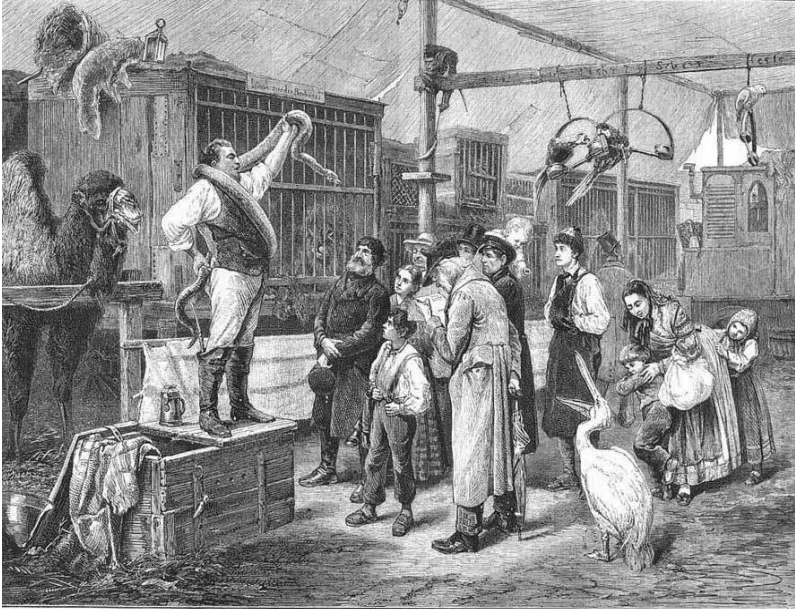


Balsall Heath's Zoo. Sherbourne Road, 1873 to 1876

The Victorians were fascinated by wild animals and zoological gardens. Regents Park Zoo in London opened in 1828 but only opened to the public from 1847. Travelling menageries and circus acts were also popular.



A TRAVELLING MENAGERIE
FROM THE PICTURE BY PAUL BERRIDGE

Birmingham's first zoo arrived when the Midland Zoological gardens were opened with great acclaim in May 1873 by Morris Roberts, an ex prize-fighter. A celebratory dinner was held, attended by members of the Local Board of Health. The admission price was to be 3d but children attending with their teachers would be admitted for one penny each while children from the asylum and charity schools would be let in free of charge.

The Zoo was at The Sherbourne Hotel which had a range of public venues including grounds which ran through to Balsall Heath Road. Soon there were dances advertised for every Monday and various other concerts and events.

On 10 May The Birmingham Post reported: "A large quadrangular building has been fitted with roomy cages for the accommodation of the larger animals.... and In the centre of the gardens a bear pit has been built, and there a good tempered "bruin" amuses himself by climbing a tall poll and' by other pranks."

By the end of May there was an extensive range of animals including: "a splendid Pair of African LIONS, a very fine Pair of LEOPARDS. a HYENA, three BEARS, a Blue-faced GORILLA, twelve Baboons,. a choice display of Gold and Silver PHEASANTS. KANGAROOS, and a wonderful CHIMPANZEE. Feeding-time: Weekdays 4.30: Sundays,6.30.

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

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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 April 27th 2023

Richard Churchley A Century of Popular Songs 1860s -1960

Thursday May 25th 2023

Malcolm Hall 'La Belle Epoque'

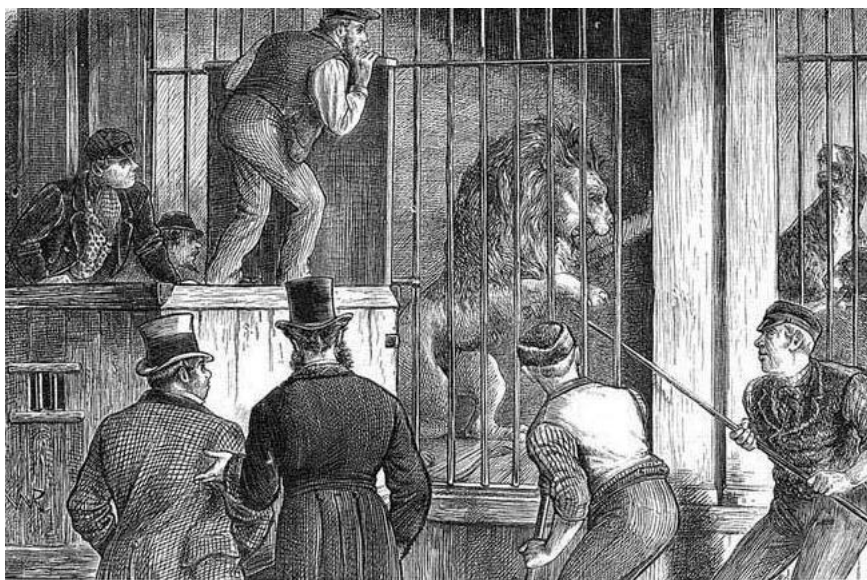
This talk examines the many inventions, improvements, and lifestyle changes that occurred in the 19th Century

Advertisements also claimed; "No disagreeable smell".

The zoo was clearly a popular attraction but the local residents had some concerns.

In January 1874 Morris Roberts applied for a licence to slaughter horses on the premises but this was opposed by 115 residents and rejected. Obviously it must have been a challenge to provide food. The following year the press carried advertisements: "Wanted. Old and lame horses for food for wild beasts. Best prices paid." However, worse was to follow when a lion escaped its cage.

LION AT LARGE

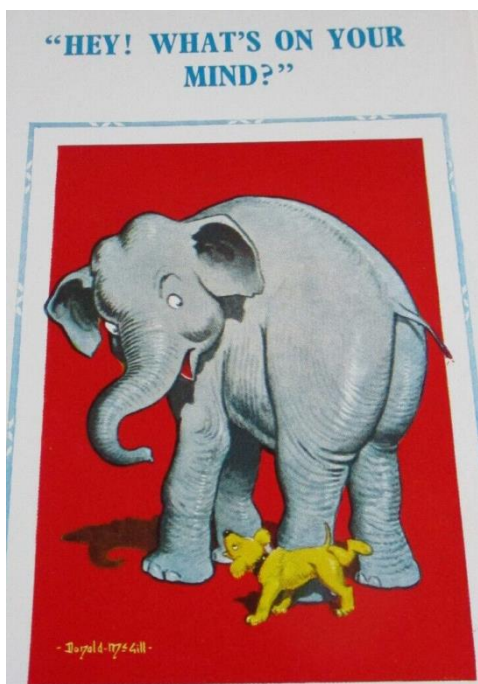


CATCHING THE LION

(Illustration from *The Graphic* newspaper, not specific to Balsall Heath)

The incident in 1875 was described by Morris Roberts.

"On Wednesday, during my absence, the keeper of my menagerie, contrary to my instructions, attempted to enter the lion's cage, On its being opened, as the keeper was about to step inside, the lion playfully pushed his head against the keeper, sending him backwards out through the door, the lion falling on the outside the cage . The keeper got up, and the lion stood by him quite harmless.



Of course all the visitors at once left the area The keeper then brushed the lion, a process which the animal is very fond of ; he then walked up and down the menagerie, the lion following by his side in a most tractable manner. The keeper then got on the roof of the menagerie, took a few slates off, tied a piece of string to the door of the cage, which is self-locking, then let a piece of meat down into the cage. As soon as the lion saw it, he sprang into his cage and seized the meat; the door was pulled to by means of the string and Mr Leo was secured in thirty three minutes."

A further incident occurred in August that year involving a fight between a mastiff dog and a lion and so when an elephant escaped in February 1876, it seemed the last straw for local people. The Birmingham Daily Mail published an ironical report.

“ Mr Morris Roberts is more liberal than the general run of menagerie proprietor, for he occasionally allows his wild beasts to exhibit themselves to the public for nothing. Some time ago, it may lie remembered, a lion escaped from the place in Sherbourne Road which, by figure of speech, is called the Zoological Gardens and on Monday morning the elephant was found wandering about at his own sweet will.

Although none of the animals are of very ferocious appearance. still the inhabitants of the neighbourhood may be excused if they object to the existence a menagerie over which there is, evidently, not the most careful supervision. A hungry bear, for instance —and we are permitted to entertain the possibility that even the Balsall Heath bears are occasionally hungry—would not be a welcome visitor at one’s house ; and even a dwarf elephant, or a lion more terrified than terrifying, is not the companion one would choose for tete-a-tete.”

Morris Roberts was so infuriated by this that he sued the newspaper for libel. He claimed that

The article had placed him in such a position that his neighbours and people who met him in the street spat in his face. He was held up by this paper to scorn and contempt, so that men women, and children shunned him; and he was compelled to sell his grounds. The defence argued it was all just a publicity stunt. Morris Roberts lost the case and closed his zoo. In April 1876 the ironwork bars from the wild beast dens were being sold off as well as the animals themselves. A sad end to an exciting enterprise.

Val Hart

Launch of “The Home Child”, a novel in verse by Liz Berry.

The story of Eliza Showell, a Middlemore Child.

The Launch, held at Queensbridge School, on April 20th, attracted an audience of over 100 people. After an introductory discussion, Liz Berry read a selection of poems from her book and then there were questions from the audience which were responded to by Liz herself and Val Hart from our Society. The Lost Children touring Exhibition was also on display and received a lot of attention.



Many thanks to the Heath Bookshop from Kings Heath, who organised the event.



Inspired by the presentation ‘Pubs with no Beer’ given to Balsall Heath Local History Society.

The Cannon Hill Hotel & Pub. A Memory

A memory and a short, varied history of this imposing building. Many times, in the long summers of our youth, we lads would pass this pub on our way to Calthorpe Park with our red plastic ball ready to play football until it was dark.

Then in the late 50s that red ball represented

the technology of the day! Having gathered in Mary St, we made our way into Edward Rd where there were a number of pubs including the Cannon Hill. At the junction with Edward, we would see the stand-out Coach & Horses building, it was like a fortress guarding the gateway to the southern section of Mary St. (see map, lower middle-right). Before we turned away to the right and west down Edward Rd, we glimpsed the painted Eagle on the Gable End wall of the pub, on the other side of Mary St (extreme bottom right of map).



We needed to cross over Lincoln Street hardly noticing the pub on the corner with Edward Rd, it was The Woodman (P.H. map centre).

This one is etched in your writer's memory as it was a favourite watering hole of an uncle of ours. We are delighted to have found a picture of The

Woodman online via 'Lost Pubs in Birmingham' (B12 : Balsall Heath).



Along with this photo a member of the family who had run the Woodman, Wendy Woodings (Can't help but wonder if the lady's surname is just a co-incidence), wrote "My mom and dad were the proprietors of the pub for the last six years of its opening (1971-7), I lived there with my sister and brother. We watched it being bulldozed in the summer of 1977."

From there it is only a hundred yards to be in what seemed like an open space outside the Cannon Hill pub. Its very name and that of the road opposite announces that the famous park (to Brummies' at least) is not far away. The building is the centrepiece of a spacious 5-way junction of Edward, Court, Jakeman and Cannon Hill Roads. What then of the history of the Cannon Hill Hotel & Pub? Well lots, but it wasn't bulldozed. Which made it a candidate for the 'Pubs with no Beer' project. In its heyday, it was part of the 'Ansell's' chain of pubs.



Ansell's was founded by hop merchant and maltster Joseph Ansell in 1858 at Aston Cross, he was later joined by his son William in partnership and from 1877 the company was known as Joseph Ansell & Sons. It became a registered company called Ansell's Brewery Ltd in 1901 and was valued at over £750.000 including 388 licensed houses.

Ansell's grew by taking over a number of smaller local brewers, including Holt's Brewery with another 250 licensed houses. Holt's logo, a red squirrel in the side view was adopted by Ansell's to identify its own beers.

In 1961 Ansell's merged with Taylor Walker & Co and Ind. Coope & Co to form Allied Breweries. During the 1960s and 70s, the brewery was prone to strike action by its workers and was struggling to remain profitable. Further industrial action in 1981 led to the company closing the brewery and 700 jobs were lost.



The Cannon Hill was not demolished, instead, became 'spare' and abandoned.

Far left, this once proud hotel & inn is home for fly posters.

Near right, the weeds still show a lack of love and care. But a new fixed notice announces future plans for the building.



“Acquired By South Birmingham College on Behalf of the community of Balsall Heath”.

My thoughts on the wording “ on behalf of the community” had the most value in the fact that the building was going to be used again and not allowed to fall into disrepair and become an eyesore.

This notice suggested the use would be education and that’s how it turned out. It has been a Women’s Academy and a 6th-form girls’ school. In the present day (2022/3) it is the ‘Marwa Institute’ teaching the Qur’an.

That last fact also informs us of all of the changes we have seen over the decades beyond the physical and environmental, there are immense social changes in the mix of people living and working in Balsall Heath. It’s called diversity and it is here to stay. Pundits who comment on this social ‘togetherness’ here, seem to do it with a sense of awe as though the fact needs some sort of explanation. I have learned that the explanation is simple, for those of us that have been here long enough Balsall Heath is collectively ‘our’ place.

All that was so far into the future, and we lads with a ball knew little enough about the world that surrounded us then let alone what the future held. We were approaching our destination of Calthorpe Park with the large Baptist church on the corner of Harbury Rd. Here we had a choice of entering the park by way of the corner gate at Cheddar Rd or continuing down Edward to the side gate (opposite Constance Rd) leading directly to the grassed areas where we intended to kick that ball about. If we had entered by way of the Cheddar Rd gate, we would cross the River Rea inside the park over the white-coloured concrete bridge.

From there the expanse of green could be seen inviting us to put down our goalposts of jackets and pullovers and to run and run.



J.F.

Do you remember this?

A Balsall Heath Flyover!

In March 1988 proposals were made for a new route into the city involving a tunnel under Kings Heath and a huge flyover to run from Moseley to the junction with the new road, Haden Way, in Balsall Heath which had been built in 1982. It involved the demolition of 135 houses and was likely to cost £83 million.

The Heathan commented, "The old Moseley Road was once a thriving economic, educational, recreational and social focal point of the whole community. It was a bustling hub of activity around which industry, enterprise and social life turned. Then the planners struck. A new link road was built from the Library to Belgrave Road. 110 houses, 5 businesses, a doctor's surgery and the oldest public building in Balsall Heath, were all bulldozed. Lloyds Bank and a lot of shops and smaller businesses closed."

There was massive opposition and a campaign was launched, reported in The Heathan community newspaper. Over 1000 people packed a meeting at Queensbridge School at the end of March with a lot more unable to get in. The campaign eventually succeeded and the plans were dropped - just before the local election in May.

Thanks to Sam Cornwell for reminding us of all this.

Val Hart

The idea behind all this was that the M40 was supposed to be coming this way to connect Birmingham to Oxford and the south coast and take some pressure off the M1 and, obviously, it would need to come into Birmingham somewhere. Various organisations were trying to capitalise on this.

Friends of the Earth and the Green Party were opposed to the motorway anyway. They had already had some success with the M40 at Otmoor and were trying for more with the road coming into Birmingham.

It was said that Birmingham city council were trying to get as much money as possible out of the national government by planning something outrageously expensive. It was also said that the plan was intended to outrage people so that the city could come up with something less awful and get it through easily. The plan was never an official council plan but had been put together by engineers trying to work out what to do with the traffic from the M40.

There were also rumours that the plan had come from a planning department that had formerly been part of the West Midlands Metropolitan District but with the government's dissolution of the WMDC wasn't really responsible to any part of government.

Whatever the reason, the plan was scrapped. The M40 stopped outside of Warwick and joined the M42 which formed the southern section of the ring of motorways around Birmingham connecting the M5 in the west, the M6 in the east and, eventually, the M1.

So what happened to all that traffic? Maybe they used the M6 toll. Maybe they just didn't come to Birmingham. It's even possible they just turned around and went to Bristol (on the M5).

