

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Chairman's Chat

Judy Westacott

I haven't given much thought in the past to the profile of the local area. People come to Totnes to view the historic buildings, the river Dart and/or to take advantage of our small specialist shops but we should not lose sight of the fact that the surrounding countryside contributes to their overall experience.

Did you know that the South Hams covers an area of 906 square kilometres and in 2010 it was estimated that its population of approximately 83700 comprised some 42,000 households? The Dartmoor National Park accounts for 19 per cent of the area which also includes 27 sites of Special Scientific Interest. However, an interesting, and somewhat surprising statistic is that, at present, some 92 per cent is still green space![†]

Our natural environment, and the approach to the town, is of great importance and underpins our economic prosperity, our health, leisure and general sense of well-being.

The importance of reducing use, re-using items and recycling all that can be recycled has not diminished since we were all made aware of the dangers of depleting finite resources, global warming and all manner of other scientific phenomena that were putting the planet at risk.

We now have wind farms, wind turbines, solar panels, ground source heat pumps and a whole range of energy saving devices. We encourage walking, cycling, car sharing and water re-use amongst other things. The difficulty we now face is comparing the advantages of such schemes against the need to preserve as much of the 92 per cent of our green space as is possible and making reasoned decisions about new development. In order to achieve this, we need to educate and encourage

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our young people - the custodians of the future. It was a step in the right direction when TotSoc joined forces with Year 3 at the Grove School to produce a leaflet depicting 9 of the town's most historic buildings. The leaflet was illustrated and prepared by the children working in conjunction with John Keleher and is given to visitors calling at the Town Information Centre - free of charge (see page 4 for more details).

As a Society, we continue to monitor planning applications and encourage developers to provide well-designed, sustainable homes. We must be just as vigilant in protecting its rural setting which has, over the years, contributed to what makes Totnes, Totnes.

[†] statistics provided by South Hams District Council

The Church of St Mary, Berry Pomeroy

Lawrence Green



This typically Devonian perpendicular church enjoys a beautiful and unspoilt setting. It sits on a slight rise at the edge of the village of Berry Pomeroy contained by a bowl of rounded limestone hills, farmlands and orchards. A smaller tenth century church occupied the same site before the church was rebuilt during the fifteenth century. Beside the present church is the ancient manor house behind a wall and below it is the extensive former vicarage. Two gnarled yew trees shade the small churchyard which has a few well placed seats from which to admire the wonderful views.

The south porch is deep and has retained its upper room with latticed windows. Ribbed vaulting rises to large bosses which depict a man's face with a moustache (or is he a pagan green man?), fishes and an upside down face.

The interior of the church is not as light as it could be. Restored Victorian windows are mainly glazed in frosted glass and the stone interior wall of the church are stained a dull red and savagely pointed in cement. The overall impression is of an unusually broad nave with a very good arcade of five high beer stone arches and a restored barrel

vaulted ceiling. There is a very fine fifteenth century screen which is almost complete having been sensitively restored in 1908. Traces of the mediaeval paint remain and unusually, the central screen doors have been glazed and hang on the side of the organ casing.

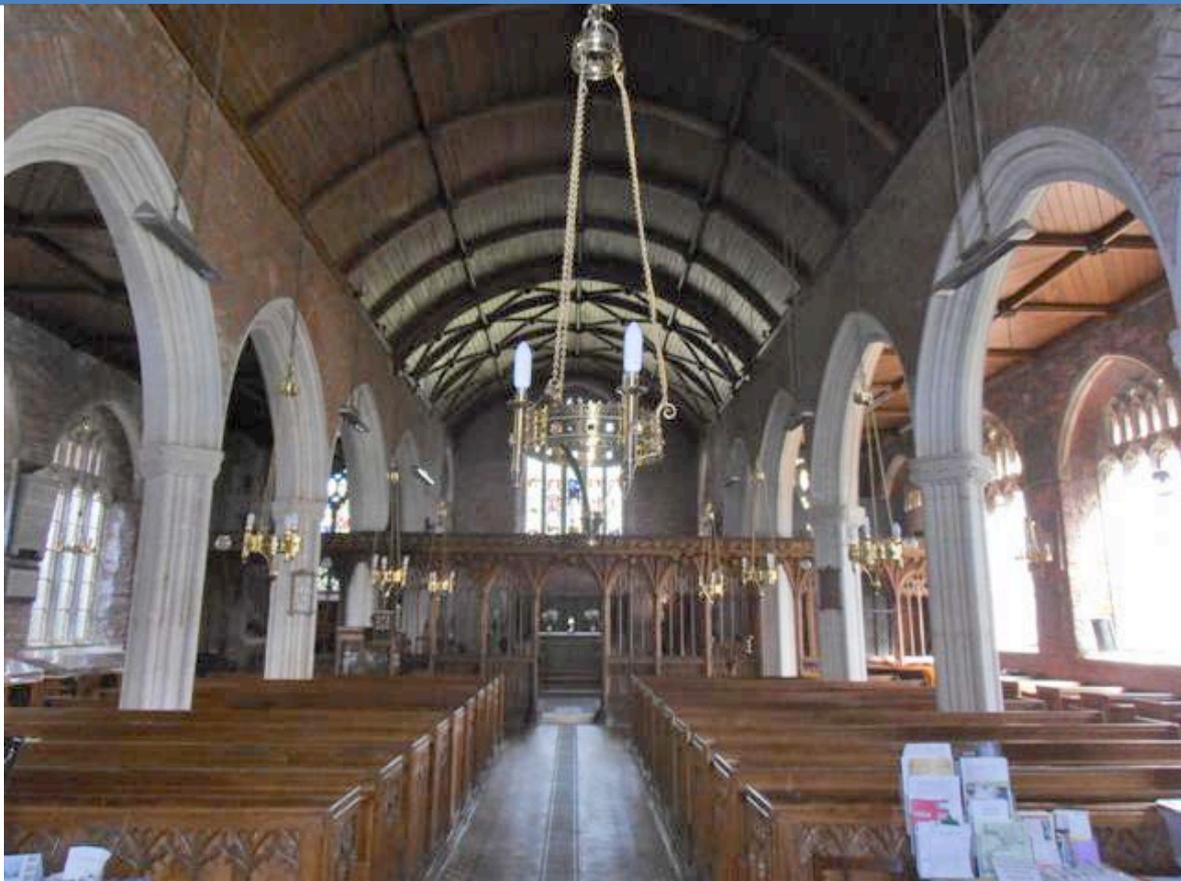
The Victorian pews match the restored roof and encaustic tile floor very well. The Victorians in their restorations emulated the fifteenth century perpendicular style successfully in this fine church. The sanctuary has a particularly Victorian feel; the seventeenth century former altar now stands in the north chapel and the Laudian altar rails have been put to an interesting use enclosing the Sunday school area like a large playpen.

The tower, which has been imperfectly rendered on the outside, contains a ring of eight bells and a meeting room behind a wooden screen. The interior of the tower is made rather dark by the red stonework. In the north aisle is the recently well restored royal arms on a wooden panel commemorating King William III and Queen Mary who held their first informal parliament in a thatched cottage on the road to Stoke Gabriel before visiting Berry Pomeroy Castle as guests of Lord Seymour. Painted under the lion and unicorn are the words: 'Fear God and Honour the King.'

There are some fine monuments in the church, mainly to worthies of fairly high status who died young. The finest and most extensive is a floor to ceiling monument to Sir Edward Seymour, son of Lord Protector Somerset, and his son Edward with his wife Elizabeth Champernowne. The three recumbent figures, the men in armour with swords, the lady in a fine gown with a ruff, are most lifelike. They appear to be most uncomfortable having rested on their right arms for the past four hundred years. Their grown up children, five bearded men and four ladies, kneel dutifully beneath their recumbent parents.

Another sixteenth century monument can be found on the north wall of the sanctuary with all brass figures and inscriptions removed, probably by the Roundheads during the Commonwealth period. The east window is fine Victorian showing Christ in glory in the centre with images on either side depicting Him as redeemer of the world, good shepherd, judge of all and conqueror of death. The sheep and goats shown at the bottom of the window are particularly lifelike.

Continued on the next page



To me by far the most beautiful and exquisite thing in the church is the small modern stained glass window at the western end of the south aisle near the church door. It commemorates the death, in 1951, of Fanny Emma Harrison who was born in 1876. The central image, contained within a light wreath, is a scene of a field being ploughed by a horse and man. The detail and proportions are wonderful: the hills surmounted by billowing clouds, Berry Pomeroy church with flag flying from the tower, the three molehills on the narrow strip of unploughed grass. Below the horse, plough and labourer



are lifelike figures of men sowing seed and reaping the harvest. The reaper is shown wearing yorks, strings tied below the knees to stop vermin running up inside baggy trousers. The messages: 'The earth is full of thy riches' and 'He that ploweth should plow in hope' complete the window. The archaic or American spelling of the words 'plougheth' and 'plough' are unusual.

A well-organised display of the history of the parish in several cases reminds us of the American Army camp that existed near the village at the time of Operation Tiger for several months before D Day. A number of wartime artefacts and the name of an American officer near the war memorial plaque bring home the sacrifices made by these young GIs in 1944 and 1945.

Come and visit this church on a sunny summer's day when the clouds over and behind the hills mirror those so accurately depicted in the Harrison window. Take your time in the church and churchyard and sit down wherever you can. Listen to the birds sing and the distant sounds of tractors turning hay. Feel the warmth of the sun on your face and arms and remember the plough turning the rich Devon soil back in the cold spring.

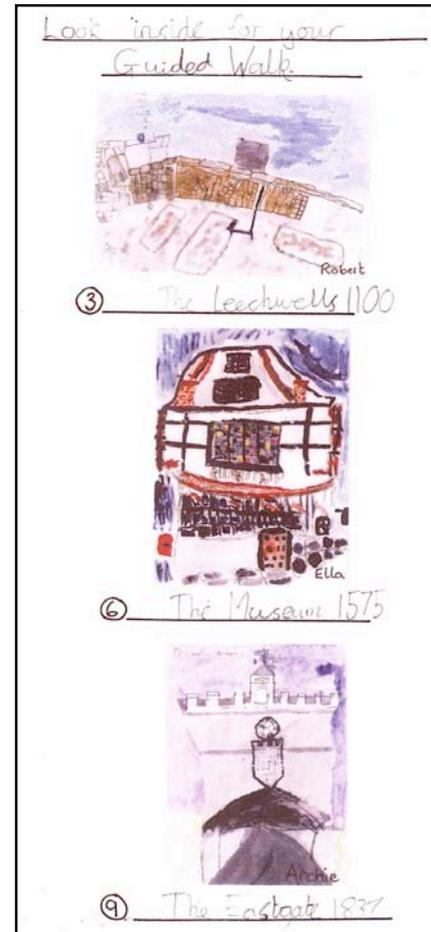
A Guide to Totnes Historic Sites

John Keleher

A CONTACT or two ago you'll remember that we promised to let you know what TOTSOC was planning to do about reminding people that from a heritage point of view we're sitting on a pearl as far as the old buildings that are in the town are concerned. With the help of the Grove School (and the Mitchell Trust) we've come up with a little project, and we're taking this opportunity to bring you up to date on this.

As part of the Year 3 curriculum the pupils at the Grove produced a wonderful leaflet which highlighted ten of Totnes' historic sites (the Leechwells, the Museum, the Castle, St Mary's and so on.) The children made drawings of the sites and added, in their own handwriting, a short description of each one of them. On the reverse side of the leaflet is a map of the town and a guided walk to enable visitors to visit these sites.

These leaflets are available in the Tourist Information Centre, at the Museum and on some of the stalls at the Elizabethan market. They are given out free so why not pick one up at any of these places. But come to think of it you'd better move quickly because they're going like hot cakes – and that's not just the ones at the market! As you see, the Year 3 children at the Grove are helping to raise awareness of some of the main features of Totnes' historic past.



The End of the Planning System?

Paul Bennett

This was the question posed recently to planners and developers at a roundtable discussion sponsored by the *Estates Gazette*. Peter Rees (Chief Planning Officer, City of London) said that *"what the government has done is to dumb down planning. Even as we speak the government is tearing up the planning system. I often feel ashamed that we have a weaker planning system than many African Countries."* It is therefore with distinct pessimism that we approach the preparation of the Local Development Plan for the South Hams District.

Gone are the days when local authority planners took this as an opportunity to exercise their creative skills but now, under-resourced and demoralised, they retreat into their bunkers. There they will

undertake a "tick box" exercise enough, they hope, to get them through the Public Inquiry.

Masterplanning of specific areas, which should be led by the planners, will be left to developers with the inevitable consequence of community interest coming a poor loser against commercial interests. As Peter Rees said: *"If the market is capable of planning, I have yet to see any evidence of it."*

Here in the South Hams we are particularly vulnerable to predatory open market housing developments because of its desirability as a place to live but with requirements to provide affordable housing being weakened yet further by recent legislation what prospect is there of creating a balanced community?

Riverside (Bridgetown) Planning Debacle

Paul Bennett

The handling of the two planning applications for this major and prominent site by the District Council was incompetent from the submission of the first application through to its utterly inept performance at the public inquiry dealing with the appeal by the applicant against the refusal of consent to the first application.

The application was an outline one only so far as the proposed housing was concerned accompanied by sketches showing possible layouts. TotSoc suggested that as the application site lay in an area of great prominence and sensitivity it would be appropriate for the Council to ask for greater detail. This was never pursued and the time limit for the Council to make a decision had passed when an urgency sub-committee meeting was called at which, on the basis of the officers' recommendation it was resolved to refuse the application.

However this came too late for the decision notice to be issued as the applicants had by then lodged an appeal on the grounds of the Council's failure to deal with the application in time.

The applicants also made a second application, which apart from some relatively insignificant alterations was identical to the first. This time the officers changed their stance and recommended approval. The planning committee members however took the view that the amendments to the original application were insufficient to justify the departure from the officers' earlier recommendation of refusal and voted to refuse this second application.

The applicants then continued with their appeal against the "non-determination" of the first

application. To say that the Council responded with indecisiveness would be an understatement. TotSoc urged the Council to appoint independent planning consultants to deal with the Inquiry on its behalf because the Council's planning officers were compromised by their recommendation to approve the second application.

From the outside there appeared to be no common view between the planners and the Council's legal team as to what should be done: possibly because they continued to hope that somehow the appeal could be aborted.

At the eleventh hour a barrister, whose area of expertise was family law, and not planning, was instructed to appear at the Inquiry. The result was disastrous; the applicants had instructed one of the country's leading planning barristers to represent them who destroyed the Council's witnesses with the ease of a machine gunner mowing down advancing infantry in the First World War. At times the Inspector looked on with disbelief that a District Council could act with such sheer incompetence.

Inevitably the applicants won the appeal with further ignominy for the District Council in being ordered to pay part of Linden Homes' costs. An order of this kind is made only where a Council has behaved unreasonably, causing unnecessary or wasted expense. It goes without saying that the substantial sum paid to Linden could have been better spent.

Whilst the Council has publicly apologised for the way in which these applications were handled, nonetheless there is little excuse for this ineptitude.

40 Years On

Sue Bennett

Looking at a 1973 TOTSOC Newsletter in many instances it is tempting to comment '*plus ca change*' as the issues exercising the Society then are very similar to today's problem areas. Bill Bennett, then Chair, was exhorting members that "a strong Society relies on strong membership" and encouraging current members to pass on news about TOTSOC to encourage their friends to join.

We do, as in 1973, need more members especially those of working age who may have some time and energy to spare a thought - or deed - to the future of the built environment of this lovely town. Also the Committee needs - still - a Minute Secretary which would free up the current postholder - me - to take on organising some social functions.

Any offers?

“Victorian News from Totnes” by Todd Gray

Reviewed by John Keleher

The past is a territory we seem to need to know about. The number of TV programmes and websites, recipe books, magazines and so on devoted to the subject, along with the DNA testing bodies and the oral historians, are all indicative of how fascinated we are with our predecessors.

This slim little volume gives us a glimpse as to how people in Totnes lived during the reign of Good Queen Vic. Todd Gray's material is taken from a range of newspaper reports. (Incidentally, every copy of the Totnes Times, dating back to 1861 can be found in the Study Centre which is located behind the Museum.) The first of these reports (23rd June 1838) tells of how the Coronation was celebrated here, while the last (29th January 1901) records the memorial services marking her death which took place in the town.

Bookended by these two events are extracts covering a whole range of areas and themes which shed some light on nineteenth century Totnes. Incidentally, talking about shedding some light, there's an extract (4th July 1857) bemoaning the fact that Totnes was without public lights at night – and a policeman – and it suggests that this state of affairs encourages crime. (Are there echoes of this sort of thing today?)

Among the themes covered are politics and elections – very dirty and messy even by today's standards. In October 1859, for example, the Duke of Somerset issued eviction orders to all his tenants who had voted contrary to His Grace's wishes in the recent Totnes election. There's also quite a graphic account of the 1852 General Election in Totnes – and plenty more too.

The Victorian era was, as we know, the time when the rail network was started. By 26th April 1847 we are told that the work is going well and that '... it appears there is no impediment to the line being shortly opened to Totnes.' But when it did arrive it wasn't long before there were reports of trains running late, especially in dodgy weather, and some didn't even stop here. (Are there echoes of *this sort of thing* today?!

Personally I enjoyed reading about the accidents: the chap who got tangled up in a lady's crinoline and broke his leg; when one of the boats from the Dart Rowing Club sprang a leak; and on 16th September 1887 there was a report of Mr Rew's tricycle colliding with Mr Eynon's on Bridgetown hill. They both came off apparently and Mr Eynon 'only suffered a shaking.' Poor Mr Rew though, (who, we are informed, *en passant*, had run the brewery during Mr Dobre's absence) suffered '... a broken collarbone, concussion of the brain and other injuries.' The report ends by

stressing that he 'is in a very precarious state.' There are reports of plenty more accidents too – after all the book does span a sixty year period!

The weather is a regular feature of these reports. If you thought it was a bit nippy in March this year you should read the 13th March 1891 report. It starts by telling us that 'Totnes people [had] been quite cut off from the outer world since Monday.' The Kingsbridge mail cart should have arrived that evening, but at the time of reporting it still hadn't shown up.

We get glimpses of how the town celebrated, how people relaxed, how the poor were treated, what sort of petty crimes were committed, and how as a consequence the perpetrators were punished. The names of people whose descendants live in the town today occur from time to time, though not in this context, one hastens to add.

We learn what sort of things were controversial, such as early closing day. To the people at the time such issues were as important as parking, and traffic flow are to us today. Fundamentally, people do not change much from one era to another. They seem to be interested in the same sort of things: transport, the weather, the misfortunes of others etc, as a few headlines from The Sun of 2nd March 2013 demonstrate.

- Death at level crossing: horror on 5.46.
- Great British flake off. Snow again across UK this weekend.
- Patient died with head stuck in bed railings.
- Yob gran in rugger club ban.

This last one reminded me of the report of 22nd July 1945. On the previous Tuesday 'Jane Avent, alias Long Tom, a lady of the pave,' on leaving the court approached Mr Farley who had spoken on behalf of the prosecution and 'politely gave him a kick in an unmentionable place, and on coming into the open air she administered a second dose in the shape of a box under the ear.' Far as folks is concerned ain't nothin' new under the sun!

Dr Gray, who is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and taught at Exeter for several years, is a historian with a special interest in local history. He has written a number of books on Devon, and Totnes figures large in his work. He's the guest speaker at the next TOTSOC Annual General Meeting which will be on Thursday October 3rd at 7.30pm at the United Free Church, but before then I recommend you get this little book.

“Victorian News from Totnes” – Mint Press £4.99

2013 TotSoc AGM – A Reminder

Sue Bennett



Our TOTSOC Annual General Meeting will be on **THURSDAY 3rd OCTOBER 2013** at 7 p.m. in the UNITED FREE CHURCH on Fore Street, Totnes.

It will be followed at 7.30 p.m. by a talk from Dr. Todd Gray entitled “Great War Remembrance and the Totnes Solution”.

Dr. Gray is Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University, Chairman of the Friends of Devon’s Archives and of the Devon & Cornwall Record Society, and author of more than 40 books on Devon, including:

“Lost Devon, Creation, Change and Destruction over 500 Years”

“Victorian News from Totnes”

The talk will contain some interesting snippets from the history of Totnes, including the erection of the town’s war memorial – which was by a leading national designer – and the curious story of how the mayor tried to obtain the castle but failed.

Please come along and bring some friends too for what promises to be an extremely interesting, informative and entertaining evening.

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.

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cllr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
Paul Bennett	secretary	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Sue Bennett	minute secretary	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Jeremy Logie	treasurer and membership secretary	jeremy.logie@talk21.com
Kate Wilson	planning officer	katewilson.totnes@gmail.com
Jim Carfrae		jim@carfrae.com
John Keleher		john.keleher@virgin.net
Dave Mitchell	webmaster and Contact editor	dave@zenoshrdlu.com
Anne Ward	public art & design subcommittee	anneward@onetel.com

Application to join TotSoc (The Totnes Civic Society)

Individual annual membership fee: £5.00; family membership: £8.00

Please complete the form below. Payment by standing order is much preferred, but if you wish to pay by cheque or cash this is also quite acceptable. The membership year is from 1st October.

Name..... Tel.....

Address..... Post Code.....

Email address.....

STANDING ORDER FORM

To: (name of your bank)..... bank

Please set up the following Standing Order and debit my/our account accordingly

1. Your Bank Account details

Account name..... Account Number:

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Your bank branch..... Sort Code:

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Postal address of your branch (please print)

.....**Post code**

2. Payee details

Name of organisation you are paying: **Totnes & District Society**

Sort code of TOTSOC: **20-60-88**

Account number of TOTSOC: **50878642**

3. About the payment

How often are the payments to be made: **YEARLY**

Amount details: **£5.00 / £8.00 (delete one)**

Date of first payment: **on or after 1st October 2013**

until further notice (payments will be made until you cancel this instruction)

4. Confirmation Customer signature(s)

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Date.....

Please return this completed form to:

Jeremy Logie, TOTSOC Treasurer,

15 Heath Way, Totnes, TQ9 5GP

He will then send the lower section of it to your bank.