



LEIGHWAY

The newsletter of the Leigh Society
An eye to the future with an ear to the past in the heart of Leigh

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Looking back 2006 was something of a milestone in the history of the Society with the completion of Plumbs Cottage due to the efforts of Carole and Alan in achieving the Lottery grant and keeping the project on track.

The Cottage looks fine and we now look forward to opening it to the public at large. We will of course be seeking the assistance of folk to man the new building.

We have a lot to look forward to in 2007 with this marvelous extension to the Heritage Centre making a positive contribution to the refurbishment of Strand Wharf.

Thanks as ever go to all the Heritage Centre helpers who do such a sterling job and to the Committee for their tireless efforts.

A happy new year to you all

Frank Bentley, Chairman

SUBSCRIPTIONS ETC

Let's get the good news over first. The proposed rise in subscriptions is being put off until **2008** when they will rise to £10 per address (£15 overseas). The bad news is that those of you who pay by standing order will need to complete a new form (copy inside your Leighway) and return it to the Membership Secretary. It is also the opportunity for others of you to pay by standing order in the future by similarly completing the form. This is one way of ensuring you always get your Leighway.

A reminder that subs for this year are now due (at the current rate). We rely very much on subs to keep the Society and Leighway going so please pay promptly.

THE HERITAGE CENTRE NEEDS YOU

As Frank has mentioned, Plumbs Cottage will soon be open to the public and we desperately need stewards to help with both the Cottage and the Heritage Centre. If you are looking for something worthwhile to do with a few hours a week please think of us and volunteer. It is great fun and very worthwhile. If you would like to help please contact Diane Sandall on 01702 557526

CHRISTMAS COMICALS

The 2006 Christmas Comicals was another roaring success. Nearly 100 of you crowded into the Den for this now traditional event where this time the theme was the coming of the railway. We had marvellous sketches, songs and recitations all with a railway theme and everyone agreed it was probably the best Comicals to date. And of course we raised several hundred pounds for the Plumbs project. Our thanks again to the Sea Scouts for the loan of their HQ and to all those who took part, in particular the rather dashing Hercule Poirot – eat your heart out David Suchet

Now for this year, the theme will be school days so start putting on your thinking caps or mortar boards, as the case may be.

WE GOT MAIL

Members will be pleased to know we are slowly dragging ourselves into the computer age and now have our own dedicated e-mail. So if you wish to contact the Society or encourage someone else to join please pass on our e-mail address which is leighsociety@btinternet.com

DIARY DATES

All events will be held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m unless otherwise stated.

14 March – David Williams of the CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England)

25 April – AGM and talk by Neil Smith on Pottery

16 May – Peter Finch of the River Thames Society

12 May - Quiz – 7.30 in the Den

10 October – Mark Bridges- The Warden of Two Tree Island

14 November – Mike Culley – Southend Planetarium

Ann is also trying to arrange a visit to the House of Commons.

IN MEMORY OF TWO DEAR FRIENDS

Thanks to the generosity of the families of two of our best loved helpers who are sadly no longer with us – Iris Williams and Isobel Holland - we have been able to refit the kitchen in the Heritage Centre.

PLUMBS COTTAGE

We're nearly there. The construction work on the Cottage is now complete – a huge sigh of relief there. Now comes the work of putting together the exhibits and written material.

Due to the delays we had early last year the project fell a bit behind time but our thanks go to the Heritage Lottery Fund who have extended the period for our grant to 31 March to enable us to get everything done.

Our grateful thanks also go to Cory Environmental who have supported the project throughout, keeping a lively interest in progress and supporting us with grant aid towards the works.

The Borough Council has also played its part with grant aid and of course there are the marvellous people of Leigh and visitors who have supported us from the start, bought their tiles for the roof and taken part in all the fund raising activities.

Our thanks also go to all others who have had a hand in the detail of the project including; Ronald Cox, Rosemary Arcsott, our builders, T Mann Ltd and building supervisors, The Livemore Partnership.

On behalf of the 2 Plumbs Yard Project, our thanks to all of you.

PLANE SAILING

Thanks to Ray Sinclair who wrote to tell us that Taylor's Woodyard – pictured in the last Leighway – was between Oakleigh Park Drive and Leigh Hall Road south of Pall Mall. It later became Page Callan.

Opposite Cannonsleigh Crescent roughly between the woodyard shop and Pall Mall was a workshop where the wood was planed. Ray used to get a free bag of sawdust for his pet rabbit from there. The site is now residential properties.

Trevor Kirby also wrote with his memories having lived in Pall Mall in the 1920/30s. The woodyard was at the rear of his house and the sawmill, Trevor says, seemed to be constantly in use. The bulk timber was unloaded from barges on Bell Wharf and craned onto special timber drays drawn by two horses. To get them up Leigh Hill two trace horses were added and at the top they were disconnected and returned to the Wharf for the next load.

Many thanks Ray and Trevor for another bit of Leigh history.

1066 and all that

What do you know about Hastings? We all know there was a battle in 1066 of course, but Hastings has some interesting similarities with Leigh. It is of course a fishing port, it has a St Clement's Church, it was involved in the defence of England against the Spanish Armada and has smugglers and famous writers (Robert Tressell – The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists)

What started me off on this trail was finding an old billhead for F T Cotgrove, Hairdresser and Perfumer of 3 Trinity Street, Hastings dated 1910 for sale on ebay. – Of course I couldn't resist it.

Frederick Thomas Cotgrove was the son of William (Judgement) Cotgrove born in 1857 in Leigh.

William, his father, was a well known figure in Leigh and commemorated, for tragic reasons. The Chelmsford Chronicle of 18th December 1874 carries the following story –

William and his eldest son were drowned opposite North Woolwich in the bawley Requitall within sight of 12 other

smacks. All were sailing home from market. The fishermen tried to recover the bodies, boat and the cash from sale of fish.

William senior was a member of the Leigh Court of Ancient Order of Forresters. Many such cases are reported each spratting year and may be due to taking out the ballast from the boats in order to carry more fish to market.

And then on 22nd January 1875 - Body of William Cotgrove from the smack Requitall recovered from the Thames at North Woolwich. (Drowned at end of last year with his son) A second body also found).

9th July 1875 - Report of installation of glass window by Mayor of London on the north side of Church in memory of William Cotgrove junior who died with his father last Christmas.

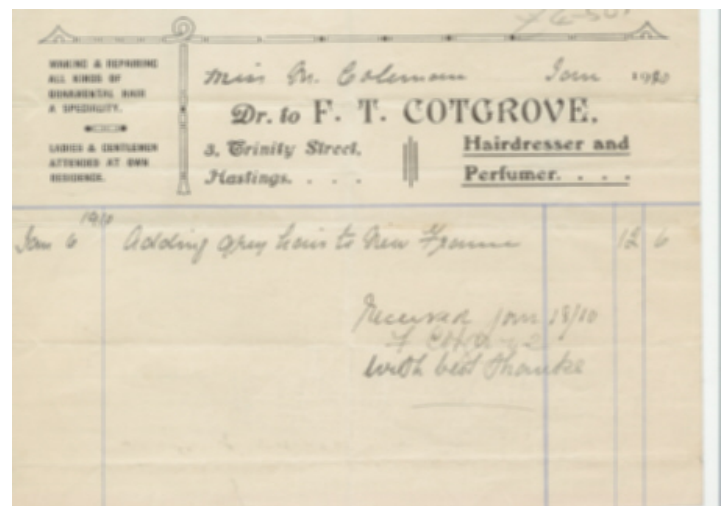
So at the age of 17 Frederick lost his father and older brother to the Thames – perhaps that is why instead of entering the fishing trade, like so many Cotgroves before and after him, he chose a different career and became a hairdresser and perfumer.

Fred seems to have been a bit of a wanderer and he was very hard to pin down from the census returns between 1881 and 1901 although he could be the Frederick Cotgrove, under butler to the Baroness Huntingtower at 29 Chesham Place, London in 1881. He married in 1885 in St Olaves District (Southwark) to Emily Parsons (a dressmaker) and had two children, Amy born in Cheltenham in 1887 (died St Olaves 1888) and William, born in Reigate in 1889 but dying a year later in Hastings.

In 1891 I found Fred and Emily at 44 Alma Terrace in Hastings. Now here's another coincidence, Emily was born in Leigh in Surrey. Perhaps that was the attraction. So it seems by 1890 Frederick had settled in Hastings. By 1901 Fred and Emily were still living in the Alma Terrace area but their house was now called Sonnenberg. Fred was listed as a hairdresser's assistant so somewhere between 1901 and 1910 he went into business on his own.

Trinity Street is now within a conservation area and 3 Trinity Street is a wholefood shop and not far from the Hastings waterfront. But for Fred it was his hairdressing premises where he made and repaired all kinds of ornamental hair as a speciality. He also made home visits.

The billhead is made out to a Miss M Coleman for adding grey hair to new frame – I would have thought most people wanted grey hair taken away but Miss Coleman paid 12 shillings and sixpence (62 ½ pence) for the privilege – that won't even get you a squirt of shampoo nowadays.



PLANNING

There can be no more contentious subject in Leigh and the last few months have evidenced an upsurge in the involvement of local people in the Planning process which has resulted in the refusal of several planning applications for developments which would have scarred the character of Leigh and its conservation areas.

The Leigh Society has reacted very strongly to applications of this nature and will continue to do so where it feels the heritage of Leigh is threatened.

We are playing an active part in the new Conservation Forum referred to elsewhere in Leighway and will respond, where appropriate, to local development plans. Of particular interest will be the proposed action area plan for the seafront.

English Heritage is urging Councils to review their lists of locally listed buildings. These are buildings which of themselves do not merit Government listing but are important locally and should therefore be safeguarded from inappropriate development. Plumbs Cottage was one such building.

To this end local people have a role to play in bringing buildings to the attention of the local authority. Care does need to be exercised, however, as few of us have the expertise to determine the true value of a building either in architectural or historical terms. We should guard against a rush to list as inappropriate suggestions will devalue the process. Having said that we should not be averse to putting forward buildings which we genuinely think may be worthy of protection, so that the experts can take a look.

To bring you up to date here are a few of the issues and applications we have responded to in the last few months.

The Bell Hotel and St Clement's Hall sites. I won't go into detail on these two as I think everyone is well aware of the local opposition to both schemes. Suffice it to say that the Council has refused both and we will now have to wait and see if appeals are lodged, which means the opposition will need to be cranked up again to convince a Planning Inspector of the veracity of the Council's decision.

I expect most people will have noticed the hive of activity in the Broadway, particularly in connection with signage and fascias for the Banks. We have been concerned about the proliferation of inappropriate proposals and have objected strongly in most cases. Our view is that Leigh is not an urban sprawl, it is a compact shopping area and as such those who bank in Leigh do so in full knowledge of the position of their bank. It is therefore considered that there is no need for the excessive signage which is beginning to proliferate the Broadway and that the Council should refuse inappropriate applications because of their detrimental effect on interests of conservation. We have also asked the Council to consider making the Broadway an area of Special Advertisement Control.

6-7 The Gardens – demolition and erection of 2 semi detached dwellings – we felt there was no reason why the existing buildings should be demolished. The proposals did not blend with their setting creating a mixture of styles out of keeping with the conservation area and inappropriate materials. To the rear façade the proposed large gable would break the line of the dwellings and create an alien feature. The Council refused this application and undertook an investigation into the properties historic value.

No doubt 2007 will bring many more challenging planning situations for us to deal with.

A NEW VOICE FOR CONSERVATION



Concern at the increasing effects of development, coupled with the demise of the former Conservation Working Group of the Borough Council, has led to the formation of the Southend-on-Sea Conservation Forum, made up of representatives of the Leigh, Milton, Shoebury and Southend Societies, all of which are charged with the aims of preservation and conservation in their respective areas. The new Forum will seek to promote the enhancement and preservation of the Borough's built and environmental heritage.

The Societies are concerned that too little attention is being paid to the heritage of the Borough in the rush to fulfil housing, employment and other demands on finite land resources.

The Forum is well aware of the constraints and requirements laid upon the Borough Council and its officers and sees its role as one of working with the Borough Council to achieve the right balance between development and the preservation of the Borough's heritage.

The Forum has considered the best way forward in achieving this balance and has drawn together a number of objectives which it is hoped, in association with the Borough Council, can be achieved.

As a start the Forum, as a group and as individual member societies, is writing to the Borough Council to seek the reinstatement of the Conservation Working Party which it is felt was a valuable and worthwhile group for the discussion and sharing of views from around the Borough on conservation matters.

It will not be the remit of the Forum to review individual planning applications as there are other procedures in place for this. However, there are some applications which transcend Society boundaries and are of Borough-wide importance and, of course, there is the whole process of the preparation of the Local Development Framework which will shape the development of the Borough for the foreseeable future. These are the areas where the Forum sees its main role to be in terms of seeking to influence planning policy and a more conservation oriented focus in the consideration of planning applications which affect heritage interests.

It will also look to improve public education regarding planning and conservation; discuss issues which will impact on all Conservation Areas; seek improvements to conservation and heritage interests through planning agreements and improved enforcement performance within the Borough; and share information and be informed and informative on matters relating to conservation and planning throughout the Borough.

The representatives on the Forum for the Leigh Society are Margaret Buckey and Carole Mulroney.

Be aware

Remember you can keep up to date with planning developments and local plan issues via the Borough Council website and if you wish to comment on a planning proposal you can do so on line – no need for a letter or to pay postage.

COCKLESHELL CRUSH.

A chance meeting and overheard conversation in the Heritage Centre one Saturday in November led to the following wonderful article by Richard Woodley, erstwhile cockle crusher of Leigh

I have always been in envy of those who have eidetic memories and can recall in alarming clarity events which happened aeons ago. They all seem to be very bitty to me, old memories from the 1940s, wisps of inconsequential places and faces mixed with the more substantial recollection of a whack across the knuckles with a ruler. I did not like school and the feeling was mutual. So in 1946, aged 14 and knowing it all, I left.

I don't think anyone noticed.

Getting a job was going to be pretty easy, I thought, but what to do? Anything that did not require the use of maths seemed a good idea, in fact a job which did not require the use of too much brain-power at all seemed an even better idea. So I decided to become a boat-builder. I had always loved Old Leigh and had spent many happy childhood hours leaping over the mudflats and jumping off Bell Wharf and rowing a whaler up and down the creek when I was in the 3rd CB Sea Scouts - although the scout HQ was in Electric Avenue in Southend in those days.

So I went to. Johnson & Jago's yard, walked into their really big shed and asked the first person that I saw if there were any vacancies. I remember that he gave me a baleful look and told me to "B****r off". He was quite a large gent and did not appear to be joking so I took his advice. I have since found out that boat-building is a little more complex than I surmised at that time and I'm jolly glad I was not deemed suitable after even that shortest of interviews.

Wandering a little disconsolately past the cockle-sheds I came eventually to the place which now houses the Leigh Heritage Centre but which was then home to Meddle's cockle-crushing machine. There was a lad standing outside the place, thin and tall and maybe a year or two older than me "Got a light, mate?" he asked. I carried a box of matches for just such an occasion, I didn't actually smoke myself but quite liked the idea of being thought old enough to do so and happily obliged. We chatted for a while and the upshot was that I found myself starting work the next day with my new friend (remember his name? I can't even remember what he looked like) and a cheerful little old fellow who was in charge of the shed and who told me he was seventy years old and "still able to" - I had not the faintest idea what he was talking about.

The cockle-crusher was a large machine driven, apparently, by a belt which vanished into a loft above it. I suppose it must have been since if anything went wrong with it the little chap would climb up a ladder, vanish through a hatch and hurl imprecations at the dratted thing whilst apparently hitting it with a large heavy instrument. It was our job, me and the other lad, to shovel huge quantities of shells into the endlessly voracious maw of this clanking contraption. Two rollers were at the bottom of the hopper and these crushed the shells into various sized pieces which then fell onto a long sieve, which vibrated backwards and forwards, falling through graduated holes onto the floor.

It was quite hard work to try and keep the hopper full of shells and after an hour of shovelling I found myself whingeing about being a bit tired. My friend, who was shovelling shells from under the sieve into sacks being held by the old chap (whom I do remember lived in Norman Terrace) offered to swap jobs and winked at me as we changed places. Two minutes later there was a horrendous grinding crunch from the machine and it

stopped dead. The old chap gave a screech of rage and leapt for the ladder with agility remarkable for his advanced years, wisps of smoke came up from the inside of the hopper as the rollers were put into reverse and the old gent came leaping down the ladder, went crunching up the piled-up uncrushed shells and, leaning right down into the maw of the thing, emerged triumphant with a large rock.

He shot a baleful glance at my companion and muttered something about "@*%%" kids wasting my "***&*% time" before once again going up the ladder and setting the rollers going in the right direction again. I began to realise just how fit these men were. It made me tired watching him. My friend had a pile of these rocks and large stones stashed away for use when our aching muscles felt the need.

The crushed shells were used, I believe, for blasting onto house walls, laying in driveways and chicken-grit depending on the grade of crushing. When the shells were all sacked up they were loaded onto a lorry and taken from the shed to what we then referred to as New Leigh Station to go who knows where.

I thought the shells were the left-overs from the cockles which were sold from the sheds but apparently they were not the right sort of shell and ours came from the shell-banks situated somewhere out off Foulness Island. Sometime later, just when I was getting the hang of the crushing business and was not averse to heaving the odd stone or rock into the hopper myself, someone mentioned that we needed more shells. "You'll need seaboots" I was told. This sounded good to me, I imagined myself standing on the deck of one of the cockle-boats as we made our way out to sea from Leigh creek with any of my contemporaries who may have heard of this momentous event watching enviously...

I did not have any sea-boots, did not know where to buy them and, even if I had known, couldn't afford them. So Mum lent me her slightly elevated Wellingtons which almost fitted me quite well. I tried them out in the front room, mincing around like an effeminate John Wayne but, I thought, the heels would sink in the cockleshells and even things out. We - the other lad and two gents whom I did not know - travelled out to somewhere on or near Wallasea Island in an open-backed lorry, very early in the morning, in the dark. The two men were in the cab and the lads in the back, no admiring spectators in sight. Not one.

The boat was a big disappointment. It was like a large flat-bottomed pontoon and it was going to tow four other non-powered pontoons, there was no cabin, just a sort of covered wheelhouse up front. The only thing I can remember with certainty is someone telling me that the thing was powered by a two-hundred and fifty HP Chrysler marine engine. This vital statistic has remained with me for more than sixty years and no, I would not appreciate anyone telling me any different now because my fourteen-year-old alter ego would not like it. It was choppy - they said it was choppy - on the way to the shellbank which lies, I believe, out of the Crouch and someway off Foulness Island.

I was so disorientated (seasick) from it being choppy that I never noticed that we'd actually arrived until someone suggested that I might like to get out and get some work done. My high-heels did not sink into the shells as I had expected and since, even out of the boat, the world continued to move with fervent intensity matched only by the movement in my stomach I tilted gracefully forward until my face collided with the hard mud, and shells.

A kindly voice advised me that work would help my delicate condition. There appeared to be shovels and spades and suchlike implements but it wasn't long before I found myself holding the sacks open as the others filled them, since I could do that job on my knees.

Flat bottomed boats can get on the shellbank, fill up and get off on the day, apparently. Someone had told me that. I have no idea why we had to stay overnight but I expect there was a jolly good reason. I remember hearing the crew talking about the Shoebury gunnery range firing over the shellbank and they not knowing we were there for the night and much muttering about real shells falling short on the cockleshells. If they were intent on winding me up they succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. It was quite cold, my feet were wet. I had not noticed that each of Mum's Wellingtons had, admittedly small - holes in them. I couldn't get them off because my feet had swollen up, they didn't hurt, just felt cold and sort of spongy. Where were we going to sleep? No one appeared unduly perturbed by our situation but as darkness began to descend with malignant inevitability I had a passing thought that my mother most definitely would be.

We found (well, one of them found) a conventional-looking cockleboat with a keel, almost upright on the mud, smug and apparently lifeless so quiet it was in the gloom. Someone from our crew hailed the boat and within minutes we were being welcomed on board and down into the small, snug cabin. They all seemed to know one another and so many bodies in such a small space soon built up a lovely, smokey, fuggy atmosphere - I know that smoking is taboo today but then, in the 40s and 50s, we knew no better and I remember with affection the intoxicating smell of pipe tobacco mixed with cigarette smoke, bodies and oil-lamps. Strange how smells bring back old memories, with clarity and yet faces and names and even some events fade across the years.

I was given some tea and must have eaten although do not remember what. Next, I woke up and it was morning.

Things now become even sketchier, apart from the weird feeling of walking on porridge I can't recall how I got back on board the boat or anything that was said or done to get us under way again. On that return journey it was even choppier than the outward trip and one of the four pontoons being towed was in some danger, apparently, of taking on too much water and maybe even sinking. I was a 14 year old atheist who was being rapidly converted, muttering what may have been prayers to Someone under my breath.

On arrival at wherever we started out from we were required to unload the sacks of shells by walking along a plank to the shore. I can't remember how I got ashore, only that my mother was there. Since she had no transport I assume she was given a lift by Mrs. Meddle who was also there. Once home mum cut off the Wellingtons and we stared at my corrugated feet which resembled tripe but looked worse than they felt.

My mother went and collected my pay and cards and I got another job.

My brother told me a few days ago that he remembers mum going out to a public callbox late one evening to find out were I was and coming back with the hump because she needed her wellies.

I suppose something must've rubbed off from the experience because I joined the navy three years later. And I still love to walk through Old Leigh and watch the cockle boats from the shore.

IN YOUR NEXT LEIGHWAY

From Cockles to Canon – John Fairchild of Leigh
90 Years on – the Loss of the HMS Vanguard

And much much more

WHAT'S IN A NAME

If you saw the name Heber in a document – wouldn't you think it was a typo and the name should be Herbert? Given how bad our ancestors' spelling was and the weird and wonderful concoctions you find reading old parish registers and census returns you could be forgiven for making the mistake of assuming the record is wrong.

In the Leigh registers I came across Heber several times – so many times I realised it was not a mistake. It was very often coupled with Reginald, so it seemed there may be some significance to this pairing.

So what did I do? I 'Googled' it. In other words I searched the internet and lo and behold up popped Reginald Heber – Heber being the surname.

For those of you who like the good old hymns you may very well recognise the name for Reginald Heber was the author of some of our most traditional hymns – From Greenland's Icy Mountains, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty and Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning.

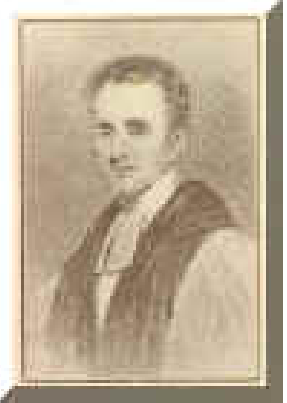
Leigh folk had a habit of naming their children after religious leaders. In an earlier Leighway we had an article on the life of Jabez Bunting a leading Methodist whose name was carried through several children in the Quilter family of Leigh.

Well Reginald Heber's name appears in the Noakes and Going families so he was obviously an inspiration to them.

Reginald was an interesting man and somewhat of a child prodigy. He was born in 1783 in Cheshire and by the age of five he had read the Bible and could give chapter and verse on chance quotations.

He attended Brasenose College, Oxford and was ordained in 1807.

He was quite a poet at university and won several prizes for his efforts. He was appointed Vicar of Hodnet in Shropshire where he served for 16 years. From



Greenland's Icy Mountains was written during this time and first performed on Whitsunday 1819. It was composed at Wrexham at the request of Heber's father-in-law, Dr. Shipley, Dean of St. Asaph's. Heber was to give a lecture on the Sunday evening, but the Dean was to preach at the missionary service in the morning. On the Saturday, the Dean asked Heber to "write something for them to sing in the morning." Heber went to another part of the room and set to work and after a short time produced the now famous missionary hymn.

In 1823, after refusing twice, he reluctantly accepted an appointment as Bishop of Calcutta which at that time included the whole of India, Ceylon, and Australia.

After three years of ceaseless traveling and intense missionary work, Heber died suddenly while visiting Trichinopoly, India on April 3, 1826 at the age of 42 of a cerebral hemorrhage while in his bath. He is buried at St. John's Church, Trichinopoly, Tamil Nadu, India.

HAVE YOU GOT

We are looking for a very old sou'wester and fisherman's jerseys for Plumbs Cottage – can anyone help.

ESSEX RADIO – MAKING WAVES

Twenty seconds to go, and across the ether, the soft tones of an orchestra tuning up can be heard... then:

“It’s 6am, Saturday, September the twelfth, 1981. Welcome to Essex Radio...”



That first voice belonged to John Wellington, and marked the launch of local radio for Essex, bringing the total number of new commercial radio stations opening up and down the country to just over 30.

In those first few exciting minutes of broadcasting, the County of Essex was introduced to the team that were to become household names for many in Essex. Accompanied by the station’s main theme, called “Listen to Essex” and performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, we first heard the voices of breakfast show presenter Jon Scragg, daytime show hosts Dave Gregory, Dave Gilbee and Keith Rogers, drivetime presenter Terry Davis, news man Steve Wood, Talkback’s Chris Mann, “The Hairy Eyeball” (Rock presenter Paul Lee), and late night phone-in voice, Tim Lloyd (later to become ‘Timbo’).

The station’s weekend lineup in those early days included Andrew Marshall’s Country show, Andy Anderson’s Saturday Supergold, sport with Rogers Buxton, Eddie Blackwell’s Jazz show, the Sunday morning religious show with Jeff Bonser and Peter Elvy, Alan Bell’s Essex Top 30 chart countdown, with Lindsay King’s late night Sunday show. The first record heard on that September morning set the pace for things to come ... Cliff Richard’s appropriately-titled “Wired for Sound”.

Essex Radio broadcast from studios two floors below Clifftown Road, in a building that formerly housed the printing presses of the Southend Standard newspaper, and the basement had to be refitted with high-tech studio equipment, which was floating on a special concrete base needed to deaden the vibration from the neighbouring Southend Central railway station. Transmitters for the station were atop Benfleet water tower, with a medium-wave transmitter on a site in Rayleigh. Later, transmitters for North Essex were added.

Those few lucky enough to gain admittance to the catacombs of Radio House would hurry down a rather drab staircase into a beige and cream tunnel that lead to the station’s two main on-air studios, the production studio and two production areas. The basement also housed the station’s Engineering team and the well-stocked record library. Other parts of Radio House were home to the busy newsroom’s typewriters and teleprinters, and the sales, production and management areas.

In the early days, the station was owned by local businesses people, including directors from Keddies, Garons, H.W Stone and Tots nightclub. Since those early days, much has changed. Presenters have come and gone. The station’s medium wave and FM frequencies did the ‘splits’ towards the end of the eighties, when Breeze AM was launched, providing music for an older audience. Over the years, the station saw a transition from vinyl and magnetic tape, through the CD era, and now to

digital computer systems. Essex Radio’s management and formats changed a number of times. Many may remember the old slogans “Somewhere Special”, “We’ll make it a great today”, and “Greatest Memories, Latest Hits”. In the nineties, the station renamed from Essex Radio to Essex FM, with Breeze still operating an oldies station on medium wave.

Today, Essex FM broadcasts from Chelmsford, having recently vacated Radio House in Clifftown Road. The new studio complex is not that far from where UK broadcasting all started. Back in 1922, the first regular broadcasts were made, by an experiential station called “2MT”, coming from a small shed in Writtle. Essex FM is now part of the large UK radio group GCap Media, and twenty-five years since those early days of basement broadcasting, it’s still the number one rated station in Essex. To many, the station will be warmly remembered by many locals as “somewhere special”, and a part of the history of our county.

For more on the history of Essex Radio, and to listen to the original launch of the station back in 1981, go to www.radioandtelly.co.uk/essexradio.html

Pete Sipple

CAN YOU HELP (1)?



The tall gentleman on the right of this picture is John Saunders who lived in Manchester Drive. The picture is believed to have been taken outside the Ship. Wendy Rose a relation of John’s is trying to find out who the other men in the photo are. If anyone recognises any of them please contact

wendyrose10@yahoo.com

CAN YOU HELP (2)?

Can anyone help with this request from John Jenkyn?

John is researching an artist (Alice) Dorothy Cohen because he has a small watercolour of his mother painted by Dorothy when his mother was in the ATS in 1940.

As John thinks his mother is an unlikely candidate for an artist he thinks there may have been some other connection between the two ladies.

Dorothy was born in London in 1887 and studied at the Female College of Art. Between the wars she lived and worked in London and exhibited widely. From at least 1947 she lived in Leigh at 49 Southsea Avenue. The house still exists and next to it is a small building now used as a sail maker which used to be her studio.

Dorothy’s brother Arthur Evelyn Cowan (he changed his name) lived at 88 Salisbury Road and Dorothy may have moved to Leigh to be closer to him. (Arthur had a son, John).

Dorothy died in 1960 and one of her paintings is now in the Beecroft... John would love to hear from anyone with any information on Dorothy. If you do know of her please contact Carole through the Heritage Centre or at carole.mulroney@btinternet.com

CENSUS SNIPPETS

In 1891 Hester Ann Robinson aged 30 and born in Leigh was the cook to the Earl Spencer at Althrop House in Northamptonshire



John Poyntz Spencer, Fifth Earl Spencer

He was twice Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord President of the Council, and First Lord of the Admiralty. At home he was a keen huntsman, readily identifiable on horseback as the 'Red Earl' by his flowing beard. He often rode out with the Empress of Austria, a frequent guest at Althrop. With his wife, the beautiful Charlotte Seymour dubbed 'Spencer's Faery Queen', he also travelled widely with a round-the-world trip in 1895. The Red Earl has the dubious distinction of reputedly having introduced barbed wire to England. He was also Diana, Princess of Wales' Great Great Grandfather.

PRITTLEWELL FAIR

Prittlewell Parish Church, St Mary the Virgin, dates back to Saxon times. Built of Kentish ragstone and limestone brought from Lincolnshire. The building has seen many alterations over the years,

The tower was built in about 1470 and the porch a little later.

The oldest part of the church is the north wall, where there is a Saxon arch built of Roman bricks. The doorway in the west wall led to a room which was used as a schoolroom or priest's lodging.

It was alongside the church that the Prittlewell Fair took place.

The fair was held annually on the 15th. & 16th of July. Hundreds of people attended. There were stalls selling almost anything from toys, sweets and gingerbread, to bread and beer. Gypsies and hawkers came from all around the country to take part. North Street was lined with carts, sheds and barrows. The pubs were open at any hour the publican chose. It was often a rowdy affair, fights frequently broke out. Old feuds were renewed, old scores were settled. This often resulted in the rowdies being confined in the village lock up which was near the church, or in the stocks.

The fair was cancelled in 1665, because the great plague was raging in London. The fair was not by charter, so therefore it could be closed. The great fear was that the plague could be spread to Prittlewell by the visitors coming to sell their wares.

Dr Asplin's diary records how when he lived in North Street the stalls were set out outside his house. He mentioned a giant and a giantess, an Albiness from Baffin Bay, and a dwarf and a learned pig and Punch.

Mr. John Perry told the Southend Standard in 1924 that he remembered how the stalls were set up in North Street and West Street to the Blue Boar. Penny sausages and a ha'penny bread were sold. Shows were set up on Goodman's Green (a space that opened out onto the south side of East Street.) The Spread Eagle had had a booth outside in which dancing took place. Prittlewellers enjoyed gooseberry pie and new potatoes. There was dancing, games and cart racing. The pubs opened their doors as early as the publican chose and closed them at 11 o'clock.

The fair was abolished in 1872. Daniel Scratton declared that it was unnecessary and the cause of great immorality and injurious to the people of the town. Six or more constables needed to keep the peace.

Mr. Scratton said he was willing to give up his rights to any tolls arising from the fair

He said "I shall be pleased to know it is being done away with."

A petition for the closure of the fair was endorsed by Henry Garon, grocer, Henry and William Dowsett, boot and shoe makers, Arthur Bentall and the Reverend Wigram.

Mavis Sipple

ESSEX

By A.C. with apologies to John Betjeman.

"The vagrant visitor erstwhile",
my colour-plate book says to me,
"Could wend by hedgerow-side and stile
from Benfleet down to Leigh-on-Sea."
And as I turn the colour plates
Edwardian Essex fades aside
No mirrored ponds, unseen the gates,
sweet agri-flattened countryside.
Like river, railway runs below
the Castle, straight as arrows fly
Tied fast by sleepers, signals show
to white-faced workers milling *by*.
The marshes drained, no cattle tread
where wheat soft sways in rippling swirls,
No cobbled pathways lead the eye,
no cottage doors nor golden girls.
London to Shoebury, none can stray
from level rail, and gravel fills
Where distant barges high with hay
once sailed past where the steam train plies.
Electric trains now slide and sway
hooking us back with speed unbound
To haste us, not the Epping way
but London-wards, to streets *of* gold.
At convoluted pubs and clubs
they used to break from Wapping's reeks
In that half-land *of* drugs and clubs
past Basildon to Canvey's creeks.
An Essex traveller, now I know,
as whirling marshes sprint past me
That Fenchurch- Shoebury ebb and flow
returns, returns to Leigh-on-Sea.
The little branch line used to go
by white farms snug, with golden stook
By haystacks where shire horses slow,
now thrashes through the Tilbury loop
Now litter chokes along the track,
brambles where hikers crossed the stile
No railway train can take me back
to that Edwardian "erstwhile".

WHITHER THE ERRAND BOY?

Paper rounds apart, these days one does not see youngsters pedalling away to deliver shops' products. As a boy in the 1930s errand running was a way of life to earn a bob or two to buy the odd Walls ice-cream from the tricycle man, sweets, comics such as The Wizard, Hotspur, Magnet and Comic Cuts or indulge a Saturday afternoon for threepence at the Empire Cinema with its three continuous performances. Besides the Movietone News and cartoon there were two films including a serial where one was left wondering whether the heroine would be rescued or the hero escape. They always did of course but one just had to go the next week - forerunners of today's TV soaps perhaps. Cowboys Tom Mix and Buck Rogers were great favourites.

Pocket money in family businesses had to be earned and not gratuitously handed out weekly.

My grandfather Rowland (Bona) Kirby and his brothers came from a long line of Leigh fishermen who had their own bawleys but he decided just prior to World War 1 to come ashore and open his own fishmongering business in Leigh Road and this was taken over by my father Alfred in the twenties.

In the thirties there were always orders to deliver after school and in the holidays also many is the mile ridden on the old fashioned bicycle (no multi-gears:) with a basket frame on the handle-bars. No pay was expected in those days and if one was lucky a customer would reward one with a penny tip. I used to thank those dear souls who had cats and fed them with the cheapest fish - the common whiting for twopence, but which fish has gained status in the fish chain now.

At Christmas there was extra for plucking and drawing turkeys (sixpence), ducks and chickens (threepence) and skinning and cleaning a rabbit (threepence).

When the shrimpers catch was ready for collection it meant a quick cycle down Leigh Hill to collect the sack and then a hard push up hill to the Broadway. On occasions father would take me on one of his twice-weekly visits to Billingsgate fish market, getting the 4am-ish train from Chalkwell and returning about 8 am - just in time to get ready for school. When the lorry later delivered the order to Dalton's fish shop in the Broadway and to us, that involved unloading, sorting and storing the fish in the ice locker. Before that however large ice blocks had been delivered and they had to be broken into smaller segments. On Saturday mornings extra could be earned running errands for my uncle, Ted Joiner at his 'Savoury' delicatessen shop across the road or inspecting dozens of eggs in front of a light bulb to spot any bad 'uns.

Rushbrook the butcher along the road also employed me on errands or filling sausages on the nozzle machine - a type still used, or salt syringing beef cuts for brisket. All for a shilling (5p) so life was on the up! The shops kept a supply of soda crystals for hand washing which resulted in many chapped hands in cold weather; no pleasant soapy detergents then.

Another revenue source was when Keddies had a sale and leaflets needed distributing through letter boxes. They paid three shillings (15p) a day which gave me a margin to recruit

school chums to each of whom I gave a princely threepence. We walked and cycled many miles covering every street in the Borough including Eastwood and Thorpe Bay and yes we did respect the 'No Hawkers, Circulars and Canvassers' brass plates on doors.

Several of the young men employed in ours and neighbouring shops were in the Territorial Army Anti-Aircraft Battery at Eastwood so one had to do their shop duties when they went on their annual camp. One became quite skilled at gutting and filleting fish, preparing crabs and tending the smoke-shed for the bloaters, kippers and haddocks. Washing down our open-fronted shop in all weathers at closing time - 8 pm weekdays and 10 pm Saturdays - was a necessary chore. This work had to be done when the men were called-up for the 1938 Munich crisis and explanations were often sought for absences from school. Just prior to World War II I had left school and found a job so when the men again had to leave, one's work load doubled - but not the pay!

Then came the general evacuation of school children and non-essential adults from coastal areas and through lack of trade my father had to close his business 'for the duration', and we moved to Prittlewell, too close to Rochford aerodrome for comfort when it was attacked.

My father having served in the Royal Navy on minesweepers in World War 1 and again went to sea but this time on barrage-balloon barges accompanying convoys and on tugs supplying the Estuary forts under Nore Command. Not to be outdone and to contribute to the war effort my mother went onto the EKCO military radios production line. It had always been her intention that her three sons should not follow on in the fish trade and here the war fulfilled her wish for after service in HM forces we went into other occupations.

Looking back, they were hard times but one thought nothing of it for there was the companionship of school-fellows doing similar errand jobs and with whom one enjoyed scouting, cycling, swimming and football. Certainly I bless those active days for keeping me fairly fit throughout my life. Today when I see the lads and lasses cycling on their early morning paper rounds I have great empathy with them and always hope they get good tips at Christmas!

Trevor Kirby (aged 83)

LEIGHWAY – SPRING 2007

The next edition of Leighway will be in April so can you start putting your thinking caps on for articles of interest. I will need these by the middle of March. Please send contributions to Carole via the Heritage Centre or to 83 Southsea Avenue, SS9 2BH or via the internet at leighsociety@btinternet.com.

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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