

Published by.....
Balsall Heath Community School

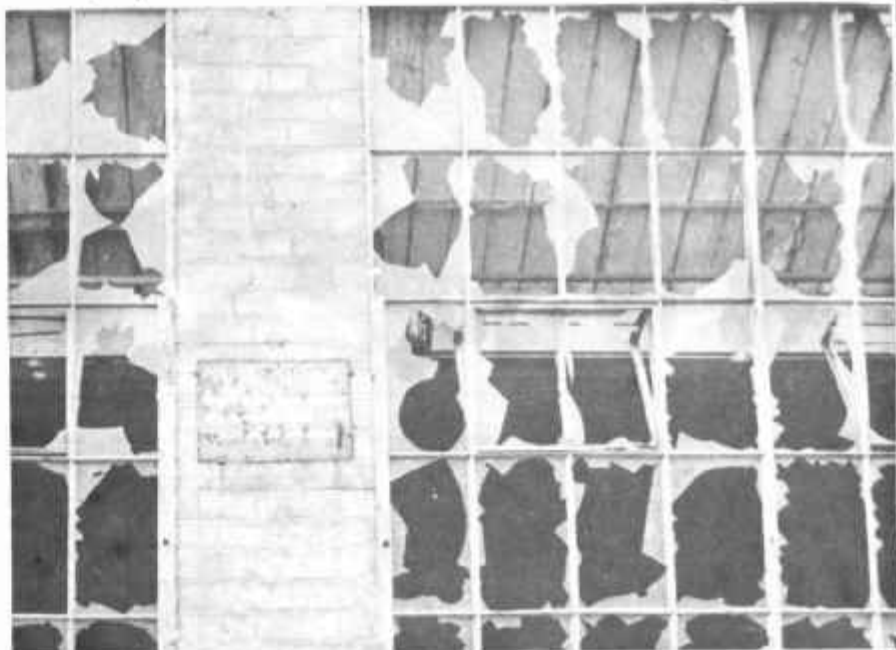
June 1974



We Can't Go On Like This



F30 JDUKJ L<OU-DE-WU



How do we protect our surroundings?

As you can see from our front page cut-outs the Evening Mail and Sunday Mercury have plenty to say about vandalism and delinquency in Balsall Heath and inner-city areas like it. So it's a great pity that the Heathans have to take up the same theme. But recently several cases which are very disturbing have been brought to our attention and we feel we must do what we can to help.

Encouraging Vandalism!

Vandalism is a vague word and covers a multitude of sins - from breaking into phone boxes for money to breaking up cemeteries, possibly for 'fun'. Some of the activities which go on under this heading are so common in an area like Balsall Heath that lots of people hardly notice anymore. Breaking up empty houses, factories, shops, is almost routine for youngsters who are bored, and for tatters who are in search of lead to sell. (See Letters Page for evidence of this.) It's all just as illegal, of course, as breaking into occupied premises, though many of the kids don't seem to realise this. You can't entirely blame them for being surprised when they are caught by the police and taken to court, because, after all, why ARE the houses and other places left empty for years, if someone values them, intends to use them, and wants whatever is in them? NO-ONE WANTS A VANDALISED HOUSE NEXT DOOR, ACROSS THE STREET, OR EVEN IN THE NEXT ROAD - BUT NEARLY EVERYONE IN BALSALL HEATH LIVES WITHIN 30 YARDS OF ONE.

If the Council, which is the main offender in this area, wants to keep young people out of the courts, reduce the workload of the police, encourage people to take a pride in the area and an interest in 're-development', and MAKE THE BEST USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES, it should do up the houses good enough for temporary use and pull down the others. The various Residents' Associations have been pressing for this for years, but the wheels of local government bureaucracy seem to be rusty with age.

A Nasty Case

But some of the vandalism and petty crime which goes on in the area is not solely the outcome of dilatory policies on the part of the Council. Take, for example, the harrowing story of Mr. Jahir Din.....

Mr. Din is 32, though illness has made him look a lot older. His wife is 26, and their little girl, Komel is 5½. They have tried to earn a living

from a small grocery and sweetshop at the Moseley Rd. end of Ombersley Rd. for five years now.

Now they want to move.

The first four years weren't too bad - they only got broken into about three times a year. But this year they have been driven to desperation by A BREAK-IN ONCE A MONTH! Two weeks ago their shop window was smashed. A month ago it was the door. So far as they know, the police have made no progress, and despite promises from the police that the shop will be watched, the trouble goes on.



Jahir Din's Shop. The door and windows were smashed, and are now boarded up.

Mrs. Din told us she's beginning to think the police don't bother because the family is coloured. No doubt this isn't true, but you can see why she might think it was - the family aren't getting much help from anyone.

Meanwhile the Dins are fed-up and very frightened. The constant strain is undermining their health. Their daughter has become so nervous that she can't sleep at night. Mr. Din has been treated in hospital several times as a result of the incidents. 1½ years ago he was half-strangled by some intruders and spent 24 hours in hospital. Another time four men - two with knives - broke in. That time Mr. Din went to hospital with cuts on his throat. His wife is suffering from the strain, too; on one occasion she was threatened with, 'Your money or your life.' It all sounds a lot

more like America (where 90% of the population say they are frightened to be in the streets after dark) or towns of a hundred years ago, than like Britain in the 1970's.

The Dins sleep downstairs now, and lock and bolt their door before piling milk crates in front of it. Mr. Din is no coward. So far he has lost little property to the thieves. The family don't dare to go out, so he is there to offer resistance to intruders. But unless he gets some help from somewhere very soon, he will be forced out of his shop.

The family get no help from neighbours. The shops on both sides are empty. There was a mysterious fire in the one on the left - foul play, most likely - and the shop was given up by the old proprietors. They were driven out, just as the Dins are likely to be. The people who used to have the shop on the other side were white, and didn't talk to the Dins anyway - but now they're gone it makes the family that much more isolated.

The Dins think people should be moved into the houses on either side of them. These houses are due for demolition in 1976, and the Council looks like keeping them empty until then - and no doubt it could be longer.

We have drawn the Dins' plight to the attention of Councillor Jack Webster, as a first step towards giving them a hand. But what about our readers, who live in the area round Ombersley Road? Surely someone must see or hear the doors and windows being smashed, even if they don't see any suspicious characters hanging about? All you have to do is call the police - or come to that, just make a very loud racket to let the thieves and vandals know they've been spotted. And meanwhile, perhaps a few friendly words of encouragement to the family would at any rate make them slightly less depressed.

How Many More?

The story of the Dins makes us feel that there must be other shopkeepers, especially in the side streets of the area, who are suffering harassment and intimidation. We shall be following up this possibility in our next issue - calling on the small shopkeepers in particular, to find out if there are others who are having bad experiences. We know already of at least one other case, without making any special inquiries: a shopkeeper on the Moseley Rd. told us that he no longer kept any stock in the shop, because he had so much stolen in the last few years, that he simply couldn't afford to go on. This tradesman says that the thieves are young people from a local secondary school. (Mr. Din also reckons that most of those who have broken into his shop are teenagers.)

Another Example

Unfortunately there are other bad cases of vandalism involving danger, loss and strain for local people. Consider the example of the Congregational Church in Ladypool Road, too.

The pastor of the Church, Mr. Rogers, is losing count of the number of times, even in the last year, that it has been invaded. Again the police seem powerless to do very much, although on each occasion they have been called and have now promised to keep a special watch on the Church. As Mr. Rogers says, it seems on the face of it, that they ought to have a foot patrol on Ladypool Rd. at night as well as Pandas.

He says this because on one of the four occasions in the last year when lead has been taken from the church roof, the people who did it must have been on the roof for 4-5 hours, and must have had a lorry below to transport the metal. Yet it seems no-one noticed them. At any rate, no-one called the police and £500-worth of lead has gone. The church has now given up the struggle, and is replacing the lead with plastic - an expense it can ill-afford, but which, will, it is hoped, deter the thieves.

Some of those breaking into the Congregational Church are obviously adults and professional thieves, but others are equally obviously teenage trouble-makers. On one occasion one of these was also after some of the lead, and was seen, and recognised by several witnesses. What disturbs Mr. Rogers is that although he again reported all this to the police, nothing happened to discourage the youth in question.

Other examples of the harassment suffered by the church include: the vestry broken into, and tur-



CHURCH ROOF-NO LEAD LEFT

ned upside down by people presumably looking for non-existent money; the church broken into and a bike stolen belonging to one of the congregation; stones thrown at the windows of the church while a service was going on; the church invaded during another service by youths who kicked over fire buckets and threw bottles; windows constantly broken. Of course the lead-stealing from the roof has caused damage to the inside of the church. We marvel at the perseverance of the members of the church who battle on, repairing the damage, and carrying on with their activities.

No Bible-Thumpers

As Mr. Rogers points out, the members of this church are not just Bible-thumpers with their heads in another world; they are doing their best to make Balsall Heath a better place to live right now. They have, for example, three pensioners clubs in the church. They have a playgroup every morning in the church hall. Members of the church visit sick people locally, as well as old people's homes. They raise funds for, and visit, various handicapped groups. The church members have from time to time lent a hand with the activities of Malvern St. Adventure Playground.

Given all these projects which the congregation are involved with, it seems a pity that they get so little encouragement from some of the local youth. Where will the small brothers and sisters of these teenagers go when they lose the premises their playgroup uses? Is it likely that the pensioners will want to carry on using a hall which is constantly disrupted, even if it is not actually wrecked? No-one knows better than Mr. Rogers that teenagers in Balsall Heath, and their families, have problems. But unless more members of the community have the courage and the interest to stop people ruining the efforts of others, the problems are not likely to decline.

Some of us aren't very brave, and some of us aren't very observant. Not everyone would have noticed kids setting fire to a fence outside a woodyard. Mr. Rogers did notice, and though he is by no means young, had the courage to make them stop. We could do with a lot more of this kind of action, and quickly. Otherwise getting the Council to clear up its mess is indeed going to solve only a bit of the problem.

PLAYGROUP MEETING IN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.



ONE OF OUR NICEST SCHOOLS

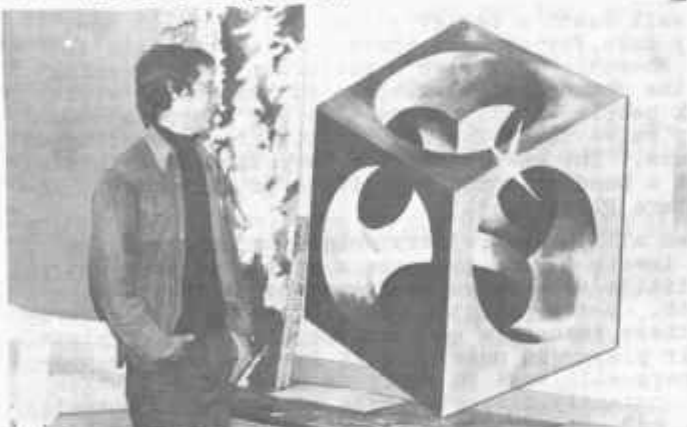
UNIQUE

You must have seen the kids, and adults (and cars) wearing 'Save Moseley Art School' stickers. We've seen them, and we've read about the children's march to the Town Hall in May, so we decided to go along and find out what they were trying to save....after all, there's the school, slap-bang right in the middle of Balsall Heath on the Moseley Rd.

There can't be many people who realise what a un-ique school we have in our midst. Most of us probably have the vague feeling that it's just another grammar school, with a peculiar name, trying to preserve its privileges.

In fact it's just what its name says it is - a school which concentrates particularly on teaching children various forms of art. It is the ONLY such school in the whole country - the only thing which is comparable with it is Menuhin's school for young musicians. But this is a STATE school - and there's the rub, because at the moment, Birmingham Education Committee are still threatening to make the school part of Mount Pleasant Comprehensive. The school is small - only 300 boys and girls from 11 to 18. At the moment they take both the 11+ and an art exam to get in - though many are accepted only because they have shown promise in their art. They may have 'failed' the 11+.

At one time there were quite a few art schools in Britain for youngsters interested in cultivating skill or talent. Now, however, this one is the sole survivor. It has been attacked before, but managed to keep going - now the passion for standardisation threatens it again. But the parents, staff, pupils, and friends of the school will obviously keep on arguing till there is no hope left - which is far from the case as yet....



A QUESTION OF CHOICE

Recently the Education Committee has shown a certain willingness to recognise the undoubted merits of the school, and its difference from the grammar schools. The Education Committee appears to be interested in keeping the school now, if it will find a way of recruiting its pupils without a selection exam. Now this is difficult, because while they DON'T WANT the old and iniquitous 11+, they DO want children who are interested in art. And how do you get them without looking at their work? But the people who are trying to save the school have a real hope of finding an answer to this question, and persuading the Education Authority to keep the school.



will it survive?



FRIENDLY

We found the school a very friendly and very impressive place. You will see from our photos the exciting work they produce - and some of you may have seen it elsewhere, since they often put on exhibitions in places like Cannon Hill Arts Centre. Our photographer had a problem, because there were so many good things in the school he couldn't decide what to photograph. Then he took so many photos we couldn't decide what you'd like to see most!

NOT ONLY ART

The children don't ONLY study art of course. They also do all the usual school subjects - but they are able to develop their interest in a wide range of artistic pursuits as well. These vary from textile design, through photography, graphics, metalwork, to painting. There is an obviously enthusiastic staff - who manage to turn even the most boring maths lesson into an interesting visual problem. A lot of the pupils go into such occupations as architecture, confectionery design, embroidery, window display, printing, and other trades in which they can use their special skills. Not all turn out to be artists in the end - but they don't seem to like the school less for having misjudged their bent.

The school's results are perhaps one of the strongest arguments for its existence. But another very good argument seems to us to be the sense of purpose and self-fulfilment of pupils and staff. No doubt it is a happy school partly because it is small - if we are right about this it's a pity the small schools are disappearing so fast.

We wish the school luck in its fight to carry on. We just wish it was called the Balsall Heath Art School - after all, as the Headmaster says, the area is so visually stimulating they could not wish to be in a better place. (And though some might think their building a little inconvenient, they are very fond of that, too.) We've got our fingers crossed.



LETTERS

Your Support

Dear Heathan,

St. Paul's Nursery never has enough money. Especially, it needs to raise extra money for educational toys. The next toy we need is a slide.

We've decided to collect stamps and cigarette coupons of all kinds in order to reach our target. The Nursery, in Tindal St. School is our collecting centre-but anyone who has trading stamps or coupons they are willing to give us can send or deliver them to 36, Brunswick Rd if they can't get to the Nursery.

It's only a little effort you have to make - and just think of the enjoyment the children will get from this new toy.

Yours sincerely,
Ann Cotterell, Alcester Rd.

(Come on now, readers. The Nursery deserves a lot of help after its struggle to carry on - if you have a local shop that gives stamps, perhaps you can persuade them to keep a box on the counter for people who don't collect stamps to put them in for the Nursery. Ed.)

EXPLORE

Dear Editor,

I can't quite bring myself to address you as 'Dear Heathan' as it seems to me, though I know what you mean, a rather uncharitable way to think of anyone. But still, I must get to the point. You seem to get steamed up in every issue about the bad aspects of our area. Like the curate's egg, however, it is good in parts.

I thought I would try and begin a trend by pointing out to you that there are in fact some very attractive streets and houses in Balsall Heath - as well as some very attractive people. For example, in Tindal St. there is a very picturesque cottage, and a most peaceful avenue off the road.

Don't let your praiseworthy social concern blind you to the good things in life!

Sincerely,
Morris Beesley.

(Well, I hope you do start a trend. We could certainly do with some more good news here - we didn't win the Pools again this week. We did go and take some photos in Tindal St. and we agree that there are some other nice spots around too - anyone else got a favourite? Ed.)

You

WRITE A LETTER TO THE
HEATHAN.

Our address is 120, St. Paul's Rd., Balsall Heath, Birmingham 12. We shall be glad to hear from you on any subject, but especially about anything of local interest.

OR PHONE 440-4376.

RUINED

Dear Sir,

The large factory at the junction of Hertford St. and Brunswick Rd. has now been empty for 1½ years. During that time it has suffered mounting attacks, mainly from children. Nearly every window has been smashed and every door has been kicked in.

More recently the tatters have moved in. There can't be much lead left on the roof, and there have been floods of water from the broken pipes. The building is ugly now. It's a wreck, which could be very dangerous to the children who play in it.

Now two houses which are nearby have become empty. Already one of them has been broken into, and I fear both will quickly come to be like the factory. Can nothing be done to stop good buildings like these being destroyed, used as rubbish dumps, left to become health hazards and eyesores?

The waste of money is one thing. But the unused opportunity for living accommodation and other uses is quite ridiculous.

Yours faithfully,
V.M. Jines.

Take a look

Dear Heathan,

I've been getting angrier and angrier about the state of Woodfield Crescent, where I live.

There is no tarmac surface to the road. There are craters everywhere. When it rains it's a nightmare.

The bins are left unemptied for long periods. Often rubbish is dumped at the end of the road. The road itself is never swept. It's all enough to depress anyone.

I decided to do something about it. Most people in the Crescent have now signed a petition. It is going to be presented to the next Council meeting. I hope it will lead to quick action. Perhaps writing to you will also help. If the Heathan could print some photos, they would show better than my words how bad things are.

Yours sincerely,
Evelyn Sarr, 52, Woodfield Crescent.

(We went round to see - and did take some photos and got some more information. You will find both in the Up Your Street story. The Heathan will be keeping an eye on Woodfield Crescent, and hopes the petition to the Council will have a quick effect. Ed.)

Dim view

Dear Heathan,
Your paper's not bad but it's all a bit SERIOUS. Couldn't we have some pin-ups or something?

C. McEvoy.
(Sorry - no-one wants to pose for us. Ed.)

bright idea!

Dear Heathan,

It is very hot today! Will you please ask Rob McCann to get a hosepipe for the playground. Then he can hose us with cold water.

Yours sincerely,

Jimmy and Joey Green.

(Come on now Rob, don't be a coward - I'm sure they mean it when they say it's for you to hose them. Ed.)

Cross

Dear Heathan,

I bought a copy of your paper from a lady who delivered it to my shop on March 25th. Now I'm very fond of doing crosswords and would have liked to have sent in an entry for your competition - I never know my luck, I might have won! But the entries should have been in by 21st March. So I would like to know why, if the paper was published for March I only managed to get a copy at the end of the month?

But I still found the whole paper very interesting and I hope I'll receive further copies from now on.

Yours sincerely,
M.E. Simmons, 15, Kingsley Rd.

(Apologies to you and the other crossword enthusiasts who made the same very justifiable complaint. We hope you'll have plenty of time for this one. And we'll ask our sales force to run, not walk, with this issue. We have to be careful though, because we don't have any money to pay either of them, and they tend to get a bit uppity! Ed.)

Discovery

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your correspondent in the March issue who is having trouble with mice may be interested in a discovery of mine. In the course of encounters with mice in three continents (Africa, America, Europe), I have observed that mice are suckers for PEANUT butter. I find that a mousetrap baited with peanut butter is invariably full in the morning.

Yours etc.,
M. Peil, University of Birmingham.

(We thought this must be a joke so we rang up and asked. It isn't. So off you go folks and get some peanut butter - you can eat the left-overs yourselves, and they will be stuffed with calories, which is more than can be said for rat poison. Ed.)



AN INTERESTING VARIETY OF HOUSES-TINDAL ST.

from the COMMUNITY SCHOOL

ALL THE ARTICLES, POEMS & CARTOONS ON THIS PAGE HAVE BEEN PRODUCED BY PUPILS AT THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL.

Prejudice

Prejudice in Britain is amazing. White people really think that black people are dumb. It's mainly the English-the Irish don't like us but you can trust an Irish person, but hardly ever an English person.

The three main clubs around here are the Locarno Top Rank and Rebecca's. Now 9 out of every 10 white boys get into all three of these clubs, but out of every ten black boys only two or three get in. Why? Because the people who own these clubs think that they are trouble-makers, so they treat them like savages.

What are our kids going to grow up to live like? I pass signs every day saying, 'Make Britain a better place, Kill wogs.' Do you think that Britain would be a better place?

Black boys are quite rough, I think, but it's not only them to blame. When our fathers came to this country you put them in dirty rotten factories, and when they married and had children, the kids hung around with white boys. The white boys would have good gear on and the blacks had cheap clothes. They would feel left out - who wouldn't? So they might go and steal some good clothes, just because of the nice clothes the other boys had, - it's the same meaning in a lot of ways.

G.Amo.

SUMMER

The pavements are hot and reek of dirt
As an ice lolly paper rolls by.

The dust is choking and the air foul.

My hands sweat and my collar itches

And the sun beats down upon my back.

The gentle breeze sticks my sweaty shirt

To my back and makes me shiver all over.

My hair is straggly and dry, my long thin arms

Sting with sunburn.

How I long for the winter.

T.Doyle.

Scouting

I belong to the 1st Midlands Baden Powell Scouts. These are the tests - everybody has to do them: Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class. These are not very hard to do. The sort of things we have to do in the Tenderfoot are: know the salute sign and motto; Union Jack (this means that we have to learn the design of it); Activity (this is when you do a jumble sale or a piece of work for Scouts); and the last test is the most essential test - the Law and the Promise. When you have passed all these you are a scout.

And another thing; we don't spend all our time doing tests! We play a game of British Bulldog, and do wrestling (not rough). The first thing we do is break flag, then inspection (of uniform). We collect subs. - 10p a week or 21 before the 1st May, which saves you some money.

Second Class is a bit harder. First you have to do some First Aid. Then you have to learn six common trees. Then there is an observation test. (If there are 24 objects you have to get 10 or 15 of them). Then there is firelighting; we have

to light a fire with 2 matches and cook potatoes and sausages. We also learn knots and whipping, learn about a hand-axe (when it is sharp and how to use it), learn lashing (that is, how to lash pieces of wood together). In this test, too, we have to learn how to use a telephone and how to send telegrams; learn about personal camping equipment and do an 8-mile hike.

When you have passed all these tests you do the First Class which is harder still. I will write about this next time....

K.Teece.

Various Views on Vandalism

Every Saturday afternoon a copper comes round Brunswick Road checking it. It may be robbed, it may be bust up by vandals. The reason why he comes round every Saturday is because vandals used to bust it up. I think it is very stupid, and the people who do it must think they're very clever to smash up telephone boxes. I don't see the kicks they're getting out of it. It's terrible because I can't go into the phone box without someone giving me a dirty look. It's just because I'm young - they think I'm a vandal. I know I'm not an angel, but I wouldn't go around doing stupid things like that.

A.McGee.

Old people are scared of vandals, because they will go to old people's houses and break in. They might knock them down and the old people might get hurt. If they phone for the coppers, the coppers can't do anything about it. Vandals throw bottles outside people's doors and break into shops.

D.Brown.



Vandals are kids who throw stones and light fires. Maybe it's because they have nothing else to do, and nowhere to go. They roam around the streets and when they have nothing to do they put bottles on walls and throw stones at them. Or perhaps they beat up other boys.

So why not build more disco's and playgrounds, and give the kids somewhere to go? There are parks around, but some kids don't like going to the park, because there's never anything in the park.

Some kids vandalise places just to make themselves look big, and some do it just for a laugh. I think the Council should put up more discos and youth clubs.

V.Doyle.

The Free Community School!

BALSALL HEATH COMMUNITY SCHOOL HAS BEEN RUNNING FOR JUST OVER A YEAR NOW. MANY PEOPLE IN THE AREA STILL KNOW LITTLE ABOUT IT. IN THIS ARTICLE OUR REPORTER TELLS OF THE HOPES OF THE SCHOOL, SOME OF ITS DIFFICULTIES, AND THE CHANGES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE SINCE IT BEGAN. WE HOPE THE ARTICLE ANSWERS MANY OF THE QUESTIONS ASKED IN LETTERS TO THE HEATHAN.

The Community School was one year old this Easter. For the teachers it has been a long, hard year, even though until recently there were only 6 pupils.

Its one thing teaching in a state school or university with wages, equipment, building and everything else all laid on. Its another thing altogether when you are independent of the state and have to do EVERYTHING yourself. Because the Community School is independent, and was started by the teachers themselves, they have to find every penny which is spent on the school, as well as do all the teaching. It sounds like hard work and it is.

BIG BOOST

The three full-time teachers have just had a big boost. A Managing, or governing, Committee, which is to employ the teachers (when money can be found to pay them!) has been formed. The three teachers, two mothers (Mrs. McGee and Mrs. Whiteley), a local painter, Sandy Sarr, two local community workers (Gill Southwell and Rob McCann), a pupil's representative, and a local Headmaster, Alex Hughes, sit on the Committee. It is hoped that it will help the teachers to run the school.

The new Committee has a big job-one that in state schools is usually done by solicitors, bank managers, Bishops and other V.I.P.'s. But then the views of such people, like those of many teachers in state schools, are often irrelevant to the needs of the kids and communities which the state schools are supposed to serve.

The first Management Committee of the Balsall Heath Community School feels it can do at least as well as any other - they may even do a bit better. After all, they should know what their kids want and need - they are their parents and neighbours. And the teachers live across the road and help out at the playground and the nursery, and run this community newspaper.

The school is beginning to look like the COMMUNITY school which its teachers always said it was. But besides the formation of the Management Committee, other important developments have taken place, in the way the school is run from day to day.

GREAT REFORMS....

When the school started a year ago, it had no rules and no timetable. Everything had to be done from scratch. The teachers have slowly set higher standards. The kids are expected to do school work, turn up on time, and from Christmas the serious teaching of subjects relevant to the kids' needs has been provided. The kids have also had to be taught how to gain self-control, and how to work out and attain their own interests. A difficult task, but clearly a necessary one. The kids have done a lot of good work - the Heathan shows that.

.... SOME PROBLEMS

But not all has been well. The kids had got used to doing as they pleased, before Christmas. Like their friends at state schools they didn't always want to do as they were told, be disciplined or taught, after Christmas. Add to this the fact that the large state secondary schools which serve Balsall Heath (only one of them is local) were having their own problems. The raising of the school leaving age to 16, the attractions of the spring sunshine, teacher strikes and teacher shortages - all these lead to many disciplinary problems and a high rate of truancy. Many teen-

agers who should by law be at school, merely wandered the streets of Balsall Heath this spring. They had nothing to do. Little wonder that they end up causing trouble of one kind or another. The Community School has been asked by many teachers, social workers, probation officers and parents to DO SOMETHING. It can't. Its got its own children to look after. But in time, who knows? First, more teachers, more money and more space would be needed. The demand is there, alright.

WHAT IT ISN'T!

The Community School has in fact just increased its numbers. But not with 'problem' kids. It is NOT a school for drop-outs or trouble-makers. It is NOT a 'Do-As-You-Please' school either - even if the Evening Mail did choose to use that headline in one 'story' about it. It is the job of the new Management Committee to see that it is a good school, that its pupils do good work, and that it serves Balsall Heath well - as well, or better than other secondary schools.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

So the teachers have a difficult and challenging job, as have their new Committee. They have to do their teaching and help out in the community generally. Can they do as good a job as, say, St. Paul's Nursery or Malvern St. Playground? (These too are independent locally-run projects.) But making a playground is one thing - running a secondary school is another. After all, how DO you educate a 14 or 15 year-old in a school when he really wants to be at work earning a wage, and when harsh reality tells the child that he or she will sooner or later get to know the dole queue; or when he knows someone, a bit like himself, who gets into trouble and then slides downhill fast?

MORE HANDS NEEDED

Will the Community School continue and develop further, or will it fizzle out? Its up to the pupils, their teachers, and the Management Committee. But they could do with some help from anyone who is interested. The timetable shows that Friday afternoon is an open afternoon. Friends and visitors may call - why not drop in for a chat and a cup of tea? You will be very welcome. And, if your child is keen to join and is between 11 and 15 years old, why not take the step? The Heathan gathers that there is space for 3 more children of that age.....

Straws in the Wind

The vandals have been.
The windows are smashed,
The schools are burnt.
Train seats are ripped and bottles are thrown.
Cars are smashed and people are hurt.
The vandals have been
And gone like the night.
But their mark is left and who knows
When they'll return?

T. Doyle.



the Nursery can go back

"Why can't we go in any more?" asked a 3½ years-old member of St. Paul's Day Care Centre when he walked past its old home, the Church Hall. He used to go there before the Nursery was evicted. Afterwards he never got used to the friendly but temporary shelter offered in his school by Alec Hughes, Head of Tindal St. School. But now, we are glad to report, the children, Gill Southwell (the Teacher-in-Charge), and the rest of the staff can look forward to an early return. The Council has at last bought the Hall.

Gill and an ad hoc Committee of local people organised the campaign to buy the hall - starting almost a year ago. Letters were written, Councillors lobbied, newspaper articles gave publicity, and the Community School offered the Nursery space in its T.V. documentary (recently re-shown). Why should the Nursery lose its hall to industrial or commercial use when no other facility like it exists in Balsall Heath the campaign organisers asked. The row continued, often behind the scenes, while the hall stood empty and open to vandalism. (It has been broken into more than 20 times.) It has been an anxious time for all concerned.

The need for a good, well-run nursery, in the area is obvious. Balsall Heath needs more of them - never mind worrying about the closure of the only one it has. The case for keeping the Nursery, which takes 60 kids should have gone without saying. It didn't. The Nursery had to keep going, both for the 60 kids and for those to come in the future. The staff kept going, faced cuts in salary, the dole, and long hours in

cramped conditions. Without their determination to carry on under such great difficulty, the campaign to regain the church hall could not succeed - those who would take the decision to buy the hall or not needed this embarrassing reminder of the importance of the nursery.

The purchase of the hall for use as a community centre is a victory for the Nursery, and for Gill Southwell in particular, whose efforts deserve the highest praise. Gill told us, "The parents were wonderful. But we couldn't have done it without the help of the staff of the Community School, especially, and those at the Lane Neighbourhood Centre, the Playground, the Balsall Heath Association who have worked for our success." The whole community should benefit from the work done - for although the Nursery is to have pride of place in the hall now, in the evenings and at weekends a range of activities organised by a variety of local community groups. This should add to the social and educational virtues of the nursery.

The former church hall is still empty - but is now to be brought to life. This time, with a difference. It could, in its new life, form a centre for community self-help, at a time of rapid re-development and insecurity. Balsall Heath does not have many assets. Now that the Council has bought the hall, to let it be used by local people it could offer a great new opportunity. Bill Turner, Chairman of the Social Services Committee, and other Councillors, are to be thanked for their decision to buy the hall and let it to the Balsall Heath Association. But all now depends on how the Hall is to be used. Can its potential be realised? Anyone with ideas, or who is willing to help with repair or cleaning work is asked to contact Gill Southwell at 36, Brunswick Rd. or the Heath Office 120, St. Paul's Rd. Its up to us all now. The nursery campaign said, "We'll kick up a fuss till you buy this hall for the Balsall Heath community! They did buy it - now we had better put it to good use. Anita

up your street



Mrs. Sarr shows Councillor O'Keefe the problem...

Residents of Woodfield Crescent are up in arms these days. So much so, that they have now presented a petition with around 50 names on it to Councillor John O'Keefe. Their complaints are that their dustbins are not being emptied regularly, and even when they are, rubbish is scattered all over the place. Extra rubbish beyond one-dustbin-per-household is ignored. Some people have had to pay up to £4. to have extra rubbish collected.

On Saturday May 24th Councillor O'Keefe came to accept the petition from Mrs. Evelyn Sarr, and to have a look for himself. He agreed to present the petition at the Council meeting to be held on June 4th, and to ask council officials to visit the Crescent in the meantime. He also thought the protest should be broadened to include the shocking state of the road in the Crescent, and several dangerous derelict houses.

Councillor O'Keefe has promised action. We hope to be able to report new developments in our next issue. Meanwhile the state of the road will continue to reflect discredit on the houses in the Crescent - most of which are very well-kept. Mrs. Spence summed up the problem when she said, "Sometimes I'm so ashamed when I walk up the road I just want to shut my eyes till I get in the house!"

Part of the problem with Woodfield Crescent is - like many other local avenues and crescents - it is 'unadopted'. The upkeep of roads in adopted avenues is definitely the responsibility of the Council. Unadopted avenues belong to no-one in particular. Which means, if your avenue is unadopted, and you want it surfaced you will have to fork out to the tune of about £40. per household. We have not so far been able to establish if there is hope of council grants, or of getting avenues 'adopted'. We'll have more on this next time.

THE CUTTING
ON THE RIGHT
IS FROM THE
MAGAZINE
'WHICH' IT IS
TO BE HOPE
THAT THESE
STANDARDS
WILL SOON BE
MADE LEGALLY
BINDING ON
COUNCILS.

How it should be collected

In an ideal world, your refuse would disappear down a pipe like sewage. There is at least one housing estate in the UK where rubbish is sucked away through underground pipes and incinerated automatically. For the rest of us, it's possible to establish standards for conventional rubbish collection that councils should meet. Based on the 1967 Government working party report on refuse collection, we can say that a council should, as part of the service provided on the rates:

- collect rubbish from all domestic premises in their area
- provide the containers for rubbish (bins or sacks) that the households need
- collect rubbish at least once a week
- collect rubbish from its normal storage place - not from the kerbside
- collect bulky household rubbish - old TVs, sofas and so on.

EVERY HOUSE-
HOLD PAYS ABOUT
£5 A YEAR RATES
& TAXES TO GET
RID OF RUBBISH.
BUT SOME PAY &
DON'T GET SERVICE!



mike.

CLUB FOR ELDERLY

A shop for cheap groceries and second hand clothes, tea and biscuits and a reading of the famous monologue "Albert and the Lion" by twelve-year-old Peter Milton - just some of the activities that go on at an Old People's Club held in the Methodist Church on the Moseley Road every Friday afternoon. The Club is just one of the activities of an organisation called Voluntary Care for the Aged, which has been run for the last 9½ years by Miss Jones. The excellent work which includes a visiting, shopping and library service for the elderly and disabled, is run from an office at 255, Mary St., and is funded mainly by money from Harry Payne - himself now nearly 90 years of age, of Payne's Shoe Repairers.

The organisation does not, however, have a large budget, and is enabled to function mainly by the unpaid work contributed by volunteer helpers. Five boys from King Edwards School, Edgbaston, provide entertainment for the social club, and 5 girls from King Edward's High School for Girls provide refreshments. Teachers from the boys' school provide transport for the 80 or so old people who attend the club.

Other help is provided by some of the elderly themselves - Sid and Ellen Hewitt, Mrs. Minnie Worten and Mr. Fred Lane. All are themselves over 70, but help with the visiting and the other activities. As Ellen Hewitt says, 'A lot of people haven't got anybody' - and there's no doubt that many are very grateful to Miss Jones and her band of volunteers for the fun and practical help they are providing.

mike



ABOVE: SHOP BELOW: ALBERT AND THE LION HOLD THE FLOOR.



Make Yourself at Home

Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly have six children aged 7-16 and live peacefully at 170, Clifton Rd. Or at least they used to live peacefully, till someone discovered that they were Irish, Catholics, and hold broadly Republican views. Then the raids started. It was about 3 months ago, and at 6.45 in the morning, when about twelve men (Mr. Donnelly thought some of them were armed) got the family out of bed and searched the house.

The pattern was repeated on the morning of the 29th May. This time policemen pushed in the side gate, and then searched the house again. They went so far this time as to read a letter from Mrs. Donnelly's handbag (a letter, mind you, from her mother - dead these ten years).

On both occasions the police found nothing even remotely incriminating - and yet one policeman, by way of farewell, said, "We might be back!"

The Donnellys are, not surprisingly, upset. Its bad enough having policemen with dogs parading in front of your house, while others turn out the drawers and call the contents, "Rubbish". But of course the raids frighten the children - not to mention cause the neighbours to look a bit queer. There's apparently no knowing when the family can look forward to NOT being got out of bed at a moment's notice.

The Donnelly family are the first to admit that the police have a job to do, and that no-one wants to be around when a car bomb goes off. But there is a limit to the inconvenience and insult innocent people will stand before they start thinking of it as harassment.

The family is well-known locally and no-one who knows them will suspect them for half a second of harbouring explosives, villains, or anything else. Their friends WOULD like to know why police, who are of course, fully entitled to search any time they have a warrant, also feel entitled to insult people who are supposed to be presumed innocent until shown to be guilty of something. We may also wonder why the Donnelly's 16 year-old son who was trying to go off to his job when the police arrived last time was not allowed to do so, though he was quite obviously NOT walking off with gelignite up his jersey. It is to be hoped that the magistrates will have a very hard think before they grant the next warrant to invade the Donnelly's house.

WAKE UP THE CO-OP!

It sounds like an interesting suggestion - our local shopping survey showed Co-op prices as higher than most other supermarket prices, which is strange if you remember that the Co-op was founded 'for the welfare of the common people! Now this could mean not lower prices, but, for example, giving the profit to good causes. However the Birmingham Co-op does not do that either. It does give some money to charities, but a pitiful sum compared with, say, the London Co-op.

The 'Wake Up the Co-op' slogan is not our idea, though, but that of a group of Birmingham members of the Co-op who are thoroughly disenchanted with the policies of the 'Forward' group who at present control the Birmingham Co-op. The new group are anxious to get in touch with other Co-op members who sympathise with their desire to get more of the profits to local charities. Contact the group at the Peace Centre, Smallbrook Ringway.

Local Services

THE LANE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE, 422, Ladypool Rd.

Housing Advice, Muns. 7-9 p.m., Weds. 9.30 a.m.-12.30 p.m. Legal Advice, Weds. 7-9 p.m. The Neighbourhood Centre is open ALL DAY weekdays for advice of a general nature. DONT DELAY, especially with legal problems - it may mean complications. Advice is FREE.

BALSALL HEATH ASSOCIATION, 91, Court Rd.

Free legal and housing advice. Weds. 7-9 p.m. Phone 440-1310. There may be someone there during the day on weekdays.

The HOUSING CENTRE, 261-271, Stratford Rd.

Free advice on any kind of housing problem - this service is run by the Council. Mon.-Fri. 9.00-16.00, Sat. 9.00-12.30. Tel: 773-4211.

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU, 261-271, Stratford Rd.

Free advice on any problem except housing. Only on Fridays, 10.30-14.30

A History of the Area

"Ours was an unattractive area to all but refugees, outlaws and escaped slaves". That is how J. Morris Jones describes Balsall Heath as it was before 1700. It was an expanse of infertile grass and bush, left desolate and treeless by the charcoal burners. The original oak-forests had disappeared to feed the forges and furnaces of the town. A few sheep grazed in the boulder-strewn scrub that remained.

What's in a Name?

Balsall Heath gets its name from a man named Bord - who must have grazed his sheep here around 700 years ago. In this way people began to call the area Bord's Heath, which became over the years Borsall Heath.

Nothing much stirred here until about 1700 - though some of Cromwell's soldiers did make a camp nearby during the Civil War. They placed their cannon - guess where? On a hill not far off, which came to be called Cannon Hill.

Of course even three hundred years ago there were tracks or paths where Highgate and Ladypool Road now run. (By the way, Ladypool Road got its name from a pond which used to be where Balsall Heath Park now is. The fish which were caught there were devoted to Our Lady - St. Mary's Church Moseley.) Later there was Stoney Lane, so called because the gravel banks of the Spark brook offered a firm footing to travellers who in those days didn't often find a good track to walk on!

On the Track

From 1700 Balsall Heath was chiefly important for its road (or track!) that ran roughly where the Moseley-Alcester road now is. Even after the road became a toll road in 1767, it was little more than a track. We learn that in the winter it was often over 200 yards wide in some places, because travellers avoided the muddy centre of the road.

The real development of Balsall Heath didn't begin until about 1830. Building was slow at first, planless and piecemeal. This can be seen in Tindal St. which has a mixture of separately built houses, each in its own style. The canals were relatively far away from Balsall Heath and therefore there was no rapid building of factories, or early development. All this changed with the coming of the railway. The first station was at Camp Hill, then at Highgate Rd., Brighton Rd., and Moseley. The railway encouraged the growth of light industry and factories and workshops were soon springing up in backyards and converted houses.

A landmark was passed in 1848 when the Sanitary Board installed the first sewer - too late, however, to prevent several outbreaks of cholera and typhus. Balsall Heath must have been a pretty grim place to live in at that time. But things improved, slowly. Many of the first schools were built at this time - five, between 1837 and 1873. Transport improved too. In the 1870's horse-trams travelled the Moseley Road. They were replaced in the 1880's by steam-trams, which in turn gave way to electric trams - these last were in operation from 1906 to 1950, and no doubt lots of our readers remember these, if not the steam trams!

Moving Story

A hundred years ago there was still open country between Balsall Heath and the city. We are told that well-to-do folk often drove out in their carriages from the city to enjoy the view of the old town from Highgate. Only on Sundays, of course, because on the other days all you could see was smoke. Some of these visitors even built 'country houses' here. But they were doomed to disappoint-

ment. The country houses were swallowed up by the city as it sprawled outwards over the years. The fate of one such builder is described in a nineteenth century song:

I remember one John Crowse,
A buckle-maker in Brummagem.
He built himself a country house
To be out of the smoke of Brummagem.
But though John's country house stands still
The town itself has walked uphill
Now he lives beside a smoky mill
In the middle of the streets of Brummagem.

Research for this article by Donna and Mike. We shall be very interested to hear from readers who have any further snippets about our yesterdays, or day-before-yesterdays!

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FROM YOU - more contributions of any kind, - stories, drawings, letters, crosswords (we'll pay £1 for one with local interest for publication.)

PHOTOS - especially old ones of Balsall Heath. Any we use will be returned intact.

PHONE US AT 440-4376, or write/call 120, St. Paul's Rd.

The Heathan is produced entirely by members of the Community School, and financed entirely by money from sales and advertisers. We are VERY SORRY indeed to raise the price to 4p, but our bills have gone up almost beyond belief - mainly because of the increasing cost of paper. We have also DOUBLED the size of the paper, so we hope you'll think it worth twice as much.

Photos are mainly by Mike and the Community School pupils and copies can be bought cheaply from our office. This Crossword is by Adrian McGee, and we had some help with typing and layout from Carolyn Parish and Nigel Halliday.

service to advertisers

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WINNERS of our crossword competition in the last issue were Class 4C, Tindal St. Primary School, who sent in a joint effort. They receive £1 and our congratulations.

news from
Malvern St.

PLAYGROUND

The playground has just finished its usual hectic but satisfying round of holiday activities for the half-term break. These included trips to Sutton Park and the Wyre Forest for hundreds of kids and some parent-helpers. We'll hardly have time to draw breath before the long summer holiday is with us - but we shall be prepared with an exciting programme, including, we hope, some camping trips lasting several days. There's still time for anyone who has ideas about trips or other activities for the summer programme to let us know.

There has of course been a rather sad change at the playground since the last issue of the Heathan. Probably many readers will know that Rob Whewsey, playleader for several years, has left. He will be very much missed by both kids and parents. He has been temporarily replaced by Cas Henderson, and the playground Committee are looking for a new permanent Playleader. Meanwhile we are all enjoying the fine weather and long evenings - please join us!

Rob McGann and Cas Henderson.

We are All Actors now!

Adrian, aged 7, thought the huge green man was a Monster. Judging by the screams, most of the 170 playground kids thought the same. They were watching a play at Cannon Hill. It all ended happily, and the Monster turned out to be a friend who saved us all from being trapped on the sea-bed.

For a year now 3 actors from Cannon Hill Theatre Company have come to the playground every second Saturday. They help the kids to perform an improvised play, or make up a treasure hunt, or do anything that gives excitement and helps them to think, and co-operate with others. The actors and kids have had some great times together.

Things were going so well that we decided to be a bit more adventurous. Last Christmas 60 of us went carol-singing. Lanterns were made and songs rehearsed in the hut with the actors' help. They provided a band on the day. Over £16 was raised, which helped to pay for our Christmas party. And we all had a great time.

The success of the carols made us think even bigger. Three events were planned-linked together and spread from Christmas to Easter. FIRST - collect jumble. The Community School kids started it off by collecting in Moseley. Then the actors came. They were Steptoe and Son, and they brought their band again. Over 70 kids helped collect jumble that day - and quite a few adults. The lorry was full.

SECOND, a grand Jumble Sale was organised, with an

auction, refreshments, etc. This raised £84, and all who helped, kids and adults, and the 350 people who came to spend their money had an enjoyable afternoon.

THIRD, the jumble sale paid for two buses, refreshments and theatre seats for the 170 kids who went on the Saturday trip to the theatre we began by discussing. The community play which they saw was about pollution and was called 'Adventure in the Deep'. The whole audience was invited to take part-as the crew of a bathyscope. We were nearly stranded 10,000 ft. under the sea, were befriended by a monster from Atlantis, and lived to tell how we helped the actors to escape. We all managed to get back to Balsall Heath in time for tea. We all had a marvellous time and lots to eat - FREE, thanks to the money we raised ourselves.

The actors came to see us again last Saturday. The kids know them well now and are always asking what's on next and can they help. The big events have raised our sights. Actors and playground helpers are already planning the next 12 months of activities. It will be even better than the first year because both actors and kids have learned a lot.

Praise is due to the playground, to one of its voluntary helpers, Dick Atkinson, and to the actors, for organising these projects. (And to the Midland Arts Council for paying the actors' expenses.) We've all had some constructive fun - but also Cannon Hill and its Theatre Company have become a bit less remote. Our kids have shown them that they are as good an audience as any other - and better at participating! As one kid put it, 'I thought it was just for the snobs.' Another said, 'I like them.' (The actors.) 'They want you to help them. They let you do things with them.'

The actors have got the message at last. Balsall Heath has been left, neglected, on their doorstep too long. Lets have a lot of your attention please, Cannon Hill! What the actors have done so far should only be seen as a good start. Lets hope they get some more money for next year.



Anita

Photo by M. Widdiffe.

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Glass Cut To Size



GARDEN TOOLS.

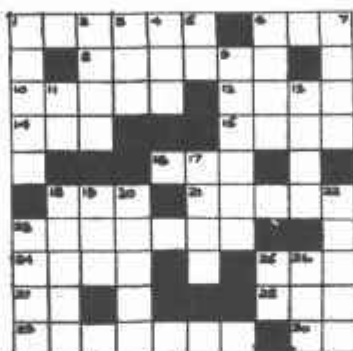
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ROOF FELT, WIRENETTING,
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ACROSS.

1. Road where most accidents occur in Balsall Heath. 6.
6. 2nd Class Scouts can use it. 3.
8. Rope for hanging. 1-5.
10. Pancake place in Bucks. 5.
12. Singular tool for sugar. 4.
14. Small fry for a war. 3.
15. A waste outlet. 4.
16. French for bad. 3.
18. A bitter experience? 3.
21. And ale as well, perhaps. 5.
23. Doing all with same brush. 7.
25. A short expert. 3.
27. Brief morning. 2.
28. Old French coin. 3.
29. Local road leads to Somerset. 7.
30. Initial preservation of our heritage. 2.



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DOWN.

1. 'Christian' name of an ex-M.P. 5.
2. A magician may have one. 4.
3. Scots word for 'own'. 3.
4. He's in the Royal Oak. 3.
5. ...by all means. 2.
6. Quite a long time! 4.
7. Maybe these came first. 4.
9. Add a mite to get a deposit. 6.
11. Or behold. 2.
13. Barely apparent. 4.
17. Readily spotted. 4.
18. Buddhist destiny. 5.
19. A unit of energy. 3.
20. You could have this or gin. 5.
22. Closed round nothing to yell. 5.
23. Baby's on the bottle. 4.
25. Afterthought. 2.
26. Nor will he be twisted. 3.

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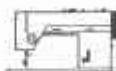
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