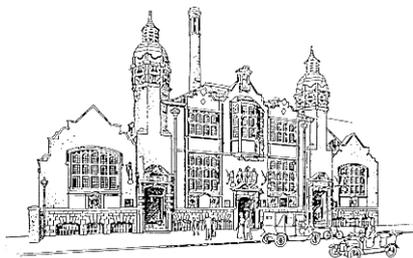


# Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

## JANUARY 2026



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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.

Next Meeting Thursday Jan 28th at 2 pm at the Creation Centre (ex Tram Depot) on the Moseley Road.

Liz Palmer, on the Whittall Street Explosion.

Pursall and Phillips was a percussion cap factory located at 22 Whittall St in the heart of Birmingham's Gun Quarter. On the 27th of September 1859 a huge explosion tore through Pursall and Phillips factory resulting in the death of 20 employees.

Refreshments will be served at 2:00 p.m. followed by a speaker Coming soon Feb 27th Gill Binnie talking about the history of some prominent women of Moseley

### In Memoriam. Mike Byrne

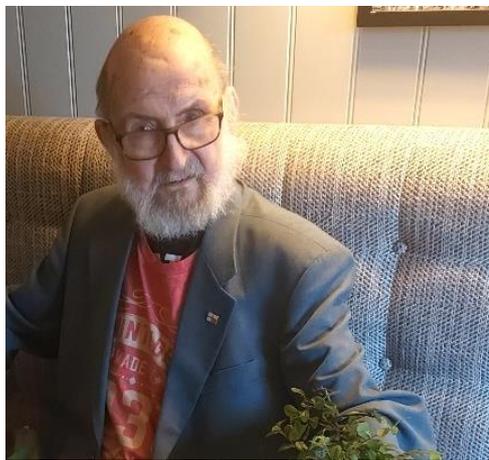
Sad news that Mike died unexpectedly and suddenly in December. He was an active and dedicated local historian and author. Over the years he gave several talks to the Society and the local heritage community will miss him greatly.

Val Hart

### ALBERT JOHNSON

Albert has been a long standing member and is an ex Chairman of the Society.

We wish him warm congratulations on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday



### November 27<sup>th</sup> A talk by Betty Hagglund about Mary and Martha Russell

Betty treated us to a fascinating talk about the Russell sisters who were daughters of William Russell, a Dissenter and close friend of Joseph Priestley. The two women grew up at Showell Green House which was destroyed by the mob in the 1791 riots. Priestley himself fled to America and the Russells followed in 1794 when Mary was aged 28 and Martha 26.



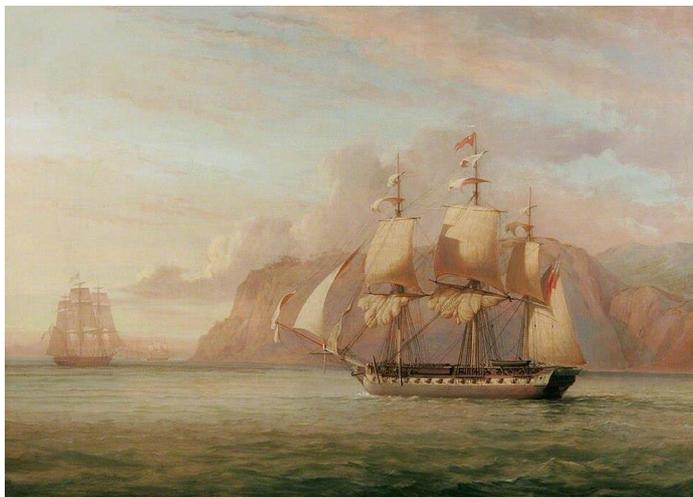
However, the most most extraordinary feature of all this is that the two sisters kept diaries which are preserved in the Birmingham Archives.

In these they recorded in great detail their reactions to events and their emotions. This is all quite amazing as we are able to understand their attitudes and opinions during such turbulent times in their lives.

Along with their family, they rejoiced in the 1789 French Revolution and applauded the overthrow of the French monarchy.

### Captured by The French Navy

It came as a shock then to find themselves being taken prisoner by a frigate, The Prosperine. It was only the fifth day of their journey. At first when the French Captain appeared on deck they felt pleased and excited but then had to quickly pack up a few of their possessions as they were transferred on to the French ship, together with their servants, as prisoners of war.



*HNMS Amelia formerly The Prosperine. (Wikipedia)*

They were treated reasonably well although amenities were missing and food was short. The ship continued to capture other English ships as prizes of war and it seems that the sisters felt excited by the process of pursuit and capture.

Eventually they were transferred to other ships and then, on December 26th, 1894, arrived at Brest harbour in France. Letters

flew to and fro which resulted in permission for them to travel to Paris where they stayed for six months. They finally left and reached New York in August 1795 to settle in Philadelphia.

### Back to England

The political situation meanwhile continued to be volatile and both sisters returned to England. Martha married James Skey, a friend of her brother, in 1798. She died in 1807 and remarkably James subsequently married her sister, Mary, in 1810.

Neither of the two sisters returned to live in Birmingham.

### VH

## The Stone Family

An article appeared in the April 2025 issue of the Gazette which told of two brothers from the Stone family who were killed in WWI. The family had kindly donated two framed photographs of the brothers together with their medals and death pennies. Recently the family sent details of their family tree, including details of names, dates and addresses relating to the Balsall Heath area.

### A résumé of the Stone family tree

William John Stone was born in 1839 in Newent in Gloucestershire. At some point in the next two decades, William moved to Birmingham. This was at a time when there was much migration into the industrial Birmingham from the

surrounding rural counties. In 1860 William married Hannah Hill (a Shropshire girl) at St Martin's Church. William was a Joiner living in Bromsgrove St. In the 1861 Census William, Hannah and their son, William were living at back of 264 Bell Barn Road. By the time of the 1881 Census,



William John Stone  
1839-1912  
Taken c1900

William and family had moved to 56 Clevedon Road, Balsall Heath. He was described as a staircase joiner and builder and was the employer of nine men. He remained at this house in all following censuses up to and including the 1911 Census. William died in 1912.

William and Hannah had six children:-

William Henry Stone 1860 – 1933, Alfred Theophilus Stone 1862 – 1948, Annie Louisa Stone 1865 – 1933, Emily Jane Stone c1867, Ernest Charles Stone 1870 – 1871, Alice Stone 1873 – 1974.

For the purposes of this article, the focus will be on Alfred Theophilus Stone, who was born in 1862 at back of 264 Bell Barn Road. In the 1881 Census, Alfred was listed as a Joiner, living with his parents at 56 Clevedon Road. In 1885 Alfred married Annie Mayo at St Thomas’s Church, Birmingham. Both of them were living at Holloway Head.

Alfred and Alice had five children:-

Annie Stone 1886 – 1966, Alice Stone 1887 – 1971, Alfred Theophilus Stone 1891 – 1919, William John Stone 1895 – 1916, Sidney George Stone 1900 – 1918.

In 1891 Alfred and Annie were living at 11 Cannon Hill Grove, Heath St off Hallam St.

In 1901 they were living at 6 Brunswick Road. In 1906 Annie died. Alfred married his second wife, Nellie Long in 1909 and at that time he was living at 80 Runcorn Road. Nellie was from Windsor in Berkshire, but in the 1901 Census she can be found living as a lodger at 6 Homer St, Balsall Heath and her family suspect that she attended the Congregational Church on Moseley Road. She was a Sunday School teacher and she taught Alfred’s children. In 1911 Alfred and Nellie were living at 26 Edgbaston Road. They had two children, Graham Cameron Stone 1914 – 1984 and Raymond Verdun Cameron Stone 1916 – 2011.



6 Brunswick Road (2nd door on the left)



26 Edgbaston St (the end house)

In October 1916 tragedy struck for Alfred and his family when his son William John Stone was killed in action in WWI while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. In 1918 his youngest son, Sidney George Stone was also killed in action. He was serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Dorset Regiment. Alfred’s oldest son had tried to enlist for WWI, but was found to be medically unfit. He served instead as an Ambulance Driver with the Royal Field Artillery. Alfred junior survived the war, but died in 1919 from a heart condition. Alfred junior left a wife Louisa and two young sons, Alfred aged five and Sidney aged four, both born at 4 Brighton Terrace, Court Road, Balsall Heath. In 1939, the widowed Louisa was living at 34 Conybere St.

		
William John Stone 1895 - 1916	Sidney George Stone 1900 - 1918	Alfred Theophilus Stone 1891 - 1919

In 1923 Alfred senior emigrated to Canada. In 1924 he was joined by his wife Nellie and their two sons, Graham and Raymond. Could this have been an attempt to escape the great sadness of the loss of his three older sons?

The medals, photos and death pennies for William and Sidney were framed by Raymond's daughter, Stephanie and these were donated to Balsall Heath Local History Society with the agreement of her family.

Stephanie writes that her father had fond memories of growing up in Balsall Heath and liked to talk about his time there.

Raymond was born on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1916 at 27 Vincent St. This house was destroyed by enemy action in WWII on October 29<sup>th</sup> 1940. Both Raymond and his older brother, Graham were baptised at St Thomas in the Moors, Balsall Heath. This church was demolished in 1970.



Raymond & Graham Stone in the back garden at Vincent St. (Raymond is on the left)

Raymond remembers living in the house at Vincent St. These are some of his recollections:-

- The house fronted directly on to the pavement.
- There were 2 storeys and a cellar, possibly 3 bedrooms
- There was no running water.
- A shilling (5p) had to be put in the gas meter to keep the supply going.
- A lamplighter came every night to light the streetlights.
- The milkman came with a horse and a big container of milk. Customers took a jug out to him to be filled.

- Coal was delivered to the cellar via a grate in the pavement.
- He lived next door to a Baker's shop.
- The Christmas tree had real candles as there was no electricity
- Meals always consisted of meat and potatoes.

Raymond attended Tindal St School, where he remembers that everyday he had to recite the letters of the alphabet, which were written across the top of the blackboard.

Raymond is believed to have attended the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Vincent St, also an Independent Chapel on Moseley Road and St Paul's Church, also on Moseley Road.

On arrival in Canada, Raymond's father, Alfred found it very difficult to find work, as by this time he was 61 years of age. On leaving school, Raymond also had difficulty in finding suitable, well-paid work. He eventually secured a position with the Chrysler Company and he stayed there until he retired in 1976.

In 1948 Raymond married Frances Amy Barden and they had five children. Stephanie was the oldest of these children. In April 2025, she came over to England and enjoyed a tour of Balsall Heath with Val Hart, Patrick Baird and Haqi Ali. She was delighted to see some of the buildings, which were of significance to her family.

Balsall Heath Local History Society is grateful to the Stone family for the donation of the framed plaques, medals and photos and to Stephanie for this background information about her family, whose lives were so affected by the sad loss of the two young men during WWI.

JH

### Changing Times in Balsall Heath 1960s to 18899s Update on the project



**The 750<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party** went with a swing attended by many people. Lots of them commented on the Balsall Heath Timeline and we were able to record some people.

Meanwhile we are making good progress with oral history interviews and will be doing a lot more in the near future..

#### Would you be able to volunteer?

Please let us know if you would like to join our team of interviewers. We can provide support and guidance.

**Or maybe you have memories to share? We will be running a stall at the Second Saturday at The Old Print Works on Sat, Feb 14<sup>th</sup>. Come and talk to us.**

**Contact Marcus by email: [marcus@balsallheathhistory.co.uk](mailto:marcus@balsallheathhistory.co.uk)**

**or phone: 07511 482 528**

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