

# Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

## JUNE 2025



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Membership of the Society costs £15 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 £4 for visitors.

Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m. followed by a speaker  
Coming soon

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June 7:00 p.m.,  
“A Women’s History of Balsall  
Heath to 1914.” By Val Hart

## This month’s Meeting

The topic for this **Thursday, June 26<sup>th</sup>** is

**“A Women’s History of Balsall Heath to 1914.”**

**By Val Hart**

Unfortunately the planned speaker, Ray Wills, has had to cancel because of family illness. Come at 7 pm for a 7.30 start of the talk. Refreshments will be available.

## Balsall Heath local History Society Publications

All our books are available via the Society’s website but the good news is that they are now also on sale at

**The Heath Bookshop in King’s Court, off Kings Heath  
High St B14 7JZ**

## 750 years of Balsall Heath

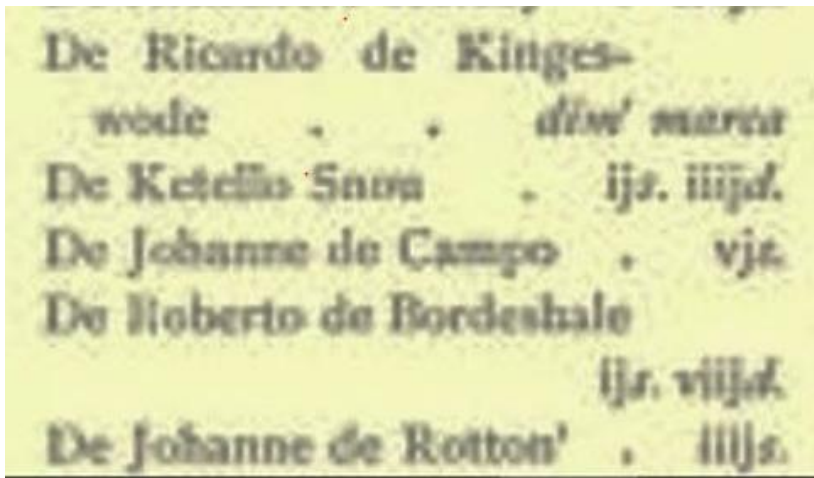
The first record of Balsall Heath was in 1275, according to The Survey of English Place Names, held by the University of Nottingham. The spelling was **Bordeshale**. Later spellings show how this was contracted down to **Balsall**. Many place names show such contractions to forms that were easier to say. There was no standardised spelling in English. Balsall Common had a different derivation.

How do we know about this earliest record? The internet allows anyone to find the documents. The Survey gives, as its source for Bordeshale, the first “Lay Subsidy Roll for the County of Worcester”. Subsidy meant a tax and lay meant that everyone with property had to pay, not only the big landowners. The medieval manuscript still exists, and it was published in 1893 for the Worcestershire Historical Society by J.W. Willis Bund and John Amphlett (now online at Archive.org). The language is Latin, not English. The date of this first Subsidy Roll is said to be 1275 or soon after, based on the names of prominent people in the lists. This was the reign of Edward the First, King of England and other territories. He wanted money for a crusade and for military expeditions in Wales, Scotland and France. English people had to pay for his ambitions, hence

taxes or “subsidies” were collected for him.

## First Balsall Heathan

The Subsidy Roll gives all the people in Worcestershire who were liable for tax. We can see **Roberto de Bordesale**, living in the extensive royal manor of Bromsgrove and Norton in Worcestershire (*Page 68*).



Family names were only emerging at that time, with people referred to by where they lived, or by their occupation. Robert's tax liability of 1 shilling and 7 pence shows that the land he held as Bordesale yielded some value, but he was far from the richest person in the Kings Norton manor. He may have had dependants, servants and neighbours who lacked taxable property, hence would not appear. However, tithe maps of the 1700s reveal there was very little here, even many centuries later. Tithe was the tenth part for the church.

## Meaning of the place name

Old English *Halh*; the meanings included "A piece of land projecting from, or detached from, the main area of its administrative unit." *Key to English Place Names* Uni of Nottingham. Therefore, Bordesale seems to identify an area that had been detached, at some earlier time. from Bordesley in the manor of Aston, which was in Warwickshire (like Birmingham). Bordesale had been moved into Kings Norton in Worcestershire. The manors of Norton, Edgbaston, Birmingham and Aston were in the Domesday Survey in 1086 and probably they existed long before that. in the Survey, Moseley was a sub-manor of Kings Norton. Manor = something held (French *une main* = a hand) from a great lord or from the king.

Small brooks made land boundaries that could not be disputed, before any maps. This could apply to Balsall Heath, being a recognised unit of land from early times, bounded by the Rea, Sparkbrook, Bully or Billesley Brook and Cole. These can still be followed on foot. Therefore, Balsall Heath may have existed for a very long time, like other places in England, and the surviving medieval documents are not "beginnings".

**Bordeshalle Hethe** is first recorded in a deed of 1533. There were heaths all round Birmingham; heath defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "uncultivated ground covered by low shrubs, especially heather or ling". This scrub could be the result of overgrazing for a long period, encouraged by the price of cattle in nearby

Birmingham Market. In 1533, people were looking to enclose and to improve such poor ground by manuring it. The area was tied into the development of Birmingham as a town, although not yet part of the borough (and in a different county).

## Ball's House

There is a picture of Ball's House, painted by an artist in the later 1800s reproduced in "Balsall Heath A History" by Val Hart, pp 13-14.



*Copy of a  
watercolour by  
Warren Blackham.*

*in the Birmingham  
Museum and art  
Gallery*

This timber house was on the bend of Edgbaston Lane and looks of the 1500s or earlier.



*Part of 1828 plan of  
Edgbaston Lane*

In 1833 it was recorded as sold by Thomas Ball. This raises the possibility that a further contraction of Balsall to Ball had taken place, with a family called Ball in occupation, potentially back to Robert de Bordeshalle, who could have had a great many descendants over the centuries. Land gave security and status: individuals moving away, but the name of Ball continuing from the Middle Ages, perhaps. We can say Balsall Heath has 750 years of history.

John Newson with Val Hart (2025)



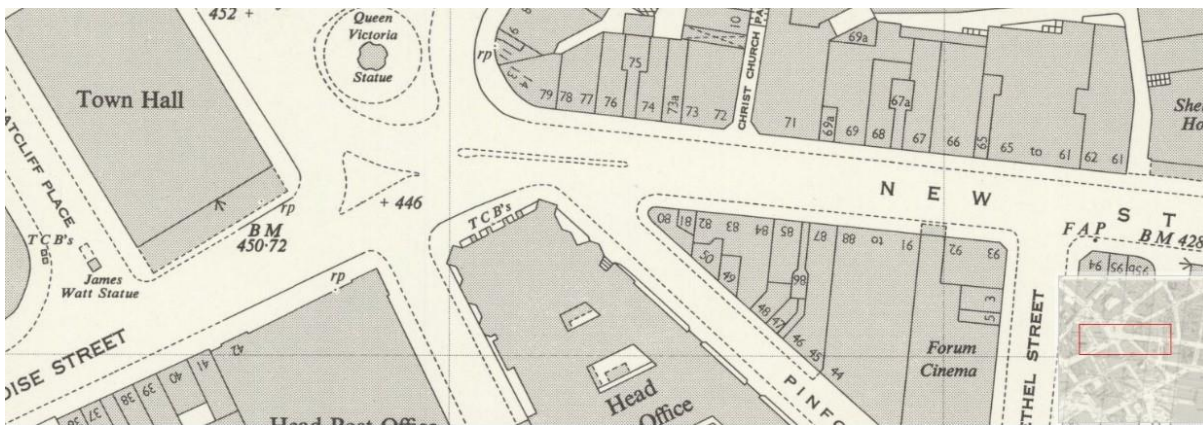
# MAY 29<sup>th</sup> 2025 - MIKE BYRNE

## NEW ST (but not the Station)

At our meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2025 Mike Byrne talked to us about New St. He explained that he would not include New St station, as that would be a complete talk in itself. This talk would take the form of a virtual walk down New St from Victoria Square to the Rotunda.

New St, unlike its name, is one of the oldest streets in Birmingham. The earliest mention was in borough rental records from 1296. At that time and up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it remained a rural area with cottages and barns and animal markets. A huge amount of development took place in New St in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the talk, we saw slides of some of the old buildings together with their replacements and in some cases further replacements.

A strange fact about New St is the way it is numbered. Unlike other streets, the numbers run up from High St to the edge of Victoria Square and then down again on the opposite side.



A map of part of New St showing the numbering.

Starting at the top end of New Street, we learnt about The Panorama, near Christ Church. This was a round building constructed in 1803. It was used to display, as the name of the building suggests, pictures of panoramic views of cities from around the world. When The Panorama closed, it was used as an auction house for a time and then was taken over by The Society of Arts and used as a gallery.

The foundation stone for Christ Church was laid in 1805, the building was consecrated in 1813 and demolished in 1899. There were shops underneath Christ Church, one of which sold oysters. Christ Church was replaced by Christchurch Buildings, often known as Galloways corner. Galloways was a large camera shop on the corner. This building was demolished in 1970.



Christ Church, New St.



Christchurch Buildings.

The key to enjoying a walk down New Street is to look up and ignore the sometimes gaudy, corporate shop fronts on the ground floor. Many of the Edwardian and Victorian buildings remain and their intricate architectural features can still be seen and admired. Sadly, many beautiful buildings were lost in World War II and many which survived were then demolished by Birmingham City Council to make way for modern concrete and glass structures.

On the left, heading down from Galloways corner was The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists building with its imposing portico which reached across the pavement. This was built in 1829 and demolished in 1912.

Further down on the right, occupying the corner of New Street and Ethel Street was a cinema. This opened in 1910 as the Theatre de Luxe, known as The Regent from 1922, later The Forum and finally ABC New St from 1963 until its closure in 1983. Plans for renovating the building are currently being processed. On the opposite corner of Ethel St and New St stood the Colonnade Hotel and further down was the fourth Theatre Royal building, which had opened in 1904 and closed in 1956. All of these buildings were demolished and the Woolworth building which took 3 years to build was opened in 1961. Prior to this Woolworths had occupied a building across the road from 1927. Woolworths closed in 1983 and the building was renovated in the 1990s with the addition of an external lift. The building opposite Woolworths was destroyed in WWII and replaced by Grosvenor House, which was designed by architects Cotton, Ballard & Blow. It is a Grade II listed commercial office building, built in 1953 – 55. It was the first city centre building to be built after the war.



Woolworth Building



Grosvenor House

Piccadilly Arcade which runs from New St to Stephenson St was once a cinema. It is a very smart arcade which has been recently renovated.

Moving down to the junction of New St and Stephenson St opposite Corporation St was the magnificent Exchange building. This opened in 1865 and was extended between 1876 & 1878. It was demolished in 1965 and replaced in 1970 with the then Midland Bank (now HSBC) building together with the ramp which led to The Pallasades shopping centre.



The Exchange



1970s

Further down New St, passing Corporation St stands The Britannia Hotel. This was the site of Warwick House, the very first department store in Birmingham, built in 1839. The building was extended and became the home of the very elegant department store, Marshall & Snelgrove. The building was bombed during WWII and was rebuilt. Marshall & Snelgrove was part of the Debenhams group and after it closed, it was re-opened as The Magnum Hotel. This later became

The Central Hotel and finally The Britannia Hotel. The once grand building now looks rather shabby.

The end of New St at the corner of High St suffered severe bomb damage in WWII on the night of April 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> 1941 and many of the Victorian and Edwardian buildings were lost. The site was cleared and for a time there was a Circus there. From then on, that corner was known as The Big Top. The space was used as a car park for several years before a modern block of shops and offices was built in the 1950s. This included several shoe shops including Barratt's shoes, Saxone shoes and also a very large British Home Stores. These buildings still stand, but have been updated and occupiers have changed many times.



Bomb Damage 1941



1950s

These are just a few of the buildings mentioned in the talk, but remember, look up when you walk down New St.

JH



## **A Dramatic Canal Trail in Galton Valley**

**Saturday July 12<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM**

The Birmingham History Theatre Company are taking to the towpath again this July with a circular walk starting and finishing at Galton Bridge Station.

The Trail will include:

- a variety of characters from the past;
- authentic songs,
- A visit to the Pumping Station,
- interesting information provided by a Trail Leader
- Outstanding scenery provided by Mr Brindley and Mr Telford.

The walk is about 2 ½ miles and is likely to take 1 ½ to 2 hours. Unfortunately no toilet facilities will be available.

Please book by Eventbrite. We are charging a fee of £5. Children free.