

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Autumn 2016

The Event of the Year!



The annual Leamington History Group History Day took place at All Saints Parish Church on Saturday 3rd September. Opened by Leamington Mayor Cllr Ann Morrison, despite heavy rain, the event attracted over 266 visitors, - a huge success for the twenty-four participating Societies, from Leamington, Lillington, Sydenham, Whitnash, Harbury, and Southam. The Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society, the Dugdale Society, the Warwickshire Local History Society, the Police Local History Society, the Leamington

“Lit” and the Leamington Society, Trinity Family History Society, Friends of the Czech Memorial Fountain and Friends of the Pump Room Gardens, and Warwickshire Gardens Trust also took part. A number of local authors presented their publications and smaller groups such as the Clapham Terrace School Association displayed their recent research into the long-lost shops of High Street. There were some wonderful photographic displays, a rich testament to the enthusiasm and patient research being carried out all over Warwickshire, and in some cases prompting reminiscences of people and places almost forgotten. The History Group’s hard-working team of volunteers is to be congratulated on another splendid turn-out.



Allan Jennings

Heritage Open Days 2016

Leamington History Group volunteers opened the exhibition of Jephson Gardens' history at South Lodge on all four afternoons of the Heritage Weekend, - and in spite of not having a single mention in the publicity booklet, managed to attract 154 visitors over the four-day period. Most visitors came from Leamington and District, but there were also visitors from Alcester, Coventry, Dudley, Hatton, Hull, Manchester, Middleton-in-Teesdale, Middlesex, Oxford, Plymouth and Wolverhampton. From further afield, we enjoyed the company of tourists from Austria, Canada, Greece and Los Angeles. Our Brunswick Street Cemetery walks were also popular: they attracted a total of 40 visitors, some of whom bought copies of the newly reprinted Cemetery booklets, currently on sale on Tuesday mornings at South Lodge.

William Riley (1815-1904) and the Leamington Almshouses

The only remaining Almshouses in Leamington can be found in Prospect Road. They were endowed by the *William Riley of Birmingham and Leamington Charity*, set up in his name after William Riley's death on 1st May 1904. Between 1907 and 1926 sums amounting to more than £11,000 accrued to the charity, which is still administered by Leamington Solicitors Wright Hassall. The Charity built Almshouses in both Birmingham and Leamington, in the proportion of Birmingham Northfield 4: Leamington 2, with the stated purpose of



“The Provision Of Almshouses For The Benefit Of Poor Persons Of Not Less Than Sixty Years Of Age Who (Except In Special Circumstances To Be Approved By The Commissioners) Are Inhabitants Of The Area Of The Former Borough Of Royal Leamington Spa.”

In 1931, when Leamington's first Riley-endowed almshouses were built, this meant that applicants had to live within the precise Leamington Spa parish boundary of the time, and so, not in Milverton, for example. The William Riley Charity Trustees issued a notice in the *Leamington Courier* of 27th February 1931 to the effect that the first occupiers of the houses would be elected on 22nd March of that year. Applicants had to be poor persons of good character who had lived in Leamington for two years and who from age, ill-health, accident or infirmity were unable to maintain themselves by their own exertions and who were 60 years old or older. Preference was to be given to those who had shown reasonable providence and to those who had been longer resident in the Borough, and married couples who met the criteria could also apply. All applicants had to provide testimonials.

Although the Birmingham properties were transferred to a housing trust in 2007, the work of the Charity is perpetuated in Leamington. The last time one of the almshouses was let, this description appeared in the particulars: “A two bedroom Almshouse located to the south of Leamington Spa with good access to local amenities. The applicant must be over 60, be in receipt of housing benefit and be a current resident of Leamington Spa ward.”

William Riley was a Birmingham businessman who lived at 41 Leam Terrace Leamington. He was buried in Brunswick Street Cemetery, following Riley's own full instructions for his interment. These included the erection of a magnificent memorial prior to his death to be topped by a marble bust of him executed in Florence, and his request for two coffins, one of oak and one of lead.

Among Riley's many bequests was one of £800 to endow a bed in Warneford Hospital and a similar bequest to hospitals in Birmingham. Also, rather surprisingly when living so far from the sea, William Riley endowed a lifeboat at Whitby. Former History Group Chairman Alan Griffin researched and wrote about the Riley Lifeboat in the Group's 2009 Summer Newsletter, accessible at:

<http://www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk>



Barry Franklin

Sources: Leamington Courier archives; personal reminiscences of former Riley Almshouse residents

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Memories of Regent Street

Numbers 133/135/137 Regent Street hold many memories for me. I remember going there, to "T Stubbs" for new clothes and to be measured for a suit, paid for by so much a week on a card, at the cash office for these payments at the back of the shop. Woodward was at no 104, where my Uncle, Phil Parrish started work as an apprentice hairdresser. He eventually left to work at Armstrong Siddeley in Coventry but well in to his eighties, he still cut hair - as long as it was the traditional short back & sides. My next door neighbour worked at Blackwells Bros, Fishmongers, at no 102. He used to bring home poultry to be plucked and dressed, and at some point, he also brought home the shop's old green roller shutter to use as a garden fence.

At no 84 was H Butlin's, Grocers. Harry Butlin, (who lived in Myton Rd), Mr & Mrs Collins, (who lived in Radford Rd) & Mrs Blythe (from Masters Rd) all worked in the shop. Mr Collins died whilst I was there and ever afterwards, Winne Collins blamed Harry Butlin for his death. I worked there after school as one of about four errand boys, delivering orders by bicycle, - the sort with a small wheel at the front, a carrier on top and no gears. The cycles, which I think were repaired by Shaylor's in Park Street, were kept at the back of the shop, and this meant a trail up the stairs past the freezer and the stock and down the back stairs to the cycle store. During the day customers handed in their orders which were packaged and placed in a box. The orders were then loaded up on to the carrier, with the relevant address. We errand boys did not collect money, but we were sometimes given a tip, - 6d (two and half new pence, not a bad amount in those days). Deliveries were made all over Leamington, for which I earned 15 shillings (or 60p) a week. Sometimes I also took money to the Midland Bank and delivered to other Grocers in Leamington - bacon, mostly. The worst delivery was to Buckley Road which meant pushing the bike all the way up Campion Hill to Lillington. That was hard work!

Terry Gardner

Free Guided Town Walks

Historic walking tours of Leamington have been provided free of charge to local people and visitors for over twenty years, the service provided by volunteer members of the Guild of Guides. For the last four years Leamington History Group has managed the Guild of Guides, with financial and administrative support from Leamington Town Council. The 2016 season of themed walks ran from mid-June until mid-September every Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday evening and the season proved every bit as successful as last year. Almost 500 people took part in the 2016 walks, with many visitors and locals enjoying learning about the interesting history of Leamington.

As well as the free guided walks our History Group also ran two tours of Leamington Cemetery and conducted a Charity Walk for the Mayor. During October there will also be a short programme of pre-booked group walks, giving visitors from all over Britain an insight into our historic town.

Michael Pearson, walks organiser and vice-chairman of Leamington History Group, said, "I am extremely pleased to record the success of the walks in 2016. Much credit must go to the ten guides who provided such enjoyable and informative tours for visitors and locals alike. I look forward to organising next year's programme and maintaining the support of our guides, members of the Leamington History Group and Leamington Town Hall. If any members wish to join the friendly group of guides or wish to organise a private tour for a group please contact the secretary, Margaret Rushton, on 01926 424659 or email rushtonmm1860@gmail.com"

Michael Pearson

Campion School, Leicester Street

In bright sunshine on Monday 12 September, LHG member Tom Lewin and his cousin Bill formally handed over a 1930s school photograph to the current head of Campion School, Jassa Panesar. Bill's father, also called Bill, was on the photo, - a diminutive twelve-year old on the front row. Bill senior grew up to be a well-known local craftsman, who carved a number of prominent Leamington signs, and the Whittle Plaques for Leamington College and Milverton School. Lillington resident Gary Timlin became involved when the remains of the old Leicester Street School were being demolished, and he tried to rescue some of the significant examples of stonework and decorative brickwork. He worked with the developers, Waterloo Housing, to agree the incorporation of the school (and town) coat of arms, the stone tablet bearing the foundation date and some patterned bricks. They can all be seen on the gable end of the new block of flats now on site. Two former pupils, Alan Smith and Dave Tabor, were on hand to point out where the old classrooms, workshops and segregated playgrounds had been, and to name a few members of staff, still working there in Alan and Dave's post-war schooldays.



Tessa Whitehouse: Reviews of Monday Evening Meetings

26 July: Val Brodie: *Humour & Sentiment in WW1 Southam Soldiers' letters*

This was a most enlightening presentation by Val Brodie, focusing on a surprisingly light-hearted aspect of the horrors suffered by the soldiers serving in the trenches. Throughout the conflict, communication with home was vital for morale both at home and abroad. The soldiers put a cheerful face on things for their families, sending cards and letters, poems, pictures and cartoon postcards. In return, sons, brothers and husbands at the front received letters relating every kind of everyday trivia to ensure that they would be up to date on their expected return. Thus, the war provided an interesting and productive spin-off: - the manufacture of postcards, autograph books, beautifully embroidered cards and cushions, to be kept as keepsakes and comforts. As the war progressed and became a way of life, pressure was sometimes relieved through song and verse, often expressing the feelings of those in the ranks towards their commanding officers! Val's presentation marked a 'First' for Leamington History Group: no-one before had ever persuaded the audience to sing along, - and we all did, with gusto! On a more sombre note, soldiers from all ranks felt impelled to record their thoughts, feelings and impressions, should their future hopes be shattered. Their messages survive, not only to tell the poignant stories of the young men of Southam, but to reflect the experiences of all those who took any part in the First World War. Thanks to Val, this was a sobering, but enjoyable experience for us, the happy survivors.

26 September: Jo Clarke: *Leamington Stories*

Jo Clarke stepped into the breach when Chris Baker, the military historian, was unable to deliver his planned talk relating to WW1, and gave his audience a real treat: no pictures, but stories about Leamington people and places, backed up by documents and engravings from Jo's personal archive. He began with much humour and enthusiasm talking about a manhole cover with connections to Thomas Crapper of sanitary ware fame, followed by an amusing story about the Rev Craig, who rebuilt the Parish Church. Following the amputation of his leg, the Rev Craig had it buried in the churchyard, believing that leg and owner would be reunited at the day of judgement. Whether his wishes were fulfilled will never be known! Jo was thoroughly in his element relating these stories, including one of Hall and Son, high class tailors of Euston Place and their links to undertakers and mourners, and one of a coachman who came to a gruesome end when his horse bolted on the Parade and hit a tree. Jo concluded with incidences of ghostly appearances at the Manor House Hotel. We greatly enjoyed our evening and look forward to hearing more stories in the future.