

## The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC - the Totnes and District Society

### President's Piece

**Judy Westacott**

I am sure that most of you will have seen, and admired, the chain of office of the Totnes Town Mayor. It has quite a history which I am sure will be of interest to you. It was obtained by Mr Evan Evens, a Totnes jeweller from the manufacturer, Messrs. Bragg of Birmingham. The cost was £140 which was raised by public subscription. The chain has 19 shields, was originally 41 inches long and weighed about 21 ounces.

It was made of a little over 18 carat gold. The first Mayor named on it was Charles Taylor in 1846. The badge – the centre-piece known as 'the gong' - shows the town's Coat of Arms (the keys have been incorrectly reversed - some say due to an accident that resulted in a major repair). The coat of arms is emblazoned on blue enamelling and is surrounded by a rose, shamrock and thistle. On the reverse is an inscription

*"This chain of office was presented to the Mayor and Corporation of Totnes AD 1875 Jeffery Mitchellmore Mayor, George Presswell Town Clerk".*

Just before 3pm on the 31st March 1875, the church bells ringing, Councillors, Magistrates, Borough Officials, the Subscription Committee and members met the Mayor, Jeffery Mitchellmore at his reception rooms in the Gate House. They were joined by 40 members of the 17th Devon Rifle Volunteers - under the command of Captain Weathead and Lieutenant Kellock - who formed a Guard of Honour and accompanied the Mayor and the Councillors to the Guildhall. The chain was presented to the Mayor by Matthew Fortiscue. Congratulatory speeches were made by Alderman Chaster and Mr Kellock. In the evening, 50 people attended a Celebratory Banquet held in the Seven Stars Hotel.

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The chain now has 25 Shields including the arms of the 14th Duke of Somerset and the arms of the Windeatt, Kellock, Condry and Symons families.



**The Mayor's Chain and Badge of office**

In 1927, Sir Robert Harvey of Dundridge, presented a solid gold replica of the Mayor's Badge of Office to be worn by the Mayoress (or sometimes the Mayor's Consort). Unlike the Mayor's Badge the keys on this are the right way up.

A chain was provided for this by public subscription for the sum of £60-00.



**The Mayoress' Chain**

The 18 carat gold chain is 36 inches long and weighs 7 ounces. It was bought from Page, Keen and Page. The Mayor at the time was Frank Revell. It took a long time for the money to be forthcoming and the locals were angry as the local jeweller, Mr Wellington, was not asked to supply it. Details may be found in the Totnes Times for 21st July, 1928.

(Judy Westacott is of course the **current** mayor of Totnes)

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# TOTNES Envisaged

Roger Hawkins

One of the objects of TOTSOC is: *To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town and its surroundings.*

Totnes, acknowledged to be one of the most interesting historical towns in Devon, is going downhill, in more ways than one!



The street environment is poorly maintained, together with more commercial and domestic refuse bins disfiguring the street scene, also the reduction in the amount of pavement advertising in Fore Street and High Street would improve the town. Many shop-fronts are unkempt and neglected. However, the shopkeepers who have pride in, and take care of their premises are already setting an example. Loose and broken paving; damaged and poorly reinstated surfaces; blocked drains; sprouting weeds are certainly not indicators of a cared for town or responsible authorities.



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To help put right all this neglect and clutter, which is the first step towards improving the town and enhancing the sense of civic pride:-

- Landlords and tenants can be encouraged to better maintain their frontages.
- We must initiate an easy-to-operate scheme to build waste bunkers in wider parts of the streets and squares for domestic and commercial waste.
- County Hall and Follaton House need to be constantly lobbied about maintaining the town's fabric and that long-outstanding repair are carried out. PERSISTENCE is rewarded.
- A clean-up campaign whereby we are all urged to take more pride in our offices, homes and shops. Some people already do this in a quiet, unobtrusive way.

*Totnes Against Trash* is one example

While these proposals are being considered we can look at more long-term issues such as shared space; landscaping and refurbishing the principal streets of Totnes; replacing damaged ugly bollards with well-designed and locally made street furniture, of which there are already some good examples in the Rotherfold.

These suggestions do not conflict with the Conservation Area in any way, since 'conservation' involves the protection, preservation and restoration of the environment. They are bold and challenging and, can be unsettling. But as the nineteenth century Quaker writer, William Pollard said:

"To change is difficult, to not change is fatal"<sup>†</sup>

To read more proposals please visit [www.totnes-envisaged.co.uk](http://www.totnes-envisaged.co.uk)

<sup>†</sup> Also seen this on a T-shirt in Totnes Cinema – there it was attributed to Charles Darwin!

## The Totnes Image Bank

John Keleher

In order to get a better understanding and appreciation of itself a society, or a community - even an individual – needs to be very aware of its past, its history. Traditionally, at least in Europe, History has been identified with the written word: dusty documents, ploughing through chronicles and diaries, swotting up on what the experts had (yes, you've got it) written about a subject. But always the written word was central unless, of course, you happen to live in a pre-literate society where there was an oral tradition. But early on people found the need for writing to secure that elusive thing called truth. Writing tends to cast thing in stone, or at least clay!

But around the middle of the nineteenth century things began to change slightly once we'd learned to capture an image on paper, with the discovery of photography. Now people were able to actually see things from the past; actual people now long dead. We could see how they dressed; what kind of work they did; how they spent their leisure. In short, how they lived. Now we are very familiar with libraries, where written words are stored, but perhaps not so much with a place where visual material is stored – a sort of photographic library.



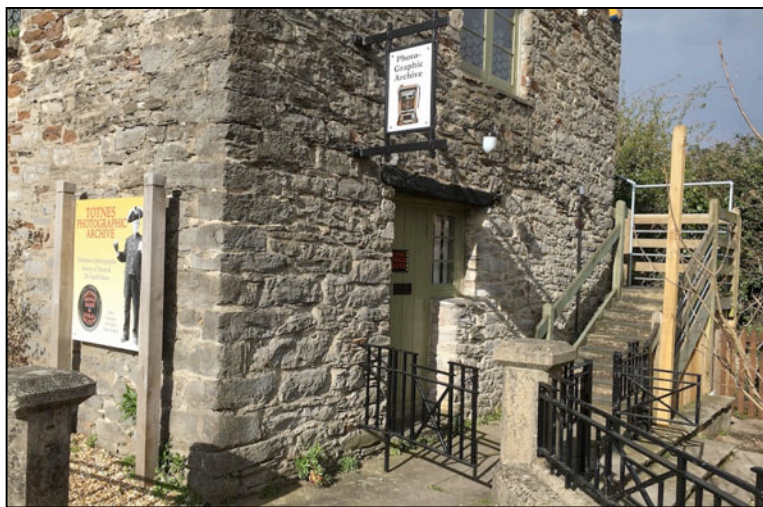
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About twenty years ago Barrington Weekes and a group of like-minded people in Totnes set about establishing such a repository here in the town where any number of aspects of life in Totnes-past. So they set about collecting photographs from private collections either on loan or as donation.

Now, one of the problems with photographs is that they quite quickly deteriorate through being handled, so there's always the danger that this invaluable material will be permanently lost. But once again technology comes to the rescue! There's no need for the photographic images to be tucked away in box-files- rather like old historic documents - gathering dust! The images can be scanned into a computer, stored, and, if necessary, returned to their owner. Now they are far more readily accessible to anybody in the world – provided they are on the Internet. This task of making the database (i.e. the Image Bank's 60,000 or so scanned images) more readily accessible is one with which the Image Bank is currently engrossed. (But that's a mere technical problem!)

The important thing is the images themselves, and hence the features of life and living which they capture. The Image Bank is not just an archive of photographic material: it has an outreach function too. There are audio-visual presentations, special exhibitions in the Museum and local churches and so on. Moreover, it has the potential to be a valuable resource for local schools as the images relate not only to the town itself but also to life in surrounding villages.

It is crucial that we cherish the archive for future generations. If possible let us contribute what we can from the past, but also let us leave something of our life today for future generations (but please NOT tongue-out, V-sign toting selfies!).



Totnes Image Bank is open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 4pm at Town Mill, Coronation Road, Totnes. There is easy access from Morrisons car park.

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## St Petroc's Church, South Brent

Lawrence Green



The ancient church of St Petroc, one of fourteen in Devon, has turned its north wall to the River Avon which rushes, almost unseen, beneath a cliff only a few yards away. It has a squat Norman tower with later crenelations and a lofty nave and sanctuary with side chapels and mediaeval extensions to the aisles. It is surrounded by a large level churchyard with many interesting tombs.

Before entering the church building it is worth examining the tower. Some Saxon work, unusual for Devon, can be seen in the lower courses and traces of the Norman cruciform plan are evident.



### **Infilled Round Arch**

A round arch in the west side of the tower shows where one of the arms of the cross formed a chapel. It is infilled by a partially restored Early English window and a gothic doorway beneath. The south arm of the cross still exists, housing the vestry above the boiler house.

The entrance to the church is inviting. A pair of modern glass doors open into the barrel vaulted porch. We are asked to close the doors because the heating is on. A massive, probably mediaeval, studded oak door with sanctuary ring and fleur-de-lys hinges opens into the lofty and airy nave, uncluttered by paint and lit by plain glass windows on both sides. The level floor is of fine modern slate with the late Norman round sandstone font prominent in the middle. It is one of six in the area with honeysuckle and a ropework and sawtooth surround. It was brought forward into the body of the church when the mediaeval rebuilding and enlargement occurred.



## The Church Interior



The wonderful open feel of the church interior is enhanced by the absence of a screen between the nave and the choir. The doors to the screen can be seen in the south aisle behind the choir: a door from the floor up to the screen and the doorway which would have led onto the rood loft. The screen at St Petroc's was one of the finest in Devon; a pair of mismatched screen doors hang just to the west of the main door in the south aisle. They are marked as fourteenth or fifteenth century. I would put them slightly later because of the early renaissance work in the carvings.

The fine barrel vaulted roof dates from 1870 and is a refreshing change from the typical dark Victorian openwork pitch pine roofs so common in Cornwall and Devon. This roof does not pretend to be mediaeval but is right for this church. The choir benches with their beautiful carved angels are the work of Harry Hem's workshop in Exeter (1926) and are proudly marked as such. The fine pulpit on the north side of the crossing (1935) resembles the Herbert Read pulpit in St David's Church, Ashprington, but is by Harry Hems, some of the carving being flatter and less detailed than Read's work. The pieces of the original stone pulpit can be seen in the steps to the vestry at the west end of the South Aisle. The benches in the nave are undistinguished, being typical Victorian pitch pine of a lighter colour than usual.

The two arches, north and south, above the crossing show evidence of enlargement, having been stretched when the North and South Transepts were added. They are



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almost crippled but apparently strong enough to do the job. The North Transept contains the organ and the South Transept the wheeled bier and three remarkable war memorials to the fallen of the First and Second World Wars.

The main Great War memorial was moved to the east wall of the North Transept when the north doorway in the nave was reopened. It is bold and informative, having ranks and regiments noted against each man or woman's name. There is an anomaly between men in the newly-formed Royal Air Force who retain their Royal Flying Corps ranks. There are two names at the bottom on the plaque which must have been added later. Even so, five men were left off the memorial. Thanks to the thorough research of Bernard Elms in his book *The Tommies of South Brent* these five men were given a slate tablet in 2018 with their names and regiments under an impressive bronze bas relief of a 1917 painting *The Great Reward*, by local artist Wendy Bristow, showing a British soldier being supported by a female angel. This is a beautiful way to put right a wrong from nearly a hundred years ago. One of the men on the new plaque, Pte Frederick Hall, was wounded at the Battle of Kut Al Amara and taken prisoner by the Turks, to die later in captivity. He is also commemorated on the Ashpington War Memorial.

The screen may be gone but pieces of it were used in parts of the church. The altar rail was built from pieces of the screen, some with their original polychrome paint. In the North Chapel a painted vine carving from the screen hangs above the Jacobean altar frontal. In the South Transept parts of the screen form the base of the memorial table. There is a painted beam from the screen forming part of the belfry screen at the base of the tower.

### **The Murder Doorway**

The stonework in the sanctuary shows alterations and blocked doorways, principally the 'Murder Doorway' through which Master John Hay, the vicar, was dragged out after the service of vespers on the feast of Corpus Christi in the Spring of 1436 by Thomas Weke and friends to be beaten to death for reasons unknown. Weke was hanged and the church reconsecrated in September 1436.

Apart from Archbishop Thomas a Becket the only priest murdered in his church during the Middle Ages was the Vicar of Woodleigh, near Kingsbridge, by Sir Peter de Fitzacre in the fourteenth century.



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The monuments in the sanctuary are all to former incumbents; there is a plaque to Admiral William Cuming, one of Nelson's commanders in the North Aisle. There is an icon of the Madonna and Child by Lillian Delevoryas and two tall statues of St Petroc and his wolf by Peter Noble, both these fine artists being local to South Brent.

We notice the blue carpet in front of the base of the tower and the chairs for Sunday school, meetings and other activities. The six bells in the tower were cast by Bilby in 'Collumpton' in 1755.

St Petroc's Church is very well cared for, especially since the repointing of the tower and new lighting, both done in 2016 and 2017. The correct lime mortar was used on the tower, contrasting with patches of Portland cement pointing on the outside of the nave.

There are some very interesting gravestones in the churchyard. William Hosking was run down by a train while working on the Cornwall railway in 1859. Lance Corporal Bertie Hard of the Machine Gun Corps died at home in 1917 from the effects of poison gas. What is probably the slab from the old altar is mounted on granite near the church door.

The tidy condition of the churchyard with its fine trees adds to the feeling that St Petroc's is a much loved church, inspiring local artists and the people of South Brent who look after it so well.

## Restoring Victorian Cast-Iron Gutters

Kate Wilson

The house we live in was built in the 1860s. It still has many of its original features including the gutters which are elegant, cast iron, Ogee gutters with lion's heads moulding covering the joins. When they were newly installed, they must have looked beautiful.

There's nothing like being concerned about something to heighten awareness. Our gutters looked tatty and leaked but are original. When I started looking, I realised that much of the guttering on houses near ours has been replaced. PVC guttering is everywhere and some of it looks better than others.

We were hoping our gutters could be renovated rather than replaced and that it wouldn't be too expensive. We bit the bullet and put some scaffolding up. The gutters were a bit rusty, and a bit mossy and contained the odd bird's feather and other stuff, but they seemed to be in quite good nick. The fascia boards that they were attached to were a different matter. The original Victorian fascia that was in place had held up well, but the boards that had been replaced, maybe 30 years ago, had rotten and crumbled almost to dust in places.

To replace the rotten fascia boards, we had to remove the gutters and as we were going to fettle them up it seemed better to do this on the ground rather than on the



**Before renovation started**

top of the scaffolding. Making use of a handy knot called a pipe hitch, we lowered the lengths of guttering to the ground for a closer inspection. One of the gutters was broken which we thought might be a problem until we discovered that cast iron guttering is still readily available and not outrageously priced, though without the integral lion's head detailing. We spoke to our neighbours about what we were doing and to our delight discovered that they had kept some lengths of their old guttering which was still in their garden waiting to be rescued. The task in hand looked a little easier.

All the gutters were stripped of years of paint using a hammer and chisel (we wore dust masks) back to the bare metal. This took quite a while.

Then we sanded the gutters with an electric sander. The lions' heads needed paint stripper. It was lovely to see the detail that was revealed when years of paint were removed. We primed every surface with red oxide paint.

While this was going on, the wonderful Joe was up the scaffolding replacing the rotten fascia boards.

The gutters were undercoated, glossed and the lions' heads painted gold and given a coat of varnish before being taken back up the scaffolding to be attached to the prepared boards. This time Graham and Joe for some reason dispensed with my useful knots and carried the gutters up.

Most of the original screws that held the gutters onto the fascia board were still usable and screws and fixings were found online for those that we had to replace.



**Red Oxide primed**



**Lion's Head**

**Gold painted**

Joe applied sealant to the gutters when they were in situ and tested whether they leaked. They didn't. All we needed was rain for a final check...

So yes, we had to put scaffolding up, and yes, it's taken a while and we've had to fit in the work around our day jobs, but it's been satisfying - and the view from the top of the scaffolding is great. We're hoping that the secret to the longevity of cast iron work is thorough preparation. We also hope that we have preserved an interesting feature of our house for many more years.





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# Totnes Railway Station - Update

Dave Mitchell



**Remains of the old footbridge on platform 1**



**New footbridge and lift on platform 1**

Network Rail have now removed the old footbridge and installed the new one (although the lifts are not yet in service). The plan to create a new garden and pond on platform 2, where the old footbridge steps were, is on hold until platform 1 is extended at the London end to take the new 9 coach trains.

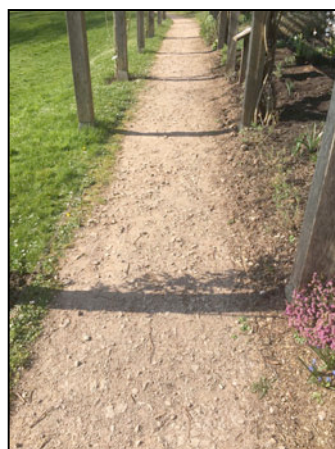


**Proposed site of the new garden and pond on platform2**

## Leechwell Garden News

**Dave Mitchell**

Since it opened in 2010 the Leechwell Garden has become a very popular spot for those with young families and serves as an outdoor classroom for children from the Grove School across the road. Popularity has its costs however – the original play structure had to be replaced a year or so ago and the footpaths now need to be repaired – new wooden edging boards, replacement of the stone surface and new bark chipping. Fortunately the Leechwell Garden Association was successful in obtaining a Pocket Parks Plus grant to do the work, which should be carried out before the summer.



**Worn footpath under the pergola**

## Application to join the Totnes and District Society (TotSoc)

Individual membership fee: £5.00 s/o or £8.00 cash. Joint: £8.00 s/o or £11.00 cash

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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:

--	--	--	--	--	--

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:

**40-52-40**

Account number of TOTSOC:

**00027393**

#### 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018**

**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 send the lower section to your bank.

*The information you provide will be used solely for dealing with you as a member of The Totnes and District Society. The Society has a Data Privacy Policy which can be found [totsoc.org.uk/privacypolicy.pdf](http://totsoc.org.uk/privacypolicy.pdf). Your data will be stored and used in accordance with this Policy.*

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## TOTSOC on Facebook

TOTSOC now has a Facebook page at:

[www.facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society](http://www.facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society)

## The TOTSOC Committee

The current TOTSOC Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott President	tq9jude@gmail.com
Paul Bennett Chair	paulandsuebennett@gmail.com
Tom King Secretary and Minute Secretary	tom@seymourvillas.com
Sue Bennett	paulandsuebennett@gmail.com
Jeremy Logie Treasurer and Membership Secretary	jeremy.logie@talk21.com
Kate Wilson Planning Officer	katewilsondeane@gmail.com
Jim Carfrae	jim@carfrae.com
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A form for joining TOTSOC is on the previous page.

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