



## ***The Middlemore Update from The Lost Children Project***

1.). **The Blue Plaque at St Luke's Rd, Highgate, where the Homes were established, has now been launched**



The original buildings were demolished in 2018 and the area has now been developed by Barratts the builders for housing. The plaque is the fruit of a partnership between the History Society, the Civic Society and Barratts. Children from Percy Shurmer School have also been involved. The Plaque is surrounded by maple trees as a homage to Canada.



## **Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette**

# **JULY 2022**



**Telephone: 07565 194822**

**Email:**

**info@balsallheathhistory.co.uk**

**Web:**

**www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk**

**www.thelostchildren.uk**

**Facebook: Balsall Heath Local  
History Society and  
lostchildrenproject**

**Membership of the Society costs £12 a year. Membership runs from January to December each year and application forms are available on the website. Fees at meetings will continue unchanged: £1 for members and £3 for visitors.**

**Meetings are held at St Paul's Venture, Malvern Street at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served from 7 pm to 7:20 p.m.**

**Coming soon**

**Thursday July 28<sup>th</sup> – Visit to the new Police museum at Steelhouse Lane (see the May gazette for details)**

**Thursday August 25<sup>th</sup> - A Balsall Heath Stories from the Stones Walk at Brandwood End Cemetery**



The Unveiling Launch was a glittering occasion, attended by The Lord Mayor, Birmingham Civic Society representatives, Balsall Heath History Society Committee members and volunteers, relatives of children who were emigrated and Patricia Roberts -Pichette , the leading authority on the Homes, who flew in specially from Canada for the event.

The plaque will stand as an enduring reminder of this extraordinary Commonwealth connection which is also a significant part of Birmingham's heritage.

## 2) Last chance to see "The Lost Children" play

Friday evening , 29<sup>th</sup> July at 7 pm


Saturday evening, 30<sup>th</sup> July at 7 pm

at the **Blue Orange Theatre**, Great Hampton St, in the Jewellery Quarter, as part of BirminghamFest

Birmingham 2022 Festival Presents

## The Lost Children

A Creative City Project generously funded by Birmingham City Council



The Middlemore Emigration homes moved 5000 Birmingham children to Canada and Australia between 1873 and 1948. Why did this happen? Birmingham History Theatre Company explores the impact this had using drama and songs.

Blue Orange Theatre B18 6AD  
Friday 29th July and Saturday 30th July 7pm  
Standard £8 Concessions £6  
All tickets available from the venue

www.birminghamhistorytheatre.uk

**BIRMINGHAM 2022 FESTIVAL**  
community festival

**Birmingham City Council**

**Birmingham Fest 2022**  
at the Blue Orange Theatre  
For tickets: 02020 316000 or birminghamhistorytheatre.co.uk  
100 Great Hampton Street, Birmingham, B18 6AD

In the play we attempt to present conflicting opinions about the work of the Middlemore Homes – illustrating the desperate conditions which led to parents sending their children abroad as well as a glimpse of what happened to them in Canada. The outstanding feature of the play, however, is the music. Peter Churchill, Community Musician, has written some brilliant songs which are emotive, thought provoking and humorous.

The play was put on at The MAC earlier this month and was well received. The audience included relatives of children emigrated by the Homes.

### Some comments:

*"This is a story people should know about and is told here very well"*

*"All the songs brought to life the stories of the lost children from Birmingham. The mixture of film and stage performances was measured and brought the audience along on a journey of discovery, leaving them to want more. "*

*"The Lost Children deals with difficult and ambiguous issues of poverty, liberty, privilege, social class, and colonialism. I thought there was great drama in seeing these momentous issues being given form by a local group of amateur actors. "*

**Do please come to our last performances and support us.**

### 3). The Exhibition

The exhibition is now at The Back to Backs in Hurst St. until October, and is free. Visitors can see the display without paying for entry to the Back to Backs Tour. However, be warned- the staircases are the original ones and VERY STEEP! Access is from the new bookshop on the ground floor.

Comments from visitors:

- *"Thought provoking"*
- *"A hidden treasure"*
- *"Very powerful display of stories"*
- *"Fascinating and very moving exhibition"*
- *"Very important to record and remember these times"*



Many children who were admitted to the Homes came from back to back housing. *"House in very poor condition, two rooms up & one down for 6 children & father, very crowded & disreputable neighbourhood. When I visited, the house was lighted by one candle."* 1900

Presented by Balsall Heath Local History Society with support from Celebrating Communities funding from Birmingham City Council and Midland Ancestors

#### 4). "Stories of the Lost Children," a free talk as part of Birmingham Heritage Week,

**September 14<sup>th</sup> 2.30 p.m**

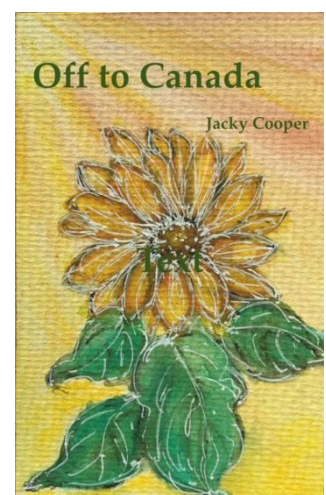
at the Deritend Room, St Martins in the Bullring

The children who emigrated faced a difficult transition from the poorest parts of crowded Birmingham to the backwoods of Canada. For some children this was a fresh start in life which went well. Others fared badly and some were even sent back to England in disgrace. Some of their stories will be told in this talk.

#### 5) The Lost Children Book. Available at £4 from our website

#### 6) A new book , "Off to Canada" by Jacky Cooper.

Stories of children who emigrated with the Middlemore Homes on the SS. Carthaginian in 1909. The result of long research and a fascinating read.



## Lost Children

### Tracing the Journey to a New Future

Back in 2018 Val Hart noted the fact that the original Middlemore Emigration Home in Highgate for destitute children was being demolished. Valerie had become aware of the history of The Birmingham Emigration Homes some years before, but proper research hadn't been possible then due to a 100 year closure of the archives. Now things were different, increasingly as time passed, more and more of these files became available to researchers.

Valerie wasted no time in applying for funds from The Heritage Lottery to finance the research needed and secure paid help. She was successful and was joined by Rowena Lyon. Together they launched an inspired campaign that enlisted the help of Patricia Roberts-Pichette, leading authority in Canada on The Middlemore Homes. Pat Skidmore, author of 'Marjorie, Too Afraid to Cry', the story of her Mother's time in the Middlemore Homes, and then so many other people and organizations drawn in to help bring much accomplishment. – and that is an understatement! Teams of researchers uncovered personal stories of children accepted by the Middlemore Homes and then emigrated to Canada.

Many of their descendants have been helped with research with information about their relatives. Many more, both in Birmingham and Canada, have generously shared their families' stories. A number of them became known as The Middlemore Group, meeting other people with a common interest in their ancestry.

The book 'The Lost Children' by Valerie and Rowena, was published in March 2019

In September 2019 a two week exhibition was staged at BMI complete with a dramatic lecture.

**The Logo adopted  
For the 2019  
Exhibition**



The achievements during this year 2022 of the History Society together with the Birmingham History Theatre Company, both led by Val Hart, are nothing short of remarkable. We have been spurred on by funding for celebrating our common heritage with Commonwealth countries as the Games are staged in Birmingham. A touring exhibition has appeared in 7 different venues, a commemorative Blue Plaque of the Middlemore Home in Highgate has been unveiled - And the Lost Children Play is being performed at two theatres in Birmingham. The details of these events can in found in a separate piece in this edition of the Gazette. Next page, A picture paints a thousand words . J.F.



Photos.

Top: The 2019 exhibition team enjoy their work.

Middle: The combined BHTC & BHLHS teams add drama to the lecture.

Bottom: July 2022 The Lost Children Exhibition opened under the marquee at the unveiling of the Blue Plaque commemorating the Middlemore Home in Highgate and the children who were emigrated.

## **Stories from the Stones**

***A Balsall Heath Walk at Brandwood End Cemetery, led by Julia Griffin and Val Hart***



**THURSDAY, AUGUST 25<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm.**

This is a free event open to all. Brandwood End was our local cemetery for many years. We will be visiting the graves of particular interest to Balsall Heath including the famous, the important, and the honoured as well as the little known. A unique opportunity to meet some of our old Balsall Heathans.

**We will meet by the Lodge in the Cemetery, near the entrance in Woodthorpe Road.  
Refreshments will be available.  
Val Hart**



### **Brandwood End Cemetery Events**

#### **Celebrating Birmingham's Burial Grounds Project**

##### **August**

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday Cemetery Session Brandwood End  
10:30-12:30

##### **September**

6<sup>th</sup> Tuesday Adding records to the map The  
Moseley Exchange 10:30-12:30

14<sup>th</sup> Wednesday Cemetery Session Brandwood  
End 10:30-12:30

**Please visit [caringforgodsacre.org.uk/events](http://caringforgodsacre.org.uk/events) for more information & booking links**



## **Birmingham Heritage Week -**

**coming in September**

Advance notice that the Society will be running :

### **A Balsall Heath Heritage Walk**

**on Sunday September 11<sup>th</sup> at 11 a.m and 2 pm**

with some interesting visits, speakers and pop up characters along the way.



### **A new gallery**

Balsall Heath now has a new art gallery on George Street in John Bowen's former yard. In commemoration of this it is called The John Bowen Gallery. The gallery is run by Hannah Al-Shemmeri and Rowena Davis and will be open to the public on Saturdays between Noon and 5pm. The art on display will change regularly but these pictures were taken on their first day.



### **Other events**

Since the last issue went out, I've heard that we have a (short) Balsall Heath Film Festival. Hopefully, some of the events will still be to come when you read this.

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July 7pm at the GAP on Moseley Road – "In My blood it runs" (film) £4

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 10am-2pm at Moseley Road Baths – "Swimming Shorts and Blowing Bubbles" – short films in the Gala Pool and a 10 minute documentary in the Foyer (free).

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 11:30am – 1pm starting at Saheli hub in Calthorpe Park – Balsall Heath Cinema Walk. Stories from the cinemas and a walk around some of the sites.(free but you may need to book).

Booking and more details including some short films at

<https://flatpackfestival.org.uk/projects/balsall-heath-film-festival>