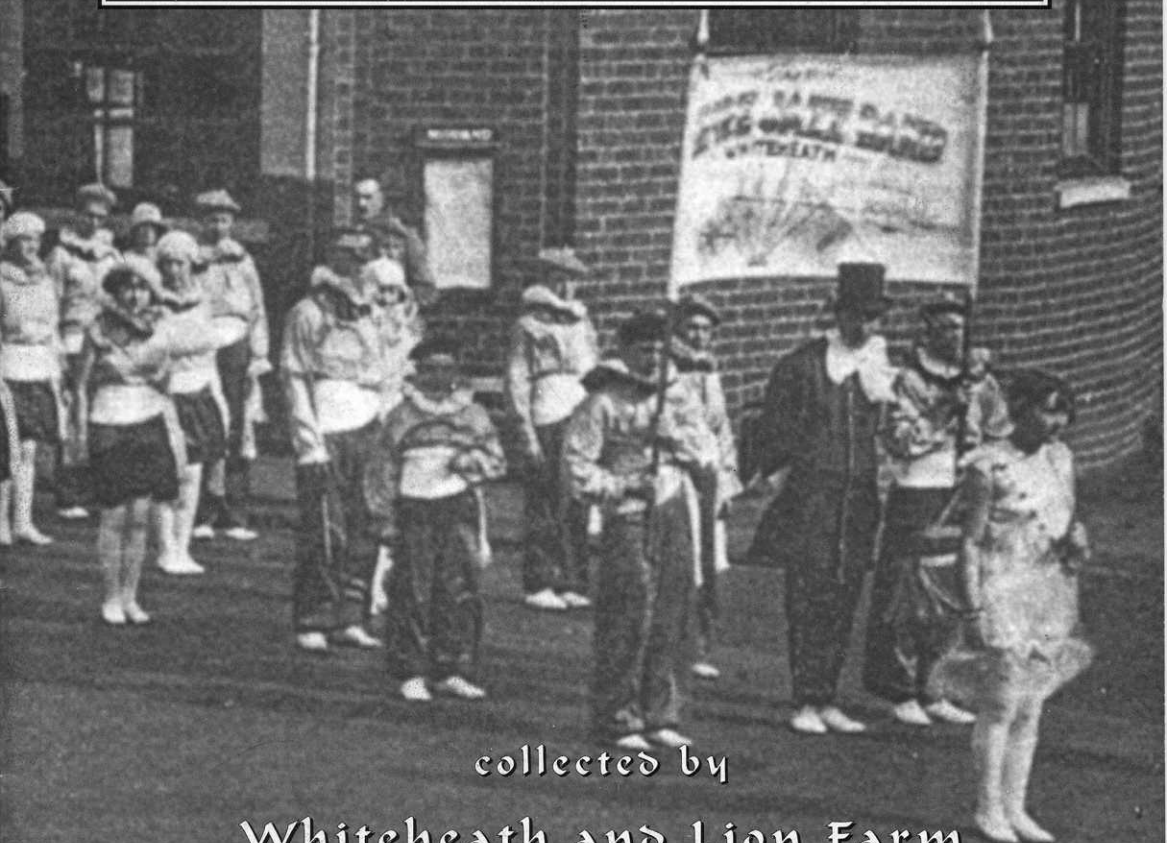


GATE

BUTLER'S

WHITEHEATH AND LION FARM

A Century of Memories



collected by

Whiteheath and Lion Farm
Local History Society

Fields of Buttercups

Fields of buttercups, that's how it used to be.
Fields of buttercups, where people walked quite free!

They're digging up the fields, Mam.
There's men with big machines
And they're digging up the fields.

I think they call them JCBs,
They're big and strong and massive
They're digging up our fields, Mam.
How can you look so passive?

No more fields to roam,
No banks to climb and skelter
Meadow lands where cows would roam
Will be gone and gone for ever.
They're building houses on our fields
To find folk home and shelter.

They levelled off the banks,
They laid down tarmac roads,
Built houses all around,
All new and bright and clean.
They built a pub and shops
Where once our fields had been.

Meadow lands have gone
It's no use looking back.
Progress marches on,
We have to keep on track.
The new estate's been built -
We must look to the future.
Distant thoughts of years gone by
Can be put aside - but never die!

They've built the new estate, Mam,
They've built the new estate,
Homes for folk to dwell in,
A church for peace and calm.
They took away our fields, Mam,
And gave us Lion Farm!

Fields of buttercups, that's how it used to be.
Fields of buttercups, where people walked quite free!

Cliff Worley

Whiteheath and Lion Farm Local History Society has been working in close cooperation with St Michael's High School. Pupils' artwork depicting the local area will be on display at the book launch and prizewinners' work included in the Society's archive.

The Society has tried to include as many of people's reminiscences and contributions as possible in this book, but, unfortunately, limitations of space have meant that many have had to be edited and a few omitted. We apologise, but all will be included in full in the Society's archive at Rounds Green Library.

Whiteheath and Lion Farm

A Century of Memories

Collected by Whiteheath and Lion Farm Local History Society



This is the story of two communities, largely told through the reminiscences of people who were part of them. The village of 'Whiteheath' called, more correctly, 'Whiteheath Gate' from the gate of the old turnpike road there, was the product of agriculture, mining, brickmaking, quarrying and ironworking. In the fifties, the need for new housing saw the redevelopment of farmland and the derelict industrial landscape as the 'Lion Farm Estate', a mixture of houses and high-rise flats on the lower slopes of the Rowley Hills overlooking Oldbury. As old Whiteheath was demolished many people moved up to the new estate, joining those from Rounds Green and the older parts of Oldbury. Whiteheath is completely changed and the old village recalled here is lost forever.

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The Society has made every effort to verify the information in this book, but the reader is asked to remember that much of it springs from memories of events long past and places no longer visible.

The Society was saddened to learn of the deaths of four of the contributors while this book was being prepared for publication: Walter Latham, Pauline Mercer, Pat Rodwell and Joe Taylor. With affection, we dedicate it to their memory.

Cover picture: The Empire Jazz Band at Whiteheath crossroads in the thirties (Howard Poultney collection)
Title page: Mr Kesterton, ex-miner, at his cottage in Spring Row (Florence Messenger collection)

Whiteheath - at the boundary

The village

The village of Whiteheath covers an area of approximately three-quarters of a square mile. One part was in the Borough of Oldbury and the other in Rowley Regis. It was a semi-rural environment, containing no more than five shops in the twenties and early thirties. In Titford Road, close to the sewerage pumping station, there was a small factory called 'Tips' which made sprigs, nails, and tips for the toes and heels of boots and clogs. Apart from this, there was no industry in the village, although several dairy farms flourished. Local folk would have worked at the many long-gone coalmines, but several brickyards across the 'border' were still active. Hailstone Quarry also offered employment. The majority of working folk in the twenties and thirties would have been employed in the factories of neighbouring Oldbury.

Private houses were at a premium, and the locals lived mainly in rented terraced houses. Many of them were back-to-back, affording little room for large families. Throne Road was a part of the regular stagecoach run in earlier days from Wolverhampton via Dudley and Bearwood and on to Birmingham. A toll gate was stationed where the original 'Gate' pub stood. A new pub has been built on the diagonal corner of the crossroads from the old one. Football teams flourished. Several individuals made their mark in other spheres, one of note being Cliff Hodgetts, a boxing pro of great renown.

Howard Poultney

Whiteheath Gate

I was born at number 5 Whiteheath Gate. When I was 7 or 8, they changed all the numbers and we became 138 Whiteheath, Blackheath, Nr Birmingham. We left in 1938 and after the war, they pulled the houses down and built the new Methodist Chapel where our house had been.

Evelyn Price (née Pearson)

Living on the edge!

The crossroads at Whiteheath was the meeting point of Halesowen, Oldbury and Rowley Regis. This could lead to difficulties! When we wanted to get married, nobody wanted to know. We didn't belong to Oldbury, we didn't belong to Langley and we didn't belong to Blackheath. In the end they told us we belonged to Rounds Green. We couldn't understand it at all - I was from Spring Row in Whiteheath, and my husband was from Titford Road, Langley. In the end the vicar at Oldbury, Canon Fletcher, asked my husband "Do you have any relative living in Oldbury?" "Yes", he said, "an aunt living in Union Street". "Well, ask her first, use that address and I'll marry you here". So we married in Oldbury!

Florence Messenger (née Johnson)

It was the same when I went up from Causeway Green School to the seniors. My mother took me to St Michael's at Langley Green on the Monday. I stopped there one day, and on the Tuesday they said "Don't come again, you don't live in our parish!". It turned out that I lived in Halesowen. Spring Row was in Cakemore, part of Halesowen. So I had to go to Hill Top School in Long Lane.

John Johnson

I used to attend the junior school at Titford Road, Langley. When they built the new senior boys' school, in Britannia Road, Rowley Regis, it was a prototype for all the secondary moderns in the country, complete with its own swimming pool and a huge gymnasium. I wanted to go there! Fortunately for me, although our toilet was in the Borough of Oldbury, the house itself was in Rowley, so I was able to go to the 'new school', as they called it for many years. Living on the edge!

Howard Poultney

The disappearing green

The early thirties brought dramatic changes to the semi-rural environment around Whiteheath. A huge council estate was built at the top of Throne Road, and Mucklow's built private houses at the bottom. The Slim brothers, a well-known Whiteheath family of brickies, built a small estate between the crossroads and Mincing Lane, and a few private detached houses were added here and there. The first farm to be erased was Monk's dairy farm, and the site itself was used to build prefabricated houses during WW2. Little was done during the war, but when the fifties came, the old village was to lose its identity for ever. The enormous 'Red Ash Bonk' was levelled and the 'Tocky Bonk', which the elders said would never be moved, was unceremoniously dumped in the local disused marlholes and quarries, including Ramrod Pool.

The majority of the old houses were bulldozed, and only two or three remain today. High rise flats began to dominate the landscape and practically the whole village was covered with bricks and mortar. The slow-moving Black Country village had gone. The crowning glory in the march of progress was when the raised motorway began to pour forth its noise and pollution on the eastern side of the village.

Howard Poultney

'Lion' Farm

When I was young there was no such place as 'Lion Farm'. The name was wrongly applied to Skidmore's Farm in Throne Road. I believe the name was taken from the long defunct 'Lion' Pit, which used to be near the farm. The disused pit shafts were usually enclosed by a high brick wall or had huge, ground-level doors with padlocks.

Howard Poultney

What's in a name?

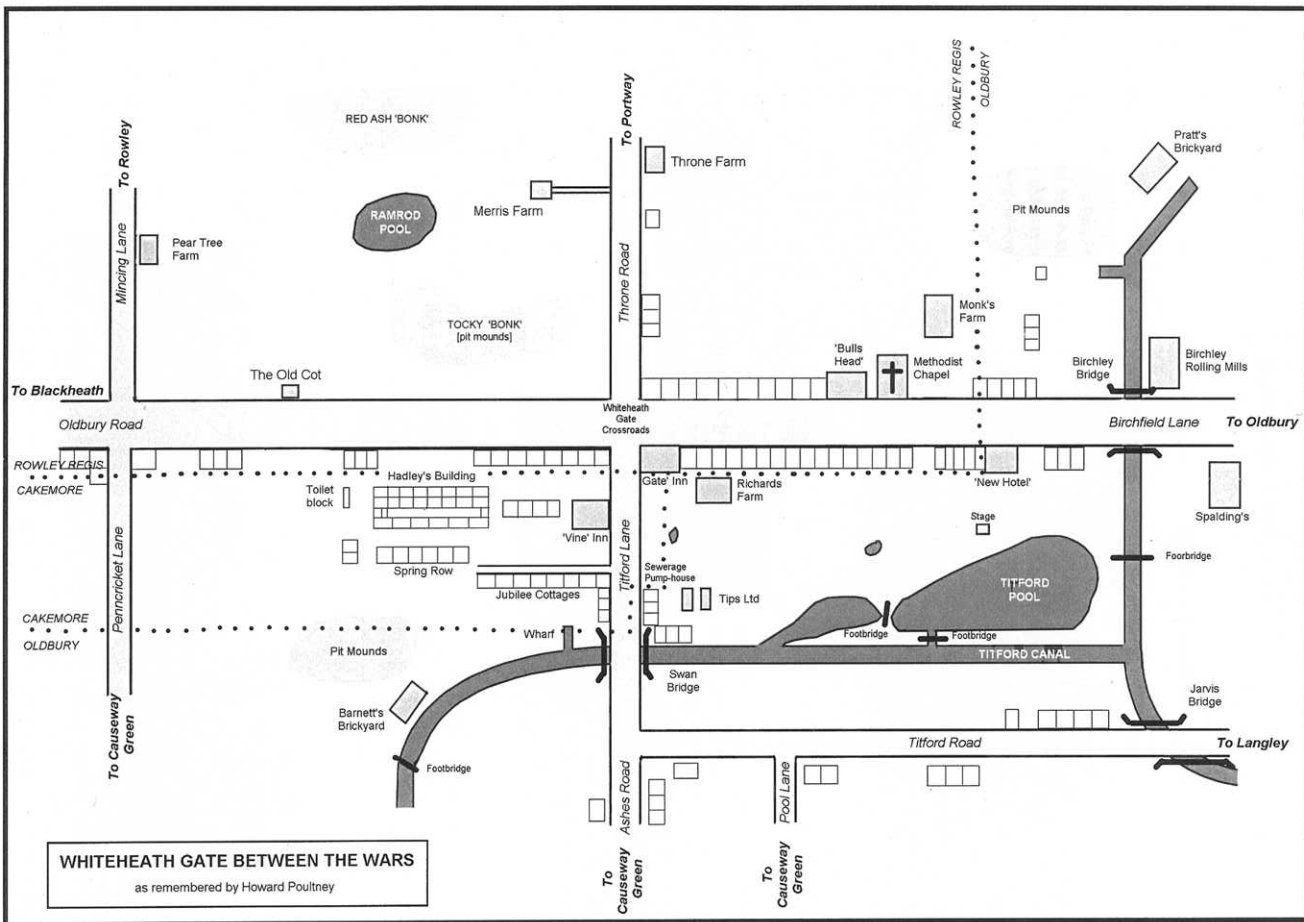
In 1956 Oldbury Council minutes under 'Whiteheath Estate' recorded that "... the progress made on the preparation of plans, specifications etc. for levelling work, including the removal of tocky mounds and stanking off of canal arms, and the construction of roads ... was discussed". Also it was resolved that "...the present tenant of Whiteheath Villa be rehoused and the building demolished". In September 1958 the Estates Layout Sub-committee resolved "that the Whiteheath Estate be re-named 'Lion Farm Estate'", but, unfortunately, they give no indication of the reason for the change.

From Oldbury Council minutes

A split vote!

Oldbury acquired some of the land for building the estate from what was then Rowley Regis Borough Council in Staffordshire, but the parliamentary constituencies were not changed. The boundary actually ran down the middle of one block of flats, Wallace House, so people on one side of the corridor voted in Rowley Regis and Tipton, and those on the other side in Oldbury and Halesowen!

John Sullivan



'Old' Whiteheath before the developers came ...

The lost landscape

Childhood memories of Newbury Lane

As a child I lived in Churchbridge, but I had a grandmother, Mrs Baker, who lived in Newbury Lane when it really was a lane. I used to visit her frequently in the early '20s. There was no Wolverhampton Road and it was safer then to let children go out on their own. We could walk across the fields, past Pratt's brickyard and their marlhole and up to gran's. She lived in one of two cottages on the left hand side going up Newbury Lane. An aunt of mine, Mrs Griffiths, lived in the other; these cottages were opposite where the second Wallace Road is now.

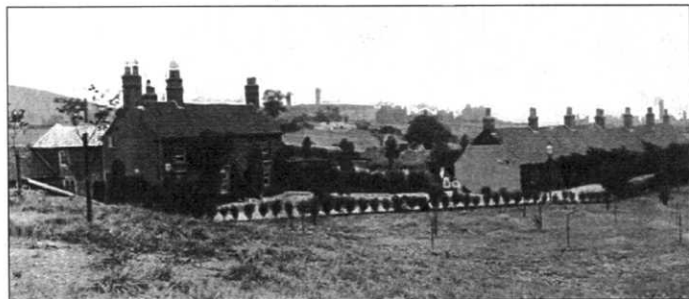
Just a little further on was the actual Lion Farm; how and why it came to be called that I do not know - I did know the people who lived there, however. Their name was Chandler. There's a block of flats on the estate named after them, Chandler house.

Further on still were two very large old houses. Families named Green lived in one, and Hadley in the other. When these were demolished, the Greens had a house built almost opposite the 'White Horse' pub, and my grandmother and aunt moved into a council house on the other side of the road from where they once lived.

Harriet Taylor had a house in Newbury Lane, on the other side from gran's original cottage, and she sold sweets, although it was not a shop. That house is still there.

Then on the corner of Throne Road was the 'White House' with its castellated roof. The Pardoes lived there, and my aunt cleaned for them. At that time Throne Road was really just a lane.

We could walk across the meadows behind my grandmother's, cross Throne Road into the cornfields opposite, and finish up at Rowley Church.



The Isolation Hospital in Newbury Lane was converted from a group of cottages in the 19th century to separate small-pox victims, but was used later for all infectious diseases (From 'Picturesque Oldbury')



Portway Hall was built in the 17th century by Daniel 'Ironside' Johnson. This century it was the home of the Pardoe family, local industrialists, and before its demolition in 1979 became a nightclub! (Ken Rock collection)

On the way to gran's, just past Pratt's brickyard, was the Isolation Hospital. I never saw it up close because there was a rather high wall, and I think there were some houses there as well.

May Lines (née Baker)

Buttercup fields

Our garden in Birchfield Lane (on the left going into Oldbury) backed directly onto the fields. The cows used to come right up to our bottom wrought iron fence and they would eat anything they could reach through it. As a youngster I could get through that fence, cross the field to the dirt track and then on to the main playing fields. It was beautiful. The top half nearer to our house was football pitches and the rest was just fields, which reached down to Birchley Bridge.

The playing fields were full of buttercups and daisies. The first bank was delightful in the summer for blackberry picking and in the winter for sliding down in the snow. Then there was another untouched field full of wild flowers and then a second bank. When you climbed up it, it took you up to Newbury Lane, just up from the 'White Horse' pub, where there was a quarry. You could look down and watch the men working - they looked like miniature men to us children from there.

Between the two banks there was a freshwater pool, not a large one, but full of newts and tiddlers, where we used to fish. We used to go up the dirt track past Whiteheath Villa and on to Throne Road. It was all lanes and fields, not like the big estate it is now. The fields were open then and led you right down to the 'Tocky Bonk', where the petrol station and the Catholic Church are now.

Those banks were absolutely awash with blackberries. We used to take sandwiches and a bottle of water and eat lots of blackberries, unwashed of course, and be out all day. It was a paradise for us children. Apart from the canal, which we were warned about, our families knew we would be all right.

If he hadn't come with us, my dog Whiskey would always come and find me when it was time for my dinner and we would come home dirty, tired and healthy.

Betty Worley (née Weaver)

Whiteheath at the back of Borough Crescent was all fields. We used to love it when it was haymaking - we'd build ourselves houses out of hay to play in.

Evelyn Price

Getting about

'Shanks's pony' was the done thing in days gone by. Few folks had bicycles, and, to my knowledge, there were only four car owners in or near Whiteheath. The Midland Red Bus Company started the 217 route from Oldbury to Halesowen in the twenties. I well remember the single-deckers with their artillery wheels, and having to walk partway up Gorsty Hill because the vehicle couldn't make the gradient with passengers.

Howard Poultny



Above: the 'tocky bonk' on the left, looking towards Oakham from Throne Road corner, about 1928. Howard Poultny is the cyclist with his uncle and sister. Below: from Throne Road across the fields, with Whiteheath Villa in the background. (Howard Poultny collection)



Living in Birchfield Lane

In the early thirties my gran moved from Churchbridge to a modern house with an indoor bathroom in Birchfield Lane, and it was there that I grew up. I remember the big cast iron bath. That was all there was in the bathroom, but at least it was indoors! The toilet was in the back porch with the coalhouse.

Birchfield Lane was a main road then, on the 217 bus route with a pavement outside the house, but there was a grass verge on our side of the road, which was tree lined. There was a lovely view of the trees out of my window, especially in the spring and summer. On the 'New Hotel' side of the road opposite us you could see the fields and we used to go over and feed bread to the horses - that is until the war broke out, then, of course, there was none spare. Further back towards Tittford Lane itself was where we used to go coal picking in the forties. Half of our front garden had to go in the sixties, when they widened the road to make the dual carriageway, but the fair came to the land across the road from our house once or twice before that happened.

Betty Worley

Wolverhampton 'New' Road

I was taken down to the Birchley crossings to see the Prince of Wales cut the ribbon when he opened the new road in 1927. I was in a wooden pushchair. My two aunts took me with my older sister and brother. They pushed me on to the front of the road so I could see really well despite the crowds. I can still see him with his long overcoat on. It was Tuesday 2nd November, and my gran, who kept the 'Bull's Head' at Whiteheath, had just died and she was the first corpse to be taken along the new road on Friday 5th.

Evelyn Price

The 'Wall of Death'

In 1948 I began as a driver at the Oldbury Depot of the Midland Red. One of the first routes I worked was from Oldbury to the 'Four Ways' via Rounds Green Road, Taylor's Lane and Newbury Lane. I forget the service number, but on some trips we went up Tippity Green, and also through to Dudley on Saturdays.

However, a rather hard-working would-be Councillor, Mrs Deeley, won her fight to get a better service put on; the service, the 229, was extended to Bearwood from just inside Hanover Road. This was not very satisfactory as far as we were concerned because only two vehicles were used, making it a half-hour service, and we had to go like the proverbial clappers! It soon came to be known as the 'Wall of Death'. Mrs Deeley kept the heat on, however, and the service was soon extended to Blackheath, another vehicle put on, and things were much more reasonable.

Bill Hipkiss



On the corner of Whiteheath Gate around 1930, looking from the direction of the 'Tocky Bonk' towards the 'Gate Inn'. When the fair came it would occupy the land in the foreground. (Howard Poultney collection)

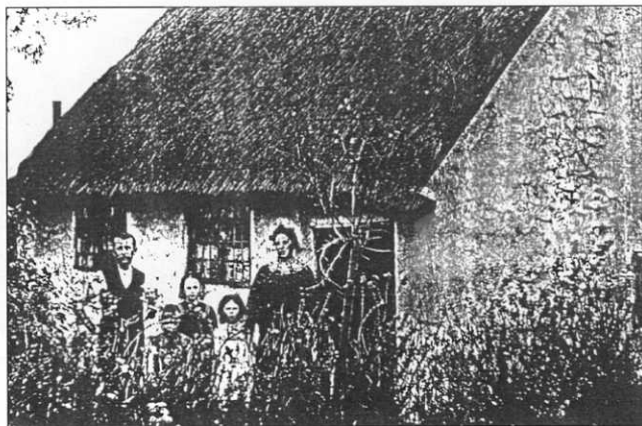
House and home

The Old Cottage

The old cottage at Whiteheath was on the corner of what is now Uplands Avenue and the main road. It was a straw-thatched building with a stone floor and an outside dry privy. I spent many happy hours there because one of my mates George Hadley lived there.

Because of a proposed road widening scheme, which never actually happened, the family had a detached house built a few yards away. They knocked the cottage down during the mid-thirties, but then the war broke out and the council had

no money for any road widening. Right outside the old cot stood an enormous pear tree, and every autumn Mrs Hadley used to say "Come on you kids! Bring your caps!". They were only small pears, but very sweet. In the very spot where the old cottage stood, a new bungalow now stands - it was such a pity that the old one was never listed!



(Howard Poultney collection)

Howard Poultney

Ramrod Hall

During the American War of Independence it was discovered that steel ramrods were more effective than the old-fashioned wooden ones. 'The Brades' steel works in Oldbury supplied the steel for the ramrods to be used by the British soldiers. One local contractor grew so rich out of this business that he was able to build himself, at Whiteheath, Rowley, a substantial and comfortable residence which was known as 'Ramrod Hall'. When the coal-mining era reached the Rowley Hills, the old hall was pulled down and a pit called Ramrod Hall Colliery was sunk in its grounds. In 1856 a disastrous explosion there cost the lives of eleven local colliers.

After 'Oldbury and Round About' by F W Hackwood

Portway Hall

My mother was friendly with Bella Pardoe, who married Bert Pardoe. They lived in one of the houses at the top of Throne Road. Bella Pardoe was a very kind lady and she paid a shilling each for all six of us children to be registered for our birth certificates. When Bella went up to Portway Hall to visit her in-laws, my mother sometimes went as well. She used to say that it was beautiful inside with lots of antiques, and she also told me there was a tunnel from there to Dudley Castle!

Evelyn Price

Spring Row & Jubilee Cottages



Residents of Spring Row and Jubilee Cottages at their Coronation Party in 1953 (*Florence Messenger collection*)

Spring Row were the larger houses and the road ran off Titford Lane. Jubilee Cottages (presumably built in 1887 or 1897, one of Queen Victoria's Jubilees) were one up, with a bit of a scullery. All the brew houses were outside. I remember when we were kids, we had a huge pump at the bottom of the entry which both of the neighbours also used, and we had to go down to the bottom of the entry for our water. In the early thirties we went modern and we had one of those little hand pumps put in and then in the late thirties they put the water in the house. When I was young we had dry toilets although many other people had water laid on. They could flush, but we couldn't, and so the night soilers had to come!

Howard Poultney

What I remember most about Spring Row and Jubilee Cottages was the diphtheria outbreak. It was really bad, and somebody in nearly every house went down with it. I must have been about 6, so that would be 1929 or 30. My mother and brothers caught it, and my father was away at the time convalescing, so I had to go to live with one aunt and my sister with another. The ones that were at work had to come home and look after themselves. The worst thing about it to me was that you were forced to have your house fumigated, and the stuff they used smelled horrible, just like fish glue. To me it was a dreadful time, and I felt that we were at the mercy of everybody.

Florence Messenger



This photograph of Beatrice Poultney taken in 1921 has an interesting background. Behind the hinged wooden door above ground level the ashes from coal fires and human excrement from the dry privies was contained. This was removed by the night-soilers and sometimes used as fertiliser. (*Howard Poultney collection*)

The Willetts family
of Jubilee Cottages.
(Howard Poultney
collection)



Hadley's Buildings

There were two sets of 'Hadley's Buildings' in Whiteheath. One was up the foredraught next to the Methodist Chapel in Birchfield Lane, and one opposite the Catholic Church. The latter were the 'infamous' Hadley's buildings, built in a square. In the centre of the dirt square there was the one tap, and that sufficed for everything. These houses were back to back, one down, with a small scullery, and two up, and maybe a glory hole. In the twenties and early thirties several large families occupied them. The toilets were in a block, away from the houses.

Howard Poultney

The coming of the gypsies

From a tender age I witnessed gypsies passing through the village. These nomads were treated with disdain by many folk, but, like most things, there are exceptions to the rule. In the late twenties, a cavalcade of caravans entered Whiteheath from the direction of Oldbury. As we youngsters stared spellbound at greyhounds and lurchers trotting obediently beneath the caravans, we all wondered why their paws were never run over by the wheels. The leading caravan stopped by the foredraught and the driver opened the five-barred gate. They had received permission to set up a temporary camp.

In the weeks that followed, only two caravans remained, the others having left the area in twos and threes. By this time we had met and spoken to several of the gypsies, and we found them to be extremely polite, but with no Black Country accent like ours. Their surname was Loveridge, and I never found out what caused them to quit the Romany life. With the many horses they had had when they arrived, they were clearly horse traders. The two remaining caravans eventually found a home two or three hundred yards from Richard's farm, virtually behind the old 'Gate' pub. There they remained for many years.

Jimmy, the youngest son, was my own age, and many's the cup of tea I had with him, his mom and aunt in their home on wheels. The one spectacle that I missed, and I still rue the day, was the burning of the caravans in traditional Romany style when their mother and aunt had died - a one-off, never to be repeated in Whiteheath. By then the boys were living with their own families - in houses.

Howard Poultney



Mary Johnson, the mother of Florence Messenger, on her 21st birthday in 1905, in the gardens of Hadley's Buildings by the Chapel. (Florence Messenger collection)



The towering block of Threlfall House. (Sandwell Community History and Archives collection)

first to move into that block and we all moved in within weeks of each other. In about two months it was full, but the road still hadn't been built.

Our flat was beautiful, brand new and modern with a bathroom and hot running water. We had under floor heating and paid 18 shillings a week on a separate card for it when we first moved in. They didn't mix young with old in those days. Families with children would be together on the bottom floors, older people whose children had grown up would be on the middle floors, and on the top floors would be just young couples. I loved my high rise flat. I liked the privacy and it was friendly since you knew everyone on your floor. We took turns on a Sunday morning to keep the landing clean and tidy. Mr Ray Harris, the caretaker, kept an eye on the whole building and was quite strict, so it was always kept nice.

We lived in that same flat on the eleventh floor for seventeen and a half years. My husband would love to stand on the balcony and look up over Throne Road. We only moved because they started mixing all sorts of people up on different floors and it caused a lot of hassle, as well as problems about the state of the landings. Threlfall House itself has been demolished now.

Olive Mellor

RIP

They came in the fifties and sixties, the pride of their day, and they lasted about forty years! All (good) things come to an end and the high-rise flats are now being demolished to make way for more human-sized buildings.



Flats towering above Queens Road are brought low. (Michael Scarrott collection)

Hackwood House

I went to live there when I married my husband in 1963. They were beautiful flats when we moved in. We moved out in 1967 because my husband was made redundant. We lived on the top floor and it was a nightmare when my daughter was little, because she would hear the ice cream van, but by the time we got down to the ground floor it would be gone.

Evelyn Price

Rounds Green to Threlfall House

I used to live at 77 Dingle Street. It had gas lighting when we first moved in and no hot running water, never mind a bathroom. When the whole side of our street was condemned, we had no choice but to move. That's how we came to move from Rounds Green into a brand new high-rise flat in Threlfall House on Lion Farm. We missed our garden and the people we had left behind, although a lot of people moved up to Lion Farm at around the same time. The ground wasn't finished when we moved in. We were the very

Church and chapel

Whiteheath Methodist Chapel

Whiteheath Methodist Chapel in Birchfield Lane was the first church in the area, erected in 1873. The original building was replaced by one on the opposite side of Birchfield Lane which is now the headquarters of the local St John's Ambulance brigade. (Howard Poultney collection)



I remember going to Sunday school at the old Whiteheath Methodist Chapel, before they built the new one on the opposite side of Birchfield Lane. I was regularly on the anniversaries - it was so popular that you had to get to the service very early - if you were any way late you had to take a chair to sit outside and listen. They were always held at the end of May and we were dressed up in our best dresses and bonnets. There were three services the first Sunday and two services the next Sunday. I always had a new pair of white shoes and a pair of black patent ones, because my gran spoilt me. In the fifties I remember us having a book of tickets to each buy a brick to build the new church, but we didn't get our names on them.

Betty Worley



(Evelyn Price collection)

I was always on the anniversary. I went to the Sunday school twice without fail every Sunday and sometimes three times. I loved Sunday school. We used to practice on Tuesday evenings as well for the anniversary. The picture shows Mr J. Smart, on the right, and Alfred Evans in the trilby hat with members of Whiteheath Chapel on the Sunday afternoon of an anniversary in May in the twenties. You can see the 'Tocky Bonk' in the background.

Evelyn Price



Whiteheath Methodist Sunday School parade in 1912. The girl in black at the front is Mary Johnson, Howard Poultney's mother. The man in the boater is Joseph Smart, the Minister. The boys were in awe of him because he used to walk down the middle of the road and look at them as if to say "You'd better follow me to chapel, or else!". The last building in the row is the chapel, and next to it the white building is the old 'Bull's Head'. (Howard Poultney collection)

We went to the old Whiteheath Sunday School every Sunday. It was a must! My father had an annual outing to the Sunday School Anniversary. Nearly all the men turned out for that, but church going wasn't their regular habit.

We walked around the streets down to Birchley Bridge and back, and as far as Uplands Avenue. Throne Road was a cobbled street then and there were only a few houses. In the other direction we went up Pool Lane and back down Ashes Road. There were lots of children then, especially at anniversary time. We were on our best behaviour that day, dressed up to the nines. I had a blazer and a panama hat and ankle strap shoes, but as soon as you got home it was "get 'em off and put away 'til next Sunday!". We always had something new for the anniversary, but we weren't allowed to wear it again until a good twelve months later.

George Round was one of the Sunday School teachers. He was an electrician, and did the lighting for the new building. There were quite a few of us of the same age who went to school together. We could be a bit of a nuisance at times. George would say "Come on, part!", and he'd sit in the middle to keep us under control. Dicky Glaze, one of the elders, always announced 'Hymn 111' as "we will now sing hymn number one hundred and onety-one"!

When we first went to Sunday School, we were put in the vestry while the grown-ups were in the Church Hall, and we had to read test cards all round the walls. They'd tell us stories, but like all kids we'd have a little snigger at what took our fancy.

Florence Messenger

Fishing for prizes

On Sundays I had the choice of going to Sunday School at the chapel or going fishing with my grandfather. It was no contest, and I used to go fishing! It was far more interesting than listening to boring sermons about being saved from hellfire. My mother never forced me to go regularly, although she would have preferred it to the fishing.

On one occasion I did give in to her wishes as it was prize-giving day. I went in my best clothes with my hated striped woollen tie. They gave out the first prizes to those who had attended regularly with congratulations all round, and then the second prizes with encouragement to be better next year. One small book was left on the table, and to my embarrassment my name was called. The book was presented with a lecture on the importance of attendance, and I went a deeper shade of crimson. It was a third prize - the lowest of all, and the only one given that day. I never went back, and concentrated on the fishing.

Howard Poultney

St James's Church, Rounds Green

The Brades' Steel Works, ten brick factories and seven collieries constituted Rounds Green during the latter part of the 19th century, and the only place of worship was a small Primitive Methodist Chapel and Day School.

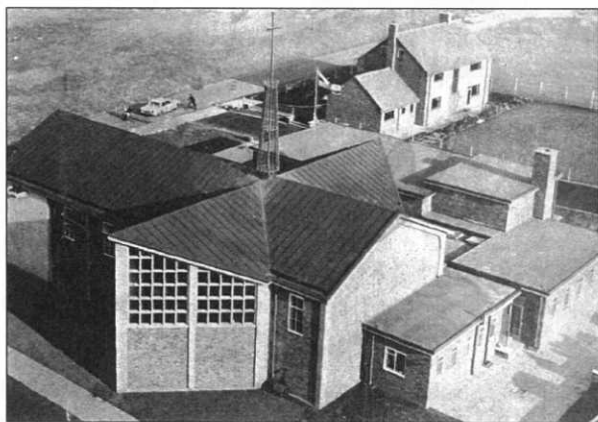
Several Church of England families moved into the district to work in these factories and became interested in facilities for their chosen form of worship. A room over the Post Office in Brades Road was used for meetings.

The Revd Michael Pryor of Langley became interested in their work, and enlisted the financial help of the manufacturers in the district, with the result that a Mission Church was opened on July 25th, 1892 on land given by Miss Palmer of Malvern. William Showell, the Langley brewer, and members of his family provided the pulpit, organ and stained glass windows.

Families from Gypsy Lane (now City Road), Tividale, Whiteheath and Oldbury attended the Mission Church and as the congregation grew, the Revd G A Anning was appointed Curate-in-Charge and stayed until 1900. The development of the area continued, and the Parish of Rounds Green was formed in 1905 with the Revd Leon Gabbott as Vicar. He was followed by Revd P Burnett in 1908, who stayed for 36 years until his ministry ended through ill health in 1944.



Old St James's Church, Rounds Green, opened 1892. (From 'Picturesque Oldbury')



The new St James's Church on Lion Farm Estate at the time of its opening in 1964. (From the Church Stewardship brochure)

Revd Burchill predicted in the forties that the church would need to be moved to the Lion Farm Estate to better serve the people. Revd J B Martin became Vicar in 1959, and under his guidance, Mr Burchill's prophecy materialised and the Vicarage and the new St. James's Church were built on the Lion Farm Estate. "Many of the older people here loved old St. James's so much that they feel hard hit indeed that the transfer of the population has resulted in the resiting of St. James's."

From the foreword by Mr W Stevens to "St. James's Church, Rounds Green" for their 1964 Stewardship Campaign.

The 'temporary' organist

In September 1963, I received a letter from the Revd John Martin, Vicar of St. James's, inviting me to become the first organist and choirmaster of the new church. I was very keen until a model of the new building was produced showing the priest at one end and choir and organ at the other. Throughout my church life I have preferred a building where priest, organ and choir were together, so very reluctantly I declined.

The choir of St Michael's, Langley, took part in the opening ceremony in 1964, with a Mr Hicks playing the organ. One day in May 1966, an urgent 'phone call from the new vicar, Revd Michael Griffiths, informed me that Mr Hicks was in hospital, and asked if I would take over until he was well.

In August I took my family on a three-week holiday, and on my return was greeted with the news that the organist had suffered a heart attack, and was dead and buried. Was I prepared to carry on? I agreed to continue until Christmas to give them enough time to find another player, and were singing regular anthems, so leaving at that time would have been a let-down for the members who were enjoying their singing. Everyone knew I was only 'temporary', but I stayed, working with five incumbents, for thirty years, and finally left in September 1996.



Walter Latham at the organ of St James's . (Walter Latham collection)



By this time the choir had grown, and were singing regular anthems, so leaving at that time would have been a let-down for the members who were enjoying their singing. Everyone knew I was only 'temporary', but I stayed, working with five incumbents, for thirty years, and finally left in September 1996.

Walter Latham

St James's choir eight years after Walter Latham took over as organist, at the wedding of his son, Derek, and Delia Warwick. (Walter Latham collection)

The Sunday School in the front room

In the sixties between the old St James's Church closing and the new church opening, we had the Sunday School in our front room in Birchfield Lane. Revd Martin often used to visit my gran, and we had a piano, so he asked if we could have the Sunday School. I was married by then and we used to wake up on a Sunday morning to "All things bright and beautiful" and "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam".

Betty Worley

Other places of worship

In 1962 Rounds Green Methodist Church moved from Brades Road to the corner of Newbury Lane and the Wolverhampton Road, a position where it could serve its old community and the new Lion Farm estate. The Catholic community was served by the Church of the English Martyrs on the Blackheath and Rowley Regis side of the crossroads at Whiteheath.

Learning

Rounds Green Library

A new branch library, "centrally situated in an important position on the Lion Farm Estate" and costing £18,000 was opened on 6th January 1966 by Cllr Frank Giles. Revd Martin composed a special prayer of dedication for the opening. It had a stock of 10,000 books and "provides for a full and adequate adult and junior service for the estimated 10,000 persons living in the area". The opening brochure shows how times have changed: "A large fixed seat is provided in the hall so that parents, if they wish, may leave there a young child while making use of the library service".



Summer activities at Rounds Green Library, 1990 (Rounds Green Library collection)

Vi Allbrooke, the first Branch Librarian, is quoted as saying "It was an unusual situation - the estate half-built, no school, no shops - only the church, the library, the pub and the local bobby on the beat. A kind of 'deserted village' for many hours during the day with people at work or off to Oldbury or Blackheath to do the shopping. Eventually, it was to become a thriving and energetic community of which the library was an important part, especially in its association with the school."

Based on Library records

The mid-eighties saw the beginning of a community partnership between the Lion Farm estate and its library which remains as firm now, in the new millennium, as it was in the last two decades. It began with a simple idea: residents and professionals working on the estate combining to pull the community together. The library was seen as an ideal 'centre' in all senses of the word, the geographical centre of the estate (almost) and a centre in which people could meet.

So, Rounds Green Library became the headquarters of the Lion Farm Community Group, with library staff playing key roles in events such as the 'Lion Farm Funday' and the annual 'Rosebud' and 'Rose Queen' competitions. The 'Funday' was probably the highlight of the year. I can only remember good weather, and the sight of what seemed like the whole estate descending on the land that is now St James's School playing field to enjoy, amongst other attractions, Mr Tweddle's funfair.

At this time the library began to host its annual Christmas party for the over-sixties, wonderful occasions with food provided by local shops and entertainment by the schools. The summer holidays were packed with activities for the children. In 1996 Rounds Green became the first library to have a homework club, a model for the others in the borough to follow. This year a 'Learning Centre' was opened, catering for all ages and staff share their knowledge of computers with residents young and old alike. Talking and spending time with people who have become friends is still the important part of being a community library.

Kim Mcroft, Rounds Green Librarian 1984-1992

Rowley Hall Primary School

On November 27th 1939 Rowley Hall Council school opened for children between five and eight years, with Mrs K M Mucklow as head teacher. 166 children were transferred from Siviters Lane Infants School, 70 from Knowle Infants School and only 10 from the Oldbury area. It was never 'officially' opened because it was wartime. The school log book for 14th August 1940 records that, owing to enemy air raids in the early hours of the morning, the school did not open until 10.00 and only half of the children were in attendance.

From an article by B M Holyhead, a teacher from 1946-1984, in the school's 50th anniversary magazine

St Michael's School

St Michael's Church of England School, next to the church at Langley Green, was opened in 1893 as a mixed school with pupils from 3 to 14 years old. An Oldbury man, Mr John Beach, was the first headmaster, and his wife ran the Infants Department. The vicar called weekly to inspect the pupils and staff, and take the teachers' salaries. In January 1932, the school reopened after the Christmas break as a secondary school for pupils 11 to 14 with J H Orgill as Headmaster.

By 1962 the problems of the old buildings were very serious. A programme on the cramped conditions was shown on BBC TV, and a deputation sent to the Minister of Education. Despite this, the application for a new school was turned down. A 'Youth Wing' was completed on the Throne Road site in 1970. Shortly afterwards, the governors met to discuss a new school at Lion Farm, and it was agreed that it would be a Church of England Voluntary Controlled School. The new school was one of the first in the country to have a specialised unit for 20 physically disabled pupils. It opened in September 1973, under a new Head, Harry Nottingham, and pupils and staff moved from Langley Green. The school's relationship with St Michael's continues, and the pupils worship each year at the church on St Michael's Day.

From "St Michael's Church of England High School. A history of the first hundred years in words and pictures, 1893 to 1993" by Sheila Harper

Good Shepherd School

This school opened in 1899, and, like St Michael's, was attached to its own church, the Mission Church of the Good Shepherd. It closed when Whiteheath Junior School was opened on the estate, and is now Churchbridge Training Centre. I went to the Good Shepherd during the war, like my dad and his brothers and sisters before me. There were two male teachers, Mr Hastelow, the Headmaster, and Mr Knotcut. All the others were women because the men were away fighting in the war. We took our gas masks to school, and I remember going into the brick shelters one day when the sirens went off. Later, I worked on the school meals there until I transferred up to Whiteheath Junior School on the estate.

Betty Worley

Lion Farm Action Centre

The action centre in Harry Price House came about because three residents, Edith Turner, Malcolm Wilkinson-Jones and myself, had the idea of setting up somewhere on the estate for people to go for training and help with employment. We were told that if enough people were interested we could have a public meeting, and it went from there. It took nearly four years, and, to tell the truth, we didn't expect anything to come of it. We were part of the selection panel when the first Centre Co-ordinator, Pernille Cauchi, was appointed. She put in a lot of hard work, and the Open Day in September 1993 was a wonderful community event in which over thirty local organisations took part.

Ken Doughty

Working

Dairy Farms

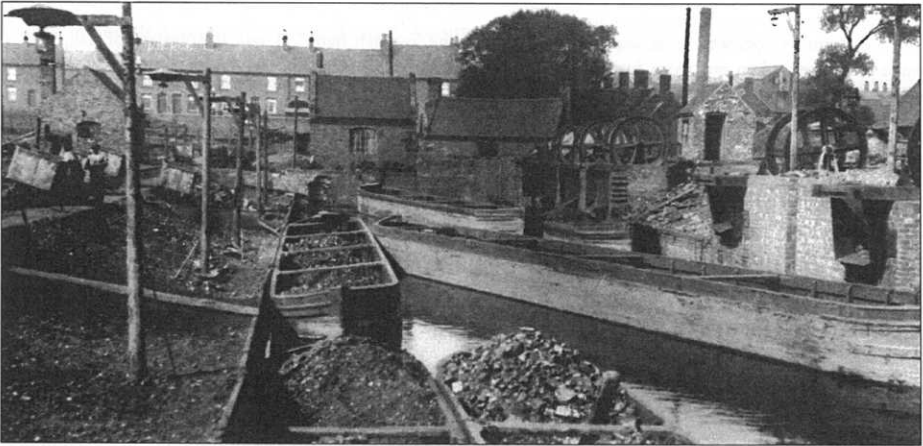
There were four dairy farms in or near Whiteheath in the twenties and early thirties: Richards's, Monk's, Merri's and Skidmore's. You couldn't go wrong for milk! Skidmore's Farm was on the right hand side going up Throne Road, and the whole of it was swallowed up by the Lion Farm Estate.

As an eight year old I helped to deliver groceries to Skidmore's Farm in a makeshift dobbie. While Mrs Skidmore unloaded the rickety contraption, I wandered off to the cowsheds to watch Mr Skidmore milking the cows. On seeing me, he said "Bend down a bit and see where the milk is coming from". I fell for it, and got a squirt of the white stuff right in the face. I'll never forget that little caper!

A few years later, I accompanied him on several occasions delivering milk all around the Rowley Regis and Springfield area.

Howard Poultney

Coal Wharves



The coal wharf at Titford showing laden coal barges and the end of the incline from Rowley Hall Colliery. Barges were loaded by hand from the coal piles tipped out of the trucks on the left. Primitive electric lights are suspended from the wooden poles along the wharf to allow loading day and night. The line of houses in the background is Jubilee Cottages. (*Sandwell Community History and Archives collection*)

In Titford Lane next to Swan Bridge there was a wharf that served the pits on the Rowley Hills. A railway brought the tubs of coal from Rowley Hall Colliery to the narrow boats waiting there on the Titford Canal. They were loaded by hand by the coal heavers. After 1900 there were few active pits in the area, and the last of them closed around 1920 when the mines became impossibly flooded following the miners lock-out in 1922. The wharves were then used for a reverse trade, coal being brought in by boat and sold from them.

When I was small, the coal wharves were still full of water, and we used to swim in them. One of the silly things we did as kids was to roll down the grass as fast as possible and dive into the canal.

Howard Poultney

Brickworks

When 'Birchley Coppice' estate, which included 'Whiteheath Villa', was sold late in the nineteenth century, much of it was covered with pit spoil from the coal mining, but the sale particulars claimed "There is a valuable bed of celebrated Oldbury Marl underlying the estate". Several brickworks were started in the area to exploit the clay. Ramrod Pool collected in the marl-hole supplying the brick yard at the old colliery. 'Newbury Lane Brickworks' were close to Ivy House Farm on the slopes of the Rowley Hills.

In 1900 John William Devey Pratt opened a new brickyard which he called 'New Century Brickworks', although it is remembered as 'Pratt's Brickyard'. It was the last working brickyard in the area and many people using Accles and Pollock's sports field nearby remember the clouds of smoke from its large square chimney on Sundays as the fire was restarted for the week's production [photograph on page 26]. The marl-hole lay between Newbury Lane and the factory at the end of the Portway Arm of the Titford Canal. The whole site, marl-hole, factory and canal, has been levelled and is now part of the public open space.

Terry Daniels

In 1903 J W D Pratt built a large house for his own use which has become 'Newbury Sports and Social Club' today. Eventually, he sold his house to the Pardoe family, who divided it into two dwellings. In the sixties Oldbury United Football Club bought the Pardoe's half for use as a club-house, and later purchased the other half too. Around 1993 the building was sold and developed for its present-day use.

John Whitehouse

The red ash bank

Beyond Ramrod Pool was a hill that they used to call the 'red ash bank'. It was a mountain of ash, which must have been taken out from furnaces, whether from coke burning or firing boilers, I don't know. The ashes were sold to road makers or contractors.

Howard Poultney

Red-hot snakes

We would stand fascinated on 'Tater Row Bridge' over the canal in Birchfield Lane and watch the men rolling the steel at Birchley Rolling Mills. The steel came out of the 'ovens' red hot, and as they passed through the rolls on to the floor of the mill, they would wriggle like giant snakes. Then the men hammered them and great clouds of smoke filled the mill.

The men wore towels around their necks to absorb the sweat. You can imagine what the heat would be like during the summer! Often, after a shift, you would see the men walk up to the 'New Hotel'. How many pints it would take to put back the fluids they had lost, we can only guess, but I know from watching them that they earned every one!

Betty Worley

As late as 1938 Birchley Rolling Mills were still having three 40 ton deliveries of coal chippings each week for their furnaces brought from Cannock by Ernie Thomas's canal boats.

Frank Hadley

The rolling mills were run down by British Steel and, despite the best efforts of the workforce to save the company, it was closed in the early seventies.



Red-hot bars passing through the mills at Birchley and snaking across the mill floor. (Terry Daniels collection)

Working 'down Accles's'

Accles and Pollock came to Oldbury in 1902 as a new company just a couple of years old. They were pioneers in making tubes by cold drawing, and mainly supplied them to the growing cycle industry. The firm grew rapidly to become the largest employer in Oldbury, with over 5000 employees in the fifties. Many men and women from Whiteheath and many of those who moved out of Oldbury and Rounds Green to the new Lion Farm Estate were Accles's employees.

The production of tubes was a simple process, but involved hard work. The end of a short tube was 'tagged' - heated and flattened - to fit through a circular die. This was attached to a grip, the 'dog', and the tube drawn through the die to reduce it to the correct size using a mechanical draw-bench. The process required two men, the 'drawer', who was in charge, and the 'dogger'. With tongue in cheek their Chairman, Walter Hackett, once described the process to an official visitor as "We take a hole and put the metal round it!".

The firm gave much back to the community, symbolised, perhaps, by the manufacture of the cross for the new St James's Church in their workshops. They were an inventive company, both in business and otherwise, and were the first company to supplement wartime rations in their canteen by raising their own pigs on part of their playing fields at Birchley. A hint of more rural times!



A draw-bench at Accles and Pollock with the 'drawer' feeding the tube through the die and the 'dogger' ensuring that the tag is firmly gripped. (Terry Daniels collection)

Terry Daniels

Spalding's slaughterhouse

I used to go and play with Evelyn, the daughter of the aptly-named Mr Bones, who lived on Spalding's site and used to fetch the dead animals on his horse-drawn, flat-bottomed cart. We used to play tick, hopscotch and skipping in the yard and fields. It was funny, you couldn't smell Spalding's there, but you certainly could in Whiteheath, where we lived!

Evelyn Price

British Road Services [BRS]

There was a BRS depot on the present site of 'Toys-R-Us' from 1962. Before this, the land had been a field where Spaldings slaughtered animals in a small shed. I began working for BRS at Dudley in the early fifties before moving to the new Birchley Crossings depot. At first I was a 'trailer lad', helping the driver with certain loads. In 1952 the basic wage was three guineas [£3.15] per week, but if I worked eleven hours a day for five days, all day on Saturday and on Sunday morning, I could take home the princely sum of £10. I gave my wife £6, and out of my £4 could run an Austin A30 car and have a drink at the week-end.

Eventually, I started making local runs as a driver, and then long-distance runs as well. 'Trunk and shunt' we called it - one week journeys to distant London or Swansea, and the next week local trips. A long distance driver would bring in, say, a load of wool from the depot at Batley, Yorkshire, and a short run driver would take it on to the carpet factory at Kidderminster. In the afternoon we would collect steel from Baldwins at Brockmoor, and the night-shift took these to Batley for a shunter to forward to Huddersfield.

I remember working with lorries made by Atkinsons [you needed four blokes with rope round the starting handle to get those going], Leylands, Guys [from Wolverhampton] and Seddon-Atkinsons. One five-year contract was for Lyons cakes, but when that came to an end, I'd had enough and left the job.

Gerry Martin

Shopping

Whiteheath shops in the thirties

You could count them on one hand! Robinson's Buildings, a big house, stood on the corner where Whiteheath Community Centre is now. Then there was Siddaway's fish shop, my uncle John's shop, Hewitt's papershop, and finally Ward's. Mrs Ward sold wallpaper and clothes, but not at the same time - I can't remember which came first! There were a few houses in between. The Robinsons, who lived next to Uncle John Johnson's shop, turned the front half of their house into a chemist's shop. A fish shop was run by Mr and Mrs Siddaway, who had three children George, Frank and Nancy. George was a carpenter, working further up towards Blackheath. Frank went to Wales as a minister and came back to play the organ when the new chapel was opened. John Johnson, my father's brother, sold all sorts - food, paraffin, candles, anything you wanted. The paper shop was run by Mr and Mrs Aaron Hewitt. When they took the papers out, they never walked, they always ran. On the corner by the traffic lights opposite 'The Gate' was Mrs Swift's shop, old Mrs Harrison lived in the next and then Brain's. Brain's was a general store, and Mr Brain used to push a wicker basket on wheels selling sausage. After this it was houses down to Tater Row Bridge.

Florence Messenger

Newsagents

When we were kids there used to be a newsagent in Whiteheath, right where Lancaster House is now. It was run by Daisy Harrold, who had relatives in America and they used to send American newspapers. They were very thick, and we kids were enthralled because inside there was a supplement with each newspaper, 'the funnies'. Daisy used to lend them to us.

Howard Poultney

Mrs Daisy Harrold and her daughter Marie are outside her paper shop in the late twenties. Elsie and Aaron Hewitt's shop is next door. At this time Whiteheath had a chapel and four pubs, 'The Vine', 'The Bull's Head', 'The Gate' and 'The New Hotel'. 'The Gate' is just visible in the picture by the tiny white square on the wall in the background.

Evelyn Price



(Marion Walker collection)

The sweet shop

On the right hand side of Birchfield Lane going towards Oldbury, opposite the old chapel, there was a row of cottages and a little shop kept by Mrs Brain, who sold sweets. You had to go down steps from the pavement into the shop, and I think it was their front room that had been converted. I can just remember her from when I was a child in the forties - a little grey-haired lady in a crossover pinny.

Betty Worley

The butchers

Two butchers served Whiteheath, Burgess's, near to the start of Birchfield Lane, and Alf Levett from Penn cricket Lane. Mr Levett sold his meat from an open-sided, roofed horse-drawn cart.

Howard Poultney

The fish shop

One of my favourite shops in Whiteheath in the fifties was the fish shop, run by Bade and Annie Perks. She had her little finger missing and, as children, we always used to check in case we had her little finger in with our chips!

Betty Worley

Annie Peel's

On the same side of Birchfield Lane, towards the Birchley Bridge, there were some old terraced houses. Miss Annie Peel ran a shop in one of them. It was open all the time until late at night, and on Sundays as well. I remember her old fashioned scales with the metal weights. Of course she didn't have a till, just an old wooden drawer to keep the money in.

You could buy anything you might be desperate for on a Sunday, cures for the men's hangovers from the night before, stomach powders, a dummy to placate the baby, remedies, sweets, stockings, cigarettes. There were always bile beans on the counter. My favourite sweets were the liquorice strips and the anised balls.



She lived at the shop with her elderly mother. As you walked in a bell would sound, but you could be standing there quite some time before she finally appeared. Children being children, some took advantage and it was not unusual when walking down the street to the shop to come across little groups of children sharing out the sweets from their pockets.

She must have finished when they widened the road in the sixties. She was always one of my favourites - everyone went to Annie Peel's.

Betty Worley

The shop of E & L Jones, general dealer, was on the Blackheath side of Whiteheath Gate. It was run by Lawrence Jones (the 'L') and his sister Elizabeth (the 'E'). Their mother Clara is in the centre, with Lawrence on the right and Elizabeth's husband, Samuel Wimbush on the left. The shop had originally been built as a lock-up, but later had the top storey added. (*Alan Jones collection*)

Doctors

One of the local doctors was Dr Jones. His surgery in Siviter's Lane, Rowley Regis, was always jam-packed, and he would come out any time of the day or night on his bike if you were ill. Our doctor was Dr Ribchester, a very elegant man and a habitual smoker. His surgery was in Blackheath, and there was no doctor based in Whiteheath itself.

In the late twenties and early thirties TB was rife, but most could not afford to go to a sanatorium. Instead, they stayed in bed, or moved into an outside shed. One lad had a shed in Richard's field across the road from their house, and another lived in an old brewhouse. I remember one sad day when Titford Road was covered in straw to deaden the noise of the cartwheels and hooves as he was dying.

Howard Poultney

Playing

The pig and the band

My mother used to tell me that as a young child, before World War I, she visited her grandfather who kept the 'Bull's Head' pub on the Whiteheath Road. He always kept a few pigs in the back yard and she has many times seen him slit the throat and hang them up to drain, catching the blood to make black pudding. Although it is claimed by other parts of the Black Country, she has actually been beside her grandfather when he stood one of the piglets on the wall 'to see the band go by'. The band was the one leading the anniversary parade from one of the local Sunday Schools.

Audrey Taylor

Pat Collins's Fair

Twice a year, a fair used to come to the corner of Throne Road. Many a happy hour was passed watching the booths being erected and then spending our penny pocket money 'having a go' at hoop-la, roll-a-penny and so on. Quite a lot of the pennies would roll off the top of the stall and when the stall holder was busy on the other side we crawled underneath to 'pinch' back the lost pennies to have another go.

One of the main attractions was the boxing booth. I seem to recall it was 1/- [5p] to go in and the tent would hold about fifty people, mostly men, since in those days it wasn't seemly for women to enjoy boxing. Anyway, after a few rounds between the professional boxers the referee would invite any men in the audience to come up and try their skill in a three one-minute round fight against one of the show boxers. If the volunteer managed to last the full three minutes without being knocked out they would earn £5. Hardly any volunteer did last the full distance as the professional boxer would let them land a few good punches in the first two rounds, but during the third he would come in for the kill. I seem to remember the Turpin Brothers boxing there as professionals at one time.

Joe Taylor

Pub games



The pubs were important centres for pastimes and entertainment. Many had football teams in local leagues, such as Whiteheath FC based at 'The Gate'. The gentler indoor sports of dominoes and darts were well represented too.

The 'Bull's Head' Football Team with cups and shields around 1920. Some of the players have been identified: Back: ?, Harry 'Nedler' Harvey, ?, Sam Willetts; 3rd row: Jim Mallin, Tom Johnson (trainer), Jack Calloway, Bill Pearsall, ?, Jack Fletcher; 2nd row: ?, Bert Mallin, ?; Front row: ?, ?, ?, ?, ?. (*Ray Lowe collection*)



The darts team outside 'The Vine' [now 'The Fox'] in February 1949, including Bob Messenger and the landlord, Jack Johnson. (Florence Messenger collection)



The darts team from 'The Gate Inn' in the fifties. The landlady for 34 years was Millie Calloway who kept on the license when her husband died. (Gwen Wilson collection)

and we moved into the flat above them.

My husband was, and still is, a full-time council gardener, but then he also had the job of switching on the water heaters for the showers on match days, and opening up and allocating the dressing rooms. There was also a kitchen opening out on to the pitches from where we served refreshments, mainly at 'half-time', when a roaring trade was done in hot drinks on cold afternoons. We were also responsible for cleaning and securing these amenities.

The pitches and dressing rooms were opened by the Bishop of Birmingham, accompanied by our 'civic dignitaries'. This, though, was not our greatest hour - when the new St James's Church was built, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh performed the opening ceremony, landing by helicopter on 'our' field.

Throughout this period the estate was being built up into the present community. The five football pitches were increased to eight, more dressing rooms built, and a children's play-centre added at the side of the building. We moved out at this point, and now I understand that the flat is used as a crèche.

At the beginning, when we moved in, there was a marl-hole nearby serving Pratt's brickyard - but this became redundant, and was used as a land-fill site. When the flats in Wallace Close were built, the spoil from the 'tocky-bonk' that was there topped the whole lot off, this being transported across Newbury Lane for some considerable time.

Bill & Pauline Mercer

A monk in 'The Phoenix'

The first sacristan at St James's, was Eric Dawes, who was assisted at times by his brother, Jim. Jim was a colourful character with a strong penchant for the ministry. After a few years of praying, soul-searching and help from the vicar, Michael Griffiths, he finally offered himself, but not quite in the manner expected. He became Brother Jim, a monk, a grey friar of the Order of St Francis.

During his three-year period of probation, Brother Jim could be seen around the parish, clad in a monk's habit, complete with knotted girdle. Sometimes after a church meeting, we would adjourn to the 'Phoenix', including Jim. Our entrance would cause a deathly silence, only to be broken by Jim saying "It goes well for fancy dress, doesn't it?"

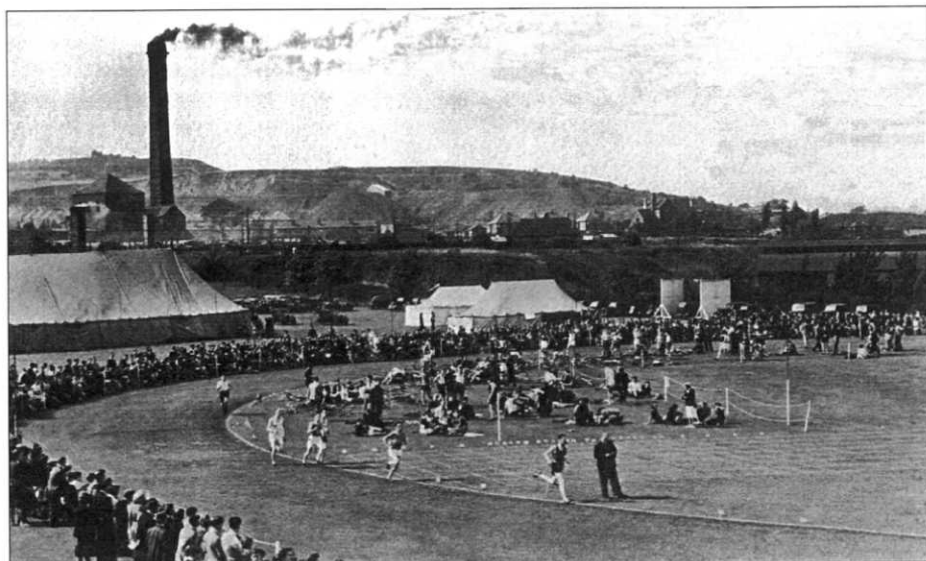
Walter Latham

Lion Farm Playing Fields

In the early sixties there were already football pitches in the area of what became the Lion Farm Playing Fields. However, in 1964 five new pitches were laid out, dressing rooms built

Accles & Pollock's 'Birchley' Sports Ground and Social Club

At the junction of Birchfield Lane and the New Wolverhampton Road, near the present M5 island, used to be Accles & Pollock's Sports Club and grounds.



'Apollympics' at Accles & Pollock's sports field in 1948. Houses in Newbury Lane and the quarrying on the Rowley Hills are clearly seen. Pratt's brickyard chimney is in full cry but the wind is not, on this occasion, blowing the smoke over the sportsmen. (*'Apollo' Magazine*)

During the early war years, the grounds-man was Mr Fred Clark, and he and his family lived at the house within the grounds. I was a friend of his daughter and spent time with her in the grounds playing tennis. Mr Clark kept several pigs in brick sties in the grounds and these were fed on kitchen scraps and peelings. They were bred and reared to provide meat for use in the works and office canteens. Accles & Pollock provided subsidised meals for their workers, which was a great help during times of rationing.

The Social Club was well attended. They held twice-weekly dances, where a member could sign in an extra non-employee friend for a free night out. I went to Thursday and Saturday night dances in the late 1940s - in fact it was there that I got to know the young man whom I eventually married in 1952! I never worked at Accles & Pollock myself, but my dad worked there for almost 30 years, and my elder brother was also employed for a number of years. The social club stewards in the late 1940s were Mr & Mrs Baldock. Accles & Pollock, as well as using the grounds for their own sporting events, allowed some of the local schools to hold their annual sports days there too, and it became a sporting venue for the area.

Pat Rodwell

The Empire Jazz Band of the thirties

The band had red, white and blue costumes, and nearly everybody from Whiteheath was in it. There were lots of bands at the time, and they used to travel round to compete against each other. My sisters won one or two trophies with the band. The money it raised went to the local hospitals.

Florence Messenger

Trails and trials

Before the idea of land re-use became popular after the war we 'lads' were doing it. In the late forties a large area of land behind the corner of Newbury Lane and the new Wolverhampton Road was derelict. The surface was irregular from the various dumpings of quarry spoil and mining waste and cut up by water erosion over the decades. It was a miniature Switzerland! Its steep hills, rock crags, scree-like slopes and stream ravines made an ideal trail for adventure cycling. We would strip our bikes down to bare essentials, not always leaving the brakes, and race round and over the hills in competitions of speed and bravery (and foolhardiness). It was great fun. I don't remember anyone getting seriously hurt in the many spills, or an infection from the spoil. A few years later we were doing the same thing on pipsqueak motor bikes, practicing for motorcycle 'trial' and 'scramble' events, and still having great fun.

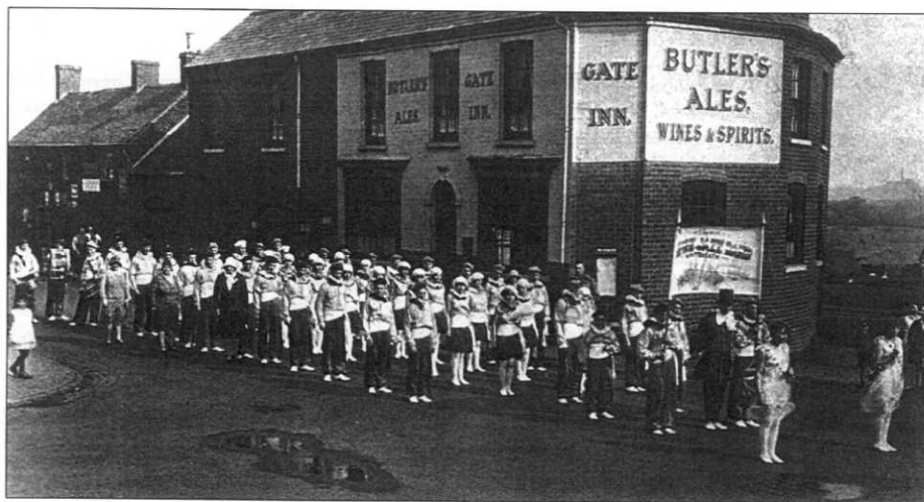
John Hodgkins

Titford Pool

To get into events at Titford Pool, you crossed over a narrow footbridge and there was a little hut for cups of tea and the tuppence entrance fee. Next to the hut was a wooden stage with seating. There were some lovely local singers, and Billy and Benny Plevin played the piano. Records were played as well and there were speakers all round the lake. One evening I was out with my friend Susie and Billy Parkes and Tommy Stevens. We were singing our heads off, but none of us had a watch and we were supposed to be home at 10 pm. At 11pm over the speakers came: "Will Miss Susie Comley and Miss Evelyn Pearson please come to the entrance as their mothers are waiting for them!" So everyone knew, and on the way back we met some more boys who said we should have been with them, because they had a watch! From Birchfield Lane you crossed over open fields to get to the lake. I used to nip over Richards's field through the back entrance and get in for free. The concerts were on Sunday afternoons and evenings, and we went home for tea in between. It was a proper talent contest - you were paid a few pence to volunteer, and the winner got a small prize. The pool itself had rowing boats. It was very popular, especially with courting couples! It was closed in the thirties or forties after a young girl drowned in the pool.

Evelyn Price

The Empire Jazz band at the crossroads in Whiteheath. Barbara Slim and Gladys Hadley lead the parade, and the man behind them is 'Nedler' Harvey. Most of Whiteheath's young people seem to be there. On the right of the picture is the area where the cows of Richards's Farm grazed, with a clear view across to Albright & Wilson's factory between Oldbury and Langley. (*Howard Poultney collection*)



There was a song we always sang at the concerts on Sunday nights about fifty or sixty years ago. It was to the tune of 'Lovely Lake in Loveland', and went like this:

*There's a lovely lake in Langley
Where all the people go
There's a lovely lake in Langley
And it's a real good show
There's a concert every Sunday night
and it finished
... None could be fairer
Than taking young Sarah
To Tittford Lake, you know!*

Ken Dakin

Other pastimes

Traditional local pastimes included whippet racing and pigeon flying. The Whiteheath Angling Society was formed in the thirties with its headquarters at the 'Bull's Head', next to the Methodist Chapel. They used to hire Ramrod Pool and have it stocked from time to time. They would fish there and down on the Severn on alternate weekends.

Howard Poultney

WHITEHEATH
ANGLING SOCIETY

HEADQUARTERS:
THE 'BULL'S HEAD' INN
WHITEHEATH

*

President MR. R. BARNESLEY
Chairman F. JONES (Sen.)
Treasurer C. PARRY
Secretary J. COMLEY

83 OLDBURY ROAD,
BLACKHEATH.

BANKS' NOTED ALES,
WINES AND SPIRITS

Furnour, Blm., Printers, Langley

Birchley Park

The 6-acre park was given by Walter Hackett of Accles and Pollock in 1920. He was involved in setting up the 'Sons of Rest' movement, and Birchley Park had one of the first such buildings to provide entertainment for retired men. In the early thirties I used to go and play in Birchley Park, when I was visiting my grandad. Mr Gilbert was the park keeper between the wars, and it was a nice park with the gardens well kept. Some of us children from Whiteheath used to play down there in the paddling pool and on the swings. Some school sports days were held there too.

Evelyn Price

The struggle for sports facilities

In the thirties, Accles and Pollock, Brades and Edwin Daŋks, the main employers in Rounds Green, all had top class recreation grounds and leisure facilities. Their football teams took part in the Birmingham Works League until the sixties. However, there was a lack of sports facilities for other members of the community. Walter Hackett and my father, Frank Giles, realised that a local stadium was needed with junior football to be the main beneficiary. Eventually, it was decided that a stadium should be built near the present Council House in the centre of Oldbury, but the war stopped the idea.

Frank Giles was elected to Oldbury Council in the fifties, and became its last Mayor, and again pressed for a stadium. Eventually, one was opened in Newbury Lane, but very little junior football was played there. Lion Farm Playing Fields opened in 1964, but on a very boggy site. Oldbury Council failed to provide the promised drainage system, and after some years of Saturday and Sunday matches it became a mud-bath! It improved when Saturday play was stopped, but still attempts to roll it left deep ruts from the tractor tyres! The nice dressing rooms and a competent council worker resident on the site made it a very good social place, but vandalism over the years has made it a desolation now. The private football grounds have all closed with the demise of the factories. So, the struggle for good facilities still continues.

Frank Giles (Jnr)

Parting thoughts ...

Benny Houghton's farm was on the left going down Newbury Lane to the Wolverhampton Road. We used to call him 'Benny-whack-a-penny', because, if the kids did anything for him, he would give them a penny and say "Whack that between you!". After WW2 he sold his farm and part of Ivy House Road was built where the old farmhouse had been.

Doris Townsend

In 1958 the old 'White Horse' pub was still there. It was a quaint old building with red-brick scrubbed floors. It was rumoured that Oliver Cromwell once visited there. Mrs Julia Northall, who ran it, was a grand old lady and very strict on keeping time and on good behaviour. She was also very good natured. If you had been away ill, she would always give you a free pint when you came back

Bill Neale and Doris Townsend

My husband James Parker worked at Accles and Pollock and became a craft designer. One of his projects was to make the cross for the top of the new St James's Church. It had to be lifted in position by helicopter.

Jean Parker

I was born at 13 Rounds Green Road, a house belonging to Accles and Pollock, where my father was working. We had to move to Newbury Lane after my parents died. When I was young, June fetes were held at the old St James's Church. They floodlit the tennis courts for dancing and had a band. It was *the* occasion on the green!

Betty Slater (née Holloway)

At the time of publication, two Whiteheath ladies have seen the whole of the twentieth century through, Lizzie Morris (102) and Sarah Briggs (100). We wish them well.

An appeal from Whiteheath and Lion Farm Local History Society

This book contains a few of the memories, photographs and items which make up the local history of the area. The society copies and photographs any original materials and 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 materials you could lend us to copy and add to the collection. Please contact Rounds Green Library.

This group meets at Rounds Green Library, Martley Road on the Lion Farm Estate. Details of its activities can be obtained from the library on 0121-552 2879.



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