



The Balsall Heath Local History Society was founded in 1979 with the aim of promoting interest in our local history. We feel pride in our area and value its strengths – past and present. 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.

DIAMOND BALSALL HEATH

Coal Porter and other stories

A humble lump of coal prompted lots of memories from Society members, not least for **Sue Rose** whose family made a living from it. Sue told us:

“My maiden name is Mullis and my dad and my grandfather used to be the coal merchants at 208 Edward Road. I remember my dad coming home every night covered head to foot in coal dust, and it was a bath before he could do anything else. I used to go out with my dad collecting the money on Saturday mornings. On a couple of occasions I went down with him to the railway yard to watch them putting the coal into bags on the back of the waggons. That was at Camp Hill. In Edward Road there was a big yard and they used to have different piles of coals - Sunbright, there was the coke, the smokeless – all round the yard. Originally they had horses to pull the carts; they had stables down the one end.



“When the coalman used to come and your parents were out they would say: “make sure you stand at the top of the cellar and make sure they put 500 hundred weight in there, and make sure the bags are full and tell him we don't want no brickbats like we had last time”. **Pat J**

“My job with a pram was to go to the same coal-yard and get a bag of coal for my gran and my mother. What Pat's saying is exactly right: “You make sure when you fill those bags up that the scale goes up and down level. I was about ten or twelve, pushing this pram up Edward Road. It was alright going up but it used to run away with me going down it”. **Reg**

“You were going for the coke and you would take your pram or handcart and a sack, well a couple or three sacks actually. You would have the coke going down the chute into your sacks and in the pram. But the coke didn't work as well as coal, and it stunk. They used to whitewash the walls in the coal-yard to make the coal look better”. **Bernard**



There was a coal merchant at the bottom of Clifton Road right next to the pub, the Clifton. It was called Giles's. This was in the 50s. It was the grandmother of somebody who lived in our road. **Diane**

Happy Birthday to Bernard

One of our longest serving members, Bernard Jackson, celebrated his 90th birthday (*below*) on 3rd April. Bernard grew up at **137 Sherbourne Road** and is seen (*below*) in younger days there with his family. That's our Bernard grinning happily for the camera on the motorbike. Bernard worked as a metal spinner and served with the Worcestershire Regiment in the war.

Bernard's keen interest in local history is well known. He still does research into things that interest him and is happy to share it with anyone. I have had many car and taxi journeys with him where he has given a running historical commentary about the streets we have passed along – and it is always an interesting and often entertaining experience.

Many of you will have also seen Bernard in other guises. He has been an ever-present member of the theatrical productions the Society has been involved with for many years. He is always well received and popular because he creates very believable characters. That's him below right in *Sweet Freedom* telling us how things really are, and he meant every word of it too! He is also very funny too when it's called for. He can get a laugh out of an audience just by raising an eyebrow or shrugging his shoulders. A hard act to follow indeed. From all of your friends in the History Society to you Bernard – many happy returns!



May Meeting: Thursday 23rd 7:30

The Venture (*on Malvern Street by the farm*) Members' Meeting – the Annual General Meeting

It's here again folks. At this meeting we have the Annual Report of the Society plus the election of committee members. There is a proposed change to the Society's constitution which has to be approved, and has to be proposed in advance. The proposed amendments in Section 2 of the constitution are detailed below in red:-

2. Objects.

The Charity is established for charitable purposes only to educate the general public in an understanding and an appreciation of local history in Balsall Heath through:

- 2.1 Encouraging members of the society to undertake both written and oral research;**
- 2.2 Promoting local history in schools;**
- 2.3 Collecting artefacts, images and documentary material;**
- 2.4 Undertaking reminiscence work with older people;**
- 2.5 Working with other agencies, including other local history societies;**
- 2.6 Mounting exhibitions and displays for the general public;**
- 2.7 Making the society's collections accessible to a wider public through the internet;**
- 2.8 Promoting local history through the arts, especially, photography drama, music and performances.**
- 2.9 Any other activities which promote an interest in, and an awareness of, local history relating to Balsall Heath, Highgate and Birmingham.**

The reason for the proposed additions are that it will enable us to pursue more funding sources than we can at present, particularly those supporting the Arts. The proposals cover aims and activities that we already strive to achieve and we hope you will support these amendments.

