



LEIGHWAY

The newsletter of the Leigh Society

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Well here we are at the start of a new year again. 2012 was a truly momentous year for everyone but for the Leigh Society, with our 40th anniversary, it was a very special year. The anniversary celebrations were very well attended and the local papers did us proud with some really good articles about the Society. We need to build on that now and will be looking in 2013 to broaden our appeal to all ages and hopefully try to get an occasional presence in the top town.

Our membership has seen a net increase in the last year which is really good and shows there is still lots of interest in the history and heritage of Leigh. So, as ever, its onward and upward

DEAR DIARY

All Society meetings are held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m - Members £1, visitors £2

- 6 March** – Leigh and Southend Cinemas and more – David Simpson of the White Bus
- 30 March - Easter Event – Library Gardens
- 24 April** – AGM/update on Endeavour by Peter Dolby
- 7 May - visit to Polesden Lacey
- 8 May** – Visiting Local Gardens – Harry Brickwood
- 27 May - May Day on Strand Wharf
- 27-30 June -Leigh Folk Festival
- June - Leigh Art Trail
- August (TBA) Southwold Summer Theatre
- September - Leigh Regatta
- 9 October** – Researching your house and old buildings – Jenny Butler of Essex Record Office
- 29 October - Brick Lane Music Hall
- 6 November** - TBA

LEIGH COMMUNITY CENTRE

In August Leigh Town Council took over the Leigh Community Centre from Southend Borough Council. The Town Council offices and staff moved in and after hard work by both staff and Leigh Town councillors in redecorating and alterations etc the Centre reopened to the public at the beginning of September.

What an event for Leigh residents to celebrate.

After many years the building is once again available to local groups for meetings, concerts, drama, U3A, children's parties with a cafe in the foyer. The White Bus Cinema group can show popular films saving residents the hike into Southend and the bleak Victoria Plaza area. Hopefully the renowned Leigh Music Festival will return.

Lastly and importantly the office, staff and councillors are there to help residents with queries and often solve problems and concerns for them or point them in the right direction.

With the refurbishment of the Grand at the other end of the Broadway we can feel that some good has been achieved for Leigh.

Thank you Leigh Town councillors and those who campaigned and negotiated and best wishes for the future

Margaret Buckey, Hon Secretary

LOST FRIENDS

Sadly we have to record in Leighway the loss of two great friends of the Society.

JEAN JORDAN

1930-2012



After a short illness one of our regular helpers in the Heritage Centre, Jean Jordan, passed away in November. Jean was a stalwart on a Friday for many years along with her partner in crime, Joy Dalwin.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Jean's family and thank them for the kind donation made to the Heritage Centre in Jean's memory – we will use it well.

RONALD COX

1928-2012



Ronald Albert Cox. DipArch. ARIBA .FSIAD.ACIArb

We are sad to announce the recent death of Ron Cox at the age of 84, a locally based architect who lived on Leigh Hill for over 50 years. He excelled in the restoration of old buildings, brick and timber, winning a national award for his restoration of the Saffron Walden Corn exchange. He designed buildings all over the country, winning prestigious awards in London and the south east. As well as his architectural practice, Ron was an examiner in the Architecture Diploma, was a fellow of the Society of Illustration, Artists and Designers, and an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

Ron was the driving force in the 1960's behind the creation of the Leigh Hill Conservation Area, without

which the the Leigh Society would not have been set up, and kept a critical eye on the surrounding areas.

He sat in his office on Leigh Hill with a wall of architectural books behind him, and one of his son's large paintings of Leigh Hill in front of him, plus a never ending supply of transparent paper which he overlaid on planning elevations and illustrated how elevation drawings could and should be improved. He was always ready to give advice on design, conservation and the many planning and conservation acts. He designed and drew plans for our link building joining the Heritage Centre to Plumbs Cottage, and for the restoration of Plumb's Cottage itself.

We are grateful for his advice over the years, he was a good friend , always ready to give advice over a glass of good red wine on the many complicated planning, design and conservation issues that never seem to end in Leigh.

Alan and Elaine Crystall.

HOW GREEN ARE OUR VALLEYS?

Some of you may have heard of the MaxiGreen project. This is part of an initiative from Essex County Council, working in conjunction with Southend Borough Council and Essex Wildlife Trust, to revitalise our coastal marshlands. The aim is to establish a Thames Estuary path, stretching from Tilbury to Leigh-on-Sea via Stanford-le-Hope and Benfleet. In doing so, it will highlight green heritage sites along the way, including Hadleigh Castle Park, and provide gateways and signage to access points using C2C railway stations. It is hoped that through this project, an area of land that has been neglected for far too long will be regenerated and leave a legacy for future generations.

The Maxigreen project kicked off last Autumn with a series of roadshows that went around the Essex Thames Estuary towns and engaged with the local populace - some of you will have attended the open days in October and November that took place at the Leigh Community Centre. You may have seen the proposed route and listened to some of their plans.

Leigh Society is keen to be involved, and we have expressed our desires about how the route can be developed to maximise the benefits to the people of Leigh. One proposal is to extend the route along the cinder path to Chalkwell Station and another is to dovetail the pathway with our own Leigh-on-Sea Heritage Trail (which to date has received 371 hits on our website).

The period of consultation is now complete and we are awaiting the results eagerly. With the project still at the planning board phase, it is impossible to provide more specifics. However we do expect to see exciting developments in the next few weeks and hope to invite one of their speakers to attend one of our meetings. Any of you interested in monitoring the progress can log onto Facebook at www.facebook.com/MaxiGreenSouthEssexMarshes and if you wish to find out more about Maxigreen you can find it on www.maxigreen.eu.

Running alongside the Thames Estuary Path project is the Living Landscape project. This aims to improve the conservation of woodland areas in the Belfairs and Daws Heath area and establish a woodland centre. This will also involve the local community in its design and implementation and locals are encouraged to find out more by accessing the relevant websites.

BARRIE RN

I had joined the Royal Navy when I was 18, and it was now January 1945.

After laying up my Motor Gun Boat I now found myself as Officer of the Watch on a Landing Ship Tank we had taken over from the Americans.

We were leading a convoy along the south coast when a main propeller shaft broke. After a pleasant stay off Brixham, and enjoying the local cider, the Admiralty eventually found us a dry dock on the Tyne large enough to take us (a little longer than a football pitch), and withdraw the broken shaft. We had about 10 days before the dock was available so our captain decided to make it a leisurely trip and stop overnight at various places en route.

One afternoon we came through the anti submarine barrier that ran from Shoebury to the Kent coast and the C.O. knowing that I was local, asked me to choose a good spot to anchor. It was getting quite foggy by then and I chose a place about a mile up river of the Pier. Having anchored I asked him if I might go shore and he agreed.

We could not see the Pier by now so I told the coxswain of the landing craft (ship's boat) to steer north until he could see the mud (it was low tide) and then creep along until we could see the Pier.

On climbing to the top deck I was met by an officer who manned the Lloyds Signal Station there. The Pier was closed to the public during the war. When I explained that I lived in Westcliff, he kindly laid on a train to take me ashore. A single coach and driver were provided for

me and I arranged for it to pick me up again at 10.30 pm.

My parents were, of course, surprised to see me, thinking that I was still in Scotland. We had a happy evening together and my father accompanied me back to the Pier, hoping to see the ship. Sadly he was out of luck as the fog was now a lot worse.

We parted, the train was waiting and I was again the only passenger and I didn't have long to wait for my boat. We retraced our way back, though the mud was no longer visible. When we had gone about a mile we waited for minute or two when, as arranged, the Officer of the Day sounded off the ship's number in Morse Code on the ship's fog horn. What people on shore thought was going on I could only guess.

A happy day ! Barrie Price

The following article is reprinted by kind permission of Mid Gippsland Family History Society Inc. I was unable to contact the author, Sandra Dumble, so I hope she doesn't mind the reprint of her article which won first prize in the Society's Writing Competition in 2007. Mid Gippsland History Society is based in Victoria, Australia.

THERE'S A DOCTOR IN MY FAMILY

The Ovens and Murray Advertiser of September 30, 1905, reported "Intense cold has been the rule this month, such rigorous weather having never been suffered in the experience of the oldest resident of Beechworth. The weather during Sunday was an alternation of rain, sleet, and snow, which descended heavily during the night". The Sunday in question, September 24, 1905, was the day Dr. Henry Augustus Samson was laid to rest in the Beechworth Cemetery. An article appeared beside the weather, reporting on the burial. "The Late Dr. Samson...The obsequies of the late Dr. Samson, medical superintendent of the Beechworth Hospital for the Insane, were performed on Sunday afternoon...The interment took place at the Beechworth Cemetery...". Dr Samson, aged 50 years, died prematurely while in Melbourne on the 22nd September, and was farewelled on a day of extreme weather conditions.

Henry Augustus Samson began his life on July 17th 1855 in Leigh-On-Sea, the first child of Edmund Augustus and Sarah Mary Samson. Sarah's maiden name was Fairchild and she had been born in Leigh in 1833. Edmund and Sarah were both teachers and had married at St. Dunstons' in the West, London. The Samson's took up

residence at Bedford Place, London, while Edmund studied at King's College.

Henry's sister, Eleanor Augustine, was born in March 1859, but unfortunately contracted bronchitis and died aged 2 years in 1862.

During 1865 Edmund was appointed English and Elocution Teacher at Scotch College, East Melbourne, and set sail aboard the "Yorkshire", leaving Henry and Sarah to follow at a later date. They arrived in February 1867, and joined Edmund at East Melbourne.

Henry became a student at Scotch College leaving to study medicine at Melbourne University. He received his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery in 1880. While studying medicine, and living in Fitzroy, he met nursing assistant, Mary Savage who was also living in Fitzroy. They were married in 1879 with their first child, Francis Henry, born 1880 the same year Henry received his degrees.

Dr Samson's stint as a general practitioner came when he arrived in Omeo in 1882. By this time his father, Edmund, was suffering ill health and Henry moved his parents to Omeo to be closer to him and his family.

The life of a doctor in the high country created a challenge and called for a person with a strong disposition. Newspaper articles collected during Samson's time at Omeo show just how diverse a Doctor's life was. The Omeo Telegraph of February 20, 1885, reported on "a little child belonging to a highly-esteemed townsman, Mr. Odell, attacked by bronchitis. Dr Samson is constantly attending to it and it was hoped the little sufferer will be restored to health".

The same edition reported on the son of Mr. Spencer who met with an accident while playing in the street. He was knocked down by a mule and trampled upon before the rider noticed. Samson was close by and attended to the child. "It is a miracle that many more such accidents haven't occurred, as persons are allowed to drive both mobs of horses and cattle through the streets at a furious rate" it was reported.

Dr Samson was relied upon to perform a variety of medical duties. The following were reported in the Omeo Telegraph ...A post mortem on the body of a gentleman who had been struck down while felling trees.... Attending to a victim of blood poisoning who was in danger of losing an arm Accompanying Constable Walsh to Swifts Creek after a Cobb & Co coach driver had been thrown from the coach and was suffering serious head injuries.

Being a medical "Jack of all Trades" also included being appointed Health Officer for the Shire of Omeo in March 1883. During 1885 there was an outbreak of pneumonia caused by contaminated drains running beside a watercourse. Dr. Samson had the job of disinfecting the houses. This same year saw the death of his father, Edmund Augustus, and the birth of another son, William Lionel. Henry and Mary now had a family of three sons and one daughter.

Dr Samson decided to specialise in Psychiatry and during 1886 left general practice in Omeo. His first Government appointment came in 1887 when he was appointed Senior Medical Officer at the Kew Asylum. This was followed by a move to the Beechworth Hospital for the Insane, otherwise known as May Day Hills. Another two sons, Edmund Augustus and Eric James, were born at the asylum during 1887 and 1888. Families of the medical staff lived at the institution.



Beechworth Asylum in 1867

By 1890 the Samson's were living at Ararat where Henry had the position of Medical Officer at the Ararat Asylum. The year 1890 brought sadness, with the death of their son William Lionel aged 5 years in June and the death of 3 year old Edmund Augustus in August, both from croup. The family moved to the Ballarat Lunatic Asylum during 1893 where they remained until 1896 when Dr Samson was promoted to Medical Superintendent of the Beechworth institution.

The book 'Early Victorian Psychiatry', C.R.D. Brothers, mentions "Samson as a rather interesting figure because of his many ideas, not all of which were practicable in his time, but some of which may have received more attention today. An example of his interest in the industry of patients was his suggestion of the planting of willows for basket-making."

The family took up residence on the top two floors of the Administrative Building. The accommodation was "very comfortable" in fact has been described as "palatial", with patients attending to all the housekeeping duties, including keeping the fires stoked. The young Samson's were cared for by an inpatient called "Scottie" and Mary's life became easier. Three daughters, Stella, Phyllis and Marjory had arrived between 1891 and 1897. The family joined the Beechworth community and enjoyed life for the next 9 years until Henry's premature death changed their lives.

He had remained close to his mother, Sarah, who continued to live close to the family after her husband's death in Omeo. Sarah died in 1903, just two years prior to Henry, and is buried in the Beechworth Cemetery with her son. Henry's journey began at Leigh-on-Sea in the year 1855 and ended in Beechworth, Victoria, 1905.

As the family had lived in accommodation provided by the institution, they didn't own property or have their own home. Mary was left with seven children, the youngest 5 years of age, with no home and little income. Her circumstances had turned upside down overnight. From living a comfortable existence with very little to do, she now had to find a means of caring for her children and providing a roof over their heads. She decided to return to East Melbourne and moved the family to Gipps Street where she ran a boarding house.

None of the Samson children followed in their father's footsteps. Henry was the one and only doctor in this branch of the Samson family and he was a Leigh man.

STONE THE CROWS?

Anyone have anything nice to say about the crow family? No, not Mr and Mrs Crow, who live down the road and keep the neighbours awake with their constant arguing, but the bird family, *Corvidae*. In England there are six common members of the Corvid family and none of them win anything in the popularity stakes. Yet have they been unfairly maligned? How much of their unwholesome reputation is justified or is it all just a conspiracy?

If we draw up a charge sheet we should begin with the carrion crow. With a jet black plumage - as dark and sinister as the Middle Ages - this creature is often portrayed as a portent of doom.



Carrion crow

For centuries, the carrion crow was associated with war and the putrefaction of death. It smelt it, it plundered it and it always seemed to be around it. As noted in an old nursery rhyme, this cadaverous overtone made the crow an unwelcome guest.

Wife, bring me my old bent bow,
Sing heigh ho, the carrion crow,
Fol de riddle, lol de riddle, hi ding ho,
That I may shoot yon carrion crow.

Sing heigh ho, the carrion crow,
Fol de riddle, lol de riddle, hi ding ho.

Crows are naturally intelligent birds. As an active hunter and gatherer, they have distinctive behavioural patterns which mean they were often attributed with human characteristics. Indeed, throughout history - in poems, Celtic myths and fairy tales - crows are often mentioned in human terms. Whenever a witch's curse took effect, it was invariable a crow or a raven that took over the human form.

So far, so clear. Moving on we find the jays, striking with their distinctive mauve-coloured plumage and common visitors to our woods and gardens. They might also be described as 'intelligent' but they are noisy, compulsive hoarders and prone to bouts of kleptomania - the term jaywalker derives from someone who is reckless and impertinent.



Jay

The jackdaw, on the other hand, is small and nimble, equally thieving and mischievous but with a silvery sheen to add a false air of respectability.



Jackdaw

Then there are rooks, circling above the tops of their twiggy nests, cloaked in black, giving the countryside an air of spectral menace. And what about the raven, the largest and blackest of the crow family? It has become the most potent harbinger of all, a symbol of destruction - if ravens were ever to leave the Tower of London, it is said that the Kingdom of England would surely fall.



Rook



Raven

The charge sheet is long and damning. But surely the most pernicious family member is the pied magpie? (*Pica pica*). This creature has a long established reputation for stealing bright and shiny things. As long ago as 1815, its guilt was established beyond reasonable doubt when Gherardini, writing the libretto for Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, blamed the bird for grand larceny.

These days the thieving magpie is seen everywhere; ubiquitous in woodland, meadows, town and country. Without wishing to anthropomorphise these creatures, their glossy black and white plumage gives them the unmistakable appearance of cads in dinner jackets plotting to commit a dastardly act. And who hasn't witnessed a group of magpies in their garden and decided that they are up to no good? As they strut across the lawn, flicking their long tails like bullwhips, they cackle to their band of cohorts and look at you defiantly as if to say, and what are *you* going to do about it, eh? Indeed, just the sight of these birds makes all but the most tolerant of gardeners, bristle with indignation, sending us out with a broom to shoo them away.

More serious is the charge that magpies attack the nests of songbirds and devour their young. Is it true or is this seamier side to their reputation unjustified? I have to say that opinion is divided. I have spoken to several birdwatchers, and some say it is all a myth; magpies are no worse than other opportunists of the crow family - jays and crows being equally ruthless. They point to cats as being more predatory and name sparrowhawks as being the real avian villains because up to ninety eight per cent of their food supply consists of live birds. Others admit that magpies do indeed attack nests of songbirds but argue they are just performing a natural cull. Furthermore, whilst there has been a noticeable decline in songbird numbers and an equally marked increase in magpies, no causal link has ever been proved. Thus, in the absence of any firm evidence, they leave it at that.



Magpie

What is indisputable, however, is that creatures aim to hatch their young when their natural food supply is most abundant; and a magpie builds its nest at the precise time that robins, thrushes and blackbirds also nest - it could almost be choreographed. The charge sheet therefore sounds conclusive but my own view is possibly distorted over the years by having watched the magpies nest in our family garden. They found the tall, perpendicular castlewellan conifers particularly to their liking. The tree line gave them a grandstand view of the rest of garden and, as they perched on the waving branches, surveying their realm, they were kings of the castle.

I remember watching in abject horror as a raiding party of magpies descended onto a songbird's nest. Two of them would lead the attack and, as the hapless songbirds fought furiously to chase them off, another magpie would steal in and take the chicks. They even

returned later in the day to pick off the remaining chicks. *Dead ruthless* - it was like watching a US crime scene from the lounge window. Meanwhile back in their roost, the magpies swayed jubilantly on their branches calling to each other with their rat-rat-rat machine-gun chatter, clearly glorifying in the spoils of war. And in the aftermath...a strange desolate calm descended upon the garden; where once the songbirds had thrived, a few bereft feathers lay, scattered across the lawn like confetti.

Yet it wasn't all one way. The magpies were attacked by crows and also had to deter marauding squirrels. Sometimes they came off worst in skirmishes with collared doves and I've even read reports that said that cuckoos laid their egg in magpie nests. What goes around comes around, I thought.

Members of the crow family are inquisitive, intelligent and highly adaptable. Their family is part of the mythology of this country, woven into our landscape and history. They are part of God's kingdom and have to survive. Yet whether that justifies their acts of mass infanticide, I'll leave up to you. Happy hunting!

Clive Webster

THIS YEAR'S OUTINGS

You will see in Dear Diary that as well as our usual talks we have several visits. These outings are extremely popular.

As well as our annual visit to the Southwold Summer Theatre, Ann is also organising a trip to Polesden Lacey, a National Trust property in Surrey, the home of Mrs Greville, an ambitious Edwardian hostess, who chose Polesden as the ideal setting for entertaining and relaxing with friends, such as King George VI and the Queen Mother. The gardens offer something for every season.

Ann is also organising a trip to Brick Lane Music Hall which bills itself as a totally unique venue and the only permanent home of music hall. Set in Silvertown but named after its original home in Brick Lane the venue thrives on its east London Heritage.

Keep an eye out for when tickets go on sale later in the year.

COLIN SEDGEWICK, MBE

The Society would like to extend its congratulations to Colin, who is a familiar sight in the Old Town. The MBE, which was given in the New Year's Honours list is for Colin's devoted service to the Lifeboats over a period of 54 years.

THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1953 – A MEMORY OF LEIGH

On the morning of Sunday, 1 February 1953 Doreen and I, together with four month old Donald junior, were on our way to St. Clement's Church when we noticed considerable activity, both of people and vehicles, in Elm Road close to the Police Station and the Fire Station (which was then next to the Police Station). When we arrived at the Church we were told that all parish activities at the Church Hall were discontinued until further notice. The reason being that the Hall was being used as an evacuation centre for residents of the Old Town, who had to leave their residences due to some four feet of flooding in several places. Later, we were to hear that, fortunately, there had been no loss of life in Leigh – unlike Canvey Island, where there were more than fifty fatalities.

Later that day I walked down to the railway station, where I found the road bridge closed to vehicular traffic. I walked onto the bridge where I observed that the railway lines going eastwards were completely invisible as they were completely covered with water. I then went into the station foyer and looked down to note that the water level was lapping the upper edge of the platforms.

Next morning there was a fleet of buses at Leigh Station, destined to carry us to Benfleet Station for our onward journey to London. For a whole week, Benfleet remained as the starting point for London trains. The following Monday we found that there was a limited service of trains running through Leigh. However, on that day the trains travelled extremely slowly taking well over 20 minutes to reach Benfleet. A further week elapsed before the trains were able to resume their normal timetable.

A few days later I walked down to the High Street, and was horrified to find that the Borough Council had taken the opportunity to demolish several buildings, with the excuse that they were damp. One of the buildings was the Tudor Restaurant (opposite what is now the Heritage Centre).

Donald Fraser

In this year of commemoration the Leigh Society extends its thoughts for the people of Canvey Island who suffered such devastation in 1953.

ELM FARM

The following is extracted from the writings of H.W. 'Antiquary' King on the Manor of Leigh towards the end of the 19th century.

Allans Elm alias the Elm Farm - This small farm belonging to the Manor of Southchurch is entirely within

the parish of Leigh. The farm house stands on the right* hand side of the road leading from Prittlewell towards Hadleigh. The earliest reference to lands called 'Alan Elme' appears in a will of 1523. The name is derived from an earlier owner Allan or Alan and from an elm tree of huge proportions which stood at the junction of the road upon a small patch of green. The trunk was estimated to have a circumference of at least 10 metres. Owing to the trunk having rotted away to a shell it could no longer support its huge branches and was felled.

Every attempt to mark the site by planting another tree failed owing to the destructive vandalism of the town lads who destroyed the fencing and broke and injured every tree in succession that the owner of the land planted, until he was forced to abandon the attempt. The destructive habits of the town are so great, that they habitually delight in the destruction of everything costly and beautiful in art or nature or venerable or historical. They have probably no rivals in this propensity in the whole kingdom.

* If as is presumed the eastern section of the Elms public house today contains remnants of the old farm house then it would mean it was on the left hand side of the road. This is borne out by another piece describing Elm Farm as having the Highway on the north.

Ed Simpson

Footnote:

Slightly earlier than 'Antiquary' King, Philip Benton, in his History of the Rochford Hundred, referred to the Elm as 'one of the best farms, consisting of good useful mixed land'. He also refers to the different names the Farm was known under, In the then recent particulars of sale it was known as Ellen Elm Farm, in the register of voters of 1850 it was Allen's Elm by some and Adam's Elm by others and rather oddly in a guide book to Southend called 'Adonis'. In the 1780s the Farm had been owned by a William Webb of Hatfield Broad Oak who originally came to Leigh and worked on the farm incognito as a ploughman, but when the farm came up for sale he bought it for £800.

Benton speculates the name came from a magnificent elm tree called Ellen or Adam's Elm. Sadly in the early 1800s the elm began to decay and became reduced to a shell which a dozen men could get inside, the tree measuring 30 feet in circumference. The last remains of the tree disappeared about 1840.

As for the Webbs, William's son, John, predeceased him (being kicked by a horse) but not before he had married into a local family, the Dolbys, Rebecca, the daughter of Andrew Dolby, became his wife in 1787 at St Clements.

FROM LEIGH TO CLEGGY TO WALLACE



For years I have laughed at his antics with Foggy and Compo and chuckled at the sound of his voice as Wallace in the Wallace and Grommit capers, without knowing that this dearly loved actor has a connection to Leigh.

Peter Sallis was born on 1 February 1921 in Twickenham and attended Minchenden Grammar School in North London. He then went to work in a bank. That is what his Wikipedia entry on the internet will tell you. His autobiography of course tells you much more.

This book entitled 'Fading in to the Limelight' is written, as he speaks, in that warm rather diffident style but with a rye sense of humour – its like he's telling you a story. What it does reveal is that before the war the family (Peter was an only child) used to go on seaside holidays like many other families, from their then home in Palmers Green. Their last holiday from Palmers Green was to Leigh where Sallis senior had rented a bungalow in Old Leigh called 'The Dinghy' (DOES ANYONE KNOW WHERE THIS WAS?), it had a large, long, sloping front garden looking out on the Estuary.

One day Peter's mother slipped and fell and had to spend a spell in hospital. Peter and his father had to return to Palmers Green alone but after a while it was decided that the family would move to Leigh.

Peter's father was manager of Barclays Bank in Haringay. Peter had a year left at school at this time and was given the choice of either going to a local school in Leigh or Westcliff or continuing at Minchenden. The latter meant a long train journey but this is what Peter chose and he travelled up from Chalkwell Station with his father, the one going on to Haringay the other to Minchenden. Peter states in his autobiography very proudly that he was never late for class. 'The trains were always on time' he says.

Peter recounts that the family were living in Grand Parade before the war at which time his father bought a television set – they were the only people in Grand Parade to have one - they knew this because they were the only ones with an 'H' aerial.

The family were still in Leigh when war broke out by which time Peter was also working for Barclays in Bloomsbury.

The following extract from Peter's autobiography is printed by kind permission of Orion Publishing Group Ltd

"It was the first day of the war when I walked down to Chalkwell; it only took me about four minutes, and when I got on to the platform there were about three passengers waiting there. I thought, oh my God, I mean is it all over, have we given in already? A few minutes went by and then in came the faithful train.....I and the two or three others all got in. All the carriages were empty or nearly empty, we set off and when we got just outside Leigh-on-Sea, near Hadleigh Castle.....the train came to a halt. You could hear it panting quietly to itself as it nibbled the grass either side of the track.

Then I hear in the distance, vroom boom, vroom boom, vroom boom. Even I could tell that that was anti-aircraft fire, so I looked out of the window and I could see the puffs of smoke over the estuary, gunfire smoke, I mean, shells bursting. Then after a few minutes I heard the plane. I couldn't see it, but I could hear it. Just one aeroplane I would have guessed, and they were firing at it.....After a minute or two the train pulled itself together and set off again, and we all went on to Fenchurch Street. But when I got to Fenchurch Street there was hardly anybody there. I walked to the Bank tube station and there was nobody there either to speak of, and the tube took me to Holborn, where I got out as usual. I walked along to Barclays, Bloomsbury, where the door was locked, but I was expecting that, so I rang the bell and Jimmy Reynolds, the porter, opened the door. He said 'What are you doing here?' I said 'Well I've just come from Leigh. I've just come as usual to be here.' He said 'Don't you know there's an air raid on?' I said 'No, no, I mean if they blew a hooter or did anything down at Leigh-on-Sea I didn't hear it. Certainly my mother and father who were in the house with me, they didn't hear it. Well, there we are. Still I'm here.' 'Yes'. He said 'Yes, you're here' After about another half an hour or so the all clear went, and later that day it transpired that of course the aeroplane was in fact one of ours."

Can any of our readers remember that day and perhaps the same incident – or do you know the house in Grand Parade that had the first TV in the road?

AND FINALLY

Any opinions expressed in Leighway 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. ©Leigh Society, Leigh Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2EN