

STORIES OF



LYE

In recent years, Lye has received a bad press. It has been labelled a 'no go zone' by the local papers, with tensions reported between different groups of people and concerns about crime and fly-tipping. Here are just a few stories about Lye. There are so many more.

Here are stories we heard from people of Lye during the summer of 2019, in their own way and in their own words.



Back to my roots – Lye!

by Seema

I've grown up in Lye and remember playing at the mosque and at the park. I got married and moved away from Lye however following a divorce I came back to my roots, Lye!

There were no groups for kids to go to and I was concerned for my children. I decided to partner up with other like-minded ladies to set up a group. I'm now volunteering with the Diyya Project Near Neighbours Scheme. I've attended Christian and Roma groups to encourage attendance and the group has slowly grown.

Culturally whilst growing up I noticed that women were attached to the kitchen sink. Slowly as time passed, Asian ladies have overcome the fear and have started to step out of their comfort and controlling zones, they are volunteering and socialising. Any ladies needing any type of support, we help to signpost to various services.

I have always tried to volunteer and give time to the community whilst working part-time. I'm working to target the 60+ Asian women to come out and join us. I'd like to provide these women with an incentive such as pampering, to encourage them to join the Diyya Project. My friends circle are all local women who stick together to try and solve issues.

I worry about local traffic and safety as there have been many accidents and fires recently. I regularly use the park and feel this is a safe, free space for the community to meet and talk whilst the children are playing. The scenery is attractive and the fresh air is good. The Library is a very helpful asset and I would miss it if it wasn't there.

I think the future is bright and would like to focus on a youth club and hope to start fundraising to make this happen!



Lye is on the map by a local resident

Say Lye to people and everyone knows where it is. The curry houses sort of put it on the map. I have lived here for 30 years. There used to be so many great pubs, I used to love the 'Hayes Lane' pub – it was great.

I have great memories of all the shops on the high-street, in particular the jewellers. What a wonderful shop that was.

"We feel really welcome in the area and wouldn't hesitate in recommending businesses to come to Lye High Street"

Kerry Holmes on page 13

Lye was known as 'The Village' by Irene McCann

I was born in 1941 and I've lived here all my life. I went to infant school at Orchard Lane and then moved to Valley Road Senior School. I always remember the headmaster, Mr Harper, he was a character.

People used to refer to Lye as 'The Village'. I remember my early years, I loved going to Sunday school. I attended Sunday school between the ages of 4-16 in the 1940's and 1950's at Christ Church. I went to Christ Church Youth Club where I built friendships and took part in dancing and drama activities.

The Clifton Cinema opened in 1937 with 'Under 2 Flags' and Ronald Coleman starred in it.

I remember the last films there were "The Patsy" in 1965 with Jerry Lewis and also "Robinson Crusoe on Mars". It closed for the last time on 7th August 1965.



"I loved working in Lye, the character, the people the culture"

Councillor Mohammed Hanif on page 14

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All the diverse cultures we have in Lye have one thing in common, they're all sociable, friendly and welcoming"

Melvyn Blackmore on pages 19-20

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"Community, friends, family and home will keep me in Lye for the foreseeable future"

Iftikhar on page 22

We need opportunities for all

by Assad

I live in Walsall but for the last 1½ years I've worked in Lye supporting people with learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, mental health conditions and complex needs. My main ambition is to help improve lives and increase opportunities for people to develop their independence.

The Roma community are very happy people and they love being out in the open. If you look back through history, they migrated from Northwest India and their journey towards Europe started between 3rd and 7th centuries AD. They settled in the Middle East calling themselves Dom, a word meaning "man". To this day they retain their name and speak a language related to Sanskrit. Large numbers moved into Europe, where the D, which was anyway pronounced with the tongue curled up, became an R, giving the word Rom. Today's European Roma (the plural of Rom) are their descendants.

There are lots of similarities to Asian Islamic Culture and Urdu, Arabic and Islamic dress codes.

The biggest change in Lye that I have seen relates to a decrease in employment and job opportunities for everyone. We need chances and openings for all. It's important we learn more about the wonderfully diverse community we live in and better understand the talents, skills and passions of the people that reside here.





Houses were bulldozed and rebuilt

Craig Lees remembers growing up in Lye in the 1970s

I lived in 7 Hill Street, in a Victorian house built in 1900's, with my parents and older brother. My parents moved into the house with my father's grandfather who passed away shortly before I was born. Properties were all rented or council houses, if you owned your own property you were classed as 'posh'.

I always knew my grandmother had grown up in the house and the area was very family orientated. Each block of terraces or houses had

a long history of one family living in it. Everyone knew each other and kids played on the streets regularly. There was one pair of elders living a few doors away who always shooed kids from in front of their house, saying go and play up your own end. I later realised they were actually related, my grandmother's cousin.

Mom's diary and rolling thunder

It was rare for mums to work in the 70s and like many others my

mum stayed home and brought us up. Dad drove an ambulance and things were always tight.

My mom started writing a diary and it states that Lye Market Hall was first opened on 29th January 1979 by Lesley Crowther. She recorded each time she went to Lye to buy meat and groceries. Some friends still remember buying certain items from the market eg. underwear!

Even if Mom popped down the Lye for one item she would take over an hour as if

she bumped into an aunty or relative she would stand and chat to them. Dad would say "you've been a long time, did you get chatting to someone!?"

Mom even recorded when Asda Brierley Hill opened in 1979 and how she took us all up to help carry the shopping and how she saved £3. We didn't have fridges in those days so had to pick up groceries regularly. I remember I use to go shopping for mom at the age of 9 to pick up meat, ham and groceries. She would give me a trolley to load it in and pull back.

From my earliest memories there was always the sound and vibration from the drop forge on Park Street which was virtually at the bottom of our garden. Our whole house would tremble from the BUMP.... BUMP.... BUMP. The hammers sounded like a chorus of cathedral bells. Factories were all open to get fresh air in the summer months. You could see the workers working with hot metal. The noise from these foundries was like constant rolling thunder but it was just a normal noise for those of us that lived there. On Sunday when foundries were closed, it didn't feel normal as it was too quiet.

The wasteland was our playground

I recall during the redevelopment of the Lye, the old houses were stripped of guttering and wood until they literally fell apart. These items were sold to make money or wood was used as fire wood in

the cold months. No one was stopped from doing this, as everyone did it!

After the demolition of a row of houses opposite us, in Hill Street, glass from the glass factory was dumped where we would play. I remember dad patching us up from our cuts and bruises as we were always cutting ourselves or falling off roofs. I had groups of friends all over Lye, we loved to get out, explore and play games.

We built our own go-karts from wood and made racing tracks. I remember playing with Asian and White British children as all communities stuck together. The only time Asians split from the White British children was during the summers months when England & Pakistan played cricket.

I remember the Wollescote Primary School site being the new estate next to the Marl Holes. Rubbish, sofas, mattresses, old cars were regularly dumped on wasteland as no-one had cars to take them to the tip. A group of us played on the wasteland and created our own car games, built dens and campfires. We always had fires - everyone did it and enjoyed it!

Bonfires every year were a competitive time as groups of kids collected wood ready for the bonfire and it had to be guarded. If it wasn't, other kids came along and set it alight. Once, I remember saving an Asian kid who ran and tripped head first into the ash from a bonfire. I dragged him out from his legs and luckily he

"I remember playing with Asian and White British children as all communities stuck together"

was wearing a parka. The fur on his hood burnt and the material on the front of the parka also melted away but we still continued to play. The local Asian ladies had fires in their gardens and would use large flat pans to make their chapattis.

Rope was available everywhere and if we needed it, we just took it, never paid for it, to make ourselves rope swings. We had swings all over the place as far up as Foxcote Fields and as far down as the Stour at Saltbrook and everywhere in between such as the Grove behind Lye church.

The by-pass wasn't there in the 1970's just a caretakers house where the current Scot Young site is. We carved our names into the trees and there would be sawdust everywhere.

Wonderful memories

I love the history of the area, the Grove, Marl Holes and Ash Banks. We were allowed to go



anywhere and return home only for tea. We even ventured out to Stourbridge to the cinema. We left the house at around 8am and were given a time to be back for. If we were even two minutes late, we were questioned and half an hour was docked off us the next day. Parents were strict, you weren't allowed to swear. I remember running home to make it in time and when my dad asked "Where's your bike?" I realised I'd run so fast I'd forgotten my bike at a friend's house. You had freedom to go anywhere. I recall listening to a guy who

was talking about the 1930's and in those days people did what we were doing in the 1970's.

Summers were very hot and I remember sitting by the brook up the park with our feet in the water. One FA cup final day over the park, someone had a radio which loads of people huddled around to listen to the game. It's a wonderful memory filled with sights and sounds and the smell of cut grass.

Lye was classed as rougher than Wollescote, it just had rows and rows of terraced houses. Wollescote had open land,

fields and new estates were named after the fields.

Way before my time, back in the 1800s, the top end of Lye was known as the Lye Waste and the other end as Lower End Lye. Even back then there were cohesion issues when Romani travellers came to work in Lye. Lye Church was built to bring all communities together.

What's really important to me is treasuring the memories of growing up in The Lye. The bumps and bruises, the love and laughter and the fun we all had as children. What a wonderful playground!

Love brought me here by Michael Troon

I was born in Penzance, Cornwall. I moved to Lye when I was 33 years old. I met my wife in the Royal Air Force and her parents lived in Gornal.

We had to find a house quickly and we managed to find a property in Bank Street, Lye. I remember getting the train to Lye Railway Station. I got off the train and didn't have a clue where I was going. I quickly went into the nearest pub and asked for directions. I remember my first neighbours being an Asian family. The husband spoke English. We built up a great relationship and got on well.

My wife and I got married at Bethel Chapel in 1988 however the chapel was undergoing improvement works and maintenance. I will always remember how the community came together to help complete the work so we could get married.

I came here to drive a 'tower crane' and fell in love by Tony

I was living in London when I was informed I was needed in the Midlands to operate a tower crane. I was helping to build the 'Crown Centre' in Stourbridge. I moved to St Marks, Brook Street and can always remember how friendly my neighbours were.

I met a local girl, we fell in love and got married in Stourbridge. My wife always remembers Lye Market Hall being a dance hall but I can only recall it being a Picture House.

A resident of Lye since 1979 by Margaret Myers

I've lived here for 40 years after moving from Blackheath in 1979. I remember how busy the high street was then. It was heaving, there were so many shops! There was so much choice. There was Jarrett's Chemist, everyone came from across the borough to use it. It had a really good reputation.

I loved how Lye Carnival brought everyone out into the community. There was a real feeling of togetherness and community spirit.

I also remember the slaughter house in Clinic Drive. I used to walk my children to school down Orchard Lane. I will always remember the smell as we walked past.

Lye has always been a friendly and lovely place to live.





Lye is our little Village

by Durri

I've lived in Lye since I was 1½ years old when I arrived from Pakistan with my family. I remember going to the park, playing in groups, playing conkers, riding a bike, playing cricket, building camps, playing rounders, playing on the elephant slide in Park Street. I was the only sister so I got to do what my brothers did, it was great fun. I remember local play schemes, health walks in the park, the swimming pool in Lye Park and I even remember when the Queen visited the Infant School in her Rolls Royce!

After going to mosque, I used to run to the Library as I wanted to get first choice on the fiction books. I loved reading!

I remember getting off the number 9 bus and running into the Lye Market. There were rides in there.

We had lots of lovely shops, clothes shops

were great, hardware, butchers, cards shops. There was even an Asian film and cassette shop. We used to borrow a film on a Friday night and then swap it with our neighbours and watch it Saturday night so we got to watch two for the price of one. There was great access to banks and post office services too.

The area has changed in terms of the community. It is more diverse now. Women in my community have become more empowered and are bringing themselves out. I saw my mom go through depression and mental health issues when I was 14 years old. I knew then I wanted to make a difference and do something for my community, something like social work but I had to get married. I continued with my life, had my children. However when Mom passed away, I got the urge to do something, I knew if I didn't do

anything, no-one else would ever try. Women in our community were targets of emotional abuse and I didn't want to end up feeling like them so I went about seeking volunteering opportunities. I volunteered and eventually got support of like-minded people and set up the Diyya Project in 2011.

My aspiration was not to become ill like my mom, it was scary to see her like that. The male members of our community did not want the females to become independent, we fought and continue to fight many battles for our independence. Once women began to feel safe and empowered, this created happier home lives for them and their partners. Physical and mental wellbeing have been the key to the success of the group.

There is still a lot of work to be done in Lye, we need to create a platform for all communities to come together and tackle issues like litter, drug issues and theft.

Lye is our little village, we are a close knit with many treasures around us, for example the park and the library which others towns do not have.

Roller skating and horse riding by Linda

I've lived in Lye since 1960 and am proud of Lye. My two sons grew up in Lye and have now moved on due to their careers. I remember the times when all communities got on with each other and knocked on each other's doors to check if they needed anything. We used to go roller skating at Lye Cross. I had a horse as I worked at the Wassell Grove Kennels and often rode it to and from Lye. I still enjoy the borough canal and go on walks and dance.

"I've lived in Lye since 1960 and am proud of Lye".





Engineering and glass works by Angela Rea

I've lived in Lye for 33 years and loved every minute. We've got a fantastic area, the park is beautiful. It's a lovely community, very diverse, lots of lovely people. You need to speak to people as you find them and once you get to know them, you have a friend for life. They are golden.

I've always had jobs in the area. I worked for Caparo engineering. I was a sample maker. The designers would design a car part, they would draw it. I would measure that part, cut the materials and then I would put it together with some other people. There was two of us in there.

Then, if it worked and the company was happy, then we would get the contract for that part. It was really interesting.

I also did every job in the glass works. I was a sandblaster, worked on the crack off which is where you took the glasses off the layer as they came down, inspected them, put in the tubs. Then they would go to crack off where they cut the tops off, finish them and polish them. That one was at Thomas Webb, which was Edinburgh Crystal in Colley Street. I also worked for Stuart Crystal.

"It's important we learn more about the wonderfully diverse community, we live in and better understand the talents, skills and passions of the people that reside here."

Assad on page 5

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"I will always remember how the community came together to help complete the work so we could get married."

Michael Troon on Page 9

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"Lye has always been a friendly and lovely place to live."

Margaret Myers on page 9

Just Got Personal by David and Kerry Holmes

Just Got Personal is a family run business providing personalised gifts for every special occasion or celebration. We started out operating online and last year decided to expand the business and secured premises on Lye High Street. This has enabled us to display the items and attract further custom. We decided to go ahead and open even though we'd heard stories about businesses closing on the High Street and community tensions. The local community have been really welcoming and people pop into the shop regularly to see what's on offer. We feel really welcome in the area and wouldn't hesitate in recommending businesses to come to Lye High Street.

Ahmed Boutique by Shamim Azar

We've lived in Lye for over 50 years. My husband arrived in Lye when he was 11 years old. We own a clothing business on the High Street. I recently decided to close the business as I want to retire and help my husband with his charity work. He has worked hard all his life and has opened a school for homeless children back in Pakistan. We have five children who have grown up in Lye however they now live in Colley Gate. I remember bringing them up in Lye and have very fond memories. We felt safe and part of the community.



From writing with bamboo shoots in a school in Pakistan to Mayor of Dudley

Councillor Mohammed Hanif tells us about his love of Lye

I was born in Pakistan in 1958 and came to England at the age of 8 after Dad came to the UK in 1960. When Dad arrived in the UK he flew into Heathrow Airport and took a National Express coach to Birmingham,

then the number 9 bus to Stourbridge, which still runs to this day. He got off the bus and had no idea where he was going. A couple walking their dog directed him to a nearby Asian household where they

knew his friends would be. People were so helpful.

We lived in Reading when I first came. During Christmas and Eid time, we were the only family that were distant so we moved to Lye, Stourbridge in

1973 due to friends, family and mosque links.

Lye was a flourishing area. The High Street was great for fruit, vegetables, meat, fashion, shoes – you name it you could get it there! There were Halal grocery stores too. There were steelworks, foundries and many industrial works. You were able to go from one factory to another and start a new job easily.

In 1979, I had a summer job at Helix Limited for five weeks which turned into a career for 22 years. The company were impressed with my skill set and offered me a full time job opportunity when my summer placement ended. After a few years I became a Senior Quality Manager. The opportunities kept coming to develop into different departments and the company grew. By 1998 there were approximately 928 people on their books. I knew most people on a first name basis.

I had the opportunity to move and work in Milton Keynes but turned it down as I loved working in Lye, the character, the people and the culture. Helix was a company that involved the community.

Changes over time

There have been many changes in society over time. People started to purchase their own properties and there was more integration. I can remember the Stourbridge Bus Station changing at least four times since I've been here.

I didn't know a word of English when I arrived. I studied

for 11 months and became fluent in English, attended the Longlands School followed by Dudley College in 1978 to complete my A Levels. I got married at the age of 19. I remember having long hair and was described as a Bruce Lee look-alike by friends. I represented the students in the students' union which sparked an interest in leadership and politics.

I remember playing a lot of football, going to the garden behind the church, getting the pears off the trees and getting told off about it.

My dad fought in the British Army. He travelled from Pakistan's Rawalpindi to Amritsar in India. I'm so happy to see our community is being recognised for their part in the Army during recent Remembrance Day celebrations.

Becoming a councillor

In 1995 my wife went to see the local MP Deborah Shipley for advice on an issue we needed support with. I told her that if she ever needed support, I would happily get involved. I started to help and Deborah soon realised the amount of people I knew would be a huge advantage.

In 2002 I stood as candidate in the local elections. Deborah Shipley helped me gain further knowledge about the role. In 2007 I got elected. I was delighted to be able to get the opportunity to support such a diverse community.

It was a huge honour when I became The Mayor of Dudley. I've enjoyed the role and have been able to contribute and raise recognition of many charities. It's fascinating seeing all the good work going on across the Borough – looking at the organisation, volunteers and people.

From being in school in Pakistan, writing with bamboo shoots dipped in ink to becoming the Mayor of Dudley, I feel fortunate to have had these opportunities and it's been an honour and privilege, especially being the first Muslim Mayor, which has changed a lot of perceptions.

Hidden treasures

There have been many great times in Lye. I remember the Lye Carnival. It used to bring out the best in the local traders and people would travel from afar to come. I'd love to have it back, we need to showcase our diverse heritage and culture.

I also remember Mister Dave's Restaurant. Dave was a waiter at a restaurant in Moseley, Birmingham. He then came to Lye to open his own restaurant which was really successful. People came from afar just to eat at his restaurant. People remember him to this day.

For me, the hidden treasures are definitely the people. We need to encourage cohesion and bring different people out and connect them more. It's important to understand each other.



Mister Dave's story

When I was 32 years of age, I was working in telecommunications and juggling a few other jobs. I'd been visiting Balti houses in Sparkbrook, Birmingham for a while. The food was always great and I couldn't believe the amount of people it attracted, locally and from afar. I decided I was going to open an Indian restaurant. My friends told me I was mad as I wasn't from India so how could I possibly produce a good curry? One of the restaurants in Birmingham known as 'Royal Kababish' offered to train me in the art of creating vintage Pakistani, Indian and Punjabi cuisine.

At first I looked at Stourbridge and central Dudley and finally, I looked at Lye. I was intrigued by the opportunities it offered with so many towns and villages within close proximity. I bought the kitchen equipment from a factory canteen in Redditch and sourced the tables and chairs from a restaurant that had gone out of business. I offered some of the staff that had trained me at Royal Kababish job opportunities and after some convincing, they came to join me in Lye. I opened the first Balti restaurant in High Street, Lye in 1984. Being English, I simply called it "Mister Dave's".

In the first full week we were open, we exceeded £1,700 in takings. On Saturday evenings there were queues of 30 to 40 people. By 6.10pm on the evenings we were full of people. We used to do four separate sittings of 65 people every Saturday evening. You ate your food using your naan breads and there were no knives and forks. Customers brought their own beer and wine. It was simple and affordable.

The layout of the restaurant encouraged social connections and friendships as we had quite a few shared tables. People used to visit with their partners and leave having made new friends, there was a real buzz about the place. I eventually opened three more restaurants in Worcester, Telford and Kingswinford.

For the first 18 months, we had very little competition in Lye and then slowly more Indian restaurants started opening. Lye was good to us and it soon became a food mecca for the whole area with so many choices and delicious options. People were travelling from all over the place to visit Lye and eat at the restaurants.

Fetching the coal from down the lock by Maureen

We used to fetch the coal from down the Dock, there was a coal-yard and I used to put the coal in a pram and push it all the way to Wollescote.

From around 1955 onwards, we used to go roller-skating up 'The Lye' every Saturday morning. It would take place at Lye Cross.

There was a slaughter house on Pig Street. Cows, pigs, sheep, you name it! I always remember we used to chase the pigs when they happened to escape. Afterwards, we would

go apple scrumping. In fact, we were always scrumping apples!

In the summer months, we would try and go on a 'Hop Picking' holiday with family and friends. I always remember staying in cowsheds whilst we were away.

I can remember the Clifton cinema turning into a toy warehouse. It's changed a few times over the years.

Love the way you Lye by a local resident

A chance occurrence brought me to Lye. I was living in Birmingham and friends living in Lye invited me to visit them at their home. We took our dogs around Wollescote Park and I immediately fell in love with the area.

I moved to Lye in the mid 90's via a brief spell in Hagley. We were looking to downsize and moved to Spring Street. We love that we can access the park so easily, it gives us a great area to walk the dogs.

One of my earliest memories after moving to the area was the Lye Carnival. It was lovely to see an industrial area like Lye put on an event like that. It really helped showcase the community spirit of the area.

'Harts Photography Shop' owned by Levin Hart brings fond memories flooding back. They were fabulous guys! I also used to frequent the 'Shovel' and 'Fox' pubs quite regularly.

Carnivals and knick-knacks by Andrea

I lived in Barn Close up until 1993. I remember Lye Market and also a good little second hand shop - "Gibson Brothers". My best memories were of Lye Carnival which went down the High Street and there was a fair positioned on the car park. I remember the Toppers Marching Band, as my sister had been part of the group. It was a lovely town to be brought up in!

"The local community have been really welcoming"

Kerry Holmes on page 13



"I've lived in Lye for 33 years and loved every minute. We've got a fantastic area, the park is beautiful. It's a lovely community, very diverse, lots of lovely people"

Angela Rea on page 12



Lye Library – books, Knex, filling forms and connecting people

by Melvyn Blackmore

I have worked for Dudley Borough Libraries for approximately eight years. I enjoy coming to work, helping and supporting people. One of my biggest successes was introducing Knex, (a type of Lego) to local young people, approximately five years ago. The first ever group was introduced on a summer reading challenge launch day at Lye Library. It was very successful and approximately

25 young people came to the event. Knex is still running to date and has expanded to all libraries across the borough. The council supported this initiative by providing training courses. I've been running the Knex group at Stourbridge Library for the last 18 months, which still has a waiting list. I'm looking to restart a similar group at Lye Library in the near future.

I'm passionate about helping people, providing assistance and supporting people. We support people to complete visas, help them search for jobs or opportunities and encourage them to attend library sessions like rattle & rhyme. We actively work with the Friends of Lye Library group and we recently supported their coffee morning where approximately 40 people attended. Books were sold making a total of £62. I find working in Lye and helping people really rewarding. The dynamics in Lye are completely different to the libraries across the borough. I recently helped a middle-aged couple with some visa forms and they bought me chocolates as a thank you.

Making links with the local businesses, GP practice, pharmacy, café and supermarkets is really important to me. Supermarkets are providing boxes to store books, encouraging them to come into the library and see what is going on. The café is supporting us by letting me promote library activities in the shop window. Voluntary help has been forthcoming from a lady in the pharmacy and books have been donated by the GP practice since the re-launch of a new Friends of Lye Library group. I've made connections

with a Romanian speaking interpreter, who is supporting the friends group and helped translate leaflets for events. Both the interpreter and I have approached the Roma community who gather around the local church and we were able to encourage four of them to join our coffee morning event. These small steps will help us build more connections with the community.

I love local people popping into the Library, they're all very pleasant. I understand that local teenagers can be challenging however this is the case in all other areas across the borough. If I see people waiting outside or seated across from the library, I make the effort to go and talk to them and see if I can assist them in any way. All the diverse cultures we have in Lye have one thing in common, they're all sociable, friendly and welcoming and I've made close connections with them. I recently visited a local lady in hospital to help keep her feeling connected to Lye and updated her on community news and events.

I will continue to provide support on a daily basis whilst enjoying my role. I hope to create a community library where everyone feels welcome, continuing to connect with the people of the Lye and increasing community cohesion.



"Lye is our little village, we are close-knit with many treasures around us, for example the park and the library which others towns do not have."

Durri on page 10



Factory Fodder and hidden treasures by Elaine

I was born here in Lye, attending Crabbe Street first then Valley Road School. We were not given the impression we could be more than we were and we were sent out straight to work as "factory fodder". I remember living on Valley Road, a street where you knew everyone, a lovely place with a strong community. My hidden treasures in the Lye area are the Library and also Wollescote Park which is beautiful.

I've since moved but I still have family in the area. I take the bus every Friday to come to Christ Church. I can't come on Sundays due to timetables. I love the people and the welcoming that the church gives.

"I'm proud that Lye has a park, three mosques, a library and a High Street."

Naseem on page 21



Part of the community by Naseem

I'm born and bred in Lye. Lye used to be a safe place to live. There was no fear of violence, theft, drugs and fly tipping. I volunteer with the Diyya Project and have been able to lose weight through the activities that are provided. I felt part of the community whilst growing up and that community, school life and childhood was great.

Lye has changed over the years with the different communities that have come to the area. Work needs to be done to understand each other.

I'm proud that Lye has a park, three mosques, a library and a High Street. I enjoy going to the Lye Community Centre for Zumba classes.

Teaching and learning English

Keith and Iftikhar tell the story of their long friendship

Keith

I've lived in Oldswinford since 1969. I was a teacher at the Oldswinford Hospital School and am now retired. I'd become disengaged with teaching modern languages and started to look for rewarding occupations. I went on to teach as a Home Language Tutor and that's how I met Iftikhar. We've become very close friends and I even attended Iftikhar's wedding in Pakistan. When I went, the first thing I saw was a painted cow. I was told it was identified for sacrifice purposes. At a relative's house, someone offered me a whisky which really surprised me. I got to wear Pakistani clothes and ride a horse at the wedding!

I met Iftikhar during the summer of 1981. He wanted to be a motor mechanic and I wasn't impressed with his English language. Then I realised there was an 'Indian English'. It soon became apparent that Iftikhar's English wasn't that bad and I was asked to teach Iftikhar other things as well as English. It was decided

that I would teach him Maths. I re-learnt Maths myself and taught Iftikhar. After three years of teaching Iftikhar, he completed O level Maths.

Iftikhar's mother was always hospitable and I got to drink Asian tea. I found it quite funny to know that the tea, spices, water and milk were cooked in a saucepan. I got use to drinking it with rather a lot of sugar.

What I did for Iftikhar was crucial, the one-to-one support and time given to him, helped him release his own abilities and led to him getting an Accountancy qualification.

Iftikhar

I've lived in Lye since July 1981. I moved to Lye from Pakistan and I've lived in this area since. It was my first experience of living in the UK and my family and community have grown in this area. I don't think I'll move anytime soon. After one month of arrival, I became friends with Keith who was a Home Language Tutor. We've

become really good friends and I continue to enjoy Keith's company. Keith visited Pakistan in 1989 to attend my wedding and stayed for a month.

My father came to the UK in 1971 and lived in Manchester where he worked for approximately nine years' then returned to Pakistan. He then returned back to UK and came to Lye because of family. I was 17 years old when I arrived and had left education at college level in Pakistan. I had knowledge of the basics of English and Maths but my English was a problem as I had less experience of speaking the correct English dialect.

Coming to Lye was a completely different culture and environment from Pakistan. The people, the weather, it was all different. I started enjoying the new environment once my English improved. I could understand English when I arrived but struggled with speaking it. As time went on, I got involved with different groups which improved my English. The population in the



area was mostly Asian Pakistani and I spent time with them to help improve my English.

Going to college and the support from Keith were the two main things which helped me learn English. Keith taught me to drive and six months later, I passed my test on my first attempt.

Keith made a big difference in my life, not just language skills but with other social and life skills. The Home Language Scheme was a successful scheme and I regret it doesn't exist anymore. It filled a gap at the time. I went onto to do Accounting and learnt how to translate from Urdu to English whilst in Pakistan which led to good results in A and O Level Urdu.

What happened next?

Keith

I taught Nusrat Mohammed, Iftikhar's cousin who was aged 10 when he arrived in the UK. He spent four years in an English school not learning anything else but English. After four years there was this 14 year old and he had no idea what a fraction was so I went on and taught him. My own son Patrick was in the same form and he was disgruntled as he felt I was teaching Nusrat more than him. Nusrat unfortunately failed his Maths exam but went on to King Edwards in Stourbridge. At the time King Edward's accepted students and put them through

the exam again. He did pass on his re-take. He went onto Bradford University and is now a Pharmacist. The Lye Pharmacy is owned by him.

I helped many other students from the Lye area who went onto achieve successfully thanks to the Home Language Scheme. I can only remember one case that wasn't so successful as the young person wasn't interested in learning. I know one man who is still in the same job as he was when he left college."

Iftikhar

I joined Dudley College Accountancy classes later than usual and remember the Tutor asking me if I'd be able to catch up and pass. I was determined and passed the course. I went on to work in an accountancy firm in Bromsgrove and worked there for five years then became self-employed and have practiced privately to date. My small practice is still running in the Lye area. Initially my clients were all from Lye but they now come from Stourbridge and Dudley.

I work part-time but my brother and other partner work full time. In 2000 I purchased a residential care home for the elderly with a doctor friend in Stourbridge which is still running successfully. I feel I have been really useful to the community and tried to contribute in different ways. I've been involved in other social projects too.

While I was studying, I was also working full time, initially in Birmingham where plastic bags were made. I worked there for approximately three years then moved to a tyre moulding factory in Tipton and started working as an 'After Buffer' where my uncle and cousin were working. I hold a City & Guilds qualification for stripping tyres. This sort of job is no longer available.

Whilst working in Tipton I spoke to the staff and mentioned I was studying accountancy and got the opportunity to work in the office, in the Accounts Department. I used to finish my shift at 2pm and go into the office for a few hours. Job opportunities in Lye were sparse, there were a few factories but they have all disappeared now. There were large factories in the 60's and 70's which have closed over the years.

At the moment I'm supporting my eldest son who has just qualified as a medical doctor in Pakistan. He studied there for six years. My younger son is studying medicine in Czech Republic and my daughter is studying A Levels.

I think my determination, hard work and strength have been the seeds to my success and have helped me to become successful.

Most people were friendly and co-operative at the time in Lye. I remember the High Street being two way traffic until about 10 years ago when the Lye By-Pass was built. There were

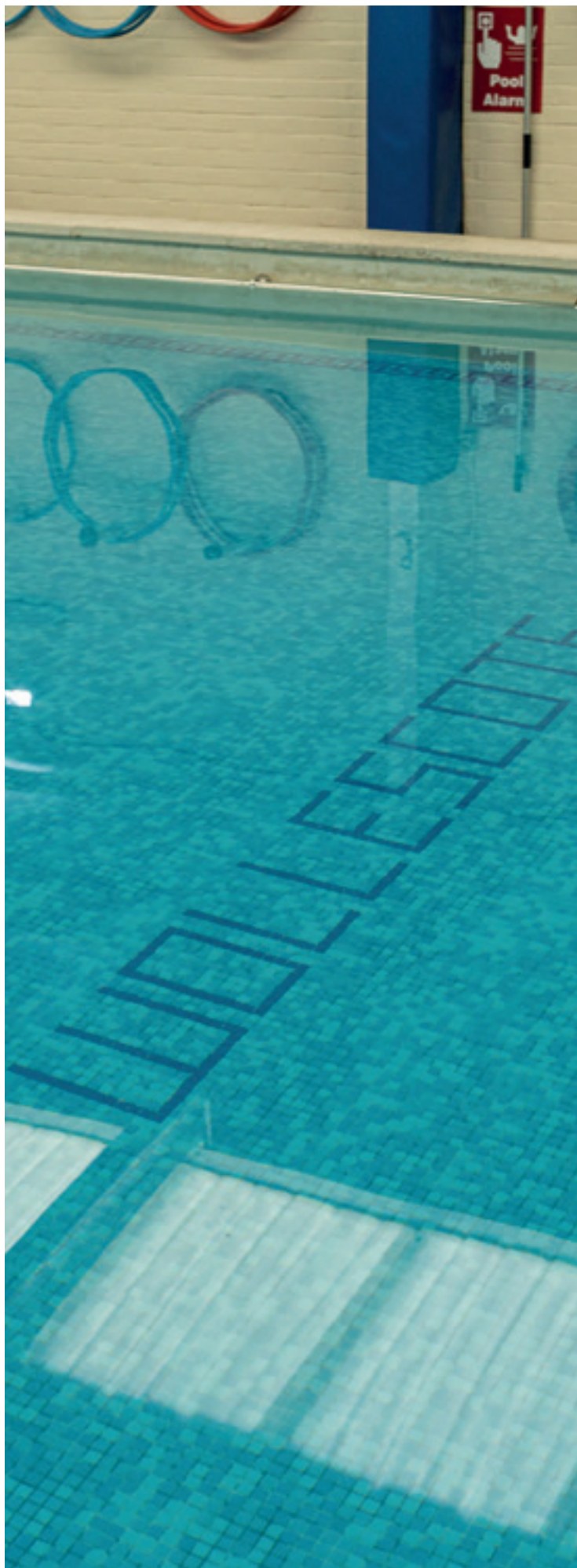


banks in the High Street and I still use the Asian shops down the High Street.

There was a market hall which used to be a cinema but I didn't see it as a cinema. The market was sold on to a private owner about 10 years ago and it is now a successful supermarket. The Library has always been where it is. Small shops have suffered generally due to larger supermarkets appearing which is evident in other areas not just Lye.

Community, friends, family and home will keep me in Lye for the foreseeable future. I feel well connected with community and family members and going away to live somewhere else would be uncomfortable now and would make me feel lost and disconnected from everyone.





The generosity of Lye people

by a local resident

I've lived here all my life. I wouldn't be living anywhere else.

I personally think it is one of the nicest places. I live in a street where there is no litter at all, it's picked up. I have a 96 year old neighbour and one or the other in the street will go and see her twice a day.

If anyone can't put their bins out, people put them out and everybody's bin is put back in their drive or wherever they are by other neighbours. Now where will you find that?

I'll tell you about the Lye & Wollescote swimming pool. It was built forty years ago. The money was not only raised by the parents, it was also built by the parents. And that is quite unique in the whole of the United Kingdom. It never happened anywhere else, it didn't happen in Hagley or any posh places. It happened in The Lye.

Here we have chapels, we care about the old people. There is the Bethel Chapel that has two minibuses and it fetches the people in on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening and these are old people who would not be going out. And on a Wednesday they have the Cornerstone lunch group and once again, mainly old ladies, are brought in for their lunch and taken back.

The United Reform does two days a week. They don't have any coaches but Ring and Ride, I believe. And they have a waiting list. And the ladies who go to the Chapel, I think it's £3 for a two-course meal and a coffee. But it means a lot of people... the isolation of the elderly

here, unless there is somewhere local to go... and it's not good for anyone's mental health. I mean. I know personally.

There is Little Lambs, the nursery centre at the Bethel Chapel. A couple of years ago it had the best Ofsted in the West Midlands. It's normally a queue to go there and just a wonderful place. People absolutely love it.

The Lye Community Centre is very unique. Christine Squires, for years she has run the Lye Community Centre. No pay and her friend who is with her today, they clean it. Otherwise, a few years ago, the Centre would have gone.

They have a new thing at the Community Centre and on a Monday it's a craft group. Don't have many people yet but you go there, do the crafts and there's no charge to anyone. There's not the funding for that, they had a Christmas fair there and did quite well.

The amazing thing is, these ladies are in the 70s and they are prepared to open that centre, do the finances and also clean it. You'll never find that anywhere again.

I did say a few years ago and I said "I'm not being rude but why are you doing this?" and she said "I live opposite and I don't want a derelict community centre there". And if you go to the Wren's Nest and the Priory estate, trees going round it, windows boarded up, but it was in Lye someone was prepared to do all that for nothing and she raised money for the central heating. Christine Squires is quite exceptional.

My last thing the Lye Action Group. I think this is the best thing that has ever happened in Lye. Nobody runs anything perfectly because nobody's perfect but the litter that is picked up and moved away. In social housing because that is where most of it is dropped, there are phone calls made and there are young mums with three children who will get those purple bags and fill them. They'll put needles in, any rubbish that is going around at all. Beat that!

From years ago we had the Carnival, took the whole of the street. In Stourbridge they may have had their three lorries doing whatever it is you raise money on, but in Lye it was seven. Every year. We raised more money here, more



than any other part of the borough where else. Unbelievable how much Lye people put in.

When it was raising money for the hospice, when the day unit was first built, the twins who were around Merry Hill, the Richardson brothers, they gave teddy bears, two of the biggest teddy bears that you had seen, to raise money.

And I just happened to be with the Director of the Hospice and I said I come from Lye because people immediately think you're a bit rubbish. And he said "Can I tell you something Carol? The Balds Lane Tavern pub raised more money than all the pubs in Stourbridge or anywhere put together". And that is the generosity of Lye people which you don't hear about.

A Fresh Start by Diane Powell

I moved to Lye for a fresh start, I've only been here a year but I have met some amazing people and am very happy here. My son lives in Lye so I get to see more of my grandchildren

When I moved here I was determined to get involved in the community. Up until now I had found it difficult as I had a hectic job and worked all kinds of unsociable hours. I have never been religious but I thought I'd give the church a try so I joined Bethel Chapel. The people there were so friendly and welcoming and I have made some good friends there.

One day whilst out walking my dogs I accidentally came across the allotments. The gates were open so I went in to discover a huge beautiful garden with people pottering around weeding and watering the fruit and vegetables. I'd never grown a thing in my life except my own teeth and hair, but this looked like something I'd like to try. So I spoke to one of the men watering the plants and asked how I could get involved.

A year later I have a two allotment plot and my own lady shed. I'm growing marrows, beans, potatoes, cabbages, courgettes, tomatoes and butternut squash. I have a small piece of land that I've dedicated just for wildlife with lots of flowers and I've made a small pond to encourage more insects. My allotment has helped me a lot with my mental health and I can't express enough how much nature and growing helps with mental health.



"There was a real feeling of togetherness and community spirit"

Margaret Myers on page 9

There is a great community spirit here, we all help each other and share"

Harry Page 29



Springfield Allotments by Harry

I've been working on Springfield Allotments for 15 years I'm also the Joint Chair of the committee that runs the allotment.

The word allotment is very old. Lords would allot their workers a piece of land to grow vegetables. Allotments were very popular during the Second World War as food was scarce and had to be rationed.

We have three different pieces of land here, we rotate to protect the soil. There are lots of different people who have plots here, different ages, cultures, gender and ethnicities. Majority of people are retired as you need a lot of time to look after a plot. No one realises but it's called Springfield because there's lots of fresh water springs here. We have lots of different fruits growing here like pears, kiwis, grapes and damsons. We also have beehives.

There's a great community spirit here, we all help each other and share. If you are new and you only have a spade, don't worry because we will share our tools with you, that's what it's like here.

Most of our equipment and resources have been given to us or recycled. The manure is from a bull farmer I know in Shropshire, the timber is left over timber from building sites and the wood chippings are from a local tree surgeon.

We facilitate 16 week gardening courses for a young people ages 16-25 local training centre. I really enjoy it, it's great having the young and old learning and working together. Every day we help the young people achieve something that they can see and be proud of.

Sharing friendships and food

by Halima

I was born in Pakistan and have lived in Lye since the age of four years old. I went to Wollescote Primary School, Grange Secondary School and Stourbridge College. I got married after attending education. There have been many changes but the biggest change is the mix of cultures in the area. When I was younger, it was the White British and Asian communities. Over time Lye has become a cultural community, incorporating many other cultures e.g. Roma, Romanian, Indians, Muslims, African, etc. Shops are now owned by Asian communities as well as White British communities.

I feel safer going shopping now than when I was younger. My children are growing up with all these communities around them which I am proud of. Children no longer look at colour, they judge friendships by personalities. Twenty years ago I would not dare sit with White British people and eat Asian food. Now I do this and feel communities want to share their friendship and food is a change for the better.

I'm worried there is nothing in the Lye area for the youth of today. Influences such as

technology have taken over and kids are not communicating face-to-face, they are hanging out in gangs and are desperate to fit in. The Claycroft play area has disappeared and there is not much on at the park for youths. The Valley Road Youth Centre was a great asset having so much on for kids. I volunteered at the centre and supported cooking classes for girls whilst boys got to take part in physical activities. There were even day trips for everyone. The Ghausia mosque ran play schemes and these have even closed down.

I'm now working full time but find time to volunteer with the Diyya Project. We are looking into re-introducing a playscheme and some educational workshops and activities for the youth. The Diyya Project caters for all age groups and runs community events, sewing classes, provides computer access and has also run courses around pain management and chronic pain disease.

The Library is a great asset for our community, especially the elderly, they are able to go and read newspapers and meet and make new friends.



If you want a curry, look no further than Lye

by Leanne Barratt

I have been living in Lye for around 12 years after getting married here in 2007. There have been a number changes over those years and a real decline in opportunities for children. I remember the music, dance, activity and youth clubs that used to be run across Lye but now we have very little. There is currently an ongoing issue with litter and cleanliness and community spirit seems to be very low.

Community is important, I love seeing people come together. We have arranged spring and Christmas fayres at the community centre. I host a crafty crafters group that let's participants explore their creativity, making lots of different

things. We are currently exploring rock painting activities, using the park to set trails and exciting activities. I'm really eager to set up a Youth Club at the community centre to help 8-11 year olds connect and take part in fun activities.

I love the park! It's such a great space to switch off and relax. I love the brook at the bottom of the park. The locality of Lye is brilliant and you've got lots of great convenience stores and restaurants on your doorstep, as they say "If you want a curry, look no further than Lye". The local schools offer our kids strong educational routes and Smarty Pants nursery is brilliant for toddlers.



This document was produced by Ideas Alliance CIC in partnership with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's Public Health Team and residents of Lye