

Tavistock and District Local History Society

Newsletter No 57 – Spring 2016



On the 19th January Moorland Guides ran a town walk for four groups of young persons, from Beijing, who were the guests of Mount Kelly. Pictured is one group of these students with Simon Dell, of Moorland Guides and Tavistock History Society, and an unknown gentleman with a wonky hat. It is desired to identify Mr Wonky Hat and answers should be written on a £20 note (non-returnable) and sent to the Society Chairman. Correct answers will receive a prize of a crisp new £5 note.

SOCIETY NEWS

Election of Officers and Committee for 2016

At the January AGM the following Society members were elected -

Chair - Alex Mettler; Vice Chair - Adrian Lee; Secretary - Gina Nicholls; Treasurer - Andrew Thompson; Committee Members - Ann Cole, John Davies, Simon Dell, Kevin Dickens, Jane Meckiff, Claire Morris, Ann Pulsford.

Jane Meckiff continues as Membership Secretary (tel 01822 616431).

John Davies and Ray Meneer have stepped down from their offices, respectively, of Treasurer and Auditor, positions which they have held for many, many years. We thank them for their contribution.

Our Society does not run itself and we do require new blood on the Committee - contact Alex Mettler (01822 614773) who will be waiting expectantly for the flood of offers.

Programme for 2016

The remaining meetings for 2016 are as follows

Apr 12 *"Beer, Bribery and the Ballot" - Adrian Lee*

May 10 *"Tavistock - a World Heritage Site" - a walk with Andrew Thompson*

Jun 14 *Private visit to Shilstone House and the Devon Rural Archive - all day outing*

Jul 12 *Private guided tour of the Royal William Yard, Plymouth with Graham Lobb*

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*

Meeting places and other information for the outdoor events are as follows

May 10 - "Tavistock - a World Heritage Site", a walk with Andrew Thompson - meet in Guildhall Square at 7pm; flat walk 90 minutes max

Jun 14 - Annual Society Coach outing - A private visit to Shilstone House and the Devon Rural Archive (see below). Please meet outside the Bedford Hotel at 9.30am. We will be going direct to Shilstone House and members are requested to bring their own packed lunch. A Devon Cream Tea will be provided in the afternoon. It is expected that we shall arrive back in Tavistock c 5.30pm. Cost inclusive of coach fare, admittance fees to the House and Archive with private guide, and a cream tea, is £25. It is essential that members pay for this trip when booking - contact Jane Meckiff (01822 616431) or Alex Mettler (01822 614773) for booking.

We must fill the coach for this event as we cannot risk falling short on receipts against the booking costs for coach etc. Please give your support this outdoor event; our daytrips in previous years have been highly enjoyable and good value for money.

Jul 12 - Private Guided Tour of the Royal William Yard with Graham Lobb. Please meet at the Royal William Yard at **7pm**. Car parking is limited and it is advised that members car share wherever possible.

Aug 9 - "Calstock - A Victorian Inland Port" - a walk with Stephen Docksey. Assemble at 7pm in the Public Car Park on Calstock Quay. This will be mainly flat walking, approx 90 minutes.

Shilstone House and the Devon Rural Archive

Set within the rolling hills of South Devon, this magnificent Georgian country house is stunning in its architecture, design and decor. When owners Sebastian and Lucy Fenwick bought the property in 1997, Shilstone House was less than half the size it stands at today. Purchased as a rather rundown farmhouse reduced in size over many years from its former medieval glory, the Fenwicks had a vision of a Georgian house and they have spent many years rebuilding and remodelling it to create their beautiful home. With stone quarried from land within the estate, the facade of the existing property was developed into the casing of this stately home but it is the interiors which really set Shilstone apart.

Winning awards and accolades aplenty for the architecture and design from prestigious organisations including the Georgian Group and English Heritage, Shilstone is rich in history too. Whilst digging and delving throughout the vast renovation work, much was uncovered, not least the lost water gardens and terracing which prompted Sebastian to initiate the inauguration of the Devon Rural Archive (DRA), a charity-run resource dedicated to rural architecture. From its building on-site at the Shilstone estate, the research centre is open to the public and aims to encourage the preservation of such sites.

From the Chairman – Alex Mettler

Our meetings from November to date have gone very well with some 40 members attending at each event - we must be doing something right.

By the time you receive this Newsletter we shall have held our first afternoon meeting. This was attended by some 29 members who enjoyed Tom Greeves's fascinating 'tragical and desperate tale' of the last days of John Fitz of Fitzford, Tavistock

The number of new members (paid up!) is encouraging but we need always to replace the inevitable loss of some of last year's members. It is essential that we keep up, and preferably grow our membership humungously in order that, as a Society, we can offer interesting indoor and outdoor events and new projects in which members can take part. The new Committee is working hard on bringing new projects to fruition but without the help of other Society members progress will be slow. To date, as a Society we have created Tavistock Museum, undertaken the digitising of the Jim Thorington photographic archive and the Ward and Chowen Archive, run an oral history project and deposited a number of photographic collections with the West Devon Record Office; our longer term aim is to make all these records available to

the public and we need help to achieve this. In addition members have provided town walks and community representation on major projects such as the Tavistock Heritage Initiative and the Guildhall Project.

So come along and help and/or actively recruit new members in order that we can continue to thrive.

Tavistock Museum – Roderick Martin

The museum re-opens on Saturday 26th March 2016. There will be two main exhibitions this year; 'The WW2 Aerodrome at Harrowbeer, Yelverton', arranged by Mike Hayes, and 'Weddings' arranged by Linda Elliott. The former exhibition commemorates 75 years since the aerodrome was opened to provide air cover to shipping convoys, and the latter the timeless institution of marriage with a particular emphasis on royal weddings and local weddings.

Over the winter the museum volunteers have continued their fundraising activities and are most grateful to the public for donations of second-hand books and bric-a-brac. Money raised has helped pay for new shelving and a new sign above the main entrance. Finance and effort has also gone into developing our digital archiving system. After well over a decade of cataloguing and scanning, by Kevin Dickens and his volunteers, the work on the Thorington Collection is now nearly complete and attention is being given to other photographic collections in the museum.

Our manager, Sue Davies, has not returned to the museum since her fall last year and we all extend to her our best wishes.

Later in the year we will be partaking in events to celebrate 'Ten Years of the Mining World Heritage Site'. The highlight will be the appearance on Monday July 26th 2016 in Bedford Square, Tavistock of a giant huffing-and-puffing mechanical puppet known as the 'Man-Engine'. This signifies the major contribution Cornish mining made to the development of the steam engine.

Ed - The largest puppet ever made in Britain, the awe-inspiring cast-iron 'Cornish Miner', will be accompanied by more than a dozen 'miners' and 'bal-maidens' who will animate the steam-powered giant, heaving on coal, ensuring that flames roar, and steam belches. From 25th July to 6th August the colossal Man Engine will make his journey, step-by-step, from Tavistock to Lands End, literally walking and crawling through each one of the ten World Heritage Site mining areas.

The Thorington Collection – Kevin Dickens

Sunny, summery sixties days in Tavistock. The paddling pond was still there in the Meadows half a century ago; the decadent luxury of a heated indoor swimming pool the wildest of pipe dreams.



In this particular sequence of Thorington slides there are shots of official visitors from Germany, parents in the park, councillors in the council chamber, but who is the portentous personage appearing again and again in these photographs? Here he is making his presence felt on the steps of the Carlton Bingo Hall. There he is sunning himself on the bonnet of a prestigious motor car and the town clearly his oyster. The accompanying notes give him a name. He is Horace the Town Cat.

What does this mean? Did the town own and maintain him? Did he own the town? It looks rather more like that. There is a smooth, (literally) feline confidence about Horace that puts one in mind of one of those James Bond villains. Welcome to Tavistock Mr. Bond! Please help yourself to a saucer of milk. So what was the power structure around Horace? What influence was he exerting? What strings were being pulled? Maybe we shall never know ... or perhaps someone out there with a long memory can come up with the goods on Horace the Town Cat.

Ward and Chowen Archive - Ann Cole

Below is a copy of a letter in the W&C collection regarding the D of B sale to take place in 1911. It is from George Gale & Co who are slightly miffed at being left out of the Duke of Bedford sale! The date is 2 August 1910.

Dear Sir

We see that Messrs Ward & Chowen of Brentor have been instructed to offer by auction His Grace the Duke of Bedford's Tavistock Estate.

We had not for one moment entertained a thought that we should receive instructions to deal with the whole of the properties, but seeing that one of our members of the firm is a leaseholder, and we tenants under his Grace, we hoped that we should have received some consideration.

We are quite aware that they are an old established firm, but seeing that we reside in the town, and do a large business there and in the surrounding country and have done so for many years past, we feel rather hurt that his Grace should have placed the whole of the sale away from his own tenants.

Trusting that we may yet do business for you at some future time.

We are
Yours obediently
Geo D Gale & Co

Ed - That should have scuppered Gale's chance for any business with the Duke

Visit to the Masonic Hall in Tavistock - Ann Cole



Members of the History Society and the Devonshire Association in the Grand Hall of the Bedford Lodge

Members of the Tavistock Branch of the Devonshire Association and Tavistock Local History Society were welcomed, by Worshipful Masters Graham Snell, Keith Johnson Director of Ceremonies and Joe Sevieri to an historic meeting at the Freemasons Bedford Lodge. It was the first time in Devon that the public have been able to visit a lodge.

The evening commenced with a short film presented by the Provincial Grand Master of Devon, Ian Kingsbury, detailing some of the work undertaken today; interestingly the Freemasons are one of the biggest contributors to non-Masonic

charities. Although little is known of how the Freemasons started up there were links with the Knights Templar and various other bodies.

Pictures were shown of the prison hulks in Plymouth Sound and the establishment of freemasonry in the French Prisoners of War housed in the prison hulks was explained.

Many famous people have belonged to the Freemasons, including Edward VII & VIII, George VI, George Washington and Sir Winston Spencer Churchill. It was only when Hitler started persecuting the Freemasons as he did the Jews that the Freemasons became a secret society and have remained so until recently.

The evening closed with some of the history of the Bedford Lodge and whilst many questions were answered the evening proved so thought provoking that there were many more questions still left hanging in the air.

TAVISTOCK MATTERS

Always in Our Thoughts

In *We will Remember Them - The Men of Tavistock who died in the First World War* is an article on Francis Harry who fell at the Third Battle of Ypres on 5 August 1917. Recently the Museum has received the War Plaque, medals and dog tag of Francis via a gentleman who was given them by a contact of the Harry family. We can get no further information as regards Francis Harry, as direct family descendants seem to be non-available. However, these medals etc are the first such that have become available and it is to be hoped that, if the Museum makes a special small exhibition of these medals with other relevant information, it may well result in more such material being deposited.

"No Waiting, Loading or Unloading"

Nicholas HUNT (1637-1716) was the second Mayor of Tavistock during its short period of incorporation in the late 17th - early 18th centuries; he was also responsible for building the C17 malthouse in Market Street, behind the Co-op building. In 1683, as Mayor, he signed the 35 by-laws which were written into the Charter of 1683. By-law No33 reads

"Item it is further ordered for the better reliefs of and Encouragement of the poore to worke and for the preventing abuses to the saide poore in the payment payment of their wages that noe person inhabiting or residing in the said Burrough Towne or Liberties shall pay or satisfie any Labourer Woollcomber Worstedcomber Spinster Carder of Wooll or Weaver for their Labour with any Wares Victualls or other Commodities save only with ready money upon pain to forfeit for every such offence ffive (sic) shillings over and besides the penalties in the Statute in that behalfe made and provided."

What His Worship the Mayor did not do is order double yellow lines and a myriad of signposts to get his message across, which is just as well because nobody seems to take any notice of them.

Respecting the quality of lectures at the Tavistock Institution

December 1827 saw the recording, in a letter from Wilson to the Duke's auditor in London, of the following incident

" ... I have no idea that the "Tavistock Institution" will last many years. It has no pretensions to a Mechanics Institute. The Subjects, for the greater part, which have been introduced are ridiculous. The Whimsical Apothecary (Pearse, a native of Tavistock) who Lectured on "Sensitive life" was rather unfortunate - he brought a mouse in a Box, and a Beetle carefully deposited in a pill box to experiment upon, - however, on removing the cover to give a small opening the mouse made its escape, & by Jumping to the floor frightened all the Ladies. He was equally unfortunate in the Beetle, it having fallen upon the floor, and in the scramble was trodden upon. The experiments therefore being at an end, he was left to his eloquence, which I believe finished with some doubt as to the real meaning of "Sensitive life." The last lecture that has been held was on Education, and I sincerely believe the Lecturer, never knew a word of Grammar in his life. It was however taken up, as I was told, by Mr Evans, who made up for the deficiency of the lecturer ..."

Ed - They are still looking for the mouse, the beetle scarpered as he felt rather down-trodden

Wilson's love of Tavistock

April 1829 shows Andrew Wilson, the Tavistock Borough Steward for the house of Bedford, to really like the town he controls and lives in. In a letter to Adam, the Duke of Bedford's auditor in London, Wilson wrote

"Mr Lemmon informs me that Mrs Kelly has consented to dispose of her interest in the said garden - but I have considerable doubt whether His Grace's property would be benefited by turning the Garden into a Tan Yard, there being a Tan Yard held on Lease by Garton & Carter, on the East side of Bannawell Street, which Tan Yard abutts (sic) on a Brook, which runs between the latter and the Garden; but as, probably, one Tan Yard may be as much as Tavistock & the neighbourhood can support, and I am not altogether prepared to say that it is, or is not, I am however inclined to think that one is enough; and as a second would increase the number

of labourers, and consequently add to pauperism, of which we have now an excess, the keeping down of which is, in my opinion, a consideration paramount to all others. (the facility with which Miners & other descriptions of labourers have been accommodated with Houses & lodging rooms in Tavistock, has rendered it a complete nest for rogues & vagabonds. There is not a more detestable place in England.) ..."

Ed - You get the impression that Wilson did not like Tavistock, is not open-minded and has no interest in increasing business opportunities in the town - sounds like a number of people I know.

Not easy to get on with?

Andrew Wilson is seen on many occasions to be a rather ascerbic man who had very strong views which he often aired to Adam at Head Office. Wilson died in 1836 and Theophilus Jones joined the Tavistock Bedford Office as Surveyor in 1843 without having met Wilson. John Benson, Wilson's successor, was very much more of a mild nature than his predecessor and was rarely 'incited' into critical comment of others. It seems, however, that at last this quiet clam was tested and Jones manages to get under his skin and Benson writes, on 27 January 1850, to Christopher Haedy, his boss in London

" ... I have consequently declined Mr Morris' proposition. I felt somewhat uneasy as I found that Mr Jones had given him some encouragement and indeed Mr Jones did not look at the matter in the same light that I did - and I dislike amazingly to have any difference with him, he almost always make[s] it an unpleasant difference by treating any opinion that differs from his own as certainly wrong."

One month later Benson's irritation with Jones comes to the fore again as on 22 March he writes to Adam thus

" ... I have no doubt but I could arrange the lime for the present year - but I do not wish to do so because I feel that Mr Jones would think I was interfering and he is so very thin skinned that it is quite impossible to say what course he might take - and I have trouble enough to get on with him without proposing anything that one knows would be likely to be objectionable - and as it seems to me Mr Jones seems to seek to act independently of me in all he can - and to assume that he is so, of course I do not wish to place myself in opposition to him ..."

Sounds like trouble in the office!

And now to end the day with something totally different, and absolutely nothing to do with local history.

Man's natural instincts - or why I like beer

In a book on beer and brewing history, written by Ian S Hornsey and published by the Royal Society of Chemistry, the opening of Chapter 1 begins thus

"The sensation of thirst is the psychological correlate of the metabolic functions of water. In direct importance drink comes after air, and before food. Thus in the field of social psychology, drink has played a more important part than food, especially since the primitive discovery of fermentation ... made ethyl alcohol a constituent of drinkables. After being weaned from his mother's milk, Man found water a "natural" drink. But, as experimentation with different edible materials proceeded, the sensation of thirst was replaced by the sense of taste. The resulting complex "sense of drink" was to be satisfied by a series of discoveries which gave some beverages certain properties of both food and drugs."

Ed - As someone who occasionally luxuriates in a pint or two of God's fermented liquor I now realise why this is so. My sensation of thirst is a psychological correlate and my resulting complex sense of drink, and love of chemistry, explains very fully why I like beer. Long live science I say.