

Our first outing this summer will be on Thursday 8th of June to St Mary's Convent, Handsworth:

We have been fortunate enough to book a guided tour on that day **to arrive by 2 pm for a 2.30 pm start.**

The suggested charge is **£5.00 pp.** St Mary's Convent is a charity, and in theory, cannot make a charge themselves and rely on donations.

Your £5.00 will be collected by us at the convent before the tour begins and passed on to the convent Sisters as a collective donation from BHLHS in appreciation of their hospitality and unstinting work.

There will be an opportunity for the individual should they so wish, to make a further donation.

Guests (friends) are welcome, though there is a limit of 30 people for any one guided tour.

We would like to see as many as possible to be there with us as this will be something special.

Refreshments will be served at the end of the tour, and the sister's cake is rumoured "to die for"

You will need to make your own way there. All the details you need are available **via**

<https://www.mercyhandsworth.co.uk/>.

You'll find the Convent address with the postcode, parking details (free), and a note on public transport.

If you have difficulty opening the link, or any other problems, do get in touch with us.

 **Birmingham History Theatre Company**

The Factory in a Garden A Dramatic Walk around Bournville



Saturday June 17th at 11.30 a.m and 1.30 pm

as part of Bournville History Day

The walk will be led by Tour Guide, Sue Deeley and accompanied by Peter Churchill, Community Musician. It will be illuminated by songs, small scenes and characters including George and Elizabeth Cadbury, Julia Varley, Harry Withers and more. Performances will take just over an hour on each occasion.

Contact details:

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Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

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Web:

www.balsallheathhistory.co.uk

www.thelostchildren.uk

**Facebook: Balsall Heath Local
History Society and
lostchildrenproject**

Membership of the Society costs £12 a year. Membership runs from January to December each year and application forms are available on the website. Fees at meetings will continue unchanged: £1 for members and £3 for visitors.

Meetings are held at St Paul's Venture, Malvern Street at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served from 7 pm to 7:20 p.m.

Coming soon

Thursday 8th June a visit to St Mary's Convent Handsworth (see top left for details)

Thursday 29th June.:

Gillian Binnie "Joseph Chamberlain - his legacy and Leadership"

Morris Roberts of Balsall Heath. Prize fighter, Publican, Zoo Keeper and bigamist

Morris Roberts, who had a most extraordinary career, was born in 1828, He came out as a pugilist when quite young, and entered the prize-ring at the age of 18. Between 1845 and 1863 he took part in many fights and only once did he suffer defeat. This was at the hands of the champion, Peter Morris, who in 1863 beat Morris Roberts after a fight, which lasted 2hrs 18min.

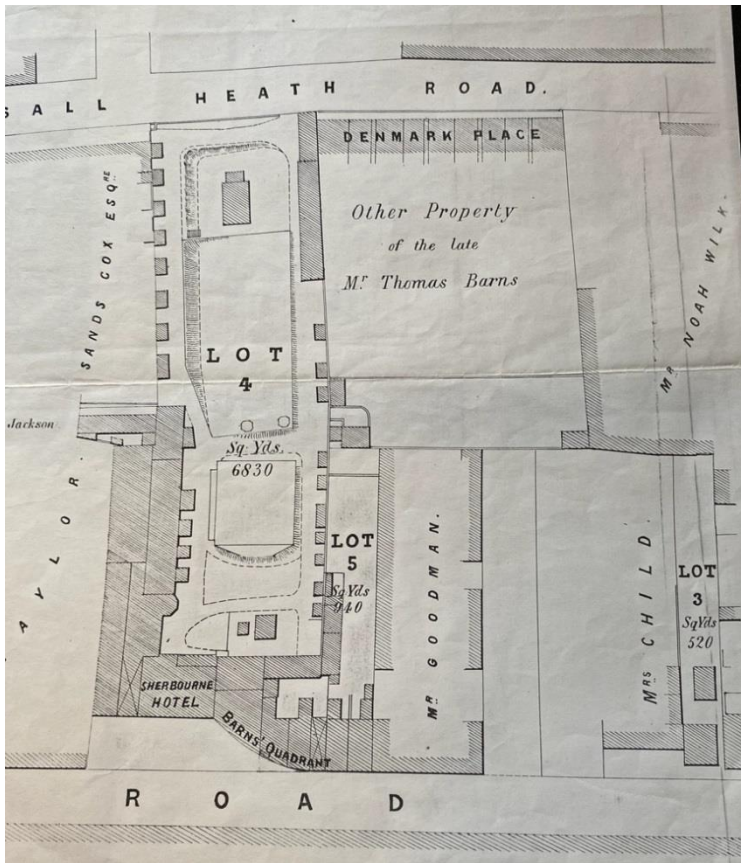


The Publican accused of murder

Roberts made a lot of money out of his fights, and next became landlord of the Bell Inn, Dale End, Birmingham. In 1867 William Murphy, a rabid anti-Catholic and anti-Irish lecturer, who toured England, came to Birmingham. He was refused permission to use the Town Hall so instead used a "wooden tabernacle" erected in Carrs Lane. Between three and four thousand people attended to hear him speak. There were major riots over the next few days during which buildings in Park Street and the surrounding area were smashed to pieces. Morris Roberts was himself a member of the Orange Lodge and was closely associated with Murphy.

Then an ugly incident occurred. Three Irishmen entered The Bell pub and a scuffle ensued with glasses thrown and threats made. Morris Roberts shot one of the men, John Mc Nally, and was arrested for murder. The trial went to the Old Bailey. However, in spite of contradictory evidence, the Court found him not guilty, recording it as "justifiable homicide".

The Zoo Keeper in Balsall Heath



On leaving his public house in Dale End, Roberts took the Sherbourne Hotel and gardens at Balsall Heath which he bought from Thomas Barns.

In the land at the back of the hotel he created the menagerie and gardens which were described in the last issue of The Gazette.

To the left: Plan of Sherbourne Hotel in 1870

The Litigant

Throughout his life Morris Roberts made many appearances in various courts, both as the accused and the prosecutor. At age 19 in 1847 he was found guilty of dealing with counterfeit coinage. This was just after he had started his prize fighting career. Then it was the murder charge as above in 1867. Next, in 1874 he went to court to accuse his barmaid of perjury, but she made a counter claim in 1875 and was awarded damages. It emerged that he had previously charged five barmaids with robbing him, but had never proceeded against one of them.

Then following year 1876 he took the Birmingham Mail to court on a charge of libel. That was dismissed. In 1878 he himself was found guilty of perjury and sent to prison for 12 months. This was just after the Zoo had closed so it must have felt a low point in his life. However, he fought



back and in 1882 proved that he had been innocent. At that time he was regarded with sympathy. "this was one of the most cruel and iniquitous cases that had ever been brought into Court, as Roberts went into prison a comparatively rich man, and had left it a ruined mess, for he was compelled to sell his house at a ruinous sacrifice."

In 1886 he decided to put his land to good use and got permission from The Local Board for the building of 38 houses off Balsall Heath Road and at the back of the hotel in Sherbourne Road. This became Kensington Gardens.

The Bigamist

It is clear that Morris Roberts had a series of problems with women. He married first in 1861 but the marriage only lasted two years after which they lived apart. In the 1871 census Jane Thomas is listed as a servant and barmaid but in fact he was in a relationship with her and their daughter was born in 1874. By the 1881 census Jane had disappeared. Morris Roberts and his "wife" Jennie were living on the Moseley Road but in 1887 trouble was brewing. His wife told the Police Court that Morris had refused to maintain her, had turned her out of the house and threatened to murder her if she went back. He seems to have told her she was not his legal wife.

The whole thing became a court case against Morris Roberts for bigamy. He apparently went through a mock ceremony of marriage with Jennie Florence Day in 1880 and then a formal registry office marriage in 1882, after which they lived together for five years. His first wife appeared in court to give evidence so there was no doubt that it was bigamy. £2500 was awarded against him: for breach of promise, £700; for fraud, £1,000; for assault, £700; and for slander, £100. The total was subsequently reduced to £1250 after he sued his solicitors! He was never one to avoid a court case.



A postcard view in 1908

Morris Roberts died in 1893. His address was then 1 Kensington Gardens, the site of his old zoo. In spite of his legal expenses he still left a sizeable sum of over £2000 probably because he still owned quite a bit of property in Balsall Heath. Newspaper obituaries were surprisingly warm in tone, recalling his early career in the ring. He was certainly a colourful and memorable character.

Sources: British Newspaper Archive & Board of Health Minutes.

Val Hart

Jeanette's Balsall Heath

Jeanette Hale, nee Lunn, shared her memories with us of her early life in Balsall Heath during the late 40s and early 50s. She had family in Haden Street, which is somewhat still there but rather changed, and nearby in the upper part of the old Balsall Heath Road which definitely isn't there and even has a change of name. It is now 'Upper Balsall Heath Road'.



Her mom and dad were Edward and May Lunn. They had married prior to WWII and while Dad was away doing his service, Mom bought a house on Haden Street (No 20), for £100 It was just up from the chippy on the corner with Arter Street, and opposite them were both the Flower Pot Pub and the Varnish & Paint Works of Ryland Paints.



Depicted in these photos is Arter Steet's eastern side. You can read both photos left to right as one. Beginning with the junction with Sherbourne on the left and ending with the Flower Pot at the junction with Haden St on the right. The tall Chimney of Rylands paint factory looms large in the background behind the pub.



The Ryland paint factory premises that Jeanette's family home looked out onto.

In this close-up map of the locality (below), we can see Arter St making a 'T' junction with Haden St and the Flower Pot (PH) marked on the corner. House No 17 is also marked which helps us to identify the Lunn family home at No 20. It is next to 'A' of Haden at the bottom of the map.



The main roads at each end of Arter are Balsall Heath Rd (left) and Sherbourne Road. It is plain to see that the back gardens of B H Road and Haden backed onto each other, and it was possible by way of the entries between the terraced housing to access one road from the other. At this location, the house numbers on Balsall Heath Road were numbered in the 330s (see map for No 323-bottom left).

Jeanette's Uncle and Aunt, Albert & Ivy Hughes, and Cousins Barbara, and Margaret lived at No 339. Other members of the family lived there too, Step-Aunt Alice Andrews, and her ward Kathleen Hunt. It is easy to see why Jeanette would have spent time there.



The back garden of their housing is being put to good use. On the left, Kathleen Hunt gets some knitting done in the sunshine. It seems like Jeanette has had her photo taken twice on the same day. In her garden and at school in Tindal Street.



We said at the outset of this recording Jeanette's memories that her Mom and Dad, May and Edward got married pre-war. Well, here they are on the day at a very well-remembered venue, that of St Paul's Church, St Paul's Road. A short walk across Moseley Road from their home to be in Haden St.

We have featured St Paul's Church many times in these chronicles about local people's lives over the years. Their parents, uncle, aunt, brother, and sister got married there. And then maybe there was a walk-up Moseley Rd to the New Inn for the reception.

This picture is typical of its picture postcard presence in our memory.



Jeanette remembers "I was four years old when I fell down the stairs and cut my eye. My mom took me to the Fire Station on Moseley Road, and a Fire Man stitched it."



The Old Fire Station on Moseley Rd near Highgate Square. There is still a Fire Station there in a more modern form.

Jeanette's story takes us all on a (familiar) trip around Balsall Heath of yesteryear.

"On Saturdays, my Aunty Ivy did the weekly shopping, I went with her. She used to say 'We are going down the Lane'. It was Ladypool Rd – there was an ice cream shop on a corner..."

Burden's ice cream, and it still has a legion of fans who haven't forgotten it. "The ice cream was made on the premises and was the best I have ever tasted", said one. "Without a doubt, the best ice cream anywhere", said another.

The shop was



One of our own, Professor Carl Chin MBE, the renowned Birmingham historian, would not have had to do too much research on Burden's ice cream, as his family had a business nearby, and was able to sample it for himself growing up. He relates, "It was the best ice cream ever! Burden's made delicious yellow ice cream and one of my earliest memories is of Our Granddad sending a gaggle of his grandchildren from his house in Alfred Street to Burden's to buy ice cream – led by my older cousins Richard and Paul Collet and Tony Chinn. I interviewed Mr Burden many years ago and I think he said his wife was an Italian Brummie and that it was from her he had the recipe."

Jeanette continues, "Some Saturdays I went with my aunt to Gooch St to pay the coal man. He was sitting in a large chair with his leather clothes on." Gooch St was like Ladypool Road, another very popular shopping precinct.

The Winter of 1963 is almost over on Gooch Street's thoroughfare.

Jeanette went to Sunday school, she remembers, "It was upstairs in a church on the Moseley Rd next to the Baths and Library. They gave me a book for stamps of Bible stories; I had a stamp each time I attended. Jeanette filled in a different sort of book while in school at Tindal St.

She made a scrapbook filled with pictures of Princess Margaret.

Things changed for the Lunn family when Dad Edward was advised on health grounds to seek fresh clean air and they moved out to the Maypole. Aunt Ivy and her husband moved to Acocks Green, while Alice and Kathleen went to Radcliffe Tower Highgate. Newly married cousin Barbara and her husband found themselves living at the top end of Clifton Rd near the Imperial Cinema.



Jeanette's BH has taken us around the usual suspects, gone but not forgotten. We can't forget as they have to do with our youthful fayre.

We wish to thank Jeanette for her help and encouragement. Mike Smith, and David Tooth for their contributions. And Carl Chinn for his always helpful support.

J.F.

Other Events



THE MOSELEY SOCIETY

Saturday 17th June, 11.30am and 3.30pm

As part of Civic Voice's day of activities the Moseley Society History group is organising

A walk around the "Blitz sights" of Moseley

Following from his well received talk on "Bomb Alley" Ian Binnie will be leading a walk around the "Blitz sites" of Moseley. This will visit the site of buildings that were destroyed or damaged during the raids of 1940 – 41, as well as buildings that were used by the military or civil authorities. Ian will also recount some of the moving human stories from those difficult times. The walk will last approximately an hour and cover no more than a mile and a half. The walk is free.

Each of the two walks will depart from the Hive, 93, Alcester Road, B13 8DD

The Exchange

Formerly the Municipal Bank and opposite the Library on Broad Street. This building now belongs to Birmingham University. They occasionally run guided tours of the building that will show you parts you may not have seen before and tell stories of the history of the bank. There are tours running on 3rd June and 1st July at 11am and 1pm. These are free. Book places at

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-exchange-heritage-building-tour-tickets-604997141737>