

LIVING MEMORY

Photography and Life Stories
from across the Black Country

LEARNING DOCUMENT

A practical guide to using everyday photography collections and local archives to run creative workshops and training sessions

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*Front cover: The Moss family on holiday in Wales, June 1963.
From the Ron Moss Collection*

About the Living Memory Project

The Living Memory Project was a 3-year initiative funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to explore, archive and celebrate life stories around photography collections from across the Black Country in the West Midlands. The project focussed on family albums and wider collections that spanned at least 8 decades and represents material from all aspects of everyday life that have been taken or assembled by family and community members, local historians and amateur photographers. These collections offer unique perspectives on social and cultural life from the perspective of working-class communities that largely exist outside of local and national archives.

The project recorded over 50 life stories around personal photographs and collections, digitised over 5,000 images, and hosted over 100 creative workshops, collecting events, pop-up exhibitions, talks and film screenings. The project also raised additional funds from Arts Council England to commission a series of community-orientate artist commissions.

You can see the full range of our activities on our website: www.livingmemory.live.

The Living Memory project was a partnership led by Sandwell Advocacy and included Dudley Archives, Sandwell Community History and Archive Service (CHAS), Sandwell College, The Black Country Living Museum, Sandwell and Dudley Library Services, Sandwell Borough Council, Big Local at Grace Mary and Lion Farm.

About this guide

As part of the project we developed and ran many successful community, school and college-based actives, workshops and training events. We want to share some of our experiences to encourage and inspire others to develop their own creative and educational activities around photography collections and life stories.

Introduction: working with archive photographs

Photography first began as a toy for the upper classes, an invention of (mostly) 'gentlemen scientists' with sufficient leisure time and private income to compensate for their endeavors and experiments. In 1888, George Eastman popularised the use of photography when he introduced the Kodak - a relatively cheap camera with a flexible roll of film with 100 exposures, which was sent back to the factory for processing, the camera being returned with a fresh roll with the negatives and set of prints. Kodak used the slogan 'You press the button, we do the rest'. In 1901 the Kodak Brownie was introduced, the first commercial camera in the market available for the middle class.

In the first decades of the 20th century photography became a public medium. In 1901 the Kodak Brownie was introduced, the first commercial camera in the market available for the middle class. By the 1930s, with the availability of small 35mm cameras, the photographic album became commonplace, emerging to become a cornerstone of the family's identity. Used to preserve the significant milestones of everyday life, stories of belonging and autobiographical meaning, photographs were taken at important events such as births, marriages, holidays, and a wide range of social and community occasions, compilations that came to represent life stories often spanning many generations. These albums also captured the cultural and ethnic changes as our communities expanded to include migrants arriving from far-flung places across the globe and well as from across the UK. The stories and experiences of arrivals from Ireland, the Caribbean, Yemen, India, Pakistan, Greece, Italy or Poland can be tracked and retold through the photographs in these family collections, offering different perspectives.

Looking into the family album as the key focus of the project, however small or large a collection of images, offers a touchstone for reflection and critical thinking, for interpretation and discussion, questioning how political, social, and economic forces impacted on different families. While archives are repositories of the past, the examination of these photographs assist in the sharing of personal experiences and memories; while filling historical gaps they also help build empathy and social skills. The philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, when writing in 1931 about the work of August Sanders photographic portraits of everyday individuals in the German Weimar Republic, used the phrase 'unprejudiced observation' — we might well apply this to the family album, photographs not taken for promotional or propaganda reasons, but for private consumption and personal record. With the passage of time this 'vernacular photography', those snapshots which take everyday life and common things as subjects, can offer us a rich resource to explore, revealing the intersection of our lives with the wider historical narratives, offering an awareness of those things we have in common and the differences that make us an individual being.



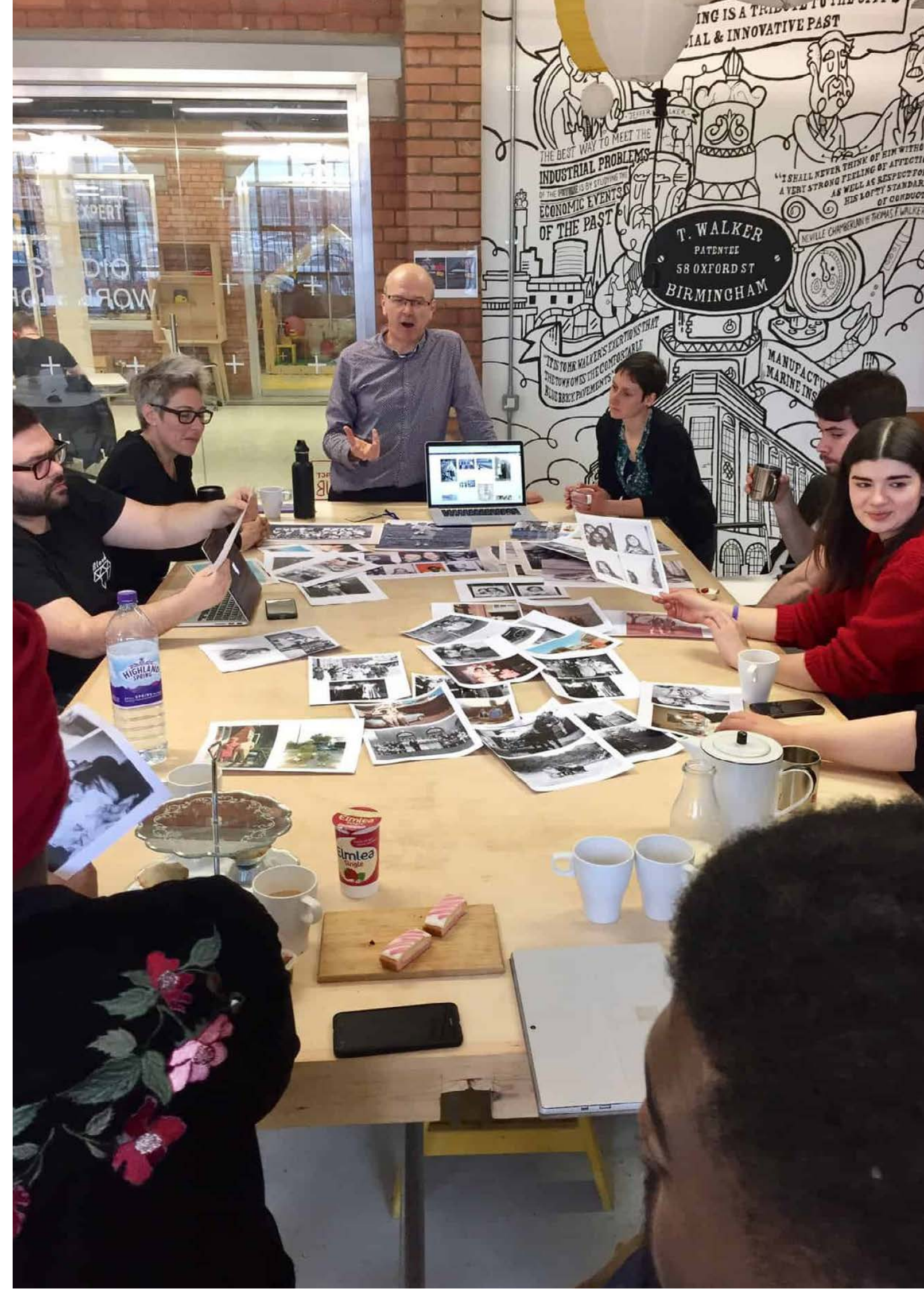
Lukasz Laba was born near the Polish city of Lwow, now part of Western Ukraine. He arrived in Britain in 1940, after evacuation from Dunkirk. As a member of the Polish Army, after the invasion of Poland by both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, he escaped to France via Hungary and Yugoslavia. He was then sent to Scotland. 'We got jobs, we got British uniforms, we each got a British ID card. We had to work the mines, that was a job; you wouldn't like it - I tell you.' He went on to fight with the First Armoured Division in Normandy, Belgium and Holland. After the war he came to live and work in Wolverhampton, for many years at the Goodyear Tyres factory.

Throughout the project these key themes were explored:

- The role everyday amateur/domestic family photography plays in creating and supporting the narratives of people's lives in terms of identity, memory, sense of place and belonging
- How the photographs people make can be a stimulus for the development and sharing of life stories, offering connections to each other, enhancing well-being and understanding
- How amateur/domestic photography collections help to interpret and understand social and economic changes of the last 80 years
- The importance of these photographs/collections and contextual information entering local and national archives
- Reflecting the changes in how we create, preserve, share and consume photography and meaning in the digital age - social media and web technologies vs physical objects in the form of prints, albums, private archives.

The examples shared in this document describe our experiences of working on the project, featuring our own learning and offering some practical suggestions for activity. It does not aim to provide a definitive guide to working with photographic archives. While archives can provide primary sources, which offer real value in educational settings, bridging the gap between distant historical phenomena and the present, they also provide an effective tool for community engagement across generations. We hope that it will encourage you to take the opportunity to explore some of the amazing materials to be found in your local archives and collections, helping both students, individuals and groups from the wider community.

Right: a 'share-and-tell' session about the significance of family photography and oral history, held at the Impact Hub, Birmingham



1) Introductory and exploratory activity

We believe that everyone has a story to share and offering open sessions to discuss the value of photographs will readily engage a wide range of participants. By using a selection of archive photographs of people and communities, you can create an informal opportunities to work with diverse groups, encouraging people to think about their own 'collections' and their photographs of their family and friends. Individuals often brought along their photographs to share, which were scanned and told their stories which were also recorded, both preserved for the historical record and immediately providing material for the Living Memory website.

The community context can be diverse, whether it be a Cancer Support Group or a 'Crafty Ladies' group in a library setting. These examples will provide you with some ideas:

Impact Hub, Birmingham: each week, this flexible workspace hosts a 'Food for Thought', with afternoon tea and cake, 'aimed at feeding bellies and minds during the mid-afternoon slump' to discuss a wide range of issues. We went along with a collection of photographs to speak about the project and invite reflections on the images, focusing many from Bob Mansell, a life-long cyclist, sharing stories of his travels. Sharing stories over a cup of tea and cake is both an enjoyable way to spend a few hours and surprisingly productive.

Boundary Way Garden and Allotments, Wolverhampton: a unique site where community members, plot-holders, artists and many others often come together to organise activities and events. As part of their 'Sharing Nature Open Day', a pop-up exhibition was staged in their multi-purpose polytunnel, showing some of the many hundreds of images and stories we had collected. Several people brought along their photographs to share; their images were scanned and stories recorded.

Trade School Dudley: a non-traditional learning space, operating from the High Street in Dudley, with a coffee shop and space for workshops for up to 30 people, offers a bartering system of classes whereby anyone can teach something they are skilled at or passionate about. Participants then pay for classes with a barter item (like food, supplies, or advice) that the teacher requests. The Living Memory project ran an evening session here – 'Every Picture Tells a Story' – to explain how best to preserve personal photographs. We trained a group of participants to digitise and professionally store their photographs.



A pop-up exhibition and collecting event held at Boundary Way Allotment and Community Garden, Wolverhampton

Pop-up Exhibitions

We presented 10 local pop-up exhibitions in a range of local venues including community centres, libraries and tourist attractions. These kinds of exhibitions are an invaluable way of sharing stories and photographs with local audiences and participants. From our research we found that the majority of the people who see these kinds of exhibitions don't usually visit regional museums and art galleries. Local exhibitions are an affordable and effective way of reaching more culturally diverse audiences. They also serve as a perfect opportunity to build additional events and workshops around such as talks, collecting events and creative workshops.

A sample of the venues we presented work in includes:

Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust: the Trust offer tours of the local network of underground canal routes and Limestone Caverns. They also have a contemporary space, The Portal, with a café and both fixed and temporary exhibition spaces. Photographs from the Will King Collection were shown; Will spent his working life on the Black Country canals and over a period of 30 years took over 2,000 photographs that captured everyday life on the canals of the Black Country. The collection preserved by his daughter Ruth and who helped curate the exhibition. Ruth also did a public presentation of her father's life and work which was attended by over 50 people.

Tipton Library: we staged an 3-week exhibition using local images from the Keith Hodgkins collection, as well as from sessions with Grace Community Church and Tipton Muslim Community Centre.

Haden Hill House Museum, Cradley Heath: we staged wide-ranging exhibition featuring several hundred images and connection stories. The exhibition attracted over 1,500 visitors and had four parts to it:

- A selection of personal photographs and stories shared during the first six-months of the project from the across the local area
- Previously unseen photographs from the Ron Moss Collection
- Work from our creative workshops with pupils from St Michael's School in Rowley Regis
- Samples of work-in-progress by students at Sandwell College, West Bromwich.

As part of this exhibition we also ran two photography and life-story collection sessions, a creative writing workshop, and a programme of talks and presentations around different kinds of photography collections



Top: Exhibition at Haden Hall

Bottom: Exhibition at Tipton Library

2) training and sharing

Oral history

'Oral History, or life history as it is sometimes called, springs from living memory. It draws upon the memories of the people whose experiences have often been neglected and excluded from the history books of the past. The voice of the working class, of women, of racial minorities, of young people, even of the middle class has rarely been heard.'

- Stephen Humphries, The Handbook of Oral History Recording Life Stories, 1984.

We ran an Oral History and Photography Collections training day at Dudley Archives. Led by archivist Richard Lewis and our project lead Geoff Broadway, it provided 15 project volunteers alongside 10 other interested participants an in-depth insight into various aspects of oral history. Core principles were examined, providing an overview of archival considerations and digital preservation best practices for oral history materials, alongside the presentation of showcasing of successful projects projects past and present¹. The day featured significant participant interaction through a series of guided exercises including developing key themes, questions and understanding 'active listening'. Aspects of recording technologies, making transcriptions, data protection and archiving were also covered. The afternoon session focused on oral history and photography collections which are at the heart of the Living Memory Project. The session explained how to establish a frame for the conversation through a pre-recording process with the participant, how to keep track of the photographs that are discussed, creating transcripts with photographs, and finally how to work the with the participant to create summary stories for publication. This was followed by a practical exercise that invited participants to conduct sessions with each other around their own photographs they had brought in for the day. Participants then had the opportunity some of their own planned or live projects, and photographer Emma Case gave us a detailed overview of her project RED², which works with Liverpool Football Club supporters.

Have a browse around these web sites for useful tips on oral history:

http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/getting-started/>

<https://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/no2.pdf>

¹ For good examples of how to use oral history visit the US-based Story Corps storycorps.org, and read about Charles Parker's collaboration with Ewan McColl to create The Radio Ballads: bbc.co.uk/radio2/radioballads/original

² See Emma Case's RED project here: <https://theredarchive.org/about>



Training day at Dudley Archives around recording oral history and photography Collections

Meet an Archivist

Sandwell Community History and Archives Service (CHAS) are based at Smethwick Library. Apart from their statutory responsibilities for maintaining borough records (minutes, rate books, electoral registers and census returns, planning and highways, education, public health, court records, registers of baptisms, marriages and burials), they collect and preserve original archives and published material relating to the history of all of Sandwell. While they are a substantial resource for researching family trees, they also hold unique items such as the Chance Glassworks business archive. They have supported a number of local history projects with groups (e.g. West Bromwich at War, 1939-45¹; Made in Oldbury²; Jubilee Arts Archive), offering full access to their photographic archives, as well as offering activities suitable for both young people and adult participants.

For example, for the Jubilee Arts Archive project, a group of adults interested in photography – who had previously undertaken evening classes at Sandwell College, met on a number of Saturdays at the archives in Smethwick, where they spent many hours pouring over the negatives, slides and hand-printed photographs. There were detailed scrapbooks of articles and correspondence that were fascinating and full of anecdotes, which helped them contextualise the photographs. In response to the archive materials they created an installation in the library and archive. They were drawn towards certain photographs and themes in the work, of protest or play; these either triggered their own memories and personal interests or inspired them to go out to find these places and take contemporary photographs in response to the original materials. The exhibition ran for a month and included open sessions, with special tours of the archive led by the archivists.

Local archives welcome volunteers who are interested in helping catalogue materials or undertake research which can be shared with a wider public.

You can also research items available on the web site representing the collections of the four Black Country metropolitan authorities: www.blackcountryhistory.org

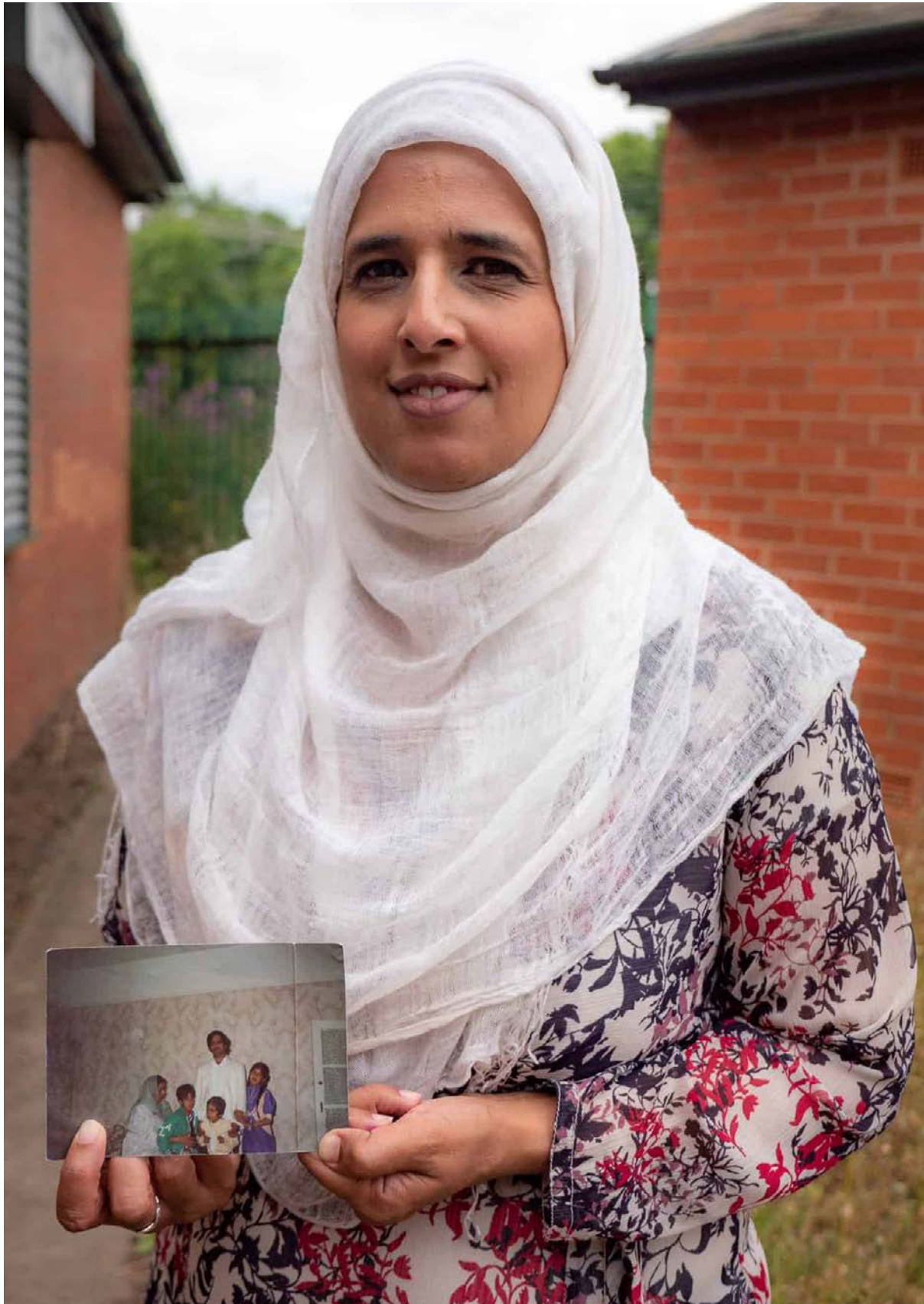
¹ www.westbromwichhistory.com/section/series-west-bromwich-at-war/

² www.madeinoldbury.co.uk/



Top: Workshop at Sandwell Community History & Archives Service, led by Maureen Waldron

Bottom: Archive print held by the Sandwell archive



Emaan from Dudley holding a photograph of her family taken at her grandfather's house in Pakistan.



Gary Moss being held by family friend Valerie, Dudley Street, Old Hill, late 1960s. Photograph by Ron Moss.

3) Participatory activity

Creative Writing Workshops

Louise Palfreyman from Arts Foundry offered a series of workshops called *Real Life Stories*¹ for developing and established writers across the Black Country, encouraging individuals to produce creative writings in response to their own photography collections. She worked with writing groups in Oldbury and Blackheath and as well as people who got in touch through the project website. She also ran the writing workshop at the Haden Hall event, advertised as an open session. People were enthusiastic about using their own photos as a hook for short pieces of memoir, which were published on the Living Memory and Arts Foundry websites. A public event to share the results was held at Wolverhampton Literature Festival, when eight participants performed their new work alongside projected images at Wolverhampton Museum and Art Gallery.

Louise noted: 'The sessions at local writers' groups were really energising and productive and it was fascinating to see a rich variety of voices coming through. Creative writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, is all about encouraging that elusive thing called 'voice'. The main thing creative workshops can yield is newfound confidence, and this certainly seemed to be the case with the writers I worked with. It was great to see both new writers and the more experienced receive a great reception from the audience at the festival, and they all enjoyed seeing their work published online. Poetry and prose are two very powerful ways to harness the power of memory and bring to life scenes from our lives, and from the region as a whole.'

Writer and poet Mandy Ross led the workshop *Untold Stories* at Tipton Library to explore different ways to capture untold stories around our photographs and collections. In this workshop they used questions such as: What does the collection mean to the person who gathered it? How can we tell a story that spans several photographs, or an entire collection? How can we work with gaps, absences and the unknown details? How to tell the story of a photograph collection? What does the collection tell us about the collector? Why do we collect photos? How do we choose what to keep?

Each person picked a single photograph from their collection, and started writing the story it showed - including some of the sounds, secrets and unseen mysteries the image might hint at. Choosing an earlier photograph in the collection, they were asked to step back in time, writing a flashback. What was different back then? How had things unfolded? What changed in between? They then chose a photograph from a much later date and were asked to think how the story had moved on. Mandy explained: 'As a writer, I love meeting people with stories to tell (which I believe includes just about everyone). We glimpsed family history touching on world events, pupils invited to sing at their teacher's wedding, and photo-booth fun in Smethwick, immortalising a diverse group.'

¹ <https://livingmemory.live/micro-projects/real-life-stories/>

Ideas to consider

Use 140 characters to describe one photograph of your choice (don't tell the others which one you have selected), then share back with rest of group. Ask them if they can identify the image.

Choose an individual in the photograph. If you met them today, what questions would you like to ask them? What do you think the people in it are thinking? What happened before and after it was taken? Work in pairs to imagine what the answers might be.

Choose one of the individuals in a photograph. Describe them. How do you think they spent their time? What kind of activities would they be involved with?

What decade do you place the photograph in? Once you pick a decade, think of some key words or phrases that describe it - think of work, forms of entertainment, music, art, books... What would be the main three things that sum up each decade for you? Then work in pairs to see what differences and similarities there are between the decades you have written about.

Choose one of the photographs; what happy memory does it inspire? Then write about it in a way that makes the memory creepy or eerie to the reader. Don't change the basic facts of the event, but select some different details and present them differently.

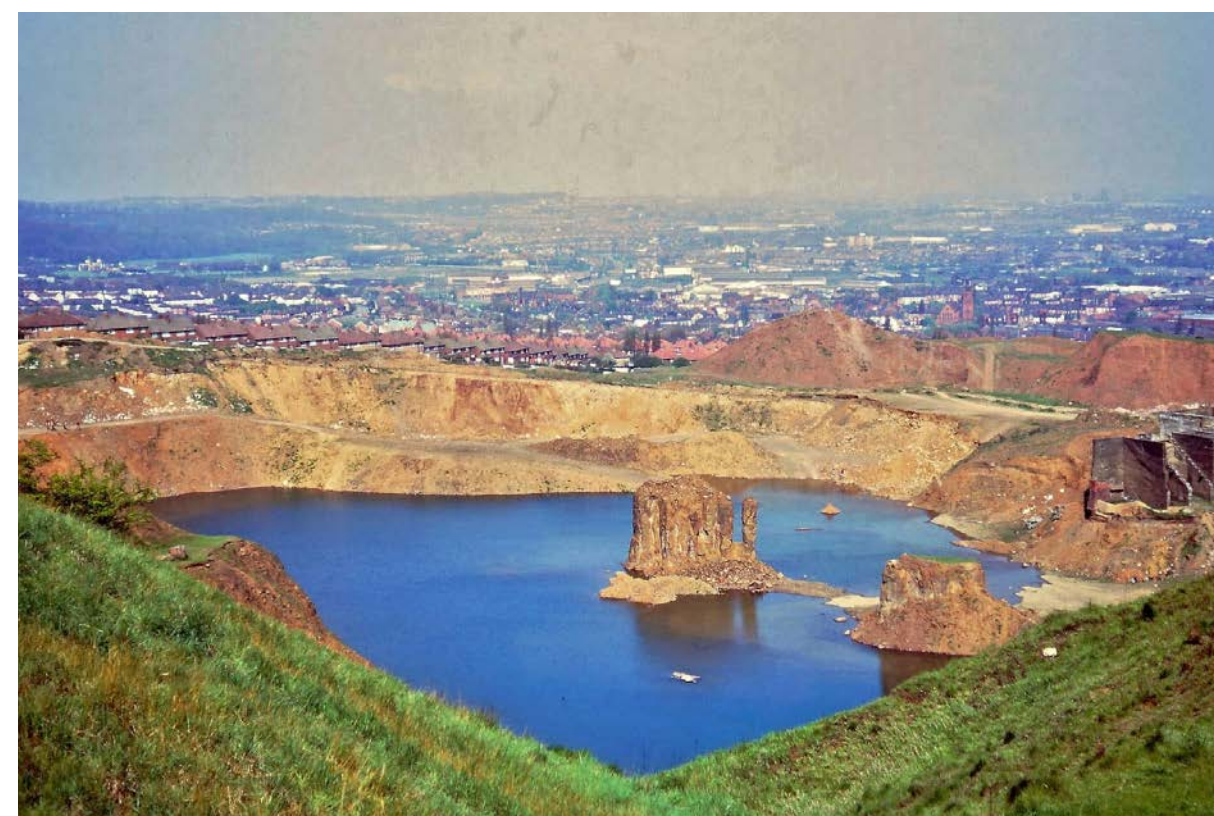
Portraiture began as a way of documenting a person's physical appearance. Only wealthy people could commission artists to create a representation of themselves or their family. With the availability of photography in the 20th century, anyone could make a portrait of themselves. If you were to make a portrait of friend or family member, write down a description of this person; what would they be wearing, where would they be situated (indoors, outdoors), would they be photographed close-up or full length, would they be involved in some activity? Think about how you would compose the photograph to convey a message about a person; what message would you want to convey?

What is included within the frame of a photograph is vital. Choose one photograph and describe what might be happening outside of the frame?

If you were documenting your own family or community today, what would you photograph to preserve for the future? Where would you take these images?



Top left: Oldbury Writing Group visiting Sandwell Archives; top right; writing workshop at Haden Hall; presentations of 'Real Life Stories' at Wolverhampton Literature Festival



Top: View taken from the upstairs house in Throne Rd , Rowley; photograph by Jim Rippin, 1950s
Bottom: View north-west over Darbys Hill Quarry, 1975; photograph by Keith Hodgkins

Combining media – Bluebricks to Blue Plaques

Workshops were undertaken with Year 5 students at Joseph Turner Primary School in Tipton. Sessions were delivered by designer Rich Franks, poet Brendan Hawthorne and filmmaker Keith Bloomfield (Reel Access Media¹); they invited the children to explore and respond to the photographic collection of Keith Hodgkins, particularly in relation to memories connected the local Princes End Heritage Trail. The children were encouraged to expand upon a written narrative, with active and dramatic interpretations. A member of the Black Country Society since its founding in the 1970s, Keith is currently their President. Born in Tipton, he traces his interest in the heritage of the Black Country back to when he began train spotting at the age of 10. Over subsequent decades he has amassed a huge and unique collection of photographs, those he has taken himself as well as those of others. Trained as an architect, he has a particular interest in documenting the built environment and the changing local landscapes, authoring several books of photographs.

The first session at Glebefields Library with led by Rich and Brendan. They introduced the collection to two groups of pupils who were tasked with doing further research using books and the internet. Each session with each group was 2 hours. The second session was devoted to taking the information they had gathered and to turn it in a personal story, primarily using poetry. The third session was devoted to editing and restructuring the written material with the pupils. The fourth session was devoted to a presentation back of all the written material from the children, with tips on performance techniques, rhythm and structure, preparing the material to be recorded. The fifth session took place over a whole day, the children filmed performing their work by Keith. The film material was then edited and supportive photographic images (from their original source material) added. A draft of the film was shown back to pupils and parents at the school, appropriate permissions sought, then the final piece, edited down to 5 minutes and called *Bluebricks to Blue Plaque*², was showcased to the public at a ticketed event at Tipton Library – an evening of films which attracted an audience of 70 people. Brendan Hawthorne commented, ‘This was a great opportunity to show the excitement and pride in what they achieved through the stages of research, creative writing and film presentation. I found that to extend fact into fiction gave the whole project a unique direction and energy. We discussed social conditions through the time period of around 80 years, thibking about the hopes and fears of the individuals, their working conditions and leisure activities, exploring the creative and emotive use of language. Humour was also used to engage the audience and to remove the lecture label that sometimes simply presenting facts can produce.’

¹ www.reelaccess.org.uk/

² See the film here <https://livingmemory.live/micro-projects/blue-bricks-to-blue-plaque/>



Top: Bilston Steel Works, 1976; photograph by Keith Hodgkins.
Bottom: Still from the short film film 'Bluebricks to Blue Plaques'

Combining media - Seven Word Story

Graphic designer Rich Franks (Blue and White Creative¹) worked with young people (14-15 age range) from St. Michael's CE High School in Rowley Regis to create artworks inspired by photographs selected from their family albums. Today, with the proliferation of digital and social media, young people (and others) can easily take hundreds of pictures a day – a staggering 95 million photos and videos are shared on Instagram each day. Rich commented: 'Meaningful narrative is often lost in this era of instant photographic gratification. The intention of these workshops was to allow participants the time and space to really think about what story they wanted to share with others, and engage in conversations with the pre-digital generation.'

They were seven sessions with the group. Each participant was asked to select just seven photographs that were important to them in some way. They then shared the stories behind each image through conversations with older members of the community, who also brought in personal photographs to talk about the value of these images to them and the memories they held. The group were then asked to develop one story and one photograph to base their final artwork on.

Developing the theme of further, participants then were taken through a process of creating bold typographical collages that told their story in just 'seven little words', whittling the story down to its essence. These were reproduced as Risograph prints for exhibition later at Haden Hall – this type of printing is a cross between screen printing and photocopying, offering very vibrant colours. These were then be juxtaposed with their selected photograph, to explore the relationship between photography and the written word, discussing how using both together can add meaning and impact to a story – to become poignant, intriguing or just plain funny.

¹www.blueandwhitecreative.co.uk



Top: sharing session at St. Michaels
Bottom: Work in progress



Top: Work in progress
Bottom: Risograph print

Top: preparation of 2-colour artwork
Bottom: Group exhibition at Haden Hall

Combining media – Making Memories

Artist Hannah Boyd and designer Rich Franks worked with 16 pupils from Grace Mary Primary School and 16 pupils from St James C of E School. They delivered a series of creative workshops and field trips to explore and interpret the collection of Jim Rippin; a keen amateur photographer Jim had lived all his life in the area, photographing the changing views from the Rowley Hills over different decades, from the 1950s onwards. His collection spans over 60 years and they capture the ever-changing landscape of industry, housing and green spaces. Their aim was to explore how archive photographs and local knowledge can help young people see the area in which they live in new and exciting ways. As part of their investigations, they used different approaches to drawing and painting, and a range of materials and styles.

Mike Poulton and Bob Duncan from the Friends of Rowley Hills¹ participated in sessions, sharing their expert knowledge of the hills and how they have changed over the millennia, as well as within our living memory. They introduced the pupils to the incredibly rich flora and fauna that thrive in and around the hills, part of which is now a Nature Reserve, a designated Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

The workshops consisted of two half-day morning sessions on the Rowley Hills where Year 9 pupils used various drawing techniques including illustrating / sketching with sticks and ink the views from the Rowley Hills. They then used fine liners to draw local fauna they found in the locality, and the unique rock outcrops of Rowley Rag stone. The groups returned to the school in the afternoon to sketch from photographs Jim Rippin's collection, as well as material shared by the Friends of Rowley Hills. For a final exercise they were asked to draw the hills using perspective techniques that placed insects, flowers prominently in the foreground. The artwork the children was produced as A2 concertina sketchbooks with each panel or panels depicting a different exercise from the day, and final result exhibited at the schools. In our digital age we are exposed to countless images virtually every day, and we ourselves can engage in taking countless photos using our smart phones and tablets, as we try and capture an endless stream of passing moments. This project created space for the children in which they were encouraged to pause and reflect, using the archive photographs and the site visit as a stimulus to understand what they can tell us about our changing world. The children loved learning from Jim, Bob and Dave, so much so they have been asked to work further with the schools to explore local history, geology and wildlife.

This is Henley's Farm. Henley was the local pig farmer. He used to come round with his horse and cart around the road and any peelings and scraps you'd got he'd have them all off you. But the farm was a bit of a gambling area - weekends it used to be, I don't know whether it was cock-fighting or dog fighting, I don't know what it was, but I can remember one time we were up that hill and police came from everywhere and raided his farm, caught them all at it. — Jim Rippin.

¹ www.friendsofrowleyhills.org



Photographs of pupils taking part in the Making Memories workshops with Hannah Boyd on the Rowley Hills



Henley's Farm, from the Jim Rippin Archive. The farm was a prominent feature on the Rowley Hills until the 1950s when it gave way to housing developments



Hannah Boyd (centre) leading the Making Memories workshop

'I enjoyed everything but especially painting with sticks because I never knew you could do it! I loved learning about blue rock and I had a very great time doing it.' – Logan, pupil, St James.

*'I enjoyed:
Learning new techniques
Painting with sticks and ink- it was fun!
Exploring blue rock and the onion rocks
Looking at different flowers
Seeing a bee on Mike's top!'*
– Amy, pupil, St James.

'The day was filled with fabulous opportunities to learn new art techniques whilst experiencing the natural habitat in our local environment.' – Mrs Freeman, teacher, St James.



Photographs of pupils taking part in the Making Memories exhibiton



Mike Poulton and Jim Rippin looking at work in progress

"Watching the children explore the Rowley Hills area and engage with the activities was amazing! They were really engrossed and were fascinated by the talks they were given. It was a very enjoyable day and a wonderful experience for children and teachers alike."

Mrs Wood, teacher, St James

"The opportunity to draw and paint in-situ outside and at the same time learn about the very things they were illustrating was inspiring for them, their teachers and ourselves as practitioners. It gave the pupils a greater depth of understanding; for example, instead of simply drawing a pretty flower they were able to learn its name, whether it was rare, what insects it attracted, when it flowered, what soil it likes to grow in. They were able to study the views of the hills in situ, and then in the afternoon back in the classroom these were put into context historically. So the pupils could see the impact the creation of Birmingham and Wolverhampton New Road had on the park nestled at the bottom of the Rowley Hills. They could put themselves historically and geographically in areas that Jim Rippin's photo collection depicted. This gave a far better understanding of local history than a book or PowerPoint presentation could ever do."

Rich Franks, Creative Producer

"The exhibition looked fantastic and we have had some lovely feedback with regards to it and the evening event. We were amazed to have a turnout of over 100 people. St James loved the exhibition in the day and the children were clearly excited and proud of their work."

Helen Truman, teacher, Grace Mary

Sample questions that we used to engage pupils when exploring the different kinds of photographs we worked with on the Living Memory Project.



Photograph from the collection of Herma Hansle

*Where do you think this picture was taken?
What might be the time period?
What are the people in the picture doing there?
Can you describe what is happening outside of the frame?*



The Butler family, circa 1910; photograph from the collection of Mike Poulton

What do you think is the approximate date of the photograph?

Note what people are wearing or their hairstyles - one person is in army uniform for example, others more formally dressed for the occasion.

Who do you think this family extended family group - who might be related to whom?

Can you see that one person has been added, pasted into the photograph?

While this is a formally posed photograph, it is not taken in a studio - it is clearly taken in someone's backyard - see the top right of the image where some junk is piled against a wall.



Photograph from the collection of Bob Mansell

*Where do you think the group are cycling?
Do you think these are members of a cycling club or a school group?
What clues can you find in the landscape?
How would you describe the surroundings?*



Photograph from the collection of Alan Price

*Rearing racing pigeons has long been a feature of Black Country life.
What other leisure and social activities might these men have been involved in? Can you tell anything about their occupations from the photograph?*

Participatory activity

Guided Walks

The Living Memory project supported Jim Rippin and Dave Poulton in planning and delivering two guided walks over the Rowley Hills¹. These were ticketed events on a Saturday morning for a maximum of 15 people; the walk was approximately 2 miles, taking some 2.5 hours, depending on the conversation and weather. The landscape is both undulating and steep (classified as moderate) and was not suitable for wheelchair users or people with mobility issues.

Jim provided a selection of selection of images to share with the walkers along their chosen route, which revealed the landscape as it was then. He shared his fond memories of playing in these hills as a child, then a place of intense quarrying - and before that mining operations. In 1875, there were one 26 collieries in Rowley alone. En route, Dave Poulton offered insights into local history, wildlife and geological features, explaining the importance of this place as at habitat for numerous butterfly and insect species, as well as wildflowers.

It was the first time they had undertaken something like this and the activity proved very successful. The guided walks invited participants to look at the area in new and fascinating ways, sharing their own recollections and reflections on the substantial changes that have taken place within living memory.

Further detail can be found at this blog post about one of the walks on the Living Memory website: <https://livingmemory.live/bj-lookingback/>

¹ www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/portway-hill-plan-visit



Top: Guided walk over the Rowley Hills
Bottom: Scramblers meeting on Rowley Hills, 1950s; photograph by Jim Rippin

Participatory activity

Exploring the High Street

This example of a guided walk delivered by Sandwell Community History and Archives Service for a primary school group serves as an alternative example. Year 9 pupils from Hall Green Primary were studying the Victorian Age as a year topic; sessions were planned to include a guided walk of West Bromwich High Street. Firstly, an introductory session in school, provided for two classes which used archive materials to explore the industrial history of the Black Country and the development of the high street. Known as 'The Golden Mile' due to its length and prosperity at the time, much of the civic infrastructure of the street came about in the latter part of the 19th century, with the building of the Town Hall and Library, as well as substantial buildings such as Kenrick & Jefferson printing works. Children were invited to suggest their own definitions and descriptions of the area. The walks took place over a 2-hour period, one class in the morning, one in the afternoon, starting from the 1897 Farley Memorial Clock Tower at Carters Green. En route, pupils were able to investigate details of the built environment and learn about their significance – clues offered by old Victorian tiles, street names¹ and signage (i.e. a delicatessen in Polish), discovering the oldest graveyard in West Bromwich hidden behind the Wesleyan Church. Photographs carried by the guides offered a comparison at several points between the street today and in the past, and they heard about some famous personalities associated with the locality – Madeleine Carroll², the first British actor to make it big in Hollywood in the 1930s (the group saw her old school), or Robert Spear Hudson³ who invented soap powder (the former site of his factory on the High Street is now a Lidl supermarket). The groups visited the old Town Hall, as well as the basement which was once a Second World War bomb shelter, then the adjacent library to learn a little of its history. While having refreshments they then viewed photographic material which had documented the High Street in 1866-87⁴. Finally, before returning to school, pupils took part in a fun quiz to test what they had learned on the walk.

Teachers followed up what they had learned about local history, then a creative mapping session was held, inviting the children to take on the role of town planners. They were asked to create a new street, asked to consider what they would preserve, what new uses they might put existing buildings to, what they would create anew. The school also organised a trip to the archives at Smethwick Library to explore artifacts from the collections. As a bonus, they also showed one of Madeleine Carroll's films to the classes.



Top: Archivists with pupils at the Town Hall, West Bromwich

Bottom: 1950s postcard of Carters Green, at one end of West Bromwich High Street

¹ www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/west-bromwich-street-names/

² www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/edith-madeleine-carroll/

³ www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/robert-spear-hudson/

⁴ www.jubileeartsarchive.com/the-golden-mile/



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