



# Smoke Signal

Affiliated to Cheltenham Art Council

Leckhampton Local History Society's Newsletter

## Austin's Austin *greased sides?*

As most people will know, Pilley Bridge was destroyed in the bombing raid of 11 December 1940 and was not repaired until 1955 (it was opened to traffic on 8 July in that year). In the meantime a temporary footbridge enabled pedestrians to cross the railway cutting but road traffic had to make a wide detour. In spite of this, there are tales of daring souls driving across the narrow replacement. Among these was said to be Austin Victor Nicholls, the elder son of the then proprietor of the garage on the corner of Pilley Lane and Leckhampton Road.

I was given categorical proof of this legendary exploit last year when I was put in touch with Austin's brother Norman, who lives in Sydney, Australia, but who was due to visit Cheltenham. As a result I had the pleasure of meeting Norman and seeing a photograph of the actual deed (see *right*). The car was a 1927 Austin Seven, one of the smallest vehicles on the road. Norman said that after the authorities learned what had happened a bollard was placed at either end to prevent a recurrence.

He also told me about some of his late brother's talents. His skill as a craftsman in metal has been mentioned briefly in an article in *Smoke Signal* No 9, referring to a wrought-iron panel he had made, representing a spider's web, based on a panel on a house in Leckhampton Road. He was described there simply as a garage mechanic but he went on to teach metal work at the prestigious Christ's Hospital School at Horsham. He later moved to Lower Swell, where he practised at his own forge.

This information came to me out of the blue – another instance of serendipity. If anyone else has recollections of Pilley Bridge or indeed any other Leckhampton curiosities, we'd be glad to hear from you.

*Eric Miller*



Photo: Austin Victor Nicholls' daring crossing of the narrow temporary footbridge erected following the bombing of Pilley Bridge in 1940.

## LLHS AGM – 14 May 2015



Notice is enclosed with this edition of *Smoke Signal* that the Society's annual general meeting will be held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 8pm. Please do attend if you are able. As usual, we will be electing committee members for the next year, receiving accounts and reviewing the Society's previous and future activities as per the agenda enclosed. Following the meeting, Amy Woolacott will present a talk based on her research into The Cotswold Hunt (which met in Leckhampton) and local Smithies.

## Chairman's Message

I have been dipping into Eric Miller's book *Leckhampton Yesteryear*. Reading the Parish Hall chapter brought back memories! One of the two that come to mind is attending Brownies in the Nissen hut at the side of the hall and jumping over the toadstool to become a fully-fledged Brownie and watching others do it too! Then I progressed to the Hall itself for Guides! My other distinct recollection was watching my father, acting in the Leckhampton Players Pantomime, becoming very cross at Aladdin as he would not give him the lamp! We are so lucky to have this facility in our locality.

I have been inspired by recent LLHS talks to visit the Military Museum in Gloucester, to look out of the window when I am on the way to London to look for the mills in the Stroud area and been moved when I have heard about what our local priest, Eric Cordingly, did for those men when he was captured in the second world war.

I hope you will join us all on the trip to the National Memorial Arboretum on Saturday July 18<sup>th</sup>. I have seen it on television and also from a car when travelling on the A38 to Burton on Trent, so I have always wanted to be there. I am

Photo: Leckhampton's Parish Hall



sure it will be very moving when we are taken around in the land train and told about the memorials. Let's hope the weather will be kind to us!

I look forward to seeing at the next two talks: Ullenwood Court US Military Hospital on 16<sup>th</sup> April and The Cotswold Hunt and Local Smithies on 21<sup>st</sup> May at our AGM.

If you have any ideas for future programmes of events do please get in touch!

*Sue Marlow, Chairman*  
01242 581661 [sue@everest48.plus.com](mailto:sue@everest48.plus.com)

## Recent Events

**Thursday 15 January:** David Elder captivated us by the life of Edward Wilson including references he made to local landmarks and places in his Antarctic diaries

**Thursday 19 February:** We heard about an engaging selection of topics including from Anne Gale about the foundation of Leckhampton Primary School, Chris Woodham about volunteering at The Wilson and from Eric Miller about WW1 soldiers of Leckhampton.

**Thursday 19 March:** Julie Sargent gave us the fascinating history of Sandford Parks Lido, the most historically complete lido in the UK.

## Dates for your Diary

**Thursday 16 April, 8pm Church House:** Michael Cuttell will be speaking about Ullenwood Court's role as a US Military Hospital during the two World Wars.

**Thursday 14 May, 8pm Church House:** The LLHS AGM followed by a talk by Amy Woolacott on The Cotswold Hunt and Local Smithies.

**10 – 13 September 2014, Heritage Open Days:** Flyers will be published in due course.

**LLHS meetings will resume in September.**

# Geo-Physics Survey in Church Meadow

## *the field behind St Peter's Churchyard*

Isaac Levi is an A-level student of Archaeology at Cirencester College. He asked the Society if any members would take part in his Geo-Physics survey looking for evidence of a medieval settlement. Peter McDade, Rick Kedge, Paul McGowan, Eric Miller and I volunteered to help with his survey on February 7.

Geo-physics can locate archaeological remains hidden beneath the soil. Church Meadow has some remnants of ridge-and-furrow medieval ploughing, but not in the area for survey, though there are some humps and bumps, which might relate to early buildings, and a long hollow that could have been a path or perhaps a watercourse. A clue whether buildings ever stood in this field is a mass-dial on the church wall facing Church Meadow; it would not have been visible to users of today's regular path to the church.

The area for survey is marked out with 20m x 20m squares referenced to a fixed point such as the churchyard boundary wall. Each square is laid with lines at 2m intervals; the lines have 1m markers along their length. Setting out squares is time-consuming, but must be accurate in case further measurements are needed.

The Geo-physics equipment consists of a rectangular frame with paired spikes at the bottom and includes an on-board computer, which sends low current into the soil. A long cable connects this equipment to ground reference paired spikes placed well away from the survey area. The equipment measures the resistance between each sample point and the ground reference.

Driving in the spikes at 1m intervals gives readings that vary depending on soil resistance. High readings hint of something solid such as building remains; low resistance suggests a ditch or other wet feature. The readings, stored in the computer, can be plotted as a resistivity map of the survey site.

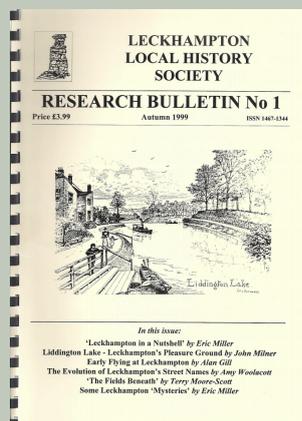
More details in the next issue.

*Amy Woolacott*

## Archive News

A pdf version of Research Bulletin No 1 is now available to download from the Society's website at [www.llhs.org.uk](http://www.llhs.org.uk).

Please do use the website to access electronic copies of the Society's current and past publications, including research papers and all previous editions of Smoke Signal since it started in 1992.



## *Leckhampton Yesteryear*

Members are reminded about Eric Miller's book 'Leckhampton Yesteryear, Village Life 1888 – 1939' which is available for only £2.50 from the Society at meetings or by contacting us. The illustrated book offers a vivid picture of everyday village life at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is full of curiosities, especially the portrayal of attitudes and opinions of the time.

## 'Up the hill ... to down Dale!'



*Photo: Tramway Cottage, Leckhampton Hill*

## BBC Gloucestershire's audio drama on the Leckhampton riots now online

BBC Gloucestershire have published on their website an audio drama on the events of the right to roam dispute over Leckhampton Hill in 1906.

The playlet, written in 2005 by dramatist Alan Morgan with help from Eric Miller, also stars pupils of Leckhampton Primary School and members of the Leckhampton Dramatic Society. You can find it at: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02hhw7y](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02hhw7y) (with credits)

Some of you may have heard it when it was re-run on Good Friday, 3 April. BBC Gloucestershire consider it "a real gem and a fabulous Gloucestershire story".

## POW Camp 263 at Leckhampton

*incredible new photograph*



The Society has recently come by this photo showing the Leckhampton Prisoner of War Camp at Leckhampton Court between 1939-1945. It was obtained from Tony Alexandrowic, who is happy for it to be used by LLHS.

Comparing it with a plan of the camp at that time, it looks as though the skittle alley would have been in one of the Nissen huts shown in the photo.

Members may recall two talks given last year referring to the camp; one by Ian Hollingsbee whose book 'Inside the Wire' devotes 14 pages to the camp at Leckhampton; and Louise

Reynolds, daughter of the Rector of Leckhampton at that time, who recalled the camp being 'like Butlins'! You can certainly see why looking at the intricate fountain, paths, flowerbeds and walkways shown in the photo.

If you have any further photographs or information about the camp at Leckhampton, please do get in touch.

## Summer Outing *The National Memorial Arboretum*



On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July our Society, together with Charlton Kings Local History Society, have organised a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. The Arboretum has 150 acres of spiritually uplifting woodland and gardens with over 300 memorials. We will be leaving from Leckhampton at 10.45am and we expect to return about 6.30pm. The price of the trip will be £17.50 (this includes a one hour land train tour). Members wishing to join the visit should return the booking form enclosed with this edition of Smoke Signal. Cheques should be made payable to Leckhampton Local History Society and returned by 1<sup>st</sup> July. We look forward to seeing you on the day.

### Contact Us

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