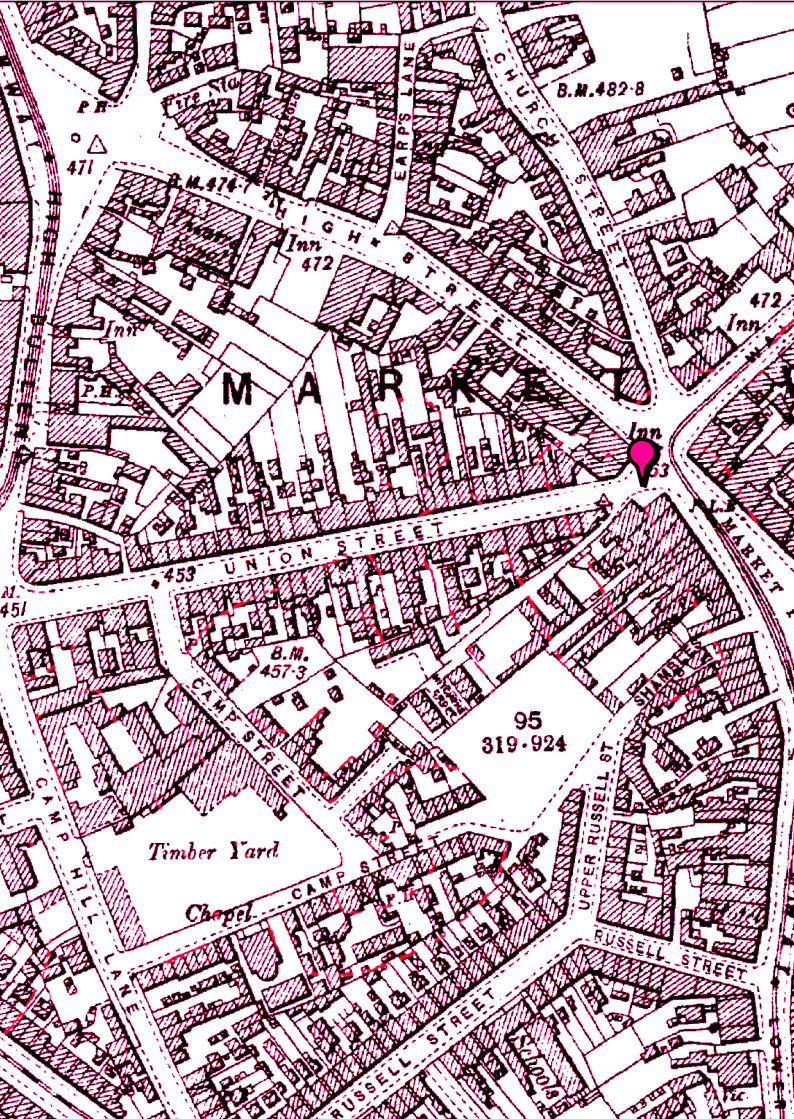


PIT BANK WENCHES,
WEDNESBURY.





B.M.482-8

471

B.M.474-1

Inn 472

472

MARRIAGE

Inn 3

453 UNION STREET

451

B.M. 457-3

95
319-924

Timber Yard

Chapel

UPPER RUSSELL ST.

RUSSELL STREET

RUSSELL STREET

B.M.400-6

Women, Work and Wednesbury



*(1) FH Lloyd Factory Women Workers' Netball Team
(date unknown)*

“On average women undertake 60% more unpaid care work than men, suffer earnings and pay gaps, and are more likely to be in part-time, temporary, zero-hour contracts.*

Put simply, the economy is not designed for women.” (2)

What is ‘work’? When we say work, we often think it exists in a specific place or done by a specific person or industry. In the conversation around industrial work, and even in work more widely, women are often omitted.

Women have always worked, whether domestically in the home, raising children and doing the housework; or on the factory floor and in offices; or working in pubs and shops and other professions. In the story of Wednesbury’s industrial past and future, women were, and remain an integral part of working life. Women are still expected to not only maintain a job but to do the majority of childcare and housework. This balance needs to change.

Much of women’s working-class history goes unrecorded. This small publication records different women’s experiences of working life in Wednesbury. From historic accounts, to interviews with women who have worked in a range of industries locally and domestically.

Beyond the goods manufactured on the factory floor, social ‘production’ was also taking place in, and outside, the factory and women were a key part.

**This term is inclusive to all those who identify as women.*

Women who have worked or lived in Wednesbury

Mary Lloyd or Mary Hornchurch (1795 to 1865) was joint secretary of the first Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in the UK (BLSRNS) based in Birmingham and Sandwell which was an instrumental group in the abolition movement. She lived in Wednesbury with her husband Samuel Lloyd who was from a prominent Quaker family and head of manufacturing firm, Lloyd, Foster and Co, Wednesbury.

Julia Lloyd (1867 to 1955) was born in Wednesbury and was a British philanthropist and educationalist. She was interested in the newly developed methods for teaching young children in kindergartens and she opened Birmingham's first nursery school based on Froebelian principles (education based around the importance of play). She was the daughter of an ironmaster.

Baroness Betty Boothroyd is a British politician who served as the MP for Wednesbury from 1973 to 2000. From 1992 to 2000, she served as Speaker of the House of Commons and is the only woman to do so.



(3) Labour MP for Wednesbury, Betty Boothroyd, being interviewed in 1986 on the site of the former Patent Shaft Steelworks which closed in 1980.



(4) Tessa Sanderson being interviewed as she arrives for a welcoming party at the Wednesbury factory where she worked following her Commonwealth Games gold medal for javelin throwing in 1978.

Meg Hutchinson was a bestselling author who lived for sixty years in Wednesbury, where her parents and grandparents spent all their lives. Her historical novels were regularly set within Wednesbury and the wider Black Country and focused on womens' lives.

Tessa Sanderson CBE, Olympic Gold Medalist for Javelin throwing is the only British woman to compete at six Olympic Games. During the 1970s, she worked as a secretary for a factory in Wednesbury whilst training for the Games.

Suzie McCloskey, known as Zenda Jacks, is an English singer active in the 1970s. She is best known for being a member of Silver Convention in the 70s, and Hard Rain in the 90s. She has also worked with artists such as Tina Turner and Ella Fitzgerald.

Beverley Harvey is a Community Artist and Executive Director (1999-2002) of West Bromwich based, Jubilee Arts, an internationally acclaimed community arts organisation. In 1999, she led a team of staff and artists to obtain a BAFTA award for the multimedia project Lifting the Weight in collaboration with Geese Theatre - the first awarded outside of a film or television production in forty years.

This is a growing list, with the expectation that it will be expanded in the future.

A Brief History of Women and Work in Manufacturing in Wednesbury

Women's involvement in industry in Wednesbury stems from before the industrial revolution, when 'cottage industries' were commonplace, with whole families working on small jobs such as nail-making at home.

The Pit Bank Wenches (cover picture) worked for Blue Fly Colliery in Wednesbury during the 1890s. Working days were usually 8 hours and low paid. Women were specifically employed for sorting and loading the coal on the pit bank and it was dirty and tiring work.

During the 1913 Black Country Strike, women workers were a key part of the industrial action. "Over 400 women workers and the wives of strikers met at Kings Hill, Wednesbury on 30 May to receive a talk from Julia Varley, the Workers' Union Women's Organiser. She told her audience that the fight was not confined to the men, adding:

'... it was always the women that had to suffer through low wages'. (5)

Over 200 female employees from the Darlaston firm Steel Nut and Joseph Hampton Co. Ltd left their place of work to protest through the streets of Wednesbury. At a time when many working-class women were oppressed and subject to social control, this was a remarkable act of defiance for the time (Fantom, 2015).



(6) The Globe Works of John Spencer Ltd

In July 1914, women comprised 29% of the total workforce. Employed not only in domestic service, they also worked in manufacturing, with 36% belonging to the industrial workforce. Throughout the Black Country, large numbers of women were employed in mechanised industries, working for lower wages compared to the men. During the first and second World Wars, more women in the UK were called upon to work in the factories to manufacture and repair arms, ammunition, ships, vessels, vehicles and aircraft for the allies.

The majority of the women munitions' workers were from a working-class background, working out of economic necessity rather than choice. Frequently, they were either already employed or they had returned to the workplace they had left following marriage and motherhood (Fantom, 2015).

The George Hotel

1, Upper High Street, Wednesbury,



(7) From the Midland Advertiser, 29 February 1896

TRIGGER WARNING - this newspaper article contains a distressing story.

“On Tuesday afternoon, an inquest was held at The George Hotel, Market Place, Wednesbury, touching the death of Margaret Berry (48), the wife of William Berry, ironworker of Little Hill, who committed suicide in a most determined manner. The husband stated that on Friday night he went to a public house to have a pint of ale, when he was followed by a neighbour named Bennett who told him that his wife had poisoned herself. He immediately went home and found his wife sitting on the stairs very ill.”

“He asked her what she had taken and she made no reply. A neighbour however told him that she had taken an acidic substance

The deceased had no trouble, except that she had lost a child three years ago. He could not assign any reason for the deceased taking her life.

On Friday night shortly after eight o'clock deceased came to her home and said, ‘Mrs. Bennett, I have done it this time.’ And at the same time put a little jug on the table, which had contained the poisonous substance. She afterwards said, ‘Take care of my little girl and see that no one knocks her about.’ Deceased said, ‘It’s too late, I am done.’”



(8) The George Hotel, Wednesbury circa 1960s.

Interviews

(9)

Women War Workers at





Madnesbury

834 J.P.

Florence 'Floss' Trinder

Florence 'Floss' Trinder (formerly Wright, née Harrison) lived and worked in Wednesbury. She was born in 1921 and passed away in 2001.

Alongside being a wife, mother and nan, she worked numerous jobs throughout her life. Following the death of her first husband to TB after the Second World War, she had to work in many waged jobs, sometimes working three at one time.

Not only did she cook food for the nursery at local manufacturers F H Lloyd, where her second husband also worked, she worked as a barmaid at The Lamp Inn on Upper High Street, where her mother Clara Harrison had worked during the 1950s, as well as working as a dinner lady at Old Park Primary School.

She worked incredibly hard to care for her daughter and granddaughter, whilst also maintaining the household through cooking and cleaning.

Her tools were her chopping board and knife, not only at work but in the home.



(10) Photograph of kitchen staff and the Headmaster at Old Park Primary School in the 1970s. Floss is standing at the far right on the back row.

Dawn Winter

Floss's granddaughter is Dawn, who also lives in Wednesbury and is the Business Manager for the Libraries and Archives for Sandwell Council. Dawn started at the counter of the library at 16 and worked her way up to management. After 13 years of service, the council paid for her to go to university to become a qualified librarian. She is a mother, was a governor at Albert Pritchard School and she was one of the original members of the Women of Wednesbury Group that was active in the 1990s.

How do you define work?

"I started work at 16. I had to contribute to the house. There was no thought of going to university. I see work as my profession; however, I also do the housework but I would define that as physical work. Strange word 'work'; it can be a physical act or an intellectual act. My work is about creating a vision and strong vital services that Wednesbury and Sandwell needs.

What is your tool?

Conversation, my voice. I use my voice every day. My laptop computer. I can't function without an internet connection – it's like having electricity. I can't do my work without a connection. It has been the strangest time in my career... having to close libraries (in response to Covid-19). Libraries are vital. Many people use the library computers to search for jobs and apply for benefits. They can't do this without a broadband connection."



(11) The Lamp Inn circa 1950s. Pictured is Clara Harrison (1903-1978) who worked as a barmaid.

Office Worker at Patent Shaft*

Born in 1934, she has lived and worked in Wednesbury most of her life. She worked in the print room at Patent Shaft for 11 years, during the 1960s, as well as working in sales for a dress shop and as an office worker in different industries around Sandwell. She was also a full-time carer for family members and looked after her children.

What did you do at the Patent Shaft?

We worked on a machine called an Addressograph. We would print all the timecards, the sales, publications and catalogues. We also worked on a photomachine; we had to collate and copy meeting notes and address envelopes... I worked with three girls, a lot of the time working with about 6 people... The solvents were very strong, the smell was bad and we would have the windows open. Many girls would get ill; one got bronchitis. I was fortunate in that way to not get ill.

The engineer showed me how to strip the machine down and take it to pieces, I came home covered in ink. One day the 'big boss' for the whole department came in, he wanted to put a hardback book in the machine. When I said it wouldn't work, he carried on anyway and it broke. It was out of action for 2 to 3 days whilst they waited for an engineer to come in to fix it.

Did you like working there?

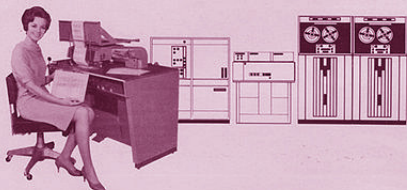
I loved it. 18 months before I could see it was going to close, they went around and asked people if they would take voluntary redundancy. Another job came along, they didn't want me to leave. I loved working at the Shaft. Everybody was happy, nice, even in the factory, we used to have a laugh.

Before working at the Shaft I worked in the gown trade, I liked mixing with people. When a more 'la-di-da' lady would walk in, it would be 'Madam'; when someone more 'normal' it would be 'good morning love'. People would come from all over to visit the local gown shop and it had longer hours compared to the Shaft, which was 8:45 and finished at 5:30. If someone came into the shop at 6pm you would have to stay. The Manageress called me over one day and told me if I can't sell anything to ask her for help. So I left that day and went to work in an office where they rented televisions. In those days you could leave one job and find another the next day.

**The participant has asked to remain anonymous*

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What would your definition of work be?

I loved going to work, I got on with everyone. When I was at the Shaft, people would be in stitches, they would go over to another office and say 'oh she has a sense of humour'. When I left school at 15, I have report cards that said I was polite and well mannered, I've still got them! I enjoyed work and socialising, feeling like I have value. I had to be pleasant at the gown shop and that stayed with me in other jobs. Those traits shine through. Work was an escape from the atmosphere at home.

Why do you think being pleasant or hiding your true feelings was a good thing?

You couldn't afford not to be pleasant, especially at the gown shop!

Grace Dore

Grace Dore is an artist, mom, nan, photography student and was a full-time carer for her dad as well as running a market stall every Saturday on Wednesbury Market. She lives in Wednesbury.

Can you tell me about your history of work?

I work on a market stall in Wednesbury on a Saturday. I originally started it with my sister and now do it on my own. I enjoy it; it is hard but worthwhile. I sell all sorts of things, original paintings, things in the house like CDs and DVDs, books, clothes, shoes, anything really. I enjoy talking to people and chatting to a few of the stallholders. Before lockdown, I had my little following: they would all have a look at what I have, whether it was shampoo, children's books, or clothes. Some people just liked to say hello and chat for a bit. There is a community feeling in the market; we look after each other – if something rolled off someone's stall, I would chase after it! Most of us get on really well.

I've had lots of different jobs. My first was in the Jewellery Quarter in Hockley, making earrings. I remember having to pick glue off my fingers on the bus ride home. I also delivered the Express and Star and I was a postwoman for Royal Mail. I also worked in an office – I hated anything like that; I like being outside in the community, out and about. I also did some voluntary photography work at the REP Theatre for Dimensions. I've always taken photographs since I was young. I don't think I ever thought it could be a job in those days. I went to college years ago to do art and now I'm at Walsall College doing photography.

What would you define as work?

That's a good question. It's not what everyone thinks it always is. Society tells you that you only get a job one way: school, college, work. Women have always worked from home and that is work. The thing is, you can't put on your CV that you're a housewife or a carer for your parents or family. It's not seen as work if you're not paid by an employer. To be part of society, they want us all to act a certain way – however, you can survive outside of those definitions.

Being self-employed seems the best option for me at my age. After I've completed my college course, I want to set up my own photography business. I don't want to have to rely on anyone; I want to be self-reliant.

Work should make you feel happy and content. I'm 58 and I don't want to do anything that wears me down or makes me unhappy, that's not what life's about. You've only got one chance. Society doesn't have to be so hard on people; it would be great for young and old to do what they really want to do and follow any dreams they may have.

I know most of us have to work because we need money to survive. Life is hard for so many people and you don't always have the choice. Sometimes you know you've got something valuable to offer – I know we all have our own unique talents. I just want to work in the community creatively, using my talents. That's what would make me content, working with, and helping, people.

What tools do you use?

I think the ability to get on with people, being able to communicate is really important, especially on the market. Having the creative skills to be able to paint, draw, use a camera all help in working in the community. I love working with people and achieving whatever we set out to do. Creative wise, I like to express myself in a way that will help others and use my talents for the good of the community, as well as my own personal growth.

In terms of physical things, I haven't got a car; I usually use the bus even if I carry a lot of stuff about. For the market, I have to take all the stuff there, so I get a taxi. It's all part of it – you just have to persevere, you know you have to do something, so you just do it. Women are like that. Resilient.

Have attitudes changed from the olden days? For women, work at home is work. Just because it is more nurturing, it's still hard work and if you get help from parents or family, that is a bonus. Hopefully ideas and attitudes will change as we move further into the future and people will be appreciated for what they do, in whatever capacity.

The future is very unpredictable, not just because of what's happening now but technology wise, people will be at home even more. But if you work from home for a company, that is classed as working but the woman working next to you is just a mother, not a worker?



(13) Grace pictured in front of the market she works at on a Saturday.

Margaret Grundy

Maggie's Traditional General Store opened in 1983 on Franchise Street in Wednesbury and the owner and manager is Margaret Grundy who was born in Darlaston and lives in Wednesbury.

Previously, I had worked at Rubery Owen as a secretary. When I got married in my early thirties, we decided to look for a small shop where I could earn a living from home and support the family while my husband went out to work. We purchased the shop from the previous owner Connie. She and her husband had operated Connie's Comer Shop from the front room of number 139. When number 137 came up for sale at a low price, we were able to buy it and extended the shop and our home.

Apparently, a lot of women did 'outsourced' work from home?

Back in the 1960s, a lot of women worked from home. It was called 'out work' – work that was done out of the office or factory in people's homes. I did work such as addressing envelopes for offices; it wasn't very well paid. I also helped my mom to attach sequins to plastic covers for manicure sets, which was a very fiddly job; we never wanted to see another sequin again after that!

What do you sell in the shop?

We sell everything from electrical fuses to one penny bubble gums, Lottery tickets and Scratchcards. A regular customer purchased a Scratchcard and won £100,000. We were all very excited and I was so pleased for them; it was almost like winning myself.



(14) Maggie's shop in 1983

We also sell pick N mix sweets, children can pick what they want from as low as a penny. I often get asked, 'How much is a 10p mix Maggie?', and it always makes me smile. Teddy Gray's sweets, the pear drops and pineapple rock are our best sellers. We have groceries, household necessities and DIY products, anything really that people might run out of.

What do you define as work?

I don't regard my job as work but more of a service. I decide what's best for me. I'm fortunate to be my own boss which provides flexibility but the downside is very little leisure time. I didn't plan on being a shopkeeper, having worked as a secretary for most of my working life. I love the shop and I'm very lucky to have a job I enjoy. Having this job and working from home enabled me to take care of my family. In later life, having the shop helped me to support my parents when they suffered from ill health.

What tools do you use?

Advice on what to buy, such as birthday gift suggestions. The shop is an over-the-counter service, reminiscent of sitcom *Open All Hours*; a customer comes in for a tin of beans and ends up leaving with a sweeping brush, a tape measure and a hula hoop instead! I value the interaction with the customers, chatting to them about their ups and downs in life, their families and pets. I always ask how they are; pensioners appreciate this, as I may be the only person they talk to that day. You often don't encounter this at the supermarket checkout.



(15) Maggie's shop, 1987. Margaret's son Thomas aged 4.

Kate Grundy

Margaret's daughter, Kate Grundy, grew up in the shop. She has lived in Wednesbury most of her life.

I don't consider it work at the shop. Maggie's is separated by a sliding door and having our front room open to the public feels commonplace. It's my home so I can't differentiate, I'm so accustomed to it. Up until recently our shop bell sounded like a bird so visitors would often ask, 'where's the bird?'. Sadly, no bird, but we used to have a cat called Arthur that insisted on entering the house through the shop.

My grandparents used to live across the road from us when I was a child. When my nan passed away my grandad came to live with us as his health was deteriorating. They used to help my mom with childcare and trips to the warehouse for bread early in the morning. The Maggie's sign outside was painted by my dad in the 1980s; he also made the canopies over the windows and shelving inside and it all still remains to this day. My nan, grandad and mom all worked at Rubery Owen at various times. It was a huge factory that manufactured vehicle parts, wheels, axels, located on the border of Wednesbury and Darlaston but only the main office stands now as the rest has been torn down.

What do you define as work?

It's an agreement. Satisfying a need to the best of your ability. Work requires fulfilment and balance... being valued.

The unseen work such as caring responsibilities mostly falls on the shoulders of women... I hope our lived experience of the pandemic will lead to lasting positive change. A fairer world is attainable but that will require work, empathy, persistence and a fighting spirit.

What tools do you use?

I loved the price gun. I do miss it but I wore it out. My mom prefers to write the price tags by hand now anyway. We also use Avery scales for sweets, cheese, potatoes and onions. There's a buzz you feel when you choose something in a shop; you see it being wrapped and there's anticipation, it's an essential connection for independent business.

A few years ago, I worked for a global company in Wednesbury. As they introduce self-service checkouts the interactions between people are disappearing. With advancing technology providing this kind of rapid progress, jobs are being lost faster than they can be replaced. Wouldn't it be better for technology to offer better jobs than fewer unfulfilling ones?

Post-industrial towns frequently feel lost and forgotten about. It's the small character-filled businesses that keep a high street thriving. Many of our customers are regulars and my mom can sometimes identify who's about to enter the shop by how they open the door. It's fortunate that Wednesbury town has managed to survive beside a major supermarket.

Kallianne Titley

Kallianne is 22 years old and has lived in Wednesbury all her life. She set up Kickstarts Dance in Wednesbury at 16 and has been running it ever since. It began with 10 members and has grown to over 100 members aged between 12 months and 55 years. She teaches 12-15 classes per week and in conjunction with running the dance school she also obtained a degree in Geography and Planning at the University of Birmingham.

My long-term vision for Kickstarts dance is to train up all the girls to teach. It's also important for me that the school is more accessible, even though we cover a lot of the costs, not everyone can afford to attend. I would like more outreach for example to teach in schools or in residential homes

People don't think there are opportunities in Wednesbury but there is; sometimes you just need to be pushed. A lot of the dance students have started applying for university and I have run sessions to support them in writing their personal statements.

What do you define as work?

My job doesn't feel like work. The perception seems to be that work should be hard to do and you shouldn't enjoy it, that you just do something for a few hours and go home. I want to be invested; it doesn't come down to money for me. We help to create friendships for the kids and experiences that they would never have had. Teaching students a creative talent or building a skill, not physical things but something they can learn and keep with them which may help shape their future.

What tools do you use?

Networking. Networking has boosted us. Having conversations with people, as much as lockdown has been awful, I've got to connect with lots of different people in new ways online. Which has given us a stronger presence and strengthened the business and networks. People are now more open to doing things.

A venue. All you need is a venue and people to join in because it makes the students feel at home, there is nothing else physical we need. Sometimes thinking you need tools or equipment becomes a barrier. When I set up this group, we had no equipment or money. If I was able to do it – then anyone can.



(16) Kickstarts Dance

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10. Image courtesy of Dawn Winter.

11. Image courtesy of Dawn Winter.

12. Addressograph Image. c/o Pinterest

13. Image courtesy of Grace Dore.

14. Image Courtesy of Margaret Grundy .

15. Image Courtesy of Margaret Grundy.

16. Image Courtesy of Kallianne Tittley.

17. Image Courtesy of Dawn Winter.

Research Links

If you want to uncover more of Wednesbury and Sandwell's history these ongoing projects are fantastic resources.

Jubilee Arts Online archive (www.jubileeartsarchive.com), updated by Brendan Jackson and Beverley Harvey. Includes Information and resources on a range of the projects they ran throughout its time.

Black Country Visual Arts (www.bcva.info), founded by Anand Chhabra. Includes a range of art projects which explores the migrant history of the Black Country. They regularly put on events and call-outs.

The History of Wednesbury (www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/Wednesbury). An online website which is very detailed on Wednesbury's industrial history.

The History of Wednesbury Facebook group (www.facebook.com/TheHistoryOfWednesbury), run by Mike Maynard. A large community of people which is updated regularly with people's personal stories of Wednesbury.

Thanks

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To find out more about the project head to:

www.wearewednesbury.uk

Accessibility

If you need this document as a Word document, please go to the We Are Wednesbury website.

multi
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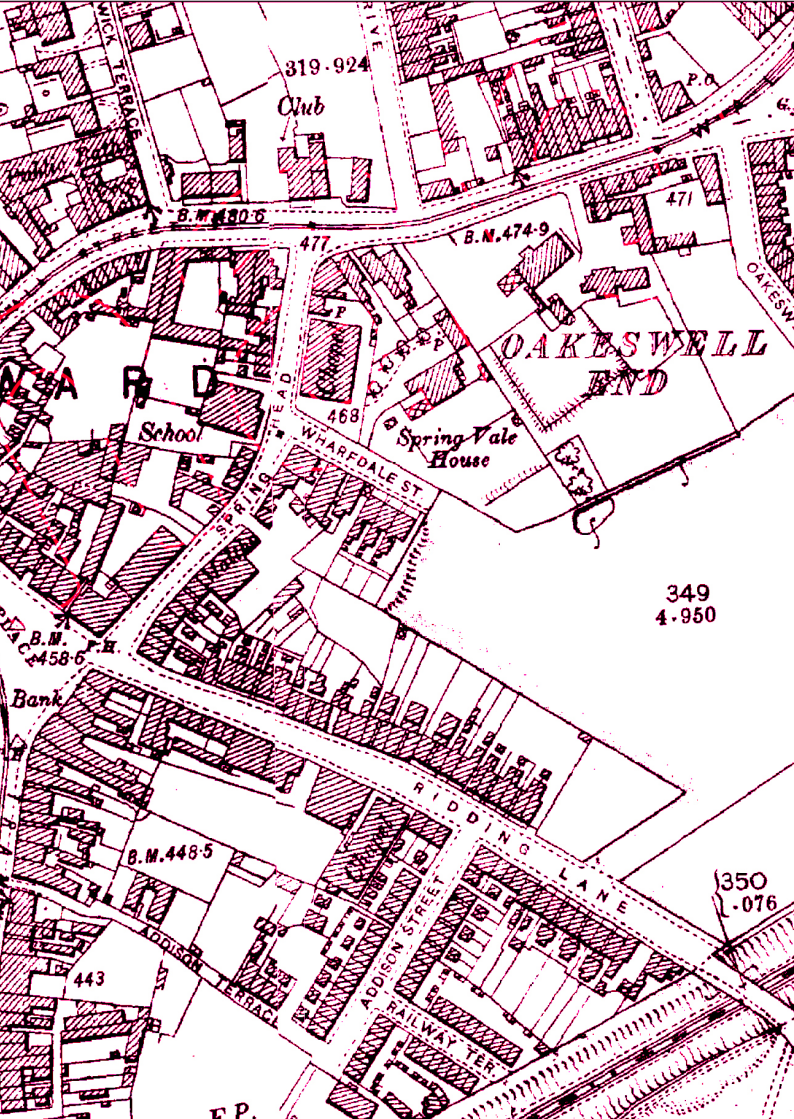
Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council



HM Government



*(17) Alice Harrison WAAF, pictured during the 1940s.
Seated fourth from left seated on the front row.*



319.924

Club

B.M. 480.6

477

B.M. 474.9

471

OAKESWELL
END

School

468

Spring Vale
House

WHARFDALE ST

349
4.950

B.M. 458.6

Bank

B.M. 448.5

443

ADDISON TERRACE

ADDISON STREET

RIDDLING LANE

RAILWAY TER.

350
-076

E.P.



Sophie Huckfield, 2021