

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Summer 2014



As the centenary of the out break of the Great War approaches, along with many other organisations, Leamington History Group is anxious to record local experiences. If you have photographs, family stories or other memorabilia, please get in touch, so that we can archive them.

This plea went out to members earlier in the Spring, and Rosemary Guiot from Cubbington, whose great grandparents owned WG Pugh & Sons, Bootmakers, 45 Bath Street, was the first to respond. Her grandfather, Percy Nixon Pugh, (left, in hospital blues), enlisted in the Durham Light Infantry, and unfortunately, falling badly as he jumped off a wall in training, managed to break both ankles. His injury didn't stop him from going on to serve in Egypt. Percy survived, coming back to Leamington to marry in 1917 and start a family.

He died in 1973 at the age of 86. *Photograph Courtesy of Rosemary Guiot*

W J Bradley, 1873 – 1964, Basket Maker and Antiquarian,

William Bradley was born into a family of Leamington basket makers, who grew their own osiers on a small island in the River Leam, adjoining Welch's Meadow. Both Kit Smith and Eva Sabin remember a smallish, kindly man, working on his little patch in the river. Kit's father, the bootmaker from Bath Street, had a small boat which cost him 2/6d a year to use on the river, and they used it to visit Mr Bradley occasionally at work. The Smiths were one of a few families accorded this privilege, but Eva Sabin, née Kilby, was also one of his visitors, walking gingerly with her schoolfriend along a series of planks over the water to the osier beds where they were allowed to help Mr Bradley strip the willow. Mr Bradley carried on his basket-making business until the end of WW2, when he diversified rather dramatically into Antiques and Collectibles. He became a regular at Locke and England's auction sales, and towards the end of the day, if items failed to sell, the auctioneer would call out, "Come along, Mr Bradley, make me an offer!" - and he invariably did, amassing an eclectic collection of furniture, paintings and bric-a-brac. He died in 1964, at the ripe old age of ninety-one.

The Great Warwickshire Show & Tell, Friday 16 May, Market Square, Warwick

Leamington History Group and Lillington Local History Society collaborated to produce a display for the day-long celebration of Market Hall Museum's winning bid to host one of the four nationwide Museums at Night events. We named our contribution 'Changing Places', to reflect the enormous number of significant alterations to the Leamington townscape over the last half century. On a very fine warm day, Warwick Market Place was a hive of activity all afternoon and evening with interactive events presented by societies such as ours and Lillington, clubs, art galleries and museums from all parts of the County. People of all ages visited our stand, many with memories of their own to contribute. A gratifying reward for the stalwarts who masterminded the display itself, and the volunteers who came to steward it on the day. It was a great way to bring everyone together and the warm weather and balmy evening did much to add to its success.



Lyndon F (Toby) Cave

We were saddened to learn that Toby, LHG President, died peacefully in hospital on Monday 12 May at the age of 90. His funeral was held in Sherborne Abbey on 27 May, and a memorial event will be held in Leamington later in the summer.

Travelling to School on The Train, 1955 - 1962

Back in the mid - 1950s, following my success in passing the eleven plus examination I was offered a place at the Hugh Clopton School for Girls at Stratford upon Avon (later The Stratford upon Avon Grammar School for Girls at Shottery Manor). When I first started there a lot of Leamington girls chose to travel by train, as did many of the boys who went to King Edward VIth Grammar School. This soon became routine and we adapted to catching the train at about 8.10 in the morning.

At the beginning of each term, wearing our green and white uniform (later changed to purple, with a pale blue shirt), we collected our travel passes, in this case, a small red card which expired on the last day of each term. We then proceeded up the steep flight of stairs to the platform to await the train. This was still the 'age of steam' and the train usually consisted of a small, 'matchbox' engine and two coaches. By the late fifties this had been replaced by a diesel train which, above all, was certainly much warmer in the winter! I have vivid memories of the waiting room on those cold winter mornings. There were several wooden arm chairs and we would draw them up before the blazing fire which had just been lit by a porter. The trains were freezing cold as the heat generated by the steam engine only filtered through as we neared the end of our journey. This certainly made us hardy individuals.

By the early sixties the numbers travelling to Stratford were very few as children were then offered places at Blackdown High School and Kenilworth Grammar School, but these were happy days and friendships made then have survived the test of time, which we happily recall whenever we get the chance to meet up.

My lasting memory of the journey is railway tracks, sidings, signal boxes, fields and hedges, and village stations, each with their welcoming stationmaster. To me, it was a living, working Hornby train set!

Such special days. Would children do it today? I doubt it.

Tessa Whitehouse, née Chapman.

Railways in Leamington - A Potted History



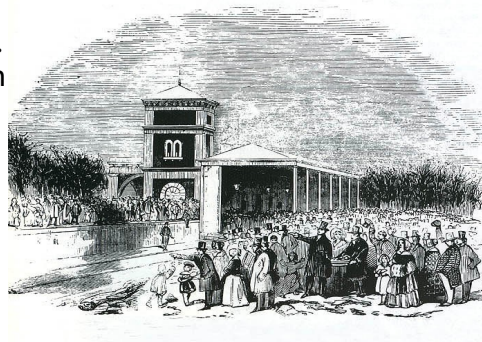
In the nineteenth century Leamington Spa became like many British towns with the construction of railway lines radiating to most points of the compass.

The Line to Coventry

Leamington missed out on the first main line from London to Birmingham which opened in 1838 and passed through Rugby and Coventry. However the London and Birmingham Co.

soon saw the value of a link to the prosperous new spa town and in 1844 the line opened from Coventry. This line ended at a timber station on the north side of Rugby Road (see right). It was originally named Leamington, but the station had eight different names during its life, based on various permutations of Milverton, Leamington and Warwick.

In 1851 this line was extended as a branch from Milverton to Rugby via Leamington Spa just as the GWR line arrived. Although this line ran close to, and parallel with the GWR line, a station was not built near the GWR station until three years later. Six years later a new and enlarged Avenue Station was opened. A long footbridge from Old Warwick Road



crossed the GWR line to Avenue station but gave no access to GWR platforms. The final evolution of this line was a branch from the Rugby line to Weedon and a junction with the main London to Birmingham Line. Milverton station was replaced with a brick building further to the south in 1883 on the north side of Warwick New Road. The Rugby Road station was redeveloped for goods and locomotive servicing. One tragic accident happened on the line to Coventry in June 1861 when a steam locomotive hauling a goods train fell through the bridge across the road junction between Leek Wootton and Hill Wootton and the driver and fireman perished.

This line then ran for nearly 50 uneventful years. In the 1930s, Armstrong Siddeley railcars which had Michelin pneumatic tyres were an innovation. On 1st July 1939 an IRA bomb exploded in the cloakroom in Milverton Station but there were no injuries. Passenger service on the lines to Rugby and Weedon ceased in 1959 (well before the Beeching report) but general freight services continued until the mid 1960s. Following the Beeching Report, Leamington Spa (Avenue) station closed on 16th January 1965 and passenger services to Kenilworth, Coventry, Bedworth and Nuneaton were withdrawn. The track was used only for goods until 1969 when it became disused. The route reopened in 1977 and continues in use for passengers and goods.

Meanwhile - In A Parallel Business Empire

The GWR line through Leamington began as the Birmingham and Oxford Junction Railway opened in 1851. It was engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and completed the route to London (Paddington). The new station was built on the site of a large building, Eastnor Terrace, which had to be totally demolished despite having been completed only seven years before. Sadly the grand opening ceremony was delayed because, incredibly, the train bringing guests from London collided with a goods train. There was a GWR loco shed at the end of Clapham Terrace opposite the Eagle recreation ground. This site is now part of the Sydenham Estate. Around 1907 the original Great Western railway bridge across Clemens Street and High Street was replaced because trains were getting heavier.

On 1st January 1923 all the existing 123 railway companies in Great Britain were amalgamated into four Groups including the Great Western Railway and the London Midland and Scottish Railway (which included the London North Western Railway) .

Leamington Spa station was replaced in Art Deco style and opened in 1939. Much of this building survives and is now Listed Grade 2; the station and the gardens are cared for by the group of Friends of the Station which was formed in 2005.

The Modern Era

On 1st January 1948 all Britain's railways were nationalised by Clement Attlee's Labour Government and passed into state hands. Most of the locos were still steam engines. In 1956 and 1957 Diesel Units were introduced on most local services. Steam traction on Paddington-Birmingham-Wolverhampton express services was replaced by diesel locomotives in September 1962. On 1st January 1963 all railway lines in the Birmingham area taken over by London Midland region and the names Western region and Great Western were lost. However the GWR line survived the Beeching Report in 1964 unscathed.

From March 1967 all express trains to/from Paddington were routed to Birmingham New Street instead of Snow Hill. Leamington station closed for general goods on 19th May 1969 although a private siding continued in use for some time. In a major change Inter City trains commenced running again between Leamington and Coventry in May 1977. In 1996 Chiltern Railways were awarded a franchise. In 2009 the station's garden, which the Friends of Leamington Station help to maintain, was awarded the title of Best British Garden in a Country Life magazine award.

Mick Jeffs and Barry Franklin

Tessa Whitehouse Reviews

Monday, 24th March: Chris Holland, When Warwickshire Went To War

Well known local historian and author Chris Holland gave us an insight about how communities in Warwickshire responded to the declaration of war in August 1914. People tried to carry on as if nothing was happening but adopting at the same time a sense of patriotism. With the government mobilising troops, calling up reservists and taking over the running of the railways people gradually began to realise that life as they had known it would never be the same again. The promise that it would 'be over by Christmas' was never going to be a reality but it gave some comfort when the troops began training for eventual hostilities and people gradually adapted to the status quo. Troops from Coventry and the industrial north of the county were joined by the volunteers from the rural south who also had to send their horses to join the many that were being sent abroad. Everyone felt it was their duty to do what they could, but no one could have known of the stress and unbelievable horror that would soon be overtaking their lives in a very changing world. It was a captivating talk and we look forward to hearing what happened next at a future date.

Monday, 28th April: Colin Maynell, The Slums of Royal Leamington Spa

Behind the elegant façades of the prosperous spa town in the early 19th century a different world was evolving. Workers drawn to the town from the rural areas, were seeking work and needed to be housed. Slums, defined as 'homes in heavily populated areas with no water, poor sanitation and poor law enforcement' were built in many locations and, most notably, in Satchwell Street and Kenilworth Street. Censuses showed the wide range of occupations of the inhabitants, all necessary for the livelihood of the rapidly expanding town. Many lived in appalling conditions in small houses shared by several families where sanitation was confined to one privy in a yard shared by several properties. Slaughterhouses, pig sties and blocked cesspits added to the squalid conditions which continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Although sewers had been laid in the 1850s, landlords were reluctant to spend money on linking to them. Acts relating to public health often were not enforced and it was not until the 1930s that the town finally started to improve workers' standards of living. Historically, slum areas in most large towns and cities were often those abandoned by earlier wealthier inhabitants. It was a shock to discover that some of Leamington's were purpose-built, - and that the descendant of one of the builders was in the audience!

Monday, 19th May: Stas Librowski, Leamington Ladies who Lunched.

This was not about modern 'Ladies who lunch' but a very enlightening talk about the beginnings of this social activity. Stas began by passing round two images of Willes Terrace at the turn of the twentieth century and copies of the 1881 and 1891 censuses. It was around these that he based his exploration of the number of wealthy unmarried women with servants living in the Terrace in late Victorian times. . These ladies were women of independent means derived from inheritances, annuities and bank interest. They had no desire to be 'owned' by a husband and did not want to follow convention by producing heirs and large families. This life style had already been accepted in France following the Revolution where women were already able to treat their bodies, their money and dowries as their own rather than belonging to their husband or father. But it took many more years for the choice to be socially acceptable in this country. Stas gave us a new insight into the lives of wealthy people who had made Leamington Spa their home, inspiring many thoughts of another aspect of life in the town.

Before the meeting closed Chairman Barry Franklin showed us further pictures from his extensive archives. These screenings always bring interesting memories and anecdotes. **T.W.**

<p>Committee Members 2014</p> <p>Barry Franklin <i>Chairman</i> Michael Pearson, <i>Vice Chairman</i> Terry Gardner <i>Treasurer</i> Margaret Rushton <i>Secretary</i> Alan Griffin <i>Ex Officio</i> Maggie McGreevy, Tessa Whitehouse, Jo Clark, Mick Cullen, Mick Jeffs, Simon Yarwood <i>All members can be contacted via the Secretary, via the website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk</i></p>	<p>Forthcoming Monday Meetings</p> <p>(at Dormer Conference Centre, Dormer Place, CV32 5AA (next to St Peter's Church) at 7.30 pm. There is no charge for members. Visitors welcome (£2.50per meeting). Annual subscription £10pp, payable in January each year.)</p> <p>23 June: Jim Layton: Black People in Warwickshire 28 July: Jacqui Kirk: Francis Stenton, M C of the Upper Assembly Rooms 22 September: Alice Fookes: Alice Rosa Barker, Victorian Traveller and Explorer</p>
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