



**THE MOSELEY SOCIETY**

Formed to protect a unique area of Birmingham

Charity No. 512211



## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

*September 2012*

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### GAMES IN THE PARK

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September saw a rare beautiful day of warm sunny weather. It prompted many local residents, and a fair number of non-locals too, to enjoy the farmers' market and also pop in to the Community Games in Moseley Park. We met a great number of people, all of whom were interested in, and very complimentary of, the displays we took along.



Both of our new displays were out on view – Wish You Were Here (Moseley on old picture postcards) and Moseley Now And Then, which contrasts photographs of the area from around 100 years ago with the same views today. The latter exhibition will be on view in the Exchange from now till the end of October. Many thanks to Tony Thaper and his team for organising such a great Games event.

- *The spooky image above is the bottom of the Ice House!*

### KINGS HEATH TO SPARKBROOK

**CARL CHINN**

Many readers will know that local historian and broadcaster Carl Chinn has "roots" in the Moseley area. I wrote to him asking about his connections and he kindly sent this article for use in the newsletter.

From family stories I knew that my great grandfather, Richard, had gone to the same primary school as me and my brother, Darryl. It was Moseley National School in School Road. In our childhood in the 1960s it was surrounded by houses but in his day in the 1870s it had lain in the midst of the Worcestershire countryside.

We were told that great granddad's older sister used to take him in to school with her but that almost immediately he would go back out. I also knew that his father, Henry, had farmed somewhere in King's Heath and that he had died in a farming accident – but I did not realise that whenever I step along the High Street or go around King's Heath Park, or shop in Sainsbury's that I am stepping alongside my ancestors.

The story begins with my great, great, great, great grandfather Richard Chin – as the name was then spelled. He was born in Rowington in 1765, where his people had lived since at least the 1630s. Mostly they were yeoman, small-scale tenant farmers. Better off as they were than either landless labourers or skilled agricultural workers, yet they never came near to rising to the same wealth and prestige of families like the Colmores and Smallbrooks. They too had started off as yeomen but unlike my family they went on to thrust themselves out of their middling status and into the ranks of the landed gentry.

Like so many others from rural north Warwickshire, Richard followed other Chinns to the rapidly expanding manufacturing town of Birmingham and married Ann Pearson at St Martin's in the Bull Ring in 1790. The couple did not stay in the town, though. Ann had been born in Sheldon, where her four children were baptised. Thence she and Richard moved their family to King's Norton, where their older daughter was married at St Nicolas in 1818. Richard was unable to write for he made only his mark as a witness.

The draw of King's Norton was Richard's older brother, John. He had married a Mary Barwell at St Martin's in 1788 but in his will of 1813 he was described as a yeoman of King's Norton. John had no children. He left small sums of money to his various nephews and nieces but the larger amount of £25 each to two of Richard's children – Elizabeth and Henry, my great, great, great grandfather. After making provision for his wife in his lifetime, John also left them the rest of his personal estate 'share and share alike'.

There is, however, a puzzle here. My great, great, great, great grandfather Richard was born in 1765 and did have a brother called John, but according to the Registers of Rowington he had died as a small child in 1763. Another John Chinn is recorded in this source as having been born in 1758. My direct ancestor, Richard, was the son of Richard the elder and an Abigail Hornblower, but this other John was the son of a Henry Chinn and an Elizabeth Palmer.

My most distant relative was a Henry Chinn, who was baptised in Rowington in 1619 and who was the son of another Henry Chinn. Over the next few generations the names Henry, John and Richard were common amongst the Chinns of the village and this makes it difficult to trace exactly who was the son of whom. Still it is likely that the Henry Chinn who was the father of John born in 1758 was a cousin of Richard Chinn, the father of Richard who was born in 1765.

That still leaves the problem of John Chinn the yeoman of Kings Heath describing as his brother the Richard who would seem to be his cousin. Perhaps the vicar of Rowington had made a mistake and in fact the John Chinn who had died young was the son of Henry and the John who lived was the son of Richard the elder?

Unfortunately this seems unlikely as John the yeoman also left a sum of money, £5 each, to the children of his sister, Mary Glover. There is no evidence that Richard the elder and Abigail had a daughter named Mary, but Henry and Elizabeth did have such a child. To make matters more confusing in his will, John named his executor another brother, Henry. Yet the Rowington Registers give no indication of a Henry who was a brother either to John or to Richard, although such a Henry may have been baptised in another parish.

John the yeoman also left £5 each to the children of his brother-in-law, William Barwell, but apart from his wife the main beneficiaries of the will were two of Richard children: Henry and Elizabeth. Another sister, Mary, had died as an infant, and a third, Sarah, was excluded. Henry and Elizabeth shared the large sum of £50 and the residue of John the yeoman's estate. Henry went on to marry at St Martin's, in 1821. His wife was Ann Barwell, a relative of his aunt. Although born in Birmingham, Ann's family hailed from Bickenhill, next to Sheldon. Her four children were all baptised at St Philip's, Birmingham between 1823 and 1836 but later censuses indicate that all were born in King's Norton. Henry's inheritance gave him the funds to rent the 88 acre Church Farm in Kings Heath. The 1840 Tithe Map indicates that his farm house was on the Alcester Road, where Sainsbury's now stands. His farm encompassed all the land behind the house as far back as about Hazelhurst Road and from Vicarage Road – then called Bleak Lane - along to Featherstone Road.

Henry was a tenant of William Congreve Russell, one of the biggest landowners in Moseley and King's Heath, and he also rented Row Heath Farm, in what is now Bournville. The two farms gave him 136 acres of farmland and a position of status. He became both a churchwarden and an overseer of the poor in King's Norton.

Ironically Henry's sister, Elizabeth did not fare so well. In 1861 she was a widow aged 67 who was struggling as a charwoman in Gravelly Hill, whilst her unmarried son was an agricultural labourer. Moreover Henry's own grandchildren by his oldest son, also called Henry, would themselves have to endure poverty.

By 1861 Henry the elder had given over the tenancy of Row Heath Farm to his second son, William, but his main farm in King's Heath was worked as a family affair. He employed only one labourer for he had the help of his three single children - Henry, James, and Anne. Later that year Henry the younger, aged 38, married Mary Ann Grigg. She had been born in Northfield but had lived at Row Heath, where her family farmed near to the Chinns. Soon afterwards Henry took on Church Farm from his father. Unhappily the fortunes of the family changed badly for the worse and in 1868 both he and his brother, William of Row Heath, were made bankrupt.

It must have been a bitter pill for Henry the elder to swallow. As he came to the end of his life his life's work in raising his family's position to one of comfort and security had been shattered. He died in 1873 at the old age of 80 and was buried at St Mary's, Moseley – as had been his mother, father and wife. Worse was to come for his family. His bankrupt son, Henry the younger, had quickly found work as a farm bailiff with the Cartlands of The Priory. He lived with his wife and children in a cottage on Vicarage Road. It was not the life of a prosperous tenant farmer but it was still a good job that was far better than that of an agricultural labourer. Then tragedy struck in 1877.

The family story goes that Henry fell off a haystack and broke his neck. He was 54 and was buried at All Saints Church, Kings Heath. Whatever the cause of death, it was a disaster for his widow, Mary Anne. She had five children aged twelve and under, but with no man she lost both his income and her home – for the cottage had gone with the job. Mary Anne must have been a strong and determined woman for she kept her family together and out of the hated workhouse. Putting what belongings she had on a hand cart she traipsed to nearby Sparkbrook, then part of Balsall Heath, and rented a back house in White Street. Here she scratched a living as a washerwoman. Her ability to cope against adversity meant she got by - though she and her children, including my great grandfather, Richard, knew what it was to be clammed and to have to scrat to survive. She died in 1910, still living in White Street and still a widow after 33 years.

## NEXT MEETING:

## JOHN BOWEN of MOSELEY & BALSALL HEATH - by ANTHONY COLLINS

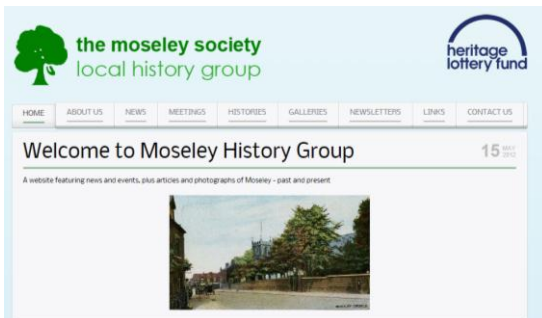


John Bowen gained a good reputation for winning contracts to build a number of significant buildings in Birmingham and the Midlands. These included some of the early Victorian board schools, swimming baths, The Victoria Law Courts and the Hollymoor Asylum at Rubery.

It was a stupendous achievement by Bowen in building his own life. He started off as the son of a village Blacksmith but rose to become a figure of considerable note and local importance as an Alderman and a JP. In 1916 he was appointed High Sheriff of Worcestershire. Bowen's works were in George Street in Balsall Heath and the premises can still be seen there today. His home in Moseley was at 2 Strensham Hill, named "Rochford".

Visiting us on **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> October** is Anthony Collins who will be giving us his usual engrossing and entertaining account of his ancestor. The talk is in the Red Room at the Exchange and starts at 7:30. Anthony is hoping to produce a book on Bowen to coincide with the centenary of the Old Repertory Theatre in Station Street in 2014, which the firm also built.

A blue plaque for Bowen is also scheduled to be put up.



### History Group website goes live!

The new website which will showcase all manner of articles from Moseley's past is now online and available to see. Find it at [www.moseleyhistory.co.uk](http://www.moseleyhistory.co.uk) or on Google. The site will expand as times goes on with all manner of exciting material, featuring some choice items from the Moseley History Group's own collections. If you have any Moseley images or stories of your own we would love to hear from you. Those of you who use Facebook online should also join the Moseley Society Local History Group there. It features plenty of pictures and lively comments.

### Moseley: Then And Now display



Moseley Exchange is home until 29<sup>th</sup> October of a display of "Then and Now" images of Moseley. The old pictures are all circa 100 years old and we sent Moseley photographer Brett Wilde out to take the same views today in 2012, often at his own risk!

*Above is the Park Garage on Alcester Road South circa 1910 and then as O'Neill's pub today*