

Dawlish Local History Group Newsletter: October 2016

Newsletter Editor: Vacancy

Following production of the August newsletter, due to his other commitments and interests Ian Thompson decided he could no longer devote sufficient time and attention to his role as Newsletter Editor. This newsletter has been prepared by David Gearing as an interim measure in the hope that someone else comes forward as Editor. The work of the Newsletter Editor is concentrated in the week or so prior to publication of each issue, which can be two-monthly or quarterly. It involves liaising with contributors, editing submissions as necessary, and setting out the contents for printing and for display on the website. Initial help and advice is available. Please contact any Committee member if you are interested.

If no-one is prepared to do it, regrettably we will have to discontinue newsletters in their present form. In that event, members will need to look at the website for information on the current programme, reports of past events, and occasional articles. Also, if there are any last minute changes to the published programme (fortunately that hasn't happened for a while) we will inform those members without email by telephone.

History Day 2016

This event was a big success. It is estimated that at least 500 people attended, and maybe a lot more – we didn't keep a count, but at any one time there were at least 40 to 50 people in the exhibition, and this peaked to about 90 at midday. A lot of effort had gone into advanced publicity, and on the day the colourful group of historical characters outside the Strand Centre were very successful in encouraging passers-by to come inside and take a look.



There were a number of similar exhibits to last year: Archaeology, Tourism and Leisure, the Railway in the Steam Age, the Great Storm, a Rolling Image Show, plus Dressing-Up and Family History Search. New topics this year included Shops and Trades and Devon Violets, which used to be a significant business in and around Dawlish. We would like to develop a new book on Violets, but need more information and personal memories, and Joanne Bickel made some useful contacts on the day. The old maps of Dawlish laid out on tables generated a lot of interest and discussion, particularly from residents wanting to know more about the history of their own house. Also new this year was having the old Dawlish Stocks in the exhibition; a number of people tried them out to the amusement of those around. And we took the opportunity to launch our attractive new Railway History Walk guidebook, which is now available in the Tourist Information Centre as well as the Museum.

The exhibition was created by a team from the Museum and the History Group led by Keith Gibson, and with help from other organisations in the town, including a display by the World War I Project and a Model Railway layout by the local group that was popular with children and their Dads. In addition, the Shaftesbury Theatre provided stewards' costumes on loan and auxiliary lighting in the Strand Centre.



History Day 2016 was opened by the Mayor of Dawlish, Cllr Angela Fenne, seen here with a group of organisers, stewards and greeters.

Facebook

We have opened a Facebook page called 'Dawlish History', to see how useful it might be in communicating both with DLHG members and others interested in local history. It has been set up as a 'closed group', which means that only those members who decide to join can make postings, but anyone can look at anything there. Members will then receive emails notifying of any new postings, which can then be viewed by clicking on the link. Facebook provides easy-to-use facilities for adding images and short pieces of text, and for making comments and engaging in discussions.

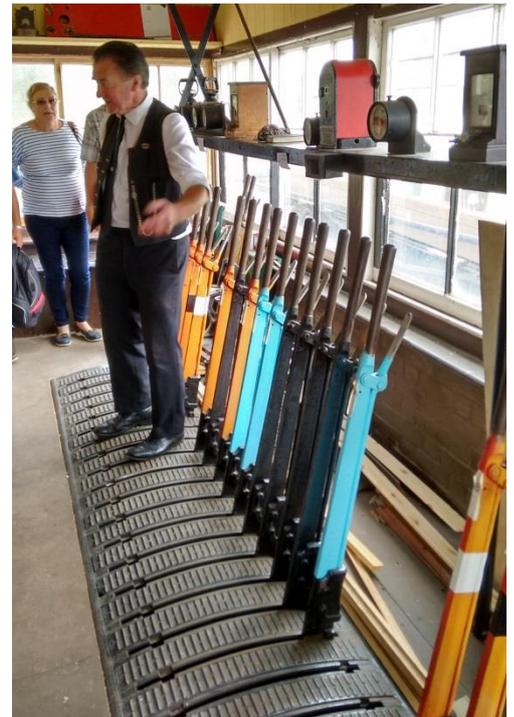
The Facebook account has been set up and will be monitored by Chris Marsh. The plan is to let it run for a year as an experiment and then assess its value. Even if you currently avoid Facebook and other social media sites you might like to dip into ours occasionally to see what's there. In the meantime we will continue to use the website as our primary source of information on-line.

The South Devon Railway



On September 6th fifteen of us visited the South Devon Railway (SDR). We started at Buckfastleigh station, which has been restored to how it looked in the 1930s. First we had a guided tour of the museum, which has the sole surviving locomotive from Brunel's broad gauge railway era, built in 1868. Then in the old signal box we had a detailed explanation of how the signals and points were

operated, and how the safety of the system as a whole was maintained by an interlocking mechanism built into the lever frame with the current status displayed on a control board. We also looked into the on-site engineering works, which has the capability of repairing or re-making any part of a steam engine, both for the SDR and other heritage railways. After a refreshment break, the group then enjoyed the leisurely seven mile train trip to Totnes and back along the Dart valley, pulled by a willing little steam engine that didn't look big enough for the job. We were seated in a beautiful Art Deco style coach while our host, David Allanach, described points of interest along the way.



All the above articles by David Gearing

Dawlish Women in World War One by Bob Vickery

The recent release by the Red Cross of records of Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.) in World War One provides an insight into the contribution of women. The ladies of Dawlish, and indeed throughout England, were not idle during the grim years of 1914-1919. 148 persons are recorded as enlisting with the Dawlish V.A.D. and working for the Dawlish War Hospital Supply Depot. The records show that the initial recruitment was to the Dawlish V.A. Hospital to help treat Belgian refugees who had been driven out by the violent German invasion in 1914 that brought Britain to war. They were ferried across the Channel and sent

to distribution centres like Exeter from which they were allocated housing in towns such as Dawlish and Teignmouth. The Dawlish V.A. Hospital and Belgian Nursing Home was opened in the Victoria Hall (said to have been in the building now housing the Conservative Club in Park Road) and it attracted about 34 women as nurses, cooks and other helpers during 1914. The immediate need was met and it closed in May 1915 when the new Cottage Hospital was open.

The next phase of V.A.D. work in 1916 was to help meet the needs of larger hospitals for extra nursing staff, for ward orderlies and to help with transport. A brief analysis shows that 48 volunteered as nurses. Available staff were allocated to Exeter, Newton Abbot and many other war hospitals in this country and abroad (one as far as Cairo). Not every member of the Dawlish V.A.D. was female. Seven men worked as hospital orderlies and assisted with transport in Exeter and Newton Abbot.

The Dawlish War Work Depot began in 1916 to make clothing and slippers for those brought back from the Front, and to produce moss dressings for front-line casualty clearing stations and hospitals. The work in Dawlish was directed by the Quartermaster, Maud Lewis Hildyard, a sister of the Misses Jackson who lived in the Manor House. Maud Lewis Hildyard (1863-1920) was one of ten children of George W Jackson who bought the Manor House and established his family there in the 1880s. Maud was the mother of Catherine Blanche Hildyard who acted as Assistant Quartermaster. Later she took on a nursing role and for nearly two years worked in hospitals in Winchester, London and Stoke Gabriel giving 7,036 hours of service over the war period (equivalent to four years full time work at 35 hours per week, but in reality probably much more). At a more modest level Katherine Anne Jackson, the eldest sister who inherited the Manor House, made slippers and cut out patterns in the period 1916-1919. (The record cards show that the service given by most of the members of the Dawlish V.A.D. ended on 29th April 1919. Some nurses continued beyond that date.)

The President of Dawlish V.A.D. was Mrs Mary Margaret Charlotte Washington, nee Bryett (1877-1945), who lived at Langstone Cliff, Cofton. She had married Joseph Woodhouse Clulow Washington (1838-1922) who had been born in Congleton, Cheshire. He first married Eliza Catherine Wood in Liverpool but she died in London on 15th October 1904. He married again to Mary M C Bryett in the summer of 1909 and it was in this period of their marriage that she was drawn into war work. (After the death of her husband in 1922 she married again, in 1928, to the widower Frederick George Avant (1875-1949) and they adopted the linked surname of Avant-Washington – see DLHGp publication “Dawlish Folk”, page 29.) The records give the total hours worked by each volunteer and they vary widely but some nurses contributed 100 hours per month with a 'nil' entry against pay. A small number applied themselves to admin and cooking but the greater number were involved in needlework and knitting. It is thought that they were making slippers and clothing for use in the war hospitals.

43 members of the Supply Depot engaged in the preparation of 'moss dressings'. “Millions of wound dressings made from Sphagnum, or ‘bog moss’, were used during World War I.

Dried Sphagnum can absorb up to twenty times its own volume of liquids, such as blood, pus, or antiseptic solution, and promotes antiseptis. Sphagnum was thus superior to inert cotton wool dressings (pure cellulose), the raw material for which was expensive and increasingly being commandeered for the manufacture of explosives.”

“Most collecting was done by women and children (often boy scouts or girl guides) working for long hours in cold, wet bogs in areas in England, such as Dartmoor where bog moss was abundant. This followed a model pioneered by Lt Col Charles Walker Cathcart R.A.M.C., an Edinburgh surgeon. By the end of 1916, Britain was producing 200,000 dressings per month, a figure which by the end of the war two years later had risen to 1,000,000 per month. Testimonials flooded in from all theatres of war:

‘I should be so glad to get more of both dressings if you can send them, particularly the Moss.’

W.E. Thompson, First British Ambulance Unit for Italy.

Sphagnum moss was far from inert, for unlike cotton wool, it had antiseptic properties, which were of inestimable value to surgeons and nurses. Medical staff who had experience of the Boer War, only twelve years earlier, were shocked by the high rate of wound infections in WWI. A critical difference was that the uniforms of soldiers in WWI were relatively filthy, contaminated with soil bacteria from the muddy battlefields, mixed with sewage bacteria that

commonly contaminated the trenches. Thus, as bullets and shrapnel penetrated flesh, they carried fragments of dirty uniform deep into the soldier's body, commonly resulting in infected, suppurating wounds that required limbs to be amputated to avoid septicaemia. Unfortunately, the antiseptic chemicals available to surgeons were unreliable.”
(Extract from article by Peter Ayres)

Dawlish Museum Report

The 2016 season has been a very interesting one for the Museum: visitors from all over the UK, also from Germany, France and the USA; a Muslim family also visited. The comments in the visitors book have been very complimentary. The ‘Swan Trail’ and the quiz have proved popular with children, who were very pleased to be given their badges for completion. Also for children, we now have an opportunity for them to try Brass Rubbing. The ‘Misplaced Article’ in Carnival Week encouraged some people to at least find out where the Museum was. Among the exhibits the display of wedding dresses from the mid-1850s to the 1970s (back in an updated version) and the Red Arrows flying suit proved very popular. We have welcomed several school parties, covering items on the curriculum such as Disasters, World War II, and the 1930s – interesting, but noisy! Next year will be the 50th Anniversary of our Museum – watch this space!

Mavis Stuckey

Future Programme

The next talk is on **November 1st 2016: ‘The duel on Haldon, 1833’** by David Pugsley. Prof Pugsley will recount the details of Devon’s last duel, which took place on Haldon, between Sir John Jeffcott, a high court judge, and Dr Peter Hennis, hero of Exeter’s cholera epidemic.

Details of the talks in December, February and March have already been published, but recently the programme has been extended to June 2017, as follows:

★ April 4th 2017: ‘The Tollhouses of Devon’ by Tim Jenkinson

Tim has co-written three books on tollhouses with Patrick Taylor, two of which cover the Devon area. He is also the Devon representative for the Milestone Society. His talk will take us on a tour of the toll houses and milestones of Devon and will include plenty of local examples of each.

★ May 2nd 2017: A visit to the Devon Rural Archive and Shilstone House & Grounds, 12pm

This will be a full day’s outing to a unique resource: the Archive is dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of Devon’s domestic rural architecture and associated landscapes. We will also have a guided tour of the restored Georgian country house, and a guided walk around the historic gardens, exploring the development of the site from prehistory to the present day through the surviving archaeology. The cost of £20 per person includes a light lunch and a cream tea. Shilstone is near Modbury: car sharing will be arranged.



★ June 6th 2017: ‘Bringing 1939 to life’ by David Gearing

A free-wheeling historical exploration of the subjects of articles and advertisements found in a copy of the Exeter Express and Echo from May 1939, just before WW2. The presentation will be fully illustrated with dozens of images of the newspaper items and the people, events and products linked to them, and with plenty of opportunities to prompt memories of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The subjects include ‘The Lambeth Walk’, the first-ever Minister of Health, the Beverley Sisters, Clarke’s Blood Mixture, Exeter’s cinemas, the Yokohama Earthquake, Wartime Evacuation, and Errol Flynn.