A rose and a billycock

Carmen Hanson presenting a rose to Councillor John Silk to mark a bygone custom of Balsall Heath. Festival organisers Jan Brookes is wearing one of the "Fred" T-shirts that Councillor Silk handed over in return.

I'm A BALSALL HEATHAN

ANCIENT CEREMONY OF GOODWILL RE-ENACTED

by JANE HOLDEN

A n age-old ceremony, last seen in Balsall Heath more than 100 years ago, was re-enacted to cement a "goodwill bond" between the Balsall Heath Festival and Birmingham Corporation's own two-week festival called Fred.

To mark the occasion, eight-year-old Balsall Heathan Carmen Hanson presented a single rose to Councillor John Silk, chairman of the city's Parks Committee, outside festival headquarters at 8, Upper Cox Street.

In return, Coun. Silk presented two "Fred" tee-shirts to festival organiser Jan Brookes—each shirt emblazoned with the symbol of a flower growing from an upturned bowler hat.

Coun. Silk said: "This is the symbolic re-enactment of particularly fine bloom which seemed to be suffering from the heat. Coun. Silk said: "I only hope that Fred will be the success that the Balsall Heath Festival so obviously is."

Fred starts on September 8, and will, we are assured, be a fortnight of riotous and eccentric delight.

LAST PARTY

This evening, residents of Upper Cox Street were joining in the last street party of the festival, complete with cakes and beer and lots of bunting loaned by the Parks Department—much to the expected delight of Aston Villa's Folk and Fa group. Flower, Folk and Fa will appear in the park from three until six p.m., where a children's procession of the streets and later Irish Rovers ceilidh band make a guest appearance in the park.
Clean sweep by ‘broom brigade’

by JANE HOLDEN

BALSALL HEATH’s ‘broom-and-shovel brigade’ of mothers and children marched out in Mary Street on a summer-time spring-cleaning spree. And, after an hour or so of sweeping and singing in the sunshine, they held a picnic and decided that “Mary Street has never been cleaner.”

Children started the street-cleaning party by going along the road, knocking on doors and inviting everyone to come out and help. Balsall Heath Festival helpers handed out brooms, strummed guitars to help the work, and fetched festival lorry Zebedee to cart away dustbins filled with collected rubbish.

Even bystanders studying forms outside the local betting shop were persuaded to put away the racing page and sing a few choruses of the Balsall Heath song.

SAT BACK

Then, the Balsall Heathans sat back to admire their handiwork. Said one woman, whose children had been sweeping away with the best of the broom: “I’ve never seen Mary Street look cleaner.”

Pots of tea, sandwiches and other goodies were fetched from indoors, and Mary Street residents settled down to a picnic party on their own doorsteps. Festival helpers will be running other street-cleaning-cum-tea-parties all over Balsall Heath during the coming weeks.
BRIAN PRIESTLEY looks at the serious thinking behind the Balsall Heath Festival, which is inviting the people of a twilight area to have four weeks of fun.

Reputation

It is a project you can either greet with a grin or dismiss with sneers. The whole thing is hilariously serious, significantly funny.

Consider the old reputation of the area, the rubbish in the streets, the local complaints every housing, and sewage, and lack of amenities. On July 19 the amazing Balsall Heath Festival will be launched with support from more than 25 local organisations, the police, and the City Council.

Tones... Title...

With a bit of luck, painted shields on the lamp standards will tell the traveller he is entering the proud suburb of Balsall Heath.

Miss Harwig was staying with Jan Brookes, when you may think of it as a television personality more than a woman much concerned with social work. They discussed the problem all through an evening, drinking countless cups of coffee on a green rug in front of the fire.

"We began with the fact that everybody seemed so depressed — and we thought that what Balsall Heath needed was a morale booster," says Miss Brookes.

The trouble is that Balsall Heath has a certain sort of image and many of the people who live there have come to believe in it. So we thought 'Let's have a Festival, let's have some fun'.

The first reaction of most people is wonderment. But when you explain it they usually start laughing and say 'Good luck to you, let's hope it works'."

Help...

The festival now has solid roots in Balsall Heath. Local churches, tradesmen, publishers, teachers, and social workers are busily helping to organise their share of the fun month. What can go wrong?

Off-hand, the organisers can think of nothing. One major worry they have is that not enough of the ideas or the action, may come from Balsall Heath people..."

Happiness

The hopeful thing is that so far it seems to be working. Jan Brookes and others of us who live in other parts of Birmingham are thoroughly enjoying it. But the other major worry is that the festival could draw some crowds of sightseers from outside the area — and this must be avoided.

Others?

Miss Harwig said: "The point is that this is a Balsall Heath event — if other districts want a festival why don't they organise it for themselves?"

BRIAN PRIESTLEY looks at the serious thinking behind the Balsall Heath Festival, which is inviting the people of a twilight area to have four weeks of fun.

If you want to be Archduke of Balsall Heath...

ONE pavement cafe will be outside a Methodist church. There, folk will lounge on sunny afternoons, watching the world go by in Balsall Heath.

And anyone with £50 will be able to purchase the glorious and unique title of Archduke of Balsall Heath. People with rather less will be able to buy more modest titles in the Balsall Heath pecking order. They discussed the problem all through an evening, drinking countless cups of coffee on a green rug in front of the fire.

"We began with the fact that everybody seemed so depressed — and we thought that what Balsall Heath needed was a morale booster," says Miss Brookes.

They have printed 6,000 yellow lapel badges bearing the title: "I'm a Balsall Heathian."

Miss Harwig was staying with Jan Brookes, when you may think of it as a television personality more than a woman much concerned with social work.

"I thought what the area needed was cheering up."

"We want ideas and help from as many local people as possible — we want everybody to join in," says Miss Brookes.

"If there is anybody we haven't contacted yet, please write at 101 Balsall Heath Road, Moseley, or phone me at 449 5481. We want all the local help we can get — and we are short of money, too."
Setting up H.Q.—a paint and tea party

Evening Mail Reporter

It was "all hands to the paint brushes" at 8, Upper Cox Street, Balsall Heath, as children, neighbours and an international group of volunteers joined forces to get ready for Saturday.

Rented for a month from Birmingham Corporation, the house is to be "Operational H.Q." for the Balsall Heath Festival, which starts on July 19.

Miss Jan Brookes, one of the Festival organisers, said: "Seven young people will be living here throughout the festival, helping to run the street parties, dancing, games in the parks, children's competitions and the hundred and one other things that will go to make up our summer fun in Balsall Heath."

Young volunteers were painting the house inside and out in rainbow colours, putting up posters, sawing, nailing and brewing endless cups of tea for helpers.

Facelift for Balsall Heath

Plans to redevelop part of the condemned area of Balsall Heath which is bounded by Balsall Heath Road, Moseley Road and Court Road and include some of the worst slum houses remaining in Birmingham will be put before the Housing Committee on Thursday.

The committee will be asked to approve plans for 446 houses, 110 low rise flats and ten bungalows. Most of the condemned houses are already owned by the Corporation.
It's festival fun everywhere

by JANE HOLDEN

BALSALL Heathans, from the oldest inhabitant down to the smiling five-year-old who tried to take the hub caps off my car, are taking a delighted "Whatever next?" view of their home-grown fun festival.

Festival organiser this week released a printed pro­gramme of events for the next couple of weeks, with the printed proviso: "When things go wrong, we just laugh . . ."

Most events listed take place in the festival centre at Calthorpe Park, where children play daily and pop groups play almost every night.

From 5 o'clock today, Warwickshire cricketer Billy Ibadulla, with a hand-picked star XI, was to play a match against a Balsall Heath team in the park.

Later, it has to be a great night for the Irish, who were staging a grand entertainment centred around the Birmingham Irish Pipe Band, the Irish Rovers O rash Band, and various singers and dancers.

TREE KNITTERS

But though the park is the pulse-beat of events, the festival is happening all over. On Saturday, Balsall Heathans who know the difference between purl and plain will be taking part in a tree-knitting marathon, which calls upon knitters to settle in the lower branches of trees and go on knitting until their wool touches the ground.

Those with an eye for art will be going along to the corner of Edward Road and Court Road, where Balsall Heathans are planning a communal festival painting to be presented to the City Council.

Besides each day's special events, there are all sorts of things going on all the time.

PICNICS

Every Sunday is picnic day in Balsall Heath, when families are invited to take sandwiches along to the park and share the fun - and food - with their neighbours.

Public houses are joining in with dart and domino contests, competitions for drinking yards of ale, and wrist-wrestling bouts.

A photographic contest is being run and there is a Parisian flavoured pavement cafe outside Moseley Road Methodist Church.

From the local day champions to the young's clamber up over and Edwar Erving's sculpture in Calthorpe Park, the festival is a delight to all.