

# the **BLACKCOUNTRYMAN**

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**STAN HILL**

**The Black Country  
Society's very own  
Black Countryman**



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## Welcome to the Spring edition ...

We're celebrating the life of one of our own in this edition of *The Blackcountryman* magazine: Stan Hill, one of my predecessors, and a major personality in the Black Country for a good many years.

My own memory of him is of writing to him when I was studying for my first degree.

I was researching for my dissertation on the Black Country dialect, and he was incredibly generous with his time, and very enthusiastic. I was, and remain, extremely grateful to him for his patience and encouragement.

And continuing in Stan's tradition, this Spring edition gives plenty of encouragement to our Black Country creatives.

I hope you'll be reintroduced to some names you know and introduced to some that you didn't. There are some very exciting things going on here, and cracking poetry and novels being written by Black Country writers, as well as other very exciting things going on creatively. If, like me, you love photography, you'll love Tom Hick's article. You can follow him on Instagram – which I



recommend. Have a look there at BlackCountryType, you'll be impressed. As well as this, enjoy the fascinating articles on Sedgley and on Kingswinford, and a brilliant article on Black Country Footballers. If you were a pupil at Wall Heath Church of Ascension School, Terry Church's article will take you back.

I hope you'll enjoy the mix of photos, news and articles in this edition, and if you'd like to write something Black Country-related, and think others would be interested to read it, please, do email me. I'd love to hear from you.

Contact:

[editor@blackcountrysociety.co.uk](mailto:editor@blackcountrysociety.co.uk)

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## STAN HILL – An Appreciation by Angus Dunphy

Stan's contribution to life and the lives of others was considerable. His achievements were many, but none more so than as a loving husband to Jean. We saw a team of equal partners- kind, generous, full of laughter, concern for others and with a spirit of public duty. His energy was that of both an express train and a canal boat- his ability to get the job done at rapid rate whilst ensuring that the journey was well thought out, steady and secure in its destination. Stan's pride in his daughters, Sheila and Mandy, was always uppermost in his mind as he confided to his friends his latest news of their professional and personal successes.

"I am so lucky", he would say.



He delighted in his grandchildren, Stuart and Scott and was thrilled at the arrival of his great granddaughter, Lucia. Stan was above all a family man and he would recount the family stories of happy summers spent at Tenby taking in the sands and sea air. Was it really 16 years on the trot?

Stan's family went much further; it included Dudley Teachers, members of the Black Country Society; members of the Francis Brett Young Society; those at the Hawbush Community centre; those at the Broadfield House Glass Museum and its successor, the Red House Glass Cone and many more. To all he gave his time, attention, advice, energy and best wishes. Whilst he will be sorely missed, he instilled in them his blueprint for living a good life.

He was a very well-read man and his written style had considerable merit. His books and the commentaries to his maps on Brierley Hill and Wordsley broke new ground for none had gone before. He was determined to ensure that his birthplace received national recognition for the hard work and products of its people. Stan rightly said that being a Black Country man was an attitude of mind rather than coming from a specific township in the West Midlands.

It is therefore not surprising that he became the second editor of The Blackcountryman magazine, the quality quarterly published by the Black Country Society. Under his editorship the circulation spiralled and the magazine was regarded in local history circles as a template for others to follow. He edited an amazing 45 issues. We have much to thank Stan for. He persuaded Sutton Publishing that they should commission books on Black Country townships in the Britain in Old Photographs

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Series. He then found them the authors. Little did they realise that some 30 to 40 volumes would follow. Each volume carried the Blackcountry Society logo. We would joke that he was a facilitator or was it as Enoch and Ali would have claimed, "Youm a fixer?" It was little wonder that he was recognised nationally by the British Association for Local History in 2007 when he was given their prestigious Personal Achievement award.

Stan came from a modest background. His father, Albert Edward Hill served in the Royal Engineers in the First World War, but he was badly gassed. After the war an open-air job was essential and he became a postman. Living besides the rail They benefitted tens of thousands of Dudley school children eg. In the 1970s a school Head of History might expect just £120 to be spent on books and materials for the coming year. This averaged out at about 21pence per student. By buying tailor made items from the Teachers Centre the meagre budget could be enhanced up to ten times.

Dudley led the way, three of its schools (Ellowes Hall, Summerhill and Hillcrest) were part of 40 schools nationally who trialled The Schools Council History Project ('O' level/CSE). The History Around Us units written by Dudley teachers and produced by Stan travelled way beyond its borders. Other subject curriculum projects followed. In the Primary sector the Child's Awareness of the Past was an important learning experience.

Stan was above all a people's person, easily approachable, keen to support and generous with praise. There are many examples of how he helped others. He mentored large numbers of young teachers who went on to influence classroom learning, thus enhancing the life chances of young people. Many later advisers and headteachers were influenced by Stan.

In his books, "57 Black Country People" and "57 More Black Country People" he reflected on how his characters improved the lives of their fellow men. This theme was also evident in Stan the politician. In the 1950s he served as a Councillor on Brierley Hill Urban District Council. In 1955/6, aged 26, he was elected Chairperson, and was probably the youngest Civic Head in the Country. He represented the Urban Districts of Staffordshire and with Jean was presented to Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Phillip. An aspect of Stan that is not often mentioned was his personal support for Mary Steven's Hospice. He was pleased to bequeath them over the year's considerable personal sums. A celebration of Stan's life is to be held on February 12<sup>th</sup> at Gornal Wood Crematorium at 1.30pm followed by a gathering at Himley Hall, a fitting venue for the work he did at the former Teachers' Centre. In lieu of flowers there will be a collection in aid of Mary Stevens Hospice.

The boy from Bent Street Infants 'did good' or as the Holden's advert says, 'He was Golden'. Stan's was a life well lived in the service of others.

Like many I am proud to have known Stan and to call him a friend.

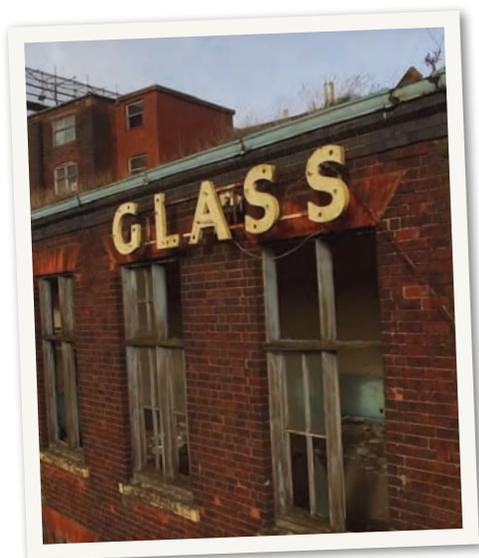
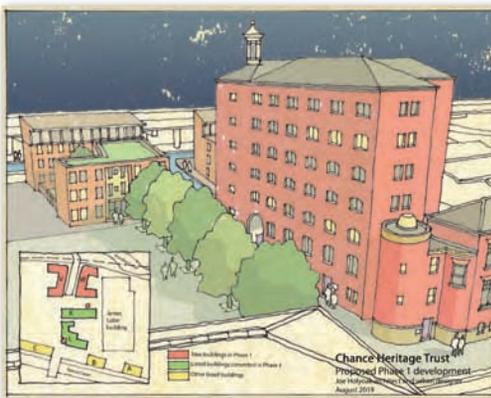
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## TALKS at The Quality Hotel, Dudley DY1 4RN

The Quality Inn, Birmingham Roadl, Dudley DY1 4RN (7.30pm start)

### Black Country Society AGM Wednesday 25 March 2020

Meeting starts at 7.30pm.

BCS welcomes all members able to attend.

**The AGM will be followed by A Tribute to Ron Moss; an illustrated talk by Keith Hodgkins.**



Ron Moss was one of the great stalwarts of the Black Country Society. His passing in April 2019 deprived the Black Country of one of its most significant local historians and researchers of the past 50 years. Ron will be forever associated with the rescue, refurbishment and running of Mushroom Green Chainshop on behalf of the Society. To honour his memory the Society is planning to unveil a commemorative plaque on the Chainshop in the near future.

Keith Hodgkins, Society President 2016-18, joined the BCS in 1973 and straightaway became involved with the Industrial Archaeology Group where he became firm friends with Ron Moss. Since 2012, when Ron`s mobility became restricted due to a stroke, they worked together on digitising and cataloging Ron`s extensive photographic archive. A selection of these images, mostly of Black Country content and portraying Ron`s interests and passions, will form the basis of the presentation.

### Wednesday 22nd April 2020 The Black Country V Zeppelins

**Speaker: Ian Bott** Talk starts at 7.30pm

The Quality Hotel, Birmingham Road, Dudley DY1 4RN

Ian Bott is a well known Black Countryman and has been involved in the promotion of the area for many years. He has a great breadth of knowledge about everything Black Country and in this capacity has appeared on both television and radio.

Ian, on this occasion, will talk about the true story of two stray German Zeppelins that found their way into the skies of the Black Country one a dark night in 1916.

Ian has written and published seven books about various aspects of the Black Country and is a visitor guide at Walsall's Leather Museum. Ian's book will be on sale at the event and available through the Black Country Society Library thereafter.

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## The Man Who Built The Coronet by Ned Williams

On Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1933 an important event occurred in the Black Country township of Quarry Bank in the south western quarter of the Black Country. The region consists of towns of varying size, and villages which are equally varied in size and sense of importance. This sense of importance has been very significant and has been interwoven with the 'Blackcountryman's' feeling of regional identity. People identified themselves with their local patch and that patch might be no more than just a small part of a village that, to outsiders, already seemed a pretty small place. Thus it was that Quarry Bank felt confident that it had a life and history of its own, yet even within its own boundaries it had a number of independent patches. However, the event we are

about to consider brought together all those who were proud to be part of Quarry Bank.

On that night Quarry Bank's brand new purpose built cinema opened its doors for the first time, rejoicing in the name: The Coronet. Cinemas had long existed in neighbouring towns like Brierley Hill and Cradley Heath, not forgetting larger towns like Dudley and Stourbridge, but now at last Quarry Bank could stand alongside them with its very own cinema. No wonder the new building was already full long before the appointed hour of six o'clock when it was scheduled to be opened officially. People arriving just before six found they were unable to obtain seats. Who was responsible for putting

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Quarry Bank on the map and elevating its importance with the provision of The Coronet? The answer to that question is: Cecil Couper – the man who is the subject of this article.

Back in 1932 The Quarry Bank Cinema Company had obtained permission to build The Coronet. Plans had been drawn up by A. L. Horsburgh – a Birmingham architect, but the job of building it was given to a local Brierley Hill – based firm of Messrs Batham and Beddall. The four directors of the Quarry Bank Cinema Co. were Cecil Couper, his wife Myra, his daughter Irene, and Irene's husband: Harold Roberts – all of whom we will meet as this story unfolds.

Local people worked on building The Coronet, and local materials were used wherever possible. The interior decoration was carried out by W.J. Price – a well-known painter and decorator of Quarry Bank. William Price (1865-1945) lived at 156 High Street, Quarry Bank, only a few yards from the site of The Coronet, and his name, painted on the brickwork of his house, was still visible until fairly recent times. His colour scheme for the interior of The Coronet was orange and blue – matching the orange and black of the screen curtains – provided by J.H. Stringer, of Stourbridge.

The auditorium of The Coronet was built to seat five hundred patrons, originally in four price bands ranging from four pence to a shilling in 'old money'. A raked floor ensured that everyone enjoyed a view of the screen but no balcony was provided. The frontage of the cinema included three vertical windows that gave the impression that the cinema had a balcony, but only the projection facilities were to be found on this floor.

The frontage itself was plain with only a slightly stepped parapet above the three windows to suggest a certain 1930s feel to its design. The entrance consisted of two double doors, and small lockup shops were provided on either side of the entrance. Such shops provided rent which the cinema proprietor could depend on, and therefore were a common feature of cinema frontages in such modest enterprises. Not even a small canopy graced the entrance – either to add some grandeur or keep patrons dry in wet weather!

Nevertheless, no one seemed to note the lack of grandeur on opening night. The opening ceremony was performed by J.E. Dunn who, at the time, was President of the Quarry Bank Hospital Carnival Committee: the most important local body in Quarry Bank after the Urban District Council who had been running the township since 1894. James Dunn, of The Mount in Coppice Lane, was Managing Director of an iron foundry and hardware factory, and was a suitably important person to be opening The Coronet. His carnival committee raised money for local hospitals and was going to be the recipient of the evening's takings.

The film presented on that occasion was 'The Cuban Love Song'. This 1931 MGM musical romance, starring Lawrence Tibbetts and Lupe Velez is a Cuban reworking of the Madame Butterfly story. By today's standards it is unbelievably creaky but if you want to see what hit the screen in Quarry Bank that night in 1933, you can catchup with it on YouTube! 'The Cuban Love Song' was only presented for the opening performance. Immediately afterwards the cinema settled into a pattern of two three-day programmes a week, opening

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only in the evening except on Mondays and Thursdays when there were matinees.

The Ideal Kinema, the weekly trade newspaper of the time, reported on the opening of The Coronet in its 16<sup>th</sup> March 1933 edition, in which it was able to report: 'The cinema is remarkably well-patronised, particularly by elderly people and invalids who are not equal to a journey out of their own village.' Such a comment illustrates how little was understood of what it took to provide cinema in a place like the Black Country. Cecil Couper was a good judge of what it took to provide the villages of the Black Country with cinema entertainment – in places that would never have attracted a mighty Odeon or Gaumont. His cinemas were small, unpretentious, and succeeded by showing more than one programme a week, and usually concentrated on action pictures.

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The Coronet was managed by Harold Roberts, Cecil Couper's son-in-law, but the staff were generally all part-timers and were often connected by family. It has been difficult to identify all the people who worked at The Coronet, or even work out the order in which they served! Chief Operators included Don Weston, George Horton and Jack Fletcher, but I am not sure in which order. George Horton seems to have been in charge at the outbreak of the Second World War. He was related to Muriel Horton who was an usherette – and Muriel married Tommy Morgan, who had worked his way up the system at the Queens Hall in Brierley Hill, and at some stage was 'Second Operator' at The Coronet. Muriel also had a sister named Marie, who married Jack Fletcher, mentioned above.

Muriel herself enjoyed working at The Coronet but dreamed of being a full time Usherette in a posh uniform at The Danilo cinema in Brierley Hill. Harold Roberts encouraged her to pursue her ambition – which was eventually fulfilled. Tommy Morgan so enjoyed working at The Coronet that he would often come back in later years to lend a hand when required. Harold Roberts could also project the films when necessary. Cecil Couper favoured the use of the Morrison sound system in his cinemas, but after the war new Kalee II projectors were installed with an RCA sound system.

Cecil Couper's success with The Coronet encouraged him to build two further cinemas of modest proportions in other Black Country villages that would not have been able to sustain a grander picture palace. These were The Savoy in Netherton and The Forum in Pensnett. However, Cecil had been struggling with health problems throughout this period and he died soon after the opening of The Forum. At the time he was a well-known figure in the Stourbridge and Brierley Hill area but now, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century there is a danger that he will be forgotten, so let's try and look at the story of his life and achievements:

Cecil Frederick Couper was the son of Frederick Couper and Olivia Couper nee Churcher, and was born in 1885 at South Stoneham, near Southampton. Cecil's father was a draughtsman working with the Ordnance Survey. Cecil's progress into the world of show business is usually explained as the result of being related to the Poole Family, associated with Poole's Myrioramas. Cecil's mother was the sister of Elizabeth

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Frances Churcher, who in March 1881, married Charles W. Poole in Plymouth, about six months after the marriage of Olivia and Frederick.

The Churchers seem to have been an interesting family. Elisabeth appeared with the Poole's Myriorama Show as a soprano vocalist: Madame Garland Poole. (A photograph of her appears on page 123 of John Powell's book about Poole's Myriorama.) Elisabeth and Charles W. Poole had three sons who all went into the business, and Charles had two children as a result of a previous relationship.

gressed in the business while in his teens and by the turn of the century was appearing on the show as a vocalist and sometimes as the 'guide' or 'lecturer' to either the panoramas, or cinematographic presentations.

Although his name would not be well-known to the public while working on these shows, he does become someone named in reports appearing in the trade press. For example, the Music Hall & Theatre Review of 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1905 describes the presentation of Pooles' Myriorama at the Philharmonic Hall in Southampton. Cecil is described as a



Thus, as a result of being Charles W. Poole's nephew, Cecil joined the travelling myriorama business after leaving school at the age of twelve. These shows travelled from town to town and usually rented public halls for their presentation of tableaux and moving scenery, supported with musical and variety acts. Cecil seems to have pro

'smart vocalist and entertaining guide.' The report also tells us that the show by that time was including 'animated pictures' – providing Cecil with an introduction to cinematography. He later joined the Cinema Veterans Association – an organisation uniting cinema pioneers who had been associated with cinematography before 1903. We also read

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that, 'Myra Lola' was appearing in the show as an 'excellent trapeze and bar performer'.

Myra Lola was later known as Inez – part of a gymnastic act. What is not clear from that report is that Myra was Cecil Couper's wife. The couple had married at the parish church in St. Helier, in Jersey, on 3rd September 1905 – presumably while Poole's Myriorama was visiting Jersey. The couple were both in their early 20s. Myra was born in Leeds as Maria Belfield on 24th February 1884. Her father was a stage gymnast and she seems to have followed in his footsteps.

Cecil and Myra's first daughter, Irene, was born on 10th September 1906 – probably at Cecil's family home at Southampton as Cecil and Myra were still travelling with Pooles' Myriorama show. Interestingly, Myra seems to have wanted to be a 'working mum' as within a year or two she returned to the stage with her gymnastic display. At some point Myra started to appear in a gymnastic double act with her adopted brother, John William Watson Belfield, as 'Inez & Pim'.

A second daughter, Cecilia, was born on 3rd February 1920, by which time Myra had retired from the stage.

Cecil Couper continued to work for Poole's Myriorama through the first decade of the twentieth century, often 'describing' the scenes and the films, but sometimes also credited as being general manager of the show. The show travelled far and wide, including visits to the Black Country. By the end of the decade Pooles had to face the fact that presenting film, rather than scenic tableaux, was going to be the way forward, particularly once the Kinemato-

graph Act became law at the beginning of 1910. Like other travelling showland families, the Pooles had to contemplate opening permanent cinemas. In Stourbridge the Pooles took over a skating rink in New Road – re-opening the building as the Kings Hall Cinema in 1911. They also had their eyes on The Queens Hall in Brierley Hill, which was being used to present films and variety acts by Robert Colin, who called it 'The Tivoli'. In 1912 they were able to take advantage of Brierley Hill UDC's decision to seek a new lessee of the hall. Pooles were among several bidders and were finally successful in obtaining the lease. They re-opened the hall as 'The Queens Hall' on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1912, after refurbishing it. The twenty-seven-year-old Cecil Couper was appointed manager and he promptly made Brierley Hill the Couper family home. About one year later Cecil took over the lease in his own name. From then on, its success was totally his responsibility: he had become a 'cinema proprietor', as he later described himself on Cecilia's birth certificate.

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Once The Queens Hall was well established, Cecil began to expand his empire by taking over the Palace Theatre in Brierley Hill – a small corrugated iron building behind The Three Horseshoes in Moor Street. Further expansion seems to have been halted by the outbreak of the First World War. Cecil enlisted on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1915 and joined the Royal Garrison Artillery as a gunner. His service number was 285702, and he was honourably discharged on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1918 with a Silver War Badge. However, it seems that his experience in the Army had permanently affected his health.

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The first step towards building a larger cinema empire began with the acquisition of The Cinema in High Street, Tipton. This was a modest enterprise operating in a converted school building. One of the problems that must have faced Cecil Couper in running The Cinema was that it was rather remote from his base in Brierley Hill. It was sold at the end of the silent era, in 1930, to Fred Leatham.

It was 1923 when Cecil was next able to expand his empire. In the March of that year he purchased the Olympia Cinema, Wordsley, from Anthony Bailey for £4500. The Olympia was a converted 'pop' factory but had enjoyed some success as typical small Black Country 'blood tub' – often interspersing films with variety acts or whole variety shows. Cecil was quite able to continue such a regime but by the mid-twenties all three venues were solidly showing films

and advertised themselves collectively as 'Coupers' Enterprises'.

Cecil met a projectionist at the Olympia named Harold Roberts, whom he moved to the Queens Hall. This is where various threads of this story converge. Harold was born on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1906, making him three months younger than Cecil's daughter, Irene, who sometimes provided piano accompaniment to silent films in her father's cinemas. On 15<sup>th</sup> September 1928 Harold and Irene were married at St. Michael's Church, Brierley Hill – both in their early twenties. Their wedding was filmed by Pathe News: the first wedding in Brierley Hill to be recorded on film! The film was shown the following week at the Queens Hall, the Palace, and the Olympia, Wordsley.

Although his experience of the First World War had left him with some health problems, Cecil's enthusiasm for remaining in the entertainment business seemed undimmed. He adapted to the coming of sound at the end of the 1920s and introduced the talkies in The Queen's Hall and at the Olympia, Wordsley. However, as the 1930s unfolded Cecil appears to have developed the idea of creating new purpose-built sound cinemas constructed to fit the village-like scale of some Black Country communities. Opening The Coronet in Quarry Bank in 1933 was the first step in this new direction.

While completing The Coronet, Cecil was also involved in helping Howard Bishop deal with bringing the talkies to Netherton. Howard Bishop had showed silent films in the Public Hall, Netherton, the Workers Institute, Cradley Heath, and the Temperance Hall, Dudley since before the First World War. By the end of the 1920s only the Netherton venue

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was still viable, but even there audiences were diminishing. Cecil helped Howard Bishop install a Morrison sound system as used at The Coronet and the Public Hall enjoyed as new lease of life as The Imperial. Such name changes were lost on the people of Netherton who always referred to the venue as 'Bungies'!

Howard Bishop died in July 1933, at the age of sixty-four, but his son Charles decided to join forces with the Coupers to build a brand-new purpose-built cinema in Netherton. The four directors of Savoy Cinema (Netherton) Ltd. were Cecil and Myra Couper along with Charles and Gladys Bishop. The Savoy was designed by Stanley Griffiths of Stourbridge and was built by J.M. Tate of Cradley Heath. It was a very simple functional building, incorporating some shops and adopting a single storey stadium-style auditorium. It was opened at 6.30.p.m on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 1936 by Councillor Hillman, the Mayor of Dudley. Everything followed the pattern established by The Coronet, from the use of the Morrison sound system to the two three-days-a-week programming, with matinees on Monday and Thursday as the new films arrived, and with the cinema closed on Sunday. Both cinemas provided Saturday matinees for children.

The next village to receive Cecil Couper's attention was Pensnett, one of the villages on the fringe of Brierley Hill. A site was found on Commonsides – the road leading from the older centre of Pensnett to Brierley Hill. Once again Stanley Griffiths designed the modest building and J.M. Tate built it. (The four directors of the company were Cecil and Myra Couper, Irene Roberts and a J.H. Hobson.) Once

again it opened on a Wednesday and then went into two three-day programmes a week – a formula tried and tested at The Coronet and The Savoy. The Forum was opened by J.T. Higgs, President of the Midlands Counties Mutual Benefit Society, a well-known local citizen. Proceeds went to the local Hospital Committee.

Mr. Higgs extolled the virtues of good clean wholesome entertainment but a Mr. Andrew Cooper rose to his feet to say, 'The people of Brierley Hill are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Couper for several reasons... They had not built any huge cinemas, but what they had done was to erect buildings suitable for the district, the working man and his family, and the working man's pocket.' This was greeted with many shouts of 'Hear, hear!' This was followed by Jessie Matthews' film Evergreen, replaced on Thursday with a three-day run of Gracie Fields' Queen of Hearts.

Unfortunately, Cecil Couper did not attend the opening of The Forum as he was too ill. He died at the end of June 1937 while in a nursing home in London. His funeral took place at Holy Trinity Church in Amblecote as the Coupers had left their home in Albion Street, Brierley Hill, and had moved to nearby Amblecote. The family was joined by many people from the cinema world, including Charles Bishop from Netherton, Donald Pass representing the Odeon Circuit, and Mortimer Dent from the Danilo Circuit. The Poole family and a representative of the Cinema Veterans' Association were present. It seems ironical that Cecil died at the age of fifty-two just at the height of his cinema-building programme. 1937 was also the silver-anniversary of his arrival in Brierley Hill.

### The Blackcountryman

Cecil's trio of little cinemas survived, while the remains of his earlier empire; The Queens Hall and The Palace in Brierley Hill faded away. The Coronet, Quarry Bank, continued to be run by Harold Roberts. The Savoy, Netherton, continued to be run by Charles and Gladys Bishop, with the latter doing most of the work as Charles had a 'day job' on the Great Western Railway! The Forum, Pensnett, was looked after by Kitty and Alfred Stewart who were long term acquaintances of Cecil from the world of variety. (Kitty was a pianist and had used her talents to be an accompanist to silent films.) Myra Couper booked the films, and her daughter Irene was also capable of doing so. In this way Cecil's three little cinemas continued to prosper, finding themselves pretty busy as the Second World War unfolded.

In the period after the war the future began to look a little more uncertain. Myra Couper, Cecil's widow, died in the Spring of 1947. The first sign that things would change came with the sale of The Forum to Fred Leatham – the gentleman to whom Cecil had sold the Olympia, Wordsley, in 1934. The sale was possible precipitated by the retirement of Alfred and Kitty Stewart. Kitty Stewart died early in 1948, followed by Alfred in 1951, both by then in their seventies. The Forum continued to show films until 30<sup>th</sup> May 1959, and the building itself was not demolished until 2011.

The 1950s were increasingly challenging for the small independent cinema proprietor. The Savoy was left in the capable hands of Gladys Bishop and she managed to continue showing films until Christmas Eve 1960. Irene and Harold Roberts, Cecil's daughter and son-in-law, struggled through this period at The Coronet, Quarry Bank

.Irene died in April 1959 leaving Harold to ponder the future of the cinema during a period of rapid decline in patronage. In the end The Coronet closed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1960 with 'The Mouse That Roared', starring Peter Sellers. The closure received little attention in the local Press, and went almost unnoticed by the local community. I have never met a Quarry Banker who claimed to have been at the last show at The Coronet – despite the fact that I have met many who claimed to be in the cinema on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1940 when land mines were dropped in the area!

The Quarry Bank Cinema Company was wound up in 1963 – having lasted a mere thirty years. Harold Roberts tried to sell The Coronet and sought planning permission to change its use to a factory or car showroom. In the end the building was unceremoniously demolished in 1967 to make way for a petrol service station. Today houses occupy the site. All the local buildings associated with the life and work of Cecil Couper have now disappeared. Ironically a modern multi-screen cinema operates in Brierley Hill today, alongside the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, but I doubt whether many of today's cinema-goers could imagine that little cinemas were once to be found in the villages of Pensnett and Quarry Bank.

*(The story of Cecil Couper and his local cinemas is partly revealed by work in archives, but could not be brought to life if it were not from the help of his descendants. In the 1980s I was fortunate to be able to interview Cecilia Thornycroft, Cecil's younger daughter, and also Gladys Bishop of Netherton. More recently I have been greatly assisted by Christine Smith who is Cecil's grand-daughter and custodian of a wonderful archive relating to this story.)*

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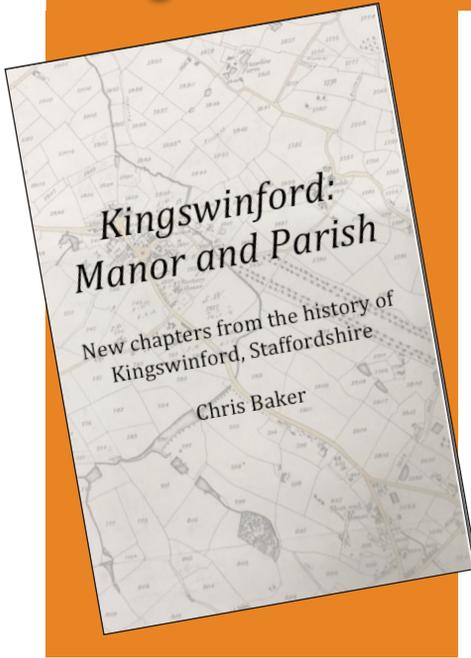
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**OLDBURY                HAWTHORNS**

The Blackcountryman

# Kingswinford Manor and Parish



Over the last few years I have been working on some aspects of the history of where I was born and brought up – the ancient parish of Kingswinford (which covered the region from Wall Heath and Prestwood in the west to Old Park, Brierley Hill and Cradley in the east) and its more recent offspring, the industrial village of Pensnett. This work has finally come to some sort of fruition in an ebook entitled *Kingswinford; Manor and Parish – New chapters from the history of Kingswinford, Staffordshire*. Many readers will recognise that the subtitle is taken from the work of David Guttery, whose work in the 1940s and 1950s has remained an inspiration for many years. This short article gives a brief outline of the contents and outlines ways to obtain a (free!) copy.

## Contents

### Chapter 1.

#### **Kingswinford Manor and Parish**

This chapter is a brief introduction and an outline of the ebook's contents.

### Chapter 2.

#### **The making of the Manor**

This chapter looks at the early history of the area that was to become Kingswinford manor and parish from the Roman invasion through to 1750. Although it might be thought that not a great deal could be said of the early part of this period, a careful consideration of kingdom, diocesan and estate boundaries, roads and place names does offer some clues as to how the area around Kingswinford might have developed over this period. The manor first becomes visible in a historical sense with its inclusion in the Domesday book, where we are given for the first time firm information concerning its size, number of inhabitants etc. The manor itself lay within the must larger entity that was to become known as Pensnett Chase, and this chapter looks in detail at what can be inferred concerning the geography of the Chase and the meaning of what one recent commentator calls its "intriguing name". Finally the chapter gives a brief description of the late 18th century enclosures.

### Chapter 3.

#### **Lords and gentlemen**

This chapter considers the more historically visible inhabitants of Kingswinford from the 15th to the early 19th centuries – the feudal land owners, the yeoman

farmers and their rise to the status of landed gentry, and the emergent class of coal masters and ironmasters. A genealogical study reveals an astonishing degree of inter-relatedness amongst the chief families in this period.

#### Chapter 4. A tale of two maps

In 1822 the chief landowners of Kingswinford parish commissioned the firm of W. Fowler and Co. in Birmingham to produce a very large scale and detailed map of the whole parish, and a Book of Reference giving owners, occupiers, land areas etc. This map gives a wealth of information of the nature of the parish in this period. A revision of this map was made in 1840, with another Book of Reference and a comparison of the two maps reveals, in fine detail, the spread of industry across the parish in that period. This chapter considers the topography of the parish as revealed by the maps over a twenty-year period, and looks in detail at the landowners of the period, and at those who occupied and exploited the land.

#### Chapter 5. The quest for coal

This chapter continues the study of the Fowler maps, and looks at the spread of industrialization across the parish in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, driven by the need to find the coal to power the various industries. The transportation network and the major industries of coal mining, iron working and brick making are considered. The chapter also contains a detailed discussion of the various townships within the parish in that period.

#### Chapter 6. Between the canals

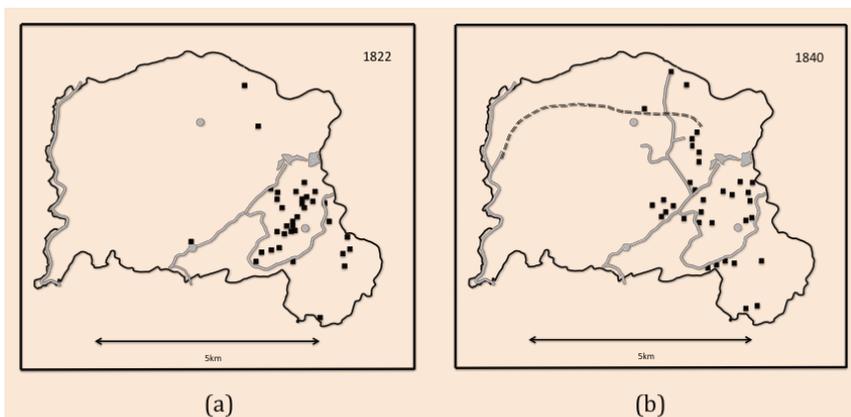
This chapter narrows the focus of the study further to the northeastern portion of Kingswinford parish – the parish of Pensnett, created in the 1840s, the geographical extent of which was, in the main, delineated by the canals and railways in the area. Based on a study of a range of sources, this chapter takes forward the work of chapters 4 and 5 and looks at the development, and to some extent the decline, of industry across Pensnett in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Chapter 7. A migrant society

This chapter attempts to paint a picture of the nature of the society of the newly formed and growing Black Country village of Pensnett in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Again, it uses a variety of sources and looks at a range of topics including the make-up of the population, commerce, education, sports and religion.

#### Chapter 8. An Ecclesiastical Affair

In the 1860s and 1870s major scandals upset the calm of the Anglican Church in Pensnett, which have many modern resonances. They involve clerical adultery, an affair between the vicar and a pupil teacher at the church school, ecclesiastical disciplinary processes, libelous letters and a nationally reported court case. This chapter tells the story of those turbulent times, which is in turn sordid, comic, sweet and tragic. This story has appeared in installments in the 2019 editions of the Blackcountryman.



### Chapter 9. An extraordinary landscape

This final chapter again concentrates on the village of Pensnett and presents a tour around the parish of Pensnett in the year 1881, based upon census returns, commercial directories and ordnance survey maps. It paints a picture of a small and industrious village in the Black Country, set in an extraordinary landscape of open fields, heavy industry and industrial waste.

### Appendices

A number of appendices are included that give more detail of some of the sources used and issues raised in the main text.

### Availability

The book is available (free) in electronic PDF colour format that should be readable on most tablets or PCs. Colour and Black and white A4 versions, suitable for sending to an on line printing firm to produce a hard copy, are also available. I do not intend to produce hard copies myself, but one is available at the Dudley Archives and Local History Service if required.

In addition an EXCEL file and accompanying notes are available (again, free) that include transcripts of the 1776 Ashwood Hay Enclosure Act, the 1784 Pensnett Chase Enclosure Act and the Books of Reference for the 1822 and 1840 maps of Kingswinford parish. These were all used extensively in the analysis contained in the book and name very many individuals and may be of interest in family history studies.

For further details and to request a copy, go to:

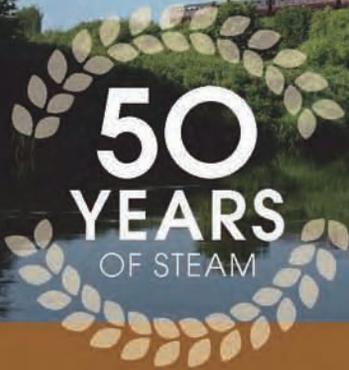
<https://profchrisbaker.com/kingswinford-manor-and-parish/>

There are also a small number of blog posts on this website that may also be of interest.



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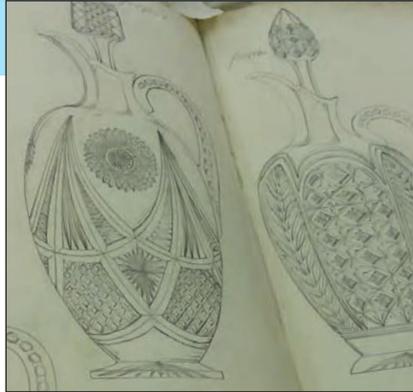
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## LOCAL NEWS ...

**LOCAL GLASS CHARITY  
RECEIVES SUBSTANTIAL  
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PRESERVATION OF  
HISTORIC PATTERN  
BOOKS ...**



The Trustees of the British Glass Foundation are delighted to announce the receipt of a grant of £25,000 from The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust to conserve the pattern books from the glass factories of Stevens & Williams (better known as Royal Brierley Crystal), Thomas Webb & Sons, W.H., B. and J. Richardson, Boulton & Mills, John Northwood & Co., and Smart Brothers.

These date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and are the only surviving complete records of every glass made by these factories.

The designs were entered as each glass was finished with its own unique pattern number and further information about cutters, engravers, weights and costs. Their importance as a unique record of the most important glass factories in the world is acknowledged both nationally and internationally.

75 spring-back volumes, comprising 8 pattern books, featuring intricate sketches and 65 description books, ranging in date from 1851 - 1945 are highly requested by researchers but, following a specialist conditions survey, 32 volumes have been identified as unusable and completely unsuitable for production to users i.e. so fragile and damaged that they are certain to suffer further if handled. 18 others are in such poor condition that further use is likely to cause damage.

### The Blackcountryman

Through the BGF project the newly conserved pattern and description books will form an integral part of the interpretation of the new [White House Cone museum of glass](#) and their content will allow visitors to follow selected objects in the collection, from design, through the factory floor, to their eventual customer destination.

The books will be displayed on rotation in the museum and their content made accessible through digitisation. By being digitised they will provide information not just to international glass historians, collectors and museum curators but on a wider level to social and economic historians, designers, auctioneers, publishers and modern-day glassmakers.

Their availability world-wide will undoubtedly open up and uncover even wider areas of research and knowledge.

'We are very grateful to the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust for awarding us this grant of £25,000 which we understand is one of the largest grants they have given and which puts our pattern books on par with the Minton pattern books, proving just how important they are.'

Graham Fisher MBE, Trustee of The British Glass Foundation

'These books are a crucial record of the achievements of the skilled glass makers of the Stourbridge district. They were used daily in the firm for 125 years and record the designs of titans like John Northwood and Fred Carder, and the breadth of glass-making skills of the skilled glass makers and cutters of the area. It is marvellous that they are being preserved for posterity.'

David Williams-Thomas, former Chairman/Managing Director of Royal glass makers Royal Brierley Crystal and Patron of BGF

### The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust (NMCT)

'The NMCT helps preserve important manuscript and archive collections by awarding grants for their conservation. Since the NMCT was founded in 1990 it has awarded grants of nearly £3m which have enabled the conservation of hundreds of musical, literary, architectural and other vital historical documents that would otherwise have been lost or faced an uncertain future. We welcome applications from non-national archives and record offices, as well as specialist libraries, universities and museums.'

With acknowledgements to the NMCT website

### British Glass Foundation (BGF)

The British Glass Foundation is an independent enabling body bringing together all relevant glass and cultural organizations and private individuals, in a common aim to protect and save the glass, archive and technical collections formerly held at

The Blackcountryman

Broadfield House Glass Museum; to ensure their future display to the public, their continuing access for research and their on-going promotion.

GlassCuts, the ad hoc email bulletin of the British Glass Foundation, is the voice of the BGF is available free of charge to anyone contacting

The Stourbridge Glass Industry

Once dominant in the world of glass, the Stourbridge industry reached its zenith in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries before undergoing a period of decline that culminated in the closure of Stuart Crystal in 2001 - the last remaining serious 'heavy-weight' - and the loss of 220 jobs. However, suggestions that the industry is dead are erroneous; although it no longer produces items en masse (Stuart supplied the White Star line, owners of RMS Titanic) it thrives in areas across the range from the burgeoning studio glass movement to high-tech specialist equipment and full-lead crystal items.

Dudley MBC, Complex Developments Ltd and BGF - the connection

Dudley MBC is currently the custodian of the world-famous Stourbridge Glass collection, which is in the process of being transferred to the custody of the BGF on a long-term arrangement for display in the new facility. The BGF is leading facilitator between DMBC and property developers Complex Development Projects Ltd , owners of the White House site, in developing this permanent and sustainable new home for the collection. White House is itself historic, latterly being the home of Stuart Crystal (closed 2001).

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Further info/photo opportunities/quotes/references/enquiries:

Graham Fisher MBE, BGF Trustee (PR & Comms).  
Telephone: 01497 831358 / 07885 7686826, \_  
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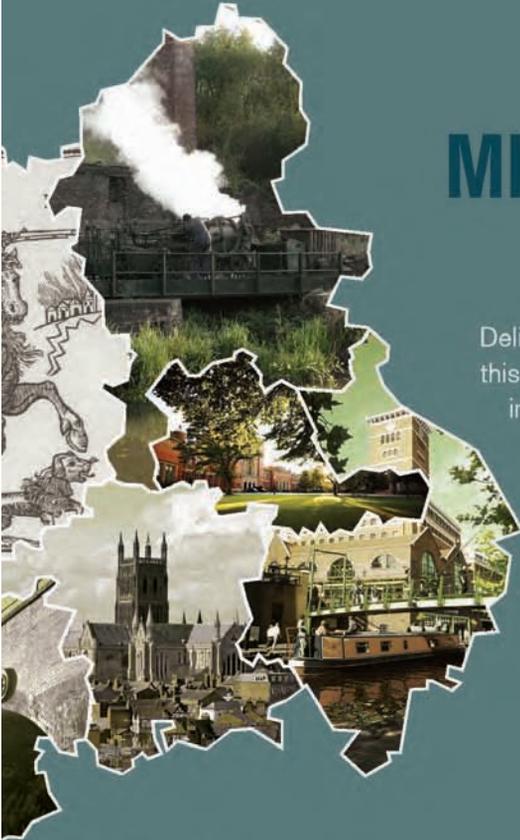
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The Blackcountryman



## NATHAN PERRY, You Beauty!

**Nathan Perry** was a husband, a father, a cricketer, a wonderful friend and thoroughly good Black Country man. He passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 aged 48 years old. This is the tribute to him by his friend and colleague, Dave Powell, Swindon Cricket Club's Club President.

Nathan Perry was born in Dudley, a proud Black Country man, hewn out of Gornal rock, he was as strong as an ox and extremely fit. He came from a strong cricketing family. His Dad, Geoff, played for Stuart's in Wordsley, where Nathan first starting playing at the age of twelve. His Mom, Anne, was also involved in the catering there.

It soon became apparent to Geoff that Nathan needed to play youth cricket, so in 1984 he brought him to Swindon, and here his story began. He had a good hand-and-eye co-ordination even then, and soon became a regular in our Under

16 team, which he eventually captained. He was a fast bowler, a terrific hitter and a wonderful fielder, with hands like shovels. I rarely saw him drop a catch.

He was soon picked for our second team, playing league cricket on a Saturday, and then graduated to the first team, where he became a regular, and one of the first names on the team sheet for many years.

I think it's fair to say that Nathan and the lads that played with him at the time were the rock that Swindon Cricket Club was built on from a playing point of view.

He won numerous awards for his efforts on the field of play. For example, he won the first team bowling award on five occasions since the year 2000. In 2015, when he was Captain, he won the Batting & Bowling Award.

In 2005, Nathan was elected as one of the club players of the season by The

## The Blackcountryman



Midlands Club Cricket Conference. A large group of us went to the Midlands Motorcycle Museum to support him and see him collect his trophy. He was chuffed to bits – his smile lit up the room. It was a great night. There is no doubt in my mind that Nathan was Swindon's answer to Ian Botham. He simply had it all.

One of the few regrets in my life was that I never played with Nathan. We had so much in common, both of us could move the ball both ways, we both believed that it was better to smash a six rather than bother with singles.

Most of the lads who did play with Nathan have great memories of him, such as his now famous shout of 'YOU BEAUTY!' when he took a wicket.

We won't forget one day at Redditch when he was wearing a new pair of boots, he took a wicket and shouted at the top of his voice, 'IT'S THE BOOTS!'

Nathan was a real character. There will

never be another like him. His famous pink jockstrap should be displayed in our trophy cabinet.

He was a superb leader, and when he captained a Swindon side, he led from the front. His heart was on his sleeve, he always played to win, but was gracious in defeat and became a fine ambassador for our club.

Nathan always looked after youngsters in his side, either giving a little piece of advice, a word of encouragement or a hug if he thought they needed one. They loved and respected him for it. All the youngsters looked up to him, which was great. He was always keen to help a young cricketer and was a fine example to us all.

Nathan Perry was a legend. Loyal, inspirational, and above all, respected by everyone. He was simply one of the nicest men I have ever met.

My everlasting memory of Nathan would be of him on our sit-on mower cutting the outfield ready for the next match.

I have never known such a devastating effect on so many people of someone passing away as Nathan's death, but he was a one-off. There will never be another one like him.

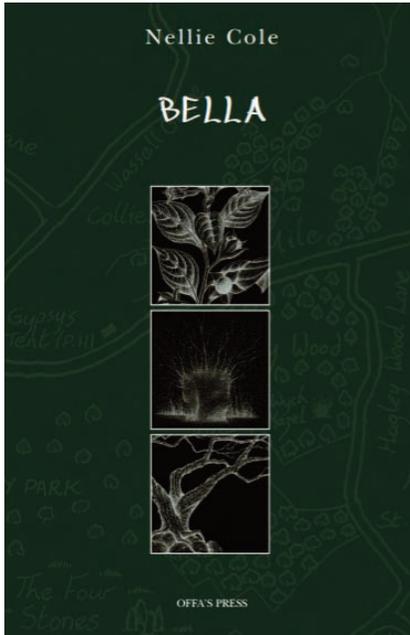
All our thoughts go to his wonderful family, whom he loved to bits: Sarah, Lauren, Megan, and, of course, Dexter the family dog.

We will all miss our Nathan very much. At his funeral £1251.00 was raised for the charity:

<https://www.myositis.org.uk>

The Blackcountryman

## Nellie Cole is a Midlands-based poet



**Nellie Cole's writing explores the history, mythology, folklore, and superstitions of her local area. Her debut pamphlet, *Bella*, was published by Offa's Press in 2018, and explores the Worcestershire murder mystery 'Who Put Bella in the Wych Elm?'. She also acts as a poetry workshop leader and mentor.**

### What made you decide to embark on a career in poetry?

When I began studying Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham, I wanted to become a writer of novels. It had always been my dream, since a very young age, to have stories pub

lished; it didn't occur to me that I could tell stories through a medium other than prose. An early assignment gave us the option of writing poems, and after trying it, I found I really enjoyed the highly-wrought nature of poetry. Being a poet is like being a crafts-person: you plough all your energy and skill into one small, diamond-hard thing.

### What is it about the Black Country that inspires you?

For the early assignment mentioned above, the theme was 'generations'.

Something fascinating I learned about my family is that we have been in the Black Country for over twelve generations, so my hometown of Halesowen really is our native land.

With a surname like 'Cole', it was no surprise that coal-mining played a large part in our story: my great-grandfather Bert Cole was a miner at Beech Tree Colliery, before a tunnel collapse left him unable to work.

Coal-mining was my starting point, but admittedly, as a young woman born in the 90s, there was a limit to how close I could bring my writing to true experience. So I branched out into subjects I can relate a lot closer to: family ties, connection with the land, its people and animals, as well as notions of playfulness, freedom, and hope.





### Poetry is notably in an area of literature that is very difficult to be successful in. How did you do it?

Success is difficult to define - when I first started writing, getting something published was the highest indicator of success. Now, I see it as a constancy morphing thing, full of small and large achievements along the way. For me, it has always been a case of creating, seeking and accepting opportunities. Applying to schemes, submitting to magazines or competitions, saying 'yes' to offers that come your way... A knowledge of what is going on in the poetry sphere is very important, as is getting to know people in that sphere. Since my first online publication and involvement with the arts organisation Leaveners in 2015, one thing has led to another. You never know what's around the corner, so I'd encourage anyone to take those steps and see.

### Tell us about the success you've had with your publications.

While I no longer see publication as the final and highest indicator of success, it did fulfil a childhood dream of mine to see my work in print in my own, single-authored book. *Bella* is the title of my debut pamphlet, published by Offa's Press in 2018, and is a culmination of over a year's work which began as my undergraduate dissertation. Publication came with the opportunity to read at many spoken-word nights, festival events, and book launches, and also enabled those who enjoy my work to take something away, to read over again in their own time. My writing has also generated new creative work - since *Bella* was published, the poems have been used in an undergraduate dissertation piece by drama students at the University of Birmingham, and in a short docu-drama film created by Sutton Coldfield Movie Makers. A number of lovely reviews have also been published, in magazines as varied as *Under the Radar* and *SlagMag*. It was also short-listed for a Saboteur Award, in the category of 'Best Poetry Pamphlet', in early 2019. As an early-career poet, published with a small independent press, that was particularly thrilling.

### Favourite poem you've written? Which one is it and tell us why.

I'd have to say 'Spirits Raise *Bella* from the Wych Elm'. It's a poem split into five parts, tied together with the basic concept of *Bella*'s ghost exploring the local area. Along the way she meets various other mythic, supernatural, or otherworldly figures: the Four Stones who are thought by some to be

The Blackcountryma

witches; the boy king Kenelm; miners killed in a tunnel collapse; the Iron Age watchmen at Wychbury hillfort; and the ghost of a Cavalier sometimes spotted on Hagley Mile.

These are all stories or figures that were of interest to me, so it was nice to place them into Bella's story - or rather, to place Bella amongst this great pantheon of Worcestershire folklore. There's a lot at play in the poem: it starts with dawn and ends with dusk; follows Bella from being 'reborn' to facing an end; and if you were to plot her movements on a map, it's all roughly circular.

It has echoes of Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' speech, too. It required a lot of planning and research, but I believe the finished piece is quite lovely.

### How important is the performance aspect of your work and where and when can we come and see you.

I wouldn't class myself as a performance poet, but I do think hearing my poems read aloud brings a new life to them. While some poems, such as the blackout poem in Bella, can only really be understood when seen, others have a carefully plotted rhyme and rhythm which become more clear when vocalised. I think I've come a long way since my earliest readings, both in confidence and delivery: while I used to stress a Black Country accent, I now read with a more authentic voice. I do not have a regular event at which I read, but I am always open to considering bookings..! Do get in touch with me through the contact page on my website (link below) if you would like me to appear at your event.



### Tell us a bit about your other project(s).

As well as writing my own poetry, I also tutor and mentor others in writing theirs. I have lead workshops at local primary and secondary schools, including a day of activities for National Poetry Day 2019; I also teach creative writing for Spark Young Writers, with one of twenty groups run by Writing West Midlands.

I run my own poetry group for adults called Pen to Paper, which has popped up for two successful seasons so far, in Harborne and in Birmingham city centre. In 2019, I became the poet-in-residence at the University of Loughborough, mentoring BA, MA and PhD students through a series of open-door sessions, workshops, and readings.

I also act as a private mentor, developing partnerships with dedicated, emerging poets to strengthen their work, cultivate ideas, and polish up their portfolios. For details about my role as a mentor, do see the page on my website.

The Blackcountryman

## Links to your website and where we can buy your anthologies.

For updates on what I've been up to, to follow my research journey into my next portfolio, and for information on how to book me for either a reading or workshop, see:

To buy a copy of my pamphlet *Bella*, and the two anthologies I've been included in (*The Poetry of the Black Country*, and *The Poetry of Worcestershire*), see:

<https://nelliecole.com/>

Buy a copy of my pamphlet *Bella*, and the two anthologies I've included in (*The Poetry of the Black Country*, and *The Poetry of Worcestershire*), see:

<https://offapress.co.uk/shop/>



## What's next for you?

Excitingly, I have been asked to be a part of a new project called under-GROWTH, a year of micro-residencies which aims to deliver a programme of interdisciplinary conversations and activities engaging with current ecological conditions. It is funded by Coventry City of Culture Trust, and curated by Lauren Sheerman and George Ttoouli, in collaboration with the Pod: Coventry City Council's award-winning mental health social brokerage and cultural hub. My micro-residency will take place in April 2020, and will centre around the theme of 'foraging'. There will be two events tied in with the work I generate, so keep an eye on my website if you would be interested in attending these.

**Twitter:** @nelliefayecole

**Website:** <https://nelliecole.com/>

**Debut poetry pamphlet *Bella* available here:**  
<https://offapress.co.uk/shop/>

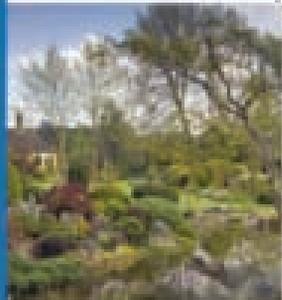
*Park land near Bert Williams Leisure Centre, Coseley*





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## National Projectile Factory – Dudley



In August 1914 the state-owned ordnance factories were providing the Army with about a third of its weapons and at this time there were only sixteen firms tendering for War Office munitions contracts. One of those sixteen was A. Harper Sons and Bean Ltd., Dudley.

At the beginning of World War I (WWI) these various armament firms throughout the country were strongly opposed to the Ministry of Munitions setting up new independent production centres for heavy shells and instead, agreed to set up their own new factories as an extension to their existing works. These new factories would be Government property and the armament firms were responsible for their design and construction and would also provide managers to run them as agents for the Ministry. All new factory designs had to be submitted to the Ministry for approval and their erection was supervised by the Office of Works. But progress was so slow so that, in October 1915, John Hunter of Sir William Arrol and Co. Ltd. was appointed as Director of Factory Construction.

In 1916 Michael Bruce Urquhart Dewar was appointed Director of National Projectile Factories (NPF) and Assistant Controller of Shell Manufacture. In total seventeen NPFs were set up throughout the country.

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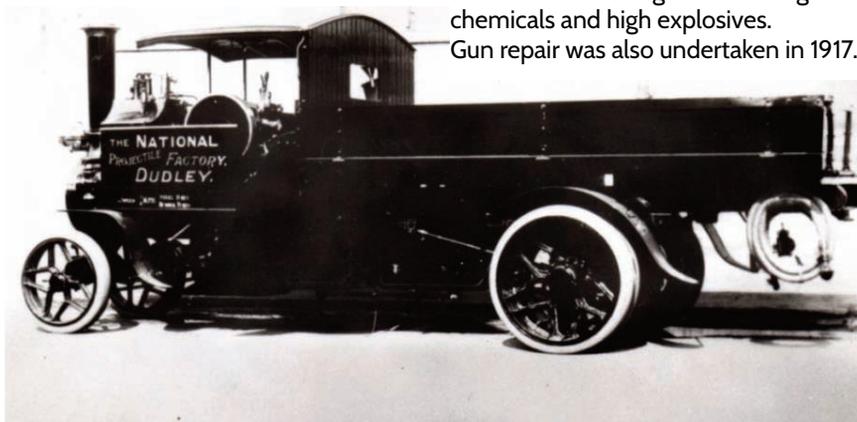
## Dudley NPF

The site chosen for the Dudley Factory was vacant land in Waddams Pool near Dixons Green. Construction began August 1915 and the contractor was A. Harper Sons and Bean Ltd. It opened on 27 May 1916 under the management of George Bean, Chairman of A. Harper Sons and Bean Ltd. Before the War the company was producing car parts and shrapnel but it did not manufacture cars until after the end of WWI.

Originally the factory employed around four thousand workers - many were women (munitionettes) and children. This huge influx of people into the region caused serious housing problems. Eventually, land was found by the Town Council at Brewery Fields to build houses on for the workers. In 1916 nine hostels and 345 houses were built, living conditions were primitive and insanitary. The Council acquired the site in 1930 and the remaining wooden hutments were ceremoniously burnt down on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1933.

From September 1916, the factory started to produce 6 inch (15 cm) (high explosive), 18lb (8.2 Kg) and 60lb (27.2 Kg) shrapnel shells, progressing to the manufacture of 6 inch (15cm) chemical shells in 1917. In late 1916, the government appealed for more women to join the workforce and offered free training in aspects of munitions manufacture. Working hours varied and 53 hours a week was about average but the pay was generally good. But the work could be sometimes dangerous dealing with chemicals and high explosives. Gun repair was also undertaken in 1917.

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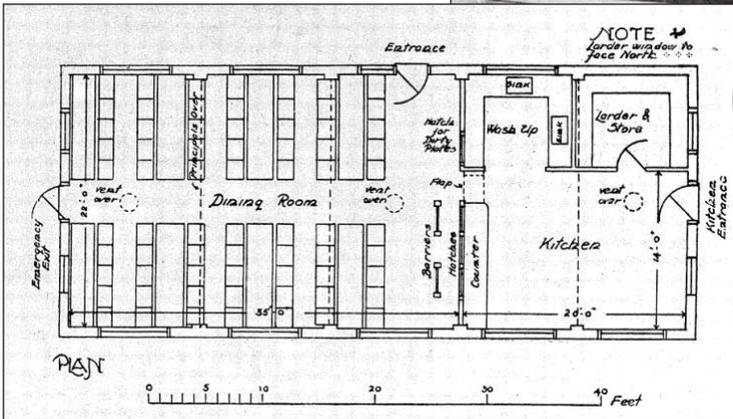
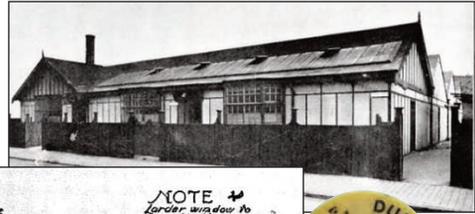
*Foden Steam Lorry, reg.no. M8759 chassis no. 6426, in NPF livery pictured 27<sup>th</sup> July 1916.  
One wonders how you reconcile the use of a steam propelled vehicle in an armaments factory? (Authors collection)*

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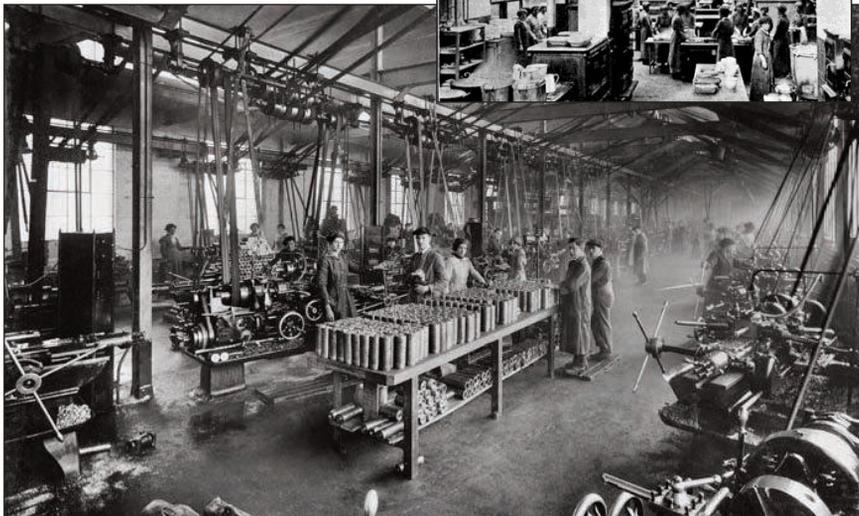
Eventually, production of chemical shells overtook production of shrapnel shells. Shrapnel shell production was also further hampered by a steel shortage in 1918 causing production to change from shells to aero engines in March 1918. However, the National Projectile Factory continued to make shells until the end of 1918.

Although one cannot find pictures of the actual Dudley canteen they were of a fairly standard design as the following illustrations show.

*Canteen at a "Controlled Establishment"*



*Layout of standard NPF Canteen courtesy of the Wellcome Collection,*



*A. Harper Sons & Bean, Dudley, West Midlands.*

*Photograph taken 1914 - 1918 © Reproduced from the Historic England Archive ref: bb88/07425*

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*SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED AT THE NPF, DUDLEY*



The above picture appeared in the Dudley Herald, dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974, with the following caption –

“Some of the men who did their bit for Britain’s war effort between 1914 – 1918. They were carpenters at the National Projectile Factory, Dudley.

Mr Cyril A. Webb of Dudley, loaned this 1917 photograph. He is fourth from the left on the middle row.

The picture also shows senior foreman Mr. W.P. Dudley in the centre of the front row with foremen Mr. S.B. Gibbs and Mr. H.W. Brown either side.

Seated on the ground is apprentice L. Hackett.”

The below photograph shows of some of the munitionettes who worked in the factory, it must be dated around March 1918 as this was when the Aero Section came into being. I believe the lady seated on the front far right of this picture is Lilian Hodgkiss.



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Lilian features on the Black Country Living Museum website as one of the former inhabitants of the Toll House, Littleworth Gate, Woodsetton, now situate on the Museum.

There was also a works football team that played in the local Works League Division 1 and Suburban League. The team that played an Aston Villa Cup match, on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1917, against Austin Motors on the County Ground, Dudley NPF consisted of - Williams, Crump, Taylor, Buckley, Bradley, Webb, Stacey, Effcott, Peters, Stokes and Loach. Unfortunately, they lost 5 – 3, despite Stokes scoring twice and Effcott once.

### After the War Ended

On the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1919 the Government announced that three munitions factories were to be put up for sale.

They were Watford, Trafford Park, Manchester, and Dudley, Worcestershire.

The first two have been used for the manufacture of explosives, and the third has been a projectile factory.

It said that the Dudley factory, stands in 7 acres, 3 roods, 36 perches (3.23 Ha.) of ground and has an area of 25,470 square feet (2,366 sq.m).

On the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1920 the Western Daily Press printed that "The National Projectile Factory, Dudley, was sold yesterday - to Messrs Harper Bean Ltd who have other large works in the district, at a price not disclosed.

A large quantity machinery has also been purchased. The factory, with its equipment, cost £890,000." (About £ 38 million today).



*Woodsetton Toll Hose c.1920  
(Author's collection)*

Sadly, this was not the end of the story as in December of 1920 Messrs Harper Bean Ltd were in the court of Chancery being sued by the Secretary of State for War and the Ministry of Munitions for non-payment of debt. The Judge, Mr. Justice Eve, concluded that "this was a case in which he must appoint a receiver, as the financial position, of the purchasers had altered materially, and they were not in a position to complete the purchase on June 24 and had not been in a position to do so since."

Despite various efforts by the Government the site lay in a state of neglect, and an embarrassment to the Council, for some years (shades of Cavendish House).

In June 1925 the site was used to stage an "Old English Fayre" in order to liquidate a debt of £10,000 (about £ 612,000 now) on the Guest Hospital.

The event was opened by the then famous actress Miss (later Dame) Gladys Cooper on June 1<sup>st</sup>. On Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> the Duke and Duchess of York, the future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, visited the bazaar having earlier in the day laid the foundation stone for the new Nurses home at the Guest Hospital.

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*Inside the former NPF, the Duchess of York receives one of a number of cheques presented to her on the day to go towards the Guest Hospital Fund, these ranged from £ 25 to £ 5000 in value.*

*The Earl of Dudley is on the Duchess's right, next to him is the Duke (with the bowler hat), and the Mayor of Dudley, Alderman James Smellie, together with the Mayoress, is on her left (Authors collection)*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1928 The Birmingham Daily Gazette reported that "This week a part of the (NPF) factory has been taken over as a Government training centre on the lines of the scheme formulated by the Ministry of Labour of the training.... At present some 50 young men are in training, but week by week that number will be increased until there are 200." These trainees would mainly come from the South Wales coalfields.

Finally, it was announced in the Hull Daily Mail on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February 1934. "The greater part of the national projec

tile factory at Dudley, built during the war at a cost of £200,000, (about £ 17 million now) has been sold to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Manchester, by a firm of brokers who recently bought the factory from the Government. The purchasers propose to transfer to the works, which comprise 16,000 square yards, several industrial activities carried out elsewhere which are overcrowded."

Subsequently the factory has had many more owners until the present incumbents, The Alan Nuttall Partnership Ltd., moved in.

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*Munitionettes in the Lord Mayor of London's Parade 1917  
(Illustrated London News Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November 1917)*

## Acknowledgements

Black Country History -

<http://blackcountryhistory.org/>

Black Country Living Museum -

<https://www.bclm.uk/ww1/lilian-hodgkiss-minionette/190.htm>

Dudley Archives and Local History -

<https://www.dudley.gov.uk/things-to-do/dudley-borough-libraries/archives-and-local-history-service/>

Grace's Guide -

<https://gracesguide.co.uk>

Historic England -

<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/>

Open Street Map -

<https://openstreetmap.org>

Wellcome Collection - <https://wellcomecollection.co.uk>

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## INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

### PROGRAMME - May to June 2020

This year we are once again meeting in the upstairs room at the Old Swan (Mrs Pardoe`s), Halesowen Road, Netherton. Access to the room is by a staircase at the back of the pub lounge. The Old Swan has its own car park off Northfield Road at the rear the pub, from which the lounge can be entered directly. Please note there is no lift to the first floor, so stairs are the only option.

**Wednesday 6th May. 7.30pm.**

**A BLACK COUNTRY FAMILY OF IRONMAKERS**  
by Keith Robinson.

Keith`s ancestors, the Rose family, owned ironworks in Moxley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The talk traces the development of the works through alternating periods of growth and recession, together with an examination of the working conditions and social lives of the employees.

**Wednesday 13th May. 7.15pm.**

**IA GROUP EVENING WALK: EXPLORING MONMORE GREEN.**  
Led by Pete Glews and Keith Hodgkins.

Meet on the car park at the junction of Lower Walsall Street & Lower Horseley Fields. Wolverhampton.

This area, to the immediate south east of Wolverhampton town centre, saw some of the earliest coal and iron ore mining and iron making in the Black Country. It was also the point of convergence of three major transport routes; the Birmingham Canal and the main lines of the Great Western and London and North Western Railways, both of which developed interchange facilities with the canal. The walk will explore all three routes together with the sites of lost industries and the Black Country`s last complete (though derelict) canal-rail interchange basin.

**Wednesday 3rd June. 7.30pm.**

**THE SOHO FOUNDRY by Alan Hill.**

A history of the Soho Foundry in Smethwick, which was opened in 1796 by Matthew Boulton to build the steam engines designed by his partner James Watt. It was the first factory in the world built for the manufacture of complete steam engines, a status now recognised by the grade II\* listing of the buildings and the scheduling of the whole site as an Ancient Monument.

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## White Shirt, 'blue collar,' Black Country

By Patrick Talbot

Whilst recently updating my history of Black Country footballers who played for England, White Shirt, Black Country (I), I consulted a large amount of census data. The census returns revealed more about the family backgrounds of these players than I could use in a book principally about football. I feel that some of these facts in themselves are worthy of consideration as measures of historical family occupation. It is logical to assume that most of these Black Country footballers would have come from skilled and unskilled manual working families, hence pointing to their 'blue collar' or working-class background. However, does the census data bear this out?

Fifty-two Black Country-born footballers played for England between 1882 and 1995 but I have restricted the sample to those 32 born before 1900. A birth limit of 1900 tidily comes at the end of a century and almost at the end of the Victorian era but there is a more practical reason for doing so: census returns are currently only available up to 1911, which therefore marks the end of easily accessible family detail. Hence, no such adult information will be readily available for any player born in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I have added to the sample four more Black Country players who were excluded from full international

while Langley-born Billy Jordan (Albion) played for the amateur England side, not the professional one. Consequently, the sample is of 36 players.

Occupational family information here takes two forms (see Figure 1). Principally, the occupation of each player's father has been recorded as a measure of the employment background of the family. Secondly, any details of the player's job before his career took off or carried on alongside football have also been collected. I have tried to avoid including the jobs that players entered after they retired because, by then, they may well have 'broken the mould' of traditional family occupation. Logically, a former footballer's later job may well have been determined by the status achieved by the player, directly going into football coaching or management or indirectly by being offered opportunities through the status they have achieved, such as the tenancy of a public house.

### Footballers' fathers

So, how 'blue collar' were footballers' fathers? Given the nature of the Black Country economy in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, we might expect that most of them came from a manual working family. From our sample, 81% came from a family background of an indus

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trial nature. Iron making made up 25% and manufacturing using metals another 19%. For instance, the fathers of Harry Wood (Wolves), Jem Bayliss (Albion), Steve Bloomer (Derby County & Middlesbrough), Jesse Pennington (Albion) and Joe Smith (Bolton Wanderers) were puddlers, while Joe Bache (Villa) and Billy Wooldridge (Wolves) had fathers who were boiler makers. Further stipulated occupations in coal (11%), saddlery (8%), glass (8%), lock making and chemicals made specific reference to industrial jobs. Of the remaining 19% of father's jobs, there was further manual work in brewing, plastering, a plate layer and working on the railway. Meanwhile, Jeremiah Mason, the father of Charlie Mason (Wolves) kept 'The King's Head' in Blakenhall.

Few footballers, then, came from more 'white collar' or clerical, administrative or managerial families. Fred Pentland (Middlesbrough) came from a printing household and Billy Walker's father was a professional footballer. In his autobiography (2), Billy Walker (Villa) revealed that, by trade, his father George was an archer in the coal pits. He made the wooden arches that supported coal workings. He goes on to reveal the trade background of his mother's side of the family, the Jacques of Darlaston. His maternal grandfather, Tom Jacques, was a hand forger in the nut and bolt trade. Although Charles, the father of Billy

Bassett (Albion), had a coal background, he was a coal /colliery agent in the 1881 and 1891 Censuses, thus not manual at all. The amateur player Anthony Hossack (Corinthians) was always more middle-class: his stepfather was a solicitor in Walsall and Anthony attended Chigwell School and then Jesus College, Cambridge and became a solicitor in Devon. In 1907, he was working in the firm of Wilkinson & Hossack.

With a distinct preponderance of manual labouring background, it is no surprise to find little evidence of a father who was an employer rather than an employee. Anthony Hossack's stepfather, Thomas Wilkinson, was a solicitor in Walsall and an employer according to the 1891 Census. Earlier, Abraham Fletcher, master locksmith and father of Albert (Wolves), employed both men and boys in his business (1851 & 1871 Censuses), there being two apprentices living in the family home in 1861.

### Footballers' jobs

Turning to the footballers themselves, it has been possible to trace occupations outside football for 31 of the 36. Five of them gave their job as 'professional footballer' only. The extent of industrial occupations was almost as high as for their fathers, with 76%. Again, metal manufacturing dominated: 17 (out of 31) of them; plus 2 in both glass and saddlery and single returns in the making of locks, iron and buttons.

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*This photograph of Albion's 1888 FA Cup winning side includes 6 players from our sample. On the back row are Albert Aldridge (left), Bob Roberts (in cap & England shirt) & Charlie Perry (black shorts). On the front row are George Woodhall (left), Billy Bassett & Jem Bayliss (second right).*

There was still the tradition of 'following in your father's footsteps' in terms of occupation in the sample period. Bob Roberts (Albion) and his father were both journeyman plasterers, 'journeyman' meaning that they had both served apprenticeships in their trade skill. Bob was a plasterer before making it in the football world and he returned to it afterwards in the North East, to where he had subsequently migrated. Alf Jones (Walsall Swifts & Great Lever) became a carrier in the leather trade bringing tanned hides to saleable form, like his father. Wolves players Harry Allen and Albert Fletcher joined their father's occupation as gas tube maker and lockmaker respectively. There is plenty of evidence that this was not just copycat. Firms often welcomed the family

link, deeming the son of a reliable worker a sound appointment. Salters of West Bromwich, makers of scales amongst many things, is known to be one such example of a factory with clusters of related workers (3). No surprise to find then that both Charlie and Tom Perry (Albion) followed their father Charles into making spring balances at the firm in their home town.

There are, however, plenty of examples of football enabling players to escape the manual tradition. Jack Brodie (Wolves) became first a pupil-teacher and then a teacher, a role for which he first retired from football but then he combined with playing, eventually becoming a headmaster. Albert Wilkes (Villa) was encouraged to begin taking

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*The Wolves team of 1889 includes 7 players from our sample. The back row contains two clusters of outfield players: (from left to right) Albert Fletcher, Dickie Baugh (an England badge sewn onto his Wolves shirt) & Charlie Mason. Beyond goalkeeper Baynton are Harry Allen & Arthur Lowder. In the middle of the front row are Jack Brodie (3<sup>rd</sup> left) and Harry Wood. The players are thought to be wearing armbands*

football photographs whilst still playing and later he was to develop this into a very successful sports photography business based in Legge Street, West Bromwich. Jesse Pennington (Albion) ran a sport shop in Smethwick High Street, over which the family lived in much of the time he played for and captained Albion. Billy Jordan (the Albion amateur) and his brother became Church of England clergymen, their father William being a brewer in Langley! It is tempting to assume the football was a way out of a life of manual labour. However, footballers were rarely able to earn enough money to rely solely on playing the game in these early days of the professional sport. Details of George Woodhall's contract for season 1888

-1889 with Albion reveal that he was paid £1 a week from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> June, in the football season only (4). Although 13 of the sample of 36 called themselves footballers or sportsmen in the censuses, it is unlikely that they only earned wages from the game. That said, there seems to be a greater confidence in declaring yourself to be a professional footballer as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed into the 20<sup>th</sup>. Only three players in 1891 called themselves footballers: Dickie Baugh and Harry Wood of Wolves and Joe Reader of Albion. Curiously, Harry Wood claimed elusively to be 'of independent means,' probably a euphemism for being a footballer. In contrast, in the 1901 Census, a dozen of our sample declared themselves prof-

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-essional sportsmen. There is the issue of status, of course, and the few in our sample who claimed that their occupation was 'professional footballer' might have seen it as something that would pick them out of the crowd in the census return.

The classic way out of football once a player retired was to become a publican. Presumably, breweries saw ex-footballers as a combination of 'star' who would attract drinkers to their premises by their reputation and 'public figure' who would run the establishment in a professional way. In our sample, seven of the players actually took on a pub whilst still playing. It is no surprise to observe that this was more common in the early days of professional football immediately after the sport went professional in 1885. Bob Roberts of Albion was landlord of The Horse Shoe in West Bromwich High Street in 1887-1888 and the FA Cup, won particularly because of his outstanding display in goal, was displayed in the establishment (5). Football clubs came to realise, however, that such responsibilities outside the game could become a diversion, although they would not ban a player from doing so.

Notably, Charlie Athersmith became a pub tenant while still playing and Aston Villa were not prepared to pay him the maximum wage for season 1901-1902 unless he gave it up. He would not, and left the club accordingly. Incidentally, 14 of our sample of 36 became pub landlords at some time in their lives.

## Locations

In all this talk of occupation, we have not commented on the locations involved. There are numerous examples of players and their fathers living in places which are known to have specialisms in a particular industry at this time. More generally, iron making and 'metal bashing' are found in families living in West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, New Invention, Wolverhampton, Tipton, Cradley, Stourbridge, Blackheath, Dudley and Dudley Port: not unlikely locations for working in such heavy industry. Coal mining in Wolverhampton, West Bromwich and Netherton are more specific. Even more so are saddlery-related jobs around Walsall, exemplified by Benjamin and Alf Jones, both furriers, and John and Albert Aldridge (Albion & Walsall Town Swifts) as buckle tongue maker and harness maker respectively. The Fletchers of New Invention, Abraham the master locksmith and Albert the lockmaker fit in with the specialism of nearby Willenhall. John and Albert Hall (Villa) were glass cutter and glass blower respectively from Wordsley, in the heart of glass-making.

With a little more information gleaned from further sources, the presence of a single company in a particular location explains two further family occupations: the father of Billy Williams (Albion), Richard, was a glass maker and blower in West Smethwick and Billy followed him as a labourer in a glass works. From Billy's interview in *The Sports Argus*, we find that both worked at Chance's glass-works in Smethwick (6).

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A contemporary in the England team was Fred Wheldon, whose father Joseph was a foreman in a chemical works in Langley Green at Albright & Wilsons (7 & 8), where Fred completed a 7-year apprenticeship, we are able to glean from a similar source. In addition, Harry Hadley (Albion) was brought up in a nail-making household on Birmingham Road, Halesowen and it is tempting to think that the factory of James Grove & Sons on the Stourbridge Road was accessible enough to explain his designation as button maker in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses!

### Football as local history

So, a sizable sample of English international footballers from the Black Country did typify what we might expect from their family background. Manual labour was the predominant occupation: 'blue collar' rather than 'white collar.' As such, it might be argued that, put into some sort of regional context, the study of football history can make a useful and relevant contribution to the study of local history!

(N.B. Where a player's team is referred to, it is the one (or two) he was playing for when selected for England).

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- Ancestry.co.uk* for access to Censuses 1851-1911 and *Britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk* for Sports Argus copies.  
Acknowledgements to West Bromwich Albion FC and Wolverhampton Wanderers FC for use of the team photographs.

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## The Black Country's 'Pam Ayres'?

***Marianne Burgess is a poet from Stourbridge.***

***You can see her performing at various venues around the Black Country.***

***She is our own Black Country Pam Ayres.***



### WHO IS MARIANNE BURGESS?

I am a social butterfly. I love to be surrounded by people. Interacting or just observing it doesn't matter. I am never happier than when I am surrounded by family and friends. I try to see the funny side of life; but I have a very serious side too. I am full of empathy and can cry at the drop of a hat - it is when I am feeling extreme emotions that I tend to write my best poetry.

### WHAT ABOUT THE BLACK COUNTRY THAT INSPIRES YOU?

The Black Country is full of diversity. From its dark winding canals to its beautiful urban landscape. People here are honest and down to earth. They call 'a spade, a spade' and that's how it should be! The Black Country dialect fascinates me - although I never mastered the art of 'spakin it proper'.

Marianne's anthologies are available on Amazon

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**TELL US ABOUT THE SUCCESS YOU'VE HAD WITH YOUR PUBLICATIONS?**

I have released two poetry anthologies Amateur Grammatics and The Intolerant Cow. The latter is a collection of comedy poetry based mainly on news events and my own life experience. Both are available on Amazon. Someone once called me 'The Black Country Pam Ayres', which is a massive

compliment as she has always been one of my favourite comedy poets.

I would love to be as successful as she is and make a living from performing and writing - but alas, most of us poets still need day jobs to survive!

**Watch Marianne performing 'My Husband is a Vampire' online:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zDHjc7KMHS](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zDHjc7KMHS)**

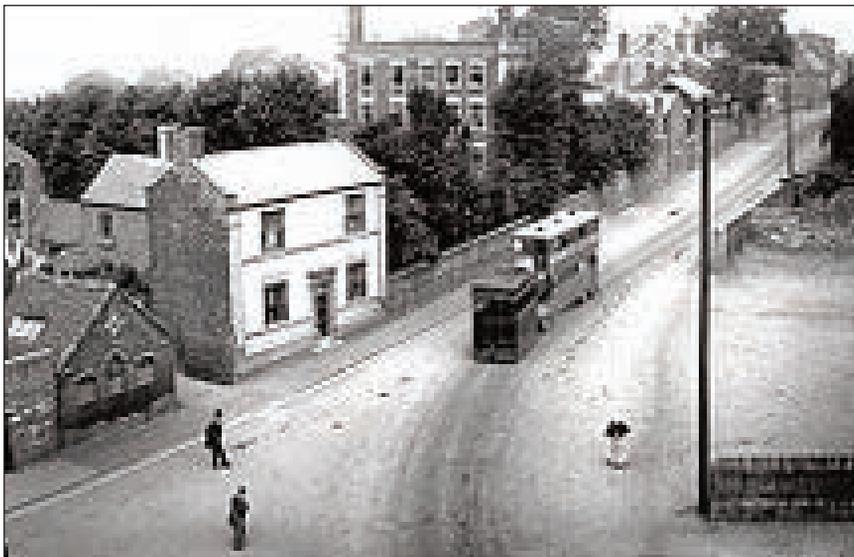
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## THE MANOR of SEDGLEY by Matt Mills



The history of Sedgley dates back to the Anglo-Saxon era. Sedgley's name is of Saxon origin itself, being derived from Secga's Lea, meaning the forest clearing belonging to Secga. The earliest reference to Sedgley was in the year 866, a few years before the reign of King Alfred the Great, and mentions an "exchange between Burgred King of the Mercians and Wulfred of land at Wulfferdenlees belonging to Soegeslea", as recorded in Staffordshire County History and referred to by Sedgley Historian Andrew Barnett (1991, p.7). Barnett also mentions the charter given to Lady Wulfruna by King Ethelred in 985 which established the town of Wolverhampton, and states how the translated document records "Grant of Wolverhampton and Trescott by King Aethelred to Wulfrun 'Along the dyke to a pool, from the pool to Bilston boundary, thence to Sedgley boundary'" (Barnett, 1991, p.7).

It was in the Domesday Book compiled in the reign of William The Conqueror that The Manor of Sedgley was first referenced. Andrew Barnett (1975, p.2) pointed out that Ettingshall, one of the nine villages that formed part of the Manor of Sedgley for centuries, "was listed separately in the Domesday Book", although at some point in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it became part of the vast Manor of Sedgley. The nine villages of the Manor were Sedgley, Cotwall End, Upper Gornal, Lower Gornal, Woodsetton, Coseley, Ettingshall and Brierley. The Manor bordered Wolverhampton in the north, Wombourne, Lower Penn and Himley in the west, Pensnett and Kingswinford in the south and Tipton, Bilston and Wednesbury in the east. Although nearly all the



village names survive, Ettingshall is now the name given to the area in the western part of Bilston, this area originally being known as New Village and then Ettingshall New Village, as the original Sedgley village of Ettingshall expanded over the border.

The historic Ettingshall stretched as far south as Hurst Hill and was the largest of the nine villages. Brierley village became a lost community, however, the parish and later local government boundaries continued to include the old Brierley area, which consisted of areas that became the eastern parts of Coseley, as well as parts of Bradley, Princes End and Gospel Oak. In fact, with the development of Bradley as a community, the area was split between Bilston and Sedgley, with the boundary running between side streets, while the border through Princes End and Gospel Oak ran along the middle of the main road. Woodsetton was also a large village and it included Dudley Castle, Priory and the Wren's Nest within its boundaries. Although Dudley Castle and Priory were in Staffordshire when the rest of Dudley was in Worcestershire, it is important to consider that while within Sedgley Manor and Parish, the Castle and Priory were always regarded as Dudley, along with the Wren's Nest, a fact referred to by John Roper (1952, p.8) who stated the area "finally became part of Dudley County Borough under a local boundary extension scheme", which took place in 1928.

The village of Upper Gornal stretched a considerable distance, further south than the area generally perceived as Upper Gornal and bordered Dibdale Road at the point where the main Dudley to Wolverhampton Road, known as Highland Road at this stage, becomes Salop Street. The boundary was in fact only around a mile

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from Dudley town centre, and Ned Williams (2014, p.12) considers that “the proper moment of feeling that we have entered Upper Gornal comes as we traverse the crossroads formed by the junctions of Eve Lane and Jews Lane”.

As well as Dudley Castle being within Sedgley's historic boundaries, The Manor of Sedgley was actually owned by the Earls of Dudley, the Ward family, for centuries. In 1600, after being in the ownership of the Sutton family, who had married into the Ward family, the Manor was sold to a local nail manufacturer, Thomas Parkes.

Thomas had made a considerable fortune in his business, as nailmaking became one of the first industries of Sedgley, and the Parkes family, who originally lived at Parkes Hall in Woodsetton, moved to Willingsworth Hall near Gospel Oak close to the far eastern boundary of the Manor. Both Parkes Hall and Willingsworth Hall are long demolished, the site of the former now being the location of a reservoir and the latter's site was developed for industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is now covered by part of a modern industrial park.

The Parkes family later moved to Sedgley Park Hall close to the northern boundary of both Sedgley Village and the Manor itself, and one of the daughters of the family married a Ward in the late 1620s and as a result of this union, the Manor eventually passed into the ownership of the Ward family again. The family moved out in the 1760s and Himley Hall became their residence, after the Earl of Dudley title became the Viscountcy of Dudley and Ward, which was noted by Trevor Genge (1997). The Park Hall is the only surviving manor house of Sedgley and after being vacated by the Wards, it became a Catholic College, before being bought by the Ward family again in the 1940s. Eventually the Hall became a hotel in the early 1980s.

Another large house of note was Ellowes Hall in Lower Gornal. While never the home of the Earls of Dudley or their relatives, a number of prominent industrialists lived at the Hall, as well as late Victorian and Edwardian member of parliament John Lloyd Gibbons, who had begun his political career as a councillor, as discussed by Angus Dunphy (1983). Ellowes Hall School has occupied the former site of the Hall since the 1960s. Sedgley Hall was another substantial property which was located to the west of Sedgley village centre and its name still exists in Sedgley Hall Park, situated close to the house's former site. Coseley Hall, located close to Coseley village centre, is one property that still exists, although it was converted into flats many years ago and is considerably smaller than Sedgley Hall was.

## THE GROWTH OF INDUSTRY IN THE MANOR

Due to the Manor of Sedgley's location on the South Staffordshire coalfield where most of the Black Country towns and villages were situated on the ten-yard coal seam, coal started to be mined at a very early stage in Sedgley's history, long before the Industrial Revolution. The first recorded reference was noted by E.A. Underhill (1941, p.147) who comments "at the inquisition held on the death of Roger de Somery I in Edward I (1272) among other things mentioned are four coal pits". Coal mining continued for the next few centuries on a small scale and, as previously mentioned, nail manufacturing was already prominent in the Manor by the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Barnett (1975, p.7) noted "by 1634 the number recorded had reached 636. Colliers had been recorded a modest 61 times with locksmiths at 96". While nail manufacturing continued into the late nineteenth century in Sedgley, the most famous producer from the area being Eliza Tinsley, who took over her late husband's business and greatly expanded the company, lock making became concentrated on Wolverhampton, Wednesfield and especially Willenhall in later centuries.

As well as coal being mined centuries before the start of the Industrial Revolution, limestone was also extracted in Sedgley, as it was found that large amounts of the rock were also obtainable in the area. Barnett (1991) recorded that lime was being mined in the Hurst Hill area in the Elizabethan era and that the Manor was already recognised for lime quarrying.

As the well-known Limestone Ridge runs through Sedgley from Sedgley Beacon to Castle Hill, the limestone supply was heavily exploited in the later centuries and quarries were established on the lower slopes of the Beacon, as well as famously on the Wren's Nest, geographically in Dudley, but as previously mentioned, within the historic Sedgley boundaries until the late 1920s.



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It was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Dud Dudley, the illegitimate son of an Earl of Dudley, developed a process where coal could be used to smelt iron. This was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution which would lead to the name of the Black Country. The origin of the Black Country's name has in fact been the subject of debate, as it is sometimes believed to originate from the fact that the region lay on the ten yard coal seam, rather than deriving from the area appearing black due to its extensive industries.

In the following century, John Wilkinson established the first blast furnace at Bradley, Bilston and this was a key event in speeding up the Industrial Revolution. The progression of the iron industry led to huge changes in the towns and villages in the area that was to be known by the Black Country name and most of the villages of Sedgley, in particular those on the eastern side of the Manor, experienced these changes prominently. Barnett (1991, p.62) noted "in Lower Sedgley Manor, to the east...it became a region of isolated cottages with tiny gardens, small pools and coal and cinder tips".

## PARISHES AND GOVERNMENT IN SEDGLEY

For centuries, the main church of Sedgley Manor and Parish was All Saints and this covered the whole area. A church existed on the site at the time of the Domesday book, with the present building being consecrated in the 1820s. Paths to the church were once prominent in the Manor, and part of one of these is still in existence, running from the Dovedale Road in the Woodcross/Cinder Hill area alongside Beacon Street which it leads into. The other end of the same path runs behind Lanesfield Primary School in a more northern part of the old Ettingshall village, as noted by Genge (1993) In 1823, a short time before the new All Saints was built, the first new church in the Manor had recently been consecrated, this was St. James's, Lower Gornal.

Throughout the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century, more Anglican churches were built all around the Manor, with three all opening in the 1830s - Christ Church in Coseley (1830), Holy Trinity in Ettingshall on the northern edge (1835) and St. Peter's in Upper Gornal (1838). In 1872, St. Mary the Virgin at Hurst Hill was consecrated, followed by St. Chad's in West Coseley in 1883 and St. Paul's Protestant Mission in Lower Gornal in 1891. Underhill (1941) made a detailed account of the building and consecration of all these churches. Also, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many non-conformist churches and chapels began to appear around the Manor.

Until 1867, Sedgley had been governed as a parish. However, government changes resulted in the formation of local boards in 1867. Because of the vast size of the Parish of Sedgley, the district was divided into Upper Sedgley (Sedgley, Gospel End, Cotwall End, Upper Gornal and Lower Gornal) and Lower Sedgley (Coseley, Woodsetton, Ettingshall and Brierley). A further change occurred in 1894, when following further changes in local government led to the creation of Urban Districts. This new type of local government unit being brought into force resulted in the creation of Sedgley Urban District (Upper Sedgley) and Coseley Urban District (Lower Sedgley) and the Roseville area in the centre of Coseley village became the urban district's administrative centre. Both urban districts still followed the old village boundaries of Sedgley Manor, with Sedgley bordering Wombourne and Himley in the west and Coseley bordering Bilston and Wednesbury in the east.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and going into the early years of the following century, the Manor, particularly the portion that had become Coseley Urban District, had widespread industry and manufacturing, still including many coal mines. A study of reproductions of Ordnance Survey Maps from 1900, 1901 and 1904 show that twenty-five collieries were in existence, with only three of these being within Sedgley Urban District. In addition, seven disused mines were shown within Coseley Urban District during this time. The ten yard coal seam was becoming exhausted by the early twentieth century and coal had already been found at much greater depths at Sandwell Park and Hamstead. However, a study of the coalfield in the west of Sedgley found coal measures even deeper than those in the far east of the region. This was at Baggeridge in Gospel End and the colliery that made the village famous opened in 1912.

## SEDGLEY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Following the First World War, the Manor of Sedgley underwent many prominent changes. In the early 1920s, both Sedgley and Coseley councils built large numbers of housing, the Beacon Estate being the first in Sedgley and the area around Old End Lane and Vicarage Road being Coseley's first. By the 1930s, both council and private housing grew, particularly in the Coseley section of the Manor. One new private development in Sedgley was Goldthorn Park, built on the site of the former Sedgley Park Colliery, whose streets were named after members of the Earl of Dudley's family, reinforcing the history of the district. More estates were built after the Second World War, and the amount of private housing especially

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grew, with the Brownswall Estate west of Sedgley village centre and the Bramford Estate which stretched from West Coseley to Woodsetton. The first stage of Sedgley's Northway estate started in the 1950s and many more private houses were built all over both Urban Districts. By the early 1960s, further estates had been built at Ettingshall Park to the east of Sedgley Beacon, The Straits in Cotwall End and at Swan Village in Woodsetton. It was in the 1960s that the Northway estate was also extended considerably, although it still did not stretch as far as the Wolverhampton Road at this point.

The number of council housing built by both Sedgley and Coseley had also grown rapidly by the 1960s, and Coseley's 4000<sup>th</sup> dwelling at Lanesfield was completed in 1961. Many terraced houses were also cleared around this time, particularly in Coseley Urban District, and the Hurst Hill and Wallbrook areas were heavily rebuilt. More housing continued to appear in both urban districts by the mid 1960s and the old Manor of Sedgley was becoming a much more built up area, particularly in the part that became Coseley Urban District. However, huge changes were soon to affect the districts as a local government plan proposed for 1966 was to see the historic manor of Sedgley divided between large Borough councils. This change came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1966, along with the abolition of every other urban district and municipal borough in the Black Country, with the exceptions of Stourbridge and Halesowen, which were to retain their independence for another eight years.

A large area of the Urban District of Sedgley was given to Dudley County Borough, but the northern part of the district which included the Seven Cornfields and Goldthorn Park, was transferred to Wolverhampton County Borough. However, the whole of Gospel End including Baggeridge Colliery, was handed over to Seisdon Rural District, which was later to become South Staffordshire District. The transfer to Seisdon could possibly have occurred because Gospel End had retained some of its rural character and was still separated from the rest of Sedgley by countryside. Coseley Urban District was also carved between three councils, a large part from Hurst Hill to Woodsetton and Parkes Hall was transferred to Dudley, while the area from the north side of Hurst Hill to Parkfields was given to Wolverhampton. The Ladymoor area, along with Coseley's parts of Bradley, were also taken over by Wolverhampton, while the eastern part of the urban district, from the edge of Wallbrook to the boundary with Wednesbury, was given to West Bromwich, which became Sandwell in the further government changes of 1974. The same year also saw the County Boroughs of the Black Country becoming Metropolitan Boroughs and the formation of the West Midlands metropolitan area.

## LEADING TO THE PRESENT DAY

Following the division of the historic Sedgley area, further housing developments continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s and into the early twenty-first century. Sedgley village and its districts, along with central and eastern Coseley, Hurst Hill, Woodsetton and especially The Gornals, have retained their own separate identities within the Dudley Metropolitan Borough and Gospel End is still perceived as Sedgley, especially as it also has a Sedgley DY3 postcode. However, because Princes End and Gospel Oak were always divided between Sedgley/Coseley and Tipton, the fact that the northern parts of these areas were within the Coseley Urban District and historically Sedgley is not always known and they are often perceived as Tipton. Similarly, as parts of the old Brierley village became areas of Bradley, they are often considered a part of Bilston. The district of Ladymoor in the north east of the old village of Ettingshall – and located fairly close to Bilston town centre, is also often perceived as Bilston.

The area of Milking Bank, to the west of Gornal Wood, is another district that is often considered Dudley, despite the area in which it was built in the 1980s being within the historic Manor of Sedgley and the former Sedgley Urban District. The Parkfields area in the far north of the Manor and the former Coseley Urban District is often perceived as Wolverhampton; as with Princes End and Gospel Oak, the area extends over the historic border of a main road, meaning that other areas of Parkfields were always within Wolverhampton. However, the 1966 division of Sedgley Manor has led to a loss of identity for many other areas of the Coseley Urban District that were handed to Wolverhampton. Unlike the parts of the Manor within Dudley Metropolitan Borough that have retained their identities, areas such as Lanesfield, located north of the modern Wolverhampton-Dudley council borders, are often thought of as Wolverhampton districts despite being within the Manor and Parish of Sedgley for hundreds of years – and the Urban District of Coseley for over seventy years.

This perception could have arisen by the fact that Lanesfield, along with Ettingshall Park, has a Wolverhampton WV4 postal address. However, this type of identity loss has not occurred in other towns or districts that were taken over. For example, the Foxyards area of Tipton was taken over by Dudley in 1966 when the rest of Tipton was given to West Bromwich, yet the Foxyards is still recognised as Tipton rather than Dudley, and the areas of Kingswinford and Wall Heath, to give

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another example, are not generally perceived as simply districts or suburbs of Dudley. The Goldthorn Park area – the only residential part of Sedgley Urban District to be taken over by Wolverhampton – is possibly the most “Wolverhamptonised” of all the parts of the Manor, as it has more links with Wolverhampton than Sedgley, and the former Sedgley Park Hall, known for many years as the Park Hall Hotel, is now part of the Ramada chain and branded as Ramada Park Hall, Wolverhampton. Despite this fact, the Park Hall's heritage is recognised by the fact that one of its conference suites is called The Sedgley Suite. A page refers to “Hill Avenue Primary School in Wolverhampton” and does not even mention Lanesfield, as if to imply that the school is simply in a district of Wolverhampton, yet a Facebook group for former pupils of Sedgley's Cotwall End Primary School refers to the school as being in Sedgley and not simply “Dudley”. It is clear that following the division of the Manor of Sedgley, confusion about the history and heritage of a number of its areas has arisen.

Researching the Manor of Sedgley, as with any other district or town in the Black Country, can reveal many interesting facts. In the twenty-first century it is important to recognise the Manor's heritage in the wider context of the history and heritage of the Black Country, as well as in its own right. Since the 1940s a number of historians have recorded Sedgley's past as well as focussing on the Manor in more recent times and up to the present day, and the heritage and history of the Manor is just as important for future generations.



Sedgley Beacon Tower is a well known landmark, sometimes known as “The Monument”.

Old local legend also has it nicknamed “The big whistle”.

The Beacon Tower has been a significant landmark for over 200 years. What we see today is an 1846 rebuilding of the Eighteenth Century monument. The tower marks where the ancient signal beacon would have been. In the days of Urban Districts it became an icon for Sedgley and Coseley, appearing on both coats of arms.

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## TELLING IT HOW IT WAS...

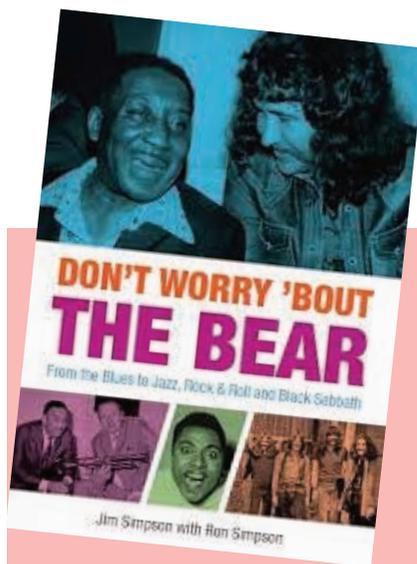
Ron Simpson recounts the writing of *Don't Worry 'bout the Bear*, a memoir about his brother, Jim Simpson's sixty years in the music business.

By the end of July 2019, my brother and I were feeling relieved.

What became known as 'The Book' came out three weeks ago, there have been a few reviews, all very favourable, and sales have been reasonable in the UK, remarkably high abroad.

It all began at Christmas 2017. My brother, Jim Simpson, was approaching his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his company, Big Bear Music, both in 2018, and people had started saying with irritating regularity, 'You should write a book about it all.' And so, we finally took the plunge.

'It all' consisted of more than I could get my head round and more than Jim could remember, but he got remarkably close! The big selling point, we guessed, would be his two years as manager of Black Sabbath, a pretty eventful two years, it must be said. At the start of that time there was an unknown band called Earth, soon to be re-christened Black Sabbath. At the end of that time there were two albums in the charts, one of them at Number 1, a single at Number 2, and London sharp-suits turning the band's heads away from Birmingham. Oh - and there was a court case!



But we also had to accommodate a life in jazz, including 35 years running the Birmingham Jazz Festival (now the Birmingham, Sandwell and Westside Jazz Festival) and developing, managing and recording any number of Midlands rock groups, many to the brink of a national breakthrough (but there was to be only one Black Sabbath). Then there were such things as touring some 40 American bluesmen throughout Europe in the 1970s, running clubs and festivals galore, some of them relatively mundane, others giving rise to great music and shady dealings (more court cases!), and years photographing and writing about the great and the good in popular music.

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Jim would constantly claim, 'I don't see myself as the main character at all. I'm just a bystander writing about what happened.' He probably meant it, but it was nowhere near true: he was far too proactive ('hands-on' is a term he used about himself) to be just a bystander.

However, that attitude led to whole chapters being devoted to musicians he particularly admired and was heavily involved with, the great jazz trumpeters Kenny Baker and Humphrey Lyttelton, for instance. Most especially, he wanted to detail the career of King Pleasure and the Biscuit boys, formed in Walsall some 30 years ago and still flourishing under Big Bear management, and West Bromwich-born singer Val Wiseman, star of the long-running Big Bear show, Lady Sings the Blues, and recently honoured with a plaque in West Bromwich Central Library.

The division of labour became clear early on. Jim had done half his work already, by living a life remarkably full of incident. Now all he had to do was remember as much of it as possible and express it vigorously, accurately and entertainingly, which he did with great success – at least, most of the time! His limitation was that, though he spends much of his work-day in front of a computer, he really doesn't like them. So he would write page after page of long-hand with a good old-fashioned fountain pen, writing tailing off from a fairly neat page 1 to a near-scrawl by page 8, and he remained unwilling to consult the web to confirm facts.

But that was fair enough: we agreed at the outset that was part of my job. I sat at the computer typing out his words, surprisingly often exactly as they stood, but correcting Jim's first draft

where necessary. From time to time a cry would come from the table behind me: 'What label did Tommy Tucker have his big hit on?', 'Who was the drummer on the first Blues Brothers tour?', 'When did Jesus Gil y Gil go to prison?'

I would supply the answers (usually – sometimes we had to rely on memory and use such defensive words as 'probably' and 'apparently') and now and again write a few paragraphs explaining the background to the tale that Jim was plunging on eagerly narrating. The afore-mentioned Jesus Gil y Gil is the best example of this. In the early 2000s Jim was responsible for booking and administering the Marbella Jazz Festival – and very nice, too, more sun and sea than Birmingham! Marbella Council was in the middle of maybe 20 years of spectacular corruption at the time: Jesus Gil, the former mayor, was in jail in Madrid and most of the existing council eventually followed his example. I had enormous fun (if that doesn't sound too irresponsible) finding the facts of court cases, collapsing buildings, jail terms and dissolution of councils that provided a background to Jim's great stories of the Count Basie Orchestra, Annie Ross and the Sun Ra Arkestra. The two strands came together spectacularly on the day Jesus Gil died – but that's another story



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The organization of the book was fascinating – and not easy. If a man, at the same time, was running a blues club, managing bands, touring Europe with a bluesman and writing and photographing for a national magazine, you haven't a hope of presenting his life chronologically – the reader wouldn't enjoy it even if you could. So we decided on a long first chapter about Jim's background, from being brought up in Old Hill, Blackheath and Halesowen to forming his first bands in Birmingham, then giving each chapter a separate theme.

Interestingly, the most naturally coherent chapter was one to which Jim constantly referred to with a doubtful, 'Is it all right?' This chapter centred basically on a few weeks in Kansas City. Initially Jim met the jazz violinist, Claude Williams, a Kansas City great then hardly known in Europe, on tour in the Netherlands. He went to KC to record him – and the chapter is just about that, Kansas City jazz in general and the rest of Claude's career. I assured him it was one of my favourite chapters (two chapters on some astonishing old-time bluesmen are my absolute favourites) and it turned out that Jim worried about it because it had come too easily.

It was, we felt, important to keep Jim's own voice fresh in all this, so, if he follows one train of thought, don't distract him. This led sometimes to telling the same story from different angles in different chapters. Jim's response to my plaintive, 'You've written about this already', was always, 'Well, pick the best one and use that.' But, of course, they both had different qualities – with any luck, the final stitched together version was the best of the three!

Sometimes a simple tale would wander homeless for some time before I found the right place for it. Early on Jim wrote a fondly amusing page about a bank manager he found a friendly support in his early days. Where to put that?

Eventually, surprisingly enough, it settled in nicely at the start of a chapter about the aftermath of losing Black Sabbath! There is more than a hint of stream of consciousness about parts of the book, but we like that – that's how it is with memories!



It took us a year to reach the end of the book and some three months to revise, make cuts, put in extra bits, etc. – 15 months for just over 300 pages – we must have been slow workers! We did have an excuse. Jim lives in Edgbaston, I live in Yorkshire. Jim works full-time (Big Bear pushing on to the next 50 years), I don't, but I have other commitments in educational visits and theatre reviews. So it was a matter of grabbing the time when we could.

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Those last three months preparing the text for the publisher threw up quite a few interesting dilemmas. What do you call the thing? It had been 'The Book' for so long. Jim enjoys a near-obsession with Spain and his knowledge of the Spanish Armada provided the phrase, In the Confident Hope of a Miracle, that wonderful expression of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Perfect! That, in a sense, is exactly how Big Bear has operated for its 50 years.

Then we realized that the title of the book needs to sell it and nobody would have a clue what that meant. Lists of titles were drawn up, text messages went to and fro (one day I received a message saying simply 'Best seat in the house' – by the time I found out what it meant, we'd decided it was a rubbish idea anyway) and eventually Don't Worry 'bout the Bear was settled on, derived from a song by blues-singing one-man band Doctor Ross, a tribute to the original Bear of Big Bear! Then it was more weeks and several more lists before we found a sub-title that would sum up the book. Black Sabbath, our unique selling point, had to be prominent, but without misleading by giving the impression it was all about them.

When we were finally happy with the title and the book came out, one helpful friend immediately said, 'It's very good, but don't you think it would sell better if you altered the title?' Gee, thanks!.

Another problem was the law of libel. We were warned that we had to be careful not to lay ourselves open to court action. As I write, we hope we have achieved that, but by the time you read this, who knows? Oddly enough, in several cases, Jim found himself mellowing towards characters of dubious



honesty anyway, so he preferred to cut statements that might possibly have been libelous. Much of the information we used on Ronnie Scott's Club in Birmingham, the Marbella Jazz Festival and Black Sabbath was in the public domain, so we felt safe if something had been in the Sunday Mercury or appeared in court papers.

Perhaps our biggest fear was that the litigious Allan Sartori, whose tenure at Ronnie Scott's Club was marked by financial chicanery and a tenuous connection with the truth, might stir himself into legal action again. Then, during a Jazz Festival gig at Lee Longland's on Broad Street in July, a phone message to Jim bore the news that Sartori had suddenly died. As you can imagine, our grief was tempered with relief.

Now it's to be hoped that Ozzy Osbourne doesn't take offence at being portrayed as too nice a chap!

Even so, when we get an email with the subject 'Don't Worry 'bout the Bear', we hope it will be an order from Antarctica, the only continent we haven't yet sold to, rather than a missive beginning, 'My client has instructed me...'

*Don't Worry 'bout the Bear: From the Blues to Jazz, Rock and Roll and Black Sabbath by Jim Simpson with Ron Simpson (Brewin Books)*



Black Country Living Museum is looking for memories from the 1960s of the Spring Hill Post Office, Wolverhampton, as part of its ambitious new development project BCLM: Forging Ahead. The post office will be recreated and set in the mid-1960s as part of the new 1940s to 1960s town providing the opportunity for visitors to learn about the history of the postal service, and its social and technological development.

Built in the late 1930s, Spring Hill Post Office was ready to serve the large new Woodlands Estate, Upper Penn. It was situated on the A449, Penn Road, from Wolverhampton towards Stourbridge and Worcester, with a George V post box outside. Plans were submitted in February 1935 on behalf of Leonard Nettleton, a local confectioner, and the post office opened in 1937. Leonard, his wife Edith, and son Leonard Stanley (usually known as Stan) lived in a flat above the shop.

By 1965 the shop was run by Leonard's son Stan and a 'Nettleton's' sign was added to the shopfront. In addition to the traditional products and services of a post office, Stan sold Dinky and Hornby models, amongst other brands. The business was sold to a Mr Skilton in the 1970s, and his son Peter Skilton took over in 1985, renting the shop space. When Stan died in 1990 Peter took the opportunity to buy the building, and he lives and works there to this day. It operated as a post office until about 2005, when it closed along with many others in Wolverhampton. The shop is now a specialist model shop.

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Post Offices were a fixture of every high street in the Black Country and, by the post-war period, had often been there for a century or more. With the introduction of the Penny Post, post offices, post boxes and postmen appeared all over the country, and the sending of letters, postcards and later telegrams expanded. By the end of the 19th century the service was highly professional, with a new law stating that every house in Britain should have 2-3 deliveries per week.

In 1940, the former Dudley & Stourbridge, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton Head Offices came under the control of the new Midland Region. The number of letters sent grew steadily, and the profit of the business remained even until the 1970s. As with many industries, working conditions and wages improved during this period, which eventually caused problems for the labour-intensive post office. In 1960 it was converted from a government department (from which profits were repaid into the Exchequer) into a self-financing nationalised business.

To help us in our recreation, we would love to talk to anyone with memories of the Post Office. Do you remember Spring Hill Post Office? Did you buy, or post, your Christmas cards there? Did you buy any models in the shop? Do you remember Stan Nettleton?

Please get in touch with us by emailing - [collections@bclm.com](mailto:collections@bclm.com)

Telephone: 0121 557 9643



*Penny Farthing at BCLM*

The Blackcountryman

## Wall Heath 'National' School



### WALL HEATH CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION SCHOOL

By Terry Church

Having only a single photograph of the "old" Church of the Ascension School I have long lived in the hope that further copies may appear. What I didn't know was that several photographs were available and in the possession of a lady who lives less than two hundred yards from my home. During the course of a conversation with Robert Newey he supplied me with contact details of Janet Jeffries (nee Harker) who attended the school between 1957 and 1963. Janet trained to be a teacher at Dudley

College of Education and as part of her studies had produced a dissertation on the history of the school between 1870 and 1902. A few weeks prior to its demolition Janet obtained permission to take photographs (with her Polaroid camera) of both the interior and exterior of the building. Wall Heath "National" School was built in 1851 to incorporate infants, juniors and what were termed as senior children. The National Society, established in 1811, aimed to provide schooling for the poor and the Society influenced the erection of the school and in the deed dated 12.07.1851 it declared its intention as follows "a School for poor persons of and in the said District of St. Mary, Kingswinford ... .."

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shall at all times be conducted upon the principles of the Incorporated National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the principles of the Established Church". The school was built because of the increase in population and economic growth, the influence of the National Society and its concern for the religious and moral welfare of the people and the easing of financial difficulties, besides the general movement towards a National system of education.

In June 1851, on the instructions contained in the last will and testament of the late Earl of Dudley, who died in 1821, a piece of land 1204sq. yards in area was sold to Richard Smith Esq. for the sum of £30 with the understanding that it was given to "the Minister and Churchwardens of St Mary, Kingswinford", this being the site where the school was built, near to the nucleus of the village.

In 1851 it would have looked very much like a church hall. Large, arch shaped, Gothic windows were situated at both ends of the school room although not very much light was admitted due to the white tracery. Other smaller windows were strategically placed to preserve the symmetrical appearance and they too were ornately decorated with window tracery. The windows were surrounded by white-coloured brick which increased the impression of pattern and symmetry; there was also a "rose window".

The school consisted of a large school-room measuring 56ft by 20ft and 16ft high plus one classroom whose dimen-

sions were 14 ft by 20 ft. There was a small cloakroom which was used by all of the children. The 'offices' (toilets) were not mentioned until 1872 and it is enough to say that they were grossly inadequate. The average attendance in 1872 was sixty five.

Following a visit by Her Majesty's Inspector the following had to be implemented 'children should be arranged in three or four groups, with three parallel desks in each, on one side of the room only. A small gallery with a curtain to be provided for the infants'.

In 1877 alterations were commenced and the premises were improved by forming a partition off-space for the children, the partition presumably replacing the curtain. By 1886 there had been a large increase in the number of scholars with one hundred and forty on the Roll. In danger of losing their grant the managers opened a "new Infant room". The main reason for the increase in numbers was the law compelling attendance. In 1884 it was reported in the Diocesan Inspector's Report that "there has been a change of teachers, very much for the better".

In 1901 **Mr Clewley** was appointed as Headmaster and a small number of his staff progressed from pupil-teachers to certified assistants which meant that the school had more qualified staff.

**Rebecca Beardsmore** was recruited as a Pupil-Teacher in 1895 and attended a Pupil-Teacher and Probationer's Class held in the school building between 7.55 and 9.55 in the evening!

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Initially failing her scholarship examination she became an assistant teacher before leaving, later returning as a certified assistant.

Harvest time was the worst period for truancy and other agricultural activities which encouraged absenteeism were 'potato getting', 'pea picking' and 'hop



The school's Infants' department was constantly plagued by large numbers, inadequate building facilities and a shortage of staff, trained or not.

There were few incentives for children to attend school regularly with deterrents being harsh discipline, restriction of movement, monotonous lessons and dull surroundings. Some parents and children did realise the advantages of being able to read, write and do "sums" besides the other "subordinate timetabled activities but others must have desired the freedom of farm work which brought in a few pennies towards the family budget and therefore there were many truants. In 1873 the following was entered in the log book:

*'Dec.18th- a very poor attendance through the week owing to the children being kept at home to assist their parents.'*

picking'. The attitude of some parents is reflected in a report written by the Headmaster concerning school leavers in 1896 – 'several children have left because they are thirteen years of age; this is a great pity as they are not allowed to go to work till they are fourteen years old. I have been to the parents but they do not seem to value the education of their children at all'.

Besides the lure of earning a few pennies other activities encouraged children to be absent and sample entries from the log book confirm this-

*1873- 'attendance very poor on Wednesday afternoon owing, I think, to a funeral which took place in the village.'*

*1885- 'Tipton Wake Week ... two children present. Visited by the Attendance Officer who cautioned the children about being absent.'*

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***1895- 'many absent picking wood from the trees blown down by yesterday's gale.'***

It was not unusual for the school to be closed down because of measles, sometimes for long periods. Indeed the Medical Officer often recommended it. Besides measles, the children suffered from whooping cough, chickenpox and occasionally smallpox, skin disease, scarlatina, severe colds and influenza, mumps and the dreaded scarlet fever. These illnesses spread through a school, rapidly aided by overcrowded classrooms, poor ventilation and unsanitary conditions. The children's resistance to disease was very low and they were left fragile and weak.

***1890- 'seventy three children absent this morning on account of influenza.'***

***1896- 'sent the Colleys home as they are suffering from a skin disease which is catching.'***

***Fee paying was also a problem and again a few extracts from the log book are worthy of a glance:***

***1879- 'learnt from Mr Simpson that Mr Lower's four children were to pay six pence per week.'***

***1888- 'the Gould's attendance this week has been bad owing to school fees not being paid.'***

***In 1891 school fee-paying was abolished by government legislation.***

Wall Heath National School not only reflected the period's attitudes towards education but it almost seemed to embody them. It can be seen, through the years, how some ideas changed and others remained.

Today the education system reflects the whole motives and ideas of our society just as the Victorian era of education was portrayed so vividly in Wall Heath National School.

I am indebted to Janet Jeffries (nee Harker) for the content of this history which was extracted from her "Education Special study - "The History of Wall Heath Church of Ascension School 1870-1902" which Janet produced in 1974. It truly gives an insight into school life in those far off days.

I was delighted to uncover this "nugget" of the history of the school, a school of which I am very proud and was such an important part of my education. In 1914 within a few days of World War 1 being declared my mother, Clarice Cartwright, became a pupil there and both Mr Clewley and Rebecca Beardsmore taught her, both of whom are mentioned in Janet's dissertation.

I was a pupil at the school between 1949 and 1953 and the third generation of my family, Julian and Lynsey were pupils in the 1970s and 80s and during that time I was honoured to serve as Chairman of the Home and School Association as well as a term as a School Governor.

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I would be pleased to hear from any families who have also had three generations (or more) attend the school.

The 'old' Junior School was demolished in the early 1960s.

As from 1 September 1975 Wall Heath First School was amalgamated with Church of the Ascension CE Middle School and renamed Church of the Ascension CE (Controlled) Primary School.

I was born in Manor Park Kingswinford and my education commenced at St Mary's Infants School in April 1947 and I was to spend about eighteen months there. The only knowledge that I have retained is the ability to correctly pass a pair of scissors to another person! That cannot be true as surely I learned to read and write.

My family moved to Wall Heath in 1949 and I spent about six months in the village Infants School before entering Wall Heath Church of the Ascension Junior School on 6 September 1949. I was to spend a mostly happy and enjoyable four years there being taught by Miss Goodwin, Mr Greenfield and Miss Whitehouse. On occasions we were also taught by the Headmaster, Mr Frank Holmshaw who travelled each day by bus from his home in Brockmoor. Mr Greenfield lived in Kidderminster and sometimes cycled to Wall Heath, on other occasions hitch hiking and occasionally managed to obtain a lift on a Whittles Coach and I cannot remember him being late or ever being absent. For almost sixty years I maintained contact with Mr Greenfield even after he emigrated to New Zealand and in 2008

I was privileged to visit him at his home in Auckland when my wife and I were on holiday in that beautiful country. I cannot speak too highly of a wonderful teacher but also, more importantly, a wonderful human being.

The school had changed little from when it was built with two separate classrooms plus a hall that with the help of a moveable partition created two further classrooms, one of which was used for daily Assembly, school lunches, physical education on wet days as well as the embarrassment of our first steps in country dancing!

There were separate entrances and playgrounds for boys and girls with outside toilets being the norm for schools of that era.

At the end of 2019 I was delighted when the Headteacher, Mr Stephen Hudson, allowed me to view some of the school records. My mother had nine siblings and I was able to view the dates when each one entered the school, the first one in 1907 and the last and tenth one in 1923. Of interest only to myself and possibly my one remaining cousin but an emotional and valuable discovery was to visualise the Cartwright family walking to school from their home in Albion Street and later Enville Road. For twenty two years between 1907 and 1929 there was at least one "Cartwright kid" attending the school. I remember my uncles telling me of some of the punishments that were administered in their time there, although not to them they hastened to add! Examples were: 'Defacing of a desk incurred two strokes to the hand whilst 'Bad Language' was

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punished by three strokes to the buttocks and when truants returned to school they were welcomed back with one stroke on each hand. How times have changed. Sometimes when visiting, say, Merry Hill, I invariably see children of school age and wonder why aren't they at school although they will be safe in the knowledge that they will not be caned when they do return to school. I am aware of several 'success stories' of ex pupils of 'our' school although I must stress that I am only able to highlight achievements of people that are known to me and there must be many more, both boys and girls, who would merit inclusion.

### *Notable achievements of past pupils.*

**Geoff Baxter 1955-1958.** Became a successful jockey and rode nearly nine hundred and fifty winners in Great Britain. Taking into consideration his rides overseas he was first past the post on over one thousand occasions.

**Dennis Breakwell 1953-1956** Played County Cricket for Northamptonshire and Somerset, at the latter County being a member of the very successful side that included Ian Botham and Viv Richards.

**Jack Flavell 1936-1940** Played football for West Bromwich Albion and Walsall. Played cricket for Worcestershire and was capped for England on four occasions.

**Eric Horwill 1940-1944** In New Zealand in 2014 he was the Gold Medal winner in the 50k (Veterans) Walking Race in the World Championships. In

2013 in San Sebastian he won Gold in both the Indoor 30k and the Outdoors 50K. In 2014 he was elected President of the Race Walking Association.

**Adrian Hyde 1969-76** Staffordshire tennis player who has captained every age group. LTA coach and international player. A member of the Florence Tennis and Bowling Club who won the British Over 45s Club Championship in 2019.

**Harry Higginson 1924-1928** Became Headmaster of Brockmoor Primary School.

**Alastair Maiden 1987-1993** Currently the Batting Coach for England Women's Cricket team.

**John Massey MBE VMH 1956-1960** Owner of the very successful Ashwood Nurseries and multi medal winner at RHS Chelsea. In 2003 he was awarded an MBE for services to charity and in 2010 The Royal Horticultural Society presented him with the Victoria Medal of Honour in recognition of his outstanding services to Horticulture.

**Len Round 1935-1939** One of the few English footballers to play regularly in the Scottish Football League as goalkeeper for several seasons for Ayr United. Len also played for Hull City.

**David Tyler 1954-1958** Has been a Dudley MBC Councillor for over twenty years representing Kingswinford and Wall Heath Ward. Dave was Mayor of Dudley MBC for the year 2017-2018.



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## Tom Hicks Black Country Type

Black Country Type is Tom Hicks, an artist, writer and curator from Kingswinford.

Black Country Type is an ongoing photographic project. In his series of images he applies his unique aesthetic to the region, focusing on words, typography, handmade lettering and signs. He also photographs 'types' of architectural features, objects and the post-industrial landscape of the area.

### What prompted you to start this Black Country Type project and why do you think Instagram works so well for you?

I think I've always had an eye for unusual images but I'd never really thought to share my photographs. A few years ago I had a Facebook account and occasionally posted images there, but I don't think it was the most receptive place for the kind of photographs I take.

One set of photographs I posted on Facebook was a small series called 'Doorways of Wolverhampton'. In some ways this was a tongue-in-cheek reaction to a touristy calendar that I had called 'Doorways of Dublin', which featured grand Georgian designs in that city. But behind it was a more serious intention – I was fascinated by the amount



of locked and empty properties in Wolverhampton and my photographs were a reflection on the current economic state of the region. Instagram is centred on photography and I thought I'd use it as a place to share photographs that I'd taken whilst out cycling and walking across the region. Initially my images centred on signs and words in the Black Country, hence the 'Type' part of the name. Instagram for me is a really supportive platform – just a fantastic place to share visual material of all kinds. I really wasn't expecting a reaction but within a short period I gained followers and was offered a place in a group exhibition as part of the Wolverhampton Photography Festival. It's moved from strength to strength ever since and largely via word of mouth.

### There are no people in your pictures (or rarely so). How come?

This partly explained by the fact that when I walk or cycle, I often end up in the hard to see places within the Black Country, such as industrial estates, back streets and derelict sites and very often I'm the only person there! In terms of influences, I'm more influenced by contemporary landscape painters (e.g. John Salt, George Shaw) than photographers and my work is really about places, objects, signs and structures.

This said, in many ways, most of my images are about people – the traces they leave, graffiti they have written or marks they've made on the landscape.

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## What is it about the Black Country that inspires you?

It's where I'm from – I grew up and still live in Kingswinford – but the Black Country is in some ways a hard place to ever fully know. I'd visited most of the towns in the area but quick visits or driving through a place are very different to walking or cycling through them. That way of travelling lets you see details and features more clearly.

One of the things I love about the Black Country is the sheer diversity of the landscape – it has canals, roads, traces of industry and semi-rural places. Part of the project is really about recording the history of the place – some of the places I've photographed have already been demolished.

I'm also inspired by the strangeness of the landscape, the scale of the factories and the humour of the place. As we live here I think it's easy for us to take things for granted but hopefully my photographs encourage people to take a closer look.

## Would you say you're a 21st century flaneur and how much does psychogeography influence your work?

Well flaneur sounds very exotic but I do identify with the idea of walking around towns and cities for inspiration!

In daily life we tend to travel by car or on public transport and whilst this is good way to see an area, you only tend

to get see the bigger picture - it doesn't allow us the flexibility that cycling and walking offers. When I'm cycling, for example, it's easy to change direction quickly, head up alleys or duck into side streets. Some of the best photographs I've made are when I've taken a wrong turn or cycled somewhere based on an inquisitive urge.

Psychogeography is a definite influence on my work – particularly the idea that places, streets and features can affect our thoughts and feelings. The creative possibilities of unplanned walks in urban areas (also known as a *dérive*) is one of the central aspects of psychogeography. I think Black Country Type is a great example of how it can work in practice. The project is really an extended exploration with a camera.

## Is the Black Country Type project evolving in the way you imagined it would?

I had no real expectations for it as a project other than giving people the opportunity to see my photographs, but it's been a constant source of surprise! It seems to have struck a chord with a really diverse range of people.

I was lucky enough to be asked to exhibit my photographs in a solo exhibition at the Birmingham and Midland Institute and this attracted artists, architects, designers and people interested in the history of the Black Country. I have since exhibited my work at The Birmingham Design Festival and The Birmingham Photography Festival have

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*Tom Hicks - Car Wash*

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### *Tom Hicks - Smoking Chairs*

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In addition to exhibitions, I've also run several Photowalks, which are basically guided walks around different areas of the Black Country. Before this project, I wasn't really aware that this was even a thing! But people really enjoy the opportunity to meet with me and try their hand at my style of photography.

### **What prompted you to start Brum Type?**

There has been a lot of interest in my photography in Birmingham and I started Brum Type as a separate project. I'd been spending time over there whilst speaking or working on exhibitions and began to gather a collection of photographs. (Just to put your readers minds at rest, I never mix the projects up!).

Brum Type has been really well received and I've recently exhibited a collection of photographs of the Jewellery Quarter which was commissioned by The Museum of The Jewellery Quarter.

To find see more of Tom's work, see:

[www.blackcountrytype.com](http://www.blackcountrytype.com)

<https://www.instagram.com/brumtype.com>

<https://www.instagram.com/brumtype>

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Despite being firmly trapped in middle-age, James Josiah actually didn't exist until 2012. The man behind the name comes from a small market town on the Welsh border and had always dreamed of being a writer. These dreams were quashed by the realities that come from being raised in a small market town on the Welsh border force upon you, and it took moving to Walsall and some substantial emotional trauma for the writer to finally emerge. It all started on a blog called *Stories I Shouldn't Tell* where I anonymously aired all of my darkest secrets, fears and generally overshared about what was going on in my life at the time. It was like therapy, I found solace in both the words and anonymity.

As the blog gained traction and I started to dabble on social media, it fast became clear that folks needed a name to call me and then one day I ended writing about my paternal grandfather, James Josiah Morgan. The entry was about how he is the man I aspire to be and it was one of the rare positive entries, as the blog primarily focused on depression, divorce and abusive relationships. I dropped the Morgan and from that day onwards I have been James Josiah.

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Oh yeah Digby, he's **The** star of this tale and the love of my life. **James Josiah**. Its not only true but I better get a move on if I want to get in first. **Flash Fiction**. Always first into a tackle, **Project** From that moment I was hooked. **Volume 1**. In the last few years the jamboree has changed. He flopped back down onto the mattress. **With contributions from** Sometimes **Alan Nash** I think it would **James Josiah** just be easier to end it all. **Vincent Furnier** I hope it wasn't a dangerous animal. **Miss Mac** He'd been planning it for nearly a year, **The Chimping Dandy** this idyllic trip to New York. **Slick Hellbastard** She did not need **Jane Bennett** this, or deserve it. **Thom J. Wallace** Most of his customers came back unable to resist his cakes. **Neil Schmbhy**. 500 words

Kindle and self-publishing were just starting to explode at the time so I collated the blog into a book and released it for the world to see. It was absolutely disastrous. I literally just copied and pasted it from one screen to the other. It was littered with spelling, grammar and formatting mistakes, and after a few months I unpublished it with the intention of righting the wrongs and re-releasing it. This has never happened and probably never will now, but I do like the idea of a ten-year update to show how far I have come.

*Stories I Shouldn't Tell* had rekindled my passion for writing and I started writing flash fiction stories with a strict 500 word limit for what would eventually become *The James Josiah Flash Project* (lovingly referred to as TJJFP.) The project put up a new piece of flash fiction, either by myself or by one of the many guests, every single weekday for 18 months. Using my previous self-publishing experience as a learning tool, I collated and released two volumes of stories from the project that you can still buy on Kindle to this day.

By this point I fancied taking on something bigger so I brought TJJFP to a close and wrote my first novel. A little over twelve months later I released *Days of Madness*. Looking back, it could do with a "proper" edit and a proofread. There is one part that really jars that I'm still not sure

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how I would reword, but I had taken what I had learnt from TJJFP and taken another step forward. It was at this point I met and started to work with Lucy Onions, over the years I have edited three of her novels – *Shout The Call*, *If You Should Ever Leave Me* and the forthcoming *Always*. I also wrote a novella called *C90* that is about the joys and beauty of the humble mixtape. *C90* is a delightfully odd little book where I got overly-fixated on the idea of the limitations of a cassette tape. It only has two chapters (or sides!) and both should take you 45 minutes to read but most importantly every single song mentioned would fit exactly on to the titular blank cassette.

And then came the sequel to *Days of Madness: Stay Happy*. It would be wrong to say I wasn't happy with *Days of Madness* but the story wasn't finished and I couldn't get the main character out of my head. He deserved an ending so I picked up where I had left him and took him as far as he could possibly go. I poured all of my heart and soul into *Stay Happy*. It's a very hard book to read, review or even recommend to anyone but it is as utterly perfect as it can be. It was submitted to a few agencies and publishers for consideration but was never picked up for various reasons, so I once again self-published. The old saying goes that everyone has a book in them, *Stay Happy* was mine.

After *Stay Happy* I wasn't sure what to do or even if I wanted to do anything next and sort of fell into the bustling Walsall poetry/spoken word scene entirely by accident. It was here that I met Dave Pitt, Steve Pottinger and Emma Purshouse of Poets Prattlers and Pandemonialists who host the Yes We Can't open mic night on the first Sunday of the month in The Pretty Bricks; as well as Matt Humphries, Richard Archer and Ian Davies of Orators and Opinions, the open mic night held in The *Fountain* on the third Thursday of the month. All of these people have helped me find my voice and my feet. Since being part of this scene and with the help of local poet Leanne Cooper I have started a project called *Lost Haiku*, that collects and distributes Haiku across the globe... but most can be found in or around the arboretum in Walsall. I have also teamed up, once again, with Lucy Onions to start our own publishing imprint called *Black Dream* where we will be offering editing, proofreading and publishing services. Our first anthology *The Last Time* is currently in the editing stages and will be out shortly.

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I may have not been born here but I am proud to call Walsall and the Black Country my home. It was here that my dreams were not only nurtured but actively encouraged and supported. If it wasn't for the fantastic people I have met over the past eight years I wouldn't be James Josiah and the lad that grew up with ideas above his station can't ever thank them enough.

Volumes 1 & 2 of The James Josiah Flash Project, Days of Madness, C90 and Stay Happy can all be found on Amazon. Lost Haiku can be found across social media as well as the website -

[www.losthaiku.co.uk](http://www.losthaiku.co.uk)

James is currently working on a collection of short stories tentatively called "Fear and Self-loathing"

He can be found on twitter as

[@bananafoxjones](https://twitter.com/bananafoxjones)

where he probably swears and talks about running too much.



Robert Perry at work  
See his Exhibition  
News on Page 89

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**Lucy Onions, writer, publisher, musician and all-round creative from Walsall tells us what writing, and the Black Country mean to her.**

### Who is Lucy Onions?

I suppose that all depends on who you ask, but if you're asking me, I'm a forty-year-old woman who lives in Bentley, Walsall. I'm a Mum to a ten-year-old young lady, who I wish would stop growing up, and wife to Simon. As husbands go, he ay too bad. He's bostin', to be fair. I'm a daughter, a sister, an aunty, a best friend. I have my fingers in many, metaphorical pies. I'm an author, writer, music reviewer, lead singer, photographer, jewellery maker, book club host/organiser, and most recently, I've become a student again, which is really rather strange after having a twenty-year (or so) hiatus. When I'm not doing all or any of the above, you can usually find me with my head in a book, my records playing in the background, with a large glass of whiskey or wine in hand. Or at the local boozier, watching the rugby or belting a few numbers out on the karaoke.

### What made you decide to embark on a career in writing?

I can't say I experienced an epiphanic moment or anything like that. I just love to read. A lot. And I've always been able to tell a story (I've never been able to cut a long one short; you ask my parents!). I wrote many a tale, mainly for school projects, and English Literature was always my favourite subject. I started writing poetry at senior school, and further on, when I was at college. I wrote because it was therapy. A piece of blank, lined paper was always a friend, someone I could spill my guts to. Around fifteen years ago, I started writing chaptered stories, and I discovered an

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online creative writing forum called Mibba. It was a great way of getting feedback on my work, and really exercised my writing muscles. And then I started to realise I'd got enough in me to write a book, well a novella, at least.

I'd heard so much about self-publishing, and what I was hearing really struck a chord with me. I had a novella completed, all ready to go. I wasn't confident enough to pitch it to a traditional publisher, but knew I wanted to see my words, in a book, held in my two hands. Admittedly, and this is something you only learn in hindsight, it needed far more work doing to it. It needed an editor, a proof-reader, someone other than me, to go through it with a fine-tooth comb. Saying that, it was well received by family members and friends, and the moment I held that book in my hand was life changing. I knew then that I wanted to write and self-publish even more, but this time, I'd do it properly.

### What is it about the Black Country that inspires you?

What's not inspirational about the Black Country? It has a wealth of history, and the name of it alone evokes a sense of darkness and mystery. But, for me, it's the people. I worked in customer service for years, in the pub trade, retail and as a civil servant, and I heard all sorts throughout this time. Everyone is a character here; everyone has a story. I'm a naturally inquisitive soul (by that, I mean I'm a nosey bugger!) and I can strike up a conversation with pretty much anyone I meet. I can be a room full of strangers and find someone to talk to. That being said, I'm as antisocial as can be when I'm on the bus, with my earphones in and/or reading a book. Unless my daughter is with me of course. Then I have to talk to her.

So, where Good for Nothing was a bit of a toe in the ocean, Shout the Call was a foot. It was a different beast altogether. Completely different story, with much more to it. I spent more time editing and proofreading, but I wanted it to really take off. It was through a local, independent book shop, that I met three awesome chaps, Rob Grimes, Neil Sehmbhy and James Josiah, and it just so happened that they had their own publishing imprint, The Penguins Head, and they took me under its wing (excuse the pun). They read, reread, edited, proofread and polished my story, and along with the amazing talent that is Nick J Townsend (WEAK13) on cover art duties, I had in my hands a book that would look good on any bookshop shelf. We arranged and held a book launch at the very same bookshop, Walsall's only independent one (at that time), and my gosh, it was one hell of a book launch. It wasn't only my book that was being launched though - James Josiah also had a book out, the phenomenal, C90 (you must read it). So, two local authors, letting two brand new books out into the world, with live music courtesy of the Black Country's very own Balsall Heathens and WEAK13. The day was a huge success and it's one that I will never forget.

And if Shout the Call was a foot in the ocean, If You Should Ever Leave Me was a whole torso. Inspired by my love of the song, God Only Knows by The Beach Boys,

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and the pain of losing loved ones, it was a hard write but I'm proud of it, and myself. I self-published again, and my mate, Mr Josiah was on board with his editing expertise. Nick J Townsend designed my cover art again too. I'll never be able to thank these two enough. With their help, I've produced two books that have been stocked in two of my favourite bookshops ever, The Ironbridge Bookshop and The Whitby Bookshop, and of course, they're available online too. ,

### Tell us a bit about your collaborative project(s).

When you're a writer, you tend to find others, and the Black Country is full of amazing authors and poets if you look closely enough. I've had the pleasure of working with a fair few of them, and meet up with them all regularly, at a local book club I run, Walsall Book Social. I've submitted stories for a few anthologies, the most recent one I had accepted was for an anthology called Greetings, produced and published by London based, Enthusiastic Press. One of the highlights of my literary career thus far was editing, proofreading and illustrating (that's right, illustrating!) my very first children's book, *The Curious Adventures of Pip Shakespeare and The Dragon on the Stairs*. The author, Ella Fletcher, is my Sister, and that's why it's up there as one of my proudest achievements. I'm looking forward to illustrating the rest of the books in the series.

This next one is the best, and biggest, collaborative project for me though. *Black Dream* is a brand new, Black Country based publishing imprint that me and my go to editor/one of my greatest friends, James Josiah have set up. It's still in its infancy, but we're both determined to make it a huge success by giving local (and hopefully, national and international), indie authors, poets and writers a platform to get their works published and put out into the world.

### What advice would you give to aspiring Black Country writers?

Go for it! Cliché, maybe, but it's true. We all have a story to tell. We come from a place full of them. Write what you'd like to read. Read. Read lots. Read what you'd like to write. Join a book club and/or a creative writing course. Write. Even when you feel you have nothing to say, you have. Put it onto paper, whatever it is. And I know it's hard, but next time you get on the bus, take your earphones out. Trust me.



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### Where can we buy your work?

Why, thank you for asking! You can find my books on Amazon (in paperback and on kindle), here:

[www.amazon.co.uk/s?i=digitaltext&rh=p\\_27%ALucy+Onions&s=relevancerank&text=Lucy+Onions&ref=dp\\_byline\\_sr\\_ebooks\\_1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s?i=digitaltext&rh=p_27%ALucy+Onions&s=relevancerank&text=Lucy+Onions&ref=dp_byline_sr_ebooks_1)

You can find me on social media, too:

[www.facebook.com/LucyOnionsAuthor/](http://www.facebook.com/LucyOnionsAuthor/)

[twitter.com/LucyOnionsAuth](https://twitter.com/LucyOnionsAuth)

[www.instagram.com/lucyonionsauthor](http://www.instagram.com/lucyonionsauthor)

I'll add that I don't just talk about all my author-y stuff. My life is full to the brim, and as much as writing is a huge part of it, it's not the only part.



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### What's next for you?

Do you want to grab yourself a cuppa? This might take some time. I'm currently proofreading Black Dream's very first anthology, *The Last Time*, which is going to be released very soon. You can find out more about that, here:

[www.facebook.com/blackdreampublishing/](http://www.facebook.com/blackdreampublishing/)

I'm also in the last stages of proofreading my own novel, *Always*, which will also be released through Black Dream in the not so distant future. Outside of writing, I'm a professional photographer and I've got wedding and music shoots booked in throughout the year. As one of the lead singers of the Black Country's biggest and best Northern Soul and Motown party bands, Soul'd Out UK, we've got a very busy year thanks to our ever-expanding gig schedule. And then, of course, there's running and organising guest authors/speakers for Walsall Book Social (which you can also find on social media), and amidst all of this, I'll be busy, as always, being Mum.

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# The Hidden Depths

## of Richard Bruce Clay



Richard Bruce Clay is a writer from Stourbridge. Setting his novels in the Black Country, Richard's prose-style has been described as hilariously dark and wildly original. Here he talks about his writing and the way the Black Country inspires him.

I'd never found a use for my middle name. It had hung around, not doing much, for as long as I had until, late in 2002, I sat down to redraft and expand a long-short story I'd first written in the 1990s. After about a year, it had become a short novel. *She's Alone* is a science fiction dystopia, set some time after militantly misogynistic fascists have exterminated the entire female gender – except for Our Heroine, who's in hiding at the back of a hospital where little boy babies are cloned. If *Stalker* is your favourite movie, if Joanna Russ' *We who Are about to...* - or anything by Clifford D Simak - is your favourite novel, if Pornography by Andrea Dworkin is your favourite non-fiction work, if 2112 is your favourite LP record... Well, then you will love *She's Alone*. Otherwise, perhaps not - its appeal is to a very specific mindset and I should probably be pleased

that the Poetry Monthly Press edition, 2006, sold 132 copies. Here's the rather better kindle version, if it sounds like your very bitter cup of tea:

[www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B01APNUQBE/ref=dbs\\_a\\_def\\_rwt\\_bibl\\_vppi\\_i2](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B01APNUQBE/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i2)

But why stick my middle name on the cover? Largely, because Auntie Mary (Mum's older sister) married Bruce Beddow's brother, which is where said middle name came from. Never heard of Bruce Beddow? He wrote a series of locally-set novels in the 1920s and 30s. I've read one of them - *Coals from Newcastle* - and it's worth a look:

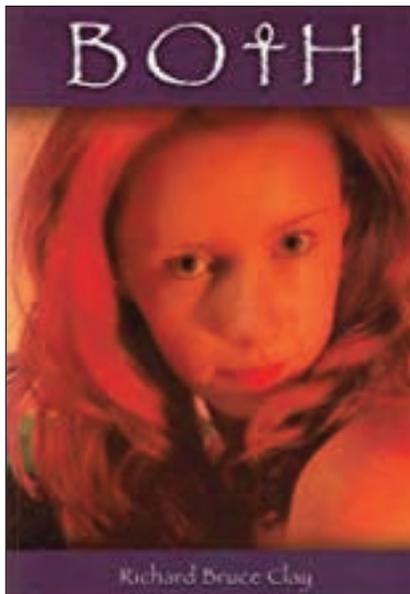
[www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=Bruce+Beddow+Coals+from+Newcastle&i=strip-books&ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=Bruce+Beddow+Coals+from+Newcastle&i=strip-books&ref=nb_sb_noss)

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So: about 2006, I had developed a sort of a 'writing identity', complete with a name I'd inherited from a proper writer. The first thing to emerge from it was *Both*, which I self-published in 2010. A much longer novel than *She's Alone*, here was where, in places, I found my voice. No, it's not wholly original – very far from it! The seed of it had come when Grant Morrison brought his long-running comic book *The Invisibles* to an end in 2000. I'd been following it since it started in '94 and was suitably bereft. A few years later, I faced up to the fact that if I wanted more such occult magick superheroics, I was going to have to do it myself. So I did. And, yes, my Babalon Kyle does look a heck of a lot like Morrison's Ragged Robin. No coincidence. And I was similarly shameless in my ripping off of Lovecraft, Aleister Crowley, Neil Gaiman, Clive Barker, Twin Peaks and Robert Anton Wilson. But there's just one chapter – Chapter Eleven – which is a bit different. It tells the back story of a character, Dougie Cayle, and doesn't read like anything by anyone else. It's mine. As a writer, I'd arrived. Here's the paperback, on Amazon:

[www.amazon.co.uk/gp/offerlisting/1844267814/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_new\\_olp\\_sr?ie=UTF8&condition=new&qid=&sr=](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/offerlisting/1844267814/ref=tmm_pap_new_olp_sr?ie=UTF8&condition=new&qid=&sr=)

Spring of 2012 and I was ready to get serious. A few months after sending your parents' remains to Stourbridge Crem is a good time to do that.



So I packed in my embarrassing attempts at performance poetry and accepted that I had written the one and only poem I was ever going to be proud of ('Grene Woddenesse', which was to be published in 2015 under the name Alex Chaplain in *The Pow-Wow Book of Ghost Stories*). From now on, it would be novels-novels-novels. In particular, it would be novels in the first person, multiple narrator format that I'd used with only partial success in *Both*. Now, I reckoned I'd got it sussed and it was time to turn the dial up to 11.

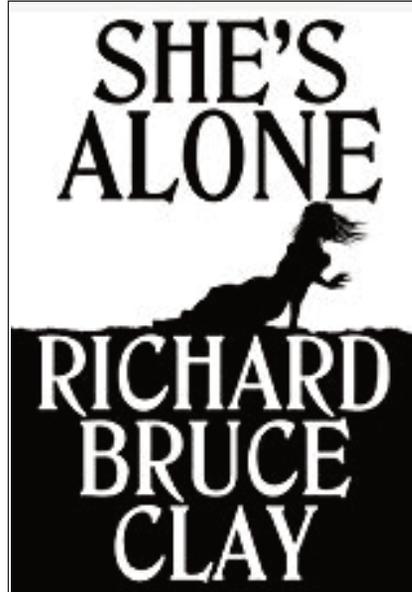
It helped – no, it was crucial – that I joined a writers' group, Andy Killeen's PoW-WoW. And, during the composition of what was to become my next nove, *Kingswinford Sunset*, there were moments when I felt there was a big red button in the middle of my back marked 'Bright Ideas' and that Andy was banging his fist on it repeatedly.

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What emerged was on a different level to any I'd touched before. What I hadn't expected to achieve was that it shared a number of characters, and kept faith with all the premises of *Both*, while working on a vastly more intense level. Again, it was locally set and infused with magick and occultism. Again, the reader was left free to decide whether these magicks were the 'real thing' or whether they were the products of the troubled personalities of the narrators – Lee 'Satansfist' Icecream, Harry Ronsard, 'Pretty' Polly Gauvain and Mary Maitland, the drama's damaged and unreliable chorus. Bits of it sound a bit Pinter-ish. There's a touch of the Christopher Marlowe about Satansfist, a dash of the DH Lawrence about Pretty Polly. But, in the main, this epic fantasy of Satanic interior design and bloodthirsty vigilantism in the suburban Black Country is mine-all-mine and, by the eleventh and final draft (PoW-WoWers found my indulgence in repeated redrafting most amusing), the voices of the characters were distinct and unmistakable. Whenever I discuss this, the one thing I've done that I think pretty well everybody ought to read, I find myself becoming, in the words of Captain Beefheart 'Kind of... non-modest'.

Here it is on Kindle, but I'll be reprinting a few paperbacks later this year:

[www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B01LJOT108/ref=dbs\\_a\\_def\\_rwt\\_hsch\\_vapi\\_taft\\_p1\\_i0](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B01LJOT108/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_taft_p1_i0)



So, what do you do when your ego needs taking down a peg? As mine quite clearly did. Naturally, you try writing a sequel to *Middlemarch*.

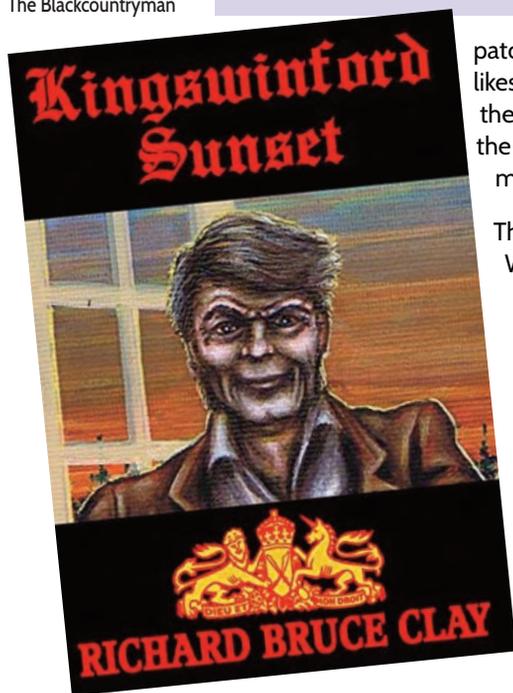
Well, not exactly.

I had found myself brooding, as many readers will have done, on what would have happened to Doctor Lydgate if he hadn't married the silly cow.

Clearly, his researches would have led the novel into the realms of the speculative – by the standards of his time, certainly, by the standards of the time when the novel was written, probably and by the standards of today, possibly.

And here I admit that my idea for a 'Lydgate Project' was about as vulgar and simplistic as one could possibly imagine: I decided to have him reanimate Frankenstein's monster.

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patch is one of those that Martin Wall likes to describe as ‘thin places’ where the boundaries between the real and the imagined, the naturalistic and the mythic, are especially easy to cross.

Think of the ending of Clive Barker’s *Weaveworld*, or of what’s probably my favourite Led Zep song, ‘The Battle of Evermore.’

So, In *Kingswinford Sunset*, I tell the story of a painter who believes his paintings call up forces he cannot name, and of a retired, Daily Mail-reading builder who believes those forces have turned him – depending on his mood – into one of King Arthur’s knights or into the Devil himself.

Yes, I know.

I ought to be ashamed.

Except that the shame of inadequacy one experiences when one has attempted to write prose in the manner of George Eliot and inevitably failed failed FAILED – renders all other shames negligible, as will be familiar to anyone who’s tried it.

I don’t suppose anyone else actually has; they’ve all been too sensible.

Still, one way or another, this supreme act of fiction-writing hubris will be out some time late this year – and you can all ‘tut-tut’ at me then.

Meantime, I’m back in the Black Country, among familiar surroundings and some of my recurring characters. One way or another, it seems like my home

Now – that would all sound silly if I set it in Hampstead or Surbiton, wouldn’t it?

But I’ve set it in Kingswinford – so it doesn’t sound silly at all. It sounds all-too-credible. All-too-frightening.



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## Message from the Chairman

The time has flown since I joined the committee of the Black country Society and took on the two-year chairmanship which ends at the AGM in March.

Much has happened: we have a new editor, a newly reinvigorated website, we have reviewed the status and direction of the Society and the committee has four new members and continues to deliver the benefits of BCS membership. Your volunteer committee has worked hard to do this against an ever-challenging financial climate. May I, on your behalf, thank all of those who have contributed to the work of the committee. Most importantly, the person who will assume the Chair at the AGM (subject to members' votes) is the ideal candidate for the role - Malcolm Dick who is presently Director of the Centre for West Midlands History at The University of Birmingham and who has organised the annual Black Country History Day for the last fourteen years. I wish him every success in his new role.

I had been a member of the Society for many years before I joined the committee and regret now that I didn't get involved much earlier. I have had the privilege and joy of meeting so many like-minded people whose passion and knowledge of the Black Country far, far exceeds mine. I am always amazed when I meet or hear from people (not always born in the Black Country) who can educate and inform us with their experience and knowledge. I continue to be aware of what is different about those of us who love the Black Country. As Stan Hill said, being a Black Country man or woman is an attitude of mind rather than coming from a specific township in the West Midlands.



We must look to the future and recruit more young people and be ready to adapt to new ways of reaching potential recruits to achieve the Society's aims "to promote and stimulate interest in the past, present and future of the Black Country with regard to historical, social, cultural and environmental matters .... and to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic interest in the Black Country".

In order to save costs, can I appeal to those who have access to the internet, but for whom we do not have an email address, to please let our Membership Secretary have one as communication by post is becoming rapidly unsustainable.

The Society exists because most of the work is done by volunteers. Please consider if you can use your skills, experience and time to support its work.

We are all saddened to have lost some real stalwarts of the Society recently including Stan Hill, Ron Moss and Ron Davies. The Society stands tribute to their huge contribution over many years.

Thank you all as members for supporting the Society. You are the Society.

John Woodall

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## R. Perry - Veteran Black Country Artist

A true son of the Black Country, Rob was born in 1944 in the old Brockmoor House Pub which was kept at that time by his Grandmother, Victoria Chuter (nee Warren) while his Grandfather, Alf, worked at the Earl of Dudley's Steelworks in Brierley Hill, always known as "The Earl's" before becoming "Round Oak"

Leaving the Brockmoor House when Rob was 6 months old, the whole family (seven in all) squeezed into a two bedroom terraced house in Lawnswood Road, Wordsley until Rob was 5 years old when his parents managed to get the brand new two bed-roomed council house at 50, Ryder Street, Wordsley, where he spent his formative years. These were adventurous times for Rob and his friends, exploring and playing in the vicinity, Tack Wood, The Osier Beds, Bells Mill, or cycling along the canal towpaths past Glassworks, Foundries, Clay-mines, Brick kilns, Steelworks, scrap-yards, derelict industrial buildings and the local countryside, Kinver Edge, Gothersley and Highgate Common

These experiences engendered an enduring love of the Black Country and a spirit of adventure, exploration and travel which has never left him.



*Rob with friends, sledging on Fox Bank Wordsley (since levelled)  
Left to right. Rear rank: Kenny Banks, Georgie Smith, 2 unidentified, Alan Marsden.  
Middle rank Roy (Soccer) Fereday,  
Front rank Eddy Loach (Trevalen) Rob Perry, Jeff (Stemmy) Wall, Iris Fereday. 1955*



His interests are extremely wide and somehow always make their way directly or indirectly into his art.

His inherited Black Country mechanical and practical skills have enabled him to convert a Renault Traffic van into a comprehensively equipped "Mobile Studio" (in which he has done over 300,000 miles) and maintain his 1977 DUCATI 900 and the 1930 500cc Scott Flying Squirrel which he bought when he was sixteen years old and has been riding continuously ever since (59 years!) and on which he is still regularly seen riding in the area.

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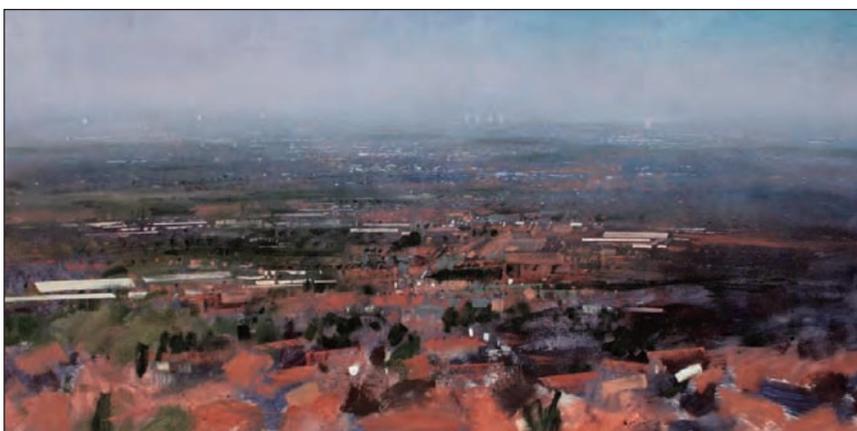


*NwpA3-02 3.00am 18 October 1988. Stuart  
Crystal Glassworks. Size A3. Oil.*

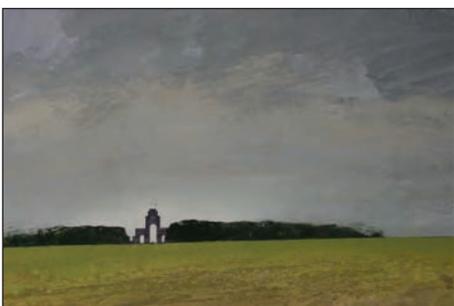


*NwpA1-02 3.00am 16 November 1988. Fog.  
Mount Road, Wordsley. 60x84cm. Oil*

Following on from this he has been spending some years painting panoramic views, day and night, of the Black Country from Turner's Hill and Darby's Hill, Dudley, three examples of which are on permanent display on the ground floor of Russells Hall Hospital



*10Dp36x72-01 3.45pm, 23 April 2010. View North-East from Darby's Hill, Dudley.  
Towards Tipton, Wednesbury, Bilston. 36x72 inches. Oil.*



Rob's commitment as a Peace Campaigner has lead him to spend many years working in the battlefields of the two World Wars, particularly those of the First World War where he has been made an Honorary Citizen of the town of Albert, the epicentre of the Battle of The Somme in 1916 (the battle in which three of his Great Uncles were killed)

*5.15pm, 2 July 2013. Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. From the Pozieres Road near Mouquet Farm. The names of over 70,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers with no known graves are inscribed on this huge memorial arch. A3. Gouache-watercolour.*

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Robert's upcoming exhibition, entitled  
**The Black Country and Beyond**

Himley Hall, Himley Park, Himley, Dudley. DY3 4DF

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April-Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2020**

Admission is free, but a small parking charge will apply.

Further details can be found on Robert's website:

[www.robertperry-artist.co.uk](http://www.robertperry-artist.co.uk)

or

[www.himleyhallandpark.co.uk](http://www.himleyhallandpark.co.uk)

or call 01384 817817

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## WALKS PROGRAMME 2020

### May 13<sup>th</sup>. Exploring Monmore Green. Led by Industrial Archaeology Group.

This area to the immediate south East of Wolverhampton town centre saw some of the earliest intensive coal and iron ore mining and iron making in the Black Country. It was also a point of convergence of three major transport routes; the Birmingham canal and the main lines of the London and North Western and the Great Western Railways, both of which developed interchange facilities with the canal. The walk will explore all three routes together with the sites of lost industries and the Black Country's (though derelict) canal –rail interchange basin.

Meet on the Public Carpark at the junction of lower Walsall Street and Lower Horseley Fields, Wolverhampton.

### May 27<sup>th</sup>. History Galore at Hill Top. West Bromwich. Led by Robin Pearson.

A novelist who also inspired Scott Fitzgerald, a Violinist on the Titanic, a World War 1 VC holder, West Bromwich's oldest pub, and possibly the town's shortest Street- all on the 200th anniversary of the death of James Keir. He and his famous colleagues in the Lunar Society always met on the night of a full moon, so our walk will be close to one (5 June). Meet at the corner of the A4196 and Trooters Lane (B71 2QF). June 10<sup>th</sup>. Moorpool Estate, Harbourne. Led By David Granger. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> there was a national movement to establish garden cities or Garden Suburbs. One of these was Moorpool Estate in Harbourne. See the unusual housing in the area.

Meet at the Moor Pool in Ravenhurst Road Post Code B17 9HP.

### June 17<sup>th</sup>. Common Ground in Upper Penn. Led by Ian Bott.

Once under threat of the Victorian HS2 the green pastures which frame the Reverend Stebbing Shaw's Over Penn are currently at risk of the calculating developer! Never has there been a more urgent time to embrace and protect what remains of to quote another noted author Elihu Burritt's Green Borderland of the Black Country. With a history predating the Norman conquest, and associated to the iconic Lady Godiva, amongst other great names, there is much to learn and still see today of the ancient village which became a noted resort of the Black Country's gambling fraternity.

Meet on Carpark opposite St Bartholomew's Church at junction of vicarage road with Pennwod lane and Church Hill

### June 24<sup>th</sup>. Great Barr part 3. Led by Robin Pearson.

After the excitement of last year's police car chase as darkness fell its back to Great Barr for a final exploration of the last remaining farmland in the Sandwell Valley with its wedge Bridleway and Forge Mill Lake (home to a RSPB Visitor Centre)

Meet at the Malt Shovel public house, Newton Road, Great Barr. B43 6HN. Stout footwear recommended.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Eldon Street: The history of Victorian Darlaston and the Black Country told through the lives of ordinary people, by Keith Robinson.**

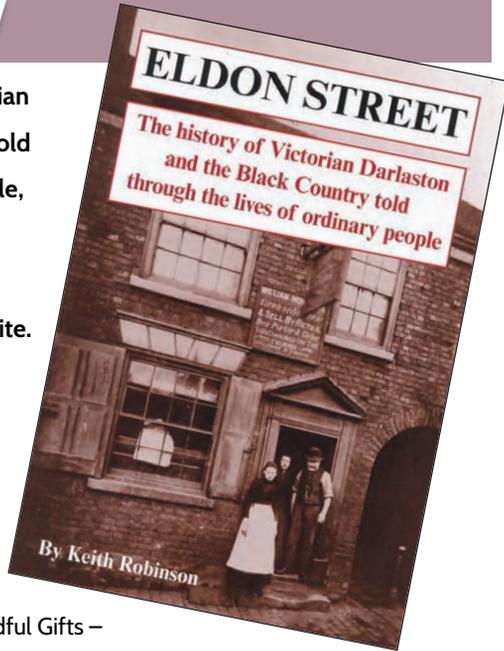
**Published by the author.**

**126 pages illustrated in black & white.**

Price £9.99

ISBN 9781-9113-0908-6.

Available from Darlaston & Wednesbury Libraries,  
The Black Country Living Museum,  
Black Country T-Shirts, Dudley,  
Ashwood Nurseries, Wall Heath, Mindful Gifts –  
Darlaston & The Black Country Hub.  
Review by M. Pearson



Readers will remember Keith's last book: *Iron, Coal & Roses*, as well as articles in *The Blackcountryman*. Keith grew up in Darlaston and lived in Eldon Street. This book covers the history of Victorian Darlaston, and this story is told through the lives of some of the 400 inhabitants.

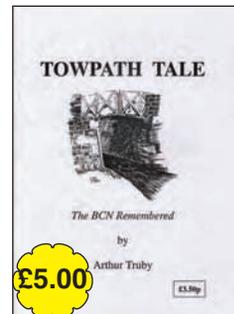
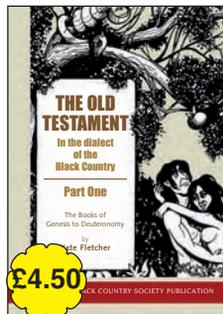
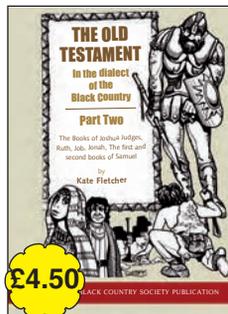
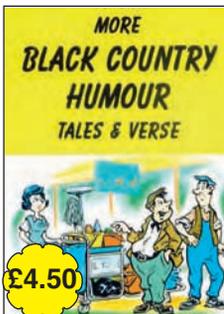
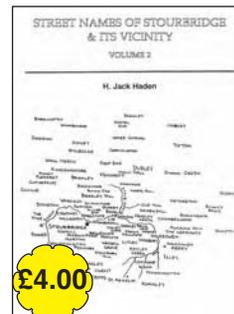
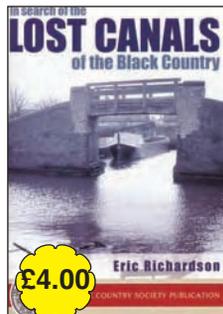
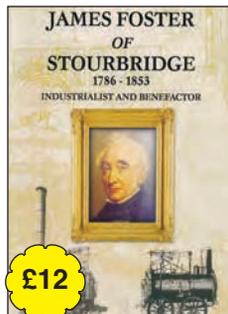
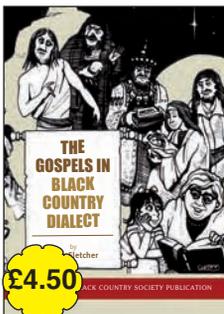
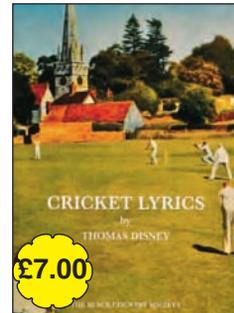
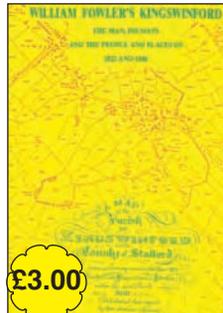
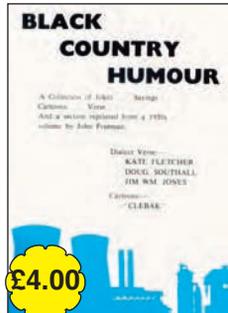
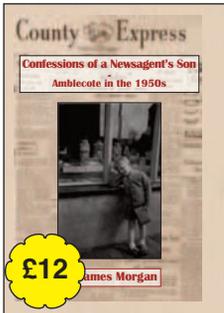
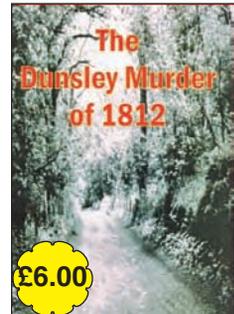
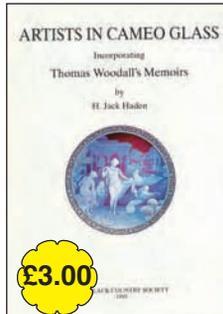
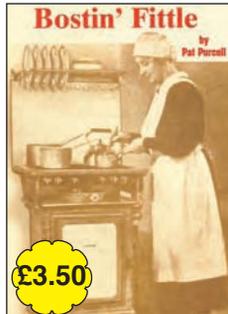
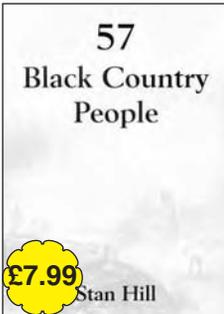
At the time, Darlaston boasted many trades, including gunlock makers (very relevant before and during the whole of the 19th century). Also made were nuts and bolts, screws, buckles, coaches, horse tack and files, to name but a few. The fortunes of workers were up and down, and many had hard times, living hand to mouth. There were good times, but many workers lived the 'high life' when work was good but didn't save for the slack times.

Keith has done a good job of documenting the lives of workers, including women who worked in several industries, such as banks, women workers on pit tops, charwomen and dressmakers, which were some of their jobs.

The book also focuses on crime, religion, education and entertainment, all through the lives of Eldon Street residents. Finally, Keith lists the names of jobs and trades, together with their context within the pages of the book.

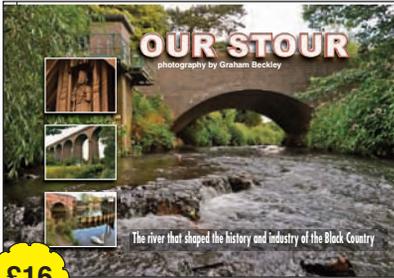
The Blackcountryman

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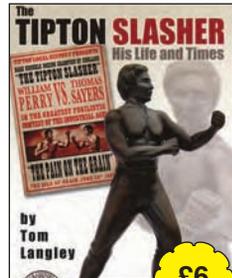
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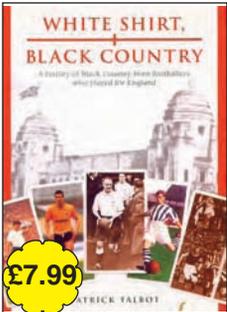
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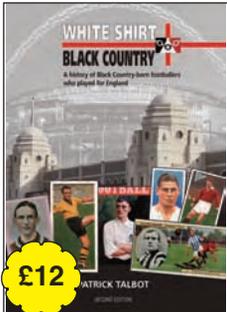
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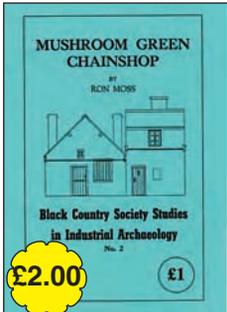
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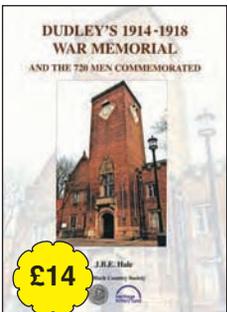
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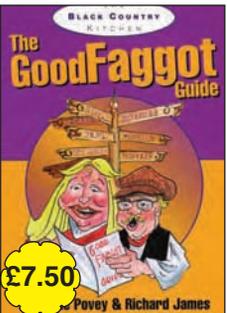
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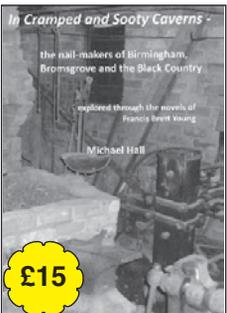
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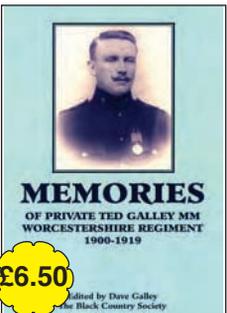
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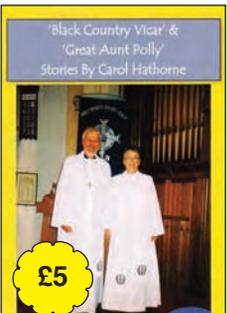
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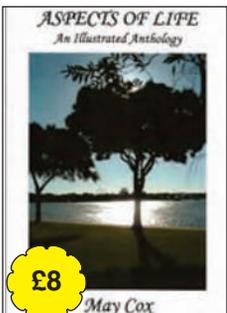
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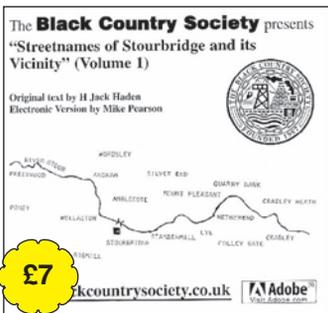
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