

Balsall Heath Heritage Trail



A new Heritage Trail for Balsall Heath has now been produced and will be available soon. We ran two live versions of the trail in September as part of Birmingham Heritage Week, with pop up characters and we now have a printed booklet of the trail currently being printed. This will be on offer free at Balsall Heath Library, St Paul's Venture and our base at the Old Print Works. The Trail is thanks to funding from The Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund.

The Lost Children.

The Birmingham History Theatre Company mounted a performance of "The Lost Children" in July this year at the Midlands Arts Centre and the Blue Orange Theatre. It told the story of the Middlemore Homes in Birmingham which emigrated over 5000 children chiefly to Canada, between the years 1873 and 1954. I am glad to tell you that a film of the play is now available on Youtube, made for us by Dan Burwood, a well known figure at the Old Print Works.

This is the link: <https://youtu.be/mp6cm9oT99E>

We had a lot of positive reviews of the play. Do hope you enjoy it.
Val Hart

The Benjamin Grimmett Gravestone Appeal.

We launched this in the Gazette in September. Many thanks to all those who have already contributed. We have now raised about half of what's needed. If you would like to donate, it's best to do so by using the Donate button on our website.

www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

Val Hart

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

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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 are: £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 pm.

Coming soon

Thursday December 15th

Richard Churchley A Century
of Popular Songs 1860s -1960s

Community Demolition a Comparison with Liverpool

At the Balsall Heath History Society's meeting at the end of October, following a presentation of photographs depicting the area before and after the wide demolition and rebuild, a debate took place about the outcomes of that refurbishment. A general agreement was reached, it was that while there was a need to modernise the housing and other buildings, more thought should have gone into the subject of preserving community cohesion.

A few days after this meeting we had this enlightening email communication from one of our members who had been at the meeting.

BBC News: Scotland Road: Pubs of Liverpool thoroughfare face last orders.

"I thought this was interesting to see on the BBC News App this morning, as it is a somewhat parallel view to our discussions on Thursday evening about the demise of community life in an inner city area over the past sixty years or so.

I lived across the Mersey in Cheshire for a couple of years in the mid-1970s and became quite familiar with Liverpool and its environs, as my next-door neighbour at the time had grown up in Liverpool and often drove me over there for shopping and to see her old haunts before I went to America and learnt to drive myself.

Having visited Liverpool several times on architectural visits in the years since then, the city has become quite unfamiliar to me now, apart from some obvious well-known landmark buildings in the city centre. So, it isn't only Birmingham which has been radically reinvented over the years and lost thriving businesses and communities."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-63145686>

This link was also provided and *is a recommended read*. As pointed out, Balsall Heath is not the only city inner district to suffer the demise of community life. This demise is not simply about the community being dispersed but also the loss of an area's economy. '*A picture is worth a thousand words*



The same place pictured eons apart.

Balsall Heath Rd junction with Longmore St

We passed on the Liverpool article link to our friend Joe Holyoak, architect, and urban designer, who has commented on this kind of subject before, and we got a surprising answer. Joe had run a project on this very matter :

"Incidentally, I ran a project on the regeneration of Scotland Road at the national architecture summer school in Liverpool in 1981. Forty years have passed since then. What has happened there and what has happened to Balsall Heath are examples of the same urban processes of decline and renewal. Although I think Balsall Heath came out of the period of decline relatively well. (You may remember a proposal to drive an expressway through Balsall Heath, Moseley, and Kings Heath. connecting the city centre with the M40)."

To think that there could have been an 'expressway driven through Balsall Heath, Moseley, and Kings Heath doesn't bear thinking about. Community cohesion was not given a thought about in that plan. And anytime we get held up in traffic in these places, let's be happy they are still there at all. J.F.

An article by Carl Chinn.

Following the last issue of The Gazette, we received the following lovely article from Carl. He has, of course, a fuller picture of the Ladypool Road than I could ever have. He has his own memories but also has spent years collecting them from other people too, preserving for us a rich heritage. So thanks Carl and here it is. Val

Westwood's: Nuf Sed

Carl Chinn

In the October 2022 edition of the Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette, Val Hart asked if anyone remembered Westwood's on the Ladypool Road. Well, I do. Dad, Buck Chinn, had grown up in Alfred Street and had a betting shop at 236, Ladypool and although we lived in Springfield, Mom did most of her shopping 'down The Lane'.

She bought greens and fruit from Jones', pork from Mr Lunn, lamb and beef from Harrington's and Gough's, bread from Trippas', cooked meat from Cash's, sweets from Mrs Hudson, and fish from Westwood's.

As a youngster I was mystified by Westwood's motto of 'Nuf Sed!'. Dad tried to explain it to me, but it took till I was well into my teens before I grasped that the Westwood name itself said enough for quality.



This photo taken by Roger Gwynne in the late 1960s shows Westwood's on the corner of the Ladypool Road, although the address was actually 1, Alfred Street. As I recall, fish was sold to the left of this shot.



As Val noted, Westwood's also had premises further down the Ladypool Road at 158 Brunswick Road – just to the left of the open gate. However, I can't ever remember that it was open as a shop. This photo was taken in 1960.



My Dad bought 158 Brunswick Road from Westwood's in 1976, moving his betting shop just a few yards down from 236 Ladypool Road. I worked in both premises from when I was thirteen, part-time on Saturdays and during school and university holidays, and then full-time from 1980 to the summer of 1984 when we sold up to William Hill's. This photo was taken on the last day of us trading as bookies and shows Dad, Alf 'Buck' Chinn, my Aunt Mavis Hillan nee Chinn, me, and my younger brother, Darryl. The R. A. Chinn of the sign was my Granddad, Richard Alfred, who started up as a street bookmaker further up The Lane in Studley Street in 1922.



Westwood's also had a greengrocer's at 499 Stratford Road on the corner of Durham Road, Sparkhill. On the opposite corner, out of view, they had their fishmongers.

Val mentioned that she'd been told that Joseph Westwood started out as a barrow boy, selling his fruit and vegetables from a hand cart and that doing well, he eventually had several shops, including two in Ladypool Road. It seems to me, however, that the person who passed on this information perhaps mixed up Joseph Westwood with Tom Jones. The Jones family originally had a 'show', small fairground, on the Ladypool Road, behind the George pub. Tom Jones then sold greens and fruit from a handcart in the 1920s before setting up a shop. By then, Joseph Westwood was a wealthy man and there is no evidence to suggest that he'd been a barrow boy. Born in 1863 the son of a market gardener from Yardley, he became a corn salesman. By 1901, he was in business on his own account as a greengrocer at 1, Alfred Street, although he and his family lived in a big house on the Stratford Road. He died in 1928, now living in Lapworth, and left the huge sum of just under £16,000. By the 1930s, the business of Joseph Westwood and Sons also had a fruiterers on the corner of Brunswick Road, two greengrocery shops on the Stratford Road, Sparkhill and one each in Bournbrook and Handsworth, and a fishmongers on the Stratford Road.



Before finishing, I wish to pay tribute to the tireless work of Val Hart in uncovering the history of Balsall Heath and to thank her and the members of the Society for the support and insights that they have given me over many years, but especially when I first started out as a social historian.

Mrs Jones at work in the family greengrocers and fruiterers on the Ladypool Road, probably in the 1950s. This photo was given to me by her son, the late Raymond Jones. I don't remember Mrs Jones but I knew Raymond well and respected him, as I did his brother Tommy, sister Violet, and brother-in-law Dennis.

Wanted!

Birmingham People's History Archive (BPHA) has a Historic England grant for an exciting project about local industries. Birmingham's changed so much in recent times, but we must remember, and keep for future generations, the memories of people and places who have contributed so much to our great city.

We want to interview retired industrial workers. University of Birmingham students will be trained to carry out interviews by the Oral History Society.

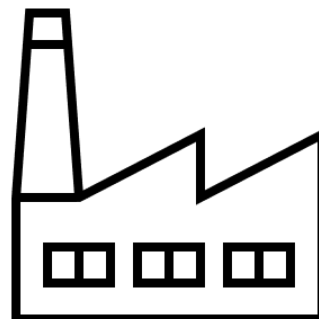
These will take place in community settings during December 2022 – early 2023. Information from the interviews will be used for school artwork, teaching resources, and community activities, exhibitions and other events led by BPHA.

We'd love to hear your stories! If you'd like to be interviewed, or have questions about the project, please email gill@bpha.online or phone 07585-140392.

Thank you,

Birmingham People's History Archive

Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, B3 3BS



Historic England

Happy Christmas to all our readers.

The December issue of the Gazette will not come out until after Christmas so this is an early seasonal greeting. We hope you have a pleasant and restful time.



A quick reminder, too, about Easy Fundraising. At the moment they are donating £10 for every new user! once signed up, you can raise donations on over 4000 retailers online as well as insurance companies.

The Balsall Heath Local History Society is Registered Charity No. 1101945
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