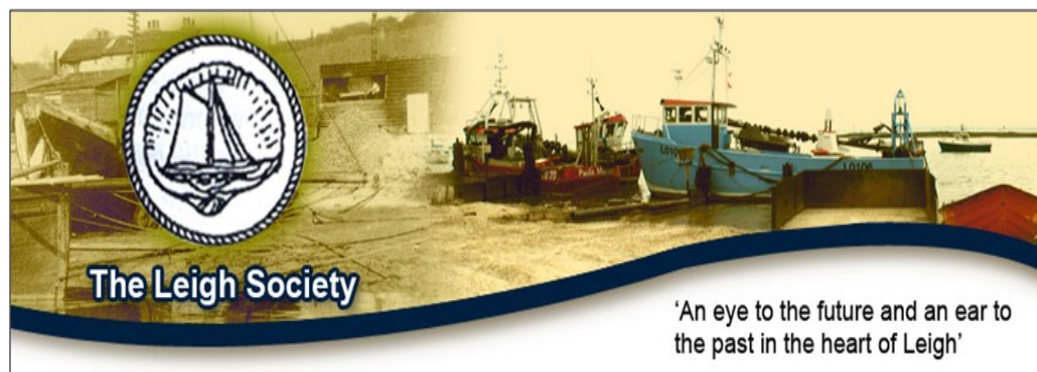


# LEIGHWAY

## ISSUE 51

### NEW YEAR

### 2017



#### CONTENTS

Happy 2017/Subscriptions/Diary Dates	1
Harry Smith—Horticulturalist and Photographer	2/3
Is there a Doctor in the House/ Keeping the Memories/Leigh's link to Dunkirk	3
Full Steam Ahead	4
Latest Acquisitions	5
The Churchyard Well/St Thomas' Mission Then and Now/What a Load of Rubbish	6
Wesley Church Mural/Fishermen's Chapel Gospel Choir	7
Thames Estuary Path/Happy Birthday Plumbs	8

This edition we have had a bumper crop of articles from members. This is most welcome and we would love to hear more from you—so if you have an item of local interest please

#### HAPPY 2017

Is it really 17 years since we saw in the New Millennium—how time flies. Well here we are at the start of another New Year, with the hope that 2017 will be an even better year for the Society and the Heritage Centre than 2016.

Small societies all over the country are struggling for membership and we, like them, are always looking for ways to enhance what we offer our members and keep you all interested in the aims and objectives of the Society.

In 2016 we maintained our level of membership, which is excellent, and thanks go to all of you who continue to support the work we do in the Heritage Centre and through our involvement in planning and local issues.

This year we are going to be looking at 'the way forward' for the Society and Centre so that we can ensure its existence for many years to come.

To kick this off we are adding to our meeting schedule by additional talks in June and September.

If any member has any ideas or suggestions for future events or activities please drop Carole a line on [carole.mulroney@btinternet.com](mailto:carole.mulroney@btinternet.com).

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Start of a new year and, sorry folks, it means it is subs time.

2016 was a good year for membership with no overall change in numbers, which is very pleasing.

As always if you pay by the AGM your membership is safe. After that date we're afraid you will be off the list, which is a shame.

We realise that some people forget they have not paid and are only too happy to do so when reminded, but reminder letters also diminish our reserves so can we ask everyone to pay as soon as they can. We will enclose a standing order form in the Autumn Leighway for those who wish to pay that way from next year and thus don't need to worry about remembering. Many of you do this already.

#### DIARY DATES

**22 March— Barbados—Slave or Free – Rev David Tudor**

**19 April (AGM) - Thames Estuary Partnership—Amy Pryor**

**17 May—The Effect of the Great War on Local Children—Andrew Emeny**

**21 June—Speaker TBA**

**20 September—Speaker TBA**

**18 October - Thames Barges in the Blackwater—Stephen Nunn**

**15 November—Tales from Hadleigh, Thundersley and Daws Heath History—Robert Hallmann**

## HARRY SMITH— HORTICULTURALIST AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Harry Smith was the longest serving Chairman in the history of Leigh Horticultural Society: 22 years, until his sudden death in 1974. He taught science at Westcliff High School for Boys, where he was irreverently known as 'Black Harry', a nickname whose origin appears to have been lost in time. In the late 1930s, he set up a gardening club at the School and encouraged the students in all aspects of horticulture, creating a flower and vegetable garden alongside the boundary of the school sports field. So successful were the boys, that under Harry's guidance they staged an exhibit of vegetables and soft fruit at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show.

Harry was a much-travelled and highly-gifted plantsman, and an expert photographer, and over the years the Society profited greatly from his wide circle of horticultural friends and contacts. A committee member since the 1940s, he was elected Chairman in 1952, at a time when the LHS was undergoing major changes following the end of rationing and the austerity of the war years. Events such as coach outings and evening lectures resumed, and Harry was instrumental in organising many of these popular activities, often with assistance from his many horticultural associates. His unbounded enthusiasm spurred on many an LHS member to have a go at exhibiting at the Society's flower shows.

Harry's wife, Susan, always known as Susie, was also a keen gardener, and many of the visitors to their garden at Merilies Close, Westcliff-on-Sea, remarked at her extensive plant knowledge. Behind the house Harry and Susie created a beautiful and interesting garden, with beds of shrubs, herbaceous plants and bulbs, many of a rare and unusual nature, collected on their travels in this country and abroad. Susie would call herself 'the plumber's mate'; Harry took the photographs and Susie could always come up with the names. And, in due course, the photographs were to become Harry's greatest legacy.

In the 1950s, Harry took over the photography business of Ernest Crowson, a renowned horticultural photographer, whose work appeared in many gardening books and journals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Harry was one of the pioneers of horticultural photographers working in colour, and over the years added to the library of horticultural images, which became known as the Harry Smith Horticultural Photographic Collection.

Harry had close ties with many local gardeners, including Dick and Helen Robinson who, in the 1950s, created one of the country's most outstanding gardens of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at Hyde Hall, Rettendon, which they gifted to the Royal Horticultural Society in 1992. Beth Chatto was another good friend and Harry and Susie were regular visitors to her marvellous garden at Elmstead Market. Harry was a regular customer at Bob Mansfield's rock plant nursery at Eastwood Rise, Leigh-on-Sea, where he and Bob would discuss the merits of rare alpine plants and exchange specimens. This was, of course, in the days before garden centres, and Harry and Susie would travel the country seeking out nurseries that specialised in rare and interesting plants, and inevitably making new friends.

Also great chums of the Smiths' were Roderick and Joy Cameron, who created in the late 1950s the magnificent garden at Great Comp near Sevenoaks, in the heart of the Kent countryside. Roderick declared that Harry and Susie were their most frequent visitors, and he and Joy were very impressed with Harry's photographs, considering them to be the most professional images of their garden. Over the years their friendship grew, and in May each year, under his expert guidance, Harry would arrange for a group of Dutch horticultural students to visit Great Comp and other outstanding English gardens.



**Harry Smith on the right in the doorway at Great Comp with Susie in front of him. They are photographed in 1972 with Roderick and Joy Cameron and a group of Dutch horticultural students**

Other good friends included Fred Whitsey, then editor of *Popular Gardening* magazine, Roland Jackson, who ran Jackman's Nurseries at Woking, and Ralph Gould of Hurst's Seeds, Witham.

It therefore came as a great shock to his many friends and colleagues when his unexpected passing was announced in February 1974. Members of Leigh Horticultural Society were especially saddened to learn of Harry's death. He had been a stalwart of the Society over many years and his outstanding stewardship left a great void to fill. In recognition of his enormous contribution to the wellbeing of the Society the Harry Smith Memorial Fund was launched, and from the proceeds a public address system was purchased. Susie continued to support the Society, and was a regular visitor to the flower shows until her passing in the 1990s.

On Harry's death, his good friend Dick Robinson became custodian of the Harry Smith Horticultural Photograph Collection, and today this celebrated picture library is in the safekeeping of the Royal Horticultural Society, for the enjoyment of future generations of gardeners.

Jim Sanctuary

## IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Member Ruth Savery, who now lives in London, asks whether any other members remember a doctor in Leigh who she thinks was Belgian and whose name was something like Sayment. Everyone called him Dr Say. His surgery was at the top of Church steps in the late 1940s.

Dr Say also have a fashionable practice in Wimpole Street and, in Ruth's words, was before his time. He put her on a low fat diet as a small child to cure her eczema. The diet consisted mainly of tomatoes and macaroni—no milk. He also treated another child in the family through using dietary methods.

Does anyone else remember Dr Say who according to Ruth was quite a character.

## KEEPING THE MEMORIES

As part of its ongoing work into preserving Leigh's heritage, the Leigh Society is now the sponsor of the last surviving red phone box in Leigh down in the Old Town.

Without such sponsorship BT would remove the box which is still operational and surprisingly in this day and age of mobile technology was used over 100 times last year.



## LEIGH'S LINKS TO DUNKIRK

Although Leigh's most memorable link to Dunkirk today is in connection with the evacuation, those links are of longstanding as this article from the Sketch in 1901 shows

It is reported in the neighbourhood of Leigh, in Essex, that the Midland Railway Company has the idea of reviving a trans-Channel service between that old-time port and Dunkirk. Certain it is that the great association whose headquarters are still at Derby, though St. Pancras is one of the biggest stations in London, has penetrated into Essex. It would require a vast outlay of capital to convert Leigh into a modern port, but the connection between it and Dunkirk dates back for centuries. Dunkirk, as a commercial focus, is superior to both Calais and Boulogne, and since the London dock strike many British ships unload there in preference to seeking Antwerp as a harbour of refuge. No greater contrast, perhaps, could be afforded than that existing between the sleepy fishing-village on the Thames and the busy French mart which Charles II. disgracefully sold to Louis XIV.

## FULL STEAM AHEAD!



During the third week in September many bird watching eyes look into the eastern skies for the first signs of Dark-bellied Brent Geese. But another Autumn migrant might also be seen moving along the horizon.

It's the *Waverley* of course. And for those of you with an endless fascination for the River Thames here is something I can highly recommend: a day cruise on the *Waverley*. Sailing daily, until the second week in October, this 70 year-old paddle steamer, recalls the bygone days, before the railways, when day trippers arrived in their tens of thousands from London to disembark at Southend Pier.

First impressions as she chugs in from the west on an ebbing tide, travelling low in the water and sporting a gaily painted livery of red, white and blue is that of a toy; because she appears tiny. She is in fact the world's last sea-going paddle steamer and as she pulls away from the pier she pugnaciously shows her paces. With water rushing on either side the *Waverley* heads rapidly past the Crowstone picking out the shapes that dominate the horizon; St Clement's, Hadleigh Castle and the water tower at the top of Essex Way.

As she reaches Canvey the landscape is a jumble of silos of liquid gas flecked with tiny patches of yellow to suggest beach: business mixed with pleasure. Then comes Coryton, the abandoned refinery revealing an industrial jungle of snaking pipes, rusting jetties and smokestacks. Looming on the starboard side comes the new Dubai Ports super terminal, the pilings along the banks holding back the river's natural erosion. With its spacious quayside and containers stacked up like matchboxes it is a human-less, silent landscape. Meanwhile, hovering over a ship like a malevolent praying mantis, is one of twelve enormous angular cranes, evidence of how dependant we are on the river as a means of transportation - more than ever these days when we import over half of our food.

The *Waverley* also offers a glimpse into our military past - when the river was our route to the outside world but also our Achilles heel: witness the distant Maunsell Forts in the estuary, gun emplacements now half-buried in the fields, Coalhouse Fort, Cliffe on the other side, the rusting radar tracking tower and the enormously impressive Tilbury Fort.

For wildlife enthusiasts, there's a good chance of spotting seals basking on the strips of beach and cormorants perched on the tops of buoys, their wings half extended like some ancestral coat of arms. Hot meals are served in the dining room and it is advisable to book in advance. There are two bars on board providing hot and cold beverages. The paddles can be observed at close quarters through a porthole, the constant thrashing and whooshing of water reminding one of a washing machine. Also visible are the three huge steel piston rods that drive the cranks that turn the paddle wheels and propel the boat up to a speed of 18 knots.

As the *Waverley* thrashes westwards the turgid river is in a constant state of flux and we are treated to a moving panorama of urban Essex: Tilbury port, the cruise terminal, Grays, the Graffiti-daubed "Wall" and Purfleet, before the elegant lines of the QE11 Bridge come into view.

Until now the drama has all been on the northern, Essex, side but having stopped at Gravesend the southern, Kent side, soon redresses the balance. Breaching the Thames Barrier we approach Greenwich with its splendid classical buildings, the towering Cutty Sark and the Royal Observatory perched high on the hill. As we pass the meridian, the metropolis opens up; a skyline hotchpotch of banks and financial services companies all jostling for attention, like an open-cry market. Holding centre stage is Tower Bridge which ceremoniously opens its arches to much anticipation. As we pass through we give a cheery wave to the tourists who are lined up three deep along the shoreline by the Tower. It feels like we are the toast of London.

The *Waverley* visits these shores from the third week in September until the second week of October. It visits Clacton, the River Medway, Tower Bridge and Whitstable. Catch it if you can! To avoid disappointment it's best to book in advance: go to <http://www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk>. For cruises in October, it's advisable to wear warm clothing.

Clive Webster

Picture reproduced by kind permission of Waverley Excursions.co.uk

## LATEST ACQUISITIONS—READ ALL ABOUT IT

Our thanks to Mrs Penny Garrard who has donated four issues of the weekly 'Southend and Westcliff Graphic' newspaper from August and September of 1910. These newspapers can be viewed at the Forum in Southend on microfiche but they are a poor substitute for the actual newspapers themselves. These copies are rather fragile so we will be preserving them in archival film and they can be used for research.

From the front page we can see that the Kursaal, as we know it today, (opened in 1901) and was Southend's principal attraction. Beneath the arms of the Borough is an advertisement for 'Luna Park & Palace (late Kursaal)' with 'Novelties never before seen in Southend in the Magnificent Grounds and Arcade. Scenic Railway. Figure Eight. Joy Wheel. Mysterious Caves. Miniature Railway. Shooting Jungle etc. and Astley and Lorenzo's American Circus performed three times daily. A beauty Competition is announced for August 31<sup>st</sup>.

The contents of the papers are not so different from today's local papers. The main shops and restaurants run adverts, there are profiles of eminent inhabitants, cartoons and the minutiae of town life and items of interest such as "Serious Subsidence at the Sewage Works". Something which no longer appears today are the guest lists from the major hotels which are printed so you can see if any of your friends are in town. We are also told where residents of the town are going on holiday or in the case of Mr. J. Simmonds, who has had a serious breakdown through neuritis "he has been ordered away by his doctor to a nursing home at Tunbridge Wells, where he is accompanied by his wife" and "Mr. James Tabor, J.P. returned home on Monday from Sandwich where he has been spending a short holiday."

Much of the content concerns Southend itself but Leigh is regularly mentioned as in the following snippets:



In one of the Leigh cartoons a fisherman with 'Leigh' on his cap shakes the hand of a boxer – "Mr Leigh: 'We are glad to welcome you into our midst, and hope that the air of Leigh will prove of such benefit to you that you will become champion of England.' (Bombardier Wells is in training at the Elms Hotel for the heavyweight championship of England)" [he became the British heavyweight champion in the following April]



"Among the special attractions at the Leigh Garden Fete, which will be held on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Rectory Grounds, will be the appearance of Victor l'Estrange, the Royal Vaudeville entertainer. In addition, some clever juggling will be given by Marah Raj and Maf, the Oriental fakirs."

"A runaway horse rushed into the shop window of Mrs Bates's premises, at Leigh Hill, on Tuesday, and Miss Mildred Park was cut by falling glass."

Victor L'Estrange Wayre was a young vocalist and actor aged 13 at the time of the advertisement. He joined the Royal Army Pay Corps on the outbreak of the Great War as a clerk and died of sickness in Heathcote Infectious Hospital, Warwick on 22 October 1914 and is buried in Warwick Cemetery, although he came from Earsfield in London.

**VICTOR L'ESTRANGE,** the Royal "Vaudeville" Entertainer and his novel and skillful Production (as performed before H. M. Queen Alexandra)

Local politics are discussed at length and Leigh School Board was no stranger to controversy:

"A Correspondent writes – At the meeting of School Managers on Monday a requisition was presented by Mr. Thatcher headmaster (of North Street School), for several new maps, a quantity of disinfectant fluid and a pencil sharpener. Full of economic zeal the managers wanted to know what had become of the old items. The headmaster objected to go into the discussion of such matters of internal detail in a public meeting, as such discussions had given rise to much misunderstanding, but the managers declined either to meet the master's objection or to order the goods required for the school."

Jennifer and Ed Simpson with additional historical information from Carole Mulroney Carole has digital copies (1914-1917) if anyone needs to search anything in particular but will need rough dates as the paper was published weekly so there are many editions.



## THE CHURCHYARD WELL

In 1932 a deep hole was discovered in the churchyard of St Clement's. There was much speculation as some thought it was the entrance to an old vault and there were those who vaguely hinted at a possible subterranean passage which might reveal forgotten stores of untold wealth left by bold of smugglers of a past generation.

However, neither supposition came near the truth. What had been discovered was simply the old well that in former days was an ordinary water supply. Mr. Bundock who was deputy warden of the Church explained that there was a time when that part of the churchyard was the side of the parish pound and stocks and the well was there to water cattle confined in the pound. In fact he said there was still a pipe which leading from it down to the schoolhouse, which in 1932 was occupied by Mr. W G Beecroft. Mr. Bundock said he had had many a drink of water from it when a boy at school.

He said the well used to be about 20 feet deep but apparently it had become more or less filled up and when it became disused the well was covered with a stone top but that had now vanished and in 1932 it was replaced so that the hole would not be a trap for the unwary.

## ST THOMAS' MISSION THEN AND NOW



## WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!

Those of you who swim in the Thames or partake in the beaches around Leigh and Southend might like to know of work being conducted upstream (see below).

A team of volunteers, marshalled by Thames 21, clean-up specialists, have been attempting to clean up notorious litter blackspots in the Thurrock area. In just over a year, 158 volunteers have removed 515 sacks of rubbish from the shoreline along with 28 supermarket trollies, car tyres, traffic cones and a mattress! In total it amounts to 24,000 items of litter that would otherwise be making their way down to Leigh. Litter harms the environment in many ways, not least of which is plastic which is not biodegradable and can be ingested by fish and thereby work its way into our food chain.

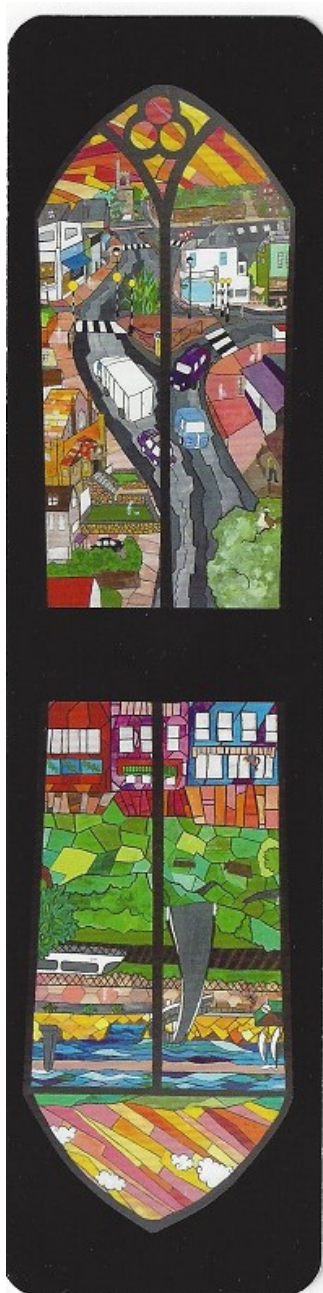
Anyone interested in continuing this work into 2017 can email me at [cliveawebster@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:cliveawebster@hotmail.co.uk). Alternatively, you might wish to register for the Great British Spring Clean taking place 3-5<sup>th</sup> March 2017 by going to <http://www.keepbritaintidy.org>.

Clive Webster



Grays Beach  
before  
and  
after  
the  
clean up

## WESLEY CHURCH MURAL



If you are a resident in the area of Leigh and frequent the Broadway you may have recently noticed the large scale painting around the now complete building works at Wesley Methodist Church. My name is Mary Lister and I am the local artist who organised this painting.

I was first approached by the Church's Reverend Julia Monaghan and asked to do some kind of painting to mask the boring boards that would be up whilst the Church had various changes made. I heard that they would be losing one of the stained glass windows which was situated at the entrance and with this in mind I came up with the theme of stained glass windows and beautiful archways, but I also wanted to represent our diverse community in some way.

Looking at the great expanse of wall I had undertaken I thought it would be a great opportunity to paint a panorama type image of the estuary from Southend to Leigh with its gorgeous coast and quirky features; this being the art deco architecture of the Cliffs Pavilion, Southend Pier, our statue of Queen Victoria and Leigh's Old Town.

I wanted to capture all the things that make this part of Essex such a wholesome and well-rounded place to live with a plethora of beautiful views and activities to take part in (with a few Pokemon thrown in for good measure). To take it a step further I organized the painting so that it was a large scale paint by numbers in which anyone could join in, young and old, to make their mark on where they come from.

The painting was eagerly received and opened up so many people to talk to each other about where they live, what they like about Leigh and Southend and how they have enjoyed the artwork in some way.

North Street Junior School had amazing involvement and, I've heard, skipped a P.E. lesson or two to take part, and many passers-by had a dabble who perhaps never had an art interest or feel they were capable but did an amazing job.

I just want to say a huge thank you to all those that have helped me to paint the mural, it has been an extraordinary team effort. A special thanks to my mum and dad for all of their help painting and carting paints back and forth to the church for me and a big thank you to Wesley Church for giving me the opportunity to make an artwork that has inspired so many to take part.

Mary Lister

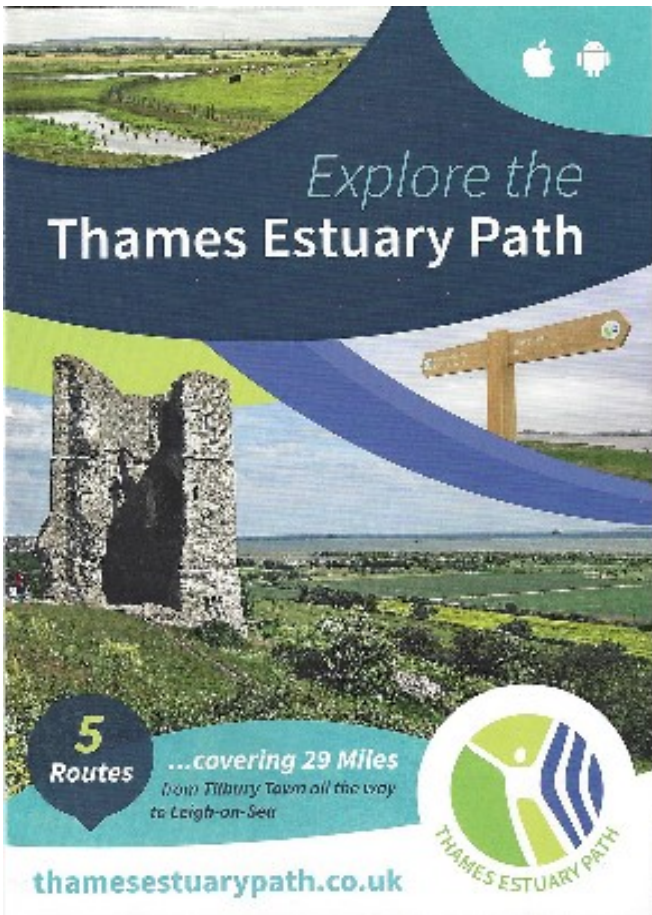
I think we can all agree that Mary's efforts brought together the community of Leigh in a fun and worthwhile activity and certainly brightened up our lives for the few weeks of the building works - well done, Mary and well done Wesley Church for showing the way.

Leigh Town Council and other local organisations have purchased panels so they will remain part of Leigh's community.

## JOIN THE GOSPEL CHOIR

Looking for something different to do this year? Why not join our new Fishermen's Chapel Gospel Choir, singing traditional gospel music at the Chapel? Rehearsals will be every Tuesday evening, 7-8pm, starting THIS TUESDAY, 10th January. Contact Heather for more details, [07879 232231](tel:07879232231). Look out for a new Facebook page for the Gospel Choir - coming soon. We have plans for a new 'Gospel Vespers' service too - details to be announced when the choir is up and running.





The Thames Estuary Path stretches for 29 miles from Tilbury Town to Leigh and comprises 5 separate walks with many places of interest on the way-

**Tilbury to East Tilbury 7 miles**—Tilbury Cruise Terminal, Tilbury and Coalhouse Forts, Tilbury Power Station, West Tilbury Church and site of QE1 speech to the English Fleet, WWII radar station and bunkers and Bata factory

**East Tilbury to Stanford-le-Hope 3.5 miles**—Thurrock Thameside Nature Park, Mucking Flats SSSI and Mucking Church.

**Stanford-le-Hope to Pitsea 10 miles**—Thurrock Thameside Nature Park, London Gateway Port, Stanford Warren Nature Reserve, Corringham and Fobbing Marshes, Corringham village, Vange Marshes, Vange Wick, Fobbing Village and Wat Tyler Country Park

**Pitsea to Benfleet 3.5 miles**—Pitsea Mount Church, Wat Tyler Country Park, RSPB Bowers Marsh, Bowers Marsh Church, Benfleet village and church, WWII pillboxes, St Michael's Church, Pitsea Mount and St Margaret's Church, Bowers Marsh

**Benfleet to Leigh 4 miles**—Benfleet village and church, West Canvey Marshes, Hadleigh Country Park, Hadleigh farm and castle, Hadleigh Olympic mountain bike track, Two Tree Island and Old Leigh

For those technically minded among you can download a mobile app from [thamesestuarypath.co.uk](http://thamesestuarypath.co.uk). A full leaflet of the routes is available from the Heritage Centre.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY PLUMBS

This year will see the 10th anniversary of the opening of Plumbs Cottage as part of the Heritage Centre.

Its fair to say that the Cottage has given the Centre a new lease of life and now with Strand Wharf refurbished it suits proudly on the edge of the Wharf looked to the Estuary as no doubt the doughty families who lived in it did many years ago.



BEFORE AND AFTER



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 hope you will like to keep your copy of Leighway, but if not please recycle it**  
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Articles for Leighway always welcome—email them to [carole.mulroney@btinternet.com](mailto:carole.mulroney@btinternet.com) or to Carole at 83 Southsea Avenue, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2BH