



# LEIGHWAY

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

## AGM ANOTHER GREAT MEETING CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

In 2007 we have seen the completion of the Plumbs Cottage project and the building is currently being decorated and furnished by Alan Crystal. The rebuilding of this Victorian cottage has been a huge success and our thanks are due to Carole and Alan who have worked tirelessly.

The building is a major visual contribution to Strand Wharf and we look forward to the new layout for the wharf by Leigh Town Council in the near future to complete the picture. The Heritage Centre continues to be well visited and the efforts of the Society members in staffing the shop are much appreciated. We still have vacancies for helpers though so if you wish to help out please contact Margaret (Tel 473628) Lastly many thanks to members who regularly attend our meetings at Wesley Church, whatever the weather!

Frank Bentley

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Committee has maintained a vigilant and active role over the past year in the affairs of Leigh and further afield. Planning matters keep us busy with developers targeting Leigh with an unending number of plans for flats, wine bars etc.

The running of the Society with its Heritage Centre and, of course, the Plumbs Cottage Project, relies on quite a number of very committed people who give up valuable time in various ways to keep them all running smoothly and effectively. I won't name them all but everyone has various expertise and abilities to offer. They are a great team and a lot of pleasure, friendship and some satisfaction is their reward.

Affiliated to the River Thames Society and Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Essex), Thames Partnership and English Heritage, we are kept informed on issues further afield but relevant to us.

Our members' meetings have, I hope, been useful in meeting with members and friends and hopefully of interest. Through our fund-raising activities and outings, we also provide members with an opportunity to be involved.

Thank you all for your support, it is very valuable and makes the Society worthwhile. Any offers of help in any way will be welcome. Do come and join us.

Margaret, Hon .Secretary

## THE 2 PLUMBS YARD PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT

The Cottage is now complete and will be officially opened on 5 May at 11sam – all are welcome. It has been a tremendous effort on the part of all concerned but my especial thanks go to Donald Fraser who has looked after the money so judiciously, to Alan who has helped with all sorts of things from running papers to the Lottery in Cambridge to painting the walls and negotiating contracts, to Elaine who has masterminded the internal works, to everyone who has helped in whatever way and to Margaret who has been there all the time as a shoulder to cry on when things weren't going well and as a source of support through all the trials and tribulations. Thanks to everyone

Carole Mulroney

## SUBS OR CONFUSED.COM

An apology for the confusion regarding subscriptions and the standing order form. To set the record straight the new subs of £10 per household (£15 overseas) commence on January 2008. With your September Leighway will be an up to date standing order form with full instructions. Many of you are now using this arrangement and it does work well for everyone (when we get it right of course). Thanks everyone for your forbearance on this and if you haven't already paid please do so.

## QUIZ

The quiz is on 19 May NOT 12 May as stated in the last Leighway. Teams of 6 and tickets as always from Ann Price at 15 Henry Drive, 01702 710324. The price of £7 includes a fish and chip supper.

## DIARY DATES

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

25 April – AGM and talk by Neil Smith on Pottery

16 May – Peter Finch of the River Thames Society

19 May - Quiz – 7.30 in the Den

19 June – House of Commons and Jeffrey Museum

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

14 November – Mike Culley – Southend Planetarium

December – Comicals (Schooldays) – TBA 7.30 in the Den

## PLANNING

To bring you up to date, yet another amended scheme came in for the Bell. In our view this was no improvement on the previous scheme and the Bell itself was proposed for flats instead of hotel use. Once again we objected strongly to the backland development of 4 and 5 storey flats and to the loss of the use of the Bell as a hotel. Thankfully the Borough Council agreed and refused the application.

The same applicant submitted an application for what seemed at first sight to be an unremarkable proposal to knock the rear wall down between the fish and chip shop and the Rock Shop and extend the outside seating area to the rear of both properties.

Members will remember that an application to change the Rock Shop to a restaurant was refused on appeal only a year or so ago.

The plans for this new proposal clearly showed a change of use and an internal link being made between the two properties and the provision of customer toilets in the Rock Shop side, thus opening up 75% of the site to restaurant connected uses. We objected strongly to this in the light of the previous appeal decision, the loss of the retail shop (only a small area at the front of the Rock Shop was to be retained in retail – but for how long). Our great fear being that the whole site would gradually turn into yet another restaurant in a piecemeal fashion before anyone realised.

We fear greatly that Old Leigh will end up as a café/restaurant area which is completely against the Borough Council's policy of retaining the area as a marine village. We very much support the traditional pubs (which all serve food) and sea food outlets, although we were very concerned about the permission to grant No 1 Cocklesheds for a restaurant use and thus extend the restaurant uses into the traditionally industrial area of the cocklesheds. However that permission has been strongly tied to the type of food which can be served as related to the fishing industry.

We do understand the issues which such an application raises in terms of the need for the fisherman to diversify and enhance their incomes but we have to balance this against preserving the conservation area which is not just its buildings but their settings and the historical ambience and nature of the Old Town.

The last few months have also seen the publication of more sections of the Borough Council's local development framework which will shape development in the Borough for several years to come. There has been an Action Area Plan for the Seafront and a separate one for the Town Centre of Southend and the Society has reviewed these and made comment. The Seafront Plan obviously affected us the most and if members wish to see a copy of the comments we submitted on this please get in touch with Carole.

The newly formed Southend-on-Sea Conservation Forum has met and discussed many issues surrounding conservation in the Borough and we are pleased to say that the Borough Council has decided to reconvene its own Conservation Working Party which hopefully will give a higher profile to these important issues.

## THE CONDUIT

The Society would like to send its grateful thanks to Mr D Richardson of SP Memorials at Benfleet who has refurbished the plaque in the Conduit at no charge. A wonderful gesture when others wanted to charge over £500.

Thanks as always to Norman Sutcliff who looks after the Conduit and who organised the refurbishment.

## THE CANON GOES INTO BATTLE

On 5 May 1885 Canon Walker King took a number of the oldest fishermen to act as witnesses before a Committee of the House of Commons to protest against having Bell crossing and wharf closed.

Apparently as they were entering the Law Courts, Sir Samuel Wyatt came up to the Canon and said 'Why King, what are you doing here?' The Canon, who was an old college friend of Wyatt's told him the reason. It turned out the case was heard in Wyatt's court but when the case began Counsel for Leigh was not there and the Canon rose saying 'I don't know if you will hear me, but in my parish I am parson, clerk and lawyer too'. The judge laughed and the Canon continued with the case.

The Canon won the day against the Railway Company and it was ruled that the public had a right to the pathway from time immemorial. The returning party was met by nearly the whole of Leigh with loud cheers, the boys escorting the Rector to the top of the hill shouting and beating on tin pots and kettles.

On 16 May the following year Bell crossing was closed and an iron bridge erected instead by the Railway Company and presented to the village to maintain the right of way over the railway.

## STOP PRESS

We have recently been contacted and met descendants of Canon Robert S King (son of Walker), who many of our older readers will no doubt remember as a dearly loved member of the community. We are delighted to say that the Canon's grandson, Brian King and great granddaughter, Lorna Bidgood have placed on permanent loan to the Society a wealth of the Canon's personal papers and letters as well as a large number of photographs and other items.

It will take sometime to catalogue these items but once this is done we intend to mount an exhibition in the Heritage Centre and produce some written material alongside this to commemorate this truly beloved man of Leigh.

Our grateful thanks go to Brian and Lorna for thinking of us and allowing us to share their family history.

## A SAD SIGHT IN OLD LEIGH

### As remarked by visitors to the Heritage Centre

The following is the text of a letter which Carole wrote to the Leigh Times after some comments made in the Heritage Centre by visitors.

*Dear Sir*

*I am writing in following comments made by several visitors to Leigh Heritage Centre on a Sunday when I was recently helping in the Centre.*

*The scene was Sunday lunchtime outside the Boatyard Restaurant - two very imposing gentlemen, clad in black bomber jackets and looking very out of place in a little fishing village and more appropriate to a Saturday night in town – sad though that is as well.*

*No doubt they are there for a purpose but in a beautiful little conservation area on a Sunday afternoon, with local people, day visitors and families wandering along the Old Town – what sort of message does that send out?*

*Is this really necessary? Do the gentlemen have to be so conspicuous? People visiting the Heritage Centre have commented that they found it intimidating and would think twice about an area that feels the need for this type of welcoming for its visitors.*

*Not conducive to an upmarket tearoom either I suspect!!!*

*Carole Mulrone*

## HMS VANGUARD

9 July 1917

The loss of the HMS Vanguard in Scapa Flow in July 1917 was the worst loss of life in a naval disaster on home shores in the history of the Royal Navy.

Over 800 men lost their lives, not through enemy action, but due to a cordite explosion.

The Vanguard had fought at the Battle of Jutland the previous year but for the 7 months prior to the explosion she had been docked at the Northern Base on Scapa Flow's north shore.

Eye witness accounts told of a massive explosion at about 11.20pm which was followed by a second blast which sent flames high into the night sky and scattered machinery on the shore.

Although the official report said that the crew was 'as happy as any ship in the Grand Fleet' seven months inactivity must have weighed on them. Out of 845 men on board only 2 survived.

This was of course still war time and the Navy was very cautious about the details which were released and it was not until after the war that a full report was made.

Sabotage was officially ruled out – the Vanguard was an old ship and not the type of target for sabotage activity. The official reason for the disaster was a series of massive explosions caused by cordite, which is a very unstable, heat sensitive commodity used in charges. There were several other instances of cordite explosions causing the loss of ships from several navies, except the German which used a different type of propellant.

The Vanguard was built at Chatham in 1909 and it was interesting for the investigators to note that two other Chatham built ships, the Natal and Bulwark had also sunk after similar explosions. However, they attributed this to coincidence.

The report noted that the position of the coal stack stowed in the Vanguard's patent fuel space – where the first explosion happened – 'produced conditions favourable to spontaneous combustion'.

Two Leigh men were serving on the Vanguard – James Deal, who thankfully was not on board that night, and Able Seaman James Risby Wilder who unfortunately was and was lost.



James was born on 24 September 1897, the son of William Gabley Wilder (a founder Trustee Of Wesley Methodist Church in Elm Road) and Annie, his wife (formerly Risby). The family lived in Cranleigh Drive and James joined the Navy on 4 October 1915 at the age of 18. His working life was as a fisherman and his service papers state that he was 5ft 3in tall with light brown hair and brown eyes.

After starting his naval career on HMS Pembroke, James was transferred to the Vanguard and fought at the Battle of Jutland. James was just 19 on that ill-fated July night and like the majority of the Vanguard's crew has no grave. He is memorialised however on the Chatham Memorial and on the 1914-18 Roll of Honour in Wesley Methodist Church.

Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Beatty said of the disaster 'It is an overwhelming blow and fairly stuns one to think about. One

expects these things to happen when in the heat of battle but when lying peacefully at anchor it is very much more terrible.' The graves of the sailors from HMS Vanguard who could be buried are at Lyness in the Orkneys and the disaster is highlighted at the Scapa Flow visitor centre at Lyness where a porthole from the ship is displayed.

Although salvage was attempted the remains of the ship still lie at 108 feet to the north of the Golta peninsula in Flotta.

Keith Charnock and Carole Mulroney

### BAWLEY SONG

This little ditty was heard by the late Mrs J Turnnidge of Hastings, the wife of Thomas Reuben Turnnidge.

Thomas was the last hereditary freeholder of mooring on Leigh foreshore. On his death in 1966 the Southend Corporation took over the mooring. Mrs Turnnidge heard this in snatches outside the Crooked Billet in 1927 sung by an old crabber who was well lubricated at the time.

*Come break out the anchor, the nets alongside  
Our bawley is waiting to sail with the tide  
The wind is a-westering filling the sail  
Old Tom's at the tiller, our voyage won't fail.*

*Lay off the Red Tower and dribble our net  
The shoal is to Norarrd we mustn't forget  
With whitebait and shrimps coming up from the Nore  
We shall have to beat hard to the peter-boat shore.*

*With our starb'd to Maplin, our net we shall hoist  
And fire up the boiler, the catch to keep moist  
With an eye on Leigh Tower no further we'll roam  
And we'll drink to old shipmates who'll never sail home.*

*Chorus  
So home in the morning the night stars are pale  
Old Tom's at the tiller, our venture won't fail.*

Tom Turnnidge was remembered by the Turnnidge Cup which was competed for annually by Church scholars under the direction of the Vicar. Tom's father, George, was a fisherman who had a bawley with Fred and George Cotgrove and they fished for cockles, shrimps and whitebait at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. George later left Leigh to join the London and India Docks and became Chief Lock Keeper, Southern Department. He lived for the rest of his life in Tilbury.

All this information was donated to the Heritage Centre by Mr and Mrs Cooper who had found Mrs Turnnidge's notes in a copy of Old Leigh by Rev Bundock which they bought at a jumble sale in Harold Wood – everything eventually comes home to Leigh

### KNIT ONE, PURL ONE

We have it on good authority, that, in common with other fishing ports, Leigh women knitted their menfolk's fishing jerseys to a traditional pattern for Leigh.

A recent visitor to the Heritage remembered Bertha Harvey knitting these sweaters with oiled wool, using wooden needles. She sat in a chair with arm rests to take the weight of the heavy wool off her arms. Needless to say we would love to get hold of this traditional pattern but suspect it was all in their heads. If anyone knows anything about this or has a pair of the old wooden knitting needles or indeed a patterned sweater we would love to hear from you. or display.

## MEMORIES OF GREAT AUNT PEM

Does anyone remember my Great Aunt's Tea Shop in Old Leigh High Street? She was born in Leigh to James and Alice Osborne (nee Lungley) and though named Emily I only ever knew her as "'Aunt Pem"' - in fact she was Aunt to my father George Frederick "'Fatboy"' Osborne, born Leigh in 1901. Seemingly, she was always referred to as "Pem, and indeed in John Bundock's 1978 book. entitled "Old Leigh - a Pictorial History' she is thus named in a group of New Road Methodist Sunday School Teachers, from 1913.



Alice and Pem Osborne

Alice is probably her sister. Another sister, Selina, born about 1886, sadly died at 28 years or so, from whelk poisoning. She left two young motherless daughters - Alice and Emily Pond, and I know that subsequently Pem helped bring up niece Alice - not sure who raised young Emily, but she grew up to marry Arthur "China" Cotgrove .

Returning to Pem's tea shop, that enabled her to have some income - she was a maiden lady all her life and turned the small front room of her modest 2 up 2 down over to the provision of refreshments for visitors to the Old Town. Regrettably the row of Victorian brick built houses where she lived was demolished to accommodate the present hideous fly-over road bridge, constructed about 1960'ish and crossing the railway from the foot of Belton Hills - how it continues to ruin the locality.

If one refers to another book, being Judith Williams 2002 "'Leigh on Sea - a History"' page 124 the row in question is clearly shown, ready for the bulldozer. Pem lived in the end right hand house, closest to the Billet Pub, with the former level crossing alley in between. I think that hers was numbered 48 High Street and that possibly it was formerly the home of her Mum and Dad - my Great Grandparents. Page 123 of Judith Williams' book has a photo including a close up of Pem's front door and front ground floor sash window and when her Tea Shop was open, the front door was propped back and a Board outside proclaimed:

Cockle & Shrimp Teas - 1/3d (might have been 1/-)  
Plate of cockles or shrimps.  
Bread & butter.  
Pot of tea & rock cake.

My memories of Pem date from about 1949/50 onwards, as I was born in 1943 and loved being around the Old Town - the beach, the boats and the cockle sheds - in particular sliding down the huge heaps of cockle shells, that were chucked out the back of my Grandfather, James "Ratsy" Osborne's shed, my Grandfather being Pem's brother. As you stepped into Pem's small front parlour the thing that struck you was an abundance of sky blue gloss paint as almost everything was painted in it - the 4 or 5 small tables, the chairs, tea trays and picture frames etc. It must have been her favourite colour, unless a few tins had washed up on the shore. Fixed around the walls above the picture rails were several glass fronted boxes of preserved wild fowl, shot on the Marshes by one of the Osbornes and mounted by one of the Johnsons. So as visitors, including many Londoners who returned year on year sat scoffing their cockle teas, they were watched by the petrified beady eyes of these

poor long dead creatures, above their heads. I wish that I could recall who exactly shot them, but my mind was on cadging a rock cake and these were kept in a large tin in Pem's shed. This shed was situated a couple of steps from her back door, perched against the railway wall and it was here that she prepared the teas. Everything was spotlessly clean with American Cloth tacked over the surfaces, and gleaming plates around the sides on shelves and rows of cups on hooks. When a steam train thundered by, just inches from the shed - all the crockery went berserk, jangling together crazily until the train had passed. She was a largish lady, in wrap around paisley pinafore, grey hairnetted hair and puffy feet in slippers. I can, in my mind's eye still see her, standing in the shed plating up the teas and buttering bread. The bit I awaited was when she reached for the rock cake tin and no matter how longingly I looked I was rarely lucky. In truth, I was rather in fear of her as she was very stern and a bit grim faced.

At that time there was no piped water into the terrace of houses, nor any inside lavatories. These vital requirements were provided by one outside cold water tap and one outside "Thunder Box" lavatory - both serving all the properties; indeed I recall fetching enamel buckets of water from the tap out the back.

My Dad's bawley "'The Rainbow LO 240"' had its mooring immediately opposite Pem's front door and as she'd know when he was coming in on the tide, she would sometimes trot across the few steps to the Creek where my father most often would give her a sieve full of whatever he'd returned with. Such happy memories of my childhood around the Old Town - I now live in Kent and whenever I cross the Thames I visit my haunts of younger days and look to where Pem's little Tea Shop was and opposite to where my Dad's boat was moored for so many years - it is very poignant for me and hard to believe it all took place. In later life, Dad sold the Rainbow to Dennis Brown, son in law of Emily and China Cotgrove and as Emily was Dad's cousin, I guess it stayed in the Clan. Dennis retired and I believe the Rainbow went to Maldon? Does anybody know?

As for Aunt Pem, she must have been very sad at having to leave her home of so many years - I know that she then went to live in elderly persons flats facing the Elms Pub - up top on the London Road. She lived there for a few years until she passed away - may she Rest in Peace.

Sheila Osborne, Faversham, Kent

For those interested in these things whelk poisoning is characterized by intense headache, dizziness, nausea, and vomiting.

## LEIGHWAY – AUTUMN 2007

I received quite a few articles from you for Leighway and was not able to publish them all in this edition so they will keep until the autumn. But I can always do with more. The next edition will be in September so can you start putting your thinking caps on for articles of interest. I will need these by the end of August at the latest. Please send contributions to Carole via the Heritage Centre or to 83 Southsea Avenue, SS9 2BH or via the internet at [leighsociety@btinternet.com](mailto: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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