

Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette **AUGUST 2026**



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Membership Details

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 of the Society

**2 pm on Thursday,, Sept 24th at the Creation Centre
(ex tram depot)**

Val Hart will be talking about the changing Balsall Heath Project and there will be a showing of the short film made by Haqi Ali for the project.

Sun 20 Sept | 5pm-6.30pm

A live performance by Liz Berry, award winning poet, of her new poem "Psalm"

a tribute to women of Balsall Heath

and an interview with Liz Berry.



Image from Forward Arts Foundation

- Film clips of Balsall Heath including a new short film by Haqi Ali.

- Exhibition of Balsall Heath In Changing Times, 1960s to 1990s

5pm to 6:30 pm at the Venture Hall on Malvern St.

£5 entry for non members. Members free.

Book on Eventbrite via the Birmingham Heritage Week website

The Balsall Heath in Changing Times Project 1960s to 1990s



Readers may remember that we launched this Heritage Lottery funded project last September. We aimed to draw together a picture of how Balsall Heath changed during this period, through oral recordings, The Heathan newspaper and the amazing Mick Turner photographic archive .

In the 1960s to 1990s many migrants moved into the area, and some residents were compulsorily rehoused elsewhere. Whole streets were built and demolished. Meanwhile the area had been in decline with uncleared bomb sites from the Second World War, poor housing, poverty and prostitution.

But it was also a time of new opportunities, new organisations, new ideas, new faith centres and communities arriving in Balsall Heath. There was growing dynamism and hope as the groundwork was laid for the thriving multi-cultural community of today's Balsall Heath.



We have made huge progress on the project, and have now catalogued the Mick Turner archive so we can now present the story of Balsall Heath over these 40 years in a touring Exhibition during Birmingham Heritage Week.

DO COME ALONG AND LOOK AT IT!

Fri 11 Sept 11am- 4pm	Exhibition at the Old PrinWorks, Mseley Rd.
Sat 12 Sept 11am-4pm	Exhibition at the Old Print Works
11am and 2.30 pm	Moseley Road Trail
12-2 pm	Belive in Balsall Heath event at the Moseley Community Hub, Moseley Rd
Tue 15 Sept 2pm-4pm	Open day at St John's Church + Exhibition in Chuch hall, Mary St
Fri 18 Sept 12pm-4pm	Exhibition at the Creation Climbing Centre, Moseley Rd
12-1.30	Moseley Rd Trail

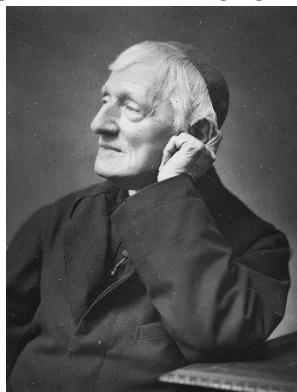
Sun 20 Sept 11am-4pm	Exhibition at St Paul's Venture, Malvern St, off Clifton Rd.
5 -6.30 p.m	Memories of Balsall Heath with Liz Berry and a new film by Haqi Ali

VISIT TO THE ORATORY JULY 23RD 2026

On July 23rd instead of a talk, the meeting took the form of a visit to The Oratory in Edgbaston. A visit has now become the normal pattern for the July meeting.

The tour began at 2pm in the red brick cloister. The coolness of this area was most welcome on a very hot day. The tour guide, Daniel Joyce introduced himself to the group. Daniel started the visit with a short history of John Henry Newman, who was responsible for setting up the first Oratorian congregation in Birmingham in 1848.

John Henry Newman was born in 1801. He was a theologian and academic at Oxford University. Newman was an Anglican priest, but in the late 1830s, he began to lose confidence in Anglicanism and developed an interest in Roman Catholicism. In 1843 he resigned as vicar of the University Church and in 1845 was received into the Roman Catholic Church.



1887 - John Newman

In 1847 Newman was ordained priest in Rome. While in Rome, he met the Oratorians. The Oratory in Rome was founded by Saint Philip Neri. Saint Philip placed great importance on prayer and met regularly with a group of men for prayer, spiritual reading and discussion. As the group grew, they moved to an 'Oratory' or 'place for prayer' (from the Latin *orare* to pray). This is also how the congregation acquired the name Oratorians. Newman was inspired by their way of life and on returning to England founded the first Oratorian Congregation in Birmingham. In 1852 the Oratorians moved from Alcester Street to Hagley Road, Edgbaston and the present house and a temporary church was built. Newman and his companions carried out much good work amongst the poor. Pope Pius IX wanted Newman to work with the educated classes too.

The site in Edgbaston was well placed for him to carry out all this work with the affluent people who lived there and on the other side the poor people of Ladywood. The temporary church remained during Newman's lifetime, but did undergo some changes and extensions. Newman was created Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. Cardinal John Henry Newman died on August 11th 1890. After his death, a decision was made to build a permanent church as a memorial to Newman. It was constructed between 1907 and 1910 and this is the church which can be seen today.

The visit continued with a tour of the church. The sight on entering the church is quite amazing. The 152 feet long nave is lined on either side by two rows of six magnificent Breccia marble columns. These columns were imported from Serravezza in Italy. They were transported on a steamer to England, then transferred to canal barges to Monument Road wharf and finally by road to Hagley Road.



**The Nave looking
towards the High Altar.**

The first stop was at the baptistry. The lower part of the huge font was carved by Bridgeman of Lichfield from a block of white alabaster. It is covered by a moveable bronze canopy, which swings to one side. It is topped by a bronze sculpture of St John the Baptist.

Along the side aisles, there are altars dedicated to the saints. These are panelled with Italian Marble with the exception of St Patrick's Altar which is panelled, appropriately, with green Irish marble.

The visit continued passing many other shrines and altars, particularly notable is Our Lady's Altar.

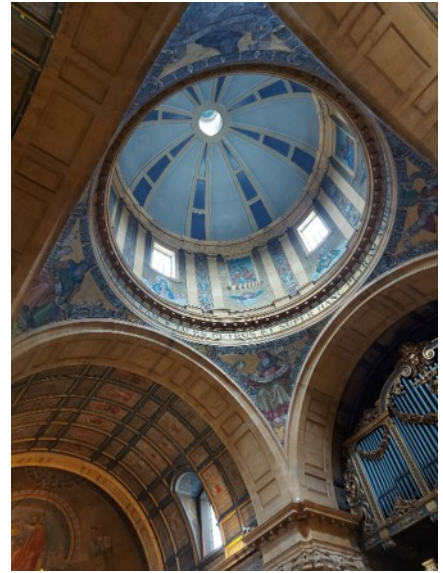


Our Lady's Altar

The Sanctuary provides the focal point for the whole church. There are panels of red African onyx, Old Convent Siena marble and rare green Mexican onyx. The High Altar came from the old church. It was a gift from the congregation in 1899 to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Oratory.



The High Altar



The Dome

Looking up at the gates of the Sanctuary gives a spectacular view of the Dome.

Moving on past the Choir Gallery and The Organ, the tour continued into St Philip's Chapel and then into the house and museum. The tour finished where it started in the red brick cloister. There are many stone plaques on the wall in memory of departed members of The Oratory. The visit concluded with tea, coffee and biscuits. It was unanimously agreed that the tour was excellently conducted by Daniel. He is extremely knowledgeable and articulate. Attention was drawn to many outstanding facts and features which might otherwise have been missed without such an effective guide.

JH

Bibliography

The Birmingham Oratory Church – A History and Guide.

Colour photos by Jenny Hodson.

Black and white photo of John Henry Newman widely available.

Other Events

September 11th-20th is Birmingham Heritage week and these are just a few of the events. There are also a tour of Moseley Road Baths on both Fridays, Stories from the Camp Hill Line on the train on Sunday 20th although these two are fully booked so there's a waiting list, and the Golden Lion in Cannon Hill Park is open on the afternoon of the 20th. For those who like to visit local churches, All Saints in Kings Heath have a new trail through their graveyard on Saturday 12th while St Mary's in Moseley will open for the weekend of the 12th & 13th with guided tours of the church both days and one of the tower on the Sunday. For more events and details of these see <https://birminghamheritageweek.co.uk/>

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