



## DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

# Newsletter

## November 2015

the year down to 1962 because Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May only occurs in that year in the 1960s.

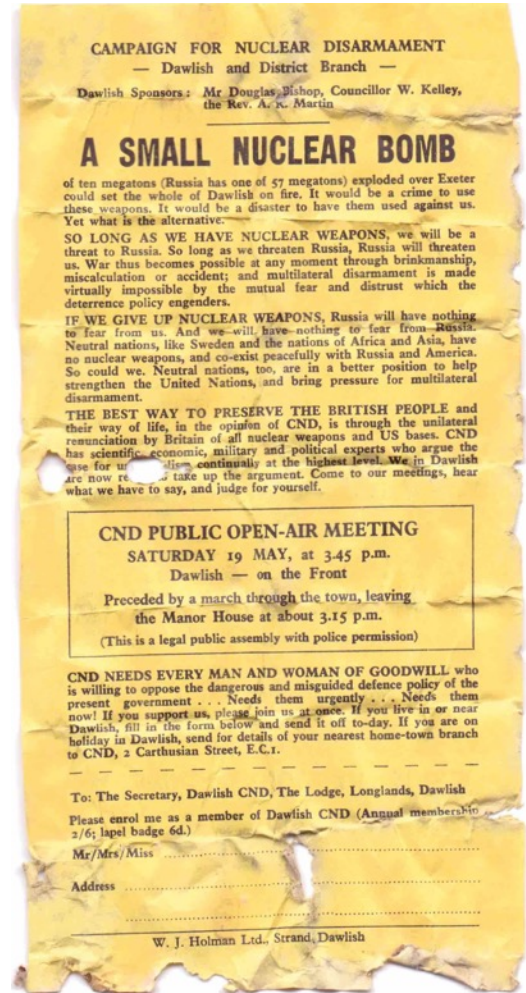
The committee wishes all our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

### THE DAWLISH CND IN THE 1960s

Quite recently, and entirely by chance, a pamphlet calling for Dawlishians to demonstrate against the use of the atomic bomb fell into my hands. Strangely, when lengthening the handrail leading up our steps, it had been rolled up inside a piece of pipe that we removed!

The pamphlet makes people aware of the dangers the town would be exposed to if a “Small Nuclear bomb exploded over Exeter”. This aroused my curiosity, so it was followed up with a visit to the Devon Heritage Center in Exeter and the Dawlish Library as well as Internet searches.

After some research, it has been possible to roughly determine when it had been printed by the local firm of W. J. Holman, in the Strand. One of the



In his final year of office Mr Kelley was Mayor of Dawlish and also chaired council meetings. Another member of the committee was Mr Douglas Bishop of Fairfield House, Dawlish. He was notable for being the author of two booklets on Dawlish.

One was “Rambles around Dawlish” from 1955

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

sponsors for the Dawlish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was Councillor W. Kelley who served on the Dawlish Urban District Council between 1961 and 64. Therefore, it must at least have been around the early 60s that the movement was active in the town. The date was given as Saturday 19 May, but unfortunately not the year. However, with some assistance, it has been possible to pin

and the other was “The Official Guide to Dawlish, South Devon”. “Rambles around Dawlish” is still available in the reference section of the Dawlish library. The many firms advertising in it brought back many memories of my childhood in the town

Our Next meeting will be on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup>  
December 2015

**at the new time of 2:30 pm**

Christmas Social with a talk entitled  
**“Christmas in Devon 1200 – 2000”**

by the very popular Todd Gray

He will describe the changing ways Devonians  
have celebrated over the past eight centuries

and the tradesmen and shops that were once so familiar names. Both booklets were published with the support of the Dawlish Chamber of Trade. Mr Bishop also ran Fairfield House as a home for evacuees during the war and later as a Quaker guesthouse. It is now a further education college. Another member of the committee was a Reverend A. Martin.

At present it has not been possible to trace him, nor the secretary of the Dawlish CND who lived in the Lodge, Longlands, Dawlish, now a residential care home.

If anyone can help with further information on the movement or the people involved, we would appreciate their input. The CND movement is still active with branches all over England. The nearest group is in Exeter, but was formed in the 80s. Thus they have no records stretching back to the date of the CND movement in Dawlish.

Footnote:

The CND movement began after a public meeting in London in 1958. It was because of the very real fear of nuclear conflict in the 1950s. This concern had arisen after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima by the USA in August 1945 resulting in the loss of many thousands of civilian lives and the consequent health risk along with the danger of environmental damage.

Ian Thomson

## THE EARLY DAYS AT HALDON AIRFIELD by David Gearing

This is the first of a short series of articles on Haldon airfield. Graham Lewis wrote about the wartime history of the airfield in the May 2009 newsletter. This piece will focus on the first two years of the airfield's existence. The activities at the airfield during the 1930s, including its scheduled air services and flying events, will be covered later.

The airfield was created from a patch of rough heathland on Little Haldon at the top of Luscombe Hill. It was the brainchild of Bill Parkhouse, a Teignmouth businessman who owned the Agra Engineering Company, which made and sold a mechanical manure distributor that he had helped to design. Parkhouse had qualified as an aircraft mechanic, pilot and latterly a flying instructor during service with the Royal Naval Air Service in the

First World War. In 1928 he decided to try to realise a long-held ambition to set up his own flying school. He acquired the use of the Haldon land for a peppercorn rent and purchased his own Avro biplane. By June 1928 a small hangar had been built and a fuel pump installed, and the airfield was ready to receive its first visiting aircraft, which came to deliver Peter Hoare, whose parents lived at Luscombe Castle. Initially Parkhouse acted as both instructor and ground engineer for the flying school. He got off to a good start: in the first year he had thirteen pupils, and his company had been appointed as the West Country sales agent for both Avro and De Havilland, both major British aircraft manufacturers of the time.

In 1929 sixteen year-old Whitney Straight turned up unannounced at Haldon on his motorbike and asked Parkhouse to teach him to fly. Although initially Parkhouse didn't know who he was, it turned out that money was no object: Whitney was the son of the American heiress Dorothy Straight, who aged 17 had inherited a large fortune from her father, which immediately made her one of the richest women in America. By 1929 Dorothy's first husband had died, and she was married to Leonard Elmhirst and living at Dartington Hall, where together they were



Flying-Officer W. R. Parkhouse (Reserve) (on right) and Mr. Phil. Pike in the Avro "Avian" which the former's company, The Agra Engineering Co., Ltd., of Teignmouth, use for demonstration purposes in the south-west of England

(from [www.aviadejavu.ru](http://www.aviadejavu.ru))

undertaking a pioneering experiment in rural community reconstruction and progressive education. After he qualified as a pilot Straight maintained contact with Parkhouse and purchased three different types of de Havilland aircraft from his

agency. By the age of 19 he was also a Grand Prix racing driver and later formed his own motor racing team. In order to try to steer him away from the risks involved in motor racing his parents funded the creation of an aircraft-related business and he became head of the Straight Corporation, which operated airfields throughout Britain, ran flying clubs, and in the late 1930s bought a commercial airline business. In fact the Straight Corporation took over the management of Haldon (by then it was called an 'aerodrome') in 1937 and acquired the freehold in 1938. After distinguished wartime service in the RAF Whitney Straight held senior management roles with BEA, BOAC and Rolls Royce.



Alan Cobham (on the right) on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1926 at the start of his epic trip to Australia (from [www.rafmuseum.org.uk](http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk))

In August 1929 Sir Alan Cobham made his first visit to Haldon in a ten seat DH61 Giant Moth named 'Youth of Britain'. This was one stop on his UK Municipal Aerodrome Campaign Tour which aimed to convince local authorities that municipal aerodromes would soon become a necessity. The event attracted about 3,000 spectators. As part of his effort to win hearts and minds he offered short flights to civic dignitaries and school-children. Later the campaign was re-branded as 'National Aviation Day Displays', popularly

known as 'Cobham's Flying Circus'. These events continued until 1935 and came back to Haldon three more times; more of this later. Cobham was a pioneer of long distance aviation and an international celebrity. Most famously, he was the first person to fly from England to Australia and back (it took him 93 days) and his final touchdown on the Thames in front of the Houses of Parliament in his DH50 seaplane was watched by an estimated one million people thronging the bridges and embankments, almost a quarter of the population of inner London at the time.

The official opening of Haldon took place in September 1929, when the first air display ever held in Devon attracted thirty aircraft and thousands of spectators whose traffic blocked all the surrounding roads. Some of the aircraft were flown by well-known aviators, such as Dame Mary Bailey, who in 1928 had made the longest solo flight and the longest flight accomplished by a woman: 8,000 miles between Croydon and Cape Town in a tiny biplane with an open cockpit. Unfortunately high winds on the day of the display prevented some of the planned flying attractions, but a Junkers F-13 all-metal monoplane airliner, an advanced design for the time, did manage to fly in, and was then the largest plane to land at Haldon. The only incident occurred, when an autogiro was tipped over by a gust of wind as it landed, and was wrecked. (An autogiro has an engine-powered propeller for forward thrust and a unpowered rotor with cleverly angled blades that provides lift. It fulfilled the need for an aircraft that could fly safely at low speeds – the first helicopter didn't appear until 1939.) For many spectators one of the memorable aspects of the event was that the high winds coupled with the slipstream of the aircraft blew a lot of dust off the cinders that had been laid down to provide a more secure surface. As a result everything on the airfield, including the spectators, were covered in a fine black powder.

The airfield, on the top of a hill between Dartmoor and the sea, was not well located. It was prone to high winds gusting off the moors or the sea, and to mist and fog. In wet weather the ground was likely to be waterlogged. Take-off and landing must often have been challenging for pilots. And it was also some way from any big population centre. In these circumstances, Parkhouse had done really well to get the airfield and its associated

businesses up and running. Indeed, towards the end of 1929 the hangar capacity was increased to accommodate the increased number of aircraft being kept at Haldon by their owners.

## NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

2015 has been a very busy season at the Museum – the figures have not yet been collated, but speaking as a long-term steward I have welcomed many visitors – some local, others from other parts of the country and Europe. Several were return visitors who also plan future visits. There have been some lovely comments in the Visitors Book. The new stewards have fitted really well and will hopefully decide to stay. Several changes are planned for the coming season – some of them quite big changes. So do come to see our new displays when we open May 2016. At the time of writing it is all happening behind closed doors.

Mavis Stuckey, Oct. 2015

## GARTON & KING TALK REPORT by David Allanach

There aren't many Exeter firms that can trace their history back to 1661 like Garton & King. They started as ironmongers and developed into a large shop and a foundry. Both were based in the city centre for many years, the shop being on the site of the old Woolworths on the High Street and the foundry in Waterbeer Street. On 6th October we learned a lot about the firm from Richard Holladay, whose family ran the firm for many years. He was particularly proud that the firm could boast a royal appointment for supplying the means of providing hot water for the Kew conservatories in Victorian times and that Prince Albert admired their cottage cooking stove. Their other claim to fame was the Portsmouth Latch a device to stop horses escaping as those at Saltram House had developed the knack of opening their stable doors themselves. Anyone who hasn't heard of the firm should start looking at their local drain and manhole covers. It soon becomes clear that Garton & King Ltd are everywhere, but if you find one without the Ltd it is much rarer.



Devon Water Board Meter cover seen recently in Sidmouth - however, just with Ltd!

## LOOKING AHEAD TO OUR NEXT TALK

We will have a piano presentation by Adrienne Hesketh on 2nd February at 2:30pm

She has been writing her own musical compositions ever since she learnt to play the piano as a little girl. The presentation includes sixteen of her best piano pieces. Devon's land and seascapes have been the inspiration for most of them, as she explains in the presentations, which last around 45 minutes. The style is her own, but best described as modern classical.

### **Chudleigh History Group**

6th November 2015 - In The Woodway Room  
Exeter Women and the Great War  
Illustrated presentation by Dr. Todd Gray

### **The Topsham Society**

Thursday 19 November 2015  
The Oboussier Lecture  
*Forced into Exile? Three Devon estates 150 years ago* by Jeremy Pearson

### **RAMM, Exeter**

6 October to 27 December 2015  
Potted History – The passions of local collectors

### **RAMM, Exeter**

5 November 2015 - Time: 6.30 - 7.45pm,  
The archaeology of Exeter Cathedral Close and its Roman legionary baths - Cost: £8.50