

## California Dreamin'

California may be far away but Graham Partlett is still very much a Heathan. He writes:

*"Thank you for continuing to send the Balsall Heath and Moseley newsletters each month. They keep me updated on what is happening in those areas and often evoke many memories for me. I spent most of my childhood living in Oldfield Road from 1936 until 1949. The two books I obtained from you: "Balsall Heath & Highgate – Past and Present" and "Balsall Heath Through Time" provided so many photos and memories of the places that I knew as a child. Based on those books and my memories I recently wrote a poem about Balsall Heath, which I hope you enjoy reading as much as I enjoyed writing it".*

## Balsall Heath Through Time

In the Midlands long ago,  
A rural place where life was slow,  
Balsall Heath and Highgate lay,  
With open fields, a sparkling stream  
And oak trees to complete the dream.

But Birmingham lay close at hand,  
From where a track did cross the land,  
Pack horses used this muddy way,  
To markets in the city's place,  
Enveloped in dark smoke's embrace.

To allow the city to expand,  
A turnpike road was quickly planned,  
Through Balsall Heath it made its way,  
Around that scenic countryside,  
Wealthy families did reside,

Birmingham continued to grow,  
New workers formed a steady flow,  
So houses were in short supply,  
The city needed much more land,  
Lo, Balsall Heath was close at hand.

Part of the city's bribery,  
A public bath and library,  
Balsall Heath was then annexed,  
Soon there was no land, no wood,  
Rented homes in rows now stood.

These rented homes had comforts few,  
Slum houses were the constant view,  
Electric power they did not have,  
Gas lamps burned to light the gloom,  
In these homes with no bathroom.

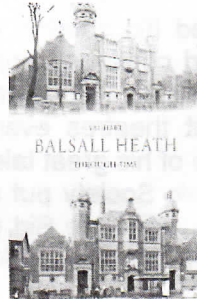
Across the yards their toilets lay,  
Yards where children had to play,  
Neighbours cared, so fights were rare,  
A slum, but a community,  
Where people lived in amity.

Houses were bombed in World War 2,  
Balsall Heath was low in the queue,  
Of districts the City would rebuild,  
Damaged houses were left to decay,  
Decline continued day by day,

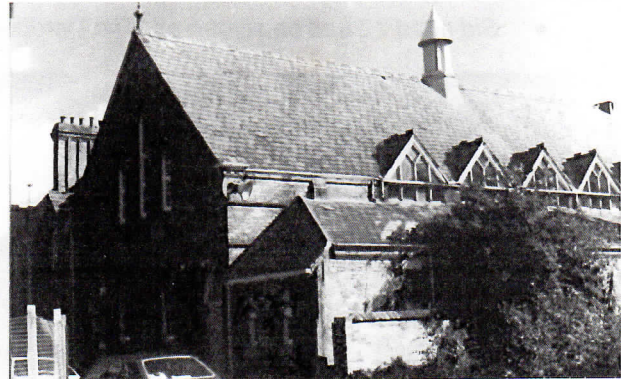
Urban renewal at last took place,  
New houses with green open space,  
Ethnic peoples had come to stay,  
Then it did not take too long,  
Community spirit grew fast and strong.

Then Balsall Heath ran out of luck,  
When one year a tornado struck,  
Buildings were damaged all around,  
Cars and trees were flung aside,  
By that wind's destructive ride.

Residents were keen to stay  
And help each other in any way,  
Again the area was rebuilt,  
Now diverse groups live side by side,  
Sharing feelings of local pride.



We have only a few copies left of "Past & Present". "Balsall Heath Through Time" is £10 plus postage. Please email if you would like to buy either book or would like details of our other publications.



Val Hart found this picture in her files of the Methodist Sunday School Hall in Lime Grove. Another lovely building from John Bowen & Sons of Balsall Heath. Did any of our readers go here?