



LEIGHWAY

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

ITS THAT TIME AGAIN

It doesn't seem five minutes ago that I was exhorting everyone to come to last year's AGM – but here it is again. Your agenda and accounts papers are enclosed. A lot to talk about with the eventful year we've had – so please try to come along. An added incentive – John Porter will be giving a slide show on Old Leigh and the estuary, in his inimitable style.

My apologies to those of you expecting to receive your Leighway by e-mail – modern technology is causing me a few problems at the moment but I hope to sort it out over the summer months.

Once again a member, Trevor Kirby, has come up trumps with a character of Old Leigh and we have articles by Brian Ford, Mavis Sipple and Lyn Davies. Well done to them all and keep them coming.

In this edition those of you who have renewed their membership will find their 2002 membership cards. For those who have not yet renewed please do not forget to do so – you don't want to miss out on Leighway – do you?

Also inside is a flyer for our annual quiz to be held on 18 May at the Den – always a very enjoyable event.

Over now to the Chairman and Secretaries for their annual reports.



CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

As I pen my report the sun is shining brightly from a clear blue sky – spring has sprung (just) and all is well with the Society. The Centre has now been completely refurbished after last year's fire – the final touches now being organised involve new blinds and improvements to the lighting arrangements and displays.

From remarks voiced by one and all it appears that the new layout, exhibits and internal decoration have been well received.

The shop is open and attractive in its improved setting but we still have room for more helpers. If you can help please telephone the Centre or just pop in.

I now have to mention two members of the Committee. First, Iris Williams, who has given many years of service, not only as a Committee member but also running the Centre shop. Iris has recently resigned due to health reasons. We shall miss her efforts on our behalf and wish her well in the future. She will continue her duties in the Heritage Centre I am pleased to say.

Next I regret to announce that our Treasurer, Judith Coombs, is standing down at the AGM. Over the last seven years Judith has looked after our finances in an impeccable manner and we shall be sorry to see her go. On behalf of all of you I thank them both for their outstanding help to the Society.

It remains now for us all to look forward to a bumper Jubilee year with lots of good weather, shop sales, visitors galore and hopefully a large lottery grant for Plumbs Cottage.

Frank Bentley

SECRETARY'S ANNUAL REPORT

2001 was largely dominated by "the fire" at the Heritage Centre last June. Although the Society functions as a separate body, it is responsible for the Museum and its officers, committee and members of the Leigh Society are, therefore, very involved with the day to day running of it.

However, we continued to meet monthly and the planning sub-committee had many plans on which the Society's views were made known. The quality of the shopfronts continues to be of concern, as so many shops come and go, leading to constant alterations. We do try to ask that the fascia boards should be toned down and help to improve the street scene.

Of major interest has been the building work carried out on the old Coliseum and adjacent former Lantern Restaurant. After many planning alterations, our concern regarding the public highway behind the development was taken on board and car parking for the Coliseum was deleted to ensure a pleasant area for pedestrians.

Hopefully, this area could eventually be decently paved and the toilets refurbished and the entrance set back for safety, this area should soon be greatly improved. Many residents will remember the Lantern Restaurant, with its interior wall paintings, and were probably sad to see it go. However times have changed, "moved on", and the new Pizzeria is probably what the younger generation want. Leigh is now a major venue for trendy wine bars and cafes.

Leigh Broadway is now being given an "upgrade" in keeping with its conservation area status and block paving is being laid, new street furniture, lamp-posts, signs and seats are being put in. Paving across the side road entrances will be level to the pavements to reduce tripping. These improvements are a joint scheme between Southend Council and Leigh Town Council.

I would like to thank Carole for all the work she does both in producing the "LEIGHWAY", driving over from Chelmsford after a day's work in London, for committee meetings as well as opening the Museum on a Saturday. She is "the brains" behind the Plumbs Cottage Project and the fund raising for it. THANKS CAROLE.

Ann Price has also put in a lot of hard work not only in organising the outings but in helping to keep the Museum supplied with our own booklets and leaflets. In fact, a very big THANK YOU to everyone who gives their time to keep the Leigh Society and the Leigh Heritage Centre going.

Margaret.

All members of the Committee would like to record their thanks and appreciation for Margaret who works so tirelessly on our behalf.

THANK YOU MARGARET FROM US ALL

LEIGH'S LITTLE MONSTERS

Extracts from the Log Books of North Street Schools

The Log Books of any school are a wealth of information, not just about the children but about the daily routine of school life in the Victorian period and the attitude of the teachers and school governors.

Here are a few extracts from the Log Books of North Street Schools which are held in the Southend Record Office. Some names have been omitted to spare any blushes from descendants

29 November 1889 – it should be noted that the following boys were completely ignorant of the merest elements of the three Rs when received here. They had been running about the streets for years. They have had great attention paid to them here however, and four of them show signs of developing intellect, the remaining ones seeming unable to emerge from the closet of ignorance in which they have for so long been left.

Unfortunately the teacher did not say who the four Einsteins were.

31 January 1890 – Today had to cane xxxxx for great carelessness in work. Would not hold out his hand and was impudent towards me. Was obliged to give him 3 cuts in the rear before he obeyed me. I then gave him 2 stripes in the hand (one on each). He then went back to his place in a defiant manner muttering and threatening for which conduct I gave him 2 stripes more

Some people just don't know to quit while their ahead do they.

The Log Books also record tragedy –

25 February 1892 – Alice and Clara Noakes absent owing to the death of their mother

The parish registers show that their mother died in childbirth.

The level of medical treatment available is quite interesting

1 December 1893 – xxxxx fell down in an epileptic fit this morning. The symptoms were so serious I feared the child might not recover so sent for Dr Kirton. He attended the case and ordered her mother to be sent for who took the child home.

No other treatment of the doctor is recorded.



North Street School

A WATERY BEAT



This handsome fellow resplendent in his uniform, is Frederick Plumb, who was born in Leigh in 1861.

Fred was left a widower at an early age with three young daughters but he remarried to Hannah Killick in the mid 1880s.

At this time Fred was a police constable in the River Police stationed at the Thames Police Station, east of Waterloo Bridge, St Mary le Strand

Today there are four police forces involved in policing the River Thames, which covers an area of 54 miles of river from Dartford Creek to Staines Bridge. The stretch below Dartford is under the jurisdiction of the Kent and Essex police forces.

The Marine Support Unit is the oldest police force in the country, formed in 1798 by Patrick Colquhoun, a magistrate and John Harriot, a master mariner, to combat theft, looting and corruption in the Port of London which were rife at that time. It was known as the Marine Police Force and its annual costs were shared between the Exchequer and the West India Merchants and Planters Company.

The force took a lease of premises on the current site of Wapping Police Station and appointed a Superintendent of Ship Constables with 5 Surveyors to patrol the River, day and night. These Surveyors were rowed in open Galleys by Police Watermen. They also had 4 Surveyors visiting ships being loaded and unloaded, with Ship Constables (who were appointed and controlled by the Marine Police Force but paid for by ship owners and not out of police funds) supervising gangs of dockers. A Surveyor of quays with 2 assistants and 30 Police Quay Guards watched over cargoes on shore.

In 1829 Robert Peel formed the Metropolitan Police Force by which time the Marine Police Force had 3 police stations at Wapping, Waterloo, where Fred Plumb served, and Blackwall.

In 1839 the two police force amalgamated with the Marine Police Force becoming Thames Division, a name it kept until 2001.

In the early days, the police carried out their duties in rowing boats (which were still in use until 1925) but two steam launches were introduced in the mid 1880s. By 1898 a further 8 steam launches had supplemented the 28 rowing galleys and in 1910 the first motorboats were introduced.

LEIGHWAY

Articles for the next edition should be with Carole, through the usual channels, by 31 July.

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.

STEPHEN FROST JOHNSON 1876-1959

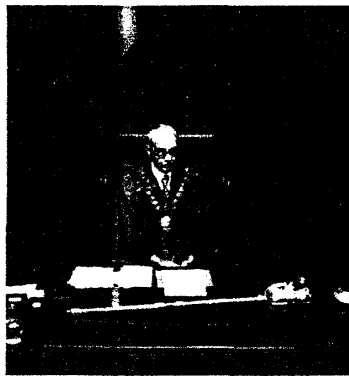
Stephen, was born in a cottage off Billet Lane, the sixth of the eight children of Robert "Skipper" Johnson. As a true "Leighmen", he too had a nickname, "Doodle", this was because as a child he was very fond of the sweets called Liquorice Bootlaces, which were known as doodles. To be entitled to be called a "Leighmen" you have to be a direct descendent of one of the original families of Old Leigh, and Stephen was well qualified for this privilege as his family have been traced back at least as far as 1699.

Several of his brothers and sisters left their mark on Leigh...Harold Johnson O.B.E "Darrell", was the Captain of the Leigh Fire Brigade, Ernest Gilbert, "Brownie" was a butcher in the Broadway, in the building which now houses the Woolwich Building Society. Stephen's younger sister, Lilian, always referred to as Lil, married Frank Bridge who among others things had the sailing boat Peggy which took visitors out into the Estuary for 6d. Lil and Frank also ran a general provisions and fishermens' clothing shop opposite the old level crossing in what is now the "Rock Shop". They were the parents of 'Brubs' Bridge. Stephen's mother was Martha Tomlin, sister of Michael Tomlin, the great preacher, who featured in an earlier Leighway.

Stephen's generation were the first not to follow their father as a fisherman. Robert had the foresight to see the coming decline in fishing and encouraged his sons to move up the hill and branch out into other fields. Stephen went to work for his uncle in the building trade, and ultimately had his own building business, S.F.Johnson & Co, based in Grange Road, behind his own house called "Ducksmead" in Hadleigh Road. At one time almost every house in Hadleigh Road, leading to London Road, was built by him, as well as many others on the Marine Estate and all over Leigh.

Stephen left Herschell School when he was about ten, but made up for this by attending night school to gain building qualifications and also read very widely. He was a prominent member of Leigh Debating Society and as a young man was a skilled footballer with Prittlewell Greyhounds.

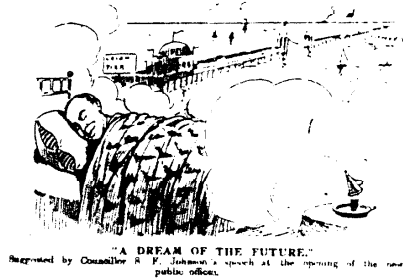
He took a very great interest in Local Council affairs, serving first on the original Leigh Town Council when it was housed in what is now the Police Station, where just inside the door is a tablet bearing his name, that of his brother and of his father-in-law Henry King (no relation to Canon King). When Leigh was incorporated into the Southend County Borough in 1914 he became a Councillor and later an Alderman, serving with great distinction as the longest serving mayor in peacetime from 1945 - 1949.



Whilst in office he presided over the installation of the Pier trains which replaced the old "toast racks", received the late Marina, Duchess of Kent, when she opened the newly completed Rochford Hospital, and oversaw the recovery of Southend after the neglect of six war years. He presented the Mayor's stall to St Mary's Prittlewell, having had his own carpenters craft it in his workshops to the design of Sir Charles Nicholson, the architect of St Margarets. His other great interests were Public Health, serving for many years as the Chairman Of Runwell Hospital Board, and the local schools, serving as Chairman of Governors on several, including the newly opened Belfairs School.

Stephen was a very devout Christian, having been brought up as a Methodist in New Road, but as he matured he joined Christ Church, Free Church of England, based at the foot of Victoria Road, until he built them their new Church in Pall Mall opposite North Street School, the original iron church from Victoria Road being re-assembled to serve as the Church Hall. These buildings were eventually re-placed by the present Christ Church buildings. Stephen was an ordained non-Stipendiary Minister, serving under Bishop Forbes Smith. He was also a great family man and was well loved by all his family.

Lyn Davies - SF Johnson's granddaughter



PLANNING

Over the last few months the Committee has considered a number of planning applications in the Conservation Areas including the following:

62 High Street - enlarged window opening to gable end - objection raised, insufficient detail for such an important listed building, substandard drawings.

22 Leigh Park Road - retention of windows to front elevation - objection raised, insufficient information, lack of detail of elevations. Deplore the fact that the work has already taken place.

35 The Leas - amended car park and access layout - reiterate previous objections to this development which is overpowering and lacks consideration for Crowstone House which it faces and the seafront setting.

11 Cockle Sheds - single storey extension at rear for storage - no objection but concern expressed about the continuing encroachment on the beach which should be monitored in future.

12 Avenue Road - single rear extension and 2 storey side extension (amended proposal) - objection raised - overdevelopment of the site which would set a precedent for other properties in the street.

We have also expressed our concern about the poor state of some of the public houses in the Old Town and on the need for painting and refurbishment work at the Library.

HAMLET COURT ROAD

Have you been to Hamlet Court Road recently? Oh what a change from the sixties. Then it was the place to be seen in. Very exclusive. There was everything you could want. You name it, you would find it there. Hodges and Johnson could provide you with a Hammond organ, a pianoforte, a radio, television or a gramophone and records. Antonet, sold china and glass, and strange modern pictures and minimalist coffee tables, the epitome of modern living. Good old Havens is still there and little altered. For the not so well off there was Greens Hardware, and Kenway for china and glass. Hairdressers abounded, Moskowitz,(you had to have your hair done before you dared enter the door,) Michelle, Kathleen and Marianne to name but a few. There were dress shops galore. Ashley Russell, Aubrey Young, Lavalette, Alfrenes, Maggy Gowns and Baums. The London Theatrical Hire kitted us out for that special occasion and the Hamlet Court Studios photographed us in our finery. Grocers were plentiful, from Stitches Supermarket, Home and Colonial, Joy's stores, to Garon's, fruiterers, grocers, bakery or butcher. Wordsworth Bakery sold the most delicious cakes in the country while no one could pass Planters without sighing at the delicious smell of coffee. Not so sweet was Tibbles the fish shop. It was a sad day when Kemballs closed down and Limmericks the drapers not forgetting Howards Fabrics. Smerdons the House furnishers according to their advertisement 'with a name for quality' sold bedroom suites, dining sets, carpets and linoleum. Eastern Electricity had a showroom there, just beyond Anerley Road and the Anerley School of Ballroom Dancing. The Ministry of Social Security had offices at number 100. K Shoes, Freeman Hardy and Willis and Jennings shoes, (and bootmakers) looked after our feet, and Kennings Motors our transport. Curry's bookseller improved our minds and Woolworth's did a bit of everything. Mareks Restaurant, quite innovative in it's time, was on the corner of Canewdon Road and almost opposite stood the Queens Hotel huge, glorious and opulent. Now just a bit of waste ground. This was a time when we carried shopping baskets and wore our best clothes to go to the theatre, and matching handbag and gloves on a day trip to London. The good old days! Or were they?

Mavis Sipple

Hamlet Court Road in 1907



Remember the Star Toy shop – an Aladdin's cave of delights for a youngster in the 50s

Ed

LADY OLIVIA SPARROW



Lady Olivia Sparrow

Lady Olivia Sparrow's inheritance of the estate of Leigh came through her husband's mother from his grandfather Sir Robert Bernard who in 1789 left the estate to his daughter who married Robert Sparrow of Worlingham in Suffolk. They had one son, another Robert, who married Olivia, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Gosford.

Tragically Robert Sparrow died on active service with the army and left Olivia a young widow the estate of Leigh.

Olivia was a compassionate woman and soon became popular with the people of Leigh who recognised her true interest and concern for their well-being.

She quickly set about improving their lives. Special day schools were built and opened in December 1834. Although not a popular act to some people who thought education for all was a dangerous thing, Olivia was not deterred.

She joined forces with the Rev Ridley Herschell, a Polish Jew who had converted and who came to Leigh. We now, of course, have Herschell House as a reminder of his stay which, surprisingly, was only about 2 years. But what an impact he must have made on the little isolated community.

He worked at the schools in the town where illiteracy was rife amongst children and adults alike. At first his congregations were small but his fame spread and he attracted more and more people until his congregation swelled to over 700.

When he eventually left a subscription was taken up of a penny a person and he went with a new Bible and prayer book. The names of all the donors were inscribed in the Bible.

Lady Olivia's estate included Hadleigh and in 1885 she granted a site for a Church of England school

There is no evidence that Lady Olivia lived in Leigh but along with the precious gift of education she gave the town two new water supplies in wells on the Strand and near Bell Wharf.

Olivia died in 1863 and her heirs having little interest in Leigh, sold the estate.

Did you know that the Rev Ridley Herschell's son Farrer Herschell became Lord Chancellor in two of Gladstone's cabinets and was created the first Lord Herschell



Rev Ridley Herschell

A SALTY TALE

Amongst a bundle of memorabilia of my Uncle Brubs (Bridge), kindly passed to me by his wife, Eunice I found this wonderful tale which I can just hear Brubs reciting at some jolly do

THE OOZLE SNARK

The liquid tale of G Andi, the Old Salt of Squiffle-squug-quo-vadis

'Twas just such a night as this, sir,
'tis nigh on a year ago
I was reading a 'ome of a murder
and the wind was a-getting to blow
I'd just put my youngest to bed, sir,
a lively young limb, full of go,
When there came a bang on the door, sir,
And a voice said 'You at 'ome there, Joe?'
I made 'aste to answer I was, sir,
I thought 'twas my beer, but ho no
It turns out to be Bill, me brother,
Along of the missus and Floe.
I guessed that summat was wrong, sir
They was all breathin' 'eavy, 'cept Floe.
There'd been rockets sent up for the lifeboat
But the tide was extra low,
So they'd rushed up 'ere for the cox, sir
They knew as 'e'd 'ave to go.
I've been cox nigh forty years, sir
And ain't missed a call, rain or snow
By this time the tide was a flowin'
So me and stroke shoves 'er orf,
But blimey, the wind weren't 'arf blowin'
A 'lashin' the channel to froth.
'T'warn't no use us siting there though,
And leavin' the 'ooker to sink,
So I tells the crew to give way, sir
And we ventures out in the 'drink'.
We soon had the sails well up, sir,
In spite of the roaring gale
Reefed right down to third point, sir
With four of the crew to bail.
The tramp was some five miles out, sir
And sinkin' purty fast,
She'd been rammed by an oozle snork, sir,
With a 'ole above the mast.
Now a oozle snork you may know, sir
Is about the size of a whale,
With a jaw like an 'ungry shark, sir
And an 'ide as tough as a nail.
It's tail is a 'undred yards long, sir
And flexible just like a rope,
Seven flippers the size of a 'ouse, sir
And coloured a bright 'eliotrope.
It's snouts just like Wigan Pier, sir
With one eye the size of a pond
And it's nostrils breathe fire and sulphur
It's tongue's the spit of a squond.
It's mouth's the size of five caverns
With teeth as sharp as a saw,
It's stomach could 'old fifty taverns,
A 'undred, or even ten score.
We soon saw the hidjus monster
A wallowin' near the tramp
So we started to turn the siren
Till all of the crew 'ad cramp.
D'you think that brute would move, sir
Not 'im. He just lay there and grinned,
'til it seems as 'is mouth must split, sir
and I thinked p'rhaps 'is jaw'd come unpinned.

It seems as the snork 'ad been followin'
The vessel for nigh fifteen days
And they'd fed 'im with cases o' knives, sir
Spare crows nests and five stowaways.
To get to the side of the tramp, sir
We must pass just in front of the snork
And I thinks, suposin' 'e's peevish
Yer know, oozle's are fond of fresh pork.
But we couldn't stay there 'esitatin'
So 'up with the 'ellum says I'
We 'eads straight for the oozle snork, sir
And cripes, we didn't 'arf fly.
By a wunnerful stroke o' luck, sir
That snork must 'ave been rather old,
'Cos he opens 'is mouth as we passes
(Though it might 'ave been due to the cold)
With 'is lower jaw under the water
An' 'is upper one towerin' above
We flitted right in between 'em
An' I whispers a message of love.
Lor' lummy, it gives me a fright, sir
Wot's a thing as ain't often told,
If you'll pardon my saying so, sir
And you don't mind me bein' so bold.
But we reaches the tramp quite safe, sir
And the crew jumps into our boat,
As with a last despairing gurgle
Their vessel ceased to float.
'T'warn't 'arf a narrow shave, sir
and the crew they looked quite white
'Cos they were 'nt so brave as my men, sir
and besides they'd 'ad sich a fright.
When that snork saw the tramp go down, sir
His temper – well 'tweren't nice to see,
'E roared with a noise so loud sir,
I believe 'as they 'eard it at Leigh.
'E lay there a-thrashin' the water,
surrounded by oceans of froth,
So we put some salt on 'is tail, sir
And that seemed to get 'im right off.
We couldn't get back to the land, sir
Unless we went past that there snork,
And I thought p'rhaps 't'was noise as 'ad peeved 'im.
So I told the men not to talk.
What a rage that snork was in though,
'E lay on 'is back an' just squealed,
The I spotted a box of spring onions
And I 'oped as 'is doom it was sealed.
We rowed 'ard and picked up that case, sir
Them onions was perfectly fresh.
Each man of the crew 'ad five dozen,
And ate 'em with mustard and cress.
And then we rowed back to the snork, sir
Whose blood vessels swelled fit to bu'st
As we passed, we breaved on 'im 'eavy.
Tho' we all 'ad a 'orrible thirst.
The smell of our breath made things 'um, sir
And the snork turned a deep crimson lake.
Then 'e 'opped it for 'ome like a swordfish
As was lookin' for kippers and 'ake.
That oozle's alive to this day, sir
And is wanderin' over the sea.
'Is appetite's just the same, sir
Tho' 'e can't abide onions for tea.
We reached Squiffle-squug quite safely;
At beer swillin' none of us shirk.
An' I 'ope as you'll pardon the words, sir
But eninnin' came to right thersy work
*But spinnin yalms is
thirsty work*

CHARACTERS OF OLD LEIGH Alfred and Rowland Kirby

The mention in January 2002 Leighway of the Bundocks repairing the halyard block on King George V's Britannia reminded me of a Kirby family connection with Britannia which caused some embarrassment at the time and amusement later.

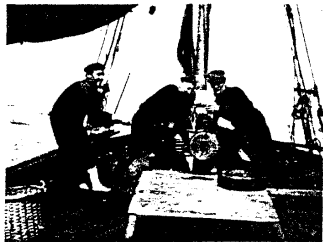
In the 1920s and 1930s it was the custom for the big J Class yachts racing at Harwich, Southend and Cowes regattas to recruit a local pilot and crew. One such pilot was Alfred Kirby (1872-1950), the brother of my grandfather Rowland (Rolls or Bona) Kirby (1873-1952). They, as had other Kirbys, owned several shrimping bawleys the last of which was the Vera moored in the Ray and distinguishable by being the last to carry her topmast.

A keen racing man, Alfred was much in demand as is recalled in John Leather's book 'Smacks & Bawleys' and after piloting Britannia to a win at Southend in 1921 he was engaged again in 1923. Leading against Nyria he took a risk to cheat the tide and stood too far inshore of the West Shoebury (Knock) buoy and put Britannia aground. There she stayed until the night tide lifted her off, fortunately without any damage.

Alfred and his wife Dorothy (Doil) lived in Sea View Road and he and their son Eric (1903-1960) were a familiar sight selling shrimps from their barrow at the corner of West Street and the Broadway.

If any reader is a relative I would dearly like them to contact me to complete the Kirby family tree I have compiled.

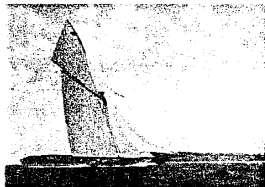
Trevor Kirby
10 Ashmede, 56 West Cliff Road
Bournemouth BH4 8BE



The Kirby brothers
Alfred on the right and Rowland (barefooted) on the left

The Britannia to which Trevor refers is not the one now moored in Edinburgh. That yacht's predecessor was built in 1893 on the Clyde for the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). She had a successful racing career which included beating the winning America's Cup defender in 1894. The Yacht was inherited by George V on his father's death in 1910, and she continued to win races, reaching a total of 231 first prizes between 1893 and 1934. The king willed that on his death Britannia should be taken out to sea and scuttled. She was sunk off the Isle of Wight in 1936.

GEORGE V'S BRITANNIA



FOUL PLAY AT FOULNESS

The following as a report in the Chelmsford Chronicle for 19 March 1824 -

The Foulness Island Gang

'The dispersion of this formidable gang must be highly congratulatory to the public and to those in particular whose property on the Island of Foulness had been so long exposed to the depredations of such a body of conspirators.

It is impossible to contemplate to what an extent continued success might have led the members of this gang, when under the guidance and connivance of such a person as appears to have been their banker and factor. All will, however, regret that this self admitted rogue has most undeservedly been allowed to shield himself from the just vengeance of the laws, by being accessarily (sic) submitted on evidence, the better to ensure the conviction of his villainous companions. But it is a character, which he has since declared he always purposed to assume, whenever danger approached. This man, the principal in the scene, was John Dowsett, who resided upon the Island, as a small farmer and shopkeeper, a sufficient period to accumulate considerable real property. The second in honesty was James Chandler a miller. Previous to the day of trial, so haunted were the consciences of these two men, that they sold their illgotten wealth on the Island, having been told that the property of a convicted felon became forfeited to the King. Dowsett's property brought upwards of £1100, in all probability obtained by the fraudulent traffic now come to light, the whole of which money, therefore, he ought to be made to disgorge. Exclusive of Dowsett and Chandler, there were 8 others upon the calendar, who stood charged with robbing barns on the Island of Foulness, upon farms in the several occupation of Mr Charles Asplin, Mr Richard Going, Mr Peter Lodwick, Burchell, Mr Stephen Allen, Mr William Jackson, Mr James Eicke and Mr Thomas Laver.

The first of the group put to the bar was John Bennewith, designated a sea waller, formerly of some notoriety as a pugilist, until the reverse he met with in his match with David Hodson upon Rettendon Common, after which he never shone in the profession, but was taunted by every boy in the Island. Bennewith was clearly convicted by the evidence of the accomplice Dowsett of stealing corn from Mr Charles Asplin and was sentenced to 7 years transportation.

Isaac Bennewith, the brother of the last prisoner, was charged with stealing wheat from Mr Richard Going and Dowsett was ready to swear to himself being a party in the transaction, but the prosecutor could not swear to the corn and he was discharged by proclamation. Isaac seconded his brother in the fight with Hodson but he is said to be a very different character, and may yet prove a good subject; it is very evident however, that he will not be the worse by their separation.'

The case report goes on to list other men involved in the skulduggery on the Island who received sentences of hard labour in the House of Correction. It ends by considering the turncoat Dowsett who got away with it all by turning against his companions -

'Of this gang it will be observed that just half are left to tell the fate of their companions and who will hereafter very justly be pointed at as having escaped through the levity of the laws, from a punishment which they alike rightly deserved. Dowsett carried on his nefarious dealings with labourers under the cloak of selling those necessaries which are generally purchased by them; the daily communications, therefore, which this man had with that class, was looked upon to be in the common course of the business which he openly professed. Besides this wholesale dealer had a barn which was kept locked by day, but those whom he had made his agents were in the secret where to find the key by night in order to deposit the produce of their nocturnal depredations. In the morning Dowsett was accustomed to visit the fund sometimes congratulating himself with the richness of his harvest and at other times regretting the scantiness of his illicit gains'

MEMORIES OF BELFAIRS PARK

I think we are very lucky to have a place to stroll like Belfairs Park. It is an ideal place to get away from the traffic and to listen to the birds and the rustling of the wind in the trees. It is very peaceful at the time of the year when the leaves have almost disappeared. You can see through the trees and watch the grey squirrels foraging about in the thick carpet of leaves for food they have stored for the winter.

Crows are calling to their families, rooks squawking, and the occasional green woodpecker laughing at you trying to spot him, or the rat-tat-tat of the lesser spotted. He is the most difficult one to spot, or the tiny robins flitting about, all sorts of birds too numerous to mention even if I knew the name of them.

Joggers abound in numbers, the thing I don't quite understand about them is every time I see one they are puffing and blowing and as I wish them a cheery "Good Morning" I am lucky if I get a nod or a grunt back. If it makes them so miserable why the hell do they do it?

Then we come to the horseriders from the stables who trot and gallop up the trotting track with the instructor barking out her orders like a sergeant major on a parade ground. I love to see the little ones who can hardly see over the top of the horse being led by a handler, their little faces are a picture of awe and bewilderment.

Last but not least we come to the dog walkers these are people who really care for their dogs enough to give up an hour or so each day in all sorts of weather to exercise their dogs and allow them to roam free to socialize with other dogs.

I have been walking the woods for some 20 years now and I can honestly say I have never seen a serious dogfight yet and as someone once said to me the dogs are OK the trouble is the owners. Most of the Golfers are pretty tolerant most of the time and only complain if the young dogs take their ball back to them, they never seem to say anything if they run up the green for a hundred yards.

Me and the woods go back a long way I can remember during the war when coal was very short I used to take a old pram with buckled wheels and go into the woods and fill it with old branches that had blown down in the wind and took them home to store in the shed to burn on the fire. Mum would always be pleased with us and gave us a couple of coppers to spend.

The thing I remember vividly about Belfairs is the battery of anti aircraft guns that were lined up across the field just below where the kiddies playground is now pointing towards the sea. Of course there were no houses there then, there were only two houses on that side of the road and they were up the top near the London Road where the soldiers were billeted who manned the guns. We would sit for ages and watch the soldiers doing their drill loading and calling out funny instructions that we couldn't understand. We were really waiting for the guns to go off but they never did.

I used to do a morning paper round then and I would take a extra few Daily Mirrors with me and the soldiers used to give me a steaming hot cup of tea with lots of real sugar in and a big slab of fruit cake which I consumed in 30 seconds flat. I don't think I have ever enjoyed a piece of cake like that to this day.

Brian Ford

BRIAN'S POSER

Brian Ford wants to know if we can jog the memories of our readers. Brian remembers one character of Leigh, the Rag and Bone man who used to walk the streets with a coster barrow calling out 'Ole rags a lumber'. Brian remembers him because summer and winter all he wore was a white singlet with an old trilby and a red handkerchief round his neck. He was a fine built man with arm muscles like a boxer, and on his barrow he had written 'Jack of all trades, master of none'. The only trouble is Brian cannot remember his name – can you?

THE MISSPENT YOUTH OF A SNOOKER HALL



Remember this – many of you will no doubt, it still stands today but this picture was taken in its heyday.

It is, of course, now the snooker hall but once it was the Corona Cinema which opened its doors in 1929.

Leigh being a fishing community, what better way to decorate such a grand building but by covering the walls with plaster shellfish and hanging shimmering curtains to simulate the surface of the sea. Such were the furnishings of the Corona.

Although originally designed for silent movies the impact of the talking picture in the late 1920s forced the designers to add sound equipment during the construction works.

The Corona played its last movie in 1959 and became the snooker hall.

THE FIRECRACKER THAT SILENCED THE MOVIES



Another Leigh movie house, the Mascot, opened its doors much earlier in 1912. It was refurbished in 1932 but, sadly, destroyed in 1964 by a someone throwing a firecracker at the screen. (I wonder what film was playing at the time)

The Mascot had been a very plush affair in the 1930s with a fishpond in the foyer.

In March 1940 it closed but reopened two years later with a café offering three course lunches, except on Sundays.

AND IN THE BEGINNING



The Empire Palace was the first Leigh cinema which closed its doors in 1937, a victim of the popularity of the Corona and the Coliseum.

**All sadly now a part of Leigh's history
What a shame – so much more attractive than a
multiplex!**

PLUMBS ANNUAL REPORT

It has been a bit of a slow year for the Plumbs Cottage project, mainly due to the fire at the Heritage Centre and the fact that all our resources were diverted to get us over a very difficult period.

Due to such heavy commitments we were unable to put together our bid for Lottery money but will be doing so this year.

Even so we still managed to raise some substantial sums of money from the race night, quiz and Comicals.

Sad to say that Queenie Burder, the last survivor of the last family to live in the Cottage passed away during the year. Queenie helped us a great deal with her memories of the interior of the Cottage.

Thankfully the fire did not damage the Cottage, which would have been devastating, but it has shown how vulnerable the Cottage can be so we would ask all members to help as much as they can in any way to raise funds for the project so that we can get on with it. Some people have expressed concern at the time it is taking to get the project off the ground. Please remember we are starting from scratch and it is a hard slog to get things moving and motivate people. But we'll do it.

Carole Pavitt

2002 DIARY

24 April –	AGM Up and Down the Thames – John Porter
15 May	The Salvation Army came to Leigh – Gordon Parkhill
14 May	Greenwich coach – fully booked
18 May	Quiz – the Den (see flyer in this Leighway)
23 June	Essex History Fair in Chelmsford – the Society will have a stand at this event
29 June weekend	Leigh Folk Festival
7/8 Sept	Leigh Regatta
7-10 October	Trip to Bruges
16 October	Titbits and Tales of Essex Inns – Mavis Sipple
13 November	A collection of Street Signs – Neil Smith
December	Comicals
December	Society Christmas Lunch

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

On 28 March, one of our members, Isobel Holland, celebrated her 90th birthday.

Isobel, along with Iris Williams, (known as the two I's) share a duty in the Heritage Centre, come rain or shine, which makes Isobel our oldest steward.

I am sure, with the Committee, all members would wish to extend to Isobel their very best wishes for her birthday and their thanks for the sterling work she puts in at the Centre.

Well done Issy and happy birthday

PEOPLE COUNT

Many of you will have read in the papers at the beginning of the year about the complete fiasco of the 1901 census which was opened to public scrutiny and which was to go on-line on the web. You may very well have asked yourself what on earth all the fuss was about. Well to historians it is a really big deal.

The 1901 census is the first census where generally speaking people have been able to find out where their grandparents were or who lived in their house so it has created a lot of interest beyond the family history researcher.

Last edition we looked at the Tithe Map and what information that provided about our area, this short piece gives an insight into the census and the information and pitfalls of using it.

Censuses had been taken since 1801 but were very limited in the information they provided and it wasn't until 1841 that the first relatively full census was taken. The 1841 census has its problems though. It does not provide for a place of birth. People only had to say whether or not they were born in the County they were then in or if they were born in another country – this included Scotland and Ireland.

For years I looked for the entry for the birth of Alexander Ritchie of Leigh because in the 1841 census he answered yes to being born in Essex. He died before 1851 when the census did require place of birth and it was only by looking at fishing records that I found out he was actually born in Chatham in Kent.

The 1841 census also provides a problem with regard to ages as those of adults were rounded up to the nearest five. So someone who was 57 would be recorded as 60. A bit of a problem when you try to find birth certificates.

By 1851 this had been rectified and that census and subsequent censuses since have gradually increased the amount of information required until today when last year the form ran to several pages.

The other great problem with interpreting census information is the accuracy of the information given and its interpretation by the census enumerator. Some genuinely did not know where they were born or how old they were – and some, of course, lied. The census enumerator may have misheard answers. Accents caused problems and, of course, spelling could vary.

On the 1881 census Leigh is recorded correctly as Leigh but also as Lee, Lea, Liegh.

But even with all these potential problems the census is a great source of information about more than the people – you can track the rise and decline in employment, the influx of people when, say, the railway came along. You can see trends in family sizes and the role of women in the household.

In fact it is a mine of information. The growth in genealogy has been phenomenal in the last few years. The 1901 census on line was designed to deal with 1 million hits a day in fact it was getting 1 million at a time – and in charging for it someone somewhere will be making an awful lot of money out of it!!!!!!

Carole Pavitt

Carole has the 1881 census for the whole of the country on CD ROM and the 1841-1901 censuses for Leigh so if anyone would like her to look up an ancestor just drop her a line or an e-mail.

Next issue we'll look at the parish registers

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