



# talking history

East Midlands Oral History Archive

No 4: June 2002

## everybody's reading

*Everybody's Reading* is a two week celebration of words organised by people in Leicester. There will be poetry in the park, words on the web, stories in the library, theatre productions, films and cabarets taking place between June 15-30. If you want to find out more about *Everybody's Reading* contact Sarah Butler on (0116) 252 7347 or check out the website at [www.everybodysreadingleicester.co.uk](http://www.everybodysreadingleicester.co.uk).

This month's *talking history* is therefore dedicated to the theme of reading. Inside you will find articles on the history of bookselling in Leicester, memories of Leicestershire's libraries and favourite childhood books, book reviews and news about how the East Midlands Oral History Archive has been working with Leicester City Libraries to bring oral history to school children. So read on...

# Talking in the library!

How EMOHA and Leicester City Libraries have been using oral history



In May, the East Midlands Oral History Archive, in partnership with Leicester City Libraries, held a joint event at the city's Lending Library. Year 5 children from Sparkenhoe Community Primary School were invited to listen to childhood memories of toys and games, dating from the early twentieth century to the 1970s.

The children were played a variety of oral history extracts, and were interested to learn that modern day versions of Hide-and-Seek, and the popular playground game 'Free Pod', have their roots in the unusual sounding games of 'Tin-A-Lurkey', 'Foggy Hounds', and 'Poddy-1-2-3' from the past. They were also able to draw comparisons between the mischievous pastime of the 1920s, called 'Spirit Rapping', where children would gently tap a needle threaded onto a piece of cotton against the outside of a window in order to confuse the adults inside, with the present day game of 'Knock-Door-Run.'

The children then turned their hands to mastering traditional toys, such as Cup-and-Ball, Snobs, Dominoes, and Jacks, with great enthusiasm and success. The children were able to compare old favourites with their more modern counterparts, such as Tic-Tac-Toe with Connect 4, and Pick-Up-Sticks with Kerplunk. Books available from the library were also displayed to help the children learn more about the toys and games played by

their parents and grandparents, as well as those played by children in other parts of the world.

The East Midlands Oral History Archive has produced a teachers' pack on Toys and Games, comprising a CD of oral history extracts and support materials for use at Key Stages 1 and 2. If you would like to know more about this, or any of the other educational services we provide, please contact Sarah Ferrier, Education Officer, at the East Midlands Oral History Archive on (0116) 252 5065 or by email on [sjf17@le.ac.uk](mailto:sjf17@le.ac.uk), or by writing to Sarah Ferrier, EMOHA, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH.



A CD entitled *Toys and Games: An Oral History* will be available to members of the public from the end of July, priced £7. While stocks last teachers may also request a free support pack to accompany the CD. Contact EMOHA to get your copy.

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# Where have all the bookshops gone?

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The new book trade in Britain is now dominated by the bookselling chains, many of which have come into being in the last twenty years. Parallel with their rise has been the decline of small, local bookshops. That has certainly been the case in Leicester, writes **JD Bennett**, where not one of the independent, city centre bookshops which operated around the middle of last century now remains.

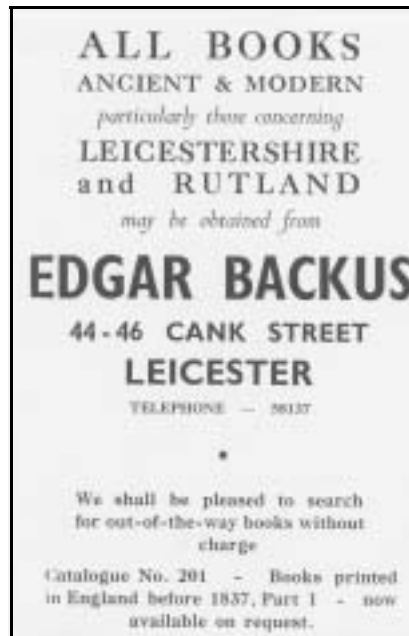
The oldest bookshop in Leicester that survived into the twentieth century was owned by Thomas Combe, who had a bookshop in what is now the City Rooms. From this shop he published Susanna Watts' *Walk through Leicester* in 1804. The business moved to Gallowtree Gate in 1817, where it remained for more than a century, before transferring to Hotel Street in 1932. The firm went through a variety of owners and names, eventually becoming *Clarke & Satchell* after Robert Satchell bought a partnership in 1895. After his death in 1923 his son, Frederick Satchell, took over. When he retired in 1953, Ray Winter and Roland Spence, who had joined him as partners in 1948, took control of the business, though Satchell remained a director until his death in 1963.

*Clarke & Satchell* had a good reputation for service, and a visit there was always an enjoyable experience. The shop itself was not particularly large: the ground floor, managed by Ray Winter, housed the main book department, while the first floor, run by Roland Spence, was chiefly given over to greetings cards, stationery and records. One of the assistants in the book department was Phyllis Orange, who worked there for more than twenty years, until long past retirement age. Miss Orange, whose memories of Leicester stretched back to the 1890s, published two volumes of reminiscences in 1974-5. It became the St Martin's Bookshop after it changed hands in the 1970s.

Edgar Backus in Cank Street was established in 1915 and dealt in new and second-hand books. By 1948 it had acquired new owners although it continued to operate under its original name. The firm occupied two adjacent shops in a small development which had been built in 1904, and one shop window usually contained a display of old maps and prints. As well as a selection of new titles, and a large stock of second-hand and antiquarian books, the shop also offered a book-finding service. Edgar Backus specialised in Leicestershire books, and for many years issued catalogues. It published local historians like S.H.

Skillington, Charles Billson, Henry Hartopp, Florence Skillington and Colin Ellis, as well as the Leicestershire and Rutland Magazine.

The once well-known second-hand bookselling business of Bernard Halliday started around the beginning of the 20th century in premises in Silver Street. By 1928, this and a successive shop in Highcross Street had been given up, and the firm was operating by catalogue from the Gothic house which stood in the grounds of Archibald Turner's factory on King Richard's Road. From here the business made its final move, to a house in New Walk, just above De Montfort Street. Though it was not a shop, members of the public were allowed to inspect their stock, which was particularly strong in subjects like history and archaeology, and always included local books. Bernard Halliday was to be the first of the bookselling firms described in this article to close, and had gone by 1969.



Not all bookshops in the city were owned by Leicester people. A Birmingham firm, *The Midland Educational Company Ltd*, ran what was for many years

Leicester's largest bookshop in Market Street from at least 1882. While *Murray's Ltd* in Loseby Lane was also part of a larger regional business owned by Frank Murray, who also had bookshops in Derby and Nottingham. Murray purchased it as a second-hand bookselling business in 1894 and installed Charles Peaks as manager in this shop. Peaks later bought out his employer, though it continued to trade as Murray's. Charles was succeeded by his son Eric in 1952, by which time the shop was selling both new and second-hand books.

One of Murray's customers was the City Libraries, and Eric Peaks would from time to time deliver small parcels of books labelled "Free Libraries" to the Central Lending Library. The shop was popularly known as "The Shakespeare's Head", on account of a plaster head of Shakespeare outside. This has long since crumbled away, though there are intriguing wooden carvings still to be seen on the shop-front.

# Remembering reading at

## Remembering Reading: *John Howlett (born 1932)*

I was a rare one for books even then... If my grandchildren get as much enjoyment out of books as I have during my life, they'll do very well... Treasure Island, Black Arrow... and Rupert, of course, old Rupert... I only take the Express for Rupert!... Romany books, oh yes, I had the set of Romany books. Broke my heart when he died... We used to love to listen to him on Children's Hour. Tom Browne's Schooldays... I had some as presents, but we had a library at school... The Library van used to come from the County Council. Great big wicker baskets of library books, and you used to scrabble in there to get them. Just William, yes, you used to scrabble in to get Just William [by] Richmal Crompton...

Did you have comics as well?

Yes, we had Chips, I think... Weary Willy and Tired Tim, they were a couple of tramps, and I remember that whenever they were taken off to the Police Station there'd be a finger post pointing, 'Cop Shop'... It stuck with me. I always call the Police Station a 'Cop Shop'... Of course, the other kids would have a Dandy and a Beano, the Champion and Rover. Rover, was, that was great because there was always a story in about the war... The one I remember, 'The Exploits of Rockfist Rogan of the R.A.F.'. He was the one that was in the Rover, and of course there was some real bloodthirsty exploits every week. You couldn't wait for it to come out! It was great.

All quotes from the  
East Midlands Oral  
History Archive

## Libraries in Loughborough

**Paul Martin** joined Loughborough Library in the early 1930s as a junior member.

The atmosphere was a bit grim in those days. The Library staff treated small boys with suspicion. Mr Topping, the Chief Librarian, was a bald headed, stocky, wing collared disciplinarian of the old school. Mr Topping might have accepted the Internet and the Videos as signs of scientific progress, but I know he would have hated the "Paperbacks".

The Reading Room was at the front of the Library, and the Lending section at the rear. Silence was the golden rule in both sections. Anyone with a fit of coughing would be classed as a serious menace to Society, and anyone wishing to use a loo would have to go to the Queens Park opposite. Those were the days!

The 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of 1931 reveals that the library had 128,380 books, of which 86,583 were fiction; the rest being Non-fiction, magazines and music. It was a good library for a small town, but unfortunately by 1937 many books required replacements and a fresh stock of new books was needed. You would often find pages torn out of a book or defaced by a scrawl. No security system was in force, and I often imagined some Old Codger shuffling past the exit counter after having his book stamped with another book wedged inside his Long Johns. In 1937 Mr Topping retired and a Mr Swift became Chief Librarian. Business was bucking up in the town from the Depression years, and that meant that more money was available to buy new books.

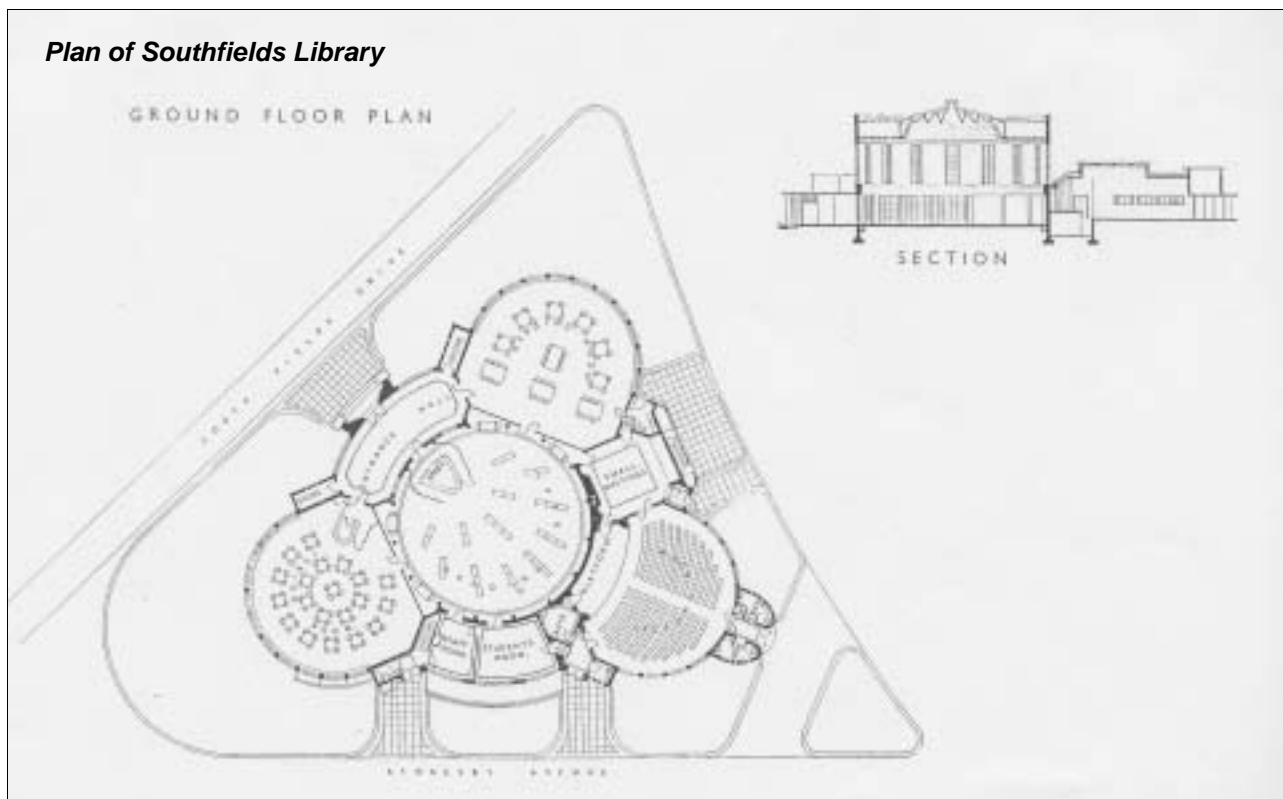
I can only remember two books being banned from the public after the war. 'Forever Amber', an American best seller, which was a torrid tale of *hanky panky* in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. Today it could be read out at any school and the kids would be yawning. After all, they have been brought up to 'Eastenders'. The other, of course, was the notorious 'Lady Chatterley'. Folks said the Library Committee were past their sell by date...

Another Library I had joined was Boots. Boots had an excellent interchange system that meant that you could borrow a book on holiday and exchange it back home if not finished, or *vice versa*. Their shelves were always stacked with current fiction and interesting non-fiction. I stayed a member until the war. Sometime in the 30s the Chain Library opened in High Street. Not many people remember it, but I think it stood where the new Co-op store was built (now replaced by Argos and other shops). Their policy seemed more to entertain than to educate. No non-fiction, but many modern novels, especially Thrillers and Adventure stories, and as the attractive girl at the desk seemed a welcome change to Mr Topping, I joined the first week of opening.

When I returned to Loughborough after three years overseas, I found that the Library had disappeared and was told that the attractive girl had married a Yank. But you can't win 'em all, can you?

*Reprinted with permission from John Storer House Newsletter, February 2002*

# home and in the library



**Mrs J. Harvey lived on the Saffron Lane Estate as a child in the 1940s. She recalls her memories of Southfields Library.**

After the war everything was rationed... Books were on ration, yes. You used to have to queue, queue up at the library and put your name down. They used to have the

book, you know the book cover jackets, they used to have all the book jackets pinned up, and you used to have to go round and look at all the jackets. And then if you fancied a book, you used to have to go and put your name down, and you had to book it, and when the books came in, you would go up and queue to get your book at the

was quiet... We used to have newspapers in there. Because we couldn't afford to buy a newspaper, you would go and read it at the library. They had one room which was the reading room, now that was newspapers, then you had the adult library in the middle. And then the children's library was a separate library which you went in from the side. And the children's library had things like comics there. The first issue of 'The Eagle' I read there, I used to kill for that. We just used to queue up to read it...

**Remembering Reading: Mrs Iris Smith (who lived in the Wharf Street area as a child)**

And another thing we used to do, we used to collect comics, you know, one would have a different comic and we'd swap them... that was a regular thing. During the war especially we used to love it if we could manage to get these American comics, which Flash Gordon was in, and Mandrake the Magician, but they were very hard to come by, I mean, I could never afford to have them bought me. I mean, I don't know where people got them from, but you did eventually get hold of the odd one, so I used to enjoy them.

library. There was only one copy of each book in the library, so you had to reserve the most popular titles....

I used to spend hours at the library. It was a wonderful place. It was warm and it

It was open until eight at night, and my Mum would come and look for me because she knew where I was, in the library reading. I can remember standing outside the library in a long queue and they used to have revolving doors, and for a dare, because the librarian ladies were very strict, for a dare

they said 'Dare you'. So I went up to the library and ran round the doors and ran out again. Before the caretaker came and got you...

**Remembering Reading: Mrs Blanche Harrison (born 1917).**

I've always read a lot, but then I got that from my father... When I was very young I got hold of some of these comics, these girls' romances, and my father said to me, if you're going to read, join the library and get some decent books. So I did. I've always been a reader... biographies etc., I prefer them... it's got to have some body in it.

# Research Notes

**District Nursing in Leicester:** Margaret Damant is researching District Nursing in Leicester before the birth of the NHS. In particular she is interested in finding out more about the Leicester District Nursing Association (LDNA) which was based at 2 University Road, Leicester from 1909 to 1953. LDNA provided a district nursing service for the sick, dying and elderly people of Leicester. It was a progressive voluntary organisation funded by donations and subscriptions. Many of Leicester's leading families also donated money to support the organisation.

The records and annual reports of the LDNA seem to have been buried with the past and so Margaret would like to hear from anyone who recalls the organisation or had any connections with it. Even better, if anyone knows where any documentation related to the LDNA is deposited, please get in touch by phoning 0116 270 3338 or emailing [damant@damant.freeseerve.co.uk](mailto:damant@damant.freeseerve.co.uk).

**Women in the forces:** The East Midlands Oral History Archive would like to hear from any women who served in the forces during the Second World War and who are willing to be interviewed for the archive.

**Hosiery exhibition:** The East Midlands Oral History Archive's first on-line exhibition on the hosiery industry has recently been unveiled at <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/resources/hosiery/>. The exhibition recalls the time when hosiery made Leicester into a boom city and attracted workers from all over the country to move to Leicestershire. Using oral history extracts and photos from the archive the exhibition gives interested web surfers an insight into the working conditions and lives of those who worked in "the Hosiery". Hear how to "link a toe" and about the smell of a hosiery factory first hand from those who actually worked in the industry.

## Driving into history

The letters about Marc Fitch House keep coming. The house seems to be a rich source of reminiscences about Leicester's history, which just goes to show that when researching a subject you can often find something much more interesting than what you went looking for in the first place.

Brian Johnson of Wigston Magna writes:

I well remember No.5 Salisbury Road being a Driving Test Centre. Having learned to drive in a 3 ton lorry, as a driver's mate back in 1964, I duly arrived at the test centre with provisional licence in hand on a very hot summer's afternoon. As my 3 tonner was required for deliveries I had to attend in the spare van, a 30 cwt Morris, with a faulty fuel gauge – which we didn't know about! After running out of petrol prior to the test and having to walk to a petrol

station to get some in a can, the engine wanted to play silly games and kept cutting out. Obviously dirt in the fuel tank had got into the carburettor.

On arriving at the test centre my accompanying driver went to sun bathe on Victoria Park whilst I set off on my driving test. The Examiner seemed a pleasant sort of chap and appeared satisfied with my drive, the emergency stop, turn in the road and right-hand reverse (for commercial vehicle) went well – then the engine cut out! After re-starting with some difficulty, cutting out again, and again shortly afterwards, the Examiner decided quite rightly to terminate the test with no result. This was on Melbourne Road, just about opposite Derwent Street. The Examiner set off on his long walk back to the test centre in the hot sun, and I sat staring at the street name-plate for the next two hours



**Mark Fitch House—the home of the East Midlands Oral History Archive**

until being towed back to the garage, hence the name Derwent Street became firmly impressed in my mind – right up to the present day.

About a month later I attended the test centre again, in a different vehicle and passed. I believe the Driving Test Centre moved from Salisbury Road to Keble House on Welford Road about 1968.

### Top 5 Oral History Books

If you want to find out more about oral history—why not try one of the following books:

**George Ewart Evans, 1956, *Ask the Fellows Who Cut The Hay.***

Classic text written by a pioneer in the field of oral history, who recorded what appeared to be a disappearing, older tradition of agriculture as a new one was emerging.

**Paul Thompson, 3rd Edition 2000, *The Voice of the Past.***

Paul Thompson's classic introduction to oral history, originally published in 1978, has been revised and updated together with additional material, new approaches and technologies.

**Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds., 1998, *The Oral History Reader.***

International anthology which explores central debates in the development of post-war theory, practice and use of oral testimony.

**Studs Terkel, 1970, *Hard Times: An oral history of the Great Depression.***

This classic account of the Great Depression in North America during the 1930s assembles the memories of both destitute and rich alike, showing how people's lives continue to be informed by their processes of remembering the past.

**Saffron Past & Present Group, 1998, *The Story of the Saff: A history of the Saffron Lane Estate, Leicester.***

An excellent example of how a community organisation, with the help of a professional oral and community historian, turned a collection of oral histories, written records and photographs into a very readable publication.

### Twisted Yarns

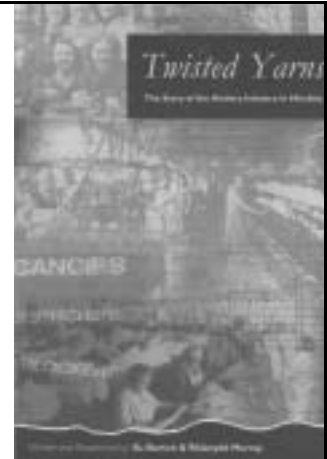
Twisted Yarns, by Sue Barton and Rhianydd Murray, tells the story of the hosiery industry in Hinckley and is the result of an innovative European project which also looks at the textile industries in Portugal, Spain, Ireland and France.

Illustrated with photographs, diagrams and posters, this is a beautifully presented book which draws from a variety of sources, including nearly 50 oral history interviews.

The story of the hosiery industry in Hinckley starts around 1640, several decades before the trade began in Leicester. *Twisted Yarns* follows this story through the effects of enclosure on Hinckley, periods of poverty, migratory labour and the growth of the town, strikes and protests. The final chapters use oral history to construct a picture of work and social life in the factories.

*Twisted Yarns* isn't intended to be a definitive history of hosiery in Hinckley, but it does provide an excellent introduction to the subject, and the use of oral history helps to create a vivid description of life in the trade over the last 100 years.

*Twisted Yarns* is available from the reception at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. Tel 01455 251222.



# Book bonanza



### Book Trade Lives

Book Trade Lives is an oral history project run by the National Life Story Collection to record the experiences of those who have worked in publishing and bookselling between the 1920s and the present day. During this period the British book world has been transformed. Family firms have been replaced by conglomerates, and the Net Book Agreement has been abolished.

A CD of edited highlights is available

Through a series of interviews recorded with people from all areas of the trade, Book Trade Lives preserves a picture of this nearly vanished world. Equally important, it provides a range of personal perspectives on how the changes came about, and their impacts on individuals' lives.

To find out more about Book Trade Lives, or to buy a CD of edited highlights from the collection, contact the National Life Story Collection phone: 020 7412 7404 email: [nsa-nlsc@bl.uk](mailto:nsa-nlsc@bl.uk).

### Scattered Scruffs

**Hazel Jacques, 2000, *The Scattered Scruffs.***

It is 1940. A family is thrown into turmoil when both parents contract tuberculosis. Their six children are to be looked after as best they can. The eldest boy, Ted, goes to live with his Grandma. The two-year-old baby is taken to Countesthorpe Cottage Homes near Leicester, and put into the Nursery. Norman, Hazel, Doris and Edna are placed in the system of care at that time - the Leicester Scattered Homes.

This is the account of their childhoods...

For further information contact Panda Publications, 75 Valley Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3PX, tel. 01509-821576, or email Hazel on [h.jacques@ntlworld.com](mailto:h.jacques@ntlworld.com)



# EMOHA Diary

There isn't enough room to include everything in our printed diary. We prioritise events which deal with twentieth and twenty-first century history which is where EMOHA's focus lies. You can find what is probably the most complete listing of historical talks and events in Leicestershire on our website at <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/news/diary.html>. Send details of oral history and general history events for inclusion in the next EMOHA Diary. All news, views or diary dates must reach us by Friday 16th August 2002.

All of the events advertised in the Oral History Diary are open to the public unless otherwise stated.

## June

**Sat 1st - Sun 25th August:** *Meeting God In Leicester.* Exhibition (New Walk Museum) providing a contemporary view of Hindu devotion.

**Mon 10th - Fri 14th (10 am - 12pm & 5.30 - 8.30pm):** *The Village in the Past.* Exhibition of photographs, mining memories and family history. At Bagworth W.M.C.

**Sat 15th - Sun 25th August:** *A Taste of Leicester.* Exhibition (New Walk Museum) looking at the growth of Asian food in Leicester.

**Tue 18th (2.00 pm):** *Waterside Loughborough and Barrow-On-Soar.* A guided walk. Meet Charnwood Water.

**Sat 22nd (2.00 pm):** *Market Bosworth.* A guided walk. Meet Market Place.

### Sun 23rd

- **2.30 pm:** *Tomb Trail.* A guided walk. Meet Welford Road Cemetery.
- **7.00 pm:** *A Midsummer Night's Haunt.* A guided walk. Meet Town Hall.

### Mon 24th

- **2.30 pm:** *Memories of a Leicester Life.* Readings from Dorothy K Walton's book by the Outreach Writers Group, Fosse Library, Mantle Road.
- **7.30 pm:** Christine Thornhill (EMOHA), *Children's books and magazines from the 'golden age'.* Organised by the Community History Network, City Rooms, Hotel Street.
- **7.30 pm:** *A guided walk around Newtown Linford.* Meet outside Newtown Linford Church.
- **7.30 pm:** *Midsummer's Ghost Walk.* A guided

walk. Meet outside St Mary de Castro.

**Tue 25th (7.00 pm):** *Waterside Glen Parva.* A guided walk. Meet County Arms Car Park.

**Thu 27th (7.15 pm):** Jane Berry, *Guided Walk around Kirby Muxloe.* Birstall and District Local History Society, Birstall Library, Wanlip Lane.

**Sun 30th (2.30 pm):** *A guided tour around Humberstone Garden Suburb.* Meet St Mary's Church, Humberstone.

## July

**Tue 2nd (7.00 pm):** *Waterside Birstall.* A guided walk. Meet St James' Church County Arms Car Park.

**Thu 4th (7pm):** *Guided tour of the Archer Cottage.* Organised by Burbage Heritage Group, Millennium Hall, Britannia Road, Burbage.

**Tue 9th (7.00 pm):** *Waterside Aylestone.* A guided walk. Meet St. Andrews Church.

**Sun 14th:** *Coach tour of Fosse Way.* Cost £16. Ring 0116 2611576 for further information.

**Tue 16th (7.00 pm):** *Waterside Quorn and Barrow-On-Soar.* A guided walk. Meet Quorn Cross.

### Sun 21st

- **2.00 pm:** *Legends and Traditions.* A guided walk. Meet Town Hall.
- **2.00 pm - 5.00 pm:** Drop into the Refreshment Rooms at Abbey Park

and share your memories of the park with staff from EMOHA. Further information, telephone 0116 252 5065 or email [emoha@le.ac.uk](mailto:emoha@le.ac.uk).

**Mon 22nd (7.00 pm):** *Welford Road Cemetery.* A guided walk. Meet Cemetery Gates.

### Tue 23rd

• **7.00 pm:** *Waterside Market Harborough.* A guided walk. Meet Angel Hotel.

• **7.15 pm:** Alan Joyce, *A Guided Walk around historic Enderby.* Meet at Enderby Parish Church. Organised by Enderby Heritage Group.

**Tue 30th (7pm):** *Waterside Loughborough.* A guided walk. Meet Charnwood Water.

## August

**Sun 4th (2.00 pm):** *Mountsorrel.* A guided walk. Meet Stonehurst Farm. Cost £4.00/£3.00.

**Mon 5th (7.30pm):** Derek Seaton, *A Tiger and a Fusilier.* Organised by the Community History Network, City Rooms, Hotel Street.

**Sat 10th (2.00 pm):** *Barrow-On-Soar.* A guided walk. Meet Holy Trinity Church.

**Sun 11th (2.00 pm):** *Hidden Leicester.* A guided walk. Meet Town Hall. Cost £3.50/£2.50.

**Sat 24th (7.30pm):** *Enderby Heritage Group open meeting.* Enderby Civic Centre, King Street.

**Wednesday 28th (2.00pm):** *Lost Inns and Coffee Houses.* A guided walk. Meet Town Hall.

## East Midlands Oral History Archive

The East Midlands Oral History Archive is a partnership between the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester, the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), and Leicester City Museums and Library Services. It is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish the first large-scale archive of oral history recordings for Leicestershire & Rutland.

Its first aim is to retrieve as many of existing recordings as possible, and to make them more accessible through a website, an on-line catalogue, newsletters and edited CD-ROMS and cassettes. In addition to the Record Office itself, some of the recordings will also be available later in libraries and museums. EMOHA also aims to generate new oral history recordings through its own programme of

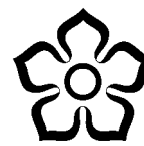
interviewing, and by providing advice, training and support for community groups, museums and heritage organisations, students and other individuals who are interested in developing their own projects.

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LEICESTERSHIRE  
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The next issue of *talking history* will focus on Black history to tie in with *black history month*. Please send us any stories, diary dates or ideas for articles that fit in with this theme or any other that interests you. We are particularly interested in receiving reports and updates on how our readers' oral history projects are going.