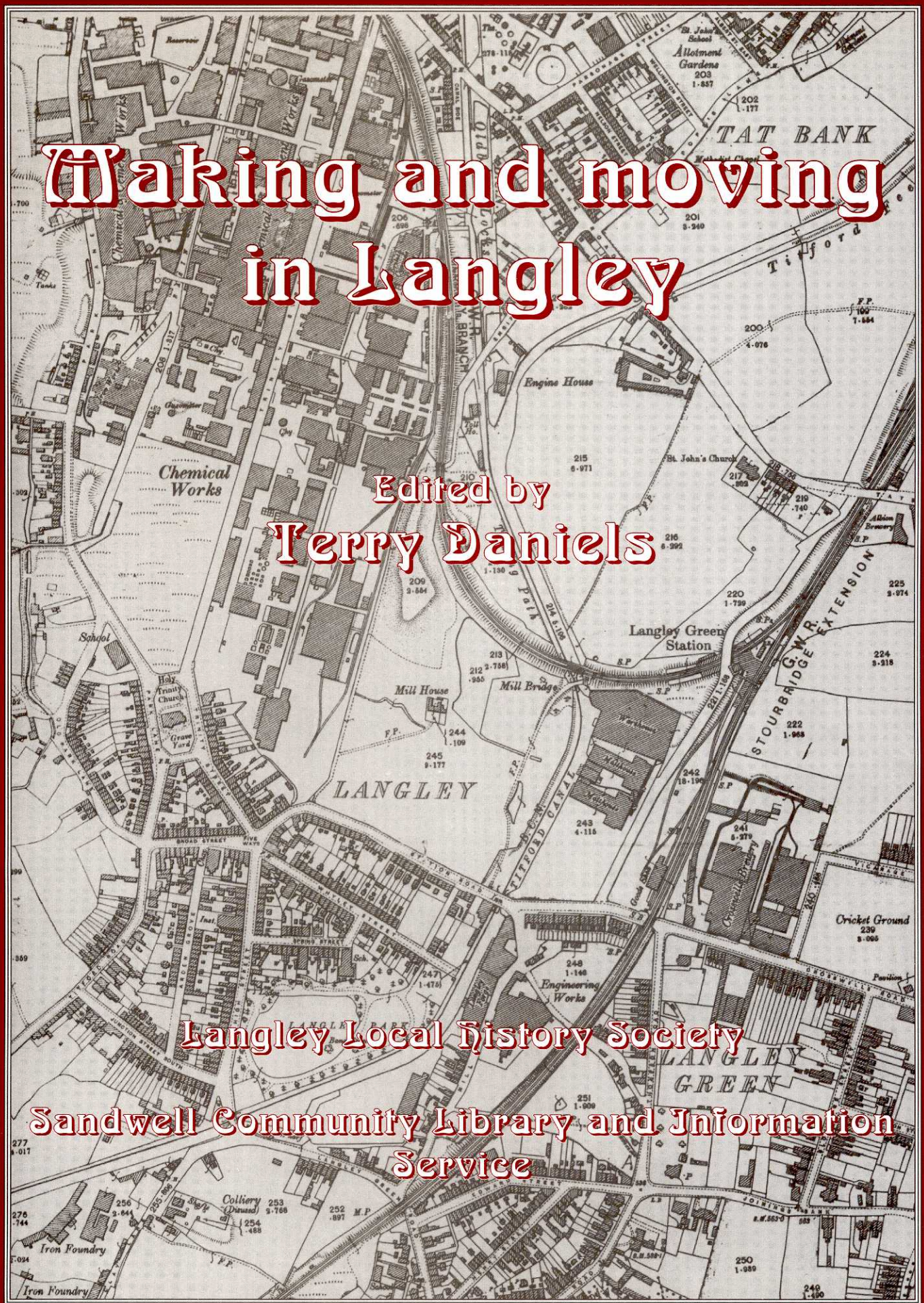
Making and moving in Langley

Edited by

Terry Daniels



Langley Local History Society

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Title page: Rood End goods yard and BIP Ltd, 1990 (Picture: Mike Wood)
Back cover: The chemical factories at evening, 1920s (Picture: Harry Wakeman)

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We are grateful to the following group of companies for financial help towards the production of this book:

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Foreword

Langley Local History Society has been documenting the history of the area, and has already issued two books, 'Langley & Langley Green Recalled' in 1996 and 'Langley & Round About' in 1997. After these, we planned three further publications on specific aspects of Langley's history: industry and transport, shops and trades, and entertainment and pastimes. This is the first of these books, celebrating the skills of the entrepreneurs and workmen who developed industry and transport here. Many of the firms achieved world-wide recognition and spread the name of Langley far and wide.

It is the product of many people's memories and research. We are grateful to all who have contributed article and information, and they are credited throughout the book. We have included as many contributions as possible in the present book: we have had to edit some, and one or two could not be included, but will be held on file at the library. Our thanks are also due to some whose names are not included, but who have provided background articles and information used in preparing the text. In addition, thanks are due to the members of the Editorial Committee of the Local History Society for the work they have done in seeking out contacts, interviewing contributors, reading scripts, and commenting wisely.

There are over 200 photographs in the book, many of which have never been published before, or are drawn from obscure publications or those of limited circulation such as company house magazines. Many have emerged from people's albums and attics, faded and long forgotten, to be given new life here. Where the name of the photographer is known it is quoted in the caption with copyright permission, where relevant. If the photographer is not known, the source is given or the donor of the photograph is specified as '... collection'.

We have tried to keep a balance between the various enterprises, but some companies are long gone, and now just a memory. For some firms we have been able to find official histories, which provide dates and facts, for others we have the memories of men and women who worked there, which adds life to the text, and for some we have both. For a few we have been unable to trace either, and these, alas, could be covered only superficially.

Development and regeneration have robbed us of much of the tangible heritage of buildings and structures. While the book was being written, the depleted remains of Langley Green Station were 'stolen away' after 104 years, and something looking like a modern church left in its place! Most of the little that does remain can be seen on a walk described at the end of the book.

We trust that the book is accurate and have checked details, as far as possible, with contemporary sources. Some of the material relies on personal memories of events which took place forty or more years ago, and is subject to the vagaries of time. If your recollections of events differ, please let us know.

Langley Local History Society meets each month at Langley Library, Barrs Street, Langley and welcomes anyone with an interest in the history of the Langley area. You are invited to come along, bring your information and memories, and help us research and record the community that lived, made things and moved in this area.

Terry Daniels

For Langley Local History Society

May 1999

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Langley 'green'

The old landscape

The visitor in 1800 would find a very different scene from that today or even a century ago, with a gently sloping valley between the Rowley Hills to the north-west, and Hilltop and Broad Moor to the south-east. Standing on 'Pudding Rock' near Moat Farm he would see a stretch of woodlands, fields and farms, drained by small streams. The hamlets in front of him would be Causeway Green, Titford Green and Langley Green. It was indeed a 'green' land, scarcely touched, as yet, by the growing industrial revolution. It was an empty landscape with only a thousand people living between Oldbury and Quinton, and most of those in Oldbury 'town'. The hamlets would have been home to a few families only, mainly engaged in agriculture or cottage industries such as nail making.

True, the collieries were reaching southwards from Staffordshire towards Rounds Green and Oldbury, and Park Hall Colliery was starting up close to the area that was to become the 'village' of Langley, but these pits were in their infancy. Although the streams draining from the Rowley Hills had been dammed thirty years earlier to create Titford Pool, there was no canal through Langley. From the pool a small feeder channel, a 'leat', threaded its way past Langley Mill and through Tat Bank to carry the water to the busy canals already linking Birmingham to the Black Country. The overflow stream from the pool was joined by the mill stream and flowed on to Oldbury as Flash Brook.

Langley Green was there, a small group of dwellings around the 'Old Cross' inn and the newly established Zion Independent Chapel. The nearby Langley Hall at the bottom of Joinings Bank

A track across farmland at Causeway Green about 1920. The landscape all round Langley must have been just as rural a century earlier, and many of the lanes and tracks in no better condition than this one. (Picture: Frank Wakeman)

was already old.

Most of the area lay in Halesowen parish, served by a chapel of ease in Oldbury, and it was to have no parish church of its own until Holy Trinity was opened in 1852. Parts of Warley to the south-east were in Quinton parish, and the land divided in small parcels between Worcestershire (Warley Wigorn) and Shropshire (Warley Salop).

There were settlements at Causeway Green, Titford Green, Whiteheath Gate and 'Rude' End (as it was less politely spelled on the Ordnance Survey map of 1830), and a few houses in Titford Road and Mill Lane: but of Langley village itself there was no sign! Park House was the only sizeable building there.

It was still the age of travel by foot or horse, and the road pattern in 1830 reflected the age-old routes and tracks between homesteads and villages. These had evolved over centuries, some with ancient names, such as Hobicus Lane (later to become Station Road) and Penncricket Lane. They twisted through the countryside in contrast to the later roads planned with ruler and set square.

Such industry as there was in the area was small-scale, largely cottage industries associated with agriculture. Nail making had spread down from the Rowley Hills into Causeway Green, Bristnall Fields and Langley Green, and many of the houses would have had a small nail shop where the family worked long hours for the nailmasters or their middlemen, the 'foggers'. However, there were no 'factories'.

Change and progress

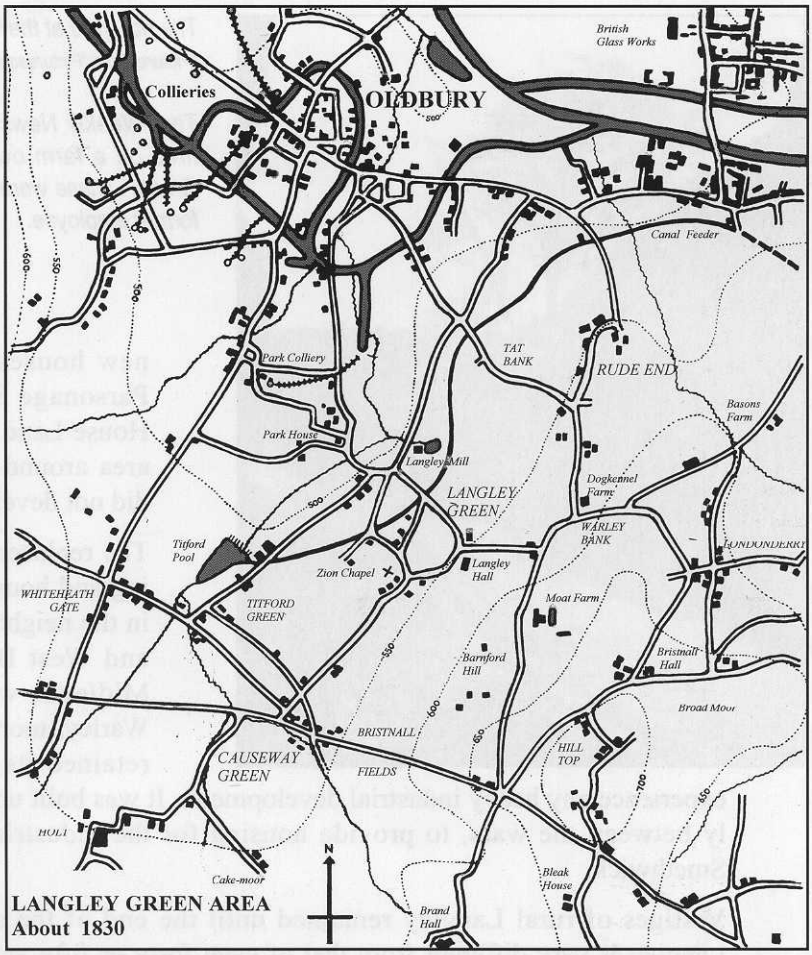
This rural scene was to change rapidly in the 19th century with the arrival in Langley of the canal and railway, and the industry that followed rapidly on their heels. The canal and railway ran side by side through the area from Rood End to Causeway Green, creating a narrow corridor of easy transport ideal for the development of industry.

From the early 1800s there was a rapid migration into the Langley area to supply the manpower needs of the growing factories: all the communities expanded and Langley village itself came into being. The census carried out in 1851 recorded the changes taking place. Many of the men in Tat Bank, Park House Lane (the original name for Park Lane) and Titford were coal miners and brick-makers. Most were newcomers to Langley, born in older mining areas, such as Shropshire and Staffordshire, and moving to Oldbury and Langley as the new mines and brickyards opened up. Many came from Tipton, Sedgley, and Bilston.

The new chemical industry was also attracting settlers, some from as far as Ireland, and many from

The main features of the Rood End — Langley Green — Causeway Green valley about 1830.

The canals linking Birmingham and the Black Country surround Oldbury. The first signs of industry are apparent with collieries in the north-west near Oldbury and Chance's glass works in Smethwick. Chances were about to start their chemical works and set in train the industrialisation of the valley. The Titford Canal and the railway have not yet invaded the valley, although Titford Pool is supplying the Birmingham Canal system via the small canal feeder. Langley Green is there with a few houses, but there is no sign yet of Langley village itself.



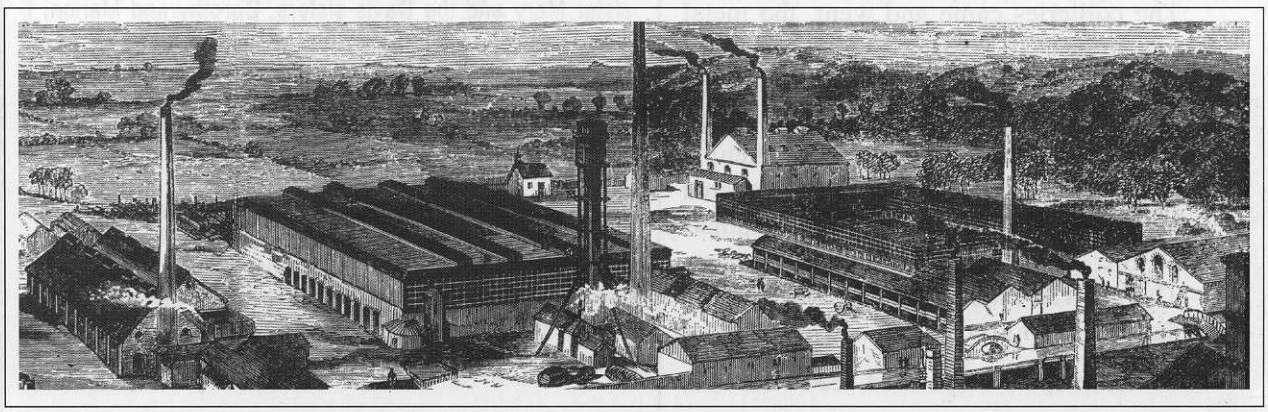
LANGLEY GREEN AREA
About 1830

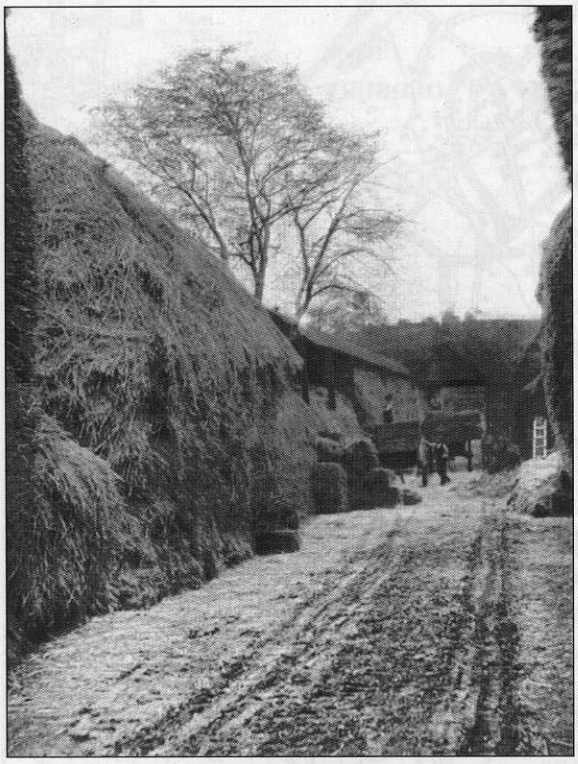
rural areas of Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, lured by wages that were higher than those of agricultural labourers.

Despite this, nail making remained one of the main jobs, particularly towards Causeway Green, Langley Green and Warley, away from the newer industries. Nailing and brick making attracted many women workers, and often whole families, including teenage girls and boys, would be employed in one of these trades.

By 1860 Langley village had started to take shape around the newly-consecrated Holy Trinity Church, and close to the booming coal mines, brickyards and chemical industry. There were also

Detail from a drawing of Chance & Hunt's Alkali Works from 'Illustrated News' of July 1862. Beyond the factory are the wooded slopes of Warley Bank and the fields around Rood End.





The rick yard at the 'Laurels', Langley Green in 1900.
(Picture: from 'Picturesque Oldbury')

The 'Weekly News' of 25 May 1907 reported rick fires on a farm owned by S J Sadler at Langley Green. These were caused by arson by an unhappy former employee.

new houses for workers at Tat Bank between Parsonage Street and Popes Lane, and in Park House Lane and Park Street. Rood End and the area around Warley Bank and Dog Kennel Lane did not develop until later, about 1900.

The replacement of green fields by industry, mining and housing seen in Langley was also evident in the neighbouring towns of Oldbury, Smethwick and West Bromwich and throughout the West Midlands where the main transport routes lay. Warley, more distant from the canal and railway, retained its rural character longer, and did not experience any heavy industrial development. It was built up much later than Langley itself, largely between the wars, to provide housing for the industrial workers of Langley, Oldbury and Smethwick.

Vestiges of rural Langley remained until the end of the second world war (WW2). Today's Langley is very different from that of even forty or fifty years ago. The last signs of agriculture have disappeared — there are no cows left!

Much of the heavy industry that brought prosperity has now gone. Traditional company names have disappeared, such as Ham Baker, Hughes-Johnson, Chance & Hunt, and Thomas Clayton. Since 1970 Langley village and Langley Green have been redeveloped, old street patterns destroyed and most of the old houses replaced.

Langley learned to live with industry and to accept its dangers and disadvantages in exchange for the prosperity it brought. The collieries came and went, the metal industries changed from extraction to fabrication, the brick-yards expanded and died. Much of the land was blighted by the abandoned buildings, spoil heaps, chemical dumps and marl holes created by the new industries, and these dominated the landscape for a hundred years. The air was filled with the stench, noise and smoke of production.

Now, the spoil heaps have been removed,

The mill pool and cows in Langley!

One of my happy memories when quite young in the 30s was the old mill pool or 'Milky Way', as we named it, on the farm where Albright & Wilson's car park is today. Along with my sister Mary and the Davis sisters, Dorothy and Marion, I would paddle in my sixpenny bathers bought from Peacock's in Oldbury. The mud was brick red, and we would come out of the pool with red toes and legs, amid howls of laughter if we had put some on our faces, knowing it could be easily washed off before going home.

We would look through a little hole at the cows on the other side of the fence, and all the time we would hope that the farmer didn't open the gate and bring them down to the water's edge. Once or twice it did happen and we scampered home just in time for tea!

Joan Highfield (née Price)

the pits and marl holes filled in, remaining factories landscaped, trees planted along the roadside and the air is much cleaner: environmental, health and safety legislation sees to that! Langley and Langley Green are 'greener' once more, if not the pre-industrial rural area that they once were. The fields and open countryside have gone forever and only the parks and landscaped areas recreate the lost green of the countryside.

A view of Langley past

In 1915, looking back into the previous century, Frederick Hackwood described the Oldbury area, including Langley, in terms that capture the effect of industry on the landscape:

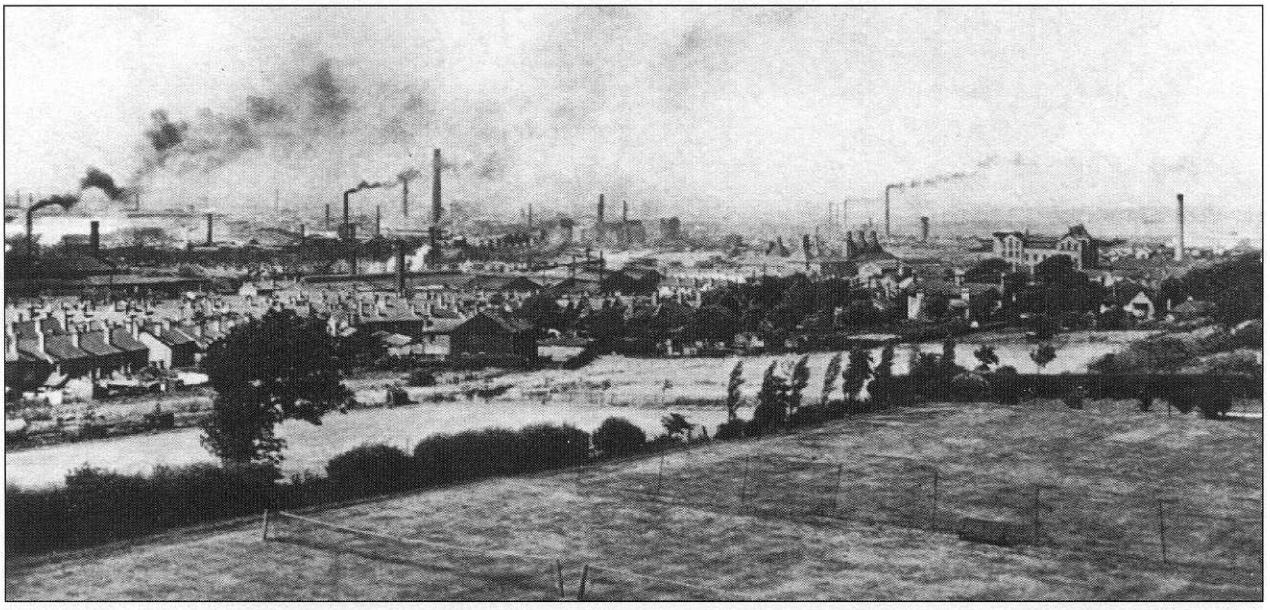
"It was indeed a region of furnaces, ovens and kilns; of forges, factories and iron-mills; the dull and depressing landscape varied only by heaps of cinder, slag or miniature mountains of pit refuse, and relieved but slightly, if at all, by intersecting canals that appeared to be fed by water of the colour and consistency of pea soup, and which indeed, near to the great furnaces, sometimes steamed like that nourishing compound ...

"At night the sky was illuminated by the lurid glare of the countless furnaces, varying in shade from the blood-red of the puddling furnace to the streaked white and red of the blast furnace, and diversified here by the yellow and blue flames of the copper works. By day dense clouds of smoke obscured the light of heaven, and kept off the vivifying rays of the sun with destructive effects to the struggling vegetation. Corroding gases emitted from chemical works in the heart of the town completed the blight that even grass and the hardiest of plants failed not to succumb in due time ..."

Of the area in 1915 he wrote:

"The smoky, grimy, manufacturing Oldbury [and Langley] *which presents itself to us now is ... a pale semblance of what was its former self, before the age of industrialism had dawned upon it, but to blight its scenery while endowing it with material prosperity."*

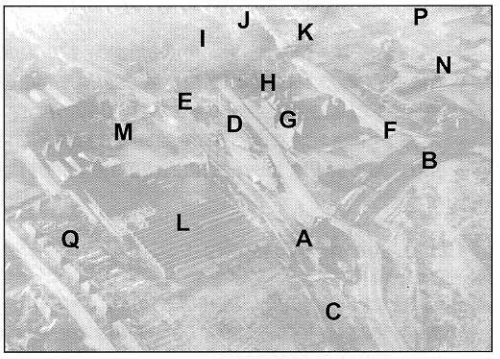
The view from 'Pudding Rock' across the smoke-filled valley to Langley and the Rowley Hills in 1935 is very different from the rural view in 1800! The foreground shows Barnford Hill Park, given to the people of Langley by Arthur Albright. Albright & Wilson's factory lies in the middle distance with the largest chimney, the 'big stack', standing out clearly. In front of Albright & Wilson are the buildings of Hughes-Johnson and Langley Forge. To the right are Showell's Brewery and Langley Maltings, and in front of them is Langley Hall. The houses of Farm Road and Langley Green separate the park and the allotments from the factories. *(Picture: Sidney Darby, West Bromwich, by permission)*



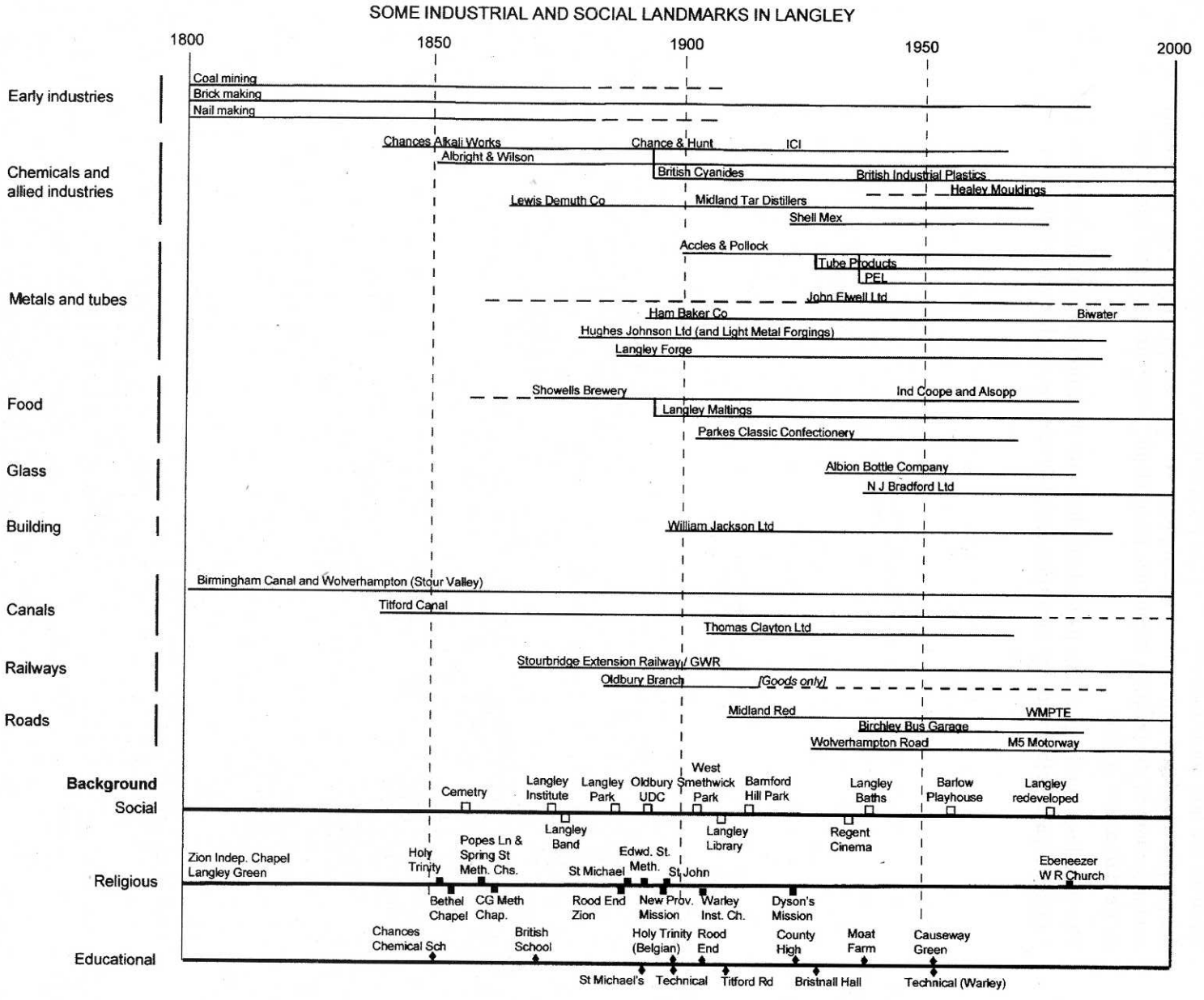
The industrial corridor

There can be few better examples of the mutual dependence of transport and industry than the location of the traditional factories in this region. We shall explore the area from Rood End in the north-east to Causeway Green in the south-west, merging into Oldbury to the north-west and Warley to the south-east, along the corridor of industry that followed the Titford canal, the Birmingham to Stourbridge railway line, the Wolverhampton Road and the M5 motorway.

Coal, chemicals, plastics, petroleum, brewing, bakery and confectionery, engineering, iron and steel, and glass bottles are some of the products of Langley. Many flourished for a while, but have gone now, leaving memories, but few physical traces: Midland Tar Distillers, Albion Bottle



The sites of various industries, the canal, the railway and local roads come together in this view of the 'industrial corridor' around Langley Green station (A) about 1940. The branch line to Oldbury Town (B) leaves the main line from Birmingham to South Wales (C), passing the goods yard (D) and the level crossing in Crosswells Road (E). The Titford Canal (F) flows past Langley Maltings (G), the Shell-Mex terminal (H), Hughes-Johnson Stampings (I), Langley Forge (J) and the 'New Inns' (K). On the opposite side of the railway are the extensive factory of Myers and Sons making pens (L) and the remains of 'Crosswells' Brewery (M). Undeveloped land includes part of the Albright & Wilson site (N). The picture is completed by the older houses of Langley village (P) and the inter-war houses of the Mushroom Hall estate (Q). *(Picture: This photograph is crown copyright and first appeared in 'Conurbation' published in 1948: used by permission of DETR)*


SOME INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL LANDMARKS IN LANGLEY
1800
1850
1900
1950
2000
Early industries
Coal mining
Brick making
Nail making
Chemicals and allied industries
Chances Alkali Works
Albright & Wilson
Chance & Hunt
ICI
British Cyanides
British Industrial Plastics
Healey Mouldings
Lewis Demuth Co
Midland Tar Distillers
Shell Mex
Metals and tubes
Accles & Pollock
Tube Products
PEL
John Elwell Ltd
Ham Baker Co
Biwater
Hughes Johnson Ltd (and Light Metal Forgings)
Langley Forge
Food
Showells Brewery
Ind Coope and Alsopp
Langley Maltings
Parkes Classic Confectionery
Glass
Albion Bottle Company
N J Bradford Ltd
Building
William Jackson Ltd
Canals
Birmingham Canal and Wolverhampton (Stour Valley)
Titford Canal
Thomas Clayton Ltd
Railways
Stourbridge Extension Railway / GWR
Oldbury Branch
[Goods only]
Roads
Midland Red
WMPTE
Birchley Bus Garage
Wolverhampton Road
M5 Motorway
Background
Social
Cemetry
Langley Institute
Langley Park
Oldbury UDC
West Smethwick Park
Barnford Hill Park
Langley Baths
Barlow Playhouse
Langley redeveloped
Langley Band
Langley Library
Regent Cinema
Religious
Zion Indep. Chapel Langley Green
Holy Trinity
Popes Ln & Spring St Meth. Chs.
St Michael
Edwd. St. Meth.
St John
Ebeneezer W R Church
Bethel Chapel
CG Meth Chap.
Rood End Zion
New Prov. Mission
Warley Inst. Ch.
Dyson's Mission
Educational
Chances Chemical Sch
British School
Holy Trinity (Belgian)
Rood End
County High
Moat Farm
Causeway Green
St Michael's
Technical
Titford Rd
Bristnall Hall
Technical (Warley)

Company, Hughes-Johnson, Myers Pens, Parkes Classic Confectionery, and Shell-Mex among them. Others, like Albright & Wilson, BIP, and Langley Maltings have seen out their centenary and are still going strong.

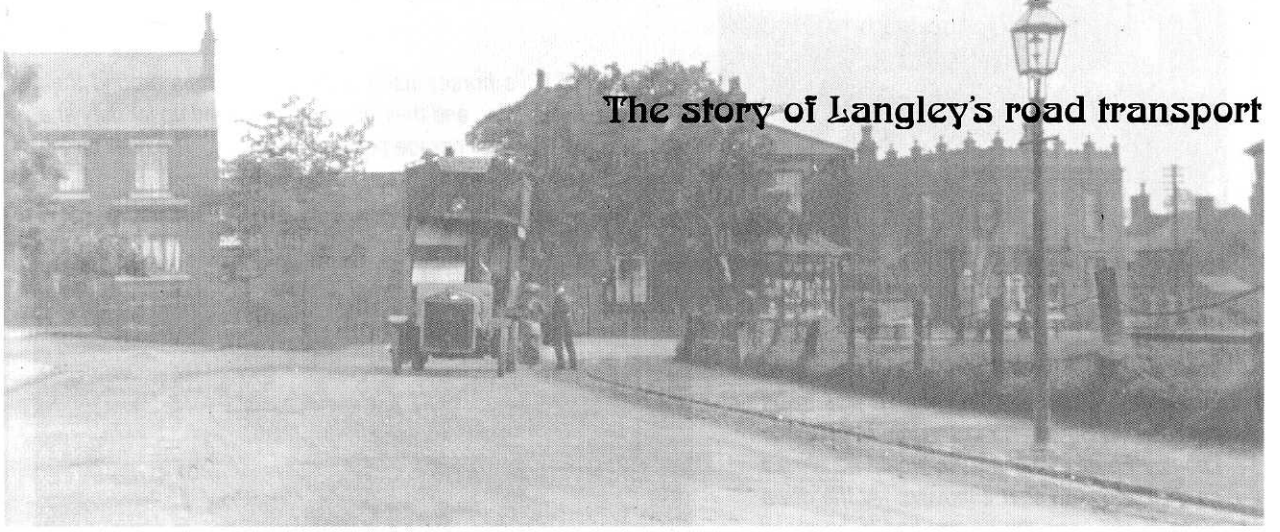
We shall see how these industries brought prosperity, and the many ways they affected the lives of the people who lived and worked in Langley. As well as the history of the industries, the book contains some of the people's memories, pictures and souvenirs of a past age rapidly disappearing as we start a new century.

The time-lines on the previous page show the main developments in transport and industry in the Langley area, together with the important social developments that went with them.

2

Way ahead

The story of Langley's road transport



Mud and horses

In 1800 local roads were much as they had been for centuries. Road maintenance was the responsibility of the parish, and generally carried out to a very poor standard. Most roads at this time were muddy, rutted and not easily passable in bad weather. Where possible, heavy goods were moved by river, sea or the newly cut canals. Local transport was by packhorse or horse-drawn cart, and the horse would be the main motive force well into the 20th century.

The local roads in the early 1800s were narrow and followed well established tracks and field boundaries through the countryside, as the map on page 7 shows for the Langley area. Some of the important through routes were

Bearwood to Causeway Green and Rowley via Pottery Road and Pound Road,
Smethwick to Rowley via Holly Lane, Joinings Bank and Causeway Green Road, and
Oldbury to Rowley via Birchfield Lane and Whiteheath Gate.

The nearest 'main' road was the turnpike running just north of Langley, through Smethwick, Oldbury and Dudley on the way from Birmingham to Shrewsbury. In 1760 the road became part of the Birmingham, Dudley and Wolverhampton turnpike which operated until 1876. It was better maintained than most local roads, and carried the main through traffic of coaches and carts. Other turnpikes operated further north through West Bromwich and Wednesbury.

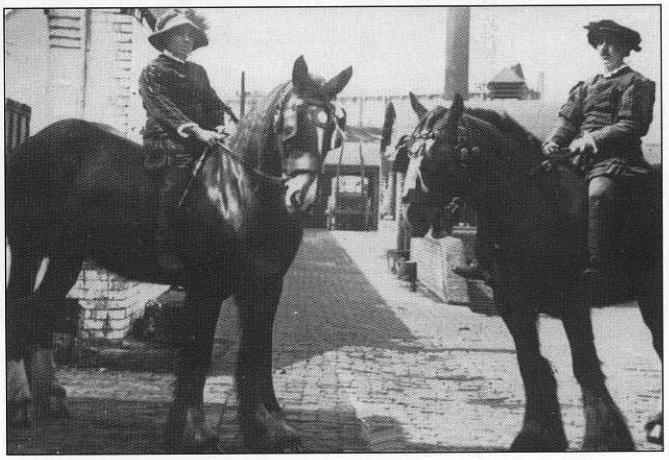
The larger inns became staging posts for mail and travellers. The 'Bell Inn' at Rood End may have served this function from the mid 19th century, although lying just off the turnpike road.

A tribute to the horses

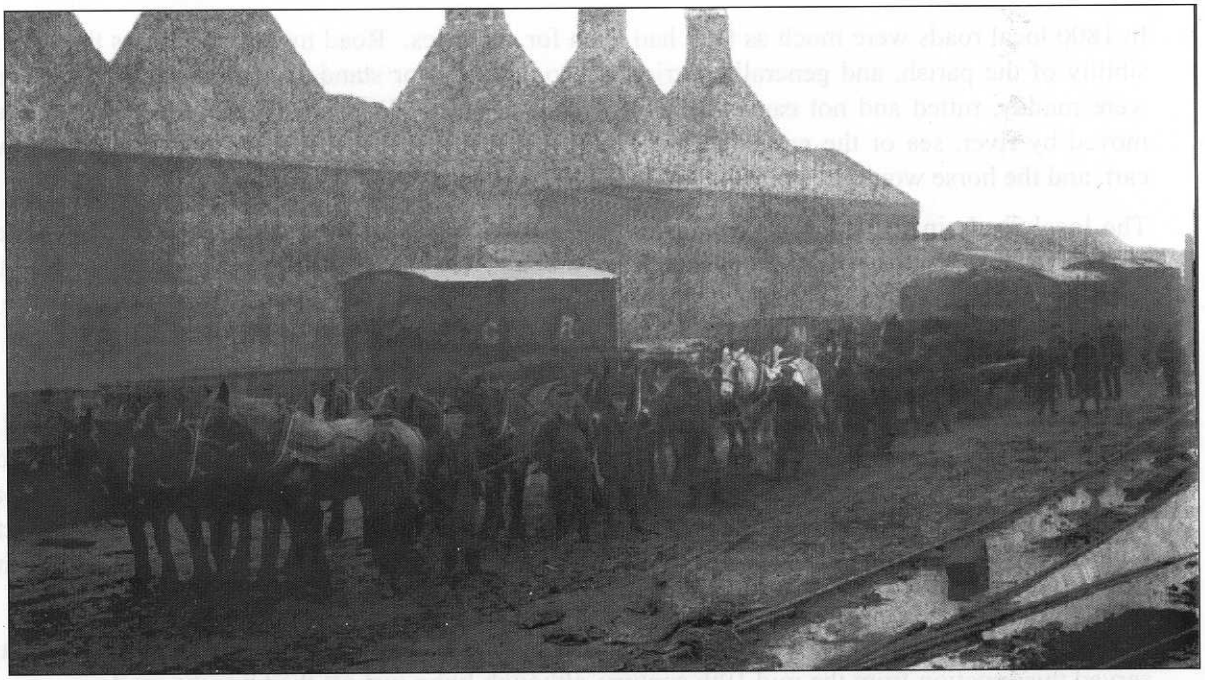
The horse was the main motive force well into the industrial age, and we owe them a great debt. Although gradually replaced by the steam engine and the internal combustion engine, horses were widely used up to the second world war for carrying locally, and even at the end of the fifties many milk and bread deliveries were still made by horse and cart, by the Co-op, for instance. Now they are rare, but not unknown, on the streets of Langley.

Horse and cart used by Millership's of Langley Green for grocery deliveries between the wars. *(Picture: Margaret Shaw collection)*

Two of ICI's horses used to move materials around their site. Here they, and their riders, are dressed up for duty at a Langley carnival parade between the wars. The rider on the left is Ernest Daniels. *(Picture: Barbara Thorpe collection)*



1920s: this team of about fifteen GWR railway horses is hitched to a 30 ton wrought iron billet in Langley Green Goods Yard. It was to be pulled along Station Road and into Mill Lane to Langley Forge. The horses would be almost on their knees to start it moving. At the down slope in Mill Lane the horses had to be raced to keep ahead of the cart - how they stopped is not recorded! One of the horse drivers was George Mullet, father-in-law of James Hallard who provided the details. *(Picture: James Hallard collection)*



From 1848 Boards of Health took over responsibility for roads in urban areas, and on the formation of Oldbury Board of Health in 1857, care of the local roads became one of their duties.

New forms of road transport

New road making techniques were tried in the late 1800s, including the use of steam rollers and the first experiments with tar to bind the dusty road surfaces. As railways expanded most long-distance traffic moved on to them, leaving mainly local traffic on the roads. In 1861, pressure from vested interests in railways and canals, resulted in the 'Locomotives on Highways Act' which limited the speed of road 'vehicles' and required a man to walk in front of them carrying a red flag. Not suprisingly, this restricted the development of road transport, but did not stop trams coming to the Oldbury - Smethwick Road, although they did not reach Langley itself.

Trams

The trams by-passed the Langley area, but only just! In August 1885 services were started from Birmingham through Smethwick and Oldbury to Dudley using steam trams on a 3'6" gauge. There was a further loop along Spon Lane to West Bromwich and back along Bromford Lane to Oldbury town centre, with a horse-drawn tram service operated by Crowthers, West Bromwich undertakers and horse vehicle hirers. This line was electrified in 1903.

In November 1904 the line through Oldbury was electrified, and these trams continued to operate until 1939, although from the mid-20s there was very strong competition from bus services.

These trams will have served the people of Langley area before the advent of buses by providing a direct route to Dudley and West Bromwich just a short walk away on the Oldbury Road, and an alternative to the trains into Birmingham.

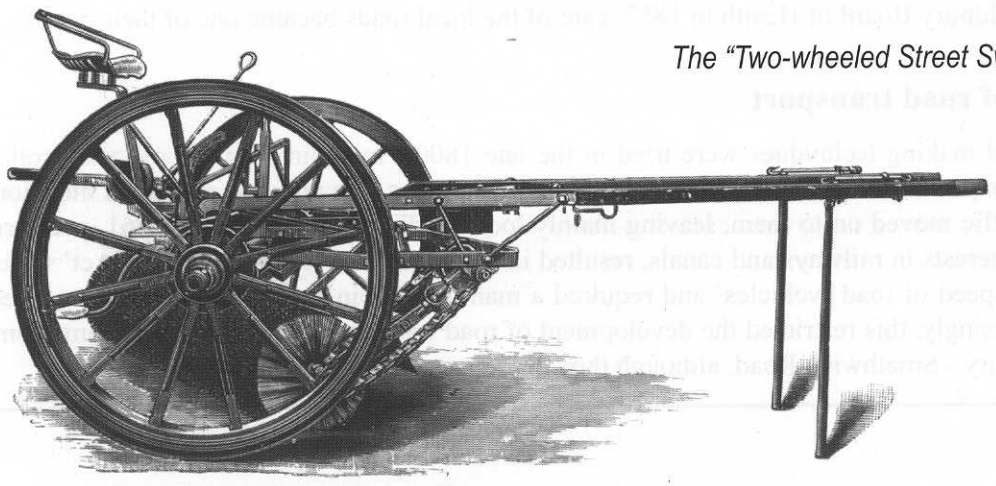
Around 1911 Langley almost moved into the tram age. Oldbury Urban District Council considered the feasibility of running 'trackless trams' (trolley buses) between Oldbury, Blackheath and Langley. The scheme was welcomed enthusiastically, and an approach made to the Birmingham and Midland Tramway Company. Unfortunately, the company was not as enthusiastic, and the scheme came to nothing.

In 1896 the need for a man to carry a red flag in front of motor vehicles was removed, and the time was ripe for the expansion of four-wheeled vehicles. In 1903 a speed limit as high as 20mph was introduced, and the motor age had arrived! The roads needed stronger surfaces which created less dust as the new cars passed by, and tar-laying machinery was introduced: much of the tar was distilled locally at Lewis Demuth and Co. The reaction of Lloyd George and the government in 1909 was to introduce petrol tax (3d per gallon) and motor vehicle tax, and to use the money to pay for the road resurfacing. Roads improved generally, creating opportunities for companies such as Ham Baker to introduce cast iron products for street drainage, cleaning and lighting.

This was the time when the prestige of owning a car was important and not lost on the industrialists. William Jackson, the builder, owned one of the first cars in Langley, and companies such as Showell's Brewery had an early fleet of vehicles.

One of the works cars at Crosswells Brewery, owned by Showells, in the early 1900s. The chauffeur was Mrs Allen's father, Vic Brettell. *(Picture: Audrey Allen collection)*

The "Two-wheeled Street Sweeper"



A contribution to road cleanliness from Ham Baker & Co's 1905 catalogue. The cost was £36 with a 7 ft brush.

The description includes the following: "A clutch is conveniently placed for the driver to work either by hand or foot, by which the whole of the working parts of the machine can be thrown out of gear without stopping the horse ... The driving seat is fixed in a convenient place and manner upon springs, and is so balanced as to take the weight off the horse's back ... The driver has perfect control over the machine either walking or riding ... The machine is equally useful for Macadam as for other descriptions of roadways. At each passage it sweeps 6 ft in width, and the mud or dirt - which is left in a ridge - is taken by the machine at its next passage nearer to the gutter, where the sweepings are collected by carts, which follow the machine. 8,000 square yards per hour is fair work for one sweeper." (Picture: Ham Baker 1905 catalogue, Biwater Engineering Products)

Soon the first reports of road accidents involving cars started to appear in local papers. The 'Weekly News' of 8 July 1911 reported a motor accident at Smethwick in which a pedestrian was killed by a car driven by H S Stringer, an iron master: the verdict was 'accidental death'. The same issue also recorded a motorist being summonsed for not producing his car licence when requested to do so in Warley Park - the first of many, we sympathise!

Very early bus with the 'MIDLAND' logo turning into Vicarage Road, Rood End from Vicarage Street.

This is a Tilling-Stevens petrol-electric bus, known as a TTA2. A petrol motor drove a dynamo which, in turn, drove an electric motor that powered the bus. This was a complicated system that was short of power up hills and offered no engine braking down-hill! It had no gears, rear brakes only and solid tyres. BMMO purchased these buses in 1913. No 09921 is shown, and its brother, 09926, is preserved at the Midland Bus Museum at Wythall. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

Expansion and regulation

After the 1914-18 war, roads became the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport. The use of cars, lorries, vans, and buses developed rapidly and many familiar features appeared on our roads. The first buses had arrived in the Langley area just before the war, run by the Birmingham and Midland Omnibus Company.

In 1924 roads were first classified A, B or C and numbered, and white lines introduced. The road system was inadequate, and unsafe, for the growing number of motor vehicles. Existing roads were widened and straightened, and new roads cut. The Langley area was affected by the great new road opened in 1927, the Birmingham to Wolverhampton road, the A4123. This cut through open country where possible, avoiding existing routes through towns and villages. It was wider and straighter than any other road in the area, with wide verges carrying mains and sewers, and good visibility.

At the end of the 20s transport matters were still largely unregulated, many commercial vehicles unsafe, and accidents were increasing alarmingly. Compulsory third-party insurance for motorists was introduced. Bus transport was developing rapidly, and Langley was well served by the 'Midland Red'. Bus operations were controlled in 1930, with new safety requirements. Haulage firms were controlled and licensed three years later. Hazard warning signs, electric traffic signals,

Basons Lane in the 1930s. A new traffic sign warns of the roundabout at the junction with Warley Road. The roundabout and sign have gone, but the rest of the scene is similar today. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

cat's eyes and pedestrian crossings with Belisha beacons were all introduced by the mid-30s as the motor age rushed ahead. There were many opportunities for local metal-working firms.

This was also the period when smaller cheaper cars became available, and even working-class families could buy the Ford Popular, Hillman Minx, Austin Seven, Morris Eight or Standard Nine. In the thirties the prices of these models were all in the £100 to £200 range new, reduced by improved production methods and higher sales volumes. Many

This Standard Nine was bought for £96 second-hand in 1936 and ran around the streets of Langley from the 30s to the late 50s. *(Picture: Terry Daniels collection)*

The Wolverhampton 'New' Road

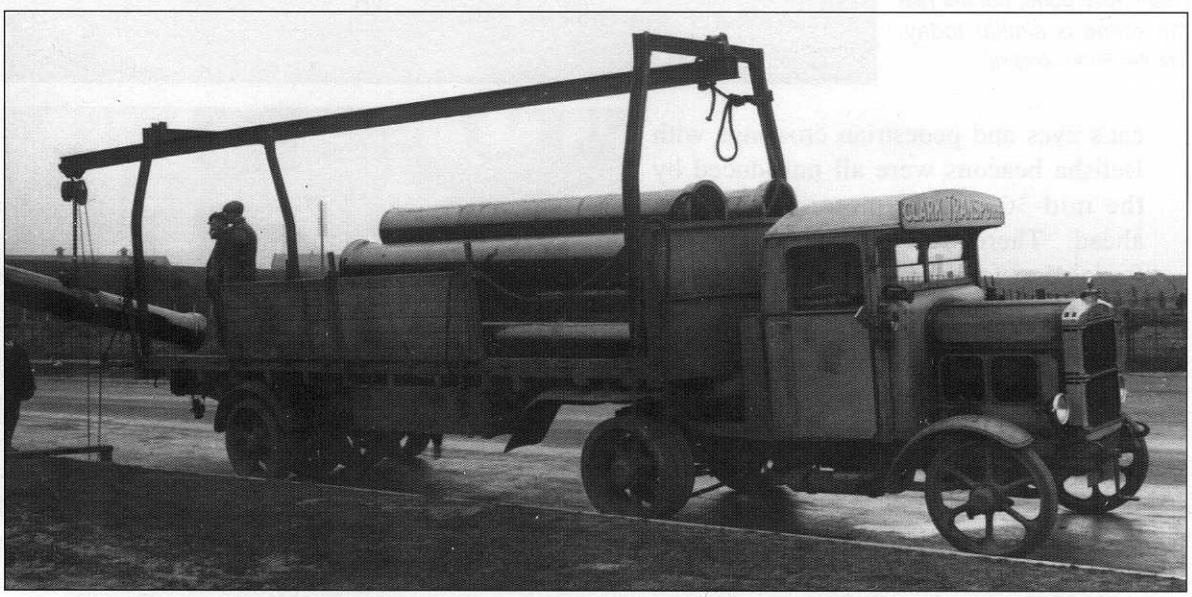
The need for a new road linking Birmingham with the Wolverhampton area was first recognised in 1909 as motor traffic became established. Proposals were put to the Association of Midland Local Authorities, but it was difficult to achieve agreement between the large number of authorities involved. By 1911 a route was being discussed for the road to pass through this area from Whiteheath, to Pool Lane, to the 'Beeches' at the top of Bristnall Hall Road, and via Hill Top to Bearwood. Oldbury Urban District Council was not enthusiastic and the cost did not help! The 1914-18 war intervened before any progress was made. By the early 1920s there were two urgent reasons for building the road: the need to reduce congestion on the narrow roads that wound through the towns and villages, and the need to find employment for the many men out of work at that time.

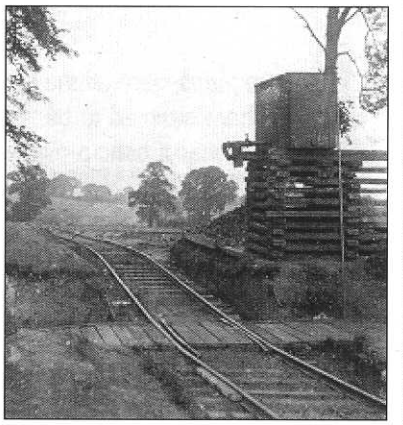
By 1924 work was starting on the route we know today, shorter than that considered fifteen years earlier and avoiding the major centres of population. The road was planned to be as straight and level as possible, with a 100ft total width and 40ft carriageway. The contract to build the road was won by McAlpine, and the total cost was £600,000. Most of the work was done by the unemployed, particularly former miners from the Oldbury area, and ex-servicemen.

There were considerable technical problems to overcome. Between Pound Road and Bury Hill four unused, unrecorded mine shafts were discovered and had to be capped with ferro-concrete. Vast amounts of slag from pit heaps and industrial waste mounds

Road making about 1925. This is probably the 'large steam-driven excavator' at work on the Birmingham-Wolverhampton Road. *(Picture: Frank Wakeman)*

Laying water pipes along the almost complete Birmingham to Wolverhampton Road between Causeway Green and Jarvis Bridge. The embankment of the railway line leading to the new bridge can be seen in the background. *(Picture: By permission of South Staffs Water plc)*



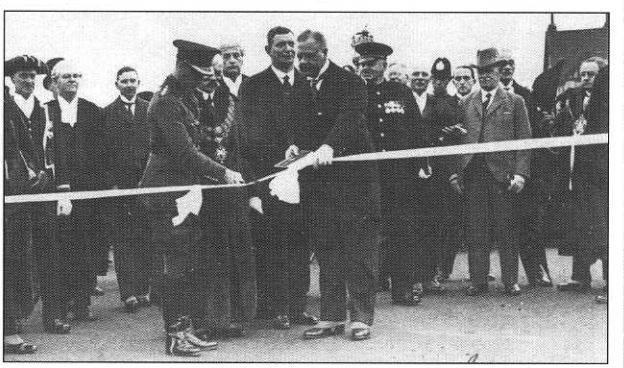


The contractors had a small railway for moving materials along the road during construction. The engine was a saddle tank, seen here as it arrived by road. It is rumoured that the remains of the engine are buried underneath the road near Brandhall. The lines do not look too secure, so it could easily have fallen from the track! The scene beyond the water tank shows well the countryside through which it was built. *(Pictures: Sandwell Community History and Archives)*

were used to level the land. A large steam-driven excavator was brought in to handle the earth moving in the Oldbury section. A 'huge valley' had to be filled between Pound Road and Jarvis Bridge to keep the road level: this was done by a donkey engine hauling 15cwt trucks. The sub-structure of the road was made up of this slag topped with a layer of 'Rowley rag'. A small railway was built to convey materials.

The landscape around the road was considerably improved by levelling and filling in many of the pits, quarries and brick-fields close to it. This indirectly helped the poor and unemployed by exposing fresh layers on the tips ripe for 'coal pick-ing'. Eight major new bridges had to be constructed, including the railway bridge at Causeway Green, and others such as Jarvis bridge had to be strengthened and raised. New sewage and water pipes were laid along the road.

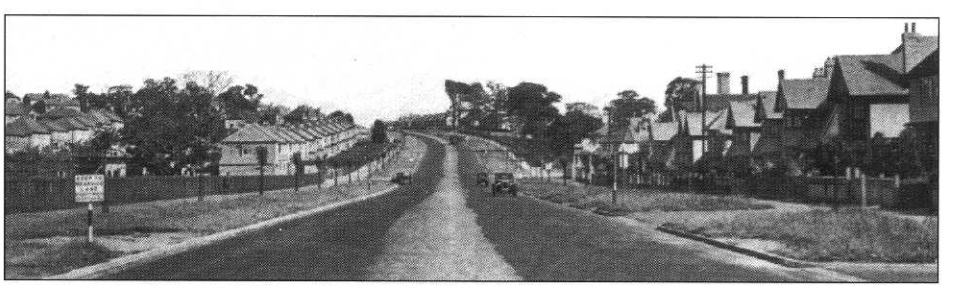
Construction was completed within three years, and the road officially opened on 2 November 1927 by the Prince of Wales. The first stage of the official opening took place at the junction with the Hagley Road, where the Prince cut the ribbon. Each local authority involved in the project wanted its own dignitaries to be presented to the Prince, so there were eight ceremonies as he travelled the road to Wolverhampton.



The Prince of Wales cuts the ribbon to open the road on 2nd November 1927. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

Oldbury's podium was set up at the junction with Birchfield Lane, and the crowd was so large it broke through police lines behind the Prince's car. Councillor K H Wilson, Chairman of Oldbury UDC, presented the Oldbury dignitaries. The Prince of Wales saluted the schoolchildren and spoke to the ex-servicemen, before moving on to the next gathering at Rowley Regis. As well as the flags and buntings evident all along the route, the 'Hen and Chickens' sported a display of electric lights, which were a great attraction for months.

The road did not have a central reservation at that time. There were soon complaints of motor cyclists racing up and down the road to try out their machines! No speed cameras then! The road originally ran through open fields in this area, but soon new houses were built along the road: then traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, road islands and the general con-gestion we experience today!

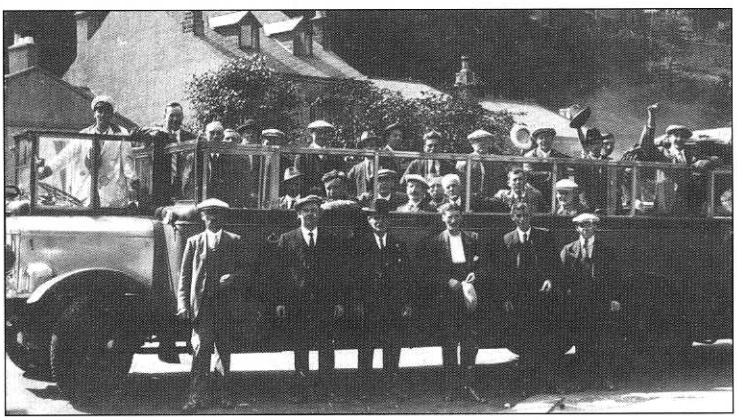


The Wolverhampton Road in 1935, looking very quiet and showing the rapid development of houses along it. *(Picture: Sidney Darby, West Bromwich, by permission)*

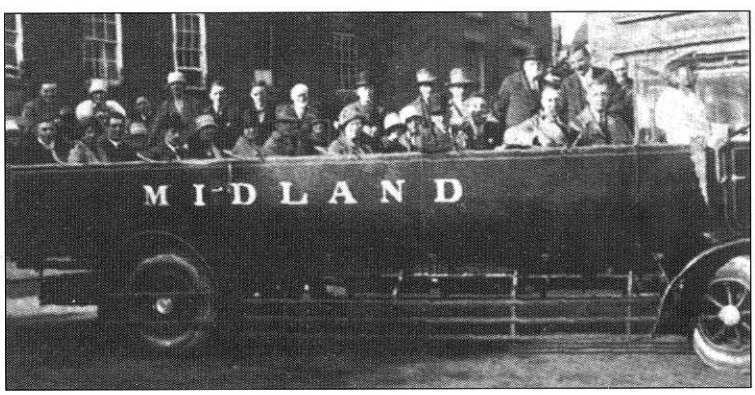
A trip to the country

Char-a-banc trips were all the rage for Sunday School, Church and works outings before we all had our own wheels. There seemed to be no limit on the amount of people they could hold! As time passed, the coach replaced the char-a-banc providing more protection from the weather.

We don't know who was setting off from the Institute in these vehicles, the first a Vulcan called 'The Village Belle' and the second a Daimler. (Picture: Ray Watkins collection)



Outing of the works fire brigade from Albright & Wilson. Samuel Alfred Aston, wearing a bowler hat in front of the coach, was seconded from the fitting shop to be first mechanic at Albright & Wilson, and went on the trip as the mechanic. (Picture: Win Round

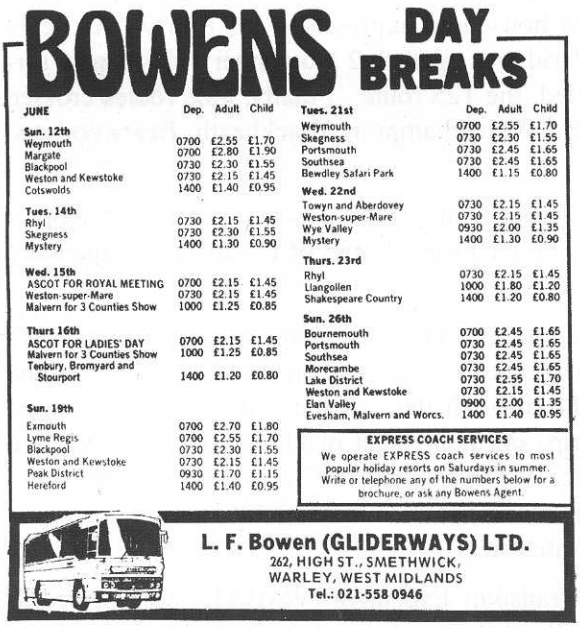


The workers and their ladies from Midland Tar Distillers on the annual works outing in 1927. An early Midland Red open coach does the honours. (Picture: MTD Magazine)

motorists developed loyalties to a particular firm, always buying a Ford or an Austin as their experience, or prejudice, dictated.

The rise of the motor car was interrupted by the Second World War, when petrol was first rationed and then withdrawn completely for private use. It got underway again when rationing ceased in 1950, and petrol was relatively cheap. People were able to live further away from their work and travel in easily, so the age of commuting was beginning, and small cars such as the Mini were again in fashion. Many of the workers in the Langley area started to live further away, on the edge of the countryside, and travel in by car, rail or bicycle.

This was also the age of touring with trips to the country and seaside, and the caravan became a popular addition to the family car. Day trips in coaches had been popular since the char-a-banc had taken over from the horse-drawn bus, and the annual works outing moved from rail to road. After WW2, day trips, weekends and touring holidays with coach firms such as Midland Red and Gliderways boomed until we all had our own car. Scarborough 15/- single: 25/- if you wanted to come back. Blackpool only 12/6. A two-day tour of Snowdon and North Wales was £2 10s 0d, and that included meals, accommodation and a free hardback book describing the sights along the way.



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Blackpool	0730	£2.30	£1.55
Weston and Kewstoke	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Cotswolds	1400	£1.40	£0.95
Tues. 14th			
Rhyl	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Skegness	0730	£2.30	£1.55
Mystery	1400	£1.30	£0.90
Wed. 15th			
ASCOT FOR ROYAL MEETING	0700	£2.15	£1.45
Weston-super-Mare	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Malvern for 3 Counties Show	1000	£1.25	£0.85
Thurs 16th			
ASCOT FOR LADIES' DAY	0700	£2.15	£1.45
Malvern for 3 Counties Show	1000	£1.25	£0.85
Tenbury, Bromyard and Stourport	1400	£1.20	£0.80
Sun. 19th			
Exmouth	0700	£2.70	£1.80
Lyme Regis	0700	£2.55	£1.70
Blackpool	0730	£2.30	£1.55
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Peak District	0930	£1.70	£1.15
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	Dep.	Adult	Child
Tues. 21st			
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Portsmouth	0730	£2.45	£1.65
Southsea	0730	£2.45	£1.65
Bewdley Safari Park	1400	£1.15	£0.80
Wed. 22nd			
Towyn and Aberdovey	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Weston-super-Mare	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Wye Valley	0930	£2.00	£1.35
Mystery	1400	£1.30	£0.90
Thurs. 23rd			
Rhyl	0730	£2.15	£1.45
Llangollen	1000	£1.80	£1.20
Shakespeare Country	1400	£1.20	£0.80
Sun. 26th			
Bournemouth	0700	£2.45	£1.65
Portsmouth	0730	£2.45	£1.65
Southsea	0730	£2.45	£1.65
Morecambe	0730	£2.45	£1.65
Lake District	0730	£2.55	£1.70
Weston and Kewstoke	0730	£2.15	£1.45
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Gliderways of Smethwick (later Bowens) were always the 'Rolls-Royces' of local coaches and widely used for holidays and outings! (Picture: Mary Griffin collection)

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The rise and fall of 'Midland Red'

For most of the 20th century the only buses to serve Langley were those of the 'Midland Red'. The name arose from the word 'Midland' on their side, a shorter version of 'Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Co.' (BMMO) which was formed in 1904 to supply public transport using the new motor buses. 'Red' had been the colour used by a forerunner of BMMO in 1900 for its horse buses.

Their first successful operation of motor buses started in 1912 in Birmingham and by the next year routes included Oldbury and Smethwick. At first the new omnibuses were not allowed to use routes on which trams operated, but this restriction was relaxed during the 20s: the Birmingham - Oldbury route was extended to Dudley along the tram route in 1928, although the trams were not withdrawn until September 1939.

Routes were numbered chronologically from 1913, but in the mid 20s area-based route codes were introduced, and the route numbers that were to be household expressions for nearly fifty years started. On the evening that the Wolverhampton Road was opened, 2 November 1927, a new service from Birmingham to Wolverhampton was added, the 125 route. Finally, nine routes crossed the Langley area, linking with Birmingham, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Blackheath, Bearwood and Oldbury.

From 1923 the BMMO built its own buses, and thirty years later introduced a plastics workshop as more body parts were made of glass-reinforced polyester resin. Some of the resin was made by BIP at Rood End.

The headquarters and main depot was at Bearwood, but in 1937 a bus garage was opened closer to Langley, the 'Oldbury' garage at Birchley Crossing on the Wolverhampton Road, and many of the Langley services were operated from there. In the difficult days of the war petrol was scarce, buses had very dim lights and conductors had lamps on their ticket machines so they could see what they were doing. By 1947, there was a shortage of drivers, and 1007 new drivers were quickly trained, only 83 failing to qualify. Passengers continued to increase to 1954, until a decline in numbers set in with the rise in popularity of the private car.

On 1 October 1969 the West Midland Passenger Transport Executive (WMPTE) was formed to take over bus and train operations for the area. Midland Red routes and the Oldbury garage were

Passenger please raise your feet! It often flooded in Park Lane between ICI on the left and 'Blue Billy' on the right. The acids leeching out of the waste mound will have helped to turn the Midland Red to a rusty shade. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

Driver training for the Midland Red

In September 48 I reported for training to the Midland Red Driving School at Bearwood depot; there were about six of us in the 'class'.

My initial test for acceptance had been on an old petrol-engined bus, single deck, mid-twenties vintage, of a type disparagingly known as a 'Madam', and this was the vehicle that began the training. Accommodation for passengers had been provided before they remembered that someone had to drive these things, so they stuck an apology for a cab alongside the engine compartment which stuck out in front. The windscreen was so low that one had to bend or incline the head on one side to see any distance forward, the steering column rose straight up from the floor, and also the pedals - so that to brake or declutch meant levering oneself up to the roof with only the steering-wheel to hang on to. To make things worse the gear lever was so short that it seemed like scraping the floor to find it. The directive against smoking in the cab was useful because you sat on the petrol tank.

The training began with instruction on the 'snap-change' out of bottom gear into second. This was to avoid dragging up a long, steep gradient in the lowest gear if a stop had been made at the bottom or part way up; to try to change in the normal way would have the vehicle at a standstill before it could be accomplished. This was because of the 'crash-box' with which practically all motor vehicles were fitted in the 20s. Changing gear was a slower and more skilful process before 'synchro-mesh' changed all that.

Hand signals were a must in those days, and we were well drilled in those amongst other things, such as how to judge the correct distance away from the kerb at a bus-stop, and how to position the vehicle on the road at turning points; coming to a halt without jerking the occupants forward - and in general, driving smoothly.

After a couple of days of this it was time for us to move on to the diesel engine, not all that common then; I had not handled one. The conversion went quite smoothly, and the driving conditions inside the cab were much better, but we were still on a 'saloon', as these single-deck buses were called. We were looking forward to the next stage - the double-deck.

This was an anti-climax: the extra deck seemed to make the bus easier to manoeuvre, I found. If I remember right, the wheel-base was slightly shorter, and perhaps the weight distribution was better - so no problem there. By this time, however, we were being taken into Brum and round a couple of well-rehearsed routes, the 'big eight' and 'little eight' - which by a coincidence were the test routes. Actually, if the chief instructor decided that you were ready for the test, you would have to do something silly to fail. I passed, and in fact we all did in my group.

I reported to the Oldbury depot at Birchley to await my badge, and on one bright Saturday afternoon I kicked-off up and down the Dudley Road on the B86/7. The whole business had taken 13 days.

The training on the Midland Red was first-class, and we were on full wages while we trained including any overtime. I found them a good firm to work for, even though the discipline was strict. I did not dislike bus-driving, but being a public servant has its draw-backs.

Incidentally, I recall driving a 'Madam' on service several times in those early days, on the 210, Handsworth, route for example - and we did Ludlow together at least once. The same goes for all the other drivers then, especially Kay our lady driver - but it's been a long time ago.

Bill Hipkiss

transferred to WMPTE who started services on 3 December 1973. Only two buses were in the new WMPTE livery of blue and cream on the day services started, and one operated from the Oldbury garage: soon, however, the familiar red livery had disappeared from Langley. Routes and route numbers were changed and the stability of our traditional buses lost. Finally, deregulation in the 80s brought buses of all sizes, shapes and colours to our streets, but in the hearts of the older generation in Langley the red buses still remain.

Bus services in the Langley district

Buses running through the area were exclusively Midland Red until relatively recent years. One of the first sounds that I remember as a small child was the two-bells signal, followed by the sound of an engine as a bus accelerated away; the more pleasant sound made by the petrol engines then in use. These buses were running up and down Trinity St, which ran parallel to Titford Rd where I lived.

That memory was from the beginning of the 1920s, and those buses hadn't been running the route for very long before that; then there were only two every hour to the best of my knowledge. One of these routes was Oldbury to Bearwood, via Langley, Vicarage Rd, left through Rood End and on through Smethwick - number 215. Another ran the same route up to Vicarage Rd, but then via Dog Kennel Lane to Londonderry, and on to Birmingham - the 122 or 120, which went through Oldbury on the return journey and finished up in Dudley.

The buses on the 215 route were single deck vehicles (saloons), and what double deck vehicles were used (120/2 route) were often of the open-top variety then. One such came down Trinity Street and ran slap-bang into the church wall; a young chap we knew panicked and jumped from the top-deck into the grave yard - but he did'nt stay there and lived to tell the tale! I well recall a policeman on point-duty in the centre of Five Ways; but a one way system was in operation by the 30s: down Broad St and Old Park Lane, and up Trinity St.

In 1937 the Oldbury Depot was opened at Birchley, primarily to replace the trams up on the main Birmingham-Dudley Road, but several of the routes came to be exclusively theirs - and they participated in the others. A new route had been put on, the 233, Oldbury-Bearwood via Trinity St, Titford Rd to the Wolverhampton Rd, up Pound Rd and so to Bearwood. This was really to serve the housing estates that had been built in Warley, and was a half-hour service.

In addition to the services that ran through Langley village itself by the 30s, the 127 ran through Tat Bank, up Warley Rd to Londonderry, and then to Birmingham. Blackheath had a service, the 123, which ran from Birmingham to Vicarage Rd, Joinings Bank, through Causeway Green, Cakemore and Shell Corner to Blackheath. The 124 went from Langley Baths, up Moat Rd and George Rd to Bearwood and Birmingham.

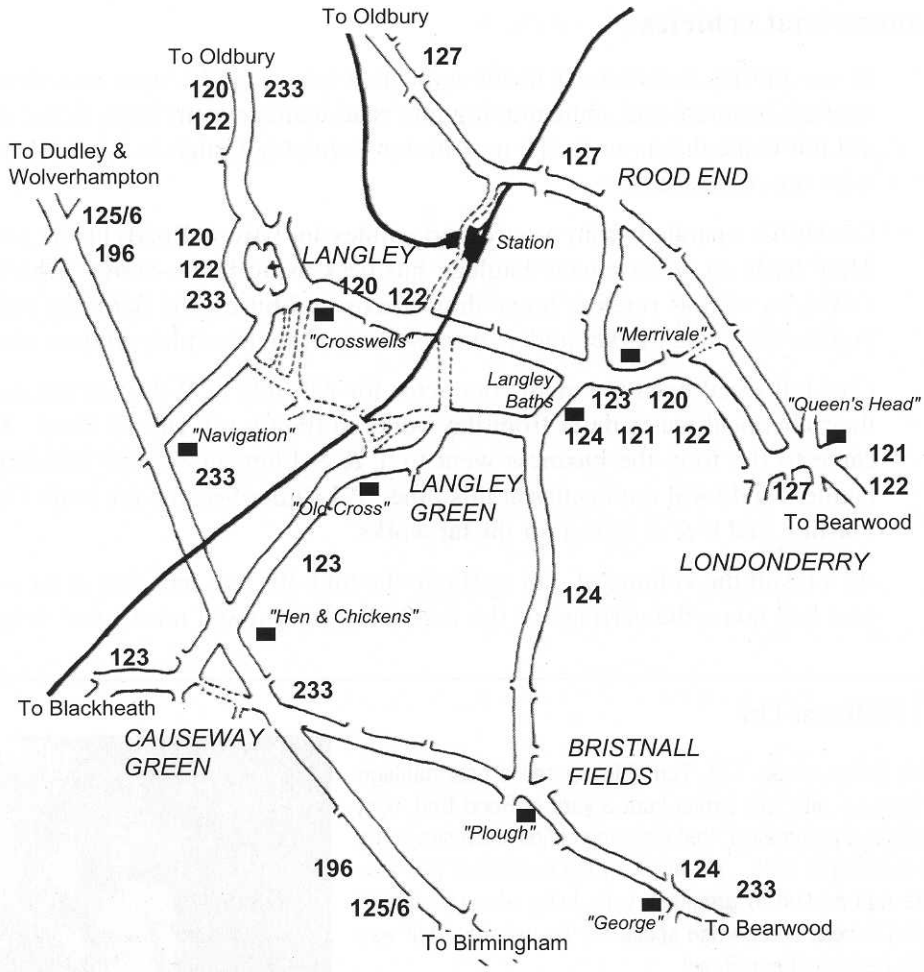
Along the Wolverhampton Road, of course, there was the 125, Birmingham-Wolverhampton, later to be alternated by the 126, which only deviated in Dudley a little. The 196 ran in conjunction with these but only every hour and went through to Stafford. In the early 50s, due to the hard work, or badgering, of a Mrs Deeley of the Rounds Green area, the 229 began and ran from Blackheath via Rowley Village and Newbury Lane to Oldbury, and then Tat Bank, Vicarage Rd, Brookfields Rd and Salop Rd to Bearwood. Another service that touched the area was the 210, up Rood End Rd from the Oldbury Rd, Victoria Rd and Queen's Rd to Londonderry Lane and down to Smethwick and Handsworth.

From the mid-30s the diesel engine started to take over; to me that was a shame. One of the features of a Midland Red bus prior to that was coasting - the driver would get going and then as soon as he had enough speed he would 'throw the stick out' - put it into neutral and just coast. The thing was, drivers had a bonus for petrol saved on a particular route, and I used to like to hear the hum of the tyres on the road as the engine died down. I didn't understand the reason for this until I started driving with the Midland Red myself in the late 40s; even then, with diesel engine vehicles and no bonus, we were still taught to coast, especially coming up to a bus-stop. Bear in mind the brakes were not servo-assisted; this is where coasting is dangerous in case the engine cuts out, and on greasy or icy roads it is not advisable anyway.

One of the most essential ingredients of any public transport service must be the timing factor. Urban routes were planned on the basis of 12 mph, and 15 on what were known to us as 'top roads', the more rural routes - we had few of those at Birchley Depot. It might seem slow, 12 mph, 5 minutes for every mile, but at times it was impossible to keep up to the schedule; however, most of the time it was adequate, sometimes painfully so, and there was 'time to burn'. Routes were for that reason broken up into timing points of a few minutes each which we were enjoined to observe, and disciplined for any breach of. Running early was the chief crime; for obvious reasons it is difficult to criticise lateness as there are so many causes - and it carries its own penalty anyway - more work. Between Langley Five Ways and Vicarage Road was an anomaly because of the level crossing, we were allowed 5 minutes for just a half mile. With the amount of traffic on the roads now I doubt if the present bus-drivers have 'time to burn' very often!

Bill Hipkiss

Some of the 'old' Midland Red bus routes in the Langley area operated from the 30s to the 60s



WMPTE buses at Birchley Bus Garage in December 1979. These had been part of the Midland Red Daimler fleet. *(Picture: Mike Wood)*

Commercial vehicles

In the thirties commercial traffic expanded very rapidly, with new firms starting up in the road haulage business and some moving into road haulage from being horse-drawn carriers. Those that did not make the move to the new motor technology, such as Joseph Cockbill & Sons in Langley, went out of business.

Cockbill's operated from a yard and stables in Titford Road, at the junction with Broad Street. They built up an extensive haulage business using horse-drawn vehicles from the 1890s to the 1930s, as well as running horse-drawn taxis and buses: the Saturday evening bus to Oldbury was popular since the market traders were selling off their surplus produce cheaply!

Cockbill's had been the main contractor for Albright & Wilson at the turn of the century, moving their chemical waste daily from the works to the tip off Titford Road. However, as lorry haulage came to the fore, the business went to T & S Element. Close associations were made between hauliers and local companies at this time. P J Butler became the main haulier for British Industrial Plastics, and F & A Nixon for the tar works.

As a result the volume of rail traffic in the mid-30s was half that at the start of WW1. Road transport had taken the carriage of the less bulky freight and most local deliveries, leaving to the rail-

T H Mercer Ltd

My father-in-law, T H 'Tom' Mercer ran a coal haulage business with four lorries from a yard in Rood End, right next to the cemetery; that was when I first knew him at the beginning of 1936. However, by the summer of that year he had moved to premises with living accommodation plus access and garage space for the vehicles; that was 23, Langley Green Road.

He ran his business from there until his untimely death in 1948, and for the next six months the business struggled on, but then the coal factors, Kimberly Beddoes, took over. After a few years, however, due once again to sudden death, the business was on the market; fortunately, the manager on the spot, Mr Ron Gayden, was able to avail himself of the opportunity and take the firm over.

Bill Hipkiss

Ivy Mercer, Frank Jones and Gladys Adams in Mercer's yard Langley Green Road, around 1940. (Picture: Bill Hipkiss collection)

Gayden Transport

In 1966 we took over the transport firm which still operated under the name of T H Mercer, although it had belonged to Kimberly Beddoes for a number of years, during which time my husband, Ron, had been the manager. Now it became R Gayden and Sons Ltd. The firm was operating with much larger vehicles by this time, but the coal trade, which had been the mainstay up to then, was beginning to peter out. It became necessary to find new sources, and for a while we were successful in getting plenty of work with the firm of Cementation, and since then we have branched out into general transport. During 1979 we suffered the loss of my husband, but with the help of my two sons, Tony and Brett, we rallied round and eventually, in 1984, my younger son, Brett, took over completely. The business premises have moved across the road into the yard vacated by the defunct Langley Forge.

Joan Gayden

Commercial vehicles

Once the horses were taking second place, the streets of Langley were busy with commercial vehicles of all sizes, some owned by individual shops and factories, some from the haulage fleets.

Delivery van of A E Watkins, Trinity Street, Langley with HMV advertisements shown prominently. (Picture: Ray Watkins collection)

Arthur 'Nixon' (real name Nicholls) with one of his lorries hired to Midland Tar Works. His depot was originally in Popes Lane, but moved to Stone Street to the site vacated when Thomas Clayton's canal business ceased. (Picture: MTD Magazine)

Sentinel steam waggon belonging to Midland Tar Works. Although dating from an earlier era, it was used until 1955 when it was retired at the same time as its crew, driver Tommy Rushton and mate Tommy James. (Picture: MTD Magazine)

A Foden lorry, from 1964, owned by Langley Forge. It had a combined rigid and articulated structure, and could carry 11 tons on each platform: ideal for moving heavy forgings. (Picture: Nick Baldwin, by permission)

ways the less profitable long-distance transport of bulkier items such as coal, and very heavy billets and castings.

In 1948 road haulage was nationalised with the formation of British Road Services (BRS). They first had a depot at Clay Lane, and then moved to the Birchley Crossings on the site formerly occupied by Spaldings, and now by 'Toys-R-Us'.

Since the war - motorways!

By the 50s roads were again proving inadequate for the volume of traffic. Holiday black-spots such as 'the Exeter by-pass' brought dread to the traveller, and many a local holiday maker watched his water boil away there, and at least one Langley family, the Daniels, joined the AA on that stretch of road! What we needed was a network of through roads, avoiding towns and permitting high speed in safety: so motorways were born.

Soon the M5 stretched to the south-west and the M6 to the north and to London with a gap in the middle occupied by Langley and the neighbouring towns. The first plan was to join the M5 at Lydiate Ash to the Wolverhampton Road near Brandhall Road. Eventually, a more northerly route was chosen carrying it on stilts through Causeway Green, the edge of Langley and Oldbury and on to join the M6. Part of the raised section followed the line of the Wolverhampton level canal, destroying all traces of Thomas Clayton's canal yard.

This route did not cut through Langley itself, but it had major repercussions for the town. It provided an opportunity to finally remove the 'Blue Billy' waste mound in Park Lane, and use it to fill in some of the redundant marl holes. It also cut through the ICI and signalled the departure of that firm after 120 years, and cut through part of the tar works site.

It may have had a bad effect on the view, but it did bring easy access to the whole country and help to maintain the area's prosperity.

Cycling

That do-it-yourself, environmentally friendly, road vehicle, the bicycle, has not been considered yet, but was important to many generations of local people providing a means of getting to work on time and a way of escaping to the countryside at a time when cars were beyond their reach. 'Cycling' was invented as far back as 1816, but did not become popular until later in the century. The 'penny farthing' was invented in 1870 and the 'safety' bicycle with equal wheels and a chain drive from the pedals, four years later. The Bicycle Union was formed in 1878, and the blessing of pneumatic tyres came in 1888, so cycling was now fairly safe, fairly comfortable and fairly efficient. Cycling clubs soon followed, and Langley Green had its own by the turn of the century.

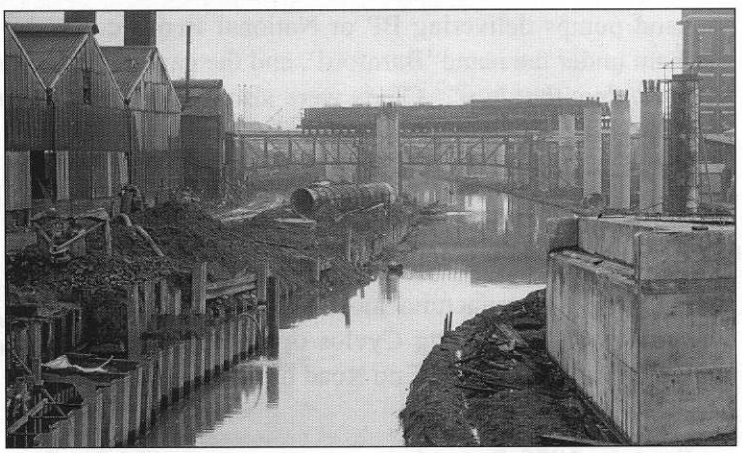
Many small manufacturers grew up, and with them cycle shops and tradesmen who bought in parts and assembled cycles. Back in 1884 James Prince of 8 Henry Street was listed in Kelly's directory and 'bell and bicycle maker', the only cycle entry for the area at that time. Perhaps he made some of those used by the Cycle Club! By the 1930s more names were appearing: Harry Wilkins, cycle agent, 49-57 High Street; Barnford Garage, 4 Langley Road; Quick Service Ltd, Londonderry; Arthur G Davis, cycle dealer, 150, Causeway Green Road, and, without doubt, others too! After WW2 they were joined by A E Watkins in Trinity Street, Langley.

Barnford Garage was started by Fred Williams in 1931, and run after his death by his wife and son Geoffrey. The building was situated at what is now the junction of Westmead Drive and Langley Road, but then led up to the houses in Mount Pleasant. The garage originally had wheel and rachet

The M5 motorway

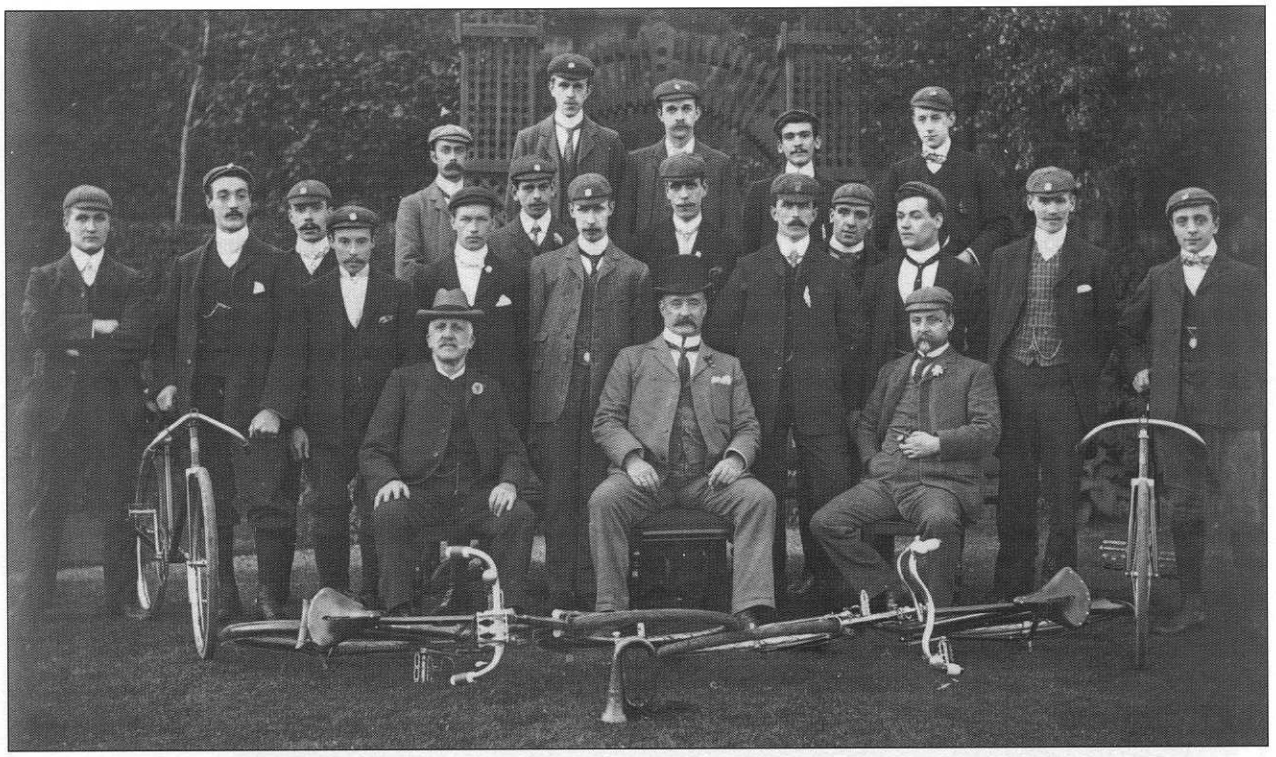
The motorway from Quinton to the A4123 was opened in May 1970. The section from Quinton to Park Street, 3.6 miles, was built by Christiani-Shand in a £5.8 million project taking two and a half years. A village of caravans grew up for the workmen on the Oldbury Road near Whiteheath. Eight new bridges were required, Titford Pool had to be spanned on 50ft deep piles, and 'Blue Billy' had to be removed. The contract for removing the chemical waste, transporting it across Birchfield Lane and filling the marl holes went to Richardson Brothers, and it proved to be a major undertaking!

Removing 'Blue Billy' and levelling the marl holes and chemical dumps to make way fror the new road. Part of Albright & Wilson's works can be seen top right. (Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)



Construction of the M5 motorway. Huge piles cut across Midland Yorkshire Tar Works site and straddle the Wolverhampton level canal. (Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)

The Titford canal below Crow Locks with the entrance of the canal arm to the tar works just beyond the narrow boat. In the distance the newly-built motorway straddles the Wolverhampton level canal at its junction with the Titford canal. Commercial traffic on the Titford canal had just ceased: a final victory for road over water! (Picture: Shirley Rippin)



Langley Green Cycling Club at the turn of the century. Did they really go cycling dressed like that, or was it a case of elegance for the photographer? The man on the far left was T W 'Bill' Fanthom. (Picture: Eric Fanthom collection)

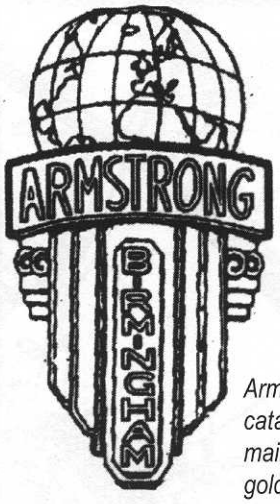
hand pumps delivering BP or National Benzole petrol. They sold bicycles, and also assembled them under the name 'Barnford', and the garage carried the slogan *"Buy a Barnford Bicycle, you'll never buy that bus"*. [They were also agents for 'Meccano', and many a child in the forties and fifties, like the editor, built cars and cycles on a different scale from the sets bought there.]

Armstrong Cycle Co Ltd

One larger manufacturer moved into the area for a time when Armstrong Cycles operated from the Credenda site in Rood End Road between 1951 and 1958.

Back in 1878 Samuel Armstrong was an established manufacturer of die and press tools who also made 'Armstrong' and 'New Imperial' bicycles at their Great Hampton Street works in Birmingham. The company operated at various Birmingham sites, with different names until it became the Armstrong Cycle Co Ltd, moving to Sampson Road North around 1937. In 1951 it moved to Rood End Road and operated until 1958 when it was absorbed into a larger cycle conglomerate and 'Armstrong' went into oblivion, just a brand name.

Cycling researched by John Hodgkins



Armstrong logo from 1953 catalogue. Colours were mainly maroon, black and gold. (Source: John Wilde)

Making cycles

In 1951 my husband worked for about six months at Armstrong Cycles. It was mainly assembly of cycles that was carried out at the site. Tubes for the frames were bought from Tube Investments, saddles from Brookes of Birmingham, pedals from Phillips of Smethwick and three-speed gears from BSA.

Armstrongs had made tandems before the war at their Birmingham works. They moved to Rood End just after the war, and employees were bussed from the Birmingham works each day. Armstrongs employed a 'tester' who rode fifty miles a day doing time trials and testing cycles for comfort and strength.

Pat Rodwell

Buying and selling cycles

My father often went on cycle buying trips to supply his shop at Londonderry. One factory that he visited was the Armstrong Cycle works in Rood End Road. He sometimes took me with him. I remember the first time in the early 1950s. Still at junior school, and, not knowing that I was to be a future cycle retailer, I was more interested in peeping into the assembly shop than in the 'dealing' going on in the warehouse and offices.

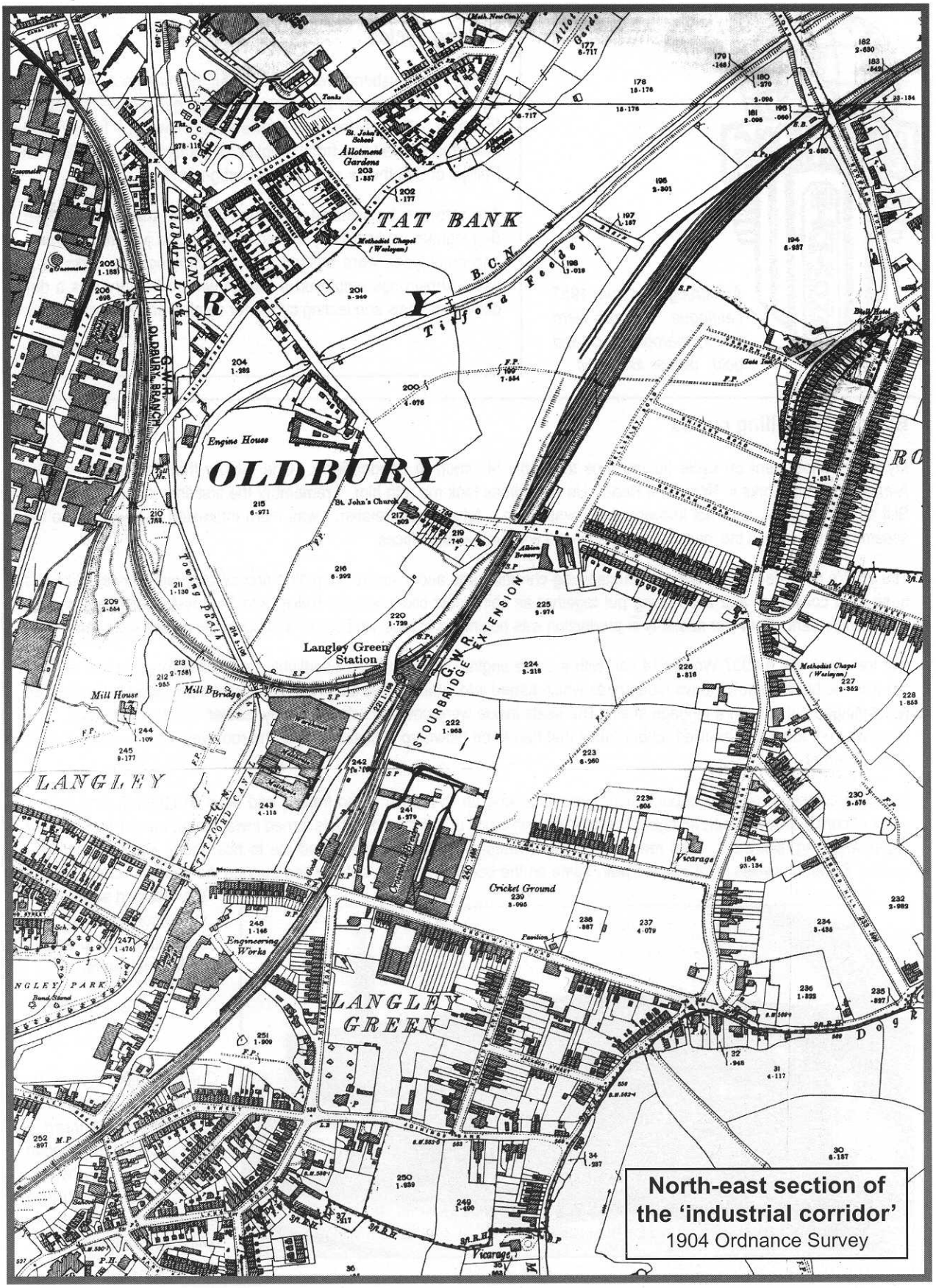
The shop's dim interior was aglow with gleaming chrome parts and lustrous deep blue and brilliant red frames. Bike bits hung from conveyors and were being put together as shiny new bikes with De-Rallier and Sturmy-Archer gears and full drop handle bars. Post-war austerity in production was beginning to fade, and colour and customer choice were returning.

Our transport was a 1937 Wolsey 14 car, with a 2-litre engine, huge chromed headlights (still with scraps of paint on from the wartime blacking out), above mudguards which turned into 'running boards'. At the rear was a postage stamp-sized lid which hinged out to form a luggage shelf. The seats inside were covered with thick grey leather, still smelling good. The filling was not foam, but air-filled rubber tubes that had to be blown up occasionally. In the roof was a huge, leaky canvas sliding sunroof.

Business complete, we had to pack eight cycles into and on to the car. The frames had been wrapped in long narrow strips of crinkly brown paper, mudguards protected with strips of cardboard, pedals turned inwards and handle bars, in their paper wrapping, sideways. Dad removed the front wheels and packed them, and me to hold them, into the front seat space. Several bicycles went into the rear, some on the boot lid, and the last few tied through the sunroof. Quite a sight! We returned safely, mission accomplished, with fine machines to satisfy eager customers.

David Hodgkins

Quick Service shop at the Londonderry about 1950. The Wolsey 14 used to fetch cycles can be seen. The shop sign by the door says 'Cycles: Rudge, Phillips, Armstrong' (Picture: John Hodgkins collection)

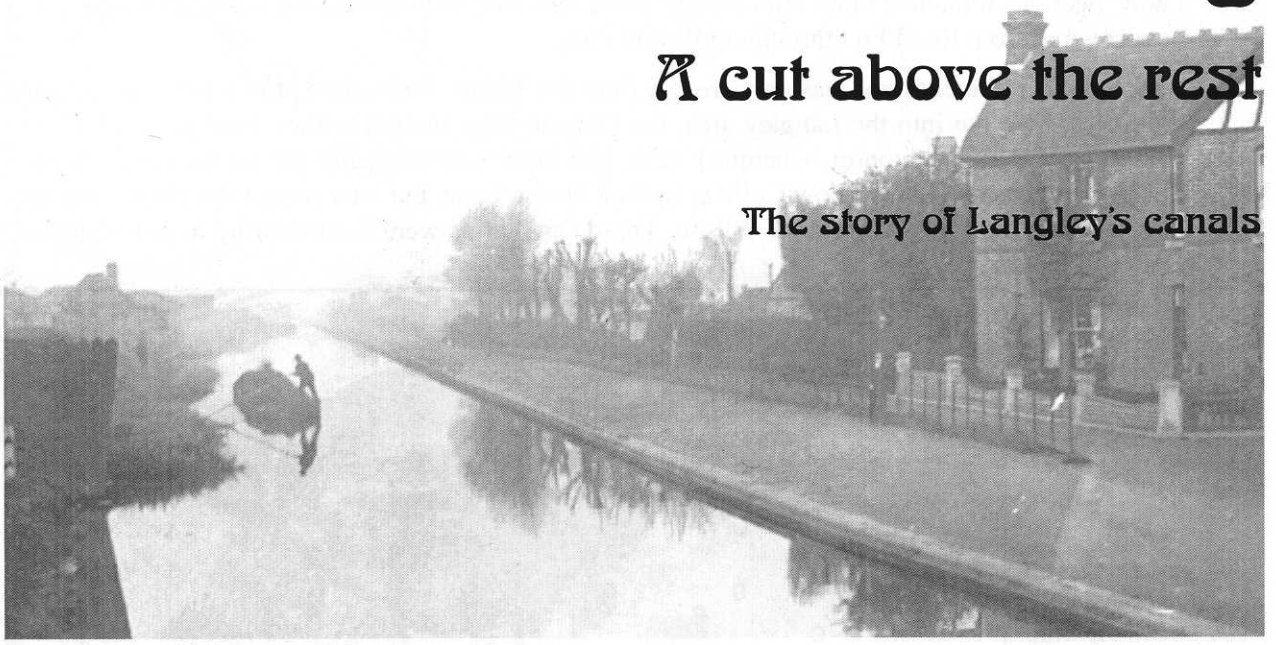


North-east section of the 'industrial corridor'
1904 Ordnance Survey

3

A cut above the rest

The story of Langley's canals



The Birmingham Canal

The second half of the eighteenth century saw the great expansion of canal building. The main impetus was the need of the growing heavy industries for cheap easy transport for raw materials and goods. Although Langley was not directly served by a canal until much later, the opening of the Birmingham Canal through Oldbury in 1768 brought it within easy reach of the new transport system.

The first canal, built by James Brindley, was a 'contour canal' following the lie of the land and winding through Smethwick and Oldbury to Wolverhampton, with a slow climb over Galton summit involving six locks on either side. The Smethwick summit was lowered by John Smeaton in 1790, halving the number of locks and easing the growing flow of goods on the canal. This was the 'Old Main Line' or 'Wolverhampton level' at 473ft above sea level.

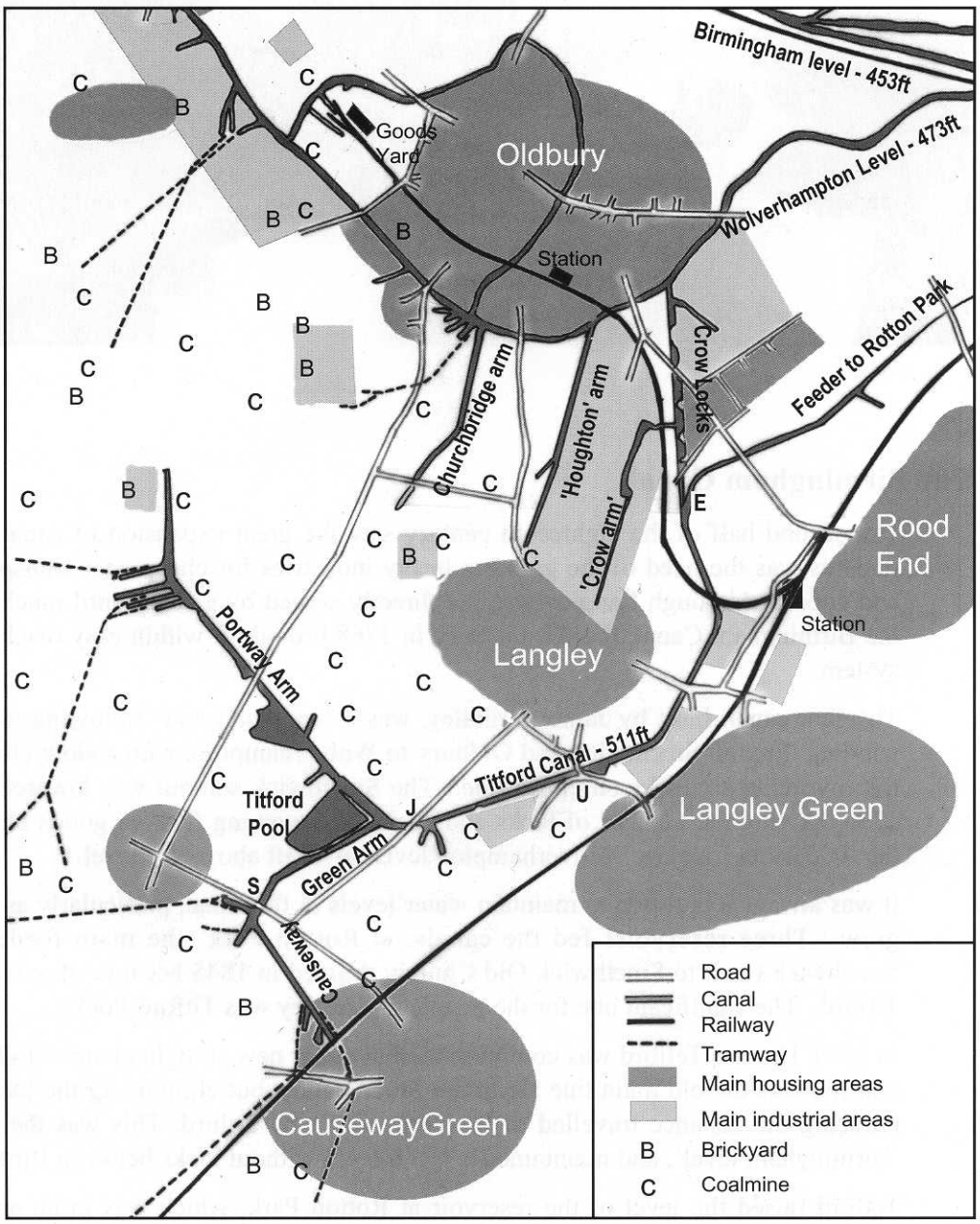
It was always a problem to maintain water levels in the canal, particularly as the volume of traffic grew. Three reservoirs fed the canals, at Rotton Park (the main feeder at Edgbaston), at Smethwick (next to Smethwick Old Church: drained in 1845 because of persistent leakage) and at Titford. The significant one for the people of Langley was Titford Pool.

In 1829 Thomas Telford was commissioned to cut at new straight channel following the same general route as the old main line along the Stour Valley, but eliminating the locks at Smethwick and reducing the distance travelled to Wolverhampton by a third. This was the 'New Main Line' or 'Birmingham level', and maintained a 453 ft level without locks between Birmingham and Tipton.

Telford raised the level of the reservoir at Rotton Park, which was in an area where the natural

water supply could not cope with the increasing demands of the canal. Hence, the 'Titford feeder', which originally supplied water into the canals at Smethwick, was extended to the reservoir at Rotton Park. It was supplied via a narrow watercourse from Titford Pool, through Smethwick and Cape Hill to Edgbaston, partly open and partly closed-in with culverts and tunnels. It was open as far as Mallin Street, West Smethwick, and in winter it was possible to skate from there to Titford Pool. Sections remained open until twenty years ago, but, with increasing safety awareness, it is now covered from Rood End through to Rotton Park.

Various small branches and basins were cut from the higher Wolverhampton level to serve local industries. Two ran into the Langley area, the Churchbridge branch to Park Hall brick works and colliery, and the Houghton or 'Chemical' arm. The latter was originally cut for the collieries near Langley such as Cinder Meadow Colliery in Park House Lane, but later served the chemical works of Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson. These canal arms were used to bring in raw materials,



The canal system around Langley, about 1900 when it had reached its fullest extent. The Titford Canal had served many of the coalmines around Langley and the foot of the Rowley Hills. Others, closer to Oldbury, used the Wolverhampton level of the BCN. Many of the coalmines and some of the tramways were disused by this period but other industries were expanding rapidly. The goods yard in Oldbury on the Oldbury Branch line allowed items to be trans-shipped between the railways and the canals. The engine house (E) is at the junction of Crow locks and the feeder. Jarvis bridge (J), Swan bridge (S) and Uncle Ben's bridge (U) are shown.

distribute finished goods and remove waste from the chemical works and were doubtless a significant factor in the choice of site for the chemical manufacturers.

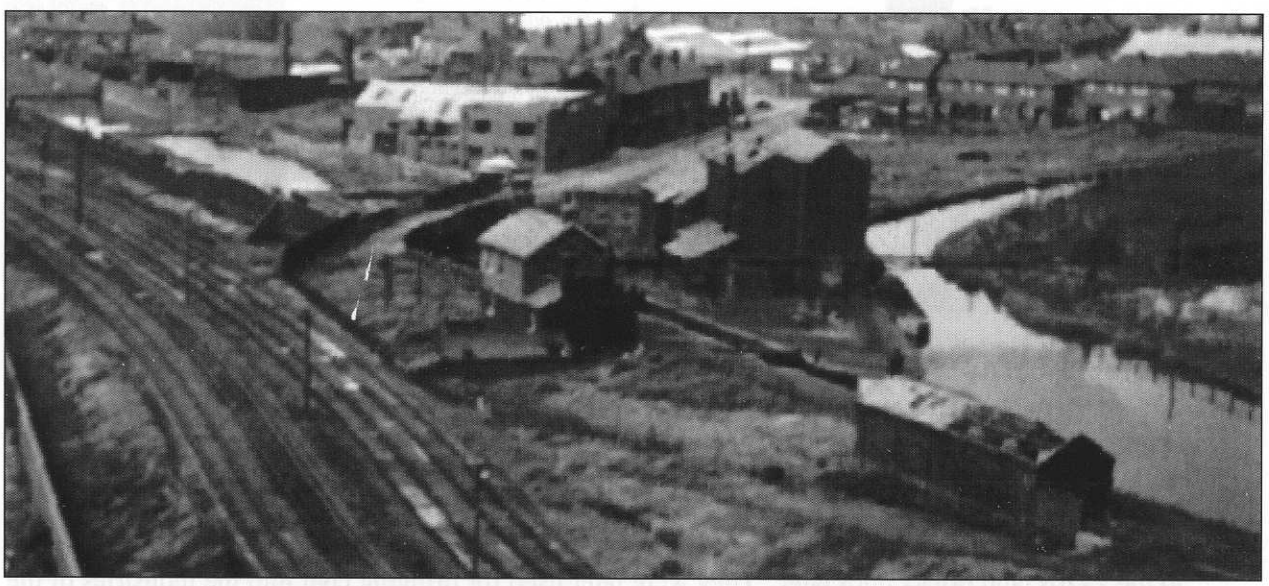
Titford Canal

It was the cutting of the Titford canal that really brought the canal age to Langley. With the growth of mining on the slopes of the Rowley Hills in the first half of the nineteenth century, there was a demand for canal transport to directly service the new collieries. A Parliamentary Bill was passed on 17 June 1835 for the construction of the canal. It was planned to be 30 ft wide, 5 ft deep and 1⅞ miles long. It was linked to the Wolverhampton level of the Birmingham Canal via a flight of six locks at Tat Bank Road raising the level to 511ft.

Officially, these are the 'Oldbury locks', but have long been known locally as the 'Crow' or 'Jim Crow' locks. A short branch left the main canal above the third lock, and fed a basin and an arm into Albright & Wilson's site This basin was also used by British Cyanides and Chance & Hunt. An arm below the bottom lock led to the basin at the Springfield site of Lewis Demuth & Co, later Midland Tar Distillers. Both arms are now filled in.

At 511ft the Titford canal is the highest level on the Birmingham Canal Navigation, indeed 'a cut above the rest'. In this position conservation of water has always been critical. The water lost in operating the locks was so great that it endangered the water supply to Rotton Park Reservoir from the top of the locks. By 1840, three years after the canal was opened, an engine house was operating at the top of the locks to return water from below the locks at the Titford level. The pump raised the water from a sump 38ft deep fed by a level conduit from just below the bottom lock. The original pump was a steam-driven beam engine made by Boulton and Watt at their Soho works, replaced in 1863 by a more powerful one, in turn replaced by an oil pump in 1928 and finally the electric one now in place.

The lock-keeper's house and the toll house were at the top of the locks, and there were stables for



The engine house and lock-keeper's cottage face each other across the top lock next to Engine Street bridge in the centre of the picture. The 'Jim Crow' locks descend to the left towards the Wolverhampton level of the BCN, and the arm to the right curves through BIP Chemicals on its way to feed Rotton Park reservoir. The stables in the right foreground were abandoned and falling into ruin by 1956. The 'Navigation Inn' stood on the far side of the bridge immediately above the lock-keeper's cottage in the picture. *(Picture: John Hodgkins collection - enlarged detail)*

the barge horses just along the canal. The road running from Tat Bank Road to the lock cottage, originally part of Popes Lane, was renamed 'Engine' Street in the 1860s. Opposite the engine house was the site of the 'Navigation Inn' until the 1880s. The canal office of the Birmingham Canal Navigation for the Titford Canal was run by Samuel Deeley in 1871, and the office in Birmingham Street by Samuel Deeley Jr. This must have been a very busy part of the system with queues of boats waiting to travel through the locks. The lock-keeper's cottage was occupied until after WW2, Mr Hewitt being the canal employee there in the 1940s and 50s. A second canal cottage was situated in Engine Street next to the engine house.

'Navigation' Inns

The 'Navigation' Inn, overlooking Crow locks in Engine Street, was run by Walter Pearce from the 1850s to the 1870s. It had stopped being licensed premises by 1881, and was converted into cottages. By this time the 'Navigation Inn' opposite the windmill in Titford Road was operating, serving the canal and the nearby collieries. Perhaps it was simply moved to increase trade! The original building was replaced by the one there today, and it was renamed the 'New Navigation'.

"The 'Old Navigation' had been refurbished into three houses, and ours was the middle one, no 37. It had bay windows, and still had the iron bar on the back window used to raise and lower the barrels of beer into the large cellar beneath. It was our joy and delight to watch the narrow boats being drawn by the horses along the canal beyond our backyard wall. The lounge, whose fireplace took two buckets of coal to fill, must have been full of boatmen exchanging gossip well into the night. In my time oil was delivered by barge to the Shell-Mex complex near the 'New Inns', the end of a journey taking three or four weeks."

Joan Highfield

Charlie and Hester Davies were the last people to occupy the cottage next to the engine house. Charlie worked for BCN and was in charge of maintenance on the locks, keeping then oiled and repaired. He also worked the ice boat in winter. They left shortly after WW2. (Pictures: Dorothy Davies collection)

The canal followed the course of the original Titford Feeder channel from the top of the locks to Titford Pool. A new cut was made from the pool to the coal wharves near Whiteheath, the 'Portway Branch'. In 1858 the 'Causeway Green Branch' was opened from Jarvis bridge to the coal mines and brick works at the Ashes and Cakemore. Several mines and brick works, including Bell End, Rowley Hall and Ramrod Hall, were linked to the wharves by tramways and inclines, and others were close enough for direct access. These wharves were very busy exporting coal up to the 1920s, and bricks until later. They were later used for bringing coal into the industries of the area.

The Titford Feeder was widened from the top of the locks to Rood End Road. This later provided access to the canals for British Industrial Plastics and Tube Investments, and was one of the last stretches of narrow canal to be built in England.

Working the barges

Most of the trade plied along the Birmingham Canal through Oldbury, and it is here that many of the Langley families found employment. The men were often gone for days taking cargoes to distant parts of the country, so naturally, when opportunities arose, whole families would live in the small, carefully organised cabins of the narrow boats.

The trade on the Titford canal, a dead end, was always less than that on the main BCN canals. Nevertheless, a steady stream of boats could be seen carrying coal and ironstone from the mines, bricks and tiles, grain to the Maltings, billets, forgings, and, in later years, oil to the Shell terminal in Station Road. When the mines had been exhausted, coal was brought into Langley for sale

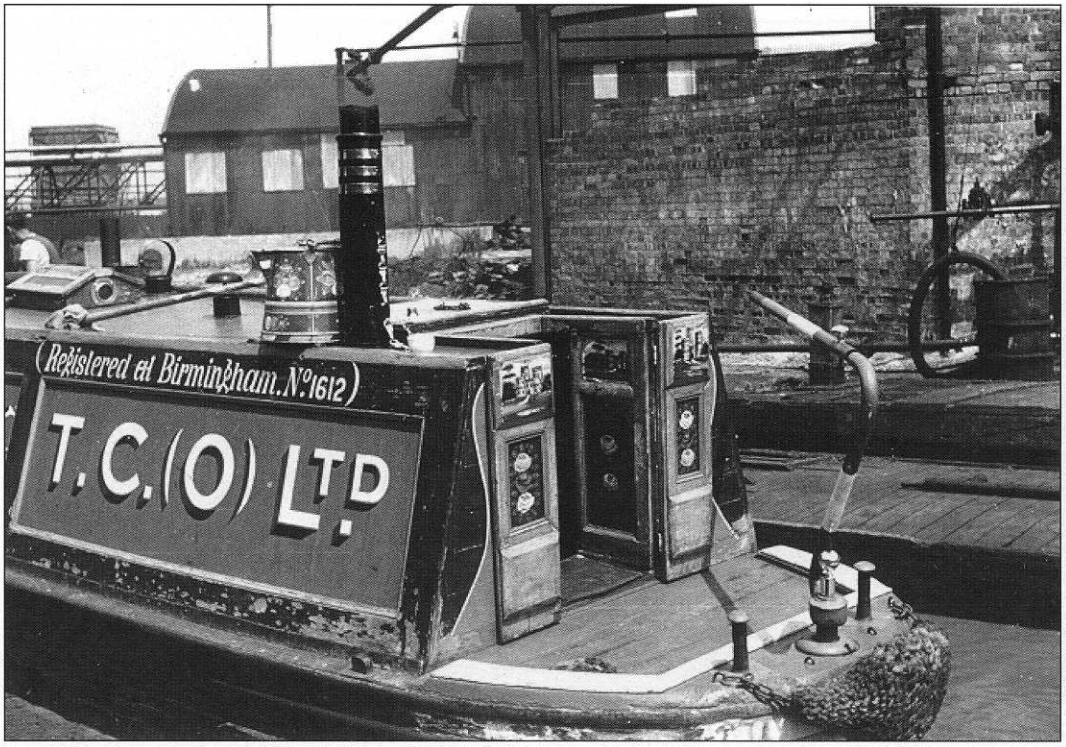
The boatman's cabin

In the 19th century the boatman's cabin was home to him and his family. Built into an area about 8 ft long, 6 ft wide and 5 ft high were the 'pot-belly' stove, shelves, cupboards, folding table, drawers, double bed, a second bunk and all the family belongings. Husband, wife and several children would occupy this space, so overcrowding was always a problem. However, conditions were not that different from those endured by many families living in one room on land.

There were no sanitary facilities, so local hedges had to suffice. Drinking water was carried on the roof in gaily painted three-gallon cans. Cooking was largely confined to boiling meals, so the air could get hot and humid. At night, the paraffin lamps would add to the atmosphere. The sliding hatch of the cabin provided ventilation in all but the most inclement weather.

Despite the cramped conditions, the cabins were the wife's pride of place, and would often be adorned with brightly painted plates and linen pictures, showing the needlework skills of the working wives.

James Durrant



A Clayton boat, the 'Spey', at Thomas Clayton's yard. The cabin doors and the container on the roof are painted with the traditional roses and castles decoration. (Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)

Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Ltd

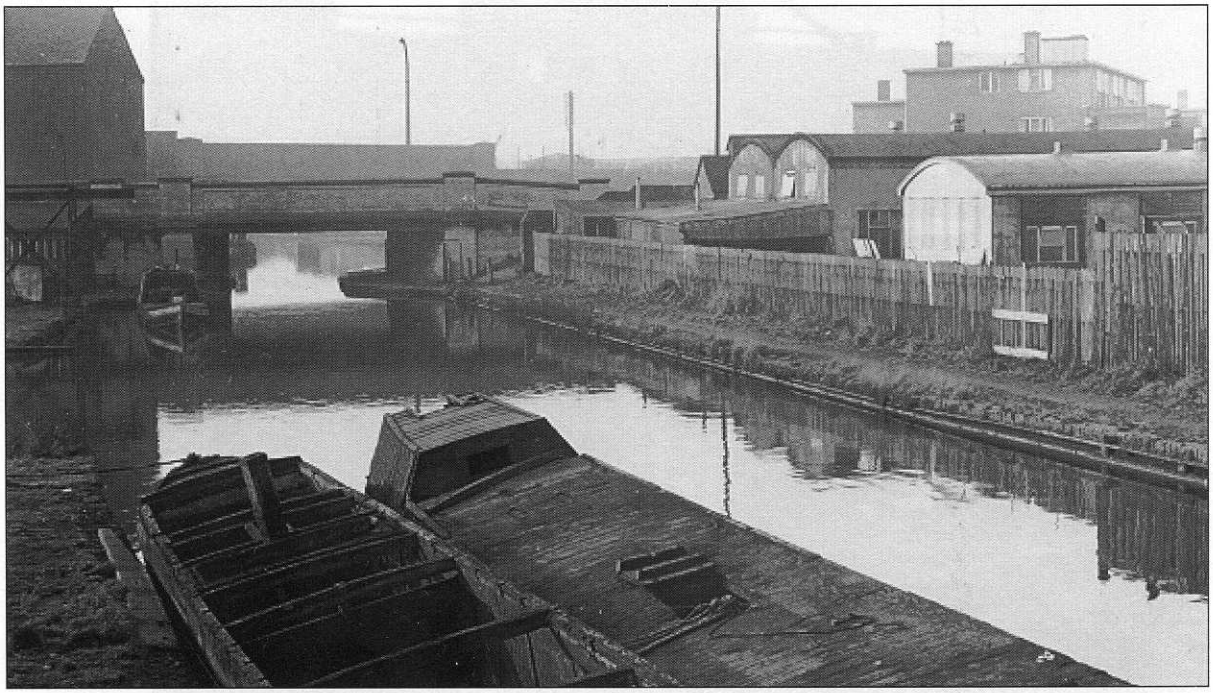
The firm of Thomas Clayton Ltd was set up in 1889, and changed its name to Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Ltd in 1904. It took over the special liquid carrying business established earlier by William Clayton when the remainder of his business was incorporated in Fellows Morton and Clayton Ltd. It needed a new operational base, and chose a wharf at the junction of the Old Main Line and the Titford Canal and adjacent to the Springfield Works of Lewis Demuth and Co. Claytons had an important contract to transport creosote from Springfield to the Great Western Railway sleeper works.

Early boats were obtained from other boat yards, at least ten from G Hale & Son of Oldbury, or second hand from companies such as British Cyanides Ltd and Midland Tar Distillers. As late as 1959 they took over 15 boats from ICI. In 1935 they opened a repair yard at the Oldbury base by Stone Street bridge. This had a ramp for launching boats sideways and two moveable sheds to provide protection from the weather during repairs.

The first boats were all horse-drawn, and sizeable stables were maintained at the wharf, and they employed full-time blacksmiths to keep the horses shod and provide iron work for the boats. Nevertheless, steam driven boats were introduced from the late 1930s: the first motor boat was the 'Soar' bought in May 1937. Many of Clayton's boats were named after rivers.

Two long-term contracts were significant to industry in this area. Both involved the transport of liquids in barges that were, in effect, floating tanks. The first covered the delivery of tar from local gas works to Lewis Demuth & Co tar works for distillation - on the 'black boats'. The second, starting in 1924, involved the transport of fuel oil and other petroleum products from Ellesmere Port on the Mersey to the Shell terminal in Station Road, Langley. The round trip of 180 miles took a week, and by 1938 there were 26 horses used in this trade. It reached its peak in 1946 at nearly 30,000 tons per annum, but fell rapidly over the next decade and finished completely in the mid-sixties.

The company finally ceased operations in 1966 and no trace remains of its wharf, which was swallowed up by the elevated section of the motorway and became the depot for the haulage firm of F & A Nixon - motor transport rubbing salt into the wound!



Stone Street bridge on the Wolverhampton level, not long before the elevated section of the motorway straddled this section of the canal. Clayton's yard lies on the left side of the canal, already looking deserted. *(Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)*

The 'black boats'

My first memory was living at home and my Dad was a canal boatman. He used to work on Clayton's 'black boats' that went to Windsor Street Gas Works and collect the gas oil and bring it back to the Midland Tar. The Midland Tar would distil it into their products. They were called 'black boats' because of the black tar.

When I went out with my father, it was called 'hob-knobbing' and that meant you were helping a canal man without pay, apart from a small backhander. Dad would come in and say "Windsor Street Gas Works in the morning". I said "OK Dad! What time are you starting?" "5 o'clock!"

The first job was to get the horse fed, watered and harnessed. And then his mate would go down to the boat and get the fire going in the boat. When the horse had had his feed and drink, off we would go. We used to take a 'chuff basket'. 'Chuff' in the Black Country is food. If you were going out for the day you needed breakfast and dinner, so mother would put bacon, eggs and maybe some meat that we would cook on the boat. And a loaf of bread and a lump of butter. Maybe a bottle of tea, or we would make our own tea if we had a boat where we could boil a kettle. We'd cook our breakfast and eat it as we were going along.

Black boats have become white boats! The canals regularly froze over and needed ice-breaker boats to get the goods moving. Some of the black boats have been trapped below the 'Crow' locks as they wait by the entrance to the tar works arm which branches off to the right. *(Picture: MTD Magazine)*

We used to go through Smethwick and the three locks there. When we got through the locks we would go towards Birmingham, down the thirteen locks. After we got through the thirteen locks, there were eleven locks. So far down the eleven locks there was a side turning to Windsor Street Gas Works in Birmingham. You would tie the horse up, put a feed on him, let the boat go in and the process workers at the gas works would load the boat for you, and you would come back. We used to get back into Oldbury around half past three or four o'clock.

Frank Hadley

through wharves such as Slade's by Uncle Ben's Bridge.

Oldbury was the home of several canal carriers when trade was at its height. One of the most familiar in Langley was Thomas Clayton Ltd., who had a base at the junction of the Titford Canal and the Old Main Line. He was one of the last carriers on the BCN, closing in 1966, and specialised in carrying industrial liquid cargoes. Two major contracts were conveyance of tar to Midland Tar Distillers, the last load being delivered by the narrow boat 'Stour' in 1966, and of oil from Ellesmere Port to the Shell-Mex terminal at Langley Green.

The canals provided much employment for the people of the area, although the work was generally long, hard, and not well paid. Carriers always sought return cargoes to keep profits high, but generally the bargees were not paid for returning empty narrow boats. Boys were taken on as boat lads at minimal wages, only to be replaced as they got older: they often stayed on the canals, getting work in the boatyards or on the canal wharves. Whole families were involved in the work on the boats, and conditions were cramped in the very small cabins.

Working and building barges for Chance and Hunt

Tom Gough was the eldest of fourteen children, born close to the canal in Lodge Street. In his nineties he recalled the early years of his life when he worked on the boats for Chance & Hunt, and later went on to build and repair them.

"My father was a bargee, and my grandparents lived on a barge. When his mother died, my father ran away from home and went to live on a barge in Oldbury. He met my mother who lived in Lodge Street, and after they were married they lived there. That's where I was born. I went to the Church of England school in Flash Road, but something happened and I ended up throwing the ink pot at the headmaster. He threw me out and I had to go all the way to Rounds Green, a mile walk along the canal and across the pit fields. The canals were full of barges and the roads full of horses and carts.

" We all had to go to the Sunday School. Chance & Hunt had their own Sunday School. We used to have Sunday School trips from Oldbury to Cadbury's by horse drawn barge. The boat would be full of youngsters and their parents, and we used to go into the field there and play all kinds of games.

"I went on the barges every day of my holidays, 'hobbing' we called it. A 'hobber' was a fellow on the boat just helping out. I used to go with a fellow named Joe Windmill and his father. They lived in Engine Street, and I used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and run up Tat Bank Road. We would get the horse and the boat and go to the 'Stew Pony' [near Kinver] carrying carboys of acid. We stopped at the 'Stew Pony' in a big hovel where the boatmen used to sleep because they hadn't got proper cabins. You'd sleep on a bag full of corn for the horse. Next day we set off back again, but didn't bring a load back.

"My father got promoted from bargee to being in charge of all the barges at Chance & Hunt. We moved into Tat Bank Road. It was a good move because we went into a better house. I was fourteen when I left school. On my first job I was to go out on Sunday night at 10 o'clock through to Cannock with four empty boats and bring four loaded boats back. There was one motor boat, the 'Hector' or the 'Stentor', and four butties [open boats without engines]. The butties were tied stem to stern with one man at the back to steer. We would come back to Bloxwich, sleep in the hovel there and arrive back next afternoon. All our boats were open without cabins.

"At Cannock beside the colliery, the trucks would tip the coal into the boats. The boats were tied together with a rope 2fi inches thick, plaited together. We called it 'snobber'. From the stern of the motor boat to the stem of the first butty would be about 20 yards. It had to be a long way so the wash of the propellor was spread out and wouldn't interfere with the boat. The butties would be about 5 to 10 feet from each other. Each butty carried about 20 tons, but the motor boat didn't carry anything. When we got back to Chance & Hunt, two or three men would get into the boat and throw the coal out into 'dobbins'. Then the horse would pull it up to the furnace.

"Chance & Hunt must have had over 100 boats. Some had a big cylindrical tank in them which carried sulphuric acid. Muriatic acid was carried in carboys, glass bottles in a sheath of straw and a metal case. Chance & Hunt was at the bottom of 'the arm' as we called it. Some boats used to bring gas water from the gas works to make ammonia.

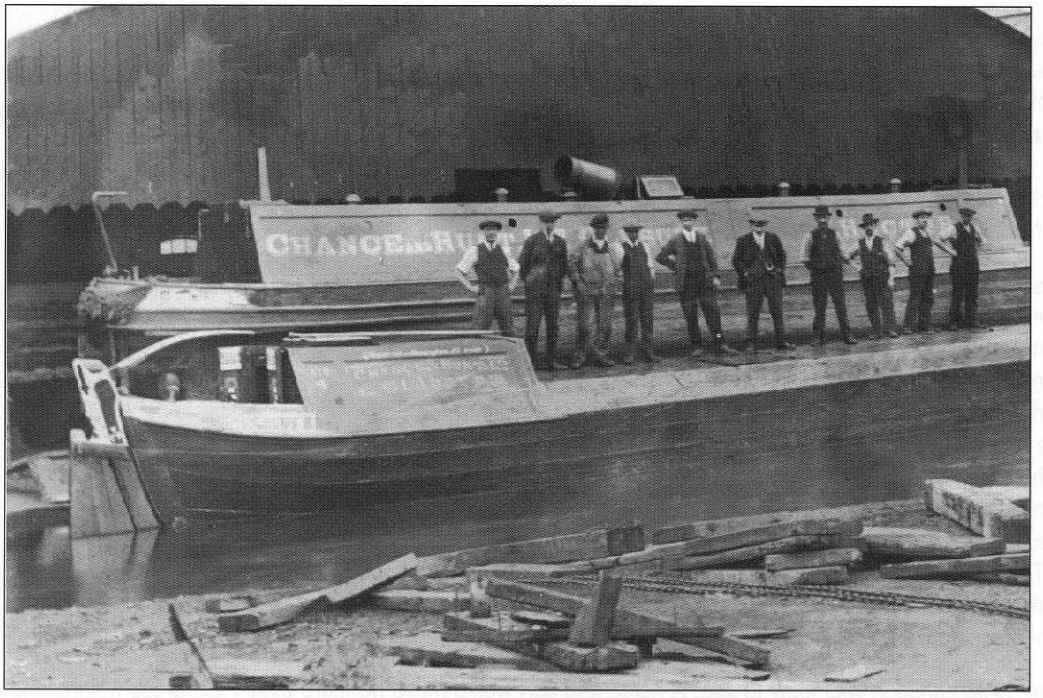
"When I was 16 I had to come off the barges because they didn't want to increase my wages. I was getting about 7/6 [38p]. So they took on another lad, and I went on the 'bonk', as we called it. I went off the canals and was working on the banks at the side of the canal, building barges in the boat dock.

"There were 14 men working in two sheds that held four boats being built on stallages. A frame held the bottom of the boat. The bottom was made out of elm or spruce, about 7 foot long, 11 inches wide and 3 inches thick. The planks were cut out of 2 inch oak, probably 20 inches wide, with a hand saw. These were put in a tank of water heated by steam. After two hours they were hot enough to bend, and six of us would run with them and clamp them to the boat and fix the 'knees', oak pieces shaped like a leg. For coal boats with a dry cargo, we would use pitch pine instead of oak. The planks were bolted with 10 inch bolts. It would take about a fortnight to build a barge with six men on it, and reinforcements when they were steaming. Some of the boats had a cabin on them and some had a deck, especially those carrying fluids.

"I worked on the 'bonk' for thirty years until the canals closed. In the war it was a 'reserved' occupation. Although we were told we might be transferred to the dockyards, we never were."

Tom Gough

'Hector' at work and at play

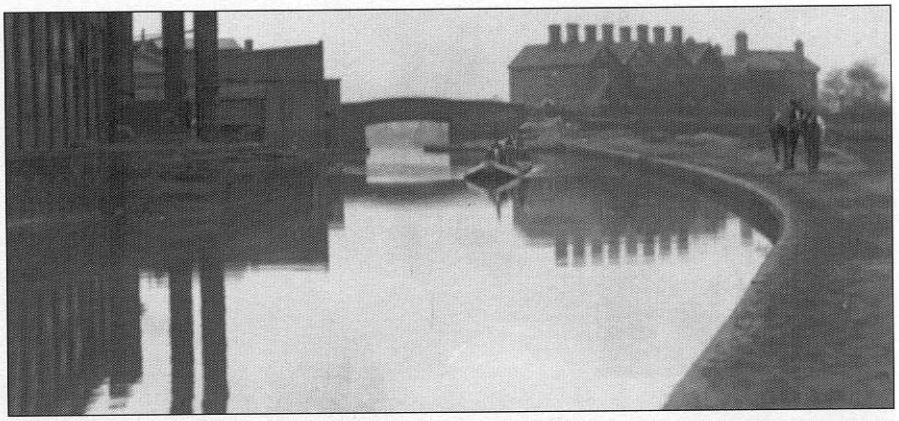


Chance & Hunt's motor boat 'Hector' and a second boat at work in the factory. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

'Hector' at play, carrying a party on a works outing at Titford Pool. Hector was the first motor boat in the area, and was driven by Frank Hadley's 'grandad Atkins'. (Picture: Frank Hadley collection)

A bit about boat 'osses

For over 150 years the raw materials and products of the Industrial Revolution were hauled the length and breadth of the country by canal. It was the humble boat 'oss that did the hauling.



A boat 'oss drags a boat along the industrial canal: in this case, the Wolverhampton level *(Picture: Frank Wakeman)*

There is a popular image that boat horses were mighty Shires, complete with polished harness and burnished brasses. Nothing could be further from the truth. The typical draught horse on the canals was smallish. 15fi hands at the shoulder was the typical height, that is about 5 feet. All that the boatmen looked for was a horse which could 'step out well'. The ideal horse was a Welsh Cob gelding, much favoured by the long distance hauliers. Other boatmen had to select from a motley equine bunch which could include farm horses, retired race-horses, 'osses taken out of shafts of a milk float, and even donkeys and jack-asses were used.

The advantage of canal transport was easy to see. A horse and cart would move no more than 1 ton gross weight, and that was a struggle for the beast, particularly uphill. A boat horse could pull 25 tons, almost effortless work. And there were no hills!

The horse pulled by means of a collar harness to which a chain was attached. The chain connected to a wooden arm, behind the rear legs of the horse, called the 'swingle tree'. The swingle tree was, in turn, connected by a long length of rope to the stem of the narrow boat. Once the boat was moving the going was easy. Wooden balls, fashioned from *lignum vitae*, were threaded like beads along the chain link to stop the chain rubbing the flanks of the horse.

Steady progress would be made, the 25 tons moving at a gentle walking pace. There were plenty of opportunities for a

A classic picture of one of the best known local horses, 'Mac' with Caggy Stevens. This picture was taken at the end of the coal boat era when Caggy and Mac were both retiring. Mac was one of the 'gentle giants' who had given a lifetime of service. *(Picture: courtesy of Birmingham Post and Mail)*

rest. Locks had to be negotiated. The boatman had to stop for his 'snap and a cup of tay'. A typical working day for a boat 'oss was 6.00am to 5.00pm. At the end of the day's work the horse would be stabled, fed and watered. The boatman would make his way to the 'hovel' to brew up and cook his supper.

Sometimes the boatman would sleep on board. The most comfortable bed was on the bags of corn-fodder always carried to feed the horse. In summertime the horse would sleep under the hedge near to the boat. They never needed a tether.

On very rare occasions a horse might fall into the canal. The cry would go up,"'oss in the cut!". All hands would muster to encourage the horse to swim to a shallow section. Other times, they had to float the poor creature out by placing stacks of canal stop boards under his belly.

The end of 'Chocolate'

Alfred Matty had a horse named 'Chocolate'. My dad came in one day and said "Frank, Chocolate's dead!

"He was coming over the side bridge from the ICI when he slipped and went down. We tried to get him up, but he wouldn't get up at all. He'd fallen and broken his leg. I got in touch with the gaffer. Alfred Matty came down and brought a bottle of brandy. I said 'It's saftness giving him that, you may as well give it me'. Matty gave the horse the brandy, but it didn't get up. He sent for the vet and the vet shot him.

"They rolled him into the canal, put a rope round his neck, dragged him from the ICI to Whimsey Bridge and winched him out under Whimsey Bridge."

That poor horse was shot, drowned and hung!

Frank Hadley

For the cost of three good meals of fodder corn each day and plenty of fresh water, the boat horse pulled the products of industry the length of the land, to the great ports of England. They enabled products to be shipped to the continent beyond.

At first sight it might seem like a very pleasant life for the canal boatman. You were your own boss; the freedom of miles and miles of canals, often passing through the rural heart of England, lay before you. Idyllic? It certainly wasn't so in winter-time.

Tom Gough recalled the days of the canal ice-breakers: "They were big heavy boats, clad in steel with a rounded hull, different from the usual flat sided narrow boats. They had two stump-like masts, with a rope strung out between them. Six or seven men would hang onto the rope and rock the boat from side to side. Up to six horses would haul the boat through the frozen water. Sometimes it looked like they would capsize the boat, but they never did!" In this way the navigation would be kept open during all but the coldest days of winter.

Six horses to a boat was only seen on the ice-breakers. The usual arrangement was one horse walked along the tow-path by a boat man, with a second boatman on the rudder to steer the craft. Sometimes a horse could be trained to walk on its own. This was called 'backering'. A canal 'oss that was good at backering was a real treasure to a boatman. It saved him many many miles of Shanks Pony!

Strong head winds made progress more difficult for the boat horses. Worse still was a strong cross wind with an empty boat. Man and horse would struggle to keep the barge moving, in some sort of straight line. No doubt a strong fending-off pole and a few strong words kept both 'oss and boat on course! The same swearing would often be heard at locks and narrow bridge holes. Often a queue of boats would be formed to pass through the locks. The boatman had an agreed delivery time and it wasn't rare for shirt sleeves to be rolled up and punches exchanged to decide who would go through first! Some barges, known as 'fly-boats', had a special licence that allowed them to the head of the queue at a flight of locks. They were the 'express trains' of the canal and usually belonged to railway companies.

So life could be hard for the boatman, but not that hard - particularly if you had an 'oss good at backering. Then you could sit on the stem quarters of the boat, a cup of 'tay in yer ond' and watch rural England slipping quietly by. Idyllic!

Tom Tomlinson

'Gentle giants'

I remember the huge horses that towed the narrow boats along with deliveries of coal and oil to the industries on the canal routes. When we took our short cut along the towpath we might encounter one of these horses, and we would nervously dodge under the tow rope to pass by. Mainly they were gentle giants as they cropped the grass along the edge of the path.

Pat Rodwell.

Alfred Matty boats - tipping the waste

Dad's next job was working for Alfred Matty. Alfred Matty used to dredge the canal arms out for Albright & Wilson's. Sometimes I would come home at dinner time and Jack Matty would be there, and he'd say "Frank, will you go and work with your Dad this afternoon?" I'd say "That all right Mum?" "Yes" I'd go and get changed, get into Jack Matty's car, be taken down Tat Bank Road, turn into the Oxford, drive through Albright & Wilson's. He'd drop me by the boat and say "OK, start to work".

Me Dad used to be a canal boatman and a dredger man. He'd load the boats up with sludge and take it to the Rattlechains tip, and they used to have to wheel it out with a barrow to throw it down the tip. And they had to load the barrow with scoops to get to the bottom of the boat. They wheeled it across this plank and the plank would be bouncing up and down as they went across. It was quite an achievement to do. That was calcium phosphate residue.

The next thing I remember is the Gower tip. They used to load it into tubs - a half a ton, maybe a ton. A little pony pulled it up the lines to the top of the tip. When he got so far up the lines he would step out and the tub would roll past him. I had to take the hook off him so that the truck wouldn't drag the pony. Then I pulled a switch over to tip the tub over, and the pony would turn round. I'd hook him back on and say "Go on, Billy", and he'd go on his own. So far down, we'd take the hook off again and let the truck run down and there'd be another one waiting there to go back up. There were about four tubs, and we used to keep on doing that 'til the tender boat was empty.

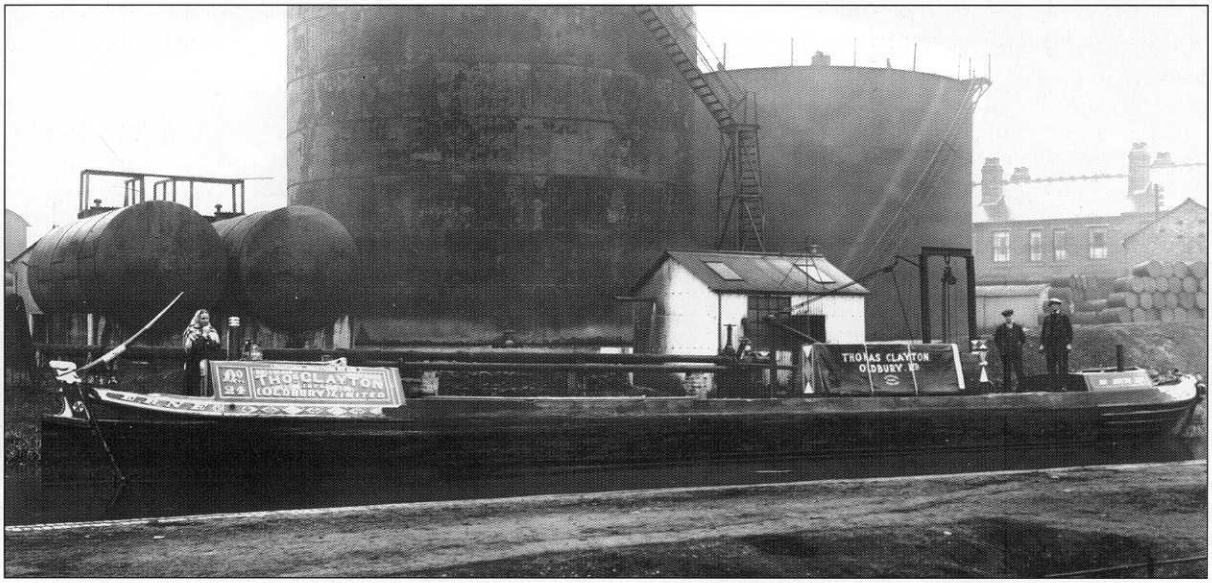
We used to transfer the calcium phosphate residue into the tubs with a scoop. And then they had a brainy idea. Somebody put a hand pump in - a slurry pump with a great big ball inside it. We used to pump it out then. Then they finished up with an electric pump.

Frank Hadley

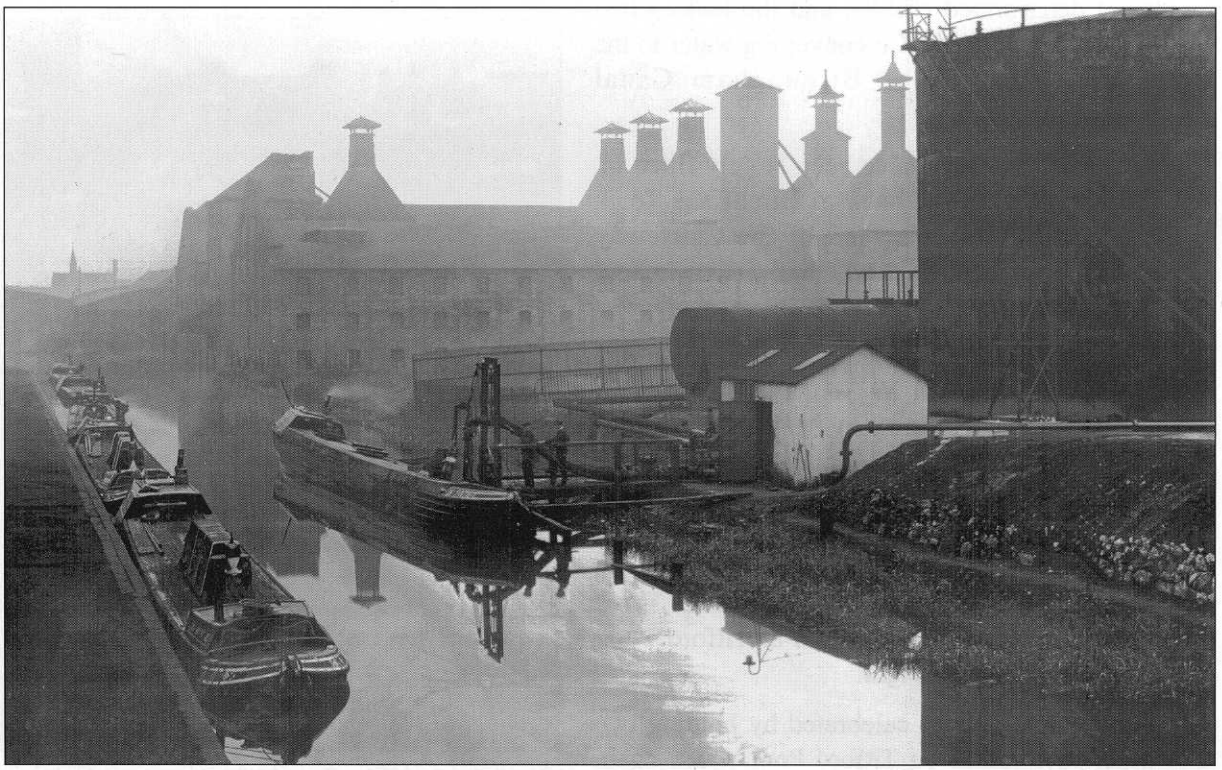
Alan 'Caggy' Stevens with one of his coal boats near Whimsy Bridge, Oldbury. He was one of the last characters of the local canal scene and one of the last to operate the horse-drawn coal boats. An Alfred Matty boat is passing with a load of waste from Albright & Wilson, but the picture was taken well after WW2, and too late for it to be Frank Hadley's father! *(Picture: Courtesy of Birmingham Post & Mail)*

The petroleum boats

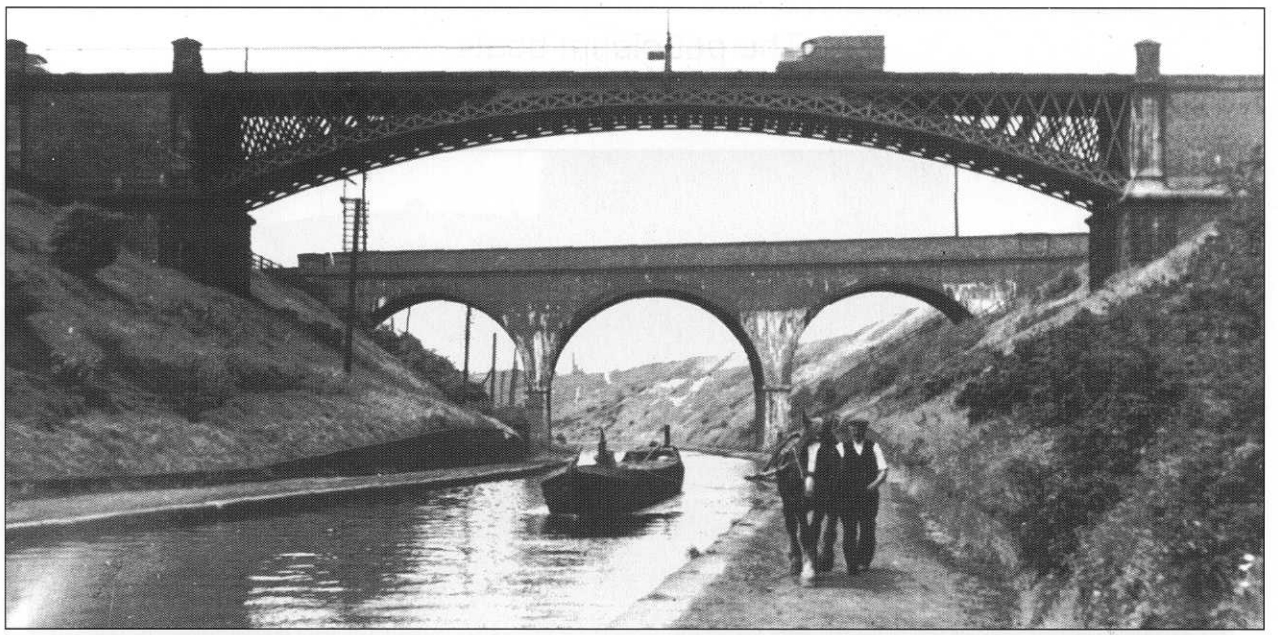
These were family boats doing the week-long run to the Mersey and back to serve the Shell depot at Langley Green.



The 'Erne' moored at the Shell terminal wharf in Station Road. The lady at the stern has the traditional bargewoman's shawl. *(Picture: F R Logan, permission of Tony Short Associates)*



Clayton's boats unloading petroleum products at the pipeline jetty of the Shell terminal at Langley Green. Langley Maltings are in the background and St John's Church, Tat Bank, on the horizon. *(Picture: F R Logan, permission of Tony Short Associates)*



Out on the big canal, going to fetch the tar. Harry Powell, one on Thomas Clayton's employees, leads an empty black boat under Galton bridge in the thirties on the way to collect a load of tar from Birmingham. (Picture: Joan Smith collection)

Decline and renewal

With the decline in the canal trade, the use of the Titford Canal by industry ceased altogether. The canal deteriorated rapidly, and the locks silted up. Only its function in conveying water to the main canals of the Birmingham Canal Navigation saved it.

The canal branches have been largely filled in, the Portway branch back to Birchfield Road, and, in 1971, the far end of the Causeway Green branch after a boy had fallen in and drowned in it.

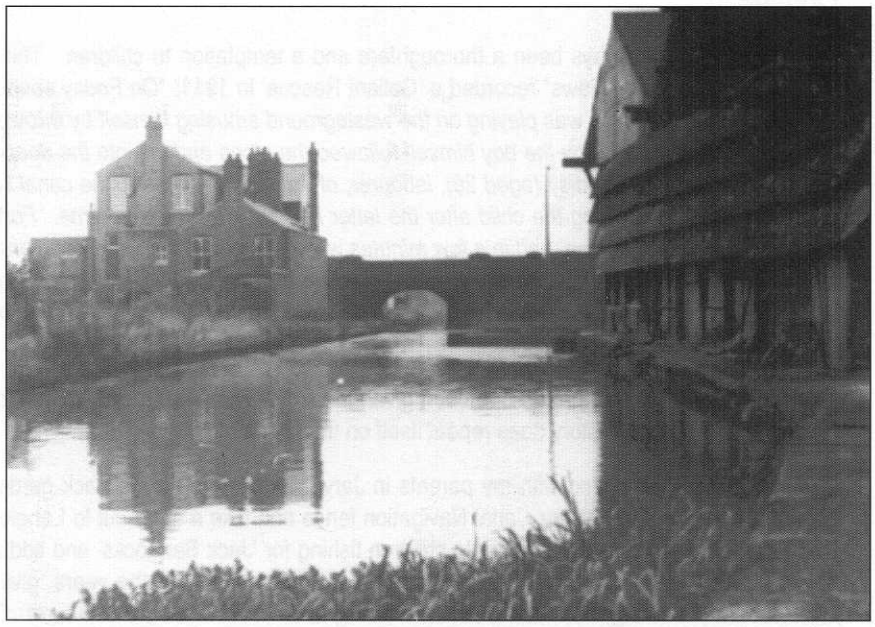
Within a decade of industrial use finishing, the canal was overgrown and impassable for much of its length. In January 1973 major work started on clearing the silt from Crow Locks and repairing them. With much voluntary help Warley Borough Council and British Waterways were able to renovate the canal and made it navigable again to Titford Pool. There were even plans for a marina at Titford Pool, but these came to nought.

The renovation was celebrated by holding two waterways rallies on Titford Pool which again packed the canal with boats, albeit not working ones.

Dereliction in 1971. Crow Locks overgrown, broken and unuseable, looking up the flight towards the engine house which is visible on the horizon (Picture: Shirley Rippin)

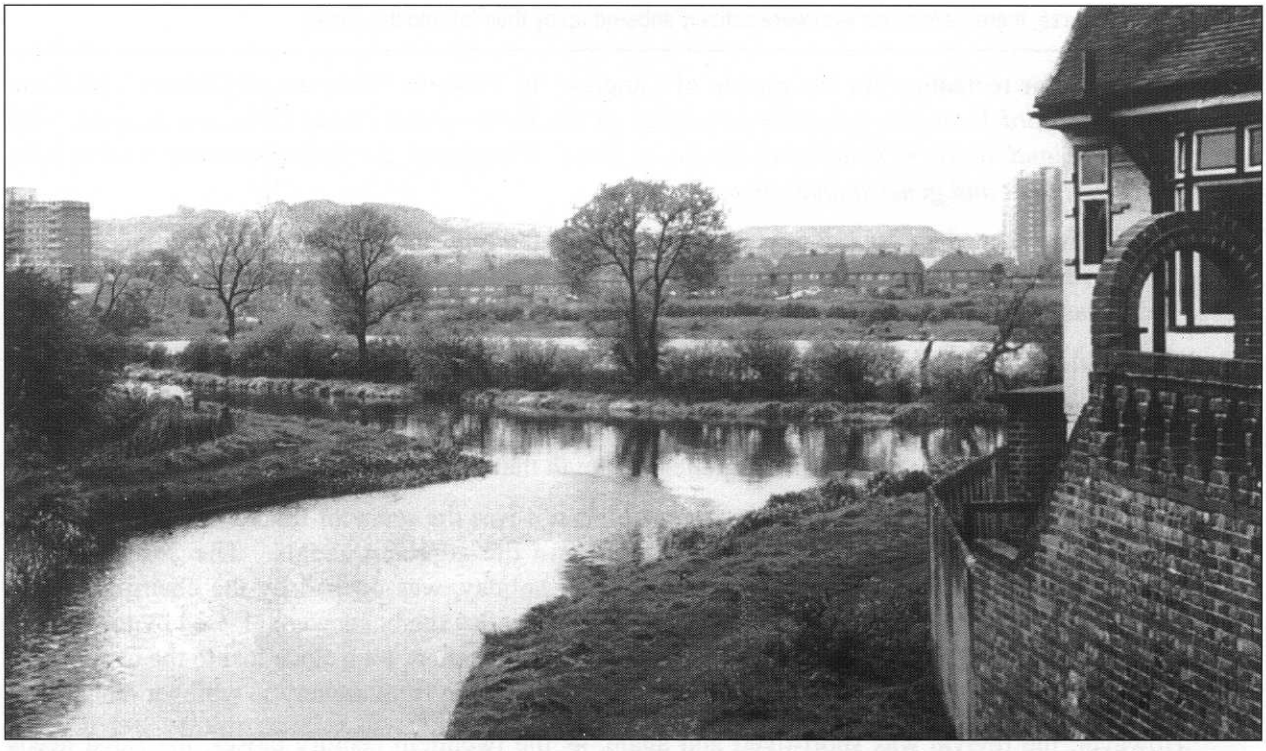
Refreshment and recreation

As with all transport routes, inns and public houses grew up along the canal side. The main ones on the Titford Canal were the 'Navigation' at Engine Street, the 'New Inns' at the junction of Mill Lane and Station Road, the 'New Navigation' in Titford Road, and the 'Boat Inn' on the Portway Branch at Birchfield Lane. These were accessible by road and canal, and popular with boatmen and locals alike.



The 'New Inns' next to Station Road bridge seen from the dock-side of Langley Forge soon after the firm closed. The inn has its own brewery, and has now been renamed by Holts the 'Finings and Firkin': such is progress! (Picture: Shirley Rippin)

Titford Pool itself always provided an



The canal leading to Titford Pool from Jarvis bridge which carries the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Road over the canal. This picture, probably from the late 1950s, shows the pool before the construction of the motorway, but after the building of flats at Whiteheath (left) and Lion Farm (right). The Causeway Green Arm diverts to the left and the Portway Arm to the right. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

Fallings in

The towpaths have always been a thoroughfare and a temptation to children. This led to rescues, and, sometimes, to fatalities. The "Weekly News" recorded a 'Gallant Rescue' in 1911: *"On Friday sennight a boy named John Horton (aged 7) of Lock Side, Tat Bank was playing on the wasteground amusing himself by throwing stones into the canal. In throwing with a little too much energy the boy himself followed the stone and fell into the deep water near the mouth of the lock. A young man Frederick Bradley (aged 26), labourer, of Tat Bank, rushed to the canal side, threw off his coat and jumped in and succeeded in rescuing the child after the latter had sunk for the third time. Fortunately, the youngster seemed little the worse for the immersion, and in a few minutes was quite conscious, and was carried home to his father. Bradley, seeing the child was being looked after, quietly picked up his coat and walked home, without a word. His mates expressed some anxiety about him as he had no other clothes than those he wore, which had been damaged by his plunge into the canal."*

The paper later reported that he had been given the Royal Humane Society commendation, but is silent on the matter of his clothing. However, history does repeat itself on the towpath:

"From 1939 to 1952 I lived with my parents in Jarvis Crescent, and the back garden bordered the canal towpath. We used to climb over the two-bar Canal Navigation fence and take a short cut to Langley High Street or the Wolverhampton Road. The canal was like a magnet to children fishing for 'Jack Bannocks' and tiddlers, and quite few mishaps occurred when the kiddies got too adventurous. We rescued a number over the years, giving them a hot bath and drying their clothes before sending them home with a warning to be more cautious in future! One day a tall man about 6' 3" rode along the towpath on an old-fashioned 'sit up and beg' bicycle. His front wheel struck a pot-hole, and he sailed over the handle bars into the murky canal. He managed to scramble out, but what a job we had trying to kit him out with dry clothes - my dad was only 5' 3", so his trousers were a very comical fit on this giant of a man. However, he was grateful for the help." - *Pat Rodwell*

And then, of course, there were those who were actually sobered up by their fall into the canal!

open area for recreation for the people of Langley. In 1900, in 'Picturesque Oldbury', McKean wrote: *"Titford Pool is a reservoir belonging to the Birmingham Canal Company, now let, with adjoining land, to Mr W Comley, of the Royal Hotel, Whiteheath, for fishing, boating, and at holiday times, fetes and general amusement".*

Entertainments at the pool continued on and off for many years, there being a pavilion and side shows there in the thirties, with talent competitions that were very popular amongst the youngsters. There was even a plan for motor boat racing but this never caught on.

The rural setting of the pool was gradually lost as the mines closed, and housing developments climbed further and further up the Rowley Hills. The skyline was altered by the flats of the Lion Farm Estate. The scene was irreversibly changed by the arrival of the M5 motorway crossing Titford Pool on piers. At least that dispelled the myth that Titford Pool was bottomless!

In 1978 and 1982, its recreational use returned when it was the scene of Inland Waterways rallies, attracting over two hundred boats to the pool and the adjacent canals. The 29th National Waterways Rally, held over the 1982 August bank holiday, was opened by the chairman of the British Waterways Board, Sir Frank Price, and on the Sunday the boats were blessed by the Bishop of Birmingham. Old skills of fender making and boat decoration, long since lost to the canal, were again evident, and there were bands and entertainment ranging from archery to whippet racing.

However, the revival was short-lived and again, as the twentieth century closes, the canal needs much work to develop and preserve it. Combeswood Canal Trust have initiated the 'Titford Project' in the hope that its preservation will come about. We must protect one of the prettiest spots in the Midlands!

Titford Pool - 'one of the prettiest spots in the Midlands'

That is how it was described in Mr Comley's advert in 1911!

FISHING. FISHING. FISHING.

TITFORD POOL,

LANGLEY, NEAR BIRMINGHAM,

(15 minutes' walk from Langley Green, G.W.R.)

IS NOW OPEN FOR FISHING

In addition to the facilities afforded to Fishermen, this is now one of the prettiest spots in the Midlands, and is much visited by Pleasure Parties, School Treats, &c.

TERMS.—Angling, 1s. per day, 6d. per half day (from 1 p.m.) Pike, 2s. per day, 1s. per half-day. Admission to Grounds, 2d., including Bowling Green, 3d. Tickets to be obtained at the Pool only.

Refreshments supplied and Parties catered for on due notice being given.

Season Tickets for Promenading and Fishing on special terms.

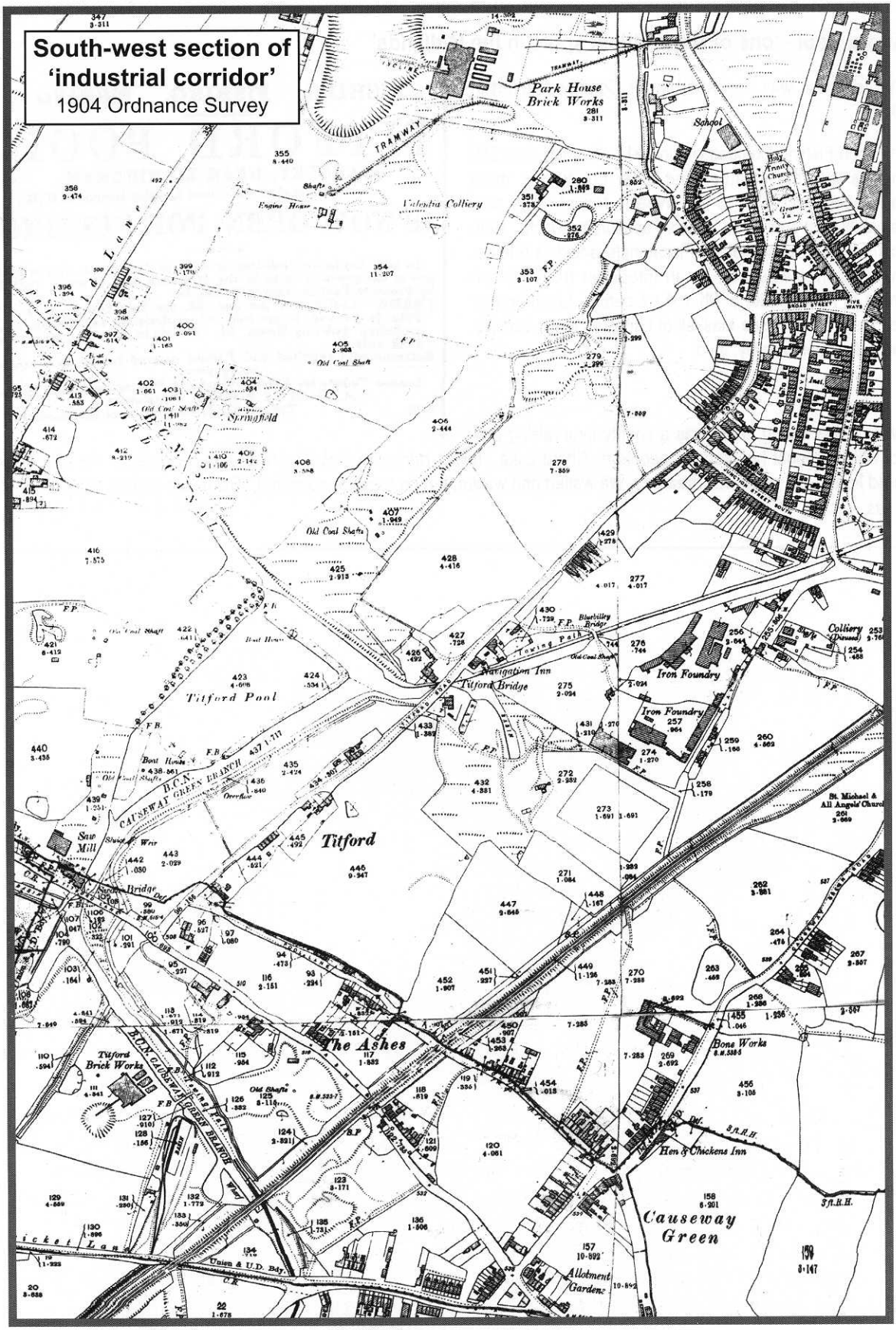
M. COMLEY & SONS, Proprietors,

3195 Titford Road, Langley, near Birmingham.

The first prize was won by an interloper from Winson Green, J Parker, with a 1lb 10fi oz perch. Local honour was restored by Jesse Maskell of Langley Green, second, and J Upton of Langley, third.

An 'Open Fishing Competition' in 1911 attracted over 250 anglers with the weather and other conditions 'most favourable', according to the "Weekly News". The pool was at its best and it was a record season for roach. Sam Smith, a member of Oldbury Piscatorials, acted as referee.

"When I was young, there was a charity fund-raising project which brought hundreds of people to Titford Lake. It was rumoured that a monster had been seen. An expert was called in and the water was 'treated'. We waited and waited, but no monster appeared. But it was a great day's fun!" - *Mr Jones.*

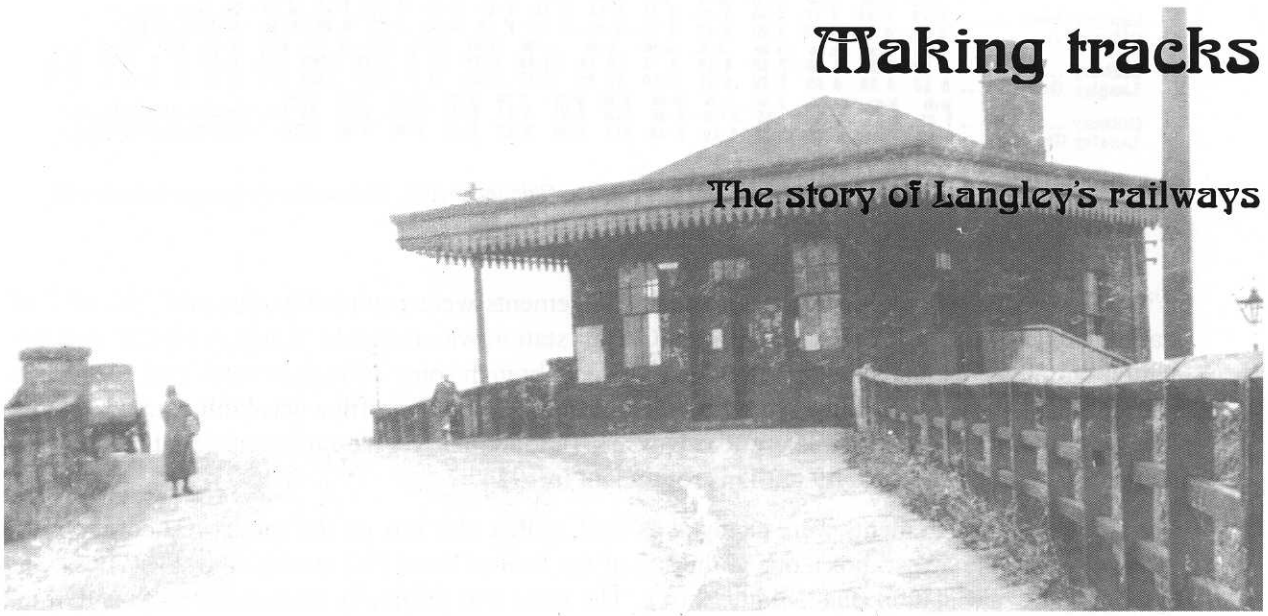


South-west section of 'industrial corridor'
1904 Ordnance Survey

4

Making tracks

The story of Langley's railways



Railways in Langley

Like the first canal nearly a century earlier, the first railway followed the Stour valley and served Oldbury from 1852, but missed Langley. Fifteen years later the Stourbridge Extension Railway was built, running from Smethwick Junction to Stourbridge Junction. On 1 April 1867 the line was opened with not one, but two stations serving the Langley area. These were 'Oldbury and Langley Green' at the level crossings at the junction of Station Road and Crosswells Road, and 'Rood End' on the south side of Rood End Road.

The railway passed through a green landscape with a few houses and the villages of Langley and Langley Green. Only the chemical works of Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson half a mile away suggested the industrial development that was to come.

The Great Western Railway (GWR) bought the line from the Stourbridge Railway Company in 1870.

The Oldbury Branch Railway built an extension from Langley Green station into Oldbury, so that the company could compete for local trade with the established London and North Western Railway which operated 'Oldbury and Bromford Lane' station. The Oldbury Branch was opened in 1885 serving a passenger station in Halesowen Street and a large goods yard in Inkerman Street. The goods yard had canal basins which allowed interchange of materials with Birmingham Canal Navigation traffic. The branch also linked the expanding chemical works between Langley and Oldbury, with sidings and lines into both Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson. The branch was absorbed into the GWR in 1894.

The journey time to Oldbury was 3 minutes. It was operated by a 'Rail Motor Car (one Class only)', known locally as the 'Owdbury Dodger'. The 1911 timetable shows thirty trains ran each way between 5.45 am and 10.00 pm, but none on Sundays!

RAIL MOTOR CAR SERVICE (one Class only) Between LANGLEY GREEN & OLDBURY.

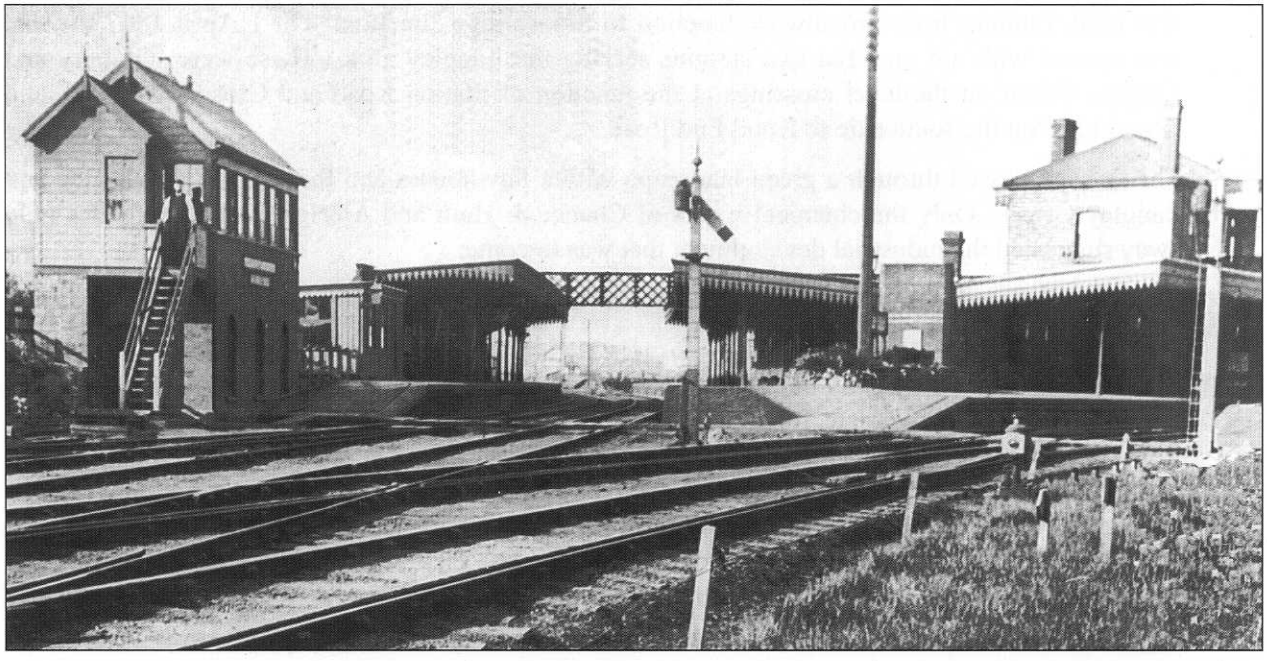
Week Days.	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m
Langley Green	545	6 3	637	7 0	732	838	930	1034	1050	1140	1210	1235	1256	1 17	1G42	1847	5 26	5 55
Oldbury	548	6 6	640	7 3	735	836	933	1037	1053	1143	1213	1238	1259	1 20	1G45	1850	2 29	2 58
	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	pm				
Langley Green	5 22	5 43	6 19	4 48	5 40	6 31	6 56	7 16	7 40	8 32	8 56	9 30	9 45		G—Sats. excepted.			
Oldbury	3 25	3 46	4 22	4 51	5 43	6 34	6 59	7 19	7 43	8 35	8 59	9 33	9 48		S—Sats. only.			
	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	a m	noon	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	
Oldbury	5 52	6 30	6 49	7 20	8 12	9 7	10 26	10 39	1150	12 0	1225	1246	1*5	1 23	2 5	2 42	3 13	
Langley Green	5 55	6 33	6 52	7 22	8 15	9 10	10 29	10 42	1153	12 3	1228	1249	1*7	1 26	2 8	2 45	3 16	
	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m	p m					
Oldbury	3 32	4 10	4 27	5 25	6 9	6 45	710	7 22	8 14	8 40	9 25	9 35	10 7		*Smeth. Jun. 1-11 p.m.			
Langley Green	3 35	4 12	4 30	5 28	6 12	6 48	713	7 25	8 17	8 43	9 28	9 38	1010		†Smeth. Jun. 4-7 p.m.			

Timetable from the "Weekly News", February 1911 for the Oldbury shuttle. This was only four years before the passenger service ceased.

With the opening of this branch, the station arrangements were completely changed. 'Rood End' station was closed. 'Oldbury and Langley Green' station was renamed 'Langley Green' and new station buildings opened at the junction with the new branch some 200 yards north-east of the original station. The new buildings served both lines, and the booking office was built on a new bridge over the Oldbury Branch in Western Road. Mark Tatton took over as station master at the new station and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1924.

The signalling arrangements were changed as well, with a new box on the south-west corner of the level crossing (the 'West' box), one at the site of the former Rood End station (the 'East' box), and another at the new station (the 'Middle' box). The latter was originally sited at the north end of the

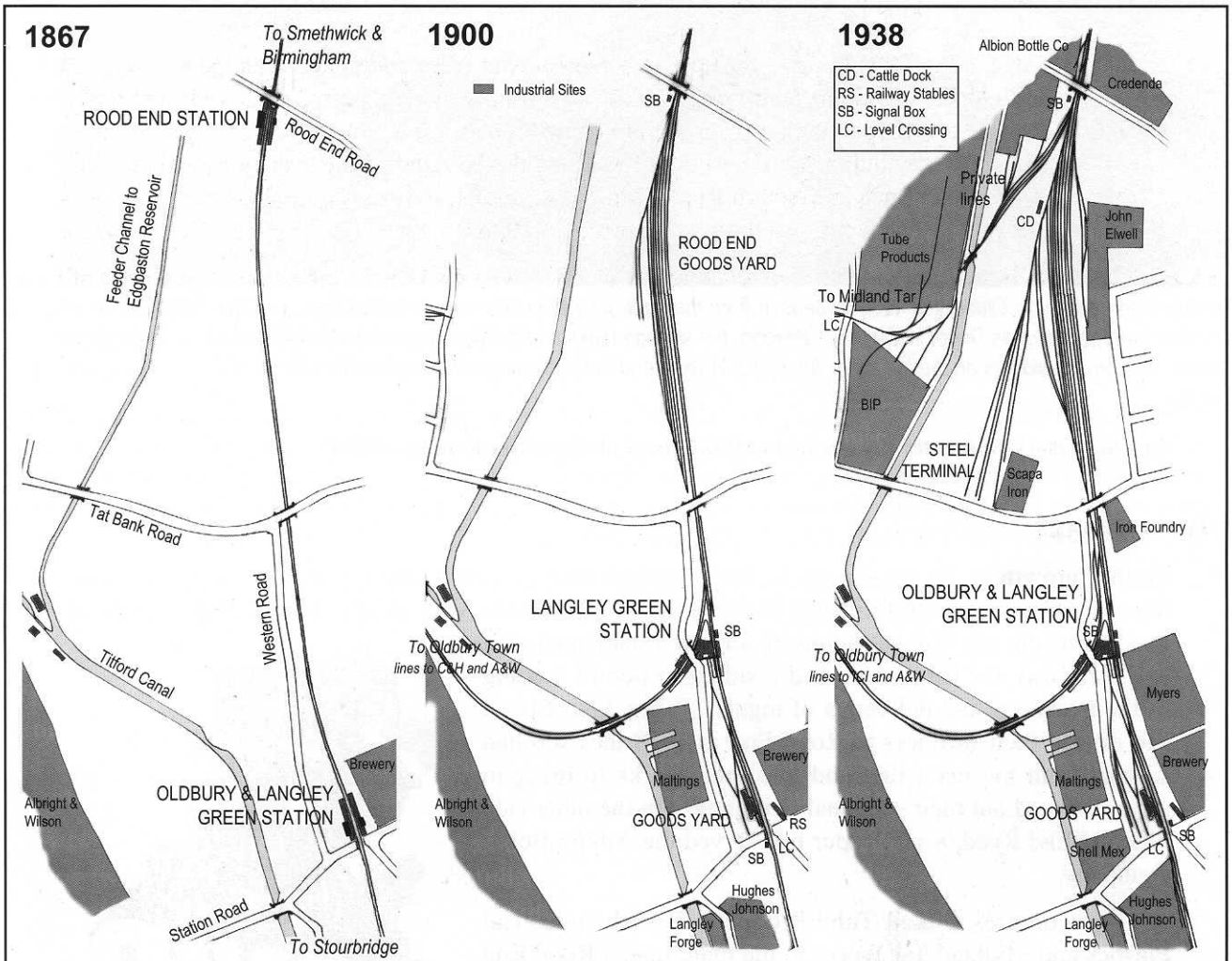
An early photograph of Langley Green station from Western Road. The arrangement of Langley Green station between 1885 and 1904 with the 'Middle' signal box on the Stourbridge platform. In 1904 it was moved to the opposite platform between the junction of the two lines, presumably because it was easier to signal both lines from that position and the view of the main line curve was better. The central signal was also converted to a double. The line to Stourbridge passes under the footbridge and the line to Oldbury Town diverges to the right. GWR canopies grace the booking office on the bridge and the platform awnings.
(Picture: Ken Rock collection)



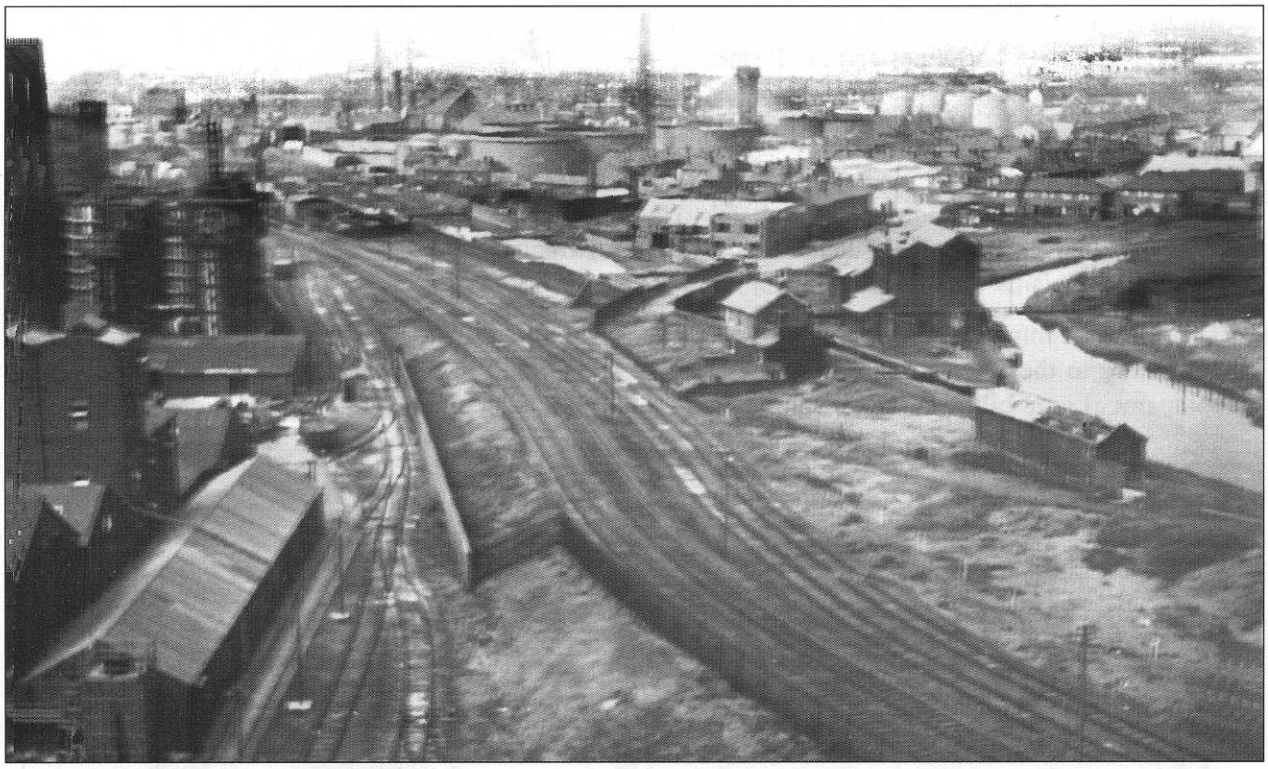
Stourbridge platform, but later replaced by one between the main line and the branch which gave better visibility of both lines and platforms..

By the turn of the century, other industries were springing up along the railway and the adjacent canal. A goods yard was built between the level crossing and the new station, and extensive sidings between Tat Bank Road and Rood End Road. In the early, more rural, years at the start of the century these even included a cattle dock! The facilities served, among others, the brewery and maltings, engineering works such as Langley Forge, Hughes-Johnson and Ham Baker & Co, and the chemical giants Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson.

The railway company used horses to deliver goods from the railway yard locally, and stables were built close to the level crossings. The stables have survived to this day and are used by a metal company. Large billets of steel were handled through the goods yard for Langley Forge, when it



The development of railways in Langley. In 1867 the route was opened with a simple layout of two stations on a through line. The only industry was Albright & Wilson, Chance & Hunt and the recently opened Crosswells Brewery. By 1900 the Oldbury branch line had been opened with connections to the private sidings of Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson (not shown). The station had been moved, the goods yard and Rood End sidings built and more industry had arrived. By 1938 the railway system had reached its zenith with extensive systems of private lines to British Industrial Plastics, Tube Investments, Midland Tar Distillers, Scapa Iron works, John Elwell Ltd, Albion Bottle Co, Shell-Mex and Hughes-Johnson.

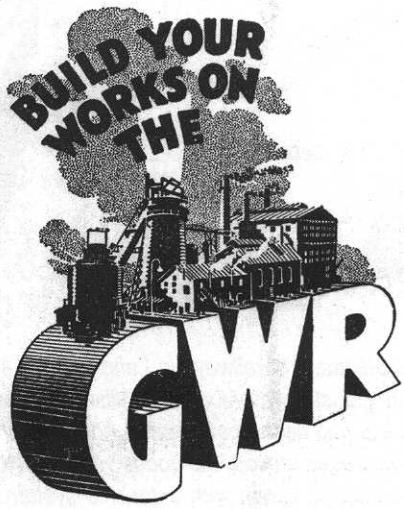


The line from Langley to Oldbury in 1960 sweeps in from the right, past the canal engine house and Jim Crow locks and on to the Inkerman Street Goods Depot in Oldbury. Beyond, the storage tanks and fractionating columns of Midland Tar Distillers are evident. The private sidings on the left serve Albright & Wilson, and further towards Oldbury are the sidings of ICI. *(Picture: John Hodgkins)*

was necessary to muster horses from all the local stations to move the billet.

Private sidings

Further growth in the system up to 1940 resulted from private industrial lines. Companies were urged by Great Western Railways between the wars to 'Build your works on the GWR' and many local firms did so. Hughes-Johnson, already established next to the railway for fifty years, had a siding to permit loading of their castings and deliveries of ingots. When John Elwell Ltd moved their business to Rood End in 1928 they too had sidings from the main line laid into their works to bring in steel and send out their sectional buildings. On the other side of Rood End Road, a small spur line served the Albion Bottle Company.



Advertisement from 1932-3 GWR Timetable

A large complex linked Tube Products, British Industrial Plastics and Midland Tar Works to the main line at Rood End Road. The line to Midland Tar Works crossed Popes Lane and Parsonage Street by ungated level crossings, and there was a small exchange siding between these two roads. Goods were being moved by bright green industrial locomotives into the 1960s, including crude tar into the tar works and creosote from them. To transfer such materials, move-

ment within the BIP grounds was carried out by their drivers who left the waggons in the exchange sidings, and these were picked up by drivers from Midland Tar Distillers.

Within each company there was a maze of tracks serving the various processes, and similar networks were to be found at Albright & Wilson and ICI. The rail systems to BIP and Midland Tar Distillers closed in the early 70s, although a short spur into BIP remained to allow methanol tankers to be unloaded. The last active rail user was Albright & Wilson who were still supplied down the aging Oldbury Branch, long since reduced to a single track. Even this traffic ceased in the mid-1990s and no wheels disturb the weeds along the track now.

A trip working from Bescot in 1984 bringing trichloroethylene from ICI to Albright & Wilson. The line is already looking derelict and down to one track. The four acid towers of Albright & Wilson, a landmark for so long, have now been demolished. (Picture: Ned Williams)

A railhead was built in Tat Bank Road off the Rood End sidings. Mainly, this served Scapa Iron works of Cox and Danks, who dealt in heavy scrap. Many of the salvaged boats from Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands made a last journey to be dismantled here, and right up to the 1970s Cox and Danks had a mountain of scrap next to the railway. The railhead was also used by small businesses: at least one coal merchant, William Cockbill, operated from these sidings, storing and bagging the coal there. The rails were lifted in the 80s to extend Bird's depot and provide a car park for BIP.

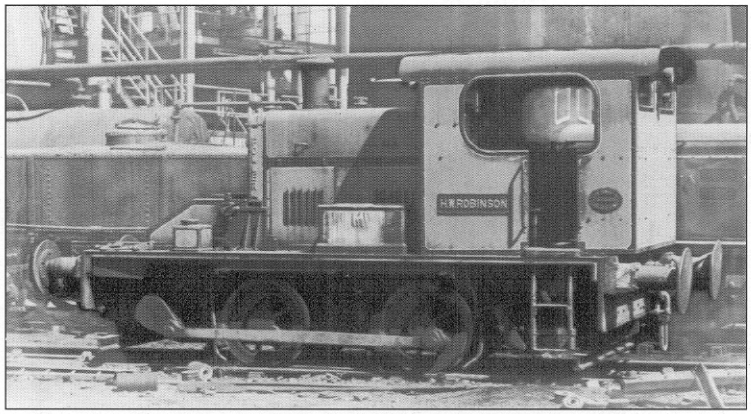
BIP had three engines since 1918, when the connection to the GWR at Rood End was made as part of the potash venture with the government. The last, a 1953 Ruston Hornsby 319290, was sold to the Severn Valley Railway in 1972. In addition to the GWR siding, John Elwell Ltd had a narrow gauge Lister diesel that ran between their stores and works.

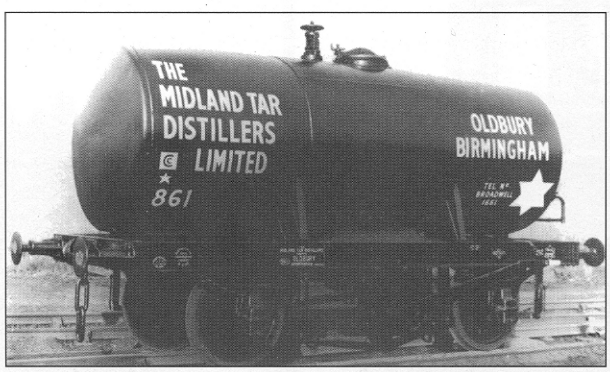
Industrial locomotives and waggons

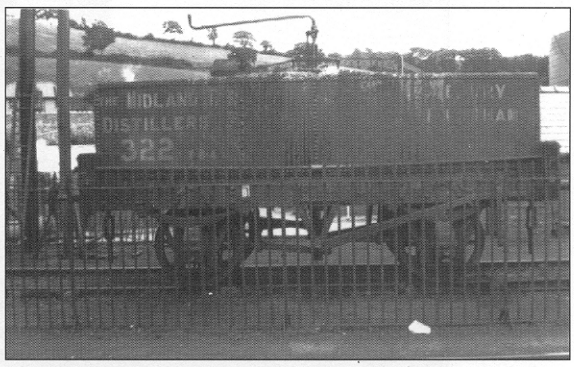
Midland Tar Distillers Ltd

The works were connected to the GWR in 1921 and continued to receive material by rail until 1971. Their last engine was the 'H W Robinson', named after the founder of Midland Tar Distillers, and built in 1946 by John Fowler. They used various designs of tanker waggon, including rectangular and the familiar cylindrical ones. Within the works there was an extensive system of tracks.

(Pictures: Right - Mike Wood; below left - Leslie Scarlett; below right - Midland Tar booklet)







Albright & Wilson

The works was connected to the Oldbury Branch in 1930, although it has an earlier internal rail system using both horses and locomotives to move materials. This engine was built by Peckett of Bristol in 1902 and rebuilt twice by them. Albright & Wilson bought it second-hand and used it until 1978, when it was given to Chasewater Light Railway. In 1974 it is shunting chlorine tankers which had been brought from the Rood End yard by British Rail to Albright & Wilson's sidings. Rail deliveries of chlorine and phosphorus continued until the 1990s, but have now ceased. *(Picture: Mike Wood)*

Bayonets at Langley Green station!

On Saturday 18th August 1911 there was a national railway strike which led to 'remarkable scenes' at Langley Green station. Most of the unionised men had joined the strike, but George Frederick Harris, a signalman, and one or two other non-union men, remained at work. In the evening a crowd gathered around the signal box at Langley crossings, but attempts to persuade him to join the strike failed. Two of the men went into the signal box to convince him, and, it was claimed, finally threatened to burn the signal box down. The station master, Mark Tatton, joined him and ordered the ringleaders out A police officer was left on duty at the signal box to prevent further intimidation of signalman Harris.

Several hundred people had collected by eleven o'clock at night, and extra police prevented them from reaching the signal box. The crowd blocked the crossing, stopped the gates being opened and held up a train on each side of the crossing. The police were reinforced by all those on duty in Oldbury, and the crowd rose to over a thousand. The police could not persuade them to disperse, although the strike had been settled nationally and the police informed the crowd. Stones were thrown at the signal box, breaking many of the windows.

Since no further police could be drafted in, a thirty-strong detachment of the Royal Munster Fusiliers was sent by special train from Snow Hill, arriving quietly at 1.35 am without lights. The soldiers approached the crowd with fixed bayonets and the mob then dispersed with little resistance. Ten minutes later, the gates were opened and the delayed trains were able to proceed. The soldiers remained until 3.00 am, when the crowd had gone.

The Weekly News of 26 August 1911 states: *"Fortunately they did not have to make use of their weapons, and although the situation seemed threatening at times no injuries were reported"*. The paper commented *"The singularity of the whole affair is that the strikers took little part in it. The greater part of the noise, and probably all the stones that damaged the signal box windows, came from the distinctly hooligan element. If the strikers had been left to carry out their own 'picketing' it would have been a small matter, as there were only about 30 railwaymen in the Langley area who had joined in the strike."*

Twenty-four men from the Langley area, none of them railway employees, appeared before Oldbury magistrates charged with 'unlawfully, riotously and routously assembling'. After a seven-hour hearing, twenty-one were discharged and the three 'ringleaders' were committed on their own bail to Worcestershire Quarter Sessions, where they were bound over for twelve months in the sum of £10.

There cannot be many occasions when a riot in Langley was pacified by the use of bayonets!

Delivering the goods

The saga of name-changes for the station continued in 1904 when it became 'Langley Green and Rood End'.

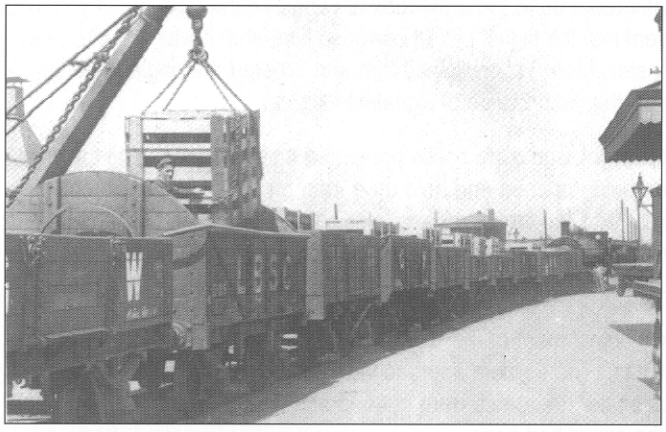
On 3 March 1915 the Oldbury Branch was closed to passenger traffic, but continued as a goods line operating into the depot in Inkerman Street. This was a war-time measure, but with the increase in bus services, it never restarted. The goods service continued until 1964 although with declining use in the latter years. Apart from trains serving the chemical plants, materials were also taken to the Tilcon cement works. Long goods trains of Portland cement were then to be seen in the sidings.

With Oldbury station closed, 'Langley Green and Rood End' reverted to its first name, 'Oldbury and Langley Green' on 6 January 1936, and then on 6 May 1968 it became simply 'Langley Green' again. Confusing!

Its goods yard was much in demand between the wars as local factories started up and grew, and a wide variety of cargo was handled. Petroleum products were brought into the Shell-Mex depot in Station Road, and pumped directly from the rail tankers under Western Road into the storage tanks at the depot. The whole area around the sidings was covered in oil spillages, and the heavy smell of oil lingered on the corner of Western Road. A very different cargo of grain was unloaded into

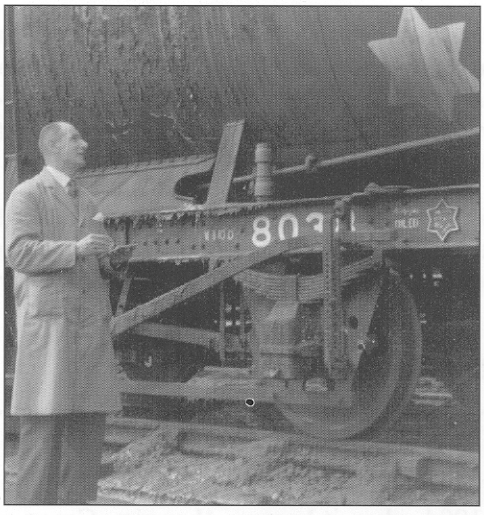
Moving the goods

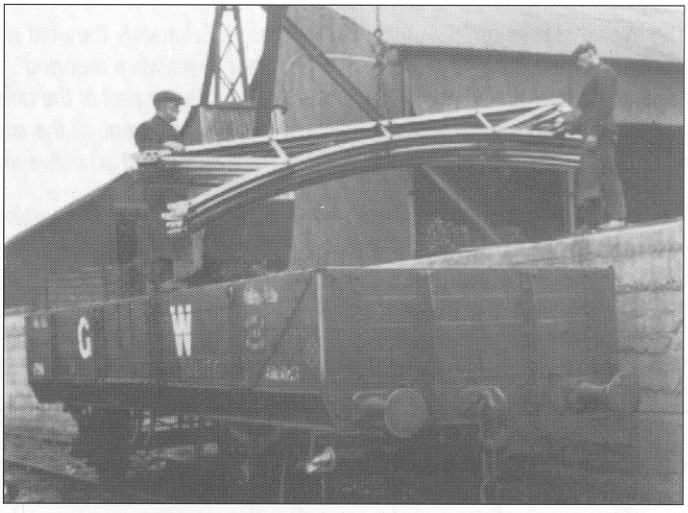
The huge range of items handled in Langley Green Goods Yard reflects the diverse nature of the area's industries



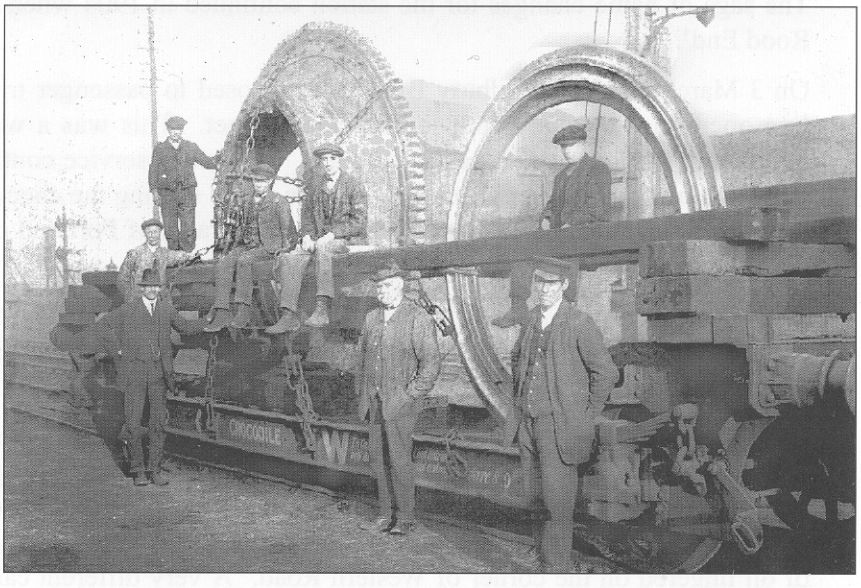
Heavy penstocks and sewage systems from Ham Baker start their journey across the world from the goods yard at Langley. (Picture: Ham Baker brochure)

Loading sections of buildings on to the GW waggon in the private siding of John Elwell Ltd at Rood End in the 1950s. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)



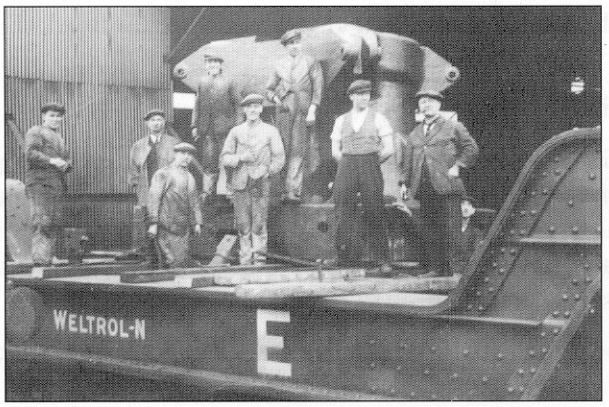


Walter Percival Brown checking a Shell rail tanker. (Picture: Dennis Heath collection)



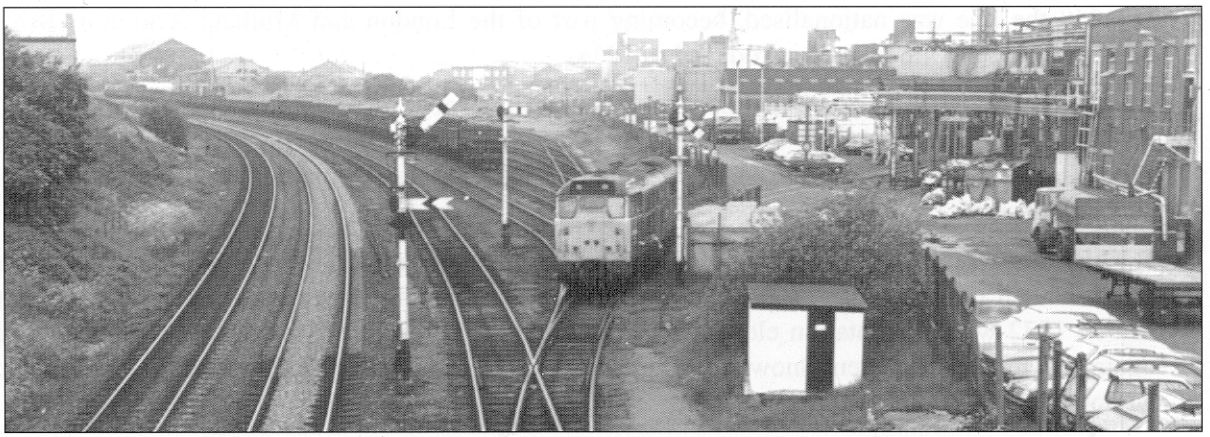
Heavy engineering work loaded on a crocodile wagon. The middle man sitting on the beam is George Mullet who started as a horse driver at the station and rose to become leading porter in the goods yard. (Picture: James Hallard collection)

The level crossing in Crosswells Road in the days of gates: the Stourbridge side had small passenger gates that avoided frustration for pedestrians. The 'West' signal box is still operational, and behind it the goods shed. A line of Shell-BP tankers stands in the siding along Western Road, with a road tanker beside them. The storage tanks of the terminal are visible behind. The Maltings and the towers of Albright & Wilson complete the skyline. (Picture: Alton Douglas collection)



Rood End goods yard in 1984. The engine has just left the short private siding to BIP. (Picture: Ned Williams)

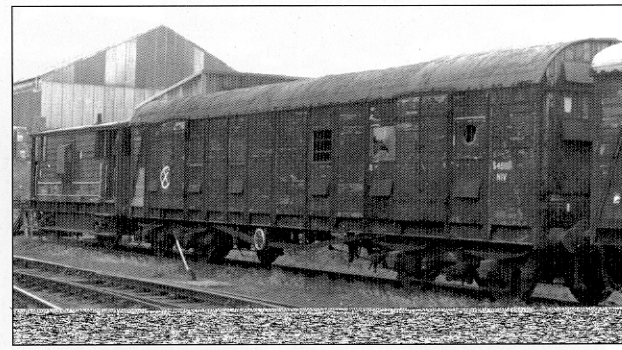
A gang from Hughes-Johnson prepare to unload a new block from a crocodile wagon. It was manhandled from the wagon in their private siding down the slope into the factory. (Picture: Eric Fanthom collection)



trucks and taken across Western Road into the Maltings. Heavy castings were winched from lorries on to waggons to begin their journey all round the world. Incoming billets of steel and ingots of pig iron, with rounded bottoms and flat tops, were regularly unloaded to supply the forges and foundries. The whole goods yard must have been a scene of great activity.

During WW2 consignments of incendiary bombs from Albright & Wilson were despatched from the yard. The yard foreman, George Mullet, and his team were responsible for the loading. This they did very carefully, and once the train was in motion and no longer their responsibility, they breathed a sigh of relief!

Gradually, trade declined with the supremacy of road transport, and the system contracted. All the industrial lines are now disused and most traces gone, and the railhead in Tat Bank Road was removed in the 80s. The Rood End yard is still there, but a desolate scene of unused rails with a few rusting waggons. For some time in the early 90s the yard contained some unusual disused waggons - elephant vans. A dozen or so had been used for transporting circus elephants by rail in earlier times, and one or two ended up in Rood End yard (without elephants) before being scrapped! The last business in the yard was the final chemical deliveries to Albright & Wilson and waggons of scrap.



Large delivery! A redundant elephant van at Rood End, 1992. *(Picture: Mike Wood)*

Effectively, now, we are back to the single main line of the 1870s!

The station buildings have changed, the old GWR style being gradually lost. The station awnings had all gone by 1960, and the original platform buildings were replaced by (bus) shelters. Langley Green East signal box at Rood End was demolished in 1973 and the Middle signal box in November 1993. The traditional swinging gates have been replaced by a barrier, the West signal box removed and the level crossing is now observed and controlled remotely via a TV camera.

Finally, in 1998 a new building replaced the booking office and the landmark on the bridge, which heads this chapter, disappeared.

Passenger services

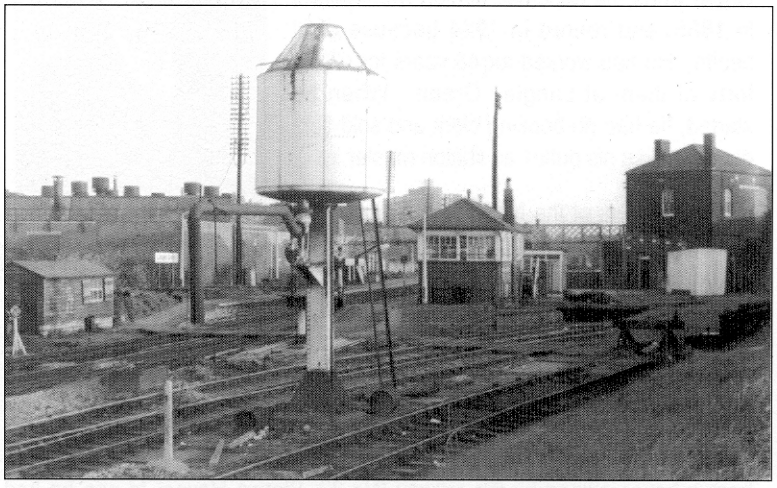
In 1948 the line was nationalised, becoming part of the London and Midland Region of British Railways. Diesel trains were introduced in 1958.

Most Langley folk will remember the station for local journeys on 'stopping trains' to Birmingham or Stourbridge for shopping, or further down the line for an outing to Worcester or Malvern. Direct services also ran through to Dudley via Old Hill, passing through places such as Windmill End and Blowers Green.

But the line was also used for expresses from Birmingham Snow Hill to Cardiff and these were steam-hauled until the mid-1960s. Snow Hill was the Birmingham station serving the line until March 1972 when that station closed, and trains started to run into New Street. Trains now run again into the very different Snow Hill of today and via Galton Bridge rather than West Smethwick station.

All change!

These pictures show some of the changes to the station buildings in the last twenty years - the goods yard has gone, replaced by an Avery-Myers warehouse, the platform buildings and the signal boxes removed, and a modern building replacing them.



The station from Western Road with the prominent GWR water tank and Middle signal box. The Myers factory on the left skyline has been replaced by a housing estate. (Picture: Leslie Scarlett)

Crosswells Road level crossings with the old style gates, opened by a huge wheel in the West signal box. This was the scene of the riot in 1911. The former railway stables is the low dark building behind the signal box, and beyond that the remaining buildings of Crosswells Brewery. (Picture: Leslie Scarlett)

The last working days of the Middle signal box and the semaphore signalling operation, July 1990. The engine is an English Electric Class 37 CoCo. The station is 'Langley Green' again. (Picture: Mike Wood)

Station Staff

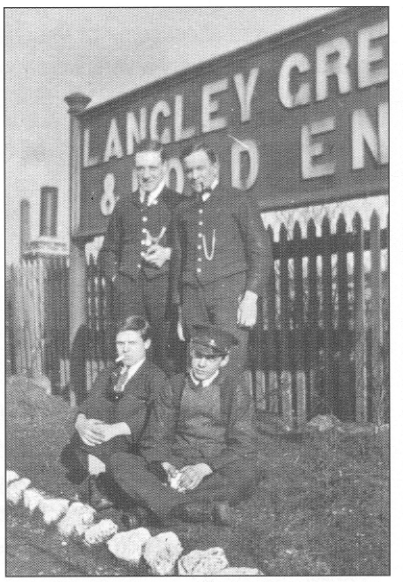
Mark Tatton: station master

Mark Tatton in station master's uniform. *(Picture: Keith Crump collection)*

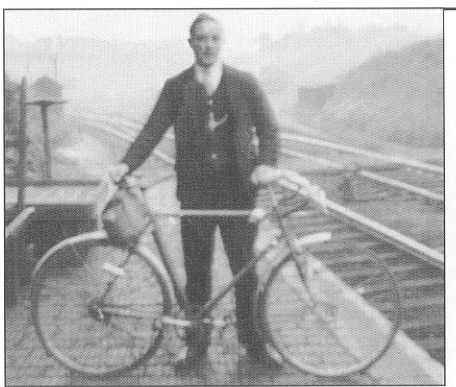
Mark Tatton became station master at Langley Green when the relocated station was opened in 1885, and retired in 1924 because of ill health. He had worked for 48 years for GWR, forty of them at Langley Green. When he started, he had no booking clerk and sold tickets as well as his duties as station master.

Other members of the family joined him at the station: daughter Amelia ('Millie') working as booking clerk, and brother-in-law Will Smallwood as signal man. His 'customer service' was legendary, and his motto "civility, courtesy and obliging". His retirement was marked by a presentation from local dignitaries and the passengers he had served for many years.

After his retirement he moved a few houses in Barker Street, Rood End, from a house owned by the railway (No 32, Station House) to one he had bought himself.



The staff of the station in its 'Langley Green & Rood End' phase. *(Picture: Keith Crump collection)*



John Clarke 'on loan' to West Smethwick station. *(Picture: John Clarke collection)*

Oh! Mr Porter

I was born in Station Road, next to Holden's the newsagents. We moved away from Langley in the early days of the war, but came back to live in Vicarage Road in 1943. In 1946 I went to work at Langley Green station as a 'lad porter'. There was a senior porter, who was an adult, and a lad porter on duty. There were two shifts, but the lad porter could not work after 8.00 pm. The station master was Mr Griffiths and a senior porter was Mrs Cartwright. It was a busy station, and in those times nearly all the trains ran to time!

My job was to put the light parcels on the trains and make sure all the doors were shut. There was other work such as sweeping the waiting room out, sweeping the platforms, cleaning out the fire grates, re-laying and lighting the fires, and cleaning the toilets. The job I liked best was lighting the gas lamps and putting them out. All this was daily work. The weekly work was to clean the glass in the doors and windows. The station master inspected the work every day to make sure it had been done correctly.

All the trains for Oldbury were goods trains. These were controlled from the signal box at the end of the up platform. Trains to and from Oldbury usually consisted of 25 to 35 trucks. There were two trains daily to and from Oldbury, one at 8.00 am and one at 3.30 pm. These trains carried such things as coal, coke, pig-iron, wood, steel billets, grain and animal feed. Albright & Wilson had two trains a day, morning and afternoon, with 5 to 15 tankers carrying chemicals.

After my National Service I returned to Rood End goods yard as a shunter. Trucks came from all over the country to Langley. It was the shunter's job to sort those out for Langley goods yard, those for Oldbury and those to go out to other destinations around the country. The work was done on a two-shift system, from 6.00 am to 10.00 pm. Each shift had three head shunters and three under shunters.

John Clarke

The last days of steam at Langley in May 1958 as the train to Cardiff and South Wales passes through 'Oldbury & Langley Green' station. The buildings of now demolished Albion brewery are evident on the right skyline (Picture: Michael Hale)

The new station building opened in 1999 to take us into the millennium. Neat and tidy, inoffensive, but, to those of the old school, lacking in character! At least we still have the footbridge. (Picture: Terry Daniels)

The line was used by many people to get to work in the factories that grew up along the railway. So many of the workers at Myers's pen factory next to the station travelled by rail that a gate into the factory was included in the fence at the end of the platform. It was also the start for seasonal workers going to the orchards and hop-fields of Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

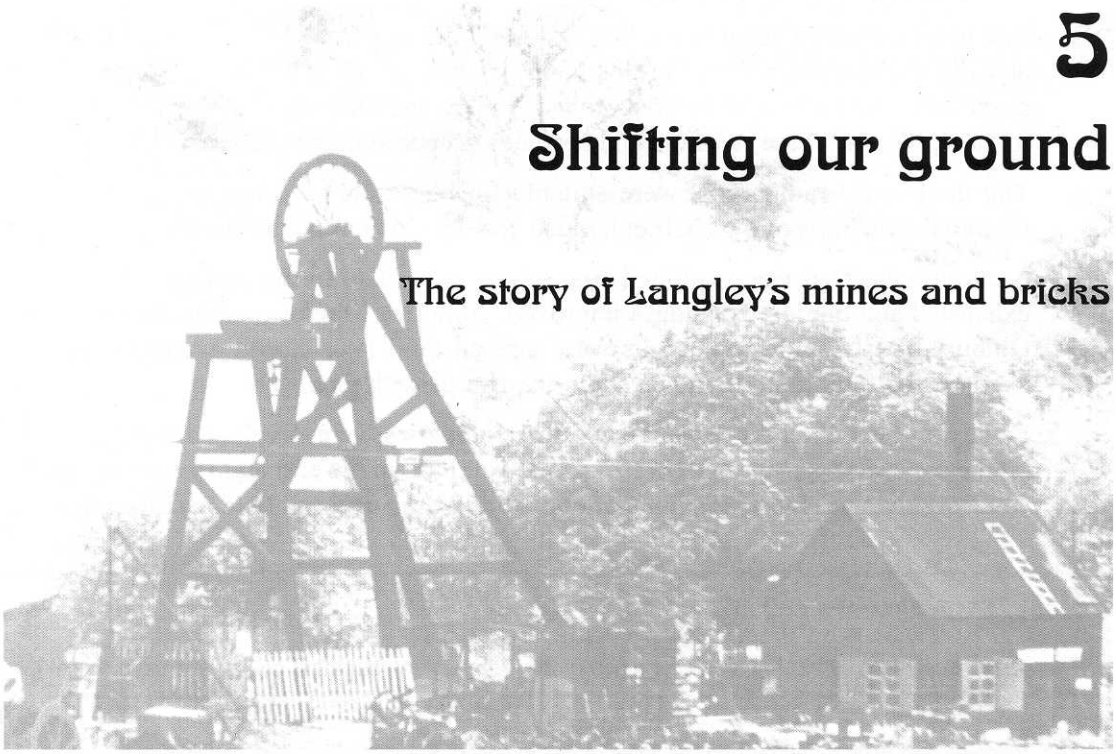
Until the private car became dominant, it was the main escape route to the sea and the countryside for holidays and days out. In Edwardian times the "Weekly News" reported 'heavy booking of trippers' for both Oldbury and Langley Green stations. Fifty years later the same paper carried British Rail adverts for trips to Stratford, up the Severn Valley to Bridgnorth, to Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight (with a road tour), to Swansea, Weymouth, Weston Super Mare and London. For football fans it was 11d [5p] to The Hawthorns Halt to see West Bromwich Albion play Birmingham City.

Now it is the era of 'Sprinters' and commuters, of Railtrack and franchises, of late trains and penalties, of bus-shelter stations and remotely-operated crossings. Its all so different - what would Mark Tatton make of it with his 'civility, courtesy and obliging'?

5

Shifting our ground

The story of Langley's mines and bricks



The geology of an area shapes not only the landscape, but also the lives of the people dwelling there. Nowhere is this more evident than in 'The Black Country'. The industrial corridor considered in this book straddles the southern edge of the South Staffordshire coalfield, and the eastern boundary fault runs through Langley. This divides the industrial area of the north-west situated on the coalfield, around Oldbury and Rowley, from the Warley area on Permian sandstone with its housing and fields and farms, some remaining until the 1950s.

The rocks beneath us contained not only coal, but also ironstone and, not far away, limestone for smelting the iron. Furthermore, as the sale particulars of 'Birchley Coppice' estate proudly boasted in the late 19th century, *"There is a valuable bed of the celebrated Oldbury Marl underlying the estate"*. Thus, the area was blessed with the basic raw materials for raising steam, smelting iron and making bricks, and Langley folk literally 'shifted their ground' in all these activities, and with great effort took from it the materials for the heavy industries that were to bring prosperity.

The South Staffordshire coalfield

The accessible 'exposed' part of the South Staffordshire coalfield stretches from the Bentley fault running just north of Wolverhampton and Walsall, to the Halesowen area in the south. It is limited by roughly north-south faults on the eastern and western boundaries. Beyond these boundaries, on the 'concealed' coalfield, the coal plunges to greater depths.

Within the coalfield there are eight significant seams, according to the Regional Survey of the Ministry of Fuel and Power in 1945, in order of increasing depth: Brooch, Flying Reed, Thick, Heathen, Sulphur, New Mine, Fireclay, Bottom.

The most important seam is the 'Thick Coal', varying from 18 to 30 ft deep across the coalfield, and the thickest seam found in this country. It is also known as the 'Ten-yard' or 'Thirty-foot' seam, and is at its best in the area around Dudley and Oldbury. The seam crops out at the surface in the north-east of the coalfield and becomes deeper to the south and west in our area.

The thick and heathen coal were suitable for blast furnaces, but not good for coking. Hence, despite the richness of the coalfield, much coal had to be brought into the area for the iron works.

Naturally, the coal was exploited first where it is close to the surface. As these fields became exhausted and mining techniques improved, collieries were opened on the deeper seams nearer to Oldbury and Langley. Thus pits were opened (and later closed again) in the north-east of the exposed coalfield first, spreading south-westwards with time.

Finally, at the end of the 19th century, three collieries were developed beyond the boundary faults on the concealed field, Hamstead and Sandwell Park in the east and Baggeridge in the west. These were worked until the 1960s, long after the pits on the exposed field had been forgotten.

Moat Farm - almost a colliery

There have been schools at Moat Farm for much of the 20th century, but there could have been a coal mine instead! In 1907 the 'Weekly News' confidently reported that '*steps are being taken fully to develop the colliery*' on the site.

Coal reserves had been found outside the limits of the 'exposed' South Staffordshire coalfield at the end of the 19th century, leading to pits at Sandwell Park, Hamstead and, on the western side, Baggeridge. These pits were worked into the second half of the 20th century and had a large impact on the local landscape. It could easily have been a similar story in Langley.

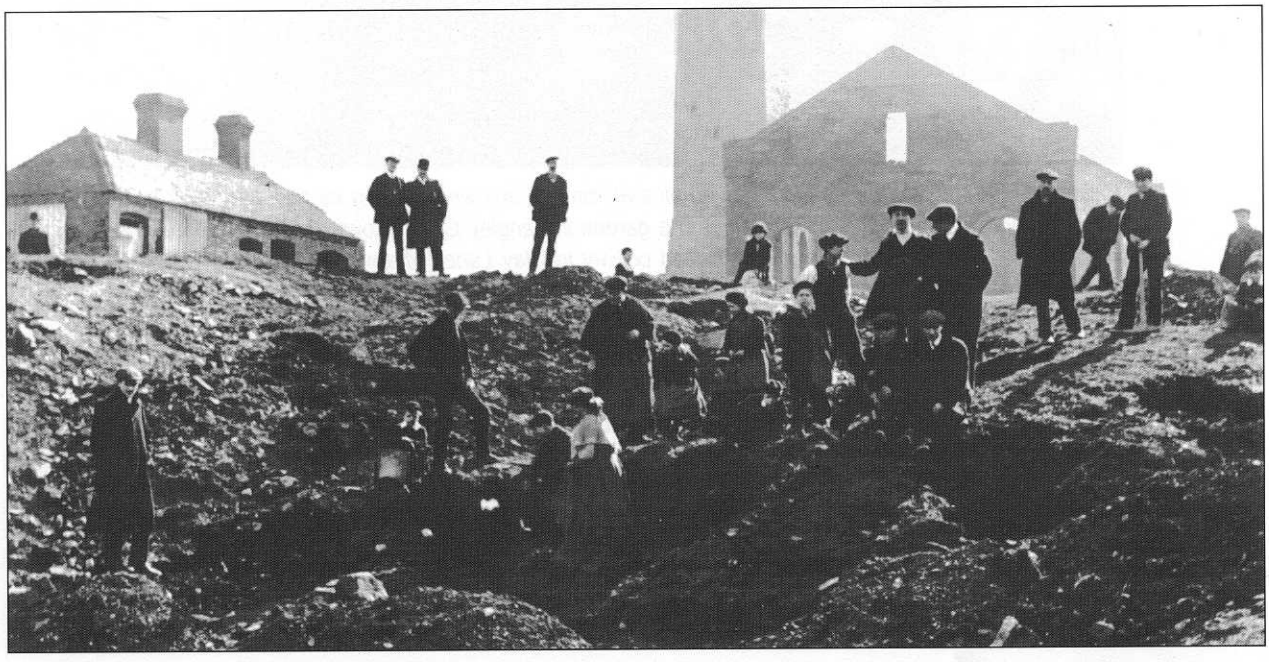
Trial borings had been made between 1898 and 1905 at two sites owned by the Birmingham Coal Co, the Moat Farm and Brand Hall Farm estates. These revealed the presence of the Thick Coal at 1530 feet, a workable depth and shallower than that exploited at either Hamstead or Baggeridge. There were some legal difficulties, but the Chairman of Birmingham Coal Co stated that these had been overcome, and seemed confident that mining would soon begin on the then green fields surrounding Moat Farm.

However, the pit was never started, and in 1911 both Moat Farm and Brand Hall were sold. Albright & Wilson bought much of the Moat Farm Estate, building houses on parts and selling other land to Oldbury Council. The residents of Langley were spared the pithead buildings, spoil heaps and disruption resulting from a large coal mine in the vicinity.

Langley's mines

In the Langley area pits were developed from the beginning of the 19th century, but at this time were mainly small. The population of Oldbury increased rapidly in 1830-40, according to the Victoria County History *'due to the opening of new mines in the region'*, and the local coalfield was at its most active in the 1850s and 60s. By 1860-70 the pits at Oldbury were beginning to close, mainly because the mines were exhausted or unsafe to operate or flooded. Drainage of water was a major problem in the whole coalfield, affecting the working conditions and causing premature closure of some pits. New mines were opened in the Rowley area at this time since improving technology allowed the coal to be won from under the basalt outcrop of the Rowley Hills.

The largest complex of collieries in Langley was situated between Park Lane and Birchfield Lane, the Whimsey, Valentia, Park Hall and Cinder Meadow collieries. These were the ones whose operations dominated the lives of people living in Langley village from the mid-1800s, and where many of them will have worked. The 1851 census records many coal miners in Park Street, Park House Lane, Tat Bank, Langley and Langley Green: few of them were born in Oldbury or Langley. They are part of the great migration from countryside to town, drawn by the prospect of better paid work in the collieries and industry, and the movement of active pits southwards through the coalfield.



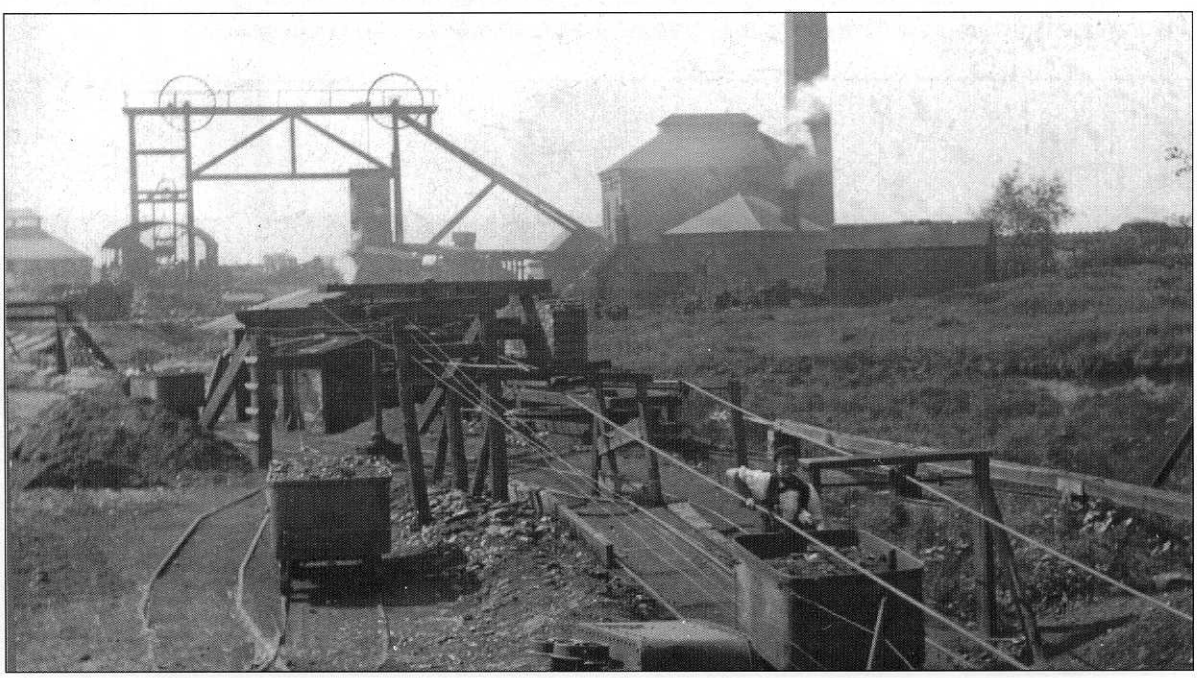
The abandoned pit-head buildings at The Ashes colliery in 1912. This was the time of a dispute in the coal industry, and local miners and their families are 'coal picking' on the waste tips left over from the mine working. The lower picture includes some of the remaining winding gear. The railway embankment and bridge in Ashes Road form the background. The pictures catch well the depressed situation of the miners at the time. (Pictures: Sandwell Community History and Archives Service)

Pictures of the Langley mines have proved elusive, since many were closing as photography was starting up. However, this trick photograph taken in a garden in Langley Green Road about 1896 does show the winding gear and pit mounds from the closed colliery in Clay Lane (where Woodfield Road now stands). The young man standing left and sitting right was Eric Fanthom's father, Bill. (Picture: Eric Fanthom collection)

Coppice, Nine Apostles (where were the other three?) and Titford Bridge collieries were sited between the railway and the canal in Langley. An undated plan of Coppice Colliery shows it was worked by Messrs Johnson and Probert, on land belonging to the 'Trustees of Oldbury Meeting'. The thick seam workings stretched under the canal as far as Titford Road, where they met the boundary of workings from Speedwell and Clifton collieries on the Oldbury side of Titford Road.

Between Causeway Green and Whiteheath Gate were Ashes, Blackbat, Hartland and Titford collieries, among others. These were well served by the Causeway Green Branch canal and its wharves. These extensive wharves were the loading points for coal from the mines on the Rowley

Bell End Colliery high on the Rowley Hills showing the pit workings and the top of the rope-driven tramway down to the loading basins on the Portway Arm of the Titford Canal. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)



Hills via a network of ropeways and inclines (map on page 36).

A long incline from Rowley Hall ended at a basin near Swan Bridge in Titford Lane, on its route crossing the tramway from Bell End and passing under the Whiteheath Road. A nearby basin served Hartland colliery. At the end of the Causeway Green arm were loading points for Cakemore colliery and brick works, via an incline, and Rowley Station Colliery via a tramway.

The wharves at the end of the Portway Arm had received the coal from many local pits, Lifter, Birchley Coppice, Birchy Field, Top End and Top Pressure among them. By 1900 these had all ceased operation, but Ramrod and Bell End, higher up the Rowley Hills, still used these basins.

The list of coal mines still working under the Coal Mines Regulation Act in Worcestershire from the Inspector's report for 1896 includes the following in the Oldbury area:

Pit	*Owner*	*Manager*	*Products*
Brades	John Beasley	-	coal
Newbury Lane	Newbury Lane Colliery Co	J W Growcott	coal, ironstone
Park Hall	John Baker	-	coal
Rowley Station	Rowley Station Colliery Co	W Ivan Smith	coal
Samson	Mansell and Davies	J H Price	coal, ironstone

Only one Langley pit was still operational, Park Hall. There were other pits still working on the Rowley Hills in Staffordshire, including Bell End, Cakemore, Hartland, Ramrod, Rowley Hall, and Titford, all of which sent out their coal through the Titford or Portway wharves. These continued to operate into the 20th century. There was a fatal accident at Titford as late as 1911: Samuel Brinton of Titford Road was killed after being hit by rails ripped up by the tubs when the ropeway jammed. The same year there was a short strike at Cakemore over wages, the working system and inadequate ventilation.

The deeper mines on the Rowley Hills, Bell End, Ramrod and Rowley Hall, were owned by H S Pitt & Co and these finally closed just after WW1 when they were flooded following a period of unrest between miners and mine owners. The last to close was Ramrod in 1921. Thus, coal mining ceased in the Langley area, and the ex-miners suffered much hardship in the depressed times of the 1920s. Many were employed on the construction of the Wolverhampton Road, levelling the spoil banks left by former generations of miners. Others found work where they could. At Warley Institutional Church, for example, a group of Oldbury miners was employed to lay out the grounds around the new church building.

Oldbury miners employed on laying out the grounds of Warley Institutional Church, Pound Road, in 1926. (Picture: Warley Institutional Church collection)

The pits in Langley were mainly small and quite close together. They were worked by the 'pillar and stall' method in the thick seam. Large rectangular chambers were excavated from the seam, leaving square ribs to support the roof. With this system, not all the coal could be removed, although, where the mine roof had not collapsed, it was often the practice to remove additional

coal from the pillars at a later date. Nevertheless, the system was wasteful and did not extract all the available coal.

Work in the mines was hard, dangerous and very unpleasant. Smaller pits would be under the control of the owner or manager, but in many larger pits the owners contracted with chartermasters or 'butties' to work sections of the mine. The butties managed and paid their own teams of miners and received a levy on each ton raised. The owners were responsible for the surface operation, winding gear and banksmen. Unscrupulous butties would pay part of the wages in tokens which could only be redeemed at shops and public houses under their control, the 'tommy-shops'.

By 1900 old mine workings were scattered all over the land between the Birmingham to Stourbridge railway line, the Oldbury branch line and the Rowley Hills: the whole area was a mass of abandoned shafts, spoil heaps and marl holes: even Park House in Langley village had fallen victim and disappeared. The positions of most shafts were documented, but others came as a surprise, for instance, when the Wolverhampton New Road was cut through the area. Underground plans remain for a few, but the records are far from complete.

Bricks and marl

Associated with the coal seams on the South Staffordshire coalfield were fireclay, marl and ironstone, and many of the coal-mining operations also recovered these materials. The ironstone was widespread, but generally of low grade: once the iron industry was established, better quality ironstone was brought into the area for the development of the industry.

There were several layers of clay associated with the coal measures, and clay was extracted from variousl local pits in the last century: one pit with its drying kilns was located alongside the Titford canal behind the 'Sycamore' Inn - at Clay Lane, of course.

The most valuable layer was the Etruria marl used in the manufacture of bricks, especially Staffordshire blue bricks. These were ideal for engineering, and many local bridges and industrial buildings were made from 'blues'.

Most of the marl holes have been filled in today. One opportunity was taken when the M5 was built the level the area of the marl holes by in-filling with chemical waste mounds and pit spoil. There is only one marl hole left, water-filled and heavily fenced between Shidas Lane and Rounds Green Road, formerly the site of Sadler's Brick Works.

A brick works in Langley was marked on an 1857 map of the area, the Patent Brick Works near the present entrance to Albright & Wilson in Trinity Street. This probably supplied many of the bricks used in the building of Langley and its industries in the mid-1800s, although only the water-filled marl hole remained by 1880.

In the Oldbury and Langley area, brick yards using the local marl were associated with many of the collieries. The main concentration of brickyards was away from Langley, closer to the centre of Oldbury and the slopes of the Rowley Hills. In the 1896 Kelly's Directory seven were listed:

Alston	run by John Joseph Hollyhead
Churchbridge	run by Joseph Matthews
Portway Road	run by Septimus John Sadler
Radnor Fields	run by executors of William Morris
Railway	run by Henry Jackson
Shidas Lane	run by John Sadler
Taylor's Lane	run by Joseph William Devey Pratt

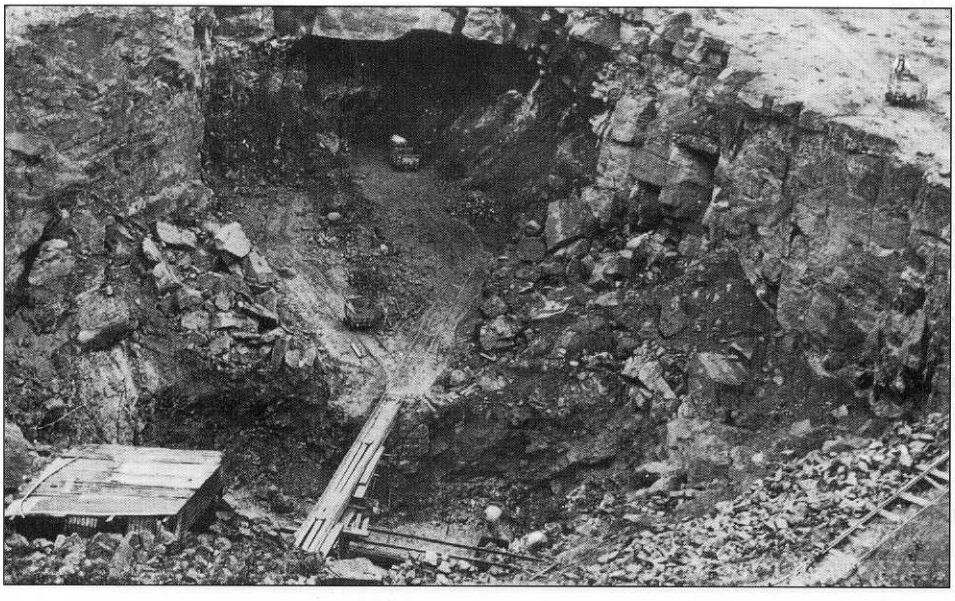
Only one was listed in Langley village, Park Hall, run by George Jackson & Co., and part of the colliery complex.

Although most of the coalmines had closed by 1900, the demand for bricks continued. In 1908 the Titford Brick Company, under William Barnett as Managing Director, reported 'a period of good trading', and had exhibited that year at the Building Trades Exhibition at Bingley Hall. In appreciation, they gave a supper for all their work people at the 'Barrel' Inn.

The last brick yard to operate in the area was that of Joseph William Devey Pratt. He had started work at Paddock Brick Works in Oldbury, then moved to the Taylors Lane brickyard in 1892, and left that to open the New Century Brick and Tile Works in Newbury Lane around the turn of the century, as the name indicates. The bricks bore a 'PL' marking. He died in 1916, drowned in a canal while returning home from a Liberal Club meeting. The business was continued by his sons, and lasted into the 1970s. In 1960 the firm had been incorporated as J W D Pratt (1960), and were agents for the London Brick Co.

Their brickyard was situated at the end of the Portway canal arm. Locals remember the clouds of black smoke drifting across Accles & Pollock's sports field on Sunday afternoons as the furnaces were heated up for the week's work. Near to the kilns was the marl hole served by an incline with a narrow gauge track along which the 'dob-bins' of clay were raised by a wire rope driven from the engine house at the top. Nothing remains of the workings now. The whole site has been levelled and is public open space, although it is still possible to uncover a brick or two with 'PL' or 'LBC' there.

Examples of Pratt's bricks and a London Brick Co brick rescued from the levelled site of their brick yard. (Picture: Terry Daniels)



Pratt's marl hole, Newbury Lane, showing some of the incline and track. The depth can be gauged from the size of the man pushing the dob-bin on the edge of the crater. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

Local bricks made a local landmark

In 1872 a structure went up at Albright & Wilson's Oldbury Works which could be seen from the Clent Hills and beyond. It was the famous Albright 'Big Stack', which rose 251 feet above Langley. It was the second longest stack in the country and was designed by W J Macquorn Rankine, the well known Glasgow civil engineer. The reason for so large a stack was to provide adequate draught to four furnace flues radiating some distance from its base.

It contained half a million local bricks, but from which brick yard we do not know. The original specification, hand written by Macquorn Rankine himself, still exists and gives a detailed description of the bricks required: *"The bricks to be of regular figure with plane surfaces, straight edges and sharp, square corners; free from flaws and giving a clear ringing sound when struck. They should not absorb more than one-fiftieth of their weight in water; and a single brick set on end in a hydraulic press should not be crushed by less load than half a ton on the square inch".*

The nine page specification covered every aspect of construction from excavation to fitting of a lightning conductor. Those half a million bricks were bonded in place with a mortar of formidable composition: *"The mortar to be composed of rich lime, clean sharp sand, and finely ground iron scale, in the following proportions:*

Slaked lime	*2 measures*
Ground Iron Scale	*1 measure*
Sand not to exceed	*5 measures*
	8 measures"

The local Langley building contractor, Edward Jackson was responsible for the actual construction. That family business, later William Jackson (Langley Green) Ltd, existed until recent years, and they did all of the building work at the Albright & Wilson site until 1915.

The 251 feet chimney was famous as a landmark for miles around. It's presence was noted even further afield during the second World War. The traitor Joyce ('Lord Haw-Haw') broadcasting from Berlin said "Albright & Wilson, you can pull down your big chimney, but we can find you". In reality the German bombers never did find the Albright & Wilson Works. The big stack was demolished in 1941, to make way for other structures needed for the war effort.

An even greater landmark, the phosphate rock silos, had arisen close by. They were constructed in reinforced concrete, not good old fashioned common blue bricks that gave *'a clear ringing sound when struck'*.

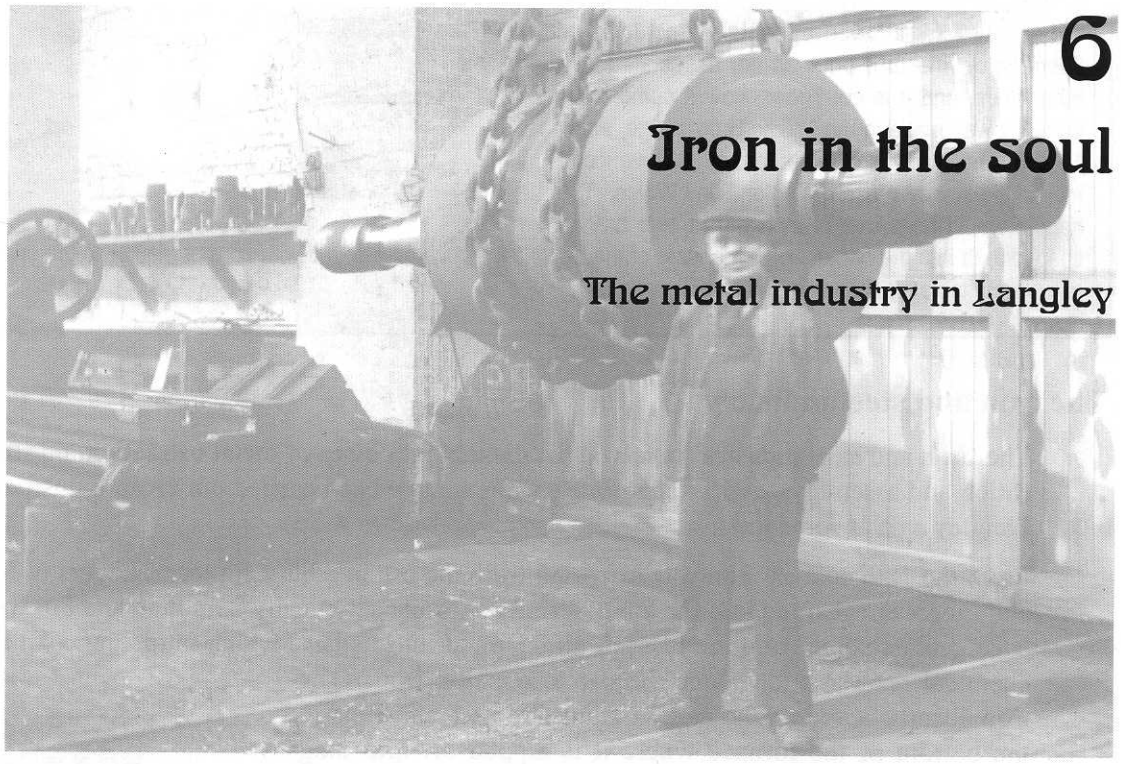
Tom Tomlinson

Even the rocks were melted

'Rowley rag', the basalt rock of the Rowley Hills, was quarried for many uses, particularly for roadstone. It is still obtained today from the Edwin Richards Quarry in Portway Road, a very deep hole in the hills! It was the starting point of a ingenious industrial process. The rock was crushed, heated in a furnace to melt it, and the molten rock cast into moulds. This process was invented by Henry Adcock at the middle of the 19th century and developed industrially by Chance Brothers. A factory was set up next to the Chance's alkali works in Windsor Street, Langley (later called Trinity Street) and is marked on the 1857 map.

The product was known as 'basaltic stone-ware', and it was used for the manufacture of building and decorative items such as lintels, window sills, mantelpieces, door-knobs and ornamental stonework. The process was patented and worked for a number of years. However, the production cost was too high and ultimately the process was discontinued because it was uneconomic.

Some local buildings remain with features in the basaltic stone-ware; for example, buildings in the centre of Oldbury including the 'Junction Inn'. (Picture: Terry Daniels)



6

Iron in the soul

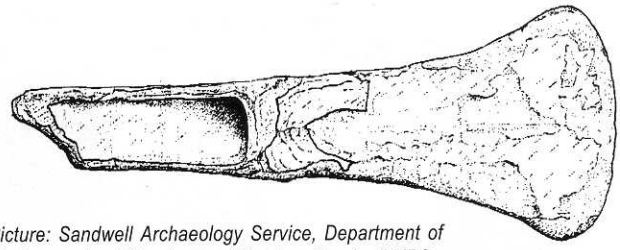
The metal industry in Langley

Metal working has a long history in the area. The earliest find is claimed to be a bronze-age axe-head in Langley Park, although it may have been traded into the area from southern England rather than made locally. However, it was the forerunner of the products from the foundry and forge which were to play such an important part in the development of the Langley and Oldbury area 3400 years later.

It was iron, rather than bronze, that really entered the soul of the Oldbury man. The black country had the three essential ingredients for the extraction of iron: charcoal or coal, limestone and iron ore. Small-scale iron working in bloomeries dates back centuries and fed the many local forges. Larger-scale smelting operations, the result of the industrial revolution, started up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. These followed the spread of the South Staffordshire coalfield southwards. By 1780 they had reached Tipton, and about the same time the 'Brades' works was started. By 1830 the Black Country was the leading iron producing area in the country, and there were enough furnaces on the Rounds Green side of Oldbury for them to be shown on the first Ordnance Survey map. The age of smoke and glowing skies had arrived.

The metal extraction and fabrication industry has been important to the wealth of the Oldbury and Langley area for two hundred years. In that period the processes and operations carried on locally have changed, shifting the emphasis from extraction to fabrication in the late 18th century. The last thirty years has seen much of the traditional involvement with metal working disappear from Langley.

Langley axe-head



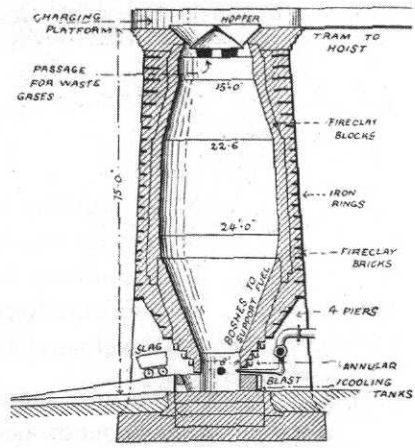
Picture: Sandwell Archaeology Service, Department of Environment and Development Services, Sandwell MBC

A 15cm long bronze axe-head was reportedly found in Langley Park in 1986 by metal-detector about 20cm below the turf, but was not associated with other finds, and it is not known how it came to be there. It was made in the Middle Bronze Age, about 1500BC and is a type of axe-head, or *palstave*, common in the southern part of England and Wales. The handle would be a tree branch with a side branch shaped to fit into the hollows on either side of the head; this was tightly bound with cord or leather to the axe-head. The axe was suitable for chopping and shaping wood.

The iron and steel industry

The 'iron and steel industry' involved the distinct processes of metal extraction, purification, fabrication and assembly. All, except for extraction, have been carried out on an industrial scale in the Langley area at some time.

From the 16th century iron was extracted from the ore in a blast furnace. Layers of iron ore, coke and lime were charged into the top of a fireclay furnace, typically 25m high and 8m wide. The furnace gets its name from the blast of air supplied into its base which burns the coke and starts the chemical reactions to reduce the ore to metallic iron. The iron absorbs some of the carbon from the coke and runs to the bottom of the furnace where it is tapped off into long moulds in the floor giving 'pigs' of cast iron or 'pig' iron. The slag, comprising the lime flux and impurities from the iron ore is tapped off separately. Once up to temperature, blast furnaces were run continuously for months or years at a time.



Blast Furnace

There were no blast furnaces at Langley, but the lights from the Oldbury furnaces would be visible, as Frederick Hackwood reported: *"At night the sky was illuminated by the lurid glare of countless furnaces, varying in shade from the blood-red flame of the puddling furnace to the streaked white and red of the blast furnace ... "*

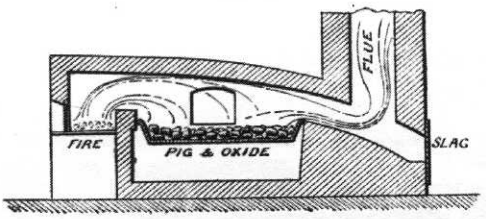
Process illustrations are from "Textbook of Mechanical Engineering" by W J Lineham, 1904. Presented as a prize to T Crump by Zion Chapel Adult Bible Class!

Pig iron contained a high level of carbon which made it weak, but it flowed easily and was ideal for casting items from the molten metal. This was carried out by remelting pig iron in a furnace or 'cupola' and pouring it into a mould shaped in a sand box. A critical part of the casting process was the manufacture of accurate wooden patterns to form the void in the sand of the mould. By the use of cores and patterns complex items could be cast including wheels, gears, propellors, pipes and cylinders - all the requirements for industrial growth!

Iron was purified or refined by 'puddling' which reduced the carbon level to give wrought iron. Pigs of cast iron were broken up, mixed with iron oxide scale from the rolling process, and heated together in a draught of air in a puddling furnace. This gave a spongy mass of iron which was

stirred with a long rake through a side opening in the furnace. Originally, the stirring was carried out by hand, a hot and unpleasant job, but mechanical furnaces were developed in the later part of the nineteenth century.

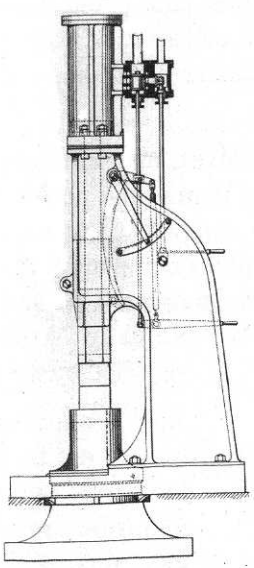
The molten iron became more viscous as the carbon was burnt off, and was finally raked into balls called 'blooms' which were removed and compressed under a steam hammer to squeeze out the impurities as slag.



Puddling Furnace

Elihu Burritt described the process in 1868: *"An outsider looking into one of those furnaces seeing, if his eyes would bear it, the boiling, bubbling mass of metal, ten times more than red hot ... The puddlers who fish in the troubled fountain are generally stripped to the waist and flooded with perspiration ... they fish out a mass at the end of a rod. ... This mass, cooling a little on its way to make it more coherent, goes under a hammer or into a squeezing machine, which at first blow or turn throws out a spray of impure puddle-matter such as melted stone or cinder. ... Some of these hammers are of tremendous power, especially the Naysmith pounder. When it falls with a ton weight upon the liquid boulder, you will see a horizontal shower of meteors ..."* Spectacular, and dangerous to the puddlers!

The metal was passed through the rolls of a rolling mill to remove more impurities and give 'puddled bar'. Puddled bar could be further worked to increase its purity and give different grades of wrought iron for applications needing different strengths. Wrought iron can be worked by forging and welding when red or white hot.



Steam Hammer

The working of wrought iron on the small scale has been the job of every blacksmith through history. This was usually carried out in the hundreds of small smith's shops or forges which dotted town and country alike - a cottage industry. There must have been many in this locality, including one on the side of the Titford Canal in Mill Lane, which would develop into Langley Forge. The industrial revolution brought a demand for larger forgings, too big for one man to carry out; larger smith's forges, and finally industrial premises, were built.

The forging process involves heating wrought iron or steel to red or white heat and hammering the metal into shape or stamping it into a metal die. Large complex forgings require a team of men to heat the various metal pieces, secure the growing forging and control the hammers and dies. When the component was too large to be shaped by a man with sledge hammers efficiently, a mechanical tilt or steam hammer was used.

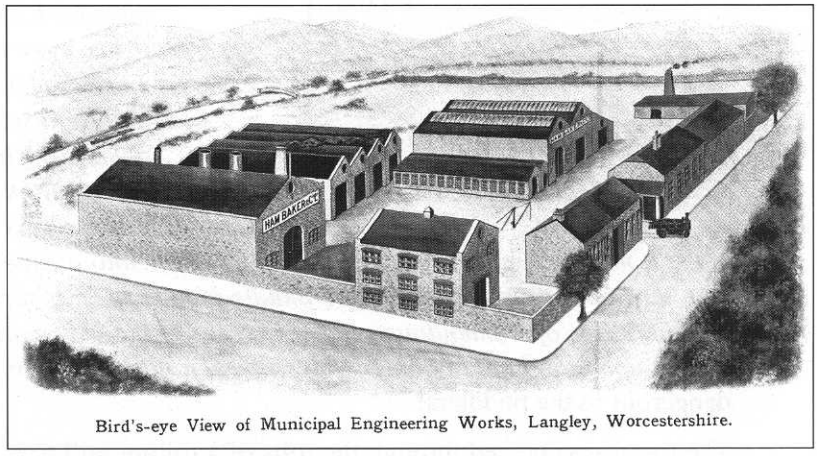
Hammering was suitable for thick items that would retain their heat, but thin strips or bars cooled too quickly to be worked this way. These were produced from hammered strip on a slitting mill or roll mill. The hot strip was squeezed between rolls and slit by passing between disc cutters. Bars with shaped sections could be made by passing through shaped rolls to give squares, rounds, angles, tees and even patterned bars. These bars could be used by nailmakers, chain makers and blacksmiths.

Steel is intermediate between cast and wrought iron in its carbon content, and may be made from

either wrought iron by the cementation process or cast iron by the Bessemer process. In each case, the aim is to control the level of carbon and other metals in the steel, and so determine its mechanical characteristics. Wrought iron was gradually replaced by mild steel after the Bessemer process for making steel was introduced in the 1850s. Steel could be worked in the same ways as wrought iron.

Ham Baker & Co - castings and penstocks

Ham Baker and Company was established in Grosvenor Road, Westminster, London in 1893. Shortly afterwards, they moved to a site next to the Titford Canal and close to the coal mines of Langley and Rowley. There they set up their 'Municipal Engineering Works' at the end of Clay Lane. One of the original buildings remains, and is now listed.

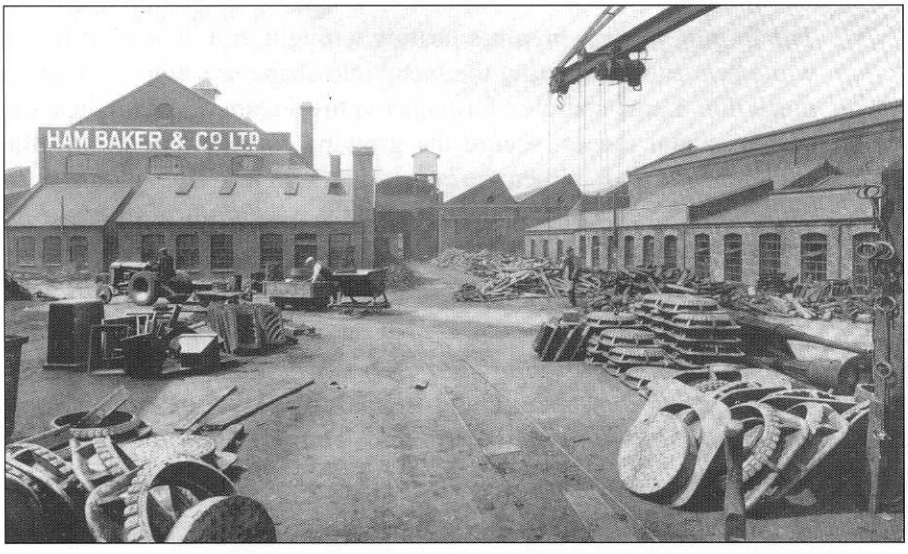


The site as shown in the 1905 trade catalogue of Ham Baker & Co

They were general engineers and iron and brass founders, but specialised in articles used by local authorities including sewage disposal, water distribution and irrigation equipment, waterways, docks and, later, power stations and oil supply equipment. The works consisted of pattern shops, brass and iron foundries capable of castings up to ten tons, and fitting and erection shops, all linked through rail tracks.

Their 1905 catalogue shows a wide range from small items such as valves, man-hole covers and drains to huge sluice gates (penstocks). In later years they supplied oil depots and power stations, including the then Calder Hall Nuclear Power Station. Items were shipped world-wide, many starting their journey from the goods yard of Langley Green station, and the company had agencies across the globe. Local requirements were also met, and much of the equipment at the Oldbury Sewage Works was supplied by them.

The company was bought out by Biwater Industries Ltd and still manufactures similar products at the Clay Lane site.

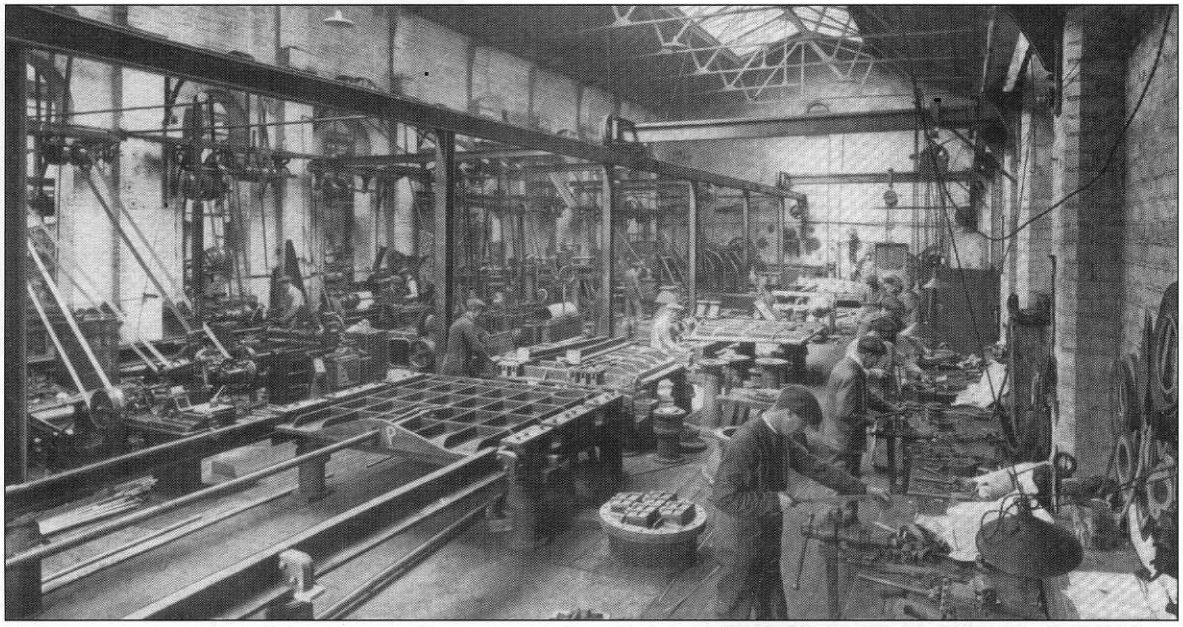


Ham Bakers's yard showing castings of manholes covers and drains. Rails for the hand trucks cut through the yard, with a man loading a truck in the background and also a tractor used for towing materials round the site. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

Spindles, pulleys and belts at Ham Baker Ltd

Sometime in the spring of 1947 I took a job at Ham Baker, Clay Lane, as a 'bench fitter'. Not the type of work I'd been doing: it was factory work for one thing, but I reckoned I could cope - they had a wide reputation for their penstocks (sluice gates) and valves, so I supposed they could cope with me.

My first impression was of a rather old-fashioned place with its belt drives running all round driving the various machines. I realised afterwards that this was typical of that time, and indeed up to much later in most places, but I found it a bit off-putting to have spindles, pulleys and belts running overhead until I became used to it.



Making penstocks at Ham Baker between the wars: note the spindles, pulleys and belts! *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

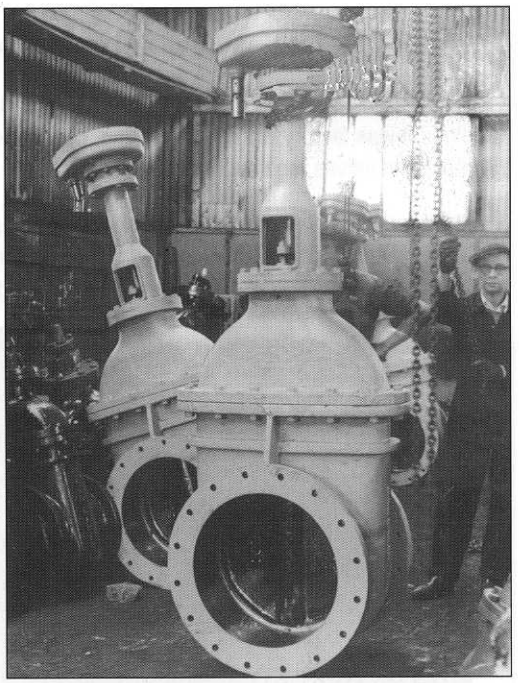
Most of the men worked in pairs, but I worked alone, and for that reason was on the smaller penstocks - not valves, that was a different department. It is hard to remember the actual dimensions of the various jobs that I tackled, but perhaps 4 to 6ft long, by 2 to 3ft wide would be about right. The aperture itself would take up most of the width and about half the length, and the rest was for the operating mechanism - the hand-wheel and screw. Most of these apertures were square, with the door sliding down under wedges to make it a tight fit on to the opening - but some were circular and hinged.

The openings and doors had to be lined with brass strip, and bedded-in one to the other to be water-tight - that was where the real art of the job came in. It was completely new to me, and I was indebted to the older men there inasmuch as I managed to get the hang of it in a fairly short time. Not only using a scraper and file, but even a hammer and chisel had more to it than I had realised. Everybody was friendly and helpful, a bit like a village where everybody wants to know all, but I had nothing to hide and I knew how to hide it if I had. I learnt a great deal at Ham Baker that was of great use to me in after years.

Work was done from drawings (blue-prints), and from these dimensions the castings, made in the foundry there, had to be identified and various other bits and pieces sorted out and checked for machining before I could begin to fit them all together. There was never a dull moment - nevertheless, through a round window high in the wall behind my work-bench the open sky called, until I could resist it no longer.

I did have the opportunity to go on outwork with a man named Bill Groves, an experienced bench fitter who went sometimes to supervise the fitting of the job on site. I declined as it meant staying away from home for several days, so I said farewell to Ham Baker in September of 1948 - and they seemed to manage without me.

Bill Hipkiss



Ham Baker's were always ready to respond to an emergency. Following catastrophic floods in Bangladesh in 1971, they urgently made and sent these massive sluice valves to the stricken country. *(Picture: Edith Williams collection)*

Oldbury was an important centre for casting iron with many large foundries such as Shotton Brothers Ltd who made 'Blackheart' malleable castings, Central foundry Co Ltd specialising in cylinders, and Hunt Brothers at Griffin Foundry. There were two other foundries in the Langley area: Rood End Foundry Co., and, next to Ham Baker in Clay Lane, John Wheeler & Son Ltd, one of Langley's earliest firms, dating back to 1862.

Now we turn from the casting process to the forging of wrought iron and steel.

The Langley Forge Company

The Langley Forge Co was started in 1904 on the site of a small existing forge, and was to expand into one of the pre-eminent forges in the UK. In the forging process, billets of metal were cut to size on a circular saw and then heated until red-hot in a furnace. In latter times these were oil-fired, but gas and coal were used originally. The red-hot block was then transported by tongues, trolley or crane, depending on its size, to a forge hammer or press. Small blocks were formed using a tilt hammer which fell under its own weight. Larger billets required more power to shape them, and a steam driven forge hammer, capable of much greater force, was used.

Although the whole procedure sounds crude, in the hands of a skilled team complex forgings were produced with great accuracy. This reduced the amount of machining needed to meet the final tolerances.

The company specialised in the manufacture of large forgings. Typical products include turbine rotors for power stations, crank-shafts for pumping stations, mills and mining equipment. Many shafts and parts for ships were forged, including the 'Titanic', the 'QEII' and for the refurbished 'SS Great Britain'. The Forge even had a special double-articulated lorry to deliver these huge items.

Forging by eye

I remember watching the men working at Langley Forge. They had a 3000t steam press under the foreman operator James Jarratt and a 1500t press under Jim Williams. These presses were in the building close to the canal wharf in Langley Green Road. The smaller drop hammers were in the building at the end of Mill Lane. Jim Jarratt had a rule fixed to the press and would control the size of the component by eyeing up against the rule and giving instructions to the press operators accordingly.

The billets or ingots were heated up in a furnace using best coal and an air blast. It could take up to two days to get the larger billets hot enough to work, and then they could work them for about two hours before they had cooled down too much and had to be reheated. The ingots were suspended from chains on a crane, and this mechanism was used to turn the forging in the press.

The men worked a twelve-hour day, 6am to 6pm five days a week. There was no forging work at night, although furnaces would have to be tended; presumably, it would have been unacceptable to the people living nearby for the noise of the forge hammers to continue day and night.

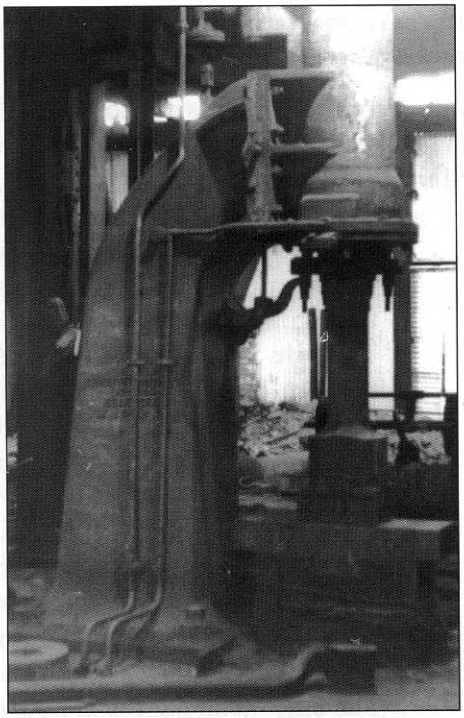
James Hallard

The first forty years

In March 1942, as part of 'Warships Week', Langley Forge sought to do its bit and raise £480 towards Oldbury's total of £210,000 to 'adopt' HMS Griffin. They produced a one-off magazine which included the following (slightly edited) short history of the company's first forty years.

"Way back in the dim dark ages, when a cornfield and a pub occupied the site where Messrs Hughes-Johnson Stampings Ltd now stands, there was a small forge on the ground where the present forge was built. Much water has flowed along the canal since then, and we have seen the arrival of our neighbours whose expansion has long since outsripped our gradual progress.

"Little is to be found of the original forge with its one or two hammers before it passed into its present ownership. The works have completely changed: more steam hammers were added and later it was necessary to meet the demand for machined work by the erection of a Machine Shop, and, joy of joys, it had a man-powered travelling crane.



Typical steam hammer (Picture: Shirley Rippin)

"1911 saw the beginning of the Heavy Press Shop and the arrival of Sam Holling. The erection of presses began, and large cranes were fitted, capable of handling pieces over 40 tons each. An electric crane was fitted in the Machine Shop, where further expansion was necessary, so the stables had to go. Yes, it was horse transport in those days, and it was a magnificent sight to see about twenty of the great station horses bringing over a large ingot from the station, each horse straining to its utmost - a final rest before the last pull for the sweep round through the top gates, and George Jennings supervising the job. Well, the horses have gone and are now replaced by horse power.

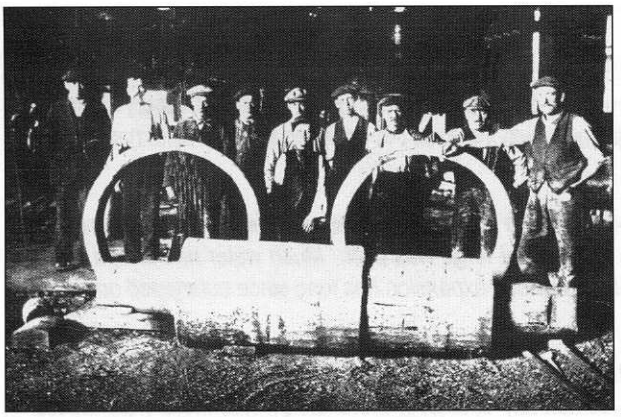
"The production of the Press Shop and expansion of the Machine Shop made heavy demands on the use of the crane, and one often heard the familiar complaint of 'Waiting for the crane!', so the Shop was extended towards the Forge, and a smaller 5 ton crane installed. There were one or two collisions at first, but things settled down and much time was saved.

"New needs for steels called for testing, and a Test House was erected (previously test pieces had to be carried over to Dudley). Ironwork was dropping out, alloy steels were in greater demand and these needed treatment, so Sam Nightingale founded the Heat Treatment section, first with two furnaces and an oil bath, later three more furnaces were added and a large oil bath big enough to swim in - as some people know from experience. Meanwhile the Press Shop wanted room to fling its arms, so an Ingot Store was erected and the greater part of the stock moved out of the Shop.

"On the technical side it was realised that closer control was required, such as brinelling, pyrometric recording, chemical analysis, more accurate testing and micro-photography.

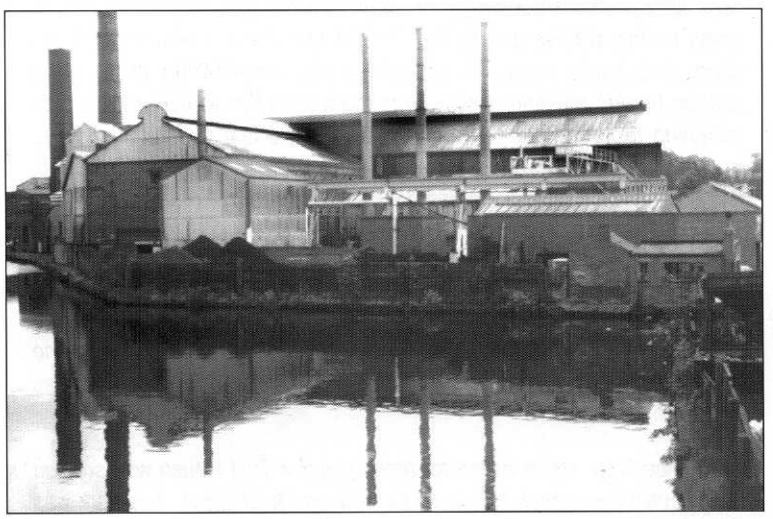
"There have been many ups and downs whilst all this has been going on, but we have still kept going. The coal strike in 1926 was a tough spot, but it did not stop us, and even the bad depression that came in later years was overcome, although it hit everyone hard: but work was found when many a factory was idle. In fact, it was soon found possible to resume the annual works outing: Blackpool, Llandudno, Porthcawl, Weston-super-Mare, Brighton - if some people had had their way, it would have been "Blackpool every time!" Once more times have changed and what new delights have we discovered? - ARP, blackout, firewatching, Government returns .... eugh! - give me the good old days.

The editor of 'Warships Weekly' (unnamed)



Like father, like son... *Bill Neale (senior) second from the right with colleagues and a massive forging, believed to be for the 'Titanic'. Bill Neale (junior) machining a component, definitely for the 'QEII'* (Pictures: Bill Neale collection)

After WW2 the company continued to expand despite a downturn in business for forgings: the number of forgemasters in the UK decreased from 45 in the early fifties to 10, including Langley, in the sixties. By the early eighties, the company required massive capital expenditure to remain competitive, and the Nightingale family, who had owned it since its inception, decide to cease trading, although still in profit. The site was sold, and passed through different hands until it was acquired in 1989 by Finkl (UK), part of a US company based in Chicago and started in 1879 by Anton Finkl, blacksmith. They continue to machine parts and have refurbished the machine shop and warehouse, but no longer forge on the premises. The site, including the old buildings of the machine shop, has been renovated with money from the Black Country Development Corporation, thereby preserving some of the best remaining industrial buildings in Langley.



Langley Forge from Uncle Ben's Bridge in 1983 when the Forge closed. These buildings include the machine shop, press shop and warehouse. The hammer shop was along the canal to the left. In front is the coal wharf run for many years by D Slade and Sons. The wharf buildings have been demolished, and this area is occupied by Gayden Transport. (Picture: Bill Neale)

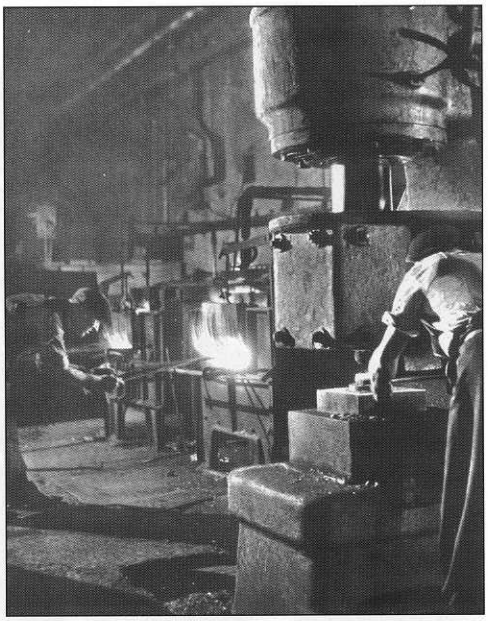
Hughes - Johnson Stampings Ltd

Next to Langley Forge in Mill Lane and working a similar process was Hughes-Johnson Stampings Ltd. Hughes Johnson & Co, was started in 1877 by two employees from Tangye's of Smethwick, James Hughes, a forge foreman, and Richard Johnson, a machine shop foreman. The company started making test machines, pumps and presses, including coining presses for the Birmingham Mint, and soon after began drop forging. Drop forging, particularly stamping, gradually became more important in their activities and finally took over. By 1897 the public company Hughes-

Die making at Hughes-Johnson in the fifties (Picture: Hughes-Johnson brochure)

Johnson Stampings was floated.

Stamping differs from forging in that hot metal is forced into a massive iron or steel mould, the die. This is more economical where quantities of identical articles are required. The company made its dies in its own workshops.

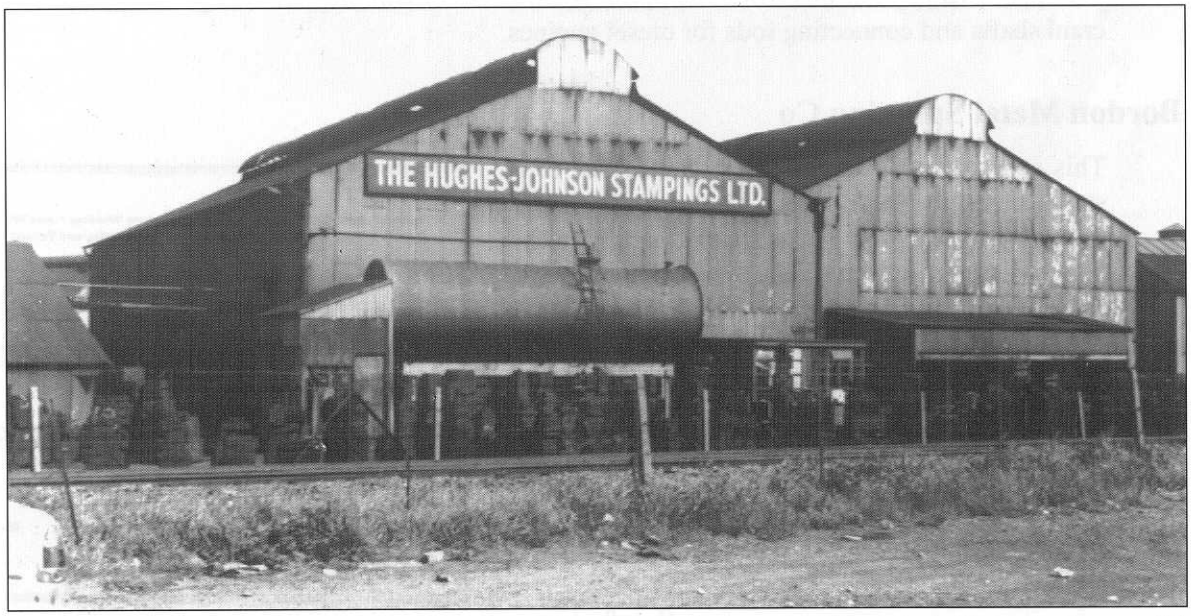


Drop forging at Hughes-Johnson in the fifties. In the background are furnaces used to heat the steel ingots prior to stamping. (Picture: Hughes-Johnson brochure)

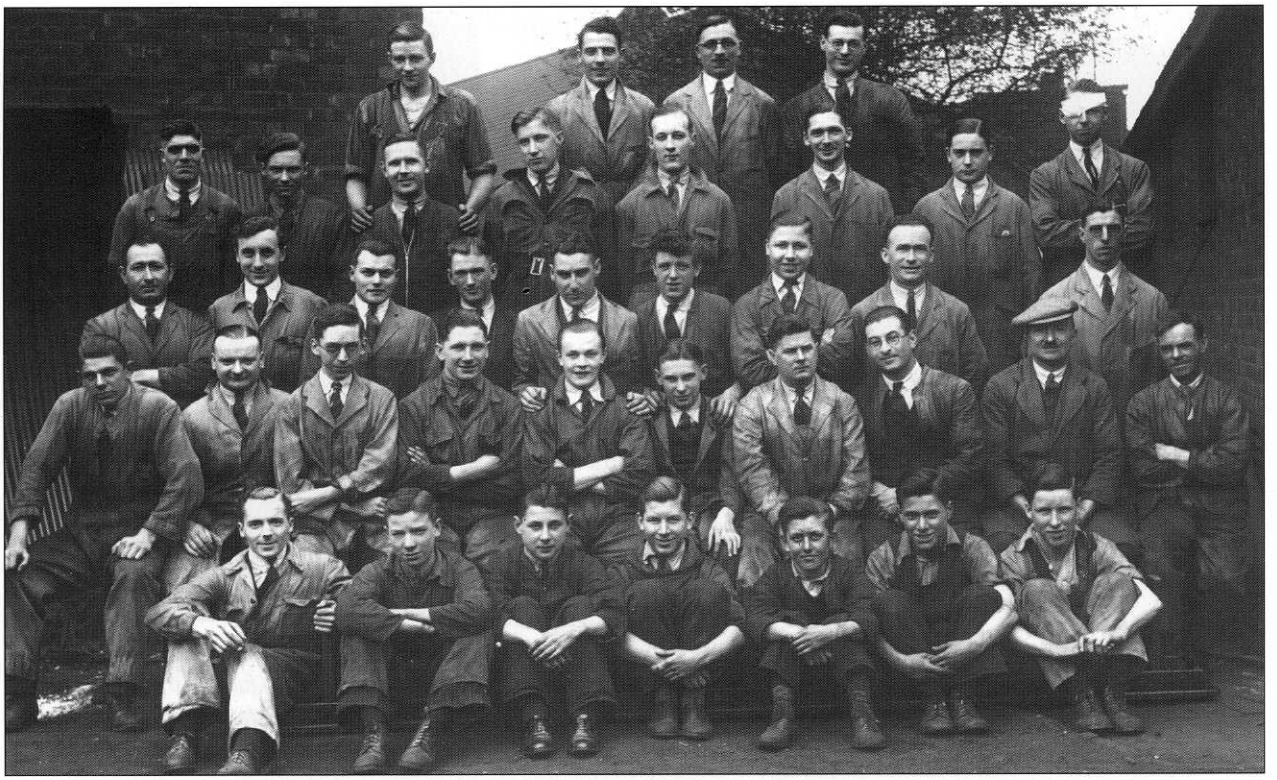
They were a pioneering company, ready to use the latest equipment and techniques, and renowned for high class work of fine detail and accuracy in agricultural, automotive, marine and aircraft applications. They were leaders in the drop forging of aluminium alloys during WW1, particularly for aircraft, and they established a subsidiary, Light Metal Forgings Ltd, in Churchbridge to develop this side of the business.

Their forgings covered a wide range of applications from scalpel handles and cake moulds to parts of the 'Comet' airplane and 'Norton' motorcycles.

The firm has now closed, and the buildings are derelict and deserted.



The face of Hughes-Johnson Stampings presented to the railway. Their private siding extended in front of these buildings with a connection to the main line close to the level crossing. (Picture: Leslie Scarlett)



Fitting shop personnel at Hughes-Johnson about 1938. *(Picture: George Garratt collection)*
Back Row - L Williams, A Cutler, T Salter, F Hall: fourth row - H Church, F Taylor, H Hughes, J Coates, V Wilcox, C Pacey, W Minchin, N Harrison: middle row - W Green, A Harper, E Smith, F Woodward, M Vincent, J Element, R Smith, T Cutler, B Hollins: second row - ?, V Broadbent, R Lindop, B Scandrett, T Minchin, R Pearce, S Taylor, S Hall, F Grigg, J Bowen: front row - H Walters, G Garratt, S Wyatt, R Acutt, J Acutt, J Fletcher, A Smith

Forgings were also made by other companies in the area. One of these was British Stampings Ltd who had a factory on the Wolverhampton Road close to Birchley Crossings. They specialised in crankshafts and connecting rods for diesel engines.

Bordon Metal Spinning Co

This company was set up in the late forties in a stable block in Green Street, Oldbury. By 1952 the owners, Marshall Rickers and Charlie Davis, had moved to premises on the corner of Park Street and Park Lane, next to the 'Spread Eagle' public house. The company moved to a larger site at Blackheath in 1988.

Metal spinning is a method of making concave objects in metals such as aluminium, brass, copper, mild steel or even stainless steel. The metal is spun on a lathe with a pattern at the chuck over which the metal is manually forced.

Alan Rickers

1950s advertisement for "Bordon". Clearly, they did more than just metal spinning.

Belts, suds oil and bosh at MCL

I was fifteen and it was a week before Easter. I left school on the Friday and on the Monday my dad took me to the MCL. I was shown into a little office for an interview - a quick interview as the man was only interested in my attendance and time-keeping at school. After this I was told to report to the office at eight o'clock next morning with a head scarf. So, on the Tuesday I reported to the office clutching my head scarf.

After a short time a nurse came in with two blue overalls. "'Come along with me, dear. I'll take you to the cloak room". We went along the drive to a long wooden building on the right. Inside were rows of wash basins, and coat hooks with benches underneath. She told me to hang up my coat and put on my overall. Then she put on the head scarf for me, as a turban with all my hair pushed underneath. She explained that there was a lot of leather belts in the factory, and if one broke it might get tangled in my hair. I was thinking 'What am I getting into?' She took me across the drive to two big wooden doors with a small door in one of them. As she opened the door, the first thing I noticed was the terrible smell, which I found out was oil and suds oil for the machine. The second thing was the noise: so great that I thought 'I'm never going to hear what she says to me'.

Then I saw a maze of machines and hundred of belts running across the ceiling and down to each machine. She took me through the maze to the first aid room, and told me to report there if I had an accident or was not feeling well. After this I went back to the factory to meet Jacky Dyas. He said "I'm your tool setter. If you have any problems with your machine, come to me." By now, I was petrified.

He took me to a young lady working one of the smaller machines, but some were six feet high and the same across. You had to stand on duck boards to work them and to stop the oil rotting your shoes. This machine was a capstan. She was a very small lady with a pretty face and very friendly: her name was Brenda Cole, and she lived in Old Park Lane, Langley. I spent the day with her trying to put a blank screw or bolt into a collet, which is like the chuck on a drill but continually spinning, pulling a handle to lock it off so that the screw then spins, pulling another handle at the other side of the machine which brought a tool called a die-head on to the screw and put the thread on it.

A maze of belts and machines at MCL. *(Picture: 'Made in Oldbury' brochure, 1949)*

Eventually I graduated on to what were called 'bar jobs', making a whole component out of a bar of steel, brass or aluminium. You could use seven or eight tools on one machine, working to two thousandths of an inch!

In summer, to keep the factory cool, they put wooden boards on the shafts in the ceiling that ran the belts, so they acted like fans. In the winter months the tool setters would come in early, and, after the stoves that were scattered round the factory had been lit by the labourers, they would put old bars of steel in them until they were hot. One of these was put in the 'bosh', the bin for the oil, of the machine to warm the oil and the suds oil so that we could start work. The oil and steel were so cold that within a few minutes you could not feel your fingers. This was dangerous as you could easily cut yourself and not notice, the swarf coming off the work being very sharp.

I was 'the baby' there for three or four years: everyone took me under their wing and spoilt me rotten. There was a good rapport between everyone. We had 'Music While You Work' on the radio every day and we all sang along. We had a nice canteen where you could get a good breakfast or dinner, and we held our Christmas parties there, paid for by the company. Also there was a dance club every Tuesday night where Jacky Dyas taught me to ballroom dance. My wage for the week was about £3, working five days a week, eight till six with an hour for dinner.

Marie Stanley

MCL and Repetition Ltd

Everyone locally knew the 'MCL' - but how many knew what the letters stood for? It was 'Midland Car Lighting', perhaps a clue to its origin.

MCL and Repetition Ltd was established in 1926 to manufacture from metal bar small components that were used in thousands. By 1947 they were making six million items per month! The works was situated in Pool Lane, and by the 1960s had expanded to over 400 employees.

They proudly claimed to supply 'automatic and capstan precision components in any quantity and any metal to the customer's own specifications', but steel and brass bars were their main raw materials. Their own product list included such items as banjos (presumably not musical), flushing plungers, grommet sleeves, knuckle joints (not medical), thumb screws and many more with equally bizarre descriptions. However, the components they produced were vital to the most important of British industries, including motor cars and aircraft, for half a century. As well as producing small components they also manufactured two of their own lines, an office duplicator and a steam cooker, for a while.

The firm had a reputation for the accuracy of its components, using the best available equipment and even making their own when necessary.

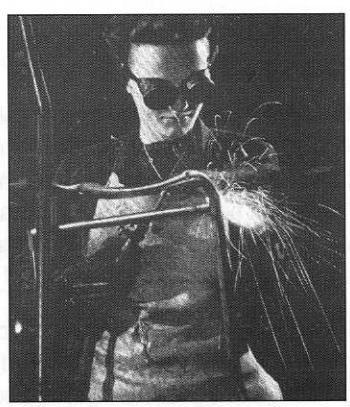
Tubes

Oldbury was an important centre for the development of tubes. A pioneer in cold drawing of tubes was Accles & Pollock, set up in 1899 in Perry Barr and moving to Churchbridge, Oldbury, three years later. The company expanded rapidly, merging with other companies in 1910. After the 1914-18 war, Tube Investments Ltd (TI) was formed covering Accles & Pollock, Tubes, Simplex and Credenda, and the expansion continued between the wars. In 1927, Tube Products was set up to exploit the production of tubes by electric resistance welding, the Johnson process, under an American patent. The first 'Tru-Wel' tube was manufactured a year later.

TI's tube came in many shapes and sizes and found applications from hypodermic syringes to aircraft parts and nuclear fuel tubes. Everyday applications included tubular furniture, golf shafts, bicycle frames and fishing rods. Much of the company was sited in Oldbury itself, outside the area covered in this book, but TI companies operating in Rood End Road included Tube Products, PEL, and Credenda.

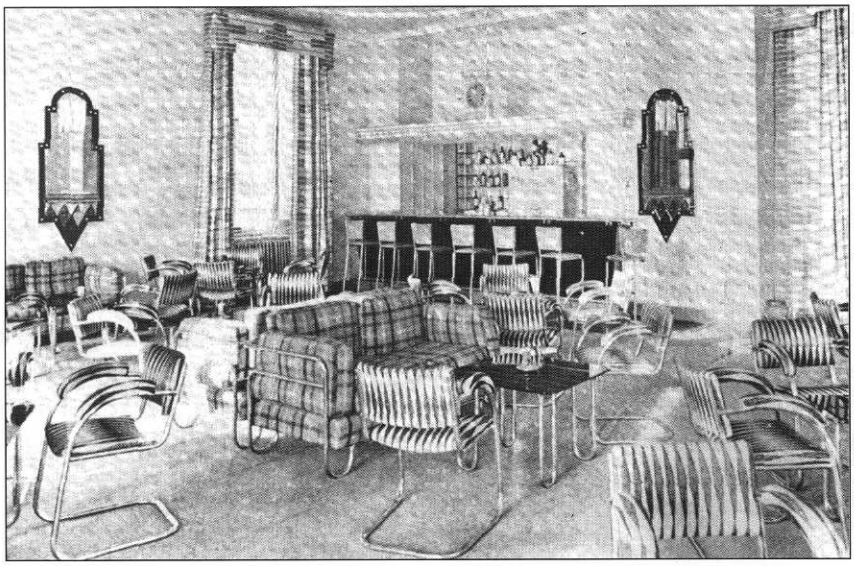
PEL furniture

In 1929 a small department was set up within the Accles & Pollock factory at Paddock Works to produce tubular steel-framed furniture and bus seats. This was a small operation involving prefabrication of the seamless tubes in the main factory: assembly by bending, welding, polishing and spraying or plating was carried out in the unit. Initially, there was no capability for upholstery, so this was contracted out. The venture was successful, and in 1931 a new company was registered, Practical Equipment Ltd. Next year it was renamed Pel Ltd to avoid confusion with another company, Practical Furniture Ltd.



Welding a PEL chair, about 1949.
(Picture: Architectural Association booklet)

The company worked with leading designers, such as Oliver Bernard and Raymond McGrath, to manufacture up-market furni-



PEL furniture at the Hotel Metropole, Brighton in 1933. *(Picture: PEL 1936 catalogue)*

ture for contracts such as Broadcasting House, Marshall & Snellgrove's stores and various hotels including the Savoy. It also produced its own designs for the mass market. In 1932 they issued their first catalogue and had a stand at the 'Ideal Home' exhibition. Their first advert promoted the 'strength, comfort and grace' of the items. They were leaders in avant-garde 1930s designs.

In 1934 Pel bought a patent for tubular stacking chairs from the Austrian designer Bruno ollack, and was able to obtain royalties from other manufacturers of stacking chairs until about 1950. These chairs proved very popular, and spread throughout the country in schools, church halls, and canteens, anywhere that the convenience of stackable chairs was required.

During the war supplies of steel were limited, and Pel was involved solely in government work,

Pel in the war

Shortly after the outbreak of the 1939-45 war, production was switched to items of a military nature for the various forces. One of the larger items was fabrication of ailerons for the wings of the 'Avro-Ansa' aircraft. Both men and women were employed, the men mainly doing the cutting and bending of the various diameter tubing, and the women and girls the acetylene welding.

One winter night a large unexploded bomb fell through the roof and landed in the polishing section. When we arrived in the morning around 7.15, all employees except the Works Fire Service and the Home Guard were stopped. We were set to work to evacuate the department of everything moveable, machinery, tubing, tools and, of course, any finished products packed and ready for despatch. This we did in record time, fear lending strength and speed to our efforts. Later in the morning, the Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal Squad arrived to make the bomb safe before removing it.

Ray Kenny

including the manufacture of seating for armoured cars and furnishings for ships. But immediately after the war Pel moved to its present premises in Rood End Road, and business returned to normal. The BBC bought Pel chairs for its television presenters in the 50s.

The company continued to innovate: in 1964 they introduced chairs with moulded polypropylene seats and backs, and in 1968 they opened the first European plant for powder-coating tubes to give the best possible finish to coated tubes. They became the largest producer of school furniture in the country, and then introduced wooden furniture and folding beds in the 80s and seating for venues such as sports grounds, including the Hawthorns, Villa Park, Wembly and Wimbledon.

In 1978 they were sold by Tube Investments to Uniflex, and in 1989 they were bought by the McGinnity family, and have seen a ten-fold increase in turnover in a decade. They have increasingly emphasised shopfitting and furnishing project management in this period, working for large companies such as Marks and Spencer, W H Smith and Comet - a far cry from those first few welded chairs made in a corner of the Accles & Pollock factory!

John Elwell Ltd

In 1860 John Elwell, then 23, was trading as an iron, steel and tinplate merchant at Snow Hill Birmingham. His logo on letterheads and on some products was the 'Phoenix' rising from the flames. From the rolling mill he offered a full range of steel sections: "Rolls turned for any section at short notice", read his advert in 'Griffith's Guide to the Iron Trade' in 1873. They also acted as agents for fire and burglar-proof safes manufactured by his brother, James Felton Elwell, at Vulcan Works, Birmingham.

In 1879 they moved to Sheepcote Street, and then in 1913 to Sherbourne Street, Birmingham, the new site being named 'Phoenix Works'. The product range expanded to include iron hurdles and fencing, and agricultural and industrial buildings as well as stockholding. They exhibited at agricultural shows throughout the country, gaining many medals and a reputation for good quality.

John Elwell died in 1910, but had already handed over the running of the company to Oliver Hancocks Hawley and Thomas Woodhall who had joined him in 1888 straight from school.

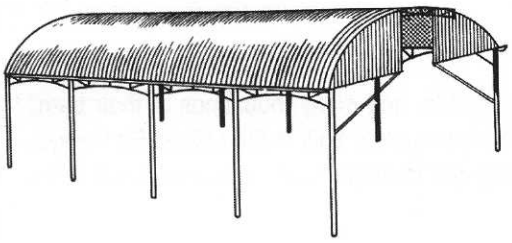
The company needed a larger site again, and in 1926 started to develop a 7-acre site at Rood End. This was a triangular plot with roads on two sides and Rood End railway marshalling yard on the other. A line was brought in from the Birmingham to Stourbridge railway (then GWR) through the new stockholding building, with a further loop through the construction shop.

The new workshops were manufactured at 'Phoenix Works' and delivered by the firm's 'Sentinel' steam lorry to be erected at 'Rood End Iron Works'. It took four years to complete the move, and in 1930 the Phoenix works closed; thus, trading in Birmingham ceased after 70 years.

Mr Woodhall's health failed soon after the move, and he retired in 1932, but Mr Hawley continued to lead the company through the war and up to 1959, when he finally retired at 85, having worked for the company for 71 years. Stanley Hawley had been a director since 1947, and took over from his father. Success continued, especially in the development of sectional steel buildings, one of the firm's main products today.

Sales of agricultural buildings reached a peak in the 50s with the relaxation of steel rationing and the introduction of farming grants. John Elwell Ltd also produced many fine industrial buildings together with steelwork for cinemas, multi-story car parks and similar constructional work. These were put together by Elwell's own gangs of erectors.

Smaller departments produced pig and cattle troughs, wheel barrows, gates, fencing, and complete



penning layouts and auction rings at cattle markets throughout the country. During WW2 the range extended to Nissen huts, field cookers and work benches for the forces, and Anderson table shelters for homes to help protect against air raids. Perhaps the most important war work was the manufacture of large parts of 'Mulberry Harbour'. After the war the stockholding department specialised in straight and curved galvanised corrugated steel sheets.

In May 1972 it was announced, to everyone's disbelief, that John Elwell Ltd had been sold to the Tube Investments Group as a going concern. The stockholding department was purchased by Ash and Lacy Ltd, and the steel shed and construction departments by RBM (Holdings) Group and moved to a site at Oldbury Road, West Bromwich. Rood End Iron Works site became an industrial trading park,all the buildings being replaced by warehouses and workshops. The stockholding department remained in Wellesley Road for a few more years, but it too finally closed.

The shed department was renamed Elwell (S&S) Ltd, and the construction department Elwell (RBM) Ltd. The latter secured orders for aircraft hangers and coach houses as well as the traditional farm and industrial buildings. In 1986 purchase by the David Webster Group allowed further expansion and development. In 1988 the recession and cut backs in farm grants proved too much for Elwell (RBM) Ltd who erected their last farm building. Over 100 years of agricultural building manufacture had come to an end.

Elwell (S&S) Ltd, being more diversified, fared better. It moved back to stockholding galvanised corrugated steel sheets, added to its range of industrial buildings, introduced temporary steel security fencing, started a hire department, and bought 'Odoni' who made cycle racks and sheds. It changed its name to Elwell Buildings Ltd, and it is now one of the most versatile steel building companies in the country. In 1998, the company was bought by Alpha Building Components Ltd, manufacturers of coated steel sheeting, and is now based at Garratts Lane, Old Hill.

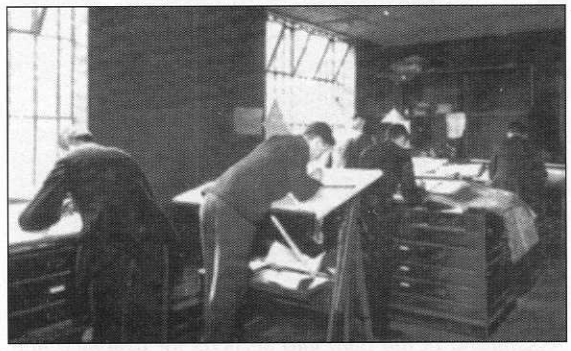
John Elwell certainly chose the right logo when, 138 years ago, he picked the Phoenix rising from the ashes, proving you cannot keep a good company down!

Ken Rock (former Managing Director)

Drawing the line at John Elwell Ltd

I was an apprentice draftsman at John Elwell's structural engineers from 1948 to 1950, when I was recruited for National Service in the Royal Air Force. When I left Technical School I started work at about £1.10s, and that included Saturday morning as part of the working week! At first I was working under supervision producing drawings of the structural steel buildings for the works to manufacture. At 18 I finished by having to design and draw a three-span factory building for the Valor Company at Erdington with only minimal supervision. This was to give me the confidence to become a fully fledged draftsman and take responsibility for complete projects. The managing director, Mr Hawley, was a very religious man, who kindly posted a Bible through my letter box just before I left for National Service. I remember he had an amazing ability to add up pounds, shillings and pence all together rather than adding the columns separately. Having finished in seconds he would ask me whether it was correct, by which time I had just about finished the pence column!

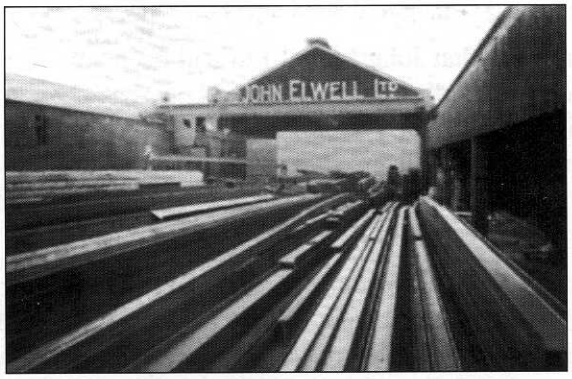
John Lewis



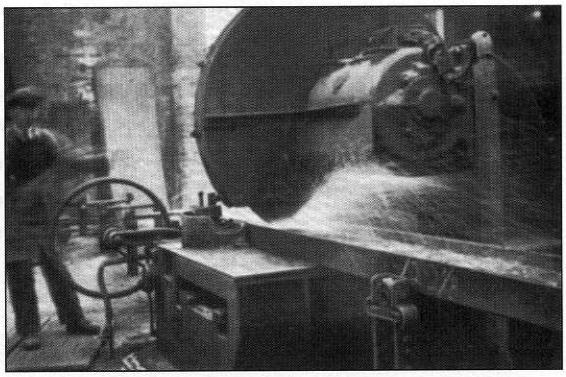
The drawing office in the 1930s, a little before John Lewis worked there. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

How to build a Dutch barn

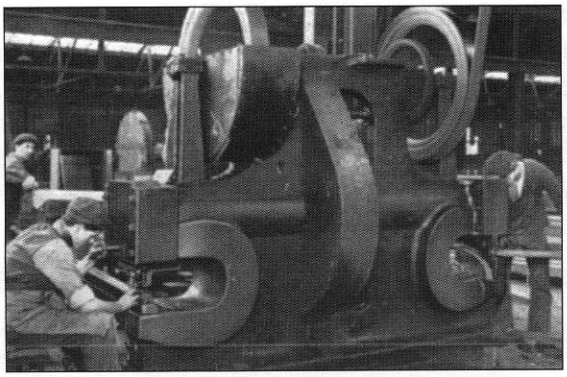
Dutch barns were one of the buildings that John Elwell Ltd specialised in, and many thousands of their barns are still standing. In 1937 they published a brochure illustrating how barns were built in their Rood End works, and these pictures show the type of heavy equipment used for cutting and forming heavy metal structures at the time.



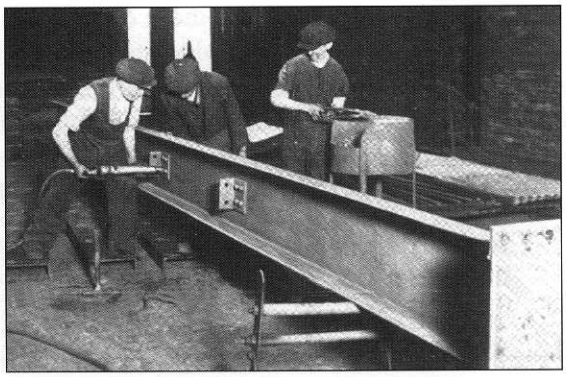
Stocks of material await conversion.



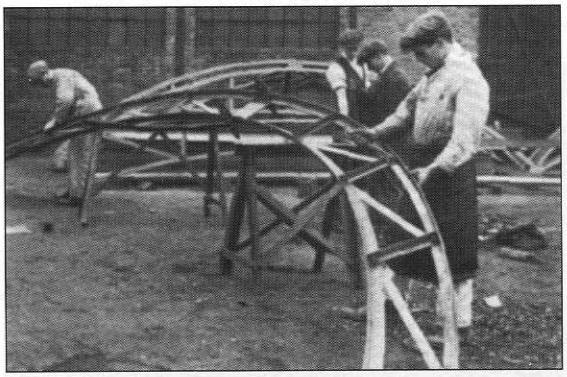
High speed, 60 horse power, electric saw which rapidly cuts stantions to length.



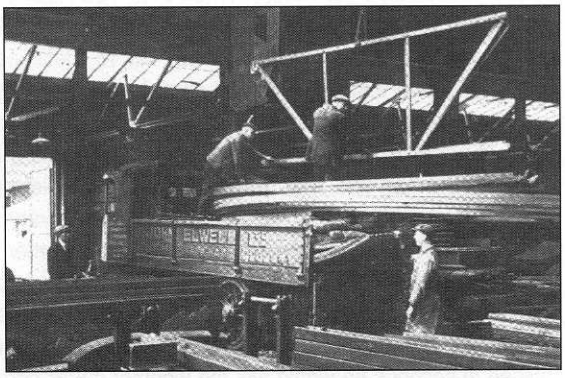
Machine for punching and shearing plates up to 1" thick at 28 strokes per minute.



Pneumatic rivetting of beams and stantions. Hydraulic rivetting was also used.



Assembling of the barn into sections for despatch and erection on site.



Despatch of dutch barn in sections using John Elwell's lorry. Goods were also sent out by rail from their siding.

Engineers and the like

Many small engineering companies, die casters, iron founders and pattern makers have come and gone in Langley. In many cases we have few details other than a name and location in a trade list, and perhaps an advertisement. After WW2 new enterprises arose as industry boomed and reconstruction got underway, as the official Oldbury and Warley Handbooks of the 50s and 60s record.

Langley Constructional Engineering Ltd made stainless steel tanks and pipework, hoppers and chutes in their factory in Spring Street, while Lawrence Engineering Co Ltd made conveyors and elevators in Bloxcidge Street. Rood End Road was home to W P M Engineers Ltd, toolmakers.

Hall Foundries Ltd at Crown Works in Engine Satreet was a well established family business casting brass, bronze and other alloys. The iron foundry of John Wheeler & Sons Ltd, established as long ago as 1862, still flourished in Clay Lane. There were many wooden pattern makers scattered through the area supplying the foundries, including C H Patten & Co Ltd at Rood End, Patternmakers (Oldbury) Ltd in Popes Lane, and Midland Art Woodwork Supplies Ltd in Tat Bank Road. L J Gough (Patternmakers) in Clay Lane started in 1960 in a garden shed and expanded rapidly: by 1972 they were making patterns in wood, metal and plastic, and capable of making castings themselves up to 60 tons.

After WW2, two other firms operated out of TI's 'Credenda' site in Rood End Road, Gowshalls, who made road signs, and part of the Simplex Electric Co Ltd. Under the 'Creda' brand, Simplex manufactured electrical appliances such as cookers, irons, fires, wash boilers and water heaters for the domestic market and public bodies like hospitals and canteens. They designed and built the cookers for pre-fabs after WW2, and 'Creda' was a popular brand in the heyday of British white goods - what home was complete without a Creda Corvette?

At the other end of the 'metal-bashing' industry, literally, was the local blacksmith, who hammered out the wrought iron bits and pieces needed by the local community before large firms took over and left them just to look after the horses.

The village blacksmith

My grandfather, George Thomas, was the blacksmith in Langley. His smithy was where Old Park Lane runs into Park Lane. He made his own horseshoes and his own nails.

One family story is that he accepted a bet to shoe a horse blindfold: the only condition he made was that his wife be the one to hand him the nails, as he couldn't bear to risk laming a horse. He won the bet.

Margaret Upton

Scrap

The end-product of all this forging, casting, milling, threading, spinning and assembly of metals is, of course, scrap, and many people in the Langley area have made a living through it! These may have been simply the rag and bone men who walked the streets with horse and cart collecting rusty scrap and old mangles along with everything else offered. Or they may be the dismantlers and scrap merchants who sorted metals and resold any good items - car parts especially!

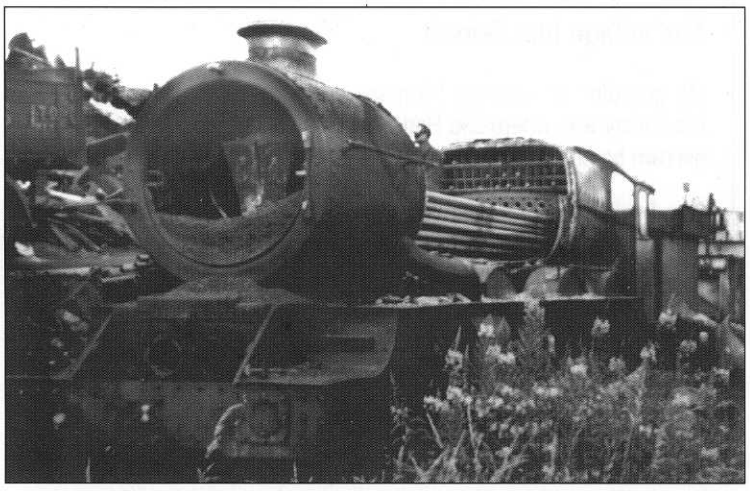
But the kings of scrap in Langley were Cox & Danks. No one will have taken on a bigger challenge than they did at Scapa Iron Works in Tat Bank Road, for there they helped to dismantle German Navy ships taken from the waters of Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands.

Ernest Cox was a Wolverhampton Engineer who became a partner in his father-in-law's firm Overton Forge Steelworks at Wishaw, Manchester. He started the firm of Cox & Danks with

Cox & Danks offices and warehouse in Tat Bank Road at the end of the seventies. (Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)

Tommy Danks just before WW1, but it was Cox who ran the firm for the next thirty years.

After the war he first bought and dismantled two old battleships, and then in 1924 he bought the entire sunken German fleet in Scapa Flow from the Admiralty. His team started raising the boats, pioneering the techniques of raising ships as they went. They started with small destroyers in 1924 and by 1931 had raised 32 ships, including battleships of 25,000 tons. They started in Manchester, and the Tat Bank Road site was opened in 1935. Doubtless the thriving local metal industries and Rood End goods yard were important in the choice. In 1949 Cox sold the business to Metal Industries Ltd, and it finally closed in the seventies. The offices and part of their site is occupied by Birds Transport who themselves developed from the firm of J W Bird of Titford Road, hauliers and scrap merchants.



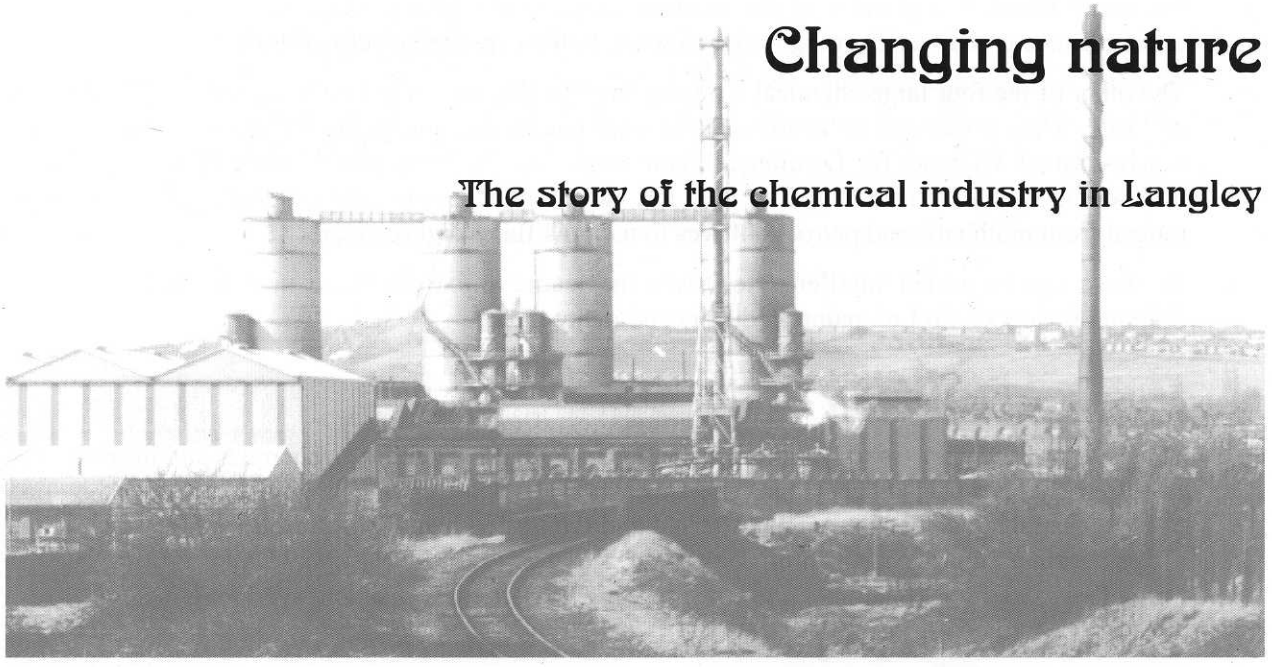
GWR 6027 'King Richard 1' being broken up at Cox & Danks yard in Tat Bank Road, August 1963. No fewer than eleven such 'Kings' were disembowelled there. (Picture: Mike Wood)

Ships were not the only source of scrap for Cox & Danks: in the post-steam era trains too were dismantled by them, particularly GWR 'King' locomotives, and a host of other items too. One manager at BIP used to look out of his window at the Cox & Danks scrap pile to judge the nation's economy - if the pile was high, the economy was in good shape because people could afford to throw things away!

7

Changing nature

The story of the chemical industry in Langley



The aim of the chemical industry is to take the materials provided by nature and rearrange their atoms to give new materials that are useful to mankind - in this sense the chemical industry changes nature. Thus, the alkali works could be described in the 'Illustrated Times' of 1862 as a "city of transformations". Chemical manufacture, 'changing nature', was at the heart of Langley's growth and prosperity. This area was to become home to four major chemical producers, each gaining international repute over the next hundred years in their own specialist areas.

The big four

The chemical industry arrived in Langley in 1835 when Chance Brothers started to manufacture chemicals for their glass works in Smethwick, and chose the green fields between Oldbury and Langley Green as the site for this new venture. It was an ideal site, close to the glass works and linked to it by canal, the Old Main Arm and the Houghton Arm, serving Cinder Meadow and Park collieries at the time: yet it was far enough away from the residential areas of Smethwick and Oldbury for the effects of the noxious processes to be dissipated somewhat. This also gave easy access to the salt works at Stoke Works, Droitwich: salt was an essential ingredient of the 'salt-cake' needed for glass manufacture. Coal and limestone were available locally. The Chance initiative became Chance & Hunt, manufacturers of basic chemicals such as sulphuric acid, hydrochloric acid and ammonia compounds used throughout British industry as well as more domestic products such as washing powder and smelling salts.

In 1850 they sold land to Arthur Albright for his phosphorus works and were able to exchange chemicals with the Albright & Wilson operation next door. So close was the cooperation, that for

over a century sulphuric acid was delivered directly to Albright & Wilson along a pipeline through a hole in their adjoining wall. They built on the production of red phosphorus for matches, making other products, some familiar to us as water softeners, washing powders and baking products.

These two companies jointly started British Cyanides Ltd in 1894 to produce materials for use in metal extraction, particularly in the gold-fields of South Africa. This company became British Industrial Plastics, a pioneer in the plastics industry, and at one stage the largest producer of aminoplastics in the world, going into tableware, bottle caps, and electrical fittings.

The other of the four large chemical works in the Langley area was Lewis Demuth and Co, started in 1865. They processed tar residues from local gas works, and in the 1920s became part of the newly-formed Midland Tar Distillers. Their works on the 'Springfield' site in Parsonage Street was served by the Titford Canal so they too had good access to raw materials. Their products ranged from mothballs and petrol additives to naphtha flares and road tar.

To these can be added smaller enterprises that came and went: soap manufacturers, Tharsis Sulphur & Copper Co Ltd, paint producers and many more.

Men of the chemical industry

The chemical industry owed much to the genius of individuals either as chemists and inventors, or as entrepreneurs and managers, and sometimes as both. Albright & Wilson was developed by one of each, the talented chemist Arthur Albright and the skilled manager John Edward Wilson. It was a close partnership: Richard Threlfall wrote *"... if Arthur struck the spark, John Edward blew it into a flame; and it was his wise and constant tending that kept it burning ever more bright!"*.

In Ludwig Demuth, the young German chemist who founded the company that became Midland Tar Distillers, both scientist and entrepreneur were combined.

Although Chance & Hunt started as a development of Chance Brothers & Co's glass works, the real expansion of the chemical enterprise came under the leadership of Alexander Macomb Chance who became Managing Director in 1868 and led the company almost until the first World War. Another of the Chance family, Kenneth Macomb, was instrumental in the development of British Industrial Plastics.

The companies are often regarded as 'Oldbury firms' rather than 'Langley firms'. Indeed, they do lie on the northern edge of the industrial corridor close to Oldbury. However, the towers and chimneys of Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson did dominate the Langley skyline, they did draw on Langley men and women for the labour force, they were intimately connected with the canal and railway through Langley, and their fumes did blow across Langley homes. Indeed, the chemical industry was largely responsible for the building and expansion of Langley 'village' between 1850 and 1900.

The prospects offered by the chemical industry attracted men from the decreasing mining and metal industries and caused many from the countryside to give up the land and move to the growing town. Typical of these was Joseph Cooper, who, at 17, came from a family of farm labourers at Packwood near Solihull in 1850 to work at Hill Top Farm, Warley. Soon after, he married and got a job at the Alkali Works, remaining there all his working life. The family lived successively in Mill Lane, Nelson Street and Popes Lane, as newer and better houses were built. Two further generations of Coopers worked at Chance & Hunt, sons William and John and grandson Samuel: this family involvement was typical with local companies. William lived in Park Lane opposite the factory, and finally had to move when 'Blue Billy' slipped and destroyed the house.

In saluting the men who made a success of the chemical industry we must acknowlege the part played by not only the owners and chemists, but also by the process workers and labourers. Much of the work was hard, dangerous and unpleasant with poor protection against fumes and harsh materials. However, it did provide much needed employment as the chemical industry expanded at a time when the area was seeing a decline in mining and metal working in the second half of the 19th century.

From Chance Brothers to ICI

Chance's glass works in Smethwick started a small chemical operation making salt-cake, used in the production of glass, by a new process patented by one of their chemists, Richard Phillips. From this grew what was to become the largest chemical works in the Midlands.

Slowly the works expanded as other basic chemicals were introduced, sulphuric acid by the lead chamber process, hydrochloric acid and soda ash by the Leblanc process. The firm remained part of Chance Brothers until 1890, when it became a separate company 'The Oldbury Alkali Company Ltd'. Eight years later it amalgamated with a Wednesbury company, William Hunt and Sons, and 'Chance & Hunt Ltd' was formed, operating on both sites. Ammonia compounds, cadmium, copper and zinc compounds and cement were added to the products.

The company was forward looking in its employment practices and social attitudes, and some of their social innovations are considered in Chapter 9.

In those early days Chance Brothers had its own coopers and carpenters and a steam-driven sawmill for making casks, barrels and containers for the packing and despatch of products. It was necessary to be self-sufficient in such things.

In WW1, manufacture of strategic materials for the Ministry of Munitions was started, as it was by all the local chemical firms, and two critical products were introduced, ammonium nitrate and the explosive TNT. The TNT plant had to be built with great speed and one million bricks were laid in 19 days! The 'ammonite' explosive plant is said to been situated in Western Road, probably on the land that is now Albright & Wilson's sports field, known to many as 'the ammo'.

In 1917 Brunner Mond acquired a controlling interest in Chance & Hunt, and when ICI was formed in 1928, the site became part of the General Chemicals Group of ICI, and later part of the Mond Division of ICI. With the arrival of the M5 motorway, most of the site was taken for the building of the new road, and chemical manufacture ceased. Some packing and distribution from the site continued, but that ceased soon after and all connection with the great chemical manufacturing site was lost.

Manufacture in the 1860s

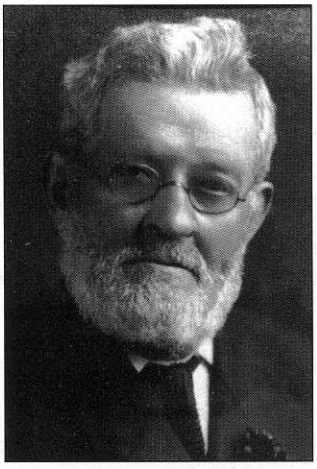
The 'Illustrated Times' of 5 July 1862 featured the operation of the works in their series *"Workshops of England, No IX - The chemical works of Messrs. Chance Brothers and Co. at Oldbury"*. This was only twenty-five years after the company had been set up, but, as the drawing shows, the works were extensive by then, and the 'Blue Billy' waste mountain already indicated much production.

The article describes some of the processes then operated, and give an idea of the work carried out by our ancestors, some of whose jobs were stated in the census returns as 'soda breaker', 'black ash worker', 'white ash packer' and 'salt cake manufacturer' as well as many a 'labourer, alkali works'.

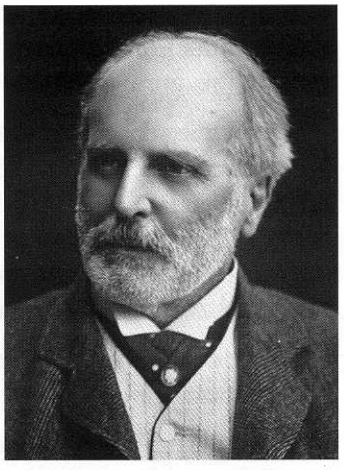
Masters and men - a picture gallery

From the beginning of the 19th century, the success of the chemical industry, as with all manufacturing enterprises, depended on the skills of both the men who set up and led the ventures and those they employed to do the actual work of manufacture. It has been a long struggle to establish fair reward and acceptable conditions for both masters and men, and a sense of partnership between them. This small gallery represents the contribution of so many people from both 'sides' of the chemical industry to prosperity and progress in the Langley area.

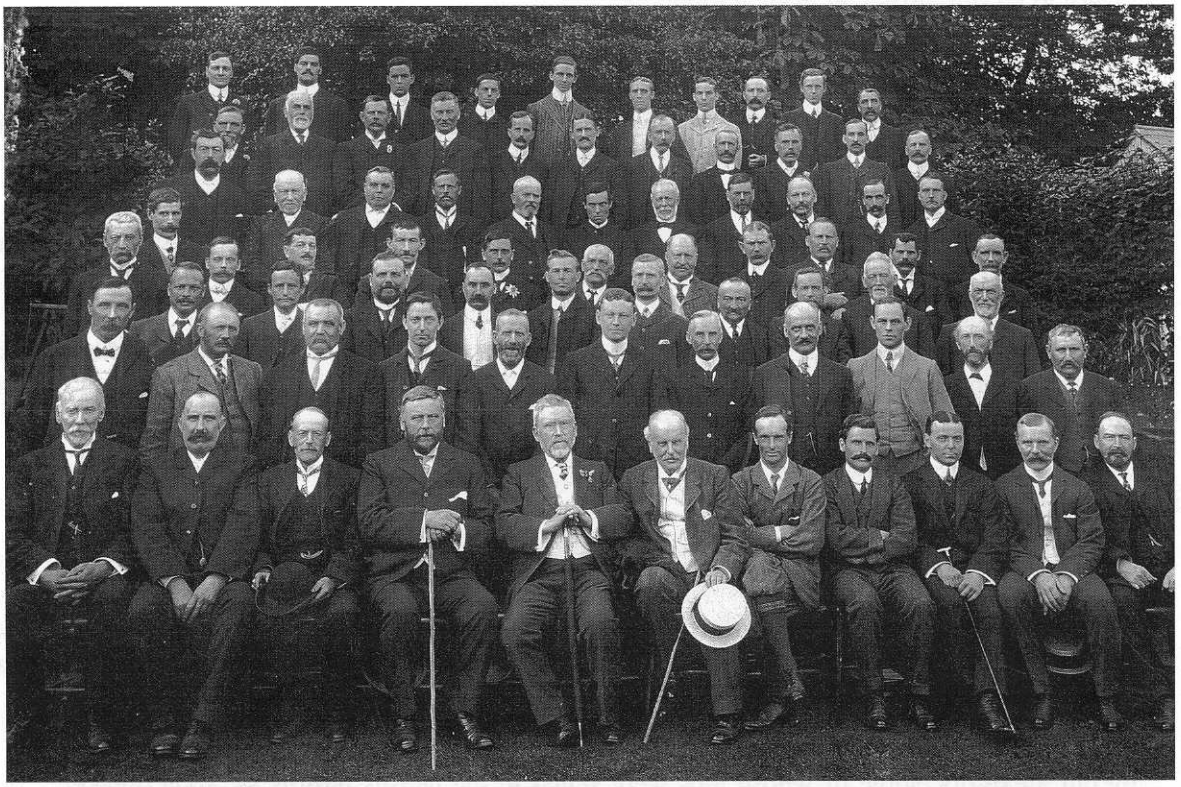
Chance and Hunt



Sir Alexander Macomb Chance who directed the fortunes of the Alkali works from the 1868 to 1912. A great benefactor to the area who became a total abstainer to discourage drunkenness in his work-force. *(Picture: ICI brochure)*



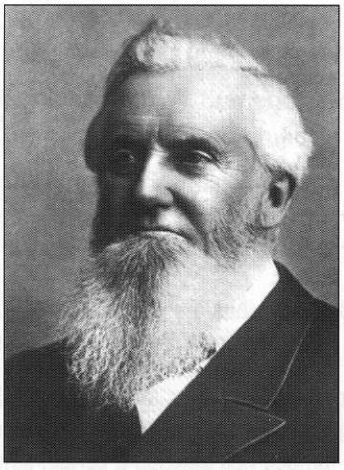
William Cooper, one of his loyal employees for fifty years, and a leading member of the Church established by Chance Bros, the New Providence at Churchbridge. *(Picture: Annie Dixon collection)*



Alexander Macomb Chance, with hat and dog, at a reception for all the foremen of Chance and Hunt at his home at the turn of the century. *(Picture: Eric Fanthom collection)*

Albright & Wilson

Arthur Albright, 1811-1900
First Chairman



John Edward Wilson 1834-1907
Second Chairman

William Arthur Albright, 1877-1915
Third Chairman

Pictures from "One hundred years of Phosphorus making"

May 21st 1896

To Messrs Albright & Wilson Limited

Gentlemen

We, your employees, think that the present time a fitting opportunity to tender you our united thanks for the many expressions of your feelings towards us.

It is now 25 years since you first commenced our annual excursions.

Also, since the formulation of our Sick and Accident societies, you have subscribed to them most liberally.

The Pension scheme we are very much pleased with, it has far exceeded our hopes, and we shall ever remember the words contained in your address "for faithful services rendered".

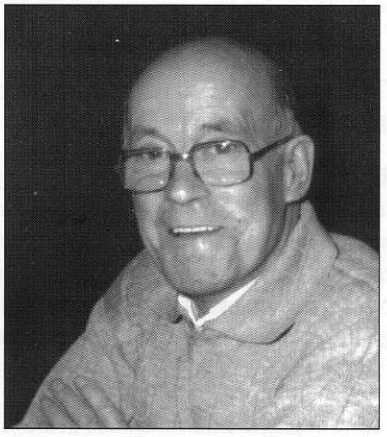
We desire also to give many thanks to all those who have added to our pleasure in sending us flowers at our Annual Excursions.

We sincerely trust that you may be long spared with good health and that your trade may be still more prosperous in the future.

Believe us to remain,
your humble servants

Signed on behalf of the workpeople:

42 signatures follow



Frank Hadley who worked at Albright & Wilson for 43 years. Some of his memories are recorded later in the chapter. *(Picture: Frank Hadley collection)*

A letter sent by the Oldbury workforce of Albright & Wilson to the directors of the company in 1896 to express their gratitude for the company schemes then in operation.

The main processes were

manufacture of sulphuric acid by burning pyrites or sulphur (brimstone) to suphurous acid and converting to sulphuric acid in large lead chambers: boiling the acid to concentrate it,

reacting the sulphuric acid with salt to give 'soda ash', sodium sulphate, used in glass making, releasing hydrochloric acid ('muriatic' acid) as a gas,

reacting the soda-ash with limestone and coal, 'black ash', to give sodium carbonate used in washing powder: this was the Leblanc process which gave rise to the mountains of calcium sulphate that formed 'Blue Billy',

Making sulphuric acid and soda ash

The writer in the 'Illustrated Times' of July 1862 describes the operation of the alkali works in some detail. Extracts from the production of sulphuric acid and soda ash give a picture of the processes worked at this time.

"... the 'burner-houses' where the sulphur and sulphurous ores are burned for the production of sulphuric acid. They are large and well-ventilated buildings, containing furnaces so constructed as to ensure the proper combustion of the sulphur stone, or pyrites, which is thrown in when the furnace has attained a certain temperature. The result of the combination is a copious liberation of sulphurous acid gas, which rises and passes along with nitrous gas ... along flues leading to the leaden chambers, where, combined with steam and air, and the oxygen of the nitrous gas, it becomes sulphuric acid, and falls by its own gravity to the bottom of the chamber.

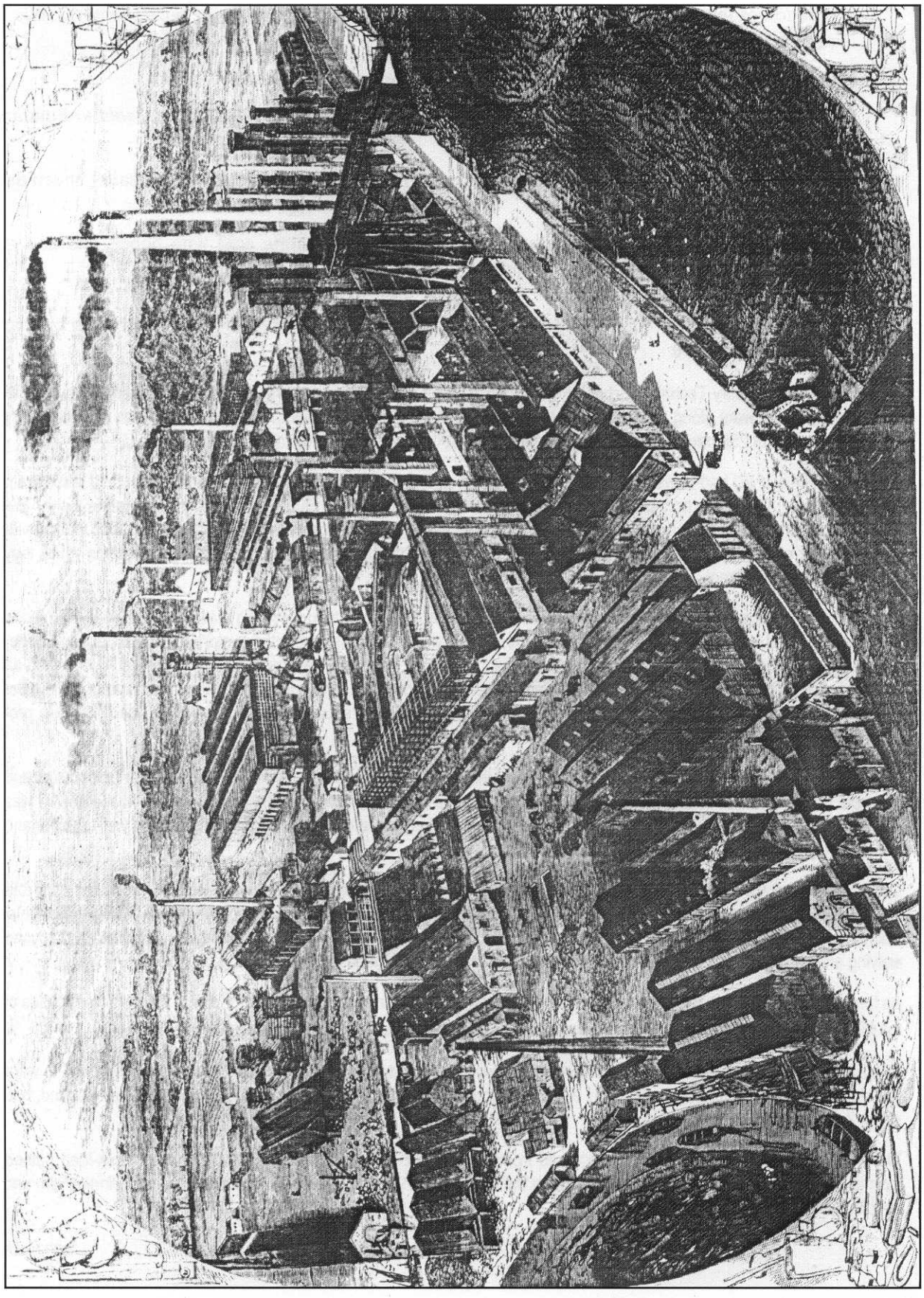
"These chambers, of which there are thirteen, occupy a large area of the works, looking like a quadrangle of black, square fortifications; the top ... is reached by broad wooden ladders leading to planked galleries. Each chamber is 100ft long and of proportionate height and breadth. They are composed entirely of sheet lead, supported by a stout wooden framework ...

"The quantity of diluted sulphuric acid produced by these huge chambers amounts to 350 tons a week, and is drawn off in leaden cisterns and pans, part of it being converted into sulphate of soda and the remainder into rectified acid.

"Rectified acid is produced in ... two communicating buildings, against the walls of which a series of glasses with retort-shaped heads and arms, are fixed in the brickwork of what looks like an enormously-extended French cooking-stove. In these the weak sulphuric acid is simmering by means of a fire which is applied to each glass, the boiling process being continued until it is ascertained that the acid has reached its maximum strength. It is now a fluid colourless as water, but of considerably greater specific gravity, and has to be drawn off the retort by a syphon into the vessel prepared to receive it - generally a glass carboy containing some twelve gallons, and carefully packed by means of a firm bedding of straw into a protecting hamper. Many hundreds of these bottles of acid are sent away every week.

"... The suphuric acid consumed in the works is applied to the production of sulphate of soda: for this purpose a large and heavy cast-iron pan is built up with brickwork, with a firegrate carefully set under the bottom. Into this pan, after it has been moderately heated, a quantity of common salt is thrown, upon which the sulphuric acid is poured from a leaden pipe communicating with the chambers: from the decomposition which takes place the products are sulphate of soda and hydrochloric acid. The latter passes in the form of a gas into capacious stone flues, and thence into large and lofty stone condensers, which resemble towers with double turrets, and are reached by wooden galleries in the same way as the chambers. The sulphate of soda, after being boiled in the iron pan, is transferred by workmen to the bed of a furnace of similar construction to those known as 'reverberatory' furnaces, where it is roasted and finished previous to its removal to the stockroom, afterwards to be converted into carbonate of soda."

The Alkali Works in 1862. The viewpoint appears to be the top of 'Blue Billy' which is evident in the bottom right corner, supplied via a gantry over Park House Lane. Chance's Oldbury School is at the bottom centre of the picture, and the Wolverhampton level of the canal with the boat-building yard in the bottom left. The 'Chemical Arm' of the canal cuts across the centre of the picture with various bridges, wharves and boats shown. A collection of carboys for holding the acid products stands by the canal. Over thirty chimneys and towers release smoke and fumes contributing to Oldbury's 'great, black, boding cloud which broods immovable above the earth'. (Picture: 'Illustrated Times', 5 July 1862)



reaction of the sodium carbonate with carbonic acid (soda water) to give bicarbonate of soda - a relief to many people!

Another production stream started with the ammoniacal liquor of the gas works:

reacting this with hydrochloric acid to give sal ammoniac some of which was *"sold to Russia as a luxurious alternative to common salt"*,

heating sal ammoniac with limestone to give ammonium carbonate, 'smelling salts', much used by Victorian ladies.

They also produced calcium superphosphate by reacting sulphuric acid with bones, and this was the basis of an artificial fertilser when mixed with other products.

ICI's the dance hall office

In July 1942 I left Oldbury Technical School, Flash Road, where I had spent two years learning shorthand typing and commercial subjects. I went along for an interview at ICI and was offered employment. The first month was a probationary period on a salary of 25/- per week, after which I was transferred to the permanent staff at £6 per month.

The Sales Office of ICI had moved out of its offices in Birmingham, because, I think, one of the Ministries had taken them over in wartime. They were housed upstairs in the dance hall of the Chance & Hunt Social Club in Dog Kennel Lane. We worked together in this big open space with the desks placed at all angles to accommodate everyone. Heating was provided by one-bar electric fires high up on the walls. We were always cold in winter, and the typists wore mittens which they knitted from scraps of wool.

My first job as junior was to make the tea and do the washing up. Each morning incoming mail was handled by the senior men, but I learned how to do the outgoing post in the afternoon. Later I was taught the system of filing orders and correspondence. Much later I was shown how to use the hand-operated Gestetner duplicator, and what a relief it was when an electric one was installed! My next step up the ladder was taking dictation in shorthand for letters and reports. The typewriters were heavy manual machines. I remember an Underwood like a square metal box, and felt I had definitely progressed when I later used an Imperial.

As it was wartime, the office staff consisted mainly of teenage girls, a few men too old for war service, four older ladies and a couple of girls perhaps in their mid-twenties. We shared sad times because one of the girls lost her husband who was serving in the Navy, and the other heard that her husband was 'missing believed killed'. But we all got on well together and shared many happy occasions as well.

Office hours were 9.00 to 5.30 Monday to Friday and 9.00 to 12.00 on Saturday. Eventually, Saturday work was on a rota system. On Saturdays the men were allowed to come to the office in casual clothes, sports jackets and grey flannels. Each morning we had to sign the 'Time Book' and at exactly 9.00 a line was drawn beneath the last signature, and anyone arriving afterwards was late. I don't think anyone arrived late without a good excuse!

As the office was based at The Social Club, the people who lived too far away to go home for dinner enjoyed the facilities of the billiards room, table tennis, and tennis courts, and the piano was put to good use by anyone who could play.

A rota system was operated for the men who did fire-watching duty at night. I do not recall hearing the sirens wail to warn of air-raids during working hours. One day a plane circled round, obviously in trouble, looking for somewhere to land, but, sadly, it crashed and the crew were killed.

The number of staff increased as men returned from the war and extra people were needed as the work-load gained momentum. The dance-hall office was bursting to the seams! In 1950 the Sales Office moved back into Birmingham and life changed as we became 'city office staff'.

Joan Rock

Albright & Wilson - a spark into a flame

Way back in 1669, Henning Brant, a Hamburg alchemist, was hell-bent on making gold, like most chemists of his day. He failed, of course, but in the process discovered a white waxy substance that glowed in the dark, the element phosphorus. The word 'phosphorus' comes from the Greek 'bearer of light'. Almost two hundred years later this 'bearer of light' saw the real light of day at Oldbury.

In 1851 phosphorus manufacture began at a works on a two-acre plot of land that had been purchased by Arthur Albright from Chance Brothers in 1850 for the sum of £1,182. By the end of that year buildings had been erected with bricks made from local clay dug, probably, from the marl hole at the end of Trinity Street. Kilns were put up to fire them on site. The first furnace was in operation by 1851. Chemical production continues to this day on a busy site which has extended now to about 50 acres.

The founder, Arthur Albright was born in 1811 at Chalbury in Oxfordshire. After serving an apprenticeship with an uncle in Bristol, at the age of 29 he was invited to become a member of the firm of John & Edmund Sturge at Selly Oak, Birmingham.

When phosphorus first came into use for match making in its 'white' form, it presented a hazard to both match makers and users. Arthur Albright had learned about a much safer form of the element, 'red' or 'amorphous' phosphorus. As a fine chemist and engineer he developed and patented a safe, efficient method of making this red phosphorus, and the foundations of the company were established.

Arthur exhibited this new, safer, red phosphorus at the Great Exhibition as early as 1851. Business flourished and the partnership with Sturge was dissolved. Arthur Albright traded for a year on his own, then formed a new partnership with John Edward Wilson in 1856. Thus the company name 'Albright & Wilson' was established and very quickly became recognised and respected across the nation and the world.

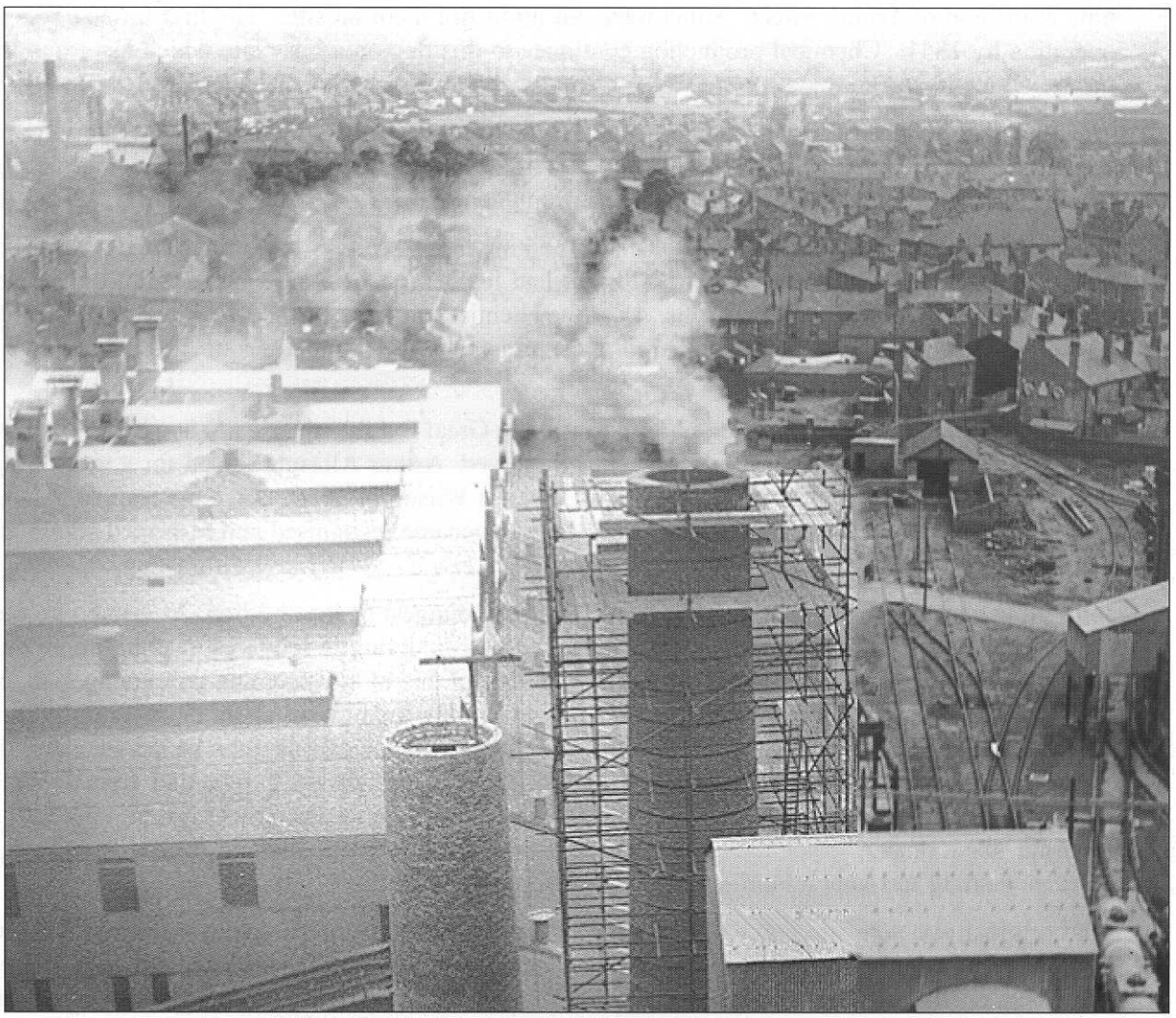
John Edward Wilson was born in Kendal in 1834, the youngest of ten children. At sixteen he was put to work in a warehouse in Manchester where he was '... living in lodgings, reading improving books after his day's work ...'. Arthur Albright later said this of him 'coming as a young man, he quietly set to work to learn about things instead of appearing to know all about them. I might liken him to one who has turned a small craft into a large steamer, which all the time he has successfully navigated as captain'. A combination of Arthur Albright's chemical genius and John Edward Wilson's administration, meant that the 'large steamer' sailed on to greater and greater success. It was said 'for if Arthur struck the spark, John Edward blew it into a flame; and it was his wise and constant tending that kept it burning ever more brightly'.

That original two acre site purchased at Langley by Arthur Albright brought a wealth of benefits by its very location. The site was close to good road links, a very efficient canal network existed and cheap energy was close at hand. Arthur Albright needed coal for his furnaces, lots of it: it is recorded that he bought his first coal shipment for 40 shillings [£2.00]. That was for a lot of 30 tons! Proximity to the very rich seams of the South Staffs coalfield ensured that coal was plentiful, of good quality and cheap. The Great Western line through Langley was completed in 1867 and until very recently a branch line into Albright & Wilson works provided a link for bringing in raw materials from all over the world.

Oldbury Works remains at the centre of the Albright & Wilson enterprise. The site employs 650 people with a further 350 employees at the company's World Headquarters at Warley. Albright & Wilson chemicals can be found in a host of well known products throughout the world, from

Big neighbours of Langley village

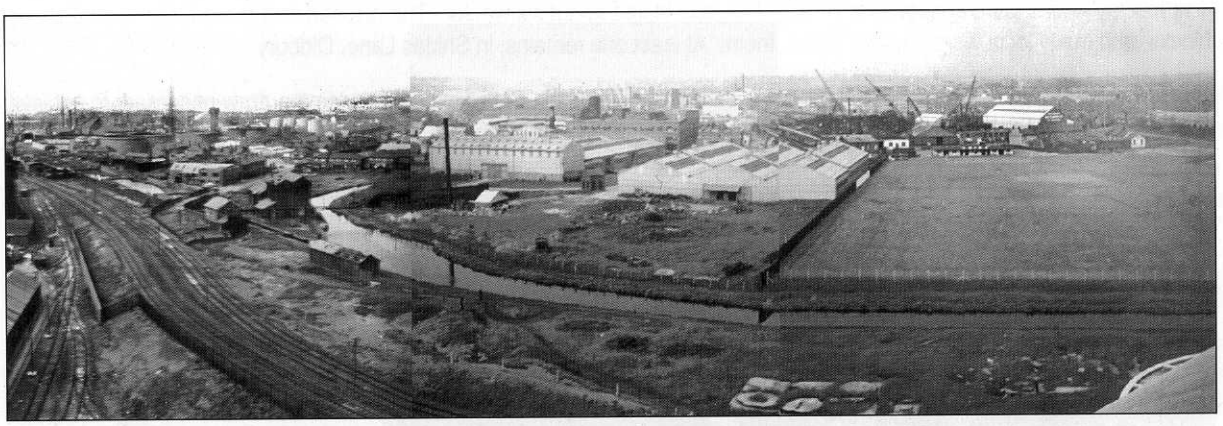
In 1956 I was asked to take photographs regularly during the construction of the replacement stack of the Phosphorus Plant Boiler House at Albright & Wilson. The hot gas from the six electrically heated furnaces was washed to remove the phosphorus product and rock dust, and the remaining gas burnt to raise steam. There were three Lancashire boilers with a common chimney stack close to the silos. The six silos stored the thousands of tons of phosphate rock, anthracite and granite needed to feed the furnaces From 1941 to 1975 these were a highly visible landmark in Langley and the surrounding area. As I took the photographs of the stacks from the water tank on top of the silos, I also took panoramic shots of Rood End, Langley and Oldbury for good measure.



The main picture shows the two stacks when the new one was nearly finished and the old one still working but prepared for demolition. The new one was a few feet higher. Within the works are some of the railway tracks and, at the end of the line, the locomotive shed for the shunter, the Peckett 0-4-0. The large building to the left is the furnace house. Beyond the factory wall is the centre of Langley with the houses of Station Road visible through the smoke, and Five Ways at the right-hand edge. The building with the large roof on the right is Langley Institute. The trees of Langley Park are just visible above the smoke. Further away is the flat area of Myers' sports ground in Causeway Green Road, a white side-screen for their cricket matches being visible. The stacks and roofs of Langley Forge are to the top left. The old Victorian housing built for the local workers in Langley 'village' stand out clearly, roughly a decade before it was cleared and redeveloped.

This is the scene looking West towards Park Street, the straight road to the top right.. To the right of the road is the 'Blue Billy', and to the left some of the ICI settling beds, 'little Blue Billy'. Within ten years the M5 was being cut through there. Prominent is the 'Spread Eagle' public house in Park Lane. The yard between the '4 Acid' (left) and '3 Acid' (right) is crossed by an arm of the canal and railway lines. A burner from 4 Acid is on its side in the yard.

Looking towards Oldbury town centre. In the foreground are Albright & Wilson's trades shops for carpenters, plumbers, blacksmiths, and fitters: also visible is the drum store, Oil Additives Plant and the Works Office Block. Further away, just over a wall, are the buildings of ICI and, in the distance, Oldbury itself. Is that the tower of Christchurch in the centre horizon?



This panorama starts with the private sidings of Albright & Wilson and the Oldbury branch railway line. To the far left are the storage tanks of Midland Tar Distillers beyond the Crow Locks on the Titford Canal. The right branch of the canal flows through BIP to the channel leading to Rotton Park Reservoir and between them is the engine house and buildings at the end of Engine Street. In the centre are the warehouses and factories of British Industrial Plastics. To their right are the cranes and buildings of Cox and Danks. In front of these is Albright & Wilson's sports fiel, laid out on waste land, and probably includes the land known locally as 'the ammo' where an ammunition factory had operated in WW1.

text and pictures John Hodgkins

antibiotics to agrochemicals, foods to flame retardants, washing powder to water treatment, oil wells to olive groves. More than half of the local production goes to export markets across the world.

The success of the site is based on world class production facilities, with a workforce devoted to quality, safety and protection of the environment. Arthur Albright and John Edward Wilson founded a forward looking company in 1856, and in 1999 it is still looking forward with an enthusiasm and a commitment to succeed. With 4000 employees world-wide and production plants in five countries in Europe, four in the Americas and eight countries in the Asia/Pacific region, the company now has the proud claim of 'International in Chemicals'.

Also based at Langley is the International Technical Centre. This department employs over 100 experts in chemistry and chemical engineering, recruited across the world. The department carries through all of the research, development and innovative chemical engineering, to ensure that Albright & Wilson retains its world leadership in phosphorus technology.

From that spark, struck almost 150 years ago by Arthur Albright, the business based on the 'bearer of light' has grown brighter and brighter.

Tom Tomlinson

A fine retort!

Arthur Albright's process involved the decomposition of calcium phosphate, as bones or imported phosphate rock, with sulphuric acid (from Chance Brothers) in lead-lined tubs. Calcium sulphate, 'gypsum', settled out leaving soluble phosphoric acid. The acid was mixed with ground charcoal or coal, dried and distilled in a fireclay retort. These retorts, about 8 inches diameter and 48 inches long, were placed in a coal-fired furnace and white phosphorus distilled out into condensers. White phosphorus is spontaneously inflammable and has to be handled under water.

The fireclay retorts were shaped and fired on site, and lasted about six weeks. The disused retorts were excellent building blocks, and many local walls were built from them. At least one remains, in Shidas Lane, Oldbury.

The furnaces at Oldbury were located around a central chimney, 'the Big Stack', to provide the draw necessary to achieve the high furnace temperature. When built, it was the second highest chimney in the world, beaten only by the one at Stoke Prior salt works.

Amorphous red phosphorus was made by a second process involving heating the white phosphorus in a cast-iron pot fitted with a safety valve. The red phosphorus was ground under water, boiled with soda ash and dried to give a powder that could be handled and despatched easily in dry form.

Changing the retorts in 1890 under the watchful eye of George Ankers (sitting). The team is Charles Parker, John Jones, George Harris, Samuel Smallwood, William Horton, George Guest, David Bastable, William Cutler. *(Picture: Albright & Wilson, "One hundred years of Phosphorus making')*

The best sale of gypsum

In 1874 Albright & Wilson built a large water-balanced hoist to handle gypsum, a useful by-product from phosphorus manufacture. The resulting mound was a conspicuous landmark in Langley, crowned by a tall timber framework, like the winding gear of a pit-shaft.

Gypsum found some application as a fertiliser. But the mound grew bigger as phosphorus production increased and farmers used less gypsum on the land. French gypsum was offered on the London market at l0s 0d per ton in the early eighties. Albright & Wilson even tried to colour their by-product in order to improve sales, but all to no avail. The mound grew.

In 1879, however, the Great Western Railway decided to build a branch line to connect Langley Green with a station at Oldbury. Most conveniently, a survey showed that the line would pass through the gypsum mound, and in 1883 a large part of the mound was sold to the Railway Company to form the embankment of the new line.

The price paid by the Railway Company included £750 for the value of the gypsum they acquired. It is recorded as *'the best sale of gypsum the company ever made!'.*

Tom Tomlinson

The 'Gyp'

On summer holidays with my brother, sister and friends we would walk over the bridge in Engine Street and along the canal past Mr Hewitt's, the lock keeper's cottage. We passed the stables and went across the fields to get white and pink 'chalk' off the small hills nearby. The area was still known to us as the 'Gyp' fifty years after the railway had been built, and was the source of our free 'chalk'.

Joan Highfield

Just the job

Conditions in the chemical industry had improved by the 1930s, but were still far from those enjoyed today. The job required much lifting and moving of materials by hand, and safety precautions were less effective then.

Getting a job was easier if you had family working at the company. Len Turner's father was a fitter at Albright & Wilson: *"I left school at 14 in December 1935 and went off to Albright's. I wanted to be an electrician, but it wasn't easy to go directly into the trade shops. Boys went mainly into the keg shop, the box shop, both making wooden packaging, the tin shop, cutting and soldering tins for the phosphorus, or the pellet shop, making smoke shells. I went to the pellet shop."* After the war he did become an electrician!

Frank Hadley got his job through the labour exchange: *"They said 'I think Albright & Wilson would suit you.' When I was younger I did a lot of stammering, and down the labour they said 'Are you handicapped?' I said 'No!' So I went to Albrights."* He stayed for 43 years.

Their descriptions of the jobs they did are typical of those of the times.

'The bonus'

Wages were 10/- per week for 48 hours, five and a half days. But to this a quarterly bonus was paid to all company staff. As the committee sat to agree the rate for the quarter, all the workers waited for the result. The figure announced was based on the yard labourer's rate, usually equivalent to 2 - 3fi weeks pay. Other staff would quickly work out their entitlement. The bonus scheme finished early 1956 and the merit scheme took over.

Len Turner

Baking agent

'Cream powder' was used as a baking agent, a very important product, a high quality sodium phosphate blended with wheat flour and starch to make leavening agents for cakes, bread and confectionery. The present plant is at Widnes. The names of the cream powder were 'Antilope', 'Bex' (short for 'Ibex') and 'Egret'.

The works manager started me off in the 'cream powder'. The first man I remember working with was Bill Skett. He said "Have you done any stencilling, lad?" I said "No, but I can learn". So he showed me how to stencil. I started on the packing first, then the blender, the ovens and the mixers. I did everything on the cream powder plant.

The 'ASPP', acid sodium pyrophosphate, the basis of the cream powder, was made with four hundred-weights of soda ash and eight and a half of phosphoric acid, mixed for three quarters of an hour to an hour in big dough mixers. There were two of you, a leading hand and a tester. We would take a sample, which was tested, and if we needed more soda ash we would put that in. There were eleven mixers, and the tester would have five to look after. We had three acid containers that held about three or four tons of acid, and we ran the acid out of these. There were individual valves for the acid to go different ways. We would keep the mixer rolling a bit, and dig the material out. When it was emptied so far, you would stop the mixer and scrape the rest out.

They would then put the material into trays and into trucks we called 'decks'; a big tray on the top and six underneath. We put them in the oven, at 350 degrees, I think, for about eight hours. They were slowly drawn through the oven. Every hour and ten minutes we would take two out and put two in. You let them cool down and put them through a big 'Miracle' mill. It was kibbled up first, put in the big hoppers over the top, fed through from there to the Miracle mills, and blown upstairs to the blender.

Upstairs in the blending section it was very dusty. We used to manhandle nearly everything: big hoppers upstairs to hold the pyrophosphate, bags of cornflour and wheatflour upstairs - wheatflour for home trade, cornflour for export. Eleven hundredweights of flour, five of salt and twenty-nine of pyrophosphate. Drop it into the mixer and blend individually for about twenty minutes. Take a sample up the lab, they give you the result back and you've got a chart to work out if you need to put more flour or pyro in, and take another sample until it was right.

There would be four people down below, one a packer, one a sewer for the paper bag sewing machines, one running off and one outside stacking. The runner-off would move two bags outside and help to stack them, then come back for another two. It wasn't on pallets then!

Frank Hadley

Washing powder

I did a bit in tri-polyphosphate - that was making washing powder on 'topside': an interesting job that was!

We used to mix soda ash and acid together and pump it into a sump tank, and from there to a header tank. It was fed from there on to hot rollers giving a coating; the roller man would adjust a blade and scrape it off. It would go through the worm screw into a riddler and the 'unmilled' bunkers. From there it was blown to the mills and on to the 'milled' bunkers. There were about six bunkers, and you'd start at number one. You had to strap the bags on, five with an overflow bag. As the first bag fills up, when you think you have the weight in, you'd shut the slide, and start to fill the second bag up. You'd drop that bag off, weigh it and put another bag on.

A chap would run them off to the scales and another one wire them up. These were two hundredweight hessian sacks. They could be handled by two men with a stick. Then we put them in the warehouse, and Jack Round would come up and say "I've got a truck here wants loading up with so many sacks of tripolyphosphate". We used to load the trucks there, and we finished up putting them into big powder tankers. I remember loading the first tanker with hundredweight bags of tripolyphosphate. They brought the first one in for a trial, put a pair of steps down the side, and we had to carry hundredweight sacks up and just tip them in.

Frank Hadley

Smoke shells

I was employed within the filling section of the pellet shop. There were about five teams, three to a team sat in a triangular pattern. The shells were about 3" in length and fl" inside diameter filled with amorphous phosphorus.

A screw hopper slowly delivered amorphous phosphorus and the first operator used a push rod to fill a 2" piece of brass tubing. This was passed to the second operator who pressed the phosphorus tightly into the brass using a hand press. He passed it to the third operator who pressed the phosphorus out of the brass into the pellet using a foot press. It took about two and a half brasses to fill the pellet. We used about eight brasses to keep a continuous cycle.

The amorphous phosphorus was mixed with, I think, petroleum jelly by a male operator who topped up the screw hopper. The team took turns on each job. We wore bib and brace overalls, gloves, elasticated sleeves covering our wrists and a leather apron.

An eighth of an inch was gouged out of the top of the filled pellet and it was sealed with wax. It went on to have a lid soldered on, and was washed, coated in shellac and stoved. Next door they were wrapped by 1914-18 disabled war veterans. Some found the work awkward, so when we boys had completed our day and washed up, we would sit with our adopted partner and help him get his day finished.

The finished items were checked by army or navy inspectors prior to packing.

Len Turner

Second world war - extra rations for Ned and Dolly!

Phosphorus was of major strategic importance to the war effort. Albright & Wilson was the main UK producer, so these were busy times within the works. The war spurred inventiveness. In the earliest days the Research Laboratory worked on self-contained, self-igniting, versions of the 'Molotov Cocktail'. Its functions were incendiary and smoke screening. John George Clarke, the Works Manager, took charge of the operation. He said that, provided the bottles and machinery were released by the War Office and subject to 'no inspectors', they would produce 100,000 in the third week of operation and 250,000 a week afterwards. The promise was fulfilled to the day. Other war time efforts were devoted to the 'razzle' and 'deckers', devices based on celluloid sheet and a small slice of phosphorus, produced in their millions as incendiaries.

During the war years, hundreds of women operators were drafted in from the Kidderminster carpet factories. Special trains were arranged for three-shift working on all of the plants. Special arrangements were made to ensure the health and safety of all workers. "The carpet weavers, lambs in protective clothing, did more than a man's job!" quoted Clarke.

The black-out brought special problems to the works. At the start of the war, more than 5,000 skylights had been removed from buildings and replaced by match-board and felt. Shelters had been made inside the process buildings because it was impracticable for workers to go to the outside dug-outs.

As early as 1938 a few public spirited employees had undergone training as LAGC instructors (Local Anti-Gas Certificated). Later, over eighty men and women volunteered their services, particularly night duty, without payment. Many joined the Home Guard and ARP Service. Although such services were voluntary, the company provided extra rations (a quarter of tea, bread and cheese etc.) for all of those involved in ARP and Fire Picket duties at night.

Urban Robbins, a Langley man who worked on the amorphous plant during the war years, told me the story of Ned Trotter and Dolly Gray. It seems that Ned and Dolly were ponies brought in from one of the local coal pits to haul the trucks of phosphorus around the works. They were always well looked after and fed with the very best fodder. It was only towards the end of the war that an observant foreman discovered that, three or four times a week, the names of Mr N Trotter and Mrs D Gray appeared on the free rations list. No doubt the 'extra' tea and provisions were shared out, with a smile, by the volunteers and no doubt Ned and Dolly had extra rations of fine clover!

Tom Tomlinson

British Cyanides Co Ltd

BIP, or 'The Beetle' as it has been known to several generations of Langley people, grew out of an earlier company, the British Cyanides Company Ltd. Both Albright & Wilson and Chance & Hunt had been experimenting with the production of cyanides for use in extracting gold in the South African goldfields. They decided to join forces in 1894, and set up British Cyanides Co on the land between the 'Jim Crow' arm of the Titford canal and the Oldbury branch railway. Albright & Wilson's interest in the company continued until 1920.

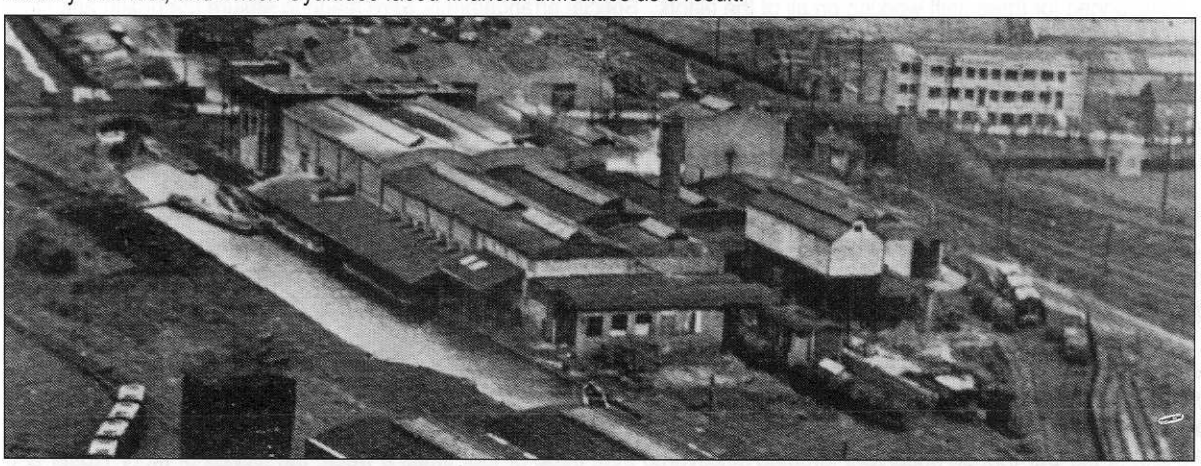
The raw material, ammonium sulphocyanate solution, was obtained from gas works by canal or rail tanker. This was reacted with salt-cake or soda ash, obtained from Chance & Hunt, and the ammonia produced sold back to them! The process was very unpleasant, involving hard work to break up the solid cakes of product and the evolution of various acrid and foul-smelling gases. It

Potash - the industry that nearly was

The 'Midland Advertiser' of 27 July 1918 was able to print an article "The British Potash Industry - Another German Monopoly Attacked. New Factory at Oldbury". After describing the pre-war German monopoly of potash mines and dismissing the German idea that they would hold us to ransom over the potash shortage, they go on to announce our success: *"... the curious mentality of our enemies has not permitted them to take into account the ready adaptability and resources of our manufacturers. The fact is that not only have we begun the work of recovering potash, which was formerly treated as waste and refuse, we have proved that the total output of potash in this country may speedily be made to exceed the total demands ...".*

British Cyanides together with the North Lincolnshire Iron Co and John Lysaght Ltd had demonstrated that potash could be recovered from blast furnace ash, and the amount of potash in the flue gases markedly increased by the addition of common salt to the blast furnace. These companies formed the British Potash Co, half the shares being taken by the government. By July 1918 a new factory in Rood End Road had been operating for three months. The potassium chloride produced only contained 5% impurities compared with 80% in the material available before the war from Germany. All seemed well for the new industry which was forecast to rise to 10,000 tons per annum rapidly.

The factory had been built with company and private money and the promise of a loan from the Ministry of Munitions, which when the time came they refused to make. The company offered to take over the factory, but this was also rejected. Finally, the company was liquidated, all the money lost and the plant scrapped. The opportunity for a significant UK potash industry was lost, and British Cyanides faced financial difficulties as a result.



The potash works at Rood End Road, about 1919. The wharf and the end of the navigable canal where it became a leat to Edgbaston reservoir can be seen top left. Railway sidings serving the works are visible bottom right. Only one factory is evident in Rood End Road, and the area was not significantly developed for industry until the 1930s. (Picture: BIP)

must have been hazardous too, with the addition of sodium metal and the use of molten lead. The final product was sodium cyanide in block form, cast from the molten cyanide, and shipped in metal-lined wooden cases.

For twenty years, sodium cyanide was the main product, but with the advent of the first World War, more materials were produced for the government, including sodium manganate for gas masks, ingredients for blue print paper and high purity potassium permanganate for making the sugar substitute, saccarin. The products were sent out in packages with a beetle logo and 'Beetle Brand - registered' stamped on them. This was the origin of the 'Beetle' trademark and the employees who later described themselves as 'working at the Beetle'.

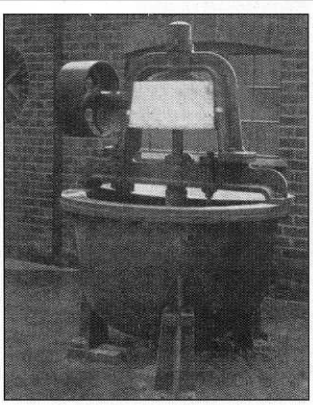
The main source of potassium, or 'potash' prior to the war had been the German mines in Alsace. Since artificial fertilisers and many of the new products required potash, fresh sources were essential A suitable source was found in the ash emitted by blast furnaces, and in a joint venture with the Ministry of Munitions, the company set up the British Potash Company Ltd in a factory in 1917. Although it produced various potassium compounds very successfully, problems with the government resulted in the closure if the plant in 1920.

Shortly after the war, the whole cyanide plant was moved from the original site to the new factory in Popes Lane which had been erected just before the war to house a new cyanide process. The company faced difficult times in the post-war slump as demands for its products declined. However, it had started to manufacture thiourea from the ammonium sulphocyanate liquor obtained from gas works. This found use in treating silk and taffeta, and continental sales helped to keep the company afloat, and, under the leadership of Kenneth Macomb Chance, better times were ahead.

Important work was underway on the reaction of thiourea with formadehyde described in a Dutch patent. Rossiter, the chief chemist at British Cyanides, developed it into a process to give the first clear water-white resin in the world. The main rival was 'phenolic' resin, a constituent of 'Bakelite' plastics, which was, brown or, at best, straw-coloured. The new clear resin and solid moulded discs were shown at the Wembley Exhibition of 1925 in white and a range of pastel and bright colours.

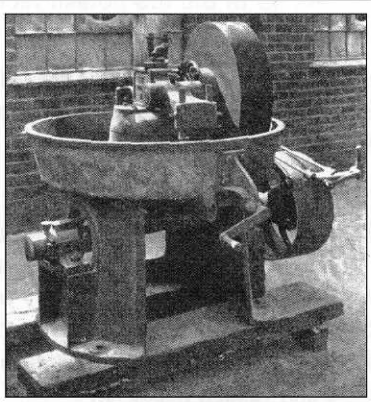
Plastics - and the birth of BIP

In 1925 a new company, The Beetle Products Co Ltd, was set up to develop moulding materials made from the resin. They were made on simple equipment involving the impregnation of paper pulp (cellulose) with the clear resin, pigments and other chemicals in a mixer, drying and grinding



The mixer

The first simple equipment used for making moulding powders at British Cyanides in 1925. Larger mixers and mills were required as production was increased. (Pictures: BIP)



The grinder

The souvenir that was never needed. This two-tone cameo moulding was made for the coronation of Edward VIII that never took place. (Picture: BIP)

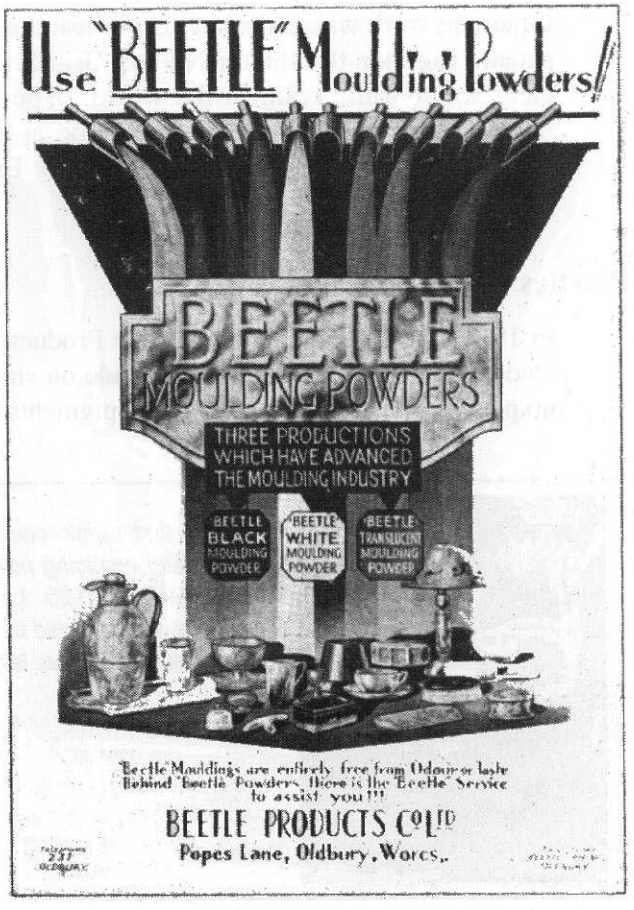
to a powder. When the powder was heated, it melted, flowed and then turned to a solid that would not melt again. If the melting and hardening is carried out in a mould, the shape of the mould is retained and useful articles are obtained.

The materials were first used in tableware: white, pastel and bright colours were possible, and also characteristic mottled effects. Demonstrations at Harrods and other London stores increased the popularity of the moulded articles, and the new company was successful. They were soon used in white domestic switches and plugs, and found their way into homes throughout the country.

In 1929, they bought Streetly Moulding Company Ltd, a pioneer in moulding their thiourea plastics. A second major development was the introduction of faster processing materials based on urea and formaldehyde and this enabled cheaper articles to be produced for sale through Woolworths. In 1936, with the emphasis on plastics not cyanides, the name of the company was changed to British Industrial Plastics Ltd, and two years later the production of chemicals ceased, except for those used in their plastics materials. New applications were found for their resins in adhesives, the treatment of paper and textiles. In the 30s, the firm expanded into button manufacture, and also started to produce its own moulding tools and presses. Thus, it was at the forefront of the development of plastics in this country.

The applications and sales of 'Beetle' moulding material increased rapidly. Some were novel or unusual: trinkets, ornaments, 'Thermos' flasks, buttons, table lamps, souvenirs for the ill-fated 1937 Coronation, billiard balls used in the world championships of 1936, and cases for Philips electrical shavers as early as 1939.

During WW2, a wood adhesive, 'Beetle Cement A', was much in demand, and, among its many uses it was the main glue holding Mosquito planes together. Plant for the production of resins and adhesives was set up in the old potash factory at Rood End.



Trade advertisement for 'Beetle' moulding powder from the 1930s emphasising the vast range of colours available in the new material. (Picture: BIP)

An article on 'Beetle' moulding powder in 'Plastics', *January 1939, says:* "The story of the amino-resins is one for which ... we must thank the chemist, for from comparatively unknown materials he has evolved an industry which has given such colour to the world as the great masters of old never dreamed, and has made it colour conscious to a degree those same masters only vaguely hoped for."

After the war demand picked up again and they were the largest producer of 'aminoplastics' in the world, supplying materials for tableware, bottle caps, domestic electrical parts (switches, plugs and sockets) and even coloured toilet seats at the bottom end of the market!

Polyester resins were added to the range and supplied into the boat-building and vehicle industries, including Midland Red buses. In the 1960s, moulding materials were developed from these polyester resins, at first for industrial and electrical components such as switchgear. Improvements in moulding techniques and development of products with a good glossy surface led to their use in parts where appearance was important, such as cooker knobs and sandwich toasters.

In the 1970s the market for their traditional moulding materials started to decline as the newer plastics such as polythene, PVC and nylon came into common use. A successful range of nylon materials was introduced in the 70s, finding use in applications such as domestic plugs and sockets (a market the company knew well), curtain tracks, industrial parts and engineering components.

For thirty years, from the early 1960s to the 1990s, BIP was owned by T & N, and part of a much larger group. They first expanded and then sold off many BIP subsidiaries, until it is now largely concentrated at Oldbury again, apart from some overseas interests, and once again an independent company and master of its own fate. It was a pioneer in the plastics industry, and has a name respected around the world.

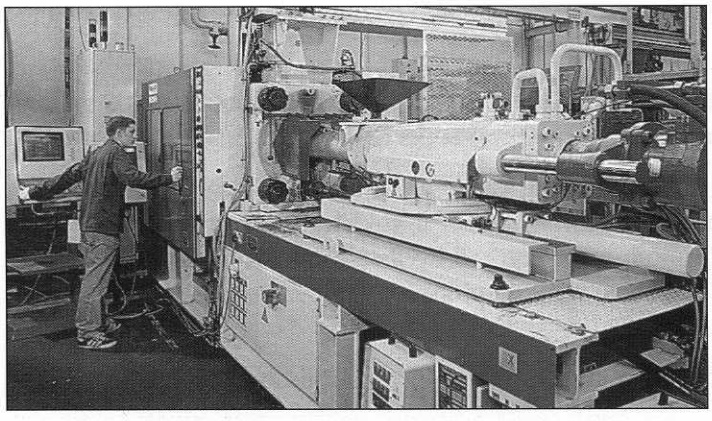
Hemo Ltd

Healey Mouldings was founded in 1928, in the very early days of the plastics industry, the name being taken from one of the partners, Percy Healey. With Adamson Lennox Leigh he started moulding the phenolic material 'Bakelite' for ammeter cases at premises in Walsall. The company expanded its range of products into industrial and household items, and became one of the leading specialist moulders of thermosetting plastics.

In 1955 the company moved to its present site between the Titford Canal and the Wolverhampton-Birmingham Road. This brought it closer to its main supplier of amino moulding materials, BIP. In 1966 the company took a key decision and installed its first injection moulding machine. This allowed more consistent parts to be produced, initially in phenolic materials, and later through a joint development with BIP and the machinery firm Bucher-Guyer, in 'Polyester Moulding Compound'. This material was capable of producing parts such as sandwich toaster cases with good appearance in a wide range of colours, a great advance on the browns and blacks of Bakelite.

Most homes will have some items moulded at Hemo, saucepan handles, cooker knobs, even a gas meter or a part of a washing machine or vacuum cleaner motor. The company has developed its own processes for painting items and making handles with simulated woodgrain surfaces, so the 'wooden' handles on your saucepan may be plastic after all!

The company is still expanding, exports two-thirds of its output, and employs over 100 people in round the clock working. In 1996 it added more space for moulding and finishing operations, also allowing the firm to carry out more sub-assembly work.



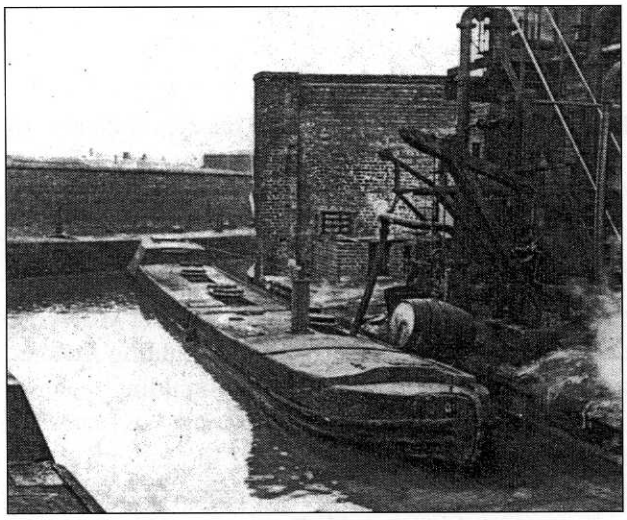
Modern injection moulding machine at Hemo (Picture: Hemo brochure)

Midland Tar Distillers Ltd

The life span of this company approximately coincided with the development and decline of the production of gas from coal. Almost all industries that utilise basic raw materials in considerable quantities have a problem with the disposal of waste and unwanted residues. The production of 'town' or coal gas on an ever increasing scale during the 19th century was no exception, and initially, having extracted the gas from coal, they were left with embarrassing quantities of coke and tar.

This was a nationwide problem, and chemists soon realised that valuable by-products could be extracted from coal tar, resulting in the construction of tar distilleries in various regions of Britain, usually with access to the bigger towns and their large scale gas works.

In 1865 one of these pioneer chemists, a German named Ludwig Demuth, acquired a site in Oldbury with easy access to the Birmingham to Wolverhampton canal, and Lewis Demuth & Co came into being. The site was previously an orchard, through which the parson of Oldbury Parish Church proceeded from Parsonage Street to Christchurch in Birmingham Road. Demuth's works was bounded on one side by the canal and by Tat Bank, Parsonage Street and Birmingham Road and accessed via Manchester Street.



A black boat unloads its cargo of tar at the wharf within the works of Midland Tar Distillers. These are the boats on which Frank Hadley had helped his father [Chapter 3]. *(Picture: Midland Tar Distillers booklet)*

Apart from the problem of transporting bulk tar in and products out, thermal distillation in those days called for the use of considerable quantities of coal as fuel. The canal was invaluable. The extensive use of tanker canal boats, in particular, saw the rise of Thomas Clayton & Son with the canal basin off Tat Bank, and employees' cottages at Lock Side.

Later, rail tank wagons were used for the inward carriage of crude tar, and products such as benzole, toluole, pitch and naphtha were sent by tanker and goods wagons via the London & North Western Railway Co's basin at Spon Lane. However, this double handling was very expensive. Road transport was effected in 600 gallon tank carts, drawn by two horses, and it was in this activity that the transport company of F & A Nixon saw its genesis.

As can readily be appreciated, canal barges with their carrying capacities of 4,000 to 5,000 gallons, although slower, held their own for many years against rail tanks of 1,500 to 2,500 gallons, whilst road tankers were very much 'also-rans'

However, Demuth was a small entrepreneur with technical innovation, but restricted financial resources. Thus it was, in 1923, that Demuth was acquired by Robinson Brothers Ltd of Ryders Green, and the tar businesses of both Companies were combined at Oldbury under the new banner of The Midland Tar Distillers Ltd.

In the years leading up to 1939 many developments took place. The road tar business which had

been pursued by Robinson, but never Demuth, was greatly expanded. In the main, however, this was transported to various council locations in wooden barrels during the working season. The heating and spreading on the roads in those days was a very labour intensive operation. During the winter months huge mountains of empty barrels accumulated, and a coopers shop was busily engaged on repair work. Locals will recall the large storage tanks, one of 2 million gallons, on the corner of Tat Bank and Parsonage Street.

Some of the other products were: creosote, extensively used for timber preservation; pitch, sent to South Wales, France and Belgium for use as a binder in the manufacture of 'briquettes' for fuel; solvent naphtha, used largely as a solvent in paint manufacture; and naphthalene for mothballs and firelighters.

Later, under Midland Tar Distillers, tar acids which were further refined by other companies, had uses in products as diverse as saccharin, wire coatings and pharmaceuticals. Pyridine was used in dye stuffs, and in medicines, including the first successful drug in the treatment for tuberculosis.

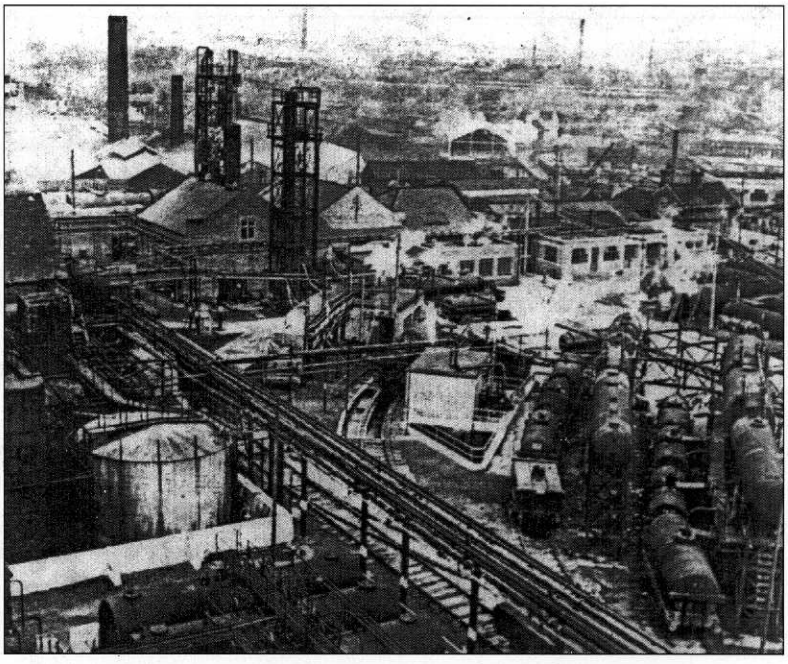
Road transport grew slowly between the two world wars. The purchases under Demuth had been two Bedford lorries in 1917, a Mann steam lorry in 1922 and two Sentinel Steam wagons with trailers in 1923, all second hand. In 1925 the first new purchase by MTD was a solid tyred Leyland (ON 504) which gave faithful service until 1945. Other vehicles were hired from people like Nixon and Holland Brothers.

Motor spirit was brought in from Shell, mixed with 105 benzole, and sold in cans by The National Benzole Co. With the outbreak of war in 1939 the benzole shed was used for the manufacture of 'Molotov cocktails' in bottles, optimistically to be used against German tanks!

Rail access was constructed in the early 1920s from Rood End sidings via BIP, crossing Popes Lane and Parsonage Street, and this led to a considerable growth of transport by rail tankers and refined tar in barrels by wagons.

Demuths 40 ton stills were largely superseded by the construction of continuous fractionating tar stills in 1936.

Throughout WW2 trains of tankers were regularly sent to ICI at Billingham with creosote for the production of high octane aviation spirit by hydrogenation. However, the greatest wartime development was the construction in 1940 of a crude benzole distillation and refining unit, giving toluene which was utilised in making the explosive TNT. Perhaps in a way even more radical, women were employed in increasing numbers, both indoors and outdoors, with the call-up of so



Storage tanks, fractionating columns and railway waggons within the congested site of the tar works in the early fifties. No wonder there was no room for expansion by 1950! (Picture: Midland Tar Distillers booklet)

many men. In 1936, Head Office had moved out of Birmingham into a newly constructed building fronting Birmingham Road, but further expansion of manufacturing units was impossible. As a result, in 1950, the refinery work was transferred to a new works at Four Ashes, north of Wolverhampton.

Other post war developments saw an extensive growth in pitch/creosote fuels for industrial boilers, and increased use of road tankers for delivery and collection and the resultant decline of rail traffic. This was accompanied by the gradual demise of canal traffic, which had received a real body blow in the great freeze-up of 1947, and, amongst other effects, finished off the few people whose homes had been on the boats. The post war nationalisation of the gas industry and its associated rationalisation closed many of the smaller gas works, but usage was ever growing, ensuring raw material for MTD. The sale of road tar alone stood at 15 million gallons in 1946, and by 1963 had increased to 19 million gallons. Overall, the company was using 91 road tankers.

However, the 1960s brought sinister writing on the wall, 'North Sea gas'. There inevitably followed an increasing shut down of coal gas plants with its attendant decline of gas tar. Undeterred by the great fire of March 1962, and in spite of a merger with Yorkshire Tar Distillers in 1968, the eventual demise of coal gas production, which had brought about the closure of smaller tar distillation premises reached the Oldbury site in 1972, and resulted in the termination of work there. It was sad that yet another of the industrial employers in Oldbury had gone. It was a modest sized 'family business' where people knew and cared for one another, and long service was the order of the day. Thus blows the cold wind of change: I wish it were truly progress!

Article by Ron Smith

'Keep going Shell'

In the 20s Shell opened a terminal at the corner of Western Road and Station Road for storage and distrubution of fuel oil, gas oil and, later, diesel. It was supplied via the Titford canal, and also via the railway goods yard and pipes under Western Road from the railhead. Oh! the heady smell of fuel soaked into the rail ballast on that corner! More recently, fuel was brought up from the Stourport depot by road tanker. It was closed in the 70s when Cakemore depot was expanded.

Working the steamers

My father-in-law, Percy Brown, started at the Shell Mex depot in 1924 as a stoker on a 'steamer'. The term 'steamer' referred to the old steam-driven waggons. The stoker was the driver's mate, and the main part of the job was to keep the boiler happy - stoke up the fire and keep the water topped up. A trip to Worcester would take all day! The 'Weekly News' of 2 May 1962 quoted Percy Brown: "With the old steam waggons there was the constant problem of finding water for the boiler. We had to stop at roadside streams and ponds to fill up, and sometimes we had to appeal for supplies from people with water butts. On one occasion we set off at 7.30 am on Tuesday and, as a result of problems with the steamer, we did not get back to the depot until 5.30 pm on Thursday, not having been to bed in the meantime. I was as black as the fuel oil by then, but was told to go home, have a wash and a meal, and report for duty the same night. That sort of thing was accepted then, because there were plenty of unemployed waiting to take your job if you gave it up. In those days it was a good job with £2.10s 0d a week, plus so much per ton of oil delivered."

After a year he became a driver, and obtained his first driving licence on 27th October 1925. His driving career continued for 21 years, and was followed by service at Cakemore depot as pump man, foreman and supervisor. He delivered fuel oil over most of the Midlands in vehicles ranging from the steamer to a 3,200 gallon road tanker. During the war his 'mate' was Ada, his wife, one of several wives who joined their husbands in the cab in wartime.

Dennis Heath, as related to Bill Hipkiss

8

Jacks of all trades

Other industries in Langley

Langley has always had a wide range of industries as well as the major mining, chemical and metal-based activities. This was true of the whole of Oldbury, and the wide range of industrial jobs helped to stave off the worst effects of unemployment between the wars. Levels of unemployment in Oldbury, although significant and affecting the lives of many people in the Langley area, were not as bad as in areas with a less diverse job market.

Clearly, the people of Langley could turn their hand to many jobs and were truely 'Jacks of all trades'. Kelly's directories and census returns record the range of activities, many small-scale, perhaps involving just the family or a small number of workers. Thomas and Henry Millward of Tat Bank were 'coffee mill makers' in 1851. At the turn of the century in Henry Street there were several small enterprises, a soap factory, a 'brass bell founder and cycle maker', and Luther Ridding & Co, steam millers and corn merchants. Silas Round was a file maker in Titford Road. A W Smith, who played for West Bromwich Albion in the 1920s, was involved in starting a small factory in Clay Lane for producing candles.

Glass industries

In Langley there was no glass works to match the large Chance's Glass Works just over the border at Spon Lane in Smethwick. However, many Langley people worked at the Glass Works, particularly those living in the Rood End – Langley Green – Londonderry area, where the 1851 census records glass makers, glass gatherers and

glass polishers. Nevertheless, the biggest spin-off for Langley was the establishment of the Alkali Works by Chance Brothers to make materials for their glass works, and this was the fore-runner of the chemical industry considered in the previous chapter.

Nevertheless, some glass products were made in the Langley area. A small firm of glass cutters and decorators, Machins, operated around 1925 from premises at the top of Spring Street close to the school building. They bought in plain items such as glasses, bowls and vases and decorated them by glass cutting. These were sold to various outlets including the large Birmingham store 'Lawleys'. Arthur Field, who worked there after he left school for about a year before they closed down recalled that they worked by candle-light using cutting machines driven by a gas engine, and each glass cutter was given a bottle of milk a day!

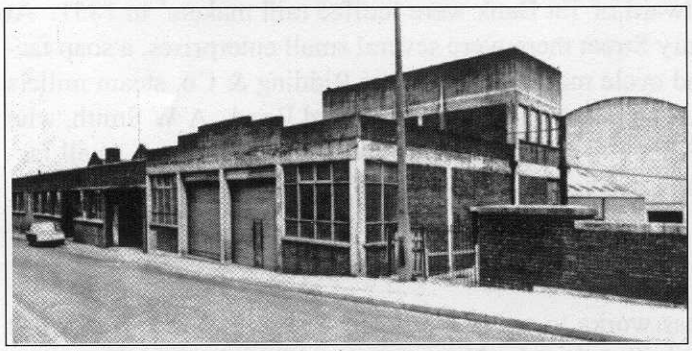
Albion Bottle Company

The Standard Bottle Company, based in London, had supplied bottles to HP Sauce Ltd of Aston Cross, Birmingham, since the beginning of the 20th century. To meet the increasing number of bottles they needed, HP realised that local high volume manufacture was required, and in June 1929 the two companies set up the Albion Bottle Company. They bought the premises of the timber merchants Tailby and Geddes in Rood End Road and established their new factory there.

Sauce bottles made at Albion Bottle Co, including '8oz squares' that were their first product. (Picture: Albion Bottle Co brochure)

Production commenced in 1930 and, of course, the first bottles were '8oz squares' for HP sauce. The company set out to equip the factory with the best machinery available for making and handling the bottles. The original line had a Knox O'Neill machine, and further lines were added during the 1930s based on Lynch machines. A second glass melting furnace was installed in 1933. The company grew steadily in the thirties and was so profitable that by 1937 a 35% dividend was declared!

Bottle production is a continuous operation, and the plant was run on a three-shift system. For the first two years, workers only had one 24-hour break every three weeks, but by 1936 the Glass Bottle Manufacturer's Federation had agreed to a 42 hour week nationally, so working conditions became more humane.



The Rood End Road premises. The railway bridge is shown bottom right. (Picture: Albion Bottle Co brochure)

The company was ideally placed next to the railway and canal, and in the early days the GWR provided a rail link with a siding into the works diverging from the main line by Rood End Road bridge. Raw materials, soda ash from ICI, limestone and sand, were brought in by rail. Within the yard a shire horse, 'Darky', was used to shunt the wagons. In 1931 two new lorries were purchased, 'Albion' 6-tonners, and the practice of using aptly-named 'Albion' lorries was established.

Crates of bottles were slid down a long metal ramp from the second floor to be hand loaded on to the lorries.

After the war, expansion continued and 50 million bottles per year were being made by 1949. The range had expanded from sauce bottles to include bottles for milk (pints and small bottles for school milk), medicine, toiletries, groceries and jam-jars. Customers included Masons, Dayla, and Whites (soft drinks), Co-op and Unigate (dairies) and Reckitt & Colman.

Bottles by the thousand on the automatic lines (Picture: Albion Bottle Co brochure)

The process was highly mechanised by this time. The raw materials, silica sand, soda ash and limestone, were charged into 80-ton furnaces running at 1400C, together with waste glass 'cullet', and converted into glass. Accurate weights of molten glass dropped into the mould on the forming machine and these were blown into the bottle shape by compressed air. The red-hot bottles were automatically transferred to annealing furnaces and allowed to cool slowly to release any stresses in the bottle and prevent cracking.

Albion Bottle Co had a large maintenance department always at the ready to keep the machinery moving day and night. They bought a set of spares with each new piece of equipment and then set about making their own spare parts. They also had a carpenter's shop who made their own packing crates and pallets.

A new warehouse was opened in Fisher Road on the opposite side of the canal feeder. In the late 1960s HP Sauce themselves opened a depot in Crosswells Road, Langley Green, and, as they expanded, storage space was leased in this building. Finally, a new state-of-the-art warehouse was built on the Churchbridge Industrial Estate.

The firm ran into financial difficulties in the early 1970s. Since it was the only bottle manufacturer in the Birmingham area, the company's owners, the Imperial Tobacco Group, set about reorganising it to provide a profitable service to local bottlers and packers. Manufacture was developed around six new higher capacity lines and all other systems geared up for increased output. In 1975 W R C Halpin and R J G Kowall acquired the company from Imperial Tobacco. They weathered the difficulties of the late 1970s, including depressed markets and strikes, and in 1979 Albion Bottle celebrated its Golden Jubilee. However, further trading difficulties in the early 80s caused the firm to close a couple of years later and bottle manufacture in the West Midlands ceased.

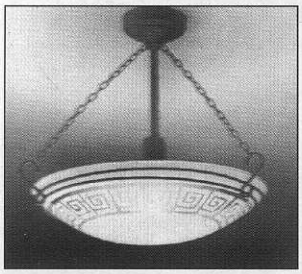
From the 50th Jubilee booklet and memories of Bill Hazlewood, employed 31 years at the company

N J Bradford Ltd

Glass is not the first substance that comes to mind when we think of bending materials, but glass bending is one of the oldest industries in this part of the Midlands: it was carried out at Chance's glassworks from the mid-1800s. In 1937 Norman John Bradford left Chance Brothers and set up

his own business in Nimmings Road, Blackheath, bending glass to make various products including the 'sun trap windows' then popular.

During the war the firm turned to metal finishing, but afterwards returned to glass fabrication. In 1947 the company moved to a site in Ashes Road which had been part of 'the Ashes' coal mine in the late 1800s, and was then used as grazing by the local milkman for his horse.



Glass lampshade bent into shape by N J Bradford Ltd
(Picture: Company brochure)

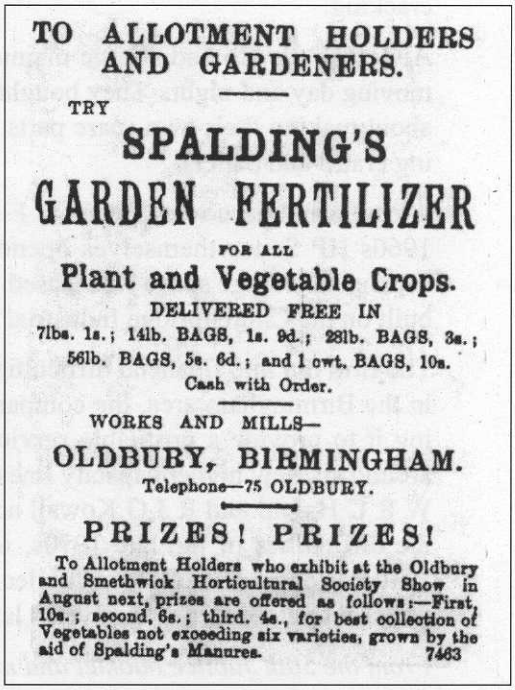
The company produced glass dish lamp shades for ceiling lights and table lamps. It also went into the production of glass signs, screen printed on the reverse, and used to advertise products in shop windows, including 'Fry's Chocolates', 'Batchelor's Peas' and 'Player's Please'. New planning regulations in 1953 controlled the use of such glass advertisements and restricted business.

In 1960 they installed their first glass toughening furnace and started to produce 'Fortrex'. Glass is toughened by oscillating it backwards and forwards in a furnace until it reaches 690C and then quenching it with a cold air blast. This toughened glass has found applications in cooker doors, hostess trolleys, and floodlights, and during the 1990s in furniture and holiday homes. Current processes include screen printing in ceramic colours, design cutting and sandblasting giving a wide range of decorations. Although few householders will know of N J Bradford Ltd, most will have some of their glass products in their home!

Cattle products, maggots and fertilisers

One of the industries well able to compete with the chemical industry in making smells, and easily beat it, is the processing of cattle products. Langley has a long history of dealing with meat waste! Richard Patrick was described in the 1896 Kelly Directory as 'blacksmith and manure manufacturer, 25 Causeway Green Rd'. Patrick's processed animal bones into buttons and their animal glue factory was a good wind direction indicator for over half a century.

A second factory was Spalding's at Birchley Crossing on the site now occupied by a toy store. It was a slaughter house dating from the late 19th century, which exported horse meat to Belgium before WW1, sold meat for pet food and produced organic fertilisers. In 1911 they offered prizes for local produce grown with 'Spalding's Garden Fertiliser'. The works closed in the mid 1950s.


TO ALLOTMENT HOLDERS AND GARDENERS.

TRY

SPALDING'S

GARDEN FERTILIZER

FOR ALL

Plant and Vegetable Crops.

DELIVERED FREE IN

7lbs. 1s.; 14lb. BAGS, 1s. 9d.; 28lb. BAGS, 3s.; 56lb. BAGS, 5s. 6d.; and 1 cwt. BAGS, 10s.

Cash with Order.

WORKS AND MILLS—

OLDBURY, BIRMINGHAM.

Telephone—75 OLDBURY.

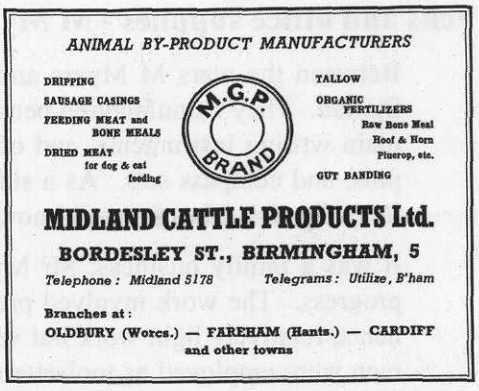
PRIZES! PRIZES!

To Allotment Holders who exhibit at the Oldbury and Smethwick Horticultural Society Show in August next, prizes are offered as follows:—First, 10s.; second, 6s.; third, 4s., for best collection of Vegetables not exceeding six varieties, grown by the aid of Spalding's Manures. 7463

Spalding's advertisement from 1911

One of the recollections of Spalding's concerned the appropriately named Mr Bones, a caretaker who lived on site. He ran a small sideline supplying maggots to the local fishermen at Titford Pool at the rear of the factory premises, and obtained these by steeping horse's heads in sacks in a disused arm of the canal.

Midland Cattle Products



1950s advertisement for Midland Cattle Poducts

"There was a maggot factory in Rood End Road." "And the smell was awful too!" "Yes, but the dripping was delicious." Some of the reminiscences of Midland Cattle Products Ltd at Rood End behind the Albion Bottle Co factory, and close to houses in Fisher Street!

Midland Cattle Products was not a slaughter house, but received cattle carcasses and meat industry waste and converted them into products such as fertilisers under the "Plucrop" brand, dog meat, sausage skins and that delicious dripping! Tallow and grease was supplied to industry, and, for example, blocks of their grease were used to lubricate the slides for hot metal bars at District Iron and Steel Works. Presumably, the maggots were a sideline for fishermen from the carcasses, like those from Spalding's. The company always maintained that they carried out a service to industry and society by converting the animal waste into useful products.

Generations had put up with the nuisance, the flies and the smells, but as sensitivities increased, a petition was raised in 1970 by local residents and workers in neighbouring factories, who threatened a one-day strike unless the smell was abated. The management promised that improvements were underway, but the main culprit was a meat cooking process, which was finally moved to one of their other factories. However, this made the whole plant uneconomic, and it closed in 1980.

Clothing manufacturers

Langley has been home to two small garment factories, Arden Knitware and Lauris Garments.

Arden Knitware

This factory was in Arden Grove at the rear of Fox's shop in High Street. The business was owned by Fo"s and was a family firm passing from grandfather to son and grandson. It produced machine-knitted garments for sale in the shop and provided employment for a number of local women. They also supplied some of the prestigious stores including Harrods, Selfridges and Marshall & Snelgrove in Birmingham. As with many places, WW2 seemed to lead to its decline and eventual demise. In later years the premises were used as a small warehouse where the public could buy ladies' and men's wear at keen prices.

Judith Tranter & Nancy Jones

The 'girls' at Arden Knitware between the wars (Picture: Nancy Jones collection)

Harwood (Lauris Garments) Ltd operated in Spring Street, Langley, in a factory by the theatre. They specialised in up-market children's clothes under the trade marks 'Lauris' - infants frocks and rompers, and dresses for tiny tots and toddlers - and 'Laurette' dresses for girls and teenagers. The company moved away when the area was re-developed at the end of the 1960s.

Pens and office supplies - M Myers & Sons Ltd

Between the wars M Myers and Sons set up a factory in Hall Street, close to Langley Green Station. They manufactured pens and nibs in the days when bottles of ink and steel pens were the main writing instruments, and office supplies such as propelling pencils, bulldog clips, mapping pins, and compass sets. As a sideline, their equipment was also ideally suited to producing such items lipstick tubes for well-known cosmetics suppliers like Boots and Elizabeth Arden.

It was a family business: Mr Myers senior and his son Malcolm would stroll around to check progress. The work involved preparation and assembly of many small metal and plastic components, relatively light work but very repetitive. Much of the work was carried out by women, but men were employed as toolsetters, foremen and progress clerks. Many of the women came from the Mushroom Hall estate, built at the same time as the factory. Others came from Cradley, Old Hill and places along the railway line, and Myers had a gate in their wall from the station to avoid the long walk round to Hall Street.

Working at Myers

I worked at Myers for two separate short periods in the 40s and 60s. The workers were very loyal to the company on the whole, considering that there was no trade union, just the 'Penworkers Federation', which never seemed to mean very much. Most of the press jobs were paid by 'piecework', and quite good wages could be earned by hard work with a bonus for high production during the late 1940s. Basic day rate applied to waiting time between jobs or when machines were being repaired. Piecework rates were based on 1000 process pieces, calculated according to the time taken. They were 'counted' by weighing with special scales. Jobs were allocated by the foreman, who also had to approve the work before it was weighed in for payment.

Processes included cutting, stamping, plastic moulding, plating, shaping by power and hand presses, piercing, spring coiling, lathe work, welding and assembly by hand or foot press. This was followed by inspection, packing and despatch. Repetition work could be tedious, so to help pass the time whole departments of girls would sing in unison whilst working. The foremen didn't always enjoy the community singing from the frowns that were often evident.

By the 1960s good wages were more difficult to earn and there was no longer a bonus! By then the working week had been shortened from 45 to 37fi hours. Subsidised dinners were available in the canteen (main course 5d [2p]). Workers had to clock in and out, and latecomers had their wages docked by the quarter hour. The only 'perks' were the Christmas party and the annual outing.

Pat Rodwell

I started working for Myers in 1954. We clocked in at 8 o'clock and worked through to 6 o'clock in the evening, and Saturday morning too if we could get the overtime. Whole families often worked there: my mom, brother, sister, aunt and sister-in-law for example. A radio would be playing, and we would all sing along to it above the noise of the hand and power presses, which we would operate almost non-stop throughout the day.

Sheila Shaw

Lilian Spittle worked for Myers for 45 years, from April 1944 until she retired in 1990. Among her jobs were Sample Clerk, Assistant Sales Administrator and Relief Switchboard Operator. When she was interviewed, her mother had to attend because you were only considered if a friend or family member put your name forward. Her mother made it clear that she did not want Lilian to operate machinery, as she had always had to do. Nevertheless, Lilian often watched the others making nibs in Mr Fen's press shop. Her war work when she started was pushing a trolley of rifle cartridges from department to department. All employees had a gift dependent on length of service when the Americans took over the company - in her case a brooch with three diamonds - and on the 150th anniversary all employees received a gold-plated bulldog clip.

Related by Lilian Spittle

The company was sold to Avery. In the 1970s a new warehouse and distribution centre was built on the site of the station goods yard. In October 1987 the company celebrated its 150th anniversary, and marked the occasion by a visit from Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York. The factory finally closed in the 1990s and has been replaced by new housing, 'Avery-Myers Drive'!

Timber!

Smith Bros (Quinton) Ltd, despite their name, now have a site between Titford Road and Titford Pool. They are a go-ahead firm and one of the few in Langley with their history, abstracted here, on the Internet!

The firm was started by three brothers, Cliff, Ran and Stan Smith, in 1927 with a workshop on Hagley Road West, Quinton. They were looking for work at the time of the depression and started making incubation units for chickens, then sheds, greenhouses, verandas and other timber items for local people. During WW2 they switched to making ammunition boxes, and by the late 40s two other brothers, Eric and Ken, had joined the family firm.

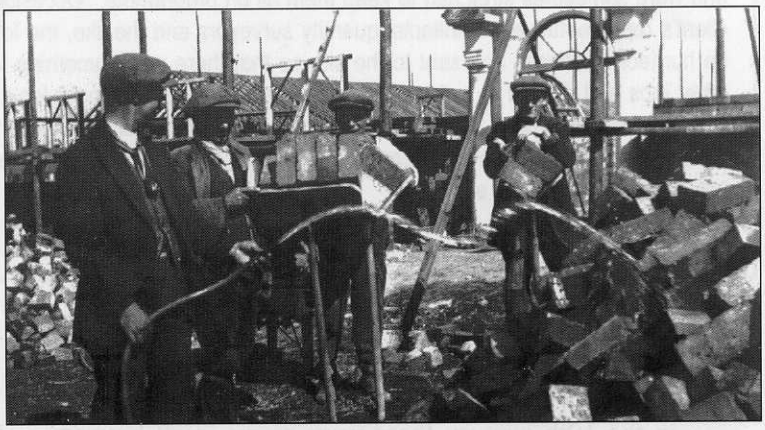
After the war, timber was in short supply making times difficult for the business. They bought some old Canadian timber invasion barges from the MOD, and with difficulty and perseverance managed to reclaim much of the timber from them.

They were invited to tender for packing cases for the Austin Motor Co, and that led them into their main post-war product line. Soon after, they started a factory at Bo'ness in Scotland to make cases for the car industry and other timber goods in Central Scotland. In the 1950s they opened the Titford Road site, and are probably the largest manufacturer of packing cases in the UK. Their ingenuity led to SCRUM, the 'Smiths Collapsible Returnable Universal Module': this is a patented nail-less timber and plywood case that slots together and collapses down for return transport.

Building Langley - William Jackson (Langley Green) Ltd

The Jackson family were local builders as far back as 1872 when Jackson Bros built the big stack at Albright & Wilson. However, the main building firm in the Langley area for most of the 20th century was William Jackson (Langley Green) Ltd, formed in 1897. William Jackson died in June 1973 and, according to his obituary, was quite a character: in his youth he gave an ice-skating exhibition on West Smethwick Park pool, had one of the first driving licences in the area in 1908, and gave the 'Jackson shield' to the 'Old Cross' bowling club.

It was a company that never compromised the quality of its joinery, and was responsible for many of Langley's important buildings including the Library in Barrs Street (1909), the County High School (1926), Moat Farm Schools (1938) and the new Technical School in Pound Road (1953). They carried out work for local industry, so much in the



Building in hand at the County High School, Moat Road, in 1925-6. The characteristic arch over the front entrance can be seen in the background. The land had been sold by Albright & Wilson from the Moat Farm Estate. (Picture: Ray Chalk collection)

case of BIP, for example, that they had a permanent site hut on the firm's grounds. The company was much in demand for pubs and schools in the 1960s, and continued to prosper. One of their last jobs was to renovate the deserted Langley Hall near their factory and convert it into flats. However, the firm finally went into liquidation in 1995. Their buildings remained unoccupied for some time, but have now been replaced by houses, built, we trust, to Jackson's standards!

Recollections of a surveyor

I started work at Jackson's as a surveyor in 1961, having just left the highly competitive 'big time' of Birmingham. With the arrogance of youth I first thought that they were 20 years behind the times. I soon found that wasn't so. In reality, I was now in the building trade as it should be, where quality always came first, as the many fine examples of their work around the district testify.

Jackson's had a superb joiner's shop. From the selection and ordering of materials, through machining and assembly, to the finished product, it was nothing but the highest quality. When we were compelled to order window frames from a national firm of mass-produced joinery manufacturers to meet an abject specification, one of the frames was brought into the yard and viewed with pitying curiosity. Everybody took a turn to look at it. Bill Shenton, the machine shop foreman, looked at the sharp radii of the widely-spaced growth rings of the end-grain and muttered 'Spruce!' - just about the lowest condemnation he could make. Spruce is not a joinery timber, and I don't remember Jackson's using it for anything.

An improvement to the Joiner's Shop, just before I joined the company, was the installation of the extraction system serving all the machines in the 'mill' which was attached to the shop. Not many builders had such sophisticated equipment to remove dust and woodchips from the atmosphere of their machine shops. It was installed after the directors went to Gerry Troman, the shop manager, saying they'd been reserving money for several years to improve the shop, and their accountants had warned they might be in trouble with the Inland Revenue if they didn't spend some of it. So they asked Gerry what he would like for the shop, and the extraction plant was chosen.

We usually travelled to make repairs, but one of the few occasions when a repair came to us was while carrying out an extension to Langley Distillery. The 'gin paddle' had to be repaired. It was over twelve feet long, and some kind of American pine, I think. After being used for twelve years for stirring gin it had the most incredible aroma I've ever smelt on a piece of timber. Gin was brought to the distillery in tankers at something like 169 degrees proof. For the public to be able to drink it, it was mixed with the beautiful water obtained there from the artesian wells. I can still recall the heady fragrance of that paddle. There was a queue in the shop all that day - Gerry Tromans could have charged for a sniff!

The 1960s were a boom time for building, particularly new schools and pubs. Jackson's had their share of these contracts, and were sometimes stretched to keep them all on programme. Occasionally, when a monthly site meeting was due with client's representatives, architects, quantity surveyors and the like, the following would take place. Office furniture would be hurriedly gathered and sent to the site so that there was something for them to sit on. Labour would be pulled from other jobs and drafted in to temporarily populate the site, making it look a hive of activity. When the meeting was over, both commodities, men and accoutrements, were either returned where they came from, or rushed to another site for a similar purpose. It caused no harm and served its eventual purpose. The contracts were usually completed on time anyway, and often ahead of schedule.

David Grant

Brewing

In the 19th century there were many small brewers and victuallers, making beer for use in their own or one or two local public houses. The 'New Inns' had one such small brewery, and it remains today part of the new-styled 'Finings and Firkin'. By the turn of the century there were four breweries in the area 'Albion', by the railway bridge in Tat Bank Road, 'Dog Kennel' in

Crosswells Road on the site of the current snooker club, 'Ardengrove' run by the Jordan family in Junction Street, and 'Crosswells' run by Showells by the level crossing in Crosswells Road.

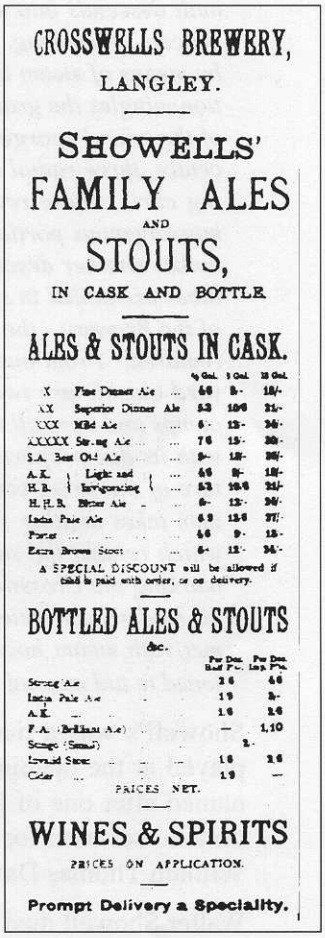
The largest and most significant was Crosswells, and they opened their own maltings in Western Road which still operates the old floor-drying malting process. On part of the brewery site Langley Distillery was set up adding to the range of alcoholic drinks.

Crosswells Brewery

Walter Showell began his career as a chemist and then moved into baking and brewing, originally in Simpson Street, Oldbury. The business soon outgrew the premises and in 1870 he moved to the site in Crosswells Road close to the railway yard and canal. The site enclosed the pure springs that had been given the name 'Cross Wells' from the ancient holy wells there.

In 1885 Walter Showell published "Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham" which includes the following entry relating to the 'Brewery at Crosswells':

"Though by far the most extensive brewery supplying Birmingham, the Crosswells cannot claim to be more than in the infancy of its establishment at present, as only twelve years ago the many acres of ground covered by its buildings formed but part of an unenclosed piece of waste land. Nevertheless, the spot was well-known and often visited in ancient times, on account of the wonderful and miraculous cures said to have been effected by the free use of the water gushing up from the depths of the springs to be found there, and which the monks of old had christened 'The Wells of the Cross' ... It has always been acknowledged as one of the purest waters to be found in the kingdom; but its peculiar and special adaptability to the brewing of 'good old English beer' was left to be discovered by the founder of the firm of Messrs. Walter Showell and Sons, who, ... some twelve years back, erected the nucleus of the present extensive brewery. Starting with the sales of only a few hundred barrels per week, the call for their ales soon forced the proprietors to extend their premises in order that supply should meet demand. At first doubled, and then quadrupled, the brewery is now at least ten times its original size; and a slight notion of the business carried out may be gathered from the fact that the firm's stock of barrels tots up to nearly 60,000, and it is being continuously increased, extensive cooperages, blacksmith's shops, etc., being attached to the brewery, as well as malthouses, offices, and storehouses of all kinds. The head offices of the firm, which are connected by telephone to the brewery, as well as with the stores at Kingston Buildings, Crescent Wharf, are situated in Great Charles Street, and thus the Crosswells Brewery (though really at Langley Green, some half-dozen miles away as the crow flies) becomes entitled to rank as a Birmingham establishment, and certainly not one of the least, inasmuch as the weekly sale of Crosswells ales for this town alone is more than 80,000 gallons per week." {article supplied by Bob Mills]



CROSSWELLS BREWERY,
LANGLEY.

SHOWELLS'
FAMILY ALES
AND
STOUTS,
IN CASK AND BOTTLE.

ALES & STOUTS IN CASK.

		½ Gal.	1 Gal.	18 Gal.
X	Fine Dinner Ale ...	4d	8-	18/-
XX	Superior Dinner Ale	5d	10d	21-
XXX	Mild Ale	6-	12-	24-
XXXXX	Strong Ale	7d	15-	30-
S.A.	Best Old Ale	8-	16-	32/-
A.K.	Light and	4d	8-	16/-
H.B.	Invigorating	5d	10d	20/-
H.P.A.	Bitter Ale -	6-	12-	24/-
India	Pale Ale ...	6d	13d	27/-
Porter	... ...	4d	9-	18-
Extra	Brown Stout ...	6-	12-	24/-

A SPECIAL DISCOUNT will be allowed if cash is paid with order, or on delivery.

BOTTLED ALES & STOUTS
&c.

	Per Doz. Bass Pts.	Per Doz. Imp. Pts.
Strong Ale ...	2 6	4 6
India Pale Ale ...	1 9	3-
A.K. ...	1 6	2 6
P.A. (Brilliant Ale) ...	—	1,10
Scotch (Small) ...	2-	
Invalid Stout	1 6	2 6
Cider	1 9	—

PRICES NET.

WINES & SPIRITS
PRICES ON APPLICATION.

Prompt Delivery a Speciality.

This advertisement from 1907 offers:
X Fine Dinner Ale,
XX Superior Dinner Ale,
XXX Mild Ale,
XXXXX Strong Ale,
as well as India Pale Ale, Porter, Invalid Stout and Cider. Bottled Strong Ale was 4/6 [about 22p] for a dozen pints!

This gives a good picture of the business which was very modern (with the telephone!), clearly expanding rapidly, and in 1885 was 'the most extensive brewery supplying Birmingham'. It was made a limited company a year later. It had offices, stores and agents throughout the Midlands. In 1882 an advertisement described them as 'Brewers, Maltsters, Wine and Spirit Merchants' and said they used forty fermenting tubs each of 3500 gallons.

The brewing process itself was described in the florid prose of the 'Midland Advertiser' on 1st June 1878, where a picture of efficiency and attention to detail emerges, as these extracts show. The malting process relates to operations in the original malthouse on the brewery site before the building of the maltings in Western Road.

"... The first stage in the progress of the materials beerwards is seen in the crushing of the partially germinated grain or malt in a mill upon the top floor, a machine which also eliminates the foreign and useless matter by means of an arrangement of sieves and screens. Crushed and cleared of impurities, the malt descends into a hopper beneath, under which is a round vat of large size, where it undergoes the process of mashing. In its descent it is joined by the water from the fairy well, which has been made hot by means of steam in a cisterm close at hand. In the juncture, a patent machine of ingenious construction mingles the grain with water so thoroughly that it falls like gruel and spreads itself over the bottom of the tun. A sparging or hot water scattering instrument is then brought into play. From a pillar in the centre, three radial arms extend perforated on the underside like the tube at the back of a street watering cart. These revolve rapidly over the mash, raining on it hot water so that the saccharine and mucilagenous portions may be extracted. The liquor obtained, the wort as it is called in good Saxon, makes another descent by means of pipes into a couple of boilers ... round the bottom of which copper tubes are coiled in spirals like a couple of immense serpents. These call attention to a peculiar feature of the Brewery - the use in every department and in every process of steam instead of fire where heat is required. From one end to another of the establishment you cannot see a live coal anywhere. In the yard outside are two great Cornish boilers, and these generate the steam that drives the engines and pumps and does all the warming that is required ... The wort with which the boilers are filled is mingled with its due proportion of hops and steam rushing through the serpent coils simply raises the temperature of the sweet yet bitter liquor to its boiling point. It seethes and bubbles for a sufficient time, and then takes another step downwards into a vessel curiously termed a hopbeck, the perforated bottom of which retains the substance of the exhausted hop blossoms and allows the thin fluid to escape. ... In marking the Crosswells Brewery as in so many ways a model establishment, it goes without saying that all modern conveniences have been adopted, and that all requirements of moving and lifting have been met with steam hoists and other arrangements which improved knowledge and experience have fashioned to aid manual labour ..." [article supplied by John Whitehouse]

Showell's was a major employer in the area with its own band which, among other activities, played at the opening of Langley Park in 1886. It had its own firemen and fire engine 'Lilian', named after one of the daughters in the family. The site also had blacksmiths and stables for the dray horses used for local deliveries, and coopers for making the casks. The manager in 1896 was William Thomas Davies.

Walter Showell died in 1901, and the business then seems to have got into some difficulties, so that by January 1907 a shareholder's meeting proposed reconstruction of the Showell's Brewery Co Ltd. This must have been successful since the firm continued, although a large fire later destroyed some of the buildings. The brewery was sold to Ind Coope and Allsopp Ltd (by 1957), later to Ansells, and now bears the name 'Alcohols'.

Langley Distillery was associated with the brewery and prepared spirits for distribution, diluting the concentrated spirit that they bought in to palatable strength.

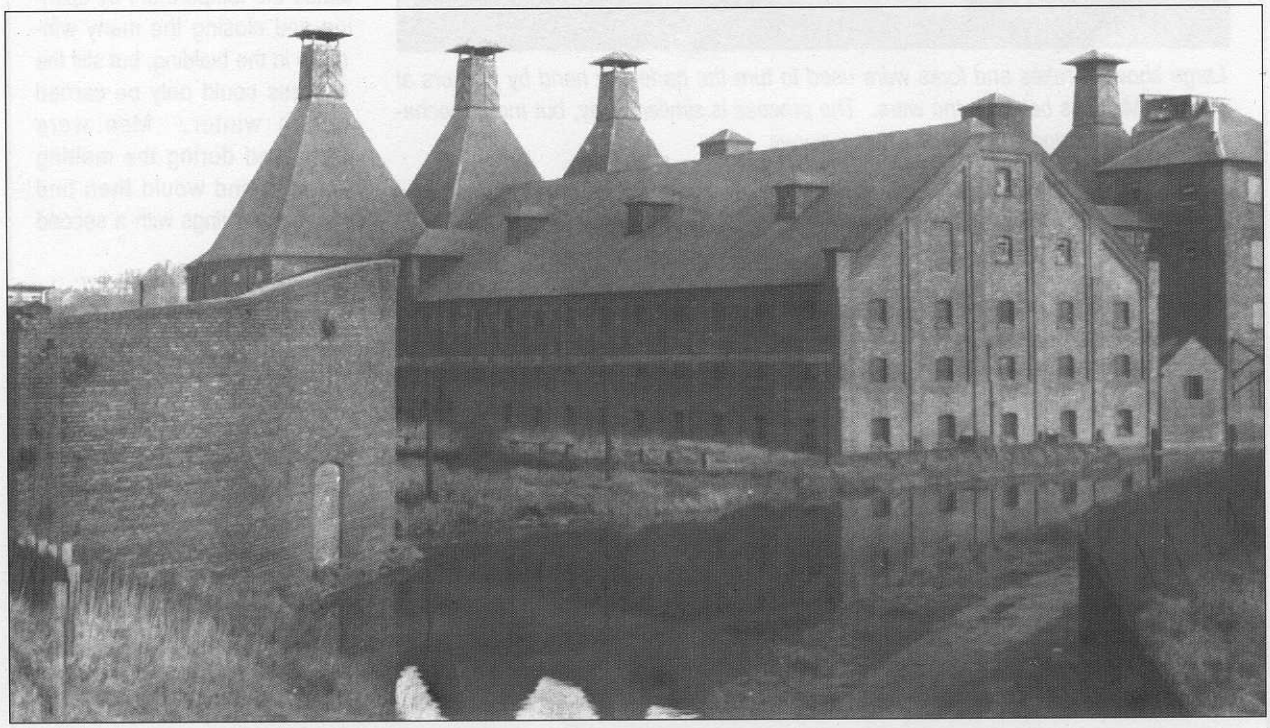
The brewery supplied many local public houses and owned some, including the 'Crosswells'.

Around 1880, extensive new maltings were built close to the brewery on the canal side.

Delivering the ale from Crosswells Brewery

A horse drawn delivery vehicle used at Showell's brewery, typical of the type used well into this century for local deliveries by the company. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

Showell's 'Sentinel' lorry, ready and in steam, marks progress in the delivery of ales. The picture is undated. *(Picture: Audrey Allen collection)*



Langley Maltings around 1960 from the railway bridge, showing the many windows of the drying floors that were opened and closed to control the air temperature for the chitting process: these are still used but are supplemented by cooling in hot weather. The characteristic flues of the drying kilns can be seen behind. The open area in front of the malthouse was the site originally occupied by the canal basin serving the warehouses of the Maltings. *(Picture: Leslie Scarlett)*

Langley Maltings

Langley is the site of one of the last five maltings in Britain using the traditional floor malting process. Other maltsters have introduced modern industrial processes to increase the scale of the operation and replace hand turning on the malthouse floor, the age-old method of malting. At Langley, Wolverhampton and Dudley breweries, who make Banks beer, have increased the efficiency of the malting process, but retained its essence.

'Malting' is a process which promotes the natural germination of barley, but then stops the development of the seedlings at a stage when the growing barley has the required combination of sugars and proteins to give the malt flavour needed by brewers. The process operated at Langley still involves the traditional maltster's art in controlling the process. The germinating grain is inspected as it is scuffled (turned) and a watchful eye kept on the process. The appearance and feel of the grain supplement the laboratory tests, and the experience of the maltster is critical.

Large shovels, rakes and forks were used to turn the barley by hand by workers at Langley Maltings between the wars. The process is similar today, but more mechanised in some stages. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

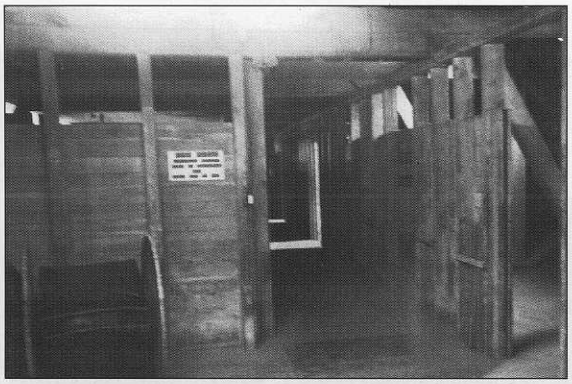
The exact date when Langley Maltings were built is not known, even to the present owners, but an article in February 1882 refers to them as 'newly-built' by Showells's Brewery. There were two malthouses each with three kilns. Malting could not be carried out when the temperature of the malthouse floor was too high. The foreman maltster regulated the temperature by opening and closing the many windows in the building, but still the process could only be carried out in winter. Men were employed during the malting season, and would then find other employment in the summer, many as agricultural labourers. Some would work only in the mornings with a second occupation in the afternoons.

Barley, described by Showells in 1882 as 'the best Californian or British barley' was delivered by canal, and there were two canal basins feeding into the covered warehouse. The mooring rings for the barges still remain. The malt was transferred by horse and cart across the road to the brewery. Later, the railway was used to bring in the barley, and today it arrives exclusively by road.

Much of the buildings are constructed in timber, and some of the original wooden storage bins are still in use. In 1922 there was a fire which destroyed half of the buildings, the malthouse and kilns on the Station Road side. These were rebuilt, but with only two drying kilns, not three. Around 1940 Showells Brewery was sold to Ansells, and the Maltings, not required by Ansells, were sold to Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries. They undertook process improvements.

In the 1950s they introduced 'broken steeping', and added refrigeration to the malt floors so that malting could be undertaken all through the year. The original perforated tiles forming the kiln floor were replaced by wire web flooring. In the 70s they added extra barley drying and storage facilities, although these modern buildings do obscure the lines of the older buildings when viewed from New Inns bridge.

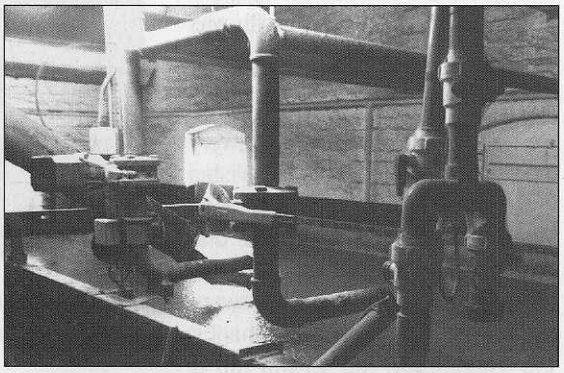
Langley Maltings preserves a traditional industry in a rare way. It is rare because few floor-drying malt-houses remain in Britain, and also rare because it is one of the few industries from last century still to be carried on in Langley in essentially the same way. It is one of Langle"s finer pieces of industrial heritage!



The malting process at Langley

Pictures: John Hodgkins
with the help of the staff at Langley Maltings
and kind permission of Wolverhampton & Dudley Brewery Co

Grain storage: Oak storage bins in the eaves of the building. No wonder the fire had a disasterous effect! These are original, having been in the north wing that was not burnt out.



Steeping in water: this takes three days and uses water from a 300ft bore hole on the site; the water has a constant temperature of 11C (52F) winter and summer. Dissolved oxygen is critical to the process which softens the grains and starts the enzyme activity to break down the starch. The original 'ditch steeping' was slow and labour intensive, but maintained the oxygen level. Today the larger volume 'broken steeping' procedure is used, in which the water is changed daily to maintain the oxygen level and remove carbon dioxide.

Chitting by floor drying: the steeped barley grains are spread to a depth of about nine inches on the malthouse floor and allowed to germinate for five to six days until the roots and shoot have just started to form. This needs careful temperature control to reduce the moisture content, and the windows in the malthouse are opened and closed to regulate the temperature (now supplemented by refrigeration). Even germination is ensured by turning the grains with a plough known locally as a 'scuffle' and, if necessary, slowing the germination by removing the roots from the grains with a rotary cutter. The grain softens to a point where it can be rubbed out into a powder.

Kiln-drying: The germination is then stopped by transferring the grain to kilns which have a porous floor so that hot-air is drawn through the grain by the natural flue of the pyramid-shaped kiln. The drying rate is critical, starting gently and as the malted grain dries, reaching higher temperatures so that the malt is roasted to give its characteristic flavour. This is the part of the process that generates the steam often seen to escape from the flues of the malthouse. The roots, shoots and husks are separated from the material leaving the pure white powdered malt.

'Crosswells Inn'

Just how many public houses the brewery owned or supplied is unknown. One of their pubs was, obviously, the 'Crosswells Inn' at Five Ways. The 1857 map shows it as 'Cross Wells Inn' and this predates the brewery. The 1861 census shows the 'victualler' as Frederick Kinchin, with Mary and four children and a servant all living at the inn: he later became a foreman at Albright & Wilson. In 1896 William Smith was the landlord there.

Albert Cotterill outside the new 'Crosswells Inn' around 1930. The building has retained its character to this day. (Picture: Eric Ruff collection)

My grandfather, Albert Cotterill, worked for the Crosswells Brewery as a wheelwright before he enlisted in the Royal Artillery in the first World War. He received a medical discharge about 1918. As his health precluded heavy work in the brewery, the company placed him as tenant in the 'Navigation Inn' at the top of Titford Road. In about 1922, Albert and his wife Mary, with sons Albert and Arthur, moved to the 'Crosswells Inn', where, shortly after, my mother Mary was born. In 1924 the family moved to the 'Holly Bush', Cradley, while the old 'Crosswells' was demolished and a new one built. The Cotterills returned to the 'Crosswells' in 1929 and remained there until 1951. I was born there in 1945. During their tenancy, the pub became a house of Ind Coope & Allsopp, then Ansells, and later belonged to Holts. It is now privately owned.

Eric Ruff (Canada)

Feeding Langley

There were many shops and small traders supplying food to the people of Langley, but these will not be considered in this book. However, a few food producers were larger, supplied a wider area and were known outside Langley.

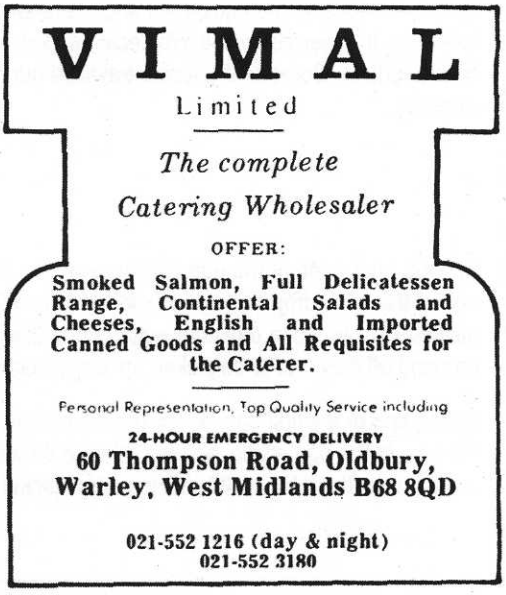
One such was the Standard Vinegar Co Ltd in Cakemore Road, Causeway Green. The company, owned by the Blackband family, was formed in 1894 and closed about twenty years ago. It brewed and bottled 'Standard' malt vinegar, and other products included pickled onions. The onions were delivered to local houses for preparation prior to the pickling process. The labels on the vinegar bottles showed a fat bald man with a red apron.

Malt was also used in baking as well as brewing and vinegar. Sultana malt loaf was made at Albion Mills Bakery, in Tat Bank Road by Cremalt Ltd. The 'Cremalt' loaf was publicised in 1930 by two early advertising 'jingles' by Jack Judge: 'The Cremalt Song' and 'I've been eating Cremalt'. The theme was picked up by all the local children who sang the song through 1930, and Jack Judge even recorded the songs!

Vimal Ltd, founded in the 30s, were flour blenders in Arden Grove who specialised in the production of a malt meal, 'Trumalt', for bakers and confectioners for the manufacture of malt loaves.

Did they perhaps supply Cremalt half a mile away? They expanded their business by becoming catering suppliers, and moved to Thompson Road next to the level crossing. As well as supplying local hotels and canteens, they covered the whole country. By 1978 they were advertising as the 'complete Catering Wholesaler' including smoked salmon, delicatessen range and continental salads, and they ran a 24-hour emergency delivery service. What kind of emergency requires a delivery of smoked salmon? - surely not those usually encountered in Langley.

Cremalt advertisement from the late 1950s



Advertisements for Vimal Ltd from 1957 (above) and 1978 (right)

Lion's eggs

Our children will tell us that lions don't lay eggs, but they won't remember the bygone days when all 'official' eggs had a lion stamped on them. During the 60s there was an 'egg factory' on Causeway Green Road, E A Hughes, run by Frank Hickton, one of the directors. This was situated behind the shops running up to the 'Royal Oak'. Eggs were not made there, of course, but brought in from the countryside of Worcestershire and beyond the Severn Valley (Bewdley, Kinlet, Mamble and the like) and packed at the station. This provided employment for many of the women in the area.

Packing eggs

I worked in the egg packing station doing general office work in the 1960s.

The eggs were collected and brought in two or three times a week by a couple of farmers, Fred and Alf, as I remember. Some producers would send very large numbers and others just a few dozen. The eggs were unloaded into the warehouse, where ladies would be waiting to process them. The eggs were placed individually on a conveyor belt designed to cradle each egg. It was carried along to a booth completely enclosed with thick black curtains where sat the 'candler'. The eggs passed over a strong light which enabled the candler to pick out those that were not perfect.

Eggs were rejected if they were cracked, had blood spots, misshapen shells, sugared ends and so on. Only perfect eggs qualified to be stamped with the little 'lion'.

After leaving the booth, the eggs were automatically weighed, stamped and graded according to size. They were then rolled down on to a large round table divided into sections graded 'small', 'medium', 'large' etc. Around the table stood ladies who packed them into boxes of fi-dozen, 1-dozen or on to large open trays. All eggs had to be packed with their pointed ends down.

The boxes or trays were packed into cartons, loaded into vans and delivered by the company's drivers and salesmen to bakers, confectioners, caterers, and large and small shops throughout the Black Country.

Standards were very high and periodically inspectors from 'Weights and Measures' or 'Agriculture and Fisheries' would call to make checks on the equipment and operation. I don't remember the date when the packing station closed, but the sales side was transferred to the Wholeale Market in Birmingham, and the candling and packing went to Yieldingtree near Belbroughton. Some of the ladies travelled out there by minibus for a while, but gradually left as, I suppose, it was too far to travel.

Barbara Powell

In 1965 I got a job at the egg packing station. Bob Walker, the foreman, kept a watchful eye on the workers that they did not let the eggs drop through a hole in the middle of the table before grabbing them and putting them on the egg tray for distribution. In those days the eggs had a 'little lion' stamped on them by a machine running on a spindle. As the eggs dropped off they had to be picked up very quickly or they dropped on to the floor beneath.

By the end of my first day, all my fingers and thumbs had small cuts on them which were very sore. I soon learned it was the lime in the egg shells, and the thing to do was to wear cotton gloves, but they were ruined in a day! After my first day leaning over the table I felt I was in a strait-jacket when I got home, but I soon got used to it.

Elsie Cartwright (née Hadley)

Sweets

Sweets were a luxury compared with eggs and malt-loaves, but Langley did have sweet makers as well. One of the smallest was 'Pearl' sweets on the corner of Dog Kennel Lane and Landswood Road. It was a small enterprise owned by Luke Bradley and employing half a dozen people. It operated in the late 20s and early 30s.

In contrast, Parkes Classic Confectionery also started in a very small way with Arthur Parkes selling home-made sweets from a barrow, but it grew into the largest sweet maker in the Midlands with an international reputation and no fewer than two hundred and thirty types of sweet before WW2! The starting date for the company is in some doubt. Parkes's letterhead claims that the

company was 'established in 1880', and this is probably when he started selling from the barrow. The 'Made in Oldbury' brochure quotes 1904 for the founding of Parkes Classic Confectionery, and may refer to the start of manufacture at the factory in Crosswells Road.

Sweets were exported all round the world. This too required expertise, for the sweets had to be adjusted to the climate: good old English toffee, soft and chewy here, would melt in the tropics and be too hard in the frozen wastes of Canada!

Arthur Parkes was a religious man, involved with Langley Green Chapel and a window was dedicated there to his memory. A letter, dated 14/11/1934, to one of his employees, N Fellows, is a little homily: *"Presented to Mr N Fellows upon the occasion of his marriage in recognition of services faithfully rendered. To you and yours I wish you health, wealth & happiness. May your home be a haven of rest and comfort under all circumstances. Union of hearts, not hands, does marriage make. Use your opportunities to secure this union & happiness is bound to follow. A Parkes"*

Sweet success

Arthur Parkes bought a house in Crosswells Road and became a sweet wholesaler after WW1. His first employee was Joseph Statham who joined as a carter, delivering the sweets. Arthur Parkes believed that he could make sweets more cheaply than he was buying them in, and he employed a Frenchman to make his first sweets and teach Joseph Statham the art. He bought the house next door and built a factory in the back gardens of the two houses.

During the depression he sold cheap sweets to the Welsh miners under the 'Diamond' brand, while selling his best sweets under the 'Parkes' brand. The firm prospered between the wars and the product lines increased until there were over 200. During WW2 business became very difficult: rationing restricted the ingredients available, and by Thursday the week's supply had usually gone. The range of sweets was drastically reduced to the more popular lines, and they relied on very young and older employees to keep going.

After the war the firm started to build across the road, and steam was transferred through pipes in a tunnel under Crosswells Road from the boilers to the new site. More than 400 people were employed at this time. Initially, hand machines were used to stamp the sweets in dies, but these were replaced by electrically driven stamping machines. It was very hot work in summer with coke stoves and, later, gas stoves to prepare the molten sugar syrup. Finally, a coater was introduced giving a continuous stream of syrup. The operators sat at the tables with copper steam pots. Some lines, such as buttered brazils and chocolate eclairs, were hand-dipped.

By 1949 Arthur Parkes was still Chairman, Joseph Statham had become Works Manager and Leonard Oakes was Company Secretary, and the factory was the largest in the Midlands making that type of sweet. The factory had largely re-equipped after the war with many automatic machines.

The workers wanted to introduce a union, but the management would not recognise one, and a strike ensued. After the workers returned, the atmosphere seemed to have changed. Arthur Parkes retired in the 50s, and Len Oakes became Managing Director. In 1959 they were taken over by Vincent's of Hunnington, who made 'Bluebird' toffee. By 1967 they were producing on their own again under Len Oakes, but soon afterwards the company went into liquidation.

Colin Statham

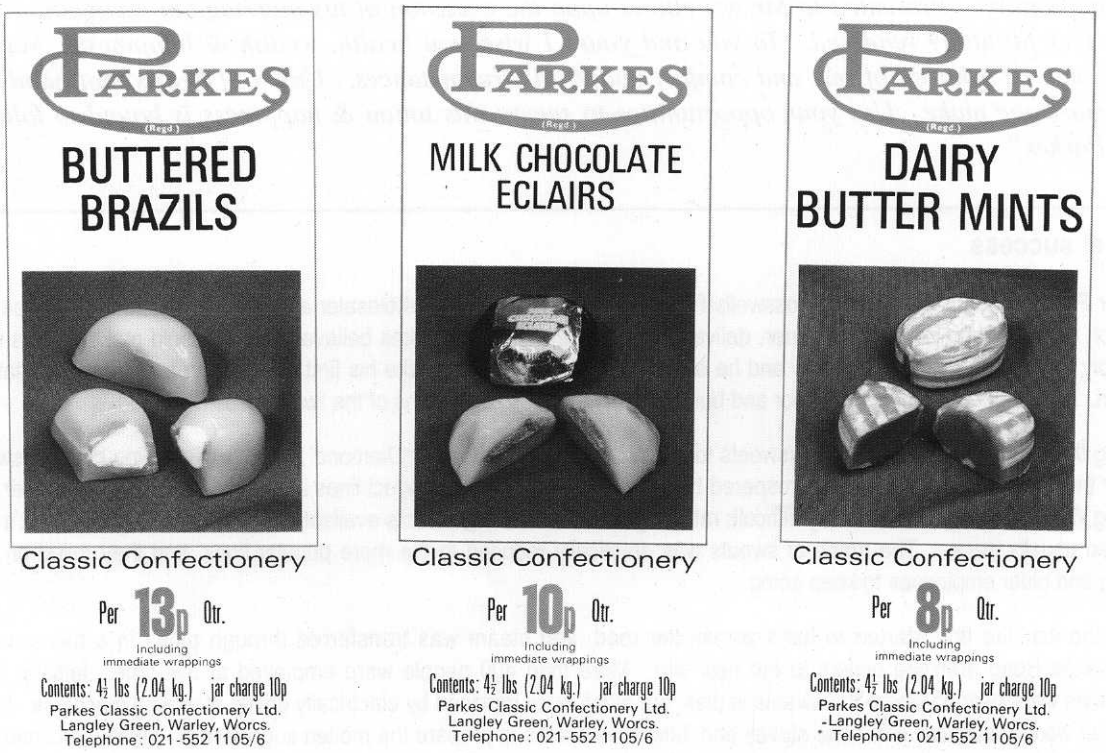
For three months in the 1930s, I was 'assistant sugar boiler' to Bill Cutler. My job was to weigh all the ingredients: white sugar, brown sugar and glucose into a copper pan - this must have been at least 20" in diameter and, perhaps, 14" deep with side handles. When the correct measure of water had been added, I'd put it on a gas burner and stir the concoction until it boiled, then transfer it to another jet to carry on the boiling at a steady rate. I would then prepare the next lot. Bill would pour the first one on to a heated metal slab when it was ready, and proceed to knead it. The weather became very hot in late May and early June, and with such a warm job we were put on morning shifts, six till two.

Bill Hipkiss

Their letter heading gives the telegraphic address of the company as the delightful 'Sweetmeats, Langley Green', and carries two panels listing some of the sweets then made by the company, presumably the most prestigious:

Classic Confectionery: Malt Toffees, Walnut Sachets, Passion Fruits, Oriental Dates, Swan Assortment, Edward Selections, Smyrna Figs, Melba Fruits

Specialities: Butter Almonds, Butter Walnuts, Walnut Toffee, Almond Circles, Everton Toffee, Melba Dessert, Glacé Fruit, Doncaster Mixture.



Bottle labels for three popular lines used as advertising materials by Parkes sales representatives in the 60s. By now the prices have gone decimal! *(Source: Leslie Scarlett collection)*

All facing the right way

In the early 1950s I packed sweets at Parkes's. The first few jars I packed were promptly emptied out by the inspector because I had not got all the names showing correctly on the individual sweets. The pay was 2fid [1p] per jar, and you were expected to pack 90 jars in a day. I only worked there three weeks!

For 2/6 you could have a tin of sweets made up to send to the forces.

Jean Parker

A nice cup of tea

Those locals who had signed the pledge and rejected Mr Showell's products would welcome Mr Sheward's! William Sheward was a former butcher who started the Indian and Ceylon Tea Company in premises on the corner of Junction Street South and Titford Road in the 1920s. He was a prominent local figure who served as an independent councillor in the area and did much to

help the residents of Langley. He was followed into the business by his two sons, Norman and Bernard who ran it until it was finally closed in the mid-70s when Norman became seriously ill.

The tea was bought and paid for in the tea plantations of India and Ceylon, usually through agents out there. It was then shipped to England, to several different ports and bonded warehouses to avoid the possibility of local dock strikes stopping access to the tea stocks.

Tea chests for hop-pickers

One of the common uses for tea chests was for carrying and storing clothes by people who couldn't afford a proper tin trunk. These were often used by the families who went hop-picking each season. They doubled as a table as well, being spread with a cloth by the hop-pickers.

Joan Highfield

At Langley the tea chests were check weighed to ensure that no one had tampered with them and removed any tea through the customs bung. They were inspected to make sure the tea had not got damp and caked together. Inside the wooden chests were a layer of tinfoil, used to reseal the chests, and a layer of tissue paper protecting the tea. Disused chests were recycled, although a few were disposed of locally to Langley families.

Most teas had to be blended to achieve a consistent quality. Only a few, like Darjeeling, were a single unblended leaf. The blending was carried out at first by William and later by Norman Sheward. The teas were mixed in a gentle blender that rolled them together, and transferred to a machine that delivered the required weight, mainly ¼lb, into the packet. Large numbers of packets were filled this way and carefully stacked on tea chest lids on stands. These were then hand-folded, a label stuck on to seal them, each label being damped with a sponge, and the packet stacked upside down to make sure the label stuck. These were then wrapped into parcels in brown paper by hand, and were ready for despatch.

The packing was done by a lady called 'Bessie' after the war. Eventually, the filling, sealing and labelling was done by machine - a second-hand machine being scrapped by a London firm of tea packers. Bernard Sheward was an engineer as well as a tea merchant, and he bought the machine and rebuilt it, added hoppers, chutes and conveyors: the machine lasted until the firm closed. Bessie, who was getting on by then, carried on packing on a part-time basis, mainly the 1lb packets, of which less were required.

An early brand was 'Digesta tips' tea, which used only the tips of the tea shoots, not the stalks, but more types were introduced. In the 1950s the cheapest cost 1/- per ¼lb [5p], and the most expensive, Darjeeling, was 2/6. Among their range was 'gunpowder' tea, so called because of its appearance, rolled into small balls like gunpowder: this was an acquired taste and usually mixed with other teas by connoisseurs. Their packets had an oriental design, rather like a willow-pattern plate, and were printed in different colours to distinguish the types. The company, despite its name, also supplied 'China' tea, such as Earl Grey, and coffee, and even cakes for a while from Broadhurst's Bakery or Kunzles.

Indian & Ceylon Tea Co's packet design reflected their oriental name

Tea was distributed country-wide by a fleet of small vans, and, in the early days, by horse and cart: the warehouse

Line-up of the vans owned by the Indian & Ceylon Tea Company and their drivers, led by the owner's Ford Pilot car, in front of the warehouse in Junction Street South. The notice over the doors says 'Try "Digesta Tips" the tea without the stalk'. (Picture: Robert Sheward collection)

in Junction Street had stables. Customers included large organisations, hotels, hospitals, schools, police forces and even the Meteorological Office, as well as private individuals and local shops.

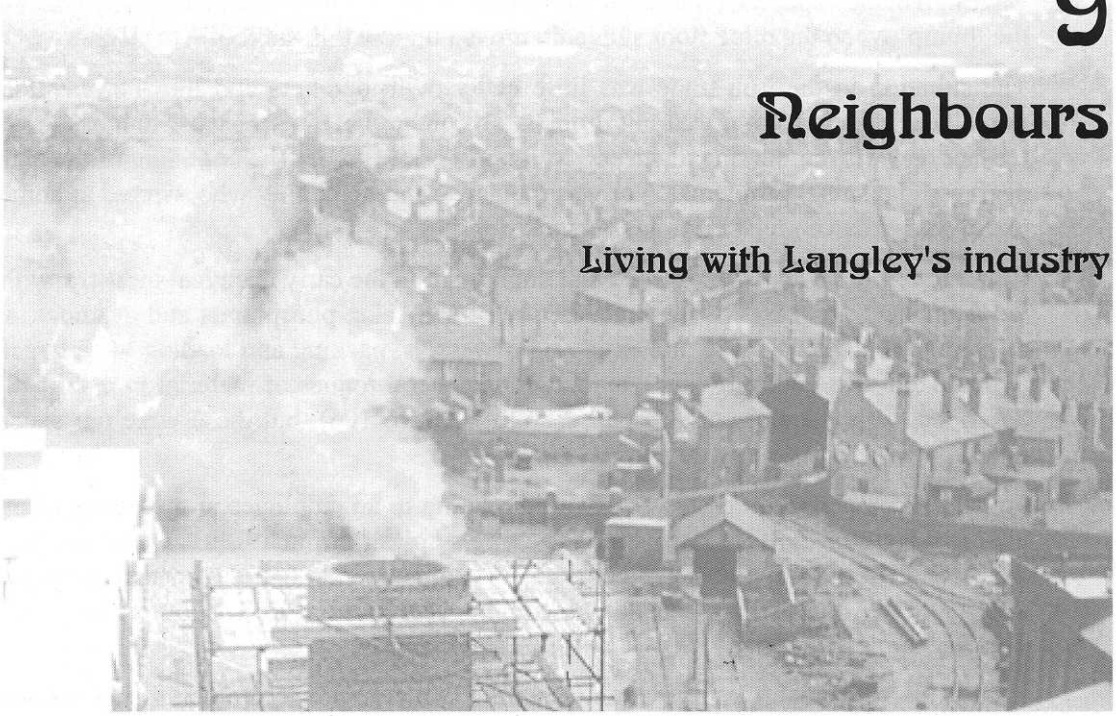
They also ran a scheme whereby coupons on the packets could be exchanged for free crockery, and Robert Sheward remembers many trips to Stoke on Sunday mornings to fetch the pottery. Special offers came along from time to time - in 1958 30 coupons from 'selected tips or profit sharing tea' could be exchanged for 'one pair of superior quality fully fashioned, 60 gauge, 15 denier nylons'. On another occasion there was a 'special seasonal offer of one "Harlequin" Christmas Pudding for 24 ½lb tea wrappers'.

The best unsolicited testamonial came when the family were on holiday in Scotland. Two men at the next table were discussing the poor quality of the tea at the hotel when one of them said he obtained his from a small firm in 'Langley, or somewhere like that, and very good it was too!'.

Related by Robert Sheward

9
Neighbours

Living with Langley's industry



This chapter could be called 'muck and brass' since there is always a trade-off between inconvenience and prosperity in industry. In the early days of industry, most of the prosperity, the 'brass', went to the factory owners and shareholders, although many had a strong community spirit and tried to promote the welfare of their workers and the social development of Langley. A little of the prosperity and most of the 'muck', the inconvenience, came to those who worked in the factories or lived in the area close to them. Much of the work was physically hard, hours were long and working conditions varied from unpleasant to dangerous. It has been a long struggle to achieve the levels of reward, the working conditions, the safety and the clean environment enjoyed today. Industrial firms now have to be good neighbours, and, by and large, want to be so.

Working conditions

Conditions in local mines in the early 1800s were very bad, and Black Country pits had the highest death rate in the country. The thirty foot seam was generally worked by the 'pillar and stall' method, in which the full height was cut, a highly dangerous procedure. Men were not generally employed and paid by the mine owner, but by a chartermaster or 'butty', who contracted with the owner to work part of the pit. With several butties in a pit, co-ordination of safety could be lax. Miners received payment just above the poverty level in good times, but when coal prices dropped or demand fell their payment also was lowered. All this led to a short hard life, and protests and

strikes ensued.

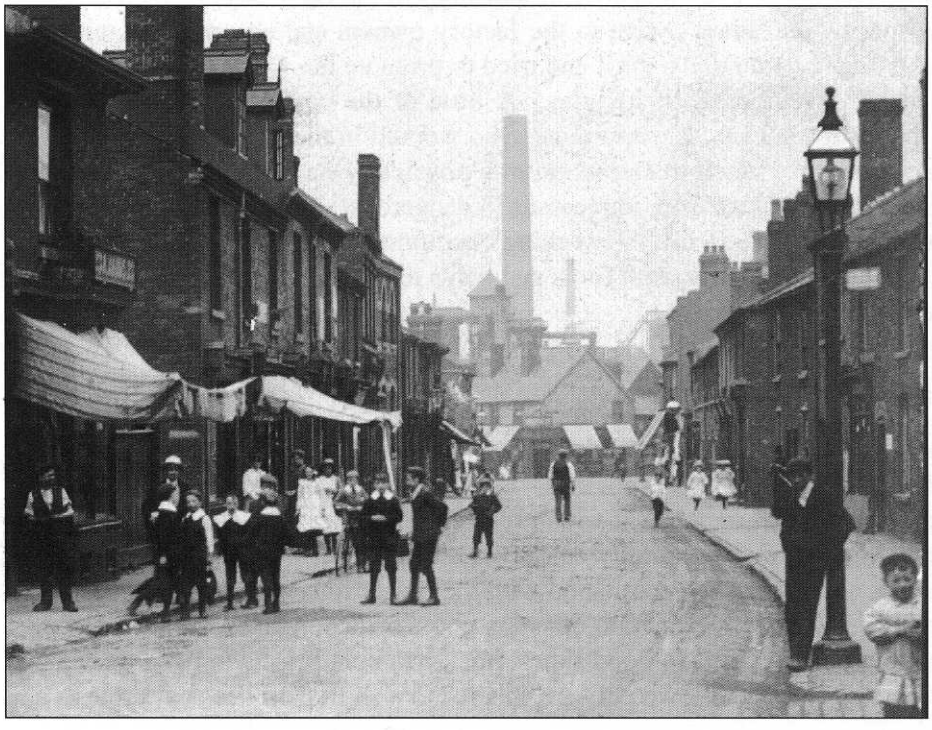
Inspection of mines started in the mid-1800s, leading slowly to less deaths and better conditions, but as late as 1911 a strike at Cakemore Colliery was as much about inadequate ventilation as poor wages. The newspapers reported many accidents from explosions, roof falls, runaway trucks and the 'bump' when the mine floor suddenly moved up towards the roof.

The situation in the iron trade was little better, with puddlers and furnace operators exposed to fierce heat and showers of red-hot droplets of iron, and men using hand tongues to catch and steer red-hot bars of iron moving at speed. In foundries and forges the pounding of the hammers caused deafness and spinal problems. Nor was the nailer and his family who worked at home much better off, at the whim of greedy iron masters and foggers.

Conditions were equally dangerous and unpleasant in the early chemical industry, with fumes emitted from such processes as the manufacture of salt cake, phosphorus and cyanides, and heat from the furnaces. The charging and emptying of vessels, packing and loading were largely carried out by hand and this could involve men handling several tonnes of material in a shift. Frank Hadley described such instances at Albright & Wilson (page 106), but these were not exceptional at the time.

In 1911 a compensation case was reported relating to an employee at the Lewis Demuth company who had lost the sight in one eye after getting a splash of pitch in it. There was 'conflicting evidence' in the case and he received only 10/6 [52p] per week, half the normal compensation. It was also suggested that with spectacles he could return to work as a labourer: he was 75 years old. This was not exceptional.

Neither factory owners nor governments were unaware of the problems, and some owners made attempts to improve the situation. Various Acts of Parliament in the 1800s also started to regulate conditions and safety in factories, but it was a long slow process, and it is only within the last fifty years that good working conditions and safety-consciousness have come to the fore, and really effective protective equipment has become available for hazardous operations.



Albright & Wilson's 'big stack' and chemical plant tower over the shops and houses of High Street, Langley early this century. *(Picture: Ken Rock collection)*

Going to blazes!

Fires have always been a danger in those industries using or making large quantities of flammable materials, particularly the chemical and brewing industries. From time to time Langley residents have been presented with the joint spectacle and hazard of a fire at one of the works. Locals could not resist going to these blazes! They tend to stick in the memory as people grow older and some of the best remembered are those at Langley Maltings (25 September 1925), Midland Tar Distillers (29 March 1962) and Showell's Brewery.

'Lillian', Showell Brewery's fire engine after the fire at the Maltings in 1925. The wooden structure in the malthouses burned readily, and the smell of overcooked malt pervaded the area for some time! The Titford Canal in the background was pumped on to the fire, which destroyed much of the southern half of the building. (Picture: Sandwell Community History and Archives)

Companies have worked hard to develop processes which present little hazard to their workmen or the general public, and to include fire prevention as part of their operation. Increasing safety legislation over the last twenty years has brought even greater preventative measures. Even back in the 19th century, however, larger companies had their own fire engines and trained members of the workforce to act as firemen.

Albright & Wilson's fire brigade was formed at the turn of the century, and they had a powerful 600 gallon per minute engine bought from Glasgow Corporation before WW1. BIP's brigade started in 1940 and was immediately involved in the war work of the Smethwick Fire Brigades Association to the benefit of all the local community.

One of the most susceptible companies in the area was Midland Tar Distillers, and their fire in 1962 was spectacular and destructive. The summarised description from 'MTD Magazine', Autum 1965 issue, gives a flavour of the event.

"Soon after 8.35 pm a fitter noticed 'sparks in the air' around tank 589/590 situated on the Refined Tar Deck, followed by a burst of flame at the top of the tank. Immediate action was taken, and within minutes Oldbury Fire Brigade were on the scene, soon to be supported by brigades from Tipton, Stourbridge, Rowley Regis, Smethwick and Halesowen, with assistance from the Works Brigade and contingents from Accles & Pollock, Tube Products and British Industrial Plastics.

"The conflagration was centred at the Refined Tar Deck, where approximately 70,000 gallons of Refined Tar were stored in fifteen elevated tanks each connected to a common run-off. As the second tank became involved, the structure of the first began to give way under the heat, taking with it the bottom connection on the second tank, so pouring tar into the fire. In this way the whole

Smethwick and District Fire Brigades Association

Albright & Wilson's, BIP's and Chance & Hunt's brigades were at the heart of the Smethwick and District Fire Brigades Association, founded on the evening of Thursday 19th March 1942. The formation was recorded in the Fire Brigade log book of Mitchell & Butler's Cape Hill Brewery, which throughout the war recorded a mixture of fire brigade administration, local events and national history.

The log for 19th February records: *"No enemy aircraft were over this country last night. Activity of the RAF was restricted to mine laying in enemy waters. At night, a meeting was held in the Board Room of representatives of the Fire Brigade officers of firms in the Borough to discuss the proposed formation of an Association of Industrial Fire Brigades. Mr Arthur Mitchell presided and welcomed the visitors, who were later entertained in the Directors' Dining Room."* One month later, on 19th March the Association formally came into being: *"There was no activity by enemy aircraft last night. ... At a meeting in the Recreation Room during the evening, the Smethwick and District Fire Brigades Association was officially inaugurated ..."*

Factories in the Black Country were regular targets for German raids, and the Association got on with its wartime work over the next few years. The brigades of the association worked shoulder to shoulder with the professional firemen, and made a significant contribution in those dark, war-ravaged days, for which they could feel genuine pride.

The association staged courses and competitions to encourage training and expertise in the fire crews. The competitions were a matter of local pride within the companies, attracting supporters from among the workforce and reports in company papers.

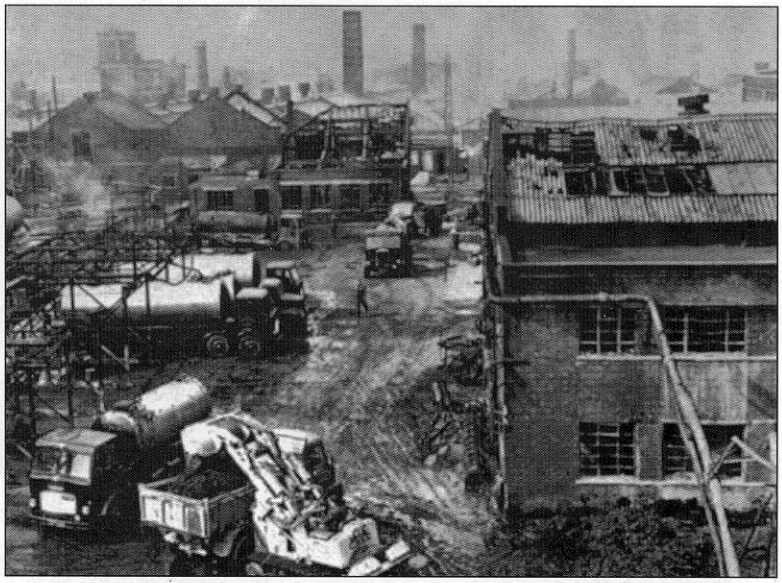
Good neighbours! In 1962 BIP firemen help to tackle the blaze at PEL in Rood End Road across from the BIP resin factory. (Picture: BIP 'Beetle' Magazine)

Although they were principally intended for use within their own premises, they often supported the Fire Service in the local area at large fires. The BIP fire brigade was initially mobilised on the evening of 29 March 1962 in case the fire burning at Midland Tar Distillers spread to BIP, but was one of those used later in the night to augment the public fire service in fighting the blaze.

Fifty-six years after its formation, the association is now called 'Sandwell Industrial Fire Brigade Association', and is based largely on the Albright & Wilson site. However, it continues to play a significant role in the local industrial and commercial community and retains professional links with the West Midland Fire Service. It still organises competitions and an eight-week course for fire-fighter trainees from companies to learn the skills of professional firemen. The rules and objectives laid down in March 1942 still apply: the association not only survives, it continues to thrive!

Tom Tomlinson

assembly collapsed in turn ... Burning tar poured from the deck, drums filled ready for delivery were exploding, and the fire-fighters were driven back leaving the deck water hydrant open ... so rapid was the spread of fire with the heavy flow of tar that it became impossible to save the Fitting Shop, Stores Block, Engineering Offices, Works Laboratory, Instrument Shop & Electricians Shop. In all a total area of 9500 square yards became involved, and ... almost total destructiom in an area of about 2400 square yards."



The fire at Midland Tar Distillers, 29th March 1962. Watchers gather to see it burn (above), and the day after (below) showing the area destroyed and the start of cleaning up. (Pictures: 'MTD Magazine')

1962 was not the first fire to occur at the Tar Works: Lewis Demuth and Co had fires at least as far back as 1869. The 'West Bromwich Free Press' reported an incident in 1879 when an explosion occurred in one of Demuth's 40t pitch beds because the gases contained in it could not escape. It caught fire and spread to a second bed, and there was a fear that the distillation plant itself would catch fire, but fortunately it did not. Remarkably, no one was injured, but there was so much smoke that 'the area was darkened'.

The report lists the companies and organisations that were able to send fire engines to help at this time: Tharsis Copper Works, Railway Carriage Co, Chance's Alkali Works, Chance's Glass Works, and West Bromwich Volunteer Fire Brigade.

An earlier fire had been more serious as Ludwig Demuth's obituary in the 'Birmingham Post' of 20th February 1897 reports: *"In the spring of 1869 ... a serious fire broke out at Mr Demuth's works due to an explosion, which caused the deaths of four workmen and resulted in considerable destruction of property. Undaunted by this check, he redoubled his efforts, and within a few years the works were reconstructed on a much larger scale. Since then so much care has been exercised in the management of the business that no other accident of importance has occurred, a fact which, considering the highly inflammable nature of the products employed at the works and the difficult enterprise carried on, redounds to his credit."*

Outside the factory wall

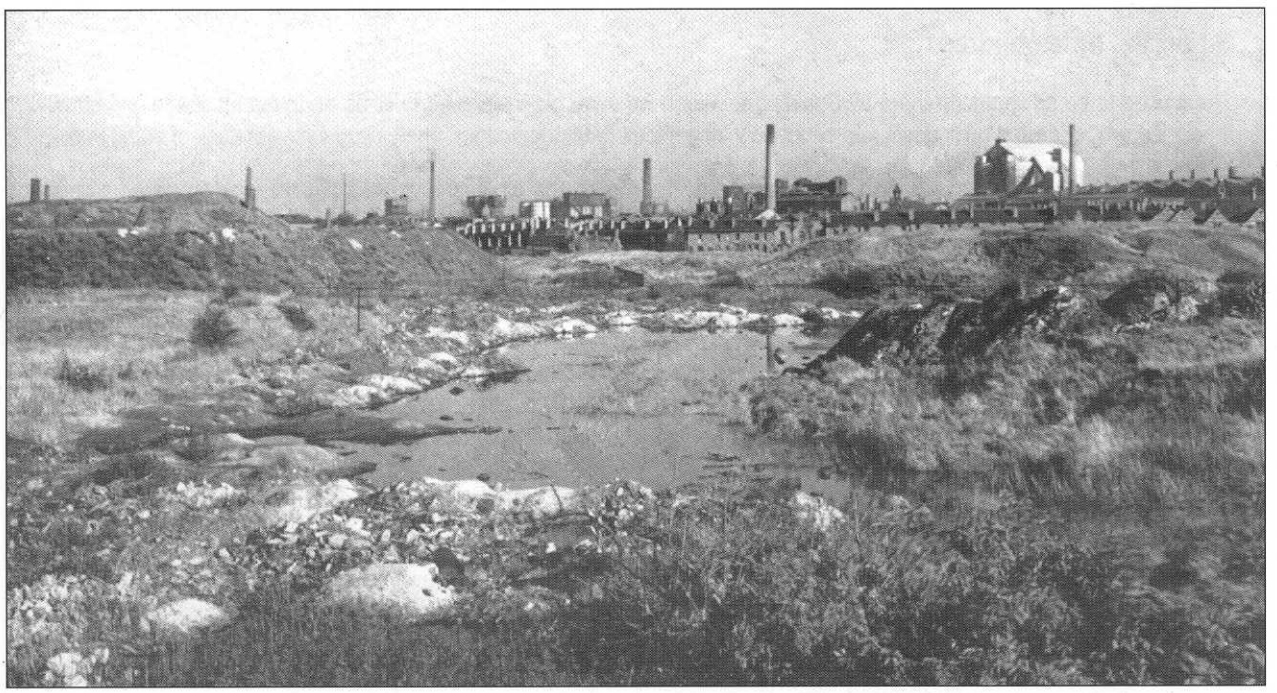
What applied within the factory gate also applied outside it. Mining, brick making and chemical waste blighted the landscape, and factory operations affected the lives of those living nearby. The stacks and towers of Albright & Wilson and Chance & Hunt dominated the skyline of Langley village throughout the century.

Near neighbours! A general pall of smoke and the houses in Langley silhouetted against the smoking chimneys of Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson at evening in the 1920s. (Picture: Harry Wakeman)

The old salt-cake process, which was the reason for establishing Chance's chemical works back in the 1830s, is an interesting case. Originally, the hydrochloric acid by-product was allowed to escape up the chimney, and it affected the surrounding area. There were many complaints: Parson Bowlby claimed for the damage to his vicarage walls, and John Powell, a draper, claimed for damage to his stock caused by the fumes. Chance's paid compensation, but when they threatened to close the site and move, the complaints died down!

The company did its best to remove the acid from the gases, the first attempt being to pass them up a disused windmill filled with brushwood down which water was trickling to absorb the gas. Later procedures, using the same principles, were more successful in removing and reclaiming the valuable hydrochloric, or 'muriatic', acid for sale.

The process also generated large amounts of a white waste material, calcium sulphate, which in its contaminated form was the main constituent of the blue-grey waste mountain, 'Blue Billy', that dominated one side of Park Lane for a century. The waste was trucked over the road on a gantry from the alkali works to the growing mound which covered the site of several old colliery workings. The leachings contaminated the brook running along Park Lane. On several occasions Blue



Dereliction in the late 1940s between Old Park Lane, whose houses are visible in the background, and Birchfield Lane. This was formerly the site of Valencia and Park House collieries, and was later used as a chemical dump. 'Blue Billy' is evident on the left. The chemical works dominate the horizon with the houses of Old Park lane in front. (Picture: Adcraft Ltd, from 'Conurbation')

Billy slipped, and once destroyed several cottages in Park Lane at its foot.

Although dumping stopped in the late 1800s, Blue Billy was a well-known feature for over a century. When the M5 motorway was built in the late 1960s an opportunity fell to Richardsons to 'kill two birds with one stone'. The mountain of noxious chemical waste was transported a lorry load at a time and used to fill up many of the remaining marl holes in the region - a neat, if laborious and expensive, solution requiring the impetus of the motorway to justify it. Even the removal was not straightforward, as the editorial in 'Chemistry and Industry' reported in October 1969: *"... Local press reports told of the labour force 'stricken with strange maladies' and of workmen suffering from 'an itching dust and a smell causing nausea'. The issue of breathing apparatus to the men, the installing of air filters in the local telephone exchange, and the hurried analysis of Blue Billy earth - all were reported as essential in the last battle against Oldbury alkali waste."*

Later Chance & Hunt settling beds and Albright & Wilson chemical dumps added to the wasteland between Park Lane and Birchfield Lane which earlier had been coal mines and marl holes. Other old workings further afield were used: Frank Hadley described the Alfred Matty boats that took Albright & Wilson's waste to Rattlechains tip (page 46).

Generations of Langley children played on these ill-fenced areas of dumps and old workings.

The smoke, gases and smells were part of the lives of the Langley residents. For many years they tarnished brass doorknobs and blighted gardens and allotments. It was said that you could ride into 'the Oxford' on a shiny bike and out of it on a dull one, corroded by the acid gases! In the 1950s people near Barnford Park could judge the direction of the wind, whether it blew from Albright & Wilson's bringing a 'tom-cat' smell, or Patricks bringing an animal glue smell. In the 80s it was complaints about the unacceptable smells from Midland Cattle Products that finally caused the firm to leave their Rood End site.

Suffer the little children ...

There used to be pit shafts up there by Spalding's. When we were boys we used to climb on to the pit shafts and throw a firework down, or drop a brick down and count how long it took to hit the bottom - things you wouldn't think of doing today.

I remember another instance up the fields when we built a raft on the marlhole - a great big raft, and launched it on the marlhole, saft as you like! Four of us jumped on at the same time. Down it went, and we all went in the marl hole. Well, it was the middle of summer, so we got out and put our clothes to dry on the side of the slack holes. I came home and sat at the table, right by father. We sat there having our tea, and he sat back on his chair and said "You've fell in the marl hole, I can smell you! Upstairs to bed!"

At the back of our houses was Chance and Hunt's dump, where the trucks used to run up and tip. We would go up there, get tins and slide down: we never had no behind in our trousers. We'd come home sometimes and stand in front of the fire and all of a sudden you'd go 'flick, flick, flick' and you got all little holes in your trousers, just like the moths had been at it.

Norman Tarplee

As a boy about 11 to 12 years old, one of our pleasures was for a dozen of us to push a disused colliery truck on the rails to the top of Radnalls closed down pit. Everyone on board, brake released, and away we went down the hill, crossing the road at Churchbridge, heading to Blue Billy, passing the place where Mr Bishton kept his terrible gander.

Mr Jones

As a boy we often used to go up Blue Billy - it was ideal for toboganning in the snow.

George Webb

In WW1 things obviously got worse with government projects at most of the factories to make war materials. A letter to the 'Weekly News' in 1917 appeals to the patriotism of the residents in putting up with the fumes. Lord Moulton, Minister of Munitions, writes (from the safe distance of London): *"... I have never failed to realise that such fumes are calculated to cause inconvenience to the inhabitants, but when the national necessity is considered I feel sure that from patriotic motives they will bear any inconvenience. ... the question of reducing the amount of fume escaping into the atmosphere of Oldbury has always received the most careful attention of the department and also of the managers. Many devices have been adopted to reduce the nuisance, but there have been difficulties in the way of reducing the nuisance to a degree that everybody desires. ... In addition to the reduction of the fume escaping, it has been arranged to build a new chimney through which all fumes escaping will pass, so that the inconvenience will be greatly diminished. ..."*

Fumes and smoke were not the only nuisance: noise played its part too. In 1908 a letter of complaint from W C Adams was published *"... a great nuisance ... in our midst. ... the gas engine that Messrs Chance & Hunt have lately put in their works; it goes from morning to night all the week and Sundays as well. I have not had a good night's sleep since it has been at work, and when a man cannot get his rest after a hard day's work, I think it is time to complain. I have written to Mr Chance ... but it still goes 'chick, chock'"*.

The dull thud of forge hammer and press was well known to those living close to Hughes & Johnson and Langley Forge. In the houses along Mill Lane each drop of the big hammers would be accompanied by the tinkle of the ornaments jumping on their shelves.

The situation has improved so much over the last fifty years with Clean Air Acts, forceful environmental legislation, and waste management that it is hard to imagine the many chimneys and the pea-soup fogs, the dangerous dumps and ill-fenced marl holes where people walked and children played. It has been costly to industries, but they are now mostly good responsible neighbours.

Social facilities at work

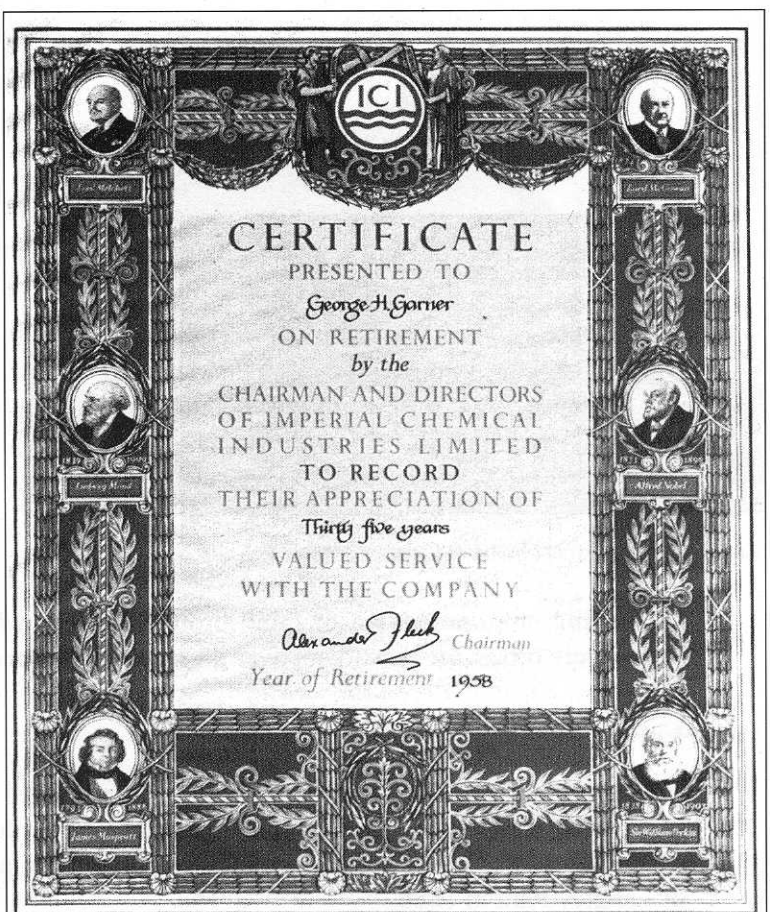
Working conditions improved gradually from the middle of the 19th century as legislation, pressure from trades unions and the attitude of employers began to change. Working hours fell and wages improved.

Attitudes varied with employers and industries, and some of the larger concerns were pioneers in relationships with employees. Two examples of how individuals could be treated illustrate the point. The 'Oldbury Weekly News' of 1907 reported that the Home Secretary had reduced the sentence of Richard Crumpton of Tat Bank for the manslaughter of his wife in 1902: he had worked for 20 years at Chance & Hunt, who were willing to reinstate him on release, and A M Chance had taken a personal interest in the case. The same paper reported a compensation claim by Sarah Ann Willetts over the death of her husband at Albright & Wilson: the company minutes for 1907 record that the insurance company would not meet the claim in full, but the firm agreed to make up the shortfall.

Companies welcomed loyalty and long service once a man had been trained, and in turn a secure job was appreciated in times where unemployment could suddenly increase. Long service was rewarded by the presentation of a certificate, a clock, a gold watch and sometimes money!

To some extent Langley and Oldbury were protected against the worst effects of unemployment by the variety of industry in the area, and throughout the 1930s, for example, unemployment was generally lower that the national average. Even so, the demise of the mining and metal industries last century and manufacturing industries since 1970 have created employment difficulties.

As companies prospered they started to provide health facilities for their employees. In 1874 Chance & Hunt opened a convalescence home at Quinton for their employees and their family dependent on them: 1d per week was levied on employees and the balance of costs made up by the

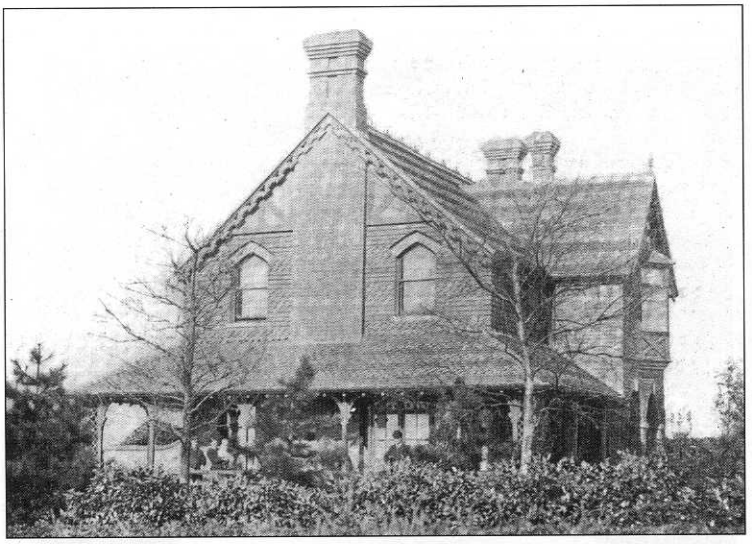


Retirement certificate presented to George Garner after 35 years work at ICI. He was born in 1893 and lived on a barge, and as a young man 'legged' the barges through the tunnels. After WW1 he joined Chance & Hunt working on their horse-drawn barges. When ICI stopped using barges, he became a driver's mate, retiring in 1958. The inset picture shows George with his wife Alice. *(Sources: Michael Scarrott collection)*

company. Albright & Wilson had a home in the Lake District where recovering employees could recuperate under their 'Change of Air' scheme. They started a dental service in the 1890s to combat 'phossy jaw' which attacked white phosphorus workers through their bad teeth. This developed into a basic clinic which was gradually improved, taking in X-ray and ultra-violet equipment after WW2: a surgery and resident dentist remain today.

From the 1870s Albright & Wilson's workpeople operated a Sick Fund run by a workmen's committee. This covered items such as visits to doctors and funeral expenses. The committee could take a high moral stance with fellow workmen, in at least one instance refusing funeral expenses to a 'widow' when they realised the couple were not legally married but just a common law arrangement!

A scheme of great value to local work people and their families long before the coming of the NHS was the Hospital Saturday Fund. For a small regular contribution, administered through the company, members received hospital treatment. In 1907 about 1500 people from Oldbury and Langley were treated at West Bromwich District Hospital. Langley companies of all sizes involved in the scheme included Showells Brewery, Chance & Hunt, L Demuth & Co, Langley Forge, J W D Pratt, British Cyanides, Ham Baker & Co, Titford Colliery, Hughes-Johnsons Stampings and Jordan's Brewery. The scheme still continues today.



Chance's convalescent home at Quinton. (Picture: from 'Picturesque Oldbury')

Many of the jobs were repetitive and boring, and the advent of radio brought 'Music while you work' and 'Workers playtime'. These were broadcast to workers over the noise of the machines.

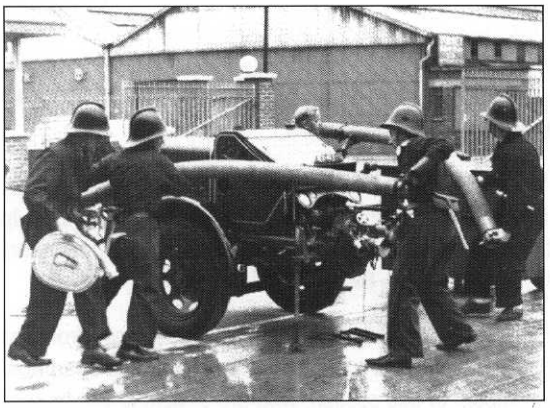
'Workers playtime'

Once working conditions had been improved, sports and social clubs were introduced providing a real worker's playtime! One of the first cricket clubs in Langley was that of Showell's Brewery which had a ground in Crosswells Road. The same company could provide a band for the opening of Langley Park in 1886.

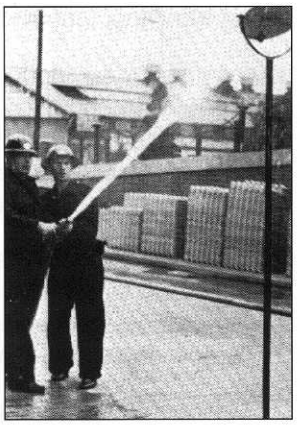
In March 1907 a rifle range was opened at Chance & Hunt. This was in response to a suggestion from Lord Roberts that local authorities and companies should set up such facilities *"as a means of nationalising and strengthening the country's defences"*. The opening ceremony was performed by Earl Roberts KG VC himself, and for several years 'Lord Roberts Day' was celebrated in Oldbury each March. Three ranges were set up, of 25, 50 and 100 yds, under cover in an old aluminium works that had been bought by the firm. Membership was restricted to employees of Chance & Hunt, and exceeded 150 within a few weeks.

After WW1 more firms started sports and social clubs, for instance Chance & Hunt in the mid-20s in Dog Kennel Lane, and BIP from the early 30s. After WW2 Myers had a flourishing cricket

The spirit of competition in the sixties!



BIP fire crew start a drill in a competion ...



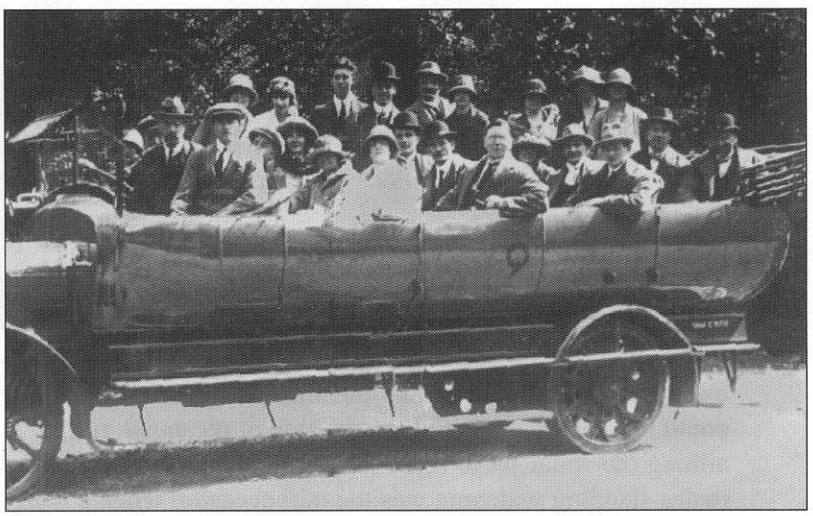
... and hit the target.

(Pictures: BIP 'Beetle Magazine')

The BIP Chemicals team treat a 'casualty' in one of the first-aid competitons held regularly between the various sites in the group.

team which played on a field between the railway line and Causeway Green Road. These were centres for a range of social activities at a time when there were less facilities in the wider community. Being close to the centre of Langley village, Albright & Wilson's recreation club was used by the Langley community as well their employees, and the large TI ballroom in Oldbury was another mecca.

Nearly all companies had a works outing, usually to the seaside by rail, char-a-banc or coach, or, in earlier days, by canal. These started at Albright & Wilson as early as the 1870s, and the fortieth in 1911 was a visit to Weston-super-Mare, Cheddar Caves and a sea trip to Cardiff - quite a day!



Works outing from Parkes Classic Confectionery betwen the wars. Joseph Statham at the back of the char-a-banc described such outings as 'a very rare occasion'. In the centre, without a hat, is Mr Haynes, the company secretary, and behind him William Grice who was in charge of Parkes's vehicles at their Vicarage Road garage. (Picture: Colin Statham collection)

After WW2 an element of competition and fun was introduced into two essential activities, first aid and fire services. Competitions were held between groups within factories, various local firms, and country-wide in, for

Being sporting and sociable at BIP

When it started in the 30s, BIP Sports Club used Barnford Park as its sports ground. It initially met at the Oldbury Unionist Club in Park Lane, but by 1939 it had facilities on the works site in Popes Lane which lasted until the 80s. The 'Beetle Magazine' of Easter 1939 reported eight sporting sections: Darts (Oldbury Central Darts League), Cricket (Smethwick & Dist. League), Bowls (Blackheath & Dist. League), Football (Birmingham & Dist. Works League - Div 12), Billiards (Langley & Dist. League, Div 1), Snooker (Langley & Dist. League, Div 1), Fishing and Table-tennis.

It also recorded two social events. The Annual Dance was held at the 'Merrivale' on 13 Jan 1939 to Maurice Udloff and his band. This was the first dance to be held at the new building and the manager, perhaps unwisely, invited the members to christen the house! There was also a Panto Party to 'Cinderella' at the Prince of Wales Theatre attended by 250 members and families. This starred Tommy Trinder as Buttons and Elsie and Doris Waters as the Ugly Sisters.

The Christmas 1940 issue reported a 'Knitting Bee' to provide parcels for the forces, and included a sad report from the fishing section: *"Nothing much to report as petrol coupons are short, railway and bus traffic very congested, and apart from walking to places of enjoyment, everything is definitely against the members of this section, who are unable to exploit their cunning".*

In 1950 the Staff Party was still being held at the 'Merrivale', but earlier, from 6.00 to 10.00, due to 'transport difficulties'.

The other great event was the party for the employees' children. 350 children were entertained in 1949 at Albright's School, and enjoyed a performance from 'Uncle Len and Reggie'.

Later developments included golf, chess and judo, so there was something for every taste!

BIP Chemicals first team after winning the Holt Brewery Cup in 1962. It was an emphatic victory 10 - 2 over Brades Steel! Back row: J Smith (sec) J Taplin, T Woodward, C Gardiner, P Cook, R Williams, B Thompson, V Vaughan (trainer). Front row: D Wood, K Palmer, B Grover, R Birch (capt), G Burling. It must have been a good season since the reserve team won the Afrikander Cup, beating Boxfoldia 3-1
(Picture: BIP 'Beetle' Magazine)

example, the national championships of the British Fire Services Association. At BIP the crew could be seen practising along the side of the canal, rolling out hoses, connecting them to the pump aiming the water jet to flip over a white target in the shortest possible time - even better for work-mates standing watching was the odd occasion when a badly made connection resulted in the team getting soaked.

Another feature of social development within companies was the issue of house magazines giving information on the progress of the firm, featuring employees and reporting on social and sporting activities. These were an early example of today's 'team-building' and 'communications' exercises! Nevertheless, house journals such as BIP's 'Beetle' Magazine and the tar works's 'MTD

Magazine', do document the changes in working life during the 20th century.

Nowadays, there is much alternative entertainment, and people tend to live further from their place of employment, so the social side of industry has weakened. Few firms now run the sports teams that were a source of pride to players and spectators alike up to the 1960s and 70s. The sports fields in Crosswells Road and Dog Kennel Lane are both housing estates now, and Myers's cricket field houses a day centre.

Benefactors and beneficiaries

Many of the local companies or individual industrialists were generous benefactors to the people of Langley. In the case of the Albrights and the Wilsons this was largely the result of their Quaker faith. William Arthur Albright resigned as Chairman of Albright & Wilson because he felt the manufacture of phosphorus-filled shells in WW1 was incompatible with his faith, and put all the dividend due to him throughout that war into a trust for the benefit of the work people.

However, they were not alone in wishing to give back to Langley some of the wealth earned by the work people who lived there. William Sheward, owner of the Indian & Ceylon Tea Co, was a smaller industrialist who worked for the betterment of the people in Langley, and stood as an independent councillor: one of his projects, still to come to fruition, was a footbridge over the Titford canal at Jarvis Bridge to avoid the danger of crossing the Wolverhampton Road on foot.

A display in Junction Street South of the 100 ballot prizes given by the Indian & Ceylon Tea Co in 1930 to raise money for West Bromwich and District Hospital, which served Langley. Mrs Sheward offered to give an extra £20 if the effort raised £20 from the raffle at 6d per ticket. William Sheward is on the far left. (Picture: Robert Sheward collection)

Churches and schools were natural beneficiaries. The Bethel Chapel and school were supported in their fund raising by, among others, Chance & Hunt, Albright & Wilson and Showells Brewery Co (a brewery paying for a Methodist New Connexion Church?). Working miners made a contribution too in raising an extra 'skip' of coal on each shift and giving the proceeds to the chapel. A

tablet in St Michael's Church records the generous donations of the same firms for their building fund: Alexander M Chance was Chairman of the Building Committee, and also gave a stained glass window. Chance's works gave the site for the first St John's Church at Tat Bank. Albright School in Popes Lane bears the name of one of its benefactors.

Broader educational aims were supported, and in 1877 J E Wilson presented 1000 books for the first library at the literary and debating society which met at the newly opened Langley Institute.

Most of the present parks were given by industrialists who recognised the need for places of recreation for the people of Langley as housing began to spread. West Smethwick Park, which straddles the boundary of Smethwick and Oldbury at Rood End was given by Sir James Timmins Chance in perpetuity to the inhabitants of Smethwick, but with a strong plea at its opening that it would be used by the people of Oldbury.

Langley Park was given and laid out by Arthur Albright in 1876, complete with Park Keeper's house, and forty years later his son, William Arthur, gave the land for Barnford Hill Park. Chance & Hunt built Park Lane playground on their land. These gifts have provided a necessary buffer against the encroachment of housing and industry, providing centres for social events, peace celebrations, parties and jubilees from Queen Victoria to Queen Elizabeth II. The park house in Langley is now a community centre for Langley people.

In opening Langley Park, Arthur Albright said that *"they fully recognised their duties to their workpeople, and it was chiefly for them that that the ground had been given. There were a large number of workpeople around that place, so there must be some thousands of their children, which he hoped would be sent there to play instead of on the streets"*.

Considerable areas of land were owned by companies, particularly Albright & Wilson and Chance & Hunt. In 1911 Albright & Wilson bought the land of the Moat Farm Estate at 6d per yard. This gave them control over the water supply via Crosswells Brook to the Mill Pool, an important source of pure water for the company which was regulated by a pump house opposite the 'Merrivale' Inn. After WW1, some land was sold for the site of the County High School, some sold to Chance & Hunt for a sports field, and some to Oldbury Council for development of council housing at the original purchase price.

At this time, companies were actively involved in providing housing for their workpeople. Some were tied to the job, such as 'Station House', 32 Barker Street owned by the GWR for use by the station master at Langley Green, or the houses in Park Street for use by Chance's workers. In 1917 a report on Oldbury Council's Meeting includes *"... Messrs. Accles and Pollock Ltd have paid £685 10s 6d, the amount due in respect of the construction of a new street near Birch Street ..."*: this was Apollo Road, where the company built houses for its workforce. During the 20s, Albright & Wilson built eight houses in Dog Kennel Lane and fifty-four in Bristnall Hall Road: of the latter, twenty-two were sold and thirty-two transferred to their Pension Fund. From the 1950s these houses were sold off at favourable rates to the sitting tenants. Similarly, John Elwell Ltd bought houses in Vernon Road and in Barker Street as they became vacant to encourage its best workers to come to Rood End when the firm moved from Birmingham.

New housing was built on the Warley side of Langley. In 1907 the 'Warley Model Village' scheme had been proposed by A M Chance, whereby /-acre plots of land (95 acres total) would be sold at cost to working men to develop a model village on the Warley Hall Farm estate. Although we may have had a local village like Cadbury's Bournville, the idea had to be abandoned when there were insufficient working men interested in undertaking the scheme.

Community support continued throughout the 20th century, but increasingly the responsibility for

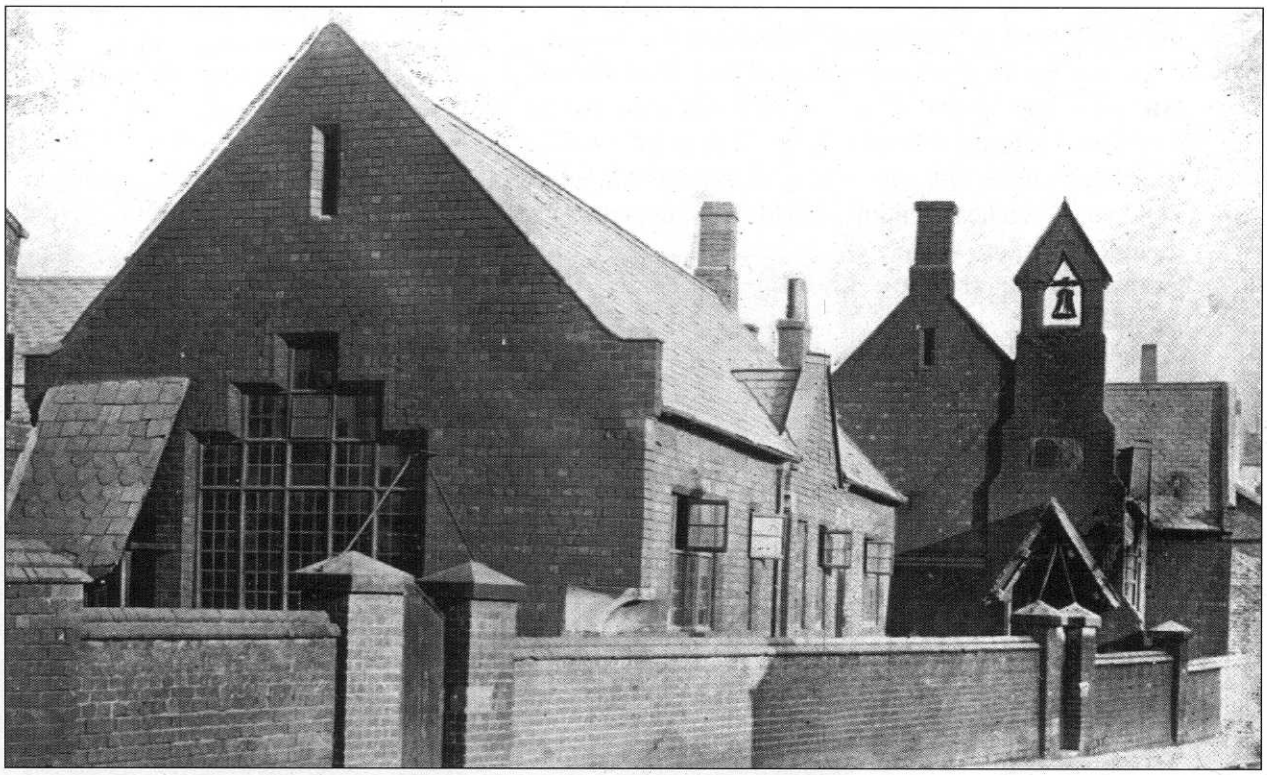
social improvement fell on the local council, rather than individuals and companies. Many of the leading industrialists served as councillors, and K H Wilson JP was Mayor when Oldbury received its charter in 1935. Increasingly, they were joined by their employees as the political and social balance shifted, and together worked hard to develop the Langley area, and indeed the whole of Oldbury, and overcome its many social problems.

Chance's schools

In the first half of the 19th century many children were sent out to work to supplement the family income, and as late as 1850 it was reported that children were employed at the mines to the detriment of their education. From 1850 educational establishments were introduced by various benefactors, charities, churches, and local authorities. This was accelerated by the Education Act of 1872 which prohibited the employment of children under ten, and four years later education was made compulsory. Local companies were also involved in this area, particularly in the development of technical education which could provide more of the skills they needed in their factories.

Many employers in the 19th century were opposed to the provision of education for their employees, and many bitter battles were fought. But in Langley, Oldbury and Smethwick the Chance companies were pioneers. In the 1840s the glass works in Smethwick opened a school in the Spon Lane works to educate their employees' children. Evening classes for young employees to learn 'the 3 R's' soon followed and the range of subjects increased.

In 1851 a school was opened at the Alkali Works in Park Lane, next to the main entrance, 'Chance's Oldbury School' or, as it was usually known, 'Chances Chemical School'. Although



Chance's 'Chemical' School in Park Lane next to the factory entrance. The original photograph, from McKean's 'Picturesque Oldbury', appears to have been badly retouched to remove the sky which would have shown many chimneys and the plant of the chemical works! The school bell is painted in. The school is also shown on the drawing of 1862 (page 99).

priority was given to the children of its own workers, others were admitted to fill the capacity of the school. A small weekly fee was charged. The Chemical School was finally closed down in 1903 when the Good Shepherd School came into use and the building became Chance's canteen. An infants section was also opened but in Spring Street, Langley, away from the works. This school was rented from the Primitive Methodists from 1874 to 1879, but was then run again by the Church and became the 'British School'. The aim was to provide *'... a sound moral and religious education ...'*

In 1853 evening classes were started for older boys to promote their technical education. Twenty years later the company made it compulsory for their employees aged 13 to 18 to attend, and stopped the fees from their wages. The curriculum covered reading, grammar, composition, mathematics and algebra under the first headmaster, Mr Robertson: physics, chemistry, art and design were added when Shaw Hanson took over in 1861.

The bookplate for a prize awarded to William Edgley for regular attendance at Chance's Evening School, Oldbury in 1882. He and his father were boat builders at the Alkali Works. The prize was "The poetical works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow" - quite a choice for a boat builder, but not exceptional for the spirit of self-improvement that fired many of the local working people. (Source: Bill Hipkiss collection)

Technical education

In April 1891 a 'Technical Instruction Committee' was set up in Oldbury comprising Rev Henry McKean, the leader of the council and minister at Oldbury Unitarian Church, A M Chance (of Chance and Hunt), G S Albright and J W Wilson (of Albright & Wilson). They moved rapidly, and 'Oldbury Technical School' started in the September spread over various sites. These included the Langley Institute to help cater for the growing population in the Langley area.

Two years later 'Evening Continuation Classes' started, catering for pupils of lower ability, but providing a first training that would lead many to go to the Technical School. This expanded rapidly, and in 1896/7 some classes were held at Warley Board School and at the new National School in Langley.

Oldbury Technical School, Flash Road, soon after its opening. (Picture: Ken Rock collection)

The premises were inadequate for the work being done, and, after some adverse reports from inspectors, the situation was finally settled when W A Albright (the brother of G S) gave a plot of land in Flash Road and a new building was opened in January 1900 at a cost of £6000.

The Technical Instruction Committee recommended that a secondary school was established in the area, and since the Flash Road building was used only in the evenings, the new school began to use it during the day. From 1904 the school provided training for pupil teachers, but the intake was soon widened to admit pupils aged twelve for a four-year course. The arrangement was not very satisfactory, but continued until the secondary school could move into a new building in Moat Road in 1927 - where it became first the County High School and then Oldbury Grammar School. G S Albright was Chairman of Worcestershire Higher Education Committee in 1926 and heavily involved with the building of the new school. He gave the money for, amongst other developments, an open-air swimming pool: many pupils will have felt grateful as they took an ice-cold dip!

Postscript

The people of Langley were no different from others of their generation: over the last two hundred years they faced many difficulties and had to work hard to stay alive. How else would the pawnbroker have made a living in Langley? Norman Tarplee recalled the families coming across the fields to the pawnbroker in the 1920s: *"There were fields at the back of our house in Old Park Lane, and on a Monday you'd see them coming from the courts, the houses built round a square, in Park Street with great big parcels under their arms. They were taking them up Langley pawn shop to have some money off them to tide them over for the rest of the week. Then you'd see them on a Friday or Saturday morning, when the menfolk had had their wages, come back with the same great parcels. We knew them by heart, because they'd pass the bottom of our garden."*

As a result, they lived hard and they played hard. The reminiscences and the newspaper reports confirm that there were brawls, drunkenness and disagreements to offset any opportunities that were there for education and for a slow steady improvement in their standard of living.

Through all this, however, they had a fierce independence and a dignity to see them through. Two slight and amusing tales about our grandparents will, perhaps, prove the point.

Ken Rock's grandparents lived in Langley all their married life, and his grandfather, John Mason, worked for fifty years as an engine-driver at Albright & Wilson, driving, among others, the 0-4-0 Peckett. After his retirement he was bored, and in the early 20s at the age of 70 took on the job of boilerman at the Langley Cinema and served nearly ten further years in that post!

Sam Healey was the grandfather of Nancy Adams. He was a plumber at Chance & Hunt when he had his photograph taken with a group of colleagues at work - we don't know why or when, or who the others were. When he took the photograph home, his wife was not pleased, but indignant because some of the others had ties on, and Sam had only his muffler. So she sent the photograph back to the photographer and insisted he paint a tie on the negative before sending another print. Such was her pride and dignity, although they were one of the poor families of the village. The photograph survives as a tribute to those of an indestructible spirit who lived and worked in Langley and made it the place it is.

Sam Healey and the painted tie. (Picture: Nancy Adams collection)

What's left in Langley now?

Sadly, not much of our industrial heritage. But this 7-8 mile walk will take you past most of the sites covered in this book. Numbers thus **[1]** refer to the page numbers of pictures in this book. Other numbers and letters refer to the map on page 157. The sites are described in their state in April 1999, but they do change suddenly and unexpectedly!

From car park in High St (A), pass the 'Crosswells' Inn to Trinity St.

The 'Crosswells' Inn **[128]** is largely unchanged from its ownership by Crosswells Brewery. Albright & Wilson's factory entrance (1) now cuts off public access to Trinity Street (the 'Oxford'). Many of their characteristic towers and stacks **[57, 99, 136, 140]** have now disappeared.

Bear right into Park Lane to the junction with Park St (B).

The grassy island is the site of Holy Trinity Church (2), and the grassy junction with Old Park Lane is that of the 'Belgian' School. Opposite, within Albright & Wilson, is the end of the Chemical Arm canal and the site of Cinder Meadow Colliery (3). On the opposite side of road, now open space, is the site of last century's Park (4), Valencia and Whimsey Collieries and marl holes; later, these became chemical dumps and separation beds **[103, 141]**.

Down Park Lane to the canal bridge (C); return.

Chance & Hunt's works **[99]** was on right (5), now factory units, but the base of some original walls remain. The main entrance and 'Chemical' School (6) **[149]** were just before bridge, with their boat building yard (7) to the right of bridge **[43]**. To the left, under the M5, was 'Blue Billy' (8) **[22]**.

Park St, left along Churchbridge to junction of M5 and A4123 (D).

Demuth Way (9) on left commemorates Ludwig Demuth, but his Springfield Chemical works was half a mile away (10). Churchbridge dual carriageway now crosses a former canal arm and marl holes (11), and there were many brickyards and coalmines (Houghton's, Churchbridge) here. The M5 junction is at 'Birchley Crossings', where the Midland Red bus garage **[25]** (12) was sited near the hotel. Spalding's, and later BRS, occupied site of toy store (13). This junction was the place where Oldbury's ceremony for the opening of the Birmingham to Wolverhampton road was held. The quarry on the Rowley Hills can be seen, source of the basalt roadstone, 'Rowley Rag'. Housing now covers old coalmines and brickyards on the lower slopes.

Optional: cross the A4123 and follow towards Dudley for quarter of mile to a track leading to the site of Pratt's brick works (E); return.

The brickworks, marl hole **[73]** and canal wharves are now flattened open space, and the track follows the entrance to the works. This was the end of the Portway branch of the canal with tramways from the mines (14).

A4123 towards Birmingham as far as the canal bridge (F).

There are small factories on right, including Hemo (15), and former chemical dumps **[141]** and marl holes on left (16) as far as Jarvis Bridge over the Titford Canal **[49]**. Past the 'New Navigation' Inn (17), the canal stretches away to Uncle Ben's Bridge (18). A narrow point in the canal marks the place where a footbridge, 'Blue Billy' bridge, crossed from Titford Road to Coppice and Nine Apostles collieries on the right (19). Beyond the showroom is Biwater's, formerly Ham Baker & Co **[78]** (20).

Optional: cross under the bridge carrying the A4123 on the towpath to Birchfield Lane (G); return.

This follows the Portway Branch, passing under the M5 between Titford Pool **[43]** and small factories, formerly including Spalding's, to Birchfield Lane where it now terminates (21). Originally, it went under the road to the Portway mines and wharves.

Cross over Jarvis Bridge on the A4123 to the towpath entrance in Titford Road to change to the opposite side of the canal. Follow the towpath to Ashes Road (H).

The towpath continues to the present end of the Causeway Green branch between Titford Pool and the scrap yards and Smith Brothers's timber yard (22). This area was formerly the site of many coal mines and brickyards. The canal originally crossed Ashes Road to Titford Wharves (23) on the Blackheath side, receiving coal and bricks from the mines at Cakemore and on the Rowley Hills **[70]**, but this has now been filled in.

Turn left up Ashes Rd, under the railway bridge; at end turn left into Causeway Green Rd (J). (Alternative: cross public open space to right after bridge to Penncricket Lane (I), left to Causeway Green Road).

On right before railway bridge is site of Ashes Colliery **[69]**, now occupied by N J Bradford's glass factory (24). The Causeway Green canal arm ran behind the houses to the right, under the railway and through to the colliery and brick yard at Cakemore. The arm has been filled in. The alternative route passes the site of the Standard Vinegar works (25), now Field View Drive, and Howse Paint factory (26) is just along Cakemore Road towards Blackheath.

Along Causeway Green Rd, over Wolverhampton Rd to the 'Royal Oak' (K).

The MCL factory **[85]** (27) was in Pool Lane on the right before the railway bridge. Along Causeway Green Rd the Resource Centre on the left occupies the site of Myers's playing field (28). Opposite St Michael and All Angels Church is the site of an egg-packing station, now a furniture factory (29). The 'Old Cross', where the cycling club met, is to the right, with Langley Library behind, built by William Jackson (Langley Green) Ltd.

Left into Langley Green Rd, under the railway bridge to the canal bridge (L).

On the right is Mill Lane, long since cleared of houses, but leading to the derelict factory of Hughes-Johnson **[83]** (30). This is the start of the area where most industrial heritage remains. Finkl UK occupies the buildings of Langley Forge **[82]** (31), the machine shop and warehouse: the earliest building, the hammer shop, is along Mill Lane. These buildings retain many of the original features. Gaydon Transport occupies the old coal wharf and part of the Langley Forge site. In the 19th century a canal arm led from the basin to a colliery **[70]** situated under Woodfield Avenue, off Clay Lane (32). A detour along Clay Lane leads past the 'Sycamore' Inn, a worker's hostel in the fifties, and Clifton Close, named after the colliery, to Biwater's works. This was the Ham Bakers 'Municipal Works' **[78]** (20), and one original building remains. At the turn of the century there were clay pits and lime kilns on the canal side by the canal bridge **[35]**.

Cross Uncle Ben's bridge, join the towpath to the left and pass under the bridge past the buildings of Finkl UK, under the 'New Inns' bridge to the top of Oldbury locks (M).

Langley Park (33) is seen from the bridge, and there is a good view of the renovated Langley Forge buildings occupied by Finkl UK, and the deserted Hughes-Johnson building near the bridge. The old canal side inn 'The New Inns' **[49]** has been refurbished and is now the 'Finings and Firkin'! On the other side of the bridge new buildings occupy the site of the Shell terminal **[47]** (34), and the canal then reaches Langley's finest industrial building, the Maltings **[47, 115, 125]** (35). Later additions hide the side of the building, but the canal wall is as originally built, and the old mooring rings for the barges can be seen at the base. The site of the old covered unloading basin is occupied by silos. The towpath passes under the bridge **[57]** carrying the Oldbury Branch railway (36), now with only a single track and heavily overgrown. To the left is the site of Langley Mill and the pool, now part of Albright & Wilson's site, and a little further along a concrete plant occupies the site of 'the gyp', the old stables and lock cottage (37). The track and some of the sidings which served Albright & Wilson until the mid-90s remain by the next bridge. The canal divides, the right branch (38) flowing through BIP to Rood End Rd **[108]** whence it is culverted to Edgbaston Reservoir. The main branch flows down Oldbury locks **[48]** (39). To the left of the towpath is the site of the stables and lock-keeper's cottage **[37, 38]**. Between the branches is the 'engine house' (40) that still holds British Waterways's recirculating pump for the locks. Part of the building has been damaged by vandalism recently and its future must be in doubt. Opposite the engine house across Engine St was the site of the first 'Navigation Inn', and beyond it modern factory buildings which replace earlier industries on the site.

Follow the towpath under two bridges until the junction with the Wolverhampton level of the BCN is reached, cross the bridge and turn left and climb up to the road at Stone Street bridge (N).

After the third lock, the towpath crosses a humped bridge over the entrance to the Jim Crow arm (41) formerly serving Chance & Hunt and Albright & Wilson, but now filled in. The original British Cyanides works was situated between the railway and this basin. Below the last lock on the opposite bank is the old entrance to the Midland Tar Works **[31, 112]** (42). Brick arches still straddle the entrance, but the basin is filled in. The towpath then passes underneath the M5 motorway. At the canal junction a signpost (43) reading "Birmingham 7 miles 3 locks", "Wolverhampton 6fi miles", "Titford Pools 1fi miles 6 locks" remains. Oldbury Boat Services is visible under Stone Street Bridge **[40]**.

Turn left over the bridge and up Tat Bank Road to Parsonage St (O).

To the right is the end of Trinity St, now accessible only as far as the Rosier site (44). On the right is an old industrial building, Suttons, and a wall containing bricked up windows and doors, probably part of the Chance & Hunt works. This was also the site of the Oxford Engine Company last century, giving the nickname 'the Oxford' to the road. Opposite, the embankment of the Oldbury branch and the abutment of the bridge can be seen. In Tat Bank Rd over the canal bridge is the site of Lewis Demuth's tar works **[113]** (10), now partly occupied by a warehouse.

Left into Parsonage St, third right along Albert St, right into Popes Lane (P).

The workmen's houses of the late 1800s in this area have all been replaced by small industrial concerns. The road still contains two rails of the private railway **[58]** into the tar works site, and the entrance in the factory wall (45) is evident. No more track remains: the old sidings between Popes Lane and Parsonage St have been built over. At the end of Albert St are the buildings of Tube Products and BIP, and the line of the railway can be made out on the BIP boundary. BIP offices date from the 1920s (46).

Left into Tat Bank Rd, over the canal and railway (Q), left into Wellesley Rd and right at end into Vernon Rd (R).

The route skirts the BIP site: their car park is on the site of the railhead which served Cox & Danks (47). Bird's offices were formerly those of Cox & Danks **[92]**. Birds and the builder's merchants occupy the rest of their site. Opposite is the Albright & Wilson sports ground **[103]**, with their club building on the site of the first St John's Church (48), built on land given by Chance & Hunt. From the railway bridge the station **[53, 54, 63, 65]** (49) can be seen: all the original buildings have been replaced, and only the footbridge survives. To the left of the bridge the Rood End goods yard **[1]**, (50) is quietly rusting away, not used and with a few remaining decrepit wagons **[62]**. Wellesley Rd contains turn-of-the-century working class housing. At the end are remaining buildings from the John Elwell Ltd complex (30), and on the left side of Vernon Rd the houses bought in the 1930s by that company for its employees.

Left into Rood End Road, bearing left, crossing the railway to the canal adjacent to BIP's entrance (S). Return to road junction.

On the corner of Rood End Road is the low office block (52) built by John Elwell Ltd in the 1960s, now housing various firms. The remainder of their site to the left is now occupied by recent factory units. From the railway bridge to the left the Rood End shunting yard **[63]** (50) can be seen, now controlled by a ground frame. The old rail entrance into BIP (and thence to Midland Tar Works and Tube Products) (53) can be seen to the right, and further away a deviation in the fence shows where the lines to the railhead went. The position of the siding to John Elwell is just visible to the left, but largely overgrown. The original Rood End Station (54) lay next to the bridge. BIP's factory and entrance was the site of the potash works **[108]** during WW1. The end of the canal can be seen as it travels over a weir into the conduit to Rotton Park Reservoir (55). Tube Products works (56) occupies the rest of Rood End Road. Over the road a narrow grass strip marks the line of the canal, originally an open leat. To the right is the building that housed Albion Bottle company **[116]** (57), and a rail siding served it. Beyond this building was the site of Midland Cattle Products. Over the railway is the building occupied by PEL **[138]** (58). This was part of the 'Sampson Works' or 'Credenda' site built in the 1930s. At various times Creda cookers, Gowshall enamelled signs and Armstrong Cycles were made here. At the junction the 'Bell' inn stands (59), a coaching inn probably dating from the mid 1800s, although the fancy brickwork has a later date.

Cross into Victoria Rd, turn right into Apollo Road (T), right into Birch St and left through Barker St to the traffic lights (U) on the main road.

The entrance to West Smethwick Park (60) is opposite Apollo Road. The park is much changed from when given by Sir James Chance, the bandstand and refreshment room having long gone. The houses in Apollo Rd (61) were built by Accles & Pollock for their workers, and some of the houses in Barker St owned by John Elwell Ltd for theirs. The GWR station master's house was at 32, Barker St, 'Station House'.

Along Vicarage Rd to the 'Merrivale' (V). Optional detour: along Vicarage Rd and Moat Rd to Barnford Hill Park (W); return to the 'Merrivale'.

Note for the fit: A further viewpoint can be gained by leaving Barnford Hill Park by the gate opposite Knottsall Lane, climbing that road, crossing Bristnall Hall Rd to the radio mast at Hill Top (off the map). Return via Bristnall Hall Rd, and Brookfields Rd to Vicarage Rd and the 'Merrivale'

Down Crosswells Rd over the level crossing (X), right into Western Rd to the station (Y). Return to Station Rd.

Along Station Rd to Mill Lane and Underhill St. Through Langley Park to High St (Z). Either right to the 'Crosswells' Inn, or left and right into Junction St, right into Arden Grove and right to the 'Crosswells'.

Langley High School in Moat Rd is the former County High School **[121]** (62), the exterior largely unchanged, but it was a tasteful cream in 1926, not pink! Barnford Hill Park (63), given by William Albright still gives a good panorama of Langley and its industry from Pudding Rock **[9]**.

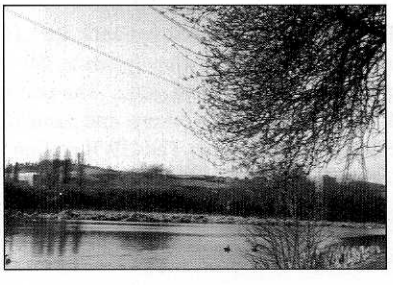
The open land at Hill Top gives a panorama of the valley across the motorway to the Rowley Hills. Part of it was formerly a sand-pit and it houses the covered Langley Reservoir supplying water to the area. The junction of Bristnall Hall Rd and Brookfields Rd is the site of Bristnall Hall Farm **[5],** and the continuation of Bristnall Hall Rd contains houses built by Albright & Wilson on part of the Moat Farm Estate.

On the left is the site of Parkes Classic Confectionery (64), now 'Hot Shots' Snooker Club. The original offices and rear factory remain. Opposite is the housing estate that now occupies Hughes-Johnson's sports field (65). Crosswells Brewery (66), now 'Alcohols', is further down Crosswells Rd and several of the original buildings can be seen from the road. Between the brewery and the level crossing is a low blue-brick building (67) now a small industrial unit: this was originally the railway stables **[63]**. The level crossings now have barriers and the curve of the line through the station is evident. The new Avery building to the left (68) occupies the site of the goods yard **[14, 60, 61]**, and the new houses to the right of the line have recently replaced the old Myers pen factory **[10]** (69). On the other side of the crossing, the derelict buildings of Hughes-Johnson **[83]** (30) remain, and the line of their siding can be made out although the tracks have gone. The Shell-Mex terminal (34) was sited between Station Rd, the canal and Western Rd, now a small factory, with the tanker railhead **[60,61]** on the opposite corner of Western Rd. Western Rd has the most significant industrial building, Langley Maltings (35), with two bays of drying kilns at the front still steaming forth. Apart from the obvious modern additions, the front of the building is essentially as it has been for a century. Only the footbridge remains of the original features of the station (49), the signal box **[63, 65]**, booking hall on the bridge and the platform buildings have been removed. From the bridge the heavily overgrown Oldbury Branch (70) runs over the canal bridge towards Albright & Wilson, but only one track remains **[57]**.

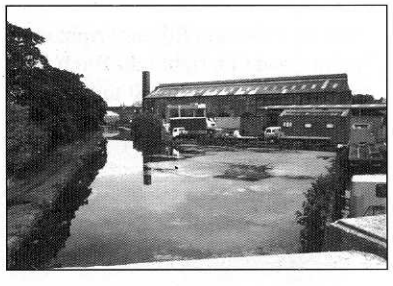
The derelict buildings of Hughes-Johnson (30) in Mill Lane are in a bad state and unlikely to remain much longer. Langley Park (33) was given by Arthur Albright and the park house has been saved as a community centre. The view down High Street **[136]** has changed with the Langley Institute and Five Ways gone, less domination by Albright & Wilson on the skyline and new shops. The detour down Arden Grove goes past the old site of Arden Knitware on the right (71), and some old buildings can still be seen behind the printing works.

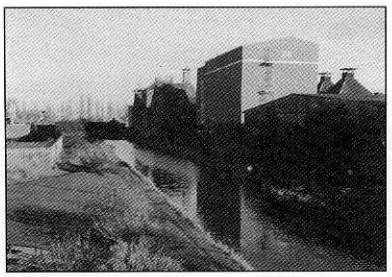
Item 1: Albright & Wilson entrance and site of Holy Trinity Church

Item 21: The Portway Arm of Titford canal from under the motorway bridge

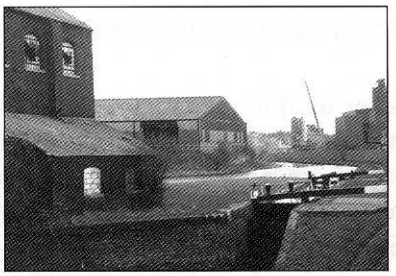


Item 31: Langley Forge and Gayden Transport from Uncle Ben's bridge



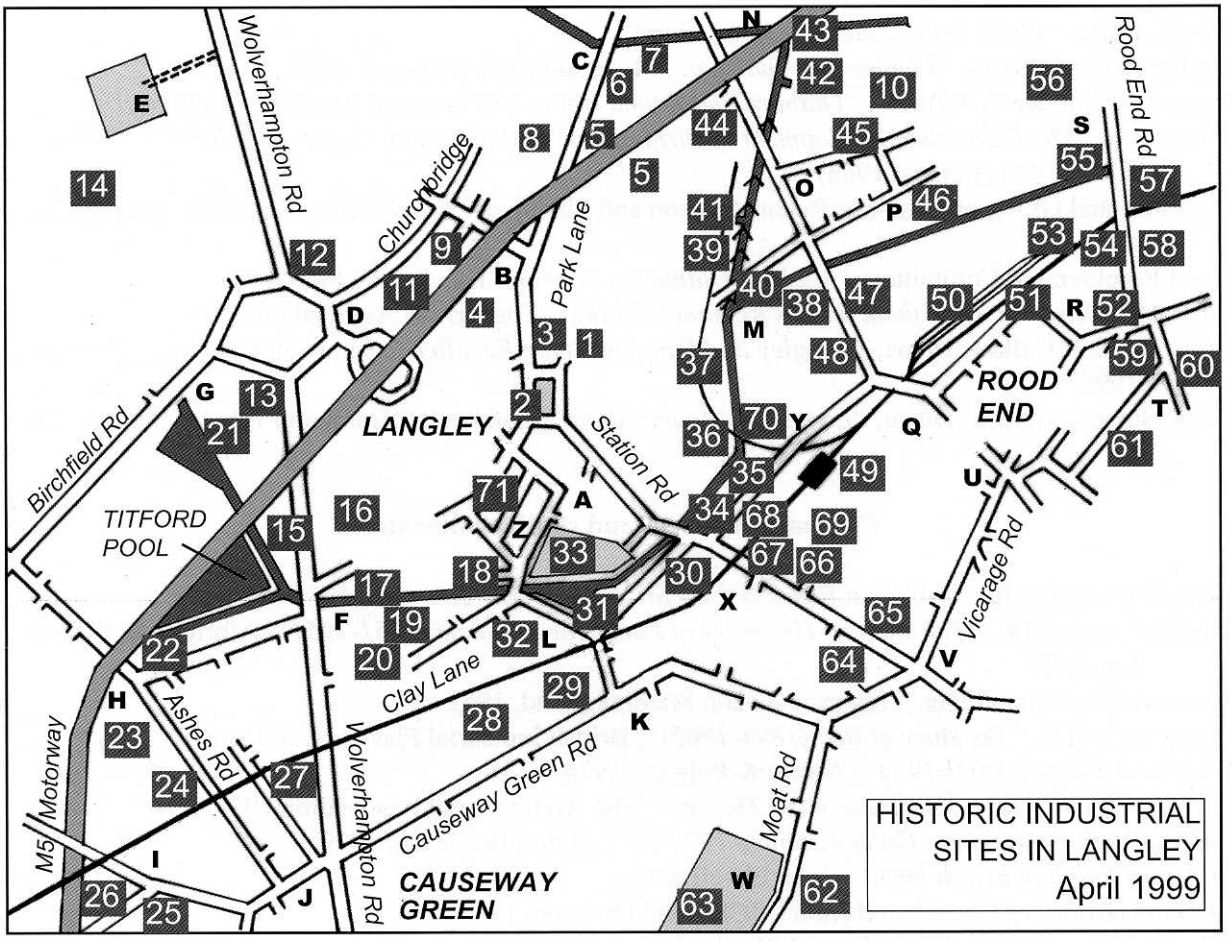


Item 53: Langley Maltings from the 'New Inns' bridge



Item 39: The top of Oldbury locks with engine house and feeder branch

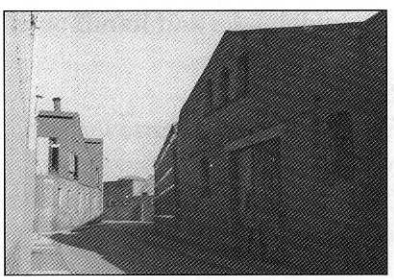
Item 43: The signpost at the junction of the canals under the motorway



Pictures: Terry Daniels and John Hodgkins

Item 64: Former buildings of Parkes Classic Confectionery factory

Item 30: Derelict buildings of Hughes-Johnson in Mill Lane



Item 33: High Street and Langley Park from Uncle Ben's bridge

Langley's industrial history - sources

A list of the main documentary sources used in the preparation of this book is given below, but it is not comprehensive. There is no single work dealing with transport and industry in Langley, and the information presented here has been gathered from a wide range of sources. Most of these books, and other sources such as photographs, newspaper cuttings, and some company archives, are available in Sandwell Community History and Archives, Smethwick.

General books on the area

Burritt, Elihu, *"Walks in the Black Country"*, 1868

Mc Kean, Revd Henry, *"Picturesque Oldbury"*, Midland Printing Co Ltd, 1900

Hackwood, Frederick William, *"Oldbury and Round About"*, Whitehead Bros/Cornish Bros, 1915

Allen, G C, *"The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927"*, Frank Cass & Co, 1929 (Reprint 1966)

West Midland Group on Post-war Reconstruction and Planning, *"Conurbation"*, Architectural Press, 1948

Local Employment Committee, *"Made in Oldbury"*, Souvenir Handbook, 1949

Wise, M J, Wise, *"Birmingham and its Regional Setting"*, The British Association, 1950

Drew, Suzie & Callow, Diane, *"Langley and Langley Green Recalled"*, Sandwell Community Libraries, 1996

Drew, Suzie & Callow, Diane, *"Langley & Round About"*, Sandwell Community Library Service, 1997

Company histories and similar pubications

"The Engineering Works of Ham Baker & Co Ltd", Ham Baker & Co, ca. 1935

Threlfall, Richard E, *"The story of 100 years of Phosphorus making 1851-1951"*, Albright & Wilson Ltd, 1951

"Seventy-five Years Young" Hughes-Johnson Stampings Ltd, 1952

Dingley, Cyril S, *"The story of BIP (1894-1962)"*, British Industrial Plastics Ltd, 1963

"Accles & Pollock 1899-1974", Accles & Pollock, 1974

"Pel and Tubular steel Furniture of the Thirties", The Architectural Association.1977

"Albion Bottle Company - Golden Jubilee 1929-79", Albion Bottle Co, 1979

"How we build an Elwell barn", John Elwell & Co

"A Short History of Chance and Hunt", ICI Mond Division, 1985

"Beetle Magazine", British Industrial Plastics Ltd

"MTD Magazine", Midland Tar Distillers Ltd

Guidebooks and handbooks

"The Borough of Oldbury Charter Souvenir 1935"

"The Borough of Oldbury Official Handbook", Ed J Burrow & Co, Approx.1947, 1957, 1964

"Warley Official Guide", Ed J Burrow & Co Ltd, 1966

"Sandwell Metropolitan Borough, Official Guide", British Publishing Co Ltd, 1977

"The Titford Project", Coombeswood Canal Trust

29 : indicates a map or picture

Books published by
Sandwell Community Library and Information Service

"Where Three Shires Met": reminiscences from the Thimblemill & Bearwood areas of Smethwick
Dave Reeves [compiler and editor], 1998, £3.99 ISBN 1 900689 08 1

"Jack Judge: The Tipperary Man"
A biography by Verna Hale Gibbons, 1998, £9.99, ISBN 1 900689 07 3

"Free Wheeling": A Collection of new writing by Oldbury Writers & Friends
Wayne Dean-Richards [editor], 1997, £2.00, ISBN 1 900689 04 9

"The Best of Times: The Best of Places": reminiscences from the Stone Cross Area - the original heart of West Bromwich
Dave Reeves [compiler and editor], 1997, £3.50, ISBN 1 900689 05 7

"Langley & Round About": an illustrated community history of Langley, Langley Green, Causeway Green & Rood End
Suzie Drew & Diane Callow [compilers and editors], 1997, £7.95, ISBN 1 900689 06 5

"Langley & Langley Green Recalled"
Suzie Drew & Diane Callow in co-operation with Langley Local History Society, 1996, £1.95, ISBN 1 900689 03 0

"Cardboard Crowns and Cast Iron Cookpots": memories of Hill Top [formerly known as Finchpath]
Dave Reeves [compiler and editor], 1996, £2.50, ISBN 1 900689 02 2

"Oldbury: The Town of the Four Moons": the story of Oldbury in extract and anecdote
Dave Reeves [compiler and editor], 1994, £2.50, ISBN 1 871296 55 2

"Its Not The Money You've Got, It's The Dash You Cut": reminiscences of Cradley Heath and Old Hill
Dave Reeves and Cath West [editors], 1992, £1.25, ISBN 1 871296 16 1

Making and moving in Langley

"Making and moving in Langley" tells the story of industry and transport, what people made and how they moved about, over the last two centuries in Causeway Green, Langley, Langley Green and Rood End in the West Midlands. Together, these communities formed an 'industrial corridor' following the Titford Canal and the Birmingham to South Wales railway line, and crossed by the 'Wolverhampton Road' and the M5 motorway. This corridor follows the eastern boundary fault of the exposed South Staffordshire coalfield and is on the edge of the Black Country. The region has successively seen the rise and fall of coalmining, metal working and chemical processing, and has been home to a wide range of other industries, all attracted by the good transport facilities in the area.

The development of those industries, and the prosperity and problems they brought to the people who lived in and around Langley is told, in part, through the recollections of the men and women themselves. The book contains over 200 photographs, many of which have been drawn from people's albums and attics, and never been published before.

The book was edited by Terry Daniels for Langley Local History Society and published by Sandwell Community Library and Information Service. The information has been gathered through the efforts of the Local History Society and the 'collecting initiative' of Sandwell Libraries, especially Langley Library, where the Society meets. This is the first of a planned series of publications on particular aspects of local history in the Langley area, supplementing the previous books "Langley and Langley Green Recalled" and "Langley & Round About".

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