THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN AUTUMN 2022 VOLUME 55 No. 3

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Dudley's 1914 - 1918 War Memorial: the missing men

The Community of Wall Heath in 1881

Sunset over the Severn Valley Railway. A personal memory

New voices - the language they choose

J B Priestley's Black Country Journey

Writing dialect down

Creating canalside communities in the Black Country

Lost mansion houses of the Black Country

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Contents - Autumn 2022

3 Message from the Editor
4 Message from the Chairman
6 Dudley's 1914 – 1918 War memorial: the missing men
10 The Shut End Primitive Methodist Chapel
15 Pubs and Breweries of the Black Country
16 Black Country Creatives – We catch up with Kerry Hadley-Pryce our outgoing Editor
18 The Community of Wall Heath in 1881
25 A question of pit pulled buildings
26 Letter from Matt Mills in response to Nick Moss's letter in the Summer 2022 edition
28 Sunset over the Severn Valley Railway. A personal memory
34 New voices – the language they choose
38 JB Priestley's Black Country journey
46 Black Country Society Autumn Programme
48 Tom Larkin – an appreciation of a Black Country historian
52 Writing dialect down – what written dialect can tell us about the spoken dialect across time and space
61 No Jumbo fee for Johnny
62 Creating canal communities in the Black Country
67 Coalman on the cut – Part one: Working the Wolverhampton "21"
70 'Business a good deal more than usual' The First World War in Francis Brett Young's Black Country – Part two: Outbreak and industry
76 Some of the lost mansion houses of the Black Country
81 The last meadow – a study of the historic landscape of Corbett Meadow, Amblecote. Part one: The ecology
89 Mum's not the word
90 On the High Street – a spotlight on Wednesbury's Blue Sheep Books
92 Letter from Eileen Ward
93 Black Country Society books
96 Officers and Committee

The Black Country Society welcomes the input of Members, Authors, Researchers, Poets and Photographers who would like to contribute to the magazine, increasing the knowledge and heritage of this unique area.

Please contact the editor.

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Front cover image: "Rainbow over Bantock" by Brad Purshouse

Message from the Editor

Hello folks, welcome to the Autumn Edition

I hope you're enjoying the 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' of the season as summer shifts into autumn. You may have noticed that the editor's picture has changed, that's because Kerry Hadley-Pryce has handed over the editorial baton to me as she moves on to pastures new. I suppose I better introduce myself. I'm Emma Purshouse, and I'm a free-lance writer, performance poet and novelist. I was the first poet laureate for the City of Wolverhampton and I've worked on lots of local history projects over the last couple of decades. I'm passionate about the Black Country and its people. I'm fascinated by its past but equally absorbed by contemporary aspects of life in our glorious region.

I'm aware that I've got big boots to fill (shoes doesn't feel appropriate for the Black Country) in following Kerry. And I'd like to thank her for the support she's given me during the takeover process.

If you'd like to know what Kerry will be up to next then do head straight to the Q and A article that we've done with her. In this edition we've also got a piece by David Cattell on JB Priestley's visit to the Black Country, part two of Jack Price's article on Francis Brett Young, and Dr Esther Asprey has written us a piece on writing down dialect. I'm particularly taken with the picture of Johnny Morris (readers of a certain age will know, younger folk might need to give him a google) that was sent in by, award winning photographer, Graham Gough. We've also got the next programme of events which has just been released, and of course the Black Country Society Books are listed there at the back too. Do check them out, there are some great titles. Having just seen the lionesses bring the European Championship cup home, I may have to treat myself to a copy of White Shirt, Black Country and find out more about Black Country players who've played for England.

Of course, we can't make a magazine happen without your input. If you've got an idea for something you'd like to submit then you can get in touch with me to discuss it, or you can just go ahead and write a piece before emailing it to me for consideration.

Oh, that probably means you'd like my email address: **emmaasif@hotmail.com**

I really hope you enjoy this first issue under my watch. Happy Reading.

Best wishes

Emma Purshouse

Message from the Chairman

Dear Members,

Our Black Country History Day was held on Saturday 16 July at the Black Country Living Museum after a gap since November 2019, due to Covid. Despite the heat on the day our room was cool enough to hold the event. There were great talks, an excellent turnout which included members and non-members of the BCS and displays from different local organisations which promote history and heritage in the area. I am delighted as well that we were able to increase our membership during the day. The atmosphere was very positive, and it was good to talk to people I had not seen since before lockdown. The next Black Country History Day will probably take place in November 2023 and I will be planning the programme in the next few months. We will, of course be holding various talks, presentations and walks from the autumn: see our website: **https://www.blackcountrysociety.com/events** for more information.

As I mentioned in my last message, the BCS is exploring how best we can extend our activities, work with other organisations and expand our membership, whilst supporting the interests of existing members. Brendan Clifford is leading a small working group to draw up proposals which we will bring to members in due course. Please contact Brendan on **brendanmclifford@btinternet.com** if you have any thoughts about how we might move forward.

I am delighted to welcome our new editor of The Blackcountryman, Emma Purshouse, many of you will be aware of Emma's extensive work as a writer and poet (**https://emmapurshouse.co.uk/**). My thanks go to our retiring editor, Kerry Hadley-Pryce for her outstanding efforts. She secured a wide range of articles for the magazine, including many on the culture and arts of the Black Country and through her efforts published the magazine on schedule during lockdown – a considerable achievement. My best wishes go to Kerry for the completion of her PhD and her future activities.

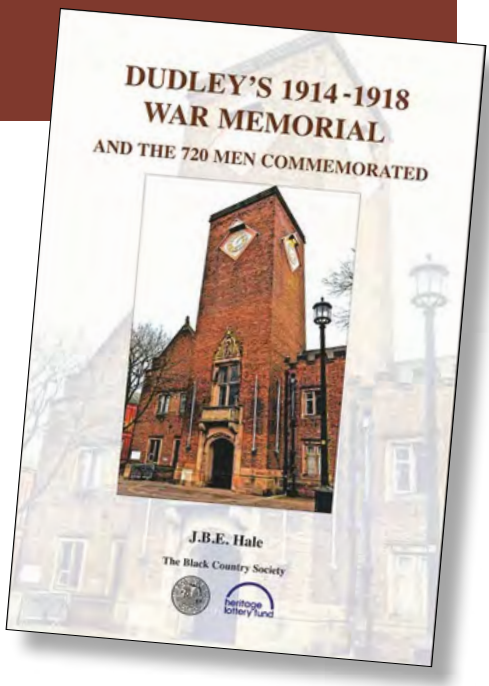
New activities require people on the committee who can bring their skills and experiences to help the BCS to develop. I am delighted that Quint Watt has agreed to act as secretary, and this has created a vacancy for a minute secretary, a position he previously held. We are also looking for a marketing/advertising officer who can help to fundraise and publicise the work of the BCS. Do contact me on **m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk** if you are interested in serving in one or other of these roles.

My very best wishes for the next few months.

Malcolm Dick, Chairman,
Black Country Society

Dudley's 1914 – 1918 War Memorial: the missing men

by J.B.E Hale



Back in 2015 I was privileged to have been approached by Roy Peacock to collaborate on writing a book on Dudley's clock tower war memorial, in connection with the Society's contribution towards the centenary commemorations of the Great War in 2014 to 2018.

At the time there were 720 names carved on the wall of the war memorial (this has increased to 724 over the intervening years since publication of the book). Before compiling the book, about 700 of these men had already been identified in my researches and some basic information as to unit served with, date of death and place of burial had been discovered. I had already conducted some further research in the contemporary local press, but completing this was a mammoth undertaking and could not be done in the time available before publication of the book was scheduled. It was however possible, though time consuming, to write a paragraph about each man giving his next of kin details, and in some cases a much fuller story of his life and death.

The book was published in April 2016, and copies are still available from the society's shop. The Blackcountryman Summer 2016 issue (Vol. 49 No. 3) may be referred to for further information.

Of course to an author, research work is never completed and after publication of the book I continued to read the wartime pages of the Dudley Chronicle, Dudley Herald and County Express. It became increasingly evident that there were many men of Dudley who had died during the war whose stories appeared in the local press but whose names did not appear carved on the walls of the memorial. Aware of the potential for a significant number of such men, I made a point of seeking out as many other war memorials as I could find around Dudley and Netherton and cross-checked the names thereon with those on Dudley's clock tower memorial. There were many on these local memorials whose names were omitted.

How many additional men could have been named on the memorial?

Taking this further, I decided to interrogate the database of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission using the search terms Dudley and Netherton; being aware that only about half of the entries on the

AUTHOR WITH THE MAYOR OF DUDLEY, CLLR STEVE WALTHO

CWGC's database held next of kin information it was necessary in addition to consult the publication Soldiers Died in the Great War. This was published in 1921 by the HMSO using Regimental records, over 700,000 men were recorded. Thankfully this mammoth work has been computerized and so is relatively easy to search. Each entry for a man records either place of birth, place of residence or place of enlistment.

Over 740 men were identified who might be candidates to have had their names recorded on the war memorial; a rigorous programme of validating then had to take place. Men from the Dudleys in Northumberland or Bradford were immediately discounted, and whilst many candidates had Dudley as their place of birth this turned out to be a case of using Dudley in its meaning of a postal address rather than the local government entity of the town proper. The Dudley of 1926 covered a relatively small geographical area, and so many who used Dudley as a postal address lived over the borders of the town in Rowley Regis, Brierley Hill, Tividale or Dudley Port etc. and so were more properly remembered on war memorials in their respective boroughs.

There are no extant records as to how the names were selected for remembrance when the memorial was planned, but I used the following criteria when sifting through the many candidates whose information suggested that they might have a sufficient connection to Dudley: either they would have been born in the Borough of Dudley, as it stood in 1928 (this was essentially the town of Dudley, with Woodside and Netherton), or born elsewhere but resident or employed in Dudley at the time of enlistment.

350

It transpired that, in my opinion, there were in excess of 350 men who would be suitable candidates for inclusion by the committee who oversaw the construction of the memorial, but for various reasons were not honoured. So Dudley's clock tower war memorial could have been half as big again.

There were men who had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Military Medal amongst them; these later had been accorded a civic reception by the mayor and were presented with a gold watch, during the conflict or immediately afterwards. It was therefore puzzling why their names had been omitted.

Who were these missing men?

The reasons why a man's name was not carved on the walls of Dudley's war memorial in some cases can only be speculated upon, whilst others are manifestly self evident. It was distressing, but perhaps not surprising, that six of the men whose names are omitted had committed suicide; perhaps their families wished to put this tragedy behind them? Five of these men committed suicide whilst the war was still in progress, whereas the last was serving with the Royal Navy as a Cook's Mate aboard HMS Maidstone, a depot ship serving the submarines supporting the White Russians against the Bolsheviks. He is buried in Tallinn Military Cemetery, Estonia.

One of the men who committed suicide was the brother of a soldier whose name was carved on the memorial. Otherwise, there is nothing to differentiate between the men remembered and the men who were not: they served in the same units, and died over all periods and theatres of the war.

Woodside and Holly Hall

Dissatisfied with Dudley's lack of progress in constructing a war memorial, the burghers of Woodside and Holly Hall took matters into their own hands and commissioned a fine memorial which today stands in the grounds of St Augustine of Hippo's church-yard. Officially unveiled by HRH The Prince of Wales in June 1923 on the occasion of his visit to Dudley, one can only think of the potential embarrassment of the worthies of Dudley Council who had yet to commence

ONE OF THE PANELS INSIDE THE MEMORIAL LOBBY (PHOTO BY GRAHAM BECKLEY). THERE ARE SUFFICIENT MEN OF DUDLEY WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR TO FILL ANOTHER WALL OF THE SAME SIZE.

work on the Dudley memorial. And in a case of one-upmanship Dudley were only able to secure a Prime Minister to open their memorial five years later, whereas Woodside had had royalty.

29 of the men whose names appear on the Woodside war memorial do not appear on Dudley's.

Why were they not honoured?

One of the principal reasons why a man's name would not have been carved on the walls is simply the passage of time. Dudley was very dilatory in deciding upon the form that their town's war memorial would take, and even slower in putting their plans into action. The only firm decision that had been taken was that the war memorial should be in the centre of the town, rather than in a remote location as was the town's Boer War memorial.

The project became labyrinthine and com-plex, and eventually involved the erection of a wider civic quarter which encompassed the building of the Town Hall, Coroner's

Court and war memorial clock tower using the money left to the people of Dudley by Mr Brooke Robinson, 20 years MP for Dudley. This required securing an Act of Parliament to amend the terms of his will. The foundation stone was not laid until April 1926. By this time nearly eight years had passed since the end of the war; eight years in which time many of the relatives of the men who had died had themselves died. In many cases, there was simply no-one left alive to put their names forward. Lye, Stourbridge, Quarry Bank and Brierley Hill had all completed their civic war memorials years before Dudley began to construct theirs.

In other cases men had been born in Dudley, and either they or their families had moved away from the town. Several of these men are commemorated on the war memorials of their adopted homes, of course, but this would not preclude them from being remembered by the town of their birth. It is also likely that many families did not wish their grief to be put on display in such a public manner. Widows with children to support may have not wished to create friction with their new husbands by putting the names of their dead former husbands forward for remembrance.

Dominions

The early years of the 20th Century saw significant migration of people of the Black Country to the new countries of the Empire. Eight of the men not named on the town's memorial, had served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force; their next of kin were therefore thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Unless they subscribed to Dudley's local press they would have been ignorant of the erection of the town's memorial and would not have seen the request for suitable names to be submitted. The Mayor made an appeal in March 1917 for names to be sent to the Town Hall so that the most comprehensive Roll of Honour possible might be compiled, and this was printed in the local press at the time.

Similarly, there are two men who served with the Australian Imperial Force whose names are not on the memorial, and a single New Zealander.

It is possible that there are as many reasons why a man was not remembered on the town's war memorial as the number of men themselves. All that can be stated for certain is that Dudley's war memorial could have been significantly larger than it is.

WOODSIDE WAR MEMORIAL IN ITS ORIGINAL LOCATION

The Shut End Primitive Methodist Chapel

by Chris Baker

Shut End

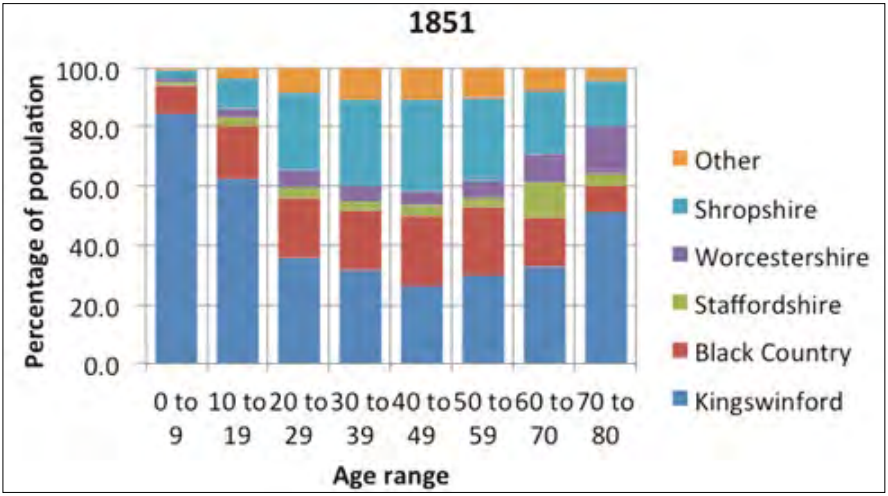
The name Shut End simply means "steep hill / place" (1) and the area that it refers to is roughly that part of the modern parish of Pensnett to the north of the Dudley - Kingswinford Road, which does indeed slope steeply from the Dudley ridge to the east towards the Smestow valley in the west. The name however no longer appears on modern maps, although it will be familiar to those who are interested in Black Country history as the location of James Foster's huge iron works and the destination of the Kingswinford Railway on which the historic Agenoria locomotive travelled backwards and forwards for 50 or more years pulling its loads of coal, limestone and finished iron products. In the nineteenth century this area went through massive changes. Figure 1 below shows the 1822 Fowler map of the area and compares it with the 1883 OS map. The 1822 map shows an essentially rural landscape, dominated by Shut End Hall (the ancestral home of the Bendy family but at this stage owned by John Hodgetts Foley of Prestwood and leased to the ironmaster Thomas Dudley) and the avenue of trees that led down to Kingswinford village. By 1883 the landscape was wholly industrial, dominated by the ironworks, and its associated mines and railways and the inevitable swathes of waste. The line of the avenue has become a railway incline. The original Kingswinford Railway can be seen as the straight dotted line in the bottom half of the map.

FIGURE 1. SHUT END IN 1822 AND 1883

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the population of the village of Pensnett, which included the Shut End area, varied between 4000 and 6000, with over a quarter of the population being below 10 years of age. In 1881, around 60% of the employed population were working in the coal, iron or brick making industries. Many of these would have been employed at the Shut End works and its associated mines, but there were other major sources of employment in the Corbyn's Hall iron and coal complex, and in the mines and railways of the Dudley estate. Perhaps most interestingly, the graph in Figure 2, which shows the birth location of each ten-year age group in the 1851 census, shows that there was a significant

migration into the area in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly from Shropshire. Pensnett, including Shut End, was very much a migrant society at that time.

FIGURE 2. POPULATION ORIGINS IN PENSNETT FROM THE 1851 CENSUS



In this article however we will not consider the area in general or the ironworks and railway networks - but our focus will be on the small Shut End Primitive Methodist chapel, shown as the red circle on the 1882 map of Figure 1. We are able to tell the story of this chapel in some detail, largely because of the transcript of Baptismal Registers and associated notes given in Dodd (2), as well as a few other references in historical sources.

The chapel

At the religious census of 1851, just after the parish of Pensnett was formed in the mid-1840s, there were a number of non-conformist chapels in the area, as well as the rather grand new parish church of St. Mark - two Wesleyan Methodist chapels, two Primitive Methodist chapels, and an independent congregation. In the census it is clear that the latter thought they were the remnant of the true church of God in the area, and the others were not really Christian! The Primitive Methodists broke from the more established Wesleyan organisation early in the 19th century as they espoused "camp meetings": lengthy open-air meetings involving public praying, preaching and Love Feasts.

One of the Primitive Methodist chapels was that located in Shut End, the history of which begins in 1832. The Chapel was situated on Tansey Green Road and ultimately consisted of a Chapel Building and a Schoolroom behind the Brickmaker's Arms. Directly behind it was the Shut End Pit, and there were later to be subsidence problems due to this (Figure 3). The first services were held in December 1832, and by 1836 meetings of some sort were also being held in Commonside on Pensnett and at Shropshire Row in The Oak in Kingswinford parish. The chapel is mentioned a number of times in the 1837 diary of J. Petty (3), an itinerant Primitive Methodist preacher, which gives a good indication of the life of the church at the time.

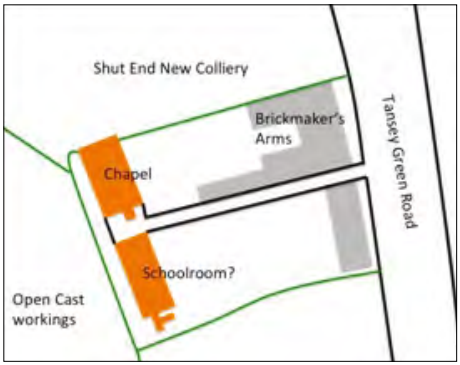


FIGURE 3. THE SHUT END PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL AND THE BRICKMAKER'S ARMS (IN 1996) FROM (4)

Sunday April 2. *— In the morning and afternoon, I spoke at Shut End. I was pleasingly surprised to see so many people present and was much refreshed with the consolations of the Spirit. It was also a very profitable time during the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.*

Sunday, May 28. *— At seven in the morning I renewed tickets to two classes at Brierley Hill. I then hastened to Shut End to conduct a Camp meeting. The Lord blessed us with a fine day, and with the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. A large assembly listened with becoming attention to the word of life, and much evident good was done. We had a love feast in the chapel in the evening, and one backslider or more professed to be reclaimed. Praise the Lord.*

The chapel continued to flourish over the years. The 1851 Religious Census records morning, afternoon and evening congregations of 110, 134 and 120 respectively, with 120 sittings provided, and in 1887 there were over 250 children in the Sunday School and 20 teachers. Later various directories in the 1880s indicate that there were only two services on a Sunday – at 10.45am and 6.00pm, but there was also a mid-week service on Wednesday at 7.30pm, which probably existed throughout the life of the chapel. Similar midweek services were common practice for all the churches in the area at that time. The Church also operated its own Friendly Society – the Shut End Primitive Methodist Economic (Sunday School rooms) with 54 members in 1878, and assets of £200.

On the 1839 Tithe map of Kingswinford, only the chapel building existed and is described in the Directory to the map as being owned by the "Trustees of William Porter and others". The southern half of the plot was owned by Joseph Downing, but occupied by Ephraim Guest, William Greenway and William Morris. These surnames occur frequently in the Baptismal Register. By the 1883 OS map, the Schoolroom was present, and the open cast mine to the west was very clear. Both the Chapel and the Schoolroom were rectangular in form, roughly 14m by 8m in plan. Over the years the building deteriorated and there were repeated moves to persuade the local Primitive Methodist circuit to purchase land for a new chapel. Matters came to a head in the early 1890s when the congregation purchased land for a new chapel on Commonside themselves and were expelled from the circuit. It seems that payment of the quarterly circuit fees was also an issue at the time (5). In 1893 the original building, which by that time was badly in need of repair, was finally sold and the new Independent Methodist chapel on

Commonside built. After the congregation moved to the new building it would seem that the old chapel was in use as a sewing factory. The 1910 OS map indicates that they had become a "Picture Theatre" and the Chapel and Schoolroom had been joined together into one long structure.

No details of the interior of the building as a chapel survive, but these can perhaps be conjectured by what was built to replace them on Commonside (figure 4). This had a balcony at the front of the chapel for the choir and organ, with the raised preaching desk and the table for the Lord's Supper placed centrally at the front of the Chapel beneath the balcony. Pews occupied the rest of the chapel building. Although the original chapel was unlikely to have had a balcony, it would almost certainly have had a preaching desk / pulpit of some sort of simple communion table at the north end.

THE INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHAPEL ON COMMONSIDE

Before moving on to consider the congregation, there is an interesting aside for Black Country railway historians. In 1861, the minutes of the Trustees of the Church (2) reveal an offer for the purchase of the building from the proponents of the Dudley and Bridgnorth Railway, part of the Welsh and Midland Counties Junction Railway – a line that was never given parliamentary approval and about which little detail is available. The fact that the chapel was on the potential line however, suggested that it was the intention to incorporate the Kingswinford Railway into the route.

The congregation

It is a commonplace that the church is defined by a worshiping community rather than by a building. So can we say anything about those who worshipped in the Shut End chapel? We are in a position to do just that because of the information contained in the Baptismal Register already mentioned (2). These cover the period from 1845 to 1887 with 777 entries over that period, with 514 different couples represented. To enable this information to be analysed, all the entries were transcribed to an EXCEL spreadsheet, which was a thoroughly mind numbingly boring experience, but this did enable some detailed information about the Shut End congregation to be obtained.

Firstly, it is clear that the chapel served the local population. The breakdown of the residences of the couples bringing children for baptism show the large majority of baptisms were of those in the 1845 ecclesiastical parish of Pensnett (Pensnett, Commonside, Shut End, Tansey Green and Bromley – 83% in total) and most of the rest from closely surrounding areas (Kingswinford, Coopers Bank, Oak Farm, Brockmoor, Brierley Hill and Wordsley – 14%). The remaining entries were geographically widespread, from as close as Dudley to as far away as Wigan, and probably indicate married children returning home for the baptism of their child at their home chapel. But it is clear that in general the chapel served a very local congregation.

Secondly, the congregation very largely consisted of manual workers of various skill levels. The breakdown of the fathers' occupation shows that 34% were miners; 31% were labourers; 13% were iron

workers, 3% engineers, 3% blacksmiths; 2% stock takers; 2% brick makers and 1% boiler makers. The labourers could be working in any of the other industries included in the list. The iron workers included on a large variety of forms including moulder, furnace man, roller and puddler. Some of these, particularly the latter, were regarded as highly skilled jobs. The remaining 11% includes trades such as groom, keeper, horseman, boat builder, shoemaker, grocer, butcher, with a very small number classified as managers or clerks. Now to some degree these figures will reflect the fact that the fathers of those baptized were relatively young and unskilled, and thus more likely to be labelled as labourers than their elders, but nonetheless they do show that the congregation at the chapel were overwhelmingly manual workers of various skill levels - perhaps more so than the make-up of the general population of Pensnett.

Thirdly it was very much a congregation of migrant families, many of whom migrated from the Shropshire area in the first part of the nineteenth century. Several of these families can be traced through several generations in the register, the most prominent being the Astons, Shukers, Kendricks, Cottons, the Dodds and Greenaways. There were numerous intermarriages between these families, Typical of these were the Cottons with 18 baptisms in the chapel over three generations. Their common ancestor George (b1792) came from the Wombridge area of Shropshire (near Oakengates and Wellington), and the family migrated to the Kingswinford area in the early 19th century. There were several marriages of Cottons to others within the church. After the family moved to the Pensnett area, they all lived around Shut End / Coopers Bank / Tansey Green for three or four generations. Without exception, all the males mentioned in the register were miners – there was nothing by way of social mobility.

Fourthly, the ministers at the church came in the main from the same social group as the congregation (the manual working class) and were themselves long term members. The five most common baptizing ministers were Abraham Dodd (40 baptisms between 1871 and 1887 – a miner living in Oak Farm); Samuel Kendrick (38 baptisms between 1856 and 1874 – a miner living in Smithy Lane who was born in 1811 in Ketley in Shropshire); Robert Bowen (30 baptisms between 1860 and 1885 – no details available); and Joseph Homer (28 baptisms between 1871 and 1886 – another miner); and William Dudley (18 baptisms between 1855 to 1884 - a tailor and draper from Kingswinford).

A number of others performed just a few baptisms and these were likely to have been Circuit ministers. Only two such can be identified with confidence by their appellation – Rev R Brewen in 1861 and the Rev J Hawkins from 1881 to 1884. Dodd (2) draws attention to another itinerant preacher – Henry Higginson – and says that he was nicknamed the Roving Ranter. Unfortunately the census records reveal no more about him, which is the greatest of pities, as the name suggests there are stories to be told.

Concluding remarks

The Shut End chapel grew up in the shadow of James Foster's huge Shut End Ironworks with its associated mines and railways and served the local industrial working-class community. It seems to have been set up to serve the spiritual and community needs of migrant workers, largely from the Shropshire area, and was in a many ways a "family" church, with several generations of the same families worshipping there throughout its existence. That state of affairs continued into its successor chapel on Commonside and the same families worshipped there throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. But that is another story for telling at some stage.

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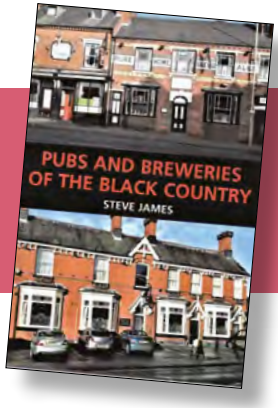
Much of this article is drawn from the author's four part eBook "Kingswinford Manor and Parish" that can be downloaded free from his web site at

https://profchrisbaker.com/kingswinford-manor-and-parish-new/kingswinford-manor-and-parish/

Pubs and Breweries of the Black Country

by Steve James



This new book by Steve James takes us on an alphabetical tour through the towns and communities of the Black Country, discovering the stories behind the many hundreds of pubs and breweries that have served them, both now and in the past. It is an ideal gift for the pub and brewery lover to enjoy over their favourite pint of beer as they reminisce about the pubs they have visited.

Steve is passionate about beer, pubs and breweries. He is a life-long member of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) and a member of the Black Country Society, Brewery History Society, Pub History Society and Friends of Highgate Brewery.

He is also a member of the British Guild of Beer Writers and has written many articles on the history of pubs and breweries in the Black Country for local CAMRA magazines and other publications. This book is based on a series of articles published in the Black Country Bugle newspaper and Blackcountryman magazine during 2020-2022.

"Pubs and Breweries of the Black Country" will be available from the Black Country Society, Black Country Living Museum and selected pubs and micro-breweries, including Beat Brewery, Lye (£9.99).

Black Country Creatives - We catch up with Kerry Hadley-Pryce our outgoing Editor

How has your tenure as editor of the Blackcountryman been?

I took on the Editorship of the magazine in May 2019, and it's been both enlightening, and a joy to be involved with the Black Country Society. I've read some of the most compelling articles about our region, and feel like I've learned about people and places I didn't know about. It's been a privilege.

What do you feel you've brought to the magazine?

I was the first woman Editor, and I'm very proud of that. I feel like that is highly significant, and says a lot about the Society and about the region. I wanted to bring the 'now' into the magazine, because although the past is important, the present and the future of the Black Country are also vital and evolving. I wanted the magazine to reflect that.

What are your hopes for the magazine's future?

I was absolutely delighted when the wonderful Emma Purshouse agreed to take the baton. There couldn't be a better successor. I hope, first and foremost, that Emma will enjoy the editorship and I know she'll bring vitality and creativity to the magazine. She's an amazing Black Country woman and her instinct for all things Black Country is unsurpassed. I hope she takes it from strength to strength.

KERRY HADLEY-PRYCE

The regular readers might know that you're a successful novelist. What has your writing journey been like?

I've always written fiction. I think maybe all writers always say something similar, but it's true in my case. Even before I could form words, I used to write 'details' in notebooks (childish scribbles – I've still got the notebooks) I always wanted to be a writer but I'm afraid my teachers and my parents were more keen on me getting a 'proper job' so I ended up teaching. With hindsight, I'm glad I wasn't encouraged, because it made writing 'my thing', and only served to make me more determined. I still teach creative writing, and I love that, but it's the writing of fiction that is, will be, and always has been, my priority.

Your first novel was actually called 'The Black Country', are all your books set in the region? What is the pull of the place for you as a writer?

Yes, they're all set here. I love the region and I think it's under-represented in fiction. I'm a runner and spend a lot of time exploring. There's always somewhere interesting, and my PhD is in psychogeography in fiction – which is all about the psychology of 'place' and how fiction tackles that.

You're leaving the magazine to focus on your PhD and writing commitments. Can you tell us a little about more about what you're up to at the moment?

Yes, my PhD is in its final throes now, and this is the 'writing-up' part, so I need to focus. The title is 'Psychogeographic Flow in Black Country Fiction'. I'm also judging a writing competition with a company called Creative Writing Ink, and have stepped up my creative writing teaching commitments.

I'm also talking to publishers about publishing some creative non-fiction I've written (about our region, obviously.) I'm also in talks about a series of Black Country novels I'd like to write and have another novel due for publication next year in February.

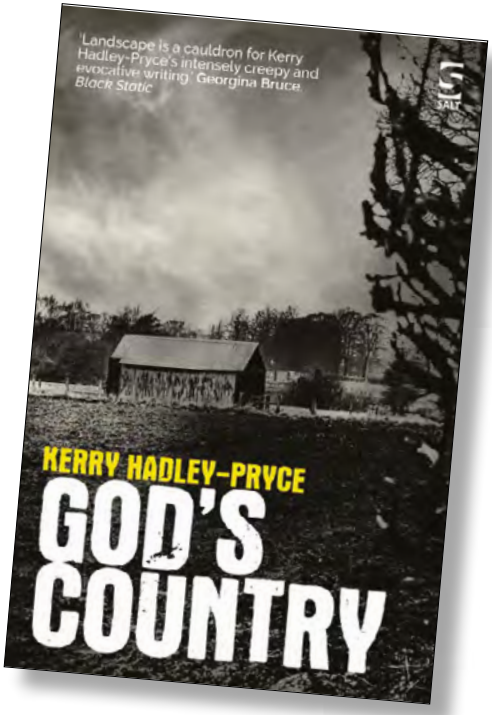
'God's Country' will be my third novel, to be published by Salt Publishing. It's another 'Black Country novel' and I'm very excited about it.

Where can we get your books?

They're available from all the usual places online and from the publishers, Salt Publishing:
https://www.saltpublishing.com/collections/author-kerry-hadley-pryce

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Yes, it's been an absolute pleasure being Editor of The Blackcountryman magazine for the last few years, but I know I'm passing it on to good hands in Emma Purshouse. I wish you the very best of luck, Emma. Enjoy.



The Blackcountryman Magazine and The Black Country Society would like to thank Kerry for all her hard work, and the fantastic job she has done as Editor. We wish her well for the future, and can't wait to read her new novel.

Good luck, Kerry. Keep aht th'oss road, mah wench.

The Community of Wall Heath in 1881

By Paul Bowen

The former Staffordshire village of Wall Heath which today is part of Dudley Metropolitan Borough lies astride the A449 seven miles southwest of Wolverhampton and four miles from Dudley. Nestling on the edge of the Black Country and within the parish of Kingswinford, whilst Wall Heath's great expansion was in the 1950s the Victorian period witnessed significant development much of which survives today in the landscape and continues to shape the character of the village. This article seeks to explore Wall Heath's Victorian world by focussing on 1881 and census records, newspapers and Ordnance Survey evidence to provide insights into the nature of its community in the late 19th century.

For the purposes of this article Wall Heath is geographically broadly defined in line with the two Kingswinford census enumerator districts eight and nine within the 1881 census. The southern boundary is the Dawley Brook to Heathbrook Farm, with the eastern boundary the Wolverhampton Road north to Holbeche. The brook through Maiden's Bridge to Hinksford constitutes the northern perimeter, whilst the western boundary is the Swindon road as far as Heathbrook. The High Street (31 houses, 146 people) and Enville Road (40 houses, 147 people} were the epicentre of the village but Foundry Road (19 houses, 102 people), Chapel Street (13 houses, 49 people), Albion Street (26 houses, 104 people), Brook Street (21 houses, 101 people), Maidensbridge Lane (13 houses, 47 people) and Victoria Street (12 houses, 51 people) were also significant developments. The central feature of Wall Heath in 1881 as of today was the junction of Enville Road, Dudley Road, High Street and Albion Street. Overlooking this was The Laurels, which today survives as the Prince Albert. Close by stood the now demolished Wall Heath House adjacent to Albion Street, the home of William Bagott, a wealthy linen draper and village benefactor who on his death in 1903 left a gross estate of £189,464 2s 3d.

The Earl of Dudley's mineral railway from Shut End was a distinctive feature of the village crossing the High Street on the level at the Wall Heath Inn and also Foundry Road. No Church of the Ascension in the centre of the village at that time nor a Congregational Chapel on the main road as these were 1890s developments. In 1881 the Independent Chapel was on Foundry Road and Chapel Street was home to the Methodists, a prominent member of whom was Thomas Pope of Foundry Road, a 'colliery labourer and Methodist free Preacher'. The National School on Dudley Road was no doubt used for church events such as Sunday school. Villagers wishing to attend church had a longish walk or a carriage ride to St Mary's, Kingswinford. Wall Heath, however, did have its own curate at the start of 1881, the Reverend George Augustus Knight Simpson, although he left during the year, the County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 17 December advertising his former home for letting.

The population of Wall Heath was approximately 900 with a fairly even gender

distribution. 29% were under the age of ten and 73% under 40. The over 60s constituted only 9% of the population. There was strong vulnerability to disease in late Victorian England with high rates of infant mortality and for those born in the 1880s life expectancy was in the 40s. About one third of people in Wall Heath were in designated employment of whom 76 were women. In exploring Wall Heath society at this time Victorian attitudes towards gender need to be highlighted. The notion of separate spheres for Victorian men and women has often been emphasised, men in the public sphere, in employment for example, and women in a more private sphere focussing on the home and domestic matters. The contribution of women to the community of Wall Heath in 1881, however, should not be underestimated. The census refers to 144 women as a wife and they would have had huge responsibilities with childbearing, childcare and running the house. Given the large numbers of young children in the village, their role would have been crucially important, albeit unrecorded. Facing inequality and a male dominated society, Wall Heath women were a powerful force in the success of the village's community.

Typical of the Victorian period was the importance of domestic service with over 52 people or 18% of the workforce employed in this area, 36 of whom were women engaged as servants, housekeepers or housemaids. There was also a large pool of general unskilled labour with 42 people in this category. The iron and coal industries were also important providing 16% and 9% of jobs respectively. A feature of Wall Heath would have been a significant commute at the start and end of each day. Shutend ironworks was at the top of Stallings Lane but there was also Baldwin's Swindon works. The census refers to nine puddlers living in Wall Heath in 1881. This was a skilled job using an iron rod to turn a mass of molten iron in the furnace to remove impurities, following which the iron would be hammered and rolled into sheets. Several Wall Heath men were associated with sheet iron rolling including Zachariah Hammond of Albion Street.

Wall Heath's coal miners would have been employed in pits accessed off Stallings Lane, one of which was Himley Colliery's No 8 pit. Norman Dando of the High Street was a 'charter master' at this pit with responsibilities including payment of wages.

FIG 1 AN EARLY 20TH CENTURY VIEW OF THE YEW TREE HOTEL ON ENVILLE ROAD, LARGELY UNCHANGED FROM 1881. WITH ITS PLEASURE GARDENS, THIS WAS A POPULAR VENUE WITH DAY TRIPPERS FROM PLACES SUCH AS WOLVERHAMPTON.

A court case took place in May 1881 regarding the alleged theft of £10 2s 6d by William Smart, a 'butty', from a candle box at the bottom of the shaft where the money had been placed but the Dudley and District News for 21 May reported that the case was dismissed for lack of evidence.

Limited manufacturing existed at Wall Heath at this time. The foundry still operated in Foundry Road and 'iron founder', Mrs Ann Bowler, clearly had significant social standing in the locality. In the northwest of the village Wall Heath forge is shown on the 1881 surveyed Ordnance Survey map with a weighbridge and extensive pond for waterpower but it is doubtful whether this was in operation, the County Advertiser for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 3 July 1880 referring to a liquidation sale of stock, fixtures and tools. The presence of three horse nail forgers and one scythe forger indicates some of the village's manufacturing output. Sand extraction was also important with two railway sidings serving workings to the south of the windmill. Victorian settlements were often more self-sufficient compared with modern times and Wall Heath was no exception with eight dressmakers, three shoemakers, two tailors and one seam-stress. Mary Gilham of Foundry Road was a member of this cottage industry community and a 'besom maker'.

By 1881 the village's windmill was already disused, a victim of steam powered mills. Nevertheless, agriculture and allied trades still provided 8% of employment in the village. William Hanky, for example, of Foundry Street was a 'farm shepherd', whilst there were also 14 general farm labourers. James Horne on the High Street was a 'maltster employing two men'. Wall Heath still had two millers who worked at Holbeche corn mill.

About eight people in Wall heath were engaged in producing fire bricks which were designed to withstand the hot temperatures of furnaces such as in the glass industry. The main local manufacturer was the Himley Firebrick Company at Shut End where in 1881 John Bird was manager who lived in Beech Tree House at Wall Heath. About 5% of the workforce were linked with transport. There was a 'railway engine cleaner', a 'stoker on the railway' and a 'signalman', William Swadkins of Foundry Road, whose duties probably included supervising the main level crossing in Wall Heath. Horse drawn transport, however, predominated and there were three carters and one carrier. Some of their business was probably derived from the railway which had three coal wharves in the village, one near to the windmill, a second on Dudley Road and a third at Dawley Brook just north of the gas works.

Perhaps some of the most important jobs in Wall Heath were those in the service sector without which the village could not function. There were two school mistresses, one police constable, one postman and nine shopkeepers who included five grocers, two drapers, a baker and a butcher. Esther Page of Foundry Street was 'assistant school mistress', whilst Mary Ann Horne of the High Street was 'governess in a gent's family'. Henry Elkington on the High Street was a 'butcher' whilst nearby Thomas Jarvis was a 'baker and flour dealer'. Also in the village at that time were three staff from the Ordnance Survey, two serving members of the Royal Engineers and a civilian assistant. John Tyrrell was 'Sapper in the Royal Engineers and Ordnance Surveyor' living in Chapel Street. The village was surveyed in 1881 and in the following year appeared on Staffordshire map sheet LXV11.13, part of the Ordnance Survey's 25 inch series. This was followed in 1886 by Staffordshire LXV11.SW, a six-inch Ordnance Survey map which also included Wall Heath.

Apart from census and map evidence, day to day life in Wall Heath is recorded in contemporary newspaper reports. Typically in Victorian times there was a preoccupation with law and order and newspapers frequently document court cases where drunkenness predominated. The County Express for Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, Kingswinford and Dudley News on 15 January 1881 referred to William Mitchell, 'collier of Wall Heath', appearing before the police court and being charged with being drunk on the 5th. Police Constable Banton proved the case and the defendant was ordered to pay costs. The public house clearly played a significant role in Victorian leisure. For those enduring hard, long days of work in industries such as coal and iron, they provided easy respite. A more unusual case reported in the County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 27 August 1881 was that of Charles Holland, a groom from Dudley, who was summoned for being drunk on the 14th whilst in charge of a horse and trap at Wall Heath. Again P.C. Banton was on the scene. The defendant was ordered to pay 10s plus costs and in default one month imprisonment.

Courts were also regularly involved in the protection of property. The Express and Star on 29 August 1881 reported that at Brierley Hill Police Court on 22 August, 'Reuben Timmins, puddler, and Arthur Slater, a boy, both of Wall Heath, were convicted for doing wilful damage to the amount of 3d; to a fence belonging to William Meredith'. Timmins was fined 10s plus costs, with the alternative of 14 days imprisonment whilst Slater was ordered to pay costs only. William Meredith was a member of the village's elite, Surveyor of Highways and Assessor and Collector of Taxes.

Poaching offences also regularly appeared before the courts. The County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 1 October 1881 reported the case of William Whateley and George Page, 'young men of Wall Heath charged with being in search of game on land in the occupation of Joseph Fellows at Ashwood'. Fellows was a farmer of 190 acres employing six labourers and three boys. In a somewhat telling phrase the prosecution commented how 'it did not want to press the case, but still it was one of those cases which ought to be brought before the magistrates.' Gamekeeper Edward George saw defendants go into the field and 'throw at a covey of partridges' although Whateley and Page claimed they were sparrows! The defendants were given a fine of 8s each including costs.

Newspapers also highlighted the village's links to farming. In the Express and Star on 25 November 1881, Mr George Flewett, a grocer of Canton House, in an advertisement addressed to 'pork butchers, bacon curers and others' offered for sale the 'largest and finest pig in the county'. In the Express and Star on 22 September 1881 bags of potatoes were advertised for sale from Albion Cottage, 'warranted good cookers, 6s per bag delivered'. Victorian farming was often afflicted by livestock disease and the County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 21 March 1881 refers to an outbreak of foot and mouth at Oak Farm, Wall Heath, amongst some heifers belonging to Mr. John Walker of Dawley House.

Wall Heath was a hierarchical society at the top of which was a group of wealthy and influential people. One such member was Mr William Spruce who lived at The Laurels and was a mining engineer and agent for the Earl of Dudley with 40 years of service. His son Josiah was also a mining engineer whilst another was a veterinary student. William Spruce's death on 3 February 1881 was followed on 16 and 17 May by an auction of the contents of The Laurels details of which

appeared in the County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 7 May 1881. Items included a 'handsome drawing room suite in walnut and crimson silk', 'Brussels carpets' and a 'rich toned pianoforte by Broadwood and Sons in walnut'. The affluence extended to the outbuildings where a 'strong cob, seven years old, very fast and steady to ride or drive', was offered together with a wagonette, phaeton, spring cart and iron garden chairs.

Another well respected member of Wall Heath village but of more modest means was Thomas Barrow, a colliery clerk who was also employed as a census enumerator in 1881. On 25 July 1881 the Alliance Lodge of the Wolverhampton Loyal Order of Oddfellows had a dinner at the Seven Stars Inn to mark his retirement as secretary of the lodge. The County Express for Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, Kingswinford and Dudley News on 6 August 1881 referred to him being presented with a 'well executed portrait of himself' and commended for his 'good qualities and efficient service'.

Public houses played a significant role in the life of Wall Heath of which the largest was the Yew Tree Hotel. In the County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 7 May 1881 it was advertised for letting and was described as a 'full licensed free house Public House with Pleasure Gardens, Conservatories, Stables and Coach Houses on the road leading from Enville to Wolverhampton'. With its extensive grounds the Yew Tree was popular with day trippers from Wolverhampton and a stopping off point for those visiting Enville gardens. On 16 June 1881 the South Staffordshire Bicycle Club called in during a ride from Walsall to Enville as reported in the Walsall and South Staffordshire Chronicle on 16 July 1881. The Yew Tree had sport facilities including a bowling green and running track. The latter was used for races at which betting was popular, Sporting Life on 24 September referring to a foot race on the 26th 'for £10 a side between Billy Cooper of Dudley and Thomas Milward of Kingswinford to run 60 yards. Mr. John Plant was stakeholder and William Brown referee.

FIG 2 THE WIDE, TREE LINED HIGH STREET OF WALL HEATH JUST AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. THE SEVEN STARS INN IS ON THE IMMEDIATE LEFT. THIS MARK AND MOODY, LTD POSTCARD CONVEYS THE PLEASANT, VILLAGE ATMOSPHERE OF WALL HEATH.

Inns such as the Yew Tree were also venues for the sale of houses and land which provide insight into Wall Heath's property market. The County Advertiser and Herald for Staffordshire and Worcestershire on 9 April 1881 advertised an auction on 12 April at 7:00 pm of 'that plot of eligible building land having a frontage of 36 yards to Albert Street, Wall Heath and containing in the whole 1440 square yards adjacent to the property belonging to Messrs. Bate and Bird.' A second lot included a plot of land having a frontage of 100 feet to Victoria Street. The grid street plan associated with the likes of Victoria Street was set out in the 1860s by a land society but was never fully developed during the Victorian period.

In conclusion, the village of Wall Heath in 1881 was a relatively remote and rural settlement displaying typical features of Victorian England including a distinct social hierarchy, young population profile and strong public house culture. Many found employment outside the village along Stallings Lane and at Shut End, but Wall Heath escaped much of the grime and pollution associated with industries such as coal and iron and would have been a pleasant environment. Its popularity as a commuting centre on the periphery of the Black Country remains to this day and despite some redevelopment the Victorian Wall Heath of 1881 can still be seen in the streets and many buildings which survive.

Press Release

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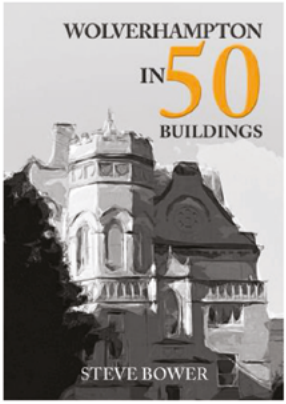
Wolverhampton in 50 Buildings

Steve Bower

Explore the rich history of the West Midlands city of Wolverhampton in this guided tour through its most fascinating historic and modern buildings.



The city of Wolverhampton was originally a Staffordshire market town. Its wealth was built on the woollen trade, but during the Industrial Revolution the exploitation of coal and iron deposits in the area transformed the city, which, along with neighbouring towns, came to be known as the Black Country. The town became a centre for steel production, lock and key manufacturing, iron and brass working, bicycle and car manufacturing and many other industries. Mass housing was built in the first half of the twentieth century to replace the slum dwellings that had grown up around these industries. The city has altered radically in recent decades, with the decline of many heavy industries, opening of large-scale shopping centres, the movement away from mass entertainment such as cinemas, closure of the tram and trolleybus systems, development of the university and preservation of cultural heritage sites. Awarded city status in 2000, Wolverhampton has a fine collection of buildings representing its past, from its historic St Peter's Church and attractive art gallery, imposing Victorian and Edwardian commercial and civic buildings and the elegant West Park, to the newly rebuilt bus and railway station, modern education buildings and the Light House Media Centre and more everyday structures such as pubs, shops and restaurants.

Wolverhampton in 50 Buildings explores the history of this fascinating city in the West Midlands through a selection of its most interesting buildings and structures, showing the changes that have taken place over the years. This book will appeal to all those who live in Wolverhampton or who have an interest in the city.

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PRESS INFORMATION

- The latest title in Amberley's *50 Buildings* series.
- A delightful architectural adventure around Wolverhampton.
- The book is a valuable guide for local residents and anyone with an interest in architecture and heritage.
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THE AUTHOR

Steve Bower began his explorations of Kensington whilst living in London as a teenager, as he travelled through the borough to his school. He has university qualifications in engineering and town planning and has completed a photography evening course.

Alongside a career as a social housing developer, he has maintained a continuing passion for buildings and how they create exciting towns and has also contributed listed-building photos to Historic England's Images of England project, including some in South Kensington. He has lived in West London since completing his university education.

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A question of pit pulled buildings

a letter from Roy Donnelly

I read somewhere recently that the last pit pulled property in the Black Country was demolished some years ago, The Crooked House in Himley excepted.

Yet there is still a less well-known private residence in Coopers Bank Road, just over a mile east of this famous establishment.

Also, The Sampson and Lion, on the brow of Halesowen Road in Netherton, had its licence extinguished on 18 June 1952 after being referred to the Compensation Authority – a body that decides the amount of compensation paid to the owner when a license is refused on grounds other than the statutory ones relating to the character or conduct of the house.

The former pub stands opposite an entrance to Netherton Park where the former colliery pit head and shaft exploited the 30' coal seam.

Perhaps there are other pit pulled buildings still standing that evoke our industrial heritage?

THE SAMPSON AND LION BUILDING FRONTAGE LEANING SOME TWO FEET TOWARDS THE ROAD, SINCE COMPENSATION WAS USED TO STABILISE RATHER THAN DEMOLISH.

Letter from Matt Mills in response to Nick Moss's letter in the Summer 2022 edition.

I found the latest issue of The Blackcountryman very interesting as always and I noticed Nick Moss had another letter debating whether Wolverhampton should have been considered the capital of the Black Country. This is my response:

Although Nick made some good points regarding Wolverhampton's industrial character in the 19th century, he mentioned how Penn and Tettenhall were rural villages. Although this point is true, Nick failed to mention the differences regarding Tettenhall and Penn. Most of Penn, along with Heath Town and Bushbury was incorporated into Wolverhampton in the earlier 20th Century and Penn and Bushbury were both very rural and developed as suburbs.

The Tettenhall situation is very different. Unlike Penn and the other areas Tettenhall Urban District was forced into the borough of Wolverhampton in 1966 along with most of Bilston, most of Wednesfield and parts of Willenhall, Coseley and Sedgley. While Penn is clearly a suburb or residential area, Tettenhall is a distinct village with its own character and its residential areas also have a distinct character.

I felt it was important to make this point regarding Tettenhall's distinction. In some ways the former Urban District of Tettenhall is to Wolverhampton what the former Urban District of Aldridge is to Walsall in how they both contain semi-rural areas and in Aldridge's case open countryside.

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Sunset over the Severn Valley Railway A personal memory

By Terry Hyde

Following on from Keith Hodgkins` article `A Black Country Steam Photographer Rediscovered` in the Winter 2021 edition of the Blackcountryman, that self-same photographer, Terry Hyde, recalls a journey over the Severn Valley Railway in the spring of 1962, eighteen months before the line was closed by British Railways.

A hundred and sixty years ago on February 1st, 1862, the ancient town of Shrewsbury and the venerable city of Worcester became connected to each other by railway and the Severn Valley line was in business. I write this because it was just over 61 years ago that I first travelled over this lovely route. At the time of my sunrise journey, I was not fully aware how short a time I would have to enjoy and absorb the workings of this charming line and how soon the sun would set on the Shrewsbury to Hartlebury section. It lost its passenger service in September 1963 and thus my exultation of March 1962 would soon become a funeral dirge as the dreaded closure notices began appearing over stations and halts. But for now, discovery and delight!

Saturday, March 31st was one of those early spring days which dawn bright, clear and chilly and I had promised myself that this was the day to go where I had not been before. As a 21-year-old 'train-spotter' now with a camera, I had traversed and photographed the old Great Western through such sylvan glades as Swan Village, with its noxious gasworks and landmark Klönne gasholder; then through Daisy Bank, sans daisies. Also, on the old LMS I had sampled the dubious delights of the Stour Valley between Bilston and Spon Lane gasworks including the Port without shipping, known as Dudley Port. Names can be deceptive until the reality is experienced. But today I was off to a place beloved of generations of Black Country coarse fishermen, the Severn-side town of Bewdley.

On that morning the West Bromwich Corporation service 74 was a bit tardy arriving at the Horseley Heath stop so, keen to be first off the bus on arrival at the 'Midland Red' Garage in Dudley I swung off the pole and quickly scooted across the road and down Station Drive to arrive at the ticket office and see 'my train', the 0818 from Wolverhampton (LL) sizzling gently at the platform with a 'Standard' 2-6-0 78008 and ready to go at 0845. Despite 14 years of nationalisation, Dudley was still divided in two, with separate ticket offices, but the same man walked between them. This was a legacy of two competing 19th century railway companies, which lived on until the station closed in 1964.

So, holding my precious 3/5d return ticket to Bewdley, I threw myself into a carriage, and with a shriek on the guard's whistle and a 'toot' from the engine we were away. With the service from Wolverhampton to Stourbridge Junction due to cease during that summer, this day`s trip would soon be impossible to repeat.

Thus began my journey on a part of the old Great Western quite unknown to me.

The line's original title was the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway, and it quickly attracted a nick-name. Such was the awful service in the early days that the initials OWW became better known as the 'Old Worse and Worse'. I mused on this as the train emerged from the darkness of Dudley tunnel and stopped and started at Blower's Green, then past Round Oak steelworks and onward to Stourbridge Junction. Considering that the service was under threat of closure the two-coach train was quite full. Perhaps people didn't believe such things could happen, or because it was a Saturday and a day off work?

Passing an 0-6-0PT pannier tank - known to spotters as a 'matchbox' - between Blower's Green and Brettell Lane, being helped by a sister engine 'up the bonk', I enjoyed the early morning sun casting long and pleasing shadows on embankments, cuttings and across a shallow valley with industry all but eliminating nature. Then, surprise, surprise, passing a 'Castle' on the less than glamorous duty of a coal train to Stourport Power Station.

We duly arrived at Stourbridge Junction on time, where a change of trains was necessary to continue my journey to the land beyond industry. Here was and still is one of Britain's shortest branches, to Stourbridge Town, and I made a mental note to travel on it at some point in the future. In this context 'short' is 59 Chains, a time-honoured system of distance measurement on the railway which continues to this day. How long is a chain? Twenty-two yards, your honour, the same as the distance between the two stumps in Cricket. `Eny fule knows that`, so do pay attention at the back. So, no metric distances on Britain's Railways either now or then.

Arriving at the Junction I saw 'Crynant Grange', my engine on the 0912 Worcester

6861 CRYANT GRANGE AT KIDDERMINSTER WHICH TERRY HAD TRAVELLED ON FROM STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION. HERE HE CHANGED FOR HIS TRAIN TO BEWDLEY

bound train which would drop me off at Kidderminster. It was quite a full train that chugged away, reaching a leisurely 40 mph as town changed to country, to stop at Hagley followed by Churchill & Blakedown. We passed GWR 2-8-0 3842 hauling a train of oil tanks, probably from Bristol to the depot at Rowley, as we drifted into the Victorian half-timbered Station that was Kidderminster. Waiting in the bay was a two-coach train and the scene was set to access the mystery of the Severn Valley line to Bewdley and beyond.

THE VIEW FROM THE BEWDLEY STATION FOOTBRIDGE WITH A BR DIESEL UNIT AND GWR RAILCAR W20

So, with a bird's eye view of Kidderminster from the viaduct we wound our way through a short tunnel and past what is now the Safari Park but was then just countryside. After passing the junction of the line from Stourport the train arrived at Bewdley. By now it was a beautiful sunny day and seeing a flurry of activity, it was camera out and onto the footbridge for 'topsides' pictures of a British Railways two-car DMU set, a Great Western 'streamlined' railcar and an elderly 0-6-0PT with two carriages which was to take me forward to Bridgnorth. But first I had to rebook to Shrewsbury. The Bewdley Station foreman told me that "the station was a little goldmine between April and December with people from Birmingham and the Black Country on fishing trips and visitors just enjoying being by the river." So, parting with my 9/- for a return ticket to Shrewsbury thus adding to the 'goldmine', I boarded the two-coach corridor train and declared a silent thank-you for the on-board toilet facility necessary for quite a lengthy journey.

TERRY`S TRAIN TO SHREWSBURY ARRIVES AT BEWDLEY BEHIND PANNIER TANK 3601

Of the line before me I knew but little. What I did know from working at the National Coal Board was that there was a colliery at Highley on the west bank of the Severn and another at Alveley on the east, connected by an aerial ropeway. With an annual throughput of around 30,000 tons at the time, the railway still did a good business in freight, which would sadly disappear when the collieries closed in 1969. But for now, the passing scene was of the English countryside in early Spring with trees just beginning to colour with catkins appearing, but the branches still bare except for riverside willows with a sheen of green. So on through Northwood Halt then crossing the Severn just before Arley to put the river on my right, where it would remain.

After Highley came the aerial ropeway connecting the collieries, with a collection of wagons in the sidings, before arriving at the small busyness of the old river-side town of Bridgnorth with its leaning remnant of the Castle that Cromwell 'knocked about a bit'. Here trains cross: parcels, boxes, motorbikes and such emerge from a carriage and people gossip as they have for the past hundred years. It was wonderful to see how this railway was so much a part of the life of Bridgnorth and I resolved to bring my girlfriend and share this lovely scene.

With the locomotive having satisfied its thirst we re-started, passing through Bridgnorth tunnel and out into a different Shropshire countryside. At stations and halts people boarded the train and others left laden with their shopping from Bridgnorth's Saturday market, showing that small though their numbers were, it certainly provided a service. Parcels and small items were taken off and other things taken on, much as it had been since the line opened in 1862. To the outsider like me, the timetable was an irregular passage of trains, but to those that lived there, it was part and parcel of daily life,

Heading north the railway and river became even closer, with the land on either side becoming steeper as we entered the Severn Gorge and arrived at Coalport, passing a 2-6-2T hauling four wagons, two of which contained, appropriately enough, large coal for the householder. Practically

every station bore witness to pick-up freight, a coal merchant's yard, or a few wagons in a siding and a lorry or two bustling back and forth. Looking across the river I could still see the remains of the former LNW branch to Wellington (Salop), which closed completely in 1960 after losing its passenger service in 1952.

Onto the next station, Ironbridge and Broseley and by now the sunny day had changed to the cloudy colder variety with occasional rain, so 'The Ironbridge' was seen through water-streaked glass or by opening the window and getting wet. The station was well placed for passengers to get off and walk across the world's first bridge made entirely of cast iron, into the town and pop into the imposing Tontine for a pint, but quite frankly it looked a tad run-down, post-industrial and quite uninviting.

BUILDWAS JUNCTION AND IRONBRIDGE `A` POWER STAION TAKEN BY TERRY ON A LATER VISIT IN THE SUMMER OF 1962.

Onward to the Welsh sounding name of Buildwas, which was then an important junction. To the left a branch to Much Wenlock linked to the North and West joint route at Woofferton. To the right a line bridging the Severn headed to Wellington (Salop), with another branch to Shifnal and Wolverhampton. Then I saw what had until then only been something to do with my work with the NCB, the Buildwas 'A' Power Station. Taking advantage of the cooling waters of the Severn and the rail connected supplies of coal, the first part of the power station opened in 1932 with further additions up to WW2 to provide for the rapidly increasing demand for electrical power. It may not have added to the scenic beauty of the place but there was an ever-growing demand for electricity, with British coal as the primary fuel. Coal for Buildwas and Stourport power stations came from pits which are now part of the Halesfield and Granville Country Parks and plans had by then been laid for the construction of the 'B' station.

Leaving the junction, we chuffed past the ancient and venerable ruins of Buildwas Abbey, a 12th Century Cistercian foundation. Now a romantic ruin, less well known than other abbeys but still so much part of the land it had occupied for centuries. This was a rural landscape I had not before experienced from a train. The poet A. E. Housman described it as a 'land of lost content' and we slid past green acres with gamboling lambs, placid sheep and contented cows. To slightly amend Housman:

What are those blue remembered hills?
What spires, what farms are those?
That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy railways where I went
And cannot come again.

Before long we were approaching the outskirts of Shrewsbury and rolled past the engine sheds with their mixed bag of former Great Western, LMS and some LNW locomotives. To the right the sandstone bulk of Shrewsbury Abbey Church, built as a Benedictine Abbey by the orders of Roger de Montgomery on a Saxon site, before we arrived under the overall roof of Shrewsbury Station.

5. SHREWSBURY STATION WITH `BLACK FIVE` 45143 HAVING JUST ARRIVED FROM SWANSEA (VICTORIA) VIA THE CENTRAL WALES LINE

As a station Shrewsbury had atmosphere; a major junction from where you could travel to all points of the compass. From a 'spotters' point of view it was an ideal venue. Why on earth hadn't I discovered it sooner? Arriving by the large Station Clock at 1240, more or less 'on time' my stomach said 'lunch' and where better to spend it than amid sulphurous smoke smells, hot oil and the sounds of trains arriving and departing? There were also a few young 'spotters' and talking to one or two whilst chomping on my egg and bacon roll and a warming cup of Bovril revealed that a D8000 (now Class 20) diesel locomotive had been seen on a train to North Wales. Dieselisation was something that we all knew was coming, but what wasn't evident then would be the speed of that change. But on this day not a diesel did I see.

But hasten away from the refreshment room to another platform because here's a train with one of Mr Stanier's ubiquitous 'Black Fives' with its black paint gleaming as it rested from the labours of steaming its way from Swansea (Victoria) along the mid-Wales line through Llandrindod Wells. I had missed the arrival and departure of the 'up' Cambrian Coast Express, but that was a train I could see any day on its journey between Wolverhampton (LL) and Birmingham (SH) on its way to Paddington. As an express train it only really deserved that name after leaving Wolverhampton where a gleaming 'King' would take it forward to cover the remaining 130 miles to London. Its journey begins in the early morning when a three or four coach train starts out from the farthest outpost in Wales at Pwllheli and another similar set also begins its journey from Aberystwyth. They combine at Machynlleth, then stopping only at principal stations and reversing at Shrewsbury.

Little did I then know that 26 years later my wife and I would be calling Shrewsbury "home" for 25 years of our lives when I would regret not having been there more often when younger.

'Spit spot and off we trot' smartly at 1345 for the return run behind a Standard tank engine over the Severn, because the station is partly over the river, then passing the imposing signal box and away past the sheds before quickly emerging into the surrounding countryside. At Berrington and Cressage folk got on and off, including one man who had boarded in Shrewsbury with a number of saplings. Not exactly the sort of 'luggage' which would be welcome on a bus. The guard obviously knew all those using the train, passed the time of day and enquired about this and that, all a million miles away from urban bustle. Then, before we got to Bridgnorth, the weather turned to rain then hail, then rain again and even snow flurries followed by bursts of sun. This was early in an English spring so should one be surprised? I quickly nipped out at Bridgnorth and photographed 'my' train from the footbridge and then returned to the warm carriage to take more pictures from an open window. That's something you can't do with modern stock, no opening windows. Those old coaches had their benefits and sticking your head out of the windows, despite the cautionary note advising you not to, was one of them.

STANDARD TANK 82036 IN THE RAIN AT BRIDGNORTH ON THE RETURN JOURNEY TO BEWDLEY

On we proceeded, passing other trains on the loops, keeping the Severn in view until we drifted into Bewdley, and I noticed what I had previously missed on the riverbank, the strange and sometimes bizarre collection of riverside shacks. Presumably, these were sort of summer hideaways allowing families to breathe fresh country air for a weekend or during 'stop fortnight', a holiday away from home. Pretty they were not and by the look of some of them had been there since before the war, or maybe even longer. But, hey, I have a train to catch and we're arriving on time at 1643 so along with a dozen or so other people we transfer to a diesel unit for the short run to Kidderminster where we change again to a train going to Birmingham (SH). This meant a further change was required at Stourbridge Junction since I wanted to get to Dudley, but by now it was the thought of tea which spurred me homeward to whatever Mom was preparing this Saturday evening. It had been a grand day out despite the weather, and I made a mental note that here were places to which I would take my girlfriend during the summer by whatever route remained.

Did I return to this 'land of lost content' during that summer and the following year? Indeed, I did, but the pleasure was tinged with sadness as it became evident that this newly discovered area was going to be shortly removed from the railway map, not to be travelled on again, or not until 1979, when the preservation society reopened the section between Bridgnorth and Kidderminster. As with the Biblical story of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel Ch. 37 vv1-10), new life was breathed into what was dead and the southern half of the Severn Valley railway lived again, enabling me in later life to entertain my grandsons in the joys of travelling 'like we did in the old days' and on my 70th birthday having the treat of driving and firing a real steam locomotive. What a present!

In 1962 I was a young man full of bounce and energy. A lovely girl had come into my life who has been my wife these past 56 years and she was happy to spend our courtship travelling hither and yon, often pursuing trains that would soon be no more. Now in my 80th year, the many photos I took will always remind me of an age that has now passed. One of my railway books is entitled: 'Gone With Regret' by George Behrens. Whilst the passing of such scenes may indeed be regretted, they will never be forgotten.

IT`S STILL RAINING AS A GWR RAILCAR ARRIVES AT BRIDGNORTH FROM BEWDLEY PRIOR TO THE DEPARTURE OF TERRY`S TRAIN

New voices - the language they choose

By Simon Fletcher

About four years ago I started to think about how best Offa's Press, which I manage, could extend its range of poets and further draw on the common cultural and language practices of the West Midlands.

We'd published a number of books that drew strongly on Black Country dialect and traditions, Dave Reeves's Black Country Dialectics, for example, and published a pamphlet of Kuli Kohli's poetry, Patchwork, spiced with Punjabi life and words, but hadn't got much further than that.

So, after a number of conversations with colleagues and regional writers, I started to pull together a group of younger poets who showed promise and a greater diversity in the language they choose to express themselves in. I was moving away from the Standard English I'd been obliged to speak, and write in, at school and university and out into new linguistic country.

It was an interesting journey and one I'm still on. As someone who reads French poetry in the original, and grapples with other languages, I should have thought about this diversity question sooner, surely, but hadn't that language been presented to me as monolithic and immutable? I don't remember having read a single line of Provençal or Parisian dialect. Perhaps I have.

With these thoughts in mind, the group of 'new voices', all from the wider Black Country area, as it turned out, was about to experience some mentoring. I'd lined up the poets with their 'best' mentors and off we set aided by some ACE funding which was much appreciated.

I worked with Tom Allsopp, from a mining background and an English/ Drama teacher so someone with whom I had a fair bit in common. I also worked with Santosh K. Dary. My 25 years of work with 'north Indian' poets would come in handy!

Emma Purshouse worked with Gracey Bee and Priyanka Joshi, Nick Pearson with Fraser Scott and Kenton Samuels and Marion Cockin with Anne Babbs. Some of the cultural links between mentor and mentee are more obvious than others but we all discovered that we were learning new stuff as well as reassessing the old.

What we found was different approaches to the language chosen, some of which may be generational, but I'd like to dwell, for a moment, on a couple of poets who know the importance of food, and who in the Black Country does not enjoy their food? Santosh K. Dary and Fraser Scott are both deeply-infused with a sense of where they live and their everyday language. Both know that particular food items conjure up worlds of memory, culture and comfort.

In 'Bulbulhamptan Tuesday Market' Santosh describes meeting her friends to go shopping. The term 'Bulbulhamptan', by the way, is the regular Punjabi way of saying 'Wolverhampton'. The word 'bulbul' is also the Punjabi word for a nightingale, a slightly comic but loving association.

THE 'NEW VOICES' POETS AT THE BOOK LAUNCH IN JULY 2022

She writes:

Finding a bench we eat paneer pakoras,
sip bottled paani, but prefer masala chai.
Gup chup on ailments, there's no cure for us,
bitch about our bahus, they just don't try.

Notes:
paani - water, masala chai - spicy tea,
Gup chup - chit chat, bahus – daughters in law

Santosh finds herself, as someone who thinks in Punjabi and writes in English, straddling a linguistic divide and she's doing it very well. Not only is the poetry warm and affectionate it's also skilful, as these four lines show, being part of a traditional (Shakespearean) sonnet.

Fraser Scott, who was born in Brierley Hill and now lives in Coseley, reminisces about his grandparents, 'Nan and Grandad', and the crucial role of food but he expresses the names of these important things in dialect, not 'Standard English':

The real gaffer made opple pie
filled with sweetness
and baked in a Rayburn heart.
Tradition and a blunt knife
peeled tayters and fingers
into a stainless-steel sink,
while um-med offal delicacies
were mixed with wizened hands.

Notes:
opple – apple, tayters – potatoes,
um-med – homemade.

As poets, their concerns are to find the closest way to the heart of the matter, and good poets always know where the heart is. Using the language that is closest to home packs a much greater emotional punch than distant or 'polite' equivalents.

This 'local speech' was once frowned upon by the men who decided what was 'proper'. Consider, for example, the way the 'unschooled' country labourer, and poet, John Clare was embraced then abandoned by publishers in his day. And that didn't do a lot for his mental health!

Any road up, as my Grandma from Darlaston would say, nowadays writers and poets are choosing their own language-ways forward. I wish them all the best.

'New Voices' is published by Offa's Press, £7.95. If you'd like to find out more then go to **www.offaspress.co.uk**

Remembering Edith Cotterill

By Keith Hodgkins

In 1973 the Black Country Society produced one of its most distinctive and successful publications, A Black Country Nurse at Large, by Edith Cotterill. The book was an autobiography, in which Edith told the story of her training as a nurse and subsequent career working as a District Nurse in Tipton in the 1950s and 60s.

In February 2021 a letter appeared in the Express and Star from Christine Lee of Tipton who, having rediscovered the book, suggested that the fondly remembered Edith deserved some kind of memorial in her native Tipton. The letter was spotted by Black Country Society and Tipton Civic Society member David Humphries, a second cousin of Edith, who contacted Christine and suggested the idea of a commemorative blue plaque to honour Edith`s memory.

The Tipton Civic Society took up the idea and after a fundraising appeal a plaque was produced and unveiled by the Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Mushtaq Hussain, on 29th September 2021 on the Community Building in Tipton`s Jubilee Park. The location was significant to Edith`s story, as the park was developed in the 1930s adjacent to the Cotterills Farm housing estate, which was named after the ancient farmhouse, occupied until its demolition by Edith`s grandparents. The unveiling of the plaque and the buffet lunch which followed, was made extra-special by the presence of several members of Edith`s family, including her son-in-law Ivan Warren and granddaughter Julia Warren-Kyle, who had travelled from their home in mid-Wales.

EDITH COTTERILL IN HER DAYS AS A DISTRICT NURSE.

Edith Cotterill (nee Humphries) 1916-1997, was born in Alexandra Road, Tipton on the night of the infamous Zeppelin raid. After attending Wolverhampton Girls` High School she qualified as a nurse, and as war broke out was working in Margate Hospital in Kent. When a group of injured sailors arrived from a stricken minesweeper it transpired that several hailed from the Black Country and Edith was the only nurse who could interpret their dialect. She fell for another of the sailors, Yorkshireman Harry Cockerill, whom she married in secret in 1940 as it was forbidden for nurses to fraternise with patients.

After their first child suffered teasing over the surname Cockerill, Edith persuaded Harry to have their name changed to the similar sounding Cotterill, after her grandparents` farm which she fondly remembered from her childhood. In the early 1950s, with her two children now of school age, she commenced her career as a District Nurse and became a familiar sight around the district making her house calls. She became even more of a local celebrity in 1973 with the publication of A Black Country Nurse at Large, but then came to national attention in 1986 when a revised version of the book, re-titled Nurse on Call, was issued by Century Hutchinson, which on re-publication in 2010 by Ebury Press, topped the Sunday Times best seller list. Edith donated all royalties from the books to animal charities.

THE PLAQUE UNVEILED. FOREGROUND FROM LEFT- CLLR MUSHTAQ HUSSAIN, MAYOR OF SANDWELL; IVAN WARREN, EDITH`S SON-IN-LAW; JULIA WARREN-KYLE, EDITH`S GRANDDAUGHTER.

A couple of days after the plaque event, a letter arrived from Edith`s granddaughter with the following message: "Thank you to the Civic Society and the Cotterills Farm community for such a lovely and well organised event at my Grandma`s plaque unveiling. We were blown away by the warmth and the generosity of the Tipton community and the kindness you showed us all". It is hoped that this small memorial will ensure that the warmth and generosity that Edith showed to those she cared for in Tipton will long be remembered by her townsfolk.

Edith wrote an article about her childhood memories of Cotterills Farm in the Summer 1979 edition of the Blackcountryman. She also contributed several stories and poems, many in dialect, to the magazine in the late 1970s.

J B Priestley's Black Country journey

By David Cattell

It has been nearly ninety years since J B Priestley was commissioned by the left-wing publisher and writer Victor Gollancz to write a study of contemporary England in the autumn of 1933. The journey was undertaken at a time of economic, political, and social change which was creating very different ways of living and earning a living within England. This article focusses on the weekend he spent in the Black Country and what "...a few sketches...probably not accurate nor free from subjective colouring" and "... his chronicles of a succession of moods" reveal about this area, the country as a whole, his political views and the mixed responses he received from newspapers, the Black Country public and fellow writers.

He left Birmingham on a Saturday morning and travelled through Smethwick and Oldbury to Dudley "...which seemed to be a fantastic place." He climbed Castle Hill to Dudley Castle leaving behind grim works and unpleasant dwellings and passing a "ridiculous terra-cotta music hall", where Parisian Follies was playing. The Dudley Opera House had opened in 1899 before becoming The Dudley Opera House Picture Palace and Electric Theatre in 1910. It was indeed a red brick building with cinnamon terra cotta dressings built in the Italian Renaissance style. This 2000 capacity theatre burnt down two years after Priestley's visit and was replaced by the Hippodrome built in an Art Deco style.

DUDLEY OPERA HOUSE AND CINEMA

DUDLEY CASTLE

On reaching the Castle he was able to sit down by the remains of the keep and smoke his pipe whilst enjoying "colossal views...of the Black Country unrolled before you like a smouldering carpet." The middle distance was dominated by an enormous round white tower which he later learned was a gasometer "...like a temple of some horrible new religion." Access to the castle was relatively easy as it was to be four more years before the castle was incorporated into the grounds of Dudley Zoo. The castle is situated on an outcrop of Wenlock Group Limestone and Priestley's view was further enhanced by the deliberate damage or slighting to the fortifications perpetrated by Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War. Damage to the residential buildings in a 1750 fire meant that prior to the Zoo in 1937 the grounds were mainly used for fetes and pageants.

SWAN LANE GASOMETER

The gasometer he observed was situated in Swan Lane, West Bromwich and was part of the Swan Lane Coal Gas Works which was run by the Birmingham and Staffordshire Gas Light Company. Coal to produce the gas was brought in firstly, by the Ridgacre Canal and then by railway on a GWR branch line from Swan Village station. A new works was opened in 1953 but during the 1960s the availability of natural gas eventually led to the demise of the works, the railway branch line, and the gasometers.

Whilst Priestley was smoking his pipe and taking in the view the only sounds, he could hear were from the tangle of railway lines below him. The passenger stations and freight yards are long gone but in the 1930s these services were operated by the London Midland and Scottish and the Great Western Companies. There was a large station on Castle Hill which was shared by the two companies and another station on the Tipton Road. The importance of Dudley to the railway network is evidenced from the LMS having had 15 daily departures to Euston and the GW having 11 departures to Paddington and Birkenhead for the Irish Ferry. Furthermore there were a host of local services including 70 daily four-minute journeys each way to Sedgley Junction and Dudley Port High Level station.

On leaving the Castle Priestley descended into "...a vast smoky hollow" of workshops, grimy terraced housing, pubs, picture theatres, scrap metal yards and great patches of waste ground "...as shocking as raw sores and open wounds." As he journeyed from Dudley he passed through Wolverhampton, Wednesbury, Willenhall and Walsall, names that were merely alliteration as he had no idea where one ended and another began. The only place he commented upon was the Midland Counties Dairy in Wolverhampton, describing it as an outpost of a new civilization, "white and trim with immense windows." This cursory view of Wolverhampton drew criticism from The Express and Star for March 27th, 1934, when English Journey was published. It said that it made no reference to the beautiful areas around the town including Boscobel, Brewood and Codsall.

The Lea Road Dairy at the junction of Lea Road and Penn Road had been a local landmark since its opening in 1931, with these immense windows affording interior views from the upper decks of passing buses, of the use made of mechanization and technological innovations. The tiled and chrome building was designed to showcase the purity and cleanliness of its product. The clean strong lines of the building, the use of modern materials and chrome plating

MIDLAND COUNTIES DAIRY IN WOLVERHAMPTON

and polished surfaces and the exposure of the internal workings made it a good example of the Art Deco genre, particularly in its more subdued manifestation of Streamline Moderne which emerged in the 1930s. It was very different from the more traditional soot-stained brick-built factories common across the Black Country.

Priestley then moved on to Gornal, "...the end of the earth where the land appeared to have been uprooted by a giant pig and cottages so small, they must have been built for gnomes." He commented upon the women returning home from the brickworks wearing shawls and caps. He said that in his hometown of Bradford the women weavers used to wear shawls but used them to cover their heads unlike the caps which "...looked as outlandish as the place they lived in."

Many towns in the Black Country had their own brickworks utilizing the clay of glacial deposits, coal from the local mines, the infrastructure of canals and railways and the ready supply of women and children as workers. Although the school leaving age had been raised to 14 in 1922 pupils in some areas were allowed to leave early for "beneficial employment", often a necessity when male unemployment was high. For many working-class children the elementary school has been described as a finishing school for young workers. Although it was a Saturday when Priestly saw the brick workers, it must be remembered that Saturday was still a part of the normal working week for many working-class employees. It is highly likely that the workers were employed by Cartwright Brickworks situated at the top of Jews Lane in Lower Gornal. This prominent local employer was established in the 1840's but ceased trading in the 1940s.

The aforementioned Express and Star article said that like Wolverhampton, Gornal had once been surrounded by charming countryside and whilst it had been mangled and churned in the quest for coal, this very coal would enable Mr Priestley to keep warm. Furthermore Mr Priestley did not enter the cottages in Gornal and if he had he may have described the dwellings and the people very differently. People did not have to live at the "beginning of the earth" and possess money and land to be near God and lead a life of goodness, happiness and contentedness. It concluded by stating that even if the women of Gornal wore caps and shawls their character and principles may be far higher than some women who wore fine clothes.

After Gornal Priestley travelled straight through the Black Country and came within sight of The Potteries. On his return journey to Birmingham for the evening he came across heathland "glowing with autumn" on the road between Stafford and Rugeley. The road would be what we now call the A513, and the heathland is Cannock Chase.

Before moving on to Priestley's second day which was dominated by his visit to "Rusty Lane" in West Bromwich it is worth considering how his experience on the Saturday fitted into his views on the country as a whole, his political viewpoints which were to be given full voice on the Sunday and how historians have interpreted the period.

In the final pages of his book Priestley describes three Englands that he encountered which were "variously and most fascinatingly mingled in every part of the country." He described "Old England" as the country of cathedrals, minsters, manor houses and inns with parsons and squires. It had long since ceased to earn its living apart from tourism, but parts of it needed to be preserved so that "a lot of poor souls toiling in the muck can peep at them and be determined that everyone should have as good a quality of life as these things."

His views on the English class system which permeated the first England were present, but in a different way, in his description of what he calls the third England of post-war England whose birthplace was America. He characterised this as essentially a democratic country of mass production where you needed money but not too much making it as near a classless society as we have got. This England was characterised by arterial roads, filling stations, factories like exhibition buildings, giant cinemas, dance-halls, cocktail bars and Woolworths and factory girls who looked like actresses.

He felt that this Modern England was rapidly Blackpooling itself in that as an early seaside resort Blackpool majored on the idea that everyone was as good as one another as long as you had the necessary sixpence thus making no distinction between different classes of patrons. In this England young people got on with their own lives choosing their heroes and heroines from the world of sport or film and not living their lives vicariously by "playing chorus in an opera in which their social superiors are the principals." However he had reservations about this England in that he felt that too many people were doing not what they like but what they have been told to do, reflecting the influence of American culture. This cultural tension between what many people like and what Priestley feels they ought to like, has attracted some criticism and his views on the paternalism of the Cadbury family which underpinned Bournville in Birmingham is the subject of a detailed discussion both within and without the book.

The remaining England was the nineteenth-century England as typified by much of the Black Country, although not all of the Midlands. The difference between this England and the Modern England was well expressed by comparing factories of glass, white tiles and chromium plate with the huge dark brick boxes which dominated many industrial areas. It is this England which really brings out his socialism which was forged in his upbringing in Bradford, the moral influence of his socially aware Elementary School Head teacher father, his war experiences and to a lesser extent through reading history and politics at Cambridge. He made it quite clear the West Riding working class was in his blood and bones and he did not discover the proletariat at Cambridge unlike some of the left-wing intellectuals of the 1930s, some of whom looked down on Priestley for his writing and politics. He was never a member of the Labour Party and in 1941 he helped to form the Common Wealth Party which advocated Common Ownership, Vital Democracy and Morality in Politics. It never developed into a mass party and after failed negotiations with the Labour party in 1945 it was dissolved. He has been described as a reforming patriot with an understanding of and an empathy with the less fortunate in society and a belief that the more fortunate should take a greater responsibility for inequality. This is why so much of his literary work is concerned with social change and is evident in his writing on what he called the second England.

This second England made up a large part of the Midlands and the North and featured coal, iron, steel, cotton, wool, railways, thousands of identical back-to-back houses and terraces and detached villas with monkey trees, mills, foundries, warehouses, mill chimneys, slag heaps, tips, cindery waste ground, fried fish shops, public houses, Mechanics' Institutes, sham Gothic churches and square faced chapels and Unionist or Liberal clubs. To the more fortunate people it was not a bad England at all, very solid and comfortable. "The entrepreneurs such as Mr Birling in Priestley's, An inspector Calls published in 1945 but set in 1912 would fit into this

category. When they had made their money, they could move into the older England where their children could be schooled and groomed to be like the land-owning aristocrats and indeed marriages between the classes gave the entrepreneurs a position in "old society" and the landowning classes access to "new money" as exemplified by the Birling and Croft Families.

However the less fortunate classes were very unlucky in that work gave them some sort of security, but it was the security of long hours, miserable wages and "surroundings in which they lived like black-beetles at the back of a disused kitchen stove." Many of their descendants now living in the 1930s did not even have the work to provide this miserable security. "...the more I thought about it, the more this period of England's industrial supremacy began to look like a gigantic dirty trick. At one end of this commercial greatness were a lot of half-starved, bleary-eyed children crawling about among machinery..."

Priestley's analysis of the three Englands and his development of the theme of unemployment throws light on what was actually happening in 1930s England. The inter-war period has been characterised as a period of economic depression with unemployment figures of over 2m. in 1922 and 2.5m. in 1933 which was over 25% of the workforce, with many regional differences. The recession which followed the short-lived post war boom deepened into a depression in the early 1930's after the Wall Street Crash, reduction in world trade, international recession, and domestic policies which emphasised reductions in government spending to balance budgets in the face of austerity. The ideas of the economist John Maynard Keynes emphasising the crucial role of significant government investment and a budget deficit to set in motion an upward multiplier in economic activity was supported by few in government circles.

The period before, and indeed, after Priestley made his journey was a period of economic, political, and social turbulence. There were controversial decisions made over returning to and then leaving the Gold Standard, maintaining then abandoning Free Trade, and trying to maintain London as an international financial centre by maintaining a strong pound. All of this led to the political upheaval of the Conservative defeat in the 1929 election and its replacement by a minority Labour government supported by the Liberals, which in turn was replaced by a National Government led by Ramsay MacDonald "to save the pound" in 1931, and when they could not, the calling of an election resulting in a Conservative dominated National Government.

In the country as a whole there were significant events demonstrating the desperation of many working-class people facing unemployment, falling wages and an inadequate benefits system. These events included the 1926 General Strike spearheaded by the miners' union which was more a partial than a General Strike, the Hunger Marches of 1927, 1931 and the National Hunger march of 1932 with the driving force behind many of these being the unemployed of the South Wales Coalfields. The last Hunger march would actually take place in 1936 which was the same year as the Jarrow March from the Northumberland "town that died" with an unemployment rate of 68%. Priestley described Jarrow as a derelict town with thousands of men hanging around and that

JARROW MARCH

he had not seen anything like it since the war, presumably drawing on his war time experiences in France.

Of course all of these marches had some degree of political motivation and understandably contained political activists, but the majority of marchers were desperate people seeking help from the government. However the government saw them as a real political threat and a significant police presence, infiltration by spies and forcible confiscation of petitions were common tactics deployed against the marchers. This type of reaction and sensitivity to political demonstrations had been shaped by the events in Russia from 1917.

Unemployment benefit or the dole was not designed to deal with long term unemployment on this scale. Not only was the benefit too small to cover the basics of food and clothing but also it ran out after 6 months. Furthermore to reduce public spending the Means Test was introduced in 1931 meaning that families had to spend any savings and sell anything of value in their home before qualifying. Also, if any other member of the household managed to secure any paid employment the main breadwinner was refused dole. Continued austerity meant that the dole itself was cut by 10% later in 1931. The basic dilemma for Government in the inter-war period was how to preserve the insurance principle of the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 whilst preventing the vast numbers who had exhausted their benefit from being treated as paupers under the Poor Law. The difficulty of doing this in a time of economic depression and austerity resulted in over 4m people having an inadequate diet, people in poor families spending less than half per head on food compared with wealthier families and death rates for women 15-35 between 1931 and 1935 being twice as high in areas of high unemployment compared with wealthier areas.

These statistics not only demonstrate the class-based nature of British society but also that there were very real regional differences in the inter-war period of the type identified by Priestley in his three Englands. The inter-war period has undergone considerable historical revision from the traditional view seen through the prism of the depressed areas. One historian has talked about three nations consisting of the depressed areas of large-scale and long-term unemployment, the boom areas of the towns around the "new" industries and the twilight areas where people feared unemployment might spread. Another has talked about "two Britains in the 1930s." The areas dependent upon the old traditional industries of coal mining, cotton, steel, and shipbuilding were very different from the areas seeing the growth of the new industries of motor-vehicles, electrical goods, Petro-chemicals and food processing which were reliant on electricity rather than coal, a different type of worker and proximity to affluent domestic markets. Consequently the south-east of England and parts of the Midlands were very different from parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North-East of England and South Wales and the Scottish Lowlands.

The inter-war period saw an upturn in the Housebuilding cycle with the large-scale building of private houses and council homes, which might help to explain Priestley's reference to the Gornal brick workers. The total for council homes was 1.4 million with more of them built in the 1920s and the private sector built 3.1 million with more of them in the 1930s. Locally, West Bromwich built over 5,000 homes in this period to address the problem of slum housing, and the Conservative M.P. for West Bromwich made a reply to Priestley about this when the English Journey was published in 1934.

Mr Ramsay M.P. was critical of Priestley's description of West Bromwich saying that 150 years of industrialism had produced serious problems, but thanks to the devoted efforts and voluntary service they were rehousing 400 families a year and had already rehoused one-sixth of the population in municipal dwellings. However this was ignored, and all Priestley appeared to have found was a number of boys throwing stones at an old empty warehouse. It is now appropriate to turn our attention back to his visit to West Bromwich on the second day of his Black Country journey.

The Sunday was a cold, wet and foggy day which may well have affected his experience of West Bromwich. He lunched with several Black Country businessmen, many in the metal trade, in one of the smaller towns. Given that he was travelling from Birmingham this could have been Smethwick or Oldbury and his description of being shown the last dairy farm in the district might well have corresponded to Cooper's Farm, which was located at the junction of Penny Hill and Tame Road just to the south of Oldbury. Many of the farms in the area had already been swallowed by housing development but this farm functioned as a dairy farm and small dairy delivering milk by a horse drawn milk float into the 1940s.

As there had been an upturn in the metal trade his friend took him back to his sheet metal warehouse in "Rusty Lane" and Priestley expressed his dismay at the condition of the area and that it was allowed to exist "In the heart of the great empire... in the land of hope and glory" He said that if there was another economic conference, probably a reference to the London Economic Conference of June and July 1933, it shouldn't meet in Mayfair but in a warehouse in Rusty Lane and the delegates fed with bread and margarine and slabs of brawn and so they could witness another England. According to The History of West Bromwich in The Victoria County History, Rusty Lane is Grice Street which still exists just off Spon Lane South, which is now separated from Spon Lane by Kelvin Way and Kenrick Way. The Kenrick's had developed foundries in the locality and the area around Spon lane earned its living from the metal trade and so fits with Priestley's description.

Priestley described Rusty Lane as the worst example of desolation he had ever seen and the whole neighbourhood was mean and squalid, alright for storing sheet metal but not for children to grow up in. Whilst he was in the warehouse boys were throwing stones onto the roof and they ran away when Priestley and the owner emerged. He said they had no need to run away from him as he would not blame them if they smashed every pane of glass for miles around, and when they grew up, "smash everything that can be smashed." Whilst Rusty Lane continues to exist the whole pomp of government of the Crown, Lords and Commons were a miserable farce. Priestley finished his description of The Black Country with "What do they know of England who only England Know? The answer must be Rusty Lane, West Bromwich." Whilst not wishing to display any disrespect to the people who work in the workshops in present day Grice Street, the imagery in the photograph conveys the sense that not much has changed.

We have already seen examples of offended civic pride on behalf of the people of Wolverhampton, Gornal and West Bromwich and further cuttings from Priestley's scrapbook, now housed in a special collection at the University of Bradford contain others such as, Priestley searched for dirt and found it, the Black country is a product of labour not sport like Epsom and whilst we are not as beautiful as lilies The Midlands and Birmingham has made England.

There was also contemporary criticism of his book as a work of literature. Some of it was based on intellectual snobbery as some of

the writers of the Auden group saw him as a popular rather than a serious writer. Virginia Woolf was a particular critic and dismissed him as a "tradesman of letters" and decidedly middlebrow. Priestley revelled in that description and when he called Woolf highbrow the subsequent exchanges between them became the "battle of the brows."

Further criticism has been based on his literary style in that he relied upon portrait and anecdote rather than analysis and that he lacked originality in that his social criticism style, using the staple approach of contrasting the prosperity of some with the squalor of others, such as in his description of Rusty Lane.

However there was some support in local newspapers such as one letter which argues that city pride is often an excuse for downright conceit and Priestley gives us the unpalatable truth which is something he has always done. In a similar vein The Birmingham Post said that his indictment of the Black Country can hardly be gainsaid but in spite of the criticism the book is valuable and realistic and has the virtue of saying that England is still the best place in the world to live and ordinary English men and women are the salt of the earth.

In the closing pages of his book he writes that he wished he had been born early enough to have been called a Little Englander. Although it was a term of sneering abuse, he would have delighted in being so described. He loved little England and disliked Big Englanders who he saw as "red faced ...loud voiced fellows... wanting to boss everybody all over the world and being surprised and saying Bad Show! If someone refused to fag for them. They are patriots and he wished their patriotism began at home and they took the trouble to say Bad Show! to Jarrow and Hepburn."

It is the power of Priestley's descriptions and his obvious dislike of the power of the class system and how it perpetuates inequalities in society that makes English Journey such an important book. It appeared to speak to people in the 1930s and it has been credited along with books such as Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole (1933) and George Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier (1937) with contributing to the consciousness which helped to shape the work of the reforming 1945 Labour Government.

Although it has been ninety years since he made his journey his observations still speak to us. What could be more relevant to Boris Johnson's Government and its supporters than these comments found at the end of his book? "Let us be too proud...to refuse shelter to exiled foreigners, too proud to do dirty little tricks because other people can stoop to them, too proud to lose an inch of our freedom, too proud, even if it beggars us, to tolerate social injustice here, too proud to suffer anywhere in this country an ugly way of living."

To celebrate Priestley, other writers have made their own English Journey. In 1983 Beryl Bainbridge subtitled her work as The Road To Milton Keynes. Unfortunately for this article she went straight to Stoke after leaving Birmingham. However, fortunately, Will Self's Great British Bus Journey in 2018 for a BBC Podcast featured his trip downRusty Lane, where he described Spon Lane as featuring a multi-cultural population with businesses involved in metal bashing and car body shops and car washes. He also commented that West Bromwich was the second most deprived town or city in 2016 in the UK.

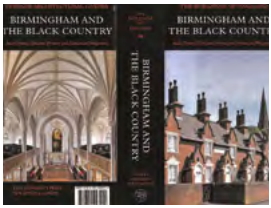
It is, therefore, only fitting that Priestley should have the last words in this article and those words should be about West Bromwich and The Black Country. "*I would rather spend a holiday in Tuscany than in the Black Country, but if I were compelled to choose between living in West Bromwich or Florence, I should make straight to West Bromwich.*"

Black Country Society Autumn Programme

Venue: The Court House,
corner of New Street and Tower Street, Dudley, DY1 1LP.

The meeting is in the first-floor function room, but please note there is no lift.
Large car park adjacent in Tower Street. A five-minute walk from Dudley bus station.

Pevsner`s Black Country



Wednesday 28th September

7.30pm

An illustrated talk by Andy Foster

Since their introduction in 1951, the Pevsner Guides to the buildings of England have been indispensable to anyone interested in the study and exploration of our architectural heritage. The books usually encompass traditional counties, but the latest volume, covering Birmingham and the Black Country, has broken with that practice to embrace the whole West Midlands conurbation in a single publication. Its author, Andy Foster, will tell the story of his mammoth twelve-year task to update the relevant parts of the older Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire editions and describe some of his favourite local buildings and architects. He will tell us that despite many grievous losses, there is still a surprising amount of good architecture in the Black Country for us all to enjoy.

The Black Country of the Future


WEST MIDLANDS MAYOR, ANDY STREET

Wednesday 26th October

7.30pm

A talk by Andy Street,
Mayor of the West Midlands

Andy Street was elected as the first Mayor of the West Midlands in May 2017 and re-elected to serve a second term in May 2021. The primary function of the role is to chair the West Midlands Combined Authority and brings with it significant powers over transport, housing, skills and jobs. Before becoming Mayor, Andy combined a career with John Lewis, Britain`s most successful worker`s co-operative, with a host of high-profile economic development roles, working with local and national government. Starting on the John Lewis graduate scheme, Andy rose through the ranks to become managing director,

overseeing one of the most successful periods in the company`s history. He was Chair of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership between 2011 and 2016, helping to build the relationships that have underpinned the economic growth of the region. Additionally, he has been lead non-executive director for the Department for Communities and Local Government as well as a member of the Prime Minister`s Business Advisory Group. Outside of work, Andy is passionate about the arts, particularly in the West Midlands, having previously served as Vice-Chairman of Performance Birmingham Limited, which is responsible for running the City`s Symphony and Town Halls.

He will give a personal view of how he sees the Black Country developing in the next couple of decades and will identify both the opportunities for the future and the issues that need to be addressed.

An Evening with the President: Marlene, the Black Country Wench

MARLENE WATSON - BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY PRESIDENT

Friday 18th November

7.00pm

For BCS members and friends:

entry by pre-booked ticket; £5 per person.

Society President Marlene Watson, the well-known Black Country comedienne and entertainer, presents another variety evening of music and Black Country humour.

Bring your friends to support the Society. Contact Keith Hodgkins to book your tickets. Telephone: 0121 520 0080 or email: staffs.munchkin@btinternet.com

From Kates Hill to California. James Whale; "The Father of Frankenstien"

PROMOTIONAL ILLUSTRATION FOR THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, 1935

Wednesday 25th January

7.00pm

An illustrated talk by Craig Denston

How did a working class lad born in 19th century Dudley become, for his time, the highest paid director in Hollywood?

An extraordinary life story that goes from a factory to a war, through art to the theatre, and to the making of some of the most influential horror movies of all time. Yet ultimately to a heartbreakingly tragic end.

TOM LARKIN – an appreciation of a Black Country historian.

By Brendan Clifford

Black Country Society members will recall that the Society supported the production of my book, "Red By Day, Black By Night. The Black Country – 500 Years in 50 Voices", published just before Christmas 2021.

When he was designing the book, the late Brian Ridout asked me for a photograph of myself for use on the back cover. I sent him the one shown here at Fig 1.

FIG 1 BRENDAN CLIFFORD PICTURED WITH TOM LARKIN'S BOOKS

Readers may wonder why, in an article which is meant to be an appreciation of Tom Larkin, the Black Country historian who died just over a year ago at the age of 90, I should begin with reference to this photograph. Well, if you look closely (and apologies if a magnifying glass is needed to see them more clearly!) you will see that I am holding a book entitled "Black Country Lives." This book was edited by Tom. And just above that, on the shelf, with its cover facing the viewer, is a book written by Tom entitled "Black Country Chronicles." I have treasured these books for a number of years.

And in fact, showing these books in the photograph was my small way of paying tribute to Tom and his work. I had wanted to send him a copy of my book and to tell him of this acknowledgement which I had made in the photograph. Alas, Tom died before my book was complete. But I was absolutely delighted to hear from his son, Hugh, an old school friend, that the book would have been "right up his (Dad's) street."

In addition to being a Black Country historian, however, Tom was a community builder, activist and campaigner. For some time, this included political action and representation as a Labour Councillor for the Bilston East Ward. His time as an Elected Member of the Council spanned the transfer of local authority responsibility from the smaller unit of the Borough of Bilston (see Fig 2) to the larger unit based in Wolverhampton. Tom was passionate about local representation and he was not alone in the Bilston area in fearing that a larger administrative unit based in Wolverhampton might overlook the needs and aspirations of the now smaller unit – Bilston. He regarded the change as a "complete destruction of 19 historic councils" replaced by enlarged local government bodies "achieved by forced amalgamation". Looking back, it's also interesting to note that his work-life with the former Midland Electricity Board could be seen to be part of this commitment

through local / regional responsibility for energy – an issue which remains of concern today for reasons associated with views on climate change or wider international relations factors.

FIG 2 COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS OF BILSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL IN MARCH 1966 A FEW DAYS BEFORE BILSTON MERGED WITH WOLVERHAMPTON. COUNCILLOR TOM LARKIN IS FOURTH FROM THE RIGHT IN THE FRONT ROW. IMAGE FROM BC MEMORIES WEBSITE.

Tom's interest in and commitment to people in Bilston and the Black Country and its history was very much rooted in his personal experience. Amongst the many reports on his Black Country history work he said, "I lived in Bissell Street in Bilston, (where) some of the slums were indescribable ... It's amazing to think how people managed to live in conditions like that, every day. We did have our own backyard, but a lot of houses had shared facilities, one toilet between seven families, and outside facilities for washing." Tom was nine years old at the outbreak of the Second World War and would have been able to recall this experience well.

Tom's contribution in developing the Black Country Memories Club (where much information is still available online at **www.blackcountrymemories.uk**) was surely a great way of bringing people together to value their locality and enjoy the community it created. The pen picture stories which he pulled together in "Black Country Lives" provide a great witness to the experience of a generation which included war as well as the effects of poverty.

This work was followed up by publication of "Black Country Chronicles" in 2009 which looked at the Black Country in the time up to 1939. The text at the seller's website summarises the book as follows:

"Tom Larkin and other members of the Black Country Memories Club have long been determined that the way of life, sacrifices, and hardships, and daily activities of days gone by should not be allowed to be forgotten. This book looks at the Black Country from a working-class point of view and records the significant contribution which these people made to the economic stability of the country as a whole. Neither romanticizing nor exaggerating working-class life, this snapshot brings home the harsh reality of life for residents, faithfully bringing to the fore the harsh living conditions, bad housing, polluted environment, low standards of hygiene, and tough discipline which dominated people's lives. Fascinating and multi-faceted, this narrative provides a fascinating insight into the Black Country of yesteryear and a valuable record of the reality of life for generations to come."

Tom then spent more years researching and launched a sequel, Whatever Happened to the Real Black Country? in 2019. It charts how the region changed since 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War. A particular aspect of the book was Tom's analysis of how the conditions experienced by working-class families in the area came to attention during a controversial 1944 by-election.

Ian Hannah had been the Conservative MP for Bilston for 14 years by the time he died in 1944. There had been a wartime agreement by the main parties not to fight by-elections due to the pressures of wartime. This would have meant that the Conservative candidate, Lt Col William Gibbons, should have been able to take the seat unopposed. However, Tom explains that the Independent Labour Party, which was opposed to the war, refused to abide by this

understanding and put up a candidate, Anthony Eaton. So a poll had to be held in September 1944 even though it was not universally welcomed. Many saw it as an unnecessary distraction, as well a waste of resources given the stage of the war. In addition, Tom recounts how a "firebrand pacifist", Fenner Brockway, arrived in the area to speak on Eaton's behalf. Brockway's presence was controversial, apparently, having been told he was not welcome in Bilston following a 1932 visit which was recounted in his book "Hungry England" (written a good few years before George Orwell's "Road to Wigan Pier") when he stated that "Surely no place could have grown up so ugly as this, without some evil mind having deliberately planned to wipe out every last trace of beauty." It looks as if Brockway's views did not endear him to Bilston people and his book was banned from local libraries, as a result.

His 1944 visit echoed the 1932 one and Brockway told his audience: "In Bilston there are hundreds of houses more suitable for chickens to live than human beings." Tom argues that Brockway may have had some impact in the election in that at the election, whilst Gibbons retained the seat for the Conservatives, it was only by a small margin, with Eaton receiving only 349 votes fewer. Tom believed that Brockway's comments played some part in influencing the creation of the post-war welfare state. But he writes that legislation to tackle the heavily polluted atmosphere in the 1950's also marked the beginning of the end for the Black Country of his youth. While the post-war years saw a boom in manufacturing, this came at a price in the form of increased air pollution.

As noted earlier, Tom published his last book in 2019. So his efforts are a reminder that it is never too late to publish your work! Moreover, his efforts and his life have been given public recognition earlier in the summer of 2022 by the unveiling of a plaque dedicated to his memory in Bilston Town Hall. It's fitting perhaps that the plaque is located near another one dedicated to all those who battled to maintain the independence of the town he and they all loved.

FIG 3 UNVEILING OF THE PLAQUE DEDICATED TO TOM LARKIN AT BILSTON TOWN HALL. HIS WIFE, EMILY, IS AT THE FRONT AND HIS SON, HUGH, BEHIND HER IN THE BLUE SHIRT (PHOTO FROM THE EXPRESS AND STAR)

Bilston Town Hall was a place where I have a memory of Tom taking me under his wing as a friend of his son, Hugh, at a public meeting called in connection with the future of Bilston Steel. To be honest, I can't recall if Tom spoke that evening, but I do remember clearly Dennis Turner – later to be M.P. for Wolverhampton South East - telling the Panel that *"Yow car do this to the waerkers!"* As readers will know, in due course - they did.

And perhaps a couple of years earlier, I recall Tom taking me with his son Hugh, to hear the Prime Minister of the time, Harold Wilson, speak in the main auditorium in the Wolverhampton Polytechnic. This was really exciting for me as a young person becoming more aware of politics. I'm very grateful for those memories and I know that some Members may have others to share.

It's most fitting perhaps to end with a couple of comments reported in the newspaper coverage of the unveiling of the plaque. First from his wife, Emily who said that the plaque *"… means an awful lot. My husband*

was an extraordinary man and he worked very hard for anyone who came to him for help and always did his best. He was hard working, tenacious, and it's always said they broke the mould when they made Tom, God bless him. He was an extraordinary man and a very astute politician." And his son, Hugh said that Bilston Town Hall *"… was so central to what (Tom) believed in and to have the plaque in here, I can't think of anywhere better – this is the place. (Tom) was born here (in Bilston) and apart from his National Service for two years, he has always lived within two miles of where we are now (at the Town Hall.) He was born just down the road and for 90 years nearly, he lived within two miles of Bilston and when we had his funeral we had it at the Holy Trinity church (Oxford Street) so he was extremely attached to Bilston and meant a lot to him."*

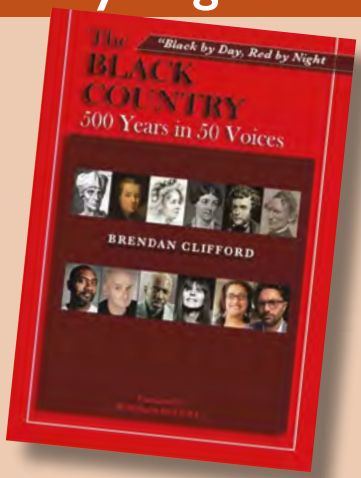
TOM LARKIN (PHOTOGRAPH EXPRESS AND STAR)

'Black by Day, Red by Night

Author, Brendan Cifford is a true Blackcountryman and his passion for writing and investigating authors who have visted the Black Country has come together here in a new book that is an extension of his features in the 'Blackcountryman' magazine.

The Society is pleased to present to you this fascinating book containing the writings and comments from a wide range of authors, some well known and some intriguingly less familiar, like John Leland, regarded as one of the first writers on English local history. The book has excerpts from 50 authors including Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Julie Walters, Lenny Henry and Black Country Creatives Emma Purshouse, Khuli Kohli and Wolverhampton-born Sathnam Sanghera who writes in 'The Times'.

It is a fascinating read, presented as individual authors in date order with their backgrounds and writings about the Black Country, over a 500 year period. The book is 112 pages in full colour and also features photographs, illustrations and artwork by present day artists associated with the area including Rob Perry and Ed Isaacs, as well as those from years ago, such as JMW Turner.



Sponsors have included the Francis Brett Young Society, the Jerome K, Jerome Society and the Black Country Society. The book is published in a limited quantity and therefore available exclusively to members of the Black Country Society.

Purchase your copies at the Introductory Price of £12.00 incl.pp.

Visit the Gift/Book Shop on the Society website: www.blackcountrysociety.com

Writing dialect down – what written dialect can tell us about the spoken dialect across time and space

By Dr Esther Asprey

Recently, my work on Black Country dialect has moved from examining the living dialect around the region among its speakers to examining the legacy left of the dialect in writing. Dialect in England has lost ground since the process of standardisation began with the advent of greater mobility, the arrival of the printing press and growing codification of language. Decisions about what to write down and how to spell gradually meant that a variety of English with its origins in the Middle English of the East Midlands transplanted to London via wool merchants, and given prominence in Chancery and Parliament, displaced other varieties. Where dialect was once normal, moves towards a standard are apparent by the time of George Puttenham, who in 1589 was dispensing advice for wannabe poets in his book *The Art of English Poesie:*

Our maker [poet] therfore at these days shall not take the termes of Northern men, such as they use in daily talke, whether they be noble men or gentlemen, or of their best clarkes all is a matter: nor in effect any speech used beyond the river of Trent, though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so Courtly nor so currant as our Southerne English…

In Puttenham's advice we see several things. First the idea that the gentry DID speak with regional variation, second, the notion that this is not good and Southern gentry's standards should be adopted, and third, the idea that dialect is somehow historically purer and closer to the original Anglo-Saxon varieties. My work has examined the continuance of these ideas, most recently looking back to when we can say the first dialect begins to be written in literature which is for sale. Before children received statutory education free with the advent of the Education Act 1870, many speakers would have acquired partial literacy and would thus have written in a way that reflected their accent and dialect. We see traces of this today in spaces like social media, where 'work' is not 'marked' and people will not pay too much attention to their spellings. Many spelling errors on social media reflect accent and dialect:

"Ah bless him he lucks so tired and sad" (post made on cat rescue website)

"Your lookie we alive" (post made following car collision on local West Midlands site)

"We tuck some flowers to the scene." (remark made on social media following a death)

These sources though, are not easy to find. Ordinary people are rarely approached to donate their writings to archives, and so records of such spellings are very thin on the ground. The case of Colley Lane school in Cradley shows us also that written and spoken dialect are still given short shrift in schools, since Standard English is necessarily the target which classrooms orient to. The

Daily Mail (Levy, 2013) and local news papers reported on and discussed the decision of the headmaster to ban dialect from the classroom and crucially, from the playground. The full list of items banned is itself indicative of the kind of dialect still used by young speakers in the region (though it also contains features of fast spoken English and supralocal informal terms). It was given out to parents and posted on the school website with the explanation that "[r]ecently we have asked each teacher to write a list of the top ten most damaging phrases used by the children in their class." From this, a list of banned words and phrases was generated followed by the suggested alternative:

They was	They were
I cor do that	I can't do that
Ya	You
Gonna	Going to
Woz	Was
I day	I didn't
I ain't	I haven't
Somefink	Something
It wor me	It wasn't me
Ay	Pardon

TABLE 1: BANNED EXPRESSIONS AT COLLEY LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL

What we can do, however, is to examine dialect literature. This is literature written either wholly or partially in dialect (think Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting or Anthony Cartwright's Heartland). This is what I have been doing, and we can see from my research that certain authors do use dialect, that their respellings of the dialect reflect regional dialect difference across the Black Country, and that they also reflect change over time and influences on the dialect from other areas.

Dialect literature is probably more represented now in the Black Country than it ever has been. Since the term Black Country became more widely popularised in the middle of the nineteenth century, pieces by local poets and writers have appeared in local newspapers, while at the same time, chroniclers of the region and interested laypeople began collecting broadside songsheets from wakes and fairs. These were written versions of songs, sometimes written to commemorate the wake (festival day) itself.

The texts I chose to consider span the 1800s-2000s and all count as dialect literature. The first text is a four-line dialogue on voting choices which appeared in the Morning Herald in 1817. The Morning Herald was founded in 1780, and was initially a liberal paper aligned with the Prince of Wales, but later became aligned with the Tories, ceasing publication in 1869. Martin Danvers Heaviside is a pseudonym of Matthew Davenport Hill, the brother of Rowland Hill, inventor of the Penny Post. He was a regular contributor of satirical content to various newspapers and quarterlies. Born in Birmingham, he later became recorder for that city and a criminal law reformer. The content of the excerpt is satirical and refers to an attempt by the Whig Lord Thomas Foley, to run for Parliament in 1816 as MP for Worcestershire, against his father's wishes, against the eventual MP, Henry Beauchamp Lygon (History of Parliament, 2018):

"Dudley Man. "Oi say, surree, hew dust thee vowt for?"

Stourbridge Man. " I caw tell – I've not made up my moind."

Dudley Man.- "Whoysna vowt for ---? Thur best feller ee the wurrld; damned his own feyther at foiv' 'ear ode"!

The second is a song which was first distributed in the 1820s in broadsheet form following the Corn Laws passing into statute, and concerns a riot on the Earl of Dudley's estate where many of his workers

ran through Dudley town centre causing property damage in protest at inflated corn prices. The version I deal with here was transcribed from the singing of a labourer working at the roadside in Dudley in 1880 by W.H. Duignan, and republished by Jon Raven (1965). Duignan it was who wrote it down and decided how to spell the dialect:

Toims they bin moighty queer, Wo boys! Wo!

Toims they bin moighty queer, Wo boys! Wo!

Toims they bin moighty queer, for the fittle is sa very de-ar,

And it's O! The brave Doodley boys! Wo boys! Wo!

We bin a-marchin up and de-own,

Fur to pull the housen de-own.

F.R. Bartlett was a Bilston doctor who lived his whole life in the town and would have been witness to the severe deprivation there and the cholera epidemic of 1832. This third piece concerns the death by freezing of a small boy on his way home from school. The story made headline news and is said to have affected Bartlett so badly that he wrote the verse as a reaction to it. The poem is his only one to be written in dialect in a large self-published volume of verse otherwise in Standard English, which he called *Flashes from Forge and Foundry.*

Well! One day las' Janooary,
Arter trudgin' miles around
Seekin waerk– in' vain as nary
Such a thing sir, c'ud be found,
Tho' fer wicks un wicks tergether
Norra single stroke ah struck

The fourth text, A Capful o' Nails by David Christie Murray is the tale of nailmakers in West Bromwich seeking to escape the truck system whereby they buy raw materials from a ganger or gangmaster and sell the finished nails back to that same gangmaster at a very low and non-negotiable price. Although it was local journalist Christie Murray's first novel, it achieved only limited local success despite having a London publisher. It is dialect literature, being told through the first person narratorial lens of the protagonist's son, watching his father seek to organise industrial action and ultimately die in the process.

'This is a black business' said Mr Brambler, 'and I'm bent at getting at the bottom on it. I suppose you've got some kind of a notion as to whose hand is on it?' … 'may I ask if your ideas pints any-wheer in the direction of Quarrymoor?'

The next source is a verse poem dealing with a cockfight in Bilston (The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act in 1849 made cock-fighting illegal but it remained hugely popular in the Black Country as elsewhere, and there is an area of Wolverhampton called Fighting Cocks). It was written down in the Bilston Almanac in 1923. The Bilston Almanac began in 1872 and was a trade directory mixed with songs, poems and local news which appeared for sale annually, but the song dates from sometime in the 1830s. It uses many dialect features, though both the singer and collector are unknown, so discussing it is problematic.

Yet that Darlas'on cock was a good 'un,
He was red as a sodger's coat.
And the way he went at the other,
Made the Bils'on men change their note.

For he pecked like a miner a-holin',
And struck clean and straight with his spurs,
"By Christ" said 'Old Bull's Head' "he's a true un,
And let him say he binna, wot dares."

But the Bils'on cock warn't yet beaten
He was steel to the very backbone
And with a blow on the head, his opponent
On the turf he dropped dead as a stone.

The last text, Summer's End by Archie Hill was written as a 'coming of age' novel

about a boy of 13 after the Great Depression of the 1930s, contemplating his future in a declining Black Country. He is drawn to life as a bargeman, and spends some time working as a glassblower, but decides to return to school to finish his education on the advice of his friend Gyp, a war veteran and anarchist who spends time in and out of jail and tries to convince the young protagonist that work in the Black Country will no longer be easy to find, and that formal education might offer an escape route. Although the concentration of dialect features rises in first person dialogue, the narrator's own voice is non-standard throughout, and it is not possible to say that the novel is purely literary dialect. Archie Hill grew up a dialect speaker in the home, and we must think about what that means for our use of the standard across our lives.

The items of grammar examined in these texts had been judged Black Country from the time of my doctoral research in the area and I show them in the table below:

Variable	Forms	Remarks and examples
Continuous aspect marker	<a> + ing form	Derives from OE <ōn> prefix a-running down the road
Perfective aspect marker	<a> + ed form	Derives from OE <ge> prefix had have a-done
Verbal present tense suffix	<n> ~ <en>	Derives from ME subjunctive [ən] (Wakelin 1972) Cows they treaden in the muck
Negative verb DO	Forms with ablaut Forms with more standard negative clitic Forms with [nə]	Ablaut mutation seems newer than more standard clitic AND [nə] forms also known in Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire (Britton). Clitic [nə] forms I conna go to town today He dunna do nothing She wunna help you] We shanna go Ablaut mutation I day see nothing I cor see the point He doh like it She wo help you We share goo
Negative verb BE	Forms with ablaut Forms with more standard negative clitic Forms with [nə]	
Negative verb HAVE	Forms with ablaut Forms with more standard negative clitic Forms with [nə]	
Negative verb SHALL	Forms with ablaut Forms with more standard negative clitic Forms with [nə]	
Negative verb CAN	Forms with ablaut Forms with more standard negative clitic Forms with [nə]	
Adjectival marker	<n> ~ <en>	'boughten cake' = shop bought cake, 'erden gown' = hessian gown
Noun plural marker	<n> ~ <en>	'flen' fleas
Third person female singular subject pronoun	[ɜˤ]	Derives from OE <hēo> 'er's a lovely girl

TABLE 2: MORPHOLOGICAL VARIANTS

In all cases, the chosen written sources were consulted for the presence or absence of these features and the distribution noted. If the text does not discuss women for example, we can expect not to find <she> or <her> but that does not mean those structures are not in use in the region. Any alternative possibilities for the variants were also gathered. The results are given and discussed in the next section:

	1817	1880	1886	1896	1923	1976
Continuous aspect marker		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Perfective aspect marker			YES	NO	NO	NO
Verbal present tense suffix		YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Neg DO			Dunna			doe, dinna, doesn't/don't
Neg BE			Binna	ain't, isn't	binna	bay
Neg HAVE			anna	ain't		ah, ain't, air't
Neg SHALL			shanna	shan't		s'll not
Neg CAN	caw					cor't, can't
Adjectival marker			YES	YES		YES
Noun plural marker		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Third person subject female pronoun		YES	YES	YES	NO	YES

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF MORPHOLOGICAL VARIANTS ACROSS LITERATURE

On the face of it, these divide into categories such as time and region. The Black Country dialect has changed over time. The variants that are captured in literature, however, make tracking such changes problematic. The only variant which appears to have fallen out of use in this sample is the perfective marker <a> which derives from OE <ge->. It is no longer found in the last piece of writing.

The other variants are all found in the sample and many appear to do so consistently regardless of WHEN the text was written. We must remember though that the presence of variants in such texts is no guarantee that they are in common use in the speech community at that time. We can say that the variants used were known to the writers of the time and are very possibly intended to represent speech in the region at that time.

All of the authors are familiar with the dialect they portray; Hill returned to the family home at Kidderminster after coming down from university and Bartlett returned to live and work in Bilston for the rest of his life. It seems unlikely that they had no contact with speakers of the dialect at all – indeed their professions and domestic life could hardly have precluded contact with some speakers of the dialect. Although Archie Hall left the Black Country to study, his severe depression coupled with his homesickness meant that he later returned to it, and indeed has spoken at length about his relationship with the dialect in a BBC documentary which he filmed in 1974, titled Archie Comes Home. Similarly, David Christie Murray, although he went into the Army at 18 and later became a journalist, reporting all over Europe, spent his formative years until 18 in West Bromwich, and indeed much of his journalism career working on local papers like the *Wednesbury Advertiser* and the *Birmingham Morning News*.

These authors then, were professionals who nevertheless had more contact with their home region than many who are educated out of their first variety. It is not possible to say who composed the first versions of The Brave Dudley Boys, or indeed The Battle of Bilston, but since one concerns local farmers and the other cockfights, it is unlikely that the composers moved in high social circles at all times. In their form therefore and their composition as poem and song, these pieces differ from the literature in terms of the speakers who composed them.

It is likely that the prose pieces were composed by those whose variety at work was closer to the standard, and that the song was sung and the poem read and recited by those whose first variety was Black Country.

The small sample of older Black Country texts does give us evidence of which features were in use and which are now known to be representative of the region. Even in 1817 the Black Country negative forms of the verb are present in Heaviside's parody text.

The change between the more recognisable negation of warn't in the cockfighting poem 'The Battle of Bilston' (which is still used in the area today and exists on a cline with warn't, war, and wor and the older 'wunna' is clear, but from such scant evidence it is hard to say what it can tell us about age or spatial distribution.

Bartlett's 'Collier's Story' is a rich source of data, revealing the consistency of the [nə] negative marker, the existence of a-prefixing with the continuous and perfective aspects, and the use of third person subject female [3:]:

Well! One day las' Janooary,
Arter trudgin' miles around
Seekin waerk- in' vain as nary
Such a thing sir, c'ud be found,
Tho' fer wicks un wicks tergether
Norra single stroke ah struck
Till ah 'gan a-thinkin w'ether
Fate w'ud ever turn me luck
An ah thus a'bin a'playing orrl the time, right up ter now-
Burras ah were jes' a-sayin
It soo 'appened sir, as 'ow
On that day last Janooary
Ah'd returned wum, tired quite
W'en our little wench there Mary,
W'ot is lookin' thin un w'ite,
Cum a-runnin in a-cryin

Bob's bin sent back from the Schule,

An' ee conna walk – ee's lyin'

On the path be th'owd pit pule.

More useful as a source is Christie Murray, whose novel gives us the nailers and those who finance the nail trade; the merchants. Both groups speak non-standard English, but the merchants live luxurious existences, attending local political events, living in large houses with servants and carriages, and taking up musical instruments for pleasure. One such character is Mr Brambler, a kind and upright merchant who seeks to support the protagonist's father in challenging the corrupt pricing system. His language is more standard than that of Mr Sim the ganger whom Mr Brambler challenges:

'This is a black business' said Mr Brambler, 'and I'm bent at getting at the bottom on it. I suppose you've got some kind of a notion as to whose hand is on it? […] 'may I ask if your ideas pints anywheer in the direction of Quarrymoor?'

Mr Brambler uses non-standard on for 'of', has two clear instances of Black Country phonology in the words 'anywheer' and 'points' and uses third person plural verbal [s] in pints. In this he is very different from Mr Sim the ganger, who is only ever represented as using Black Country morphology, and even from the protagonist's morally upright, self taught father, who although lower in social class aspires to a better life for his children and fellow workers. The narrator is clear that his father can style shift, and indeed we see this when he starts to talk to workers and suggests a strike:

"We'em goin' to get up a bit of a strike.' Father always spoke with a broader accent to men of his own class that he used in talking to educated people like the doctor, or the parson, or the district visitors, who were the only decent people who came our way.

We'em goin' to get up a bit of a strike,' he said.

'Bin you?' said old Blowhard, swinging round to his little anvil, and raining a shower of tinkling blows on the hot iron. 'Then yo' can count me out on it.'

'I mek bold to say,' said my father, 'as theer's no white men i'the world at this minute as is trod down like we be.'

'Trew for thee, ode lad,' said Blowhard, wheezing away over his anvil. 'But I'm none for helpin' the thieves to rob us. I'd as lief goo an' play as anybody, but wheer's the grub to come from? I remember the last strike thirty 'ear ago. We'd been at play seven wiks, an'[…]I'd ha' gi'en all my right o' man for a bit o' tommy.' (1896:18)

We see here use of verb levelling by the protagonist's father to , use of we for object pronoun second person plural, as well as Black Country relativiser as for who. This shift is typical of the narrator's father throughout the novel, and Blowhard's speech typifies all other working men. A more nuanced source is the multivoiced novel Summer's End which does reveal more about age related variation, as well as much about class variation. The protagonist gets four weeks work as assistant in a glass blowing cone one summer and befriends the glassblower he is there to assist:

'Do we make good glass round here?' I asked. 'Is it well thought on?'

'The best in the world', he answered, 'bar none. Stourbridge cut glass - Black Country table glass. There comes no better.'

I was pleased.

'Ah'm glad o' that,' I said sincerely, 'ah really am glad.'

A smile broke his stern face up and made him look years younger.

'Ah'm pleased that yo'm glad, young 'un,'

he answered, 'that's the nicest thing ah've heard said in a long time. Yo' listen to me, - come into glass when you leaves school. Thing's will have picked up[…]come here wi' me and Is'll teach you all that I know. My word's on it.' He took a sandwich from his fittle bag and bit on it. 'Hasn't got any snap with thee?' he asked surprised, 'no fittle to chew on?' He dug into his fittle bag, pulled out a couple of thick wedge sandwiches and handed them to me. 'Get this down thee', he ordered. 'There's enough here for the two on us.' (1978:72).

This passage shows not only the young narrator's ability to style shift, but older features of speech. The glassblower uses thee forms, second person [s] verb endings in the present tense and the older verb paradigm of have [hasnt] before thee. In my doctoral work I found all these forms used in the speech of the oldest speakers I interviewed in the Southern Black Country.

Dialect features in literature

Literature, then, can show us which features point to one region over another, to a sub group of speakers, a gender or a class. It cannot tell us accurately what speakers were actually using at the time the pieces were written, nor what speakers not represented in the literature were doing. If, for example, a woman does not appear in the piece of writing we are examining, it can be no surprise if female pronouns are not present in the text. Similarly, if a variant is not present, we are unwise to claim that it has fallen from use. Prose written in the past tense, for example, may not generate as many perfective forms as prose that refers to events further back in time or completed. Songs may preserve features for metrical reasons.

All pieces contain the female object pronoun [ə:~ ə], and indeed this is still in widespread use among speakers today.

Unusually though, it seems to be little involved in processes of enregisterment, which is where a variant becomes noticed, discussed and reproduced within and beyond a speech community (think 'geezer' for Cockney dialect, for example). It was recognised by speakers in my 2007 research to be local, judged by many to be overtly stigmatised and local, but is not employed by the new wave of merchandise seeking to sell dialect as a marketing strategy. The reasons for this are unclear at this stage since the Black Country is one of the few areas preserving the form, the others being Stoke on Trent (Leach 2018) and Shropshire (Hubbard 1960).

The Black Country contains folk songs which were written after humorous or noted events at wakes, fairs, bull baitings, cock fights and wife sales (events at which men discontent with their wives would exhibit them in public as a form of disgrace, and often illegally sell them to another man). It also contains songs written for political reasons. It would be prudent to trace different versions of the songs and chart their changing structures and lyrics. By the time of its 1880 rendition The Brave Dudley Boys was a protest song in general terms and no longer an anti-Corn Law song.

In other words, folk songs, learned as they often were 'from the singing' of another, were not always subject to rigid standardisation and might be more representative of the time they are sung and observed in by song collectors than one imagines. Comparing Raven's 1880 version with the 1967 version collected by Charles Parker confirms this – the [n] verbal ending is gone by 1967.

The Black Country was, as I discussed in my introduction, slower to emerge as a recognised area than some other areas of the country during industrialisation such as Tyneside. The variety is thus slower to be recognised and labelled (this being a step toward

enregisterment) and indexical patterns in dialect literature are harder to remark on until later in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century (see Clark 2013 for evidence of emergent enregisterment after 1970). Indexicalisation (the way speakers see a variant as pointing to social information like class or region) changes over time, and dialect writing is a rich though complex source to attest to this. We only have to look at 'g' dropping to see that it exists in upper class speech (huntin', shootin', fishin' stereotypes) but is more likely to be interpreted as a marker of lower class status today. The set of indices associated with the form is changing. We can use dialect writing in the quest to understand which features symbolise the Black Country at a given moment, but caution must be used when doing so, for all the reasons this article has outlined. Similarly, commodification of the variety occurs now at grassroots level, some of it driven by locals keen to see their variety receive recognition for its difference and vibrancy, some by institutions keen to sell merchandise which chimes with the interests of the speech community. This process also can inform us, but the features which are picked to do this work are by no means the historically most 'Black Country' features, as my analysis has shown.

No Jumbo fee for Johnny

By Graham Gough

Dudley Zoo is 85 years old this year and its opening in 1937 was said by many at the time to be one of the most important events in the town's history.

As an award winning photographer I've covered many stories over the years at the zoo, including one little-known tale of a generous act by TV star Johnny Morris. Johnny was the star of the hugely popular BBC TV children's show Animal Magic which ran from 1962 to 1983. It applied jovial voiceovers to footage of various animals, some of these amusing sequences were filmed at the zoo.

In 1978 Dudley Zoo was in financial difficulty and was taken over by a charity fund. On hearing this Johnny Morris offered his services free of charge to make a TV commercial to promote the attraction. During the filming he had to ride Tanya the elephant through the archway into the castle courtyard but, as you can see from the picture, he had difficulty getting on her back. With a little help from the zoo staff, however, he managed to complete the filming without any more mishaps!

JOHNNY MORRIS AND TANYA THE ELEPHANT, PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM GOUGH

Creating canal communities in the Black Country

By Jennie Howland

There are over two thousand miles of canals in this country many of which run through the Black Country. The canals have a long history associated with the industrial development of the area. The boats transported the raw materials needed by the factories and foundries and the finished goods to the rest of the country. Today the canals are mostly used for leisure boats. There is also a large community of boaters who both live and work on the canal system. There are, of course, places around that celebrate the history of the canals, the Black Country Living Museum being one example. There are also smaller projects that are attempting to keep this wonderful resource on our door-steps alive and thriving. Here is how one group of boaters began to develop a boating and community asset just outside Wolverhampton.

Urban Moorings CIC – the beginning.

The idea of our urban moorings came about in 2016 when myself, Alison Tuck, Louise Moore, and Paul Howland (my late husband and one of the original directors) were having coffee and discussing the mooring availability within the Black Country. The idea of a boater led community mooring came up. The general agreement was that none of us particularly liked the moorings available and as there were many smallish areas of land around the canal system that would make good community moorings, we would build our own.

Boaters are very resourceful people. They are required to generate their own power, take care of their own waste disposal, collect their own water and be self-reliant when dealing with problems as they arise. Getting mail delivered or general deliveries can be problematic.

It's difficult to be able to register to vote as even though most people who live and work on/from their boats own their boats, they are still at present considered to be homeless.

Doing internal alterations or external maintenance on a boat on the towpath is difficult. These things develop a skill set amongst boaters that the team wanted to share with the land-based community as well as providing the services that other boaters may find helpful.

Currently with more and more people living in accommodation with very limited space and no garden, many folk living on land experience similar problems and may sometimes feel isolated from the community in general.

Boaters are also very good at recycling, reusing, and repurposing "stuff". Recycling, reusing and repurposing are amongst the central tenants of the Urban Moorings ethos. Again, it is hoped that others may learn from our experience and example.

The team wanted to create a space where boaters and the land-based community could share ideas and skills, dispelling some of the misconceptions and distrust that has built up between the two communities.

FIG 1. EARLY DAYS AT THE URBAN MOORINGS

A self-sustaining project.

Many projects risk failure if they are completely grant funded. If the grant money runs out, the project often folds. Being a community interest company (CIC), Urban Moorings generates a core income from the moorings, coal, gas and diesel sales, fund raising events and donations. We are licensed by HMRC to sell diesel and have all the proper equipment to do so. As a CIC, Urban Moorings can also apply for grants to help individual projects within the main project, but the idea is that we will not be reliant on them.

A business proposal was drafted and presented to Canal and River Trust and after lots of meetings, discussions and initial disappointments, a scrap of unused, derelict land with some access problems was found. Most would have probably just seen an odd bit of inaccessible, derelict, industrial waste-land but four pairs of eyes saw the potential.

Urban Moorings is situated in Wolverhampton on the Wyrley and Essington canal a few hundred meters from its junction with the Birmingham New Main Line. By road it's off the A454 (the Willenhall Road), just before it reaches the ring roads around the town centre. The West Coast Main Line Railway passes by us and we are next to the main railway holding area for trains coming into and leaving Wolverhampton. There is a low railway bridge at the road entrance and the old underground railway tunnel runs underneath the site.

At first the agreement was with Canal and River Trust to use their piece of land for moorings. This was followed by a series of meetings with Wolverhampton City Council who owned the adjoining piece of land which had an old, derelict boat house on it. Again, four pairs of eyes could see the potential in this space for use by boaters and the community at large. We also discovered a large building we now call the garage and an original canal Toll House that were completely concealed by buddleia. These spaces have all been incorporated into the

business plan for restoration in the future. Happily, both the Council and Canal and River Trust could also see the potential and had confidence in the team to get things done.

The current Urban Moorings team

The team is made up of a group of people who live on boats and have cruised our amazing canal system for many years.

The directors of Urban Moorings CIC are Alison who is a design engineer, Louise, Alison's partner, who owns and runs a high-end bespoke artists canvas manufacturing business, and Ronni Payne who is an independent trader specialising in alternative clothing.

Myself, Yogi (Ronni`s other half), John and Rita Tuck along with Chris Munton and Kat Klaws make up the rest of the team. Each have their own skill sets and life experiences that they bring to the project.

There are also 3 dogs and 2 cats that make up the full compliment.

The first day

Two boats and one butty (unpowered boat) left Birmingham at about 9am on a cool day in the last week of October 2016 to begin a great adventure. They arrived in Wolverhampton late afternoon.

To say the site they had come to was a mess would be an understatement. A forest of Buddleia, with stems as large as tree trunks covered the place along with countless years of built-up rubbish from fly tipping, the remains of the burnt-out building that once stood there and a long ramshackle, derelict asbestos covered shed.

On the day of our arrival, we had to literally hack our way in. Our boat was moored on the main canal, but due to the erosion of the bank edge, it was several feet away from the land and a gang plank was needed.

The other two boats, belonging to Alison and Louise, were going to moor down the canal arm that runs up to the boat house, but had to moor against our boat

FIG 2. PROGRESS BEING MADE ON SITE

as they could not get in until a large super-market delivery trolley, car seat and lots of other rubbish that had been dumped in the water were removed. There was also a sunken boat in the canal arm but that was passable. Good use was made of ropes, a winch attached to one of the sturdy trees on site and loads of man and woman power ensued to get it all out. It was hard, dirty work. Steps also had to be dug out and made safe, so that Louise and Alison could get on and off their boats. It was a long, tiring but very exciting day. The first of many exciting and rewarding days at Urban Moorings CIC.

Progress and plans

Since that first day the site has been transformed. The spot where the first boat moored has been cleared and the concrete pad discovered now provides the base for two sheds. A walkway that follows the original line of the canal bank has been constructed after submitting a detailed works proposal and gaining permission from Canal and River Trust. Stout English Alder stakes have been used and all the construction was completed by hand. Rubble from site was used to backfill the eroded area, coir matting placed on top with soil and compost on top of that and now we are creating a meadow like area, which is all good for the ecology of the place.

Many of the concrete beams (there used to be a concrete manufacturing business here run by a Mr. Perry) have been used for shoring up where needed and creating flower beds.

The sunken boat has been raised and so much rubbish has been cleared, including lengths of heras fencing, old chairs and big chunks of foam which were cut to size and used as a weed suppressant layer in the base of some flower beds. It never ceases to surprise us the things that get thrown into the canal, even old road signs that now make a decorative feature in the garden.

We had many neglected trees on site, birch, rowan, willow, cherry and one that we are still not sure of in terms of what it is. We employed some local arborists to come and make the trees safe, raise the canopy and pollard the willows. Raising the tree canopy has allowed the light in and encouraged the growth of wild grasses and plants, assisting the local ecology.

The arborists came back later and cleared many of the dangerous and dead trees from the off side of the canal arm. Chris and Kat are doing a sterling job of turning that rubbish filled piece of land into pleasant moorings.

We have numerous bug and bee `hotels` around the site, and this year we have noticed a significant increase in bee numbers.

With the help of Wolverhampton Council, the asbestos covered shed and approximately 65 tons of assorted rubbish has been removed from site.

Planning permission has been gained for the erecting of several wooden sheds. Three large sheds, the Urban Moorings office and laundry room in one, DV Designs Studio in another and a community space for meetings, events and activities incorporating a small kitchen area in the third which is still an ongoing project.

The Hippie Shed (which is where Ronni trades from when not working at festivals) is also on site, along with the woodworking shed, greenhouse and several small sheds to be used as storage or as the community wants.

Raised beds have been constructed from the old beams taken down when the ramshackle shed (affectionately known as `the shed of doom') was dismantled. Recycling and composting bins have been constructed from the same materials.

Paths have been laid from bricks dug up on site and edged with stones and cobbles found in the 'shed of doom'.

A coal store constructed from old pontoons and recycled wood is serving us well.

Trenches have been dug and electricity and water installed.

We aim to provide access for people of all abilities, ages, genders, cultures, races and faiths. Our only requirement is that all prejudices are left at the gate.

Several of the boats moored here have dry (composting) toilet systems. We have shown that dealing with such waste is not rocket science and can be successfully achieved with little space and effort. The resulting compost from our bins has helped enrich the soil so that now where nothing would grow, we have grass and loads of wild and cultivated flowers and plants growing. Such has been our success that Canal and River Trust amongst others have taken a report written on our achievement and are using it as a guide for others to follow.

We have separate bins for food and garden waste which is then used on the raised food beds. Everything we use in the garden is organic. Even the tons of soil we have had to import has come from certified organic distributers. We make much of our own plant food and use homemade bug deterrents and weed inhibitors. Hopefully, we will be certified as an organic garden by the Soil Association in the future.

We have held two successful Open Days and several volunteering days despite having to close due to Covid. Coffee and Colouring for Grownups was well received. And we held a consultation with the local community to see what they would like Urban Moorings to provide.

Working with the consultation in mind, future plans include a community run café, secure sensory garden with public BBQ area, history and nature walks and various workshops such as creative writing, and art classes, as well as men and women only activities which have yet to be determined.

A community run trip boat has been suggested and well received by the Urban Moorings team.

Three members of the team are under taking 'walk leader' training with Sustrans UK with whom we've developed a good working relationship.

And we're currently in negotiations with Wolverhampton Council as how best to proceed with the restoration and bringing into use of the boat and toll houses, both of which date back to the 1800's.

Urban Moorings has come a long way since that cool day in the last week of October 2016. But there is still a long way to go.

To discover more about the Urban Moorings CIC and their progress you can find them on Facebook.
wwwfacebook.co.uk/urbanmoorings

The Black Country Society wishes to express its admiration and support for all NHS, Carer and Keyworkers in the Midlands, throughout the UK & further afield. We shall all be forever in your debt as individuals and as Nations.

Coalman on the cut - Part one: Working the Wolverhampton "21"

By John Jackson

The twenty-one locks that conduct the Birmingham Canal downhill from Broad Street in Wolverhampton to join with the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal at Aldersley were a feature of our working life for twenty-five years.

This work was the delivering of solid fuels using our nineteen-thirties built narrow boat "Roach." Initially based in the boatyard of Les Allen and Sons at Valencia Wharf, Oldbury, we eventually moved down to Awbridge on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal where a little more space was available for our activities. We delivered coal (and various smokeless fuels) to customers along the waterways, mostly canal-side properties in the early days, but to more and more boats as the live-aboard population expanded.

ROACH HEADING FOR OXLEY VIADUCT

Over the years, we have both ascended and descended the twenty-one locks at Wolverhampton countless times. Being originally based in Oldbury, our first encounter with these locks on a loaded boat was going down-hill, whereas after the move to Awbridge, travelling up-hill loaded was the order of the day. Traversing these locks in an empty boat was never too difficult, but it could be quite a challenge to pass through with a loaded vessel. All the obvious problems have been encountered over the years; supermarket trollies, push-bikes and other assorted objects mainly from road-works deposited in the lock chambers being the most common, but low or even dry pounds between locks was not an uncommon occurrence. Low water was easy if time consuming to deal with, water could simply be run down the locks from the top level. Removing an obstruction from a lock chamber could be much more challenging; usually the first indication of such an object hidden under the water when going up-hill was the sudden stop as "Roach" collided with it. The first thing was to reverse "Roach" off the offending item, and then attempt to snag whatever it was with the hook on the end of a boat shaft. The trolley, or whatever, would then be loaded onto the fore-end and another attempt would be made to enter the lock. Obstructions encountered when going down-hill would either be crushed by the combined weight of the boat and coal, or, on occasion, prevent the boat from fully descending. If the bottom gate could be opened, then a flush of water from the top

end paddles could be employed to try and float "Roach" over the obstruction on a sudden wave of water. Generally, this technique worked — usually after a few flushes had each moved "Roach" a little further along until the offending object was passed over. There have been a few occasions where the lock has had to be refilled and "Roach" reversed out of the lock before having a fish around with a long shaft or even a grappling hook.

I make it sound like the passage through the "21" was a nightmare, but this was not the case. Generally, Wolverhampton Locks have been a pleasure to work through. They are interesting too. There are lots of historic details and artefacts to be discovered, from the grooves cut into the lock-side brickwork by the tow-ropes of the old horse drawn boats, to the various sites of old wharves and basins. The gradual escape from urban waterway to rural surroundings as a passage down the flight is undertaken is also striking.

Sometimes, in the course of our business, we needed extra carrying capacity. This was usually achieved by hiring another narrow boat complete with owner/steerer to accompany us; we had a pool of friends and acquaintances who were willing (and able) to help in this regard. Most had motor-boats similar to "Roach," but we occasionally used a butty boat. A butty boat is unpowered, being either an ex horse-boat or a vessel specifically designed to be towed by a powered narrow boat. As we were by now firmly established at Awbridge, all the loaded boating through the Wolverhampton Locks was up-hill. Two motor boats could ascend the locks independently, but a motor boat and butty was a different matter.

Once upon a time, horses were stabled at both the top and the bottom of the '21' and available for hire to pull a butty boat through the locks. Stables and horses are long gone. There are now basically two techniques available for getting a pair of these boats through the locks.

AT THE TOP OF THE WOLVERHAMPTON 21

ROACH 1930S BUILT NARROW BOAT

The first is that the motor boat is taken up independently and the butty "bow-hauled" up behind. "Bow-hauled" is exactly as it sounds — the butty boat is pulled along by hand from the towing-path using a long rope. This is extremely hard work with a loaded boat. The other method is to "long-line," or "lock-line" as it is sometimes referred to. This method is not difficult, but requires all crew members to be alert as both boats ascend consecutive locks simultaneously whilst joined together by a sufficiently long tow-rope. Clearly, both boats have to move in unison, and the crews have to ensure that each lock is ready in time. This was a method that I had heard about, but had never used until we were behind schedule one evening and in danger of missing an appointment with some beer in the "Great Western" at the top of the flight. I was quite surprised how efficient this technique was once we had overcome the inevitable teething problems such as routing the rope away from the joint in the gates to avoid it catching and bringing the entire proceedings to an abrupt halt.

One of the enjoyable aspects of taking a working boat through these locks was the chance of an encounter with one of the few old boat-men who strolled the towing path on occasion. I knew some of them and would always make time for a chat (and inevitably learn something new), but I would be pleasantly surprised when a stranger stopped to talk and would just drop out the odd comment such as: "I 'ent sin anyone lock-linin' for fifty years. Nice ter see." Clearly an old boatie then.

The other enjoyable aspect of working up the "21" was, as previously referred to, the "Great Western" public house on Sun Street near the top of the locks. It was not very often that we did not stop for refreshments there; our excuse being that there were no other suitable places to stop until Tipton was reached, and those pub may be closed by the time we got there.

To find out more about John Jackson go to https://coalboat.co.uk/

'Business a good deal more than usual' The First World War in Francis Brett Young's Black Country

Part two: Outbreak and industry

By Jack Price

Between mid-1914 and late 1918, the whole world experienced a series of events which are almost the historical equivalent of Neil Diamond's 'Sweet Caroline': we can all recall the general gist of what happened, everybody knows the key moments, and they hold a central place in the national psyche of populations around the globe. But, all light comparisons aside, the crucial chain reaction of events that started with Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination and closed with the Armistice proved to be one of the most monumental watersheds in history, and that fact alone cannot be understated. It is no wonder, then, that the events we now know as the First World War came to play a dominant role in British culture during the war years and certainly post-1918, a dominant role it certainly plays in the novels of Francis Brett Young.

Brett Young's considerable body of work – novels, poetry, and plays – covers the entirety of Britain's history. His 1944 epic poem The Island demonstrates his widest historical sweep: it begins with the geological formation of the British Isles and runs straight through to the Battle of Britain; along the way, it introduces the reader to several eminent historical characters, including an Iguanodon, William Langland, Oliver Cromwell, Matthew Boulton and James Watt, Admiral Nelson, George Eliot, Alfred Tennyson, and David Livingstone. As discussed in the first instalment of this article series, too, Brett Young's 1935 novel White Ladies recounts the fortunes of one Black Country industrial dynasty from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the years succeeding the Great War. By and large, however, his novels are unlike Cynthia Harrod-Eagles's Morland Dynasty series: where Harrod-Eagles's constituent books take one particular period or temporal issue as their setting, with the family's history providing the overarching thread, Brett Young's novels are not as explicitly linked. Each book stands as a story on its own, and can be understood if it is the only Brett Young work one ever reads. But they do share links, with characters from one novel cropping up later on down the line in another – for example, Edwin Ingleby, the protagonist of The Young Physician (1919), turns up as a military doctor on Salisbury Plain in Portrait of Clare (1927).

Brett Young's novels are also, as mentioned in my last article, primarily set between the years 1890 and 1920. This period of British history was no stranger to important historical moments: the Diamond Jubilee and death of Queen Victoria; the suffrage movement; the political dominance of Joseph Chamberlain then David Lloyd George; the appearance

and reappearance of Sherlock Holmes; the sinking of RMS Titanic; and a whole host of other pivotal events that contributed to the development and formation of what we now refer to as "modern Britain", its national image, and culture. But those thirty years are chiefly remembered as the period in which a major competition was waged between the Allies, chiefly comprising the British Empire, the French Empire, Tsarist Russia (until 1917), and the United States of America (from 1917), and the Central Powers, primarily the Second German Reich, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria (from 1915). This Great War is considered to have been a "total war", in which the very survival of each belligerent nation is considered at risk (and is certainly portrayed in this way). As such, each participant must direct a vast amount of its resources – industrial, political, economic, military, and civilian – towards the war effort in a bid to ensure their survival. Though the Great War was not without its precedents in terms of totality (particularly the Napoleonic Wars and, above all, the American Civil War), it set a new watermark – one that was only raised by the Second World War that followed.

This new level of totality meant conflict was felt by those on the home front more strongly than ever before: the Industrial Revolution had given Britain the capacity to produce the tools of war on a scale never experienced before; more and more people were drafted in to perform war work or serve in the armed forces; the government and the state exacted ever-increasing control over everyday life; and civilians themselves became "legitimate" targets due to their important role in the war effort, and as technological developments allowed the enemy to reach them.

In Brett Young's Midland novels, the home front takes centre stage while the theatres of conflict themselves (primarily the Western Front but also the Mediterranean and also, thanks to the author's own wartime service, German East Africa) appear less frequently, although playing, of course, a crucial role in the plots. With the Black Country being one of Brett Young's key settings, it comes as no surprise that we, as readers, see the wartime trials and tribulations the region and its inhabitants encounter in a number of his novels. In this instalment, I'll discuss the first two of four "vignettes" that I believe best exemplify the experience of Brett Young's Black Country during the First World War.

Outbreak: Deus ex machina

'The shot heard round the world' was a phrase first used in 1837 by American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, in reference to the opening shot of the Battles of Lexington and Concord (19 April, 1775), the first engagement of the American Revolutionary War. Ever since, however, the phrase has gained wider currency by its use to describe the event that sparked the outbreak of the First World War. On 28 June, 1914, Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophia, in a Sarajevo side street that the Archduke's vehicle had wrongly turned into. What followed became known as the 'July Crisis' – an immense diplomatic back-and-forth between the major European powers as the Austro-Hungarian Empire worked out whether or not it would declare war against Serbia. On 23 July, Austria delivered an ultimatum containing ten demands to Serbia: the latter accepted all but one of the conditions, but the former deemed this tantamount to a rejection of the demands. Within no time, the continental powers were mobilising their armies in anticipation of certain war.

Great Britain, involved in the diplomatic tango from the start, had her entry into the war sealed by her insistence on maintaining

Belgian neutrality. Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith sent notes to both France and Germany, requesting those powers abided by this. But Germany, having had passage through Belgium refused and, insistent upon winning a general European war rapidly, invaded Belgium on 4 August. Citing the 1839 Treaty of London, under which several European powers agreed to guarantee Belgian independence and neutrality, King Albert I of Belgium asked Britain for assistance. Britain sent an ultimatum to Germany, requesting that the latter withdraw from Belgium: midnight passed and no response was received, and, thus, the British Empire found herself at war with the Second German Reich.

Neither the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand nor the immediate lead up to the First World War feature heavily in Brett Young's novels. Perhaps the backwards and forwards of diplomacy just was not interesting enough; alongside that, though, Brett Young is aiming to show the reader the Midlands's experience of war and he focuses on how the war impacts the everyday lives of the region's people, rather than how the politicians of Whitehall reacted to and dealt with the chain of events following 28 June, 1914. It makes sense, therefore, that his representation of the First World War's outbreak really hones in on the very moment that Britain declares war on Germany – because it is this that actually means something momentous for the Black Country.

During the early summer of 1914, Jonathan Dakers, the titular protagonist of My Brother Jonathan (1928), travels to his family home Chadshill, located in the shadow of the Clents. On his journey back to Wednesford, he has a rather odd experience:

"At midnight, when he had left the Fatherless Bairn ridge behind him, he heard, above the rattling explosions of his exhaust, another sound, familiar enough, yet, at this moment, out of place. It was the tragic minor triad of the Wolverbury siren, echoing under the night like the bugles of an army in retreat. Behind him another great voice shook the air. It was the deep-toned "bull" of the Great Mawne Furnaces. Swiftly, as though some sudden alarm had roused a forest full of sleeping monsters, the syrens of Dulston, of Sedgebury, of Wednesford, opened their throats. That ultimatum! Was it possible that this war, of which he had been too busy to think – this war with Germany, about which old Hammond had been growling over his Daily Mail, had actually come at last?"

So the possibility of Britain going to war with Germany had crossed Jonathan's mind, and had certainly preoccupied the imagination of John Hammond, into whose practice John had bought. But it was easily forgettable to the provincial doctor, too busy to think about anything, usually, other than the case at hand. Now a haunting sound reminds Jonathan of the diplomatic events that had gripped Europe as a whole army of the Black Country's factories sound their bulls in the dead of night. But why did Britain's declaration of war invite such a weird response from the Black Country's industrialists?

The answer can be found in the wonderful ending of The Iron Age. In the first instance, we hear the moaning of the Black Country's banshees:

"At first it was low, and half muffled, but as it swelled and to it were added the waves of sound which rolled back from the slopes of Timbertree and Mawne Bank, it filled the whole night with tremendous howling. It was the voice of Mawne, the great bull of the works, which in the morning calls the men from sleep to labour; but now it was calling in the dead of night, and never ceased. In a little while other voices joined in, that of the Hingston Steel works at Wednesford, and the great furnaces whose ceaseless fires

lit up the mournful valley of the Stour. Under the pitchy sky of the Black Country, these insensate monsters called to one another, as though they were indeed alive as well as monstrous, and knew that the day of triumph or of death had fallen on the iron age and all its creatures [.]"

The Mawne works are owned by Walter Willis, who, like Josiah Tinsley before him, had cyclically benefited from the industrial requirements of war and suffered from decreased demand in peace-time. By 1914, his works had been dithering for some years. In a desperate attempt to get some money pumped into the business, he had hoped to win a contract to produce a new material, "Titan metal", but his hopes dry up in the heat of a lumbering Iron Age that seems certain to end in a matter of moments. But it is at the very last moment, on 4 August, 1914, that Willis's works are miraculously saved:

"Down at Mawne, Mr. Willis, who had answered the telephone in his dressing-gown, had sent on the tidings of war from London to the works, asking the engineer on duty to sound the great bull. At his elbow stood Mrs. Willis, who was afraid that he would catch cold standing on the flagged floor without his slippers. To her protests he only answered: 'We've declared war on Germany. You may thank God for that […]'

He fetched a bottle of champagne from the dining-room cupboard […] 'That's Hingston's,' he said; and 'There goes the Wolverbury Tube Works.' Standing there in his dressing-gown he sipped his wine, and was intensely thankful."

An incredible reaction, to say the least. The war is bound to be destructive and deadly – the wars of the nineteenth century had proven that. But Willis, and his fellow industrialists, all welcome it gladly. Bravely, Willis even risks catching a cold to get in on that momentous event, and is so pleased by its arrival that he cracks the champagne in the very dead of night. Why? Because war means money – and this, to a concern that had been stumbling on the tide of industrial depression since the Second Anglo-Boer War, was welcome news worth celebrating for the Black Country's greedy industrial capitalists.

This sickening celebration is also made clear in one comment made by the driver Bissell to Clare as the war shakes up the plot of Portrait of Clare. Asked as to why the bulls of the Black Country were ringing out at night, he replies "'I don't rightly know, ma'am […] but Waldron and me think it's likely this war that's in the papers has broken out […] Waldron, he says, they acted like this on Mafeking night'". During the South African War, the town of Mafeking was besieged by Boer forces for 217 days until 17 May, 1900, when the town was eventually relieved. The news was met in Britain by immense jubilation and partying in the streets, particularly in London. Now the factories of the Black Country are toasting the outbreak of war in a similar fashion. Brett Young makes it clear that, whether by ringing factory bulls or sipping champagne, such celebration by the region's industrialists is distasteful, horrendous, and despicable.

Industry: Ares's Minions

I admit that, personally, I have not yet found any proof that the sirens of the Black Country's factories were sounded in reality, but the event occurs so consistently in several of Brett Young's novels that, in his version of British history, it did happen. Additionally, we know from both actual history and Brett Young's history that the industry of the Black Country absolutely benefitted from the materiel requirements of the First World War – it was a conflict that promised prosperity.

Between 1914 and 1918, the Black Country followed the nationwide trend of industrial expansion. There was a large

focus on and shift towards the production of munitions, particularly after the formation of the Ministry of Munitions under Lloyd George in July, 1915, and profits were made by the factory and business owners who got their hands – or, rather, their workers' hands – stuck in with such production. Those workers even received pay rises, meaning it was a win-win for a great number of people in Britain's industrial regions, and certainly in the nation's industrial cradle.

In the real world, Messrs Harper and Bean, the car manufacturer, built a new factory at Waddams Pool in Dudley. Its purpose was the production of shells (it must not be forgotten that the Ministry of Munitions was the result of the 1915 "Shell Crisis"), and the factory was churning out 21,000 shell cases a week by November, 1916. Numerous tube-works in the region switched from bicycles to gun barrels, an example of how just one industry diversified and specialised to meet the demands of the war. Extensions were made to many factories, such as the Cable Accessories Company's Britannia Works and the Vono Works of Tividale, indicating how, happily met with greater demand for their products, Black Country firms needed to adapt accordingly. The Black Country even found itself at the forefront of military development: Oldbury was home to the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon, and Finance Company, which produced some of history's very first tanks, crucial to Britain's military advances during the latter stages of the war. The First World War was truly a bag of mixed blessings for the Black Country.

We get a quick snapshot of how Brett Young's Black Country operates under the exact same conditions in My Brother Jonathan:

"'Roll on the war!' the soldiers joked in the trenches […] 'Roll on the war!' the Black Country echoed piously. Walter Willis, with his eye on his first million; Joe Hingston with a peerage dangled in front of him; George Higgins turning shell-cases by the thousand at his foundry; John Morse stamping nails for the hoofs of cavalry-chargers and boots of infantry; […] Joe Matthews, Ada's husband, 'picking up' six pounds a week, to say nothing of overtime, in Higgins's shell factory.

Watered by blood and fertilized by gold, the desert region round Wednesford blossomed as a rose."

We see this profiteering replicated in Portrait of Clare:

"'Business as usual' might be good enough for Mr. Pomfret and Wychbury. 'Business as usual' was the disease from which the black-country had lain dying. 'Business a good deal more than usual' was what they wanted, and what they got.

Not only such vast and complicated organisms as Mawne and Wolverbury, those iron-ribbed, iron-toothed, iron-hearted monsters that the industrial age unwittingly created for its own destruction. The mad wind out of Europe fanned humbler fires […] No fuel like gold to keep them roaring. So the astonished Midlands gasped and clutched at the uncoffered wealth of a century rained upon them, encouraged by fate's ironical largesse to imagine that they were 'doing their bit.'"

So once again, we see the industry of the Black Country in a disparaging light: it all seems to be for financial gain. The war is lucrative for the industrial basin, and not just for its manufacturers, as we see with Joe Matthews, the factory worker in Wednesford, and those who work by 'humbler fires'. That, and the region greets the need for the tools of war with open arms. 'Business as usual' is what the rural town of Wychbury (and many areas in Britain, as cultural memory indicates) wanted to maintain; but 'Business as usual' had been poisonous to benefitting from the immense explosion of production that Brett Young labels 'Business a good deal more than usual'.

Materiel is thrown out, fortunes are pocketed, and the towns of the Black Country come into flower – a horrific image when the reader remembers what was happening abroad in order for this industrial activity to be possible or necessary.

Brett Young's first Black Country novel, The Iron Age, was published in March, 1916. Contemporary readers would have read it with the war absolutely fresh in their minds, and those that read it after its first few months of publication would have done so in the shadow of the Battle of the Somme, notorious for its needless slaughter (historians disagree on the military merits, or lack thereof, of the Somme offensive, but it is as a bloody, muddy disaster that it is remembered in the British national memory). The remaining eleven of his Black Country novels were released in the aftermath of the Great War. It would be nigh impossible for any of Brett Young's readers to follow the fortunes of the Black Country between 1914 and 1918, as told in his novels, and not recoil when considering this representation alongside what we know to be the realities of that war.

Brett Young's Black Country plays a very interesting, and certainly important, role in his narration of the First World War's course. Of course, it would be churlish of me to argue that the Black Country caused the war. But it almost seems as if the Black Country is the very reason for its continuation. I feel it is rather like the cowbell in Blue Öyster Cult's '(Don't Fear) the Reaper'. It does not play the most prominent role, it is not the most obvious element, but once you become aware of it – as Brett Young makes the reader incredibly aware of the role his Black Country plays in his version of the First World War – it is impossible to ignore it. It is always there, and the song would be very different without it. Brett Young, I believe, has the power to convince us that the Black Country is exactly the same to the First World War. Its capitalists, having come too close to financial ruin in the years leading up into 1914, now have a reason to once more fire their furnaces and produce goods required by wartime, and produce them on a scale they have never seen before, and will never see again. Lured by peerages and profits that dwarf anything they had known before, wartime production proves to be a drug to them. Brett Young shows this to be sickening, but his portrayal is rooted in the actual development of events during the war.

Naturally, however, with the Black Country being shown in such a negative light, it was bound to have its comeuppance…

Apologies...

"In the Summer edition of the magazine, we included a response from Nick Moss, entitled: LETTER FROM NICK MOSS, AUTHOR OF 'IRONOPOLIS – STANDING UP FOR WOLVERHAMPTON' which referred to an article in the Spring edition that we had inadvertently attributed to Matthew Stallard. The original article was, in fact, written by Matt Mills. We apologise to Matthew Stallard, Matt Mills, and Nick Moss for the error.

If you would like to read the correctly attributed original article, and the first letter responding to it then we have reproduced them on the Society's website here...

https://www.blackcountrysociety.com/post/blackcountryman-article-by-matt-mills-corrected-article-and-response-by-nick-moss

In this edition Matt Mills continues his debate with Nick Moss."

Some of the lost mansion houses of the Black Country

By Ian M Bott

Study of the early Ordnance Survey Maps reveals the rapid transformation of our region from sweeping tracts of ancient farmland to a vast wilderness of industrial wasteland, yet still juxtaposed with thousands more fertile acres which since have also succumbed to the urban sprawl that fuses together our once parochial Black Country towns and villages. Nestled amongst those virgin pastures were the ancestral seats of South Staffordshire and Worcestershire's landed gentry, together with the newer grand secluded homes built by local pioneers of the great Industrial Revolution. Many of these houses are now sadly lost forever. Here, in alphabetical order, are brief accounts of six such mansion houses, their occupants, their destruction and what replaces them today.

Bentley Hall

Bentley Hall, near Willenhall, stood on an elevated site bound by today's Queen Elizabeth Avenue, Churchill Road and Cairn Drive. This was home to generations of the Lane family, whose timeworn memorials are to be found in St Peter's Church, Wolverhampton.

In September, 1651, King Charles II took refuge in the predecessor to the house pictured, following defeat at the hands of Oliver Cromwell's army during the ill-fated Battle of Worcester. Mistress Jane Lane, sister of the host Colonel John Lane, was instrumental in the Sovereign's escapade, being rewarded with a perpetual Royal Pension upon his restoration to the throne.

Bentley Hall's eighteenth century replacement met with a very undignified end, suffering the sinking of a coal shaft under the adjacent lawn, leading to severe subsidence, hastening its demolition in 1929. Today a fenced circular enclosure containing carved stones, in an area of public open space, marks the spot where textbook history was made over 370 years ago.

BENTLEY HALL

Dunstall Hall

Dunstall Hall, at Wolverhampton, was erected on a moated site, about 1650, which suggests it could have replaced an even earlier house. Successive owners included the Hampton, Moseley and Wightwick families, its last occupant being Alexander Staveley-Hill whose family also resided at the neighbouring Oxely Manor estate.

Smestow Brook ran north of the hall's ornamental gardens, with Lady Wulfruna's Well in close proximity. In 1826 the old timber framed hall was superseded by a brick built house with stone dressings.

Over time the Staveley-Hills considered Dunstall to be surplus to their needs selling its parkland for use as a racecourse in 1887. In 1916, only ninety years after its erection, the replacement Dunstall Hall was demolished The original gatehouse suffering the same fate in 1925 to make way for the development of a Courtaulds rayon factory. However, the name of Dunstall Park is still familiar to us today, albeit through its turf.

DUNSTALL HALL GATEHOUSE

Ellowes Hall

Ellowes Hall was newly erected in 1821 on land off Stickley Lane, Lower Gornal, for local industrialist John Turton Fereday, to the Grecian-Doric designs of architect Thomas Lee. Its central grand staircase of carved oak had been rescued from the dismantled Horseley Hall at Tipton the previous year. However, legend had it that the 'ghost of Horseley' had travelled with the staircase and made frequent appearances in Fereday's house.

Between 1892 – 1919 John Lloyd Gibbons was in residence. He had made his fortune from the manufacture of chemical fertilizers. During his time, Wolverhampton novelist Ellen Thorneycroft-Fowler wrote 'The Farringdon's' which featured Ellowes Hall under the guise of 'The Willows'. Sadly, Ellowes Hall is no more. Although today is perpetuated in the name of the secondary school it made way for in the 1960s.

ELLOWES HALL

Sandwell Hall

Sandwell Hall is long gone, but a remarkable survival is the handsome stone built archway which once gave entrance to Sandwell Park, today marooned on the M5 traffic island, half a mile from West Bromwich town centre.

The house was built for William Legge, First Baron Dartmouth, in 1705, incorporating the remains of the Benedictine Sandwell Priory which had been founded in 1180. The Dartmouth's capitalized on the seams of deep coal which lay beneath their estate, sinking Sandwell Park Colliery and the Jubilee Pit either side of their palatial home, encouraging their relocation to Patshull Hall, west of Wolverhampton which survives to this day.

Sandwell Hall was eventually used for the incarceration of Birmingham's mentally ill, until subsidence caused by the Dartmouth's own coal workings were to seal its fate. During demolition in 1928 the remains of the priory were revealed, lost, then rediscovered in archaeological excavations carried out in the 1980s. These are now accessible to the public at the centre of the Sandwell Valley Country Park.

SANDWELL HALL

Warley Abbey

Warley Abbey was given its ecclesiastical denomination because the land on which it was built had formerly belonged to Halesowen Abbey. The estate had been purchased by Samuel Galton, a Birmingham gunsmith, and member of the Lunar Society, who resided at Great Barr Hall, which he leased from the Scott family. The renowned Humphrey Repton was commissioned to design and layout out the new parkland.

After his father's death, Hubert Barclay Galton contrived with a London architect named Lugar, the result being the completion of the splendid Gothic house in 1821. One of its successive occupants was the publisher Sir Hugh Gilzean Reid, who often entertained high profile figures to dinner at Warley, including Victorian Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone.

Warley Abbey was last used by Smethwick Corporation as a golf club-house before demolition commenced in 1957. Repton's parkland, Warley Woods, are fully accessible to the public today.

WARLEY ABBEY

Wollaston Hall

Timber framed Wollaston Hall carried the date 1617 and lay between Wollaston village High Street and the River Stour. A one time resident was Henry Onions Firmstone, iron founder and coalmaster, who died in 1899. Many industrialists found residing at such a former ancestral home to be a fitting status.

After auction in 1924 the process began to carefully dismantle the hall for its materials which were eventually shipped to the USA, it is said, under the instructions of the Ford motor car family. Today the suburban homes of Sherwood Road and Apley Road cover the site of the ancient house and its gardens.

WOLLASTON HALL

The last meadow - a study of the historic landscape of Corbett Meadow, Amblecote Part one: The ecology.

By Robert Bevan-Jones and Helen Cook

Introduction

In recent decades, the story of Corbett Meadow has been somewhat fraught. Since at least the early 1990s, there have been attempts to build houses on the site. By 2005, the owners, Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, had already sold half of the Victorian charitable Corbett Hospital site, which is now covered by housing. Since then, the remaining portion, Corbett Meadow itself, has been interpreted by the owners as being surplus to requirements. It is currently earmarked to be sold to the highest bidder, and it is of interest to property developers. An initial planning application is fully expected to be put in from Charles Church Homes, owned by Persimmon Homes. They have leafleted approximately 500 properties in the area earlier this year and conducted a brief survey of local people, mainly via invitation to their website. This proposal for around ninety homes on a green site of local importance is an unwelcome prospect for many reasons. Corbett Meadow merits protection and preservation.

FIG 1. CORBETT MEADOW GENERAL VIEW CIRCA 2019 (PHOTO GRAHAM BECKLEY).

The site

The whole site was originally gifted in 1893 by the businessman and philanthropist, 'salt king' John Corbett, for the building of a local hospital in (and around) an 18th century mansion called 'The Hill'.

Although Corbett made his fortune in Droitwich, he was born locally in The Delph, Brierley Hill. His philanthropy included bestowing his childhood area of the Black Country with gifts, including the Corbett Charitable Hospital and the surrounding meadows in 1893. After the formation of the National Health Service in 1948, the site and meadows migrated to ownership and management of the NHS free of charge. Circa 2007, the local authority sold half of the park (and part of the meadows) and houses were built over it. The mansion, known as The Hill, was levelled, along with the old hospital and medical services were scaled down. These projects were completed in 2010.

In 2022, a group of relatives and descendants of John Corbett from around the country met members of the Corbett Meadow Action Group to express their enduring support for the campaign to protect the remaining meadow and prevent it from being destroyed by proposed housing plans. The family members present viewed this prospect as being contrary to the intention of the original gift by their ancestor, which was to be used by local people. The original gift stated that the hospital and its surrounding park be for the benefit of subscribing patients, mainly people of Amblecote, Stourbridge and surrounding areas. The new John Corbett Outpatient Centre, completed in 2006, had also reduced the acreage of Corbett Meadow. Its café windows look out onto the meadow's features, the cattle, wildflowers, trees and ponds. This undulating pastoral spectacle is the last unchanged visible vestige of the original gift and bequest of John Corbett.

The Brierley Hill Advertiser newspaper, dated 5th August 1893, states that the original hospital site is situated in the green borderlands of the Black Country, a kind of oasis on the edge of a waste. Its grounds, now only represented by Corbett Meadow, are also described as being much as it looks today:

"an undulating surface carpeted with ancient turf, and studded with stately trees, with kine and sheep browsing or lazily ruminating in the shade form a picture so entirely rural that one might fancy himself far indeed far from the stress and strain of everyday life in a manufacturing district."

The article continues to add that the green grounds of the hospital were considered a distinct benefit to patients, and that:

"during convalescence…. the patient is hungering and thirsting for fresh air … the pleasure that can be drawn from a noble landscape and beautiful surroundings is no small matter in aiding recovery."

With the National Health Service now nationally promoting green surgeries, and green prescribing, supporting the merits of natural spaces being used for the health of the community, therefore saving expenditure on conventional therapies, this green place could have a valuable multi-faceted role to play in the future of the Service. The Corbett Meadow Action Group has the full support of several local general practitioners, including former Primary Care Network Clinical Director, Brierley Hill & Amblecote Dr Ruth Tapparo. With the support of the local MP Suzanne Webb, the action group are urging Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to investigate this as a benign, financially viable usage of the meadow.

Corbett Meadow is also of high historic value, it being a part of the internationally famous local glass industry heritage. This makes a persuasive case for its listing and general

protection where possible in perpetuity. This was surely the wish of John Corbett, who originally gifted the site for the benefit of the people of Amblecote, Stourbridge and its surrounding areas. In the Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Study Final Report October 2019 Client: Sandwell and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Councils document, local listing is discussed on page 18, 3.2.6., stating that all four of the Black Country Authorities maintain a list of locally significant heritage assets. In most cases, entries on the lists refer to built heritage, but in some instances particular landscapes are recorded. It seems reasonable, based on the accumulated evidence, that this is a landscape that may be deserving of being accorded a listed status, for environmental and historic reasons listed here. The Meadow is being considered for this status and the results of the application will be heard in the next six months or so.

This green urban space is a valuable resource; an important piece of green landscape that has been cherished, used and appreciated by local people for centuries. It's a beautiful natural space, in the midst of industry. It has been variously used, both as a part of an historic garden for a house occupied for a time by the owner of one of Amblecote's leading glasshouses, then for most of the 20th century, for the annual hospital fetes which brought over 20,000 paying visitors to the meadows every August, being also used by the staff and patients to generally feel the benefit of the unspoilt green space. Corbett Meadow is also of significant urban ecological merit in the context of its ancient ponds, mature assembly of trees and associated biodiversity, a valuable corridor for ecology in an urban environment. Ecologically, it is linked to the nearby Coalbourne Brook. It has importance as a corridor for urban biodiversity and supports a wealth of wildlife and habitats.

FIG 2. PART OF VETERAN/ANCIENT HAWTHORN HEDGEROW REMNANTS IN THE MEADOW. (PHOTO HELEN COOK).

Ecology and Landscape Value of Corbett Meadow

Michael.J.S. Liley (Bsc Hons), an Ecologist, Grassland Specialist and conservation Officer (Retired), has provided a summary of the ecological value of the Corbett Meadow and the threat to it that the proposed building of approximately ninety houses on it presents. His comments below indicate some of the losses that the site would irreversibly endure should the meadow have this housing built on it.

"The Corbett meadow constitutes an integral part of a continuous green corridor/nature network linking through to the Coalbourne Brook Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The proposed development scheme disrupts and degrades that integrity and connectivity to the Coalbourne Brook valley. This undisturbed landscape, with its ponds, mature parkland trees and locally scarce open grassland, will have enormous future benefits if left in its current intact natural state.

As records show, the Corbett Meadow has been largely untouched since at least 1750. This type of sward vegetation (pignut grassland) is considered a priority habitat now rare in Dudley, Birmingham and the Black

Country. The planned development which includes ninety houses, associated footpaths and a new road would mean that the surviving fragments of grassland would be too fragmented and small to survive at all, becoming ecologically unviable over time.

The destruction of ecological connectivity caused by the new buildings and road would lead to genetic weakness and local extinctions of plants and invertebrates would occur. Extraneous lighting from the development will also adversely affect bats, moths and nocturnal fauna. Domestic pets from the new properties will cause excessive wildlife disturbance and species predation. The loss of this historic pignut grassland will be detrimental to our local wildlife/ecology and environment. This type of grassland habitat cannot be recreated.

The ground plans for the proposed development scheme, as mapped, indicate a splitting up and destruction of the grassland and old parkland, such that there would be no "biodiversity net gain." For example, pollinating insects – species like the chimney sweeper moth, burnet companion moth and skipper butterflies - that depend for their survival on the principle component of this grassland, pignut (Conopodium majus) and other species present in the sward: bird's-foot trefoil, yarrow, creeping cinquefoil, meadow vetchling, would experience local extinctions.

In fact, as a result of the development, there would be a biodiversity net loss - an increase in abundance of commoner species tolerant of the reduced value habitat. Further, there will be disruption to the ecological link with the adjoining open spaces and wildlife habitats. The Corbett Hospital fields form an integral part of a valuable, near continuous green corridor stretching almost 1.5 KM northwards towards Brierley Hill.

Inevitably, all of the above impacts of the development - the loss of this landscape,

FIG 3. FEBRUARY 2021 "D" SHAPED EXIT HOLE OF HAWTHORN JEWEL BEETLE AT CORBETT MEADOW. IT PREFERS TO LIVE IN ANCIENT STANDS OF HAWTHORN, IT IS A VERY UNUSUAL PRESENCE IN THE BLACK COUNTRY AND AN UNCOMMON SIGHT IN DUDLEY BOROUGH. (PHOTO: BRETT WESTWOOD).

with its ponds, mature parkland trees and open grassland - would have deleterious consequences for the local community and its mental and physical health too, for example: increased traffic generation, increased road run-off affecting storm flow drainage, pressures on already stressed local infrastructure, the reduction in cooling effect of the tree-scape on existing housing and the hospital itself, not to mention, in this time of looming climate crisis, the carbon release due to the excavation of long undisturbed grassland - and so on, and on.

In summary, the irreversible and devastating impacts a proposed housing development could have upon a historic and high value landscape for nature conservation and wildlife, an already designated site, inextricably linked with the Coalbourne Brook valley Nature Conservation site, added to the degradation in the quality of life and physical well-being of the local community, would be absolutely and totally unacceptable."

There are many aspects of the ecology of the site that individually contribute to the integrity of the site and interest from landscape historian and botanist alike.

The special pignut grassland cannot be replanted. It depends on centuries of hay cutting at the right time of year to encourage the plant to spread over an area. For the last 43 years the hay has been made by the dedicated local farmer Cliff, who has had an agreement to tenant and now graze the meadow. Before that, he took over from the previous tenant who worked from nearby Amblecote Hall Farm. This practice had been ongoing throughout the era of the charitable Corbett Hospital and into the early 19th century and beyond. This is why such pignut grassland cannot be planted, it requires centuries of hay making and grazing to develop its unique flora. Without management, meadows cannot exist, they return to scrub and ultimately woodland. The idea of the developers to plant an orchard (not appropriate to the site) could overshadow the remnants of this grassland, equally their suggestion of planting a wildflower meadow is not of any ecological significance, since this can be planted on a roundabout; an artificial new planting does not replace ancient habitat in a substantial or meaningful ecological sense.

The pignut grassland, is described by Michael Liley of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, as unspoilt. It includes a range of native plants associated with quality grassland and meadows, including Buttercups, meadow vetchling, pignut, cranesbills, clover species and plantain. As George Peterken in his magisterial British Wildlife Publishing volume entitled Meadows explains, the nature of meadows are elastic and as suitable grasslands change their management, whether animals are kept on them and for how much of the year, affects the time of year they are cut, they become more (or less) suited to hay production, i.e. more or less meadow-like, depending on these factors. Like all unspoilt semi-natural forms of landscape in the environment in the UK, this is increasingly scarce in urban contexts. This patch of ancient growth actually serves as a very important ecological link in the chain of habitats down to the Coalbourne Brook and Dennis Park, if any link is lost, the ecological knock-on effect is amplified, since without continuity, the whole suffers irreparably.

FIG 4. OTHER POSSIBLE REMNANTS OF 1567 HEDGING IN DENNIS PARK 2021 (ROBERT BEVAN-JONES)

The meadow has other interesting ancient features of ecological significance. Fig 2 shows a remnant of ancient hedge, a few metres inside the current boundary that is perhaps a part of the original boundary hedge likely planted in the sixteenth century. Hawthorn hedges can sucker, that is, send forth new shoots from the roots, some trunks can die, while the rootstock can regenerate. So, a sixteenth century old hawthorn or holly hedge can have trunks in it perhaps no older than three centuries, yet the hedge remains as the rootstock can live that long.

These thorns were visited in 2021 by naturalist Brett Westwood who made these comments:

"On the highest parts of the meadow, I was keen to inspect the veteran Hawthorns that appeared to follow an old hedge-line. For over a decade, I've been recording a nationally scarce and local insect, the Hawthorn Jewel beetle, which only breeds in old and wizened hawthorns. It's not called a jewel for nothing: this beautiful bullet-shaped beetle is a metallic coppery-violet colour and emerges in midsummer from the thinner branches where its grub has fed on dead wood. A bitterly cold February morning wouldn't seem the best time to look for them but Hawthorn Jewel Beetles leave clues. The adult beetle is rounded on top and flat underneath and so it creates an unmistakable D-shaped exit-hole when it emerges in July. I'd never seen them in Stourbridge before or indeed anywhere in the Dudley Borough. Really old hawthorns are pretty scarce and the adult beetles are notoriously hard to find. But we will be looking out for them this summer at Corbett's Meadow because we were delighted to find several exit-holes in these venerable trees; a real bonus."

Historically there were several veteran oaks, Quercus spp. recorded on the meadow, that were removed in the 2000s, apparently for safety reasons. The trunks were not left for insect habitants and were removed. Their presence would be the reason that the purple hairstreak butterfly Favonius quercus has often been recorded on the meadow, as it requires oak for its lifecycle. There were also examples of elms, Ulmus spp. now gone. These, along with large swathes of native bluebells, Hyascynthoides non-scripta perhaps suggests an historic woodland component to parts of the surviving meadow. Along with the natural ponds, perhaps indicating in part that the site may have been ancient wood pasture. The steepness of the site in parts is a significant reason why it shows no evidence of ever having been ploughed.

Interestingly, some remnants of the 1567 hedging described by John Hemingway PhD may have survived. In Dennis Park an odd patch of old trees, holly Ilex aquifolium and hawthorn, Cratageus monogyna runs parallel to where an original hedge for one of the little fields was recorded. This then may be part of the original hedging for the original little fields. The course of the boundary may have been changed on completion of the modern housing in Trinity Road (the modern housing and new hedge being positioned behind the photographer of Fig 4). Remnants of suckering holly trees also survive, with some holly with hawthorns on the other side of this playing field, within the Corbett Meadow boundary itself. When hollies are in an ancient hedge, though the original trunks may persist for a couple of centuries, more trunks appear over several centuries (or more) where a bank of suckering offspring can spread creating the appearance of a holly hedge. Though not planted as a pure holly hedge, in many old fields around the area, this phenomenon can be seen and there may be an example of this where the edge of Corbett Meadow meets the path behind the allotments, leading to Amblecote high street. Holly and hawthorns were the likely components of the 16th century hedge.

The diversity of birds and other wildlife recorded here is listed in greater detail in the appendices for the application for the meadow as a Local Green Space, as compiled by Helen Cook. Species include badger, hedgehogs, grass snakes (historically), greater spotted and green woodpecker, buzzards, sparrowhawks, kestrels, tawny owl, tree creeper, gold crest, wood mouse, pygmy shrew, at least two bat species, fox, palmate and common newts, great crested newts (historically), a good population of frogs and toads. Also in the Local Green Space application are approximately 325 moth species recorded by local naturalists. Michael Liley noted over 70 species of vascular plants on the site. Local naturalists Allan and Jo Nolan have also provided a list of 65 bird species seen on the meadow and 20 species of butterfly. The rarity of these species in an urban environment enhances the importance of this site. These species thrive here because the land has been undisturbed.

Conclusions

The historic roles Corbett Meadow has played in the history of Amblecote are numerous, as are the reasons for preserving its heritage.

These include the glass industry connections it has. It is the last surviving unchanged part of the Hill House estate, the former residence of the glass industrialists Thomas Rogers of Holloway End glassworks, and Richard Mills, of the Albert Glassworks, Wordsley. Corbett Meadow is seen from most of the windows of the grade II listed Dennis Hall, former home of Thomas Webb glassworks, and formed part of its original vista. The value of Corbett Meadow is also as the sole surviving part of the grounds and park of the original hospital; many glassworkers were treated medically in sight of the meadow. Thousands of glassworkers enjoyed the hospital fetes held on the turf annually for many decades, offering rare respite from industrial toil. Edward Webb

FIG 5: CORBETT MEADOW (PHOTO BY HELEN COOK).

repeatedly raised funds for this original hospital. The director of Stevens and Williams, J.S. Silvers-Williams helped run the hospital and meadows for more than thirty years. These facts emphasise strong links between Corbett meadow and the historic glass industry. The role of Corbett Meadow in the landscape of the glass heritage of Stourbridge was clearly enduring and multi-facetted. It ought to be considered an important feature of the Glass Quarter and listed as such.

The fact the meadow has never been ploughed means that it preserves a fragment of a mediaeval agricultural landscape, now almost gone from the parish. The un-ploughed, ancient grassland and associated corridor of ecology in an urban context is also a rare thing in the Dudley area. If not built upon, there is a chance in the future that it may join the nearby Coalbourne Brook habitat and become part of a significant urban nature reserve, helping to improve the ecology of this already congested area. All these things add much to the historic reasons for preserving the Corbett Meadow. Currently, due to economic pressure and a general lack of management by the owners, such as keeping the large pond free from being increasingly overshaded by young saplings etc. this decreases the diversity of waterfowl, dragonflies, newts and fish. Therefore, Corbett Meadow is temporarily facing a decrease in biodiversity. This suits those who wish to assess it for building housing.

As an unspoilt part of the historic glass quarter and as an important local green space, it also deserves a level of protection that it currently does not have. To see it disappear for the sake of building a few houses would be a move that could not be undone within our lifetimes. It ought to be listed and protected. Its unspoilt natural beauty was a key part of the gift by John Corbett, the "salt king." According to the constitution and bylaws of the original 1893 hospital, that was completed while John Corbett was still alive, "The gardens and grounds belonging to the hospital may in the discretion of the Trustees be used for the purposes of a public park." The Corbett Meadow today represents the last vestige of this site that may yet be seen in its original condition today. For these numerous ecological and historical reasons, this site deserves recognition as a space that needs as much protection as it can be afforded not to be built on. When it is gone, it's gone for good.

Mum's not the word

By Heather Wastie

"I wonder about the word 'Mom' – isn't that American?" (or words to that effect) said Kate, after reading through a draft of a piece I had written for Alarum Productions, the theatre company we run together. She suggested that the word 'Mum' might be better, but I just couldn't write that to describe my mother unless the word 'my' came first and it had a small 'm' – 'my mum'. My mum is 'Mom' with an 'o', as in 'top'.

Kate's question highlighted for me how much is wrapped up in that one short word, and how, when I say it, far from sounding American, it gives away my Black Country roots. It's a down to earth name, and when I speak or write it, it's one person, one wonderful woman who gave up her vocation in the 1950s and devoted her life to her husband and family for the best part of 60 years. It's the most natural word to use – possibly the first one I ever said – but in certain contexts it sticks out, drawing attention to itself.

I can't remember now what piece I was writing which Kate responded to, but it was part of the 'I Dig Canals' project we did, interviewing women involved in, or linked with, campaigns to restore Black Country canals in the 1960s and 70s. If you go to our website **https://alarumproductions.org.uk** and click Projects then I DIG CANALS, we've used a photo from the mid 1960s of the ex-working narrow boat my family bought when I was a child. In the photo (reproduced here), Mom is standing on the left and I'm on the right, looking very excited. We're all inside the empty hull, before Dad built a cabin over it. On the website page mentioned there's also a link to our podcasts which feature the voices of women we interviewed, including my mother.

Here's an extract from an interview which is included in the I Dig Canals book we produced. These words were spoken by Angela, who I would like to thank for not only telling a lovely story but also using that word 'mom'… on this occasion with a small 'm'…

The canal froze over at Dudley Port. The ice was really thick. We played football on there. We weren't scared, it was so solid. It must have been a really harsh winter. There must have been ten, fifteen people on this little patch of ice. We walked that way to school. Rather than walking all the way round, we walked across the canal. You wouldn't dream of it now. There were fish in there and eels, but there were lots of bikes and the water looked dirty. We used to spend a lot of time fishing. I remember once they drained it and my friend Jenny, she'd be about twelve, fell in the mud – thick black mud. We thought, 'Oh no, she's gonna get in real trouble'. But when she stood up she was completely clean and just her outline was in the silt. She was so relieved because she thought her mom was going to go mad.

How do you address your mother, and what does that word mean to you?

NARROW BOAT LAUREL CIRCA MID 1960S. HEATHER WASTIE PICTURED ON THE RIGHT, HER MOM STANDING ON THE LEFT.

On the High Street – a spotlight on Wednesbury's Blue Sheep Books

How long has Blue Sheep Books been open?

Since Independent Bookshop Day 2021 or, as most people know it, 9th October!

Who are the team at Blue Sheep books? Can you tell us a little bit about each of you and your backgrounds and interests? What are your favourite books?

I'm the owner - Sorina Marinescu - and I opened the shop after moving to Wednesbury from Birmingham, and thinking the high street needed more variety. I have a background in education and think reading is something more people should do. My favourite books are anything with a strong female lead. Recently I really enjoyed the fun steampunk adventure Gearbreakers and the action thriller Save Me From Dangerous Men. I'm currently reading Red Tide at Heron Bay - a detective thriller - and really enjoying it!

We also have a group of apprentices and volunteers - Paige, Eve, Libby and Mickey - who work a range of shifts as and when they can. I really like helping local people get their first experience of work and they are all fantastic.

What type of books do you sell? Do you stock local history and local authors? Do they sell well?

We sell all types of books. Every genre, topic and type in both new and used formats. We stock a range of local history books and these have been really popular. Black Country folk are rightfully proud of their history and clearly have a desire to know more about it.

Who are your customers? Do you get to know them and their tastes? Do you feel close to the community in your role as local booksellers?

Our customers are a diverse range of people. Locals, people from further afield and of all ages. It's wonderful to see how levelling books can be with no one feature defining who buys what! We have a small - but growing - group of regular customers who I know really well and who I recommend books to. It's great when they come back and tell me how much they enjoyed a recommendation!

Do you run book stands at local events?

We recently supported a local event at a Goldicroft Park, Wednesbury, which was designed to raise the profile of the space. We were a hit! We love supporting local events as it's really important to us that we play a part in our community.

You are one of very few independent bookshops in the Black Country. Why did you think Wednesbury would be a good place for an independent bookshop?

The simple answer is because I live here! The less simple answer is because Wednesbury has one of the last remaining historic Black Country town centres which is currently part of a Historic England supported renovation. I wanted to help keep that history alive by putting a shop back on the high street. It's a genuine thrill every time I see the shop and think "that's my bookshop!"

What are your plans for the future? Do you think you'll expand to other Black Country Towns?

We are always looking to grow our Book Flock and we would love to franchise another shop elsewhere in the Black Country. We would also love to move our current shop to bigger premises so that we can offer more like author events, children's story times and a tabletop gaming space.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

That people should shop local and shop from independents. When you do you are supporting the paying of taxes, local job creation and are keeping your high street from being just take outs, nail bars and estate agents.

Blue Sheep Book are to be found on Upper High Street, Wednesbury. They are one of the stockists of the Black Country Society's publications. Do pop in and say hello, we're sure that they'd be very glad to see you!

A correction

In the article "John Louis Petit and the Black Country" by Chris Baker that appeared in the last edition of the Blackcountryman, some figures were omitted and others wrongly captioned. The correct figures and captions have now been added to the electronic copy on the Black Country Society website, where it can be accessed by members. In addition the entire corrected article has been included as a blog post on the website, which can be publicly viewed. Here is the link:
https://www.blackcountrysociety.com/post/john-louis-petit-and-the-black-country-by-chris-baker

Letter
from Eileen Ward

Our shop 'Wards' was on the Parkfield Road at the end of a row, on the corner of Windsor Road. The other end of the block there was a small holding owned by Aunty and Harry Jukes (Aunty's real name was Hilda). They always seemed to be an elderly couple to me. They raised chickens and turkeys for Christmas and kept some chickens as layers. They also had a milk round that had been theirs since they initially took on the land which was then a small dairy farm. The land and the milk round had both got smaller over time, but still provided a living.

I used to go on the milk round with Harry, and one of the houses we delivered to belonged to Mrs Hazeldine from the Bilston coach company of the same name. She had a lovely double fronted house which I loved to look at. One Christmas I was given a handmade model of the house by my dad who was great at making things. The original house still stands on Goldthorn Hill but my replica has become rather the worse for wear and in need of a lot of TLC if it can be salvaged at all. I would love my doll's house to have a chance at survival but it would break my heart to put it in a skip. I wonder if there is anybody out there who would take on this project and find it a good home?

There was also a desk and stool made by my dad when I was at school. Both are in good order. They are mostly pine or plywood with the stool having a padded seat which is covered in material used by the GPO for their van upholstery in the 1950s! Dad was a champion scrounger who would make something from nothing.

An apology

We would like to apologise for the numbering of the magazines being out of synch. There seems to have been a glitch in the works. The spring edition for 2022 was given the same number as the winter edition for 2021. They were both issued as Volume 55 No. 1. When the error was picked up, we made the pragmatic decision to align the volume numbering with the turn of the year which meant that the Summer edition was going to be Volume 55 No.2 and so on. Unfortunately, in an interesting leap of numbering it came out as Volume 56 No. 2. No, we've no clue what happened there either, but we're very sorry about it.

For those of you whose heads haven't scrambled then this edition is therefore Volume 55. No. 3. And we sincerely hope that the next one will be Volume 55 No. 4.

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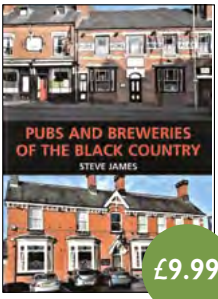

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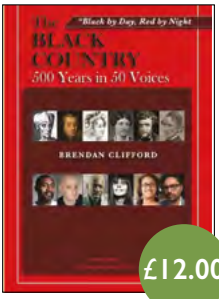

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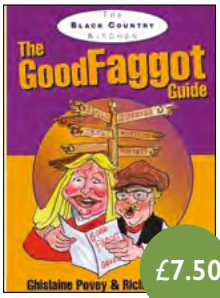

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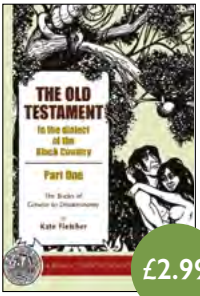

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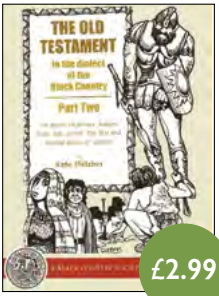

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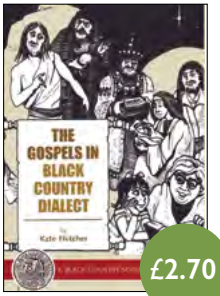

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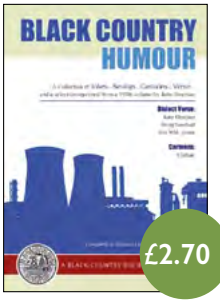

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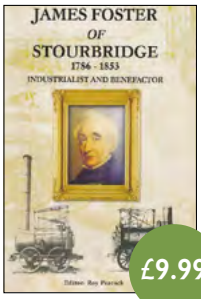

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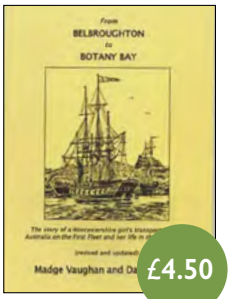

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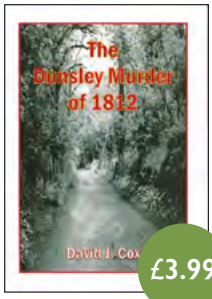

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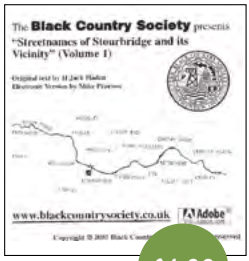

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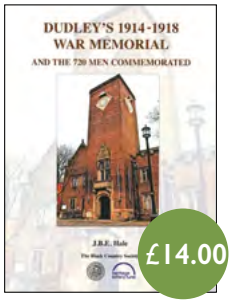

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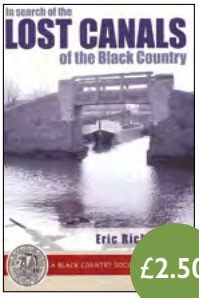

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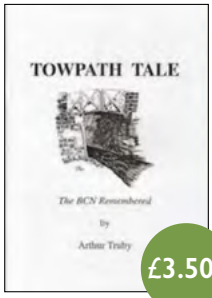

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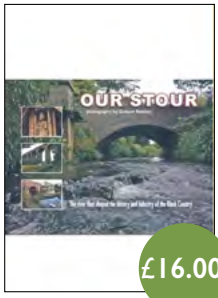

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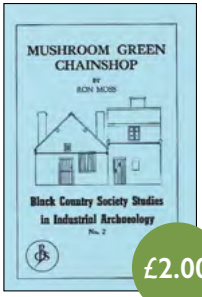

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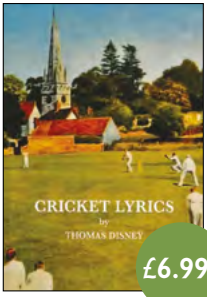

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