



The website of the Black Country Society



**Established in 1967 to Support, Record, Preserve and Celebrate the distinct
Character and Nature of the West Midlands area known since the mid nineteenth century as 'The Black Country'**



BCS AGM 2017/18 Report

President's Report - Keith Hodgkins

It has been an honour to serve as President for the Society's 50th anniversary year and I hope I have played a part in making the anniversary a memorable one through my involvement in a series of activities.

These started with a special celebration which I organised on 1st March at the Noah's Ark in Tipton, fifty years to the day from the Society's inaugural meeting at the pub in 1967. A blue plaque (produced jointly with the Tipton Civic Society) commemorating the anniversary and bearing the names of the Society's founders, John Brimble and Dr John Fletcher, was unveiled by their widows, Doreen Brimble and Pauline Fletcher. Many longstanding members with memories of the early days of the Society attended and an enjoyable afternoon of nostalgia ensued.

At the Society's anniversary event at Himley Hall on 1st June I acted as host to the four Black Country Mayors and at the celebration day at the Black Country Living Museum on 6th July I was invited to deliver an address on 'My Take on the BCS'. I spoke about the Society's principal remit of promoting the identity of the Black Country and the immense progress made over the last fifty years, including the development of the BCLM. Over that period the Museum itself has become a physical embodiment of the historic and cultural identity of the area for which we all feel we have a collective ownership. I proffered the thought that the challenge for the Museum as it grows larger as a business will be to maintain its grassroots support and to continue to nurture that sense of ownership that Black Country folk have of what they regard as "their Museum".

This theme continued at the Society's November meeting when I gave an illustrated presentation entitled 'Looking Back on Fifty Years of the Black Country Society', in which I outlined the Society's main achievements, particularly in the 1970s and 80s when I was active on the committee. I also paid tribute to several of the leading lights of the Society in its early days, many of whom are sadly no longer with us.

On 7th October I presented one of the lectures at the Black Country History day at Birmingham University and then, to round off the year on 5th December, I invited the Society to share the Black Country carol service with the Tipton Civic Society. This annual carol service with bible readings in local dialect was initiated by the Black Country Society back in 1972 and continued for about 40 years but is still maintained by the Tipton Civic Society which has been heavily influenced by BCS traditions, thanks to its first Chairman, John Brimble.

On 9th January I attended, with Judith Watkin, the launch of the Living Memory project at Smethwick Library, to which the Society has lent its support. On a related theme I have, at the request of the committee, been liaising with Terence Hyde, a retired Blackcountryman now living in Germany, who contacted the Society with an offer of donating his photo archive of local railways, taken in the early 1960s. I met him recently on one of his visits home and he handed over the first batch of negatives which contain some wonderful images of lost Black Country lines.

I would like to pay tribute to the hard work of the committee over the year and in particular to James Morgan, who is standing down as Chairman after a lengthy spell of ten years at the helm. I know from experience just how time consuming and sometimes gruelling this type of work can be. Much of it is unseen and often taken for granted so we must always show the fullest appreciation for the likes of James who have given so much of their time to keep our great Society alive and relevant in a changing world. I send my best wishes to the incoming Chairman, John Woodall.

I have accepted the invitation from the committee to serve as President for a second year.

Secretary's Report - Judith Watkin

2017 was notable as the Black Country Society's 50th Anniversary year and we owe much to our retiring Chairman, James Morgan, for organising the celebratory events. James' guiding principle was 'to give something back to our members and supporters' so both the main events, the Afternoon Tea at Himley Hall in June, and a day out at the Black Country Living Museum in August, were free and open to all who applied, a lucky draw system being used where they were oversubscribed. At Himley Hall a



BCS Officers at AGM

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cheque for over £10,000 was handed to a representative from Mary Stevens Hospice, the profits from 'The Tommy Mundon Story' by Angela Daniels, and we were pleased that both Tommy's widow, Val, and Angela could join us on the day. We were also pleased to welcome the Mayors of Dudley and Walsall, and the Deputy Mayors of Sandwell and Wolverhampton, along with their Mayoresses and Consort. Dudley's

Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor Dave Tyler and his wife, were also able to join us for the evening celebration at the Museum, along with Andrew Lovett, its Chief Executive, who had provided 100 free tickets and 50 half price ones, in recognition of the part the Black Country Society played in the Museum's early development and continues to play, as part of the Advisory Panel for the new 40s/50s/60s development.

The magazine, which was also celebrating its 50th Anniversary, was given a makeover, with perfect binding and full colour, and special events were organised for advertisers and regular contributors, without whose support it would not be the outstanding publication it is. A tour of Holden's Brewery in Woodsetton, long term advertisers in the magazine, took place in July and a wine tasting at Halfpenny Green Vineyard, in August. We were pleased that Will Morgan and his business partner, Daniel Williams, who had contributed £3,000 towards the printing of 'The Tommy Mundon Story' were able to join us at the Vineyard.

Our thanks are also due to the President, Keith Hodgkins, for organising a joint Carol Service in December, with Tipton Civic Society, at St Martin's and St Paul's Church, Tipton and for his many contributions as a speaker during the year.

Unfortunately, 2018 sees the retirement from the committee of many long-standing members, often due to ill health. As a young man, Martyn Round worked for Reliance Printing Works, who were the original printers of the magazine in the late 1960s, and he then went on to own the firm himself, which continued to print the magazine. Even after retirement Martyn has continued to contribute as an expert proof reader, now alongside his partner, Joan Robins. He has therefore been working for the Black Country Society for over 50 years and has unwaveringly supported many of its activities, especially the former excursion programme, Black Country History Day and the selling of our books. He will continue to proof read the magazine in the future and we would like to thank him for all his work for the Society. Similarly, both our former Treasurer (twice), Tony Copson, and former magazine Editor, Dr David Cox are leaving the committee, the latter due to pressure of work in his role as Reader in Criminal Justice History, University of Wolverhampton. David has also contributed much to the Society as a walks leader, speaker and writer.

Although James Morgan is stepping down from the Chairmanship, due to family illness, we are pleased he will continue as a committee member. James has been an excellent Chairman, organising many book launches, including two of his own 'Cricket Lyrics' and 'Confessions of a Newsagent's Son', the Society's lecture programme with many entertaining and informative speakers and dealing with problems as they have arisen with his characteristic good humour. We would urge members of the Society to consider joining the committee or volunteering for our work in other ways, such as selling the Society's books at events. We are grateful that John Woodall has agreed to take over as the Society's Chairman. A Life Member of the Society, John has much experience at a senior level in Business, Education and Regeneration so we look forward to working with him in the future.

It is with regret that I also have to mention the passing of Joan White, former Chair of the Kingswinford Group, as 2017 ebbed away. Joan contributed much to the Black Country Society, especially as a leader of the excursions programme, along with former Membership Secretary, Linda Button. By the time of the AGM the funeral will also have taken place of Lettrice Winterborn, the wife of committee member, Doug Winterborn, who supported Doug in all his work for the Society.

Membership Secretary's Report - Tony Ridge

Membership currently stands at 1,439. In 2017 we welcomed 67 new members to the Society. Each was sent a welcoming letter, membership card and the latest edition of The Blackcountryman. Despite continuing to attract new members the overall membership total dropped by 56 year on year. Our members continue to be drawn from the Black Country and surrounds, but with a significant body of "exiles" whether elsewhere in the UK or abroad, especially Australia, USA and France. We were pleased to welcome new members from Germany and Switzerland during the year. We continue to enjoy the loyal support of a number of local authority archives, local history societies, and educational establishments, but we have also felt the effects of local authority curbs on expenditure.

Please encourage your friends and relations to come to one of our lectures or events, and perhaps to join the Society. A reduced first year rate is available for new members, and various payment methods are available.

Finally, my grateful thanks to all those members who pay their subscriptions on time!

Treasurer's Report Year Ended 30 June 2017 - Aaron Hickman

As in previous years the accounts have been prepared by the Siviter Greenfield Group based in Wall Heath. The Society remains in a strong financial position. We have seen a small increase in the subscriptions we receive from members and have been able to absorb the additional printing costs for 'The Blackcountryman' as we moved to a full colour finish.

As in previous years, we still rely heavily on the profits we make from the sale of publications. 2016/17 has seen us involved with two new publications.

Firstly, 'Our Stour' produced by Graham Beckley. Graham kindly donated to the Society 300 copies of the initial print run. Also, as many of you will be aware, the Society supported the publication of 'The Tommy Mundon' story by Angela Daniels. The profits from the book were donated to Mary Stevens Hospice at the 50th Anniversary afternoon tea at Himley Hall, the donation totaling £10,087.

The balance of the grant from The Heritage Lottery Fund to cover the Society's WWI project stands at £643 and is included within Other Creditors. We have until 2019 to spend this money. All in all, the Society remains in a stable and healthy financial position.

Magazine Report - Mike Pearson

The magazine (and the Society) have gone through their Golden Anniversary year, and it can be said we are back to 'business as usual'. The format that was adopted at the start of the anniversary is to be retained for the foreseeable future. It does cost more but was felt worthy of retention.

My move into Wales has led to a few 'timing issues' for the magazine, but as time goes on, and work on the house is finished, I should return to 'business as usual'. The work carried out by my proof-reading team of Frank Cox, Judith Watkin, Martyn Round and Joan Robins have kept the magazine one that doesn't suffer the ignominy that some publications have: typos.

Material comes in for publication on a regular basis; there are ups and downs, and I will always be grateful for too much copy. I thought the March issue this year was going to come up short, but with a late spurt it was covered, with a couple of items to carry forward.

Website Report - Judith Watkin

I hope you have all found the Society's new website www.blackcountryandsociety.com Designed and managed by our new webmaster, Brian Ridout from magnum-designs, it is the place to go to find details of forthcoming events, reports of past ones, buy books and renew membership. You will also find photos taken by Graham Beckley, especially at the 50th Anniversary events. Take a look – you might find yourself there!

Publications Report - Judith Watkin

Since its opening in July 2017 the Black Country Society has a new outlet to sell its publications - the Black Country Hub at the Merry Hill shopping centre. The unit, near the bus station entrance, is being run by the Black Country Arts Council. Since Mike Pearson's move to Wales, Graham Beckley has taken over running the stockroom and supplying books to our outlets. Graham was kept particularly busy during the Christmas period and we are grateful to both Mike and Graham for their work. The selling of the publications helps the Society to continue as subscriptions do not cover our expenses.

The Industrial Archaeology Group - Keith Hodgkins

The Group continued with its format of evening lectures on industrial topics in 2017, in addition to leading one of the Society's summer evening walkabouts. Lecture subjects ranged from a History of Colliery Ventilation by our regular member, Alan Hill, to a talk on the Special Collections Department at Birmingham University by its archivist, Jennifer Childs; and a presentation entitled 'Do You Remember That Railway Line?', a tour of pre-Beeching railways in the area by rail enthusiast and photographer, Paul Dorney. For the past three years we have concluded the programme with a video night which has proved very popular, when we show short films or excerpts from films covering industrial and transport topics. A talk on the New Cross Mine Disaster had to be rearranged because of speaker Philip Jones' poor health. Alan Hill saved the day with another of his illustrated talks: 'Hemingfield Colliery, South Yorkshire; an Early Victorian Coal Mine'. Alan is a volunteer with the mine's preservation group and we hope to arrange a visit there in 2018. The walkabout in June explored more isolated landscapes, this time around Great Bridge and Swan Village. Isolated that is, for the pedestrian, because passing through the area of the walk is the busy Black Country New Road. But few people in cars will ever have stopped to explore the sites of the old canals, railways, marlholes and gasworks that were once commonplace. Over the past six years or so I have been slowly scanning Ron Moss's photographic archive, part of which was the subject of a presentation to the Group back in 2014. This type of archive has taken on a new significance this year with the launch of 'Living Memory', a two-year project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is designed 'to explore and share unique photography collections and life stories from diverse communities across the Black Country'. Living Memory director Geoff Broadway is talking to Ron on the use of his photos to promote the project. If anyone in the BCS has old photos which might have a story to tell about the Black Country, please get in touch and we can link you to the project. Another varied Group programme is being planned for 2018.

Men and Memorials of Dudley 1914-1918 - Roy Peacock

Two more VC commemoration stones were laid in 1917 - the Lye VC for Thomas Bryan, Northumberland Fusiliers, and the Coseley VC for Thomas Barratt, South Staffordshire Regiment. Both were fine commemoration ceremonies and very well attended. Sgt. Johnson Beharry VC, Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, was also present and Graham Beckley's photos were splendid. We continue to support 'Worcester World War 100'. Most of the Black Country soldiers' descriptions have originated with us - and with our permission. Our final contribution to 'Dudley Men and Memorials' will be a book of Remembrance. It will be based on 50 stories of Great War men - and a few women - illustrating the long path to victory. The Mayor of Dudley has seen a draft and I hope that the Council might sponsor its publication. Advice on a suitable title is requested. I rather like 'Victory 1918 - Still Remembering 2018'. My thanks are given to many members who have provided details and assistance over the course of the HLF project.



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