THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN

WINTER
1972

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No. 1

17p

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

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Editor: H. Parsons

EDITORIAL

A QUESTION has recently been asked of the B'ack Country Society: "What do I get out of being a member?" It is not our task here to pre-supppose the answer that will be given by the committee of the society (who are taking it most seriously), but it is not inappropriate to point out that membership of the society costs only 20p more annually than does a subscription to "The Blackcountryman." This sum is reduced to 5p for students and pensioners.

Perhaps, then, the question should be: "What do I get out of subscribing to 'The Blackcountryman?'" This is certainly within our brief to answer: four issues a year, each of 72 pages, the whole containing 50 articles plus photographs and other items, all freely contributed and distributed, postage paid.

The true cost of the magazine in terms of unpaid labour is incalculable, but it is safe to say that if all who handle the publication, from editor to the person who licks the stamps on the envelope, were paid a qualifying wage, the cost per issue would be at least 50p.

Further, compare the amount of reading matter carried in each issue with that in any commercial publication. It will be seen where the best value lies. Taking all in all, it does seem that the society has an unenviable task in explaining how they offer members more than they do now for a fabulous 20p! Another point brought to our notice (with more justification) is the society's penchant for what one might describe as the public house scene. Looking through the pages of this issue, we find that by curious chance, several of the articles deal with an aspect of the alcoholic brew.

This being the season of good cheer, it is surely permissible. But we would like to assure our more temperate members that this should not be regarded as a precedent!

"We doe want ter upset non on yer, dun we?"

Society News | John Brimble

THE Black Country Society has now passed its first five years of existence, a period over which we can look back with satisfaction at our achievements. We must not, however, rest on our laurels. We have overcome many problems and will no doubt face more in the future. The committee accepts constructive criticisms of its' work as a means of improvement and strong support from members is essential to success. We have had this asset to date and hope for its continuance in years to come.

As mentioned previously in 'Society News,' the need for suitable rooms in which to hold meetings is a major problem. A permanent headquarters is the answer and steps were made recently to obtain for the purpose, use of the old Public Offices, Owen Street, Tipton.

Negotiations took place with the owners, West Bromwich Borough Council, regarding this, but the outcome was a decision to demolish the building. This came as a surprise to the committee, who felt that with enterprise the building could have been put to good use. At the time of writing, the Council have indicated that they are willing to discuss a further site within the borough, but no details are at present available. The committee hopes to take further steps in this direction.

In these days of television and instant entertainment, it is enlightening to see, after so many have disbanded, the formation of a brass band in this area. The society felt therefore that it could perform a service by presenting a programme of music by this band, The Black Country Brass Band, as a means of projecting them to the public at large. On Saturday, 30th October, a musical evening was held at Dudley Technical College, featuring the band, the Cradley Heath Male Voice Choir, and compere Mr. Bernard Jackson. The evening was highly successful and both band and choir are to be congratulated on their performance, before an audience of well over three hundred. We wish both of these musical groups well for the future.

So successful was the evening that a similar event is being arranged for next spring, with possibly another later in the year.

DANCE

The Gas Works Club, Swan Village, West Bromwich, is not the most romantic-sounding of names, a fact that does not do justice to the premises at which a society dance was held on Tuesday, 9th November. The atmosphere was pleasant and congenial and a most generous buffet was provided. We thank all concerned for making the event worthwhile.

The society has not held a dance for two years, largely because of difficulties in booking suitable halls, although over the period, there has been pressure from members to arrange such an event. We were fortunate in being offered the gas works club and gratified to see over one hundred people present. Even so

the committee would like many more members to support future dances, so that they can be held annually as highlights of the society's programme.

On Tuesday, 19th October, a meeting was held at **The Cottage Spring,** Dudley Port, Tipton, when Mr. Alan Price, director of the photographic sub-committee, presented an illustrated talk entitled, 'Black Country Past and Present.' This comprised a number of photographic slides from the society collection, used to show comparisons between today and yesteryear. It was seen how certain places had changed beyond recognition during a half century or more, whilst others had changed hardly at all. Photographs shown were merely a few of the large number now possessed by the society; a number that increases daily and contains many prints which are unique. Any member wishing to participate in the work of building up the photographic collection will be welcomed and should contact the secretary for information.

TAPES

On Tuesday, 16th November, at 'The Britannia Inn,' Hill Top, West Bromwich, Mr. John Savage director of the tape-recording section, presented a programme of his tape recordings of reminiscent and dialect material. The society has compiled a collection of tape recordings and would like to hear from members interested in providing additions to this field.

On Wednesday, 1st December, a games night was held at the 'Round Oak Inn,' Wombourne, and on 15th December, a Christmas party was held at the British Steel Corporation Club, Bilston.

The society has again published Christmas Cards, these as in previous years, being popular with many folk. It is known that some of these cards are sent overseas.

Following the success of the calendar for 1971, another has been issued for 1972; this comprises twelve illustrations of Black Country Public Houses, selected and drawn by Mr. Austin Moseley. It is intended that a calendar shall be an annual publication, with a specific theme each year. It has already been decided that the calendar for 1973 shall depict sketches of notable landmarks in the Black Country.

The latest book to be published by the society is a collection of cartoon sketches: 'Clebak in the Black Country,' drawn by local cartoon artist, C. L. Baker.

The society has for some time been submitting to certain local authorities, suggestions for street names. One recently accepted by West Bromwich Council is that of John Welsby, hero of the Hamstead Colliery disaster, who lost his life in rescue operations. The name Welsby has been given to one of the streets on a new housing development near the site of the former Hamstead Colliery.

We were sorry to hear, on 26th November, of the death of actor/comedian Mr. Billy Russell, at the age of 79 years. In 1968 Mr. Russell was made the first hon. vice president of the society.

It is worthy of note that, as a result of the publication of the canal pollution survey in the last edition of this magazine, interest has been shown from various sources including local authorities and British Waterways.

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY
WINTER PROGRAMME, 1972

Thursday, January 20, 1972
The Staffordshire Knot, Birmingham New Road, Lanesfield, Wolverhampton, 8 p.m.
Lewis Braithwaite speaking on the Canals of the Black Country.

Thursday, February 10, 1972
Film Night at Dudley Technical College, 8 p.m. Admission free.
Black Country films by local film-makers.

Wednesday, February 16, 1972
The Ellowes Inn, Ellowes Road, Lower Gornal, 8 p.m.
Talk by members of the industrial society sub-committee of the Black Country Society.

Wednesday, March 8, 1972
The Crown and Cushion Inn, Ocker Hill, Tipton (junction of Leabrook Road and Toll End Road), 8 p.m.
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Wednesday, April 12, 1972
The Neptune Inn, Bilston Lane, Willenhall, 8 p.m.
Bring and Show Slide and Film Night.
(Members are invited to bring along their own Black Country films and slides for general showing).

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THE STORY OF PARGETER STREET, WALSALL

(and its connection with the Portland Vase)

Henry E. Green

ALTHOUGH the history of most of the older streets and roads contained within the Borough of Walsall before its recent extension was faithfully and extensively recorded by the late Mr. W. F. Blay in his "History of Walsall Street Names," for some curious reason one of them is missing. The original notes for this momentous work were handed to the Walsall Public Library after his decease, and a typed copy may be perused in the Local Reference Section.

The missing street name is that of Pargeter Street, which runs from Wolverhampton Street to the Birchills. The person after whom it was named, although not a native of Walsall, and never even resided in the borough, was once the owner of a considerable area of land in the Birchills district.

Philip Pargeter, who was born in 1826 and died in 1906, spent the last few years of his life at Stourbridge. He was one of the sons of Philip Pargeter of Kingswinford, who at one time was manager of the Shut End Iron Works, with which the late W. E. Gladstone was once associated.

As Philip the younger was a member of a large family, he had to make his own way in the world. At a very early age he became interested in public affairs, an interest which he retained throughout his life. He became a member of several public bodies and organisations which must have occupied a great deal of his time.

He was a member of the old Stourbridge Board of Guardians for over forty years, and was, for a time its chairman; he represented Amblecote on the first Staffordshire County Council; later on the Stourbridge Urban District Council, and also became a member of the Worcestershire County Council. He was also a founder member of the Worcestershire Historical Society on its inception in 1893.

Philip was elected a Member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1875, and was a Justice of the Peace for the County of Worcester for many years. In his early life he was responsible for the formation of several Freehold Land Societies in Kingswinford, Wordsley, Amblecote and the district, for which he acted as secretary.

In 1878, Philip purchased a considerable area of land in Walsall, between Wolverhampton Road and what is now Reedswood Park. This land he developed, building several streets of houses, among them Pargeter Street, Raleigh Street, Jessel Road, and Farringdon Street. The last one should be Farrington Street, spelt with a 't,' not a 'd,' as it was named after a Mr. Harry Farrington, who acted in the capacity of surveyor for Philip Pargeter, from 1883 until about 1910.

In 1880 he purchased and developed land at Amblecote, promoted a Freehold Land Society and encouraged members to purchase plots by small fortnightly subscriptions. His main object in developing this land was that he believed that it should be the ambition of every man to own his own house. He was certainly the means of many people being able to do this.

In 1863, Philip became a partner in an old-established glass manufacturing firm at Wordsley, which then became "Hodgetts, Richardson and Pargeter," and with whom he was associated for several years. During his association with the glass trade he became highly skilled as a glass engraver. When his partnership with the one firm ended he moved to the Red House Glass Works where he remained until his retirement in 1882. Philip Pargeter's fame was such that in one report it was said "whatever emanated from him, or had been effected under his auspices, bears upon it the stamp of faultless excellence and of almost unapproachable skill."

At one time Philip was closely connected with another person in the production of a perfect and unique copy of one of the worlds most priceless treasures, the Portland or Barberini Vase, a copy which was produced entirely in glass, and which took three years to make.

The history of this famous vase which follows is taken from a "Quarterly Paper on Arts and Manufactures," published in 1877. "The original vase was discovered in the early part of the 17th century, during the pontificate of Pope Urban the Eight, in a sarcophagus in the Monte del Grano, three miles from Rome. The inscription on the sarcophagus showed that it was dedicated to the memory of the Emperor Alexander Severus and his mother, and the vase which was estimated to date back to nearly two centuries before the Christian era, was taken to the library of the Barberini family, thus acquiring the name of the "Barberini Vase."

Towards the end of the 18th century it was passed into the hands of Sir William Hamilton, who brought it to England and eventually sold it to the Duchess of Portland, in whose possession it remained for many years, thus becoming known as the "Portland Vase." The Duchess died in 1785, and the contents of her private museum including the Portland Vase, were sold by auction, the vase realising £1,029.

Among those who bid for the vase were the Duke of Portland, (son of the late Duchess), and Josiah Wedgwood, the latter being determined to gain possession of the Portland Vase at literally any price. The bidding had reached almost a thousand pounds, when the Duke asked Wedgwood the reason for his keeness to obtain the vase. He was surprised to learn that the sole reason was to have the priceless

object to examine and copy at his works. The Duke then offered (if Wedgwood would cease bidding and permit him to become its purchaser) to place the vase in his hands and allow him to keep it sufficiently long to do as he wished.

The arrangement was mutually agreed, the Duke became the new owner of the vase, and Wedgwood was allowed to borrow it. Wedgwood kept the vase for twelve months and produced fifty copies. subscribed for at fifty guineas each. But it is said that the cost was far greater than the sum realised.

It was, however, reserved for Philip Pargeter and Mr. John Northwood, by their combined skill and perseverance, to make a perfect and unique copy of this priceless treasure in its own material, hand-cut by its own original process. The material, of course, is glass, and thanks to the skill and perseverance of Mr. Pargeter, this has been produced as nearly as possible to the same rich, full deep tone of blue colour, closely approaching to black when seen with the light upon it, but of vast richness in dark blue when the light passes through it.

Upon this blue body, Philip Pargeter succeeded in laying a layer of fine white soft opal glass, specially made for the purpose, to a considerable thickness; the welding of these two together being a process of exceeding difficulty. The two kinds of glass, one opaque and the other transparent, are usually of different degrees of specific gravity, but for this special purpose they had to be made of the same degrees of specific

Frank Hammond

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gravity and of expansion and contraction. This difficult task was brought to a successful result, and the welding accomplished with the utmost care and delicacy; not a flaw, or air bubble, or even partially united spot being visible in the whole of the work.

The body of the vase being entirely coated even to halfway up the neck with the opal, it was ready for Mr. Northwood to operate upon, and he set about his herculean task with a spirit of determination that ensured success. For three years he devoted himself to his task, never working less than six hours a day, often more, patiently cutting away by hand the opal coating, so as to leave the blue surface clear as a groundwork, and the figures and other parts of the design in relief.

The whole of the grouping, the figures, the trees, and indeed every minute portion of the decoration is delicately carved in the opal, and entirely carved and cut by hand as in the original. By the entire cutting away of the opal the amethystine glass of the vase itself is cleared and polished while by the gradations of thickness in the carving, all the most delicate shades of colour from the finest white to the sweetest of all half-tones, produced by leaving simply a thin and fairy-like film of the coating on the body, are produced.

We cannot too highly compliment Mr. Pargeter, the fortunate owner of the renowned Red House Glass Works, Stourbridge, in being the possessor and maker of so inestimable and priceless a treasure, nor can we too strongly congratulate Mr. Northwood on the truly successful completion of his task, which has been a labour of love to him, and on which his whole heart and soul, as well as his busy fingers and active brain have been unweariedly occupied for so many years."

This is what Mr. Blay had written about Pargeter Street:—

> A personal name.
>
> O.E. pariet . . . a wall; a pargeter is a plasterer. Henry Farrington, surveyor of Walsall, made this street for Philip Pargeter, glass manufacturer, of Stourbridge, the owner of the land, and whose name was given to the street.

KNOW YOUR BLACK COUNTRY

The former rich mineral wealth of the Black Country today plays little part in the region's industrial development. But do you remember what was meant by the following terms?

1. Cat earth, Catch earth, Broad earth, Hard earth.
2. Black rings.
3. The Bunter.
4. The Gubbin.
5. The Humphries.
6. 'Green Rock' or 'Trap.'

Answers see page 72.

New Hawne Colliery

(a Case of Duplication)

by
John Thompson
and
Ron Moss

WHILST Peter Barnsley was researching his article on the New Hawne Colliery, for the summer edition of **The Black-countryman,** the industrial archaeology group of the society was also engaged on, amongst a variety of other projects, researching that very same colliery. Much of our information is the same as Mr. Barnsley's, underlining the need for individuals and groups interested in this area to make the subjects of their studies known at an early date, thus avoiding duplication. However, a few additional facts came to light.

New Hawne Colliery began its life close to Hawne House, the boyhood home of Thomas Attwood, a political reformer of the early nineteenth century, whose father, Mathias, was a wealthy iron manufacturer and owner of several large estates. The cherry orchards of Hawne House were once famous and until the early 1800s an annual wake celebrated the ripening of the fruit.

The New British Iron Company were the original owners of the colliery, but they fell into debt and in 1894 their assets were sold to Shelah Garratt and Son, and Robert Fellows Ltd. The Colliery Guardian of 18th Dec., 1887 states that a Liquidator was appointed to wind up the N.B.I.C., whilst the 23rd June, 1893 issue says that it was to be auctioned on 13th July, 1893. The furnaces of the Company finally closed in 1912.

The huge pit mound at New Hawne was formed, not only from mine spoil, but from the cinder waste from the ironworks of the N.B.I.C.

The fatal accident that occurred at the colliery in 1921 is remembered in Mr. Barnsley's interview of a "' New Hawne Collier." Our account of this tragic occurrance is somewhat different.

Jesse Adams was winder on duty on the day that the fitters came to cap the rope. A timber baulk was put in the drum to prevent its movement and Jesse was warned to remove this obstacle before starting the engine. Unfortunately, after the capping had been completed, Jesse started the engine without removing the timber. The

baulk was brought round with the drum and struck the eccentric rod, causing the reversing lever to kick into Jesse's stomach with considerable force. The engine continued to run, and ran the rope off the drum, shearing off the anchoring clips and dropping the rope down the pit. Meanwhile, Jesse had staggered out of the engine house and into the main office, where he died. The cause of death was a burst bladder.

An Old Hill shopkeeper told us of the murder of the night-watchman at New Hawne Colliery in about the year 1870. Mr. Moses Round, being the first man on duty that morning, found the murdered watchman. This unfortunate man was accused of the murder and taken into custody; after going through the Courts, the last one in London, he was found not guilty. Moses Round's character had been damaged, however, and wagging tongues and pointing fingers made his life less happy than it might have been.

In 1919, at the age of 19, the teller of this tale of murder was married, and a year later had a daughter. During her confinement, a local woman came to "do" for her. This woman spoke of her father-in-law, a wicked man, who was a collier at the New Hawne; he was prone to attacks of the "blue devils" and would come home from the pub at night with the "devil" chasing him. To escape, he would hide in the "purgit (or porget) hole" (the ash hole in a black countryman's grate). She said that he had not had a good night's sleep since he had murdered the night-watchman at New Hawne Colliery!

During our researches, we also came upon the engine house of the Old Hawne Colliery, which still stands in Shelah Road (named after Shelah Garratt, no doubt) Hayseech. This building is now used by Hayseech Motor Services. Perhaps someone is doing research on this colliery also. Let us know. You may not be the only one.

Peter Barnsley, Author of "New Hawne Colliery" (Summer Issue)

I had no idea that anyone else was working on the history of New Hawne Colliery. I am glad that the authors have been able to provide the correct information about the death of the unlucky Jesse Adams. Clearly Arthur Grove's memory had retained only part of the story.

Incidentally, Jack Haden's article about the 1921 Coal Strike (Autumn 'Blackcountryman') included fuller details than I gave about the incident at New Hawne during that strike.

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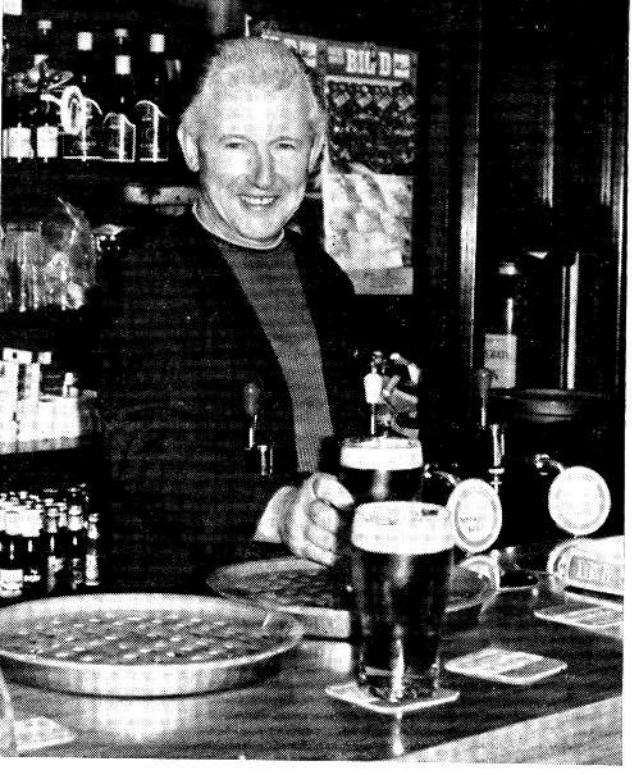

Harry Hulse

Publican Extraordinary

'When I look at the wage slips of my customers and compare the hours they work with mine, I can only conclude that I must be bloody saft.' Harry Hulse, landlord of the 'Herbert's Park Tavern' in Darlaston, had this quick reply when I asked him if he found his job worthwhile as a tenant in a pub of the Bass Charrington group. 'Mind you,' he continued, 'it isn't really a job it's way of life and if it suits you, well you just can't leave it.'

HARRY has been at the 'Herbert's Park Tavern' for about two years. He took over a pub that was rebuilt at the end of the 1930s on the site of a much older building, probably erected to serve the needs of the workers of the Herbert's Park Iron Works. This great factory, responsible for much of the notable British iron constructions at the close of the last century, has long since disappeared, but the building of council housing estates in the area has provided new customers for the local public houses.

It would be true to say that Harry has beer in his blood. His family kept the 'Cottage Spring' in Franchise Street, Wednesbury, in the days when homed brewed beer was served there. Harry remembers helping to brew the beer

and claims that this public house was the last in Wednesbury to serve home brewed beer. His mother also had a keen mind for business with a fish and chip shop and a green-grocery trade on the Holyhead Road in Wednesbury. Harry's brother kept the 'Woodman Inn' in Dale Street, Wednesbury, for some time, but he himself is a tool-maker by trade. He came to the 'Herbert's Park Tavern' from the 'Three Crowns,' Kings Hill, Wednesbury, where he had already earned a reputation as a good landlord amongst the foundry men and regular customers who used the pub.

He found a pub that had seemed to have lost its attraction to local people. There were and still are many other public houses in the area, and it was not difficult for customers to move elsewhere in search of the company they wished to find. Now, two years after his move, Harry has built up a house that must be one of the busiest in the Black Country. Should any of our readers fancy a game of dominoes at just after 5.30 p.m. during the week, Harry can usually guarantee a sufficiently full house even then to provide a choice of partners or opponents! A notable feature of the 'Herbert's Park Tavern' that impresses even the casual customers who look around the bar, is the large number of different clubs who use this house as their headquarters. A pigeon club meets there and there is a fishing club now affiliated to the Birmingham Anglers' Association. On Monday nights and Wednesday nights two domino teams compete in their respective local leagues; there is a crib team and two darts teams. In addition to this, the Darlaston Flying Club run a tote in aid of their funds. And there is a weekly fund raising effort on behalf of the local old age pensioners. Harry wonders if any other public house in the Black Country can compare with the 'Herbert's Park Tavern' in the number and variety of organisations it shelters.

FREE SANDWICHES

Harry is quick to emphasise that this large number of activities is not of his creating: 'I do not think that it is possible for a landlord to organise such things properly', he said. 'The initiative and control must come from the customers. The landlord should only help and advice, and try to establish an atmosphere to encourage the individual organiser's work. When they want help from me, they come and ask for it, otherwise I just leave them alone to get on with the job.' Harry and his wife, however, appreciate the trade that is brought to the pub by these different organisations. They are prepared to provide refreshments for such meetings: 'Often we have put on five different lots of sandwiches in one evening without charging the clubs involved one penny. It was the least we could do to help them.' Customers at the 'Herbert's Park also receive free sandwiches every Sunday morning, a tradition once common in the Black Country but now found in very few public houses.

Harry's attitude is a simple one: 'A pub should be a community centre. It should try and provide something for all the local families in the area who want to have a pleasant evening with their friends. It should also itself try to foster a community spirit; an English pub should be an important local centre serving the local people.' Customers of the 'Herbert's Park' who fall

ill can usually count on some help from other regulars. Harry recalls one occasion when the family of a dying man received six pounds every fortnight from the pub: 'It wasn't much, but it helped when help was most needed.' A raffle for the older people who use the pub raised £15 in two nights. Old aged pensioners regularly find a few shillings put in their hands as a gift from the pub's money raising activities: 'We have grey pay nights, faggot nights and sing songs; anything we can do to benefit our customers we are prepared to have a go at.'

BEER BOUTIQUES

I asked Harry what he thought of some of the latest pubs, rudely called 'beer boutiques'! 'They might suit some,' he said, 'but not me and not most of my customers. They're all facade; nice places to look at once but not to visit regularly. People talk in whispers; there's no sing song; drinkers dawdle over a half pint of expensive beer. My customers expect to play games in a pub; they want a joke, a laugh, conversation with their friends, and at the end of the night perhaps a good sing. My customers are essentially bar men drinking pints of beer. It is my job to provide a good pint at the cheapest possible price.'

From the number of customers using the bar, it would seem that Harry had judged the needs of his regulars with some accuracy! Not that he does not welcome families or people who want a quiet drink. He has several rooms apart from the bar and tries to cater for all tastes. Children are welcomed in a special room where they can stay with their parents. Harry favours this arrangement: 'I think that sometimes people want to be with their children and sometimes with their friends. In the bar, of course, and in our smoke rooms people can meet without worrying about the behaviour of children. In the children's room, children are under the control of their parents, which is how I think it ought to be.'

Harry would welcome a little more appreciation from the breweries. 'I am a tenant and I don't think that the breweries understand how important our position is. They tend to concentrate their interest on their managed houses and ignore us, but I think that the future is on our side. It stands to sense that a tenant is working for himself and the brewery; he will put himself out to get trade, which is surely what the breweries should want.' Harry also finds that the mergers have produced some loss

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of variety in the beers he can sell. 'At Christmas I could never get enough Old Ale; everybody wanted it. Now they don't brew it at all.'

What is Harry's recipe for success in his trade. 'First,' he said. 'you must have a good partner. If your wife isn't interested, then you might just as well pack in; you must pull together. Secondly, you must at first be prepared to work hard. My wife and I have been able to take a holiday together this year for the first time for ten years. We couldn't risk it before; it's a strange business to leave in other people's hands. But now our children are growing up we can rely on them for some support. Finally, you must serve a good drink and this means you must be spotless clean. I am lucky in having a good bricked cellar, but I can truthfully say that if any inspector came at any time to look at this house. he would find nothing about which I ought to be ashamed. Cleanliness creates good beer; it's as simple as that.'

At the present time, the government has set up a committee to review the working of the licensing laws. They will hear a lot about 'the changing pattern of demand,' the 'new drinkers' and the 'commercial explotation of assets.' Perhaps they might bear in mind also that some decent adherences to the traditional tasks of the landlord might serve to halt the steady decline in the numbers and importance of the English pub. They might even learn a few lessons from Harry Hulse!

J.M.F.

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Biblical Names in the Black Country

G. A. Moore

DURING the fifty years I worked at a general ironworks in the Black Country, from apprentice to manager, I have always been interested in the Old Testament names of the older generation in this district.

One can speculate for the cause of this—does it go back as far as the Puritans of the Cromwellian era? No! it is more likely to stem from the upsurge of non-conformity in the early eighteenth century followed by the evangelism of John Wesley and his followers.

I have known several men named Adam or Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Israel, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Joshua, Moses, Aaron and Noah.

All the well known prophets' names have been popular—Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, also Emmanuel, Jethro, Amos, Nathan, Jesse, Samson, Elam, Simeon, Levi, Reuben, Ebenezer. Of course, there have been the inevitable Enochs and Elis (Anuck and Ayli).

David, Jonathan, Samuel, Joseph and Daniel have always been popular, but strangely enough the name of Pharaoh has re-occurred in one family. Mordecai is another unusual name.

I have recorded the names of two of Daniel's fellow exiles in Babylon perpetuated in the Black Country viz. Shadrach and Meshech but never came across the third hero, Abed-nego.

Some years ago I spent many months in the Middle East visiting many places of biblical interest including the ruins of Babylon. Near this ancient place I was shown a large depression in the ground and from the gaps between stones, smoke issued with occasional licks of flame. I was told by people connected with the nearby oil wells that this was the original " burning fiery furnace " of the Bible in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and it had never ceased to burn. Of course it was escaping natural gas and the story was taken with a grain of salt. I thought of the missing name of the third hero in our Bible story.

Sometime after returning home to Wolverhampton, I happened to glance at the obituary notices in the **Express & Star** and there it was. Blank; on the 5th ——— Abed-nego, the beloved husband of ———. I was delighted that the third name in the famous trio had been perpetuated in the Black Country amid its own fiery furnaces.

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THE HILL AND SMITH STORY

by Harold Parsons

THE firm of Hill and Smith, Brierley Hill, Dudley, was established in 1824 and was known as Hill's Ironworks before Mr. Edward Hill took into his employ a young school-leaver by the name of Henry Smith. Little is known of the Hill family except that Edward Hill had married an elder sister of Henry Smith while Henry was still at school, an incidence that doubtless paved his way to a job and eventual partnership.

Henry Smith was the youngest of the family and was born at Pedmore, Stourbridge, in 1824. He had a life-long connection with Hill and Smith's and lived at Summerhill Court, Kingswinford for the last forty-five years of his life. He was a Dudley J.P. for over 40 years, and also served as a J.P. for Staffordshire and Worcestershire. His wife, Marianne, was the daughter of Joseph Webb of Holly Hall and later of Springfield House, Wordsley. She died in 1897. Henry Smith died in September, 1906, aged 82.

Last Working Proprietor

Henry was succeeded in the firm by his eldest son, Joseph H. Smith. He was the last working proprietor with founder connections, but did not enjoy the role for very long. On the Whitsuntide Wednesday of 1909, he was driving his dog cart on the way to the works when he was in collision with a governess cart belonging to a Mr. Grazebrook of Himley, and was killed. He was 54 years old. An account of his death in the **Country Express** tells us that he had formerly commanded the 'A' Squad (Dudley) of the Worcestershire Yeomanry, retiring in 1897 with the rank of major.

After Joseph's death the firm was made into a private limited company, and an unmarried sister who had lived with him at Summerfield Court (later Mrs. E. M. Lewis) held a considerable interest in the firm until her death.

Early Products

An early record of Hill and Smith's manufactory is to be found in the **Guide to the Iron Trade of Great Britain,** by Samuel Griffiths (1873), where an advertisement lists the firm as a "manufacturers of Griffiths Patent Puddling Machine, hurdles and fencing, wrought iron shafts, crank shafts for marine engines, piston rods and connecting rods."

In 1870 a grey-iron foundry was erected and in about 1875 the first 5-ton steam hammer to be erected in the Midlands was installed. Shortly afterwards a small ironworks was hired at the Delph for the manu-

facture of wrought iron bars. Owing to a dispute with the landlord at the close of the century, it was discontinued. Wire netting works and galvanising plant at Tividale discontinued soon afterwards, although the galvanising works still appeared in a catalogue dated 1900, as do the company's rolling mills, Delph Works, Brierley Hill.

Catalogue, 1900

One of the interesting aspects of the catalogue for the year 1900 is the importance placed on a testimonial from Balmoral, " copies of which can be had on application." This was in connection with their most famed order of the 19c, received in 1860 for ' many miles of continuous fencing for Queen Victoria.' Continuous fencing, of which Hill and Smith claim to be the original inventors, is of a horizontal bar type, despatched in bundles and secured to uprights in fixing by means of ferrules and wedges.

Considerable store was also placed upon the acquisition of awards and medals (of which the medal reproduced on page 23 is a local example). Dublin features in the list of towns for which exhibition medals were held, and it is significant that at the turn of the century—probably until the death of Joseph Smith—there was a Dublin branch of Hill and Smith.

Ornamental Work

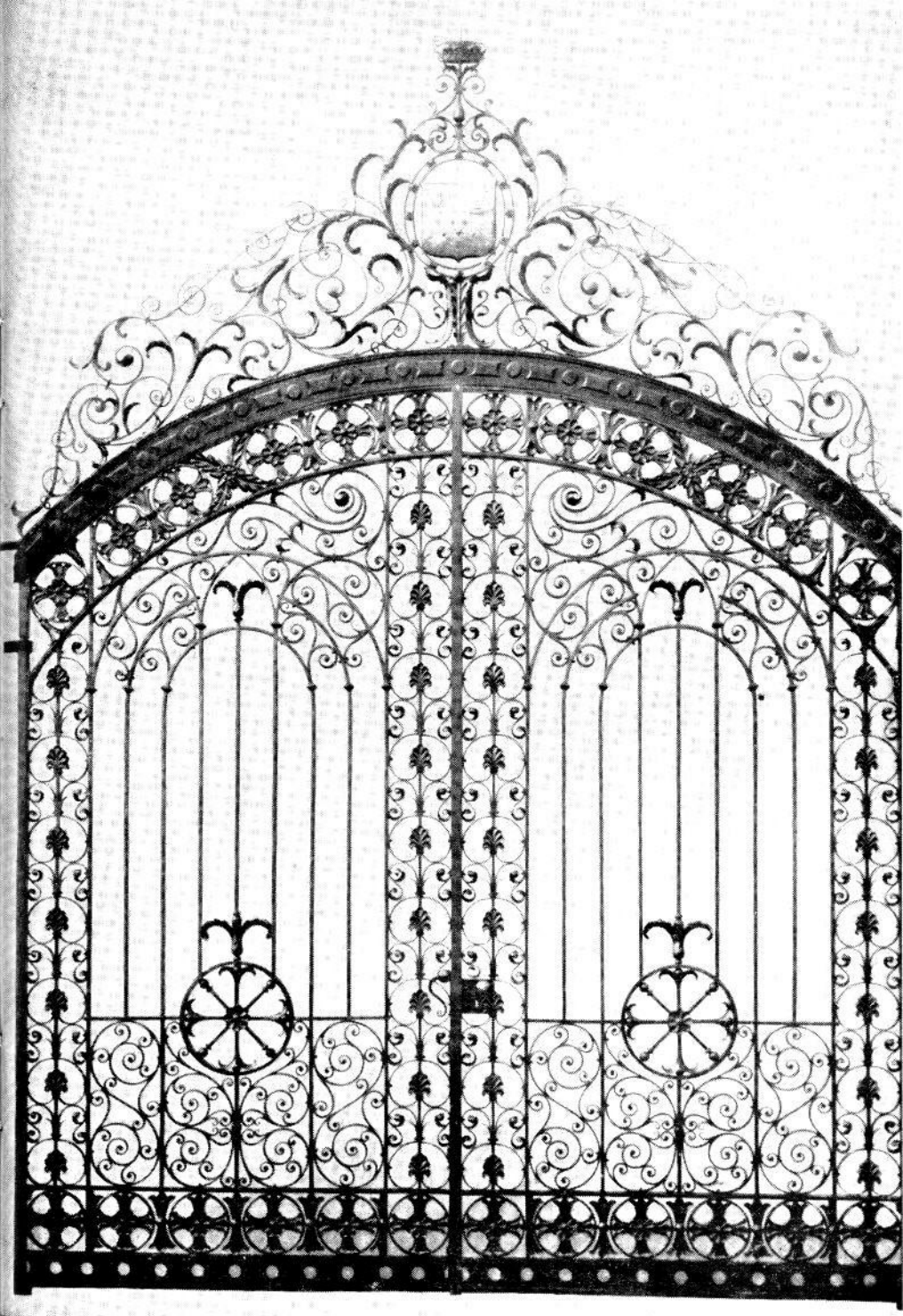
The company has long been famous for its ornamental ironwork. Pre-first world war successes included the fabrication of ornamental gates and parapet railing for the Royal House of Siam, work on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Royal Dockyard at Simonstown, South Africa, and gates at Hong Kong market and the European Club, Shanghai: all fine examples of black country craftsmanship.

Hill and Smith's, in the early years of this century, consisted of the following departments: fencing, art metal, bridge and roofing, foundry, forge, galvanising, and rolling mills. By contrast to fine works of art it is interesting to note some of the more mundane articles sold in large numbers, ranging from pig troughs to wheelbarrows, from stable, harness and saddle-room fittings to shepherd's huts—in appearance like the corrugated air-raid shelters of the last war, mounted on wheels, fitted with doors and windows, and shafts for pulling.

Structural steelwork included complete factories, warehouses iron-houses, market roofs and railway station roofs, footbridges and walk-ways. An illustration of the footbridge across Malvern Link (G.W.R.) Railway Station Platforms, appears in a later catalogue.

Of particular interest in this catalogue is the dome steelwork at Birmingham University and an air-ship shed, 553 ft. x 110 ft. x 120 ft. high.

It would seem that nothing was too large or too small for the Hill and Smith's of that day. It was possible in contrast to the huge structures mentioned above, to buy a cast iron pump, rainwater gutters and downpipes, a galvanised bullock feeding pan or a pig trough, not forgetting black varnish. At one time, fifty cast iron lamp columns were kept constantly in stock for Birmingham Corporation. In one year, a



Ornamental gates (14 ft. opening) for a palace in Siam. Late 19th or early 20th century

thousand such columns were made. It is strange to think that these columns are now much sought after and can be found ornamenting private grounds, even domestic gardens, not for illumination but simply as status objects of Victoriana.

World Wars

During the first world war, the firm made screw pickets for barbed wire, of which no less than three and a half million were produced. In the second war its contribution included cast iron de-gaussing boxes for the protection of vessels against the magnetic mine; parts of Bailey Bridges, rocket-firing equipment, nissen huts and equipment for landing barges, also air-raid shelters.

For nearly twenty years after the latter war the company appeared to have soldiered on under the control of trustees without any great change. A serious loss on contracts produced a crisis in the late '50s, and it was decided to sell. In 1960 it passed into new hands and a new era of change and development.

Cranes

Before looking at Hill and Smith's progress during the last decade, it is worth detailing one of the few documentary records of the past that has survived in connection with the company. It concerns the proposed installation of cranes to the roofing department. The following report was prepared by an unknown hand sometime between the death of Mr. J. H. Smith in 1909 and the receipt of a number of quotations for cranes in 1911. The identity of the Mr. Kor referred to is not known, but certainly the report gives insight into one of the problems of management at that time.

> Just before the death of the late Mr. J. H. Smith, he had practically decided to electrify the cranes in the roofing department, and it was primarily with the object of putting this matter before the board in proper form, that Mr. Kor was consulted.
>
> In Mr. Kor's original report, he refers to this and many other matters, forming such a large scheme of alterations that the board decided that the report should stand over till after the balance sheet for the present year had been considered.
>
> The necessity for the alteration to the cranes is much greater now than it was in the late Mr. Smith's time. Great delay is caused by the slow and costly way of handling materials in the yard.
>
> For instance, lately, when the new punching machine arrived in the yard, it took two days, and at a cost of about £2-0-0, to get it from the truck to the side of the yard. With one of the new cranes this would have been done in under one hour at a cost of about 2s. 6d.

Again, we have an order on hand for a girder 66 feet long, weighing about 17 tons. All the cranes, together, at present in the yard, are not sufficiently strong to load this on to a truck, so that it will be necessary to raise this girder by jacks at a probable cost of not less than £5-0-0 whereas, the two new cranes would have done it for under 10s. 0d., and in as many hours as days will be required. This girder will have to be turned over several times while being made and painted, and, with the present cranes, it will cost about 12s. 6d. each time, whereas, with the new cranes the cost would be less than half-a-crown.

The great delay caused in handling materials prevents us turning out work in a reasonable time, and prevents us taking on more work. The delay in getting out work has caused very great annoyance to our customers, and, for some time past, the men have been working overtime and they have been paid a higher rate of wages than they would have been if the materials had been handled more quickly. This delay and cost of manufacture was so serious that I decided to put the matter before the board, as early as possible, though I was fully aware that it had been decided to put aside the question of any alterations to the plant until the balance sheet had been considered.

Having ascertained that the cables laid in for lighting the offices had been put in large enough to provide the necessary power for two electric cranes, I consulted Mr. Kor, and he has now reported on the most suitable method of treating the cranes.

At present, we have to pay a minimum, to the Dudley Corporation, of £15-0-0 a year for light. Were we to take current for power, we would have the current for lighting at one third of the present cost, and so save at least £10-0-0 a year on lighting offices, alone.

The cost of Mr. Kor's scheme would be about £1,600. Depreciation at 5% and loss of interest at 3% per annum would amount to £128-0-0, so that before any actual saving can be shown, £128-0-0 has to be provided. The difference in cost of unloading and loading materials, alone, will be sufficient to cover this £128-0-0. Further saving in cost of handling materials in course of manufacture, over and above the before mentioned £128-0-0, would be very great, but it would be impossible to form an approximate idea of how much the saving would actually amount to.

> The two instances I have mentioned, above, would indicate a very great saving in cost, but this great saving would only be to the same extent when heavy loads were being moved, but in every single case of material being moved there would, of course, be a saving, though not to the same extent.
>
> (N.B.—Original punctuation retained)

Tenders for electric travelling cranes were eventually received from eight firms, two of which were in Scotland. The order was placed with Herbert Morris and Bastert Ltd., Loughborough, Leics., and was for two cranes each with a working load of 15 tons, at a cost including erection of £1243. 15. 6d. After 60 years service the cranes are now being pensioned off!

The Last Decade

1960—The new owners of the company were Mr. Tom Hampson Silk and two brothers Leonard G. and Clive H. James, all of whom were prominent Midlands businessmen.

1961—The first acquisition and a first step towards the new policy of growth. Tipton Steel Stockholders Limited, operating from Bloomfield Road, Five Ways Goods Depot, Tipton, was the company and it has made very considerable growth to a turnover in the region of £1 million at the present time, still operating from the same site.

1962—Strenuous efforts to improve the Brierley Hill site and the company's performance brought the rewards in a return into profitability.

1963—A brass and aluminium drop forging company, Wednesbury Stampings Limited, had gone into liquidation and a scrap dealer bought the plant from the liquidator. Hill and Smith bought the plant from the scrap dealer and arranged to continue to supply the old customers from their dies. Many of the ex-Wednesbury Stamping employees were re-engaged and continued their old jobs in new surroundings.

A small company, E. Fox (Diesinkers) Limited, who had been associated with Wednesbury Stampings and carried out the skilled work of die sinking for them, was also acquired in 1963. It continued for some time, working in the same premises at Leabrook Road, Wednesbury.

The ever increasing demands on the time of Messrs. Silk, James and James from their many other commitments, began to have their affect, however, and the company again fell into losses.

In **1964** the directors decided that they must bring in a new man to correct the loss situation and re-vitalise the company. The man selected was the present managing director, Mr. Denis Hodgetts, whose previous experience was with G.K.N. It was too late for 1964 results to be much affected and losses were sustained in that year.

1965 saw the sale of the construction and agricultural department to T. Partridge and Company of Walsall and the leasing to them of over 20,000 sq. ft. of production and office space. The company was back into profitability!

1966 and a deal was done with Westinghouse Brake and Signal Co. Limited to acquire the whole of their drop forging plant and equipment. More than 2,000 tons of machinery, dies and plant were moved by road from Chippenham to Brierley Hill and an indication of the size of the project can be judged by the fact that the foundations alone for one battery of three hammers involved pouring 800 cubic yards of concrete in one day. To make room for this mammoth drop forging development the foundry was closed in June, 1966, and by October of that year much of the acquired plant was working. Part of the deal was to supply Westinghouse (and others) with their own forging requirements.

1967—Nortons-Tividale Limited who had been big in coal preparation plant and had tried to diversify following the National Coal Board's cut back, had been placed into the hands of a Receiver. Hill and Smith purchased selected items of nearly new plant, all the work in progress, the order book for heat exchangers, air coolers, pressure vessels, etc..

Continued overleaf

Although reproduced here somewhat larger than its actual size, you may still need a magnifying glass to study the inscriptions on this prize medal, awarded to Hill & Smith, Brierley Hill, in 1866.

Front: Prize medal of the Dudley and Midland Fine Arts, Scientific and Industrial Exhibition, held in Dudley, 1866.

Obverse: Insignia of:
Dudley Mechanics Institute
Dudley School of Art.
Dudley Geographical Society.
South Staffs. Union of Institutes.

for the chemical plant industry and N.C.B. contracts including a coal washery for Baddesley Colliery worth over £300,000.

Two subsidiary companies were formed, Nortons-Tividale Engineering Limited, to deal with the chemical industry etc. orders, and Nortons-Tividale Design and Contracting Limited, to handle N.C.B. washing plant, etc. Over 90 ex-Nortons-Tividale personnel were re-engaged at Brierley Hill.

1968—Pressure on manufacturing space for heat exchangers and coal plant led to the next acquisition, W. H. Barker and Son, Engineers Ltd., Stoke-on-Trent. Barkers, like Nortons-Tividale, had specialised in coal board work and felt the draught of reducing demands. The picture here was different, however, with plenty of money in the bank and the company needing an injection of work which Hill and Smith could readily provide.

Barkers site at Stoke had more potential and at the end of 1968 a new subsidiary, Tipton Steel Stockholders (Stoke) Limited was formed to operate from the same premises.

1969. January saw another acquisition: John Perks and Sons Limited An old established company in Wolverhampton. A subsidiary of Delta Metals Limited, it was being closed down due to a series of losses Products included drop forgings, hammers and edge tools and the purchase was made excluding the property. Again plant and machinery was moved to Brierley Hill and many of the old employees of Perks were transferred. They are still transported to Brierley Hill by the company's own bus service.

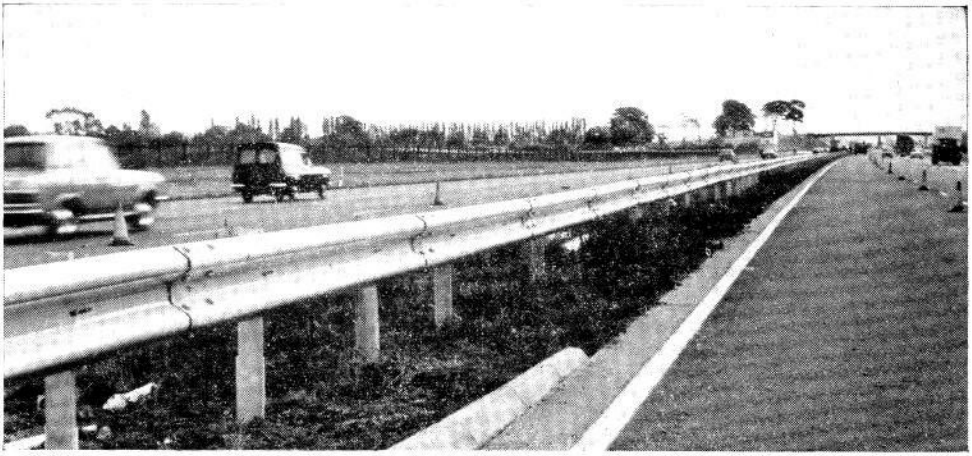
March, 1969, and a major move was made by offering 40% of the capital in the company to the public at a price of 12/6d. (62½p) per share. The stock market recognised the successes which had been achieved and the forward potential and a premium on the share price was soon established.

1970—Another acquisition: this time a drop forging company Criterion Stampings Limited, rich in liquid assets and continuing to operate from its Willenhall site.

1971—April and a £360,000 Convertible Loan Stock issue was made to repay short term borrowings and to finance the further planned expansion of the company.

To make space for the installation of new presses of 600 tons and 200 tons capacity, bought from Cincinatti specifically for the manufacture of motorway crash barriers, the 20,000 sq. ft. of production space leased to Partridge was taken back by mutual agreement.

July, 1971—Crash barrier was in production and, with the aid of the most modern handling equipment, a rate of over two miles of barrier per single shift was being produced. Already the company's barrier has been installed on parts of the M.3, M.4, M.6, M.53, M.56 motorways and many other roads. With the government's programme to install barrier on the central reservations of all motorways, a big market is assured for some years.



Hill and Smith type motorway crash barrier

1972—Although this year is only just starting it is already apparent that Hill and Smith will continue its progress. Another capital project to bring the galvanising of its products under its own control will bring development expenditure to over £300,000 in two years. From their record it is very easy to predict that this will not be the only expansion development this year, next year and for many years to come.

The main board of directors comprises Mr. Tom Hampson Silk, chairman and also chairman of another public group, Hampson Industries Limited, Mr. Denis Hodgetts, group managing director, Mr. Leonard G. James—also managing director of Metalrax Limited Mr. J. Roy Skidmore—another ex-G.K.N. man who joined the company in 1965.

One man from the 1960 team is missing: Mr. Clive H. James, who died on 2 June, 1970. The annual report for that year said "His colleagues very much regret that he will not be with us to share the satisfaction of the success that his earlier unstinting efforts have helped to make possible."

The group is now organised in **three Divisions:**

Steel Fabrication—Hill & Smith at Brierley Hill make road safety barrier, bridge railings and all types of steel fencing and fabrications for the mining and chemical industries.

Barkers at Stoke-on-Trent make coal handling plant and machined fabrications for the engineering industry.

Steel Stockholding—Tipton Steel at Tipton and Tipton Steel (Stoke) at Stoke-on-Trent.

Drop Forging—Hill & Smith, Perks and E. Fox at Brierley Hill, Criterior Stampings at Willenhall.

As it approaches its 150th anniversary, Hill and Smith goes forward with a vigour and purpose that very many younger organisations would wish to emulate.

COVER DESIGN: Art metal Weather-Vane made at Hill and Smith's, early 20c.

'WEDGEBURY MARKET'

It has been officially decided that the site of Wednesbury market be moved from the town centre to a covered site in Camp Street. Another bit of the old must give way to the new and with it will vanish a little more of the heritage of the 'Wedgebury mon.'

The market has a long history, having flourished certainly since 1709 and, many would believe, for centuries before that. The arguments for and against the extreme age of Wednesbury market are interesting indeed, but we must not enter into them here.

JOHN Shelton II was Lord of the Manor of Wednesbury and West Bromwich 1663-1701. His brother, Richard, sold his manorial rights to John Hoo of Bradley, and he it was who is said to have converted an ancient prescriptive market that had been acquired by use and time, into a chartered privilege. In 1709 the Market Charter was granted in Letter Patent by Queen Anne. Mr. Ede, however, in his History of Wednesbury argues that 'a market or fair, official or unofficial, much before the Charter of 1709 is improbable.'

The Charter granted two fairs or marts annually, one on the 25th April and the other on the 23rd July, "unless any of the aforesaid days should be Sunday, and then upon ye following Monday next following such Sunday." It also granted a weekly market to be held on "Fridays in every week for ever . . . for buying and selling corn, flesh, fish and other provisions, and cattle and beasts and all goods and wares and merchandise commonly bought in market places."

In addition, the Charter granted that a Court of Pie Poudre may be held. This in effect was a summary court for trial of offences committed in a fair or market. The ancient Norman name signifies 'Court of Dusty Foot' so called because the offenders—generally strangers—were apprehended, tried and summarily dealt with by the bailiff of the manor before the dust of travel was off his feet.

The market toffs, together with stallage fees for cattle and goods sold or exposed for sale, were to be received "to the only and proper use of John Hoo, his heirs and assigns for ever." However, as sometimes happens, funds were misappropriated and the old records in Wednesbury library provide stories of amusing incidents.

For many years the custom of 'Walking the Fairs' was observed in Wednesbury. On the morning of the fair the parish beadle would appear in the market square, bearing a long pike and bell as his symbols of office. He would be joined by the principle members of the town and in solemn procession they moved through the town. The first liquid refreshment was taken at the Elephant and Castle, hard by what is now Flynn's Garage on the High Bullen, it

consisted of two tankards of ale.

Then, just as solemnly and just as steady (for as everyone knows a Wedgebury mon con ode is ale), they returned to the market place where they again quenched their thirst—subsequently dining at one of the public houses; the entire expense being defrayed by the parish funds.

It would appear that the Saturday evening markets began in the early 19th century. These quickly gained popularity because of the odd hours the local employers chose to pay out wages. These markets would still be open and doing business at 11 p.m., the stamina of the stall-holders being fortified by the usual beverage.

MATE SACKS'

These late night markets provide us with many stories both humorous and tragic. One told by a seventy-eight year old, tells of bargains offered by the 'Mate Sacks', the butchers whose stalls occupied that part of the market still known as the Shambles. Large choice cuts of meat would be shown to the crowd. When a person offered to buy it, it was weighed with a speed that would put the Concorde to shame, and some obscure weight would be shouted, rapidly followed by the price which could only be an inspired guess on the part of the butcher.

However, listening to many of our older citizens, all seemed highly satisfied. Many butchers would auction their meat, 'ool gie me tuppence for this'. These men were not without compassion, for many times we hear of them giving a small ragged child a piece of meat as big as himself 'ere ma babby, tek this whum to thee muther.'

'JOE PUDDEN'

A very disturbing story was told (and checked with three different sources) of 'Joe Pudden' a man of small stature and dressed always in a cloth cap and stained blue suit. He was employed by a market butcher known locally as the 'Mate King' and would carry the meat from a store room located in the shambles opposite to Bowcott printers. It seems that one night Joe was asked to hold a large 'chine o' beef' while the butcher chopped it. As the knife descended, Joe somehow moved his hand and the knife sliced right through his wrist. This is not hard to understand when we remember our informant's words: 'They boozed from mornin' to night, they wuz alliz drunk.'

Outside the Green Dragon (Wednesbury Fruiterers) was a sweet stall, again the goods being sold by auction. The son of the 'suck mon' would stand on a chair holding a paper bag. His father would hold up an item of confectionery and ask 'ool gie me airpny (½d) for this? When someone took him up on his offer, he would refuse it and drop the sweets into the bag, saying: "no yo' wo' missus," repeating this until the bag was absolutely full, when he would ask threepence for the lot.

At Christmas time, along with these bargains, he gave away large walking sticks made of rock. The centre of the entrance to the Shambles was dominated by the seated figure of an old lady, her voluminous black skirt covered by an apron under which she kept her money bag fastened about her

waist. At her side a large basket was filled with 'Tigs Herbal' of which I am assured she always rapidly sold out.

The market used to be much larger than the present day one. It stretched from Morris's (Olivers) chemist shop hard by Hitchens Croft, now Holden's shoe shop, into the market square and down the Shambles. The wares offered were numerous, varied and cheap. All products were catered for, and many of the poorer folk got their clothes from the second-hand clothes stalls that stood next to the butchers' stalls. A few of these 'rag stalls' are still there, but strangely they are isolated from their neighbours, O'Connell's fruit stall. Is tradition so strong? Strong enough to prevent their moving into a position formerly held by other traders?

A wealth of stories exist about the market, 'Wedgebury folks' are fiercely proud of the 'lineage' of their town and the market that has been part of it for so long. There will be many among us who feel not a little apprehensive and sad about the recent change.

Mrs. M. Hutchinson.

BLACKBERRY PODGE

WHEN me un our kid wuz young uns, not many 'ears agoo, we lived over the back o' Glebefields on the estate they call the Lost City. The cut run all the road from Ocker Bonk ter Summer'ill in them days and me un our kid, an we mates, used ter spend the long 'olidies frum skule playin' we germes up over the cut bonks.

Wi' a pop bottle o' werter un sum bread an' screpe son'widges in we pockets, we'd goo by the tatters 'osses grerzin' by the Mot bridge an' past the gypos' caravans wot come every summer ter stop on Glebefields. Sumtimes, we'd goo straight ter the cut fer a swim, or ter catch a few tadders un newts, but moostly, all we'd gor on we minds them days wuz blackberries. There wuz sum gud plerces fer blackberries over Glebefields then, and me un our kid an' we mates knew all on um.

Wi' we jam jars in we 'onds, we'd moach under the bushes wot went right down sum o' the bonks, un pick till we fingers wuz scratched un covered in jewce. When the jar wuz about 'alf full, we'd gerra bit o' stick un rom it into the berries—like we mothers' doin' the maidin' in the ode tub.

After a birra pokin' un 'ommickin about, the berries all squashed together ter mek blackberry podge. We gor it down we right off the stick, all perple un sweet an' it tasted grand: right down to the last screrpins, wot we 'ad ter tip upside down an' ger all over we 'onds an' ferces ter gerrat.

The cut dow run from Ocker Bonk ter Summer'ill no moor, un theres 'ouses un flats weir the gypos camped on Glebefields. The young uns wot live in um moost likely git their blackberry jewce frum bottles—un that's good for um. Still, ar reckon we dey do ser bad on blackberry podge—me un our kid an' we mates.

Carol Marsh.

Breweries and Brewers

Derek Preedy

IN 1900 there were 106 breweries operating in Staffordshire. Most of these were registered as companies and it is known that 62 of them have been taken over or closed down. The remainder were smaller breweries and it is not known what happened to them, though many lasted into the 1920's and 1930's.

In Worcestershire there were 45 breweries but it is only known what happened to 24 of them. The remainder seem to have disappeared without trace.

Both in Staffordshire and Worcestershire there were literally hundreds of public houses which brewed their own beer. These were known as home brew houses but are not classified as breweries as they sold their own products only on their own premises. A brewery, on the other hand, sells its products through various licensed outlets which include their own public houses, off licenses, clubs, and nowadays even in the local supermarket.

Staffordshire was a well-known county with regards to its many small brewery companies. These were concerns with only a few licensed houses, i.e. between 5 and 10. One still surviving at Brierley Hill is J.P.S. Breweries Ltd. at the Dennis Brewery formed by a merger of Johnson & Phipps Ltd. and J. P. Simpkiss Ltd. in 1955. Also in Brierley Hill but at the Delph Brewery is D. Batham & Son Ltd. They were first established at Netherton in 1877, later moving to Cradley Heath in 1900 and acquiring the Delph Brewery in 1905. They were registered as a private company in 1941 and controlled about 19 licensed houses. some of these had to be sold because of death duties and now only 8 remain.

Another private concern left in Netherton is D. C. Pardoe at the Old Swan Brewery. They have two public houses and a couple of off licenses. John Flavell, who recently died at the age of 73, had been brewing at the "Druids Head" in Coseley since 1931. Not all the old breweries have completely vanished however, as Harpers Brewery still stands in Wellington Road, Bilston, despite being taken over in 1928. It is now used as a shoe factory. While the "Red Cow" in Bilston Street, Wolverhampton, has several windows still advertising Harpers beers.

Most of the many pubs still remaining in the Black Country belong to the Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries Co. Ltd. which brews, as its name suggests, both at Dudley and Wolverhampton. This company was founded in 1890 when Mr. Banks, who brewed at the Park Brewery,

Wolverhampton, Mr. Smith of the Fox Brewery, Wolverhampton, and Mr. Thompson of the Victoria Brewery, Dudley, got together to form the triple partnership with around 193 public houses.

The Thompson family were originally maltsters but soon found it more profitable to go into brewing as well. Even today, the family are still involved in the management of the company. Like any other concern, they wanted to increase their trading area and to do this they had to expand by purchasing licensed houses. The best way to do this was to acquire other brewing companies. The first expansions were in 1896, when the Round Oak Brewery at Brierley Hill, the White Swan Brewery at Oldbury, the Rowley Brewery at Blackheath and the Stourbridge Brewery were taken over. This was followed in 1909 by the North Worcestershire Breweries Ltd. at Stourbridge in 1912 by J. Rollinson & Sons at Netherton, in 192? by T. Booth of Pensnett, in 1934 by Smith & Williams of Brierley Hill, in 1943 by Julia Hansons & Sons Ltd. of Dudley and in 1960 by H. Newman & Sons of Stourbridge. There were also other take-overs in Lichfield, Kidderminster and Worcester and resulted in the company today having around 850 Licensed Houses and Hotels.

The Worcester Brewing & Malting Co. Ltd. at Brierley Hill was also taken over in 1905 but this, the Delph Brewery premises, was sold to D. Batham.

Julia Hanson & Sons Ltd. of Dudley was founded in 1847 and registered in 1897 and has the unique distinction of being the only brewery in the country with a lady's name. Up till fairly recently Hanson's trade mark was the old Dudley Castle but this has now been superceded by the dominant Banks's Lion. Behind Hansons Brewery in Stepping stone Street, Dudley, still stands the "Gipsies' Tent" Inn, where the Millard brothers brewed their own 'nectar' up to 1967. The only other private company left, at Woodsetton, is Holdens Brewery Ltd. which was registered in 1964 to take over the firm of Edwin Holden.

Most of the present day beers bear very little resemblance to those quaffed in the good old days but a recent survey of beer strengths showed that Banks's Bitter was near the top of the table. Fewer and fewer become the big breweries' names, but with the rapid growth of home brewing kits it may be the turn of the wheel.

Mr. Preedy is Hon. Sec. of the British Beermat Collectors' Society.

The Editor thanks contributors and advertisers for their support and extends sincere wishes to them and all readers in 1972

S. A. WILLIAMS

THE PICTURE ON THE FOUNTAIN WALL

IT is only the elderly in Gornal who can say that they personally knew in his hey day Tom Griffiths, the licensee of the "Fountain Inn", Church Street, Lower Gornal. Even to these he is now very much of a legend. But should anyone, having heard of this wonderful character, wish to know more about him, then they could not do better than to call at the "Fountain Inn," half way up the "Church Bonk," and make the aquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Keaton, now Landlord and Lady respectively.

Not only that, they are the daughter and son-in-law of the redoubtable Tom himself. Mrs. Keaton was born in the "Fountain" and has lived there ever since, so it seemed only natural that when her father died in 1947, she and her husband should take over the licence. This couple have enhanced the reputation of a pub, which by virtue of Tom Griffiths's stewardship, already stood high in the favour of Gornal people.

Mr. Griffiths was physically a big man, six feet two in height, and even in his latter years, always looked fit with never an ounce of surplus flesh. Such was his prowess with his hands, that even if the beer he sold sometimes enboldened a customer "To spake out of his turn" it rarely needed more than a look from the "Gaffer" to quieten even the toughest.

There were some "tough uns" in Gornal at that time. The majority of the customers being either hardbitten colliers or mine workers, most very useful with their hands and used to hard knocks in their daily work. So much so, they seemed to enjoy "Havvin a bit of a goo," but most fought shy of tackling Tom.

Should the enquiring visitor arrive at a time when Mr. and Mrs. Keaton are, "up to their necks in it" and just cannot be available for a chat, then he should slip into the Children's Room. Hanging there, he will see a framed eulogy of Tom Griffiths, painted and printed by Jack Humphreys, a "Gornal Mon," a bricklayer by trade which makes the quality of the picture even more remarkable!

The work is by way of being an obituary too, and surely never was a better written or deserved. It contains the following information, surrounding a picture of Tom.

Testimonial and Tribute to the late, Mr. Tom Griffiths, of the Fountain Inn, Lower Gornal

Presented to his family by his numerous friends and customers, who desire to show their respect and sympathy to his three daughters, two sons, eighteen grandchildren, and six great grandchildren, and to him as a true sportsman and gentleman, for he showed these qualities in every sphere of his life: in all circumstances and environments. As gentle as a lamb at

home, "As a lion in the chase." He had all the Englishman's love for horses and he loved his game of bowls and the companionship of his fellow men. The type of man who would contribute to a nation's greatness.

He was interested in every kind of sport and he excelled in the "noble art" of self defence especially, even aspiring to the Amateur Championship of England in the year 1892; he even sparred with the redoubtable world champion, Jack Johnson.

He won also a gold medal for entering a lion's cage at a fairground in Dudley.

A man whom the Gods favoured with honesty, strength, courage and loyalty, he held a blameless record as a licensee for 50 years and the iron hand in a velvet glove was the index to a well kept inn. He could be gentle; he could be tough. His friendship was sincere and he possessed a character of which any Englishman might well be proud.

Born at Gornal in the year 1869, his brilliant career was closed in 1947.

He was keenly interested in the church services at Lower Gornal, St. James Church; together with his belov'd wife who passed away in the year 1941. United on Earth, now united in the life beyond, they seek the World of Glory together.

Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: In Tuis Manus Domini.

He was also Vice President of the Gornal Branch of the British Legion.

Aged 78 Years.

Printed in 1947 by S. John Humphries.

The above is set out in the order in which it appears on the picture.—Ed.

SKETCHES BY BUBB—Prepared

"The weather's gooin' ter change," said Tommy to his wife, as she rattled plates in the kitchen. She didn't hear his comments over the noise of domesticity. When her usual, pleasant rejoinder did not materialize, he shouted again:

"The weather's gooin' ter change! It's the 'nee!!

"Yes, dear. You stay indoors today. It does look bleak oustide. Looks almost like snow. It's very black over the park."

Tommy's knee had always been 'suspect' after a cartilage operation. It stopped his football playing, but his memories flooded back on occasions and his old fingers would search out and fondle the smooth medals which hung from the gold guard across his waistcoat.

The knee no longer helped the leg in a mighty full back's dead ball kick, but only acted as a barometer for the weather. Today, true to form, it ached. How it ached! But today was Tuesday, and Tuesday meant the weekly meeting and service at the Sons of Rest. At 'the Rest' he found spiritual peace and true friendship amongst his childhood friends who had followed his football career with pride in those hard depression days. They were all growing old, peacefully, together. He looked forward to Tuesdays because, together, nobody individually seemed quite so old.

"I'm gooin' te the Rest!" he suddenly declared, and no matter how

his wife attempted to dissuade him for his own good, the more determined he became.

"Do wrap yourself up warm then when you do go," she advised, and later fussed over him as he prepared to meet the December day.

With a final tug of his cap, and an adjustment to muffler and belted overcoat, he walked out of the kitchen door onto the drive at the side of the house. The bitter wind tugged at his cheeks and tore at the corners of his eyes. He reached for his handkerchief and mechanically wiped his eyes. He coughed as the wind caught his throat, and he held the voluminous white linen to his mouth.

"Must get on," he mumbled to himself, and rolled and swayed, sailor like, down the road in the general direction of 'the Rest.' He hadn't gone many yards when wisps of sleet began to flash across his vision. Gradually it turned to snow which floated and swirled in a white mass around him.

"Gran'-muther's fethrin' the ducks agen!" he chuckled to himself.

The knee had been right, and it now pained him somewhat as he dotted and carried onwards, but 'the Rest' soon came into sight. Feeling rather like Scott, he tucked his chin further into his muffler, and strode out as best he could in a final effort to reach the warmth, sanctuary and friendship he knew lay within its walls.

The murmer of voices reached his ears as he opened the door. "'ello Tommy. Tek yer jaket off. You must be welly frowz ter jeth."

Other voices of friendship came to him across the room, and after hanging his outdoor clothes on the hooks provided, he fetched himself a cup of hot tea and found himself a chair next to Billy. Self-conciously, he rubbed his knee for minutes; the legacy was always there.

After some general comments about the weather, Billy said, "I dey expect yow ter cum in this," his hand describing an undefined arc in the general direction of the windows. "I nowd yow wanted ter 'ear the praycher terday, but I thort thowd 'nee ood keep you in."

Tommy rubbed his knee again. "Thort I'd better cum," he said. His voice trailed away and his eyes misted as his mind spanned tens of years in a moment. His fingers caressed the medals on his guard. Then he smiled and looking at Billy he said, "I con always pray for the Villa!!"

And they smiled together, but Billy knew what he meant, and why.

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Tramways of the Black Country

THE first permanent street railway or tramway was opened in Paris in 1855, and in 1860 the first tramway in England opened in Birkenhead. The period 1870 to 1914 was the golden age of the tramway and it greatly affected the nature and growth of urban communities, "*for with this revolutionary instrument of travel, the mass transport*-ation of the multitude to their work and pleasure had begun." [1]

The golden age of the tramway was a period during which the Black Country moved from a dependence on coal and iron manufacture in a semi-rural environment to one of manufacturing and rapid urbanization. The development of tramways in the Black Country played a part in enabling the area to adapt successfully to a changing economic environment, and established a basic pattern for public road transportation which remains with us today. It is 100 years since the opening of the first Black Country tramway and public road transport service between Handsworth and Dudley Port, Tipton.

This article describes briefly the rise and fall of the Black Country system, highlighting some factors which contributed to its successes and shortcomings. These factors are discussed in relation to some of the contempary problems facing public road transport in the area.

Historical Development

The development of tramways in the Black Country [2] was carried out by separate private companies, each of which was authorised by Act of Parliament to construct a particular tramway route and operate a specific service. This procedure was controlled by regulations contained in the 1870 Tramway Act, but there was no overall plan for the development of tramways in the region.

The earliest tramways were horse drawn with services between Snow Hill, Birmingham, and Dudley Port, Tipton (1872-73), Wolverhampton to Tettenhall (1877) and Wolverhampton to Moxley via Bilston (1877) and Dudley to Sedgley (1883).

The days of the horse drawn tram were doomed to failure in the face of competition from steam power which was so much more effective in areas with steep gradients such as those around Sedgley and in the Stour Valley side of the Black Country. There were however considerable difficulties to be overcome before steam-powered trams were introduced into the area, particularly the time-consuming task of agreeing operating regulations and the establishment of fuel and water depots.

The first steam powered tram in Britain began operating in

Wantage, Berkshire in 1876, but it was not until the early 1880s that the first steam trams began operating in the Black Country. A steam tram began operations from Wolverhampton (Queen's Square) to Tettenhall in 1881, replacing the earlier horse tram. In the period 1883-6 the earlier horse trams were converted and a number of new lines were opened under steam power, including services which linked Stourbridge, Walsall, Birmingham and Dudley via Oldbury.

Within less than a decade another technological innovation led to changes in the Black Country tramway system. This time it was the use of electric power to provide traction for the tram cars and the first electric trams in the Black Country began operating between Wednesbury and Bloxwich via Pleck and Darlaston, and Walsall via Pleck, early in 1893. The tram depot at Pleck can still be seen standing in front of the James Bridge Copper Works on the Walsall Road. Some six years passed before any further development of electric tramways. This delay was due to a combination of technical and administrative factors. The electrification of the Black Country Tramway system did, however, develop rapidly from 1899 to 1907, and by 1910 the Black Country had developed the largest narrow guage (3ft. 6ins.) electric tramway system in Britain.

Organisation and Tramway Development

Two factors can be highlighted in determining the pattern of tramway development in the Black Country. Firstly, the rapid developments in technology at the end of the nineteenth century saw the application of horse, steam and electric power to tram traction. To some extent tramway development on the western side of the Black Country was restricted as a result of steep gradients, and it was never as extensive as on the eastern side.

Technical problems delayed electrification and extension of the Black Country Tramways in the 1890s. During this period there was considerable disagreement about what form of electric traction was best. There were two methods of carrying the electric power, one using surface transmission, the other overhead power through cables suspended from centre or side poles. The latter was eventually adopted for the Black Country, apart from some operations in Wolverhampton.

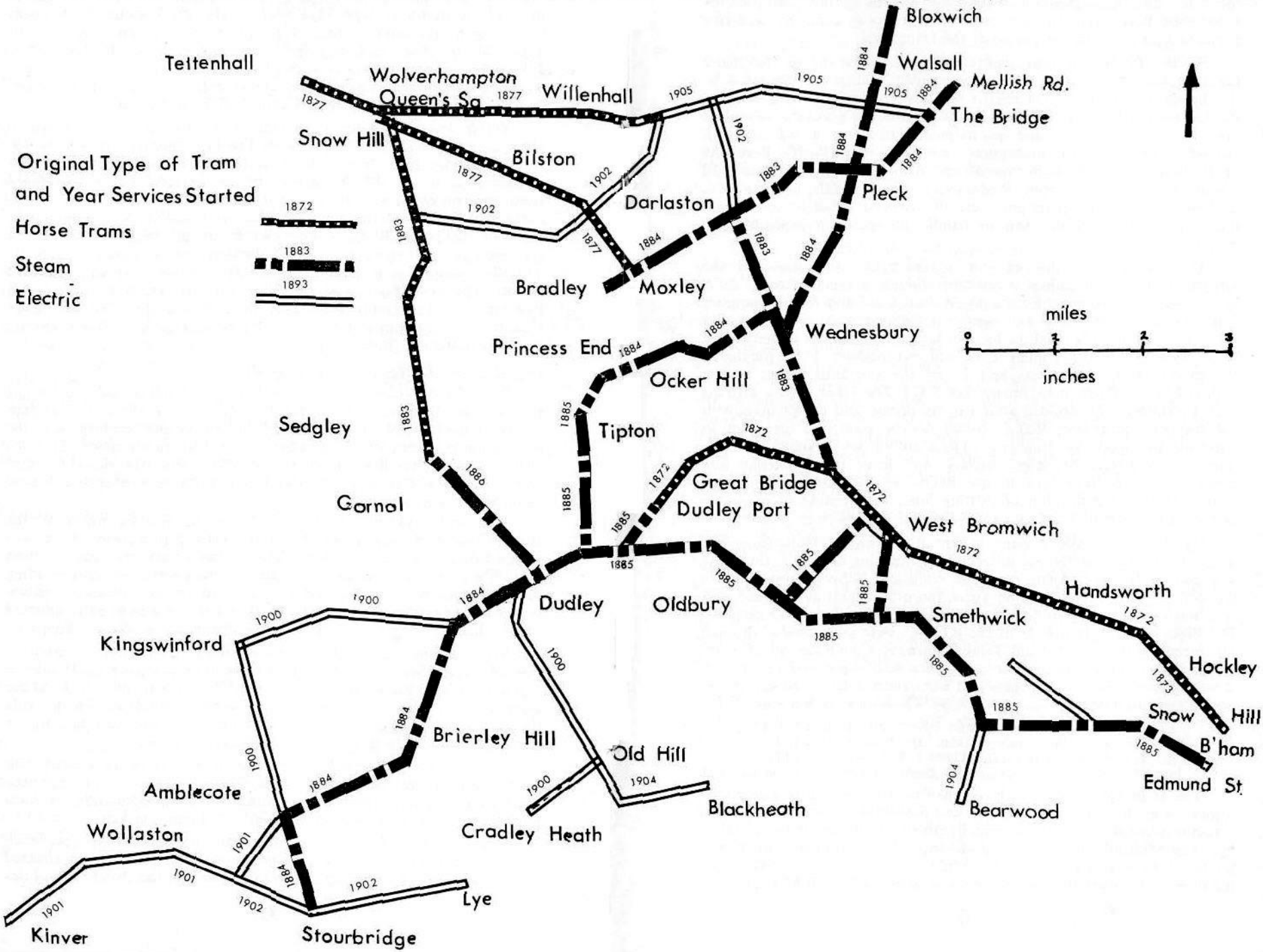
The electrification of tramways involved considerable reconstruction of streets, and some difficulties arose in negotiating canal bridges especially where the promoters wished to install a double track. Other engineering problems arose in areas of mining subsidence which made the construction of new tramways extremely difficult and this was a particular problem in the Princess End area of Tipton.

The second and probably the most important factor contributing to the delayed electrification of Black Country tramways was the combination of separate tramway companies, a complex pattern of local government and the provisions of the 1870 Tramway Act.

The Tramway Act was important, in-so-much that it gave each local authority an absolute veto on new routes and all newly constructed lines were subject to compulsory purchase by the local authorities

Fig 1

MAP OF BLACK COUNTRY TRAMWAY SYSTEM



through whose area they ran, within six months of the expiration of twenty-one years from the time when the tramway company was empowered by parliament to construct the tramway.

By the 1890s the futures of tramway development in the Black Country was in a chaotic state. The tramway companies were left in the hopeless position of having to negiotiate separately with each of the local authorities on the questions of compulsory purchase as well as necessary reconstruction and re-equipment of lines associated with electrification. The local authorities comprising the County Boroughs of Dudley, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton and nearly 20 County Districts (e.g. Tipton, Wednesbury, Brierley Hill), had not been in existence for many years and were ill equipped either to co-ordinate tramway development or even to handle the problem expenditiously by themselves.

The outcome of this chaotic administrative situation and the inherent technical difficulties in electrification was a considerable delay in tramway development. Eventually Walsall C.B.[3] and Wolverhampton C.B.[4] decided to purchase and operate integrated tram services within their areas and these formed the basis of later municipal bus undertakings. West Bromwich C.B.,[5] Dudley C.B. and Wednesbury U.D. purchased the tramways in their areas and leased the operating rights to the British Electric Traction Company (B.E.T.C.). The other county districts such as Tipton U.D. decided after lengthy debate and negotiations with the tramway companies that it would not be economic for them to purchase and work the tramways. These authorities arranged with the tramway companies to defer purchase and leave the ownership and operation of the tramways in the hands of the private companies, subject to the electrification of existing lines, the opening of new lines and the provision of satisfactory services and conditions.

By the early 1900s a clear pattern of tramway organization had been established and the reconstruction of existing and new tramways was pushed forward. Apart from the municipal tramways operating in the Walsall and Wolverhampton areas, the other tramways formed part of a single undertaking owned by the British Electric Traction Company. The Black Country tramways of the B.E.T.C. were co-ordinated through the Birmingham and Midland Joint Tramways Committee which comprised representatives from four companies who supervised the day-to-day operations. These companies had been formed from the companies which had promoted the early tramways. They were as follows:—

1. The Birmingham and District Power and Traction Co. Ltd.;
2. The South Staffordshire Tramways (Lessee) Co. Ltd.;
3. The Wolverhampton and District Tramways Co. Ltd.;
4. The Dudley, Stourbridge and District Electric Traction Co. Ltd.

The tram cars of the early companies had been distinguished by colours, e.g., the cars of the Dudley and Stourbridge route were painted a bright mustard yellow but eventually all the tram cars of the Birmingham and Midland Tramways were of identical pattern distinguished only by an unobtrusive pair of initials—" B.D.," " S.S.," " W.D.," " D.S.," on the lower side panel. The conductors and drivers of the B.M.T. all wore

uniforms marked B.M.T. and in later years interchanged tram cars and tickets.

The separate development of tram services by the municipal bus undertakings of Walsall, Wolverhampton, and the B.M.T has left a lasting impression on the pattern of public road transport in the Black Country. Although West Bromwich began operating municipal bus services in the late 1920s and purchased from the B.E.T.C. their workings in West Bromwich, the B.E.T.C. tramway network formed the basis of the existing Midland Red Bus operations while the municipal operations formed the basis of the existing Passenger Transport Authority bus services.

Local Authority Involvement

The authorities who decided to purchase and operate tram services gained experience in the planning and management of a complex public service and its relationship to other local government interests. This was associated with the acquisition of specialist staff to manage the transport and engineering aspects of the tramways.

The local authorities which had a leasing arrangement with the tramway companies, or had left the ownership and operations of the tramways in the hands of the companies, had more difficult administrative problems. Although these authorities were not in control of the tramway operations they maintained a watchdog role on the services offered by the tram companies, and from time to time carried out joint works with the companies in connection with reconstruction of the tramways. These works were often associated with the development of electric street lighting.

Many local authorities put pressure on the tramway company to develop new routes and Tipton Council even carried out a special origin and destination survey of pedestrians using the route of a proposed tramway between Great Bridge and Ocker Hill. But this was never constructed. The authorities also maintained a close interest in the standard of tram services and conditions, particularly the provision of special trams for workmen and cheap workmens' tickets which could be used in the afternoons, mornings and evenings, so as to cater for the needs of shift workers .

The question of the safety of pedestrians and the speed of trams through busy areas was also closely watched by councils. At one time Tipton council was particularly concerned with the environmental impact of trams and requested the tramway company to replace the Rowley Granite sets with wooden blocks near a school in Leabrook, so as to reduce the noise outside what was also a place of worship.

Tramway Services About 1910

The end of the Edwardian era saw the route system of the Black Country tramways fully established. In comparison with present-day bus services, the tram services were no-where near so extensive, but on the routes where trams operated the present-day bus services cannot

offer a significantly better service. What is more, the tram services in no way suffered from the delays which result from traffic congestion, or unreliability caused by labour problems which affect bus operators.

Frequency of trams on these main routes was as good as those offered by bus services, although the journey time of trams was somewhat slower than the 'timetable times' of the bus. The speeds of trams were restricted by speed limits of between 5-10 m.p.h. set by the local authorities in relation to standards of safety. The fares on the trams were reasonable in relation to average earnings at the time and in comparison with present day bus fares.

Some examples of pre 1914 service characteristics and fares are given below:—

Route	Frequency Every	Journey Time One Way	Through Fare One Way
Wednesbury to Dudley via Princess End	30 mins.	30 mins.	3½d
Birmingham to Dudley via Oldbury	20 mins.	60 mins.	4½d
Wednesbury to Bloxwich via Pleck	30 mins.	50 mins.	5d
Birmingham to Darlaston via Wednesbury	16 mins.	64 mins.	6½d

In addition to passenger services the tramways offered through-goods and parcels services. The goods or parcels were carried by special rolling stock or by scheduled passenger trams towing a goods wagon. The rates for these services were cheaper and the transit of goods much quicker than by the local railways. Is there a case for linking existing bus operations, and postal services in the Black Country?

Tramway Companies

The personalities who formed the tramway companies, particularly the executive officers; their motives and administrative arrangements, is a field of interest in its own right when linked to the wider field of the role of capital and entrepreneurship in the economic development of the Black Country. It is certainly true that the members of the early companies were not all local people, although some had connections with the business and social life of the area. The influence of outside personalities increased in the later years of the tramway era with the activities of the B.E.T.C. There are many accounts of jounrneys to London by local councillors to negotiate arrangements with the secretary of the B.E.T.C.

The Black Country tramway companies demonstrated considerable administrative and technical initiative at two points during the tramway era. The first occurred in the middle of the 1880s and was associated with the introduction of steam power and the opening of a number of new routes. At this time the Dudley and Stourbridge Steam Company devised an interesting incentive bonus scheme for drivers and conductors which it hoped would increase patronage. This scheme involved the payment of a basic wage of 16s-0d per week for conductors and £1-6s-0d for drivers. These basic rates were increased by a sliding scale of bonuses based on the average number of passengers carried per month. The company advised their staff that it would be in their best interest to look out for and to carry as many passngers as possible. All efforts were made to give the conductors unrestricted opportunities for spotting passengers and collecting fares.

The second period of innovation by the tramway companies followed the administrative chaos of the 1890s. The early 1900s saw the introduction of a variety of tram car designs all aimed at attracting patronage and maintaining profits. The companies became actively involved in the engineering side of tram car design and the B.M.T. developed at Tividale, a central depot for tram maintainance.

Impact of the Tramways on Black Country Life

The tramways produced an important change in the accessibility of economic opportunity in the Black Country. The labour force were provided with a wider choice of workplaces and businesses were given access to a larger population which contributed to economic growth. The time which had previously been spent walking to work was now available to be spent in additional work or recreation. The pattern of shopping changed and centres with tram services prospered. The tramways also opened up for development those areas between the townships which up to that time had remained open. This stimulated ribbon development and the urbanization of the Black Country.

Trams provided a means for the clergy and school managers to introduce children to new places. During the summer months, trams carried children on outings to Kinver, the Lickey Hills and Dudley Castle. The traditional Black Country Sports of coursing, dog racing and pigeon flying were also affected by the tramways. The tram provided greater mobility and brought about intensification of these recreational pastimes. In his 'History of Tipton,'[6] Hackwood describes how men from the Five Ways area of Tipton used the tram to travel to the coursing events at Leabrook outside Wednesbury. It seems that the Tipton men were 'naturally rough' and at the slightest provocation from the conductor would set their dogs at him. The trams were also used by men to train their pigeons, putting their homers off the tram at different points on the route.

End of the Tramway Era

During the first world war the tramways were hopelessly overworked. Tracks were neglected, and there was insufficient labour and material to carry out the repairs. The relentless impact of the war

enfeebled the tramway and the post war period found the Black Country tramways in a pitifully inadequate state in a rapidly changing environment. The motor bus, coupled with the growth of population away from the old town centres and main routes, contributed to the abandonment of the tramways. Most of the Black Country tramways ceased operations between 1926 and 1930 and were replaced and extended by bus services operated by Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton Corporations and the Midland Red.

Conclusions

The rise and fall of the Black Country tramways explains many of the shortcomings of the existing pattern of bus services. These inadequacies include the lack of through-routes and the integration of services and fare structures; the inflexibility of services and of co-ordination with local authority planning and statutory services.

The bus operators of today might learn much from the marketing attitude of the tramway companies, while local politicians might learn from the keen interest of local authorities at the turn of the century in the maintainance of agreed standards of service. This last point must mean that eventually public road transport in the Black Country must be in the hands of an elected body in touch with and responsible to the community.

REFERENCES:

[1] In the foreward to "Great Britain Tramway Networks," W. H. Brett and J. C. Gwilliam, 2nd Ed. 1944.
[2] Tramways of the Black Country, Webb, 1954.
[3] The transport undertaking of Walsall Corporation was first established in January, 1901 as a result of the Walsall Corporation Act of 1900 by which Walsall Council was enabled to purchase certain tramway routes from the South Staffordshire Tramway Company.
[4] The transport undertaking of Wolverhampton Corporation was first established in May, 1900 when the Wolverhampton Council purchased certain tramways from the Wolverhampton Tramway Company Ltd.
[5] The transport undertaking of West Bromwich Corporation was first established in January, 1902 when the West Bromwich Council purchased certain tramways from the South Staffordshire Tramway Company, but the council did not operate services itself until September, 1914.
[6] 'A History of Tipton,' F. W. Hackwood, 1891.

FILM NIGHT, FEBRUARY 10th, DUDLEY TECHNICAL COLLEGE

(admission free)

Films to be shown are all of local origin and include : "Lucy Woodall, Chainmaker" . . . ."Buttons and Sew On" . . . "The Glorious 1st of June" (granting the freedom of Halesowen to the Worcester Regiment), and "Whippet Racing at Cradley Heath."

Black Country Society Winter Programme on page 5

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Fee £1.70. R. J. Robinson, M.A.
10 meetings, Tuesdays, 7.30 p.m., January 11, at the Central Library, St. James's Road.

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10 meetings, Tuesdays, 7.30 p.m., January 11, at the Central Library, St. James's Road.

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10 meetings (including two field visits), Mondays, 7.30 p.m., January 10, at the College of Adult Education, Old Hall Street.
Also on Wednesdays, 7.30 p.m., January 12, at the Teachers' Training College, Walsall Street, Wolverhampton.

CHARTRES : Portrait of a Cathedral*. Fee £1.70. M. Miller, B.A.
10 meetings, Mondays, 7.30 p.m., January 10. Meeting place to be arranged.

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J. Ruffle, M.A., and J. D. Ray, M.A.
10 meetings, Thursdays, 7.30 p.m., April, 1972. Meeting place to be arranged.

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* Enquiries regarding these courses should be made to Mrs. Joan Cattell, Joint Committee Offices, c/o W.E.A., 9/11 Digbeth, Birmingham 5.

† Fees for these courses are payable to the College of Adult Education, Old Hall Street, Wolverhampton.

Except for courses marked * and †, enquiries and enrolments should be addressed to the Department of Extramural Studies, University of Birmingham, P.O. Box 363, Birmingham B15 2TT. Tel.: 021-472 1301. Ext. 749.

Beefsteak and Barley Water

by
J. William Jones

'AH'M what they call a ' breaker-down ' at the Millfield Rolling Mills. Dun ya' know what that is? No? Well ar'll tell ya! An' 'ar won't mek' it tew technical.

Fust' of all, the steel comes into the mill in long bars. These ere bars 'am cut up on the big shears into smaller bars which 'am took along to the furnaces; then when they'me 'ot enough, the ' breaker-down ' and 'is mate puts 'em " threw the mill " so to spake.

The big rolls 'am a spinnin' round all the time, an' sometimes yo' stands in front 'on 'em an' thinks " What if 'ar was to slip an' get catched an' goo' threw an' come out t'other side as flat as a poncaerke!" Ma God! It mek's ya backboon bristle just ta' think 'on it.

Anyroad, when the bars 'am 'ot enough me an' me mates we starts 'a puttin' 'em threw, 'an yo' should 'ear the racket when we startin'.

'Ar yanks tew bars out smartish wi' me tongs, and' plays 'em threw from mar side.

Yo' gorra be accarat mind ya! No pushin' 'em threw arseways on or sideways up. Still, yo' gets used to it after a bit. It's the rythm see! Yo' gorra get the swing on it! 'Threw—over; threw—over; tighten up a bit, threw—over; threw—over —and soo' on, till the tew bars 'am stretched out like 'ot putty.

Dun yo' know, them rolls, they grabs the bars outa ya' 'onds, just like a mad dog 'ad grab a piece o mate. Many's the time a young learner as bin that took aback wi' puttin' 'is fust bar threw as he's let the tongs goo' threw 'an all, an split a roll. A clap o thunder 'ay no louder than a roll when it bosts, an' many's the young 'un as 'is put the Mill out of action for 'arf an hour or moor, 'an 'ad 'is ears chewed off by the Mill Manijer besides nearly throwin' a fit wi' the shock 'on it all.

The idea is see, to roll the bars into sheets. When me 'an me mate 'as got the bars stretched an' flattened soo far, they'm put together to mek what they callin' a ' pack '. It's these 'ere ' packs ' as 'am rolled out inta the proper sheets, but that's done by the top-flight rollers like Billy Flavell and 'Arry Amphlett.

Dun yo' know, 'arve seen 'Arry an' his mates run a pack 'o sheets threw the rolls wi' no moor than a width 'o tissue paerper 'aich side. Perfect! Some 'on 'em born tew it, ya see!

Mind yo', if it wor for the beer, yo' coundna keep gooin on a job like mine. Yo' sweats buckets what wi' the heat an' the weight yo'me hondlin' all the time. Yo' gorra put back what comes out on ya.

Now wearter aye a bit o use! It just gos' right threw ya. But beer! Ah, now beer! Beer sets ya up somehow. Yo' feel yo' can keep

gooin on beer.

Ar reckon on drinkin' about ten pints a day. 'Ar usually as it from 'The Forge,' that's a pub just down the road from the Mill. The kid fatches it in a bag. It's 'ome brewed down theer.

'Ome brewed suits mar stomach. Now that theer bottled stuff as they meckin', well, if I 'ave any 'o that ar'm all wind and wearter for days after. 'Arm certain sure it was the bottled stuff as did me in about a munth agoo. Ar back yo' ar wus off work above tew wicks.

GASSY STUFF

The kid as usually fetches me beer was away bad, soo daft ode Solly Joones fatches it, but instead o' gooin ta 'The Forge,' he trairpses off up the 'Crown an' Dolphin' an' comes back wi' four big bottles 'o this 'ere gassy stuff. Well, I atta drink it, but I aya kiddin' yo', it fair ruined mar stomach. Ar was a belchin' an' a gawpin' all that day. An' next day, 'ar wouldna ate nothin'. 'Ar was a throwin' up all the while.

Well, I atta goo up to see old Doctor Millichamp at Sedgfield—'arm on 'is books see!—and 'e dae arf get stuck inta me!

Mind yo', these 'ere doctors, thame all the sairm! So sure yo' goo round an' say yo' aye feelin' up to the mark, the fust question they askin' ya is 'How much beer dun ya drink?'

Ar told old Millichamp as I 'ad about ten pints on account o' me work. Well, 'is glasses slipped down 'is nose a bit at that, an' 'e looked at me as tho' ard struck 'im.

"Ten pints!" he says, blinkin' a bit, an' lookin' at 'is fingers. "Let me see, now—five and a half working days—that's well over fifty pints between Monday morning and Saturday dinner."

Then 'ar chips in an 'ar told 'im as wick-ends 'ar usually 'ad a drap moor—p'raps twelve pints of a Saturday all to'd, but on'y 'leven of a Sunday, seein' as 'ow it was a day o' rest.

"God love us!" says 'e. "That's over seventy pints for a whole week."

Well, 'ard never reckoned it up like that, me not being a scholard like 'im, but ar couldna understand why 'e was lookin' at me as tho' ar was a prize pig on a butcher's winder.

Presently, 'e says summat as fair maird me 'air stand on end.

"Do you know you're killin' yourself? 'e says "You're committing suicide!" 'e says.

"What dun ya' mean, doctor?" 'ar says, me throat all tight.

"It's ya' kidneys and liver!" says he "You're working them to death. They're doing overtime to cope with with all this beer, and if you don't ease up, they'll go on strike, and that'll be the end of you."

Well, I 'ad ta sit down at that, an' the sweat started to bile outa me.

"Doe say that, doctor!" 'ar says "Why 'arm on'y twenty-five. I aye in me prime yet!"

"No, and you're never likely to be !" says he, lookin' over 'is specs agen. "Your kidneys and liver will never stand the pace."

Well, ard never gid me kidneys 'an liver a thought afore. Ar just took it 'ow when the good Lord gid me me bits 'an pieces as they'd last fer ever. Yo' caw trust nobody con yer?"

"What shall 'ar dew doctor?" ar says, all of a tremble.

"Stop drinking beer!" he says.

"But 'ar caw work without it!" ar says.

"Nonsense!" he says "What you want is beefsteaks and barley water."

Well, fer a minute 'ar thought 'e was a jokin'.

"Barley wearter?" ar says. "That's what they gin invalids ter drink aye it?"

"Quite so!" says he "It's the finest stuff in the world for replacing body fluid, and it does your insides a power of good."

"Well arm bosted!" ar says, "Beefstakes 'an barley wearter. Would ya credit it?"

'That's right!" says he "Have a beefsteak for breakfast with three boiled eggs if you like, and three glasses of barley water, the same again at midday and once more at night. But no beer—just barley water!"

"Ar doe know what me mates 'll say" ar says "They'll loff theyre britches off."

"Let em!" says 'e "You'll have the laugh on them one of these fine days."

DIFFERENT MON

Well, ar did what the doctor toed me, an' dun yo' know ar was a different mon! After about a wik on beefsteaks and barley wearter ar dae need a mate. Ar felt as though ar cud dew the lot meself.

Why, if ard a let meself goo, ar cud a pushed the bars threw, dashed round th' other side, pushed 'em over an' bin back mar side ta catch 'em again. Yo' wouldn't credit it wudja?

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Me mates loffed like 'ell at fust when they sid me swiggin' the barley wearter, but it dae matter, and it wor long after afore summat 'appened as put a damper on 'em.

About a wick after, 'Arry Amphlett drapped jed just as 'e was 'angin 'is bag up in the 'cubby hole.' They carried 'im out by the 'cut' thinkin' eed on'y passed out, but 'e wus a gonner, an' when they cum ta dew this 'ere postman's mortar on 'im they reckoned as 'ow 'is kidneys an' liver 'ad jacked in wi' tew much beer.

It maerd we think ar can tell ya, an' me mates dae loff no moor.

They all started on the barley wearter after that, an' dun yo' know, we'd all got that much goo in we as we butties dae atta dew much, an' the Manijment wun all for mackin' 'em redundant. Mind-

ja! we wor gooin' ta stand fer that. We called a meetin' o the Union down at 'The Forge,' ta thrash it all out.

Old Jackie Flypaerper, that's what we callin' the landlord down at 'The Forge,' 'e was proper chuffed about we 'avin' the meetin' down theer. He'd gone down the nick a lot lairtly, we gooin' on the barley wearter. He reckoned 'e couldna mak a goo on it no moor.

Well, while we wus theer we all 'ad a drap o beer just to 'elp ode Jackie out a bit. But would yo' believe it! We not 'avin' the usual 'um brewed off 'im 'e 'adn't bin brewin' sa much, an' 'e'd 'ad ta get some o that theer gassy stuff in. Well, I 'ad about twelve pints, an' next day ar wus theer agen—throwin' up all over the plairce.

'SLOBBER-CHOPS'

Ar dae fancy gooin' ta Doctor Millichamp again 'cos ar knew as 'ow eed gimme a proper thrairpin this time, but as luck would 'ave it, as ar wus a clockin' out, ar copped sight o old Doctor Brown smokin' his pipe an talkin' ta 'Slobber-chops' the gate-keeper.

"Good Lord, Sid lad!" says 'e. "You're looking very seedy. You're not half the chap you used to be!"

Well, me knees went like jelly an I 'ad to 'ode on to the gate to stop me from drappin' down theer and then.

"Soo ar toed 'im everythin', an 'ow ode Doctor Millichamp 'ad toed me to goo onta beefsteaks and barley wearter.

He looked at me fer a bit, then 'e bosted out a-loffin. "Beefsteaks and barley water!" 'e says, and loffs a bit moor. Well, the beefsteaks are all right—but the barley water! Can't understand old Millichamp!"

"Oh, he's all right doctor! I aye sayin' nothink against Doctor Millichamp!"

"No no! Quite so!" says Doctor Brown. "Doctor Millichamp is a fine doctor, but I can't understand 'im prescribing barley water for a chap like you. You're not the type Sid!"

"Ar doe get ya, doctor!" ar says.

"Well, it's like this!" 'e says. "You're the coarse grained type. Made for good strong work. Like—well—if I can give you an example—you're more of a Samson than an Apollo."

"Now look 'ere, Doctor!" ar says, feelin' me pluck risin' "I aye bein' sweared at by nobody, not even yo!"

"All right Sid!" he says. "Never mind that now! Just you get off that barley water right away and start drinking good honest beer."

"But look 'ere Doctor!" ar says "It's supposed ta be the beer what's laid me up! An' worrabout 'Arry Amphlett?" ar says, "It wus the beer what finished 'im off!"

"Quite so, quite so!" he says, "But there's beer and beer, Sid. It's this home-brewed stuff that's no good to you. Not properly refined—full of impurities.

"Oh, ar dae know there was any o them in it Doctor!" ar says.

"It's alive with them!" he says "What you want to drink is the bottled stuff straight from the breweries, where they know all about refining."

Well, what would yo' dew, I asks ya! One says one thing an' one another. Mar yed's fair gooin

round with it all.

Anyroad, arm on the bottled stuff reg'lar now. Ten pints a day arm drinkin' an' arm gettin' yewsed to it a bit. It meks me belch tho'. Still, yo' caw 'ear that when weem a puttin' the bars threw.

An ode Jackie Flypaerper at 'The Forge,' 'ees a new mon these days. 'Ees stopped brewin' 'ees own altogether, an' 'ees 'ard put to it ta get enough bottled stuff in for we lot.

Doctor Brown was in theer th' other night an all, an' he dae arf seem pleased ta see we all swiggin' it down. 'E trayted we all, and 'im and Jackie Flypaerper kep' shearkin' 'onds an' winkin' at one another as tho' they'd got something up their sleeves as wus ticklin 'em something' crooel.

JOE AND THE ANGEL

Rennervaisshun ov the chairch—this 'ad gorra be dun.
Sum 'ard wairkin Blackcountrymen on the job begun.
Joe, 'e wuz the carpinter, an' wuz 'ommerin a nail
Wen suddinly, 'e 'it 'is thum—'e day arf cuss an wail!

The vicar standin' in the chairch, unnotissed by the men,
Thort langwij such as this in chairch mus' not be 'eerd agen.
This vicar—a ventrilerkwist—fine sairmunz 'e cud praych
Dissidid tew throw aht 'is vise a lessun, Joe, ter taych.

A stachew ov an aynjul, standin near ter Joe,
Appeered ter spake an' say tew 'im: " Now betta yo shud know,
Fer swairin in theez 'oly worls—ah think yo shud repent
An find sum uther methud fer yer feelins tew gi vent."

Joe looked up ashtonisht, 'is mahth wuz opun wide.
'E thort that 'e wuz dreemin—soo off 'e tuk ahtside
The vicar then went aht ter Joe wi a twinkle in 'is eye,
An sed, " Ah notiss yo've stopped wairkin, praps yo'd tell me why?"

Joe then tode the vicar, ow th' aynjul's vise 'eed 'eerd,
An cudn't understand it—it reelly wuz mos' wierd!
The vicar sed: " Th' aynjul's theer ter see an 'ear no rung
An wo allow bad langwij ter flow frum enny tung."

" Ah cor understand it vicar," sed Joe in 'is reply.
" Cuz it day spake this mornin, an now ahm wundrin why.
There wuz noweer tew 'ang me jackit up, it day seem ter mind
Wen ah went an nocked a six inch nail rite in it's be'ind."

Kate Fletcher.

A FIRM HOLD ON THE TRADE

Story of
E. Wood & Sons
Lye

By G. Stevens
K. Fellows

IN the 1880s, the Wood family lived at Lye Cross, where they carried on business as anvil makers (Bache's Motor Works now stands on the site of the works). At this time anvil making was one of the staple industries of Lye. The head of the family spent much of his money on drink, however, and was forced through financial difficulties to seek employment elsewhere. He obtained a job at Ludlow's in Pedmore Road making handles for various items of holloware. Later, his son, Elijah, joined him. A disagreement with one of the bosses prompted Mr. Wood, senior, to leave for work in Ireland. When established there, he sent for Elijah who departed, leaving his wife, Alice, at home in Lye, having "put her back with her father." Elijah Wood was to return and start his own business.

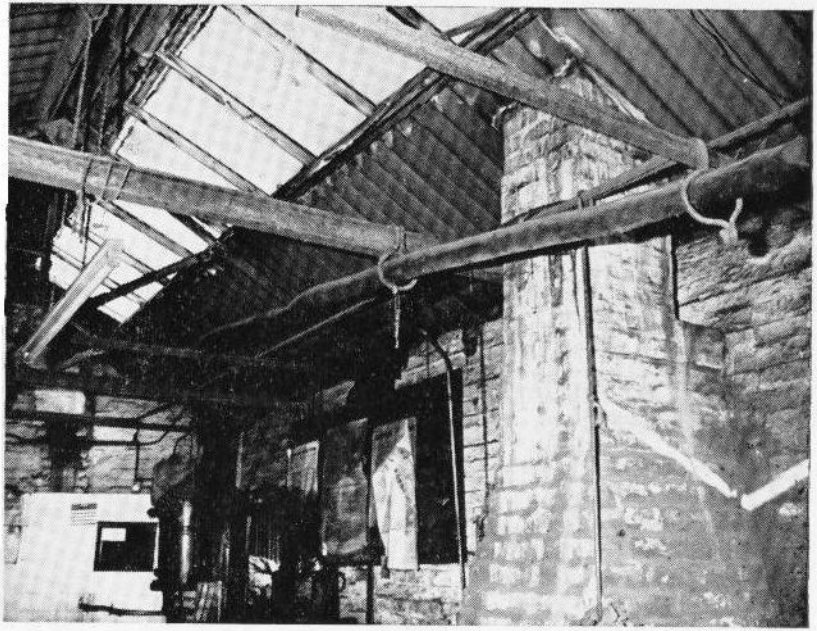
Elijah's wife, Alice (nee Cochrane), was herself well schooled in industry. She was brought up, one of 15 (12 sons and 3 daughters), in Park Street, Lye. After a childhood of illness, (fluid on the lungs prevented her from learning how to walk until the age of ten and it was at eleven that she first went to school), she started work in 1898 at Butler and Hickman's at Cradley. She was aged 13.

The firm made buckets, dustbins and watering cans, and it was Alice's job to groove the sheet metal so that a good seal could be made when the vessel was riveted. She remembers doing 196 dozen buckets for 3/6d. (17½ new pence). She sometimes riveted them as well, although this was a man's job and one that the other girls refused to do. But then, she couldn't refuse her brother George, who was the foreman!

There was in fact two works, the Top Works and the Bottom Works, and George was foreman at the former, whilst another brother, Tom, did the same job at the latter. The sheet metal was cut by a man known as "Billy Half One," and this gentleman did not pay too much attention to rough edges. The cuts and scratches that Alice's hands received due to this prompted her to remonstrate with him, when this had no effect, she promptly blacked both his eyes!

By an indenture of the 9th May, 1884, a plot of land (part of lot 36) situated at Waste Bank, and of 350 sq. yds., was transferred from William Pearson, late of Red Hill House, Stourbridge, and then residing at Green Royde (Road), Pedmore, coalmaster to Thomas Wooldridge of

Bucket handles bent on the instrument attached to the bench



Blacksmith's shop, showing spring poles

Hill Street, Lye. This land was on the corner of the present Crabbe Street and Pearson Street, and conditions of the above transaction included the erection of a fence and the making-up of one half of the new street and footway. The document also refers to a number of past ownership changes dating back to April 1847.

A deed of the 20th December, 1901, records the transfer of the property from John William Thomas of Red Hill, Stourbridge, fine-brick manufacturer; Phoebe Pearson of Red Hill and Samuel Pearson of Hagley Road, to George Wooldridge, frost cog maker, and Major Pardoe of King Street, Wollescote, schoolteacher.

Elijah Wood was to rent this same site from a Mr. Pardoe. The head of the Wooldridge family, (occupants of the site immediately prior to the Wood lease), threw himself into a gas-engine used on the site—a bloody end indeed ! Elijah and his brother Walter (as E. and W. Wood) started making frost cogs in the old blacksmith's shop, as the Wooldridges had done. Walter was to leave later to start his own business. Due to a fall off in demand for cogs, this work was soon superseded by the manufacture of hollow-ware.

G. C. Allen's statement, in his "The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country," that the galvanised hollow-ware trade was concentrated in Cradley and Lye by 1914, shows that the firm was following the trend of the time. Casseroles, frying pan and kettle and bin handles were made, whilst the stable was the scene of ash bucket manufacture for the steamships of the day. The latter were made from angle-iron and were turned in the furnace.

FILLING BOMBS

No. 8 Field Lane, Oldswinford, was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elijah Wood, but they later moved nearer to the works, at Belmont, and finally to the house that still stands today on the works premises. During the first world war, Elijah showed his wife how to make barbed-wire entanglements, but she went on strike after finding out that her friend (in her own words) "had a lovely job, filling bombs, at £8 per week," and she was paid nothing by her husband.

Mrs. Alice Wood recalls that she got up at 4 a.m. each morning to do her washing and cleaning before laying 1,000 barbs a day, her twin sons lying nearby in their carriage. Incidentally, the barbed wire was transported by horse and cart to The Hayes and the horse almost always stopped on the way and refused to budge. Because the horse had been known to kick Mr. Wood and to bite his brother Walter, George Crump, the cart driver, sent a plea for help and Mrs. Wood was despatched to the scene.

Elijah Wood worked hard in his forge and regularly consumed six large bottles of beer before work to sustain him through a day of heat and toil. His leisure time, besides an occasional visit to a cricket match, was spent with his brother-in-law, George Cochrane, who he would meet on the corner opposite the works for a chat, before walking up to Oldnall—calling in at the **Hare and Hounds** on the way back. A

favourite outing of the pair was a walk to Clent, where it is said they often downed twenty pints before their return.

Elijah Wood, junior, was born in the house at the works in 1919. Known to everyone as 'Reggie,' Mr. Wood now runs the family business. He remembers how he and his brother used to bundle up the frost cogs on the kitchen table when school was over for the day. He did not go into the business when he left school, but became an apprentice at Lucas in Birmingham. When his mother was nursing his father during the three years prior to his death, his eldest brother, Walter, helped to run the factory. It was Walter's plans that brought 'Reggie' into the family business. For Walter left to start up on his own, making bucket handles.

SPRING POLES

When we visited the works in September, 1971, Mr. 'Reggie' Wood showed us the old blacksmith's shop where production had started. Seven blacksmiths used to work in the shop, but today only two hearths are used. In the past, spring-poles were used on the hammers (two gross of handles being made at the Oliver in a day, where today 35 gross can be made on a press in the same time). These ash poles are still in place and Mr. Wood recalls that they were three feet lower down at the end of the week, due to continual usage, and had to be let "off the hooks" at the weekend, to recuperate.

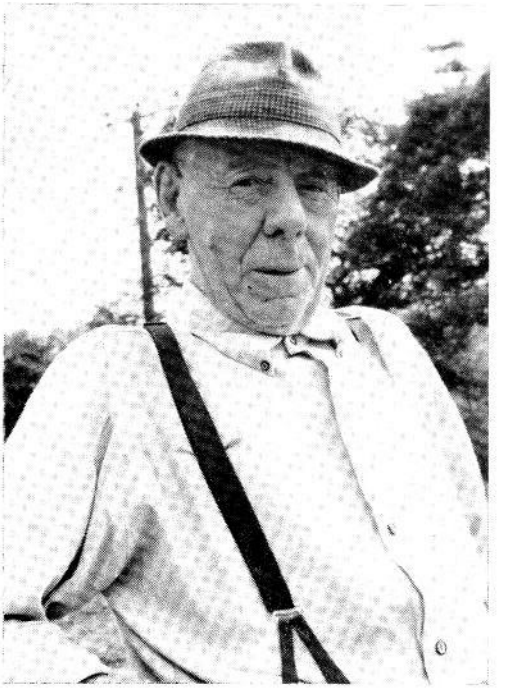
The blacksmith's shop was rebuilt after the last war. The lighting of the factory has developed from candles, through periods of Tilly lamps and gas light, to electricity, though some of the gas-lights are still in place and have been found useful during power cuts. Gas-engines have been used to drive the machinery in the past.

Although there are modern presses and machines at the works, some old methods are used along with the new. Apart from the work still carried out in the blacksmith's shop, bucket handles still have to be bent by hand, there being no press available. The fluted iron used for these handles is no longer rolled by the suppliers and has to be fluted after delivery.

Today, handles are made for frying pans, kettles, bins and buckets and bucket ears are also manufactured. Moving with the times, steel handles are made for heavy duty plastic buckets and for the lids of plastic dustbins. The sites (there are two, known as the Crabbe St. and Pearson St. sites respectively, though adjacent to each other and for practical purposes one unit) contain a blacksmith's shop, press shop machine shop, barrelling department, office and the house.

Mrs. Alice Wood, now 86, remembers the hard times of the past and although today Mr. 'Reggie' Wood is still very much a working boss, it can be said that the Wood's, with their handles, have indeed got a firm hold on the trade.

(Information sources: Mrs. A. Wood, Mr. 'Reggie' Wood, and Mr. John Cave).



JOE BEASLEY

—66 years at White House Farm

A BLACK COUNTRY FARMER

By PETER BARNSLEY

THE scattered hamlet of Lutley, outflanked as it is by Cradley on one side and Halesowen on the other, still manages to preserve its own separate and distinct identity. It rests on the side of a shallow valley of a tiny tributary of the River Stour. At the valley's northern end, Lutley Mill and its attendant cottages stand in a quiet circle of trees. At the southern end there are three old farmhouses which have stood there for so long that they seem to be a part of the natural landscape. Add to these a couple of small cottages and you have completed the inventory of Lutley's buildings. Set as it is among hedged fields, it is difficult to regard Lutley as even remotely part of the Black Country. But Lutley Mill is less than a mile and a half from Cradley Heath's bustling Five Ways Road Junction.

Lutley's oldest inhabitant, but still one of its most active, is Joe Beasley, who came to live there when he was seven years old, 66 years ago. He was born at Two Gates Farm, Cradley, on 6 June, 1898. This farm has long since been demolished and its land built upon. When Joe was five, his parents moved to a farm at Care-

less Green, Wollescote. This farmland, too, has now been built over, though the farmhouse still stands. In 1905 Joe came with his parents to White House Farm, Lutley, where he still lives and farms. His fields stretch northwards to Lutley Mill, and are spread on either side of an unmade narrow track which is reputed to date back at least as far as the Middle Ages. Its dusty surface may even have been powdered by contemporaries of Chaucer's pilgrims; ox-carts may have sunk in its winter mud.

Joe Beasley now drives his cows along it, as his predecessors no doubt did, with the practical eye of the farmer. His interest in its past really starts only from 1911 when he left school at thirteen and immediately went to work on his father's farm. The farm also employed a waggoner, a cowman, and a milkman who helped with the milking and took the milk out twice a day in a horse-drawn cart. The milk was ladled out from a churn in a pint measure; from cow to customer without benefit of the Milk Marketing Board!

WASSELL GROVE

Joe married in 1925, and his father moved to nearby Grange Farm, leaving him to run White House Farm, to be assisted in due time by Reg and Ray, his twin sons. He bought the freehold of the land in 1954, and in 1959 he made the farm into a limited company. In addition to his own 62 acres in Lutley, he also farms 68 acres at Wassell Grove and a further nine acres which were once part of the old Lutley Mill Farm. About fifty two acres of this land provide pasture for his seventy cows.

The changes that Joe Beasley has seen in his lifetime of farming are mostly the ones common to farmers all over the country. He has long replaced all the horses on the farm; his first tractor was bought in 1941 after he had obtained the permit necessary in wartime. The permit was a symptom of another great change, most noticeable since 1939; the appearance of the bureaucrat whose forms have had to be completed in ever-increasing numbers, mostly in the matter of farming subsidies.

The use of pesticides has been another development; and the use of herbicides too—" We had to hoe all the weeds out before." The combine harvester and the all-electric milking parlour are other novelties abhorrent to the romantic but benevolent to the farmer.

In crop-growing, the main change as far as White House Farm is concerned has been the introduction of barley, grown as cattle food. (Some of Joe's barley is occasionally sold to breweries if the buyer approves after he has rubbed, sniffed and generally cross-examined it). Wheat, oats, potatoes, mangolds and swedes have always been grown. Joe also used to grow one acre of vetch—" . . . with a few oats to keep 'em up. I used to cut 'em with a scythe and feed 'em to the cows."

Joe Beasley's fortunes have varied. In 1929, he was trying to get rid of potatoes at 35/- a ton; the depression years were as bad for farmers as for others. The most prosperous period, ironically, was the second world war when food supplies were as vital as munitions.

Even more ironic is the fact that Joe Beasley's greatest prosperity

Lutley about 1911. Land in background now part of Hasbury Estate. Machine: grass mower adapced for bundling corn. Colley Gate helpers followed behind tying up bundles. Left to right: T. Billingham, S. Beasley, —. Robins, J. Beasley, Snr., with little girl Rose Beasley, J. Turley, J. Gomery, O. Beasley, and J. Beasley, Jnr. (subject of this article). Figure in background unidentified.

could come, not from farming the land, but from selling it—the third farm that Joe has lived on might go the way of the other two and be built on. In 1959, one local builder paid him £1,500 for a ten year option on the land should it be re-zoned. The option expired with the land still precariously in the Green Belt, though anyone buying a similar option now might well have a safer bet. White House Farm itself is fairly safe; it is Classified Grade Two on a statutory list of protected buildings (it was probably built in the 16th Century) and cannot be demolished without Ministerial consent.

LUTLEY WEDGE

Joe Beasley's farm forms part of what is known as the Lutley Wedge —a strip of green between the Hasbury Estate in Halesowen and the Fatherless Barn Estate in Cradley. Some land on the borders of the Hasbury Estate has already been re-zoned and will be built on —closing in a pincer movement on Joe Beasley's land. He views the possible disappearance of his farm with equanimity. The presence of so many people so close to it has made farming it more difficult anyway. Heedless of their good fortune in having so much countryside right on their doorsteps, they use the farmland "like a playing field." Fences are broken and crops trampled in discouraging displays of vandalism.

To any tidy-minded planner, armed with a ruler and a pencil, and an urge to straighten out the edges of the conurbation, the temptation to fill in the Lutley Wedge with housing development must be strong indeed. If they succumb to the temptation, the disappearance of this area's previous blend of unlikely contrasts will be complete. It was once possible to start out from Cradley and see, in less than a mile, chainshops, water-mills, mines and farms. The chainshops, mills and mines are already gone. If the farmland goes too, suburbia will have smothered the land completely and Lutley will become just another annexe of just another dormitory suburb. The local worker will have been finally ousted by commuter-man.

Joe Beasley has lived long enough to be fatalistic about the future. He lives from day to day, as all farmers do, in an arduous seven day week, starting work with the dawn (or before it) and stopping work each day only when he has finished or when it is too dark to go on. An active physical existence has kept him fit; his wife and sons are still there to help him, and a trip to Cradley each evening for an hour in the 'Round of Beef' provides convivial relaxation. He has seen little external change in Lutley during his lifetime. If change does come, it will be drastic and final.

Author's footnote: Lutley and Cradley are part of the Borough of Halesowen, and those who collapse in helpless and incredulous laughter at Halesowen's claims to be part of 'rural Worcestershire' might well take a stroll over the 'Lutley Wedge'. That Halesowen is strongly linked with the Black Country is the truth. But not the whole truth.

Introducing a new poet to these pages—
David Calcutt

— CREATION —

For three thousand years King Minos
Leapt the haunch of the bull.
For three thousand years King Minos
Went into the arena, stripped himself down to his bone
And prepared to meet the onslaught of muscle
And black flesh, burning eyes.
For three thousand years Minos, the King,
Performed feats of magnificence, balancing
Himself on the back of the bull,
Slipping easy between the sharp horns,
Running headlong at Death, leaping,
And fell safely across on the other side.
For three thousand years Minos danced the bull-dance,
Always the same,
The terror, the twitch, the dive, the defeat.

And then, one day, the last of the feast,
Minos, the man, as he drove slowly between the horns,
Looked down,
And there, in the red eye, saw smoke and furnaces,
Fires and burning skies.
He saw chimneys breathing darkness, and with that
The clash of metal, the roar of steel,
The churning of the earth into deep pits.
And from there the ring of steel on rock,
The faces of men tortured with polluted air,
With thickened air.
In the eye of the bull the man saw
How earth would become, a place of furnace and fire,
Of fire and furnace, how men would dissolve into rock.

And seeing, he toppled, fell backwards, and with a gargle
Dropped beneath the bull's hooves,
Pounding his body like pistons.

Hymn to the Furnace and the Fire

This is the place where lives were forged,
Hopeless of eternity, beaten from rock,
To stand as ragged skylines of cruel towers,
And twisted horizons.
And here, the smoke thickened-air
The heaving feet and bursting muscle

Sinking into the earth, pits and mines,
Tunnels leading them to the centre of darkness.
And this is the place where Man meets beast
To forge from the sun a grotesque image,
A troll-figure of human stature;
Perched erect on a blackened hill above the red town,
Stone gleaming through his flesh.
This is the place of the snapped-back,
The cracked door, the broken wall.

Blood of Fire.
Flesh of Earth.
Breath of Smoke.
Muscle of Steel.
Bone of Rock.
Eye of Darkness.
Tongue of Flame.

All heaved together, all thrust
In a jumble of prayer and despair,
Thrown from heaven to taunt the sky,
To torture life, bring laughter to death.

This is the place of breaking and making,
The law of the hand and the foot,
The law of the anvil and the hammer.

David Calcutt.

A CRAFTSMAN TO BE REMEMBERED

MR. 'Les' Allen was born in 1905. He started work at 13 as an apprentice boat builder, working with his father at a West Bromwich boatyard. His father 'Fred,' had worked previously at Selly Oak Junction where a boat dock was situated beside the arches of the railway bridge. Here, the very first wooden motor boat was built by Fred and a family tradition came into existence.

Les married in 1926 and the family grew with the coming of his two sons, Bob and John. During the war he worked at Spencer Abbots, the boat dock outside Nechells power station, where his father was foreman. When Fred retired, Les stepped up into his father's position. He was very forward-looking and quick to realise that the decline in commercial boat traffic had to come about after the war and would effect his livelyhood. He obviously appreciated the fact that the canal system offered enormous potential for pleasure cruising. With the falling off of orders for new "working boats" and with repair work diminishing due to companies allowing their fleets to run down, he turned his hand to building boats ideally suitable for holiday cruising.

His first success was after the war, when he converted an ex-Fellows Morton and Clayton butty as a hostel boat for Peter Scott of the Wild

Fowl Trust. Then followed the building of a little B.C.M. tug, "Christopher James," which worked for 21 years hauling coal to various power stations.

In 1950, at T and S Elements' boat dock in Oldbury, Les converted another ex-Fellows Morton and Clayton butty called the "Ruby." This boat belonged to the Birmingham Federation of Boys' Clubs and was re-named the "Norman Chamberlain." When finished, the boat was a show-piece of craftsmanship, being expertly fitted out to accomodate 16 persons. The following year it made its first maiden voyage to London for the Festival of Britain. It was extensively used for 10 years, giving excellent service and introducing approximately 600 youths to the "cut" each year. Without Les, this youth club project could never have got under way.

In 1959, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Society was formed and the Allen family became members. They built and exhibited a new wooden narrow boat at the Society's first boat rally held in Kidderminster basin. The climax of his career and working life came in 1967 when he built a new timber hull for the Staffordshire and Worcestershire inspection boat called "Lady Hatherton." This job was considered an impossible task, but not to Les. With expert skill, he and his two sons built a new hull exactly to the original dimensions, in order for the original cabin to be transferred.

He retired the following year to live with his wife in Weston-super-Mare, leaving his sons carrying on with the family business.

P. J. Freakley.

N.B.:—Les Allen died in August last year.

Reader L. Rowbottom gives a different interpretation to that by H. Jack Haden (Autumn '71 issue) on the background to . . .

The 1921 Coal Strike

AFTER the Armistice on Nov. 11th, 1918, the coal miners were among the first to be demobilised owing to the importance of coal to the economy. Oil and electricity were not yet sufficiently developed to challenge the importance of coal, so it was essential that the coal industry, as the backbone of all other industries, should run smoothly if we were to recover from the effects of the war.

Unfortunately, the reverse was the case. The industry was bedevilled by petty strikes and early in 1919 a national strike was threatened. The main reason being that while wages had risen by 78 per cent, the cost of living had risen by 120 per cent (based on 1914 index). The gap of 42 per cent against the miners and the general public was the cause of the threat to strike. It can be stated that no strike occured in these times that was not thoroughly justified because of

the arrogance of the coal owners. The "militancy" of miners was backed to the hilt by the ex-service men who, having endured four years of military discipline, were in no mood to accept the dictates of the coal owners. Their experiences during the war had widened their outlook, and they were no longer the gullible people they had been before the war. They had expected the promise of "A land fit for heroes" to be fulfilled, at least to the extent of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

However, talks had been going on between the Miners' Federation and the Government for a Royal Commission to be set up to enquire into conditions in the industry. The Government, after much delay, eventually passed a Bill known as the "Coal Industry Commission Bill, statutorily establishing a Royal Commission and passed into Law to enquire into the position of, and conditions prevailing in, the coal industry. In particular as to wages and hours of work in the various grades of colliery worker."

In short, the Coal Industry Commission held its first meeting on March 3rd, 1919, and the national strike was called off. The Commission was chaired by the Hon. Mr. Justice Sankey. His committee comprised four members of the Miners' Federation, three members of the Government, three representatives of the Coal Owners and two agreed independent members. The first witness called was the Financial Adviser to the Coal Controller. The revelations disclosed by him of the profiteering in coal during the war caused an immediate revulsion public feeling in favour of the miners and against the coal owners. It was found that the total royalties and profits of the industry (not including profits from coke ovens and by-products works) amounted to £160,000,000 from 1914 to 1918. This was £25,000,000 more than the total pre-war capital of the industry.

Reams could be written about the Sankey Commission, but suffice it to say that between its setting up and its suspension the miners received several wage increases and fewer hours of work.

Then coal was de-controlled and handed back to the owners, who immediately began slashing wages, in some cases, as much as 50 per cent. Is it to be wondered at that the miners refused their "take it or leave it" ultimatum and went on strike?

It was not militancy on the part of the miners that caused so much unrest. Their "militancy" was more like an appeal to the Deity for fair play. Compared with the militants of today they were like sheep, made discontented by harassment and baa-ing just a little louder.

NEW PUBLICATION

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Putting Memories to Print

The Blackcountryman, as our regular readers will know, often contains material that is composed of the memories and experiences of older people in this area. Many such people have passed through times that will never again be repeated and it is part of our duty to record for the future their view of the past as an ordinary person's commentary on the great events of history. In so doing we are able to make available details of the life of our area that very often have never been seen in print.

Many of our people are reluctant to talk to strangers or to those only wishing to use their experiences as the basis of a short lived piece of journalism. In members of the Black Country Society they find a sympathetic and appreciative audience of their own folk. This is the way in which many of the more unusual articles in this magazine are made.

Here, in a side street in Darlaston, George Moran of the planning sub committee, the president Dr. John M. Fletcher, and society member Jack Daker, chat over a pint with one of the most famous of the local dog breeders. The subject of the conversation appears to have turned her back on the entire proceedings!

Should you know of anyone who would like to talk to society members in this way or may have experiences that are worthy of recording, please let the editor know. We will then try to arrange an informal chat. After all, everyone's life is unique and all the people of our region have made a contribution to its history. Let's get their stories down in print before it is too late. **J.M.F.**

TWO RECENT CANAL REPORTS

1. Remainder Waterways—
   Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council — August, 1971.
2. Birmingham Canal Navigations—
   a report on the 'remainder' waterways — 36p illustrated.
   British Waterways Board — December, 1970 — price 60p.

SINCE the 1968 Transport Act the inland waterways owned by British Waterways Board have been divided into three categories: commercial waterways (300 miles) for the commercial carriage of freight; cruising waterways (1100 miles) principally for cruising, fishing and other recreational purposes; and the remainder (600 miles), for the most important of which the Lord Chancellor gave an undertaking that B.W.B. would not take any action for three years, which would make impossible the restoration of these waterways for navigation, that is before 18th November, 1971.

In the Black Country area, there are no commercial waterways, and of the B.C.N. specifically only 25 miles are cruiseways (like the Staffs. and Worcs., Shropshire Union and Worcester and Birmingham Canals) —the Main Line from Birmingham through Tipton and Wolverhampton, and the link through Netherton Tunnel via the Dudley and Stourbridge Canals, joining the Staffs. and Worcs. at Aldersley and Stourton respectively. Another 80 miles of the B.C.N.—most of it navigable and in good condition—are remainder canals, covered by the Lord Chancellor's undertaking which has just expired, and it is on these B.C.N. remainder waterways that two reports have recently been published.

The first report was produced in August, '71, by the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council, set up in 1968 to advise B.W.B. and the Secretary of State on amenity and recreational uses of the canals, or, as in this case, to advise on any proposals to add to or reduce the cruiseway network. The report is the result of a nationwide study of all the remainder waterways in Britain; and it recommends that the Ashton and lower Peak Forest canals be restored (thus making possible again the 98-mile round Cheshire boat trip) and promoted into the cruiseway system, as well as the Caldon Branch of the Trent and Mersey near the Potteries and the middle section of the Kennet and Avon, and that "a high priority for promotion" be given to the B.C.N. waterways in the Lord Chancellor's undertaking.

The report considers cruising and angling on the B.C.N. have good potential (there are 290,000 anglers in the West Midland Region), though pollution has reduced angling recently (together with fish disease) and deterred pleasure craft; and concludes: "the miscellaneous amenity uses of these canals depend entirely upon the improvement of the local environment."

The second report is a lavishly produced booklet specifically on the B.C.N. produced by British Waterways Board themselves, the sketches and maps being done by Peter White, the architect largely responsible for Birmingham's Brindley Walk canalside scheme, now working for the Board as an architect/planner. It was this report that my own town

planning report was intended to complement (The Use of Urban Canals with special reference to Birmingham and the Black Country, Autumn 1970, obtainable from the B.C.S. price £1.00), though the B.W.B. report, despite its date of December, 1970, was only published in the summer.

While admitting that the B.C.N. now has commercial uses only "over a very limited section of the system," the report emphasises the canal's other existing uses.

Function as a drainage channel

The system forms a lineal reservoir with a surface area of 300 acres and acts during periods of storm as a 'buffer' to reduce the impact and intensity of the initial run-off from the urban area. There are 800 recorded drain connections, one seventh being from local authorities road surfaces etc. During heavy rain the system receives a total discharge of 850 million gallons a day, which the local authorities agree would be "extremely difficult and costly" to deal with in other ways. By analogy with a detailed estimate done in Merseyside with a similar storm water discharge per mile, the report estimates the replacement land drainage system would cost £250,000 a mile, a total of some £20m; the annual interest and maintenance charges on this would be about £25,000 a mile, compared with the existing costs of the B.C.N., for all the canal's uses, of £900 per annum per mile.

Source of industrial water supplies

Fifty industrial concerns take water from the canal, up to 5,000 million gallons per year (an average of some 140 m.g.d.—over twice that supplied by the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company). The greater part is used for cooling and returned to the system (a facility not offered by the public mains), and the sources of supply are the reservoirs at Cannock Chase (Chasewater) and Rotton Park, Birmingham, with a combined capacity of 1,134 m.g., and underground resources up to 2,000 m.g. a year can be drawn through Bradley Pumping Station. The chief consumers are the two C.E.G.B. power stations at Ocker Hill and Birchills on the Walsall Canal, which account for half the total water revenue; and despite new plants proposed elsewhere, new agreements have just been negotiated for the next five years.

Water supplies earn B.W.B. over three quarters of their revenue from the B.C.N. and they estimate the cost of replacing these supplies, as a capital cost of some £30,000 per mile, making £2,000 per mile per annum.

Thus the major fact that emerges is that, **without a single boat or amenity use at all,** the B.C.N. is already a considerable asset to the Black Country, in that if the canal was to cease its existing drainage and water supply functions, local ratepayers would have to pay a lot more money, in local authority rates for new drainage and in higher water rates to cover the cost of additional new public water mains supplies.

The B.W.B. does not mention some other uses at all, such as the use of the towpaths (particularly of the Tame Valley) for services such as the 132 kv electricity and the high pressure gas grids, nor the value

to industrial canalside users of the canal water as an alternative supply in event of fire (thereby considerably reducing their insurance premiums); but the use of the canal as open water pumping positions for the local fire brigades is mentioned, the chief fire officers regarding the canal as an "invaluable" source of water and looking forward "to the continued availability of canal supplies particularly in high risk industrial areas; and the records of three of them show the canal being used on 121 occasions over the last five years.

On one important point B.W.B. have changed their mind in recent years—whether it would be cheaper to maintain the B.C.N. just as a water channel or as a navigation as well. In 'Facts about the Waterways,' December, 1965, B.W.B. estimated the conversion to a water channel would lead to "substantial savings in maintenance," of about £250 per mile per annum. But, influenced apparently by the difficulties of access and the obstructions caused to flow where bridges have been culverted, the latest report has very different conclusions: "The cost of conversion to water channels or for piping and infilling would be very much higher than those for restoration. Future maintenance costs as cruising waterways are unlikely to be significantly higher than those for maintaining the canals for water supplies and land drainage."

On recreational and amenity uses, the report points out that despite none being designed public rights-of-way, the towpaths are in regular use by people walking and cycling to work, and the more rural stretches used for recreational walking, the Ramblers Association considering the B.C.N. towpaths a means of getting away from heavily industrialised areas to pleasant rural surroundings which should be developed further.

Fishing is generally limited to a short stretch in the N.E. where 15½ miles is rented to seven angling societies and clubs, day tickets in the Rushall/Longwood area earning £200 a year. There are five fairly active boat building and repair yards, three on the Cannock extension, one at Oldbury and one at Bumble Hole Turn. Canoeing is a growing sport, especially for youngsters who seek their recreation near home, but like boating and fishing, future demand depends on pollution being dealt with effectively and the quality of the water being improved.

The report does not deal very fully with the town planning and amenity uses, though there are some delightful sketches by Peter White of possible improvement schemes: below Chasewater; at Parkhead Locks, Dudley; and at Coronation Gardens, Tipton, as suggested by the B.C.N. Society. The report simply suggests a greater integration of urban and suburban developments with the canal to improve the environment, the establishment of new boating centres, and the improvement of access for the general public "if arrangments are concluded with the local authorities for the transfer of responsibilities similar to those which apply in parts of London." "The key to the situation is held by the main local authorities concerned, who, by their central position, will influence many decisions of the future development of land alongside those waterways which at present possess a questionable environment."

More specifically, I would suggest there should be canalside conservation areas, a policy of linking the towpaths with a walkway systems

elsewhere, new buildings that face the canal and back onto the roads (for now it is the canal area that is the attractive urban environment and the roads that are unpleasant with continuous commercial traffic), back access provided by canalside industries for their employees and some paint applied, and in selected areas some landscaping and tree planting.

On the basis of their popularity and potential for recreation and amenity purposes, the report considers the promotion of the B.C.N. remainder waterways on the basis of four priorities, as I did also in my report. The four priorities are given in the table below, and in brackets are the costs of restoring those stretches to cruiseway standard (none at all for priorities 1 and 2) and the priorities given to the same stretch in my report, e.g. (I, II, III, IV).

Table of Priorities in B.W.B. Report
Priority 1

A.—Wyrley and Essington, Daw End Rushall and Cannock Extension to A.5 and Anglesey Branch below Chasewater (II).
B.—Pudding Green to Doe Bank and Tame Valley Canal (I).
Bumble Hole Turn—included for its boating activity.
A. represent the cross link across the north of the Black Country from Horseley Fields, Wolverhampton, via Birchills, Walsall, to Aldridge-Brownhills and then down to join the Tame Valley. B. is the Tame Valley link between Salford Bridge, Birmingham, via Ocker Hill to the Main Line in Oldbury.

Priority 2

A.—Walsall Canal and Arm (Doe Bank to Birchills) (IV).
B.—Old Loop Main Line (Smethwick to Tipton) (part I, part II).
Both are, with priority 1, a useful alternative "'escape' route, if, for any reason, navigation along the Main Line is interrupted."

Priority 3

Oldbury Locks and Titford Canal (£5,000) (I).
Dudley Tunnel Branch (£6,000) (I).
Gower Branch (II).
Halesowen Arm (£5,300) (III).
Winson Green Branch, B'ham (£6,500) (IV).

Priority 4

Wednesbury Old and Ridgeacre Branch (£4,700), Bradley (£1,000), Anson Arm to M.6, Engine Arm, Grazebrook (£4,000), Bentley top section, Gospel Oak Branch (£10,000), Ocker Hill, and Icknield Port and Oozells Street loops in Birmingham (£5,000).

The main recommendations of the Report are that priorities 1 and 2 "be given early consideration for promotion to the Cruising network" —to which I would add Oldbury Locks and the Titford Canal and the Dudley Tunnel link, both in my priority (I), even though they need £11,000 spent on them. And "that no action be taken, unless the Minister gives his consent, which would make impossible the restoration of the waterways in priorities 1-4."

The other recommendations call for more effective steps against "pollution, including depositing rubbish in the canal," and a greater financial recognition by the local authorities of the canal's land drainage and fire-fighting functions. The onus for securing the B.C.N's future now rests with the local authorities, for it is only they that can, by town planning decisions, improve the canalside environment and contribute, as laid down in the 1968 Transport Act, towards the restoration of the

remainder canals and their subsequent maintenance as a cruiseway.

B.W.B. have a statutory duty to deal with the remainder waterways "in the most economical manner possible." Judging by agreements they have recently concluded on the Slough Arm and the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, B.W.B. is likely to ask the local authorities for the capital cost of restoration (£47,500) plus an annual contribution to the maintenance costs to cover any difference between maintenance as a water channel and as a navigation, as previously explained not likely to be much and at the most say £200 a mile a year, making £16,000 a year for the 80 miles of B.C.N. remainder waterway. So bringing the B.C.N. into the cruiseway system will undoubtedly involve costs from the rates, but surely not very much, as a 1d rate for the five Black Country boroughs brings in over £180,000.

The reports mentions feasibility studies done on canalside areas by Walsall and specific proposals by Aldridge-Brownhills for the Anglesey Branch and Dudhill Road, Rowley Regis, by Warley. Let us hope that the other boroughs also take some action an that future issues of "The Blackcountryman" will have further developments to report, and eventually the actual completion of a Black Country canalside scheme to match Birmingham's at Brindley Walk.

Lewis Braithwaite.

BOOK REVIEW

The Welsh Marches, by Roy Millward and Adrian Robinson. Macmillan, 1971.

THIS book is available as one volume or as four separate booklets, namely The Northern March, The Middle Severn Valley, The Middle March and The Lower Wye Valley.

The 'Welsh Marches' follows in the tradition established by W. G. Hoskins in his 'Making of the English Landscape' and the publication of the Geographical Association which describe individual ordnance survey one inch maps. This particular publication by Millward and Robinson forms part of a series of regional landscape guides. The subject matter of this publication is the Welsh borderland which is so often visited by Black Country people at week-ends and holiday times.

The author's main objective has been to explain in some depth the distinctive themes in the history and geography of the borderland which have produced its unique landscape. The border between England and Wales is a fascinating one for those interested in the evolution of the landscape. In this area, one gets the impression of the interface between highland and lowland Britain and the territorial features which make the Welsh borderland a frontier zone in the physical and historical senses.

The book contains twelve sub-regional studies of the borderland which emphasises the history of settlement, its relationship to the physical characteristics, particularly the deeply penetrating valleys, and the relationship between, geology, scenery and vegetation.

The landscape of the borderland is a living museum representing over two thousand years of history. The large churches of ancient

origin, many highly decorative, standing in what can merely be described as hamlets, are clues to a higher status at an earlier date; grassed over castle mounds, 'defended by inpenetrable thickets of hawthorn' still remain, as do castles such as Ludlow, whose ruined walls and towers today place them among the great architectural monuments of the world.

The studies in the book, particularly rely on medieval times, when the Marches Lords defended their new lands from the Welsh and established the basis of the border's rich history. Other studies describe the impact of the industrial revolution in the Middle Severn Valley.

It was in 1707, at Coalbrookdale, that Abraham Darby took over a small blast furnace and began his experiments using coke to smelt the local iron ore, and was ultimately to revolutionize the whole iron industry. It was the geology of the area, deposits of coal, iron and clay, which allowed it to develop as a one time important industrial district. For long the Coalbrookdale area has been in decline in the industrial sense. While this has not been economically favourable, lack of development has meant that many important industrial relics have been saved from destruction.

The book being written by two geographers, the emphasis is understandably placed on exploring the physical landscape we see today, and, as such, provides a wonderful work of reference for geography students.

Place names are all given ordnance survey co-ordinate references, and suggestions are provided for further reading and field investigations following each of the twelve studies. The weekend visitor to the borderland wishing to see more into the landscape than immediately meets the eye, will also find the book, or individual booklets, invaluable as guides.

J. B. and G. M.

RECORD REVIEW

'Kate of Coalbrookdale': Jon Raven and Jean Ward, singers; Mike Raven, Pete Sage and Jon Raven instrumental accompaniment. (Argo Records ZFB 29): £1.75. Stereo.

'Kate of Coalbrookdale': Songs from Broadsheets of the 18th and 19th Century, collected by John Raven, Robbins Music Corporation Ltd., 50p

READERS will recall the enthusiastic welcome given to Songs of the Black Country and West Midlands (reviewed in The Blackcountryman Vol. 1 No. 3.) recorded by Jon Raven, Jean Ward and Mike Raven in 1968. Regretably, this record is no longer available, but all three, here joined by Pete Sage, fiddle, now present another collection of songs of the Midlands on the Argo label.

It must be said at once that this is a much less varied and impressive group of songs than those of their earlier record. Collected mainly from Broadsheets, these songs often have a 'precious' quality associated more with the Victorian drawing room than with the vigourous life of the industrial Midlands. 'The Rose of Cashmere.' 'The Pirates Seren-

ade' and the title song itself, 'Kate of Coalbrookdale,' belong rather to the rural tradition as interpreted for he delicate tastes of sensitive refined ladies; one is reminded of Louis XIV and his ladies of the court dressing up and pretending to be shepherds and shepherdesses. Neither the words nor the tunes leave more than a pleasant impression behind them.

'The Brisk Young Butcher,' 'The Buxom Dairy Maid,' 'Bold William Taylor,' 'Nine Times a Night' and 'The Soldiers Fancy,' represent the more down-to-earth rural tradition of the Midlands. Here are songs that tread carefully between obscenity and vulgarity, but leave by their clever use of rhyme and their story-telling quality a more satisfactory impression. The industrial tradition of the area is covered here with three songs only, 'The Collier Lass,' 'The Brave Collier Lads' and 'Wife for Sale;' the last song is from Bilston and describes a custom prevalent in the Black Country in the last century.

Finally, 'I Wish, I Wish,' 'Cold Blows the Wind,' and the 'Grey Cock' here hark back to the authentic folk song tradition, with their attractive lines and impressively simple tunes. The record is, in fact, a mixture of the banal and the beautiful; the combination gives an appeal which tends to grow on the hearer as the record is repeatedly played.

The stereo recording is excellent and the performance of all artists clear and competent. We can recommend this record to folk song collectors and those interested in broadsheet songs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

To accompany the record, Jon Raven has edited with a brief introduction, the music and words of the songs performed. The booklet is clearly and attractively produced, with a number of period woodcuts to accompany the text.

Both record and booklet can be obtained from local dealers or direct from the Black Country Society.

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE HISTORICAL COLLECTION

- Several items of Victorian lace clothing.
  Donated by Miss Roberts, Star Street, Wolverhampton.
- Spectacles case and a mourning handkerchief.
  Donated by Miss Wardle, Old Hill, Warley.
- Horse register (1890 period) and memorial card.
  Donated by Mr. D. Holds, Great Bridge, Tipton.
- Two dolly maids.
  Donated by Mr. K. Worton, Penn Fields, Wolverhampton
- Brick mould used at Lower Gornal.
  Donated by Mr. H. Hyde, Modenhill, Sedgley.
- Rat trap, mole trap, hand-made chain, chainmaker's tools, chainmaker's price lists dated 1899, 1902, 1907, 1908 and 1918.
  Donated by Mr. W. Homer, Dencil Close, Cradley Heath.
- General Strike bulletins issued by the Express & Star and the Birmingham Post, May 5th and 6th, 1926.
  Donated by Mr. R. S. Cartlidge, Priestley Road, Beechdale Estate, Leamore, Walsall.
- Two public house tokens.
  Donated by Mr. D. Simpkiss, Stokes Avenue, Portobello, Wolverhampton.
- From other sources a clay pipe, Smethwick Almanac and an Izons catalogue.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

I am currently engaged on detailed research into the history of my ancestors. My efforts have led me to Dudley, where, during the nineteenth century, several families bearing the name of Knowles where to be found.

At the present time I am trying to establish the relationships between these different families and their place of origin.

I would be grateful for any information your readers may have concerning families or persons bearing the name of Knowles, and in particular I would like to contact present-day members of the clan.

There is a rather vague family story concerning one Richard Knowles born in Dudley in 1845, who was sentenced to 20 years hard labour for manslaughter. Can anyone help provide details.

Roger John Knowles.

Church Road,
Norton Canes, Cannock.

* * *

Sir,

The spelling of our name (Thommas) is most unusual and this has prompted me to try and piece together our family history, because it is just possible that I may be the last holder of our name.

The point in writing is that my great grandfather, having come from Yorkshire to Birmingham where he married for the first time, then came over to Dudley. He resided at the Cromwell Grove Inn and Pleasure Gardens, Cawney Hill, Dudley, which had been purchased by his father-in-law, a James Smith. Upon the death of his first wife he then married a Dudley girl.

I understand that this was a place of historical interest and my late father, when a small boy, remembered playing with a document which was something to do with the beheading of Charles I, and he pulled the seals off this document. Also there was a large oil painting of Oliver Cromwell in the Grove at that time. No doubt you can now appreciate my interest in this property.

Could you advise me whether there are any books of local history in which the Cromwell Grove may be mentioned. I have been able to get photostat copies of Blocksidge's Dudley Almanack for 1912, in which there is quite a good reference to the property and my great grandfather, Thomas Brown Tommas, and I have also been able to get a copy of a plan of part of the site.

I would dearly like to have an illustration of the Grove. My grandfather did have a picture of it, and also one of the Queen Victoria Jubilee bonfire held in the grounds, but unfortunately these went astray when he died.

G. E. H. Thommas.

J. E. Thommas & Sons,
Five Ways,
Tipton,
Staffs.

* * *

Sir,

Many thanks for **The Blackcountryman,** to which I eagerly look forward every quarter.

I have remembered yet another anecdote from my father's wealth of Black Country stories.

The incident is supposed to have happened to my father and his friends, but of course, I can't vouch for its authenticity.

Many years ago (c 1895) my father and several of his friends walked from their homes in Coppice Lane to Dudley for the purpose of visiting a circus.

During the circus performance, the ringmaster announced that he had an "unrideable mule" and would give 10/- to anyone who could stay in its back for five minutes. One of my father's teenage friends was persuaded to "Av a goo."

For several minutes the young lad tried his hardest to climb on to the mule's back but without success.

Eventually the mule began to kick out and finally chased the yelling youth round and round the circus ring, to the amusement of the audience.

Finally, the ring-master drove the mule from the ring and approached the frightened contender.

"Whatever's the matter,?" he demanded, "Why are you making so much fuss?" "Ar"—retorted the boy, "E kicked me." "Don't be so silly," replied the ringmaster, "He can't hurt you—he's not wearing shoes."

"No," cried the lad, "but by God 'e's wearing some bl - - - - 'ard stockins."

(Mrs.) E. M. Babb.

Paddocks Road,
Hollywood,
Nr. Birmingham.

SUPPORT OUR ADVERTISERS

Sir,

I am currently engaged in research into the past position of gypsies and other travellers in the West Midlands. I would be most grateful for any information from readers regarding their own contact with, and experience of, this nomadic group who I believe have traditionally encamped in, or who have habitually frequented the Black Country.

I am especially interested in anyone who has partially or wholly settled in a house, either through pressures exerted by the host community or from personal choice, and who would be prepared to describe past and present experiences.

David Morgan.

c/o 3 Downham Wood,
Orchard Hills,
Walsall.

* * *

Sir,

"Subterrean Fires in the Black Country."

I have read this article in the Autumn edition of **The Blackcountryman.** I do not know the author, nor am I related to anyone who owned the book that the article came from, but I have in my possession the book entitled "Good Words," a prize presented to my brother Arthur Haycock, by the Smethwick Education Committee, West Smethwick Boys' School for perfect attendance during the year ending 31st August, 1905. There is more information regarding these fires in 1897 at Coalbrookdale; also at Stalybridge near Manchester.

S. Haycock.

Topsham Road,
Smethwick,
Warley,
Worcs.

CORRESPONDENCE TO MR. D. SIMPKISS—

Sir,

We look forward so much to the Magazine as we find so much of interest in it. Also the book on Stourbridge glass was of especial interest to us as my father's mother was a Stourbridge woman and her small collection of Victorian glass is something of which we are very proud.

In the Winter '71 issue of the magazine, my father was very interested in the article on the Wolverhampton Exhibitions of 1902, which he remembers well—especially the water chute where, as a ten-year-old, he was pushed off the top in a kind of toboggan and ended up miraculously dry in the pool in the West Park!

When my aunt, Mrs. Esther Walters of Wolverhampton, died a few years ago, we found in the drawer of her sewing machine, a souvenir of the Exhibition.

My aunt was named Esther after her (and my father's) grandmother, Esther Ward Jarrett, née Hingley, of Cradley Heath. It was, therefore, of great interest to read in **The Blackcountryman** that the industrial archaeologists were investigating the Hingley works at Cradley. I wonder if they are piecing together information about the people of Cradley as well as the works? I know only that my great-grandmother was a daughter of Tobias Hingley, who in his turn was a relation (brother, cousin?) of Sir Benjamin Hingley, whose works still stand in Birmingham. We have one of Sir Benjamin's election "hand-outs."

There is nothing so fascinating as trying to trace one's ancestry and it is Tobias who interests me. If your archaeologists should find out anything about him I would be so pleased to hear of it. Esther was born in 1828 and ten years later was embroidering a sampler of very profound sentiments, and at the age of 14, a huge tapestry of Queen Victoria at her coronation, both of which are my great treasures. She married Edward Jones-Jarrett in what is now Birmingham Cathedral, named her eldest son Tobias, after her father (he, her son was my grandfather) and she and Edward died young before their little family were out of childhood.

Incidentally, we always pronounce her name with the soft "g"—I believe that today it is pronounced with the hard "g," Hingley.

Margaret Jarrett.

Cedric Road,
Bath,
Somerset.

* * *

Sir,

It would be most interesting to hear if you ever receive information about the 'Washington Inn,' Netherton (on the main road to Old Hill by the old canal). I was about five years old when I left there to live in Old Hill, but have vivid memories of the 'Wake,' when the fairground was almost opposite the pub, and the times when the gypsies used to visit us. They were true Romany's, and would often bring their horses into the bar for a drink of beer.

My grandmother used to keep the pub and I expect many members would remember her (Mrs. Griffin). At times when the factory by the canal was on shifts, she would line up pints of beer on the bar just before closing time, and when the bull sounded the

doors would burst open and the men just finishing their shift would rush in, "'down' two pints each and taste the third."

She knew exactly who was on each shift, and must have kept a terrific slate, during that time.

Jennifer V. Sidnage.

Derwent Drive,
Bewdley,
Worcestershire, DY12 2PW.

* * *

CORRESPONDENCE TO MR. A. H. PRICE—

Sir,

My attention has been drawn to the photograph appearing in 'The Circular' (October), of chain-making at Oak Street, Old Hill, about the year 1910. It was with great pleasure that I recognised the photograph of my father now aged 89 years of age. My mother is aged 82 years of age and, until recently, has been reasonably well. My parents moved to Stratford-upon Avon from the Old Hill district 13 years ago.

It was a particular thrill to me and my family to see that an All-day car, registration No. AB 3972, which was used for the 1951 production of Toad of Toad Hall at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (now R.S.T.) originally belonged to my father. It was so strange to us that a car which began its life in the Black Country should have found its way at Christmas-time to Stratford-upon-Avon of all places, and that I should have had the nostalgic pleasure of seeing it standing in the window of the Warwickshire County Garage pending its use in the theatre. The dickey seat was specially constructed for my benefit when I was a small child. I wrote to the manager of the Shakespeare Theatre at that time, and complimentary tickets were showered upon us.

My husband tells me that his grandfather owned the Rattlechain Colliery, Cradley Heath, during the subsidence of High Street, Cradley Heath. He remembers when his father took him to the colliery's disused works after the subsidence, to collect for him a quantity of glass marbles removed from Albert Shaw's (Quarry Bank) pop bottles, which were in wide use during this period.

E. M. Gill.

'Zendaw,'
Alcester Road,
Stratford-upon-Avon.

KNOW YOUR BLACK COUNTRY

—Answers

1. The clays associated with the thick coal of the Black Country.
2. Extremely thin seams of coal.
3. An abbreviated form of 'Bunter Pebble Beds' found frequently throughout the area.
4. The Gubbin ironstone, worked from the earliest times throughout the region.
5. The lowest measure of the thick coal.
6. Local names given to basalt.

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