

Leamington's Victoria Cross Holders



In August 2013, the Government Communities Secretary announced an initiative to provide a lasting legacy of Victoria Cross recipients from the First World War, whereby an incised stone slab would be laid in the home town of each of the 469 Victoria Cross recipients. Subsequent stones would be laid on the anniversary of the award to the individuals concerned. In September this year two such stones were laid at the foot of the Leamington War Memorial in Euston Place, commemorating Lieutenant John Cridlan Barrett and Private Henry Tandey, whose awards were announced in the London Gazette on 14 December 1918.

John Cridlan Barrett was born in Leamington on August 10th 1897. His father was a pharmaceutical chemist, and his mother a member of the Cridlan family who owned the Regent Hotel on the Parade. After attending Arnold Lodge School in Leamington and Merchant Taylor's School in Northwood, he was commissioned into the

Leicester Regiment in 1916. He was posted to the 3/5th Battalion on the Western Front on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. Barrett was wounded at Gommecourt in February 1917 and after a short period of recovery became a Signals Officer when he was again wounded in gas attacks at Gorre. Shortly after his return to the Front, he was involved in the action which would lead to the VC. On 24th September 1918 at Pontruet, France, during an attack, owing to the darkness and a smoke barrage, Lieutenant Barrett found himself advancing towards a trench containing numerous German machine-guns. He at once collected all available men and charged the nearest group of guns and in spite of being wounded, gained the trench, personally disposing of two machine-guns and inflicting many casualties. Notwithstanding a second wound, he then climbed out of the trench to fix his position and locate the enemy, then ordered his men to negotiate their way back to the Leicesters' trenches, which they did. He was again wounded, very seriously. John recovered from his wounds which ended his war prematurely. He was presented with his VC by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 13th February 1919. After the war he pursued a distinguished career in medicine becoming a consultant surgeon at Leicester Royal Infirmary and a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. He died in Leicester in 1977 aged 79.

Henry Tandey known to all as "Napper" Tandy, was born in Leamington in 1891. Before the war he was employed as a stoker at the Regent Hotel prior to joining the Alexandra, Princess of Wales Own Regiment (The Green Howards) in Richmond, Yorkshire in 1910. At the start of the war the regiment were on the Western Front and in October 1914 Henry rescued a wounded colleague and carried him on his shoulders back to a first aid post, an action which was later the subject of a painting by the celebrated war artist Fortunino Matania.



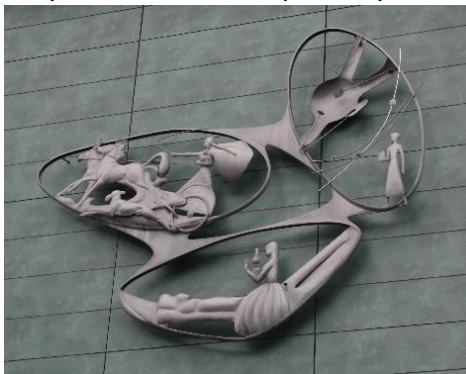
He took part in the first Battle of Ypres in October 1914 and was shot in the arm at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He was again wounded during the Battle of Passchendaele in November 1917. In an almost unparalleled burst of heroics by a single soldier, Henry Tandey won three gallantry awards in the space of six weeks. He was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal, then a Military Medal and bar and finally a Victoria Cross for 'desperate bravery and great initiative' in one of the final battles of the war. He was also mentioned in despatches five times and on one occasion was told by a senior officer that his bravery could not adequately be rewarded because he had already won all the gallantry medals available. Henry was the most decorated Private of the Great War. After the war he was made a Freeman of Leamington and was one of the guard of honour that took part in the service for the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey in 1920. He died in Coventry in 1977 at the age of 86.

Cenotaph Photograph © Patrick Kingston

Alan Griffin

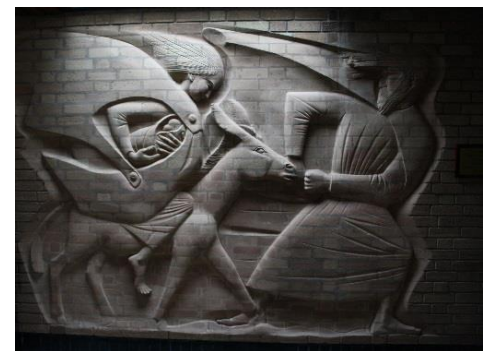
Sculpture at Leamington College for Girls

When Leamington College for Girls opened in 1959, the long wall at the entrance in Cloister Way featured a specially commissioned aluminium sculpture. "Three Aspects of a Girl's Education", was created by Kenilworth sculptor Walter Ritchie



and manufactured in beaten, welded and rolled aluminium. It represented positive action, scientific research and humanitarian activity and was designed to inspire young women to look further and aim higher. At that time, girls rarely studied technology or engineering. The sculpture (left) was refurbished when the new North Leamington School opened in Sandy Lane in 2009, and relocated there, to continue to inspire future generations of North Leamington School pupils.

Walter Ritchie, 1919 -1997, was evacuated in 1940 from Coventry to Kenilworth following the blitz, and remained there for the rest of his life. He was trained by local masons, and was a fully-fledged sculptor by the age of 18. He said that they taught him how to hold a hammer and a chisel, and a crowbar – in his words, "a very useful tool." He was one of the last apprentices of Eric Gill, in High Wycombe, and trained to work in a wide variety of media including traditional sculpture materials, and marble, silver, gold, aluminium and steel, but Ritchie preferred English brick. Brick allowed him to explore a new world of texture and colour, but is a difficult medium. Sadly, many of Ritchie's prized works have now vanished thanks to redevelopment, but two large Portland stone sculptures created for the Coventry precinct in the 1950s are now in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, and his "Flight into Egypt" brick relief can still be found at St Joseph's Church, Whitnash. He completed many works locally, - including the Coventry Belgrade Theatre, Binley Woods Primary School, and Bilton Primary School. However, many considered his figure of Len Hutton in action, installed at the Oval cricket ground, to be Ritchie's greatest masterpiece.



Ritchie was a private person. His obituary in The Independent in 1997 claimed that "The career of the sculptor Walter Ritchie provides the best 20th century example of the artist as his own worst enemy," - because he only ever had two exhibitions, one in the 1960s and one in the 1990s. In fairness, an exhibition would have presented a number of practical problems, given the siting of Ritchie's work in brick relief, on banks, hospitals, colleges, churches and other public buildings.

Photographs © Derek Billings

Leamington History Group Annual General Meeting 2018**Monday 28 January 2019, Dormer Conference Centre, Dormer Place.**

Business meeting at 7.30 pm, followed by a short presentation by Mick Jeffs

Secretary's Report 2018

Leamington History Group has made a significant contribution to Leamington life and culture over the last decade. We have supported, in volunteer effort, in cash and in kind, the Blue Plaques commemorating notable local figures, the Heritage Lottery Fund bids for the refurbishment of the Pump Room Gardens and Bandstand, the Transcription of the Willes Archive for CRO, the 'Tapping in' exercise to upload the Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum archive material to Windows on Warwickshire, and collaborated with a number of student projects in schools, at the University of Warwick, and elsewhere.

Each year since our inception, we have also supported WDC Heritage Open Days by opening to the public South Lodge and its permanent display relating to the history of Jephson Gardens. Most recently, following the demise of the Council-run Free Guided Town Walks in 2011, with the support of Leamington Town Council, Michael Pearson spearheaded the return of the Walks, developing an immensely successful season of themed walks which top all the popularity charts. Our website, last refurbished in 2013, and currently under review, remains the envy of many. For the last six years, we have published a sell-out 'Old Leamington' Calendar, with images supplied by members and friends. Perhaps the most pleasing exercise in 2018 has been the publication of 'Royal Leamington Spa: A History in 100 Buildings', the brainchild of Mick Jeffs, its editor-in-chief. To date, with support from external outlets, we have sold over 400 copies.

BUT!**WE NEED YOUR HELP, if only for the short term.**

Without a quorate management committee, we cannot continue to support these activities, let alone produce a programme of monthly talks and a quarterly Newsletter. By January 2019, Barry Franklin will have a year left of his second spell as Chairman, and deserves a rest and the opportunity to develop his other interests. Our Treasurer, Terry Gardner, will step down. LHG's original Chairman, he has served on the Committee since the first Steering Group Meeting, and has lost count of the years he has been Treasurer. Michael Pearson takes care of the annual four-month season of weekly guided walks, and Margaret Rushton, the Secretary, tries regularly (and fails) to hand on the job of Secretary and Programme Manager. Tessa Whitehouse has taken over as Membership Secretary, Ian McCutcheon acts as Assistant Treasurer, and Mick Jeffs manages the website.

Will you help? Please send nominations to the Secretary (rushtonmm1860@gmail.com) by Monday 14 January 2019, having first made sure that your nominee is in full agreement.

The Chairman's Report will be circulated with the meeting Agenda, by the end of the year. Audited copies of the accounts will be available at Dormer Hall. Some hard copies of all papers will also be available, but it would be appreciated if those on the email circulation list could print and bring their own copies to the meeting.

Happy Christmas! We look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Margaret

W H 'Bill' Billings

William Herbert (Bill) Billings was born on 4th March 1898 in Cherry Street, Warwick. His father, Charles William was a qualified carpenter and joiner who became site foreman and Clerk of Works at Warwick Castle. At the age of thirteen, Bill, along with three of his younger siblings, was still at school, but also had a job as a grocer's errand boy. He later became an engineering apprentice at Midland Autocar on Coventry Road, Warwick.



In October 1916, Bill was called up at the age of 18 years seven months and reported to Grove Park London to the 11th Battalion Machine Gun Company (later, the Machine Gun Corps), formed in December 1915 from the amalgamation of the machine sections of the 11th Brigade, 4th Division. From training at Shorncliff Camp, the Battalion embarked from Folkestone on 9th June 1917, landing at Boulogne in France and arrived at the Carnières Depot a day later. His Battalion were in action at Arras during the first and third Battles of the Scarpe, (April-May 1917), Polygon Wood, Broodseinde, Poelcapelle, and the first Battle of Passchendaele. (September-October 1917). Bill was promoted to Corporal in July 1918 and discharged on 19th of March 1919. Like many soldiers who saw

action, once home, he never talked about his service.

However, once back on 'civvy street', Bill became disillusioned and re-enlisted a mere month later, for the period up to March 1921. His address on enlistment was given as 19 Mill Street, his trade as 'Apprentice Motor Fitting', and his age, 21 exactly. He sailed from Tilbury on 29th October for Bombay (Mumbai), arriving on 14th November. He was stationed at Benares (Varanasi) with his old unit, the 11th Battalion Machine Gun Corps and served in and around the Khyber Pass, one of the most important trade routes and strategic military locations in the world,



and Landi Kotal, in Pakistan. Bill was discharged at the end of his period of service on 31st March 1921. He survived without injury, which for a machine gunner was remarkably lucky. Back on 'civvy street' a second time, he joined Midland Autocar in Warwick as a chauffeur. He later delivered Ford Model T cars from the Ford factory in Manchester to London. After that, Bill worked as an AA cycle patrol man, but in 1927 he found his true calling when he joined the 'Midland Red' as a driver at the Leamington garage, remaining with them for the next 40 years.



In 1930, he married Ivy Lawton, whose father was World Champion Indian Club Swinger in 1896. They set up home in Victoria Street, Leamington, and had a son, Derek. Bill passed away at Victoria Street in 1986 at the age of 89.

Margaret Rushton, from information supplied by Derek Billings

Images: Cpl Billings, the MGC at Benares, Bill on his last day at work, ©Derek Billings

Reviews with Tessa Whitehouse

Monday 25 September: Tara Morton: Suffragists and Suffragettes; the differing voices of Votes for Women in Leamington

With this year focusing on the centenary of women's suffrage, it was fitting that Tara Morton came to present her research into its local connections. The suffrage movement had been active for many years before it gained prominence early in the 20th Century, thanks to the groups of women who were passionate in their views about equality and the need for social reform. They came from all walks of life, all with a common aim. Eventually, the more militant, known as Suffragettes, under Emmeline Pankhurst, went their own way, and the Suffragists continued the battle by peaceful means. Leamington boasted a number of prominent Suffragists, including Mary Dormer Harris, Mary Louise Vellacott and Lady Margaret Hulbert. Alice Walsh chose to get her "Votes for Women!" message across by endorsing the 1911 census form in several places. Most Leamington women sought recognition for their cause through peaceful means. It is often assumed that this movement was only about women, by women, but a lot of men supported women's suffrage. Many of us would not be able to do the things we do today without the untiring efforts of these formidable women. We left Tara's talk with a much enlightened picture of their cause.

Monday 22nd October: Helen Eldridge, Leek Wootton History Group: Doreen's Diary, or 'She Could Not Have Loved More'

Doreen's Diary, a collection of letters to her husband Gilbert after he was reported missing during WW2 was discovered when Doreen Wright, née Cooper, died in 2003 and her family felt it was worthy of publication. The 'diary' recounted her life and events back home, pending his return. Doreen and a younger sister both excelled at swimming and represented the country at the first Empire Games in Canada, where she met Gilbert. They married in 1934 and made their home in Chalfont St. Giles, where Gilbert's family were involved in the engineering and motor business. Gilbert was also passionate about flying, which led him in 1940 to fly on RAF missions to France. When he was later reported missing, Doreen brought her children to his family home, Wootton Court, Leek Wootton, from where she helped with the family business. At the same time, she occupied herself with many aspects of the war effort with the Women's Institute, including during the Coventry blitz in 1940 helping victims evacuated to the Leamington area. Each day, she still found time to 'talk' to her husband, until December 1942, when the diary ended abruptly. The New Year brought the dreaded news that her husband's body had been found and buried in Berneville, Pas de Calais. After the war Doreen returned to Buckinghamshire, expanded the family business and resumed her love of art and textiles. She learnt lace making and spent the rest of her life teaching and giving lectures. She designed and embroidered a white altar frontal for Leek Wootton Church incorporating personal fabrics and parachute silk in memory of Gilbert. It is here where her ashes are buried. This fascinating story was of particular interest to the writer who has happy memories of Leek Wootton having lived and worked there until the mid-1970s.

Monday 26 November: John Wilmot: The History of Rock Mill

As we travel between Leamington Spa and Warwick, we hardly give a second thought the buildings known as Rock Mill standing above the river facing Potterton's field. John Wilmot opened his presentation with an outline of the history of mills over the centuries and their role in society and the industrial revolution. These mills provided much needed employment. Frequently young children were involved not just for financial reasons but their skills in confined spaces, helping to keep the mills working. Over the centuries the mill not only ground corn from the local farms, but wove cotton, - an unusual combined function. Mills' locations by rivers ensured plenty of water power to increase output. With the coming of the canals, goods could easily be transported to other parts of the country. Rock Mill is ideally situated, on an outcrop of sandstone beside the River Avon at Milverton, just downstream from another local mill, Guys Cliffe. It was built over 4 floors, with some accommodation for workers close by. Some of these buildings can still be seen from the footpath leading to Guys Cliffe. By the end of the nineteenth century, the cotton and corn-grinding industries were in decline, leaving the mill unused for many years but it has now been restored and provides apartments with additional properties built at the rear. Rock Mill of course had connections to other mills in the area. Kenches Mill is now familiar to everyone as a pie factory in the second half of the twentieth century, but was once a thriving mill alongside the canal. There may have been similar facilities at Edmondscote, close to Mill House Drive. Contd/

Few of us were aware that there had been several mills in this area but Rock Mill still stands and is often a source of curiosity to passers - by. This very interesting talk answered a lot of questions and shows that behind every building in the town there is some fascinating history hidden within its walls. The mill's future is now secure and Potterton's field, in the flood plain, once the site of pleasure gardens, is currently being landscaped to provide another amenity in the area.

Tessa Whitehouse

Local History Day 2018

This year the main focus of Local History Day in September was the promotion and sale of our latest book. 'Royal Leamington Spa: A History in 100 Buildings' written and researched by local



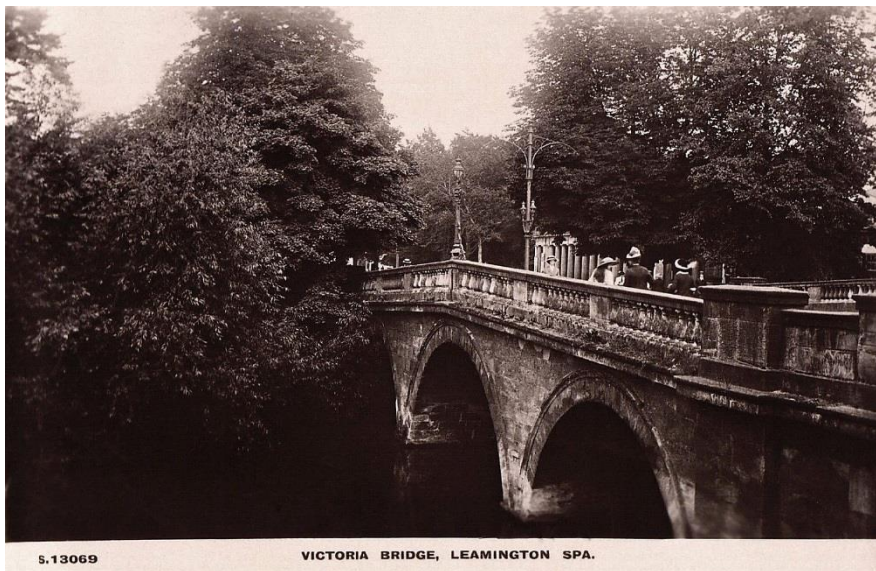
historian Michael Jeffs and his Project Team of Peter Coulls, Barry Franklin, Michael Pearson and Margaret Rushton. The publication does not just focus on the old history of the town, but features many buildings which have become landmarks and instantly recognised, bringing back so many memories. A wonderful book, which once one has started to look through it, cannot be put down! As usual, many local history groups including Lillington, Marton, Southam, Sydenham and Whitnash, took part at the Parish Church, all eager to show photographs and share memories with visitors. Jacqui

Kirk was on hand to advise on family history research, and a number of amenity groups and local authors were also present to promote their work. Leamington History Group were pleased to offer space to Cynthia Haddasah Dwyer to promote a personal and public concern: the incidence of prostate cancer in the Caribbean community. Cynthia thoroughly enjoyed her day meeting many old friends and was an asset to us. As is often the case when chatting to new people one can often find a connection. The writer remembered Cynthia's daughter in her son's class at Westgate School! This is one of the pleasures of these occasions. We thank all who took part, and look forward to future events with everyone's support.

Tessa Whitehouse

Fake news from the early 1900s? Surely not!

Local history sleuth Allan Jennings has turned up this collectors' item, - a postcard of Victoria Bridge, which shows the Pump Rooms 'rebuilt' in Jephson Gardens.



How many people never noticed the reversal of the image, - and how many unsuspecting visitors then went hunting for the Pump Rooms in the Jephson Gardens? In the age of the Internet, 'photo-shopping' an image is not unknown, - there are examples in the press almost every day, but it must have been quite disconcerting when this card was printed.

Do readers have any other examples to share? *Ed.*