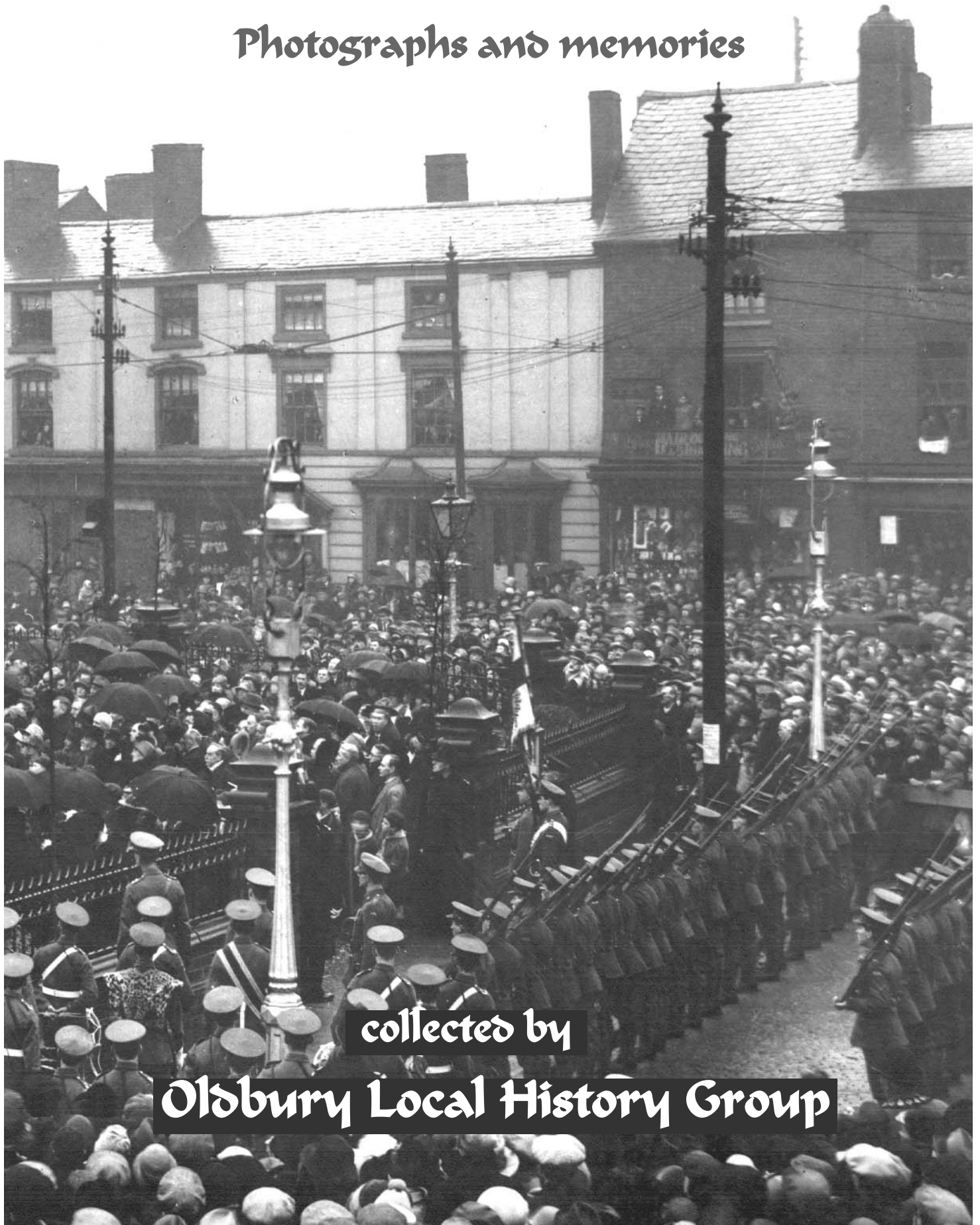


# OLD-TIME OLDBURY

Photographs and memories



collected by

**Oldbury Local History Group**

# OLD-TIME OLDBURY

## Photographs and memories

*Old-time Oldbury ~ Rural remnants ~ Pleasant pastimes  
Shops and shopping ~ Church-going ~ Schooling ~ Fighting fires  
Firms and factories ~ War and peace ~ Round and about in Oldbury  
Oldbury re-developed*

**Collated by Terry Daniels**

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**Cover Picture:** *The unveiling of the memorial to the fallen, 'The Cenotaph', in Oldbury Town Square, Thursday 4th November 1926. The unveiling was carried out by General Sir Ian S M Hamilton, GCB, GCMG, DSO. The address was given by Ven Archdeacon of Birmingham, Charles E Hopton, and the service led by Rev S Dacombe, Vicar of Oldbury, Rev Walter Wale, Vicar of Langley, and Rev R Curzon representing the Free Churches. Councillor W B Hayes, Chairman of Oldbury Urban District Council, laid a wreath on behalf of the townspeople, D P Pielou, MP, on behalf of the British Legion, and Capt Cuthbertson on behalf of the Worcestershire Regiment.*

## 1 - Old-time Oldbury

Oldbury was old at the dawning of the last millennium. In Anglo-Saxon times it was already called 'Ealdenbyrig' or 'old burgh', suggesting that it was founded much earlier still. We do not know when or where. The site of the present town centre would have provided a gentle knoll above the Tame valley to the north, and a good place for an early village to be built. Higher still, and overlooking the whole valley, was Bury Hill. Either could have been the first 'old burgh'.

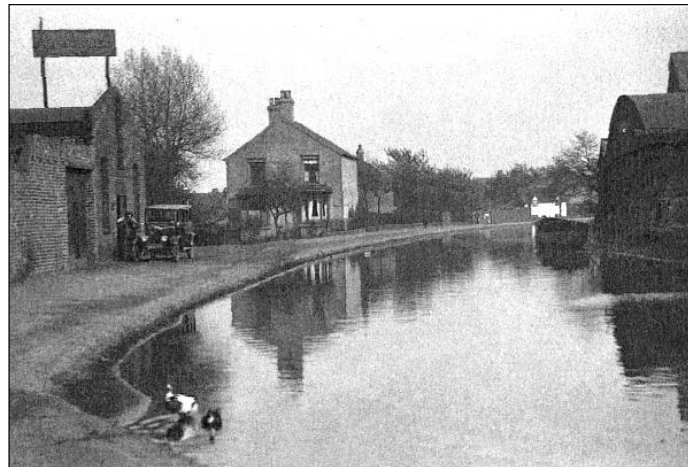
Oldbury became part of the Halas (Halesowen) Manor lands in the eleventh century, and with the manor was annexed to Shropshire, where it remained until being transferred to Worcestershire in 1844. Halesowen Abbey was created in 1214, and Oldbury remained part of the Abbey lands until the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII in 1538. Oldbury Manor, with the manor house at Blakeley Hall, reverted to secular owners.

An important coach road from Birmingham to the north and west ran through Oldbury, providing prosperity. The 'Old Talbot Hotel' in the Market Place was one of the coaching inns, and the road was later turnpiked with a toll gate at the junction of Birmingham Road and Rood End Road. Oldbury was still a small town in a rural setting until the end of the eighteenth century. It then expanded rapidly as canals were cut between the coal-fields of the Black Country and Birmingham.

By 1850 it had thriving coal, iron and chemical industries which assured its prosperity, although they had created serious social problems for the many working-class people who had thronged into the town. Many of these problems were being addressed by the Oldbury Urban District Council by 1900, with the provision of amenities such as piped water, deep sewerage, good schools, better housing and a municipal gas supply. Oldbury was a progressive town at this time and in 1935 received its charter, becoming the Borough of Oldbury.

After the second world war, it continued to grow until it became part of larger local authorities, first Warley in 1966 and then Sandwell in 1974, and so lost its independence and self determination. The heavy industry, its lifeblood for over a century, has gone, it declined steadily as a shopping centre until the Savacentre arrived, and many of its old buildings were lost in the redevelopment of the seventies and eighties, although it did become home to the new Sandwell Council House. Now it is just a town close to the junction of the M5 and M6 motorways, much of its achievements and history forgotten.

This book records some of the memories of the men and women born and living here in the 20th century and many of the photographs they treasure. It is not offered as a complete history, but as a taste of the life and people of the town.



*The old canal, cut in 1772, taken from the bridge in Church Street around 1920. It was drained and filled in during the town's redevelopment in the 1970s. [Photographer Frank Wakeman]*

## 2 - Rural remnants



*A rural remnant in the 1920s. Danks's Farm at the top of Lower City Road, then called Gipsy Lane. The photographer is close to the junction with the newly-built Wolverhampton Road. [Edward Leedham collection]*

### **Wheat fields and sparrow pie**

Up St James Road, Dingle Street and over the New Road it was all wheat fields, agricultural ground, right up to the Twin Pits, quite a distance up into Rowley. The whole of that hillside was agricultural. After the war it was developed for housing.

Along Brades Road, commonly known as 'Dock Row', towards Brades Bridge, you had a massive field, - well, two fields actually - they were agricultural and eventually turned into pasture land before they were developed to build Brades Rise. The family of Danks 'the farmers' owned these, not Danks 'the factory'.

City Road was known as Gipsy Lane then. Danks's Farm was on the corner of Lower City Road and the Wolverhampton New Road: they were the ones that owned the wheat fields. In Dingle Street we had a dairyman, George Harper and Sons: he was related to the Danks. I used to go with him and his son, who was my age, to get the milk in their horse-drawn float.

It was there that I first saw how they caught the sparrows to make sparrow pie. Old Mr Danks was there with a box with a stick underneath it holding it up, and some corn under it. He'd be sitting there all day when he'd got spare time, waiting for a sparrow to go underneath. He'd pull the stick away and go and get the sparrow. Soon he had enough for a sparrow pie. It was a known thing in those days, sparrow pie. Danks's had all the facilities to make a big pie, but not everybody had - still it was quite a common food then.

*Wilf Walters*

### **Rounds Hall**

From the age of two I lived at Rounds Hall in Gipsy Lane. Rounds Hall was a big three-storey rambling place, divided into two. We lived at the back and Bishtons lived at the front. We had five bedrooms, two large rooms downstairs and lots of dark passages. The house and grounds were enclosed with a high brick wall.

I had five brothers and three sisters. We had a happy but very strict childhood. Most of the time was spent on nearby Danks's Farm, and the highlight was hay-making. We practically lived outdoors after all the household chores were done. The worst of these was scrubbing three flights of stairs, starting at the attic, down to the cellar. Another bad memory was pig killing time. To boost our menial money supply we reared pigs on kitchen scraps until they were big enough to kill for pork or bacon. The butcher came to the house, the squealing pig was tied on a bench and its throat was cut. It was then shaved and hung for a day, and then cut up into joints which had previously been ordered by neighbours. Nothing was wasted, chitterlings were washed in a nearby stream, fat was rendered down for lard and scratchings, liver made into faggotts, even the bladder made a well-prized football. Pig manure was a good garden fertilizer.



*Looking up Gipsy Lane towards the top of the Rowley Hills from the newly made Wolverhampton Road. Rounds Hall was in the buildings to the right. [Edward Leedham collection]*

We had two goats, some ducks and fowl, which gave us milk and eggs. We always had a side of bacon and ham hanging from the ceiling, so we didn't exactly starve. We went coal-picking on the nearby pit mounds, so we didn't have to buy much coal.

One of my happy memories was taking a picnic (a piece of bread and lard and a bottle of water) up on to Rowley Hills. Other times we collected birds' eggs and Jack Bannocks (small fish from the canal) and fried them on a piece of tin.

My love of knitting started with two sticks and a piece of string. We made our own clothes from cast-offs. Our winter nights were spent making rag rugs. There was no gas or electric and no running water and so no flush toilet. These are just a few of my memories from the start of the first world war.

*Nell Martin (née Edwards)*

## Mill Farm

Mill Farm was the farm associated with Blakeley Hall and its corn mill. Blakeley Hall was situated just north of the road from Birmingham to Dudley between Anchor Bridge and the Smethwick boundary.

Among the families that farmed there were the Downings in the eighteenth century, and the Smiths. The farm land was cut in half when the canal was made in 1772 and the farm house was often flooded. During the first world war part of the farm land was used for testing the tanks assembled nearby at the Oldbury Carriage Works in Broadwell Road. Industry gradually encroached on the farm buildings, but it continued to be an active farm into the 1930s. The Smiths left in 1936, and all traces of the buildings have now gone.



*Jesse Smith with one of the horses on Mill Farm. He was one of the four children of Joseph and Ampliss Smith who ran the farm and supplied milk to Oldbury residents. [Florence Smith collection]*

### 3 - Pleasant pastimes

#### Bury Hill Park - My little adventure

I think my earliest memory of Bury Hill Park was on a beautiful summer's day in 1942 - the day my brothers, who were twins and who were born in 1941, took their first walking steps.

As a family we lived in a street very close to Oldbury town centre. It was a street of old houses and, even by the standards of the day, our house was particularly small. It had one room downstairs and two rooms up. It had no indoor water, but that was not particularly unusual, neither was the fact that we had a shared lavatory.

Now on this particular day we were being honoured with a visit from my mother's 'posh' cousin who, as far as I was concerned at that time, lived in a foreign country - it was in fact Nuneaton. Entertaining was always difficult for my mother, so we decided that we would 'go out somewhere nice'. At this time I was about six years old and the war was on, so it must have been decided that we would have a picnic - all very exciting! The twins were 'got ready' and eventually we set off.



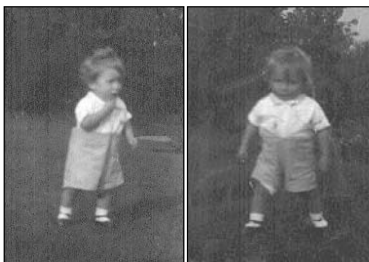
*Bury Hill Park in its heyday, before the flower beds were reduced by the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Road in 1927. The park was the gift of John W Wilson MP to the people of Oldbury on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. His wife gave the money for a shelter named after her 'The Florence Lodge'. This had to be moved when the new road was built. The picture is from postcard no 143 issued by W Hole, Newsagents, Oldbury. [Ken Rock collection]*

We went the way I walked every day to my school at Rounds Green. I kept running in front and showing off to my aunt that I knew the way. We got as far as the school and, because I was a little attention seeker at this time, I can imagine me jumping up and down and showing this aunt exactly where I entered the school and which was my classroom. We passed the school and now I was lost. We must have turned up Florence Road or St. James Road and eventually reached the

New Road and then our destination - Bury Hill Park.

Now, bearing in mind that at home we only had a yard not much bigger than about ten square feet, the sight of all that grass must have been too tempting to resist. I must have run about like a mad-thing, as I remember being repeatedly told to "come back here!". I suppose there must have been 'keep off the grass' signs about. The area that we settled in with the pram and our bits and pieces was to the right of the main entrance. I have it fixed in my mind that there were flowerbeds and what was probably a pergola.

Meantime, the twins, who up to this time had been crawling about at home for what seemed ages, were put on the grass and held by their hands and walked. I've always thought it quite remarkable, but they both walked here for the first time. Our aunt had a box-brownie camera and recorded the occasion.



As it turned out, because there was not enough room at home for me and the twins, I went to live with my aunt in that foreign place called Nuneaton and from time to time she commented on what a lovely park Bury Hill was.

*Edna Babbs*



## The T I Ballroom

The T I (Tube Investments) ballroom was just a place that I had heard so much about until the '60s, but then my wife and I had the opportunity over the next few years to go there often. Strangely enough, it was shows that we went to mostly at first. Charity shows had the support of top class artists such as Donald Peers and Don McLean, but one memorable, enjoyable evening was spent with 'The Merry Widow' given by the T I Social Club Operatic Society.

As for the dances, here are three to remember. Who can forget dancing to Victor Silvester's immaculate rhythm? They played long sessions of each particular dance, but the musicians changed over without a break in the music, the 'new' one sliding into the old one's place.

Then there was the benefit dance for Bobby Hope, the Albion player, and the band was Geoff Love, if I remember right; but the place was so packed we could hardly get on the floor, let alone dance. We made do by sitting at a table in the bar most of the time, and who should be sitting at the same table but Harry Harrison. I happened to say my heroes were the 1931 cup team that beat Brum. So he said, "Well, most of 'em are here!", and there they were on the adjacent tables. This big fellow came talking to him, and he introduced me: it was Harold Pearson, the goalkeeper whom I had idolised as a boy.

The last time we went was to an annual dance of Hughes Johnson, and a very enjoyable night it was too - until the end when a fight broke out on the floor.

A remarkable feature of the ballroom was the lack of windows - there didn't seem to be any at all.

*Bill Hipkiss*



*We have no picture of 'The Merry Widow', but here the T I Operatic Society ring up the curtain on 'The Mikado' in 1963. Gilbert and Sullivan was the staple repertoire of the Society in those days. [Apollo magazine, Nov 1963]*

## Oldbury Piscatorials

Oldbury has long sported a fishing club, the Oldbury Piscatorials. This picture shows them gathered on the porch of the Oldbury Convalescent Home at Quinton at the turn of the century. The porch doubled as a bowling alley.



*[Janet Smith collection]*

## Carnival time and music

I've got a picture of me in the Oldbury Carnival. It must have been taken in the late twenties. The houses in the background are in St James Road. At that carnival the King of Mirth was called Townley. He lived along Dudley Road, opposite the 'Blue Ball'. He was related to Sammy Saul the baritone, who was works manager at Brookes. He used to sing at the Oldbury Tabernacle when we did the Messiah and those sorts of things.

At the next carnival I went in a band. My brother-in-law was the band leader, and I played the saxophone in the band on the back of one of Accles and Pollock's lorries. I haven't played since the war! I started with a banjo, but my brother-in-law said I'd do better with a wind instrument, so I played the alto saxophone. My brother-in-law was a well known accordionist round here - Don Williams and his band. He used to do lots of charity work in Oldbury. He lived at 13 St James Road, Rounds Green.

*A young Wilf Walters ready to join the carnival procession as Dick Whittington, complete with black cat. His chauffeur is Old Mother Riley (also known as 'Dad'). The milestone on the side-car shows 114 miles to London, the distance quoted on Oldbury's original old mile post in the churchyard. [Wilf Walters collection]*



*Wilf Walters*

## Wakes, fairs, carnivals and boxing

The visits of Pat Collins' Fair twice a year clearly won a place in the hearts of Oldbury people, especially the young boys and girls. Everyone from those days has stories to tell and we include three.

The wake ground was a plot of land in Bromford Lane about a quarter of a mile from the town centre owned by Pat Collins. One week in May was 'Wakes Week', when the wake ground was filled with all sorts of amusements - swing boats, chair-o-planes, the big wheel, waltzers, bumper cars, side shows, flea circus, ghost train and boxing booth. If a person could go a couple of rounds with the booth's boxer he could win a fiver. I remember seeing Randolph Turpin who became world middleweight champion in 1951.

The fair was held in September and lasted three days, Friday, Saturday and Monday, and was a smaller version of the wake. The rest of the year the ground was used for football, cricket and cycle speedway, and by local children for bonfires and sledging.

*George Ingley*

On approaching the fairground you were met by the sound of organs playing popular tunes and light classical music. Then your eye caught 'Italian Jack' and his hot potato ovens. Along the left hand side from Bromford Lane entrance were small sweet stalls as far as the Fountain Lane entrance, where the traction engines were sited to supply the whole fairground with power. Then there were the side shows, boxing booths, and the lion show. The trainer put a somewhat ancient animal through its tricks, and invited any member of the audience to accompany him into the cage: strangely, there was no lack of volunteers.

*Leslie Kershaw*



Pat Collins always came down to the wake ground in Oldbury. Everybody went. At the Pat Collins fairs they had coconut shies, steam boats - a great massive thing on a swing: they sat in rows in it. Just imagine yourself on a steam ferry going up the Thames, just like that in the steam boat it is, up and down. Oh! it was a terrible thing if you were tickle-stomached. Then there was the big horses as they called them - they went round and round and up and down.

When the wakes were on I used to go with my aunties and my uncles and my grandad. Instead of paying a pound for something like you do today, it was a penny! You'd have a good night out for fivepence!

The boxing booth was right down the bottom end, backing on to the Pazo works. They challenged you to go so many rounds with them. And then they would have their own boxers to give a show. Oldbury Town Hall used to have boxing bouts occasionally. The gentleman who used to organise it was Fred Burgess, a butcher and his shop was in Brades Village. I went boxing there one night. Sometime previous I had had an operation on my nose, and it bled easily. I'd got my best white sweater on, and when I got home my mother went mad - blood all down my jersey. That would be in the late twenties or early thirties.

*Wilf Walters*

### **Edwin Danks' Football Club**

The boilermaker Edwin Danks was one of the many local firms providing sports and social activities for their employees. They had a football ground in Rounds Green next to St James Road.

*Edwin Danks FC in 1920-21. Clearly, they had had a good season showing off shields and a cup. [Janet Smith collection]*



### **At the flicks**

In its hey-day Oldbury had three cinemas 'The Picture House' or 'Savoy' on Bustle Bridge, spanning the canal,



the 'Grand' in Church Street which finished by 1930, and the 'Palace' in Freeth Street. The 'Palace' was the best picture house in the town for half a century, opening in 1910 and closing in 1961. It then gave way to variety, bingo and, finally, demolition.

*The 'Palace' in the late 1970s when it was a bingo hall and casino. Freeth Street has now been cleared, with the Savacentre on the right and Sandwell Council House on the left. [Photo: J D Spooner Derek Chambers collection]*

## 4 - Shops and shopping

Shopping in Oldbury had its own folk-lore. The names of the shops were a law unto themselves - some were quaint: Hole's, Bone's, Gadd's, Spittle's, Troath's - some were well known in the Midlands: Foster's, Woolworth's, George Mason's - some were well established in the town: Bates's, Hadley's, Adams's, Woolridge's, Sam Sturgess's. All were known with a final 's' in local speech. Some had two shops, such as Guest's, 'top Gessies' and 'bottom Gessies'. We can only cover a few here.

### **William Hole - newsagent**

My mother's people started a newsagents in Talbot Street, Oldbury. My grandfather, William Hole, was born in Somerset, and there wasn't much in the way of employment, so he came up to the Midlands and started work at a factory in Birmingham Road, Tharsis copper works. When mother's father died, my parents decided to come down to Oldbury from West Bromwich and live with my grandmother at the back of the shop.

I grew up with the object of taking over the business. But, as the years went by, I saw what a life they had living behind the shop and I didn't like the idea. I got married, and I still came to the shop for a few years. We had two daughters and lived about half a mile away in a new house in Brades Village. I went up to the shop daily at about six o'clock each morning, and then you kept open till about eight or nine at night. My father and mother hardly ever had a holiday, so I thought to myself, 'this is not for me'. We had a family discussion, and I said 'I'm going to get a job'. Eventually, we sold the shop.

My grandfather was knowledgeable about plants and wild flowers, and he used to sell herbs. We would go up on to the Rowley Hills and gather the herbs and bring them back in bulk. He would dry them in his oven. When the people of the locality had got anything the matter with them, they'd send for three penny worth of herbs. They had to brew them up themselves - he just dried them. Of course, when you went to the doctor in those days you had to pay, but for a few coppers my grandfather would do his best to find something. His knowledge was passed on to my mother and she knew all about gentian root, camomile flowers and so on. I was all right when they came in for a pennyweight of mixed herbs - something for everything. The open bags were under the counter, so I took a pinch of the first and put in a bag, added a pinch of the next and so on.

Just before November 5th, everybody who sold fireworks had to go to the Police Station to register their premises for the sale of explosives. And my father used to send me to register the premises. I'd say "I want a firework licence". And the policeman behind the counter would reply "There's no such thing as a firework licence: it's a certificate to register your premises for the sale of explosives". Very precise about it, they were.

*Leslie Kershaw*

### **Oldbury Market**

As a five or six year old I was allowed to stay up late one night and Mom took me to Oldbury Market. Oh! the delight and excitement of the crowds - yes crowds! There were flares on the end of the stalls giving the illusion of a warm atmosphere, no matter how cold the night was.

My favourite stall sold sweets, all sorts of wonderful things, like bull's eyes, troach drops, cough candy, and aniseed balls. My two ounces were always the same, fishes looking like glass, in red, green, blue and yellow. I remember having only one that night and keeping the rest for tomorrow, when, alas, they had all stuck together and had to be broken apart. How I wish the market were like that today, for it held a certain magic then.

*Joan Bridges*

## Isaac Nash and Co - ironmongers

Isaac Nash's ironmongers was in Church Street, next to the Police Station. The building is still there but is now a veterinary practice. It had a corner door with shop windows on either side full of builder's tools, garden tools, decorating materials, brushes, candles, screws, nails, oil, lamps, ropes ... . It was started in 1860 by Thomas Nash and later taken over by his son Isaac. In 1934 Frank Bridge joined the shop as a humble assistant, then as a partner and finally as proprietor. When Frank gave up in 1984, the firm of Isaac Nash & Co finally closed.



Nash's shop in the 1980s, just before closure, and a 1932 bill: 6 yds felt, 4/-, 1½ lbs galvanised nails 9d, ball of string 1/-, 2 gallons petrol 2/11: total 8/8 or 43p [Janet Smith collection]

72, Church Street, Oldbury, 1172. 4645  
21, CHURCH STREET, OLDBURY,  
M. J. H. Smith Sep 21 1932

**Bought of ISAAC NASH,**  
General Ironmonger, Builders' and Plumbers' Merchant.

6 Yards Felt	8	40
1½ lbs Galv'd Nls	6	9
1 Ball String	10	
2 Gall Petrol	11	
Paid in Advance	88	

*W. Smith*

This shop could certainly be likened to an 'Aladdin's cave', a real treasure house of quality goods, tools and materials. It was born at a time when 'small was beautiful', and independent families owned small outlets. It was all very different from today's commercial outlets selling items in coloured packs in racks devised for self service. Most of the items were stored on hooks in the ceiling rafters, making them easy to see and easy to serve.

It had everything for the householder - everyone in the early days required traps, tallow candles, lamp oil, gas mantles, balls of whitewash, tarred yarn and so on. But many young men obtained good tools to start their careers, helped by a

generous system of repayments. The business earned a reputation for courtesy, good advice and helpfulness. Now life will be poorer when all such shops are a thing of the past!

*James Durrant*

## Thomas Savage's shop

Thomas Savage ran a small 'Grocer and General Dealer' on Whimsey Bridge, at the corner of Portway Road and Halesowen Street. It was situated between Aston's, the corn and seed merchant, and Bradley's coal wharf. Thomas worked as a packer at the Oldbury Carriage Works, and the running of the shop was left to his wife Sarah, a common situation early in the century. They sold household items, groceries, tobacco and sweets: the sweets were carefully set out on tiered plates, each with a doily.

At the turn of the century the wall was covered with advertising signs for Venus Soap, Lifebuoy Soap, Fry's Chocolate, Nestlé's Milk Chocolate and Colman's Mustard. By the 1920s, when this picture was taken, the shop had been renovated and the advertisements removed. However, the window still advertises Cadbury's and Park Drive cigarettes, and vinegar at 1½d and 2d.



Thomas and Sarah Savage outside the shop around 1920 [Lilian Edwards collection]

*Memories from Lilian Edwards, their granddaughter*

## Top Bates's and bottom Bates's - the butchers

In the summer of 1934 I started with John A. Bates, butcher, Birmingham Street, known as 'bottom Bates' in distinction from Jack and Walter on the Bustle bridge, nephews of John A. Our shop was in the row between Low Town and Perrot Street between the pawn-shop and a grocers, the names of neither of which I can recall.

I was fourteen and a half years of age, which was just about right for tearing about on a sit-up-and-beg with a partition for a large basket on the front. I soon got to know my 'round' and my customers - better than I got to know my meat. I came to grief one frosty morning turning into Engine Street from the bridge in Tat Bank Road, the packets of meat went flying - and so did the tickets off most of them. I had to put some back on by guess - somebody up there must have been helping because there were no complaints.

Dick Smout, a Langley man, was the manager of the shop, and his second-in-command was Bob Jackson from Brades Village. Dick was a chirpy sort of man, full of go; Bob, on the other hand, was big, bluff, and I think of him now when Shakespeare's Falstaff comes to mind. What they had in common was a liking for slipping down the 'Perrott Arms' every now and again.

Both these men were in late middle-age, Mr Smout, in fact, had a fair size family, from a daughter my age upwards - his son, Ernie, worked for the 'top Bates' as it happened. On the other hand, Bob, as far as I know, was a life-long bachelor - there was a pub in Church Street, the 'White Swan', and if I had to go there, I always had to give the landlady a message from Bob, "When the old Queen's dead.". She always laughed and knew what it meant - I didn't, but reckoned it was not for my delicate years, so I didn't ask.

Shop hours were longer then than they are now, but it was taken for granted, and when we heard of the hours that our predecessors worked we actually thought that we were lucky. Butchers had two afternoons off per week - Monday mornings we only went in to scrub down and then we were finished, and of course we had the usual afternoon which in Oldbury was, as I believe it is now, on Thursday.

But it was Saturday evenings that I loved - the window pushed up and a shelf outside and all the meat on display, people thronging the pavement and the trams rattling by, and I would take my turn with Bob to entice the ladies to buy. Not only had I my white apron, but white coat also, and I felt that I had arrived; and somebody said I looked a proper butcher with my little red cheeks. I was fascinated when Bob was out there and would converse with Dick in the back-slang in regard to price, so that the customer would not know what was being discussed of course - which was sometimes as well, uncomplimentary things were said about some poor souls.

I rather liked the job, the fresh air and freedom of the open road, not too much traffic - the tram lines were something of a hazard but we learned to cope; and there was a good rapport with the other butcher-boys, and even the grocer-boys. However, I couldn't see myself standing in a shop all day serving meat, so, after eighteen months, I thought I'd try some thing else, and packed it in.

*Bill Hipkiss*

The week before Christmas one year in the early 1970s, J & W Bates, 'top Bates's', in Birmingham Street had all their turkeys dressed, ready for the oven and waiting to be collected by their customers. They were collected all right, but by thieves who broke through the floorboards at the back of the shop in Canal Street and took the lot!

Bates managed to get more turkeys ready for their customers. The thieves were never caught, their premises were moved further up, and the canal filled in soon afterwards.



*Jess Ingley*

*Interior of J & W Bates, Birmingham Street - 'top Bates's' on Bustle Bridge. Geoff Bates, Roger Bates and Ron Jarvis. [Jess Ingley collection]*

## 5 - Church-going

### Christ Church, Oldbury's Parish Church

In 1837 Oldbury Chapel (St Nicholas) was in a very dilapidated condition and it was also deemed to be too small, containing seating for only 234. By 1831, the population of Oldbury was around 6,000 and rising, owing to industrialisation. The foundation stone for a new church was laid in 1840, on a piece of land known as the 'Close Orchard', and the building of Christ Church was consecrated in July the following year.

In the 1960s and 70s the population of Oldbury town fell from 30,000 to less than 5,000 due to industrial decline and redevelopment. The church in the 60s was again in a bad state of repair, and demolition, like a spectre, hovered over it. But the congregation and friends fought for their church and work started on a major restoration and development scheme. Two thirds of the church was converted into offices on three floors. The remaining east end became a much smaller church seating up to 150.

This work was funded by the Black Country Development Corporation, the Birmingham Diocesan Board of Finance, and Oldbury Parochial Church Council for £750,000. In 1992 it was rededicated by the Bishop of Birmingham.

*Pat Speed*

Sunday before Christmas 1991 - our first service in our new church. Oh! the bliss of being warm and dry after all the Sundays sitting in the cold with buckets catching water from the roof. At the close of this first service, Mr Bert Blagden, honorary churchwarden and aged 80, turned to me with arms extended, tears in his eyes, great joy in his voice and said "We've done it, after all the fighting and hard work - we've done it!"

*Norma Lowther*

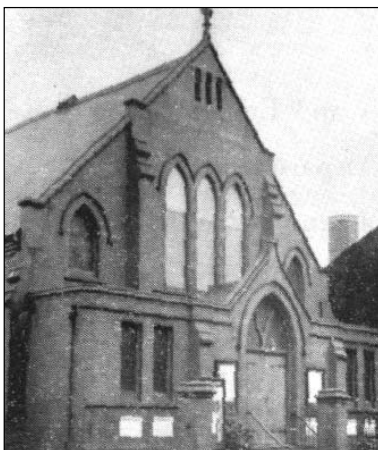


*The interior of Christ Church from a postcard of the early 1900s, well before it was redeveloped in the 1990s. Beautiful tile work was revealed behind the altar, hidden for many decades by a curtain. [Janet Smith collection]*

### Rounds Green Methodist Church

My father, Jacob Farmer, came from Great Wyrley, Cannock, to seek work and found a job at Brades steel works. He married Mabel and they had three girls, Mabel, Jessie and myself, Elsie. My first memories of Rounds Green are of the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Brades Road. We were all christened there, and spent a lot of our time there, including Sunday School and services twice every week. The Sunday School was situated in Chapel Street, and there were many stone steps to climb at the entrance. Prior to this it was a day school started by Tom Hadley. In those days our life seemed to revolve around the chapel and the hills: it seemed a much slower pace of life and people had time to stand and stare.

*Elsie Checketts*



*The second building of Rounds Green Methodist Church, that attended by Elsie Checketts. It was built in 1904 and replaced in 1962 by a new building in Newbury Lane. [From the brochure for the opening of the new Church]*

## 6 - Schooling

### Schooldays

I started at the Tabernacle School in Talbot Street in 1942. The classrooms were on the top floor of the building. The lower part of the building was used as the Welfare and Clinic (I think the nurse's name was Stanley or Winstanly, the nit nurse). To go to the toilets we had to come down a dark flight of stairs across to the far end of the playground. The teachers, as I recall, were Miss Jones (head), Miss Oliver (deputy head) and Miss Turner.

If there had been an air raid the previous night, after dinner we would put our arms on the table, then our heads on to our arms and have a short sleep.

My mother (Florence Ingley) came to work as a dinner lady and was to stay there for many years. The meals were prepared elsewhere and brought to the school in hayboxes: I pity the man who had to walk up those stairs! Mornings and afternoons we were given a bottle of milk to drink.

I moved to Rounds Green School in 1944. The only teachers I can remember were Mr Peter Ward, headmaster, who lived in McKean Road, Miss Ryder and Miss James. When the war was over a Mr Keen (or Keyte) came as the PE teacher, running cricket, football and athletics. During the lunch break he would come into the playground with bat, ball and three stumps set in a wooden base. He put a coin on the stumps, and if you hit the stumps he gave you the money. Mr Keen later became headmaster at St James' Junior on the Lion Farm Estate.

*George Ingley*

The Tabernacle School was a very 'Victorian' building housing children between five and seven years. It had rather uneven floors, but was always warm and cosy. The children adored the head, Miss Oliver, and the teachers, Miss Sabin and Mrs Flutter. They had a lovely playground to play in, despite the fact it fronted a main street. This was a lovely happy grounding for future schooling.



*A class from Rounds Green Junior School, about 1942 during WW2. [Joan Bridges collection]*

You started Rounds Green School at five and went to 'the big school' when you were eleven. It was an old school with a 'Boys' entrance and a 'Girls' entrance. Once inside, you all merged together and in the classroom we girls sometimes sat by boys at the lovely old wooden desks with storage space and ink pots in the top - nib pens, a far cry from ball points. It was a happy school with Mr Ward as a kind, but firm, headmaster.

Small bottles of milk to drink in the morning were put on the pipes in winter to make sure no ice was left inside. If you were lucky, you were chosen as a 'milk monitor', or to fill the ink pots, or perhaps you could water the beans or mustard and cress that

was grown on flannel on saucers on the window ledges. They were happy times in the playground, playing tick, skipping and hopscotch, where bullying was unheard of, and you could walk to school in safety.

The Wesley School was an old school with wooden floors and a black stove in the middle of the room, with a bowl of water on the top to stop the air from drying out. You really got to know everyone from the headmaster down because you spent your entire school life there from five to fourteen years of age. The highlight of the week was to go one afternoon to the Technical School for woodwork. School trips used to be on a canal boat when everyone had a good time, although you did come back filthy and tired, but happy after a big adventure!

*Joan Bridges*



### **Today's mystery object!**

*What is it?*

*This object was identified as a dame school 'Clicker' used by the teacher, the 'dame' to attract the attention of the class by producing a loud clicking sound. Part of the original mechanism is missing. It was obtained from the Church of England School when it was situated in John Street. Presumably, it worked then, but how effective would it be today?*

*[Photographer: Terry Daniels Janet Smith collection]*

### **Miss Holland's School**

My parents sent me to a private school in Church Street. Just a few yards up the street was a pub 'The White Swan', and a grocers 'Mason Williams' and next to that a ladies and child's outfitters. An entry at the side went up to the back premises, and quite an area of this was Miss Holland's Private School. They'd only got two classes, a juniors and a seniors. It was built of corrugated sheeting but well lined with wall-boarding, and there was a stove in there. The teachers were two sisters, Miss Polly Holland and Miss Miriam Holland. They were excellent teachers: we had the basic teaching, "the three Rs". They were very kind, but strict in their way. There was getting on for a hundred pupils in the two classes. The seniors had proper desks with lids on, but the juniors had long tables.

Miss Miriam was very musical, and I learned to play the piano under her tuition. She used to give her lessons in the house fronting on to Church Street. She had a piano in her living quarters - it was a harpsichord-sounding piano, a 'tinky-tank' thing, and you had to use a bit of pressure on it to get a sound out. But the one in the school was modern.

*Leslie Kershaw*

### **Apollo Boy's Club**

Since the end of WWI, Accles and Pollock had run a club for the young men who worked for them. For many years they met at premises in Talbot Street, but their building was threatened under the re-development scheme for Oldbury town centre. In 1963 they bought the former Manse of Tabernacle Church in McKean Road and converted this to club premises. They extended the range of activities, and were able to include a billiards room and a TV lounge. The club changed its polict to admit girl employees from the 1960s.

Apart from the indoor activities, and running football and cricket clubs, the boys went on outings and camps, Malvern being a very popular centre.



*Apollo Boy's Club at their camp in Malvern, 1926. [Nell Martin collection]*



## 7 - Fighting fires

### Oldbury's burning!

Fighting fires in Oldbury was always a problem with houses packed together in courts and potentially dangerous industries like metal working, chemical manufacture and tar distillation. Even the ricks and fields caught fire, and the railway embankments were not immune. The first fire brigades were established by the larger companies, Chance Brothers, Demuth and Co, Albright and Wilson and Showell's Brewery among them.

These were joined by Oldbury Volunteer Fire Brigade in 1888. Amidst some controversy about the cost, the town bought the most up to date engine, a 'steamer', rather than a manual pump, and this proved a very wise decision. The fire station was situated in Low Town, and linked to the homes of the firemen by a series of electric bells. When the telephone arrived, the Fire Station number was 1.

Oldbury was justly proud of its fire service, and ahead of many of the neighbouring boroughs. The brigade was involved in local social activities and fund-raising: it ran an annual sports at the Oldbury Town football ground at the turn of the century.



[Alan Jefferies collection]

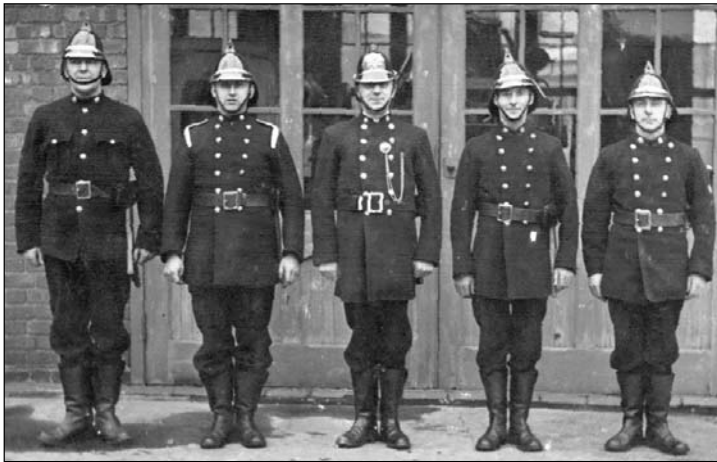


*On 3 July 1895 the fire brigade, wearing West Bromwich Albion stripes, played Oldbury police, wearing Oldbury Town FC colours. The result was 4-2 to the firemen. More importantly, 2000 people paid to watch and over £14 was raised for the District Hospital. This may not seem much today, but was regarded as a great success a century ago. [Photographer: A Highfield, 1895]*

### Firemen Jefferies

One family long associated with the Oldbury Fire Brigade was the Jefferies. My great uncle John ('Jack') was in there in 1888 at the start, grandfather, Sam Jefferies, from 1892 and they threw him out when he was 70 in 1934. He used to clean the clock at Christ Church in his 70s, and, I think, he used to do the Town Hall clock as well. He died at 84.

My father, Frank, finished about 1947. He lived in Green Street, and was called out by a bell in the house. When the bell went he had to turn out in all his gear and hurtle down the road. The neighbours could also hear the bell, so they came out to watch. They were employed by the local authority: although they were professional firemen. That's why they were called 'auxiliary'. They worked as road-sweepers, plumbers etc. They had to



*Firemen outside Oldbury fire station in the 1930s. Frank Jefferies is on the right. [Alan Jefferies collection]*

brigades. It became Worcester County Brigade. At that time, around 1947-48, they got rid of a lot of the old local firemen.

catch the horse first, get steam up, and they were away. It was an event for the engine to turn out.

It became a national fire service in wartime. They also had auxiliary firemen for the duration. The works brigades remained separate, even in the war.

As well as being a fireman, my father was an ambulance man. When someone got run over by a horse and cart, they had to turn out to patch them up. The horse ambulance was kept at the fire station in the early days. So they were St John's Ambulance men as well as firemen.

After the war, the local authorities lost the fire brigades and they became county

#### *Information from Alan Jefferies*

Most calls to the brigade were for chimney fires, grass or rick fires, or small incidents at local factories. In World War II there were at least two occasions when barrage balloons were struck by lightning and burst into flames. These were usually soon put out.

One of the largest fires the brigade had to deal with was at the Oldbury Carriage Works on 31 July 1900. The sawmill caught fire and was completely destroyed. It provided a great spectacle and the cafes and pubs stopped open all night to cater for sightseers! The Oldbury Fire Brigade was helped by twelve town and factory brigades.

"Many thousands of spectators visited the scene of the disaster. The flames were visible for miles around, and the ranks of the persons residing in the vicinity were swelled by visitors from all parts - attracted either by the flames themselves or the hoarse-throated 'bull' that announced the mischief. ... roofs in the vicinity were thickly occupied ... Mounting the great steep cinder banks between Oldbury and West Bromwich ... the sight obtained was as of a walled city burning" 'Weekly News', August 4th 1900.

### **Works Brigades**

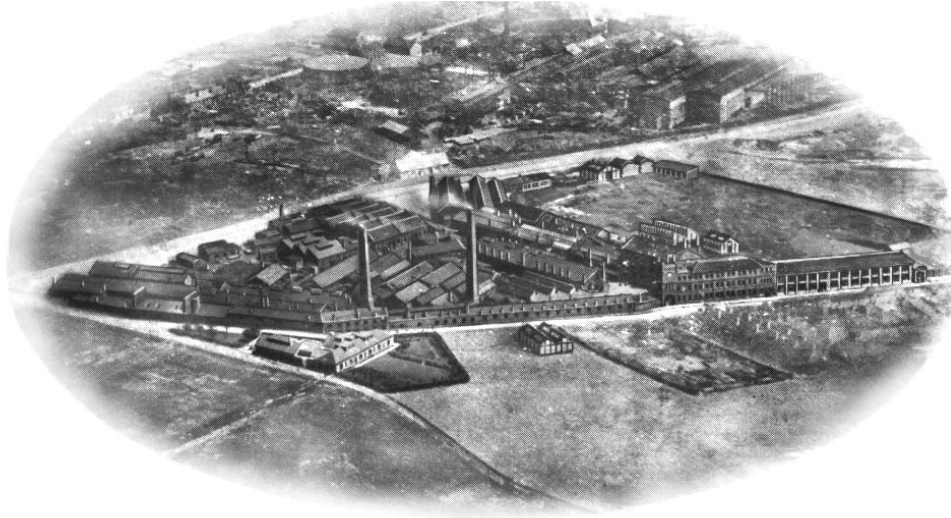
One of the works brigades that helped in 1900 was that of Chance Brothers. These brigades were mainly concerned with incidents within their own factories, and developed an expertise in coping with their particular hazards that the main brigade could never acquire.



*John Mallard was a member of the Chance and Hunt Fire Service, the internal works brigade. As such he would have responded to alarms when he was at work. He lived at 84 Old Park Lane, Langley with his wife Eliza and seven children. Six of his children died of tuberculosis, and by 1938 only one, Alfred was alive, having escaped tuberculosis by going to sea. [Janet Smith collection]*



## 8 - Firms and factories



*The Brades Works from their 1930 catalogue. In front of the works is Brades Road with their sports ground and some of the houses of Rounds Green on the right. Beyond the works is the canal, and on the far side the Oldbury Municipal Gas Works and the boiler works of Edwin Danks. [Brades catalogue]*

### The Brades

Brades Works had a big clock tower for all to see - no being late! The press shops stretched along Brades Road to the canal bridge and housed big hammers for pressing steel for the different kinds of tool. Opposite was Brades cricket pitch, sports and social centre and some gardens. Off Brades Road was Dock Road with a few houses and 'The Brades Tavern'.

*Elsie Checketts*

Brades made very good chisels and very good tools. They were world leaders. When I was in Africa, part of my equipment was a 'panga' a big knife - you see them hacking away on these jungle pictures. There it was - 'Brades Steel Works' stamped on the blade. I thought 'its come from a good place' and it reminded me of home.

William Hunt and Sons of the Brades was the proper name. I can go back as far as the Eaton family, who were the managers and directors. At the bottom of Dingle Street was Brades garages, and the Eatons used to keep their cars there. I was down there playing with the lad who lived in the house there, and I picked a half crown up and gave it to Mrs Payne, the lady who lived in the house. 'Oh, she said, that'll be Mr Eaton's. I'll give it to him.' The next day she came up to me and said 'Here's sixpence for you. Mr Eaton sent you that'.

There was an agreement between Accles and Pollocks and the Brades that their starting and knocking off times would be different. Accles started at 7.30 in the morning and the Brades Steel Works opened up at 8.00 in the morning; Accles finished at 5.00 in the evening, the Brades finished at 5.30, so you didn't get the great multitudes on the road. Round about 5000 would come out of Accles and Pollocks. You didn't dare be coming from Oldbury to Rounds Green when they opened the gates at 'The Paddock' or you'd be carried back into Oldbury. At twenty-five past seven the 'Bull' would blow and folks would start running down Brades Road 'We'm nearly late!'. Then it would blow again at half past. A bit later the Brades would blow their hooter.

*Wilf Walters*

Brades was a family firm. I was the last of our family to work there, following four uncles, an aunt and a cousin over a sixty-year period. Frank Giles, the works convenor, used to say, "Once a Brades man, always a Brades man", and I think he was right! I remember some of the families: the Pardoes, Paynes, Pools, Shepherds and Windmills. People were known by their nick-names: 'Chottey' Rowley and 'Bubblor', who had a stutter.

*Les Darby*

## Sadler's Brickyard

Sadler's Brickworks was located in the area bordered by Shidas Lane, Portway Road and Taylors Lane. The one on the other side of the road was always used by Accles and Pollocks as a waste tip. When I was a lad there was no fence around it, just the Rounds Green Road and the marl hole was in action when I was a little boy. The people of Rounds Green used to walk round there and throw their rubbish into the marl hole - it was a common tip.

William Whitehouse was the general office manager at Sadler's. He was a cripple with a clump foot, a big shoe on one foot. In the main it was ladies that made the bricks, with big sacking aprons on. I can see them now with skirts down to their ankles and great pieces of sacking on, knocking heavy lumps of clay into the box moulds.

*Wilf Walters*



*Three 'brick wenches' dressed up in their working clothes for the photographer. They would not be as clean and tidy on a working day! [Janet Smith collection]*

In the late 20s and early 30s we lived in a lovely big house, 'Gladstone House', number 63 at the top of Portway Road facing the Wolverhampton Road. The house had two front rooms, four other rooms, kitchen/veranda, and six bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. There was a large garden, where we kept ducks, hens and pigs, a large greenhouse and a stable for a pony and trap. There was a letter box in the front gatepost: many will remember it, as the nearest other one was in Oldbury. I was the last of a large family of fourteen or so. Gladstone House belonged to John Sadler who owned the marl hole and brickworks. He lived there until he moved to Newbury Lane to live with his son. [John Sadler was a staunch Liberal supporter and local councillor, and named the house after Prime Minister William Gladstone, whom he greatly admired.]

The marl hole stretched between the Wolverhampton Road, Portway Road, Shidas Lane and Barn Hill (now Taylor's Lane). It was very deep, with grass at one side and the clay at the other. My father, John Hipkiss, had worked at the marl hole since leaving the army in 1918, and was a chargehand, responsible for explosives. Matt Woodhall was foreman, and some of the men were Jack Shepherd, two Pickerall brothers and Mr Tranter. My father would drill the holes and pack them with dynamite. Then he would blow his whistles to warn the workers and fire the charges to loosen the rock and clay. The clay was loaded on trolleys, and taken to the top of the marl hole. There the women would take it to make bricks, which were a blue colour after firing.

In the marl hole was a large shed, 'the hovel', with benches where the men had their meals. There was a coal stove where the men put their dinners to keep warm. I used to take my dad a bottle of tea, and his dinner in a basin with his sweet in a saucer on top. It was all wrapped in a large handkerchief in a basket.



*Gladstone House in 1932 with Edith (right) and two cousins. The post box is in the far left gate post. [Mabel Stewart collection]*

The marl hole began to encroach on the house. After one blast the pigs and ducks disappeared into the pit and we had to go and rescue them from the mud at the bottom - surprisingly they were unharmed. The house was threatened and we moved out shortly after 1932. Eventually, Gladstone House itself fell into the hole, leaving only the gate posts and post box to mark its place. The marl hole was exhausted in the 1940s and filled in about thirty years ago, and the land reclaimed and used as the council's refuse depot.

*Edith Johnson (née Hipkiss)*

## Oldbury Carriage and Wagon Co Ltd

Oldbury Carriage Works was a large employer, up to a thousand men at its height, and occupying a large area between Broadwell Road, the railway and the canal. It manufactured rolling stock of all kinds, and was also the factory where the first highly secret tanks were assembled in World War I. It closed when it was absorbed by the Metropolitan Carriage Works and its activities moved to their site at Saltley. The premises then became the 'Broadwell Works' of Accles and Pollock.

*Terry Daniels*



*Employees from Oldbury Carriage and Wagon Works about 1911 [Hilda Hale collection]*

## What's in a name?

Whatever the name they were known by, Accles and Pollock would still be world leaders in making cold-drawn tubes. The company came to Oldbury in 1902, three years after it was founded. From very small beginnings, the company grew rapidly until it employed about 8500 people during WW2 at the Paddock Works in Rounds Green and the Broadwell Works in Oldbury itself.

The main outlet for its tubes at the start was the manufacture of cycles, but across the years their products went into aircraft, motor cars, hypodermic needles, sten guns, fishing rods, archery bows, furniture ... . Under Walter Hackett's leadership the company introduced a light-hearted style of advertisement to carry the name of Cackles and Polyp, or whatever, round the world.

*Terry Daniels*

**The Postman gets cut up...**

because it's not  
RACKLESS & SPOTLESS  
or BOTTLES & HICCUP  
or TRUFFLES & WEDLOCK  
or TICKLES & WALLOP  
or KNACKLES & STOPPUP  
or CACKLES & POLYP

... it's  
**Accles & Pollock**  
OLDBURY · BIRMINGHAM

*for precision steel tubes*

Accles & Pollock Ltd. · Oldbury · Birmingham · A Company  
Makers and manipulators of precision tubes in plain carbon, alloy and stainless steels, and other metals  
Largest stocks in the country

*Accles and Pollock advert from the late 1950s [Oldbury Handbook]*

## 9 - War and peace

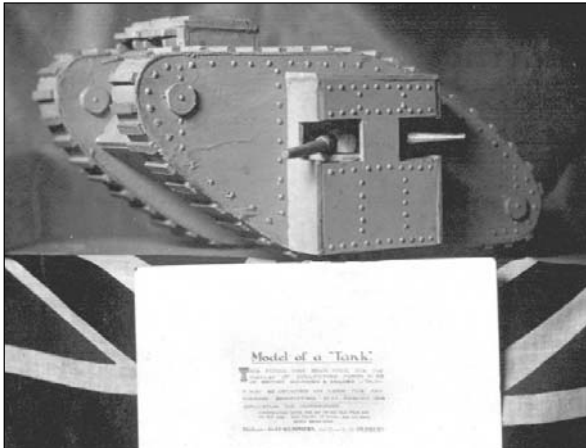
### Tanks, spitfires and peace medals

The manufacture of tanks at the Oldbury Carriage Works during WW1 is well known. A tank stood in the town centre in front of the Town Hall as a war memorial before the cenotaph was set up to the memory of those of Oldbury's people lost in the war [cover picture].

The tank became a symbol and was shown on a peace medal issued to 7000 school children in Oldbury at the end of the war. Mr Dudley Docker and Colonel Knothe provided the medals made from tank salvage. They were the owners of the Carriage Works. The school children's medals were made from aluminium, and 100 bronze medals were issued to teachers and local officials.



*School children's peace medal [Janet Smith collection]*



*[Janet Smith collection]*

A model of the tank was made by G H Summers. The description said:

*"This model has been made for the purposes of collecting funds in aid of British Soldiers and Sailors. It may be obtained on loan for any purpose benefitting H M Forces upon application to the undermentioned. Constructed with the aid of an old file and an old saw, 240 pieces of wood and 420 brass rivets being used."*

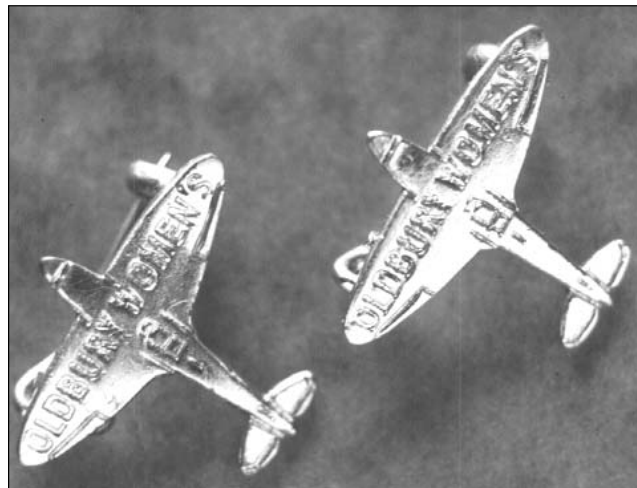
*G H Summers, 64 Church Street, Oldbury"*

In World War II, money was raised by the Oldbury Women's Spitfire Fund. It does not seem to have been restricted to women raising the money, but doubtless they were the inspiration.

The 'Weekly News' of 21 February 1941 published a list of contributions totalling over £14, and including proceeds from a whist drive in Rounds Green, collections in shops (T Wooldridge, butchers, and customers of the 'Brades Tavern' and the 'Jolly Collier'), and collections in various streets.

These spitfire badges bearing the words "Oldbury Women's" belong to George Ingle's family.

*Terry Daniels*



*[Photographer: Terry Daniels]*



## The 'Siegfried' Line?

During the night of 21st and 22nd December 1940, a woman gave birth to a daughter as bombs fell nearby on Oldbury. Bon Marché, then in Halesowen Street, had a direct hit. The next morning all that remained was bras, knickers and various other items of underwear hanging like washing from the tram wires and cable lines overhead - not a pretty sight!

*Jess Ingley*

## The Duke inspects

On 19th February 1941 the Duke of Kent paid an unpublicised visit to Oldbury to inspect the civil defence arrangements. The 'Weekly News' reported "The striking feature of the Royal visit was the complete lack of pomp and ceremony. The Duke ... was intent on seeing for himself whether our civil defence organisation was ready to deal with the worst the Nazis can send over. The impression he got from his inspection was so good that before leaving he told Capt Niall Fox, borough ARP officer, that he had no doubt that, if called upon, Oldbury can take it.



*The Duke of Kent inspects the ARP wardens in Freeth Street. They were resplendent in new overcoats recently issued to the ARP personnel. [Terry Daniels collection]*

Although the tour was, officially, a 'secret', the parade of civil defence units in Freeth Street had attracted a fairly large crowd by the time the Royal party arrived ... He also visited the ARP post at Langley Institute.

*Terry Daniels*

## The army in peacetime

On 30th April 1955 the Borough of Oldbury formally adopted the Territorial Army units stationed in Oldbury. These were No 1 (Worcestershire) Platoon Women's Royal Army Corps (Territorial Army) and 'Q' Battery 639 Heavy Regiment (Worcestershire) Royal Artillery (Territorial Army).

The TA and WRAC units marched through Oldbury to the Town Square, accompanied by the band of the 7th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment. The Mayor, Cllr John Beard, took the salute and inspected the Parade. He also presented Scrolls of Adoption to the two units.

*Information: Muriel Bowen (née Morris)*



*The Mayor of Oldbury presents the Scroll of Adoption to the WRACs [Muriel Bowen collection]*



## 10 - Round and about in Oldbury

The following extracts are taken from descriptions of life in 'Old-time Oldbury' by people who lived there in times past.

### Down to Low Town

My parents would often take me 'down to Low Town' because it was where the Smith family home was - grandfather, my uncle and his family, and the family business, Smith Brothers. From Warley we travelled on the 233 bus, and the stream from Brandhall ran along the bus route behind a brick wall. Over the wall was 'Blue Billy' and the remains of the bridge which carried carts loaded with chemical waste from the Chemical Works. As we approached the hump-backed canal bridge it was the Midland Red driver's joy to drive at speed so that the passengers in the rear of the single decker bus had a terrific jolt. On one occasion a lady was heard to say "Thank God I paid the insurance mon last wik!" - it was the jovial sister of Jack Judge.

Opposite Chance's School the stream flowed towards Low Town and disappeared into a 'tunnel'. The road divided into Low Town and Perrott Street. I used to dread getting off the bus at Low Town because my mother knew everyone and it could take up to two hours to get to the Market Place and catch the blue bus to West Bromwich.

The family house, 4, Low Town, had a slate yard and shop adjoining. The house had two staircases leading from the back room and you had to decide beforehand whether you wanted the front or back bedroom. The slate yard led towards Perrott Street, but there was no exit because of the stream behind a brick wall disappearing into a tunnel under a house built for one of the Smith family. As a boy, my father used to go into the tunnel to shoot rats in the dark! The stream then diverted to the Flash and Broadwell Park area: on the corner of John Street one house had a bricked-in tunnel shape on the end wall, doubtless where the stream emerged. Nearby was the pound - hence 'Pinfold' Street.

In the short Stone Street was the Fire Station, and my father remembered the sound of hooves when the engine was called out. Opposite No 4 was a most important building - the public urinal, imperative with so many pubs in the vicinity! On one corner of Low Town was Adam's stores and on the opposite Key's, the stationers.

*Janet Smith*

### Bromford Road

It was the factory in the middle that separated the 'better' half from the 'lower' half of Bromford Road. You were considered 'one step above' if your house faced the open ground of the fairground. That was until the gypsies came with their garish lights and shiny metal caravans: then it was thought better to live further down the road in case anything suspect should happen.

We lived in the middle of the lower half, on the same side as Cuxon Gerrard's factory that made medical supplies. The company owned several houses in the block, but my father had paid a few hundred pounds to be the proud owner of our terraced house. It had a long hall running front to back, and covered in lino which was very good for roller skates or playing ball. Eight of us lived in this three-bedroomed house: mom, dad, five girls and one boy. My brother was lucky as he had a bedroom to himself and four girls had to share the next bedroom. The baby slept in a cot in my parents' room.

Our side of the street was much the same as you could find anywhere in the Black Country. House after house and then an entry with a blue brick floor and an eerie echo, an entrance to another world for children. Anyone could have used the entry, but it was very rare to see a stranger there. At the end of the entry a pathway led left or right to each back yard. Here was housed the coal yard and toilet, and our rabbit hutch. Over the pathway was our garden, which was always filled with marigolds. In summer they seemed to take over the garden and it looked like a carpet of gold.

One summer we went to the country and bought an apple tree. This just meant that we could have the apples that grew on the tree that year. In late September we all went in dad's van to 'shake the tree'. We had hundreds and had to keep them somewhere. The only place was a set of old drawers in the shed. It seemed we would eat apples for the rest of our days, but with five children, fifteen when friends came to play, they soon disappeared.

The opposite side of the street was different from ours because each few houses opened out on to a courtyard. They were smaller houses with a front door and front window looking out on to the street. From the front room you walked into the only other downstairs room - the kitchen. The toilet was across the yard. Between the rooms were steps leading down to a cellar, that was a dark and creepy place for a young girl. As I did errands for an old lady, I had to bring back shillings for the meter, and then go down the cellar steps with only a torch for guidance. People have many smells to remind them of times gone by, but for me it has to be the damp smell of the cellar to take me back to Mrs Taplin's house.

Further down the street was the traditional corner shop which sold most things from buttons to gob-stoppers. It was open all hours - if there was a customer it stayed open! Next to the shop was a triangular piece of land with a wall round it. Many friendships were made and broken over this wall. Behind the wall was one of the two pubs, 'The Old House at Home', on the corner of the street. As it was on a cross roads you could bank on a car crash at least once every couple of months. Once or twice drinkers got more than they bargained for when cars came through the snug window.

If the accident happened at night, up would go the casement windows to see what the fuss was about, and then they would go out to help. Usually the men would sleep right through the episode. The only time they were called out was when there was a good storm. Then the road under the railway bridge would flood, and help would be needed to pull the cars out when the drivers wrongly thought they could get through. A strong rope was kept handy for this purpose as it happened with amazing regularity.

Bromford Road is only the name of the road now because all the houses have gone, the fairground is covered with factory units and the factory that divided the road has only its gates standing. The road has been widened so two buses no longer get stuck when passing each other.

*Helen Jayes (née Bridges)*

### **Brother and sister remember**

Ray Kenny and Pat Rodwell were brother and sister living in Oldbury in the 1920s and 30s. Ray was born in 1918 at 44 Church Street, 'The Big House'. Their maternal grandparents were caretakers there for Jones Son and Vernon, Estate Agents. When their grandfather, Zephaniah Parsons, died the family moved to 36 Church Street and it was there that Pat was born. Grandmother Sarah was a lovely lady who always wore a fresh flower buttonhole whenever possible. The house was a three storey building with a shop front opposite the police station (now the library): next door was the school dental clinic at number 34.

The shop premises at 36 was let to various businesses over the years, but when I lived there it was a ladies hairdressers, run by my cousin's wife, Gladys Roe, better known to her customers as Gladys Gough. Her assistants were Doll Shaw and Dot Wooton, and I remember my mum cooking dinners for them.

I started school at St Francis Xavier's R C, but left to attend Rood End School when I was seven because we moved house after Gran died.

In the seven years that I lived in Oldbury Town I can remember quite a few things, like going with Mum to George Mason's Grocers in Birmingham Street. I was fascinated watching the manager, Mr Laker, sending money in a screw-top wooden cup whizzing across the shop on a wire to the cashier's office, and back would come any change due to the customer by the same method. Guest's, the greengrocer, had two shops, one on the corner of Church Street and Freeth Street, and the other at Low Town - they were known as 'top' and 'bottom' Guessies.

Two ways led to the rear of Church Street pubs and shops, one in Church Street by Kimberley's, the tobacconist, and one, a wide, arched entry, off Freeth Street. This way also led to the houses in Orchard Street, so named because it was once part of the orchard of 'Ye Big House', but that was long before my time.

I remember the street party in May 1936, celebrating the silver jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary, and being given a commemorative drinking mug. In those days, Empire Day was also celebrated, and my Mum made me a red dress with silk flags of the Empire countries stitched on for a competition at school: for this I won a ball with Royal Photos printed on it.

My brother Don, aged 14, was allowed to take me, aged 6, to the 'twopenny rush' matinees at 'The Palace' cinema in Freeth Street. We used to re-enact the cowboy films on the way home.

Before the electric tram-cars ceased to run from Dudley to Birmingham via Oldbury along the 'track', I remember seeing the illuminated tram (like Blackpool) passing along Freeth Street, but cannot recall the exact date.

Another incident comes to mind, when the Fascist Oswald Moseley came with his team of Blackshirts to orate from a platform on the island in front of the Cenotaph. I did not understand at that early age what it was all about, but we all found out during the six years of World War II

*Pat Rodwell (née Kenny).*

My earliest recollection is of single-decker trams passing our house on their way to West Bromwich, and the night watchman who sat in his hut with a blazing brazier outside our front door. In the 20s and 30s Oldbury was a busy and vibrant town with dozens of shops and varied industries. Trams, and later buses, brought in hundreds of folk to work in the factories in and around Oldbury. Some of the items that stick in my mind are:

The blacksmith's forge at the corner of Birmingham Streets and Broadwell Road, where we used to go after school to watch the horses being shod: I can still smell the pungent smoke from their hooves!

Mr Monk on his big white horse leading the carnival procession and other parades: the Territorials marching up Church Street from their drill hall.

Margaret Harris, a fellow pupil at St Francis Xavier's, who became the first female police officer and rose to sergeant.

Jack and Ted Judge when they came to St Francis Xavier's School at Christmas to sing to us. Jack Judge selling his fish by 'Polly-on-the-fountain' next to the Wrexham pub.

'Cheap Harry's' bike shop in Halesowen Street where he sold brake blocks that wore away like chalk and black enamel that never dried properly.

Mrs Wood's shop in Low Town where she made and sold lovely troach sweets. Turley's Cook Shop in Halesowen Street with their delicious jam roly-poly and scrumptious rice pudding.

*Ray Kenny*

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**JOHN? Everybody Knows JOHN, he's a good**  
**JUDGE**  
**In first-class FISH & RABBITS, and the most important**  
**part is WEIGHT and QUALITY and Justice to every**  
**Customer.**  
 \*\*\*  
**I**F you want a good bloater to have with your tea,  
 Or a good pair of kippers, you go to J.T.  
 His plaice and his codfish are always grand,  
 On his soles and eels you can safely stand.  
 He has jealous rivals upon his track,  
 But his fish and his rabbits they cannot knock back,  
 He can tell a good tale, he can sing a good song,  
 As he pushes his way through the **WORLD'S MERRY**  
**THrong.**  
 \*\*\*  
**JOHN STUDIES EVERY CUSTOMER'S INTEREST.**  
 A POST CARD SUFFICIENT FOR ORDERS.  
**J. T. JUDGE, LOW TOWN, OLDBURY.**

*Jack Judge's advertisement from 'Bone's Year Book, 1905'. A R Bone, a tobacconist in the Market Square published a yearbook covering the trades and activities of Oldbury each year around the turn of the 20th century. [Terry Daniels collection]*

## Aplin's still



We bought Aplin's, the newsagents, thirteen years ago from Mr Delima. He had kept the 'Aplin' name, and so did we. An old lady told me that Aplin's shop was originally at Causeway Green, but moved to premises opposite here until the re-development, and then to where we are now. A year later we bought the shop next door, and knocked it through so that we were really able to expand. I was very happy to leave my work at Old Hill, spraying car parts, when we bought the shop - I've always said it has brought us luck!

*Tejo Pangli*

*Shops in Halesowen Street including Aplin's.  
 [Photographer: J D Spooner Derek Chambers collection]*

## 11 - Oldbury re-developed

Oldbury has changed gradually over the decades, sometimes through the vision of individuals and sometimes through the policies of the local authority. However, the greatest change came with the re-development of the town in the 1970s and 80s. The ring road was built along the line of the railway. The old streets, the Tabernacle School and the 'Talbot Hotel' were all demolished when the Savacentre came. The old canal was filled in. Some buildings remain, but many of the places remembered in these pages have gone - just memories and fading photographs.

Just before the redevelopment, J D Spooner set out to record some of the buildings and roads. A few are reproduced here by courtesy of Derek Chambers.



*Oldbury town centre in 1977. The white building is the 'The Old Talbot', in its former days a coaching inn on the road from Birmingham to Shrewsbury and the north-west. The old George Mason's shop can be seen, and to the left Church Street.*



*Talbot Street and the bus station in front of Tabernacle School to the left and the Tabernacle Church. This is now the site of Savacentre and its car park.*



*Canal Street leading off Halesowen Street, the site of the present bus station in Oldbury. This shows the state that many of the shops had reached prior to the redevelopment as the town was neglected in the 60s and 70s. The shops all had their individual styles and characteristics, the products of a less controlled and planned age.*

Still the demolition continues!



*A JCB at work on the old Town Hall building as part of the re-development. The toilet block on the left has been spared a little longer! [Janet Smith collection]*

*Still today the old buildings are disappearing. Amos's shop on the corner of Fountain Lane and West Bromwich Street is prepared for demolition - February 2000. [Suzie Drew collection]*



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## **Oldbury Local History Group**

Oldbury Local History Group comprises local people interested in studying, recording and preserving the history of Oldbury. It meets at Oldbury Library, Church Street, and details of its activities can be obtained from the library, 0121-552 5933. It is open to anyone, and you are invited to join us.

## **An Appeal**

This book contains a few of the memories, items, photographs, programmes etc that people have shared with the group. Many such items, like Oldbury's old buildings, will soon be lost - help us to record them and their history. The group copies and photographs any original materials and also ensures that they are included in the records of Sandwell Community History and Archive Service for the benefit of the whole community. We would welcome any material you could lend us that could be copied and added to the collection: please contact Oldbury Library if you can help.



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