



LEIGHWAY

A YEAR TO REFLECT

There can be no one in the country that does not know that this year sees the commemoration of the start of the Great War. There will be many events over the next 4 years to honour and remember those who died or suffered injury, and, indeed, those who survived in a world much changed and not always supportive.

Like many towns and villages across the country Leigh lost young men to the War and this year we hope to stage fitting events to bear witness to their sacrifice and ensure that we never forget.

The Leigh Society will be staging a new exhibition in the Heritage Centre and its open day this year will be dedicated to the commemoration and remembrance of the people of Leigh in that terrible time.

The commemorations will not, of course, just be for this year so we will endeavour to present a rolling programme of commemorative events and exhibitions over the next 4 years.

To this end can I put out another plea for members or friends who have a family recollection and information about Leigh in the time of the Great War. We can all glean information from the history books but it is the personal family stories which carry so much of the heart of a town that are important.

Please get in touch with me if you think you can help at leighsgreatwar@btinternet.com. This is a special email address to ensure they don't get caught up in the deluge of useless email many of us receive nowadays.

Thanks

Carole

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE

The Leigh Society wishes you all a very happy and healthy New Year and as always we will endeavour to produce interesting newsletters, events and trips and continue our enhancements of the Heritage Centre and the information we display.

Of course we cannot do that without funds, and I am afraid that it is that time again. Subscriptions. They remain the same at £10 per household and need to be paid by the AGM in April otherwise you run the risk of being taken off the membership and miss out. (For overseas readers the subscription is £15). The ever increasing cost of postage is a major factor in our resources but we will try to keep the subs low and not compromise on what you get for your money. The Heritage Centre and the work of the Society in the planning and historical fields is very valuable and we could not do it without your support. So a big thank you from the Committee.

OUR THANKS AND BEST WISHES

Go to Mavis Sipple, Joy Dalwin, Shirley Stead and Diana Sandall, four long serving stewards in the Heritage Centre who have retired from duty. At a packed afternoon tea for the helpers organized by Jenny Simpson we presented the ladies with lovely bouquets and our warmest thanks for all their efforts over the years.

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

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

**IN FUTURE OUR MEETINGS AT WESLEY
WILL BE STARTING AT 7.30PM NOT
8PM – SO IT MAKES IT A BIT EARLIER
FOR YOU ALL GETTING HOME.**

DEAR DIARY

26 March – The Estuary – A Deep Exploration of Space – Rachel Lichtenstein

23 April AGM and Quiz by Heather Feather

29 April - Trip to Portsmouth

10 May – Annual Quiz 7pm at the Den

14 May – Local Essex Churches – Mavis Sipple

2 August – Open Day at the Community Centre

Trip to Southwold – date to be confirmed

15 October – The Essex Police Museum – Fred Feather

19 November - Women and the Great War – Carole Mulrone

CLIVE WEBSTER’S JOURNEY ALONG THE THAMES

From Source to Dreaming Spires – Clive Webster

The national trail website read as follows: ‘FLOOD ALERT ALONG WHOLE OF TRAIL. Due to heavy rainfall the Thames Path is likely to be flooded along much of its length... I read it again carefully. The word ‘likely’ was hidden in there. So it wasn’t definite about the flooding? What were the chances: 70%,60%,51%?? And that alert was posted weeks ago. Surely since then?...Besides I was only going to Oxford, a trifling 60 mile jaunt through picturesque Gloucestershire, rural Wiltshire and honeyed-stone villages of Oxfordshire. No problems.

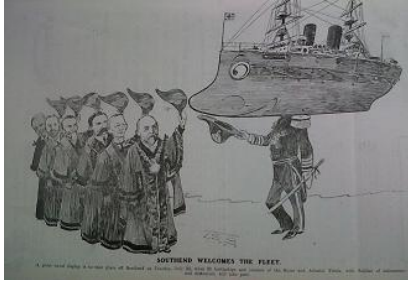
So off I went, oblivious to the squelching noise my boots made and the gentle trickle as one desultory puddle dribbled from one field into another. But at least that’s what I expected - it was the source of the Thames after all - and soon the puddles formed into a little stream, running merrily down a gentle terrain, the first embryonic sign of a river that was to run for 215 miles.

Now I was on my way, there was no turning back. I was tramping along a water course that had run for thousands of years and shaped our world with what is called its liquid

history. The first stage of the Thames Path leaves the river and heads across ploughed fields to the village of Kemble. Here it follows the road to Ewan before ducking down a footpath that follows a scurrying little band of water threading its way through the town. The water here is crystal clear like a chalk steam, and as I stepped across its narrow course and back again, I mused that I had just walked across the Thames.

From here the path winds across small wooden and stone bridges, over stiles and through kissing gates, usually on the northern bank of the bubbling stream. Here a spot a firecrest, Britain’s smallest bird, busily flitting and weaving in and out of the hedgerow; perfectly in scale with the tininess of the river. At certain points the stream meets a smaller brook or run-off from a meadow and together they join forces, like a fledgling army on the march. As the water snakes ahead, I see my first waterfowl, a mallard sedately gliding upstream but no doubt paddling like mad underneath. I also search in vain for an oxbow lake, a feature much beloved by my geography teacher. It’s a strange feeling, walking alongside the stream. As it passes through a narrow course it gurgles and hisses, like a creature quietly muttering to itself before sweeping on ahead with a real sense of purpose, as if to say, ‘Look don’t bother about me, I’ve coped perfectly well on my own for the last thousand years, thank you very much.’ So I continue, walking along a pleasant gravel path, dappled with shade from a canopy of trees, until the view broadens and I arrive at Cotswold Water Lakes. Here the path disappears, submerged by lakes to my left and right. There is no alternative, I have to strike out. So I turn obliquely and plough my way across a boggy field that oozed with mud until I eventually reach the other side. I clamber over a gate and find myself on a minor road. Terra firma at last! Now the elements kick in as snow, hail and rain drive in from the chilly north hampering my progress until I finally make it to the Saxon village of Cricklade. Here is a welcoming bed for the night and a chance to refuel. The next day is equally inclement and with several obstructions en route I eventually opt for a taxi which takes me the remainder and by mid-afternoon I arrive at the charming village of Lechlade. Now for the first time I see my boats and the stream has become a navigable river. I take the chance to visit a roundhouse and weir and follow back on the path as far as I can before returning to Lechlade for a good night’s rest. Next day, I have company and we set off on the sixteen mile hike to Newbridge. The weather is glorious and we make easy progress under open skies; across open meadows, parkland and woodland before we reach a pub and ease off our muddy boots. Fortified with the local ale we soon reach our first lock and tow path, a growing indication that we are approaching the business end of the river. Swans, waterfowl and rooks speckle a sodden landscape bereft of flowers and crops. We are finding it increasingly difficult to navigate our way and eventually, two miles from our destination, the path becomes submerged in floodwater. We have no choice but to cross the river. We follow a winding road which takes us in the opposite direction, adding another four miles to our journey, before we arrive finally at our destination well after nightfall. It’s a salutary lesson and next day we mix up public transport with walking and arrive at Oxford in the early afternoon. There’s the end of the line for the canal but the river is in full spate, surging past the dreaming spires on towards the next part of its journey.

1909 FLEET REVIEW – A NASTY CONSEQUENCE



Southend Welcomes the Fleet

In July 1909 the Home and Atlantic Fleets were reviewed in the Thames at Southend. Pier Hill and the Pier itself were awash with flags and bunting and a huge crowd of sailors and the public. Paddle steamers took people out to get a closer view.

Not only the big ships but submarines were anchored. The main fleet included the HMS Dreadnought and the fleet stayed in the Thames for a week with many visitors coming by train.

You can see a short newsreel of the Review at <http://www.archivealive.org/video/index/id/266>.

One unexpected consequence of the Review was an unfortunate accident to a fourteen year old Leigh lad, George Collins.

George was watching the Review and the illumination of the Fleet from Leigh cliffs when suddenly something struck him in the left eye, knocking him unconscious.

Taken to the local doctor it was found that his injury was serious and he was taken to Moorfields Eye Hospital in London.

The local paper reported that the blow to George occurred immediately after the firing of the signal rocket from the Dreadnought!!!!

IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

On 29 November 1925 at his home in Marine Avenue, Leigh Reginald George Griffiths Blackall passed away at the young age of 44, leaving a widow, Jessie. Reginald had been born in Kennington in 1881, the youngest of the 4 children of John and Emma Blackall. John was a surgeon's assistant.

By the age of 9 Reginald and his older brother Stanley were inmates in the Wanstead Orphan Asylum and their 2 sisters (Mildred and Ida) were in another orphanage in Bristol.

Their mother Emma died only a few months after Reginald's birth at the age of 32. It would seem the loss of his wife was too much for John and the children were split up and sent to the orphanages. John was still alive in 1902 (a chemist) at the time of Stanley's marriage but had died at the time of Reginald's marriage in 1911.

When Reginald married Jessie Danks, daughter of a dentist, he was living at the Anchorage, South Benfleet and was working at the London Hospital as a radiographer's assistant. Indeed the girls and boys of the family would appear not to have lost touch as Mildred was a nurse at the hospital in 1911.

In 1910 Reginald had been living next door to Jessie at 382 Brixton Road and sharing a house with another radiographer, Ernest Wilson.

Nowadays we take X Rays as a routine visit to the hospital and we are used to the radiographer staying out of range of the machinery in action. But at the outset the dangers were not known.

Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen discovered the X-ray in 1895 and was awarded the first Nobel prize for physics in 1901. At the Royal Hospital in London, doctors were working on further developing this new imaging and in the late 1890s, three assistants - Reginald Blackall, Ernest Wilson and Harold Saggars - were employed to help.

At this time it was common for doctors and others working with X-rays to test the imaging by taking X-rays of their own hands. By 1903, all three assistants had radiation injuries.

Before Ernest Wilson died of his injuries, he photographed the bone deterioration in his hand which had become bone cancer. Blackall and Saggars continued to work at the Royal Hospital, and they helped to found the College of Radiographers. Eventually the dangers were realized but for Reginald and the others it was too late. They were known as the X Ray Martyrs.

Reginald continued at the London Hospital until 1920. In 1924 the Carnegie Hero Fund trustees awarded him an Honorary Certificate and an annual award of £75. By this time Reginald had carcinoma and had had to have both hands amputated. The London Hospital also gave him a grant of £285 a year and provided insurance for his family. He died the following year.

A memorial to all X Ray Martyrs was unveiled on 4 April 1936 at St George's Hospital, Hamburg. There are 150 names on the memorial from all over the world including R G Blackall.



A candidate for a Blue Plaque?

THE MYSTERY OF SAILOR BILL

The Grand is a very topical building for us in Leigh and it has indeed had a checkered life after being built in 1899, but even stranger is the latest twist in its historical tale.

Through the internet we were contacted by a senior lecturer at Charles Sturt University in Australia. The History and Heritage Studies Department are researching Australians and New Zealanders who went to the Klondike Gold Rush in the Yukon in Canada. Through their 'Diggers on the Klondike' project they have uncovered some evidence that one of them came to Leigh-on-Sea.

His name was William James Partridge (an old Leigh surname) but more commonly known as Sailor Bill. The information the University had was that he arrived in Leigh about 1904 when he is said to have purchased the Grand and it was said he was still there until the early 1930s.

Information on the web in Australia indicates that "Sailor Bill" Partridge (William J.), aka "Maritime Bill", was a well known character on the Queensland and Western Australian goldfields in the late 19th century. It is believed he made a substantial fortune on the Croyden, Qld field, but he was also well known around Coolgardie in the early 1890s. From Australia, he went to Victoria on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada where he ran a hotel, The Australian Hotel, on Douglas and Yates Streets - with his wife. This hotel was a very popular stopping place for Australians on their way to and from the Klondike goldfields in the Yukon. "Sailor Bill" made at least one trip to the Klondike, via Skagway and the Chilkoot Pass/Yukon River in mid-1898. The photograph was taken in Skagway on this trip.



Picture courtesy of Yukon Archives, Roy Minter fonds, 92/15 #208

He had some gold claim investments on the Klondike, but he was not an active prospector or miner at this time. It looks like he returned to Victoria at the end of the summer of 1898.

He may have deserted a wife and family in Australia before leaving the Western Australian gold fields for North America about 1897. However, sources in Victoria, British Columbia say that he had another Mrs Partridge, an American woman who ran off with him.

Sailor Bill's granddaughter who lives in New Zealand says that his second wife (who may have been in Leigh with him) was

called Gertrude Ellen Partridge, maiden name Morrison. He had no further contact with his children and it is not known whether he was a widower or had deserted the first wife.

William Partridge is cited in newspaper articles in Australia as the proprietor of the Grand Hotel as early as 1904. The references are quite specific - Grand Hotel, Leigh-on-Sea, near Southend. The following item appeared in the Charters Towers gossip column on the Ladies Page. The newspaper is a regional newspaper published in Townsville and Charters Towers is a major gold mining centre further inland.

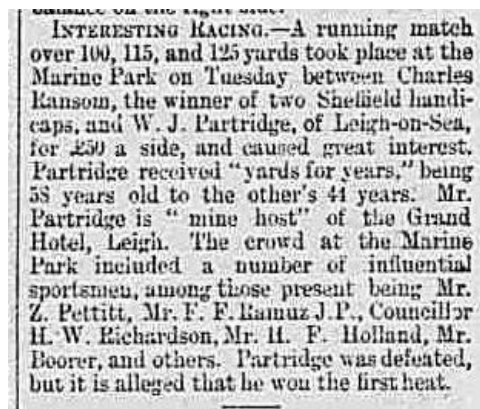
"A letter with 8d deficient postage to pay, and which only contained an hotel advertisement card was felt by us as an injustice, until it was perceived that the hotel, 'The Grand' at Leigh-on-Sea (sic), England, is a mansion and that its landlord is Mr W.J. Partridge, better known to North Queenslanders and West Australians as 'Sailor Bill.' The picture shows a quadrangular building five stories high. Breakfast, the card shows, ranges in cost from 1/- to 3/-, and dinners to 4/-. The enterprise of William is shown by the fact that for £10/10/- a month he boards and lodges visitors, and gives a first-class season ticket to London. Mr Partridge announces himself as 'W.J. Partridge, late of all the principal goldfields of the world,' and says his hotel, which is really an architectural triumph, is the 'Home for return miners from all over the world.' "

Was Sailor Bill spinning a story about owning the hotel? Could be. But, he was a hotel keeper both in Australia and in Canada. And, seriously so in Canada. Buying, or buying a share in, a hotel in England fits well with his past activities.

However, he is not a Leigh Partridge as far as can be told, being born in London. He emigrated as a small child with his parents (father was a clerk in a brewery) and siblings to Australia in the 1850s.

A search of the Licensed Victuallers records shows that there was a Partridge in the Grand in 1906 but his name was George and he left soon after.

Research in local Essex papers has revealed a closer link in Leigh - Chelmsford Chronicle, 4 May 1906 -



Have you anything in your Leigh family that has a link to Sailor Bill - if so please get in touch with Carole.

EAST COAST WAR CHANNELS

The East Coast War Channels were the channels used by shipping – especially civil shipping – in the course of maintaining vital maritime transport in the face of enemy action in the First and Second World Wars. From the start to the end of each war, major campaigns were fought within a few miles of the English coast. Away from this front line, huge industrial effort went into keeping the ships moving. Civilians of many countries found themselves either directly in the firing line or connected to the War Channels through shipyards and factories much further afield.

The campaigns on the East Coast were some of the longest, most intense and important of both wars; but their history and surviving remains are largely unrecognised.

The East Coast War Channels project being carried out by Fjordr Ltd. on behalf of English Heritage, is examining the important role played by the Channels, and to better understand what still survives from both conflicts.

Shipping within the Channels was an intense focus of enemy attack from mines, submarines, aircraft and warships. Very high losses occurred in the course of defence, deterrence and counter-offensive, as well as from the dangers of navigating seaways that were hazardous even in peacetime. The hazards in these waters continued after the close of each conflict whilst minefields were cleared; stray mines continued to cause casualties for many years subsequently.

The Channels are represented today by large numbers of individual features ('heritage assets') that are not visible at the surface. They include the wrecks of ships and aircraft lost on both sides; the infrastructure used to create and maintain the Channels; and to facilitate navigation and defend against attack. As well as heritage assets at sea, the Channels encompass assets at the coast and on land, such as port facilities, airfields and radar stations. Together, these individual components combine to form a series of landscapes and seascapes that add to the distinctive historic character of the East Coast.

The project focuses archaeological attention on the under-studied places of the Channels to better understand their chronology and spatial character. The project is examining the significance of heritage assets as groups and as a whole, and is reviewing their current survival and the factors that may affect future survival.

The project includes an appraisal of the wide variety of sources of data relating to the heritage assets of the Channels, considering how they might be used to enhance public records of the historic environment and to reach wider audiences. It is also looking at the range of organisations that have interests in elements of the Channels, amongst both public authorities and private associations. It is hoped that the project will stimulate greater awareness of the Channels amongst the public at large, especially those who live or work on the East Coast or visit it

for recreation or tourism.

If any of the Leigh Society's members have any information that can assist the project it would be of great interest to Fjordr Ltd who can be contacted at info@fjordr.com.

Antony Firth, Fjordr Ltd

THAT DIRTY LITTLE SLUM VILLAGE

The Chelmsford Chronicle of 8 August 1913 carried the following article –

LEIGH ON ITS DIGNITY

Remarkable scenes were witnessed at Leigh, when certain inhabitants avenged what they termed an insult to their native place by burning the effigy of a Southend Town Councillor on the mud after carrying it through the streets. The offence alleged was that at a public meeting at Southend the Councillor referred to Leigh as 'that dirty little slum village'.

The 'Director of Ceremonies' (at the burning) was attired in deep mourning, and led the procession, those taking part also being attired in black.

The cortege proceeded slowly up Leigh Hill and traversed the principal streets of the town to the accompaniment of an euphonium. The player opened with a few bars of the Dead March, and quickly changed into 'The Soldiers of the King', 'Sally broke the jam pot' etc. The burning took place near Billet Wharf, and was witnessed by a very large crowd. The coffin was placed on the top of a pile of faggots 30ft high, and was burned to the refrain of 'Who Killed Cock Robin?'.*

*Sally broke the jam pot, the jam pot, the jam pot, Sally broke the jam pot and blamed it on to me' - to the traditional tune of the Keel Row.

You can hear a recording of Keel Row by Kathleen Ferrier at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kV5JbDJXwyM> so you can see how the words fit the tune.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

A RECENT ACQUISITION OF THE Heritage Centre archives is this photo of the early origins of the Leigh Seafront Action Group. Taken in about 1969 after the fight for the Leigh Swimming Pool had been won and before it was lost! People in the photo include Alan and Elaine Crystall, Jane Lovell and children (behind the placard) Angela Graham and children, Mr Sewell and other members from Undercliff Gardens.



BUILDING BRIDGES

One of the most delightful outcomes of last year's Open Day was that, through Michael Howard, we were put in contact with Peter Leveridge, former bridge designer for the Borough Council, who had played a major part in the design and construction of Belton Bridge.

Now I know this bridge has its detractors but it was built for a sound reason necessitated by the railway company who were altering the overhead cables and could not have them over the level crossing at the other end of the Old Town.

It had to be built fast in 1959 to avoid Old Leigh being cut off and it won a Civic Trust Commendation. The contractor was Peter Lind who specialized in concrete beams and at the time was building the Post Office tower in London. The beams were cast about 20 miles away and transported by road to the site along the A127 on a pole wagon.

Peter recalls the locals of the time saying 'It will never stand, it'll slide because of the cliffs'. But it was on deep piles and there it stands to this day.

Peter took many photographs during the construction of the bridge of which the following are examples and he has donated copies to the Heritage Centre for our archives.

We are hoping to get a copy of the original plans to add to the archive and prepare a short information leaflet about the bridge.

Peter had joined the Borough Council in 1958 as a Senior Assistant Engineer and was immediately put to work on the design of the bridge. He and his wife have lived in Ipswich for many years but made the journey down to Leigh recently to bring the photos and tell us of his involvement in the project.

Our thanks to Peter for adding to our archive and to Michael for putting us in touch with him.



Subsequent to Peter's visit, whilst working in the Heritage Centre, Jenny Simpson, received a call from Eric Potter who was also a civil engineer and part of the design team working on the Bridge. In fact Eric spent every day on site supervising. He now lives in Bath and has supplied more information and photos and an interesting insight into the difficulties they encountered with the clay when building the foundations. See next issue of Leighway.

THE END OF THE DISTRICT LINE

Watching a recent episode of Sherlock prompted research into abandoned underground railway stations.

London Underground District Line used to run excursions to Southend and the first stop after Barking was Leigh on Sea. It ran from 1920 to 1939 as a part of the District Line's Eastbound Service.



Quote from <http://www.davros.org/rail/culg/district.html>

One unusual service run by the District was the Southend excursions (extended to Shoeburyness from 1911). District trains, using coaching stock hauled by an electric locomotive, ran from central London to Barking, where an LTSR steam locomotive took over. The service varied over the years, but three return trains daily was typical. Surviving timetables show wide variation in stopping patterns: for example, a train might miss Ravenscourt Park, Gloucester Road, and South Kensington, call at all stations from Sloane Square to Aldgate East, then run non-stop to Leigh-on-Sea (on the edge of the Southend conurbation). The excursions were withdrawn in 1939. Incidentally, these were the first trains in Britain to be fitted with retention toilets"

Stations beyond Upminster appear on maps until 1941, but there is no other evidence that the excursion trains lasted that long, and the intent may have been simply to show LTSR connections.

THE BUENOS AIRES CONNECTION

Members will no doubt recall the article some time ago (My Family Seat, Leighway 37) by Sheila Osborne regarding her Dowsett/Thipthorp family.

We are delighted to say that the article bore fruit in a very interesting way and we were contacted by Mary Godward who lives in Buenos Aires and whose great great grandmother was the sister of Sheila's great great grandmother. As a result to the two ladies are now in contact with each other and their families reveal a very interesting tale which they are happy to share.

The Buenos Aires connection comes about through Mary Godward's great great grandmother Mary Thipthorp who married Daniel Lambert Godward. It was their son, Thomas who emigrated to South America in 1871. First to Paraguay as part of the Lincolnshire Farmers (of which see more below) and then to Buenos Aires. Thomas became an engine driver with the British owned Central Argentine Railway.



Daniel Godward and Mary Thipthorpe about 1870.

The Godward family were originally from Peasenhall in Suffolk and moved to Southchurch in the early 1800s. Daniel and Mary married in 1831 when he was a farm labourer.

Why did son Thomas go to South America?

After the Triple Alliance War of 1865-70 funds were needed to reconstruct the affected areas and a bond issue was launched on the London Markets. In order to divert funds to Paraguay and paint it as a place of opportunity and prosperity and to substantiate the bond issue as a sound investment, an emigration scheme to Paraguay was set up. Although called The Lincolnshire Farmers the original emigrants mainly comprised poor folk of all manner of trades and labourers, many in poor health and who died on the way there.

When they got to Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, they were disowned by the Paraguayan government and basically left to fend for themselves with what few possessions they had. Many more died. Eventually they arrived in Rosario in Argentina where it was reported –

In view of the poverty-stricken state in which they arrived, an appeal was made through the local newspapers, as well as to individuals, for a public collection of goods and clothing in order to meet their immediate needs. The citizens of Rosario, both Argentines and foreigners, responded generously to this

call on their charity, providing a great quantity of goods and clothes for men, women and children. This shared among the recent arrivals, provided them each with nine changes of clothing. Various Englishmen, in forming a committee, raised a substantial sum as financial aid for those who had come from Britain.

Thomas Godward survived but his wife, Jane Kennett (a widow), died young of TB in Rosario in 1878 leaving Thomas with children, which included Annie his stepdaughter from Jane's previous marriage. Immediately after Jane's death Annie and his daughter Lillie were sent back to England to the care of relatives; at that time where they took the name Kennett. In time, Thomas Godward moved to Barracas, Buenos Aires, where he married Isabel Gillies from England in 1886; they had three sons.

Annie, who returned to England, wrote an account of their hardships in travelling to South America which can be read at <http://www.argbrit.org/pioneers/LincolnfarmersB.htm>.



Thomas Godward

WHAT'S GOING ON IN LEIGH

This is by way of a planning update on some major developments in the town.

No one can have missed the massive development of the old St Clement's Hall site by what will be known as Eden Point (named after Rector Eden who built the Library in the early 19th century – slight difference in design concepts!). The crane towers above the town as will the development. Thank goodness we now have the Community Centre.

The Bell – things are moving on Leigh Hill too. The area behind the Bell has been flattened and cleared and hopefully the whole area will be tidied up and we won't have to wait too long for the Bell to be restored.

The long saga of the Grand has hopefully come to an end with reports that the lease has now been signed and work is to commence shortly. The scheme is likely to take 18 months to complete so expect some disruption at that end of the Broadway for some time.

Despite objection permission has been granted on appeal for 7 houses on the Tennis Courts on Highlands Estate.

THE GALLANT GALICIAN



To start off our Great War stories, in the very early days of the war an event occurred on the High Seas with a Leigh connection.

The Union Castle liner Galician sailed from Cape Town on 28 July 1914 and after a few days received news of the outbreak of the war. Changing her course she came to the Canary Islands. Her course had been ordered by the Admiralty but she had deviated from it when coal started to run out. The German ship, Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, had intercepted the radio messages and thus laid an ambush. The Galician was captured by the German cruiser, and ordered to follow her. German officers later boarded Galician and dismantled the radio equipment, confiscated her papers, inspected the cargo and mustered the passengers and crew.

Two army officers were taken aboard the German ship as POWs, but otherwise relations were said to be quite cordial and Captain Day presented the Germans with cigarettes and tobacco in appreciation.. The next day he received a message from the German commander saying 'On account of your women and children I will not sink the ship. You are released. Bon Voyage'. You can see contemporary film of the incident at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFnIGnM2SNc>

The Galician arrived in London on 25 August. Later in 1914 she was renamed Glenart Castle and in 1918 was torpedoed and sunk in the Bristol Channel whilst working as a hospital ship.

The Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse did not last long in the War and was hunted down and sunk at the Battle of Río de Oro, on 26 August 1914 by the Highflyer. An engagement which was announced in the Commons by Winston Churchill.

The connection to Leigh is that the Captain of the Galician, Edward Weatherstone Day who had worked for the Union Castle line for many years, lived, at the time of the event, in Leigh. Sadly he was not in Leigh for the 1911 census and in later life lived in Southampton.

As a sea captain we can surmise he lived close to the sea front – so does anyone know where?

Captain Day went on to have a very eventful career in the fleet. In 1922 he was the Captain of the SS Kinfauns Castle.

In September that year there was a considerable loss of life when the German steamer Hammonia foundered off Vigo, Spain. The Kinfauns Castle docked at Southampton carrying 283 passengers and crew from the Hammonia, with Captain Day estimating that about 80 lives had been lost, although others estimated up to 150.

The first 2 lifeboats launched by the Hammonia had capsized with the loss of approximately 50 Spanish nationals on their way to Cuba. The cause of the tragedy was considered by the captain of the Hammonia to be due to shipping water. The ship began to list and eventually sank. The Captain and 19 men who had remained on board abandoned ship just before she went down sending up a plume of water 100ft high.

Captain Day on the Kinfauns Castle launched 10 boats in a rescue operation but the sea was full of bodies and overturned rafts and lifeboats. It took 3 hours to save those they could and Captain Day said it had been a terrible experience and he was unable to sleep afterwards because of the recurring scenes of horror.

Captain Day retired in December 1922 just 3 months after the incident and died in 1930 aged 70. Sadly I could find no picture of him.

In 1918 he had been mentioned in the London Gazette as his name had been brought to the attention of the Secretary of State for War as one of those who had rendered valuable service on the occasion of the sinking or damage by enemy action of the Glenart Castle (the renamed Galician). On 1 March 1917 under Captain Day, the Glenart Castle was travelling from Le Havre to Southampton as a hospital ship when she struck a mine and had to be towed to Portsmouth for repairs.

FIND THE LADY

On 20 October 1910 off the Scilly Isles, the British steamer Kurdistan foundered. Amongst the 41 who lost their lives was one woman, the stewardess on board, Mrs Maud Hartles.

The ship had a crew of 43 of whom 17 were Arabic mostly employed as firemen.

There were 3 lady passengers on board, which no doubt necessitated the presence of a stewardess amongst a totally male crew.

The cause of the disaster was damage to the port side which took on water and coupled with high winds and seas caused the ship to list and capsize. In a report of the incident carried in the Chelmsford Chronicle it was stated that Mrs Hartles was the sister of Mrs E H Stevens of Napier Avenue, Southend and Mrs Osborn (sic) of the High Street, Leigh, in fact the report describes Mrs Hartles as a Leigh lady.

Mrs Stevens has been traced to be Fanny Gray who married Edwin Stevens in 1881 in Preston. The 1911 census reveals a large number of Osborne (all with the 'e') families living in the High Street.

Mrs Stevens had been born in Bognor (not yet Regis) in Sussex. But the ship's crew list said Maud was born in Swansea.

Can anyone shed any light on the Mrs Osborn(e) referred to or on Maud herself. Hartles is an unusual name and no marriage has been found to date.