

"A TOUCH OF EASTERN PROMISE"

RETURNS TO BALSALL HEATH

by Paul Long

Over recent months, as part of a large-scale project called 'Cultural Intermediation and the Creative Economy', a team of researchers from the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City University have been exploring the cultural life of the residents of Balsall Heath.

One of the things that the project seeks to do is to recruit local people to form part of a panel to work with us in order to commission a funded project for Balsall Heath. We are not looking for experts or people with experience and we'll be offering support for the group: what we need are people who are interested and willing to get involved.

We'll be holding a meeting on 4th June at the Hillac Restaurant at 498-506 Moseley Road. At the meeting we'll also be screening a long lost gem from BBC television called 'A Touch of Eastern Promise' that will be of immense interest to many local residents, especially those with long memories! We hope that this will spark some discussion of ideas about what shape the cultural project might take and excite people about getting involved. 'A Touch of Eastern Promise' was broadcast on 8th February 1973 and was produced by the English Regions Drama Unit at BBC Pebble Mill. It was originating by Tara Prem, a young writer-producer of Anglo-Indian parentage who felt that migrant communities such as those in Balsall Heath were under-represented on TV.

The light-hearted drama concerns a young man (Dev Sagoo) with fantasies about a Bollywood film star (Jamila Massey) who he seeks to meet when she pays a visit to the city. The programme was shot entirely on film and on location in Balsall Heath, amongst the local Asian community. In fact, the show drew much of its cast from amongst the same community. As Tara Prem recalls: "The BBC had problems in casting dramas that dealt with people from migrant communities such as those from Pakistan as the pool of available professionals appeared quite small". As she says, she and the director Michael Lindsay Hogg toured around the streets of the Balsall Heath, 'literally picking people off the street and saying - "do you want to be in a play?" and getting them in.'

The film is around 30 minutes in length and shows some aspects of Balsall Heath that have disappeared. It features a huge range of local people who some may recognise and in fact, some may recognise themselves! It is suitable for all the family so do come along and take a look and hear about our project and the opportunity to get involved. You can find out more about the film, and its producers, online at the Pebble Mill Studios website (<http://www.pebblemill.org/>). If you are interested in attending the screening and meeting, email me: paul.long@bcu.ac.uk or call/text 07870507771.



BALSALL HEATH PALMIST FINED.

Says His Predictions Were Not Accurate.

FOR SCIENCE, NOT PROFIT.

On a charge of pretending to tell fortunes, Charles Burton, of 214, Martineau-street, Balsall Heath, appeared before the Birmingham magistrates today.

Evidence was given by a married woman, who stated that she visited defendant's offices in Martineau-street on 1 July.

GOOD AT FIGURES.

She went into his private room, and had her hand read. Defendant said she was a conscientious, straightforward, industrious woman, and would make a good wife. She was good at figures, very accurate in her payments, and kept her rent clear. She would have a lot of trouble.

He then asked her what was wrong with her husband, and asked if he drank a lot. She would outlive her husband, and would live to be seventy.

"A TEASE."

A single woman who accompanied the last witness said defendant told her she was very sensitive, fond of pelasure, fond of men, and liked to tease them and throw them aside.

He asked her if anything was wrong with the young man she was going with. She replied nothing that she knew of. He said there was going to be some trouble at her home, probably a death in the family. It would cause her to have an illness. She would go abroad, but would come back again.

Police-constable J. McDonnell said he had received a complaint about the defendant, and, in consequence, he sent the two women to his place of business. He also visited defendant's premises in company with Police-constable Hillier.

The outside of the building bore the sign, "Professor Burton, Palmist." Inside were various charts, etc., showing heads and palms, and also a scale of charges.

A SCIENTIST.

Defendant said: "I don't think it is fair to send women. I do not do it for the purpose of making money. I do it for science. I have been connected with the Midland Institute years ago. You ought to have sent men to me. You ought to have come yourself."

Defendant said he was a citizen of Birmingham, having resided there sixty-six years. All the time he had been in the city he had never had a complaint. He had been in Martineau-street nineteen years.

NOT TO BE RELIED ON.

He never made a positive statement as to the future. What he said was not to be relied on as to its accuracy, for he nor anyone else could prophesy as to the exact date of events to come.

The magistrates found the case of pretending to tell fortunes proved, and imposed a fine of £10 and costs.

STOPPED ADDRESS.

BISHOP INTERRUPTED AT ST. ALBAN'S, BALSALL HEATH

The Suffragettes created a disturbance and had to be forcibly removed from St. Alban's Church, Balsall Heath, last evening.

Being the first celebration of the Patronal Feast, a large congregation had assembled, and were about to hear an address by the Bishop of Birmingham (Dr. Wakefield), who had just advanced to the chancel gates for that purpose.

His lordship had pronounced the invocation, and was commencing to speak, when three women, who were seated in the south aisle, jumped to their feet and shouted "We protest against forcible feeding."

RUSHED AT THE WOMEN.

Men on the opposite side of the church rushed across the aisle towards the women, while all around them members of their own sex rose to their feet in indignation.

For a moment it almost seemed as though the disturbers were about to be crushed by the startled worshippers, but the figure of the Bishop at the chancel gate waiting calmly to resume his discourse had a reassuring effect, and the congregation seated themselves while the three Suffragettes were ushered out by a number of men. On the way one woman was heard to remark "Leave me alone, and I will go out."

SCREECHING OUTSIDE.

At last calm was restored and the Bishop continued, while from the outside came the noise of screeching, and the vicar, Father Underhill, left his place in the choir and went outside in order to persuade the women to be quiet.

Following the service a procession took place, Dr. Wakefield with cope and mitre, and carrying his pastoral staff, taking part. As the procession moved round the church all those not kneeling to receive the Bishop's blessing were kept under strict observation, but no further disturbance took place.

NEWS 100 YEARS AGO

The Evening Despatch of 22nd June 1914 carried the story (left) of Suffragette disturbances at St. Alban's.

On a lighter note, on 8th July 1914, they carried the story (right) of the palmist whose fortunes took an unexpected turn for the worse...