

# CASTLE VALE

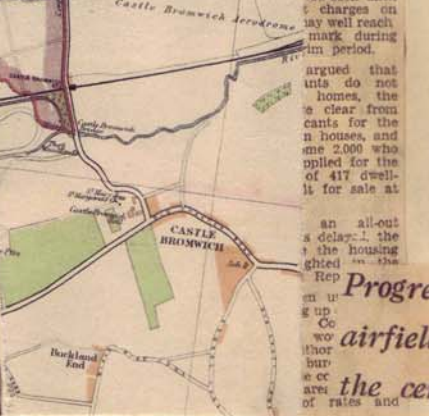


**BRITISH INDUSTRIES FAIR**  
**BIRMINGHAM**  
**1920**

AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE BOARD OF TRADE BRITISH INDUSTRIES FAIR ORGANIZED BY THE BIRMINGHAM MUNICIPALITY & CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & HELD CONCURRENTLY WITH THE BRITISH INDUSTRIES FAIRS LONDON & GLASGOW. . .

**Feb 23<sup>RD</sup> TO March 5<sup>TH</sup>**

Bear or a needle or a precision instrument at one of the Fair, and at another - at Castle Bromwich Birmingham - the largest exhibition of civil engineering plant ever to be held at the B.I.F. Hundreds



**PICTURE SPECIAL**

**The housing battlefield**

*Progress report on Castle Vale, the airfield housing site until recently the centre of hot controversy.*

## CULTURAL CHAMPIONS PROJECT



# The Cultural Champions Project

## Castle Vale and Birmingham Archives & Heritage



Advert for British Industries Fair, 1920 [BA&H: Drw 341]



Construction of estate [Castle Vale Library History Collection]

### The Project

During 2010-11, Birmingham Archives & Heritage and Castle Vale Library collaborated on the *Cultural Champions Project*. Its aim was to provide local communities with access to archive collections and heritage materials relating to their own local geographical area, interests, issues and memories.

### Castle Vale Library Workshops

During the project, public talks in Castle Vale Library were run by a collections expert from Birmingham Archives & Heritage. A range of local social history subjects were covered including, "An Introduction to Archives", "From Birmingham to Castle Vale in Photos", "Birmingham at War", and "Oral Histories: Songs of Work and Voices from the Street".

### Archive Resources for Castle Vale

Birmingham Archives & Heritage contains a rich variety of historic materials and this introductory source guide is aimed at helping general readers who would like to know more about archives and the history behind the Vale. *Where can we find more information about the estate? What key stories connect with its landscape?*

### The History of Castle Vale

This learning guide focuses on events and issues leading up to the emergence of the Castle Vale estate, using images from heritage collections from Central Library and Castle Vale Library. For those who want a more detailed overview of the estate's history, the books listed below could be used in connection with the following images.

### Key Sources/Castle Vale General Histories

A History of Castle Vale [LF 91.8]

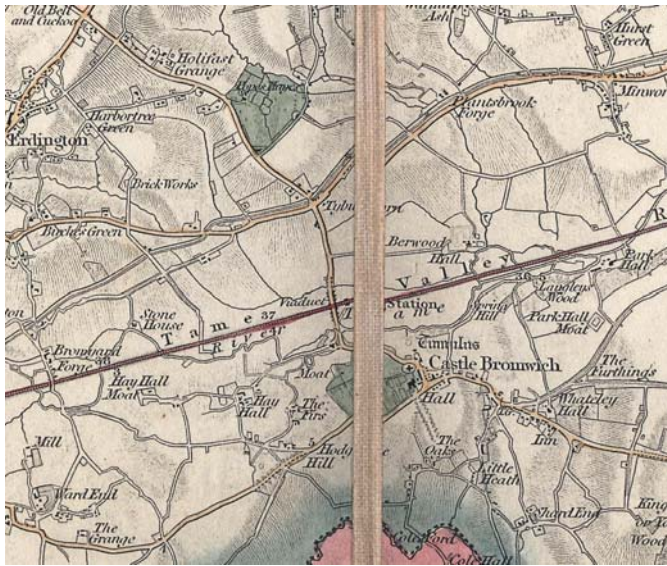
No Longer Notorious: The Revival of Castle Vale 1993-2005 [LF 91.8]

Images of England: Castle Bromwich, Castle Vale and Shard End [B.COLL/CASTLE VALE]

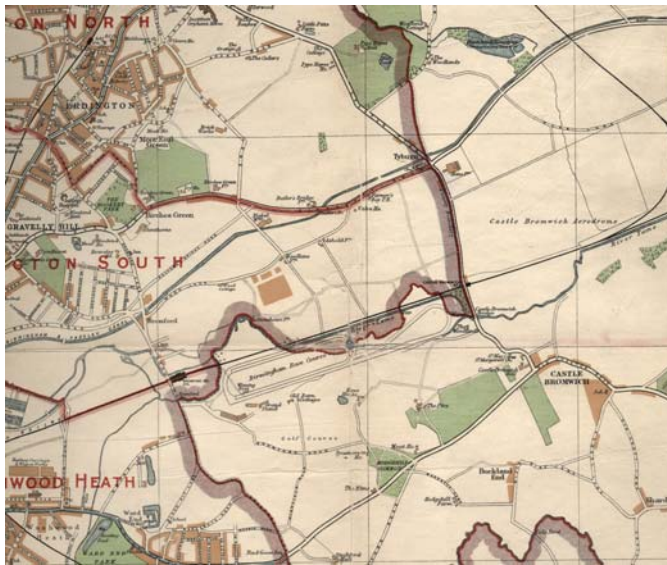
Castle Vale Birmingham: A reflection by Reverend F.A Carroll, 2002. [B.COLL/CASTLE VALE]



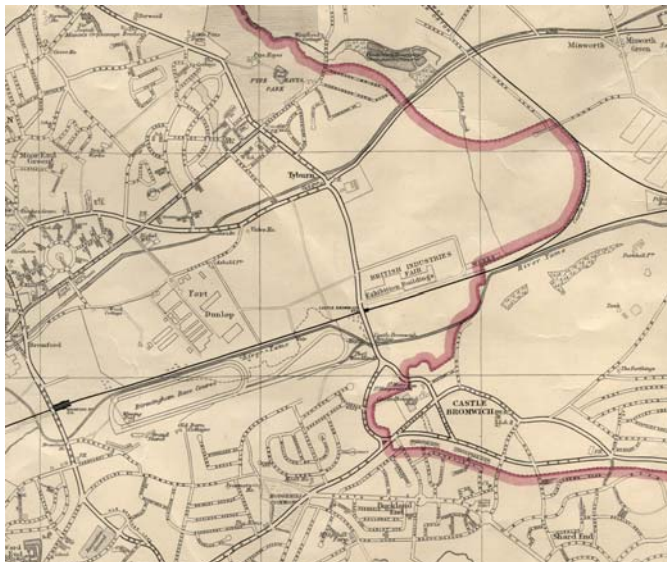
# From Castle Brom to Castle Vale: Mapping Landscapes



1860



1920



1949

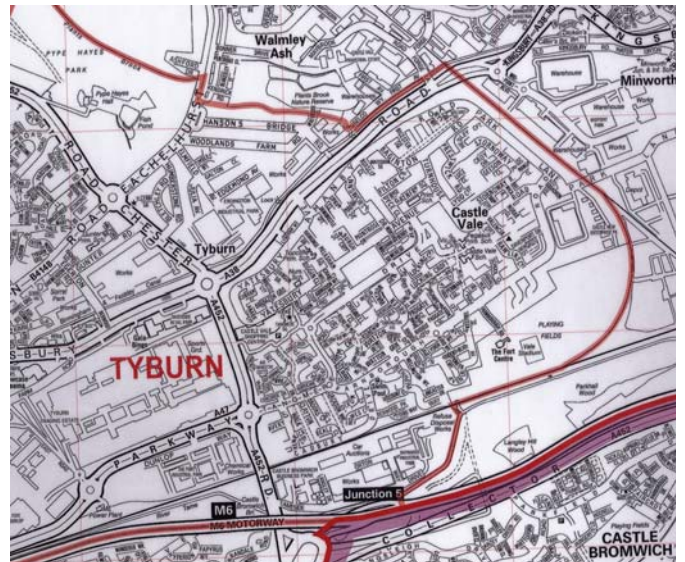
Maps can contain important social information. They show how the landscape on which Castle Vale now stands (once known as 'Berwood') went through many changes. Although in 1860 the area appears predominantly open and rural, the railway line was already a crucial link to social developments in the area. In the late 19th century, part of the flat landscape was also being used by the city Drainage Board. Soon however, its character was to become increasingly industrial. These maps are a small number of those in the Birmingham collections and show alterations across the years 1860, 1920, 1949 and 2005.

## Key Archive Sources/Map Collections

Examples used on this page:

- Warwickshire c.1860/Large/128
- Greater Birmingham c.1920/Large/134
- City of Birmingham c.1949/Large/136
- North East Birmingham 2005 [Map Collections]

[Note: A large range of local maps which may include the areas surrounding Castle Bromwich/Castle Vale can be viewed in Birmingham Archives & Heritage]



2005



# Massive rehousing from central areas

## Social Origins of Castle Vale Estate: Responding to Birmingham's 'Housing Crisis'

B'ham Mail 29.10.65

### Now 'Death Trap Alley' No. 2

**THEY LIVE IN FEAR OF BULGING WALL**



Evening Mail Reporter  
**A GROUP** of families who live beside a 50ft. wall at Aston are calling themselves "the forgotten people of Death Trap Alley No. 2."

The wall, which is topped by a chimney stack, rises above a group of 100-year-old houses in a yard at the back of Hanley Street.

And the wall appears to be bulging five feet from its base. Housewives said today they live in fear of the wall collapsing at any time, rendering their homes, and they are afraid when hanging out washing on lines attached to the wall.

It has become known as "Death Trap Alley No. 2" since the "Evening Mail" spotlighted the plight of families living in similar conditions in an alley off Granville Street, Ladywood.

**Terrified**  
 Mrs. Christine Davis, of 3/56, Hanley Street, said that her family was terrified of the wall, which dominated their lives.

Mrs. Davis, mother of an 11-year-old daughter and a son aged 10, said: "We fear that the pounding of heavy presses in factories all around us will bring the wall down."

Mrs. Olive Hughes, who lives alone at 1/55, Hanley Street, said that because of the height of the wall no light penetrated her tiny living room.

"I have to keep my electric light on all day and every day to see at all," she said.

"The wall has become an obsession with everyone around here. It is all we talk about; it rules our lives."

Another housewife and mother, Mrs. Evelyn, of 59, Hanley Street, said her son, aged five, nearly died recently when he fell into a nearby canal.

She added: "I had forbidden him to play in the yard."

... and 1,500 say: Our houses 'intolerable'

### 'SOME OF THE WORST CITY SLUMS'

Evening Mail Reporter  
 A PETITION signed by 1,500 people

Birmingham Mail, 1965 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Housing]

Past Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup> 1965



**PICTURE SPECIAL**

### The housing battlefield

Progress report on Castle Vale, the airfield housing site until recently the centre of hot controversy.

By John Lewis

THE flat expanse of the former Castle Bromwich airfield, Birmingham, still shows little above the ground for the years of planning and controversy which have surrounded the scheme to build more than 4,000 houses and flats there.

But on the ground and under it there is a great deal of activity.

If it is argued that municipal tenants do not want to buy homes, the answer is quite clear from the 2,000 applicants for the 110 Valley Farm houses, and the total of some 2,000 who have already applied for the small number of 417 dwellings to be built for sale at Castle Vale.

The longer an all-out housing drive is delayed, the greater will be the housing miseries highlighted by the Milner-Holland Report.

We have been years the setting up of Development Co. whose function was to advise local authority financial but they were in the of developing an area of interim loss of rates and rents.

There is land within Birmingham for well over 30,000 homes. Without Chelmsley Woods, Daventry, Overspill areas, and the New Towns, the House Building Committee has over 15,000 dwellings either being built or in planning stages.

All parties are committed to a massive drive but in this only effective answer to "bad landlords," it has taken 13 years to convert the Labour "booses" in Birmingham.

Birmingham Post, 1965 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Housing]

The roots of Castle Vale estate lie in the 'battles' over housing conditions that raged in Birmingham after WWII. Many inner city families who had survived the conflict were left stranded in poor quality housing, waiting to be re-housed. By the 1960s, large-scale estates like Castle Vale, complete with revolutionary new tower blocks, were seen as a radical response to this social crisis. Images on this page highlight the urgency of the issue and ways in which it was debated.

Standard Mail 6.4.67

# BLITZ ON CITY SLUMS

## Massive rehousing from central areas

### 'Gone by end of next year' target

Evening Mail Reporter

**NO** more slums left in Birmingham's five central redevelopment areas by the end of next year.

This is the new accelerated target now being recommended after the dramatic increase in the city's rate of municipal house building.

The original clearance programme for the five central areas was planned to be completed by 1971. But the Public Works Committee was being told this afternoon that the chief officers believe that a greatly

There are 7,100 slums remaining in the five central re-development areas, and it is proposed to clear half of them this year.

Totals proposed for clearance in future comprehensive development areas by 1975 are: Boulton, 1-3 areas (2,633); South Aston, 2 and 3 areas (4,120); St. Andrew's, 1 and 4 areas (2,272); Costa Green, No. 1 area (449); Marley (1,051); Calisbope, 1 and 2 areas (3,125).

Salford Park, Queen's Road, 1-3 areas (2,045); Chamberlain Gardens, 1 and 2 areas (4,171); St. Clement's, 1 and 2 areas (1,933); St. Andrew's, 2, 5 and 6 areas (1,428); Boston Park, 1-3 areas (3,334); Costa Green, No. 2 area (1,621); St. Andrew's, 2, 7, 8 and 9 areas (2,421).

St. Clement's, No. 3 area (665); Lonsdale (674); Lee Bank extension (1,100); Newton extension, James Street (548); Boulton, 4 and 5 areas (2,448); St. James (869); South Aston, 1 and 4 areas (893); St. Paul's (1,176); Conservation areas (2,650).

Birmingham Mail, 1967 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Housing]

### Key Archive Sources/Housing

- Birmingham Newscuttings/Housing
- Birmingham City Council Minutes/Housing
- Warwickshire Photographic Survey



## First Glimpses of Castle Vale Estate: Birmingham's largest post-war housing estate



[Castle Vale Library History Collection]

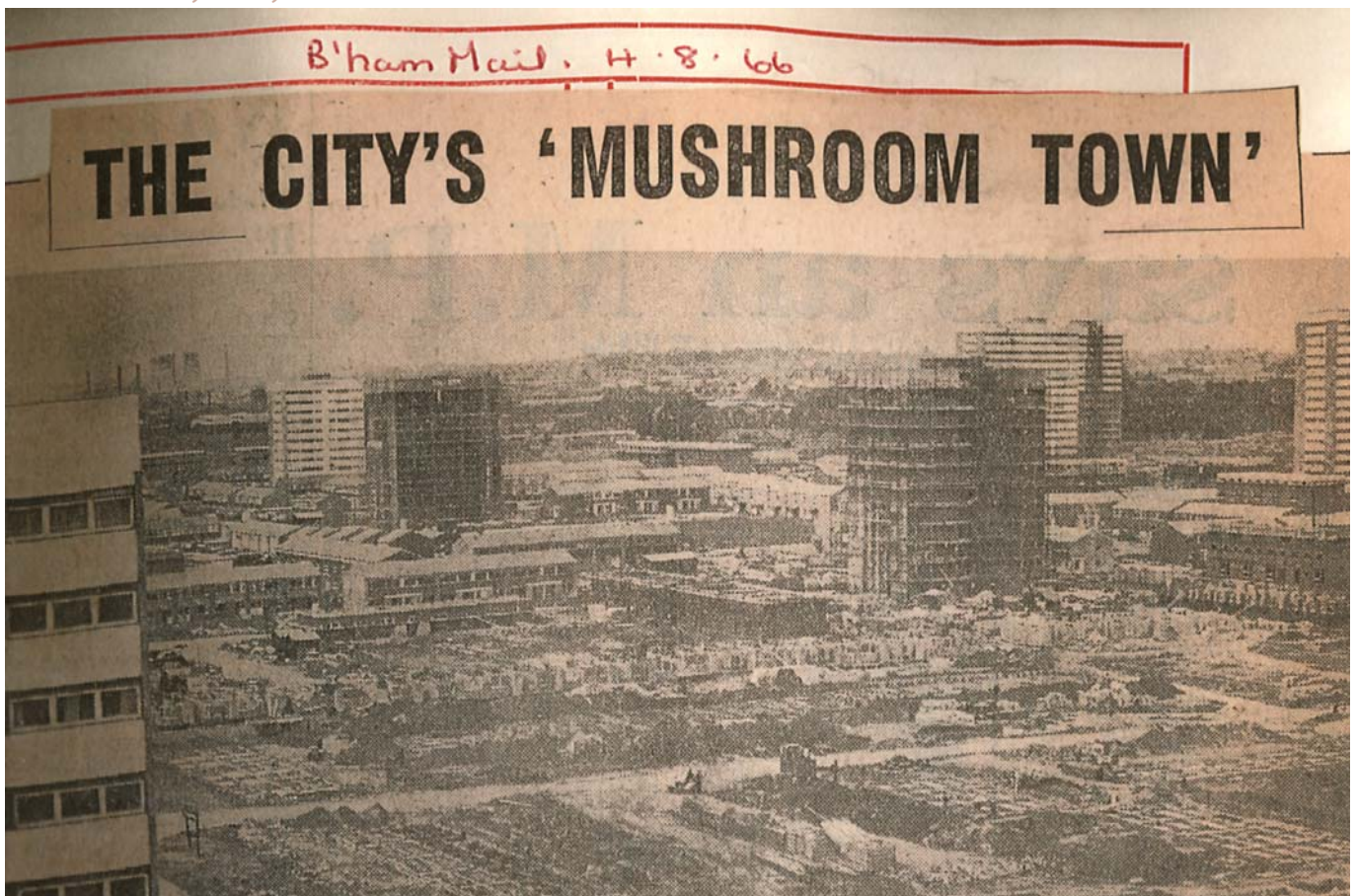
**"New homes are mushrooming on the 'town within a city' under construction on the old Castle Bromwich airfield site."**

*Birmingham Mail, 1966 [BA&H: Newscuttings/Housing]*

In the early 1960s, the historic airfield space at Castle Bromwich was chosen by Birmingham City Council as an area large enough to provide accommodation for up to 20,000 people. Built 1964-1969, Castle Vale became Birmingham's largest post-war housing estate. Images shown here and the next page (photos, newspapers, slides) give a vivid glimpse of the estate taking shape. In the future the estate would become involved in new community struggles over housing and living conditions.

**"Up and down the old airfield, the shells of new houses are rising and the tracks of new roads have been thrust across the plain. Within a few months, the first of many people will be moving on to the Castle Vale estate"**

*The Times, 17 May 1965 [BA&H: Newscuttings/Housing]*



*Birmingham Mail, 1966 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Housing]*

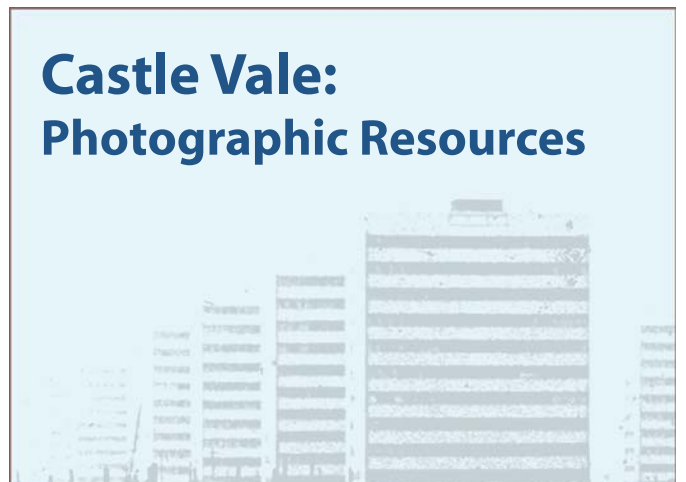




Castle Vale, c.1974/75 [BA&H: Birmingham Slide Collection]



Photos from Warwickshire Photographic Survey [BA&H:WK/C12/9]



### Key Archive Sources/Photography

Warwickshire Photographic Survey [WK]  
Birmingham Slide Collection/Castle Vale  
Early Castle Bromwich images; also see the  
Benjamin Stone Collection  
'Life on the Vale', 2004 [L91.8 BAI]  
Richard Harris Photographic Collection,  
'Utopia', 1999-2000 [MS 2335]  
Materials held in Castle Vale Library/Local  
History Collections; please contact library

[BA&H:WK/C12/7]





# Encounters in the Air: Castle Bromwich, WWI and the Aerodrome

*"In 1915, during the First World War, an airfield was established on the Berwood playing fields, by the War Department. This was initially used for training airmen, including ones from Canada and France, and later for testing newly built airplanes. The airfield initially had a very small staff - a commanding officer, his assistant and two mechanics. There were only three to four aircraft and opportunities for flying were limited to about forty minutes each day because of fog, high winds and industrial haze[...] the first active squadron at Castle Bromwich airfield was the No. 10 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. Pilots were trained to man the increasing number of squadrons in France[...] Initially the pilots were accommodated in tents and their mess was a large marquee. Later they were billeted at Erdington[...] German prisoners of war were housed in a corrugated iron shed on the airfield and were used to construct roads. The aircraft themselves were kept in huge corrugated buildings next to Castle Bromwich Station. These buildings were later to house the British Industries Fair."*

*[Geoff Bateman, 'A History of Castle Vale']*



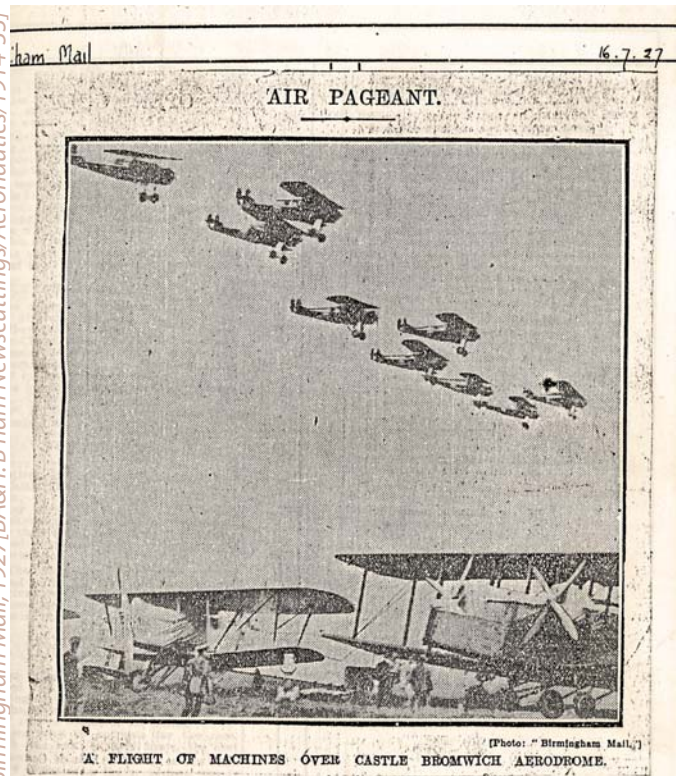
The lay-out of the Castle Bromwich Aerodrome for to-morrow's air pageant is indicated in the above plan. All visitors, motorists in particular, should carefully read the police notice in reference to traffic regulations which appears on our front page to-day.

Archives and maps show that Castle Vale's landscape contains a number of hidden stories. For instance, the map dated 1920 shown on a previous page reveals the presence of 'Castle Bromwich Aerodrome'. An aircraft is known to have landed on the local playing fields as early as 1909. However, the area's most significant first encounters with the sky came in 1915 during the First World War. Geoff Bateman's account (top right) tells us more.

After the allied victory, the fields continued to be used as the base for the Midland Aero Club. The yearly Air Pageants, which began in 1927, drew in huge crowds to see the daring airborne acrobatics in "an exhibition of crazy flying".

## Key Archive Sources/ Aerodrome and Airfield

Birmingham Newscuttings/  
Aeronautics/1914-33 onwards  
G. Bateman, 'A History of Castle Vale' [LF 91.8]



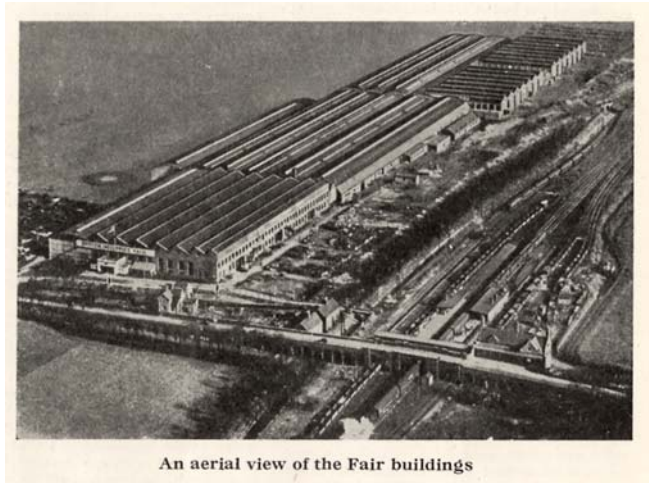
A FLIGHT OF MACHINES OVER CASTLE BROMWICH AERODROME. [Photo: Birmingham Mail.]

Birmingham Mail, 1927 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Aeronautics]





[BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/B.I.F./1924]



An aerial view of the Fair buildings

British Industries Fair, 1932 [BA&H: LF 62.7]

**NARRATOR:** A Teddy Bear or a needle or a precision instrument at one section of the Fair, and at another - at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham - the largest exhibition of civil engineering contractors plant ever to be held at the BIF. Hundreds of tons of machinery is now moving into place there - an enormous pile driver, built by a firm who have supplied great plants for the barrages in Pakistan, Egypt and Iraq and for harbour works in Capetown, Sydney and Bombay;

Extract from radio script, from the Charles Parker Archive [BA&H: MS 4000/2/2/2]



[BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/B.I.F./1924]

## British Industries Fair

The British Industries Fair is another important story connected to the site now occupied by the Castle Vale Estate. The previous 1949 map of the area shows the Fair building stood on the corner of the airfield. How did the fair begin?

After WWI it was more important than ever for Britain and Birmingham to promote its industrial economy. From 1920, the yearly fair allowed local industries to trade with merchants and markets from around the world, and the BIF drew large crowds of tourists.

The fair's international significance is illustrated on this page by a script from a radio show (from the Charles Parker Archive) and a news article on the first flight of Imperial Airways arriving at the Industries Fair with four Burmese passengers.

### Key Archive Sources/British Industries Fair

British Industries Fair Newscuttings [LF 62.7]  
Charles Parker Archive [MS 4000/2/2/2]

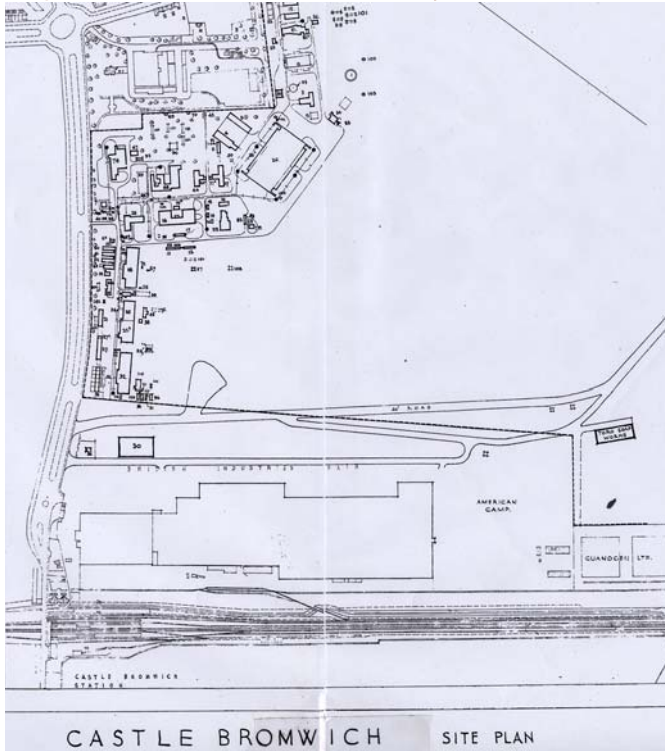


# WWII, Spitfires and Castle Vale Heritage

*"It may be said that air supremacy, long contested and hard won, owed more than can be computed to Midland factories, of which one alone produced over 11,000 Spitfires."*

[Birmingham Post, 2 May 1945]

Site plan of Castle Bromwich Aircraft factory, 1943.

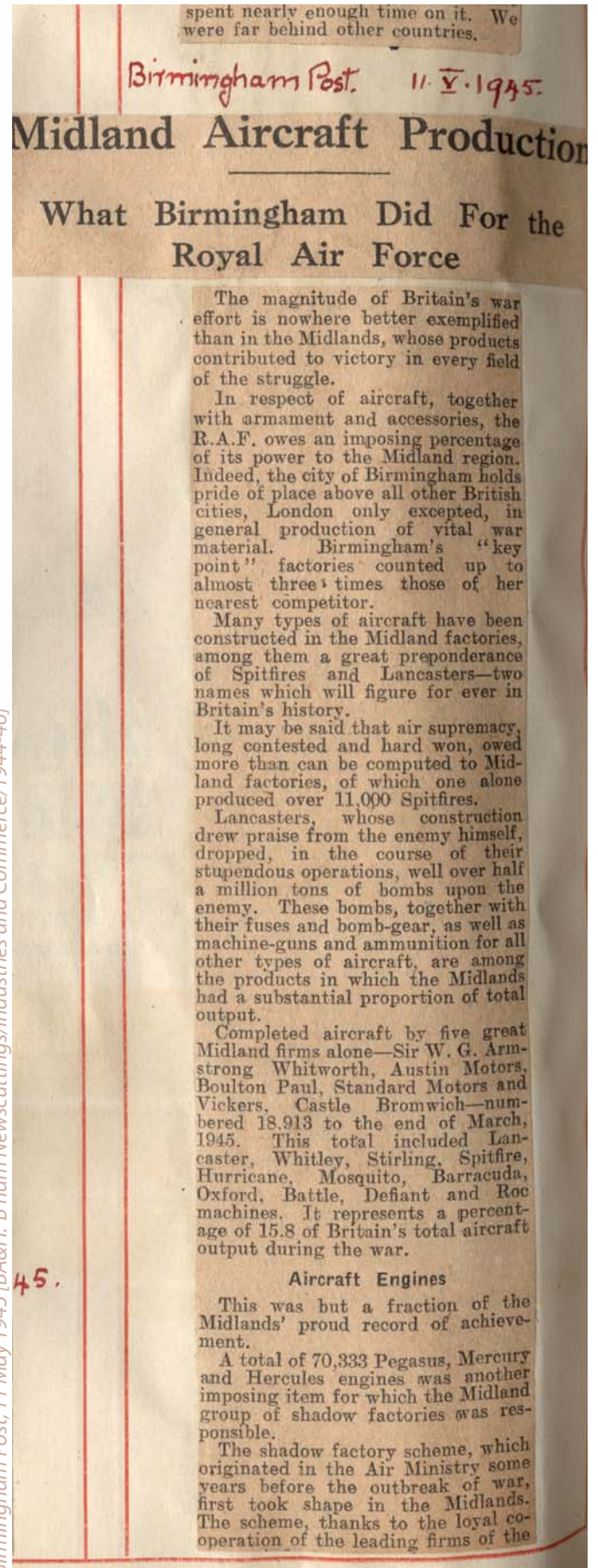


[BA&H: Birmingham/Suburbs Maps/Drawer 226]

Castle Vale's most important symbol remains the iconic spitfires produced in WWII by local factories where the Estate now stands. The article on the right shows a contemporary newspaper account celebrating Birmingham's vital involvement in the aircraft's production. On the following page you will find unique archive photographs of spitfires being built by communities of workers, many of whom were women, in the vast industrial hangers that were once prominent landmarks.

## Key Archive Sources/Spitfire Production

The Warwickshire Photographic Survey  
 Birmingham Newscuttings/Industries 1944-46  
 Castle Bromwich Site Plan Map, 1943/ Dr 226



Birmingham Post, 11 May 1945 [BA&H: B'ham Newscuttings/Industries and Commerce/1944-46]



# Castle Vale's Spitfire Factory



*Women workers at the spitfire factory, Warwickshire Photographic Survey [BA&H: WK/C1/137]*



*Rows of spitfires in production, Warwickshire Photographic Survey [BA&H: WK/C1/147]*





*Warwickshire Photographic Survey [BA&H: WK/C1/151]*

## Conclusion: Castle Vale Heritage Legacies of the Past, Lessons for the Future

This learning guide is a reminder of how Castle Vale stands on a landscape that should be seen as central to Birmingham's identity. The iconic outline of spitfires produced in WWII are a fitting image for an area whose identity has gone through far reaching histories of conflict, transition and development. At the same time, as life in the area continues to change, more work is needed to document the importance of old and new communities on the Vale.

Under the shadow of the spitfire, the heritage of the area is linked to important legacies and stories: the area's geographical position; the development of its airfields; the growth of its industries; the influence of events like the British Industries Fair; and, above all, the spirit of the men and women who have lived and worked in the area. When the first residents from across the city arrived to take up their homes on Birmingham's newest estate, they were but the latest in a long line of pioneers to shape the destiny of the area.



*[Castle Vale Library History Collection]*

### Key Website Sources

[www.birmingham.gov.uk/castlevalerhistory](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/castlevalerhistory)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle\\_Vale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_Vale)  
<http://birmingham.wikidot.com/castle-vale>  
<http://valemail.wordpress.com>





# The Cultural Champions Project

## Birmingham Archives & Heritage - General Information

### Visiting Birmingham Archives & Heritage

Plan your visit in advance so that you can make the most effective use of your time spent in Archives & Heritage. The service is based in Birmingham's Central Library and consists of an Open Access Area and an Archives Searchroom.

### Using the Service: Open Access Area

The Open Access Area, which in general holds printed local and family history material, genealogical sources, maps, local newspapers on microfilm and computers, does not require a special ticket.

### Using the Service: Archives Searchroom

The Archives Searchroom holds archival collections. All photographs, slides and engraved prints are also served in this area, together with early printed material and manuscript maps. A special CARN reader's ticket is required to use this area. The 'County Archives Research Network' is a national network of record offices that share one standard ticket system. So when you get a ticket from this office, you can use it at any of the other offices that are part of the CARN network. As part of a national network, tickets are required to be issued by the same standard rules. To obtain a ticket we need to see proof of your identification. This should be an official document with your full name, printed address and signature, such as a driving licence. See [www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage) for further information.

### Online Information for Birmingham Archives & Heritage

<http://calmview.birmingham.gov.uk>  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/>  
<http://birmingham.gov.uk/libcat>

### Contact & Enquiries

Contact us in advance, particularly if you wish to consult archival records in the Archives Searchroom and particularly if the archival material is under 100 years old and may be closed to viewing. It is also advisable to check opening hours and levels of service, which can change throughout the development of the new Library of Birmingham, due to open in 2013. Email: [archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:archives.heritage@birmingham.gov.uk) or phone: 0121 3034549.

Any enquiries that are specific to this *Cultural Champions* learning resource should be directed to: [andy.green@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:andy.green@birmingham.gov.uk) and not to Birmingham Archives & Heritage.

### Project and Learning Guide Credits

Dr Andy Green of Central Library would like to thank all of those who attended the *Cultural Champions* events. A special word of thanks goes to the patience and support of Castle Vale Library. Also thanks to the Vale Mail for their support in advertising various events.

*Produced 2011 by Dr Andy Green. Designed by Brigitte Winsor.*