



DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter

November 2014

Website: www.dawlishhistory.org.uk

Dear Members,

Well, Autumn is upon us and the rain and wind have returned. As we speed towards Christmas we can all look forward to our Christmas Social on the 2nd December.

Although we now have more than 70 members, at our committee meeting in late September and at a following informal meeting we considered ways of trying to attract new, younger members, including those who have not yet retired. To that end we considered additional activities which could take place in the evenings and at weekends. These included general research, genealogy and related family history activities, possibly linked with WW1, field walking and historical walks led by experts. If any of you have any ideas please contact a member of the committee.

The committee also decided we would like to take part in the Ceremony of Remembrance at the War Memorial on Sunday 9th November. Muriel Bradshaw laid a Poppy wreath on our behalf.

Regards, **Mike Ralls - Chairman**

Talk by Todd Gray – Sheila Ralls

At our October meeting, we welcomed Todd Gray to talk about his most recent book. Before the talk, the group congratulated Dr Gray on his M.B.E awarded in the Queen's birthday honours this year.

Like all his others, this new book, "Devon's 50 Best Churches" aims to alter perceptions of Devon's history and heritage. Few people go into churches now but that is exactly where they should be going to experience the wonderful and often unique art that is preserved there.

For example, Doddiscombsleigh has a rare stained glass window depicting the 7 sacraments with Jesus at the centre, which would have been an object of devotion and prayer. Almost all these windows were destroyed as attitudes to religion changed and this is the only one left in Devon.

Hacombe church contains a medieval rood screen and Elizabethan carved bench ends, as well as rare, decorative floor tiles. While the church of St Peter and St Paul at Teigngrace is a delightfully pretty church, painted pale blue inside with white marble.

Plymouth's medieval church was bombed in WW2, destroying the roof but when it was rebuilt in 1950s, John Piper was commissioned to make the windows, which transform the building and attract visitors from far and wide.

Collumpton Church is a gem with the most beautiful fan

vaulting and, by contrast, a rare 16 foot Golgotha carving of skulls and cross bones with a slot which once held the crucifix. As church congregations decline, this art and architecture is in danger of being lost forever. Artefacts which are preserved and revered in great museums and galleries are mostly ignored in our churches. By visiting these treasures on our doorstep and putting a small donation in their collection boxes, we can play an important role in saving these historical buildings.

Remembering the Scala Cinema – Sheila Coates

Thinking back to how Dawlish has changed over the years, what a lot of characters we had in Dawlish!

One of my best memories is of the Scala cinema and dear old Charlie Payne. He was the manager for many years. It was at the end of Lawn Terrace next to the Library. There were curved steps at the entrance and a round ticket office. If it wasn't too



busy, Charlie would see you in, take your money and show you to your seat.

My Mum always went on a Monday and Thursday afternoon because there was a change of programme on a Wednesday. There were never many people there in the afternoon, perhaps only three or four. When the commercials were on, Charlie would take orders for tea, make it and bring it round to you. He wore a suit and tie during the day and a dress suit and dickie bow in the evenings.

The Saturday matinee was when we all queued, pushing and shoving, all excited in case Charlie let us in early! And when the cowboys (the good ones always wore the white hats) met up with the baddies or the Indians, everyone would stamp their feet and Charlie would come down and threaten to throw out anybody who wasn't behaving.

Oh, happy days! We miss you Charlie and the good old Scala.

Dawlish Fair from Dawlish Gazette 1897 - Sheila Ralls

Easter Monday 1897 in Dawlish was very wet, raining hard all morning and forcing visitors to shelter under the Viaduct and in shop doorways. Having been a lively event for many years the fair was now dwindling to a few stalls and a Swing Boat, which

**Our next meeting will be on
Tuesday 2nd December 2014
2:00 pm at The Manor House.
Christmas Social**

had seen better days. However, after lunch, the weather improved and "...the Strand was soon crowded with those who had come to partake in the fun of the fair, if the last named could be found. During the afternoon, from three to six o'clock the Dawlish Town Band gave selections of music on



the Lawn, under the conductorship of Bandmaster McDermott." The Salvation Army, along with members from Newton Abbot, held meetings, marched through the town and held services on the Parade. They also served teas at the barracks in Chapel Street, which was very popular.

In the evening, the younger visitors enjoyed themselves "dancing, to the strains of a somewhat crazy melodeon" and playing games of "Kiss in the ring" and later "Teasers", which apparently involved the young men chasing and pouring water over the young ladies. But "Soon after eleven o'clock the streets had resumed their normal aspect".

Dawlish Museum News - Mavis Stuckey

The Museum has suffered a sad loss with the death of Danny Newburn, who had worked at the Museum for over 40 years in many capacities – steward, maintenance and latterly, Vice-Chairman. He was a "character" who will be sadly missed.

On a more positive note, the visitor numbers are up, partly due to interest in "The Storm" display. As usual, more stewards are needed URGENTLY.

Victor Beard, a DLHG member and steward, is going to catalogue the archaeological display – many artefacts having been found during field walks by DLHG members in the past.

As always, during the closed season, a lot of behind the scenes work is in progress for 2015 season!

Some Fascinating Facts - Bob Thompson (N/L June 1996)

1. When in 1882, criticism of the lighting in the town then

provided by the Gas Company rose to unacceptable levels, the town fathers sitting on the Local Board stoutly rejected the offers of three companies to provide electric lighting and instead opted to convert from gas to oil fired lighting. Later, the operation of the lights was taken over by the Lighting Committee itself – a decision that conjures up pleasant but doubtless unhistorical images of stout, red-faced gentlemen striving to maintain their dignity as they climbed ladders to fill and light the lamps. The Birmingham Mail got wind of the matter and reported as follows:



"In the past the Board had believed it was being imposed upon by the Gas Company and had cut off the gas supply from the street lamps with the result that people who wished

to walk abroad at night had to carry lighted candles to avoid accident. Particular sufferers were ladies who requested the Council to return to gas light as candle grease caused damage to many dresses. The Local Board are to oblige." (quoted in the Exeter Flying Post 10.9.1884)

2. Another cause of local dissatisfaction was the inefficiency of the local fire engine which was hardly surprising since, when examined in 1893, it was found to have been built in 1785. No built-in obsolescence in those good old days! Councillor GB Avant later proposed that the fire engine be gilded and become the nucleus of a local museum. Even when in 1900 the then Urban District Council purchased a steam powered fire engine there was much concern in the rural districts which did not fall under the UDC, particularly when in 1918 they were informed that if the services of the fire engine were needed, the person requiring it should send his own horses to pull it to the scene of the fire!

An Enquiry - Mike Ralls

A few days ago I was contacted by e-mail from a researcher in California who had seen our Dawlish History Website. Nancy Wilson is researching into two brothers who were attorneys in London around 1800 - term abolished after 1873 in England and Wales and replaced by solicitor. She has just discovered that a daughter, Miss Caroline Shephard only 16, died in Dawlish on the 1 April 1797. Nancy's question - was she buried in St Gregory's Churchyard? With the help of computer records that Derek Wain produced, we were quickly able to identify that she was indeed buried in the churchyard and the location of the grave. We went and found the grave, and confirmed that although weathered, the inscription on the stone was that of Caroline Shephard. This now raises at least two obvious questions. Why was she visiting Dawlish and why did she die? Given her background she could have been staying with one of the more affluent residents of Dawlish at that time. If any of you have any ideas or suggestions as to how we could take this forward I would be very interested.

Correction - Sheila Ralls

Following my article in the July edition about Archie Ballard, we were contacted by Paul Ballard a distant cousin. He informed us that Archie Ballard was never in India, but made his money as a property developer in London—Streatham, Crystal Palace, Walthamstow & one or two other areas. He also told us that there was a good book by George Male, "The Pied Piper of Plymouth" which covers his life from his arrival in Plymouth and a book he had written as a tribute entitled "The Baggy Trousered Philanthropist".

2014-15 Diary Dates	
2nd Dec	DLHG - Christmas Social
Until 18th Jan 2015	Paper Persuaders: First World War Posters RAMM http://www.rammuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/paper-persuaders-first-world-war-posters
Until 6th Feb 2015	Torquay Museum tel:01803 293975 Oldway: The American Women's War Hospital http://www.torquaymuseum.org/explore/changing-exhibitions/future-exhibitions/oldway
Until 5th April 2015	Faces of Conflict—RAMM http://www.rammuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/faces-of-conflict