

Balsall Parish Council | History

The Early Years: 1894-1918

The Local Government Act 1894 excited much controversy particularly with the proposal to create Parish Councils. As a result of the Act the Church was to be excluded from formal participation in Local Government and the traditional functions of the parish were to be administered by laymen.

Balsall Parish Council held its first meeting in Lady Katherine Leveson School on 4th December 1894. Ironically the first person to be elected Chairman was the Revd C R Shaw, Vicar of the Parish of St Mary the Virgin. The first business meeting of the Parish Council took place on 13th December. The minutes of that and all subsequent meetings have been preserved, the majority of which have been deposited with Warwickshire County Records Office.

The early meetings of the Parish Council were mainly concerned with administrative issues such as the appointment of Overseers to deal with day-to-day affairs of the Parish. A special meeting was held on 20th October 1896 to appoint an Assistant Overseer and Clerk, at a salary of £25 per annum, whose remit was to collect parish rates. At the time this was regarded as a good job!

Parish Councils were entrusted with powers to report issues relating to public health to the District Council - such action against 'unhealthy dwellings' occupied the time of councillors, together with complaints about blocked footpaths. During its first year the Parish Council received petitions to establish allotments at Chadwick End and to improve the postal arrangements in Balsall Street where there was a post office.

The years 1898 and 1899 were dominated by the issue of rising crime in the area. The population, particularly along Balsall Street, was increasing, and there were complaints of rowdyism. An early request by Cllr William Gilbert for a policeman in the parish met with the reply "one at Solihull, one at Knowle, enough"! A special meeting was held on 15th August 1899 to discuss the problem. During the meeting the population of Balsall was stated as 1,064 (1891 census). The rowdyism was blamed on "the presence of four fully-licensed houses in the district and the fact that 20 new houses had been built in Balsall Street in the last eight years, and an influx of excursionists into the area".

A policeman had been stationed at Chadwick End by 1905, although this was still considered unsatisfactory. Crime was not the only issue at this time. In July and August 1901 the problem of speeding in Kenilworth Road was raised, with a request for the policeman to prosecute. Further letters to the police followed when a motorist killed a cow!

Controversy on the provision of education in the Parish dominated the 10th anniversary of the Council. Warwickshire County Council Education Authority wanted to convert Lady Katherine Leveson School to mixed classes and dismiss the Head Teacher after 24 years service. The Parish Council was strongly opposed to the change, stating that it was "not conducive to the morals of the children, as many boys and girls in these schools are fourteen years and upwards". The Parish Council later agreed to the changes provided the Head Teacher was not dismissed. The Education Authority finally backed down over the changes, agreeing only to split the school into two departments.

The funding of education was also high on the agenda, with Solihull refusing to take over the rate contribution. The Parish faced considerable difficulty in collecting the education rate since the termination of a contribution from the Charity Commissioners. The issue was taken to Parliament and finally settled in 1906.

A public meeting was held at the Saracen's Head on 29th June 1907 to discuss a proposal by Warwickshire Education Committee on the offer of £1,500 from the Governors of Lady Katherine Leveson Hospital (*as it was then known*) to provide a site and partly fund the building of a new church school as a replacement for the existing school in Holly Lane which was grossly overcrowded, and could not cope with the increasing population.

Numerous discussions on the provision of a site and the funding followed, The Vicar, the Revd Nicholas Fairbairn, was concerned that if the school was enlarged at a cost to the ratepayer they, "as church schools be lost to religion", and "in five years, all schools would be state schools."

Various options were considered, including a new site at Frogmore Wood at a cost of £2,500. A site was finally obtained in Balsall Street, and Balsall Street Council School opened on 22nd September 1913. The original school building in Holly Lane became a Church Room for St Peter's, subsequently it was used by the Scouts and ultimately demolished in the 1950s and was replaced by the existing Scout building.

Balsall Street was an important route for the transport of bricks from the Cherry Orchard Brickworks in Kenilworth to Solihull and Birmingham where a lot of building was taking place. The bricks were transported by traction engines which did considerable damage to the road surface resulting in numerous complaints to the Parish Council. The traction engines later moved on to minor roads, such as Holly Lane, prompting further complaints which resulted in raising the question of tarring some of the minor roads.

During the years 1914 to 1918 the activities of the Parish Council were less in evidence in the minute books, but considerable efforts were being made to support the war effort.

In 1917 the Potato Scheme was introduced in which seed potatoes were distributed to local growers to improve the stock and food production during the war. The purchase of four and a half tons of potatoes was made and they were distributed by the Parish Council. The exercise was repeated in 1918.

A grant of £3 was also provided to start the 'Rat and Sparrow Club', in an attempt to reduce pests in the area. The Club met for many years at the Saracen's Head. By the end of 1917 it was reported that 692 rats and 113 sparrows had been caught together with 34 eggs. Two local residents with the highest score were paid 10 shillings and five shillings. The grant was withdrawn in 1921.

The Changing Years and the Second world War: 1918-1945

After the First World War, in 1920, the Parish Council was promised war trophies comprising ten German rifles, one helmet and one field gun. The rifles were distributed to the schools, and the field gun was destined for 'the crossroads at Station Road and Balsall Street opposite the Blacksmith's shop', but was never delivered. A note adds that danger signs were also to be added on this corner!

On 4th May 1921 a new cemetery was consecrated at Temple Balsall by the Bishop of Birmingham and was 'officially opened for burial'.

Around this time, it was agreed that a police constable should be provided on the Kenilworth Road side of the Parish. It was also recorded that a contribution of £106 was made to the District Council for the purchase of a 'motorised fire engine' costing £1,850. The tender was to be kept at Knowle and the Parish Council complained that it would always be late due to the state of the roads!

The years 1922 to 1932 saw many changes in the Parish. The provision of gas and electricity received considerable attention, and there were battles fought over local government reorganisation.

The period started with changes to the membership of the Parish Council. Charles Blyth had been Chairman since 1901 when he died in 1922. The vacancy was filled by David Gee, who was to become Chairman in 1925.

The strategic situation of the Parish on the busy route from the south to the north-west was starting to cause significant traffic problems, and proposals by the Northern & Western Motorway Company to build a road through the Parish to provide access to the north-west were made public in 1923. A year later a letter was sent to the Prime Minister in support of the route, but the road was never built. However, improvements were made to a number of local roads. Kenilworth Road was completely remade, the work causing considerable flooding to roadside cottages, and indeed drainage problems in the area continue to this day. There were plans to straighten the road to Temple Balsall, but only the Balsall Common end of this scheme was actually carried out.

Requests to Kenilworth Gas Company and Warwick & Leamington Light & Power Company for supplies failed. However, in 1926 Birmingham agreed to supply electricity, but it was 1930 before the installation was finally completed. The gas supply was to be provided by Coventry, despite opposition from the Parish Council.

Considerable efforts were made at this time in the area of public health. Balsall Common still lacked a water supply, mains sewerage and refuse collection. The situation came to a head in 1931 when it was reported that 'householders usually bury tins and bottles in the garden, but others tip them outside in the roads in front of their houses, thus causing a nuisance'. Furthermore, a dumb-well had overflowed and contaminated the water supply. Mains water was finally made available in 1938, largely due to the efforts of Councillor David Gee. However, many properties relied on their own supplies until well after the Second World War. The War interrupted the installation of mains sewerage, and the scheme was not completed until about 1950, due to problems with running sand, and a contractor going bankrupt. A service to empty cesspits became available after the War, although a refuse collection service had first started back in 1934. For many years after the War men from Coleshill Mental Hospital were employed on the dust carts, being paid pocket money and cigarettes only!

Constitutional issues aroused a considerable amount of discussion following the publication of the 1929 Local Government Act. Four years earlier the Parish Council had lost responsibility for collecting rates with the passing of the new Rating and Wateration Bill, this resulted in the abolition of the 'Overseers'.

The 1929 Act threatened the historical connection with Solihull which dated from the Poor Law Acts of 1834. A move to Warwickshire County Council was strongly resisted, and late in 1930 a public meeting and referendum were held. Opinion was that Solihull would provide more, but at a cost. The decision in the end was taken for the Parish of Balsall to join Meriden Rural District Council within the new county boundary of Warwickshire - this occurred in 1932. The years leading up to the War were less controversial.

Chadwick End Village Hall was built through the generosity of Mr Watson of Chadwick Manor in 1908, and run by Trustees. However, the cost of maintaining the Hall finally forced the Trustees to offer it as a gift to the Parish Council in 1932. Within two years the Council had to borrow £150 for repairs.

In the early 1930s street names were erected in Balsall Common and lighting

was installed along Balsall Street, although there were problems with dimming at times of full load. Even then speeding was a problem along Kenilworth Road and Balsall Street. A public meeting was held to discuss the problem and a 30 mph speed limit was requested. However, this was not supported by Berkswell Council and despite subsequent attempts the limits were not reduced on Balsall Street until the early years of the 21st century and remain at 40 mph on Kenilworth Road!

Following the declaration of war, preoccupation with the war effort resulted in less frequent meetings. The traditional role of maintaining cemeteries continued, but there was a sombre reminder of the human cost of war when additional cemetery groundsmen were taken on, and more ground at Temple Balsall was consecrated by the Bishop of Birmingham in 1942.

There was considerable military presence in the parish during the war. Many airmen were stationed at Honiley Aerodrome, with large numbers of RAF personnel living in Balsall Common. The Home Guard took over Chadwick End Village Hall as Regional Headquarters, and in Balsall Common the Headquarters of the local platoon was based at the requisitioned house known as 'The Gables' on the Kenilworth Road opposite Lavender Hall Lane. Although it was not considered necessary to build public air raid shelters in the area, several bombs fell on Balsall Common. One fell in Kenilworth Road close to 'Oak Croft' opposite the Equestrian Centre; and incendiary devices set fire to the hedgerows on the Kenilworth Road south of High Cross. A large bomb landed at the junction of Frog Lane with Holly Lane, and a further bomb landing in Wootton Green Lane was exploded by the Royal Engineers. The road to Knowle (B4101) was closed for three years to act as part of a decoy airfield for Honiley, with flares being placed in a field between the road and the River Blythe (part of the Lady Katherine Leveson Estate). A crater from a land mine in this field still exists close to footpath M141.

Parish Council members put a huge amount of effort into fundraising during the war. The Parish raised nearly £36,000 for the 'Wings for Victory' campaign organised by Cllr Ford. In June 1943 Cllr David Gee was congratulated for organising the 'Heart of England Fund' when just 44 people raised £44,000! Later, Cllr Perks organised the 'Salute the soldier' raising £21,000. Warship Week was hosted by the Parish Council, one WREN and one rating from HMS Victory came to collect the cheque, and a document still exists to commemorate the event. These are all respectable sums by today's standards, and must have represented a tremendous achievement. After the war a special permit for rationed food was obtained for the Parish Victory Day celebrations which took place in May 1946 and cost £71 1s 0d.

The Post War Years: 1945-1974

The years following the war saw a return to the day-to-day business of seeking to improve the quality of life in the Parish. An increased population had brought many more children to the Parish, and there were calls for playing fields to be provided, but progress was not to be made until the early 1970s. In 1948 The Lant trust (a local charity) purchased land adjacent to the White Horse, which was laid out for cricket, football, hockey and tennis. After fundraising by the Clubs, a pavilion was erected by the Trust for local residents.

Improvements were made in public transport, with a new bus service starting from Birmingham to Leamington Spa and Coventry via Balsall Common; this included a Sunday service. However, there were complaints that the buses

returning from Coventry were filled by the squatters who lived in the defunct wartime workers' hostel in Duggins Lane, and the "Balsall Common people were left behind".

In 1948 the Representation of the People Act brought the secret ballot to the election of the Parish Council, replacing the show of hands previously used.

Despite many years of planning and four years hard work, the scheme to install mains sewerage was still causing problems in 1950. A public meeting was held on the subject following problems with running sand and the resulting twelve months closure of Station Road. The public were assured that the scheme would be completed, and indeed it was later that year. The related issue of providing public toilets for the village was nearly resolved at this time, having appeared regularly on the agenda since 1894, and still does to this day. The scheme was just about to be given the go-ahead when it was shelved, (according to former Councillor Richard Lawton), following a visit by members of the Parish Council to see "Clochmerle" at the Balsall Palace Cinema! - which subsequently became "The Cameo", on which now stands the development known as Cameo Court. We are now assured by the Heart of England Co-operative Society that a public toilet will feature in their revamped building during 2007.

Springfield Hall in Temple Balsall, the home of George Jackson, Chairman of Solihull Bench and a contemporary of the Watsons at Chadwick End, was high on the Parish Council's agenda in the early 1950s. Birmingham Education Authority published plans to develop the house and gardens into a teacher training college. Objections were lodged to the planned 3-storey building on this site, and to the removal of trees around Temple Balsall. In the event this was not proceeded with, but it became a Special School under the aegis of the Birmingham Education Authority. In 1952 the building was Listed when a new Schedule of Buildings of Historical Interest was drawn up. The Lady Katherine Leveson Hospital, Temple House, Templar's Hall and the Saracen's Head were amongst other local buildings included in the List.

Despite appeals to the then local MP Sir John Mellor, a telephone box could not be provided at Needlers End. Only five kiosks were available throughout Warwickshire in 1950. There was more luck with bus shelters though. Efforts to persuade Midland Red to provide shelters had failed, but a new Act of Parliament allowed the Parish Council to build the first of the shelters near the main island in the village in 1956, at a cost of £140. Unfortunately, due to continuing vandalism, the shelter was dismantled in 1995 at a cost of £188. The effects of increased use of private transport were in evidence again with the completion of a car park for Berkswell Station at the rear of the Railway Inn. Alterations to the central island in Kenilworth Road were also made to make it easier to negotiate.

During the 1950s the name of the railway station was changed to Berkswell and Balsall Common as "Balsall Common is off the map and goods get lost".

The end of the 1950s saw the beginning of a major expansion of Balsall Common. In 1957 Meriden Rural District Council planners allowed various developments to go ahead, including Sunnyside Lane, Kenilworth Road and Station Road, although development of Balsall Street East was turned down due to drainage restrictions. It was decided that no more development would be permitted for another five years. Changes were also planned for the village centre. The Cameo Cinema, a haunt for villagers and airmen from Honiley, closed - despite vociferous opposition from the public - (but not the shopkeepers)! it became a second-hand car showroom until 1961 when the

building was demolished and the present shops and flats were built. Even this development was controversial, and a public enquiry was held at Coleshill. The early 1960s was a quiet time for the Parish Council, but this was not to last. The number of planning applications gradually increased although most new developments were rejected by Meriden Rural District Council. Two successful applications in 1965 were the CEGB major transformer in Hodgetts Lane (although it was eventually reduced in size), and plans to develop Yew Tree Farm (Kemps Green Road, etc) with the inclusion of shops and recreation areas. The process of local government reform began with a Royal Commission in 1966. Rural and Urban District Councils would go, including Meriden, and a new West Midland County formed. Would the parish boundaries change? Who would be the paymasters? Protracted discussion began between parish councils and central government with the publication of the Redcliffe-Maude Report on local government reform in 1969. This was followed by 'The New District Councils - a Blueprint for the Future' in 1970. By 1971 it was clear that boundary changes would affect the Parish with a choice' between remaining with Meriden and Warwickshire or moving into Solihull or Coventry. The 'Committee for the Preservation of the Rural Belt' was established in anticipation that attitudes to development may change.

Public consultation began and a public meeting was held. The two hundred members of the public present at this meeting resolved that "Balsall should remain in the shire of Warwick". The resolution was publicised, but there was a poor response, probably because the decision echoed the views of most people in the Parish. In September 1971, Councillors Burman and Cockersole met the then Secretary of State for the Environment (Michael Heseltine) to put the case, also supported by Warwickshire County Council, that Balsall should remain in Warwickshire. But it was to no avail. Despite numerous objections, it was decided that the Parish would become part of the New Metropolitan Borough of Solihull and the transfer was made in 1974. As if the future of the Parish Council wasn't enough to deal with, for the first time, the serious possibility of a by-pass for Balsall Common emerged. Kenilworth Road and Warwick Road traffic levels became a major concern. The idea first surfaced during public questions in 1966, but there had been little progress for several years. By 1971 several factors contributed to a substantial rise in traffic. The Warwick by-pass was partly blamed for this, resulting in a suggestion that Kenilworth Road should be duelled; this was rejected as impractical. The debate really got off the ground in 1971 with fears of further traffic problems due to the NEC and the 'village being split in half'. A public petition was started with the help of Balsall Common Women's Institute and the Mother's Club. Over fourteen hundred signatures were collected for submission to the Department of the Environment. Councillors were keen to push the scheme ahead at this time in case priorities changed following local government organisation scheduled for 1974.

Rapid progress was made in the next twelve months following a public meeting which strongly endorsed the by-pass, but controversy followed. Warwickshire County Council produced plans for an eastern by-pass, but these met with opposition from Berkswell Parish Council. A joint meeting between Balsall and Berkswell was sought in March 1973. Meanwhile, Balsall Parish Council was shown a Warwickshire plan containing three proposals: an eastern route costing three quarters of a million pounds, and two possible western routes costing half a million pounds each. Berkswell declined to participate and deadlock followed.

Six months passed without a decision from Warwickshire, but by now reorganisation was only months away and two new roads, the M40 and M42, which would reduce traffic through the village, were on the drawing board. Without the support of the Department of the Environment the plan was dropped in October 1973. This was probably as the result of the Parish moving from

Warwickshire to the new West Midlands County. Recriminations followed, but it would be seventeen years before the plan was resurrected. Many improvements were made to the A452 during this period, including the Pelican Crossings and central refuges along the full length of the Kenilworth Road.

With increasing pressure on the Green Belt, a Village Plan for Balsall Common was proposed in 1971. The plan was conceived in two phases. The first dealt with school provision, whilst the second included suggestions on residential development, health care, library facilities, play areas and landscaping. This was opportune, given the proposed Yew Tree Farm development proposed in the early 1960s but postponed in 1966.

Concerns were raised over the state of the RAF houses at Fen End which had become disused. Keith Speed MP was contacted to expedite matters with the Ministry of Defence. Following lengthy negotiations the houses were transferred to the District authority in 1973 and given the name 'Oakley'.

Although the by-pass, planning and reorganisation occupied a lot of time, much hard work went into improving several aspects of village life. For example, considerable advances were made in the provision of sports facilities and children's play areas.

Discussions on providing play areas started in 1965, but early attempts to obtain the necessary land had failed. By 1968 negotiations were under way for sites in Needlers End Lane and Meeting House Lane.

Following negotiations in 1970-71, instigated earlier by Cllr Margaret Mellows, Balsall Parish Council obtained permission from the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham to use part of their land in Meeting House Lane to create a children's play area. The terms agreed were very favourable and the annual rental was nominal. The details of taking possession of the land and the provision of play equipment took a considerable time to establish and there were problems with vandalism. However, both sites were ready by 1972 and a Playing Field Sub-Committee was formed.

Later, in the early 1970s land in Chadwick End was also donated as playing fields. Mr Norman Moore generously donated this land to the Parish in recognition of his daughter Anne gaining a silver medal for show jumping in the 1974 Olympic Games. Mr Moore also donated the pavilion, whilst the Parish Council erected the pavilion, completed the servicing, landscaping and fencing. The field, known as 'Moorefield', became a football pitch, and a play area was subsequently provided by the Parish Council.

Chadwick End Village Hall was the subject of much discussion since it was in need of considerable modernisation and repairs were estimated at £17,000. Through the efforts of Bob Prestidge, the Chairman of Baddesley Clinton & Chadwick End Residents Association, the Village Hall was converted into a Social Club, and the interior was refurbished. The lengthy process of obtaining grants for the work began, although there were suggestions that the residents of Chadwick End should be responsible for funding.

Several requests were also made for more money to be spent on Balsall Common Village Institute in Station Road. However, this building, although used as Balsall Common Village Hall, is not owned by the Parish Council. Its refurbishment was to be addressed in the early years of the twenty first century.

Life in a Metropolitan Borough: 1974 - 1994 (The Parish Council's Centenary Year

The reorganisation of Local Government took effect from 1st April 1974. On that date Balsall Parish Council became part of the new Metropolitan Borough of Solihull. To the regret of many, Balsall was no longer part of Warwickshire - it now became one of the few remaining rural parishes within the newly formed County of the West Midlands. Concern was expressed that the new regime would be urban in outlook, and not sympathetic to the problems of our much more rural area.

During 1974 several major projects threatened Green Belt land in the area. The result was the preparation of a Green Belt Plan by the new West Midlands County Council. This was the subject of a public meeting in 1976. The intention was to establish a framework for future development; essentially a forerunner of the Unitary Development Plan which surfaced ten years later. However the plan was never approved due to the abolition of West Midlands County Council in 1987.

With the completion of the main surface water drainage system for Balsall Common at the end of 1973, the 'white' area known as Yew Tree Farm became available for development. An 'outline' application for residential development was submitted in November 1974, and over the next three years numerous meetings and discussions took place between the Parish Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council regarding the detailed layout of this site - bounded by Balsall Street, Station Road and Kenilworth Road.

Issues raised by the Parish Council at this time were: the developer's proposal to access the site via Priors Close off Station Road; the provision of shops; and the lack of protection and retention of the trees, hedges and ponds. There was also the need to preserve and enhance the last remaining worker's cottage in the area known as Chattaway Cottage. Although through pressure by Balsall Parish Council it became 'listed' by the Department of the Environment it was not saved. This old timber-framed wattle and daub cottage was doomed, as through lack of physical protection by the developers, it was, sadly, eventually burned down by vandals.

The proposal to provide a new shopping centre on the 'Yew Tree Farm Estate generated a lot of concern. In response the Parish Council in 1976 arranged for a 'shopping feasibility study' of Balsall. This was undertaken by Chris Lewcock, a third year student from the School of Planning at Lanchester Polytechnic. The results of the study backed the views of local traders, namely the need to concentrate on the existing shopping facilities in the centre of the village, and not allow a supermarket to be built on the new estate.

By the end of 1976 and early 1977 the detailed plans were finally submitted by the developers for consultation. Some of the Parish Council's comments were to be taken on board, and the general layout of the proposed development met with approval. However, nobody was aware that the developers had continued to pursue their original outline application via an appeal to the Secretary of State. Much to the shock of the Parish Council a public enquiry was held, and the Secretary of State granted outline approval with the minimum of conditions. Much to the disgust of the Parish Council, years of meetings and so called 'consultations' with the developers went out of the window and new plans were submitted and eventually approved. Some of the original views of the Parish Council were taken on board although, regrettably, the attractive setting surrounding Chattaway Cottage was lost. However, the Parish Council did manage to get the 'Yew Tree', located just off Station Road, protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

In the spring of 1974 the Parish Council launched 'The Balsall Magazine'. This was an ambitious project, with up to 32 pages full of articles on local personalities, history, photographs, sketches and information of local interest. Under the leadership of Cllr Bob Meacham a small editorial team produced nine editions over the next four years and over 1,500 copies per issue were distributed. However, although it was hoped the magazine would be self-financing, it eventually cost some £900 per issue, nearly 20% of the Parish budget, and reluctantly it was abandoned.

In 1976, following yet another public inquiry, a plan to build a new village in Temple Balsall, with homes for over 500 people was rejected. Other planned developments included: the re-development of the Speedwell Gear Company factory in Needlers End Lane - now Whitnash Close; bungalows in Coplow Close; together with houses in Needlers End Lane.

The first hint of interest by the National Coal Board (NCB) came in 1976 when a request to drill bore holes was put to Solihull MBC. Indications were that rich deposits had been found. The exercise was repeated in 1978, following which the NCB indicated that no more bore holes would be drilled but offered no information about their future plans.

Although outside the parish boundaries, an announcement in 1976 of a major development at Elmdon Airport (now Birmingham International Airport) would prompt much discussion at future Parish Council meetings. The most common source being the erosion of the Green Belt and the nuisance resulting from aircraft deviating from the flight path.

Around this time the rather 'sad' appearance of Balsall Common Village Centre prompted moves to improve the area. The opportunity was taken to increase the number of parking spaces, and following lengthy discussions with the traders over the assignment of land along the shop frontages, echelon parking bays were introduced in front of the shops. Also around this time a 30 mph speed limit was introduced in Station Road.

In 1976 the library finally moved from a small room at the rear of the Village Institute to Churchill Hall in the centre of the village; this building having previously been the Friends Meeting House.

In 1976 the ecological disaster of Dutch Elm disease struck and a programme was started to replace the diseased trees in the parish. This tree planting programme has continued.

It was during 1976 that residents of Chadwick End asked the Parish Council if allotments could be provided in the area. This resulted in protracted negotiations with Solihull MBC for some land. The lease was finally signed in 1979 for the site of the old sewage farm that had served the village. Unfortunately, interest waned, and by 1985/1986 the Parish Council no longer administered the allotment and the land returned to the ownership of Solihull MBC

Parish boundaries came under review by the Boundary Commission in the mid-seventies. There was Controversy over the boundary between Chadwick End and Baddesley Clinton, and Berkswell and Balsall Common. A poll in Chadwick End resulted in a 63% turnout, 133 votes in favour of transferring to Warwickshire, and 47 in favour of remaining in Solihull - where it still remains. Balsall Parish Council recommended that the boundary line between Balsall and Berkswell should run along the railway line, but this was not implemented. In 1977, the fact was raised that Balsall Parish Council did not have a badge of office for its Chairman. This was a controversial issue, and although a badge was designed and quotations obtained, it suffered the same fate as the Parish

Magazine. The Chairman, Cllr Tom Winter, summed up the feeling at the time when he said, "with cutting back the parish magazine and the need to spend money on play areas, it would seem the wrong time to spend money on a Chairman's badge". The Parish Council has had to wait until 2007 and the retirement of Cllr Rodney Crossley (first elected May 1970) for the Chairman to have a badge of office. This being due to Cllr Crossley's generosity, for which the Parish Council is very grateful.

Through the early 1980s the development of the Yew Tree Farm Estate became the largest single building project in the Balsall Parish. The development started with controversy when, in 1980 the original, now listed, Chattaway Cottage was vandalised and destroyed. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council ordered the developers to replace it with another appropriate dwelling, since the original intention was to retain the cottage within the development. A plan for the whole Yew Tree Estate was displayed in the village in 1981 as building commenced. Developers were criticised for felling trees and destroying a pond near Chattaway Cottage. Parish Councillors Monitored the project and took part in many site meetings - to review progress, and many amended applications were submitted, but unfortunately the final development layout was not as originally intended, and was a great disappointment to the Parish Council. For many years there had been a debate over whether there should be a fish and chip shop in Balsall Common. Some considered that the loss of a retail unit and the smell of the shop would have a detrimental effect on the village centre. However, it had been forgotten that there had been a fish and chip shop in the village run by Mr & Mrs Toole, and later by Reg French, from the 1940s until the mid-50s. Permission for a new shop was finally granted in 1988!

In 1981 the Community Health Centre in Station Road was opened and a year later, through the instigation of the Parish Council, a Piper alarm system was installed in the senior citizens' bungalows in Coplow Close, Whitnash Close and Ferndale Road.

During the 1980s the valuable work of maintaining the cemetery and playing fields, repairing bus shelters and planting trees continued. With an increasing population in the area, public footpaths were used more for recreation. Members of the Parish Council were involved in regularly walking those rights-of-ways to ensure they were passable and many were way-marked with new signs. More walkers from further afield visited the area with the establishment of long distant routes such as the Heart of England Way.

Vandalism became an increasing problem, the village centre becoming a popular meeting place for motor cyclists. The possibility of providing better facilities for the youth of the Parish was raised on many occasions. No long-term solution could be found, although the use of a building at the disused RAF Command Post in Holly Lane was mooted. This proposal was subsequently withdrawn due to local opposition. This site has now been re-developed as the West Midlands Dog Training Centre and still causes controversy! A further suggestion put forward was to utilise the old telephone exchange in Gipsy Lane - this was also vetoed due to massive local opposition.

More time and money was spent repairing bus shelters and play equipment. Items such as swings or slides were purchased by the Parish Council, or donated by such groups as the Lions, only to be vandalised soon after installation necessitating expensive repairs. With a greater emphasis on safety, concerns were raised over the paved surfaces in the play areas, the best solution being to provide the new type of rubberised safety surfaces. This work was carried out in 190 at a cost to the Parish Council of over £7,000.

Village policing was discussed at length during this period. In 1984, after a gap of many years, a police house was again provided with Balsall Common.

Optimism followed the introduction of the police house in Needlers End Lane, but greater police mobility and an increase in crime in other areas of the Borough meant that officers were often sent out of the village. Requests for a more formal police presence in Balsall Common village centre continued when it became clear that the house was merely a residence without facilities for meeting members of the public. Moves to recruit special constables met with limited success, but the introduction of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme could be seen as the single most important event in the fight against crime. A public meeting resulted in a number of schemes being launched in the area, but many faltered as the enthusiasm of coordinators waned.

With the continued expansion of Birmingham International Airport, complaints over aircraft noise grew. Regular meetings took place with the airport authorities who became more amenable to discussing problems with local groups. Many hoped that the introduction of new radar equipment with facilities to record and plot flight paths, the problem would be minimised, but with the ever increasing numbers of aircraft the problem continued.

As the population increased the postal service gradually became unable to cope with the volume of mail. The mail was sorted in George Scott's garage, which was attached to the Post Office/Newsagents shop in Station Road. The number of complaints increased, and postal staff attended a number of Parish Council meetings to explain Royal Mail's difficulties. The most radical change to the postal system occurred in 1990 when sorting was transferred to Coventry. Delivery staff and the sorted mail are now transported to Balsall Common on a daily basis.

Planning Issues occupied greater moments of Parish Council time as pressure to develop the Green Belt increased. A number of pressure groups were initiated, including the Green Belt Protection Society in 1980; this being chaired by Ian Mills, Member of Parliament for Meriden. The three most emotive schemes were proposals by British Coal to build a super pit in the area; the preparation of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP); and linked to the UDP, the proposal for a Balsall Common by-pass.

Although coal reserves were known to exist in the area, the first hint that there were proposals to mine did not come until 1980. Rumours of the development resulted in approaches to the National Coal Board, and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) for information. No formal plans were made public at that time, but Parish Councillors monitored the situation, and in fact visited Daw Mill Colliery in 1981.

In 1985 British Coal announced that they intended to extract coal in the area. The development was called a 'super pit' because it would be much larger than any existing British coal mine in order to exploit 'economies of scale'. The result being a huge development with the prospect of a major environmental impact. Uncertainty followed, since several sites were proposed, including Hawkhurst Moor near Berkswell and Crackley Wood in Kenilworth.

On 13th June 1985, the Chairman of Balsall Parish Council (Cllr Ron Beaty) called a 'special meeting' following the publication of British Coal's consultative document - 'The South Warwickshire Prospect'. A public meeting was held on 20th June 1985 at Heart of England School. Public interest was so great that the main assembly hall was fully occupied and close-circuit television had to be installed so as to allow proceedings to be followed by the overflow in an adjacent hall. The feeling of the meeting was overwhelmingly against the development of a new mine in the area, and a mandate was given for an Action Group to be formed under an interim title of 'Colliery Opposition Group'. members of the Group initially consisted of Balsall, Berkswell and Meriden Parish Councils, together with local residents' associations, including Burton Green. In September

1985 Parish Councillors met with British Coal chairman, Ian McGregor, and Ian Mills MP, but few specific details were release. In December the choice of sites was narrowed down to Hawkhurst Moor and Crackley Wood.

Opposition to the mine consolidated during the following year, with the amalgamation of a number of opposition groups under the umbrella of the Federation of Colliery Opposition Groups (FCOG). The cost of fighting British Coal's proposals was estimated at £100,000. In June 1986 Hawkhurst Moor was finally chosen as the preferred site. There followed a petition and a protest march involving over 1,000 people. FCOG flew a balloon 200 feet above the site to indicate the height of the proposed winding towers.

British Coal submitted a formal application in July 1987. The Parish Council submitted its formal objection in April of the following year. The plans were called in by the Secretary of State, and eventually a public inquiry began in January 1989 and lasted for six months. Balsall Parish Council raised £26,000 to fight the proposals with the total amount raised by FCOG amounting to about £120,000. A session of the inquiry was held in March at the Heart of England School, to hear local objections. The Inquiry Inspector duly presented his report, but it took over a year for the Secretary of State to make his decision public. Objectors were jubilant to hear that the proposal had been rejected, but cautious since the door was left open for future applications, albeit in a modified form.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council commenced its first Unitary Development Plan in 1987 as a replacement for the Structure Plans previously prepared by Warwickshire County Council and later, West Midlands County Council, based upon Central Government Guidelines. The issues covered housing, commercial and infrastructure needs, among others. Parish Councils were to be involved in consultation. The final plan would be subject to a public inquiry and, if approved, would remove uncertainty over planning policy during the ten-year period up to the year 2001.

The initial consultation process commenced in 1987, with meetings between Balsall Parish Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, the issues being the allocation of some 300 homes to meet projected housing needs, commercial and infrastructure needs; tree planting/conservation, the Green Belt, and the need for a Balsall Common by-pass. As part of the process a Balsall Common Village Study was produced (in consultation with Berkswell Parish Council). The study was similar to that carried out for Chadwick End in 1987, the aim being to assess infrastructure needs in relation to proposed future development. The result of the study was made public later in 1988. Green Belt land would be released to give a wider choice of housing, improve recreational, cultural and shopping facilities, and provide a residential home for the elderly as proposed in the Heart of England Homes project. The need for a by-pass and improved public transport and library facilities was also recognised. It was also intended that the new Green Belt boundary would provide a 'fortress wall' against future development. It was during this period that the Boundary Commission began a review of Parish boundaries.

In 1989 the detailed planning process got underway, with a total of 400 extra houses now being planned for Balsall Common. But more controversial was the intention to establish a by-pass route for planning purposes. Once again fierce debate followed over the merits of eastern and western routes, with leaflets and questionnaires being sent to 1,700 homes followed by a public meeting at the Heart of England School. Public opinion favoured the eastern route, which was eventually chosen. There were many concerns over the need for a by-pass and there were calls to wait to evaluate the effect of the M40 on local traffic. The original plan also included an expansion of the shopping centre but this was dropped following a public outcry.

The final Unitary Development Plan was discussed at a public meeting at the Heart of England School in February 1990. (A vote rejected the suggestion of an alternative housing development at Chadwick End.) A public inquiry was announced to consider the general and specific details of the UDP. There were already fears at this time that the 'fortress walls' were being breached due to pressure by developers and Central Government. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council assured the Parish Council that these boundaries would not be moved again.

The inquiry began in March 1991, and considered 1,500 objections from 700 submissions, and in August 1991 Balsall Parish Council presented objections to the proposed Business Area and the lack of community facilities. The Inspector, David Bushby, upheld the Parish Council's views on the allocation of land for business use.

In response to the Inspector's report, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council were required to identify further land to accommodate housing needs up to 2011. This proposed the removal of Green Belt protection from nearly two hectares of land in Needlers End Lane. The Parish Council objected to this proposal at a further public inquiry, which however supported the proposal.

In 1989 the Co-op redeveloped the old PARTCO site on the Kenilworth Road to provide Balsall Common with its first supermarket, which also provided much needed parking spaces for the village centre.

Controversy surrounded proposals for a replacement Catholic Church on an adjacent field site in Meeting House Lane. Following several modifications the plans were finally approved in 1994, and the church, dedicated to Blessed Robert Grissold, was built on the original site.

Finally in 1993, after protracted negotiations with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, the centre of Balsall Common was refurbished following a sketch plan prepared by the Residents Association - who made a major contribution to the discussions. The development included block paving, new parking spaces and ornamental lamp posts.

In 1993 Chadwick End lost its village store which also housed the post office. After many months of negotiation with Royal Mail a sub-post office was located in the old porch of the Village Hall.

Regular 'spring clean days' were introduced by the Parish Council to tidy up Balsall Common and outlying areas. Initially this scheme was part of the National Environment Week, but the Parish Council continued the 'spring clean' for several years on its own initiative.

December 1994 witnessed the commemoration of the Centenary of the Parish Council. The event was recognised by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, when the Mayor, Cllr Eric Pemberton, presented the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Godfrey Chesshire, with a Rose Bowl and Scroll at a Reception held in the Civic Suite. Also present were the Clerk and other members of the Parish Council.

On 3rd December a Dinner was held in the Old Hall, Temple Balsall, for serving members and their spouses.

The Centenary Parish Council meeting was held on 12th December in the Old Hall, Temple Balsall, at which, by invitation of the Chairman, the Mayor of Solihull, civic dignitaries, past members, clerks and other honoured guests were present. Cllr Pemberton spoke about the history of the Parish Council and gave praise to members past and present for their valuable contribution to local

democracy. The meeting was followed by a buffet supper, which completed a memorable and moving occasion.

During 1994 the Parish Council commissioned a china mug to mark the occasion. Trevor Boulton, the local artist, kindly designed a crest. This was used on the mugs and, subsequently on all letter headings. The mugs were distributed to all pupils and Lady Katherine Leveson and Balsall Common Primary Schools.