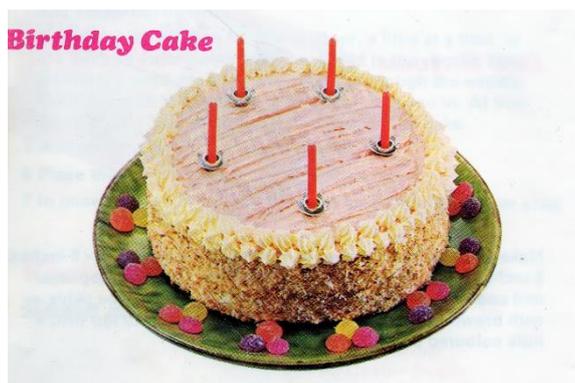


The Birthday Party, 1950s Style

Reflecting on my past, one event has just come to mind - the birthday parties of my childhood days! Back in the 1950s this was the highlight of my life, after Christmas, that is. My birthday being in February meant the event took place in the winter. It was always held on a Sunday afternoon from 4.00 - 6.00. Guests numbered no more than 8, plus my brother,



due to the limited size of the front room. Mother was always in charge and Dad usually went to bed for a couple of hours! Invitations were sent out a couple of weeks in advance to cousins and current school friends. Very often one of my Christmas presents was a stationery set complete with a pretend sheet of stamps and this was always kept with my approaching birthday in mind.

Guests arrived on time, each, hopefully, bearing a gift or a half crown coin. Best clothes were the order of the day and for me that meant my prettiest summer dress regardless of the weather.

For the occasion my hair had been curled with my Mother's 'dinkie' hair curlers and she had bought me a new hair ribbon. My brother's hair was plastered down with Brylcreem.

And so the fun began with a riotous game in the front room until mother announced that tea was ready. The cake had been made in advance and iced according to my instructions and adorned with the appropriate number of candles and a coloured cake frill around it. The tea followed the same for all parties of that time - jelly made in the 'rabbit' mould, peaches, Carnation milk (ugh!) the obligatory bread and butter, chocolate teacakes or similar and home - made rock cakes and jam tarts made earlier in the day. All this was washed down with a cup of tea, or if Dad had been very generous, a glass of Corona pop!

The candles were lit and Happy Birthday was sung. Not everyone wanted the cake at that time so a slice was wrapped in a serviette to take home. Then it was back to the front room for more games. I never had the luxury of having a conjurer to entertain my guests. We played *blind man's buff*, *hunt the thimble*, *pass the parcel*, and no party was complete without *postman's knock*. A fight was not uncommon but this added to the fun of the occasion!

Time to leave and best coats were brought into the front room. No goody bag to take home! It was all good fun and hopes were that party invites would come my way later in the year! Children today would find it difficult to get satisfaction from such simple pleasures. This was before the advent of cheese and pineapple on sticks, cheese and crisp nibbles, sausage rolls and burgers and fries. And no McDonalds! And never ice cream, well not in the winter.

But, it was fun and long-remembered. It was, as intended, a birthday tea, and one of the social niceties of my generation. If any cake was left, a slice was taken to school the next day for the teacher.

Tessa Whitehouse

Another reminder of times past: Whose families collected these, from shops and petrol stations? What did you buy with them? I still have, and use, an 'Old Hall' stainless steel teaset, designed by Robert Welch of Chipping Campden, saved up for by my mother, in the 1960s, - and now a museum piece. Its elegant design made me a lifetime fan of Robert Welch, - to the extent of now buying R W Christmas tree decorations! M.R.



Thorburns Ltd

Now based in Whiteheads Court, "Thorburns" is Leamington's oldest independent male outfitters, supplying traditional and modern menswear for all ages. The business was founded by an ambitious young draper and tailor from Scotland, James Thorburn, in 1880. He opened his first shop at 46 Clemens Street, - where at that time £4 would buy a man a tailor-made suit of the finest worsted. James worked hard and his business rapidly became successful. He and Jane his wife married at Warwick in 1878, and went on to have a family of ten, of whom eight survived into adulthood. Some of the five daughters and three sons followed their father's footsteps. William and Charles joined their father, and their descendants carried on the business, through several changes of venue, until relatively recently.

James Thorburn soon made himself at home in the Spa: as well as running a thriving business he was a keen sportsman and active in local politics. A Liberal, he was elected to the Council several times to represent West Ward, and served on the Committees of the

Free Library and Museum, the Allotments (He was a keen allotment holder), the Cemetery, the Parks and Gardens, and was on the management board of St Paul's School. Mr Thorburn was instrumental in the setting up of the Leamington Bowling Club, even though this proved something of a trial: it took a whole three years to persuade the Council to agree to lay the green in Avenue Road. By 1912, the club boasted 50 season ticket holders, with green fees of 10/6d. James Thorburn was keen to reduce the fee to 5/- to encourage more players, - so he was far from the stereotypical Scotsman! He



A small crowd of shoppers wait patiently for the staff of Thorburns in Clemens Street to open their doors for the winter sale. Mr Thorburn, the founder of the business and other members of the family look on from the upstairs windows.

lived in hope that one day, Leamington would host a Bowling Tournament, on a par with the Tennis Week and the Croquet Week. He would undoubtedly be pleased to see that the town has more than achieved this aim with the annual Ladies' International Bowling Competition held in Victoria Park.

William, the eldest son became the manager of the store and consequently spent long hours at work. It was usual for him to be at work at the shop until 10 pm on Saturdays, and to his horror, one Saturday evening in 1913, looked out of the window to see his wife Harriet accompanied by a fellow tradesman, going into The Great Western public house. When they left, he followed them by bicycle, back to his home in Llewelyn Road... This led to divorce proceedings on April 1914, when William settled a sum of money on Harriet and agreed to pay her an allowance of 10/- per week thereafter. Harriet clearly had mental health issues, - when discovered in compromising circumstances by her husband and brother-in-law, she didn't appear upset or embarrassed, but sat down and played the harmonium for a while.

Charles, the youngest son, also worked for his father, and also became involved in local politics, sport, and charitable organisations. He served in the Great War, and whilst recuperating in hospital from his wounds, formed the idea of creating an association to maintain the camaraderie that he had encountered in the trenches, whilst helping others at the same time. Having taken over management of the business on the death of his father in 1920, although Charles kept his links with local sport as chairman of the Town Football Club, and served on St John's Horticultural Society Committee, he was not able to achieve his aim until 1943, when "The Good Companions" was formed, taking its name from the novel of JB Priestley, who became the association's patron. The Good Companions worked tirelessly to raise funds for the Royal Midland Counties Home, the Sunshine Home for Blind

Babies, St Anne's Home and the RAF Association, amongst others. Coal and groceries were provided at Christmas for widows and the aged. Seaside holidays were funded for children and families in need. By 1953, the Companions had raised over £10,000, - some of this in wartime.

After wartime service in the Royal Navy, Charles' sons Derek (Dick) and Ian ran the business and oversaw the move to Warwick Street, - when Golf permitted! (Ian played off 4 for a while, and like his brother, captained Leamington and County G C.) Dick died suddenly in 1978, leaving Ian at the helm. Thorburns celebrated their centenary in 1980, with Ian as Chairman and Managing Director. It remained a family business until 2000, when the Stewart family took over. They kept the name 'Thorburns' and are now based round the corner from the Warwick Street shop, just inside the Royal Priors.

William Smith and the Oak Inn

William's grandson Mark Savage writes:



I don't know a great deal about my grandfather (pictured left, with Wallace, his youngest son) - except that he was born in Wolstanton on 22 October 1861. He was married to Helen Kate Farnsworth (1865-1920) and had four children. William was the landlord (but not the owner) of the Oak Inn, Radford Road from 1892-1900, and he also ran the carriage business from the stables at the back. Unfortunately, he is best remembered in the family for going bankrupt, having drunk the proceeds of the business). His father, also called William, was a builder turned undertaker from Nuneaton, who had the misfortune to be killed by falling coffin boards the same year that his son had to sell the Oak Inn. For a while, it was known as the Oak Hotel, and street directories of the time show advertisements for the hotel, with livery stables, open and close carriages, dog carts and pony carriages on hire, and fêtes, galas and flower shows catered for. The hotel also offered rooms for cyclists and visitors. The sale particulars give some idea of the scale of the carriage business, - William Smith looks like a typical late Victorian entrepreneur, trying to catch on to any trend. He even advertised the hire of a marquee with bar, - perhaps it isn't surprising he took to drink!

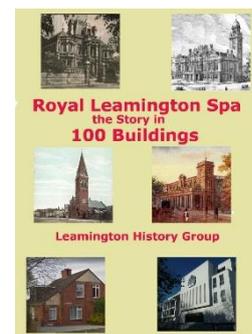
We are still not sure when William died.

Forthcoming Events

Please put these dates in your Diary, - and get in touch if you can help just for half an hour. LHG can only open to the public if enough volunteers sign up to help, and these dates represent some of our best opportunities to meet the public and promote what we do.

Heritage Open Days: South Lodge, each afternoon, 12.30 - 3.30 pm
September 6-9

Annual History Day, "Leamington Past and Present," 10.30 am - 4 pm,
Saturday September 22 at the Parish Church, when the new LHG book, relating the *History of Leamington in 100 Buildings* will be launched. Pre-order your copy now, by contacting the Secretary, Margaret Rushton, rushtonmm1860@gmail.com



2017: Another Busy Year



July: Blue Plaque to architect John Cundall, unveiled at Warwick Street



September: Local History Day at the Parish Church



October: Town Guides' Lunch with Cllr Caroline Evetts, Mayor of Leamington



November: Dedication of the of the memorial to the Civilian War dead of WW2

The "Cobra" 8th Annual Picnic

On Saturday 5th July 1913, as was the practice at the time, Messrs Blyth and Platt Ltd of Watford, manufacturers of "Cobra" polishes, funded a day's outing for their 100-strong workforce. It was B & P's eighth annual picnic, and held in Warwickshire. Staff and workforce made the journey from the factory at Watford to Leamington, Warwick and Stratford upon Avon. At Leamington they were formally received by the Mayor and taken on a tour of the public buildings of interest. As the party left the Town Hall, souvenirs of the occasion were handed out. The Leamington Courier reported that lunch was taken at the Crown Hotel, where the General Manager and Director of the company, Mr FJ Brown, reported on his recent promotional tour of Canada. Mr Spencer Brown proposed a toast to "the Firm," busier than it had ever been, both in Watford and in Australia. Amusing comments were made about the bright prospects ahead, - with "Cobra" suggested as the thing to keep them bright. After lunch, the party left in "char-a-bancs" for Stratford, led by the firm's own attractive motor car (MX607, above). Having visited Warwick and Stratford, the party returned to Leamington in time for tea at 5:30 pm. During lunch and tea music was provided by Mr Rawlings, (the Leamington and district representative of Cobra) and some of his friends.



Information and image supplied by Ian Read, Image Researcher at Bushey Museum, Herts. Image ©Bushey Museum Trust (Wheatley Collection)

A Decade of Leamington History Group, or 'Now we are Ten'

Leamington History Group started life in 2008 at Bath Place School, after a Lottery-funded Community History Project, *History @ Bath Place*, came to an end. The project was set up in 2005 to collect evidence of Leamington's recent past, in the form of oral histories, reminiscences, photographs and ephemera. It was staffed by a small group of paid employees and a substantial group of volunteers, who were trained to research items in the Library and the County Record Office, record interviews and scan photographs and documents. A small group was trained to build and maintain a website.



The focus in the early days was primarily Bath Street, Bath Place, High Street and Clemens Street, and the project culminated in an exhibition, with twelve pop-up banners printed to show the results of research projects such as the story of Spencer Street and the history of Bath Place School. An extensive archive of photographs, postcards, maps and newspaper cuttings donated by old pupils and close neighbours was collected and uploaded to a laptop using a (then) state-of-the-art piece of software which enabled searches by street, by building, by the names of families, etc. Later, a small book, 'People and Places' was published, with contributions from volunteers on topics researched as part of the project. Rather than see the results of three years' extensive research simply mothballed, Alan Griffin set up a steering group and from that grew '*The Leamington History Group*', with 16/18 members attending the first AGM in the old school. Terry Gardner was elected Chairman, with Alan Griffin as Secretary and Jenny St John as Treasurer. The meetings rapidly became popular, and we outgrew the space. South Lodge was our next venue, and we rapidly outgrew that, moving to the Old Library in support of Bath Place Community Venture when BPCV set up there. Eventually, we moved to Dormer Place, now a popular venue for many Societies.

The quarterly Newsletter, *The Leamington Omnibus* was another of Alan's innovations, first published in Summer 2009, and (so far, at least!) still going strong. In 2013 we launched the new website, again, thanks to Alan, who persuaded the Committee to fund its development and commissioned Mark Ellis to take on the task.

In 2011, we held the first Local History Day, at South Lodge, with Sydenham, Lillington, and Leek Wootton. Members brought maps and documents of interest, including a basket full of old newspapers, bought at a local fête. It was a bit of a squash, so the following year, we moved to Dormer Hall, a great venue, but a little off the beaten track. For the past few years, we have held the gathering at the Parish Church, and now have around twenty groups taking part each year. 2012 saw the publication of the first fundraising 'Old Leamington' Calendar, and the following year, the partnership with the town council to reinstate the free guided Town Walks. Our success in these ventures is a tremendous tribute to the core of volunteers who give unstintingly of their time and expertise in support of the group.

Leamington History Group Current Committee

*Chairman; Barry Franklin Vice-Chairman: Michael Pearson Treasurer: Terry Gardner
Assistant Treasurer: Ian McCutcheon Secretary: Margaret Rushton Web Master: Mick Jeffs
Plus: Tessa Whitehouse and Maggie McGreevy*

*There are two vacancies: if you are interested in joining us, please contact the Secretary,
rushtonmm1860@gmail.com*

Reviews with Tessa Whitehouse

Monday 23 January 2018: Barry Franklin, Leamington's WW2 British Restaurants

'British Restaurants' were established in 1940 to ensure that workers in particular people were eating healthy meals. The first Leamington restaurant opened in 1941 in the Liberal Club premises in Regent Grove. All meals provided were off-ration and had to have a set maximum price. Strict rules were laid down and all meals consisted of meat or fish and 2 vegetables. Fish and chips was always very popular especially as fish was never rationed. In 1941 a fully equipped central kitchen was established in Brunswick Street. Two vans were provided by the Ford Emergency Vans Trust, driven by ladies from the Women's Voluntary Service and serviced by Soans. This maintained the ever- increasing supply of meals, all sourced from local suppliers. Crops were grown on Campion Hills and part of Jephson Gardens. The restaurants were open during the daytime and people were able to collect a meal to take home after their day's work. When the restaurants finally closed in 1949, the Borough Council bought the Regent Grove building and the club relocated to Holly Walk.

Monday, 26 February 2018: Sheila Woolf, Jane Austen and Stoneleigh Abbey

Always a popular LHG Speaker, Sheila Woolf made a welcome return to take a full house on an enlightening journey through the Leigh family tree, showing us that although Jane Austen, her mother and sister Cassandra only stayed at the Abbey for nine days, their family links were strong, and many familiar names of characters in Jane Austen's novels are in fact family names. Intriguingly, Sheila's researches in the Stoneleigh papers lead her to think that Mrs Austen may well have been the model for Mrs Bennett, in 'Pride and Prejudice'! The hour went by far too quickly. We would have loved to have heard more.

Peter Chater, 29 March 1925-12 January 2018

Peter was one of a family of five, originally from Fenny Compton, but Peter grew up here. His father had an allotment where the Sydenham estate now lies, - where they kept a pig, and Peter had the job of building a home for it (He was very good at woodwork.) Peter went to Leicester Street School, where on his first day he met Bill Gibbons, then a prefect. They struck up a friendship which lasted until Bill's death, visiting sites of local historical interest, industrial archaeology sites and railway stations. When he left school, Peter desperately wanted to join the railways, but his father was adamant that he should get 'a proper job', so he was apprenticed to a local building firm. Once over this hurdle, he did join the railways, working first on the footplate and then later in management, at Leamington, then Hatton, and finally at Solihull until retirement.

For many years, Peter led a walking group, plotting the routes from his extensive collection of OS Maps, almost invariably to sites of industrial archaeological interest. A few years ago, when his walkers (and he) were all getting on a bit, he decided to hold an early 90th birthday celebration, - because at that point he didn't think he would see 90!

Sharp and alert to the very end, there seemed to be nothing Peter didn't know about Industrial Archaeology, Church Architecture, the Railways, and local history, not just of Leamington but the whole of the Midlands! We shall miss him.

Eileen Pullin

On another sad note, Eileen, wife of well-known local monumental mason and craftsman Ray, died shortly before Christmas 2017. Ray and Eileen had moved from Offchurch, to a residential home near their son, as both were becoming frail in old age. Ray, now 96, and their son survive her.

Back copies of The Omnibus, 2018 AGM documents, Membership & Gift Aid Forms, Privacy Statement and contact details can be found on the website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk.