

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Summer 2012

Welcome to our Olympic edition where we celebrate the achievements of some of our local sporting heroes past and present.

THE 'KING OF CLUBS'

WILLIAM JAMES HENRI LAWTON, 1871 – 1964



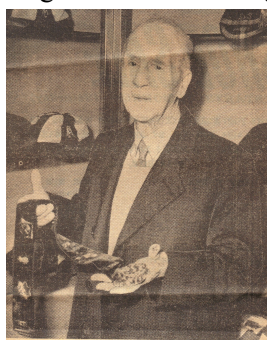
Born in Warwick in August 1871, small in stature (5ft 4½ in) and slender in build (9st 3lb), Henri Lawton nonetheless became a renowned gymnastic, boxing and fencing instructor, the author of 2 small books on exercise and fitness, and in 1895, World Champion Indian club swinger.

To claim the title, which had almost always gone to an American before this, Henri Lawton had to swing his 2½ lb clubs continuously for 25 hours, - an almost unimaginable feat of endurance. Warwickians were so proud of his achievement that they presented him with a blue velvet belt, (just visible in the photo on the left) with the Warwickshire crest in silver and enamel as its clasp, and engraved silver medallions showing the bear and ragged staff on either side.

Henri had begun club swinging as a young teenager, talent-spotted and mentored by Professor Hubbard of Birmingham Athletic Club. He gave many displays, and was soon in demand all over the country. Sam Lockhart, the famous circus proprietor was so impressed that he tried to persuade Henri to join the circus for a Continental tour, but family circumstances and a burgeoning business at home made that impossible. Henri ran a gym from his home in Archery Road, taught gymnastics at Warwick School, and ran evening classes for both ladies and gentlemen at Clapham Terrace School. He was acclaimed in the national press as “a splendid teacher”, and acknowledged as the leading authority in the field. He and his pupils gave regular displays, at gatherings such as testimonials, charity and fund-raising events, prize-giving ceremonies at the Winter Hall in Leamington, and at other national venues. Henri even gave a demonstration at the Paris Exhibition.

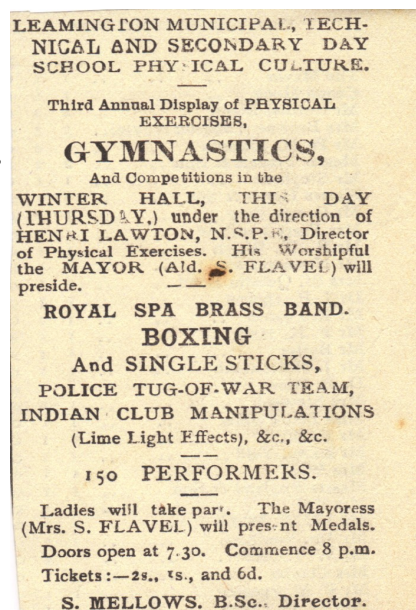
Henri maintained his early links with a wide range of sports. He was a member, and secretary for a time, at Warwick United F C. He ran a sports shop at no 1 Regent Grove, Leamington, next to the Town Hall. A local newspaper lists supplies for all the major sports, - golf, hockey, football, polo, boxing, fencing, tennis, gymnastics, billiards, fishing, physical culture, - and curiously, wood turning. However, there is no mention of rugby!

Even in old age, Henri could still string a 'gut' tennis racquet, - and taught the skill to his grandson. (me!)



Henri retired to Kenilworth, where according to 1950s press reports, in his eighties, he still kept fit by club swinging. “It helps to keep my muscles loose”, he said. He died aged 93, and it wasn't until long afterwards that his book of press cuttings, photographs and testimonials came to light amongst other family papers.

Derek Billings



Images courtesy of Derek Billings

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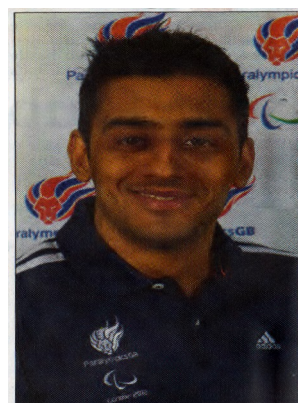
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Leamington has had a long and proud sporting history, covering a wide range of disciplines, from the world champion Indian Club swinger Henri Lawton in 1896, to our current 'home-grown' Olympian, Naomi Folkard.

As Queen Victoria's reign came to a close, archery, croquet, tennis, - including the new outdoor game of lawn tennis, - cycling, cricket and football all flourished in Leamington. John Wisden, of Almanac fame, had run a business here for a time, and captained a team that played on what later became Victoria Park. There was a handsome modern swimming pool, and boating on the river Leam.

Many sportsmen and women who have achieved success at national and international levels were born here or lived for part of their lives in Leamington. So many that it is difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps with cricket, following Wisden's example. In recent times, MJK Smith, MBE, Leamington resident for many years, Warwickshire player and one of England's most popular captains, also played rugby union, making him England's last double international. Eddie Hemmings, Leamington born and bred, played in 16 Test Matches in the 1980s and double that number of one day games. Also in the 1980s, and perhaps less well-known, former Telford School and Leamington College for Girls pupil Janet Tedstone played cricket for England between 1984 and 1992. Daphne Wilkinson swam at the 1952 Helsinki Games in the 400m Freestyle, and although she didn't win a medal, she broke the World Record. Our Chairman, Alan Griffin, can remember as a youngster, queuing up to get her autograph. Daphne taught swimming for many years, and still lives in Kenilworth.

Amongst paralympians, current titleholders include Bob Matthews, the blind distance runner and former member of Leamington C & AC, who, having decided to retire and move to New Zealand, has taken up cycling so successfully, he is ready to represent his new country in his new sport at the coming Olympics. Local man Mandip Sehmi (right) took up wheel-chair rugby after a spinal cord injury, winning European Championship golds in 2005 and 2007, and in Beijing in 2008. Nigel Murray from Whitnash is the current world no 1 and double medal winner in Beijing 2008 in the less well-known sport of boccia, - a cross between bowls and the French game of boules. Another Whitnash resident, Richard Moreton competed at Seoul in 1988, in 100m, 200, and 4 x 100m relay. In 1992, he played football for Team G-B at the Barcelona Games.



Mandip Sehmi

Simon Archer is another Leamington-born athlete, a badminton player who learned his skills at the Coventry Racquets Centre at the age of eight. He competed in Atlanta 1996, and Sydney 2000, where he won bronze in the mixed doubles. He took Commonwealth golds in 1998 and 2002.

R P (Nicky) Thompson, a hockey player, was born in Leamington in 1965. He lived in Rugby and played for Coventry and North Warwickshire. A contemporary, Suma Singh, although born in Sangathpur, played for the Leamington team Khalsa in the mid 1980s, and competed in Atlanta in 1996. (The team came 7th overall). From an earlier generation of Khalsa hockey players, Darshan Singh Kullar was part of the gold-medal winning team at the Tokyo Olympics of 1964.

The Turpin brothers, Lionel Cecil (aka Dick), John Matthew (aka Jack) and Randolph, were all born in Leamington, and all became recognised champion boxers in their field, although only Randolph won a world title, in 1951. Jack once said that the younger of their sisters, Kathleen, was the best fighter of the lot!

A generation younger than the Turpins, Willie Stack is another Leamington boxer with an international record. Born in the town in 1936, he was a member of Leamington Boys Club. He became ABA middleweight champion in 1964 and went on to represent Great Britain as a middle-weight in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. He had over 300 fights before retiring in 1976.

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Summer 2012

In Judo, honorary Leamingtonian Neil Adams won silver medals at both the 1980 and 1984 Summer Olympics. He was the first British man to win a world title, and to hold a world title and a European title at the same time. He now teaches Judo all over the world. Although born in Rugby in 1958, Neil grew up here and was a pupil at Myton School.

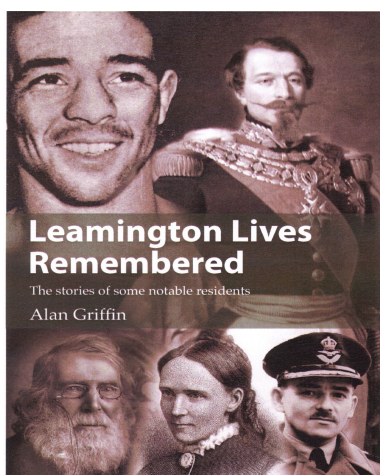
Back to athletics, and Leamington resident Michael Ralph, a former lecturer at the University of Warwick, who, whilst still a student, competed in the triple jump in Tokyo in 1964. He also took part in the 1958 Commonwealth Games, 1962 European Championships, and 1963 World Student Games. The athletics section of Leamington C & AC boasts many national and international title holders, not least, 100m hurdler Sara McGreavy who is hoping to be on the podium this summer, at London 2012.



Photos courtesy Leamington Observer

Another medal contender may well be Kelly Sibley, (in action, left), national table tennis champion, inspired by her mum, Lyn, a former county player, and nurtured by the Leamington Free Church Club. She has come back stronger than ever from a hip injury, and is about to spend a month training in China, prior to competing in London. We wish them all well!

Colin Jennings



New Book

Alan Griffin's latest publication, *Leamington Lives Remembered*, is now available, priced £6.95, from South Lodge on Tuesday mornings, or from the Visitor Information Centre at the Pump Rooms.

In Alan's own inimitable way, he relates the stories of well-known Leamington figures, alongside those of a number of unsung heroes. They include, amongst others, Henry Eric Maudslay, DFC, the youngest of the Dam Buster pilots, killed in action at the age of 21, the eminent forensic scientist Sir Bernard Spilsbury, two extraordinary eccentrics, Rev John Craig and Edward Tracy Turnarelli, and Frances Havergal, Victorian hymn writer and Christian poet.

A fascinating read, and highly recommended. It might even spur you to new walks around the town, as you search out the haunts of these colourful contributors to the Leamington story.

[Eds]

ARCHIVE UPDATE

Our archive cupboard at South Lodge has now been sorted and the various shelves contain:

- 1 Warwickshire & Leamington books for sale
- 2 Leamington books, files and pamphlets collection
- 3 Maps in A2 & A3 folders
- 4 Newspapers
- 5 Printed collectables in A3 & A4 files.

Unfortunately, we cannot allow any of them to be borrowed or taken out of the building, - but they may be consulted by arrangement, *in situ*.

In view of copyright/individual permissions, we are considering restrictions on copying/scanning archive items where the intention is to republish in another format, asking 'borrowers' to confirm in writing their acknowledgement of the source, - and charging a small fee.

This may sound rather grim and too unnecessarily restrictive, but we have a duty under our constitution to safeguard as well as maintain our local history archive for the benefit of donors and members.

Jo Clark, Mick Cullen, Robin Stott

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LOCAL HISTORY FAIR, 19TH MAY

By common consent, the Local History Fair on 19th May was a success. People commented how pleased they were to have the opportunity to share information, make useful contacts, discuss mutual interest and be able to handle artefacts on display. The is reviewing all feedback before deciding where and when to hold next fair. Besides ourselves the groups participating were:

Lillington Local History Society, Sydenham local history group,

Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society, Friends of the Dell, Chedham's Yard staff, Friends of the Pump Room Gardens, British Association for Local History, Cardall Collection (Southam), Trinity Family History Group and the Police Local History Society. Our thanks go to everyone who helped make the event a success.

Robin Stott

July Meeting: A Leamington widow and her plantation slaves.

I had frequently walked along Church Walk through the churchyard at All Saints' and was intrigued by the two large table tombs within a foot of each other near to the gate into Church Street. When I was appointed vergier at the church and had a key to the fenced area of the churchyard, I was able to have a closer look at them. What struck me straight away was that just readable on both tombs were the words 'of Trelawney in the Island of Jamaica'. I knew that the only reason for English families to be in the West Indies in the eighteenth century could be summed up in one word 'sugar'.

I guessed that with a bit of research there might be an interesting story here waiting to be told and so it turned out. I don't want to give away parts of this story. Suffice it to say that my research took me up to East Yorkshire and down to Cornwall. I learned a lot about the working of sugar plantations, about the millions of African slaves who were transported to the Caribbean to labour on them and not least about the astronomical sums of money involved at every stage of the process. I will explain how I went about my research and what primary sources I looked at and will show copies of original documents relating to a large sugar estate.

Sometimes a chance discovery leads you to explore topics that you had never given the least thought to and that is one of the great joys of local history.

Alan Griffin

September Meeting: Jo Clark: Humble Village to Splendid Spa, Leamington 1800 -1890

In 1800 Leamington Priors was a tiny village with approximately 70 houses and a population of 300. Having discovered new springs not far from the Parish Church, two friends, William Abbotts and Ben Satchwell, together with local landowners and businessmen, began to develop their vision of Leamington as a grand social and medical centre. As well as the good and the great, we will look at the seamier side of life, behind the elegant facades of the new spa town.

The talk is based on articles written by Bill Gibbons in the 1980s, for the Radford Semele church magazine.

Jo Clark.

STOP PRESS: TWO EXCITING NEW PROJECTS

Leamington History Group is planning a second volume of People and Places, to be published in 2013. We are happy to edit and proof-read, and so welcome members' contributions, short and long, in any format.

We are also planning to research and publish a history of Ford Foundry. If you have images, press cuttings, reminiscences - or know of a friend or neighbour who has, please get in touch.

Margaret Rushton