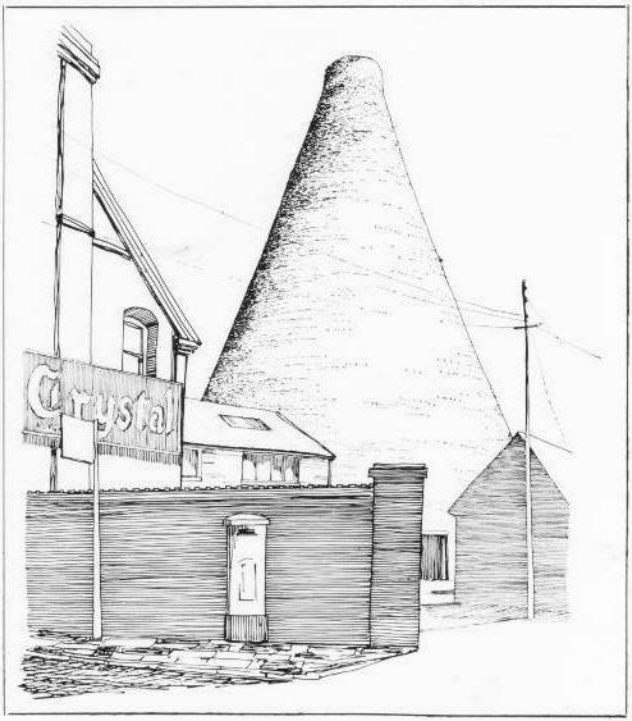
THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN

SUMMER 1974 Vol. 7 No. 3 20p



THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY

Vol. 7 No. 3.

Editor:
HAROLD PARSONS

Contents

Published by
The Black Country Society.

Printed by Reliance Printing Works, Halesowen.

July, 1974.

Editorial:
1 Cedar Gardens, Kinver
Tel. Kinver 2065

EDITORIAL

IT had to happen! After seven-and-a-half years the cover price of this magazine has been increased from 17p to 20p. It should really have happened quite a while ago, increase upon increase in printing and paper costs being absorbed as a matter of course until recently, when the cost of each individual copy was assessed, we made the alarming discovery that copies to retail shops were being sold at a loss. Now, even the committee of the Black Country Society, adept though it has become at absorbing costs, had to draw a line at that!

To those who may think that a 3p increase is a bit steep, we must emphasize that copies sold through shops will still produce less than 1p a copy profit, even after having been lugged round to retail outlets gratuitiously by members in their own vehicles. Not to sell to shops would be to deprive ourselves of a useful method of communication. How many reading this will have had their first introduction to the Society through spotting a copy of this magazine on a shop counter?

Anyhow, there it is! 'Be-opes-it-ay' going to put you off, to quote the theme of one of the articles in this issue.

Turning aside from the subject of increased costs, one with which the reader will be heartily sick, since it looms on all horizons (we could beef about the latest jump in postage!), it is gratifying to see in the magazine a large number of short articles which, although perhaps pedestrian to some, will be a delight to others. The range of readership is such that while the well-researched article is the backbone of the publication, giving it status as a serious work, the more general titbit has a welcome place. Black Country men and women in all walks of life are putting their thoughts and reminiscences to paper in a way they would not have thought possible a few years ago—and there would have been no publishing outlet for them if they had! Apart from the satisfaction it gives to them as individuals, posterity will be the richer.

Soo goo on wi' it, yo'ne all gorra chance wi' we!

SOCIETY NEWS | John Brimble reports

THE society's involvement in the various activities of the region has continued at all levels throughout the last quarter, concerning itself as always with matters both past and future.

At the meeting at the Union Inn, Tipton in March (one of a series dealing with the various aspects of the local authority's structure plans), the topic was the future of transport in the Black Country. The meeting, which covered road, rail and canal transport, was very well attended and produced a lively discussion with representatives of the local planning departments on hand to answer questions.

As this meeting was held within the area covered by the Owen Street, Tipton development plan, it was felt opportune to outline the council's proposals for that scheme. Sandwell Council's plan for public participation in suggesting ideas for the new development was explained by Mr. A. A. Cave of their planning department. The society had been asked by the council to suggest its own ideas on this matter and our town planning committee gathered views from members and public in the Tipton area (questionaires were not sent to members outside the Tipton area as this would have been both irrelevant and impractical). At the time of writing, a report is being prepared, to be presented to the Sandwell Council planning department when completed. The committee of the society were pleased to see that the local council were prepared to have the public participate in a planning matter of considerable local importance.

Although the society could not be represented at the public inquiry at Dudley during April, when the proposed development of green belt land at Cotwall End, Sedgley, was reviewed, a letter stating the society's objections to any such development was sent based on the grounds that the area in question is of amenity and recreational value, which the local people can ill afford to lose.

The society has also sent representations to Sandwell Council concerning its views on the future of Haden Hall, Old Hill, which again is in doubt.

We are pleased to see that a public appeal has at last been launched to raise money to develop the Black Country Museum. As early campaigners for this venture, the society has always tried to maintain close links with the project and hopes that these links will be strengthened even more as the scheme gets underway. Recently, a number of this society's members have helped on museum rescue projects, particularly in regard to the salvaging of pharmaceutical material from the former chemist shop of H. E. Doo, Netherton, and the demolition of Armishaw's bakery, Salop Street, Dudley, where a dough mixer and and the oven fronts were saved. Because notice of these operations came after the publication of the previous issue of the magazine, it was possible to contact only a few

members. We would, however, like to see more members able to take part in such activities. Anyone who would like to be informed of such rescue operations, please write to me (49 Victoria Road, Tipton).

Of recent meetings, Mr. Don Gray gave an illustrated talk at the Five Ways Inn, Cradley Heath on 15 May, on the subject of the Stourbridge Canal, whilst on 6 June at the Painters' Arms, Coseley, local historian, Mr. John S. Roper addressed members on the subject of Sedgley and Coseley people in the seventeenth century. Also, the usual darts and domino matches took place where members were able to meet the people of the Black Country in a grass roots atmosphere.

The trips offer a friendly day out in a congenial atmosphere, recent ones being to Matlock, Bath, and the Blue John Mine, Derbyshire, as well as to the ancient city of Chester.

The sub-committees of the society continue to function well, and the work of the town planning sub-committee has already been mentioned. The industrial archaeology group meets regularly on a monthly basis and visits to local works and industrial sites are continually organised. It is hoped that the project undertaken by this group on the history of the Saltwells Spa, Dudley, will shortly be published in pamphlet form. Photographs of the area, especially older ones, are being received by the society to add to its ever-increasing collection. Older prints are usually copied, the original being returned to the owner.

It was felt a rational move recently to merge the tape recording section with the industrial archaeology group, and it is in fact interesting to note that the society's tape recording activities are listed in Lewis Foreman's Archive Sound Collections directory.

The cultural activities side is considering several ideas concerning the theatre, whilst it is envisaged that another brass band concert might take place later in the year.

Members wishing to become involved in any of the activities, please write.

SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Prizes totalling £100 are to be awarded in a short story competition organised by West Midland Arts. Authors must live within, or been born within Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Hereford, Shropshire and Warwickshire. Any subject may be chosen, length up to 2,250 words. Closing date, 30 September, 1974.

Entry forms with full details from: The Literature Officer, West Midland Arts, Lloyds Bank Chambers, Market Street, Stafford ST16 2AP.

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY
SUMMER PROGRAMME, 1974

Wednesday, August 14 (8.00 p.m.)—
The Brittania Inn, Owen Street, Tipton. The Secretary introduces and discusses acquisitions to the Society's historical collection during the past year.

Sunday, September 8—
The Sports Union, Wednesbury Oak Road, Tipton. Whippet Race for the Society Trophy: The Pride of the Black Country. Weigh-in during the morning, racing commences 2.30 p.m., presentation approx. 6.00 p.m.

Thursday, September 12 (8.00 p.m.)—
The Sports Union, Wood Green Road (Nr. Horse and Jockey Inn), Wednesbury. Members of the Wednesbury Amateur Boxing Club introduce a discussion on Local Boxing, past, present and future.

Sunday, September 15—
Tour of the canals of the Black Country **by canal boat.** Leave Owen Street by coach 9.30 a.m. to return there by canal at approx. 7.00 p.m. Adults 75p, Children 50p. All children must be paid for. Numbers limited to 48. Please book with the Secretary.

Sunday, September 22—
Society coach trip to Oxford and Blenheim Palace. Further details and bookings from the Secretary.

Thursday, October 10 (8.00 p.m.)—
The Vine Inn (Bull and Bladder), The Delph, Brierley Hill. From Brierley Hill to Vancouver. A talk about local miners in Canada in the nineteenth century.

Thursday, October 17 (8.30 p.m.)—
The Limerick Inn, Summit Place (off Himley Road), Lower Gornal. A dominoes, darts and crib match against the pub. All players and non-players invited for a friendly evening.

Saturday, October 26. All day—
The Library, Mount Pleasant, Bilston. An exhibition of Black Country historical items.

Cover illustrations: The cone at Red House Glassworks, Wordsley, as drawn by Austin Moseley for the Black Country Society's 1972 calendar.

Readers interested in the local glass industry are reminded that the following is still on sale at the extremly low price of 30p plus 7p p. and p.

"The Stourbridge Glass Industry in the 19th Century"
by H. Jack Haden

This magazine receives financial assistance from West Midland Arts

BLACK COUNTRY SLAUGHTERHOUSE

The executioners bestride the road,
Their white gowns flecked with blood,
Their arms are thick and dark with hair,
Swift in movement, eyes aware,
As they form their grisly barrier
Across a sunlit morning street,
Slowing the tramp of morning feet;
Halting the rumble and the rhyme
Of wheels, with the imminence of blood.

The smells of death and cringing fear
And fleshly rotteness are here,
Intermingling in the air.
We breathe its odour with despair,
And retch in our souls clean depths,
For the carnivorous strain,
That keeps us on our carnal plain
Of hungering for fresh killed meat
And the salt-sweet taste of blood.

Now the doomed herd tumbles forth
In close packed horde of jostling pink,
Squealing, leaping on each other,
Running the rubber-booted gauntlet
Of those white-gowned blood-flecked giants
Who crouch and weave; and flex
Their hairy arms like trees in wind,
Watching for the pig with shifty eye
Who might espy an opening and fly
Blind with fear into the watching street,
To dodge the wheels and crowding feet
And seek escape, he knows not where,
Nor why!

When they are gone, our life moves on;
Forgetting soon, the tragedy we looked upon,
Nor could we ever comprehend
That blind unreasoning race to death
Of pigs, whose tiny pink-toed feet
Ran fearfully across a sunlit street.

J. William Jones.

BARE FACTS

Wen noo wairds am inventid,
A recent one is " STREAKING,"
Do we spake ower own swate way
Or the Oxford way of speaking?

This noo waird is American,
That's weer it began,
An' gid ter folks in bairthday sewts
As threw the strates thay ran.

Soo shud we stay just as we bin,
As trew Black Country spakers?
Sayin', " Them wot run wi'owt no cloos,
Ter we, rahnd 'ere, thay'm " STRAYKERS."

Kate Fletcher.

This attractive stone vessel was recently found on a building site by Mr. Alan Golcher of Wednesbury. It is about eight inches in height, brown in colour, with the design as shown slightly raised from the surface.

Can any of our readers tell Mr. Golcher exactly what he has?

ARTS AND CRAFTS

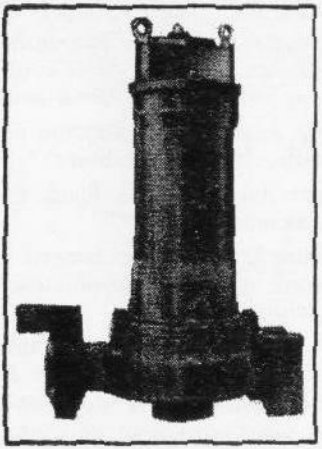
The Visual Arts and Crafts Officer of West Midland Arts would like to hear from professional or semi-professional artists/craftsmen living in or otherwise connected with the West Midlands (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire). Registers of artists, craftsmen, workshops and studios are being compiled and all information on these would me greatly appreciated. WMAA is also in a position to give advice, and in some cases, financial assistance for projects.

Lloyd's Bank Chambers, Market Street, Stafford ST16 2AP
Tel. 0785 2788-2022

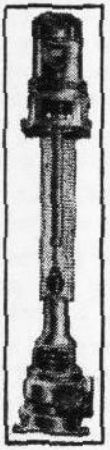
Lee-Howl Pumps

...BACKED BY 90 YEARS EXPERIENCE

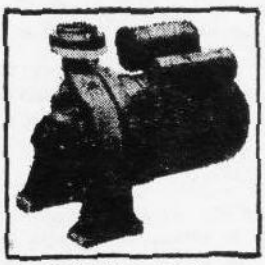
'EXPELEAU'
Domestic Sewage Pump



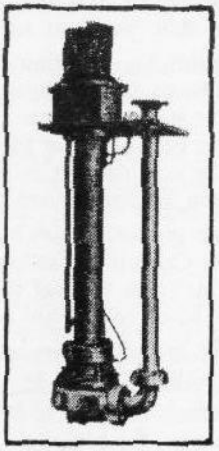
'TIPTONIA'
Submersible Sewage Pump



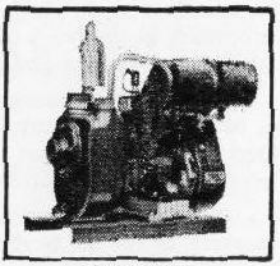
Vertical 'Non-clogg' Pump
For Sewage and Semi-solids



Horizontal End Suction
Centrifugal Pump



Vertical 'Non-clogg'
Wet Sump Pump



'EASIPRIME'
Self Priming Contractors' Pump

Numerous other types available. Details on request.

Lee, Howl & Co. Ltd

Alexandra Road, Tipton, Staffs. DY4 8TA
'Phone 021–557 3721/5 *Telex* 338945
LONDON OFFICE
375A, Regents Park Road, Finchley, London, N.3.
'Phone 01–346 5994/5

The Kinver Light Railway

(AN IDEA FOR REVIVAL)

by

Tom R. Bennett

HOW many older readers remember the thrill of the ride on what must have been one of the most scenic routes in the country, the old Kinver Light Railway, which closed down in 1930.

How many younger readers have seen the articles and pictures of the tramway in the Dudley Reference Library?

How much pleasure did it give to Black Country people during summer and holiday weekends?

The pattern of leisure activities has changed very much since those days, but how many people realise the possibilities of a return to the use of local amenities for leisure?

Everyone is aware of the problems of traffic congestion and the possible limited uses of the private car and the Black Country Society itself is actively engaged in the planning of leisure amenities in the area.

A new subject has been introduced into schools called "Environmental Studies," which attempts to make children aware of the effects of good land use, pollution, and planning for the future. Already, county planning authorities are looking for suitable country parks within their own boundaries to accommodate weekend and holiday leisure seekers.

For example, Staffordshire is examining the possibilities of the Churnet Valley, Cannock Chase, and Highgate Common amongst other places, and all Black Country people who are interested should go to see the excellent work which has been done in the Sandwell Valley at West Bromwich in the heart of the conurbation, where the local authority has appointed a warden and given encouragement to his ideas.

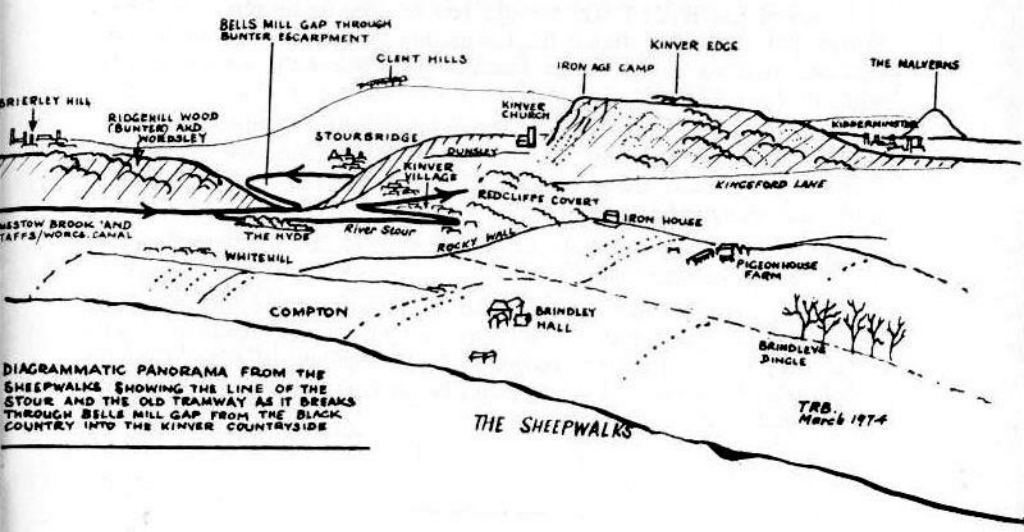
A great deal of attraction in recent years has been centred on revivals of old transport systems. At Crich Tramway Museum, near Matlock, in Derbyshire, one can see trams from all over the world; buy postcards of trams that ran in your own home town; and even take a tram ride.

Nearer home, we have witnessed an astonishing interest in the recovery of the old Severn Valley Steam Line with its attractive scenery.

I cannot help thinking that a re-opening of the Kinver Light Railway would be an outstanding success, for although I have not made a survey of all the difficulties which might be involved, on the map the line of the track seems fairly straightforward.

For those who are not familiar with the route, an outline might be useful at this point.

From its junction with other tramways of the area at the Fish Inn, Amblecote, the tramway followed the canal and the River Stour through the Bunter Escarpment of Ridge Hill Wood at Bells Mill Gap.



It is thought that the Stour was an overflow stream from an ice and debris-ponded lake at the end of the Ice Age, which cut down quickly to form the present deep valley feature at Bells Mill.

Bells Mill itself was one of the many water-power sites which worked forges and wireworks before the great expansion of industry on the coal-field plateau.

The tramway continued across peaceful fields and woodlands all the way to Kinver, following the terrace of the Stour and only crossing the road at the Stewponey.

Still following the Stour but now joined by the Smestow Brook and the Staffordsire and Worcestershire Canal from the direction of Wolver-hampton, the tramway passed the site of the Hyde Ironworks, an area of busy manufacture up to the beginning of this century, but now mercifully reclothed by natural woodland.

This is indeed an historic site. The tramway sheds were on the spot when Foley introduced the first slitting mill in the Midlands in 1628. Most people have heard of the legends behind the introduction of this piece of machinery and I will not repeat them here, but the innovation was the cause of what I like to think of as a minor industrial revolution, a century before the main one.

The development came in time to supply armaments to both sides in the tragic civil war, and later contributed to the trading in domestic wares up and down the Severn.

Now, the only evidence on the ground are the forge pools in the woods, the sluices, and the occasional pieces of slag, but the tracks of the old tramway here and there are left in position across the Stour or its water-power diversions.

Beyond the Hyde Lock, the old line reaches its terminus at Kinver bridge, but along this stretch the fascinating feature is the church tower standing high above the village which shelters below the sandstone ridge with the Iron Age camp on top.

It is truly a line which passes through beautiful and historic countryside. With proper planning, the visions for future leisure use are endless, with walking, horse riding, industrial archeology, canal regattas, nature trails and many other events.

In conclusion, I would like to see reactions to this article in the pages of "The Blackcountryman."

There must be many people who could write interesting memories of this picturesque tramway, and there might even be enthusiasts who would like to see this route reopened for the delight of Black Country people who have such attractive green borderland, and who have always been proud of it.

(See advertisement page 33)

THE BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY'S HISTORICAL COLLECTION

John Brimble itemises two interesting aspects

(1) News during General Strike, 1926

NOT a particularly significant item to look at, yet a very important social document in the light of historic events succeeding it, is a sheet of paper, duplicated on both sides and headed, 'Express and Star' Bulletin No. 2. First edition, Wednesday, May 5, 1926. Price one penny.

At this time, the General Strike was in progress; journalists everywhere were on strike and many papers, including 'The Times,' in common with the 'Express and Star,' appeared in typescript. This copy, one of the items in the Society's collection, reported to its readers that there was no difference in outlook in the country and the prospect of discussions between the parties in dispute was not likely in the foreseeable future. Items of general news included reports of rioting at Poplar, London, and from the headquarters of the Miners Federation in London, where the situation remained unchanged. However, an executive meeting was to be held that afternoon. There was also a report that over 10,000 men were on strike at the Crewe railway works.

On the political front, local news gave hope that trains would be run from the G.W.R. station, Wolverhampton to Birmingham and Knowle, also that volunteers for special constables and transport

workers were enrolling in large numbers.

A communist meeting of about 800 persons had met at the Market Place the previous evening, but the crowd had been dispersed immediately by the police.

Wolverhampton and District Dairymen issued a statement that there would be no need for increasing the prices of milk locally, though Buttercup Day for Wolverhampton Childrens' Camp to be held on the forthcoming Saturday, had had to be abandoned, so was the visit of Lord Burnham to the town. Mr. Kidson of Willenhall is reported as being a member of the Food Emergency Committee for Wolverhampton and District.

The glassworks at Brierley Hill were still continuing operations, though the iron and steel trade was at a standstill. We also learn that Mr. J. Phillips, headmaster of the Parish Church School, Darlaston, had died the previous night after a short illness, and that councillor F. C. Wesson had been elected Chairman of Darlaston Council at the Tuesday meeting.

Intermingled with this was the news that on that very morning, Capt. Amundsen's polar airship left Trotsk for Spitzbergen.

Ironically, as if the political unrest of the country was not bad enough, the weather forecast offered little better; ' unsettled ' was the verdict.

Old copies of local newspapers are always a useful source of information on the political, social and industrial life of a district. This particular news-sheet is, perhaps, just that more significant, for whilst such emergency efforts were at the time unpopular in certain quarters, it was not to be foreseen that they would become interesting social documents half a century later.

(2) Sunday School Certificates

THE Society's attempt to collect items of social history relating to the area covers a wide field and includes material connected with churches and chapels.

Of particular interest from a social aspect are the certificates, or book plates, found on the inside cover or fly leaves of Sunday School prizes. These were usually awarded for regular attendance, and as these can still be commonly found dating from the period 1880-1920, they provide us with information from those times. For instance, we find the names of chapels which in these changing times are no longer with us, together with the names of the various superintendents and secretaries carrying out their work therein; also the names of printers and stationers of the time, some surviving, many now gone.

Amongst those in the Society's collection are ones awarded by Bell Street Primitive Methodist Church, Tipton, 1897-1905; Zion Sunday Afternoon Adult Bible Class, West Bromwich; Centenary Sunday School Select Class, John Street, Walsall, 1890; Weslyan Sunday School, Dudley Port, 1913; Old Hill Weslyan Sunday School, 1918 and Adult Bible Class, Wesley Chapel, Causeway Green, 1889-90.

The Society would like to build

up a large and comprehensive collection of these items, to represent one important aspect of life years ago and perhaps to provide material for some future historian researching into the history of Sunday Schools in this area.

There must be many of these old prizes lying about, passed down by successive generations, their contents no longer of general interest.

Therefore, if you are about to throw out your grandparent's Sunday School prizes, please let us have them.

Halesowen Station's Edwardian Heyday

by

Michael Hale

STRICTLY speaking, the Edwardian era spanned the years 1902-10, the reign of King Edward VII, but features associated with the term lasted a few years longer into the reign of King George V. The First World War brought an end to the gaiety, the fashions, the sparkle and glitter of that age.

In high society, the social whirl had developed to some extent as a reaction against the rather prim outlook of Queen Victoria. For the working classes, life was not so rosy, but at least there was then a certain stability that was lacking in the twenties. Wages were low and hours were long, which meant that labour costs were kept down. Working men had to accept low wages in return for security of employment.

The post-war years brought wide-spread unemployment as a result of the trade recession, and strikes for higher wages by those who still had jobs. Many firms closed down, and others reduced the numbers of their employees in order to keep going. Nowhere were those changes more apparent than on our railways.

Fortunately for the historian, photographs remain in existence of Halesowen railway station as it was in the early years of the century, together with a detailed description of its extensive garden. A brief history of the railways that once served Halesowen appeared in **The Blackcountryman** (Vol. 5 No. 4, Vol. 6 No. 1) where it was pointed out that trains of both the Midland and Great Western Railways used the station.

Midland passenger trains were hauled by 0-4-4 tank engines, painted red. Carriages were also red, indeed "Midland Red" was a well-known expression before the days of the bus company! The trains worked to and from Kings Norton on the Birmingham-Gloucester line, and the

engines were based at Bournville shed on the outskirts of Birmingham. There, young lads would be employed to clean the engines with oily rags or cotton waste until the paintwork shone. Engine cleaning was the first step on the long road to becoming a top-link driver.

Great Western engines were green, with elaborate lining in orange-chrome. They had brass numberplates, safety valve covers and other fittings, all of which had to be kept highly polished. Some locos had large brass domes which gleamed in the sunshine. Engine crews who were allocated the same loco every day used to take a special pride in its appearance.

Coaching stock of the GWR was painted dark brown with pale yellow upper panels (chocolate and cream). The carriages were lettered, numbered and lined out in gold leaf. Roofs were treated with white lead paint, but how long they remained white after emerging from the paint shop is anybody's guess.

The steam rail-motors, which were introduced on the Halesowen branch in 1905, were given the same livery as the coaches. Porters at Halesowen were expected to assist in cleaning the bodywork of those vehicles when they had no passengers to look after. As the station staff numbered about 13, it can be seen why they had time to spare.

Another of their duties was attending to the station garden. The railway company used to hold an annual competition for the title of "Best-kept station" to encourage its employees to be tidy and to take an interest in their place of work. Evidently, Halesowen station normally did well in that competition, as reported in the "Advertiser" for July 28th, 1906:

"Halesowen station garden—

This garden usually bears the palm in the district, and it was a matter of surprise to those who use the station that the splendid display of last year did not meet with better reward. Mr. H. W. Payton the station-master and his staff have not been discouraged by this result, but have worked harder than before and their efforts have been successful, for this year's show is considerably better than previous ones. The main features of the garden are the same as in past years with the exception that a little patch of ground near the signalbox has been cultivated and some of the flowers there are in splendid bloom. The plants and trees put in last year upon the north side of the up platform are thriving well, and there is also a pretty show of flowers. The fence at the end of the up platform is covered from end to end with a luxuriant growth of ivy, which was planted eighteen years ago and is always greatly admired by the passengers. It has thickened somewhat during the last twelve months and presents a very attractive appearance.

Underneath the verandah on the up platform are the usual grottos of Derbyshire spar, for which the station is famous, the grottos being picked out with Derbyshire ferns and various kinds of moss. The border, which is also picked out with spar,

among the stones of which flourish various mosses, has handsome terra-cotta vases at intervals containing nasturtiums, calceolarias, geraniums, and asters, while the flower bed itself is a wealth of colour. The flowers comprise geraniums, calceolarias, French marigolds, stocks, asters, lobelia, pansies, sunflowers, ferns and shrubs. At this part of the platform is the finely kept elongated lawn, access to which is gained by two steps which are surmounted by large flower pots containing flowers. The embankment at this spot forms a pretty picture, dotted about it being roses, ferns, geraniums, marigolds, pansies, asters, stocks, violas, dahlias, and many other floral varieties.

The other side of the platform is also of an attractive character. Over one hundred trees of large growth are planted upon the down side. These are all thriving well, while the lamp posts are still entwined with ivy. There is an excellent display of flowers here, and the show of dahlias will be capital. Though the garden is not yet at its best, it presents a most attractive spectacle. The lovely golden moss, pansies, Canterbury bells, thrifts and pink are being replaced by geraniums, calceolarias, nasturtiums, stocks, asters, roses, sweet peas, French marigolds and many others. It may be mentioned that altogether there are between 2,000 and 3,000 plants in the garden and over 100 dahlias. Mr. Payton and his assistants frequently receive the compliments of passengers, and strangers are amazed to see such a beautiful garden. It is hoped that they will receive a more tangible reward from the judges on this occasion in recognition of their labours which have not been light."

That was Halesowen railway station in its prime; the shrubs and flowers combining with the trains themselves to give a very colourful scene. Much of this was swept away by the war to end all wars, as it was thought of at the time. Midland passenger trains were reduced in number, ceasing altogether in 1919, and Great Western trains were much less attractive. Brasswork was removed or painted over, lining was discontinued for most classes and khaki paint was used in some instances. Coaching stock was painted all-over brown from about 1909 and crimson lake from 1912. The war brought a general deterioration in appearance as vehicles ran for longer periods between repaints.

Later on, chocolate and cream livery was restored, but publicly advertised passenger services from Halesowen ceased in 1927. The workmen's trains continued for another thirty years, but by the 1930s, the station staff had been reduced to 4 people. So although goods traffic lasted until 1968, in later years the station presented a very sombre and dowdy appearance, in marked contrast to those far-off Edwardian days.

Michael Hale is part-author of By Rail to Halesowen (now being printed)

The 1831 Riots in the Black Country

(PART ONE)

by J. Robert Williams

THE opening of the 1830s saw dissatisfaction and dissent throughout England. The old Tory party, forming the government, was split over the question of Catholic emancipation; the middle classes were pressing for a wider franchise; and the labouring classes, in the midsts of a depression, felt any change must be for the better.

The movement for parliamentary reform achieved new vigour. An ever-growing newspaper distribution had brought the facts of the more corrupt abuses of the electoral system to a wider public. This served to give the industrialists, who wanted a say in Parliament commensurate with their economic importance, a reforming aspect when they demanded a change in this electoral system. Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham Tory banker, seeing the parliamentary reform as the only answer to the depressed state of Midland industry, organised a Political Union for reform in Birmingham. This General Political Union was to be composed of "the Lower and the Middle Classes of People." William Cobbett, the radical, travelled the provinces exhorting people to take concerted action and publicised Attwood's Political Union in his "Political Register." Attwood's example was soon followed, and Political Unions were established in other large towns.

The combination of corn laws, poor law system, over capitalisation and a market depression, had reduced the agricultural labourer to poverty. In the high summer of 1830, the farm labourers errupted in Kent, breaking threshing machines and burning ricks. The disturbances spread to the rest of the country in the ensuing months. This was purely an industrial dispute; a demand for better wages and a reaction caused by the fear of displacement by machines. However, the destruction of property caused much apprehension amongst the gentry. To this could be added the worry that crime was increasing. Letters from concerned persons are found in the newspapers of the day, pointing out the growing crime rate and suggesting solutions. The theft of butchers' meat, sheep, ducks and pigeons etc., is a commonplace in the write-ups of assizes, possibly indicating that the need for food rather than a lack of morale, caused much of the felony.

Across the Channel, the French had risen in revolt, driving their king, Charles X, into exile, and the Belgians had turned against their Dutch rulers. The excesses of the French revolution were well within living memory, and taking into account the political unrest and other

disturbances, fears of a similar general rising were held by the propertied classes in Britain.

Wellington's ministry fell in November to be succeeded by Lord Grey and the Whigs, who were pledged to bring in the reform of Parliament. Lord Melbourne at the Home Office, took up the problem of quelling the disturbances amongst the agricultural labourers. In his words, "To force nothing but force can be successfully opposed. It is evident that all legislation is impotent and ridiculous, unless public peace can be preserved and the liberty and property of individuals saved from outrage and invasion." A special commission was set up, which dealt out heavy death and transportation sentences and the situation quietened somewhat, in the south-east at least. Outside London, there were hardly any organised and permanent police forces and law and order finally rested with the military and the deterrent value, if any, of severe penal reprisals.

On 29 November, 1830, Viscount Deerhurst summoned a meeting of the Worcestershire magistrates, with the result that the following resolution was passed: "That the general state of the county of Worcester affords a subject of great congratulation. The magistrates, however, viewing with the utmost abhorrance the atrocious acts of violence which have taken place in other counties, feel it their duty to declare that they have made such arrangements as, by giving full effect to the existing laws, are best calculated to prevent the occurrence of similar calamities in this county."[1] The reformation of the Yeomanry Cavalry in Worcestershire was also mooted as a precautionary measure.

The Black Country escaped the depredations perpetrated by farm labourers, which had manifest themselves in North Staffordshire, neighbouring Shropshire and to a lesser extent in Worcestershire. The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" of Wednesday, 19 January, 1831, notes:

> "It is with deep regret we announce that the incendiary system, which has for several months past spread with such devastating effects through various parts of the kingdom, has at length extended its ravages into Staffordshire. The peaceful and remote village of Swindon, about seven miles from this town, has been the scene of two fires, which it is too surely manifest, were wilfully occasioned. At about half-past eight o'clock on Friday night last, a wheat rick in the farmyard of Mr. James Perry, a respectable farmer at Swindon, was discovered to be on fire; but by the active exertions of a number of people who were soon collected on the spot, a part of it was saved, and the damage does not exceed £30. The shock which the fire had excited was only in a slight degree allayed, when another cause of alarm arose. At half-past eleven o'clock, a large rick of barley belonging to Mr. R. P. Williams,[2] who resides at a short distance from Mr. Perry, burst into flames, and every effort which the united force of the neighbourhood could use was unavailing—the rick was entirely consumed. In preserving the surrounding property, including wheat ricks, farm buildings filled with stock, and the dwelling house of the proprietor, the praiseworthy endeavours

SPONSORED PANELS

of those who assisted with all their strength and skill were fortunately successful; in these endeavours they were essentially aided by the use of a fire engine from Himley, the seat of the Earl of Dudley, and by a plentiful supply of water which was contributed by a canal running on one side of the premises. The circumstances to shew that these fires were the work of wicked and mischievous hands, are strong and conclusive and suspicion points to three known individuals as the perpetrators of them. In the course of the afternoon, two men and a boy, one of the former wearing the garb of a collier, were lurking about, and had been begging both at Mr. Perry's and Mr. Williams's, and several other houses in the neighbourhood. As soon as the fire at Mr. Perry's was discovered, a hat, rather a good one, was found lying by the rick; and a servant at a neighbouring farm house, who was closing the shutters about that time, saw a man, without a hat, running past, and urging, with an oath, another that was before him to hasten his speed. It was also remarked that the firing of Mr. Williams's rick began at the bottom, rapidly spreading all round it, and that from the place where it first broke out a bluish flame issued for several minutes; from this circumstance a strong presumption arises, that it was caused by the depositing of some combustable preparation on the spot. The distance of the rick from Mr. Perry's and the opposing current of the wind, negatives the assumption that the fire could have been communicated from one stack yard to the other. The motives which could actuate men to the commission of such deeds as these, appear mysterious and inexplicable; their fiendish purpose could not be directed against the case of thrashing machines, because we know that Mr. Williams does not employ one; his considerate behaviour to those engaged in his services, and his benevolent disposition, we should have thought sufficient to have protected his property from violation; but against such a spirit as that which has wrought so effectively the destruction of the valuable productions of the earth, and the means by which they are made available to the use of man, the most blameless conduct forms no shield—power and foresight, no safeguard: we trust, however, that the efforts which are being used to detect the evil doers (for the whole country is raised against them) will be effectual; and that the law will bring them to condign punishment. The injury done by the burning of Mr. Williams's barley will ammount to about 100/., which will be defrayed by the Phoenix Fire Office, in which he is insured."

Apart from reflecting the high blown verbosity of local journalism at the time, the readiness to assume the guilt of a "collier" on the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence, is also marked. The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" of 26 January, reveals how misplaced were the suspicions of the week before:

"The late fires at Swindon, of which we last week gave an account, were, it has been ascertained, caused by four of the

servants of Mr. Williams, and the discovery occassioned very considerable surprise—the motives by which they could have been actuated to the commission of such a crime being involved in mystery. In consequence of the strict examination which they were subjected to by the magistrates, who have been indefatigable in endeavouring to trace the mischief to its source, John Swatkins, a labourer under Mr. Williams, and living in the same house, has by a confession, acknowledged his own share in the transaction, and also implicated three of his fellow servants, namely—Thomas Timmins, Thomas Lloyd, and Thomas Wilcox; and they have all been commited to our county goal for trial at the next assises. The magistrates, we understand, are still pursuing their investigations into the circumstances of the case."

At the assises in March, John Swatkins, aged 22, and Thomas Lloyd, aged 53, were sentenced to death and subsequently hanged, and Thomas Timmins, aged 19, was found not guilty; Thos. Wilcox is not mentioned and was probably cleared before the trial.

Meanwhile, the Reform Bill was being blocked in Parliament. Attwood's political union declared against paying taxes if the Reform Bill did not pass through Parliament. Reform meetings were held in most Black Country towns, on the 21 January at Walsall; 4 February at Bilston; 11 February at Dudley; and 4 March at Wolverhampton, to cite a few. These reform meetings were middle class affairs. The meeting at Dudley on 11 February, is noted as follows:

" A numerous meeting of the principle inhabitants of Dudley was held at the town-hall on Thursday last, at which it was agreed to petition both Houses of Parliament for a moderate Reform, and the extension of the elective franchise to the town of Dudley which, as one of the resolutions states, in a point of population, wealth, and importance, has a strong claim to the once enjoyed privilege of returning Members to represent its various interests in Parliament."[3]

Note the meeting was composed of " the principle inhabitants " and that reform was to be " moderate "; the Dudley manufacturers wanted their voice to be heard in the Commons but not that of their workmen, who in fact, made up the large population which had been cited as a ground for the extension of parliamentary representation to Dudley. None of the Black Country towns, such as Dudley, Stourbridge or Wolverhampton, had a seat in Parliament; they were only represented by their respective county member. These manufacturing towns, with their large populations and wealth, wanted more influence in Parliament comparable to their economic importance. Petitions were sent to Parliament and on 3 February, 1831, Sir John Wrottesley[4] " presented the petition from (Wolverhampton) praying for Reform in the representation of the people, the vote by ballot, and an extension of the elective franchise to this town. The Hon. Baronet, at the same time, presented a petition against the Truck System,[5] from upwards of 3,000 of the labour-

ing classes, principally employed in the coal and iron trade in this town and neighbourhood."[6]

The "labouring classes" were thus, also petitioning for reform, but theirs was a reform in working conditions and not in parliamentary representation. For the illiterate industrial labourer, the Reform Bill was something remote and in the end would bring him no direct benefit; however, seeing protest advanced by more educated sections of society may have influenced them to be more demanding as well. Some leaders of the nascent trade unions wanted a much more revolutionary policy than that envisaged by the "Reformists." There were rumours of the trades unions secretly arming and drilling. Violence broke out and severe disturbances took place at Derby and Nottingham,[7] and at Bristol.[8]

Industrial unrest in the Black Country appears to have manifest itself in 1831, first of all amongst the skilled metal workers. The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" of Wednesday, 16 February relates:

> "On Saturday last a placard was affixed to the walls of this town announcing that a public meeting of all the trades in the town and neighbourhood would be held in the Broad Meadow yesterday, at one o'clock, to consider the propriety of becoming members of the National Association for the Protection of Labour; and that Mr. Hodghon, of Manchester, would address the meeting. The handbill concludes, 'England expects that

every man will do his duty!!!' The occupier of the Broad Meadow having warned all persons against trespassing upon his land, the meeting was held in St. James's Square, and the orator held forth to an assemblage of 300 or 400 persons only, a very insignificant number, particularly when it is considered that Shrove Tuesday is kept as a holiday. We are glad to find that our fellow-townsmen will not allow themselves to be imposed upon so far as to give their money to artful demagogues, who get their living by going from place to place urging their hearers to an infraction of the laws, and exciting them to discontent. There is also a good demand for the manufactures of this town, but the prices of some articles are low, if, however, an advance of prices be practicable, the good sense of our artisans is, we hope, sufficient to direct them how to obtain it, without sending to Manchester."

Industrial workers in the Potteries, Lancashire and Derbyshire seem to have had more cohesion than their brethren in the Black Country, possibly due to the concentration of the workers in mills or factories as opposed to the back yard workshops and scattered pits of south Staffordshire. Mention is often made of delegations coming from the north to urge the Black Country workers to take more organised action.

Mr. Hodghon's speech may have had some effect on the local journeymen, as forming themselves into associations, they soon began demanding rises in pay.

"TO FIRE-IRON MANUFACTURERS

THE Journeymen Fire-Iron makers, finding it impossible to maintain their families at the present very low rate of wages even with the greatest industry and economy, beg leave most respectfully to appeal to the kind consideration of their several Masters, and humbly hope they will afford them such a moderate advance as the present state of trade will admit of. To take date on Monday fortnight.
Feb. 7, 1831"[9]

"THE JOURNEYMEN SPECTACLE FRAME MAKERS of Wolverhampton are detirmined not to work at present Prices after the 14th of March.
28th February, 1831."[10]

"THE JOURNEYMEN PLATE STOCK LOCKSMITHS do Hereby give notice to the Masters that an advance of wages will take place on the first MONDAY after the 25th of MARCH."[11]

Support for the associations was not one hundred per cent, and cohersion was used to bring the dissenters into line. On Wednesday, 16 February, 1831, Stubbs Wightwick Esq. and Henry Hill Esq. committed

three mechanics of Willenhall, Samuel Dudley, Samuel Banks and William Smith, to take their trial at the ensuing Sessions. The trio were charged with entering the workshop of Mr. Joseph Eggington[12] and cutting two machines, called blow bellows, because Eggington 'did not conform to the lawless and misguided rules of some club, which requires the manufacturers of this neighbourhood to close their shops two days in every week.'

> "An Association was formed at Willenhall of manufacturers of locks and other hardware goods, in which the members engaged not to work on certain days of the week. The object is to raise the price of their manufacture. Those who refuse to join for this purpose have no security for their property: for it is generally understood, that in case the demands of the society are not complied with, some injury will ensue, which is called 'durgying.' In this case, the prosecutor was called upon by some of the members, and requested to join in the club and give them some money, which he declined to do. A few days afterwards, his shop was broken into, the screws and boxes of three vices were stolen, and the leather of two large bellows cut to pieces .... Six or seven locksmiths from Willenhall, who all admitted they belong to the association, gave the prisoners good characters for honesty, industry, and peaceable habits etc."[11]

Sir Oswald Moseley,[13] the magistrate, sentenced the three prisoners to "six months' imprisonment and hard labour, and one week's solitary confinement." The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" commented, "This system of 'durgying,' as it is called, is so much on the increase as to require prompt suppression, and we trust the trial of these offenders will operate as a salutary warning."

However, the combined action of the journeymen brought some results, as the following declarations reveal:

> "NOTICE
>
> To Merchants, Factors, Saddlers' Ironmongers, etc.
>
> WE, the MANUFACTURERS of ROLLER and INLET BUCKLES, etc. respectfully beg to state that in consequence of the very heavy advance of journeymen's wages which we are now compelled to pay, no orders can be executed at the present prices subsequent to the 9th day of April next.
>
> Walsall, Feb. 16, 1831."[14]

> "TO MERCHANTS AND FACTORS
>
> THE MANUFACTURERS of FIRE IRONS hereby give notice, that in consequence of a request made to them by their Workmen for an increase of Wages, and which they cannot in justice refuse, an ADVANCE must necessarily be made ON THE ARTICLE, which will commence from the 25th MARCH; particulars of which will be furnished you immediately."[11]

"NOTICE TO MANUFACTURERS, etc.

THE MANUFACTURERS OF FILES hereby give notice, that in consequence of a request made to them by the Grinders, etc., for an increase of wages, which they cannot, in justice, refuse; an advance must necessarily be made on the article which takes place from this date, March 16th, 1831."[15]

Footnotes:

[1] "Worcestershire in the Nineteenth Century," by T. C. Turberville, London, 1852.

[2] Mr. R. P. Williams had had trouble with constant trespassers and poachers two years previously:

> "NOTICE
>
> All qualified Persons are hereby requested to REFRAIN FROM SPORTING over, or trespassing in Pursuit of Game, or Hunting on the Lands belonging to or in the Occupation of MR RICHARD POWELL WILLIAMS, in the Liberty of SWINDON and Parish of Wombourn; and all unqualified Persons found trespassing thereon after this public Notice will be prosecuted according to the Law.
> Sept 1, 1829."
>
> —"Wolverhampton Chronicle" of 9 September, 1829.

[3] "Wolverhampton Chronicle," 16 February, 1831.

[4] Sir John Wrottesley, first Baron Wrottesley: born 4 October, 1771; 23 July, 1823, returned for Staffs. and after the Reform Act continued to sit for the southern division of the county until 1837; advanced to the House of Lords as Baron Wrottesley in 1838; died 16 March, 1841 and buried in the ancestral vault at Tettenhall church.

[5] Truck system: a practice, whereby miners were paid partly with chits or tokens, cashable only at certain stores.

[6] "Wolverhampton Chronicle," 9 February, 1831.

[7] 8-10 October, 1831.

[8] 29-31 October, 1831.

[9] "Aris's Birmingham Gazette," 7 February, 1831.

[10] "Wolverhampton Chronicle," 2 March, 1831.

[11] "Wolverhampton Chronicle," 9 March, 1831.

[12] "Eggington Jph, Salop Street," a maker of Banbury Locks"—"Hist., Gazetteer and Directory of Staffs.", W. White, 1834.

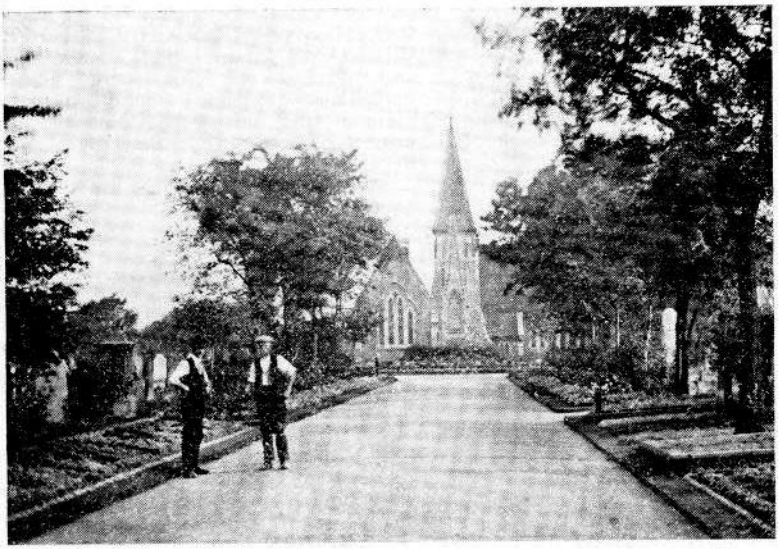
[13] Sir Oswald Moseley, second, Baronet; born 27 March, 1785; died 8 June, 1859.

[14] "Aris's Birmingham Gazette," 21 February, 1831.

[15] "Wolverhampton Chronicle," 16 March, 1831.

Tribute to a Cemetery

THE photograph below portrays the drive leading from the main gate into Bilston cemetery and was probably taken during the early part of this century. At the end of the drive in the centre, can be seen the monument erected to the memory of John Etheridge referred to in "Freeman's Black Country Folk."* Behind the monument is the cemetery chapel. The monument fell into disrepair,



and the chapel had to be demolished approximately twenty years ago owing to dry rot. A circular bed of flowers now surrounds the slab which has replaced the monument, and a large bed of roses in the shape of a cross replaces the site where the chapel stood.

I was born near Bilston cemetery and lived there for over forty years.

There is now a gate leading into the cemetery from Green Lanes, which was not there when I was a child. That part of Green Lanes was part of what is now called Stonelawn estate. This estate was previously green fields and there was an old broken down bridge which everyone knew as the "donkey bridge." There was also the "pink pool" (I never knew how its name originated) and two other large pools—one known as the "cracker" and the other as the "stocking," so called, presumably, by reason of their shape. We would go fishing for "jack-bannuks."

There was also a brook containing very brown water which was known as the rusty brook. There was plenty of room for play, but these expanses were reserved for our evening activities!

SPONSORED PANELS

At the end of the road where I lived there was a high bank which sloped down to some allotments, and just beyond were the railings enclosing the cemetery. The summit of the bank gave a splendid view of the cemetery and one morning, soon after school holidays commenced, my playmates and I sat on top of the bank debating how to spend our holidays. As we sat there we saw a funeral procession arriving. Ken, the most daring member of our gang said, " Cum on, let's goo an' watch the funeral! " We felt we could see it quite well from where we were sitting, but Ken was determined to get nearer to it and said, " Yer—yow'm all frightened. Cum on, ah dare yer."

None of us needed further persuasion and down the bank we slithered, over old Pursehouse's allotments, regardless of what was growing, and through a gap in the railings where we had seen adults squeezing their way into the cemetery. We stood around the graveside and watched the commital service. When the mourners had moved away we stood watching the grave being refilled with earth and the silence was broken again by Ken saying, " Cum on—'ere's another cumin " —so off we all ran to watch the next funeral.

During that day we observed no less than five interments: cremation was only in its infancy.

We were all agreed that evening that we liked watching funerals. We had recently had a craze for collecting car numbers, but this practice had to cease now that we had found something much more interesting to record in our note books. We carefully recorded all the names and ages of the deceased we saw buried. If a member of our gang did not look down into the grave after the coffin had been lowered, to read the name and age of the deceased and record it, the rest of the gang would call, " Yeller belly! "

Saturday afternoons were dull and uninteresting when there were no funerals to watch, and so we would go in search of a dead bird in order to have a funeral of our own. Many a dead bird was buried with all the solemnity of a Christian burial. We had our own clergyman, cemetery superintendent and coffin bearers. Ernie was our clergyman. He was a great impersonator and could imitate all the local clerics. I usually played the part of the cemetery superintendent because I liked the job of

sprinkling soil on top of the "coffin" when Ernie announced, "From ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Our "coffins" were usually pieces of newspaper.

At authentic funerals it was usual to see a crowd of neighbours and friends of the deceased gathered around the grave-side. When the mourners had moved away, they would inspect all the wreaths, making remarks about them and also about the deceased. Our ears were always eagerly awaiting remarks made by these onlookers in order to repeat them at our own Saturday afternoon funerals. I can distinctly remember two elderly women both wearing scarves over their head to conceal many of the metal curlers in their hair. The conversation went as follows: "Fancy 'er blartin' like that—ah shud think 'er orter be glad eez gone. Ee yewster knock 'er abaht scandluss—there wuz alwiz a cat an' dog fight gooin' on wen thay lived nex' dewer ter we." "Are—an' did yow read that saft powim worr 'er purr in the pairpa? Ah cor understand folks purrin that saftniss in the pairpa. Ower Bairt sez it's onny purrin gud munee in th' onds o' the pairpa, cuz it wuz onny a pack o' lies wor it."

We had a large store of remarks which were repeated countless times and it was probably these that gave us such a high percentage of enjoyment.

We spent most of the time when we were not at school in the cemetery. I learned many of the tomb-stone inscriptions and can still remember them.

We always felt sorry to see neglected graves and would collect jam jars, and even fish paste jars to place on them, carefully filled with wild flowers.

Looking back, I wonder why no-one ever questioned why we should always be in the cemetery or why we should have such morbid interests.

One grave digger used to say, "'Ello, yow kids. Ere agen—goo an' fetch me a packit o' fags wull yer?" He would hand one of us two pennies and we would race to a nearby shop to purchase five woodbines in a paper packet.

Most of my family have now passed on, and I still pay regular visits to the cemetery to care for their graves. When the time comes for me to depart, I feel there can only be one place befitting my earthly remains: **Bilston Cemetery.**

Kate Fletcher.

* **Published by the Black Country Society, price 25p**

A Grazebrook of Stourton (1884-1974)

P. R. Rostron

OWEN Francis Grazebrook, "OFG," to his descendants and friends, was born in Dudley in November 1884. He was educated at a Malvern prep. school, before going on to Marlborough (1897-1902) where he achieved literary distinction. He then worked as an apprentice in an engineering shop in Dudley, before going to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he became "President of the Union" Debating Society. After Cambridge, he joined the family firm of M. and W. Grazebrook in Netherton, where he worked nearly all his life.

For over three centuries, OFG's branch of the family had manufactured glass and pig iron, besides having many business interests in the Black Country, while for over 200 years, the Netherton Ironworks remained a family concern. Almost until the final takeover, the firm was small enough for OFG to know all his employees personally, and his familiar figure was seen daily on the shop floor.

In 1909, OFG began his outside activities as a director of the Birmingham Navigation Canal, then a subsidiary of the North Western Railway.

In 1910, OFG married Margery Rostron, a daughter of a London barrister. The young couple settled at Castle Cottage, where two daughters were born. (The house is now the club house of the Dudley Zoo).

In 1914, OFG joined the Worcestershire Territorials, but within a year, was summoned back by Lord Dudley to organise the Wednesday Oak Furnace, making munitions for the Allied Armies. In 1919, he and his young family went to live at Himley House where he had lived as a schoolboy. His father, Francis Grazebrook, who had left Himley, bought Stourton Castle from the Foley Estate and went to live there. A century earlier, the castle had been the home of his great-great-uncle, Thomas Grazebrook.

In 1925, OFG became High Sheriff of Worcestershire, and from then until the outbreak of World War II, his expanding business interests claimed his attention. He converted M. and W. Grazebrook from a declining pig iron works into heavy engineering with great success. He

was chairman of two roll foundries, and when most people were "easing up," organised the British Rollmakers Corporation, being an honorary president when he died.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, OFG worked harder than ever. He had important contacts with the Admiralty, besides being put in charge of the Birmingham Map Room (A.R.P.) by the Home Office. However, he soon found it impossible to work in Birmingham at night and direct M. and W. Grazebrook by day, so he left his A.R.P. work but, on the formation of the Home Guard, became a major in command of the Himley section. By that time, he was a grandfather.

Meantime, M. and W. Grazebrook were producing a 4,000 pound bomb for the Ministry of Aircraft Production and every existing building at Netherton was in use. Early in 1941, along came the blue prints for the 8,000 pound bomb, and the first was dropped by especially equipped Lancasters on the Gnome works at Limoges in 1942.

The next year, a model was presented to the Prime Minister inscribed: "Presented to the Right Hon. Winston Churchill by all those engaged in the manufacture of the bomb. 8,000 pound Bomb Mark I. August 1941. M. and W. Grazebrook Ltd., Netherton."

These bombs were also used for the destruction of U boats sheltering in their bomb proof pens.

In 1945, on the death of his father, OFG moved to Stourton, where he lived for 29 years. His first wife died in 1953, and the following year, he re-married. He and his second wife celebrated their twentieth anniversary in February 1974, by which time he had three great-grandchildren from his first marriage.

In 1971, OFG handed back the Boulton and Watt engine (bought in 1817), to the Birmingham Corporation, which was followed by a letter from Mr. Heath at No. 10 Downing Street, expressing interest.

OFG had literary talents; his first long poem, "The Pilgrimage of a Thousand Years," was printed around 1920, and he wrote whenever he had time to spare. His book, "Nicanor of Athens," published by the Cambridge University Press c. 1938, was translated into many languages.

OFG travelled widely in his later years, though he continued working till over 80, believing with his father that—hard work never kills.

N.B.—OFG died earlier this year. His daughter, who writes frequently for this magazine as Primrose Rostron, has sent a £5 gift to the Society "in his memory." —Ed.

THE CENTENARIAN

(A Fantasy by Edith Cotterill)

'OLD Mary" lay cocooned in her narrow hospital bed. Her body, a desiccated shell still harbouring the spark of life, was nurtured with scientific skill, not out of love for her but because that spark had now burned for a hundred years and there was glory in keeping it alight.

She knew that amongst her contemporaries in the ward she was something special by reason of her great age alone, but she did wish they would let her go for she was so weary of living. The nurses, pert young beesums in their trim uniforms and coquettish caps saw her only as a necessary chore; briskly they bathed and powdered her and fed her with nauseous slops, the quick chatter of their conversation tossed from one to the other like a bright ball until they finally tucked her in tidily, the sheet pulled tight across her toes. By the time she had wriggled herself into a bit of comfort, she reckoned they would be doing it all over again.

Today, the usual routine had been changed. She had a new bed jacked and they had hung colourful cards and gay greetings about her bed; one, they told her impressively, was from the queen. Saft gawbys, she didn't know any queens! Men with cameras flashed brilliant lights in her face making her eyes water, and strangers came to gawp, as at some ancient relic, croodling over her, mouthing fatuously and intruding into her private world. She tried to rebuke them, but long ago her dentures had been taken away leaving her mouth slack and inarticulate, so that she drooled incoherently as though she was barmy.

Determinedly, she closed her eyes and simulated sleep, shutting out her tribulations and the curate who was bearing down upon her with zealous intent. But curates are made of sterner stuff and he was not to be baulked.

"Come! It's your big day!" he cried waggishly, "Awake! Awake!"

What did he say? A wake? She had always been partial to a good wake! They'd built all over the wakeground now, the varmints, but many's the junketing she'd enjoyed there. Memories jostled in her poor old noddle. There had been tumblers and contortionists and a lady sawn in half—she could never for the life of her see how the two pieces came together again, and stalls selling liquorice laces, locust beans, tiger nuts and sticky sweet gingerbread men. Boastful boxers strutted outside their booths challenging all comers and, if you'd got a ha'penny left, there were pickled mermaids, monsters and two headed piglets to be seen, and over it all, the churning hurdy-gurdy music of the roundabouts. Best of all was dawdling home under the Dudley moon remembering tomorrow was Tipton-wake-Sunday with the traditional "duck and green peas" and the Pepperbox anniversary.

She fumbled amongst the cluttered contents of her mind; once there had been a fortune teller, too, but that was donkey 'ears ago when other giggly girls had pushed her in just for a lark. The booth had been a little

world of its own, dim with a dry dead smell and heavy drapes muffling the bedlam and honky-tonk of the fairground. The only illumination came from a crystal ball revealing a spidery creature lurking in the shadows. Before you could say "Jack Robinson," it had her by the wrist and she was paralitic with fright. Then, suddenly, time had no meaning, the future was there glowing in the crystal sphere, opaque and mysterious, embracing them both in an abnormal state of suspended consciousness.

At last the spider spoke, the words falling like bibbles down a pit shaft. "I see a century of years and lights about your head. There will be a son but no father."

The crystal broiled effervescent as the voice rose shrill and ecstatic. "I see your son within a holy place! The mighty pay homage at his feet! He is the chosen one — — — —"

When she had escaped into the open, weeping hysterically, a gipsy man had comforted her, reviving her with fierce liquor that scalded her throat. She remembered nothing more until the morning when she woke up under a hedge feeling ill and shaken and all the fairground people gone. What a lamping she'd had when she got home! Worse was to follow. She was a good girl, but when they found that she was with child they turned her out and wouldn't listen to her story of the gipsy's warning, or of the miracle that was coming true. Many a girl in like circumstances ended in the cut, but from the depths of her being she believed the fortune teller and faith in her son's greatness kept her safe. Anyone could see how different he was from other children with his gaiety and coal black curls, but when at last he reached maturity the first world war had taken him away to shed his young vitality upon some foreign field leaving her only the weary years ahead; a tear traced the deep furrows of her face, but it was left for the curate to wipe away.

Consumed with sorrow and remembered dreams, "Old Mary" lay in her narrow bed fulfilling her part of the tale, while in far off London, in the sombre splendour of Westminster Abbey, amongst the kings and queens and mighty men, the unknown soldier lay quietly in his grave.

A TASTE OF SUNDAY DINNER

by

Geoff Stevens

THE Delph, Brierley Hill, where men once toiled for coal and clay and where their grandsons now await the new houses on the same land; a land of mineral riches and deep deep cellars.

Sunday, and men, some cloth-capped and Sunday-suited, others bare-headed and self-suited, stand on street corners. Some, more anxious and perhaps more honest, jostle the pub doorstep, look through the letter-box, or even bang on the door.

In an upstairs window, George, the gaffer, lifts his elasticated bracers one loop at a time over broad shoulders and takes his responsibility downstairs. Tongues come to lips in anticipation as the bolts are drawn on the door, but it is the "Off Sales" that opens first. More bolts, and George steps out into rain or shine, to lead the way inside.

Enter the vanguard to the first pints being pulled, some fresh from bed, lucky ones from egg, one or two from church (?) or work, some still walking the dog, and Bob in his purple trousers. Soon, they're drinking at the bar or carrying beer to tables . . . . "excuse me" . . . . "mind yer backs" . . . . "oright Noah" . . . . "mornin' Mr. Brookes," then silence for the first swallow.

Ah! Batham's beer! It's very good, the Bathams drink it themselves. Strangers like it. Black-countrymen like it, the locals prefer it, and Brummies travel for it. There's flavour and strength; traditionally brewed and still from the wood.

There's a lot of pride in the men who use "The Bull and Bladder" and a lot of pride in the beer. No man who brews as good should be slow in having the self-praise: "Blessing of your heart, you brew good ale," emblazoned on his pub frontage for all to see; and Arthur Batham is not slow.

Top: GEORGE HARPER—THE GAFFER

of

Lower: THE " BULL AND BLADDER"

Photos: Ken Westbury

Sixty Years of Guy Motors

Harold Parsons

AT the end of 1913, a man named Sydney S. Guy resigned from his job as works manager at the Sunbeam Motor Company, then gaining world renown for its race-winning Sunbeam cars, and set up his own company, Guy Motors Ltd.

The company was floated in May 1914, and a factory built at Fallings Park, Wolverhampton. The first product was a 30 cwt lorry of advanced design, employing a lighter form of pressed steel frame than the then normal heavy rolled steel channel frames. A patented three-point suspension prevented distortion from being transmitted to the engine and gearbox. The direct third gear was intended for use when the vehicle was fully laden, the fourth gear (indirect) being for use when travelling light. A governor, controlled by road speed and not engine speed, was another new feature, limiting the maximum to 30 m.p.h. without affecting the ability of the engine to rev in lower ratios when climbing. Variations on these features became standard practice in the industry in later years.

In that first year, the company also built its first passenger carrying vehicle, an open 'mail car,' used to operate a combined passenger-mail service on a hazardous route in a remote part of Scotland.

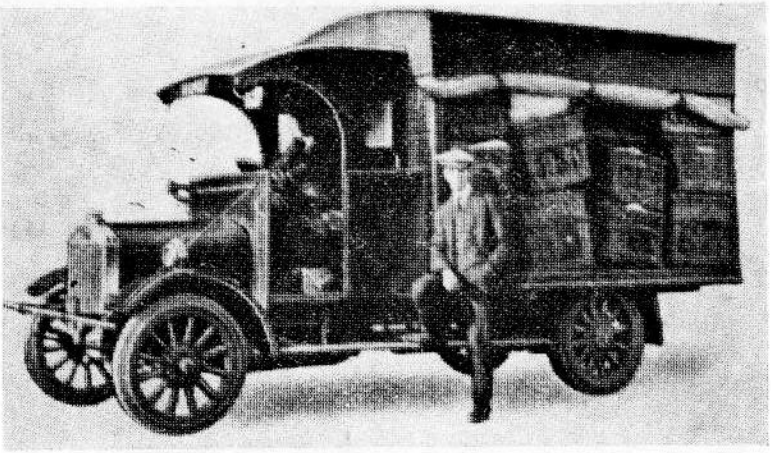
Aero Engines

The outbreak of war doubtless helped the new firm, for the Ministry of Munitions took over the vehicles produced and supplied them to the Russian allies. During the war, Guy Motors became the country's largest manufacturers of firing mechanisms for depth charges, and later were asked by the government to concentrate on the production of aero engines. The first of these was the seven-cylinder Wasp radial of 1917, followed a year later by the 350 h.p. Dragonfly, another radial.

Selling difficulties were acute after the war, because thousands of surplus army lorries were being sold by the Army Disposal Board. However, the company exhibited five-seater tourers at the first post-war motor show held at Olympia in November 1919. Two months earlier, Sydney Guy had written in a newspaper article on "the American invasion of the motor industry—and how we are trying to combat it."

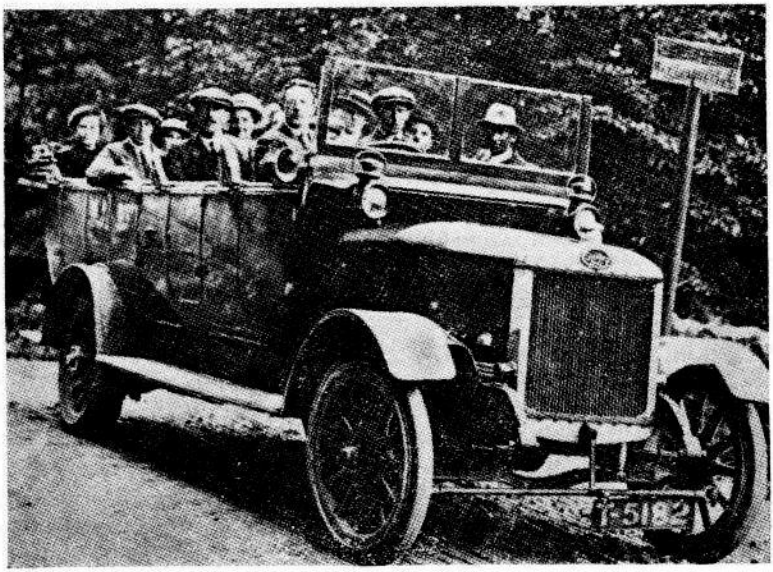
In 1919 the inclined valve and head design was used for a V8 engine, the first of its type to be produced in England. This was fitted into a Guy open tourer that also had the distinction of incorporating the first automatic chassis lubrication system.

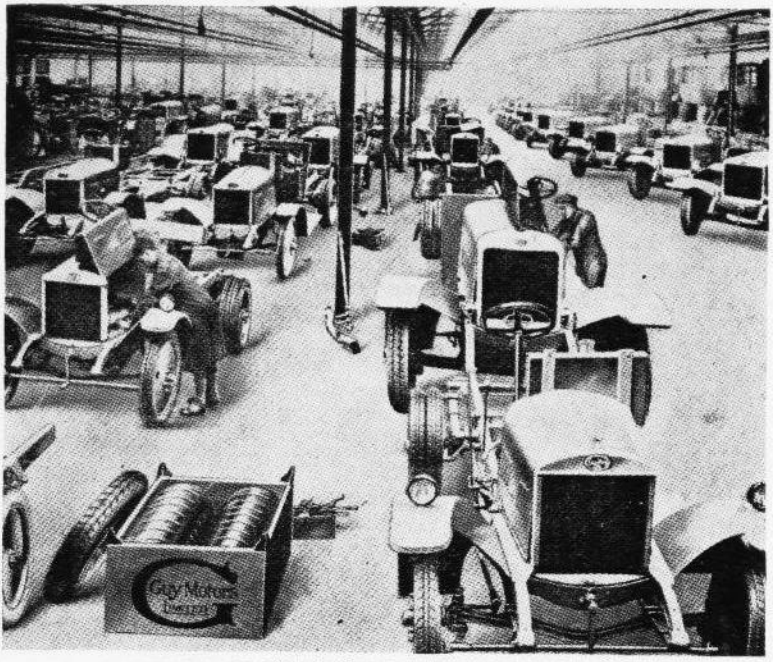
Also in 1919, the first charabanc was produced by Guy Motors, and a year later saw the appearance of the first special cross-country vehicle. The early twenties marked the appearance of a Guy saloon car fitted



Top: The original 30 cwt. Guy lorry design of 1914

Guy charabanc of 1919 at the top of Lynmouth Hill (1 in 4½) Devon gradient





Guy truck production in the early days

with the then revolutionary four wheel brakes, yet in spite of these and other triumphs, car production ceased in the mid-twenties because of the general world slump when, as Sydney Guy himself commented . . . " one could hardly give away a second-hand car let alone sell a new one."

Luckily, there were other products in addition to those mentioned here to fill the gap left by the inability to sell cars. Not least was buses, the first British dropped-frame chassis for which was developed by Guy in 1924. Two years later, an order for no less than 170 Guy buses was placed by the Rio de Janeiro Tramway and Power Department. In that year (1926) the company produced Britain's first six-wheeled double decker, and the first trolley bus.

At about this time, Guy Motors acquired another Wolverhampton firm: the Star Motor Company, which had been formed in 1899. Star trucks, cars and buses continued to be produced until 1932, all new-car spare parts being sold to a Birmingham firm who continued to build Star vehicles for two or three years.

It is impossible to detail here all the subsequent development in Guy vehicles. Government orders in 1936 began with a four-wheeled military truck and led to the manufacture of the first British rear-engined four wheel drive armoured car.

After the war, the company reintroduced improved versions of earlier trucks, and in 1947 the first post-war trolley bus left the factory. A year later, Guy acquired the Sunbeam Trolley-bus Co. Ltd.

It was in 1957 that the company made 10 of what was known as the "Johannesburg Giant"—among the largest buses in the world, accommodating 105 passengers. The company stopped producing bodies in 1959.

Jaguar Cars Ltd. bought Guy Motors (Europe) Ltd. in 1961, and a new programme of partial rationalisation was begun. By 1964, a completely new range of trucks had been developed—the Big J Models—and the firm had reverted to its title of Guy Motors Ltd. with record-breaking production figures.

New premises adjoining the Fallings Park factory were acquired in 1967-68, and in 1969 the company joined Leyland Motors to become British Leyland. Today it is known as the British Leyland Truck and Bus Division Ltd., Guy Motors.

Sydney S. Guy, who retired in 1967, continued to follow the fortunes of the company until he was well into his 80s. He died in 1972, towards the end of which it was reported that after a slack period, a full order book was certain "well into 1973." Orders then included one for more than 60 vehicles from an East Anglian operator, and another for 21 Big J Tractors from a milk transport firm.

Production levels remained steady throughout 1973 until the power crisis and imposition of the three day working week early in 1974. Though the effects of three day working are still being felt—particularly in the area of material and component supplies—it is anticipated Guy Motors will have reached last year's levels by August.

Today, Guy's Big J range of trucks are more popular than ever and the ability of the Wolverhampton plant to build top quality highly durable premium trucks is reinforced by the inclusion in the build programme of British Leyland's top weight European contenders.

THE BARGAIN

"YOH doh get many bargens these days, what with all then price rises goin' on." Ken Nation was reminiscing in the Woden, Wednesbury, before leaving for the afternoon shift at Goodyears.

"But ah remember, about twenty 'ears agoo ah went up ter ode Billy Cole's, up in Bilston. Ah wanted a werterin' can. E'd got sum bosters the'er, all about seven an' a tanner apiece. Then 'e'd got sum a bit broke an' tatty, about five bob apiece. 'Bill,' ah says, 'why am yo chargin' five bob fer them an' seven an' a tanner fer them over the'er?'

"'Cos them as is chape am a bit dented,' Bill says. So ah picks up one a' them gud uns, 'olds it by the wall and gi's it a kick ter put a bit on a dent in. 'Gis this fer five bob, then,' ah says. 'Yo cheeky ————,' says Bill. But ah'd got me a bargen!"

J.M.F.

More Massey—

LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER

AT last! Eagerly awaited summer holidays had arrived with a whole month to be spent out of doors. August or September for hop-picking, it made no difference to our plans. Many local families went "hopping," so we watched them depart in horse-drawn wagons, carts and brakes: men, women and children squeezed together with their pots and pans etc., piled high in old tin baths.

It surely must have rained sometimes, but to us children day followed day of glorious sunshine. The whole gang usually gathered at our house as it was very conveniently placed for "the lane." Mothers willingly packed bags for the day. Bottles of cold tea, jam butties, squares of bread pudding —commonly called "suety fill-belly," broken biscuits or cake, and off we went.

The lane wound its way from the Pound, leading to the farms of Humphries and Cotterill, the Pits and many, many fields. Hawthorn, elderberry and willow formed a strong hedge with a profusion of wild flowers beneath. Boys loved to snatch a piece of wattle from the hedgerow, light one end and twirl it around to frighten the girls. Girls would burst the "bladders" of the bladder campion and hit the boys' backs with goose-grass!

Meandering along, we sometimes went to the left over the "banks" where many shaped hollows were waiting for our games. Gathering all the broken bricks and stones, we shaped houses, castles, hospitals, churches, schools, forts, trains, shops, ships, canoes and rowing boats. Plenty of choice for our games of make-believe, and hours of sheer enchantment followed, as time flew on magical wings. After a picnic meal we lazed and dozed until "time for home" was announced and happily we made our way back.

Another day we would walk to the top of the lane, staying for a while in a popular place called the "Leg o' Mutton" field, so called because of its shape. A glorious mass of buttercups and daisies covered the field and many daisy chains, crowns and bracelets were made and proudly worn. "Do you like butter?" we laughingly asked each other, holding a buttercup under each chin.

Everyone agreed about our real favourite spot. A very shallow stream running across the field in the region of Moat Bridge. Clear water sparkled and twinkled lazily along. Low growing bushes provided shade in which to lie or sit just listening to the gently trickling water. The more energetic would fish with their hands for tiddlers, sticklebacks, jack-bannocks or minnows which to me all looked alike. Watercress grew in plenty in this clear water and this we gathered to eat with our dinner. Pangs of hunger told us the time as watches were not

given to children. Comfortably sitting close together, we would quickly scoff everything we had. No "Cordon Bleu" cook could have produced food more enjoyable, whilst our cold tea was truly "Nectar of the Gods."

The pits of the area were forbidden places, but there was "magic water" for our pleasure, and kept secret. After a short walk through long grass, there it was! Off came shoes and socks and in we went! Really, it was an open culvert, bricked and narrow, with lovely warm water running through. Paddling slowly, we enjoyed our forbidden treat in the few inches of water, which must have contained a considerable amount of iron as socks and feet were stained brown, much to the puzzlement of our mothers! Discomfort never bothered us—on went socks and shoes even though our feet were dripping wet! Another happy day had been spent.

Often we "stayed home" to enjoy many games together. A wide "right of way" between all the houses in Pound Terrace and their gardens provided our playground. Here, we would separate into groups, girls choosing their own games apart from the boys. Hop-scotch, skipping with large and small ropes, ball games, top and whip, were a few. Favourite singing games were: Here we come gathering nuts in May; All round the village; Poor Jenny sits a' weeping; Ring a ring o' roses; Here we go round the mulberry bush; Oranges and lemons; The farmer wants a wife; In and out the piskey bluebells; and the big ship sails to the Illy Ally O!

Skipping games with long thick ropes were: All in together girls; Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, etc.; Eva Weaver chimney sweeper; Higher the rope; and others. Boys' favourites were: Marlies; Tip-cat; Kick can-a-nercky; Duck o' the knob; How many fingers have I got up?; Leap-frog; Pig in the middle; and cigarette cards.

Summer holidays passed all too quickly with never a dull moment, yet happy with such simple pleasures.

A LITTLE-KNOWN BLACK COUNTRY 'FIRST'

THE predominant position of our region in the development of industry and technology has given the Black Country several well known 'firsts.' In 1972, we celebrated the anniversary of the construction at Tipton of the world's first iron steam ship; next year we shall commemorate the patent taken out from Wednesbury for the manufacture of the world's first modern iron tube. These are but two of the better known achievements of the area.

But what about Joseph Heath's performance at Wolverhampton on Saturday, September 14, 1891? I'm sure that to most of our readers neither the name nor the date has any significance. The event took place

in the match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Accrington Stanley at Molineux ground. One of the visiting team's half backs handled the ball to prevent a goal being scored and, from the ensuing penalty award, Joseph Heath scored the second goal of what was to be a five-nil win for the Wolves. The crowd must have been astonished because this was in fact the first time that a goal had been scored from a penalty kick on any English football ground! Both the Irish and the Scottish F.A. leagues had introduced the penalty law previously, but it was not until September 1891 that the English F.A. accepted the new law and thus provided Joseph Heath with his opportunity to create a small piece of football history.

The event is hardly worth a commemorative medallion or cover, but as an interesting aspect of the local story of sport, perhaps deserves to be better known in the Black Country.

J.M.F.

A School Room

Conversation Piece

Talking recently to my class of nine year olds about the episode where Jesus was left behind in the Temple and discovered by his mother talking to the Rabbi's, we decided to reconstruct their possible conversation using dialect. I enclose two examples because they illustrate so well the way our particular vernacular is changing. The rather beautiful 'thee' and 'thou' of our grandparents to the more usual 'yo' of today.

Mary: Thea yo' are. Wha' du yo' think yo' are a doin'?

Jesus: Ar'm a'lis'nin' to these tachers talkin' abart the scripchuz.

Mary: Well, wer an yo' bin these last three days, weiv bin worrid abaht yo'? '

Jesus: Arve bin 'ere in the Temple th'ole toime, air I. Yo' needn't a wurrid abaht me. Ar'me orright.

Mary: Aer waz we tu know you woz orright? It wuz a thortliss thing tu dew. Nah cum on afower I gie ya a fowpenny 'un.

* * *

Mary: There thou art, what doest thee think thou art doing?

Jesus. I am lis'nin' to the preechers torkin' about scripchuz.

Mary: Where hast thou been for three daze past? We wurrid about thee.

Jesus: I have bin here in the Temple. Thou need not wurry.

Mary: How wer we to know thou be orlright, it be a thoughtliss act. Cum afour I get very cross.

Margaret Hutchinson.

Class 2X,
Lyng Primary School,
Horton Street,
West Bromwich.

TWO MISSIONERS

A Tale from Albert Head

AT the mouth of New Street, Cradley, there stood two public houses in High Street—The Holly Bush, and The Robin Hood, the latter delicensed in 1940. Now, old Phil Box had a habit of being first in the Holly Bush at one minute past seven every Sunday night. His position was six inches due south of Jack Worral's beer engine, and old Phil, complete with wormwood sprig in his mouth to ward off flies, would smile as he sampled a half pint of Ind Coopes mild ready for the evening's trade. Jack Worrall would accept Phil's decision on the brew and rest contented, especially when members of Cradley parish church came in to quench their thirst after 90 minutes of worship.

" 'Ow bin yer, Phil? " one would enquire.

" Orlright if it's ony of your business," Phil would reply . . . or: " None the better for tha enquiren."

Jovial rather than quarrelsome, and although aged 75, he would take on any youngsters at darts. When retrieving spent darts he would often return to re-throw in a tap-dance, rocking the wooden floor.

The Holly Bush was by no means Phil's only welcome place, for as sudden as a clap of thunder he would down his empty glass and run down to Batham's White Horse—the beer he was weaned on!

Phil never slept in the daytime, being too busy picking fuel, metal, or any useful item off the tip at the top of his back yard. It is claimed he would have knocked Steptoe into a cocked hat with his stable full of curios. Anything you wanted, Phil had got it!

One night as Phil was heading towards his weekly haunt, he was halted in his tracks by a missioner touting for souls to enter the old Robin Hood, now a Faith Healer's Chapel. " I know where you are going, Guv.," said the missioner. " You're going in there." He pointed to the Holly Bush.

" That's right," said Phil.

" Well," said the missioner, " why don't you come and have a half hour with us? "

" I'll tell thee what I'll do with thee," said Phil. " If thee comes into

the Holly Bush, I'll pay for all thee drinks in half an hour, then I'll come an' have half an hour with yow in your chapel."

The missioner had signed the non-alcoholic drinking paper and said he couldn't do that. Pressed to give his reason, he said: "The devil's in the'er."

"'E hay," said Phil. "I've just sid him the back o' your chapel. He cor be in two places at once. I up, out o' me road," he added as the Baptist chapel clock suggested his late arrival at the bar.

The puzzled missioner walked to the rear of the chapel, scratching his head. "The devil wandering round the back of the chapel . . ." he muttered. Presently, he came face to face with the local bookie's runner and realised what Phil had meant. By this time, Phil was sampling Jack Worral's ale, and telling the tale.

"He wo' stop me agin in a hurry, I bet," he said. "Let him save his own soul, it's the body I'm interested in."

'TIS TO BE HOPED THAT HE IS NOT'

says

Arthur E. Truby

DIALECT phrases peculiar in form and peculiar to the Black Country abound throughout the West Midlands. They enrich the English language in their own way, but to try and analyse some of them is often as futile an exercise as explaining the point of a joke can be. When some of our Black Country sayings are rendered literally into their original form, the results usually sound far more bizarre than the mellowed dialect versions which have taken shape over the years; a shape usually concise, meaningful, yet at the same time hopeless, ungrammatical and uncouth to the ear.

For instance, it is natural for us to say, "Yo' wo' arf coppit," but to express this sentiment in correct English as "You will catch it by a measure not exceeding one half" would convey, not a threat of future punishment, but the fact that fifty per cent of some unspecified object would be caught at some future time. Which is all quite absurd.

The rendering into plain English of the Black Country saying, "I'll lamp your onion," presents not an absurdity, however, but an impossibility. The sentence is good English grammar just as it stands. Its literal meaning has no existence. It is the adopted meaning of this expression which gives this wonderful jewel of our dialect its undeniable charm.

Now, there is one particular expression used in the Black Country, which taken in its context, makes good sense, and even when this phrase has been parsed, analysed, dissected, scrutinised and what have you, still manages to bear some resemblance to its English original. The Black Country gem referred to would be lost on a foreigner from say, London or Liverpool, sounding to him more like an Italian phrase, or perhaps an "enigmatic variation" on whoopsadaisy or ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay. It is employed at the end of the following imaginary conversation:—

"I 'ear yower Olf's likely to be put on the Lerber!"

"Ooh—be 'opes 'e ay."

"BE-OPES-E-AY"

Just look at it; say it out loud, and listen to it in all its Gornalese glory! What a lovely, rhythmic lilt it has! It is almost musical. It is concise and easily understood by those among whom it is used. It is also awful; a grammatical monstrosity which somehow still bears a vague resemblance to its parent form. Oh, yes, despite its strange and bouncy sound, it still deserves to rank as one of our dreadful treasures. For it has the power of "boffumbling" both the Londoner and Liverpudlian. It also goes one better than Shakespeare himself, for would not the Bard have greatly erred by giving us in its place, in immaculate, most correct blank verse, the spineless form of:—

"'Tis to be hoped that he is not"?

Since English literature may be said to gain by the employment of dialect, I wonder if some enterprising person is about to translate "Hamlet" or "Macbeth" into pure Black Country?

Well, since I prefer Shakespeare as written—**"Be-opes-e-ay."**

SUPPORT
OUR
ADVERTISERS

BRIEF MOMENT

Alone on the train at drab Brettell Lane,
Surroundings so dreary and grey:
The station was dim with paintwork so grim
And brickwork showed cracks and decay.

When lo! I espied placed there side by side,
Some posters, bright, sparkling and gay:
The bluest of seas, a soft southern breeze
Inviting me far, far away.

My fancy was caught, O magic of thought,
I sped o'er the distance between:
A moment of bliss, a salt-laden kiss,
So pure, so deliciously clean.

With a hiss and snort, my dreams were cut short
By a monster steaming to go:
Brought back with a jerk to the grime and murk . . .
How I loved that brief moment so!

Meg (1958).

MR. ERNEST LISSIMORE—

WITH the death, at the age of 84, of Mr. Ernest Lissimore, the Black Country, and West Bromwich in particular, has lost an outstanding local historian.

A true Blackcountryman, he was born at Newtown, Great Bridge, and spent his whole life in West Bromwich. He must have been the last surviving member of the teaching profession to have received his training as a member of the old West Bromwich Pupil-Teachers' Training Centre. He later became a graduate of London University, and devoted his whole career to West Bromwich schools.

On his retirement he was able to give time and interest to the history of his native town. He located a wealth of local Manorial documents in London at the Public Record Office where they had been deposited following a protracted Chancery case early in the last century. He was largely instrumental in persuading the local corporation to have these photostated so that copies should be available locally. In order to be able to study these, he set himself to learn the Latin and the 'Court Hand' in which they were written. He then undertook the herculanean task of first transcribing and then translating the Rolls of the local Courts Leet and Baron, which dated back to the late 16th century. The results of his labours were bound and deposited, together with other similar works of his, in the local history section of the reference department of West Bromwich library.

Future students of this area will be greatly indebted to him for the work he has done and the foundations he has prepared.

D.D.

At 14 years of age, Herbert Valentine Morgan joined the Volunteers at Wolverhampton. Three years later, whilst undergoing annual training on Salisbury Plain, he volunteered for service abroad, and was attached to the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, 'The Fighting Fifth.' He landed in South Africa in 1898 after a storm-tossed six weeks voyage in the troopship 'Bavarian,' which had been buffeted 600 miles off course.

Recently, at the age of 92, this cheery veteran—with a magpie memory for facts if ever there was one—recalled some high spots in his army life out there.

From Saddle to Stage

VAL was a bit of a dare devil and was soon to find plenty of scope for adventure astride a pony in a company of forty 'Wilson's Scouts,' who had set out to match the Boers in mobility and in knowledge of the terrain. He just lapped up this life and rocketed to sergeant.

He related the dramatic story of a despatch-bearing mission by night to Fraserburgh with a sergeant whose pony had broken down, leaving Sgt. Morgan to go it alone. His hair-raising return to base in the early hours of the morning was something straight out of a western.

As he descended a defile the Boers on the Kloof heights spotted him and opened fire. He switched to Indian-style horsemanship as he broke into a gallop, crouching low along his pony's flank for cover, and got away with it, except for bullet grazed cords, with his mount minus the tip of one ear.

Danger over, he reined in. "I gave 'em the biggest raspberry; you could have heard it from here to Molineux," he related with a smile. Val is still a bit narked as he looks back on this episode today, for his fellow despatch rider, forced to drop out, was made up to King's Corporal. "I never got a sausage," he lamented.

Once, with a native guide, the company was traversing a waterless expanse of scrub and was nearly all in. "The lads were dropping out and falling off their veldt ponies." Things were desperate. "I took to sucking a pebble and even the tip of my bayonet," recalled Val gravely. Finally, he jabbed his gun into the guide's ribs and bellowed: "Find us water." He made tracks in double quick time for a dried-up river bed, knowing full well water was never far below the sun-baked surface. Digging down, he soon found it, and a can full was on its way to the parched riders. "The lads were dishing out golden quids to the water carrier for a mouthful but I soon put a stopper on that," said Val.

Val spoke of the feverish haste with which he mustered twenty men to form a guard of honour at the P.O.W. camp which was visited by the Duke of York, later to become King George V, and the Duke of Connaught. They had landed at Simonstown. The former shook hands with each member of the squad. "Best of all," said Val, "he left us a pint apiece in the canteen!"

During a spell of guard duty at the camp, Sgt. Morgan was shaken rigid one morning when giving the 'wakey wakey,' for a voice boomed out, "Where do you come from?" in pronounced Black Country tones. "Portobello, Staffs.," was the reply. "I'm from Bilston Street, Wolverhampton," said the figure with massive white whiskers, now emerging. "I've been here sixteen years and felt entitled to take up arms." "Take care to keep your mouth shut, you might be for it as a traitor!" said his compatriot, whose birthplace was just a mile from his own.

He mentioned in passing the occasion when the two guerilla fighter sons of Boer General Christian DeWet were captured, and how he marched them off at bayonet point.

Once, a Boer spy hastily faced a firing squad. "I was off duty at the time," said Val, "and to this very day I thank God for that mercy, because he would have met his end at my command."

One last fling for dare devil Val was when he deliberately went adrift for four days, "To see a bit more of the country," said he as an afterthought. With his tough pony he crossed a plateau and could hardly believe his eyes, for there was quartz strewing the way. "If only I could have staked a claim, I might have been a rich man," he laughed.

He really was lost, and only by chance did he meet up with a platoon of Britishers. By this time he had done enough to get himself posted as 'Missing' back in England, to which he returned in 1902 after a record 16 day crossing. His sister in Walsall had read this announcement and when brother Val suddenly turned up from out of the blue, she nearly passed out.

Later, as Val Morgan and Partner, he and his wife went on the stage and for 35 years their musical act delighted audiences in theatres all over Britain.

As a change from army tea in South Africa, this fine old trouper finally recalled once having a tot with Vesta Tilley in the bar of the Hippodrome, Birmingham.

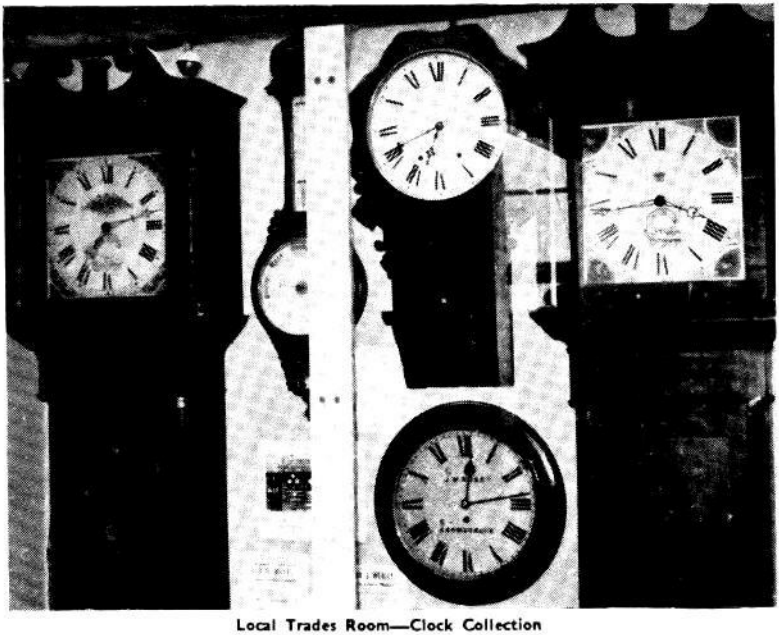
E. C. M. Baker.

Ron Moss visits

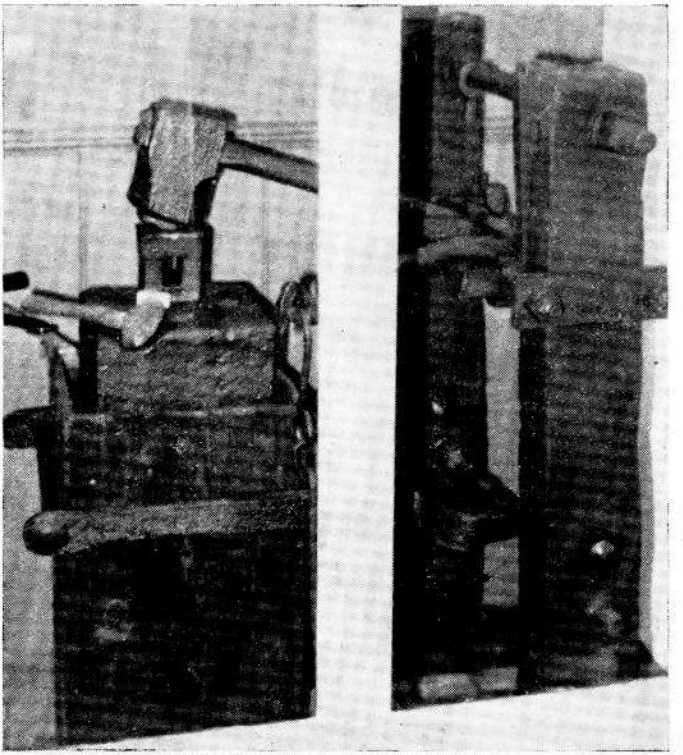
The Norton Museum, Bromsgrove

THE Black Country Society were among the privileged company invited to attend the opening of the Bromsgrove Room of the Norton Museum on April 6. The invitation read, "The Editor or representative"; fortunately for me, the editor had a previous engagement and I was asked to represent him. Dennis Norton, the keeper and owner of the private museum, had been in contact with me last year when he was on the lookout for an oliver (a treadle hammer) and tools to be used in a display representing the nail-making industry in the Bromsgrove Room. He was put in touch with me through our secretary and fortunately, around that time, Mr. Tromans of Meredith Street, Old Hill, was preparing to close his forge due to a compulsory purchase order. I was then able to put Mr. Norton in touch with the equipment he needed. He subsequently told me that Mr. Tromans was so interested that he made several journeys to the museum at Upton Warren, near Bromsgrove with extra items.

The Bromsgrove Room was opened at 17.00 hours by Sir Michael Higgs, chairman of the County Council of Hereford and



Local Trades Room—Clock Collection



Local Trades Room—Oliver/Nail Section

Worcester, who cut the ribbon after making a speech commending Mr. Dennis Norton on his marvellous collection. Mr. Norton had previously thanked all the people who had helped him with his work, especially his wife, and Miss Margaret Moffatt. Champagne and refreshments were served later.

The room is devoted to displays of the various industries and crafts associated with Bromsgrove and the surrounding countryside. The clock industry is represented by examples of various large clocks including the grandfather, while the nailmaking industry is illustrated by photographs of the different stages of making a nail, together with the tools used, including the spring pole oliver and horseshoe bellows. The stained glass window and ornamental and architectural lead trade is well shown, together with other examples of the work of the Bromsgrove Guild of Craftsmen. The salt industry at Stoke Prior is included, and also glass and button making. There are numerous illustrations of the Banshee motor cycle, approx. 800 of which were manufactured in the town between 1919 and 1928.

In other parts of the museum, there are very good collections of household items such as table oil lamps, sewing machines, and early gramophones, together with a

marvellous show of transport lamps, oil, carbide, etc., which I believe was the start of his collection.

The museum is open in summertime, Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and wintertime, 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., weekdays and evenings by appointment. The Industrial Archaeology Group of the Society made an evening visit last year and plan one for this year. There is no charge for admission, but a box is available for voluntary contributions towards the upkeep and enlargement of the collection.

Photography was hampered by glass show cases. Broad white line down centre is frame of case.

—R.M.

REDUNDANCY AT THE FORGE

The heat that forms those myriad beads
Of sweat on working brows,
That glow of steel withdrawn,
The hotness of the air that sears the skin.
Has ceased, and all is cool and still.

The force that shakes the sweat
From working brows,
That noise of steel on steel,
The movement of the very earth beneath the feet.
Has ceased, and all is quiet and still.

The toil that breaks the backs
Of working men,
That ache of muscles strained,
The heavy work that brought its monetary reward,
Has ceased, and all is desolate and still.

'Tis the end of waiting for orders
That did not come,
Of four days and hope,
Of three days and less,
Of fourteen men a-working at the broom,
The writing on the wall is now all that remains,
And all is quiet and still.

Geoff Stevens.

The Haden Saga

H. Jack Haden

WHEN Haden Hill park and its house at Old Hill were bought for the public in 1922, an illustrated booklet was issued and copies were presented to those who had contributed towards the purchase, not only of the 44 acres of the estate but of a further 16 acres of adjoining land. This booklet, compiled from information about the Haden family by C. W. Bassano, mentioned that there existed a good collection of pre-Reformation documents about this estate, which had been possessed by the Hadens for centuries. In them were mentioned many interesting details of local history and local families, including the Hadens whose name was spelt in different ways—early on as De la Haude and atte Haueden, which surely indicates that they took their name from a locality within the ancient manor of Rowley. Alas, this remarkable collection of documents has disappeared and is probably destroyed (as were the Haden family portraits after Rowley Regis Council had declined to accept them as a gift, being unable to provide a place where they could be hung)—a great loss and cause for regret by Black Country historians.

The direct line of Hadens of Haden Hill ended with the death of Miss Anne Eliza Haden on 11 May, 1876, aged 86, though the Bassano offshoot from the family continues, the junior local representative being Mr. Peter Ashe, a local journalist whose mother, Mrs. Vera Ashe (nee Bassano), was until recent years well known as a radio actress.

Haden is a surname commonly encountered in the Black Country, but whether many of its holders are descended from the Hadens of Haden Hill is virtually impossible to ascertain. A point of interest to anyone with unlimited time who attempts to compile a family tree of the Hadens is that the Hadens of Haden Hill often bore the christian names Henry, Richard, Thomas and Isabel.

The parish register of Rowley Regis (the original was destroyed when the church was burnt down) begins in 1539, and the first Haden recorded is the christening on 12 January, 1541 of Isable, daughter of Hendry Haden—spelling in those days was erratic. On 25 March, 1544, Hendrey Haden had a son christened Richard and on 29 September, 1547, another daughter, Margrett, was christened. Next month, on 26 November, Ales Haden married Richard Marten and on 17 September, 1548, their daughter Isable was christened. Meanwhile, Elizabeth, daughter of John Haden was christened on 21 May, 1548, but four days later the baby was buried. A family tree of sorts from this period has been compiled, beginning with John Hadon. From one of his sons, Thomas (born 1555), there is a continuous line through the Barr, Best and Bassano families to the present day. The Hendry and Ales mentioned in the register were presumably also children of John Hadon.

By the 16th century, the Hadens were a family of some substance. Later, there is a reference to a Haden having a mill and they must have been engaged in farming. Beneath their land in Rowley Regis was coal and this was mined. Some indication of their local status is the fact that Thomas Haden (baptised 15 November, 1608) became churchwarden at Rowley and was an assessor for a levy made in 1631. His eldest son, Henry (born 1633) inherited the estate and styled himself "gentleman" instead of "yeoman" used by his forebears. This Henry was presumably the Henry Haden who, with Thomas Grove and Richard Russell, disclaimed the right to bear arms in 1663. He died in 1675, having added to his wealth by a judicious marriage. Presumably, he was the Henry Haden who was one of several local people who erected a gallery in Rowley Regis Church to seat themselves and their servants. Henry married Elizabeth Fullwood who inherited an estate at Studley, Warwickshire, from her grandfather, Ralph Steward (? Sheward). It is interesting to observe that the Rev. Edward Sheward, M.A., of Merton College, Oxford, a member of a Tardebigge family, was vicar of Clent—which was then linked to Rowley Regis—from 1719 until his death in 1736 and had been curate to the previous vicar of Clent with Rowley Regis, 1717-19. Probably about 1700, the Hadens acquired a coat of arms—Or, a man's leg couped at the thigh azure; a crest of a cubit arm erect in armour holding an arrow; and a motto "Disce pati." After Henry Haden's marriage the Fullwood arms—Gules, a chevron betwixt three mullets argent—was quartered with the Hadens.

Each Haden heir entailed his estate on his issue, but John Haden (1723-1796), the last male heir, tried to change the traditional scheme. He remained a batchelor until he was 65 when he married Mary Kendrick (whose mother was born a Haden) and they had one child, a daughter, Anne Eliza (1790-1876) who died unmarried. John Haden disliked the

'Ah doh care whether yoh'm in that Black Country Secierty or no, chap . . . yoh'm gooin' ter no moor on them gray paze suppers . . .'

other branches of the Haden family and resolved that if possible they should not inherit his estate. Should his daughter not have an heir, he intended that it should go to issue of a second marriage of his wife who was a young woman and in fact married the curate at Rowley Regis, the Rev. George Barrs (1771-1840) on 1 August, 1801. Barrs, a Cambridge graduate, was a stern character, was the eldest boy of the 13 children of Robert Barrs and Elizabeth Miles, and by Mrs. Mary Haden he had three children—Frederic Alfred George Barrs (1802-1875) who married twice but left no issue, Alfred Haden Barrs-Haden (1804-1877) who left no issue and Emiline Georgina (1807-1849) who married Benjamin Best and had three children. These were George Alfred Haden-Best (died 1921) who, as a result of an arrangement made in 1858 by Miss Anne Eliza Haden, eventualy inherited the Haden Hill estate; Laura Elizabeth (1837-1902) who married James Payton Badley, a member of a Dudley family, and left issue, and Emiline Mary Georgina (1836-1892) who married Walter Bassano (1832-1903), a colliery proprietor, local justice of the peace and public figure who was largely responsible for building Old Hill Parish Church.

Alfred Barrs-Haden built the large red-brick house, High Harcourt, at Haden Hill, but he was in poor health and lived only a year after coming into the Haden Hill estate which then passed to his sister's son, George Alfred Haden-Best who was responsible for building the large house adjoining the ancient hall within the park. In addition to land at Studley, the Hadens had acquired estates in Gloucestershire and at Compton, Kinver, but these were sold by G. A. Haden-Best.

The Bassano family, which in the 19th century became linked with the Haden line, is of singular interest as an example of inherited talent—in their case, musical. Dr. A. L. Rouse, the historian of the Shakespearean period, mentions the "numerous clan" of Bassanos in his book "Shakespeare the Man," in which he claims that the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets was no other than Emilia Bassano, illegitimate daughter of an Italian musician at the English Court named Baptist Bassano (buried St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, London, 11 May, 1576) by a Margaret Johnson. Emilia was also a musician and became mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain, and by him had a son, Henry. At the age of 23, she was married off conveniently to another Court musician, William Lanier, and her child bore his surname but his real father's christian name. When he grew up he became a musician at the Court of Charles I.

In the course of time the Bassanos spread to other parts of the country and one of them, Francis (1675-1746) became a distinguished antiquary and heraldic illuminator. It is from his brother, Christopher Bassano, who lived at Derby, that the Bassanos of Old Hill are descended. Christopher's grandson, John, became a suger refiner. His son, Francis, born at Hull, emigrated to Texas, but one of Francis's children, Walter, was born at Handsworth before the family went to America. This was the Walter Bassano who married Emiline Mary Georgina, the second daughter of Benjamin Best and they had six children. One married Thomas Cooksey, a Rowley solicitor, and one

son, Alfred Hill Bassano (1862-1946) remained at Old Hill and had a son, Alfred Charles Haden Bassano, who now lives at the new Hadenholme, a bungalow at Haden Hill, and for many years has acted as organist at Old Hill Parish Church. A devotion to music was shared by Walter Bassano who composed the hymn tune "Experience" in 1878 which was rendered at his own funeral service.

(See also Correspondence, page 68)

MONTE CARLO INTERLUDE

by

Tom Langley

TWO years ago I was resident in Monte Carlo for several weeks. During this period I not only recalled my long-forgotten school-boy French, but I acquired a genuine Maritime Alps tan. One morning I was walking with my grandchildren along the shady side of the Boulevard Des Moulins en route for the beach. I saw approaching, a motor car bearing a Black Country registration number. It teetered towards the centre of the carriageway and then manoeuvred back to the right hand side of the road as the driver mastered his powerful inclination to keep to the left. He was, by the way, the only driver I saw in Monte Carlo who gave way at a pedestrian crossing. In spite of the sign that to stop on the Boulevard was "Interdit," he pulled up alongside me and pushed his head out of the window, with thick trilby, collar, tie and all in spite of the heat. He said, "Do yoh speak English?"

Now, I was instantly suffused with satisfaction to be mistaken for a Monagasque and I answered in my best B.B.C. accent, "A little."

"Thank God for that," said the driver, and he switched off his engine to prepare for a long talk.

'Where is Monte Carlo? I asked a bloke up there and he kept pointing to the ground and saying, 'Monaco, Monaco.'" His wife in the rear seat decided that I would understand better if she aired her Black Country French.

"Parlez vous English?" she smiled.

"Pour de Moins," I smiled back.

"Monte Carlo? Princess Grace?" said she.

"Je comprens," said I.

Her husband cut short this incomprehensible idyll with, "Leave it to me, will you. Now, ower kid, how do we get to Monte Carlo?"

In my best English accent I explained that this was Monte Carlo, also Monaco, for they were one and the same place. As I answered his questions, every so often I asked if he understood me. He reassured me that he did with "Keep gooin', yoh'm doin' well." And it seemed to me that every time he spoke his Black Country lingo became broader and broader. His wife asked about the Casino and commanded him to keep out of it if they played pontoon, and he put the embargo upon her going in if they played bingo.

After I had imparted to them my intimate knowledge of Monte Carlo, I bade them bon voyage, with a parting, "I hope you have been able to understand me." This intrepid Black Country traveller (I mean this for I would not have driven in Monte Carlo for a golden pig) looked me straight in the eyes with a very, very meaningful stare and assured me, "Every word yoh said, ower kid. Yoh spake just the same as we dun."

I watched the car as it moved away on a long diagonal from the right kerb to the centre of the Boulevard en route for the Casino and Princess Grace, and I got his message. My grandchildren chattering in French, my Monagasque shirt, my Levantine tan and fondly imagined B.B.C. accent had not fooled him. Full well he knew the neck of the woods from whence I had come. If he reads this, I hope he kept clear of the Casino, for from my limited experience it seems that within it, suicide is an occupational hazard, and he who wins is the one who leaves with his shirt still swinging from his own shoulders.

WHIPPETS AGAIN AT TIPTON

THE second open whippet race for the Pride of the Black Country Challenge Trophy, presented annually by the Black Country Society will take place on Sunday, September 8, at The Sports Union, Wednesbury Oak Road, Tipton. Dogs will be weighed in during the morning and the races will take place in the afternoon. The event will conclude with the presentation of trophies to heat winners and the first, second, third and fourth in the competition. The winner will also receive the Society Challenge Trophy to hold for one year.

Despite adverse conditions, the competition last year attracted a good entry from a wide area. Considerable interest was aroused in Tipton where whippet racing had not been seen for many years. Track equipment and supervision were supplied by the officials of the Brierley Hill Whippet Racing Club who were widely congratulated for their efficient organisation of the racing. It was perhaps appropriate that the winner was a whippet, Blue Lagoon, owned and trained by Stephen Hodgetts of the Brierley Hill Club. With such a magnificent trophy at stake, it is not surprising that the final race was a very close one and the winner closely challenged.

We hope for a larger entry, better weather and an increased attendance for this second competition.

J.M.F.

Stephen Hodgetts, with 'Blue Lagoon,' winner of the Black Country Society Challenge Trophy, 1973, receives cup from committee member Mrs. Andrea Archer

AYNUK'S ARK

Ode Aynuk had tew many grey paes it ud seem,
Un last night he had a strange dream;
This angel cum un tode Aynuk ter build an Ark,
Cus it wuz gunna rain un it wuz gunna be dark,
Un ter loose all the animals in tew by tew,
But not ter let one mon or woman gu threw;

Soo Aynuk dun just like he said,
Un he built his Ark daern the garden shed;
For this eer Ark there wuz nothin' tew good;
He had all his timber from Gornal Wood,
Nails from 'Alesowen, made special for the job
Un a Craerdley 'Ommer uz cost thirty bob;

He built it wide un he built it lung,
He built it high un he built it strung,
Un everythig wuz gooin' great,
Till up cum Ali—Aynuk's mate:—
" Wot'n yer dewin' theer, Aynuk? " he said;
" Cor yo see, yer great mutton yed?

Arm buildin' this Ark they asked me ter dew,
Un arve gorra let th' animals in tew by tew."
" It's a bit on the big side aye it, ode taerter?
Un 'ow dust know it'll float on the waerter? "
" Cus arm gunna try it out fust on Braerdley cut!
Naer shut thee flippin' faerce up wut? "

The last nail un the last plank o' wood,
Un that ode Ark wuz ready for the flood.
Ode Aynuk wuz proud ut wot ud com aert uv 'is yed,
But all uv a sudden he nearly drapped daern jed;
He'd done a good job there aye no doubt,
But it wuz stuck in the shed un he couldn't get it out.

Suddenly a voice from behind said " Yo'n atter break the shed up, chum ":
" Ar thought ar'd tode thee ter shut up un goo wum."
He wouldn't be beaten tho', no not our Aynuk—
He got that boat on the cut un it floated like a duck;
A bottle uv hum-brewed on a string, for a lark,
Un that theer ship wuz truly christened " Aynuk's Ark."

All the crowd gid one mighty cheer
Un finished up with Rule " Britannia ";
The nize cud be 'eard for miles un miles,
Un that lad's faerce wuz full o' smiles,
Till Mrs. Aynuk with piercing cry
Yelled " Aynuk! Aynuk!! Thee toast's gooin' dry."

Jay-Jay (Bilston).

BOOK REVIEWS :

Roy Palmer (ed.), Songs of the Midlands, E.P. Publishing Ltd., X + 115pp., £1.50.

Jon Raven (ed.), Songs of a Changing World, Ginn and Co. Ltd., 63pp., 70p.

Kate Raven (ed.), Canal Songs and Songs from Canal Folk, Broadside Records, 28pp., 75p.

TODAY it seems strange to think that until a few years ago hardly anyone was interested in the songs of the Black Country, and most collectors regarded the area as devoid of interesting material. Early compilers of folk song material naturally attempted to capture the words and music of a rural England that seemed fast disappearing at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of this century. But even when the "folk club boom" of the post-second world war period was well under way, forcing singers to seek for new material in the industrial regions, the Black Country remained neglected.

Why was this so? Of course, the region lacked the sensational disasters, the great conflicts between capital and labour, the disastrous collapse of essential industries, the grinding poverty, that were too often characteristic of other industrial regions. Many of the collectors of industrial folk songs were convinced socialists; they had great sympathy with the sufferings of the people of Wales, Scotland and the North, and regarded their rhymes and music as an important record of the class struggle. The history of the Black Country, for all its patches of tragedy and deprivation, could never in this way compare with the history of other industrial regions. Its evolution was remarkably consistent; its poverty, with perhaps an exception in its nail and chain trades, never so terrible as elsewhere. Also, the natural isolation of the area, the marked insularity of its people and their apparent concern with twentieth century industrial activities, may have led many to believe that the Black Country was not a promising area for collection and research. Indeed, until recently there was little to inform them otherwise. The number of useful books on Black Country topics was small and these mostly very dated. Even today, for example, almost every coal mining region now has its own well researched account of the activities of the National Union of Mineworkers and its predecessors; the sole exception is the Black Country!

The first serious attempt to locate and print the rhymes and songs of the Black Country was made by Jon Raven. At first he relied on the small collection made by Dr. John M. Fletcher but soon extended his researches to local archive collections and individual singers. The result was one small and three large volumes of material from the Black Country and its surrounding region. Jon not only printed this material, but, with the help of his brother, Michael, and Derek Craft, adapted tunes to existing texts and performed the songs in clubs and on the radio and television. In this way, for the first time for about a century, many

people obtained some idea of the richness of the Black Country material. Many later "folklorists" have been critical of his collecting methods and the arrangements made by his brother. But the fact remains that Jon Raven was the first on the ground, and all later collectors owe him a considerable debt. If they wish, they can ignore his arrangements, but they cannot ignore the material he printed, in many cases for the first time. These three volumes reviewed here all show this indebtedness in one form or another.

All three include a selection of songs from an area wider than the Black Country, but all include a large number of songs from the region itself, thus showing the influence of Jon's work. Roy Palmer's collection includes songs from throughout the Midlands. However, a word of warning is necessary here. Although these songs were collected locally, their singers and subjects are often from further afield; an Irish tinker sings of the banks of the Lea; a Durham miner sings farewell to the pit. The book, therefore, can mislead by its title. Roy Palmer's reputation in this field ensures that the songs are properly described, the musical notation is clearly printed and proper acknowledgments are given. But surely Roy Palmer is wrong in claiming to have himself collected two songs from Mrs. Turner of Wednesbury. This reviewer certainly remembers, long before the foundation of the Black Country Society, that he heard Mr. Charles Parker sing these songs on B.B.C. television following a programme in which Dr. John Fletcher described how he had collected them.

Jon Raven's Songs of a Changing World is intended to provide for schools a useful collection of songs from the early Industrial Revolution. The commentary, therefore, is less valuable and more simple than that of Roy Palmer. The range, however, is very wide, with songs from colliers, weavers, nailmakers, county labourers, sportsmen, gipsies and canal boatmen. The whole gives a vivid and sometimes horrifying portrayal of this transitional period in our history. Jon's words and music are well intertwined with Derek Collard's illustrations that will help children to capture something of the historical setting of the pieces.

Kate Raven's edition of Canal Songs is a much slighter work, designed to accompany the recent play "Canal Folk" at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre; some of the songs printed here were used in the show. Kate's husband, Jon, has brought together twenty-two songs with a few prose extracts relating to the canal system. There is a minimum of commentary. It is suggested that this little book is the first collection of canal songs to be printed. Our readers will note the marked absence of traditional canal songs from the Black Country despite its extensive system of waterways. Perhaps this is because much of the local trade was short haul, day work, and the boatmen never developed the completely separate clan they otherwise might have created. However, the contemporary interest in our waterways is reflected here.

In presentation, these books vary tremendously. The first two are professionally and attractively printed, with fine spacings and illustrations. Kate Raven's book is a much more utilitarian product: cheaper printing often produces blurred or missing words; the songs are

cramped one against the other without adequate spacing. And if any reader wishes for a wonderful, if unintentional picture of the Delph Locks, Brierley Hill, in a heavy thunderstorm, he will find one here!

It is good to have available here more evidence of the wide appreciation of Black Country folk lore.

Readers may order any of these books from the Black Country Society, 98 Bescot Road, Walsall. Appropriate postage will be charged.

G. Winter, A Country Camera 1844-1914, 120pp., 159 photographs, Penguin Books, 75p.

THE development of photographic techniques in the second half of the nineteenth century may have demoted the importance of the painter and engraver as a recorder of the contemporary scene, but it certainly left to posterity a far greater mass of evidence than would otherwise have been available. As the pre-1914 era gradually fades into history, the value of this material is coming to be properly appreciated. Much has been lost. The author of this collection tells how a large number of unique glass negatives ended their lives as cloches for lettuce in a country garden; the few that survived this treatment, some of which are reproduced in this book, give us an inkling of how fine must have been the original collection.

Mr. Winter has collected from archives throughout the country and from individuals this group of photographs to illustrate aspects of country life before the outbreak of the First World War. Young and old, labourers and craftsmen, rich and poor are here presented, together with the villages and fields and workplaces of those now distant times. The pictures give an impression of timelessness. The techniques used by many of the workers are unchanged from the medieval period as are most of the tools they are using. The gentry, the professions and the church occupy their established place in rural society and exist in friendly association with their labourers and domestics. Almost all the individuals face the camera with confidence and a smile, appear well fed and prosperous, and are satisfactorily clothed and shod. Everything seems orderly, almost idyllic; everyone seems satisfied with his allotted place in society. This impression is reinforced by the author's tendency to compare life at that time with life today to the detriment of the latter. Are children today happier and healthier? " Personally, I doubt whether any conclusion can be reached," writes Mr. Winter. " Whether these countrymen and countrywomen appear healthier, happier and nicer than their successors is debatable," he states, but he is convinced that " they enjoyed an ordered and comparatively peaceful existence." He ends his selection with a picture of young men from Wiltshire leaving for the Forces in August 1914. Rural England was never to be the same again.

This really will not do. " From the parish in which I write, thirty-one sons of the soil have been enrolled as London policemen in thirty years," wrote Augustus Jessopp, vicar of Scarning, Norfolk, after 1879.

Canon Girdlestone, Vicar of Halberton, Devon, 1862-72, organised schemes to remove surplus rural labour to industrial towns. "As late as 1914," writes one of our contemporary agricultural historians, "there is good reason to believe that most labourers were still underfed." During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, much arable land fell out of cultivation; land was grassed down, fewer labourers were needed. Some emigrated, some moved to the industrial regions. Many of the readers of "The Blackcountryman" will be able to trace back their ancestry to a rural grand or great-grandparent forced to leave the land at the close of the last century. In 1894-95, the price of wheat fell to its lowest level for one hundred and fifty years; between 1872 and 1900, two and a half million acres of arable land were converted to grass; in the last quarter of the century, one-third of the labouring population left the land.

These magnificent photographs show one aspect of rural life in England before 1914. For the other may we recommend to our readers the brief study, "British Agriculture 1875-1914," by P. J. Perry. University Paper Backs, 1973, from which the above references have been taken. For the real grass roots of rural England, from which many years ago some of our readers came, we would suggest the reading of Miss M. K. Ashby's biography of her father, "Joseph Ashby of Tysoe" (C.U.P. 1961). Professor Hoskins, reviewing this wonderful study of the illegitimate son of a Midland cottage girl, who began work at 3.30 a.m. to follow the scythe and sickle before he was eleven, who taught himself to read Homer, and who devoted his life to relieve the terrible conditions suffered by his contemporaries, writes: "It is doubtful whether Anglo-Saxon slaves were treated as contemptuously and brutally as the labouring class in the English countryside only three or four generations ago." Our own Black Country Maurice Wiggin writes bitterly of "the misery and anaemia in Victorian times" when "only village Methodism kept hope and grace alive."

Who, then are these happy people in this collection and what lessons have they to teach us in the Black Country in the 1970s? The collector acutely recognises that many of his photographs are especially posed for a special audience; number 94, for example, shows an oarsman who has forgotten to cast off! But where are the photographs of suffering, of the emigrants who left for distant parts of the Empire, forced to beg from the neighbours a frying pan to cook their food on the voyage, of the strikers who fought against terrible odds, far worse than their colleagues in the industrial towns, to establish at this time the Agricultural Labours Union? These forgotten men have no place in this collection of rural photographs. Perhaps they were the more typical products of rural England before 1914.

These are important lessons for us in the Black Country from the example of this book. During the past few years we have seen a number of books produced, perporting to portray the region through its earlier pictures. Michael Hale's excellent photographs of steam trains have concentrated on the technical details of railway transport, with a minimum of social comment. Others have printed earlier photographs with little or no observations at all. Such works, although providing

much welcome material, are a dangerous precedent. Photographs, especially in the late nineteenth century, were rarely and carfully taken; the subject was usually posed and the print often commissioned. Inevitably, few pictures of humdrum activity of working life, and of working protest reached the negative, except when great local or national interest inspired attention, during a colliery disaster, for instance. The publication of such material unless accompanied by qualified and adequate appreciation by recognised historians can be both misleading and dangerous. The Black Country Society possesses a fine collection of early photographs of our region. We hope that the mistakes made by other collectors and publishers will be rectified when the time comes to print a selection from this rich store.

Our welcome for this collection of photographs must, therefore be qualified. They certainly do not reveal the full story of pre-1914 rural England which was crumbling long before the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, the pictures printed here are certainly a fine collection, superbly reproduced and with a helpful commentary on the details. Wolverhampton readers will be interested to see the magnificent photographs of Shifnal Post Office and staff in 1900. At the price of 75p, this book is a well worthwhile bargain that does credit to the publishers.

William Tann, Midlanders Who Made History Vol. 1. 96pp./photographs. Wayland Regional Studies. £2.25.

A SERIES of potted profiles is perhaps the fairest way to describe this slim volume, which attempts to examine the lives and careers of forty Midlanders of the 17th and 18th centuries. Nine Midland counties are covered and most of the people presented are so well known to even the enthusiastic non-historian that what little we read about them here can scarcely add to the reader's knowledge. The exceptions are characters such as Anna Seward (1747-1809) of Eyam Deryshire, a poetess who was "never very good at her chosen art," and whose claim to fame as expressed here, was to have her eyes flattered by Sir Walter Scott; write a book about Darwin, and be buried in Lichfield Cathedral —hardly qualifications for inclusion as a Midlander who made history!

The section on Staffordshire includes such notables as Izaak Walton, Jonathan Wild (the Wolverhampton criminal), Samuel Johnson, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgewood. Worcestershire is confined to mention of Thomas Foley and Hannah Snell, which is a bit lightweight, especially as John Baskerville, the typographer, is listed under Warwickshire because of his association with Birmingham, although we are told that he was born in Wolverley, near Kidderminster. This raises the question whether, in a county-by-county volume, a person should be listed under that of his birth or that of his achievement. Incidentally, Thomas Foley was the founder of a hospital at Old Swinford, Stourbridge; Hannah Snell, a lady who succeeded in serving as a soldier and at sea disguised as a man without being detected.

These are the skimpiest of profiles, the author having been permitted only 350-500 words for each. 'Permitted' would appear to be the operative word, for the type is larger and more widely spaced than it need to be, with plenty of empty space surrounding, and an unusually large number of whole page photographs. For example, Darwin's house takes up a page whereas his life and work is restricted to some 300 words!

The book is attractively presented and expensive-looking, and presumably this was the aim of the publishers, rather than that of producing a meaty appraisal of these 'historic' Midlanders. Yet even in the comparative small amount of fact distilled, we read that Dud Dudley, the illegitimate son of Baron Dudley, whose claim to have first used coke for iron smelting is now widely given credence, was a **Shropshire** cannon maker. Staffs. and Worcs., but not Shropshire, surely!

Wright and Priddey, Heart of England, Robert Hale and Co., £2.80.

A DELIGHTFUL and absorbing account of journeys by car and on foot, covering an area within a radius of twenty-five miles of Birmingham's Bull Ring Centre, recorded by Louise Wright accompanied by numerous sketches drawn by the widely known Birmingham artist, James Priddey.

The author's travels take the reader to beauty spots such as Cannock Chase and Clent Hills, through villages, along river banks and canal tow paths, to ancient towns like Bridgnorth and Warwick, and to modern Coventry.

Up hill and down dale, the journeys take in the well-trodden path along with places which only seem a name on the map, yet illustrate the fact that the often maligned West Midlands has much of interest to offer if one takes the time to explore it.

The Black Country is naturally included, with references made to many interesting aspects of the region. Visits are made to such green open spaces as Himley Park, the Wren's Nest and the Sandwell Valley; to historic buildings, Dudley's castle and the priory ruins, West Bromwich's manor house, Rushall Hall with its Civil War associations, to mention just a few. Traditional industries are not forgotten, with references to stone quarrying at Gornal, nail-making, glass-making and decorative enamelling. The author quite rightly recommends the reader who wishes to learn more of the history of the two latter-named crafts to visit the excellent glass museum at Brierley Hill, and the enamel collection at the Bilston Museum and Art Gallery. Two highly topical points in the book are the references to Haden Hall and the Black Country Museum. The former is now empty and is the concern of local enthusiasts who wish to see it preserved. Its preservation is still a very controversial matter. With regard to the Black Country Museum, enthusiastic support is also mentioned and it now seems that after much patient effort, this may soon become a reality. Hopefully, the book will add to support to these two projects.

Sir,

I am working on a book about rag rugs and the traditional craft of making them. Such rugs, which are also called hooky, proddy, clippie or tab rugs are made from pieces of old clothing cut in strips and hooked through hessian to make a sturdy floor covering.

I would be most interested to hear from any of your readers who make these rugs or who know people who made them in the past.

I am specially interested to know the names given to patterns and whether certain designs had any traditional significance. I also would like details of the making of the rugs. Were they made as a communal effort in the winter, for example? Or did new brides have them made specially?

Any information which will give more knowledge on a dying craft which, I am trying to record before it is too late, would be of great help to me.

Leslie Cuddis Brown (Miss).

Yeoman's Cottage,
Great Ouseburn,
York YO5 9RQ.

* * *

Sir,

While looking through my spring edition of "The Black-countryman," I was pleasantly surprised to find an article about local tokens by Primrose Rostron. However, after reading the text, I felt that the overall impression given by the author, as well as a few points, needed clarification.

In each of the mintings of tokens a particular denomination of coin predominated; in the 17th century—farthings; in the 18th century—halfpennies, and in the 19th century—pennies. Each catered for the demand of the time. The issue in the 18th century had by far the highest minting.

The latter two coinings were done on the behalf of large organisations such as factories or boroughs. So the retailers who had themselves initiated the first issue of tokens, found themselves with the task of collecting this latest flood of unofficial coin until such time that they had enough to warrant a journey to the issuer, where they could get their 'one pound note for 240 tokens.' It was by this method that the tokens obtained their 'official' rate of exchange.

Your writer does not make a distinction between James Wilkinson of Dudley, the vicemaker, who issued his token in 1812, and the much more important John 'Iron Mad' Wilkinson of Bradley. This later Wilkinson circulated his tokens in the 18th century; they were minted by Matthew Boulton at his Soho Manufactory. The first of these tokens, dated 1787, depicted a drop hammer, with the 'barge' appearing in 1788. On the last of this spate of tokens, in 1795, the deity Vulcan was shown at his forge. These three common types of reverse were much issued in the intermediary years.

E. Davies of Dudley was a nail wholesaler, not manufacturer; his tokens describe him as 'factor.'

Matthew Boulton received his forged coin in change when paying his toll at tollgates while

on a journey from Birmingham to London in 1789. At this time it was estimated that three quarters of copper coin and two million pounds worth of silver coin in circulation were forged. The nickname, 'Brummagem,' meaning a forged coin, was probably 'coined' from the prologue to John Dryden's "Spanish Fryer," which he wrote in 1681.

Tokens were frowned upon by the Crown but greeted with delight by the forger, so silver tokens were outlawed by Act of Parliament in 1810, with copper tokens getting the same treatment in 1817.

I hope to write further on this fascinating subject in future issues of "The Blackcountryman."

P. Glews.

Marston Road,
Russell Hall,
Dudley.

* * *

Sir,

I read with interest your kind notice of my history of St. Paul's Wood Green (Vol. 7 No. 2). I agree that the sketch maps ought to have been better, and for the mistakes, I am responsible and not my daughter—then aged 13. If the booklet should ever be reprinted, I shall try to arrange for the maps to be replaced by better ones.

There is one statement in your article which, I think, ought to be corrected. You say that I donated the centenary booklet. If this implies that I paid for its printing, it is not so. In fact, a good many members of the Elwell family contributed—some of them pretty handsomely—towards its cost. I would not like to think that they should be deprived, for all time, of the credit that is theirs!

I greatly enjoy "The Blackcountryman" which, if I may say so, seems to me to be a first rate publication.

Charles Elwell.

Chalfont St. Giles,
Bucks.

* * *

Sir,

I should like to become a member of your commendable society and enclose £1 subscription —which appears most reasonable. Although distance will prevent me from attending meetings and going on excursions, I wish to support your work in preserving and chronicling Black Country history. I hope too, to submit articles for publication in your magazine eventually. I would, however, be interested to know whether the society has many members in Scotland, and particularly in the north-east of Scotland.

Yo'll unnerstand 'ow I day allus live 'ere. Me owd folks live in 'alesowen, an' I wus brought up in Brummagem.

John Huxley.

Auchenblae,
Kincardineshire.

* * *

Sir,

I am currently beginning research into the impact of the Industrial Revolution upon the people and towns of the Black Country in the period 1815-1850.

I am particularly interested in the growth and development of temperance societies, religious denominations, trade unions, educational institutions and kindred organisations in the area during this period.

I must confess myself a 'foreigner' to the Black Country, being born and bred in Nottingham. As my father hails from Dogkennel Lane, Langley, however, I take the liberty of regarding myself as a Blackcountryman —one generation removed!

John J. Rowley.

Lime Tree Avenue,
Tettenhall Wood,
Wolverhampton.

* * *

Sir,

Will you kindly send me a copy of your St. Paul's centenary booklet for which I enclose a postal order.

This will be of great interest to me I am sure, for at one time my father was organist and a lay preacher at the church. I was christened there some seventy years ago.

In your article (Vol. 7 No. 2), you refer to "The Iron Elwells," which I should much like to read. Would you please tell me if it is possible to obtain a copy.

May I say how much I enjoy "The Blackcountryman," though I should like to see more references to Wednesbury.

E. P. Wilson.

Upper Basildon,
Berks.

* * *

Sir,

I have read "The Blackcountryman" and was very impressed with the poem by H. M. Plant (Vol. 7 No. 2).

I have always had a fascination for the Black Country as when we were children our mother used to take us for a "day out" up Barr Beacon and she used to point out to all the smoke and haze that used to hang over that area and used to say, "That's the Black Country. No houses, only factories."

T. Pinner.

Stanhope Way,
Great Barr,
Birmingham.

* * *

Sir,

I read with interest the letter from Mrs. Caesar in the winter '74 edition of "The Blackcountryman." The clergyman to whom she refers was the Revd. Angelo Solari, who was vicar of St. Mark's Church, Ocker Hill, from 1854-1888.

In his book about Ocker Hill,* the Revd. F. Brighton tells us that Angelo A. N. F. Solari was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge and was ordained priest in 1854, the same year in which he was given sole charge of a parish, a very rare occurrence. Mr. Solari owned estates in Italy from his father and periodically he visited them. On one occasion he was ship-wrecked, narrowly escaping with his life. When he returned, the people of Ocker Hill were so pleased that they presented him with an office desk, which at the time of the book (1949) was used in the Clergy Vestry. Apparently, he used to get lots of melons from Italy; these he used to share with the children of the parish, regardless of their religion. Parkes, in his "History of Tipton," describes the Revd. Solari as "a Christian first and an Anglican afterwards."

He travelled about the parish on a pony which, so the Revd. Brighton had heard, was stabled in one of the lower rooms of the

Vicarage. According to Hackwood,** the Vicar's pony was popularly supposedly to have got its food by foraging around the gravestones in the churchyard.

Mrs. Caesar is correct when she says that Revd. Solari committed suicide on 8 March, 1888; the "Dudley Herald" of 10 March records that:

"His universal geniality to the poor, and the deep interest he took in all that pertained to the raising and ennobling of the toilers of the Black Country will ever stand out as a memorial to his memory."

The inquest, held at the Cottage Spring Public House on 10 March, returned a verdict of "suicide while temporarily insane." The funeral took place on the 13 March and again, the "Dudley Herald" records:

"There was not an inhabited house in the parish which had not blinds lowered, so highly respected and deeply revered was the reverend gentleman by all classes alike. The road from the vicarage to St. Mark's Church was crowded with parishioners and others long before the time the funeral was announced to take place."

The Revd. Solari was buried in the south-east corner of the churchyard and his memorial, a simple white marble cross, is easily seen from Ocker Hill Road.

Linda R. Hughes.
Osbourne Close,
Kidderminster.

*Rev F. Brighton, L.th. "The Venice of the Midlands" Ocker Hill (100 years). pub. 1949.

**F. Hackwood. "History of Tipton." pub. c. 1891

Sir,

Haden Hall, Old Hill

With reference to Peter Barnsley's article on Haden Hall in the spring issue of "The Blackcountryman," I must point out that this contains some glaring inaccuracies which ought to be corrected, both in the interests of veracity, and of future historians of this area.

The caption to the photograph of Haden Hall describes it as "Haden Hall (also known as Haden Hill House)." This is nonsense. The Hall has never been known as Haden Hill House. This latter building is the Victorian residence adjacent to the Hall, built by the late G. A. H. Haden-Best in 1878, and was where he died in October 1921.

In the account of the succession to the Haden estate in 1876, Mr. Barnsley states that both of the Rev. George Barrs' sons died before Miss Anne Eliza Haden. This is all wrong. The younger Barrs son, Alfred Haden Barrs, was still alive when Miss Haden died, and on succeeding to the estate, changed his surname to Barrs-Haden, becoming Alfred Haden Barrs-Haden. Furthermore, Mr. Barnsley says that the children of Barrs' daughter (Emilina Georgina) and Benjamin Best, all took the name of Haden-Best. This is entirely wrong. Only one of the three Best children took the name of Haden-Best, and that was George Alfred Haden-Best. It was not until he succeeded to the estate on the death of his uncle, Alfred Haden Barrs-Haden that, under the terms of his uncle's will, he took Haden into his surname and became George Alfred Haden Haden-Best. The other two Best children, Emiline Mary

Georgina (Mrs. Walter Bassano), and Laura Elizabeth (Mrs. J. B. Badley), never took the name Haden-Best.

Mr. Barnsley's denigration of the Rev. George Barrs is to be deplored, particularly his description of Mr. Barrs as "an icy fanatic." Mr. Barrs was a man of deep spiritual insight, and was responsible for many people being converted, including men who eventually became ministers themselves.

With reference to the details of the Haden, Best, and Barrs families given above, I may say that I have for some time been doing some research into the history of Haden Hall and the Haden family, and in this connection have had access to part of the Haden family tree.

A. E. Woodall (Mr.)

Halesowen Road,
Cradley Heath.

* * *

Sir,

I mentioned to you some time ago that there are a number of drain covers and railings etc. in Banbury made in the Black Country. During a recent survey of drain covers made by the local ironfounders, C. Lampitt and Co., I came across a few covers made by Dudley and Dowell Ltd. of Cradley Heath. There are also some iron railings and gate posts near the town railway bridge which were made by Bayliss, Jones and Bayliss of Wolverhampton. There are also a few drain covers bearing the inscription Hoods of Banbury and Robins Bros., Banbury. These last named firms are well estabilshed ironmongers in Banbury and on enquiry, I found out that the covers bearing their names were made for them at Cradley Heath.

Our once busy iron ore fields also had connections with the Black Country. Six of the quarries in the Banbury area were owned by Staffordshire firms and it is believed that ore was being drawn from Oxfordshire as early as 1881 by Alfred Hickman of Bilston, for use in some trials which he was carrying out at that time at the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company's works at Wednesbury; the success of these trials, I understand, led to the forming of the Steel and Ingot Company, for which a basic steel works was later erected next to Hickman's blast furnaces at Bilston.

The six quarries in the Banbury area were at East Adderbury, owned by Alfred Hickman Ltd. from 1889-1900; Astrop Mines, near Kings Sutton, Banbury owned by Hickmans 1897-1925; West Adderbury Pits owned by Cochrane and Co. (Woodside) Ltd., Dudley 1904-1922; Sydenham Pits near Adderbury, owned by Hickmans 1914-1925. Ore from the Hook Norton field was conveyed to the Earl of Dudley's Round Oak Works c. 1895-1918.

A number of the locomotives used in these quarries originated from Bilston and subsequently found their way back there. These are listed below.

Sydenham Pits

Three locos made by Andrew Barclay Sons and Co. Ltd.: "Winifred," "Gertrude," "The Doll." All three were 0-6-0Ts, numbered 1424, 1578 and 1641 respectively. Bought new in 1915, 1918 and 1919 and sent to Springvale Furnaces, Bilston, in 1926.

Oxfordshire Ironstone Company

"Noel" 0-4-0ST No. 1172, purchased from Baldwins Ltd., Netherton, in 1912 and returned to Stewart and Lloyds Ltd., Bilston in 1946. This loco was built by Peckett and Co. Ltd.

"Phyllis" 0-4-0ST, built by W. G. Bagnall Ltd., 1895, No. 1453. Purchased from Alfred Hickman Ltd., Bilston, 1925. (Unfortunately scrapped in 1951).

"Grace" 0-4-0ST No. 1894. Purchased new from Peckett and Sons Ltd., 1936. Sent to Stewart and Lloyds, Bilston, in 1946; returned to O.I.C. in 1948. Scrapped in 1967 when O.I.C. closed down.

Geoffrey C. Hartland.

Beesley Road,
Banbury.

* * *

WHAT ABOUT THIS THEN?
(Third time lucky)

Donald Foster replies to Our Ede

I had intended to make this just a discussion of Our Ede's patriotic denunciation regarding my vers libre leg pull in the spring issue of "The Blackcountryman."

Then, on reading the appreciations of Henry Treece, whose oldest friend I can claim to be, and of John Petty, with whom I corresponded I feel justified in writing on all three.

Our Ede's forthright injunction to get off my—er—gluteus maximus, as we exiled para-medicals call it, to do something positive for the Black Country, is certainly justified. (Likewise, her annoyance expressed in such well-balanced scansion).

But, for the last twenty years, I have been "off my gluteus maximus" and very much on my feet working hard to help clear the black country. Not the Black Country we love (yes, Our Ede, me as well as yoh), but the far lesser known and heart-rending **black, black** country of the despair, frustration and helplessness of men and women paralysed by spinal fractures (tetraplegias and paraplegias), cerebral palsy, disseminate sclerosis, strokes, and crippling diseases of a like nature.

My work for twenty years in the hospital service has involved day after day weary hours standing by the bedsides of paralysed patients in hospital wards, or in their homes, trying to help them to regain manual independence and the ability to write again.

And in many cases of emotional disturbance and manual paralysis, to teach them slowly to draw and paint and so release dangerous emotional tensions (catharsis).

This involves patience, understanding, and a practical adaption of art teaching methods to horizontal postures, limited movement and intense personal problems.

Although I write this in rural Shropshire, and am now aged well over 60, I am a Blackcountryman by birth, breeding and loyalties. And am proud of it. Till I was 42, I lived and worked in Wednesbury. Then, an obscure, and then incurable blood disease which had bedevilled my life for thirty years, and several times proved nearly fatal, caused me to leave for healthier conditions.

Art Therapy

In 1954 at a large orthopaedic hospital near to Oswestry, I started and developed the first full-time physical art therapy department (remedial art teaching)

in the hospital service.

The activities were mainly as described. The very tragedies which filled the wards were, and are increasingly, a reflection on the "progress" of the outside world. There are young people reduced to spasticity (brain damage) by road accidents, and many more paralysed by spinal fractures. All have the need and wish to regain their ability to write.

A little colour was brought into the really black country of an adult spastic who could not speak, walk, read, write, or use his hands at all, and courageously learned to paint with his feet.

If Our Ede still looks askance at me, I hope she will forgive my aged Black Country parents for retiring from Wednesbury to the Essex coast. Here, for the first time, my hard-working mother did not have her window curtains, household linen and bathroom begrimed with foundry dust, and my worthy father, who had served the Black Country industries so faithfully and well all his working life can maintain and enjoy good health by breathing clean sea air in the garden of their home loyally named "Wedgebury."

This correspondence must now cease.—Ed.

Henry Treece

For such readers who are interested in this ex-Black Country writer, after reading the review of his career in your last issue, I make bold to say that I was his oldest and very close friend from our boyhood days at Kings Hill Council School until his death at Barton-on-Humber.

Harry's father was a skilled structural engineer and came of sturdy yeoman-farmer stock in Nottinghamshire. Harry, who was strong and of excellent physique (he was later captain of the Birmingham University boxing team), lived with his parents and two friendly black dogs up a yard leading off Cook Street, Fallings Heath, Wednesbury. There on winter nights, a favourite supper dish would be "ale toast"—toasted cheese on toast in porridge bowls, liberally soaked with hot spiced mulled ale, and washed down with mugs-full of that beverage.

I lived in Franchise Street, nearly fifty years ago, and Harry and I would walk together to Wednesbury Boys' High School over green fields to Wood Green. Sometimes, we would search for water-fowls' nests in the fields of Sparrowsforge Lane, or return home by another rural by-way near "the Ten-Acre," where a row of gnarled hawthorn bushes led us to a Bewick engraving come to life—an old cottage flanked by elder trees near to a rushy pool where frogs and lizards could be found.

As Harry progressed to Birmingham University, so did I to Wolverhampton College of Art, and our friendship continued with many weekends' walking on the (to me, health-giving) heights of Shropshire's Long Mynd and the Stiperstones, and holidays in Wales and Northumberland.

John Petty

Strange circumstances of fate brought John Petty and I, who both belonged to the Black Country, to Shropshire in our later years. I greatly admired his writing and his personal courage in a battle against odds, without the unfailing and generous help I

had had from my parents over the years.

While John Petty was living in Telford we corresponded freely. and in this extract from one of his letters, he expressed his home-sickness for the Black Country:

> Dear Mr. Foster,
>
> Many thanks for your letter, which moved me so much: our experiences are much the same.
>
> I don't know where to begin, and you have caught me at a typical time; worries about paying the high rent here, worries about not liking it here, worries about paying the very high electricity charges, and so on. Do you possibly know of a cheap cottage to rent at Oswestry?
>
> Bentley? It was a better life than this: lovely pubs to drop in, lovely people, and a typically British way of life.

D. A. Foster.

Green End,
Oswestry,
Salop.

* * *

Sir,

In "The Blackcountryman" (Autumn 1968, Vol. 1 No. 4), R. E. Boffy noted that a Miss Elizabeth Prowse mentioned "Stewponey" in a diary entry for August 1774. (See also N. Biggs' letter explaining the origin of the word 'Stewponey' in Vol. 2 No. 1). An item in "The Worcester Journal" of June 14, 1753, reveals that there was a building called "the Stewponey" twenty years before Miss Prowse visited the area:

> "NOTICE is hereby given,
>
> THAT on Monday and Tuefday the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Days of June, will be fought at the Houfe of William Fletcher, call'd the Stewponey, in the Parifh of Kinfare, and County of Stafford, a Main of Cocks, between the Gentlemen of Worcefterfhire and Staffordfhire, for one Guinea a Battle: To weigh on Saturday the Sixteenth."

The year before the venue for the cock fight was at the Swan, Enville ("The Worcester Journal," April 9, 1752):

> "This is to give NOTICE
>
> THAT, at the Houfe of GEORGE TOMLINSON at the **Swan,** at Enfield, (near Stowerbridge) **Staffordfhire,** there will be a Match of Cocks fought betwixt the Gentlemen of **Worcefterfhire** and **Staffordfhire,** for Four Guineas a Battle, and Fifty the Main: To weigh on Saturday the fecond Day of May, and fought on the Monday and Tuefday following."

Robert Williams.

Amblecote, Stourbridge.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

SPONSORED PANELS

ADVERTISEMENT RATES

	per insertion
Inside front cover ...	£25.00
Inside back cover ...	£25.00
Whole page facing matter ...	£20.00
Half page facing matter	£10.00
Quarter page facing matter ...	£5.00
Display panel (1" x 1¼")	£2.00

10% reduction on four consecutive issues.

15% agency discount

SPONSORED PANELS

(2" x 2") per four issues £20.00
10% agency discount only

THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN

Editor :
HAROLD PARSONS
1 Cedar Gardens
Enville Road
Kinver
Stourbridge DY7 6BW
'Phone: Kinver 2060

Advertisements :
As above

Subscriptions :
DEREK SIMPKISS
4 Stokes Avenue
Portobello
Wolverhampton WV13 3JT
'Phone: Willenhall 67352

Circulation Manager, Back Numbers, etc.:
DEREK SIMPKISS

THE BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY

President :
DR. J. M. FLETCHER
98 Bescot Road
Walsall
'Phone: Walsall 27989

Secretary :
J. BRIMBLE
49 Victoria Road
Tipton
'Phone: 021-557 4662

Membership :
DEREK SIMPKISS
4 Stokes Avenue
Portobello
Wolverhampton WV13 3JT
'Phone: Willenhall 67352