

SEDGLEY JOURNAL

The occasional news-sheet of Sedgley Local History Society
WINTER 2014/15 – Number 8

BIRMINGHAM AND THE BLACK COUNTRY

The perceived rivalry between a city and its neighbours surfaced again when the idea of a Greater Birmingham was sketched on the political map.

Although the declared intentions are just to attract funding and uprate regional planning and co-ordination the conspirator theorists worry about 'a take-over'.

Dr Chris Upton, Reader in Public History at Newman University in Birmingham says – *Taken together, the Black Country and Birmingham remains the most highly concentrated centre for manufacturing in the UK.* Over the years many firms have bridged the gap. Recently Jaguar Land Rover has invested heavily in plants in Wolverhampton and Castle Bromwich with a spin off for numerous components manufacturers.

Surely something can be forged that preserves historical identities and learns from the services that already work across boundaries – policing, fire & rescue and public transport. A return to a West Midlands County Council (1974 to 1986) or similar elected body is not the answer. Yet when inward investment is desperately needed and a sharper international profile sought, a meeting of minds cannot be delayed.

FORGOTTEN FOUNDRY?

Hopyard Foundries Ltd in Siddons Road, Coseley closed at the beginning of 2000. The following year the site was cleared and some 70 houses built. The estate's street names echo the work carried on there for at least 100 years – Greensand Drive, The Castings and The Crucible.

At one time the firm cast scrapers for cleaning shoes and boots as well as jacks for removing same. However, Sedgley Local History Society is keen to know details of their full product range over the decades and any other facts about the business and ownership. Any snippets of information would be much appreciated.

In the C19th the Hopyard colliery and others worked the land. The coal mining legacy meant three mine shafts were capped before the present day housing estate was laid out.

CHIMNEY MONEY

Over the centuries governments have raised taxes on people, buildings, commodities, services – nothing is beyond their reach.

In 1662 the Hearth Tax came into force. It levied a yearly payment of two shillings on each hearth in a house and thus gave an indication of the size of a property and an owner's wealth.

Thomas Janns, Sedgley's vicar, paid for six hearths, while Lord Ward of Sedgley Park, (site of today's Park Hall hotel), paid for thirteen.

It was not popular. Privacy was invaded as houses were searched for fireplaces and counts made. The tax was repealed in 1689.

All was not lost – the tax collectors were back in business in 1696 with an outdoor job – enforcing a Window Tax which lasted until 1851.

BORN IN THE MANOR

Lenworth George Henry collects comics, cuff links and vinyl records. His stand-up comedy is peppered with mimicry and well observed everyday happenings. In recent years he has trod the boards including taking major roles in two of Shakespeare's plays, and last year (2014) in *Rudy's Rare Records* based on his Radio 4 series set in a Birmingham reggae record shop. It received rave reviews.

In 1999 he was awarded a CBE for services to comedy drama and Comic Relief which he co-founded in 1985. Eventually, in October 2013, he was made a Freeman of Dudley Borough following a revision of criteria by the Council.

On Wednesday 23rd April 2014 Lenny was invited to officially open Dudley's brand new Archives Centre next to the Black Country Living Museum. His tour of the building included a look at a collection of material about himself!

By growing up on the Buffery estate Lenny is always associated with Dudley, but he was born in Sedgley on August 29th 1958. How's that? The birth took place at the Rosemary Ednam Nursing Home in the Urban District of Sedgley.

SEDGLEY MANOR TRIVIA

In 1925 the Picture House in Walsall installed the first Wurlitzer organ in England. By 1955 its new home was the basement of Dormston House, Dudley Street, Sedgley – the prize possession of Alan Hickling. However, not for long, as April 1957 saw the instrument move to the Devon coastal village of Beer. Here, the Congregational Church had it rebuilt for use in services and recitals. Recently restored to its former glory the organ attracts visitors for worship and concerts.

Alan was not finished with Wurlitzers, quickly picking up a larger one from the City Cinema, Leicester. This was the organ featured in radio programmes and played by Reginald Dixon, Brian Sharp and many other renowned organists

He sold the organ to the Isle of Man Government in 1989. It is still in full working order after a 2009 renovation.

(Alan John Richard Hickling bought Dormston House in 1947. He was an industrial chemist, local business man and colourful Conservative councillor in the 1950s & 60s on Sedgley UDC and Staffordshire CC. In 1962 he was elected Chairman of Sedgley UDC. AJR's enthusiasm for music was matched by "a morbid fascination", his own words, for Black Country pits. His tribute to the miners was a collection of captioned photographs published in 1989. He died in 1996.)

DID YOU KNOW?

The common building brick was taxed from 1784 until 1850. In 1785 the tax raised £46,000 at 4 shillings per thousand. Eventually it reached nearly six shillings per thousand. Cunning brick makers started to produce larger bricks to reduce their tax bills.

A hat tax for men was introduced in 1784. Milliners pasted a revenue stamp inside the hat. Tax dodgers, whether milliners or wearers, faced heavy fines – stamp forgers the death penalty.