



**THE MOSELEY SOCIETY**

Formed to protect a unique area of Birmingham

Charity No. 512211



## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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### Brought to Book

Our September speaker was Patrick Baird, the former head of the Local Studies department of Birmingham Central Library. Patrick gave an amusing outline of his career in libraries and gave an overview of the collections held by Local Studies. These included some of the lesser known “gems” such as the newscuttings indexes, the coroner’s inquest reports indexes and the building plans collection. The latter collection is organised by street and house



number and contains many houses from the Moseley area. The indexes usually name the plot or house owner and sometimes the architect and/or the builder as well. Ring or email for current availability of the collections as the staff prepare for the big move to the new Central Library.

### The Fortunes of War

There were many victims of the air-raids from 1940 - 1942 in Moseley, with there being, of course, no discrimination as to who was killed or injured. Amongst them were some with foreign connections. The Piccioni brothers from Italy, Roberto and Ernesto, had settled in England and ran a renowned Marble Merchants business from 18a and 60 Hunters Road in Hockley. Both men married English women, Roberto to Doris Townsend and Ernesto to Phyllis Waldron (nee Bradbury).

Ernesto is on the 1936 electoral roll at 62 Greenhill Road in Moseley but after a couple of years he moved to 68 Oxford Road (called “Chellington”). This house had already been affected by war with the death of Sydney Currie Betts in 1917 while serving with the Rifle Brigade. His parents, Charles and Margaret, owned the house during the First World War and for many years after. The brothers business flourished - with offices also at 32 Paradise Street and in other towns and cities - but the esteem in which they were held by the authorities came into doubt with the outbreak of the Second World War. An interesting diary entry by British Intelligence officer Guy Liddell from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1940 reads as follows:-

*“Two town councillors in Birmingham are complaining that an Italian called Piccioni, who is Italian consular agent in Birmingham, is serving in the Birmingham ARP Central Control and Report Centre. The Centre gets all reports on bomb damage and transmits them to the HO (Home Office). Later information is to the effect that he is a member of the Fascio.”*

Whether this “conflict of interest” or worse caused the internment of one or both of the brothers is not public knowledge. They were, however, both missing from 68 Oxford Road on the night of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> December 1940. The warning of the first air raid of the night was received at 6:26pm with the first high explosives dropping at 6:52pm and the first incendiaries at 7:35pm. It was a fairly comprehensive raid on many Birmingham districts and the City Centre. The official report continues with details:

*“22 parachute mines fell (12 unexploded); 318 High Explosive bombs (69 unexploded) and some oil bombs were dropped. Over 120 fires were caused by incendiary bombs, of which about 200 sets were reported. . A number of parachute flares were also dropped. Extensive damage was done to house property by High Explosive bombs and parachute mines. Damage was caused to 61 factories, some of which were completely destroyed. A Gas Works; sub-power station; 3 military establishments; 3 public houses, and a Deaf and Dumb Institute were also damaged. Three cinemas and 16 schools were damaged. Slight damage was done to the Little Bromwich Fever Hospital and Monymull Colony (Mental Hospital), Kings Heath. Three railway stations, four goods depots and a railway bridge were damaged. Railway traffic in the City was affected owing to the presence of unexploded parachute mines. One Church was severely damaged and four others slightly damaged. Small fires occurred at two Convents. Two High Explosive shells fell on Thorp Street Barracks, one demolished a kitchen and the other fell in the main hall; there were no casualties.”*

**PART B.**

**Notice of Certification of Death as due to War Operations**  
(Defence Regulations, 1939).

Identified Body of Angela Piccioni aged 6  
who died (whose body was found) on 14/12/40 at 68 Oxford Road  
Serial Identification No. \_\_\_\_\_ Form C.W.D. No. A196

Unidentified Body of male (female) person aged about \_\_\_\_\_ who died (whose body was found) on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_, and the known particulars of whom are recorded in Form C.W.D. No. \_\_\_\_\_ in the Office of the below-mentioned Council.

Notice is hereby given that the death of the above-mentioned person has been certified by the Clerk to the below-mentioned Council to have been due to war operations, and that the body of that person may lawfully be buried under arrangements made or authorised by the said Council without a Certificate for Disposal issued under the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1926.

Where Applicable M. A. Piccioni is hereby authorised by the Council to make arrangements for the removal from the mortuary and burial of the above-mentioned person.

Signed The Solicitor TOWN CLERK,  
On behalf of the BIRMINGHAM CITY Council.

Note.—This form must be produced to the Mortuary Superintendent when application is made on behalf of a private individual for removal of the body. It must also be produced to the Cemetery Superintendent at the time of burial.

At Number 68 the two Piccioni wives were killed along with their daughters Angela and Gina, both aged six, and Phyllis’s other daughter, Phyllis Waldron. Also killed in the house were Florence Elliott and William Watson. Many houses on either side of the families’ home in Oxford Road were also hit that night with one person dying two doors away and eight elsewhere in the Parish. The burial index record (left) for little Angela is for Warwick Cemetery.

Following the war the houses in this area of the road were either repaired or rebuilt and Ernesto returned to live at 68 with Ernesto’s brother Roberto moving in alongside at number 70 (“Ambergate”).



Little Suzanne Marburg, aged five, arrived in Moseley under different conditions. She had been sent away from Prague by her mother in the *Kinderlift* evacuations. These had been made at the behest of Sir Nicholas Winton who persuaded the Home Office to issue visas to Jewish Czech children and also arranged the foster families in Britain. In total eight trains left Prague from the end of 1938 through to early 1939 carrying several hundred unaccompanied children.



Suzanne died (during the same bombing raid which also claimed the Piccionis) along with all her foster



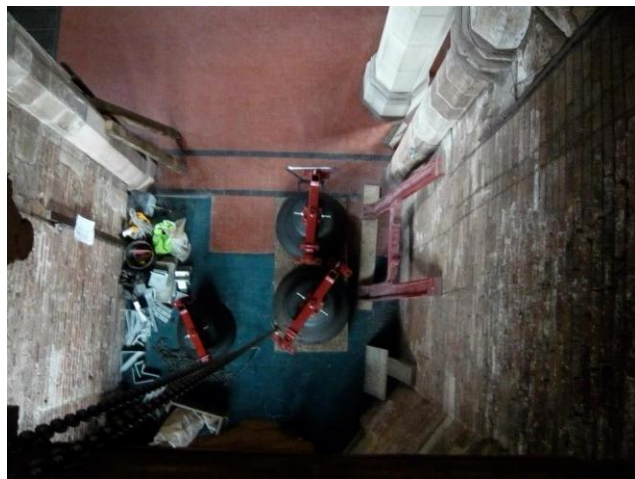
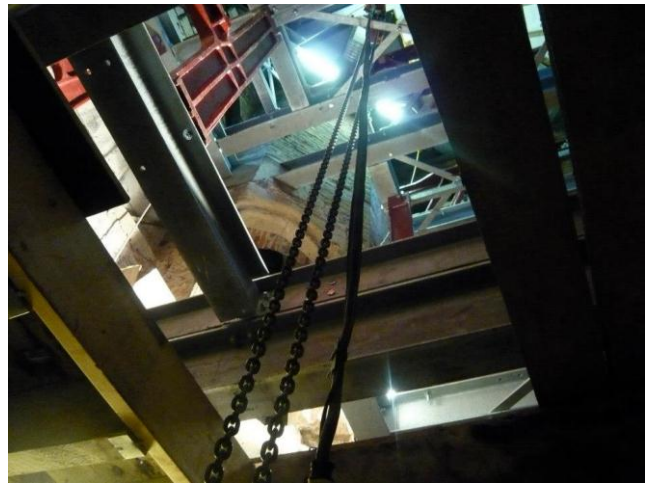


family, the Lloyds, at 167 Swanshurst Lane. She was buried, with the Lloyds, at the Unitarian Church in Packhorse Lane, Wythall. Following the war her mother made several trips to visit Suzanne's grave.

Another child who made the journey from Prague was Lia Lesser (nee Blum) who fortunately survived the war. Lia is seen holding her Czech passport in the left image. Sadly her parents did not survive the war. Her mother died in the Terezin ghetto in Czechoslovakia and her father died in Auschwitz. Mrs Lesser lived for many years in Moseley and we are hoping to interview her soon.

## The Bells of St Mary's

The new bells have arrived at St Mary's, replacing the worn out steel set. They have been cast by Taylors of Loughborough and are all now safely in situ and awaiting their first test. Moseley will then be graced once more with the sound of church bells from St Mary's Row. Jonathan Smith was on hand to capture the arrival and installation for us.



## Moseley Society History Group meeting: 28<sup>th</sup> November

This meeting will be a workshop looking at two different themes. Christine Mann will be looking at Trade Directories with a chance to try some "hands on" use of their contents. Chris Sutton will be looking at how the Society's collections can be used for further research – using the example of the Piccioni Brothers. As usual the meeting starts at 7:30 and is in the Red Room at the Exchange.