

LEIGHWAY ISSUE 65 WINTER



INTO THE FUTURE

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VE76 EVENT— UPDATE FROM HMS LEIGH

**Be happy the War is over!
Unfortunately, the pandemic is not...**

With the help of our project partners HMS Leigh has all the framework in place for the VE76 Event on 6-9 May 2021, but due to recent events, are having to look again at the arrangements. So its back to the drawing board and they are looking for ideas. Last year it was a very successful online event where over 140,000 people got involved.

Contact Carole if you have comments or ideas.



YOUR SUBS ARE NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER

This last year has been miserable for everyone, however you have been affected and we appreciate your loyalty to the work that we do even though the opening of the Heritage Centre has been off and on over the year and no events were possible.

We have managed to keep our heads above water throughout this time and the Leighway has kept going as has our planning remit. We live in hope that this period will be over as soon as possible and we can get back to our usual routine of events and managing the Centre.

Having said that we realise that some of you even after the job, and opening up of businesses, will be wary of large groups and going out and about, and we understand that.

Your subscriptions each year are vital to our work and whilst it may feel that you haven't had much bang for your buck this last year, but if we are to move forward into the 'new normal' they are a vital help to us to do so. We cannot leave Leigh without an organisation which cherishes its history and looks out for its environment .

We know that many small organisations like ours have failed during the pandemic and we have worked hard to make sure we will still be here when its all over.

Subscriptions (£12) are due by 31 March 2021 and we know that some of you will consider this the last thing on your minds so please take this as a gentle reminder in the hope that you will continue to support us in this way.

To save the worry of whether you have paid your subs in coming years, why not pay by standing order. To make this even easier enclosed is a SO form for completion for your bank. This method of payment really helps our administration costs.

Any standing order won't commence until January 2022 so pay as you normally do for this year and please let Carole know on carole.mulrone@btinternet.com if you are submitting a standing order to your bank so that we can marry the details up when the payment comes through.

That's the business end done with—so now sit back and enjoy this first Leighway of 2021 and remember if you have any articles for future editions please send them to Carole at the same email address—with pictures if possible.

THEN AND NOW—CONAN DOYLE'S CHURCH

CONAN DOYLE MEMORIAL CHURCH.
 On Sunday last the Conan Doyle Memorial Church re-opened at Oakleigh Hall, London Road, Leigh, the hall being well filled some time before the services started. The chair was taken by Mrs. M. F. Wood, and after the usual silent meditation the hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my Soul" was sung, followed by Prayer, and the Lord's Prayer. The reading was taken from the seventh Chapter of St. John and the address was given by the Leader, Mrs. M. A. Bruce, who based her remarks on the patience of Jesus Christ. She also gave quite a number of clairvoyance descriptions and messages. There was an after circle held, at which there was a large number present, and once more Mrs. Bruce demonstrated her gifts as a clairvoyant.



1151 London Road

THE INNER WHEEL STOPS SPINNING



Its always a shame when we hear of small local organisations that feel they cannot continue, and this last year has seen many fold because they just can't sustain themselves in such straightened times.

One such was the Leigh-on-Sea Inner Wheel. Sadly they are no more but have left a legacy of good works and community spirit in the town. They also contacted the Heritage Centre to ask about donating their memorabilia to our archives. Of course we were happy to oblige because these groups and their history in the town need to be preserved for future generations.

This is how it all began, in their own words.

Ever since the formation of the Leigh Rotary Club in 1952 the question of an Inner Wheel had from time to time been considered and the District Extension Committee had worked hard to get the Leigh Rotary Club to give them a hearing, to no avail. It must be recorded that not all the Leigh Rotarians were opposed to an Inner

Wheel Club but there was certainly some indifference. Then in 1959 when the Extension Committee had almost given up hope, some of the ladies took the matter into their own hands and set the ball rolling to form an Inner Wheel Club of Leigh-on-Sea.

As a consequence, in October 1959, several of the ladies met the Chairman of the District Extension Committee at the Popular Roadhouse and decided to form the Club. A preliminary meeting was held on 26 October at the Roadhouse when 8 ladies were present. The sponsorship came from the Southend Club who helped and advised. It was decided to hold regular meetings once a month in the Community Centre in Elm Road and it had been ascertained that a charge of 5/- a time was made for the hire of the room. Each member would pay a subscription of 25/- per annum and 1/6d at each meeting to cover cost of tea and the hire.

The first meeting was held on 16 November. Several members were already members of other Inner Wheels so the group got off to a flying start. Twelve ladies were present at that first meeting.

The proprietor of the Roadhouse, Arthur Porter, was a Rotarian, and laid on an excellent meal for the Charter Presentation Luncheon held on 26 January 1960. The Leigh Rotary Club gifted the group a President’s Chain, the District Chairman presented them with a Visitors’ Book, Southend Inner Wheel Club gave a reading desk and a frame for the Charter was also donated.

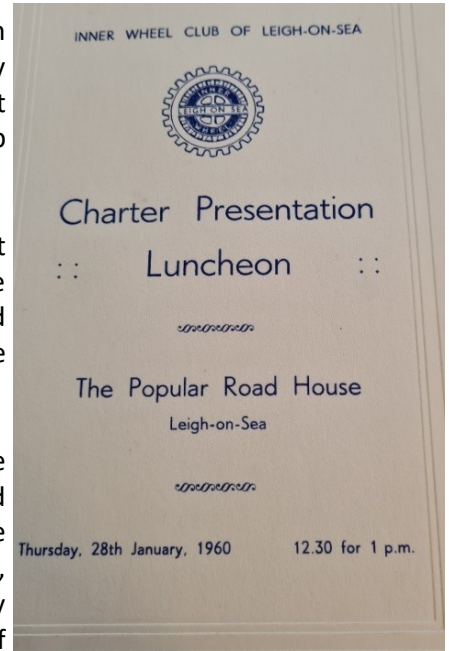
The motto of the Inner Wheel is ‘Friendship and Service’ and so over the next 60 years this was the case. Service could be given in many forms to the community at large and clubs were free to give their support to causes and could contribute to special projects organised either by their District or the Association as a whole.

When Leigh’s Inner Wheel started in 1960 there were 705 clubs around the country and 180 overseas. Over the years since then the Club raised considerable sums of money for charities and supported projects and the members supported each other in friendship. They collected milk bottle tops, knitted blankets, vests, teddies, sponsored children with leprosy, they sponsored a displaced Lithuanian person, living in Germany for a number of years and helped the elderly in the community providing food parcels, blankets and visits. They set up a visiting rota to lonely patients in hospital and gave sweets to the gentlemen and talc to the ladies.

Locally the Club also supported the RNLI, Save the Children, a Donkey Sanctuary, Fair Havens and Little Havens, Help the Aged and Lulworth Court and many other good causes.

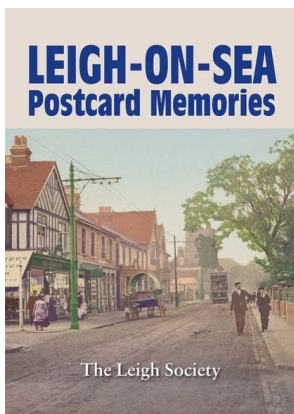
2020 was the Club’s Diamond Jubilee when it was held by all that they felt fortunate to be associated with the town of Leigh-on-Sea with its historical interest. But with some sense of déjà vu, it was said ‘whatever happens in the future to our club it will be documented that for 60 years we helped make a difference to the local society and area and made a big contribution in helping both overseas and local charities.

And so they did—we wish all the members well in their individual endeavours in the future and thank them for all the good works they did over 60 years in Leigh.

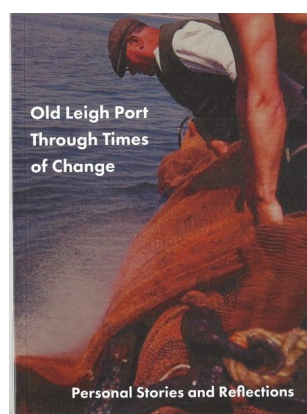


HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS AND SALES

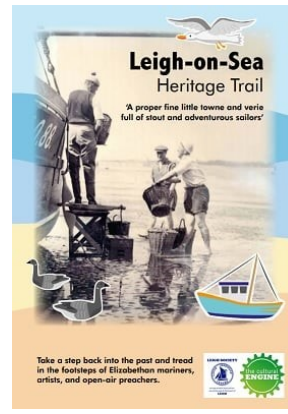
Like many businesses the Heritage Centre has suffered from the lockdowns and changes in rules that we have all been trying to cope with over the last year. The situation put pay to our Christmas trade like many others, and though we were able to sell a few things on line we are sure that many people missed out on that Leigh item which would have brightened someone’s Christmas morning. Fear not—we are still in business and if you need something to cheer the day you can purchase these publications from Carole at carole.mulroney@btinternet.com. Cash only and buyer collects. Tidetable also available £2.



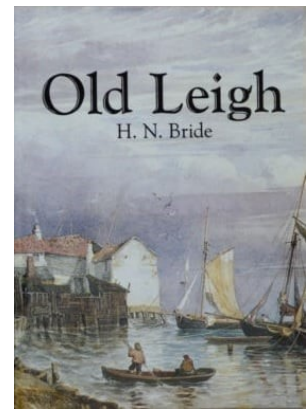
£10



£5



£2



£5

We wish good luck for the future to all shops and businesses in Leigh.

HALT WHO GOES THERE?

By Geoff Gonella



Like many other young boys in the 1950s I knew where this statement came from. In our district the War had not long been over and there was much talk about it amongst us children, along with war films at the local cinema, war themed toys and war stories in the comics. So the activities of war were getting quite well-understood by us children.

My father, Jim Gonella, told me that he was in a Reserved Occupation, and living in Kingsway he would need to walk or drive through the Albany Laundry area. He described a checkpoint close to the actual laundry, where Manchester Drive ends. It was made of sandbags, fabric etc., and as you went towards it a voice would call out: "Halt, Who Goes

There, Friend or Foe?" One voice would do the calling but you always felt that others were in hiding. When you said loudly: "Friend", the voice would then ask "Where Are You Going To?" At this point you knew you'd better have a good answer!

Jim Gonella

I've always assumed that these checkpoints were manned by the Home Guard. Since then we've grown fond of the 'Dad's Army' programmes, and history programmes have informed us about the actual shortage of rifles and ammunition for the Home Guard, but back then nobody was to know, and with Leigh being a seaside location with remote marshland and creeks, the national fear of being infiltrated must have seemed a distinct possibility.

LEIGH HISTORY—OR IS IT?

There are many little happenstances when researching local and family history, things turn up in the strangest places. The next book on my reading list is Michael Palin's *Erebus* - the story of the Arctic expedition of Sir John Franklin who along with the *Terror* went out in search of the North West Passage in 1845.

I then saw an article in the Southend and Westcliff Graphic of 15 August 1913 about a grand old lady of Leigh, Hannah Going, celebrating her 95th birthday. She had been born Elizabeth Hannah Baker in Leigh in 1818 and married John Going, a fisherman, in 1841. Hannah and John had 10 children in Leigh, and when widowed Hannah moved in with their son, Reginald in Prittlewell. What intrigued me was Hannah's newspaper interview.

Hannah had a younger brother, John, born in 1825 in Leigh and she told the reporter that John was a member of Sir John Franklin's expedition which set sail from the Thames on 20 May 1845. She went on to relate (or was this the journalists' research? as it seems too detailed for a little old lady of Leigh to have known) that the *Erebus* and the *Terror* passed through Lancaster Sound, and, as was afterwards ascertained, sailed up Wellington Channel to Penny Strait and down Crozier Channel returning to Beechey Island in winter.

Subsequently the vessels made their way to the NW coast of King William Island, where Franklin died in June 1847. The survivors under Capt Crozier, started, in 1848, for the Great Fish River and their remains were found along the route to Adelaide Peninsula. The expedition had ascertained the existence of a sea channel south of Victoria and Woollaston Land, leading to Behring Strait. Nothing having been heard of the expedition, some 40 expeditions were sent out between 1847 and 1857. And there the story ended, for Hannah Going died later in her 95th year.

There has been extensive research into the crews of the two ships from the muster rolls at the Greenwich Maritime Museum, and no John Baker appears. The nearest is a John Bates which could I suppose be him, given the standard of 19th century script. What a shame.

The *Erebus* was discovered under just 11 metres of water near King William Island, 2,000km (1,200 miles) north-west of Toronto, and confirmed as such by the Canadian Government in 2014 after the Canadian government ploughed millions of pounds into an extensive search operation. It was in a remarkable state of preservation such that extensive research with many remains tested by DNA proved through present day descendants.

So its a great story Hannah but like most family stories there are some things that can't be proved - but I will enjoy the book!

THE RAILWAY STATION

Monday 1 January 1934 was a momentous day in Leigh, for it was the day the 'new' railway station was opened.

The Tilbury to London line was constructed by the Eastern Counties and London and Blackwall Companies (ECBR) and it was leased to Messrs Peto, Brassey and Betts for a period of 21 years from July 1854. But in 1862 it was incorporated into a separate company the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway Company (LTS) which was absorbed by the London, Midland and Scottish (LMS in 1912). Through trains eventually reached Southend in 1855.

Christopher Parsons recorded in his diary in 1854 how on 1 May that year he went to London by steamer and Tilbury by rail for the first time, returning the same day. On Easter Monday 1855 he went to Stanford by the Southend Coach and to London by rail. And by August he was travelling to London by train from Leigh.



The construction of the line made a great difference to Leigh. The railway absorbed the large houses which had long gardens stretching behind them and also took in the chapel which the earlier Wesleyans had erected after the town was visited several times by John Wesley. On 26 September 1854 the Chapel received notice of intention from the ECBR stating that they intended to take and use the building and would build a replacement chapel and lease it to the church for 21 years. Later they enfranchised it to the Wesleyans permanently on payment of £200.

From the returns of the LTS of the weight of sea fish carried from Leigh the produce varied considerably. In 1855 the amount was 467 tons 3cwt of oysters and 29 tons 13cwt of winkles, mussels and shrimp's, nearly 10 years later in 1864 it was 33 tons 5cwt of oysters, and 704 tons 16cwt of winkles, mussels and shrimps. By 1931 350 tons of produce went to London but the following year being a bad year for fishing produce only 250 tons. For 1933 it had picked up again to 400 tons but oysters had dwindled away and white bait was added to the winkles, mussels and shrimp loads.

There are some amusing tales surrounding the station. In 1897 the old King's Head was demolished but the landlord was very loath to leave the premises on the morning when the work was due to take place and stayed in bed. So the contractor gave the instruction to take the tiles off the roof – when the landlord saw daylight he realised he had to go and so departed.

Many years later in an interview with the Southend Standard, Edmund Robinson, a local man, recalled that he helped build the new station working on both the up and the down sides. He recalled the arches of the doors etc were cut in the bar of a public house. About 20 or 30 men worked on the job which started in winter time and lasted until the following summer. The station was used a great deal by Leigh fishermen especially for shrimps and they had a large shed built nearby.

Mr Camper who also worked on the job remembered one day when there was a violent thunderstorm which delayed the workmen for some time and lightning struck the tower of St Clement's. There was such a huge rush of water down the slopes that mortar boards were lifted clear off the ground and the men worked up to their knees in water. The bricks came from Uttons brickfields and the cement from Kent. The pub where the arches were put together was the King's Head which used to stand close to the gates at the line crossing.

And that is where the station stood until 1934 when it moved well away from the Old Town.

THE STATE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

END OF YEAR REPORT FROM MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER RIVER WARDEN, CLIVE WEBSTER

Note from Editor—I make no apologies for publishing Clive’s report in full as this is such an important subject for Leigh and the Estuary and it deserves as wide a readership as possible.

Background

The North Thames Estuary litter picking database was set up in 2015 to record volunteer litter picking events taking place along a 35-mile stretch of Thames shoreline; from Rainham in the west to Shoeburyness in the east. Volunteers play a vital role in maintaining the health of the river and this database recognises these unsung heroes. Since its inception, over 6,000 volunteers have taken part in 684 events (from solo picks to large scale events) and removed nearly a half a million litter items from the estuary. The database also provides valuable data to key decision makers about the distribution and make up of litter and plastic pollution along the tidal river.

Overview of year

2020 has been a tumultuous year with the covid-19 virus disrupting everyone's lives, bringing personal tragedies and changing the landscape for ever. People have had to reappraise their priorities and behavioural patterns. But, if anything positive has come out of this, then it is the dawning realisation that our open spaces, particularly around the estuary, are essential for our welfare and recreation as well as providing a gateway to the outside world and a home to huge numbers of waders and marine life.

Quarter 1 saw violent storms and high tides battering the estuary (Storm Brenden followed by Storm Ciara and Storm Dennis) with resulting record amounts of litter deposited beyond the upper tide mark, particularly in Rainham and Grays. Pickers removed over 1,000 sacks and 16,000 plastic bottles, 67% of the annual total. Much of the litter was old and freshly deposited Smartie lids over 30 years old were discovered as well as 20-year-old Marathon bar sweet wrappers. There is a growing school of thought that once plastic tidal litter leaves the river, it doesn't go out to sea, it just 'sits' outside the estuary and gets brought back in again on the storms.

In January, Wayne Dixon returned to Southend to resume his epic 4,500 mile trek around the coast of Britain. His mission is to wage war on litter, picking as he goes. So far, he has collected more than 20,000 sacks. While down here, he attended school assemblies and joined us at several events, one of which attracted 250 volunteers. In March, a national lockdown was announced and litter picking activities, including the Great British Spring Clean were cancelled -with just a few solo picks continuing as part of daily exercise regimes. It left the shoreline to the elements and pickers soon noticed how devoid of litter public spaces had become. Hope sprang in the belief that this could be the dawn of a new sense of public responsibility towards our environment.

Quarter 2 began with a warm spring and a public desperate to escape incarceration. Hot weather in May brought tens of thousands of day trippers out to enjoy the sunshine around the parks and beaches in Southend. Beaches were extremely popular, and newspapers reported of council cleaners struggling to cope with the litter. Unlike tidal litter, Southend's litter is primarily brought onto the beaches and parks by people and left there rather than be taken home. It is the most reprehensible kind of littering because it is wanton, deliberate, costly and arises out of simple laziness. On 2 June, the national lockdown was eased, and Thames 21 Action Groups, together with Keep Britain Tidy BeachCare resumed litter picking, albeit on a restricted level observing social distancing protocols and running small private groups rather than public events.

Quarter 3 and high summer brought more trippers. One conservative estimate suggests that between 3,700 and 7,400 plastic bottles left on the beaches find their way into the river each year. In September, a Mandala was created in Grays made up of river plastics and Southend BeachCare and Surfers Against Sewerage began recording the different types of litter. Over the course of 35 picks, they counted 589 plastic bottles, 908 drinks cans, 201 glass bottles and 150 disposable face masks proving that face masks haven't replaced plastic bottles in our estuary, they have simply added to it. Such evidence confirmed sceptics views that the change in people's attitude to litter had been a fleeting one. Thames 21 supported this opinion with London’s largest mass census of river plastic and concluded "that COVID-19 has increased the impact of single-use plastic on London’s largest blue-green space".

Meanwhile, also in September, the Port of London Authority launched their Cleaning the Thames database, offering a one stop-shop for pickers organising litter picks along the tidal Thames. The PLA is responsible for managing the foreshore and event organisers are encouraged to register which will provide them with a licenced permit to pick. Permits are free of charge.

Quarter 4 brought Lockdown 2 and a return to solo picks. Mid November was characterised by cross onshore winds and spring tides and revealed once more, how much plastic is being swept onto our shoreline. After a gruelling year, December finally brought some hope against the pandemic with the rollout of a vaccine and a relaxation in rules allowing litter groups of up to 6. (Obviously things changed some what after this was written).

Salient points

-This year the North Thames Estuary saw 1,334 pickers attend 258 picks. While the number of pickers was down 47% on 2019, picks were actually up 17% to an all-time high. There is no doubt that covid restrictions had a significant part to play in this drop off in pickers and, as a case in point, Concrete Barges would have attracted over 200 volunteers to an event if it hadn't been cancelled.

-While the number of sacks picked 2,282, was down 22% on the previous year, the average sacks picked per picker was higher - 2.23 per picker compared to 2.13 in 2019 - which probably reflected the fact that the pickers were more experienced, many of whom had been doing this work for years.

-The number of plastic bottles removed in 2020 amounted to 25,562 (naturally, this excludes the many thousands of bottles that were picked but not counted) and was up 7% on 2019, bringing the grand total to nearly EIGHTY-TWO THOUSAND, a figure never thought achievable when we started counting thirty-one months ago. It proves, beyond reasonable doubt, that even in this truncated and turbulent picking year the level of plastic bottle pollution is as high as ever.

-March and November were by far the busiest month for pickers, 37% of the total, while May and December were the quietest.

-The most littered towns over the four-year period, were in descending order, Grays (3,158 sacks) Leigh (1,571) and Rainham (1,525). To put it into perspective, they were picked 125 times, 157 and 56 times respectively and together they accounted for 65% of the total haul. Tilbury and Purfleet would have come close, if they had been picked more often (28 and 48 times) and Southend would have leapt to the top if Veolia's figures were added.

-In overall terms, this year's figures are similar to previous years and adds up to a remarkable effort from volunteers, young and old alike.

Looking forward to 2021

As mentioned last year, litter forecasts are highly subjective. The sense of frustration that not enough is being done to quell the tide of litter and microplastics has probably been overtaken by events -who would have predicted three national lockdowns in one year? Indeed, because 2020 hasn't been a normal year it would be wrong to draw too many conclusions. However, I predict that once a degree of certainty returns, so will the pickers although I expect the number of sacks and plastic bottles to be lower in 2021 now that much of the legacy litter has been cleared.

The basic conclusion is that not enough is being done. Ultimately, reducing pollution needs an ongoing commitment from major decision makers i.e. central government, local authorities, landowners and industry. Custodians of the foreshore need to manage the situation in a pro-active way to prevent littering in the first place: viz., recruiting river wardens, using large 'smart' wheelie bins for black spots, issuing fines for polluting and using the latest camera technology and physical signage to deter littering. Government can do more by way of making the producer responsible for disposal and introducing an environmental tax for non-compliance. Volunteers are ill-equipped to deal with the plastic situation effectively and pickers are only able to pick up one item at a time when what is needed is mechanised, all terrain, litter-removing equipment for hoovering up the debris - not just the tractor that Veolia employs to rake Southend's beaches. Meanwhile, little is being done to address the issue of microplastics which comes amidst the UN Secretary General's warning that "Oceans are choking with plastic waste"

PEOPLE COUNT

Can you remember the census of 2011 – distant memories perhaps, well 10 years have passed and in March households across the Borough will be asked to take part in the nationwide survey of housing and the population which has been carried out in some form every decade since 1801, with the exception of 1941.

Information from the digital-first census will help decide how services are planned and funded in our local area. This could mean things like doctors' surgeries, housing or new bus routes.

Households will receive a letter with a unique access code in the post, allowing them to complete their questionnaire online. Paper questionnaires will be available on request. Census day is March 21. Although this is a first in digital terms there will be help on hand for those who are not able to use digital facilities. For more information, visit census.gov.uk.

RIDING THE RAILS

On 6 April 1907 Leigh laid to rest an 88 year old resident. He had had a long life, married twice with 3 sons and 3 daughters. You could say there is nothing remarkable in that BUT Thomas Sutton (sometimes known as William) had fulfilled every little boy's dream and in a most illustrious and iconic way.

Born in Lancashire in 1819 into a labourer's family, at a time of great strides in industry and new innovations including, when he was 10, the introduction of the railways when Stephenson's Rocket took its first tentative wheel spins leading to the spider's web of railway lines which would cover the country in the coming years.

At 30 Thomas was a married labourer with a son and had made the move south and was living in Paddington. Leap frog 10 years and he was a widower bringing up his son, still in Paddington but now an engine driver. After his remarriage there were 5 more children. Paddington, was the London terminus of the Great Western Railway for whom he worked. By 1871 the family had moved to Chelsea, and there they stayed until in 1891 we find Thomas in Leigh, still with the railway at the ripe old age of 72 living in North Street when he eventually retired.

So what was so remarkable. Well his obituary revealed that he was the oldest engine driver in England having worked for GWR for 60 years, 50 of which had been spent as an engine driver. And there's more.

Thomas had driven many engines in his career but the most well known was 'the Flying Dutchman' and he looked after royalty when he often piloted the carriages of the Duchess of Kent (Queen Victoria's mother), Queen Victoria herself and Prince Albert and the then Prince of Wales (Edward VII). When Garibaldi, hailed as the hero of Italy, was returning to his home country from England, Thomas drove the engine that took him to London. He was also the first man to drive a goods train from Paddington to Reading.

So from very humble beginnings he fulfilled every boy's dream – and then some – and eventually rested in Leigh where he could still hear and see his beloved trains.



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 or pass it on to friends and family, but if not please recycle it**

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