

A change of hours

With the longer days we are changing back to evening meetings from April. So the Richard Churchley meeting will be on Thursday 25th April at 7pm for a 7:30 start to the talk.

Committee Members of the Society

Val Hart. Treasurer.

I am currently Treasurer of the Society as I took over from Pat Johnson last September. My involvement began many years ago .

I came to Birmingham in 1969 and then in 1975 I took a job as a teacher in two terrace houses in St Paul's Road, the very small School for educational misfits which had been founded by Dick Atkinson and Anita Halliday. I was always interested in history. I did a History degree and a Diploma in Archive Administration which led me to become the Archivist for St Thomas's Hospital in London. However, life intervened and I left that post to move here because of my husband's new job and the arrival of my first son.

Balsall Heath in 1975 was still suffering from the combined results of World War 2 and the city's own Urban Renewal scheme. There were "Bomb Pecks" everywhere, strewn with rubbish; derelict housing; barely any green space: nowhere for children to play. Meanwhile there was also high unemployment, overcrowded living conditions, low educational achievement and terrible health statistics.



St Paul's Avenue c 1980 Photo by Mick Turner

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

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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 7:30 pm. Refreshments will be served from 7 p.m to 7:15 p.m. Coming soon Thursday 25th April 7pm for 7.30pm. Richard Churchley talking about Place names in Warwickshire and Worcestershire



Photo by Mick Turner

But there was also a strong sense of community and in time the School joined with the Nursery in the old St Paul's Church Hall, and the Adventure Playground (started by Residents and the Balsall Heath Association), to become St Paul's Project in 1979. I stayed for another 41 years.

By 1979 I had started to research Balsall Heath's history and then St Pauls were successful in getting a grant from West Midlands Arts which made it possible for us to employ a part time worker to assist me in research. This was Jacqui Ure who, with Mick Turner as photographer, undertook a lot of oral history and other research with me. This eventually led to the publication of my book, "Balsall Heath. A History" in 1992.

The Society itself grew from some Workers' Educational Association classes to become an organisation in 1980. The aims then were: to promote interest in the history of Balsall Heath



Carnival Float 1989

through organising public meetings, publishing material concerned with this area, gathering photographs and other documents and arranging exhibitions. From its beginning it was very active, with meetings, exhibitions, and participation in Balsall Heath Carnival. I became a member of the Committee from about 1981

One of the activities which I started in 1988 as a sub group of the History Society, was the Making History Reminiscence Theatre Group, which consisted of Bernard Jackson, Mary Bramwell, Nell Wilkins, Pat Johnson and me. We devised about six different drama pieces which we took on tour to schools and older peoples' groups all over Birmingham. This continued to 2004.



Over the years I have raised funds for many different projects for the Society. One of these was to set up the Victorian Schoolroom in the old Clifton Junior School. This expanded to also become the World War 2 schoolroom and was visited by literally thousands of school pupils not just from Balsall Heath but also from the whole of the West Midlands. Bron Salway took the role of teacher with Pat Johnson as Teacher's Assistant. Unfortunately we had to close it in 2016.



I also raised the funding from the Heritage Lottery. and organised our most recent project, **The Lost Children** which told the story of the Middlemore Emigration Homes founded in Highgate in 1872. This project has been a colossal success, both in Birmingham and internationally. The major exhibition was held in 2019 and the book, "The Lost Children" is now still available through our website.

To coincide with the Commonwealth Games in 2022, I and other Committee members worked with The Civic Trust and Barratts the builders to install a Blue Plaque in St Luke's Road to commemorate 150 years from the founding of the Homes. I also organised a touring version of the Lost Children exhibition which ran from July to October and was visited by an enormous number

of people. I am continuing to undertake research on this project although the funding has now finished.



Unveiling the Blue Plaque 2022.

As well as particular projects I have, with other members, produced a number of publications, devised trails, mounted exhibitions and assembled a Society Archive with a good collection of books, maps and indexed photos of the area. We get a continuing stream of enquiries which we always try to answer. My other contribution to the Society is to edit and produce the monthly newsletter/ magazine “The Gazette,” which goes out to a large circulation by email . It also goes on the Society Facebook page, thanks to Jenny Hodson..

Finally I should add a word about the Birmingham History Theatre Company of which I was a founder member in 2008. It has always worked closely with the History Society and has mounted shared events, especially dramatic trails and dramatic lectures. The Company also put on a play , “The Lost Children” in conjunction with the Society in 2022.

The History Society has been a major part of my life for many years and I hope it will continue for many more.

Val Hart

Funeral of Sgt Norman Harold Pettitt

Chris Prichard sent some information, photographs and copies of newspaper cuttings.

Chris’s grandfather, Fred Hemming lived with his parents and siblings at 310 Balsall Heath Road. Amongst his photo collection were two taken at a funeral at St Paul’s Church, Moseley Road. It was the funeral of Sgt Norman Harold Pettitt of the Royal Field Artillery (RFA). The funeral took place on Saturday April 17th 1915.

Fred Hemming had served with Sgt Pettitt in the RFA and the 3rd South Midland Brigade and so may well have been at the funeral.



MILITARY FUNERAL IN BIRMINGHAM

LAST RITES OF MOSELEY HERO.

Much public interest was aroused this afternoon at the funeral of Sergeant Norman Harold Pettitt, of the Royal Horse Artillery, who resided in Newport Road, Moseley, and who died at the Bournbrook Military Hospital on Tuesday last. Sergeant Pettitt served in the Boer war with the Worcestershire Yeomanry, and afterwards joined the Royal Horse Artillery. He was commended for conspicuous gallantry at Mons. During the retreat he was thrown from his horse and received serious injuries. He also contracted rheumatic fever and was invalided home, dying in the hospital.

The first part of the funeral service took place at St. Paul's, Balsall Heath, the coffin, covered by a Union Jack, being conveyed to Yardley Cemetery placed on a gun carriage. The bearers were members of his own battery from Woolwich, and they were supported by a contingent from the 3rd South Midland R.F.A. (Reserves), members of the Balsall Heath Rifle Corps under Colonel Halse, Church Lads' Brigade, and Boy Scouts. The firing party was provided by the 1st Birmingham City Battalion.

SOLDIER'S BURIAL.

MILITARY HONOURS AT YARDLEY FUNERAL.

The funeral took place with military honours at Yardley Cemetery on Saturday of the late Sergeant Norman Harold Pettitt, of the Royal Horse Artillery, son of Mr. J. H. Pettitt, Newport-road, Balsall Heath.

The deceased was present at the retreat of Mons, and died in the Bournbrook Hospital, as a result of injuries sustained in France. He was formerly a member of the 3rd South Midland Brigade Royal Field Artillery, and went through the Boer War.

The first part of the funeral service was held at St. Paul's Church, Balsall Heath, which was crowded. The entrance was lined by the St. Paul's Church Lads' Brigade and members of the Balsall Heath Rifle Corps, with Colonel Halse in command.

The coffin, covered by the Union Jack and bearing the cap and sword of the deceased sergeant, was on a gun carriage, and was met at the entrance to the church by the clergy and choir. The bearers were members of the R.H.A.

At the cemetery the "Last Post" was sounded, and a party of the 1st City Battalion fired a parting volley.

The above article appeared in The Birmingham Daily Mail on Saturday April 17th 1915.

MILITARY FUNERAL AT
BALSALL HEATH.

AN ECHO OF MONS.

Some thousands of people witnessed the funeral on Saturday afternoon of Sergt. Norman Harold Pettitt, Royal Horse Artillery, whose home is at 9, Newport Road, Moseley. Pettitt, who was 33 years, was, as a boy, a member of St. Paul's (Balsall Heath) C.L.B. He joined the local Artillery Volunteers, now the 3rd South Midland Brigade R.F.A., and on the outbreak of the South African war he went out with the Worcestershire Imperial Yeomanry. He afterwards joined the Royal Horse Artillery, and was present at the retreat of Mons. His battery (I) was specially commended for its gallantry, it being stated that by its work it saved part of the force from annihilation. Sergeant Pettitt was thrown from his horse in the retreat, and sustained a broken rib, added to which he contracted rheumatic fever, due to the exposure, and was invalided home. He was hoping to return shortly to the front, but on Sunday while on a few days' leave from Woolwich, he was taken ill at St. Paul's Church, and was removed to Bournbrook Military Hospital, where he died on Tuesday.

Military honours were accorded the deceased. The coffin, draped in the Union Jack, was borne on a gun carriage, and the bearers were members of the battery, assisted by old colleagues of the 3rd South Midland Brigade Reserve. Muffled drums were played by the St. Paul's troop of Scouts, and these also followed members of the Balsall Heath T.F.C. Corps, accompanied by Colonel Hale, the commandant, and Councillor J. H. Kitchen, members of the C.L.B., and many personal mourners. The service at St. Paul's Balsall Heath, which was fully choral, was conducted by the Vicar (the Rev. G. H. Harris), assisted by the Revs. E. Asch, Tooh, and W. H. Jones. The interment took place at Yardley Cemetery. The firing party was provided by members of the 1st City Battalion, and "The last post" was sounded by buglers.

This article is from
The Birmingham
Daily Post Monday
April 19th 1915

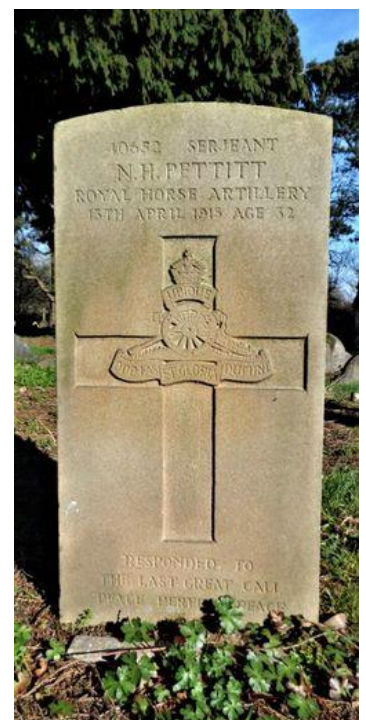
Following receipt of this information from Chris, further research has shown that Norman Harold Pettitt was born on February 12th 1881 and was baptised at St Jude's Church, Birmingham on March 12th 1881. He was the first child of John Hayman Pettitt and Elizabeth Jane Pettitt. The 1881 Census shows that the family were living at 10 Balsall Heath Road at that time and John was a boot manufacturer. John was born in 1852 and baptised at St Martin's Church on March 29th 1852. He was the son of Charles and Emma Pettitt and they were living in Suffolk Street and later at 53 Bristol Road, Birmingham.

At the time of the 1891 Census, Norman was living with his parents and siblings at 11 St Paul's Rd, Balsall Heath.

Norman Harold Pettitt joined the army on March 2nd 1901 in the 1st Warwickshire Artillery in the Imperial Yeomanry Regiment. From March 30th 1901 until December 2nd 1901 he served in South Africa in the Boer War. On January 3rd 1902 he was discharged as medically unfit. His trade was given as Commercial Traveller and his discharge address was 10 Kingswood Road, Moseley. His conduct was described as 'Very Good'

In 1906 Norman re-enlisted and remained in the army. This led to his being involved in active service in France in 1914, where he was described as a good and efficient soldier. When he was injured, he was taken to the 1st Eastern General Hospital in Cambridge. He was later admitted to 1st Southern Hospital, Birmingham. This was a war hospital and was situated in the buildings of The University of Birmingham. Norman died on April 13th 1915. His cause of death was given as cirrhosis of the liver and general peritonitis. Probate was granted to John Neal, a Merchant's Buyer in the amount of £372 15s 11d on May 21st 1915. Norman's address was given as 1 Newport Road, Balsall Heath.

Sergeant Norman Harold Pettitt's grave at Yardley Cemetery, Birmingham. His age is shown as 32, but he was actually 34 years of age at the time of his death.



JH

Congratulations, Liz Berry!

Wonderful news that Liz has won the prestigious Writers Prize for 2024. Not just in the Poetry category but also as overall Book of the Year!



The Prize Director, Minnie Fry, said,

“All of us on the prize have been touched by the story of Eliza Showell, Liz Berry’s great aunt.”

She added. “The Home Child is a tender novel in verse, which shines a light on this little-known miscarriage of justice.

It is a book anyone could read and everyone should.”.

Those of us who have worked on the Lost Children project believe that it is an over-simplification to describe the Middlemore scheme as a “miscarriage of justice.” The children who emigrated were orphans, children who had been brought before the courts by the NSPCC, children rejected by step -parents, destitute children and children from workhouses.

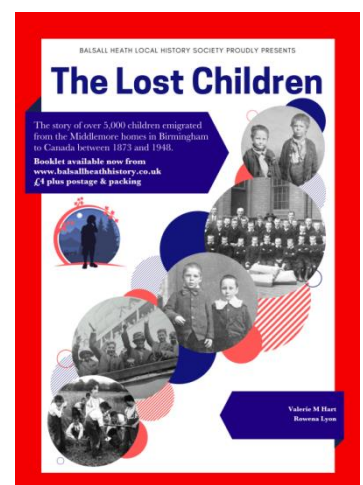
There should have been better provision for them in this country but there was not. There were few orphanages and no support for parents raising children on their own as a result of death or desertion of a partner. We are of the opinion that John Middlemore acted from the best of intentions and a desire to give the children an new opportunity in life. He always had the parent’s or family’s consent. It is true that the outcomes for children varied enormously. Some did well and some did not.

Liz Berry’s book shines a light on all this with her book and has justly received huge acclaim.

- ‘One of the outstanding books of this year. Although this is a historical tale its resonance is timeless’ *Sunday Times*
- ‘Ground-breaking’ *Benjamin Zephaniah*
- ‘Deeply moving. A graceful, delicate book, stunning in its emotional depth... I know I’ll return to it many times in the future’, Megan Hunter, author of *The End We Start From*

Thank you, Liz, for raising awareness of this extraordinary story.

Our own publication, “The Lost Children” is still available to buy through our Society website at a cost of £4 plus postage.



Val Hart

Norman Bartlam: Edgbaston Reservoir

On Monday February 26th Norman Bartlam gave a very interesting and lively talk about Edgbaston Reservoir. His talk was illustrated with pictures of the reservoir, including some from Norman's collection of postcards.



Many activities have taken place and still take place at the reservoir, including sailing and fishing. Perhaps the most unusual happened in 1873 when the Frenchman, Charles Blondin carried out a tightrope walk over the water. In 1992/3 a statue of Blondin was installed in Ladywood to commemorate this feat. The statue can still be found on Ladywood Middleway. The whole occasion was recently re-enacted (excluding the actual tightrope walk) by the children from TNT. TNT is The News Team, a group led by Norman, who report on news and events in Ladywood.

We were also shown a leaflet advertising the Blackpool Week which took place in 1932. During this week, visitors could enjoy all the fun of the fair and there was even a scaled down replica of Blackpool Tower. As the Reservoir was in a poor area, this was the closest that local children could come to experiencing the seaside atmosphere. The event was very popular and enjoyed by many. It was a revelation to some of us, that it was because of this that the Ballroom was called The Tower Ballroom.

Sadly, the Tower Ballroom has been demolished with plans for redevelopment of the area, but the Reservoir will remain for future generations to enjoy.

JH

Other Events

Miner's Strike Exhibition

In the Dickens Room at the BMI in Margaret Street, B3 3BS on **2nd April, 6pm to 8.30pm**, the Birmingham & Coventry Branch of the NUJ has organised a photo exhibition of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, followed by a meeting to discuss the role of the media during the year long dispute.

Kings Heath Local History Society are holding regular meetings again. The next on is: Jane McArdle on St Phillips Cathedral to be held at Heathfield Road community centre at 7:15 on April 17th. Admission for non-members is £3 or free to members of that group.

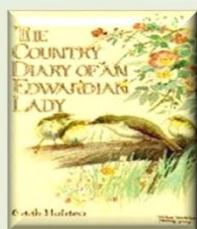
Sunday 21st April 2024, 2.00pm

at Brandwood End Cemetery, Woodthorpe Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B146EQ.

A commemoration of Gallipoli day

There will be a short service followed by a tour of the many graves/memorials with a Gallipoli connection. The event will last approximately an hour. the service will begin at the cross of remembrance.

There is no need to book. Veterans and other uniformed groups are most welcome to attend. Interested parties should contact Ian Binnie on education@gallipoli-association.org



My Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady Journey

talk by Rachel Smith-Chopra

- ❖ *How I became interested in the book and author*
- ❖ *Events that I have organised*
- ❖ *Over to you and **Your Country Diary** items*
(please do bring a related product if you have one)
- ❖ *Edith Holden Trails*

Tuesday 28th May 2024, 2 till 3pm
followed by refreshments



Moseley Exchange
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THE MOSELEY SOCIETY

Caring for an historic area of Birmingham Charity No. 52211

"It's reassuring to know that these plants still grow in our garden and provides nourishment for the visiting bees and us, in 2024."