



Smoke Signal

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The newsletter of Leckhampton Local History Society



The King's Coronation

Above: A mug commemorating the Coronation of King George VI, the last male monarch of the United Kingdom.

Picture courtesy of Stephen Gale.

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Chairman's Message: A Successful Year for LLHS

I hope you are all enjoying the trees and the gardens and especially Leckhampton Hill! It is beautiful this time of year. I never fail to stop and look at the hill when walking through Old Pats or our local Burrow's field. I expect you will agree what a lovely and varied programme we have had this year. From monumental brasses to local industry. Our members did us proud in February with six presentations about our locality, when Leckhampton came alive! Thank you!

The AGM will be held on Tuesday 30th May at 7.30pm in St Peter's Church. After a short meeting, Paul McGowan will speak on Leckhampton – A Place and its People.

Sarah has arranged a walk with Stuart Manton on 27th June and we have an archive afternoon on Sunday July 16th where teas will be served in the cottages and donations will be given to Family Space, a Cheltenham-based charity. Plenty to look forward to! Thank you all for your loyalty and support over the year. Don't forget...you can always bring a friend! We have plenty of room! After all that...see you in September!

Sue Marlow

Chairman

LLHS Programme News

We are fast moving through our 2023 programme, so much so that I am finalising our programme for 2023-2024. Over the next year, we will be exploring the world of metal detecting, Steven Blake will be visiting us and telling us about the 100-year history of the Cotswold Way, and Eric Miller will be closing our programme with a talk entitled 'Leckhampton and further afield in Old Prints'. The whole of the programme will be published soon.

I hope you have enjoyed the speakers we have welcomed this year and the topics they have presented to us. We are recording many of the talks and making them available online so you can now enjoy them in your homes or watch them again at your leisure.

Just a reminder: we have a walk advertised at 7.30pm on Tuesday 27th June 2023 with Stuart Manton. He will walk and talk us through some of the history of South Town. It would be most helpful if you could let us know that you wish to join the walk as there are a maximum of 16 places. Please email leckhamptonlha@gmail.com or call Sue Marlow on 01242 581661. The walk is due to last for 90 minutes and will begin and end at The Norwood Arms. Please see Stuart's words below:

Cheltenham's Bath Road and The Suffolks – 200 Years of Trading History

Starting at the Norwood Arms, this 90-minute circular walk takes us along the upper Bath Road to the Suffolks and Great Norwood Street. We will hear about the history of this vibrant area, stopping to look at some of the shops, pubs, and other notable buildings.

Sarah McGowan

Scrapbook from the ‘Bendall Archive’

*The archive of items kindly donated to the society by the Bendall family includes an old and extremely fragile scrapbook. Stuck into it, or on loose pages, are fascinating documents and pictures from the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. **Oliver Pointer** has catalogued and analysed the contents and presented his findings at our members’ meeting in February. Here are a few extracts from his detailed account, and a sample scrapbook page dating from King George V’s Coronation in 1911 (see overleaf).*

The scrapbook was given to the Leckhampton Local History Society for safe keeping by Rachel Kimpton following the death of her unmarried sister, Jean Muriel Bendall (1926-1999). Jean, a loyal founder member of the LLHS, had been both teacher and Deputy Head of Leckhampton Primary School and also a keen supporter of the Sue Ryder hospice in the village. She had inherited a large collection of local memorabilia from her parents and grandparents; amongst which was this scrapbook.

Her father, Alfred (commonly known as ‘Alf’) Thomas Bendall (1891-1971), was a prominent and active figure in village life in the mid-twentieth century and had been chairman of the parish council. In an obituary he was described as ‘the unofficial mayor of Leckhampton’. A diary, detailing his account of serving in Mesopotamia during the First World War, can be seen on the Society’s website.

In August 1916 Alf married Grace Evelyn Thompson (1893-1956), youngest child of Barnard George Thompson (1853-1913), long-serving Head Teacher at the village primary school (1886-1913) and his wife Susan Isabel née Blackwell (1853-1924). Both families would have known each other well, the fathers particularly so, having worked together

closely as builder and first Head Teacher respectively of the new village primary school, finally opened in 1906.

Barnard Thompson was a noted performer and frequent MC at social events in the village in the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The nature and date of the items chosen for inclusion on the loose pages suggest that these might be the remnants of a news/anecdote/poem scrapbook

perhaps created by him, in part as a source of material for his performances.

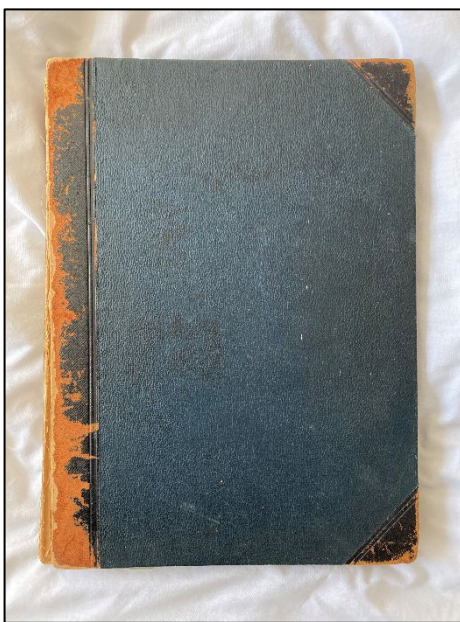
Internal evidence from the nature and date of items pasted into the main book – for example, the close attention given to the voyage of the ship *Magdalena* from Southampton to Jamaica, carrying Barnard Thompson’s son, Grace’s elder brother, Percy towards his intended destination of Bolivia in August 1910 – suggest that this scrapbook was created either by Barnard’s wife or, perhaps more likely, by his youngest daughter, Grace. Indeed, the handwriting in the scrapbook

identifying the source and date of entries pasted in is very similar to her hand in St Peter’s marriage register when she married Alfred Bendall in 1916. The dates of active chronological pasting in of entries, 1907/8 to 1912, perhaps suggests an adolescent interest soon overtaken by the demands of her war-time Red Cross nursing at the Leckhampton Court Hospital and courtship by and marriage to Alf Bendall.

Oliver Pointer

You can find Oliver’s detailed account in full on the LLHS website here:

http://leckhamptonlhs.weebly.com/uploads/5/8/8/7/5887234/llhs_scrapbook.docx



Obituaries

We regret to report the death of **Dave Mackman** after a long illness. Dave was a founder member and had been a loyal supporter of the society. We offer our condolences to Pat and her family.

We also regret to report the death of **Philip Cheeseman**, who recently joined the Society. We offer our condolences to Jill and her family.

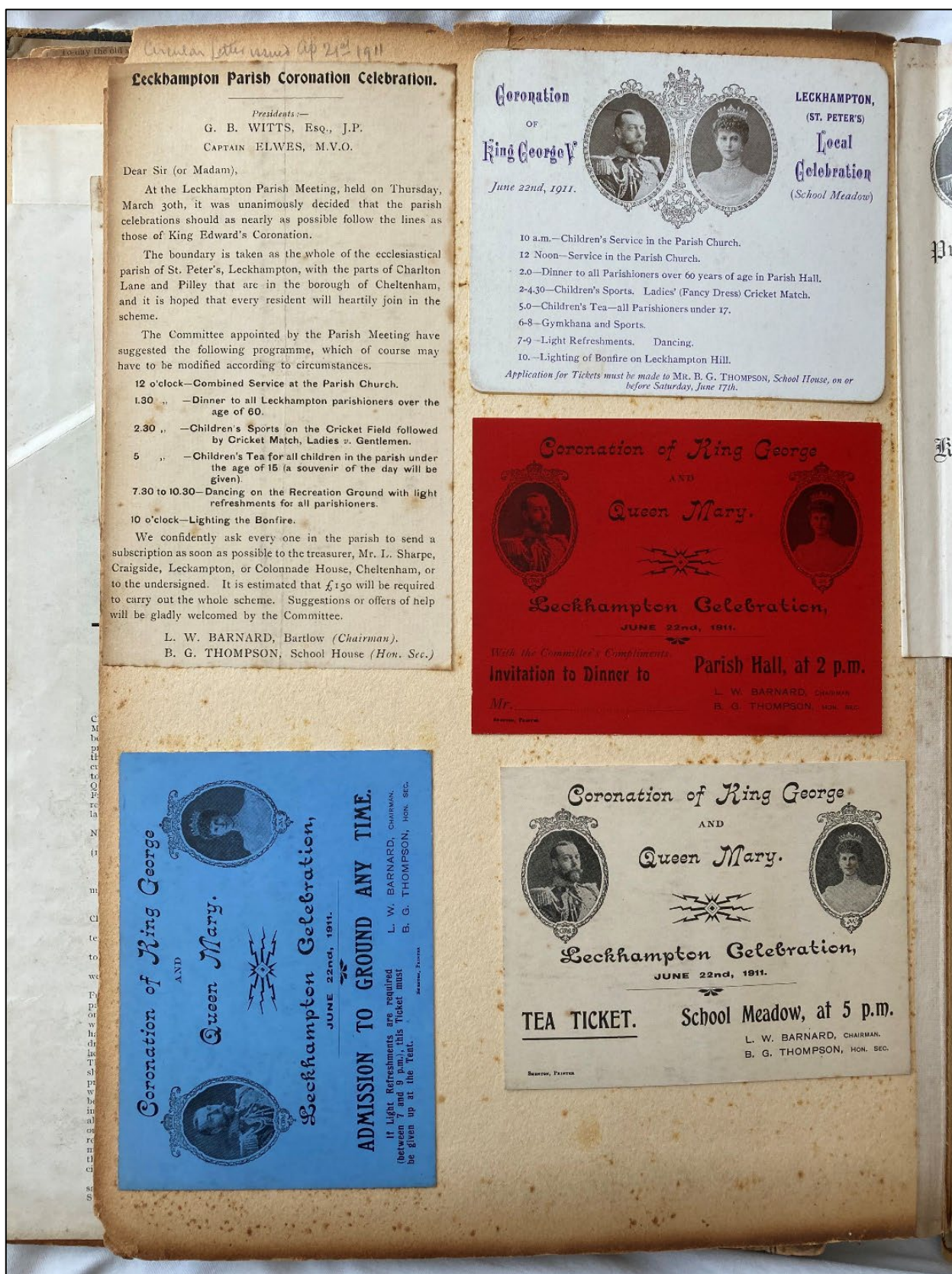


Figure 1 A page of the scrapbook showing tickets to celebrations marking the Coronation of King George V.

The Dowty Group and Sir Robert Hunt CBE (1918 – 2004)

For our January meeting, Ally McConnell gave a talk about the Dowty Group. Ally has recently moved to a post in Wiltshire, but previously was an archivist at the Gloucestershire Archives, where amongst her roles she worked on the Dowty Archive. Ally had brought along copies of Sir George Dowty's autobiography *'Sir George Dowty – In His Own Words'*, which she has edited.

There is considerable interest in the history of the Dowty Group in Leckhampton; indeed, one of the founder members of the Society, the late Bruce Stait, had written a book *'Rotol – the history of an Aircraft Company 1937-1960'*. Several of the members at the meeting shared memories of working there and brought along Dowty-related memorabilia to display. Leckhampton also has an important link to the Dowty Group through Sir Robert Hunt, who succeeded Sir George Dowty as Chairman of the Group in 1975.

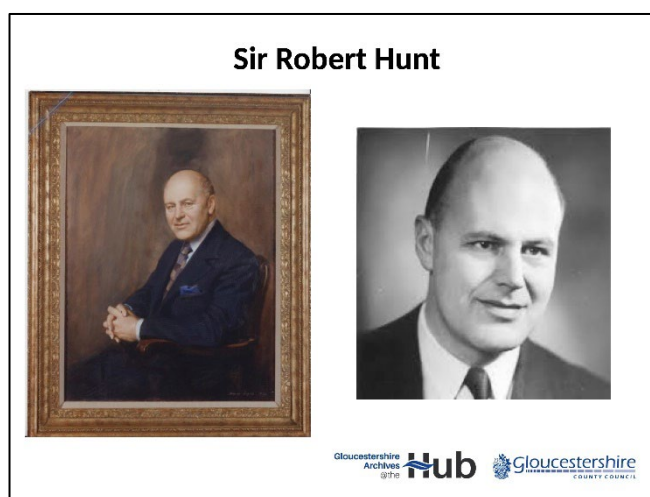
Robert Hunt was born in September 1918 to Arthur Hunt and Kathleen *née* Cotton. The Cottons were an old-established Leckhampton family. Robert's grandfather, Robert Cotton, was an entrepreneur and landowner in Leckhampton and was also landlord of the Malvern Inn, where Kathleen was born.

Robert Hunt is one of the most distinguished former pupils of Leckhampton Primary School. From there he went to Cheltenham Grammar School. His interests were always in practical and mechanical skills – he enjoyed tinkering with cars at a local garage – and he left the Grammar School to attend Cheltenham Technical College as a part-time student, where he passed an HND in mechanical engineering. From there, Robert became one of the first apprentices at Dowty and joined the company as a draughtsman. Continuing his career through the War, Robert Hunt moved with his family to Canada to run a Dowty company there. He and his family returned to England in 1957, when he took up the role of Deputy Chairman. In 1975, on Sir George Dowty's death, Robert Hunt became Chairman of the Dowty Group, a position he held until 1986. He was awarded a CBE in 1974 and knighted in 1979. Robert Hunt died in September 2004 and his funeral was held at St Peter's Leckhampton.

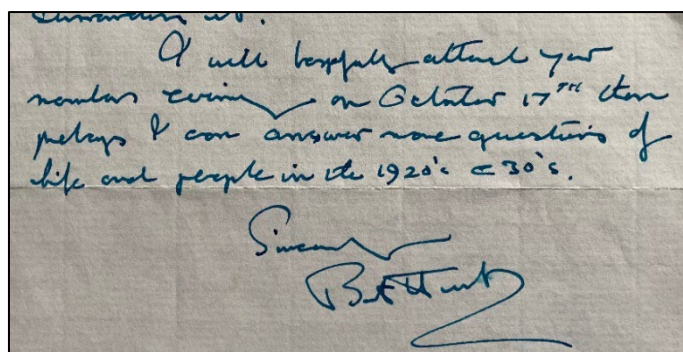
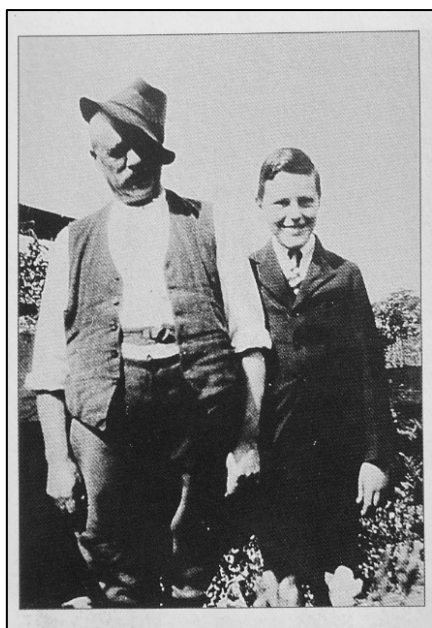
Robert Hunt retained his interest in Leckhampton throughout his life and supported the Local History Society. In 1996 he replied to a query in Smoke Signal (SS16) about a Webley postcard of Sheepshed Row off Kidnappers Lane, which he knew well since his grandfather owned some of the surrounding fields; Frank Webley, who owned the Post Office on Leckhampton Road, was a friend of the Cotton family and was Robert's godfather at his baptism at St Peter's. In October 1996, Sir Robert spoke at an LLHS members' evening about his early life in Leckhampton and the Cotton family (see SS17).

Martin Robins has published a 24-page booklet *'Dowty Days Remembered'* which includes detailed recollections by Sir Robert Hunt, recorded by his daughter. A copy is lodged in the LLHS archive. Copies are available to purchase from Martin Robins for £10.00 including postage – he can be contacted at martinrobins@btinternet.com

Anne Gale



Above: A slide from Ally McConnell's recent talk on the Dowty Group. Portraits from Gloucestershire Archives.



Images

Left: Robert Hunt (R) with his grandfather, Robert Cotton (L), c. 1930 (from 'Leckhampton in Old Photographs').

Above: Extract from Robert Hunt's letter to LLHS dated 1st September 1996.

VCs' Memorials Cleaned

There are three memorials to holders of the Victoria Cross in Leckhampton churchyard. Two are crosses on the graves of William Fraser McDonell, from the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and Major Douglas Reynolds from the First World War, and the other is a stone recording the name of Commander Cecil

William Buckley who died in Madeira and gained his honour in the Crimean War. The memorials had become rather shabby with the passage of time, and we were delighted recently when the Victoria Cross Trust contacted the Parish Office with an offer to clean them.

They came one sunny day in February and transformed the stones. The grey patina was removed from the crosses and the stone underneath was revealed to be white marble, as can be seen in this photo of Major Reynolds's grave. Steve Abell and Barry Stewart from the Trust made short work of the task and had time in addition to treat the gravestone of Major Henry Duberly and his wife Fanny (who wrote about her experiences in the Crimean War and in India).

When they had finished, Steve and Barry presented plaques inscribed with brief accounts of the actions for which the crosses were awarded. More information, including photographs of the plaques, can be found on the LLHS website (under 'Local History') and also on the VC Trust's website <https://victoriacrosstrust.org>.

Eric Miller



Working at Delancey Hospital

I was privileged to give my account of my experience of working as a State Enrolled Nurse at Delancey Day Hospital in the 1980s. A Leckhampton publication written by Eric Miller and Alan Gill gave an account that the hospital was designed by John Middleton and was opened in 1874. It was named after Miss Susan Delancey who donated £5,000 for the building and it became a fever hospital for infectious diseases, the most common causes were Smallpox, Diphtheria, and Scarlet Fever. In 1950, under the National Health Service, it was decided to concentrate on providing accommodation for the elderly sick and other changes and additions to the facilities were added later.

In the 1970s/1980s Delancey was enlarged so we were able to have a day hospital on the ground floor. The wards were Birdlip, Deerhurst, Stanway, Gretton, and Bredon (all Gloucestershire names).

Under the leadership of Sister Jean Prust and Hazel Chapman we were a band of nurses caring for patients on a daily basis, brought in by county ambulances for the day. There was also respite care when patients were able to be admitted for one or two weeks which gave the families a break from

caring. Sister Jean Prust also set up a stroke club which was well supported and ran for many years.

An auntie of mine, Mrs Winnie Summers, was also a nurse at the Delancey in the 1950s. I have a photograph of her and other members of staff together with the Matron and Deputy Matron in the grounds of Delancey. I retired from Delancey hospital in October 1999 and thoroughly enjoyed working there with lots of happy memories.

Peggy Taylor



Milk Bottles & Conkers

On Saturday, 1st April, Gloucestershire Heritage Hub held an afternoon event to look at school life in days gone by under the title 'Milk Bottles and Conkers'.

A major part of the event was a focus on the Alvin Street building which now holds the Gloucestershire Archives and its previous life as a school. As well as talks and an exhibition of some of the archive material relating to the school, a number of Local History Societies, including LLHS, took along the displays which they had prepared for last year's GLHA Local History afternoon.

There were plenty of opportunities for discussion with members of the other Societies; it was an interesting afternoon.

Anne Gale



LLHS Archaeological Survey – our very own ‘Time Team’

As Smoke Signal goes to press, we have just finished two days of ‘resistivity scanning’ on King’s Meadow behind the Old Rectory, looking for evidence of buildings that are depicted on early maps and which may have been part of one of the historic manors of Leckhampton. Detailed analysis of the results is still underway so we do not yet know what, if anything, we have discovered – there will be more reports when we do. The survey work, brainchild of our Vice-Chairman Paul McGowan and led by professional archaeological investigation company Archeoscan, gave LLHS members the opportunity to get hands-on with modern geophysical techniques, and thanks to some excellent teamwork we managed to cover most of the area of interest. It was interesting, good exercise, good company, and great fun – and we managed to avoid almost all of the rain!

Stephen Gale



Ladybirds in April

At our April meeting, Caroline Alexander gave a talk about the history of Ladybird books and her father Douglas Keen, who was the driving force behind this popular series from the 1940s to the 1970s. Douglas spent his early years living in Hall Road and went to Leckhampton Primary School. The meeting was well attended and plenty of members and visitors got a chance to look at some of Caroline’s fascinating collection of Ladybird books across the years.

Leckhampton Local History Society

Affiliated to Cheltenham Arts Council