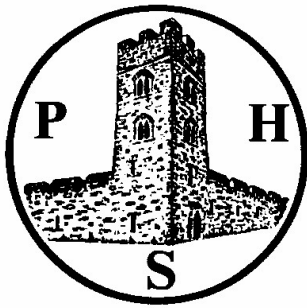




Paignton Heritage Society

Newsletter – May/June 2020

www.paigntonociety.webs.com
www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I am writing in the hope that you are all keeping safe and well during these challenging times. It is a blessing that we live in a beautiful part of the world and just a shame that, because we are self-isolating and self-distancing, we are not able to appreciate it as much as we would normally ... the good thing is that it will all still be there for us, looking brighter than before when the lockdown is eased.

I have thoroughly enjoyed all the VE Day celebrations and take heart from the Queen encouraging us to "Never give up, never despair" and her view that "We will meet again" - which I am hopeful will be in the not too distant future.

I have also been taking inspiration from all the people on the front line and the fund raisers, of all ages, who have been raising money for charities and good causes. This brings me nicely on to saying a very sincere thank you to the following members of our Society:

Anne Pentney: Since our last meeting, Anne has handed over the membership information and I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my sincere appreciation to Anne for all her hard work over the many years she has been our Membership Secretary. It is one of those "behind the scenes" roles that are crucial to the success of any Society and the fact that we have an involved and active membership is due, in no small part, to Anne's enthusiasm and commitment. I am glad that Anne is still happy to serve on the Committee and also appreciate the fact that she sets up the room and supplies us with refreshments at our meetings.

Jim Milne: Over the last few months Jim (supported by his son and Jean Morris) has been posting in excess of 2,400 postcards

on the Heritage Society website. I cannot imagine what a daunting task this must have been and it is testimony to his diligence and enthusiasm that so many are now available for everyone to enjoy, rather than being filed away in our archives.

Tony Hill and Pam Milne: Who have both taken the time to review the Aims of our Society and suggested how these might be changed to make them more relevant as we move forward. The Committee have considered their suggestions and we plan to take proposals to our next AGM.

Dave Watts: Many of you will not be aware that for many years Dave (Christine and David's son) has been supporting the Society by registering, hosting and meeting both the set-up and annual costs of our new website - thank you so much Dave. I would also like to place on record appreciation to Dave's partner Lisa, who has set up a Facebook page for the Society. It means a lot to the Society that we have such great social media platforms to be able to promote ourselves in the future. Both the Website and Facebook pages now need to be populated - so if any members have thoughts about what we can publish please contact myself or a Committee Member.

It has been a pleasure to write this article for the June newsletter and it now only remains for me to wish you all the best and say how much I am looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Iris Butler
Chair

The Corona Virus

Of course, in these difficult times we have had to cancel meetings, and forego our social interactions. Hopefully all our members are coping with the Government's emergency measures, but if anyone has a problem, there is a Community Support hotline staffed 24/7 covering Torquay and Paignton - 01803 446022, or for Brixham Does Care, the number is 01803 857727 Mon - Fri 9.00 - 4.30.

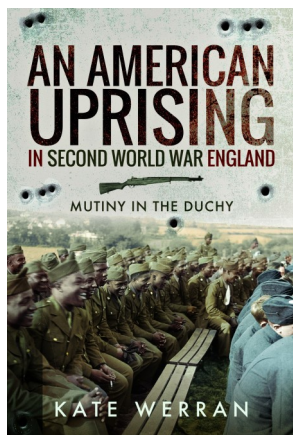
Kirkham House



Kirkham House is closed at present. In the circumstances, no opening dates have been set for the summer, but we will keep you informed.

We have a group from U3A Ivybridge scheduled for a tour of the House and medieval Paignton on 22nd September at 2pm. Hopefully this will be able to go ahead.

Local Story



Fancy a good read? A new book out in April features a mainly forgotten local story. Basically, for three days in 1943 Paignton was centre stage for an American court martial that gripped the newspaper-reading populations of the UK and USA. The town

gave delightful colour to press reports - animals from the zoo could be heard from the courtroom; Paignton Council deckchairs were used by some of the witnesses and crucially a 21-year-old Torquay woman was the USA Army's court reporter. Her unique role - just six women in the whole country were employed in this capacity - was the subject of many press reports, affording her the headline itself in one instance.

The book came out at the end of April. It is published by Pen & Sword and is available at Waterstones, WH Smith and Amazon.

Our own David Watts is mentioned in the acknowledgements by the Author, as David researched much of the detail regarding both Paignton's Police Station in Palace Avenue and Paignton itself in 1943.

2020 Dates - PLEASE CHECK FIRST!
subject to likely cancellation:

Paignton Harbour Day

25th July - our display theme will be "the history of the Harbour, and shipwrecks off Roundham Head"

Heritage Day

20th June



An Audience at the Palace

Dates for the monthly Thursday daytime talks at Palace Theatre have been set for the Summer, and will continue throughout 2020.

Doors open at 10am for a 10.30am start. Tickets are £5, with a £2 discount available to members of PHS for:

- 11 June - Ken Beevers - "The Man Who Wrote Alfie: Bill Naughton"
- 9 July - Phil Badcott - "The Life, Legends and Legacy of Sir Walter Raleigh: the Queen's favourite Devonian"
- 10th September - Jo Loosemore - "Mayflower 400: Legend and Legacy"

PHS dates for your diary

All talks have been cancelled until the lifting of the present restrictions.

However



To fill the pages of our Newsletter, here's a story I stumbled across by accident whilst surfing the internet. If you want the full story, go to www.swmag.org/hms-venerable - the following is a summary.

HMS Venerable was launched in 1784 - a 74 gun man-of-war. It took almost 4,000 mature oak trees to build her at a cost of some £3,800.

Little is known of her early years, but it may be that having been built of "green" wood, she stayed in dock for several years until her timbers seasoned.

She was involved in the Battle of Algeciras in July 1801, under Captain Samuel Hood. The British fleet, consisting of seven ships, was stationed in the Bay of Gibraltar, blockading the port of Cadiz. On arrival and finding Cadiz blockaded, a smaller French fleet of three ships of the line and a frigate, sailed into the nearby harbour of Algeciras, considering this a safe option as the harbour was protected by four Spanish forts.

Under Sir James Saumarez, the British Fleet attacked Algeciras, but were repulsed by the French ships and the guns of the Spanish forts. The British lost HMS Hannibal, which ran aground, together with 121 men killed and 240 wounded. The French lost 306 men, with 280 wounded.

Under Captain Hood, HMS Venerable was damaged in the conflict, but sailed back to the Bay of Gibraltar for repairs.

Three years later, on Saturday 24th November 1804, the Channel Fleet was at anchor in Tor Bay and one of the ships was

HMS Venerable, now captained by Capt. John Hunter. At 3pm there was a sudden change in the weather, with a shift of wind to the North East and heavy rain. The Admiral ordered the fleet out to sea for safety, and anchors were raised. However, just as HMS Venerable was preparing to set sail, a seaman fell overboard. A boat was launched to rescue him, manned by Midshipman Deas and two seamen. However, one rope was released too soon - the rescue boat tipped and the three sailors fell into the sea and were drowned. A second boat was launched and the "man overboard" was rescued. Whilst this was going on, Venerable had drifted and found herself unable to weather Berry Head. Captain Hunter gave the order to tack North, but this brought Venerable on a course straight towards other ships of the fleet. To avoid collision a new course was set, but with the wind against her, Captain Hunter realised his ship was nearing the lights of Paignton. In the growing dark, another ship loomed ahead of Venerable. Again the ship changed direction, but too late Captain Hunter found his ship touching the bottom and grounded under Paignton cliffs on rocks fore and aft.

By now it was 8.30 pm. The wind changed direction again, and an Easterly whipped up the sea around the grounded ship. A distress signal was fired, and by 10pm water had filled the lower gun deck. HMS Impetueux and HMS Goliath managed to anchor near the stricken Venerable, and rescue the crew. By midnight, 547 men had been rescued and only 8 drowned, including the three drowned trying to save the "man overboard".

Captain Hunter was court-martialled and acquitted. At the trial, he said of his crew that he would sail again with any of them again except one. Marine David Evans was dragged on deck during the rescue efforts drunk on port wine, having filled his pockets with loot from the officers' wardroom whilst the rest of the crew strove to save the stricken ship. He was given 200 lashes of the cat-o'-nine-tails and beaten round the Fleet some weeks later.

The next day, the guns of HMS Venerable were salvaged in the shallow waters off Roundham Head, and more recently in the 70's and 80's cannonballs and small lead shot were brought up by divers.

Paignton Heritage Society

Did you know how it all started? Eileen Donovan reminds us:

The Society has its origins in a movement which started in 1985 to save Primley Meadow (now Primley Park) from developers, as it had been Herbert Whitley's wish following his death that Primley Meadow should be opened to the people of Paignton, but in the absence of a legal will the Whitley Trust was set up by Mr. A. P. G Mitchelmore (a life long friend), and administered by the trustees who favoured the upgrading and expansion of the Zoo over Herbert Whitley's dying wish. The first plan put forward by Paignton Zoo was to build a supermarket on the site and use the profit made to help pay for the upgrading and hopefully the expansion of the Zoo.

In 1986, following public concern Torbay Council decided to make the land available for housing and the Zoo management again put forward proposals which would have destroyed the park, but finance the Zoo's expansion.

In the following year [1987] Pat and Bill Elwick raised a petition against the loss of the Meadow. Meanwhile Peggy Parnell (Peggy Head) had also written to the Press, various officials and organisations and when Mrs Elwicks' health prevented her from continuing her campaign, she contacted Peggy to take on the task.

On the 4 June 1987 when the Herald Express announced that Paignton Zoo was about to launch a '£4m' super regeneration plan, to be funded at the expense of selling the late Herbert Whitley's Primley House and grounds, the threat to the Park became widely known, and four ladies joined with

Peggy to form an ad-hoc organisation to defend the park as Herbert Whitley had wished. In 1988 Torbay Council turned down the Zoo's planning proposal. By this time the Open Spaces Society had become involved and asked Peggy keep them posted on events.

Various courses of action were pursued with varying degrees of success, by which time it was pointed out to the group that they really needed a more formal organisation and a title. They chose to identify themselves as 'The Paignton Preservation Society'. In July 1989, they called a public meeting at which three more volunteers came forward to help – Ivor Bond, John Pentney and Rhoda Villis, and three councillors also offered their support. More members were soon recruited and the campaign gathered pace.

Meanwhile, even more of Paignton's green spaces had come under threat – notably the Yalberton Apple Orchards, Queens Park and Goodrington. The Society now became involved in ever more battles over Primley Meadow, then in 1992, after seven years of campaigning, the Primley Meadow issue was finally resolved and designated a Park, and so named was saved. The park was formally opened to the public by the Zoo on 8 November 1992.

More campaigns against inappropriate development followed together with some words on the inevitable loss of protected scenery by Miss Jan Hatley. Consequently in 1999 the phrase 'Local History' was added to the title-. i.e. (The Paignton Preservation & Local History Soc.,). However this made the title cumbersome, and in July 1999 when the Society's formal constitution was adopted, a second, shorter, name was added for administrative convenience– i.e. *Also known as 'The Paignton Society'*- because the Society is increasingly concerned with matters of the local environment as a whole– most recently with traffic planning in Paignton. In October 2011 the name was finally changed to the *Paignton Heritage Society*.