Balsall Heath.

See also The Gazette May 2016 'Shirley's Roots in Balsall Heath`.

Review by Jim Fitzpatrick

Balsall Heath Local History Society Speakers list 2018

The Ventures, Malvern Street, Balsall Heath B12 8NN

(off Clifton Road)

Doors open from 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Visitors and new members always welcome

January 25th Journey to Balsall Heath – living, working, leisure. Sharing memories.

February 22nd - Charles Brecknell - "How to Survive the Great War- with Photos: the War Service of S N Menzies, dispatch rider & pilot 1914 – 1919".

March 29th – Javed Hashemi – The Life of King George the Third

April 26th – Dr Graham Cope – The Grand Old Duke of York

May 31st – Bob Green – "One, two buckle my shoe" Growing up in the 1950s

June 28th – an evening visit to the Leather Museum, Walsall

July 27th – AGM and members and visitors evening

September 27th – To be confirmed

October 25th – Ruth Lowe – Mary Quant through the 40s to the 80s

November 29th – Mary Harding - Local Postcards

December 13th – Ray Sturdy – Vesta Tilley a Victorian Light

Information/contacts

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or write to us

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AXON Motor Rewinds, Moseley Rd in the 1960s

Does anyone remember this place? Someone who worked there contacted us recently. He wants to know when it closed and if possible make contact with old workmates. If you can help. please let us know