



Birmingham Heritage Week

The Society is arranging a series of events. All are free and listed on the website with no booking needed :

1. **The Lost Children Touring Exhibition** will be on display at The Gap Café at the Old Print Works, Moseley Rd, 10 to 3 on Sept 8th, 9th and 13th to 16th. Then at St Paul's Venture, Malvern St. on Sept 17th 11 to 4
2. **A Screening of the film of The Lost Children** play, on Sept 17th at St Paul's Venture at 11.30.
3. **An Exhibition of Balsall Heath's History** . From 11 to 4 on Sept 17th at St Paul's Venture
4. **A talk about the History of Balsall Heath** at 2.30 at St Paul's Venture

These other events may be of particular interest:

- **An Exhibition about Victorian Moseley**, 10 am to 4.30 pm at the Hive, Alcester Rd, Moseley, **with a Book Launch and talk by Jan Berry at 2.30**
- **Moseley Dove Cote and Icehouse** can be visited on 16th & 17th Sept, 11 to 1 & 2 to 5.
- **St Alban's Church, Conybere St**, open most days 11.30 to 5.30
- **A Play at the MAC about Louisa Ryland**. Sept 14th -17th
- **"City on Screen" a documentary film on cinema in Birmingham** including Oscar Deutsch & Michael Balcon runs at the Mockingbird . Sept 16th
- **Birmingham History Theatre presents "A Workers Paradise"** at Bournville - Sept 9th

There is a full programme of events for the week. Many of them you will need to book places for, some will want payment. The full details are available here.
<https://birminghamheritageweek.co.uk/>

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

AUGUST 2023



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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 are: £1 for members and £3 for visitors. Meetings are held at St Paul's Venture, Malvern Street at 11:30 a.m. Refreshments will be served from 11 a.m to 11:20 a.m.

Coming soon

Next meeting will be the AGM on 28th September. This will be the last meeting to be held at 7pm for 7:30pm

Next important milestone in the landmark project to restore Moseley Road Baths.



On 2 October 2023 Moseley Road Baths will close for swimming and all other activities as the next phase of work to the building starts; this work is expected to be completed in Spring 2025. The library will close on Sept 30th for 15 months.

The Moseley Road Baths Community Interest Company report that the works include major roof repairs, the installation of a new renewable air source heat pump to replace the steam boilers, installation of level access ramps, a new café space in the 'second-class' slipper baths, reinforcement works to the basement, and the remodelling of Balsall Heath library, including the introduction of a mezzanine floor which will double the space for library users. The Gala Pool is not included in this phase of development but there is an ongoing plan to restore it to its former glory in the next phase after Spring 2025.

The Company say, "To our staff, volunteers, neighbours, funders and supporters we extend a huge thank you. The restoration of the Baths has come out of decades of campaigning, activism and enthusiasm from our brilliant local Balsall Heath community and especially the Friends of Moseley Road Baths, combined with our brilliant coalition of partners - Birmingham City Council, the National Trust, World Monuments Fund and Historic England.

Together, the Baths and Library are a vital part of Balsall Heath life, serving a brilliant local community, and bringing people together in safe, welcoming spaces that offer activities that benefit health and wellbeing. Their Grade II* listing means that they are among the most important historic buildings in Birmingham, with international significance."

Val Hart

BOOK LAUNCH - Keeping up appearances in Victorian Moseley

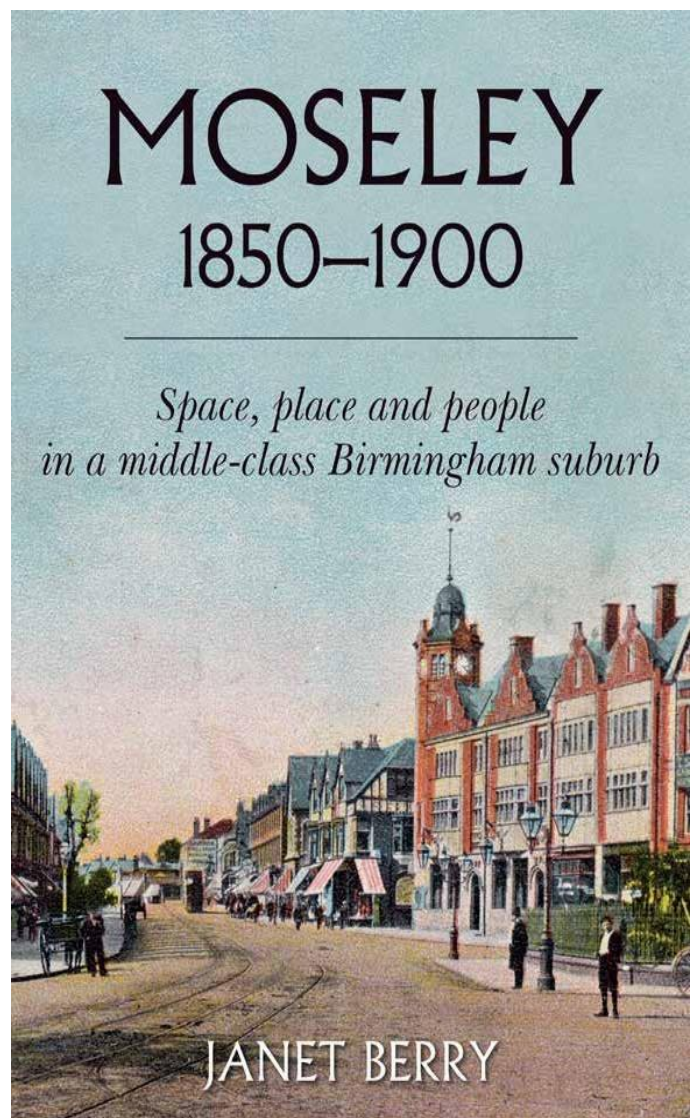
Saturday 16th September 2023. 10.00 am – 4.30 pm

at The Moseley Hive, 93 Alcester Rd, Birmingham B13 8DD

This is a special event with a dual purpose – as a book launch for Janet Berry's new book **"Moseley 1850 – 1900: Space, place and people in a middle-class Birmingham suburb"** and as an opportunity to celebrate the enormous contribution Janet Berry has made over more than fifty years by researching, recording and publicising the history and heritage of Moseley. Janet has lived in Moseley since 1968 and has been an active member of the Moseley Society and of its History Group in particular. In 2012, she took the lead in bidding for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and successfully won a grant of £25,000 to help develop the Society's Local History Archives and Resource base (known as 'The Collection'). She led the subsequent project which produced a large archive of documents, artefacts, displays and booklets backed up by a substantial website, supporting educational sessions for local schools together with local talks, walks and workshops. She was a well-known figure at local history fairs in Moseley and beyond. She will be greatly missed when she leaves Moseley this summer to live closer to her family.

Janet Berry has a doctorate from the University of Birmingham for which her thesis was a study of Moseley's development. This led her to produce this book embodying much of her earlier research.

Copies of the book will be available to buy on the day at the special discounted price of £12.50 (compared with a normal retail price of £16.99)





The Picture of a Tram on the Moseley Road in 1941 explained.

Yes, if you have seen this picture before. It was in this Gazette in April and May last year (2022), and it gave us a few problems. Why is it on the wrong side of the road going the wrong way? We can see that it is traveling towards us and therefore should be on the left side of the road like the car in the picture. We had a few theories mainly around the fact it was wartime and routes were changed to suit the circumstances at the time, and that was not that far away from the truth.

Since then, one of our eagle-eyed members spotted this same picture in a book dedicated to the work of William Arthur Camwell. Cam as he was known, was a banker by profession, and in the Second World War served with the RAF, retiring with the rank of squadron leader. He also had a big interest in rail transport, taking a camera with him whenever there was an opportunity to record this form of transport in service. The book *Birmingham in the Electric Tramway Era* has this photo with the text “A wartime service temporarily diverted from its normal route owing to air raid damage. The photo is dated 10th June 1941.

If *any* picture paints a thousand words surely this is one. Britain has been at war for 18 months, bombs have been dropping from the sky, and we are informed the train track has been damaged. The photo-text continues “*Note the wartime emergency features on the tram—headlamp black-out mask, white painted fender, and saloon windows protected by anti-blast mesh glued on*”. And yet life goes on. The cinema is open. The gentleman on the footpath needs crutches to complete his mission. A girl gets ready to mount her bike after the tram has passed. Three boys on the upper deck of the tram have spotted our photographer ‘Cam’, he’s taking *their* photo and one of them gives him the thumbs-up. JF.

Photo Bonus

When we first used this photo in your Gazette we were strong on the location, pointing out the Imperial Cinema and looking south passed the Congregational Church with its twin peaks. This second (Postcard) picture looks north from the same location. The Moseley Road Baths are just 3

years old (behind the trams and trees). The New Inn is prominent on the left, while the Imperial Cinema is still 4 years away. It is 1910.



27. Moseley Road, with car no. 137 stopped while two passengers have to walk to the middle of the road to get on – one of the dangers of tram travel! On the lamp-post is the small sign *"all cars stop here"*. The destination board displays Kings Heath via Bradford Street, together with a destination letter 'M'. The tram behind has 'B' for Balsall Heath. This photographic card dates from about 1910.

A Tribute to Dr.Dick Atkinson, O.B.E. Founder of St Paul's Trust



Dick was an extraordinary man who devoted his life to Balsall Heath. A controversial figure, he never held back in tackling issues affecting the neighbourhood. To many residents he was a hero; to the City Council he was often seen as an enemy. He campaigned tirelessly over the years and won support from many national politicians while also finding the time to write a collection of books, in which he explained and discussed the significance of how Balsall Heath had developed and urged a model of bottom-up neighbourhood management.

How did Dick arrive in Balsall Heath?

Dick, originally from Yorkshire, pursued an academic career but a major row erupted in 1971 when he was offered a Sociology Lectureship in Birmingham. This was vetoed by the University

hierarchy because of his previous support for student protest in 1968/69 while employed as a temporary Lecturer. Anita Halliday was deeply involved in defence of the appointment as she and her colleagues in the Sociology Department regarded it as an attack on academic freedom as did the Students Union.

Dick then chose a different life, leaving the University to respond to calls from the multiply deprived community of Balsall Heath.

This is how Dick described it in an interview in 2015.

“A couple of people from Balsall Heath came to the university and said, ‘We know a bit about what has been going on, but actually... Balsall Heath is in a terrible state, we need a bit of help. Anyone here interested in helping us?’ As a sociologist I am supposed to be interested in society so I came and had a look, did one or two things, and before too long thought actually why am I doing sociology in the ivory tower, it would be much more interesting to get stuck into Balsall Heath and see whether I can be of any use there.” Anita Halliday and Mike Dunkley from the Sociology Department accompanied Dick to work in Balsall Heath.

What was Balsall Heath like in 1970?

The area was bombed heavily in the Second World War and priority for rebuilding went to the city centre. The 1950s & 60s saw a continuing decline. Houses were decaying, overcrowded; unemployment was high; educational attainment was low. *The photo to the right shows Highgate Road in 1977.*



Many people moved out of the area and their place was taken by newcomers from the West Indies, Africa and the Indian sub-continent. The newcomers were crammed into substandard housing. Crime increased and prostitution spread until by 1980 over 450 prostitutes dominated the street corner. Balsall Heath's name became associated with blight, decay & depression.

Some local residents had, however, got together to form the Balsall Heath Community Association and they did manage to get a piece of a bomb peck in Malvern Street to found an Adventure Playground for kids with a paid playleader, Ray Wills. There was also a playgroup which started in the old St Paul's Church Hall.

How did St Paul's School start?

Increasing numbers of teenagers were hanging around during the day at the Playground as they were excluded from school with no alternative provision made for them or they had refused to attend. It was to provide education for these young people that in 1972 Dick and Anita established a small independent school with 5 pupils in a derelict terrace house. They both decided to abandon their academic careers and commit their lives to Balsall Heath. The pupils were young people who had given up on school and the schools had given up on them. Anita later commented,

"Many of our pupils, all from Balsall Heath, were crushed by broken families, rotten slum living conditions and depression. They felt themselves failures with no hope of a future career as well as outsiders because they had been rejected by their original schools."



This photo shows most of the pupils and a few staff in 1976.

The School was registered as an Independent School in 1973 with 3 teachers and five pupils. I joined the School as a teacher in 1975. My English classroom was the former upstairs bedroom of one of the houses, complete with a sagging ceiling which eventually collapsed.



Funding was very difficult and the whole project ran on a shoestring budget, with continual fundraising events of all kinds, in addition to events for the local community: jumble sales, discos, children's parties... *The photo shows a Christmas party at the Nursery, with Dick standing at top left.*

An early feature of the school was the idea to expand pupils' horizons by taking them on trips out of Birmingham and the Field Trips became a significant element in the educational programme while the Nursery also took their children on residential trips and the Venture organised family trips.

When Anita Halliday took over from Dick as Head Teacher in 1977 he embarked on a mission to improve the whole area. This was also the year of the first Balsall Heath Carnival, which flourished exuberantly for many years.



Scout band leading the Carnival procession. 1980

When did The Heathan Newspaper start?



CAN WE SAVE ST. PAUL'S NURSERY?

THE CHURCH EVICTS THE CHILDREN

Many people will know already that there is a danger that the Nursery in St. Paul's is at risk. The Nursery has been running for three years and has been a great success. The building was bought by the Church of England and used to be the church hall for St. Paul's Church. Since the Nursery started it has been re-decorated and improved, with lots of equipment and special facilities for the children. The Church of England has now decided to sell the hall and has given the Nursery notice to leave by July 1st. In fact the children are to go to the school for their summer holidays.

No Sale - So Far

In fact the Church has been refused planning permission by the Council. The Church is now in a difficult position. It is difficult to find a buyer for the hall. The Council refused permission because they said the hall should be used to serve the local community. This seems a clear enough indication that the Nursery which helps to meet one of the greatest local needs has a strong claim to stay put. Why does the Church with all its money of course, want to sell the hall?

where will they go - if we don't?



Some of the children who attend St. Paul's Nursery sent to this message before they broke up for their holidays. They are standing outside the front of the nursery building.

The Playgroup in St Paul's Church Hall had by 1973 developed into a Nursery offering longer hours to provide for working parents but that year faced a crisis when the church decided to sell the property and applied for planning permission for commercial development. It was partly in response to this that the newspaper was founded. The Nursery moved out to temporary accommodation at Tindal St School and the local Councillors received over 200 letters of protest. The council gave in and decided to buy the hall for the Nursery and general community use so it was an early win for The Heathan as well as the Nursery. At first we sold The Heathan door to door, but in later years it was distributed through community outlets. It finished in 2015 with issue 334.

Urban Renewal

Meanwhile the City Council embarked on a programme of Urban Renewal, which to many residents felt like a return to the war years.



Malvern St before the Farm was built



Mary St ready for demolition 1970

Much of the area to the west of the Moseley Road was demolished and rebuilt. To some extent the roads themselves changed shape. Green spaces were created and a new major thoroughfare, Belgrave Middleway, but the old community of the Heath was dispersed and much was lost.

Those of us working in the area did all we could to keep the sense of Balsall Heath's identity alive. Dick was at the forefront of all this, seeking every means to bring the neighbourhood together and to foster community spirit.

When was St Paul's Trust founded?

In 1980, after much discussion, the three independent organisations, Adventure Playground, Nursery and School, came together to form St Paul's Project. They recognised they had a common mission to work for better education and leisure provision, and opportunities for children and young people. 1980 was also a landmark year as it saw the opening of The Balsall Heath City Farm, born from an idea of Dick's, and a royal visit to St Paul's Project by Prince Charles. More success followed. In 1982 the School moved in to the old Clifton Infants School in Hertford Street and in 1983 the new Venture building opened. After years of precarious funding The School was awarded Grant Maintained status in 1997, thanks to Dick's efforts.

When did Balsall Heath Forum start?



Dick left St Paul's in 1992 and Anita replaced him as Project Director. Dick believed strongly that the only way forward for Balsall Heath was the empowerment of residents, so Balsall Heath Forum was born. It grew rapidly with a host of Residents' Groups, local volunteers, huge community gatherings, an Executive Committee elected by local residents and a team of employed staff.

Much of the area had improved but one aspect in particular, grew ever worse- prostitution and associated crime. The Streetwatch campaign led by the Forum and local residents succeeded in ending this but it was controversial and much criticised. However, it transformed Balsall Heath.

The 21st century

During his years at the Forum, Dick gained much attention and support. Prime Minister David Cameron himself came to stay and based many of his Big Society ideas on what he saw and heard. Another significant supporter was David Blunkett. Government funding supported some new initiatives and Balsall Heath became a Guide Neighbourhood, showing others a path forward.

A positive and long term legacy is The Neighbourhood Development Plan, achieved in 2015. Anita Halliday commented in 2013,

" He enabled many people and organisations to learn about things that will make a difference and in many cases given them the confidence to put this learning to good use."

Dick retired in 2014 and it is sad to say that the Forum has now gone but proposals have been made for a Neighbourhood Council so Dick's work is still bearing fruit. St Paul's Community Development Trust is also continuing and the City Farm thrives. The daffodils which Dick planted on the embankment in 1974 still come up every year. At the time he was arrested for trespass! Are they a symbol of hope and resilience?

Val Hart

Earlswood Village Museum, Shutt Lane. B94 6BZ



I recently went to visit this fascinating collection which is housed at the back of Earlswood Village Hall. It is well worth a visit.

Opening dates: Saturdays Sept 2nd & October 14th from 2.30 to 4.30 pm.

Val Hart



I have just finished the Society's accounts for 2022 to 2023 and see that we have raised £56 from Easy Fundraising. Please can you sign up? Whenever you buy anything online, Easy Fundraising will make a donation to the Society. It is easy to sign up and recommended by BVSC and many others. They give donations on over 4000 retailers as well as insurance companies and will even include online food shopping.

This is the link: <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/balsallheathlhs/>

Val Hart



News: Saif Hardware is closed

We have learned that Saif Hardware Shop formally known as Sandbrooks has closed for good. The shop on the Corner of Homer St is one of the longest-established businesses in Balsall Heath with its roots in the early 20th Century.

We understand that it will be absorbed by the business next door, Sheereen Kadah, a Bali Restaurant, Sweet Shop, and Takeaway. The restaurant will extend through into the former DIY shop.

The Balsall Heath Local History Society is Registered Charity No. 1101945
The Old Print Works, 498-506 Moseley Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12 9AH