

October 2017
Newsletter

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Report on the visit to Newton Abbot Museum and a History Walk

On July 4th sixteen of us visited Newton Abbot Museum. Perhaps the most interesting displays were those relating to John Lethbridge (1675–1759), who in 1715 invented an underwater diving machine for salvaging lost cargo and valuables from sunken wrecks. It was essentially an airtight reinforced oak barrel with two holes for the arms and a glass viewing hole. This contraption allowed the ‘fisher’ to submerge long and deep enough to retrieve material, and offered greater underwater mobility and better working conditions than the traditional diving bell or other diving apparatus available at the time.



Lethbridge wrote that he was able to work at a depth of 10 fathoms, stay on the sea floor for up to 34 minutes at a time, and remain in the machine for more than 6 hours – his supply of fresh air was replenished at the surface by pumping it in through a hole at the top using bellows. Over the next thirty years Lethbridge worked on wreck sites all over the world and made a lot of money. One of his better-known recoveries was from the Dutch *Slotter Hooge*, which had sunk off Madeira with over three tons of silver on board. Lethbridge rose from an unsuccessful wool merchant, struggling to support his family, to a man of wealth, owning the estate of Odicknoll in Kingskerswell. The Museum has a life-size model of the diving machine, built by a local carpenter. The photo is of this model with Felicity Cole, the Museum Curator, who was our guide to the exhibits.

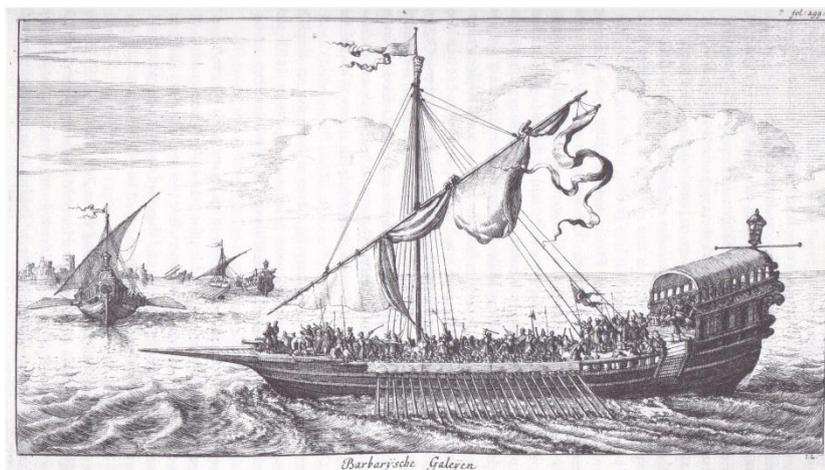
We then went on a short walk in some of Newton Abbot’s interesting historical streets, guided by Museum volunteer Michael Bennie. The route took us through Devon Square, down East Street, and then into Union Street where Michael pointed out a window display describing ‘Newton Abbot’s bloodiest day of violence’. In January 1908 the Conservative party won a parliamentary election from the Liberals and this shock result prompted rioting in the town. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Sylvia were here celebrating the Conservative victory as the Tories were in support of the women’s movement at the time. In Union Street they found themselves at the centre of the melee and were trying to protect themselves with their umbrellas when they were rescued from the angry mob by Harry Balls, the town’s first garage owner, who drove them to safety in Teignmouth. Unfortunately, the violence ended in one fatality: local man Henry Rendell was beaten and murdered that day and his body thrown into the Bradley Lane leat. The walk



continued along Courtenay Street past Austin's shop, which used to house the Globe, for many years the best hotel in town, past St Leonard's Tower, and ending at the old Manor House in Wolborough Street.

An Exeter Man in Algiers and Mecca: The Amazing Adventures and Achievements of Joseph Pitts (1662-1739). Report of the August 1st talk by Paul Auchterlonie.

Paul began by providing some historical context. By the late 16th century the Ottoman Empire controlled much of the North Africa coast, which was known in Europe as the Barbary Coast. This gave its name to the Barbary Pirates, who operated out of various ports including Algiers (which had a larger population than London in the early 1600s), Tunis and Tripoli. The Algerian fleet was the most powerful in European waters. The pirates attacked and seized ships over a very wide area and also raided coastal settlements, their main purpose being to capture Christian slaves for the Ottoman slave trade as well as the general Muslim slavery market in North Africa and the Middle East. Between 1580 and 1680 it is estimated that 850,000 people were captured and enslaved. The pirates were particularly active where West Country mariners operated, and everyone in Devon would have known someone who had been captured. The ransoms demanded for release were typically about £100 – a huge sum at the time.



This Dutch engraving, published in 1684, shows in striking detail how Barbary galleys were equipped and manned by soldiers and slave rowers.

Joseph Pitts was captured in 1678 aged 15 or 16 on board a fishing boat returning from Newfoundland with its catch. He was taken into slavery, initially in Algiers. He was forced under torture to convert to the Muslim faith, becoming what was known as a Renegade, but this did give him some status and opportunities for a decent life in the society within which he found himself.

Paul explained that almost everything known about Pitts comes from his own narrative concerning his time in captivity, which was published in 1704, ten years after he

returned to England. According to his account, between 1678 and 1694 he had three different masters, ranging widely in their level of cruelty towards him. Pitts was the first Englishman to provide a first-hand description of the daily life of the people of seventeenth-century North Africa, their economic and slavery systems, and the proceedings of the hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam. In 1694 he escaped from a French ship bound for Leghorn (Livorno) from Izmir (Smyrna). His third master had been kind to him, and after all he had endured in Algiers even then he was pondering on whether he had done the right thing by escaping. To return home he travelled on foot through Italy, across the Alps, eventually reaching Amsterdam via Frankfurt and Cologne, having received much kindness from strangers en route. Ironically when he finally got back to England he was immediately press-ganged at Harwich, but was released after an influential London merchant with Smyrna connections intervened and persuaded the Admiralty to release him. Pitts arrived back in Exeter in 1795, 18 years after he had left on the fishing boat.

Report of the visit to the Devon & Exeter Institution.

On September 5th a large group of DLHG members visited the D&E Institution in Cathedral Close. We were given an introductory talk by Ann Howard, the Librarian, and then looked around various parts of the building including the library galleries, the upstairs Reading Room and the garden. We also browsed some Dawlish-related material laid out for us on the library tables.



The building was acquired by the Institution soon after it was founded in 1813. It was originally a canonical house and its earliest recorded incumbent was there in 1441. It was owned by the Courtenay family, the Earls of Devon, and used as their town house, from 1672 until 1813, when the then Earl was in financial difficulties and needed to sell. The Institution completely re-modelled the house, converting the Courtenay dining room and garden into the Outer Library, and the medieval Great Hall and kitchen became the Inner Library. The housekeeper's house at the rear is all that remains of the Tudor building; the luncheon room, with its armorial wood panelling and 16th century plaster ceiling, was the parlour of the original house.

Ann explained that a project was underway to review the whole collection, to better understand how it was originally catalogued and arranged on the shelves, and to clean all the older books to conserve them for the future. Space is at a premium: the Institution library has nearly 50,000 items. The library catalogue is now maintained by the University of Exeter, with whom the Institution has strong links.

[The above three reports by David Gearing.]

The Oldest House in Dawlish

by Tricia Whiteaway

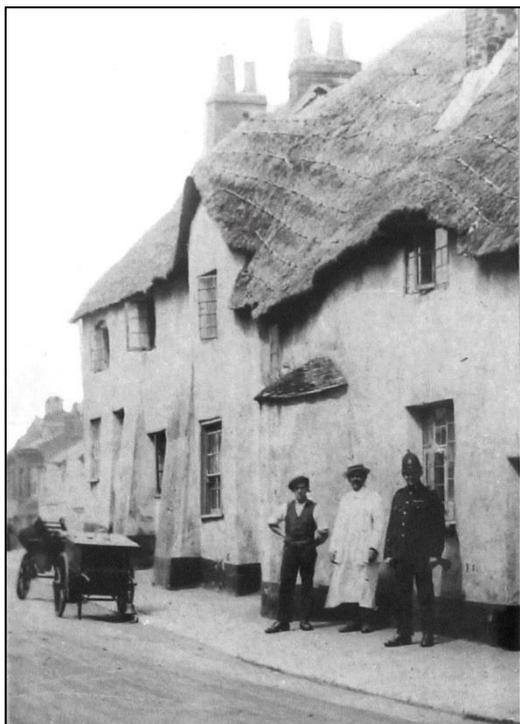
There are only a few dwellings in Dawlish in the contest for the title of oldest house, such as Church House, Rixdale Farm, Court Farm and Tudor Cottages. There might be another ancient house behind a modern façade, but from those I have visited I think the title goes to Tudor Cottages. These certainly look old, and I had always been happy to accept the date (1539) that shows on the outside, but then I was told by a local builder that they weren't as old as that. That date was, of course, just after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by King Henry VIII, so perhaps whoever put up that date had seen some document of the period verifying the age of the building. In truth these four cottages don't have an official title but everyone knows them as Tudor Cottages. They are now numbered 1,3,5, and 7 in Exeter Road, not the High Street as one might assume, but of course they were there well before Iddesleigh Terrace was built, prior to which to get from the Strand you would have to go up Park Street (now the lower part of Strand Hill) then turn right to get to the main Exeter Road.

The whole building was the farmhouse to Strand Hill Farm held by copyhold by the Tapley family probably as far back as the late 1500s, as this family came to Dawlish around 1544. In the mid-1600s the Tapleys were a large family of 13 males and many of them were mariners, probably trading with Newfoundland. Mariner Nicholas Tapley was the occupier of this property, then called 'Tapley's Tenement'.

In 1732 Ann, the only child of a Nicholas and Sarah Tapley, was born. In 1745 Sarah was mentioned in the Manorial Roll with regard to this property: 'now in possession of Sarah Tapley his widow by Court Roll of 1686' and she was the Reeve for the town in 1761. In 1758 Ann married one of the Tripes, a well-known local family - Gawin Tripe who held Smallacombe and Duckaller, but was also a mariner. In 1775 the Manorial Roll reported 'Ann Tripe formerly Tapley, wife of Gawyn Tripe, mariner, and Richard their son, admitted for the messuage and tenement and half farthing on Dawlish Strand formerly in possession of Nicholas Tapley but now of Sarah Tapley his widow'. After the death of Sarah Tapley in 1785 this Richard Tripe was then admitted tenant of this farm.

In 1802 the owners of Dawlish (the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral) were allowed to sell their land and properties. This brought in many Exeter businessmen to invest their money such as John Pidgley, who bought Gatehouse and Secmaton farms in order to form a large estate around his new house, Elm Grove. By 1839 the Tithe Map shows that he also owned Strand Hill Farm, although the Tripes continued to farm it. The 1851 census shows a Richard Tripe, aged 83 retired farmer, the last farmer of Strand Hill, his second wife Elizabeth Ellis Batt, aged 46, and Mary Tarr, a house servant.

Richard died in 1852 and his widow Elizabeth inherited 'a house and cellar in Beach Lane, two gardens in Dawlish Road, five fields called Hare Hill, Beacon Close, Broom Close, Culver Close and Green Close'. There was a barn yard and timber yard in Little Park Street, three cottages in Park Hill, a cellar or shop and



three cottages in Little Park Street, two pig sties, and a cottage and garden now in possession of Elizabeth Ellis Tripe and others. Little Park Street later became Commercial Road. There is no mention of his seven children from the first marriage. So it's likely that his widow lived in Tudor Cottages while it remained as one building until her death in 1880. It seems after this date that Tudor Cottages were converted first into three labourers' cottages (the usual plan for unused farmhouses). The census fails to identify the occupants until 1901 when Sam Murch the Okey Pokey Man lived here until 1920. ('Okey Pokey' - or 'Hokey-Pokey' - was a slang term for the ice cream sold by street vendors around this time.) Later a new front door to No.5 was inserted into the wall behind where Sam Murch (in the white coat) is standing in the picture.

In 1909 J Pidgley Trustees had offered these cottages for sale and it would seem that they were purchased by another Richard Tripe. Presumably the money for the purchase of the cottages came from the proceeds of the development of Commercial Road and later Iddesleigh Terrace (built in 1887) on fields previously belonging to Strand Farm. Richard, the grandson of the last farmer, was described as a coal and ale merchant, a fisherman, owner of one of the bathing machine companies,

and later, through his wife's family, owner of the Gresham Inn. In 1881 he lived in Commercial Road with the surviving members of his family, (formerly of ten): four daughters, two sons and his retired father William, who was a tinsmith worker, owner of a shop in the Strand (later to become Gordon Shapter's garage and then Gateway's Supermarket and Somerfield, and now part of the Co-op store). Richard then moved into Iddesleigh House where he died in 1914.

Confirmation of ownership of Tudor Cottages in the early 20th century comes from an unexpected source, a report from the National Sanitation Report by the Ministry of Health. This shows that in 1912 there were four cottages owned by the Misses Tripe (Reta and Lilian), two of the above Richard's children. It describes who lived there, how many adults and children, and the situation as regards their sanitation. These officials went round certain run-down and old houses checking their condition, and needed to see inside Tudor Cottages but Reta initially refused admission, then wrote to the Dawlish Gazette that "she owned 3 and 4 Exeter Road in her own occupation" thinking this would end the matter. But the Council said they would get a Magistrates Order to view the property. She then agreed to the inspection "but not with a view to slum clearance. The house is one of the oldest buildings in England, for navigation was taught here by my old people for generations before HMS Britannia was commanded as a training ship in 1859 (...). One piece of ancient plastering shows a lion rampant, and four others are groups of lilies of Henry VI 1422-1462 each at four corners of the ceiling. I shall ask the Society for Preservation of Ancient Buildings to take the matter up if necessary". She referred to the early Tapley mariners, and her knowledge of history was certainly accurate.

So we have Reta's declaration of the ownership (probably her sister had the other two cottages) and her giving an interesting description of No.3's interior, and she was later the owner of the garage next door. A later Sanitation Inspection in 1928 said Miss R Tripe was the occupier of No 5 with a Mrs Burch in No.7, whose bedroom had to have a bigger window inserted, and that the thatch was still not in good repair. I will not go into the report on the sanitation, except to say that later in No.5 there were three adults and five children in one room downstairs and two up. Reta Tripe died in 1937. I had the pleasure of meeting Reta's aunt, a Miss Hull, the last of our Tripes of Dawlish Warren, who told me many tales of this interesting family. So it was Reta Tripe, a keen historian, who put the identical lintels over all the doorways and windows, and prominently dated it 1539.

I have visited all four cottages but was not able to do a thorough investigation of all of them. In 2004 the new owners of No. 5 were restoring it back to its original state and actually invited people to go and see it, so I was on the doorstep next day. There were many interesting features they had discovered such as the two

bread ovens plus a special hearth for making clotted cream, whilst the archaeologist who viewed the house found that in the attic the thatch was blackened by soot, confirming that it was built around 1450, making it an Open Hall House of a single room that had a fire in the middle of the room with smoke wafting through the thatch. In the 16th century another room (No.3) was added making it a Cross-Passage House and it was this cottage that had the lion rampart plastering with the lilies, and had a plank and muntin screen as a wall between it and No. 5, and there was a staircase in the wall leading to the bedrooms upstairs. Nos. 1 and 7 were added later at either end, possibly in the 1700s.

So part of Tudor Cottages is the oldest building in Dawlish and certainly one of the most interesting, but why did Miss Reta Tripe put the date of 1539 and not earlier, in the reign of Henry IV ? We will never know.

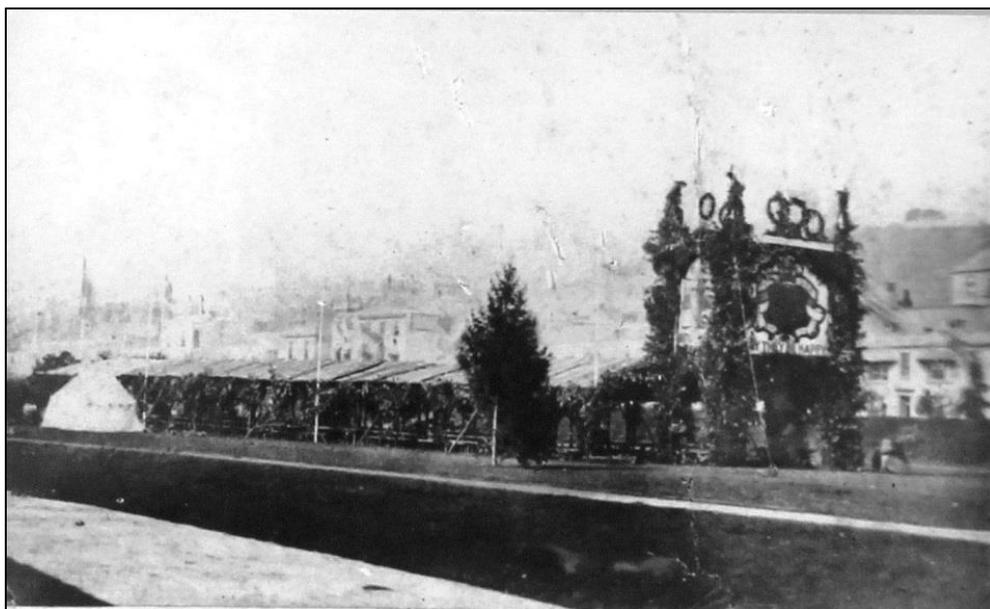
Dawlish Celebrates a Royal Marriage

by David Gearing

On Tuesday March 10th 1863 the marriage took place between Edward, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of Queen Victoria, and Princess Alexandra of Denmark. This was a significant national event and Dawlish people made the most of the chance to celebrate. Money contributed by some wealthier residents made it possible for many less fortunate folk to share in the festivities. The following description of events is based on notes in one of the albums of historic photos that Bernard Chapman created in the 1960s and which was on loan to Dawlish Library for many years.

On the day cannon were fired early in the morning to rouse would-be revellers. Householders decorated their homes and then set out for the main streets of the town. According to the report in Westcott's Press 'By ten o'clock the appearance of the weather was cheering, which caused many people to leave their homes, and thus our streets, which at an ordinary time are so quiet, became almost unpassable.'

On Marine Parade a procession was formed, only moving off when a passing train had detonated signals placed on the line to give the effect of a starting gun going off. A marshal on horseback headed the parade, and he was followed by Yeomanry Cavalry, Yeomanry, and Volunteers and their band. Then came the Fire Brigade, the clergy in their gowns, and Admiral Henderson and Major Rocke resplendent in their full dress uniforms. They were followed by Parish officials, the Local Board, the Committee of Management and railway station officials. Next came members of the Lodges of Oddfellows and Foresters, clad in their aprons and sashes, and then representatives of local clubs: the Manor Inn, York Hotel, Swan Inn, and White Hart Inn, all with their respective banners. Children from various local schools also walked in the procession. The highlight was a boat set on a wagon; in the boat were eight young lads clad in 'man-of-war' fashion, each carrying an oar, and four 'fair and pretty girls' in white, with turban hats and blue sashes.



At the entrance to the Lawn the procession halted while the Volunteers and their band marched onto the green and fired a 'feu-de-joie' (a salute where each soldier fires in succession along the ranks to make a continuous sound). Afterwards the parade continued to the church, where a short service was held. Returning via Plantation Terrace and Teignmouth Hill, the parade was dismissed

on the Lawn, where two oak trees were planted to commemorate the event, and coins buried beneath them.

The photograph above shows the pavilion which was built on the Lawn for the ceremonial dinner. (The image is rather fuzzy and shows some damage, but bear in mind this is 1863, and the original might not have been much clearer.) At the east end it was finished with a 'Grand Turret' topped with four pinnacles and

flags. Each side of the pavilion was decorated in a style designed to celebrate the royal marriage, and inside evergreen foliage, artificial flowers, festoons, plumes and crowns were arranged to disguise the structure. A bugle sounded to call the diners to the meal. A 'gargantuan feast' of roast beef and 'English pudding' was eaten by 1,800 people. The Westcotts Press reported 'The quality and substantial appearance of the joints excited admiration, every person was satisfied, and no angry or distasteful word was spoken.' The children also had a tea party, but found that some of their cakes were consumed by men who gatecrashed the party.

The only snag in the whole proceedings occurred when the bonfire was lit earlier than planned. To complete the evening 80 or 90 people attended a ball at the Assembly Rooms.

Next day there was so much food left that four baskets of meat sandwiches were distributed to the aged and the poor. At the town's Soup Kitchen the bones and offal were made into soup, which must have been a welcome change from the pea soup that was normally provided to the hungry poor. The remaining beer and cider was also taken here, where it was quickly consumed. The next day 'gentlemen and tradesmen' held a dinner at the London Hotel, followed by fireworks on the Lawn. Westcotts Press said 'Thus concluded the grand holiday, the like of which was never seen in Dawlish before, and it may be, never will again.'

At the wedding itself the bride wore a gown made of white satin and Honiton lace, designed and stitched in England. Orange blossoms adorned the front of the gown's skirts and Princess Alix wore a large floral headdress to match. The Prince of Wales wore the uniform of an army general under his Order of the Garter robes.

He was 21 and she was 19. Edward didn't accede to the throne until the death of his mother nearly 38 years later. (Incidentally, the next wedding of a Prince of Wales was when Charles married Diana in 1981.)



COMING UP

Meetings

The **November** talk (on Tuesday 7th) will be given by Hugh Meller, who spent 26 years working for the National Trust in Devon, with responsibility for its historic buildings, and 15 years researching his comprehensive book 'The Country Houses of Devon', which is also the title of his talk.

The **December** meeting (on Tuesday 5th) will feature a Quiz by Dave Strawbridge. Dave is a quiz enthusiast and he promises 'a fun historical, slightly mysterious, quiz, even with a touch of Christmas.' There will also be seasonal refreshments and, maybe, prizes.

New Publications

Tricia Whiteaway, David Allanach and David Gearing are working together to produce a new booklet provisionally titled 'Interesting Buildings of Dawlish'. This will include short essays on around 25 historic buildings that are still standing and viewable, illustrated with a mix of old and new images. The authors will be seeking your help to fill gaps in the information we have on some of these buildings.

We are also planning to produce what may turn out to be two booklets (before and after 1900) on the railway at Dawlish, a subject that we haven't specifically covered before. Of course there are many existing publications on the local railways, but they tend to focus on the hardware, whereas we are hoping to include more on the social context, including the use by and impacts on local people of the rail services at different times in the past. David Allanach will be leading this project, and he will also be seeking help from DLHG members and other local residents in the form of personal and family memories, articles, photographs, or other memorabilia relating to the railway. There will be more on this at the November meeting and the next newsletter.