

LHG Annual General Meeting January 2020

At the AGM on 27th January, it was agreed to vary the society's Constitution so that all Committee Members will in future be elected for one year, rather than three years. It is hoped that this will give the society greater flexibility and ease the problem of recruitment of committee members.

For 2020-2021 therefore, Barry Franklin continues as Chairman, Michael Pearson (Vice-Chairman), Ian McCutcheon (Treasurer), Mick Jeffs (Website), Tessa Whitehouse (Membership), Stella Bolitho, Bobby Boalch, Joyce Plumb, Maureen Thornton and Margaret Rushton. (Secretary)



V E Day 75th Anniversary Celebration,

Friday 8th May 2020 at the Pump Room Gardens

Leamington History Group was invited to put on a display for this celebration, which will not now to take place on the date arranged. We could still put together a display, with members' help, and show it on the website, and in the Autumn Newsletter

Did your relatives play a part in WW2? Was there a party in the street where you lived?

Do you have photos or memorabilia that we could borrow and scan, to use in a future display or on the website? If you have, please get in touch.

Forthcoming meetings

We hope to resume Monday meetings at Dormer Hall in July

Monday 27 July, 7.30 pm
Nigel Briggs: The Story of Leamington's own 'Sari Fabrics'

Heritage Open Days
Saturday 12 & Sunday 13
September, 2.30 pm

Barry Franklin: Brunswick St Cemetery Walks

A local bus service to and from the town centre, (Leamington, Whitnash, South Farm,) stops outside the cemetery. **There is no parking in the cemetery.**

Please consider residents when parking on nearby streets.

Local History Day

Saturday 26 September

All Saints Parish Church,
10.30-3.30pm

Many Warwickshire groups will be taking part.

No admission fee.

Althorpe Street



The History Group has now given up tenancy of South Lodge, and moved to The Band Factory in Althorpe Street, where we have been made very welcome.

Althorpe Street was once a tight-knit, thriving community with its own shops, and small businesses, three pubs, the Eagle Inn, the White Lion, and the Althorpe Arms, and the Police Station and the Fire Station at the end of the road. Althorpe Street, seen above in the 1950s, was built in the early 1830s to provide housing to meet the needs of post-industrial revolution expansion and the development of Leamington as a major spa town and tourist attraction.

Until the 1950s' bid for industrial regeneration, there was little change in the area. Althorpe Street consisted of two long rows of forty-four terraced houses fronting the cobbled street, often home to large families, - of up to twelve adults and children, squeezed into the two-up, two-down space. The houses opened straight on to the street from the front room, and had a kitchen behind, with an open cooking range/oven, and a copper to heat the water for wash day and bath night, when a tin bath kept at the top of the cellar steps, came out, placed in front of the range, and sheltered by a blanket or a sheet over the clothes horse.

The cellar was used for storing coal or coke and keeping food cool. Some families used the cellar as an extra bedroom, as there were only two rooms on the first floor, and an attic above. The yards, or 'courts' behind the houses were shared by several houses, with unlit, unheated outside toilets. Early residents were skilled artisans, but the coming of the railways in the 1840s brought about long-lasting changes. The carriage trade died out, and in came unskilled labourers who worked at the Eagle Iron Foundry or the Leamington Mineral Water bottling plant. Althorpe Street had twenty-three laundresses, kept gainfully occupied by the many visitors to the Spa.

Until the 1930s, the streets were lit by gas. Even when electricity was laid on in the 1940s, it wasn't in all the rooms. Some families still used candles to get up to bed or to read upstairs.

"Althorpe Street" was a close-knit community of interrelated families, and quite self-sufficient, with its own shops and pubs. No-one had much money, but no-one was allowed to go hungry if they fell on hard times or there was illness in the family. Neighbours rallied round. One of the shops was a pawn-brokers, - used regularly when work was scarce.

Having enough to eat was a major pre-occupation. Soup or stew, slow-cooked on the range was popular, as were left-overs from the baker's. If a family had a pig, children went from house to house collecting food waste to feed it.

Children all played outside, whatever the weather or season. Hopscotch, marbles, top and whip and skipping were popular street games, and there was the attraction of the canal at the end of the road. 2d pocket money could buy all kinds of treats, - entrance to the cinema, a bag of Spa Water rock, lots of broken biscuits, or a bag of chips from the chip shop. Life was tough, - boys and girls left school and started work at 14, - but according to one old resident, "We still had a good time".

In the 1940s, the main entertainment was the cinema, but the focal point of social life was always the pub, where adults would meet up at weekends, leaving the children outside with a bag of crisps. No-one went home before closing time. The Althorpe Arms (now the Band Factory) had a bar at one end divided by a chimney breast, with lovely fires on either side,



heating the whole pub. The men played cards and dominoes at one end of the bar and had a dart board at the other end. There was also a smoke room, considered 'posh', where young ladies were taken to sip a gin and orange, and the 'Donkey Box', a small space with just two settles facing each other. This was where women popped in in their 'pinnies' for a quick lunchtime drink, and sometimes placed a bet.

Notwithstanding gasmasks, shortages and rationing, the German plane shot down after a bombing raid on the Lockheed factory, the enduring memory of the 1940s for most residents was the night of the Coventry Blitz. One resident was quoted as saying that "From the top of Althorpe Street, you could see the glow in the sky as Coventry burned. I will never forget it". There was an air raid shelter in Althorpe Street, and anti-aircraft guns on the railway line, but it was the pub cellars that were packed with people waiting for the All-Clear. On V E Day, there was a Street Party, - complete with two Japanese PoWs.

By the 1950s, Althorpe Street and the streets around it were in decline. The terraced houses offered only the most basic accommodation. There were no bathrooms and toilets were still outside in the yard, unlit and subject to frozen pipes in winter. As the terraces were demolished, families were moved out and dispersed all over Leamington, - a wonderful prospect to begin with, but the spirit of community was lost. Everyone missed "the street." It is now home to a flourishing Industrial Estate



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Photographs © Peter Coulls and Joe Claydon

Facebook

We encourage members to look at the LHG Facebook page from time to time; there are usually 2 or 3 new posts each week. Here are some recent images with a small number of comments.



8th March 2020. Clemens Street
 "...date unknown...however it is pre-1993 as the sign of the 'Great Western' pub is still visible (right hand side) ...1993 was the year the pub closed and the building became a Chinese Take-away" (Photo courtesy of the Derek Billings collection, Leamington History Group archive)

Comments: Peter Perry: The road sign includes the M40, which reached Warwick at the end of 1989, so it looks like we can date the pic to the very early 90s.

Graham Taylor: Looking at the cars, I can see a Mk 2 Sierra which was released in 1986, so it can't be any earlier than that.

March 3. Curry's, Bath Street.

People of a certain age will probably remember Curry's being in this location, now part of the 'Old Library' pub. (Photo courtesy of Bob Saunders)

Comments: John Hemmings: Remember looking at the first colour televisions through the shop window; they left them switched on all day and night until late.

Leamington History Group: This became the Leamington Building Society followed by the Bradford & Bingley ... later incorporated into 'The Jug & Jester.'



A Message from the Committee

Special LHG Members Project: April – July 2020

We are sure that we are all disappointed by the need to stop our weekly and monthly meetings. This leaves gaps in the lives of most of us. And, perhaps, TV, jigsaws and board games are already losing their attraction!

We would like to encourage you to keep in touch with your interests in local history and entertaining your friends and other members. We are suggesting that we prompt your memories and, possibly, enthusiasm for research, by designing some simple light-hearted projects for you.

We are sure that many of you have stories, memories or research that you would like to recall and share at this very unusual time. Our initial idea is that we would suggest a topic for you to think and write about every three weeks or so. The focus would be on Royal Leamington Spa. We would suggest 300 to 500 words.

The responses would be posted on our website (unless you do not want this) and you would be able to vote for your favourite. The winner would receive a certificate or small prize. It is intended to operate the project using the wonders of the internet. We recognise that quite a few of you do not use the internet but it is difficult to find an alternative at the current time. If you have a contact who could submit your entry for you, then that would be fine.

Four initial ideas so far are - Memories about work; Events that you have attended; Homes where you have lived, and Schooldays.

What to do next?

- Get writing your 300-500-word article based on 1 of the themes above
- Submit this to Margaret Rushton, Mick Jeffs and Stella Bolitho, care of secretary@leamingtonhistory.co.uk, by one of the deadlines below. We are offering four dates in the hope of avoiding having everyone's projects coming in in one mad rush at the end.

The deadlines are 18th April; 9th May; 30th May and 20th June

Good luck!

Reviews

With Tessa Whitehouse

Monday 27 January: Peter Coulls, Henry Fedeski, award-winning Leamington Architect.

This was a very enlightening talk about the architect who was responsible for a good deal of post-war development in the town. Henry Fedeski qualified as an architect in 1934 and was later appointed as chief architect for Leamington Council. He was in partnership with Kenneth Rayner. He focused on planning homes and public buildings especially in Lillington, which was the largest area of expansion in post-war Leamington, giving us Crown Way shopping centre, the original Youth Centre, the houses close by and the blocks of flats at the Crest at the top of Mason Avenue. He designed Denville Road facing the cricket ground and Cubbington village hall. In the town centre he gave us the Lee Longlands store which to so many residents will always be A. H. Hayes furniture shop, and he replaced a property in Clarendon Square with flats in keeping with the surroundings and with an underground car park.

With so much housing being built and new communities being created there was a need for facilities for the local residents and it is in Lillington where his most rewarding and memorable work was done. He designed the library which is still a much-used facility and is continually being adapted for a changing society. His most noted work is the beautiful Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady in Valley Road, needed to accommodate increasing numbers. The foundation stone was laid in July 1962 and the church officially opened in September 1963. Its interior is stunning, with its central altar and beautiful stained-glass blocks, reminiscent of mediaeval stained-glass windows, but here part of the building's construction. This prominent building in Lillington now has grade 2 listing and is a lasting memorial to a man who did so much for the people of the town. Henry Fedeski's last home in Leamington was in Cloister Way. It was designed in his particular style and the current residents have retained its unique features.

Monday 24 February: Mike Bunn, - It's not all anoraks and numbers!

As the heading suggests this talk is about railways! In 2013 our speaker undertook a meticulously-planned week-long journey the length and breadth of Britain and recorded the discoveries he made. So many fellow-passengers rarely looked out of the windows or noticed the view or the places that they travelled through. He left home at Stratford and headed to Birmingham Moor Street, then Leeds and Bradford. Mike was particularly fascinated by the stations and how they adapt to cater for changing needs. The problems encountered in their construction and, sadly, the accidents and fatalities that were part of it came alive for Mike when he was able to see the evidence and some of the memorials to these tragedies. He arrived in Scotland via the Settle and Carlisle railway, and visited the Glasgow railway museum. Onwards then to Edinburgh, once Britain's second largest station and the Forth Bridge. Time to head south to York and the National Railway Museum with its huge collection of railway memorabilia which were once familiar features of every town and village. He made his way south through Crewe, Cardiff and to Cornwall and then to London and St Pancras Station. Marylebone was his final call before heading back home with so many stories of what is hidden along the tracks and its buildings.

This was a fascinating talk with many humorous touches and photographs. One feature that most of us noticed was as stations were continually changing, so were the needs of the passengers and Costa coffee and Coca Cola adverts were prominent everywhere. A sign of the times!