



# Smoke Signal

Affiliated to Cheltenham Arts Council

Leckhampton Local History Society's Newsletter



## Twenty-Five Glorious Years of Leckhampton Local History Society *a review of the highlights*

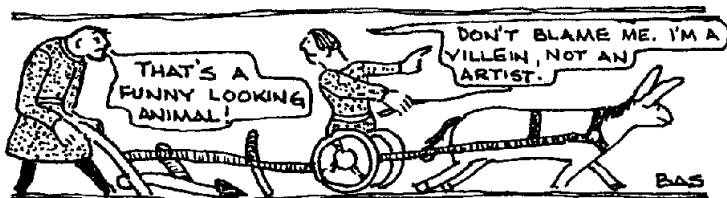
This year the Society is celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. After a preliminary session in the Church Cottages on 21 July 1992 to gauge the likely interest, the first formal meeting took place in the hall of Leckhampton Primary School on 1<sup>st</sup> October. The next few meetings were held in either the chapel or the dining room of Leckhampton Court, by kind permission of Sue Ryder Care, and we once met in the former St James's Church (now Zizzi's restaurant) before settling on Church House in Painswick Road.

The moving force was the late Bruce Stait, ably supported by John Randall, who was the first chairman. Bruce was already known as the author of a book on the history of Dowty Rotol, and he was quick to deploy his literary talent in the society's newsletter. He called the first issue *Smoke Screen*, but he afterwards agreed that that 'smacked too much of concealment - we have nothing to hide!' and the title was changed to the now familiar one. Later editors were Roger Richards, John Randall, Eric Miller and Lorna Robson. Now Julie Sharpe has brought it into the digital age as an A4-size document.

Articles in early issues of *Smoke Signal* show how members were making their first discoveries and tentative speculations about the area, and some of the items covered subjects that were later given fuller treatment in articles in *Bulletins* or in books.

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In the first issue Bruce Stait quoted from a lecture entitled 'Leckhampton in Norman Times' which had been given in 1898 by Major Robert Cary Barnard - an appropriate choice, as he was the first person to study and record the history of Leckhampton. (His nephew, the architect Leonard William Barnard, in 1914 carried out a survey of the churchyard, which is still an authoritative source.) Bruce accompanied the article with one of his cartoons. He also advertised a village walk, a forerunner of the one recently organised by Paul McGowan.



Picture: Bruce Stait's cartoon from the Society's first newsletter

In later issues Rick Kedge wrote about the Hill Stores, recalling the coach that demolished it (see also Sue Marlow's item in *Smoke Signal* No 77). He also speculated that graffiti in the church porch resembling drawings of windmills might have been evidence of such a mill in the grounds of the Court, and this prompted Terry Moore-Scott to set down the evidence for the existence of a water-mill elsewhere. John Randall wrote about the trains stopping at Leckhampton ('Cheltenham South') as listed in the 1934 Bradshaw's Guide. Don Biddle wrote about the Leckhampton Players, founded in 1947, and also about the pantomime at the Village Hall in 1909 (written by the Barnards). Alan Gill supplied extracts from early newspapers that referred to Leckhampton and also wrote about Frank Webley, the local Sub-Postmaster, whose picture postcards evoke the village scene at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

To put the society's name on the map, the obvious thing was to produce a book describing the village at an earlier stage of its existence. It was agreed that the sale of the manor and its lands in 1894 would be the ideal choice, and this led to the publication of *The End of an Era* one hundred years later. Bruce and John had encouraged members to carry out research in the libraries and archives, and their contributions helped greatly in compiling the final version. A similar approach was followed when compiling *Leckhampton in the Second World War* (which also included reminiscences from people who lived here during those times), but these preparations were brought to a sudden halt when Bruce died of a heart attack. It took some time for his shocked fellow-editors to pick up the pieces (the book did not come out until 1998), and to fill the gap another member offered an account of social life in the village from the Victorian era up to the Second World War, which appeared as *Leckhampton Yesteryear* (1996). In 1999 we brought out the first of our *Research Bulletins*; this is now available on-line and the other three will follow in due course. Another is planned for next year.

In June 1993 a Postcard Research Group had made a good start. Alan Gill took the project under his wing and assembled a unique and important portfolio comprising high-quality copies of over 500 photos and engravings of the area in all its variety. This collection formed the basis of *Britain in Old Photographs: Leckhampton* (Sutton Publishing, 2000). In addition, histories of St Peter's Church and Leckhampton Court were produced.

In 2006 the society's website was set up by Jeremy Davis, and the webmaster is now Mike Rigby. Inquiries are often received through that channel from people who have historic family connections with Leckhampton, some living on the other side of the globe. We can generally satisfy the inquirer and often learn something new in return.

Over the years the society has acquired a significant archive of documents, letters, maps, photographs and publications, which assist our research. Many such items have been donated, the most recent ones being from long-time resident Mary Paterson. However, the most substantial element was received after the death of Jean Bendall, a loyal founder member, who had in her turn inherited a wide range of memorabilia from her father and grandfather - leading local figures, builders, active in sport and local government and the church. Some of the more significant or delicate material has been deposited in the County Archives or Local Studies Centre, after copies have been taken for our own purposes.

#### OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY 1992 – 2017

##### Chairman

1992- 1995 John Randall  
 1995- 1996 Amy Woolacott  
 1996- 1999 Eric Miller  
 1999- 2002 Roger Richards  
 2002- 2005 David Lyall  
 2005- 2006 Amy Woolacott  
 2006- 2009 Eric Miller  
 2009- 2012 Mike Rigby  
 2012- 2015 Eric Miller  
 2015- Sue Marlow

##### Hon Secretary

1992- 2000 Alison Merrett  
 2000- 2009 Amy Woolacott  
 2009- 2010 Mike Rigby  
 2010- 2015 Ken Stephens  
 2015- Heather Smith

##### Hon Treasurer

1992- 2000 Tom Hewlett  
 2000- 2003 Jeremy Davis  
 2003- 2015 Jim Breddy  
 2015- Dave Sharpe

Members and visitors have been informed and entertained by visiting speakers on a wide range of topics. The late Joan Launchbury drew up the first programmes and arranged speakers, since when Amy Woolacott has performed this task over many years, and it is now undertaken by Sarah McGowan. Indeed, there would have been no occasion to compose these reminiscences were it not for Sarah and Paul McGowan, Julie and Dave Sharpe, Sue Marlow and Heather Smith, who saved the society from collapse a few years ago. We believe that all the above demonstrates that the society has lived up to its aim 'to collect, study and publish information concerning the history of Leckhampton and to stimulate public interest in local history'. May it continue to do so for the next quarter-century.

By Eric Miller



# Chairman's Message

*Sue Marlow, Chairman*

Enjoying the steam train ride from Toddington to Cheltenham a week ago, my friend and I noticed how the haws were ripe on the hawthorn and the leaves on the trees were beginning to turn to beautiful oranges and reds. We wondered how we had arrived to the end of August but of course that heralds in September and the start of our meetings once again. This is our special 25<sup>th</sup> year, which will be celebrating in February.

I am delighted to say we have a very diverse programme for you this year. Eric Miller is first up reminding us about the history of Leckhampton. Eric and I recently attended The Hill event at The Wheatsheaf when Angela France shared her poems about Leckhampton Hill. I have bought her book and feel we are in for a treat in October.

I would ask you all to look among your old photos for something you have been researching and bring it along to our members' evening in November. These have been most interesting in the past, covering a range of subjects. I would be delighted to hear from you. With Christmas not far away we are serving mince pies and mulled wine at our December meeting while we hear about Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Gloucestershire. I hope I have whetted your appetite to come along and bring a friend to find out more about our lovely and interesting locality.

## Leckhampton Boundary Posts

All of my life I have passed the red brick wall at the Leckhampton end of Naunton Lane and have given it no thought except that there was a tree in a very inconvenient place when the wall was built and the wall had been built around it.

Browsing through old Smoke Signals, (a source of lots of interesting pieces of information) looking for something quite different, I found a reference to a Boundary Post in this position – so not an inconvenient tree but someone preserving a piece of history. This set me thinking. Are there more



boundary posts that are largely un-noticed? Do you know of any? I would love to know so that I can make a record of them. Eric has kindly supplied me with some maps showing the boundary, but if anyone has any information it could save me a lot of searching.

*Mary Oliver*

## A Short Walk Back in Time

The Society's Committee had decided that it might be of interest to members and visitors alike, to take some of our knowledge outdoors and organise a short walk around the area most likely to have formed the heart of the old village of Leckhampton. With this in mind, a group of 20 or so met at the Parish Pound car park opposite St. Peter's lychgate on the Sunday morning of 25 June.



There was a nice mix of members and visitors and a good sprinkling of children. We began by establishing the origin of the name - Leckhampton - the home farm where leeks are grown. I've written an account of the walk (which we will issue in a future edition of Smoke Signal) as a narrative that you might follow yourself if you have an hour to spare.

*Paul McGowan*

## *Berkeley Castle and Dr Jenner's House, Museum and Garden – by Sue Marlow*

Unfortunately we had to cancel the trip earmarked for July 9<sup>th</sup>. The date was still free for me so a friend and I still made the visit on a lovely sunny day. We were made very welcome – the guide was very clear and led us through the rooms giving information and pointing out different features and artefacts. We learned that Berkeley Castle has been a family home for 850 years since Robert Fitzharding completed the Keep in the late 12th Century. The items include Francis Drake's cabin chest, Queen Elizabeth I's bedspread, and the banner that the 4th Earl of Berkeley took with him to the Battle of Culloden. There are also unusual tapestries, paintings, ceramics and silverware.

After a lovely salad lunch in a Yurt we walked across to Dr Jenner's House, Museum and Garden. This is where Edward Jenner, pioneer of vaccination against smallpox, lived and told the world about his work. We learned that smallpox had been eradicated in less than two hundred years later. In the garden is a hobbit-type house where he used to immunise the townsfolk for free. If you get a chance to visit it is a great, informative day out!

# The 'Despard' Connection

By Neela Mann

During my research for "Cheltenham in the Great War" I came across the surname Despard twice and, being such an unusual name, wanted to see if the two people concerned were connected. In April 1915 a "Miss Despard", became the first Captain of the Women's Volunteer Reserve in Cheltenham. This was a national organisation mainly set up and staffed by volunteers who had been suffragists and suffragettes. By November Mrs Florence Earengy had taken Miss Despard's place - well known in the circles of the Cheltenham suffrage movement. Florence was the sister of Edith How-Martyn, a nationally known suffragette who had been imprisoned in 1906 for attempting to make a speech in the House of Commons, in the company of others including a Mrs Charlotte Despard and Adela Pankhurst. Edith had married Herbert Martyn the son of the Cheltenham industrialist H.H. Martyn.



Photo: Mrs Charlotte Despard



Photo: "Miss Despard" marching with the Women's Volunteer Reserve in April 1915

Mrs Charlotte Despard, a nationally known suffragette, and Edith How-Martyn were founding members of The Women's Freedom League. Charlotte Despard, whose brother was Sir John French, later the Earl of Ypres, had been married in Kilburn by the Rev. George Despard. Charlotte married George's brother, Maximilian Carden Despard. The Reverend George Despard, retired as Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Cheltenham, to a house called Undercliff on Leckhampton Hill in November 1902. George's daughter, Amy, had carved part of the font at St. Luke's. She died tragically on 2nd November 1918 while cycling along Pall Mall in London when she collided with a motor car. It was reported that she lived with her family at Undercliff, Leckhampton.

But what of "Miss Despard" of the Women's Volunteer Reserve? Was she one of Rev. George Despard's four daughters and the aunt of Mrs Charlotte Despard - and if so, which daughter? Of the four daughters, Miss Mary Despard became the Matron of Cheltenham Asylum for Orphan Boys, Helen looked after the house and kept chickens and Edith married Mr J.J. McMillin. Exasperated at not knowing which daughter was the "Miss Despard" of the WVR, I extended my search to just after the war and came across a report of a court case in the *Echo* of 6th June 1919. A Mrs Mary Bertha Norman of Lynwood, Leckhampton Road was suing Jacob Smith and Company for the recovery of 6 gns., the value of a khaki service costume left with them for dyeing which they had lost. It stated that Mrs Norman had bought the costume in 1916 from a Miss Despard, a lady knocked down and killed in Picadilly. So now I know, Amy was my "Miss Despard" of the WVR.

## Contact Us

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## Further Surveying in Church Meadow

We reported in our April 2015 edition of Smoke Signal about Isaac Levi, an archaeology student, who had undertaken a geo-physics survey of the field behind St Peter's Church. A further survey was carried out earlier this summer to take additional readings of the area - details of the findings will follow in future editions of Smoke Signal.