

**LEIGHWAY
ISSUE 47
AUTUMN
2015**



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DIARY DATES

18 October—Wilton lunch
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 —**
20 September—Regatta
27 November—Leigh Lights
12 December—Carols on
 Strand Wharf

OPEN DAY 2015—OH WHAT A DAY

This year's open day on 18 July was another resounding success for the Society. Several hundred people piled in to the community centre to view the variety of exhibits and talk to the local organisations who took part. A lot of old friends met up over a coffee in the cafe and people brought in their photos and information for the archives. The talks were extremely interesting and very well attended—it just grows year on year. Thanks to everyone who took part or attended. See pics on page 5

BRENDA CARTWRIGHT AND RUBY FROST

In the last month or so we have lost 2 very dear and longstanding members of the Society.

Brenda Cartwright, born locally in Westcliff, was a fount of knowledge about the Estuary and its shipping. Living in Sans Souci in Hadleigh Road, she had a bird's eye view of the river and its traffic which she watched avidly through her strategically placed telescope. Brenda was a teacher and helped Leighway and the Society immensely with her in depth information about local schools, public and private. She was a member of Wesley Church and was heavily involved in its Drama Group. A very cheery lady, always willing to share her knowledge and enthusiasm for her local area.

Ruby Frost was one of the first members of the Society back in the 1970s. Ruby always maintained a keen interest and support for the work of the Society amongst her many other interests and her Bridge playing. She was an avid computer user, playing Bridge online with opponents from around the world into her 90s. She was also on the Town Council's Community Transport Committee helping to select events and trips for elderly and disabled residents. Ruby also helped with information for our Great War Open Day with her family stories and pictures.

We will miss them both and send our condolences to their families.

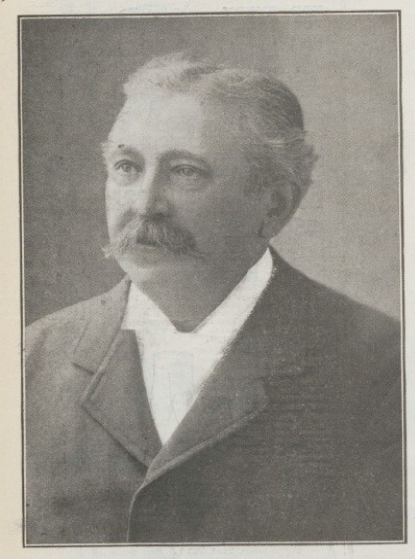
WILTON LUNCH

This year's Wilton lunch will be on Sunday, 18 October. Tickets which cost £18.50 are on a first come first served basis and can be obtained from Pat Gaskell 01702 473573.

LEIGHLIVES

Take a look at Carole's new website, leighlives.co.uk, which is dedicated to the history of the people and places of Leigh. There are some interesting articles on there already and Carole is hoping people will get in touch with information and stories about our Leigh heritage. Please send any entries to leighlives@btinternet.com

THE ENTREPRENEUR OF LAPWATER HALL ALEXANDER U HIGGINS



Alexander U Higgins was born in 1840 in Butleigh, near Glastonbury in Somerset. His father, also Alexander, was a master carpenter of some standing and employed 20 men in 1851. The U stood for Underwood—his mother's maiden name. Alexander went to the National School in Butleigh and by 1861 he too had taken up the carpentry trade. The Higgins family was a prominent one in Butleigh and by 1871 Alexander's father had become a landowning farmer of 86 acres in the village.

Alexander junior came to South Weald in Essex with his wife of 2 years, the former Rosalie Angier Moffatt. His skills had progressed and he was now a qualified surveyor. His work obviously took him around the country and away from home for in 1881 he is lodging in West Down in Devon and his career had blossomed as he is now an Architect and Surveyor. Rosalie, and their growing family, was at home in New Malden in Surrey.

Ten years on in 1891 the family is living in Westerham in Kent where the development of Westerham Hill Estate absorbed his attention. The extent of the undertaking may be gauged by the fact that something like half a million shrubs were planted in the laying-out of the various sites. The operations included the sinking of a well which subsequently furnished a supply for the whole district.

In Maidenhead, Alexander was responsible for the development of a large estate. At first he thought of the idea of the development of estates in connection with Jesse Collins' "three acres and a cow." (Jesse Collins was an MP and Mayor of Birmingham who was a great Victorian advocate of land reform). Alexander actually offered "three acres and a cow" for £100, finding plenty of customers, but the animals caused so much bother that he dropped that portion of the bargain and turned to land alone.

Lapwater Hall was originally an old farmhouse and when Alexander took possession in 1890 he effected a wonderful transformation, for, while retaining the beautiful old orchards, he extended the boundaries by converting the farmyard and a large area of meadow land into a perfect picture of rural beauty. The local paper said that the result was 'one of the most picturesque gardens one could wish to see', with orchards and tennis courts, long archways of roses (in the summer a perfect mass of bloom), winding walks and walls covered with apricots, peaches and plums.'

Leigh Park Estate, of which Lapwater Hall was a part (the house facing the road from Leigh to Hadleigh, which formed its northern boundary), comprised 190 acres. Alexander considered its situation to be ideal, with the sea frontage about a mile in extent, and the view of great beauty, embracing the broad sweep of the Thames Estuary, with Southend's giant pier to the east and, beyond, the boundless ocean, the long line of Kent hills, and the mouth of the Medway to the south, and Canvey Island stretched out like a map to the west. The southern boundary of the Estate, was a winding lane running along the top of the cliffs. which the public had a right of way over. It was Alexander's intention to lay out the space between the lane and the Marine Parade, for a distance sufficient for the purpose, for gardens, with a bandstand and tennis-courts, for the use of the occupants of the houses on the estate.

To give the houses an individual touch Alexander designed them and for a rental of £40 a year, the occupant had a detached house standing in good grounds with four bedrooms and two sitting-rooms, a kitchen, scullery, larder and offices and a large garden. By the following year Alexander was still in Leigh living in Ye Old Barn on the London Road but things were not going well. The Essex County Chronicle in October that year reported that he was insolvent and had failed to appear at a bankruptcy hearing. At some time between 1910 and 1916 Alexander and Rosalie went to live in South Africa which is where he died in 1916 and she in 1931.

Whatever his personal difficulties Alexander did indeed shape the western end of Leigh with his development and entrepreneurial spirit.

GREAT WAR - DOVER PATROL

At the outbreak of war the Dover Flotilla formed part of the East Coast Command, with Harwich as headquarters. Its chief function was to prevent German ships breaking through and passing down Channel. It soon became apparent that Dover and the Narrows of the Channel were destined to become of greater importance. The Dover area was, therefore, made a separate command.

On the night of 14th/15th February 1918 seven German destroyers in two groups attacked the anti-submarine net barrier. They achieved surprise, first damaging the paddle minesweeper HMS Newbury. HMS Amazon sighted the German ships, but uncertain of their identity, held fire. At 01.00 the first group of German ships opened fire on the drifter fleet attending the barrier, and the second group arrived some 20 minutes later. One trawler and seven drifters were sunk by gunfire, and six damaged, before the raiders escaped undamaged.

The evidence given afterwards by the few men who escaped amounted only to broken, disjointed stories of a sudden outburst of fire, the hurricane of shells, the havoc in their ships, and the small number who got off in the boats and rowed away from the blazing wreckage.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes said:-"The activities of the Dover Patrol were immense, and Admiral Bacon had built up an enormous organisation which carried out its daily duties with great regularity and efficiency ... The vessels of the patrol numbered over 300, including large and small monitors, the light cruiser "Attentive", Flotilla leaders, destroyers, P-boats, trawlers, drifters, mine sweepers of various types, MLs, CMBs, and submarines.

Joseph Conrad wrote, "that which in the instance kept the German forces from breaking disastrously on any dark night into the Channel and jeopardising the very foundations of our resisting power, were not the wonderfully planned and executed defences of nets and mines, but the inimitable hearts of the men of the Dover Patrol"



Thomas Meddle, a 34 year old cockler of Leigh, was a deck hand on HMPS (Her Majesty's Paddle Ship) Newbury on that fatal night, he was lost and left a wife and three very small children. He is remembered at Chatham Naval Memorial and in New Road Chapel.

With grateful thanks to Mr Thomas Meddle, son of the above, who was able to give information on his father's career, although sadly he never knew him.

THE BELLE OF THE BELL



This lovely picture has been in the Leigh Society archives for many years without research into who this lady was. On the back someone has written 'Bowen, The Bell Hotel, Leigh 18/3/97'.

From the early 1890s until at least 1933 the landlord of the Bell was one George Bowen. George was born in Stock in 1863, the son of a Farm Bailiff. The family soon moved to Rayleigh. By 1911 George had been married for 28 years to Louisa Brown, 5 years his senior from Hawkwell. They had had 6 children but only 4 survived.

Although the lady in the picture is not wearing a wedding ring, if the date on the back is correct then it cannot be one of their daughters as they would not have been old enough. Louisa would have been 39 in 1897 - does this lady look that old? Though elegant her face is sad and she is dressed in black - is she in mourning? It could also be George's sister, Ellen, who had married into the local Turnridge family in 1881. She would have been 36 in 1897.

Louisa Bowen died in 1931 and George in 1938— was he the last landlord of the Bell? We will probably never know her name - but what a Belle she was!





DUNKIRK - THE VIEW FROM THE BEACH

During 8/9 May 1940 the German Army, instead of breaking through the Maginot Line in France as expected, out-flanked, the French and came round the back of the Line through Belgium, and my Battalion was sent up to meet the German advance on 10 May. This was to no avail as we did not possess the real fire power to halt the advance for any length of time. For 3 weeks we retreated using delaying tactics, making a last stand then the order came through for all vehicles to be dismantled and made useless to the enemy and to discard all our personal kit. Having carried out this order we took refuge in the forest at Montequé.

As was the usual practice at 4am German spotter planes were sent out to pin-point our positions and we found ourselves under artillery bombardment followed by air attack. Our situation was becoming rather desperate when at about 11am orders were given "Every man for himself". As an N.C.O. I had to lead 10 men to Dunkirk. The directions were "follow the crowd".

After what seemed to be a long trek we met up with some 200 men of the Battalion led by a Major Marks who formed us into 3 ranks, thus marching towards Dunkirk in an orderly manner. After some time we reached a place called Poperinge which meant, we were given to understand, that we were very near Dunkirk. We crossed a bridge in a hurry as we had been told it was being blown up, subsequently learning that it was the last bridge to cross before reaching Dunkirk. It was not long before we found ourselves in Dunkirk in the middle of an air raid. I took shelter in a doorway with a chap named Sid Stanborough. When we looked up, to our surprise we found no roof over us so we scampered to find other shelter but there was no other for safety. Just before the raid finished we were pestered by French soldiers asking for '303' ammunition for use as small-arms fire against the German aircraft. We were unable to help as both of us only had revolvers. Our only possessions were the clothes we stood up in, our steel helmets, gas mask, gas capes and well-worn boots.

Having got down to the beach, we found a dugout built in concrete. We thought we would use it as a shelter but on entering we found it to contain the body of a dead French soldier. On coming away from the dugout we met a N.A.A.F.I. van from which we received 200 cigarettes and a tin of corned beef each. If one wanted to learn what discipline was all about, it was very formative to the Guards on the beach polishing their equipment and boots as if they were going on parade. Sid and I wondered how it was the Guards had managed to keep all their equipment and arms whereas we had lost all of ours on orders.

Next morning and poking our heads out of the trench we could not see a soul. PANIC! However, quite suddenly heads were popping out all over the beach, which quelled our fear. Then the troops in a very orderly fashion began forming columns as the little boats had been sighted coming towards the shore. GREAT RELIEF! Tragically a number of men drowned wading out of their depth to reach the boats and by mid-morning wading was stopped. All columns were then split into parties of 50 with one officer in charge. Each party was given a serial number, ours being "53". It was whilst we were waiting our turn to be called to embark, which we had been told would be when darkness fell, that we were subjected to another German raid of bombing and strafing. One of the chaps in our party asked the officer in charge "Should we take cover, sir?" "Certainly not" he replied 'They are bad shots in any case.' At this stage the Royal Navy appeared and formed a semi circle round our beach and opened up with their big guns. For the first time I saw the German Air Force disengage very quickly and leave us alone.

Nightfall came and we were warned to get ready to move at the double long the pier to the boats tied up there. A shell had fallen in the middle of party numbered "50", the Germans having found our range. As soon as Sid and I had embarked on a "ship" - not a "boat" - we found a bunk down below which we shared. We fell asleep exhausted after our experiences getting to Dunkirk and being on the beach for a day and a half. We landed at Folkestone at 7 o'clock on the morning of 1 June 1940. After being put aboard a train we were greeted by the Salvation Army with a mug of tea and a bun and the train took us down to Paignton. After his we went on to Oxford where fresh uniforms were issued. I took size 4 but was issued with size 14. WHAT A SIGHT! On top of this my boots had no heels having completely worn away.

All of us owe a great debt to the fishermen of Leigh and Southend with their small boats and the Navy, who through their courage brought out and saved some 338,000 men of the BEF and the French army. We must never forget those who gave their lives bringing us off the beaches in order that we could fight another day.

The late OSWALD J. W. GRAY

OPEN DAY PICS

We were so busy on the day we couldn't take time out to view snap the crowds—these are the calm before the storm



MR BRAY THE BOOT REPAIRER

This delightful picture has been donated by the former Susan Williams who is the child in the picture which was taken in about 1962/3 outside the Crooked Billet.

The Bray family had been boot repairers in Leigh High Street for many decades and in 1933 Alfred Bray, nickname Bully, had his business at 68 High Street. His brother Frederick was a pastry cook at 15 High Street. Alfred died in 1944 aged 50 so this can't be him in the picture. His older brother Arthur had also been a boot mender, but he had moved away to Redcar.

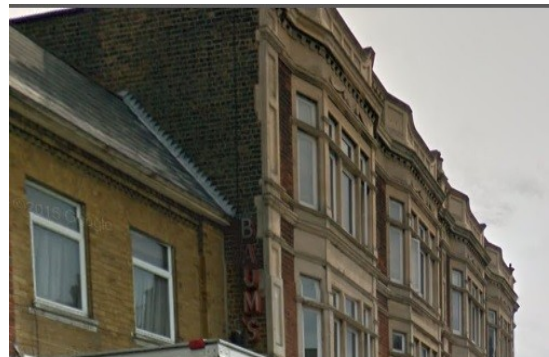


A LITTLE BIT OF LEIGH IN PHILADELPHIA



On the left Baum's in Philadelphia established 1867.

On the right Baum's in Leigh, sadly only the sign remains.



ARTICLES WANTED

The next edition of Leighway will be in January. If you would like to submit an article please email Carole by 31 December carole.mulroney@btinternet.com

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THE TRAGIC LEIGH LINK—BETWEEN THE GREAT WAR AND DUNKIRK



In May 1915 Bombardier George Maurice Dorkins (sometimes Dawkins) was a local hero, for he had been stationed at Purfleet Garrison with his brother, Reginald and it was he that was named as the soldier who brought down the Zeppelin L15.

The men involved in the incident were all awarded a special medal by the Lord Mayor of London for their part in protecting the capital from attack.

George later became an oil company representative and lived in Station Road, Leigh until his death in 1959. Reginald married and had moved to St Albans.

On 17 June 1940 Reginald was a Sergeant on board the HMT Lancastria, which was sunk off St Nazaire whilst taking part in Operation Oriel, the evacuation of British troops and nationals from France, two weeks after Dunkirk. Having left Liverpool on 14 June the Lancastria was in position and had embarked thousands of civilian staff, troops and RAF personnel.

At 13.50 during an air raid the Oronsay was hit by a German bomb. Although Lancastria was free to get away, without a destroyer escort, against submarine attack her captain decided to wait. At 15.38 she was attacked receiving three direct hits making her list to starboard and then to port. She rolled over and sank in 20 minutes. Over 1400 tons of fuel leaked into the sea and was set partially on fire by strafing German bombers. Many people drowned or were choked by the oil or hit by the strafing aircraft.



News of this terrible loss of life was suppressed by the British Government for fear of the effect it would have on morale, but the story appeared in American newspapers shortly afterwards. The full story is embargoed under the Official Secrets Act. Survivors and crew of other ships who had assisted never spoke of the disaster for fear of court martial. The wreck site is not a war grave because it is in French Territorial waters but the French government has placed an exclusion zone around the wreck.

One survivor recalled 'I didn't see the Lancastria go down but I saw the hull. I saw those clinging to it as the hope ebbed away and I could hear them singing. They were singing 'There'll always be an England' and 'Roll out the Barrel' for a long time afterwards I didn't want to hear those songs. Then I looked and it had gone so quickly, there was nothing, just a void.'

The loss of the Lancastria is stated to be the greatest sea tragedy of all time and among those who died was Sergeant Reginald Leonard Dorkins.

VOLUNTEERS AT THE HERITAGE CENTRE

Our volunteer stewards have once again given their time to making sure that the Centre is open during the busiest time of the year. From February to Easter the Centre was open as often as possible. Summer term is the busiest time for school visits so we aim to open between 11 and 3 and many children bring their families back to see what they have learnt. Visitors are delighted to have found the Centre and Cottage and locals are proud to show us off to their visitors added to which many past residents return.

We were pleased to welcome back Carol Edwards after a period of illness and have said a fond farewell to Donald Fraser who has retired after many years service. We have also welcomed several new stewards and hope they enjoy their new role and interaction with the public. We are often seen as an information point about Leigh generally as well as its history and if we don't know the answer we go away and find out. We learn much from our visitors who share their memories of the Old Town. Our comments book is filled with plaudits from around the world.

We are lucky to have such great volunteers and would welcome others who can spare some time especially at busy periods, like Regatta. If you are interested please contact us.

Jenny Simpson

A LADY OF LEIGH—BERYL CATHERINE PLATT BARONESS PLATT OF WRITTLE, CBE, DL.

Beryl was born on 18 April 1923 at 93 Crescent Road, Leigh the daughter of Ernest and Dorothy Myatt. On her mother's side she was related to the Goings, oyster merchants, who had a shop at 8 High Street, Southend opposite the Royal Hotel. The Myatt and Dainty families were friends and my sister and I knew Beryl and her brother James from infancy.



She went to Tower House School before going on to Westcliff High School and was the first girl to obtain distinction in every subject she took for Matriculation. She was offered a place to read maths at Girton College, Cambridge but switched to engineering because, feeling the need for aeronautical engineers in wartime, the government offered her more money to study engineering. She found she loved engineering and throughout her life encouraged and supported women to enter the field. On leaving Cambridge she worked for Hawkers Aircraft, then for a short time after the war, for British European Airways [BEA] and, as was usual in those days, left on her marriage in 1949.

She married Stewart Platt at St Saviour's, Westcliff. They had known each other since early dancing classes with Miss Leybourne in Westcliff, but romance only blossomed at a Christmas dance held at the Erlsmere Hotel in 1947.

Stewart was a very keen sailor who at that time kept his boat, *Campion*, at Leigh. Beryl really preferred playing bridge and thought 'unmoving land' much better but if she had to be on a boat she liked the water to be 'iron flat'. However, her husband's enthusiasm usually won the day and she became an able Captain's Mate.

Beryl was a great cook and was a generous hostess both at home and on board. After their wedding they lived in Parkside, Westcliff where their son, Roland, was born in 1950. They moved to Writtle in 1952 and their daughter Vicky, who is my god-daughter, was born in 1953. By this time Stewart had moved the boat to Heybridge Basin so it was a shorter journey at weekends.

When the children were established at schools Beryl served on Chelmsford District Council for 7 years, then for 20 years on Essex County Council and five years as Head of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Countless stints on Parliamentary, Engineering, Science and Education committees meant she always had a lot of homework to do on board at weekends. Beryl was made CBE in 1958 and Life Peer in 1981.

In spite of her growing number of public commitments she remained a loyal and close friend and enjoyed entertaining us all at the House of Lords.

I treasure our long-standing birthday card. On my birthday in May 1963 she sent me a McTavish Everlasting Greetings Card which I duly returned to her the following April. This continued for the next 51 years! One year it even went to Florence where she was spending her birthday but arrived late; fortunately the hotel sent it back to her in England.

Beryl was confirmed at St Michael's, Westcliff and she served God not only in the way she lived her life, but also in her personal faith which was steadfast to the end. Stewart died in 2003.

She had a lovely 90th birthday lunch at Hylands House. Sadly her son Roland died in December 2014. This affected Beryl badly and her health declined. She died on 1 February 2015.

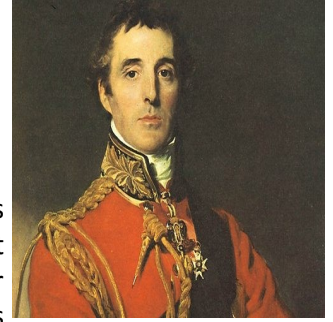
Mary Dainty

Footnote

Baroness Platt's obituary in the Telegraph said 'She felt that schools and parents were at fault in steering girls to "feminine" subjects, and served on dozens of committees campaigning to change attitudes. Among many others these included the Engineering Council, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, the Engineering Training Authority and the Technician Education Council.'



LADY OLIVIA SPARROW, LADY OF THE MANOR OF LEIGH AND WELLINGTON



Arthur Wellesley, who was to become Duke of Wellington, was the third son of Lord Mornington born on 1 May 1769. In August of the same year as Napoleon Bonaparte. As third son Arthur had to take some sort of profession to support himself and at his 18th birthday became an ensign in the 73rd Highlanders and thus began his military career.

Catherine or “Kitty” Pakenham was Lord Longford’s second daughter and lived near the Wellesley family seat in Ireland. The couple are said to have first met in 1792 when she was a beauty of 20 and he was 23. In 1793 he made his proposal to her, but his offer was rejected by her family because he was by then only a Lieutenant Colonel in the 33rd Foot and not considered to have enough money to support her in the way her family considered appropriate to her social standing. He wrote to her in 1794 saying that if ever she and her family changed their minds “my mind will still remain the same”.

Arthur went away and made a name and fortune for himself in Europe and India. He was to return to England in 1805, but before that in 1801 he began a correspondence with Lady Olivia Sparrow, a friend of Kitty’s, who made sure that he knew that Kitty was still unmarried, lived a very quiet life in Ireland and was still interested in him. Lady Olivia is described in one account as “an amiable busybody” but she must have been very determined to get the pair together again.

Later it was revealed that the first sight of his faded 34 year old bride to be was a shock to him when they were married on 10 April 1806.

Kitty gave birth to their first son and heir, Arthur Richard, in February 1807 in her 36th year and in January 1808 their second son, Charles, was born. So Kitty absorbed herself in the bringing up of her boys whilst Wellington campaigned in the Peninsular Wars and later became the hero of Waterloo.

Kitty remained a friend of Lady Olivia Sparrow and wrote in her journal of 2 January 1811 when visited by Lady Olivia and Lady Hood, wife of the Admiral, “Olivia and Lady Hood taken separately are extremely agreeable, together are perfect Romps.”

And again on 17 January, “Dined at 5 o’clock with Olivia, with the intention of going to Astley’s * in the evening, but finding there was a probability of Lord Wellington’s name being introduced, I did not wish to encounter the public gaze. Returned home when they went.”

4 April is noted as “the day of Olivia’s Ball”, but Kitty did not go for similar reasons, as everyone was discussing the Peninsula War.

Sadly their marriage was not a happy one and perhaps Lady Olivia, as Kitty’s friend, knew some of the details of this. The Duchess of Wellington died on 24 April 1831 and Wellington, who had had several prominent mistresses during the time they were married, remarked “How strange it was that people could live together for half a lifetime and only understand each other at the end.”

Lady Olivia Sparrow had married Robert Bernard Sparrow in 1797 when she was 22. He inherited the Leigh estates in 1803, but after only 8 years of marriage he died on active service with the rank of Brigadier General and is buried at Tortola on the Virgin Islands. He was also lieutenant colonel of the Essex Fencible Infantry. Lady Sparrow inherited the manor of Leigh at the age of 30 and before she died in 1863, became one of the great benefactors of the town, providing fresh water and a school.

Jennifer Simpson

* **Astley’s Amphitheatre** was a performance venue in London opened by Philip Astley in 1773. The structure was burned in 1794 and later grew to become Astley’s Royal Amphitheatre and this was the home of the circus. The location of the theatre was Westminster Bridge Road in Lambeth .