

Devon History News



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• NEWSLETTER OF THE DEVON HISTORY SOCIETY •



Castle Drogo (see article on page 7)

From the Editor

This time last year, you were invited to complete a membership survey questionnaire designed to help Council direct its energies towards achieving those outcomes that you, the membership, wanted. The results were analysed and then discussed at October's AGM. In this issue, Membership Secretary Gerald Quinn, and Programme Secretary Jane Bliss, set out some of the proposals that have emerged from the survey and incorporated into future events.

Several changes were made to the membership of Council at the AGM and these are commented on by Chairman, Shirley Purves. The changes included the election of two new Life members as well as personnel changes in the positions of President, Vice Chairman and Treasurer. Shirley also posts an early warning of the need to identify a new Secretary at the AGM next October. So this is no time to relax!

One of the emerging points from the survey was the need to improve communication with affiliated groups. This newsletter has articles from two affiliated group members. David Everett of the Chardstock Historical Records Group, explains how they dealt with over six hundred records relating to the sale of the estate of the Bishop of Sarum and Anthony Beard describes some of the activities of the Widecombe History Group. In addition, Roger Brien sets out some of the milestones that, over nearly two centuries, have marked the progress the Devon & Exeter Institution and Paula Clarke writes about the subject of our featured front cover picture, Castle Drogo.

Other items include announcements about some new books, an update on the Society's own anniversary book project, and a request from Canada for research assistance about a nineteenth century Devon artist.

If anyone, particularly from affiliated societies, has material for the next newsletter due in August, my contact details are on the back cover. The deadline for receipt is Saturday 10 July 2010.

Chris Jago
Editor

From the Chairman

The AGM in October brought changes and additions to the activities of the Society this year. First we had to say good-bye to two well-known and long term members of Council. Robin Stanes, retired farmer and well known writer on all matters agricultural was made a Life member. Thanks to him, a blue plaque now adorns the house near Crediton where Ernest Bevin grew up.

Elizabeth Maycock has been responsible for our annual programme for at least twelve years. She has spent many hours researching and liaising each event including the highly acclaimed seminar, which surrounds the AGM each year. People like Robin and Elizabeth are hard acts to follow and we wish them both well on their retirement. We were delighted to make them Life members in token of their long service to the Society.

After three years, our President, Professor Malcolm Todd, former Professor of Archaeology at Exeter and Durham universities retired and we welcomed Professor Christopher Holdsworth as his replacement. Malcolm was joint organiser of the successful seminar in April 2009 and in his final month he managed to acquire money from an education Trust fund of which more later. Christopher came to Exeter from UCL as Professor of Mediaeval History in 1977 and since he retired in 1991 has continued to pursue his great interest in monastic history. We are incredibly fortunate in having these two erudite educationalists as our Presidents.

Sadru Bhanji, treasurer for ten years, is another to whom we owe gratitude. He handed over a healthy, meticulously kept balance to Graham Bliss so we now have a husband and wife team on Council with Jane Bliss, Programme secretary. They bring a strong input from North Devon. We said goodbye to Derek Gore but are delighted to welcome back Todd Gray, an author who needs no introduction and Clare Greener, former Chairman of the Gardens' Trust.

Philippe Planel has become Vice Chairman and he and Professor Holdsworth are implementing the first use of the Trust money I mentioned. Under the tutelage of Jamie Byrom, a training day in local history is being set up for teachers of history in both primary and secondary schools especially as the new and envisaged syllabuses lay stress on local community history. As you

will see from Jane Bliss's account of the programme we have drawn heavily on the results of the survey conducted by Gerald Quinn. Lectures are to be organised, north, south, east and west of the county, which will also draw in the affiliated societies.

And there is more to come. So I happily foresee that 2010 will be a year full of interest and enjoyment. So a happy and healthy new year to one and all.

Shirley Purves
Chairman

From our new Treasurer

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself following my election as Hon Treasurer at the last AGM. My name is Graham Bliss and I am following on from Sadru Bhanji, who has stepped down after some ten years of excellent service. In fact, I would like to take this opportunity to most heartily thank Sadru for all the excellent work he has undertaken over the years. He has given me a great deal of help during the transition period from his tenure to mine, and indeed for effectively carrying on in the position while the bank mandate process was taking place.

I am not a historian by background, having trained as a geologist, and worked in the oil industry all my career. But geology is not really that far from history, and I very much look forward to being part of the team that takes the DHS forward.

For any financial matters, I can be contacted by email at grhmbllss@aol.com or by phone on 0798 961 3349.

Devon History Society Members' Survey Update

At the AGM in October, some time was provided for in the programme for feedback to members, for an exchange of comments and ideas and also for suggestions from the floor as to the further progress of the aims and ambitions of the Society.

Some very useful and perceptive comments ensued. It was encouraging that practically everyone present before the final session, stayed on to either listen or actively participate in the proceedings. Of those who responded to the survey, about sixty per cent were aged 71 or over, with none under age 41. Subsequent to the AGM, a meeting was held to consider how best to respond to this situation. It was decided that the Society should aim primarily to attract a wider and younger membership by expanding the range and locations of its activities. We are therefore planning to offer more Society events around the county to encourage a wider membership, particularly in north and west Devon. We also intend to provide a practical, interactive element in the annual programme by organising workshops, and to establish a more meaningful role for the affiliated societies.

The Society's current activities - the production of the journal and newsletter, the spring and summer meetings and the annual Devon Book of the Year - will all, of course, remain. Further details about the new events are set out in the following article from Programme Secretary, Jane Bliss.

If any member or affiliated society has any comments or suggestions (or indeed, any offers of help!), my contact details are on the back cover of this newsletter.

Gerald Quinn
Membership Secretary

Obituary

It is with great regret that we have to announce the death of our former Chairman, Adrian Reed. An appreciation of his contribution to the Devon History Society will be in the next issue of this Newsletter.

From the Programme Secretary

The extended programme for 2010 aims to provide a broader range of events and venues for members of Devon History Society. In addition to the regular spring and summer history days, we are introducing weekday morning seminars in locations across the county. In response to issues raised in the membership survey the one hour talks will incorporate a 'how to' element, including information on archives and sources for local historians. By allowing time for discussion following the presentations, we hope to encourage an exchange of ideas and information amongst the membership. There will be a maximum of twenty places available at these sessions. Future programmes could include at least one additional venue if they prove to be popular. During 2011 we hope to offer seminars at Tavistock, Bideford and Exmouth.

We are also able to offer members the opportunity of a guided visit to Devon Record Office, where the Devon County Archivist and the Heritage Outreach Officer have kindly offered to present an introduction to finding aids. This programme will be repeated on two Saturday mornings, with a maximum of twenty-five places available at each session on a first come first served basis. The spring meeting to Honiton includes a visit to Allhallows Museum, which houses the finest collection of Honiton lace in the world. Petrockstowe Local History Group are hosting the summer meeting. The group have recently spent three years researching the history of their village, culminating in the publication of a 285 page book.

The fortieth anniversary AGM will be held on Saturday 9th October 2010, in the usual venue at St Luke's Campus. A full programme will be included in the next edition of the newsletter. The afternoon session at the AGM includes a half hour presentation of university dissertation research, which has previously been awarded a prize by the Devon History Society. A further half hour will provide an opportunity for individual members (perhaps fifteen minutes each) or an affiliated group, to present a brief account of their current research. It is hoped that these presentations will be a regular feature of the AGM programme.

The programme for 2010 is included with this newsletter, and the 2011 programme will be available by late summer this year. Bookings can be made either for individual seminars/visits, or for several/all events. It would be

helpful if booking forms and any required payment can be posted to me no later than two weeks before events are due to take place. I will be pleased to hear from individual members or affiliated local history groups who may wish to give a brief presentation of their research at the AGM in 2011. My contact details are listed on the back cover.

Jane Bliss.
Programme Secretary

England's Last Castle

Perched high on a granite spur with far reaching views across Dartmoor, Castle Drogo really is an oddity. At first glance, you see a medieval castle made of locally quarried granite which has been in place for hundreds of years. Then you look a bit closer.

Castle Drogo is actually an Edwardian home, with all the modern comforts that we now take for granted such as central heating and electricity. Built between 1910 and 1931, it is the creation of two men: Julius Drewe, who was the founder of the Home and Colonial Stores, and Edwin Lutyens, who is often referred to as the greatest of English 20th century architects.

Drewe was a self-made millionaire by the age of 33 and had all the resources necessary to build his own country seat. After much research into his ancestry, he assumed a relationship with a Norman baron, Drogo de Teign, after whom the parish of Drewsteignton had been named in the 12th century. Thoughts of ancient family roots sparked his imagination, as did stunning views of Dartmoor. His dream of an ancestral home could only be satisfied by a spectacular building - a castle!

To find out more about Castle Drogo, please come and visit. For opening details, please visit the National Trust website www.nationaltrust.org.uk or call 01647 433306.

Make a Difference as a Volunteer

It would not be possible to open Castle Drogo without the volunteers who generously give their time to assist in the running of the property. If you have time to spare and enjoy the company of others with similar interests, volunteering at Castle Drogo can be very rewarding. It can provide the chance to meet all kinds of people, share and develop your own interests, join in social activities and take on new challenges, all within the unique environment of the last castle to be built in England.

There are many varied opportunities for volunteers: welcoming visitors in the house itself, helping in the Garden, Shop and Plant Centre, assisting with our Events and Education programme, or working with the Wardens out on the Estate.

All volunteers have their travelling expenses reimbursed and, after a qualifying period, they also receive free entry to National Trust properties and a discount in our shops.

If you are interested in getting involved as a volunteer, please contact Paula Clarke, Visitor Services Officer on (01647) 433114 or paula.clarke@nationaltrust.org.uk

Devon Book of the Year

The Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital 1741-2006 by Andrew Knox and Christopher Gardner-Thorpe was highly commended by the Devon History Society's awards for the 2008 books. This history is available at £8.99 for the paperback and £16.99 for the hardback from The Coach House, 1a College Road, Exeter, EX1 1TE, telephone 01392 433 941 and cgardnerthorpe@doctors.org.uk. Any profits will go to the Devon and Exeter Medical Society which promotes and awards funds for local medical research.

DHS Anniversary Book

The celebratory DHS anniversary book project is progressing quite well. Four final contributions have been received, and we have proposals for around thirty others. These cover quite a wide and interesting variety of subjects and some unusual aspects of Devon's history. Council will decide later in the year whether we have a sufficient number of suitable articles to make publication of the book feasible.

While we have had a good initial response to our invitation for contributions, we would still like to have more, so if anyone or a group is working on new research and would like to submit an article for consideration, there is still time before the deadline on 31 May 2010. In particular, more contributions from affiliated societies would be warmly welcomed. So if your local society has been working on a project that it thinks should be given a wider audience, please let us know by emailing Chris Jago on generalcj@hotmail.co.uk with brief details of the subject. He will send a copy of the guidelines if you have not got one.

Elizabeth Maycock

New publication: Exeter and the Trams: 1882-1931

Exeter Civic Society has just published 'Exeter and the Trams' by Julia Neville, an evocative account of the fifty years in Exeter's history when the 'Workmen's Cars' trundled through the city. The Society was lent a collection of Exeter photographs by tram historian John Perkin and Julia Neville has used these as the framework to explore the changes brought to city life by suburban growth, public transport, the extended franchise and by the motor cars which finally forced the trams off the streets.

The book is now available from:

<http://www.exetercivicsociety.org.uk/Publications.html>

Julia Neville
Exeter Civic Society

A Request for Research Assistance

Devon artist, Field Talfourd (1809-1874), is the subject of a research project currently being undertaken by Professor Jennifer Harris of Mount Allison University, Canada. If anyone can help Professor Harris in her researches, please contact her direct at the address below.

When Field Talfourd wrote of his residence in Plymouth "My room is too small-yet I fear London lest I should get into bad habits," he was not suggesting that Devon lacked its own notable distractions. Indeed, throughout the 1840s and 1850s Talfourd travelled throughout Devon, alone or in the company of other artists, enjoying himself immensely. He left behind portraits of individuals from across the region, amusing verse in the Three Crowns visitor book (at Chagford), and probably more than one admirer. He took with him works he would exhibit at the Royal Academy of Arts, a partial record of his subjects, and a shutter from the Saracen's Head Inn at Two Bridges (not liking their sign, he began an improved one on the shutter).

I would be very grateful for any information about, or photos or images by, Field Talfourd, that DHS members might be willing to share.

Professor Jennifer Harris.

Email: jharris@mta.ca

Post of Society Secretary

After serving as our Secretary for five years, Margaret Lewis has decided to step down at October's AGM. We shall therefore be looking for her replacement over the coming months. If you think you might be interested in taking up this vital post, please contact me on 01395 232397.

Shirley Purves
Chairman

When quantities of new local historical material become available, how might these be dealt with? David Everett, of the Chardstock Historical Records Group, writes about the Chardstock experience.

Starting a Village Web Museum

The Parish of Chardstock is located in the far eastern corner of Devon very close to the borders with Dorset and Somerset. In Victorian times it covered just over 5000 acres, had a population of about 1300 and in 1896 was transferred from Dorset to Devon. Researching local history is complicated by this boundary change, the local use of solicitors and land agents from Chard in Somerset and the holding of the Manor Estate by the Bishop of Sarum (Salisbury); the net result being that records can be held at any of the four county records offices at Chippenham, Dorchester, Exeter or Taunton.

In 2007 Chardstock Historical Records Group (CHRG) was granted access to records held by the present Lord of the Manor, Mr. Jonathan Milford. These extend to over 600 documents and while they are primarily concerned with the sale of the estate from the Bishop of Sarum to Lord Henley in 1873 and the dispersal sale by the Henley family in 1915, some documents date back to the 17th century. The question facing us was what do do with this information.

The Group strongly believed that it should be made available, without unreasonable delay, to as many researchers as possible, irrespective of where they lived. The obvious answer was a dedicated website, which could include other relevant information. Parish Registers were relatively straightforward because we had good quality transcripts made by local historians, as were Memorial Inscriptions. The censuses were a completely different matter. To achieve an acceptable standard, we had to transcribe each census from the original handwriting and this delayed the project by about four months. Overall the initial research and processing operations took two years.

The layout of the website was undertaken by a member of the Group, who is a graphic designer, with the aim of making it clear and simple to use. The site itself was created by a web author at a commercial rate. Each section has an introductory page with information in searchable PDF format. The PDFs can be amended or increased as further developments are made to the site. The overall cost should be within the capability of most local history groups.

In our case we obtained about a quarter of the funding through a grant obtained by our County Councillor, another quarter came from donations and the remainder from our general funds. Once established the site costs about £100 a year to cover hosting and domain name charges.

We hope to expand the website by having two updates each year, although this will depend on the availability of source material and the time taken to convert it into a format suitable for posting. Throughout the whole process, our main aim has always been to use local knowledge of names and places to achieve a high standard of accuracy, so researchers can have full confidence in the finished work.

The website can be viewed at www.chardstockwebmuseum.org and we can be contacted on e-mail chrg@btinternet.com by anyone who would like more information about the project.

David Everett
Chardstock Historical
Records Group

The Devon & Exeter Institution has been a feature of Exeter for nearly two centuries. Roger Brien reports.

Two centuries not out at the Devon & Exeter Institution

Let me commence by confessing that I have a tendency to exaggerate. My parents must have told me at least a billion times to desist from this annoying habit. This should be kept in mind regarding the title of this article. The Devon & Exeter does not celebrate its bicentenary until 2013 and I shall probably regret already having used this title when it does come around. What can be said, without any fear of exaggeration, is that it is a truly wonderful place and a great resource for historians.

Established in August of 1813 (inaugural meeting on the glorious twelfth) the founding proprietors rented rooms in the house of a widow on the corner of Swan Alley and High Street. Later that same year they acquired the lease on 7, Cathedral Close, the former town house of the Earl of Devon. The

conversion of the building created two large rooms, the outer a library, the inner a museum.

In the late 1860s the museum wing of the DEI (the acronym used by aficionados of the Institution) was closed and most of its collection was sent to the newly built Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Queen Street. The DEI was now a fully fledged library with reading rooms, without the distraction of a museum, although some of the exhibits lingered on well into the twentieth century. Just recently one such exhibit has returned from Tiverton Museum.

With a second room freed up, the collection grew apace with scholarly Edwin Parfitt, Librarian, being instructed to lighten the heavyweight tomes with popular fiction and poetry.

Move forward a century to the 1960's and having survived two world wars the Institution was described by WG Hoskins as 'silently gathering dust'. It had become a fossilised collection with inadequate cataloguing arrangements. By the early seventies it was becoming clear that it could not survive for much longer without outside help. It was then that the University of Exeter became involved in the daily running of the library. Concentrating on local history had been a major part of agreement between the Institution and the University. This has served to give the collection a focus and make it a valued resource for historians.



Today there is so much more to the DEI. Whilst the library is the central focus, there is also very fine in-house catering, with lunches available each day. Social evenings, lunchtime lectures and a cinema club are all part of the activities offered to members. Rooms overlooking the cathedral can be hired and a small meeting room at the rear of the building is also available at a modest cost. The Summer and Christmas parties are very popular, as is the annual book sale held each November.

The Devon & Exeter Institution has a vibrant feel, whilst at the same time retaining the atmosphere of a fine nineteenth century library. It is an important part of Exeter's heritage. New members are always welcome. Details are on our website at www.devonandexeterinstitution.org You are cordially invited to call in and sample the delights of a library two centuries old. Well, nearly two centuries...

Roger Brien
Devon & Exeter Chief Library Officer.

Famed for a particular song Widecombe must be one of the most widely known places in Devon. Antony Beard, of the Widecombe History Group writes about some of their recent activity.

Widecombe History Group

Formed in 1997, our group has, over the years, been able to gather together a sizeable collection of documents, photographs and other items of local historical significance which now forms a basis for our activities. Some of these items, such as apprenticeship indentures, tithe maps and property agreements, originate from the old parish records ("The Parish Chest"). The group has also organised some local exhibitions that have resulted in new items being given or loaned to the group. Other material has been loaned to the group to be copied, the originals passed back to the owners.

Over the years, the group has published several books and has also produced a CD containing images of some of the parish documents. The books include "All Along Down Along Widecombe Way", a look at Widecombe through the eyes of those that have lived there and "One Hundred Years and more of Ponsworthy", a look at how a village has changed from being a self-contained community with all local craftsmen, to a few local families and several holiday homes. The research that went into the production of our book, "The History of Widecombe Fair", proved very interesting and rewarding, and the reprint, with added photographs of "Dartmoor's Policeman Poet", has been another success. Further details can be found on the group's website (see details below).

Some items that had been lost to the Parish have been retrieved, and with the co-operation of Widecombe Parochial Church Council, they are now on display in Widecombe church. For instance, a Great Storm struck the valley of Widecombe on Sunday 21st October 1638 and is recorded on a board beneath the church tower. The tower itself was struck by lightning and great damage was done and people killed. Recently three bell clappers, reputed to have come from the tower at that time, have been given back to the parish and these are now mounted on board for all to see.

We are also concerned that local place names should be maintained and stones of interest be recorded. With the co-operation of Dartmoor National Park Authority, we have had a stone suitably engraved, and erected at 'Two Crosses', half a mile west of the village. We are also exploring the provenance of a boundary stone, engraved with the letter "D", that has been reported to us recently, which we hope to re-erect.

The group is now trying to create a Heritage and Educational Centre in Widecombe which will house a permanent exhibition and research centre accessible to all. We are also pursuing a number of smaller local projects. Details of these projects, together with those of the group's publications and other activities, can be found on our website at www.widecombe-in-the-moor.com.

Anthony Beard
Widecombe History Group

Upcoming Event

The Westcountry Studies Library, in conjunction with the Exeter Local History Society and RAMM, are holding a local history day on Saturday 27th February 2010. It will be held at Exeter Central Library between 10.30am - 3.30pm. The theme of the event is the port of Exeter - its trade and industry and Exeter's water supply.

OUT OF COUNTY EVENT:

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY LOCAL HISTORY DAY

To be held at 10.30-4.30 on Saturday 5th June 2010 at the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1.

The Annual Lecture will be given by Dr Adam Longcroft, Senior Lecturer in Local and Regional Studies, University of East Anglia, entitled 'New Insights into Vernacular Architecture: a View from the Flatlands of East Anglia'.

Tickets from BALH(L), 7 St Mark's Road, Salisbury SP1 3AY, price £15, (£12.50 for members).

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