



Smoke Signal

Affiliated to Cheltenham Art Council

Leckhampton Local History Society's Newsletter



New programme: It's looking good!

Please find enclosed your Programme Card for 2015-2016. We hope you find the variety of talks and events interesting and exciting, starting with Rose Hewlett's 'A Village Through Time' on Wednesday 16th September when we will trace the chronological development of a village from Jurassic fossils to the 21st Century. See page 3 for more details of upcoming events.

Summer Outing: National Memorial Arboretum

Charlton Kings Local History Society joined us for a day out on July 18th. We were blessed with the weather and thirty-seven of us made the trip. The land train with commentary proved invaluable as the site is over 150 acres! Whilst we slowly made our way around the memorials the atmosphere became hushed and intense as we contemplated those who had lost their lives.

Continued on next page

We are moving!

New venue - New day - New Time

Church House at St Philip's and St James' Church is being sold next year so we have had to find a new venue to meet. We are pleased to announce that as from September our monthly meetings will be held at the Glebe Cottages next to St Peter's Church, Church Road, Leckhampton (pictured above).

As the room is not available on Thursdays, meetings will now take place on the third Wednesday of every month at a slightly earlier time of 7.30pm.

We hope you can all still make the meetings – the programme for the coming year looks particularly good.

PLEASE NOTE!
ALL FUTURE MEETINGS WILL BE AT GLEBE COTTAGES, ST PETER'S CHURCH, CHURCH ROAD, LECKHAMPTON GL53 0QJ ON THE THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH AT 7.30PM

Leckhampton Local History Society

HOME CONTACT US PROGRAMME PUBLICATIONS LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCH



It's that time of the year again and membership renewal forms are enclosed with this edition of Smoke Signal. We would be grateful if you could please take 5 minutes to complete and return the form with your membership payment. The details on the form are useful in ensuring our records are up to date. Thank you.

(continued)

The walk around the large central Armed Forces Memorial (pictured) was staggering as the names of all those who have died since the Second World War are etched into the stone. We could not believe that there were so many Service men and women who had lost their lives in conflict since 1945. The most poignant part for me was seeing the empty slabs of stone. On one side of the monument is a sculpture depicting a serviceman raised aloft on a stretcher by comrades. My grandfather was a stretcher-bearer in the First World War (who lied about his age so he could join up) so the sculpture had special resonance.



Photo: one of two large bronze sculptures forming the centerpiece of the Armed Forces Memorial created by Ian Rank-Broadley.

To complete our time at the Arboretum, we decided to visit the Changi Lych Gate, mindful of what had happened in the Far East during the War as learnt during last year's talk by Eric Cordingly's daughter, Louise Reynolds. The lychgate is the original lychgate from the cemetery at Changi Jail, built by the prisoners as a memorial to their comrades who died.



Photo: The lychgate at The National Memorial Arboretum is the original lychgate from the cemetery at Changi Jail, built by the prisoners as a memorial to their comrades who died.

On the way back we entered the garden of Still Birth and Neo Natal Death Charity (SANDS). In the middle of the garden is a stone child as though still in the womb with pebbles inscribed with the names and dates of loved ones who died so early in their lives - a very striking and moving memorial.

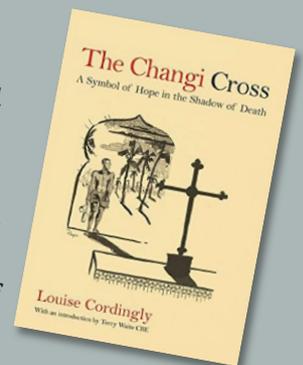
As someone commented, a worthwhile day.

Sue Marlow, Chairman



The Armed Forces Memorial dedicated to the men and women of our Armed and Merchant Services who have lost their lives in conflict, since the end of WW2. Nowhere else records the 16,000 plus names of those who have been killed on duty in recent times.

Second Book about Japanese POW Eric Cordingly



The Changi Cross, is the latest publication from Louise Reynolds, daughter of Leckhampton's former Rector, Eric Cordingly. Louise's previous book, *Down to Bedrock*, was based on her father's war diaries about which she gave us a fascinating talk last December. This latest book traces the journey of a small brass altar cross made by allied prisoners in Changi prisoner-of-war camp, Singapore, in 1942. It was made to the instructions of Eric Cordingly who was Rector of Leckhampton when he left to become an army Chaplain. The prisoners then took the cross "up-country" with them during the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway, where they struggled to keep faith and hope alive under the most appalling conditions. When they were finally released after 3 and a half years of captivity, Eric brought the cross home to Leckhampton and it lived in his study for many years until his daughter took it out to Changi Museum in 1992. Then, in a remarkable sequence of events, the cross brought an orphaned son close to the prisoner-of-war father he never knew.



Leckhampton and The Irish Crown Jewels

By Eric Miller

What is the connection between Leckhampton and the theft of the Irish Crown Jewels from Dublin Castle in 1907? The link is Sir Arthur Vicars, who is buried in Leckhampton and who at the time was responsible for the jewels' safe keeping. He held the appointment of Ulster King of Arms, Ireland then being part of the United Kingdom.

The thieves simply used a key to open the safe in which the jewels were stored, and Sir Arthur (who had reportedly been careless with the keys on an earlier occasion) was at first suspected of being complicit in the crime. The loss was all the more embarrassing, as King Edward VII had been due to wear the regalia during a visit to Ireland. A commission of inquiry was set up but Sir Arthur refused to attend it, vehemently denying the accusations against him, but he was dismissed from his post. (He maintained that the real culprit was his deputy, Francis Shackleton, brother of the explorer.) Smarting from the injustice, and troubled subsequently by other malicious allegations, he spent the rest of his life as a recluse in the family home, Kilmorna House, County Kerry.

Much later, in 1921, during the Irish War of Independence, thirty armed members of the IRA burst into the house, took him from his bed and shot him dead, leaving a placard round his neck saying 'Spy - Informers beware - The IRA never forgets'. The house and contents were set on fire and completely destroyed. All that remains is a red brick wall that once surrounded an orchard.

But why was Sir Arthur buried in Leckhampton? The simple explanation is that his father, Colonel William Henry Vicars, had earlier retired to Cheltenham, like many army officers in the 19th century and was buried at Leckhampton. In view of the circumstances of Sir Arthur's death, it will have been thought advisable not to bury the body of the IRA's victim in Ireland and so it now rests here near his parents' grave.

I was reminded of this story the other day when I was contacted by a gentleman living near Kilmorna asking for photos of the graves. I was able to supply these as well as details of the tombstone inscriptions (K.37 for the parents and I.20 for the son), which readers can find on both the church and the LLHS websites. The jewels have never been found but my contact tells me that many people believe they were buried near the house.

Similar tales will be included in my talk during the Heritage Open Day on 11 September and will also feature in the display planned for the Local History Day at Pate's Grammar School on 24 October (*see page 4 overleaf*).

Dates for your Diary

Fri 11 – Sun 13 September: Heritage Open Days

St Peter's Church 2-4pm - talk on the memorials at 2.30pm. The Wheatsheaf will have a display about the Leckhampton riots from 11am-11.30pm each day (see page 4).

Wed 16 September: A History Through Time

Rose Hewlett will trace the chronological development of a village from Jurassic fossils to the 21st Century.

Wed 21 October: Lost Railway Journeys In Gloucestershire

Including unique photographs of lost railway lines in the County.

Sat 24 October: Local History Day

The annual Gloucestershire Local History Association day at Pate's Grammar School 10.30am-4.30pm

Wed 18 November: Victorian Village Christmas

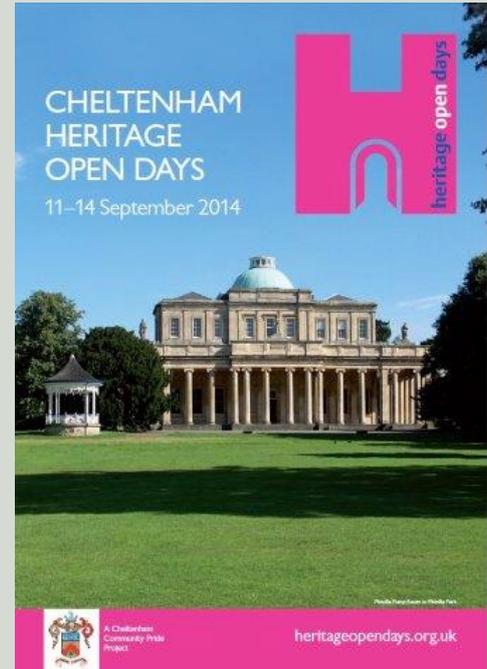
Ingrid Walden and Adrienne Grinyer's will start the countdown to Christmas with a talk in full Victorian costume.

Heritage Open Days

The Heritage Open Days, held over the second weekend of September, are an annual Europe-wide opportunity for people to visit historic landmarks. Some are not normally accessible to the public, such as the Foreign Office in London or the Masonic Hall in Cheltenham, while others are usually open but become the venue for some special event. Leckhampton Church is one of these, having successfully tested the ground last year.

On Friday 11 September the church will be staffed by volunteers from 2 to 4 pm, and visitors will be able to follow self-guided tours of the church and churchyard. To set the scene, at 2.30 I shall be talking about the memorials, stained-glass windows and graveyard. Members of the congregation are of course very welcome to come too – an opportunity for newcomers especially to find out more about our lovely 14th-century building, its Victorian embellishments and the interesting people who are commemorated or buried here. An added attraction is that teas will be served afterwards in the Glebe Cottages.

A new departure this year is that the Wheatsheaf Inn will also be involved. An earlier building on the site was the headquarters of the 'stalwarts' behind the battle for access to Leckhampton Hill, and Sue Marlow and Neela Mann on behalf of the Society, have arranged a display about those events, which can be seen at any time during normal opening hours (11 am – 11.30 pm) from Thursday 10th to Sunday 13th



And stay for a drink or perhaps something to eat as well! The events are co-ordinated by English Heritage, and details of the 24 venues in Cheltenham can be found on its website. An illustrated brochure has also been prepared and copies are available from the Tourist Information Centre and other venues, including the church. For more information please contact Sue Marlow or myself.

Eric Miller

Local History Day – 24 Oct 2015

Every year the Gloucestershire Local History Association (the umbrella organisation for all fifty local history societies in the county) organises a grand jamboree, which this year is being held at Pate's Grammar School on Saturday 24th October, 10.30am – 4.30pm.

Member organisations put on displays and talks are given on a set theme, which this time will be 'Immigration and Emigration: to, from and within Gloucestershire'. The LLHS intends to play its part. Many Victorians who had had careers in the British Empire or had been successful businessmen in other parts of the country settled here (some were buried here too!) and among the emigrants, the Norwoods of Leckhampton Court were the first colonisers of New England.

Further details will be found in due course on the GLHA website <http://www.gloshistory.org.uk>

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