



# LEIGHWAY

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

## IN THE DEPTHS OF WINTER

There is always a Leighway to keep you company. This edition is very much focussed on Leigh people which we hope readers will find interesting. Much of the content has come from members and local people which is fantastic and we would like to encourage all our members to think whether they could contribute to the magazine and bring their knowledge of Leigh and its people out of the cupboard for everyone to enjoy. We would also appreciate some articles on other subjects. The history is great and is my personal interest but others of our members have other interests such as local ecology, interesting walks and other things of interest about the town – so please have a think as to whether you could write something for the next Leighway.

Carole

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Sorry folks but its that time again. Subs are due by 31 March. So if you don't renew by then the March Leighway will be your last edition (and it would be such a shame if you did not receive any more issues – wouldn't it?)

For those of you who pay by standing order there is no need for you to do anything. Anyone who wants to pay that way please get in touch so we can get it set up for you.

Subs are £10 UK and £15 overseas.

We need your support so please don't let your membership lapse.

## DEAR DIARY

All our talks are held at Wesley Hall, Elm Road Methodist Church at 8 p.m entry charge of £1 for members and £2 for visitors.

17 March – Cycling in Essex

20 April – Visit to Dover Castle

21 April – AGM and slides of Leigh

12 May – Talk on Paglesham – Ann Boulter

13 October – Leigh buildings – David Greenwood

10 November – History of the Palace Theatre

Ann is hoping to arrange another theatre trip to Southwold in August

## MARGARET ARTHUR

Margaret Arthur a member for many years and a well known figure in Leigh died, at about the age of 80, on 7th January 2010.

Although Margaret never married, she had a great love of children, being a wonderful aunt to her nieces and a nephew. Her first job was with a large shipping company, where she was in charge of the nursery departments of liners on world-wide cruises. After a few years she returned to her beloved Leigh, to assist in the care of her elderly mother. She was appointed School Secretary of the former Belfairs Boys School. When time came to amalgamate that school with Belfairs Girls School Margaret moved. For her final employment Margaret, somewhat reluctantly, joined Southend Borough Council, where she worked in the Housing Department.

Margaret was a great supporter of the Guide movement. As a young girl, she became one of the first members of the then newly formed St. Clement's Guide Company. A few years later, a vacancy occurred in St. Clement's Brownie Pack for a Tawny Owl. Margaret willingly took up this post. On one occasion, she assisted in taking the brownies on a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral. Whilst there they visited the crypt. Although a lot of noise was being made by tourists, an officious verger accosted Margaret, telling her to keep the brownies quiet. Margaret responded, in her booming voice heard throughout the crypt, 'My good man. Did you not know that our Lord said 'Suffer the little children to come unto me?'' The red-faced verger then crept away without a further word.

For many years Margaret was a dedicated bell-ringer at St. Clement's Church, where for a few years she became a Churchwarden.

Margaret was a very keen long-distance walker and cyclist. Even in later years, when she suffered badly from arthritis, she continued to be seen cycling round Leigh.

Margaret was a lifelong "Leighman" and was delighted at the formation of Leigh-on-Sea Town Council in 1996, after which she continuously praised the work of that Council. Margaret's other interests included poetry, drama and music. For many years she was a valued member of Wesley Dramatic Society and in her youth was involved with entertainment in the town and we believe joined Peggy Mount and Brubs Bridge in concert parties.

Donald Fraser

## THE REV GILBERT



This photograph of the Rev Gilbert in the last Leighway sparked some memories.

David Atkinson remembers 'He was Parish Priest at Our Lady of Lourdes RC Church, Leigh Road for many years and died in the 1950s, I think. His grave, outside the church near the corner of Marguerite Drive and Leigh Road will record his years. I always thought he was known as Fr. Francis.

I went to Sunday mass at OLOL from 1945 until I left Southend for Bournemouth following my election as MP in 1977. Canon Gilbert was a genial and popular priest and I would often find him chatting to my father in his office at Chalkwell Motor Co., 686 London Road (recently been demolished!) on my way home to Bridgewater Drive from Alley Court.

Tony Bullock has provided this very detailed account of the Rev Gilbert's ministry for which we are most grateful.

### Who was Rev. Gilbert?

Father Gilbert was the parish priest of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes from 1917 until his death in 1952.

I have good memories of him when I was a child. A stubborn energetic man, a very good parish priest, who was greatly respected by his parishioners.

He came to Leigh in 1919 at the age of 42. He had been previously parish priest at Grays. He was descended from an old English catholic family who were proud to say that Sir Humphrey Gilbert the great Elizabethan explorer was an ancestor.

In 1917, the Catholics of South East Essex were scattered and there were few churches or any other infrastructure.

The mission given him by his Bishop was to look after, not only Leigh, but also, Hadleigh, Benfleet, Canvey Island, Rayleigh Hawkwell and even as far as the River Crouch.

Most men would have found the task too great but not the indomitable Father Gilbert.

In Leigh the only building was a hall in Marguerite Drive which was used as the local mass centre.. This had been quickly erected as a drill hall for volunteers during the Boer War in 1902 it remains as the church hall to this day.

His first task was to build a church at Leigh as soon as he could. Finances were poor and there was also an outstanding debt on the drill hall. This did not deter Father Gilbert. His Bishop urged caution but Father Gilbert ignored this good advice and went ahead! He managed somehow to obtain the plans of St Albans Church in St Johns Road, Westcliff and he used then as a blue print for his new church.

He asked former parishioners from Grays to come and work for him. During the construction of the church, he ordered and arranged payment of materials and supervised every stage of the building. For someone with no previous experience of building, this was a truly an amazing feat.

The stones of the church have an interesting history. They were quarried near Glasgow and used as ballast for some landing craft sent out to Gallipoli in 1915. The boats were intended to ferry troops ashore at Suvla Bay. After the evacuation of Gallipoli these small boats were sent to Malta.

When the war ended in 1918 they were brought back to the Thames for use on a housing project in East London. Father Gilbert somehow managed to persuade the owner of the stones to give them to him. They were landed at Bell Wharf and towed up Leigh Hill by a steam traction engine in 1924. With the arrival of the stones, the construction of the church began.

Father Gilbert planned his own heating systems but in the early days the heating was not used and every penny was saved because of the cost of the building. It was said that his former curates wore overcoats in the presbytery house because it was always so cold.

The first mass was celebrated in the church in October 1925 but the church was not consecrated by the Bishop until 1929.

With the completion of the church he went on with the same frenetic enthusiasm to complete other projects for his "mission".

Father Gilbert wished to have a convent as part of his new parish. There was a new parishioner called Mrs. Moore from Tipperary. She admired the work of Father Gilbert and when she died she left her house in Hillside Crescent to Father Gilbert. Father Gilbert made this the convent for the parish and invited the Sisters of Charity to run it.

Father Gilbert then turned his attention to the other areas of his mission.

In 1927 he called a public meeting in Benfleet and arranged for a mass centre in the assembly rooms in Benfleet and visited there regularly to say Mass. He obtained plots of land to build a church in Benfleet but this was interrupted by the War.

Rayleigh was also part of his mission until it was set up as a separate parish in 1931. Before that time he had acquired some land in Rayleigh and organised a Catholic Centre which was run by the Sisters of Charity from Leigh.

He was given a site on Canvey Island by another parishioner for a church, and with his direction a church was opened on Canvey in 1938. This church was served by the priests at Leigh until a resident priest arrived in 1947.

In 1947 shortly before his death, he purchased land in Hadleigh high street for a Mass Centre and where now there is a church.

He also worked to have a Catholic school for the parish.

In 1938 he had advanced plans for a primary school next door to Our Lady of Lourdes Church at Leigh. The coming of the war stopped this project. The money raised was used after the war towards the development of Our Lady of Lourdes primary school but sadly he did not live to see this part of his plans for the parish.

In 1952 at the age of 77 he became terminally ill. He continued his work as long as he could and even managed a pilgrimage to Lourdes a few months before he died.

When he died he requested to be buried near his beloved church. His grave at the foot of the church tower is probably unique in Leigh. It is the only grave in Leigh which is not in a registered churchyard or cemetery.

The simple inscription on his gravestone reads " he served the parish for 35 years and he built this church" -- a fitting epitaph for a great man.

Tony Bullock

## PLANNING UPDATE

The Society continues to give its views on applications in the 4 Leigh Conservation Areas and over the last few months has considered a number of applications in the Broadway, not least the new Tesco store.

Whether you like it or not, and there are views either way, Tesco is in our midst, but not without a struggle. The Company submitted a raft of applications for the refurbishment of the store. Thankfully they withdrew some of these (i.e. bollards in the pavement!!!) and also amended their plans for the shop frontage which would have made it out of kilter with the rest of the building. Look up next time you pass it is quite impressive above ground floor. There was still one bone of contention and that is the provision of yet another ATM in the frontage. We consistently objected to this because of the heavily trafficked area of pavement in front of the shop and its relative narrowness and we could not see any reason why the ATM could not be within the store. Tesco's consultants pointed out that this would affect the sales area potential but that to our mind was not a valid planning reason for allowing the ATM externally especially in a conservation area. Thankfully the Borough Council have turned it down.

An enforcement notice has been served in respect of the amusement arcade in the Broadway seeking the restitution of the shop front – hopefully this will be complied with.

By the time you get this Leighway we will know which way the Council has voted on the airport expansion and soon thereafter whether or not the Secretary of State is to call the application in for a public inquiry.

## THE MANX CONNECTION

The 1901 census reveals that Abraham Partridge of Leigh was the master of the 'Manx Maid' a 92 ton vessel which was employed in general coastal trade between the Isle of Man and Cumberland and Lancashire ports.

How Abraham came to be working in the Isle of Man, living at Water Street, Ramsey in 1900, is not known. Does any member of the Partridge family know?

Abraham had obviously been working in the Island for some time as he married a local girl, Sarah Clarke. They had one known daughter, Rhoda Frances who in 1881 aged one was living with her Clarke grandparents in Maughold, IOM registered in the census with the Christian name, Routledge, the census enumerator was either deaf or a very bad speller. By 1911 Rhoda was unmarried and working as a domestic cook in the household of a Cotton Spirit company director in Ramsey.

Information from Paul Weatherell, Library & Archive Services Officer, Manx National Heritage

## WHEN LEIGH WAS A PARISH

The Society's web site is proving to be a constant source of new information about the town and its history. Thanks to Oliver Johnson for this interesting delve into the Parish of Leigh.

The main branch of Oliver's family are the Foster's. William Foster, Oliver's great, great grandfather, was born in approximately 1817 in Witham son of John Foster. In 1851 William Foster was married to an Elizabeth Foster (nee Shaw) and working as a Coal Merchant and Victualler or Inn Keeper

and was listed as being at the Kings Head inn, Leigh Street (the Sailing Club site).

In 1861 William and Elizabeth are living on New Road in "Shaw Cottages". At this time William Foster's occupation is given as a Coal Merchant. By 1871 William had made his fortune and had built Pittington House on New Road which was a rather grand house and Oliver's mother can remember visiting her grandparents there.



Also in 1871 William was a farmer owning 260 acres of land, employing 12 men and 2 boys. From a newspaper article printed in 1895, it mentions that he owned a farm on Canvey Island.

In 1891 William is still living at Pittington House (where it is believed he remained until he died) and was then married to a Mary S Foster, formally Mary S Beadel.

A newspaper article of February 1895 introduces the members of the Leigh Parish Council. William Foster is the Chairman and took a great interest in local matters – 'the right man in the right place' is how he is described. He is quoted as being a believer in the great future which lies before Leigh and fully expects it eventually to blossom out into a fashionable watering place.

There is a stained glass window in St. Clement's Church which it is believed is either dedicated to William or his family – do any of our readers know this window?

According to the 1895 newspaper article William had lived in Leigh for 55 years and had "filled almost every conceivable parochial office. For 34 years he served on the Board of Guardians. In 1893 William broke both his arms but the article says that 'despite this accident at his age he recovered and was a man possessed of a fine physique, great breadth of intellect and a mind which is nevertheless thoroughly capable of dealing with the small details of business and official life.'



William Foster

## BARRY BRIDGE

It is with deep regret that we record the passing of another former member, Barry Bridge. Barry may not be known to many of you but in the past he contributed to the Leighway from his home in Tasmania where he emigrated many years ago. He never lost touch with Leigh though and everyday looked out the local news, followed the English cricket team and passed on anecdotes about his early years in Leigh. Barry was the grandson of Henry (Scoppy) Bridge who started Bridges buses before the war.

## THE CIRCUS PARTRIDGES

Members may remember a couple of years ago an article about 2 Partridge sisters who married into famous circus families the Ginnetts and the Samwells. Well a descendant through the Samwell family has been in touch and sent us a copy of an interview given by Charlotte Samwell (nee Partridge) in 1896 which makes very interesting reading. It is a very long article so here are some highlights –

‘There is a venerable lady, living Kennington way, in whom a poor opinion of London grows stronger and stronger. Astley’s demolished, Hengler’s a skating-rink – not a circus, nor an apology for a circus to be seen in this vast city. Whatever, this estimable old lady would like to know, are we coming to? If Mrs John Samwells were in the habit of using such language, she would probably say something of a sarcastic nature about our vaunted civilisation; but she is not, and so she merely cherishes a sentiment of regret that London should so callously neglect an institution to which she has devoted the greater part of her eighty years. Her eighty years – you would not think it, for Mrs Samwells is so nimble on her feet, so intellectually alert, so deeply interested in all that goes on around her. She is a near relative of the Ginnetts; but she bears a name that is ever so much older in the annals of the circus than theirs. There were Samwellses in the last century...you will find in ..... description of Bartholomew Fair a full and particular account of Samwells’s circus – one of the sights of the fair.... Samwells’s acquired a greater style and circumstance, and was the circus best known to our grandfathers for many years. It mostly pitched at fairs, such as those held at Greenwich (abolished in 1857) and Croydon. “I have heard my people say”, Mrs Samwells tells you, “that they had not time to count the money they took at the fairs, but just flung it on the floor of the living vans till they walked about in it”. The decay of the old fairs was a very serious matter for the circus folk, many of whom, however, acquired vast fortunes before evil days came.

.... The clannish disposition of circus folk is well known. They marry and intermarry, and dedicate their youngsters to their calling. But Mrs. Samwells is exceptional in that she was not born in the business. She came to London from her village home in her girlhood to join an elder sister, who had married Mr Ginnett – (who) was of French birth. His son...periodically visits the village whence the family comes and royally entertains his kinsfolk. ...Mrs Samwells, earliest recollections of the circus are of taking my brother-in-law’s dinner and sitting on a [?]cushion while he ate it. There was no idea then of my joining the business. Mr Ginnett was a very clever horsebreaker and trainer, and many members of the aristocracy used to bring their cattle to him. Well do I remember his breaking a horse for the lady who is now the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. ... In those days, you know, there were more or less permanent buildings in most of the large cities. The tenting circuses were a later growth. When Mr Ginnett left Astley’s he allied himself with a circus in the provinces, whereof the proprietor was at length overtaken by monetary difficulties. Mr Ginnett helped him from time to time, and at length took over the business, in which Mrs Samwells, still a girl, was employed. She became an accomplished equestrian – that was, in fact, the only work for a woman. The day of the female acrobat had not yet come. .... Mrs Samwells cherishes an old fashioned prejudice against sensational acrobatic and gymnastic feats by women – thinking them better left to men. In due course Mrs Samwells achieved by marriage the name that she now bears. Her husband, a fine horseman, was disabled by an accident which rendered an arm useless for the rest of his days, though Mr Samwells was otherwise deft and active.

Then it was that Mrs Samwells thought well to retire from the profession. She took a large house in the neighbourhood of Astley’s which was for many years the rendezvous of circus folk. Her boy [Roland], ...was educated as an artist; but, with the instinct of his family strong within, he found an application of the scenic art to circuses his most congenial occupation. Mrs Samwells’s daughter [Amy] became a rider, but a few years ago injured her knee so seriously as to prevent her from riding with any effect. An aptitude for wardrobe work has, however, stood her in good stead, and has enabled her to earn her living in the old atmosphere. Such accidents, Mrs Samwells tells you, are of frequent occurrence, and, not being sensational in their circumstances, do not reach the public knowledge. The plight of a disabled equestrian or acrobatic artist is indeed sad. The facility that he has taken a lifetime to acquire becomes of a sudden useless to him, and he is too often without other resource. No doubt this is an explanation of the prevailing multiplicity of smaller circuses.....

Old Mr Ginnett, the founder of the circus, left a large fortune behind him. .... Mrs Samwell, ... watches with deep interest the progress of the circus with which she spent the best years of her long life. She supposes that her travelling days are now at an end; and, indeed, at eighty the inclination is “to husband out life’s taper at the close, and keep the frame from wasting by repose”. Mrs Samwells is a truly wonderful woman – a magnificent specimen of old age, indurated by industry and mellowed by content, and an afternoon spent in her society is as delightful as the perusal of a volume of old time reminiscence.’

Charlotte Samuel (nee Partridge) died on 1 January 1907 in Midlothian. Her older sister Anne Ginnett had died in 1877.

Ann Partridge and Jean Pierre Jennett (the name has had many variations over the years) were married at St Mary’s Church, Lambeth on 2 October 1825.

Show business started for the Ginnett’s in Briton in the early 1800s when they were captured in the Napoleonic wars. At this time Ginnetts were big horse people and thought to be high ranks in the French cavalry. They were brought to England on prison ships. When the wars were over and prisoners released some of the Ginnetts stayed in England. It was Jean Pierre Ginnett (Ann’s husband) who started in show business with his Pony and Budgerigar show in Ludgate circus. Ginnett’s grew to become one of the UK’s largest circuses between the years of 1890 and 1930, closing down for a period, like many of the shows at the time, during world war one (owing to the war office confiscating their 200+ horses for the war effort).

The Circus Ginnett finally closed its tent flaps in 2007, a victim of the new licensing laws and changes in attitudes to the use of animals in circuses

There is clear evidence that Charles Dickens was well acquainted with the equestrian capabilities of the Ginnett family for in *Hard Times* he describes an equestrian act he must have seen at Astley’s Hippodrome in his childhood whereby in 1833 Andrew Ducrow, the great equestrian of the day, with the Infant Ginnett (most likely Ann’s eldest son, Frederick) performed a comic interlude during intervals between scenes in the circle.



Andrew Ducrow



'Thelma', named after Walter's grand daughter, was released in 1927. It has soft, coral pink flowers, which are produced in spectacular sprays of up to 18 flowers. Better known, though, is *'Easlea's Golden Rambler'*. Released in 1932, the large, heavily-scented, deep creamy-yellow flowers, which display a boss of golden stamens, stand out against the dark olive-green foliage. It won many grand prizes, including the Royal Horticultural Society's prestigious Award of Garden Merit, and, due to international acclaim, Walter appointed distributors for the rose in the USA.

Other popular roses released in the 1920s included the HT, *'Prince Henry'*, named in honour of the third son of King George V, who had opened the new London-to-Southend Arterial Road in March 1925, and the HT, *'Rupert Brooke'*, named in memory of the esteemed war poet, who died in 1915.

One of Walter's first important orders was placed by Southend Borough Council, which, in 1903, had purchased the 26 acres of land now known as Chalkwell Park. A Rose Garden was being established and Easlea's Danecroft Nursery supplied many of the bare-rooted plants. Over the years, this magnificent municipal rose garden became one of the best in the country and many of its visitors were to become regular customers of the Danecroft Rose Nursery. Another important source of orders was from visitors to the many rose shows up and down the country, the nursery's wonderful floral exhibits winning many important awards and securing lucrative plant sales.

Since the early 1900s, Walter had been a member of the Council of the National Rose Society, no doubt a reflection of his prominent position as a distinguished authority on the genus. Each year, in memory of its founding father, the NRS presented a notable person with the prestigious Dean Hole Medal, and in 1935 Walter was the recipient of this illustrious award. His name was now firmly impressed on the roll of important British rosarians and Walter was to remain a member of the NRS Council for the rest of his life.

Walter's achievements enabled him to meet many eminent rose breeders and amateur growers. He enjoyed a friendship with the French breeder, Pernet-Ducher, as well as his sons, Claude and Georges, and in 1914 visited the Pernet-Ducher nursery at Lyons. But Walter was to be greatly saddened to learn that a few months later both sons had been killed in the Great War. And tragically Walter was also to lose one of his own sons, Walter Allen, felled by enemy fire while serving with the Hertfordshire Regiment near Ypres in September 1917.

Walter was friendly with another important Essex rose breeder, Benjamin Cant, and also the famous Irish rosarian, Sam McGredy. One of his American friends, E. G. Hill, on a visit to England, stayed with Walter and by all accounts was very impressed with the hybridising work being carried out at the Danecroft Nursery. Another American friend, W. E. Nickerson, had the honour of Walter naming a rose after him. Walter also visited Alex Dickson's rose nursery at Newtownards, near Belfast, where, he later wrote, 'I could have lingered for some days'.

One of Walter's many delights was his regular visits to the National Rose Society's trial ground at Haywards Heath, where, as one of the NRS's judges, he was responsible for ensuring that the new varieties, entered for trial by both British and overseas rose breeders, were worthy of cultivation and sale to the public. Walter's extensive knowledge, honed from his many years experience of rose breeding, was greatly valued by his fellow judges and he was now held high in the ranks of the elder statesmen of the rose fraternity.

Although now well into his 70s, Walter continued the programme of rose hybridisation, after 1932 concentrating his efforts on breeding reds, crimsons and scarlets. The business prospered with son, George, taking an active role in managing

the nursery. In 1929 Walter and George greatly increased production by renting land at Church Road, Hockley, known as the Vicarage Rose Nursery. By 1930, Walter Easlea and Sons were growing 10,000 standard roses, in addition to the tens of thousands of hybrid teas, floribundas, climbers and ramblers. Four years later, Easlea's rich vermilion pink Hybrid Tea, *'Lal'*, was on sale to the public and a bed containing 200 plants could be seen at Queen Mary's Rose Garden, Regent's Park.

In the late 1930s, with a second World War looming on the horizon, the purchase of ornamental plants was not the first thing on the mind of the home gardener, and nurserymen up and down the country were concerned about the future financial viability of their businesses. Municipal authorities also had more pressing activities on which to spend their money, and public parks were being ploughed up for vegetable growing, in accordance with the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. With the outbreak of hostilities, the Government decreed that commercial nurseries would be required to utilise their land for food production, although permitting a small area to be set aside to retain a stock of ornamental plants for when the war ended. By now, the Danecroft Rose Nursery was just a green island in the midst of stark estates of residential housing. The grubbing up of their stock, representing so many years of hard work, was to spell the end of the line for many ornamental plant nurseries, and sadly this was to include the esteemed name of Walter Easlea and Sons. One of the last roses to be released to the public by Walter - in 1939 - was the pure pink Hybrid Tea, *'Mrs. George Easlea'*, named after his daughter-in-law, and, poignantly, the business was wound up in the same year.

Walter and his wife, Ada, moved to Cambridge at the start of the War to be near their son, Maurice, from where Walter continued to write informative articles on roses for the horticultural press. He remained on the Council of the National Rose Society until his death, aged 85, in February 1945. The site of the Danecroft Nursery is now a housing estate and all that remains to remind the visitor of Walter Easlea and Sons are two roads, Danescroft\* Drive and Irvington Close, named after the cottages where Walter, his son, George, and their families lived. In 1954, George emigrated with his family to New Zealand where, to this day, many of Walter's wonderful roses continue to flourish and bring joy to gardeners, a most fitting memorial to one of Britain's truly great rosarians.

\* Walter named the nursery 'Danecroft', without an 's', but in the 1930s, when Danescroft Drive was named, it was spelt with an 's'.

Acknowledgements: My grateful thanks to Vivienne Hawken of Albany, New Zealand, Walter's great granddaughter, for her assistance in compiling this article, and also to Patricia Routley of Australia, for letting me see her research notes on the Easlea rose dynasty.

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## LEIGHWAY

The next edition of Leighway will be coming out in April so if you have any articles please send them to Carole either by email at [carole.mulrone@btinternet.com](mailto:carole.mulrone@btinternet.com) or via the Heritage Centre by the beginning of March.

**Don't forget to pay your subs if you want to continue to receive Leighway.**

## MUSEUMS AT THE HEART OF HERITAGE

Renaissance East of England, working in partnership with the East of English Museum Hub has recently published 'Museums for Changing Lives'. The report acknowledges that museums are intrinsically worth investing in and have an important contribution to make to the communities they serve. Their collections form a unique cultural asset which preserves the history of a region's landscape and its people. They are a tangible way for communities to make meaning of their surroundings and explore different cultures in a trusted environment. The buildings in which these collections are housed form a visible link to this rich and varied past and, alongside the knowledge of their staff, provide a sense of continuity and stability at the heart of changing communities.

Now we all knew we were doing this all along so its nice to see it recognized for its true worth. We may not have the biggest museum in the world but it certainly has all the attributes that Renaissance East of England say are vital and our volunteers have a wealth of knowledge which they freely pass on to visitors and school parties.

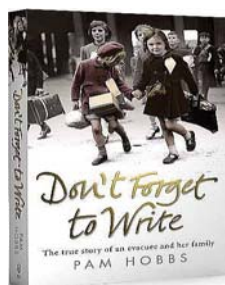
## FROM LEIGH TO CANADA VIA DERBYSHIRE

One of Canada's leading travel writers, Pam Hobbs, has written for numerous magazines and newspapers and her stories have earned her national and international awards in Canada. She has also written or co-authored six travel-related books.

*Don't Forget To Write* is a memoir of Pam Hobbs' experiences in England during the second World War.

Most of it is set in Leigh - at first in the Old Town where Pam's mother lived for a while, then on Church Hill where Pam was born at 1 Castle Terrace just below St Clements Church, and eventually over at a new estate alongside Westcliff High School for Girls. In the book she mentions a lot of landmarks, and the shops her mother used to frequent on Leigh Broadway (Good Alf the fishmonger on the corner, the Co-Op, Dowsetts for cakes etc.) Pam's sisters were married in the church.

Pam describes how, in 1940, she and her sister were evacuated from Leigh because a German invasion appeared imminent. Along with their class-mates they were taken by train to central England, their names on labels pinned to their coats and their belongings in sandbags.



While evacuated, Pam lived in four different homes in which she was received with love, indifference or hostility, and after two years returned home to find everything had changed. Few of her six sisters had remained at home, and those who did were

working all hours to help in the war effort. With her father away repairing bomb damage, and her sisters busy, it fell to Pam and her mother to queue for food day after day. They turned their hand to raising chickens, experimented with Spam and nettle tea, and replaced the rose gardens with vegetable plots. They slept each night in a garden shelter, and on one of the few nights Pam slept in her house it was bombed. Then, just when they thought the end was in sight, they were introduced to 'Doodlebugs' and V2 rockets.

Pam began writing during the War when she wrote long letters home from Derbyshire.

When Pam moved to Canada in 1950, she wrote to her family but most of her letters went un-mailed because she couldn't afford postage. Pam wrote for publications - little articles about Toronto events and landmarks. Almost all returned as regularly as homing pigeons, but once in a while something was printed. Pam kept on writing in her spare time: novels, memoirs, essays. Somewhere in there was an attempt or two about her years as an evacuee. Then came Canada's 100th birthday and all over the country, communities, businesses and individuals were doing something to commemorate the occasion. By now Pam was married to Michael (a former Londoner) and with a view to learning about their adoptive country their personal centennial project was to explore Canada coast to coast with their three small daughters in a Volkswagen Campmobile with an attached tent. They had never camped before, didn't even own a barbecue, yet on only one occasion during their six weeks adventure (after an attack by black bears in the Rocky Mountains) did they resort to sleeping in a motel.

That trip spawned twenty or so travel articles, snapped up by Toronto newspapers. When, on the same day, two appeared on the front pages of travel sections in the leading Toronto newspapers, Pam was asked to write exclusively for the *Globe and Mail*. The contract, which lasted for 17 years, allowed her to travel to world-wide destinations.

In 1991 her first book was published. A collection of *Globe and Mail* articles about Canada, it included material from that first cross-country trip. Next came regular guide books on Canada, a selection of *Globe* stories on Britain, and a how-to book giving travel tips to retirees.

For the fiftieth anniversary of the war's conclusion in 1995, Pam returned to places where she had lived as an evacuee, talking with people who were there in the 1940s. Around this time it occurred to her that life on the home-front was a little known aspect of the war. Whenever travel assignments took her to Europe, or to countries she could reach via England, she stopped off at Leigh for a few days with her sister when conversation turned to the war years. Approaching 80, and with the war's 70th anniversary looming Pam decided it was time to write of her experiences. The result is *Don't Forget To Write*.

Although Pam travels less these days, she continues to write magazine articles. Currently she is gathering material for a sequel about her family's post war years.

## ANNUAL EVENTS IN LEIGH

Tell your friends about them –

Leigh Art Trail – 12-20 June  
Leigh Folk Festival – 26/27 June  
Leigh Fishing Festival – 25 July  
Leigh Regatta – 11-12 September

Come and join the fun and culture!!!

## FERRY CROSS THE ESTUARY

Member Terry Pond is seeking help in his research into the Pond family and ferry services to Sheerness.

In the 1860s the sons of Robert Pond of Prittlewell took the ferry to Sheerness where they worked in the shipyards. Many of them married local girls and their sons were also employed in the shipyards. Some joined the navy before the First World War and others possibly served in the forces in World War 2.

Terry says that originally he was bemused as to how they travelled from Southend to Sheerness but enquiries revealed many ferry services particularly the Medway Steam packet Co Ltd from the start of the building of the first paddle steamer about 1861. Apparently many of the Sheerness émigrés returned to Southend to work as cab proprietors.

Terry wonders whether any members have any more information on these ferry services such as when was the first on and when was the first paddle steamer on the Thames?

Also if anyone has any knowledge of the Pond family Terry would like to hear from you.

Please contact Terry through the Heritage Centre or Carole at [carole.mulroney@btinternet.com](mailto:carole.mulroney@btinternet.com)

## THE MEDWAY QUEEN ENGINE FUND APPEAL

In 1963, the *Medway Queen* finished her last summer season after carrying thousands of people to places like Southend, Herne Bay or Margate for their summer holidays year after year. Since then she was laid up, served as a nightclub on the Isle of Wight and has spent the past 24 years in the ownership of the Medway Queen Preservation Society who have been restoring her. In September 2008, the contract was signed for the construction of a replacement hull but the Medway Queen still needs a working engine. The Preservation Society have now launched an **ENGINE FUND APPEAL** to raise over £350,000 pounds to another step forward towards her operating once more. The Fund will solely fund the complete refurbishment of the engines to working order in time to reunite them with the ship as soon as possible. For every donation of £25 or more a uniquely numbered 'Certificate of Appreciation' will be issued.

If you hanker for the days of the paddle steamers and want to help the appeal you can write to the Medway Queen Preservation Society Project Office, Office 3, 42 North Street, Rochester, Kent. ME2 4SH.

You can also see how they are progressing by logging on to <http://medwayqueen.co.uk/shipyardblog/?p=132>

## THE LEIGH DRINKING FOUNTAIN

How many of you pass the drinking fountain at the top of Leigh Hill every day and don't give it a second thought?

The Leigh Society think it is important to retain these traditional pieces of street furniture and we wondered whether the fountain could be revived.

The simple answer to that question is no it can't because of modern day environmental health regulations and basically we don't know the condition of its pipe work which could be lead. It's a shame but at least we still have it as a feature of the street scene and investigating whether it was feasible to use it again did open up a fascinating history of the water fountain.

With the help of Paula Dawson in the Highways Department of the Borough Council we were able to find out that the fountain had been offered to the town by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association in 1938. (there is a plaque on the fountain to this effect).

This Association was established as a charity in 1859 by Samuel Gurney MP in order to provide the poor of London with a clean, fresh water supply following the cholera epidemics of 1848-9 and 1853-4. The first drinking fountain was erected in 1859 against the wall of St Sepulchre's Church in Snow Hill.

The Association also had the support of temperance organizations who disliked the fact that beer was more readily available than water. It was also concerned with animal welfare and erected a large number of cattle and horse troughs in and around London. By 1865 the majority of drinking fountains also had troughs for dogs attached to them.

By the 1930s there was no longer a need to provide drinking facilities for animals as they were no longer herded through the streets of London and the motor car had taken over from horse drawn vehicles. The Association began to concentrate on providing drinking fountains in parks and other recreational areas as well as schools.

Despite its name the Association constructed fountains all over the UK and in Australia, Africa, Japan and Korea and remains today as the Drinking Fountain Association.



Leigh's drinking fountain is this model which was introduced in 1929. How welcoming it must have been on a hot day after traipsing up Leigh Hill. And what a pleasure that the town still has this reminder of a bygone age.

## NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THAT

Did you know that the UK telephone network became totally digital on 11 March 1998 with the closure of the last electronic TXE4 exchanges at Leigh-on-Sea (and Selby)?

## 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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