BLACK COUNTRY LIVES IN THE *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

Mark Curthoys

'The very ground seems on fire' wrote Robert Cheney of the Black Country. This powerful image from *The Illustrated London News* of 1866 reflects the impressions of many nineteenth-century commentators.

Biography and Black Country History

In the autumn 2013 edition of the *Blackcountryman*, Dr Trevor Raybould describes 'The Making of a Tiptonian'. His recollections of growing up in the town include the youthful escapade when he and a group of friends crept through Dudley Zoo at dusk – a hazardous undertaking. This was in June 1951, and their objective was to get a free view of the historical pageant being enacted in the courtyard of Dudley Castle. The Dudley Pageant was part of the town's contribution to the Festival of Britain celebrations, and was produced by the most celebrated pageant master of the time, Gwen Lally.

Lally has an entry in the September 2013 update to the *Oxford DNB* - an update that included the lives of more than 70 notable figures connected with Birmingham and the Black Country. These were in addition to many others from those places already in the *Dictionary*.

The new subjects represent a further acknowledgement within the national biographical record of the great contribution which the Black Country has made in the industrial development of Britain. The *Dictionary* is a selective source, which includes people who achieved a significant degree of noteworthiness in the history of the British Isles and its people. Within this limited field, it is important that the achievements of the Black Country receive their due share of recognition.

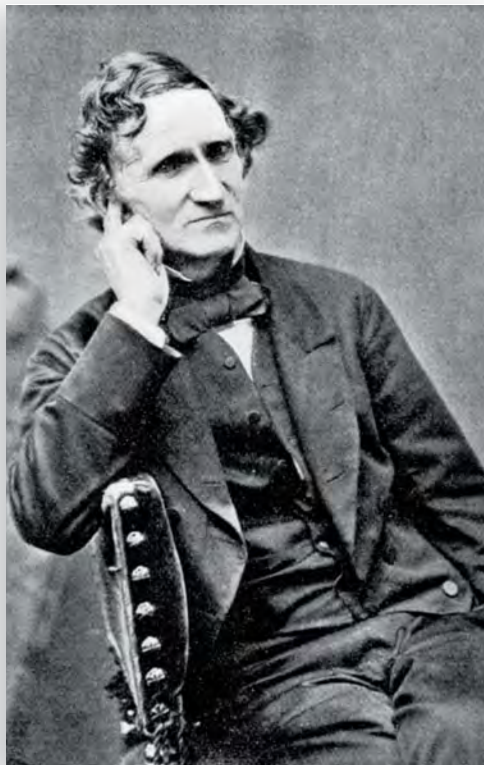
But the individual lives open up wider perspectives. Entries in reference works can raise questions well beyond each subject's life. So the *Dictionary* can be used as a starting point for research as much as a work to be consulted for resolving specific questions.

Gwen Lally: Pageant Maker

The life of Gwen Lally herself is an example. Deborah Sugg-Ryan, who has extensively researched the pageant movement, describes how Lally, a London clergyman's daughter, began a career on the stage and in journalism. In the 1920s she

became involved in productions by the newly-created Women's Institute movement, notably a series of village pageants, put on by Institute members. By the 1930s Lally was directing casts of thousands of amateurs in pageants, for example at Warwick and Tewkesbury, and commentaries on them were broadcast by BBC Midland Regional radio. The most ambitious of Lally's productions, involving 8,000 participants, was held in Aston Park, in July 1938, to mark the centenary of Birmingham's incorporation.

War interrupted the pageants, but they enjoyed a brief revival in 1951. The Dudley scenes mainly concerned dynastic incidents in the castle's thousand-year history. There is conflict between castle and people, when the latter resist Lord Ward's attempt to impose his choice of parliamentary candidate on them in 1857, followed by reconciliation when the Castle is opened to the public for fêtes and other amusements. Although Dud Dudley is acknowledged in passing for his role in helping to create the industrial wealth of the Black Country, there is little more on that theme. Lally – who did not write the script – made amends in her preface to the Pageant programme. There she acknowledged the heavy price which Dudley paid for its industrial prosperity: what she called 'the hard and heavy task of mining, quarrying, smelting, and forging', as well as 'the sturdy independence of the Black Country' which grew out of that hardship.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Elihu Burritt, United States consul in Birmingham, author of *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-Land* published in 1868.

Industry and trade formed the focus of Elihu Burritt's reports to the United States. *John & Samuel Roberts, Swan and Small Heath Foundries, West Bromwich* from *The New Illustrated Dictionary*, 1858.

Dudley was one of the last of Lally's pageants. The genre went into decline and no doubt television helped play a part in that. But there was a spectacular revival in 2012 when Danny Boyle's Olympic Games opening ceremony echoed Lally in addressing among its themes the costs and achievements of industrialism – and this ambiguity underlies a lot of what follows.

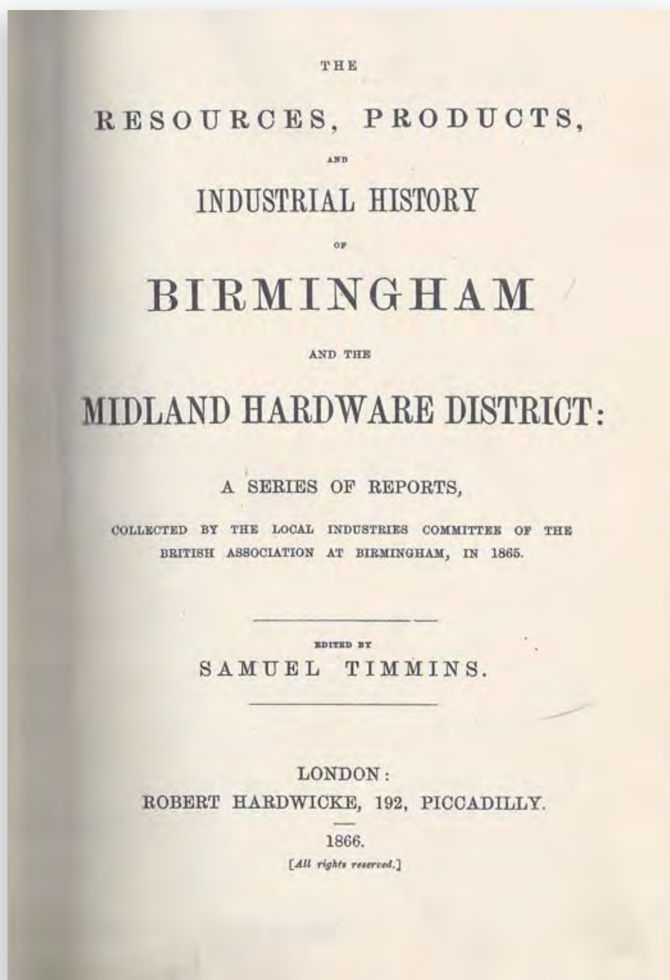
Elihu Burritt: Chronicler of the Black Country

The term 'the industrial revolution' is generally reckoned to have been coined in 1884 - it was the title of some lectures given by the economic historian Arnold Toynbee, and can be quite precisely ascribed to him. Elihu Burritt, the man appointed by Abraham Lincoln as United States consul in Birmingham, was not the first person to use the term 'Black Country'. But I would argue that Burritt's famous book, *Walks in the Black County and its Green Border-Land*, published in 1868, coincided with a precise historical moment when the term entered common currency – or more specifically, began to be used by politicians and in public administration.

Burritt was not British, of course – but that does not exclude him from the *Dictionary's* remit. He spent three extended periods of residence in Britain, and the contributor of the *Dictionary* entry, Peter Marsh, assesses his life and writings in a British context. (By contrast, the entry on Burritt in the *American National Biography* focuses on his US career.)

Burritt's book was written when he was resident in the West Midlands in an official capacity, so his usage of the term 'Black Country' is potentially significant in that context. Students of language can unearth earlier usages – the current earliest cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from a private journal written in 1834. But it is not until the early 1860s that it catches on in wider public discussion. The future Conservative prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, seems to have been the first person to use the term in Parliament. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, he introduced his party's abortive Parliamentary Reform Bill into the House of Commons in February 1859. He explained his party's intention to create a new constituency of Wednesbury and West Bromwich to represent, in his words, 'that district called the black country where an immense distinctive industry has grown up since the passing of the Reform Act' in 1832.

Of course, that industry long predated 1832: what Disraeli was really concerned about was that the electoral system created by the Whigs in 1832 had worked unfavourably to his party. He wanted to hive off borough electors from the industrialised Black Country towns (who were assumed to be Liberals) so they did not swamp the county constituency of South Staffordshire. When


THE

RESOURCES, PRODUCTS,

AND

INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

OF

BIRMINGHAM

AND THE

MIDLAND HARDWARE DISTRICT:

A SERIES OF REPORTS,

COLLECTED BY THE LOCAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE OF THE
BRITISH ASSOCIATION AT BIRMINGHAM, IN 1865.

EDITED BY

SAMUEL TIMMINS.

LONDON:
ROBERT HARDWICKE, 192, PICCADILLY.

1866.

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Samuel Timmins' book represented the Black Country at the height of its market dominance. *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, 1866.

Disraeli managed to carry a Reform Bill, in 1867, the boundary commissioners appointed to redraw the electoral map later used the term 'Black Country' to describe the character of the Wednesbury borough constituency that they carved out of South Staffordshire. So exactly at the moment that Burritt was undertaking his walks through the region, the term was being applied to describe the dominant characteristic of a new parliamentary constituency, though, of course, the region itself was never officially defined.

Black Country Investigations

At the same time, in official reports, civil servants were beginning to invoke the term 'Black Country' as a description for the region. These were generally in the context of education (or the lack of it), health and sanitation, intemperance, and working conditions. A collection of such reports by the inspectors of coal mines prompted the use of the term as the title of an article in the *Edinburgh Review* in April 1863 written by a Shropshire ironmaster, Robert Henry Cheney. 'The very ground seems on fire, like the representations of Pandemonium in an old edition of *Paradise Lost*', he wrote. Occasional references to 'the Black Country' had, by the mid-1860s become a cluster, in official reports ranging from the inadequacy of infant vaccination to women working on pit banks. Women's employment in nail- and chain-making is a concern running through them until up to the First World War and, from an official viewpoint, might appear the defining characteristic of the area.

They provide other, less expected, insights. A report on the conservation of eels emphasised that they were widely consumed by miners in the South Staffordshire coalfield. It was therefore important to protect elvers to maintain supplies. These reports tie in with the observation of a Belfast newspaperman who wrote on 'Saturday Night in the Black Country' in 1861, and marvelled at the fish dealers' stalls, much better stocked than outlets nearer the coast. At the same time, there are the harrowing accounts of the diets of nail- and chain-makers: tea and bread, with bacon occasionally.

Burritt's own emphasis was less on social conditions – as Peter Marsh points out. Burritt had little to say on this except for expressing shock at the conditions of female brickmakers at Halesowen. Instead, it was Burritt's official remit to report on industry and trade, so his focus was on the metal products of the Black Country and their export to the United States. Anvils produced in Peter Wright's Dudley foundries could be found in most blacksmiths' shops in the United States – and Burritt himself was a New England blacksmith. Of Brades trowels, made in Oldbury, Burritt speaks in modern marketing terms: 'The brand rules the market and it is borne by ninety-nine in a hundred of those wielded by the American masons'.

Samuel Timmins and the Midland Hardware District

But again Burritt should be put in context. His observations were another insight into the general phenomenon described two years earlier by a Birmingham hardware manufacturer, Samuel Timmins, whose life has been researched by Stephen Roberts.

Timmins' firm made a vast array of products from coal tongs to lobster crackers. He brought this eclecticism to bear when he published, in 1866, a collection of reports on *The Resources and Products of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District*, to mark the visit to Birmingham of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Timmins is best known as a bibliophile (his bust is on display outside the restored Shakespeare Library in the new Library of Birmingham) but his report deserves recognition as a seminal document. His collection served to show, as he wrote, that 'Within a radius of thirty miles of Birmingham the whole hardware wants of the world are practically supplied'.

Significantly, because they were both writing about hardware, Burritt and Timmins lumped Birmingham and the Black Country together. But there were signs of a distinct, district consciousness, as Richard Trainor has pointed out in his study of Black Country Elites, when, in May 1869, Wolverhampton hosted the South Staffordshire Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition. This was an opportunity to showcase the finest hardware products of a portion of the region: a Birmingham newspaper commented that the exhibitors had transformed Molineux House into a 'Black Country Fairy Land'. But noticeably the organisers preferred to style the region South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire.

John Shaw: Wolverhampton Businessman

The hardware products of that region – however it was named – needed to be got to customers, and this was the function of the Wolverhampton firm founded by John Shaw, born in 1782. With a business career begun as a travelling salesman, success involved, as Andrew Popp's *Dictionary* entry points out, the ability to win customers in face-to-face relationships while still driving a shrewd bargain; to judge character and creditworthiness; to forecast demand and to judge taste. Shaw set up business on his own, married, and settled in Wolverhampton where he remained for the rest of his life. He had a villa in Bushbury and is buried in Merridale cemetery, having with his wife laid the foundations of a business dynasty.

Surviving correspondence reveals his wife Elizabeth Shaw's role in the business. As she and her husband were often apart when he was on the road, they wrote letters which reveal her role in overseeing the warehouse, dealing with accounts and post, and on occasion meeting customers.

Black Country Women: Hidden from History?

There must have been many others like Elizabeth Shaw, hidden from view. Part of the difficulty in rediscovering their role, where there are no private letters, arises from the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres for the genders. While this concept has been critiqued by scholars in recent years, and was obviously subverted by the extent of women's employment in the Black Country, it still has explanatory power. The Wednesbury antiquarian Frederick Hackwood pointed out that the statue of Sister Dora in Walsall was a rare example of a woman other than Queen Victoria being the subject of a sculpture erected in a public space in the nineteenth century.

Consider also this episode in September 1862. A procession, including a brass band, two drum and fife bands, banners and flags, formed outside a private residence, the Limes, in Sedgley, and set off for the town's High Street where work had begun on constructing the temperance hall and ragged school. A great crowd was reported to have watched the laying of the foundation stone when a silver trowel was presented to the principal subscriber and initiator of the two buildings, who was also an employer of 3,000 nailers and chainmakers.

Yet Mrs Eliza Tinsley, who wielded the ceremonial trowel, was not reported as speaking. A statement of the intentions behind the buildings was instead made by a male neighbour, who handed her the trowel. Her silence may have been reticence – but it may also have been dictated by convention. Another major benefactor whose life is now included in the *Dictionary*, is the Edgbaston-born heiress Louisa Ryland. The author of the Ryland entry, Phillada Ballard, points out that many of her donations (which included the Wolverhampton orphanage) were anonymous. When invited to take part in the laying of a foundation stone, in 1867, of a church which she had paid for, Louisa Ryland restated her desire not to take a prominent part in the occasion.

Eliza Tinsley: Chainmaker

Tinsley's life and work have had to be pieced carefully together. Richard Hawkins shows how her widowed mother's will supplies the tantalising detail that provision was made for Eliza's education. Although there is no known information about where or what she may have been taught, she certainly demonstrated acumen and a strategic outlook in later life. After inheriting her husband's nail and chain business, she expanded it in factories which replaced poverty-stricken workshops. Under her leadership, the firm developed its trade within the British Empire. Admiralty contracts for chains were especially important: official records show that alongside the likes of the Hingleys, Eliza Tinsley had approved machines to test their strength for maritime purposes. But when government sought information, and interviewed witnesses – in this case on the law regulating working hours in factories and workshops – it was her business partners, George Green and Richard Green, who spoke.

The Threat of Foreign Competition

The history of the Tinsley firm after her death, in April 1882, is revealing about broader trends in the Black Country economy. By the late 1880s George Green was reporting how American orders for chains had fallen away, and that some skilled men had emigrated to the United States where there was work. This shift reflected both increased competition and, tellingly, the effects of recent US tariffs on imported metal goods, which were driving Black Country products out of the US market.

This was a sea change from the era of Burritt. Burritt celebrated Black Country exports to the United States: in his world view, international free trade contributed to amity between nations. It also puts into perspective the fact that his book was written on the cusp of a great shift, when the Black Country was about to face both increased foreign competition and tariffs in response to a worldwide depression. His and Timmins' books represented a region at the height of its market dominance – and one which was about to change.

One political response to the change was the rise of the tariff reform movement, later associated with Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain's publicist was the Wolverhampton-born economist W A S Hewins - son of an iron merchant - who also has a *Dictionary* entry.

Thomas Parker: Electrical Engineering and Coalite

Another response was to shift from hardware to engineered products. This was done by a remarkably inventive figure, Thomas Parker, whose achievements are traced by Paul Freund. Born in Coalbrookdale, Parker's early innovations were in developing more efficient domestic grates and coal stoves. By the early 1880s an interest in electroplating drew him into the new technology of electrical accumulators. This brought him to Wolverhampton where he went into business with Paul Elwell. Elwell's family factory was transformed from making horseshoes and nails, to making electric accumulators, and then dynamos. Their dynamos powered early electric light schemes.

Eventually Parker set up on his own, making electrical generating equipment in Wolverhampton. He was chief engineer for electrification schemes such as the Liverpool Overhead Railway and street lighting, such as in the city of Oxford. When

the lights were switched on in Oxford, the papers reported that Parker had to leave before giving his speech, which was read by someone else, as he had to get a train back to Wolverhampton. He was an electricity pioneer much in demand. His most famous invention, though, is probably Coalite smokeless coal, dating from 1904. The promoters of Coalite welcomed those 'enlightened' town councils who took up smoke abatement. Paradoxically, the Black Country produced an instance of resistance to this, highlighted among those whom Coalite's advertisers labelled 'igonorant obstructionists'. Tipton town council was held up as an example of the latter – but its reasons for not embracing the new cause were revealing: Tipton councillors welcomed smoke 'as an evidence of renewed trade'.

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Coalite smokeless coal was the invention of Thomas Parker of Wolverhampton.

John Marston: Sunbeam Cycles and Motor Cars

Another innovator in Wolverhampton, John Marston, was the subject of an entry, by Richard Hawkins, when the *Dictionary* featured a selection of lives connected with the motor industry. Marston is an illustration of expertise acquired in a declining trade being applied to an expanding one. After an apprenticeship to the Wolverhampton tinsmith, japanware manufacturer and mayor, Edward Perry, Marston bought London Works in Bilston. He next acquired Perry's own Paul Street works in Wolverhampton where he focused his manufacturing. The japanware business went into decline in the mid-1880s but Marston used his expertise in tin-smithing to move into cycle manufacture – which was enjoying a boom. He established a successful cycle business under the Sunbeam name, and in 1899 he consolidated his manufacturing in Moorfields works, Upper Villiers Street, where he experimented with prototype motorcars. On the eve of the First World War the firm was also making radiators for aeroplanes.

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'It's a long way to Tipperary'. The popular First World War song was the work of Jack Judge. *The Bystander*, c. 1916.

Meanwhile the Shaw family of hardware factors diversified into machine tools. And the Williamson family in Worcester, who are relevant here as the *Dictionary* entry on them by Michael Bevan identifies their founder as a tinsmith from Wolverhampton, moved into the canning of food products and tobacco, and eventually became part of the Metal Box conglomerate.

'Merry Christmas Everybody'

So far the industrial examples have related to metal working, but creative industries should not be overlooked. It is particularly timely to remember this, as December 2013 marks the fortieth anniversary of the release of one of the Black Country's most enduring creative products.

A Holder-Lea composition, 'Merry Christmas Everybody' shot to number 1 on its release in December 1973 and sold a million copies by Christmas. It has been an anthem for the festive season ever since. In his autobiography, Noddy Holder relates how he penned the lyrics in the early hours at his parents' home in Walsall, after an evening spent mulling over ideas in 'The Trumpet' inn.

'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'

The 'Malt Shovel' in Oldbury was the favoured resort of another Black Country composer who wrote a worldwide hit song. Unlike 'Merry Christmas Everybody', which the band, the record company, and anyone else who heard it, immediately realised would be a huge hit, this other song was rejected by publishers in 1912. Its potential wasn't recognised until audiences took to it when Florrie Forde performed it during the Isle of Man summer season in 1913. It was in very different circumstances, at the sea's edge, that in August 1914 the song really took off.

Watching troops disembark at Boulogne, shortly after the outbreak of war, a *Daily Mail* reporter described the faces full of laughter, singing 'It's a long way to Tipperary'. A day later the paper reported on how a once-rejected song had become world-famous. It interviewed the publisher who reported that the song was in

worldwide demand, selling 10,000 copies (this is sheet music, of course) daily in America, France, Canada, Australia, and India. When the song's author died, in 1938, *The Times* recalled how its catchy tune spread like wildfire – and how its refrain could still evoke the spirit and excitement of the early days of the war – before the reality of the trenches became apparent.

Jack Judge, who wrote *Long Way to Tipperary*, and who is now commemorated in Oldbury library, did not make a fortune out of it. The author of the *Dictionary* entry, Terry Daniels, points out that Judge sold the copyright to the publisher for a limited royalty.

William Perry: The Tipton Slasher

By the outbreak of the First World War Burritt was long dead, and perhaps fortunate to be spared the further disillusion of world conflict. The Crimean War had effectively dashed his hopes of founding an international peace movement, which had first brought him to the West Midlands. But he retained his moral seriousness, which surfaced when he visited Tipton. 'I fear', he wrote, 'that the fist of one brawny prize-fighter has given it a wider reputation than all the honest hammers it swings from year to year'. The Tipton Slasher, Burritt noted, had once been as well-known as Stilton Cheese.

David Cox's entry on William Perry, as the Slasher was properly named, recounts his achievements and later decline. As holder of the title of champion of England, in 1850 and again in 1853, until he relinquished it to Tom Sayers in 1857, Perry had a national standing. But Burritt does raise a challenging question as to why Perry should have enjoyed, and continued to enjoy, such strong attachment in his native town. Burritt thought that Tipton had 'outgrown' the Slasher's 'example'; with such a view of moral progress, Burritt would surely have been surprised that the town would erect a statue of the pugilist at the end of the twentieth century. But Burritt did not, perhaps, appreciate how sporting heroes were to become so significant in cementing local patriotism. Instead, Burritt drew encouragement from the fact that Tipton had no fewer than thirteen Methodist chapels, representing the various strands of that denomination.

John Blackham and the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon

Building chapels was one thing. Getting people, and especially young men, into them was quite another. At the time of Burritt's tour, a young draper in West Bromwich, John Blackham, was running a Sunday School at the town's famous Ebenezer Congregational Church. Jennifer Davies shows how Blackham went on to found a highly-successful adult school, modelled on Joseph Sturge's Birmingham Schools, to teach numeracy and literacy.

However, Blackham wanted something with more spiritual content, but livelier than Bible Classes. He came up with the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon classes to provide a convivial musical worship and male fellowship within a religious framework. The movement caught on, and self-governing classes were founded throughout the Midlands and beyond. By the early twentieth century, Blackham's Black Country creation had become a nationwide movement, though he resisted attempts to centralise it. It is a good example of how a local phenomenon had a national impact: it illustrates changing and more relaxed attitudes to Sunday observances, and new forms of male sociability in the years before the First World War.

© Birmingham Museums Trust

Dante and Beatrice stained glass window. One of three designed by Florence Camm for the Turin International Exhibition of 1911.

Florence Camm: Stained Glass Designer

Educational opportunities were opening up in the late nineteenth century, as illustrated by Sally Hoban's *Dictionary* entry on Florence Camm, born in 1874 into the Smethwick stained-glass manufacturing family. Camm was enabled to attend the girls' secondary school established from the endowments of the King Edward's foundation, and then the Birmingham Municipal School of Art. The Birmingham newspaperman, J T Bunce, was one of the founders of the art school, and was emphatic that it should be open to women. Florence Camm herself went on to join the family firm in Smethwick, and made prize-winning stained glass – notably a series of windows depicting scenes from Dante, which she displayed at the Turin International Exhibition in 1911. A later student of the Birmingham art school was the Dudley art teacher Marion Richardson, whose life was added in a recent update.

Kaye Don and the Land Speed Record

Another recently-added *Dictionary* subject educated in the Black Country was admitted at Wolverhampton Grammar School as a seven-year-old in 1899, under the name Carl Don. The 1911 census shows that his real name was Karl Donajowski. But after the First World War he called himself Kaye Don, and under that name he raced Sunbeam cars in the 1920s. In 1930 at Daytona Beach he made a world land speed record attempt in the Wolverhampton-built Sunbeam *Silver Bullet*. Ian Boutle places these land speed record attempts in the context of advertisements for British manufacturing and the technical improvements which would benefit ordinary motorists.

Sir Alfred Owen: Motor Sport, Manufacturing and Philanthropy

When *Bluebird* broke the 400 mph barrier, and with it the land speed record, in July 1964, this too was based on Black Country engineering. The Black Country Rubery Owen company constructed a vehicle tough enough to withstand the appalling conditions on Lake Eyre, while the company's head, Sir Alfred Owen, whose life and achievements have been researched by Peter Bartrip, was the main backer of the record attempt. When British motorsport was in the post-Second World War doldrums, Owen also backed the British BRM team, notching up a Formula 1 victory in 1959, with the Owen organisation winning the constructor's championship in 1962. In 1963 he was awarded a British Automobile Racing Club gold medal and the prestigious Ferodo Trophy as the leading contributor to British motor racing.
The story of Sir Alfred Owen goes far beyond this, of course; he had, while still in his twenties, to take over the running of the family company following his father's sudden death. And he set himself the challenge of doing so on Christian principles, with an emphasis on the welfare of the company's workforce.

Jim Simmons: Lay Preacher, Soldier and Labour MP

The final life illustrating Black Country themes concerns a figure who brought the same religious impulse to politics which Owen brought to business. Mel Johnson highlights the Primitive Methodist context to the life of the MP Charles, or Jim, Simmons. A lay preacher, Simmons was drawn to socialism in the early twentieth century when he saw the living conditions of children attending his Sunday School classes in Edwardian Birmingham. He was also patriotic, and enlisted in the Worcester Regiment Reserve in 1911. Simmons served on the Western Front, where he was wounded in 1915. He returned to the front where he was wounded again, and lost part of his leg in 1916. By then he had turned against the war, campaigned against conscription and for a negotiated peace, and exposed the cruelty of the British Army's field punishments. He was arrested and imprisoned. After the war he became a campaigner for ex-servicemen and in 1929 he was elected a Labour MP.

Simmons' Black Country link came in 1950 when he was returned as MP for Brierley Hill, a new constituency created as a result of boundary reorganisation, which had abolished his own Birmingham West constituency.

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Kaye Don being measured for the Wolverhampton-built Sunbeam *Silver Bullet* in 1929.

© Geoff Goddard/The GP Archive/Mary Evans Picture Library

Sir Alfred Owen with John Surtees and team mechanic Allan Challis. Silverstone, 1969.

© Mary Evans Picture Library/Grenville Collins Postcard Collection

The Black Country's green borderland. Jim Simmons, MP for Brierley Hill, dubbed Kinver 'Wolverhampton's best bedroom'. View from Church Cliff, c. 1910.

Simmons' autobiography, *Soap Box Evangelist*, describes his experiences of electioneering in the Black Country. Memories of hard times were strong. Constituents told him about the Black Country strike wave of 1913, of poverty and food tickets, and Charlie Sitch, the region's first Labour MP. Simmons preached in chapels and campaigned in ironworks; as he and his wife (who was a Birmingham city councillor) walked the length of a foundry shop, tools were hammered on the workbenches to make a deafening applause. And – echoes of Burritt – he encountered women loading bricks onto lorries. They were characteristically feisty, telling the foreman where to go when he tried to make them load a vehicle emblazoned with Conservative placards.

Simmons also encountered what Burritt had called 'the green borderland' – rural areas, up to the edges of Shropshire, where one polling station was in the local landowner's house. And there were residential villages such as Kinver – which Simmons dubbed 'Wolverhampton's best bedroom'. But prosperity and growing owner-occupation in the commuter-belt was his undoing at the 1959 election, and he lost his seat. He was a temperance advocate to the last – bringing in a bill to exclude children from clubs where alcohol was served – which was said to have contributed to his defeat.

Adding to the Biographical Picture

These lives, newly added to the *Dictionary*, are in addition to those for hundreds of others of people connected with the Black Country, which were already included.

There continue to be updates, with the opportunity to add further lives, and several Black Country names are in the pipeline and many more await discovery. Unlike those intrepid young history enthusiasts in Dudley in 1951, you don't have to brave cages of wild animals to see them for free! ●

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Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

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