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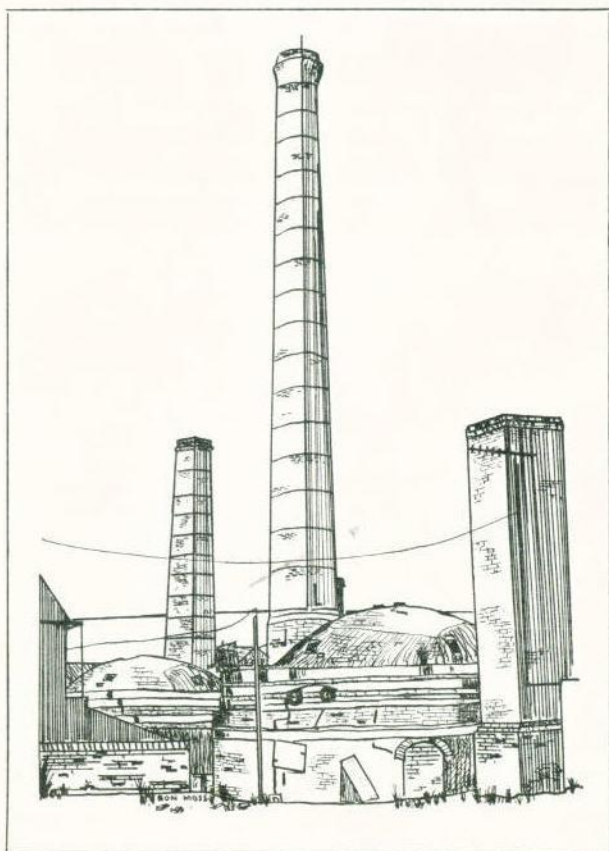
# **BLACKCOUNTRYMAN**

**SUMMER 1976**

**Vol. 9**

**No. 3**

**25p**



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## VOL. 9, No. 3

**Editor :**  
**HAROLD PARSONS**  
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Union of Journalists)

## Contents

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# EDITORIAL

**A**S yet another issue of this magazine is put together, the thought re-occurs that surely no other region in the world can be so well documented. It is apparent, then, that complete sets of back numbers are invaluable to students and individuals who have an interest in the region. Yet we are nowhere near reaching the bulk of that potential audience. Schools in particular do not subscribe to anything like the extent it is reasonable to anticipate, and the plea of being short of cash really does not carry credibility when we are talking about petty cash (stamp money) in comparison with the high cost of most books purchased for educational purposes.

If all but primary schools in the region received the magazine, Black Country Society committee members would be spared the constant flow of requests received from young students saying that they are doing a project on this or that, and can we send ALL the information we have available. In most cases, a stamp for reply is not enclosed!

All right, it is gratifying to be consulted. But is it not irritating also, when much of what is requested is already in published form in one or another of our 35 issues?

Are we not entitled to ask how these students know of us, since we do not advertise in the Press, on television, or among the jingles of 'commercial' radio? The probability is that they are prompted to contact us by their teachers—men and women who do know about us, but do not feel driven to urge a subscription so that copies may be readily available on the spot. Readers who work in education, or are members of a Parent-Teacher Association, would be enhancing their commitment by making certain that this magazine is obtained. To use consumer jargon, it is a 'loss-maker'. Deliberately so!

An' we'n got no end on um wairtin' ter be sode.



THE 'Black Country Night' has, over the last couple of years or so, become very much a part of the local entertainment scene. In fact, such events have become extremely numerous and it comes as a surprise to many to learn that the Black Country Society is not responsible for them all. The Society of course has no monopoly and several shows have been organised independently by various groups. Anyway, it is doubtful if the Society's Committee have the time or the resources to organise all such shows, other than by becoming a full time professional entertainments company! The Society nevertheless is doing much to fulfil the need for such entertainment with Winston Homer and a group of local entertainers, including Tommy Mundon, Dolly Allen, Jim W. Jones, Giggetty and others; also the Dr. John Fletcher-Jon Raven team, who perform regularly to many organizations in the Black Country and further afield.

On the more serious side, a team of speakers ensure that someone representing the Society is out addressing local organisations on most nights of every week. However, it seemed a considerable time since an entertainment had been arranged solely for members of the Society, and so on May 11, a 'Black Country Evening' was held at the Tipton Sports Union headquarters. Limited in numbers to 130, the event was a 'sell out', it began with a dinner, the audience later being entertained with poetry from Jim W. Jones, songs from the Giggetty folk group, and humour

from Dolly Allen, whose act had everyone rolling with laughter.

The show was compared by Winston Homer, and its success has prompted the committee to consider presenting more of these meetings in the future.

On April 7, Derek Simpkins—the Society's authority on the history of the sport of cock-fighting—addressed the monthly meeting on that subject at the 'Three Tuns', Queen St., Bilston. Although Derek had given a previous talk on cock-fighting to the Society, his constant researches have enabled him to unearth many more interesting facts on the subject, especially those relevant to the sport as it was operated locally. The meeting also enabled Derek to display his growing collection of rare cock-fighting artifacts, which include a number of early prints. Some paintings of fighting cocks were also taken to this meeting by Mr Ewart Chapman, a local artist and Black Country Society member.

On 27 May a film show was put on for the Society at the Technical College, Dudley, the theme of which was a study of chain-making at the works of Noah Bloomer, Cradley. The programme was the culmination of three years work by Mr Terry Francis and his colleague, and contained some excellent photography.

On June 22 at 'The White Lion', Darlaston, Black Country Society member Tony Hughes, who is Projects Manager, Foseco (Gt. Britain) Ltd., spoke to members on the local foundry industry, with

particular emphasis on its problems and future prospects.

The newly formed Womens' Group have now begun to hold meetings and it is hoped that in the future its members can hold meetings and arrange visits etc., which will appeal particularly to the female taste. To make this a success, the group would like to see more of the women members of the Society giving it support. So don't be shy ladies, look out for dates of forthcoming meetings.

The Society is ten years old next year and an anniversary sub-committee has been formed to look into ways of celebrating this milestone. This committee has been meeting and several interesting ideas have been put forward. Those which are adopted will be advertised in due course.

The Society can now look back over ten years of existence, but it must also look forward. A Review Sub-committee has been formed to look into the future potential of the Society and to help formulate its policy for the next ten years and beyond. Many changes have taken place in the Black Country since the Society was originally formed; many more will take place as time goes on, and the Review Committee will look at trends and

problems likely to be faced as a result of change, and suggest ways and means in which the Society should adapt.

As a result of the success of the Society's publication, 'The Old Testament in Black Country Dialect', its translator Kate Fletcher, now a member of the Society's committee, has appeared on an A.T.V. Sunday evening programme 'Saints Alive', reading extracts from her work. It is interesting to note that our local dialect is now being treated more seriously than of late by a section of the mass media.

At the time of writing the committee will be assessing the early results of the increase in membership fee, the first increase in ordinary membership rates since the formation of the Society. These increases were made with reluctance, being forced on the Society by inflation (many other organisations had increased their rates long since). The Society has achieved much in its existence to date, so do please continue to give your support, and help to increase the membership by enrolling others. Let us try to achieve even more in the next ten years. The greater our numbers the greater can be our achievements.

---

#### FIRST FOUR WINNERS OF THE EASTER DRAW, MADE AT THE THREE TUNS, BILSTON ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7 1976.

<b>Holiday for two</b>	...	Mr. J. Flavell, 6 Masfield Avenue, Woodsetton, Dudley.
<b>Radio</b>	... ..	Mr. K. Norris, 19 Lamb Crescent, Wombourn.
<b>Hamper</b>	... ..	Miss N. Williams, 57 Woodland Road, Handsworth, Birmingham 21.
<b>Giant Easter Egg</b>	...	Mr. E. Beardsley, 12 Bustlehome Lane, West Bromwich.

## **BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY—SUMMER PROGRAMME 1976**

**Tuesday, 20th July, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

Talk by Mrs. E. Unett, Police Superintendent, West Midlands Police on the:—

“Work of a Black Country Policewoman”

At the Cradley Liberal Club, Colley Lane, Colley Gate, Cradley.

**Wednesday, 18th August, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

An exhibition and talk by John Brimble on the Society's Historical Collection.

The Tipton Sports Union, Wednesbury Oak Road, Tipton.

**Sunday, 5th September, 1976 — Racing to Commence 2.00 p.m.**

Whippet Racing for the “Pride of the Black Country” Trophy. Weigh-in from 12 noon.

Refreshments and Bar available from noon onwards.

At the Tipton Sports Union, Wednesbury Oak Road, Tipton.

**Tuesday, 21st September, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

Talk on Pigeons and Pigeon Flying by Mr. Ron Briggs.

At the Foley Arms, Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill.

**Saturday, 25th September, 1976 — 7.30 p.m.**

An evening of Nine-pin Bowling at the Titton Inn, Worcester Road, Stourport. Price: 85p (which also includes a Buffet Supper)

A coach will be arranged if demand so justifies—Contact Stan Cox for details. Limited to 60 persons. Children welcome.

**Wednesday, 29th September, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

Domino, Darts and Crib Night at the Brockhouse Ltd., Social Club, Howard Street, Hill Top, West Bromwich.

All players and non-players welcome.

**Tuesday, 12th October, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

Domino, Darts and Crib Night at the Barrel Inn, High Street, Amblecote, Stourbridge. (Corner of Canal Street—Off the Ring Road).

**Tuesday, 26th October, 1976 — 8.00 p.m.**

Talk by Mr. A. Barnett on “Gornal in Picture and Story.”

At the British Legion Club, Ruiton Street, Gornal.

# **A Wednesbury Firm passes its 50th Anniversary**

by Harold Parsons

**P**RODORITE 'Wednesbury' is a company which derives its name from 'Produits Organiques', a Swiss firm which, in the early 1920s, developed a process for manufacturing sugar from wood under the trade name 'Prodor'. To resolve subsequent problems arising from the corrosive chemicals it contained, a castable pitch concrete material was produced and given the name 'Prodorit'.

The need for such an anti-corrosive material was evident throughout Europe and the rights to 'Prodorit' were acquired for Britain. As a result, on September 14, 1925, Prodorite Limited was registered in London. Shortly afterwards its head office and works were established at Wednesbury.

After a few years it was apparent that the product had limitations, so it was phased out slowly as the company developed new anti-corrosive materials which had scope for a wider market.

Fifty years ago lead, timber and asphalt were in general the only known materials for protection against corrosion. Environmental conditions in workshops in which chemical processes took place were such that floors consisted mainly of badly corroded concrete—even ash or dirt—so that spillage and leakage soaked into them. Drainage was usually into a town sewer or nearby stream, and workpeople suffered from the effects of chemical fumes.

Even so, there was a strong resistance to change to a new concept of acid pickle tanks with protective linings, and protective flooring and drainage. It was not until the mid-30s when the Government embarked upon a considerable building programme for power stations, that the fortunes of the company really began to improve. For example, it brought about a requirement for fume chimneys with acid-proof linings, and the company's cements were extensively used.

## **Contracting**

Contracting activities began to increase with the growing realisation that pickle shops and the like need not be filthy places in which to work, and the company constructed linings, protective floorings and drainage at the metal finishing end of the steel and allied industries.

This led up to the pre-war re-armament programme, and extensive use of the company's products and constructions for new Ordnance

factories. During the war, the company was almost exclusively engaged on servicing these factories, so that in '42/43, a large contracting force of well over 500 men had been built up.

Meanwhile, in 1940, a derelict factory known as Junction Works had been obtained to undertake war work, specifically to apply protective coatings to water tanks for armoured fighting vehicles. It is now used for plant and vehicle maintenance.

By the end of the war, Prodorite had become the most prominent company in the acid-proofing field, with its major outlets in atomic energy plants; steel industry; chemical and fertiliser plants and food and beverage industries, having then broadened its scope by specialising in surface coatings and industrial floor finishes.

The late '40s saw the introduction of the then new plastics materials, such as p.v.c. and polythene. The company was one of the first to recognise the invaluable properties of these materials and to set up fabrication workshops, but again found itself in a pioneering situation with the task of promoting these new materials and fabrications to dubious engineers, who preferred to maintain specifications for the traditional materials then available.

Progress on plastics development was slow and unprofitable for many years, but confidence persisted and continued investment proved to be amply justified.

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**Tipton**

Prodorite now claim to be one of the most prominent companies in the U.K. in the field of plastics and fibreglass engineering constructions, operating from the William Burton Works, a half mile from the Eagle Works. It houses the Plastics Fabrications, Linings and Coatings Division.

In recent years, the company has developed new specialised products for the building industry and has had considerable success with products for leisure and sporting activities.

Nevertheless, pre-eminence still remains in the corrosion resistant field, and for the foreseeable future objectives will be to develop products which have a wide market appeal.

Eagle Works has been expanded over the years and the company currently employ a total workforce of 500 people. This growth has put many pressures upon the administration of the very diverse nature of the business, and some two years ago it was reorganised into three autonomous Divisions to handle the main activities of the company.

The Materials Division manufactures the full range of products sold and are responsible for their continuing development and marketing at home and abroad.

The Contract Services Division is, as its name suggests, responsible for all contracting work, designing and installing all the complex plants handled utilising, wherever possible, the company's own materials.

The Plastics Division control all plastic fabrication and coating work, both at William Burton Works and on sites throughout this country and abroad.

## CHATTAWAY — AN OLDER SUBSIDIARY

W. Chattaway Limited, Great Bridge, constructional engineers and steelwork fabricators, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Prodorite Limited, with its own Board.

It has a history dating to the early 1900s when William Chattaway began to undertake boiler repair. Three years later, correspondence shows Chattaways to be boiler makers and much of the turnover in the company in those early days was for the supply of riveted tar stills.

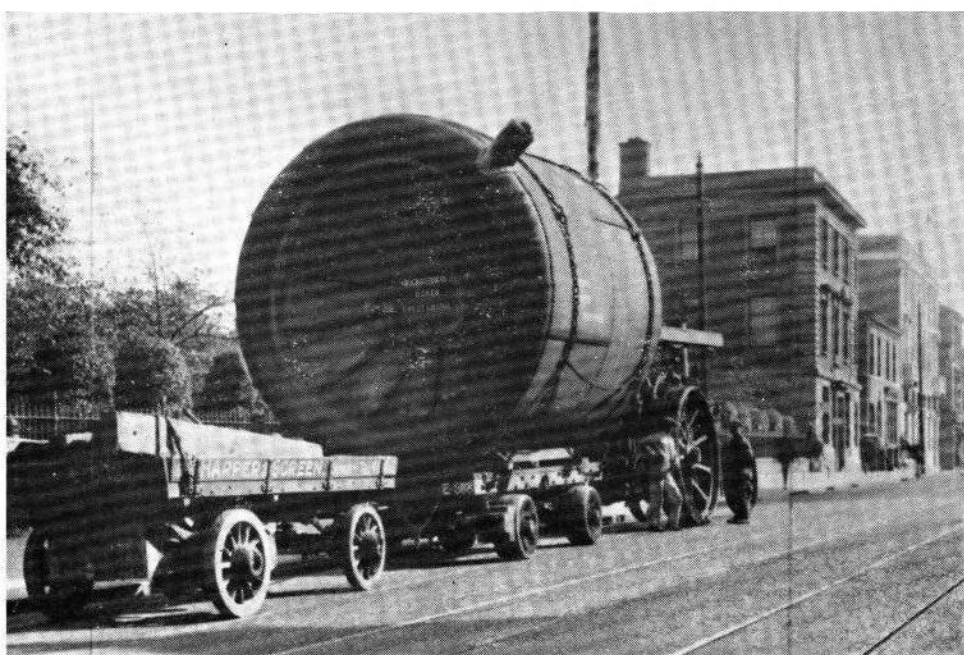
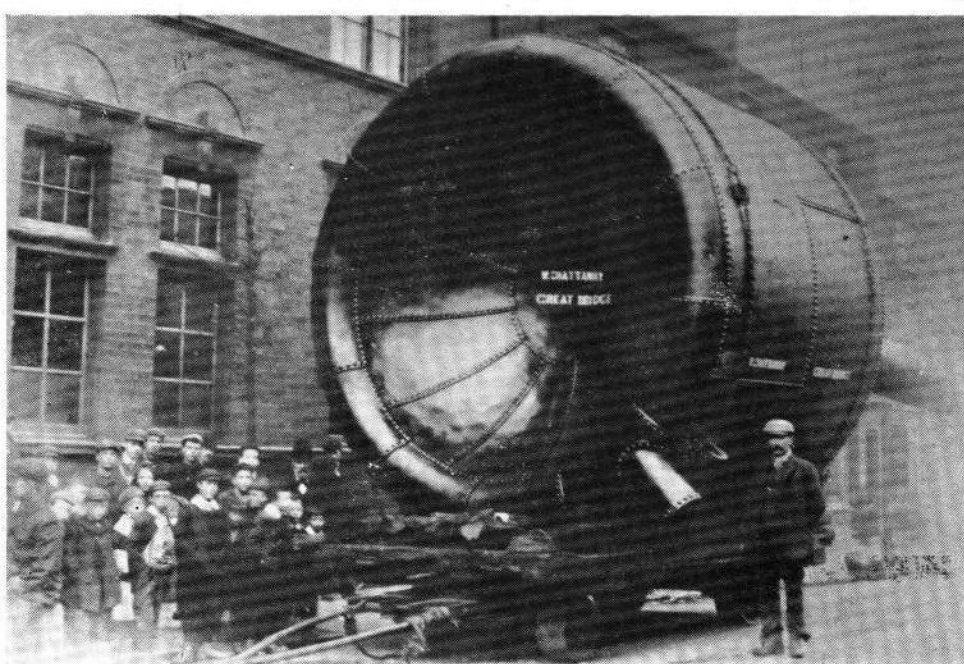
The company was registered in 1935 and began to develop the structural steel side. This progressed successfully and there was a major involvement in the construction of heavy riveted weighbridge girders.

The late 30s saw traditional business fall away, but war work took up the slack and projects carried out included parts for the Mulberry Harbour, and the strengthening of cellars in commercial buildings to form air raid shelters.

## SCOPE EXTENDED

In 1941, the operating side of the company was taken over by Mr. C. F. Burton, a brother of William A. Burton, founder and former chairman of Prodorite. He had built up a machine tool company in France and just before the war he literally escaped with a suitcase.





September, 1902, and the lower October, 1929. They illustrate how little Twenty-seven years separate these photographs; the top one is dated products changed in those times, and there is interest here for the technical-minded in the fact these tar stills are of riveted construction.

Courtesy Wm. Chattaway



A forward-looking man, he installed additional equipment, thus extending the scope of work that could be undertaken.

This began a link with Prodorite which resulted in that company acquiring Chattaways in 1968. From then on it began to develop along two lines; on the one hand broadening its structural steelwork operations from such things as warehouse structures and simple roof trusses to welded fabrications, and on the other, undertaking specialised tank work. The latter really got off the ground in the 1950s, mainly on continuous strip pickle tanks, in conjunction with Prodorite.

Structural steelwork is even more varied, ranging from steel framed structures of up to 100 ft. span, clad in a range of materials, and general fabrications up to 8 tons. At one period, a large volume of roof tracks for the window cleaning of high rise buildings was supplied, and there is still a requirement although high rise buildings are no longer in demand to the same extent. Another aspect of work is in the construction of special road vehicle bodies.

Chattaways work in close co-operation with Prodorite in many ways, yet there is still a Chattaway in the firm. A grandson of the founder, Don Chattaway has graduated from draughtsman to production director.

FOXFIELD

LIGHT

RAILWAY

(A BLACK  
COUNTRY  
CONNECTION)

by

Keith Lloyd

---

WHEREVER I go I always look for items connected with the Black Country. On August 25, 1975 I was wandering around North Staffordshire and, being a railway enthusiast, naturally included the Foxfield Light Railway in my itinerary.

This light railway, formerly a colliery line, runs for approximately  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Foxfield Sidings Blythe Bridge to Dilhorne (or Foxfield Colliery), and since the closure of the mine has been the home of the Foxfield Light Railway Society. Here, one of the finest collections of industrial steam locomotives in the country can now be seen and heard.

The railway, although formerly a mineral line, passes through the beautiful rural scenery of North Staffordshire, and its cuttings, embankments and steep gradients display the power and beauty of

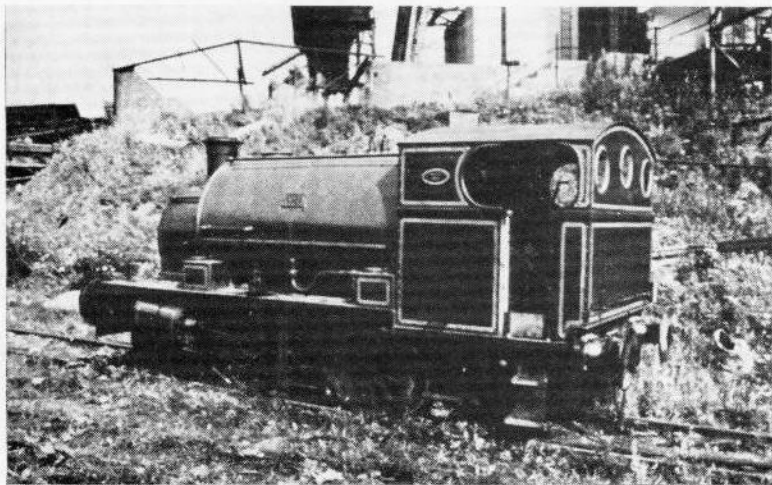


Photo K. Lloyd

*Peckett 0-4-0ST "No. 11" at Foxfield Light Railway, 25.8.75*

steam at its best. It also gives excellent views of the area, and can well be recommended for a visit. Trains are operated on Sunday afternoons and Bank Holidays from April to September, and the centre is easily accessible by road as signs abound once Blythe Bridge (on A50) is reached.

Thirteen steam locos in all are found on the line, mostly belonging to private individuals, and of these, four have links with the Black Country. Two have very strong links indeed.

The two engines that have only limited ties with this area are:— "Wimblebury", a Hunslett 0-6-0ST built in 1956 and delivered new to Cannock Wood Colliery; and "Topham", a Bagnall (of Stafford) 0-6-0ST built in 1922, delivered new to Hednesford Colliery of the West Cannock Colliery Limited, where it worked until 1970 when it was transferred to Cannock Wood Colliery. Here, it would probably have worked with "Wimblebury". Both locomotives were

subsequently sold, being purchased privately for preservation and transferred to Foxfield. "Topham" arrived in November 1972, and "Wimblebury" during 1973.

The third locomotive, with closer ties is "No. 11", a Peckett 0-4-0ST built in 1947 and delivered new to the Nechells Gas Works of the West Midlands Gas Board. However, in August of 1965, No. 11 was moved to Swan Village Gas Works, and there remained until purchased privately for preservation. She moved to Foxfield in August 1969 and some readers may remember the local press coverage given.

So for four years, No. 11 was a Black Country resident, and now she is in retirement at Foxfield, suitably overhauled and restored and available for occasional traffic.

The fourth locomotive has the strongest links of all, having been a Black Country resident almost from 'birth'. It deserves an article to itself and I hope to present it in a future issue.

# WILLIAM FREDERICK BLAY

by H. G. Green

*"Then shall our names, familiar in his mouth as household words,  
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered."*

—KING HENRY V. IV. 3.

**W**ALSALL has produced few historians of note and the recording of the passing years has been undertaken by a mere handful of interested persons. Thomas Pearce (1813); William Glew (1852); Frederic Willmore (1887); spent many years of their lives in the service of the town, recording for posterity some of the wealth of history in which the town is steeped, (but of which so much has unfortunately been lost), adding many little incidents which occurred during the daily routine in the fulfilment of their occupations.

In more recent years we have reason to remember another person who left his mark, but except to a few of the older inhabitants of the town he too has become history. But his type of history is one that lives on and will continue to do so as long as the streets and roads of Walsall remain.

Born in Birmingham in 1862, William Frederick Blay was the eldest of a family of six, two of whom died from diphtheria at an early age. His father, also William Frederick, married an Emma Hartshorne, and there is little doubt that on the birth of their first-born son, plans were already made for his scholastic future, by such amenities as were available in those strict Victorian days. Many years later in 1933, writing about his early years of school life, he gave the following graphic description of local education.

"I wonder how many readers were pupils under the old King's Norton School Board, before the Board possessed a school. It seems a little ludicrous to think of a School Board without any school, but it must have been about 58 years ago when the newly formed body opened a temporary boys' school in the Knutsford Street Mission Room, Balsall Heath.

A corresponding school for girls was held in the old Baptist Schools in Balsall Heath Road. At that time the houses in Knutsford Street possessed front gardens enclosed by low walls, and as the school playground was the street, the chief form of physical exercise consisted of jumping over these garden walls.

In Knutsford Street School there were two rooms fitted with long Sunday School benches. The headmaster (Mr. Rhead) had charge of the main room, and as a candidate pupil teacher, I had the responsibility of preparing youngsters for the Government Standard I examination.

Ye teachers of today, imagine my work! I was a boy aged 13 in charge of about 40 boys packed closely in a room about five yards square, and each boy had to pass the annual examination in reading, writing, arithmetic; and was absolutely ignorant of such work when placed in the class. Before school hours I attended the headmaster's house at 7 a.m. for instruction, and each night I was expected to attend classes in science, art, and languages. I claim to be the first pupil-teacher under the King's Norton School Board".

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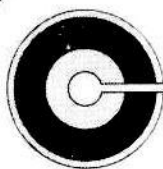
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Conditions and hours such as these would have put paid to any ambition which an average boy of 13 possessed; not so young William Frederick. He left his pupil-teacher days and went on to higher things when in 1880 a great opportunity presented itself. A brand new Scientific College built and endowed by Sir. Josiah Mason, manufacturer and philanthropist at a cost of £180,000, was opened on October 1 of that year and among its subsequent pupils was young William Frederick Blay. This college was later incorporated in Birmingham University).

From Mason's College he moved to the Royal College, London (now London University) for a further period, eventually returning to Birmingham, where he obtained his first scholastic appointment at Bourne College, Quinton, a brand new college erected by the Primitive Methodists at a cost of £100,000—officially opened on October 24 1882.

During these early days he was one of the staff of teachers who spent many of their spare time hours teaching at evening classes, including Johnnie Turner's penny classes in Science and Art, which were held in Birmingham.

At one penny per class, or one shilling for 16, the fee was returned as a reward for success in examinations, and for that and other reasons the classes were even more popular than a similar series which were conducted at the Midland Institute. The prime figure and instigator of these classes was a John Turner, described as a saintly-looking Non-conformist, who with the help of a large staff taught numerous subjects for many years until he moved to Walsall to take up a post as science lecturer at the newly opened Science and Art Institute in Bradford Place.

His immediate successor in Birmingham was "Billie" Blay, and when in due course John Turner retired from his post in Walsall he was again followed by the man who succeeded him in Birmingham . . . "Billie" Blay.

During his early teaching days W.F.B. played a major part in assisting many well known persons to start their scientific careers. He conducted science classes at Bourne College, Quinton; at Walsall Science and Art Institute, as well as at Willenhall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich, and Brownhills. In Birmingham he held classes at Hurst Street Schools, Severn Street Friends Mission Room, the Harborne and Erdington Institutes and many other places. For some years his physiography classes at Hurst Street were attended by over 100 students, chiefly teachers under the old Birmingham School Board. He met all the responsibilities and received all the Government grants paid on the students who passed the official examinations each year. Members of the families of Cadbury, Barrow, Southall, and Barclay, were included among his strongest supporters.

W.F.B. must have been a man of indefatigable willpower and strength, for among the subjects he taught were chemistry, magnetism and electricity; physiology, hygiene, botany, geology, physiography, astronomy, mathematics, sound, light and heat, and many others. Imagine a modern teacher trying to cope with all these subjects. It must have

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been gratifying when in January 1887 the Mayor of Walsall appealed to his fellow citizens to erect in Walsall "a building adequate and suitable for carrying on the Science and Art teaching of the very inefficient schools already in existence, and carried on under many dis-advantages at Railway Chambers, Station Street". The outcome of this appeal was the building of the Science and Art Institute in Bradford Place, an institution with which W.F.B. was later to become associated for a period of 21 years.

In spite of what must have been a tremendous work load resulting in exceptionally long hours "Billie Blay" found time to do a little courting. The young lady to whom he turned his attentions was a Miss Eva Maria Clarke of Walsall, whose father was a well known personality in the town and manager of the old established firm of Brace, Windle and Blythe of Goodall Street. The Blythes were to become almost neighbours of the Blays when they later took up residence in Highgate Road, as they resided in the large black and white house known as "The Crossways", and which still stands at the corner of Gorway Road. Mr. Blythe was driven to his office each morning in a coach and pair, complete with liveried coachman. On July 21 1887 William Frederick Blay and Eva Maria Clarke became man and wife at Moseley Road Congregational Church, Birmingham, their bridesmaid being Mr. Blay's sister Minnie, who in later years married a Mr. George Jackson also of Birmingham.



After the ceremony the young couple travelled by coach to take up their residence in a brand new house known as Claremont in Highgate Road, a house which was later to become familiar to hundreds of Walsall boys who came under the stern eye of W.F.B. during their terms as pupils, either at the Walsall Technical School, or at Hillary Street Schools.

The Highgate to which the newly married couple came to begin their married life was so different from the Highgate we knew 40 years or so ago. Highgate Road was not yet completed, and what is now Gorway Road was a narrow winding country lane leading to Birmingham Road. Their nearest neighbours were the Taylors who lived at the large house now known as The Hawthorns, but which then suffered from the indignity of being christened The Folly House because everyone said that it was a folly to build a house in such an isolated spot so far from the town.

The narrow lane which was once the approach from Sandwell Street still rejoices in the name of Folly House Lane. Round the corner near the Folly House were two farm labourer's cottages, built on a sandstone outcrop and known as Rock's Cottages. At the rear of the house was all open farmland with Wiggin's Farm, as it was then known, tucked away at the end of a long narrow track.

During the first world war part of the land nearest to the rear of the houses in Highgate Road was known as the Folly Fields Allotments, and there is surely no need to mention who was one of the prime instigators for their inception; after all, he had only to climb over his garden wall to be on his allotment. At the foot of Highgate Road was West Bromwich Lane, a narrow winding lane with tall hedges on either side leading to the hamlets of Maw Green, Fullbrook, The Delves, and finally to West Bromwich.

The completely rural aspect of the district was described fully by W.F.B. when he was reminiscing many years later in an article which he wrote for the local newspaper.

For a time he continued teaching in Birmingham, travelling by train either from Walsall or Bescot stations, which were both about equi-distant from Highgate Road, and quite a good step to walk morning and evening. In 1891 he was offered the position of headmaster of the newly formed Walsall Technical Day School, following in the footsteps of Johnnie Turner, the man whom he had previously succeeded in Birmingham. He held this post most successfully until he was offered what was a step up the educational ladder, namely the headmastership of Hillary Street Senior School. Here, he was responsible for the education of literally hundreds of Walsall boys, by whom he was held in the greatest affection and on whom he exercised a great deal of influence, with the result that many of them were able to take their places in the public life of the town.

In 1927 W.F.B. reached the age of 65, when it was necessary for him to retire from the teaching profession. His retirement was marked by an impressive gathering of civic dignitaries, top ranking personnel



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in the field of education, fellow teachers, and pupils, both past and present. Many spoke highly of the man who had been held in so great an esteem by thousands of pupils who had passed through his classes over the past fifty years. Many of them had reason to thank him, not only for the interest he had shown in their school lives, but also in their leisure time and well being after they had left school.

When asked to comment on education as he saw it, Mr. Blay once said . . .

"The educational system in this country is theoretically perfect. From the earliest weeks of their school life the children are graded according to their intelligence. It is not true now that dull children retard the progress of the brilliant, or that the brighter ones are given so much attention that the dullards are neglected. Each child is assured of receiving just the treatment which its brainpower deserves. It is difficult not to be lazy in these modern days. Young people ought to realise that a full life can only be lived by personal exertion, by cultivating grit, determination and a love of work for its own sake. Modern school products are starting on the road of life with far fewer barriers to potential success than previous generations. But even so, the only way they can succeed is by hard work and constant endeavour, and by continuing to study after they have left school. School nowadays can give a child a good start in life. It is his own fault if he becomes slack after leaving".

These words were written over forty years ago. With the tremendous strides which education has made in the last decade and with the facilities now offered by modern teaching establishments, they could equally apply to the present generation, who so often complain about having nothing to do in their spare time.

After his retirement from the teaching profession W.F.B. had plenty to occupy both his mind and body. For over thirty years he had been an active member of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, and an instructor in Red Cross and ambulance work. His services were especially valuable on the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war, when he devoted long hours to giving lectures, demonstrations and instruction in first aid, bandaging etc. to men and women, chiefly with the object of preparing nurses for military and Red Cross hospitals. He also did a great deal of work organising entertainments and appealing for comforts for the sick and wounded.

The tremendous efforts which he had put into the St. John Ambulance Brigade was shown when in the short space of a few years the South Staffordshire Section increased from a mere five divisions to a total of twenty-three. In recognition of his services for the Brigade, Corps Superintendent Blay was summoned to attend an investiture at London where he was installed as a "Serving Brother of the Order of St. John", for long and honourable service to the Order.

Someone once said that a busy man had always time to do a little more. This was no rash statement as far as W.F.B. was concerned, for in addition to his untiring service for the younger generation in the field of education he was also connected with them in other directions, notably with the Girl Guide and Boy Scout movements.

The start of the Girl Guide movement in Walsall reads like a fairy tale and appears to be almost as improbable. He had the idea of starting the Guides as far back as 1910, but after discussing the prospects with several of his lady friends received little encouragement, as none of them were prepared to accept any responsibility. He said that one evening, almost in desperation he stood in front of a mirror, read the Girl Guide Law, saluted, shook hands with himself, and became what was reputed to be the only male Girl Guide in the country and probably in the whole world!

Eventually, in 1918 the movement was recognised in Walsall, and from that date Mr. Blay began a long and happy association with it. He assisted with training in first aid, home nursing and other subjects, but regretfully, owing to failing health, had to hand over to others.

As a token of appreciation for the many years he had been connected with them, he was presented with a Girl Guide Thanks Badge which entitled him to call on the assistance of the Girl Guides at any time.

After his retirement he also had more time to spend on another of his many hobbies, namely local history. For many years he had been an enthusiastic member of the Walsall Historical Association and at one time held the office of chairman. At one of the meetings it was suggested that members should participate in a local project, and after some discussion it was decided that the subject should be a history of local street names. This was agreed upon with some enthusiasm and members were asked to become amateur detectives and find out as much information as they could.

In words which were often repeated to me in later years by Mr. Blay, "When they did that, they knew not what they did". How true were those words. After many months enthusiasm began to wane and the sum total of information discovered concerned only one street.

Repeated attempts to revive interest in the subject failed and all the members except one gave it up. The one that did not was W. F. Blay—he had found another subject in which to interest himself. For years he painstakingly searched for information, wrote hundreds of letters and literally visited every existing street, court and alley in the town. The result of his efforts was fantastic; information poured in, and he spent many hours poring through old deeds, documents and diaries carefully collating a wealth of information about places which had long since disappeared, and persons long since dead. Unfortunately, the effect of all this work on his eyesight was disastrous and he gradually became blind. At a meeting of another society of which I was a member, the talk one evening was given by Mr. Blay, and the subject was Old Walsall.

After the meeting I spoke to him and was persuaded to attend the next meeting of The Walsall Historical Association, subsequently becoming a member and, in later years, secretary of the branch. After one meeting the subject of street names was mentioned and I was told of the immense amount of work which had been done on that subject

by Mr. Blay. It was also mentioned that it was a pity that the work had never been completed owing to the fact that Mr. Blay was now completely blind. I decided to have a talk with Mr. Blay about it. It was evident that he was delighted to have someone who was interested and he invited me to his house one evening. After some conversation he went into another room, and from a cupboard brought out a parcel done up in brown paper and tied with string.

We sat down and he opened the parcel and showed me the contents. There were literally hundreds of sheets of quarto size paper in that parcel, many completely covered with writing and, in many instances, corrected and altered until it was difficult to tell which was the correct text.

He explained that he would like me to read through the whole lot for him and we would make some attempt to finalise the work and, if possible, seek out the history of the few names which remained. He agreed that the task would take some time and I agreed to help him, but even I did not realise the magnitude of the task which lay before us.

For one night a week over a period of three years I too became enthralled in the history of the street names of Walsall, and as time went on I became more and more interested in this fascinating subject. I obtained complete lists of the Walsall street names and checked off those which had been dealt with by Mr. Blay. I read to him every word

## VISIT



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that he had written and on many occasions had difficulty in deciphering his close-written crabbed handwriting. When this happened his phenomenal memory became apparent and he quoted word for word what he had written many years before. Often, when we were unable to obtain certain information he would pick up the telephone and ring up some person and try to get the matter sorted out.

Eventually out of the mass of information and the seeming dis-order there came a time when we had reduced the list of street names to the stage when there remained only five about which we could find little or no information, and we then reluctantly decided to consider the prospects of putting the mass of information into print. I obtained estimates for printing one hundred copies, but after many months gave up the task as it was impossible to get one hundred people to subscribe a modest guinea for a printed copy. Like Mr. Blay I was disappointed and the manuscript was again tied up in a parcel and put away for some further attempt in the future.

Unfortunately, however, the future was to become uncertain as the clouds of war were darkening the horizon and more important issues had to take precedence as the whole world became involved in World War Two. Due to other more pressing matters I saw very little of Mr. Blay during those years. I married and moved away from Walsall, and other items beside street names occupied my time.

On the death of Mr. Blay the manuscript copy of the history of Walsall Street Names was handed over to Walsall Public Library, who produce typescript copies which can be perused by anyone who cares to visit the Reference Room.

I often wondered what had happened to the original manuscript and thought that it had possibly been destroyed after the copies had been typed. However, by a most amazing turn of fate the original is now back in my possession after nearly forty years. The circumstances under which it was returned seem to me to be something of a miracle. From time to time over the years I have written articles about Walsall and W. F. Blay, and in October 1973 one of these was printed in the Walsall Observer. Imagine my surprise when in December I received a 'phone call from a member of the Observer staff saying that they had a letter for me from Canada, which they were forwarding on.

When I received this letter I was amazed to find that it was from Mr. Blay's only daughter Dorothy, now living in Quebec, saying that a friend of hers who still lived in Walsall had sent her a copy of my article. The outcome of all this was that she told me that another relation

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of hers who lived in Birmingham would be pleased to see me, as she had something in which I was interested. I paid this lady a visit and imagine my surprise when I was handed the original manuscript of Walsall Street Names which I had last seen in 1938, together with a bound typed copy of the same. I think it was one of the greatest surprises I have ever received, and certainly a most welcome one.

It is my intention to have the work printed when possible as a memorial and a tribute to the man who spent so many years in proving "What's in a name".

In addition to the many things I have mentioned above, W.F.B. produced several booklets on matters concerning the History of Walsall. Probably one of the better known is 'The Story of Walsall Turnpike Roads and Tollgates', published in 1932, but from his pen came also 'The Geology of Walsall'; 'The Botany of Walsall'; 'Life 1,800 Years Ago', and a number of articles which appeared from time to time in the Walsall Observer.

The vitality of this man was amazing, he crammed more into life than any other person I have met and it was apparent that no-one ever asked him what he did in his spare time—he never had any!

Another of his little-known hobbies came to light in an article in the Walsall Observer in March 1929. This time it was about winning the confidence and love of wild birds, and he told of the many hours he had spent standing in various gardens feeding and taming them. Among the information is a fascinating account of the food capacity of a common sparrow, and the time when he had no fewer than six robins feeding from his hand at the same time.

After the loss of his eyesight this remarkable man started to learn to read Braille, and I remember him trying to explain to me the way that this 'touch' language transposed a simple combination of dots into words, and the various shorthand combinations which the more advanced reader had to master.

In 1947 Mr. and Mrs. Blay celebrated their Diamond Wedding, receiving a congratulatory telegram from their Majesties the King and Queen. William died on March 5 1948 in his 86th year.

Mrs. Blay survived him by two more years and then unfortunately fell in her bedroom and died from injuries received. A few days previously she had been in fairly good health and had celebrated her 90th birthday.

One other thing which he did was to supply lists of names to the Borough Surveyors Department for new streets which were made in the borough, and here again his attention to detail was such that he insisted that they should have some connection with persons or places worthy of record, and he always supplied a short history with his suggestions. I have tried to continue this practice and to ensure that the name of Blay should be remembered. I managed to get a street named after him. Not, alas, the one I would have liked and which is now known as Highgate Drive, but one of the streets which form part of the new estate between Wolverhampton Road and Manor Road.



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COSELEY)

by

J. William Jones

In my mind  
I can see  
The old landscape  
As it used to be,  
A great sweep  
Of open land  
Rutted and scarred,  
Brittle with wind-shaved grass.  
It is like an old dream  
Pounded out  
With the shock  
Of waking:  
Houses and flats  
And shops;  
Black tarred roadways  
Looping and splintering  
Where man-made tracks  
Meandered,  
Savouring their leisure  
In that tranquil age  
—so far removed  
from today as to  
seem ethereal—  
Of sunshine and peace.  
The merry brook  
That took the feet of children  
To its heart;  
Piped and channelled now,  
Squeezed out of sight;  
The great pools, deep in marl,  
That lay, in summer  
Like spilled blue paint,  
Are drowned  
Under bricks and mortar.

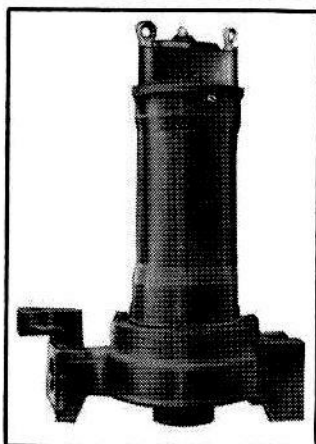
Lazy, limpid days,  
Warm and fleecy as wool;  
Adrone with flies,  
Hazy with woodsmoke  
From gypsy fires.  
All bright, as a child's eyes  
Viewing life.  
Or a man's struggling  
To focus back through time—  
The singing and the gold—  
Seeing only the light.

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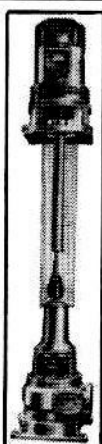
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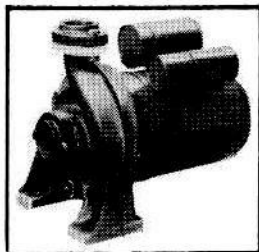
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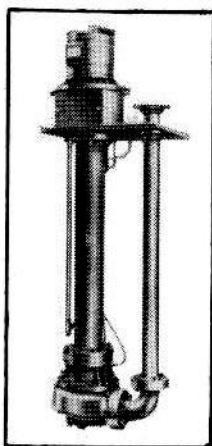
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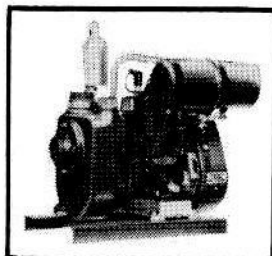
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# Beggars 'ud Ride

by Edith Cotterill

ME an' our kid day atta goo ter skule on votin' day an' we 'ad a bostin' time. We'd reckoned on gooin' wiv Fairther an' Mom ter the votin' an' then on wiv 'em ter the "Blood Tub", but we wus a bit jubus when we sid Ma puttin' clane newspairpers on the fairble, (Our Fairther allus puck 'is winners while 'e wus aitin' 'is fittle),

"Who'n yer got cummin'?" aksed our kid.

"If yer mus' know", sed Mom, wipin' the platters on 'er appund, "yer a'nt Fabe's cummin' tew 'er tay, then 'er con goo avotin' wiv we".

"Now me an' our kid cudn't abide a'nt Fabe; 'erd gotta fairce like a wirrycow an' 'er legs wus that bandy 'er cudn't a' stopped a pig up entry.

"That's buggered it!" chelluped our kid, dodgin' the back a' Mom's 'ond, "If that sawny beesoms' cummin', I'm agooin' ter Nans".

"Then goo an' jiy goo wiv yer!" snapped Mom, an' we node 'er on'y waented ter be shut on we so's 'er cud 'ave a gud cag-mag wiv a'nt Fabe.

Now, our Nan lived in a party yard up "Wit's End" in a one up an' one downer, but 'er kep' a lodger in th'up bit, 'Er cudn't gerrup stairs any road on account of 'er 'avin' on'y one leg, (t'other 'ad bin blowed off be the Zepplins when 'er wus a wench). 'Er cud 'ave 'ad a tin un, but 'er sed why shud 'er? Wiv 'er peg-leg 'er cud set taters, poke the fire an', if any th'ode gammers on the fode got franzy, 'er cud whip it off in a jiffy an' clonk 'em wiv it. Once upon a goo 'er clobbered a copper an' laid 'im out code. They rostled 'er off ter the clink an' we wor 'arf chuffed 'cos nobody else at our skule 'ad got a granny in the nick!

Well, when we got ter "Wit's End", the'er 'er sot, dolled up ter the nines.

"Weer bin yoh agooin'?" aksed our kid.

"Weer'n yer think? I aye never missed a votin' yet an' I doh mean ter start now, so that's weer I'm agooin'. An' in a moty car", 'er added slyly.

"Cor"! breathed our kid, "A moty car?"

"Well, yoh doh think I'm agooin' 'op a ketch on me peg-leg when I con ride, dun yer? I shud be a fule!" sed Nan.

"I doh 'arf wish we cud goo wiv yer", sighed our kid.

"If wishes wus 'osses beggars ud ride", loffed Nan. But when the motor cum 'er tipped we the wink ter foller.

"Aye! ode on!" ollered the driver, "If yoh young varmint think yo'm agooin', yo'n gorra 'nother think cummin'!"

"Well if they doh I shore goo naither!" capped Nan, plonkin' 'erself down on a cheer an' drawin' 'er 'atpins outa 'er titfer.

"O, orlrite then, yo'll a' me shot", 'e chuntered, "But kape yer clod'oppers off them sates, or I'll tan yer 'ide, see if I doh".

So the'er we sot in all we glory.

"Tek yer time", sed Nan, "we might as well 'ave we monies wuth".

"Cor blimey mussis!" groused the fella, "I cud a tuk a bakers' dozen the'er an' back agen while I'm tekin' yoh!"

Gooin' along the road we passed our Fairther wi' Mom an' a'nt Fabe on Shanks' pony. They loked daggers at we, but we jus' waved we 'onds as tho' we wus riyalty. When we got the'er the news pairper blokes wus tekin' pitchers of our mon, an' they tuk sum of 'im 'elpin' Nan inter the booth, tho' 'er wud 'a got the'er a sight quicker without 'im.

"Cum on! shift theesen!" bellucked the driver when we cum out agen, "St'trewth, yoh three bin a pair if ever there wus one!"

"Sod 'im!" sed Nan, "It's allus the sairm; once they'n got yer vote yoh con goo ter pot fer all they'd amind, Arr' well, yo'n 'ad yer wack aye yer?" Then 'er gid we faggots an' pays fer we tay.

"'Ow dun yer vote Nan?" aksed our kid when we'd blowed we bags out.

"Well yoh 'ad orter know that!" sed Nan, "But yoh cor goo far wrong so think on. When yoh does yer sums at skule the taycher puts a big cross by them wot aye right doh 'er? well, it's jus' the sairm wi' votin'. It stands ter sense, yoh puts yer cross by the bloke wot aye right!"



It wor 'arf a shairm tho', cos after all that galavantin' our mon lost. —an' be on'y one vote an' all!

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# CHEAP TICKET TO THE HAWTHORNS

by Michael Hale

**I**N these unsettled times, when each year sees British Rail produce an enormous loss, one way in which economies are made is to shut down virtually the entire system on Christmas Day. There is thus no possibility of a new station opening on that day, and yet that is what happened thirty-five years ago. Even then, such an event must have been very uncommon, possibly unique, and it took place here in the Black Country. It was associated with a football match played by West Bromwich Albion, and nowadays there are no Football League matches scheduled for Christmas Day, which is another reason why this event seems so unusual to us now.

On December 25, 1931, the Great Western Railway opened "The Hawthorns", a new stopping-place specifically serving the ground of West Bromwich Albion Football Club, and bearing the same name as the ground. In the previous season the "Baggies" had achieved fame by winning the F.A. Cup and promotion to the First Division. This had resulted in increased attendances and the club management asked the G.W.R. for improved facilities for supporters travelling by rail. Previously, they had used Smethwick Junction or Rolfe Street stations, both about a mile from the ground. The scheme had been first mooted some ten years earlier,

then shelved as attendances fell in the twenties, particularly when Albion were relegated in 1928.

A brief opening ceremony was held, the occasion being honoured with civic recognition. Amongst local notables present were the Mayor and Mayoress of West Bromwich (Councillor W. T. and Mrs. Poultney), the Mayor and Mayoress of Smethwick (Alderman Sands and Miss Sands), the Borough member for West Bromwich (Mr. Alexander Ramsay) and Mrs. Ramsay, the Town Clerk of Smethwick (Mr. F. Chapman), the Deputy Town Clerk of West Bromwich (Mr. R. H. K. Wickham), and the following directors of West Bromwich Albion F.C.: Messrs. W. I. Bassett (Chairman), J. S. Round, W. W. Hackett, J. Everiss and Major H. Wilson Keys, together with officials of the Railway Company.

A contemporary account tells us that a ribbon had been placed across the line, and the first train to stop at the new platform arrived from the Stourbridge district soon after ten o'clock. The engine was gaily decorated and presented quite a festive appearance. The ribbon having been duly severed, the Mayors of West Bromwich and Smethwick shook hands with the engine driver and his fireman, and offered a few words of commendation to the Railway Company for making a provision which would

meet a long-felt want. This was acknowledged by an official of the company.

Altogether 17 trains arrived at the station for the local derby with Birmingham, seven coming from the Birmingham district and ten from the Stourbridge and Wolverhampton areas. They conveyed 8,967 passengers, which was regarded as a very satisfactory opening number. Much appreciation was expressed later on about the cheap bookings which were available to football supporters on first team match days, and this was largely taken advantage of.

The two teams on that day were: W.B. Albion—Pearson; Shaw, Trentham; Magee, Richardson, W., Murphy; Glidden, Boyes, Richardson, W. G., Sandford, Wood.

Birmingham — Hibbs; Liddell, Barkas; Firth, Morrall, Cringham; Briggs, Crosbie, Smith, Bradford, Curtis.

The official attendance was 38,053, and the match was refereed by Mr. A. J. Caseley of Wolverhampton. Unfortunately for the home supporters, Birmingham won by a solitary goal scored by Curtis after 85 minutes.

The Hawthorns was situated at the point where the Stourbridge line left the main line from Birmingham (Snow Hill) to Wolverhampton (Low Level), namely, Handsworth Junction. There were four platforms in all, with footpaths leading to Halfords Lane, about a quarter of a mile from the ground. Platforms 1 and 2 served the main line on the

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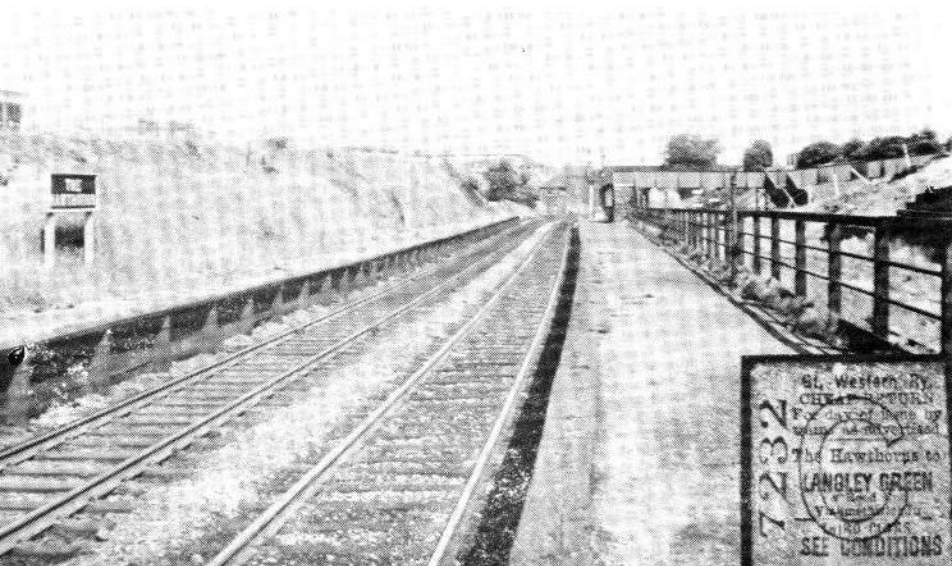


**A local tradition for over 100 years**

Wolverhampton side of the junction, Platform 3 was on the up side of the Stourbridge line, while Platform 4 was on the Birmingham side of the junction, serving the down Stourbridge line. From Handsworth Junction into Snow Hill there were four tracks, two main and two relief lines.

The photograph shows Platforms 1 and 2 with Handsworth Junction signalbox in the background, just

and it was open only on match days. The public timetables did not mention its existence. Yet it was not merely an unstaffed halt, because the simple booking office and ticket-collecting points were manned when the platforms were in use. The service was provided by advertised local trains on both routes, and also by specials when demand justified them. Sometimes, for Cup-ties for example, long-



*The Hawthorns, June 20, 1964*

M. Hale

before the Halfords Lane road-bridge. Platform 3 is on the right, out of sight, joining Platform 2 at the end and linked to the approach path by a footbridge. Platform 4 lay beyond the roadbridge. Inset is the return half of a cheap day ticket to The Hawthorns, issued at Langley Green in December, 1933.

It is difficult to know what status to give The Hawthorns. It was not a station in the ordinary meaning of the word, in that it had no waiting rooms and other facilities

distance excursion trains would call there.

So, for over thirty years, those platforms were used by followers of the Albion and many visiting teams, but from March 6, 1967, the situation changed completely. Stourbridge trains were diverted from Smethwick Junction via Galton Junction to Birmingham (New Street) Station, and thus no longer ran through The Hawthorns. Wolverhampton services were reduced following the withdrawal of



main line trains from that route, and a year later they were reduced even further; a single-unit diesel railcar ran at peak periods only. By this time, most supporters from the Birmingham side who used public transport were travelling by bus.

Near the end, only the 13.50 Wolverhampton to Snow Hill, and a special at 14.30 from Langley Green called there, with a return service provided by the 17.08 Snow Hill to Wolverhampton and the 16.59 Snow Hill to Langley Green. Those trains called for the last time on Saturday April 27, 1968, when a Central League match with Bury was played. The attendance was 1,953, of whom about 300 used The Hawthorns. The Albion reserve team makes interesting reading now:

Sheppard; Fairfax, Wilson;

Cantello, Potter, Merrick; Krzywicki, Holt, Freeman, Hartford, Martin.

The final score was Albion 3 Bury 0, the goals being scored by Freeman (2) and Martin.

As a footnote it may be added that from March 6, 1972, the remaining passenger services to Snow Hill were withdrawn, and subsequently the track from Handsworth Junction towards Wolverhampton was lifted. In 1976, the "Throstles", to use their other nickname, have again returned to the First Division, but their supporters can no longer book cheap tickets to The Hawthorns. The writer is grateful to Mr. Tony Matthews of West Bromwich Albion Football Club for kindly supplying information from the club records.

### COVER ILLUSTRATION

*The Delph Works of Price Pearson, looking through the main entrance in Turners Lane in December 1974 as demolition started. The square stack close to the canal bridge at the bottom of the Nine Locks on Delph Road has a stone set into its base which states, "Erected by E. J. and J. Pearson—A.D. 1864". (still standing 3 December 1975).*

RON MOSS.

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# PONY POWER

Primrose Rostron

AS a child, half a century ago, riding in the Himley Woods at bluebell time, pit ponies were seen grazing in Himley Park and the fields beside it. These ponies were carefree, kicking up their heels in the meadows among the lady's smock and buttercups.

In those days the popular myth that pit ponies went blind was believed and much pity was wasted, for working underground does not cause blindness.

Back in the seventeenth century, many pits used a cog-and-rung gin. This device had a rope drum, much like the cylindrical part of a windlass, suspended directly over the shaft with a hazel basket on the end of the rope. The horse track was around the mouth of the pit and the animal walked or trotted, driving a horizontal cogged wooden wheel mounted on a vertical axis. When the basket was lowered, the horse trotted in the opposite direction.

The more powerful whim gin or whimsey was larger and sometimes worked by two horses. Whim gins were still in use in Shropshire at the beginning of the present century.

The sack weight system, or "horse and gear pit" was also known in the Midlands. A pulley was erected over the shaft and the horse walked away down a slope, drawing the winding rope and thus raising the coal basket.

As the pits grew deeper, increased horse power was needed and eight horse teams harnessed four abreast were tried, but a four horse team remained the most suitable.

In 1746, one whim gin was worked by four horses trotting  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times around the track. They travelled  $151\frac{1}{2}$  yards, drawing up the coal basket from a depth of 76 yards.

During the eighteenth century strong cobs or "galloways" were introduced into the mines to pull the underground sledges piled high with coal.

By 1765 tramways were found in many collieries, along which the ponies pulled the four-wheeled corves. A corf held 14-15 pecks of coal. Small boys were paid twopence a day for driving the ponies.

By 1798 ponies were employed underground in most of the Dudley pits. It then cost one shilling to bring a ton of coal to the surface, of which  $1\frac{1}{4}$ d. was spent on pony power.

Mares were not used underground after 1840, when shaft cages came in. Where there were no cages, ponies were sent down trussed up in a net which was attached to a hook, and the petrified animals were lowered into the darkness.

By about 1869 this practice was dying out in the Midlands.

Today, only about 250 ponies work underground, and they are well looked after by the National Coal Board.

The Coal Mines Act of 1911, subsequently re-enacted in 1949 and 1954, laid down that no horse was to go underground until aged 4.

Nowadays, every animal is examined annually by a vet and the ponies are stabled in single stalls, well lit and ventilated. Horsekeepers are in charge of 8-15 ponies, and they see that sufficient food and water is provided, as far as possible dust free. No pony is allowed to work more than two shifts in 24 hours, or more than three shifts in 48 hours. (A shift is 7½ hours).

Today, the pit ponies are often in better condition than those above ground. They have a balanced diet and their favourite titbit is a piece of rock salt. The modern pit pony often stays 10-15 years underground, though some veterans manage twenty years.

A 1969 report on South Staffordshire Horse Haulage noted that in 114 local mines only 40% used ponies: fifteen of these were small pits: twelve used 10-60 ponies and eleven employed 50-100 animals. While three of the pits used 100 ponies.

Each year the number of ponies underground decreases, but in the Midlands where the coal seams are thick there is still a demand for Welsh cobs of 14 hands.

Some pit ponies become household pets suitable for children, and any new owners should remember the ponies penchant for rock salt!



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# SGT. BATES OF THE WEDNESBURY RIFLES

by

J. Robert Williams



*Sergeant Bates of the 34th Staffs.  
Rifles Vols., circa 1866.*

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Wednesbury County Library

**S**ERGEANT Bates enrolled in the 34th (Wednesbury) Company of the 5th Administration Battalion, Staffordshire Rifle Volunteers, in 1866. The photograph reproduced here was taken by G. E. Slater of 22 Windmill Street, Wednesbury, and shows Bates probably shortly after volunteering. He wears the grey uniform with green collar and cuffs, and black braid, worn by the Company until the introduction of the Scarlet tunic in 1878/79.<sup>1</sup> On the grey shako is a bronzed badge (See Photo 2) comprising a Stafford Knot within the loop of a crowned bugle horn.<sup>2</sup> A smaller but similar badge was worn each side of the collar. On the leather pouch-belt a bronzed badge has the design of a Stafford Knot within a laurel wreath closed by a crown, and the waistbelt clasp was made up of a crowned Stafford Knot within a laurel wreath. The bronzed buttons displayed a Stafford Knot within a laurel wreath closed by a crown. The weapon is the Enfield rifle, the last British muzzle loader, and its complementing triangular bayonet hangs in a scabbard on the left hip.



2

Top:  
Shako badge Staffs.  
Rifle Vols. 1860-79.  
From the collection of  
Mr. T. Reece of  
Willenhall.

Lower : Shows what may  
be a glengarry(?) badge  
in white metal, of the  
5th Admin. Bn, Staffs.  
Rifle Vols to which the  
34th (Wednesbury)  
Company belonged. IV.



Bates became a sergeant in 1881 but was not long to enjoy his new rank. He was drowned in the same year whilst trying to save the life of a girl who had fallen into the canal<sup>3</sup> near Hall Green Foundry.

The 34th Coy., Staffs. Rifle Vols. was formed in 1860<sup>5</sup> during the wave of patriotic feeling which arose in response to the bellicosity of Napoleon III's France. In 1862 the officers were Captain T. Russel, Lt J. H. Thursfield, Ensign George C. Whitehouse, Hon. Chaplain the Rev. J. Lyons and Hon. Assistant Surgeon W Iynes, and the strength of the company was 47.

It became 'F' Coy., 3rd Staffs. Rifle Volunteer Corps in 1881, 'G' Coy., 2nd Vol. Bn., The South Staffs. Regiment (Wednesbury also provided 'H' Coy, 2nd Vol. Bn.) in 1883 and 'H' Coy, 5th Bn. S. Staffs. Regiment in 1908.

#### Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> The grey uniform with green facings was worn universally by the Staffs. Rifle Volunteer Companies until the introduction of scarlet.
- <sup>2</sup> A bugle horn is emblematic of light infantry or rifle units.
- <sup>3</sup> Tame Valley Canal.
- <sup>4</sup> The other units of the 5th Admin. Bn. were: 4th Coy (Walsall); 14th (Bloxwich); 22nd (Brownhills); and 33rd (Cannock).
- <sup>5</sup> The company's services were accepted on 2 May, 1860.

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## The Marvellous Flute

**M**USICAL instruments of brass and silver are in everyday use, but there can be precious few made of gold.

Yet such was the musical talent of a Stourbridge businessman that just over a century ago a group of his admirers got together and subscribed to buy him a gold flute which was to be heard by awe-struck audiences at many a concert in the area.

The recipient of this handsome gift was James Mathews, who was born at a house in High Street and died at Clent on 31 December 1900. The Mathews family included several men of some distinction.

James was the son of Paul Mathews who had a drapery and tailor's business in Stourbridge High Street, but later became manager to the brick-making firm of Rufford and Co., Hungary Hill, Stourbridge, which had a great reputation for manufacturing glazed baths, but was taken over by members of the Holcroft family. Paul Mathews, recorded as being notable for his "humour, bon-hommie and versatility", sent James to a school at Kidderminster kept by a relative, and then to King Edward VI School, Stourbridge. Here, the Rev. Giffard Wells was attempting to revitalise a sadly decayed seat of learning which early in the century is reported to have had no pupils whatsoever!

As a young man James worked for a time for the Stourbridge and Kidderminster Banking Co., which

is now the Metropolitan branch of the Midland Bank with new premises opened in 1974 on its old site in High Street, Stourbridge, but after several years there he joined his father at Rufford's brickworks, eventually succeeding him as manager. On the retirement of Francis Tongue Rufford from the business, the works was taken over by the Holcrofts who had extensive interests in coal mining. James Mathews in all spent 45 years with Rufford and Co., becoming a partner before retiring in 1896. In June 1854 he had married Miss Charlotte Lamb from Ombersley and for many years they lived at Summer Bank, Clent, where he died in 1900. She died on 7 October 1906, aged 84.

From his youth James Mathews was interested in music and as a flautist he was in great demand at the musical evenings and concerts that were such a feature of the social and cultural life of the district. The Observer (Stourbridge) commented that "as an amateur his playing is second to none in England and few indeed are the professionals that can excel him". He was a member of Stourbridge Institute, the focal point of male educational and social activities in the town, and of one concert, sponsored by the Institute and held in connection with the popular Penny Readings in 1864, the Press commented; "No words of ours can sufficiently describe the effect produced on musical ears by his skilful performance. A most enthusiastic encore greeted him on

resuming his seat. After a moment's pause he rose to acknowledge the compliment but declined to play again that evening".

Incidentally on that occasion one of the readers was Lord Lyttelton — his contribution being selections from the works of Thomas Carlyle.

## SPECIAL FLUTE

It was in appreciation of his talents and in acknowledgement of the way he gave his time to entertain on behalf of charitable causes that a number of influential admirers decided to give him a really special flute. The idea came from a Mr. Forrest. Originally, it was proposed that a silver flute be given, but subscriptions mounted to so much that it was decided to substitute a gold one—"the finest in the world"—it was stated. This magnificent instrument, described by *The Observer* as "a fine piece of mechanism and workmanship" was produced by Ruddall, Rose, Carte and Co., the mechanism being designed by a Mr. Frankland, of Dudley, based on advice from Mr. Carte. The flute was basically of 18 carat gold, with keys of silver.

James Mathews himself planned the keys, which numbered more than usual. *The Observer* observed: "When all the holes are open upon Mr. Carte's flute it will sound the note D (fourth line treble clef), but on Mr. Mathews' instrument when all the holes open the note will be F, a minor third above D, the extra notes being made by opening the additional top keys". Apart from having 35 instead of the usual 16 keys, another feature of the instrument was that it had a square hole instead of a round one.

"His skill with that instrument

was indeed marvellous and no-one who heard him could ever forget the clear limpit entrancing tones which he brought forth and the perfect taste and mastery he displayed" was the verdict of *The Advertiser* (Brierley Hill).

The flute was handed to Mathews at a ceremony in the Union Hall, Enville Street, Stourbridge (subsequently auction salerooms, but now no more), on 7 October, 1868 when the room was well filled "with a fashionable audience, the elite of the town and neighbourhood". Edward Bindon Martin, of Pedmore, a civil engineer and well known local figure, made the presentation, and with the flute went a testimonial bearing the names of subscribers. These included William Akroyd (died Jan. 1869), the leading public man of his day in Stourbridge, and maternal grandfather of Lord Beveridge, "author" of *Welfare State*; Frank Evers, of Whitehall, Oldswinford; Henry Onions Firmstone, an ironmaster of Wollaston Hall; Charles Evers Swindell, ironmaster, of The Quarry, Pedmore; James Evers Swindell, of Oldswinford Castle; E. J. Renaud, a Dudley glass manufacturer who lived at Oldswinford; the Rev. W. J. J. Welch, the headmaster of Stourbridge Grammar School; William G. Goddard, the school's second master; John Harward, a solicitor and a leading churchman; Charles (later Sir Charles) Holcroft, who lived at Corbyn's Hall, Pensnett, and was a music enthusiast; his brother, William Holcroft, who later lived at the old F. T. Rufford home Prescott House, Stourbridge and who was the father of Sir George Holcroft, baronet, of The Grange, Stourbridge. Dr. Alfred Freer, one of the founders

of Stourbridge Chess Club was present, as also were Joseph Webb and Charles Webb, glass manufacturers at Amblecote, and Capt. James Walker, a glass manufacturer who was a leading light in the Stourbridge Volunteers.

During the ensuing musical evening, James Mathews played his new instrument. Around this time James Mathews was becoming the father of a family of sons, one of whom, Randle Lamb Mathews was to become one of the outstanding personalities in the public life of the Stourbridge district. Born in 1860, he went to the local grammar school, continued his studies in Switzerland and Germany, was articled to the Stourbridge solicitor George Perry, and admitted a solicitor in 1882. Two years later he married Elizabeth Ellen Turney, eldest daughter of William Jonadab Turney, head of the firm W. J. Turney and Co., at whose large skinworks on the banks of the River Stour, leather, parchment and glue were produced. W. J. Turney was prominently engaged in the public life of Stourbridge and on his death Randle Mathews became managing director of W. J. Turney and Co. and in accordance with his importance in the industrial life of the town threw himself into the thick of public affairs. Like his father he took a keen interest in the Stourbridge Dispensary, serving as chairman of its management committee, and he was also a member of the board of the Corbett Hospital, and chairman of the Workshops Committee of Stourbridge Institution for the Blind. For 34 years he was a magistrate and retired from the chairmanship of the Stourbridge Bench in September 1931, a month before he died at The Woodlands, Alveston,

to which house he had retired a few months earlier, after living at Stourton Court, Stourton, for about a quarter of a century.

Among the positions he held were Mayor of Stourbridge (1924 and 1925), vice-chairman of the governors of Stourbridge Grammar School, president of the Old Edwardian Club, a feoffee of Oldswinford Hospital, a governor of Kinver Grammar School, chairman of Stourbridge Conservative Club, president for 25 years of Stourbridge Rifle Club, president of Kinver and District Horticultural Society, Stourbridge Institute and Social Club, and of the Institute's Male Voice Choir, and of Stourbridge Amateur Operatic Society. He had also served as a warden at both Pedmore and Oldswinford parish churches.

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The Stourbridge scene has changed almost beyond recognition since James Mathews performed to admiring audiences on his unique flute. Rufford's brickworks is now the site of the Stepping Stones housing estate and Turney's Skinworks is no more than a short length of boundary wall and heaps

of brick rubble. How many people would turn out on an evening to hear readings from authors like Carlyle—even if a noble lord was the reader? And in these affluent times, how many people would subscribe towards the purchase of a gold flute for a local amateur musician?

---

CODE

CUMFUT

by

Kate Fletcher

Ayli got wum frum waik one night  
Un cudn't ate 'iz tay.  
'E sed, "Ah musta copped the flu,  
I an felt bad terday.

Arn bin acuffin' un asneejin';  
Me throot's all sooter un dry.  
'Ast got summut wot'll kewer me,  
Or dust waant me ter die?"

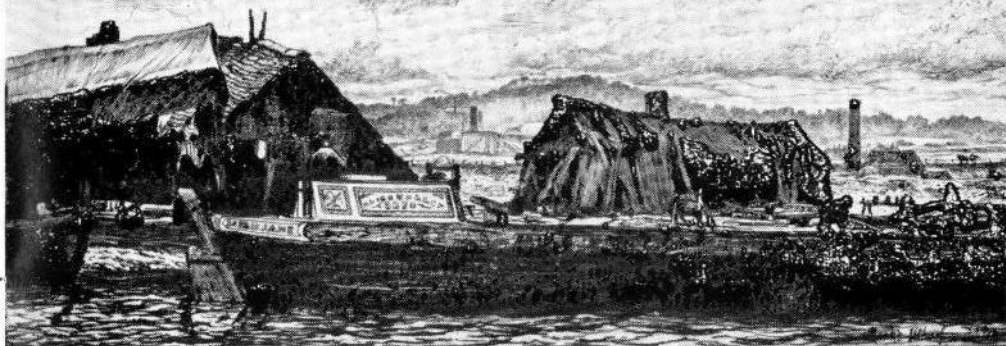
"Arn got sum camferairtid iyle."  
Is worr 'iz missiz sed.  
'Soo let me rub yer chess wi' it,  
Then goo un gurrer bed.

"If the docta cums 'e'll mek yer  
Goo on the box a wik.  
Wot yo' need is summut  
Wot's gunna kewer yer quick.

"Theer's that wummun on the telly  
Wot giz 'er 'uzband stuff,  
It meks 'im slayp un kewers 'iz code  
Un alsoo stops 'iz cuff.

"Ah think arl goo un fetch sum  
Frum up the chemist's shap.  
Yow'l be us right uz ninepince  
Wen yown 'ad a little drap."

"Dow talk saft," sed Ayli,  
"It ay put that bloke right.  
Fer wiks 'eez bin tekin' dosiz  
Tew er thray times a night."



*Monk's Wharf, by R. S. Chattock.*

Courtesy British Library.

THE *Blackcountryman* for July 1968 (Vol. 1 No. 3) and for Spring 1969 (Vol. 2 No. 2) each contained a reproduction of an etching by R. S. Chattock. The second was accomplished by an extract from *The Art-Journal*, 1872. This was a review of R. S. Chattock's "The Black Country. Sixteen Etchings illustrative of scenes in the coal and iron district of South Staffordshire, with descriptive letter-press to each plate". An editorial comment suggests that the originals of the two etchings reproduced were from the collection reviewed in *The Art-Journal*. Examination of the British Library's copy of "The Black Country" shows that this surmise was quite correct.

The Sixteen Etchings of which two further examples are reproduced on pages 41 and 42 were published by P. and D. Colnaghi, then, of 13 and 14 Pall Mall East, London; by R. W. Thrupp of New Street, Birmingham, and by Alexander Day also of New Street, Birmingham in 1872. The scenes illustrated are chiefly of iron works at Cradley and especially of the Corngreaves Works of the New British Iron Company. They depict

## Richard Samuel Chattock

by  
C. J. L. Elwell

blast furnaces; a tunnel head (the upper portion of a blast furnace); "tapping" a blast furnace; a puddling furnace (page 42); a forge hammer and the "rolls" (rollers).

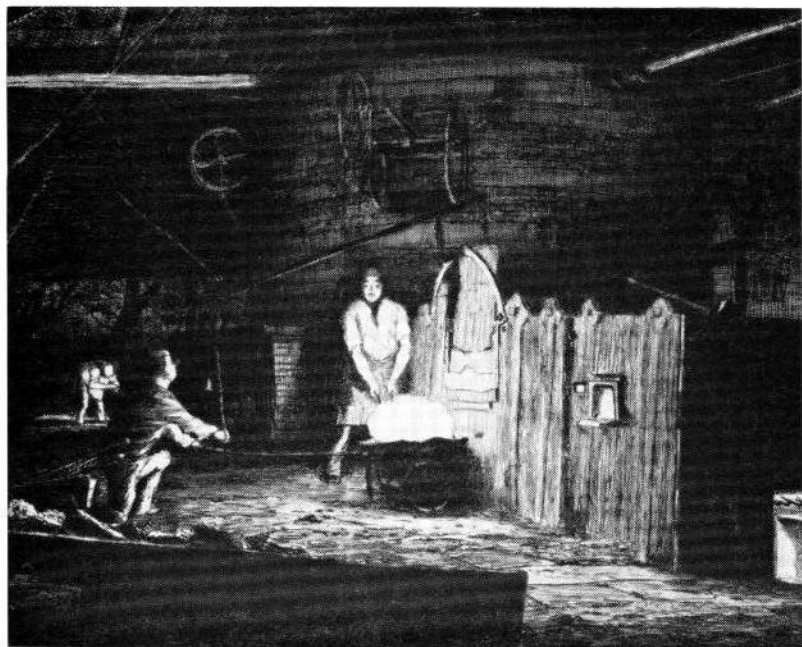
The etchings also depict coal mining scenes; a gin, which is an apparatus for raising minerals by horse power (reproduced in *The Blackcountryman* Vol. 1 No. 3); a pit mouth; the pit mound at Timber Tree colliery, Corngreaves (reproduced in *The Blackcountryman* Vol. 2 No. 2); the coke-hearth Cradley where coal was turned into coke; the glade-oven in which coke was processed suitable for the

blacksmith and chainmaker. A "glede" or "breeze" (both of which according to the Oxford English Dictionary are words for coke) oven is shown as a small domed building. The remaining etchings are of a disused pit-head; a "buffery" (a wooden beam used in pumping etc.) near Dudley; Monk's Wharf, Tipton on the Birmingham canal with the Wren's Nest Dudley in the background (reproduced on page 41); the Wren's Nest itself and finally a view of Dudley Castle grounds.

The name of the barge shown in the picture of Monk's Wharf is "Sarah Jane", its owner's name is Alice Tolley and its (registration?) number 8870. Who was Alice Tolley and who was Sarah Jane, if they were not mere inventions of the artist? Of the building behind

the barge cabin he says that "the tiled roof is the uppermost part of a three-storied house, the lower portion of which has sunk below the level of the soil. Some notion may be formed of the rapidity with which subsidence takes place from the fact that the building in question sank fourteen feet in a period of about nine months". By now it must be well on its way to Australia.

The artist Richard Samuel Chattock was a member of a family which had been settled for centuries in West Bromwich. Their connexion with it was exhaustively documented by Christopher Chattock, a surveyor of Hayes House, West Bromwich, who in 1884 published a volume of charters and deeds most of which relate to land transactions of the Chattock family



*A Puddling Furnace, by R. S. Chattock.*

Courtesy British Library.



at West Bromwich since the Middle Ages.

R. S. Chattock was born on 23 August, 1825, the third son of Thomas Chattock of Solihull. He was educated at Rugby under Dr. Arnold and became a solicitor practising at Solihull and Birmingham. Prominent in local affairs and a J.P. for Warwickshire, his claim to a modest fame is based on his achievements as an etcher and landscape painter, but chiefly as the former. According to his obituary

in The Times, he was a pioneer in copper-plate etching which had become almost a lost art. He exhibited his work for many years at the Royal Academy, contributed to The Etcher and The Portfolio and published, besides the Black Country scenes, Views of Wensleydale (1872) and Practical Notes on Etching (1881). His merits are not now greatly valued and four years ago one of his oil paintings might have fetched between £30 and £100. He died at Clifton in 1906.

---

### COMMEMORATIVE MEDALLION

THE absence of an efficient steam engine in the 18th century greatly hampered the progress of the Industrial Revolution. The Newcomen pumping engine was expensive to run, especially in areas such as Cornwall which had no access to supplies of cheap coal. James Watt in Scotland and, in co-operation with Boulton, at the Soho Manufactory, had already begun work on the concept of a separate condenser that would relieve the need to cool and reheat the cylinder and so effect a great saving in the use of coal. In 1776 Boulton and Watt erected a steam pumping engine at the Bloomfield Colliery in Tipton which embodied these new ideas. The success of the engine showed that the process discovered by Watt could be used in large pumping operations; further orders were received by the firm and the engine was widely used in mines of all types throughout the British Isles. With these developments and the further applications of other types of Watt engines to the manufacturing industry, the modern profession of mechanical

engineering originated.

To mark this important event in industrial history, The Black Country Society will strike a commemorative medallion. Delivery is expected in autumn. The medallions, in gold, silver and bronze, will show on the obverse a portrait of James Watt and on the reverse a representation of the engine. Cases and explanatory leaflets will also be supplied. Not more than two thousand numbered medallions will be struck, of which not more than one hundred will be in 9ct. gold and not more than four hundred in silver. The price will be for gold £50, for silver £7, and for bronze £2.

Medallions may be reserved by sending a deposit of £1 per piece to The Black Country Society, 98 Bescot Road, Walsall, WS2 9DG (Walsall 27989). Please enclose s.a.e. if you require a receipt. All purchasers will be informed when their medallions are available. Please reserve your medallion as soon as possible as it may be impossible to repeat this offer.

# How the Stripes Went Up

Mark Gardner

**T**HE football season of 1975/76 will go down as one of the most successful in the long history of West Bromwich Albion F.C. It was not the year that they won the "double" or even the F.A. Cup, yet so much was achieved when, at the start of the campaign, there was little hope of any end-of-term rewards. Actually, the Baggies did succeed in landing what must be a unique triple in that eight-month uphill slog. The first team won promotion to Division One of the Football League, the "stiffs" were runners-up in the Central League, while the third team captured the F.A. Youth Cup (handsomely, as it turned out, with an aggregate 5-0 win over neighbours Wolverhampton Wanderers).

Reading S.W.A.'s article "Reflections of a Baggie Supporter" (The Blackcountryman, Spring 1976), triggered off many memories for me. I first saw the Albion play in 1945 when I was six years old, and followed their progress back to the First Division in 1948/49, revelled in the glories of 1953/54, and at the end of that decade found myself sports editor of a local weekly covering the Throstles' home games from the Press box. It was difficult to remain impartial!

Like father, like son. Dad was a fan of the Baggies since before World War I. He took Mum to the Cup Finals of 1931 and 1935. (His diary records that although they lost to Sheffield Wednesday it was a smashing day out at Wembley). After World War II he was a season ticket holder at the Hawthorns and, as Mayor of Wednesbury in 1949, attended West Brom's promotion dinner in Birmingham in an official capacity. I still have the menu, signed by Ray Barlow and other stalwarts.

If I carry a single memory of an Albion match it is that of Ronnie Allen performing a remarkable bicycle kick to score against Preston in January 1954. The result of that game turned out to be the same as the Wembley final between the two clubs a few months later. But what different conditions! The Hawthorns was shrouded in dank fog and it was barely possible to see the other side of the ground. Albion were invincible at that time and the Allen goal emphasised their extraordinary confidence. Ray Barlow, in one of his typical long-striding bursts, streaked down the left wing and hit a hard cross about four feet off the ground along the edge of the penalty area. Quicksilver Allen applied the athletic finishing touch. There was nothing lucky about that goal. Ronnie knew precisely what he was doing and where the ball would end—in the back of the net.



*Ronnie Allen*

I could go on reminiscing, but the purpose of this article is not to wallow in nostalgia, but rather to give due and proper credit to the present Albion side and its remarkable climb back to its place amongst the country's leading clubs. Albion enjoyed some fine moments in the 1960s—the League Cup was won in 1966; there was another appearance in the final of the same competition the following year, and in '68 the Baggies lifted the F.A. Cup for the fifth time. In 1970 another League Cup Final led to defeat at the hands of Manchester City. Perhaps this was the turning point, for Albion began to slide and hover dangerously near the brink that spelled relegation.

Banishment finally came in the unhappy spring of 1973 when the club slid into Division Two. As any professional will tell you, the Second Division is hard to escape from. Albion tried in 1973/74 and finished eighth. The following year they seemed to be on course, but suffered a disastrous mid-season slump and ended up in sixth place. Morale was at rock bottom, as even the loyal Tony Brown later admitted.

Football is a hard trade, and sometimes it is cruel. Don Howe, who had served Albion faithfully as a player, had not delivered the goods as a manager. On April 7, 1975 he was sacked from his position at The Hawthorns and subsequently joined Leeds United as coach. His replace-

ment was a quiet Irishman who had worn the white of Leeds and the green of Eire with rare distinction during a career which had brought virtually every honour the game had to offer. John Giles came to Albion to manage and play and captain the team—heavy responsibilities. Could he somehow stop the rot and revive a club where support had waned alarmingly?

The opening games in the late summer of 1975 hardly induced confidence in the faint-hearted. When Albion travelled north to play Carlisle United on September 27 they were third from bottom of the table, having collected only five points from seven matches. They had been despatched from the League Cup the previous Wednesday, going down 1-0 at Fulham. The prospects were decidedly bleak. Only one league game had been won and Giles was still shuffling players to establish a team capable of surviving.

Carlisle has been cited as the turning point in the Albion's fortunes, for an Alistair Brown goal earned them their first away point and set the team on the path to an unbeaten run which stretched for 11 matches. When West Brom were defeated again—a narrow 2-1 reversal at Plymouth on November 22—Giles could look with satisfaction at the transformation which had taken the side within five places of leaders Sunderland. The tide had turned, the team was settled, and confident, stylish football was being produced. The surge continued and the team's tremendous away form was beginning to frighten promotion rivals. Bristol City and Bolton Wanderers both fell to the organised, disciplined Albion approach which Giles had introduced. There were rough moments, not least when the player/manager was given his marching orders at Luton, but somehow the players were able to put these setbacks behind them. After the Luton defeat and a home loss to Southampton (largely due to the enforced absence of Giles), the Throstles went to Nottingham and outplayed Forest to win 2-0. Giles, incidentally, celebrated his return by scoring a vital goal there.

At the turn of the year West Bromwich lay in seventh position, six points and five places behind Bolton. Next business was the Cup, and Albion had a respectable run beating Carlisle 3-1 and Lincoln City 3-2 in the third and fourth rounds respectively. In the fifth they met bogey team Southampton and went a goal up, but the Saints drew level and convincingly thrashed the Baggies 4-0 in the replay, going on to Wembley and into the history books. It is my belief that Southampton did the Baggies a great service by removing them from the Cup scene. Bolton were still engaged and their tussle with Newcastle went to a second gruelling replay with league fixtures, meanwhile, piling-up.

Albion remained steady in the league. Away victories were achieved at York and Stamford Bridge, where I caught up with the Baggies again. As an exile in Kent I am mainly restricted to Albion away matches in the south. Against Chelsea, W.B.A. showed their real character. A goal behind in two minutes, they kept playing their normal game, drew level, and there was Tony Brown, seven minutes from time, hitting a superb winner and helping the team to gain two more points.



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In February there were home wins against Bristol Rovers and Oxford United and a 2-1 defeat at Hull who seemed able to upset so many of the leading teams. On February 28 Bolton led the division on goal average with games in hand over their rivals and Albion were still outsiders in sixth place. But in early March the Wanderers started to crack. The pointer was there when they slumped to lowly Oxford at home on March 3, and could only manage to draw with Blackpool (away) and Plymouth (home). In their games during this spell Albion won at Notts County, drew with Blackburn, and were just pipped by Bristol City in a tense, close game at The Hawthorns. On March 20 Bolton travelled to West Bromwich and were outplayed and beaten 2-0 by an Albion brimming with skill and resource.

This was the beginning of the end for Bolton. Four days later they were overcome by Blackburn Rovers, another poorly-placed side, at home, and they only managed to beat Chelsea the following Saturday on the strength of two own goals. In eight successive matches Bolton scored only three goals, two of which were presents from the inexperienced Chelsea defence!

On March 27 the league table showed that Albion were fourth, only a point adrift of Wanderers. On that day I was at Fratton Park, Portsmouth, where once again Albion showed their ability to collect maximum points on opponents' grounds. The margin was only 1-0 but it could have been at least two more. Joe Mayo stumbled and missed

a clear chance while winger Willie Johnston, who had been tormenting defences all season long, watched an unstoppable shot strike the post with the Portsmouth goalkeeper helpless.

April 3 was a memorable day. For the first time Albion moved into a promotion spot, overtaking Bolton to snatch third place with a 3-0 home victory over Carlisle. Wanderers could take only one point from their home encounter with Notts Forest. It was becoming a tense, see-saw struggle. On Friday, April 9 I watched, sadly, an uncharacteristic display by the Baggies at Charlton. Joe Mayo's close range shot struck the bar and a few minutes later Derek Hales put Charlton ahead. Shortly after the interval Albion drew level with a Tony Brown penalty but then, instead of pressing home their superiority at this stage, the Baggies fell back, obviously settling for a point. Athletic helped themselves to a deserved winner, and many of the Albion faithfuls thought this was the end of the promotion road. Indeed one newspaper, which shall be nameless, wrote them off then and there.

The following day Bolton drew at Orient, so the positions were reversed with Wanderers third and ahead on goal average with a game in hand. That advantage was cancelled out when Bolton produced a disastrous result at home to York City, a club that was already relegated. York played havoc with the jittery Bolton defence and ran out winners 2-1. Twenty-four hours later the Baggies triumphed in a down-pour, 3-1 against Fulham, and followed up this by beating Notts. Forest 2-0 on Easter Saturday. Bolton also won that day but on Easter Monday they fell to Sunderland at Roker Park 2-0, while Albion earned a difficult point at Orient with a 0-0 draw. This was another point that mattered, and West Brom. played very sensibly in this match on one of the worst pitches I have ever seen. It was hard, bumpy, with little grass visible.

Now Albion had one match remaining. The players knew that a win at Oldham on April 24, 1976, would take them back to Division One, regardless of what Bolton did at Charlton. It was still 0-0 at half-time but Tony Brown, an Oldham lad, was the chap who won the match with a typically brilliant piece of skill and as good a goal as you could wish to see. Bristol City and champions Sunderland were already home and dry. West Brom joined them while Bolton, even though they won their last two fixtures, lost the race and finished a point behind the Black Country heroes.

As if to underline their worthiness of the higher grade, Albion went to Villa Park two days later for a testimonial match and beat their old rivals 1-0 with a Willie Johnston goal. A week later the Albion's promising youngsters clinched the F.A. Youth Cup final by beating Wolves 3-0, having already defeated their Molineux neighbours away 2-0. The Reserves stood second only to Liverpool in the Central League. For them, too, it had been a highly satisfactory campaign. And the season ended with Albion—overwhelming Coventry 5-1 in a friendly fixture.

To Mr. Giles must go most of the credit for the way he revitalised a great club. The crowds came back in vast numbers, and some 15,000



made the trek to Oldham to witness the triumphant outcome. Albion now has many young followers and they are generally well-behaved and not teenaged terrorists. The Hawthorns is alive again, one of the best stadiums in England with a team to match it.

So as I look back over recent months, I view the 1975/76 season as both crucial and rewarding. Players like Len Cantello, Alistair Robertson and Bryan Robson must win full international honours. Scotland cannot overlook the skills of Willie Johnston for much longer. Joe Mayo will improve in the First Division. John Giles? Well, perhaps his playing days are drawing to a close, but he seems destined to become one of the great managers. Hopefully, he will remain with Albion and guide them into Europe and more successes here at home. In less than a year he managed to achieve more than the most ardent Baggie supporter could have reasonably hoped for. The playing record speaks for itself: 42 matches, 20 victories (10 away from home), 13 draws and only nine defeats. Fewer goals (33) conceded than any other side in the division, 22 matches in which their opponents failed to score. One sequence of eight games when goalkeeper John Osborne had to pick the ball out of the net only once.

If there was a regret at season's end it was that Staffordshire rivals Wolverhampton Wanderers were relegated, so resumption of the old friendly battles would have to wait . . . but there is always the Villa to look forward to.

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# RAILWAY HORSES AT TIPTON

by

Michael Hale

LIKE the steam locomotive, horses have vanished from the everyday railway scene, but the nature of their passing was very different. As their numbers diminished, largely due to the introduction of the motor lorry, they quietly faded away without the publicity given to the withdrawal of the last steam locomotives from British Railways' service. The railway press and enthusiasts' magazines devoted very little space to their activities, yet as Bryan Holden pointed out in his letter<sup>1</sup> they were an integral part of railway history, at one time playing a vital role.

As well as horses belonging to the old railway companies, there were many owned by their cartage agents—Thomas Bantock in the

Black Country area. It is right, therefore, that we should attempt to record what is known about the extent and nature of their activities before memory fades. It is becoming more difficult to trace men who worked with horses and even the physical evidence is fast disappearing. Stables and cobbled yards are becoming things of the past as many old goods depots are closed and the sites sold for redevelopment.

In general, railway horses were used for two purposes—cartage and shunting. Cart horses were more in the public eye and their harness often carried decorative brasses which were highly polished, especially for such occasions as May Day parades. There are many stories told about cart horses who knew their regular round, and who could find their own way back to the stables if necessary! Some of them were very well looked after indeed, with their drivers taking a great pride in their appearance.

Shunt horses worked in goods yards and station sidings, hauling rail wagons along by means of a rope with a hook on the end which was placed in a ring or a hole in the frame of the vehicle. Again, some of those horses learned their regular duties. For example, they knew which trains had to have parcels vans attached and would wait patiently in a siding until the right moment, then would start to draw the van forward without being told. Newmarket was the home of the last shunting horse (Charlie), who retired in February 1967.<sup>2</sup> He spent his last days grazing in Somerset fields, but died in October of the following year.

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On the Stour Valley line at Tipton, by Owen Street level crossing, there was once a busy goods yard. A small canal basin on the B.C.N. 453 foot level enabled traffic to be interchanged between the two systems. In 1941 it was stated that the shunting of the small yard at this canal basin was shared between engine No. 27484 and a horse.<sup>3</sup> The locomotive was itself rather unusual, the last but one survivor of a class of London and North Western Railway saddle-tanks. It was housed in a small shed alongside the canal towpath, and traces of that building can still be discerned. The second engine, No. 27480, also had a spell at Tipton, but they both left the district in 1946. Tipton shed was a sub-shed of the larger one at Monument Lane, Birmingham, and the writer would like to hear from anyone who knows when it closed.

## ALEXANDRA ROAD

Unfortunately, no details were given about the horse, but shunt horses were often Clydesdales, with some Shires and mixed breeds of heavy horse. Several horses were used at Tipton for cartage, and the stables were located off Alexandra Road. General freight is no longer dealt with here, and except for private siding traffic, the yard closed in October 1965.

The same company owned another goods yard about three quarters of a mile away at Bloomfield, with a larger interchange basin on the 473 foot level. It is not known if this yard had a shunt horse, but again there were several cart horses. The stables were sited by the towpath of the Bradley Loop near its junction with

the Telford canal to Coseley tunnel. Closure of the yard was effected in January 1966.

Both the yards described above belonged to the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, formerly L.N.W.R., but close to the second one was yet another belonging to the Great Western Railway, also with a large interchange basin. This was called Tipton or Factory Basin, and had been built by the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway as a matter of some priority according to Hadfield,<sup>4</sup> who tells us that in February 1855 the traffic manager of the O.W.W.R. urged the completion of railway basins at Tipton and Wolverhampton. He claimed that it would be impossible to secure the heavy weight of traffic from works on the canals until they had the means of loading to and from the boats direct into the railway wagons; six months later he reported them complete.

Within the yard was situated Lloyds Proving House; a building not used for its original purpose of testing chain to Board of Trade standards for many years, but still a symbol of Tipton's once flourishing chain industry. Although listed as worthy of preservation, the structure has been so badly damaged by vandals that British Rail intend to demolish it. Another interesting feature here was the lifting bridge, which could be raised to allow narrow boats to pass to and from the inner basin. In its lowered position it enabled horses to bring their cart-loads, including heavy chain, into the yard without having to climb over a hump-backed bridge. The bridge was eventually taken to the Staffordshire County Museum at

Shugborough, and the dismantling operation was described in this magazine.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of nationalisation, rail access to the yard was transferred from the Western Region line to the London Midland Region Stour Valley line in 1958. The following years saw a decline in traffic handled there, but the yard was not officially closed until April 1968. For those not familiar with the area it should be pointed out that goods in general have not been trans-shipped between rail and canal for many years and commercial traffic on the B.C.N. system virtually ceased in the early 1950s.

The photograph, taken in August 1968, shows the lifting bridge with the stables in the background, running alongside Bloomfield Road. They have since

been swept away under a road improvement scheme which involved the removal of Factory Bridge and the use of land on the edge of the goods yard for the construction of a short stretch of dual carriageway.

This broad outline of the use of railway horses in a particular area of the Black Country has been written in the hope that it will jog people's memories. We would like to gather more details, so if any reader worked with those horses personally, or can persuade someone to tell us of his experiences with them, please get in touch with the editor.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> The Blackcountryman, Winter 1976, p. 67.
- <sup>2</sup> Railway Observer, 1967, p. 120.
- <sup>3</sup> Railway Observer, 1941, p. 226.
- <sup>4</sup> The Canals of the West Midlands, p. 258.
- <sup>5</sup> The Blackcountryman, Summer 1972, p. 35.

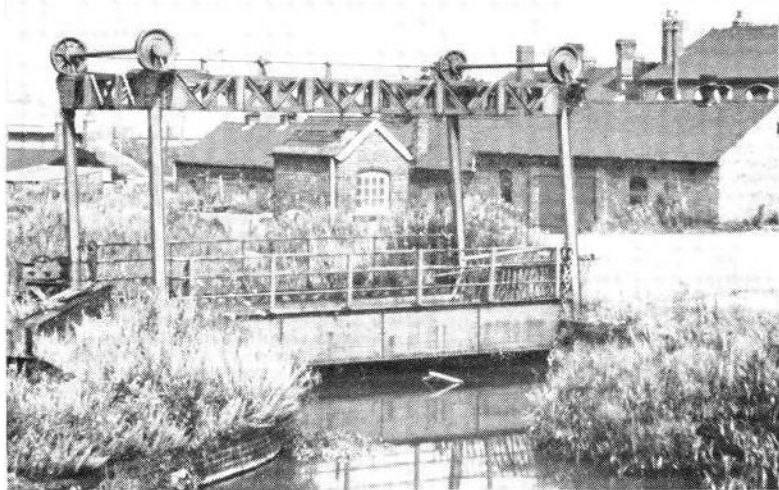


Photo: M. Hale

*Lifting Bridge and Stables, Factory Road, Tipton, August, 1968*

# A KING DIED

(at Smethwick)

L. E. Webster

**I**N 1901, after Queen Victoria's death-knells had been sounded and a new era proclaimed by the coronation of Edward VII, a king died at Smethwick. He had been living on the boundary between Handsworth and Smethwick for about forty years, though few of the locals knew of his status until his death. Those who saw the long and impressive funeral cortege winding its way towards the parish church in March, 1901, however, were no doubt prompted to ask questions about who the late dignitary might be.

King Esau Smith was a gipsy, head of a tribe known as the Smith Gipsies, and it was on the piece of waste land known as the 'Black Patch' that this king died at the age of 92. Although he had no power to administer laws, wore no mark of his office, and was never crowned—as Charles Faa Blythe, King of the Border Gipsies, had been at Kirk Yetholm in 1898—King Esau Smith was nevertheless a monarch to his people.

Many members of the tribe, scattered throughout the country, descended on the 'Black Patch' for the funeral. The coffin of solid oak lay in the gipsy caravan as the family, dressed in black, paid homage to the king.

As they reverently laid their wreaths, Mrs. Henty Smith—the king's wife—wailed in a manner that was, according to an onlooker reported in *The Smethwick Telephone*, 'painful to witness'.

Mrs. Henty Smith, who became Queen on her husband's passing, was herself 90 years of age at the time.

Five mourning coaches containing thirty mourners accompanied the hearse and coffin to the Handsworth Parish Church where interment took place. But many other mourners followed on foot.

The burial was conducted by the Rev. E. S. Genge according to the Anglican Service. The clothes which King Esau Smith wore were buried with him—a gipsy custom.

The Smith family had a remarkable record for longevity. King Smith's cousin, Sarah Smith, died at Worcester a few months earlier. She had been 106 years old.

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**WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A  
NEW MEDALLION?**

*—See Page 43 for details*



## CHASETOWN

Cliff Emberton

**T**HE spring issue of *The Black-countryman* contained two features by Tom Langley about Chasetown, both of which interested me very much, as I was born at Chasetown in 1925 and remember the old Cottage Spring pub and the adjoining football field quite well.

When I was a boy, Baker Street was seldom known as such, but always as Puddingbag. At that time, plans were made for Puddingbag to be made a through road into High Street, but they did not materialise until after 1945, and even then the road did not link up with High Street!

The observations made by Tom Langley regarding the migration of miners from the Tipton area to find work in the local pits, must have given the old Chasetown close affinities with the Black Country, though I have never heard or read of Chasetown being known as Little Tipton. My late grandfather, Richard Hancox, who was something of a character and known locally as "Dick the Dancer", was quite famous in the Chasetown entertainment world as a clog dancer. I would like to know if any Black Country reader remembers him or has heard talk of him. I am not sure where he lived prior to living at Chasetown.

My grandmother certainly came from the Tipton area before her marriage, because my mother would often talk about her childhood visits with her mother to visit relatives in the Black Country, and of walking along the cut in the dark to get transport back home. I suppose that this visiting of parents, relatives and former neighbours would keep alive the migrant interest in Black Country pursuits and pastimes. The regular visiting of parents and friends, by people who come to live in a new area, is still apparent now—young folk who came to live in Chasetown from the Birmingham area in the 1960s still maintain close ties with their home districts.

These thoughts prompt me to set down a few facts about Chasetown—this Little Tipton of long ago, which was populated to some extent by folk from the Black Country.

Just how it got its name, I do not know. Perhaps Tom Langley's "Gaffer Wills", who was Elijah Wills 'master' of the No. 3 School at Chasetown, thought up the name as a respite to relieve the tedium of teaching at the old school adjoining St. Anne's Church.

It is certain that "Chasetown, on Cannock Chase, forming a joint township with Burntwood in the

parish of St. Michael, Lichfield, was formed in an ecclesiastical parish on the 5 February 1867 out of the parishes of Burntwood, Ogley Hay and St. John, Hammerwich", to quote Kelly's Directory for 1904—which goes on to say "that the people find employment in the extensive collieries, first opened by the Marquis of Anglesey in 1849". These 'extensive' collieries consisted at first of the No. 1 pit, called the Cathedral pit because most of the coal went by horse pannier to Lichfield. The shaft of No. 1 pit is still to be identified adjacent to the canal arm which joins the old B.C.N. Co.'s reservoir Norton Pool, now known as Chasewater. There was also the Uxbridge pit—the Marquis of Anglesey had formerly been the 2nd Earl of Uxbridge, hence the name. It was known officially as No. 2 pit, but always for some unexplained reason, referred to as the Fly.

## PLAQUE

These two pits were eventually leased by the Marquis to J. R. McClean, who formed the Cannock Chase Colliery Co., the general offices of which were situated at the western end of Church Street. Over a doorway in the clocktower of these offices was a stone plaque with the date 1852.

J. R. McClean and his fellow directors must have been very far-sighted and progressive men and well in the forefront of the mechanical and electrical development of the mining industry. The diversity of their enterprise eventually included the sinking of seven, or perhaps eight, more pit units; an inclined drift to carry coal direct to their own coal wharf

on the canal at Wharf Lane; an extensive railway system; several locomotives and rolling stock; a brickworks at Hednesford; a well equipped workshop and foundry, and a power station which was commissioned in 1926. It supplied their pits and other projects with electrical power, as well as providing a wide surrounding area with domestic power and light.

The last of the old Cannock Chase group N.C.B. pits, No. 8, was finally closed early in 1962.

But back again to early beginnings. St. Anne's Church, Chasetown (St. Anne being the patron saint of miners), was erected and maintained almost entirely at the expense of J. R. McClean the founder—director of the Cannock Chase Colliery Co. St. Anne's was first known as Cannock Chase St. Anne's.

The invitation to the consecration of the church on the 14 September, 1865, was headed St. Anne's Free Church, Cannock Chase Colliery, Burntwood. There was a note on the invitation to the effect that a special train would leave Dudley at 12 noon—to carry persons attending the opening ceremony. Considering the route from Dudley to Chasetown and the possible stopping stations for people to board the train, the close ties with the Black Country are again emphasised.

## ELECTRICITY

St. Anne's was the church with Chasetown's one claim at being unique, though even that is challenged by a church in Yorkshire. It was thought, and some say is established, that St. Anne's, Chasetown was the first church in

the country to be lit by electricity—this was in the year 1883. The power for the lighting came from No. 2 pit, situated some three to four hundred yards from the church. The supply cable was flat winding rope wound round with Brattice cloth (an impregnated canvas material used widely underground at that time to control the ventilation of the mines). These cables were enclosed in pitch-filled wooden troughs and buried along-side the road. Parts of these cables have been excavated and preserved.

It is said that it was the duty of the vicar to turn the lighting on with a long-handled key, which operated some switching device set before the door of the church. He must have been a trusting soul, particularly when it rained! The lamps which were used were of the carbon filament type and did not have any screw or bayonet cap, the electrodes being brought out through a glass pinch and bent over, to hook on the conductors. These lamps must also have been used at the company pits—because I remember a stock of them in an old store at No. 2 pit.

The church continued to receive a supply of electricity from the pit by more orthodox means until the rundown of the Chase Group of pits made the supply no longer viable, and the church was rewired and supplied by the M.E.B. in the late 1950s.

Chasetown also had its fair share of Methodists, both Wesleyan and Primitive. Chasetown Trinity Methodist Church was first known as Chasetown Wesleyan and was opened in 1864. The land on which it was erected had been purchased from the Marquis of Anglesey at

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a cost of £96. 5s. 0d. in 1863, and the chapel was built at a cost of £259. Following closely on the heels of the Wesleyans came the Primitive Methodists, who built Zion's Hill Chapel in 1866. Zion's Hill is now closed and the building used for the manufacture of clothing. Possibly quite soon, Trinity, now known as Chasetown Methodist Church, where the two congregations united, will be no more. We shall have a new church on another site.

At the stonelaying ceremony of a new chapel on the original Wesleyan site in 1883, John Gittings, Surgeon, of Chasetown, placed a stone in memory of his father, John of Bilston—so one continues to find links in the chain which connects the old Chasetown with the Black Country.

The benevolence and patronage of the directors of the Cannock Chase Colliery Co. had a considerable influence on the social and sporting life of Chasetown. The company built and maintained an Institute with a sizeable hall, reading room, billiard tables, etc. They also gave a large open area, known locally as The sportsfield, which had facilities for cricket, lawn tennis, bowls, and also an excellent football ground, the home of the Cannock Chase Colliery Football team who in their heyday were a team to be reckoned with! This sportsfield was the annual venue of the Chase Wakes, which was the athletic and sports highlight of the Chasetown year. In its earlier days, the competitors were mostly local and the rivalry and partisanship quite fierce. The wakes were of course sponsored by the Colliery Co. The sportsfield is now leased to Burntwood Parish Town

Council and known by the more grandiloquent title of Burntwood Leisure Complex.

Chasetown is now rapidly losing its separate identity and, having already lost most of its old characters, is now united with the Chase Terrace and Burntwood wards of Burntwood Parish, the largest parish in the country.

In 1976, we have the Leisure Complex with its swimming baths and hall, squash courts and excellent facilities. There are shopping centres and supermarkets, large estates of modern houses, and an almost trebled population during the last fifteen years. There are discos and bingo and most of the fringe benefits of modern day life.

Even so, I think I liked the older, or should it be the newer Chasetown best. For when I was a boy we had the wakes, complete with Pat Collin's amusements; and the Plaza Cinema at Chasetown, and the Chase Cinema at Sankey's Corner, as well as the Cannock Chase Colliery Silver Prize Band. Even though we had the cinemas, we still dutifully attended magic lantern shows.

These things and many more I enjoyed, then, in the 1930s. Would I like them so much now? Or is it all just a touch of nostalgia, sparked off by Tom Langley?

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE

*Reference mention of 'Pudding Bag' at the beginning of this article, Tom Langley has written a number of stories based on 'Pudding Bag'. They have been broadcast, and it is hoped to include some of them in future issues.*

## REPORT ON CONSERVATION AREAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THE Conservation Areas Advisory Committee has been in existence for more than 12 months and it is now an opportune time to look at the achievements of the committee during this period.

In addition to a number of reports submitted to the Committee by individual members, a considerable amount of valuable information and illustrations have also been given to the local authority. This illustrates what is perhaps the most important feature of the Advisory Committee, namely the two way flow of views, ideas and information.

The past year has seen a considerable degree of progress within the field of Conservation in Dudley. The re-survey of buildings of architectural and historic merit by the Department of the Environment has now been completed, and the new list for the former Dudley area has been confirmed by the Secretary of State. The list for Halesowen should be officially finalised soon. The revised lists include many of the buildings recommended by the various societies and individuals who helped the local authority to carry out its own survey of the Borough.

Three new conservation areas are proposed and those at Delph Locks and Wordsley Locks, in particular, should provide the opportunity for joint projects by the local authority and the canal societies.

In the existing Conservation Areas the first stage of the enhancement works has been completed and at Mushroom Green the Department of the Environment has indicated that it is prepared to make a financial grant towards the proposed works there. Hopefully, work on the ground should start later in the summer.

In order to ensure that the public are aware of the policies and duties of the local authority with regard to conservation, two documents have been prepared—The Design Guide for Mushroom Green, and the advisory pamphlet on Conservation and Listed Buildings, which will be discussed later in the meeting.

As to the future I should like to see further involvement, through the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, of the local societies in conservation projects, either on their own or in conjunction with the local authority. Furthermore, I hope that every effort will be made to stimulate the awareness and involvement of the general public in the conservation of both the built and natural environment.

BRIAN MOORE, *Director of Planning and Development*

The Society is represented on the C.A.A.C.—Ed.

## BOOK REVIEWS:

*The Development of English Glass making 1560-1640*, by Eleanor S. Godfrey. Pp xii + 288. Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press. Price £10.50.

ONE of the most significant developments in the history of the glass industry was the invention of using coal instead of wood to fire the melting furnace. To whom the credit for the discovery should be given has long been debated. Abraham Liscourt, a glass maker at Newent in Gloucestershire, asserted in 1621 that Claude and Ambrose Hensley had made glass with "sea coal and pit coal" in Staffordshire, and that he and Paul Tyzack had also done so for Lord Dudley in Staffordshire a decade before. These claims are for the most part untrue, though it is known that Tyzack was in Kingswinford parish in 1612, and it would seem that the abundance of coal to be found there was an attraction, as was also the clay for making the glass melting pots. That Tyzack was not the great innovator is indicated by the fact that he did not take out a patent for his discovery. The earliest patent was in fact acquired in 1612 by courtiers, Sir Edward Zouch and Bevis Thelwell, Thomas Mefflyn (the King's glazier) and Thomas Percival, to whom the actual invention is attributed. They were given the exclusive right to make glass with coal for 21 years on payment of £20 to the King, and £10 to the Prince of Wales.

Until then the glasshouses scattered about the English countryside and in London had used wood fuel, but for some time deep anxiety had been expressed in official quarters about the decimation of the woodlands by glass workers and the growing number of other industries, especially the iron smelters, who had to fire their furnaces with charcoal.

The use of coal of course meant that changes had to be made in the design of the glass furnaces and the melting pots, for if economical use was to be made of the more costly coal a strong draught had to be introduced and the pots had to be covered in, otherwise the metal would be contaminated by smoke and fumes.

Until the second half of the 16th century almost all the glass used in England was imported, but in 1567 Jean Carré, a native of Arras, established himself in London and obtained permission to set up a works for making window glass in the Weald, and another works for making crystal vessels in London. He brought in Flemish glass makers, and before long glass makers from Lorraine, Normandy and Italy were also encouraged to set up other glass works for making various types of glassware. A condition was imposed that they should teach Englishmen their craft, an obligation which they strenuously sought to evade, for the technique and skills of glass making had for centuries been kept as family secrets.

Over the past century many books have been written about glass making, and many students have touched on the development of the English industry from the time of Carré until the troublesome monopoly system under which it operated ended in 1640. However, no work that



has appeared can hold a candle to the remarkable volume, produced after 20 years of intense study, by Mrs. Godfrey, who comes from North Carolina. She has examined the prodigious number of official and private records, and has produced, if not the last word on the subject, the finest exposition of the most complicated development of a then tiny industry that dedicated research could achieve.

Other students will no doubt be encouraged to follow up her source references and endeavour to expand on them, but the book will stand as a major contribution to the history of glass and English economic history.

The story of the glass monopoly is followed by a full and lucid account of the technical problems confronting the early glass makers. Details are also given of the trade in glass, imports and exports.

The book is illustrated, references are carefully given, and there is a fine bibliography and an index. For anyone studying a seminal period in the history of a vital industry, Mrs. Godfrey's book is a must.

H.J.H.

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*The Tame Mills of Staffordshire* by D. Dilworth. Pp. 212. Phillimore. £4.75.

POETS, novelists, painters and composers have found in water-mills a perennial source of inspiration. It is easy to see why. The mill pool is a background for idyll as well as, and perhaps because, it is the abode of trout and kingfisher. The mill race and the mill wheel are endowed with mystery as man's earliest and longest method of developing on land non-muscular power. For this reason alone mills are likely to have an appeal for anyone interested in an area such as the Black Country, whose characteristics are largely the product of industry based on power.

In his history of "The Tame Mills of Staffordshire", Mr. Dilworth has done much to satisfy curiosity about the transformation of the mediaeval water mill into the "dark satanic" factories of Blake's England. He shows us how the process had already begun in

the 14th century and how most of the mills, of which there is any record, were gradually put to other uses than the grinding of corn. They became fineries, bloomeries and chafferies to refine iron, slitting mills for the production of iron rods, forges for the manufacture of edge tools, foundries for iron hollow ware, grinders for gun barrels and factories for leather dressing, chemicals and soap. As more mills were established competition for the limited water resources of the Tame and its tributaries led to outbreaks of industrial violence. It was not unknown for a master and his men to attack and wreck a rival works. In more recent and less militant times such disputes were settled by litigation, as when Edward Elwell of Wednesbury Forge pursued an action against the Birmingham Canal Company to the House of Lords—and lost.

With the coming of steam, water power gradually ceased to be used and by the end of the 19th century

only Wednesbury Forge was still a genuine mill as well as a factory. All the other mills, except two which had reverted to their original function as corn mills, had either ceased to exist or had become factories whose only connexion with the original mill was the site.

Mr. Dilworth has delved far and wide in his search for information about the 48 mills in and around Handsworth, Walsall, Bilston, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Tipton, Dudley and Oldbury, which he describes in his book. In spite of his diligence, the facts are often scanty and obscure and in spite of his rejection of "surmise intelligent or otherwise", he is frequently obliged to eke out his matter by weighing probabilities or posing unanswered questions. Sometimes centuries pass without the merest hint of a reference to the mill under study. Sometimes it is difficult to know to what mill a reference relates. It is not surprising then that to follow the succession in ownership and tenancy of the less well documented mills becomes something of an endurance test. Many of the

mills remained for a century or more in the possession of a single family, whose fortunes they were the means of founding or increasing. Examples of such families are Ryders and the Turtons of West Bromwich, the Parkes of Wednesbury and the Foleys of Stourbridge. Mr. Dilworth is at his best when he is writing about some of these families and I wish he could have told us more.

The book is well produced and contains some interesting illustrations. It is a great pity that there have been several mistakes in printing, one of which is of major proportions. However this is a small fault to find in a book which, with its copious references to published and unpublished records, with its description of the working of a mill and with its excellent glossary of industrial and other terms, all of which are prefaced with a delightful quotation from Erasmus Darwin, is an essential addition to the library of anyone interested in the industrial, economic and social history of the Black Country.

C.J.L.E.

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*Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain*, by Geoffrey Beard. Pp. viii + 262. Phaidon Press. Price £8.50.

ONE of the consequences of the Civil War was a boom in the building industry. Both sides in the war had the unpleasant habit of destroying or seriously damaging large old houses, regardless of the political or religious sympathies of their owners, to prevent them falling into the hands of the other side. This was the fate of the home of the Lytteltons at Frankley.

With the restoration, Britain settled down, developed her industries and overseas trade. As the prosperity of the country grew there was a great urge to build and rebuild with a grandeur of style commensurate with dignity of the land-owning nobility and the new wealth and status of the affluent merchants and industrialists, many of whom, like the Foleys of Stourbridge, acquired extensive estates and linked themselves by marriage with the aristocracy.

To serve the needs of the times there were architects of outstanding ability like Wren, Inigo Jones and Vanburgh, and artists and craftsmen to supply ancillary adornment to the churches and country mansions now each summer season the source of wonderment to tourists. One of the most impressive decorative features of the lofty halls and salons of the grand houses was the plasterwork, so extensive in some interiors as to give them an iced wedding-cake appearance.

Since the war scholars have devoted much time to elucidating the creative genius inherent in the architectural heritage of the British Isles, discovering the names of the architects, painters, sculptors, workers in iron and wood. Now Geoffrey Beard has produced an authoritative study of the hitherto much neglected workers in plaster.

About a third of this beautifully produced volume is made up of some 150 excellent pictures of examples of mainly 17th and 18th century plasterwork on walls and ceilings throughout the British Isles. The rest is devoted to a long essay on the development of the plasterworkers' art and their methods of working, and to a dictionary of some 300 workers and their creations, details of which have been laboriously disinterred from rarely consulted archives in libraries and the muniment rooms of widely scattered country houses.

Geoffrey Beard, son of an Amblecote glass decorator, a former pupil of King Edward VI School, Stourbridge, and one-time member of the staff of Birmingham Reference Library, is now recognised as one of the outstanding art historians of today, his speciality being interior decoration, though he has written much on glass and antiques generally. One of his early publications was a guide to Hagley Hall, where is to be seen some high quality plaster decoration.

Hagley Hall was one of those fine Palladian houses built in the 18th century to replace an old inconvenient timbered house which the Lytteltons had occupied after their Frankley house was burned down. Sir George Lyttelton not only engaged distinguished architects to create his home, park and its eye-catching mock castle and other features, but employed one of the outstanding stuccoists of the time, Francesco Vassalli (who signed a panel over the fireplace in the White Hall), to execute the plasterwork in various rooms). Vassalli's work is also to be seen at Shugborough (seat of the Earl of Lichfield and at the same time Staffordshire County Museum), and at Petworth. It was also a feature of Trentham Hall before it was demolished.

Little plasterwork of note has survived in the Black Country, but some notable specimens are to be seen in the surrounding country—the ceiling and walls of the salon at Hartlebury Castle (home of the Bishop of Worcester) by Joseph Bromfield (fl. 1771-95); at Ragley Hall near Alcester; at Blithfield and at Kedleston Hall.

One of the greatest native plasterers, Joseph Rose, carried out a great deal of work at the home of the ironmaster Knight at Wolverley. A craftsman named Higginson (fl. 1771-2) did work for Matthew Boulton at his Soho warehouse. Richard Huss (fl. 1710-20) worked at St. Philip's, Birmingham (now the Cathedral), and reference to the Earl of Bradford's archives reveals that Edward Goudge did work on the ceiling (1689) at Castle Bromwich Hall.

**H.J.H.**

Attention is drawn to a now annual publication 'West Midland Studies', published by The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton. Vol. 8 has now been published, and although none of these volumes are on general sale to the public, they can be found in local reference libraries.

This journal of regional history carries a wide variety of material. For example, the contents of Vol. 8 include such articles as 'The Promotion of Adult Education in Wolverhampton (1827-1869)'; 'Education and the Community in 19th century Sedgley'; 'Changes in the Scale of the Industrial Unit in Stourbridge and District (1815-1914)'; and 'The Glass Industry of Stourbridge and District'.

Articles are not confined to the Black Country, this particular issue carrying an article on Sion Gardens, Stourport-on-Severn.

**H.P.**

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*The Black Country of Francis Brett Young, L. J. Jay. Reprinted from the Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers.*

This 16-page booklet, written by Mr. Jay, a senior lecturer in Education, University of Sheffield, deals with the features of the Black Country which are described in the novels of Francis Brett Young. It

is reprinted by the author from the November '75 issue of the Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, but copies are not available for sale.

Mr. Jay points out that members wishing to read the article can do so by visiting any Public Reference Library which takes in regularly these Transactions. He is a member of the Black Country Society.

**H.P.**

---

*A History of Housing in Wolverhampton 1750-1975, by George J. Barnsby. Integrated Publishing Services Co., 141 Henwood Road, Wolverhampton. 70 pages, 60p.*

**T**HIS paperback marks a venture into publishing by author George Barnsby. Do-it-yourself publishing is a hazardous venture to be applauded and encouraged whenever it occurs. It is not so much the printing of a book which is difficult but the marketing, for conventional wholesale outlets rarely undertake to handle relatively slow selling, specialised work.

This history of housing in Wolverhampton, covering a period of 225 years, is crammed with facts and figures which trace housing development in all aspects, type and amenity. In fact, there is scarcely a paragraph in the close-type pages that does not contain information of value to the researcher and student.

Copies of the book can be obtained from the author at the above address. Do please include postage—9p.

**H.P.**

## CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

In reply to Frank Sharman's letter in the Spring 1976 edition of *The Blackcountryman*.

I agree with Mr. Sharman that articles are written in an accent rather than dialect, since the original Black Country dialects have inevitably become diluted due to the influx of outsiders into the area with improvements in transport etc., and attempts by educational establishments to impose the use of "proper English"—to mention just two factors. It is arguable whether many readers of *The Blackcountryman* would indeed be able to understand an article written in the original dialect.

Having said that, I strongly defend the practise of publishing articles in a local accent for three reasons:

1. the accent used indicates the origin of the writer—a point of interest in itself.
2. if this does educate the outsider (why only the southerner?) to an appreciation of the language, so much the better.
3. in view of my previous statement about the dilution of the dialect, any articles written in accent/dialect can only help to preserve and strengthen it.

I personally find reading such articles an excellent means of extending my local vocabulary.

Finally, I see no reason why a Black Country publication should not indicate the pronunciation of its words—does not the Oxford English Dictionary include in brackets after each word an explanation of how it should be pronounced, albeit in a B.B.C. accent!

As a conclusion, would anyone

like to publish a Black Country English Dictionary?

**David Dwyer.**

Trafalgar Court,  
New Birmingham Road,  
Tividale, Warley.

★ ★ ★

Sir,

I am a Black Country Society member and a student at Birmingham University. During the summer I shall be preparing a dissertation on the subject of womens' work in the Black Country in the nineteenth century, with particular reference to mining. If any members have information or reminiscences on the subject, I would be grateful if they would get in touch with me.

**Susan M. Hughes.**

4 Earlswood Road,  
Kingswinford.

★ ★ ★

Sir,

I would like to offer the following comments on articles on railway topics that have appeared in recent issues of the magazine.

1. Newton Road station: There have been three stations bearing this name, and details can be found in Clinker's Chronology (Railways of the West Midlands — published by the Stephenson Locomotive Society). The first one was opened on July 4, 1837, as stated, but trains ran to a temporary station at Vauxhall, not to Curzon Street. The latter was opened by the London and Birmingham Railway on April 9, 1838, and the Grand Junction Railway opened their extension to reach it in January 1839. In 1846, those two companies began working as one system and, together with the Manchester and Birmingham Rail-

way, formed the London and North Western Railway.

The L.N.W.R. closed Newton Road station on March 1, 1863 and replaced it by a new station named West-Bromwich (sic), located a short distance to the north. From May 1, this station was renamed Newton Road for West Bromwich, and from December 1870 the suffix was dropped. A third station, sited about thirty chains to the south, replaced the second one on January 1, 1902. Newton Road station was closed for the last time (one assumes!) from May 7, 1945 by the L.M.S. Railway.

2. Ryecroft engine shed: The Journal of the Stephenson Locomotive Society Vol. 34 (1958) p. 143 tells us

“**Walsall:** This has always been an important depot in the Black Country, and since its assumption of independent status in 1864, it has had a number of sub-sheds which have varied from time to time. I have not been able to find out when the first shed was built here; the earliest reference found so far is one of September, 1852, when Trevithick was instructed to put gas into it. Three years later, a minute of the South Staffordshire Railway noted that a water tank and girders were required for an engine shed at Walsall, and on 5th June, 1857, tenders were put out for the construction of a new shed. Where this shed was built, I do not know, but it must have been very near the station of the period, for in 1876 Webb sent in a report on the subject of “old Engine shed at

Walsall. Resolved that Mr. Webb report to the Locomotive Committee what additional accommodation will be required at the Cannock Mineral Junction and at Hednesford; any further large outlay for repairing the old engine shed at Walsall (which will have to be removed) to be authorised by the Chairman.”

In December 1876 Webb stated ‘that to enable him to clear out of the old premises understood to be required for traffic purposes at Walsall Station, the shed at Cannock Junction will have to be enlarged sufficiently to hold 24 more engines.’

The shed at Cannock Junction was first suggested in January 1874, and it was to hold 24 engines. By 1876 the number to be held had dropped to 8, and the project was deferred, and as far as is known, never revived. In October 1877, a new shed at Ryecroft, no doubt as a substitute for Cannock Junction, was authorised, and this shed remained intact until rebuilding was begun a year or so ago.

In the years following the second world war, Ryecroft had an allocation of about 55 engines, but the number dwindled in the mid-fifties due to the spread of diesel traction. Towards the end, some of the freight engines were transferred to Bescot, and Ryecroft shed closed to steam from June 9, 1958.

The above extracts from S.L.S. publications are quoted by kind permission of the Journal editor, Mr. W. A. Camwell.

**Michael Hale.**

Sedgley Road,  
Woodsetton, Dudley.



Sir,

My husband, Francis William Whitehouse has died, and some of the money donated instead of flowers by friends and relatives, has been set aside for your Society, of which he was a member.

He died of cancer, and so the major amount has been sent for Cancer Research, but no doubt you will be glad to have a little help towards furthering your activities. I here enclose £15 to that end.

My husband derived great pleasure during his last long illness from your magazine. He was very knowledgable about the Black Country and its industrial concerns, and never forgot his Black Country origin.

He was born at Tipton in 1904 and then lived at Dixons Green, Dudley, before moving away. His skill as a motor body builder, his integrity, and his concern for working people the world over, endeared him to all who knew him.

A small acknowledgement in your journal would be appreciated.

Wishing you success in keeping alive the culture and traditions of the area my husband loved so well.

**(Mrs.) D. Whitehouse.**

145 St. James' Road,  
Shirley, Southampton.

if the subject of my letter has previously been raised.

I refer to games we played as children, but which now seem to have disappeared (at least in my locality). Some of my contemporaries cannot even remember some of them.

### 1. "Stakes"

Equipment is two round pieces of steel about  $\frac{3}{8}$ "/ $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter and about 6" long, and a button.

A circle is scribed in the dirt using a stake (i.e. about 12" diameter).

A stake is placed upright in the centre of the circle with the button on top.

At a measured distance from the circle, turns are taken to throw underhand the other stake, attempting to knock the button out of the circle.

### 2. "Tip Cat"

One piece of wood about 3' long, tapered very slightly one end, and one piece 6" long, about an inch square, tapered both ends.

The short piece is laid on the ground, either end struck smartly by the larger piece on the taper. The short piece rises in the air, then knocked as far as possible.

My interest is in home-made toys and games. Both stakes and tip-cat were current in Willenhall (Walsall Road Junior School) at least 1938-41.

Others come to mind such as "five stones", "five cans", elastic guns firing "bibbles", flicking cigarette cards, peg dolls—even marbles seem few and far between.

**A. B. Smith.**

Helston Road,  
Walsall.

Sir,

Not having been a member of the Society for too long, forgive me

Sir,

An answer to the letter from Mr. Sharman (Vol. 9 No. 2)—from a furriner—here via Hampshire and Suffolk.

The 'dialect' or 'accent' articles in *The Blackcountryman* are a great help to those of us new to the area. After all, before I came here it was simply an area within the Midlands with probably a Birmingham accent. How wrong can you be!

Mr. Sharman would brand me a 'southerner', whereas if he came from the south he would be able to say which area within that, I came from, even to whether it was Pompey (Portsmouth), or Southampton (Southampton) within Hampshire, so all things are relative. Without seeing accents written, whether it is a 'southern' one (is 'Zummerzet' southern?) or Black country, it is very difficult to appreciate the difference in use of language and even to help understand those who speak with a very broad accent.

Welsh is known by most people and relies on phraseology to a great extent, but how many people know the Suffolk accent where hill becomes heel, toy is toye, have is hay, etc.—same words but entirely different pronunciation.

The Black Country dialect articles aren't preaching to the converted, nor inviting us southerners to become psuedo—Black-country, but helping strangers to understand and appreciate the area and its people.

Please carry on with the articles.

(Mrs.) Q. F. Brown.

Compton Drive, Dudley.

\* \* \*

Dear Sir,

I have received my copy of Vol. 9 No. 1 of *The Blackcountryman*—

and as usual every word has been absorbed with great pleasure. A friend of mine—Mr. F. Barlow, enlisted me as a member of the Society whilst he was in Wolverhampton last July.

I was born at Penn and spent most of my early life in Penn or Wolverhampton (I lived in Owen Road and then Lea Road), and spent many happy hours at my Grandmothers Cottage on Penn Common—I believe the cottage was demolished about 1969.

My Grandmother and Grandfather (Griffin) used to keep the Malt Shovel public house in Bilston. I did my schooling at Woodfield Avenue and Wolverhampton Grammar School. A lot of memories are of the 1914-1924 era—and the wonderful times spent with the local Motorcycle Club—most of them to do with A.J.S., Sunbeam and Clyno. Our parents had marvellous runs to Enville Common, Ivetsey Bank, etc., for picnics and the inevitable call at the pubs on the way back.

Memories come flooding back of Blowers Green (where at the age of 16 I worked in the Ticket Office of the G.W.R. Station), and of the Hop Picker's Specials!

I visited England for 3 years—1967-70—and spent most of my spare time on the "cut" with a boat I bought, and crewed by my wife and son. We explored every bit of "wairter" around Brum. and Wolverhampton, and up the Shroppie to Llangollen, then down as far as Oxford. Happy days.

By the way, a well known Wolverhampton man also lives in Ballarat—Mr. J. Hanford Stevens—one of the last of the old A.J.S. firm.

W. Dennis Griffin.

16 Dermot Street, Wendouree,  
Vic. 3355, Australia.

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