



**January 2018
Newsletter**

Website: www.dawlishhistory.org.uk

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Talk by Dr Sue Andrew: ‘The Three Hares: A Curiosity Worth Regarding’ (3/10/17)

The *three hares* is a motif appearing in sacred sites in Britain and northern Europe, and the Middle and Far East. It shows three hares (or rabbits) chasing each other in a circle, but each of the animals’ ears is shared by two hares so that only three are shown. There are many examples in Devon churches: the nearest to us are in Ilsington, Widecombe, Bridford, North Bovey and Chagford. It has been claimed that the motif was associated with tin miners whose work funded the building and repair of local churches, and in Devon they have been called ‘Tinnners’ Rabbits’, but Sue Andrew said that this is a modern myth. (In 15th and 16th century Devon it may just have been fashionable to include a three hares design as part of the church decoration and carvers may have regarded it as a challenge.)



Three Hares carved roof boss in Throwleigh church (Sue Andrew)

In Devon most examples of the three hares are on wooden roof bosses, and mostly carved by local men, although in high status buildings such as at Cotehele Chapel specialist carvers were employed. But elsewhere it also occurs in stone carvings, as a seal motif, on coats of arms, on tiles, on stained glass, incorporated into decorations in medieval books, on ceiling and wall paintings, and on coins. Sue showed photographs of all these types of rendering.

There are many theories about its significance, including symbolic or mystical associations with fertility and the lunar cycle, and with the Trinity in Christian teaching. Frustratingly its meaning is apparently not explained in contemporary written sources from any of the medieval or earlier cultures where it is found. The earliest occurrences appear to be in cave temples in China, dated to the 6th or 7th century AD. Its widespread occurrence might have resulted from it being transported via designs found on Oriental ceramics from China across Asia and eventually as far as the south west of England, by merchants travelling the Silk Road.

Next meeting

As usual there’s no DLHG meeting in January; the next one is on Tuesday February 6th when Angie Weatherhead will present ‘A Taster of Devonshire Customs, Festivals and Traditions’.

Dawlish’s First Cinema Opens

In reviewing old copies of the Dawlish Gazette in the Museum, Keith Gibson spotted an advert and brief report marking the opening of Dawlish’s first cinema in the January 11th 1913 edition.

The advertisement read:

Walfords Electric Picture Palace. *Dawlish has now a First-Class Electric Picture Palace. Open Nightly at 7.30. Commence at 8. Popular Prices: 3d, 6d, 9d, 1s. Special Matinee every Saturday at 3. Change of Pictures on Monday and Thursday.*

All the best pictures including Pathe Colour, Art Aramas, Travel Subjects, and the Best Comics. Special Feature Pictures in Each Programme. Seats Booked and Reserved at the Palace Daily for the 9d (Leather Upholstered Tip-Up Seats and 1s (Plush Upholstered Tip-Up Seats) rates only. Lower Prices pay at the Door.

The report said:

Quite a stir has been made in the town this week by the opening of a picture palace (at the Albert Hall) by the well known local firm of Walford. The electrically lighted 'Palace' over the entrance has attracted much attention and undoubtedly proved a good advertisement for the venture. On Wednesday, the opening night, large numbers had to be turned away, and chock full houses have been the rule each night since. A thoroughly up to date apparatus for displaying the pictures has been fitted up and the seating accommodation is on the most approved lines.

The reference to 'Pathe Colour' is worth exploring. Given that feature films on general release were all shot in black-and-white until the late 1930s, and thereafter colour was only used selectively until the 1960s, it may be surprising that moving colour pictures were generally available in 1913.



Before the three-strip Technicolor process became available in the late 1930s (when it was used for *Snow White*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With The Wind*) there had been several other processes for creating and projecting moving colour images. The first commercially viable system, Kinemacolor, was launched as early as 1909. It used red and green colour filters to create the negatives and in projecting the positives. The camera ran at 32 images/second, twice the then normal speed, and was fitted with a rotating frame set up so that exposures were made alternately through the red and green filters. The monochrome negative was then printed in the usual way. This was ingenious, but there was plenty to go wrong, and the system was not widely adopted.

The short films made and distributed by Pathe at this time were coloured quite differently, by a process called stencil colouring. This involved the manual cutting, frame by frame, of the area which was to be tinted onto another identical print, one for each of between three and six colours. Several hundred women performed this exacting task at the Pathé workshop in Vincennes, in the Paris suburbs. For each colour the stencil print was fed synchronously with the positive print into a printing machine where the acid dye was applied by a continuous velvet band. By 1913 hundreds of different stencil-coloured Pathé films were in circulation worldwide. The company used this method to produce coloured films until 1928. Similar techniques were employed by other film companies. The resulting films can be identified by the sharp outlines that define the coloured areas, and the colours used were mainly soft pastels, giving the images a painterly quality.

David Gearing

A note about Facebook

A while back we set up a Facebook account ('Dawlish History') to see how useful this might be. We adopted a cautious approach and set it up as a 'closed group', so that people asking to join had to be accepted by the administrator and only members could post to it. Ray Bickel has now taken over responsibility for our Facebook presence and has decided to change 'Dawlish History' to an 'open group' so that anyone can recruit members and join a discussion. He has also created a new Facebook account called 'Dawlish Past and Present' (DPP) which is a 'page' rather than a 'group'. The intention is that 'Dawlish History' is mainly for posting and sharing information on upcoming and past DLHG events, whereas DPP is open to all and encourages wider discussion, sharing and chat about anything related to Dawlish – both history and current events and activities.

Of course not everyone wants to get involved with Facebook. Our website will still be updated as now with information on our current programme, our newsletters, an index to our archives, and so on. And we'll continue to provide printed copies of the newsletter to those without internet access.

Fire!

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century fire was a frequent hazard. Houses were often built with thatch roofs and each one contained fires for cooking and heating. In addition there were flammable stores of hay and straw in the town and on the surrounding farms because of all the horses.

Today's efficient fire service took a long time to evolve. Dawlish acquired its first fire engine in 1817, which was a great improvement over buckets of water but rudimentary by today's standards. In the 1800s it was usual for fire protection to be offered by insurance companies who would have their own fire engines. The firemen needed to know who had paid for their services and so small plaques called fire marks were placed on the outside of buildings. There is at least one still extant on an old house in Dawlish. The picture at left shows three



leopards' heads, although they might be a bit difficult to recognise. This was the insignia of the Salop Fire Office, which also operated under the name West of England.

By the time of the 1870s there were two fire engines run by different companies in Dawlish. When the wooden railway station buildings caught fire in 1873 both the West of England and the Royal fire engines were deployed. The newspaper recorded that 'it was some time before they got to play [on the fire] owing to the difficulty in obtaining a constant supply of water free from gravel' [because it was coming from the seashore]. They failed to quell the fire and indeed the Royal had part of its frame burnt in the fire. The report went on 'great complaints are expressed at the sufficient power of the two fire engines – they are very old'.

Despite the criticism the fire engines continued in use, but the insurance companies could see the writing on the wall. In 1889 the West of England Insurance Company announced they were discontinuing their fire brigade and offered their fire engine and appliances to the Dawlish Board [fore-runner of the Town Council] for free. It was accepted and a volunteer force set up.

However, the Board soon discovered that there were problems with free gifts. By 1893 the Captain of the Fire Brigade was saying 'if the engine was put into proper order it would be very efficient [but] it required remodelling'. He then referred to the fact that the Fire Brigade did not attend when five cottages burned down in Ashcombe. 'The reason we did not go to Ashcombe is that the messenger said we could do no good if we went'. At the Board meeting Mr Avant argued that Dawlish did not require an engine as the town was well supplied with hydrants and water and the West of England machine was an encumbrance and expense and should be disposed of without delay. Other members pointed out that that would leave the outlying areas without any form of protection.

When it was inspected it was discovered that the machine dated from 1785. The fire engine had to be hauled by the firemen as 'it would not admit of a horse being attached to it'. Eventually some money was spent on improving the machine but in April 1900 the Dawlish Gazette reported that a new engine had been bought. It was a 'double vertical' steam fire engine. It could be steamed in 5 to 8 minutes and pump 300 gallons a minute. At a ceremony on the Lawn it was proudly named 'Sir Redvers Buller', a Devon hero of the Zulu wars who had been born in Crediton.



The 1900 horse-drawn steam fire engine with the firemen posing in their splendid brass helmets.

This engine was heavier than the previous one and required two horses to pull it. The down side to this was that whilst the fire engine was kept in what is now the Baptist church the horses were kept some distance away in stables which an inspector later claimed 'could not be called stables at all'. He also described the fire station as 'much too small'.

It was therefore not surprising that the Board sought better facilities. The Knowle (now the museum) came up for sale and it was realised that some of the offices could be moved there and the grounds would offer plenty of space for storing all the equipment for repairing roads and the like. In addition a purpose built fire station could be erected and the horses which pulled the fire engine could share the stables with those used by the Board. It opened in 1914.

Newcomers may be surprised to learn that this building has since been converted and now performs another useful function, namely providing the toilets by Barton car park!

The problems of horse power for the fire engine were not fully solved by having the stables near to the fire station as the horses were often used on council business and were not quickly available. It was a problem which was not fully solved until the first motorised fire engine. The picture below, from around 1950, was taken in front of the Barton Hill fire station.



As a postscript a small paragraph in the Exeter & Plymouth Gazette of 1920 records that the old Royal fire engine was sold by the Council to a glove factory in Cullompton, but what happened to the West of England machine is not known.

David Allanach, with help from Keith Gibson and Tricia Whiteaway

[P.S. The author would be interested in discovering if anyone has a copy of the book by Stan Shorland called 'Lest it's forgotten' about the Dawlish fire service as it seems hard to get hold of.]

Extract from a newspaper report on the Church of England Temperance Society Annual Tea and Meeting held on October 18th, 1898 in the Parish Room.

Inclement weather prevailed, but, notwithstanding, 120 sat down to an excellent cup of tea and good fare. [...] After Grace, the Rev V L Keelan read the statement of accounts which showed a satisfactory balance of £7 17s 7d. The total abstaining members are 78, non-abstainers [moderate] 12, total 90. [...] A well-attended public entertainment and meeting was afterwards held. [...] A short programme of vocal and instrumental music was much appreciated. [...]

Dr Tracy was then called upon, and delivered a stirring address, brim full of excellently told and pointed anecdote, both humorous and tragic on the 'sound sense, the good sense, and the common sense of teetotalism'. The doctor proved to be in splendid form, and drove the points of his remarks forcibly home to his hearers by the irresistible force of his logical, earnest and spirited enunciations. He said he had come to try and induce some of those present that evening to take their personal stand against drink. [...] He argued that no man or woman could do a better thing than sign the total abstinence pledge. Firstly because it would do them good; secondly because it would do their children good [applause]; thirdly because by doing this they would have the magnificent privilege of helping that other man, their fallen brother (Applause). [...] Drunkenness made a man either a fool or a fiend. Nothing would dethrone the magnificent intellect which God had given man more than the fuddling of drink. [...] Referring to the taking of drink as a medicine, the speaker, whose words have additional weight from experience, said this practice was in most cases nothing more or less than bosh. [...]

A hearty vote of thanks was returned to Dr Tracy for his address. After the meeting 13 signed the total abstinence pledge.