



LEIGHWAY

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

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It is my privilege to thank all of our members for their support throughout another busy year.

The members of the committee, as ever, have worked extremely hard, it is a job which occupies a lot of time, committee meetings being only the tip of the iceberg. My thanks to the stewards at the Heritage Centre who not only do such a fantastic job, but do it on a regular basis, which is so important. But every one of you, our members, is vital to our success. It is because of your support that our planning committee has the opportunity to comment on, and hopefully influence, developments in the area. It is with your support that we are able to maintain the museum in the Old Town, providing information and interest to visitors, and educational facilities for the hundreds of children who visit it.

Please continue your support and persuade your friends and neighbours to join the society - the more of us there are, the greater influence we can have on the future of this unique place in which we live.

Ann Price

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Leigh Society Committee had another full year of monthly meetings at the \heritage Centre when matters concerning Leigh, planning applications and the running of the museum were discussed and dealt with.

We signed up to the Good for Leigh Campaign organised by Leigh Town Council and ran a successful stand at the Community Centre on 7 February attended by a good crowd. This is not a good time for local shops but hopefully the Campaign will help persuade people to shop locally, recycle and support local environmental issues.

In Carole we have an excellent resource for people researching their family history and it keeps her busy! The Leighway sparks off many readers with their memories of local places and past events.

The Heritage Centre with Plumbs Cottage has been extremely busy with visitors from near and far, schools and local groups and is a very useful place for keeping up to date with local affairs. The schools appreciate their visits, the children taking a lively interest in Leigh's history and learn how people used to live in days gone by.

The Folk and Fishing Festivals and Regatta kept us involved in the Old Town, the time given to these events being well spent and entertained and informed thousands.

As members of the River Thames Society, the Thames Estuary Partnership, English Heritage and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England we kept informed of matters which concern us here in Leigh.

Our participation in the Southend-on-Sea Conservation Forum, along with Milton, Southend and Shoebury Societies has enhanced our involvement in this important area with a useful dialogue now in place with the Borough on such matters.

Thanks to our Chairman, Ann, members and friends enjoyed popular trips to Greenwich and Southwold - she hopes to repeat the Southwold trip and the visit to the Summer Theatre this year.

Jane provided a most enjoyable luncheon at her home in aid of the Society funds and Sally organised a successful quiz at the Den which we hope to have again in October. We had to cancel the Comicals this year but hope to run it again in December. Please support these events if you can.

Lastly I would like to thank those members who attend our meetings which provide a useful opportunity for contact with the membership. Thanks to Sally for providing tea and coffee.

Margaret

PLUMBS COTTAGE

As members will know the Plumbs Project is now complete, subject to a couple of minor outstanding issues which will be sorted very shortly. We therefore need to wind up the Charity and the Company which were set up to manage the project.

At the AGM we will be asking members to pass a resolution to this effect and transfer the remaining funds to the Leigh Heritage Centre Ltd which is also a charity. In future the cottage and the Heritage Centre will therefore be under one charity umbrella. Dissolving the Company will then be dealt with.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Just to remind everyone who hasn't renewed their membership that if you don't do so now this will be your last Leighway. Renewals can be sent to the Membership Secretary via the Heritage Centre.

DEAR DIARY

All our talks (in bold) are held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m. For the Society meetings there is an entry charge of £1 for members and £2 for visitors. For your information we have also listed other events for your diary.

21 April – visit to Walmer Castle

22 April – AGM and Paul Gilson will talk about the Thames Estuary and latest developments.

4 May – May Day on Strand Wharf

13 May – TBA

13-21 June – Leigh Art Trail

24-29 June – Leigh Folk Festival

23 August – Fishing Festival – Old Town

19-20 September – Leigh Regatta

14 October – Films of Southend and Leigh, Old and New - Westcliff Film and Video Club

18 November - The Saxon King – Ken Crow, Southend Museum

12 December – Carols on Strand Wharf

GETTING AN EDUCATION IN LEIGH

The interest in education in Leigh continues here with three further interesting snippets.

On 1 January 1808 the curate of Leigh, M Hodge, curate, wrote from Leigh Rectory to 'Rev'd Sir' (presumably the Bishop) as follows –

In obedience to your directions I have made the requisite enquiries in the Parish of Leigh. There are in this place 4 day schools of which 3 of these are under the direction of females and have for their object reading and needlework. The fourth is superintended by a man and his wife and extends its instruction to writing and ciphering.

In the first of the three former schools are 14 scholars, in the second school there are 20, in the third 7; in the last school 15. The adjoining parish of Hadleigh of which I am also curate, contains one day school in which upon an average about 15 scholars are instructed in reading and needlework.

Matthew Hodge was curate of Leigh and son of the Rector, also Matthew Hodge who came to Leigh in 1766. Matthew Junior's brother John Davy Hodge became Rector of Leigh after his father. In 1793.

The second snippet is an extract from the Southend Standard of 28 November 1889

Leigh School Board Rate: On Saturday evening an excited and extremely noisy meeting was held at the Sailors Rest under the presidency of Canon Walker King for the purpose of protesting against the unnecessary School Board rate that has just been

made....On Monday evening a further meeting took place at Mrs Herschell's schoolroom... Outside in the streets 500 fishermen formed in procession, bearing in front of them three effigies named Barrabas, Judas and Innocence. These three dummies were taken in the mud and there burnt. Supt Hawtree and five constables were present, but their services were not called into requisition. The whole village was in foment.

Ian Hawkins wrote to us as an Old Boy of Tower House School which he attended in 1938. Ian says his memories are scant but he remembers the sense of pride in donning the bright scarlet blazer and cap.

In 1938 Ian moved to Haddon Court College which he thinks was near Chalkwell Park. The blazer there was slightly more dignified being bright purple with silver braid around the pockets. On the outbreak of war the school moved to Manuden. As anxiety in Leigh grew Ian's parents, who had stayed behind, decided it would be safer to move back to London which they had left in 1937. But the first three months of the Blitz convinced them to move back to Manuden. After the Blitz the family moved back to Leigh in readiness for the V1 raids. By this time Ian was at Westcliff High School for Boys where lessons were regularly interrupted by trips across the playing fields to the shelters. Long before they reached them they heard the V1s explode (usually in the distance) and after letting out a loud cheer they returned to their lessons. All in all Ian reckons he had an interesting war.

CHURCH ON SUNDAY

Whilst browsing in our book cupboard Margaret Buckey found an interesting tome on Elizabethan life in Essex.

Leigh is mentioned under 'Religious Offences'.

In 1578 a nonagenarian from Leigh (so he was born in 1488 only three years after the Battle of Bosworth which ended the Wars of the Roses) was called before the church courts for non attendance at church. His wife attended and told the court that he was 'a very old man and so impotent and lame that he was not able to go so far up the hill to the church being of the age of lxxx or very near. The road from the riverside to the church was described as certainly one of the most stiffest, though short, climbs in Essex.

The 1559 Act of Uniformity made attendance at church compulsory and a fine of one shilling per week (nearly half the weekly wage of a labourer) was imposed for unauthorised absence.

C MILLS BUIDERS' MERCHANTS, ELM ROAD

Does any member remember this firm or anything about them. Where were they in Elm Road? We have been given the firm's signboard but have no idea where they were. If anyone is going to the Southend Library local studies centre could they look them up in Kelly's Directory for us. Guessing this would be early to mid 1900s.

LEIGHWAY

The next edition of Leighway will be coming out in September so if you have any articles please send them to Carole either by email at carole.mulroney@btinternet.com or via the Heritage Centre by mid August.

A VERY UNUSUAL VOYAGE

Member Margaret Dent shares a childhood memory of coming to Leigh in a very unusual way.

When I was just six years old I made an extraordinary journey from Peterborough on the River Nene to Leigh-on-Sea via the Grand Union Canal and the River Thames in my father's converted lifeboat 'Puffin'.

She was powered by a specially adapted Austin 7 engine and crewed on this voyage by my father, mother, uncle aunt and myself. Since accommodation on board consisted of two bunks and a pipe cot (mine), camping equipment was taken along, so that aunt and uncle could sleep ashore.

Before we left Peterborough I got wind that my father, David Benson, had invited some RNVR officers who he had served with in World War II plus some senior officers from the local Sea Cadet corps (he was a helper there) to a slap up farewell party on the MTB 777, moored nearby. I desperately wanted to be at that party, so my mother consoled me with the news that there would be another party the next day.

The following afternoon several old ladies plus grandmothers arrived on board 'Puffin' for a party of cups of tea and cucumber sandwiches. While the party went on deck I sat in the cabin having what I considered to be a justified sulk. THE MTB party had been a very drunken affair.

When all the farewells had been said we finally set out with a few good friends for part of the first leg. Several local boats also accompanied us for a while and it was only recently when I re-read the ship's log that I realised what good friends they must have been as the call for 'all hands' to help load water on board was at 0445!

Extract from the log kept by Aunt Marjorie:

August 28th 1948

0445 Call hands and fill with fresh water 0530 Slipped. Visibility fair with low mist 0700 Secured alongside at Alwaton Woods and went mushrooming 0730 Breakfast. Eggs, bacon, mushrooms and coffee.

0830 Slipped.

That first day we negotiated 14 locks, mooring for the night at 1940 at Waddenhoe locks. Earlier at Oundle lock we said goodbye to 'Petrel' the last of our escorting craft.

The next day 'call the hands' was at 0600. The early starts were essential since the men had to be back at work the following Monday. At 0930 we stopped at Thrapston Boating Club where we filled up with fresh water and had a yarn with club members. By now the river was getting narrow and weedy. At 2000 we moored for the night at White Mills lock. We were 155ft above sea level

We were underway at 0640 on the Tuesday and at 1115 entered the Northampton arm of the canals. At 1150 we commenced a climb of 17 locks (fortunately manned by lock keepers) to the Grand Union Canal. The locks on the canals were designed for narrow boats and were 7ft wide, exactly the beam measurement of 'Puffin', which jammed in three of them. On the worst occasion we were well and truly stuck and the order was given to abandon ship in the hope that people trampling over the deck would cause 'Puffin' to move. Lo and behold she slowly dropped down, minus a rubbing band.

At 1545 we reached the summit of the Northampton arm at 274ft above sea level. I vividly remember the Grand Union Canal, as I was rather frightened about going into the longest tunnel on the canal system, the Blisworth, 1 3/4 miles long and only 12ft wide. There was, therefore, hardly room for two boats

to pass in opposite directions and, in addition, the tunnel was very dark. In the days before tugs, the bargees would walk barges through with their legs, while the children led their horses over the hill to rejoin the barge at the end of the tunnel. In our time there were no traffic lights and we just took potluck that no boats were coming the other way. We commenced our passage of the tunnel at 1705 using a searchlight but light from it 'bounced back' and we had to resort to shining torches on the roof. It didn't relax until we spotted daylight at the end of the tunnel, which we finally cleared at 1730.

More extracts from the log:

1745 Pass through a batch of even locks, aided by lock keepers, now on the downgrading

1845 Clear locks - fine light rain - everything soaking wet 1900 Berth alongside and pitch tent. Most exciting day so far having passed through 32 locks and one tunnel.

2200 Secure for the night.

In 1948 there were still parts of the canal system that hadn't reopened to commercial traffic and we came across a section that was choked with chickweed, which was so thick in places that it was difficult to tell where the canal actually was. The weed choked our propeller and at times the two men had to get over the side and push. For a time we were watched by youths on a bridge ahead, armed with sticks and stones. When my uncle pointed a broom handle at them and shouted 'Hande Hoch!' they fled.

Log extracts for the fourth day:

0545 Call hands and brew tea. Carry out repairs and overhaul engine, eater pump having proved defective 0920 Repairs completed - proceed, breakfast underway

1048 Cosgrove village - berth alongside while ladies purchase provisions, including hot bread straight from the oven

1058 Proceed

Later

1830 Secure alongside for the night near a garage. Great assistance given by garage owner who will top up batteries during the night

2105 Two barges try to berth in the dark, nearly crushing 'Puffin' in the process 2130 Secure for the night.

We were now nearing the end of our voyage and my father, wishing to conserve water for tea making etc asked for volunteers to forego washing. I was head of the queue! Just imagine going on an exciting adventure plus not having to wash - marvellous!. When we finally arrived at my grandmother's house in Hadleigh, she laughed and said 'You can't come in. I'm not expecting a little black girl!'

From the fifth day's log

0645 Call hands 0 brew tea

0800 Breakfast

0820 Crew roam round Leighton Buzzard, send letters and do shopping 0930 Embark batteries and proceed

1005 Water pump clogged with mud and defective 1030 Repairs completed and proceed

Later events are best explained by the log:

1745 After passing through five locks find a pair of barges jammed owing to lack of water. Bargee drains pond that we are waiting in to try and float her barge off and leaves us high and dry with a list to starboard. During this time many other barges

arrive and are kept waiting by the pair that are aground. Heavy rain adds to our discomfort.

2030 Barges all clear and the overflow from the locks as they pass up gives us sufficient water to proceed

2035 Berth alongside in pouring rain at the next locks ready to start in the morning. Hot drinks and a good supper cheer us up before securing for the night. Small black kitten comes aboard to share our supper.

Friday Sept 3rd (sixth day)

0515 Call hands - brew tea etc

0605 Disembark kitten - proceed after running aground in shallow patch. We lose count of the number of locks but make steady progress through at least thirty or forty, passing through Berkhamstead and Boxmoor. Very little water in canal and have to navigate carefully. Water deepens after we pass through Kings Mills and countryside very pretty.

1745 Heavy rainstorm and we berth under a bridge for shelter. Do minor repairs to engine.

By that evening, after completing the day's run almost in the dark, we realised that only ten locks stood between us and the Thames. We have a special supper to celebrate after one of the hardest days so far.

Saturday Sept 4th

By 0845 we had only one lock to go before we entered the Thames. Before reaching it we had to move a number of large barges out of the way, only to find that the tide, as we had expected was low. We waited until 1410 and then proceeded against a strong flood hoping to be at Vauxhall Bridge at high water. By 1630 there was a fast ebb running, sweeping 'Puffin' under Tower Bridge at 1815. Estimated speed about 12 knots. By now we were looking for a berth for the night.

This we found between two barges at Blackwall at 1900. The combination of a heavy swell and the wash of river trip boats was causing 'Puffin' to roll badly. (But at least as it was a Saturday, we were spared the additional disturbance from merchant ships, tugs and lighters). It was decided to put the ladies ashore to complete the journey by train and bus. Good I thought, I won't have to listen to the constant repetition of phrases like 'eat up your Spam fritters' or the dreaded 'It's your bedtime'. I was too young to realise that it was presumed that I would also go ashore. The two men would complete the voyage on their own, after an uncomfortable evening and night, with the paddle steamer 'Golden Eagle' creating a particularly bad wash.

Sunday Sept 5th (The final day)

0500 Call the hands (both of us)

0820 Off Tilbury Docks

And the final entry:

1230 Arrive Leigh-on-Sea and moor up. Secure hatches and wade ashore. Good old Leigh mud!!

Peterborough to Leigh-on-Sea, a distance of around 200 miles, taking 7 days to complete and entailing use of some 141 locks. My father had, in fact, picked up an Essex Yacht Club mooring and although very tired, hungry and quite grubby, he went on board the then EYC headquarters ship, 'The Lady Savile' to explain the situation. The first person that he met was a fellow cruiser owner, Norman Arnold who checked that the mooring was spare for a while, explained that his boat 'Yeoman' was moored nearby and promised to go down the next day to check that all was well. Mr Arnold was a good engineer (and soon

became an expert on the workings of an old Austin 7 car engine) but he wasn't so knowledgeable about things nautical, such as navigation. My father, ex Merchant Navy and RNVR officer, knew almost everything there was to know about things marine. They became firm friends until my father died many years later.

Footnote.

I spent many happy years crewing on my father's boat but at about the age of 16, I wanted to sail on dinghies, in particular the G>P>14s. About that time I noticed a motor cruiser called 'Islander' was often moored near us in the bay and there was usually a few dinghies toed on astern of her. One of these was a G>P<14 belonging to the owner's son, unfortunately an old man of 21. So no hope there! I needed to learn to sail dinghies, so I joined the Sea Rangers where I was helped and encouraged by a (young) senior Sea Ranger called Angela. Having been taught to sail well I bought a Cherub which I named 'Yogi Bear' and which, with its tender 'Bu Bu' dates. An old international 14 followed and I joined the very popular Leigh Sailing Club only to discover.... but that's another story.



Margaret & her Father on the riverbank.

PLANNING

Since the last Leighway Jane Lovell has represented the Society at yet another planning appeal. This time to try and prevent the old Swanleys newsagents in the Broadway being turned into an amusement arcade. Both Jane and the Town Council put up a strong fight and we await the outcome.

AND FINALLY

Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the particular author and not necessarily those of the committee and officers of the Society.

We rather hope you will like to keep your copy of Leighway but if not please recycle it.

© Leigh Society, Leigh Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2EN