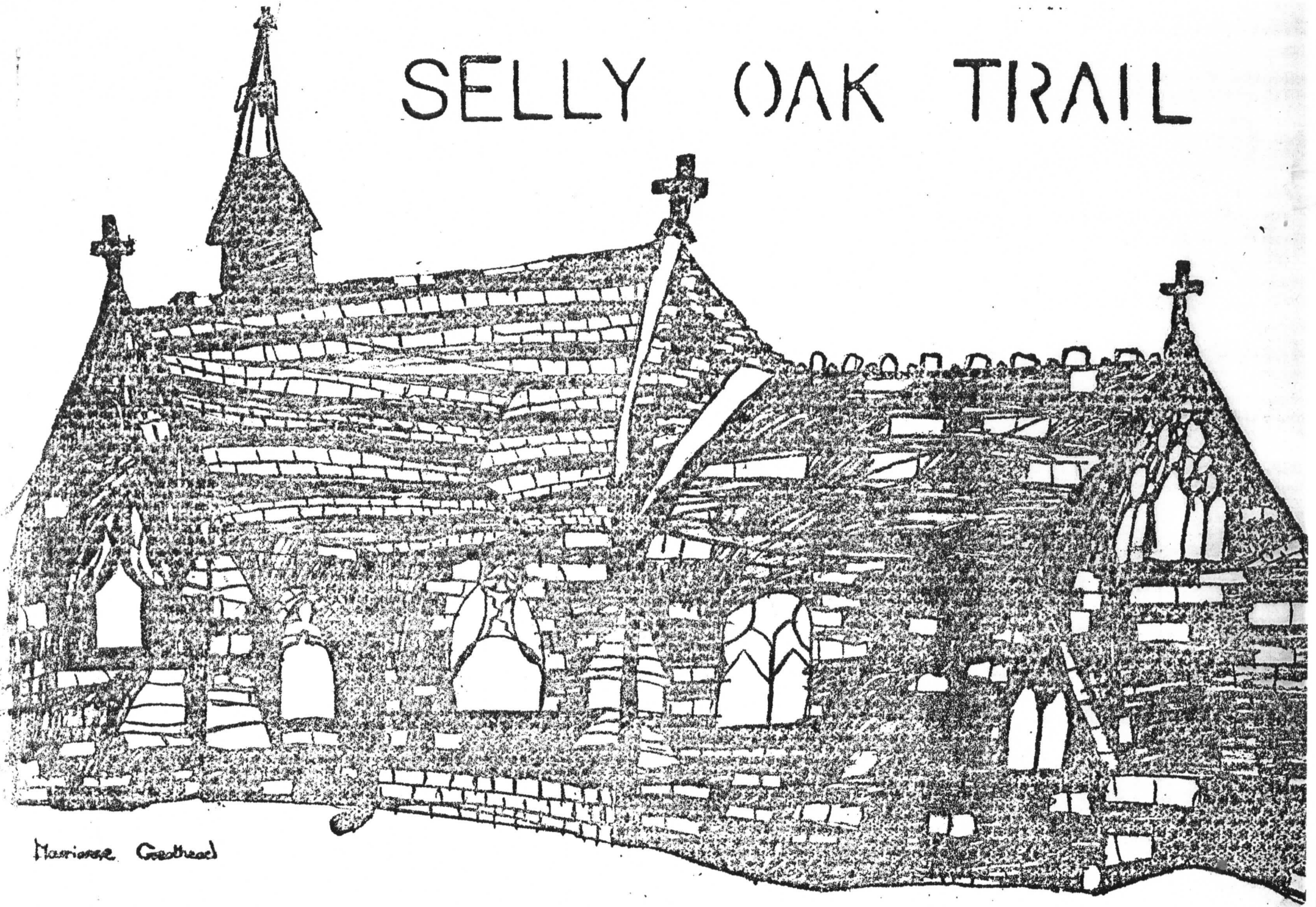


# SELLY OAK TRAIL



Marianne Goodhead

## SELLY OAK

Selly Oak developed as a small hamlet on the south side of Birmingham at the crossing of two main roads, the Bristol Road and Oak Tree and Harborne Lanes.

Bristol Road is a probable site of the Upper Saltway, a Roman Road, running from Droitwich to the Lincolnshire coast. (Excavations uncovered Roman coins and an aqueduct in Northfield alongside the Bristol Road)

Oak Tree Lane was possibly a part of the great Roman road, Ryckniel St, which ran from Alcester via Stirchley to Birmingham. This lane may also be part of an old British Trackway which ran from Wychall to Edgbaston.

Certainly there was a hamlet at the junction of these two important roads by 1085 - as "Escelie" is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being worth four hides. In the Curia Regis Rolls (1204) Gervase de Selvele (or Selleg) is referred to.

Many other ideas have been put forward concerning the origin of the name, such as Sel Ley (salt way through a meadow), Sele Leah (clearing with a building) and Selig (or Holy) Oak, under which druidical worship took place. None can be verified but the addition of "oak", certainly came from the monster oak tree which grew at the cross roads for many years.

Selly Oak must have remained very much a village until the late eighteenth century when the coming of the canals increased its importance. Not only did the village stand at the junction of two roads, but also of two canals (the Worcester-Birmingham and the Dudley canals).

The canals attracted industries and by 1860 both the Birmingham Battery and Metal Company and Ellicott's Metal Company were established in Selly Oak plus many smaller factories. The resultant trade meant that the size of Selly Oak increased rapidly; from 1500 in 1861 to 5,000 in 1881 to 16,000 in 1901.

The village had changed into an industrial town and has remained almost unchanged until now. However, plans to widen the Bristol Road will almost certainly affect the character of the area as a good deal of it is likely to be demolished. It is possible that the 40 years until 2010 could change Selly Oak as much as the 40 years from 1860 to 1900.

This guide was researched and written by the teachers and children of Water Mill Primary School, helped by the knowledge of Selly Oak residents and the resources of the Local Studies Library.

Start at Water Mill Primary School

Walk along Water Mill Close.

The school and houses are built on the site of the old Harborne Reservoir. The reservoir was built at the time of the building of the Dudley Canal in 1798. It was filled in in 1957 and the Bournbrook was diverted to flow through the centre of the original reservoir bed.

The houses in Water Mill Close were built in 1972-73

What year was the school built ?

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Look at the coat of arms on the lamp post outside the school gate. Compare this with other lamp posts you see later. Look at the fire hydrant, gas and electricity covers along the road. What letters are on the stop cock cover ?

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At the top of Water Mill Close turn right into Reservoir Road.

From the corner you can see several different types of houses. Write down the number of one of each type.

Terraced \_\_\_\_\_ Semi-detached \_\_\_\_\_  
Detached \_\_\_\_\_ Flat \_\_\_\_\_

Outside the flats is a sewerage chimney. It looks like a lamp post. Can you find it ?  
What is on the top of it ?

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Cross the road.

Examine the lamp posts. Look for any signs that they may once have been gas lights.  
Write down anything you notice.

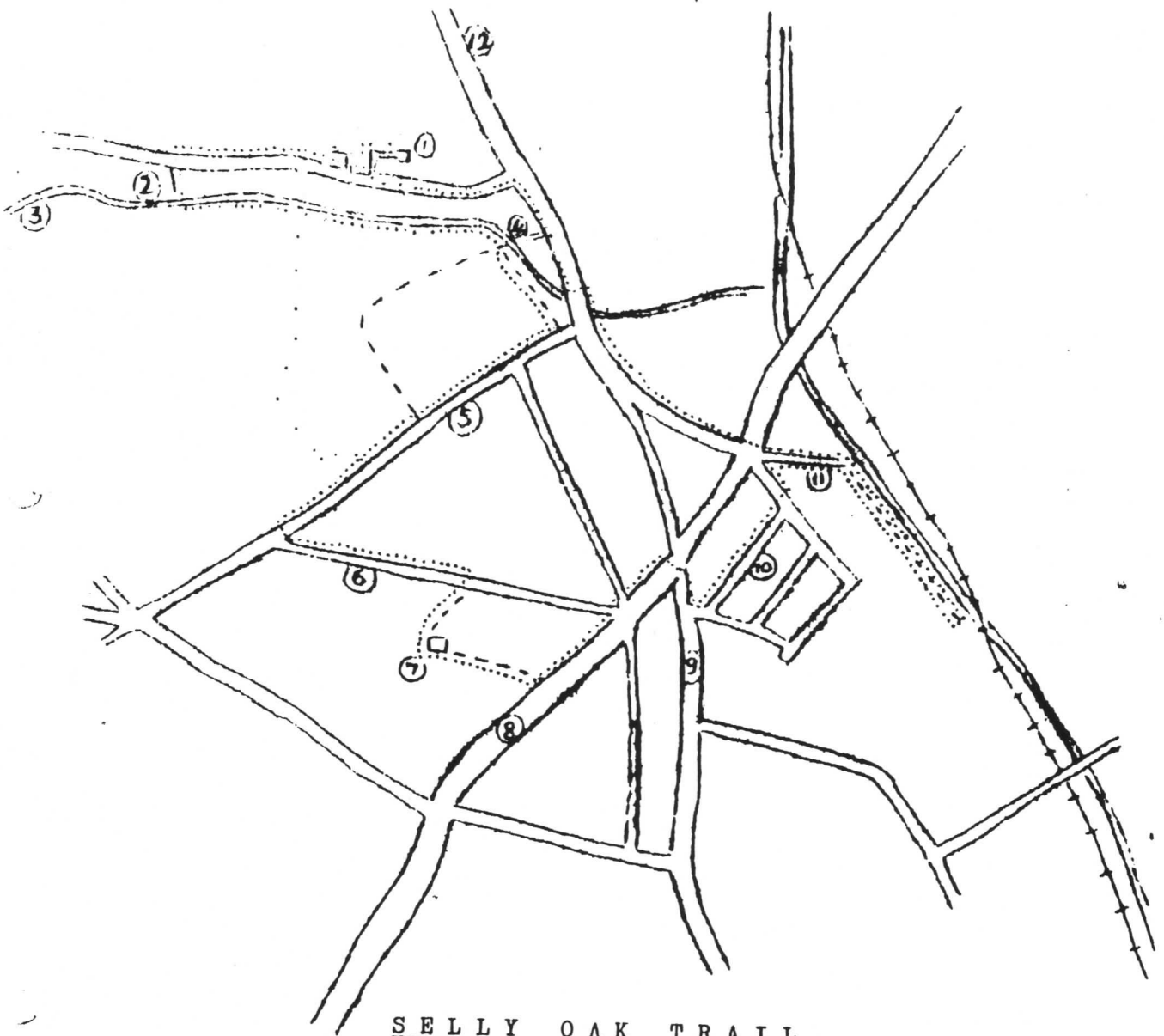
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Continue up Reservoir Road until you reach the Gully on the left between houses 189 and 191

Turn left and walk right along to the end of the Gully.

The Gully has been used as a pathway for many years, probably at least 200. It led to Weoley Park Farm which was at one time owned by the Ledsam family and which stood on land which is now part of Selly Oak Park.



Key

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Water Mill Primary School | 7. St. Mary's Church |
| 2. The "Gully"               | 8. Bristol Road      |
| 3. Dudley Canal (remains of) | 9. Oak Tree Lane     |
| 4. Docks Bridge              | 10. Lottie Road      |
| 5. Gibbins Road              | 11. The Dingle       |
| 6. Lodge Hill Road           | 12. Harborne Lane    |

This is a map of the whole trail. Some of the main landmarks you will pass are marked on this map.

The trail crosses several busy roads. Where directed, cross at the traffic lights. If there are no lights, use the Green Cross Code.

Part of the trail follows the Worcester-Birmingham Canal. Canals can be dangerous places, keep away from the edge.

Stop at the end of the end of the Gully. There you will find the dried up bed of the Dudley Canal.

This canal led from a junction of the Worcester to Birmingham Canal in Selly Oak to Dudley. The length of the Canal was 11 miles. The first engineer was Josiah Clowes and he earned £3.15s a day. The canal opened in 1798. It went through the Lapal Tunnel which goes under Bartley Green Girls School and is over 2 miles long. The roof of the tunnel fell in thus causing the closure of the canal and nothing can be seen of the tunnel entrances today. Iron, coal and limestone was mainly carried on the boats. The building of the canal brought more trade and industry to Selly Oak. By the middle of the 19th Century the village was to become almost the size of a small town.

Look at the rows of bricks set in the bank opposite the end of the Gully. These are the remains of a drawbridge that carried a path to Weoley Park Farm where the Park now is.

The tow-path ran on the left as you look towards the park.  
What was the tow-path used for ?

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Follow the bed of the canal towards Selly Oak Park.

You will come to a building inside a high wooden fence.  
What is this building ?

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Follow the bed of the canal along the edge of the park.

Note the interesting trees that grow here.

The land which is now the Park was at one time owned by a Mrs Gibbins who gave it to Kings Norton Urban District Council for use as a Park in 1899. When she died in 1913, the rest of the Park was donated by her sons. Gibbins Road was later named after the family. It was previously part of the land belonging to Weoley Park Farm and at one time owned by the Ledsmas who were a well known Selly Oak family in the 19th Century.

Follow the canal until you come to the old bridge.

This bridge was built at the same time as the canal.  
It carried a path from Harborne Lane to Weoley Park Farm which used to stand near the pavilion in the park.

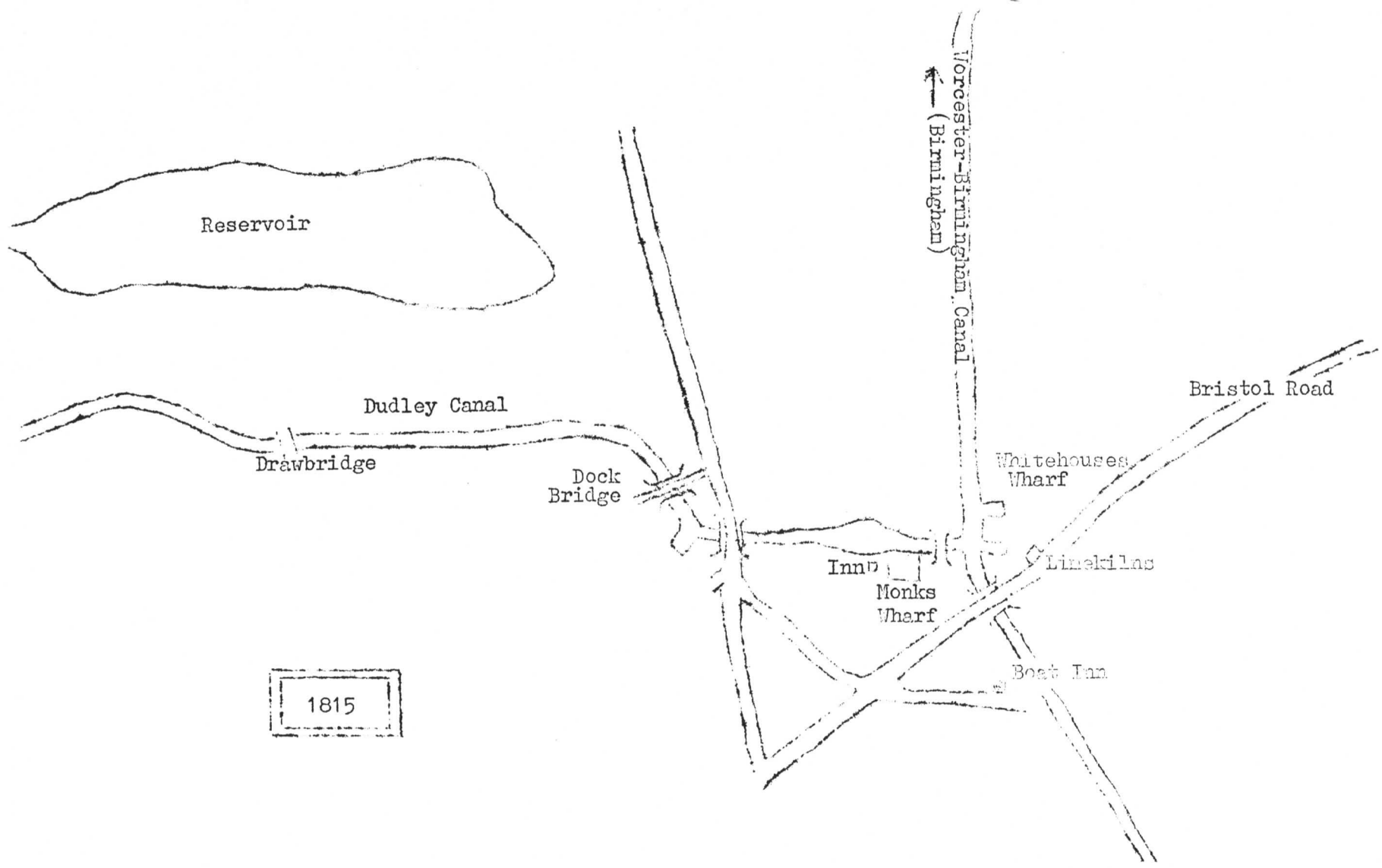
What is the bridge made of ?

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What is on the top of the wall ?

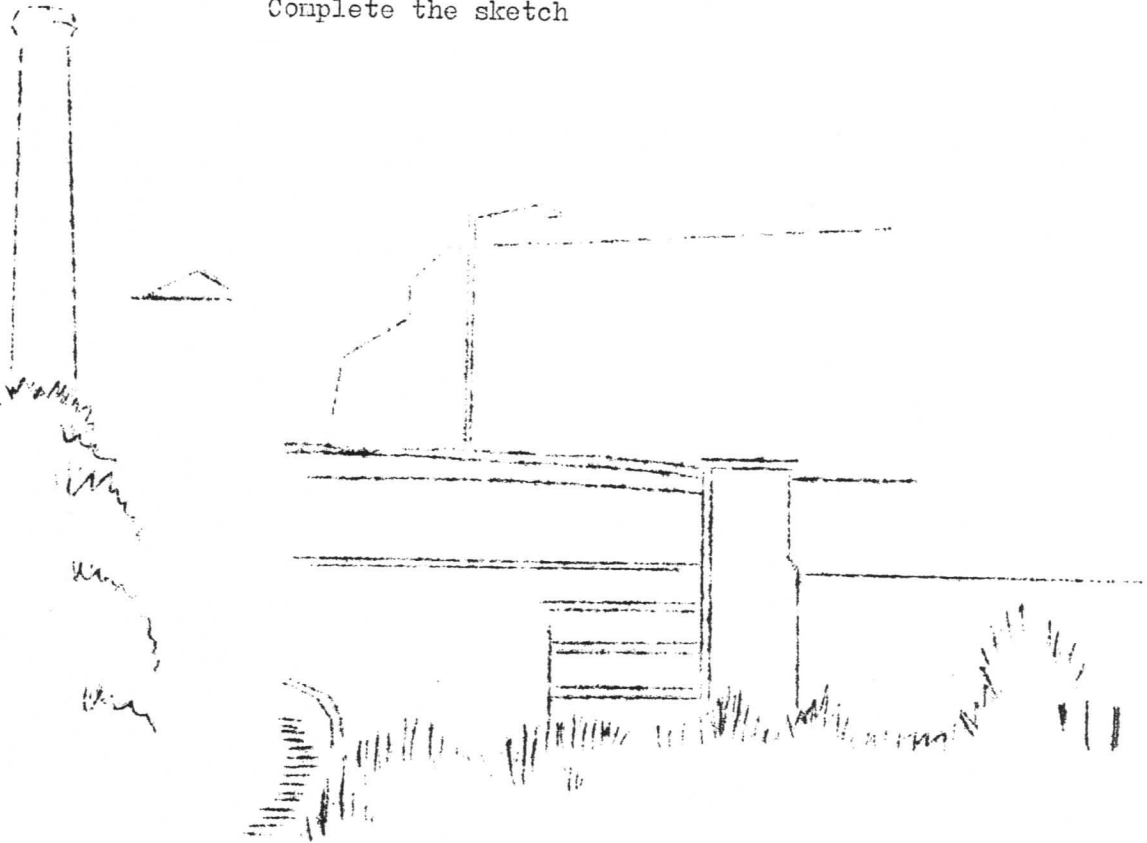
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Look over the bridge. Note how the canal narrows. It was just wide enough here to allow two boats to pass.  
Look in the tow-path wall. You will see pieces of iron. These carried a wooden bumper to prevent the wall being damaged by boats.  
The tow-path can clearly be seen going under the bridge.



Stand on the old bridge and look towards the newer bridge.

Complete the sketch



How many differences are there between the bridge you are standing on and the newer bridge?

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The newer bridge has taken the place of an older one which was just like the one you are standing on. It was called Docks Bridge because nearby was a dry dock where boats were repaired. The old bridge was brick. In 1927 Harborne Lane was condemned, so a new bridge was needed. They left the old bridge so that the vehicles would be able to pass while the new bridge was being built and it was knocked down after the new bridge was built. The new bridge was made of concrete.

From the bridge turn left along the path that follows the canal towards Gibbins Road.

The large glacial boulder on the left was a piece of volcanic rock carried by ice movement from North Wales millions of years ago. There are several of them around the Birmingham area.

Follow the path to Gibbins Road, stop and look at the houses on the opposite side of the road, near the Harborne Lane and Gibbins Road junction.

When were they built ?

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Look carefully at the differences between the two types of houses and the houses further up the hill. List all the differences you can see in the windows.

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On the right is the grave of one of the Elliot family.  
Which one and when did he die?

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On the left is a large stone which looks like this:



What is the inscription on it ?

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-----  
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Where is the Stone House ?

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Opposite the church door into the tower is a large grave with an anchor  
on it. Who was the man ?

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Why do you think he has an anchor on his gravestone ?

-----

Turn left and walk across the lawn to the far side of the graveyard.

Look for the grave of William Chambers. He was Verger at the Church  
for 41 years and never missed a service.

Go down the path around the Church to the left.

Look for a small gravestone behind a tree just off to the right of the  
path. It is the grave of Beete Jukes F.R.S. It has a large piece of  
rough stone on top of it.

What does the inscription say ?

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Does this help you to say why there should be a stone on top ?

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Now compare the doors.

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Continue up Gibbins Road on the right-hand side.

Look in the hedge for fire hydrant signs.  
Compare the shapes of the two signs. Which is the older one ?

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Stop at the main gate to the Park.

Look at the gate house. What date was it built ?

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Turn to your left and look at the tree stump near the gate house.

This is the stump of the Oak Tree which used to stand by Selly Oak Village Green (at the junction of the Outer Circle at Oak Tree Lane and Bristol Road) The tree was felled when it was of such a size that it was a danger to traffic and in 1906 the stump was placed in the Park.

One of the stories concerning the origin of the name "Selly Oak" describes a witch named Sarah or Sally being hung and buried at the cross roads with an oak stake driven through her heart. From the stump the monster oak is supposed to have grown.

What is the inscription on the metal plate fixed to the stump ?

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What do the letters K N D C stand for?

---

Continue up Gibbins Road until you see the sign for Lodge Hill Road and turn right.

From the corner look at the spire of St. Mary's Church and look at the weathercock on top.

Continue along Lodge Hill Road until you reach a pathway on the right which leads to St. Mary's Churchyard.

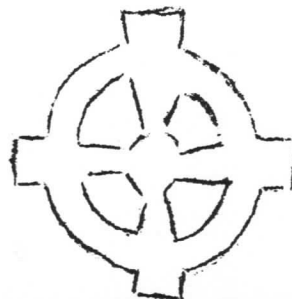
St. Mary's Church and Cemetery were opened in 1861. The money to build the church was raised by local businessmen (among them the Elliot, Halward and Ledsam families, many of whom are buried in the graveyard.)

Continue up the path towards the church, looking for each of the graves mentioned below.

Just past the gateway on the right is a grave in which a small child was buried. How old was she ?

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Look for a headstone on your left which is this shape



What is written on it ?

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Continue to follow the path right around the church to the front porch. Stand back to get a good view of the church and then turn to look at the Lych Gate.

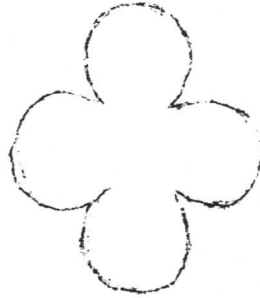
What building materials were used ?

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Notice the tiling on the roof. Look at the pattern. Look at the roof of the Lych Gate. What do you notice?

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Look for this pattern on the church and Lych Gate.



How many different shaped windows can you see?  
(Don't forget to look at the windows in the spire)

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Walk over to the porch.

What were the pieces of metal by the doorway used for?

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Look at the small carved ball-shaped decorations both inside and outside the porch.

Walk from the church to the Lych Gate, through the Lych Gate and straight down the drive to the Bristol Road.

Turn left towards Selly Oak. Walk down to just past where the road narrows.

Look at the large, old semi-detached houses on the opposite side of the road.

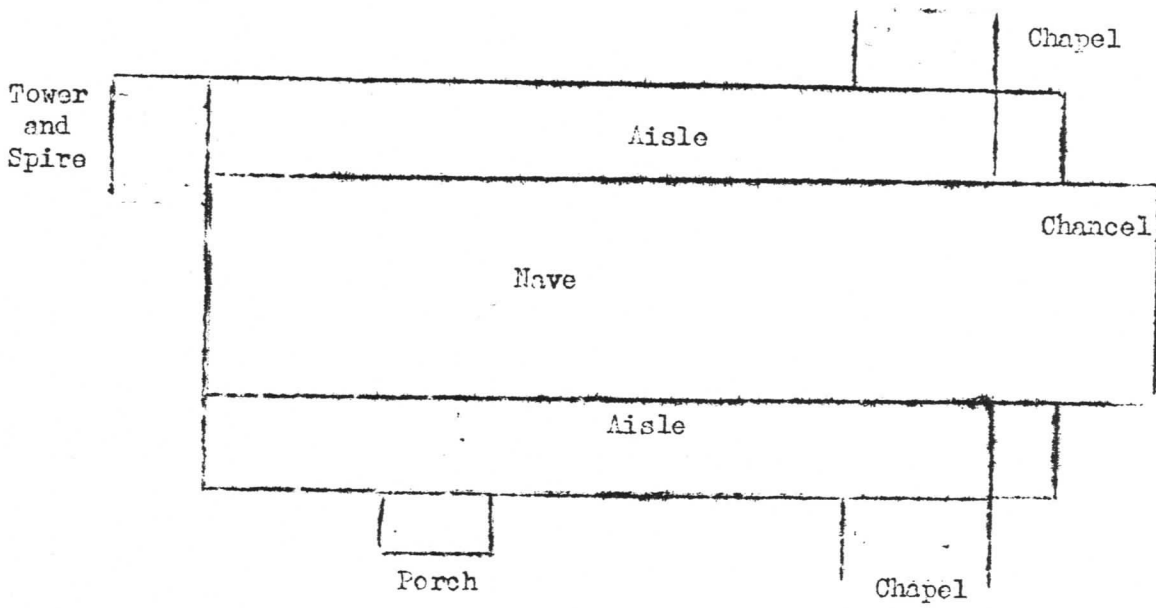
Apart from the one at the far end, they were all built between 1902 and 1907 and each had a name such as St. Ives, St. Leonards, Hillesden and Milcote.

Look at the decorative brickwork and compare the different porches.

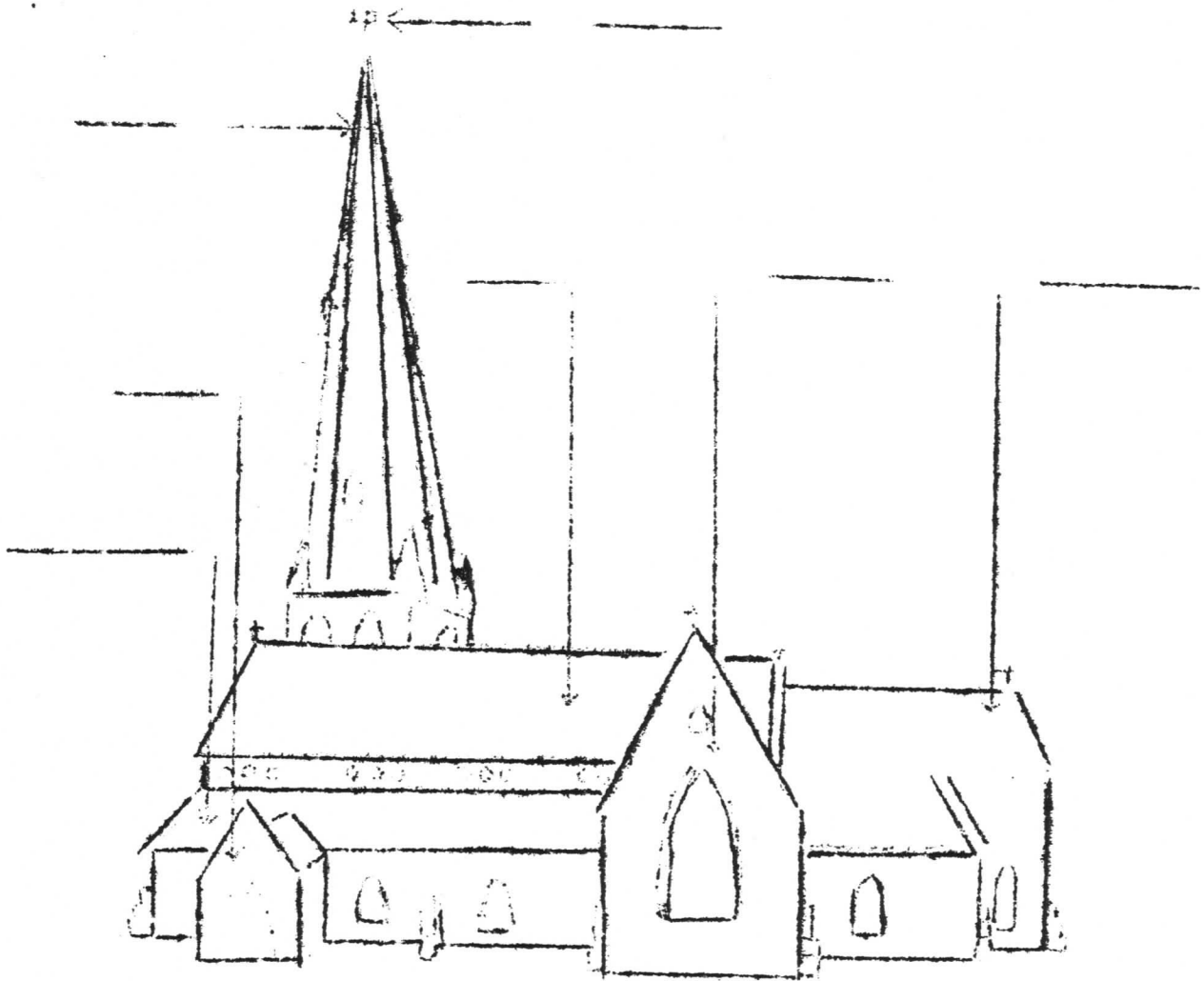
The last house before Langleys Road is called Bonshaw House and was built in about 1890.

What is unusual about the chimneys ?

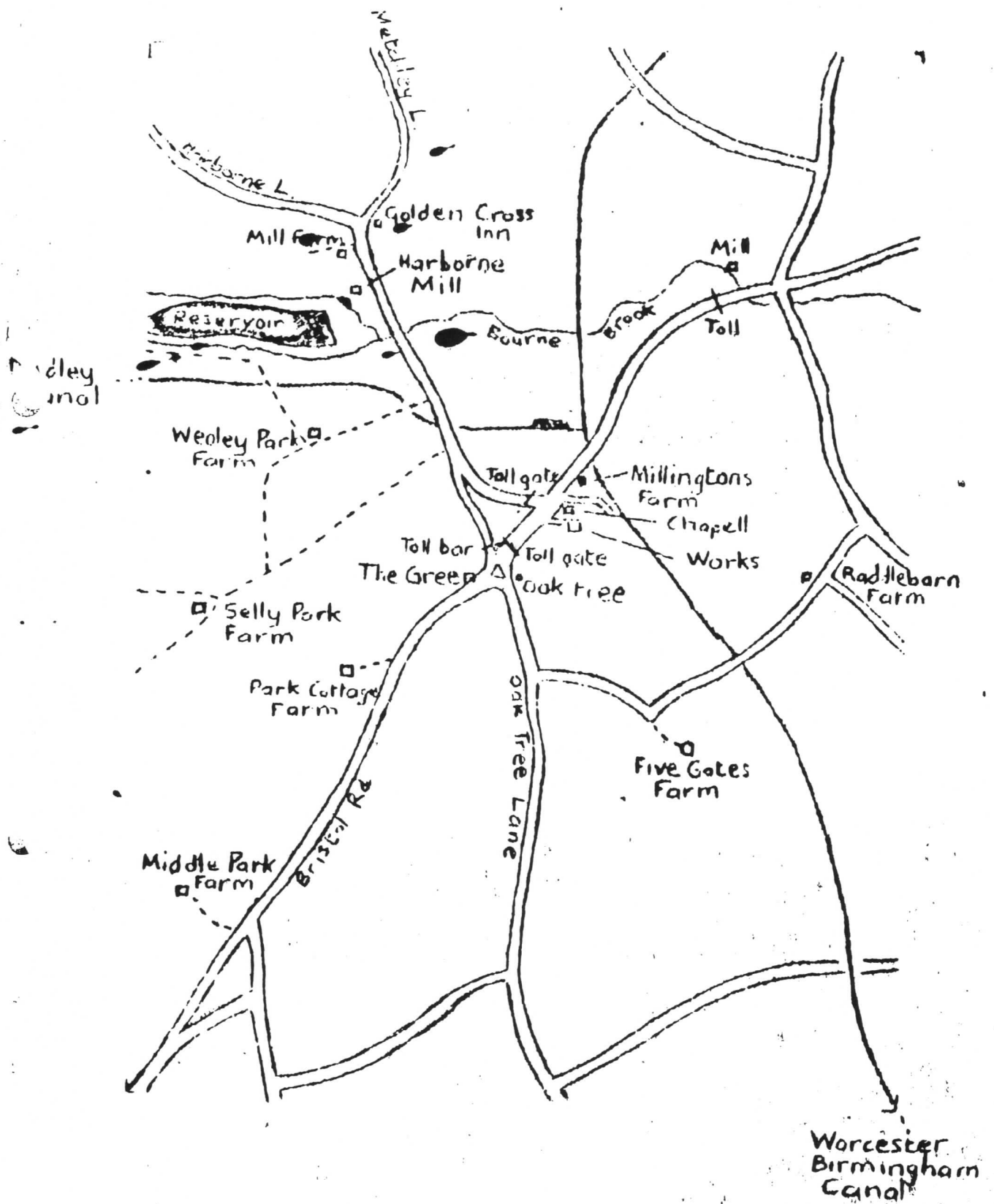
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Use the names on the plan to label the drawing of St. Mary's Church



SELLY OAK TRAIL -



SELLY OAK ABOUT 1850

Walk down the left-hand side of the Bristol Road to the old St. Mary's School.

The first building was the sandstone one by the road, built in 1860. It was intended to hold 252 children, but opened with only 43. The children were all ages from 4 to 14 and were all taught in the one small building. In 1880 the brick buildings were built and the Infants moved into them. In 1896 a new school was built for the Secondary children and so St. Mary's was left for the Juniors and Infants. In 1908 the sandstone building was damaged in a gale and in 1912 was condemned by the Board of Education. In 1967 a new Junior and Infant School was built in Frederick Road and the old Bristol Road buildings were kept to use as an annexe when the new St. Mary's school was over-full.

Look at the roof. Where have you seen this pattern before?

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Are there any other patterns or shapes which you saw at the Church? What are they?

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Why do you think there should be so many similarities between the church and the school?

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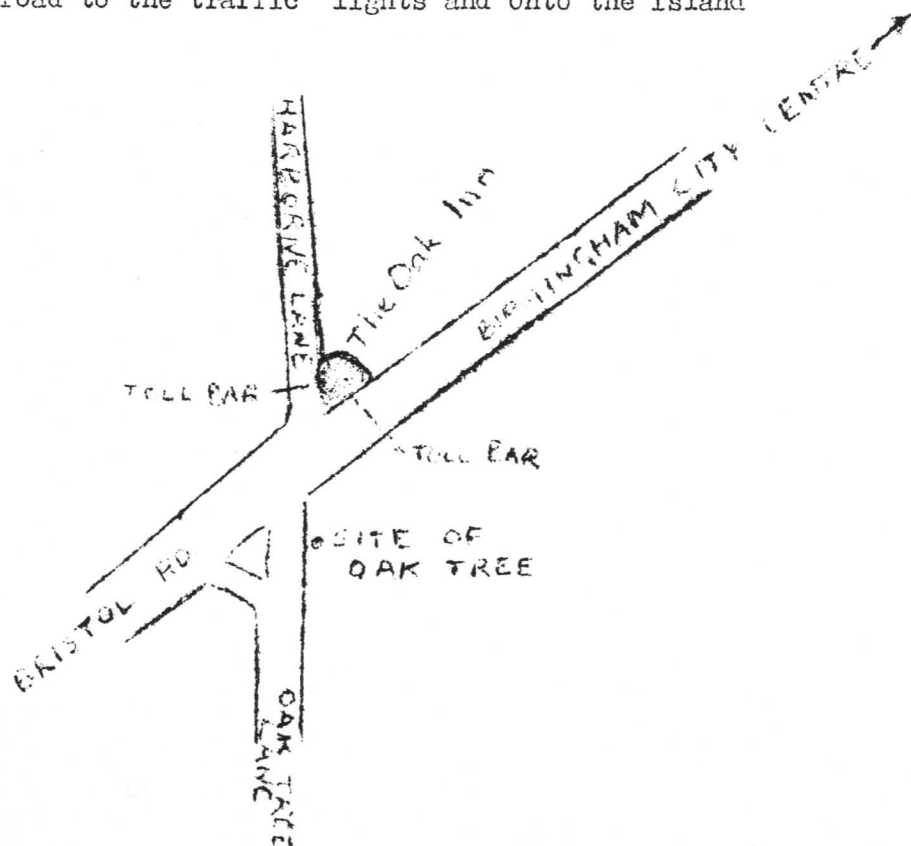
Look across the road to the two large old semi-detached houses on the corner.

These were built about 100 years ago and were known as Lansdowne Villas.

Look at the porch. What shape is its top?

---

Walk down the road to the traffic lights and onto the island



This used to be the original village green and the centre of village life.

Look towards Harborne Lane

On the corner is the Oak Inn which was built at least 130 years ago. Next to it, crossing both the Harborne Lane and the Bristol Road, were Toll Bars. (many stretches of roads used to be privately owned and a toll had to be paid before entering the road. A Toll Bar was a gate which prevented entry until you had paid)

The Oak Inn had three doors and its was common practice to enter from the Northfield side door and leave by the Selly Oak or Harborne side door and so not pay the toll.

One story, known to a few older people in Selly Oak, but not backed by written evidence, tells of a farmer returning from Northfield who, having stopped at several inns on the way, decided to evade the payment of the Toll by also stopping at The Oak. Unfortunately he took his horse and cart into the pub with him and jammed it firmly in the doorway.

Turn to look at the corner of Oak Tree Lane and Bristol Road.

The Selly Oak tree stood about where the cafe now is until 1906.

On the island itself, look at the signpost.  
Draw the design on its base.

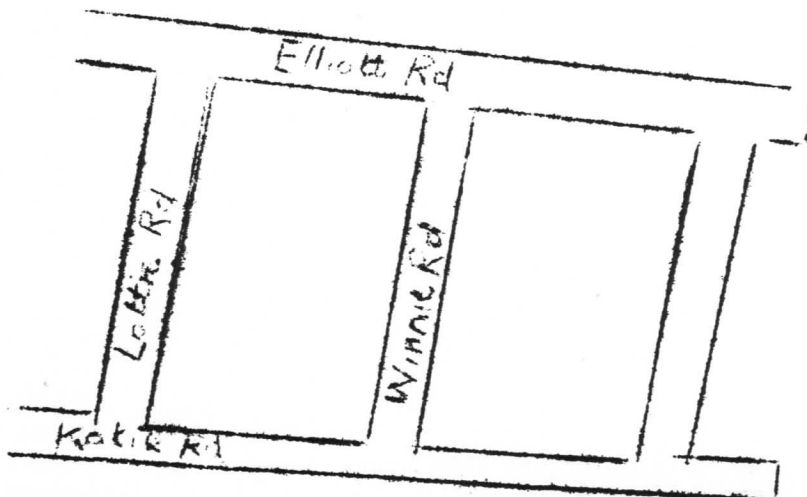
Cross the road at the lights and walk up Oak Tree Lane towards Selly Oak Hospital to the corner of Katie Road.

What are the names carved on the plaques on the houses above the shops in Oak Tree Lane ?

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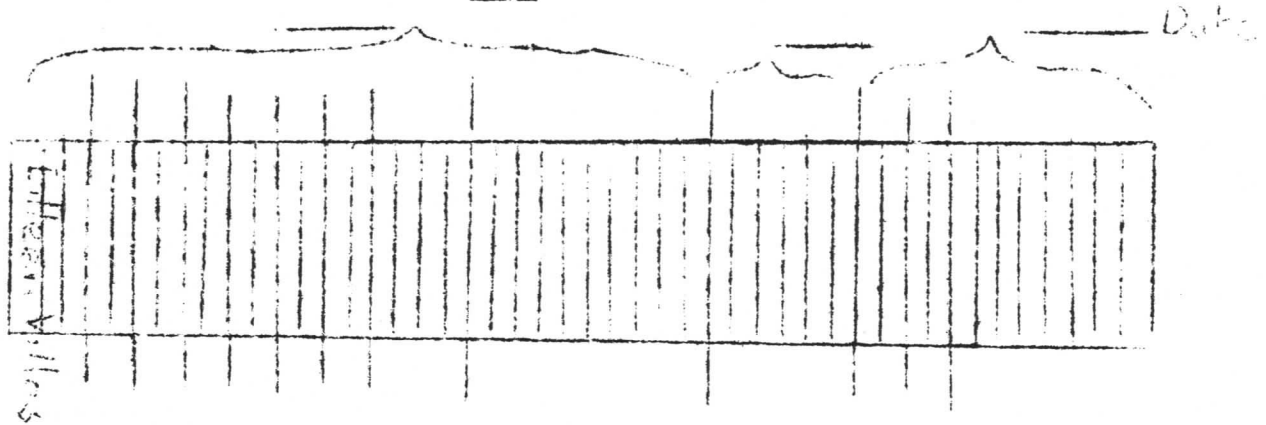
Turn left into Katie Road and immediately left again into Lottie Road.

These houses were built between 1875 and 1895 for the workpeople from Elliott's factory in Elliott Rd. Lottie, Katie and Winnie Roads were named after the daughters of Mr. Henry Elliott.



Walk down the left hand side of Lottie Road.

Complete this sketch by writing in the date at which each block of houses was built and the name of each block.



Compare the three different shapes of door frames and mouldings. Notice that each moulding on the 1891 houses has a different pattern.

Walk down to the end of Lottie Road, stop and look across Elliott Road to the factory area.

Elliott's factory was moved from the city centre to Selly Oak in 1853 by Mr. William Elliott and took over the old Sturgess Chemical Works. He had two sons, Henry and Frederick. Frederick died young and so Henry took over the firm. The factory growth was responsible for a good deal of the population growth in Selly Oak in the 1880's and so for much new housing.

At various times all of the following were manufactured there: German silver, silver wire, brass and copper wire, pins and shoe rivets, electrical cables, copper and brass sheet and strip and copper bottomed vessel sheathing.

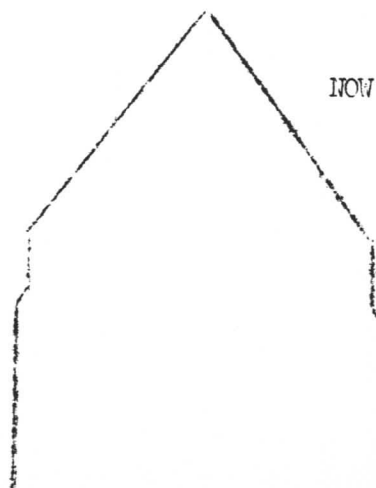
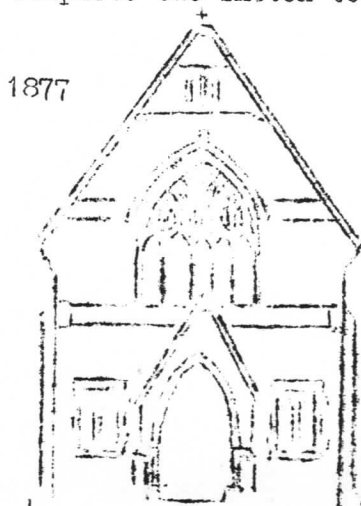
The factory covered a large area of ground but the building opposite Lottie Road and a few more are all that remain.

The factory was used for munitions making during the last war and since then has changed hands several times.

Turn left into Elliott Road. Cross the road and walk down the right hand side of Elliott Road to the Bristol Road. Turn right onto the Bristol Road.

The derelict building on the corner is St. John's Church. This was a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel built in 1877 to replace an earlier chapel built in 1835. It was used as a chapel until 1957

Complete the sketch to compare the chapel when it was first built and now.



What parts of the building would tell you it was a Church ?

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Go round past the front of St. John's Chapel and right down the Dingle.

Near the bottom of the Dingle on your left is the site of the old Selly Oak Fire Station. Some of the old buildings can still be seen.

At the bottom of the Dingle, you will come to the Worcester- Birmingham Canal. Stop here.

Work was begun on the canal in 1791 and it was finally opened in 1815. The total cost was £610,000. It is 30 miles long and has 58 locks between Worcester and Birmingham.

A pamphlet of 1790 said:

"The roads in the country through which this canal is to pass are intolerably bad"

The canal is still open today.

From the bottom of the Dingle, look left.

This is the direction to Birmingham .

You will see a bridge. What road goes over the bridge ?

---

Turn right and walk along the towpath.

On your right behind the high wall is Elliott's factory. Look at the iron clamp that helps to hold the wall up. Make a drawing of it.

You will soon come to some railings by the towpath. This is a low bridge. Under the bridge is a turn off from the main canal.

At one time this used to go through the wall on your right into Elliott's factory so that the boats could load and unload inside the factory.

The original bridge would have been much higher to allow boats to pass underneath.

As you walk along the canal look for where the canal suddenly widens.

This is a winding hole or turning place where the narrow boats could turn. Most narrow boats were 22 metres long and would be unable to turn except at specially widened places.

Continue walking and you will come to more railings and a second side turning into Elliott's. If you look carefully at the factory wall the line of the old hump-backed bridge can still be seen. It is difficult to see but keep trying.

Why do you think these side turnings are no longer used ?

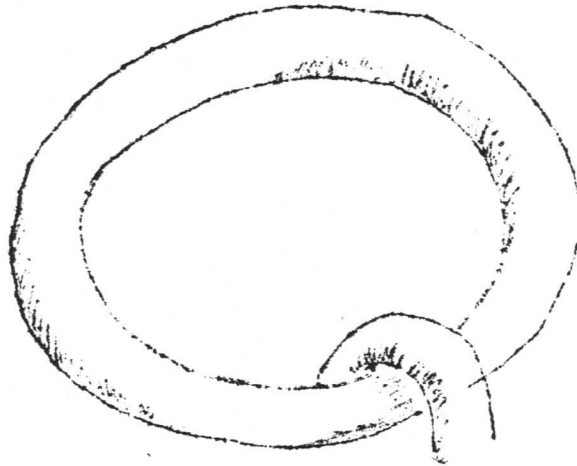
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What do Elliott's transport their goods in now ?

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Walk further along the towpath.

You will come to some iron rings set into the side of the canal



What were these for ?

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Look at the large building by the rings.

This is a warehouse, at one time used by the Elliott factory. Goods were unloaded from boats by hoists. The remains of the hoist can still be seen. They are the metal girders which have been cut off but are still sticking out of the brickwork. Cargoes were unloaded and loaded through the large door which has now been covered in.

Walk a short distance down the towpath.

Look for the remains of an old narrow boat on the side of the canal. This is only part of a narrow boat. When it was in use it would have been 22 metres long and 2 metres wide.

What material is it made from ?

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What is used to hold the timbers together ?

---

Almost opposite the narrow boat on the other side of the canal is another side turning which goes under the railway. This has been fenced off and is no longer used.

Look at the bridge where the railway crosses the canal. What is it made of?

---

Would there be room for two boats to pass under the bridge ?

---

You will now have to turn round and walk back along the towpath and back up the Dingle until you come to the traffic lights at the top by St. John's Church. Cross at the traffic lights to the Blough and Harrow Pub.

Look at the engraving on the windows.

Look at the mouldings around the doors and under the roof.

Walk down Chapel Lane.

Look for the street sign on the wall saying "Chapel Lane" How is it different from all the other street signs ?

---

Crossing Chapel Lane by the pub used to be the third toll gate in Selly Oak (the fourth was at Bristol Road by the University)

What is the blue machine on the left of the path ?

---

Who uses it ?

---

Walk further down Chapel Lane.

There is a large factory on your right. This continues down to the bottom of Chapel Lane. Walk down to the large gates to find out which factory it is.

Write down the name and what is made there.

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Look across Harborne Lane from Chapel Lane.

Opposite you is the Bus Depot which used to be the tram depot for trams on the Birmingham to Lickey Hills route.

Walk along the road to the top of the bridge over the disused canal.

This is Docks bridge which you previously saw from the old bridge in Selly Oak Park.

If you look back the way you came you can see a factory chimney with the letters B.B.M.C. on it. What do they mean ?

---

Looking over the bridge to the right, you can see the University Clock Tower (nicknamed Big Joe, because of the University connection with Joseph Chamberlain) and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Cross the road on the bridge and walk down Harborne Lane, past the Park Lodge to the corner of Reservoir Road.

When were Pengnaw Villas built ?

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What lettering is on the front of the pillar box set in the wall at the corner of Reservoir Road ?

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What do the letters E R VII mean ?

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Turn left into Reservoir Road.

Look at the terraced houses on your left and right and then at the semi-detached houses further on .

Which were built in 1902 and which in 1932 ?

Terraced

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Semis

---

Walk up Reservoir Road until you reach the right turning to Water Mill Close.

As you go along Reservoir Road look for the water stop cocks.  
Does each house have its own ?

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What are they for ?

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Look also for the metal covers for gas and other services.

Turn right into Water Mill Close and return to Water Mill Primary School.

EXTRACTS FROM MARRIAGE REGISTERS FROM ST. MARY'S CHURCH

1862 - 65

1962 - 63

Men	Women	Men	Women
Coachbuilder		Machine Tool 3	Telephonist 2
Warehouseman		Works Study Officer	Grocery Assistant
2 Farmers		Mechanic 2	Secretary 6
2 Winedrawers		Engineer 3	Cashier 3
lamp maker		Electrician	Telephonist
stocking weaver	servant	Draughtsman 4	Lab. Assistant
Captain 107th. Legion		Clerk	Canework
Commercial traveller		Postman	Typist 5
Grocer		Cabinet Maker	Hairdresser 2
Draper		Carpenter	Shop Assistant
Smith		Painter and Decorator	Machine Operator
Brush Maker	Dressmaker	Caretaker	Lecturer
Gardener		Chemist 2	Clerk 6
Moulder		Lab. Assistant	Comptometer Oper- ator
Horse Dealer		Truck Driver	Bank Clerk
Manufacturer		Pipe Fitter	Packer
3 Labourers		R.A.F. Officer	Receptionist
Blacksmith		Youth leader	
Butcher		Toolmaker	
Carter	Domestic Servant	Blender	
Corn dealer		Plumber	Canteen assistant
Roller			

Extract from Kelly's Directory, published in 1872:

Population:

1861	341 houses	1483 inhabitants	
1871	591 houses	2854	"
1881		5009	"
1891		7195	" Parish
1901		11222	"
1912		25155	" Selly Oak
1921		30073	" Ward
1931		28548	"

REFERENCES

- Kelly's Directories of Birmingham
- White's Directories of Birmingham
- "The History of Selly Oak" Leonard 1933
- "A Hundred Years at St. Mary's"
- Victoria History of Warwick Volume 7
- Birmingham Local Studies Library - photos, maps, news cuttings etc.
- Directory of Street Names
- "Birmingham Parks and Gardens"
- "History of Birmingham Parks"
- "Canals of the West Midlands" Hadfield
- Various scaled maps of area