



Balsall Heath
Local History Society

The GAZETTE

DECEMBER 2015

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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.

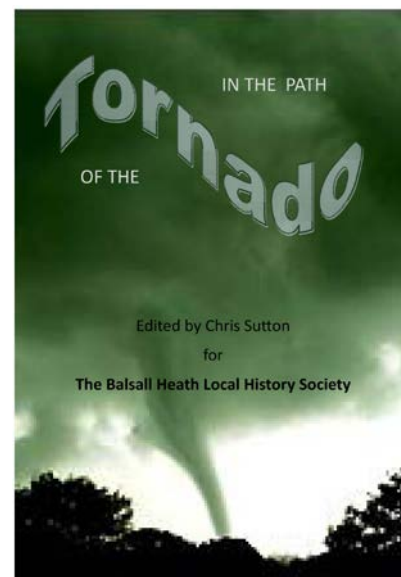
IN THE PATH OF THE TORNADO

Just published by the History Society is "In The Path of The Tornado". This full colour glossy book recounts the events and aftermath of the 2005 tornado through the words and cameras of many who were there. The vivid memories and images bring the incident to life; it still leaves you marvelling that nobody was killed.

The book also features the 1931 tornado which followed a similar path. This was widely reported at the time but over the years was largely forgotten. One who didn't forget it was May Pearson who, to her amazement, found herself on Ladypool Road in 2005 facing her second tornado!

The book is available for £4 from the History Society.

Below: Sparkhill, 1931 and Alder Road, Balsall Heath, 2005



NEXT MEETING

Thursday 28th January
7:30

The Venture
(Malvern Street by the farm)

**Sweet Memories –
rediscover delights of the
past**

Sweets always inspire nostalgia and so this should be an entertaining night. I expect Cadbury's will get a mention but my choices would be pear drops, rosey apples or lemon sherbets. And did I just see a flying saucer go past?!

ARCHIVE PICTURE

Left: Balsall Heath Road

This view of the road is undated but is certainly from the early part of the twentieth century. It is thought to be taken nearer to the Pershore Road end than the Moseley Road end.

AN UNEVENTFUL LIFE?

The article to the right appeared in the Birmingham Daily Post on 31st March 1941. There is no context given at all for publishing it. None of the surrounding articles has any relevance to it. So what we have is a stand-alone piece about what one supposes to be a typical resident of the area.

THE STATE OF LADYPOOL LANE

Some years earlier, below, the Birmingham Daily Gazette of 7th October 1869 reported on the proceedings of the Balsall Heath Local Board. Among matters for discussion was Ladypool Lane (as it was then known).

A Mr. Woodward of Clifton Road thought he knew where all the stolen timber was going... stored for use until Bonfire Night! But this was only part of what he called the "theft and vagabondism" in Balsall Heath...

THE STATE OF LADYPOOL LANE.

Mr. WHITE called the attention of the Board to the neglected condition of Brighton Road and Ladypool and Stony Lanes. The water collected on rainy days, and overflowing flooded the backs of the houses, and sometimes entered the cellars. He suggested that the drainage should be improved, and that pipes be laid in order to drain the water off.—The Surveyor was ordered to attend to this matter.

A LETTER TO THE BOARD.

Mr. BAKER read the following letter:—
Balsall Heath Local Board.

Gentlemen—I wish to Call your attention to a few of my Views on the subject how so many thieves Are Created as I think at this time of the year is a proper time for the Consideration of so many Evil practices may be put down Especially theiving the very young are Buily stealing Peoples fences weather they are Rails Edges—Doors timber Coal or any other Material that will burn and they bring it a long the Road with as much Bravado as tho they ad Paid for it Laughing at the People as they Pass them with it and their mothers receiving it of them Encouraging them to fetch more and harbouring it in their Cellar or other secluded place untill the 5 of Novr then the stock is Brought out and Burned then some one Crippled or Blinded During their lives and the quantity of Doctors that attends the hospitals that night waiting for the poor Creatures to Be brought in for their attendance after Committing the above Depredations they go pilfering at Peoples goods put out at their Doors than to greater things than to habitual thieves and as this is a time for so much talked of youth education [and moral improvement] I think there may be a great deal done in the district of Balsall Heath By putting a stop to the Bonfire system and by a few Bills posted up as Caution and a few men sent about on that night with A Bucket and Shovel may Put out all the fires and stop all fireworks and fire Arms in the streets. With one Night Determanation to do away with it the same as the Grocers did with their Christmas Boxes on the fourth of Novr last year I had about 7s worth of fences stolen and there are daily petty Offences now done By Children about the district that you never hear of as well as Cattle straying about Doing Considerable damage and the injured Parties Belnr Laughed at because there is not No Place to take them to/without they take them to King's Norton and these old Depredators have the impudence with a laugh to tell you what they shall have to pay they shall have more than that many a time over as I dont Care for that I Believe if this was adopted a great Deal of theft and vagabondism may be done away about Balsall Heath.

Yours respy

E. WOODWARD

Clifton Villa Clifton Road Balsall Heath.

The writer of the letter was called in, and informed that the Board had no control over the police.

Mr. WOODWARD said that his object was to call attention to the matter.

The CHAIRMAN hoped when the additional police and a lock-up were procured, the state of things complained of would be remedied.

Mr. WOODWARD: Well, I wouldn't advise you to spend any money.

Mr. SCOFIELD: We will see what we can do for you.

Mr. WOODWARD: Oh, don't put yourselves about for me.

The interview closed, and the Surveyor was directed to have notices issued cautioning persons against the use of fireworks in the public thoroughfares.

This concluded the business.

AN UNEVENTFUL LIFE

EMMA OF BALSALL HEATH

Emma is a short little woman with frizzy grey hair and a flat rather childish face. The events of her life are soon told. She was the youngest of three sisters living at Balsall Heath. The eldest married well; the next went into service and was "restless-like" and wandered as far as Farnham, in Surrey, and then wanted to come back to Birmingham and finally found good work at a hospital. But Emma left school to look after her father, and when he died after years of illness there was her stern old mother who had to be taken out in a bathchair and finally died of a stroke. It was only at odd periods between the home nursing that Emma could herself earn anything. Now she keeps house for Cousin Bob, who used to be concerned with electricity up at a tramway depot and now performs odd jobs; and, though over sixty, she has a round of cleaning (excluding Monday, when she washes for herself).

It sounds an eventless and not too cheerful life, but Emma is always cheerful. I met her at an office which she comes to clean on Tuesday afternoons. She entered reminding me of a bustling little hen, and began, like everybody else to-day, to talk of air raids. "We shan't have anything more bad," she said firmly in her vibrant naïve voice.

A dry remark came from Emma's "lady." "That's been her cry every week."

Sitting a moment before the stove to drink a cup of tea before she began work, Emma was led to talk about her youth. As a child of eight, more than fifty years ago, she used, with her sister, to stay at Canon frome in Herefordshire. Her uncle was gamekeeper on a big estate, and he had a farm as well. There was a long dairy, and one of the wicked things she and her sister did was to creep each side along the pails of milk with the cream on top, dipping a finger in each, cross one another at the end and make a return journey down the opposite side. Once they dipped into a covered pail and had a terribly-salt mouthful. It was cream prepared for butter-making.

One evening on arrival she was promised a cup of milk warm from the cow. It was a very nervous cow and she was told to be careful. Holding her cup, she stole up on tip-toe; then suddenly stumbled across the bucket. Over went the milk, and the cow raced to the other end of the field, her tail straight in the air. "You'd better go to bed," said her aunt. "From that day," Emma explained cheerfully, "I've been afraid of cows."

There were excursions with her uncle to feed the pheasants. Once he went rabbit-shooting, and took with him a dog from the kennels and the two little girls. The dog killed a rabbit, and he beat the creature so cruelly I said to my sister, 'Let's come away or he may start on us next.' We was only young then. There were happy days when elder cousins, maids at the big house, would come down to the cottage and bring friends, also maids, with them; and talk about grand doings. "They married gamekeepers or gardeners." Then there was church, with a choir and congregation mainly composed of people from the big house; "bowing to one another like country people do."

At home in Birmingham there were high lights, too: "Thursday at school, when the clergyman came to take us for Scripture. We used to wear pinafores, and I always asked for a clean pinafore for Thursdays. The clergyman had a very long beard, and when he got cross he used to thump his chest."

The elder sister went into service at a large house near. "Once mother sent me up with a parcel, and my sister said, 'Would you like to see the dinner-table?' She had to arrange the flowers, and order from the gardener what she wanted. I shall never forget that room. There was a grand piano in the corner, and then the table with flowers in the middle and trailing green plants at the corners. A long piece of glass went down the centre, like water, and on it were coloured ships in china."

Just then the sister's mistress came down the stairs. "They were wide stairs, and she was in shot pink and green silk with a train. My sister had to pull me back. I was that lost in gazing." But the mistress was kind. She did not mind the child peering in at her dinner-table; and later, when the little sister maid was unwell, she called at the home to enquire. "She came in a carriage with two brown horses, and the coachman had a black cockade in his hat." But the girl (who had a wandering spirit), when she recovered, made her mother very angry by changing her work in spite of all the kindness.

Emma said: "Well I must get on," and energetically began to sweep the office floor; but her lady in her turn began to talk of the old servant. Emma had come to the family long ago for about four years in between bouts of home nursing. She had always a ready tongue. Once the door-bell rang, and Emma went but soon shut the door. Later she poked her head into the sitting-room. It was somebody selling religious literature; "but I told them you were well up in that sort of thing."

Emma's house, which she shares with Cousin Bob, is not palatial; it opens straight on to the street. But the kitchen behind is glorified with a polished ancient oak dresser with brass handles: a dealer has offered Emma as much as £100 for it. Also in the kitchen is a budgerigar, and there are others outside. Emma teaches them to talk. In the small patch of ground behind Cousin Bob has built a greenhouse. In summer one always knows when Emma has been on a visit, for she leaves a mixed nosegay behind her. "You can only call it a nosegay. I think she cuts the stalks so short because she doesn't want to pick any buds."

Emma is fond of children. Every Tuesday until recently she has come to clean with an apple or an orange for the child in the family. One Christmas, when the boy was only just over a year, she brought an enormous parcel which she said he must open himself. It was a wheelbarrow, which gave him more pleasure than anything else. He goes to tea with her and she produces stewed fruit and a jig-saw puzzle and a cat that "jiggles its tail. . . . Richard adores her."

A hard-working dreary life seen from the outside; from the inside, apparently, mainly pleasure.

G. F.