

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Winter 2014

Annual General Meeting

Monday 26 January 2015 at 7.30 pm

Dormer Hall, Dormer Place

In the presence of Cllr John Knight the Mayor of Leamington, presentation of annual reports and accounts followed by

“Leamington College, an old boy's view”
with Alan Griffin, Barry Franklin and Peter Coulls.

(n.b. There are no elections this year)

Current Committee

Barry Franklin *Chairman*

Michael Pearson, *Vice Chairman*

Terry Gardner *Treasurer*

Margaret Rushton *Secretary*

Alan Griffin *Ex Officio*

Jo Clark, Mick Cullen, Mick Jeffs,

Maggie McGreevy, Tessa Whitehouse

Simon Yarwood

Barbed Poppies by Tim Tolkien



Photograph: Allan Jennings

This autumn, as we remember all those who played a role in the Great War, Leamington History Group is proud to have partnered Warwick District Council in the commission of a memorial sculpture sited in the eastern section of Jephson Gardens, a little way beyond The Aviary Cafe.

Sculptor Tim Tolkien has perfectly captured the mood of the time in his group of three poppies on stems of barbed wire, rising from coils of barbed wire at ground level. Made of metal which will gradually oxidise, his *“Barbed Poppies”*, swaying lightly in the breeze, commemorate all those who played a role in the war, whether at home or abroad, in the services, nursing the wounded, or struggling to cope at home with the after-effects. About 230 people attended the

unveiling and dedication of the piece on 11 November, and fittingly, they represented all walks of Leamington domestic, cultural and political life.

Jephson Gardens have undergone many transformations since they were laid out as an Arboretum under the direction of landowner Edward Willes in the 1830s. They have hosted archery and tennis tournaments, concerts and musical events; they were ploughed up in the *Dig For Victory* campaign of WW2 and transformed into a magical world by the Leamington Lights each summer in the 1950s. Times have changed yet again, and park users everywhere are looking to new diversions. It would not be appropriate for Leamington's Victorian 'green lung' to become a theme park, as has happened to many municipal parks. Happily, the last few years have seen the development of a Jephson Gardens sculpture trail, a fitting next step which attracts adults and children alike, fostering interaction and interpretation, - and, we hope, a lifelong interest in the park and its attractions.

WOMEN IN THE CRICKET FIELD

History Group member Mark Ryan came across this intriguing headline in the Leamington Courier of 21 June 1890 as he searched for archive material relating to Leamington Cricket Club. The women in question were members of “The Original English Lady Cricketers”, and according to the Courier, no fewer than two thousand people turned up, “to avail themselves of the opportunity of observing how females, trained for the purpose, could comport themselves in the cricket field and play the distinctly masculine game of cricket.” The report continues, kindly, that the women, disadvantaged simply because they were *women*, nonetheless, this group had “gained considerable proficiency in the game, and in their hands, it [assumed] a more serious aspect than has generally been associated with feminine cricket.”

A Monsieur Michel, a French-American and not a cricketer, conceived the idea of women players as a form of entertainment, as it was thought unlikely that young women could bring to the game “the intense enthusiasm and competitive spirit of their male counterparts.” The two teams on tour, backed by a small syndicate of speculators, auditioned, were chosen and trained for several months by professionals before playing their first match for a private audience in London on Whit Monday 1890. They appeared subsequently in Cheltenham, Cambridge, Maidenhead and other venues in London. They were chaperoned by a Matron, and were to play a season of matches in the provinces, and a number of private matches for the gentry. Inevitably, class came into it: the Courier highlighted the fact that the teams included two physician's daughters, two dentist's daughters, two architect's daughters, - and all came from the West End.

The match report praised one player for managing to hit a few fours and threes (she went on to score 56 before being caught), but although the wicket-keeping was tolerable, play was slow, tedious even, at times. The fielding was poor, “owing to the slow locomotion of the fielders.” The reporter was amused by the two white-mackintosh-wearing male umpires' dodging the balls thrown in by the fielders, and the girls' attempts at running. Their struggles were hardly surprising, given their kit: very full-sleeved jerseys under sailor tops, a protective steel and leather breastplate, high white cricket boots, and white flannel mid-calf length skirts which were weighted at the hem with shot to prevent them blowing indecorously in the wind. Nonetheless, The Originals were a highly successful team until they were forced to disband when their manager (a man!) absconded with the profits. James Lillywhite's *Cricketers' Annual 1890* recommended ladies to try the game: “as an exercise, cricket is probably not so severe as lawn tennis and it is certainly not so dangerous as hunting or skating”.

Ladies' cricket was not new: 22 'maids' of Hambledon in Surrey played a match in July 1745, dressed in white and wearing blue or red ribbons in their hair, to distinguish the teams. They apparently batted, bowled, ran and took catches “as well as most men could do”. Praise indeed! Leamington of course has its own cricket heroine, in Janet Tedstone. A pupil of Telford School, and Leamington College for Girls, Janet played for West Midlands, Yorkshire, and England between 1979 and 1992. She played in twelve tests, and with Suzie Kitson, set a world record in 1992 for a ninth wicket partnership of 99. During Janet's teens, women cricketers were thin on the ground and in the Midlands at least, girls' and ladies' teams were rare. At junior school there was no problem. Janet represented her school to great effect: turning up to play another junior school team, she once related the effect she had on the opposition. They could hardly believe their luck. A girl in the team! What a joke! However, Janet out-bowled and out-batted all the boys, and her team carried off the trophy. Although games were hard to come by once she was a teenager, Janet went on to represent England in 12 Tests, achieving batting and bowling averages many male players would be proud of.

And on a personal note, girls were taught cricket at my first teaching post, Penrhos College, Colwyn Bay in the mid-1960s, and played regularly, albeit with field placings given out on cards at the beginning of the lesson by the gym mistress, who remained stolidly at square leg throughout, occasionally calling “over” as she thought fit. I also had a Leamington teaching colleague who was coached at a Shropshire Girls' School by the great Percy Fender. *M Rushton.*

St John the Baptist Leamington Spa Roll of Honour

I have been researching the names of the men of the parish of St John the Baptist who died in the Great War. As you might expect, there are a large number: ten in 1914, fourteen in 1915, twenty-eight in 1917, followed by thirty-one in 1918 and one who died at home in 1919, and who was buried here in Leamington. They enlisted in a wide range of regiments, but the Royal Warwickshire Regiment was the most popular, and over the course of the war, lost thirty five men from all ranks.

Not all the men were Leamington born and bred. Two or three came from elsewhere but had married into Leamington families and settled here. The men came from all walks of life and held all ranks, from Private to 2nd Lieutenant. They included infantrymen and riflemen, gunners, a sapper, a bombardier, a tunneller and a stoker lost at sea when his ship blew up at anchor in the Cromarty Firth. Another man was torpedoed in the Gulf of Genoa and is buried in Italy. Most were buried in the military cemeteries of northern France, a number in Belgium, and others in Britain, Iraq, Turkey and Greece.

The saddest statistics are those recording brothers who died, some families each losing sons within a very short time of each other, - the Russell's son George was killed in action in November 1914, and within four months, in March 1915, William Russell was killed by sniper fire, and Frederick Russell died of wounds in May. Two Phipps brothers, William and John, died within a fortnight of each other in August 1916, having lost their brother Sydney in September the previous year. Edgar and Samuel Jenkins both died in 1918. The Dutton brothers died in March and April 1918, and the Bartholomew family lost three of their four sons within five months in 1918.

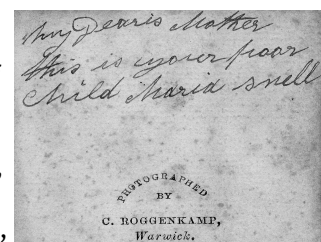
As parishioners of St John's, their addresses cluster most closely in the streets nearby, in Albion Row, Shrubland St, Tachbrook St and Tachbrook Rd, Grove Place, Eagle St, Althorpe St, Court St, Charles St, Clemens St and Brunswick St. Before redevelopment, these were streets of tight-knit supportive, self-sufficient communities of working families, and the devastating effect of the deaths of all their young men can only be imagined. It is hard to understand how anyone coped, and even harder to understand how those whose sons did not die, were still able to live alongside those less fortunate. Someone recounted recently that during the war, whilst her grandmother was heavily pregnant with her third child (the speaker's mother), her oldest son died suddenly. Her grandfather was so aghast when the man next door received a white feather in the post that he rushed out and enlisted, leaving his wife to cope with both the loss and the prospect of bringing up the family on her own. Doubtless many were in a similar position when a whole generation had been wiped out, but that could hardly have helped ease the pain.

Alan Orton

Things may not be what they seem, or the value of patient research skills!



The photograph on the left is a Victorian *carte de visite*, a collector's item much prized in its heyday as it conferred status on the titleholder, outranking the plainer visiting card which would simply have borne the name of the visitor, no matter how distinguished. When photographs came in, this type of card was seized upon by the aspirant classes of society: one-upmanship is not new! Group member Richard King asked if I could help him discover the location of the photographer C. Roggenkamp in Warwick. He had checked all the local directories available but had drawn a blank. I searched the Warwick archives, and I too drew a blank. So next, I tried the Ancestry UK website and discovered two items, one of them the arrival of a certain C. Roggenkamp



by boat into Hull from Hamburg on 3rd May 1850, but found no other trace of him. In a public family tree on the same site I struck gold, and discovered his details. Roggenkamp was born in Ütersen, Pinneberg, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany in 1842, and died in Warwick, Australia on 17 February 1918! Roggenkamp was a professional photographer and was also running the Victorian Studios at Warwick, Queensland in the late 1800s. He was listed in Albion Street, Warwick, Queensland, for ten years from 1864. By 1885 he was running the Victorian Studios at Warwick, where he remained at least until the end of the century. So, lots of familiar names, not least Warwick and Albion Street, - but Queensland, Australia, not Warwickshire! The moral of the story is check your sources, and never take things at face value.

Barry Franklin

Tessa Whitehouse Reviews

Saturday, 18 October: Leamington Local History Fair

The Conference Centre, Dormer Place was once again the venue for the Annual Local History Fair. The theme for this year was 'changing places'. Several local groups contributed displays and were available to talk about what they do, what they have achieved and what they are currently working on. 'Restoration of the Pump Room Gardens', 'Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology', 'Warwickshire Local History Society', 'Warwickshire Garden History' and three 'Family History' groups were able to show visitors how things had changed in their area. Of special interest to many was the work being done at Foundry Wood. Here a recently established group of enthusiasts are doing a grand job bringing back to life an area of 'No man's land' between Morrisons and the railway line. In time to come this hidden gem could well be another great amenity to the town. Our regular contributors, Whitnash, Sydenham, Lillington and Leamington Borough Police featured prominently. With the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War uppermost in a lot of people's minds, Richard Fisk's eye-catching map of Leamington's fallen drew particular interest. Everyone had a family story to tell. Centre of attraction must surely go to Jo Claydon's collection of cameras spanning several decades. Memories of the Brownie Box and the revolutionary Kodak Instamatic came flooding back. The digital camera and the phone camera do not have the same charm and appeal as some of those in Jo's interesting collection. 'Selfies' were not easily created with these! The day would not have been complete without Jo Clark, Derek Billings and Mick Jeffs managing the book stall and well exceeding last year's performance. A big 'Thank you' to all our enthusiastic volunteers, especially Maggie McGreevy who kept us all well-provided with tea, coffee and biscuits, Lily who had the washing up well under control, and Margaret Watkins for taking charge of the raffle. Another success for the Leamington History Group, certainly our best Fair so far.

Monday, 27th October: Jo Clark, *Leamington 1930-70: Demolition & Development*

Jo Clark's slide show on Monday 27th October, 2014 brought back a lot of memories. His collection of images from the 1930s to the early 1970s revealed a lot of changes. Many buildings were victims of post war development and were demolished rather than modernised, creating the scenes that are now so familiar, particularly in the area around Newbold Terrace, with both the Justice Centre and the Spa Centre. Fondly remembered were the town's four cinemas, three of which have disappeared and the fourth continually changes to accommodate the ever-changing movie scene and technology. So, too, was Bailey's, the furniture store in Warwick Street. Here we were reminded of a family business which promoted good choice, especially at Christmas with their fantastic toy department, and excellent customer service which was its priority. Such shops have vanished into the mists of time but have left us with cherished memories. Jo's relaxed and easy manner makes his talks very popular and anecdotes and reminiscences from the audience are much appreciated, not least by the speaker. We are already looking forward to Jo's next offering.

Monday, 23 November: Allan Jennings, *James Bisset, 1762 - 1832*

Born in Perth, Scotland, James Bisset, a manufacturer, writer, collector and poet spent many years in Birmingham, working in glass painting and metal work and displaying his collection of paintings, medals and curiosities in his own museum. Following years of successful business in Birmingham, in 1812 he moved to Leamington where he lived until his death twenty years later. He erected one of the first buildings in Clemens St, a gallery, a museum in Union Street, and published his own guide to the spa, praising in particular the town's health-giving waters. Bisset's reputation as a manufacturer of medals led to special editions, to be placed in the foundations of the Pump Rooms Colonnade and the south transept of the Parish Church. His crumbling and illegible memorial, moved many times to accommodate developments in the churchyard, now stands close to the south transept. In his day, Bisset was looked upon as more important to the town than William Abbots and Benjamin Satchwell. "Well, was he?" was the question asked by Allan Jennings. Only we can make up our own minds. Another tour de force from our popular speaker, highlighting a man who gave so much to the town.

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