



The Leamington Omnibus

Still travelling Hopefully

The Leamington History Group had modest beginnings in a small but enthusiastic band of local historians based at the old Bath Place school. Few of us who were part of that group imagined that within a few years we would be part of a thriving local history group with a membership of more than fifty, or that we would outgrow two venues.

The 'big news' of 2011 is that our somewhat itinerant existence of late is now at an end. All our future meetings will be held at the Dormer Conference Centre alongside St Peter's church in Dormer Place. This is unquestionably one of the very best hire venues in Leamington and provides facilities of a high order. Since one of our committee members is also a member of the congregation at St Peter's, we qualify for a concessionary hire rate which makes the move even more attractive. Quite apart from our regular

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monthly meeting, we also continue to hold a weekly local history drop-in session in South Lodge at the Parade entrance to the Jephson Gardens where we are open from 10.00 am to mid-day each Tuesday morning. Tea and coffee is provided for anyone who calls in for a chat and these sessions have proved to be of great

benefit. We have learnt much from some of the town's older residents and have helped a few people with their own lines of research. A chance meeting in the Jephson Gardens with three drama students from Warwick University one frosty morning, led to our helping them with reminiscences and photographs of the Lights of Leamington last held fifty years ago. They have promised to come back to show us the results of their installation.

One of the great strengths of the LHG is its function as an information exchange for local historians and in the willingness of its members to share the fruits of their research with others. Several members have given impressive PowerPoint presentations in recent months, the most recent one of which on Covent Garden Market by Pat and Colin attracted an audience of seventy.

Above all else, the Leamington History Group is focussed on research and on making that research available to a wider audience. Several members have been engaged in a project to transcribe the Willes archive recently acquired by the County Record Office. At least two of our members are doing research for books and others have written down or recorded their reminiscences of Leamington life. Our newly launched website www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk affords everyone a marvellous opportunity to contribute articles and images on just about any aspect of Leamington's past that interests them.

It is clear that there is among our membership a wealth of knowledge and expertise and we would encourage all of you to think about the contribution that you can make to what we

are trying to achieve. We will help and support you in every way possible and let no one think that their own recollections are unimportant or in any way unworthy of recording.

The Leamington History Group is in good shape and we look forward to the future with renewed confidence. Robert Louis Stevenson is said to have coined the phrase "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive". We continue to travel with high hopes and you will be pleased to hear that after a few diversions along the way, we have arrived.
Editor

Leamington's Blue Plaques

The more observant of you may have noticed a number of blue plaques which have appeared on Leamington properties in recent times to commemorate some of the town's more notable residents. This is an initiative promoted by Leamington Town Council through their Blue Plaque Committee which meets regularly to consider nominations for plaques. The Leamington History Group is represented on this committee and we are currently promoting the cause of Ben Satchwell, our mentor. Ben's old half-timbered cottage in Mill Street has long since been swept away but his remains are buried under a fine table tomb in the churchyard of the Parish Church, just inside the railings. The committee have said they would look favourably on the provision of an information plaque of some sort near to Ben's tomb and they agree that it would be very appropriate for his contribution to the early development of Leamington to be publicly recorded.



Dad's early People Carrier

'D' in our A to Z

When I was a young lad growing up in the nineteen-fifties, my father was a baker in the small Warwickshire town of Southam. In 1947 he had purchased the old windmill and the bakery business that went with it and my two brothers and I moved in to the small cottage that went with the mill and the bakehouse.

One of the things that most excited us when we moved there in 1948, was the fact that for the very first time in our lives, we as a family, were the proud owners of a vehicle. The vehicle in question was a pre-war, royal blue Ford with a registration number I still remember sixty years on, EAC 698. Lest you should think that this was a rather 'flashy' piece of transport for the post-war years, I ought perhaps to make it clear that the vehicle in question played a fundamental part in my father's life. It was in fact the bread van in which each day he did his round delivering bread and cakes door-to-door in Southam and the surrounding villages.

The ten hundredweight van had several slatted and removable wooden trays in the back on which the bread and cakes were stacked for the daily delivery round. There were a number of other things about the van that I clearly remember. The most noteworthy feature of the van's interior was the fact that it had only one seat, for the driver. There was no seat for a passenger and no footwell either on the passenger's side of the vehicle. I am also pretty sure that the accelerator pedal was placed centrally between the clutch and the brake pedal although that didn't strike me as unduly exceptional at the time.

My father was quick to realise that the blue van could be easily adapted as a

conveyance for the whole family when the occasion demanded. The most pressing need was for a seat for the principal passenger, my mother. An old Edwardian upholstered chair had its legs sawn off just beneath the seat and this was placed in the front of the van. Here my mother sat in some style but little comfort with her knees drawn up and pressed close up against the dashboard.

In a short space of time, three more old decrepit, wooden chairs were deprived of their legs and with the wooden trays removed from the back of the van we three boys were ushered in to 'our' space through the van's rear doors. The layout of the seating was infinitely flexible since none of the seats were secured to the vehicle in any way. The dismembered chairs had to be placed against the sides so that we could stretch our



legs across the width of the van. The only way we could see out was to look through the small rear windows or kneel directly behind my dad to look out through the windscreen.

Since the baking was a seven day a week job and dough had to be mixed on Sunday evenings for the Monday batch, we never had a family holiday as such. What we did have were days out visiting relatives, a number of whom lived in Oxfordshire villages south of Banbury, and well within

range of the blue van. I remember that the trips were invariably on a Sunday to fit in with dad's baking. In time he acquired an old upholstered double bus seat which when the legs were cut down made a great replacement for two of the old chairs but which also led to countless arguments as to which of us were to occupy these prestigious seats on forays into rural Oxfordshire.

Fortunately we never had any accidents. Quite what would have happened if my father had had to brake sharply with four unsecured seats in the vehicle doesn't bear thinking about. I don't think we ever did think about it but I have no doubt my mother did.

In these days of preoccupation with health & safety, it is easy to ridicule such Heath Robinson solutions but I feel sure that in days gone by people generally were far more resourceful and inventive than they are today. In the austere post-war years of which I speak, we were still motivated by the make-do and mend philosophy and making best use of the limited resources that were then available. My brothers and I still have fond memories of EAC698 and the many trips we had as kids in the back of the bread van. Dad's very own People Carrier.

Alan Griffin



Where in Leamington is this public statue? What does it depict and where was it formerly situated?
Answers in the Spring Omnibus.



Local History Month

Each year there is in the UK a Local History Month which this year will take place in May. The aim of the month is to increase awareness of local history, to promote history in general to the local community and to encourage all members of the community to participate. The event is sponsored by the Historical Association and The Historian journal. We see this as a great opportunity for local groups, including our own, to advertise their activities and to this end we are planning a one-day Local History Fair in May. The venue for this is yet to be decided but it will take place in a central Leamington location on Saturday May 14th. We plan to invite all the local groups who are involved in any way in local or family history or archaeology and invitations will also be extended to the County Record Office and local museums and libraries. There will be a nominal charge for any organisation who wishes to have a table and admission will be free. If you or your group is interested in setting up a stall at the fair, please contact us on one of our published email addresses.



Getting the Picture

Several of our members are collectors of old postcards and photographs of Leamington. At a recent postcard fair in Birmingham, one of the items discovered on a stand was a single page cut from an old photograph



album which had obviously been compiled by a rather affluent and much-travelled photographer in the late 1930's. The unknown photographer had put together a collection of photos on the theme Notice Boards of Interest with a single photograph stuck to each black page and a date and title beautifully hand written in capitals in white ink. Number 19 shows an airport sign in Gothenburg, Sweeden. On the other side of this single page is a picture numbered 20 titled Air Raid Shelter, Leamington and dated November 1939. The photograph which is reproduced alongside shows a public air raid shelter on the corner of Brandon Parade and Wood Street with a large house (since demolished) in the background. The notice above the steps into the shelter which was of such interest to the unknown photographer reads **For use only of persons caught in the street**. An elderly lady that I showed the

photograph to recalled that as a young girl she and her friends from that part of central Leamington used to play in that very same shelter. She also added that a number of such public shelters were dug between the avenue of trees in Regent Grove and Holly Walk. It would be interesting to find out whether anyone can recall having to shelter in any of these during the air raids of 1940.

2011 Programme

Small cards setting out our programme for the forthcoming year will be available immediately following the AGM. Since these also include contact details for committee members, they cannot be produced until the results of the AGM elections are known. Some A4 paper copies of the programme for the year are available, the meetings for the next three months are as set out below.

Monday February 28th

Jo Clark

The history of the Jephson Gardens

Monday March 26th

Graham Sutherland

Wawickshire Crimes from the 17th century onwards

Monday April 18th (3rd Monday) Robin Stott

The History of The Dell in Warwick Place



LHG Library

The group has been given over a hundred books on Warwickshire topography/local history which have recently been withdrawn from the library at Warwickshire College's Leamington campus. Among these are a number of very collectable books and a full set (8 volumes) of the Victoria County History of Warwickshire. All of these books are available on loan to members and can be looked at and issued at any of our Tuesday morning drop-in sessions at South Lodge. A list of all the titles will be available at our monthly meetings.

'Model' citizens rewarded

On the front page of our Spring 2010 issue we ran the story about Leamington couple Peter and Sally Lee and their collection of architectural scale models and in particular their model of the original art deco Regal cinema in Dormer Place. Peter and his wife were appealing for anyone who might find a home for their collection of model buildings where they could be enjoyed by the public at large.



The good news is that many of Peter's models of cinemas have now been offered a permanent home at Bletchley Park. Apart from portraying the work of the wartime code-breakers, The Bletchley Park site is now also the home for a number of other organisations one of which, the Projected Picture Trust, will be adding the models to their Museum of Cinema Technology collection. Bletchley Park is a fascinating place and unlike most heritage sites you visit it has a tremendous aura about it where you get a tangible sense of the momentous work that was carried out there. If you have never been there, add it to your list of 'must see' places in 2011.

Go on a Course

The County Record Office in Warwick will be running a number of courses through the coming months which will be of interest to both local and family historians. The courses cover a wide range of topics including palaeography, maps & plans, on-line archives, crime & punishment, etc. Some of the short introductory courses are free, longer half-day courses are very modestly priced between £5 and £12. Pick up details of the courses at our meetings or click on the CRO website and follow the 'Outlook' link.

Annual Membership dues

A reminder that annual membership payments are due on January 1st each year. We look forward to seeing both familiar and new faces in 2011. If you wish to renew current membership or if you are a new member wishing to join, please fill in the application form below.

Membership Application 2011

Surname Forename(s)

Postal address

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Telephone number Email address

Membership number I enclose the sum of £ 10 as my annual subscription

The Omnibus is edited by Alan Griffin with help from Margaret Rushton and Colin Jennings. We welcome contributions of any length from members on all aspects of Leamington local history however obscure or eclectic. Please contact the editor at the email address below or by telephone on 314711 leamingtonhistory@fastnet.co.uk