

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Spring 2014

Welcome to our latest newsletter. The group is going from strength to strength with interesting articles being posted on our website following extensive research by a widening number of authors. If anyone has an idea for an article for posting on the websites, or wishes to submit an article, please discuss it with Margaret Rushton or me.

Recently we have been scanning 2 collections of photographs and slides loaned to us by Alan Mayes and Toby Cave. These will be added to our archive and be available for viewing by anyone doing research. We will always be pleased to receive contributions of old images which can be scanned and added to the archive. All donations will be given due attribution when used by the group.

We will try and show some of these images at the end of our monthly meetings on an occasional basis. Thank you all for your support.

Barry Franklin

British Association For Local History (BALH) Awards 2014

We are delighted to announce that in June 2014, founder member Alan Griffin, former Secretary and Chairman of LHG, will receive a BALH Award for Personal Achievement in Local History. The award is richly deserved: Alan is unfailingly generous in his support for local history researchers both at home and abroad, giving freely of his time and expertise and sharing his own archive and publications. He has worked tirelessly in local history for most of his adult life, promoting LHG since its earliest days, and contributing substantially to the History Societies at Southam and Walton before that. The presentation will take place during BALH Local History Day on 7 June at the Charity Centre, London NW1 2DP (close to Euston Station). Further details and application forms for tickets, if you wish to go along and support, are available on the BALH website, www.balh.co.uk - Ed

Committee Members 2014

At the Annual General Meeting in January, the following were elected to the Committee. As you will observe, there were no new members, but we have a new Chairman and Vice Chairman:

Barry Franklin *Chairman*
Michael Pearson, *Vice Chairman*
Terry Gardner *Treasurer*
Margaret Rushton *Secretary*
Alan Griffin *Ex Officio*

Maggie McGreevy, Tessa Whitehouse, Jo Clark, Mick Cullen, Mick Jeffs, Simon Yarwood

All members can be contacted via the Secretary, through the website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk

Heritage Open Days 2013 Flower Festival

In September 2013, Leamington History Group were invited to contribute to the Flower Festival held at the Parish Church to celebrate Heritage Open Days.

Spa Springs, pictured right, was the LHG display, designed and produced by Maggie McGreevy.



Photo: B Franklin

Free Guided Town Walks.

Following a very successful first season last summer, the Leamington History Group will be offering a slightly longer programme of walks in 2014, from 17th June until 24th September. Walks will take place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, either at 10.30 am, 2.30 pm, or 7 pm, on a variety of routes through Jephson Gardens and the parks, in Old Town, the Parade and North Leamington. Laura, the Park Ranger, will also be offering a number of family walks round Jephson Gardens.

Do you fancy a themed walk, such as "Leamington in the 40s", or a trip round the growing collection of Blue Plaques commemorating famous Leamington residents such as Frank Whittle, Randolph Turpin or Mary Dormer Harris? Each walk lasts between an hour and an hour and a half, and starts out from South Lodge, Jephson Gardens, opposite the Pump Rooms. The History Group is happy to organise specific walks for groups, or for schools studying a local history unit.

A timetable and an outline of walks will be published in the next few weeks, and information will be available from the office of the Town Clerk (01926 450906), the History Group website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk, the Visitor Information Centre at the Pump Rooms and the Library, local hotels, community centres, doctors' surgeries, and South Lodge, Jephson Gardens.

As long ago as the 5th century BC, the Greek Physician Hippocrates lived by the maxim that "Walking is man's best medicine", - it still is. Come and join us!

Michael Pearson

Cloister Crofts Camp

Local residents Graham Cooper, Michael Wills and Mr Murray all have memories of a Military Camp on the site of the present North Leamington School playing fields, between Kenilworth Road and Cloister Crofts. Access to the camp was by gates on Kenilworth Road, where until recently traces of the gateways could still be seen in the hedgerows alongside the school fields. There may also have been a bigger, vehicular entrance, off Cloister Way. At that time there was only a handful of houses in Cloister Crofts, and Almond Avenue had not been built. Graham Cooper, who grew up at The Gables, the Kenilworth Road house closest to the site of the camp, has clear memories of a series of wooden-walled buildings, with gables supporting sloping roofs. Michael Wills was taken there one day in about 1950, by Pauline Mullis, a fellow-pupil at Lillington Infant School who lived there with her family. He too remembers a number of prefabricated-looking buildings made of wood. In Michael's recollection, they were not very big, - but they did have windows! That made a distinct impression on the Infant School pupil. Perhaps he was expecting something much more stern-looking, as the camp was known locally as a Prisoner of War camp.

Bryn Poore who lived in Kenilworth Road in the 40s clearly remembers sitting on the footpath by the gates to his house and having sweets thrown to him by American soldiers as they marched along the road before turning into Cloister Crofts, presumably en route to the main gate. 86 year old Mr D J Murray from Dereham Court also remembers wartime camp residents. Growing up in Whitnash, he used regularly to see the Italian contingent being driven by civilians along Golf Lane, where they helped on the farms, digging turnips. They sometimes threw one to the children as they passed by. The Italians were not all Prisoners of War. Some, including a family from one of the older houses in Upper Villiers Street, were Internees who already lived here, having married into local families.

When no longer required for military purposes, the huts were occupied by families, who were sometimes referred to by local children - much to their parents' disapproval - as 'the squatters'. The huts were demolished in the later 1950s.

Within twenty four hours of posting a note on Facebook, Barry Franklin received a message from one of Pauline Mullis's cousins. He discovered that Pauline now lives in Rugby, and made arrangements to go and see her

..... to be continued

This article is based on research by Margaret Rushton and Barry Franklin, with contributions from Graham Cooper, whose own article first appeared in the Lillington Local History Society Newsletter, March 2014, Michael Wills and Mr Murray.

Stowe & Co Ltd, Builders, Leamington Spa.

George Edward Stowe was born in 1891 in Leamington, where his father was a builder and joiner. He too became a carpenter and joiner and at the end of the Great War, Cecil Smith of 58 Bath Street lent George £50 to start his own building business. By the 1930s, it was considered one of the biggest and best in the district, with joinery and cabinet workshops, employing specialists in shopfitting, stonemasons and all other trades. There was an office at 111 Regent Street and an extensive building yard in Satchwell Street.

In those early days, scaffolding consisted simply of timber poles with the bases of the verticals held in barrels of sand, and the horizontals tied to them with chains. Ladders were also made of wood, and those of George Stowe were painted a very distinctive shade of red. George became well known not just for the quality of his firm's work, but also for saying: "I don't want to see any ladders on the Parade but mine!"

The head carpenter's log book, in the Jo Clark collection, reveals the extent of the business, with work contracts in Leamington, Alcester and Stratford as well as all the surrounding villages. Although Stowe and Company were not responsible for any major buildings in Leamington itself, they were for many years *the* firm to go to for first class refurbishments of any kind. In 1940, amongst the head carpenter's list of jobs including cupboards, door frames, staircases, shop fittings and so on, were bunks for Arnold Lodge, blackouts for Beauchamp Avenue, gates for Regent Garage and camp gates for Budbrooke I T C. A photograph from the collection shows some of the Stowe and Company workforce at the completion of the Lockheed Brake Co building in 1942. A handwritten note on the back states that the building began in a bare field in 1929, and was finished only during WW2. An example of Stowe and Company's workmanship and attention to detail was revealed some years ago in the redecoration of the Pump Room, where the lining paper to the ceiling of the main room was found to have been hung with torn edges, so that the join between the sheets would be less visible, - although the joins themselves were so high above the floor they could not be seen anyway!

When Mr Stowe died in 1952, his business partner Eric Haiser carried on until he too died, and the business eventually closed in 1971. A sale catalogue for the 4th March 1971 describes the buildings, contents and builders' yard at 33-41 Satchwell Street, - now occupied by the Royal Priors shops.

Kit Smith

Leamington's First Velocipede?

As many of us begin dusting off our bikes for a burst of spring fitness, we don't usually give much thought to cycling's early days, or how cycles came to be made. Many of the early models were very much a local product but still hard to come by. In 1837, the young John Charles Manning was desperate to own the very latest form of transport, a tricycle, or velocipede, as they were then known. A velocipede would have cost an unthinkable sum for Leamington family. However, John was a determined boy, and on a visit to Snitterfield, he managed to cadge the old iron fly-wheel of a disused malt-mill, and promptly took it home.

He persuaded Mr Fisher, a smith with a workshop in Brunswick Street, to make two more iron wheels - a large one to match the malt-mill wheel, and a small guider. He doesn't say how he came by the main shaft of the machine, - a bed-post. Mr Fisher supplied cranks and treadles, and so the machine was eventually put together. It was then painted, - bright yellow, fine-lined in black.

It must have been a wonderful sight, but once on the road, it revealed two major flaws. According to John, "It would only travel on the stone pavement, which the police prevented; and it made such a horrible clatter that it frightened the horses in the street, and the police put a stop to that too".

Not quite what the young inventor had anticipated, but he remained proud of the result. Even late in life he was still claiming stoutly to one and all that it was the first tricycle ever manufactured at Leamington, if not in Warwickshire, and that all concerned in the creation of "a machine so fearfully and wonderfully made", should share his triumph.

Margaret Rushton

Tessa Whitehouse Reviews

December Meeting, 16 December 2013

With Christmas approaching, our December meeting was very informal. We were unable to go ahead with our planned schedule so thanks go to Barry Franklin who stepped in at short notice to show us a selection of the many images on our web site. Barry was only able to show us a few but at the same time he invited us all to help identify the locations, people and events with a view to documenting each picture. Many stories, anecdotes and memories came to light and hopefully Barry will be able to add further details when time allows.

Seasonal refreshments were kindly provided by Maggie McGreevy, and Mick Jeffs a short but testing quiz about Leamington and Warwick. A raffle brought an end to our very successful and rewarding year and we look forward to continued success and enthusiasm next year.

Leamington Then and Now, 27 January 2014

The first meeting of the year began with the Annual General Meeting. After officers' reports and elections, Peter Coulls gave a presentation about 'Leamington Then and Now' based on old postcards and photographs taken in the late 1950s/early 60s. These were taken to highlight properties which were due for demolition as part of the town's slum clearance programme. Some were quickly identified but a lot of them, particularly rear views of premises in Queen Street and Lansdown Street needed further clarification. Old pictures of the town featured prominently and more recent pictures of the Floral Clock in the Jephson Gardens and Henry Griffiths Jewel factory in Tachbrook Road brought back many memories.

Many of these pictures were destined for the waste bin but, thankfully, they were rescued and now provide a fascinating record of a bygone era. A lot of comments and anecdotes were received which are always very welcome to enable us to update our web site.

A Warwickshire Miscellany, 24 February 2014

Our talks are not just about Leamington Spa, and at our February meeting Richard King took us on a tour of the surrounding district through his slide collection. The images reflected the changes during the twentieth century, so that we saw places and landmarks that have long vanished or changed beyond all recognition. Well featured, and of particular interest to local railway enthusiasts were the pictures of the Leamington Spa to Rugby railway line which was dismantled during the 1960s. Fond memories were revived of Thornleys Brewery at Radford Semele, the canal, and the railway at Hatton where the junction has changed from a busy railway depot to a halt and interchange between London, Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon. As the talk came to a close we were shown images of the M40 under construction near Gaydon and how it is now an accepted part of the landscape. Will this happen with the proposed HS 2 railway route? Only time will tell.

Before the meeting closed Chairman and Archivist Barry Franklin showed us a further selection of pictures which have recently come into his possession which he plans to put on our web site.

Thank to both Richard and Barry, we had a very interesting evening, bringing back lots of memories and lots of comments from our members. *Tessa Whitehouse*

Forthcoming Monday Meetings: 28 April: Colin Maynell, The Slums of Royal Leamington Spa.
19 May: Stas Librowski, Leamington Ladies who Lunched.
23 June: Jim Layton, Black People in Warwickshire

All Monday meetings are held at Dormer Conference Centre, Dormer Place, CV32 5AA (next to St Peter's Church) starting at 7.30 pm. There is no charge for members. Visitors welcome (£2.50 per meeting). Annual subscription £10pp, payable in January each year.

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