

# The Leamington omnibus



The move to the old library for our monthly meetings has been a great success and the new venue is immeasurably better than any we have used in the past. Our membership has almost doubled since last year and there is ample room at the old library to accommodate an even greater number. On a more pessimistic note, our headquarters in the South Lodge was broken into in March and some of our equipment was stolen. We still hold our weekly drop-in sessions there each Tuesday morning and these continue to be both fruitful and enjoyable. These Tuesday get-togethers also serve as a very effective information exchange for anyone doing research into Leamington history. You are most welcome to join us any Tuesday.

Many thanks for your continued support of and interest in Leamington Local History

## Leamington's model citizens

Peter and Sally Lee have lived in Leamington for over 45 years, and in retirement from their lives in business, developed a hobby that has led to TV and radio interviews, a DVD of their work, and the visit of a

film company all the way from Los Angeles.

Peter, born and brought up in Coventry, was interested in scale models from the age of about two. When he left school he worked in an architect's office for a couple of years before service in the RAF in WW2, but it wasn't until he retired that, assisted by Sally, he really began to specialise in architectural scale models.

Painstaking research and attention to detail, photographing and measuring every aspect of a building, its setting and its contents, followed by meticulous construction of every aspect of the fittings, doors and windows, lighting, furniture and furnishings are what have brought media people from far and wide to Lillington. In their time, the Lees have

captured many long-vanished gems, such as Peter's first model, the Beach Road Bus Station, Weston super Mare, with its manager's house tucked in on the left, its café, coaches and buses and nearby shops. This was followed by the Painswick Post Office, intended originally only as a copy of the frontage, but which became a detailed miniature of the whole house and its contents, displayed at Painswick Victorian Fayre a year after its completion.



Peter's scale model of the original Regal cinema in Dormer Place

The collection also includes the Regal Cinema, Leamington Spa, and its update, The Apollo, the Coventry Forum cinema, the Coventry Hippodrome, the Suncourt Spa,

Scarborough, the Beehive Inn, Wales, the Regal Cinema, Minehead, the Orangery, Charlecote Park set out as a miniature museum of all the models, the Rotunda, Oxford, once famously the home of Vivienne Green's museum of dolls houses and baby houses, 'Glendower', Sally's childhood home in Bristol, Post Office memorabilia and letterboxes, a Beach Hut with sand and a seagull, and 3 1/2" gauge models of the LNER Great Northern and GWR 3440 City of Truro steam trains.

It is a vast and wonderful collection, lovingly constructed and cared for, - but it should be seen by a wider audience. Could anyone out there give it a permanent home?

From an interview with Margaret Rushton

## Local History A to Z

### Beech Lawn

Beech Lawn was built to accommodate a large family and a considerable number of servants. Census returns show that the Jephson household was run by a fleet of servants, - a Cook/Housekeeper, a Butler and a Footman, a Lady's Maid, 2 Housemaids and a Kitchen Maid. Coachmen and Garden Staff were most likely "dailies" and lived out.

Sadly, Dr and Mrs Jephson never had the traditional, large, Victorian family to exploit this wonderful house to the full: they had only one son who died in infancy. They were a very sociable couple, entertaining a great deal, and for much of their married life, Mrs Jephson's oldest unmarried sister, Sarah Geldart, lived with them, as

James, his nephew, - and promptly sold.

The gardens were auctioned separately for development, to become the Victorian/Edwardian houses on Grove Street and Dale Street, and in September 1879, Beech Lawn became a Ladies' College, run by the Misses Brown. From 1886 until 1896, it was known as Beech Lawn Ladies' College and High School. In 1897, C.G.C. Mallam, Esq, M.A. took over and the school became a boys' Preparatory School. Owners and staff - and the name - changed many times over the years, but until 1935 the house remained a boys' Preparatory School, known as "Greyfriars", Beech Lawn, Leamington Spa. Beech Lawn was demolished in 1938, and in WW2, the abandoned grounds were requisitioned by the armed forces. Vehicles and equipment were stored there, patrolled by armed

Street in long pipes, from the River Leam. However, they were not brave enough to go into the air-raid shelters set into



Photograph of Dr Jephson by the eminent Leamington photographer Henry Peach Robinson

the former garden walls fronting Warwick Street, where the ground sloped in steeply from the road.

The site was redeveloped in the 1960s to become the Fire Station and County Fire Headquarters.



from time to time did some of Dr Jephson's nephews and nieces. Sarah died in 1872, Mrs Anne Eliza Jephson in February 1874, and Dr Jephson in May 1878. Beech Lawn, a farm at Radford Semele, its stock and crops were bequeathed to

soldiers in uniform, much to the delight of small boys who lived locally. At least two of those small boys climbed the perimeter walls to catch a glimpse of a huge cement-based reservoir built to store emergency supplies of water pumped up Dale



Dr Jephson on a medallion struck to commemorate the opening in 1846 of the gardens which bear his name

Article by Margaret Rushton  
Illustrations courtesy Alan Griffin



## Christmas Island

That's what it was called back in 1957, when I was posted there from RAF Wyton in Huntingdonshire, just after getting engaged to my future, and late wife, Evelyn. Plans for marriage were put on hold, and my fiancée and her cousin Doreen spent the time while I was away making a wedding dress and preparing for the big day.

Christmas Island has now been renamed and is known as Kiritimati. It is a flat coral island in the Pacific Ocean about 120 miles



north of the Equator. The island is shaped like a crab's claw and is about 25 miles long at its widest point, it is little more than 13 miles across. Much of the island is a mere five feet above sea level with the two highest points rising to no more than twelve feet or so.

Coconut palms provided a living for the Gilbert and Ellis islanders who lived there. Between 15 May and 19 June 1957, a series of nuclear weapons tests were to be held on the island and the majority of the population was evacuated. The tests were codenamed 'Grapple', and on 8 November, the day after my 22nd birthday I witnessed the 'Grapple X' test.

Along with scores of other servicemen, we were taken into a small plantation of palm trees and led a few metres into the trees. We were told to stand with our backs to the open ground and to close our eyes and cover our faces with our hands. When the bomb was detonated, there was a flash of light which was so intense that one could see all of the small bones in one's fingers as if looking at an X ray plate.

We were then told to move out of the palm trees and to look in a particular direction. A black rainbow came horizontally towards us. This was the compression wave of sound, and when it hit us, we all fell to the ground in shock at hearing the loud bang from the detonation. The volume of sound was quite indescribable and extremely frightening, something quite beyond anything that any of us had ever experienced before. The air temperature rose very rapidly as the heat generated by the nuclear explosion spread in every direction. A powerful wind blew the palm trees violently to and fro. Buildings

which had closed doors and windows became victim to the vacuum effect created by the blast.

Realising that we were still, thankfully, alive, we all stood up somewhat sheepishly and then



witnessed a huge column of white cloud start to rise up on the horizon. As it rose higher and higher, enormous multi-coloured flashes of flame came from the column until a mushroom-shaped cloud dominated the view. To say the scene we witnessed was awesome was a vast understatement.

There was another test in the November of 1957 which I also witnessed and a further series of tests took place in the Autumn of the following year.

The United States of America held a further series of twenty four tests on Christmas Island after the British tests ended.

Article by Colin Jennings  
Vice Chairman LHG

## The geograph project

History has to happen somewhere! Local and family history are played out against the backdrop of local geography. Sometimes you want to see what a place looked like in the past, or you hope that studying historic images of places will help you solve a puzzle in your research. Windows on Warwickshire is a wonderful resource for this with a strong collection of images of Leamington.

For photographs of places as they are today, try Geograph at [www.geograph.org.uk](http://www.geograph.org.uk) It's a collaborative project to photograph the entire British Isles, warts and all. Anyone can join in, adding their own digital photos. Other people's images

are free to use as long as the photographer is credited.

Photographs are organised by the Ordnance Survey's one-kilometre map grid. Leamington's buildings and streets are well-represented. Visiting the site and typing the grid reference SP3165 into the search box will call up pages of photos including our own dear South Lodge, Bath Street and much more.

Warning: Geograph is highly addictive! I stumbled across it last year and have hardly been off it since. Coverage of Warwickshire is patchy, sparse in places. Explore it with your camera and help to fill in some of the gaps!

Robin Stott  
LHG committee member

## Spring & Summer Programme

### April 26th 2010

Visit to the County Record Office in Warwick. Places are limited and need to be booked in advance

### May 11th 2010

Joint meeting with Leamington Literary Society for a talk by Andrew Hamilton on his book *Meet at Dawn Unarmed*. Please note this meeting is in the annexe at the Royal Pump Rooms and is on a Tuesday evening.

### June 28th 2010

LHG secretary Alan Griffin is also Verger at the Parish Church and will lead a group visit to the church. There will be a short talk and opportunity to climb the church tower and to look in the crypt.

### July 26th 2010

Visit to the Museum of Country Bygones at Marton with Marton Village History Society with a meal at The Black Horse afterwards.

## Toby Cave

At our AGM in January, we elected Lyndon (Toby) Cave as honorary president of the Group. Toby needs little introduction to most of our members but for those who are fairly new to Leamington, a few words of introduction are perhaps in order. Toby was an architect by profession and came to live in Leamington almost fifty years ago. He has written a number of books on architecture and on the history of Leamington, the most recent of which was published only last year by Phillimore and is without doubt the definitive work on the history & development of the town. Toby has a long association with the Leamington Society and with other local and national conservation groups and for many years ran extra mural classes. We are fortunate to have Toby as our President and mentor, he is ever willing to share his encyclopaedic knowledge with us in modest fashion and with good humour and we are delighted to have the benefit of his scholarship.

We welcome articles from members on any aspect of local and family history. If you have an idea for an article, please mention this to any of the editorial team of Margaret Rushton, Colin Jennings and Alan Griffin. We are more than happy to edit any submissions which can be handwritten or typed and we can record and transcribe any reminiscence you may wish to share with us.