



Balsall Heath Local History Society Annual Report 2019-2020



Bringing history to life

The Society was founded about 40 years ago with the aim of promoting interest in our local history. Over the years the Society has achieved considerable success, working with schools and community groups, organising exhibitions and events, collecting resources and producing our own publications. It is important we all feel pride in our area and to value its strengths, both past and present. Local history has a key role to play in underpinning community cohesion.



Chairman's Report

The Society continues to have both interesting and educational lectures from a wide number of experts and enthusiasts. As usual a full programme for this year had been arranged but because of the outbreak of Covid 19 we had to postpone all our meetings from March 2020 onwards. Nevertheless up until then talks ranged from Gina Maddison telling us about life in the 1960's, Julia Griffin informing us about the Friends of Brandwood End Cemetery, now in its 15th year (as well as an illuminating history of the cemetery) and Simon Gulliver on Ernest Wilson, an important but virtually unknown Birmingham-born plant hunter.

It is hoped that the Society will be able to resume its normal meetings in September, and those talks that we missed may be slotted into the programme sometime after that. Unfortunately, however, we will not be able to hold our Annual General Meeting in July as usual.

I have to thank Bron Salway, our Programme Secretary, for continuing to find and book our speakers and Val Hart, Pat Johnson, Diane Stead and Margaret Pendrey for setting up the room for meetings, taking money and providing refreshments.

One happy event occurred last September when our Vice- Chair, Jenny Lloyd was married in Lichfield (now Jenny Hodson). To her I also give my thanks for stepping in for me when required.

Finally, I would like to thank you, our members, for being loyal to the Society by your attendance and your continuing enthusiasm.

Patrick Baird

Enquiries and The Gazette Newsletter

Research queries are steady and are usually connected to family history. The Gazette continues to be widely circulated. It is available via our website and email.

Events

May 2nd Street Trail : Edward Rd, Mary St, George St and Tindal St.

This was a live event with pop up historical characters, made possible by a grant from Tesco's Bags of Help. A printed leaflet is now available free of charge.



July 6th Balsall Heath Carnival where the Society ran a tea tent & a stall at Moseley Street Fair

Sept 21st & 22nd Balsall Heath History Exhibition at the Old Print Works as part of Heritage Open Days.

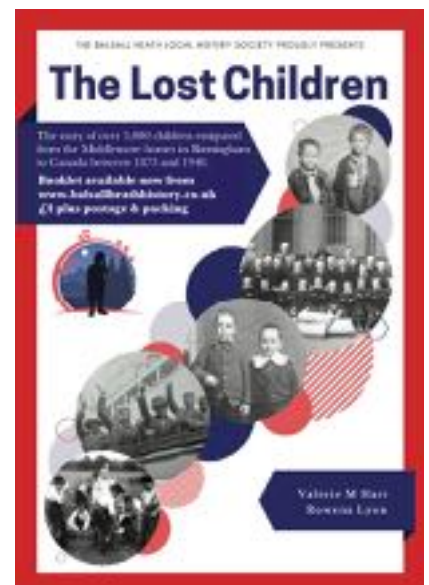
Sept 27th Birmingham Lives Local History Fair at the MAC where we ran a stall.

Sep-Oct Lost Children Exhibition at Birmingham & Midland Institute & St. Martin in the Bullring.

New Publications this year

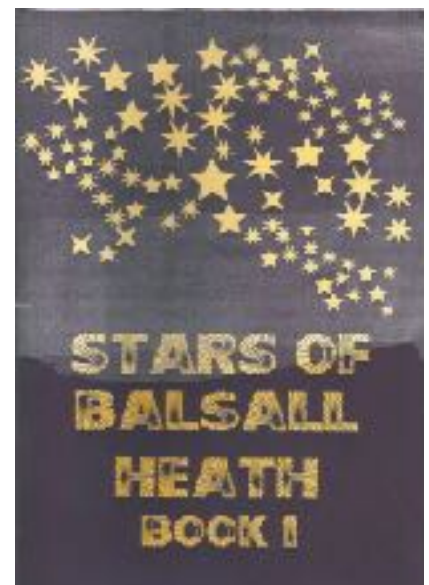
The Lost Children

A fully illustrated booklet about the work of the Middlemore Homes including family stories.



Stars of Balsall Heath

Vol 1. Featuring eleven of our famous Balsall Heathans from 1871 to the present.



Street Trail leaflet

Edward Rd, Mary St, George St and Tindal St as described above.

“The Lost Children”

This year has seen the completion of our project on the Middlemore Children’s Emigration Homes, “The Lost Children”, funded by the Heritage Lottery. The Homes emigrated over 5000 children from Birmingham to Canada between 1873 & 1948, to be placed with farmers in the backwoods until 1932 and after that to Fairbridge Farm School.

The aims of the project were to raise awareness of the work of the Homes, compile some case studies and make contact with relatives/ descendants living in England.

It has been a tremendous success. In addition to those who have shared their stories, we have had an army of over 50 volunteers, including some relatives and wonderful Birmingham University Interns. They have undertaken a wide range of tasks and made the project such a triumph.

The pinnacle of our achievement was The Lost Children Exhibition held in September and October, 2019 at the Birmingham & Midland Institute and St Martin’s Church. The Exhibition Launch was attended by the Lord Mayor, the Vice Lord Lieutenant as well as Patricia Roberts-Pichette, the leading authority on the Homes and Pat Skidmore, daughter of a child migrant, who both flew in from Canada specially.

The Exhibition itself was mounted in two rooms; one each for England and Canada. Visitors were greeted in the foyer with a short video of John Middlemore who explained his intention in his own words. The England room gave a flavour of life in the poorest parts of Birmingham with washing strung up, buckets of coal and a skeleton, illustrating the impact of disease; next it was on to the journey, with kitbags, ship’s rope and lifebelts, and then into the Canada room, with fir trees, farming implements and a bale of hay.



Display panels told the story with many illustrations and photographs as well as copies of children’s letters.

There was also a Dramatic Lecture with scenes bringing the story to life, performed by the Balsall Heath Youth Theatre together with the Birmingham History Theatre Company, and then a talk by Patricia Roberts-Pichette. The following week we had a second talk by Pat Skidmore, daughter of a child migrant. All attracted a large audience.

We estimate that over 1000 people came to the exhibition and associated events. Comments included:

“An emotional rollercoaster”

“Amazing and heartbreaking”

*“Thank you for telling our ancestor’s story.
So important to show and retain this history.
Fascinating & thought provoking”*

We also celebrated Canada’s Home Child Day in September with another performance and the lighting up of the spire of Belbroughton Church where John Middlemore is buried.

The project has finished with the publication of the book, “The Lost Children”, but this is not the end of the story. Many of the relatives want to continue meeting so we are setting up a Middlemore Group both for them and our volunteers.

We expect to continue research and to assist people in discovering their own family’s stories, through workshops, and accompanied archive visits.

Finally, there is also now going to be a Blue Plaque in St Luke’s Road in 2022, coinciding with the Commonwealth Games coming to Birmingham. So the work will continue.

Meetings and Trips

Meetings are held on the last Thursday of every month at 7.00 for 7.30 at St. Paul's Venture, Malvern St, off Clifton Road, Balsall Heath, B12 8NN. All are welcome to come along. The programme is on our website.

Partnerships & Funders

Thanks to those who work in partnership with us: **Birmingham History Theatre Company, The Old Print Works, St. Paul's Community Development Trust, Balsall Heath Library.**

We have also contributed to other local projects:

Let Us Play (General Public)

The Whole World in One Place
(Future Seed)

St Alban's Heritage Lottery bid which was successful.

Thanks to our funders, too, who enable our work. This year we have had a continuing grant from The Big Lottery Heritage Fund.



Charity Registration Number: 1101945



Committee Members 2019-2020

President: Richard Albutt

Chair: Patrick Baird

Vice-Chair: Jenny Hodson

Treasurer: Pat Johnson

Programme Secretary: Bron Salway

Committee Secretary: Val Hart.

Committee Members: Jim Fitzpatrick, Judith Millington

Contact Information

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Birmingham B12 9AH

www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

www.thelostchildren.uk

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We can also be found on Facebook

Publications by Balsall Heath Local History Society

All our publications are available to order on our website, www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

The Lost Children. The story of over 5000 children emigrated by the Middlemore Homes in Birmingham to Canada between 1873 & 1948.

Stars of Balsall Heath. Vol 1. A few of our most famous Balsall Heathans.

A Street Trail of the Edward Rd area.

Sweet Memories A dictionary of confectionery from times gone by.

Balsall Heath Through Time by Val Hart.
This book illustrates some of the major changes to the area since 1939.

The Flicks Memories of the cinemas in Balsall Heath.

The Moseley Road Trail The Development of the Moseley Road from the 1740s.

Brown Paper and Goose Grease A Dictionary of Traditional Remedies.

Balsall Heath, A History by Val Hart. Our development from the heath of the 18th century to the suburbs of the 1940s.

Balsall Heath & Highgate Past & Present
Edited by Val Hart and Alan Hemming
Photographs of the area by topic.

Tales Out Of School Edited by Val Hart.
Memories of schooldays by adults from Balsall Heath and beyond, spanning more than a century and five continents.

The Gazette Our monthly newsletter. Stories and photographs from the past and present.