

THE **BLACKCOUNTRYMAN**

AUTUMN 1974

Vol. 7 No. 4

20p



**THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
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EDITORIAL

THERE really seems to be no end to it. Following a price increase with the last issue, we now come to our most drastic economic adjustment yet : reducing the magazine by 16 pages. This move has been forced on to us by a staggering upsurge in print and paper costs which simply cannot be absorbed. And to be brutally frank, the only way in which we are likely to be in a position to reinstate them is through revenue from advertising. So, because we are non-commercial, because we are established with seven volumes behind us, we have no hesitation in asking in stronger terms than before, for all our readers who have businesses or are in a position to authorise advertising at their place of work, to come to our assistance.

It is realised that many firms have nothing to sell to our readers, or to the general public as a whole, and that is why we have instigated the moderately successful sponsored panel, which enables a firm to link itself with the magazine and the aims of the Black Country Society. All right, think of it as a donation if you wish, but chip in by following the example of the hard-core Black Country firms who have already supported us for some years in this way.

There is little doubt that were we in a position to knock on doors to solicit advertising as do commercial publishers, we would make a good showing. But who is to do it in a voluntary organisation? Indeed, who is free to do it? You, the readers out there who know about us can help. Don't wait for us to call to sell you space—it may never happen! Remember, advertising in 'The Blackcountryman' will not help to keep anyone in a cushy job. That's where we are different; where we ought to score in our sole aim of continuing the work we are doing for the good of the region. Who says it is for the good? Not us! We would not presume. Our readers tell us. Many of them. Constantly.

Soo goo on . . . gie we the advertising munny ter win back them missin' paerjjs.

*Advertisement rates . . . see
inside back cover.*

*Editor:***HAROLD PARSONS****Contents**

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Printed by Reliance Printing
Works, Halesowen

October, 1974

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A TOPIC which has created considerable controversy recently is the decision to alter postal addresses. This has angered many people who have been under the impression that existing town names which have stood for centuries will disappear as a result. However, a senior local postal official has stated publicly that whilst postal codes should be used, the old names can still be included on addressed mail. These are part of our heritage which we do not want to lose, so why should bureaucracy rob us of them? Emotional as this might sound, it is not only pride which is a reason for retention; there is also a practical reason in an area such as the Black Country, a complex conglomeration of towns and communities, where the disappearance of local names could be awkward and embarrassing to visitors in trying to find a particular destination.

The committee of the society has discussed this matter and feel that members and the public in general should be urged to continue to use the old names, including them in the new system with the postal code. This would ensure their future existence without infringing official arrangements.

Although holidays rendered the summer months quiet for most organisations, the Black Country Society continued its work during this period, much background activity goes on unknown to many,

with meetings held to retain the interest of members. On June 18, Mr. Ray Wilkes of Tipton, a member of the society for some years and a former committee member, addressed members at the Tipton Sports Union on his unusual hobby. He has a deep interest in North American Indians and over the years has amassed a large collection of material relating to the subject, items from which were displayed at the meeting. Mr. Wilkes, who has been to the U.S.A. to further his study, eagerly stresses that his interest, far removed from Tipton, is of a serious nature. He strongly disapproves of the western film "cowboy and indian" image. Two exhibitions relating to his collection have in recent years been staged at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery. This meeting was arranged to show how a local man can develop a hobby unrelated to his surroundings.

On July 10, the Warley Teachers Centre, Churchbridge, Oldbury, was the venue of a most interesting illustrated talk given by Mr. A. A. Wood, County Planner of the West Midlands Metropolitan County Council, on the subject of the role of the County Council in the future planning of the Black Country. Mr. Wood spoke of the successes and mistakes of town planners in the past and stressed the opportunities of future planners with the potential now available. Those present at the meeting felt that the

Cover

Illustration:

The 'Stafford Knot' incorporated in a white metal badge worn by volunteer battalions of the South Staffordshire Regiment circa 1900. See Correspondence (page 54).

speaker echoed many views held by the society on the planning of our region.

On August 14 at the Britannia Inn, Owen Street, Tipton, the secretary (J. Brimble) spoke to members about donations added to the society's historical collection during the past year, his talk being accompanied by a display of material. Additions to the collection are being made almost continuously and were increased by a large number of donations made on the evening of the meeting; these included pamphlets, post cards, kitchen utensils, medals and tokens, items of costume etc. A talk was also given by Derek Simpkins on the sport of cockfighting, a subject on which he has done considerable research. On display was a part of the speaker's collection of objects related to this blood-sport, including the spurs, muffles, grease and a book of rules.

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On September 8, the second annual whippet racing event for the "Pride of the Black Country" trophy was held at the Tipton Sports Union grounds. Despite blustery, showery weather, a large number of spectators were present to see some good racing which resulted in the silver cup leaving the Black Country for Nottinghamshire. The winning dog was "What a Maid" from Mansfield, with last year's winner, "Blue Lagoon," from Pensnett coming second. "What's it" from Derby was third and "Je Dolores" from Bristol, fourth. The event attracted 52 entries, over twenty more than last year, and included dogs from many parts of the country. Once again we must thank the members of the Brierley Hill Whippet Racing Club for their organisation of the event.

On September 12, a meeting was held at the Wednesbury Sports Union headquarters, when members of the Wednesbury Amateur Boxing Club discussed local boxing. Outings have included a tour of the local canals and a trip to Oxford and Blenheim Palace.

Further discussions have taken place with representatives of Sandwell Borough Council on the Owen Street, Tipton development plan and with representatives of Dudley Borough Council to discuss the Mushroom Green project.

The society is both interested and gratified to know that a special exhibition relating to the Black Country Museum is being staged at the Science Museum, South Kensington, London. This began on 26 September and will continue for three months. The event should certainly help to give recognition to our local museum project outside this area.

BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY WINTER PROGRAMME, 1974

Thursday, October 17 (8.30 p.m.)

The Limerick Inn, Summit Place (off Himley Road), Lower Gornal. A dominoes, darts and crib match against the pub.

Saturday, October 26. All day

The Library, Mount Pleasant, Bilston. An exhibition of Black Country historical items.

Wednesday, October 30 (7.45 p.m.)

Black Country Brass and Voices in Concert. A musical evening at Dudley Town Hall. Tickets (40p) from the Secretary or at the door.

Sunday, November 3

Tour of the canals (main line, Netherton Tunnel, Factory Locks) by luxury heated narrow boat. Leave Owen Street, Tipton, by coach, to return there at approximately 7 p.m. Adults 75p, Children 50p. All children must be paid for. Numbers limited to 48. Book as soon as possible with the Secretary.

Tuesday, November 12

The Swan Inn, next to old Town Hall, Darlaston. Mr. and Mrs. Taylor invite you to a "Gray Pay" Night. Gray Pays served at 8.30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 19 (8 p.m.)

Lanesfield British Legion Club, Ward Grove, Lanesfield (off Birmingham New Road), Wolverhampton. A Members' Night. Reports on the progress of the Society and its sub-committees. Members are asked to suggest subjects for further meetings.

Thursday, November 28 (8 p.m.)

St. Mary's Club, Church Hill, Wednesbury. A dominoes, darts and crib match against the club. Players and non-players are invited.

Thursday, December 5 (8 p.m.)

The Round Oak Inn (Sparky's), Ounsdale, Wombourne. A dominoes, darts and crib match. Players and non-players welcome.

Thursday, December 12 (8 p.m.)

The Angel Inn, High Street, Wednesfield. A dominoes, darts and crib match against the pub. Players and non-players welcome.

Tuesday, December 17 (8 p.m.)

The Painters Arms, Avenue Road, Coseley. A social evening. The Christmas Draw will be made.

Saturday, December 21 (8 p.m.)

Graingers Lane Methodist Church, Cradley Heath. A Festival of Carols and Nine Lessons in the dialect of the Black Country.

Thursday, January 16 (8 p.m.)

Union Inn, Union Street, Tipton. A Steam Railway on your Doorstep. Derek Simpkins talks about the progress of the Severn Valley Railway.

*This magazine receives financial assistance from
West Midland Arts*

St. Mary's Church Ocker Hill

by Colin Nicholls

NOVEMBER 13, 1849 saw the start of a new era in Ocker Hill, when St. Mark's Church began its life with its dedication by the Bishop of Lichfield. From that time to the present day it has played an active part in the life of the area and its building has remained one of the few constant features in an ever changing landscape.

Although the church was not built until 1849, the parish of Ocker Hill had existed officially since 1845. Its creation was in the main due to an Act of Parliament, introduced during the sixth and seventh years of Queen Victoria's reign, the object of which was to make "better provision for the spiritual care of populous parishes." At this time, the area around Tipton certainly seemed to fit these requirements. In fact for over one thousand years there had been only one church in Tipton, until in 1797 the new parish church of St. Martin was built in Lower Church Lane to replace the old church which needed much restoration. This restoration was later carried out and the church is still in use today, but is now known as St. John's.

During the following fifty years, however, five new churches and numerous Non-Conformist places of worship were built within Tipton's boundaries. This was again due to the Act of Parliament mentioned above, but was also due to a combination of two other factors, these being a religious revival mainly due to the Wesleyan movement and an increase in population, probably due to the growing industrial nature of the area. This then is the background in which the parish of Ocker Hill was formed.

The Rev. L. W. Stanton was appointed as perpetual-curate of the new parish and until the church of St. Mark was built, had to carry out his duties in the "White School House" which was situated in the south-east corner of the present churchyard. Here he conducted the usual Sunday services and baptisms. The first record of a baptism is on August 2, 1846 and is of William Rowett, son of Joseph and Matilda Rowett. It is interesting to note the varied trades of the fathers of the infants mentioned on the front page of the baptism register. They include: puddler, brickmaker, labourer, farmer, roller, blacksmith and a stock-taker. This provides an indication to the mixed agricultural/industrial nature of the area at that time.

The site for the new church (3 roods and 1 perch), was given by the Lord of the Manor, Wyrley Birch Esq., who at that time was living at

Wretham Hall in Norfolk. The money needed to build the church came from several sources. It was estimated that a sum of £2,500 would be needed and with contributions from wealthy parishioners, grants from the Lichfield Diocesan Church Extension Society, the Church Commissioners and the Incorporated Society, the cost was finally met.

Built in hard blue-brick with stone dressing, the building is in the style of Decorated Gothic. The nave is lighted by small trefoil clerestory windows with the west end having a three light window, surmounted by a vesica window, showing the emblem of St. Mark the lion. When the church was first built, the east end had a large three light window surmounted by a large rose window. However, the east end was extended and strengthened in 1909 and included new stained glass windows and a new reredos. The reredos came from St. Maurice Church in Winchester and was constructed in 1878. At the same time as the extension to the church, a new pulpit and choir stalls were installed as well as new floors for the sanctuary and chancel.

In the original plans drawn up for St. Mark's there was a tower and spire included, but at the time of building it was decided that the ground was not sound enough to bear the great weight. In fact during the earlier years of the church's life the ground beneath the building and the surrounding area settled very badly. Within the first few years work had to be carried out to put right damage caused by subsidence. It was found that shafts belonging to the Moat Colliery Company were undermining the area and the constant working of the coal seams were further endangering the safety of the church building. At a vestry meeting in 1857, it was decided to take out a law suit against the company to prevent further mining operations and to claim compensation for damage. It was successful: operations stopped and a certain amount of compensation was paid. Even forty years following this, repairs had to be made to walls and the north aisle had to be completely re-roofed. Almost every incumbent has had to undertake some kind of major repair work.

Many years before the parish was formed, the area that now lies within the parish boundaries was the residential part of Tipton and was also the most widely cultivated. The Lord of the Manor was known to have had his Court House at Ocker Hill. At the time of St. Mark's construction the four largest farms in Tipton lay within the parish and almost the whole of the parish was agricultural. Those farms were: the Moat Farm, Coppice Farm, Blakely Wood Farm and Cotterills Farm.

Gradually the farm cottages gave way to streets, back-yards, courts and squares. There was very little planning and the squalid slums became drinking and fighting dens. With the squalor came many problems and the parish priest had a hard time with many of his poorer parishioners. Industry was on the increase and the old ironworks and collieries were now giving way to new industries. Many of the wealthy owners of works in the parish were public spirited people and they contributed to many of the local churches and charities.

Transport at this time was also on the increase. In 1850, the railway from Walsall to Dudley was built, followed in 1851 by the branch line from Wednesbury to Dudley via Ocker Hill. There was a station at



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Ocker Hill until 1890 and it was situated on the eastern side of the present traffic roundabout. The steam tramway also came via Ocker Hill from Wednesbury to Dudley; it began in 1884. Canals were already in operation at this time, surrounding the parish. In fact it is thought that St. Mark's was probably dedicated so, because of the great St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, also surrounded by canals. Ocker Hill was always affectionately known as "the Venice of the Midlands." It now no longer can carry that title because of the gradual disappearance of the canals, now filled and covered by vast housing complexes.

The Church of St. Mark had many connections with local industries and throughout the years wealthy industrialists gave much in the way of money and effort. The Birmingham Canal Navigation Company was St. Mark's immediate neighbour, as the local workshops were across the road from the church. Representatives of the company were often invited to social functions or were asked to open bazaars etc. It is of interest to note that until 1959 the first steam engine built for sale by James Watt in 1777 was housed in the B.C.N. workshops. Before it came to Ocker Hill it was to be found working at the Smethwick B.C.N. works where it had pumped water for 115 years. At Ocker Hill it was used to pump water from a lower level of the canal to the upper level, which was the branch running from Ocker Hill to Princes End. Watt's engine worked at Ocker Hill from 1898 until 1922 and was eventually dismantled in 1959 and removed to the Birmingham Science Museum.

Since the parish of Ocker Hill was formed 125 years ago, there have been many changes, defacement of the landscape, industrial changes and of course the ever changing population. The clergy are no exception and there have been a wide variety of personalities at St. Mark's.

As was mentioned previously the Rev. L. W. Stanton was the first minister at St. Mark's. He was appointed on 16 May, 1846 and very little is known about him. Following him was the Rev. R. J. Clarke who was curate for two years. Very little is known about him either. The first vicar of the parish was appointed in 1854 and his name was Angelo Antonio Nicolo Francesco Solari. Rev. Solari was vicar for 34 years and most of his time was spent among the poor of his parish. Through his work he became greatly admired by his parishioners. Children especially loved him for his great generosity towards them (see letters, "The Blackcountryman," Summer 1974, Vol. 7, No. 3). It was a great shock to the parish when it was discovered that Rev. Solari had committed suicide by cutting his throat in his room at the vicarage. Although Rev. Solari is buried in the churchyard, it was not usual for the Victorians to bury suicides on consecrated ground. It is thought that parishioners pressed for Rev. Solari to be buried there.

A "zealous evangelistic preacher," the Rev. E. J. Norman was to follow the Rev. Solari and because of his strict disciplinarian background, was disliked by many of his parishioners. It was during his incumbency that the parish magazine was started and through this it is possible to trace the type of parish that existed at this time (1889). Great efforts were made by Rev. Norman to raise money to repair the church and to enlarge the church national schools. From the magazine, January 1889:

"There are many children running about who might be at School. I should think it would be better and cheaper to pay 2d per week to save shoe leather and clothes, than to race the streets and grow up ignorant, especially when we have such good schools."

Throughout his ministry, Rev. Norman encouraged parents to send their children to school. After an eleven year incumbancy, Rev. Norman died in 1899. The Rev. C. W. Pearson was to follow.

The first task of the enthusiastic Mr. Pearson was to have the church completed with the tower and spire which was included on the original plan (of which no trace can now be found). Alas, due to his predecessor, who had offended many influential members of the parish, he found very little support for his idea and the project was never completed. During his short ministry, he suffered ill health and died in 1906.

Following the Rev. Pearson was the Rev. T. W. Harvey and it was said of him that he "was one of the most remarkable personalities in the Church of his day." Unfortunately, most of the work that he was noted for was in other parishes in Bristol and Claverly. A book about his life, "Thomas William Harvey, Prophet and Priest," was written by his successor at St. Mark's, the Rev. H. C. A. Colville.

Ill luck seems to have befallen all the priests at St. Mark's in one way or another, but Rev. Colville's ministry was a very happy one and seemed to break the run of ill luck. He married whilst he was vicar of St. Mark's; his bride was the daughter of the vicar of the parish church of St. Martin.

They had four children all of whom were born in Ocker Hill. His most successful achievement was to extend and strengthen the east end of the church (mentioned previously). He also played a large part in extending the church National Schools in Spring Street.

These then were the earlier priests at St. Mark's; the others who followed can be read about in the Rev. F. Brighton's book, "The Venice of the Midlands, Ocker Hill 100 years," published 1949. They include: Rev. C. E. Nutley, Rev. T. Perrott, Rev. J. H. Darby, Rev. F. Brighton and Rev. R. W. Bell. Since the publication of that book, there have been Rev. R. B. Sawle, Rev. T. P. Newman, Rev. J. Howe and Rev. J. S. Lingley who is now vicar.

Another important establishment in the parish was the National School, which was built in 1858. The site for the building was purchased from the Birmingham Canal Navigation Company at the price of £266. Sir Horace St. Paul Bart of Bloomfield, Tipton gave the money to purchase the site but the building itself was paid for by contributions from the National Society, wealthy industrialists in the area and, it is thought, the Rev. Solari and other parishioners also contributed. During the school's earlier years there were many difficulties and pressure was placed upon the governors from the School Board to close the school. This was because the School Board wanted the buildings extended to accommodate more children and wanted better provision made for learning. Difficulties were overcome and the buildings were enlarged. For many years the National School was the only school in Ocker Hill. The White School House, mentioned earlier, was used as a school for many years before the National School was built in Spring Street and it also was helped by the National Society. It ceased to be used as a school when the new buildings were opened in 1858.

Copies of the deeds and plans for the National School are still held at St. Mark's Church, and it states the following in the deeds, that the National School should be "used as and for a school for the education of children and adults, or children only of the labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes in the said district." (Ocker Hill). A management committee ran the school and was controlled by the Bishop of Lichfield. This committee consisted of the minister and his curate(s) (if the minister chose to appoint them to the committee), the churchwardens and five others, who were Sir Horace St. Paul Bart of Ewart Park, Northumberland; Baronet James Solly of Tipton—ironmaster; Thomas Bagnall the younger of Goldshill, West Bromwich—ironmaster; John Yardley of Tipton—mine agent; and Samuel Nock of Tipton—licensed victualler. All these people had to pay "at least 20 shillings to the school funds every year," and "have a beneficial interest to the extent of a life estate at the least in real property situated in the said district or to be resident therein or in a parish or district adjoining thereto and to be a member of the Church of England." It is also stated in the conditions for the committee members that at each vote they should pay the sum of ten shillings to the school funds and no member was entitled to more than six votes. On all accounts the bishop had the final say although he never actually chaired any of the committee meetings.

The school continued to function until 1956. All pupils were transferred to the Ocker Hill Senior School which had been vacated. The pupils from the senior school had moved into the new Willingsworth Secondary Modern School. Following the closure of the National School, the St. Mark's Parish Church Council bought it for use as a parish hall and it has been used as such until August of this year. Its presence will be missed in Ocker Hill by many who attended it whilst it was a school, and for many who have enjoyed social functions there over the past seventeen years. Its future is now in the hands of a development company who are to buy the site and build flats on it. It is hoped to preserve the two foundation stones of the school somewhere at St. Mark's church.

Again, another landmark disappears but the church still stands watching over the ever changing parish. It remains the only feature to be unchanged. People will come and go, buildings will rise and fall and the church will still stand whatever changes take place around it.

Acknowledgements—Rev. F. Brighton—"The Venice of the Midlands Ocker Hill 100 years."

To coincide with the 125th dedication celebrations, St. Mark's Anglican Young Peoples Association are staging a documentary of life in Ocker Hill over the past 125 years using drama, song and other visual aids. This will take place at St. Mark's Church, 8.00 p.m. on Friday, November 15, 1974.



FOR SERVICE RING TIPTON 7651

The Future of the Canals of the Black Country

On 24 May, 1974, the House of Commons debated a motion, moved by Mr. John Stonehouse (Walsall, North), and seconded by Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) on the Canals of the West Midlands. This debate which involved several prominent local members of Parliament and the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, raised many important issues concerning the future of local canals. It was only briefly reported in the local press, and, therefore, we record here in a fuller version some of the details of this vital debate.

John Stonehouse moved the motion; he noted:

THERE are about 2,000 miles of canals in the United Kingdom. This asset is greatly under-used, and has been neglected during recent years. I am glad to note the increasing attention that is being given to the need to improve these canals and to make use of them for transport.

I am concerned about the 200 miles or so of canals in the West Midlands and the Black Country in particular. I understand that there are more canals in the Black Country than there are in Venice. We have all heard about the problems of the canals and waterways in Venice; they have been much publicised. There has not been nearly as much publicity about canals in the Black Country. I hope that this debate will help to focus the attention of the Government and opinion generally on the problem. It has been too long neglected.

There are three aspects to which I wish to refer: first, safety; second, amenity; third, economic viability. In recent years many young children have died from drowning because they have been able to gain access to unprotected and overgrown canals. That is deplorable. Last year alone, five

young children died from drowning in Walsall. Those young lives could have been saved if the canals that are unsupervised had had sufficient fencing. They could have been saved if the waterways had been brought up to good conditions and had been supervised by wardens. They could have been saved if action had been taken to improve the canals. Those canals are unsupervised because nobody seems to be able to take a direct interest in their supervision. The British Waterways Board has done an excellent job in certain localities but in other areas disused canals have been left neglected. They have become eyesores, dumps for rubbish, and they are a danger to health and hygiene and to life itself.

I propose that special grants be made available to the authorities concerned to enable adequate fencing to be built around the canals that are disused and neglected, as an emergency measure, and that the fencing should be at least as good as that along railway lines. It is as dangerous for children to play around these neglected canals as it is for them to play on railway lines.

The second aspect of the subject

that is of concern is amenity. In the West Midlands we have some very attractive canal improvements, particularly one recently completed in Warley. That is an example of what can be done. I believe that, with improvement, canals could become good recreational centres for boating, walking and other activities.

It is probably better for the canals to be kept as waterways rather than being filled in, because the cost of filling in is considerable. I believe that it works out at about £200,000 per mile. If all the canals were filled in, a new drainage system would have to be installed, which in the West Midlands could cost as much as £20 million. Therefore, on cost grounds alone, it would seem to be wise to keep the canals as waterways. Indeed, if they are improved, their asset value to the environment could be considerable.

I am told that there are some 290,000 anglers in the West Midlands. I am amazed by that figure. Quite where they go to fish, I do not know, bearing in mind how many of the rivers are polluted. But if the canals could be cleaned up, they could be stocked with fish, and that would give an attractive recreation to people who wish to fish in the area.

Some canals are off the main line and there is no obvious value in maintaining them. In those instances, there may be a case for filling in and using the land available for other uses. They could be used for other recreational activities. I hope, therefore, that a positive attitude will be taken to the use of canals for recreation rather than continuing to allow them to fall into disuse and neglect.

Thirdly, anyone who considers the problem of bulk transport in Britain must be amazed that we have neglected the canal system in Britain as a means of transport. Recently, there became available a report of the Inland Shipping Group, which had analysed the prospects for improving the use of canals in Britain for bulk transport. The report makes interesting comparisons with other European countries. It is clear that other countries have been able to make better use of their waterways than we have.

If we were able to improve our canal system and make better use of it for transport, it could be linked with the European system, thus saving costs as well as bringing us in touch in transport terms with a valuable network in Europe. I understand that the economic viability of canal transport is indisputable, particularly in these days of fuel shortages and the need to economise on imported fuels, and even when we have North Sea gas and oil flowing into Britain in large quantities, we shall still need to economise.

I understand that 1 ton of freight can be shipped 250 miles on water per gallon of fuel compared with 58 miles by road. It is estimated that a single barge train of 10 units can replace 70 30-ton lorries. The Chairman of the Inland Shipping Group has estimated that the canals of Britain could carry 20 per cent of Britain's bulk transport, thus reducing costs, easing road congestion, reducing noise and conserving fuel, as well as improving the environment.

The canals in the West Midlands can be a very attractive source of recreation. Many of them now are neglected. They produce a danger

to children. They are a danger to health. I hope that as a result of the debate today and the attention that we are bringing to this problem, early action will be taken to improve the canals in the West Midlands and to save young lives in particular.

Mr. Bruce George seconded the motion:

The Black Country is at the industrial heart of the nation. Enormous wealth has been created in this area since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, but this great wealth was created at the cost of developing an environmental disaster area.

It is a paradox that the enormous canal network created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and for so long thought to have declined to total insignificance is experiencing a renaissance or resurgence. A great deal of encouragement has been given by successive Governments of late to our canal system and I hope that that encouragement will develop even further in the future.

Our canal system can not only play a more vital role in developing a more rational policy towards freight transport but can be utilised for recreational, environmental and social purposes. When they were created, the major use of canals was economic, for the transportation of goods from one part of the country to another, and it is obvious that with imagination, this role can be extended. I believe that some of our transport problems can be solved by a dynamic approach to our inland waterways system.

I speak mainly about canals in the context of the West Midlands. I believe that we must develop

them. We must attempt to preserve the heritage and culture of this part of the country. It is all very well to say that canals are a symbol of the past and that in many ways the past is regretted. However, I believe that our urban areas can foster our canal network to our mutual advantage.

Canals offer to the populations living in urban areas a secluded environment clear of noise, fumes and the dangers of road traffic. One writer has called the canal system "linear parks." Others have described canals as "green fingers," linking the Black Country with more pleasant areas outside it.

Canals are used extensively, and can be used more extensively, for canoeing and for angling. Angling is very much in the tradition of Black Country sport. The canals can also be used for towpath walking. No one needs to go to the Pennines to walk over attractive countryside. We have attractive areas for walking and rambling almost in the centres of our urban areas. Canals are often havens for wild life and interesting flora and fauna. The conservationists would have an interest in preserving our canal network.

All this requires positive thinking rather than negative thinking and imagination rather than reaction, and I am pleased to say that in their structure plans, most of our Black Country boroughs have shown a dynamic approach towards our canal system and are in process of developing their plans to utilise fully the resources at our disposal. But it requires financial assistance and other encouragement from the central Government, and I hope that it will come.

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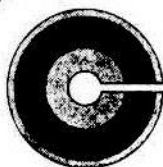
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Tribute must be paid to voluntary bodies like the Black Country Society and other organisations which, at a time when both central and local government did not properly harness our resources, sought to drain canals of refuse and to instil in the population a sense of enthusiasm for the amenities on their doorsteps. One interesting feature of our canal system is that very often canals are blocked from public view. There may be thousands of people living near canals who do not recognise the existence or the potentialities of them. Whenever there is the loss of a young life, it immediately precipitates an outburst amongst local residents which is reflected in the newspapers. This is right and just, because we cannot tolerate any loss of young lives. But it is not always the canal filled with water which is a danger. Often children fall into canals which are partly filled, and in many ways these canals are the most injurious to health.

In the past 21 years, 30 children have been drowned in the Walsall area. Although that averages only one and a half or two a year, it is much too high. In one small stretch of canal, 12 children have been drowned, and our local coroner has a file which grows annually. This is an indictment of the way that we run our affairs, despite the efforts of local authorities. We cannot tolerate this unacceptably high level of deaths. Canals are potential dangers, but, then, so are roads.

Some of the solutions suggested are perhaps impractical. Obviously, there are a number of canals which must be filled in, and many have already been dealt with in this way

in the Black Country. There are other stretches which are candidates for this approach. But the cost is very high, and it would have to be done selectively.

Fencing is another solution. But we do not want indiscriminate fencing. One of the attributes of our canal system is accessibility, and this is the difficulty facing those concerned about child safety. The amenity lobby will say that canals must be made accessible and that fences must be removed. Then those most concerned about child safety say that fencing must be put up, otherwise the canals are a danger to life. Clearly, there is a problem for the Minister and the local authorities as they try to reconcile the two interests, and, obviously, the interests of children must be to the fore.

Safety officers and borough engineers say that in some cases fencing can be dangerous. This may be hard to appreciate. A young child might be attracted to a fence, attempt to clamber over it, and end up in a canal. What is more, although a fence does not provide a barrier to a young child, it will provide an almost unsurmountable barrier to would-be rescuers. Although there must be fencing along certain stretches and dangerous sections like locks, again indiscriminate fencing will not yield the right results.

The main solution lies in education. By that I mean not only the education of young children to the dangers of canals, but the education of parents. People living near canals must be made to realise that they are a danger and that they have to be ever-vigilant.

Children should be educated in the rules of water safety. My local authority has spent a great deal of

money training young children in swimming baths and developing propaganda. This is the best long-term answer, with fencing and filling in as important secondary measures.

It may appear contradictory to say so, but environmentalists to whom I have spoken say that the solution to child safety is not in closing canals but in opening them up to the public. This is often hard to appreciate. The argument is that if canals are disused, children can walk along towpaths and fall in with no one available to rescue them, whereas if the canals are fully utilised and their environmental attractions are recognised, they will be properly used, people will walk along tow paths and their presence will be a block to enthusiastic young children who may be tempted to go too close to the canal. This matter must be fully recognised. The more people there are, the less the danger there might be to young children.

The eighteenth century capitalists—I use that word in no pejorative sense on this occasion—unwittingly bequeathed to the modern age a priceless asset: the canal. I hope that the debate will help to publicise the enormous potentialities, not only within our areas but within the country as a whole, of the canal system and industry in helping to ease our transportation problems as well as providing recreational, leisure and social aspects. To the Earl of Dudley, to Iron-mad Wilkinson, to those eighteenth and nineteenth century businessmen who so ruthlessly exploited the area but bequeathed something priceless to us, we should offer our thanks.

Amongst the speakers on the

motion was Mr. Geoff Edge (Aldridge-Brownhills):

The West Midlands canals have dangers and also potential for recreational use. We are all aware of the great problems that canals present to young children with the ever-present danger of drowning accidents.

The West Midlands and the Birmingham-Black Country conurbations have the greatest concentration of canals and a more dense canal network, even after the infilling of recent years, than almost any other part of the country and most parts of Western Europe. Many of those canals are partly disused and are overgrown. They are unfenced and, therefore, create a danger to children who find themselves attracted to the waste land forming the canal banks. Often these canal banks are deserted, except for other children, and if a child falls in, there is no one there to whom others can turn for help. By the time help is obtained, it is often too late. Therefore, we need to look carefully at the problem of canal safety.

Every time a child is drowned, there is a great cry for the infilling of canals. However, we must have a sense of balance. If we were to fill in every canal in the West Midlands, which is what some people, particularly parents, have cried out for after the tragedy of losing a child aged 4 or 5, not only should we face the enormous cost of creating new water supply and effluent disposal systems, but we should deprive people in the area of the opportunity of boating, for which part of the system is used. Part of the Wyrley and Essington canal which flows through my constituency is widely used for

boating purposes.

If we were to carry out a programme of infilling, we should also, and perhaps more importantly, sever irrevocably the national canal system because it is in the heart of the conurbation that the canal system links the Trent with the Thames and the Severn. If the system is not properly maintained in the West Midlands, it will not be possible to set out on the Thames and end up on the Trent or the Mersey. That opportunity would be lost for ever, and that would be a tragedy.

The logical conclusion to suggesting the infilling of canals is that we should infill rivers, because some rivers are infinitely more effective as a way of drowning than the canal system is ever likely to be or has been in the past. We must have a sense of proportion about this. Much of the canal system must remain, but there should be an urgent survey of the canals in the West Midlands to see what safety provisions can be made. Life-saving equipment and lifebelts are often provided on river banks but they are absent from the canals, even in the most frequented part of the system.

Secondly, we should consider the whole matter of fencing the most dangerous portions of the canals. Thirdly, we should ask whether it is necessary to maintain every scrap of the canal system that we have inherited. There are many miles of canals in the West Midlands which to all intents and purposes are unnavigable, stretches are overgrown and the brick-work on the banks has decayed, but nothing is done either to put the canals in working order or to fill them in. Many of the more backward sections are often canal arms

which served factories during the Industrial Revolution, but they are now disused and should be closed for ever.

All reasonable canal enthusiasts and members of the Black Country Society, such as myself, accept that it is no longer realistic to argue that every drop of oily water and every stretch of reed-filled canal ought to be maintained. There should be an urgent survey throughout the West Midlands by the British Waterways Board and the local authorities within a specified time and proposals should then be put to the Minister stating which portions of canal it is proposed to fill in and which portions it is proposed to maintain and—hopefully—develop for other purposes.

But that cannot be done without cash. For too long our canal systems have been starved of money. There has not been the necessary money to maintain the banks in proper repair. The banks of some sections of canals are subject to heavy erosion, with the result that the towpaths become narrower and progressively more unsafe. Money is needed to infill canals and legislation is necessary to ensure that disused canal arms are not cut off from the main part of the system and left as cesspits for industrial effluent. That is what is happening to parts of the canal system.

In Tipton part of the canal is separated from the main system and is used solely by industry for the supply of water. It is developing into a growing pool of oily water on people's doorsteps. Such things ought not to happen. Combined with the pressure for infilling, there should be a real effort to consider developing the recreation potential of the canal

system. In some cases it would be appropriate to plant trees and develop walkways, but that is not the only solution, and it is not a solution that would commend itself to all the people in the Black Country, because there is a growing interest among the people there in the role of industrial archaeology and in seeing the sinews of the Industrial Revolution, rusty and derelict though they may be. There is tremendous interest in travelling through the Dudley Tunnel by legging and in examining canal aqueducts and engineering feats which have often been destroyed, and I therefore repeat that the industrial archaeology aspect should be considered.

There is tremendous recreation potential in the area. Already the work of the Bliss Hill Museum at Telford in developing an industrial museum which includes Reynolds' famous canal is attracting a growing number of visitors.

There should be a careful examination of the canal system to see what needs to be infilled and what needs to be developed for recreational purposes, what can be used for industrial archaeological museums, and so on. I look forward to some sign from the Minister that the long period of neglect of the West Midlands canal system will come to an end and that within a short time there will be positive proposals for the development of the system.

Mr. Denis Howell (Minister of State, Department of the Environment) concluded the debate with some valuable remarks about the present Government's policy towards the canals:

I regard the canals as of tremendous importance in the develop-

ment of leisure facilities as a whole. In coming back to office as Minister for Sport, I was surprised to learn how many advisory bodies there were on water matters, both statutory and voluntary, and how enthusiastic they all are, which is no doubt why there has been a comparatively large turn-out for today's debate.

The House as a whole takes such an interest in canals that I have just reconstituted the Inland Waterways Advisory Council, which is the consumer group to the British Waterways Board, which runs the canals, and I thought it right to put back on that council two Members, one from each side of the House, who, unfortunately, had been removed from the council by my predecessor. I thought that that would be a good way of maintaining a direct link with those Members who have been writing about their problems, and I am sure that things will work out well. I know that John Barratt, the chairman of the council, welcomes the interest that is shown in this subject and the appointment of Members from both sides of the House. Until recently, Mr. Barratt was county planning officer for Staffordshire, so by coincidence he is a good Midlander who is interested in maintaining the canals.

The canal system is a product of the Industrial Revolution. It was never thought of in terms of recreational use, and I am sorry that the canals have fallen into considerable disuse over the years with the result that there is now a tremendous backlog of maintenance work to be done. The British Waterways Board, quite properly, continually draws my attention to the problem.

The amount of money that is needed for work on the towpaths alone is enormous. I believe that we ought not to be closing canals but opening many more and even building new ones. The whole question of how one polices the canals and puts the towpaths in good order is one which local authorities and the board must consider jointly in order to provide the necessary solutions, and it will not be easy to produce the money, either.

Some hon. Members might be surprised that I should talk about opening up new canals, but I have been making speeches on the subject recently. With the new regional water authorities and the National Water Council dealing with water as a whole, we now have opportunities in this regard. Although we had a lot to say about the reorganisation of water administration introduced by the previous administration, we certainly support the principle of dealing with water as a whole.

Our need in this country is the transportation of water from areas like Wales and Scotland, where there is plenty, to areas like the South-East, East Anglia and the South-West, where there is a scarcity. I have made it clear already to the authorities—I hope I carry the House with me—that it would seem to make more sense to dig canals, to transport the water through canals which can be used for other purposes like boating and angling, than to dig holes underground and transport the water in pipes, which has been the traditional method for many years. If I may call this fresh thinking, I hope that hon. Members will agree that it makes sense in the transport of water, at the same time to

improve recreational amenity.

We have a lot of unfortunate evidence about fences. People make holes in fences. The very fact that a fence has been erected is an attraction in itself in most cities to young people to get over it, under it, or through it. In a very unhappy case at Winson Green in Birmingham last year, when a boy of four was drowned, the workmen erecting the fence testified that the children involved had uprooted the fence posts before the concrete was dry. So we cannot rely on fencing to produce the desirable ends, and it is unconstructive to do so. It is also much more sensible, for the reasons which have been given and which I will not go over again, not to fill in canals.

Local authorities have a tremendous role to play. I recently opened the Ashdown Canal at Manchester which had been stagnant, full of rubbish and in a terrible state. Everybody advised the British Waterways Board to fill it in, as it had no further use. But, for the argument stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Edge)—that this would disrupt the Cheshire ring of canals and interfere with the totality of navigation—it was decided to reject that approach.

Two or three thousand volunteers turned up week after week to clean the canal. They did a splendid job. The local authorities and the Board have joined together to lay out the towpath with greens and trees. As I went along it on the day I opened it, we were cheered at almost every lock by the local inhabitants, starting from the centre of Manchester. We agreed that it was a marvellous place for hikers and

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walkers and for people to sit and stroll on a Sunday morning. It has produced a new dimension in the leisure opportunities for the people of industrial Lancashire. I am sure that that is the approach to these matters that we want. There is plenty of legislation to enable local authorities to involve themselves in these matters, and I hope that they will do so.

My right hon. Friend also mentioned freight. The British Waterways Board is anxious to do what it can to encourage the greater transport of freight, which obviously has attractions, but in the West Midlands the width of the canals makes it almost impossible for freight to become an economic proposition. However, if anyone can come up with economic propositions we should be very interested, because we want to do all we can to encourage them. But we have to recognise the difficulties. We have just received

the report of the Inland Waterways Association, which my right hon. Friend also mentioned. This is being urgently considered by the Ministers in my Department, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport Industries.

I am grateful to all hon. Members for having taken part in this debate. I am grateful also to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills for his point about industrial archaeology. Those of us who wish to protect and preserve our industrial heritage cannot do so if we go around filling in the canals which are an essential part of that heritage.

The great problem in this area in future is that more and more people will want to use the canals and will want them restored. I share that view, and I am glad to know that it is the view of my hon. Friends as well. The difficulty is that there are already signs that the canals are becoming over-congested. More and more people in the cities want to put boats on the canals so that they can travel, for example, from the Thames to the Trent. This underlines the importance of the West Midlands canals as a central part of the inland water highway of this country.

For all our citizens we shall try to use the canals in the way that I have suggested—constructively, while at the same time taking every possible step to maintain safety. I repeat that that can best be done by opening them up, spending money on them and making them attractive to the public. Then, as I have shown, questions of safety automatically fall into proper perspective.

Reprinted from Hansard Vol. 874, No. 47, Friday, 24 May, 1974.

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The 1831 Riots in the Black Country

(PART TWO)

by J. Robert Williams

IN the Black Country, a depression in the iron industry¹ hit the iron workers, coal miners and iron stone getters, alike. Following the example of the middle class reformists,² the "Union Colliers" began holding meetings during the autumn of 1831, in different places throughout the South Staffordshire coalfield, with the object of securing a rise in wages and better working conditions. This was not a new development; the 1831 riots amongst the colliers, which were to ensue, were only one of a series after the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars. From November 1815 to July 1826, the Staffordshire Yeomanry Cavalry³ was called out eight times in aid of the civil powers in the Black Country. However, from July 1826 to January 1831, there had been a lull in disturbances locally.

Resentment against the "Truck System,"⁴ which noticeably reduced the value of the colliers' wages, came to a head. Sir John Wrottesley had petitioned Parliament against the "Truck System" on behalf of the Wolverhampton miners and iron workers, in February 1831, and Edward John Littleton⁵ had introduced a Bill to suppress the "Truck System." Naturally, the employers resisted these proposed reforms and petitioned in their turn. "A petition against Mr. Littleton's Bill for the suppression of the Truck System has been signed by some highly respectable ironmasters in the neighbourhood. They allege that the Bill is an unauthorised interference between the master and the labourer, and that in the present state of the world it is necessary for England to be able to manufacture at low prices, which the Truck System has enabled them to do without decreasing the comforts of their workmen. They also pointedly object to the clause authorising magistrates to suspend the operation of the Bill, as unconstitutional in itself, and likely to be put into practice in Wales, by which the ironmasters of the Principality would have a manifest advantage over the Staffordshire ironmasters."⁶ Ten months after their petition had been presented to the Commons, the colliers saw no promise of a betterment in their conditions and began to adopt a more militant policy.

The workers' meetings were considered highly dangerous to public peace and so the authorities took precautionary measures. When meetings were announced in the neighbourhood of Wednesbury and Dudley, the Teddesley Troop⁷ was assembled at Dunstall Hall⁸ near Wolverhampton, and the Himley Troop⁹ was called out at Himley. The services of neither troop were required on this occasion and they returned to quarters the following day. The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" of Wednesday, 9th November, 1831, notes that "A public meeting of the men employed in



"The Right Honourable Edward John Littleton, of Teddesley M.P. for the County of Stafford." Engraved by Freeman from an original drawing. Published by R. Bently, January 1835.

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the collieries of the district was held at Wednesbury, on Monday, for the purpose, as stated in the hand bills announcing it, of taking into consideration the wretched system and abuses of the mining interests, and to try if means could not be adopted to amend them. There were from 2,000 to 3,000 persons present, and at the close of the proceedings, which were conducted with perfect order, the meeting separated."

In Stourbridge, however, the Stourbridge Troop¹⁰ of the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry,¹¹ under Captain Hickman, was called out on 7th November, and restored order after dispersing the mob.¹²

All this was going on against a background of political agitation for reform. Political Unions based on Attwood's model were growing in size and number. "We learn from a Birmingham Paper (the Midland Representative) that a chapel has been taken at Rowley, near Dudley, for the purpose of disseminating political principles in that neighbourhood. It has been opened by Messrs. Attwood and Salt of the 'Birmingham Political Union.' In this neighbourhood, the number of men employed in the coal works, &c. is very great. The same paper states, that the election of Mr. White, as High Bailiff of Hales Owen, was effected by the influence of the new Political Union there. These Unions are extending in all directions; the Birmingham Union is making great exertions to encourage their formation."¹³ Every week the 'Wolverhampton Chronicle' was advertising 'The Reformers' Pocket Book for 1832.'¹⁴ Middle class protest must have given a fillip to the activities of the dissatisfied labourers.

Later in the month the colliers held meetings which proved rowdy. Labour was withdrawn and some of the colliers "assembled in tumultuous bodies for the purpose of preventing those who were willing to work, from doing so, and (had) also resorted to other disorderly proceedings. The remonstrances of the masters (were) answered by volleys of stones, and their endeavours yesterday (Tues. Nov. 29) to persuade the men to disperse were unavailing."¹⁵

The apparent unity of feeling and action of the colliers worried the employers. A meeting of coal masters was held at West Bromwich on Friday, 25 November, "at which resolutions were passed declaratory of the injurious tendency of the 'Colliers' Unions,' and of the determination of the masters not to employ men who shall hereafter continue members of them; and every individual present pledged himself to call upon each of his charter-masters¹⁶ to remove all connection with such associations."¹⁷

The "Wolverhampton Chronicle" of 7 December, 1831 relates—

"We regret to state that the tumultuous proceedings of the colliers in this neighbourhood have been gradually increasing since our last publication. We have no doubt that many of the colliers and labourers of every kind engaged in the manufacturing of iron, are suffering great privations. It is notorious that the present low prices are ruinous to the masters, and undoubtedly the men must also suffer, but we must also state that many of those who have the least ground of complaint have been the foremost in their disorderly proceedings. In one field at least the wages of the men for the last three weeks before the strike were in no instance less than 17s. per man per week, and some upwards of 25s.; there are, however, numerous cases in which the payment of the men is exceedingly low and inadequate to the support of a family."

The tone of this feature is surprisingly mild and relatively unbiased, when one considers that the newspaper was catering for a readership who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, as regards labour relations at least. It continues, shedding some light on the methods of employment current at the time—

"Some statements have gone abroad of the men being oppressed by a system of paying them for a ton of coal, when they have in reality got a ton and a half, or nearly. This is altogether a mistake. The charter masters—a sort of middle men—employ the labouring collier and ironstone getter by the day. In the coal a certain portion is marked in the morning by the charter masters—two cubic yards we believe—and when that space is excavated—when a hole of that dimension is made, which requires from five to eight hours—the colliers' work is done. No matter whether he gets coal, slack or bat, he has done his stint (sic), and is entitled to his wages. Another of the colliers' grievances is the Tommy Shop.¹⁸ This has undoubtedly been sometimes a source of oppression, but it is so near its termination that it is now hardly worth naming. The indefatigable exertions of our worthy County Member, Mr. Littleton, have been crowned with success; and the 15th of January (which is the day the Truck Bill comes into operation) will finally extinguish the system. This will be a boon to men—it was a system open to great abuse, which may be inferred from a circumstance, by no means a solitary one, which has come to our knowledge, that in one field the men were some months ago offered to be paid entirely in money, if they would allow a reduction of 5 per cent from their wages; this they refused to do, and struck until they were allowed to go to work again on the truck system."

This method of deducting a per centage 'discount' from the wages of workers who were paid wholly in money, and had no truck, was instigated so that, masters paying on the truck system should not have the advantage of cheaper labour. The 'discount' system was a particular grievance of the nailers, from whose wages 10 per cent was deducted in lieu of truck.

The nail masters were not unresponsive to the afflictions of the nailers, but no one was willing to be the first to give up the advantage afforded by the 'discount.' A joint move would be the only answer, abolish the 'discount' overall at a stroke. The nail ironmongers resolved to call a meeting to discuss this matter—

"TO THOMAS BADGER, ESQ.

Chairman of the Nail Ironmongers' Meeting.

We, the undersigned Nail Ironmongers, request you to call as early a Meeting of the Trade as is convenient, to consider of the propriety of abolishing the Discount now taken from the Wages of the Workmen as early as may be deemed prudent, and making such arrangements as may be necessary thereon.

November 17, 1831.

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IN compliance with the above Requisition, I solicit the attendance of the Nail Ironmongers in the Neighbourhood at a MEETING for carrying into effect the laudable object of the Requisitionists, which I appoint to be holden at the Dudley Arms Hotel, in Dudley on TUESDAY the 6th day of December, 1831, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon.

THOMAS BADGER, Chairman.³²

Dudley, November 29, 1831.³³

Meanwhile the colliers were pushing home their claims by more drastic measures. In the course of Tuesday, 29 November, "the coal-pits around Bilston were visited by numerous assemblages of disorderly workmen, and those men who had not ceased working were compelled, in some instances with violence, to desist. A ringleader in the affair was apprehended at night and lodged in the prison³⁴ at Bilston; but on the following morning his companions assembled in great numbers, and breaking open the door, he was set at liberty. A reward for the apprehension of the parties by whom the prison was forced open was immediately offered, and a number of respectable inhabitants were promptly sworn to act as special constables."³⁵

At about 1.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 30 November, a large body of colliers marched into Wolverhampton, confusion being increased by the fact that it was market day.

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On their way they upset every coal-cart they passed; and on reaching the town crowded into the market-place, where their presence excited some consternation. In a short time a number of boys, who were associated with the turn-outs, began to attack some of the smaller stalls, and to throw potatoes and stones. Several shop windows were broken; and the shopkeepers in the market-place soon found it necessary to put up their shutters, which were kept closed the whole day after; the butchers cleared their stalls and left the market, as also did the dealers in poultry, vegetables, &c."³³

An express had previously been sent by the Magistrates to Birmingham, and at 8.0 p.m. a troop of the 7th Queen's Own Hussars³⁵ under a Captain Pettit, arrived from there. The Teddesley Troop⁷ was promptly assembled, special constables were sworn in, and orders were sent to Stafford for the immediate march to Wolverhampton of the Staff of the Staffordshire Militia.³⁶ On the same day:

"the colliers in the vicinity of Tipton proceeded to Oldbury in a considerable body, and succeeding in entering the prison³⁷ there, they released its inmates, about twenty in number, chiefly if not wholly debtors. They afterwards required drink at the public houses, which was given to them; and in the course of the afternoon they left the town without doing much further mischief. In consequence of their proceedings, special constables were sworn in for the preservation of peace in case of any further attempt at disorder, but everything has since then remained quiet, and some of the liberated prisoners have surrendered themselves."³⁸

Footnotes:

1 "Iron Trade.—The workmen in the Staffordshire iron-works are well employed, and are obtaining good wages. The demand for iron is good though at low prices."—'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 16 January, 1828. "At the Quarterly Meeting of Ironmasters held last week at Birmingham, the increasing depression of that important article of commerce was evinced by a further reduction of 5s. per ton upon pig, and 10s. upon bar-iron. The internal consumption of iron in England has decreased in the last year by at least one half in agricultural districts. In Shropshire the reduction in price is greater than in Staffordshire."—'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 21 October, 1829. "Iron Trade.—In consequence of the reduction made last quarter in the price of iron by the Staffordshire and Welsh makers, the Shropshire houses, last week, reduced pigs 5s. and bars 10s. per ton. This price of course stays stationery for the ensuing quarter, as regards Shropshire iron; but the Staffordshire and Welsh masters alter their prices during the intervening time."—'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 12 January, 1831.

A price war was being waged; Staffordshire, Shropshire and Wales each trying to undercut the other, to secure what they could of a depressed market. This explains much of the masters' resistance to the abolition of the truck and discount systems of wage payment.

2 Attwood's Political Union was to be made up of the "Lower and Middle Classes of the People," however, the following note shows that this ideal of co-operation was not always if ever, achieved—"As illustration of one of the good effects produced by the establishment of Political Unions on the social system, our attention has been directed to a statement made by a member of the 'Council' of this town (Birmingham), at its meeting on Tuesday evening last, as reported by one of our contemporaries, viz.—That a Union had recently been formed at the Lye-Waste (near Stourbridge) but the middle classes of that place obstinately refused to join it, and the consequence was the workmen had become exceedingly indignant, and a man with a good coat on his back could scarcely pass along the roads without meeting with all sorts of contumely, reproach, and insult."—'Aris's Birmingham Gazette,' 12 December, 1831.

3 Staffordshire Yeomanry Cavalry: formed 4 July, 1794, now the (Staffordshire Yeomanry Squadron) Queen's Own Mercian Yeomanry. The Staffs. Y.C. had already been

on duty in aid of the civil powers during 1831: May 24—28 (Newcastle Troop) suppressing collier riots in the Potteries; June (Burton Troop) to maintain order at the site of the discovery of the residue of the Earl of Lancaster's military chest, in the river Dove at Tutbury; October (Uttoxeter and Burton Troops) restoring order in Derby.

- ⁴ Truck System: a system causing much resentment, whereby labourers were paid in part with chits or tokens, which could only be cashed at 'truck' or 'tommy shops.' (See footnote 17). "The opponents of the Truck System are again actively at work. The Dudley meeting took place yesterday, and the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, as well as the inhabitants of the potteries, have determined to petition the legislature for its abolition."—'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 21 October, 1830. A petition was sent from Wolverhampton in February 1831 (see part one of this article, Vol. 7, No. 3).
- ⁵ Edward John Littleton: born 18 March, 1791, at Hatherton, as Edward John Moreton Walhouse; assumed the name Littleton in 1812; returned to House of Commons for Staffs. in by-election of June 1831 and represented that constituency until its dissolution in 1832; returned as one of the members for S. Staffs. at the general election of December 1832; created Baron Hatherton of Hatherton on 11 May, 1835; Lord Lieutenant of Staffs. 8 June, 1854; died 4 May, 1863 at Teddesley.
- ⁶ 'Wolverhampton Chronicle,' 2 March, 1831.
- ⁷ Teddesley Troop of the Staffordshire Yeo. Cav., composed of Wolverhampton and Penkridge men. The officers were Captain Henry Horden; Lieutenants William Brierley and Henry C. V. Graham; and Cornet Edward R. Littleton. Became the Wolverhampton Troop in 1832.
- ⁸ Dunstall Hall—the home of Captain Henry Horden, C.O. of the Teddesley Troop.
- ⁹ Himley Troop of the Staffs. Y.C. The officers were: Captain Thomas Hawkes; Lieutenants John Aston and George Grazebrook; and Cornet Thomas Shaw-Hellier.
- ¹⁰ Stourbridge Troop of the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry. The officers were Captain Richard Hickman; Lieutenants William Wheeley and Charles Noel; and Cornet Thomas Amphlett.
- ¹¹ The Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry; formed 17 June, 1831, now the (Warwickshire/Worcestershire Yeomanry Squadron) Queen's Own Mercian Yeomanry and 871 (Warwickshire/Worcestershire Yeomanry) Signal Troop, Royal Signals. The Worcs. Y.C. had already been on duty in aid of the civil powers in 1831; November (Worcester Troop) to quell disturbances amongst the river boatmen and hauliers at Upton-on-Severn.
- ¹² "Regimental Diary 1831-1841" of the Worcs. Y.C.
- ¹³ 'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 3 November, 1831.
- ¹⁴ "WHO ARE THE REFORMERS?" The 'Intelligence of the British Nation.' This fact is fully proved by the extraordinary sale of *The Reformers' Pocket Book*, for 1832, the Second Edition is now ready, which contains Splendid Portraits of William the Fourth, Earl Grey, Lord Brougham, Lord J. Russell, and Viscount Althorp; with Biographical Notices—a retrospective History of the Rise and Progress of Reform—particulars of the Bill—and every feature of the best Gentleman's Pocket Book. Price 2s. 6d.; may be had with an Almanack."—'Berrow's Worcester Journal,' 29 December, 1831.
- ¹⁵ 'Wolverhampton Chronicle,' 30 November, 1831.
- ¹⁶ "Charter-masters" were sub-contractors, also known as "Butties" or "Gaffers." They contracted with the coal master to mine and raise a given quantity of mineral at an agreed price. The master bore the costs for sinking shafts, providing drainage and winding facilities, and of transporting minerals away from the pit top. The charter-master hired the miners and provided horses, tubs, tools and timber for use underground. "Foggers" occupied a similar position to the nailers, as "butties" did to the miners.
- ¹⁷ 'Wolverhampton Chronicle,' 30 November, 1831.
- ¹⁸ Tommy shop: 'tommy' or 'truck' shops were usually kept by charter-masters and the colliers or nailers they employed, were expected to buy their provisions, often at inflated prices, from them. The colliers or nailers were paid in part with chits or tokens, which could only be cashed for goods in the tommy shop.

- 19 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9' for Stourbridge (Lye-Waste)—'Pargeter Jos. & Thos. Waste' = nail ironmongers & manufacturer. 'Bentley's Hist., Guide & Diry of Stourbridge,' circa 1841—"Pargeter Joseph and Thomas, nail factors, Carless-green."
- 20 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29' for Stourbridge—"Grainger Stephens, Upper Swinford" = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 21 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29,' for Stourbridge—"Pargeter & Skidmore, Delph," = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 22 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29' for Stourbridge—"Bate, George, Waste," = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 23 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29,' for Stourbridge—"Perrins Thos. Careless Green," = chain, trace &c. manufacturer.
- 24 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29,' for Stourbridge—"Jones Thos. Rowley Regis," = Chain, trace, &c. manufacturer. 'Bentley's Hist., Guide & Diry of Stourbridge,' c.1841—for Halesowen—"Jones Thomas, nail factor, Olive House."
- 25 'Bentley's Hist., Guide & Diry of Stourbridge,' c.1841—"Sidaway Thomas, Lye Waste," = nail ironmonger.
- 26 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Walker Robert, Netherton," = nail ironmonger and manufacturer.
- 27 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/29,' for Dudley—"Fletcher William, High st.," = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 28 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Cox & Sons, Wolverhampton st.," = nail ironmonger and manufacturer.
- 29 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Woolley & Dudley, Castle st.," = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 30 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Bennitt Jos. & Wm. Tower st.," = iron merchants. "Bennett William, New st.," = nail ironmonger & manufacturer.
- 31 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Finch, Hancox & Hancox, Wolverhampton st.," = nail ironmongers & manufacturers.
- 32 'Pigot's Nat. Comm. Diry 1828/9,' for Dudley—"Badger Thomas & Isaac, Snowhill," = nail & chain ironmongers and manufacturers.
- 33 'Aris's Birmingham Gazette,' 5 December, 1831.
- 34 Called the "Bilston Lock-up House" in the 'Wolverhampton Chronicle,' 7 December, 1831.
- 35 7th (Queen's Own) Light Dragoons Hussars: raised in 1690. The 7th Queen's Own Hussars were amalgamated with the 3rd The King's Own Hussars on 3 November, 1958, and is now the regular cavalry regiment of Warwicks./Worcs.
- 36 Only the Militia Staff were available as the Militia was not embodied at the time.
- 37 Called the "Oldbury Court House" in the 'Wolverhampton Chronicle,' 7 December, 1831.

MAKE THIS A BLACK COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

— by —

SENDING CARDS AND CALENDARS

(see Page 36)

— and —

PRESENTING BOOKS OF LOCAL INTEREST

(see inside Front Cover)

A Staffordshire Mon

M. Hutchings

I've bin a Staffordshire mon all me life.
All at once I'm not any more.
It's like 'aving the ground cut from under yer feet—
And somehow it troubles me sore.

I've allis bin a Staffordshire mon—
West Bromwich to be precise.
And merging that into Sandwell—
I doh think that's very nice.

It doh mek any sense, there's no reason.
I cor see what they've done it for.
They said somat about cutting the expenses
But rates have done nothing but soar!

Who gid 'em the right, can yoh tell me—
These faceless, almighty men—
To hack off our roots; our foundations,
With a few strokes of a pen?

P'raps they **wanted** to leave us rootless
Like cabbages cut from the stalk,
Soh we doh feel the things that they do to our land
Nor belong to the plairce weer we walk.

It's all wrong, so doh let 'em kid yer.
I'm Staffs.—and a Staffs. mon I'll be.
I 'ope they 'ave fun chairngin' it all—
They bloody well wo' chairnge me!!

I've bin a Staffordshire mon all me life—
(Well, not quite, I bay jed yet awhile.)
And I'll still be a Staffordshire mon when I lie
Six foot deep in old Staffordshire sile!

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Around the Cape

Memories of a Smethwick Childhood

by A. H. Bryan Holden

THE bullocks came galloping up the Cape Hill. There were nine animals in the charge of a man and two boys armed with spiked wooden poles. They were nearly at the slaughter-house gates when one particularly long-horned bullock, with mottled liver and white markings, turned away from the others and careered along the footpath.

Charles was about four years old at the time, and his mother's fear added considerably to his own. They both took refuge in the cake shop, until the bemused animal, *steaming with sweat and slavering at the mouth*, was cornered and driven into the slaughterhouse.

The fear of unfenced animals stayed with Charles well into manhood; as did a nightmare memory of blood and the smell of pine sawdust. The blood ran from beneath the closed doors of the slaughterhouse and mixed with the mish-mash of broken cabbage leaves, dead flowers and other garbage in the gutter near the greengrocers. In the back of this shop there were always rabbits' skins lying inside the doorway; a big hook on the door post being used to secure the animal whilst its pelt was stripped from its body. The slimy, red carcasses, with bulging eyes and furry legs, were displayed on an enamel tray in the window.

In the butcher's, hanging from metal rails, were sides of pork with a devilish hook through the hock tendon. Blood was congealed in the sawdust beneath each carcass, and the half snout of each pig was tipped with a bloody dewdrop. Charles would gaze at this scene of carnage as his mother ordered "three chops and half-a-pound of sausages," whilst the butcher in his blue and white striped apron, with a bandage on his finger, splintered bone and severed sinew on a wooden chopping block.

Often, the boy would crouch in the doorway making little mounds of sawdust. Then the wind would blow it into his eyes and he would be admonished with a slap round the ears.

A child's impressions of the world around him are not only conditioned by the development of his intelligence, but also by his limited stature. When one is small one notices things that are near the ground; the world is vast, so there is a reassuring intimacy in one's immediate and familiar surroundings.

The smell, texture and creative possibilities of sawdust have already been mentioned. There was also the fascination of peeping over the edge of a barrel-full of dried peas. Inside was a scoop which had the same attraction as a spade in sand. This was another staging point for boxed ears!

At that time, several years before the Second World War, many footpaths were still surfaced with blue bricks; the concrete paver was

only just beginning to appear. The criss-cross patterning on the face of the bricks was most apparent to a child's eyes, particularly when seeking an even surface on which to spin a top.

Many of the streets were cobbled, and the noise of horse-drawn vehicles was thunderous. Sparks showered from hoofs and metal-rimmed wheels when carts were driven at speed—particularly at the end of the day when the milkman, the baker and other door-to-door suppliers headed empty back to stables.

The coalman's horse was an equestrian giant to be watched fearfully from within the safety of the entry. He was a dappled grey with monstrous hoofs overhung with masses of white hair. His mane was plaited and so was his tail. He had a way of snorting into his leather hay bag which blew the chaff into the air and over his ears. He would watch the boy with a malevolent brown eye, and if he should venture into the street, the horse would jerk the cart forward, jingling the harness, and kick the cobbles as though threatening to mount the footpath.

By comparison, the brewery horses were aristocrats. Big, black-haired brutes with polished brasses decorating their harness, always working in tandem. They clattered up the Cape Hill from the brewery, two men at the reins and a third seated on the swaying barrels. At the 'Dudley Arms,' the dray was drawn into the curb and the red-faced, muscular-armed men dismounted and opened-up the cellar doors. There was much clanking of chains, snaking of ropes, as the moleskin-trousered men proudly demonstrated to the small crowd of onlookers their strength and expertise as effortlessly they hoisted-up the empties and lowered the full barrels into the cellar.

To respectable children, the 'Dudley Arms' was forbidden territory, but every night a group of waifs hung around the saloon doors begging. There was an accordion player who wore a Mexican outfit, the brim of his sombrero quivering with dime pieces. Frequently, a band of disabled musicians, some without an arm or a leg, played and sang outside the door.

Uncle Abe was a familiar figure; a regular patron. He was big and fat with a flabby double chin that bulged over his stiff collar and bow-tie. He had lost his right arm, and the empty sleeve was tucked inside his jacket pocket. His feet seemed small by comparison to the rest of his gross body. He walked unsteadily, almost on tip-toe, as though he had a nail sticking-up in each shoe.

Sometimes, he would make his precarious way down the street from the 'Dudley Arms' to where Charles lived. When this happened, the boy would go inside the house and conceal himself under the table; for he knew that Uncle Abe would soon begin to relate to brother Henry the incredible experiences of his Army career.

Seated cross-legged beneath the table, staring at Uncle Abe's small pointed shoes, Charles would hear the thump of two bottles of ale being placed on the table and the rattle of cutlery as his father took the bottle-opener from the table drawer. The two brothers would exchange pleasantries, but soon the conversation would narrow into the familiar channel. Abe would be back with his regiment in France. Often he would be just about to go "up the line."

"So there we was, 'Enry. Me an' six others, one of 'em a mere kid who'd enlisted under age. He was bringin' up the rear carryin' the rations, an' I was last but one. I 'ad a funny feelin' in me innards that night. Everythin' was so quiet. The rain 'ad stopped—but the trenches was still thigh deep in water—and the moon were bright. There were no gunfire. It were too peaceful.

"'Cum on, Pinky,' one of me mates said to me. They called me Pinky 'cos I'd joined under the name of Billy Green. Remember? 'Cum on,' he said, 'Yer draggin' a bit tonight. Let's gerrup there an' dig in.'

"I was sweatin' cold, I can tell yer. Me teeth was chatterin' inside me 'ead. I 'ad this feelin' that nun of us were ever gonna cum back in one piece.

"After about an 'our we was nearly there when—'whump!'—Jerry starts sendin' 'em over. 'For Chris' sake, 'urry up,' I shouted to 'em up front. But I don't know if they 'eard me, 'cos I couldn't 'ear meself, me ears was bost an' bleedin'!

"Then it 'appened. I never 'eard a sound. Just felt a God Almighty thump an' I was lifted clean awf me feet, an' 'alf buried under a ton of earth an' broken planks."

The child beneath the table knew the rest of the story by heart, and the tears would begin to stream down his face. All but Uncle Abe and the ration boy had been killed, blown to pieces. Uncle Abe's arm had been smashed to pulp, his chest torn open and an artery broken. An officer had arrived sometime later and had ordered the ration boy to leave his companion. Uncle Abe had been left, more dead than alive, to crawl on his hands and knees the two miles to the field ambulance station.

Stricken with sorrow, blinded with salt tears, his head heavy with tiredness, the boy's imagination would begin to play strange tricks. He would wonder at the giant-size of his father's lace-up boots, always with the tag sticking out at the back. His socks were always so thick, hand-knitted by Charles' mother. Peeping under the fringed table cloth, he would watch the red hot ashes dropping into the ash pan beneath the black-leaded fire grate. He would begin to feel as though he too were buried in a trench. There were feet and legs close to his head, the flares and starshells were bursting in the sky . . .

Sometime later, the cold, wet nose of his Spaniel dog would rouse Charles from his nightmare.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Uncle Abe would exclaim. "The little bugger! 'Ere yer are, kid. 'Ere's a tanner for yer."

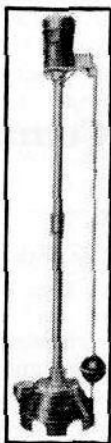
Then turning towards brother Henry: "Did I ever tell yer about the time the dog bit the fingers awf me arm? Yer see, I'd left it on the sofa and when I gorrup next mornin' there it were in bits . . . !

FACTORY AND FIRESIDE

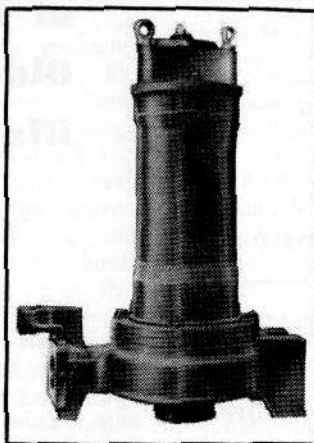
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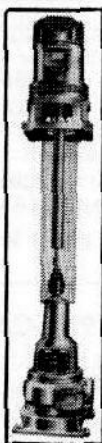
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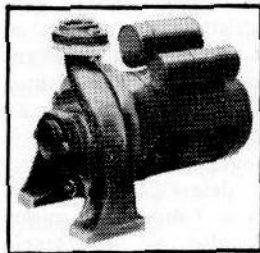
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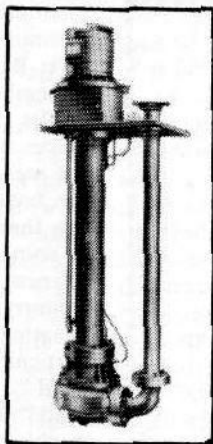
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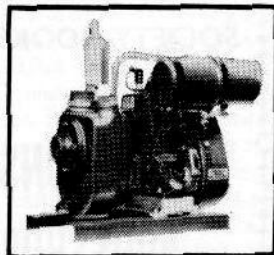
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ing and chattering on their way to the railway station. Miners could be identified by the ring of their heavy hob-nailed boots on the pavement and by the jingle of their enamelled tea cans. Other noises would then be heard, the sound of horses' hooves, generally pulling coal carts, and then the rumbling roar of the load, a ton, being dumped on the pavement. Motor vehicles were not yet too common, and all with very noisy engines and gear-boxes. Their horns were of the old rubber bulb type, emitting sounds that ranged from a strangled squeak to a bellow. Very heavy loads were moved by steam traction engines that had whistles like railway engines, and large steel-tyred wheels that crunched and grated on the macadam (not yet tarmac). Steam rollers could add the grinding crackle of the old surface being broken up by the picks attached to the body.

Another transport noise could come from the wicker baskets on wheels that were used for the delivery of bread, laundry and other light articles. They had three small wooden wheels shod with iron tyres which made a peculiar whirring noise when the basket was pushed, or ridden at a run. Since all vehicles were quite slow it was sometimes possible to get a lift by hanging on to the back of a cart causing passers-by to raise the shout of "whip behind." Other cries were the call of the line prop seller, which came out as "Lypyop," the scissors and knife grinder, and the jangling tunes of the piano organ, generally called, and wrongly, a "hurdy-gurdy."

The sounds of working machinery were different from those of today as in many places

electricity was not used. The exhaust beats of steam engines were quite regular, but gas engines had a characteristic note, each firing stroke could be followed by a varying number of idle strokes, and sometimes by a misfire, a loud bang. In smaller workshops, "Olivers" were used, their sound being quite unique. The first blows made soft thuds as the iron would be red hot and quite malleable. As the iron cooled and became harder the sound would change to sharp clinks. The pace of the blows also increased until the final "ring-off."

Many of these noises died at the end of the day, to be replaced by the sounds of folks at play. The cries of the newspaper boys would dominate the early evening. The words or rather sounds most common were "Spetchermile" and "Argust," always with a final 'T', and sometimes "Speshul." The loud voices of the commissionaires of the "Picture Palaces" could be heard shouting the titles of the films and the prices of the seats, the show was always "just beginning." Trams seemed to make more noise after dark; the hiss of the trolley wheel, the clang of the foot operated bell, and sometimes the track would be so bad as to bring down the life guard, making a startling clatter on the cobbles. On Saturday nights only the Salvation Army Band would play its stirring hymns, and between hymns the leader's voice could be heard with his exhortations. Many people had a cage bird, blackbird or thrush, and on a summer evening the cage would be hung outside on the front of the house. Birdsong was not unknown in the grimmest of streets.

The greatest excitement of the

year however, was caused by the multitudinous sounds of the annual "wake." The loudest came from the steam organs of the roundabouts, which in addition to pipes, had banjos, drums and cymbals. Through them could be heard the cracks from the rifle ranges and the metallic clangs from the backsheets of the coconut shies, as well as the thumps of the "Try your strength" and the rare ring of its bell. Screams of ecstatic terror would be heard from the riders in the big twin steam driven swingboats, and always in the background the steady puffing of the fairground engines and the hum of their dynamos.

After bedtime when things became quieter, more distant

noises became noticeable, the puffing engines of mines drainage and canal feeder pumps being examples, while the whistles and jangling couplings of goods trains always seemed louder at night.

Though by modern standards street noises were very moderate, consideration was still given to people who were very ill, when tan bark would be strewn over the pavement and carriageway, producing in the daytime an eerie silence which really was of the night.

Each morning, however, the "Bulls" would announce another day with no great change from year to year until 4 August, 1914 brought an upheaval that silenced many old and familiar sounds for ever.

AN ORANGE FROM DUBBY

An account of how the children of Coseley celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897.

AT the time we lived in Rosehill House—a Georgian villa on a hill not far from the canal, with a large garden and two fields adjoining. My father was very willing to lend one of the fields for the afternoon and we children, my big brother and I, and a very small sister ('Dubby'), anxious to join in the fun, provided ourselves with 'front seats' on top of a dividing wall.

We had perfect weather and a wonderful view of the assembled children below. Our nurse had joined us to see that 'Dubby' did not take a header into the midst of them.

There were many games and competitions, and we threw down sweets for which the children scrambled. This was so popular a pastime that our big brother took himself off to the village shop for a second supply.

As the sunshine waned the children lined up to march down the long drive on their way home, and we ran to the big gates with oranges to hand to them as they passed.

A man waiting for his child in the drive saw that 'Dubby' was overshadowed by me and my brother, and was offering her oranges in vain, so he shouted in stentorian tones: "Take 'em fra the lil'un, take 'em fra the lil'un"—and 'Dubby' came into her own.

Ethel R. Guy.

SEASONAL SECTION



'Meks no sense . . . 'er ay nowheer as funny as me . . .'

THE ERRAND

by

J. William Jones

ABOUT a week before Christmas, Bill Jeavons received a letter which worried him quite a bit.

His dad had died suddenly of a heart attack only a month before and this would be his first Christmas alone. He had never married, and now at the age of fifty-one, he began to dread the loneliness that was closing in upon him. He and his dad had been more like brothers than father and son. They'd had a good life together

since Bill's mother died ten years ago and Bill had never been one to make friends or to seek company other than an occasional Saturday night round at the 'Miner's Arms.'

The letter was from Harry Baxter, a neighbour, who'd gone visiting relatives in Coventry, he and Mrs. Baxter intending to be back again before Christmas Day. But Mrs. Baxter had gone down with a bad attack of bronchitis, so they were staying where they were until January, and (said the letter) could Bill help them out of a difficulty. 'There's five pounds enclosed' wrote Harry. 'You see, Bill, for years now we've gone round on Christmas Day to see a lonely old chap named Smart in Furnace Parade—No. 15—and of course, he'll be expecting us. We wondered if you would go in our place?'

Bill was disturbed. "A conna goo! A just doe feel like it!" he muttered. He didn't want to be uncharitable, that wasn't in his nature, and the Baxters were good-hearted folks, but he had so much sadness in his heart at present he just couldn't enter into the spirit of such a mission as this.

But what could he do? What would the Baxters think of him if he wrote back returning the money and saying he couldn't do what they asked?

He thought again of his dad and how he would have felt about it. Dear old dad! Such a generous hearted soul; he would have jumped at the chance of helping somebody. After all, it would be such a disappointment for the old chap in Furnace Parade when

nobody called to see him on Christmas Day.

So Bill changed his mind. He blew his nose hard, fought back the lump in his throat and got himself ready to go out.

There were crowds of folks in the town all loaded up with shopping bags and colourful parcels, regardless of the high prices, and there was still a vestige of the old 'magic' of Christmas in spite of the grey materialistic atmosphere of the '70's.

He spent the five pounds as Mr. Baxter instructed, but he spent wisely. He had learned the art of economic shopping over the years. He bought a chicken, some sausage, cake, chocolate, tobacco. Then when Mr. Baxter's money was spent, he dipped into his own pocket for a bottle of whisky.

And so, on Christmas morning, Bill set out for Furnace Parade; and after knocking hesitantly on the door of No. 15, found himself being pulled gently inside by a small, round-faced old man.

There was a good fire burning in the grate. "Sit thee down!" said the old man indicating a rather shabby armchair.

Bill sat down and explained why he was there.

"Well, it's very good on yer ter come. I'm sorry tew 'ear about Connie Baxter tho'. They'm nice folks the Baxters—knowed 'em for years."

Bill found himself talking easily to Mr. Smart. He told him about his father and how lonely he was feeling.

"Yo aye Harry Jeavons' son am yer—well damn my hide. 'Im an'

me waiked together when they was a buildin' the Locarno Estate." The old man's face wrinkled with pleasure. "Well would yo' believe it—damn my hide!"

After that their conversation never lapsed. The bottle of whisky was opened, memories long stored away were brought out and pondered over.

"Manny a time ai've gone carol singin' as fer as Lower Gornal," said Mr. Smart. "We yearsta tek lanterns on poles ter light we way—an' the snow 'ud be six foot deep in plairces."

Bill Jeavons talked of his childhood, his school days, his mother

and of Christmasses gone by.

"Tell yer what!" said Mr. Smart. "Wot's say yo' an' me sing a carol."

"Ar don't mind!" says Bill.

And so their pleasant meeting ended happily in song. The old man's shaky voice paused for breath as they reached the heights of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and Bill, mellow with whisky and a new feeling of joy that warmed his lonely heart once more, laughed heartily.

"Come again wo' yer!" shouted Mr. Smart as Bill left the house; and Bill knew that he would, very soon.

Edith Cotterill's Bible Ballads

JONAH'S JAUNT

Young Jonah was a ranter and one day when 'is dad
Sent 'im ter preach in Ninevah wheer all the folks wus bad
'E said, "I bay agooin', I doh see why I should,
I'd sooner goo ter Joppa wheer everybody's good!"
But when 'e got ter Joppa 'e sid a sailin' ship
An' thought, "Now that's the very thing ter give our dad the slip!"
An' so 'e took 'is ticket an' went ter sea instead,
'E never gid another thought of wot 'is dad ad said
Until a mighty tempest descended from the sky,
"Theer's someone with a voodoo 'ere!" they all begun ter cry.
The sailors, somewhat joobus, cast lots amongst the folk
An' then they tode our Jonah, "It seems as yo'm the bloke!"
They said, "There's no offence meant, but if yo'n gotta jinx
We'll atta chuck thee overboard afore the vessel sinks."
They plonked 'im in the wairter an' 'e wus nearly jed
When a great fish cum swimmin' by wot gawped at 'im an' said,
"Bin yoh that gawby Jonah?", "I bin!" poor Jonah cried,
"Yer fairther's sent me," said the fish, "Yo'd better cum inside."
'E golluped up young Jonah, it wor arf dark an' dank,
All gloomy, glaur an' glairy an' wot wus wuss it stank.
"It's rify!" chuntered Jonah, "I bin a bletheryed,
"No coddin', I wud sooner be in Ninevah instead!"

Three days an' nights 'e sot theer, aquiver an' aquake,
The fish wor 'appy naither, it 'ad the bally ache.
"Aye! yoh in theer!" it bellucked, two doubled up with pain,
"Yoh goo an' tek yer flippin' 'ook an' doh cum nigh again!"
Its bally started wambling, it couldn't stand no more
An' so it went an' sicked up our Jonah on the shore.
'Is fairther 'oo wus waitin' cried, "Thee bist a naughty lad!
Now let that be a lesson ter tek notice of yer dad!"

ESAU

Esau, 'e wus a ginger bloke with 'air upon 'is chest
An' tho' young Jacob wus 'is twin 'is fairther luv'd 'im best.
Their mother favoured Jacob but she feared 'e'd cum off wust,
It seems as 'ow when they wus born our Esau cum out fust.
Now Esau wus a huntin' mon while Jacob stopped a'wum
Bumsuckin' to 'is fairther an' aplottin' with 'is mum
On 'ow ter potch poor Esau, it wus a dirty trick,
They planned ter pinch 'is birthright with a plate o' Groaty Dick!
One day when Esau cum from werk an' all the pubs wus shut
'E wus that clemmed 'is bally thought as 'ow 'is throat wus cut,
'Is mouth begun ter wairter when 'e sid the Groaty Dick,
"Our kid!" 'e bellucked to 'is twin, "Give us that fittle quick!"
"I'll swop it fer thee birthright, it is yer only asset,"
Said wily Jacob with a loff an' Esau, 'e cried, "Pass it!"
The dunder yed, 'e scoffed the lot then sot an' smacked 'is chops,
An' so though Esau cum out fust young Jacob cum out tops!

JOSEPH

Now Joseph wus a dreamer with the gift of second sight
An' when 'e went ter bed 'e 'ad a vision every night.
'E dreamt 'e wus the "greatest" an' 'e swore it wud cum trew,
'Is brothers said, "We orter tek 'im down a peg or tew!"
But tew 'is fairther Jacob, Joseph wus the white 'aired lad,
An' when yoh cum ter reckon up, 'e wor unlike 'is dad!
('E wus that skyvin' Jacob as I tode yer wor no good.
An' pinched 'is brother's birthright with a plate o' Groaty Pud).
So Joseph grew big yedded an' when 'e wus seventeen
'Is dad gid 'im a jacket med in yellor, red an' green,
It wus a bobby dazzler an' 'e looked a proper toff,
Each time they sid 'im cummin' all 'is brothers day arf loff!
But one day they wus werkin' 'ard when Joseph took their nosh,
A'dolled up in 'is jacket lookin' lardee-daa an' posh,
"The lazy little nerker 'im!" they all begun ter moan,
"While we 'is o'der brothers werks we fingers tew the bone!"
They stripped 'im of 'is clobber an' when 'e begun ter cry,

They sode 'im tew sum tatters as wus just a 'passin' by.
 'Is coat o' many colours they blooded up an' creased
 An' tode their dad, "Our Joseph's bin devoured by sum beast!"
 The ode folks wailed an' wrung their 'onds, it nearly broke their 'earts,
 While all the time young Joseph wus well off in foreign parts.
 'E ended up in Egypt, 'obnobbin' with the kings,
 A'readin' of their 'oroscopes an' prophesyin' things.
 'E forecast times of plenty, with seven years of grace
 An' then another seven years with famine in the place.
 They thought 'e wus a marvel an' they draped 'im all in gold,
 Then med 'im gaffer of the land an' did as they wus told,
 So when the time o' famine cum they'd corn enough ter spare
 Fer all the folk from far an' wide wot pleaded fer a share.
 (They med a tiny packet mind, doh think it wus fer free,
 'E charged 'em all top prices an' 'e added V.A.T.)
 One day when 'e wus bargainin' now 'oo shud cum along
 But all 'is o'der brothers 'oo 'ad done 'im so much wrong.
 They didn't recernize 'im but 'e knew 'em at a glance
 An' so ter get 'is own back led 'em ever such a dance.
 'E med 'em bow an' scrape tew 'im an' genuflect the knee
 An' akst 'em "'Oo's the greatest?" an' they all replied, 'It's thee!'
 'E said, "Well pin yer lugs back, for there's summat yoh shud know,
 I'n gotta boon ter pick with yoh 'cos I'm yer brother Joe!"
 Their knees begun a'knockin' an' they thought they'd breathed their last,
 But 'e took 'em tew 'is bosom an' forgid 'em all the past.
 'E said "Goo wum an' fetch the tribe an' dad, the poor ode soul,
 Then yoh con bide in comfort 'ere a'livin' on the dole."
 So back they went ter Jacob, 'oo by now wus past 'is prime,
 'E said, "An' wheer 'ave yoh bin galavantin' all this time?"
 They said, "We've fun' our Ioseph dad, a'livin' like a nob,
 'E's settled out in Egypt wheer 'e's gotta bobbys' job!"
 Now Jacob wus a' gettin' sick o' livin' in a tent
 'E said, "We'll goo an' jine 'im then!" and packed 'is traps an' went!
 They lived like pigs in clover until Ioseph went an' died,
 "An' now we'll see 'oo's gaffer 'ere!" the Pharaoh feller cried.
 'E stripped 'em of their tranklements, their jew-jaws an' their rings
 An' sot 'em all a'buildin' of them pyramids an' things!
 An' so the mighty Hebrew race wus all turned inter slaves
 With Jacob an' 'is Ioseph a'revolvin' in their graves.

But now I'n 'ad me quota an' yoh know it wo' be fair
 If I goo on a'rantin' potchin' someone else's share,
 Yoh book yer copies early 'cos next time I'm tellin' thee
 About the flight from Egypt an' 'ow Moses set 'em free.

N.B.—'Our Ede's BEST SELLER, "A Black Country Nurse at Large"
 has sold 3,000 copies and has now been reprinted. Price 60p, plus 10p
 postage.

EVERY year, as Christmas drew near, I wondered if I should be able to cope with the ever-growing numbers of brothers, sisters and cousins.

Our Christmas followed the traditional pattern of spending three days with my grandparents who kept the local inn. In those days, opening hours were anything from five a.m. until close on midnight so, at busy times, it meant all hands to the mill. Christmas Eve saw my family and that of my uncle walking to Grandma's early in the morning. Sometimes we saw Grandfather on the steps of the "Shake"—the name adopted by the locals—selling rum and coffee, twopence a cup, to miners and other workmen off to work.

It was an old fashioned hostelry, with stabling, fodder, loft and pigsties. One climbed a flight of stone steps to enter the long flagged passage which led straight to the rear quarters. The windows were imposing to us children, for in the frosted glass was etched a likeness of William Shakespeare. First on the right as one entered was the bar, with its sawdust floor and gleaming spittoons. A roaring fire shone on the polished mahogany counter. Innumerable shelves held glasses of every colour and size, pewter measures, the glass spirit spoons and the pottery beer jugs.

Behind the bar, the large living room was dominated by a huge black-leaded range with enormous ovens either side of the fire, and hobs where kettles and kitchener always sang. Ritual black-leading took place twice weekly—a full morning's work. Brass fire-irons,

ENA MASSEY'S OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

pot-hooks, meat-jack, etc., were polished daily. On the shelf, with its macramé fringe, "Staffordshire Dogs" were displayed.

Opposite the bar was the tap room, where women could drink. How cheerless I thought, with its long scrubbed tables and benches, despite a roaring fire. However, *the women loved their domain*. A little way down the passage, behind the 'tap' was the small, select smoke room. Here, lino on the floor, horse-hair covered bench seats, mahogany topped iron-framed tables, a cheerful fire and silk fronted piano was luxury! Round and round we went on the revolving piano stool! Old fashioned ballads and Moody and Sankey were good for a sing-song.

Approaching the last room in the passage, eyes glistened as little feet hurried to 'our room'—'The Pawn Shop.' No longer used as such, it was ours for three whole days. At last! Ooohs and Aaahs issued from tiny lips as each slid into a comfortable chair before a crackling log fire. A moment's peace and then a peep into the 'secret room' as I carefully manipulated the queer fastening. 'Twas full of magic for us then—no windows, no other exit and full of treasures consisting mainly of large tin trunks of foreign costumes brought back by a travelling great-uncle.

This day, however, we were



*'Doh fret, ah kid . . . it'll dew
wonders foh yoh migraine . . .'*

allowed to watch the preparations. Mountains of mince pies, sausage rolls, a whole ham, a large tongue, round of beef, enormous turkey and a sucking pig were prepared for the morrow. Down the yard, the smell of newly baking bread tempted us outside and a tray of batches hot from the oven split and buttered, whetted our appetites. Then back to our room where the sideboard was piled high with fruit, nuts, figs, dates, sweets and chocolates.

Needless to say we ate our fill, for Christmas Eve dinner was usually served between three-thirty and five p.m. The round of beef was cut, plates piled with sprouts, potatoes and Yorkshire pud and a glass of port served to all. Back then to the 'Pawn Shop,' too sleepy for words. There we would

doze and dream until our parents took us home, too tired to walk. Most of us were carried part of the way and never remembered going to bed.

Awakened early on Christmas Day by dad; off to Communion at six a.m., we opened our presents, tongues chattering excitedly, then dressing quickly. A drink of milk and we were on our way again. Essentially, this was our day, for grown-ups were far too busy to join us for long. More gifts from relations were unwrapped; then there were games to play; ludo and tiddley winks, and those we invented, especially our dressing-up games in the 'secret room.' There were no tantrums and very few tears.

At four p.m., it was time for Christmas dinner. Turkey and

sucking pig were carved by grandfather. Everyone had more than enough. Room for pudding was found and as brandy was poured over it the youngest child set it on fire with a wax taper—sleight of hand most probably but sheer magic to us! Only the real trenchermen could eat the pies, rolls, fruit and nuts which followed. I only know we enjoyed one glass of port and happily retired to our room for another nap.

Supper; a cold collation, huge plates of all the cold meats with a wedge of pork pie, was served after 'closing time.' How we managed to eat so much, I don't know! Then sleepily back home.

Boxing Day was less hectic for the adults during the day, so they were able to see our presents and bring us fizzy pop in the 'marble'

bottle. In the evening there was great hilarity in the 'tap' and 'bar' and we were forbidden to leave our room. It was termed "Avin' Day" (Heaving Day) when the women tried to heave the men. Forfeits had to be paid, so much mirth permeated the Inn. Food was brought in to us, plates of cold meat, etc., and later we had a tea party with all the fancies we wanted plus a large box of crackers. A last game with our foreign costumes acting out stories then sadly putting them away for next year.

In the early hours of the morning, we all went home. Mums and dads were given enough food for several days to come. For them it had been all work and no play, but for the children it had been truly the magic of Christmas.

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BOOK REVIEWS:

W. J. Smith, "The Grand Voyage"; Robert Hale (£1.60).

MR. W. J. SMITH, a member of the Black Country Society, and formerly of West Bromwich, has recently had published his first excursion into science fiction—"The Grand Voyage" (Robert Hale and Co., £1.60). It is a most original and entertaining book, having something of the quality of both "Gulliver's Travels" and "The Time Machine" with a dash of Mr. Smith's inimitable humour added. It is the story of a twenty-fifth century man with a nostalgia for the twentieth, so that, unlike H. G. Wells' celebrated Time Traveller, when he sets out on his Grand Voyage he finds that he has travelled backwards—or so he believes! Read on. If you enjoy a good tale you will not be disappointed—also if you have a taste for the unexpected and the thought-provoking.

Mr. Smith spent his childhood and youth in the Black Country. His father came from Wednesbury but moved later to West Bromwich. He has happy memories of his old haunts, and of cycling forays into the surrounding countryside in those relatively car-less days. Particular Black Country memories, he told me, were of the Crooked House at Himley and seeing a bottle roll up a table (a puzzling experience when young!) and of Sam Cotton telling his Black Country stories in the old Labour Church in West Bromwich.

He attended West Bromwich

Grammar School, and there began his notable local career in amateur theatre. He toured with the school company in Scandinavia, presenting "Twelfth Night," and still has a Norwegian newspaper cutting praising his 'Andrew Pale-nose'! After school he continued acting, and many people in West Bromwich still remember with delight his performances in "Charley's Aunt," "The Ghost Train," and "Dear Brutus." He formed his own amateur company, and wrote several one-act plays, which were very well received.

He became a teacher, in London and elsewhere, and, as he told me, "settled seriously to writing." This is his first S.F. (though he has long been interested in the genre, and thinks Wells still the giant of S.F.)—but he has written considerably in other fields.

Mr. Smith, married, and now living at Twickenham, has two sons, one at the Slade and the other at Cambridge, and a daughter still at school. He remains, he says, a Blackcountryman still at heart, and remembers all his old Black Country friends with affection. I can say that anyone who knew Walter Smith in his Black Country days will find in "The Grand Voyage" all the old inventiveness, verve, and sly humour. It is well thought out, well put together, and neatly finished—in short, a sound Black Country job!

G.S.

"Thoughts From My Kitchen Window," published by the author, 40p including postage.

Poems by Elizabeth Garlick

MRS. GARLICK'S poems will strike a nostalgic chord in the hearts of those readers who remember something of the period between the wars often referred to now as 'the bad old days.' Her poems speak of the serenity of that period and are very easy to read. It is a pity, I feel, that only a small number of copies have been printed.

This is a book for the quiet hour, a restful book, a reflective book. The style of some of the poems reminds me very much of the famous American poetess Ella Wheeler Wilcox. There is no doubt that Mrs. Garlick is a sincere and a deeply religious person whose faith speaks out in most of her work.

Of the forty-six poems in the book I particularly liked "April Rain," "My Daily Bread," and "To The East Wind."

Mrs. Garlick was born in Portsmouth but has lived a long time in the Black Country. Her affection for our area is shown in poems like "The Way to Summerhill," "Black Country Park," etc. She is now eighty years old and lives at 2 Northmead, Ledbury, Herefordshire. Anyone requiring a copy of the book should contact Mrs. Garlick at that address.

J. William Jones.

This author is a member of The Black Country Society

"By Rail to Halesowen" by Michael Hale and Ned Williams (published by Michael Hale jointly with Uralia Press). Price £1.50.

THIS attractively produced book describes in a comprehensive way the railways in and around Halesowen in the southern section of the Black Country. One could be forgiven for thinking that the railway between Dudley and Halesowen Junction near Longbridge was conceived as a through route, but in their introduction to the book the authors explain how the railway history of Halesowen was linked with the two areas from which the railways approached. The Great Western Railway's line

from the north began as a plan to link Dudley with Halesowen, whilst on the other hand, the southern approach was promoted by an independent company, which eventually became jointly owned by the Midland Railway and the G.W.R.

From the commencement of the large scale development of the mineral wealth of the Black Country in the early 18th century, the area was handicapped from the point of view of transport. for there were no major rivers on which raw materials could be carried. The position improved with the coming of the canals from 1769 onwards, which enabled coal to be moved much more cheaply from the local pits to the iron-

works, but as time went by it became obvious that railway transport would be advantageous for long distance delivery of the finished products. In the five miles between Dudley and Halesowen there were numerous furnaces and in 1848, Henry Doulton established his pipe works near Netherton. 1860 was the year that the Coombs Wood tube works commenced manufacture. It was about this period that the West Midland Railway put forward a scheme for a railway between Dudley and Halesowen which was authorised in 1862. However, in 1863 the West Midland Railway amalgamated with the Great Western Railway and it was not until the mid 1870s that construction of the line was commenced. The line was eventually opened for traffic on March 1, 1878, and to celebrate the event a public luncheon was held at the New Inn, Halesowen, with the Hon. C. G. Lyttleton in the chair.

There was considerable coverage of the opening of the line in the local press and a correspondent using the name "Veritas" wrote in the "Dudley Herald": "... the new line from Dudley to Halesowen will be a great boon to the districts through which it will pass, especially those connected with the hardware trades and the coal proprietors . . . eventually Halesowen will become the Wolverhampton of the Black Country."

The development of the mineral resources in the Halesowen area and the subsequent increase in industrial activity attracted the attention of the Midland Railway who put forward a proposal to build a line from Halesowen to Kings Norton on the Birmingham and Gloucester line. This branch

was authorised in the Midland Railway Act of 3 August, 1846, but it was never constructed. The task of building a railway southwards from Halesowen was eventually taken up by a London based company with local support, and despite opposition from both the Great Western and the Midland Railway, obtained authorisation to proceed on the 5 July, 1865. It was, however, to be nearly 20 years later before the line was finally opened to traffic, due mainly to financial and contractual difficulties and a certain amount of opposition from one of the local industrialists.

It would be hard to imagine a railway branch line in any other part of the country which passed through such contrasting scenery. From Dudley via Netherton, Windmill End and Old Hill the traveller would have had a view of an industrial landscape the like of which probably would not have its equal anywhere else in the land, and yet, having passed through Halesowen on the southern section the outlook would be completely rural in its aspect, passing as it did, the edge of the Clent Hills.

The railway enjoyed considerable success and prosperity in its early years but by the early part of the century the southern section of the line had settled down to a passenger service of five trains each way between Halesowen and Kings Norton. The northern section, however, was busier and even had a Sunday service.

After a period of stability during the Edwardian era, the coming of the First World War was to bring many changes, and this affected the railway inasmuch as certain services had to be gradually run

down to release staff and equipment for the war effort. On the other hand, the war contributed to the rapid growth of the Austin Works at Longbridge and an increase in the number of unadvertised workmen's trains to the factory. Ironically, it was to be the rapid development of public road transport after the 1914-1918 war and the increase in car ownership by the general public after the 1939-1945 war which contributed to the decline and eventual downfall of the line.

In a limited review of a book of this nature one cannot hope to bring anything but a very brief glimpse of the wealth of material that is contained between its covers, but the conception of the railway, its construction, and its operation is a fascinating story closely linked as it was to the history of the area which it served. One chapter pays tribute to the men who worked on the line—a pleasing feature which is often overlooked in some of the

more comprehensive railway histories that are available today.

This well documented history contains 92 pages, over 40 photographs and numerous maps and illustrations of first class quality which add considerably to the interest in the subject. Moreover, it is presented in a very satisfying form and obviously great care has been taken with the selection of the type and paper and the layout of the contents. The book is far too detailed to make light reading, but to the student of branch line railways it affords a vast amount of information for which he may well thank the painstaking efforts of the authors. Work such as this requires many hours of careful and detailed research which the reader has come to expect from the previous works of Michael Hale and Ned Williams. Their latest book fully maintains this reputation.

A. H. Price.

*"The Steel Industry in post-War Britain" by David W. Heal.
Industrial Britain series, David R. Charles, £6.25.*

THIS book by David Heal gives a fascinating insight into the steel industry. He has actually worked at a steel furnace and felt the elation and satisfaction of steel producers. He takes the set up of the steel industry and shows it as a kind of map on which he traces the past, present and possible future of this most important industry. He locates historical sites and gives reasons for and against retention of these works in the future planning of steel. There are numerous diagrams, tables and photographs about sites, location, product demand and output.

As a steelworker, I found the book most interesting and recommend it to all who are interested in steel from the point of working, planning or students of its history.

Derek Simpkins.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

As a member of the Black Country Society and a regular reader of the Black Country magazine, I was wondering if any reader or member could give me information on the following. As a boy of ten years old, I used to take my father's dinner to Talbot Stead Tube Works in Green Lane, Walsall. As you may know the above named firm became Tube Investments Ltd. The old part of Talbot Stead works is now demolished, and only a part of the vast area covered by the old Talbot Stead and Tube Investments Ltd. is still in use. Next to Talbot Stead Tubes at one time stood Parkers Timber Yard, and opposite to Parkers Timber Yard there used to be an old brick building which housed a steam engine which used to run into and out of Parkers' yard. This engine house stood at what is now the junction of Stephenson Avenue and Green Lane. The engine had big square buffers on it, and since it and the engine house has vanished, I would like to know if anyone knows where this engine finished its working life, if indeed it has.

J. L. Lyons.

Simpson Road,
Walsall.

* * *

Sir,

I am, at the moment, in collaboration with a friend, compiling a book (which we hope will be published some time next year) about the Music Hall in the West Midlands, and the role played by Birmingham and the Black Country in its development.

If any of your readers have any

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

information about local halls and locally born artistes, could they please contact me.

Many of Britain's most famous artistes have strong connections with the area, such as George Leybourne (Champagne Charlie); Harry Freeman (The first King Rat); Vesta Tilley; Billy Russell; Fred Barnes; George Robey; George Doonan; Clarkson Rose and Billy Merson.

We are also interested in acquiring programmes, posters, postcards, photographs, etc. as illustrative material for the book, so again, would anyone be willing to loan such material, or even donate same with a view to passing it on to the national Music Hall Museum, recently opened at the old Sunderland Empire.

I thank readers in anticipation, and congratulate you on such a well-presented magazine, which is a joy to read.

A. J. Hitchmough.

Brennand Close,
Oldbury.

* * *

Sir,

What an excellent idea to revive the Kinver Light Railway (see Vol. 7, No. 3). A few days ago, I was in Seaton, Devon, where a disused railway track has been converted to a tramway that is proving so popular that it is planned to extend it.

I see no difficulty in relaying the track between the Stewponey and Kinver. Building several trams of 1900 vintage might be a little more difficult, but the main difficulty would be the crossing of the main road. Other "revivalists" (e.g. the Kent and East Sussex

Railway) have been refused M.O.T. permission to cross busy main roads. Nor can I see trams ever again reaching either Amblecote or Stourbridge.

Count me as one of the enthusiasts who would like to see the route re-opened (as far as possible), although distance would preclude much active participation.

H. C. Sendell.

Belmont Close,
Shaftesbury, Dorset.

* * *

Sir,

I was shown recently a token which is almost exactly the size of a 2p coin. I enclose a rather poor rubbing of this.

It has a cricket bat and wickets emblem on the face side with wording round the edge as follows: Dudley Cricket and Quoits Club, but is undated. In the centre of the reverse side is a large 2D and the edge of the token is milled like a coin.

If you can identify this I would be greatly obliged.

H. Downing.

Coppice Close.
Sedgley, Dudley.

The Rubbing is unsuitable for publication.
—Ed.

* * *

Sir,

I did not know of the Black Country Society's existence until last Christmas when my sister sent me your Nativity card. I was thrilled to become a member earlier this year.

The new change in names of old districts I find disturbing. My home town—West Bromwich—is now no longer Staffordshire but is West Midlands.

Although, on the face of it, to object seems to be making an undue fuss, I feel these changes strike at something very basic.

People need to identify with places—their home towns, and it is very much like cutting them adrift and leaving them stranded and bewildered. No-one wanted to find their town suddenly in a different county—and the feelings about this are deep, almost primitive.

I had my 80 year old dad in mind when I wrote this verse (see page 31). Apart from his 1914-18 war service, he has lived all his life in West Bromwich. Just occasionally he talks of when he was young.

"Wherever yo' lived in West Bromwich," he said once, "yo' ony had to open your door and yo' could spit in a field."

He deeply deplores the fact that the town is now ringed by motorways. He says everybody is being choked to death or poisoned. The air must have agreed with him over the years though.

Mary Hutchings.

Warren Park, Havant, Hants.

* * *

Sir,

"An Orange From Dubby" (page 38) was written by my great-aunt (87) who now lives in Colwyn Bay. A regular subscriber to the magazine, she was born at Wednesbury, the daughter of George Guy, son of Silas Guy who, at one time was managing director of the Crown Tubeworks, and he died at Malvern in 1912. George Guy also worked in the Crown Tubeworks, Wednesbury, as a draughtsman, until moving to Colwyn Bay just before the First World War. I believe the tubeworks earned a place in history by being the only Midlands factory to be damaged by a German zeppelin attack.

Roger C. G. Taylor.

Barton-under-Needwood.

Sir,

"A Capful of Nails" reminded me so much of stories still dimly in my head of the trials of the cottage industrialists and especially the journeys they made to the foggers to sell their goods—to Birmingham in my great grandfather's case by buggy. Home at any time in the early Sunday morning and bright and shining for the early Mass after walking as far as, say, Bloxwich.

He invented a patent stirrup and took a few dozen to the fogger who seemed interested and bought them. Not having heard from him with another order for them, after several months, he took another lot and was asked where he got them from. "I made 'em miself"—"Well, yo'd better be careful, 'cos it's our patent."

His workshop, which had two or three furnaces, was demolished probably over twenty years ago.

Leonard Ross.

Leegomery Road,
Telford.

* * *

Playing Hamlet with Shakespeare
Sir,

In his interesting article on dialect phrases (p.44, Summer Issue), Mr. Arthur E. Truby mentions translating "Hamlet" into pure Black Country. This is surely an invitation which few natives can resist. After all, some parts of Holy Writ and several Christmas carols have successfully survived such a metamorphosis (and hasn't it been said that every comedian's secret desire is to play the prince?) And what more natural than to translate a few passages into plain speech which the rude mechanicals of "The Dream" (the nearest to Aynuck and Ayli that Will could aspire to) could have easily understood?

Here then (acknowledgment to Will S.) is a Black Country version of Polonius' advice to Laertes.

(Actual reference "Hamlet," Act I. Scene 3).

Polonius' advice to Laertes

"Ay yoh gone yet, our kid? Now, arf a mo'.

Here's a few wrinkles as you'll find might come in useful. I know one thing and it ay tew.

Afore you spaek, tek the waerds out of your mouth, look at 'em and put them back again.

And doh goo at things like a pig at a taerter.

Be matey—but mind how yoh goo.

When yoh've sorted out your mates, them as yoh can trust on the foundry floor when yoh'm pouring a ladle, yoh stick to 'em.

But doh keep putting your hand in your pocket by buying pints for them as yoh've only met once on the waerks trip.

Keep out of quarrels—but once yoh'm in one, gie 'im a fourpenny 'un.

Listen to your mates. Keep your ear-holes open and your trap shut. Doh take sides.

Wear such clobber as yoh can afford. But doh goo around all dressed up like a dog's dinner.

Don't go in for a lot of tranklements on the H.P. what you can't afford.

And don't lend, or you'll lose what mates yoh had.

And yoh look after yourself and yoh'll be jonnuck to all on we.

And yoh woh be in the lane when you ought to be in the leasowes.

Doh yoh kid yourself, Laertes, I know what I'm on about.

Now it's time yoh was off. Keep out of the hoss-road."

Donald Foster.

Green End, Oswestry, Salop.

Sir,

My grandmother, Mrs. L. Z. Buckley of the Kingsway, Wollaston, recently gave me an old postcard. The picture, taken in the late twenties or early thirties, shows a parade of Scouts and Red Cross nurses passing the Foster Street junction with High Street, Stourbridge. Can any of your readers say what event the parade commemorated? Two placards, one with "Belgium," the other with "France," and the prevalence of Union flags, would suggest an Armistice Day parade.

In Vol. 1, No. 2 of "The Blackcountryman," Mr. R. A. Guest of Sedgley wrote, "In future

well to be clear as to just what the 'Stafford Knot' is. Unfortunately, the popular story of the High Sheriff of Staffordshire who had promised to hang four men simultaneously, found he had only one rope available and was saved from public execution by one of the victims who, in exchange for his own life, demonstrated how three men could be hanged on one rope, is quite mythical; although it does serve to emphasise that the device is more akin to the hangman's trade than to the 'lover's knot,' for which it has at times been mistaken.

"The earliest authentic appearance of the Knot is on the seal of



issues a short history of the Staffordshire Knot would be interesting." The Stafford Knot is a common feature in local civic heraldry, constabulary and military devices, and the following information quoted from "The Staffords and the 'Stafford Knot'" by Col. H. C. B. Cook, O.B.E. (The Bulletin, Military Historical Society, Vol. XXI, No. 84, May 1971), may be of interest:

"The Knot is believed to be the county badge by the vast majority of Staffordshiremen, although in fact it is the family badge of Lord Stafford and only appears with other devices on the official county arms . . . First, however, it is as

Joan, Lady of Wake, a descendant of Hereward the Wake, who died in 1443. Her possessions passed to her nephew Humphrey, Earl of Stafford, who was shortly afterwards created Duke of Buckingham and from whose descendants it has passed to the present Lord Stafford. It appears that it did not form part of the Duke of Buckingham's armorial bearings, but was worn as a badge by his retainers. As he retained the Earldom of Stafford, the townsmen of Stafford were his liegemen and wore the badge, which later was incorporated in the borough arms. Meanwhile, its use had spread over the whole county. It should,

incidentally, never be referred to as the 'Staffordshire Knot' but always, because of its origins, as the 'Stafford Knot.'

Robert Williams.

Amblecote,
Stourbridge.

* * *

Sir,

I stand indicted by Mr. A. E. Woodall on four charges arising out of my article on Haden Hall in the spring issue of "The Blackcountryman." "Glaring inaccuracies" (Mr. Woodall's phrase) are serious matters. Let me present my defence to the charges in the order that Mr. Woodall made them.

1. I said that Haden Hall was also known as Haden Hill House. "Nonsense," says Mr. Woodall, "Haden Hill House is the Victorian building alongside." Well, he and I move in different circles in different areas, and I can assure him that Haden Hall is often called Haden Hill House—however erroneously—by people who probably do not even know that there are two buildings on the site. I shall of course instruct such people to mend their ways in future. In any case, as Haden Hall and Haden Hill House stand so close together that you could not get a split hair between them, is the confusion of terminology really likely to mislead future historians as Mr. Woodall suggests?

2. I said that Alfred Haden Barrs died before Anne Eliza Haden. "This is all wrong," thunders Mr. Woodall. I must shamefacedly admit that Anne Eliza Haden died in 1876 and Alfred Haden Barrs died in 1877. An error on my part. But a "glaring inaccuracy"? Oh, fie, Mr.

Woodall. Incidentally, I should here like to point out that my information about the Haden family was obtained from a member of the committee of the Haden Hall Preservation Society in 1972. Mr. Woodall was at the time a member of that committee and must have seen a copy of my subsequent article that appeared in another magazine. (A photograph of the committee, including Mr. Woodall, was used as an illustration, and I know that the magazine reached the committee because they sold copies of it as part of their fund-raising efforts). No-one pointed out my error then, but I naturally accept that Mr. Woodall's subsequent researches have brought it to light.

3. I stated that all Emilina Barrs' children took the name of Haden Best. "This is entirely wrong," roars Mr. Woodall who then implicitly admits that it is not. "Only one of Emilina Barrs children adopted that name," he points out. I stand corrected, but surely that makes me—to be precise—only two-thirds wrong because there were three children altogether. Again, I obtained my information from the same source in the committee of the Haden Hall Preservation Society. Subsequent research has corrected that information but it was given to me in good faith at the time.

4. I am accused of 'denigration' of the character of the Reverend George Barrs. Surely Mr. Woodall will not deny my right to my own opinion of Barrs, provided that my opinion is based on reasonable evidence. My evidence is the published volume of extracts from Barrs' own diaries, and I am convinced that any unprejudiced reader of these diaries

can come to only one conclusion: that Barrs was a humourless bigot, blind to the real needs of his working-class parishioners and interested only in brainwashing them with his own version of divine truth. I do not question his zeal, energy or courage. Just his humanity. Does Mr. Woodall really only judge clergymen by the number of people that they convert? And does he not realise how a man of Barrs' commanding

personality could impose his views on ignorant and superstitious people in the early 19th century? (But I had my say about Barrs in the Autumn 1968 number of this magazine).

Peter Barnsley.

The Hedgerows,
Romsley.

P.S.—Have since learnt from Mr. Woodall that he wrote to me about my earlier article, but it did not reach me.—P.B.

REPLY TO BE-OPES-E-AY

(See Vol. 7, No. 3, page 44)

Dear Misty Truby—It's summat yo'ne sed
That's put sum ideas inter me yed.
Yo' waant Shakespeare left az rit by the Bard
Burr iz wairks purr in dialect mite prewve ter be 'ard.
Translairshuns frum scripchers in we oon tung
Moost on we like an' dow think it's rung.
Ah think "Abaht Nuthin" yo'ne med "Much Adew"
Cuz ahd dearly luv tew 'ave a goo
Yo' dow waant "Macbeth" an' neether "Amlet"
Wud yer like "Rowmeo an' Jooliet"?
Ahm undissidid wich ter dew
'Ow abaht "The Tairmin' o' the Shrew"?
Burr if naira one ull gi' yer plezyer
Ah cud try me 'ond at "Mezyer Fer Mezyer"
Dusn't think that wi' loffin aht lahd yow'd bost
If ah med summat aht o' "Luv's Lairbuz Lost"?
Ahm shooer yo' think ahm a birr uv a meniss
Burr ah cudn't goo rung wi' "The Mairchunt o' Veniss"
Worr ah think ud be aysey an' dow think ahd fairl
Is a translairshun uv "The Wintuz Tairl"
An mooer ah cud nairme—be'opes yo' wo' scraym
"The Commudy uv Erruz," "A Midsumma Nites Draym"
"Jooleus Sayzer," "The Tempist," an' alsoo "King Lear"
Ah share dew um all—yo' need a' no fear
Tho' thinkin' abaht it thuz one tharr ah mite
Tew titles it's got "Wot Yo' Wull" or "Twelfth Nite"
Az publicairshuns in dialect ah bet yo' thay'd sell
An' yow'd attew admit "All's Well Tharr Ends Well"
Cuz this dialect uv owern ween gorra prizairve
Burr ah dow waant ode Will ter tairn in iz grairve
An' az yo' priffair Shakespeare jus' az 'e rit
Ahl layve well aloon an' "Az Yo' Like It."

Kate Fletcher.

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THE BLACKCOUNTRYMAN

Editor :

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Advertisements :

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Subscriptions :

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