The Society is always keen to hear from potential volume editors regarding new proposals for publications, and is at present particularly keen to have suggestions of volumes covering aspects of Devon's history. If you have an idea for editing a volume along the above lines, please contact the honorary Editor, Professor Andrew Thorpe, Department of History, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4RJ, email a.j.Thorpe@ex.ac.uk

Prof. Andrew Thorpe
(Hon. Editor)

Prof. Christopher Holdsworth
(Chair of Council)

Official Society Contacts:

www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk

President	Prof. Malcolm Todd	01392 270564
Chairman	Shirley Purves shirleypurves@btopenworld.com	01395 232397
Vice Chairman	Elizabeth Maycock	01395 272755
Secretary	Margaret Lewis ss3681@eclipse.co.uk	01404 42002
Treasurer	Dr Sadru Bhanji sadru@bhanji.fsbfc.co.uk	
Membership Secretary	Gerald F Quinn	01803 607256
Programme Secretary	Jane Bliss jbhistory@hotmail.co.uk	01271 870723
Editor (The Devon Historian)	Dr Andrew Jackson andrew.Jackson@bishopsg.ac.uk	01522 527347
Editor (Devon History News)	Chris Jago generals@hotmail.co.uk	01395 273569
Council Members	• Tony Collings • John Draisey • Derek Gore • Prof. C.Holdsworth • Philippe Planel • Gill Selley • Robin Stanes	

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Devon History News

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• Newsletter of the Devon History Society •

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TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Two important issues are now facing the Society which I would like to share with you. First, our Treasurer, Dr Sadru Bhanji has decided to retire from the post at the 2009 AGM, to be held in October, after ten years' service to the Society. The role of treasurer is an absolutely key one and Sadru has husbanded our resources to a very high level.

Whoever takes over from Sadru will inherit a meticulously kept set of accounts, all details of dealings with the Charity Commissioners and an efficient and informative web-site, all this apart from following in the footsteps of someone who has made a significant contribution to the efficient running of the Society. His will be a hard act to follow but I am sure there must be some brave soul among our members who can look into their own achievements and think "Yes. Perhaps I could do the same!" If that person is YOU we shall be delighted to hear from you. A general description of the role is now displayed on the Home Page of the Society's website. Please get in touch either with Sadru or me to discover what an interesting and highly satisfying project awaits you.

Secondly, it is healthy for every society to look into its workings, management and structure every decade at least, so you will agree it is time for the Devon History Society to do just that. Priority must be given to the members' wishes and Council needs to ensure that you are getting what is actually wanted from the running of the Society. To do this properly, and to help the Council to act in the way YOU want, we have put together two brief survey questionnaires; one for individual and family members and a separate one for affiliated and corporate members. The questionnaire relevant to you is enclosed as a separate sheet. We ask you to fill in and return these to Gerald Quinn as soon as possible. We intend to discuss the responses at a later Council meeting and the findings will be considered at the AGM in October. This may well be an interesting undertaking... so get thinking!

While you are filling in this questionnaire, please spare a moment to ponder whether you yourself can help the Society in any way with ideas, writings and even volunteering to become a member of Council at some time. We are already expanding our former territory and you could be just the person to help promote a new venture.

Shirley Purves
Chairman

Annual History Dissertation Prize Winners

At last October's AGM, Society past president, Dr Bill Stephens, had the pleasant task of presenting the prizes for the annual history dissertation competition. The winner was Katherine Eggleston, for her dissertation on Church Monuments in South Devon, and runner-up Katie Blake, with her study of Infanticide in Devon.

The minutes of the 2008 AGM will be available for inspection at the 2009 AGM, or by appointment with Margaret Lewis, the Society's secretary. In the meantime, copies of the abridged AGM minutes are enclosed with this newsletter as a separate item.

Presentation of the Society's Book of the Year Awards

The Society's book awards for 2007 took place in November. Society Vice Chairman, Elizabeth Maycock reports:

This year the Devon Book of the Year Awards were presented at a joint event between Devon County Council and Devon History Society as part of the Hoskins' centenary programmes. The awards were given at a well-attended Open Day held by the West Country Studies Library in Exeter's Central Library on 8 November 2008. During the day the selected books were on view at the Studies Library.

A short list of thirteen books was chosen from one hundred and sixty one books on Devon published in 2007, by the Society's book choice committee. From the thirteen books, three awards were made this year. The Local Society Book Award went to Lest we Forget: the Tavistock Fallen of the Second World War by Alex Mettler and Gerry Woodcock, (Tavistock and District Local History Society).

The Devon Book of the Year Award choice was Brunel's Hidden Kingdom By Geoffrey Tudor, and the new W G Hoskins Book Award was won by Ancient Country: the Historic Character of Rural Devon, by Sam Turner which was received on his behalf.

After the welcome and introduction by Simon Timms, Head of Culture, Devon County Council, the awards were announced by Shirley Purves, Chairman of Devon History Society. The first two presentations were made by Councillor Sheila Hobden, Executive Member for Culture, Devon County Council, and the new Hoskins Book Award was presented by Susie Hewitt, daughter of the late Professor Hoskins (photo above). It is proposed that this should become an annual award.

Conference 2009 - People and Landscapes

As reported in the August issue of this newsletter the Society, in conjunction with the Devonshire Association and the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, is organising a two-day conference on People and Landscapes on 4th and 5th April 2009 at Baring Court, St Luke's Campus, University of Exeter. Subjects to be addressed include the Mapping of Devon Towns, Landscapes of Parks and Gardens, Exeter and the Civil War, Quaker Meeting Houses and Burials, Devon's Awkward History, Antiquaries and the Devon Landscape, A mid-Devon Landscape Microcosm, Making Early Devon, Landscapes of Mining and Early Devon Agriculture.

Those attending may take part in one or both days. The cost per day is £18. Payment should be made to Margaret Lewis, 17, Pine Grove, Honiton, Devon EX14 2HT.

- DHS Spring and Summer meetings - 2009 -

The Society's Spring and Summer meetings will be on Saturday 9th May and Saturday 27th June, with visits to the newly formed Alphington Local History Group (9th May) and the Mortehoe Heritage Centre (27th June). Alphington's Rowena Jay, and Jane Bliss of the Mortehoe Heritage Centre provide some background to the visits.

In 2007, I started researching the fascinating history of Alphington. This work culminated in a book, Alphington Miscellany and Memories, and an accompanying exhibition. They were both successful, so myself and another villager decided to set up a local history group and in January 2008, the Alphington Local History Group was formed. Our aims are to further research the history of our village, preserve old Alphington pictures and documents, form a complete collection of parish magazines and collect any objects with Alphington connections.

We have been extremely fortunate so far with villagers either giving us old photographs and documents for preservation, or allowing us to scan them so we can hold copies in our collections. To date, I have well over three hundred pictures of old Alphingtons and past village groups, societies and residents. We are also in the process of creating a database of Alphington's christenings, marriages and burials and to date, the burials section has already been completed.

I have organised several other exhibitions through the group's first year, including a special display on Saturday 7th June to commemorate fifty years to the day since the last passenger train left Alphington Halt on the old Teign Valley Railway line. During the evening, some members participated in a walk, that followed the route of the old railway line through Alphington. The walk ended at the old site of Alphington Halt at 9.18pm, this being the time that the last passenger train left for St David's Station, Exeter.

We have organized several outings for members this year and also our first General Members Meeting/Social Evening, which featured a talk about the Blitz in Exeter and Alphington. Our venue was suitably attired with World War Two memorabilia to give the members the feeling that they had walked back in time as soon as they entered the room. Fortunately, our array of refreshments did not follow the war-time theme; there was absolutely no rationing!

Looking further forward into the future I would like to see the group forming a museum in the village where our pictures, documents etc. could be on permanent display for "Alphingtonians", both present and new.

On Saturday 9th May 2009, we are delighted to be hosting a Spring meeting for the Devon History Society. We are very much looking forward to meeting everyone and to making many new friends with similar interests.

Rowena Jay
Secretary
Alphington Local History Group

- Summer Meeting - Mortehoe -

Mortehoe Heritage Centre committee look forward to hosting the Devon History Society summer meeting in June. We feel sure that fellow members will enjoy visiting this lovely corner of North Devon. The coastal parish of Mortehoe comprises 4,000 acres of diverse countryside with striking cliff scenery, a designated area of outstanding natural beauty. Much of the surrounding land was bequeathed to the National Trust by Mrs Rosalie Chichester, the last incumbent of the Arlington Court estate. Archaeological evidence of prehistoric remains suggest very early settlement in the area. The Domesday Survey of 1086 gives details of six manors in Mortehoe.

The English parish church has historically been the most significant building at the heart of settled territory, and W.G. Hoskins identifies the ancient church of St Mary's Mortehoe as one of the most interesting in North Devon. The Tracey family took a great interest in the building, and by c.1300 the ancient Norman church had been significantly enlarged to include a tower and chancel. Local legend has it that Sir William de Tracey, one of the murderers of Thomas Becket in 1170, is buried in the church. Centuries passed before a burgeoning tourist trade created

the need for a new church in Woolacombe. This was completed in 1912 and dedicated to St. Sabinus. It was however the arrival of Methodism in the nineteenth century which transformed the spiritual landscape of the parish. Money was raised by local worshippers to build chapels in both villages, as well as a temperance mission hall and a teetotal coffee house.

The distinctive Morse Slates form the geological bedrock of the landscape. Indeed the jagged reefs around Morrepoint have resulted in a succession of shipwrecks over the centuries. No less than eight ships were wrecked at Mortehoe during a notoriously violent storm in October 1859. Smuggling and wrecking were a generally accepted means of supplementing meagre local incomes. A local resident was infamous for holding down drowning men under water with a pitchfork in order to stake her claim to salvage! Margaret Reed's excellent book , Woolacombe and Mortehoe on the Record, (Ivanne, 1997), provides a detailed history of the parish.

The relatively tranquil pace of life was dramatically interrupted in the summer of 1943, when the American Army set up an Assault Training Centre in Woolacombe. Over two thousand American troops were housed locally in nissan huts and tents. Woolacombe beach proved to be an ideal training ground on which to prepare for the D-Day landings. General Eisenhower was the most prominent of many high-ranking officers to visit, and Glenn Miller came to entertain the troops. A granite memorial was erected above Woolacombe beach in 1992, dedicated to the thousands of American soldiers who trained here.

Following the steep decline in the profitability of agriculture, tourism is now the bedrock of the local economy. A resident population of around two thousand people increases dramatically during the summer months.

Jane Bliss
Mortehoe Heritage Centre

Exeter's new Princesshay development opened last year. Society president, Malcolm Todd, provides a personal view of its meaning for the city's past and future.

Princesshay Reborn

The dust has now settled on the replanning and development of that part of central Exeter round Princesshay and Bedford Circus. Some reflection on this major episode in the history of the city may be permitted, for this project has aroused strong emotions for and against. The matter should be of interest to anyone with concerns in the history and future of Exeter. Cities evolve, change and in some cases, die. Those which do are usually those which fail to change. The most successful cities are those which adapt to changing circumstances and pressures. This raises the question: what does the redevelopment of Princesshay mean for the past and future of Exeter?

It is unlikely that many will argue that the former Princesshay complex was an architectural gem which had to be preserved in perpetuity. It formed part of the rebuilding of Exeter in the years after the Second World War. The planning and materials used were basic and simple, in tune with the time of austerity. Sixty years on, the architecture had lost any lustre it may have once possessed and was looking tired. The area lies in the north-east corner of the walled city. Along with Bedford Circus, this area had been severely damaged in the bombing raids of May 1942. Opportunities for examination of the site were limited after 1945, so that little was known of the early history of this part of the city of Exeter.

What of the architecture now in place? By any standards, it is a mixed bag. The curved structure which overlooks the junction of the High Street and Paris Street is impressive, though impaired by a hideous advertisement for a chain-store. Behind this frontage there are new buildings which range from the seemly to the excellent. The new piazza at the centre of the development adds an attractive focus to this part of the city, naturally more popular in summer than in winter. A little touch of Italy? Perhaps the most striking advance has been the opening up of new vistas from this focus. The Cathedral towers are now visible from several angles as they have not been for centuries. Sectors of the city wall are now exposed to advantage behind Southernhay. These are credits. On the debit side is the new Debenham store which presents a gloomy face towards the street linking the piazza with Southernhay. This

building does not look likely to increase its attraction over the coming years.

The new development will continue to provoke views for and against. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the people who matter, residents and visitors, approve of the new plan and its buildings. Questions abound. How will it all look fifty years on? And what does this portend for the High Street and Sidwell Street? There is food for thought here for citizens and planners alike.

Malcolm Todd

★★ A RECOMMENDED READ ★★

The Husbandry of Devon and Cornwall - a compilation of eight papers written by DHS founder member Robin Stanes, Andrew Jewell and Richard Bass, were originally published in a scattering of different journals. Robin Stanes now brings them together in one volume. Copies may be obtained from the author: Robin Stanes, Deep End, Deepdene Park, Exeter EX2 4PH, price £8.50p, including postage and packing.

The Lie of the Land - Parishscapes Project

A day conference will be held on Saturday 18th April 2009 at the Norman Lockyer Observatory, Sidmouth, East Devon. The conference programme looks at the topography, biodiversity, archaeology and extractive industries in the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and includes talks given by Sam Turner, John Allan, John Torrance, Katherine Barker and Phil Collins.

For further details, contact Philippe Planel at the Parishscapes Project, East Devon AONB Partnership, East Devon Business Centre, Heathpark, Honiton EX14 1SF. Telephone: 01404 46663 or email: pplanel@eastdevon.gov.uk

Some years ago, members of the Whimple History Society decided that premises were needed to permanently house the many artefacts that had been accumulated since the Society's formation in 1989. Eventually, a disused bishop was purchased and the rest, as they say, is history. Roger Smith, of the Whimple History Society, reports.

Whimple History Society and the Whimple Heritage Centre

In the summer of 1989, Mr Radford was looking for a home for a child's needlework sampler, which had been worked by 12 year old Mary Ann Pollard Harris in 1806. Later in the same year, on September 27th 1989, a group of people met at Straightway Head House and formed the Whimple History Society. The objective of the Society was 'to obtain and retain information relating to any aspect of the village history for the benefit of anyone interested'. The sampler was to become the Society's first significant artefact. There immediately flowed in an influx of artefacts, documents, photographs, etc from all directions.

The growth of the Society, and its artefacts, was so great that by 1995 the membership agreed to start to look for a suitable property to house all its records. So fund raising began in earnest. After many disappointments, over the next few years, the Society was eventually offered the lithay next to the New Fountain Inn, as well as a piece of land adjoining it at the rear. Sadly, the purchase of the property in December 2000 coincided with the death of Mr John Shepherd who was Chairman, founding member and leading light of the Society. Nevertheless, the Society continued to flourish and in May 2003 the Whimple Heritage Centre was opened by Mrs Angela Browning, our local M.P. The Centre at this stage consisted of two galleries which contained picture boards as well as display cabinets, highlighting the history of village life.

All efforts were now channelled into phase two of the project, the building of the Whiteway Wing. This extension to the Centre was to incorporate a gallery devoted to the history of Whiteway's Cyder Company. Above this gallery there would be offices, a research area and storage for the extensive archives. The additional funding was raised from various events and generous donations, especially from the Whiteway family, and allowed the Whiteway Wing to be opened by Mr and Mrs Eric Whiteway in May 2005.

In 2006, the Society was awarded a Heritage Lottery Grant that allowed us to invest in new display cabinets, filing cabinets, a computerised archive retrieval system, computers and a digital projector. There is a third phase to the project which is ongoing, which is to rebuild a dilapidated store into an improved storage facility and workshop area that will allow the Society to develop workshops on country crafts etc.

Whilst the development of the Heritage Centre has been the major focus of the Society in the last eight years, we continued to provide a full programme of events for members and the village. The Society resurrected wassailing in 1993, the first time since 1931. The evening has now progressed so that it is very much part of the east Devon calendar and always takes place on January 17th , attracting well over one hundred participants. The Society welcomes group visits to the Heritage Centre and can also arrange group guided walks.

Further information can be seen on the Society's website www.whimple.org

Roger Smith

Devon and Cornwall Record Society

The Devon and Cornwall Record Society exists to publish and transcribe original records in order to promote the study of the history of the two counties. It typically publishes a volume a year. Many of you will already be subscribers or at least familiar with its publications. Volumes comprise a scholarly Introduction by the volume editor (typically between 6,000 and 10,000 words), and an edition of a document or set of documents: the whole published volume to be somewhere between 200 and 300 pages.

Recent volumes have included Cornish Wills 1342-1540 (2007); The Acland Family: Maps and Surveys 1720-1840 (2006), The Political Correspondence of Sir Francis and Lady Acland, 1910-29 (2005) and The Survey of Cornwall by Richard Carew (2004).