

A Reminder about Society Membership for 2024

Membership runs annually from January to December and costs £12 . Gift Aid can be added to this if you sign up for it. Existing members will have already received the forms via e mail but the application forms can also be downloaded from our website: www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk.

John Bernard Morris 1929 – 2022

A son of Balsall Heath

This article was sent to us by the daughter of Alan Eades. She said,"

I thought you might be interested in publishing some of the attached information I have put together about John Morris and Balsall Heath.

John was a great friend of my father, Alan Eades, and most of the article is taken from many letters & postcards, some beautifully illustrated, he sent to Dad over the years."



John was born on 15th October 1929 to Bernard E. Morris and Ada Florence Morris, nee Lancaster, at 3 Mansfield Place, Clifton Road, the home of his maternal grandparents, Jane & John Lancaster, a self-employed Encaustic Tile Layer.

Ada was the seventh of nine children and helped her mother in the house, then becoming a dressmaker until she married Bernard Morris in 1925.

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

DECEMBER 2023



Telephone: 07565 194822

Email:

info@balsallheathhistory.co.uk

Web:

www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

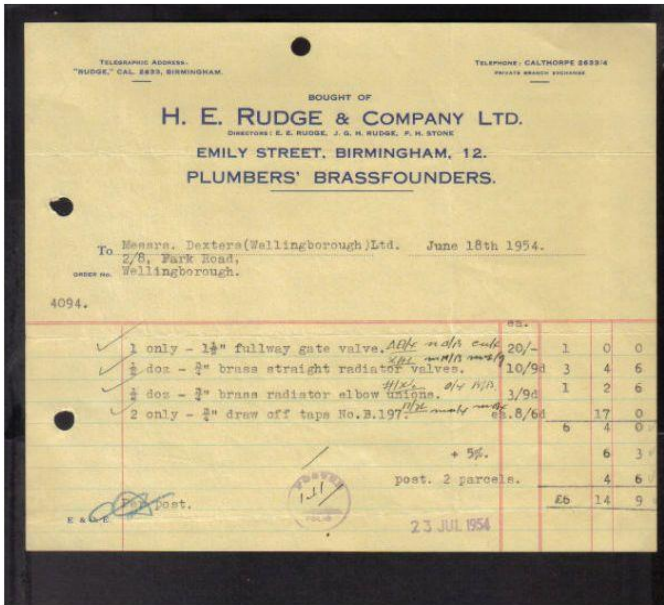
www.thelostchildren.uk

**Facebook: Balsall Heath Local
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 11:30 a.m. Refreshments will be served from 11 a.m to 11:20 a.m.

Coming soon

**Monday 29th January 11 am
for 11.30 am. start. Val Hart,
on Workplaces of Balsall
Heath 1730 to 2000**

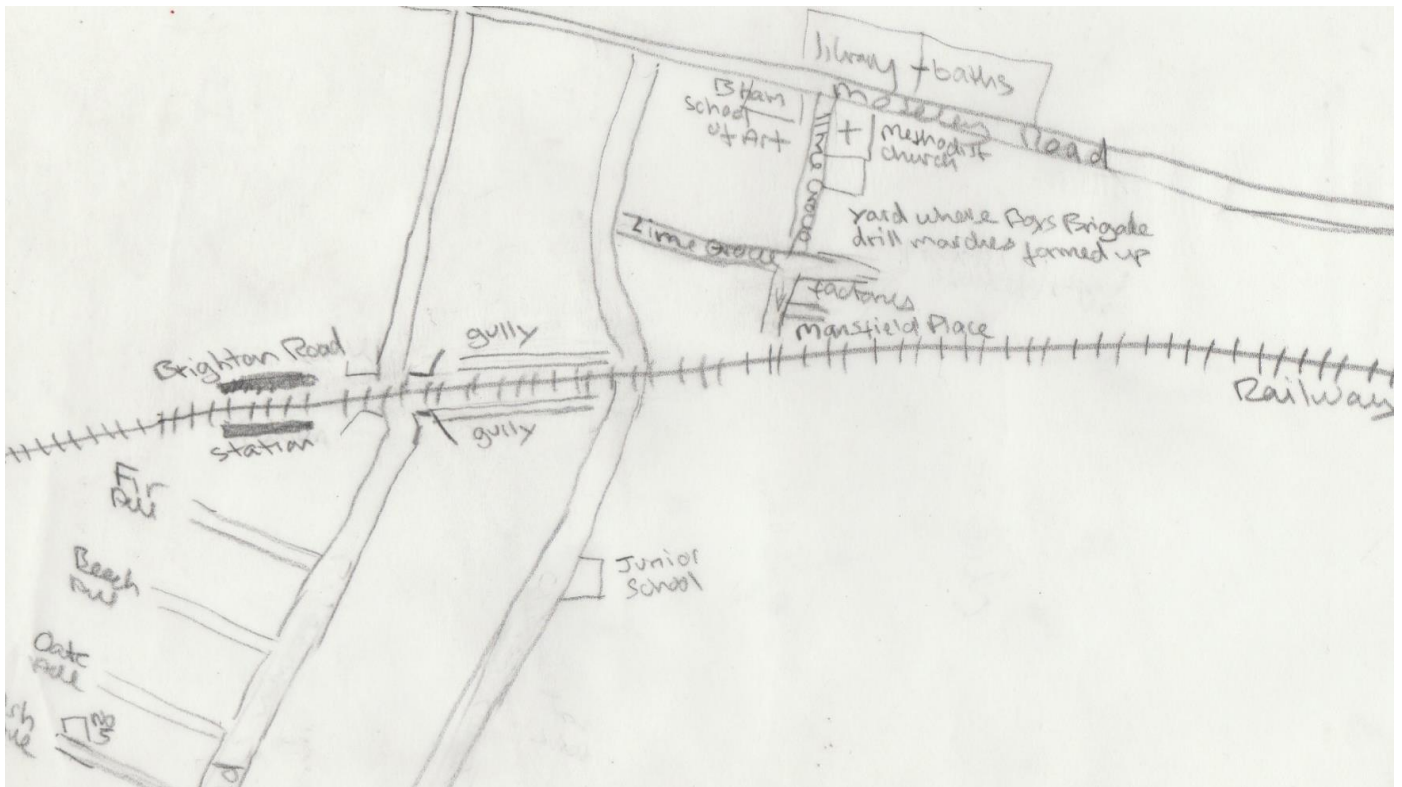


Bernard was a Toolmaker for H E Rudge & Co, Brassfounders of Emily Street, Highgate and John remembered him working night shifts there for many years.

Ada used to say that she could remember the original fields around Balsall Heath. Her family had connections with the Methodist chapel in Balfour Street and John remembered attending the funeral of his grandfather, John Lancaster, who died aged 88 in 1938.

One of Ada's brothers used to play the organ there, & later at Ombersley Road Chapel. John remembered that one of his Mother's favourite words was 'traipse' around". She would often accuse him of 'traipsing around'!

Rough sketch of the area of Balsall Heath where John Morris, Alan Eades & their friends grew up



John grew up right alongside the railway. Mansfield Place was accessed by a path from Clifton Road, just the Moseley Road side of the railway bridge. From the kitchen door & back yard there was an excellent broadside view of passing trains and from the front garden there was a good oblique view.

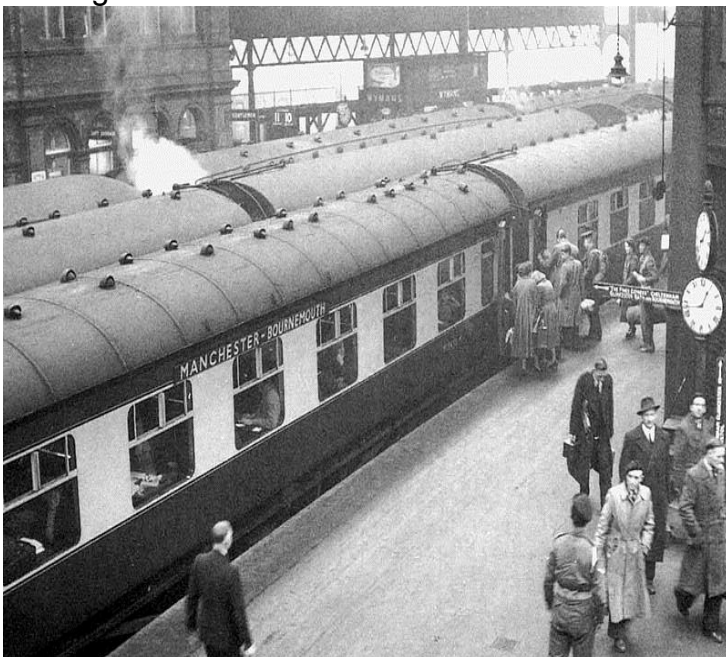
John's mother used to take him for a walk as a small boy up to Moseley Station. They were the same trains he could see any time from Clifton Road but he found it interesting to be able to look down on them instead of up.

They lingered on the long sloping footpath on the right which provided access to the platform. He used to love watching the smoke drift out of the tunnel after a train had passed through.



In the 1930s, as a small boy, John wrote, "one of my greatest thrills was the trip to Barnt Green, which we seemed to do quite often in summer, from Brighton Road station, or from Camp Hill (it was more often on a Sunday afternoon, when Brighton Road was closed) The purpose of the trip was ostensibly for the walk through the woods, but for me this was a tiresome interlude between the two train journeys. A special treat was to stay on the train all the way to New Street - the long ride from Camp Hill to New Street (a long way round geographically, for reasons of railway history), with a succession of complicated junctions, was always specially fascinating." They would then return home on the tram.

The south-bound Pines Express, from Manchester to Bournemouth, went through every day all year round except Sundays, at around 12.20 pm, and he & Doreen Dunn, who lived next door at number 2 Mansfield Place, used to regularly run out of their houses on to the Clifton Road pavement to watch the train go past. Later, the time also coincided nicely, just as John was walking home for dinner from Clifton Road Junior School.



The Pines Express, a service between Manchester and Bournemouth, stands at Platform 7 waiting to depart. The train indicator clocks and fingerboards are on the right stating that the train was due at 12:43pm and would depart at 1:08pm calling at Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bath and Bournemouth.

The Pines Express service only stopped at New Street station during the week whereas at weekends it avoided the station by directly taking the Camp Hill line from the Derby line.

At Mansfield Place, John remembered the Morris family having at least three cats, possibly four. Their next door neighbour for many years at Number 4, Mansfield Place, Mr Kinsey, worked at New Street Station and had a country accent which fascinated John as a boy - he grew up in Westbury, Wiltshire. He came to Birmingham in his late teens in about 1888, responding to adverts for jobs on the railway. He gave the Morris's a kitten which John remembered all through his

childhood & early teens, which came from New Street Station.

In those days stations often had cats to keep down the rodents, but New Street probably had several wild cats. Mr Kinsey was fond of beer & there was a story that on one occasion he had a few pints after work, came home on the tram & woke up in the small hours in the tram depot!

Harold Burnett & The Boys' Brigade

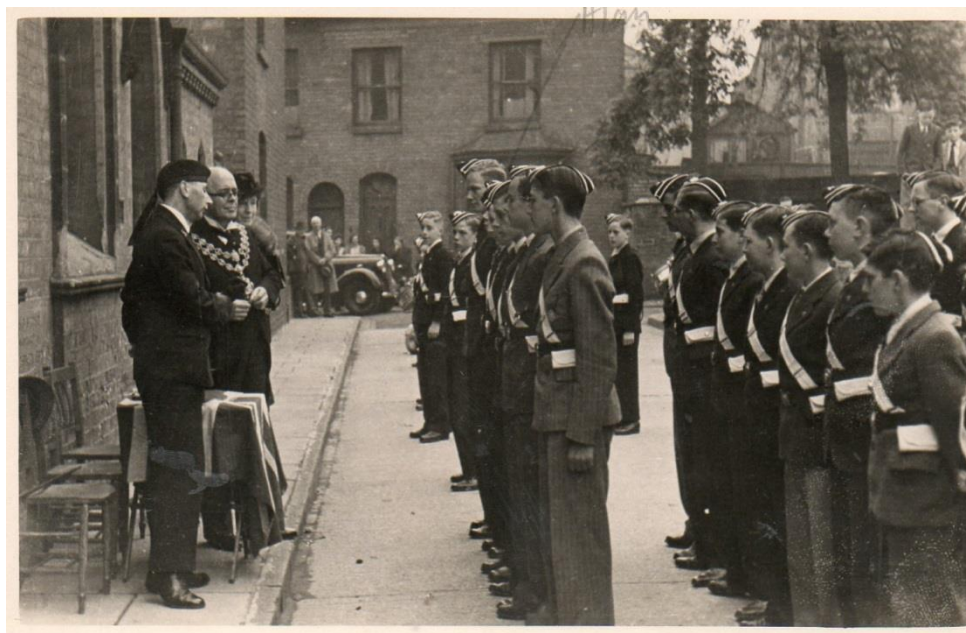
John, Alan & their friends were all members of the 10th Birmingham Company of the Boys Brigade, captained by Harold S Burnett. The company used to meet in the Methodist Church Hall, Lime Grove, for drill, gym sessions etc..



The Methodist Church Sunday School, now gone.

Harold Burnett, born in Balsall Heath in 1904, became a life-long educator through his work in the Boys Brigade and his association with Selly Oak Colleges. He attended Tindal Street School where his last school report referred to him as the most intelligent pupil the Headmaster had ever taught - hard-working and conscientious. When he was six a certain Miss Edwards, from the local corner shop, introduced Harold to the Sunday School at Moseley Road Methodist Church, thus beginning a lifetime of service at that Church, where, at one time or another, he held every office open to a layman

*10th
Birmingham
Battalion, Boys
Brigade, Lime
Grove, c1943
Harold Burnett
with the Lord
Mayor of
Birmingham,
Alderman
Wiggins-Davies
presenting
medals*



The Boys' Brigade was Harold's greatest concern. He joined in 1924 and, in forty years' service,

missed only six parades. In 1941 he became Captain of the 10th Company. He was an efficient organizer who planned everything in advance, leaving nothing to chance, and was insistent on things being done in the correct way. From 1965 to 1979, he was President of the Birmingham Battalion, and afterwards its Honorary President..

John remembered that the Boys Brigade travelled by train to camp at various places, such as Malvern, Brean, London & Penmaenmawr and particularly remembered playing the hymn 'In the glad morning of my day'.



10th Birmingham Battalion, Boys Brigade, Lime Grove c1940

John Morris, centre front row, Alan Eades, back row 3rd right, Bill Pearson

3rd row far right, Harold Burnett, seated centre

Marching through the streets of Balsall Heath with the Boys Brigade, John also remembered Alan Eades & Geoff Pearson with their drums, John & Geoff Arrowsmith with their bugles, Bill Pearson with his mace & John himself with the Company colours. Drummers & buglers or 'perhaps drummers versus buglers, seeing which of you could make the most noise when parading under the Clifton Road and Runcorn Road bridges, raising reverberating echoes ricocheting against the ancient brickwork.'

*10th Birmingham Company, Boys Brigade, Lime Grove, c1947/8
Bill Pearson, extreme left. Alan Eades was away on National Service*



John was NCO in command of no 7 squad of the 10th Birmingham Company & Len Hughes was section commander of squads 7 & 8 so he always stood alongside John when Harold had them lined up lengthways in the hall facing the stage after the Tuesday evening drill session.

According to John, "Len was always cynical & anti-authority & would constantly whisper in my ear a stream of critical, irreverent, subversive comments!"

The boys used to walk through the gulleys to get to Lime Grove. The Runcorn Road gulleys had regular & even spaced wooden palings and the Lime Grove gully had iron railings. John compared these regular spacings and the spacing of the sleepers on the train track to the regularity of Parade evenings and Bible classes.

*10th Birmingham
Company, Boys
Brigade, Lime
Grove, c1946*

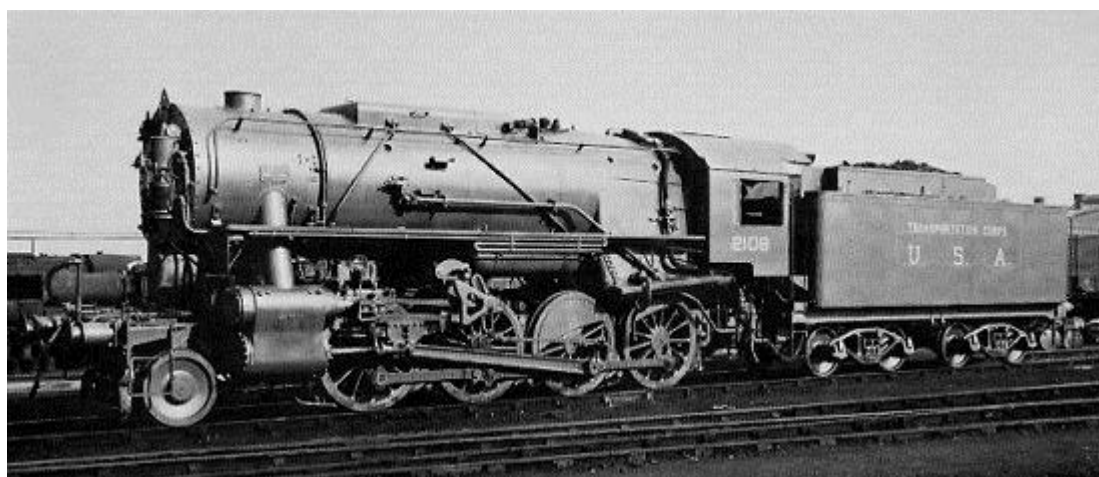
*2nd row, 6th left
Bill Pearson,*

*9th left Harold
Burnett,*

*3rd right John
Morris,
6th right Alan
Eades*



During the war years John remembered some much larger American locomotives with the lettering US Transportation Corps, passing over the Clifton Road bridge from time to time.



On 7th January 1947, John saw my Dad, Alan Eades, off to Warrington on his way to RAF Padgate for his National Service. John recalled seeing him off, saying - "it was certainly bitterly cold and the train was very late". This was the very severe winter of 1947. They were standing in the snow for over an hour. They were at the Hill Street end of Platform 3 where there was a refreshment room which they patronised.

Always academically brilliant, John attended King Edwards School, Edgbaston, and obtained a scholarship to Cambridge, graduating in 1951. Whilst studying there he was a member of the

Methodist Society & attended Methodist chapel services throughout his life.

John eventually died on 22nd December 2022, aged 93 -the passing of a very interesting man, who loved his family dearly and was also passionate about his beloved Balsall Heath, its trains and its history.

Val Hart

The Middlemore Blue Plaque

I went to visit the Blue Plaque in St Luke's Road, Highgate, recently to check that all is still well with it. The site has now been completed and there is a children's play area though slightly different to the original plans.

In 2022 pupils from Percy Shurmer School became involved in the project and I did a workshop at the school together with Bron Salway. The pupils were invited to submit designs for the entrance to the play area. The various designs were then on display at the Launch event when those present voted on their favourites.



The winning design has now been mounted on a stand next to the Blue Plaque.

Val Hart

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