



Balsall Heath
Local History Society

The GAZETTE

JANUARY 2016

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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.

PICTURE THIS: Balsall Heath photographs at the Ikon Gallery

Following on from a display last year at the Old Print Works, Ikon Gallery is playing host to the exhibition of photographs by Janet Mendelsohn.

The main exhibition runs from **27th January to 3rd April**. All of the images are part of a 'photo-essay' Mendelsohn made as a student at the University of Birmingham during 1967–69.

The photographs depict everyday Balsall Heath, focusing in particular on a sex worker, referred to as Kathleen, with whom Mendelsohn formed a close relationship. She provides a unique insight into a transforming community, shaped by immigration from the Caribbean and South Asia, and affected by ongoing poverty-related issues.



NEXT MEETING Thursday 25th February 7:30

The Venture
(Malvern Street by the farm)

Laurel and Hardy: Their Lives by John Ullah

John last visited us to talk about "the boys" connections to Birmingham. This time round he will be looking in more detail about their lives. Stan was born in Ulverston, a pretty market town in Ulverston which I visit a couple of times a year at least.

It is the home of the Laurel and Hardy museum and each year John takes Laughing Gravy, his "tent" of the fan-club, there for the festival.

SYMPOSIUM: THE SOCIAL EYE OF JANET MENDELSON

On Saturday 30th January, from 9.45am — 6.00pm, at the Rep's Studio Theatre there will be a public symposium organised by the University of Birmingham.

This event explores issues raised by Janet Mendelsohn's photography of sex workers and communities in late 1960s Balsall Heath, with topics including gender and the role of art in society. Places are free but should be booked. Please contact Chloe Lund at c.lund@bham.ac.uk

ikon-gallery.org/event/symposium-the-social-eye-of-janet-mendelsohn

STORIES OF BALSALL HEATH

To tie in with the Janet Mendelsohn exhibition, Ikon Gallery hosts an event looking back at the history of Balsall Heath. Mendelsohn's images of Varna Road and the streets beyond form a backdrop for visitors to contribute their memories. Drop in to share your own stories, photos or memorabilia.

The "Stories of Balsall Heath" runs on **12th and 13th March** from 12 – 4 each day and there is a suggested donation of £2.00.

ikon-gallery.org/event/peoples-archive-weekend-stories-of-balsall-heath

ANOTHER BALSALL HEATH HERO

Research has picked up that Home Guard Section Leader George Inwood (aged 34), who was awarded the George Cross for rescuing several people from a gas filled cellar in Bishop Street, was from Edward Road in Balsall Heath.

Bishop Street runs parallel to Sherlock Street, down near Bristol Street. There are still many old buildings left there and visiting it now it is easy to imagine the events on the evening of Tuesday 15th October 1940. Inwood knew the risk to his own life in continuing the rescue attempts in the cellar, but he carried on regardless. It was this devotion to duty and sacrifice which earned him the posthumous award – a year later. He was buried in Yardley Cemetery, his gravestone carrying a George Cross design. His George Cross was donated to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

News report below, and above right, from the Evening Despatch Thrsday 16th October 1941

H.G. died in gas rescues, awarded George Cross

TWO of the proudest people in Birmingham to-day are Mrs. Lily Inwood, of Edward-road, Balsall Heath, and her seven-year-old, only son George. They have just received from the hands of the King the George Cross awarded posthumously to Mrs. Inwood's husband George.



George Walter Inwood GC

Home Guard Inwood rescued several people from a cellar in Bishop-street, Birmingham, during an air raid.

A near-by gas main had been pierced, and the cellar was full of gas. Mr. Inwood descended into the cellar several times and extricated four or five people.

Then he was overcome by gas. When extricated by a fellow Home Guard named Tidwell (who was later awarded the B.E.M.) he was dead.



Mrs. Lily Inwood, of Balsall Heath, Birmingham, shakes hands with Capt. N. S. Twining representing her late husband's Home Guard battalion, before leaving for London to receive the George Cross awarded to her husband. Also seen are Lieut. Sheridan, of the same battalion, and Mrs. Inwood's son.

BISHOP STREET INCIDENT – 15th October 1940

A high explosive bomb hit and demolished three houses in Bishop Street, amongst them no. 154, as well as a small nearby factory. In the cellar below these houses a number of people were trapped, their situation made even worse by the escape of gas from a fractured main.

Six Home Guards from the 10th Warwickshire (Birmingham) Battalion had been called upon by the police to assist. The man commanding them was Section Leader George Walter Inwood. A cavity was formed in the debris, through which trapped people could be seen and heard. Inwood was lowered into this cavity and succeeded in bringing up two men alive. That was at 9.37. Fifty minutes later he came out with a boy who had unfortunately already died.

One can imagine the rescue attempts getting increasingly desperate. The senior policeman present, Inspector W. F. Wade, had previously attempted to go down himself but was too heavily built for the cramped space. He continued to assist at its mouth, having to leave temporarily at 10.56 to recover from the effects of the coal gas. Section Leader Inwood, although exhausted, went down for the third time when he was finally overcome by the fumes. He was dragged out by his comrade Volunteer Leonard Isoyn Tidball. Attempts to revive Inwood were in vain and he died at 11.53 p.m.

21

people were killed in the incident. One of the worst that took place during the Birmingham Air Raids.

The rescue attempts continued despite the dangers. Other men risked their lives including Messrs. Woodland, Rainbow and Pickersgill, all members of the ARP Rescue Party. All of them were overcome and had to receive hospital treatment. British Empire Medals were awarded to Messrs. Tidball and Wade and the George Medal to Messrs. Woodland, Rainbow and Pickersgill.