



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

Looking back, 2002 saw the recovery of the Centre following the fire damage of the previous year and the refurbishment of the building. Redecoration inside and out, plus a new carpet amounted to a now pristine venue. A word of thanks to Leigh Town Council for the gift of £2000 which offset the loss of takings when the shop was closed during building works. A mention too about the new laminated pictures which offer a more professional display - a big thank you to Carole Pavitt for organising it. In the round, the fire resulted in a step forward for the Centre which has never looked better.

Your Committee has worked hard at its meetings. Talks and slide shows for children as part of our educational programme and other parties have recommenced and the shop in its new layout has done well.

Personally, I would like to thank Vice Chairman, Elaine Crystall, Secretary, Margaret Buckey, Treasurer, Jane Lovall, Plumbs Cottage Director and Editor of Leighway, Carole Pavitt, and current Committee members Ann Price, who organises all our outings and trips and oversees our printing needs, Cathy Cottridge, who carries out sterling work as the treasurer for the Heritage Centre, Alan Crystall, John Porter, Stuart Brewer and Donald Fraser. Each and everyone of them contributes a vast amount of time and effort to the Society and the Centre. Thankyou also to Andrew Haines for his help in financial matters.

I would particularly like to mention all the helpers who do duties down in the Centre. They manage to keep the Centre open and welcoming to visitors and school parties and contribute greatly to its continued success.

2002 also marked the occasion when Alan and Elaine Crystall became Mayor and Mayoress of Southend. Although this is, of course, a very busy time for them, they have still found time for the Society's duties. Again, from us all a big thank you to you both.

Looking forward to 2003 it will be a challenging year for all of us in the Leigh Society. The Plumbs Cottage Project will be moving forward, with hopes for a Lottery Grant in our need to raise some £50,000 to refurbish the building as an extension to the Centre. Obviously it is up to us all to support any fund raising events. The forthcoming development of Strand Wharf as a Public Open Space will also enhance our position in the Old Town which after many decades, will have a centre.

Best Wishes to you all and thank you for your continued support.

Frank Bentley, Chairman

REGATTA

The Regatta in September was yet another resounding success and the treasure hunt as always raised money for Plumbs and the Society and enabled a donation to the chosen charities.

SPONSORED WALK

On 5 October Gordon Parkhill led a sponsored walk from Leigh Station to the new visitor centre at Hadleigh Castle Country Park, and back again in aid of Plumbs Cottage. A small band of intrepid explorers followed in Gordon's footsteps and it being a bright and sunny day a good time was had by all. In the process we managed to raise about £180 for Plumbs. Well worth the effort and thanks to all who took part and to Gordon for leading us. Hopefully we will be able to have similar walks around the area next year.

CHEESE AND WINE FOR PLUMBS

On 13 September about 50 members congregated at Porters for a cheese and wine party in aid of the Plumbs Cottage Appeal. The evening was a great success, especially the guided tour, and much thanks goes to Jane, Margaret, Ann Elaine, Kitty and Gwen for all their hard work on the organisation and food and to Barrie Price our ace bartender. Special thanks to Alan Crystall, as Mayor for the privilege of visiting Porters.



The Porter's Party

CHRISTMAS COMICALS

Once again the Leigh Christmas Comicals saw the year out with a bang with fine performances by all concerned and plenty of money raised for the Plumbs Yard Project. Thanks to all who took part and help organise the event.

The Comicals has now become one of our biggest events of the year and in readiness for next year we need more volunteers to do a turn. Its never too early to let Carole know you are interested. So on with the motley.

HOLD THE BACK PAGE

Using newspapers to research your family and local history

Anyone who has looked at a copy of an old newspaper will realise the wealth of information they contain for those researching either local or family history.

The reports are voluminous and very detailed even in the most gruesome criminal cases. You can almost see the blood. By comparison our reports of such crimes are tame.

What you will also notice is that the front pages were usually covered with advertisements for all kinds of weird and wonderful contraptions and medications. This continued well into the 20th century with the Times only putting news on its front page in the 1960s.

The oldest national newspaper is the Times which started life in 1785 as The Daily Universal Register.

Local newspapers also gathered news from all over the country. As an example the execution of a man at Chelmsford Prison in 1835 was reported in the Leicester Chronicle.

For those interested in the state of the nation Parliamentary debates can sometimes be found in full in local newspapers.

The Essex Chronicle can be seen on microfilm at Essex Record Office in Chelmsford along with various other 'locals'. Similarly Southend Record Office holds those for this area. There may not be complete coverage in all cases.

Obviously the births, marriages and deaths are of major interest to the family researcher but the criminal reports are also a mine of information.

These locals also carried foreign and national news so side by side with researching say the death of a family ancestor you can actually see what was going on in the country and abroad at the time.

The Essex Record Office can supply a complete list of their holdings and for national and local papers there is the Newspaper Library at Colindale which is well worth a visit. But know what you are looking for before you go otherwise you can waste an awful lot of time and get very easily sidetracked.

And one final word of warning be prepared for backache and tired eyes when you read from microfilm, the print is small and close and can give you a violent headache, but for the information you get the reward is tremendous.

A BELGIAN DELIGHT

A group of 29 members had a very enjoyable and successful 4 day visit to Bruges. The weather was fine and APT, as usual, provided us with a very comfortable coach and charming driver.

The hotel was just across from the main square and Bell Tower - luckily the bells don't ring during the night! We stopped for lunch at De Panne on the way, had a day free in Bruges, spent a day at Ostend and went into Boulogne for lunch on the return journey. It was worth going for the seafood alone! Barrie and I were delighted to receive the following poem from Ann & Jack Rickard

The holiday you gave us was all that we could wish
We rode about in carriages, and relished many a dish
The whole thing ran like clockwork - we didn't have a care
It was just the break we needed - with the autumn weather fair.

We thank you Ann and Barrie for all you did for us
You did it all so splendidly and never made a fuss
So when you've got your breath back and got a little time
Please, organise another one - for the grateful twenty-nine!

FLASH BANG WALLOP, WHAT A PICTURE



We are very often given photographs to keep for posterity at the Heritage Centre and this is one such example. Rarely however in group photos, do we find someone with the knowledge to identify the people in the picture.

This picture is of the Victory Party held on Strand Wharf in 1945. Our thanks go to Sheila Osborne and her mother for the photograph and the following information.

1. Sheila Osborne aged 2 daughter of George Frederick (Fatboy) Osborne
2. Mrs Lilian Osborne, wife of George Frederick
3. Joyce Osborne daughter of George Frederick
4. Ronnie Osborne son of George Frederick
5. Mrs Coleman who lived in a row of cottages on Horse Hill down by the railway between Bank House and 'Ts' and Fats
6. Mrs Coleman's children
7. Hilda Marquis and children, wife of Edward Osborne Hilda's brother (Sheila thinks) Jack, used to shin up the greasy pole at Regatta. He used to get to the top using chains and rags wrapped around them and release all the bags of sweets for the kids below.
8. Ruby Sayers - she and husband Harry and family lived in Sorrento Cottage on the corner of Norman Terrace.
9. Nelly Woods and son Tubby Woods. Lived off Church Hill
10. This is a mystery man known only to Sheila's mother as Niff Noff. He was not a fisherman and this is one nickname we have not come across before.
11. Edie Johnson, married to Cyril Johnson, lived in Theobalds Cottages, Ha is her daughter
12. Mrs Emery with her daughter next to her.
13. Johnny Mackintosh
14. Unknown but it is thought she lived in the Customs House
15. Jenny Whiffen, lived in a cottage next to (now) Lynn Tait's shop in the old town - a character according to Sheila
16. Mrs Starky, her husband was a milkman (horse and cart) for Howard's Dairies and her brother was a well known Leigh window cleaner, possibly a Kerry
17. Josie Blake

If anyone recognises anyone else, or indeed themselves or can identify Niff Noff, please let Carole know.

THE ENDEAVOUR

Few of you will be unaware of the drive to restore one of Leigh's 'little ships', the Endeavour. Along with the restoration of Plumbs Cottage it is one of the two major restoration projects in Old Leigh. The Society wholeheartedly supports the Endeavour project but Plumbs is of course our particular priority. Progress in raising funds is slow but we very much hope that the people of Leigh will fully support both projects.

THE 1873 LEIGH MAP

Many of you will have seen the report in the Leigh Times of the Society's presentation to Leigh Library of a full size colour copy of the wonderfully descriptive Leigh map of 1873. Well you will be pleased to know that we are actively pursuing the reproduction of this map for sale in the Heritage Centre. The Map, which was originally produced for the Society in 1964 by John Porter and his sister Margaret, is a very popular sale in the Heritage Centre in its reduced black and white form and we hope very much that the larger colour version will find its way on to the walls of many a Leigh household.

RAMBLINGS OF A TASMANIAN DEVIL

Carole Pavitt, our very dedicated and diligent editor, has asked that I, and I quote, "write a piece about your grandfather, Henry Ritchie ('Scoppy') Bridge" (I am the younger son of his eldest son) "for the 'Characters of Old Leigh' column or, if not that, any little article of your memories of Leigh".



Frank 'Shettie' (top) and Henry 'Scoppy' Bridge

Regretfully I know little of my grandfather's life in Old Leigh (certainly not enough to fill the 'Characters' column) and although I have very many fond memories of him and of the Old Town few of the former have any connection with Leigh and most of the latter would differ little to those of most other members of the Society - and none would make riveting copy. As Carole and I have such close family ties (well, we are, she tells me, second cousins twice removed) she might still give space for what I am

able to offer and as I now live in Tasmania (and you cannot get much more removed than that) it could go under a heading like "Jottings (or, perhaps more appropriately, 'Ramblings') From Afar".

Most of the stories that as a child I was told, half-heard, imagined and then doubtless embellished about my grandfather's early life in Old Leigh and about his forbears have been shown by a family register that Carole compiled and has kindly extended and updated for me to be at best apocryphal and at worst downright fiction. One of my beliefs was that he was 10 when his father died and as the eldest child he had to leave school and go fishing to help support his widowed mother and his siblings. The register shows that far from being the eldest he was the 11th, of 12 children. The 12th, was my great-uncle Frank ("Shettie") Bridge whom I well remember as a very jovial and kind man. In the late '30s my family had a tent on the small westernmost beach below Chalkwell railway station (then operated as a private business by the formidable Mrs. Joseclyne) and I was always welcome to take a free trip and to sit beside Uncle Frank at the tiller of the "Peggy", the pleasure sailing boat that he operated from the adjoining main beach.

Carole's register shows that my grandfather was 56 when I was born. I believe that he was then living at Upper Edwards Hall Farm at Eastwood. Anyway, it was from there that he got into omnibuses. For many years Westcliff Motors (then the dominant bus operator outside the County Borough) refused repeated local requests to provide a service from Eastwood to Leigh or to Southend so he applied for a licence, went up to London, bought a couple of buses and started one. Apparently Westcliff Motors immediately opened a competition war which my grandfather won and very soon Westcliff were met with more Bridge buses from Eastwood to Southend and to Leigh. Bridge buses from Benfleet to Southend and Bridge busses on Canvey Island. For anyone who can pretend interest in old bus timetables, pictures of old bus tickets, interminable tales of the provenance and history of old buses and detailed descriptions of old bus routes enjoyment will be found in a book entitled "The Bridge Family And Its Buses", but I believe, thankfully, it is now out of print.



Sometime before the start of WW2 he and my grandmother moved back to Leigh, living first at "The Pillars" in Marine Parade (the second house west of Crescent Road) and later at the top of Tattersall Gardens. During the early years of the war we did not meet. They had evacuated to Cirencester and I was at Belper with WHSB.

One very clear memory is that he was, to put it politely, taciturn. When I was a boy it was said that children should be seen and not heard and also should speak only when spoken to. Although those dicta were rarely observed, they most certainly were by me when in the presence of a stern grandparent. As my grandfather rarely initiated any conversation with me communication between us was limited and usually non-existent. After the war he had built a boat which he named the "Mary Louise" after my grandmother. The forward section was a comfortable cabin cruiser with a couple of berths, a galley and a head. Aft it was a Leigh hawley fitted out with all the equipment and gear necessary for trawling and with a

big well in the deck and a wood fired copper for boiling the shrimps which were the main target of the trawls. During my summer school holidays I spent many days out with him and the retired Leigh fisherman who was employed as first mate. My family's home was then at Thundersley and I would leave my bicycle in the yard of my Uncle Frank and Aunt Lil's shop. It is the one nearest "The Smack" shown in Plate 13 in Bundock's "Old Leigh A Pictorial History". I always enjoyed these trips, but verbal communication between the three of us never went beyond that pertinent solely to the tasks in hand. They did, however, give me a strong and lasting empathy for Captain Bligh's crew.

There have been three 'Henry Ritchie Bridge's. The second was my cousin, Brubs, son of Frank; the third my late brother. During the war Brubs helped organise and performed in a concert party which went to the more remote gun sites and other military outposts. My father was a civilian Pigeon Supply Officer. His duties included recruiting and supplying other pigeon fanciers (many in Leigh) who volunteered to provide pigeons to be dropped into France and the Low Countries or taken on commando raids and other clandestine operations and to organise the continuation of the pre-war training of the pigeons. His area, known as the 'Thames Estuary Group', covered most of Essex and the transport and general support that he needed for day to day activities, for collecting birds for training or for despatch for 'overseas duty' and for collecting the messages brought back by the all too few 'arrivals' (as they were called) were supplied by a Royal Signals pigeon unit which was stationed at the Salvation Army farm buildings adjoining the Castle at the bottom of Castle Lane, Hadleigh. After Westcliff High returned from Belper in 1942 I often attended the concerts given by Brubs and his fellow cast members at that unit. Now all that is to give me a lead in for a little levity. From time to time and when rations permitted my parents would give a party for the men and women from the unit who had been seconded to the Thames Estuary Group. Brubs often attended these gatherings which, as was necessarily the norm in those days, involved mostly self-entertainment. One of Brubs' party pieces was to induct any newcomers into the Siamese royal family. After (and with long rignarole) he had invested them with household bits and pieces representing cloaks, orbs, sceptres and crowns they were required to sing the Siamese national anthem, the words to which were "O wot tarnar Siam.". Its tune was the same as that of "God Save The King".

For the past 34 years there has been a corner of Hobart, Tasmania that has been for ever Old Leigh. During those years a painting by Joan Walker of the High Street which was given to us as a farewell gift by very dear friends has been prominent in our three family homes and now in my present home and in all four there has been a drawer with a collection of Old Leigh memorabilia, some of which came out with us and since has been added to with purchases at the Heritage Centre and at that bookshop in the Broadway. Where I now live - Battery Point - is a small suburb of Hobart and 'inner' to the extent that on one of its boundaries it merges with the city centre. In many ways it is similar to Old Leigh. It was the fishing and seafaring corner of Old Hobart Town and my home, built in 1875 (and therefore almost historical by local standards) would originally have been a fisherman's or a whaler's cottage. Battery Point's other boundaries are the docks, the River Derwent and the adjoining suburb of Sandy Bay. The docks are very much working docks for fishing boats, local ferries and large commercial vessels including those that supply the Antarctic bases.

The surrounding areas have become a pleasing mix of San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, London's St. Katherine Dock and

Hong Kong's Ocean Pier. One obvious difference to Leigh is the depth of water. Cruise ships (53 are expected this summer and will range in size from those with a few hundred passengers to the modern monstrosities that look more like an enormous block of flats than anything nautical) are able to tie up within less than a five minutes' walk of the city centre. It is comparable to the Q12 (a regular caller into Hobart) visiting Southend and mooring in the amusement park adjacent to the pier entrance.

I close with two of my memories of Old Leigh for which I do claim exclusivity. During my 72 years I have had four serious romances. Numbers 3 and 4 both started in Old Leigh and both in pubs there. In 1948 it was my good fortune to be in "The Smack" on the morning when there was a change-over of proprietors and to be on the spot to initiate No. 3 by dating the beautiful daughter of the incoming family for the OWRFC dance the following Saturday. I believe that she still lives locally. So, Mary, if you read this I send you fondest regards. Then one Sunday morning in 1950 it was in "The Ship" (not then a very popular pub, but it did have a dart board in the Saloon Bar) that I was introduced to a young school teacher. That was the start of No. 4 and we married four years later. Two of our three children were born in Leigh. The other one was due to have been, but he decided to arrive six weeks early and entered this world in Rochford General, as his Cousin Carole (goodness knows how many times removed they are) had also done eight years earlier. My wife died in early 1994. Later that year I was in England and on the first of many visits to the Old Town I popped into the "The Ship" for a nostalgic drink. I was saddened to see that at some time during the preceding 44 years the dart board had been removed.

Barry Bridge, Tasmania

ITS RENEWAL TIME AGAIN

Sorry folks but it's the time of year when subscriptions become due and inside your Leighway you will find a renewal form. All you have to do is send or drop it in to the Heritage Centre with your £5.

The Society has kept the membership pegged at £5 which we hope all members will agree is excellent value.

All proceeds are used in the upkeep of the Society in terms of organised events and the production of the Leighway.

Once again a full programme of events will be arranged for this year with talks starting in March. The programme has yet to be confirmed but we can assure you it will be interesting and varied.

So please don't forget to renew your subscription and we all thank you for your continued support.

PLANNING ISSUES

As members will know the Society is consulted about planning applications which fall within the Leigh Conservation Areas but occasionally an application of importance outside the areas is drawn to our attention.

One such proposal is that for an 80 stall market near Leigh Tip.

We were very concerned as were many others of the prospect of this going ahead and have asked the Borough Council to allow us to submit our views as a Society although strictly not within our remit. Our main concerns are of course congestion, noise, access to the civic amenity site and effects on the nature reserve.

THE THAMES GATEWAY

Looking at planning applications is one of the functions of the Society and we regularly report on these to members. However, most of these are of a relatively minor nature but now and again something of more wider interest and concern arises. Such is the Thames Gateway initiative.

Here Alan Crystall, our Mayor and Society member, gives a broad overview of the scheme.

Thames Gateway is just a fancy name for the North and South banks of the Thames as far as London's Canary Wharf. It is a planning region in three parts, South Essex, North Kent and London, each with it's own development agency, and a total population of two million people.

It extends from Margate in Kent to Canary Wharf in London up to Shoeburyness in Essex. There is a committee over-riding the three areas which has six ministers from Tony Blair's cabinet, so it is a mighty strong planning sub-region.

Thames Gateway is an area with well above average unemployment, which would become considerably worse if nothing was done, indeed if nothing was done for Southend and Rochford alone, we would have 20,000 unemployed by 2011, with social disorder and unrest hand in hand. Clearly, it's main function is to provide jobs, good well paid jobs, with training for the unemployed, re-skilling and education for better jobs over the Regional Plan period for East of England, of which it is a part, until 2021. It will play a major role in the prosperity of our region of five and a half million people, and will create employment on the derelict lands along the Thames North bank, with housing growth more on the Kent side until there is a better balance between housing and jobs and transport and schools and medical services, what the planners call a "horizontal spatial balance" a sustainable balance and growth which will improve the environment, working and green, for our children and grandchildren.

Southend, with a new university college in the High Street will be the "cultural hub" a stronghold of education, learning, theatre and sport. This is not a "five minute" job, and the present planning period lasts another 19 years.

Great care will be taken of the Thames marshes and green open spaces, but in some ways the Gateway will be a "lateral city" extending beyond London, with high speed road and rail links to London and new road and rail links, including heavy rail freight, across the Thames both near Canvey Island and Tilbury. It will have high quality of design and environment, exciting and desirable Thames side areas with housing and jobs and shopping in a special Thames side setting.

The proposals for an Airport at Cliffe would be totally at odds with the proposals for the Gateway, and are being strongly resisted by the whole sub-region and the whole of East of England region, as the jobs and housing would be on the wrong sides of the Thames.

It does sound a bit daunting, but the growth will be substantially in re-cycled areas of derelict land, both of jobs and housing, and the park, marine park and marshes open spaces will not only remain, but are expected to be made larger, with greatly increased access to sport and recreation and leisure, towards a time beyond this plan period when long distance commuting will be a thing of the past.

Trips to Europe will be by cheap environmentally friendly high speed trains rather than polluting aircraft. All we have to do is live long enough to see it all, good luck.

Alan Crystall is one of the three vice chairs of the East of England Regional Planning Panel.

THE ORIGINS OF THE RITCHIE FAMILY OF LEIGH

Ritchie is an old Leigh name, at least as old as 1816 when it first appears in the registers of St Clement's Church recording the marriage of Alexander Ritchie to Mary Elizabeth Ingram on Christmas Day. Witnesses to the marriage were William Rust and the bride's sister, Susannah Plumb. Thus Alexander and Mary Elizabeth were the uncle and aunt of the builder of Plumbs Cottages.

From fishing records I learned that Alexander junior had been born in Chatham in about 1791 but what of Alexander's parentage Alexander and Dorcas Ritchie?

So far no trace has been found of the marriage of Alexander and Dorcas but the registers for St Mary's Church, Chatham record the baptism on 23 November 1791, of Alexander, their son and 2 other children, Dorcas and Samuel in subsequent years.

Nothing else was known until by chance I found a reference to a will of an Alexander Ritchie of Chatham in 1800. Not knowing whether this was the right man I obtained a copy of the will to find it was my 4 x great grandfather.

The will reveals that Alexander was the gunner on board HMS Asia.

As gunner, Alexander was the senior of the three standing officers on board ship and his responsibilities were considerable. He had within his remit the maintenance of all the ship's great and small arms, the powder magazines and shot. Strict arrangements were laid down for the movement of powder, and stores and supplies had to be minutely accounted for to the Board of Ordnance not the Navy Board. In battle his station was in the magazine, supervising the filling and issuing cartridges, but not actually firing the guns.

Under him he had gunner's mates, gun captains and quarter gunners, the armourer and his mate, gunsmith and possibly a Yeoman of the Powder Room.

The gunner was an educated man having to pass an examination in mathematics and understand trajectories.

The Asia had quite a history to her, having been involved in the American Revolutionary War and taken part in the attack on Fort Royal, Martinique in 1794. By 1798, when Alexander transferred to her from HMS Assistance, she was the flagship of Admiral G Vanderput, moored in Halifax Harbour, Nova Scotia.

The records also reveal details of another Alexander Ritchie (First Class Cox) - this is assumed to be his son Alexander who eventually came to Leigh. Gunners were allowed two servants and very often sons went as their father's servant.

Men's names are very rarely mentioned in the Log Books, usually only when they receive a flogging. The books record the weather, the ship's position and what work has been undertaken and guns fired etc. Thus Alexander's name only arises when on Friday, 24 May 1799 the Captain's log records that Mr Ritchie, gunner, was sent to the hospital. The ship was at that time moored in Halifax Harbour.

Nothing further is recorded in the log but the Muster Roll records that Alexander died on 2 June 1799 at Halifax Hospital. Unlike many of the other entries on the roll Alexander's age and place of birth are not given. His death is recorded in the records of the Naval Cemetery at Halifax.

Just over a month later his son Alexander, aged 9, was transferred to HMS Dasher perhaps being sent home to his mother.

Alexander, the son of Alexander and Dorcas, and Mary Elizabeth Ingram, his wife, were to become a couple of some standing in Leigh, owning property and boats. It may be that the John Osborne of the time is the connection which brought Alexander to Leigh. In 1826 Mr J Osborne, oyster merchant was bankrupt and his vessels were sold at auction on 11 April that year. Among them was the fishing smack the 'Sharp' of 44 tons, of which Alexander was the master. Had Alexander started work for him on coming to Leigh or did John Osborne employ him from Chatham?

The research continues.

Quintin Doolittle

BIRT ACRES – AN AMERICAN IN WESTCLIFF



Birt Acres and his wife Annie

I suspect not many of you will have heard the name Birt Acres and even less a connection of that name to the Westcliff and Leigh areas, but Birt has a very significant claim to fame for all those of us who like a night at the movies.

Birt was the inventor of the first British 35mm moving picture camera, the first daylight loading homemovie camera and projector, Birtac, the first travelling newsreel reporter in international film history and the first European film maker who had his films shown in the USA in public performances.

Birt was born in 1854 in North Carolina, the son of immigrants who had started a cotton and tobacco plantation. During the Civil War Birt's parents stayed in North Carolina to protect their plantation from Sherman's advances and packed Birt off to a relative in Richmond, Virginia. Sadly Birt's parents were both killed and the house burnt down when Birt was only 10.

The Aunt he had been living with adopted Birt and sent him to Paris to study art and science. On his return from France he headed to the Dakotas as a frontiersman trading with the Sioux eventually ending up in Alaska working in lumber camps. Eventually he made enough to cover his passage to his parents home country of England.

During his stay in Paris Birt had become fascinated by moving images and tried to make improvements to the apparatus of the day, the Zoetrope, by replacing the pictures with photographs which he took with a multi-lens camera. When he came to Britain he took up portrait photography and became a recognised expert in the subject.

In 1890 he married Annie Cash, probably living in Hackney. In 1892 he became manager of Elliott and Sons Ltd manufacturers of the famous, Barnet Dry Plates and the family moved to Barnet next door to the factory.

The following year Birt registered a patent on a hopper feed arrangement with which he could take and project a sequential series of photographs enabling him to give the impression of motion. Other patents for photographic equipment followed leading to the patenting of Britain's first successful cinematograph camera, the Kineopticon in 1896.

In 1894 he had experimented with celluloid and produced a short film entitled 'The Henley Royal Regatta of 1894' a portion of which is now housed in the Museum of Modern Arts in New York. Other 35mm films followed including 'The 1895 Derby' and 'The University Boat Race of 1895'. Early in that year he filmed the opening of the Kiel Canal in Germany. The opening ceremony was conducted by the Kaiser and Birt also filmed him reviewing the troops in 1896. 1896 was also the year Birt gave a public exhibition of his 'animated photography' in Barnet. This was the first successful screen projection of films in England.

In June of that year Birt was asked to attend a gathering at Marlborough House at the invitation of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) to give a demonstration of his films to 75 members of the Royal families of Europe who were attending the wedding of Princess Maud and Prince Charles of Denmark. This was the first ever Royal Command Film Performance.

Birt Acres went on to design an improved cinematograph system which was patented in 1897 and also apparatus for the home movie maker.

So what is the connection to Westcliff and Leigh?

Birt had always had an interest in sailing and in 1905 at the age of 52 he commissioned a 42ft gaff-rigged cutter which was launched in 1907. The vessel was called Tassie after his wife's birthplace of Tasmania, and had a 52ft mast and was built by a Mr Hayward of Old Leigh.

About this time Birt closed his business in Barnet and moved to Westcliff to be near his yacht which he kept off Canvey Island. The yacht had a paid crew some of whom were believed to be from Leigh.

*Bert Mayo (coxwain)
Les Matthews
Frank Lucking
Bob Dollymore and his brother
Bob Hassler
Franz and Bert Klein*

The Tassie was entered in many races, coming out a winner in some and it is believed that Birt also sailed in the company of Sir Thomas Lipton and his yacht Shamrock III.

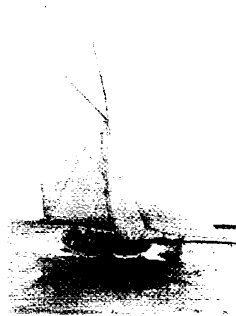
The family spent the summer sailing around the Estuary.

Birt passed away in 1918.

In 1896 the Daily Mail reported on an interview with Birt in which he said –

'He had never tried to exploit himself commercially, he had been too busy' and 'I commenced to devote myself to invention when I was only ten years of age and I am still at it at forty. One of my first devices was a centreboard for a yacht, which I employed and subsequently abandoned. One day, many years after, an American yacht builder showed me the scheme of his new patent centreboard, and, strange as it may seem, I recognised my own invention.'

This article is based on information written and researched by Birt Acres' grandson Alan Acres. Alan is writing a biography of his grandfather and would be most grateful for any information pertaining to the yacht Tassie or any of the crew listed above. He can be written to at 39 Deepdene Avenue, Rayleigh, SS6 9LF or



SPLISH SPLASH

(Memories of Leigh Swimming Pool)

By Dave Peddie

Having lived in London for the first 9 years of my life, access to salt water was severely limited. Hence, when the family moved to Westcliff in 1958, and a year later I moved to Leigh, well, there was no holding back. The Thames Estuary beckoned.

At the time my Uncle owned the Newsagents on the corner of Leigh Road and Leigham Court Drive, and I lived in the flat above, with my Mother who worked in the shop. The advantage of this was 2-fold. Free previews of all the comics and a 10 minute walk away from Leigh Swimming Pool. Later it became a 2 minute, all downhill cycle! Coming back up Grand Drive took a tad longer.

Of course there is a pre-requisite to enjoying a swimming pool, and that is the ability to swim, a skill I was singularly lacking, so my earliest trips to this cornucopia of salt water was the small paddling pool next to the real thing. I processed plenty of built-in buoyancy, much of which I still retain to this day, despite efforts to lighten the load, and so I quickly taught myself the rudiments of moving across the water's surface without sinking. I was ready for the real test: water deeper than 18 inches!

Today there is very little to even suggest the past presence of an out-door, salt water swimming pool, but back then it was where I, and my friends spent some very happy summers. If you walked down Grand Drive, crossed over Cliff Parade and walked down the path which led to the footbridge over the Railway line, the pool was located at the foot of the bridge, its entrance being actually under the bridge, which was where we all parked our bikes, padlocking them to the railings which separated the path from the railway line.

Essentially the pool was a concrete rectangle, I would guess about 30 yards wide and 20 yards from shore to the far wall. I seem to recall the depth being from about 3 foot to 5 foot, with a diving pool which was about 7 foot deep. Almost everywhere you walked there was coconut matting. Even around the walls there were coconut matting platforms for diving off, although you had to be careful as there was a very real danger of sinking your head in the mud on the bottom!

We nearly all bought season tickets for 10/6d, which allowed you to come in twice a day for the whole summer. A bargain! As you went through the turnstile there were the male changing cubicles up some steps to the left and the female to the right, all constructed on wooden pylons under which the sea would lap at high tides. The central area immediately inside the turnstile slopped down to the 2 diving boards, one springboard and one fixed, and the steps down into the pool. Of course the real show-offs simply got changed, handed their clothes in and ran and dived straight into the diving area!

As an 11 year old, there was nothing better than spending a summer day fooling around with friends in the water. We dived off the boards, held long distance contests to see who could do the most widths - I remember doing 80 one day quite easily - bombed the girls, ignored the shouts of the attendants and generally did what boys did best: had lots of, largely innocent, fun.

What made the Leigh pool exciting, and different from the sterile surroundings of the Westcliff pool, was that it was a sea water pool which meant that twice a day the tide filled it up and swilled it out. More importantly, on really high spring tides the water came right up to the turnstile, submerged the diving boards and made the water deep enough for reckless show-offs to dive off the sunbathing area which would normally have landed you in only 3 foot deep water - not recommended. These high tides changed the whole character of the pool, from a well organised facility, into a chaotic jamboree of water, waves and adventurous deeds.

Naturally, it wasn't only filled with us noisy kids. Some adults regularly braved the surrounding recklessness, and some of them were real characters. The one that sticks in my mind was an old gentleman - to my young eyes he seemed about 100! - who religiously came down for a swim every day. He had white hair and always wore the same, salmon pink swimming shorts. He would walk down the first couple of steps into the diving area, and sort of collapse into the pool like someone pole-axed. I'm sure he thought it was a good dive. He'd swim slowly out to the far wall using a laboured crawl stroke, and swim back, get out and go home. We all called him 'Old Mac', but I have no idea what his real name was, but he appeared every day without fail.



Being summer, being young, and being male, we were always on the look out for girls, mainly, as mentioned above, in order to bomb them off the diving boards, or splash them as they emerged from the changing area and before they had a chance to get into the water: the louder the screams the more satisfied we were. So it was inevitable that my first real 'crush' would be directed at one of the girls who was a regular. Despite the 'attention' we gave the girls we were really far too shy to actually strike up a conversation with these, in our eyes, unobtainable but delightful creatures. We simply adored from afar, annoyed and splashed, but in our minds we had a real relationship going on. Anyway, her name was G***, and I thought she was wonderful. With her friend, J***, they were regulars. She swam like a mermaid, dived like an Olympic champion, had the figure of a Venus, and must have been all of 14! I don't believe I ever spoke more than three words to her the whole summer, but I was smitten. This one-way love affair lasted just the 3 months of that summer of 1960 before it cooled with the onset of Autumn. By the next year we were all older, perhaps wiser, and doing different things.

However, a fire of enthusiasm for the sea had been ignited by those early salty swims and although in subsequent years the sea itself held more attractions than confining concrete walls, Leigh Swimming Pool took its well earned place in my memories, and on rare trips back, I stand at the bottom of the footbridge and can still hear the yells of kids enjoying the water and the open air of more innocent times.

I think everyone will agree that Dave's memories have really brought to life the period and the people. I am sure many more of you have memories of Leigh such as this. If you feel you can put pen to paper, please do so. It is only by this means that we keep the history and memories alive.

'BERT' JOHNSON

Many of you will have learned or read about the passing of 'Bert' one of our oldest members.

He was a true Leighman, descended from the oldest Johnson family (there are 3 different Johnson families historically in Leigh), and was the last surviving son of S F Johnson, Mayor of Southend and local builder.

Bert was a very lively character, full of anecdotes and information and he will be sorely missed. Our heartfelt condolences go to Lyn Davies, his daughter, and the family.

PILOT LIGHTS

In the year 1514, Lee (Leigh-on-Sea) became the first pilot station on the River Thames for ships requiring a pilot to London.

This event came about during the reign of Henry VIII when the country was being menaced by the Dutch, French, Spanish and Scots, who brought their ships up the River and learnt the secrets of the channels, and many foreign fishermen were encroaching on our shores. The fishermen of Lee petitioned the Monarch and warned him of the dangers, which he readily appreciated and decided something should be done. It was suggested that pilots should be employed and Henry sent for the master of his ship the Grace au Dieu (Great Harry), Sir Thomas Spent, and commanded him to seek out some mariners to set up a pilotage authority.

Sir Thomas knew the guild of mariners at Deptford and on 20 May 1514 the King granted them a charter to organise the pilotage of the Thames. Master, wardens and assistants of the Guild, Fraternity or Brotherhood of the Most Glorious and Undivided Trinity and of St Clement in the Parish of Deptford Strond in the County of Kent. (Commonly called Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strond). St Clement at this time was 3rd Bishop of Rome.

The Coat of Arms of Trinity House is a quartered shield with red St George's Cross and a galleon of early times in each quarter, surmounted by a lion rampant holding a sword, turning to the right and facing to the front. The motto of Trinity House is 'Trinitas unitate'.

As Leigh was such an important place some of the Elder Brethren resided here and at least 16 are buried in the churchyard of St Clement's. To commemorate them, the Brethren of Trinity House had a brass plaque installed in the Church in 1906. It is well worth a visit to the Church to inspect this tribute to the famous admirals and captains of Leigh.

The plaque reads as follows:

'To the Glory of God, and in memory of their Brethren of bygone days who for a long period carried on at the Port of Leigh the work of their Guild, this Tablet has been placed by the Elder Brethren of the Corporation of Trinity House, London, in the year of our Lord 1906. Living in this Parish they laboured worthily for the welfare of mariners: and, dying, were laid to rest in this Church and Churchyard.

Some of them were distinguished in the service of their country; and the names of those whose tombs or monuments can be traced are here recorded. Their tombs and those of their kindred have been repaired and their epitaphs, with the exception of that on the tomb of Admiral Nicholas Haddock, which has perished, have been transcribed into two books, of which one is deposited with the Registers of this Church, and the other in the Library of the Trinity House, Tower Hill, London.

The Elder Brethren desire also to honour the faithful services of others, their predecessors, who dwelt and laboured here, though their final resting places are not known, and to add their names if these should come to light.'



Admiral Nicholas Haddock

The Leigh Plaque bears the following names:

1453 Capt Richard Haddock
1460 Capt John Haddock
1471 Capt Robert Salmon
1576 Capt Thomas Salmon
1591 Capt Robert Salmon
1601 Capt John Bundoche
1632 Capt Richard Chester
1639 Capt William Goodlad
1641 Capt Robert Salmon
1652 Capt John Bundoche
1660 Capt Richard Haddock
1661 Capt James Moxer
1667 Capt William Haddock
1693 Capt Richard Goodlad
1714 Admiral Sir Richard Haddock Kt
1746 Rear Admiral Nicholas Haddock



Richard Chester

'EDGY' HARVEY

Sad to report the loss of another Old Leigh resident, Edgy Harvey. Many of you will know of his abounding knowledge of the Old Town and its characters. Edgy was a great supporter of the preservation of the history of the Old Town and many of the photographs which are displayed in the Heritage Centre were loaned to the Society by him for which we are eternally grateful.

Our sincere condolences go to his family.

LEIGHWAY

Articles for the next edition should be with Carole by 30 June.

e-mail:

post: 27 North Dell, Chelmsford, CM1 6UP or through the Heritage Centre

We very much want members to play an active part in all our activities, especially the Leighway, so pick up your pens and get writing.

Leighway is published by the Leigh Society c/o Leigh Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Old Town, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2LN Tel 01702 470834

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the committee or officers of the Society. We rather hope you will keep your Leighway but if not please recycle it © The Leigh Society