

DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter

January 2013

Website: www.dawlishhistory.org.uk

Dear Members,

A Happy New Year to everybody, I hope you all over indulged at Christmas!!!

Our first meeting this year will be on Tuesday 3rd February when Mr John Stuart will give a talk about the River Exe from source to sea, at the Manor House. DON'T FORGET IT WILL BE ON TUESDAY.

The hall will be open from 2pm and tea & coffee available until 2:30pm. As usual the full range of history books will be on display for purchase.

This newsletter will also be accompanied with the programme for the rest of the year which includes three days of outings to local places: Haccombe Church, Ugbrooke House and Bradley Manor, please let Tricia know as soon as possible if you will be attending these.

Derek Wain

**Our next meeting will be on
Tuesday 3rd February, at The
Manor House.**

A talk by John Stuart

'River Exe from source to sea'

at 2.30pm

Queen Elizabeth II Coronation – Part 2

(Or, I was around the corner, Tricia)

In the last newsletter Tricia, our Chairperson, gave her account of the time of our present Queen's Coronation and the months leading up to it. In it she mentioned that she worked at the time in an office in a street named Moorgate in the City of London. Imagine my astonishment on reading this for by a great coincidence I was literally just around the corner in an office in a street named London Wall, which joins Moorgate at right angles. How did I come to be there considering I was born in Dawlish and lived here with my parents while I was attending school? Well on leaving school I went to London to be 'Articled' to a firm of Chartered Accountants in the City of London and their offices were in the above mentioned London Wall. I signed the papers and so started the term of five years which was normal at that time. During those five years I travelled to many parts of London and the Home counties and got to know them well because many of the firm's clients were too large for their books of account to be brought in to my firm so we went to the offices of the clients.

And so it was that one day I was out of the office on the audit of a firm of Solicitors in Cheapside. I was accommodated in a room high up in the building which had a window facing west looking towards St Paul's Cathedral. Although the area around St Paul's had been flattened by bombing in the 1939-1945 war, to the north side of Cheapside many buildings remained intact. It was over the rooftops of these that I could see from the window. During the morning my occasional glances out of the window revealed that gradually Union Jack flags were being hoisted at half mast on the flagpoles of many of the buildings. As time went on I got the feeling that something major had occurred, and this was confirmed when lunchtime arrived and I went out of the building in search of lunch.

In those days, as now, newspaper vendors on pavements had placards by their pitch displaying the main news headline of the day. All conveyed the message "the King is dead" or similar phraseology and the usual noise of the surrounding area quietened and people went about seemingly in a sense of disbelief, for his death was not expected. Unlike Tricia who went to the West End after leaving work, I went back to my 'digs' or lodgings, to study for all studying had to be done in one's own time. All of the working week (including Saturday mornings in those days) was spent in my firm's office or that of clients.

The day before the Coronation I decided to watch the Coronation procession somewhere along the route and after some thought decided somewhere in Pall Mall would be suitable as the pavements there were fairly narrow and so fewer people would be behind me to create a possible surge forward when the Queen passed by. I have been interested in photography from a young age and so armed with my camera, food and suitable clothing I travelled up to claim my spot for the next day. On arrival I was lucky enough to find that I could be in the front row on the edge of the pavement. This would be the reward for spending the night on an uncomfortable London pavement (together with thousands of other folk) or so I thought! In the event, early next morning one of the regiment of Guards marched along and were ordered to space out to line the route. They were stationed pretty close together and their height plus their busbies, or bearskins, spoiled my hitherto unrestricted view which was further hindered by the later arrival of police to line the street in front of the soldiers. However, when the procession duly arrived I was

able to get glimpses between the heads of those guarding Her Majesty. The events of the day were wonderful and unforgettable. One of those was the excitement and cheering in the morning as news of a famous event spread through the crowd from those people with radios receiving the broadcasts. The news was, of course, that Sir Edmund Hillary with sherpa Tenzing Norgay had conquered Mount Everest being the first people to have achieved that feat. They had, in fact, reached the top on 29th May but the news of that only reached London on Coronation morning.

Before and for a while after Coronation day several arches topped by a crown were spaced along The Mall and these were illuminated at night and very attractive they were too. One evening while they were still there I set off with my camera to capture them, taking my tripod with me as a long exposure would be required to compensate for the lower level of light at night. I arrived in The Mall and chose a good place for the best photograph and began setting up the tripod, only to be approached by a policeman who informed me that tripods were not allowed in the crowded streets. The beginnings of the Health and Safety movement perhaps! However, I resorted to hand held shots and got some good results.

The coincidence of working in the next street to Tricia is not the only one, for she mentioned watching the rehearsals of the Honourable Artillery Company (the oldest Regiment in the British Army) from her office. Well, one of my fellow articulated clerks (who was a few years older than me due to his war service) was a Major in the HAC and must surely have taken part in those rehearsals and the actual Ceremonial. He duly qualified as a Chartered Accountant (as did I) and later in his career became the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

In conclusion a further coincidence (one of several) occurred during my five years in London. Part way through my time there I decided to change lodgings thinking that Bromley - in Kent - would be nicer than where I was. I saw an advert offering lodgings and visited the house by appointment, the door being opened by a kindly, elderly lady who was my prospective landlady. During the ensuing conversation I mentioned that my home was in Devon to which she replied that she had not long returned from a holiday there. She said she had been to stay at a little place she thought was too small for me to have heard of. It was called DAWLISH! Needless to say I stayed with her until my time in London was up and I returned to the town of my birth.

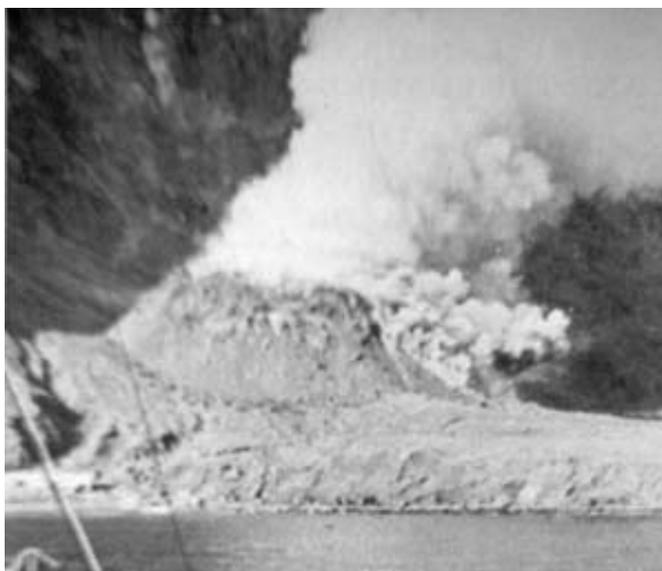
Maurice Criddle

Further history re HMS Bay, now MV Tristania.

The Earth moves!

Active volcanic islands can seem very benign as the time-scale between eruptions can span centuries. To a modern geologist, the tell-tale signs were there for all to see on the island of Tristan da Cunha. A classic pyramidal shape with a symmetric summit crater, a recent lava flow at Stony Hill not yet covered by vegetation, and everywhere evidence of hundreds of previous dark grey lava flows sandwiched between layers of fragile ash, often looking like Aero chocolate. But there had been no recorded volcanic activity during human history.

The eruption started as magma pushed upwards and caused earthquakes which produced landslides directly behind the settlement during August and September 1961. On 8th October a large earthquake and landslide particularly affected the eastern settlement where families moved overnight to the homes of relatives in the



The eruption pictured in October 1961 before lava flows destroyed the canning factory (bottom left) and Big Beach.

quieter western district. The following morning saw a fissure open between the Settlement and the canning factory where the ground rose. At a hastily organised meeting in the Hall, convened by Administrator Peter Wheeler, it was agreed to evacuate all the 264 islanders and 26 expatriates to huts at the Potato Patches overnight.

Escape from eruption.

By 10th October the rising ground had become a new volcanic cone and threatened the Settlement nearby, so a decision was taken to evacuate the island. Luck was on the community's side as local ships were immediately available for the three stage relay journey which projected the world's most isolated community from their quiet home village into the glare of world publicity. The fishing boats 'Tristania' and 'Frances Repetto' were on hand (rarely are two boats available locally in 2005) to take the islanders out of immediate danger to Nightingale Island to shelter overnight. The following day, 11th October, the Dutch ship 'Tjisidane', (equipped to carry 400 but only carrying 20 passengers and due to pick up two Tristan girls to embark on nurse training) picked up the marooned islanders for the leg to Cape Town, arriving on 16th October for a hectic few days, and then aboard the RMS Sterling Castle to arrive in Southampton on 3rd November.

UK Sojourn

The UK Government assumed that the evacuation was permanent. There had been several well documented crises in the Tristan community history when it was considered by officials that the island community should be abandoned, due to accident, environmental and economic circumstances. Surely a volcanic eruption, with a lava flow destroying the island's factory and both good landing beaches, with wild dogs savaging livestock and unknown visitors ransacking empty houses, would mean the island would be uninhabitable, even for the tough Tristan islanders. Especially as the repatriated community could be assured of a warm welcome, be found jobs and enable children to have a good education and make their way in the 'mother country'.

The Islanders had other ideas as they struggled to come to terms with their enforced move, first to Pendell Camp in Surrey, and then to the former RAF Calshot Camp on Southampton Water in 50 houses on a road which is still called Tristan Close. Many thrived, children attending local schools and adults employed in a variety of local businesses and shops. But problems occurred: a pensioner was mugged and the islanders lacked immunity from 'flu epidemics and also had to endure the appalling 1962/3 winter which lasted some three months.

Derek Wain

Hope to include the final story of HMS Bay in next newsletter...