

# LEIGHWAY

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

## HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE

And welcome to the first edition of Leighway for 2008. There are some very interesting articles in this edition and we hope you enjoy reading them. Our talk diary for this year has not yet been finalized but please note the diary dates. And most important of all please make sure you pay your subscription as soon as you can. If you are doing this through the bank then you don't need to worry about it. Remember subs are now £10 (£15 overseas) per household.

## WE'RE ON THE WEB

The Leigh Society's very own website can be found at [www.leighsociety.co.uk](http://www.leighsociety.co.uk) so check it out. There is loads of information about a variety of things related to Leigh and the Society. There is a downloadable membership form so email the link to your friends. All past copies of the Leighway will be available on the site, as will be the coming year's diary of events. The site includes e-mail addresses for family history queries and for general information requests.

## WHAT YOU CAN BUY IN THE HERITAGE CENTRE

For those of you who do not manage to get down to the Heritage Centre very often we would like to remind you of some of the books and other publications we sell. If you would like to purchase any of these items please send an e-mail to [enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk)

Leigh-on-Sea, A History by Judith Williams - £15.99  
The Mayflower - a Barging Childhood by Nick Ardley  
Old Leigh by H.N.Bride - £3.50  
Joscelynes Tales/Joscelynes Beach - both By Arthur Joscelyne - £9.99 each  
The Essex Hundred - by Andrew Summers and John Debenham - £7.99  
Thames Estuary Trail by Tom King - £7.99  
Thames Sailing Barges at Leigh by Ann Price - £5.00  
We also booklets and leaflets on a variety of subjects relating to Leigh as well as postcards and Leigh souvenirs like key rings, book marks, pens and fridge magnets.

## HELPERS WANTED

The dark and miserable days of winter may not be the time you want to volunteer for anything (but we have had new radiators installed) but those of you who may be interested in helping at the Heritage Centre can you start thinking about it now.

It is true to say that it is quieter during these months but come the spring things will start to pick up and if last year is anything to go by with Plumbs Cottage it will be busy. So if you would like to help out please contact us at the Heritage Centre, Tel 01702 470834 or [enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk)

## THE COMICALS

Once again the Comicals were a resounding success. The theme was Schooldays and we had virtuoso performances of Educating Archie, Three Little Maids (with a very fetching Alan Crystall as Yum Yum) and many other acts. Everyone had a great time and we hope are eager for this year's event. So mark down 6 December in your diaries.



Charles and Rosemary Patterson do a turn as Peter Brough and Archie Andrews

## DEAR DIARY

All held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m unless otherwise stated. For the five Society meetings there is an entry charge of £1 for members and £2 for visitors  
May Quiz – date TBA – The Den  
12 March – Crossing Temple – Dave Andres, ECC Historic Buildings Officer  
23 April (AGM) – Shoebury – Judith Williams  
14 May – River Thames – The Flow of History – David Williams  
8 October – Leigh History – Clare Harvey  
19 November - RNLI  
6 December – Comicals at The Den

## THE WIDOW OF EDEN LODGE

Leigh has many literary connections - John Fowles, John Betjeman and more, but there is another not so salubrious connection to one of this country's greatest writers, William Makepeace Thackeray, the writer of *Vanity Fair*.



For over 23 years Thackeray's widow, Isabella, lived at Eden Lodge which once stood at the bottom of the present Leigh Park Road and whose house and grounds stretched to Church Hill and up to meet Chess Lane which ran from the top of Church Hill westwards. At the time it was the home of Henry Thompson, a retired tradesman and organist, and his wife Emma Joscelyne. Before that in 1861 Isabella was living in Prittlewell with a couple called Bakewell whom she had been living with in Gravesend in 1851.

The interesting thing is that Thackeray himself did not die until 1863 so why was his wife living as a boarder with these families? Well one clue comes in the 1871 census where Isabella Thackeray is listed as a lady of no occupation and of unsound mind. Lets go back to the beginning.

William Makepeace Thackeray, was born on 18 July 1811 in Calcutta. After his father's death he came back to England to continue his education but after failing to gain a degree at Trinity College, Cambridge he spent some time abroad and then came back to England to study law. This did not work either as he preferred the theatre, writing and history.

He then met Isabella Gethin Creagh Shawe who had also been born in Calcutta, the daughter of a Colonel. At the time she met Thackeray, Isabella's father had died and she was living in Paris with her mother and sister.

After a very short courtship Thackeray and Isabella were married on 20 August 1836. It is clear from the various books about his life that his mother-in-law did not help the young couple, being naturally worried about her son-in-law's rather bohemian lifestyle and lack of application. But Thackeray and Isabella were happy and proceeded to start a family.

They moved to London when Thackeray's work as a correspondent in Paris came to an end and the next few years were a struggle for the young family which grew with three daughters. Sadly Jane, the middle daughter died when only a few months old and Isabella, after her third daughter was born, began to show signs of what we now today would know as severe post natal depression and in August, 1840 Isabella had written after the birth that she felt

*'excited, my strength is not great and my head flies away with me as if it were a balloon. This is mere weakness and a walk will set me right but in case there should be incoherence in my letter you will know what to attribute it to... I think my fears imaginary and exaggerated and that I am a coward by nature.'*

Added to this awful state of affairs her mother seemed to undermine her abilities as a mother and wife and Thackeray

himself seemed obliviously to how his wife was deteriorating, spending more and more time working away.

At last however, he did realize that there were serious problems with Isabella's mental state and he decided to take her to Ireland to see her mother and sister in the hope of restoring her spirits. Things were not to work out so well though.

During the crossing Isabella's mental stability suffered more and more until she attempted to commit suicide by throwing herself from a water-closet into the sea, from which she was eventually rescued but only after 20 minutes of floundering in the water. Not something conducive to aiding her recovery. Thackeray had to face facts and had to take some action. For the time being that consisted of tying himself to Isabella with a ribbon while they slept, for fear she would try again to harm herself. Plaintively he wrote how his 'dear wife's melancholy augmented to absolute insanity during the voyage, and I had to watch her for 3 nights... and brought her here quite demented'

The trip, which for Isabella was meant to be recuperative and for Thackeray was meant as a research trip for *The Irish Sketch-Book*, turned into a domestic battle with the mother-in-law.

After the events of that ill fated trip Isabella became 'devoured by gloom, clouded and rambling'. At first she was violent, then indifferent, then melancholy and silent. A state which the rest of the family must have been greatly thankful for.

Thackeray started out on what proved to be a fruitless search not just for a cure but for a place that would look after Isabella until she was cured. For a couple of years Isabella was in and out of professional care, her condition improving and then deteriorating, but she was finally placed with a Dr Puzin at Chaillot, where her condition appears to have been stabilised although she remained detached, not knowing what was going on around her. Thackeray came back to London, having left his daughters with their grandmother where they stayed for the next four years.

By the autumn of 1845 Isabella was thought to be incurable and she was taken out of the French care and placed with the Bakewells in Camberwell. Mrs Bakewell is described as a nurse and 'excellent worthy woman'. Good that she was for she was to be Isabella's constant companion for the rest of her long life.

The Bakewell's are a bit of a mystery. In 1851 Isabella is living with Joseph and Elizabeth Bakewell in Gravesend. Joseph is said to be an engineer, but by 1861 Joseph has become Robert Bakewell a retired doctor. This obviously bears further investigation. So there was Isabella safely out of London where Thackeray's centre of attention and attraction was.

He was a married man in name only but the social rigours of the day would not make for a pleasant divorce especially from a wife who was known to be ill. Isabella's state was the best kept secret of literary London.

We would be naïve to think Thackeray kept himself completely devoid of female company out of deference to his Isabella and indeed he developed a number of confidential relationships with women who were emotional supports to him. Two of these liaisons threatened or promised to be more than friendships.

He did visit Isabella on occasion at the Bakewells in Camberwell but according to Mrs Bakewell these visits were few and far between and eventually dwindled and in the end he stopped visiting although he continued to pay for Isabella's

support. She was not completely abandoned, however, and her daughter Annie must have been in contact with the Bakewells, if not her mother.

Thackeray's literary prowess grew from strength to strength over the years whilst Isabella was kept well away from any involvement with his life. Then suddenly on 23 December 1863, after dining out, he had a stroke and was found dead on his bed the next morning. He was only fifty-three and his death was entirely unexpected by his family, friends and reading public. An estimated 7000 people attended his funeral at Kensington Gardens. He was buried on 29 December at Kensal Green cemetery.

Isabella and the Bakewell's had moved to Prittlewell by this time and thence after Richard Bakewell's death to live at Eden Lodge in Leigh in the house of Henry Thompson and his wife Elizabeth Joscelyne. There she stayed with Mrs Thompson writing her letters in a 'neat, old fashioned sloping hand' and under the constant care of Mrs Bakewell.

In the biography of William and Isabella's daughter, Anne Ritchie, by Henrietta Garnett it is said that the Thompsons were related to Sir Henry Thompson who had been Thackeray's physician. The Henry Thompson of Eden Lodge was the son of John Bayley Thompson who had been born in Southwark and ended up in Leigh via Rayleigh. It is possible that John Bayley Thompson is the brother of Sir Henry Thompson.



Eden Lodge

Isabella died at Eden Lodge in 1894 at the age of 74 having been a widow for 31 years and insane for over 50.

Anne Ritchie, her daughter (whom Isabella had tried to drown as a child) was a writer and personality in her own right, writing several novels and cataloguing her father's works. She was also friends to many literary and social families of the day including the Dickens and Tennysons.

Henrietta Garnett writes that on 10 January 1894 Anne received a telegram from the Thompsons saying that her mother was ill and she rushed to Leigh on a damp and freezing cold day to find her unconscious but alive. She sat with her to the end, made the arrangements for the funeral and then left. By the time she got back to London the newspaper hoardings were already carrying the news of 'The death of Mrs Thackeray' Sad to say there were very few people who knew she had actually been alive.

Subsequently it has become clear that Isabella almost certainly suffered from severe post natal depression. A disease not understood in those times and even still viewed sceptically in some quarters.

If asked to name one book by Thackeray it is a 99.9% certainty that you will say Vanity Fair, and it is said by contemporaries that the looks, if not the character, of the heroine, Becky Sharp, are based on Isabella. So the widow of Eden Lodge is in no small way a part of English literature.

For further reading see Thackeray by D J Taylor and Anny by Henrietta Garnett.

## HERE'S A TURNNIDGE

The photo below was taken about 1936 and shows Tony Belvertone whose parents came from Walthamstow but who's father lived with his parents in Prittlewell. Tony is sitting on the lap of Mrs Turnnidge of Leigh.

Angela Wagstaff, Tony's sister would like to reunite the photo with a present day member of the Turnnidge family who knows which Mrs Turnnidge is pictured.

If anyone can help please get in touch with Carole through the usual channels.



## CAEDMON HOUSE SCHOOL

Does anyone have any memories of this school which was operating at least in the 1950s. Any memories would be of interest.

Where was Caedmon House School?



**Does anyone have memories of any of the independent schools in the area? – please share them**

## LEIGHWAY

Articles for the next Leighway should be with Carole by 31 March at the latest. They can be sent to the Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Leigh SS9 2EN or by e-mail to [carole.mulroney@btinternet.com](mailto:carole.mulroney@btinternet.com)

Would anyone like to write something about the natural environment around Leigh – a favourite walk maybe?

## CLIFFORD REEVE

We are sorry to advise members of the passing of Clifford Reeve who with his wife Irene (nee Osborne) were Landlords of the Crooked Billet for many years. Our sincere condolences go to the family.

## THE EDEN PROJECT

From the story of Church Hill told in the last issue of Leighway we saw how the Rev Robert Eden, Rector of Leigh, was a very forceful character. He took land which the villagers treasured into his own Rectory grounds and was most strict and authoritarian in his rebuking of local people's behaviour when a ship was wrecked off Leigh in 1840. The locals saw anything washed up as fair game and the good Rector admonished them severely for their actions.

A chance conversation in the Heritage Centre, and a hint of an interesting story from a frequent visitor, that our Rector Eden was related to the post war prime minister Sir Anthony Eden, led to some further investigation.

The connection is correct. The Rt Rev Robert Eden, Rector of Leigh was the first cousin twice removed of Sir Anthony. The Reverend's father, Sir Frederick Morton Eden, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet was the Great Grandfather of Sir Anthony. Going one further generation back, Sir Frederick's father, Sir Robert Eden had been the last Governor of Maryland during the American War of Independence. In recognition of his services as governor, George III created Eden a baronet in 1776 and a parliamentary act of 1781 awarded him and his wife £17,500 as settlement of litigation over the proprietorship of Maryland, and Eden was also awarded a pension by the government. At the conclusion of hostilities he returned to Maryland and died there in 1784 of 'dropsy'.

His son, Sir Frederick, seems to have spent his time in the insurance business and in social and economic investigations. His chief claim to fame was his authorship of his *The state of the poor, or, An history of the labouring classes in England from the conquest to the present period; in which are particularly considered their domestic economy with respect to diet, dress, fuel, and habitation; and the various plans which, from time to time, have been proposed and adopted for the relief of the poor etc.* This work was compiled during the period of acute grain scarcity in 1794-5, and was a pioneering piece of social investigation based on a set of 'queries' posed by the author and pursued by himself with the help of 'a few respectable clergymen' and an investigator who spent a year visiting parishes throughout England. Sir Frederick was one of the founders and chairman of the Globe Insurance Company, and died at the office of the company in Pall Mall, London in 1809, aged forty-three.

In the next generation Sir Frederick's eldest son William, became Baronet and it is through him that the family line leads to Sir Anthony Eden. The third son of Sir Frederick was Robert who was ordained deacon and priest by the bishop of Gloucester in 1828 and served successively the curacies of Weston-sub-Edge in Gloucestershire, and Messing and Peldon in Essex, and became rector of Leigh in 1837. An energetic incumbent, Eden's ministry revealed high-church principles, and a commitment to overseas missions and elementary education.

He was consecrated Bishop of Moray and Ross, in 1851. Apparently he made a great personal sacrifice in accepting such a poor Scottish Episcopal church, relinquishing a comfortable English living worth approximately £600 a year for a position of no more than £150 with no episcopal residence. His pro-cathedral was in fact a small cottage, fitted up as a mission chapel, on the bank of the River Ness. However, during his tenure he quadrupled the income of the see, founded the cathedral of St Andrew in Inverness, and was mainly instrumental in securing a residence for his successor.

Dignified and firm in character, he was a capable but not brilliant preacher. In his final years he became too ill and paralysed to fulfil his duties and a coadjutor-bishop was consecrated in 1885, but he continued as primus until his death. He died peacefully on the evening of 26 August 1886 at his official residence, Edencourt, in Inverness, and was buried at Tomnahurich cemetery.

Whilst Rector of Leigh, according to Benton's History of the Rochford Hundred, he received a very large legacy from a friend amounting to about £100,000 in plate, money, furniture and estates. He restored the church and built the Rectory (Library) and schools on Church Hill and during the cholera epidemic of 1849 he was 'indefatigable and rubbed the collapsed sufferers with his own hands'.

We still have a connection to the Rev Eden to this day through Leigh Society committee member and town councilor Donald Fraser who many of you will know from his work in the Heritage Centre. Donald's ancestor was the Rev Edmund Worledge who was curate of Leigh under Robert Eden in 1845.

Members may also be interested to know that the Rev Eden was the great great grandfather of Sir Laurence Olivier, the actor.



Robert Eden

Anthony Eden

Lawrence Olivier

In August 2007 a first edition of Mark Twain's 'Punch, Brothers, Punch and other sketches' was sold for \$7500. It bore the inscription 'To Rev R Eden, with the author's kindest regards, Mark Twain Sept 5/78.

In a 1936 sale held by the American Art Association, a copy of Clemens's Scrap Book inscribed to the Reverend Robert Eden in Sept. 1878 was sold.

Another interesting snippet about the Rev Eden was his connection to Edward Feild, Church of England clergyman, inspector of schools and bishop of Newfoundland

The bishop's diocese included not only Newfoundland and the coast of Labrador, but also the Bermudas and he consistently protested that this forced him to divide his time between two areas 1,200 miles apart, whose problems were completely different. Reverend Robert Eden presented an 80-ton brig to the diocese to be used as a church ship.

## THE LEIGH MAP

The 1873 map of Leigh is for sale in the Heritage Centre and Leigh Library. The cost is £20 and the map has been beautifully coloured by local artist, John Cotgrove, and is sold under the auspices of John Porter whose family members drew the pictures. It looks fantastic framed and would adorn any wall space.



Many people who visit the Heritage Centre are interested to know why our upstairs room is called 'the Foyster Room'. The following article will explain the connection to the Society and is written by the daughter of the Foyster we commemorate.



## RONALD 'DICK' CAUNTER FOYSTER

Many knew my father as Ron – mostly his Clacton family and his colleagues, however, within our immediate family he was Dick.

Ron "Dick" Foyster was born in Clacton-on-Sea on April 6, 1916, the much youngest of three children and the only surviving son of older parents. Family lore has it that his parents, Henry Foyster and Rosalie Valentine, met in Leigh while grandpa was "painting boats on the beach"! They subsequently married in Southend and lived in Alexandra Street with my grandmother's relatives Sam and Alice Caunter (hence Dad's unusual middle name), who were business people in Southend.

Ron had an idyllic childhood in Clacton with freedom to roam the town as the son of, by then, successful business people in the community. He was beloved by his parents and sisters and grew up as a contemporary of his much older sister's children. They all attended Clacton County High School. When my father started there the pupil population was only about 80! I'm sure that has changed today.

He went on to become Head Boy. His headmaster said at the time that he had maturity beyond his years. His maturity and sound judgment was to be much needed by him and valued by family, friends and colleagues in the years to follow.

Ron was articled to the Clacton Town Surveyor when he left school. His father thought that a university degree in geography could only take him off to Canada to earn a living! My grandfather died in his 70's when my father was barely 20 so Dad lived the rest of his life being his own counsel.

He transferred to Southend Borough in the late 1930's. Dick continued to enjoy his beloved sailing (any boat would do as long as he was afloat), swimming and water polo at the old Leigh Swimming Club (which met at the old salt water pool and its changing rooms which used to be immediately to the west of the paddling pool at the foot of Gipsy Bridge, and just east of The Wilton, the Essex Yacht Club HQ), not forgetting the occasional flying lesson at Southend Airport.

It was at the Leigh pool that Dick met my mother, Joan (Scurry). Her brother Douglas came home raving about the great water polo player who had joined the Leigh Swimming Club – Dick Foyster! Mum and Dad were married in August

1940 in Ilford, where her family had been evacuated from their house in Canvey Road, Leigh.

Dad, and Mum's older brother Frank Scurry, had already enlisted in the Royal Air Force for war service and after some delays Dad made it back from his post in Scotland in time to be married. (It may seem strange to be evacuated closer to London but I believe that it was thought that the Germans would attack England by coming up the Thames and thus at that time it was safer to be away from the coast).

Dad had hoped to become an RAF pilot but it transpired that he was colour blind. He served in what was then Burma (now Myanmar), working on airfields I believe, but only rarely told of some of his harrowing wartime experiences. Of course, when it came time for leave, even in Burma, he found a dilapidated boat in which to sail!

At the end of WWII he returned to his job with Southend Borough. He and my mother lived in an upstairs flat in Westleigh Avenue, Leigh, where I lived after my birth in August 1946. Rumour has it that Dad sailed along the shore to Meteor Road in Westcliff to visit his wife and newborn daughter in the nursing home. Mum recalls that the 1946/1947 winter was really cold; no central heating then! But we survived!

Dad retained his connection with Clacton through family visits with his sisters and cousins at Christmas and other times in the year, the Clacton County High School old pupils association (of which he was chairman for many years) and sundry swimming club and water polo meets there.

Dad subsequently applied for and was appointed as Deputy Engineer and Surveyor at what was then Canvey Island Urban District Council (becoming part of Castle Point in the mid-70's). My brother was born in our house in Oxford Road, Canvey, in August 1949. Dad spent his professional life dedicated to Canvey's development, as did most of his colleagues from that post war era - "we will not see their like again". In the early 1950's he received his professional qualifications and became an ARICS (Associate of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors).

He always took an avid interest in Canvey history and gave numerous talks to schoolchildren and other groups about the various Roman and Dutch remains found on the island. He also took a great interest in the early preservation of Canvey's Dutch Cottage.

In his professional capacity, being responsible for overseeing new building on Canvey, he applied himself to designing houses to accommodate the handicapped – wider doorways and access under sinks for wheelchairs. He was well ahead of his time with disability awareness.

In his capacity as the Canvey representative of NALGO, then the national and local government union organisation, he was particularly involved with NALGO's Benevolent and Orphans Committee which fought for the appropriate benefits to be given to widows and orphans of local government employees.

The January 1953 East Coast floods caused him to spend many hours, day and night, out and about on Canvey. Mum has always said it was the first year the dinghy was NOT laid up in the garden! How very useful it would have been. His years on the water and knowledge of tides gave him the awareness of the need to protect Canvey from further floods, an involvement which was maintained until his retirement in the early 70's. I well remember going with my mother to take him a thermos of soup and a sandwich late one night while he manned the hut at the old Canvey Bridge monitoring that night's spring tide. Of course it was only after the 1953 floods that sea defences became a priority for all low-lying areas.

In the late 50's we moved off Canvey Island to Kiln Road in Thundersley where Dad designed and built his first, and only, new house for our family.

Also in that era we spent our weekends at Hullbridge on the River Crouch where Mum and Dad had a small business hiring holiday chalets and dinghies to people from all over the country. We had happy times on the water there although all vestiges of the modest chalets have gone.

After selling the chalets Dad took on another weekend project of converting an old lifeboat into a Dutch-style yacht he called 'Pim Maas'. Prior to that we'd had a wonderful family holiday in Holland in my teen years and our fascination with the Dutch yachts remained with us and we eventually took the completed 'Pim Maas' to Holland for another holiday – she was quite the curiosity!

The conversion was done in a now demolished boat shed on the grounds of the car park adjacent to the Lynn Tait Gallery in the Old Town. Dad was always coming up with innovative and interesting ventures to fill his free time. It seems the waterfront at Leigh is a common thread running through his life, even before he was born, and ours too.

Dad was also very conscious of economical building, engineering and architecture and best use of materials, stemming from the design of many of the council houses built on Canvey in the 50's. This came into play again in the early 70's when, due to shortage of funds in the Canvey coffers for engineering and architectural services, he volunteered his expertise to completely plan and design the multipurpose Waterside Sports Centre for Canvey. He had to re-engineer the whole project midway through construction due to an extreme steel shortage in the country.

Many people have availed themselves of this active and thriving facility. He retired just before it was opened over 30 years ago and to this day has never received recognition for his tireless efforts. But then he didn't seek it.

That sums up Dick Foyster – he never did anything for his own self-aggrandizement. I believe my brother and I have passed that on to our own five children.

Many will not know that it was Dick Foyster who, as a club member, proposed and implemented the conversion of the upstairs bar for the Leigh Sailing Club (the original Leigh Station). Once again he volunteered his professional expertise to provide such a facility for club members on an extremely economical basis. Modern day members may not realize that there would be no such enhanced facility today had he not initially so generously and freely contributed his time.

Following his retirement Dad and my brother, Stephen, remodelled a small house in Woodfield Road, Leigh, and the family eventually moved there from Thundersley after I was married and had left for America. Living in Leigh Dad pursued his life long interest in local history with his involvement in The Leigh Society – not to mention sailing with Mum when the tides were right! They had many great adventures sailing their Wayfarer, 'Tureluur' (Dutch for Redshank, a coastal bird), across the mudflats and the river, up the creeks and even on occasion up the River Medway to Gillingham.

Sometime in between he found time to convert an old shop in Woodfield Road into two flats, the ground floor of which he made suitable for my then 90-something maternal grandmother, Esther Scurry. My brother Stephen moved into the converted upstairs flat as a young man and has subsequently become the owner of the whole house and has happily lived there with his wife and family.

The engineering work, planning permission and negotiations with builders and the surrounding property owners required

for the Smithy to become the very fine Leigh Heritage Centre it is today, were the final volunteer contributions Dick Foyster made to the community.

Fortunately it all came to fruition in his lifetime, which was cut very short by his sudden and untimely death in October 1984, 23 years ago.

Family and friends who knew Ron "Dick" Foyster understood his loyalty and determination to complete a project. Despite that determination there was never a time when he couldn't stop everything he was doing and talk to his family about our latest ideas or projects.

On what turned out to be one of his last weekends before he died the tides were right and he went sailing. Naming the Heritage Centre meeting room "The Foyster Room" is probably something he would have voted against but I feel it is a fitting tribute to someone who contributed so freely in his lifetime to his family, friends and every community he lived in.

Helen Foyster Rubin, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA  
September 2007

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### A BRIDGE TOO FAR

The article in the last Leighway about the bridge at Havengore brought back memories to John Porter who here tells a tale of hi-jinks at Havengore.

In the 1950's the motor cruiser "Conquest" , lovingly converted from a 19 ft. clinker built ship's lifeboat, was powered by a 4 h.p. paraffin engine, and always available for towing jobs, at a standard charge of one pint per tow.

At the end of one Burnham Week, Conquest. was escorting the victorious Leigh Sailing Club fleet returning to Leigh through the Havengore and we all brought up by the bridge, as the rising tide would give enough water over the Broomway, the old road over the sands, and then let us carry the rest of the flood up to Leigh.

The bridge keeper was adamant. The bridge was to be opened at . high water, and not a minute before. Those were his orders, and no amount of pleading would alter them, even if it did mean that by the time we had fought the ebb tide back to Leigh our moorings would have dried out.

He then said that he was going back to his house, and as he would be sitting down reading his paper, he wouldn't notice if two strong lads were to get on the handles and wind the bridge open.

There was no shortage of strong lads, but it was most unfortunate . that, as the last of the fleet was towed through, a lorry load of Military Police appeared on the far side, intent on changing their shift.

We were very tempted to leave the bridge open and sail away, but realised that this would make the policemen very cross indeed, so that the full majesty of the law would soon trace these impudent yachtsmen who had stopped the police from getting to the canteen.

So the bridge was wound back down, enabling the lorry to drive . across, and the villains on the handles to have their names and addresses taken.

Fortunately nobody got sent to the Tower., as it seemed that the Commodore of the Leigh Sailing Club knew the Commander of the Ranges on Foulness, so the matter was settled by letters of abject apology, and promises not to do it again.

## ONE GIANT STEP



Now we all know that Leigh is the centre of the Universe, but do you know just how central? Well without a man from Leigh Neil Armstrong may not have walked on the moon – don't believe me – well read on.

The following article is printed with the kind permission of NASA, the North American Space Agency.

' March 16, 1966, dawned at Cape Kennedy and Houston with an air of expectation as Gemini 8 stood ready to chase an Agena target vehicle poised atop an Atlas rocket at a nearby launchpad.

The pursuit would start off a planned three-day flight by Gemini 8 that would include the first docking in space, and later, a space walk. The Agena entered orbit without a hitch, and Gemini 8 blasted off right on time, commanded by the first U.S. civilian astronaut, former NASA test pilot Neil Armstrong, and piloted by the first to fly from the third group of astronauts, David Scott.

For the first time, someone other than Chris Kraft was lead flight director inside the Mission Control room at Houston. John Hodge took the spot when Kraft decided to devote more time to the Apollo program, which was beginning its operational phase.

**Hodge, then 37, stood out amongst the first group of flight directors with his English accent, his already greying hair, and the pipe and tweed jackets he preferred. Born in Leigh-on-Sea, England, in 1929, he studied engineering at the Northampton Engineering College, University of London, graduating in 1949.**



In 1952 he came to Avro Canada, where almost from the beginning he worked on the Avro Arrow. "I did the (jet engine) intake and the ram, all the inlets. Then the guy I was working for left to work for the government, and they needed a guy to take over the airloads group. I was put in that job."

Later, he did flight testing on the Arrow, and it was this experience that led to him being assigned to operations when he came to NASA in 1959. He was in flight control almost from the beginning, and in late 1963 he became chief of the flight control division as NASA prepared for Gemini. At the time, he and his wife Audrey had a son and two daughters, although a second son was born in 1967.

As head of the flight control division, Hodge was busy building up the group of flight controllers for Gemini and Apollo, and was hiring people "left, right and centre." Between flights, the flight controllers were busy planning missions, drawing up documentation, flight plans and mission rules; and closely reviewing results from previous flights. As well, they worked on simulations of flights, mainly possible flight emergencies, with the astronauts in spacecraft simulators hooked up to the flight control rooms. Although Gemini 8 had started perfectly, Hodge's flight directors would soon get a chance to show how effective this training had been.

For four orbits, Armstrong and Scott played catch-up with the Agena, and six hours and 34 minutes after leaving earth, Armstrong slid Gemini's nose into Agena's docking collar, achieving the first docking in space. The manoeuvre took place over a tracking ship in the South Atlantic, and the Gemini-Agena combination moved into an area with little tracking coverage as Armstrong and Scott tested Agena's maneuvering system.

Nearly a half hour after the docking, Gemini and Agena moved into an unexplained bank, which was initially brought under control. Then the craft began to spin. The crew of Gemini 8 first shut off the Agena and finally cut it loose, thinking the Agena was the source of their problem. In spite of the crew's actions, Gemini began to tumble and spin faster, the spin rate rising to nearly 360 degrees a second, a rate that would soon cause the crew to lose consciousness.

While this drama unfolded, Gemini 8 was out of contact with the ground. When a Capsule Communicator aboard a tracking ship in the Pacific re-established contact, he heard Armstrong say: "We've got serious problems here. We're tumbling end over end up here. We're disengaged from the Agena." Hodge called the ship, trying to make out the garbled transmission from Gemini: "Did he say he could not turn the Agena off?"

"No, he says he has separated from the Agena and he's in a roll and he can't stop it," capcom Jim Fucci replied.

"Did I hear him say he had a stuck hand controller?" Hodge asked, responding to a statement by Scott. The hand controller wasn't at fault, but a short-circuit on one of Gemini's thrusters was. The two astronauts turned off their main maneuvering thrusters and activated the re-entry thrusters to bring Gemini back under control. Under mission rules, Gemini had to return to earth as soon as possible. The rules had been bent before, and Hodge asked quickly about fuel use on the re-entry thrusters. Hodge was faced with the first life-and-death emergency situation in the U.S. space program. The astronauts, who quickly isolated the balky thruster that had caused the problem, hoped that Gemini 8 could be nursed to a full three-day mission like previous flights.

But any hope that the rules could be bent this time was dashed because of low levels of thruster fuel in the main system caused by the stuck thruster. And if the activated re-entry thrusters leaked fuel, there would be no way to control Gemini on the way home. Hodge decided that Gemini 8 should return to earth.

"Neil Armstrong did a wonderful job of getting it under control, but in the process had used up half of the re-entry reaction control fuel. And the decision we had to make - we had about 20 minutes between the [tracking ship] and Hawaii, the last we would see of them for a long, long time, we decided to bring them back in," Hodge explained. The next question was when and where Gemini 8 would return. It was in its fifth orbit, and the only remaining landing opportunities that day were on the sixth and seventh orbits. Failing that, Gemini 8 would have to wait until the next day to return.

Hodge chose to bring Gemini 8 back on the seventh orbit, near a destroyer in the western Pacific south of Japan. "By the time they came over Hawaii, we had all the data ready to give them, the retrofire time and the angle and all that kind of stuff. They disappeared off the network and we waited." Hodge's blue team of flight controllers had been on duty for nearly nine hours of flight at that point, so he handed over control for the re-entry to Gene Kranz's white team, which was originally due to handle the scheduled re-entry. Naturally, Hodge and his team remained in the control room until the flight was over.

Gemini 8 fired its retrorockets over Africa, and it landed near the target point. After three hours of bobbing in the Pacific, Armstrong and Scott were picked up by the destroyer Mason. Gemini had achieved its goal of docking, but just barely, and Dave Scott's space walk was lost with the curtailment of Gemini 8. Most importantly, though, Gemini 8 had been a good test of astronauts and flight controllers under fire.

After Gemini 8, Hodge moved on to work on Apollo.

Chris Gainor (NASA)'

### JOHN HODGE'S IMPRESSIVE CV

#### NASA CAREER:

NASA Space Task Group, Langley Field, Virginia (1959-1962)

Technical Assistant to the Chief, Operations Division (1959)

Chief, Flight Control Branch (1961)

NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, Houston, Texas (1962-1970)

Assistant Chief of Flight Control (1962)

Chief, Flight Control Division (1963-1968)

Manager, Advanced Missions Program Office (1968-1970)

NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC (1982-1986)

Director, Space Station Task Force (1982-1984)

Deputy Associate Administrator for Space Station (1984-1985)

Acting Associate Administrator (1985-1986)

#### POST-NASA

John has held a number of key positions in the US and Canada and is currently President, J. D. Hodge and Company, International Management and Aerospace Consultants.

He is an Associate Fellow, Royal Aeronautical Society and has won many awards for his work.

### 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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## PLANNING

As always 2007 brought with it some trying times for Leigh in terms of planning, yet more flat applications and some major proposals for key sites in the Town.

Everyone knows about the saga of the Bell, sadly it continues to rumble on as we await the Planning Inspector's decision. Jane Lovell represented the Society at the appeal and put up a very strong case for refusal as did many local people and the Town Council.

St Clement's Hall site is now the subject of a further application. In our view although very different from the first proposal it is still totally unsuitable for the site and we have objected strongly to it – flats again of course.

One good outcome is that the proposals to demolish 6 and 7 The Gardens which we objected to has not gone ahead and the cottages are being refurbished.

Under the auspices of Keymed the Council have proposals for traffic calming in the Old Town – something long overdue. They involve a speed limit of 20mph with speed bumps to slow traffic. Great care is being taken to ensure there is no harm to the character of the Conservation Area and they will be resetting some of the damaged cobbles.

## WE'RE NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER

It's the same for all local societies – a core group of people run the show supported in varying degrees by the membership. The Leigh Society is no different. Inevitably it is older people who tend to have more time and interest in their heritage and town. But nowadays there is a strong surge in interest in local and family history and care for the place where you live. What we need to do is tap into that concern and recruit younger people to become involved in the Society and the running of the Heritage Centre. Not only does it ensure perpetuity but it also brings in fresh ideas and enthusiasm.

Many of our members have grandchildren of varying ages from infants to adults. They have to be the future of the Society if we are to keep it going in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We rub along quite nicely at present but it is hard work for the core people involved and we could do with some more help, young and old.

So in this new year we want to try and attract new and younger members as well as the older generation. We know the youngsters are interested, school visits are increasingly popular but we need more than just the one off visit.

Plumbs has created a new lease of life for the Society and we need to take advantage of this and move forward. So next time you have the grandchildren round for tea tell them about the Society and what it does and how they can get involved. Tell them about the website – you may not understand about it but they will. Hopefully your enthusiasm will be passed on. Alternatively if you have any ideas for a recruitment drive please get in touch [enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@leighsociety.co.uk)

As a start why not pass your Leighway on to the grandchildren after you've read it. There are things in this edition which must appeal to a younger generation. What boy could not be impressed by the fact that Neil Armstrong would not have walked on the moon without a little help from a Leigh man.

**Come and join us kids**