

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Chairman's Chat

Judy Westacott

Culture, Heritage and sense of place have made Totnes and its people different from other people and places. The town is rich in heritage – its main streets and suburbs containing many listed buildings – some, such as the museum, of National importance. It is home to science, literature and the arts and has a reputation for being both forward looking and innovative. Only recently John S. Gummer said "What happens in Totnes today happens everywhere else tomorrow". The future prosperity of the town depends on the ability of those who live, and work, here to market its assets effectively.

The town's environmental setting, variety of plants and animals and the River Dart which links it to both the moors and the port of Dartmouth, play an important part in its attraction to visitors and locals alike. This is threatened by the large developments planned, the resulting lack of infrastructure and the increase in traffic in an already congested town. There is need to develop a strategy to combat these difficulties. Some of the listed buildings have been neglected, there are empty buildings that need bringing back into full use and there is traffic/pedestrian conflict. The Neighbourhood Plan could be the tool to provide sustainable, financially sound solutions.

A co-ordinated approach in marketing the town could

In this Issue

Chairman's Chat	1
2012 TotSoc AGM	1
St Peter's Church, Cornworthy	2
Members' Trip to Taunton	3
Planning Notes	5
More thoughts on listed buildings	6
Blast from the Past	7
TotSoc Committee	8
Joining TotSoc	8

result in businesses capitalising on the increased number of tourists visiting the area. Improving the visitor experience and spend could enable the small independent shops, that are so popular, to survive the present economic crisis.

As a society, we have been working in partnership with other groups and organisations to bring projects to fruition. We aim to protect our heritage and work towards preparing the town to move forward in a way which respects and protects its assets whilst avoiding the threat of mini-urbanisation.

2012 TotSoc AGM

Sue Bennett



Our TOTSOC Annual General Meeting will be on THURSDAY 4TH OCTOBER at 7p.m. in the UNITED FREE CHURCH on Fore Street, Totnes. We are extremely lucky that **Matt Harvey** has agreed to be our Guest Speaker and he will take the floor at 7.30 p.m.

As you all know, Matt is our local poet, broadcaster and enemy of all that's difficult and upsetting. Matt's way with words has taken him from Totnes to the Wimbledon Tennis Championships via Saturday Live, the Science Museum and the Edinburgh Festival.

Please come along and bring some friends too for what promises to be an evening of great entertainment.

Tickets at the door: £1.50 for members, £3 for non-members. If anyone requires a lift to the AGM, please contact Paul or Sue Bennett on 01803 865 848 who will arrange one.

St Peter's Church, Cornworthy

Lawrence Green (photos by Kim Sayer)

The village of Cornworthy lies on two slopes between two ancient ecclesiastical buildings: the Gatehouse of Cornworthy Priory, dissolved in 1536 by a greedy monarch, and St Peter's church. The church is slightly removed from the village behind impressive Victorian iron gates at the eastern end of the village street.

St Peter's dates mainly from the fourteenth century and, once entered through the crippled arch of the deep sixteenth century porch, has a particularly light and airy feel. Most of the windows are clear glass and are framed by wooden tracery dating from 1788. The granite pillars of the arcades lean somewhat alarmingly outwards. That they have done so for a very long time is clearly demonstrated by the compensation built into the eighteenth century box pews. They have recently been restored and have kept their original honey colour and generations of graffiti by the children of Cornworthy.

Walking up the recently laid new floor we come to the fine sixteenth century screen that separates the

nave from the choir. The pomegranates of Queen Catherine of Aragon show that the screen dates from before 1533. Unfortunately the Rood Loft was removed many years ago leaving the screen looking incomplete; the Cross with its figure of the crucified Christ and attendant figures of Sts Mary and Mary Magdalene are modern, having been put back in the 1960s.

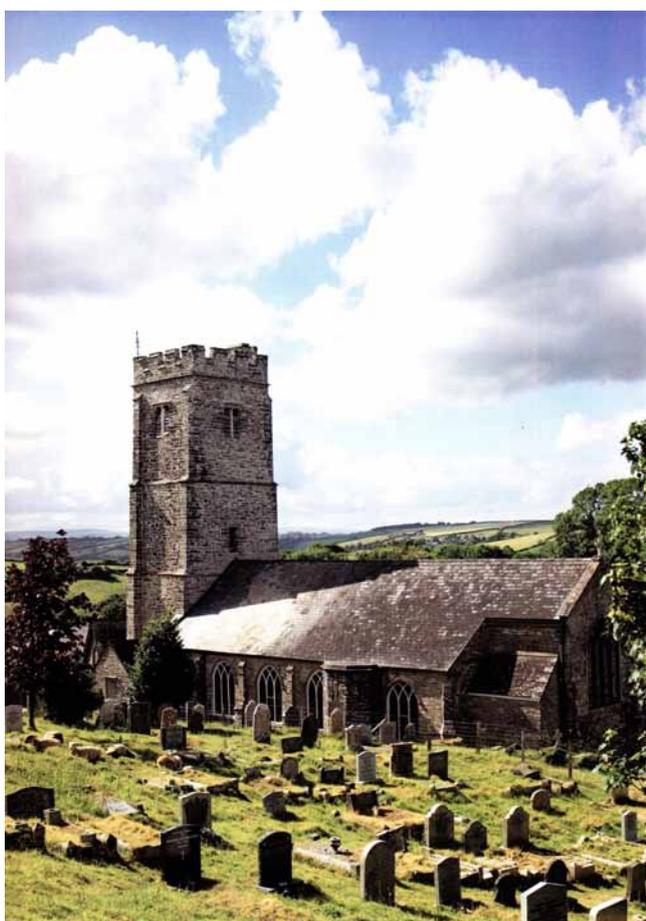
The altar is also modern, made of granite and was the first altar in the diocese to be built facing the congregation. Beside it in the sanctuary are two remarkable monuments, one a 'tester type' from 1611 commemorating Thomas Harris in his robes of Sergeant-at-law and his aristocratic wife Elizabeth who was a member of the Pomeroy family from Berry Pomeroy. This important monument has been recently stabilised and restored. The other monument is a small slate tablet to Lucy Spurway, partly obscured by the far more ostentatious Harris monument that was moved to its present position in 1788.

The year 1788 was an important one for St Peter's. The box pews were installed and a new floor laid to match the pulpit and sounding board dating from 1757. The crumbling beer stone windows were replaced. The Rood Loft was removed during the iconoclastic seventeenth century. If a Royal Arms was later put up on the screen it has long been lost.

Nothing in the church is as old as the red sandstone Norman font with its carved palmettes and saltires. Nearby is the blocked 'Devil's Door' which was opened during baptisms to let out the baby's sins. Outside it can be clearly seen that this door is blocked by a small buttress.

On the first floor of the tower and with a fine view up the nave to the clear east window behind the altar is the ringing chamber. St Peter's has a ring of six bells, cast in 1781, and an enthusiastic ringing team.

The view from the top of the sloping churchyard is spectacular. On the horizon the tawny heights of Dartmoor can be seen over the green hills and woods of south Devon. The church of St Peter sits below with its buttressed Devon tower and long nave and choir all built of the slaty local stone. The tower was recently repointed in lime mortar, its cockerel weathercock indicates the oncoming weather.



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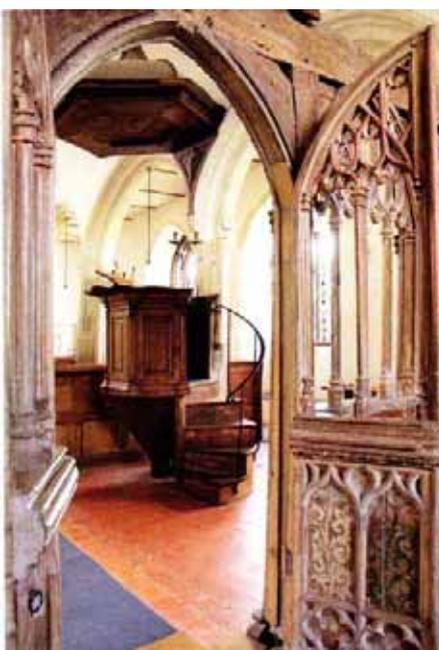
During the 1940s St Peter's was falling badly into disrepair. The roof was in danger of falling in as the pillars and walls bowed outwards. There was talk of closing the church and making it into a safe ruin. During the 1950s money was found to bind in the walls with steel rods and restoration began albeit

with a tiny congregation of two or three.

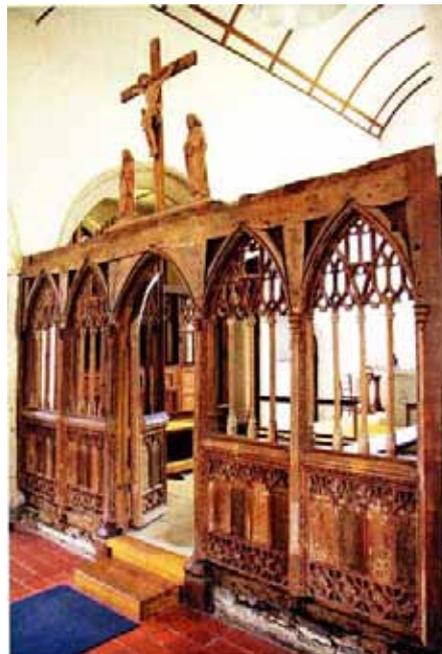
Today almost every aspect of the building has been beautifully restored and the congregation has increased greatly. St Peter's has long ago become a vibrant parish; becoming part of the Totnes Team Ministry early in the twenty first century.



The Nave



The Pulpit and Tester



The Rood Screen

Members' Trip to Taunton

Sue Bennett (photos by Louis Victory)

Following on from last year's AGM when our guest speaker was Ian Franklin, who gave members a fascinating presentation on "Project Taunton" it was decided to arrange a visit to the town to enable those interested to actually see what the regeneration was all about. Ian's background was in the private sector where he had had many years of experience as a director of a property development company before being seconded to the South West Regional Development Authority: thus having experience on both sides of regeneration work.

So, twelve of us, with Lionel Harper, our volunteer driver, set off on Bob The Bus on a drizzly morning for our informal inspection and were met in Taunton by Ian, who walked us around the centre of the town.

According to their Mission Statement"

"Project Taunton is a £multi-million programme of improvements for Taunton, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for Somerset's principal town.

The regeneration is ambitious but realistic. It is boosting business opportunities, improving

transport infrastructure, initiating high quality developments, fostering sustainable communities, nurturing Taunton's green areas and making the most of the river."

"Bite off more than you can chew" exhorts a paper on Project Taunton and "tackle large projects in stages – one area at a time" and this is exactly what seems to be happening. I visited the town some 6 years ago before the regeneration started and, walking in from the Railway Station was a rather dull, dreary introduction to Taunton with down-at-heel shops and take-aways. But all this will soon change with a proposed boulevard linking the station to the town centre thus creating an exciting new gateway.

The River Tone runs through the town but the buildings had all, rather huffily, turned their backs to it and thus the river appeared to play very little part in the town life. Happily, a very different picture is now emerging, with flats and houses fronting the river with paths, walkways, cycle paths, bridges, childrens' play areas, art centre, water meadows all,

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seamlessly turning this town into a lively, attractive place to visit. We walked past the Somerset Cricket Ground and some super flats overlooking both the ground and the river advertised as "For the Fit Over-50s". They boasted, as well as the lovely views, a rooftop communal garden and penthouse apartments. Then onto the Brewhouse Theatre & Arts Centre, hopefully soon to be expanded, and finally to the Longrun Meadows where we admired the only living green cathedral in the country – woven out of willow. It was absolutely stunning, as you will see from the photograph.

Ian, fizzing with enthusiasm, meeting and greeting easily the townsfolk who knew him by name, told us anecdotes of local people who he is weaving into the new townscape – "Pip's Park" is one such: Pip, an eccentric local character who Ian was very fond of, was known for his "ornery-ness", and Ian is remembering him by placing signs on the grass in the park with the injunction "Please walk ON the grass"!

Given that the very word "developer" brings most

people out in hives it amazed me to discover that Ian appears to have such a happy relationship with the townspeople. In part, I think, because of his career background and also because, as he says himself, people take priority in this scheme: "We are not doing this for cars, but for people". There is still much to do and he anticipates that the project will take another 10+ years to complete but, unusually for this kind of venture, they are still on course and within budget.

We finished our tour with a pleasant lunch in the Museum of Somerset Café. Our verdict? We had found the visit inspiring and stimulating and were left with an overwhelming "if only" feeling. Luckily for Ian, most of the land in Taunton within the regeneration scheme is owned by the Borough Council and this coupled with a more docile population than we have here in Totnes (!!) has made Project Taunton's ambitiously conceived plans far more achievable.

Our thanks were given to Ian for such a thought-provoking and enjoyable day.



Planning Notes

Paul Bennett

Riverside Bridgetown

My last note referred to this outline application for about 100 houses, a 60 bed extra care home unit plus employment land and open space. Totsoc entered a substantial response opposing the grant of planning permission. We could not oppose the principle of development as the site had already been allocated by the Totnes Development Plan Document (DPD). We took the view however that the application lacked the necessary detail required for a site so sensitive in landscape terms and very importantly the proposed single access road linking in to a new junction with Dukes Lane was vehemently opposed by Bridgetown residents.

We had hoped that the District Council would seek further detail from Linden Homes (the developers) but unfortunately did not do so. Shortly before the time allowed for making a decision on the application expired a resolution was passed to refuse the application but before this was issued to Linden Homes the time expired and consequently Linden has lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds of the Council's failure to make a decision on the application. At the same time Linden has submitted a second application in the same form as the first.

Totsoc is part of an alliance with the Town Council, Housing & Built Environment Forum, Traffic & Transport Forum and the Public Space Forum which

will be working closely with Bridgetown Alive in opposing the present proposals. An application has been made to the Planning Inspectorate to enable the Alliance to become a party to the Inquiry. If granted this will involve a considerable amount of work in preparing for a three day Public Inquiry starting on 23 October. Our case will concentrate on the major areas of concern; traffic and access, landscape and design, lack of affordable housing. Since the original Totsoc response to the Application Louis Victory has undertaken extensive work on the impact of the proposed scheme from the historic listed Sharpham Estate and other landscapes which will be adversely affected. It is important therefore that the layout of the scheme is agreed at this stage to minimise harm to the surrounding countryside.

Perhaps as an interesting by-product arising from the planning application is the archaeological report where fascinating detail of what lies beneath the fields would otherwise not have come to light. The report states that "Probably of most interest is the undated iron working furnace pit in Trench 1 and the series of features in Trench 5, where evidence for potentially early ironworking was identified." Elsewhere in the Report there is reference to an "assemblage" of medieval pottery dating back to the 11th – 13th centuries that are "Totnes -type coarsewares." The report is on the SHDC website relating to the application.

Ashburton Road (fields opposite Puddaven)

A Masterplan has been prepared by Millwood Homes but has not yet been dealt with by SHDC. Totsoc has made representations on the Masterplan, which although prepared in accordance with the DPD is, in our view, defective in that the greater part of the site will remain undeveloped because it is designated for use as employment land which is not viable for developers to undertake.

Our view is that the site should be developed as a whole and therefore the subject of a single comprehensive development scheme. It is generally acknowledged that the non-viability of speculative development for employment purposes is not a temporary phenomenon as this has been the case for several years and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The consequence of this will be a



The Riverside Site

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derelict empty site lying between the proposed new residential development and Dartington Lane. This cannot be in anyone's interest.

In these circumstances we are urging SHDC to grasp the nettle now and re-designate the whole of the site for residential purposes to enable a comprehensive scheme to be put in place. This would also have the support of residents in the area.

We appreciate the Council's need to find alternative sites to meet its employment land targets but in doing so the Council itself needs to find ways of overcoming the viability difficulties. There are sites, which the Council controls (e.g. the extensive car park at Follaton House) and other areas such as the old magistrates court are presumably publicly owned and available.

The National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that local plans should be flexible and capable of being adapted to meet changing needs and circumstances. There would appear to be an overwhelming case here for flexibility to be applied so that a better scheme for the development of the whole site can be achieved.

The Masterplan has not yet been approved and it is hoped that in further discussions it might be possible to persuade the District Council to the view that the whole site should be designated for housing.

Follaton Farm

The detailed application was submitted at the end of May following the outline approval for 60 homes of which 50% will be affordable. This is due for decision shortly but as the Application is broadly supported is unlikely to be refused.

Baltic Wharf

It is generally recognised that after a shaky start during the first Planning Application TQ9 (now partnered by Bloor Homes for the residential part of the development) should be complimented on an excellent community engagement. The architects appointed following a competitive process produced an outline scheme for the housing part of the site, which has received broad support. Consultations have continued with local residents over access arrangements to the site and with community groups over the open space areas.

Totnes Station Signal Box

English Heritage has applied for this (along with several redundant signal boxes elsewhere) to be listed.

Some More Thoughts on Listed Buildings

John Keleher

In the Spring edition of CONTACT we asked you to watch this space because we were going to suggest ways in which TOTSOC might help in this regard, and we also said we'd announce the name of the person who'd won a bottle of wine by being the first to name the six Grade 1 listed buildings which are in the Totnes Conservation Area, and also the four Scheduled Ancient Monuments. So let's get the competition out of the way first.

It was obviously far too tricky a question to pose since nobody submitted an answer: either that or everybody's on the wagon. Or could it possibly be lethargy? Anyway, here are the answers:

Grade 1 Listed Buildings: St. Mary's Church; the Castle; the Guildhall; the East Gate; the Museum at 70 Fore Street; Bogan House at 43 High Street.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments: the Castle; the site of the Priory; the Leechwell; the remains of the medieval chapel in Warlands.

In the last CONTACT we talked about the tremendous heritage that people in Totnes have in the form of these listed buildings, and that we owe it to past and future generations to cherish this and do what we can to ensure that these buildings survive. So what can TOTSOC do? In short the answer is: help to raise awareness. To do this requires a multi pronged thrust at three major targets, namely:

1. the general public
2. owners and occupiers of listed buildings
3. schools.

We would hope to reach the first target, the general public, through articles and features in local newspapers, and on local radio and television. The details of the media campaign have yet to be drawn up.

In order to target the second group it is proposed

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to put together packages of already extant materials, much of it published by South Hams District Council. There will be about a dozen of these packs and they will be available in certain public places such as the Library, the Study centre and so on, as well as on a website. The people who make up this group - the owners and occupiers - will be made aware of the existence of these packs through a leaflet-drop and through the media campaign. Another prong will be the visual appraisal of particular properties (obviously to be carried out by individuals with some expertise in this field) the results of which will be communicated to owners and other interested parties. The purpose of this exercise is to nudge!

In the long-term of course the third group is crucial. When schools start to function again in the

autumn we want to start discussions with teachers as to how local schools might develop materials and activities involving children with Totnes' historic buildings; how they might be integrated into the curriculum; how schools might help, as well as benefit from, organisations like English Heritage and Architectural Heritage.

This is a very exciting project: it's capable of involving the myriad of Totnes groups in what is an important feature of our society. So if you have any comments on the direction the thinking taking, or have thoughts as to how the project might take shape don't hesitate to channel your email through Paul Bennett.

Blast from the Past

Sue Bennett

Whilst leafing through some old copies of Totsoc Newsletters and Contact Magazines recently I discovered "Newsletter No.11" dated May 1973 in which the Chairman, Bill Bennett, noted that "*the Society has been in existence now for nearly four years and I had the honour of being elected to take over as your Chairman from Maurice Green, a Founder Member*". So, Totsoc has been around for approximately forty years. Does anyone have the exact date of the inaugural meeting? If so, please let us know and maybe we're not too late to arrange a "Ruby" anniversary party!

Also how many people know/remember that serious consideration was given to siting a Marina on the Long Marsh?:

Extract from the Totsoc Newsletter January 1974.

"Marina

Our September Newsletter reported the strong objections which the Society had submitted against the proposed construction on the Long Marsh of a marina with many associated

buildings.

As members may know, this proposal was subsequently rejected by the Planning Authority. The developer, Mr. David Kimber, then applied to Totnes Borough Council for an extension of time on his lease offered in order to permit him to submit amended proposals; but this was refused by the Borough Council. It now seems most unlikely that any substantial building proposal will recur for the Long Marsh; and the current economic climate implies that even a marina alone may not be proposed for some time. The Society must, however, remain vigilant about this area; and we will in particular be pressing on the South Hams District Council our view that the Long Marsh should be protected and enhanced as an open space."

Note: Totnes Borough Council ceased to exist under local government re-organisation in May 1974 and was replaced as planning authority by South Hams District Council.

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cllr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
Paul Bennett	secretary and planning officer	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Lionel Harper	membership secretary	harp@prandl.plus.com
Sue Bennett	minute secretary	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Tony Mead	treasurer	anthonyjmead@tiscali.co.uk
Jim Carfrae		jim@carfrae.com
John Keleher		john.keleher@virgin.net
Dave Mitchell	webmaster and Contact editor	dave@zenoshrdlu.com
Louis Victory	vice-chair	
Anne Ward	public art & design subcommittee	anneward@onetel.com

Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

Tony Mead
10 Castle Street,
Totnes,
TQ9 5NU

For Standing Orders, TotSoc's Bank Details are:

Account Name: **TotSoc**
Sort Code: **20 60 88** Acct No. **50878642**
Barclays Bank, 14 High Street, Totnes

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I confirm that I pay income tax and am willing for TotSoc to reclaim GIFT AID on my donations annually			<input type="checkbox"/>