

## Balsall Heath Local History Society

## THE GAZETTE

MARCH 2019

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### The Smallest Policeman in Birmingham?

In the January '19 edition of The Gazette we told of Mary and Pat Phipps who came to live in Tindal Street in 1957. The main thrust of the item was about them knowing the Eagle Pub in Mary Street as 'Snackers'. That story has become ever more mysterious and we will feature it here very shortly.

Mary and Pat had also told us of a member of the family who was considered a 'character'. He was the girls' maternal Grandfather, William Arthur Hill. Family researches had difficulty keeping up with his frequent changes of address, and he was also known for switching his Christian names around. He would be William Arthur, and then again, Arthur William.

Mr Hill was a diminutive man, just 5 feet in height. There were rumours among family members that William had been in the police force during the war and that there had been a story in the Birmingham Mail about him complete with a picture of him in uniform.



The photo shows that William Arthur Hill was a member of the Special constables and can clearly be picked out as the small man in the picture.

Birmingham's Special Constables were mobilised from the Central Police Station at Digbeth. The sandbags give the clue as to why he would have been accepted into the police force. It was war time and this caption tells us that he was not a regular police officer but a 'Special'. Special Constables are a volunteer force, and for this no formal qualification is required. There is no upper age limit-though you have to be fit, have reading and writing skills, be law abiding and have commitment.

William died in 1952 aged 77 while living in Conybere St. He was therefore still serving his country in his 70's during the war. A character? Yes!

### What are you researching?

For the last two years I have been reading through, the weekly copies of both The Builder and The Architect magazines for the years from 1875 to 1963 to find references to buildings built by the Birmingham building firm of John Bowen & Sons, which were most well known for having built the Victoria Law Courts.

During my research it has become obvious to me that there must be others who are interested one of the buildings that I am researching and that I might be able to help them with what I find. Similarly, others can help me. How can we

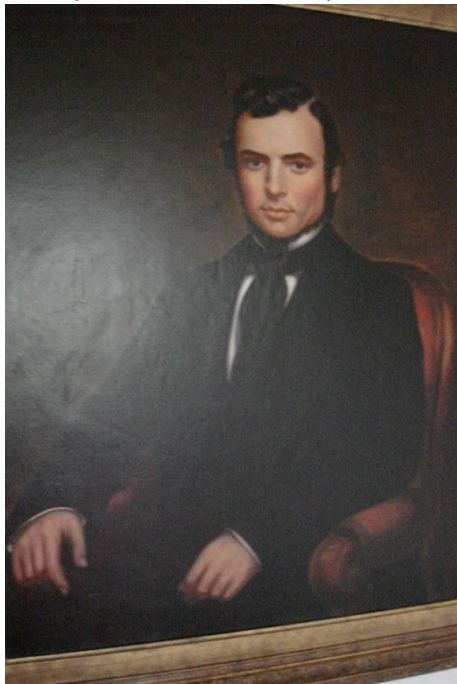
know of each other's interests and so help each other?

So do join me on the mezzanine floor of the library cafe on Wednesday 17 April at 12.45 buying your lunch or a drink from the café

If you intend to come may I ask you to email me please to confirm?

[anthonyrcollins@btinternet.com](mailto:anthonyrcollins@btinternet.com)

## Request for Help



Good evening, I wonder if someone could help me please. My great, great grandfather used to live in Balsall Heath. He was born in 1837 and lived with his parents. By the time he was 19 (1856), his parents had a student from Moseley or Birmingham Art School lodging with them. At

some point or another he couldn't pay his rent so he offered to paint a portrait of their son - John Gossage. I have this portrait but have been wondering for a long time about trying to find out about the students at the art school. I realise that the building on the Moseley Road wasn't built until the beginning of the 1900s so wonder if there was a school there before that time. I have tried to find out what I could from BCC Archives & Heritage department but was told that they don't have any records from the school. Does anyone in your group know of the past history of the art school on the Moseley Road (or even elsewhere). Many thanks in anticipation. (From Denise Ann Hobbs on Facebook).

## Events

These are meetings held by other groups in other parts of Birmingham that may be of interest.

### Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 7:00 pm

The Newcomen Society

ThinkTank, Curzon Street.

The Early History of the Newcomen Engine - A lecture by Mike Potts.

Admission free

### Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2:00 pm

Newhall Street opposite Queens Arms pub

Guided tour of the Jewellery Quarter. Tickets £8 from Birmingham Museums.

### Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 12:15 pm

Women's Work in the Jewellery Quarter - a tour about the work undertaken by women from the late 1800's until the 1980's and the many vitally important jobs that women worked. Tickets £7 from Birmingham Museums

## Next meeting.

### Thursday April 25<sup>th</sup>

Gina Maddison – author of “The Girl from Guildford Street”.

Talk about growing up in the Birmingham back to back houses 1957-68.

7 p.m for a 7.30 start.

St Paul's Venture, Malvern St.

Visitors and new members always welcome.