



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 SUMMERTIME

Well here we are again in the summer season, not the most appropriate time you might think for talking about Christmas, but planning has to be done in advance and so in this issue you will find advance warning and application for the Christmas Comicals which will take place on 7 December in the Den.

Sometime in October we will have a meeting of all those who wish to take part and we hope that more of you will want to do so this year and have a jolly good evening.

If you feel like treading the boards please let Carole or another member of the committee know as soon as possible. The theme this year for the fancy dress is characters from history but of course your party piece can be from any period.

If you still haven't paid this year's subscription this is your last Leighway so if its slipped your mind get writing those cheques. I know a number of you have tried to pay at the Heritage Centre and found it closed - there is a letter box down the side passage which is cleared regularly.

ADVANCE WARNING - WESLEY METHODIST HALL MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR OUR NEXT MEETING ON 16 OCTOBER SO PLEASE KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR A NOTICE IN THE HERITAGE CENTRE OR CONTACT A COMMITTEE MEMBER NEARER THE TIME.

WE PROUDLY PRESENT THE MAYOR AND MAYORESS OF SOUTHEND



The Society's warmest congratulations to Alan and Elaine Crystall on becoming Mayor and Mayoress of Southend. As members will know Alan and Elaine work tirelessly for the Society and we are very proud to acknowledge their achievements. Here's to a wonderful mayorial year for them both.

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

Well the Jubilee has come and gone and by all accounts it was a pretty good affair down in Leigh Old Town.

Several members of the Society attended the jollities on Strand Wharf and a good time was had by all. Congratulations and thanks to the organisers.

Whilst in a Jubilee frame of mind perhaps members would be interested to see how Leigh celebrated another Jubilee - the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897.

A committee was set up to organise the event and the old people had a dinner and there was a present for each child in the village. James Henry Johnson who was Chairman of the Committee received a letter of thanks from the Queen.

The highlight of the celebrations was the Jubilee bonfire.



Information and picture from the Society Archives donated by Linda Marshall, granddaughter of James Henry Johnson.

REGATTA

This is the next big event in the Old Town on 7/8 September. The Society will be manning the Heritage Centre and will have the traditional treasure hunt and other activities. Please come and support us and the Regatta organisation.

CHRISTMAS COMICALS

Inside your Leighway you will find a flyer for the Christmas Comicals - yes I know its only August but this is the only opportunity we have to let you know the details before the event. If you want to take part and show us your party piece please drop Carole a line via the Heritage Centre or the usual e-mail address. Its great fun and its raising money for Plumbs Cottage.

THE BOMBING OF SOUTHEND IN 1940

Thanks to Linda Kemp of Gosfield what follows are extracts from a letter dated 2 June 1940 written by a lady signing herself as Mabel living at 25 Highfield Gardens, Westcliff to her friend Dorothy Lewin. Dorothy's family lived in Leigh and her father had been the manager of Lloyds Bank in the early part of the 20th century. Dorothy recently passed away at just under 100 years old and this letter was amongst her effects. She was obviously away from home at the time of the letter which provides an excellent first hand account of the bombing raid and its effects on the local population..

'Dear Dorothy

I am glad you are safe and having a good time. I only wish I were there with you. I expect you have heard by now that Southend was bombed on Tuesday night. They would choose the Southend High School for Boys, only two or three hundred yards from our post. Just my luck! I never want to be any nearer to a bomb than that.

The siren had only just finished. I had just reached the post and was parking my bike against its side and looking at the plane, which was held in the beam of several searchlights, when it dropped its salvo of bombs. I have never heard such a crack in all my life as this explosion made. My bike and I were flung in a huddle against the wall and a terrific black cloud of smoke and dust swept down wind. Then the guns started in. Shrapnel began falling like rain all round and I retired hurriedly into the post followed by all the other wardens who were anywhere near.

We didn't know that the school was hit of course, but we knew it was jolly near. Two of our wardens climbed the railings, found the damage and reported it. My partner and I were just going to make the top of St George's Drive when it happened so that if it had happened three or four minutes later we should have been right out in the open, less than 100 yards away, and would have stood a very good chance of losing our lieutenant.

Post 80 were not so lucky. By a miracle none of the wardens were hurt although the post is right in the school grounds but the houses in Hobblythick Lane and Earls Hall Avenue got the blast badly and there were several casualties. Mr Jolley, the Mayor's chauffeur was killed in his house by a piece of shrapnel.

It was certainly warm while it lasted. I finally crawled home about 4.30 a.m. I had about three hours sleep. I felt absolutely dead the next day. But I was very glad of the rest and that my self control was equal to the occasion. At least I know that bombs won't get the better of me.

One bomb buried itself under someone's dug out but failed to explode. I wonder what the people felt like when they discovered that they had been sitting on it for four hours. They exploded it Wednesday at 1p.m. — everybody near was warned to be in their dugouts at the time and the roads all round were blockaded.

I am very much afraid that if we have frequent protracted raids like that at night I shall have to give up all other activities other than ARP and sleep when I am not on duty. I cannot carry on with only two or three hours sleep a night under such constant strain.

Mabel'



Dorothy's father, Ernest William Lewin

THE DOMESDAY SCENARIO THE ORIGINS OF LEIGH

In 1066 when Duke William of Normandy conquered England he was crowned king and most of the lands of the English nobility were soon granted to his followers. Domesday Book was compiled 20 years later.

The Saxon Chronicle records that in 1085

At Gloucester at midwinter...the King had deep speech with his counsellors... and sent men all over England to each shire...to find out...what or how much each landholder held...in land and livestock, and what it was worth.

The whole undertaking was completed in less than 12 months and the original volumes can be viewed in the Public Record Office at Kew.

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Leigh's entry in the Domesday Book of 1086

Translated this reads:

Hundred of Rochford. Ranulf holds Legra (Leigh) in lordship, which 1 freeman held as a manor, for 1 hide. Always 2 villagers and 2 smallholders; 1 plough in lordship; half men's plough; 5 smallholders above the water who do not hold land. Pasture, 100 sheep. Then 1 cob, 5 cows, 5 calves, 100 sheep; 2cobs, 4 cows, 5 calves, 103 sheep. Value then 40 shillings, now 100.

The references to then and now are a comparison to the position before and after 1066.

Smallholders above the water were probably fishermen dwelling on the shore of the Estuary.

Leigh-on-Sea is a relatively new name for the town. On old maps it is sometimes referred to as Lee, but mostly just as Leigh.

The occurrence of Leigh in English place names is widespread, indeed on its own it is the name of 16 places. Of course it also appears as a suffix to many other place names, such as Rayleigh, Hadleigh and can be spelt not only as Leigh but also as Lee, Lea and Ley.

Its meaning appears to originate as a wood or forest although it can also denote a glade or clearing or meadow or pasture

THE UTTONS OF LEIGH by Mrs Biddy Matthews, nee Utton.

The Utton, or Utting family settled in Leigh from Great Glemham, Suffolk in 1821. John Utton is said to have swum across the Crouch to avoid the constables and his wife Ann (Baxter) walked from Suffolk to Leigh. There were already both Baxter and Hutton families in Leigh so maybe that was the connection.

Ann and John had been married in the Parish Church of Great Glemham in 1815, and they had twins when living at Friston. Their son, Lewis was born in 1826 at Leigh and was named after Lewis Utting of Great Glemham, Suffolk his grandfather. At Leigh the name changed to Utton, and has been so ever since.

John obtained work, and became foreman brickmaker, at Prittlewell Priory working for the landowner Daniel Scratton, Esquire. Ann died in childbirth at the age of 39 and John remarried Isabel Emery, and started a second family.

Lewis meanwhile had registered as a fishing lad at Maldon in 1844 at the aged of 18. He married a Leigh girl, Betsy Ritchie in 1850 at St George's in the East, London where Betsy was a servant. Their son, Lewis Alexander, my grandfather was born in 1859, being the only surviving child of the marriage.



Lewis Alexander Utton

Lewis senior died in 1862 having been the landlord, and partner in the Peterboat in Leigh in 1851. Betsy died in 1875 when Lewis Alexander was living with his half Uncle John and his wife Lucy (nee Perry). Childless themselves, but loving foster parents to him. He left school, and became a pawnbroker's assistant and in 1871 joined the Royal Navy as a deck hand. In his journal (which is deposited at Southend Record Office) he describes the work of a seaman and visits to Jerusalem, and the Middle East. These memories remained with him for the rest of his life. My father Stanley Utton told me that his father's feet caused endless problems, as they were deformed, due to the climbing of the yard arm, and dealing with the sails. Often in the freezing weather shoes were not worn, as it would have been impossible to cling to the ropes. His Aunt Lucy saved up six penny pieces and bought him out of the Navy in 1880 and he left Portsmouth and travelled home by train. They lived at the time on the hill at old Leigh.

When the railway was put through all the old families living there benefited greatly, and the land was purchased to make way for the modern transport. On the strength of the land sales at Leigh they had purchased an area of brick earth, and started a business on their own account. Lewis became a partner, and they prospered as did their relatives, the Bridge family, Uncle Frank, who owned the Peggy, and Leigh Building Supply, run by his son Brubs. Our brick fields at Prittlewell, supplied the best bricks for the building of Southend in the boom time.



The brickfields

Lewis married Annie Jane Wood of Prittlewell and they settled in Victoria Avenue, and lived there happily bringing up a family. Lewis became a town councillor, and was on the Roads and Building Committee, and was in line to become Mayor when in 1910 tragedy struck. Whether as a result of his naval experiences or stress of business, he became ill whilst watching Southend United play football, at Roots Hall and died later at home. Lewis's funeral was a grand affair with many mourners and dignitaries in attendance and also his horse.

Before his death Lewis had purchased Shopland Hall Farm for its brick earth with the intention of utilising it for that purpose. In the collapse of the 1930s it was sold to make the division of assets fair to all the claimants to his legacy, and now most of the property acquired at that time has been sold, and assets dispersed. Clogs to clogs in three generations appears to be true.

JUST WHO WAS ST CLEMENT?

St Clement is, appropriately enough, supposed to be the patron saint of fishermen. And his day is 23rd November.

He was in fact a Roman citizen, son of Justinian. As a youth he studied philosophy, meditating on the subject of death and what would happen to men's souls when they had left the body.

At this time St Barnabas came to Rome to preach the Christian Gospel. Clement was greatly impressed by this and begged St Barnabas to instruct him in the Christian faith.

Clement travelled to Palestine where he became the disciple of St Peter, who took him to Rome. Peter called him 'his son in the faith' and St Paul referred to him as his 'fellow labourer'.

St Peter consecrated Clement as a Bishop and he later became Pope. St Clement was martyred during the reign of the Roman Emperor Trojan in AD100. He had been banished to Cherson, beyond the Euxine Sea and condemned to work in the marble quarries there. The convicts were required to fetch fresh water from a spring some mile away and legend has it that on one day Clement saw a lamb scraping at the soil with its fore foot. He started to dig in the spot where the lamb was scraping and an abundant spring burst forth becoming a running stream.

Clement stayed in this place for three years preaching and baptising but at last the Emperor found out about his activities and sent his Prefect to punish the Christians.

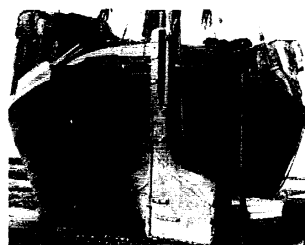
Clement was to be thrown into the sea with an anchor fastened to his neck. This terrible sentence was carried out in the presence of a great crowd.

Legend says that the Christians prayed for God to show them when St Clement's body lay and miraculously the sea receded from the shore three miles and the body was found anchored in a kind of shrine. It was said that for 200 years the sea receded in the same way on the anniversary of his death.



Information taken from A Short History of Leigh-on-Sea and the Ancient Church of St Clement

THE TALE OF EVA ANNIE



Observant visitors to the Leigh waterfront may have their curiosity aroused by the ancient wooden post standing several feet high from the middle of the Creek. Closer inspection at low water reveals various other bits of timber nearby and, from a high vantage point, the outline of a large boat can just now be made out. All the locals know it – this is the remains of a Thames sailing barge, the Eva Annie.

Eva Annie was built in 1878 as a stack barge or "stackie". Her principal function was to convey stacks of hay and straw to London from the coastal farms of Essex. In those times, when the motive power for wheeled transport was the dray horse, hay fulfilled a function equivalent to modern-day petrol. The demand for fodder and bedding was insatiable and barges, the juggernauts of the era, were the most efficient means of carrying it.

Eva Annie was built of elm, oak and pine she was 76 feet from stem-post to stern, plus another 7 1/2 feet, which was her rudder, and a further 17 feet for her removable bowsprit. Her beam was about 22 feet at the deck and 18 feet at the chine. Her single hold was accessed from two hatches and reckoned to have a capacity of 4,800 cubic feet. The actual weight she could carry would have been in the order of 90 tons.

The top of Eva Annie's mast was 66 feet above the deck and she was powered by up to six sails totalling 2,450 square feet. They comprised a foresail, a large mainsail (which was supported by a massive fifty-seven foot long sprit), a topsail, a small sprit mizzen sheeted to the top of the rudder (which was steered by a fifteen-foot carved oaken tiller) and, either a staysail mounted to the stemhead or, when a bowsprit was set, a staysail plus a jib topsail.

This huge "spritsl" rig had evolved so that it could be sailed by just two people. In foggy conditions a dog might justify its berth, using superior senses to warn of danger. However, Eva Annie's insurance company, The Maldon Barge Club, specified that London bound stackies should have a crew of three. It was, after all, quite a hazardous business sailing a 12 foot high haystack through some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. To save expense though, the third hand was frequently a child, whose duties embraced those of "Cook".

Eva Annie was built at Milton Creek, near Sittingbourne, in 1878 for the Maldon-based hay and straw merchant James Bruce Keeble and his brothers, John and Ebenezer, plus a certain J.W. Dent. The barge was named after the eldest of James' four daughters, ten year-old Eva "M" and Eb's seven year-old daughter, Annie Maria. Ownership of Eva Annie passed to farmer Henry Stevens of Purleigh Hall in 1904, and later she was absorbed into the fleet of Josh Francis.

Leigh-on-Sea became Eva Annie's home in about 1926. William Henry (Billy) Theobald bought her "for a song". Leigh born and bred, Billy had inherited the Manorial rights of Leigh from his father, along with farms on Canvey and near Woodham Ferrers and the family home, Belton Farm, (situated quite near where the Station now stands, along Belton Way).

In his lifetime Billy owned, all in all, nearly fifty barges. None of them were in the first flush of youth when he purchased them, and

Eva Annie was certainly no exception. She was nearly fifty years old and well past her prime. She was still steered by tiller (rather than by the more conventional wheel) and so she remained for a further ten years, earning her the distinction of being the last of her type still sailing. Before Billy took her on she had been sunk and salvaged twice and under his ownership she was to come a cropper once more. Yet to her new owners she was to remain a useful asset for another twenty years.

As the farm trade steadily decreased, so the canny Billy diversified, using his barge fleet to transport building materials: cement from Grays, bricks and lime from the Medway and Swale and timber from the Surrey Commercial Dock.

For a number of years Billy Theobald had been mentoring William Robert Richmond (Bill) Bridge, a local lad who was showing some flair as an entrepreneur. Bill's widowed mother had loaned him the price of his first dray horse and, on the strength of a contract from Blue Circle, he had founded Leigh Building Supply. The business flourished and Bill Bridge diversified into dairy farming (Cross Farm) and the burgeoning motor car industry (Church Road Motors and Colonial Motors). On his mentor's advice, Bill bought the barge wharf by Benfleet Station and opened another depot.

Theobald was rather proud of his fleet and wanted them "kept in the family"; Bill Bridge had become like a son to him. And so it was that Billy Theobald and Bill Bridge formed a trading company in about 1934 or '35, entitled W. H. Theobald & Co. Ltd. To mark the occasion the house flag of the barge fleet (known as the sailorman's bob) was changed from the three horizontal stripes, blue-red-blue, of W. H. Theobald, Belton Farm to a white LBS on a blue ground to signify the Leigh Building Supply interest.

Mr Theobald died in 1941, Eva Annie, which was built some seven years after his birth, survived him but a few years. It was no longer an economical proposition to patch her up: she had become a liability and was unceremoniously hulked in her present position. Eva Annie's gaunt remains still stand sentinel over Leigh Creek, a talisman for the past and an emblem of a harsh yet nobler age. When nature has finally run its course and her ghost is laid to rest, many hearts in the Old Town will be strangely moved.



In case anyone should think that nostalgia is a modern phenomenon, it is on record that Eva Annie carried her magnificent carved oak tiller on board to the very end of her days. The tiller is now on permanent exhibition in Gravesend at the Chantry Heritage Centre. Southend Central Museum has on display an attractive model of Eva Annie, fully three feet long.

Some years ago, Eva Annie's anchor was salvaged by Paul Lester and set on a brick plinth outside St Clement's Court East in Broadway West, Leigh.

There is an excellent semi-fictionalised account concerning the salvage of Eva Annie from off the Buxey Sands in Graham Dent's book of short stories 'Tidal Tales' published by Ashridge Press.

Ann Price's book 'Thames Sailing Barges at Leigh' contains additional material about Billy Theobald and his barge fleet and is available, price £3.50 from the Heritage Centre.

David Hurrell, the author of this article, is compiling an illustrated history of Eva Annie and would be delighted to hear from anyone who has memories or photographs of her, or of the men who owned and sailed her. His address is 20 Willow Walk, Benfleet SS7 2RW or he can be contacted by telephone on 01702 552668

The picture of the stem post of the Eva Annie is from a colour painting by David available as a card from the Heritage Centre

PLANNING

Over the last few months the Committee has considered a number of planning applications in the Conservation Areas and perhaps the most significant are a number of proposals to renovate and extend cockle sheds. Obviously there is no basic objection to the renovation works but we have been concerned that each application has shown a tendency to extend further on to the shore and we have therefore asked the Borough Council to draw up guidelines to assist with this.

We have also sought the Council's support for a reduced speed limit in the Old Town. Working in the Heritage Centre it is only too obvious that the traffic moves in the Old Town at speeds which are inappropriate to so narrow and cramped a thoroughfare. The matter is being considered by the Council's Highways Committee.

The Society has also considered a number of applications for extensions and whilst we have made detailed comments on the particular proposals we also commented on the appalling lack of details that are submitted with applications which makes the task of commenting very difficult and on concerns of overlooking and the amenity of neighbours. In all cases where these have been issues we have urged the Council to ensure rigorous compliance with its guidelines.

Many of you will have completed the Council's questionnaire regarding the Vision for Leigh. The Society has also responded to this consultation.

The Coliseum development is now complete and the word is it is worth a look.

IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD GET A HAT

The following cartoon appeared in the Southend and Westcliff Graphic on 27 October 1911 and just goes to prove how versatile the Leigh fisherman have been over the years.



THE HARVEST OF THE SEA.
Tripper: "I never saw a 'ay 'arvest so close to the sea before."
Bosun: "This ain't a 'ay 'arvest: its a 'at 'arvest."
(At a meeting of the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee, on Monday, details were given of an interesting industry in the shape of the collection of seaweed, which is used by London and provincial milliners for the trimming of ladies' hats.)

THE TALE OF A 2 FUNNEL STONE FRIGATE



Usually a term for a shore based Naval establishment. But where in the Old Town I hear you cry?

It was in fact the Old Town Railway Station (down side platform). It had 3 rooms, known as the Gun Room, Wardroom and Messdeck, a galley, a redundant mens' loo, and a baggage store (Bosuns store). At the western end of the platform was a 'distant' signal. At the eastern end was the level crossing and opposite was the signal box. The station was next to New Road.

The old station became redundant around 1936, when the new station at Belton Way was constructed. The 3rd Chalkwell Bay Sea Scout Group managed to get the lease of the old station for £5 per annum, which was increased by British Rail after the War to £20, which caused much gnashing of teeth.

A safety fence of tubular steel was installed near the platform edge, the steel being borrowed from the WW2 sea defences on the mudflats. At the eastern end was the entry on to a small area known as the quarterdeck from which a small gaff flew the Red Ensign... truly a salty establishment. As to the flag, one Sunday a special excursion train from St Pancras hurtled round by the Billet Lane crossing, and the driver (not local) espied the flag ahead and the train came to a shuddering stop, exuding smoke, steam and hot oil and hard words from the driver, who was not amused, especially when the signalman suggested he should salute the flag! The flag was resited as a result.

The old station was finally removed in the fifties because of impending electrification and New Road was widened. Goodies enjoyed were free water, gas and timber and coal was requested when a steam train stopped at our signal. The coal was duly stored for the winter in the redundant mens' loo. Boats were repaired on the platform, and the larger craft were brought along the track through the level crossing gates after the last train had passed by.

Lastly, as the station was gaslit, the signalmen used to supply the necessary gas mantles-one gross at a time. At times the long platform was used for alfresco big eats- like an outdoor MacDonald's, which rather amused passengers speeding by. In all it was not unlike a Will Hay railway comedy!

As already mentioned the occupants during those years were the 3rd Chalkwell Sea Scouts and their successors now reside in comparative palatial splendour at The Den, Victoria Wharf.

By the way I should mention that the old station had the largest number of 'station staff' on the Southend/Fenchurch line, and as far as we are aware, the only Scout Group in the UK to have operated on a live railway system... unless you know otherwise!

Frank Bentley

CHARACTERS OF OLD LEIGH

GOLDSRING THOMPSON

Unfortunately we have no picture of Goldspring but let not that stop us telling his tale.

He was born in Canewdon but lived most of his life in Leigh.

During the Nore Mutiny in the 1790s Goldspring and a friend escaped in a small boat. To avoid getting caught they set the boat adrift, and swam for it. Goldspring tried to swim to Leigh but the tide pulled him to Canvey where he hid in a field of wheat for three days living on corn and dirty ditch water.

When he felt safe he headed for Barking where he joined a fishing smack and laid low until the danger was over.

A few years later having been press ganged for the second time he was in the navy again and wrote to his mother that he had been cruising with Lord Nelson near Bolougne until September. His letter is dated the 3rd October though no year is given but Nelson was in this position just before Trafalgar so Goldspring could have taken part in the Battle just a few days later.

Eventually he returned to Leigh and stayed there until he died at the age of 97 years leaving 8 children, 50 grandchildren and 53 great grandchildren. Who needs Viagra when you've got dirty ditch water.

If anyone has more information on Goldspring please contact Carole Pavitt via the Heritage Centre.

CHEESE AND WINE FOR PLUMBS

On 13 September our new Mayor, Alan Crystall, will throw open the doors of Porters for a cheese and wine (and other refreshments) party in aid of the Plumbs Cottage Appeal.

Tickets will be £10 each and we are limited to 70 people so it will be first come first served. You will find a flyer in your Leighway giving you all the details.

Please do support this event – we are desperately trying to raise the money to restore Plumbs Cottage and need all of your support.

THE SALVATION ARMY AND LEIGH

One of the newest additions to the booklist in the Heritage Centre is 'Spirit of the Sea – The Salvation Army in Leigh-on-Sea 1902-2002' by Graham Cook and Gordon Parkhill.

Gordon is a very active member of the Society and regularly does a stint in the Heritage Centre. The book is hardback and priced at £10 and is an excellent read with many old photographs.

To illustrate the history of the Army in Leigh even more Gordon is organising an exhibition in the Heritage Centre in September after the Regatta weekend.

Exact details will be available from the Heritage Centre but the Society very much hopes many of you will come and see what promises to be a very interesting bit of Leigh history – and of course buy the book.

NEHEMIAH ROGERS THE VICAR OF ASHINGDON

Philip Benton in his History of Rochford Hundred tells us about the career of Nehemiah Rogers, the Vicar of Ashingdon as follows:-

'We come now to notice Rev Nehemiah Rogers, who was presented to this living in 1687 by Henry St John and was curate of Little Stambridge in 1697. His first wife, Lydia, was buried at Ashingdon, August 14th, 1695, and several of his children sleep beneath the same sod.

He was married again at Canewdon to Mrs Elizabeth Ailiffe, widow, of Rochford, in 1696. He was son of the rector of Great Tey, where he was born, and grand-nephew of the Rev. Nehemiah Rogers, ejected from Messing by the Puritans.

He was descended from John Rogers, the first martyr executed by fire in Mary's reign, Feb 4th 1555, of whose descendants it is said that the eldest son for many generations has been a minister of the gospel; and many of them eminently distinguished.'

This Rector of Ashingdon appears to have been a bit of a black sheep. He was incarcerated in 1702, probably for debt and became one of the notorious 'Fleet Parsons,' who performed clandestine marriages in the precincts of the Fleet Prison. There were several of these Fleet Parsons and their activities led to the introduction of Lord Hardwicke's marriage law of 1754 which made it a civil and legal requirement for a valid marriage to have and to record either the calling of banns or granting of a licence.

The Fleet was famous for its clandestine marriages: sometimes young men fresh from a debauch were irrevocably tied to a common 'meretrix'; young women were often abducted, stupified with opiates, and married.

Nehemiah Roger's private Fleet register was, according to Benton in 1867, extant in the London Registry, having been purchased it is said by late Bishop of London. Either Ashingdon had not lost its prestige for marriage, or Rogers had some magnetic influence, for there appears to have been an extraordinary number of couples united during his incumbency; people coming from all parts.



A Fleet Marriage ceremony

PARISH REGISTERS AND CIVIL REGISTRATION

One of the most famous divorces in history was Henry VIII's from Katherine of Aragon so he could marry Ann Boleyn. The Royal divorce sparked the break with the Catholic church and the dissolution of the monasteries. After the dust had settled Thomas Cromwell, Henry's Vicar General, brought in a system of registration for baptisms, marriages and burials. Up until then the monks had kept some records of noble families only. Obviously over the centuries many of the registers have been lost or damaged and the surviving Leigh registers only date from the 1680s.

Oliver Cromwell the 2 x grandnephew of Thomas, decreed in 1653 that the job of keeping the parish register should be taken away from the priests and given to a layman called the Parish Register who was elected by the ratepayers.

It cost a shilling to register a birth, death or marriage (about £7 today). This was a huge disincentive, so some family events were never recorded.

In 1837 it was decided to adopt a civil form of registration.

The birth certificate shows when and where a child was born, its Christian name(s), sex, father's full names and occupation which is normally left blank if the child is illegitimate, mother's full names and her maiden name or previous married name if she was a widow.

Before 1875 parents were not legally bound to register a birth; they merely had to answer the registrar's questions. So it's not surprising some births don't appear in the registers. Mothers of illegitimate babies could name whosoever they liked as the father and the registrar was bound to accept it. After 1875 parents could be fined for not reporting a birth and a father could only be named if he went with the mother to register the birth.

The marriage certificate shows the place and date of the ceremony, the full names of the bride and groom and their ages (if they were over 21 this very often says just "full" or "full age", their marital status, such as bachelor, spinster, widow or widower. Until quite recently many brides had no occupation shown, but the groom's should be there. Also listed are their addresses. If these are the same it was usually for the convenience of residential qualifications for the marriage and doesn't necessarily mean they were living in sin. Also usually shown are the names and occupations of the couple's fathers and the certificate will tell you how the couple signed, or made their marks, and the names of at least two witnesses.

Death certificates show when and where a person died, their full name, sex, age, occupation, cause of death and the signature, descriptions and residence of the informant. Ages at death are prone to error and may be "guesswork" and Christian names can also present problems. Cause of death on early death certificates may also have been the guesswork of whoever reported the death. After 1874 it was necessary for a medical certificate to be signed by a qualified doctor.

The term "Present at death" means exactly that, but "In attendance" usually means they were attending the register office to report the death only. Some people have no death registration, particularly seamen who drowned when a ship was lost with all hands, as it was the responsibility of the captain to make the register entry.

DEAR DIARY

7/8 Sept	Leigh Regatta
7-10 October	Trip to Bruges
16 October	Titbits and Tales of Essex Inns – Mavis Sipple
13 November	A collection of Street Signs – Neil Smith
7 December	Comicals
December	Society Christmas Lunch

GOSFIELD – WHAT LINKS TO GOSFIELD?

This is a bit of a request to see if any members can provide information for the Society's records and for a friend of mine who lives in Gosfield and is the local history researcher for the village.

You may well ask what the connection is because I would never have known but for a chance conversation.

The connection is Gosfield School.

Gosfield School started its life as Leigh Hall College. Can any of our senior members member where it was situated?

The College moved to Gosfield in 1929 when the then Headmaster John Wilfred Turner took over Cut Hedge in Gosfield with a nucleus of 30 pupils from the Southend area.

Turner had been appointed headmaster of Leigh Hall College in 1910 after training in Heidelberg and posts at various other schools.

When the school moved in 1929 Turner took with him a group of Spanish pupils. These boys were remembered in the area for their football prowess and maturity and the fact that they stayed at school until they were 18.

By 1939 these pupils had returned to Spain and become entangled in the opposition to Franco – no more was heard of them except the knowledge that they had fought in the Spanish Civil War.

One pupil we do know moved from Leigh to Gosfield was a Jaeger Link.

Gosfield still thrives today and has strong connections to the scouting movement.

If anyone has any information or pictures of the school please contact Carole through the usual channels.



A picture of the annual parents/pupils cricket match at Gosfield School in 1930 – some of the boys must have been from the Leigh area.

LEIGHWAY

Correction – Mr David Faley has kindly pointed out that the Mascot cinema was in fact in Westcliff/Chalkwell although I am sure many Leigh people frequented the premises. Anyway thanks David for putting me right. Ed.

Articles for the next edition should be with Carole, through the usual channels, by 30 November.

We very much want members to play an active part in all our activities, especially the Leighway, so pick up your pens and get writing.

Leighway is published by the Leigh Society c/o Leigh Heritage Centre, 13A High Street, Old Town, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 2EN Tel 01702 470834

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the committee or officers of the Society. We rather hope you will keep your Leighway but if not please recycle it © The Leigh Society

MURDER MOST FOUL AT BELFAIRS

On April 15th 1917 Louisa Walker, described in local press reports as the sister of the postmaster at Eastwood, was returning from Leigh as she did every Friday after a shopping trip, usually with her sister-in-law, only this week she was alone. (Despite the newspaper reports, Louisa's brother George was not the postmaster but, in fact, the local butcher). On the way Louisa passed the time of day with a friend, Mrs Clayton and then headed towards the Woodcutters. Her route took her along Bellhouse Wood Lane to Jones Corner and home.



Mr Staples of 37 Glendale Gardens was returning from his regular dinner time drink at the Woodcutters. Strolling towards Furzefield House (now Belfairs restaurant) he glanced at his watch, five to three. He was anxious to avoid a young lad he had met on his outgoing journey who had been hanging around asking the time. The lad had obviously been cold as his coat was buttoned up to the top and he looked hungry. Suddenly Mr Staples thought he heard a gunshot. As he rounded Tomlin's Corner he saw Louisa fall against the fence on the right of the road and then stagger into the middle of the road and collapse, desperately clutching something in her hands.

Fearful she would be run over by an approaching steam lorry, Mr Staples rushed to her assistance only to find she was mortally wounded, shot. Looking around he noticed someone taking flight with a coat flapping in the wind as they ran. Amid the confusion and panic he was the only one to notice. Louisa died shortly afterwards from hemorrhaging of the wound.

A passing telegraph boy summoned the police and P.C. Chinnery arrived 45 minutes later to find Louisa dead. However he could not confirm this until Dr. Watcher arrived from Westleiff accompanied by Chief Inspector Carr in his pony and trap.

News of the murder spread fast and Louisa's body was removed to the mortuary in Leigh. She had been killed by a single shot to the back of the head. The bullet had lodged behind the eye and severed the artery which caused the hemorrhaging. It was noted by the doctor that there were no powder burns so he assumed the shot must have been from a distance. Louisa's purse containing very little money had been stolen.

30 police officers assisted in a manhunt stopping and searching the 4.25 train to Tilbury as witnesses believed they had seen the murderer escaping along Scrub Chase and on to Leigh station. In Tilbury a man was held for questioning for some time before being released. This stalled the manhunt and some of the policemen were temporarily withdrawn.

Before the body was removed, a passing sailor (the Woodcutters was popular with sailors anchored in the Thames) scratched crosses on two of the white posts that bordered the road to locate the murder scene.

Two days before the incident a boy from Hadleigh who had been caught shoplifting and sent to Beauchamps Farm in St Albans to learn a trade had run away and also missing was a revolver and six bullets. The inspector in charge switched his search from a crime of passion to look for this boy on the assumption he had returned to the local area. Was he the lad asking the time who was described as five foot three inches about 19 years old?

Although after two days the search was scaled down, the inspector ordered his officers to question shopkeepers over a large area if a boy had bought food in their shop. A local old boy living opposite the Woodcutters offered to find the exact location of the boy as he said he knew. "Don't be stupid" he was told.

Four days later P.C. Goby was at Burnt Oak on the A13 when the boy popped out of the hedge and surrendered, exactly where the old boy said he would. P.C. Reeve arrived and as the prisoner was marched to Leigh Police station he confessed all, and showed them the location of the purse with its contents undisturbed and of the still loaded pistol. 'I shot her from 7 yards to steal her money', he stated, although it was noted he did not understand quite what was happening. From this point something of a record must have been achieved as the boy was arrested, charged and found guilty in six hours.

But was this right? Mr Staples said the person running away from the scene was tall with a long rain style coat blowing in the wind. He and other witnesses failed to pick the boy out at two ID parades. A raincoat was tried that swamped the boy. Could he run in such a coat? Witnesses who saw the boy before the crime described him with a coat buttoned to the neck. The shot had been through the back of the neck slightly downwards. Could he have reached this high to make it? The gun, when found, was still loaded but four of the bullets had been fired. Where were they? Throughout the court case the boy was disinterested, failing to grasp what was happening and actually fell asleep. It was pointed out he was a couple of sprouts short of a pound but he was convicted and sentenced.

The interesting question was how did the purse turn up some distance away? Mr Staples distinctively remembered Louisa clutching something as she staggered across the road but Mrs Clayton stated that on parting from Louisa she was only carrying her purse. There is no record if she was holding anything when she died but there was no purse with her when she was removed to the mortuary. The people of Hadleigh where the young boy had grown up were horrified. He had lived all his life in Beach Road and had been caught shoplifting and for other minor crimes but he was not the criminal he had been made out to be. An appeal for clemency from them was accepted.

Louisa was buried in Eastwood church the following Friday.

But was this the end of this sad saga? Local tales still told today tell a different story.

Where the children's playground in Belfairs Park now stands there used to be a small copse. Here on Fridays Louisa, it is rumoured, did not go window shopping with her sister-in-law, but instead met the milkman - a tall man in a raincoat. This liaison would have been heavily frowned upon, particularly by the milkman's wife if she had known. He was trying desperately to finish the relationship. If this is true did he bump into the boy and take advantage of the situation, finding him with a gun and knowing Louisa was alone? With his knowledge he would have known that the spot where the attack happened was then out of sight from the rest of the road. Even the owner of Furzefield Cottage would have been out at that time.

Mr Staples always walked that way so he had to be quick. Louisa was shot from behind so did not see her attacker. Or did she? The milkman was tall. No-one described the murderer as short. Did the milkman return the pistol and purse to the boy having taken the purse to make it look like a robbery? Although the boy was desperately hungry he had not opened the purse even to buy food in the local shops. So why attack someone? When the newspaper reporters interviewed Louisa's brother and neighbours they all referred to Louisa as a good looking 40 year old with several men friends. Why give that information?

To gauge the horror of this event even twenty years after, children who had to pass the scene were sent home early from Westleigh School or were given reduced rates on the bus on dark evenings, just in case.

by Steve Ayles