

The Leamington omnibus



Our 'Mr Leamington'

Lest anyone should wonder who the rather quaint little man wearing the cocked hat and holding the quill pen is on our masthead, he is Ben Satchwell. Small of stature but huge in influence, Ben was without doubt the one person who can lay claim to being the founder of the fashionable Regency town that the village of Leamington Priors subsequently became. We have 'adopted' the little sketch of Ben as our logo and will tell something of his story in future editions of this Newsletter.

Welcome aboard the The Leamington Omnibus.

Thanks for joining us on our occasional saunters along the highways and byways of the town's past as seen through the eyes of the Leamington History Group. Although this newsletter is produced primarily for our members, we are keen to make it available to a much wider readership of all ages. We hope that you will find something of interest within its pages. We also hope that some of you may be able to help us to document Leamington's more recent history and that you will want to come along to some of our meetings. Read on for full details of all our activities and thanks for joining us on our 'maiden voyage'

EDITOR

GOING, GOING - GONE!



Like its former distinguished Headmaster Dr Joseph Wood, seen here, the old Leamington College building in Binswood Avenue has recently passed into history. Designed by Squirhill and opened in 1848 it was the first purpose-built school in Leamington. Apart from a brief period as a convent before the First World War, it has always been an educational establishment. We think it is important to ensure that the history of such major local institutions is recorded. We have a small archive of photographs of the College and would be grateful for the donation or loan of any material relating to the school at any date. For our contact details please see below.

Bookshelf

Local History Books are a bit like buses, you wait ages for one to turn up and then several come along at the same time. The demise of many small independent bookshops and the singular lack of interest in local titles by the large book retailers has made life extremely difficult for authors and publishers wishing to sell local history titles. Notwithstanding these considerations, here are some books that have recently been published and which I am happy to recommend to you.

**Royal Leamington Spa
- A History**
Lyndon F Cave
**Published by Phillimore at
£18.99**

Toby Cave's original book for Phillimore has been the 'bible' for all those interested in Leamington history since it was first published in 1988. The new volume has been greatly expanded and includes much new material and many hitherto unpublished illustrations in its two hundred pages. The meticulous research that underpins Toby's books sets them apart from the average run-of-the-mill town history. We are fortunate indeed to have had Toby Cave researching and documenting the history of the town over the last fifty years. His knowledge of Leamington Spa and its erstwhile inhabitants is quite remarkable. This is the definitive history of the town and is unlikely to be surpassed. Go out and buy it and if you can't buy it, get a loan copy from the library.

Meet At Dawn -Unarmed
**Andrew Hamilton
& Alan Reed**
**Published by Dene House
Publishing at £19.99**

Sir Andrew Hamilton will be known to many through his connections with Leamington Cricket Club and the Tennis Court Club. Andrew was a history teacher before giving up the class room to take over the running of the Walton Estate on the death of his father Sir Richard Hamilton. Andrew knew that his grandfather Robert had served as a Captain with the 1st Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment in the Great War. What he hadn't realised was that his grandfather took part in the unofficial 'truce' in the trenches of the Western Front at Christmas 1914. The book is based on the diaries that his grandfather kept during the first months of the war. It is very well written and beautifully produced with lots of photographs and a number of cartoons by a fellow Captain in the Royal Warwicks, Bruce Bairnsfather. The book is aimed at a lay readership rather than military historians and is recommended. It is available from the Tourist Information Centre in the Royal Pump Rooms.

People & Places
Leamington History Group
£5

As someone who didn't submit a chapter for this little book, I feel able to offer an unbiased review. The book of a hundred pages or so is essentially an anthology of writings by members of the Group on various aspects of Leamington Local History. Each

chapter has been written by one of our members and is based on original research using documentary sources and the reminiscences of local men and women. The ten chapters cover topics such as a history of streets which have long since disappeared, the Polish community in Leamington, the Francis' Department store and a famous Leamington artist. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and copies of documents like census returns and most of its content has never before been published. This little book must surely be one of the greatest book bargains of all time at just £5! Copies can be obtained from South Lodge at any of our meetings and it is also on sale in the Tourist Information Centre in the Pump Rooms. There are also loan copies in the local history section of the library.



The Jephson statue in the Memorial Temple

A day (or two) in the life of a local historian

One sunny day in 2007 I was in Leamington Cemetery taking some photographs of the memorial stone of a rather eccentric former Leamington resident Mr Tracey Turnerelli, of whom more in another issue. Turnerelli is commemorated by a huge block of stone weighing several tons which is the largest feature in the cemetery. Having taken my pictures, I happened to notice that within a few yards of this memorial was a finely carved marble column about twelve feet tall on top of which was a stone panel. On one side of this panel



was a relief carving of an old-fashioned rowing lifeboat complete with crew and a floundering sailing vessel. This struck me as being a rather unusual thing to find in land-locked Leamington. A tablet at the base of the column bore the name of William Riley who had died in 1904. I took some photographs, made a few notes and went home.

I didn't give any more thought to William Riley and the lifeboat but within a few days there was a rather amazing coincidence. My good friend and eminent Leamington historian Toby (Lyndon) Cave rang me up to say that he had just read an article in a national newspaper which was worth following up. The gist of the article was that an old lifeboat had been found on the river Taw in Barnstaple and had been advertised for sale on the Ebay website. The pur-

chaser was a man from Whitby where the lifeboat had been stationed a hundred years ago. The boat bore the rather faded name *The William Riley of Leamington Spa & Birmingham*. Toby wanted to know if I had ever heard of William Riley! Only a week previously the answer would have been 'No'.

In the following months I learned a lot more about the boat which had by then been taken up to Whitby. A trust fund had been set up with Heritage Lottery funding and restoration of the old boat was well under way. The man directing the restoration was Peter Thompson the former engineer of the Whitby lifeboat. My wife and I travelled up to Whitby to meet Peter and were given a conducted tour of the project and the work being carried out. Since that day the William Riley has been fully restored to original condition and she joins a select group of only three preserved and seaworthy rowing lifeboats in Great Britain.

I also did some research on William Riley and found details of his will in an article in the July 1st 1904 edition of *The Courier* newspaper. One of the bequests was the sum of £3,050 to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution to provide a 'William Riley Lifeboat' to be stationed on the coast 'between the mouths of the Humber and the Tees'. The boat saw service at Uppang just north of Whitby and took part in one of the most famous RNLI rescues in October 1914 when the hospital ship *SS Robilla* ran aground with 229 sick and injured men on board. The William Riley was hauled three miles overland and lowered 200 feet down a perpendicular cliff to assist in the rescue

operation for the 145 lives that were saved.

Both the Whitby Lifeboat Trust and myself would have loved to have found a photograph of William Riley but in spite of much enquiring we never did. His will mentions a portrait given to a Birmingham hospital but our efforts to locate this portrait were equally fruitless. To have had a member of William's family to see the re-launch of the old boat would have been a fitting conclusion to a really inspiring story. The one great thing about researching history is that the task is never really finished, its never too late. If by chance anyone reading this can shed any light on William Riley of Firenze House, Leam Terrace circa 1900 please get in touch.

Autumn programme

Sept 28th 2009

Janet Ainley & Ronnie Goldstein talk about their research into the history of Priory Terrace, the road they live in.

October 26th 2009

Alan Griffin talks about the history of photography and shows slides of Victorian photographs including some of local interest never seen before.

November 23rd 2009

Graham Doughty talks on the War Memorials of South Warwickshire and about a major new resource for genealogists and local historians.

December 21st 2009

Our Christmas meeting with seasonal refreshments. Bring along any Leamington ephemera and see what other members have collected over the years.

Meetings commence at 7.30 pm
in the South Lodge
Jephson Gardens

'ON YOUR BIKE' NINETEENTH CENTURY STYLE

"I call to mind the first cycle races in Leamington were run on two-wheeled velocipedes with wooden spokes now spoken of as 'bone shakers'. The course was in the avenue of the Pump Room Gardens alongside Dormer Place. The races started from a point below Bedford Street and the riders had to turn round a stake at the end for their return journey. As the gardens were then cut off from outside view by a thick holly hedge, I saw only a little through the gates near Augusta Place, where the turning point was - and where, by the bye, practically every competitor collided with another, or came down".



One of Leamington's pioneer riders of the 'penny-farthing' Mr A B Cunnew of 73 Radford Road tells us that he did a little travelling on a bone-shaker, but it was not until the taller vehicle appeared that he became an enthusiastic rider.

He had one of the first 'penny-farthings' manufactured by the Singer firm. On a 'penny-farthing' Mr Cunnew cycled from Leamington to London (Marble Arch) in 12 hours. In those days of course roads bore no resemblance to their present state. Unlike some riders Mr Cunnew found the machine comfortable and he "never had a tumble".

The Courier of June 9th 1933.

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE

Earlier this year I read that Millvina Dean the last survivor of the sinking of RMS Titanic had died at the age of 97. Helen Mocklare another survivor on the last lifeboat to leave the stricken ship recalled some years after the sinking hearing the loud, clear voice of a Priest offering prayers on deck as they pulled away from the ship on that cold April night in 1912. Some research uncovered the fact that eight Ministers of Religion were on the passenger list for Titanic's maiden voyage and amazingly two of these had attended Leamington College when it was a minor Public School. Father Thomas Byles aged 41 was the Roman Catholic son of a Con-

gregational Minister and he had purchased a £13 second class ticket for the transatlantic crossing to America where he was to



officiate at the wedding of his brother William. Also on board was Revd Ernest Courtenay Carter the former Vicar of St Jude, Whitechapel and President of

Sion College with his wife Lilian who were also travelling second class. It is recorded that Revd Carter presided over a service in the Second Class Dining Saloon after the ship had struck the iceberg and concluded the service with the words "It is the first time that there have been hymns sung on this boat on a Sunday evening, but we trust it won't be the last." With that, the ship's Purser laid out the tables for a breakfast that fate decreed would never be eaten. The two old boys of Leamington College were among the 1,496 passengers who perished when the ship sank, their bodies were never recovered.

This newsletter is edited by Alan Griffin secretary of the Leamington History Group. The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the LHG. Please address all enquiries to the editor on 01926 430996 or leamingtonhistory @ fastnet.co.uk