



# LEIGHWAY

The newsletter of the Leigh Society  
An eye to the future with an ear to the past in the heart of Leigh

## FROM THE EDITOR

I hope you have all been looking forward to this edition of Leighway which is full of interesting items and information.

2005 was a truly momentous one for the Society with the award of Lottery funding for Plumbs Cottage so keep your eyes on the Old Town.

Our annual quiz was again a great success thanks to Duncan our expert quiz master and the outing to Portsmouth was enjoyed by all who took part, thanks, as ever, to Ann Price, for organizing the trip.

Our next challenge is to get Plumbs Cottage up and running.

I thank all of those who have contributed to the Leighway this year, your articles have been very interesting so keep them coming.

Carole

## CHRISTMAS COMICALS

We couldn't let the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Trafalgar pass without taking a nautical theme for this year's Comicals. So if you are an expert at the hornpipe or a saucy sailor, come along and join in the fun.

This year we would like everyone to come in appropriate fancy dress so dust off those bellbottoms and Captain's peaks and come on down to Bentley's Locker (the Den) on 10 December.

## PLUMBS RESTORATION

The award of the Lottery money allowed a huge sigh of relief to echo round the Plumbs' committee room. But it brought with it additional headaches and as Chairman of the committee I would like to thank Alan Crystall who has done an absolutely amazing job of sorting out the lease and all the other legal documentation.

Getting there has been a long haul and it is all down to the generous people who have helped, in whatever way, particularly all the helpers in the Heritage Centre for their sterling efforts selling sponsorship of tiles for the roof. We could reroof the whole of the Old Town with the tiles that have been sponsored. Thank you all.

Carole

## MEET THE ANCESTORS

At Leigh Regatta at the Heritage Centre Carole will have her 18000+ database of Leigh people and their connections going back over 300 years so if you want to know about your Leigh ancestors or know someone who does spread the word.

## DIARY DATES

Unless otherwise stated, all events will be held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m. There is a small entrance fee of 50p for members and £1 for non members for those meetings to help cover the cost of the hall which has risen again this year.

12 October - Hadleigh Past and Present - Derek Barber

21 October - 8pm at Clifftown URC, Nelson Street - Southend Band Concert to celebrate Nelson and support the Leigh Society

29 October 9.30am- 1pm - Table Sale, St Clement's Church Hall in aid of Plumbs Cottage

16 November - Walking the Essex Way - John Askew

10 December - 8.p.m. The Den - Christmas Comicals

## STRIKE UP THE BAND

Many of you will remember we had a cracking concert last year courtesy of Southend Band which raised quite a bit of money for Plumbs Cottage.

Well the Band has invited us to join them again for another fundraiser to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. A concert with a truly naval theme will be held at Clifftown URC, Nelson Street (how appropriate) on 21 October at 8 pm.

Details of ticketing arrangements are contained in the flyer in your Leighway.

## CHUCK OUT YOUR CHINTZ

Thanks to the efforts of Jan Sutcliffe we will be holding another table sale in St Clement's Hall on Saturday, 29 October between 9am and 1pm.

So now is the time for a grand clear out. Refreshments will be served so come and find a treasure. Details are on the flyer inside Leighway.

## LITTLE DOLLY DAYDREAM

Rightly or wrongly I have recently become an avid 'e-bayer' (for those not in the know this an internet auction house where you can buy or sell virtually anything and which goes to prove one man's rubbish is another man's treasure).

Anyway whilst browsing recently for anything to do with Leigh I came upon someone selling an old washing dolly. Anyone who has been to the Heritage Centre will know that we have one of these on display in Granny's kitchen and we very often confuse the visiting children by asking them to spot the 'washing machine' in the display. Of course none of them have the faintest idea it is the dolly, so we tell them what it was used for.

I was particularly interested in the item for sale as it bore a reference to Leigh-on-Sea. So I duly bid and won the auction.

Within a few days dolly arrived and though a bit bruised and battered she is a quaint addition to my



collection of Leigh items. And the plaque has provided me with another avenue for research.

The plaque reads

'THE SNOW WHITE VACUUM WASHER Co. Pat App for 15055/21 LEIGH-ON-SEA'

At the moment I have no idea where this company operated from and the Patent Office drew a blank. So I think a visit to the library to look at old Kelly's Directories will be the next line of research. Unless one of you can enlighten me.

However, this lead me on to finding out just how the dolly was used and how washday was handled by our ancestors. Today we bundle it all in to a machine, many of us overnight, and literally that is virtually all we do. But it was a lot tougher in Great Grandma's day!

They that wash on Monday have all the week to dry  
They that wash on Tuesday are not so much awry  
They that wash on Wednesday are not so much to blame

They that wash on Thursday wash for very shame  
They that wash on Friday wash in sorry need  
They that wash on Saturday are lazy sluts in deed.

So now we know why Monday was washday. Cleanliness was next to Godliness in the Victorian household and so it was a social stigma not to follow the norm. Monday was the proper day to begin washing (being next to Sunday) and became known in advertisements as 'Blue Monday' (partly because of the mood it created and partly because of the blue dye used in the laundry process).

The use of soap for washing increased throughout the second half of the nineteenth century after the tax on it was abolished in 1853. Over a stone of soap per person was being used by 1891. In addition, sometimes bleaches and 'blue' were used to whiten clothes. Starch was used for linens, aprons and collars.

Washing was done in tubs which were usually wooden, although metal ones came later. The actual washing was done with 'dolly' - a pole with one end shaped either like a cone or a small three-legged stool. This was used to plunge and agitate the clothes in the boiling water. My metal dolly is made of copper and has sieve like holes for the water to flush in and out. Washboards also were becoming more popular, used with a wider, bath shaped tub; these were easier and quicker to use than dollies.

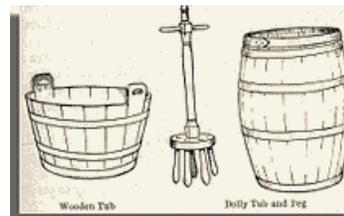
Washing machines were actually in existence as early as 1891 but they were expensive to buy and run and were not popular.

When the washing was done the next great trial was getting it dry. The first thing to do was put the clothes through the mangle to remove all the excess water and then hang them out to dry. It was not unusual for clothes to be hung on hedges and fields for drying purposes. When dry they were mangled again to smooth them out and reduce the need for ironing.

Finally the items would be ironed. Flat irons were of various weights (there are several examples in the Heritage Centre) but did not keep their heat for long so the stove had to be kept alive to keep them hotting up. They were heavy and cumbersome and dangerous both in terms of weight and burning. After ironing the clothes would be left to air.

As you can see washday was an arduous and tiresome day and consequently there was a small army of women who did it for a living and relieved their more affluent neighbours of the task.

There are several women in the Leigh census returns listed as 'washerwoman'.



## 60 GLORIOUS YEARS

Congratulations were the order of the day earlier in the year when our Chairman, Frank Bentley, and his wife Kathleen celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Many congratulations to both of them.



Dennis Puleston 1905-2001

## INSPIRED BY LEIGH

In June 2001 both the London and New York Times carried the obituary of Dennis Puleston, a naturalist, boat designer and yachtsman who, as founding chairman of the Environmental Defense Fund in the USA, played a leading role in getting the insecticide DDT banned in the US and many other countries. He had just died in Brookhaven, N.Y at the age of 95.

Dennis had been awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Harry S. Truman in 1948 for his work during World War II in designing the DUKW amphibious landing craft, commonly known as the Duck, which was used in military campaigns like the Normandy landings.

After the war he joined the Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, N.Y. and having been a keen ornithologist most of his life he began to study a large breeding colony of ospreys on the privately owned Gardiners Island, off eastern Long Island.

By the early 1960's he had concluded that these ospreys were dying out as a result of DDT being sprayed in the area to keep down mosquitoes; it weakened the shells of the birds' eggs so much that they could not protect the live chicks inside.

In 1966 Dennis and several colleagues won a lawsuit against the Suffolk County Mosquito Control Department and secured a year long ban on DDT spraying.

Inundated by requests for help in similar struggles across the US, he and his colleagues set up the Environmental Defense Fund in 1967 to raise money and campaign for better environmental protection.

In 1970, New York banned most uses of DDT and in 1972 a nationwide ban was instituted and many other countries followed suit.

Today, Environmental Defense, as the organisation is called, is one of the leading environmental lobbying groups in the United States, with about 300,000 members and an annual budget of about \$40 million.

So why is this of interest to us in Leigh?

Well Dennis grew up in Leigh, where he acquired a love of boats and a taste for adventure and nature. He also became an avid naturalist and a skilled painter of birds.

After studying biology and naval architecture at London University, he set out across the Atlantic in 1931 with a friend in a small sailing boat on what was to become a six-year odyssey down the eastern seaboard of the US, around the Caribbean and across the South Pacific, with interludes teaching sailing at Rye, N.Y., and running a coconut plantation on Tortola, in the British Virgin Islands.

In 1937, Dennis reached China just as the Sino-Japanese War was beginning. He managed to escape any trouble and made it to London on the Trans-Siberian Railway. He published an account of his adventures in "Blue Water Vagabond" .

He married in 1939 and became an American citizen in 1942, the year he started working with a firm of naval architects helping to design the Duck-like two-and-a-half-ton DUKW amphibious landing craft adopted by the Allies.

Dennis was sent back to the Pacific, where he trained American forces on the craft, organised a training school for the British in India who used it and took part in amphibious operations in the Solomon Islands, New Guinea and Burma, where he was wounded in the spine by a Japanese shell splinter.

After a period in hospital, he came to Britain to train allied forces in preparation for the Normandy landings. He then returned to the Pacific to organise a DUKW training school on Oahu and take part in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, where he was when the war ended.

After retiring in 1970, he began a second career as a lecturer and a guide, accompanying groups of tourists on boat trips all over the world. He went on almost 200 cruises, including about 35 trips to Antarctica

What an adventurer.

Today the Dennis Puleston Osprey Fund encourages research about ospreys on Long Island, improves their nesting opportunities and educates the public about them. The Fund recognises that for ospreys to be successful they must have a viable and healthy habitat in which to live, an objective that Dennis understood and supported. DPOF is part of the [Post Morrow Foundation](http://postmorrow.org), a non profit land preservation organisation. You can find out more information about the Osprey Fund on <http://postmorrow.org/OspreyFund/index.html>.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Reluctantly the Society has to increase its subscriptions this year to keep up with the costs of running the Society and producing the Leighway. I hope you all agree this is well worth it. The subs will be £5 for individual members and £8 for couples. Overseas members' fees remain at £12.

We are really sorry to have to do this but would stress that this is a modest fee compared to a lot of other societies. A direct debit form is enclosed for those of you who wish to take advantage of this easy way of paying.

## TO THE END OF THE LINE

Annie Overton, the first woman tram driver



Annie Overton was born in Leigh in 1897, the daughter of Frederick Overton and Eleanor (nee Cowey). Frederick was a baker and sometime between Annie's birth and 1900 the family moved to Fryerning, near Ingatestone.

But it seems Annie did not forget her roots, indeed there was a strong family pull to the town as her grandparents still lived in Leigh and her grandmother, Margaret Cowey, had been born a Cotgrove.

By the time Annie was 17, trams had been a part of daily life in Southend and Leigh for 13 years and in 1913 the population of Southend had reached 70,000 and the town received County Borough status. Leigh UDC decided to join with the new County Borough and the new Corporation became its own highway authority. The tram system gradually grew, linking Southend and Leigh.

When the First World War broke out the holiday makers deserted the town and tram services were reduced.

The effect of the war was, of course, the loss of manpower to the trenches and for the first time women were recruited to stand in for the absent male workforce.

One of these women, and we believe the first woman tram driver in Britain, was Annie Overton. Apparently the men she worked with called her 'Jimmy' so she would feel like one of the boys.

The use of female workforce was happening all over the country, pushing the bounds of female propriety to the limits and causing some outraged responses. I can find no responses for Southend but they were probably no different to tram operators throughout the rest of the country –

*Hamilton of Leeds were very against the use of female labour on trams, preferring disabled servicemen if "only a leg or arm were missing below a certain point".*

*Women conductresses in Blackpool, Rotherham and Gateshead were allowed with the proviso only on*

*quiet routes and single deck cars - women should not run up and down stairs.*

*The manager of the tramway in Brighton would not allow women for football and race crowds.*

*Hull's manager said "a woman's life should be sheltered as much as possible. She has not the necessary personality".*

*Wolverhampton did not want women to hear obscene language, be in contact with male drivers or to have to walk home late at night.*

*The trade unions were worried about getting rid of the women after the war and said, "they may not go quietly!"*

*Newcastle said that if young ladies were caught conducting, the male driver and male conductor would leave the car.*

Against such comments we have to admire the women that stuck to their metaphorical guns even if it was only for the duration of the war. They changed the way women were treated in the workplace and helped lay the foundations for women's suffrage and equality.

Isn't it nice to think that one of these trailblazers came from Leigh?

Photograph reproduced by kind permission of Judith Williams and information from to Annie's daughter Kath Hinton for which I am most grateful

## PIE OSBORNE

I am sure that many of our readers were truly saddened by the passing of this grand old man of Leigh.

Pie was loved and respected by all old Leigh people and will be sadly missed.

His wealth of knowledge about all things to do with Leigh and its families was boundless, interesting and entertaining.

I met him several times as he and my father were school friends and he knew things about my family that no other source revealed. He was a friendly, cheerful character who commanded respect and affection, and a true example of what it means to be a Leighman.

The Society would like to extend its deepest sympathies to his family.



## ART FOR ART'S SAKE

The Beecroft Gallery



It was 1920 when Southend Town Council conceived the notion of an art gallery in the town, and over twenty years later that local solicitor Walter Beecroft donated £20,000 to a trust for building an art gallery in Chalkwell Park. The trust was administered by four trustees, two chosen by Mr Beecroft and two by Southend Corporation. To maintain public interest and support Walter Beecroft founded the Friends of the Beecroft Art Gallery in 1947, subscriptions were 10/6 pa., husband and wife 15/6.

In 1950 the Warwick Hotel became vacant. The hotel, nos.1 and 3 Westcliff Avenue, was owned by Marion Norton and Winifred Belcham, and had been in the family for forty years. This imposing building with its fabulous view over the estuary, 24 bedrooms, 3 lounges dining room, butler's pantry, housemaid's pantry, sewing room and motor garage was auctioned on 16th September 1950 with a reserve price of £13,000. It failed to reach its reserve and in 1952 it was sold to the Trustees of the Beecroft Art Gallery for £9,000. Extensive alterations took nearly a year to complete.

The Beecroft Art Gallery finally opened to the public in 1953. Patrons of the Art Gallery included the Earl and Countess of Iveagh, Henry Channon, Sir John Ruggles-Brise, Cecil Jones, E.K. Cole and President Walter Beecroft.

The Beecroft, opposite the Cliffs Pavilion, is open to the public on Tuesday to Saturdays. The permanent exhibition includes works of many well known artists, and the Thorpe Smith collection of paintings of Southend from around 1770. There are a number of exhibitions each year including the Essex Open Exhibition.

The Gallery would probably never have been opened but for the generosity of Walter Beecroft who became a solicitor in Leigh in 1906, he lived at one time in the Old Schools. He had many interests being President of Leigh Ratepayers Association and a member of Southend Chamber Music Club. He acted as 'Prime Minister' for Southend Parliament, took an active interest in numerous local societies, including, the Hard of Hearing Club, the Darby and Joan Club, Southend Musical Festival, the Law Society Debating Society, Boyce Hill Golf Club, and many more. A headline in the Southend Standard 1961 reads, 'Last Tribute to a great man.'

*'Walter Beecroft's funeral took place at St. Clements Church, where he had worshipped all his life and was responsible for rebuilding the rectory in 1929. The service was attended by the Mayor, Alderman Johnson, members of the corporation, family and friends. The Rev Head spoke of him as one of Southend's greatest benefactors, a great man whose name will ring out long after we have gone.'*

Mavis Sipple

## OUR LADY OF LOURDES



It is clear in Leigh that the church is at the heart of the community, whatever denomination it may be, and one of Leigh's lovely churches is Our Lady of Lourdes. The Church has an interesting history which Father Kevin Hale has kindly allowed us to share with our readers. If you want to know more about the church visit their website at [www.users.dialstart.net/~olcatho/index.htm](http://www.users.dialstart.net/~olcatho/index.htm).

In 1912 the Old Army Drill Hall was taken over by Father John Joseph O'Neill, (the first Parish Priest) and was used as a church until the new church building was completed in 1925. The Old Drill Hall is still in use as a church hall.

Father Cannon Francis Gilbert was the driving force behind the new Church. He was an enterprising man and designed the church tower to his own specification so it was tall enough to hold a peal of eight bells, and the tower clock. He decided to have a clock to match the one in the Rosary Basilica in Lourdes, striking the quarters and the hours in the same way; that is O Maria, O Regina, O Benigna; Ave, Ave, Ave Maria. They were made by the French firm of Bell-Founders, Les Fils de George Paccard.

The church bells are one of the greatest church features, and they ring out the Ave Maria every hour, it is believed that this is unique in England.

The Church walls contain a stone brought from Gallipoli which was incorporated by the Bishop at a special ceremony. On completion, the Church was said to be 'superb' and "a dream to look at". No one now would dispute that. On 8th December 1925 the first Mass was celebrated and today there is singing mass every week.

Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School opened in 1960 with 186 pupils and with the building still under construction after a long battle with the Education Authority. Slowly the school grew, and in 1966, three more classes were added, with an intake that September of 334 more children. Now the number of pupils attending the school is 457.

## THE YOUNG'S CONNECTION



YOUNG'S BLUECREST SEAFOOD LIMITED

Nelson's isn't the only celebration taking place this year. In fact Leigh has a far closer connection to another bicentenary.

In 1805 a lady called Elizabeth Martha started selling fish caught in the River Thames, a trade she continued with for several years until in 1811 she married a local fisherman, Timothy Young. Together they formed a business which prospered in the early 1800s and is still with us today.

Although the Young family had been Thames watermen and fisherman since at least 1750 it was in 1805 that the activities of catching and selling fish were combined for the first time.

The business prospered because it thrived on the whitebait caught from boats based at Leigh, in fact over the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the business flourished until in 1890 they moved their headquarters from Greenwich to Royal Mint Street in London. The whitebait was taken to Billingsgate market and sold to the leading London hotels.

In these closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the picturesque fleet of bawleys at Leigh belonging to William Joseph Young and his family were an everyday part of the river life.

For over a hundred years Young's had sold whitebait and against the background of the post war depression William Joseph courageously and with foresight expanded the business.

During the 1920s Young's were amongst the first to undertake sales of frozen Labrador salmon and imports of Canadian salmon passed the million pound mark. Frozen shrimps were first imported from Canada and Young's launched potted shrimps sold in blue pottery jars.

The Second World War saw rationing and brought a halt to potted shrimps; due to the enormous fluctuation of catches caused by the fishing fleets operating in war time conditions and also the chaotic problems of distribution.

By 1940 scampi was first sold to the public and in the same decade Young's started processing fish in Grimsby. By the 1950s potted shrimps were made at 5 factories around the UK and bringing us right up to date into the frozen food era in the 1980s Young's launched their Chip Shop and Ocean Pie brands.

In 1999 the now familiar Bluecrest was formed.

Since the turn of the millennium other firms have joined the Young's brand and the company now has a turnover exceeding £500million a year. Young's Bluecrest is the top independent food company and the 15<sup>th</sup> largest UK food brand.

And to think it all started with a bit of Leigh whitebait.

**Logo Reproduced with the kind permission of Young's**

## MALACOLOGY AND LEIGH

Malacology – now there's a word to conjure with.

It means the scientific study of molluscs, i.e. snails, oysters and the like.

David Seymour Brown may not be a well known name in these parts but I am sure our readers will find him an interesting person and even more so when they know that he was born in Westcliff in 1935 and lived in Leigh both before and after the war.

During the war the family's house in Leigh was requisitioned by the army, and they lived in a variety of places including Charmouth in Dorset, a place famous for its fossils. It was here that David developed a keen interest in natural history.

After the war they returned to Leigh and David continued his education and then went on to Leicester University to read zoology. From university he joined the Experimental Taxonomy Unit of the British Museum (Natural History) (taxonomy is the theory and practice of describing, naming and classifying plants and animals).

David's first field mission was to the Gambia where he collected and identified the freshwater snails that are responsible for transmitting trematode worms that cause schistosomiasis, a parasitical infection commonly known as snail fever. When people swim or bathe in the water, the worms burrow through their skin and into their bloodstream, lay eggs in their bodies and make them ill. This disease affects an estimated 200 million people in over 70 countries in the tropics and subtropics

David conducted further field trips to Africa researching the freshwater snails and was later seconded to the Medical Research Council of South Africa carrying on further research in to the snail population and the disease.

He returned to the Natural History Museum in 1970 to write his seminal work 'The Freshwater Snails of Africa and their Medical Importance.'

In recognition of his work at least four new species of snail were named after him.

David passed away in 2004 leaving these words for his memorial service.

*The natural world has been my lifelong inspiration. I never forgot finding snails in the iris patch at the age of three and the excitement of getting to know the small creatures to be found by a child at grass level. Why should there be so many differences in kinds and colours? Since boyhood it seemed plain to me that all life has evolved according to Charles Darwin's explanation of natural selection, and he's been my hero.'*



Dr David Seymour Brown, 1963 at NHM

# THE BOY SEAMEN OF SHOTLEY

By Frank Bentley

Before and since the time of Nelson young boys have gone to sea with the Royal Navy, indeed Nelson himself went to sea at the age of twelve.

It is a little known fact that 1st Class Boy Seamen from Naval Training Establishments served in World War Two capital ships,

I was on a cruiser on the Russian Convoy Campaign in 1941/2 which had a Boys' mess deck of some 40 sixteen year olds from HMS Ganges training establishment at Shotley. All the lads were assigned to small calibre guns which offered no armoured protection. It was understood that due to the hard training received they would automatically carry out their duties under fire, whereas an older man would probably duck!

On my gun, which was a 4 barrelled Pom Pom, I had 8 boys responsible for loading shells (2 to a gun) plus the youngest member who manned a wide broom to sweep spent cartridges over the side. His other job was to place a small wooden platform on the gun deck for me as, at five foot three inches in height, I could not reach the 'open sights'! These important items were often hidden prior to action stations by the older lads - they were a fearless lot!

To my knowledge very little has been published about these youngsters, who when at sea, had to be in their hammocks by 9.30pm if they weren't on Watch.

As to recognition, they received none for their efforts, as indeed was the case for all who served on the Arctic run, in that succeeding Governments never even recognised this campaign, which was one of the most lengthy and hardest of the War. The Russian Convoy Club is still seeking such recognition.

Although most boy seamen were volunteers, some were guided towards a naval career due to various aspects in their lives where it was felt that they would benefit from the discipline and training they would receive. On entry they would hold the rank of Boy Seaman 2nd class, the lowest rank in the Royal Navy.

On completion of their training they would emerge as the most disciplined professional sailors in the world.



An aerial view of Shotley

# HMS GANGES



The name HMS Ganges came into service in 1779 when 3 vessels were presented to the Navy by the Honourable East India Company. One of them was the Bengal, built on the Thames at Blackwall, which was re-named HMS Ganges. She was broken up in 1816. Her successor, built in Bombay, was launched on 10 November 1821, subsequently arriving at Portsmouth in October 1822.

After various commissions, HMS Ganges was commissioned as the flag-ship of Rear Admiral R. L. Bayes on the Pacific Station and left for the Pacific in September 1857. On return to England in 1861, HMS Ganges entered the history books as being the last sailing ship to be a sea going flagship.

In 1866, HMS Ganges became the boys' training ship anchored in Falmouth harbour where she remained until August 1899. In November 1899, she was transferred to Harwich harbour.

HMS Ganges remained in Harwich as a boys' training ship until in 1905 the boys moved ashore for their training, which continued at Shotley until 1976. HMS Ganges herself was towed away soon after 4 a.m. on the first Thursday of July, 1906 by two Government tugs in beautifully fine weather.

The new HMS Ganges was the premier boys' training establishment for boy seamen in the 1930s. It was a shore establishment situated at Shotley near Ipswich. Anyone trained at Shotley was considered a first class seaman. The training and discipline were considered very strict and although hated at the time, it was always with a certain amount of pride that one said, 'Of course, I was a Shotley Boy.'

When the boys first moved ashore, the numbers under training were in the region of 500. As the establishment developed, the numbers increased so that at the end of the 1940s those under training numbered 2000. Approximately 200 joining every five weeks.

Originally, training was restricted to seamanship but in 1911 this was extended to include signals training and in the late 1950s, further extended to other branches of the Royal Navy.

The HMS Ganges Association has opened a 'Ganges Museum' at Shotley exhibiting artefacts, memorabilia and photographs. Entry is free but voluntary donations are willingly accepted. The museum is open Saturdays and Sundays, April until the end of October and Spring/Summer Bank Holidays.

## CHARACTERS OF OLD LEIGH



### William 'Snappy' Noakes

Many thanks to Hazel Hunter, granddaughter of Snappy Noakes, a very well known Leighman, for this wonderful snippet of Leigh family history.

William 'Snappy' Noakes was born in about 1895 in Leigh, the son of John and Emma Noakes. He married Jessie Pickett from Laindon and they lived in Surridge Cottages and later at Cottage Place. In the First World War Snappy served, where else but on the water, and in 1918 was aboard the MV Minnetonka in the Mediterranean. I will let the Secretary of the Atlantic Transport Company Limited take up the story from there. The following is a letter received by Snappy of 14 February 1918.

*'Dear Sir,*

*It having been reported to us that when performing the duties of Lookoutman on the Transport 'Minnetonka' on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1918 when the steamer was lost, you sighted the periscope of a submarine and reported to the Bridge that a torpedo was proceeding towards the ship, and Captain Cannons having verified this report we have much pleasure in enclosing our cheque for £5, in accordance with the notice which has been issued by the Company that a reward would be given at the recommendation of the Master.*

*We are glad to be able to recognize in this way your keen sense of duty in carrying out the arduous work of Lookoutman at the present time, which often in these days is not only the means of saving his ship but the lives of his mates.*

*Please sign the enclosed receipt form and return to us at your early convenience.'*

The Minnetonka was built in 1901 by Harland & Wolff, Belfast for the Atlantic Transport Line. The Atlantic Transport Line was an American company, but was effectively British operated.

The Minnetonka was a 13,440 gross ton ship, with passenger accommodation for 250-1st class only. Launched on 12 December 1901, she started her maiden voyage from Belfast to New York and London on 17 May 1902. On 12 July 1902 she started her first London - New York sailing and commenced her last voyage on this service on 31 December 1914. In 1915 she became a British war transport ship and was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U.64, 40 miles from Malta with the loss of four lives on 30 January 1918.

Snappy's Certificate of Discharge shows that he joined as a seaman on 31 July 1915 on the Osterley at Tilbury travelling to Brisbane. The following year he served on the Orontes, again to Australia but later that year the Osterley became a troop ship and Snappy served on her until 1917 when he joined the Carpathia (the ship that had rescued survivors from the Titanic in 1912). Aboard the Carpathia he went to New York and on his return signed on the Ionian to Montreal. As we have seen by 1918 he was serving on the Minnetonka. His conduct and ability throughout his naval career was stated as being 'very good'.

In later life Snappy was a Huffer. This word is derived from Hoveller and means a coastal boat man who guided vessels, i.e. a pilot, up the estuary and a person who assisted in saving life or property from a vessel wrecked near the coast and often applied to a small boat that lies in narrow waters ready to wait on a vessel, if required. Apparently it originates from the fact that these men lived in small huts by the water - hovels - hence the name.

## RECORDING FOR POSTERITY

Over the years the Leigh Society has been the recipient of a wealth of information about Leigh and its families. This is all held at the Heritage Centre and on the family history database which Carole has compiled. Carole is very happy to help any researcher on their Leigh family history or local history generally.

However, we are conscious that as time goes by memories fade and people move and pass on. We are lucky in that we do have tapes made by the late Edgy Harvey, Pie Osborne and Harry Reader about life in Leigh but we want to make sure that other interesting and vital information is not lost for future generations.

We are therefore launching a 'Record for Posterity' campaign. Jane Lovall and Carole are looking to meet and interview people who have any information/anecdotes about Leigh and its folk, businesses or events over the last century. Some may even have family stories which go back even further.

The interviews will be taped by agreement with the interviewee and transcribed. They will be kept in the Society archive and we hope to produce booklets based on the tapes. We already carry several such 'memories' in the Heritage Centre and they are very popular with visitors.

So here is the plea. If you or anyone you know would like to take part in this project please contact Jane via the Heritage Centre and she will set up an interview.

We hope this will turn into a worthwhile exercise with as many people as possible taking part.

# PLANNING REPORT

Over the last few months the Society has looked at a number of planning applications affecting the Leigh Conservation Areas.

Many of these have posed no problems or issues of moment but there are one or two which are of importance and in some cases, keep returning to our meetings. There is of course no limit to the number of planning applications an applicant can submit, so the oft heard cry of 'why are the Council even considering this, why don't they stop them' is not really a justified criticism. The Council has no control over an applicant, who may submit as many applications as he likes, sometimes a ploy to wear objection down.

However, under the new Planning and Compensation Act 2004 Councils will soon have an additional power BUT it remains to be seen whether they will use it.

A council will be able to refuse to determine a planning application where it has refused more than one similar application and there has been no appeal to the Secretary of State in the preceding 2 year period. In addition, they may decline to determine an application if they think it is similar to another application which has not been finally determined (either by them or on appeal by the Secretary of State). There is a right of appeal against a decision to decline to determine and the Councils will need to be prepared to take such a decision and fight off an appeal if the provision is to have any effect.

For our part we will keep responding to applications but on the occasions where the circumstances referred to above arise we will be urging the Council to take a firm stand.

Two of the more major applications we have dealt with recently are as follows, both fall into the category of repeat applications.:-

**Oscars – this** was a proposal which has been to us twice recently for altered elevations and conversion of the restaurant into 6 self contained flats. On both occasions we raised very strong objections as we considered the proposal to be over-development of this important prominent position. The first application was withdrawn but we reiterated our views as follows on the second application. We felt the design was very poor and the fenestration in the front elevation was out of keeping in the Conservation Area. The proposal contained no parking provision which would lead to parking issues in the area. It had no amenity space and had a deleterious effect on light and privacy to neighbouring properties. .

The second application was refused by the Council.

**Rock Shop** - Another proposal which has been to us twice in recent months was for use of the Rock Shop as a restaurant with single storey extension at rear and external staircase. Prior to the application we had objected most strongly at the Magistrate's Court hearing into the application for a licence for the premises. Unfortunately our objections were not accepted and the licence was granted. However, just because a licence has been granted does not mean that planning permission will automatically be granted as different issues apply. We have since objected very strongly to the planning applications

on the basis that the loss of the retail use of the 'Rock Shop' would be severely detrimental to the character and setting of the Old Town and the Conservation Area. The Borough Council's own Local Plan provided policies in support of our objection.

**Policy C5 – retention of commercial uses appropriate to the character of Leigh Old Town as a working marine village and the reduction of vehicular access for non-essential traffic.**

The loss of the last remaining original shop use in the Old Town and a valuable resource for visitors is totally against this policy. It would also create considerable additional traffic and congestion. With a proposal for 48 covers it would make an already appalling traffic problem even worse, especially in the light of the recent permission in respect of extensions of the Boatyard restaurant. To say that there are public car parks available is ridiculous, they may be physically there but they are certainly not available and such capacity as there is is swiftly used. In an evening there are cars parked all over the Old Town and during the day traffic is a particular hazard.

**Policy S5 – deals with Non Retail uses**

We advised the Council that there are already 8 food and drink premises within the Old Town 4 of which are licensed. To add to this number would be to the detriment of the Old Town and would add even further to the problems of anti social behaviour and intimidation which currently take place on a regular basis. There was no justification for the addition of yet another such use and certainly no case could be made on the basis of need. The Old Town is already swamped with such uses. Despite references in recent reports on applications in the Old Town that there were no close residents, this is a complete misconception. The Old Town has a residential population who are constantly being subjected to the anti-social behaviour referred to above.

We, therefore, strongly urged the Council not to go against its own policies, with their laudable aims of preserving Old Leigh as a maritime village, and to reject the applications in the most forceful terms, regardless of the fear of an appeal. This is even more important now the once heralded shops on the Juniper site are not going ahead.

Both applications have been refused by the Council

We have also been consulted on the Council's draft Design and Townscape Guidance and have made detailed comments on the document and urged more consideration, in determining planning applications, for the heritage of Leigh and its character, in particular guarding against inappropriate developments in terms of townscape i.e. flats.

# **SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK – STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)**

This document has recently been produced for consultation by the Borough Council as part of the local development framework (the new local plan) and is another requirement of the new Planning Act. The consultation period ended on 9 September.

The purpose of the SCI is to set out the Council's overall vision and strategy for community involvement, and how this links with other community involvement initiatives.

Although community involvement in the local development documents is very important, and there will be ample opportunity for people to comment on the Council's proposals for the future in due course, most people only get involved with planning when applications arise in their area and they want to express a view. This note concentrates on the part of the consultation paper which deals with community involvement in planning applications.

All planning applications (including Listed Building and Conservation Area applications and works to trees) are recorded on a Weekly List which is made publicly available for inspection in both hardcopy format and on the Council's website.

The Council also publicises most planning applications by notifying neighbours who receive a Public Participation Leaflet giving further guidance. Certain, usually more significant applications, are advertised in the press and by site notices.

A wide range of statutory consultees and other stakeholders and representative bodies are also consulted. The Leigh Society is consulted on all applications within the 4 Leigh Conservation Areas and also keeps an eye on other major developments. The Council makes the applications themselves available for inspection. Within the area of Leigh Town Council these can be inspected at that Council's offices during normal office hours. (note that Leigh TC do not have amended applications for inspection so you need to be vigilant in checking with the Borough Council if amendments are being made).

Anyone can make a representation about a planning application. All written representations will be fully considered and may influence the Council's decision on the application, provided they relate to the planning merits of the proposed scheme.

Planning considerations include:

- planning policy (national, regional, sub-regional or local);
- design, appearance, layout and effect on nearby property;
- impact on visual or residential amenity (including loss of light, noise, odour and other environmental impacts);
- impact on trees, conservation areas, nature conservation or open space; and
- highway safety and traffic issues.

Considerations which are not planning matters, and which will therefore not be taken into account, include:

- Private property rights (e.g. boundary or access disputes, restrictive covenants);
- Effect on property values;
- Personality or a developer's motives; and
- Loss of view over private land.

The Council allows 21 days for comments which may be made available to the applicant and will be public documents – so try not to libel anyone or elaborate the facts. If there is an Appeal, the comments will be forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate. Anyone who has made a representation will be informed of the Council's decision or an appeal, and all immediate neighbours are notified by letter.

Decisions on minor proposals and those in line with planning policies are normally decided by officers under delegated powers, but you still have the right to make representations which must be considered. Approximately 10% of applications, particularly those relating to major or controversial proposals, are decided at the Council's Development Control Committee where those making written representations may be able to speak directly to the Committee when the application is considered.

Local groups or organisations (or their representatives) are not allowed to address the Committee; the right to speak extends to individuals only. The applicant will be afforded the right to respond. If there are a number of people wishing to speak on the same topic they will be asked to choose a spokesperson.

If you want to speak at the committee you should tell the Council in writing by 12 noon on the day before the meeting at the latest. An objector will be given 3 minutes to speak, as will the applicant to respond.

Consultation on planning applications will on rare occasions involve public meetings and feedback to the Committee. This will only take place where a planning application gives rise to a particularly high level of concern from neighbours or other stakeholders, or otherwise proves to be particularly contentious.

The Council provides a free Duty Planner service to members of the public requiring planning advice or further information.

The Council's website [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk) carries lots more information about planning in the Borough and you can also track the progress of planning applications by clicking on Planning on the Home page and then click Planning Applications and then click Planning Applications Database. You then just fill in the details i.e. the road and the list of applications in the road will come up and you can scroll through them to find the one you want.

Committee agenda are also available on the website a few days before the meeting so you can see what the recommendations are.

## CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN – AND DON'T WHYMPER

Anyone heard of Edward Whymper? – all will be revealed at the end

On Southern Vancouver Island in the upper reaches of the Chemainus River and a little north of Lake Cowichan stands Mount Whymper. The highest mountain in Canada south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Mount Whymper is named in honour of Frederick Whymper, a talented artist and stalwart explorer (1838 – 1901), the son of Josiah Wood Whymper, a well known English wood-engraver, who arrived on Vancouver Island in the autumn of 1862. At this time the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition committee was looking at hiring men to assist in exploring and mapping Vancouver Island. Whymper was immediately appointed as the expedition's artist and spent the summer of 1864 exploring Southern Vancouver Island.

Although the Expedition and Frederick's subsequent journeys were of valuable geographical interest his exploits were overshadowed by his younger brother, Edward, who was to become the most famous mountaineer of the Victorian era when he made the first ascent of the Matterhorn in July 1865.

The mid 1850's to the end of the 1860's marked the start of modern mountaineering as a sport in its own right. This period became known as the "Golden Age" of alpinism.

There was an explosion of activity, with climbers from the emerging middle class beginning to go regularly to the "Playground of Europe," the Alps, for their annual holidays, exploring the passes and tackling the higher summits. By the end of the 1850's most of the 4,000m peaks in the Alps had been climbed but there was still one sought after prize – the picturesque Matterhorn.

Located on the border of Italy and Switzerland, the Matterhorn had seen numerous attempts by local guides to reach its airy summit. Edward Whymper, an artist like his brother Frederick, was commissioned to make drawings of the Alps for the second edition of Peaks, Passes and Glaciers, the guidebook to the Alps.

Whymper had never even seen a mountain before but in the summer of 1861 he saw the Matterhorn for the first time and immediately made an attempt to reach its pinnacle. The Matterhorn was claimed to be impossible to climb by the best mountaineers at the time.

Whymper's attempt ended in defeat, much to the relief of the local guides, but this merely increased his resolve to conquer the mountain. For the next three years he continued his attempts but it wasn't until the summer of 1865 that he managed to reach the summit along with six companions.

Tragedy struck on the descent when a climber from the triumphant party slipped and pulled three of his companions with him. The rope snapped and four of the first seven men to climb the Matterhorn plunged down the abyss to their deaths. Fortunately Edward Whymper was one of the survivors.

Whymper's fame spread far and wide and he travelled and wandered around the world writing

about his adventures in mountaineering which, apart from the Alps, took him to South America and Canada, but the fateful events on the Matterhorn's summit were to haunt him for the rest of his life. The irony is that the Mountain which bears his



Edward Whymper

surname is actually commemorating his brother.

According to Whymper's biography from about 1900 he lived in a boarding house in Southend when he was in England. The Southend Standard reported that he maintained a house at 4 Cliff Town Parade, the building is now a B & B and has a blue plaque to Whymper (the only one). A Miss Louisa Wright was the keeper of the boarding house in Whymper's time.

On 25 April 1906 Edward married his housekeeper's Great Niece, Edith Mary Lewin, many years his junior, who it is believed worked at the boarding house. Whymper took his wife on honeymoon to the Alps, where he bought her an ice axe and showed her how to use it on the glacier above Chamonix. This was Edith's only visit to the Alps.

In 1908 they had a daughter, Ethel Rosa. There was a vast age difference between them and this may have led to the marriage foundering and Edward heading west to the Canadian Rockies and then to Switzerland.

Edith and Edward were judicially separated in 1910 and he died the following year in Chamonix, having made a new will excluding any bequests for his wife and child. Edith who was then living in Uplands Road, Leigh, challenged this in the courts managing to get a settlement for her daughter but nothing for herself. She married again in 1913 but died shortly afterwards.

Edith Lewin was the daughter of William and Amelia Lewin who at the time of Edith's death were living at Cliff Road, Leigh, in a house still standing today. At the time of his death in 1926 William was living in a substantial purpose-built block of flats on London Road, Leigh. Although William had been born in London his family had run the Anchor at Hullbridge. Yet another historical connection to Leigh.

Whymper wrote several books but his Alpine adventures are best recorded in 'Scrambles in the Alps in the years 1860-69 published by National Geographic.

Information supplied by Greg Lewin, grandson of Edith's brother, and Ian Smith and Lindsay Elms an Australian who climbs mountains in Canada.

## THE BIG CASINO

There cannot be anyone in Leigh or the surrounding area who is not aware of the much discussed proposals for casino development.

Having opened the door to one regional, 8 large and 8 small casinos in the Gambling Act 2005, with no block on more coming forward, the Government is now expressing concerns that changes to licensing arrangements could result in a proliferation of casinos because under the planning legislation casinos fall in the same class as cinemas, concert halls and the like – places for amenity and leisure. These uses are interchangeable without the need for planning permission. Thus a concert hall could change into a casino with no planning permission required (it would have to be licensed of course); this is known as permitted development.

The Government has issued a consultation paper on tightening the planning rules for casinos to require permission to be obtained to ensure that local planning authorities maintain development control over such establishments. They are consulting on the following options, of which the third is their preferred:

**Option 1: No change; casinos to remain classed as 'Amenity and Leisure';**

And thus it would be possible for a cinema, concert, bingo and dance halls, swimming baths, skating rinks, gymnasiums or sports arenas etc to change to a casino without permission

**Option 2: Casinos to be removed from the Use Classes Order 1987, thus removing permitted development rights;**

This would mean they would be a use on their own which would require planning permission and could not change with other uses.

**Option 3: Casinos to be granted permitted development rights allowing a casino to convert to another leisure use but not allowing another leisure use to convert to a casino..**

On the face of it this option is acceptable as in theory the new use would be less intrusive or objectionable than the casino. Not necessarily true, some dance halls can be pretty rowdy places.

Whatever the option chosen it will not alter the fact that new casinos such as that proposed in the Borough will need planning permission and local people will get a chance to comment.

In introducing the consultation Baroness Andrews said: *"Tightening the system means that planners can ensure that casinos are in the interests of the local community by placing a requirement on developers to seek permission before converting other leisure facilities into casinos. We welcome responses from all interested parties and we will announce our proposals later this year."*

The consultation ends on 21 October 2005 and if you want to make your views known you should write to Funmi Wood, ODPM, Planning Development Control Division, Zone 4/H1, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU.

Copies of the consultation paper from the ODPM website at: [www.odpm.gov.uk/planning](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/planning) under 'consultation papers'.

## BARNADO'S GIRLS?

I have to admit to being ignorant at times – not often of course, but I always thought Dr Barnado's was for boys only. Recently, however, my ignorance has been enlightened, for when doing some research in the 1901 census I found a Leigh girl, Emma, as an inmate of The Village Home in Ilford. Although she was an inmate she was also recorded as a laundress.

So what was the Village Home? Well it turned out to be quite interesting.

Dr Barnado had opened the first home for boys in 1870 in Stepney Causeway and the story is well known of the boy called 'Carrots' who was turned away because the shelter was full and was found dead 2 days later. After this the Barnado's byword became 'No destitute child ever refused admission.'

The Victorian attitude to poverty was to regard it as shameful and a result of laziness and vice but Barnados accepted all children and stressed that every child deserved the best possible start in life whatever their background.

In 1876 Barnados opened the Girls' Village Home in Barkingside. This comprised a collection of cottages around a green and housed 1500 girls with the aim that by the time a girl left the home they could make their own way in the world and the girls were equipped with all the necessary domestic skills (hence Emma the laundress).

The home was run on a family principle and remained for girls only until 1945 when it became a mixed establishment and finally closed in 1991. One would hope because it was no longer necessary.

So let's hope that Emma from Leigh got her good start and went on to a better life.

As can be seen from this photograph the setting could not have been more pleasant – how different from the workhouse Emma would have faced only a few short years earlier.



## AND FINALLY

Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the particular author and not necessarily those of the committee and officers of the Society.

We rather hope you will like to keep your copy of Leighway but if not please recycle it.

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