

LEIGHWAY ISSUE 45 JANUARY 2015



'An eye to the future and an ear to the past in the heart of Leigh'

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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ARTICLES WANTED

The next edition of Leighway will be in April. If you would like to submit an article for the newsletter please email it to Carole by 15 March.

Well here we are again- another new year - how fast they go! 2014 was a great year for the Society. We had an incredibly successful Open Day at the Community Centre, outings to Portsmouth and Southwold organised by Ann, our hugely popular quiz by Sally and several very interesting talks. The programme for this year is now being planned and we hope will prove just as good.

We also carried out some major work to the Heritage Centre in terms of putting in a new boiler and radiators which we hope will reduce our heating bills. The boiler was over 30 years old so it was about time it went out to pasture. We also had the electricians checked out and replaced and started on a revamp of the displays - thanks to Sally, Jenny, Ed, Elaine and Carole for starting on this work and Jenny and Ed for their tremendous work on the archives. Our 2015 open day is planned for 18 July. We hope to have visiting societies as we did last year which proved very popular, and will have a focus

on further aspects of the Great War and World War II, this being the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, but also on other topics.

We will also have our annual quiz, and 'Wilton' lunch. So we hope to see you there and at our meetings and thank you for your support.

So—let's get the bad news out of the way first. Subs are due from members who do not pay by standing order (if you would like to do so in future please ask for a form when sending in your subs and we will send you one to set it up and running for 2016.

Subs remain the same at £10 per household (£15 for overseas members), and must be paid by the AGM on 22 April to avoid losing your membership.

To save postage we will not be chasing those who have overlooked their membership. So to ensure you get your Leighways and notice of events and give your support to the

work of the Society, don't miss out on the deadline date.

We have some interesting talks lined up for this year so please put the following dates in your diaries. Talks start at 7.30pm at Wesley Methodist Church.

25 March—Canon King's letters—Jenny & Ed Simpson— work of the shared learning project with the U3A

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

28 April - visit to Chiddingstone Castle & Aylesford Priory

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

18 July—Open Day

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

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

Other important local events —

6-13 June—Art Trail

18-21 June—Folk Festival

20 September—Regatta

Leigh Town Council events -

28 March—Spring Event

2 August — Leigh Maritime Festival

27 November—Leigh Lights

12 December—Carols on Strand Wharf

So plenty to see and do in Leigh

LET US EMAIL YOUR LEIGHWAY



Thank you so much to those of you who have agreed to receive their Leighway by email. This is saving us on paper and postage, money we can plough back into the work of the Society and Heritage Centre.

Getting Leighway by email means you can read it on line in colour and you don't have to print it off and can save it on your computer.

Please email: carole.mulroney@btinternet.com to get yourself added to the email list.

PHOTO CALLS

Has anyone got a photo of Saunders Motor-bike shop at the corner of Elm Road and Rectory Grove. An enthusiast who bought a bike there many years ago is keen to find a picture.

Does anyone have photos of Victoria avenue in Southend before the tower blocks were built. We are looking for the house of Louis Utton which was called Glemham.

email carole.mulroney@btinternet.com if you can help

AN ACTOR'S LIFE

You could be forgiven for missing this advert in the Southend and Westcliff Graphic in 1910 as it lurked at the foot of the page in every edition. But in one edition a whole half page was devoted to Mr Bigwood and his 81st birthday.

If you look closely you will see that Mr Bigwood is billed as 41 years at the Britannia Theatre, London. So who was he?

George Bigwood lived at Pier Hill and despite being 81 in 1910 he was recorded as being alert and vigorous and seeming to have captured the secret of eternal youth.

He first appeared on the London stage at the

Effingham Saloon in 1849 and at the Britannia in 1862. The Britannia is described as a huge place and held the same number of people as Drury Lane Theatre. It was frequented by the likes of Dickens and Shaw.

Over his 41 years at the theatre George not only took part in productions but also acted as stage manager. He once played the dwarf in Gulliver's Travels and in going to sleep and waking up as a giant with forest scenery around him he remarked "I'm Bigwood but this is a larger wood than I am"

George was an encyclopaedia of theatre lore and could talk for hours of actors and



playwrights including George Bernard Shaw, indeed Shaw devoted two pages of his "Dramatic Opinions" to George Bigwood.

The newspaper described him as the man who has provided innocent mirth to hundreds of thousands and in so doing conferring a public benefit.

Early on he had problems with alcohol, often missing shows or forgetting his lines due to being drunk. Sarah Lane, the theatre's manager, always protected him and at one point when he was sacked she had him

reinstated.

When he was fifty, he suffered a head injury and was told that it would be dangerous for him to continue drinking. He became teetotal and remained so for the rest of his life. When he eventually retired to Southend to run his tobacconists shop he was the longest surviving member of the Britannia company.

He died in 1915 aged 84.

So you never know who's behind the counter!

LEIGH LAUREATES

LEIGH AND ME

When the train pulls in, the commuters emerge
And shrug off the city's grime,
They breathe the fresh air with the tang of the salt
As they stride up the Belton climb.

The town of Leigh is a haven
For those who seek respite,
From the world of Banks and Finance,
It's a place of peace and light.

But sometimes the sea will darken
And the clouds turn grey and low
And the waves will lash in fury,
As the north winds fiercely blow.

But often it is different,
When the water's flat and calm,
As the white sails cross the horizon
They soothe like a healing balm.

For Leigh is a place of contrasts,
Where the swell may be smooth or strong,
When the crashing waves pound up the shore,
As the boats are swept along.

So for me, the area's beauty
Is the changing scene of the sea,
When the Brent geese arrive in October,
It's a magical place to be.

Norman Sutcliffe

LIFE IN LEIGH

Set by the Thames where children play
and trippers spree their precious day
With cockle sheds and prawns for tea
While dinghies sail the sheltered lee
Old cottages of 'memory Lane'
And pubs to quench nostalgia's pain
Tide varying vistas greet the eye
And marshland hides wild nature's cry
Sprawling cliffs which gently hallow
Greater Stitchwort, Vetch and Mallow
Strolling Marine Parade above
Relax on seats bequeathed by love
Regatta sails great joys unfurled
While music charms the social whirl
Belfair's kind trees nurse poison's stealth
Healing the air with scented health
The leafy lanes of Leigh-on-Sea
Retirement dream for you and me
Visit this town with time to spare
For here you still can stand and stare.

Rev John Ambrose

These two lovely poems were entries in the Town Council's Community Centre Centenary competition 'Leigh and Me'. Norman Sutcliffe's was the winning entry

A FRIEND IN LEIGH IS A FRIEND INDEED

Joseph Beresford Shields

1879-1917

From some papers found in a Deed Box from Meek, Stubbs & Barnley, solicitors, of Middlesbrough came a small envelope containing a letter from Joe Shields to his mother, his birth certificate and a letter from his mother to a Mrs (or Miss) Wilson, his friend.

Joe's letter is dated 17 August 1916 and is sent from B Company, 9th Bedfordshire Regiment, stationed at Sittingbourne, and it's about the food he is looking forward to enjoying on a short leave.

His mother was Emily Julia Shields, née Mullen, and Joe was born in Stockton.

In July 1918 Mrs Shields wrote to a Mrs (or Miss, the title is altered in pencil) Wilson at Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. The letter was forwarded to the Victoria Naval Hospital, Southend.

Joe had been reported missing, although his mother was still hoping for good news. Her letter shows no address but one has been written in pencil on the reverse.

Sadly, there was to be no good news. Joseph was killed in action on 24 May 1918; his grave is at Pozieres Memorial Cemetery.

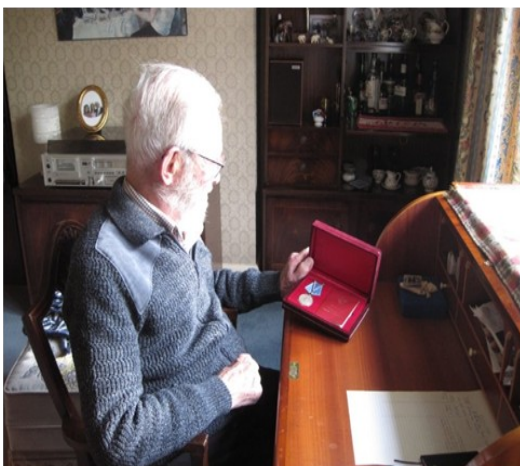
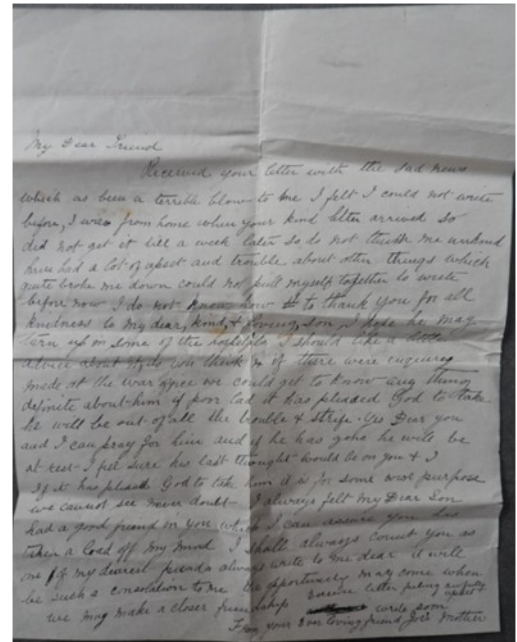
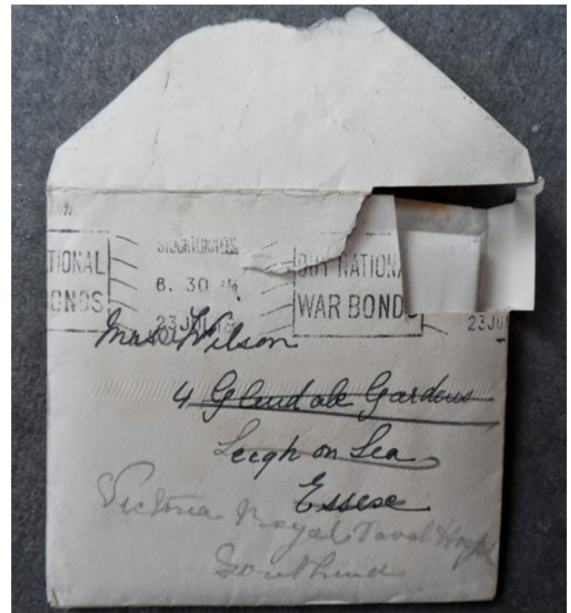
It seems likely that the Mrs or Miss Wilson to whom Mrs Shields wrote her touching letter is the Miss Elizabeth Ann Wilson named as an executor of his Will. She kept the boarding house in which he lived in Leigh.

His last address as a civilian (and the address given in the National Probate Calendar) was 19 Southsea Avenue where he was living at the time of the 1911 Census, which shows that the boardinghouse keeper was Mrs Elizabeth Ann Wilson, aged 46 and born in Boosbeck, Cleveland, and that Joseph was then 31 years old, unmarried and a draughtsman at the Marine Engine Works.

So it seems probable that Mrs Shields is addressing this Elizabeth Ann Wilson when she wrote

'I always felt my Dear Son had a good friend in you which I can assure you has taken a load off my mind. I shall always count you as one of my dearest friends always

This story and letters are reproduced by kind permission of Alice Barrigan, North Yorkshire History



A WELL DESERVED MEDAL

In October my husband Barrie received a letter from the Russian Embassy inviting him to a ceremony where he would be awarded the Ushakov Medal, a medal given by the Russians to those who took part in the convoys which took supplies to Russia in 1942/3 'the worse journey in the World' as described by Winston Churchill.

Barrie felt unable to make the journey so I went to receive the medal on his behalf.

The ceremony was very impressive and the veterans were treated with the greatest respect and consideration. After the presentation official photographs were taken and refreshments were provided. I will long remember drinking vodka in the Russian Embassy!

Barrie was impressed with the medal and particularly delighted with the letter of thanks, written on behalf of the Russian people, that accompanied it.

Ann Price—Chairman, Leigh Society

INTERNMENT IN LEIGH

On 29 January 2015 the Newcastle Journal reported that the distinguished lawn tennis player, Oscar Kreuzer, who in the previous July had played in America for his native Germany in the Davis Cup, had been interned at Leigh-on-Sea, where along with other prisoners he was working on a transport. There were three ships off Leigh where the internees were held.

The paper says he was on his way back to Germany to enlist when he was captured by a British ship on the high seas.

Oscar Kreuzer played at the 1908 Summer Olympics and at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm where he won a bronze medal in the men's singles tournament. In 1912, he also reached the final at the World Hard Court Championships at Paris which he lost to his compatriot Otto Froitzheim. At Wimbledon he reached his best result in 1913 where he advanced to the semi-finals before being stopped by Stanley Doubt. Besides tennis, Kreuzer also excelled at rugby. He won the German championships with his club SC 1880 Frankfurt in 1910, and played several times for Germany.

At the end of July 1914, he and Otto Froitzheim played the semifinal of the International Lawn Tennis Challenge at Pittsburgh against Australasia. When war broke out, the president of the local tennis club kept this from Froitzheim and Kreuzer as he didn't want to disrupt the match. The German team lost 0-5.

On their way back to Germany, their Italian steamboat *America* was halted off Gibraltar by a British warship and they were placed in a prison in Gibraltar for several months before being sent to detention camps in England. After he retired from playing tennis Kreuzer settled at Wiesbaden, near his friend Froitzheim. He died there on 3 May 1968.



FOUND - THE LADY

Further research into a recent article led to a photo of Mrs Hartle who was lost on 20 October 1910 off the Scilly Isles when the British steamer *Kurdistan* foundered.



MRS. HARTLE,
of Leigh, the stewardess of the foundered vessel, "Kurdistan," which sank off the Scillies on October 20. No news of Mrs. Hartle had been received at the time of going to press.

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. Mrs Osborne was Lilian, the wife of Daniel Osborne of 50 High Street, Leigh.

Maud's son Reginald Hartles was living with his Aunt Lilian's family in 1911. He had been born in Bombay.

YOU'VE GOT TO PICK A POCKET OR TWO

In March 1908 consternation raged at the Crooked Billet one Thursday evening. It wasn't that the beer barrels had run dry, or that the supply of Johnny Dewar was exhausted; such catastrophes as these never happen at a well ordered public house.

A cricket supper had been partaken of, and highly enjoyed, and songs and smoke were in full swing when one of the guests—a prominent public man—suddenly discovered that his gold presentation watch and chain were missing.

What had become of it? Lost, stolen or strayed? That was the query and everybody looked at his neighbor for a solution to the puzzle.

The owner was naturally angry at losing possession of a valuable article, and his friends sympathized with him in his misadventure. For a few moments, as before said, consternation reigned.

But all's well that ends well. The watch and chain was discovered attached to the coat of another guest. The whole incident was the outcome of a desire for a bit of fun, and the curiosity of what was possible to be done by an amateur imitator of Fagin.



THEY'RE MADE OF STERN STUFF THE EIGHTY CLUB

Over 100 years ago in Leigh there was a thriving and very robust over 80s club.

One of its members was John Hayward, who at 87 issued a challenge to other Club members to join 'a brother teetotal member in a refreshing dip in the sea during the months of December and January.' John says he had bathed in the sea in Christmas Day, for 50 years.

John's view was that 'people belong too much nowadays to the noble order of lie abeds.'

He said 'the worst bathe I've had! It was some years back—I was only about 80 at the time—down at Eastbourne, with the temperature 14 degrees below freezing. There were long icicles on the iron ladder at the end of the pier, down which I went to let the big rollers sweep over me. I recollect how I had to cling on for dear life. I find it does me a deal of good, this bathing regularly in the sea during winter'.

John was a solicitor by profession and his maxim for a long life, health and happiness was 'Read the Bible, cheat the lawyers; drink water only, so cheat the doctor'. Goodly living and temperance were the royal roads to a hearty age.

John was the founder of the Leigh Eighty Club which had a membership of over forty octogenarians, with a few junior members of 75.

This picture of John was taken in December 1908.



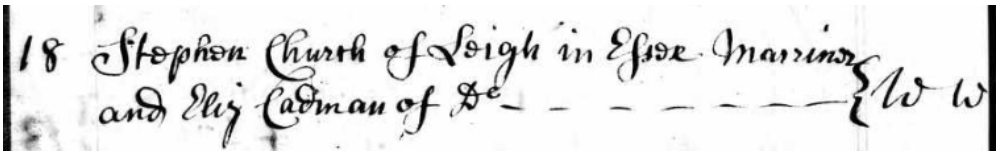
There is still an unofficial Eighty Club who can be seen on Joscelyne's Beach from time to time.

JUMPING THE SHOTGUN?

On the 18 March 1736 Stephen Church of Leigh married Elizabeth Cadman, also of Leigh. Nothing remarkable in that except that Stephen's still living wife, Mary, did not die until after this date and was buried in Leigh on 27 April 1736.

So how did he get away with it? Well Stephen and Elizabeth took part in what is known as a clandestine marriage in London. The wedding took place in the Fleet Prison. The requirements were loose to say the least. Grooms could be as young as 14 and brides 12. The bride and groom needed only to give their consent to the union for it to be recognized. Clergy and witnesses were not necessary, though they were often present to provide proof that the marriage had taken place.

Prisons like the Fleet and the King's Bench were popular for couples interested in quick, no-questions-asked nuptials because of the number of clerics imprisoned for debt who had nothing to lose and welcomed the income. Edward Ashwell was the officiating minister, who is described in the records as a 'thorough rogue and vagabond'. So was the marriage legal in any event?



There was only one Cadman family in Leigh at the time but they are confusing. Joseph Cadman married Sarah Hewitt in 1697 and had at least 6 children, 5 dying in infancy. Sarah died in 1710 and then Joseph married Elizabeth Cottis in Eastwood and from 1711 onwards had a further 5 children, 3 dying in infancy. Elizabeth died in 1720 but lo and behold a Joseph and Elizabeth Cadman are having children from 1721 to 1735, 7 of which die. So did he marry three times? Or is this the marriage of Joseph, the surviving child of the first marriage who married yet another Elizabeth?

From Joseph's 2 known marriages there were several Elizabeths but all appear to have died young. Looks like a more detailed search is needed.

For decency's sake you would expect Elizabeth Cadman to have been of age when she married Stephen Church, but we can't be sure. If she is the granddaughter and not the daughter of the first Joseph Cadman she could have been very young.

The joys of family history research—and it looks so simple on the telly!

ROLAND QUIZ

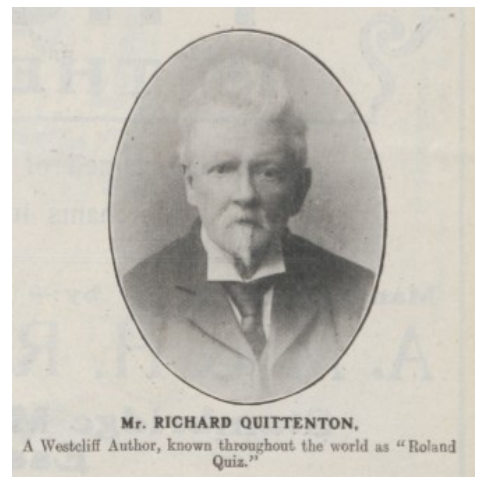
There is no reason why you should have heard this name—it was a pseudonym after all.

It was the penname of one Richard Quittenton, an author of some note in the late Victorian/early part of the 20th century period.

Richard Quittenton was born in 1833 in Lancaster and in 1907 was living in Westcliff although he had previously lived in Thundersley and died in South Benfleet.

He was a children's author who wrote the Tim Pippin stories for Our Young Folks Weekly Budget, which began publication in 1870 and changed its title to Young Folks. He became the joint editor, writing humorous sketches, rhymes and stories for children, as well as "blood and thunder" adventures for older readers.

Tim Pippin novels, first published in 1874, continued to be reprinted until the end of the Second World War, after which they vanished.



Quittenton was a journalist and editor of the Weekly Budget for 42 years.

During his lifetime he had been a friend of Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson and had travelled extensively but when at home he lived mainly in the South Benfleet and Southend area. He died in 1914 and is buried in Sutton Road Cemetery.

He was twice married and had 21 children in all.

THE VOYAGE OF THE SHAMROCK AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF CAPT. T B GREENHALGH OF LEIGH

Captain T.B. (Thomas Beddoes) Greenhalgh was born in West Ham but his family moved to Leigh at the turn of the 20th century. His father, James Richard Greenhalgh, was a founder member of Leigh Sailing Club and Rear Commodore of the Club and, indeed, designed the Club's emblem.



Thomas joined the Merchant Navy at 15 and was away for many years but always regarded Leigh as his home and his children were born here.

As well as being a serving member of the Merchant Navy for many years he also wrote a book about his adventures as an apprentice on tall ships which was published in 2012 on Kindle by his grandson, Peter, who has kindly given much information for this article. You can see details of the book, entitled 'Sons of Gentlemen', from www.nanuq.tv.

One of his most adventurous exploits was as chief officer of the yacht Shamrock IV, owned by Sir Thomas Lipton, which had taken part in the America's Cup. Shortly thereafter Thomas and three men from the Sailing Club were dispatched to New York to bring the yacht back to Leigh and it is here where the adventure begins.

When the Leigh men got to New York and saw the yacht they didn't see her as a comfortable way of crossing the ocean. They didn't like her rig and they thought she was too 'yachty' to face the sort of Atlantic gales which even the great liners had difficulty with.

24 hours after leaving the yacht anchorage of City Island, the Shamrock was driving helplessly through the night pursued by a north Atlantic gale. Great hissing seas invaded her deck, threatening to whisk her crew into eternity and making work in the terror ridden darkness all but impossible. Her mainsail dragged upside, neglected by the small crew as they strove desperately to hack away the wreckage of the smashed mizzen mast which trailed astern and threatened every moment to drive a hole through the hull and end forever the famous yacht's career.

She rolled her way across the Atlantic in sickening jerks every minute of the month long journey, until the crew felt that their bones would never cease again to ache. She had snapped backstays and threatened to send her hundred feet of mainmast and topmast after the mizzen. She had threatened to roll the 75t of lead off her keel and became caught in a southwest gale.

The Shamrock did her gallant best to climb the mountainous sea but it tore five men from her deck clinging by fingers only to the flimsy guard rail. Through the foam which enveloped them they saw only a gleam of green – the green paint of Shamrock's topsides. Their feet strove in vain for foothold where there was nothing but the yacht's smooth side. Hope ebbed as their fingers were forced open with the weight of their dragging bodies. Another moment and they felt that they would be gone. Then miraculously the yacht lurched suddenly to windward, and they were washed on board again, back to life.

Mr Ernest G Moore, Commodore of the Sailing Club never forgot those few moments or that voyage. Nor would his adventurous shipmates Messrs Smart and Topley of the Leigh Sailing Club and those who know the story of Shamrock's Atlantic ordeal would regard her not so much as a visitor, but as belonging in some way to the men of the Estuary.

In 1937 as skipper of a tanker, the Stanbridge, Greenhalgh docked at Falmouth and told how his crew had a remarkable escape when they were bombed at Gijon. He said "the crew had to make a run for it when the bombs were falling. The people of Spain believed that the bombing machines were Italian and German but I could not tell"

The Stanbridge was attacked while she was discharging a cargo of oil and just escaped being blown to pieces when a bomb fell into an empty tank. One bomb fell between the side of the ship and the wharf leaving a large hole in the hull with the result that the oil was lost. The Stanbridge was also carrying several hundred refugees mostly women and children who Capt Greenhalgh described as very courageous, but very sorrowful.

Capt Greenhalgh was called up as a Lt Cmdr of the Royal Navy Reserve in 1940 and posted to New Haven as deputy transport officer.

After the war, in 1946 he was master of the Empire Tescombe when she went to the aid of a tug in dire trouble near Pulo Tenggol, an island in the South China Sea. The radio officer handed Capt Greenhalgh a message received from an aircraft. It was informing all ships in the vicinity that a tug, the Nankai, was lying at anchor close to the coast with broken engines, leaking and listing heavily to starboard. It wasn't a distress signal but she was only 24 miles away so Capt Greenhalgh went to her rescue (the thought of salvage on all minds).

He first offered help which was refused but he got closer to the tug and using a megaphone asked again if they needed assistance and faintly above the sound of the wind the answer came back 'Yes'. After a tricky manoeuvre of the lifeboat he got onboard taking "a flying leap". The tug was in a dangerous state. He found the master, a young Englishman, shook hands and was told that the cargo was 200t of sugar bound for Bangkok.

The decision was taken to tow the tug in, Capt Greenhalgh having obtained signature to the Lloyd's Salvage Agreement. But the drama didn't stop there. About midnight the mate and the captain were congratulating themselves on the comparative ease with which the job had been done when the tug suddenly took a sheer, and ranging forward came parallel to, and almost neck and neck with the ship. The clanger of the two vessels coming together with a crash was becoming imminent when the Captain heard a dull report from aft at which he stopped the engines. A flashing light from the tug told Greenhalgh that the tug's steam steering gear had broken down. After another difficult set of manoeuvres during which time the monsoon increased and high seas were running Capt Greenhalgh ran clear of the tug's bow and put the engines full astern. The remaining voyage was difficult but there were no more incidents and they reached Singapore 29 hours later. When the salvage award was distributed it amounted to £4000 (worth about £350,000 now based on average earnings). Given that the average house price at the time in the UK was £1400 – quite a haul.

With grateful thanks to Peter Greenhalgh



Thomas Greenhalgh as first mate of the barque Gwydyr Castle in 1915

Thomas' father James Richard was a shorthand writer from Lancashire when he married Mary Ann Ward in East Ham in 1891. Within 10 years he was managing director of his own printing company and the family were living in Camberwell.

By 1911 they were living at Cliff Parade, Leigh. Thomas was not at home, having already joined the Merchant Navy. His father had remarried, presumably after the death of Thomas' mother.

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR TWO

Kicking of the year of the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, Jenny and Ed Simpson relate a local story.

Recently we were very pleased to receive, for the Heritage Centre archives, the memories of Beryl Dempsey whose grandfathers were Thomas Ritchie and Frederick "Tate" Cotgrove, both Leigh fishermen. Frederick was in a boat blown up in the Ray in 1941 by a German landmine and Beryl enclosed a copy of the newspaper cutting describing this sad event.

He was not in his own boat that day and when Terry Cotgrove came into the Heritage Centre he identified Frederick's own boat in a photo we have on display of the 1912 Regatta. The boat was called "Honour" and was registered as LO12. She was used for shrimping in the summer and whitebait fishing in the winter.

Beryl also described her experiences as a child in WW2 and says

"My brother and I sometimes watched the searchlights raking the sky for the German bombers, following the river up to London. If they found one the guns of Shoebury Garrison tried to bring them down, they succeeded sometimes. I believe there is a part of Sutton Road Cemetery where aircrew are buried that were washed up on the beach."

This led us to make a visit to Sutton Road Cemetery where we discovered that the remains of several German airmen had been removed in the early 1960s to Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery in Staffordshire.

Jennifer and Ed Simpson

If you have a story of WW2 please get in touch with Carole

BATTELLING ON

The travels and adventures of Leigh Mariner Andrew Battell, as told to the geographer the Rev. Samuel Purchas around about 1610, have been the subject of articles in the Leighway already. Very little is known of Battell in Leigh but while in the Forum Library I was leafing through the "Calendar of Assize Records James I" and on page 777 came across the following tragedy:

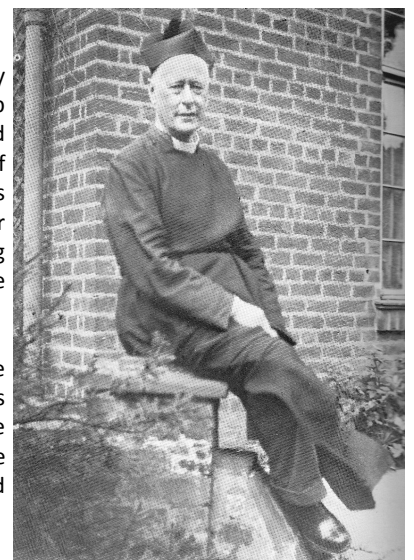
Inquisition held at South Shoebury on 18th of Feb 1612 before John Nashe coroner on the body of Hester Golding aged 9 years. A jury of 16 men found that on the 4th of February Richard Wilson, mariner, and Andrew Battell of Leigh went to South Shoebury and entered the close of Samuel Freind, not knowing that Hester was hidden in a dense thicket of furze in the close. Wilson fired his gun at a rabbit which bounded up and ran through the thicket, and by misfortune some of the shot struck Hester in the stomach inflicting a wound from which she died on 6th of February.

Ed Simpson 2015

CANON KING

Our first talk on 25 March will be by Jenny Simpson and her U3A group who have been transcribing and cataloguing the correspondence of Canon King, donated to us by his descendents. The fruits of their work will make for an interesting talk of local Leigh life in the late 19th century.

The Society is very grateful to the U3A team for all their work on this project and the talk promises to be very interesting and informative with many local names mentioned and some interesting local tidbits.



BOWERS MARSH

Just off the A13, before you get to Pitsea and Wat Tyler Park, is the relatively undiscovered jewel that is Bowers Marsh nature reserve.

Managed by RSPB this newly-created site and working farm is located off the B1454 in a neglected part of the Essex landscape. It lies in that non-descript area of land that abuts the river and lies south of the railway line and the A13. The 280 hectare site has all the characteristics of the reserves in this part of the country: flat open farmland, wetland marshes flecked with reed beds, gaping Essex skies and the ubiquitous land fill site. Fences, hedgerows of blackthorn and hawthorn and gravel pathways lead the walker around the reserve and there is a 5km circular trail for those who want some exercise. At a cost of several million pounds there is now a reservoir controlled by wind pumps and a saline lagoon with tidal exchanges. The reserve shows great potential and is already a hit with birdwatchers and most importantly, the birds themselves. One point to note is that it doesn't welcome dog walkers which, depending on your viewpoint, is either a good thing or a bad thing.

The ultimate aim, I understand is to link up the reserve to Wat Tyler Park, thereby creating a green corridor. A map has been produced for the first timer but has limited value because it shows the presence of bird hides which don't exist, points north, whereas the orientation on setting out is south, and has one of the ponds in the wrong place!

My main reason for going was to find avocets. In the past few years they have had an unhappy time of it on Two Tree Island. Breeding has been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons: predation, bad weather, flooding of their nesting areas, rampant dogs but most of all an influx of black headed gulls that have aggressively staked out their territory. All these factors have conspired against the avocets: I was looking for some good news.

And there they were, about sixty of them (I'm not sure what the collective noun is; a monochrome of avocets? a chequered flag??) lying on a sandy island in the centre of the lake. They are essentially a white bird with black trimmings but their porcelain white body and skittish nature makes them appear fragile whereas the opposite is the case. They will robustly protect their nests and drive off much larger birds but they do need to get established in the first place and here were some promising signs; some were feeding, raking their curved beaks across the shallows while others were roosting and possibly preparing to nest.



I left the lagoon with a spring in my step and made my way out along a corridor of reed beds. Suddenly a flicker of feathers revealed a chubby little bird perched on a fence post. This LBJ (little brown job) with its pink legs and a pale yellow beak was quickly identified as a corn bunting and it wasn't long before it broke into song, a series of slightly scratchy notes described by one birder as 'like jangling keys' This aria served as a useful counterpoint to its rival further along the fence and soon two others joined in the chorus, bringing their unique birdsong to the countryside of Essex.

The park is free to enter and the car park is open every day from 9-5. The single lane track leading down to the reserve is heavily potholed but keep going under the railway bridge until you reach the car park. The park now forms a section of the newly-created Thames Estuary Path, which snakes its way merrily from Tilbury Town to Leigh-on-Sea so I can only see it becoming more popular.

Clive Webster

CAROL EDWARDS

Many people will know Carol Edwards from her books about Leigh. She is also a valued helper at the Heritage Centre.

Carol has been very ill of late and we send her all good wishes for a speedy recovery.

ANN HERRTAGE

We are very sad to report the sudden passing in December of Ann Herrtage a much valued helper in the Heritage Centre and a lovely lady.

Our sincere condolences to her family at this sad time.

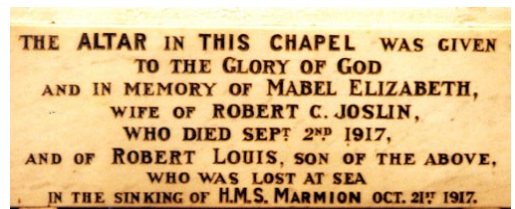
NOT A LEIGH JOSCELYNE

This distinctive plaque can be found in St Clement's Church.

Joscelyne spelt thus, is a well known name in Leigh, but you will see this is a different spelling, Joslin. They are not related.

This family came from London and lived in Dundonald Drive. Robert senior was a paper sensitizer!!

Young Robert Louis was a stoker, 1st Class on HMS Marmion and drowned when the Marmion was in collision with another destroyer, the Tirade, off Lerwick.



His mother had died just 3 weeks before.

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.

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