

BALSALL HEATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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NIPPY TIMES AT THE CARNIVAL



Thousands of people came to the Carnival on 2nd July and had a very enjoyable time. We led the procession around the nearby streets, finally ending up at Pickwick Park where "Nippy's Tea Room" offered tea, cake and a chair to those in need! A good time had by all and many thanks to the large number of History Society members who worked and supported throughout the day.



BHOPS DAY AT THE CHURCH CENTRE



The busy Summer schedule continued with a day long visit on 7th July to the Church Centre for Balsall Heath Older Peoples' Services. We took along a display of books, photographs and washday artefacts and did a powerpoint presentation of Val's "Balsall Heath Through Time" book. Some good contacts were made and it was as ever a delight to see Paul Brookes and his tram layout and photographs.



LOOKING BACK

JOHN HAYNES

John Haynes paid a visit to his old school and was so impressed he consented to return for an interview. Here is an excerpt from his memoirs:-

I was born in Clifton Road, possibly two minutes walk away, opposite the Railway pub on the corner. My mother never worked because she looked after both my sister and myself, and my father was a tool maker, he worked at Longbridge at the Austin motor company. Dad had a car in 1934/5 – an Austin 7. Where we lived there were no garages as such but there were garages in Runcorn Road and we used to walk through the gully to get his car out. He cleaned it on a Saturday, weather permitting of course. It was a lock up garage and he paid a shilling a week or possibly one and six. I remember the rent in 63 Clifton Road, which has disappeared now, it would be about nine shillings a week which of course is nothing in this day and age.



I was christened at St. Paul's Church on the Moseley Road. I was in the Boy's Brigade under Harold S Burnett. He was married to the daughter of Payne's shoe repairers. He used to get everything for us during the war, football gear, everything you know? You were supposed to be 12 years of age to get in and I was almost 12 and they accepted

me. You wore the belt and the forage cap, the lanyard and we used to walk around the streets once a month on parade with a band. We walked down Clifton Road, White Street, St Paul's Road and all round there. Occasionally we would have a battalion parade and there would be over a thousand, boy's brigade. We'd all go to the Central Hall in Birmingham, and we would walk all the way into Birmingham.



School was a hop, skip and a jump away in Hertford Street, Clifton Road Infants and Junior School. I was there during the war years and I remember on the corner of Malvern Street and Clifton Road there used to be a little delicatessen shop. It used to sell bread and things like that. Next door to it was an old house and we went into this house because the school got bombed and we couldn't use the school. So the class I was in went into this house for two or three hours

a day to be taught. I remember after an air raid coming out and seeing all the hosepipes all along the ground and on the streets. Down Brunswick Road a house had been bombed which backs onto the school, the rear gardens. I remember seeing a bed where all the wall had gone. We were kids so we went into the house and there was still sugar in the pantry and things like this. Down the cellar I had never seen so many empty wine bottles. They didn't used to seal the buildings off, the bobbies used to come round and they would hear you playing in there and he would come and say "What you doing in here" and so on. He would come up the flight of stairs and you would drop down through the girders and be away. I remember the longest air raid that we had and it started during daylight hours at seven o'clock at night and finished at seven next morning. It was the first time I had been up all night. The shelter was in the cellar of a house nearer the bridge (Clifton Road) almost opposite this building (the farm). We went down the cellar and I used to watch the men play cards and they used to play for matches by candle light. You would hear the air raid warning and you had a few minutes grace and then you heard the crunch and thump as bombs hit the area. I used to sit on the cellar steps at home in Clifton Road. My mother used to be in the middle and I was on the one side and my sister was on the other and she used to sing to us and things like that. Put her arms round you, it's very emotional to me. You heard the crunch of bombs but you never worried about them because if you heard the crunch you knew it hadn't hit your building. When we went to school we used to collect shrapnel and it was all rough edged. We used to swap it

Then Dad died very early, he died at 42 years of age because he had rheumatic fever as a young man. He died and he left my mother – I wouldn't say penniless – but she had to go out to work. Previously she had worked in the Jewish quarter, they made a lot of clothing, suits and she went and worked in that industry – men's suits. I'm talking down the Hurst Street area. The tram used to go down Leopold Street then cut up into Hurst Street.

She also used to work at the school kitchens here, she was head cook and bottle washer. They used to send meals out to various local schools, certainly Dennis Road Schools was one. They used to be delivered in a van and I remember the custard in a

heated container like a monstrous vacuum flask and it tipped over and the lid came off. And they were getting it up with a spoon in the road and putting it back in the flask. Oh good god! The meals were vile, I couldn't eat them.

Our house was a front room straight onto the street. You walked up three steps. There was a big bay window and you went through the front door into the front room. There was a fireplace in there and an old gramophone you had to wind up. That was the best room for the insurance man and the doctor and so on. Then you walked from there directly through, the cellar steps on the left, into the living room. Beyond that was the kitchen. There was no hot water, just a cold water tap. To get hot water we had a gas boiler and you poured water in it and just lit the gas underneath. Originally in the corner there was a brick and you put a fire in it and you put water in it and heated the water. We had no bath either, we had zinc baths that hung in the coal house outside and my sister and myself used the same bath. She used to go in first and I used it afterwards. But you couldn't go anywhere near the kitchen when my sister was in the bath, you had to keep well away from there. But when they delivered coal, if you hadn't got the bath out, when you put the water in all the coal dust would float on the top. We used to have a bath once a week and we had a loo outside which didn't have a seat like now - it was boarding right the way across. It had a high level flush but in the winter it used to freeze up solid. You had to go and pour water down. But it was a family use only toilet, we didn't share. We were privileged – we had our own toilet and our own backyard with a garden.

In the house to get upstairs there was a boxed staircase which went round a bend. You went up from the living room. There was a panel door at the bottom and it had a bolt so you could shut it from the bottom. That meant that anyone who went upstairs you could shut it and stop them getting out! On the landing there was a bedroom to the right looking over to the Railway pub and then there was a bedroom at the back. And then you went round again and upstairs was the largest room of the house – the attic. There was one skylight window but flat in a boxed style and you looked into the wall of the first house. We used to use the attic to keep fruit in, apples. We didn't have imported apples then, you went to Evesham or whatever to pick apples. You laid them on the lino on the floor and you put brown paper down. You never let the apples touch each other. They were always Cox's orange pippins. If you kept them for six or eight weeks they would go dry.

More from John in the future. Thanks to him and his wife Karen for giving their time.

NEXT MEETING: 29TH SEPTEMBER

EASY AS ABC

Mary Bodfish, who chairs, and is literally the voice of, the Smethwick History Society, visits us. She will be taking us on a journey of over 5,000 years via Babylon, Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece and Rome to show how our alphabet and writing system reached us.

