

A MOST PECULIAR PLACE

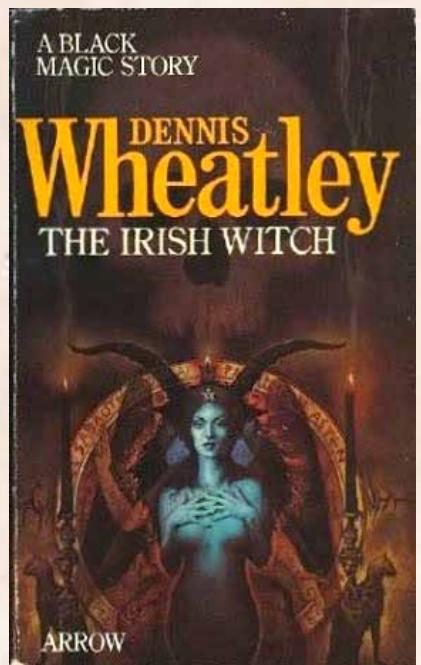
For a time my Father sold pork pies.

As a salesman for Marsh & Baxter's, he travelled around the Midlands, visiting shops with his delicious samples. Anything left over on Friday was graciously distributed to the poor neighbours of the Rocket Pool estate in Bradley. He could be relied on to bring back a box or two of left overs in the boot of his new Ford Anglia car. It was one way to make friends with the rough and tumble natives. The two sons of the policeman who lived in the corner house, two doors down, never seemed to make any friends and looked on with envy. The pork pies were magical tokens of protection. Our chickens were never stolen, my cleverly sculpted snowmen rarely damaged and I avoided potential bullies.

One of my earliest memories is of being taken to visit the slaughterhouse in Brierley Hill, a lightless cavern of pig carcasses hung on huge hooks and blood draining in deep concrete culverts. Another is the descent into the basement of the oldest church in Dublin, St. Michan's, to see the famous mummies and shake hands with a crusader, his legs broken and folded-up beneath him to fit into the coffin. My Father seemed to relish this kind of encounter, though he did not return to Ireland after one of the windows of the train was shattered by a random gun shot as we came from Birr into Dublin station. He was easily convinced it was a member of the resurgent Republican movement out to get him personally but I think the train attendant was having a joke on us, as it was he who said, '*Ah, sure it's just some 'Ra lads havin' a bit of fun.'*'

Before this he sold insurance door to door, collecting the weekly premiums far and wide, usually in the evenings and at weekends, bringing back with him those tales of seeing with his very own eyes the Headless Horseman over Wombourne way or the White Lady on the ramparts of Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire. There were panthers roaming the woods near Kinver Edge, werewolves on Cannock Chase, witch trees every which way, as well as an intriguing assortment of UFO sightings. In company, he was fond of recalling that time when, as a boy scout camping amidst the ruins of Chartley, he saw a mysterious hooded figure in the pouring rain who left no tracks as it passed the ruined gateway. He liked the stories of M.R James - even their overblown American film adaptations - and though he enjoyed Hammer horror films, he was not a fan of vampires. They rarely strayed into his lore. Rather he preferred the curious occult world of Dennis Wheatley.

He was not much of a drinking man and as there was no radio in the car in those days I am inclined to believe he made up these stories mostly to entertain himself, as he criss-crossed the region from customer to customer, driving down long and lonely roads, passing them onto me only as an afterthought. Years later when he got a proper job at the Albright & Wilson chemical factory in Oldbury he became proficient in discussing phosphorus mixes and safety procedures, yet he never lost his interest in the strange and unusual.

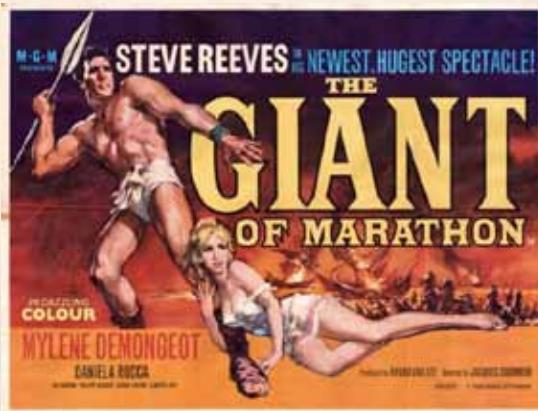
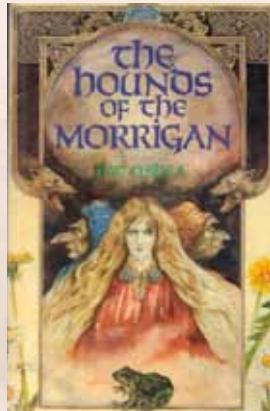




My Father was perhaps a bit of a nerd, which is a term more commonly used now, even though it dates back to the 50's. He assiduously collected stamps and model railways, and books specifically about the Second World War, most particularly the air war. He had joined the Air Training Corps as it formed in 1941. Its motto was 'Venture Adventure' and it provided teenagers with part-time training for entry into the Royal Air Force, whose casualty lists were horrendously high. But the war ended, his flight plans came to nought and he worked in a shoe shop instead.

Before the time of selling pork pies, he had worked at the train station in Dudley as an office clerk, collecting numerous stories of rail related hauntings with miscellaneous sinister entities at large. The station lay conveniently in the shadow of Dudley Castle, which itself was overrun with several hauntings. Alongside 'The Hobbit', one of the first stories I can recall reading is the 'The Signal Man' by Charles Dickens. My Father always stopped at the

newsagents at the top of the High Street in Bilston to get the evening paper, buy cigarettes and chocolate. They had a stand of paperbacks in the corner, mostly pulp fiction. Alongside the likes of Sven Hassel and Zane Grey, here I discovered Edgar Rice Burroughs. The cover of 'Tarzan and the Leopard Woman' captured my attention – the figure of imperious Tarzan surrounded by nubile semi-naked Leopard women was irresistible. My Father bought it for me – of course he was a fan of the series and this prolific writer. I quickly devoured them all and began a correspondence with the estate of ERB in Tarzana, California. I was soon mesmerised by the fantastical worlds of John Carter of Mars and Carson Napier of Venus. Once I had moved on to reading these classics of science fantasy, he invited me to watch 'The Outer Limits', late at night when my Mom was out fulfilling her duties as the district midwife. You can see I blame my Father for my interest in the things, people and places that are odd, curious, unique to a particular place, or just plain peculiar. Though my Mother, in her own way, must take some responsibility. It was she who took me to the ABC cinema, which specialised in those epic sword and sandal Italian productions, usually starring Steve Reeves. She always bought me American DC comics when we went to Bilston market hall, told me stories of the Morrigan - who appeared in the form of a crow, flying above warriors. Bedtime stories of mischievous leprechauns or the banshee of Caisleán Bhiorra were the norm. And wasn't that Bram Stoker a true Irishman after all?





'**A Most Peculiar Place**' is a site-specific installation that reveals some of the things that are odd, curious, unique and particular - or just plain peculiar - about the Black Country in the West Midlands, UK. It was exhibited at The Public in West Bromwich from February to May, 2013. Produced specifically for the '**Black Country Legends**' show it was based on personal research and conversations with local groups and individuals. As part of the exhibition, some of the material was further developed into a playstation game with young apprentices from the Learn Play Foundation. These texts will give you a flavour of some of the stories we shared.

One More Unfortunate Victim of Jack the Ripper was born in Wolverhampton in 1842. Her name was Catherine Eddowes, the daughter of a tinplate worker. Here, in this awful poor town, she became romantically involved with an old Irish fellow, a former soldier and itinerant named Thomas Conway-Quinn (whose initials 'T.C.' were found tattooed on her arm at death). She was persuaded by him to travel further afield to seek their fame and fortune. They made a living travelling between several Midland towns where executions were taking place, taking advantage of those who would pay a penny for a sheet with an appropriate topical ballad written by Conway about the villains, their terrible crime and their dreadful fate. In this business, her good looks and cheerful personality made her an asset to the Irish poet. Catherine sold one such composition at Stafford in 1866 when her very own cousin Christopher Robinson was hanged for the vicious murder of his 19 year old sweetheart in Wolverhampton - he had cut her throat, nearly severing her head.

She had three children with Conway, but by 1881 she was living with a new partner, John Kelly, in the East End of London. Eddowes was described as '*intelligent and scholarly, but possessed of a fierce temper*'. In 1888, she met her death as one of the victims of the Whitechapel murders, the second woman to be killed by the Ripper in the early hours of Sunday 30th September. Apart from the horrendous injuries they had in common with the other victims – Catherine, along with Mary Kelly, was also subjected to horrific facial mutilation.



'Iron-Mad Wilkinson' they called him. And rightly so. He paid to have iron windows, a pulpit and other fittings installed into a Methodist chapel in Bradley, and was even buried in an iron coffin. John Wilkinson (1728-1808) was a pioneer in using cast iron, essential for the development of the Industrial Revolution. He was a prime mover in the construction of the world's first ironbridge, across the River Severn at Coalbrookdale. He also enjoyed designing cannon. When he built a blast furnace in Bradley in 1766, it went on to become one of his most successful enterprises as he added additional furnaces, brick works, potteries, glass works, and rolling mills. He built the first cast iron framed building, cast iron boat and even supplied over 40 miles of iron pipes to carry water from the River Seine to Paris. After his death there were widespread rumours that he would be resurrected and return to visit his works, which culminated in several thousand people congregating at Monmore Green on the seventh anniversary of his death to witness this event. Most disappointingly, none that day saw him riding by on his favourite grey horse...

When Satan stood on Brierley Hill And far around he gazed, He said: “I never shall again At Hell’s flames be amazed.”

- *traditional ballad*

The fantastical feats of Joe Darby... Born at Windmill End, Netherton, in 1861, Joe was a superb athlete and showman, once appearing before King Edward VII in Covent Garden, London. In 1887, he defeated the reigning World Champion spring-jumper, W.G Hamlington. He was also the licensee at The Albion in Dudley's Stone Street. These are some of his amazing recorded jumping feats:

- *jump off brick on end, cleared 14 feet without knocking the brick down;*
- *jump off brick over seven chairs, without knocking brick down;*
- *jump off brick over chair, alighting on a second brick, then over a bar 5 feet 6 inches, without knocking brick down;*
- *able to clear half-dozen chairs with a jump taken off an ordinary glass tumbler filled with water, without spilling a drop;*
- *jump over 10 chairs, placed together, in a single jump;*
- *jump over two chairs placed 28 feet apart, standing start;*
- *jump over an ordinary chair placed on top of a table, at third jump with ankles tied together;*
- *jump over chair onto a man's face whilst lying on the ground and off again without injury;*
- *jump over twenty chairs placed 11 feet apart in 20 successive jumps, and on the 21st jump clearing a horse between 15 and 16 hands high.*

He was, by all accounts, able to jump across canals in two bounds and clear a full size billiard table length-wise. In 1871, he was arrested by local police seeking to capture the nefarious Springheel Jack (and therein lies another tale). Joe had been practising by the canal at night wearing a pit helmet. A statue in Netherton, showing the athlete in a crouched position about to leap, stands on the junction of the Halesowen Road and Church Road.



Is there something about the Black Country that makes people go a little queer in the head?

John Stonehouse was a Labour Party Member of Parliament for Wednesbury 1957-74 then Walsall North 1974-76. Under investigation for financial irregularities, Stonehouse faked his suicide in November 1974, leaving a pile of clothes on a Miami beach. He was arrested in Australia, where he hoped to make a new life with his mistress and secretary. Police suspected he was the missing Lord Lucan and due to the possibility that they might be arresting the wrong man, insisted he pull down his trousers – as Lucan was known to have a six-inch scar on his inside right thigh. Stonehouse was deported to the UK and before his trial resigned the Labour whip in April 1976, thus making Labour a minority government. He was sentenced to 7 years in prison.

In 2009 it was revealed that he had been an agent for the Czech StB intelligence agency during the 1960's. He had been named in 1969 by a Czech defector as a likely spy but he managed to convince his MI5 interrogators at the time that he was innocent.





Do you really want to hurt me, do you really want to make me cry?

As a teenager, Boy George (then just George O'Dowd) left home and moved to the West Midlands to 'mend a broken heart', as he put it. His Mom agreed as long as he was somewhere close to family. He lived in a former dentist's surgery converted into a flat in Caldmore, Walsall, sharing it with three friends, including local boy, dressmaker and fashion designer Martin Degville. He worked on Martins clothes stall in the old Bull Ring centre in Brum. Of Walsall he said, "*The best thing was living right next door to a market, so we could go shopping whenever we felt like it. It was a bit tough getting to the train station, dressed the way we always were. We got a lot of shouts every time we made a break for it.*"

Local girl Natalie recalled seeing him: '*Each time you did, he always looked different, yellow clothes and yellow hair, green clothes green hair etc. He used to give me 10p pocket money whenever he saw me. If you ask me Karma Chameleon is nothing philosophical or anything like that. He lived in Caldmore (Karma to us locals) and everyday he changed his appearance.*' They went on to be Blitz Kids in London, which kickstarted the New Romantic movement. George went on to both pop stardom and notoriety with Culture Club. Degville went on to front Sigue Sigue Sputnik, possibly the most reviled band of the 80's, which can be found existing in various electronic incarnations in Greater European club diaspora.

Do you remember the curious tale of the wretched Jonathan Wild, who went to the gallows at Tyburn in 1725? Born in Wolverhampton, where he was a maker of buckles, he went on to pursue a double life as a both a criminal and as 'Thief -Taker General' (a forerunner of the police) in London in the 1720's.

I was born in West Bromwich - maybe that's why I don't have it in me to construct a masterplan like his. He made the appearance of defending the public against the criminal fraternity while all the time running his own gang of thieves. So, as well as catching other thieves, he kept an overview of the robberies, then returning the goods for a reward to their rightful owners via his 'thief-takers'. He built a considerable organisation, dividing London into districts for his operations, and arranging for 'specialist' gangs that robbed churches or country fairs, gangs of conmen, gangs who ruled the prostitutes, gangs collecting protection money to name but a few. He did not 'lead' any of the gangs - rather he kept back in the shadows, organising and advising them, while on his personal testimony over 60 rival felons were sent to the gallows.

He was eventually shopped by one of his own disgruntled men, charged with being a receiver of stolen goods and an organiser of criminals, for which the penalty was death. If looks could kill, his judges would be dead men, one and all. He was immortalised in a book by Henry Fielding, written 20 years after his death, '*The History of the Life of the Late Mr Jonathan Wild the Great*'.

'He carried Good-nature to that wonderful and uncommon Height, that he never did a single Injury to Man or Woman, by which he himself did not expect to reap some Advantage.'



The Dudley Garrick Club was founded in 1856.

According to a report in the Brierley Hill Advertiser the ‘intelligent young men’ who formed the club did so ‘to save them from a senseless dissipation’. Their first production was in aid of the Mechanics Institution Building Fund. Their primary interest was the performance of the works of Shakespeare. In 1856, at a gathering at the Dudley Arms Hotel, one J.F Timmins recited from memory the whole of ‘Hamlet’ from beginning to end. Yet they were not averse to staging the occasional melodrama - such as perennial favourite ‘Lady Audley’s Secret’ in which ‘the bigamous heroine deserts her child, pushes husband number one down a well, thinks about poisoning husband number two and sets fire to a hotel in which her other male acquaintances are residing.’

The author, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, wrote: “*He forgot that love, which is a madness, and a scourge, and a fever, and a delusion, and a snare, is also a mystery, and very imperfectly understood by every one except the individual sufferer who writhes under its tortures.*” Stirring stuff for those young men!

Like any club, there were strict rules. ‘Actresses’ for female parts had to be imported from Birmingham, as no ladies were accepted as members. Smoking on stage or an ante-room incurred a fine of 2 shillings and 6 pence, refusing to play a role cast to him cost a member 10 shillings and using bad language during rehearsal or performance merited a fine of 6 pence – not inconsiderable sums of money in those days.

They dai harf love their tuck over in Tipton...

Luncheon served at the Public Offices, Owen Street, Tipton, to celebrate the opening of Tipton’s gasworks in 1882, owned by the Tipton Local Board of Health.

Salmon with mayonnaise salad.

Sirloins - Beef-a-la-mode

Four quarters of lamb. Roast veal.

Tongues hams.

Roast chickens. Boiled chickens.

Mayonaise of chicken.

Roast duckling. Pigeon pies.

Lobsters.

Lobster salad. Plain salad.

Cabinet pudding.

Fruit pies. Custard. Jellies.

Blancmange.

Strawberries. Cherries.

French plums. Oranges. Filberts.

Moet champagne, still hock,
clarets, sherry, port.

I dreamt I was dead and to Heaven did go.
“Where did you come from? They wanted to
know:

I said “I’m from Bilston”,

St. Peter did stare:

Says he, “Walk right in, you’re the first one
from
there”.

- from *The Ingots*, 1919, the works magazine
for iron and steel makers Alfred Hickman
Ltd, Bilston

In 1869 P.C. Potter arrested 14 year old Joseph Allen in Oldbury for possession of a stolen rice pudding. The boy admitted to the theft and was sentenced to be locked up for 24 hours and given 10 firm strokes of the birch rod.

They called him Throttler Smith...

George Smith (1805–1874) was born in Rowley Regis, where he worked as a nailer before becoming an apprentice hangman. He had been in trouble with the law a number of times for debt, and once arrested for running naked through the streets of Wednesbury. Well, that's not so odd, is it?

However, he landed a job of apprentice hangman when incarcerated in Stafford gaol, the beginning of a career well suited to sturdy men with big hands. The hangman's assistant had failed to turn up and Smith was chosen to perform the task. William Calcraft (who executed 450 felons during his career) was the hangman that day, and Smith soon learnt the trade from him.

As an apprentice, it was Smith's job to wait below the trap door of the gallows through which the condemned would drop. Calcraft favoured the short drop method, which did not break the neck immediately but relied on choking the victim, the prisoner taking up to five minutes before they finally died. If they were taking longer than this Calcraft would stamp on the platform and Smith would have to hang onto their legs to speed up the process.

Throttler Smith charged the standard fee of £10 a hanging and also performed floggings. He was known for wearing a long white coat and top hat to all his hangings. Hangings were public events, attracting crowds of thousands, until curtailed when Parliament introduced the 1869 Capital Punishment Within Prisons Act. Smith was also a popular entertainer, performing songs and dances of his own making in local pubs.



Have you seen the Fairies at the bottom of the garden?

In 1946, millwright Arthur Deeley decided to make something to amuse his grandson, Geoffrey. So he dug up the concrete pool at the bottom of the back garden at 50, Mansion Crescent, Smethwick. Then using concrete and lead he cast pixies, rabbits, a miniature house, toadstools and other ornaments, surrounding it with a stunning floral display. He called it 'Pixiedilly'. A local news report described it as follows: "*The pool is only two foot square, the concrete surround twice that size. But Mr Deeley has packed so much detail into that small space that even after looking at it for half an hour you can still keep discovering new delights.*" Before long he found he had queues of admiring local visitors wanting to see it, even hosting an official deputation from Smethwick's Housing Committee, who were greatly impressed and commended his efforts.

A Seasonal Close Encounter...

In January 1979, a housewife in Rowley reported to police that an 8 foot object had landed in her garden, and told them that three figures "all less than four foot tall with tissue paper wings" had then interrogated her for an hour about a variety of subjects including Tommy Steele, Jesus and the Queen. She said that they looked a bit like fairies, though they had laserbeams on top of their heads. Two police stations, Oldbury and West Bromwich, had records of the incident. After her husband left for work, she said she noticed a large orange orb hovering near her house. As she went back into the house she found the aliens in her living room. They apparently then shook her Christmas Tree until the Fairy dropped off the top and told her that they came from the sky. She offered them mince pies and they had one each before flying off in the direction of Oldbury and West Bromwich.

She found that her eyesight was adversely affected and her general well-being so disturbed by the encounter that her GP advised her she should stay off work for a fortnight. The British UFO Research Association wrote to the Ministry asking about the incident. According to the association, "*this object left prominent ground traces which were subsequently photographed and measured.*"



Flying Saucer Camera will be used by Air Force to clear up saucer questions. One lens takes regular picture; the other separates light into colors so scientists can judge the source and make-up of saucers.



Il cosa più straordinaria!

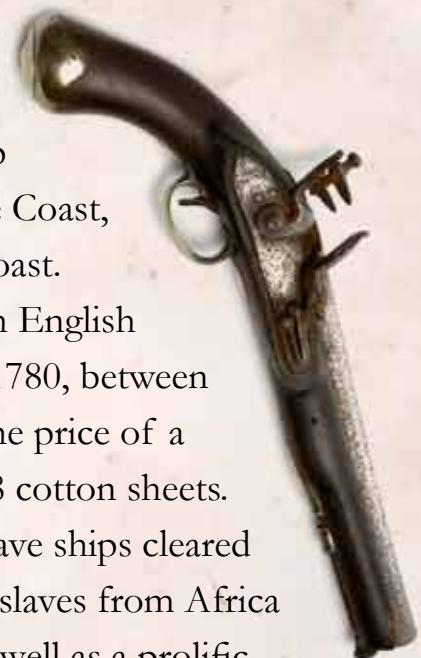
Dick Hall, a 62 year old labourer at Accles and Pollock, was applauded in the March 1949 issue of the works magazine for his inquisitive traveling spirit. Yvonne Reed in Correspondence said she dreamt of "*getting as far away from Oldbury as I could get*" and Harold Harvey in the mill department said his idea of a perfect holiday would be "*a bachelors' only holiday camp*" at Douglas on the Isle of Man. Meanwhile our Dick was planning to explore Denmark. Previously he had been to Paris, Nice, Monte Carlo, San Marino, New York, Philadelphia, Holland, Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmania, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, as well as down the Rhine. He got the travel bug when he went on a day trip from Brighton to Boulogne in 1913. He said: "*I just go and ask for a ticket and they give it to me. Anybody can do it. It's just my hobby, that's all.*" He thought everyone ought to travel to expand their minds – he said it was really no harder than going to Blackpool and the best education you can get. He particularly recommended a visit to Milan, simply to see the monumental cemetery there because it was "*the finest cemetery I've ever seen in my life.*"

Why it was called Guns Village...

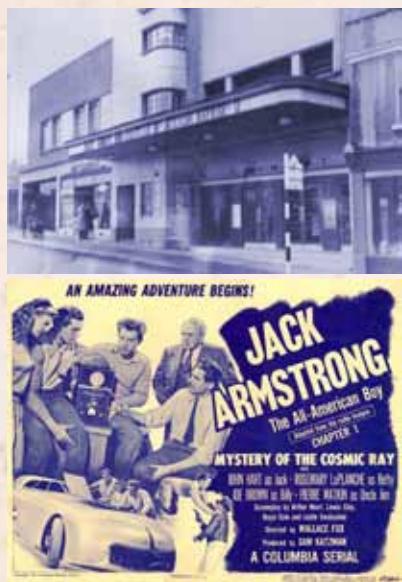
During the 18th century, the gun locks and gun barrels made in Wednesbury, Darlaston, Smethwick, Guns Village and Hill Top helped fill the holds of slaving slips bound for Old Calabar, Cape Coast, Anamabu, Whydah, Bonny and Angola along the West African coast.

Black Country gun makers made most of the 150,000 guns which English ships exchanged annually for slaves by the mid-18th century. By 1780, between 4000 and 5000 people were locally employed in this gun trade. The price of a man slave in Assince in 1721 was 8 guns, 2 cases of spirits and 28 cotton sheets.

Between 1760-69, one thousand, sixty hundred and sixty slave ships cleared British ports. British ships alone carried between 2.5 to 3 million slaves from Africa to the Americas during that century. Samuel Galton, a Quaker as well as a prolific arms manufacturer and member of the Lunar Society, invested his profits from the slave trade in canals and new roads, partly because of the damage done to the guns carried by wagon from West Bromwich to Snow Hill. Galton Bridge and Galton Road remind us of this trade. With the abolition of the slave trade in England in 1806, gun makers transferred their skills to tube-making, a natural extension from making their heinous gun barrels.



Cancelled due to Wednesbury Unreasonableness... The decision of the local authority in Wednesbury to ban children under 15 years from going to the cinema on Sundays led to a 1948 court case that introduced the concept of ‘Wednesbury unreasonableness’ – a reasoning or decision is Wednesbury unreasonable (or irrational) if it is so unreasonable that no reasonable person acting reasonably could have made it. Got that?



The Gaumont in Wednesbury opened in 1938, on the former site of the Picture House and the owners challenged the decision of Wednesbury Corporation. Passing judgement, Lord Greene, the Master of the Rolls, defined two forms of unreasonableness. Firstly, unreasonableness as a general description of a public authority doing things that must not be done, such as not directing itself properly in law by considering matters which it is not bound to consider and taking into consideration irrelevant matters. Secondly, unreasonableness occurs when a public authority does something that is “*so absurd that no sensible person could ever dream that it lay within the powers of the authority*”, as illustrated by the dismissal of a teacher because of her red hair. This latter point came to be termed ‘Wednesbury unreasonableness’. Lord Greene also noted that these aspects of unreasonableness are by no means clear, and “*all these things run into one another*”. Gaumont lost the case and children under 15 were not allowed to go to the flicks on Sunday in Wednesbury, thus missing out on latest releases such as ‘Brighton Rock’, ‘Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome’, the latest Tarzan movie and the serial ‘Jack Armstrong’.



The Jolly Collier was a former pub in Holly Hall, Dudley. In the 1950's the family living there complained of evil spirits, hearing strange noises from the cellars and bedrooms. The building had a long history of poltergeist activity and the site was investigated many times by the local press, the local constabulary, the South Staffordshire Metaphysical Society and the Birmingham Psychic Research Society without result. The family had even written to the Queen asking for help. It was reported a young blonde woman wrapped in white and wearing lipstick was seen in various parts of the house, as was a phantom bald man. Beds were moved, various knockings started and footsteps were heard in empty parts of the building. The local council refused to rehouse the family on the basis of suffering the presence of a ghost. In June 1957, help arrived from an unexpected source. Edmund Johann Wouters was a retired Belgium Congo official who said he had received signs in a cinema in Mexico and from reading the Bible before coming across a newspaper article on this haunting, which he believed he had a strong connection to. Within weeks of being resident, Wouters was successful and from July 16th, to the amazement of all and sundry, the hauntings ceased.

In 1863, according to the Edinburgh Review, fatal casualties in mining accidents in the Black Country were around 800 a year.

In 1875, John Alfred Langford reported in his book 'Staffordshire and Warwickshire', that the number of collieries at work in Rowley was 26, with 5 standing idle; at Corngreaves there were 22 pits working and a further 17 standing. The ages of the miners employed in these were stated as:

Above 5 years old, 23
Above 10 years old, 2,056
Above 15 years old, 4,418
Above 25 years old, 6,934
Above 75 years old, 129

"It was a district that had no plan, the heart of Black Country England. Thirty pits had been constructed where one would have done, houses had been thrown together so that the workers rolled out of bed into work. The roads and houses had been drawn into weird shapes by subsidences and the sun scarcely penetrated the gloomy haze. People lived and died hard.

In 1880, the scene from Rowley Regis resembled a picture from Dantes Inferno. Over fifty collieries poured thick smoke into the clouds, four large blast furnaces lit up the night sky. Near Garratt's Lane the Old Hill Iron Works maintained a continual thump of drop hammers and a perpetual whistle as the hammer was hoisted up again. The noise of the winding gear, water pumps and factory sirens had taken the place of the lark; farmlands had retreated until only the higher moorland was left; even there the blasting of quarries left very little peace."

- *The History of the Black Country, 1949,*
J.Wilson Jones



DEAR BRENDAN,

JUST A SHORT NOTE OF GOOD INTENT AND DUBIOUS CHARACTER. OUR TWO GIGS WENT VERY WELL WITH COMIC TOUCHES I THINK YOU WOULD HAVE APPRECIATED. AT ONE POINT I MANAGED TO GET A CYMBLE STAND STUCK DOWN MY JEANS AND EXTRICATED MYSELF ONLY AFTER AN IMPERSONATION OF A

SWIMMER UNDERGOING AN ENEMA. THEN I FELL OFF STAGE CLUTCHING THE KEYBOARDS. GIVE THE PUNTERS WHAT THEY WANT. I DONT THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO COME UP TO BRUM THIS WEEK, NOT THAT YOU'LL HAVE REMEMBERED I WAS PLANNING TO, BECAUSE, DESPITE BEING 'GAME AS A PEBBLE', I AM BROKE IN A DESPERATE SORT OF WAY. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MY CAR IS VERY NEARLY FIXED (HENCE LACK OF MONEY) SO ON YOUR RETURN TO THESE FAIR SHORES I WILL BE FULLY MOBILE. OH AND YES WE'RE HAVING A PARTY ON JULY 20th IF YOU ARE AROUND WHICH IS SHAPING UP TO BE A BIT OF A CLASSIC. BRING YU? YOUR OWN JELLY. SIMON IS ALMOST BOUGHT A BOOK TODAY CALLED, WAIT FOR IT, THE BASS SAXAPHONE. AH YOUTH. THE PICTURE ABOVE PORTRAYS (L-R) A CAR SALESMAN, A TERMINAL T.B. PATIENT, A SHOP DUMMY, AN UNDERTAKER AND A PERSON WHO CAN MOVE HIS HEAD BY USING A LONG STICK OPERATED BY A HAND THROUGH A WHOLE IN THE POCKET. THATS ALL. HERE ARE SOME PHOTO'S.

LOVE

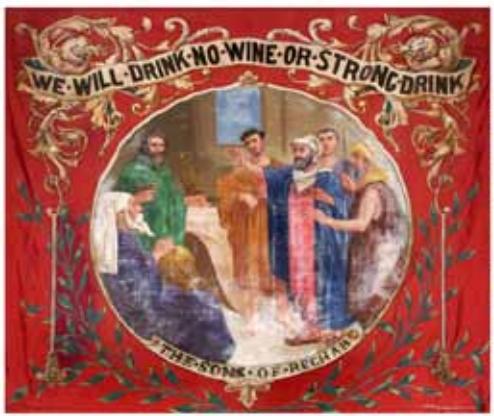
Dudley



Once upon a time... After visiting the Black Country in the 1980's, Ian Wallis from Petersfield changed his name to Dudley Tipton after seeing a sign.

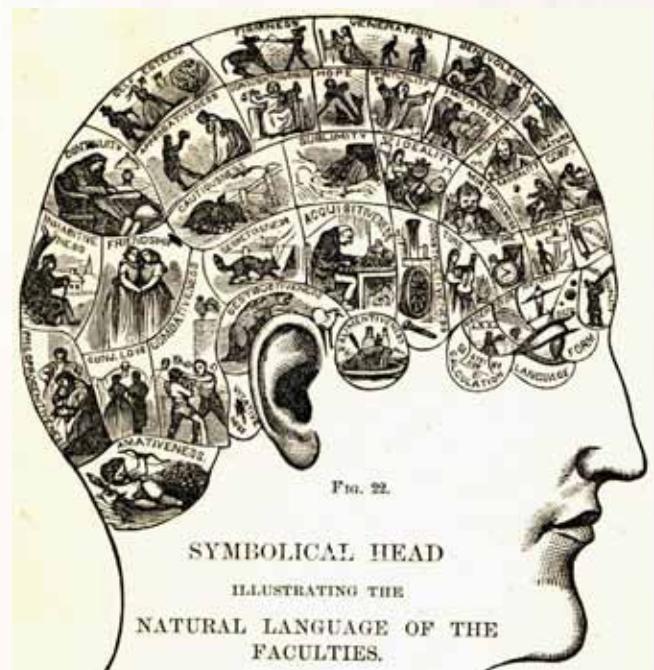
Following this revelation, he went on to perform as a musician for several years using this moniker. It is believed he currently works in health administration and, as a labour of love in his spare time, he organises barn dances in the ancient Anglo-Saxon town of Cricklade.



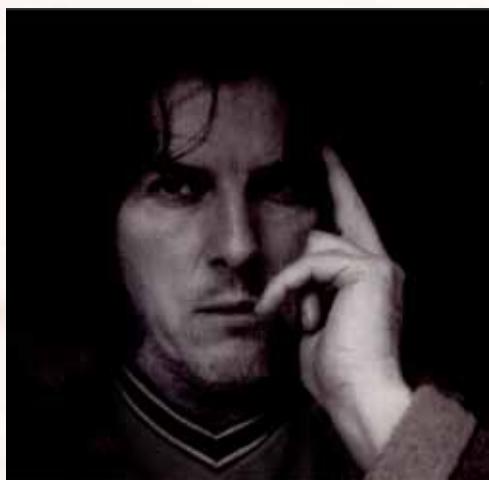


The Independent Order of Rechabites was a Friendly Society founded in 1835 as part of the wider temperance movement to promote total abstinence from alcohol. The name is taken from an eponymous biblical tribe who were ‘commanded to drink no wine’ by their leader Jonadab son of Rechab, and successfully resisted when tempted to do so. Drinking heavily was endemic in the Black Country – sweating workers in foundries or chain-making were said to consume up to 12 pints of beer a day at work, since clean water was not available. In West Bromwich, Drunkards Tea Meetings had been held since 1868 attended by “five hundred of the most abject, dissolute and drunken of both sexes” according to Robert George Hobbes, a local writer. “Many men came without coat, hat, shirt or shoes – women without gown, shoes or bonnet – unwashed and uncombed – ragged, wretched, forlorn. It was indeed a pitiable and fearful sight.” In Oldbury he noted that the local population were addicted to rum, calling it “the cream of the Black Country”. The building on the corner of Sandwell Road and the High Street, West Bromwich, was occupied by the Order until the 1980s. The Oddfellows pub, just down the road, also takes its name from a similar friendly society.

Jabez Lones was the first Mayor of Smethwick. Born in 1799, in the part of West Bromwich known as Monkey Green, he was the seventh son of an ironworker known for writing poems. At the age of 8 he went to work in the iron works, ten years later leaving to work as a warehouse clerk. He joined his brothers in a venture supplying iron for the making of springs and axles – and became partner in the firm in 1868. He was elected to Smethwick Local Board in 1876 – and when Smethwick became a borough in 1899, he was elected Mayor. Jabez claimed to be able to mesmerise people and had knowledge of phrenology and fortune-telling.



A MOST PECULIAR PLACE



1. WHAT IS THIS?
 2. WHERE WILL YOU FIND IT?
- CLUE: Perhaps a suitable H.Q. for an underground movement.

