

# Balsall Heath Local History Society Gazette

## JUNE 2026



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History Society and

[https://www.facebook.com/lost  
childrenproject](https://www.facebook.com/lostchildrenproject)

### Membership Details

Membership of the Society costs £15 a year. Membership runs from January to December each year and application forms are available on the website.

Fees at meetings are: £1 for members and £4 for visitors.

The next Meeting of the Society will be on **Thursday June 25th at 7 pm for a 7.15 start** At *St.Paul's Venture, Malvern St, off Clifton Road, Balsall Heath. B12 8NN*

**Mary Bodfish will be speaking on** on :  
The Soho Manufactory: The Early Years

### Forthcoming Programme

**Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup> St Paul's Venture**  
**A special meeting for Balsall Heath Community Festival**

#### Memories of Balsall Heath

- A live reading by Liz Berry of her new poem "Psalm" and a brief interview.
- Film clips of an earlier Balsall Heath.
- Displays about Balsall Heath Carnival

**Society Trip Thursday July 23<sup>rd</sup> at 2 pm.**



**Guided tour of The Oratory 141 Hagley Rd, B16 8UE**  
There is a charge of £10 per person payable on the day.

Booking not needed but please tell us if you are coming.

### Balsall Heath Carnival and Balsall Heath Community Festival

The Carnival was never just a Carnival. It was a symbol of hope, an agent for change and a showcase for our rich cultural diversity. It is part of our heritage and our community identity

When it started in 1977 the procession wound through streets which were still pockmarked with bomb sites and derelict housing. The area was only just beginning to recover from damage inflicted over thirty years previously in the Second World War. The City Council had cleared a huge swathe of older housing but the neighbourhood as a whole was in an appalling condition: poor housing; high unemployment; dreadful health statistics. It scored highly as a multi deprived neighbourhood.

However, it was rich with the biggest asset of all-residents who were committed to rebuilding the community. Hundreds of people created the Carnival

and thousands of people took part in it. The success of the Carnival for over fifty years reflects our achievement in becoming the thriving Balsall Heath of today.

The Balsall Heath Community Festival is not the same as the old Carnival but it has sprung from the ashes of the Carnival. We do not have the capacity to run a Carnival again, faced with hugely increased city regulations. The last one was held in 2022. But the Festival is again a symbol of hope as all parts of the community have come together to celebrate and to reaffirm our identity as a diverse, creative and enterprising neighbourhood. I hope it will continue for many years to come.

**Val Hart**



From July 3rd to 13th, 2026, let's celebrate Balsall Heath in a community led week of wonder

### **Our Local History Events**

#### **Balsall Heath Carnival exhibition**

- **Sat July 5th** at Seven Streets Park, opposite the farm in Clifton Rd.
- **Tuesday July 5th** at St John's Church hall, Mary St.
- **Weds July 6th** at The Church centre, Edward Rd
- **Saturday July 11th** at St Paul's Venture and the Old Print Works
- **Monday July 13th** at Saheli Hub, Calthorpe Park

### **Thursday July 9th Special Meeting: "Memories of Balsall Heath"**

with special guest, Liz Berry

#### **Our new Historical Interpretation Boards**

We are launching these on July 11th. They are being installed in nine different locations in the area.

. For full details of the Festival programme, please look at the Heathan website  
[BALSALLHEATHAN.ORG](http://BALSALLHEATHAN.ORG)

## 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026 – TALK GIVEN BY MARCUS BELBEN '100 YEARS OF WOODCRAFT FOLK'

The talk on May 28<sup>th</sup> was given by Marcus Belben. The talk was entitled '100 years of Woodcraft Folk'. Some did have prior knowledge of Woodcraft Folk, but some might have thought they were coming to a talk about wood turning and wood carving. It was soon apparent that this is not what Woodcraft Folk is about. It was fitting that the talk was given this year, as Woodcraft Folk is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A project '100 objects for 100 years' was launched to mark this milestone.



A meeting of Woodcraft Folk (image copied from Woodcraft Folk website) [woodcraft.org.uk](http://woodcraft.org.uk)  
At the start of the meeting, Marcus rearranged the seats into a circle instead of the usual rows. This is the way Woodcraft Folk sit when they meet. This facilitates better involvement of all present and enables everyone to have a voice. This was borne out during the meeting when members of Woodcraft Folk and History Society members were able to join in easily with Marcus's talk when appropriate.

The talk was lively and interesting. This article will not contain a write-up of the talk, as Marcus, himself has written an excellent article about Woodcraft Folk on the Balsall Heath Local History Society website. To find out more, go to [balsallheathhistory.co.uk](http://balsallheathhistory.co.uk)

JH

## Bad News for The Lost Children Project



The Middlemore Archives are now subject to a 100 year closure period. They were the source for much of the information for The Lost Children Project which we started in 2018. The decision has been taken by the Birmingham Children's Trust who have responsibility for safeguarding. Other children's homes in the city have a 100 year closure period and they have decided that the Middlemore records need to be brought into alignment with them.

At the time we started the Project the closure period had been reduced to 75 years. The Canadian authorities had copied all the records but only imposed a 75 year ban, so Birmingham agreed to match that.

The 100 year closure is much worse than it sounds as the date is taken from the last entry in a volume. For example, the Application Books, which contains details of why each child was admitted to the Middlemore Homes, span a long period. The one that has now closed runs from 1914 to 1937, so it is closed until 2037! Relatives seeking information about ancestors have to make a Freedom of Information request to obtain a copy of a specific entry.

Our Society has been responding to a stream of requests, chiefly from Canada, for research in the archives, but many of these will now not be possible. So, it is sad news for us.

A lovely quote from the Middlemore records:

Someone from Canada came over last week to look for herself at the records of her great grandmother. Fortunately, they were all from 1875-6 so not closed, although they were only available on microfilm. Her great grandmother was taken to Ontario in 1876 and all the reports were very positive. She became a member of the family. However, more exciting was that there was a quote of what she herself wrote:

*"I don't care a fig about England. I love it here and never want to go back."*

Val Hart

## Farewell to Roy Hattersley. A friend to Balsall Heath



We are sad to see that Roy Hattersley died on June 13th.

. He was MP for Sparkbrook from 1954 to 1997 and an active player in the regeneration of the area.

The Heathan newspaper is full of details of his involvement locally.

He was a guest of honour at many of our significant events: the opening of Clifton Infants School in 1979, and the opening of both the new Mosque in Clifton Road in 1982 and Roshven Gardens, for example.



It was not just big events, however. As MP he appeared two or three times a month at "surgeries" locally so that anyone could bring their problems to him personally.



For some years he captained a team for Charity Cricket Matches, often as part of the Carnival celebrations, and usually with local councillor Dick Knowles (seen here at wicket).

. So it is a Thank You, Roy, from Balsall Heath. Rest in Peace.

Val Hart

The Balsall Heath Local History Society is Registered Charity No. 1101945  
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