

The Leamington Omnibus

Winter 2017

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Town Guides' Lunch with the Mayor rounding off another great year!



To mark a further highly successful season of free guided town walks managed by LHG Vice-Chairman Michael Pearson, on Thursday 16th November, Leamington Mayor Cllr Caroline Evetts kindly hosted a buffet lunch at the Town Hall for the Guild of Guides and supporting LHG Committee members. Cllr Evetts recorded her thanks to Michael and the Guides for their sterling efforts during the season, and in particular their support of her Mayor's Charity Walk which raised several hundred pounds for her nominated charities.

Photo: Allan Jennings

This event marked the finale of another year of achievements for Leamington History Group, with a flourishing website, a number of research projects, and thanks to our band of trusty volunteers, exemplary attendance figures whenever South Lodge and the Jephson Gardens exhibition was opened to the public. Our Heritage Open Days attract a pleasing number of local visitors and tourists alike, and we are always pleased to be able to help those seeking information about long-lost relatives or memorable buildings. Yet again, LHG Local History Day in September stole the show: though fewer groups attended this year, we had more visitors than ever. The Parish Church provides a superb back-drop for the many local groups and their displays, and we are fortunate that the on-site café is available to provide refreshments for visitors. They do a wonderful job! Our thanks too, go to Church volunteers for their energetic support preparing and clearing away, and to Dale Street Church, who kindly provided extra tables for stallholders. Derek Billings took some superb photographs, too. (see above) Next year's History Day is already booked: 22 September 2018. Put it in your diary now!



Historic Unveiling



Photo: Allan Jennings

LHG members were pleased and proud to attend the unveiling on Monday 6th November, of an elegant memorial to those Leamington civilians killed in bombing raids in WW2. Unacknowledged for over seventy years, thirteen people were killed or died as a result of injuries sustained in six bombing raids on Leamington, one of them an evacuee from London. Alan Griffin and Allan Jennings researched the stories of the victims. LHG member Richard King designed the granite plinth to sit behind the War Memorial in Euston Place, and LHG publicised the appeal for funds to install it. The memorial was, fittingly, unveiled by Allan Jennings, who paid tribute to the thirteen civilians, pleased that after seventy-seven years, their names are at last recorded. The unveiling was attended by LHG members, the Mayor's Consort and LHG founder member, John Evetts, two descendants of those killed, the designer and a representative of the Swinson family, whose company carved the plinth.

For those of us born in the 1950s

We were born before colour television, heart transplants, mods and rockers, Moulton bikes, Lambrettas, Skodas, videos, DVDs, mobile phones and the pill.

We were before credit cards, dish-washers, tumble driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, trim phones, deep fried Mars Bars and the Sinclair C5, - and before man walked on the moon!

We had *Bill & Ben*, *Rag, Tag & Bobtail*, *The Woodentops* and *Andy Pandys*; and didn't you just love Spangles, Mojoes, Black Imps, and Penny Chews?

We didn't have computers, we had catapults, spud guns, pea shooters, hula hoops and yoyos.

We got married first and then lived together (How quaint is that?).

We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in lent, a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat, and 'crumpet' was something we had for tea.

We existed before house husbands, and computer dating; and 'sheltered accommodation' was where you waited for a bus.

We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies.

We had never heard of FM radio, tape decks, word processors, WAP phones, internet, E Mail, iPods, or young men wearing earrings.

We went to the pictures, not the cinema.

Central heating was a paraffin stove in the middle of the room.

We did the pools, not the Lottery.

We had the Co-op 'divi', not the supermarket BoGoF. Milk and orange juice came in bottles and were delivered by the milkman.

For us 'time sharing' meant togetherness, a 'chip' was a piece of wood or fried potato, 'hardware' meant nuts and bolts, and 'software' wasn't even a word.

In the 1950s 'Made in Japan' meant junk, the term 'making out' referred to how you did in your exams, 'stud' was something that fastened a collar to a shirt, and 'going all the way' meant staying on a double-decker bus to the terminus.

In our day, cigarette smoking was fashionable, 'grass' was mown, 'coke' was kept in the coalhouse, a 'joint' was a piece of meat you ate on Sundays, and 'pot' was something you cooked in.

'Rock Music' was a fond mother's lullaby, a 'gay person' was the life and soul of the party, while 'aids' just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble, and 'garage' was a place to park a car.

We who were born in the 1950s must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder there is a generation gap today ... BUT...

By the grace of God ... we have survived!

Allan Jennings.

And in the late 1950s,

I learned to drive, on a 1928 Wolseley, bought umpteenth-hand with my dad's war 'gratuity', for ferrying my sister around. Public transport was almost impossible because my sister wore heel to hip callipers on both legs after being paralysed by polio in the 1948 epidemic.

The car was really for taking my sister to hospital and clinic appointments, and later on, swimming lessons, but we sometimes went out on Sundays, and on one memorable occasion, the 'big end' went and we had to creep home, barely moving, - as we neared home, people going to Evensong were walking faster than we were moving, looking on curiously. There were no Sunday evening buses, and it was far too far away from home to think of walking, especially as my sister could never walk very far. Mum was furious at 'being shown up', dad was desperate about his beloved car, and we two girls sat in the back not daring to breathe!

Although it had been modified to start with a starter button, dad had to start the car with the starting handle in the winter. He used to take the plugs out, and leave them on a newspaper in the hearth overnight, in the hope of an easier start in the morning.

Lessons on an up-to-date Morris 1000 was an absolute doddle after that. I could see out of the back window to reverse, and didn't have to swing out into the middle of the road to turn left, (The Wolseley had a very long bonnet) though to my intense irritation many drivers these days still do that! There was a small wooden toolbox on a shelf under the bonnet, - I still have the hammer, intact. It had a roomy boot, - which could only be accessed from inside the car, and pull-up window blinds. The ventilation system was interesting: the windscreen could be unscrewed at the sides, and hinged outwards over the bonnet to let in more air. The car registration number was NJ 8190, -and we kept it until 1959, by which time my sister and I couldn't bear to be seen in it. We were thrilled when a new Austin A40 Farina took its place, but even that soon became a museum piece!

Margaret Rushton

A Notable Anniversary: Warwickshire Police 1857-2017

Early in 2017 the Chief Constable decided that as the year marked the 160th anniversary of the founding of the Force, an appropriate celebration was required. An organising committee under the chairmanship of Supt Ben Smith, agreed that Richard Woodcock, Force Historian and Chairman of Warwickshire Constabulary History Society would update the existing 150-year History and a commemorative badge would be produced.

The Town Hall was booked for Thursday 9th November, and displays reflecting all aspects of the work of the Force were set up, ready to be viewed by invited guests at 6.30 pm. The displays included contributions from the Warwickshire History Society, Operations Command and Control (OCC), Technology, 'Specials,' Volunteers, Cadets, Policing, and Crime Prevention. OCC demonstrated use of the control room's latest computer technology for recording incidents and the follow-up. Presentations were given in the Assembly Room, and after the Chief Constable addressed the guests, his Deputy (dressed in a 1920s uniform loaned by the West Midlands Force), gave a short history of the Force.

A number of awards were made, presented by Lord Lieutenant Tim Cox. They included Long Service Medals to officers with twenty years' service, Specials Medals to Special Constables with ten years' service, and Long Service Certificates for staff with twenty years' service. Richard Woodcock was presented with the Chief Constable's Certificate of Appreciation for his work in the Police Local History Society, and there were also Commendations for courageous acts and good work, the High Sheriff's Constabulary Award, and the Police Commissioner's Award. Guests received copies of the 160 Years booklet and badge. Richard and I received the personal thanks of the Chief Constable for our work in organising and managing the day.

Terry Gardner, Hon Secretary, WCHS

LWS Night Shelter

LWS Night Shelter is a not-for-profit organisation set up by students at the University of Warwick in 2015, to provide food shelter and company for homeless and vulnerable people in Leamington and district. The shelter is open every week on Fridays and Saturdays from 7.30 pm to 10 am, serving dinner and breakfast. The aim of the Shelter is to ensure more than a roof over one's head: it welcomes people from all walks of life, offering a place of safety, where all-comers are treated with dignity and respect, and fostering a sense of community.

The Shelter is open all year-round, thanks to continued support from student volunteers, and Tara & Co Estate Agents' facilitating use of the old Priors Club in Clemens Street.

Unfortunately, planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment of the site, so LWS Night Shelter volunteers are about to launch a crowd-funding campaign to help raise funds for a permanent home for their invaluable support service. You can find out more at justgiving.com/crowdfunding/lwsnightshelter, or LeamingtonWS.org, or email LeamingtonWS@gmail.com.

Tessa Whitehouse. Reviews

Monday 25 September Graham Doughty: The Victoria Cross & the George Cross

A late change to our scheduled programme brought the welcome return of Graham Doughty to continue his history of the Victoria Cross, the country's highest award for valour, and some noteworthy local recipients. The medal itself is only awarded to serving members of the forces on active duty. King George V realised that many civilians performed equally brave deeds and so he instituted the George Cross and George Medal, equal in status to the military award. Exactly how the medal was earned is not always fully known as survivors either chose not to speak publicly about it or their work was of a highly restricted nature and could not be openly recognised. All who receive this gallantry medal are listed in the London Gazette. Graham went on to recount the heroic story of Leamington man Henry Tandey, the most highly decorated British soldier of the Great War. Another recipient with local connections was R A J [Rex] Warneford. Born in India in 1891 he subsequently attended the Boys' Grammar School, Stratford upon Avon. He earned both the VC and France's most distinguished award, the *Légion d'Honneur*.

We are fortunate to have a member of Graham's research experience and enthusiasm and were delighted to hear him again so soon

Monday 23 October: John Berkeley O.B.E, On Home Made Wings: Early Pioneers of Aviation

John Berkeley captivated his audience with his passion for the early years of aviation. Manned flight became a reality shortly before WW1 and when peace returned the quest to create the perfect flying machine continued. Air displays became hugely popular, even with the very primitive machines on display, owned only by the very wealthy. Self-build kits were becoming available to a wider public, with flying for fun the order of the day! Planes came in all shapes and sizes and a wide variety of materials. Early restrictions and regulations, lack of flight paths and radio communication did not deter the enthusiasts. Planes in the sky gradually became a normal feature of life. Thus, with increasing amounts of air traffic, landing space across the country was needed and Warwickshire had 45 sites where this was available including farmland at Attleborough in Nuneaton, Whitnash aerodrome, Stratford Road, Warwick and several sites around Solihull and Birmingham. Each plane was unique. A specific long-term interest of John's is Henri Mignet's rather eccentric 'Pou du Ciel', the 'flying flea'. Mignet published his plans and designs, but they were far from successful and the 'fleas' were later banned from the skies! After WW2 strict regulations and safety rules came into force, preparing for flying as we know it today. 'If you can nail together a packing case you can construct an aeroplane' was the theme of this very interesting talk.

Monday 27 November: Dorothy Entwistle: Life as an enactor with the Sealed Knot

Mention of 'The Sealed Knot' automatically brings to mind the battle recreations portrayed in the media, but beyond that, most of us know little about it. Dot gave a very enlightening talk about her long-standing involvement with the Sealed Knot, - a group of very dedicated individuals who relive the history of the Civil War. Their costumes and footwear are reproduced in painstaking detail in the natural fabrics of the time, whilst observing present-day H & S standards for firearms. Entire families, including children, take part in all Sealed Knot events, where all modern technology is banned. Dot, whose Sealed Knot name is Abigail Flowerdew, a wise woman (herbalist), gave her talk dressed in a resplendent costume which she made and hand-embroidered. She also brought artefacts, props and memorabilia, including her son-in-law's armour and the beautiful hand-crafted shoes that her daughter wore for her wedding. The quality of these artefacts emphasised the devotion of members to the society, and how for so many it becomes a way of life. What fun they all must have at their gatherings!

Leamington History Group AGM

**Monday 22 January 2018, at 7.30 pm
at the Dormer Conference Centre, Dormer Place.**

Leamington Mayor, Cllr Caroline Evetts, will chair the business meeting, which will be followed by the celebration of ten years of Leamington History Group, and a short presentation by Barry Franklin, on Leamington's WW2 British Restaurant.

There is one vacancy on the committee. Nominations (with the nominee's prior agreement, please) should be lodged with the Secretary two weeks before the meeting (i.e. by 12th January 2018 at the latest.) Committee Meetings take place about six times per year, and members are welcome to attend as observers.

2017 Accounts and other Reports will be available at the meeting.

Many members have been with us since the start at Bath Place, and we look forward to reminiscing about those early days, and planning for the future of the association.

IMPORTANT!

I am sure that you will all be familiar with the tick-box which appears at the foot of many commercial emails nowadays, asking you to tick to agree to receive newsletters, offers and so on. **If you are on email, please make sure that you update your details by signing in on the sheet available at meetings, or write to the Secretary directly, making clear that you are happy to receive notifications** of meetings, book launches and invitations to other events, particularly those of other societies. Your details will not be passed on to any third parties, without your consent, and only held by LHG for the duration of your membership.

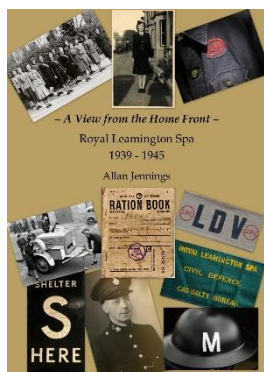
It is important that you **opt in** to such email contact, rather than opting out, in order to bring LHG into line with new legislation coming in May 2018, aimed at reducing online fraud. Margaret.

Leamington History Group Research Projects

Apart from personal interests, members have also been researching on behalf of LHG on two fronts throughout 2017. Mick Jeffs of LHG and Martin Green of WIAS (Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society) jointly lead a small team investigating *Ironfounders in 19th Century Leamington*. Their findings to date were presented at a meeting of WIAS on Thursday 16th November, to great acclaim. A small book detailing their findings will be published in 2018.

A second project, again led by Mick Jeffs, but solely the responsibility of LHG members, is *Royal Leamington Spa, a Story in 100 Buildings*, - no small task! In this, we have been helped by a wide range of LHG members, past and present, and are grateful for their input, of personal research, images, references and anecdotes. This project too, is aiming at publication in 2018, and we look forward to your support once we go to press.

A view from the Home Front: Allan Jennings



Prolific local historian Allan Jennings published his latest book, *A View from the Home Front*, at the end of November. It demonstrates the value of long patient research in local archives, interviewing and recording those few survivors who still live locally, and must be counted as Allan's best publication to date.

The book includes many aspects of the war at home: half-time schooling and the accommodation of evacuees, the role of women, the Civil Defence, the Camouflage Directorate, the various Services, the problems of public transport in the blackout, when railway station signs were removed and road signs obliterated in case of invasion. Allan has more than done justice to his topic, his contributors and not least, himself! We look forward to his presentation on the topic, at LHG next spring.

Allan's book is deservedly selling out fast, but some copies are available at Waterstones, priced £24.95.

The Myton Hospices: The First 35 Years

To celebrate thirty-five years of the Myton Hospices Trust, Mick Jeffs has compiled a tribute to the trustees, volunteers, patients and their families. Mick trawled the archives to unearth the early history of a local institution which now, touching so many lives and reaching into all communities, proudly boasts a national reputation, winning awards for excellence and innovation.

From the start, in 1982 in Warwick, Mick traces the Hospices' effects on the lives of thousands of individuals and families across the Midlands. End of life care is not an easy subject to make readable, but Mick has achieved that, and more. He closes with a vision for the future which underlines Myton's vision, to "continue to be ambitious for our organisation, and remain committed to those who most need our support"

The Myton Hospices: The First 35 Years does not come with a price tag, but donations are welcome (Suggested minimum, £5) Copies can be obtained from LHG on Tuesday Mornings at South Lodge, Jephson Gardens, or from Mick. Contact him through the website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk, or through the Secretary.

Postscript

LHG member Richard King has drawn my attention to an advertisement printed the Leamington Courier in July 1834, - one that would never appear today. Headed *The Parish of Leamington Priors*, it highlighted the quarterly expenditure accounts of the Overseers of the Poor, with a named list of fathers and mothers who owed money to the Parish "on Account of Bastardy." The sums owed varied from one guinea (£105 today) to an astonishing £15.14s.6d - or £1500 in 2017.

The greatest number of fathers had left the town; some were listed as transported; one went to America; one chose to stay, and two were recorded as 'dead.' The unfortunate mothers mostly lived close by in what came to be known as the slum quarters of the town, though some were from outlying villages. It would be interesting to discover what became of these forlorn figures, and their children, - maybe I will! *Margaret Rushton*