

A Book Launch for “The Home Child” by Liz Berry,

a novel in verse about a Middlemore child.

Wednesday, April 20th. 2023

6 to 7.30 pm.

At Queensbridge School,
Moseley B13 8QB

Book with Eventbrite with this link.

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/liz-berry-the-home-child-tickets-590409770517?aff=ebdsoporgprofile&keep_tld=1

Liz Berry is a local and much acclaimed poet who has won many awards for her poetry.

At the Launch Liz will be discussing her wonderful new book, *The Home Child* which is inspired by the true story of her great aunt Eliza Showell.

The Launch will also be an opportunity to see the Balsall Heath Local History Society's touring Lost Children Exhibition.



In 1908 the orphaned twelve year old Eliza was taken by the Middlemore Homes to Nova Scotia. Liz is able to imagine and capture Eliza's world as it becomes a place where ordinary things are transfigured into treasures - a red ribbon, the feel of a foal's mane, the sound of her name on someone else's lips.

Liz says, "I wanted to tell the story and address its sadness but I

wanted it to be redemptive, a story about human resilience, tenderness and capacity to love.

The Home children lost so much, they lost their families, their countries and often their identities.

Val Hart

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

MARCH 2023



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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 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

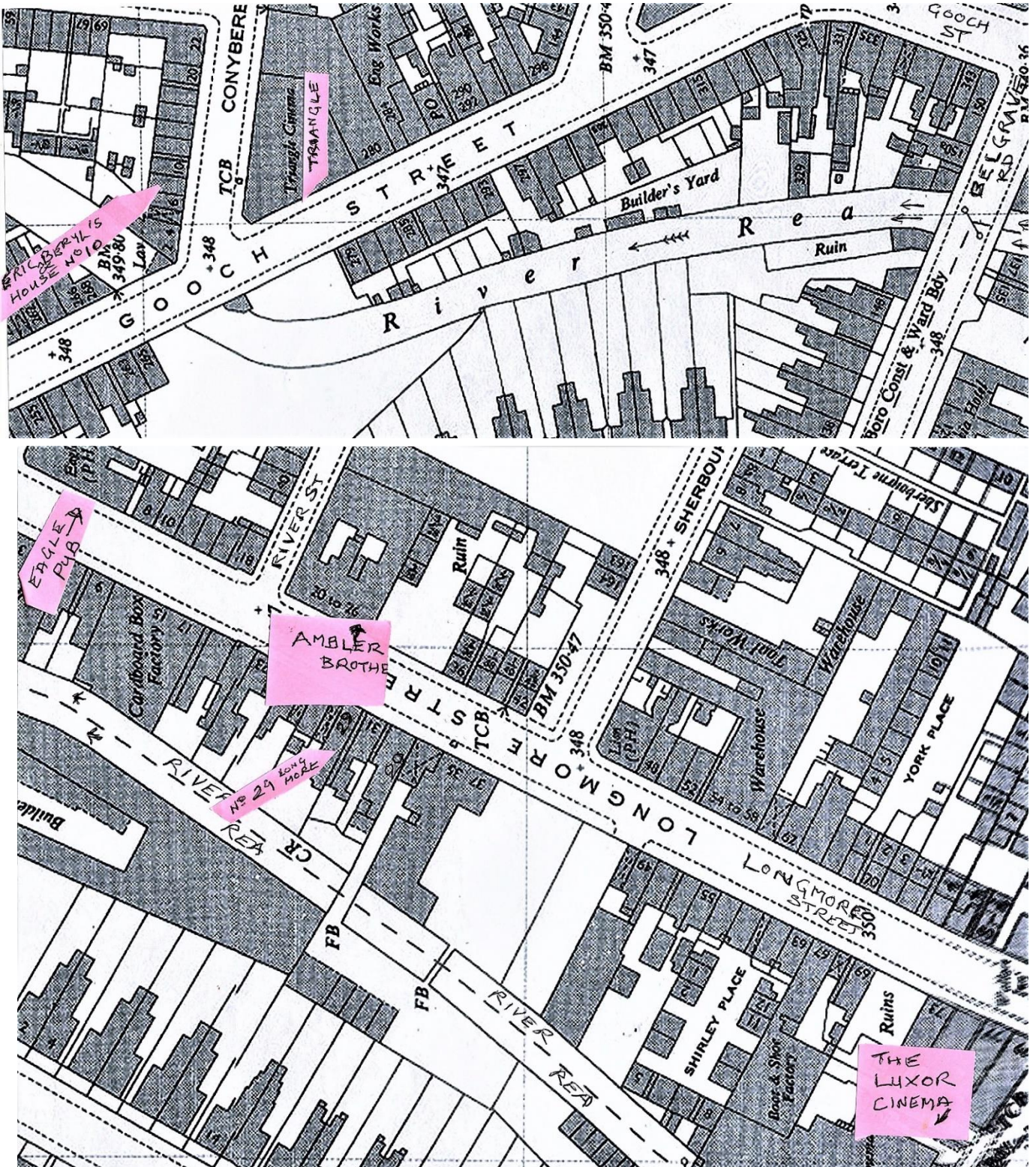
Thursday March 30th 2023
Keith Robinson. The history of
Victorian Darlaston and the
Black Country

Thursday April 27th 2023
Richard Churchley A Century
of Popular Songs 1860s -1960

Beryl's Story

January's edition of the Gazette told of June's story, and in line with the belief of Carl Chinn, that history belongs to everyone, we continue with Beryl's story. It is a democratic thing you see. So next month we'll seek to bring you Iris's story. All 3 of these ladies are in their 90s and have spent some part of their lives in Balsall Heath. In the case of Iris, it's *all* of her life.

Beryl and June were born in the same year and lived in the same corner of our district, on the border with Highgate. Gooch and Longmore Streets were their childhood worlds.



Beryl's end of the world is shown in the first of these two maps. As a married woman with two children, she lived with her husband Eric Murphy at No 10 Conybere St, opposite the Triangle Cinema.

This picture and the marked maps give an idea of the layout. On the left of the Triangle, Conybere Street recedes into the distance towards St Alban's Church tower. Beryl's house would be on the left just out of the picture, about where the woman and child (with balloon) cross the street. On the right, we look down Gooch Street towards Belgrave Road and the 'bend' with its myriad of shops (top right of that first map). Beryl, born in 1932 was named after George Formby's wife, a comedian and film star of the 30s, and 40s. Her dad Edward Smith and mom Francis were already living in Newport Place (a terrace) off Conybere St. In this 'yard,' 4 toilets had to be shared by eight families.



The laundry building was known as the Brew House. Families were allocated a time when laundry could be washed. Growing up Beryl knew the Triangle as 'Pringles', her gran worked there, and her responsibilities included lighting the boiler, cleaning, and locking up. A neighbour, Mrs Marney, was a cashier and played the piano in the silent films era.

Beryl attended Hope St school for her education aged 5 to 14 years. The Head Mistress was a Miss Lewis. She would have been around 7 years of age when WWII started and remembers that younger teachers went off to join the forces. Retired teachers then came back to school as part of the war effort. Beryl's first job at the age of 14 was with Swallow Raincoats in the Jewellery Quarter, Hockley. She took the No.8 Inner Circle bus, costing 6d (old pence). The main production

was de-mob coats. Workers were by the 'band' (conveyor belt), sorting lapels and other details and finally sewing the linings. The firm's canteen gave free dinners, some poor and some very good.

This wonderful photo was taken upon the announcement of war and the distribution of 'hard hats' (helmets) Beryl stands in front of her mom Francis and Auntie Peggy (Smith), with their helmets proudly on display and ready for the coming war.

Remembering the shops on Gooch Street's *bend*, the George Mason store was where Beryl's family got their rations. A nice rationing detail for Beryl was receiving two cakes from the Wimbrush branch there, a treat to be carefully shared with the family. They could buy groceries 'on the strap', and payment for items could be made later, on pay-day. An agreement could be made with several stores; sometimes, problems could arise with 'settling up'.



'Shops in Gooch St c. 1928' – Book; Memories of Balsall Heath, Highgate, and Sparkbrook.

This sketch of the 'bend' is marked and numbered for your interest. 1928, it's the world that Beryl would be born into four years later.

1, Beryl's family home for her married life as Mrs B Murphy.

2, Triangle Cinema, formally the Pringles and colloquially referred to as the 'Flea pit'.

3, The future location of F.W Woolworth.

4, The Sub-Post Office.

5, n/a

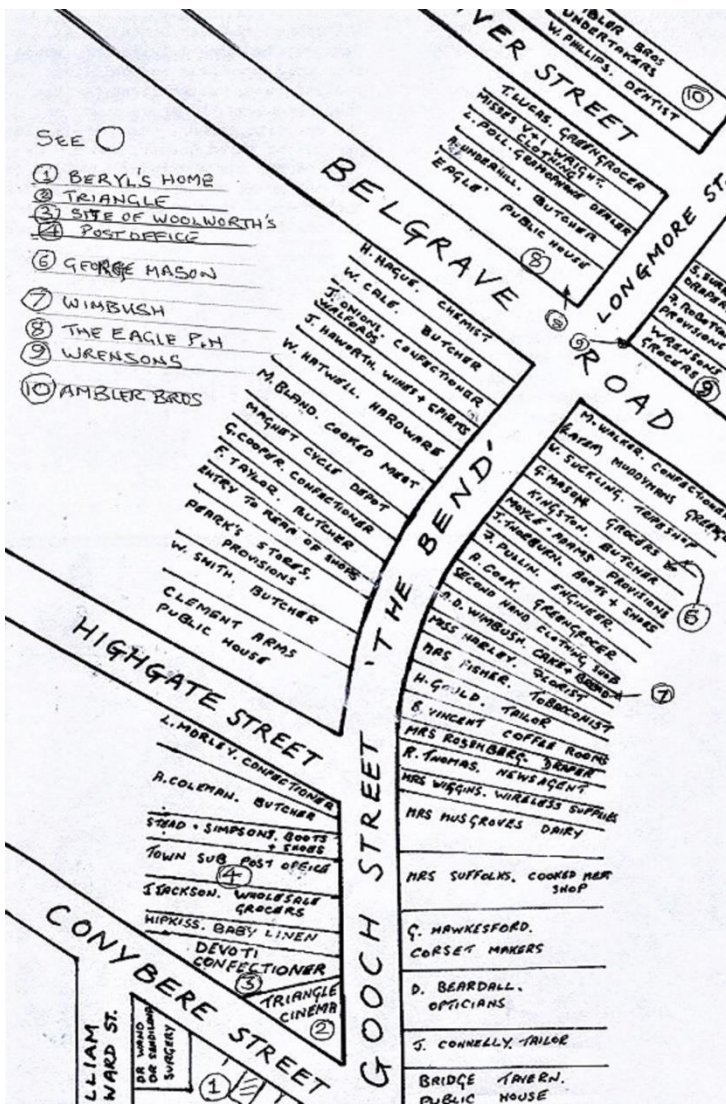
6, The George Mason Shop.

7, Wimbush Bakery & Cake Store

8, The Eagle PH, across Belgrave Rd on the corner with Longmore.

9, On the opposite corner, is Wrensons.

10, Ambler Bros Funeral Directors also marked on 2nd map above near River St.



Looking back at the 2nd of the two maps, Longmore Street is featured. Here we'll find the Eagle pub (Top Left), with Ambler Bros Funeral Directors, and opposite them house No 29, June's house (1/29) backed onto the River Rea. Bottom right (same map), the Luxor Cinema. Beryl thought of the Luxor as 'posh', compared with the Triangle.

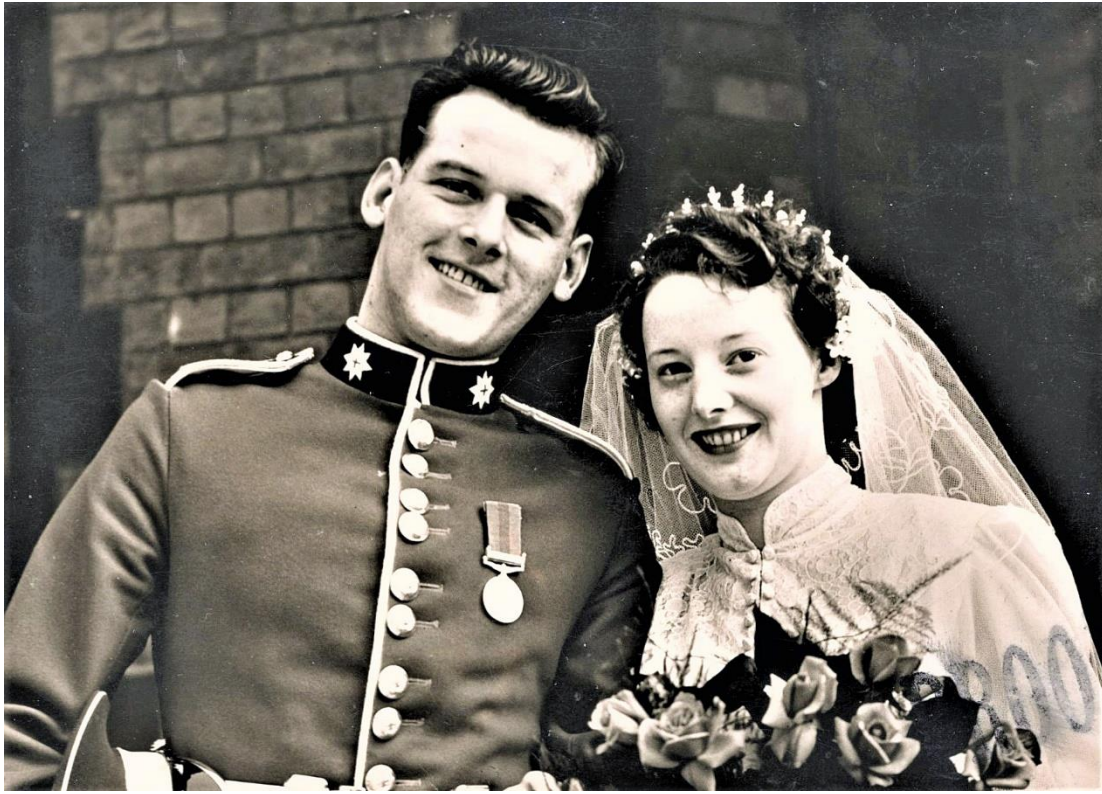
At some point, Beryl had left the job in Hockley and found herself in the newly opened branch of Woolworth's in Gooch St. The company having taken the premises immediately behind the



Triangle, there was a small back door entrance to the shop in Conybere St opposite No10, Beryl could virtually fall out of bed and roll into 'Woollies'.

Gooch Street's F. W. Woolworths branch (centre). The white building is the Triangle and Conybere St is beyond (far left).

Her working at Woollies brought a life-changing moment when her workmate Pat Murphy, suggested to Beryl that she write to her brother, Eric who was in the Army. She did write, love blossomed, and they married in 1952.



Photos: Beryl marries her soldier boyfriend, and they had two children, Stephen, and Mark (school photo). Mrs Marney, the neighbour who played the piano in the Triangle, relaxes with Mark in the backyards of No's 10 & 12 Conybere St. Mark tells us, it was possible to see the River Rea over the rear wall of their property. Our maps show that Beryl and June had that in common.



Prior to the floods of 1927, the Rea had been culverted only in part. The Digbeth/Deritend area had been done in the 1890s likely to prevent flooding of the factories of the Industrial Revolution. The rest of the river would have looked like your normal countryside river meandering through pastureland. The floods brought chaos to Birmingham and further culverting of the Rea in the 1930s.

The Rea (2020), lowered and culverted, is viewed from the bridge on Balsall Heath Rd at the site of the former Luxor Cinema.

Beryl and Eric's boys attended the Belgrave (formerly Mary Street School) with Stephen (Steve) going on to Moseley Art School and University. Young brother Mark attended Wheeler's Lane Sec Mod, Kings Heath, going on to a career in construction becoming a Health & Safety Advisor on

Building Works. Steve's education led to him living and working in Ireland as a Graphics Designer for the Belfast Telegraph.

Mary St school later renamed 'Belgrave', fell to the bulldozer in the demolition clearance of Balsall Heath.

A replacement school, Heath Mount Primary, was built nearby on Knutsford St. Almost opposite the original school buildings.



By this time, Beryl, having been employed at the Belgrave, moved on to the new school as a teacher's assistant, working with Mrs Bron Salway. Beryl and Bron were to have a reunion decades after their retirement.

The clearance of BH also encompassed the family home in Conybere St, it was time to leave and find a new place to live. They found it a few miles away in Kings Heath.

It was 1967, the new house in

Nutgrove Close was just a ten-minute walk to the High Street, and only 2 years old. Eric and Beryl had been paying a rent of something like 30 shillings (£1.50) a week. The new house was £3.00 per week. Having been in Nutgrove for over 50 years, Beryl has her memories of this house too. There was a farm where the local Community hall is now, and a reminder of BH days with a "Davenports Beer at Home" making deliveries around her new home. And found one of her new neighbours had worked in the post office in Gooch St. She got a new job in a Laundrette on Kings Heath High St where she and her workmates Janice and Ilse cleaned the shirts of the UB40 group. Her beloved Eric died in 2018 after 66 years of marriage. Until very recently she happily and skilfully cared for her garden. A fall and an operation have meant she is not as mobile as she was, but is, thankfully on the mend and with help attending coffee mornings!

Many thanks to Beryl and her sons Mark and Steve for their extensive help in providing photographs and information (with a lot of patience) needed to tell this story. Also, to Beryl's friend Sam Cornwell for his research and written contributions. It is very much appreciated. JF

Postscript:

Beryl's story, your writer has realised in retrospect, has been written to conjure the 'feel' of the day, age, and environment of Beryl's youth. In our archives at the society, we have an old project

called 'The Journey to Balsall Heath'. This begins with thinking of our youthful time, our roots, and how our families came here. But first and last, the pictures in our heads of the places, houses, buildings, shops, and people and the atmospheric lighting of our young days perpetuate an inward reflective smile. When that happens, we have completed the journey to BH.



Beryl reflects on her 90 years with a smile.

And meets once again her Heath Mount Primary School colleague Bron Salway. August 2022.



Dad, Eric's driving licence for years 1959 – 62.

Ambler Brothers Funeral Directors in Longmore St 1961. They, like Eric & Beryl, moved out to Kings Heath in 1967.



Young Mark Murphy in the backyard of No 10 Circa 1960-1



In Memoriam. Dr. Dick Atkinson.OBE



It is with great sadness that we report the death of Dick Atkinson, who founded St Paul's Trust in Balsall Heath together with Anita Halliday.

He devoted his life to the area, starting with a school in a terrace house from which the Trust developed to become a major local charity.

Moving on to set up Balsall Heath Forum. he campaigned tirelessly for the transformation of the neighbourhood with innovative ideas, strong connections and many books.

He was also a strong supporter of the Local History Society and will be remembered by many of us. Our condolences go to the family.

The funeral will be held on Thursday April 6th at 12 noon, at: Chester Crematorium, Blacon Avenue, Chester CH1 5BB

Val Hart

The future of Moseley Road Baths and Library

Moseley Road Baths and Balsall Heath Library have been working together to draw up plans to restore and develop both of these beautiful buildings as community spaces thanks to generous funding by Birmingham City Council, Government Levelling Up Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund and other similar bodies. The Baths and Library are set to undergo a major £32.5m restoration project that will see swimming, health and well-being placed at the heart of the plans.

The developer for this project will be Donald Insall Associates and there is a pdf version of the current plan available at <https://www.donaldinsallassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Moseley-Road-Baths-and-Library-plans-and-public-consultation.pdf>

For the moment there is a form for feedback available at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfza8aHS7aNAU5D2ryZvWmccjP1ESVQdisccqAOnVWT-MUug/viewform>

If you want to give more detailed feedback email Birmingham@insall-architects.co.uk and include the name Moseley Road Baths and/or Library in the title.

The plan includes more offices and a more accessible open space in the baths, a connecting door to the library and a second floor in the library. Some of this plan will mean that parts of the building (particularly the Library) will have to close for at least 9 months.

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