

LEIGHWAY ISSUE 46 SPRING



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**LEIGH
SOCIETY
OPEN DAY
18 JULY 2015
10-4
LEIGH
COMMUNITY
CENTRE**

Lots to see and
investigate
Bring in your
WW2
memorabilia
for the archives
Free

ARTICLES WANTED

The next edition of Leighway will be in September. If you would like to submit an article for the newsletter please email it to Carole by 1 August.

AGM—ITS THAT TIME AGAIN CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As always, my thanks to your ever busy committee for their ongoing commitment to the Society.

Our open day last summer was a great success, thanks to the efforts of Carole and her group of helpers. One of the benefits of this event is that it brings the Society to the attention of many people who may not be aware of our existence. This year we hope for even more success, when you all come along and bring your friends.

This year we have had to replace the boiler and heating system in the Heritage Centre, and my special thanks to Declan for negotiating with the contractors and seeing us through the teething problems. We hope that our gas bills will be lower and the Heritage Centre more comfortable.

The 'Leighway' goes from strength to strength. Some of those who have opted to receive it by E mail are delighted to find that they now have it in colour. If you would like yours this way, do let us know.

It is always a challenge keeping the Heritage Centre open as often as we would wish, and my thanks go to Jennifer for training new stewards and organising the rota. Donations and sales at the Heritage Centre keep the museum going, so it is vital that we are open as much as possible.

I close on a high note. I am sure that you will all join me in congratulating David Amess on his knighthood. Like other organisations in the town we are most grateful to him for his valuable support

The documents relating to the A.G.M. are enclosed, and I hope to see you all there.

Ann Price

DIARY DATES

22 April—AGM - Film of Leigh Horticultural Society's holiday in Northumberland—Ivan Starkey

28 April - visit to Chiddingstone Castle & Aylesford Priory

16 May—Annual Quiz

20 May—Exploring Tidal Islands around the Essex Coast—Peter Caton

18 July—Open Day

21 October—Trafalgar Day—Naval Warfare—talk by Lt John Pascoe

18 November—The Literary Associations of the North bank of the Thames from Shoebury to Barking—Jenny & Ed Simpson

Other important local events —

6-13 June—Art Trail

18-21 June—Folk Festival

20 September—Regatta

Leigh Town Council events -

28 March—Spring Event in Community Centre

2 August — Leigh Maritime Festival

27 November—Leigh Lights

12 December—Carols on Strand Wharf

PLUMBS COTTAGE

Can everyone please note that the Cottage will be closed to visitors from Tuesday, 7 to Monday, 27 April (weather permitting) for essential repairs and redecoration works.

THE USUAL

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.

And if you want to receive it (in colour) by email please email Carole at carole.mulroney@btinternet.com

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SECRETARY'S REVIEW - 2014

The Society has had a very active and interesting year, in many ways a good year.

We commemorated the Great War with a successful Open Day at the Community Centre organised by Carole, Sally Hayes and Jenny Simpson and, thanks to Jenny and Ed Simpson, an interesting exhibition of Great War memorabilia was set up in the Heritage Centre.

Thanks to a donation from the family of a member, the late Carol Cass, we restored the Conduit which is looked after by Norman Sutcliffe. We finally marked the 1953 Floods with a plaque on the wall of the Heritage Centre marking the sea level in Old Leigh. Thanks to Alan Crystall and John Lovell.

Clive Webster who helpfully produced a Heritage Centre working manual and organised our business archives, is now a River Warden for the River Thames Society to which we are affiliated. A keen walker and natural environment enthusiast, he is walking stretches of the new extension of the Thames Path from Tilbury to Leigh - guides to which are available in the Heritage Centre. Watch out for bulls!

Thanks to Sally for all her help with meetings and preparing our every popular quiz.

Development-wise, the Bell Hotel is now under wraps with work in progress and the dilapidated properties on Leigh Hill are due for some rebuild and renovation. Strand Wharf is shortly to be laid out and landscaped as a public space by Leigh Town Council.

However, the controversial Eden Point now looms over Broadway West an architect and developer's dream and a resident's nightmare. It went on and on and up and up for months causing much disruption, blocking out more sun and sky. It adds to a nasty wind-tunnel effect. Perhaps a wind turbine on the roof would finish it off! We are trying to get the popular cliff paths below Cliff Parade repaired and reopened and the shelters below Cliff Parade and on the Cinder Path repaired.

Socially, thanks to Ann, we enjoyed interesting visits to the Mary Rose exhibition in Portsmouth and to Southwold and Aldburgh summer theatre. Our meetings were well attended and the "Wilton" lunch arranged by Pat Gaskell was again popular - a great venue.

All these help us to meet and keep in touch with our members but we do need to attract more for the future.

Our Heritage Centre and Plumbs Cottage continue to impress visitors with the town's history and, through Carole, family history. However, history did not end in the 1900s. We need people to keep a photographic record of current changes. Volunteers would be appreciated.

Thanks to you all.

Margaret

HOW NICE OF THE TIMES TO CONFIRM WHAT WE ALREADY KNEW THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE IN ESSEX—LEIGH

THE LEIGH SPECIAL POLICE FORCE IN THE GREAT WAR

In a time when we do not think crime was necessarily an issue—just see how many police were in place at Leigh!!! In 1915 there were 80 special constables in Leigh—what a lawless lot we must have been!



LEIGH SPECIAL POLICE.
Photograph taken in the Rectory Grounds, Leigh. The Rector, the Rev. R. S. King, and Superintendent
Kerlake are seen in the picture. (Photo, A. W. Skinner).

THREE BRAVE LADS

On 27 May 1910 there was a tremendous storm, so bad that the Yacht, Janet with two men and the owner's young daughter on board foundered off Westcliff and the two men ended up in the water leaving the child alone on the yacht.

Three young brothers, the O'Brien's who lived in Glendale Gardens were out in their own yacht, the Galatea, when they saw what had happened and went to the rescue of the two men.

When they learned that a 12 year old child was still on board the yacht., one of the brothers, Mr P O'Brien swam to the yacht and safely brought the child to shore.

The O'Brien boys lived with their father Daniel, a retired Customs Officer.

The storm the lads got caught up in had caused much havoc. It came down in torrents over a short period and an Edmund Duff of High Cliff Drive was drowned when his dinghy capsized off the Leas. However, the newspaper reported that the High Street sewer was able to cope with the deluge because of the new storm water outfalls.



The three brave lads are seen here resplendent (P O'Brien is seated).

A GOOD JUDGE?

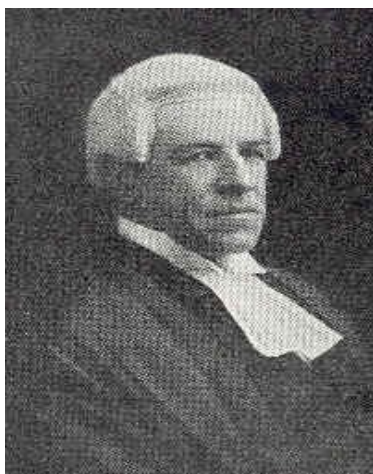
In May 1910 the Southend & Westcliff Graphic - ever one for the minutiae of life, recorded that Judge Rentoul had taken up his residence in Leigh. So who was he to be so important as to be recorded thus?

James Alexander Rentoul was a British judge and politician. born in Manorcunningham, County Donegal, the eldest son of Reverend Alexander Rentoul. He was educated at Queen's College Galway, Queen's College, Belfast, and the Universities of Berlin and Brussels. He was a Presbyterian minister for a number of years before being called to the bar in 1884.

He was a member of London County Council before being elected Conservative MP for East Down. He resigned the constituency in 1902, after being appointed a judge of the City of London Court and the Central Criminal Court.

According to the *Times*, Judge Rentoul was 'patient and kind in the performance of his duties, but it would be useless to pretend that he was a success on the Bench'. On a number of occasions his decisions were severely criticised by the Court of Criminal Appeal, one being described as 'unusual and extraordinary'. He resigned shortly before his death. In 1919.

He was described as a 'kindly and loving man' and a brilliant after-dinner speaker. His pastime was 'Reading Who's Who'!



Judge Rentoul was not considered to be the greatest judge in the country.

In 1919 his summing up in a particular case was commented on by another judge who said that 'We are at a loss to find a forensic expression to convey our real view of how bad this summing up is. Unfortunately it is by no means the first under this commissioner (Rentoul) that we have had to consider. There were many things improperly put to the jury and many things not put at all.'

This 'poor' judge however was involved in the very interesting case of an artist and self styled 'Princess Soltykoff', who received two sentences for fraud in the early 1900s. She was in court for obtaining goods under false pretences.

Masquerading as Lady Muriel Paget, she had been defrauding shops and stores in the West End. The prosecuting barrister said that she was no more the princess, let alone Lady Muriel, but the fifth daughter of a Liverpool joiner, James McKillem.

Her trial was an entertaining one. The real Lady Muriel Paget, in all her furs, gave evidence that she was the one and only Lady P, and had never met the princess.

The 'Princess' took the stand looking every inch the tragedy queen in a long red wrapper reaching from neck to feet and produced a large family bible which she kissed. Asked her name, she replied Nina Olga Trew-Prebble. Asked where she was born, Judge Rentoul interrupted, to laughter, that her answer could only be hearsay.

She said she had changed her name in 1892 to Slolterfoht and to Paget two years later when she was stranded in Paris.

She had left the stage to marry Prince Alexis Soltykoff in St Petersburg. But she left the prince in St Petersburg and returned to England under the guardianship of an old gentleman.

When she found out the prince had died in a Russian prison she had married a man named Prebble.

Summing up, Rentoul was clearly smitten with her as he referred to her as a person of undoubted ability, particularly so when it is considered that she is the daughter of a joiner. Patronising or what? The jury took half an hour to find her guilty.

She had served fifteen months for previous similar offences and although Rentoul thought it was worth five years he only sentenced her to 18 months with hard labour.

DELIGHTS OF LEIGH

In the recent Times list of desirable places to live Leigh-on-Sea rates number 4. Fellow residents will surely agree that it is worth briefly relating some of the delights my hometown offers.

When Sir John Betjeman walked through St Clement's churchyard he was ecstatic about the wrought iron balconies on Church Hill. We should add the Dunkirk memorial and the so-called Cutlass Stone, but recognise that the scenic context is part of the overall impact and, as we look across the Estuary, remember that Dickens chose the Essex marshes as the unforgettable background for the opening of 'Great Expectations'.

Overlooking the library gardens my flat in Leigh House was occupied for many years by Frieda Pelting, a distinguished marine artist who exhibited at the Guild Hall in the city and implanted a love of Leigh in her grateful nephew. Elsewhere, among the fine Art Deco buildings of Broadway West, we find two sites which lovers of Leigh will forever reflect on with nostalgic affection.

Firstly there is the splendid Victorian Gothic library which was originally the St Clement's rectory but which is now a source of original inspiration for the readership of the Borough. I borrowed my first book with my first library card from its comforting interior (it was incidentally, 'The Gorilla Hunters' by R.M Ballantyne and, shortly afterwards, 'Tales of Mystery and Imagination' by Edgar Allan Poe. The beginning of a lifelong romance).

I must pay tribute to the historical restaurant almost opposite the Library and some of the great names associated with it. Generations of gourmets - not to mention, gourmands - worshipped at the shrine of good food presided over by Andy Floris, without exception the best restaurateur I have ever known. The late, much loved Nicky supported Andy and welcomed visitors through the ancient revolving door into and Aladdin's cave of culinary delights: Lemon soles, mixed grills, kidneys, mushroom omelettes - we shall not see its like again. Instead we have a wonderful Italian restaurant - the kitchen - with a delightful airy interior. Greeting lucky customers and continuing the great tradition of Andy and Nick we have Alex a wonderfully conscientious host and the charming Raz, like Nick a great personality.

Finally, I exhort new residents to enjoy exploring one of the most delightful towns in the country and join me in saluting its historical and picturesque glories.

David Stooke

EVERYBODY OUT!!!

Our thanks to Terry Bannister for the donation of this photograph of evacuees from Leigh to Springbank School, New Mills,, Derbyshire in the early 1940s.

Are you in the picture? Whilst Terry is providing many of the names is there anyone else who has that information or a story to tell about being evacuated?. It would be wonderful to put names to faces and display these stories at our open day on 18 July.



Where were you on VE Day? Do you have any memories or photos of Leigh during the war years? Anyone with memories or pictures they would be happy to share with the Society for the archive please get in touch with Carole at carole.mulroney@btinternet.com