



## DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

# Newsletter

March 2013

Website: [www.dawlishhistory.org.uk](http://www.dawlishhistory.org.uk)

### **Dear Members,**

*Our next meeting on Tuesday 2nd April will start at 2pm with the Annual General Meeting. Attached to this newsletter are the AGM Agenda and the booking form for our three afternoon outings throughout this summer (to be completed for the days you wish to attend and returned to Tricia).*

*The AGM Agenda includes a nomination form for a new Treasurer. If you know of anybody willing to take on this function please complete the form and bring it to the AGM.*

*Paul de Lusignan has decided to retire as Treasurer. Unfortunately Paul has some health problems which require hospital visits on a Tuesday, consequently, he cannot attend our meetings.*

*Distribution of the Newsletter is also covered by the Treasurer however, until we resolve the problem Mavis Stucky will look after this task when she obtains the necessary information from Paul.*

*It could be necessary that we need to have a few more people to distribute the newsletters... This may be discussed at the AGM.*

*At 2.30pm after the AGM we have Julia Neville to give a talk about Devon Local History Society.*

*Derek Wain*

**Our next meeting will be on  
Tuesday 2nd April, at The  
Manor House.**

**Annual General Meeting  
at 2.00 pm**

**A talk by Julia Neville  
'Devon Local History Society'  
at 2.30pm**

### **Regeneration of Dawlish**

The construction of the new (passenger) bridge over the railway seems a promising start to the regeneration promised for The Strand etc. The bridge blends in very well with the station (which could itself do with a little TLC). As I walk around the town I have noticed several properties being given "make overs". No 16 Brunswick Place which was a shop has been returned to a cottage in keeping with other neighbouring properties. 'Bonne Bouche' has gone from the corner of Brook Street and is now a mini-market – better than an empty property. A few doors along Brook Street, the property that was for years the Black Swan Bakery has been returned to a house in keeping with the others in the neighbourhood. The sign of the Black Swan is still on the wall at the time of writing. In King Street another property which used to house what appeared to be a workshop has been returned at least outwardly to a house in keeping with its neighbours. I am sure that there must be other signs that Dawlish is still thriving – let's hope that The Lawn and The Strand also come up to expectations and really do improve our town.

*Mavis Stucky*

### **The final part of HMS Bay story.**

Following on from the last 'Bay' story in newsletter Jan 2013, this covers the final result of HMS Bay/MV Tristania. The superstructure of the ship had been considerably modified; original living quarters in the fore-castle had probably been replaced with refrigeration stores and the crew live in the upper area or in the stern.



*MV Tristania anchored at Tristan da Cunha with one of the local boats.*

### **Return to Tristan**

A Royal Society Expedition in early 1962 studied the new volcanic cone on Tristan da Cunha and its impact. After a positive feedback, the islanders lobbied to return and a Resettlement Survey Party including 12 islanders who left on 9th August 1962 and arrived back on Tristan on 8th September to begin the formidable task of making the Settlement habitable and paving the way for a possible return after a year of neglect.

Still expecting them to stay in UK, the British Colonial Office arranged a hasty ballot in December but the community voted 148 to 5 in favour of

returning. An advance party of 51 left Tilbury on 17th March 1963 on RMS Amazon, transferring in Rio de Janeiro to the MV Boissevain and arriving on Tristan on 9th April. The main re-settlement group of 198 islanders left Southampton aboard the Danish ferry Bornholm on 24th October 1963 and on 10th November, the miracle was complete, most of the world's most isolated community had returned to their volcano-ravaged Settlement - rejecting the booming consumer society of England's swinging sixties.

#### **Tristan's isolation in statistics:**

(Note: distances are 'as the crow flies' - miles are statute and not nautical miles)

Tristan Location: Latitude 37° 15'S , Longitude 12° 30'W.

To St Helena - 1509 miles (nearest community).

To Cape Town - 1743 miles (nearest mainland city).

To Rio de Janeiro - 2083 miles .

To Stanley, Falkland Islands - 2424 miles.

To London UK - 6140 miles.

All scheduled ships depart from Cape Town.

#### **Visiting Tristan da Cunha**

Trips to the most isolated community in the world need to be well planned. Many would-be visitors have sailed to Tristan, but failed to land. This section seeks to provide potential visitors with the facts to make enquiries to enable them to set foot on Tristan da Cunha, and possibly one of the outlying islands, to enjoy this extraordinary place. With time and careful planning a stay on Tristan is achievable - read on - but don't tell the travel agents!

#### **Finally...**

MV 'Tristania' (HMS Bay) continued to operate at Tristan da Cunha when the inhabitants returned after the volcanic eruption in 1961. However, by the 1970s she was getting old and maintenance costs were rising so the Tristan Development Co. decided to sell her in about 1973. For the last five years she operated as an Oil Pollution Cleaning ship off the South African coast. In February 1978 the new owners decided to dispose of her. After removing all useful equipment she was scuttled off Robben Island, west of Cape Town in 80 metres depth of water. (Robben Island was where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for some 27 years.)

A Cape Town dive company has records and location of the ship and for the first time in 2008, a group of expert divers went down to examine the ship. It sits on the bottom perfectly upright and the top of the mast is about 40 metres below the surface. They were not totally convinced it was HMS Bay/MV Tristania because their old records and photographs predated the major changes the Tristan Development Co. made to the ship. A short time after, I sent the photograph of Tristania (front page) and they confirmed it was the same ship.

HMS Bay was adopted by Dawlish as result of Warship Week in October 1941 when some £65000 was pledged in the form of Savings and War Bonds to provide ships for the Royal Navy. The ship, HMS Bay, was a 'tree' class Trawler-Minesweeper, one of a series of 20. Launched in December 1939, 'Bay' was purpose-built for this role. This class of ship was 164 feet long, 530 tons displacement and had a complement of 35 men. They were crewed by members of the Royal Naval Patrol Service with the four officers from the Royal Naval Reserve, some from abroad.

*Derek Wain*

#### **The story of a Dawlish sailor**

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1891 a young lad, born & bred in Dawlish, set off for Devonport where he joined the Royal Navy as a boy 2<sup>nd</sup> class – he was said to be 5' 3½" tall with fair hair and grey eyes. Prior to joining the Navy he had been a fisherman and a temporary postman. This was my grandfather Thomas Henry Combstock – he served on many ships in various parts of the world both in war and peace before retiring in 1925 with the rank of Chief Petty Officer (he was now 5' 6½" tall). In July 1897 he had been promoted to Leading Seaman – he also qualified as a diver in November of that year. He served in the China Seas in 1900 and also in South Africa in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Tom was born and bred in Dawlish living in Brook Street and in 1899 married Bessie Bryant – also from Brook Street and moved around the corner to Golden Terrace where he lived with his wife and 3 daughters until he died in 1942. (He was born in December 1874.)

During the first World War he served on HMS Niobe & HMS Goliath as depicted on his medals – probably other ships as well. This sailor was my grandfather – as far as I know he was the first member of the family to join the Royal Navy. I remember him as a lovely gentleman – always smoking his pipe – the smell of tobacco smoke still reminds me of him and of seeing my grandmother pushing him around Dawlish in his wheelchair.

*Mavis Stucky*