
Lillington Local History Society

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 42 SEPTEMBER 2026



Contents

Church Lane

When Our Gardens Were Full of Wildlife ...

John Machen –
1821-1887

Those Magnificent Men in
Their Flying Machines

Visit to Marton Museum of
Country Bygones

Lillington Wish List

Programme of Meetings

Meetings take place at
St Mary Magdalene's
Church, Church Lane,
Lillington at 4.30 pm on
the first Friday of each
month (apart from
August).

Details of our programme
can be found on our
website:

<https://lillingtonlocalhistory.org.uk>

Church Lane

Here is an old photograph of Church Lane, which I purchased a few years ago. The photograph, excluding the border, measures approximately 6 cm x 9 cm (2.25 inches x 3.5 inches).

The photograph was printed by 'Beck, Leamington', which was probably John Beck, who was a Leamington based printer in the 1800s. The number on it would suggest that 'Beck' sold a selection of such photographs, but this is the only one that I have seen.

I was trying to estimate when the photograph might date to and have concluded that it would likely be somewhere between 1856 and 1878, but probably nearer the later year. My reasoning is as stated on the following page.

Tim Nunan



Earliest Date

There is a painting by Thomas Baker, a prolific artist of the Leamington area, which shows a similar scene (same building to the left and church in the background). That painting is at Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum but can be viewed on the 'Windows on Warwickshire' website. A date of 1856 can be seen next to the artist's signature. I suspect that the photograph was taken some time after this, as the footpath in the painting is less well defined, and the bushes wilder.



Latest Date

Looking at St. Mary Magdalene's Church in the background, it appears to have the original churchyard wall, close to the church building. There is a fence above the wall which matches the style of the churchyard fence in a photo of the church on the 'Windows on Warwickshire' website, which has been attributed a date of the 1860s.

According to W. Cooper¹ the churchyard was extended away from its close proximity to the church in 1878. It was extended again in 1890, down to the wall next to the Lychgate, and then the newest area beyond that was prepared between 1927 and 1932. This photograph appears to have been taken before the first churchyard extension in 1878.

The building on the left of the photograph was located where the front gardens of numbers 11 and 15 Church Lane are now. There were buildings near to this spot on the 1711 map prepared by James Fish, but not this actual building, so it must have been erected between 1711 and 1856 (date of the Thomas Baker painting). It stood on the site until somewhere between 1955 and 1966, when it was replaced by the current buildings – so older members of the community may still remember it.

An Ordnance Survey map from 1886 shows that, at that time, this was the only building between the bottom of Church Lane and the Church. This was still the case when a map was produced in 1923. Most of the other buildings around Church Lane were built in the 1950s.

Tim Nunan

¹ Extracted from William Cooper's book 'History of Lillington', published in 1940.

Photos – Church Lane - Tim Nunan's Personal Collection
Thomas Baker Painting – © Windows on Warwickshire

When Our Gardens Were Full of Wildlife ...

The BBC1 nature series *Secret Gardens* reminds me how wonderfully full of wildlife ours and other Lillington gardens were in the 1950s and 1960s. I hope that is still the case and would love to read members' memories of their own childhood discoveries and perhaps hear of the current situation.

In the mid 1960s I could sometimes be found sitting on the swing in our garden at 20 Grange Road at dusk in summer, waiting for hedgehogs to stir. Often one, or more, would come snuffling and crashing through the leaves below the privet hedges, and then, oh the heart-stopping thrill of seeing the dark little outline in the gathering gloom. Hedgehogs run surprisingly fast, so I always had to be careful to stage my run carefully to be sure to catch one.

I had a terrible habit of wanting to keep virtually any reasonable-sized animal of any species that we came across, allegedly to 'study' but when it came to hedgehogs I was only allowed by my parents to keep one, and even then, only for a night. Other creatures were not so lucky: such as toads, voles, a mole, a slow worm (captured in Wales and brought back home where she gave birth to 12 beautiful babies.) But our mother did draw the line at the leeches that my older brother Michael once brought back from 'The Cliffs' - the Leamington brickworks ponds.

Mike kept a diary from the age of 12, mostly to note items of natural history, or climate interest. An entry for 27 July 1964, when Mike was 14 and I was 11, tells how we saw 67 Small Tortoiseshells on our privet hedge flowers in just one day. Even if we counted some twice by accident it is a phenomenal number, which would never be equalled in a day today. Mike's diary added: "This year the Small Tortoiseshell is very common, and we have had a dozen or more in the house itself."

We have been reminiscing because of 'Secret Garden', the BBC series. Mike remembers: "Eyed Hawk Moth caterpillars on one of the apple trees; stick caterpillars (Scalloped Hazel) on the lilac by the house; at least one Great Crested Newt; watching a white male Ghost Moth patrolling up and down by the washing line; two slugs new to Warwickshire; several species of bumble bee, plus Leaf-Cutter Bee; a Vapourer Moth caterpillar on the Lord Derby apple tree (it turned into a female moth, which is wingless in this species, but I took it with me when we went to the Isle of Wight, so it was more widely travelled than almost any male). On the cabbages were caterpillars of the Dot Moth and Cabbage Moth as well as Large White and Small White. The gooseberries had some rather unpleasant sawfly larvae."

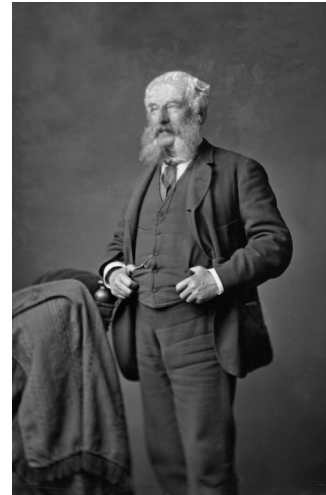
All this was in a normally cultivated garden created by our father, with plenty of lawn, flowers, flowering shrubs, fruit trees and a vegetable patch which was hidden behind the flowering currant hedge that ran right across the centre of the garden. There were always soldier beetles on the tomato plants, and everywhere lots of different ladybird species - including the tiny yellow twenty-two spot, the occasional shrew, and, though very rarely, a bat. We'd love to read of other people's garden wildlife memories.

Tina Rowe

John Machen 1821-1887

John Machen was a surgeon by profession, and started in practice in Dartmouth, Devon. He and his wife Ellen moved to Leamington, to Lillington Lodge, (now part of Arnold Lodge School), where they remained for the next thirty years.

He qualified as a Magistrate in 1860 and chaired the Kenilworth Petty Sessions at Milverton from 1879. He was a well-known Freemason, chairing meetings and organising charity concerts and balls. He was one of the subscribers to the Pump Rooms in 1861 and was also involved in the running of the Warwick Board of Guardians, the Income Tax Commission, the Warneford Hospital, and the Dispensary. He supported the establishment of the School for Cookery, at the Albert Hall, Kenilworth Street in 1876, and he chaired the Lillington Local Board, where he sat from 1860 until his death, and was also a Churchwarden at Lillington Parish Church. In 1869, he was secretary of the North Warwickshire Hounds.



When Col. Machen died in November 1887, amongst tributes to him and his outstanding range of achievements, a ward at the hospital was named after him, (there is still a Machen Ward at Warwick Hospital) and that his life in Leamington had been dedicated to the benefit of its townspeople. Two stained glass windows were erected in his memory. The first, at the Warwick Union Chapel, was funded by the Guardians and Officers of the Union, and dedicated to 'the memory of Colonel John Machen, JP, Chairman 1884-1887'. The second was at the Warneford Hospital Chapel. At the foot, a brass plaque bore the inscription, 'To the memory of Colonel John Machen, JP, DL, President of this Hospital, Chairman of Committee, 1871-1877. This window is erected in token of esteem and affection by his colleagues on the Committee, April 1888'.

Rev Rosemary Pantling, Healthcare Chaplain at Warwick Hospital, has provided Lisa Reay, a fellow researcher from Stoneleigh History Society, with the information that the stained glass window erected in memory of Col. Machen is one of two which were rescued from the Warneford Hospital Chapel before demolition and which, for some years, framed the entrance to the chapel at Warwick Hospital. They are now installed on the back wall of the chapel which is open 24 hours a day and so can be visited at any time. The window shows, on the left, the figure of St John, Evangelist and Apostle and, on the right, Saint Luke, patron saint of doctors and healers. Sadly, the stonework with the memorial inscriptions was not transferred when the windows were recycled, but it is thought that the one on the left was dedicated to Rev. Canon J T Thorn, Vicar of Stoneleigh for 33 years, Vice-President of the hospital and Chairman of the Hospital Committee 1887-1906. The window on the right is almost certainly the one dedicated to John Machen.

Image of Col. Machen © WCRO, 2019

Margaret Rushton

Image of stained-glass windows © Rev Rosemary Pantling 2026

Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines

My grandmother, Doris Moore, moved to number 2 The Holt, in Lillington, with her parents at some point between 1923 and 1929. The family had previously lived in various premises around Leamington town centre.

During reminiscing with my mother, my grandmother said that whilst living at The Holt, she witnessed some of the earliest aeroplanes as they flew around Lillington. She spoke about it as though the aircraft had used the current Holt playing field for their performances. Unfortunately, my grandmother has been a resident of the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene's for over 25 years now so is no longer available to provide more details. Having done a little digging (on the internet, not in the churchyard) I can confirm that aeroplanes did indeed perform at Lillington, in a field off Cubbington Road.

The flights happened in 1932, and at that time, to the north-east of the current Holt playing field, there was one large open field all the way up to the Cubbington Waterworks (where the Cubbington Waterworks play area is now). This was the largest field off Cubbington Road. I suspect that my grandmother stood in The Holt field to watch the display, as there was an entrance fee for spectators, and she was not well off. The Holt field at that time would have been in use either as a sand pit, or as allotments. The actual show is likely to have been in the big field, just over the hedge from The Holt field. It can't have been far away, as my grandmother associated The Holt field with the flying.

Sir Alan Cobham's Flying Circus made a huge tour of the country and, on the afternoon and evening of Friday 15th July 1932, they performed at the Flying Field, Cubbington Road, Lillington. I am not surprised that this made a big impression on my then 24-year-old grandmother.

You can see videos on YouTube showing excerpts of that tour, including one shot a fortnight before the Lillington show (search – 'Cobham's Flying Circus' or 'Cobham's National Aviation'). The show involved 12 aircraft. These included two, ten-passenger carrying biplanes (AS.4 Ferry) manufactured by 'Airspeed' especially for this flying circus. Also, a Tiger Moth (equipped for upside down flying); a Comper Swift; an Autogiro (large rotors on top, like a helicopter); a Martlet for aerobatics; a Desoutter (cabin), a Gipsy Moth for flying lessons; two gliders, and two other aeroplanes to tow the gliders and to give aerobatic flights to passengers.

The show included rolls, loops, upside down flying, wing-walking, formation flying, a parachute jump, and a race between a car on the ground and an aircraft above.

The Mayors of Leamington and Warwick were the first two passengers to have a flight. The Rev. J. A. Murray spent seven-and-sixpence to be a passenger for some stunt-flying. The Leamington Carnival Queen, Miss Cissie Woodward, also took to the air.

A lot of people clearly enjoyed this spectacle, but not everybody was happy with the pilots. A nurse, Vera, complained in the local paper that four days after the show, on Tuesday 19th July 1932, the planes were flying over Leamington from 2 am – 4 am.

The following year, in May 1933, Sir Alan Cobham returned to the area for his second visit, but this time he went to Harbury Lane, just south of Whitnash, which by then had an aviation ground. A Major Bonniksen had purchased some land there around January 1932 and then spent the next few months getting it ready – cutting down hedges, erecting hangers, etc.

Online, I can see a flyer (how apt) for one of the 1933 shows which had an entrance fee of 1/3d (one shilling and three pence) for adults and 6d (six pence) for children. They also charged 1/- (one shilling) for parking cars – only the wealthy had cars back then.

In his 'History of Lillington' local historian John M. Winterburn recalled that about 1934-38 there were aeroplane flights promoting the sale of new houses around 'Highland Road, Lonsdale Road, etc' – the flights taking off from the site, before the houses were built. Note that this area was part of the large field which I believe Sir Alan Cobham used for his flights a few years earlier, in 1932.

In an age where many people fly abroad each year, it is difficult for us to comprehend just how extraordinary seeing people flying would have been.

(See the Monday 11th July 1932 edition of the 'Leamington, Warwick, Kenilworth & District Daily Circular' for more details. Other editions after the event contain additional details.)

Tim Nunan

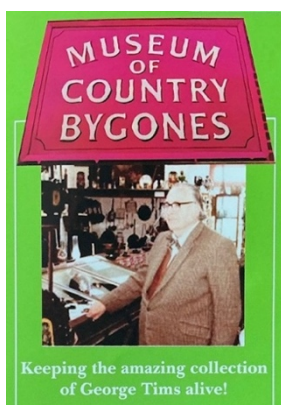


This photograph was sent to us by a gentleman, Jonathan Fahie, who found it in the back of an old picture frame. As you can see its title is 'Road to Lillington' and the date appears to be Winter 1890-1891. Unfortunately, the name of the photographer isn't very clear, but it looks like J L Ranting or Ponting?

Do you recognise this road? If you have any suggestions as to where it might be, then please let us know.

Note: It's possible, of course, that it could be Lillington in Dorset, rather than in Warwickshire ... but who knows!

Visit to Marton Museum of Country Bygones, 3rd July 2026



On a beautiful sunny July afternoon, twenty-two members of LLHS made the short journey to Marton, to visit the astonishing collection of former postman George Tims, who moved from Leamington to Marton in 1954. His finds, which soon outgrew his home, were moved to the loft of the stables at the vicarage, enabling George to open his collection to the public a decade later. As he amassed even more items of interest, he moved them to Hall Farm, at the corner of the present Louisa Ward Close. When builders moved in to develop the farm site, it was time for one last move, to the museum's present location at the end of the Close and overlooking the playing fields.

George died in 2005 and the museum is now run by Trustees, who reorganised, catalogued and labelled the thousands of fascinating items on display. We enjoyed reminiscing about items from our various childhoods and learning how some of the farming equipment in particular worked. One interesting exhibit came from close to home, - the Lillington Washing Machine - made by HMV elsewhere but donated by a family from Highland Road in Lillington.



Who knew that an old-time harvester had SEVEN meals a day, or a Gloucestershire rhyme has it, "Forebit and Breakfast, Rearbit and Dinner, Numchins and Crunchins and a bit after Supper"!



I was quite taken aback to see my own kitchen scales as part of the Bakery display! I still use them when the digital scales fail to register something considered too heavy. Perhaps my grandchildren are right after all - I am a museum piece and should be labelled and put on a shelf somewhere in the dark!

We had a wonderful afternoon, topped off by tea and scrumptious home-made cake. The volunteers did a terrific job - and the re-wilded part of the field and its butterflies was equally impressive. The museum is free, and open from the last Sunday in May until the last Sunday in September, from 2.00-4.00 pm - and on the Heritage Open Weekend in September.

Museum of Country Bygones – www.martonmuseum.co.uk

Margaret Rushton

Photos : Margaret Rushton

Lillington Wish-List (includes a camel)

(A few local people who love their community, and want to encourage more fun and togetherness, have said that they would like a camel on Buckley Road).

We want Lillington to bloom and grow
Exciting scenes and dreams wherever we go,
We want shindigs in Mason's Park,
On The Holt, by the Oak, let's have midsummer larks,
And we want a camel on Buckley Road.

We don't want to only cope,
We want fun and houses filled with hope,
Neighbours to smile and say hello,
Open doors, with laughs and friends to follow,
And we want a camel on Buckley Road.

We want green spaces with seeds we'll sow
With wild beds of reds and blues and gold,
Pound Lane, Valley Road, The Crest, to grow
10,000 yellow sunflowers to explode,
And we want a camel on Buckley Road.

We want a café with toast and tea,
Where we can banter and knit, and natter till three,
We want magic and joy in our Lillington show,
On Gresham Avenue they want a hippo,
And we want a camel on Buckley Road.

Matt Black

This poem was performed at the Lillington Speaks event on 2nd May 2026 and sent to us, on behalf of Matt, by Will Jackson.

Visit our website:
<https://lillingtonlocalhistory.org.uk>

This Newsletter is published by
Lillington Local History Society, c/o Lillington Free Church, Cubbington Road, Leamington Spa, CV32 7AL.
The views expressed in the Newsletter are personal to the contributors
and are not necessarily the views of the Society.