

## Blue Plaques Walk

### Route 1 - RED

1	Bernard Spilsbury	35 Bath Street
2	John Ruskin	8 Russell Terrace
3	Benjamin Satchwell	The Granary, New Street
4	Thomas Baker	13 Church Street
5	Sidney Flavel	24 Newbold Terrace
6	Robert Simpson	21 Rosefield Street
7	Renshaw Twins	60 Holly Walk
8	Nathaniel Hawthorne	10 Lansdowne Circus
9	Randolph Turpin	6 Willes Road
10	William Amey	13 Willes Road
11	E & F Whitehead	5 Willes Road
12	Henry Tandey	Angel Hotel, Kenilworth Street
13	Henry Jephson	118 Parade (opposite hotel – 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor)

### Route 2- Blue

14	Frank Whittle	9 Victoria Street
15	John Wisden (historic interest plaque)	The Cricketers, Archery Road
16	Malcolm Sayer	26 Portland Place West
17	Samuel Wackrill	28 Portland Street
18	Samuel Lockhart	Wilhelmina Close, Warwick New Road
19	Norman Painting	28 Grove Street
20	W. De Normanville	6 Clarendon Crescent
21	Mary Dormer Harris	16 Gaveston Road
22	Terry Frost	Stamford Garden, Rugby Road
23	Frances Ridley Havergal	43 Binswood Avenue
24	Napoleon III	9 Clarendon Square
25	John Cundall	37 Warwick Street
26	John Hitchman	Boots, Warwick Street
27	Henry Peach Robinson	60-64 Parade, (H & M Store)
28	Henry Eric Maudslay	1 Vicarage Road, Lillington
29	Herbert Cox	7 Manor Road

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# 1. Sir Bernard Spilsbury (1877-1947)

## Pioneer Forensic Pathologist



“SPILSBURY IN THE BOX” the placards said; and although the readers of the newspapers may not have understood “forensic pathologist” they knew why he was famous. He specialised in unnatural death. Few subjects are more popular.

Until he was ten he was educated at home, above his father's chemist's in Bath Street; then for two years at Leamington College; then, when the family moved, at University College School, London, and Manchester Grammar School. At Oxford he read natural science; at St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, expecting to become a general practitioner, he was lucky in being taught by Arthur Luff, William Willcox, and Augustus Pepper, all trusted for advice by The Home Office. He studied microscopy and toxicology. He gained experience in Court. In 1910, helping Pepper at the trial of Dr. Crippen, he made his name.

For five years Crippen and his American wife, Cora, had lived in Camden Town, and when Cora suddenly disappeared he explained that she had been called to a sick relative in America; later that she had died there. But the sight of his secretary moving into the house and wearing his wife's jewellery aroused suspicion and the police became interested. Crippen professed that Cora had run off with her lover and that he had been ashamed to admit it. On a second visit the police found the house empty: empty, that is, except for the remains of a body, no head, no bones, under the cellar. For the first time wireless telegraphy was used to pursue a suspect, and the captain of a ship approaching Quebec identified two of his passengers. In Court the problem was to convince the jury that the remains were Cora's. With a microscope Spilsbury exhibited a scar on the lower abdomen where Cora had once had an operation.

Appearing in the witness-box at trials for murder would never have made him a living. For that he demonstrated to his students the skills they would need. Less successfully he lectured. He carried out more than 25,000 post-mortems. Even so, it is the trials that impress him on the memory: for example, “The Brides in the Bath” (1915), in which he proved that the bath was too small for one of the poor deluded women to have drowned accidentally; Mahon (1924), in which he assembled the disintegrating remains of the body to identify it; and Armstrong (1922), arsenic supposedly bought as weed-killer. His logic made it impossible to doubt the value of scientific evidence. His presence dominated proceedings. He was tall, dignified, polite, dispassionate, never over-awed under cross-examination. He answered to the point, he was blessed with the gift of making himself understood by laymen. A judge called him “the ideal scientific witness”. Another asked whether a witness could possibly be more “absolutely impartial”. During the war he was even asked to endorse the verisimilitude of the body in the events later filmed in “The Man Who Never Was”.

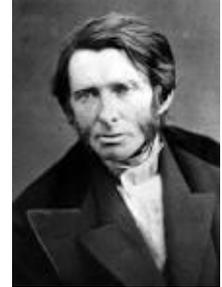
Of course success led to criticism, not always untinged by jealousy. He was accused of publishing very little. He committed the grave offence of staying away from international conferences. The verdict in the Thorne case (1925), occasioned especial controversy. Elsie Cameron, who supposed herself Thorne's fiancée, had either hanged herself or been murdered. Six medical witnesses ranged themselves against Spilsbury and the press attacked his reputation for an infallibility he had never claimed. Edgar Lustgarten and Conan Doyle argued that the jury had been over-influenced by him. There had always been those who thought he was cold and aloof. I suggest he was a reserved Englishman. He had friends enough, amongst them his teacher William Willcox, and he was always kind and generous to assistants.

His end was sad. In 1908 he had married Elizabeth Horton, the daughter of a surgeon-dentist. They had three sons and a daughter. There is talk of an estrangement and of a mistress who died too young. He suffered from arthritis. In his later years he feared that he might be losing his abilities, and in 1940 he suffered a minor stroke. That same year his son Peter, a surgeon at St. Thomas's to whom he was very close, was killed in an air-raid. His sister died in 1941 and in 1945 another son, Alan, who assisted him in his laboratory, died of tuberculosis.

He was found unconscious in his gas-filled laboratory at University College: not, I would have thought, the act of a man with no feelings.

## 2. John Ruskin

### Writer, Art Critic (8.2.1819-20.1.1900)



Works (selection): Modern Painters (5 vols., 1843-60)  
The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849)  
The Stones of Venice (3 vols., 1851-3)  
The Political Economy of Art (1857)  
The Nature of Wealth (1860)  
Sesame and Lilies (1865)

He championed the Pre-Raphaelites, and was the first Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. The University Museum is a fine example of the Venetian Gothic he especially admired.

He was born in London, the precocious only child of wealthy high-minded parents. They encouraged him, worried about him, and protected him.

I quote from a letter from his father: “You may be doomed to enlighten a People by your Wisdom and to adorn an age by your learning. It would be sinful of you to let the powers of your mind lie dormant through idleness or want of perseverance when they may at your maturity aid the cause of Trust and Religion and enable you to become in some ways a Benefactor of the Human Race.”

Excellent; but perhaps not quite for a child of ten!

While he was up at Christ Church a haemorrhage diagnosed as a symptom of consumption gave more cause for anxiety, and in 1841 he came to Leamington to consult sensible Dr. Jephson (q.v.) who put him on a course of baths and exercise.

After six weeks, wrote Ruskin, “he told me, I doubt not truly, that my health was in my own hands.”

In the “small square brick lodging-house in Russell Terrace where he stayed he worked on *The King of the Golden River*, a fairy-tale for twelve-year-old Effie Gray, daughter of friends of his parents. In 1848 they were married (annulled 1854).

His writings, often memorable, driven by an infectious enthusiasm for beauty and a conviction that civilisation cannot exist without great art, were enormously influential (on William Morris, for example). Passionately, fanatically even, he advocated the superiority of mediaeval art and Gothic architecture on the grounds that since they reflected the shaped and irregularity of nature they must be more truthful than others. The interdependence he saw between art and society led him naturally to compare the inhumanities of mass production and the humanity of work made by hand.

From the mid-sixties he ceased to write about art except as part of his Utopian social and economic theories.

*Parent were first cousins. Left £10,660.2.8d.*

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council*

### 3. Benjamin Satchwell Philanthropist & Pioneer of early Leamington (1732-1810)



After the turmoil of the seventeenth century the eighteenth breathed, as it were, a sigh of relief. It was the Age of Reason, of classical architecture and balanced prose, as near peaceful as human-beings can reasonably hope for. Peace brings prosperity, and prosperity hypochondria. It was the Age of the Spa.

Leamington, though barely 300 souls, nevertheless had a castle and a County Town only a hop step and jump away. News like water follows the easiest channels and these will naturally include the Postmaster. In 1783 Benjamin Satchwell, apparently having done the job voluntarily for several years, became Postmaster officially. He could hardly have been unaware of the rise of Cheltenham, even of Bath.

The Satchwells had lived in Leamington since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Benjamin's grandfather had been bailiff to the Willes' estate, probably his father too. Benjamin, the fourth son, learnt his letters, and when he was thirteen and his father died he was apprenticed to the cobbler at Offchurch. There he had the good fortune to find himself with a master who encouraged him to read, though few books are likely to have been available.

He seems to have been blessed with the gift of making the most of his opportunities. In 1753 when his indentures were complete he returned to Leamington, set himself up on his own, and established a reputation for knowledge, good sense and neighbourliness. In 1764 he married Mary Whitemore. In 1768 he bought the cottage in New Street (long demolished) to which he moved with his growing family and widowed mother and where he stayed for the rest of his life.

He and William Abbotts, the landlord of The Black Dog on High Street (I use modern names for streets), were congenial spirits and between them, chatting perhaps in Abbotts' bar, they conceived the notion that the saline spring near the church, first recorded in the fifteenth century, might offer the village a prospect of improvement. Report has it that they approached the Earl of Aylesford who owned the land, but that he, good man, wanting the villagers to continue to enjoy the water free of charge, turned their proposals down.

And that, they must have believed, was that, until on a freezing day in January 1784 they were walking along Bath Street and on the side further away from the church, on land owned by Abbotts, they noticed water bubbling out of the ground. From the original spring they would have known that saline water has a freezing-point lower than ordinary water. They tasted it. I doubt if they said "Wow!" and I hope not. Nevertheless they were in business. Leamington's first medicinal baths, one cold, one hot, none too grand, opened in 1786. In 1793, visitors increasing, Abbotts opened The New Inn next to the baths (I remember it as the Bath Hotel).

Nothing is so apt as success to reveal character and we are told that as Leamington prospered Abbotts gave his friend the credit. The cartoon reproduced on these pages may partly explain why. It depicts Satchwell in early old age, good-humoured, comfortable in well-made clothes, and with Dugdale's "Antiquities of Warwickshire" open on his knees. His interest in local history and his pride in Leamington never diminished. Native intelligence taught him the value of publicity and he wrote to the newspapers, even in London it seems, with news of important events and distinguished visitors. High and low alike came to sit at his fireside. He was sensible and practical. As far back as 1777 he had founded Leamington's first Friendly Society ("The Fountain of Hospitality") and in 1806 he began "The Leamington Spa Charity", sponsored by the rich to provide needy invalids with free baths. In ten years it had provided two thousand. It helped to inspire the Warneford Hospital.

The scale on which Satchwell was working was small. A man can do no more than make the most of his opportunities. An eighteenth century phrase occurs to me: “a man of parts”. It is only his due to call him “The Father of Leamington”.

*Plaque sponsored by Leamington History Group & Jaspal and Paven Rai  
Written by Robin Taylor*

## 4. **Thomas Baker** **Artist (1808-1864)**



He was born in Harborne, Birmingham, son of the headmaster of Harborne Free School, and lived there until he was twenty-five, studying under Joseph Barber and first exhibiting in 1827 at the Birmingham Society of Arts. In 1842 he helped to found the Birmingham Society of Artists (sic).

In 1833, apparently encouraged by his reception on earlier visits, he settled in Leamington, and he is usually known as “Baker of Leamington”. Until 1838 he lived in Bath Cottage, at the back of what in 2012 has become Majestic Wine. Most likely he was the drawing-master at a school run by a Miss Jackson, and in 1838 he and Miss Jackson moved to 10 Hamilton Terrace (now 28). Nothing says they were lovers.

By 1846 he seems to have been successful enough to acquire his own house at 32 Church Street (now 13), where he took on a housekeeper, Hannah Hewitt, sixteen years his senior. In 1863 they moved to 10 Regent Grove where, on the 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1864, aged fifty-five, he died of a stomach ailment, leaving no will and with effects of “under £300”. (Thirteen days later, Hannah, owed £30 for several months’ wages, distraught by false and foolish rumours that she had poisoned him, and worried about her future, committed suicide by slitting her throat). From the advertisement on 16<sup>th</sup> September for the sale of the contents of his house it appears that he enjoyed shooting, playing the violin and reading Pope, Scott and Shakespeare!

He had five children by Elizabeth Alice Smith, at one time a lodging-house keeper in Leamington, but they never married and they seem to have lived separately. The children, three boys and two girls, used a variety of surnames based upon Smith and Baker! (There is a rumour, but no evidence, that an early marriage might have prevented him from marrying again. According to the Courier of 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1997, Miss Smith died in poverty in an almshouse in Warwick in 1902).

His grave is at St. Peter’s, Harborne, close to his lifelong friend David Cox, to whom is attributed a portrait with a lively, sensitive face, carefully dressed hair and fashionable clothes. (Cox, I read, was the only member of The Birmingham Society of Artists who was more talented).

Chiefly Baker painted landscapes, oil or watercolour, detailed, delicate, and full of light, with sheep, cattle, and sometimes people. Many were of Warwickshire; not a few of Worcestershire, Derbyshire, the Welsh Borders, Wales, the Lake District and Ireland. The grouping of the figures and animals indicates the influence of the Dutch landscape painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Locally he sold through stationers, carvers and gilders such as William Whitehead, father of Frederick and Elizabeth. But he sold throughout Britain. For example, in 1838 at Manchester a “scene near Snitterfield”, including the frame, fetched £20. Detailed notebooks of his works, presented to Birmingham Art Gallery in 1908 by his son Edmund Smith-Baker, a painter and photographer, list over 800 oils, all numbered. Over fifty paintings and drawings are in Leamington Art Gallery, and Morley, in his history of Leamington written between 1887 and 1889 speaks of a “Baker craze” (too late to be useful to the artist). Today the paintings will regularly make £5,000. The record, at Sotheby’s in 2002, is £13,571 for “Leamington Spa and Warwick Castle in the distance”.

Rightly or wrongly, I have an impression of a charming, independent, hard-working man, self-possessed, inclined to live up to his income, and except when he was painting even less in control of his life than most of us.

His addresses mostly tell me that from teaching and painting he was earning a comfortable income; his effects after his death that, at least to some extent, he had moved in high society (Lord Leigh was a patron); his relative poverty at his death that the popularity of his work had temporarily declined.

Ps: It occurs to me that Flaubert might have written very movingly about Hannah Hewitt or Elizabeth Smith. For Hannah Hewitt in particular see *Trois Contes*, and the story entitled “Un Coeur Simple” (we would say “A Simple Soul”).

*Written by Robin Taylor*  
*Blue plaque sponsored by Warwick District Council*



## 5. Sidney Flavel

### Iron-founder & businessman (1819-1892)

In 1829, Sidney Flavel’s father William invented and patented the ‘Leamington Kitchener’, a new cooking range which laid the foundations of a manufacturing business which survives to the present day. Sidney Flavel was born in Coventry in 1819 into an ancient family one of whose members fought at Agincourt. He took charge of the family business on the death of his father in 1844 inheriting an iron foundry and extensive factory premises in south Leamington. A highly astute businessman, he exhibited the Flavel ‘Kitchener’ at the Great Exhibition in 1851 and opened prestigious London showrooms in Welbeck Street. A first-rate product allied to Sidney Flavel’s shrewd marketing skills ensured the rapid expansion of the company and the famous ‘Kitchener’ stove was ordered for Royal Palaces, stately homes, military and naval establishments, prisons and premises of every sort throughout Great Britain. Some stoves were shipped to Australia. The Flavel company became the largest employer in Leamington for much of the 19th century.

Continuing ill health prevented Sidney Flavel from entering public life or playing a part in local affairs but he was reportedly a kindly man and a great supporter of Leamington. When the town’s new Post Office was built in 1870 he purchased the Doric columns that had formerly stood at the entrance to the old Bath Street Post Office and erected them in front of Edgeville House (now Flavel House) where they remain to this day.

He died on 31st of March 1892 at the age of 72. He was one of the oldest inhabitants of Leamington. Few had seen greater changes in the town and few could so vividly recount tales of early Leamington. He and his wife are buried in the family vault in Leamington Cemetery.

*Written by Robin Taylor*  
*Blue plaque sponsored by TAG Exclusive Properties LLB*

## 6. Robert Simpson

### Composer, Writer (1921-1997)



Of the English composers of the second half of the last century it is reasonable to claim that Simpson was one of the most powerful, always in traditional forms but in a style of his own, logical, often expressive of conflict and energy, perhaps reflecting his love of astronomy. While “radical” composers (the two words fit ill together) were announcing that the symphony was dead he wrote eleven, as well as fifteen string quartets.

At the time of his birth at 21 Rosefield Street, his parents were officers of the Salvation Army, commanders of the Leamington Spa Corps in Park Street and living in an Army house. Later in the year they transferred to London.

He studied in London under Herbert Howells, composed his first symphony in 1951 (his latest in 1990). Having a strong character, he was never afraid to discuss the composers who most influenced him: Bach, Sibelius, Beethoven, Bruckner and Neilson. In a clear uncluttered style, designed to communicate rather than impress, he wrote standard books on the last three, and was largely responsible for bringing Neilson to British notice.

*Written by Robin Taylor*  
*Blue Plaque sponsored by a Leamington resident*

## 7. The Renshaw Twins

### **Tennis Players: Ernest Renshaw 1861-1899 William Renshaw 1861-1904**



Their father did not survive to see his sons born in Brandon Lodge, Brandon Parade (now 60 Holly Walk). They were baptised at St. Mary's Church. After a few months they family moved to Cheltenham.

Ernest won the Wimbledon singles in 1888; William from 1881 to 1886 and in 1889. They won the All England doubles seven times, at Oxford in 1880/81 and at Wimbledon from 1884 to 1886 and in 1888/89.

In 1889, before beating his brother in the final, William defeated Harry Barlow in what may well have been the first "great" match. Barlow won the first two sets, Renshaw the third. In the fourth, Barlow was six times at match point, but Renshaw took it 10-8. In the fifth, Renshaw fell behind 0-5, and won 8-6.

They were the first great stars of Lawn Tennis, asked for autographs and followed by crowds. They revolutionised the game. Without them it might never have been much more than a pastime for garden-parties. From the first Wimbledon in 1877, until 1880 when they first appeared, it was often referred to as "pat-ball", the object not so much to win as to avoid losing. Interest was waning. But the Renshaws were exciting. They hit the ball hard. They developed the over-arm service. They took the ball early. Often they volleyed. In the doubles they both advanced to the net. For years the smash was known as "The Renshaw Smash".

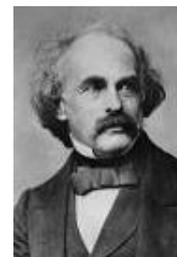
"In 1880", wrote Spencer-Gore, the winner in 1877, "ended the frivolous era of Lawn Tennis".

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council*

## 8. Nathaniel Hawthorne

### **Writer (1804-1864)**



One of the innumerable good things about the English is that they are more than willing to honour foreigners.

Hawthorne was descended from an old American family based in Massachusetts. He is recognised as the founding father of genuinely American fiction, reflecting American concerns and experience. Mostly, he is remembered for The Tanglewood Tales, The Twice-Told Tales, the House of Seven Gables, and above all The Scarlet Letter (1850), a tale of Puritanism at its worst (can it ever have a best?)

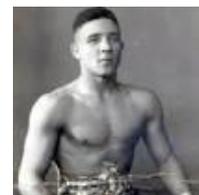
Between 1853, when his school-friend, President Pierce, made him American Consul in Liverpool, and 1860, he lived on and off in England. Three times, 1855, 1857, and 1859/60, he stayed in Leamington, in Lansdowne Crescent, Lansdowne Circus ("a small nest of a place...one of the cosiest nooks in England or in the world"), and Bath Street ("an unfashionable part of this fashionable Royal Spa"), where he wrote and corrected much of The Marble Faun.

Back in America he wrote Our Old Home, a collection of essays about the places in England he had visited. One essay is mostly about Leamington, charmingly written but not as accurate as it should be (according to him Dr. Jephson was dead when the poor man still had another eighteen years to live). By no means was he always enthusiastic about the town, partly I suggest because he seems to have made no attempt to meet the natives (perhaps his semi-invalid wife dulled his spirits). However, he does describe Leamington as "the cleanest and prettiest of England's towns" where "nothing disturbs us".

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council*

## 9. **Randolph Turpin** **Boxer (1928-1966)**



British, British Empire and European middleweight champion.  
British and British Empire cruiserweight champion.  
World middleweight champion (1951)

Randy (“the Leamington Licker”) was the youngest and best of the three boxing brothers. Under the tutelage of a local policeman, Inspector Gibbs, he learnt his boxing in Leamington Boy’s Club. Even as an amateur his talent was obvious. He could box. He had a knock-out punch in both hands. Of his 73 professional fights he won 47 inside the distance. He lifelong friend Peter Price, himself a fighter, told me that Randy was by far the most powerful man he had ever known.

His great night was in July, 1951, when he outpointed, over fifteen rounds, Sugar Ray Robinson, arguably pound-for-pound the greatest boxer who ever lived.

64 days later, forced by his contract to defend his title in New York, he lost to Robinson when the referee stopped the fight with only eight seconds remaining of the tenth round.

After that he was never quite the same fighter, though he had one more shot at the world title in 1953 and lost on points. He was in turmoil at the time, and he neglected his training.

He retired in 1958. It is an old story. He was generous, and his “friends” took advantage. I believe the stories that he was robbed by men who were cleverer than him. The tax-man was after him. In 1966 he shot himself.

He was a good-natured man. He always had time to speak. I talked about him once to a police-sergeant:

“He could have caused us a lot of trouble,” he said. “He caused us none at all.”

Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

## 10. **WILLIAM AMEY, VC MM (1881-1940)**

He was born at Duddeston, Birmingham, the last but one of eight children of a railway-farriage Fitter. Little is known of his early life, but he is described as a chandelier-worker (or maker), employed by Verity's Ltd., electrical manufacturers, a job presumably requiring at least a modicum of skill.

His eldest brother, Charles, fought in the Boer War, a volunteer like all British soldiers until early 1916. William joined the 1/8th Territorial Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment forming in Birmingham in August 1914. The battalion crossed to France in March 1915. He served until 1919, mostly on the Western Front, though from November 1917 to September 1918 in Italy. He became a corporal. It seems certain he was at the Somme and Paschendael.

In the last few days of the war (date unknown) he won the Military Medal (announced in the London Gazette, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1919). No details are available, but Military Medals were not handed out for turning up.

Nor was the Victoria Cross, which he won on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1918 (announced in the London Gazette, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1919). The medal is now in St. John's Museum.

I quote: “For most conspicuous bravery during the attack on Landrecies [to secure the bridgehead on the Sambre], when owing to fog many hostile machine-gun nests were missed by the leading troupes. On his own initiative he led his section against a machine-gun nest, under heavy fire, drove the

garrison into a neighbouring farm, and finally captured about 50 prisoners and several machine-guns. Later, single-handed and under heavy fire, he attacked a machine-gun post in another farmhouse, killed two of the garrison and drove the remainder into a cellar until assistance arrived. Subsequently, again single-handed, he rushed a strongly held post, capturing twenty more prisoners. He displayed throughout the day the highest degree of valour and determination.”

I emphasise that twice alone and three times on his own initiative he cleared up a critical situation, and that he must have saved many of his comrades from death or injury. It is difficult to imagine the depth of courage involved, but I think we should try.

After the war (and the contrast could hardly have been greater), he spent the rest of his life with his wife at “Landrecies”, 13 Willes Road. For several years he was a prominent member of the local British Legion. He made a point of attending the annual Concert of Remembrance in The Albert Hall. In 1920 he attended the VC Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and in 1929 the VC Dinner at the House of Lords.

Records of employment are obscure; however since he left only £25.00 it cannot have been well rewarded. Poor health in his last three years, whether or not because of his experiences in the war, would not have helped. He died in the Warneford Hospital and was buried in Leamington Cemetery.

I see in my mind’s eye a quiet respectable man, no fuss, no trouble, happily married, friends mostly fellow members of the British Legion. A decent man, the sort of man we call ordinary.

You may remember that General Wolfe said he would rather have written Gray’s Elegy than conquer Quebec. Better than either is winning the VC.

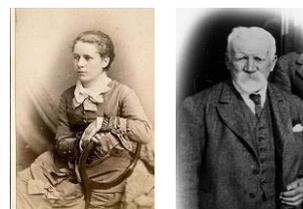
*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council*

## **11. Frederick William Newton Whitehead (1853-1938)**

### **Elizabeth Whitehead (1854-1934)**

#### **Artists**



Both Frederick and Elizabeth were born at 3 Lansdowne Terrace (now 5 Willes Road), Frederick on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1853 and Elizabeth the following year on the 21<sup>st</sup> November. Their family had been farmers and brickmakers in the town but their father, William, was a carver and gilder employing 3 men and 2 boys. The house also served as a studio with a workshop at the rear. The workshop still stands.

While still young, the Irish artist Richard Rothwell came to stay with the family and Frederick received his first lessons in drawing and painting. He later received tuition from John Burgess, a well-known artist then living in the town. Elizabeth, being a girl in those times, did not benefit in this way but she did attend the Leamington School of Art as probably did Frederick. Living in a house that also acted as an exhibition space for local artists they would have come under the influence of painters such as Thomas Baker. They both travelled to France and studied at the Academie Julian in Paris for 3 years, painting in the summer months in the open air in Barbizon and Gretz. The Academie was important for Elizabeth because, unlike the Ecole des Beaux-Arts it not only admitted women but allowed them into life classes.

Frederick travelled widely while continuing to paint and exhibited at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in 1870. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1881 to 1893 as well as leading galleries throughout Great Britain.

He began to paint in Dorset in 1893 and it was soon after, at the age of 40, that he married Beatrice Case a well-known singer and pianist. During their long married life, they lived in London during the winter and travelled in a caravan throughout Dorset in the summer months. Like Constable, whom he greatly admired, Frederick liked to paint in the open air, with its changes of light and atmosphere. While mainly known for his landscapes, he also produced still life, architectural and portrait paintings. He was skilful in both watercolour and oil.

It would seem Beatrice and Frederick's younger sister, Louisa (who acted as the family picture seller), did not get on and he rarely visited Leamington after his marriage. However, he did make illustrations for 3 books on Warwickshire.

He died in London on the 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1938.

On returning from France, Elizabeth lived at the family home for the rest of her life, although she travelled around England and Europe with her friend (also called Elizabeth Whitehead) as well as North Africa where she contracted typhoid which left her deaf and needing to communicate using a slate and chalk.

At a difficult time for women artists, she was encouraged to concentrate on still life painting and became a consummate painter of flowers, admired, among others, by Augustus John. However, she also painted landscapes and coastal subjects. Her work was exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Society of British Artists and at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists from 1877-1897.

Elizabeth also taught art from 5 Lansdowne Terrace. She never married and died here on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1934.

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust*

## **12. Henry (“Napper”) Tandey VC, DCM, MM WW1 Soldier (1891-1997)**



A small man, he was five foot five, eight and a half stone, born at Swain's Buildings, off Kenilworth Street (since demolished) a boiler attendant at the Regent Hotel until in 1910 he joined the Green Howards. After he left the army in 1926 he was a Commissionaire at the Standard Motor Company in Coventry, where he lived and died: a quiet, modest man.

He was also the most decorated private soldier (having refused promotion) of the First World War: three times wounded, five times mentioned in despatches, present at Ypres (1914), the Somme (1916), Passchendaele (1917), and the battles of 1918; decorated three times, while attached to the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, in 1918.

28<sup>th</sup> August, 1918: Vaulx Vraucourt. In charge of a reserve bombing party. Those in front were held up, and with two volunteers he worked his way round a flank and across open ground to the rear of the enemy, rushed a machine-gun post, and took twenty prisoners. Awarded the DCM “for determined bravery and initiative”.

11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September: Havrincourt. Four times, under fire, he went into No Man's Land and brought back wounded comrades. The next day, volunteering to lead a party of bombers against a machine-gun post in the Hindenberg Line, he captured it and beat off a strong counter-attack. Awarded the MM for conduct “exhibiting great heroism and devotion to duty”.

28<sup>th</sup> September: Marcoing. In an attack to capture the village and cross the canal on a railway-bridge his platoon was held up by a machine-gun. He crawled forward, located it in a ruin, and led a team forward to knock it out. Past the village the planks of the bridge were broken. Under fire he again crawled forward, sufficiently replaced them, and led the way over. In the evening, attacking again but finding himself surrounded and outnumbered, he led eight men in so determined a bayonet-charge to the rear that thirty-seven Germans were driven back into the hands of the British troops following. He refused to leave, although badly wounded, until the fight was won. Awarded the VC for “the most conspicuous bravery and initiative”.

In 1919 he was granted the Freedom of Leamington. In 1921 he was one of fifty VCs chosen for the Guard of Honour in Westminster Abbey at the burial of the Unknown Soldier.

His ashes are buried in the Masnieres British Cemetery, Marcoing.

In the museum of the Green Howards there is a painting by Fortunino Matania of a soldier, Tandy it seems, carrying a wounded comrade to a first-aid station at the Menin cross-roads. It may or may not have been sketched from life.

Four years later, on the day Tandy won his VC, he saw a German soldier, a corporal, fall wounded. He aimed at him, but could not bring himself to shoot a wounded man. The story goes that after the war, perhaps in a newspaper, Hitler became aware of the painting (he was artistic, you remember), and that when he came to power he asked a member of his staff to locate it, and when that was done to request a copy. The Green Howards obliged (with a large photograph?) When Hitler saw it he said that in September 1918, as he was lying on the ground wounded, the soldier carrying his comrade had pointed a gun at him but spared him.

At his next meeting with Chamberlain Hitler asked him to find the man, thank him, and pass on his good wishes. Chamberlain did. Tandy admitted that he remembered the incident but not what the German had looked like. (Tandy's family claimed that previously, when he had seen pictures of Hitler, he had remarked that there was something familiar about him). After the blitz on Coventry, Tandy is supposed to have said, "When I see all the women and children killed and wounded I'm sorry to God I let him go".

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue plaque sponsored by Mr. Peter James*

### **13. Dr. Henry Jephson** **Philanthropist, Medical Doctor (1798 – 1878)**



He was born in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Notts., where for five years he was apprenticed to an apothecary. At twenty he came to Leamington as assistant to a surgeon, then studied in London, returning as surgeon-apothecary, and by 1826 was living on Union Parade (now the Parade). Obtaining a degree from Glasgow in 1828, he settled finally in Leamington, able to call himself "physician" and living on the Upper Parade.

He was quickly celebrated. As early as 1825 a landowner in Warwick had written of a friend who had "returned from Leamington where, like all the world, she had been consulting Jephson."

No matter who the patient Jephson would not waste his time on hypochondria. Unusually for the time, he expected responsibility and encouraged exercise. To ensure that patients were following instructions he visited them at unexpected times. He joined them on walks. He even took them in his carriage five miles out of town and made them walk back. In real illness, however, he would tend a patient more than once a day and ask for no extra payment.

He became rich. He built Beech Lawn where Dale Street, Grove Street and the fire station now stand. But every morning from 7.00 to 9.00 he opened his surgery to the poor, free of charge. Reputedly if he earned a fee on Sunday he gave it away. From 1832 when the hospital was built until his death nearly fifty years later, he bestowed on it considerable sums.

His life was not without tragedy. His only child died aged eight months. In 1848 he went blind and had to relinquish his practice, though he remained publicly active.

Ruskin, who stayed in the town aged twenty-two, wrote that he was "a man of the highest general powers and keenest medical instincts. He had risen by stubborn industry and acute observation from an apothecary's boy to be the first physician in Leamington... [He treated me for six weeks and then] told me, I doubt not truly, that my health was in my own hands."

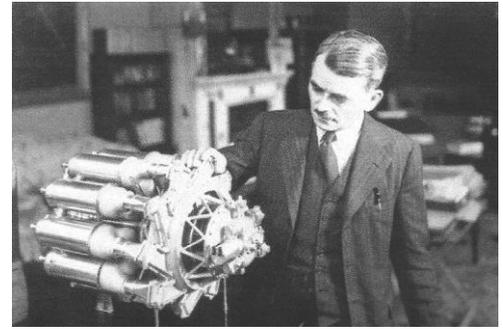
*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Warwick District Council*

## 14. Sir Frank Whittle OM KBE CBE

### Inventor of the Jet-Engine (1907-1996)

There are bound to be people in Leamington who have never heard of Whittle; but not many. By a country mile he was Leamington's most famous resident and to say that he invented the jet-engine seems redundant. It is like saying that Constable was a painter.



He was born in Coventry to a non-conformist family. In 1916 the family came to Leamington when his father, a foreman in a machine-tool factory, used his savings to set up his own small factory, the Leamington Valve and Piston Ring Company. Frank attended Milverton School, then from 1918 to 1923 Leamington College for Boys on a scholarship. He claimed that he learnt most of his engineering from his father and the books in Leamington Reference Library. Even as a boy, flight fascinated him.

At one point during his years at Leamington College he was demoted from the A-Form to the B. The following year he came top of the B-Form. It is easy to imagine him setting his jaw. At sixteen, having passed the examination for the RAF, he was rejected for being too small. He tried again, was rejected again. At the third attempt he was taken on as an apprentice-fitter, and three years later was amongst the one per cent selected for officer-training.

I doubt if anyone joins the RAF to be safe. When he became a pilot he amused himself with low-flying and was lucky to escape dismissal. He became a test-pilot, which frequently included being catapulted from a warship and landing on the sea to return. Once, his aircraft sank. Piston-engined aircraft with propellers were then reaching a hundred and fifty miles an hour, but at high speeds and altitudes propellers become inefficient and by 1928, having an analytical mind, he was contemplating flight without them. In 1930 he took out a patent for a gas-turbine turbo-jet engine. Five years later, with limited funds, a young family to support, and an indifferent Air Ministry, he saved five pounds by letting the patent lapse.

One of the major problems with early gas-turbines was the lack of suitable high-temperature materials. Like the Ministry, manufacturers of engines took Whittle less than seriously, and foolishly, in the 1930s, his ideas were not even placed on the secret-list. However when he completed a two-year engineering course in one year the RAF sponsored him for the tripos in Mechanical Science at Cambridge, and while he was there two friends volunteered to find the money for developing experimental engines. Together they formed Power Jets Ltd, which the Ministry tolerated providing Whittle performed his duties as an officer. The time he spent making these arrangements left him only five weeks to prepare for his finals. He took a first.

The RAF, perhaps more imaginative than the Ministry, moved him to Special Duties where he could devote himself to research. In 1937 he bench-tested the world's first turbo-jet-engine at British Thomson-Houston's factory in Rugby, though it was still not until 1940 that the Ministry provided the Gloster Aircraft Company with a specification for what, in 1941, became Britain's first jet-propelled aeroplane, the Gloster/Whittle E28/39. Piloted by P.E.G. "Jerry" Sayer, it had its maiden flight at Cranwell in May. Even then it was July 1944 before Gloster Meteor jet-fighters were delivered to the RAF, just in time to combat the Flying Bombs.

Subsequently Power Jets was nationalised and in 1946 Whittle resigned, no longer in charge of his own creation, his health affected by overwork, delays and disputes, and the loss of disillusioned colleagues. In 1948 he was invalided out of the RAF and knighted.

Thereafter he contemplated supersonic flight. He lectured. He advised the British Overseas Airways Corporation. He wrote "Jet", his autobiography. In 1976 he emigrated to the USA, where he was appointed to the Naval Academy. He died at his home in Maryland. His ashes are at Cranwell.

In every photograph I have seen he is immaculately dressed, dapper even, in either suit or uniform: a strong-minded man free of histrionics, a serious man able to smile and with an artist's passion for precision. It would surprise me if he suffered fools gladly.

In 1940 the National Academy of Sciences in the USA appointed a committee to report on the possibilities of gas-turbines in aircraft. It concluded that they “could hardly be considered a feasible application”. On his copy Whittle wrote, “Good thing I was too stupid to know this.”

*Plaque sponsored by The Leamington Society  
Written by Robin Taylor (technical adviser: John Willock)*

## 15. John Wisden Cricketer and Almanack publisher (1826-1884)



The world owes England most of its ball-games, which were taken over the Empire during the Pax Britannica; and the one more than any other suffused by England is cricket, a team-game for individuals, hard-edged and fair-minded.

When it was emerging from its rural origins, underarm bowling, no County Championship, no Test Matches, John Wisden was born in Brighton, one of seven children of a carpenter, probably not over-rich. As a boy he earned a few pence fielding at longstop, evidence itself of how far the game had to go. From William Lillywhite, a slow bowler whose son founded Lillywhite's on Piccadilly Circus, he received some coaching. He became a good batsman and a better bowler, bowling round-arm, “fast and ripping” though he was only five feet four inches tall and seven stone: “The Little Wonder” indeed.

On his twelfth birthday he played for “Eleven Youth of Brighton” against Lewes. A year or two later he was working as a potboy at the Hanover Arms, which conveniently possessed a cricket-ground and a landlord who kept wicket. There, in 1845, for Sussex against Kent, in his first important match, he took 6 for 46 and 3 for 59. At twenty his reputation was so great that William Clark, landlord of the Trent Bridge Inn in Nottingham, offered him five pounds a week to join his nascent All England XI. This, it seems, was how he met the batsman, George Parr, and why he came to Leamington. Parr had already played for All England on a ground, mostly ridge and furrow, covering roughly the area now bounded by Adelaide Road, Archery Road, Victoria Street and Avenue Road.

In the winter of 1848/49, with the support of Lord Guernsey, keen cricketer, MP for South Warwickshire, and one of the founders of the Tennis Court Club in Bedford Street, Parr and Wisden leased the ground free of charge and levelled it. During the following summer they played there for the North against the South, for a Leamington XVIII (sic) against All England, and for the Gentlemen of Warwickshire against the peripatetic I Zingari. Wisden became engaged to Parr's sister but when she died in 1857 they were still only engaged, a delay not uncommon when a man was supposed to make his way first.

As a cricketer his greatest achievement was at Lord's in 1850, when for the North against the South he took all ten wickets in an innings, not unique itself, but all bowled, which is. Also in 1850 he founded John Wisden and Company, selling sporting equipment to friends and friends of friends. Later he founded the Cricketers' Fund Friendly Society (which still exists) and worked as its secretary until he died. For four years he was the professional at Harrow School, and with Parr he took to Canada and the USA the first team to tour abroad.

After about 1852, having settled in London, he visited Leamington rarely, though with Parr he leased the ground until 1863, the year he retired from the game. He opened a cricketing and cigar business on Coventry Street, between Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square. In 1864 the first edition of Wisden's Almanack appeared, containing information about cricket, horse-racing, coins and canals and, as you would expect, a history of China. Later the shop moved to Cranbourn Street, where Wisden died. His sister inherited the business.

Since 1864 The Almanack, long a classic, has been published without a break. The obituary to its founder includes the following :

“A quiet, unassuming, and thoroughly upright man .... A fast friend and generous employer. Beloved .... by all with whom he came in contact.”

*Plaque sponsored by Central Leamington Residents Association Written by Robin Taylor*

## 16. MALCOLM SAYER

### Aerodynamicist (1916-1970)

He was born at Cromer in Norfolk. At nine (eleven would have been normal) he won a scholarship to Great Yarmouth Grammar School where his father taught the surprising combination of Art and Mathematics. Like his father and in spite of a number of illnesses, he acquired a width of interest. Already he must have been determined and energetic and at seventeen he won a Scholarship to study automotive engineering at Loughborough College. He edited the college magazine. In 1938 he received a first-class diploma.



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During the war, working for the Bristol Aeroplane Company on the Blenheim bomber and the Beaufighter (a first-class night-time fighter-bomber), he became an expert in aerodynamics. In 1948, married with a small daughter, he took a job at Baghdad University, but both job and university turned out to be largely illusory. Returning to England after two years he joined Jaguar early in 1951 and immediately became involved in the design of the “C” type Jaguar, the first post-war British sports and racing-car capable of challenging Mercedes and Ferrari. Eventually he became the Director of Design.

The “C” type Jaguar won Le Mans at its first attempt in 1951, and again in 1953; the “D” type won in 1955, 1956 and 1957. Both possessed a relatively small engine but aerodynamically they were far advanced and each became the world’s most successful sports and racing car. In 1961 full-time production of the road-going “E” type began and lasted until 1974. 72,000 were produced. Today many of the elements of the design remain in the company’s cars.

In the words of the New York Museum of Modern Art, where an “E-type” is on permanent display, “Sayer uniquely blended science and art to produce timeless shapes of exceptional and enduring beauty. He brought science to the art of car design, and scientifically produced works of art.”

I am reminded of the Great Exhibition of 1851, one of the objects of which was to “extend the influence of science and art upon productive industry.” I have long believed that hostility between science and art is unnatural. To my way of thinking they spring from the same course and Sayer seems to have been aware of that, as he was of the value of a rounded life: a man happy in his work and his family, by all accounts an excellent mimic and cartoonist, one of those rare people who can play pretty well any musical instrument; a sociable man, good company. So much sadder the loss, then, that he should die at only fifty-three.

*Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue plaque sponsored by Smallpeice Trust*

## 17. Samuel Thomas Wackrill

### First Mayor of Leamington (1828-1907)

He arrived in Leamington in 1861 and set up as a draper. Wackrill’s of Waterloo House, Bath Street became one of the most important concerns in the town.



For four decades he was central to Leamington’s life. In 1867 he was the driving force in saving Leamington College and its buildings. More than anyone else he was responsible for the town becoming a Borough in 1875 (to the extent of offering to pay the costs if the application to the Privy Council were refused) and he was unanimously elected the first Mayor (1875/76). In 1875, it was he who suggested that a new Town Hall was needed (although it was not built until 1884). He was mayor again in 1885/86 and 1886/87.

He donated the mayor's robes and chain of office. He chose the motto on its crest, Sola Bona quae Honesta (Those Things Alone Are Good That Are Honourable). He was the Borough's first Chief Magistrate; an honorary auditor of the Warneford Hospital; Chairman of the Provident Dispensary; Deacon of Spencer Street Church; for sixteen years Chairman of the Joint Hospital Board for the Heathcote Hospital District. To the library he gave nearly 13000 books. He gave the bust of Edward VII in the Town Hall.

In short, he was generous with time and money, the sort of man upon whom a good society depends; rightly rewarded in 1899 with the Freedom of the Borough.

Dudley describes him as "having industry, intelligence and impartiality" (not a bad collection of virtues).

He lived in Portland Street from 1863 until his death. Estate : £7,783.6.1d.

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Central Leamington Residents Association*

## **18. Samuel Lockhart Elephant Trainer (1850-1933)**



Sam Lockhart's mother, it seems, ran away to the circus, not to join one but to found one with her brothers. His father was an acrobat, a bareback rider, and a clown on stilts. Sam, born in the business, became a rider and a clown until he and his brother George created a double-act on the trapeze, swooping past each other in mid-air, pulling themselves onto the cross-bars, swinging and letting go. It may help if you are barely five feet in your stockinged feet like Sam. But imagine doing it!

Sam and George first came to Leamington with Ginnett's Circus in 1869, then several times in the early 1870s, performing in a building where the Loft Theatre now stands. In 1875 he married Harriet Pavier, a tailor's daughter from Leamington, and set up house in Warwick Street. In the same year his brother was badly injured in a fall from a horse and the double-act ended.

Sam had his living to make. Working in a circus is peripatetic and international. He took a job with Wilson's Great World Circus in the Far East. There, in 1881, at Moulmein in Burma ("By the old Moulmein pagoda, Lookin' lazy at the sea?") he saw elephants working in a timber-yard. Exactly what gave him the idea of working with elephants himself is impossible to say, but watching native children teaching tricks to baby elephants must have helped.

He shipped two baby elephants to England. Over the next thirty years he owned a dozen or more, the three most famous known collectively as The Three Graces, individually as Trilby, Haddie and Wilhelmina. In time he became the world's foremost trainer and his brother, having recovered, independently followed the same path.

For the rest of his working life Sam often travelled over Western Europe and the United States. In the United States where in the manner of circuses and the old-time music-hall the elephants became the "Marvellous Acting Pachyderms", he earned as much as a \$1,000 a week, say £20,000 today (not a fortune compared with Wayne Rooney).

Meanwhile the elephants never wanted for hay and they had a kind master. They starred in vaudeville and big circuses like the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. Incongruously they were in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show; perhaps less incongruously several times at Leamington's Theatre Royal in Regent Grove. For the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887 they appeared in her presence at Olympia; for the Diamond Jubilee Sam's friend Daisy, Countess of Warwick, invited them to the castle.

Sam's wife had died in 1897 at their house, La Pallas, in Warwick New Road, where in the garden in the 1990s the builders of Wilhelmina Close unearthed the bones of elephants. In the following year he had married another Harriet, Harriet Rose, the daughter of a Law Stationer living in Warwick. Sam retired in 1911 and became something of a character in Leamington, a small man with a walrus moustache, a man of the world, immaculately groomed, out on his daily "constitutional".

In Moreton Street The Elephant-House where some of the elephants were stabled is well known, as is the horse and elephant-wash on the north side of Priory Terrace, near Mill Road. According to Lyndon Cave in one of his histories of Leamington the owners of The Elephant-House still have the right to walk elephants along the Parade to wash. I wish they would do it, preferably at about eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning!.

*Plaque sponsored by Wilhelmina Close Residents  
Written by Robin Taylor*

## **19. Norman Painting OBE Actor, Writer (1924-2009)**



Born at 28 Grove Street, Leamington Spa on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1924, the son of a railway signalman, Norman who was a gifted scholar went on to win scholarships, attending grammar school in Nuneaton and then onto Birmingham University and ultimately Christchurch College, Oxford where he studied and then taught Anglo Saxon.

However, his interest in acting took him on an unexpected route away from the academic life into radio, television, theatre, scriptwriting and producing. He is famously known for playing Phil Archer of The Archers for over 50 years and also wrote over 1,200 scripts for the programme and held the record for the longest serving actor in any show.

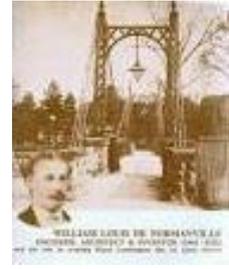
Norman's interests were varied, not only was he a talented musician and gardener, he was an authority of Warwickshire churches. His garden in Warmington was full of rare trees and historic plants, even a Mulberry tree planted in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, as so many were, to commemorate Charles II restoration. It was this love of nature and trees that led him to be a long time supporter and Vice President of The Tree Council. In this capacity, Norman was instrumental in securing two acres of ground adjacent to Anne Hathaway's cottage, to be planted as The Shakespeare Tree Garden. More recently, at Champion School in Leamington Spa, a small woodland called Painting's Plantation was funded by The Tree Council to celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Norman placed great importance on education and wanted to engage young people's interest in nature of which part was to plant and nurture trees. His ashes were scattered amongst the trees.

For 20 years Norman was Patron of Age Concern Warwickshire, now Age UK Warwickshire, where he championed the cause of older people and at numerous events over the years, helped the charity to promote awareness of its services, which directly benefited older people.

Norman never forgot his roots. He was a son of Royal Leamington Spa. He died on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.

*Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue plaque sponsored by Age UK Warwickshire*

## 20. William Louis de Normanville Borough Engineer and Surveyor of Leamington from 1882 to 1917(1843-1928)



The family was Norman. His grandfather, Marquis de Normanville, escaped from the Revolution in 1792, leaving his family behind in the sadly mistaken belief that women and children would be safe from the revolutionaries. In England he married again, and eventually dropped the title.

In his youth William de Normanville, evidently adventurous, spent five years in the Civil Engineer's Department of South Australia. From 1877 to 1882 he was Engineer to the Corporation of Durham. Like others in his family he was also a prolific inventor: for example, a device for measuring the speed of ships, a water-sprinkler that moved about powered by the force of the water, and improved version of ladies' belts and corsets (the Victorians, unto the great Queen herself, were not as tight-laced [ha-ha] as usually thought.

To mention some of his more notable achievements in Leamington he was responsible for the Adelaide Road Bridge (iron replacing stone); the York Bridge in the Pump Room Gardens; the Suspension Bridge (note the rods instead of the conventional chains); the swimming-baths, now the library, with a lantern roof supported on light iron trusses; the York Promenade; the restoration of the Pump Rooms; the renovation and layout of the Pump Room Gardens, including the bandstand; and the layout of the Victoria Park and the Mill Gardens: altogether a catalogue of buildings and gardens exhibiting a terrific sense of design and expertise in the use of iron.

His masterpiece, surely, is the combination of Weir and Mill Suspension Bridge, at once functional and beautiful, urban on one side, rural on the other, graceful pillars at each end, turbines in the abutments (to be restored, we hope).

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Blue Plaque sponsored by Warwick District Council*

## 21. Mary Dormer Harris Writer and Historian (1867-1936)



She was of farming stock, near Stoneleigh, not a background that smacks of revolution. Nevertheless, in 1886, aged nineteen, she did something more useful and unconventional by far than anything the Robespierres of this world have done: she went to university.

Lady Margaret Hall, the first of Oxford's colleges for women, had opened eight years earlier. There it was she went to read English, and three years later to obtain what in those days was an unofficial first-class degree. Subsequently, she taught in London before returning to Oxford to work for James Murray on the Oxford English Dictionary.

In 1896, to care for an ailing mother, she settled in Leamington, first at 9 Sherbourne Terrace and ten years later, and for the rest of her life, at 16 Gaveston Road. In Leamington, scholar by training, scholar by inclination, she devoted herself to the history of Warwickshire.

Probably her greatest achievement, occupying the years from 1904 to 1913, was the transcription, editing and publication of the Coventry Leet Book. A dozen other publications, none inconsiderable, include A History of Coventry from The Earliest Times (1898), The Story of Coventry (1911), and Unknown Warwickshire (1924), not to mention numerous essays and articles always readable and, not infrequently, gently humorous. On the other hand, she was not a woman to confine herself to muniment rooms and musty documents. Unusually for her time, she interested herself in the conservation of old buildings (which led to great disappointment in Coventry). She loved the theatre. As a suffragist (not a suffragette), she worked for universal suffrage. \*

Unlike many scholars she seems to have been a first-class lecturer and an effective polemicist. I like the story of the gentleman who favoured the Leamington Literary Society with the evidence to prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, only for her to respond so effectively with the evidence that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare that, by the end of the evening, only the speaker agreed with his opinion.

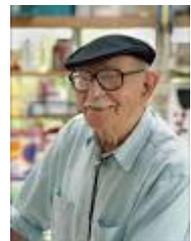
On another occasion, noting in a newspaper that there was no Women's Institute at Ashow, only a Men's Club and a Mothers' Union, to which naturally spinsters were not admitted, (autres temps, autres moeurs) she remarked that she was "all out for making life agreeable to spinsters". She never married.

As well as extremely intelligent she must have been an agreeable soul. "My sort!" to quote Mr. Polly. It is significant that after her death (in a road accident on the Rugby Road), a bursary in her name was enthusiastically set up by public subscription. She had many friends. I would have liked to have been amongst them.

*\*Fowler sensibly talks of "useful distinctions". A "suffragist" is moderate.*

*Written by Robin Taylor who was a recipient of a Mary Dormer Harris Bursary in 1956 when at Warwick School  
Blue plaque sponsored by Leamington Literary Society, Councillor Bill Gifford, Mr. John W. Brown, Mr. David M. Howe (both Trustees of the Mary Dormer Harris Bursary) and Mrs. Shirley Reading (Chairman of the Mary Dormer Harris Bursary)*

## **22. Sir Terry Frost RA** **Terence Ernest Manitou Frost** **Artist(1915-2003)**



Terry started to draw as a child but in a household pressed for money he left school at 14 to do a variety of jobs in Leamington and Coventry. During a period of unemployment he took evening classes in drawing and joined the Territorial Army. He was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1915 at the family home, 27 Rugby Road, Milverton (later demolished) where he was to be brought up largely by his grandmother, Edith Lines. His parents had married at the beginning of 1915 and his father, a bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery enlisted in spring that year. Terry only remembered seeing his father once when he was a child.

Terry was called up in September 1939 and saw service in France, Palestine and the Lebanon. He then joined the commandos and went to the Sudan and Crete where he was captured in June 1941. He spent time in various prisons ending up in Stalag 383 in Hohenfels, Bavaria. Here he renewed his interest in art, drawing portraits of fellow prisoners and met Adrian Heath who encouraged and mentored him. He also met here a fellow Leamingtonian, Fred Mulley, who was born in Clemens Street. In prison he felt a "tremendous spiritual experience, a more aware or heightened perception during starvation". After liberation he returned to Leamington and married a local girl Kathleen (Kath) Clarke in St. Peter's RC Church in 1945. They went on to have five sons and a daughter.

Returning to his job selling electrical components he became frustrated but with Heath's help he gained a serviceman's grant and a place at Camberwell School of Art. Here he moved away from his former style and developed an interest in abstract art. He and Kath moved to St. Ives probably in 1946 and he immersed himself in the local art community, commuting to London from 1947. In 1950 he produced his first non-figurative painting but confessed to Ben Nicolson that he was "torn between abstraction and figuration". After a stint as an assistant to Barbara Hepworth, Terry embarked on his long teaching career by becoming the first Gregory Fellow at Leeds University in 1954 returning to St. Ives in 1958.

Family life was not lavish but Terry was becoming known in art circles and in 1961 he held his first exhibition in New York and in 1964 there was a retrospective exhibition in several towns in England and the west coast of America. He went to the University of California to teach during the summer.

In 1961 the family moved to Banbury and Terry taught at Coventry Art College and then at Reading University becoming its Professor of Painting in 1965 and Professor Emeritus in 1981. In 1974 he and Kath returned to Cornwall to buy a house in Newlyn with a commanding view of his beloved sun, moon, sea, boats and harbour that inspired his work. Retirement from teaching led to a steep rise in productivity, not only in painting but also sculpture, ceramics and jewellery. He also ventured into glass and became a prolific print maker.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Terry was one of the best known artists in Britain. He was elected a Royal Academician in 1992 and knighted in 1998. He had an outgoing personality and infectious enthusiasm. He was a thinker and keen writer. He died on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003 at St. Julia's Hospice, Hayle, Cornwall survived by his wife and children.

“To look with preconceived notions of visual experience is to destroy the possibility of creating again that experience in paint. If you know before you look, then you cannot see for knowing.”

“The big canvas can be your liberation to discovery or your cage for a limited idea. At any rate, it will be a test of your intent, your attitude, your ability and your guts. Which follows that you will at least find something about yourself.”

*Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue Plaque sponsored by Warwick District Council*

## 23. Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879) Hymn Writer



We have all seen the rows of sermons in the libraries of stately-homes and wondered why anyone would buy them. But publishers rarely issue books they think will not be read. Darwin or not, the nineteenth century was an age of religious revival. You have only to count the Victorian churches in Leamington. Frances Havergal wrote almost always about her faith: hymns, leaflets, children's stories, anthologies. Her first book, *The Ministry of Song* (1869), sold more than a hundred thousand copies, and some of her hymns are still sung.

*Take my life and let it be*

*Consecrated Lord to thee.*

When she was born her father, himself a writer and composer, was the rector of Astley in Worcestershire. By seven years she was the youngest of six children: “Little Quicksilver”, he called her. She played in the rectory's fields, where she learnt to love nature, and mostly she was educated at home. She began to read when she was three and very early she showed a gift for languages.

It was not an idyll. Her mother died when she was eleven. Because of an accident her father was frequently ill and when he moved to urban parishes she became aware of strife and cruelty. When he remarried she acquired a stepmother who felt obliged to assert herself. Her mother's dying words had encouraged her to love God, yet unlike everyone close to her she doubted. Not until her step-mother asked her, directly, if she would be able to commit herself to Jesus if He returned did she suddenly believe. Then she convinced herself that her step-mother's foolish restrictions were God curbing her self-will.

As an adult she helped her father and brothers in their parishes. She supported the Church Missionary Society and the campaign to have religion included, non-denominationally, in schools. She gave popular talks and Bible readings and taught at Sunday School. In 1867 when her parents retired to Leamington she moved with them, and when St. Paul's opened she was the first organist and teacher of the choir.

*Oh, be my verse a hidden stream which silently may flow*

*Where drooping leaf and thirsty flower in lovely valleys grow.*

It must be admitted that she allowed herself to become narrow, which perhaps is not why the sun shines. She seems to have sung almost to professional standard, but she allowed an unintelligent clergyman to persuade her to stop singing Jezebel in Elijah. She described giving singing-lessons as “like a grappling iron to draw many drifting vessels close to within the hearing of the One Name...sweeter than music”. She read Milton, Browning and Wordsworth, but Shakespeare was too “earthy”. She read a novel and found it “mawkish and unreal” (it may have been), and that was the end of novels. She rejected marriage because she was married already to someone better than a human husband; yet she was kind, and generous, and never sanctimonious, and her sunny nature was an inspiration.

And yet, “(I am) an orphan and alone and often I feel it bitterly,” she wrote when her father died.

One thing could be relied upon to cure depression: mountains. Travelling with her father and step-mother to health resorts on the continent she fell in love with the Alps. In England her strength was easily taxed: not when she was climbing.

“She was sure-footed and fearless”, one guide remarked and she reached almost 13,000 feet, retreating only because her companion was exhausted. She climbed the Rosenloui glacier. On the Aeggischhorn she climbed in her petticoats.

“How we scrambled, and leapt, and laughed!”

“Oh, the delicious freedom and sense of leisure!”

She discovered too a talent for vivid prose: “The dawn was cloudless except some fiery flakes of pink and gold...and when the rose-fire touched Mont Blanc the glory was indescribable...I never saw anything material and earthly which so suggested the ethereal.”

“Oh, if we were only all spirit.”

Might she not sometimes have asked herself if material and spiritual *must* be opposed; if her friends must all be Christian; if some of the books with which she expected to disagree might have been worth reading?

After her step-mother's death in 1878 she moved to the home of her sister, Maria, at Caswell Bay, near Swansea. There she died looking up “steadily, as if she saw the Lord, a glorious radiance on her face.”

*Who is on the Lord's side?*

*Who will serve the King?*

After all they are good questions.

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Plaque sponsored by Leamington Churches Together*

## **24. Napoleon III** **Statesman (1808-1873)**



Prince Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon I.  
President of the French Republic: 1848 – 1852 (the Second Republic).  
Emperor of France: 1852 -1870 (the Second Empire).

In 1832, after the death of Napoleon I's son, he was the heir of the Bonapartist tradition, by then romantic and romanticised. Like his uncle, and not wholly without reason, he saw himself as a Man of Destiny, born to nurture progress.

Having in 1836 and 1840 failed to overturn the government of Louis Philippe, he was imprisoned (and spent his time studying) from 1840 to 1846. It was in the winter of 1838/39 that he visited Leamington, where he appeared in society, hunted, and worshipped at St. Peter's in George Street.

Following Louis Philippe's fall in 1848, and largely by virtue of his name and the ideals he represented, he was elected President. In 1852, supported by a plebiscite that he massively won, he had himself made Emperor.

For a long time, always keeping in mind public opinion, he remained popular. He promoted public works, supported inventors, interested himself in hygienic housing and co-operation between employers and employees.

From the end of the 1850s, however, he was often ill, and he began to lose his touch. His government became prey to intrigue and corruption. In foreign affairs he confused ideas of freedom, nationalism and the glory of France. Finally, influenced by a tide of anti-Prussian feeling, he antagonised Bismarck, who manoeuvred him into war. At Sedan he was utterly defeated. He abdicated and came to England, where he died.

*Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue Plaque sponsored by Warwick District Council*

## **25. JOHN CUNDALL** **Architect (1830-1889)**



There are twenty-nine references to him in the index of the latest edition of Pevsner's "Warwickshire". He was the architect of St. Paul's (1875); St. Alban's (1877, demolished 1968); the Town Hall (1884); St. John the Baptist's (1888); and, a favourite of mine, the Hitchman Fountain in Jephson Gardens (1869).

He was born in Regent Street, where his father was a grocer on the site now occupied by Tustain's, and he was articled to David Squirhill who was responsible amongst other things for Leamington College. Later he worked for Pugin and Murray in London, where directly or indirectly he must have been influenced by Alexander Pugin himself; then briefly for Sir George Gilbert Scott, celebrated for the magnificent Midland Hotel at St. Pancras. Back in the Midlands he joined a partnership in Coventry, and when his partner died set up for himself in Leamington.

Architecture, like everything artistic, creates and follows fashion. In Victoria's reign the prevailing fashion was neo-Gothic. Cundall followed it. I shall describe it as Gothic for eccentrics and in this conventional age of ours that is an excellent reason for approving of it. Fifty years ago the fashion was to deride it and I remember a group of us making merry at the expense of a notable example, Keble College, Oxford. A week or two afterwards, idling in a park, I happened to look up (often a good idea) and in front of me I saw a building that for all its size seemed to float. It stopped me in my tracks. I wondered what it was. It was the chapel of Keble College that I had laughed at because my friends had laughed at it. I had never seen it before.

It seems to me that the Victorians were second in achievement only to the Athenians of the fifth century BC. I admire their ambition, their confidence, their sense of adventure, their humour. They felt they could do everything and they tried. To an extraordinary degree they combined the aspiration of the Gothic and the exuberance of the Renaissance.

It so happens that one of my favourite views in Leamington is from Clarendon Avenue, near the junction with the Upper Parade, looking east towards Leicester Street. There stands the steeple of St. Paul's, assured and uplifting; and if I want to smile I go into the church and look at the lop-sided arches in the aisles. (St. John's, rather hidden away in Tachbrook Street, is every bit as good.)

The Town Hall, it must be admitted, is stylistically out of keeping with the rest of the Parade. That being said, the site is used to the best advantage, the building making its own space by its angle to the highway. The clock-tower, in conformity with the neo-Gothic taste for asymmetry, is in a corner at the back. On the Parade there is an oriel window on one side not the other. All in all the front gives an impression of including every architectural style known to man. The wood-panelled Council Chamber could not be bettered for debate, nor the classical lines of the Assembly Hall for a ball or an orchestra playing Mozart. The entire building reminds me of Mahler's attitude to the symphony: that it "must embrace everything". It is impressive within, it inspires affection without.

There seems to be little record of Cundall the man, though we do know that in Kensington in 1860 he married Frederica Croften. There were three sons (one of whom, Frederick, became an architect), and a daughter. In 1869 he became a Mason. He was the Honorary Architect of Dr. Hitchman's Midland Counties Home for Incurables, hardly a cause to choose unless you were genuinely interested in contributing more than just a display of generosity.

One incident may be mentioned. In the summer of 1852, walking alongside the Serpentine in Hyde Park, he heard a cry that a gentleman was drowning. Immediately, removing clothes as he went, he ran to the spot and more than once dived into the water, only to find the gentleman so embedded in the mud that it was impossible to release him until help arrived, too late.

*Plaque sponsored by Leamington Town Council  
Written by Robin Taylor*

## **26. Dr. John Hitchman Surgeon (1805-1867)**



The photograph is of a mid-Victorian gentleman, dark suit and waistcoat, high turnover collar, dark circle of cravat, and yet not over-tidy, rustic almost: a shortish man with a short neck, chunky rather than burly, leaning forward as if in conversation, fair hair flying as if he drags his fingers through it when he is concentrating; a man I imagine with a Oxfordshire accent, more at ease with being called "John" than "Doctor".

He was born in Chipping Norton and trained as a surgeon's assistant in Banbury. Probably he arrived in Leamington in 1827 or 1828, eventually setting up his practice in Clemens Street before moving to High Street and finally The Parade, between Regent Street and Warwick Street. At the Warneford Hospital, where he was on the staff for the rest of his life, he would almost certainly have known the hospital's chief benefactor, Rev. Samuel Warneford. One of his colleagues was Dr. Jephson. For twenty years he lived at 35 Lansdowne Place (now the Upper Parade).

By 1840 he was well enough established to help with The Relief Fund to provide work for the poor; and again three years later with the Labourers' Relief Fund responsible for the first major improvements to the Jephson Gardens, laying out paths, digging the lake, raising the riverbank. In 1848 he promoted what became Leamington College for Boys. From 1852 until his death he served on the Local Board of Health, in effect the Town Council before the town became a Borough. For many years, unsuccessfully, he pressed for an improved water supply and sewage system.

Perhaps his most significant achievement began in 1851 when he bought eleven acres on the edge of the town, between Tachbrook Road and St. Helen's Road, and laid out The Arboretum as it was called, enriching it with thousands of flowers, shrubs and exotic trees, and opening it free to the public and with plants for sale. Before long he had extended it to forty acres. Then, perhaps in emulation of Rev. Warneford, he decided to build there what may reasonably be described as a hospital in a park.

The Arboretum Hydropathic Hospital opened in 1862. Only five years later, suddenly, at sixty-two, he died. So great was his reputation that on the day of the funeral-procession from The Arboretum to the Cemetery blinds were drawn over front-windows and the pavements were lined with people. His wife, who later moved to Staffordshire and lived until 1890, is commemorated in St. John's Church, for which she gave the land and a large sum of money.

Under Trustees the hospital survived until 1883, when hydropathy had fallen out of fashion. It was bought by the Midland Counties Home for Incurables, the equivalent of a hospice, and that was taken over by the National Health in 1948. It closed in 1995, probably at the diktat of accountants, and most of the land was sold for houses. However, on St. Helen's Road, not far from Tachbrook Road, upwards of an acre of woodland remains, including half a dozen cedars and half a dozen redwoods.

As a boy I remember wondering “how all those big trees got there”. Now, every day, hundreds of people pass them without knowing or caring who planted them, but when I see the wastelands round Warwick Hospital and the University Hospital I remember the poor souls whose wretched lives were made more bearable by Dr. Hitchman’s green thought. His example might have been worth following.

In the words of *The Courier*, “He erred sometimes as we all do in matters of judgment...but whenever any good, private or public, could be forwarded he was there to forward it”. As a result soon after his death a committee chaired by Dr. Jephson was formed to create a public memorial. Two years later John Cundall’s fountain at the front of the Jephson Gardens was unveiled in commemoration of a man whose Christian faith expressed itself in useful work; who devoted untold hours of service to the town and responded generously to poverty; whose anxiety about the water supply and the sewage system was widely believed to have “hastened his end”; and whose reputation for plain speaking never interfered with friendship.

*Written by Robin Taylor*

*Plaque sponsored by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council*

## 27. **Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901)** **Photographic pioneer**



Allow me to introduce you to some clever people: Joseph Nicéphore Niepce, who in 1826 discovered a method of preserving an image and printing it; Louis Daguerre and William Fox Talbot who improved it; and those men who had the imagination to realise that something valuable might be made of it, amongst them Henry Peach Robinson.

He was born at Ludlow, the son of a teacher and apprenticed at fourteen to a printer and bookseller. Even as a child he had shown artistic ability and at twenty-one an oil-painting of his was accepted by the Royal Academy. Not long before, working for a bookseller in Bromsgrove, he had met a vagrant who presumably to earn a living made daguerrotype portraits. It is easy to understand an artistic young man's excitement.

In 1853 he came to Leamington to work for Mr. Glover, bookseller and publisher of the *Courier*, but the possibilities of photography had stayed with him and a meeting with the photographer Hugh Diamond made up his mind for him. In 1856, helped by a friend in Ludlow who believed in him to the extent of lending him a hundred pounds (at least £7,000 today!), he left his job and set up a studio and shop at 15, Upper Parade (now 60-64, Parade). He joined the nascent Royal Photographic Society. He advertised. But whatever the support he had in Ludlow (Selina Grieves, the daughter of a chemist, for example), he was on his own in Leamington and confidence without conceit has its limits. The story goes that when his first customer opened the door he fled to the back of the shop and had to screw up his courage to return.

A book “Warwickshire Illustrated”, helped keep him afloat. Meanwhile, under the influence of his friend Oscar Rejlander, he was working on the technique that produced his first surviving photograph, *Juliet with the Poison Bottle*. Then in 1858 came the one that made his name, *Fading Away*, a study of a young woman dying of consumption, surrounded by her sorrowing family. Both are “composite” or “combination” photographs, a number of negatives mostly taken in the studio with costumed models and constructed scenery and joined to create a scene of the poetic drama beloved by the Pre-Raphaelites (and me). So great a sensation was created by *Fading Away* that Prince Albert bought a print and ordered prints of subsequent photographs. The following year Robinson married Selina, and in 1862 they moved into bigger premises next-door.

And only three years later, famous as he was and although the sun continued to rise in the east, he was faced by ruin. In those days the chemicals used in dark-rooms were poorly understood and his health deteriorated. Working in a dark-room became impossible. There was nothing for him but to sell his business, move to London, and make an income writing articles for the photographic press.

At last, slowly, his health improved and in 1868 he made his final move, to Tunbridge Wells. There he rebuilt his business, at first with a partner and from 1886 largely handing over to one of his sons. He wrote several books, most notably "Pictorial Effect in Photography" (1869), one of the first analyses of photography as art and for decades the most influential in English. In 1870 he was elected Vice-President of the Photographic Society.

From the late 1880s, as often happens in the artistic world, artists being no better than anyone else, quarrels with the new generation arose. He was charged with having imitated nature rather than expressing it and adopting the methods of painting rather than intrinsic to photography. That is as maybe. More than one method may be possible. In 1900 he was elected Honorary Fellow by the Photographic Society.

I quote his words: "Men usually see little of what is before their eyes unless they are trained to use them". Taking responsibility for the training is the job. Not many have the gift.

Written by Robin Taylor

Plaque sponsored by Royal Photographic Society and Leamington Society

## **28. SQD LDR HENRY ERIC MAUDSLAY, DFC Dambuster Pilot (1921-1943)**

At 21.28 on 16th May 1943 the first of nineteen Lancaster bombers of 617 Squadron, modified to carry one of the "bouncing" bombs invented by Barnes Wallis, took off from RAF Scampton near Lincoln. Under Wing Commander Guy Gibson the Squadron was divided into three formations, nine in three groups in the first, five in each of the others. Their targets were the Möhne,, the Eder and the Sorpe dams.



Maudslay, one of the youngest of the pilots, Squadron Leader at twenty-one and in command of the third group of the first formation, took off at 21.59, keeping low to avoid the German radar.

He was descended from four generations of engineers, reliable participants in the industrial power of England. His father had founded the Maudslay Motor Company and the Standard Motor Company in Coventry. Four years after Henry's birth the family moved to Sherbourne, and later to Fox Hill Manor near Broadway. At nine Henry was sent to prep school near Stroud; at thirteen, six weeks after his father's death, to Eton. Physics and mathematics were his best subjects. In his final year he became Captain of Boats and Athletics. From the evidence of a letter to his mother when he had overspent he was well capable of acknowledging a mistake. He subscribed to "Aeronautics Magazine" and he gave a talk to the Scientific Society about aeronautical design. He taught himself Morse.

On 27th May, 1940 the evacuation from Dunkirk began. That summer he ceased to be a schoolboy. He volunteered for the RAF and by August was learning to fly. While the bombs were falling he was in Canada, not without feelings of guilt, learning to fly at night and on instruments alone.

Back in England he made his first sortie in June 1941, mine-laying near the U-Boat base at Lorient.

Altogether he flew forty-six operations. Five times his aircraft were hit, and in November 1941, "for outstanding determination" in attacking shipping off the Frisian Islands when the cloud was down to three hundred feet, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. In March 1943, with his regular crew, which speaks for itself, he was selected for 617 Squadron, newly formed for a mission demanding hours of practice in flying at low-level. He was informed of the target on the day before the raid.

That night of May 16<sup>th</sup> was fine, with a light breeze. The dams were surrounded by hills and the valleys were difficult to fly into and out of. The first, the Möhne, was protected by guns as well as geography.

Gibson, whose bomb had exploded fifty yards short, had stayed behind to distract the defenders and direct the other pilots, one by one. Maudslay joined the queue, circling out of range. Before he was needed the dam was breached.

Gibson ordered him to the next dam, the Eder, where a steep, sharply winding, valley was so demanding that the Germans seem to have decided guns were unnecessary. Another pilot, Shannon, made several unsuccessful runs. Maudslay tried twice. At 01.45 he tried again. The plan was that the bomb, spinning backwards to remain in contact with the dam after striking it, was to be released at 220mph and from sixty feet, the height indicated by two spotlights under the fuselage meeting on the water. The bomb would bounce along the water, strike the dam's wall, sink to thirty feet, and explode.

By the tiniest amount he must have miscalculated. Instead of striking the wall the bomb fell onto the parapet and instantly exploded, catching the Lancaster in the blast. Twice Gibson asked him if he was all right. In a voice tired and disembodied Maudslay replied, "I think so, stand by," and then, "Returning to base".

That was the last anyone outside his Lancaster heard. He started for home and near the Rhine he was caught in flak. There were no survivors. Only two of them, Maudslay was one, could be identified.

Of the 133 men in that raid 53 died. Maudslay, courteous, diffident, determined, as far from being a line-shooter as anyone could imagine, had told his mother more than a year before that, "It was as well to face facts in case the worst came to the worst". It was, and it did.

To me it was a life well lived, useful, largely happy.

"The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and notwithstanding go out to meet it": [Pericles, 430 BC].

Plaque sponsored by Eden Place  
Written by Robin Taylor, corrected by John Willock

## 29. Herbert Edward Cox Watercolourist (1870-1941)

Lillington's main claim to fame is being the centre of England, but after delving below the surface other claims can be found. One local claim is the fact that a very talented artist lived at 7 Manor Road. He was Herbert Edward Cox who was born in Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry, to parents James, a watch finisher, and Sarah. Herbert attended grammar school in Coventry. His father, described as a stock/shareholder, died in 1887, having been a Coventry City Councillor for 30 years.



Lillington Church painted by Herbert Edward Cox reproduced by kind permission of Leamington Museum & Art Gallery

In 1891, Herbert was a designer and draughtsman, and 10 years later he was a textile designer in Eastbourne, where his mother appeared to be running a bed and breakfast business. He moved back to Kenilworth having married Margaret Shilton in Harrogate. He must have been developing his artistic ability because in 1912 he produced his *magnum opus* in producing over 70 water colours of street scenes in and around Coventry, now housed in Coventry's Council House and in private collections.

By 1913 Herbert and Margaret were living in Manor Road, Lillington, when Margaret gave birth to a daughter, Cynthia, in March of that year. He became a painting master at Coventry Technical Institute, now the City College, Coventry.

In 1922 Leamington Chronicle reported the exhibition of 50 of Herbert's works in Leamington Public Library. A David H. Cooke purchased 70 of the paintings in 1930 'as part of the rapidly growing nucleus of the City Art Gallery', which were presented to the Lord Mayor of Coventry, Alderman Fred Lee, in the Masonic Hall, for his 'outstanding achievements' in his first year of office. These works are now to be seen in the Camera Principis (Coventry Council House).

He left the Coventry Technical Institute in the late 1930's and died on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1941, leaving Margaret £866 2s 2d - a fair amount in those days. They are buried in the new churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene Parish Church, Vicarage Road, Lillington.

One or two of his paintings are conserved at Leamington Art Gallery and Museum, and it is likely that several more are privately owned by local residents. One of these has come to light following the local publicity about the erection of a Blue Plaque at his former residence at 7 Manor Road.

Most of his paintings were produced on small 'canvases' in watercolour and their vivid colours and attention to detail readily lend themselves to enhancing the walls of modern houses. The depictions of Coventry between the Wars form an invaluable record of the city as it once was but carry with them some sadness, since the scenes they show were savagely altered in the wartime blitzes which took place just before Herbert died.

*Written by Robin Taylor  
Blue Plaque sponsored by Lillington Local History Society*