

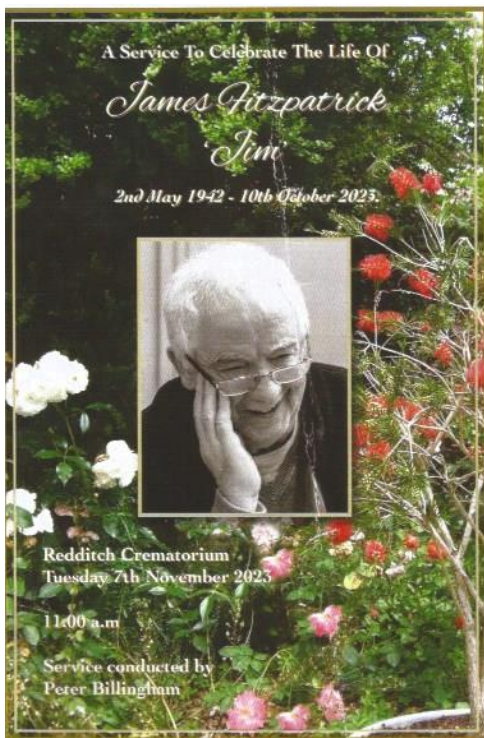
The next meeting will be on Monday Dec 11th 10.45 for an 11.15 start

Corinne Brazier | Heritage Manager West Midlands Police will speak about **Rogues, Villains and Peaky Blinders**

The first meeting of 2024 will be on Monday, Jan 29th when the speaker will be Val Hart, on Workplaces of Balsall Heath. 1730 to 2000

Jim Fitzpatrick's Funeral

The funeral on November 7th was a memorable occasion, attended by well over 100 people. Redditch Crematorium was packed, with many people standing as all the seats were occupied. Over twenty members of the History Society and Theatre Company attended.



The Reception afterwards at The Rocklands Club, Redditch, was also thronged with people. I was asked to say a few words and so I told everyone about Jim's tireless energy in working for the Society as well as his long commitment to the Theatre Company, which he originally joined as a helper in moving scenery on stage. I emphasised how much we all valued him and how much he

will be missed.

The History Society was named as the charity for people to donate to, in memory of Jim We are aiming to set up a particular project in his memory.

Donations can be made via the Donate button on the website: www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

Val Hart

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

NOVEMBER 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

Monday 11th December 11 am for 11.30 am start. Corinne Brazier | Heritage Manager West Midlands Police Rogues, Villains and Peaky Blinders



Balsall Heath. A Great Neighbourhood

On a rainy day in September, I took three visitors from **the Academy of Urbanism** for a walk across Balsall Heath. They were judges for the Academy's annual awards programme. Balsall Heath is one of three places across the UK that it has shortlisted for one of the awards, that for Great Neighbourhood. Founded in 2006, the Academy of Urbanism is a national membership body that is "supporting people and organisations to deliver and sustain great towns and cities".

I planned the three-hour visit to show them places, and to introduce people, to demonstrate the initiative and enterprise that exists in Balsall Heath. We started in Ladypool Road, rather quiet at 11.00am. I told the visitors about the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan, the first to be made in Birmingham. We walked to St Paul's Community Development Trust, where its CEO Lisa Martinali showed the visitors its urban farm, and told them about its school, its nursery and other enterprises. Habib Rahman described the current proposal for a Neighbourhood Council to represent the interests of the quarter.



We moved on, past the location of what we hope will be the new Balsall Heath railway station, to the Al-Abbas Foundation in Clifton Road, where we met Mujtaba Virani next to a big model of the ambitious

proposed mosque, school rooms and meeting rooms shortly to be built.



Round the corner in Moseley Road, we encountered Mr Butcher of Butcher's Transfers, transported from 1909 to us by the Balsall Heath Local History Society. The Society has its office in Mr Butcher's house, now part of the Old Print Works enterprise.

Over lunch in The Mix café in the building, Val Hart told us of the Society's many activities, including its years of research into the 19th century Middlemore Homes. Hannah Greenwood described how the Old Print Works is now a thriving home to

many craftspeople and artists.

We crossed the street to Moseley Road Baths, where Simon Stirling, a trustee of the charity now managing the building, and Rachel Gillies, its Partnerships and Participation Officer, told us of the building's history, the diverse community activities it now houses, and the £30m development project, including Balsall Heath Library next door, which will begin later this year. It will unavoidably necessitate the temporary closure of both buildings.

We walked from the baths to John Christopher's Zero Carbon House in Tindal Street. John told the judges about his pioneering house and, with Abbas Shah, about the Balsall Heath Retrofit project which they are engaged upon. Hundreds of local residents have signed up to a government-funded initiative to make their houses better insulated and to generate cheaper energy.



It was quite an exhausting three hours. The winners of the Academy's awards, including that for Great Neighbourhood, will be announced in November. We shall be there, hoping that our walk in the rain was all worthwhile.

Joe Holyoak

Note: Jim Fitzpatrick played the part of Mr Butcher during this tour. It was the last role he played before his death two weeks later. Thank you Jim! Active to the last

And Here are the Results of the Visit.

Balsall Heath did not win but achieved a very creditable second place. The winner was Leith in Scotland.

Ian McMillan is the AoU Poet in Residence, and he wrote a poem about every finalist.

This is his **sonnet to Balsall Heath**.

*Let's swim in the deep end of Balsall Heath,
Somewhere that's changed by a desire to shift
Attitudes, prejudice; dig deep beneath
That shallow thinking of suburban drift*

*To here, a place transformed and transforming.
Somewhere to live and, yes, somewhere to grow.
Stroll the streets this bright Midland morning:
Balsall Heath proves that it just goes to show*

*Change is a vision that helps us see clear,
Change is a movement that cannot slow down
Change is a magnet that pulls us to here
Stand still in Balsall Heath and look around*

*At the future as it starts to unfold
This place's promise will never grow old.*

Cannon Hill Park, 150th Anniversary

The park, given to the city by Louisa Ryland, opened on September 1st, 1873 to much acclaim at a ceremony attended by The Lord Mayor, many dignitaries and Louisa herself. This is an extract from the newspaper report:

"Twelve o'clock was the time-fixed for the opening, and at that hour Alderman Ryland, with his beneficent relation leaning on his arm, and the Mayor, appeared at the gates.

The first-named gentleman formally handed the key of the gate to the Mayor, amidst the cheers of the spectators, remarking that he rejoiced that he was, through the bounty of his relative, the humble instrument of handing over that place to the Mayor and Corporation of the borough, to be used henceforth for the innocent enjoyment, health, and recreation of the-people of the town.

He regretted that the work was not fully completed, but he believed enough had been done to enable them to see what a noble gift the town had received - a gift which he hoped would prove a blessing for many years to come."



Over 18,000 people had come to see the opening of the new park and every visitor on that day received a card written by Louisa, as a memento

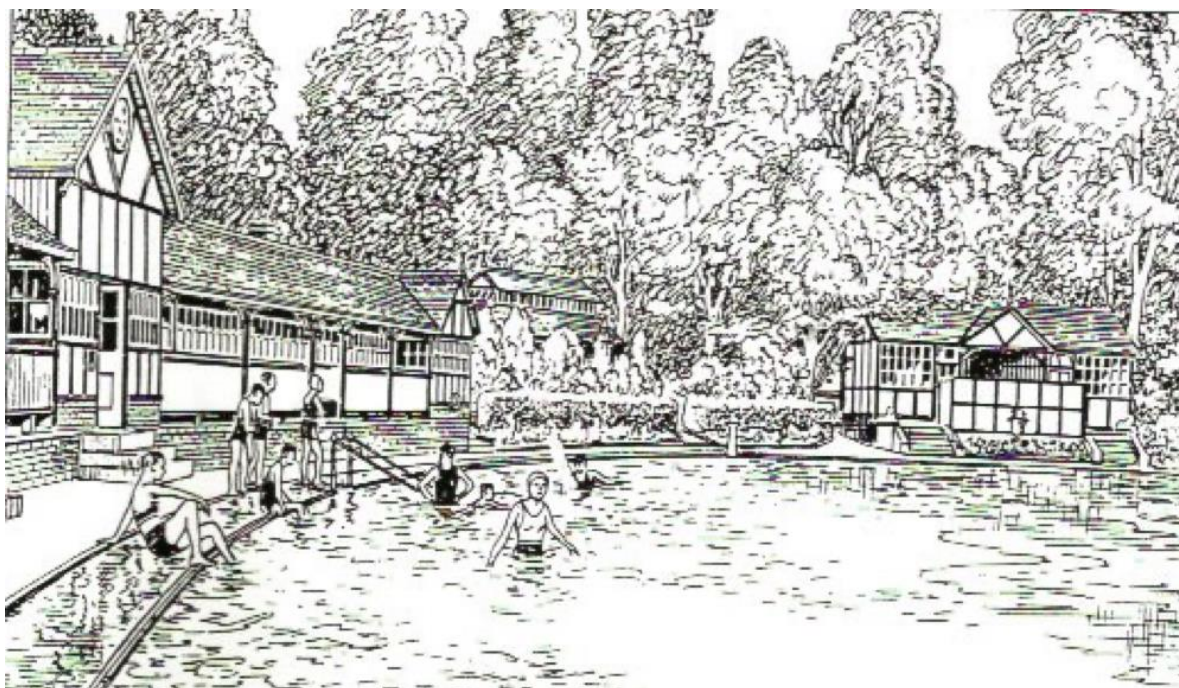
“Through the bounty of God, I have great pleasure in giving Cannon Hill Park to the Corporation of Birmingham for the use of the people of the town and neighbourhood.

I would express my earnest hope that the park may prove a source of healthful recreation to the people of Birmingham, and that they will aid in the protection and preservation of what is now their own property.”

It is interesting to note that Louisa Ryland refused to have the park named after her, unlike Lord Calthorpe who had donated the land for Calthorpe Park in 1857.

The Park was laid out beautifully with two large lakes as well as ornamental flower beds and shrub borders, many plants and seeds having been donated by Kew Gardens in London. A major attraction was the open air Swimming Pool which opened at the same time as the Park in 1873. It was quite large - 216 feet long and 100 feet wide with a varying depth of water, supplied by a small stream which had its source within the park. The pool was surrounded by a sloping grassy bank and shrubberies with a paved promenade along one side. The entrance fee was only 1d, which included use of the dressing rooms at the sides of the pool.

The pool finally closed in 1939 as a result of new Ministry of Health standards which required the installation of filtration and chlorination plants which would cost more than was justified by the attendance. However, by then Balsall Heath could use the indoor Moseley Road Baths which had opened in 1907, providing luxurious heated swimming pools all the year round.



The park was immediately popular with people across the social spectrum but there were a few complaints. In 1878 the Local Board recorded that Mr Sambridge, who lived at The Willows opposite the entrance lodge, was unhappy about *"the local nuisance caused by the costermongers and beggars who accumulated outside the park gates on Sundays and Bank Holidays"*.



The Dart August 1889 Saturday evening in Cannon Hill Park

The illustration above, from The Dart magazine, however, shows a fashionable crowd of people enjoying an evening concert performed in the bandstand.

In 1897 a further 7 acres were added to the original 57 acres of the park by Sir John Holder and in 1898 another 5 acres were acquired to straighten the River Rea which now runs along the western edge of the park.

Cannon Hill House , originally built about 1830 and a Grade 2 Listed building, still stands today on the Russell Road side of the park. It was never lived in by Louisa Ryland or her family.

The Queens Ride opened in 1899 intended to rival London's "Rotten Row" though it was never really successful. dA newspaper report commented,

"The ride was opened yesterday by the Lord Mayor with due ceremony. The aldermen and councillors had been induced to risk their necks on horseback, and a brave show they made. The Lord Mayor opened the gate with a golden key. Then the whole party ambled with becoming dignity into the drive."

The trees along Queens Ride were planted to commemorate the deaths of 250 young men who were members of the scouting movement who were killed in World War one.

Today it has found a new transport use as the car park.



The Dart. 1899. "The Cavalcade Entering the Ride."

Various other features have also been added over the years: in 1906 the Boer War Memorial; in 1911 the sixteenth century Golden Lion Inn was moved here from Deritend; in 1924 the Scout War Memorial; in the 1960s a model of the Elan Valley Reservoirs and in 1962, The Midlands Arts Centre. It is still a brilliant and much loved oasis for Birmingham so thank you, Louisa.

Val Hart

Merry Christmas to all our readers

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