

Preserving and Sharing Wednesfield's Heritage through oral history

Barclays Bank at number 11 High Street opened on 21st July 1958; this, along with the clothing & the vehicles, dates the photograph to the late 1950s/early 1960s

Working back from the right-hand edge: Wednesfield TV, Frost's the Chemist, The Rose & Crown public house - note the Butlers wagon unloading outside; around the bend but out of the photograph was Downing's the Butcher





In 2018, Wednesfield History Society started an oral history project funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. In essence this means funded by the National Lottery players of the UK. The project is called 'Preserving and Sharing Wednesfield's Heritage' and its aim has been to explore the experiences of people who have lived in Wednesfield over the whole, or part of, the past 80 to 90 years.

This period has witnessed a huge amount of change in the area from a pre-WWII semi-rural environment, to modern urban sprawl; from decaying gentrified farms to very little agriculture at all except that carried out by hardy allotment keepers; from small industry, to large scale industry, to industrial decline.

Only those who have lived through this experience can reveal the lost heritage to those who can now see little of it – that is to younger members of the community and people new to the area.

The content of this booklet is based upon the memories of Wednesfield folk and many thanks go to all contributors but especially to Marjorie Lewis, John Grosvenor, John Marshall, Alf Wardley, Les Simmons, Ray Fellows, Ken Morby and Bob Gould for their in-depth co-operation with the project.



Growing Up

Fields and Open Spaces

It has long been known that prior to WWII Wednesfield had many open fields and areas of undeveloped land. The experience of this project's interviewees reveals just how wonderful this was for children growing up in the 1930s and 40s. In an age that felt more socially safe, where freedom to roam was only curtailed by the need to get to school on time or be home in time for dinner, the fields and the small pathways that navigated through them provided an atmosphere ripe for adventure and long days spent with friends. Much has changed since then, although judging by the number of strawberries that were liberated from cruel incarceration behind allotment fences, children have probably not changed a lot.

Fields loomed large in the childhood travels of our contributors. Not just as playgrounds but also as part of the development of the area. For example, when the Regal Cinema was being built in the High Street in 1935, Marjorie could see it going up from her bedroom window in Bolton Road, just across a field. No fields there now! In the early days of the cinema there were undeveloped fields to the rear of it that were simply known as the Regal fields.

Les recalls gaining access to Dickie Lewis' corn field by climbing over the fence at the bottom of his garden in West Avenue. He walked his way around the field, coming out eventually at the top of Victoria Road at the junction with Cannock Road, where his granddad lived. Granddad

lived in a terraced house that was laid back from the road. Here he would sit in the evening after work with a little barrel of beer, a round of cheese and a wire cheese cutter - and there he would stay until it was time to go to bed.

Right opposite Alf's childhood home in the other Victoria Road, which runs parallel with Vicarage Road, was a large field where Parkhouse Avenue is now situated. There was a pool in one corner of the field which, it was rumoured, was on the sight of a former mine shaft. But that may just have been rumour. The field itself backed onto New Cross Infirmary. The residents of the workhouse would throw money over the fence to the children playing in the field to go and buy cigarettes for them. You had to give them the right change though - or else!

The King George V playing field in Amos Lane provided a base for a lot of happy young footballers. Despite the nineteen-year age gap between Ray and Alf, both generations enjoyed footie at King George's and the Park. Ray remembers local tournaments, such as Tithe Road versus Amos Lane and Mattox Road versus Wood End. Ray and his brothers, Ronnie and Roy, lived in Tithe Road at the time, and so were often in the same team. Other team mates remembered were Freddie Homer and Roger Frasier. The opposition often contained The Bickley brothers, Johnny, Albert and Corky. Albert would be instrumental much later on in bringing Ray and his future wife, Kath, together.

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The playing field was an area under cultivation as late as 1934 as can be seen from the photograph below.



*Kathleen Saunders in a corn field where King George V playing fields now lie
(Wolverhampton Archive reference P/8086)*

John G, had fields all around him when he was a boy. His family had moved from Wood End Road in the late 1930s when his dad fell out of work and money became scarce. They went to live at Sand Pits, off Noose Lane, which was just on the Wednesfield side of the border with Willenhall. At Sand Pits there were 6 railway carriage houses set out in a square. John's five neighbours were the Birds, the Worseys, the Todds, the Landers and the Georges.

John's grandparents lived about half a mile away at Neachells Farm. The farm has been there for centuries but in his grandparents' time, the farming was largely confined to pig rearing - together with a few ducks and chickens.



*Neachells Farmhouse, circa 1950.
(Wolverhampton Archive reference) P/4309*

Growing Up

A chap called Walker used to bring a boar over to the farm every now and then for breeding and John's dad had to pop over to the farm at certain times of the year to help clear out the rats.

John's granddad, James Grosvenor, in amongst his chickens at Neachells Farm



There were two fields at the back of the farm which a Mr Brindley used to plough for cattle feed. Mr Brindley's cattle were brought out every morning to graze in the field. They had to cross a main railway track to get there and also cross over a brook which was a tributary of the River Severn. The brook ran through Lichfield Road, down to March End and straight on. It has been culverted now.

The surrounding fields may have been a youngster's paradise but the farm contained old pit shafts which although fenced off were not covered over. John was challenged by temptation and danger all at the same time!

The south side of Bolton Road used to have allotments behind the houses. Behind the allotments was the canal and behind the canal, the railway line. Although this was a goods line there were a few exceptional times when it functioned for passengers. For instance, a group of Sunday School children

from St Thomas Church were able to board a train there in the 1930s for an outing to Rhyl.

Ken recollects the old railway station which was not far from the waste ground behind his home in Well Lane. It was full of straw and he and his friends spent much time playing there.

All in all, play areas comprising fields and waste land were plentiful but the general opinion is that in the twenty first century, they would be considered health and safety risks and would be securely fenced off.

Children did play in the streets as well as the open areas and there does not appear to be anyone who did not enjoy the game of knock-the-door-and-run-away. One version of this involved tying a piece of string or cotton on to the knocker of someone's letter box and securing the other end in the same way to a house across the road – not too tight though. One child would then activate one of the knockers and

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when the parent pulled the door open the thread would tighten and activate the knocker on the house across the road. How many knocks could you get before the game was up? It probably drove the adults crazy but as has been observed, 'all the kids did it and there were lots of us'. So, parents could not avoid the game really.

Hearth and Home

John G has memories of the interior of his grandparents' old house at Neachells Farm. He can recall a large stone staircase, six or seven feet wide. The staircase turned part way up and brought you out into a large room with other rooms leading off on either side. John always thought of it as a dining room, but unfortunately for the historical record, this was as far as his rather strict gran would let him and his siblings go

into the main part of the house. There was a large cellar beneath the house accessed by eight or ten very wide steps and in the kitchen area, a big, black cooking range which had a moveable plate to adjust the useable width and a clockwork jack for cooking the meat. You could sit in the grate, three on each side, and a set of wooden stairs led up the side of the chimney place.

The farm house was a little different from John's railway carriage house which was rather smaller and had no electricity or internal water supply. At one point the well, from which John's family drew their water, was filled in. From that time onwards, they sought out an arrangement with a Mr Alexander who lived by Noose Lane bridge to collect two buckets of water each morning from his property. The site of these railway carriage houses is now a small nature reserve.

There used to be a number of railway carriage dwellings in and around the Wednesfield area. The picture below shows a derelict one which was typical of its type but its location is unknown.



Wolverhampton City Archive reference P/5220

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Even in brick-built houses there was no guarantee of electricity being laid on. Certainly prior to the war, darkness was still often lit by gas mantles, frequently wall-mounted. The mantle was a small bag made of fabric and it had to be set alight before use. Burning it got rid of any loose fibres and the process hardened the material and produced a natural chemical ash, which when heated by the lit gas, gave off a bright incandescent light.s

Milk was usually delivered to the door by the milkman. Often it was in churns, from which the household's milk was measured out into a jug. In Prestwood Road there was a Midland Counties Dairy and Alf remembers the cold winter of 1947 when he and his friends took their sledges there to collect milk for the neighbours. There was a dairy opposite Marjorie's house in Bolton Road. It lay just in front of the field over which she had watched the Regal cinema being built.

Coal could be collected from the canal wharf by St Thomas's Church. Although when coal was rationed during war time John G and Marjorie remember going coal picking John on the waste areas of the local pits and Marjorie by the railway line where coal had spilled over the sides of goods wagons.

Lots of families appear to have kept chickens and ducks as well as pigs in their back gardens.

John M's house in Well Lane was more or less opposite Lewis's slaughter house where his family's

pigs were butchered. Describing the site, John recalls that next to The Royal Oak public house there was a little row of six terraced houses, then a strange building with an archway and big gates, then some fencing, then a gate through which Lewis's abattoir could be found in a corner. Each New Year's Day, John's dad would go to a pig breeder in Old Heath Road and buy two piglets for fattening up over the next twelve months. Neighbours used to bring their potato peelings and cabbage stalks which would be boiled up in the old brewhouse at the back of John's house to supplement the pigs' diet.

Supplements to the diet of the human part of the population consisted of the chickens and ducks reared in back gardens plus their eggs, together with delicious home-grown fruits and vegetables. For the latter, gardens and allotments needed to be kept well-nourished with compost. Fallen autumn leaves would form a large part of home-made compost. Pre-bagged garden compost is a much more recent convenience. Alf's garden compost was enriched with hops obtained from a neighbour who worked at Banks's Brewery.

Christmas was an enjoyable time, but not so opulent as it later became. Mothers were usually quite good at squeezing the household budget during the year in order to provide at least a small gift at Christmas. There was always the Christmas stocking with fruit and nuts rammed into the foot area. The rest of the sock? – well it depended on the household budget. Ray had a red ball one year. It cost seven shillings and sixpence

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from Sidebotham's in Amos Lane. Outside into the yard he went with his new ball, took aim and gave it a good kick against the wall of his house. It burst. So sadly, that was Christmas over with for that year. Marjorie's dad always managed to get a Christmas tree from somewhere and it would be adorned with paper ornaments and real candles. Today, that sounds dangerous, but nearly everyone who had a tree did the same thing.

Alf's dad was a delivery driver for LMS - the London Midland Scottish Railway Company. Every year he delivered a barrel of Scottish whiskey to the landlord of The Angel in the High Street, Jimmy Howe. By arrangement, he would take in a small medicine bottle, the sort with

measures on the back, and Jimmy would fill it. It was very definitely full strength, Alf recalls.

School

Most people who took part in this oral history survey did their primary schooling at either the school in Neachells Lane, or the one in Woden Avenue.

Most young people left school at age 15 or 16 during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, and at that time school leavers could leave at Easter time as well as summer time, depending on when their birthday fell in the year. You left school on a Friday and usually started work the following Monday - no extended holiday!

World War II at Home, School & in The Community

A lot of homes had an Anderson Shelter in the back garden into which to retreat during air raids. Sometimes there were above ground, sometimes they were partially below ground:



Sometimes they were communal shelters near schools or on street corners. Alf's nearest air raid shelters were on a small piece of waste ground at the corner of Victoria Road and Prestwood Road West (just called Prestwood Road in those days). The shelters became play areas for children after the war and the ground now has bungalows erected on it.

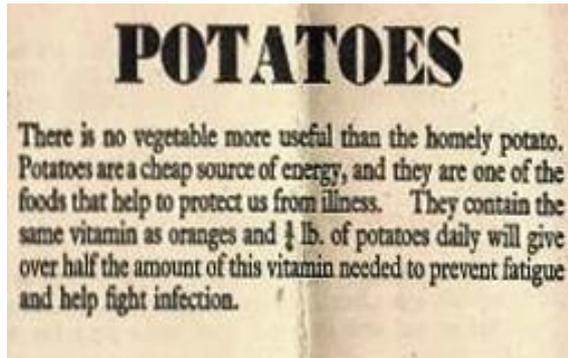
Marjorie was in a precarious situation during air raids because of her attachment to her mom. Mom had been completely deaf since the age of 22 and could neither hear the aircraft overhead nor any falling bombs. Additionally, she was claustrophobic. All of this often meant that she would leave the family's Anderson Shelter before the 'all clear' had sounded. Faithful Marjorie would follow her and so spent the rest of the air raid period hiding under her bedclothes, whilst dad and her two sisters remained in the shelter.

Food was rationed during the war, starting with bacon, butter and sugar in 1940. Rationing ensured a fairer distribution of food and commodities when supplies were scarce. By 1942 many other foodstuffs, including meat, milk, cheese, eggs and cooking fat were also 'on the ration'. A typical week's ration for an adult consisted of:

<i>Bacon & Ham</i>	<i>4 oz</i>
<i>Other meat</i>	<i>to the value of 1 shilling and 2 pence (about 2 chops)</i>
<i>Butter</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Cheese</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Margarine</i>	<i>4 oz</i>
<i>Cooking fat</i>	<i>4 oz</i>
<i>Milk</i>	<i>3 pints</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>8 oz</i>
<i>Preserves</i>	<i>1 lb (per 2 months)</i>
<i>Tea</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Eggs</i>	<i>1 fresh egg (plus an allowance of dried egg)</i>
<i>Sweets</i>	<i>12 oz per 4 weeks</i>

World War II at Home, School & in The Community

Everyone in the country had a ration book which would be registered at a shop of their choosing. The existing habit of growing your own produce at home really came into its own. The humble potato got a big billing by the Ministry of Food:



Home-grown potatoes were even praised for saving on shipping costs – much was imported even then.

Pig clubs were popular. People banded together to buy a pig and provide vegetable peelings etc to feed it, just as they had done for years anyway. They could then share the meat to augment the meagre meat ration allowed. Pig clubs were also allowed to have a small ration of pig feed or corn. Alf's family went halves in a pig with a lady in Blackhalve Lane. She had the pigsty, so she took care of the pig.

Queuing at shops could not be avoided and if you were around age 10 or older you would probably find that task delegated to you.

Coal was rationed. The ration was set at two and a half tons per household per year. It is difficult for anyone who was not alive at the time to understand how significant this was. Almost all domestic heating

was from coal fires; hot water came from coal fired boilers and many people were still cooking on coal fired kitchen ranges. Industry, too, was powered by coal.

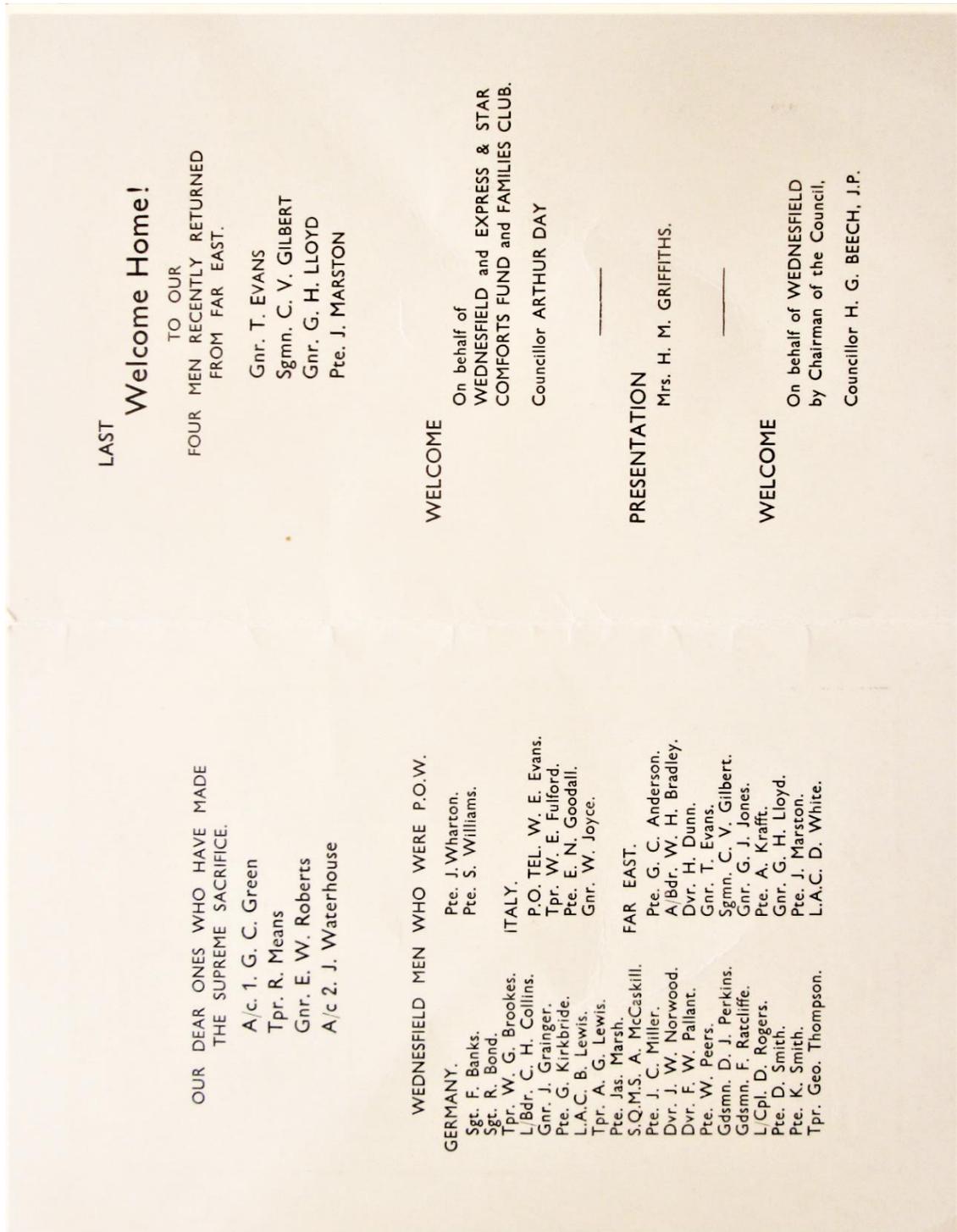
In schools, gas mask drill was practised every morning for five or ten minutes. Pupils took their masks to school each day often in a cardboard box hung around the neck with a piece of string. If you forgot it, you were sent home to fetch it!

Teachers at Woden Avenue Infant & Junior School (now Wodensfield Primary School) would walk the pupils over to their allotted air raid shelter on Lewis's field, situated to the side of the Royal British Legion driveway off Vicarage Road. Until recently, this field was the site of a care home which had now been demolished and awaits residential development. The air raid shelters for the school in Neachells Lane were in the Regal Fields, more or less where the police station now stands. The concrete from which they were made always smelled damp. This smell and the smell of the rubber of the gas masks have both proved difficult to forget.

As elsewhere, Wednesfield industry was involved in war-related production. But, after the war had ended Wolverhampton Metal Company in Well Lane, Wednesfield, bought a lot of war-related non-ferrous metal items for reprocessing. Included in this was scrap from the HMS Warspite which had played a significant role in the Battle of the River Plate. John M recalls the huge boiler being transported down Well Lane to the factory.

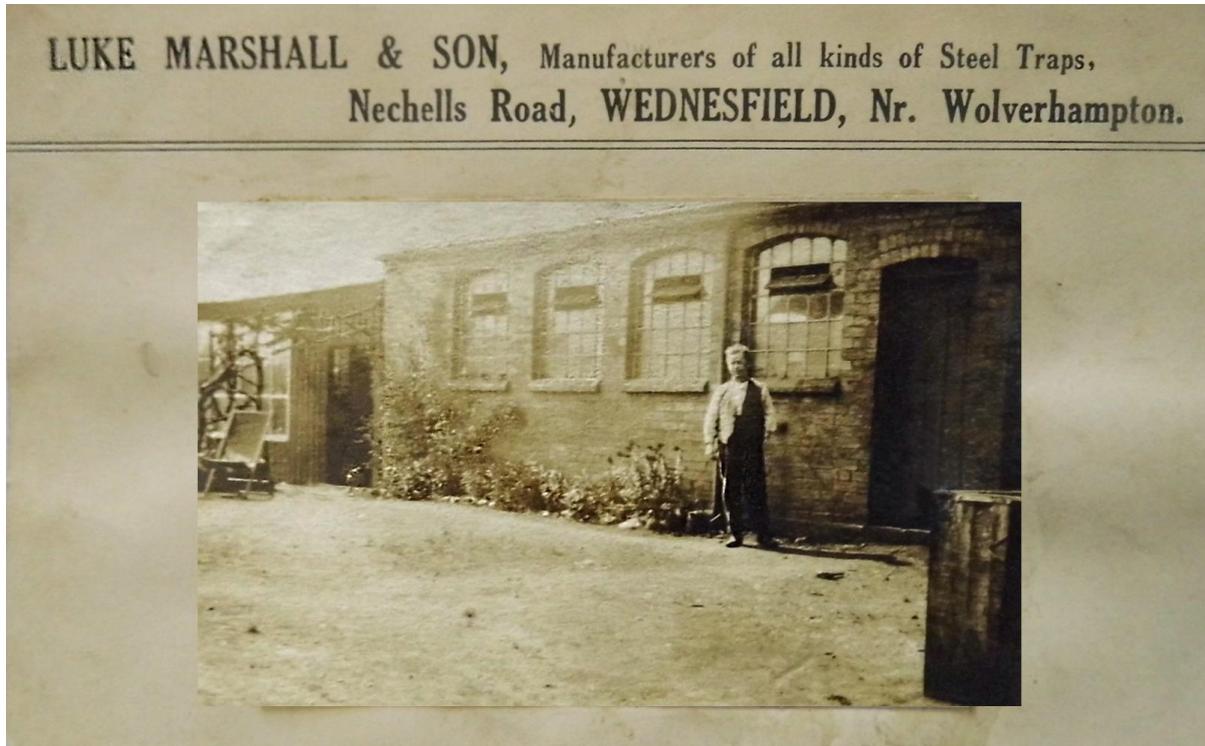
World War II at Home, School & in The Community

On 23rd February 1946, the Wednesfield Prisoners of War Families Club held a 'Welcome Home' victory dinner for Wednesfield's repatriated POWs. The Directors of Brockhouse Castings loaned their canteen for the occasion. The section of the programme reproduced below lists the names of those honoured:



Into Adulthood

John M was part of the Marshall trap making family and he started work in his dad's trap shop at 139 Neachells Lane (note below the misprint of 'Road' for 'Lane' and the different spelling of Neachells).



In the early 1960s he had to leave that job when Wednesfield Urban District Council placed a compulsory purchase order on the site and demolished both the factory and the accompanying house. It was believed that a swimming baths had been planned for the site but it was never built and a few years later Wednesfield UDC was absorbed into Wolverhampton Borough Council. The site is now a carpark and grassed area.

John then took a job at 'the Yale'. Yale and Towne, an American company, arrived in Waddensbrook Lane around 1936 where it employed many Wednesfield people, including Les who was a capstan operator there. Production at the site finally ended in the 1990s, at which time it was known as Eaton Yale and Towne

Incorporated, following a merger with another company in 1966.

Another big Wednesfield employer that arrived in Wednesfield in 1936 was Brockhouse Castings of Hall Street and Well Lane. Brockhouse's acquired the Wednesfield site from Dawkins Enamels and Foundry Company. During the war, Brockhouse's made ships' anchors and chains. Marjorie started her working life with the company operating the switchboard and remembers that there was a special number that connected the firm directly to the Admiralty. To this day she can remember the company's general telephone number – Fallings Park 736221. The old Temperance Hall, after which Hall Street was named, was amalgamated into Brockhouse's building stock as a

Into Adulthood

greasing bay, amongst other uses. The Hall had also been the Tivoli theatre in its lifetime. When Sainsbury's took over the Brockhouse site, they donated the Hall's original windows to Wednesfield History Society.

Quite a lot of Wednesfield's twentieth century industry seems to have sprung up in the 1930s. This was possibly because of the convenient juxtaposition of canal, goods railway and roads to facilitate distribution.

When not at school Alf used to go to work with his dad who was a driver for LMS – London Midland Scottish Railway Company. Mainly he carried out deliveries around the Wednesfield factories, but his Sunday morning job was to go to Wednesfield railway station and couple/uncouple the goods wagons from their engines. The uncoupled wagons would be loaded up by the local factories with their products and the engine would return later to collect the wagons and start the goods on their journies to their various destinations.

1937 saw a brand new factory erected in Neachells Lane for Jenks and Cattell. Of this factory, Ray has observed 'you name it, they made it'. Locally they were best known for their quality garden tools, but some of their other products included automobile chassis brackets, brake drums, gramophone components, parts for the aircraft industry and the textile industry. Rather humorously, Kelly's Trade Directory of 1936 describes the company as "stampers and piercers and *bucket ear*

manufacturers". Ray and Ken both worked there at different times.

Other large-scale employers of Wednesfield folk were C & B Smith Foundries Limited and Willenhall Motor Radiator Company both of which were in Neachells Lane. Also, Goodares of Rookery Street who were later incorporated into Wolverhampton Metal company, Mander Brothers, who established a works in Well Lane in 1894 and a later premises in Heath Town in the 1920s, and Weldless Steel Tube of Waddensbrook Lane.

Many companies with a base in Wednesfield have now disappeared and the resultant loss of work has often been hard on families. Redundancies were a particularly gruelling experience. However, occasionally hope bobbed up to the surface even when redundancy hit. For example, being made redundant from British Steel in the late 1980s pushed Ray further towards his love of local history, the outcome being Wednesfield History Society. Good result! Alf went through the redundancy process no fewer than thirteen times at Marlins (formerly Sniders) in Waddensbrook Lane. Thankfully, he survived to fight another day on each occasion and retired aged 65 in the normal way.

Both Alf and Les are of an age that required them to complete a compulsory stint in the armed forces. Les joined the army and headed off to Singapore whilst Alf joined the RAF and remained nearer home.

Leisure

In both childhood and adulthood, going to the cinema was a favourite leisure activity. There were two cinemas in Wednesfield - The Ideal in Rookery Street (popularly known as 'The Smack') and The Regal in the High Street.

The Ideal had originally been built as a Methodist Chapel in 1852. It was converted into The Electric Theatre in 1912 and a decade or so later it underwent further alterations and was relaunched as the Ideal Cinema. The Ideal was not as posh as The Regal but it had an effective 'good behaviour policy'. If you misbehaved the Manager would deliver a generous slap to the back of the head!

Cinema programmes used to be a lot longer than they are now. Apart from the news items and trailers, you would see a cartoon, a 'B' film and the main feature film. John M was fond of his trip to The Regal with his mates for the Saturday matinee, not least because it always entailed a one penny sticky bun from the Cash Bakery on the way home.

Marjorie also has fond memories of Saturday morning matinees at the Regal. If the price of a ticket was not available, or the film's certificate excluded you by reason of age, there was an alternative option. Around the back of the building were steps which led up to the projection room. Marjorie and her friends would go up those steps where they could hear the film through the door even if they could not see it. Then they would re-enact the films amongst themselves, be they period dramas, westerns,

pirate films or anything else whatsoever. Marjorie's sister was an usherette at the Regal a few years later.

Alf also recollects the 'Saturday crush' at The Regal, where six old pence would get you in to a Roy Rogers film. Sometimes pals could not afford the entrance price so those who could would meander down to the toilet area past the side of the screen and let the others in through the fire door.

The opening film at The Regal on 14th October 1935 was Bulldog Jack with Jack Hulbert and Fay Wray. When the cinema closed in 1962, the last film shown on 17th March was The Naked Edge starring Gary Cooper. The Ideal also closed in the early 1960s. The Regal was replaced by a series of Supermarkets, the most recent being The Heron. The Ideal became a Carpet Warehouse and although the original building was destroyed by fire in 1991, it was replaced with a building which has architecturally sympathetic features to the initial chapel design.

Dancing was a favourite pastime for the young people of Wednesfield. You could always pop up the road to The Civic Hall in Wolverhampton, where Alf met his wife Dorothy, or to The Minerva in Essington, but because of the number of works' clubs that were around, there was no shortage of more local venues to choose from. The Weldless Steel Tube club, the Willenhall Radiator club, The Drill Hall in Lichfield Road, Henry Meadows and The Ever

Leisure

Ready near Park village, and the joy of many people's lives – The Wednesfield Church Institute. A butcher from the top of Frederick Road named Bob White had a band that played there on Saturday Nights. His theme tune was "I'll see you in my dreams" and the place was always packed out. An entrance fee of two shillings would get you in on Saturday nights – one shilling on Monday nights. Les recalls that as a youngster, a tanner (six old pence) a year paid into a fund provided children with crisps and pop at the back of the building. There was a little door through which they could see the dancing. When they grew up, they became the dancers and that's where Les met his late wife Hilda. As well as dances, the Institute covered a variety of other needs and interests, from over-16s evening classes to snooker sessions run by Bert and Sam Adey.

If a quiet pint (or even a not so quiet pint) was your desire, there were plenty of pubs in Wednesfield, particularly in The Village area.

- The Boat - still pulling pints
- The Angel - recently closed
- The Dog and Partridge - still pulling pints

Just outside of The Village and still with us is

- The Vine,
- but a neighbouring pub, The Cross Guns, has gone.

Gone also are

- The Royal Tiger (the name having been adopted by Wetherspoons, even though it occupies the old Done's Bakery premises next door to the Tiger building)

- The Red Lion (used to be opposite the Royal Tiger and not to be confused with the one in Amos Lane)
- The Crown (licence later transferred to the New Crown in Nordley Road and also now gone)
- The Royal Oak - gone
- The Pyle Cock - still serving the locality, but with child care facilities rather than pints.

Marjorie's dad used to play piano in The Angel and eventually he became so popular that he played all around Wolverhampton and Bilston. He owned neither a car nor a bike. He walked everywhere, no matter how far. Bob also used to play piano in pubs and clubs. The Pheasant had a nice piano he recalls. For a while, his most regular gig was at Woden Road Club in Heath Town where he accompanied the guest artists – for instance David Whitfield, Matt Monroe and Malcolm Vaughan.

Football was as popular amongst young adults as it was with children. Alf played for West Bromwich Albion Juniors until an injury to his ankle shattered his hopes as well as his ankle. When Ray worked at Decca Radio and TV in Neachells Lane, he found a route into the football team at Essington Working Men's Club. Eventually several of his friends also joined the team and Corky Bickley became the manager. They worked their way up from division 9 to division 2, even playing in Belgium. Wednesfield produced quite a few good footballers. Dave Wilson played for Chesterfield, Alf and Bill Cook went to Wolves, John Sleuwenhoek was at Aston Villa,

Leisure

Johnny Nicholls went to the Albion, Raymond Sambrook played for Manchester City and Eddie Holding played for Walsall. The photograph below depicts Alf, on the left and Eddie Holding on the right.



Tales from Wednesfield

Marjorie

Marjorie loved sports when she was at school – running, jumping were all ideally suited to a young lady with long legs. When she started work aged 14, little did she know that those long legs were going to get her into a spot of bother. Her first job was at Brockhouse Castings – in the offices. WWII was still in progress and luxury items were scarce, so when the café across the road rang the offices to say that cake was available, someone had to sneak over there to get it. And sneaking was necessary because under strict wartime rules, no-one was allowed to leave the premises without providing the Sergeant at the gatehouse with a very good reason. As Marjorie's legs were the longest, she was elected to slip out of the window in order to bypass the gate. She soon returned with the precious cake but hit a stumbling block. The distance from the ground to the window was greater on the outside of the office than on the inside and she couldn't climb back in. Someone went to get a stool but the Sergeant on the Gate had seen her by that time. She was in trouble with the manager and was threatened with the sack if she did it again. But, she did do it again and lost her job. She soon found another one though, at the 'food office' in Willenhall.

Alf

Alf's call up to military service could not have come at a worse time. His family were in the final stages of planning a move to Australia. All of the necessary medicals and passport conditions had been sorted so Alf

asked if he could possibly do his service in the Australian military. The answer was 'No'. So, on the day that Alf headed off to his RAF base, his sister, Joan, shipped off to Australia leaving mom, dad and Alf behind her. Joan is still in Australia. Alf and his parents never made it though because after his military service was completed, he had to remain on the reserve list for a further five years, and the determination to go dwindled away.

Ray

Ray's dad suffered one of those unfortunate incidents that you really shouldn't laugh at but you can't help it. Dad, one of whose lower arms was false following a wartime injury, had managed to cycle all the way from Bridgnorth back to the family home in Wednesfield. It was getting dark when he got back home and unfortunately he had no lights on his bike. He was alright though, no-one had spotted him until, that is, he rode into his own street where a policeman, who happened to live in the same street, saw him and 'had him'. All that way, with only one serviceable arm only to get caught by your neighbour!

Bob

Bob used to work with his dad in the wholesale potato business. He recalls collecting tons of potatoes from Fred Thornley at Ashmore Park Farm and George Lewis at Bridge Farm. There was no lifting gear in those days and the hundredweight sacks (just short of 51 kilograms) were carried on your back and loaded with

Tales from Wednesfield

the strength of your own arms and shoulders.

John G's missing pig

John's school life did not produce many memories but one incident has stuck in his mind for years. One day at primary school he was called to the front by Miss Williams. He sought around in his mind for what he may have done wrong, as being in trouble was not unusual for John. When, he got to the front of the class the teacher asked him to hold up a photograph to show the class. The photograph turned out to be of his gran Grosvenor standing beside what was described as 'the biggest pig in the Midlands'. John would dearly love to find a copy of that photograph, but so far, no luck.

Ken

When Ken attended Ashmore Pak Youth Club he used to take part in the Ten Tors walk over Dartmoor. It was run by the Army and the participants were drawn from youth clubs around the country. The aim was to walk sixty miles in twenty four hours taking in ten hills – ie tors. Sadly, Ken never completed the course, but he enjoyed trying!

John M

John enjoyed his time in Wednesfield. He even came back to the Village after his family had moved a bit further away. To him, Well Lane was a community all on its own. His grandparents lived in the same street, in fact they all lived together for a while. He was close to the cinema, the buses to get him to school and the New Crown where he

worked when he was older and, indeed, held his wedding reception. One of his funniest memories though is of his part in the coronation celebrations for the Queen. He and his group had a platform on King George V playing fields performing 'Fly Bonny Boat'. He was a soldier. His dad had made him a whacking big manly sword but to complete the outfit he had to borrow a girl's tartan skirt to double up as a kilt. Oh no!

Les's dad and the rabbit

Les's family kept a variety of animals in the back garden when he was a lad. The fowl were the responsibility of Les and his sister Winnie; they had to move the roost around the garden every two weeks to refresh the ground. But a rabbit with pink eyes produced the most enjoyment. One bright moon-lit night it got out into the front garden. Dad had returned from the pub and was chasing around trying to throw his jacket over it to calm it down and catch it. The rabbit was too wiley for that though, and it spent a good part of the night avoiding dad's clutches, while the children rocked with laughter.

Les and Alf's annual trek along the great wall of ... Wednesfield

Since retiring, Les and Alf had given much of their time to volunteering and community-related activities. One of these activities is the yearly 'Wednesfield in Bloom' challenge.

This is part of the Heart of England in Bloom challenge which, in turn, forms one of seventeen regions within the UK that delivers the

Tales from Wednesfield

Britain in Bloom campaign on behalf of the Royal Horticultural Society. Britain in Bloom is one of the longest running environmental campaigns in the UK. All of Wednesfield's 'bloomers' are all volunteers and they work hard to produce pleasant surroundings for the community at large and have achieved a silver award in 2016, and gold in both 2017 and 2018.

Les has trouble bending due to a work-related accident long ago but his role in the proceedings just fits his situation. He and his mate Alf, and Alf's wife Dorothy, prepare and plant along the one hundred and eighty feet length of the wall of St Thomas' Church. The planting area is flush with the top of the wall, so Les can get at it by standing on the pavement without too much trouble. It's tiring work though as the picture on the right demonstrates.



*Left to right – Alf & Les,
a worn-out pair of Bloomers*



*Rookery Street – Lewis's the Butcher's centre right,
the Royal Oak just below it before the turn of the street*

If you have memories of living and/or working in Wednesfield that you would like to share, then Wednesfield History Society would love to hear from you.

How to contact us:

Website: wednesfield history.org (on the home page click on the 'About' menu and then the 'Contact' item in the drop down list)

Email: write to us at info@wednesfieldhistory.org

Phone: talk to our Chairman, Ray Fellows, in 01902 739592