

The new Middlemore Play,

"The Lost Children".

Rehearsals are now in full swing for this production which attempts to stride across the 82 years of Middlemore emigration. Our play is based on actual stories from child migrants and their families, contemporary newspaper articles and the records kept by the Middlemore Homes themselves.

An outstanding feature of this production is the music, with songs written by Peter Churchill, Community Musician. His most haunting new song is about the Back to Backs in Birmingham, which brings tears to the eye. It is not all doom and gloom, however. "Good as Gold" is a jaunty and humorous take on the children's placements with everyday farming folk.

The play is being performed at:

The Hexagon Theatre at the MAC, Cannon Hill on Friday evening, July 8th and Sunday afternoon, July 10th.


Then at the Blue Orange Theatre in the Jewellery Quarter on Friday and Saturday evenings July 29th & 30th.

Tickets are available at the venues. Please come and support us.
Val Hart

Birmingham 2022 Festival

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.

Hexagon Theatre MAC B12 9QH
Friday July 8th 7.30pm
Sunday July 10th 2.30pm Tickets £5 or concessions £4

Blue Orange Theatre B18 6AD
Friday 29th July and Saturday 30th July 7pm
All tickets available from the venues



www.birminghamhistorytheatre.uk

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

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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 28th – Visit to the new Police museum at Steelhouse Lane (see last month's gazette for details)

Thursday August 25th - A Balsall Heath Stories from the Stones Walk at Brandwood End Cemetery



The Lost Children Latest news.

1 The Blue Plaque.

This is to be launched in the first week of July. It will stand in a plinth on the green space in St Luke's Road, with some maple trees planted around it. The footpath running through the space is to be named Middlemore Way. We are also delighted that Patricia Roberts-Pichette, the leading authority on the Homes, is coming over specially for the Launch.

2. The Lost Children Exhibition

2022 marks the **150th anniversary of the opening of the Children's Emigration Homes** in Highgate, founded by John Middlemore. Between 1873 and 1954 they took over 5000 deprived children chiefly to Canada but also to Australia, aiming to give the children the opportunity of a better life

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

The Lost Children Exhibition

From July 14th, the exhibition will go on to The Back to Backs in Hurst St, who are holding an Exhibition Launch as it will be the first exhibition they are hosting there, after remodelling their space upstairs. The exhibition 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 at Stanhope Hall

"Interesting and informative. This is local history which would be lost without exhibitions like this. We should never forget about these things - extreme poverty, and families being split up."

"Very thought provoking and interesting. To actually know these areas/buildings makes the past come alive."

"Very powerful display of stories. It makes me appreciate the life I've had."

Val Hart

Thank you Harry Payne.

As many of you already know, Harry Payne was one of our Balsall Heath celebrities, whose business headquarters were in Cromer Road.

He first came to Balsall Heath from Northampton in 1908, setting up a shoe

repair shop in Longmore Street. He had a strong Christian faith and was imprisoned during the First World War as a Conscientious Objector. After the war his business prospered, building a reputation for giving better service at lower cost than the opposition. This he achieved due to the loyalty of his profit-sharing staff.

Now he has come to our aid through the Harry Payne Fund, administered by the Heart of England Community Foundation. They have awarded us funding for a much needed new computer which will be of huge benefit to all our work, so thanks, Harry.



Val Hart

A longer article on Harry Payne appeared in the Gazette in March 2013, available on our website.

Error Correction

You may have seen this line about Moseley Road Baths in several places over the last few months.

“One of only six Grade II Listed swimming baths currently operating in the UK. It is one of the oldest and the only one outside of London that is still open for swimming to the general public.”

There are several problems with this. The simplest is that when the Evening Mail copied the story from the World Monuments Fund website they missed the * in “Grade II*” and people copied it from them. There are around 50 Grade II listed baths currently operating in England. Even then, this isn’t quite right. I managed to find 6 Grade II* baths in England but only 2 were in London. The World Monuments people say that there is another one in London but two of the ones I found don’t count because they’re outdoor baths (lido’s) but they do accept the one in Swindon. That means that now they have 5 in England including 2 outside London. They are keen to use the bit about how few there are in the UK. The problem there is that only England and Wales use the Grade I/II*/II system. Scotland’s heritage organization uses grade A/B/C and they have a few public baths that qualify as grade B which is as near to the equivalent as it gets. Three are Victorian and in Edinburgh and one is in Dunfermline although I’ve yet to work out how old that is. So, as it is the WMF will be changing their description on the website although I’m not sure what to. As far as I can figure out Moseley Road baths is one of the oldest of around half a dozen grade II* working public baths in England (2nd or 3rd depending on whether you count lidos) or it’s one of 9 or 11 gII* or equivalent in the UK – no longer one of the oldest as it’s at best 5th of 9. Hopefully the WMF will tell me what they want to use in future.



The oldest swimming baths in England. Swindon Hydro (left) built in 1871 is the oldest of the indoor baths still working and Bristol Lido (right) from 1850 is the oldest of all although some might not call it a swimming baths.



Other Events

Birmingham Museum

With its recent re-opening, Birmingham Museum and Art gallery is putting on several new exhibitions that may be of interest. All of these will run until the end of October.

Wonderland – Birmingham’s cinema stories

Apart from the main exhibition at BMAG, there are several events tied to this and the Birmingham Indian Film Festival. They include two guided walks around current and former cinemas in town on 2nd July and 19th September (£10), Movie Mahal - a conversation event to discover life behind-the-scenes at two of Birmingham's lost picturehouses 19th July (free) and Wonderland Memory Box -Do you remember seeing Asian movies on the Soho Road or the Moseley Road? – 24th July (free).

We are Birmingham

Unprecedented Times(oral histories of the pandemic)

In The Que (remembering the Que club)

Blacklash: Racism and the Struggle for Self-Defence

Birmingham’s Museum Collections centre will open for an afternoon every fortnight. This is a large collection held in Nechells and rarely open to the public. At the moment all but one of these are fully booked and the only one with spaces is the next one which will happen before this goes out. This may mean that they do get returned tickets or that they issue more close to the open day.

For more details of these events and bookings see <https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/whats-on>

Letter to Mary St (North) Heathans

My dearest Heathans,

It is good to be writing to you again, this time I have extra photos for your personal interest in this part of Mary St, north of Balfour Steet. I have to start with the old photo of it as it is the anchor for all the rest of the photos you are about to see, and for your memories of it too.



We look towards Balsall Heath Road and Mary St/Belgrave school can be seen middle right and you can just make out beyond the towering St Albans church in Conybere St. The 2nd telegraph pole along the left pathway is at the approximate location of the well-remembered Cake Shop, Slades.

Dear Pat T, this is what you saw looking to your right as you came out of the entry from the Dodd's family home No 1/102 Mary St. If looking left, you would have seen the notable Bath Tavern Pub, and the rest of Mary St as far as Edward Road and more.

What I need to tell you all, is that I took a walk down this street just two months ago in April (2022) and photographed what this street looks like today. This second photo was taken from the same viewpoint as the first, but there is something like 55 years between the two. Check out the curve of the curb stones again in both (lower far left) as they make the turn in into Belfour St, now a cul-de-sac.

As



this is your history, you can't fail to know, the photographer taking the earlier photo would have stood outside 'Hs' barber's shop (Horace), and Bert Child's Tobacconist and newspaper shop. John H, you remember working for Bert, his shop was small with cramped space inside?



The camera has turned left to look down Balfour, you can't drive through into Lincoln St anymore. As you and your family, Mary Elizabeth, had once lived at No 30 Balfour St, the above will be a rather poignant view for you.



Back on Mary St a different form of change, not just house rebuilds but a wholly new cul-de-sac. Wenman St which formally ran completely parallel with Mary St for its whole length has been 'bent' towards Mary St. and ends with this footpath into Mary St.

In the next view of Mary Street, more of the right hand side of the road is shown. The Wenman St footpath is at right centre. Moving towards Knutsford St where we will find perhaps the biggest change with the building of a new school (Heath Mount) Replacing Mary/Belgrave around 1971 (Note the road school warning sign) .



The housing in the above photo are numbered 68 to 74a. Your families, Messrs Capper, Deakin, and Davis lived very near this spot, and you will no doubt remember your homes being numbered 58 to 64 so the numbering hasn't changed that much up to this point. As the rebuild continued with a more and more spacious environment, less numbering was needed. 100 numbers had been lost by the time they had reached the finish of the Mary St refurb at Edward Rd.



Heath Mount Primary School: How well named it is considered it is in Balsall Heath and arguably built on the steepest hill around. I remember well my dear Heathans riding my bike down Knutsford from Wenman on a regular basis and both brakes were applied to make sure I didn't hit the junction with Mary St out of control.

All the above has been about the right side of the street. Looking at the other side we have the present day buildings at the approximate location of Slade's.



That centre building is even sideways on to the road as it was back in the 60s for Slades. Going in the same direction soon after the cake shop we would come to WWII bombsites (or pecs). What we have now is a pair of Closes, Laxford Close and Hampden Retreat



Who would have thought that Mary Street would have a 'Retreat'? However, we are now at the end of the road for you expats (literally). As we are at the junction with Balsall Heath Road and have this picture of a semidetached house and an open space. A green verge, with not much there at all.



Well, we can't have that can we? Let's recall, imagine, together what was in this space once upon a time, furthest away that bomb sites, then the school, and on this corner a Corn Merchants shop.

Where you Albert J bought your eggs. It was next to your place of work at G.H. Monks, 'purveyors of meat' and makers of sausages, pies, black pudding and more. And you had the job of delivering quarter pound size pies to the Wellington Pub across the road on the other corner of Mary St, every Friday. Not forgetting the book maker located behind the pub that you lost a few bob to.

What of you Mrs S, schoolteacher for a couple of years from '68 at the by then 'Belgrave School'. Moving on in 1971 to the new Heath Mount on Knutsford, along with the headmaster, Mr Mundy. And meeting teacher's assistant, Beryl, a mother of two boy pupils Steven and Mark who had attended Belgrave/Mary St. Beryl and the boys were at the time living close to St Albans church seen in the first photo here. Incredibly Heath Mount has just celebrated its 50th year anniversary! (2021)

The history of the original school very much includes pupil Alan D for his sporting prowess that was recognised by the whole school and headmaster (Mr Bundy) with a presentation of a silver cup trophy. The lad went on to national fame.

So, what now? Well, I think that in another 55 years there will be oldies like us who will appreciate the above photos of the 'new-build' housing, and revisit heartfelt memories like we are doing now. Somethings change, somethings don't.

Very Sincerely yours
J.F.