

LECKHAMPTON YESTERYEAR



Eric Miller

Revised Edition

Leckhampton Yesteryear offers a vivid picture of everyday village life at the turn of the 20th century. Though situated on the outskirts of Cheltenham, Leckhampton still had an identity of its own and was typical of many another English village at that time, with its activities centred on the church and the manor. The building of the Parish Hall in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year encouraged the growth of community life.

From contemporary accounts in parish magazines, the author describes village fêtes and entertainments, Sunday School outings by horse-drawn carriage, 'fifty thrifty British housewives char-a-banging off to Worcester,' smoking concerts, *tableaux vivants*, recreation classes, the Parish Library, hospital egg days, bandage parties and charitable work in the days before organised state welfare. The book traces the growth of local branches of the Mothers' Union, the Men's Society, Boy Scouts, the Church Lads' Brigade, Girls' Friendly Society and cricket and football clubs. Advertisements placed by local shops, most of them now vanished, illustrate the trades and goods that were in vogue. We also read of the enlargement of the village school in 1906, and the latent divisions that this brought to the surface. The vitality displayed by the villagers both at work and at play is everywhere apparent.

Leckhampton Yesteryear is full of curiosities, with something of interest for everyone, not only for its factual accounts but also for the portrayal of the attitudes and opinions of the time, which it is instructive to compare with our own. A quarter of a century after the book first appeared, this edition has been produced to cater for a digital age, when such contrasts are even more striking. Modern technology has enabled improved graphics and a number of alterations and additions have been made to the text.

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• REVIEW OF FIRST EDITION, TAKEN FROM *GLOUCESTERSHIRE RURAL VOICE*

The author has used a remarkable run of **Parish Messengers**, edited by a succession of eight incumbents to describe community life in Leckhampton for over 50 years. These monthly publications are a veritable goldmine and provide Eric Miller with material for seven chapters. These comprise 'The Parish Magazine', 'The Parish Hall', 'Societies and Recreation', 'Entertainments', 'Peace and War', 'The Church', and finally, 'The School'.

Adverts in the Magazine are used to reconstruct the shops and tradespeople in the village and efforts to enlighten readers on local history and even the work of the Russian police in 1888. The building of the parish hall itself in the 1890s provided a venue for a local library, recreation classes, boys' organisations, the Girls' Friendly Society, and men's and mother's meetings. Village fetes, flower shows and excursions further and further afield illustrate the vitality of community life, invariably supported by well-known families at Leckhampton Court.

Chapter five, 'Peace and War', covers royal occasions of death and coronation and local war efforts from the time of the Boer War onwards. The chapter on 'The Church' focuses on the incumbents, several long serving church officials, special services like Harvest Festivals and additions to the church fabric. Missionary giving to both local and international causes remind the reader that life in Leckhampton was certainly not insular. Finally, the creation of new schools is described in 1906 and, for infants, in 1931.

Eric Miller is to be congratulated on such a lively and interesting use of the parish magazine and the sense of significant historical change over the period from 1888 to 1939 in a community in which everybody had opportunities to share. It is sad that our modern atomic individualism has so often cramped our lives within our own communities. Can we learn from the past?

Bryan Jerrard