



LEIGHWAY

The Newsletter of the Leigh Society

An eye to the future and an ear to the past in the heart of Leigh

Welcome to the year 2000

Yes I know you are all sick to the back teeth of the Millennium. We've been there and done that now so what is there left to top it?

The new issue of Leighway of course.

Well the first issue seems to have gone down a treat and has proved very popular with visitors in the Heritage Centre, so I guess that means I get to do it again.

In this issue we have a number of articles by Society members so don't be shy, you can do it too. We have a range of interesting items and are starting what we hope will be a number of regular features on people and properties in Leigh.

So sit back and enjoy!!!!

Ed



WHAT THOU LOV'ST WELL IS THY TRUE HERITAGE

(EZRA POUND)

Thanks to an army of dedicated helpers over the years and a wide range of souvenirs and informative material the Heritage Centre continues to thrive.

People come to the Centre for a variety of reasons. They may have an interest in local, social or family history. Some are looking for a lost childhood memory and stay to reminisce.

The Centre is seen as a focal point for these interests and things generally about the town. It is the public face of the Society.

Obviously, not every helper will know everything about everything but between them they have a wide range of knowledge and visitors can be referred to the right person.

Many of our visitors like a chat and Granny's Kitchen provides a starting point for many memories to come tumbling out. This is the most important part of the Centre's function. Of course we want people to buy our wares but our primary purpose is for them to learn about Leigh and its history and to tell us their memories.



Did you know that The Leigh Society was awarded first place in Essex County Council's 1980 Amenity Societies' Awards Scheme and in 1982 received joint first prize in the David Knightly Charitable Trust competition 'Pride of Place'.

As well as the Civic Trust the Society is also affiliated to the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the River Thames Conservancy. We are also members of the Victorian Society.

SUBSCRIPTION NEWS

The subscription fee for the Society has been unchanged for a number of years, but unfortunately costs have not stayed as static.

After much consideration it has been necessary to regularise subscriptions with effect from 1 January 2000.

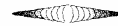
All subscriptions will now become payable by the AGM each year and from their next renewal will be on a yearly basis only, at a rate of £5 for UK members (covers partners) and £10 for overseas members.

Unfortunately we also have to contend with increasing prices for the meeting room hire and so starting with the March meeting there will be a small charge of 50p for members and £1 for non members at meetings. This will include refreshments after the talk.

We hope you will agree that in this day and age these modest rates are entirely reasonable and we know compare favourably with other such organisations..

This year we are planning a complete overhaul of the Society's archives to ensure that it is all correctly catalogued and preserved. This work will be carried out by volunteers from within the Society who will be specially trained for the purpose.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



OLD LEIGH REGATTA

Although it seems a long time ago now those of you who were down in the Old Town for the Regatta weekend in September will know what a tremendous success it was. The crowds were enormous and the weather was kind. As a result the three Scout Groups each received £3250 and the Leukemia Charity also received a sizable sum.

From the point of view of the Society it was a very successful weekend. Jan Sutcliffe's 'creative cockles' were a megga hit with the kids, the Centre was very busy and the Treasure Hunt and Count the Cockles competitions were very popular, with Lyn and Carole the most convincing pair of fishwives this side of Billingsgate.

The Society wishes to thank all the helpers in the Heritage Centre who did sterling work. It was a real team effort.

Regatta 2000 here we come

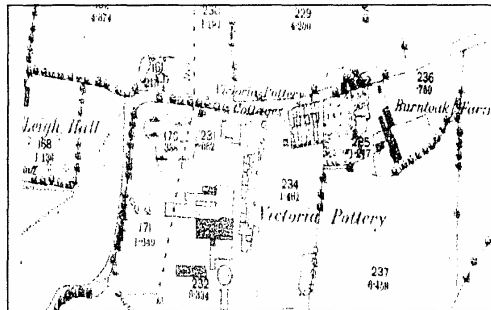


A Potted History



Do you have pieces of pottery like these?

Do you know that they are likely to have been made in Leigh where the old Corona cinema (now a snooker club) was built?



The earliest written evidence for a pottery on this site places its foundation early in the 19th Century when the owners were, successively, David Montague until about 1864, Gallichan & Co 1865 -75, The Victoria Pottery 1876-89 and Brayne & Mansfield 1890-1899 when the last firing took place.

Although considered to be the Leigh Pottery, it was actually in Prittlewell Parish, whose border lay just to the west near the Grand Hotel.

The main products were items for use in the building trade e.g. chimney pots, roofing tiles, flower pots and filters, (for water purification), all unglazed items. The pottery also produced salt-glazed items such as land drainage pipes, glazed sanitary pipes and stone bottles and jars.

The items now treasured by Old Leigh families mainly consist of flower vases, usually embellished with a spray of roses. The potters used a number of different colours for the glazed finish, dark red, green, brown, yellow and, more rarely, blue. The most frequently used was the dark red.

The outsides of the pots were further decorated by small strands of white clay which appear to have been created by pushing the soft clay through the mesh of a wire sieve. On some of the pots these strands were applied unevenly - probably because the men were not highly skilled in decorative ware.

I have a large round cheese dish with a lid, a sugar bowl on a stand and a jam jar and lid, complete with a hole for the jam spoon. These were found in a cottage at Hadleigh.

The other type of glazed decorative ware was made to look like the rough bark of a tree trunk and invariably was brown. Many families had candle-sticks, money boxes and lidded jars, usually about six to eight inches high which stored a variety of contents including tobacco. Models of buildings were made, including the model of a lych gate which is in the Heritage Centre.

The Pottery employed about twenty men and boys and there was a row of cottages nearby in which some of them lived.

Many consider Leigh Pottery to be rather crude but it has its own rustic charm for Leighmen.

Lyn Davie

Sources: The Stoneware Pottery at Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, a paper read by John Howell at the Linnean Society in 1985. Benton's History of the Rochford Hundred Old Leigh by Rev. John Bundock.

FOR THOSE IN PERIL



At our October meeting we welcomed Kris Goring from the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen

As well as giving an extremely interesting and an eye opening talk into the work of this magnificent organisation, Kris touched a chord in many of our hearts as he revealed that fishing is the most dangerous peace time occupation with, on average, 10 men a month losing their lives or being injured and 2 vessels lost to bring us fish for the table. Over 700 accidents were reported in 1999. Recent events bear this out only too well.

The Mission is a Christian organisation which brings comfort and care to the families of the bereaved and injured.

Those of you not able to attend the meeting who would like to know more about the organisation or offer assistance should write to Kris at The Fisherman's Mission, 47 Rectory Road, Rochford, SS4 1UE

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES ARE SPECIAL OCCASIONS



So why not give a special gift - a subscription to the Leigh Society?

Just send details of the recipient with a cheque for £5 to the Membership Secretary, Leigh Society, Leigh Heritage Centre, High Street, Old Town, Leigh-on-Sea SS1 2EN and we will do the rest. Please allow sufficient time before the event for dispatch.

Obituary

We regret to have to record the passing of Society members Ma Heather and Joan Draper. We send our deepest sympathy to the families.

CARETTA



SAILING INTO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

A new century has begun, but there is still one old girl who remembers the turn of another century.

1899 was a good year for the Devonport Dockyard. The Boer War was raging and there was plenty of seasoned teak from Queen Victoria's Empire, the finest gunmetal, the best copper and a yard full of craftsmen.

The plans for the Caretta had evolved from Nelson's Navy but with a concession to modern gunnery, a 4 inch thick oak platform was built into the bows in such a way that, in true Hornblower fashion, ship's guns could be lowered into the bottom, the thwarts replaced, rowed ashore, then swayed up a cliff under cover of darkness, to confront the enemy in the morning with a gun position. The service career of the Caretta is unfortunately unknown but at the end of WW1 as a concession to the 20th century an internal combustion engine was installed on a centre line shaft. The results were so horrible that she was finally ignominiously sold from the Service in 1929.

At the age of 30 she could have been all washed up but for a young marine biologist and his wife who converted her to a yacht at Whites of Fulham and renamed her "CARETTA", the Latin name for the turtle family.

On the trial run the full horror of the experimental engine became apparent. The vibration was so awful that the deck started lifting off the newly built after cabin, all loose bits fell off, and life on board was totally unbearable. The only thing to do was to cut their losses and relegate the engine to the scrapheap. As soon as she was habitable again they cruised for years interrupted only by WW2. After the war they put on a wheelhouse, and carried on until 1967, when they realised that she was too big for them to manage and they looked for someone who would look after her.

This is where I came in. I had to carry out some alterations and collect old spare parts because the two engines were, of course, obsolete. They now run on my own fuel mixture because tractor vapourising oil is not available any more.

Running a marine antique does call for a fair bit of maintenance, but she has sailed majestically into the new century. To think when that French chap, young Louis Bleriot, flew the Channel for the first time, "CARETTA" was already a respectable ten years old!

John Porter



THE CONDUIT

The Society wishes to record its thanks to Mr and Mrs Phil Blower of the Chapter of Architects for their renovation of the Conduit Plaque and to Norman Sutcliffe for his on-going good work in keeping the Conduit and surrounding area in excellent condition.



3rd Chalkwell Bay Sea Scout Group

THE RIVER EMERGENCY SERVICE

This Service, which was organised by the Port of London Authority, came into being at the outbreak of World War 2 and operated from bases from Tower Pier to Holehaven on Canvey Island. It also operated a fleet of vessels, ranging from fishing vessels, yachts, leisure craft and tugs. The crews, many of them Leighmen, included fishermen, longshoremen, yachtmen and Sea Scouts over the age of 16 years who operated as visual signallers.

At the time of the Munich Crisis in 1938, the Scoutmaster, Peter Daws, decided to form a signals section and boys were trained in Semaphore and Morse. Training was to Merchant Navy standard and the boys were also trained in Estuary pilotage and local knowledge.

In 1939 the unit was offered to the PLA to man the ships and signal station. At first the unit was assigned to Holehaven and the Lobster Smack Pub where they slept in the upper part, taking their food in the Public Bar, until the PLA built a timber building with a signal tower in the Pub forecourt.

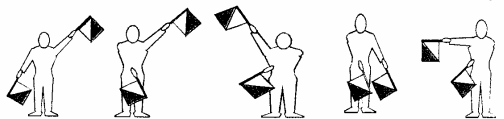
Duties consisted of logging, taking and giving instruction to passing shipping and mine watching at night....most mines were dropped by parachute. The boats buoyed suspect areas so that minesweepers from Sheerness could deal with them next day. The boats were manned with machine guns-mainly Great War French Hotchkiss type. Other duties included keeping vessels off the Blythe Sands which were heavily mined against invasion.

In mid 1940 the base was taken over by the Royal Naval Patrol Service which was the minesweeping arm of the Royal Navy. The personnel were given the option of leaving or joining the Navy-most did the latter. At the time the Sea Scouts were the youngest full time 'combatant' service in the UK.

The Unit saw the Battle of Britain at close range and dealt with hundreds of small and large ships fleeing from the continent before and after Dunkirk. They were also involved in the fires and bombing of the Thameshaven Oil Tanks where one Scout was commended for bravery.

The area covered by the base stretched from Coalhouse Fort and Sea Reach to the outer Estuary and was run by the PLA until the Navy took over. As for the Scout Group it still sails the area and is thriving as one of the largest and most active Groups.

Frank Bentley



The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the committee and officers of the Society

We rather hope you will keep your Leighway but if not please recycle it



ABOUT ESSEX

Although Leigh is, of course, the centre of the universe, it has to be said that Essex has a wealth of history. Over coming issues we will be giving you a taste of some of the other interesting places around the County.

In this issue we have not strayed far from Leigh, just up the road, in fact, to Daws Heath and Thundersley.

We would welcome short articles from readers who know of a little nook or cranny of Essex which would be of interest to other readers.

DAWS HEATH AND THUNDERSLEY

Thundersley appears in the Domesday Book and the area of Daws Heath was settled in 1816 by demobilised soldiers from the Napoleonic Wars. Soldiers, however, do not necessarily make good farmers and it is said that most of the men and their wives turned to more nefarious activities, such as thieving and smuggling. Since Tudor times charcoal burning had been a very lucrative industry in the area. Charcoal was a major constituent of gunpowder, which had been introduced into England in the 1300s but there was no wood in England suitable to make it, until the Elizabethans discovered Thundersley forests.

It is said that the charcoal used in the Gunpowder Plot was taken from Thundersley to the Gunpowder factory at Lea Bridge.

As the charcoal industry faded smuggling activities increased. The people of Daws Heath did not see smuggling as a crime.

Sometime in the 1700s they applied to the Law Commissioners for a separate government from Thundersley. When an investigator was sent to enquire into the request he asked where the church was. As there was no church at Daws Heath he was told that the nearest church was at Thundersley. The investigator told the Daws Heathians that that being the case they must go to Thundersley because the church determined the parish.

The Peculiar People were very prevalent in Thundersley. They were a religious sect who believed in divine healing. The founder of the sect was a James Banyard, a ploughman's son born in Rochford. There were enclaves of Peculiar People throughout south Essex, including Leigh. The church still exists today under a different name.

"THE PECULIAR PEOPLE"

Castle Cottage

NEAR FOOT OF CHURCH HILL,

Leigh-on-Sea,

PUBLIC WORSHIP

THE LORD'S DAY,

August 8th, 1915,

at 6.30 p.m.

A cordial invitation to All to

to come and hear the Gospel of the Grace of God.

How YOU may be BLESSED and know your Sinner's name.

Come and hear! 80 South Park

from the Thundersley

In his 90s William Stagg also became blind. The Griggs were a large family affiliated to the Peculiar People. The aunt of James and Joseph was Susannah Grigg who married Robert Ford of Leigh.

Sources: The Ancient Parish of Thundersley by Rev E A B Maley. The Peculiar People by Mark Sorrell and Our Town by Donald Glennie



BRING ME SUNSHINE

The Sundials of Southend

Above the porch at St. Clement's Church in Leigh is one of the oldest sundials in Essex. This vertical dial dates back to 1729. Even older is the mass, or scratch dial, on the south side of Holy Trinity in Southchurch. Mass dials were simply lines radiating from a central wooden peg which were scored on the stonework, usually close by the door. The priest would make a charcoal mark on one of the lines and when the peg, or gnomon, cast its shadow onto the line, the priest would ring the bell to summon the workers from the fields.

A brick-based horizontal dial, sadly minus its gnomon, stands in the Old World Garden in Priory Park and shows the hours and the points of the compass. These, plus two mythical beasts and the motto 'tyme flies' complete the dials 'furniture.'

A huge horizontal dial can be found on the wall of a house in Tattersall Gardens.

Time differed from village to village until the newfangled London time was invented. Standardised time was necessary to allow the newly invented trains to run to a timetable.

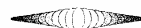
The advent of the railway and the invention of reliable mechanical clocks tolled the death knell for the humble sundial and many fell into decline. However a few were saved and restored.

Recently, sundials have begun to make a comeback. Many new and elaborate dials have been commissioned. They are attractive and ornamental but great skill and mechanical precision is used in their design and construction. One of Southend's newest dials is on the south wall of Southend High School for Boys.



The St Clement's Sundial

Mavis Sipple



HE COME FROM A LAND DOWN UNDER



A few months ago we had a visit in the Heritage Centre from Brian Axcell, a Leighman now living in Australia. Carole was able to help Brian with his family tree and we hope to have some of Brian's remembrances of Leigh as a child in a future issue.



Brian Axcell, his sister June (right), who still lives in Leigh, and their lifelong friend Ruth Hill (nee Osborne)

WHAT'S IN A NAME ?



This beautiful property was Leigh House - or was it?

Sadly, this particular Leigh House formerly known as 'Blacke House' was demolished in 1927 to make way for Broadway West. Writing in 1867 Philip Benton in his History of the Rochford Hundred refers to 'Blacke House or as it has been recently called Leigh House' situated north west of the churchyard. In a footnote he states 'This must not be confounded with Lapwater Hall, likewise called Leigh House'.

Stephen Bonner who died in 1656 left 'Blacke House' in his will to his wife. The house was later owned by Sir Anthony Deane, naval architect and friend of Pepys.

In 1670 the house was sold for £200 (roughly £14,500 today) to Thomas Printlepp and having passed through various other ownerships it was sold to John Loten, the planter of the cedar trees, in 1792.

When John Loten died in 1815 he left it to his son and it eventually passed into the hands of David Montague, the owner of the Victoria Pottery.

Writing 15 years later than Benton, Henry William 'Antiquary' King also gives the history of Leigh House but refers to that name as an alias for Lapwater Hall.



This Leigh House was said to have been built in 1751 based on the inscription of the date on the pump and the name Leigh House appears in the rate books in the ownership of Mr Edmund Lamprell, the churchwarden.

The confusion begins with the purchase of Blacke House by David Montague. He was obviously not enamoured with the name of his residence and, according to King, wished to call it by the much grander title of Leigh House. But, of course, there was already a residence of that name, alias Lapwater Hall.

Both Lamprell and Montague were churchwardens and, whilst he may have wanted to, David Montague felt he could not use the name during the residence of his colleague at Leigh House proper. It was only on Lamprell's retirement and death in 1862 that Blacke House took on its new persona.

Lapwater Hall was sold as the Leigh House Estate after the death of the widow Lamprell in 1864. Chimney pots from Blacke House can now be seen on a house at the junction of Scrub Lane and Rectory Road, Hadleigh. They were conveyed there on a handcart.

Lyn Davies and Carole Pavitt

Sources: The History of the Rochford Hundred by Philip Benton, Henry William King's Works concerning the Parish of Leigh, Old Leigh by H N Bride and Old Leigh by Rev John Bundock. Photographs from this last publication which is published by Phillimore



Dendrochronology



Not a word that trips off the tongue, but one we use quite a bit in the Heritage Centre

The previous article sets a little poser about Leigh House, but it is one of the owners of this property whom we have to thank for our interest in dendrochronology.

John Loten was the Leigh Customs Collector, who lived in the house from 1792-1815 and planted two cedar trees in what was then his garden, now the Library gardens. One of the original trees is still standing but unfortunately the other perished in the 1987 hurricane. However, it was not totally lost as we have a section of the trunk in the Heritage Centre where it is regularly used to show visiting school parties how it is possible to estimate a tree's age by its growth rings. You can also tell what the weather was like depending on the width of the tree rings. Bad growing season equals thin ring whereas a good growing year produces a much wider ring.



and that is dendrochronology.



DUAL PURPOSE PUBS

Pubs have always been a focal point of local life and it seems local death as well.

On 11 March 1870 the Chelmsford Chronicle reported that after an horrific railway accident the inquest into the death of a little boy, Henry Cotgrove, killed by a train, was held at the Crooked Billet. The poor child was deaf and didn't hear the train coming. The following week on 18 March the same paper reported on a further inquest for the little lad this time held at the Bell.

In 1783 the Vestry meeting took place in the Waterman's Arms and in 1785 at the Queen's Head. Parish meetings also took place on occasion in a local hostelry.



HERITAGE CENTRE SALES

Unfortunately due to printing costs we have had to increase the price of some booklets but they are still very reasonable.

New additions to our booklet range include

'Zeppelins over Essex - the Last Flight of the L15' by Carole Pavitt - £1

'Edric Brewer's Memories of Old Leigh and of Canon King at St Clement's Church' donated by Stewart Brewer and transcribed by Lyn Davies - £1

Another new addition is 'Titbits and Tales of Old Essex' by Society member Mavis Sipple - £3.95.

BROWSERS WELCOME



CHARACTERS OF OLD LEIGH



Michael Tomlin
1814 - 1903

Michael Tomlin was a fisherman and a fisher of men. He came from a family, still in Leigh today, the son of Daniel Tomlin and Sarah Plumb.

After having heard the preaching of the Reverend Ridley Herschell, Michael himself became a lay preacher.

He married Elizabeth Turnidge in 1834 and they had nine children. Michael's preaching ranged far and wide and he thought nothing of walking miles on a Sunday to spread the word.

As can be seen from his picture he was a mighty man and once rowed a punt full of skate single handed to London his mate having collapsed on the way.

Michael carried on his preaching in Southend founding a church, now the Masonic Hall.

He is buried in St Clement's Churchyard, his stone facing you as you walk down Church Hill.

Michael Tomlin: Fisher of Men by S F Johnson is available from the Heritage Centre



The next Character of Old Leigh will be Churchie Deal

REGARDEZ LOO

We are pleased to announce the construction of the loo at the Heritage Centre.

All the helpers are mighty relieved!!!!!!!



A KIWI'S FLYING VISIT



On Regatta weekend we had a visit from Kerry Dukelow from Hastings, New Zealand. Kerry is a Cotgrove Great Granddaughter

OPERATION DYNAMO

This year is the 60th anniversary of Operation Dynamo. Most of you will know of the Dunkirk Memorial in St Clement's Churchyard and the Dunkirk Chapel in the Church itself. Stranded on the beaches at Dunkirk were over 330,000 troops of the British Expeditionary Force sitting ducks for the German Luftwaffe. It was evident the men would have to be evacuated but not in the harbour.

Small craft were what was needed to carry the men from the shallow water to the bigger ships who could not get in close. But Admiral Ramsay who was commanding the operations had precious few small boats so he signalled the Admiralty for more, and as many as could be found.

Out from Leigh went the Defender, Reliance, Resolute, Letitia, Endeavour and, of course, the Renown.

The tragedy of the Renown is well known and commemorated in the Memorial and the Chapel. The boats landed a total of 180 men at Ramsgate and as a whole the flotilla had ferried about 1000 men.



The Dunkirk Memorial in St Clement's Churchyard

Vice Admiral Dover's report contains the following citation:-

The conduct of the crews of those cockle boats was exemplary. They were all volunteers who rushed over to Dunkirk in one day, probably none of them had been under fire before and certainly none of them had been under Naval Discipline. These boats were Thames Estuary fishing boats which never left the estuary and only one of their crews had been further afield than Ramsgate before. In spite of this fact, perfect formation was maintained throughout the day and night, under the control of a sub-lieutenant, RNVR, in command of the unit, and all orders were carried out with great diligence, even under actual shell fire and aircraft attack.'

One other boat was also lost, the Peggy IV owned by Frank 'Shettie' Bridge and used on Chalkwell Beach for passenger trips. The Peggy made two or three trips between the beach and a destroyer with soldiers but was sunk during the night.

A vivid account of the Dunkirk evacuation is contained in 'Arthur Joscelyne's Dunkirk Memories' available from the Heritage Centre



Frank Bridge and The Peggy

DR MURIE'S WHALE

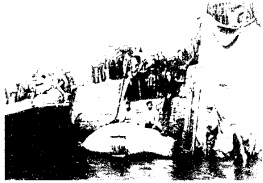
Dr James Murie came to Leigh in 1888 and lived there until his death in 1925 when he was 93. A graduate of Glasgow University, he was a distinguished pathologist at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, lecturer in comparative anatomy at Middlesex Hospital, Assistant Conservator to the Royal College of Surgeons and prosecutor to the Zoological Society.



In July 1891 just to the north of the Nore some shrimp trawlers came upon a twenty five foot Beaked Whale. The fishermen tried to kill the whale with their boat hooks but to no avail until one man went overboard with his claspknife and plunged it deep into the whale's inside and killed it.

The men then decided to tow the whale to Leigh making it fast by the tail. By the time they reached Leigh Swatch night was falling so they dropped anchor.

It would be a major operation to get the beast on dry land. Permission was obtained to use Victoria Wharf as the landing place. The whale was brought in the next day. At a weight of 20 ton it took until midnight to get it on to the slipway.



Then the side show began. People poured down to see the behemoth paying tuppence a time for the privilege.

Dr Murie, with his background in zoology was deeply interested and by the next day he was well into exploring the secrets of the whale's anatomy.

Unfortunately the weather was unusually hot and the whale started to give off unpleasant odours. Dr Murie's dissection of the creature also enhanced the flow of oil making the slipway slippery and allowed the dead animal to glide down into the water like an ocean liner launching itself.

People eventually became bored with viewing and the whale was becoming offensive to those living nearby. Some wanted to get rid of it altogether while others saw money to be made from its remains. The latter won the day and the blubber was sold to an oil firm. They then buried the skeleton on Leigh Marsh.

Dr Murie, in making his report on the Thames Sea Fisheries, said that the blubber fetched £10. The more valuable oil in the head had, however, been contaminated.

A curious privilege at the time belonging to the Crown, which it is believed still exists, is that of claiming any whale or sturgeon captured on the coast of the United Kingdom, and brought to land. This right dates back to the days of the Norman Conquest.

Obviously no one at Leigh chose to tell Queen Victoria!!

According to Philip Benton in his History of the Rochford Hundred this was not the first whale to find its way to Leigh and it certainly was not the biggest. In 1806 there had been a 36 footer and in 1826 a whale of 46 foot length came to Leigh.

Footnote: According to Bundock the whale came to Leigh in 1890 and was brought up on Bell Wharf.

Sources: Benton's History of the Rochford Hundred, Old Leigh by Rev John Bundock, Beachcomber's Log, Southend Standard, November 1938 and Curious Survivals by Dr George C Williamson



THAMES WATERMEN AND LIGHTERMEN

In the Leigh parish registers and the census you will find reference to men following the profession of 'waterman'. These men originally navigated a form of rowing boat, some with sails, carrying fare paying passengers.

This was a highly skilled and necessary job as there were few bridges across the Thames, the roads were bad and the cry of 'stand and deliver' was enough to put some people off travelling by road. The Waterman's Company was formed in 1555 when 'rulers' were appointed to oversee all watermen and wherry men working downstream from Windsor to Gravesend. Lightermen also worked the river carrying goods in a lighter or barge and 'lightened' the load of ships by taking their cargo.

In 1700 the two groups joined as the Company of Watermen and Lightermen. It is one of the City's oldest guilds, but not a livery company.

Boys were bound to a master who was a freeman of the Company. The apprenticeship papers were cut in half with a wavy line which meant the two halves could only match with each other - an indenture.

Apprentices were not allowed to drink or gamble without the Master's consent and it was his responsibility to house, clothe and feed the boys. However, it was written that he may not feed the boy salmon more than three times a week!!!!

After 2 years the boys were tested for competence and if found to be so, were given a licence to row. At the end of the apprenticeship, which could be up to 7 years, he was again called to show his worth and if successful sign the Binding Book.

Today the powers and authority of the Company are much less because of the Port of London Authority's jurisdiction. It still, however oversees apprenticeships, charities and almshouses.

One other tradition which continues to this day was started by the



Irish comedian Thomas Doggett who came to England in the 1690s and was so impressed with the watermen's skills that he set up a trust for the holding of an annual race from London Bridge to Chelsea for the best oarsman among the apprentices. His will set out how the race was to be organised and detailed the badge and livery of the oarsmen. The race was to be held on 1st August forever. This picture shows the traditional coat and badge of a Doggett's winner. The coat and cap are scarlet and the silver badge weighs 12 ounces (as stipulated by Doggett).

A FOUNDING FATHER

Vic Davies was born in the cottage next to the big shed which comprised the Southend Engineering Company which had been set up in the early 1900s by his father. The Works started business in, surprisingly enough, Southend, before moving to Leigh in the early 1900's, to set up in what is now Old Leigh Studio.

The works made a range of petrol marine engines, of which two models were 'THE EXPRESS' and 'THE LITTLE DEMON'. A rival establishment along the road was GREGORYS, now the Old Foundry, one of whose antique engines, incorporating a bicycle free wheel in the starting mechanism, is now in the National Motorboat Museum at Pitsea awaiting full restoration. It has the Leigh-on-Sea nameplate. This rivalry between the two firms extended to the apprentices, and fights were a regular occurrence. Whilst the Southend Engineering Works did the design, machining, and assembly of these engines, the iron castings were made in East London, in a little iron foundry run by an old fellow and his wife. They held the patterns, and upon receiving an order they would cast the cylinders and pistons, and put them on the train at Stepney to be called for at Leigh Station, now the Leigh Sailing Club.

No invoice ever came from this foundry, but every summer time this old couple would shut down the works, take train to Leigh and find lodgings.

Having established themselves, they would walk to the Southend Engineering Works in their Sunday best.

"Morning, Mr. Davies, we've come for the casting money."

Vics' father would then pay them out in cash, whereupon they would go straight across to the Peter Boat, for running a foundry produces a very fine thirst. The Southend Engineering Works account was their holiday fund, and when the hostilities of Leigh had exhausted it all, they would regretfully use their return tickets to London, and start casting again for another year.

When Mr Davies senior died quite young Mrs Davies started a clothing business with a shop window in the cottage and Vic and his brother made a fine range of model yachts for sale from 5/- upwards. The shed was let to Arthur Parsons who made cockle boats inside which meant knocking down a corner of the doorway each time to get them out into the High Street.

Vic revived the Southend Engineering Company just before the war, refitted the machine shop and worked flat out on War Department contracts plus the engines for the motor launches built at Jagos and repairs to Royal Navy craft.

John Porter



Leigh Life

Those of you who receive the Standard Recorder and its monthly inset, Leigh Life, will see as from January that the Society will have a regular column. As well as a short local interest item, Society news will also feature so keep an eye out for announcements of forthcoming events.



KNOW YOUR ESSEX?



G D N V N D N A L Y A M
R O E W I V E N H O E I
A O D S M A L D O N S S
S W S A S H E N O N T T
S T E L E A S T D O I L L
E N K C O T S L N D P E
N E R O D E E E R M R Y
B R A T T A X I W L E E
A B R A I N T R E E M L
R E G N A H C R I B L G
W N R O C H F O R D U U
I N W O R T H C R I B S

**Arkesden/Ashen/Birch/Birchanger
Braintree/Brentwood/Bulmer/Elmdon
Essex/Ingatestone/Inworth/Maldon
Mayland/Mistley/Pitsea/Rochford
Wivenhoe/Wix/Wrabness
Salcot/ Stock/Stone/Ugley**



DEAR DIARY



All Society meetings are held at Wesley Methodist Church in Elm Road at 8 p.m.

As from January 2000 there will be a small charge of 50p for members and £1 for non members entry to each meeting. Unfortunately this has become necessary due to increased overheads.

As the next Newsletter will not be until April please keep an eye on the Heritage Centre window and Leigh Life for more information. We realise that some members do not get down to the Old Town very often so please speak to a member of the Committee or ring the Heritage Centre to find out in advance what is being organised. The programme for 2000 is as follows:

15 March	An Archaeological Miscellany - Rosemary Arscott
26 April	AGM (Members only) followed by Society Slide Show
10 May	Trip to Canterbury cCathedral and the Canterbury Tales Experience
17 May	Hatch, Match, Scratch and Dispatch - Carole Pavitt
18 October	The History of the City of London - Sue Sincock, City of London Guide
15 November	Vic Ellis' Paintings - Bob Clark