

LANGLEY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY 1996 - 2016

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Even a history society has its own history, and that of Langley Local History Society (LLHS) dates back to St Valentine's Day, 1996. Its twentieth anniversary fell on 14th February 2016.

This booklet briefly tells the society's story over its first two decades. Not until you have re-read the old minutes and looked back, nostalgically perhaps, can you recall what the society did in that period, how much it has achieved, and who helped to make it ...

Origins

In the early 1990s staff at Langley Library, under Suzie Drew, held monthly coffee mornings with outside speakers which were well attended and greatly appreciated. However, in 1995 the Library Service in Sandwell changed its policy, and ruled that only meetings directly relevant to the service's core activities were to be held. Coffee mornings were not 'core', and had to stop, leaving the regulars disappointed. Therefore, in February 1996 Suzie started 'Langley Local History Society' to hold 'reminiscence sessions' at which a cup of coffee could be provided! Thirty people attended the first meeting on 14th February, St Valentine's Day.

The group set about recording their reminiscences of life in Langley and Langley Green, and collecting photographs and other items. The first photographs were brought in by Keith Crump, his sister Jessie's pictures of Titford Road School. For the first few meetings the library service assigned Dave Reeves to advise on collecting reminiscences, and a 'Reminiscence Day' was held on 17th April 1996. In 1995 Sandwell Community History and Archives had provided all libraries with copies of relevant local photographs from their Community History Collection, and these provided a good starting point for jogging memories.

There was no formal structure to the society at this time. Suzie Drew led the meetings and tried to note down the contributions. To help her, James Durrant offered to take the chair, a position he held for the next ten years, and Bill Hipkiss became the society's first secretary.

After a few months the group had enough material for a small publication, an idea fully supported by the library service. A small committee met to edit the material, and approached the local firm, Anthony, Phillips and Davis, about the possibility of printing it. Less than a year after the society was formed, '**Langley and Langley Green Recalled**' was published by Sandwell Community Libraries. The title page said '*compiled and edited by Suzie Drew and Diane Callow in co-operation with Langley Local History Society*'.

It was a modest first book, with only twenty-two A4 pages in a paper cover, typeset by Suzie and her son Peter at home. Its launch was at the 'Langley Lights' weekend at the end of November 1996, with large queues forming at



The first committee proudly show 'Langley and Langley Green Recalled' at the library soon after the launch at 'Langley Lights Weekend'. Left to right: Diane Callow (Library Service), Audrey Taylor, Cllr Martin Prestidge, John Sullivan, James Durrant, Bill Hipkiss, Pat Rodwell and Suzie Drew.

the stall in Watkin's shop. Ed Doolan broadcast his show from the Barlow Playhouse that weekend, and Suzie Drew and Bill Hipkiss were interviewed by him. All the copies sold out in two weeks and a reprint was rushed out to fulfil Christmas sales. It was the first book ever to cover the history of Langley, and it established the society.

An 'illustrated community history' and beyond

'Recalled' was issued with a loose insert inviting readers to submit their own written reminiscences *'for our next book, which will also include Causeway Green and Rood End'*. The response was overwhelming, and so many people brought in their recollections and photographs that a second book was soon underway.

The society was growing in size and confidence, and this book was much more ambitious in its scope. It set out to trace the development of the area over the twentieth century, decade by decade, covering all aspects of the local community, firms, shops, churches, transport, sports, wartime, social activities and more. The 'editorial committee' worked hard to compile the text in time for a launch at Langley Community Centre (the Park House) for Christmas 1997. There was much discussion at committee meetings on the placing of commas and apostrophes, and a determination to check the accuracy of the reminiscences as carefully as possible against documents and newspapers.

This looked like a 'proper' book, with 240 pages, A5 size, so-called perfect binding, in glossy card covers, and contained over 120 photographs, a contrib-

utor's list of seventy-two names, maps and an index. Albright & Wilson Ltd met most of the printing costs, but the acknowledgements included '*a donation made in memory of the late Frank Noble, who was totally committed to the collection and preservation of local history material and would have heartily approved of the project*'. It was called '**Langley and Round About - an illustrated community history of Langley, Langley Green, Causeway Green & Rood End**'. Again it was well received: 1000 copies were sold out by summer 1999, and it was reprinted in October. Through its sub-title, LLHS had defined the range of its 'territory'.



Familiar faces and new ones for the editorial committee for 'Langley and Roundabout' on launch day, 12 December 1997, at Langley Community Centre: Back: James Durrant, John Sullivan, Bill Hipkiss, Keith Hodgkins; Front: Pat Rodwell, Audrey Taylor, Suzie Drew, Terry Daniels, Tom Tomlinson (Albright and Wilson) and Eric Fanthom.

With the publication of 'Round About', the 'editorial committee' no longer had anything to edit, but it continued to meet monthly as a management committee of elected officers and committee members appointed at the AGM.

'Roundabout' had proved popular, so the question '*What next?*' faced the society. The committee decided that the next goal should be a series of in-depth books on specific aspects of life in Langley that were not adequately covered in the previous two books. These would build on the reminiscences with more detailed research. The first of these covered industry and trans-

Terry Daniels and Suzie Drew inspect the first films that LLHS received, 'Civic Oldbury' and 'Town Sparrows', both made by Frank Wakeman. They were in black and white and without sound, but they documented activities and social conditions that disappeared from Langley a long time ago.



port, followed by a book on entertainment, and one on shops, finally completed in 2013!

The industry book drew on newspapers, firm's publications, and advertisements as well as personal reminiscences of people who had worked in local industry.

Albright & Wilson continued to support the work of the society: one of their managers, Tom Tomlinson, joined the committee to help with this book, providing information from the firm's archives, and arranging a tour of their factory.

This information took nearly two years to assemble, and it was June 1999 before the launch of '***Making and Moving in Langley***' at Langley Library. It was edited by Terry Daniels and the committee, and raised the bar again for production standards. They used professional software to design the book, and established the format for the series: A4 size, 160 pages, glossy paper, and many illustrations. It was sold through various local outlets, Mike Jones at 'Luv N Kissiz' on High Street being particularly helpful. Again, an initial run of 1000 copies sold out, and it had to be reprinted.

Membership was still growing, and open meetings continued at the library each month. However, the focus of these slowly changed, with reminiscence sessions giving way to speakers, mainly on local topics. Nevertheless, some the meetings were still run as reminiscence sessions on specific topics, usually related to the current book project.

In 2000, with their changing priorities, the library service encouraged LLHS to become independent of the library with its own financial arrangements. A simple constitution was drawn up defining the society's aims to '*research and record the history of Langley, Langley Green, Causeway Green and Rood End*'.



Committee members publicise 'Making and Moving in Langley', at the Library in 1999: Terry Daniels, Suzie Drew, Tony Piorowski (Library Service), Pat Rodwell, Bill Hipkiss, John Hodgkins, James Durrant, Mary Griffin, and John Sullivan.



Stalwarts of the early days at the LLHS Christmas party in 2000. Coffee drinking is still much in evidence! Top left: Eric Fanthom, Suzie Drew and Bill Hipkiss. Top right: Bill Neale serving, with Edith Hadley and Barbara Powell in earnest conversation. Left: Judith Tranter, Mary Griffin, ?, and Hilda Broadbent drinking and canting - good local tradition.

A new millennium

To usher in the millennium, and raise money for the independent society, LLHS issued a calendar for 1999 and January 2000, '**Langley Landmarks - Memories of the century to celebrate the millennium**'. This had a pencil drawing of a Langley scene for each month with a short verse written by a member of the society. A limited edition of 1000 copies was launched at Langley Community Centre on 16th September 1999 with Maude Wylde, Langley's oldest inhabitant in attendance.



Maude Wylde with Terry Daniels, who drew the pictures, and the chair, James Durrant, celebrate the launch of the 1999 calendar.

For January 1999, the picture was one of Langley Green, and Bill Hipkiss shared these poetic thoughts on the New Year:

*I'll try again, with full resolve,
to do that which I ought to do,
and not those things that I should not;
it's been the same my whole life through.
It's funny though - just think on this -
why do the 'nots' bring so much bliss?*



In 2001, the fifth anniversary was celebrated with a cake, cut by Cllr Terry Williams, and the slogan 'I love Langley'.

The success of LLHS inspired the start of local history groups at the libraries in Oldbury, Rounds Green (covering Lion Farm and Whiteheath), and Bleakhouse (Old Warley Local History Society). These societies published their own reminiscence books from 2000 onwards, and in this way the whole of the old Oldbury 'borough' was covered. In the early days, Community History and Archives encouraged the groups to hold a quarterly joint meeting to share experiences.

LLHS set up a very simple website in 2000, but this was never easily 'searchable', difficult to use and soon abandoned. The society's activities

were growing, and it needed good projection equipment, both for its own meetings, and to enable speakers to go out to other local organisations to publicise the history of the area. In July 2002 it was awarded a Lottery Fund 'Awards for All' grant to purchase a digital projector, screen and laptop computer. Good-bye slides and overhead projector! Welcome Powerpoint!

The society's membership continued to grow, and meetings at the library were becoming a squash. When, in March 2003, the library closed for major renovation of the building, LLHS moved to Warley Institutional Church in Pound Road. Although this was initially intended to be a temporary change, the society expanded further, and its open meetings would not fit into the room at the library. Reluctantly, the society severed this link with its birth-place, and remained at the church when the library re-opened. The smaller management committee continued to meet monthly at the library'.



The digital projector put to good use in the church hall in 2003. Ian Durrant is talking about life on the canals.

Marie Stanley took over the catering for the society from Suzie Drew, arranging refreshments month by month, and food for the Christmas socials: she carried out the rôle until shortly before her death in 2013.

The society began to do more structured research. One of the first topics was the transcription of the shops entries in the available directories for Langley from Victorian times to 1940. Barbara Powell started this work by hand, and it was later continued and digitised by Rob Deboo-Jones, and proved invaluable for the book on Langley shops a decade later.

A large map of Oldbury dating from 1857 is displayed at Sainsbury's store in Oldbury. When they renovated the building, they allowed LLHS to remove the map from its frame and scan it. Rob Deboo-Jones and Terry Daniels made forty-nine separate A4 scans which were combined in Photoshop, and the age-stained map was processed to clean up the image. Copies of this map were sold, and in 2003 a large print was presented to Langley Library in memory of Bill Neale, the first treasurer.

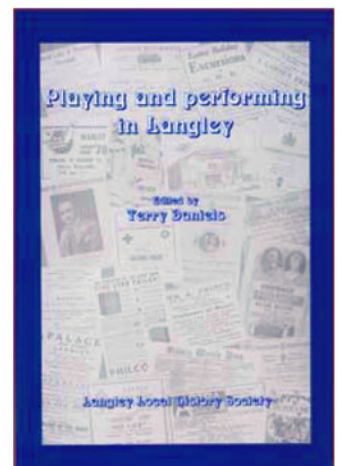


Carl Chinn interviewing Keith Crump at the church while Bill Hipkiss listens in.

On 21st June 2002 LLHS made the air-waves again when an edition of Carl Chinn's radio show was broadcast live from Warley Institutional Church and featured interviews with several of the society's members. Carl has been a good friend to LLHS across the years, readily publicising our activities and books, and several

members have been interviewed on his programme on other occasions.

Work continued for the book on pastimes and games by exploring particular topics at monthly meetings, from street games to scouts, and celebrations to clubs. ***'Playing and performing in Langley'*** was ready to be launched in November 2004. By now, the library service had stopped publishing books, and LLHS published the work itself. Technically, the publisher was Oldbury Local History Group, which had been the society first to self-publish and had registered for a run of International Standard Book Numbers. These numbers were used by various other history groups in the area to publish their books, with Oldbury Local History Group acting as 'publisher'. Hence, the title page of 'Playing and Performing' reads *'Published by Oldbury Local History Group for Langley Local History Society'*.



In summer 2005 the society held a competition for a Langley scene suitable for a Christmas card. This was printed by Anthony, Philips and Davies, and sold in packs of six from Christmas that year. The committee formed itself into a production line at the library to fold the cards, count sets of six, add envelopes, pack, seal and label the cards - a fine opportunity for team building! Each year the society shared a stall with Langley Library at the switch on of 'Langley Lights', and many packs were sold there.



LLHS Christmas card, first sold in 2005, showing Langley Park under snow.

Into a second decade

The tenth anniversary of LLHS on 14th February 2006 was celebrated with a cake, of course! Four members who had signed the attendance list at the



Michael Scarrott

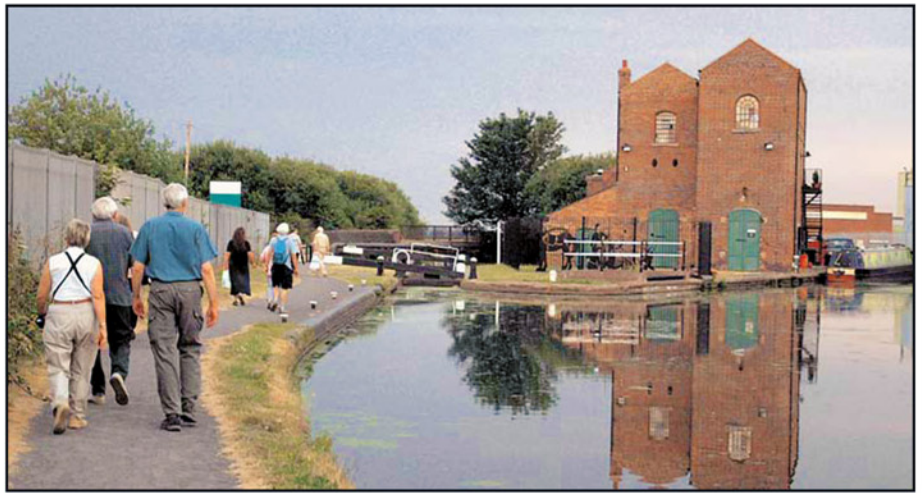
inaugural meeting ten years earlier were presented with 'founders' certificates - Suzie Drew, James Durrant, Barbara Powell and Michael Scarrott. James Durrant

died in 2010, but the other three members still attend meetings as the twentieth anniversary approaches. Others who have been active in the society since those first meetings are Judith Tranter and John Sullivan.

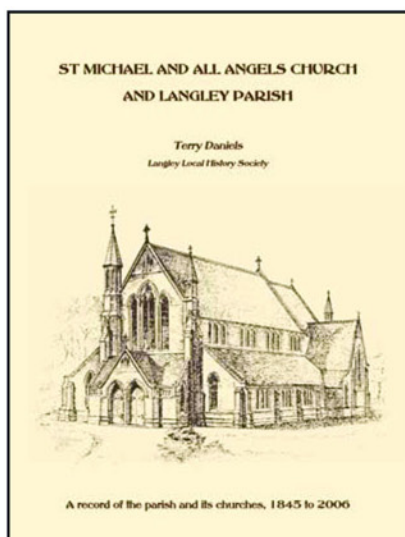


2006 was a year when significant changes in officer occurred within the society. The chair, James Durrant, had been in poor health for some time, and recent meetings had been taken by the vice-chair, Terry Daniels. At the AGM, Terry took over as chair, and James was made life president. Rob Deboo-Jones became vice-chair. Other changes in officer had already occurred. Judith Tranter became minuting secretary in 2002, providing invaluable records on which much of this story is based. In 2006, she became secretary, replacing Bill Hipkiss who had been unable to attend meetings for some time. Bill Neale, the first treasurer, had died in 2003, and this rôle was taken on by Keith Crump: he relinquished the post of auditor, which was taken on by Audrey Taylor.

The society had grown to a membership of sixty-five, with attendances at meetings averaging nearly fifty. This was also the year when LLHS got a taste for outings. In June Terry Daniels had led a walk around historic Langley for the Black Country Society, and this was repeated in July for members of LLHS: it finished with a visit to St Michael's Church at Langley Green, then under threat of closure. In September an outing was arranged by Nadia Neale, with members travelling as far as Haden Hall by car. Outings then became a regular feature of the society's programme.

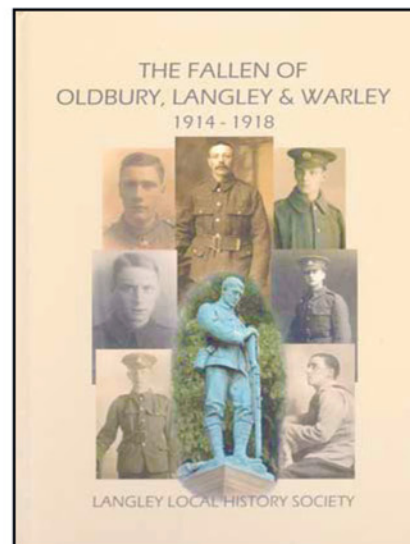


Approaching the pumphouse on the Langley Walk. Rob and Jean Deboo-Jones and Derek Deboo in the foreground.



When the closure of St Michael's Church, Langley Green, was being considered in 2005, the Vicar, Rev John Barnett, approached the society to make a record of the church building. In December 2005, Terry Daniels and Rob Deboo-Jones photographed the interior of the church. With documents and church records, these pictures formed the basis of a booklet issued in 2006) outlining the history of '**St Michael and All Angel's Church and Langley Parish**'. It was our first publication in colour.

This survey drew our attention to the war memorial window which included the names of sixty-four men of Langley Parish who died in WW1. The question was raised '*Who were these men and what were their stories?*' Several members, including Nadia Neale, Lynn Paynter, Margaret Scarratt and Rob Deboo-Jones, started to research the Langley men. Gradually the project expanded until we were trying to trace all the men with Oldbury connections who had been killed in the Great War. It took over a year, and the society identified over 550 men of Oldbury Urban District who died in the conflict, double the number in the Oldbury Book of Memory created after the war. This involved the most detailed research yet undertaken by the society.



Remembering Oldbury's fallen in WW1.

Top left: Lynn Paynter laying LLHS's wreath at Thiepval, 4 June 2007.

Top right: LLHS book listing the men who died from Oldbury, Langley and Warley.

Left: Nadia Neale, The Mayor of Sandwell Cllr Sidhu, and Terry Daniels at the launch of the book at Sandwell Council House.

LLHS paid tribute to Langley's soldiers and sailors through a visit to the battlefields of France and Flanders by Lynn Paynter, who laid a wreath at Thiepval on the Somme on behalf of the society on 4th June 2007. With financial help from Oldbury Town Committee, the Oldbury Branch of the Royal British Legion, the Lottery Fund and other local sponsors, LLHS published the book **'The Fallen of Oldbury, Langley & Warley, 1914 - 1918'**, which listed all the men and told their stories. The hardback book, in colour, was launched at Sandwell Council House in Oldbury, with the Mayor, following a ceremony of remembrance at the cenotaph in November 2007. Since then, around a dozen other Oldbury men have been traced, so the research for the book has proved comprehensive.

The last service was held at St Michael's Church on 1st July 2007 and it closed. LLHS expressed its concern to the Church Commissioners, particularly with regard to the stained glass. The society formally objected to any plan to demolish the building, although, the fate of the building would not be resolved for seven more years.

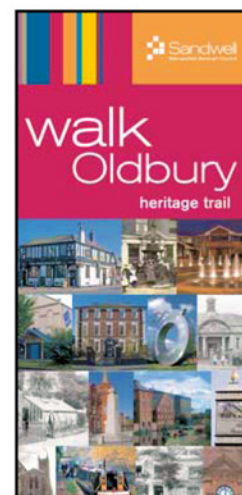
The talks began to cover wider history topics as local issues had been exhaustively covered. Two outings were held in 2007, a visit to Hardman's stained glass studio at Lightwoods House, and a canal trip from Tipton via Oldbury to Smethwick. The latter should have been circular trip along both Brindley's canal and Telford's, but closure of the locks at Smethwick meant we had to return along Brindley's. The journey was not without excitement as the boat grounded on debris under the motorway at Smethwick, and we all had to evacuate to the towpath while the boat was floated clear!



Canal trip in 2007: cruising along the canal in brilliant sunshine and ground to a halt on debris in the canal - everyone on to the towpath while the boat is lightened to float it off.

Two other developments occurred in late 2007. First, David Nightingale, who had joined the management committee, took over the arrangement of the society's programme, and significantly broadened the range of talks and outings over the next eight years. Second, LLHS successfully entered the internet era in October 2007 when, in conjunction with Oldbury LHG and Old Warley LHS, it launched a website covering the history of the whole of Oldbury. This proved popular, and an improved site was launched a year later. It currently gets about 75 hits per day, and provides a growing resource telling Oldbury's history.

In 2008 there was no new publication, but work continued on the 'shops' book: progress was slow because of the amount of detail to be traced on Langley's myriad shops and businesses. The society was involved in devising 'Oldbury Town Trail', one of the walking trails introduced by Sandwell Council for the six towns. The trail linked the landmarks of Oldbury with those of Langley via the Titford Canal, and featured in Langley the Barlow Playhouse, the Crosswells Inn, Langley Park and Langley Green. We did reflect that, with the



re-development and renewal occurring across Langley, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find significant historic buildings in the area.

That year Warley Institutional Church sold its site to the Salvation Army, so we changed 'landlords' for hiring the room. This caused some initial difficulties as the SA undertook building work.

Into our teens

2009 saw us enter our thirteenth year. The structure and activities of the society had changed so much since the introduction of a constitution in 2000 that a new constitution was adopted at the AGM. The purpose of the society was not changed, now defined as: *"The principal object of the society is to research, record and promote to the public the history of Langley, Langley Green, Causeway Green and Rood End (the 'Langley area'), and such other areas as are relevant to the Langley area"*.

One of our long-standing members, Ken Rock, had decided to sell his extensive postcard collection of the Black Country. He had always been helpful in allowing them to be copied for publications, and now he agreed to sell the Langley, Oldbury and Warley cards to LLHS, rather than breaking up the collection by selling them separately. They cost the society over £2000, but much of the cost was recouped by the publication in 2010 of ***'Just a card to say ...'***, which reproduced fifty of the cards dating from 1900 to 1925.



ON SALE HERE

and through www.historyofoldbury.co.uk
or 0121 544 8095

Just a card to say ...

A new book from
Langley Local History Society

50 pictures from postcards of
Oldbury, Langley & Warley
1900 - 1925

PRICE £8.00

Terry Daniels launching 'Just a card to say ...' at Langley Library with the help of the Mayor of Sandwell, Cllr Pauline Hinton, who was a Langley councillor. LLHS members in the audience include Lynn Paynter, Derek Deboo, Maureen Walker, and Roy and Sheila Bates.



Fascinated by the skill of craftsmen. Groups of LLHS members on outings to Hardman's stained glass studio in 2007 and the Jewellery Quarter in 2011.

Work on the shops book was now in its sixth year. Nevertheless, another research project was identified and preliminary work started by Roy Bates and Lynn Paynter: this was a study of the home front in Oldbury in the two world wars. Much relevant information on WW1 had already been gathered when the soldiers were being researched, so the project has concentrated on WW2 so far. This a long-term project has been mainly pursued by Roy Bates to date, and various aspects of life in WW2 have been discovered which will help to shape the final book.

Connections with the Media Archive for Central England allowed us to have cine films digitised and the originals stored by them under archival conditions. Since 1998 we had had the two films made in the 1940s by Frank Wakeman, and others had been received covering the Queen's visit in 1957, several on Oldbury Grammar School, and an amateur film shot by Jim McDermott in the 1960s, 'Late Arrival', about a bank robbery set in and around Langley and Oldbury. These were added to the website, and proved very popular, often showing locations which have been lost.

2009 saw the first Christmas social to be led by John Sullivan, who recalled stories of his early life in Langley, very amusing and often very touching. He proved quite a raconteur, and for several years he spoke at our Christmas socials. The first Christmas Quiz was staged that year, raising money for the fund to conserve the newly-discovered 'Staffordshire Hoard' and keep it in the Midlands. It brought our first mention on television as the envelope with our cheque was opened during the filming of a feature on the hoard for 'Midlands Today', and our letter read out.

One of our talks in 2010 was on the Staffordshire Hoard. Later, a number of members went behind the scenes at Birmingham Art Gallery to see the conservation of the hoard 'close-up'. This was an expensive visit, but well worthwhile, not only seeing the conservation techniques being used, but also being able to observe the structure of the items in the hoard in microscopic detail.



At the AGM in 2010, Judith Tranter stepped down as secretary, and Lynn Paynter took over the position. Our numbers at meetings were exceeding sixty. By each December, David Nightingale now had the forthcoming year's programme planned. That Christmas, Lynn could inform members of the entire year's programme, which she did through a members' Christmas card with a sepia picture of old Langley. This proved so popular, that it has continued to date, bursting into colour in 2014.

The next year, 2011, Lynn Paynter led us another step into the digital age with a Facebook page. This started slowly, with only 600 'likes' after two years, but has accelerated recently to over 2300, and attracts some interesting questions, comments and photographs. It is not confined to Langley, but covers the whole of Oldbury 'borough'.



Christmas 2010. Marie Stanley loads up the table for the annual 'bun-fight' between members. Ironically, John Sullivan was telling us all about the privations of rationing in 1945 at one of his Christmas talks.

Christmas 2011 was the last year that Marie Stanley was able to cater for us, with much family help because she was unwell. The next year, we moved to the Crosswells Inn for our Christmas event, and Jan Seward took over the monthly provision of tea, coffee and biscuits.

The society had always participated in local events, typically shows in Barnford Park, Langley Lights festivities, and Local History Fairs in West Bromwich and Walsall. However, its biggest event to date was a Road Show held in October 2012 at the Big House in conjunction with the Mayor, Keith Davies, and his office. We arranged a small exhibition of Oldbury and Langley memorabilia, together with tours of the Big House and viewing of the civic regalia. J D Wetherspoon had recently opened the old Court of Requests as a restaurant, and allowed us to take parties around the courtroom and jail cells, not normally accessible to the public. It was well supported by the public and very successful, despite it being a cold day.

This year saw the purchase of a public address system for use at our meeting: some guest speakers can fill the hall without amplification, but many need some help.

November 2013 saw the launch of the 'shops' book, a mere nine years after Barbara Powell started to analyse the local directories. ***'Shopping and Selling in Langley'*** proved to be worth the wait, however, with 200 A4 pages of pictures, reminiscences and details about shops and services such as builders, banks, doctors and garages. This finally completed the trilogy of books planned in 1997. It has been a notable trend that recent local history books do not sell as well as the first ones, and only 500 were printed.

In 2014 another innovation at our meetings was a brief monthly digest of news in Oldbury taken from the newspapers of 150 years ago. This is prepared by Chris Cooper, and, from August 1914, he has also told the story of the Worcestershire Regiment's action in WW1, month by month.

Our digital projection equipment had been well-used for more than a decade, and a new system was purchased in 2014.

In early 2014 we were told of the intended sale of the redundant St Michael's Church to a church based in the Philippines, Iglesia Ni Cristo. This brought the concerns over the stained glass windows to the fore again because the incom-

ing church did not allow any human images in their buildings, and the windows would have to be removed. Discussions with the Birmingham Diocese and the incoming church were positive and helpful: we were reassured we could have the windows if we could find them new homes, and withdrew all objection to the sale.



Saving the memorial window and cross.

*Top left: Fundraising at the British Legion in Langley: LLHS has built up a good relationship with the Oldbury Branch.
 Top right: The restored window in place at Zion United Reformed Church.
 Left: Re-dedication of the memorial cross at Ebenezer Wesleyan Reform Church.*

LLHS set about finding homes the windows and also the WW1 memorial cross which had been moved to St Michael's from Holy Trinity in the sixties. Zion United Reformed Church readily agreed to house the WW1 memorial window, as backlit panels. Ebenezer Wesleyan Reform Church allowed the cross to be placed in their grounds on Langley High Street. We started raising money to restore and move the items, and quickly reached the target with local generosity and a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The cross was move and cleaned, and rededicated at Ebenezer in November 1014. In April 2015 there was a rededication service for the window and an exhibition at Zion URC. The stories of the sixty-four men on the window were extended updated from those in the 'Fallen' book, and published on our website. The other windows in the church were also found new homes. The building itself was splendidly renovated by Iglesia Ni Cristo, and the future of the building secured in a way not envisaged at the time of closure in 2007.

At the AGM in 2015 Keith Crump relinquished the post of treasurer to Rob Deboo-Jones. The society has had few officers in its twenty years: two chairs, three vice-chairs, three secretaries and three treasurers, providing continuity and stability for the society.

"Research, record and promote to the public ..."

Langley Local History Society has lived up to its purpose of researching, recording and promoting the history of 'Langley' in many ways over the past twenty years - the present powerful oak growing from the small acorn planted at the library two decades ago. The same cannot be said of Langley's historic buildings, unfortunately, which have diminished and disappeared slowly and consistently over that period.

The preservation of St Michael's Church is the one good case to set against the general loss of the historic fabric of Langley. Two buildings were severely damaged in fires, Langley Maltings in 2009 and the old bonded warehouse at Alcohols in 2012. Factories have closed and been demolished, including Myers, now covered with houses, Hughes-Johnson and 'Langley Forge', both cleared and left derelict at present. Even Albright & Wilson Ltd was sold, first to Rhodia, then to Solvay, but the factory remains, albeit without its iconic towers. Many traditional pubs have closed and been demolished including The New Inns, the Barrel, The Londonderry, the Two Brewers, and the Beeches, now a Tesco Express. Even the Royal Oak at Langley Green is now closed. Albion Brewery at Rood End, later the home of the 'Cremalt' loaf, has gone. Bethel Chapel was demolished, following its use as a warehouse, and Edward Street Methodist Chapel has closed. Albright School was demolished by Sandwell Council in 2014 to sell off the land, and Oldbury Grammar School razed to the ground for a new academy in 2015. The only WW2 pill box in the area at Jarvis Bridge was destroyed to build a utilities box that easily could have stood beside it!

Without the collection of memories, photographs and artefacts built up by LLHS, it would be difficult to picture the Langley of fifty years ago and the life of its people. Perhaps that is the main legacy of LLHS after twenty years, permanently encapsulated in its books and website. The hard work of researching and publicising the past, and the details of talks and visits arranged by the society, will all fade with time, but the documented legacy will remain, and so the work of Langley Local History Society goes on into its next decade ... there is still much to be done, and who knows where it will lead us?