

**OPAL West Midlands**

**News release**

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## **Explore Brierley Hill through rose-tinted eyes with new guidebook**

A new discovery book published by a National Lottery funded initiative coordinated in the West Midlands by the University of Birmingham's School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences is unearthing the plants and local history of Brierley Hill through gardener's eyes.

*Walking to Discover Brierley Hill*, written by local horticulturalist and former Director of the University's Winterbourne House and Gardens, Pamela Smith, is a free plant discovery guidebook which takes its readers on a horticultural adventure along two walks through the Black Country town, signposting the flora along the way.

Ms Smith takes readers from Marsh Park to Merry Hill, pointing out plants, folklore and places of interest along the way, and then describes a circular route from Marsh Park to the town's nine locks and back again. Both walks take approximately one hour at a normal walking pace.

Author, Pamela Smith commented:

"These are great walks to do across the seasons, but especially so at the moment with many of our trees and bushes in brilliant flower, including Elder flowers, which can be picked and used in the guide's recipe for Elderflower Cordial. It is a great way to discover new facts and stories as well as to get fit."

As well as stories and histories of the many plants that can be found in and around the Black Country, such as the Brier Rose, Rosemary and Monkey Puzzle Trees, the book also contains a floral themed pub quiz, floral-themed recipes and identifies local attractions en route. The book was published as part of the Big Lottery funded Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project.

Dr Adam Bates, geographer at the University of Birmingham and OPAL Community Scientist said:

"OPAL wants to help everyone appreciate that you don't need to go out into the countryside to see and enjoy great British wildlife, it is all around us in our towns and city. Pam's guide is a great tool to help the residents of Brierley Hill fully enjoy the nature on their doorstep."

Dr Linda Davies, Director of OPAL added:

"Everyone can take part in OPAL by exploring and discovering the natural world around them. There are activities to suit all ages and abilities and everyone's contribution is valuable. OPAL wants to inspire a new generation of nature loves and increase environmental awareness, which has both local and global relevance."

The guidebook is available to take or borrow from Brierley Hill Library or can be downloaded online at: <http://www.opalwestmidlands.org/>. For more information, please contact Pam Smith via 0121 458

5700 or [pam@sited.org.uk](mailto:pam@sited.org.uk). Further information about the OPAL project can be found at: [www.opalexplornature.org](http://www.opalexplornature.org).

## Notes to Editors

### About the author

Pam Smith is a horticulturalist who has worked in the West Midlands over the last 10 years helping people to discover gardens, plants and history on their doorstep and high street. For more information see: [www.sited.org.uk](http://www.sited.org.uk).

### About OPAL

- Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) is a nationwide partnership initiative, led by Imperial College London, that inspires communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environments. It aims to create a new generation of nature-lovers by stimulating interest through local and national projects which are accessible, fun and relevant to anyone who wants to take part. OPAL provides the skills and materials needed for the first national community-led study of the world around us. For more information, please visit [www.OPALexplornature.org](http://www.OPALexplornature.org)
- The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been providing grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. It was established by Parliament on 1 December 2006. Full details of the work of the Big Lottery Fund, its programmes and awards are available on the website: [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)
- The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. The programme funds a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets, to education projects teaching people about the environment. A £11,760,783 Changing Spaces grant was awarded to the leading OPAL partner, Imperial College London, in August 2007

### About the University of Birmingham

- The University of Birmingham is a truly vibrant, global community and an internationally-renowned institution, in the top 100 globally. With approximately 28,000 students and 6,000 members of staff, its work brings people from more than 150 countries to Birmingham.
- A member of the Russell Group of 20 leading UK research-intensive universities, in the last Research Assessment Exercise 2008, 90% of the University's research was identified as having global reach, in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
- The University welcomes more than 5,000 new students each year, and is one of the top six universities targeted by major companies when they're recruiting graduates.
- The University contributes £662 million to the City of Birmingham and £779 million to the West Midlands region, with an annual income of more than £462 million.

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