



# LEIGHWAY

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

It is my pleasure to thank you all for your support during the year.

My thanks to all committee members, who continue to work hard on your behalf – the treasurers looking after the money, the planning sub-committee responding to planning applications, Carole always thinking up and presenting us with new projects to keep us busy, Sally trying to get it all down for the minutes and Margaret keeping us up to date on local matters. We meet once a month, and often, what I anticipate will be a fairly short meeting, goes on well beyond my bedtime!

One of Carole's best ideas was having a Top Town Open Day (which I hope you all attended) where we were able to welcome, also, Leigh people who rarely find their way down to the Old Town. The day was a great success, bringing in several new members and will be repeated this year.

My thanks again to Lyn Austin for organising the school visits, they are a very important part of our work at the Heritage Centre, and those stewards and other members who help with them do a most valuable job.

Jennifer Simpson, who organises the stewards' rota for the Centre held a very successful afternoon gathering, before Christmas, for all stewards, where we were able to thank, with flowers, four of our stewards who have given us their time over a long period, but have now retired.

Clive Webster is retiring as Company Secretary to the Heritage Centre. In his short while in the position he has been invaluable in overseeing some repair and renovation work, which has taken place at the Centre. For this, and his other ongoing work, we are most grateful.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the AGM and at our various meetings and activities during the year, your support is greatly appreciated.

Ann Price

## DEAR DIARY

Meetings at Wesley start at 7.30pm not 8pm  
23 April AGM and Quiz by Heather Feather  
29 April - Trip to Portsmouth  
10 May – Annual Quiz 7pm at the Den  
14 May – Local Essex Churches – Mavis Sipple  
2 August – Open Day at the Community Centre  
Trip to Southwold – date to be confirmed  
15 October – The Essex Police Museum – Fred Feather  
19 November - Women and the Great War – Carole Mulroney

## 2015 CALENDAR

Come on all you amateur photographers. We want to produce a Leigh Society calendar for 2015 and are calling on entries by 31 July 2014. Pictures must be of Leigh taken in the last 12 months and should highlight the diverse and interesting character of our town. Please submit entries to Leigh Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2EN. Entries will be judged by a professional photographer and the best 12 will be included in the 2015 calendar. The overall winner will also receive a prize.

## SECRETARY'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Leigh is quite obviously the place to be. People are moving in, no one is moving out. Can you blame them? With the c2c train service, cliffs and shops, Leigh is thriving despite parking stress, cycle stress, buggy stress and doggy stress (or mess usually).

The main issues for the Society in 2013 were the Havens Hospice application which would have meant the loss of a precious area of natural habitat and green belt land and an old established access to Hadleigh Downs. We were relieved when an alternative site was found in Southend.

The Library consultation was another major issue— again a no no. Leigh Library is a much loved, unique and major hub building and the library service is vital for many Leigh people, young and old. Thankfully it will be retained for the foreseeable future (which means we have to stay vigilant).

The Leigh Community Centre became more established as a major amenity for Leigh residents. Leigh Town Council offices provide a welcome presence in the building and a lively café sets the ambience for many groups.

The controversial Clements Hall flats (Eden Point) is well on its way to looming over the western end of the town. Only those with a million or two need apply. No more please!

Hopefully work will begin soon on the Grand Hotel and the Bell Hotel and adjacent properties. Both are long overdue and present an eyesore in their respective important areas.

Our Heritage Centre has undergone a bit of a revamp in the last few months. Masterminded by Clive Webster the electrics have been improved, with better lighting for the displays.

A Steering Group is also working on the refurbishment of the displays and arrangement of information/artefacts.

Visitors continue to express their appreciation of the museum and their interest in Leigh's history, many have family connections going back years and we help with family history where we can.

Our thanks to Jenny Simpson who has taken over the helpers' rota and ensures that we are, if not 'open all hours', open most of them. We could always do with additional volunteers.

Our thanks to Donald Fraser and Peter Jolly who handle the accounting for the Centre and the Society – keeping us on the straight and narrow where the pennies are concerned.

The success of our open day last year showed just how much residual information there was in families which needed to be captured and retained for posterity. This has bolstered our archiving project.

Clive Webster produced a very informative Leigh Heritage Trail which is on sale in the Centre and also available on line at our website.

Thanks to Carole for her research work, talks and Leighway and to Declan for looking after all our IT issues.

In spite of the very high tides and storms recently we have been unscathed. The seawall was built for a 1:50 year risk and so far has held. At Chalkwell and Westcliff there were spectacular waves over the Cinder Path and seafront.

Socially, thanks to Ann, members have enjoyed visits to Polesdon Lacey, Southwold Theatre, Brick Lane Music Hall and lunch on the Wilton. Ann has Portsmouth and the Mary Rose, Southwold Theatre and another Wilton lunch lined up for this year.

We look forward to 2014 when the rain stops and the sun shines!

Margaret

## OPEN DAY 2014

This year our open day will take place on 2 August at the Community Centre. As we have already heralded, the theme will be World War 1 and we are still looking for local information on participants, effects on Leigh and any war related stories. We will have the scanning table again so you can bring along your memorabilia.

This year we are hoping to include some other local societies close to Leigh and the estuary to make the day more enjoyable and informative. So please put the date in your diary and get in touch with Carole (leighsgreatwar@btinternet.com) if you have any information we can use on the day.

## WORLD WAR ONE AFTERNOON

On the day after the open day, 3 August, the Community Centre will host a Town Council commemorative event in the form of an afternoon of poetry/prose/music related to the War.

We are very mindful that this is not a celebration but the café will be open for a special afternoon tea and the displays from the previous day will remain for people to see.

Tickets will be reasonably priced and the money raised will go to a service related charity. We do hope as many of you as possible will take part in these events.

## WOMEN'S WAR HISTORY

You will see from Dear Diary that our November talk is by Carole and will concentrate on the role of women in the Great War. So if any of you have ladies in your family who played a part in the war effort please get in touch with Carole with your stories, especially, but not essentially, related to Leigh.

## WORLD WAR TWO

Whilst for the next four years the historical focus is going to be very much centred around the Great War, we must not forget that 2015 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

All too soon memories fade and we lose those who took part in whatever capacity. So now is the time to make sure we record their stories and collect as much information as we can about Leigh and its people between 1939-45.

So please if you would like to contribute to our archives in this way get in touch with one of us and make sure that in 2039 when we commemorate the centenary of the start of the war we have the story of Leigh ready to show to future generations.

## DR COOK'S CONCOCTION

From time to time Leighway has brought you little snippets from Leigh's ancient apothecary Dr John Cook – here is another for the 'destruction of bugs'

*'Mix, with a pint of spirits of wine, a quarter of a pint of spirit of turpentine, in which dissolve half an ounce of camphire. Pour of this mixture all over the bedstead, and into the holes and crevices thereof; and by a few times you may destroy their very ova, and so prevent their breed. Beware of a lighted candle, otherwise the mixture can do no harm, nor stain even silk.*

*Or, as a cheaper, and as effectual a remedy, the following receipt (recipe) may answer the end as well. – Boil two ounces of Stavesacre in two quarts of water half an hour, strain off the liquor when cold, and use it as above, but scalding hot.'*  
Scots Magazine 4 July 1768

Stavesacre or lousewort is a perennial plant with purple flowers, a species of larkspur – delphinium staphisagria



The seeds are extremely poisonous and are only used as a parasiticide to kill pediculi (body and head lice). The seeds are violently emetic and cathartic, staphisagrine paralyses the motor nerves like curare.

## DEATH OF A TILLER GIRL

Many of us will remember watching Sunday Night at the London Palladium and the ever energetic and synchronised Tiller Girls. The most famous Tiller Girl that we would recognise nowadays is Betty Boothroyd, former Speaker of the House of Commons.

But the Tiller Girls have a long and illustrious history and as records show a sad connection to Leigh.

The Tiller Girls were among the most popular dance troupes of the 1900s, first formed by John Tiller in 1890. Tiller had noticed the overall effect of a chorus of dancers was often spoiled by lack of discipline and he found that by linking arms the dancers could dance as one; he is credited with inventing precision dance.

After John's death in 1925 the troupe was continued by his son, Lawrence.



The Tiller Girls in the early 1930s – Dorothy may be in this picture. Reproduced by kind permission of John Snelson

On 1 October 1932 the Lawrence Tiller Girls were booked to perform in a Tom Arnold review entitled 'Walk this Way' at the Nottingham Empire, and indeed the show went on under the strain of the Troupe knowing that a tragic accident had claimed the life of one of their number.

Dorothy Lussigne was only 22 years of age and lived with her parents (when not on the road) in Southsea Avenue, Leigh. She had been born in Leytonstone and in 1911 the family was living in Brixton. Her father was a motor insurance agent.

The very afternoon of the Nottingham performance, Dorothy and her friend, Betty Rowe, and two young gentlemen were returning from an afternoon out to Newstead Abbey when on their way back for the evening performance the car suddenly skidded on the greasy road. The vehicle overturned and Dorothy was pinned beneath it. No one else was hurt but the newspaper report says 'the pluck of Miss Rowe can be better imagined than described when it is explained that she went straight on to Nottingham after crawling out of the overturned car and appeared on stage at both the first and second performances.' In fact the heading of the report was 'TILLER GIRL'S AMAZING FORTITUDE IN NOTTINGHAM'.

The inquest was also reported in the local newspaper, but it seems even then Dorothy's death was overshadowed by other issues.

The Coroner first asked if any members of the Arnold Council were present and was sorry none were as he wanted to say that he considered the accommodation in the Arnold mortuary was not exactly what would be expected of such a big district. He complained there was practically no room, no water and no proper facilities for carry out a post mortem. He felt that some of those present at the inquest who paid rates might be able to influence the Council to provide a proper place which he did not think would be too expensive.

Having got the domestic arrangements out of the way he then proceeded to the inquest proper. There was no explanation for why the car skidded and the driver felt his speed had not been excessive and he knew the road well, but nevertheless could not explain the accident. Dorothy had been sitting in the front of the car and the 'sunshine' roof had been locked. She was thrown through the 'sunshine' roof and trapped by the top of the car and instantly killed.

Dorothy never came back to Leigh, she was buried in Nottingham. The family was still living in Southsea Avenue in 1934 but by the time of Dorothy's father's death had moved to the Hendon area.

## OUR WONDERFUL CHURCHES

It is not possible to mention all the churches and faith groups in Leigh as there are many and they all do great work in the community, either singularly or through Churches Together. However, there have been two events recently which we should mention.

### WELCOME TO THE NEW RECTOR OF ST CLEMENTS – CLIVE HILLMAN

The Leigh Society would like to extend a very warm welcome to the new Rector of St Clement's, Clive Hillman.

Father Clive has come to Leigh from St Mary's Church, Betws-y-Coed. He was welcomed to Leigh by a packed Congregation on 22 January.

Both Father Clive's parents and grandparents were married at St Clement's and he has many happy childhood memories of Leigh.

### CHANGES AT OUR LADY OF LOURDES

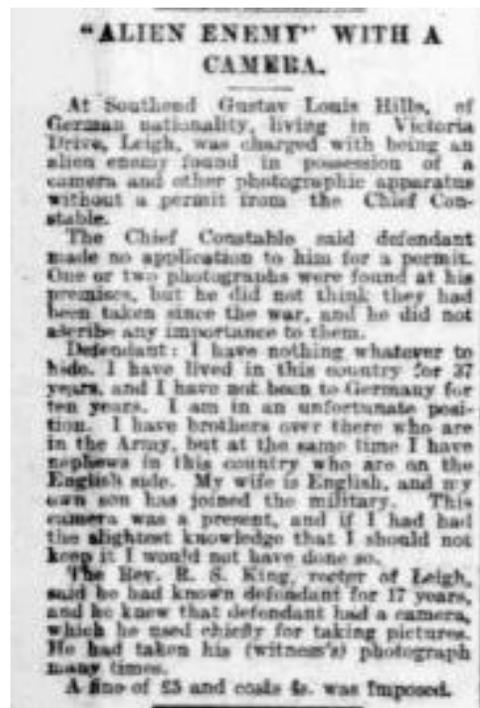
Welcome also to the new Parish Centre at Our Lady of Lourdes in Leigh Road. This is a lovely new building which has echoed the architecture and materials of the church itself.

The building has IT facilities, catering arrangements, bicycle parking and is a welcome addition to the facilities available to the people of Leigh.

If you belong to one of the many faith groups in Leigh do let us know about new developments and events which Leighway readers may be interested in.

## GREAT WAR IN LEIGH

The War started on 4 August 1914 and the first reports of activities related to the War in Leigh began in September. Over the next 4 years Leighway hopes to bring you some of the more unusual reporting of the War in Leigh.



Chelmsford Chronicle 18 September 1914

Gustav Louis Stevenson Hille had been born in Hanover and was an India Rubber Manufacturer and Patentee. In 1891 Gustav and another patented (in the USA) a machine for the painting, ornamenting, and lining of india-rubber, celluloid, and any other description of elastic balls, either hollow or solid. (for more info on this go to <http://www.google.com/patents/US455877>)

In 1901 Gustav and his wife, Helena (born in Burma) and their 6 children were living in Cliff Road having moved to Leigh from Chiswick.

### 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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