

Tavistock and District Local History Society

Newsletter No 56 – Autumn 2015



A studious Stephen Docksey with Ward & Chownen Archive documents presented at the Lamerton Tractor Day and Country Fair in September

SOCIETY NEWS

Programme 2015

The remaining meetings of our 2015 programme are as follows

- Nov 10 The East Cornwall Mineral Railway - Vic Harman
Dec 08 Christmas Social evening with "Small eats and wine" - door admission £4.50

Programme for 2016

At the time the presses rolled for the Newsletter the Programme for 2016 had not yet been finalised but is substantially complete viz

- Jan 12 AGM - followed by the Hon President's Invitation Lecture - "Saving Tavistock Guildhall" - John Taylor
Feb 9 "Cornwall's Historic Gardens" - Barry Gamble - this meeting is in the Bedford Hotel
Feb 23 "The Bloudie Booke and John Fitz of Tavistock - a Tragical and Desperate Tale" - Tom Greeves - Please note this is an afternoon meeting
Mar 8 "The Road to the Messines - Underground Warfare on the Western Front 1915-1917" - Rick Stewart
Apr 12 "Beer, Bribery and the Ballot" - Adrian Lee

May 10 To be arranged
Jun 14 All day outing - to be arranged
Jul 12 To be arranged
Aug 9 "Calstock - A Victorian Inland Port" - *Stephen Docksey*

Sep 13 "The Fair Arm of the Law - Women in Policing" - *Simon Dell*
Oct 04 Projects Evening led by the Hon President
Nov 10 "Harry Hems, Ecclesiastical Woodcarver: Saint or Sinner?" - *Sue Andrew*
Dec 13 Christmas Social evening

From the Chairman – Alex Mettler

New Committee Members Claire Morris and Adrian Lee have been joined by Gina Nicholls while Barbara Watson and her volunteers have been providing light refreshment for our indoor meetings. Thanks to them all.

The 2015 Programme has worked well with attendances at most meetings being in excess of 35 members which is encouraging but we still require more members to strengthen the Society, assist in projects and generally immerse themselves in, and enjoy, various aspects of local history of Tavistock and its surrounding district. The 2016 Programme (see above) is near completion and includes a number of suggestions from Members.

Society members continue to offer their services for local events such as Heritage Open Days, talks to other Societies and contribution to community projects such as Tavistock Heritage (see Spring Newsletter No 55).

Tavistock Museum – Roderick Martin

Our projected visitor numbers for the season will be again about 7,500. This summer the showery weather has had a big affect on the number of visitors coming into the museum. On days when there was rain in the morning few came into the museum, or into the town for that matter, but if it was fine during the morning and later wet, the museum was often crowded by the afternoon.

Our exhibitions this year have been 'The Challenging Road to Peace Since WW2' (Rupert and Ann Gude - Tavistock Peace Group) and 'The Traders of Tavistock' (Linda Elliott). Both exhibitions have been praised by our visitors although it has to be mentioned that the Peace exhibition was considered by some to be controversial.

The museum was awarded £750 from the *Small Grant - Big Improvement Scheme* funded by the Arts Council England towards the cost of an external sign to be installed above the front doorway.

Sadly this season we have been without our manager, Sue Davies, who is recovering after falling at her home last February. Everyone sends Sue their best wishes.

The Thorington Collection – Kevin Dickens

I am writing this having in the last hour scanned the final folder of 35mm black and white negatives in the Thorington collection. The number of items scanned, including prints, now appears to number in the region of 125,000. Still to do are limited numbers of colour negatives and a large cache of earlier 120 negatives. But this is a very important milestone and salutations and thanks to all over the years who have helped in this project.

Ed note - Some images from the collection have been put on Facebook and earlier this year they were the subject of a regional ITV news item narrated by Jackie Bird who spotted her younger self in one of the images.

Ward and Chowen Archive - Ann Cole

In December of last year the Tavistock & District Local History Society were offered the opportunity to create a digital Archive of the Ward & Chowen documents dating from around 1830 to 1930. The History Society accepted the offer and obtained grants from the TAP fund, Dartmoor Trust, Tavistock Young Farmers Club and the Elmhurst Trust to purchase a book scanner and computer. The Archive consists of sale catalogues, maps, copies of letters, valuation books and other associated documents.

Thanks to an enthusiastic band of volunteers the project is now up and running with in excess of ten thousand images already copied into a digital format. Eventually the digital images will be available to view on the internet, so if you have a few hours to spare please come along and help because the sooner everything is copied and indexed the sooner you will be able to access the information. Please note that even if you cannot use a computer there is plenty of other work to be done. For further information contact Ann Cole 01822 810213

Ed - Society members were treated to a special viewing of the above works on 15th September last, and we thank Ann and her volunteers for showing part of the archive and demonstrating the works being undertaken

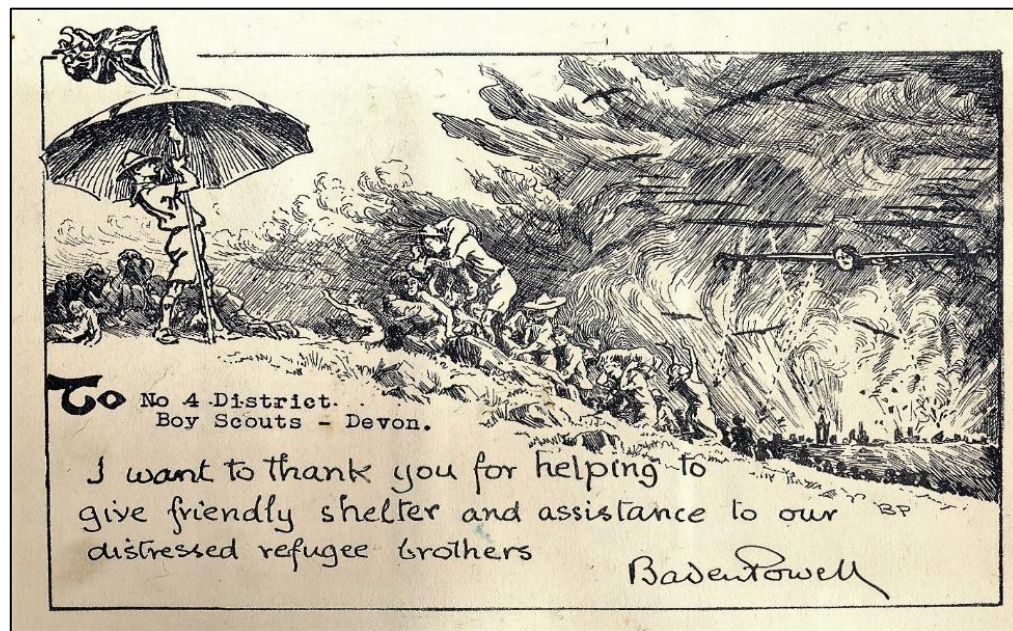
TAVISTOCK MATTERS

Betsy Grimbal's Tower and the Abbey Still Tower

News has just been received that the Tavistock Town Council are to receive a substantial Historic England (formerly English Heritage) grant for works on Betsy Grimbal's Tower and the Abbey Still Tower.

More news will be forthcoming as we receive it.

Giving shelter to people fleeing warzones is nothing new for us. This above message was sent by Baden Powell to the Tavistock scouts in 1942. The People in flight just then had been coming from a heavily bombed Plymouth and inevitably, of course, this story is a mixed one. Tavistock, like its scout group, had a record to be proud of in welcoming Plymothians; not so some of the surrounding districts.



It is interesting to see that the word refugee is used in this message. By 1945 at the end of a brutalising war 'refugee' was increasingly interchangeable with the more callous 'DP'; displaced person. Coping with the huge numbers of Europe's uprooted wartime victims would finally take more than a decade to solve.

Less than thirty years on from the end of the Second World War Tavistock was again called on to give aid and succour to people driven from their homes no more than they could carry. They were the Ugandan Asians, thrown out by the grotesque dictator Idi Amin. Many found themselves in the sub-arctic conditions of Plaisterdown Camp. Again, Tavistock Scouts provided and welcome, but also many others in the town. Kelly College invited younger members of the community to play hockey. This photograph of that act of kindness however evokes mixed feelings. The image of the – here literally well heeled – Kelly boys with their barefoot guests underlines, at least as much now as then, the handicap young people beyond Europe labour under compared with their richer peers.

The Ugandan Asians, arriving in this country with virtually nothing, went on as a group to prosper here and to make a positive economic and social contribution to the country. If any of their children or grandchildren still play hockey, they won't be doing it barefoot.



Always in Our Thoughts

The Chairman recently received a letter from Mrs Jean Miles of Tavistock with notes written by her nephew following his trip to Jakarta to visit the WW2 grave of his great uncle Charles W. R Redstone*. The following is taken from these notes.

"Jakarta is not for the first-time Western traveller [but] of course we were here on a mission to locate the grave of my great uncle, Charles Redstone.

... We were in a very busy, urban built up area with massive skyscrapers all around ... Thus it was a startling revelation when we came to the Grave to find a delightful oasis of calm, tranquility and colour. The neat little stone entrance and memorial let us in to an immaculate graveyard full of colourful flowers, trees, shrubs and bushes with many butterflies and dragonflies dancing around ... The grass was cut to the finest military haircut standards and the graves laid out in neat rows in blocks of about 120. Just walking through the entrance seemed to silence the city bustle leaving only the sound of birds and water sprinklers.

Charles Redstone lies in block 2, row B grave 12. The words "Always in Our Thoughts" are on the stone and not all graves have a personal message so I guess Aunt Pearl and perhaps Pop had some sort of input at some point in the past. He died in rural Java but was moved here in 1949.

... It is not until one is stood next to Charles' grave that the horror and tragedy of the manner and timing of his death and the many men and women around him hits home. It hits hard and I found myself far more emotional than I expected. All of the people in Charles' block died in mid to late 1945 and most like him had endured 3 years of captivity before they could finally take no more. Here are many others captured in the fall of Singapore in 1942, survivors from the sunken Prince of Wales and HMS Sultan in the same year. Gunners, Drivers, Sappers, Nurses, Airmen, Sailors; Muslim, Jew and Christian. All suffered three long years of starvation, beating and hideous mistreatment to die either of disease or directly by the hands of the Japanese. Many of the headstones are nameless - "Known Unto God" ...

Is this the right place for Charles Redstone from Tavistock, Devon? I think it is. If he was repatriated home he would be just another grave in a corner of some cemetery, unremarkable in any way. Here he lies in that very special place in block 2, row B, no 12, tended every day by careful gardeners. Most importantly he lies with his mates who after three long years of suffering together in great adversity would have been much closer to him than family. The Jakarta Commonwealth War Grave is a good place to call his last.

I am glad we came here ..."

* See *Lest We Forget - The Tavistock Fallen of the Second World War* by Alex Mettler and Gerry Woodcock and published by the History Society in 2007. Charles Redstone died 3 September 1945, one day after the Japanese Government had signed the deed of surrender.

Numbers 37 - 43 Old Exeter Road

In 2009 History Society member Andrew Thompson undertook an archaeological investigation of four late 19th century terraced houses, numbers 37 to 43 Old Exeter Road in Tavistock. Although this project was undertaken as part of an assignment for a module on the archaeology of standing buildings the principles involved in research and evaluation are applicable to everybody interested in finding out more about their own home, or other premises.

Andrew has kindly given permission for the Newsletter to publish parts of his findings which members may find of interest.

"The main purpose of this project was to analyse a type of building, namely late 19th working class century terraced housing, which has received relatively little attention from archaeologists. In a local context, the recent *Conservation Area Appraisal* identified these houses, along with their neighbours, as making a 'positive' contribution to the Tavistock Conservation Area. Therefore, a secondary purpose was to consider what measures are necessary for their effective conservation. Finally, the project allowed the preservation by record of the house interiors which are not protected from alteration and removal as the houses are not listed ...

... The houses were built in 1897 as speculative ventures following the demolition of earlier buildings on a site owned by the Duke of Bedford. The Duke leased the properties to tenants from Tavistock's commercial middle class who paid for the houses to be built and in turn leased them to working class families. This probably explains why the houses were built on pre-existing, unevenly sized plots (figures 27 and 28) rather than re-parcelling the land into more equitable units.

Number 41, like its neighbours, was double pile. On the ground floor, as demonstrated at numbers 39 and 43 by the fireplace, there was a parlour at the front and a living and cooking room with a range at the back. There were two bedrooms on the first floor and one in the attic. Where the entrance now is to the upper extension room there was a window overlooking the roof of a lean to which faced into the yard. This was probably a scullery. There was a privy beyond. The steps up to the garden, the yard and the likely coal bunker in the

retaining wall also date to this period. In form it was typical of much speculative building for the working and lower middle classes.

The materials combined fashion, in the mix of stone and brick at the front where they could be seen, with local building traditions in the use of rubble, granite and slate. Inside the relative poverty of decorative fittings, demonstrated by the ubiquitous simple moulding on skirtings and corners, suggest the builders anticipated a humble class of inhabitants. Other fittings, such as the cast iron and slate fireplaces, were relatively cheap results of mass production.

Many historians have remarked on the rigid demarcation of domestic space and the emphasis on privacy in Victorian middle class homes. It also seems to have occurred here. The elements announcing relative status to the visitor were on immediate display: the front elevation with granite, brick and fake ashlar and the narrow hall with its tiled floor which ended abruptly at the beginning of an even narrower passage to the scullery and main living room. The visitor could be guided into the parlour without ever seeing these areas. Internal doors are placed as far apart as possible and all were hung so they masked the view into the room from outside. Room status is indicated by the hierarchy of skirting boards, the highest with a lip being in the parlour and front bedroom. The attic's low status is demonstrated by narrow stairs and the lack of a fireplace. Given there were no servants in these houses it was probably used by the children.

... It seems that change came when the houses were transferred to owner-occupiers. The first house for which this is demonstrable is number 41. It was probably after Farm Industries sold to private owners in 1959 that the outside privy, which stood against the party wall beyond where the kitchen steps now are, was demolished to make way for the bathroom recorded on architect's drawings in 1989 (figure 29). The boiler, noted by the architect and evident from the surviving flue, and pipework in the kitchen probably also dates from this period. These alterations, the removal of the wall between G2 and the stairs, and the loss of Victorian floors, ceilings and mouldings occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

...Between the late 1970s and 2000, planning permission was given for modern extensions to replace Victorian lean-tos in all four houses which resulted in the first major structural alterations to the main rooms since they were built."

The full report is in the public domain and any person interested further should contact Andrew direct (01822 612707)

An Appeal to Shop in Tavistock

The following letter appeared in the Tavistock Gazette in 1932

"Sir - I wonder how many people pause to think of the changes that are taking place in this dear old town of ours? One all, men who have served Tavistock well—are feeling the strain of these days of “slump.” Slowly they are going into liquidation, driven out of business by lack of help, lack of sympathy, and, above all, by lack of ready cash. Is Tavistock to become an offshoot of Plymouth, dependent on it for all its essentials? It is the writer's carefully considered opinion, that 12 months will see many more failures in the town. Why? Tavistock traders have faced hard times in the past and won out but today the action of the railway companies, running daily cheap trips to Plymouth, provides something local traders cannot fight. Cheap trips are a public boon, on occasions; but when their persistence endangers the stability of a whole community they become a curse, both to those who use the facility and those who suffer through lost *trade*. A cheap trip becomes a very dear trip when all costs are counted! The purchase of a coat of possibly poorer quality may save a shilling or so and be a subject of temporary personal satisfaction: but, a fare, a tea, an entertainment of sorts, tacked on to two hours of wasted time in dilatory travelling make it a bad bargain after all—particularly if the bargain hunter loses his livelihood in Tavistock in consequence.

Many townspeople are utterly disloyal. They think it the height of good form to boast of their frequent trips to Plymouth; they forget that they are lowering themselves, and their town, proving themselves citizens of no consequence. Compare their attitude with that of people from the surrounding villages; were it not for these good folk who regularly make their purchases here, support our charities, markets, dances, sports, and entertainments, Tavistock, as a business centre, would cease to exist. They are the people who keep our town going to-day. Do you honestly think on are giving your town a square deal? Think again, you traders who shop in Plymouth, you residents who phone the big stores there. Think again, you working folk who rush for the 4.30, and live through the week on what is left after a “cheap” trip, I think that because you are British you will see the error of your ways, and Tavistock will again prosper.

Yours faithfully.

A TRADER WHO HAS ALWAYS GIVEN GOOD VALUE - Tavistock, August 24th 1932"

Tavistock Town planning and protection of historic character

It is true, certainly of Tavistock, that very many of the pre-nineteenth century buildings were pulled down because they were, mostly, in poor repair or because the ease of movement in the various streets had been compromised by lack of a 'planning' strategy for the town as a whole. The Dukes of Bedford did show signs of recognising the importance of some

of the town's ancient tangible heritage and in October 1822 Col Bray, the Borough Steward, wrote the following to the Duke of Bedford concerning a proposed new Sheep Market to be undertaken in Guildhall Square.

"Herewith I beg to forward a Copy of Mr Foulston's plan for the new Sheep Market with the penn's (sic) etc arranged according to Mr Wilson's Suggestion. I should wish however that whatever plan we adopt should have your approbation, but before you determine finally whether to have fixed or Moveable penns, I would beg to call your attention to the Model enclosed in the Box which Mr Wilson & myself think from its lightness and ingenuity (sic) has certainly much Merit and I conceive is well adapted for the purpose if the idea of moveable penns should not be entirely abandoned. It is the production of Colling who thinks as well as many other persons that a wall and strong fixed penns will be a great Eyesore in such a situation & injurious to the Character and appearance of the Gothic Structures around, which ought to be left as clear and open as possible in their immediate vicinity. He has therefore been at the trouble of giving form and shape to his plan which he says will not cost more than the other, as no wall or fixing will be necessary and less Timber will be required, and the Iron work may be of the commonest kind exactly as in the Model, - and that two men might carry the frames out from a convenient place for keeping them and fix them in an Hours time. He says that no holes in the ground will be necessary, the short spikes at the bottom and being all connected by the Hooks & Staples being sufficient to steady them. He states that his only motive in suggesting this plan is, if possible, to do away the necessity of spoiling the appearance of the place by fixing permanent penns and building a wall."

Bravo Mr Colling.

Sense of humour?

From the Bedford Estate archives it is easily recognised that Andrew Wilson, the Duke of Bedford's Steward in Tavistock in 1825, was not renowned for his sense of humour. However, a little flurry of mirth appears in one of his letters to William Adam, the Bedford Estate Auditor in London, when he wrote concerning his views about the then people of Whitchurch who had been trying energetically to avoid paying road tolls required to support the new Turnpike roads into Tavistock.

"Sir - ...I attended the Meeting of the Road Trustees at Plymouth on Thursday last, and laid before Mr Woollcombe and the Gentlemen the half sheet of paper which you wrote to me on the subject of replacing the Abbey Bridge Gate, & making Piscay lane the Turnpike road. Mr Woollcombe brought forward all the correspondence which had taken place, on the subject of the road, from the time of the preceding meeting, at Plymouth, which I believe was about eight weeks ago, and after some discussion it was proposed that the measure you had suggested should be adopted, which was carried unanimously. The gate is to be replaced at the Abbey Bridge in a fortnight from Saturday last - the Act requiring that fourteen days notice shall be given before the propose alteration can take place - the same to be advertised in a provincial paper. On Saturday week the Abbey Bridge gate will be re-placed, for the comfort and satisfaction of the Whitchurch people, who will not only have to pay toll, but the additional pleasure of keeping in repair a very extensive line of Parish road leading to Tavistock

A Wilson
Hurdwick House, 10 January 1825."

Heard it all before?

In the latter part of 1825 many country banks were in trouble, especially in the south west. The following is part of a letter, dated 6 Mar 1826 , from Andrew Wilson, the Duke of Bedford's steward in Tavistock, to William Adam, the Bedford Estate auditor in London - all sounds all a bit familiar.

Sir - ... I have agreeably to your desire, delivered your thanks to Messrs Rundles, for their punctuality in handing over the three thousand pounds for which they expressed their warmest obligations. I do not apprehend that they now have any difficulty in keeping their credit - but they find that banking is now attended with much trouble and little profit. Their notes are only taken in the immediate neighbourhood of Tavistock, and therefore the quantity they have now in circulation is very trifling. At Plymouth the Banks scarcely issue one of their own notes. It was found to be of no use to answer drafts or Checks with Country notes, as they were sure to be returned, for Bank of England paper or Gold, in the course of that, on the following day that they were issued.

The transition, from a very extensive, to a very contracted circulation, has had a most ruinous tendency, and I believe has not been felt more in any part of the Kingdom than in the neighbourhood of Plymouth. Country Banks had become far too numerous, from which much evil has resulted. The facility with which the money could be obtained from the banks induced much overtrading, and many fruitless speculations, the effects of which are now manifest, and I fear has not yet arrived at the worst. The diminution of country Banks, and the consequent curtailment of the issues, will, after a time, be attended with great benefit to the Country; but the evil is, that it has come on too rapidly, and has created the utmost panic and alarm. Unless employment can be found for the people, it is difficult to say what will be the consequence."