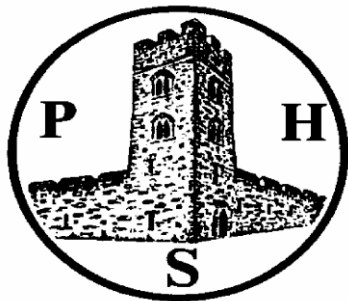




Paignton Heritage Society Newsletter December 2021

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I have really enjoyed being able to meet more of our members at the events we have held in the last few months; which have all helped raise our profile as a Society.

In September over fifty people (including some of our members) attended the Paignton Heritage Showcase event which was held at the Palace Theatre. This really excellent event has to be credited to both Karen Chapman (our Vice-Chair) and Sarah Hemingway (Palace Theatre Marketing & Public Relations Executive). You can read more about this later in the newsletter.

Also in September, Nick Pannell (our President) gave us a really interesting talk about "The History of Palace Avenue" and it was a pleasure to have some people attend who live in one of the properties that Nick spoke about.

In October we welcomed Ian Handford who spoke to us about "The Preston Pharmaceutical business AAH" and also told us about the Civic Society Blue Plaque scheme.

Then, in November we were entertained by Peter Marsden who told us about his involvement with the "Mary Rose". Peter brought with him some interesting artefacts from the Mary Rose and we were pleased to hear that he has also stood on its deck!

Karen and I were invited to attend an open evening at the Redcliffe Hotel on 16th November, where we heard from the new owners (Mallino Development Ltd) about their plans for refurbishing the hotel over the next few months. We learnt that their aim is to upgrade and sympathetically modernise the hotel ready for the next chapter in its life.

Coming up, on 9th December we will be holding the 'The Peintona Paladin - Local History Quiz' in the Palace Theatre and I would like to commend Karen on all the research and work she has put into this event. I do hope many of you will attend and test your knowledge of our local history.

It now only remains for me to say, that I hope you all keep safe and well and I will look forward to seeing you when we meet on 16th December.

I and the Committee wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year

Iris Butler, Chair

Committee Members

Your Committee members are:

Chair	Iris Butler
Vice Chair/Secretary	Karen Chapman
Treasurer	Maggie Loates
Committee Members	Eileen Donovan
	Christine Watts
	Keith Masters
	Anne Pentney
	John Pentney
	David Coaker
	Jim Milne
Co-opted Member	Lee Hayward

If you want to contact any of us, just e.mail Paigntonheritagesociety@gmail.com and your query will be forwarded.

Membership

Lee Hayward has kindly agreed to take on the role of Membership Secretary. If you wish to contact her, please e.mail – paigntonheritagesociety@outlook.com

The Bishop's Palace

Most of you will be aware of the excavation site on the corner of the Paignton Parish Churchyard, but for those of you who aren't – in 2003, Paignton Heritage Society, supported by Heritage Lottery Funding, commissioned the excavation of a site in the corner of St John the Baptist Paignton Parish Church. Further research was undertaken in 2012 and a full interpretation was published in the 150th Anniversary Transaction of the Devonshire Association, Vol. 144.

The excavation uncovered a building thought to be a garderobe block which was part of the Bishop of Exeter's Summer Palace dating back to the mid 1300's.



The site was cleared of debris, gravel laid, and interpretation boards were sited on the railings.

Since then, with permission from the Church landowners, our Society has maintained the site. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, activities of our Society were greatly restricted. As a result, the site has



become overgrown with weeds, including a large clump of pampas grass.

In October, we met with representatives of the Devon Gardens Trust to see what advice they could give us on restoring the site sympathetically, so as not to damage any of the archaeology or natural wildlife.

Thanks to David, Adrian and Colin pictured here showing off their excavation "finds" – a collection of a dozen medieval Dinky cars unearthed during the weeding!!

Heritage Open Days - Kirkham House

The last opening date for Kirkham House this year was in September as part of the 'Heritage Open Days' Festival, and what a successful weekend it was.

Thanks to the efforts of David, Adrian, Christine, Lisa and Pat we made £66.66 on a tombola stall, £71.04 from sales of our brochures and from donations received.

Over the two days, we welcomed 83 visitors and took them on tours of the House, The Clink and The Tower.

The only downside to the weekend was the visitor who left the following comment in our Visitors' Book:

"Wonderful old house, and the lady guide was so knowledgeable. A magical old Paignton gem".

Am I now an old Paignton gem, or did she mean Kirkham House???

Paignton Heritage Venues Showcase

In September, we also took part in a very successful event at The Palace Theatre. Representatives from our own Society, the Oldway groups, the Picture House and the Palace Theatre gave the audience a fascinating insight into the history of their heritage buildings and also an update on plans for the future.

It is hoped that in 2022 we can expand the Showcase to include other groups – we have so much heritage here on our doorstep that it is only right and proper we highlight and celebrate our story from Anglo Saxon settlers to the present day.

Trail Booklets

Now available on-line and payable via Paypal at:

<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 – Oldway (updated)	1.50

Paignton - Medieval Paignton - Four Old Buildings	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 have been very well attended, and the year is finished off with a local history quiz hosted by our Society. Please come along to support Iris and Karen, who will be posing the questions.

The Winter programme of talks is:

- 9th December – ‘The Peintona Paladin – local history quiz’ – Karen Chapman & Iris Butler
- 13th January – ‘The Torquay Historical Pageant of 1924’ – David Hinchcliffe
- 17th February – ‘Pottery, Geopark and Guzzledown’ – Becky Nuttall
- 10th March – ‘The Churchill Girls’ – Rachel Trethewey

Doors open at 10am for a 10.30 start. Tickets are £3 for PHS members - £4 for non-members.

PHS website

Who remembers the comedian Jimmy Cricket and his catchphrase “... and there’s more”. Well it applies to our website. Thanks to Jim Milne, we have more postcards, more photographs and more local history stories. Take a look!

Diary Dates

Our monthly Thursday meetings are as follows, all commencing at the NEW time of 7.00pm at The Gerston Hall, (behind the Gerston Chapel, opposite the Post Office)

- 16th December – A presentation by Nick Pannell followed by a few festive nibbles, and a chance to socialise!
- 20th January – Jo Loosemore – ‘The Mayflower’
- 17th February – Rosemary Griggs – ‘An Audience with the Lady Katherine’
- 17th March – Colin Vosper – ‘The Story of Harry Hems’

Also – keep 5th June free in your diary! We plan to celebrate the Queen’s Jubilee with a Garden Party at Kirkham House, and all will be welcome!

MEMORIES OF OLDWAY by Mrs Laura M Goss

Many thanks to Tony Hill, who has provided us with some fascinating memories of Oldway. These were recorded by Mrs Laura Goss, (daughter of the Architect, George Soudon Bridgman) in 1948.

My earliest memories go back to Torquay in the last century, about 1869, but these are only childhood memories which become more clear from 1870 onwards until the time when I got married and left Paignton in 1888.

That early date was at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Many French families were escaping from the troubles of their country fearing the result of Napoleon III's endeavours to retain his throne. Torquay and other places were besieged by visitors of different nationalities. French, Italians, Greeks and Americans, many of whom having recognised the beauty of Torquay, settled down to reside there.

My father, George Soudon Bridgman, a pupil of Messrs Harvey, Architects – who had laid-out and developed the Estates of Sir Lawrence Palk - was then practising as an Architect in the town. Houses were being snapped-up and enlarged and still more were being built. Father was very busy with an increasing practice in Torquay and Paignton.



One of his engagements at this time was for alterations and enlargements at the 'Victoria and Albert Hotel' in Belgrave Road, Torquay. Amongst the guests staying there was a Mr Isaac Merritt Singer, an American visitor. He had come to look around Torquay to try to find a home for himself, his French wife and family, or some estate where a suitable dwelling could be built. Nothing was available in Torquay but finally the 'Fernham Estate' in Paignton was offered for sale, containing already a comfortable villa 'Oldway House' and a second villa 'Fernham'

(occupied at the time but later vacated) which must be made sufficient for the time being.

The Estate was purchased by Mr Singer and my father was taken by him to undertake the building and planning of a new house and stabling that he wished to have built. As a young man interested in Paignton and engaged in opening up and planning several Estates there, he gladly accepted the offer which would give him such valuable additional experience.

It was a tiring business though to get the preliminaries in order and all the detail of what would be required.

"I want a big 'Wigwam'!" his client said "... and I shall name it 'The Wigwam'." However as to the design, he wanted it to be as far as possible in the style of a rather florid French villa. Also there must be roomy stables, a place for exercising his horses, harness room and carriage accommodation, with many other details regarding affairs outside the house.

The family duly settled into 'Oldway House' and elsewhere so these outside buildings were necessary as the first part of the proceedings.

It was not, as I have said before, an easy task but finally the Arena (now spoken of as Rotunda) was planned, approved of and finally evolved into the present structure. (I went to the Arena one afternoon last summer to recall 'old times'. It had not been altered much but could not believe the very dirty, dark, dingy place was the 'fairyland' where we used to dance and play!). I think that the floor of the Arena was removable, so that Mr Ward, his daughter and the stableman could exercise the horses. Riding lessons could be given to the young people and the floor then re-laid for parties, etc.

As soon as the Arena was in hand, Mr Singer gave Messrs. Edwards, Coachbuilders, Torquay – an order for two large vehicles. A carriage for travelling by road as he did not like railway travel, fitted with every convenience for picnicking and a high coach for four horses to attend the local race meetings. The coaches were exhibited at Messrs. Edwards' premises and were an attraction. I don't think the race coach was used many times but it caused a sensation as it dashed around the New Road and the streets to St Marychurch races.

[pictured; a steeplechase at Petitor, Torquay]



It required a considerable time to complete the Arena. Messrs Matcham of Plymouth were the builders of this and also the house.

In the meantime, my father was preparing plans for the house. At Mr Singer's request he visited France, the war being over, and made special notes of items which Mr Singer desired. The iron railings outside the windows were at that time a speciality. I notice that many of these still remain.

The coloured drawing of the original house design was, I am told, given to the Council by my nephew,

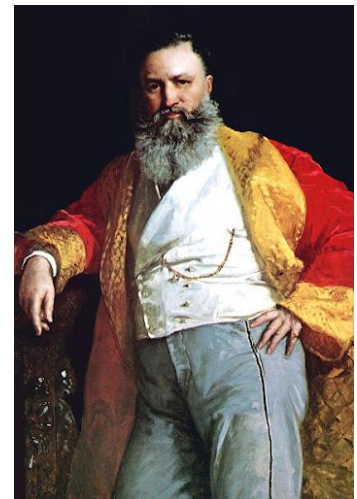
Gerald S Bridgman. It is, I believe, one of my father's own drawings. I hope I may see it when I am able to visit Oldway again.

The house was at last put in hand, but it took a long time to complete. There were, I think, many alterations and difficulties internally. However it grew into the house that was desired by its owner, but he was gradually becoming a serious invalid.

When the house was nearly finished and in the hands of the decorators, I was taken to see it. I was greatly impressed by the wide staircase but cannot in my mind, see it as it is at present. It was probably altered by Mr Paris Singer when the house was renovated and other changes made. The kitchens too were impressive for size, as were the domestic arrangements although still unfinished.

It was not very many weeks after that visit with my father that to the great regret of all interested in the work, Mr Singer became very ill and lived only a short time longer. It was a great blow for everyone connected with him. All felt sad that he did not live to see the fulfilment of his 'Dream Home'. He liked to visit the building every day that it was possible for him, to see how it was progressing.

My memories of Mr Isaac Merritt Singer are very vivid still. He was most impressive in appearance. A handsome old gentleman of medium height with a white 'Father Christmas' square cut beard and when dressed in his party attire, he was to us children magnificent. He felt the cold very much due to his illness and usually wore an overcoat, but for a party this overcoat was of velvet-lined satin.

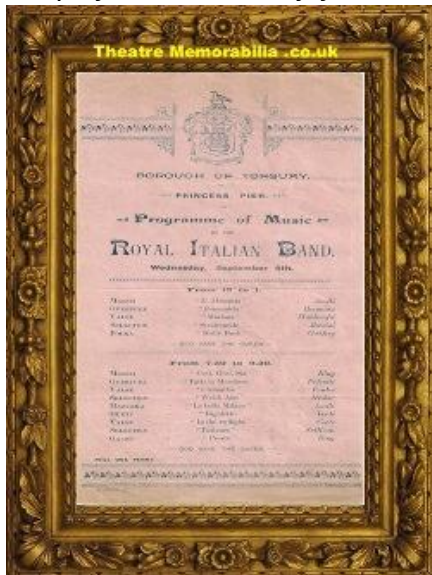


I remember a large garden party (before the Oldway grounds were disturbed for building) of children and grown-ups. Mr Singer was immaculately dressed in morning attire with a long coat of royal blue velvet lined with primrose satin. It had a striking effect but it seemed to suit him and looked quite in order – for him – and on other occasions similar coats in different colours.

After the Arena was finished, several large parties were held there in which we participated. Two American daughters had joined the family. Alice, very tall and fair, and Caroline, pretty and petite with dark hair and a brunette complexion. Alice afterwards married Mr Legrange, a

scientific inventor. That was a very happy wedding at Paignton Parish Church. Alas, I was then at school!

The guests at these parties were principally children with a good sprinkling of grown-up young people. Entertainment by a conjuror. A Christmas tree as well as the Italian Band from Torquay, added to the joy and excitement.



During the afternoon, Mr Singer would go up to the little gallery in the Arena and give a little speech of welcome to his guests. The Italian Band, a musical stand-by in Torquay for many years, would be playing in the Carriage stand and all of us dancing or playing inside the circle.

I remember on one occasion we were attracted by the terrible sounds coming from the band. There standing between the players and blowing their best, were Washington and Paris Singer, one with a tin whistle and the other with a borrowed cornet. Each kept a perfectly straight face, but the musicians were almost helpless with laughter. It all added to the fun.

Madame Eugene Singer, a tall, graceful and gracious lady and her six children, Mortimer, Winneretta, Washington, Paris, Isabelle and Franklin, were all good looking. Isabelle, the younger daughter, was a lovely dart-haired

child and at her wedding to a French nobleman, Duc Elie Decazes, the Queen Isabella of Spain was present. Winneretta became 'Princess de Polignac'.

There were several relations of Madame Singer living with them at Oldway. Her sister, Madame Bowyer (later to become Lady Synge) and her son, a cousin, Mrs Cushway and her husband who acted as Mr Singer's secretary. It was an interesting household. They were all very kind to my sister and me when we visited there.

It was a serious loss to Paignton when Mr Singer died. He was kind and generous to all. He gave freely to all the charities in existence and promulgated others. His sons who later lived in Paignton, were generous in carrying them on.

After Mr Singer's death and the departure of the family to the Continent, the great house was left quiet and unfinished, to the care of the Executors and supervised by Mr Macormack, who had been for some years the 'Major Domo' and a real stand-by for Mr Singer after Mr Cushway's death.

Except when on a visit to Paignton after my marriage, I heard little of Oldway affairs, but after Mr Paris singer took over the Estate, when the young people had become of age, it was good to hear the big house was at least to become a home. Mr Paris altered the house. He preferred a different style.

The reclamation of the marshes at Preston, the making of roads and development of other land by Mr Paris Singer, greatly increased the interests of the town and its value. I have to thank Lady Leeds, daughter of Paris Singer, for several points, the most interesting being that finding of the velvet coats many years after they had been worn, in an old box at Oldway.

