

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Winter 2013



Image: Margaret Rushton

SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL!

Heritage Open Days, 12 -15 September



Chairman of W D C, Richard Davies, LHG Chairman Alan Griffin and Treasurer Terry Gardner at South Lodge Jephson Gardens, where we enjoyed our most successful open weekend so far, with a grand total of 192 visitors to the permanent exhibition housed there. Many thanks to the group of willing volunteers who stewarded the Lodge on all four afternoons, and to Jo Clark, who led 40 visitors on his 'Leamington in the 1940s' Walk.

- Ed

Local History Fair, 21 September



Photo: Alan Griffin

Just a few of the many visitors to the LHG stall at the Fair, absorbed in their examination of a collection of local postcards and stereoscopic views of the town



Photo: Alan Griffin

Photographs, maps, documents and artefacts displayed by Lillington, Sydenham, & Whitnash Local History Societies, Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society and Friends of the Pump Room Gardens. (see Reviews, Page 4)

- Ed

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of Leamington History Group will be held at Dormer Conference Centre, Dormer Place, next to St Peter's Church on Monday 27 January 2014 at 7.30 pm.

Following the business meeting, LHG member Peter Coulls will give a short presentation entitled "Leamington Then and Now".

All Committee members are due for re-election, but are willing to stand for a further term. Nominations to the Committee should be submitted to Margaret Rushton, Hon Secretary by Monday 13 January.

The Agenda and Officers' Reports will be available to members by Monday 20 January. Margaret Rushton

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The Canal in Royal Leamington Spa



Photo: Mick Jeffs

The canal is familiar as the half-forgotten waterway to the south of the town which is glimpsed when passing over steep bridges. It arrived just as the town was about to become a popular 19th century spa but there was no connection between the two events.

The canal was developed as a commercial enterprise to replace horse-drawn transport of goods with much more efficient use of horse-power. The aim was not to make life easier for horses but to generate profit for shareholders.

In the eighteenth century businessmen throughout the land saw the potential of transport on artificial waterways following the success of the Duke of Bridgewater's Canal in the north-west of England.

There was a period of frantic interest in canal-building in the early 1790s now known as 'Canal Mania'. It may seem hard to believe but the canal through Leamington was built as part of that Mania. There was no national Plan for the canals. The earliest route by water from Birmingham to London was down the Coventry and Oxford canals and then along the Thames, but this was over 200 miles. The canal through Leamington was planned to be part of a more direct route.

The Parliamentary Act for the canal was granted in 1794. Work soon began and there were celebrations of completion on 19th December 1799. However the canal did not open for business until March 1800. From the start the canal was busy and profitable. Traffic included a wide range of goods from coal to corn. In 1816 Pickford's advertised collection of goods at Hiorne's wharf in the town. In 1819 the gas works was built alongside the canal to receive coal and the special tanker boats of Thomas Clayton frequently took away coal tar. The boats were narrow boats about 70 feet long and 7 feet wide and they usually had living cabins aboard. The canal

thrived for forty years or so but the arrival of the railways promised quicker delivery times and customer loyalty waned quickly. By 1845 the canal was struggling and did not pay any dividend at all for some years after 1853.

In 1927 the canal became part of a consortium briefly owned by the Regents Canal Company based in London. This group was relaunched under the now-familiar name of the Grand Union Canal (GUC) in 1929. The GUC was so confident that it soon built new wide locks alongside the old locks on the Warwick and Napton route to attract larger boats. These were completed in 1934. Despite the work of a number of government-sponsored committees little trade now takes place on our canal. The boats today are mainly those of holiday makers, either hire boats or privately owned, with the occasional live-aboards.

Photo: Windows on Warwickshire

The landmarks on the canal through Leamington are mainly the bridges because there are no locks in the town. The footbridge by Flavel's is known as the "Ladder Bridge" and carries the footpath from Whitnash which was shown on a map in the 1760s and renovated in 1998.

There were as many as ten wharves along the canal, starting in the west at a major wharf at the end of Clapham Terrace dating from about 1889. Others were at Flavel's, and the back of Ranelagh Street, the Gas Works and Wise Street. Their names included Leamington Stone Wharf, Nutter's Wharf, Watkin's Oil Mill Wharf, Flavel's Foundry Wharf and Frost's Wharf.

Mick Jeffs



Register of Members' Interests and Research Topics

Barry Franklin is compiling a register of members' interests and research topics, to be uploaded eventually to the website. No personal details or contact numbers will be published, but it would be a good step forward for the group, to extend/pool our joint knowledge of topics of local interest, and to avoid duplication. Please check the website for a downloadable form which can be returned to Barry at any monthly Monday meeting, or any Tuesday morning Drop-in at South Lodge.

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*Mr Herringshaw's Bath Chair, at Guys Cliffe Road,
courtesy of Alan Griffin*

A Postscript to "The Last Bath Chair Man"

The Leamington History Group web article on the Last Bath Chair Man brought back a number of memories of my early life in the town. In the 1930s I lived in Heath Terrace, overlooking Guys Cliffe Road. Every fine morning Mr Herringshaw, who lived on Guys Cliffe Road near The Midland Stores and A C Jacka's sweet shop, would bring two wicker bath chairs through his hall from where he kept them at the back of the house, and park them on the pavement at the front.

I recall that he had a son who had Downs Syndrome, who was always smartly dressed in a brown harris tweed suit and matching flat cap. He and his mother sometimes accompanied Mr Herringshaw when he went to collect his customers. Mr H had a very bent back, I guess from years of pulling the Leamington ladies, possibly from the Oaks Hotel around the corner on Warwick New Road.

I assume that Mr H was related to the Herringshaw in the article on the website, and perhaps he inherited the Bath chairs from "The Last Bath Chair Man!" I don't recall seeing him in the mid 1940s.

John Burrows

The Family of John Toone (1787-1875)

A chance meeting on facebook in 2010 enabled descendants of John Toone to become a formidable team in discovering more about his life as a builder in Leamington Spa.

Darlene Odenwalder of the U.S and Helen Pendery of Brailes, Warwickshire, became close friends after Helen & her husband Malcolm visited Darlene & Gary in America. A visit to England this year enabled Darlene and Gary to stay with the

Penderys, and join the Leamington History Group on their outing to Hampton Lucy Church and Charlecote Mill. Along with their cousin Liz from Harpenden they spent a memorable day walking around Leamington Spa where their great-grandparents had once lived. The week also enabled the cousins to spend valuable time doing research in the Coventry Herbert Museum and Warwick Record Office, discovering where John Toone was born, - at Mount Nod Farm in Stoneleigh.

John Toone, a renowned builder in 19th century Leamington Spa, and his wife Elizabeth had fourteen children, including Henry the youngest son who was Helen & Liz's great grandfather, and John the eldest, who emigrated to the United States, and who was Darlene's great grandfather. Further research has uncovered another Toone descendant, Ken Toone, living only a short distance away in Shirley, West Midlands. Ken is the descendant of another Toone brother, William. Helen and Liz were able to meet up with Ken at the Leamington History Group's Local History Fair in September. Another friendship has been made and we feel that John Toone would be pleased to know that the family bond continues.

We are still looking for other Toone cousins. Does anyone know of any other descendants of John Toone? If so please contact Darlene and Helen at toonecousins@gmail.com

Helen Pendery

Musical Memories

Cynthia Griffin, Leamington born and bred, and a well known local singer when she was younger, has vivid memories of the musical events and venues that put Leamington on the musical map 50 years ago, - the Pavilion, the Embassy Ballroom (now Iceland Supermarket), and the long-vanished Lockheed Ballroom where pantomimes and concerts were held. Family member June Griffin performed in Lockheed pantomimes as a dancer, and Cynthia sang in the Leamington "Magic Circle" concerts there. Coaches came to Leamington every weekend for concerts and music festivals. The Leamington Illuminations, and the Dance Tent, supported by bands from Budbrooke Barracks, and RAF Gaydon & Wellesbourne, brought crowds to Jephson Gardens all through the summer evenings. Cynthia was a regular Leamington Music Festival participant as a solo performer from the age of 14 until her middle twenties, winning the under-18 opera class at the age of 16. Poignant memories of an extremely happy young life.

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Tessa Whitehouse Reviews

LOCAL HISTORY FAIR, Saturday, 21st September, 2013

The Local History Fair again gave several Local Societies the opportunity to showcase what dedicated research can achieve. As always, there was emphasis on photographs, especially those of the recent past which always bring people together in shared memories of childhood, home or workplace. These now have special place in local history. It was a very informal get-together, with displays about the development of Lillington and the Sydenham estate, the long vanished black and white cottages of old Whitnash, Leamington Borough Police and the early days of the Warwickshire Constabulary, Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society, and the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens. Lots of visitors on a fine September day made this a very rewarding occasion with opportunities to browse at Jo Clark's book sale and to talk to Tom Lewin about the forthcoming book on Leamington's pubs. A big 'Thank you' must go to Margaret Watkins and Ashley for their work on the raffle, and to Maggie McGreevy, Margaret Rushton and Chris Patrick for providing much-appreciated refreshments.

MUSIC IN LEAMINGTON, Monday, 23rd September

Richard Phillips, a well-known musical events promoter, outlined the development of music and public performances in Leamington over the past 150 years and recalled some memorable musical occasions. In its time Leamington has been the birthplace of many composers whose names may not be familiar but they have left their mark in the music world. Richard related how over 100 years ago, many world famous players and conductors had performed at the Parthenon in Bath Street and the Assembly Rooms where Woodward's once stood, with Leamington residents and visitors spending huge sums of money to attend concerts. Over the years, a changing population, two World Wars and the economic situation led to the demise of both the Parthenon and the Assembly. Jephson Gardens Pavilion, several school halls, and churches became the main concert venues, all replaced more recently by The Royal Spa Centre, which promotes all types of music, from jazz and rock to brass bands, string quartets and Czech music which has a great following in the town since the Second World War. Affordability is now the keynote for any activity but

music is still a priority and much in evidence, being promoted in schools and other settings through education programmes, workshops and master classes. Richard held his audience spellbound, then happily answered a host of questions from his highly appreciative audience.

THE LEIGHS OF STONELEIGH, Monday, 28th October,

Sheila Woolf, a guide at Stoneleigh Abbey, was invited to speak about her interest in the Leigh family. Her focus was on Cordelia Leigh, born in 1866, and her life up to and during the First World War. Cordelia devoted a lot of her time to the young adults of Stoneleigh and Ashow. She was a Sunday School teacher and held Bible classes for older children. When the young men of the area were called up in 1914 she offered them her support and encouragement and presented each of them with a pocket Bible. 'Duty' was important to her and it was this that she conveyed to the young soldiers. She ended her letters to them with 'Always your friend'. Cordelia also kept a diary. More interestingly, she kept a scrapbook which Mrs Woolf discovered when researching this branch of the family. In it Cordelia kept letters which she had received from local soldiers serving in the war. From them we learned how she supported the villagers and how much she was appreciated, and the role played by the residents of Stoneleigh Abbey in those uncertain times. Cordelia was a nature lover and wrote several books on the subject. Following a visit to London she set up a fund to bring young Londoners to Stoneleigh so that they could see and understand the ways of a rural community. She was a caring lady who enjoyed the simple things in life. Her personality enriched the lives of all those with whom she lived and worked. She spent her later years at St. Marks Road in Leamington Spa, travelling backwards and forwards to Stoneleigh on her trusty tricycle. She died in 1956, and was buried at her request next to her brother in Ashow churchyard.

Committee Members 2013-14

Alan Griffin *Chairman*
Barry Franklin *Vice Chairman*
Terry Gardner *Treasurer*
Margaret Rushton *Secretary*

Maggie McGreevy, Tessa Whitehouse, Jo Clark, Mick Cullen, Mick Jeffs, Michael Pearson, Simon Yarwood

All members can be contacted via the Secretary, through the website, www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk