

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Winter 2012



Image: M Rushton

A Christmas treat before World War I

Kate Judd, in the Leamington Literary Society's 'More Looking Back', recounted her life as a housemaid at the Oaks, Warwick Place, in the early years of last century.

Kate was one of 8 live-in servants of the Lucas family who owned the Brewery in Brewery Lane. Her life was typical of a housemaid of the time, starting work at 6.30 am, with only one day off a week, but at Christmas, Mr & Mrs Lucas gave all the staff a treat: to go to London to see the pantomime at Drury Lane. The housekeeper took all the servants to London by train. It cost four and sixpence return, and before going into the theatre they all had a glass of porter in a nearby pub. Kate made no comment on the production, - the pantomime was clearly only part of the adventure. They all came back on the mail train, and 10 shillings covered it all: the theatre, the porter, and the train fare.

However, the editor of the Leamington Spa Courier of December 21 1906 offered the following seasonal caution to all:

"Some people have read of the Prevention of Corruption Act, wherein it is declared illegal to give commissions, presents, or bribes to agents or servants, or for those in turn to accept. Those who have noted the measure have promptly come to the conclusion that they must not give Christmas boxes, neither must Christmas boxes be received. Perhaps those with mean and narrow folks the wish is father to the thought - they are glad that the Act affords them the excuse for not giving a trifle at Christmastide to the milk boy, the butcher's man, the newspaper vendor, the scavenger, and other willing servants of the public who supply various needs.

But, really no one need excuse himself for withholding Christmas boxes, nor are any to be afraid of the pains and penalties of receipt. The principal thing to be remembered is that the essence of the act lies in the word "corruptly". If a present is given in the nature of a bribe it is corrupt, but for anyone to imagine that it is acting corruptly to give a little Christmas box to help make life a little easier is absolutely absurd."

STOP PRESS!

We are proud to announce that Leamington History Group Membership has topped the 100 mark. At the monthly Monday meeting in October, we were delighted to welcome our hundredth member, Brenda Layton, who was presented with a copy of Toby Cave's book, *Royal Leamington Spa*, - the acknowledged bible for anyone interested in the history of the town.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please make a note in your new diaries: the Leamington History Group AGM will take place on Monday January 27 2013, at 7.30 pm, at the Dormer Conference Centre, next to St Peter's Church on Dormer Place.

There will be a short business meeting, to review the achievements of the past year, followed by a brief election, following the resignation of Colin Jennings earlier in the year, and the intended retirement of two further members, Robin Stott and Ronnie Goldstein, all of whom have contributed immensely to the success and development of the group since the start long ago at Bath Place. Please send all nominations to the Secretary by Friday, 10th January, - having first acquired the consent of your chosen nominee, of course!

After the elections, Peter Hallett will give an illustrated talk on English and Welsh Archers since Mediaeval Times. If you have always longed for a bow and arrow, this is your chance!

N.B. Subscriptions for 2013 will be due at this meeting.

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The Chairman's View

It has to be said that the past year has been pivotal in the comparatively short existence of the Leamington History Group. I recall chairing our Annual General Meeting in 2008 and reporting to the 23 members present on that occasion that if we were to become a viable organisation then we would need to double our membership. The fact that four years on we have over a hundred members says much about the hard work and sheer enthusiasm of our management team in the intervening period. It also shows, I hope, that our members are in general satisfied with the fare that we have served up for them at Dormer Hall each fourth Monday.

In any new enterprise, one of the primary objectives in the early days has to be establishing credibility among one's peers and that is something we have undeniably accomplished in the last twelve months.

The events and achievements of the year will be reported on by the Secretary at the AGM in January when I shall outline our plans and aspirations for the coming year. Whilst I try not to indulge in too much management speak, the 'buzz word' for 2013 is involvement. Given that the group is now on a firm financial footing, we have a number of exciting projects lined up and to bring these to fruition will involve a greater level of participation by the membership at large. I hope that in the new year more members might be encouraged to help us to realise our ambitions for the group. On behalf of the LHG committee, I thank you all most sincerely for your continued support and look forward to further enhancing our well-earned reputation through 2013.

Alan Griffin

THE TOONE FAMILY OF LEAMINGTON SPA

My relatives and I have been researching our family history since the 1960s. At that time my great aunt Lulu Thomas (née Toone) had a great deal of help from the then Leamington Librarian – H Tallamy. Since that time Lulu, her daughter Jean, my cousin Elisabeth and I have gained more information and have been corresponding with a branch of the family who moved to America in the 1850s.

We began with John Toone (1787 to 1875), a builder in Victorian Leamington, who married Elizabeth Reading (1785 to 1873), and had 14 children. The photo below, showing my American cousin Elisabeth Thomas, and me, Helen Pendery, was taken recently at John and Elizabeth's grave in Leamington Cemetery.

The Toone's eldest son, also called John Toone, (1813 to 1893) married Emma Prosser and emigrated to Utah. It is his family we have been corresponding with over the years. Our great grandfather Henry Toone (1828 to 1917), was another son of John and Elizabeth. His daughter Lulu and her brother Harry, our grandfather, were brought up in Cambridge House at the end of Lansdowne Crescent. My father Basil and his brothers Laurie & Reg were born there and my family lived there until Harry's death in 1968.



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Despite the wonders of modern technology, and coming from such a large Victorian family, cousin Elisabeth and I have not been able to find any other cousins in this country, so any information would be gratefully received.



This photo, which Elisabeth found in the back of a family sampler, may jog a few memories. We can identify our grandfather Harry Toone, second from the left in the back row, dating the photo to around 1910. We would like to know if anyone can identify the occasion. On the side of the building there is a builder's sign which we believe may be Matthews. There was a builder at 88 New Street where this may have been taken.

Helen Pendery (née Toone) hpendery@hotmail.co

Carol Circuit's Leamington Mystery

A few years ago I made a most extraordinary discovery and Leamington Spa is at the heart of this find. When I accepted a commission to reupholster a Victorian chaise longue, I expected to find the traditional stuffing of horsehair inside. Instead I found a cache of artefacts dating from the Victorian period, including a name and address – Miss Smith of Russell Terrace, Leamington Spa.

Miss Sarah Henrietta Haynes Smith was born in Evesham in 1848 and moved to Leamington with her parents, Charles and Sarah, in 1861. She had a brother, William Borthwick Smith, who moved to Coventry in the 1860s, where he worked as a watch manufacturer alongside his uncle, John Ryley. Other partnerships of his included work with James Starley (of Smith and Starley) designing and making sewing machines, bicycles and roller skates, and an association with another uncle, Henry Haynes (of Haynes and Jefferis) for the manufacture of bicycles. In the 1880s, William moved to London, where he married Charlotte Marchant Oliver, and adopted a daughter, Dora Lilian. He moved subsequently first to Essex, and then to Hampshire.



A cotton lacy cap of a type often worn indoors by married women in Victorian times – one of the items found in the cache.

Miss Smith's mother's family lived in Haselor where her grandfather, John Benton Haynes, was a farmer, but I believe other members of the Haynes family also moved to Leamington. Miss Smith had a number of cousins living nearby in the town, and a general domestic servant named Ethel May Wallington who was with her for many years and became a friend.

As was usual at the time amongst families of good standing, Miss Smith had a connection to at least two charities, - The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and The Universities Mission to Central Africa.

Miss Smith's final home in Leamington was at 3 Church Street, which was at the time also the address of two further charitable organisations, the Girls Friendly Society Lodge and the Home of Rest for Girls.

If anyone has any information at all about any of the above people or organisations I would be very pleased to hear from you.

Carol Circuit

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Humble Village to Splendid Spa

On Monday 24th September, Jo Clark welcomed everyone back from the brief summer break with a lively, amusing talk based on slides he inherited from a fellow local historian, the late Bill Gibbons. In his introduction, to much laughter, Jo referred to Bill and the founder of the Spa, Ben Satchwell, as Bill and Ben! This set the tone of the meeting, as Jo went on with great good humour, to illustrate in detail the early history of the town, and the creation of the 'Royal' Spa, where the good and the great came to take the waters, to see and, almost as important, *to be seen*.

However, "Industry" had also come to the town with the arrival of the railways and the setting up of the gasworks and Flavels Foundry, - all situated at a careful distance from the fashionable centre, and all contributing substantially to the town's long term development. As Jo was keen to point out, this influx brought with it a seamier side: tucked away behind the fashionable façades, there were large numbers of tenements housing workers, - and, even more embarrassing for the elegant *Royal Spa*, many "undesirables"!

Jo related numerous anecdotes about Ben Satchwell and Dr Jephson, and many others who influenced Leamington's early days, going home very much the wiser in our local knowledge as a result. It was a very pleasant evening, the humour and enthusiasm of the speaker adding greatly to the occasion.

Leamington Pubs in 1852

At the meeting on 22 October, History Group member Allan Jennings once again shared his extensive research into the pubs of Leamington with a packed house. Few of us, if any, realised that in 1852 there were over 90 pubs in the town, - amply demonstrated by Allan by reference to the Board of Health map of the time. A great many of those early drinking establishments have long disappeared, or had their licenses transferred to other premises, but many are still trading, albeit often under different names. Using the maps of the time, those that have gone can still be located, even though their sites, such as Covent Garden, have been redeveloped.

Astonishingly, some streets in 1852 had two or even three licensed premises within a few doors of each other. Maybe alcohol was a better option than the drinking water of the time, - we will never know!

Concluding, the debate about the Oak Inn on Radford Road left us questioning the future of many more local landmarks, as social life and drinking habits continue to change. Only time will tell. This was a very well researched project, supported by lots of images, Allan's own photographs, his interesting comments and anecdotes. Thank you, Allan, for all your hard work. We could have listened much longer!

Murder Most Foul

On Monday, 26th November we were pleased to welcome Chris Baker to talk to us about the work of Sir Bernard Spilsbury and his forensic science career, especially during World War 1. Born above the Chemist's shop in Bath Street, Leamington Spa, in 1877, after university Bernard Spilsbury became a pathologist in London. His inquisitive mind and attention to detail led him to a career in autopsy, sudden deaths, and deaths resulting from other causes which previously had been dismissed or never investigated. His results were often thought impossible but many were proved to be correct and used as evidence in court. This was the beginning of a lifetime devoted to forensic science. He dealt with very high profile cases including Dr Crippen, and the Brides in the Bath murders, and his work brought him national recognition. Bernard Spilsbury's knowledge formed the roots of forensic science as we know it today. Following his high profile forensic studies during World War 1 his career continued until the 1940s when his health began to fail. Pressure of work built up and he could no longer offer the thoroughness that had been the basis of his lifetime's work. In December 1947 he took his own life by poison. He will always be remembered as a unique man who dedicated his life to his work. Given more time, Chris Baker, would like to have revealed even more from his research on this very remarkable Leamington - born man. He nonetheless gave us a very pleasant and informative evening.

Tessa Whitehouse

Best Wishes for Christmas and 2013.

We look forward to seeing you on 27th January at the AGM. - Ed

