

The Leamington Omnibus

Newsletter of the Leamington History Group

Spring 2015

LHG Guided Walks 2015

We are on the lookout for some new recruits!



The first walk of 2014, accompanied by Leamington Mayor, Councillor John Knight

Could you take a group of interested visitors and local people on a walk round the town, pointing out the highspots (and a few of the more interesting 'lowspots')? The History Group Guild of Guides, organised by Michael Pearson, is made up of volunteers who undertake themed walks, generally on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from June to September. We don't expect you to be an expert on every aspect of Leamington's history, - we offer training and support, delivered by experienced guides, - and

a tasty sandwich lunch with the Mayor at the end of the season!

Walks last around an hour and are offered at times to suit individual guides, - so either afternoon at 2.30 pm, or evening at 7 pm, and guides are asked to cover three or four walks during the season. That number may not be possible of course, and we would be happy for you to do a couple to begin with. In addition to the advertised programme, we offer bespoke walks for groups, levying a small per capita charge which goes to the society's funds.

Numbers of walkers vary widely, - from one man and his dog, to a group of up to fifteen, and guides need to take into account various health and safety issues, - traffic and accessibility, particularly if visitors have mobility difficulties.

The themes are quite broad, - covering Regency Leamington, Victorian Leamington, post-WW2 Leamington, Blue Plaques, Jephson Gardens, Leamington's Green Lung (Welch's Meadow to the boundary of Warwick, including the Pump Room Gardens and part of Victoria Park), North East Leamington and the work of William Thomas, and some new ones to come this year, The Parade from Victoria Terrace to Christ Church Gardens, Old Town, the pubs of South Leamington, The bombings of WW2, and North West Leamington.

If you are interested do please get in touch. We would be delighted to meet you to discuss it further. We meet every Tuesday morning at South Lodge, Jephson Gardens, from 10 - 12 noon. Please call in for a cup of coffee and a chat, or contact the Secretary on 01926 424659, or at rushtonmm1860@gmail.com

Current Committee

Chairman, Barry Franklin, *Vice Chairman*, Michael Pearson, *Treasurer*, Terry Gardner, *Secretary*, Margaret Rushton, Alan Griffin, *Ex Officio*, Jo Clark, Mick Jeffs, Maggie McGreevy, Tessa Whitehouse, Simon Yarwood. Mick Cullen resigned in March and we welcome Tom Lewin who has been co-opted as his replacement.

Leamington Memories



How many readers recognise these vans, and the road where they are parked? They were the Sensicle's bakery fleet, parked outside the bakery in Augusta Place. My father John Woodward Sensicle was the Sensicle in Sensicle's Bread. He was born in Cardiff of English parents. His family moved to Leamington in 1920 and opened a Bakers & Confectioners at 31 Regent Street, and after grandfather Sensicle died John moved the bakery and shop to 83 Warwick Street in about 1927. We children, Josephine, born in 1933, Graham (1935), and Andrew (1938), started life in the flat above the shop with the bakery at the back of the building. In about 1942 we moved to a lovely house with a very large garden at 29 Northumberland Road, and the bakery was moved to Augusta Place.

I went to Arnold Lodge then Feldon School and at 16 joined the police as a cadet until National Service in the Life Guards. After that I joined my father in the bakery business in 1956 but as I didn't enjoy inside work I was employed on the delivery side. We had 5 shops to service, - Sensicle's at Warwick Street, Clemens Street, Lime Avenue, and in Warwick, Sensicle's shop and milk bar in the market place and a shop in Shakespeare Avenue. We also delivered wholesale to local shops in and around Leamington and Warwick and outlying villages. My brother Andrew also worked for Dad from 1955 to 1957 as a baker but after his stint of military service, in 1960 he took over the running of a shop and bakery in Westbury, Wiltshire, then moved on to Huntley & Palmers in Reading. I also left the business: I joined the Warwick Ambulance Service, became a professional C&W Singer and Guitarist touring the country, was made president of the Leamington Spa C&W Club, shot for England for 2 years in Clay Pigeon Shooting International matches, then, following a course in London, which led to membership of the Guild Of Professional Videographers, I started Spa Video Productions specialising in filming various forms of entertainment such as shows, plays, sports events but mainly weddings. Dad sold the bakery business to the Spillers Group, then one of the largest companies in the flour and bread trade. He continued working at Augusta Place as Managing Director for a further 5 years before retiring with Mum to Westbury, Wiltshire.

The bakery was eventually closed down by Spillers some time after Dad retired and as he owned the buildings he let them to a night club called Hintons. It went through several changes, including becoming a successful restaurant. As you can see, it's in a sad state now!



And what of the rest of the family? My brother Andrew moved from Reading to Montreal then Toronto to continue working for Associated Biscuits. He and his family have lived in Whitby, Ontario ever since. I now live in Weston-super-Mare, where my wife and I moved in 1999 to help care for her parents. My family, two sons and four daughters were all born in Leamington, but only one of my sons lives in Warwickshire, in Bishops Tachbrook. The rest of the family are quite scattered, - in Somerset, Ebrington, Hemel Hempstead Plymouth and Didcot. I still come back to Leamington as often as I can, - I can't get it out of my blood!

Graham Sensicle

School at Southlands and New College, Wartime Rationing.

I am the granddaughter of Rev Bernard McNulty the vicar of Holy Trinity, Leamington, a popular parish priest who acted as chaplain to the Forces and drove ambulances in France in the Great War. His parishioners were very saddened when he moved to Tysoe in the twenties. Grandfather died before I was born, so I have no real memories of him, nor of my own father. I was brought up by my mother in Leamington, close to her mother in Wellesbourne: my parents separated when I was quite small.

I had quite severe asthma as a child, and missed a lot of school in the days before modern inhalers came on to the market. I started school at Southlands, on Radford Road, in 1938, when Mrs Tolson-Shaw was still Headteacher. Mr Groves later became Head, assisted by Mrs Groves, Miss Hart and Miss Ward. The uniform was purple: girls wore purple hats and boys purple caps, and summer dresses for girls were purple check with puff sleeves. Amongst my contemporaries at the school were Fay Henton, Jean Hickey, Jane Brett, David Wilkinson, Mark Jenkins, Jean Abbott, Sonia Nunn, Joyce Holdcroft and Eric, Thelma Grinnell, Anne Downe, Sheila Whitlock and Faith Rogers. I would be delighted to be put in contact with them all again, though I realise that given our ages, this is probably not feasible. We last met at a Southlands reunion held at the Regent Hotel before it closed.

After Southlands, from 1943 until 1948 I attended New College for Girls at the corner of Northumberland Road and Kenilworth Road. It was then a Boarding and Day School, and I sometimes boarded for a couple of days. The two people I remember most clearly are Miss Raley the Headmistress, and Miss Willoughby who taught piano and arithmetic. New College uniform was light blue, and in summer, we wore Panama hats. The school was very protective of its pupils, and tried to ban us from visiting cinemas, even with our parents. The excuse given was the prevalence of germs where so many people were sitting together. This was the time before antibiotics, before the advent of the NHS, and when posters demanded "Trap your germs in a handkerchief!" so perhaps they had a point.

My mother had a spare bedroom and so had a lodger, Herta, from Austria, whose husband played in a Viennese band. Herta was hired to teach me at home, so that I could read and write before I started school at Southlands. Herta was something of a fan of Hitler, leading mother and I to think that she was a spy! At all events, when war broke out, Herta promptly left. During WW2 bombing raids, mother and I used to shelter in the basement of our neighbours, the Wilkinson family, who lived close to St Mary's Church. When Coventry was bombed, the sheer enormity of it escaped me. From Leamington it looked just like a firework display in the night sky.

During the blackout, wardens patrolled to check that no light could be seen through curtains. They were very strict in their enforcement of the rules. Rationing was tough: I remember mother once queued for a whole half hour just to be able to buy a skirt. A Ration Book had to be produced to buy anything. The butter allowance was 4oz per person per week. Bananas were unheard of and there were no oranges except at Christmas. Bread was always white, and the only fireworks were sparklers.

Before television, everyone who could, went to the cinema. I sometimes went twice a week, with my school friends Sheila, Faith, and Pauline (Abbott). On Sunday afternoons we went to Girl Crusaders' Union run by a Mrs Major, and listened to Bible stories in someone's home in Lillington. Having asthma meant that I missed a lot of school, and so I never sat School Certificate. Asthma was one of the reasons that mother eventually took me to live at the seaside, at Birchington on Sea, near Margate in Kent, where I still live. When I was 18, I went to Cyprus for a year, and when I came back, got married. My husband was several years older than me but we were happily married until his death just over six years ago at the age of 92. Until that time, I cycled everywhere, and enjoyed gardening, not just at home, but for other people as well. But sadly, shortly after my husband died, I developed severe arthritis, and although hampered by it, I still garden in all weathers in my wheelchair, armed with a long-handled trowel to tidy the borders and clear up weeds.

Jill Repsch

Tessa Whitehouse Reviews

Monday 26 January: AGM & Presentation: Leamington College, an Old Boy's View

Following the business meeting of the AGM, Barry Franklin helped by Peter Coulls as technician deputised for Alan Griffin to deliver a very informative talk about Leamington College for Boys. The school began in Binswood Avenue in 1847, admitting the sons of local nobility and gentry. Financial problems caused its closure on three occasions and from 1903 -1916 the building became a convent for nuns of The Society of Sacred Heart. In 1920 Warwickshire County Council opened it as a grant aided grammar school, - the Boys' college that we were all familiar with. Pathologist Sir Bernard Spilsbury, writer Lytton Strachey and inventor Sir Frank Whittle were amongst a number of eminent old boys. In 1977 the College became the sixth form centre for the newly created North Leamington School. It is now a handsome residential complex, retaining many memorable features. The talk was well illustrated with photographs from Alan's collection and interspersed with anecdotes from Barry's school days there in the 1960s. Great work all round.

Monday 23rd February: Sheila Woolf, Travels with the Leighs

In February we welcomed Sheila Woolf to give another talk about her research into the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The focus was on the travels of the children of William Henry Leigh and his wife Caroline when it was becoming a tradition for younger members of any family who could afford to do so to take a long tour of Europe. The Leigh children did more than that and travelled to Jamaica, Australia and the Pacific Islands. Further travels included The United States, Japan, China, India and Egypt. Letters home to the family revealed many interesting encounters and cultural experiences: a meeting with Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa; involvement with rice and cotton plantations in America, which contributed to the wealth of the family; invitations to attend Indian Councils in Cheyenne and the Mid-West; and being in Egypt at the time of the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun. What stories they could all tell! This was a fascinating talk enriched with anecdotes and amusing stories and connections. The legacy of the Leigh family's travels endures today when young people are encouraged to see the world, bringing back memories and irreplaceable experiences.

Monday 23 March: Alan Mayes, The Rich Architectural Heritage of Royal Leamington Spa

When Alan Mayes came to Leamington as Conservation Officer for the District Council, he walked around the town observing and photographing the many diverse architectural styles that he encountered. His collection of pictures showed us so much that we do not generally notice. We never have time give a second thought to the elaborate facades, the different styles of house or semi, or the doorways, windows and chimneys which add to the uniqueness of so many of these buildings. The detail put into their construction was such that sometimes even a side gate was treated with as much importance as the main entrance, so as to enhance the overall appearance and street appeal. Most of these buildings, mainly in the town centre, date back to early Victorian and Edwardian times. Following restoration, William Thomas's Lansdowne Crescent retains all the original outside features and balustrades although, as elsewhere, the interiors have changed to reflect the needs of today's lifestyle. Other areas, especially Northumberland Road have houses dating from the nineteen-twenties and thirties, with a variety of period features, window arrangements and cladding which add to 'kerb-appeal'. This very well-presented talk prompted comments and a question about the building we all love to hate, Lillington's Eden Court, and its place in local architecture. Alan answered by pointing out that it was designed by a local architect, and is very much a building of its time, as indeed are most of the buildings in the town. When they were new, no-one knew how long they would survive and add to the individuality of the streets. We look forward to a return visit, perhaps early next year.

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