

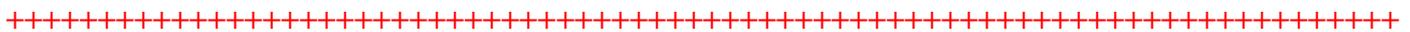
Local History Link

Keeping you in touch during the coronavirus emergency

No. 1

During these difficult times, when many of us are faced with weeks of self-isolation due to the coronavirus pandemic, welcome to the first edition of *Local History Link*, the newsletter for members of Leigh Estuary U3A Local History Group. We hope each of you will join in the project and provide items for inclusion in the bulletin, which don't necessarily have to be on a local history topic, but could be your recollections of a memorable holiday, or a favourite place, or memories of happy (or not so happy) school-days. In fact, anything of interest that will ease the monotony of self-isolation for your fellow members. Jim is undertaking the coordination of this venture and articles, photos, etc., should be emailed to him at jsanctuary28@gmail.com or post to 28 Darlington Grove, Leigh-on-Sea, SS9 3LG. We hope to publish the newsletter on a regular basis and look forward to reading some interesting articles. Thank you in anticipation of your participation and look forward to the time when we can return to our regular monthly meetings. Keep safe, keep well!

Tony, Tricia and Jim



BORLEY RECTORY: THE MOST HAUNTED HOUSE IN ENGLAND

Borley is a small village just inside the Essex border with Suffolk, close to the River Stour. Its name is derived from the Saxon 'bap' and 'ley' meaning boar's pasture. Borley is part of the Stour Valley South parish cluster, comprising two hamlets, Borley, the hamlet around the church, and Borley Green to the east.

Very little appears on record about the early history of Borley, although the area would have been inhabited since the Stone Age by early man, due to the proximity of the river. The Early English church, built of stone, dates from the late 12th Century, and folklore alludes to a Benedictine monastery being built in the area in about 1362. Borley Hall, dating from the 17th century, lies to the east of the village. Historic archives show that there were four farms in the parish during the 19th century, providing employment for a population of under 200 inhabitants, which included a miller, blacksmith and shoemaker. Today, a small group of properties are sited close to the church, including a Tudor barn conversion, a row of Victorian houses and some relatively modern bungalows. So, on the face of it, Borley appears to be a rather unremarkable little village.



But Borley's claim to fame arose in the late 1920s, when the Gothic-style Victorian rectory (see photo left), built in 1862 to house the rector and his family, gained fame as 'the most haunted house in England'. The property was alleged to have been haunted since it was built, but these reports became more widely known in 1929 following an account in the Daily Mirror of the visit to the property of the psychic investigator, Harry Price. The first paranormal episodes were said to have occurred soon after the rectory became occupied by the Bull family in 1863, when unexplained footsteps were heard. Over the next thirty years, the family were quoted as being 'very convinced that they had seen an apparition on many occasions'. In 1900, the

four daughters of the then incumbent, Henry Bull, saw what they thought was the ghost of a nun in the garden. Further apparitions of a monk and a nun, and a lady in a grey cloak, were reported by the family.

In 1927, the rectory became vacant and the Reverend Guy Smith and his rather frail wife took up residence. Soon after moving in, Smith's wife, while cleaning out a cupboard, found a brown paper package which contained the skull of a young woman. Shortly after this discovery, the family reported various unexplained events, including the sound of the servant bells ringing, although they had been disconnected. It was claimed that lights appeared in windows, the sounds of whispering and moaning could be heard, and Smith's wife declared she'd seen a ghostly horse-drawn carriage in the drive. Harry Price was called in to investigate and he recorded pebbles, vases and other objects being thrown, and 'spirit' messages being tapped out. Not surprisingly, the Smiths moved out. However, as soon as Price departed, these spooky occurrences 'curiously' ceased!

In October 1930, the Reverend Lionel Foyster, his wife Marianne, and their daughter Adelaide, moved into Borley Rectory. To assist with the cost of maintaining such a large property, the Foysters took on a lodger,



Frank Pearlless. Immediately after moving in, the family reported that various and numerous poltergeistic events started to occur. Bells would ring, glass ornaments were dashed against the floor, books were thrown, and Mrs Foyster was tipped out of bed! Various paranormal writings appeared on the walls asking for Marianne's 'help'. Due to the Reverend Foyster's ill-health, in 1935 the family moved out.

Borley Rectory remained vacant for some time until Harry Price (see photo left) took on a year-long lease in 1937. He recruited 48 so-called 'official observers', mainly students, to stay in the property and record any paranormal events. One of the researchers claimed that during a séance, a French nun had contacted her and said she had been murdered in an earlier building on the rectory site and her body buried in the cellar. The writings on the walls were claimed to have been her calls for help.

In 1939, a new owner of the rectory, while unpacking his effects, knocked over an oil lamp in the hallway starting a devastating fire. The building was so badly damaged that in 1944 it was demolished.

Many years later, Marianne Foyster admitted that she had been in a sexual relationship with the lodger and that she used paranormal explanations to cover up their liaisons. She had seen no apparitions and the supposed paranormal events were practical jokes aimed at her poor husband. She also claimed that Harry Price had faked many of the phenomena during his numerous visits to the rectory.

Harry Price died in 1948 and subsequently much has been written about the veracity of the rectory hauntings. Some researchers have claimed that Price was a charlatan who benefitted financially from the alleged paranormal events. The Society for Psychological Research rejected most of the sightings as fabricated or imagined and Price's claims are now discredited by psychic historians.

So that is why a rather nondescript Essex village became famous; for having within its borders 'the most haunted house in England'. Yet today, some still claim to have witnessed unexplained paranormal phenomena in this evocatively notorious village! **Jim Sanctuary**

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AM I REALLY 'ELDERLY'?

Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, I've abruptly had to come to terms with the fact that as I'm over 70, I'm considered to be an 'elderly' person! But like most of us over 70s, I've never considered myself to be 'elderly'. That term conjures up infirmity and senility and most certainly (as far as I'm aware) I'm not either. In truth, I've always considered you're the age that you feel mentally, not the age that you feel physically.

When I'm listening to music from the 60s, like The Stones or The Beatles, I'm back in my teens and a 'cool dude'! When I turn down that offer of another glass of wine, I'm back as the 'sensible' forty-year-old family man, demonstrating a good example to my kids (although I know many forty-year-olds and over that have extreme difficulty turning down another glass of wine!). And when I'm with my grandchildren, I'm back in the 70s and 80s, to the time I was the dad of youngsters, trying to appear 'hip' to their friends! Remember 'Dad Dancing'? Clearly, age is very subjective and having always considered myself my sister's 'little brother', it's not easy to be categorised, out of the blue, as 'elderly'!

I recently watched a BBC Four documentary about ITV's iconic 60s show *Ready, Steady, Go!* (see photo) that



showcased emerging pop music talent from the era. Do you remember the programme? Its catch-phrase was '*the weekend starts here*'! When the programme was on the air, I would rush home from work on a Friday evening and sit down in front of the TV, with my Mum moaning about me eating my dinner on my lap and not at the table. Such happy days! The BBC documentary featured Gerry Marsden, Eric Burdon, Annie Nightingale, Paul Jones, Chris Farlowe and Martha Reeves, all commenting on the success

of the trendy show that was so popular with teenagers over 50 years ago. They are all now in their 70s, and so-called 'elderly', but seeing them in their youthful 60s personae, playing and singing their current 'hits', was quite poignant. Today, they may have grey hair, wrinkles, sagging jowls, but I bet none of them class themselves as 'elderly'. So, why the heck should I! **Jim Sanctuary**



FRED YULE – LEIGH'S FAMOUS RADIO CELEBRITY

Fred Yule was a well-known character actor, singer and comedian, frequently to be heard on the radio from the 1930s to the 1950s, perhaps best known to listeners as Bigga Banga and Norman the Doorman in *I.T.M.A.*, the much-loved WW2 radio show, which ran from 1939 until the sudden death of the star of the show, Tommy Handley, in 1949.



Frederick Robert Yull - he later changed his surname to Yule - was born on 7th October 1893 at Hemsby, Norfolk. His early career was in horticulture, working at Frederick Sander's renowned orchid nursery at St. Albans in Hertfordshire. It was here that his lifelong love of plants and gardens was first awakened. The young Fred was also keen on amateur dramatics and soon joined a group of local players, appearing in many of their productions. However, the First World War was to see the closure of the orchid nursery and Fred joined the Royal Garrison Artillery, in the rank of Gunner. Unlike many of his comrades, Fred survived the horrendous conflict, and after the war found work on the music halls, becoming famous for his fine and powerful baritone voice.

In 1921, he married a fellow music hall artist, Laura Montgomery, professionally known under her stage-name, Doreen Monte, at St. George's Hanover Square, Mayfair. By 1926, Fred had joined

Catlin's Royal Pierrots, a touring music hall troupe which, that summer, played at the Floral Pavilion, Wallasey. For the next ten years, he and Laura continued the itinerant life-style common to entertainers, playing at music halls throughout the country, and living out of a suitcase.

Fred's first big break came in 1937, when he appeared in an early television production of *The Beggar's Opera*, broadcast from the BBC studios at Alexandra Palace. His name was now becoming well-known in broadcasting circles and, in the spring of 1941, his fine voice could be heard playing the part of Bill Bobstay in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

But it was to be a role in radio comedy that made Fred Yule a familiar voice to the listening public. In 1939, the entertainment show '*It's That Man Again*' - better known under the acronym '*I.T.M.A.*' - was first broadcast (see photo right with Fred, Tommy Hanley and Hattie Jacques), and quickly became one of the BBC Light Programme's most popular comedy shows, running until 1949 when the star of the show, Tommy Handley, died from a sudden stroke. Fred joined *I.T.M.A.* in the early 1940s and was soon established as a regular and popular member of the cast.



Further radio work beckoned with regular appearances in the domestic comedy show, *Ray's a Laugh*, starring Ted Ray. The show ran from

1949 until 1961, with Fred playing the star's brother-in-law. In November 1947, to celebrate the BBC's Silver Jubilee, a special edition of the popular musical revue programme, *Bandwaggon*, was broadcast, with Fred sharing the billing with Richard Murdoch and Arthur Askey.

In fact, so popular was Fred Yule at this time that he was included in a set of 'Radio Celebrities' cigarette cards issued in 1950 by Carreras. Dramatic roles also came his way. Fred was cast in the popular science fiction serial, *Journey into Space*, the last BBC radio drama to enjoy higher ratings than television. And an occasional role in *The Archers* featured Fred playing the part of Admiral Bellamy, until the character's demise in 1964.

Following the end of the Second World War, Fred and Laura moved to Leigh-on-Sea, buying a large detached property in Park Road. His local celebrity status saw Fred opening the Ideal Home Exhibition, held at the Kursaal Exhibition Hall, Southend-on-Sea, in February 1949. But, by the end of the 1950s, with Fred now in his mid-60s, his career as an entertainer was gradually fading. And despite the many comedic and dramatic roles he had played over the previous twenty-five years, in radio, and occasionally television, offers of work were drying up.

Shortly after moving to Leigh-on-Sea, Fred's love of plants and gardening had led him to join the flourishing Leigh Horticultural Society, where his jocular and outward-going personality made him a popular and much-loved member. Now, with more time on his hands, he became a regular exhibitor at the Society's flower shows, displaying some of the magnificent chrysanthemum and dahlia blooms grown in his beautiful Park Road garden, and winning many awards.

The ebullient Fred, in smart suit and tie, with his trilby hat sitting jauntily on his head, was always an early visitor to the flower shows, arriving as soon as the doors opened to the members and public. But this was not just to learn whether his blooms had secured awards; he would make straight for the tea room, where he could be found consuming vast quantities of sandwiches, cakes and cups of tea! In 1971, Fred enthusiastically accepted the position of President of Leigh Horticultural Society, an office he executed with great professional skill and wit, until ill-health forced him to stand down in 1981.

Sadly, Fred's health continued to decline and he passed away at the grand old age of 89 on 11 December 1982. Laura, his supportive and loving wife for over sixty years, survived him for another nine years, until her death in May 1991.

Although Fred Yule never achieved the fame and celebrity of many of today's radio and television performers, he had been a most admired entertainer, and a mainstay of many successful BBC radio programmes. His memory lives on in the BBC's archive of popular shows of the mid-20th century, a fitting tribute to Leigh's famous radio celebrity. **Jim Sanctuary**

CATASTROPHIC AIRCRAFT CRASH OVER SOUTHEND

Monday, the 10th of September, 1951, was a devastating day for the residents of Westcliff-on-Sea, when an RAF Gloster Meteor F8 fighter jet aircraft of 84th Squadron, flown by 25 years old Pilot Officer Lionel



Millikin, broke up in mid-air over Westcliff. The fuselage crashed onto Hainault Avenue and adjoining roads. In Beedell Avenue, no.88 was completely destroyed and wreckage was strewn across the carriageway. Further wreckage also landed on properties in Ramuz Drive and Brightwell Avenue, causing extensive damage. It was reported at the time that when the aircraft broke up, the pilot had been attempting to reach Southend Municipal Airport. Sadly, his body was discovered still strapped in his cockpit seat

and one of the two jet engines was found in the mud off the pier. Two members of the public, Mr S Smith and Mrs A Gilbert, were killed on the ground, and Mrs F Sydenham died later from her injuries in Southend Hospital. Also injured was Mr. H Duck, who fortunately survived the incident.

The Gloster Meteor was on a routine flight from RAF Wattisham, Suffolk, to Southend Municipal Airport, flying at about 1,500 feet. At the time of the crash, it was alleged that the pilot's girlfriend lived in the town. Her identity remains unknown, but according to a widely circulated story, she was a Leigh schoolteacher, taking a primary class at the time. As he passed over the school, it was claimed that Millikin put the Meteor into a victory roll, the manoeuvre assumed to have been a love token. Whatever his message to his loved one, it proved fatal and resulted in the most catastrophic air disaster to strike the town since WW2. The official report of the accident noted that the aircraft had previously been grounded for repairs to stress damage. **Jim Sanctuary**



BRICKHOUSE FARM

Before Leigh Fire Station opened in 1969, the land was the site of Brickhouse Farm (see photo below), the farmhouse facing east onto Eastwood Lane, now renamed Mountdale Gardens. The farm straddled the borders



of the parishes of Leigh, Prittlewell and Eastwood, and it is said that the boundary was apparently marked by a notch cut into the kitchen mantel-shelf. Originally 158 acres, of which 73 acres were in Leigh, the soil was (and still is) heavy clay, later praised by the rosarian, Walter Easlea, as 'good clayey loam', when, in 1906, he established his Danecroft Rose Nursery on part of the farm land bordering Pickett's Road, now Eastwood Road North.

In her book, *Leigh-on-Sea - A History*, Judith Williams draws attention to the misfortunes of the earliest known owners of Brickhouse Farm. In 1722, Abraham Caillovel sold the farm to John Lane, who died four years later. He willed it to his nephew, Henry Lane, but he died before he was twenty-one. After Henry's demise, the farm came into the ownership of his sister, Mary Lane, who died unmarried in 1772, leaving the farm to her cousin, Arthur Holdsworth. Following a number of further owners, in 1866 Arthur Bentall took

ownership, now extended to 546 acres, and one of the largest farms in south-east Essex.

In 1914, Southend Council acquired 24 acres of Brickhouse Farm's land to build an isolation hospital for the treatment of tuberculosis. However, this project was abandoned in 1931 and six acres adjacent to Manchester Drive became sports pitches and allotments. The land was also considered as a possible site for Southend General Hospital before the Prittlewell Chase site was decided on. After WW2, the remaining land was used to build social housing and the establishment of Blenheim Park. Although, in 1961, the farmhouse was deemed suitable for preservation, despite vigorous local protests, by 1968 it had been demolished and work on the construction of the new fire station was commenced (see photo left).



To the south of the farm site, on the grass verge of Blenheim Chase can still be found one of the four original iron boundary posts, this one marking the north-eastern boundary of Leigh Urban District Council with Prittlewell. **Jim Sanctuary**

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FROM OUR RESIDENT QUIZMASTER – MALCOLM BULLOCK

Malcolm has sent me a number of quizzes to stretch our brains as we self-isolate and here is the first one. You'll find the answers and another quiz in the next newsletter.

London Underground Stations

1. A place in the Alps
2. Is this where they had a big bang?
3. When the Queen's upset, he wants to travel
4. If a dog did this, all might not be happy
5. Who likes marmalade sandwiches?
6. Man of the cloth after a bad sea trip
7. Dark night at the monastery
8. A long walk
9. A lot of paint is needed for this place
10. Farewell (old army song)
11. Did Charles fall out of this?
12. Would kippers and custard do this to you?
13. Be careful you don't lose your head
14. Have you met your yet?
15. A place we go to draw cash
16. Would the Monarchy leave their car here?
17. What he sat behind when counting his sheep
18. Where the Government sits
19. This is where they make the bread
20. Same sign as a well-known bank

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Please email contributions for *Local History Link* to jsanctuary28@gmail.com, or post to 28 Darlington Grove, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, SS9 3LG