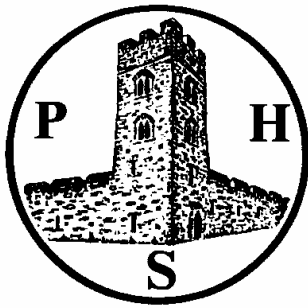




Paignton Heritage Society

Newsletter June 2021

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I would like to start by saying that I hope you have all managed to stay fit and well during the most recent lockdown. I know that many of us have found this lockdown to be much more trying than the first one when we were blessed with lovely weather. But, things are starting to change and I am really looking forward to seeing as many of you as can make it, at our first meeting on Thursday, 15th July at 7.00pm in the Gerston Christian Centre. This will be a social evening to give us the opportunity to catch up with one another and hear what we have planned for the year ahead.

I have been representing the Society by supporting the Friends of Oldway in their quest to open the Tea Room. The final piece of work is the installation of a toilet and once this is complete the tea rooms will open. We will then be able to enjoy a cream tea with lovely china cups, saucers and plates.

I have also been privileged, with other Trustees of the Paignton Picture House, to have a site visit. I was soon kitted out with a hard hat and Hi-Viz jacket and the tour began. It was interesting to climb ladders to the very top of the building and be able to see at close range, the work that has already been done by the stonemasons and other craftsmen. I was delighted to meet the craftsman who is renovating the stain glass windows and be able to admire his skilled and spectacular workmanship. I am sure that when the Picture House reopens it will be a real asset to Paignton and I am looking forward to being able to visit to watch a film, and imagine what it must have been like to have been in the audience when it first opened in 1914.

Iris Butler, Chair

Annual General Meeting

On 23rd March we were able to hold our AGM via Zoom, and sincere thanks to those members who were able to log on and join in.

The following Committee members were elected:

Chair	Iris Butler
Vice Chair/Secretary	Karen Chapman
Treasurer	Maggie Loates
Membership Secretary	Keith Masters
Committee Members	Eileen Donovan
	Christine Watts
	Anne Pentney
	John Pentney
	David Coaker

Membership

Over the last few months, we have been reviewing our membership list and a big thank you to all who have renewed, and to those who have moved to payment by standing order. This method of payment is greatly appreciated – it cuts down on administration, saves a trip to the Bank, and it saves you from being chased each year for your subscription.

Similarly, we thank those of you who have decided to change from a paper copy of the newsletter to receiving it by e.mail. Again, this saves the Society in time and costs. However, we do appreciate some of you do not use a computer, so cannot make the change.

Coverdale Tower

Again our thanks to Colin Wood, who has been keeping an eye on the Tower over the winter months. The main problem is ingress of water through the windows, and Colin is trying to contact the Architect who advised on the windows installation and who should be able to advise on the best way to resolve the problem. As the Tower

is listed and over a thousand years old, you can't just 'bung up the holes with sealant'! We still await a response from the Council regarding renewal of the Agreement, but are assured it is in hand.

Kirkham House



At last – we are back in business!

Kirkham House will be open to visitors on Bank Holiday Monday, 31st May, and then every Sunday in July and August from 2pm – 5pm. At the

moment, we cannot say whether we will be able to offer our visitors the option of an additional visit to the Coverdale Tower and Clink, as it all depends on whether there are Covid restrictions in place.

The collapsed garden wall remains a 'work in progress'

Walking Trails to beat Covid fatigue

The Trails are selling like hotcakes!! The walk from the Harbour to Goodrington has proved especially popular during lock-down, and so much of the feedback has been "well, I never knew that!".

To obtain your copy go to -

<http://www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk>

The full range now includes -

Paignton - Harbour - Goodrington	£1.50
Paignton - Old Town (updated)	1.50
Paignton - Sea Front	1.50
Paignton - Medieval Paignton -	
Four Old Buildings	1.00
Paignton - Oldway	1.00
Paignton - New Town (Victorian/	
Edwardian)	1.00
Preston - The Original Hamlet	1.00

There is a charge of £2 to cover postage and packaging.



An Audience at the Palace

Talks at the Palace resumed on 20th May with a fascinating talk by Wendy Caplan and Jill Farrant on 65 years of the Bijou Theatre.

The founder of the Theatre was a lady called Greta Huggins – several of you will remember this doughty Paignton character. After the talk, I could not resist sharing with the audience something that I found out about Greta on the internet. As well as her theatrical interests, in her younger days Greta was a founding member of Torbay Ladies Hockey Club – indeed, in later times, I recall playing with her against Dartmouth Ladies some time around 1970! Anyway – whilst surfing the internet, I came across a bookseller who listed a

"1938 excellent, original manuscript travel diary of the All England Womens' Hockey Association team tour of New Zealand and Australia, handwritten by the team goalie" who just happened to be our very own Greta Huggins.

Greta had been chosen as Goalkeeper to represent England on the tour. The team travelled by boat, and appointed Greta their diarist for the 5 months it took from setting sail from England, to returning home.

The diary is still for sale – at an asking price of £2,453.55, plus £32.92 shipping from Canada!

The Summer programme of talks is:

- **3 June** – Torbay in the Movies by Dr Kevin Dixon
- **17 June** - Legends & Legacy of Sir Walter Raleigh by Phil Badcott
- **24 June** - The Man who wrote Alfie
- **8 July** - Murder & Mystery on the GWR by Mike Holgate
- **29 July** - Deller's Café by Dr Paul Cleave
- **12 August** - 'Spout' by Robert Garnham

Doors open at 10am for a 10.30 start. Tickets are £3 for PHS members - £5 for non-members.

Memorial Tree

The Memorial Oak Tree to our late Chairman, David Watts, has been planted in Oldway and has taken well to its new home. We are now waiting for a suitable day in June or July, when the Covid restrictions are lifted and we can congregate together for an official 'unveiling' ceremony. You will all be invited, of course.

PHS website

Jim Milne is continuing to expand the website, and would welcome some Paignton Memories. What special memories do you have of Paignton? Memories of a family beach hut, or of shopping in the town, or of tea with Grandma in Dellers' Café – whatever – write them down and send them to Jim.

Diary Dates

First, the bad news. It has been confirmed that the popular "Harbour Day" Festival for 2021 has been cancelled, but fingers crossed for 2022.

Now, the good news.

All being well, our monthly Thursday meetings will resume in July, so please put the following dates in your diaries:

All commencing at the NEW time of 7.00pm at The Gerston Hall, (behind the Gerston Chapel, opposite the Post Office)

15 Jul	Social evening and catch-up
19 Aug	John Ridsden (provisionally)
16 Sep	speaker – to be advised
21 Oct	speaker – to be advised
18 Nov	speaker – to be advised

We are also working on plans for a "Paignton Heritage" event in September, to coincide with the Heritage Open Days Festival which takes place between 10th – 19th September this year.

The Marist Order in Paignton

The Monastery, Paignton

Up until the 1880's, there was no place of worship for Roman Catholics in Paignton. The nearest church for Mass being 'Our Lady of the Assumption' in Abbey Road, Torquay, which opened in 1854. Then in 1881, a property known as "Quarry House", high on a hill just outside the town (now Berry Drive), was purchased for £6,000 from a Charles Henry Spragge, Captain of the Royal Artillery. Had Captain Spragge known the prospective purchaser of his house was a Catholic priest, it is doubtful he would have sold, and so the sale was completed in the name of a local layman, William Henry Rossiter, owner of the Mill on Littlegate Road, on behalf of Fr Pimore, Procurator of the Church.

William's son, Harry Bernard Rossiter, loved to tell the story of the sale:

"My father fixed a meeting with Mr Spragge and, whilst he kept him talking, I took Fr Pimore up the back way and, keeping under cover, was able to give him a good idea of the outside of the house and extent of the grounds." Then with a chuckle, he would add "Suddenly, as we were creeping through a hedge, Fr Pimore said he couldn't go on as his suspenders had broken! I didn't realise that he was talking about his braces and couldn't understand why he was worried about his socks! We managed to fix the braces and got away without any more trouble or being discovered." With a laugh he would add - "So much hung on a pair of braces!"

The House, set in 22 acres of land, was transformed into a Monastery and Chapel by the Order of Marist Fathers. Fr Desrosier drew up plans and the local builder, Frederick W Vanstone, was appointed. Work commenced at the end of 1882.

The Chapel opened on 14th June 1883 with Pontifical Mass sung by the Bishop of Plymouth. As well as representatives of the Marist Order, the Mass was attended by representatives of the Benedictine, Augustinian, Jesuit, Redemptorist and Basilian Orders.

On 26th July 1883, the Bishop returned and confirmed ten people, ordained three Marist priests and a Deacon, and two Sub-Deacons from Buckfast Abbey. The first Parish Priest, was Fr Grimes, born in Bromley-le-Bow, London and one time Professor and President of Jefferson College, Louisiana, USA. Fr Grimes was assisted by Fr Artigan, Fr Aubry and Fr Charaigner, who together were responsible for hundreds of students who passed through Paignton on their way to the Priesthood.

However, by the start of the new century, numbers had dwindled to a trickle and by the end of the 1914-18 War had totally dried up, as the Marist administration in Lyons took advantage of a less strict interpretation of the anti-clerical laws to keep their students in France. The Monastery in Paignton had to rely on the selling of garden produce and letting of rooms to survive.

The Chapel was built in the Gothic style with a single nave and a wagon shaped vaulted roof. It is 78ft long, 31ft broad and 58ft high from ground to apex. On the roof above the eastern gable is a cast iron statue to "Our Lady", although she is also sometimes referred to as "The White Lady". The statue used to be



illuminated at night, and boats would use it as a landmark when returning to port at night. Catholics continued to worship at the Marist Chapel from 1883, but it was a steep climb up the hill for the townspeople of Paignton. In 1896 a new Parish Priest arrived in Paignton - a strong, healthy, energetic missionary called Fr Mulkern. His aim was to make it easier for people to get to Mass, and so he purchased the Baptist Chapel at the foot of St Mary's Hill for £300, and this was used for Catholic worship until the 1920's. It was blessed on the evening of 23rd May 1898 under the title of The Sacred Heart, and on the following morning Bishop Graham opened the Church with a High Mass.

Fr Mulkern had a great reputation for wit - one story tells:

One day, Harry Rossiter was taken by Fr Mulkern to see how the work in the ex-Baptist church was progressing. As they arrived, the workmen were just filling in the bath. Fr Mulkern stood watching for a moment and turning to him said "Well Harry, there goes the last of Original Sin!"



Paignton continued to grow, as tourists flocked to the area, and by the 1920's the Chapel had become too small for the number of summer visitors. A new Church was planned and in 1924 land in Spratt Lane (now called Cecil Road) was purchased. In July 1931 the new Sacred Heart Church was opened by the 5th Bishop of Plymouth, the Very Reverend John Barrett.

The Monastery continued to be used by the Marist Priests until 1971 when the building was sold to Torbay Council, and the Priests left for Heathrop College in London. Over

the years since then, it had a number of uses including The Lions' Club, Victim Support, Nightingales Children's Project, a food bank and family support centre. In August 2019 the Council gained approval to sell the building by auction at some date in the future, and at the time of writing the news is that Wessex County Assets, a social enterprise, has a project to purchase and refurbish the Monastery for community use and affordable housing.

The building is not listed.

Departure of the Marist Order

On 15 July 1984, Fr Sacco had the unenviable task of announcing the final withdrawal of the Marist Priests at Masses, ending the Order's century of service to the Catholic people of Paignton.

Education

The Order of Marists is an international Order, which originated in France. Their goal is the education of young people.

However, the first record of Catholic schooling in Paignton was by Miss Emily Parkinson, a devout Catholic lady who, in 1893, rented and opened a small one-roomed school at Castle House (now 106 Winner Street) in Barns Hill. In 1885, the school was moved to Miss Parkinson's own home at Myrtle Cottage in Kirkham Street.

Fr. Grimes took a keen interest in the school, but both he and Miss Parkinson realised that a purpose-built school was a necessity. In 1887, Fr. Grimes left Paignton to be replaced by Fr. John Buckley, who soon found a site at the juncture of Well Street with Oldway Road. The School was built at a cost of £350, and Miss Parkinson continued to teach there for the next 14 years, but refused to accept a salary. Church accounts show a monthly payment of £12 10s, which was duly returned each month to the church as a donation to funds.

Towards the end of 1900, Miss Parkinson's health was failing. She wanted to retire but would not do so until the future of the school was secure. The Parish Priest by then was Fr. Mulkern,

who also wanted to secure the future education of the children, but he also wanted to extend education to a secondary level. He approached Fr. Michael Watters, who was the Father Provincial, and together they arranged for the Marist Sisters to set up a new foundation, and so a small group of Sisters arrived in Paignton to take charge of the Wells Street school and pioneer a secondary school.

On 11th November 1901, the Sisters arrived and set up their first Convent at 1 Southfield Road. In 1905, the Sisters moved convent and school to Willow Bank in Lower Polsham Road. The School had three large classrooms on the ground floor and was set in an acre of land. Numbers increased and by 1907 there were 30 - 40 pupils. However Willow Bank was rented and needed extensive repairs, and so the Sisters looked for a larger property.

Tower House on Mabel Place, a cul-de-sac off Fisher Street, came up for sale. The house was built by Mr Baily in 1890, and stood in about 3 acres of land. The purchase was made possible by Miss Farndell, a benefactor over the years, who lent the deposit for the £5,000 purchase price - a loan she forgave by later gift under her will. Just before Easter 1908 the Sisters moved from Willow Bank to Tower House.

In 1903, a group of Sacred Heart Sisters moved to Paignton from France, and purchased Goodrington House (now Inn on the Quay), on Tanners Lane. They also took pupils, and for a short while there was a slight conflict between the Sacred Heart Sisters and the Marist Sisters regarding charges. Bishop Graham visited Paignton to settle the matter, which he did, but soon after a number of the Sacred Heart Sisters returned to France and gave up their schooling activities.

A sad footnote to the story of the Sisters of Sacred Heart is that by 1913, they had all returned to France. Some were then sent to Liege in Belgium, and during the invasion of the city in August 1914, the Rev. Mother and another sister were shot dead by the Germans, whilst drawing the shutters of their house.

The Marist Sisters continued to teach at both the Fisher Street and Cecil Road schools.

The Marist Convent School got off to a rather slow start, until 1931 when Mother Superior Livinus Hunt was appointed. Under her leadership, the school became one of the best in the area. By the 1960's, numbers had risen to 287 (including boarders) but by the 1970's numbers had dropped to 202 with only 27 boarders. In 1950 the Junior School separated from the Senior School, and moved to premises in Oldway Road (now demolished and replaced by Richmond Court).

In 1982 the sad decision was made to close the school.

By the 1930's, the little primary school in Well Street was becoming overcrowded and was black-listed by Devon County Council. A new modern school was needed, and in 1935 this was opened in the grounds of the Sacred Heart Church on Cecil Road with 73 pupils enrolled. Today, the school is thriving and in 2016 had 251 enrolled.



References:

'A History and Personal Reminiscences of the Catholic Church in Paignton' by Betty Adams

'Torbay's Heritage - Paignton' by John R Pike

Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Paignton - Parish History