

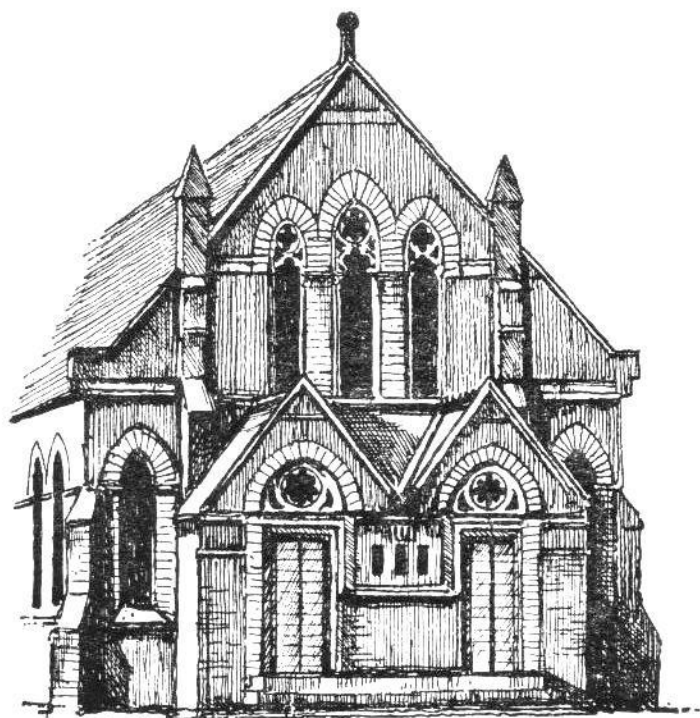
THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN

SPRING 1975

Vol. 8

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THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY



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Editor :

HAROLD PARSONS

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	Page
Annual Report by the President of The Black Country Society	2
Society News	4
Early Local Film Relics	
Bill Pardoe	7
Recollections of West Bromwich	
C. E. M. Fillmore	9
Tar and Rain	
J. William Jones	15
First Day Cover Commemorates Warley Church Re-Opening	15
Model layout of Black Country Museum	18
A Secondary School for Smethwick?	
L. E. Webster	20
Holly Bush Inn	
Jack Daker	24
Preserved for Posterity	
Michael Hale	25
The Chapels of All Saints' Church, West Bromwich	
C. W. Hannah	28
Keys by the Million	31
They Serve the Black Country	34
Art in the Black Country 1975	
Austin Moseley	36
Art in the Black Country 1909	
John Brimble	38
Wattis, a Blackcountryman	
Geoff. Stevens	39
Listen to the Children	41
Discovering History Through Street Names	
John Brimble	42
The Lyng in the Twenties	
Lew Turner/Alan Price	45
John Henry Carless, V.C.	
A. H. Price	49
Caractacus at Wednesbury?	
L. O. Clarke	51
Sandwell Priory Seal	
D. Dilworth	53
Book Reviews	54
Correspondence	61
Black Country Society Spring Programme	5
This magazine receives financial assistance from West Midland Arts	

Report by the President of The Black Country Society

—Annual General Meeting, March, 1975

THE Society has again been compelled to operate in conditions of economic difficulty and with severe problems of price rises in postage and the printing industry. The officers and committee have kept careful watch on the purchasing policy of the Society, wherever possible obtaining supplies of material to anticipate price rises or adjusting prices to cover increases. As a result the financial position of the Society is sound and considerable assets are held for future realisation. Another difficulty experienced in 1974 arose from the sudden calling of a general election in the autumn. The resulting pressure on our printer to quickly produce election literature considerably delayed the appearance of Society cards and calendars, and partly explains some decline in sales for 1974. Despite all these problems membership of the Society has continued to rise, more publications and reprints have been issued, and the Society enters 1975 with the strength to expand its activities and its local impact.

It is particularly pleasing to report reasonable success in establishing the financial viability of the magazine: with only a slight increase in price and small reduction in size. The Blackcountryman has succeeded in attracting increasing income from sponsors and advertisers and has also increased its sales. We must regard the magazine as our most important regular publication, presenting the Society to members and the general public. Its continuance and success is most remarkable in these difficult times and we are all well aware of the efforts made by Harold Parsons, the editor, to maintain the quality and continuance of the magazine. It is also pleasing to add that contributions of all sorts continue to be presented to the magazine, many by local people who have never before seen any of their work in print.

During the past year we have attempted to present a greater variety of meetings and social activities. These have been very well supported. Especially important have been the running of canal trips through the Black Country. During 1975, a more extensive programme of these trips will be arranged. The Society is aware also that such trips encourage interest in the local canal system and ensure its continued use for amenity activities.

Members associated with the various sub-committees of the Society have greatly increased its detailed work. Publications prepared by the Industrial Archaeological group and by the Photographic section will appear during the present year. The Cultural Activities group has participated with Dudley Council in the presentation of a most successful exhibition: Art in the Black Country. This is expected to become an annual event. A Christmas Card competition has also been organised for 1975. The Planning group has been actively involved in discussions with all local authorities, with considerable success. Its contribution to the re-development of the Owen Street area of Tipton has been particu-

larly important. It has also been successful in assisting the establishment of a locally based company to operate on the Black Country canals. The Society has submitted representations to the Ministry concerning the local structure plans now being examined publicly in Birmingham.

During 1974 the Society has greatly increased its work with schools, voluntary organisations and other local bodies. A team of speakers is now available and exhibitions have been arranged. Such talks and displays usually arouse great interest and produce more members and sales for the Society. We must express here our thanks to all members who, despite the increase in petrol prices, have made their own vehicles available for the transport of material and speakers to and from these activities.

The Society in January 1977 will be ten years old, and a special programme to commemorate this event is being prepared. The pattern of support for the Society is now becoming clear. We are drawing members from all over the Black Country and from all social groups. Of most importance is that the bulk of sales of Society material is to members. Membership, therefore, is not only an indication of the extent of the Society's influence but it also ensures that any Society publication has an initial ready sale. I have no hesitation in stating that a continued increase in Society membership is the most important way to ensure the continued success of the organisation. I appeal to all members to recruit new supporters, to recover any lapsed members they may know and to encourage all members to renew as promptly as possible. The continued increase in membership, as we all know, has greatly increased the administrative work done by the membership secretary, Derek Simpkins. We are all aware of his great devotion to the Society and all benefit from his efficient handling of the vast membership correspondence. He has made a vital contribution to the work of the Society in its years of constant expansion. It is also pleasant to record again steady co-operation with local authorities and support, especially from Sandwell Council, for Society publications. Many smaller Black Country voluntary organisations have also assisted the Society and in turn received its support.

We have seen steady progress during the past year towards the establishment of The Black Country Museum. The Society has assisted in this work by itself alerting the appropriate officials to the whereabouts of historical material, by providing members of the various committees, preparing detailed plans for sections of the museum, and by placing the more valuable items in its own collection on permanent loan to the museum. Amongst his many duties, the Secretary has undertaken the considerable task of sorting and cataloguing this continually growing collection.

In spite of many difficulties, 1974 was a year of consolidation and steady expansion in all fields of the Society's work. We anticipate more and different projects to be launched during 1975, and I conclude by appealing to all members to maintain and extend the expansion of the Society.

Dr. J. M. Fletcher.

UNTIL recent years the name 'Black Country' held a stigma for many of the inhabitants of the region. Today it stirs local pride in the majority, and this upsurge of interest, both by those who live within its boundaries and those elsewhere, is undoubtedly due largely to the work of the Black Country Society over the past few years.

The aims of the Society, to promote interest in the past, present and future of the area, are being achieved and sustained with considerable success. Like all successes, however, the Society has created a bandwagon onto which others are quick to jump; thus the Black Country is now being exploited by commercial ventures, the media, other organizations, and certain individuals who choose to 'go it alone'. This has given added stimulus to the interest in the area, with the Black Country Society remaining steadfast as the authoritative voice of the region, with its role as a beneficial institution to all spheres of local life becoming increasingly recognised. Few organizations can boast such diverse activities as publishing, photography, cultural pursuits, industrial archaeology, and future planning amongst their constituent interests.

Allowances are made for smaller attendances at meetings during the winter, so it was gratifying to see a large audience at the Union Inn, Tipton on 16 January to hear Derek Simpkins speak on his personal impressions of the Severn Valley and its railway. Derek, who is a member of the Severn Valley Railway Society and spends much

of his leisure time around Bridgnorth, attempted to convey in his talk a view of the railway and its surrounding area as seen through his own eyes.

On 4 February, at the Banqueting Room of Dudley Town Hall, John Hallam, assistant curator at the Dudley Museum, gave an interesting talk illustrated by slides, of the previous year's work at the Black Country Museum. He outlined work on the museum site, rescue projects, and the collecting and recording of data. It was felt that this event was an ideal occasion for presenting to the Black Country Museum, on permanent loan, another block of items from the Society's historical collection. These included some 70 separate articles, among which were items of commemorative china, school equipment, posters and programmes, Methodist ephemera, newspapers, etc. Also included were a number of items of Methodist literature pertaining to the local area and dating mainly from the early 19th century, which have been placed on permanent loan with the Society by Mr. G. Allen of Seaton, Devon, formerly a local resident.

The Society already has several hundred items from its historical collection in store with the Black Country Museum on permanent loan.

On 27 February, despite the foggy conditions prevailing, a large audience was present at the White Swan, Darlaston to hear Dr. J. Fletcher, talk on bull terrier fighting in the Black Country. This is

continued page 6

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY SPRING PROGRAMME 1975

Thursday, May 8th (8.00 p.m.)

The Albion Inn, Cwen Street, Tipton. Pete Smith (Director, Leisure Line Canal Cruises): Boating in the Black Country, Past, present, and potential.

Sunday, May 11th

Canal Trip. Birmingham—Dudley Port via Tame Valley. (See below).

Wednesday, May 14th (8.00 p.m.)

The Woden Inn, Church Hill, Wednesbury. A dominoe and crib match against the pub. All players and supporters welcome.

Tuesday, May 20th (8.00 p.m.)

The Albion Inn, Albion St. (rear of High St.), Brierley Hill. 'Faggots and Pays Night'. Numbers limited. Tickets at 25p each from Secretary.

Saturday, May 31st

Canal Trip. Birmingham—Wolverhampton Top Lock. (See below).

Sunday, June 1st

Canal Trip. Wolverhampton—Wednesbury via Wednesfield. (See below).

Wednesday, June 11th (8.00 p.m.)

The Leopard Inn, Clarence Street, Upper Gornal (Dudley—Wolverhampton Rd.). A dominoes, darts and crib match against the pub. All players and supporters welcome.

Sunday, June 15th

Coach trip to the Canal Museum, Stoke Bruerne. (See below).

Wednesday, June 18th (8.00 p.m.)

Warley Teachers Centre, Churchbridge, Oldbury (M5 intersection, Midland 'Red' Bus Garage, Birchley, 1st turn left into Park St.). Dr. J. I. Langford: Geology and Industry in the Black Country.

Saturday, July 5th

Canal Trip. Birmingham—Old line—Titford Pool. (See below).

Sunday, July 6th

Canal Trip. Titford Pool—Netherton Park Head. (See below).

Thursday, July 10th (8.00 p.m.)

Britannia Inn, Owen Street, Tipton. Keith Hodgkins: Owen St. past, present and future. An illustrated talk.

Sunday, July 13th

Coach trip to Stamford and Oakham (Castle and Burghley country house). See below.

The canal boat is a luxurious, covered cruiser with bar and all facilities. Charge per trip: Adults £1, children 75p. Coach trips charge: Adults £1.50, children £1. Further details will be forwarded to each person booking. Bookings to Mr. Ben Gaymer, 40 Holcroft St., Tipton (021-557 6041).

a subject which has over the years gathered around it considerable folk-lore. A fascinating talk was followed by a lively discussion.

Always seeking new avenues along which to champion the cause of local culture, it was suggested some time ago that the Society should sponsor an exhibition of work by local artists with the Black Country as a general theme. This resulted in the opening of an exhibition, 'Art in the Black Country', at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery on February 15 (see page 36). The committee wish to thank the director and staff of the Leisure and Recreation Dept. of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council for assistance given to the Society in organising this event.

Since the publication of 'What

Sort of Black Country', the Society's town planning sub-committee has been working hard to prepare a report on the local structure plans to be presented to the Public Examination, which opened at Birmingham on 4 March. Meanwhile, discussions are continuing with Sandwell planning department concerning the re-development of Owen Street, Tipton.

The Industrial Archaeology group have now completed their project on Saltwells Spa, Dudley and their work is shortly to be published in booklet form by the Society.

The committee was pleased to hear recently that Dudley council have now approved the restoration of the old chainshop at Mushroom Green.

The number of requests being received for members of the Society's panel of speakers to talk to various local organizations is now considerable. It is fair to say that every week-night (and occasionally at week-ends), a member from the Black Country Society is speaking to some group somewhere.

On March 12, the society's eighth annual general meeting took place at Tipton. The officers were elected unopposed and the following members were elected to the committee: Mr. Derek Simpkins, Mr. Harold Parsons, Mr. Geoff. Stevens, Mr. Austin Moseley, Mr. Winston Homer, Mr. Keith Hodgkins, Mr. John Chattin, Mr. Alan Price, Mrs. Joan Parsons, Mrs. Pat. Purcell, Mr. George Moran and Mr. Keith Lloyd.

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ALTHOUGH many archives have been searched for the old silent film of "Bladys of the Stewponey", made at Kinver in 1919, no copy has ever been found, probably because at that time it would have been made on the old nitrate based celluloid. The story, set in the Kinver of three hundred years ago, was the work of Sabine Baring Gould, a prolific writer in Victorian times, and a close friend of the Rev. John Hodgson, a one time Vicar of Kinver.

The book was first published in 1896 and opens with the daughter of the Stewponey innkeeper being offered as first prize in a bowling match, and being won by a shady character named Luke who was really the hangman at Shrewsbury jail. The hero, the good looking Crispin Ravenhill, a highwayman in disguise, admired Bladys at the bowling match but lost her through a trick by the villainous Luke. Many dramatic occurrences centre around Kinver including the burning of a woman at the stake, and the Holy Austin Rock, where Luke the hangman finally falls to his death over the precipice, after which Bladys marries the handsome Crispin Ravenhill. This novel has been described by the Vicar of Kinver, the Rev. Donald Watson as "A splendid piece of Victorian melodrama, full of action and far superior to East Lynne or the Murder in the Red Barn".

Continued.



The Burning Scene, believed to have been taken outside the old Whittington Inn

—Bill Pardoe

In 1919 Mr. Benjamin Priest, an Old Hill industrialist, commissioned a London film company to make a picture of the book, and a number of actors and actresses could be seen at Kinver in June and July of that year, where the principal scenes were enacted. The film was shown at cinemas throughout the country, and many times at the "Grand Cinema" Old Hill which was owned by Mr. Priest. It so happened that the projectionist at that cinema retained a few clips and cuttings from the film and gave them to his brother who kept them in a tobacco tin for over 50 years. Following a story in the Express and Star, I was able to make some negatives from these very fragile scraps and from them have made about twenty scenes from the film which have been exhibited from time to time. I also tried to interest the B.B.C. in the story of Bladys which could be made into an interesting feature, but without much success.

The Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould poured out scores of novels, travel books and historical works many of which ran through several editions, but it is rare to come across one of his books today. Fame came to him in another way for he is better known in all countries of the world as the author of Onward Christian Soldiers, Now the Day is Over, and other well known hymns.

N.B.: An article on this lost film appeared in the Spring 1970 issue.



FOR SERVICE RING TIPTON 7651

Horse and steam trams . . . Militant hostility . . . General Strike . . . Some of the reminiscences extracted from a Presidential address given to the West Bromwich Institute in December, 1974, by Mr. C. E. M. Fillmore, F.R.I.B.A., J.P.

Recollections of West Bromwich ... "and thereabouts"

MY family association with it [The West Bromwich Institute] goes back to the time of its inception, for in the Golden Jubilee brochure of the institute which my father prepared on behalf of the council it mentions that in the original council elected at a meeting on 3rd June, 1885 my grandfather was appointed auditor.

Incidentally, my grandfather who in 1854 was appointed headmaster of Kenrick's Summit School, afterwards became the last Clerk to the School Board of the Borough. My father was a member of the council for many years, later being elected vice-president.

I am an architect and I must first tell you of an opinion of my own house in West Bromwich. I had bought a pleasantly situated site in Dagger Lane, next to Hill House where Charles Dickens stayed and where he wrote a part of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and there had the pleasure of designing for myself the house to which to take my new wife. When it was finished I was standing one day across the road admiring it when a miner from the Jubilee pit came clattering in his clogs along the tarmac. He passed without a pause, and in a loud voice called out "Spoils the look of this 'ere road, that there 'ouse does".

I daresay not so many of you will remember when tramcars rattled along the High Street here, long monsters on bogies going from Birmingham to Dudley and short four-wheeled ones to Darlaston swaying rather sickeningly when travelling at speed, so much so that one toppled over on its side at the bottom of the hill at the Soho Road station.

These were the electric trams but before these were the cable cars which went as far as the New Inns at Handsworth and got their traction through a continuous slot in the road in the centre of the rails, a system curiously enough I believe, still in use to this day in San Francisco.

Even at that time Birmingham still possessed some steam trams, monstrous looking contraptions which I can just remember my father taking me to see chuff-chuffing along in the city.

Before this my grandfather Benjamin Crowther had held the concession for the two routes of horse-drawn trams running from West Bromwich, one to Smethwick and the other to Oldbury. The rails for these remained in the roads for many years after the service had ceased and one of the tramcars had been moved to the orchard at Oak Farm near the Old Oak House for the great enjoyment of his grandchildren in 'playing trams', while for their retirement the horses Beauty and Barnett and two companions were given the freedom of his fields, where we delighted to go and stroke them.

In winter, at the railway station off Paradise Street, now a thing of the past, porters used to put metal foot warmers filled with hot water in the train carriages for the comfort of the chilled passengers lacking other forms of heat. Towards dusk at some appropriate station a porter would walk along the roofs of the train coaches, lift up little lids, and from above light the gas lamp in each of the carriages below.

A similar little flap but for a different purpose was provided in the roof of the hansom cabs, named after their architect inventor, which were a common sight in the streets. These horse drawn cabs slung on a pair of huge iron shod wheels and entered by folding doors on a little platform behind the horse, provided cross seating for two or possibly three people facing forward looking through the glass of the doors. The driver sat entirely exposed to the elements perched on a little seat high up behind the passengers compartment, from which he could conveniently open the flap in the roof to take instructions.

Another, larger vehicle less frequently seen was the 'shooting drag', a four wheeler drawn by a team of four or possibly six horses harnessed in pairs. They carried four rows of passengers, two or perhaps three in each, seated crossways, the front two rows and the rear two each seated back to back.

My grandfather Crowther owned one of these on which from time to time the family, or a large part of it, embarked for the drive to Clent where he had a cottage. Driver and passenger alike were exposed to the weather, so that these occasions tended to be summer outings taken in the hope that the day would prove fine. In those times, clearly people were more hardy and accustomed to contending with the English weather. I well recall when we saw the first saloon cars, people saying they would never go around 'shut up in one of those glass boxes'.

Protest marches are the popular occupation these days but in the early years of the century the most significant marches were those which took place before polling day in Parliamentary elections. Then the rival candidates would tour the towns of their constituencies standing in an open carriage or landau usually drawn by four horses, preceded by a brass band and followed by their supporters lustily singing their election songs.

I believe it was in the 1910 General Election that Lord Lewisham, the Conservative candidate at West Bromwich, was returned with a majority of five over Dr. Hazel the Liberal, who demanded a recount,

and a second recount, followed in London by yet a third, and then a scrutiny.

Finally, two High Court judges came to the town, spending nine days there to conduct a judicial enquiry and scrutiny during which the Liberal party agent was alleged to have mysteriously disappeared with some vital voting papers. In the end Lord Lewisham was held to have been elected by a majority of two. Strange things, it seems, can happen to ballot papers.

Reminiscing recently with my 94-year old former gardener, I recalled the time when Woodbine cigarettes cost, in the 'old money', two pence for five and his repost was—"I remember when they were one penny for five and you got a box of matches with them for nothing".

Sometime during the 1914-1918 war the buses operating the route from the Old Church to the town were commandeered for France and replaced by electric ones. These were battery driven, having several times a day to be 'boosted', and although travelling fairly quickly when fully charged, after a while they moved more slowly and ever more slowly and on even the slightest slope barely made any progress.

These buses became a standing joke and the tale was told of the bearded old gentleman who alighted at the town terminus and presented to the inspector a child's ticket. On this being pointed out he retorted "Yes it is, but of course it was issued when I got on at the Old Church".

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Messrs. J. B. & S. Lees Ltd., the steel firm of which my father was a director, had amongst its clerks one Jones who had an unfortunate illness lasting some weeks, after which he returned to the office only to be taken ill again soon afterwards with another lengthy absence. This continued off and on for some months and it being before the days of insurance cards and P.A.Y.E. the company was very sympathetic and continued to pay his full salary. I forgot how it came to be discovered that when he was away ill from my father's office he was working at Mitchells and Butlers the brewers and was necessarily 'ill' there when he was back at Lees!

At about that time a mass prosecution of quite a number of miners was instituted at West Bromwich. Many of their colleagues and hundreds of sympathizers were very incensed by this and in consequence large crowds gathered in the High Street and in the vicinity of the Law Courts as the time of the Hearing approached. The first signs of militant hostility came as the electric tramcar, in which were travelling one or two of the magistrates, neared the Courts. The crowd surged forward and surrounded it, forced it to a standstill and then tried by united physical strength to derail it.

The police evidently had been forewarned of possible trouble and in addition to a number of constables on foot there were present half a dozen mounted officers. By this time the streets had become a solid mass of jostling humanity, feelings were running very high and soon tempers rose. Then a man walked apparently unnoticed behind the mounted police and suddenly flicked a knife and plunged it into the flank of one of the police horses. I only caught half a glimpse of an upraised arm without appreciating its significance, but any animal lover must have been delighted with the swift retribution which followed as the startled animal instinctively kicked out with its hind leg at the man and felled him to the ground, apparently breaking his limb.

Unfortunately this incident did nothing to quieten the mood of the crowd which was becoming more and more vocal and hostile, when suddenly the mounted police formed up across the width of High Street and after a brief pause with more jeering, cantered forward one on each pavement and four in the roadway all in line towards the mass of people.

It was an electrifying moment: I do not think anyone was seriously hurt, but many were very startled and scared, some rushing down the street and others crashing into doorways all in a mad scramble and a frenzied attempt to get away from the clattering hooves of those terrifying horses.

We youngsters excitedly witnessed a thrilling spectacle one Saturday afternoon when Mason's warehouse in the town caught fire with flames shooting high above the surrounding buildings, clouds of billowing smoke and—the smell of burning bacon!

Early on the following morning, long after the place had become a burnt-out shell, a police constable saw a fireman fully attired in uniform,

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helmet and thigh boots running hard but breathlessly in the direction of the warehouse. Asked where he was going, he said it was to Mason's fire. It turned out that a messenger had been sent to his house on the Saturday and finding no one in had put a note under the door, to be found by the 'part-time' fireman only in the early hours of Sunday morning on his return from a day trip to Blackpool. The message merely being timed '12.30' he had assumed this referred to midnight and that the fire was raging still!

My cousin Arthur Witcomb Smith, later to be awarded a well deserved O.B.E., was at the time of the 1926 General Strike manager of the West Bromwich Corporation Transport department. Meeting him a couple of nights before the threatened strike, he said that if it materialised he would try to maintain a service with volunteer drivers, and I duly offered to help.

Arriving home late on the evening before the strike after my father and mother had gone to bed, I found an alarm clock on the floor of the hall and beside it a cryptic note saying "Arthur has rung up—please report at the Transport depot a 4.0 a.m."

I duly turned up, so far as I remember, in the dark on a very cold and dismal morning. Several other adventurous spirits duly assembled and we proceeded to start up the buses. Those were the days before self-starters and the only way to move the stone-cold engines was to loop the knot of a rope over the starting handle, for one man to hold it and two or three others to heave in turn on each end of the rope.

The first run for which I was detailed as driver/conductor was from Carters Green to Colmore Row, Birmingham and I remember being astonished at the number of people about at what to me seemed the unearthly hour of four thirty in the morning, including the number of folk hopefully waiting for a bus to turn up!

On that first trip I recall stopping my engine at the Hawthorns, the city boundary some two miles on my six mile run. I got out to 'wind up' or swing the starting handle and in stooping thoughtlessly disgorged on to the road the entire contents of my money satchel.

The Birmingham city buses were not brought on to the road until the last day of the strike and so we were the natural target for some of the more militant strikers and a number of buses were put out of action while standing at the termini. After some stone throwing and broken windows the glass of the vehicles was protected with wire netting, but I think the most enterprising incident was when a car was driven alongside a bus in motion, the bonnet of the bus engine lifted and the leads cut! Afterwards, each bus was allocated a police officer.

In lighter vein was the mechanic at the depot who declined to strike and who lived inside the building for the entire duration of the dispute and who, whenever the strikers came to try and persuade him to join them, scrambled up into the roof and lay along one of the trusses. He was never spotted and of course none of us officially ever knew of his existence.

TAR
AND
RAIN

THE pungent smell of tar is in the air;
Black clouds loom behind tower blocks,
Factory doorways breathe out heat.
Heavy lorries hiss and roar
Their tyres flabby with weight
Spewing up gravel from the tarred road.
Bladed sunlight; swarming shadows,
And red buses, tipsy with people,
Flame and flicker through the streets;
The wool-wrap closeness of the air
Moves in idle lilt of tar-filled heat.
The smell of tar is in everything,
Everywhere, like a genial atmosphere.
The perfume of women has a mingle of tar
Over the stale sweat of their bodies.

The sky darkens, burying the sun,
And the torsoes of the roadmenders
Are like figures of wet bronze.
A twitch of blue lightning
Bowls in the first thunderclap;
The torrid air explodes with rain
Gorging the drains with a slick mush
Of multi-coloured slime. A fist of wind
knocks the rain into a way ward sheet,
Mocking the scant shelter of doorways
With a smarting whip of fine sleet.
Overhead, the crackling bowl of gloom
Empties itself of seething power
In a cool sparkle of white light,
And the smell of tar is in the rain.

J. William Jones.

First Day Cover
Commemorates Warley Church
Re-opening

METHODISM came to Warley during the lifetime of John Wesley who paid many visits to Birmingham and the Black Country. In 1781 he was invited to preach at Quinton and did so in the open air to "a serious and attentive congregation". He stayed at a house near the junction of Monckton Road and Hagley Road, which many will remember. Methodism quickly thrived in and around Warley and the usual practice of cottage meetings was followed. From such early endeavours a small but growing congregation met in a nail warehouse

in Hill Top Road. Up till the early 19th century no permanent place of worship existed in the area.

Warley is notable as having one of the first, if not the first, endowed school in the district. The school house has only of recent years been demolished, but the stone inscription which was over the doorway has been set into the wall of Bleakhouse Road Junior School and can be seen clearly from the road. The endowed school was closed at the passing of the Education Act of 1870 when school boards were established. Warley was alone in the then Oldbury Borough in having a school board. The board school at Warley was erected on land adjoining Warley Church and remains a school to this day.

In 1855 the plot of land on which Warley Church now stands was bought for 10/- and a school, buildings and a chapel were erected. Most of these stood until 1884 when the present church was built.

In the 1930s a piece of land opposite the present church was left to Warley Trustees by the then superintendent of the Sunday School, Mr. Alfred G. Hackett, a member of the famous family who built the fortunes of the Oldbury firm of Accles and Pollocks. This piece of land was purchased by Mr. Hackett for £100. In the 1960s it was sold for £3,500 to the trustees and members of Warley Methodist Church. With this money it was decided to renovate, repair and at the same time modernise the church to make it more comfortable for worship: wear and tear since the last renovation having taken their toll. That work is still incomplete and a further £4,000 is required.

Despite numerous acts of vandalism with windows broken, repaired and broken again, crosses and an old Bible destroyed, the piano damaged and a safe broken open, the first phase of the renovation has been completed and the church re-opened on Saturday, 15 February, 1975.

The President of the Methodist Conference, Rev. J. Russell Pope, conducted the Dedication Service. Also taking part were the chairman of the district, Rev. C. Hughes Smith and the superintendent of the circuit the Rev. Wilfred Trinder. Anthems were rendered by the Warley Singers.

To mark this special occasion in the history of Warley Church a One-day Commemorative Cover has been issued. These can still be purchased at 25p plus 5p postage from N. Robinson, April Cottage, Fairfield Drive, Kinver, Stourbridge (Tel.: Kinver 2643). All proceeds will go to the renovation fund.

*Covers also available
from Dr. J. M. Fletcher,
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The illustration on the front cover of this magazine is of
Warley Church. Drawn by S. J. Hadley

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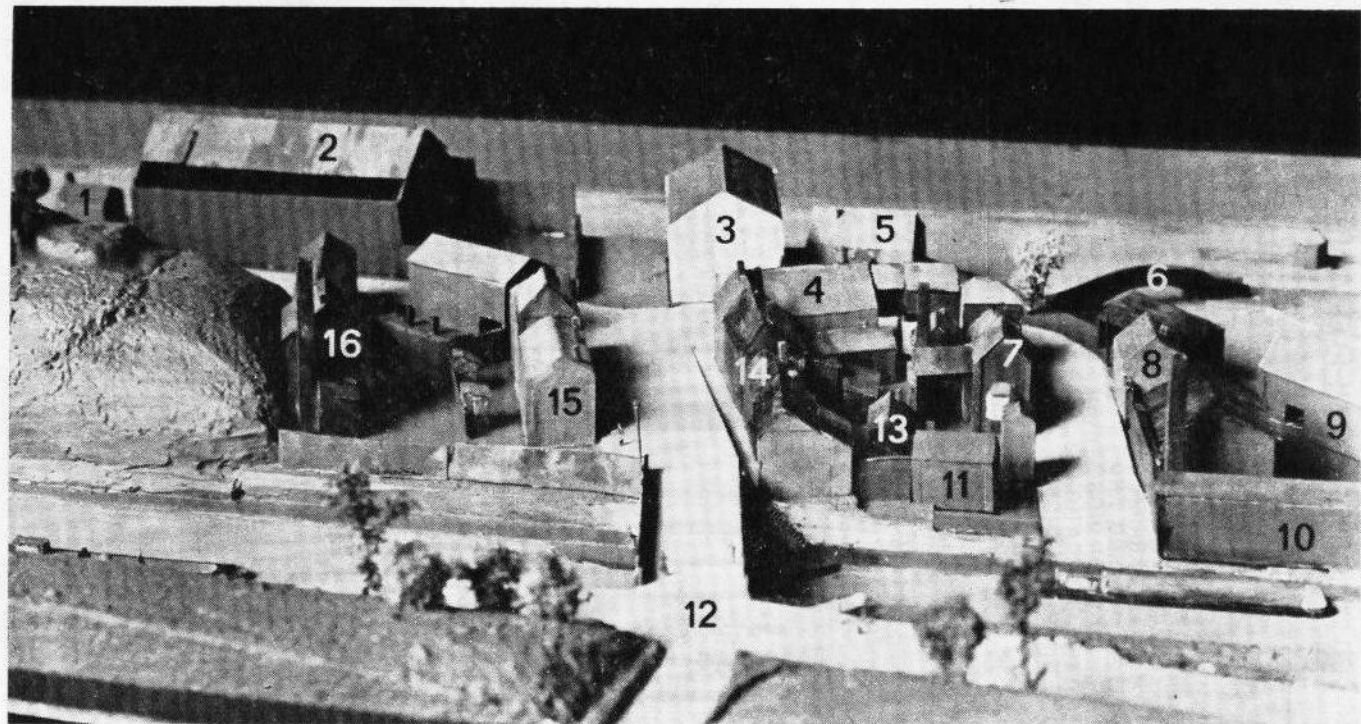


Photo: Black Country Museum

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Model of Black Country Museum

Further to the article on the Museum by John Hallam in our previous issue, we feature on the opposite page a photograph of the layout as it **may** appear, subject though it is to amendment. The buildings, etc., shown will certainly be included.

KEY:

1. Tunnel-keeper's cottage
2. Rolling Mill
3. Chapel
4. Co-op
5. Schoolroom
6. Roving bridge
7. Edge Tool Works
8. Anchor Forge
9. Chain Test
10. Chain Shop
11. Bakery
12. Bridge
13. Brewhouse
14. Shops, cottages, pub, brewery
15. Shops, etc.
16. Soap and Candle Factory

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In Wolverhampton, from Libraries, Art Gallery, Booksellers and Penn Post Office.

A SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR SMETHWICK ?

Secondary education has changed a great deal over the past ten years. But, with comprehensive schools rising from the remnants of the old tripartite system, there is a danger that parents and young people will lose a sense of history and tradition which might once have been fostered.

Education we now regard as a right, but there were struggles in most industrial towns when local authorities were empowered to build secondary (or grammar-styled) schools. The very concept of a 'grammar school' brought antagonism from some sectors of the community.

This is the first of three articles in which L. E. Webster takes a look at aspects of the difficulties experienced by Smethwick.

ALTHOUGH Smethwick was always to the fore in its provision of technical education, the building of a secondary school proved to be something of an embarrassment locally. One suggestion after another came up against a variety of difficulties, until it seemed that a secondary school for Smethwick would be an elusive item on the education authority's list of priorities.

Before 1870, the Smethwick branch of the foundation of King Edward's School, Birmingham, was attended by about twenty scholars, but for some reason it ceased to function. Consequently, the town had to rely on outside assistance for secondary education of this so-called 'academic' nature.

On May 1, 1903, the local borough council took control of elementary education, under the terms of the 1902 Education Act that abolished school boards, and in April 1907, when Smethwick became a county borough, the responsibility for building an effective school system to cater for all fell squarely onto the independent authority.

One of the most important matters to come before the higher education sub-committee during its infancy was, as I discussed in a previous article,* how suitable provision could be made for a technical school. The Board of Education, steered by Robert Morant, who wanted 'grammar' type secondary schools developed in isolation from technical schools, vetoed one excellent scheme to build a secondary and technical school complex on the Crocketts Lane site. The Board allowed the technical school scheme to go through, but the problem of finding a suitable site for a secondary school remained.

Robert Morant had taken steps to ensure that the new secondary schools established by the local authorities would be based on the traditional public and grammar schools. Morant was sceptical at the

* 'The Development of Technical Education in Smethwick,' "The Black-countryman," Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 59-62.

higher elementary education being operated throughout the country—sceptical, too, at the kind of training received by pupil teachers—and to ensure that the secondary schools would follow the grammar school pattern the Regulations for Secondary Schools were issued in 1904.

Morant's views were, without any doubt, elitist. Under the regulations, a 'secondary school' had to give a general education to pupils up to and beyond the age of sixteen. Instruction, it was stressed, could not be confined to any particular field, or to 'that kind of acquirement which is directed simply at fitting a boy or girl to enter business in a subordinate capacity with some previous knowledge of what he or she will be set to do.'

Specialization was to begin only after this general education had laid down a solid foundation and prepared young people to face up to life. The regulations specified a minimum number of hours for 'English' (by which was meant English Language and Literature, Geography, and History), 'Languages' (ancient or modern, though 'when two languages other than English are taken, and Latin is not one of them, the Board will require to be satisfied that the omission of Latin is for the advantage of the School'), and Mathematics and Science.

These formed the minimum requirements for recognition by the Board. Other subjects, such as Physical Exercises, Drawing, Singing, Manual Training, and (for girls) Housewifery, were recommended.

Clearly, then, the Board of Education would have been very

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suspicious of Smethwick's attempt to house 'grammar' and 'technical' schools under one roof.

It was an attitude on the Board's part that was later to be deplored by central government. The Spens Report, 1938, thought local education authorities should have been allowed 'to foster the development of secondary schools of quasi-vocational type designed to meet the needs of boys and girls who desired to enter industry and commerce at the age of 16.' The Spens Report added: 'The present difficulties in the field of secondary education have arisen largely out of the confusion which began about 1904 between a type of secondary education appropriate to the needs of boys and girls between the ages of 11 to 12 and of 16 to 17 and the traditional academic sources orientated towards the universities.'

Smethwick's failure to have the secondary-technical school complex approved by the Board was not the only time that proposals put forward locally were frowned upon nationally. Pressure was exerted a few years later when the Junior Day Technical School was established to operate two separate departments for the 'Engineering and Constructive Trades' and for 'Commercial and Mercantile' work.

When the Municipal Technical School building was opened in September 1910, at a total cost of £21,000, the secondary school question again became topical. Councillor C. Woodcock, speaking at the final meeting of the 1911 Education Committee, said he felt that, since the closure of the Summer Hill Grammar School for Girls, there was a greater need than ever for a secondary school. Pupils now had to travel to Handsworth for their education.

Councillor Woodcock told the committee that he wished the Board of Education would allow the Technical School to be used for the purpose, since it was a 'great drawback' that children had to go to another town to receive secondary education.

At the same meeting, councillor George Ryder agreed that there should be a secondary school, but he did not like 'the methods in operation with regard to restricting attendance at those schools.' He wanted Smethwick to develop a secondary school as 'an extension of the educational facilities which allowed every child (whether they could pay for it or not) to take advantage of it if they had the capacity to benefit by it,' and went on to say that:

to a very large extent the demand for a secondary school was not merely a desire for increased educational facilities, but only a demand for a certain class of children. It seemed to him that there was a certain amount of snobbery about the matter, and at the back of the minds of those who were clamouring for secondary education. The children of the workers who were not wealthy enough to pay for secondary education should be entitled to share in any comprehensive scheme if it was shown that they might profit by it.*1

The Technical School's success further increased the incentive to make arrangements for secondary education. Alderman Adams, education committee chairman, said at the Technical School's prize-giving ceremony in December 1912, that those who had predicted 'The Tech.' would be 'a white elephant' must admit they were altogether wrong. Attendance the previous month was about 4,000 compared with about 884 in 1909. But there was still a lot to be done in Smethwick:

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He referred to the necessity for the establishment of a secondary school and expressed the hope that, in the near future, they might devise a scheme for providing one, and also a day trades school, which he thought important in an industrial borough . . . *2

Concern at the absence of secondary school accommodation was also expressed in a letter to the town council from the Labour Representation Council. Sent in October 1913, it enquired about the possibility of providing a secondary school. The Education Committee replied that it realised the need but difficulties had 'presented themselves from time to time in dealing with the matter.' *3

The committee's wording was something of an understatement. But Alderman Adams' hopes for a secondary school scheme 'in the near future' were not vague dreams being spun out for the benefit of his audience. Proposals had already been put forward in 1912 with a view to providing a joint secondary school for Smethwick and Oldbury. Meetings between representatives of the County Borough and Worcestershire County Council were held and sites inspected. Smethwick Council bought an area of land known as 'The Uplands,' but, though plans were prepared, the outbreak of war in 1914 brought a pause to the joint negotiations.

*1 "Smethwick Telephone": 11.11.1911. 'An Educational Review: The Demand for a Secondary Department.'

*2 "Birmingham Daily Post": 11.12.1912.

*3 Smethwick Education Committee Year Book for 1914; p.9.

— NOTICES —

CHRISTMAS CARD COMPETITION 1975

To stimulate interest in the design of Christmas cards, the Black Country Society is holding a competition to encourage people with artistic ability.

Entries must be in black and white and relate both to Christmas and to the Black Country.

There are no prizes, but the three best judged designs will be published as Christmas cards by the Society, subject to circumstances beyond its control.

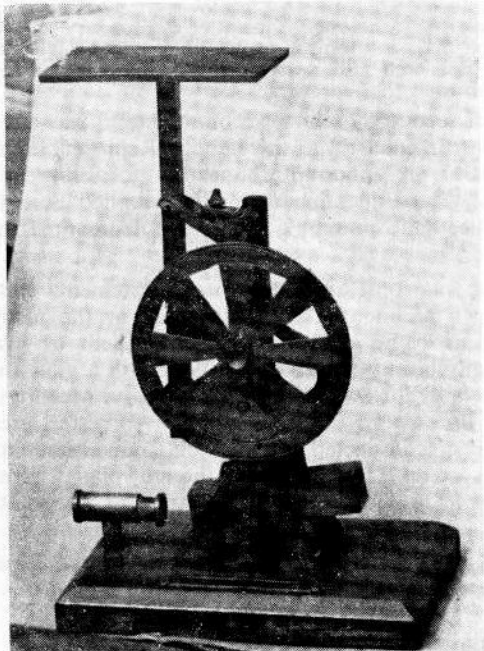
Worthy designs will also be exhibited during the Autumn.

Closing date July 1, 1975

For rules and entry forms, write to The Secretary, The Black Country Society, 49 Victoria Road, Tipton, enclosing s.a.e.

NEW PUBLICATION

The Story of the Old Testament Part 1 (Genesis—Deuteronomy inclusive), by Kate Fletcher, is being published by The Black Country Society, price 60p plus 10p p. and p. Available May/June, 1975. This work is already in considerable demand following Kate Fletcher's broadcasts on Radio Birmingham, using an abbreviated version in dialect verse.



WHAT KIND OF SCALES ARE THESE ?

The owner, Mr. J. Boulton, would like to know.

The Science Museum in London is unable to identify by maker (M. & Co.). Date is said to be between 1883-1897.

**Anyone
with the
answer ?**

Preserved for Posterity

by

Michael Hale

THE photograph* shows a scene at Bilston on the West Midland line of the former Great Western Railway. It was taken one Sunday afternoon about seventeen years ago and it records several features worthy of note. In those days no-one could have foreseen the growth of the railway preservation movement, so it is a strange coincidence that three major items visible in the photograph were later purchased for private preservation. That is, preservation by an individual or a group of people, as distinct from official preservation by British Rail or a national museum.

A section of the down line had been relaid; an operation which was normally carried out on Sundays in order to minimise disruption to the regular traffic. Pannier tank No. 3649 had just hauled several ballast wagons over the section, the stone from the wagons had been dropped in position and the permanent-way men were spreading it out between the sleepers. Later, the ballast would be tamped to settle it, and the sleepers would be packed to give good alignment of the track.

The vehicle on the left of the picture is an old clerestory-roofed passenger carriage, built in 1903. Originally it had eight compartments, all third class, and was numbered 1357. The word "clerestory", pronounced "clearstory",

refers to the raised portion of the roof which had panes of glass in the side to let in more daylight. That was a design feature fashionable in the later years of the nineteenth century.

After being taken out of normal use the carriage was converted into a mess van by removal of the internal partitioning and transverse seating. A table down the centre

**overleaf*

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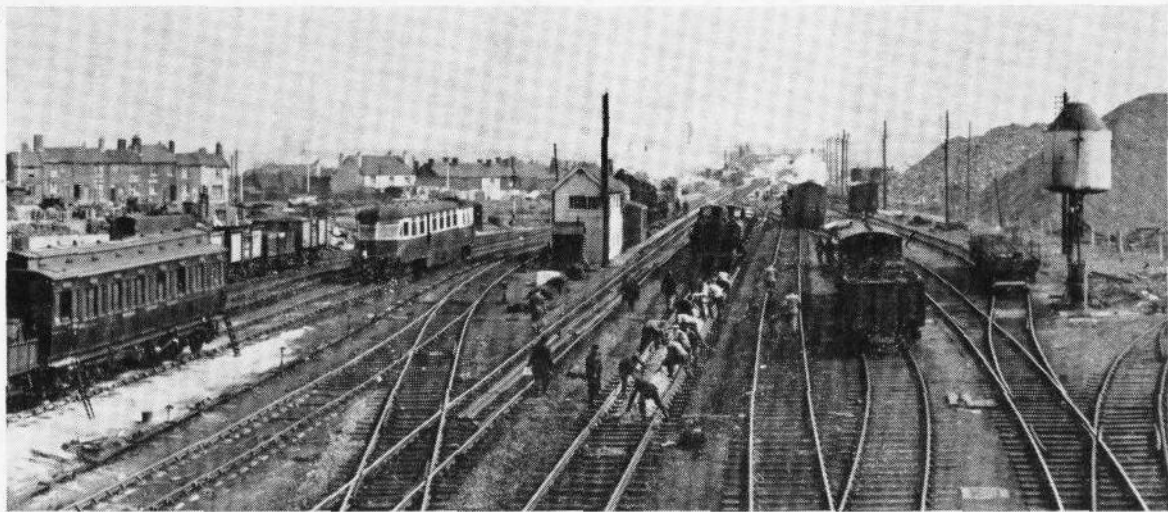
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See previous page

MICHAEL HALE

Michael Hale is the author of 'Steam in the Black Country,' 'Through Snow Hill, Birmingham,' 'Railways of the Severn Valley,' and joint author with Ned Williams of 'By Rail to Halesowen.' The latter is £1.50 plus postage; others 75p plus 10p postage. All available from The Black Country Society

and benches round the sides provided somewhere for the men to eat their food. Stoves provided warmth and gas rings were used to boil water for making tea. At one time painted in the familiar Great Western chocolate and cream livery, in its later days the carriage was painted black and numbered DW 14571.

Based at Wolverhampton, the vehicle had probably seen service in many parts of the Black Country, but following the run-down of former Great Western lines in the area it saw very little use. It was in fairly good condition for its age, and local members of the Great Western Society considered that it would be a worthwhile purchase, as very few clerestory-roofed vehicles survive to represent the coaching-stock of that period.

Thanks to a co-operative B.R. inspector, DW 14571 was protected from vandalism until purchase could be effected in 1968. The coach was then moved to the Great Western Society depot at Didcot to await the long task of restoration to its original condition as No. 1357.

To the right of the coach is a Great Western diesel railcar, No. 20. This was put into traffic in June, 1940, having been built at the company's Swindon works using diesel engines and transmission supplied by A.E.C. Ltd. of Southall. The G.W.R. pioneered the use of diesel railcars, which were the forerunners of the modern diesel multiple-units used by British Rail. No. 20 had 48 seats and was one of the later batch of cars intended for branch line use.

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However, this one, and also No. 19, differed from the rest of the batch in having a dual-range gear-box. When hauling another vehicle, for example a coach for more passengers or a van for parcels or fruit traffic, it was geared down to a maximum speed of 45 m.p.h. to give greater haulage capacity. Using the other range, when traffic conditions allowed, a maximum of 60 m.p.h. could be attained. Similar railcars were used in the Black Country, on the Dudley-Birmingham service and between Stourbridge Junction and Town stations for example, but this particular one was last based at Worcester or Gloucester.

When the few survivors of these railcars were withdrawn from regular service in October, 1962 they were put into store at Worcester for use, if required, as personnel carriers. No. 20 had been performing that function when seen at Bilston, and had probably brought additional men to assist the local permanent-way gang, so that the work could be done more quickly.

When British Rail had no further use for it, No. 20 was purchased for the Kent and East Sussex Railway, and was restored to G.W.R. colours at their Tenterden depot.

At this point on the West Midland line there was once a junction with the internal rail network of Stewarts and Lloyds steelworks, now British Steel Corporation, Bilston Works. Wagons bringing iron ore for the furnace were once delivered here. Engines shunting in the sidings would replenish their water supply from the store tank and crane to be seen on the right of the picture.

Equipment of this nature was made redundant when steam locomotives were replaced by diesels during the mid-sixties. The water tank and crane assembly was eventually purchased for use on the Severn Valley Railway. So it was that, unknown to the photographer at the time, those three items of railway equipment were destined to find a new life at different preservation centres.

THE CHAPELS OF ALL SAINTS' CHURCH WEST BROMWICH

ON June 26, 1871 the eighteenth-century parish church of West Bromwich was demolished to make way for the present building. A temporary church was built to provide for the parishioners' needs during the restoration work. However, this church was not large enough to hold the entire congregation and it was perhaps this fact which finally persuaded the vicar, Mr. Willett, to press on with what had "for a long time been so pressing a need", namely the construction of separate mission chapels. One of these was St. Mary's, Hatley Heath.

According to the parish magazine for June, 1871, this chapel was built "on a piece of ground very near to the present Mission Room . . ." A town map of 1890 shows St. Mary's in Jowett's Lane

on the right-hand side as one travels to Hill Top, and about mid-way between Wyntor Lane and Allerton Lane. The site was then leased to the church; now it is occupied by houses.

The principal reason for building St. Mary's seems to have been the absence of an Anglican church or chapel in the area. The vicar thought that "the means of grace in a large parish such as this should be within half a mile of anyone". Many people perhaps found it difficult to travel to All Saints' especially in winter, but some at least made the effort. Mr. Willett was then quick to praise "the persevering regularity with which many . . . attend Old Church . . . though the distance and the steep dark road . . . present obstacles which might daunt less earnest worshippers".

A second reason for the chapel was perhaps the fear of losing some of his flock to nonconformists. There were many who might find "The Chapel close and the Church distant".

That Willett had a great concern for the spiritual orthodoxy of his parishioners is suggested by his reaction when the Rev. W. C. Robinson of St. Andrew's Church was converted to Roman Catholicism, in 1872. This caused panic in both parishes. Willett wrote a bitter condemnation of "perverts" and exhorted his flock to adhere to the true Faith lest any should be caught in "the Romanist trap". It was hoped that a new Anglican chapel by its very presence and the "sound of its bell" would make the careless soul realize the presence of its true (Anglican) maker!

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Willett on Monday, September 18, 1871 at 6 p.m. The chapel was to be opened on Advent Sunday.

The site was liable to subsidence owing to mining galleries and thus the chapel could not be built entirely of brick. It had instead a wooden frame, plated with iron and on the inside, oak panels from the Old Church. Doubtless these were from the galleries of the recently demolished building. St. Mary's was built so that the chancel could be screened off, leaving the nave free for use as a schoolroom on weekdays. A regular Sunday school was also held in the chapel.

The day school was closed in the early 1890s and by 1901 the chapel appears to have been demolished. It does not appear on the town maps for that or any subsequent year. Further comparison of the maps for 1890 and 1901 shows also the disappearance of a large group of buildings in Wyntor Lane to the north-west of the chapel. This may account in part for the closure of the chapel school as families left the immediate area.

St. Marys' Stoney Lane was erected for similar reasons as its Hatley Heath counterpart. When built, the chapel was about one and a quarter miles from the mother church. Willett again showed concern for his parishioners' welfare. A chapel was necessary in that part of the parish because he believed (albeit mistakenly) that "there are as complete heathens in Stoney Lane and Taylor's Lane as in Heathen Countries . . ."

This building was paid for by private subscription of the Rev. J. Wylde and some of his acquaintances. Its erection therefore in no way

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clashed with the primary obligation of the parishioners to contribute to the restoration of All Saints'. St. Mary's cost £132, with the seats, gas and other fittings adding another £90 to the bill. The subscription list records a donation of two guineas from the President of Magdalen College, Oxford and £25 from the Church Extension Association. The Altar furniture was presented by religious bodies like the Society of St. Alphege and the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament.

Mrs. Willett, with her customary skill, laid the foundation stone on Monday, 5 June, 1871 at 7.30 p.m. and it was hoped to open the chapel on St. Mary Magdalene's Day. By June of the following year, the chapel had its own small choir.

The plan of the Stoney Lane chapel was essentially the same as the one at Hatley Heath, consisting of a chancel, nave and vestry.

This chapel faithfully served the parish until it was demolished to make way for new flats. A new St. Mary's was subsequently built for the benefit of the people on the Charlemont Farm Estate and it is now the hub of a thriving religious community.

C. W. Hannah, author of this article, has written a short history and guide to All Saints' Parish Church, West Bromwich, price 30p plus 7p p. and p.

Keys by the Million

KEYS—the open sesame to happiness or the keepers of sorrow—have been a fascinating subject to many people for centuries. They suggest authority, security and protection. They keep people out and they lock people in. But where do the millions of keys made every year all go?

It is known that when Americans came to England for the Coronation of the Queen, many started the "collecting" mania by taking away the keys of the State Rooms of the liner "Queen Elizabeth"—predecessor of the QE2—as well as hundreds of the ship's cabin keys and mainland hotel keys.

The urge by thousands of visitors to Britain to take home "memento" hotel keys has continued and multiplied through the years. On return home the tallies to which the keys are attached are proudly displayed as proof of having stayed at a famous hotel in the United Kingdom or travelled on one of the glamour ships.

THE vast majority of locks and keys made in Britain come from Willenhall. It is here that "Union" lock-makers Josiah Parkes & Sons Ltd., in the largest lock manufacturing unit in Europe and with many proud years of lock-making behind them, produce more than 400 tons of locks a month, many of them for export. A huge number of keys are, therefore, required as original equipment.

Willenhall began to make locks and keys in the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth. There were no large lock factories as we know them

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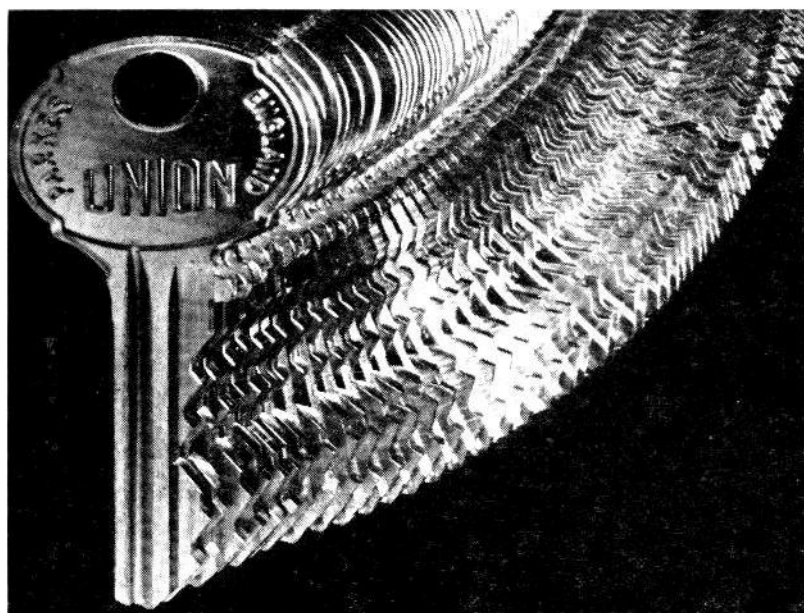
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today. Most of the lock-making businesses were small closely-knit family affairs manufacturing their wares in their own homes, with all the family contributing and perhaps with the help of outside apprentices. Wives and children all worked on assembly, most of the children starting at the age of nine years. Around 1750 a Dr. Richard Wilkes of Willenhall recorded that Willenhall consisted of "one long street, newly-paved" with "many good houses" and that "more locks of all kinds are made here than in any other town of the same size in England or Europe".

N. W. Tildesley's history of Willenhall says that in 1770 there were 148 lock-makers in Willenhall, and 340 by 1855. The population of the town in 1811 was 3,823; in 1901 it was 18,515, and today is about 35,000. Without doubt, the lock and key industry brought fame to the town. Today the emphasis has passed from the craft of locksmith to the skill of the engineer, but the bulk of the locks and keys manufactured in England are still made in Willenhall.

There is an insatiable demand for spare keys. One London locksmith ordered half-a-million blanks from Parkes to make his own keys to order. Parkes themselves are proud of a "library" they keep of 250,00 spare keys, numbered and docketed to satisfy requests (when the numbers and the letters on the key are quoted!) for replacements of lost keys for "Union" locks.

Keys are made by Parkes in more than 50 different types and sizes—small keys, big keys, keys in steel, in nickel silver, in zinc alloy and in brass. They produce nearly a million cylinder (front door) and lever (mortice lock) keys each month. Car keys made by Parkes reach the stupendous total of one-and-a-quarter million a month.

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Every month Josiah Parkes & Sons make several hundred suites of 'Union' locks and all have to be "Master-Keyed". To complete the suites, they produce each month, as required and after meticulous calculations, grand-master keys, master-keys, sub-master keys and servant keys. Key combinations for many of these suites are calculated by computer. The advantage of master-keyed suites lie in their convenience and their flexibility. They allow access through some doors while they deny it through others. They isolate selected areas against unauthorised entry, and yet all doors may be opened by a single master key.

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Editor's Note: Readers may like to be reminded that a history of Josiah Parkes & Sons appears in Vol. 6, No. 1.



THEY SERVE THE BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY

Ron Moss



BORN 1930, Woodside. Educated at Dudley Intermediate School, now Sir Gilbert Claughton Technical Grammar School, and Dudley Technical College. Now employed as a gauge/jig and tool grinder. Ron is a leading member of the industrial archaeology sub-committee of the Society, and also on the advisory panel on social history and local trades to the Black Country Museum. He is seen in the photograph, taken by his son Gary, cleaning an old iron window rescued from a forge being demolished in Old Hill.

Ron likes drawing and has produced several illustrations for the magazine as well as the tramway map published by the Society. He has been a Society committee member since 1971, but has now resigned temporarily in order to devote more time to a survey of small scale industries in his own home area, being particularly interested in hand-made chain and forging work.

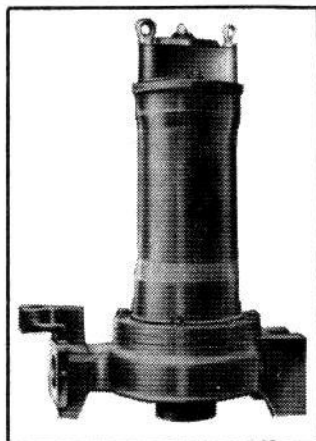
His interest in photography enables him to present slide shows illustrating these skilled and vanishing trades.

Lee-Howl Pumps

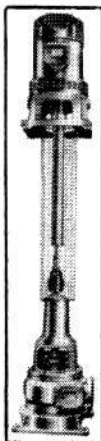
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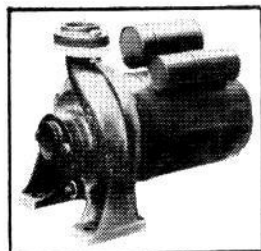
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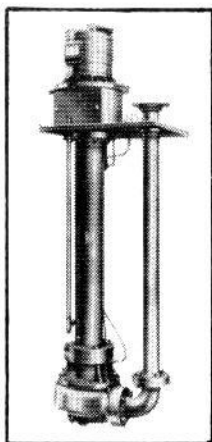
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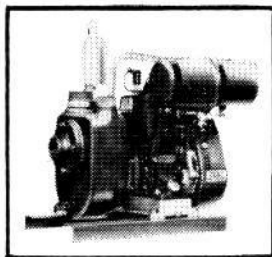
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Art in the Black Country 1975

Austin Moseley

AN open art exhibition 'Art in the Black Country' was held at the Central Art Gallery, Dudley from 15 February to 15 March, '75, organised jointly by The Black Country Society and the Dudley Leisure and Recreation Department. It was a new venture on the part of the society and a selection committee was formed to decide which submissions should be accepted. This consisted of Mr. C. R. Hajdamach, Keeper of Glass and Fine Art, Miss K. Hogwood, Arts and Accommodation Officer and, for the Society, committee members Mr. A. Moseley, Mr. W. Homer and Mrs. J. Parsons.

In many respects the exhibition was highly successful, although the work on show was of necessity limited to drawings and paintings, whereas the Society had hoped to include a broader selection of work covering such crafts as needlework, pottery, sculpture and so forth. Examples of craft-work in fabric, needlework, ceramics and wood carving were in fact submitted, and the selection committee fully recognised the high standard of most of these submissions. However, the selection process proved more complicated than had been anticipated.

To begin with, the gallery authorities had beforehand expressed the view that work should be restricted to wall-hanging only, and this automatically precluded free-standing items such as pottery, etc. Then it became necessary to reject work which presented difficulties in hanging (i.e., paintings not framed properly) and other work needing protection which could not be guaranteed in a gallery to which the public have free access. A further problem arose in that, having rejected work on the foregoing grounds, it then became necessary to conform to the rules drawn up for the exhibition to the extent of confining acceptance to items which reflected the Black Country region in specific terms. Many works which were excellent in their own right had reluctantly to be discarded because the themes could equally be associated with other regions, and here the decision of the selection committee governed the issue.

The final selection placed on display contained a gratifying number submitted by people who had never before exhibited to the general public, and in this aspect the Society achieved one of its main aims. Sixty individuals submitted work and the total number of items facing the selection committee just topped the hundred. They spent four hours in choosing the final 59 which formed the exhibition, so it will be obvious to all concerned that each submission was carefully debated upon.

The Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mrs. Mary Pargeter opened the exhibition and ably demonstrated her own keen interest in the venture. She referred to the fact that some of the exhibits depicted places in the region which no longer existed.



Photo: A. H. Price

OPENING OF "ART IN THE BLACK COUNTRY EXHIBITION," DUDLEY ART GALLERY
 L. to r.: H. Parsons, editor, *The Blackcountryman*, Mrs. Joan Parsons, Mr. Austin Moseley (selection committee members), the Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mrs. Mary Pargeter, Dr. J. M. Fletcher, president of The Black Country Society, Mr. J. Brimble, secretary, Mr. W. Homer, selection committee member, and Joanne Brimble presenting bouquet

The co-operation and assistance of the staff of the Leisure and Recreation Department, and of the staff of the gallery and the design department in particular, was truly magnificent and did much to provide a professional quality to the whole presentation. Other individuals made useful contributions in typing, preparing posters, arranging printing and publicity, and refreshment at the opening ceremony.

Each person submitting work was issued with an invitation to the opening and in the case of rejected material, an attempt was made to explain the reason. In no case was it a reflection on merit.

A substantial proportion of the work exhibited was for sale and in fact one sale was reported on the morning of the opening.

It is hoped that the exhibition will become an annual event, but that on future occasions it will be possible to broaden the scope of content to include those types of work, which for the reasons outlined, had to be excluded on what, after all, was an excursion into unfamiliar territory—at least as far as The Black Country Society is concerned.

Art in the Black Country 1909

THE exhibition described in the foregoing article by Mr. Austin Moseley is not the first to have taken place in Dudley which displayed work depicting local scenes and topics. Reference to a similar exhibition can be found in an item among the Black Country Society's historical collection—a catalogue of a collection of prints and engravings, illustrative of local history, lent by Mr. Henry C. Brettell (Town Clerk) and placed on view during the summer of 1909 at the Municipal Art Gallery.

Some 45 works were exhibited, these being a fairly representative selection from an extensive collection brought together over many years by the owner and all, according to the catalogue, commendable for either artistic merit or local interest. Dudley's two principal ancient buildings, the castle and the priory, figured high among the exhibits, together with other notable features of the town and its surroundings.

A few water colours were included, among them a view of the priory, reputedly by David Cox; also by an artist of local distinction named Paul Braddon. 'The Market Place' was a good example of his work. Alfred Newman, who drew architectural subjects and medieval scenes had two views of the castle assigned to him, whilst a view of the castle in 1763 was the work of Frances Jukes, a painter and engraver born at Martley, Worcs in 1746.

Among the engravings were two of the most highly finished specimens of the work of Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (S. & N. Buck), brothers known for the delightful plates they engraved of views of antiquities, ruins and ancient castles. A view of the priory (1821) by John Coney, was noted as being of considerable merit. Coney, an architectural engraver, executed with consummate skill a series of views of Dudley Castle and Warwick Castle.

There were also works showing the castle by James C. Allen, C. F. Chiffins, H. F. James, J. M. W. Turner, S. Shaw, T. Phillips, R.A. and Geo. Molineux and others. Among works not related to the castle or priory were, a portrait of Rev. Joseph Cartwright (Vicar of Dudley 1779—1811) by T. Phillips, R.A., St. Edmunds' School by W. Bourne, Town Hall, Dudley 1860 by Paul Braddon, and Old Himley Hall 1735 by S. Shaw.

Portraits of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who was beheaded at the Tower of London in 1553 and of John William, Earl of Dudley were also on view.

Local scenes illustrated by the admirable pen and ink drawings of E. Blocksidge represented, St. Thomas' Church, Dudley 1816; Old

Netherton Hall and Old Russell's Hall, these had appeared in Blocksidge's Almanack some few years earlier. Another work assigned to E. Blocksidge was the Thread Mill, Trindle.

Displayed also was a view of the castle from Dr. Plott's 'Staffordshire' 1686, and to interest the curious a map of Worcestershire, dated 1650 and 'The South Staffordshire Railway Guide' 1850. Those who dived into Dudley's past history will no doubt recognise many of the above named works.

Sources :

Catalogue of Engravings and Prints illustrative of Local History, Dudley Art Gallery 1909.
Blocksidge's Almanack 1888, 1893, 1904.
Dudley 'As it was, as it is today', Hannah and Chandler.

The recent exhibition was, however, a first, in that exhibitors submitted their own work, whereas the 1909 exhibition formed part of a collection owned by one man.—Editor.

Wattis, a Blackcountryman

A TRIBUTE

by

Geoff. Stevens

IN the nineteenth century the plight of Wednesbury's poor was invested in the Overseers of the Poor. These unpaid officials (before 1809 two in number, afterwards three), lightened their onerous duties by appointing a salaried assistant overseer. Such an office, combined with that of governors of the workhouse, was brought into operation in 1836.

One William Wattis was appointed Assistant Overseer and Poor Rate Collector for the town in 1884. Operating from his residence and office at 71 Stafford Street, he carried out his duties until his death, aged 54, on 15 January, 1901. Cameron Tom

Wattis succeeded him in the same year.

Cameron Wattis (William's son?) was appointed at an annual salary of twenty-five pounds, less than half that of the art gallery caretaker and meagre indeed compared to the mayor's £300. However, by 1911, he was able to move to a house in Hollies Drive and make 71 Stafford Street his office only.

On the 25 February, 1912, Cameron's wife Margaret Janet (née Preston) gave birth to a son, Richard. Richard Wattis was to become a national figure as an actor, most often cast as a stiff-upper-lip civil servant. When Richard was four the family

moved from Wednesbury to Walsall. Cameron Wattis continued his work at Stafford Street, however, and after 1919 his wife took his position. At this time they lived at 227 Birmingham Road, Walsall.

Richard Wattis was educated at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and King Edward's, Birmingham before going to Bromsgrove Public School. He took the side of a boy who had been punished, organised a conspiracy of silence against the teacher, and was caned by the headmaster.

He had always wanted to be an actor, but on leaving school was led into the family (which manufactured electrical switches) as an accountant. He yearned to act and wrote to Robert Donat for advice. The answer was to forget it—"with a face like yours, you'll have a bad time". He added that if he must act, then do it. Richard started acting seriously at the age of 23 with the Walsall Players at Her Majesty's Theatre. An introduction with the Liverpool Repertory Company led to disappointment, but Donat secured him a place with Croydon Repertory Theatre. His first job was with the Oxford University Dramatic Society, which had taken the theatre for the summer season. At Croydon he studied under J. Baxter Somerville.

Later, he moved to Brighton Rep. as leading man, first appearing in "The Little Minister" at the Royal in September, 1935. Four years on, he left Brighton to join the army. During the war he rose from private to captain.

After the war he found things difficult at first, having settled in the West End to further his career. The part of Seymour Sangate, M.P. in 'Ambassador Extraordinary' at the Aldwych, 30 June, 1948, was his first appearance on the London stage. The smash hit, 'Ring Around the Moon', which ran for two years, was to establish him. Richard Wattis' film debut came in 'A Yank at Oxford' and many more films followed. All told, he acted in over 200 films.

In 1960, Richard began a long association with Eric Sykes and Hattie Jacques and could be seen, only recently in their B.B.C. television series.

When his mother died in 1957, his connections with Walsall were lost. Family relationships had been strong with the town, his uncle, the late William Preston was a Walsall M.P. from 1924-29.

Richard Wattis collapsed and died in a London restaurant on Saturday, 1 February, 1975. He was a Blackcountryman. Not a typical one, but he went a long way.

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(TIPTON GREEN
JUNIOR SCHOOL 1974)

SKIPPING RHYMES

Cowboy Joe

Cowboy Joe, went to Mexico,
Hands up, stick 'em up,
Drop your guns and stick 'em up,
And out you go from Mexico.

Spanish Lady

Not last night but the night before,
64 rats came knocking at my door,
As they came in, I went out,
And this is what the first one said
to me,

Spanish lady turn right round,
Spanish lady touch the ground,
Spanish lady do the high kicks,
Spanish lady do the splits.

Mary in the Kitchen

Mary in the kitchen,
Doin' a bit of stitchin',
In comes a bogey man,
And frightens her away—boo!

CLAPPING RHYMES

I say Jack

I say Jack,
Where have you been
Down the alley,
Courtin' Sally,
Playin' with cinders,
Breakin' windows,
Sittin' on benches,
Kissin' wenches,
Wenches kissin' me.

When Johny was One

When Johny was one,
His life had just begun,
Cum Johny, gun Johny,
Half past one, change over.
When Johny was two,
He learned to tie his shoe,
Shoe Johny, shoe Johny,

Half past two, change over.
When Johny was three,
He sat me on his knee, etc.
When Johny was four,
He got me on the floor.
When Johny was five,
He learned to jump the hive.
When Johny was six,
He pulled down my knicks.
When Johny was seven,
He learned to go to heaven.
When Johny was eight,
He learned to jump the gate.
When Johny was nine,
He learned to jump the line.
When Johny was ten,
He started all again.

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Discovering History Through Street Names

J. Brimble

WHEN West Bromwich Council added the names Napier, Galton and Dixon to the index of Tipton streets, they were accepting the suggestions of the Black Country Society. Street naming is not new to the society, for over the years several names for new housing developments in the area have originated in our suggestions. The foregoing are typical in that they try to maintain a local heritage, being rooted in historical associations, i.e. Sir Charles Napier took charge of the 'Aaron Manby,' the world's first iron steam ship, constructed in 1822 at the Horseley Ironworks, when it took its first journey to France; Samuel Galton, the banker, gave his name to the famous iron bridge at Smethwick which was a product of the Horseley Ironworks; and Mr. Dixon was one of the partners in the original Horseley Company. The underlying association with Horseley is that the housing development stands on land connected with that company.

Of course, the sole purpose of street names is for ease of identification and communication, yet by delving into their origins it is possible to discover much about local history. For instance, we get glimpses of Tipton before the Industrial Revolution in that Coppice Street, Wood Street, Dale Street and Horseley Heath suggest a long-vanished rural landscape. Coneygrev, too, has distant origins, 'coney' meaning rabbit, it was supposedly the site of a rabbit warren. Centuries ago, Coneygrev area was a deer park connected with Dudley Castle. There are also reminders of field names in Groveland, Glebefield and Barnfield.

Several of Tipton's street names are misnomers or eccentricities, probably the most notable being Dudley Port, which was an area of wharves and warehouses around the canal known as Dudley's Port because that town had no canals in its central area, this being its nearest point for waterway transport. The 'Old Port Hotel' now closed (though its wall sign is still visible) perpetuates the memory of this canal port.

Park Lane East and West runs for quite a distance alongside the perimeter of Victoria Park, though its name has nothing whatsoever to do with the park. The public open space was not opened until 1901, whereas Park Lane can be found as such in the parish rate books of the early 1800s. It was probably known in the distant past, being the lane or track which ran alongside the Coneygrev deer park.

Toll End owes its name, not to the existence of a toll gate as is often thought, but to an old family name, and a subsidy roll of 1327 relating to Tipton contains the name Johe' atte tella (John of Toll or Tail). The name is spelt Tall and Tole in the 19th century parish records. Hurst Lane may be similarly conceived from a like source with 'De Petro atte Hurst' (Peter of Hurst), and likewise, Horseley. Great Bridge does not find its origin in some super construction, but seems to be a derivation

of Greets Bridge across the River Tame. Note that nearby is Greets Green.

With the considerable amount of post war development which has taken place, many interesting names have disappeared under the bulldozer in slum clearance schemes, doubtless never to reappear, although some disappeared even long before that. Among such were Newells Row, Groves Row, Rounds Square (Tipton Green), Dunns Place (near Owen Street), Stokes Buildings, at the 'bottom end' of Wood Street, owned by Joseph Stokes and occupying 35 houses in 1825, Police Station Yard at Horseley Heath, formerly the site of one of Tipton's early police stations, Piano Row and Monkey Row. Blue Pig Row, Dog Yard, White Lion Street, Navigation Row—all took their names from public houses!

Exhibition Row, Horseley Heath, probably took its name from the Great Exhibition of 1851, but where did 'Parliament' in Park Lane West derive its name?

More recent demolitions have removed Simons Passage, Chates Passage, Soaphouse Walk, Rifle Row, Horseshoe Row, Lockside, and Leabrook Square. Boat Row, with its row of houses and pub, the 'Boat Inn,' standing on the canal towpath near the Park Lane Methodist Chapel has now gone, also the row of houses on the canal tow path off Union Street. Howl Place, however, a name connected with a well known local industrial family, has been re-used on a new housing development on the site.

Certain names have disappeared through re-naming over the years. For example, the name Victoria Road was adopted when Victoria Park alongside which it runs, was opened. However, before this it had long been known as Randalls or Randolls Lane. Old maps show this lane as occupying the present Victoria Road and Conegre Road, and the canal bridge in the latter road still bears the name Randalls Bridge.

Castle Street was once called Quarry Lane, whilst Alexandra Road seemed more suitable to the resident than Workhouse Lane. The old workhouse which was demolished in 1912 stood close to the site of Tipton's new fire station. Industry is naturally represented as in Factory Road, the name given to this corner of Tipton which was heavily industrialised in the 19th century. Furnace Parade refers to the furnaces of the Tipton Furnace Co., which once stood nearby. Holcroft is a reminder of the name of the proprietors of the Portfield Ironworks.

Old farms and halls can be traced in street names. Cotterills Road perpetuates the name of an old farm which stood thereabouts. The farmhouse was of considerable antiquity for over the main chimney piece was said to be recorded the date 1538, whilst over the main doorway was the cypher 'C.W.M. 1695.'

Newhall Street reminds us of the now demolished Tibbington Hall, of which this was the driveway, whilst the former Denbigh Hall gives its name to a post war housing estate.

Old families in the town's history are recalled, one example here being Hipkins Street. This family are probably best known as butchers and tallow chandlers, although closer research tells us of their close involvement in local affairs. Stephen Hipkins who died in 1830 aged 81,

was John Wesley's steward during his visit to Tipton. Edward Hipkins was a member of the original local board of health in 1855 and a leading figure in local methodist circles.

Daniel Hipkins was a well known local political figure, being chairman of the Tipton Local Board of Health 1889-94 and chairman of the Tipton Urban District Council 1895-1902 (with the exception of 1898 and 1900). His portrait hangs in Tipton central library.

Prominent personalities of Tipton's local council in the early part of this century have their names perpetuated. They include among others, W. H. Powis, Joseph Baker, Joseph Sherwood, J. E. Salter, Simeon Webb and J. W. Bourne.

Although Watery Lane today only refers to the roughly surfaced approaches to the railway level crossings of that name, the name once referred to the road running from Workhouse Lane to Lower Green, the present day Queens Road. It was known in the early 19th century as Water Lane, which probably originated by reason of its proximity to the brook which ran close by, but is now culverted.

A minute dated August 11, 1820, from the Vestry Book, records that Water Lane was in such a terrible state that its reconstruction was necessary. It appears that it was constantly damaged by flood water from the brook, which may be the reason why the name was changed from Water to Watery.

An old name which has fallen into disuse is Todd's End, which was more or less where Castle Road now stands. Bell Street takes its name from the 'Bell Inn' which was one of Tipton's oldest inns, dating from at least the early 19th century. The building ceased to be a licenced house in 1923, but was demolished only a decade ago. One of its former innkeepers was John Twist, a prominent figure on the Tipton Local Board of Health in the 1850s-60s and a trustee of the new Park Lane Methodist Church when it was rebuilt in 1867.

The Pound at Toll End was originally an enclosure for the impounding of cattle. Lower Green is a reminder of the days when Tipton Green was open land and was divided into Upper and Lower parts.

Churches also give their names to streets, with St. John's Road, St. Mark's Road, Church Lane etc., whilst Tozer Street reminds us of the Rev. S. T. Tozer who was vicar of St. John's Church from 1863 until his death in 1904. He was a man who involved himself in local affairs and was the first secretary to the Tipton School Board in 1872.

Three names suggested in recent times are Heronville, Paget and Wyrley, the names affixed to three blocks of flats in Groveland Road. They are the names of families who have in the past held the manor of Tipton.

Tipton, too, has its quota of streets named from trees, surnames and the like, and whilst arguments can be put forward to support these, it seems a pity not to use names with local historical significance.

N.B.—The author has researched into the origins of all of Tipton's street names and has information on all but a few. It is impossible to mention more in the space of one article.

THE LYNCH IN THE 'TWENTIES

by Lew Turner

(in an interview
with Alan Price)

A VISITOR to West Bromwich today would find in the Lyng a compact, well planned, residential area with *shopping precinct* close to the High Street and bounded by Moor Street in the west and Spon Lane in the east: an area which mirrors much of the improvement and modernisation being carried out in West Bromwich over the past ten to fifteen years.

Only a resident of the area could really visualize the enormous changes which have taken place in the fifty years since I was a boy growing up in the Lyng in the twenties, and when I sit quietly at home, memories of these times come flooding back, recalling many of the characters who once lived there. I hope they will help to remind other people of my age-group of life in West Bromwich in the difficult times which followed the end of the First World War.

The Lyng in the nineteen twenties comprised a number of streets in which stood rows of small back to back houses. Very

few people had gardens but a great number managed to keep pigeons and almost every house had a loft. Opposite the Lyng board school was Little Morris Street, and at the bottom of that street were the *tocky bonks and old pit workings*, where, during the coal strikes of the twenties people would go coal picking. There were many open pit shafts and they were continually caving in. Past the tocky bonks was "the sinkings" and other old mine workings which had become a large pool of water. There was also a pit named Bullocks Farm, closed in the twenties due to flooding.

I attended the Lyng board school and teachers I can remember were Mr. Smith, Mr. Russell, Mr. Hillson, Mr. Savage, Miss Cottam, Mrs. Green, Mr. Hartford and Miss Young. Mr. Massey was the headmaster, later followed by Mr. Golding. Everyone in the Lyng knew them and they knew everyone, parents and pupils alike. Next to the Lyng school was St. John's church and vicarage. The first vicar I remember there was the reverend Horace Octavius Augustus Adolphus. He wore a thick black beard and was a well-known character.

On the waste ground near the school where football matches, fights and political meetings were held, I remember F. O. Roberts the West Bromwich M.P. speaking there on many occasions. He was Minister of Pensions in the Macdonald government. After his meetings he would play a tune on his violin to the assembled crowd. On this waste ground a butcher named Fardon built a wooden hut and used to sell his meat by auction. Housewives gathered around his hut and waited for him

to drop the price to the very lowest.

I remember vividly the railway horses coming up the drive from the goods yard in Spon Lane. They were immaculately groomed especially on May Day. There was one character who lived near the railway bridge named "Happy" Whitehouse who, with his family on a Saturday night after 10 o'clock, would stand on the bridge and challenge everyone who came up or down to fight. If no-one accepted the challenge they would fight amongst themselves.

There were many coal yards, fish shops, green grocers and butchers shops in the Lyng. Notable amongst these tradesmen was Charlie Green the butcher, a huge man, who always wore a striped apron. We used to fetch two pennyworth of stewing steak from him when we came out of school. I remember him giving meat to the old people many times and not taking money for it. Another personality was Jimmy Stanton who kept the "Dog and Duck" in Braybrook Street. It was a home-brewed pub and we used to fetch a pennyworth of balm from there to make home-made pop. He used to deliver beer to his customers in a pony and float, one of his best customers being the aforementioned reverend Adolphus, Vicar of St. John's.

Further up Braybrook Street was the roundhouse, a George Mason's shop. We used to gaze at the man making packs of butter with his patters. Moor Street was a busy thoroughfare with its shops lit up with gas lamps, especially busy on a Saturday night with the noise of the single-decker trams rumbling up and down. I remember also Mr. Johnson of the hard-

ware shop in Moor Street, who used to come round selling his wares from a covered wagon drawn by a horse. We used to gather round to watch him selling his lamp oil from a tank at the back of his cart.

Horobins the bakers also delivered their bread in a pony and cart. Another baker, Mr. Butler of Sams Lane, came round the Lyng selling bread from a large basket on his arm. On Good Friday all the kids sold hot cross buns for him.

A lot of houses sold milk, which was served from a churn in half pints or pints. The measures were a tin container with a handle and the milk was served into your own jug.

TRADING STAMPS

There was a shop on the corner of Bond Street and Lyng Lane called Harfords, which was owned by an old lady. The lady's nephew served in the shop and they sold almost everything. They were the first people I know to give trading stamps. You received one stamp for every threepence you spent.

The Lyng was not without its characters who fell foul of the law. One of them was Jimmy Walker who spent most of his life in jail. His speciality was stealing lorries, nothing else would he take! During his brief spells of freedom he would be seen driving around the district in a lorry and before long Detective Phillips would come round and take him in. It was always Detective Phillips—never anyone else.

Another well-known person was Freddie Weaver the bookie, who would stand in an entry in Mount Pleasant Street and take bets from his clients. He would pay the local

kids twopence per week to keep watch for him and to warn him of the approach of the local "bobbies", who were always chasing him.

There was the little Wesley chapel where the organist, Mr. W. Good, was also the borough organist. The Sunday School superintendent was Councillor Prince who ran a boys' club in the wooden hut next to the chapel. On Saturday nights he would buy us all a bag of roast potatoes from the tater hot man, Jack Harvey, who kept his machine outside the Golden Cross pub.

St. John's church hall was the scene of many of the social activities in the Lyng and wedding receptions, dances and a gymnasium class was held there for many years. In the early nineteen twenties a young men's club was started there with a membership fee of one penny per week. It grew to become a club of great importance in the area and produced some of the best table tennis players, some of whom played for the town. Table tennis was a very popular pastime in those days. The church hall was demolished after the war. One of the organisers of the club was Mr. Arthur Key.

On the corner of Sams Lane there was the Steam Gauge pub. Near to the pub was Hobday's sweet shop where lived Eric Hobday, who was hanged for the murder of a man named Fox who lived in Moor Street. Two doors away was "Nobby" Rainer's shop, a general shop which was known as "the joke shop", for his speciality was the sale of tricks and jokes. He had a machine on the counter of his shop which I think was called a "Vantas" machine. "Nobby" would pull the handle on

the side of the machine and it would produce a large glass of pop, costing one half-penny.

At the junction of Sams Lane and Littleton Street was Morgans blacksmith's shop, where we used to watch the horses being shod. He made his own horse shoes on the anvil and the sparks would fly as they were being forged from the red hot iron. When the shoes were fitted to the horses hooves, clouds of steam and the smell of burning hoof would fill the air in the little workshop. In those days there were many shopkeepers named Morgan in that particular part of the Lyng.

Other well-known people and odd characters whose names I can recall at this time were George Fleet the swimmer, little Georgie Skidmore the barber, Joe Cox who kept the Pheasant Inn, Harry

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Children at the Lyng School, West Bromwich, in the early 1920s

Davy the glazier, Jimmy Stanton, landlord of the "Dog and Duck", Charlie King the butcher, "Thompa" Mason the pigeon flyer, Harry Rose who sold fruit and vegetables from a hand cart and "Kali" who lived in Mount Pleasant Street. When I think of Donovan it is not the singer I remember but someone who sold fish in the Lyng. Opposite his shop was "Ted's", who also sold fish, and there was keen rivalry between the two. There was also a character nicknamed "Gramophone" who travelled around the district mending the old-fashioned gramophones of the type which had a large speaker and worked by clockwork. He was one of the first people to have a petrol driven push-bike, the engine fitted to the carrier at the back. To start the machine, he

had to run quite a distance with it.

The Raybould family were influential people in the Lyng at the turn of the century and they owned some of the land in the area. The Victoria Inn, which stands on the corner of Newhall Street and Lyng Lane was, in the early nineteen hundreds owned by the family. Raybould's Terrace, a row of houses in Lyng Lane, bears their name.

The people I have mentioned are just a memory, but I hope that readers of *The Blackcountryman* who may have known the area fifty years ago will have their own memories to contribute, and that through its columns they may add another chapter to the social history of the Lyng and to the Black Country to which it belongs.

John Henry Carless V.C.

by

A. H. Price

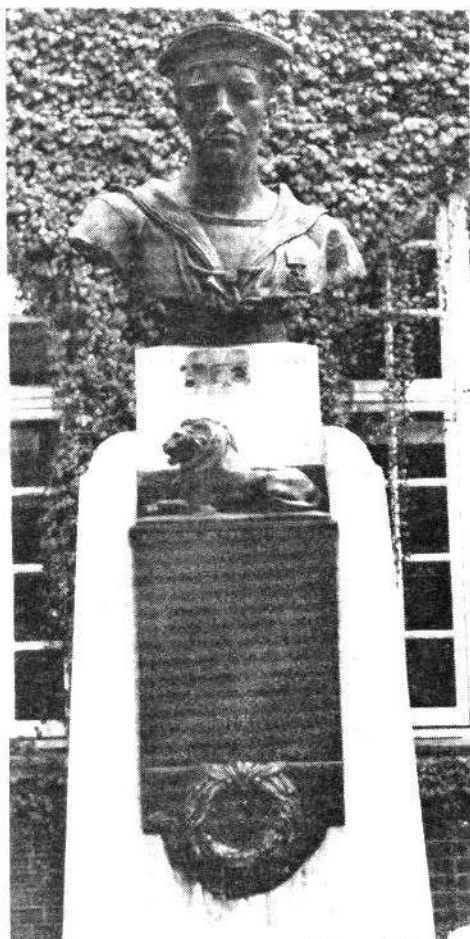


Photo: A. H. Price

JOHAN HENRY CARLESS, born in Walsall on 11 November, 1896, of working class parents, was destined in his short life span to become one of the town's most famous sons. His childhood was spent in the Caldmore district of Walsall and he attended St. Mary's Roman Catholic School. He was a "strapping lad" for his age, and as he grew up he became interested in swimming and football. In 1910, at the age of 14, he played in the finals of the English Schools soccer shield and won himself a gold medal. He had a great love of life and was a keen dancer, and like many other teenagers at the time was too occupied with his job as a currier in a local leather works to pay much attention to world affairs and the worsening political situation in Europe.

In August, 1914 the storm clouds which had been gathering over Europe finally broke, and as Britain plunged headlong into "the war to end all wars", a patriotic fervour gripped the nation. It was not

unnatural that a young man of 18 would want to do his bit for king and country, and along with some of his friends John Carless volunteered for service in the army. It must have come as a great surprise to him when he was turned down on medical grounds. Not to be out-done, however, this fine 6' 2" specimen of a man then applied to join the Royal Navy, and was immediately accepted. On September 1, 1915 John Carless became a sailor.

It was not long before the character of this young man began to make an impression on his shipmates and he soon became known for his willingness to have a go for the sake of others. Early in his naval career he was one of a number of volunteers from a destroyer who helped to rescue passengers from a beleaguered hospital ship. In another incident he saved the life of a stoker who was enveloped in flames during a fire in a boiler room.

On November 11, 1917, John celebrated his twenty-first birthday on the high seas aboard his ship, a destroyer, H.M.S. Caledon. In his last letter, written to his parents, he thanked them for his presents and closed by saying "can't write any more—we have had a sudden call". That call was to battle stations in the North Sea in what was to be one of the vital sea battles of the war—Heligoland Bight. The date, November 17, 1917.

As the Royal Navy engaged the enemy, H.M.S. Caledon was heavily shelled, and while occupied with his duties acting as a rammer at a gun, John Carless was hit by a shell splinter and severely wounded in the abdomen. Although crippled with pain he still went on serving his gun. His injury was so severe that he must have known that he was dying, yet he continued to assist with clearing the injured men around him. He collapsed once, got up, tried again to carry on with his duties and to encourage the gun's new crew, but his injuries were too much for him and finally he collapsed on the deck and died. He was, literally, in action until his last breath.

Six months after his death, Ordinary Seaman John Henry Carless received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross, the nation's highest award for bravery in action. The citation announcing the award was brief and to the point: "For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty". On the 27 June, 1918 John's parents received the award from King George V at Buckingham Palace.

Walsall was very proud of its sailor hero and its citizens were quick to respond when an appeal for public subscriptions was launched to provide a memorial to its gallant son.

On the 21 February, 1920 the Carless memorial was unveiled by Rear Admiral Sir Walter H. Cowan, whose flagship in the battle of Heligoland Bight was H.M.S. Caledon, on which John Carless served. The statue consists of a portrait bust, in bronze, by R. J. Emerson of Wolverhampton, set upon a base of Portland stone. It stands in front of the Public Library in Lichfield Street and is 10 feet 6 inches in height.

In 1923 further recognition was given to Walsall's V.C. when Oxford Street, Caldmore was renamed Carless Street, and Regent Street, Pleck was renamed Caledon Street. The white ensign from H.M.S. Caledon was displayed in the Town Hall.

An interesting sequel to this story occurred in 1970 when Mr. Graham Nunn of Bloxwich was browsing through material in an antique shop in George Street, when he came upon an oil painting which he purchased for £1. The painting was found to be a portrait of John Carless. It was in a very dilapidated condition but due to the efforts of Mr. Bob Aldridge, a local craftsman, it was extensively renovated. The portrait was of John wearing his posthumously awarded V.C. which suggested that it was copied from a photograph and the medal added later.

The origin of the painting, at first somewhat of a mystery, was later found to have been commissioned by the Walsall Services' Memorial Club in Caldmore Road, and, until 1961, it hung in the club's premises. When the club closed it was donated to John Carless's old school, St. Mary's R.C. which was then in Vicarage Place. The painting remained at the school until 1967 when it mysteriously disappeared after a fire. It is believed that it was taken away while the school was being transferred to new premises in Bath Road.

The painting was given to the town at a presentation ceremony on Monday, 16 November, 1970 by Mr. Nunn, to the mayor, alderman A. V. Townsend.

A picture of H.M.S. Caledon was presented to the Bloxwich Royal Naval Association on Saturday, 2 September, 1972 by Mrs. Dora Hearsey, John's sister, at the association's headquarters in High Street, where the picture now hangs as a memorial to Walsall's only V.C.

Underneath the statue of John Carless in Lichfield Street is written one word, "Valour". His name still brings pride to the people of Walsall.

This is the story of one man's war—a man whose courage and cheerfulness were a great comfort and inspiration to others.

"This is he, that everyman in arms should wish to be."

"**W**HY do you, who have so much, covet our few possessions?" These were the alleged words of Caractacus the British chieftain after he had been paraded through Rome by the victorious Romans. The Romans were delighted with his capture, for his leadership had been a constant threat to their conquest of Britain.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, gives an account of the Roman's last battle with the chieftain and also a description of the fortress position he was holding. Here is a short summary of the account and description.

Caractacus at Wednesbury?

by
L. O. Clarke

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After numerous defeats inflicted on him the Romans were surprised that the red haired Caractacus could install himself as leader of another race of people and in a different part of the country, but they were determined to root him out. They found him in a two-tiered fortress heavily fortified with a river to cross before they could attack. The hills around them were filled with hostile people. The officers were dismayed at the prospect of a battle, knowing that a repulse requiring a retreat in a weakened condition back to their base could tempt the rest of the population to action with disastrous results, but the men clamoured for the fight. (It must have been the idea of looting the royal baggage that generated the excitement.) The officers gave way to the men's insistence and the assault began. The river

proved to be no problem and the Romans fought their way to the top of the fortress. Caractacus escaped but left behind his wife and baggage. He was later betrayed by the queen of another tribe and handed over to the Romans.

Historians have searched for the site of this battle—mostly on the Welsh border—but to no avail. As the area occupied by the tribe mentioned includes the Black Country then there is no reason to exclude it. The word "hills" does not necessarily mean the mountains of Wales.

It is surprising how easily Wednesbury fits the description.

The Romans coming from their temporary base at Birmingham, through Oldbury and along the ancient track to the Hill Top area of West Bromwich would see on their left the hills of Rowley, Dudley and Sedgley, on their right the hills of Walsall and Great Barr all with hostile populations. Below them would be the river Tame, not much to look at now it has been channelled, but in those days it would have been spread much wider with a lot of marshy ground. Facing them across the valley would be the two-tiered fortress of Wednesbury.

Even today over 1900 years later, standing on Hill Top and mentally stripping the buildings and trees from Wednesbury Hill, it is easy to see why the Roman officers were worried at the prospects of an assault.

Some traces of the two-tier defences can still be seen particularly at Ethelfleda Terrace and Squires Walk. One large portion has recently been obscured by West Bromwich Council dumping rubbish and making a small park of the site in between the High Bullen and Church Hill.

Drawing by
D. Dilworth
of the Seal
of Sandwell
Priory, redrawn
for publication
by Ron Moss.

This drawing
appears on the
cover of "Sandwell
Priory", by D. Dilworth
published by The
Black Country Society
25p. plus 6p p/p.



The seal is now in the British Museum and is described by Prof. A. Saltman, V.C.H., Staffs. III, 219: "A 15th century copy of a 12th century matrix belonging to Sandwell Priory has survived. It is of bronze, pointed oval about 3 by 2in., and depicts Our Lord with cruciferous nimbus, seated with His right hand raised in benediction and holding an open book in His left hand. Legend, lombardic. SIGIL(L)U(M) COM(M)UNE SAN(CT)E MARIE MAGDALENA DE SANDWELLE."

THE NAILMAKERS

This play, researched and written by Jon Raven and the late Malcolm Totten, first performed with great success at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Brum Studio Theatre, is now being published by The Black Country Society, complete with music and basic suggestions for staging

Price 75p, plus 10p p. and p.

BOOK REVIEWS :

F. W. Hackwood. Staffordshire Customs, Superstitions and Folklore. 174+ii pp. Reprinted. E. P. Publishing Co. £2.75.

THERE has been no more prolific Black County historian than Wednesbury-born Frederick William Hackwood (1851-1926) and as so few of his books are now accessible to the public—some were issued in very small editions—the reproduction of his “*Staffordshire Customs, Superstitions and Folklore*,” which was first published (75 copies only) in 1924, is very welcome now that there has been a revival of interest in Black Country affairs—the flourishing state of the Black Country Society supplying some evidence of this.

Hackwood is worthy of a biography to himself but, though he was a man well esteemed in Wednesbury and round about, his fame and his books scarcely moved the wider world and now he is usually only mentioned in footnotes in other people's books. Somewhat arty in appearance—he wore a Vandyck beard and favoured a large tie done in a large bow—he was a school teacher by profession and it would appear that his first book “*Notes on lessons on moral subjects (1883)*” was intended as a guide to teachers. Bookish, he cultivated a special interest in the Black Country, but he also took an active part in local affairs in Wednesbury, becoming a member of the Town Council, chairman of the Free Library Committee and a magistrate. Much of his historical research was published in local newspapers and several of his books were composed of the galleys of type set up for the newspapers.

“*A History of Tipton (1890)*”, only 25 copies printed, first appeared in the “*Dudley Herald*” and his “*Staffordshire Superstitions*” was a collection of articles in the “*Lichfield Mercury*”. This latter volume contains a mass of information gleaned from many sources—old documents, parish registers, the writings of others, from old people's memories and by first-hand observation. Some of the superstitions and customs he mentions are not exclusively of Staffordshire, but the examples he cites are well established or documented and some survive today. Research by such as the Opies has led to better interpretations of the significance of such things as children's songs and games, but on the whole Hackwood was on safe ground and he performed no mean service to social historians in setting down so much information.

Superstitions connected with birth, marriages and death are common enough and often had a practical basis. The nails and hair of a child under one year should not be cut, though the mother could bite the nails if they became too long (in poor homes scissors were not to be found and biting was probably the safest method of reducing the long nails of a wriggling child). Although a cat would not actually “suck the breath” from a child it could suffocate a baby by curling up on it as it lay in its cot. Hackwood deals with so many things; customs connected with festivals, great occasions, markets, trading, and so on. No longer is there a cheese fair on July 29 at Clent, but the throwing of apples in the churchyard (crabbing the parson) at Romsley continues. Occasionally fairs and circuses come to town but the old wakes have

virtually died out. Hackwood points out that Brierley Hill wake (older residents will remember the boxing booth and the gingerbread stall) was held at Michaelmas, as Brierley Hill Church is dedicated to St. Michael. The superstition that it was unwise for colliers to work in Black Country pits on New Year's Eve and New Years' Day is easily rationalised in the same way as nailmakers would throw a hammer into the air to decide whether to go to work or play away on Mondays; the hammer is never known to have remained airborne and so indicate a return to work.

Times, conditions, environment and attitudes have changed much since Hackwood wrote his book, and so many of the customs that gave colour to life—which was often hard and drab for so many people—have fallen into abeyance. How many young people these days get up early on May Day to go into the countryside to pick May blossom? True there is sometimes dancing by school children round a maypole, usually set up in the school playground—but maypole dancing is more a feature of garden fete entertainment than a 1st of May activity. Old customs die or are distorted and new ones develop, old festivals and celebrations are replaced by new ones—Friendly Society parades and picnics and Dudley Castle and Corbett Hospital fetes have faded away to be replaced by boat rallies and air displays—and what new superstitions, myths and fanciful beliefs have sprung from our intrusive technology and the mysterious depths of the psyche! Had Hackwood lived another 50 years no doubt he would have industriously recorded these.

H.J.H.

W. K. V. Gale, A History of the Pensnett Railway. 111 pp., 14 illustrations. Goose & Son. Price: £3.95.

AND about time too! The main line railway buffs have had a rich vein of publications. At last, here is a book that relates the history of a privately-owned industrial railway that laced and honourably served a large area of the West Midlands over many decades. The remarkable steam engines, the prodigious work done, tightly woven into the fabric of the history and growth of the area, has now received the approbrium it richly deserves.

The book is the result of a lifetime's association with the Black Country. As a native of the area, Keith Gale has known the Pensnett Railway as long as he can remember. But he has gone much further

than mere recollection. By means of assiduous but well digested research, plus youthful memories, contacts and obvious affection, he has built up a very full picture of the trials, tribulations, delights and eccentricities of the Pensnett Railway.

The railway was a by-product of the rapidly developing coal and iron industries of the Black Country in the 19th century. Opened in a small way in 1829 as one of the many enterprises of the Lords of Dudley, it was extended from time-to-time until it had nearly 40 miles of track serving a large area of collieries, quarries, sand pits, ironworks, canals and other industrial concerns.

Its motive power included a wonderful collection of steam locomotives; over the years it had over fifty-two, including the famous Agenoria—named after the goddess

of courage and industry—which still exists. Today, truncated and modernised with its motive powers entirely dieselised, the Pensnett Railway is a major internal transporter for Round Oak Steel Works Limited at Brierley Hill.

'A History of the Pensnett Railway' is Keith Gale's first book not solely concerned with iron and steel, but it is based on a con-

nection with the industry, so the theme remains. The choice of illustrations is varied and interesting. There is a list of locomotive data and a map of the area at one time linked by the Pensnett Railway: Ashwood, Dawley Brook, Himley, Baggeridge, Kingswinford, Gornal Wood, Pensnett, Old Park, Dudley, Brierley Hill, Mushroom Green, Old Hill and Cradley Heath.

G.C.

NOTE:

The writer of the above (George Chatham) has himself written a short history of the Pensnett Railway—'Steam at Round Oak'—containing 54 mainly historic photographs. Price 80p, plus 10p p/p., from The Black Country Society.

The two works are complimentary.

Leslie Duckworth. *The Story of Warwickshire Cricket*. XVI+691pp., 149 illustrations. Stanley Paul. £5.50.

ALTHOUGH Staffordshire has its county cricket club, the allegiance of the vast majority of Black Country cricket enthusiasts is to either the Worcestershire or Warwickshire clubs between which there is keen rivalry, although these days there is close co-operation through the medium of the Warwick football pool competition which injects money into the game. The New Road ground at Worcester, with its view across the river to the cathedral, is one of the most beautiful in the country; the Warwickshire ground at Edgbaston, thanks to the enormous sums of money raised by the pool since the last war, is now one of the most handsomely equipped grounds in the country, a fit venue for Test matches. The two clubs have competed for young players and from time to time players have moved from one club to the other—for example Bob Wyatt, Warwickshire captain 1930-37 and captain of England for 16 Test matches, switched to Worcestershire after the war and Ron Bird also moved across the border to captain Worcestershire.

Where Worcestershire has had the edge over its neighbouring club in the past has been in having a published history, two substantial volumes by W. R. Chignell. The situation has now been redressed by Leslie Duckworth's truly handsome volume. Two histories of the club had been written earlier but they were small fry beside the new one in which is outlined the birth and development of Warwickshire cricket long before the county club was formed in 1882, the history of the club with an account of its achievements on the field, a mass of information about the personalities involved and the vital statistics—scores, averages, outstanding performances, amounts raised for benefits and so on set out in 10 appendices.

Leslie Duckworth, a Yorkshireman who has worked as a journalist in Birmingham for many years, has dedicated his book to R. V. Ryder, the second of the three secretaries to serve the club during its 93 years. Ryder held office from 1903 to 1944, seeing the club through many difficult periods, succeeding the first secretary William Ansell, a Birmingham schoolmaster and hon. secretary of the Birmingham and District Cricket Association, who was one of the five men who met at Leamington in March, 1882 and decided it was time to form a county cricket club. The third and present secretary is Leslie Deakins who has had the satisfaction of watching the club win the county championship twice—in 1951 and 1972. The only other time the club achieved this highwater mark was in 1911 when 22 years old Frank Foster had taken over the captaincy from H. J. Goodwin whose single season in office was one of the worst in the club's history. The one bright spot had been Foster's taking of over 100 wickets for the first time—and these included those of Hayward, Rhodes, J. T. Tyldesley, Hardstaff, Fielder, Hobbs, Hirst and Woolley. Cricket lovers with long memories will recall other great Warwickshire players of those days—Lilley, Quaife, Fishwick, Kinneir, Devey, Charlesworth "Tiger" Smith, J. H. Parsons, the Hon. F. S. G. Calthorpe, Santall, Croom, N. E. Partridge, Bates, Kilner, Dollery, and bowlers like Field, Howell, Mayer, Paine and Old Hill's Eric Hollies who reappeared to do even greater things after World War II. Their efforts are fully chronicled.

Warwickshire is fortunate in having a fine collection of club archives and Duckworth has used his patient skill in putting flesh on to the facts and figures to make his book easy reading. He has, of course, had closer contact with the club in the post-war years and not only writes informatively about the cricket, the players, the various problems and the administration, but makes it clear how the Supporters' Association has financed the stupendous development of the Edgbaston ground. An additional service the association has performed is to sponsor the publication of Duckworth's history, a book which will give cricket lovers many hours of enjoyment as well as enlightenment.

H.J.H.

Investigating Penn. 112pp. 13 illustrations and maps. Published by Wolverhampton Branch of the W.E.A. Price £1.00.

IN a recent television programme G. W. Target suggested that to lead a fulfilled life modern man needed to return to small communities without the motor car. Such a past society emerges from this book: people living obscure lives, closely involved with their neighbours, in small close-knit hamlets grouped round farms; far

different from the modern isolation of the suburban semi-detached.

The book has been compiled from papers submitted by an evening class working with Mr. T. Bennett, who has contributed much to the study of local history in the Black Country and related areas. It is not a formal history, but rather, as the title implies, investigations into various aspects of the past of Penn, a much older settlement than Wolverhampton, into which it has now been largely absorbed. Early history, common



TOLL HOUSE, PENN ROAD

—Wolverhampton Library

or open fields, manorial records, agriculture, ancient families, probate inventories and wills, the poor, and relationship with the outside world are among the topics investigated.

Until the 19th century Penn was a farming area, and indeed Lower Penn (Nether Penne of the book) is still largely so; and there are farms in Upper Penn today, with local groups concerned with the amenities of the area fighting valiant rearguard actions to prevent developers adding them to the urban sprawl of the Black Country. Penn was a manor of the Earls of Dudley from the time of William I, but no dominant family seems to have emerged since the Buffary family died out in the 15th century. One might have expected a great house, the squire owning the land, but the pattern seems to be of small landowners and yeoman farmers. Much information has

been unearthed about them, their possessions, their work, their relationships with each other, their lawsuits and their way of life generally. A Victorian account book from Orton Farm brings us nearer to the present—and incidentally makes us aware of the vast upsurge of wages and prices since then. Lawsuits concerning the difficulty of getting fuel across farm land to the ancient Trescott forge are examined.

The book is not wholly concerned with the past: there is a chapter on old houses still standing; and old footpaths, now usually through streets and housing estates, are retraced; it would be interesting to walk them, comparing past with present.

It should be emphasised that this is not a book to appeal only to Penn residents. It treats of human life as lived by ordinary people, and as such is of universal interest.

The chapter, 'The Investigator', contains information about sources for Staffordshire history; and papers on derivations of personal and place names have a universal application. 'Ancient Tracks' covers the whole of the West

Midlands area.

Not the least of the book's attractions are the sketches by Mr. Bennett, recreating from memories buildings now gone. There are also nostalgic photographs and sketch maps. **G.J.A.**

(Although only published in February, 1975, a reprint is in hand.—Ed.)

"The Quaker Lloyds in the Industrial Revolution," by Humphrey Lloyd. Hutchinson. £6.75.

THIS fascinating book deals with seven generations of a single family: a household word in Stewarts and Lloyds as well as in Lloyds Bank. The birth of Sampson I in 1664 took place in Welshpool gaol where his parents had been imprisoned for being Quakers. The tolerant attitude of Birmingham with its non-corporate status attracted them to the Midlands where they set up as iron-masters. Samson II married a Sarah Parkes of Wednesbury, heiress to the family estates there. Sampson III went into partnership with 'Squire' John Taylor, the leading Birmingham industrialist of the day, to found Birmingham's first bank in 1767, one of the earliest provincial banks in the country.

Sampson III's grandson Samuel moved to Wednesbury and formed a partnership with his brother-in-law Joseph Foster to exploit the mineral wealth of the land belonging to the Heirs of Parkes. Lloyds Fosters and Co. prospered mightily. Their Tommy shop was noted for the high quality and generous value of its goods. According to Ryders Annual "All the articles were of the best value and the prices were low and sometimes lower than in the shops. Samuel Lloyd took pride in buying the chief articles himself, especially the tea, the bullocks and the sheep, and the shop was noted for the best butcher's meat in Wednesbury."

The firm introduced the hotblast principle when it was pioneered in the early 1830s. In 1849 they were the first firm in the West Midlands to use their own blast furnace gas to raise steam for working the blowing engine and thus saved 10,000 tons of coal annually. In 1862 simultaneously with John Brown of Sheffield they were the first licensees of the new Bessemer steel making process. Their products included structural ironwork and, with the spread of railways, wheels and parts for rolling stock both at home and abroad.

Lloyds Fosters and Co. failed sensationally in backing the contractor for building Blackfriars Bridge in London in the 1860s, for which the firm was providing the structural iron. Numerous unforeseen complications bankrupted the contractors and ultimately ruined Lloyds and Fosters who were bought out by the Patent Shaft and Axeltree Company of Wednesbury which thus became the largest firm in Staffordshire.

With the death of the firm one of the partners Samuel Lloyd III removed to Birmingham to start the tube making partnership of Lloyd & Lloyd which later developed into Stewarts & Lloyds, while his nephew Francis Henry created F H Lloyd and Co. the steel founders. Other

family tube businesses included the Albion Tube Company and the Weldless Steel Tube Company.

As a record of commercial and industrial enterprise and exercise of the non-conformist conscience over the centuries this book which only covers the family fortunes until 1860 is a praiseworthy venture.

Michael M. Rix.

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH OF DUDLEY VOLUNTEERS



MEN of the cyclist section of 'G' Company (Dudley), 1st Bn. Worcestershire Regiment at Yarmouth camp circa 1903/4. The men wear their sombre black uniforms, officially described as 'rifle green', with pea green piping on the cuffs and breeches. In 1908 the full dress uniform was changed to white faced scarlet tunics with red piped dark blue trousers, when the 1st Vol. Bn. became the 7th (Territorial Force) Bn. Worcestershire Regt.

J.R.W.

CORRESPONDENCE

A selection of letters received by the Editor and by various officers of The Black Country Society

Sir,

You are quite right to draw our attention to the Society's rising costs with current inflation. Obviously, to cut back on the length and quality of the journal is a retrograde step. Equally, any rising of the subscription, which many of us must surely see as a rational move, has a disproportionately *psychological adverse effect* on both existing members and those thinking of joining the Society.

I am more than willing to pay the cost of postage so that I may continue to enjoy the quality of a journal which has become a mark of success over the years, and thereby contribute the enclosed 40p for 1975. I propose to continue this practice and would call upon all members who have enjoyed the facilities of our Society to make their token of appreciation in some similar way.

Mike Knight.

Waltham Close,
Bedford.

* * *

Sir,

Readers will have no doubt gathered from the most interesting article by W. A. Richards in your last issue, that a Quaker firm had been engaged in the gun trade over 200 years ago.

I wish to point out that Samuel Galton, one of the firm's partners, was *in fact disowned by the Society of Friends* for taking part in a gun-making business. Regarding slaving activities, the notice of Friends was drawn to this nefarious trade by the American Quaker, John Woolman, who conducted a

long campaign against slavery in the U.S.A. He visited this country in 1772 and although his reception was somewhat cool at first, even in Quaker circles, his mission eventually bore fruit. Perhaps the social conscience was slow to awaken in those days? John Woolman did not complete his mission in England however; he died in York, from smallpox, a disease which he had feared all his life, and in York he is buried.

Incidentally, Samuel Galton junior gave his name to the Galton bridge spanning the Birmingham Canal's new line at Smethwick, but at least two canal authors have been unaware of this, since they have referred to Telford's masterpiece in their books as a "bridge at Galton".

Arthur E. Truby.

Foxhills Park,
Dudley.

* * *

Sir,

I am very interested in the work of the *Black Country Society* but I live abroad. I obtained the pamphlet "Introducing the Black Country Society" from one of its members but unfortunately I lost the address.

I am writing to ask if you could send me information to do with the Black Country Society to be included in the Folk Federation Germany magazine which is very popular.

Anything I can do to promote interest in my native part of the world, I shall gladly do.

Jeannie Zoeller (Mrs.).

Sir,

I was glad to read the letter from Mr. Robert Williams of Amblecote, in your autumn number on the subject of the "Stafford Knot". He is quite right in saying that there is no such thing as a "Staffordshire Knot". There is only a "Stafford Knot" which is really the personal badge of the Stafford Barony.

The earliest known appearance of this knot is on a seal which is now in the British Museum. This seal was once the property of Joan, Lady of Wake and shows, on the right three lions and on the left a motif. These are surmounted by the figure of an angel. From the tip of each of his wings there stretches round the shield a cordon of knots which were known as "Wake Knots". These had been used exclusively by the Wake family of which the famous Hereward the Wake was a member. This seal, along with the rest of the Lady of Wake's property passed, on her death, into the possession of her nephew who was Humphrey, Earl of Stafford. He was the first to use the knot as his personal badge and from then (about 1420) on, became known as the "Stafford Knot". It had four folds and was more in the shape of a true lover's knot at first, but as time went on one of the folds was dropped and it became a three-fold knot.

The townsmen of Stafford were the first people to be allowed to use it as they were the liegemen of the Stafford family. Later the freemen and burgesses were allowed to use it and, finally it was introduced into the Coat of Arms of the County town. More recently the County Police and the County Regiments were included in the privilege. Nowadays it is used by

many people and associations who, quite mistakingly, refer to it as the "Staffordshire" knot. This is quite wrong.

Eva M. Starkey.

Emberton,
Storrige,
Nr. Malvern.

* * *

Sir,

The Wolverhampton Action Committee for World Famine Relief is an organisation set up by a number of concerned Wolverhampton residents. Its aim is to combat world famine through

1. *Aid to existing relief agencies.*
2. *Stimulation of Midland interest in the problems of famine.*
3. *Fund raising through sponsored events.*

The group has the enthusiastic and active support of local M.P.s—Renee Short, Patrick Cormack, Bob Edwards—and many local organisations such as the local branch of Oxfam and Save the Children Fund, as well as many Wolverhampton individuals from all branches of life; the medical, educational, and religious professions included.

The main strength of this new organisation lies in its local nature and local knowledge of people and places. We hope that readers will feel happier about entrusting time and money to a group of people of whom they have heard.

Through letters such as this we expect to be able to contact all sections of Wolverhampton and West Midlands society and bring the entire community together in a selfless effort to redress the balance between the haves and the have nots. We are open to suggestions which may help to raise cash or kind and will gladly receive donations of the same from groups and individuals.

Administration costs can be kept to the absolute minimum by passing on the items collected directly to one of the local branches of the national relief groups. The difference will be that 'we' will have a record of what we give and collect and this region will know that it has made some direct and recognisable contribution to the welfare of others. Committee members listed below can be contacted with suggestions, queries, donations, etc.

Chairman:

J. Clement Jones, 17 Swallowdale, Wightwick Bank, Wolverhampton WV6 8DT.

Joint Secretaries:

Dr. B. Chakraborty, 85 Linden Lea, Finchfield, Wolverhampton.

J. Raven, 68 Limes Road, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton WV6 8RB.

Treasurer:

K. Parton, Green Banks, Lloyd Hill, Penn, Wolverhampton.

Jon Raven.

Sir,

Most interesting to know that the bricks from Booth's Farm are going to be used for the engine house for the Newcomen Engine as stated in the last issue of 'The Blackcountryman'. This old farm has some real history and Birmingham Libraries mention it in their local studies department. Seeing that there is some connection with the Black Country, I have copied the story from "Past and Present," hoping it will be of some interest to readers. By the way, is there any special reason why bricks from Booth's Farm are being used for the engine house?

T. Pinner.

Stanhope Way,
Great Barr,
Birmingham.

[They are same size and age as bricks required to make reconstructed engine house authentic.—Derek Simpkins.]

Booth's Farm

A farm at Perry Barr was at the beginning of the 19c. the home of William Booth, who had on his premises some coining presses for striking private tokens. He used the presses for making counterfeit silver coins and notes. An attack was made on the farm by special constable warders and dragoons. When they reached the house they found the place a fortress; even the stairs had been removed. Booth was arrested on 28 March, 1812; at the farm were found £3,000 in good notes, 200 guineas in gold, £600 in counterfeit silver coins and a large number of forged notes.

Booth was tried for forgery at Stafford Assizes in 1812. He had already been tried at Warwick Assizes in 1808 for the murder of his brother John, but had been acquitted for lack of evidence. Now he was publicly executed at Stafford on 15 August, 1812. The executioner bungled his first attempt, however, and Booth was revived and hanged again two hours later. He was buried in Handsworth Old Churchyard, but later his body had to be moved. It is therefore said that he was twice tried, twice hanged and twice buried.

William Booth is one of the 'local characters' described in 'Folk lore and songs of the Black Country and the West Midlands'. Vol. 2, edited by Michael and Jon Raven; the song about him is written by Jon Raven.

Extract from the booklet 'Kingstanding Past and Present' by permission of the Birmingham Public Libraries.

Sir,

Trinity Methodist Church, Cradley (formerly Wesleyan) is looking forward to 18 May when it celebrates its 150th Sunday School Anniversary. Special services are being arranged, and a souvenir booklet is being published to mark this special occasion. We would like to send one of these to all known ex-scholars and friends. Will anyone previously connected with Trinity Sunday School requiring a copy of the booklet please apply to Margaret Bradley, 12 Priestley Close, Halesowen.

Margaret Bradley.

12 Priestley Close, Halesowen,
Halesowen, B63 2NJ.

* * *

Sir,

May I comment on the article on 'Black Country Guns and the Slave Trade' which appeared in the winter edition?

To talk about 'bricks being cemented with blood' is really rather emotive. It is impossible to judge the past with the eyes of the present, but if one attempts to do so then it is necessary to try to view the times in true perspective. In the 18th century the world had not developed its social conscience. People either had wealth, position and power or they were poor, weak and exploitable. This applied to the British here at home as much as to the African in his country where strong tribes attacked others in order to have prisoners to sell to the slavers.

In our towns and cities the poor existed in hellish hovels. People were hanged publicly for petty crimes to which sheer need had often driven them, or they were deported to the New World into slavery. Communications, as we know them today, were almost non-

existent. The masses couldn't read anyway and unless someone was actually involved in an event taking place, it was difficult to have knowledge of it. To a socialite in London the coasts of Africa and the Caribbean were worlds away, as were the docks of Liverpool and Bristol—and certainly the searing, satanic industrial conditions of the Black Country.

If Black Country bricks are cemented with blood, then the drop of African slave blood must mingle and be lost in the ocean of the Black Country's own people who literally slaved, suffered and died to produce those very guns that your writer spoke of in great length. There was surely no greater slavery than that of the tiny children who rarely saw daylight and women who toiled like beasts of burden, in the terrible mining conditions helping to produce the coal. Children were lucky if they ever reached their teen years and were actually bought and sold at fairs. Men and boys sweated and scorched, with seared eyes, in the Hades of iron works to produce the necessary iron. Many were gobbled up in a dreadful death of a molten spillage. If they were fortunate enough to survive their sweating toil, they were blind by their middle years.

Even the sailors on the slave ship, often shanghaied into service, were considered expendable. They were half starved on rotten food, flogged raw on the slightest pretext, and many died.

Indeed, black and white men have more than their physical humanity in common. There is a deep rooted (if unacknowledged) tie of past sufferings and oppressions that should form a bond of sympathy and understanding.

Mary Hutchings.

Warren Park, Havant, Hants.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

	Page
Ault, S. J.	31
Bulman, V. J.	40
Chapman	27
Cook, E. (I. & S.) Ltd.	40
C.R.M. Ltd.	23
D.G. Decorators	23
Durmech Engineering Ltd.	6
Gainsborough House Hotel	i.f.c.
Jukes, Isaac & Son Ltd.	25
Lee, Howl & Co. Ltd.	35
Licensed Refreshments Ltd.	21
Leisure Line Canal Cruisers	i.f.c.
New Hoisting Co. Ltd.	11
Normans (W'ton) Ltd.	41
Stourbank Engineering Co.	47
Vejay Insurance Brokers	52
W.E.A. Wolverhampton	19
Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries Ltd.	30
Whit Products	8

SPONSORED PANELS

Bills, R. R. Ltd.	19
B.I.P.	13
Bradney, Arthur	13
Cannon Industries Ltd.	17
Conex Sanbra Ltd.	17
Gailey Group Ltd.	13
Hill & Smith Ltd.	17
Lewis, S. & Co. Ltd.	13
Mander Paints Ltd.	17
Parkes, Josiah & Sons Ltd.	17
P.S.M. Co. Ltd.	13
Rudge Littley & Co. Ltd.	17
Seal Advertising Ltd.	19

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