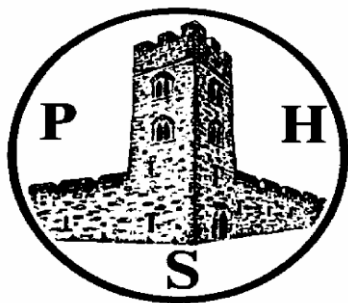




Paignton Heritage Society Newsletter December 2022

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I have enjoyed reflecting on the past twelve months of activity for the Society. Some of the highlights for me have been the visit in January from Jo Loosemore who talked to us about The Mayflower. As a result of Jo's talk I visited The Box in Plymouth and would recommend it to those who haven't been – it is definitely somewhere I will visit again. Then, in February we were entertained by Rosemary Griggs as "The Lady Katherine" and I am delighted that she will be coming to see us again in December. We are now meeting in the Gerston Chapel and I hope you will all agree that it is a much more comfortable venue. Our Heritage Day in September was again a resounding success and we were pleased to welcome some old friends and many new visitors too. The Kirkham team of volunteers have again done us proud with numbers of visitors increasing this year and their visit has been enhanced by the resident mannequins! Volunteers have been on hand too to help clear the Excavation site ground – which looks special when all the weeds have been removed. This year we had a visit and guided tour of Paignton Parish Church and we are planning next year to arrange another Society visit to a place of historical interest. To finish, I would like to thank you all for your continued support of the Society – we value your membership and look forward to seeing you at our events.

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

Iris Butler, Chair

Committee Members

Chair	Iris Butler
Vice Chair/Secretary	Karen Chapman
Treasurer	Maggie Loates
Committee Members	Eileen Donovan
	Christine Watts
	David Coaker
	Jim Milne
	Lee Hayward
	Lesley Drew
	(1 Vacancy)

We welcome Lesley Drew to our Committee. Lesley has already made a difference to the numbers at our monthly talks by taking control of publicising PHS events. Thanks Lesley – you're doing a grand job!

Membership

We will be issuing new membership cards shortly. We hope to have them available at our next monthly talk in December for collection.

Lee Hayward is our Membership Secretary. If you wish to contact her, please e.mail – paigntonheritagesociety@outlook.com

Kirkham House

If anyone is interested in helping at Kirkham, please phone David Coaker on 01803 553392. We open again at Easter 2023, with new opening hours of 13.00 – 16.00.

Excavation Site

Thanks again to the volunteers who give up a Sunday mornings lie-in to keep the weeds down at the site every few weeks. It's back-breaking work – but good fun. Thank also to Charles for clearing away after us – we couldn't manage without you!

Piggy Bank

Thanks to Pat Lawrence for donating the contents of her piggy bank to our Society! It was us or the sweetie shop – and she chose us.

Devon Archive Service

Brian Carpenter, Devon Archive Service, will be visiting Torre Abbey on 8th December.

If you have an interest in a particular subject, you can look up online what is in the Archive and you can request him to bring the original of the document for you to look at. This is a free service. You will probably be given a time slot to view your document.

You can see what is in the Archive at:

<https://swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/catalogues-and-indexes/>

Click on “explore the archives”. Once you have ascertained which documents you wish to see, email:

brian.carpenter@swheritage.org.uk

and request him to bring the documents to Torre Abbey on 8th December.

Diary Dates

Our monthly Thursday meetings are as follows, all commencing at 7.00pm at The Gerston Chapel (opposite the Post Office):

- 15 Dec - Rosemary Griggs – ‘The Lady Katherine and the Peasant David’. Christmas “nibbles” will be served after the talk – a chance to mingle and exchange festive cheer!!
- 19 Jan – Kevin Dixon “Legends of Torbay”
- 16 Feb – (provisionally) Mark Criddle, Coxswain of Torbay RNLI
- 16 Mar – to be announced

We are hoping to arrange a couple of visits for summer 2023. So far, we have in mind –

- A walk with John Risdon around the historic village of Galmpton
- A visit to the Valiant Soldier Museum at Buckfast
- A visit to the Brixham Battery

Watch this space.



An Audience at the Palace

The Autumn programme of talks is:

- 8 Dec – Chris Mackenzie-Thorpe – ‘The South Devon Railway; A Journey Down the Line’
- 12 Jan – Ian Handford – ‘Eric Morecambe, the comedian and the Torbay connection’
- 9 Feb – David Hinchliffe – ‘Drinking Fountains of Torquay’
- 16 Mar – Stephanie Austin – ‘Turning to Crime’

Doors open at 10.00 for a 10.30 start. Tickets for the talks are £5 for PHS members - £6 for non-members.

Heritage Day

What a fantastic day we had back in September. After having to cancel our “annual event” in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid, it was great to be able to put on our 4th Annual Heritage Day at the Methodist Hall.

This year we had a theme – The History of Paignton’s Theatres and Cinemas – in addition to our picture albums, and the feedback was “this is fascinating stuff – thank you!”

Guides wanted

Since Covid, walking has become a national passion, and more and more people are taking to their feet and wanting to see what is out there in their local area. PHS has received several requests for guided walks – from the organisers of the English Riviera Walking Festival, from schools, from groups and from individuals.

Would YOU be interested in leading a walk? We can provide “the knowledge” – all you need is to be reasonably fit (the walks are all moderate), enjoy being outside and meeting people.

If this appeals to you, please get in touch with Karen Chapman on 01803 550609 for a chat.

While on the subject, the first English Riviera Walking Festival was very successful, and it

is proposed to put on a Spring AND Autumn Festival for 2023. Look out for the dates in April and September.

PHS website

Our Web Administrator, Jim Milne, is busy with regular additions to the website. Have you had a look at it lately?

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

New material for the website is always welcome.

Gerston Chapel

It is a real pleasure these days to hold our meetings in the Chapel – so warm and comfortable. Here is a short history of the Chapel, which might be of interest.

There has been a Brethren Chapel in Paignton since the 1850's

The first gatherings of the Brethren were in Plymouth, and so members were often referred to as Plymouth Brethren. However the first group to meet in Paignton referred to themselves as Open Brethren. Today, the name more widely used is Christian Brethren.

The Brethren gather together for worship at meetings referred to generally as Assemblies.

A directory of 1856 states that the "Plymouth Brethren have a preaching room in Paignton". Their Chapel is shown in Dartmouth Road on the 1861 Ordnance Survey map. Additionally, there was a Baptist Chapel at Barns Hill, now known as Colley End. It is known today as Kingdom Hall and seated 200. Behind the hall is a small burial ground where former members of the Brethren are buried. By 1887 there was also a Temperance Hall in New Street. In 1888 the Gerston Chapel was opened, and the various groups came together. The Barns Hill Chapel was purchased by the Roman Catholics, and an off-shoot of the Brethren, the Exclusive Brethren, moved into the Temperance Hall.

The main Founders of Gerston Chapel were William Tapley and John Crofton Rainey. William Tapley became Secretary of the Chapel and continued in this role for over 50 years. He also served as Sunday School Superintendent for 33 years.

Chapel records show a Fellowship of members as –

1888 – 100

1920 – 108

1930 – 122

1960 – 146

1988 – 84

Landmark dates for the Brethren include:

1935 building of the Great Parks Mission Hall (now Great Parks Chapel)

1938 John Sarson (local Chemist) preached at a service to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Chapel. In addition to Chapel duties, he also worked for the YMCA and ran the Paignton Boys' Crusader Class for many years

1940 The Caretaker of the Chapel was fined £2 for allowing a light to show during an air raid

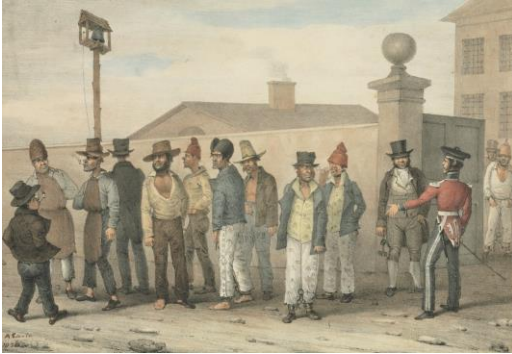
1945 Services of thanksgiving and praise were held on VE day

1952 Prayers of gratitude were offered for the life of King George VI

CONVICT MUTINY ABOARD THE MERCURY 1784

From 1615 until 1776 over 50,000 convicts were transported to the colonies in America, and in that time 10% of migrants were convicts from Britain. Many of the ships carrying these convicts visited Torbay on the outward journey.

The Transportation Act of 1717 allowed courts to sentence felons to a spell in the Americas, resulting in a massive increase in the number of prisoners sent there, and a 1720 extension of the Act allowed the Crown to contract merchants and pay them for the use of their ships. In the 18th century a crime as insignificant as petty theft drew a transportation sentence. Convicts not condemned to life abroad were sentenced to seven or 14 years, after which return to Britain was possible, although not practical. Those escaping and returning early could expect to be sentenced to death. Transportees were customarily set to manual labour on the eastern seaboard.



The American Revolution of 1776 stopped official transportation, but by no means stopped courts from offering up the sentence. The contracted shipping merchants simply labelled convicts as “Property in their Service” and sold them as indentured labour on arrival in the USA. Post-1776 transportation convicts were increasingly held in overcrowded British gaols, and prison hulks moored along the South coast of England, whilst alternative destinations were sourced.

In 1783 the then Home Secretary, Lord North, with the explicit support of George III, contracted merchant George Moore to ship prisoners to America. Moore was rewarded with £500, plus the profit gained by selling individual convicts’ indentures. Historian Emma Christopher has dubbed the venture “a madcap attempt to resume convict transportation to America”.

On 26th March 1784, 179 prisoners embarked on The Mercury, under the command of Captain Pamp, and left for Baltimore (or Georgia, depending on the source) on 2nd April. Captain Pamp had been in command of the prison ship The Swift in the previous year, which had suffered a mutiny by its convict passengers, so you might have thought his vigilance would have been a little more engaged on this subsequent occasion. Convicts, however, managed to smuggle on board a number of small saws and a significant amount of nitric acid in order to later remove their irons.



The prisoners mutinied and took control of The Mercury early on 8th April, near to the Scilly Isles, and imprisoned the crew. At convict Charles Peat’s Old Bailey trial in July 1784, he said they mutinied “about twenty-five leagues to westward of St. Mary’s, on the West India Rocks”. This is close to where Bishop Rock lighthouse stands today.

Bad weather forced the mutineers to seek shelter in Torbay five days later, where they had the misfortune to encounter HMS Helena, a 14-gun sloop under the command of Captain George Cadman. 24 of the convicts had landed at Paignton in the ship’s boats and legged it, (two of them even making it as far as London), before the naval ship could mobilise itself. The remaining convicts onboard The Mercury steered the ship towards shore, but the crew of HMS Helena apprehended 66 mutineers before they could jump ship.

On 14th April Captain Cadman, still at anchor in Torbay, wrote to the Mayor of Exeter:

“A ship arrived here last night from London, with convicts who rose about ten days since on the Master and crew. Sixty (sic) landed the same evening at Paignton and escaped. The Master informs me that they are a desperate set of fellows, and may commit many depredations. ... Forty attempted to escape this morning, but my boats were so fortunate as to take them before they reached the shore.”

HMS Helena took the convicts by sea to Topsham, and then they went under military escort to Exeter gaol.

Town and Country Magazine dated 15th April 1784 proclaimed:

“Upwards of twenty were retaken in the course of last night and today; the strictest search is still being made by the constables and soldiers. Sixty that were taken in getting ashore were taken to Topsham by water this evening under convoy of the Helena’s crew, and from thence escorted to Bridewell by the military. There are about fifty left on board the ship. The whole number that were on board were (sic) about 160.”

Of the 24 who made it to shore, all were finally recaptured and most were put on trial at Exeter. Robert Sidaway, a 26 year old watch chain maker, who had been convicted of theft, was seriously wounded in the arm whilst escaping, having been shot by the ship’s doctor. He only made it as far as Totnes, where he was arrested with one Charles Frame. Sidaway had to be taken by chaise to Exeter, where he spent a considerable time in hospital.

Charles Peat had been sentenced to death at the age of 21 in 1781 for highway robbery. His victim testified that Peat had “behaved throughout with remarkable civility”. The death sentence was commuted when Peat undertook to serve in the Royal Navy, and he became an ordinary seaman on board HMS Prince Edward in October 1782. After ten weeks he was transferred to the Belleisle, and within four days of that he had deserted. As a consequence he was banged up in a prison hulk, awaiting transportation to Nova Scotia. Peat made it to London, as did fellow escapee James Harris.

William Blatherhorn (aka Beans, also aka Fisher), convicted of theft, was one of at least three convicts who had been among the mutineers on board The Swift, as well as The Mercury. Michael Nowland, 23, convicted of horse theft, managed to get as far as Bath on the run, where he was arrested on 4th May. Ten days later he managed to escape again, enjoying another thirteen days on the run before finally being re-arrested in Bristol and spending four years on a hulk in Portsmouth before transportation.

The 24 recaptured convicts were tried at a Special Assize in Exeter. The Western Flying Post, or Yeovil Mercury, reported on the trial.

“Monday last (24th May 1784) came on at the Castle of Exeter, before Mr Justice Heath, by special commission, the trials of the convicts who escaped, only from the Mercury transport in Torbay, which ended on Tuesday evening, only 24 being tried, all of whom were identified, and received sentence of death. The whole number expected to have been tried was 90, 66 of whom were taken in boats by the crew of The Helena, who were entitled to 20/- for each man on conviction, but whom the judge did not proceed to try because they were taken on the water, and therefore could not be said to be at large within the kingdom. This circumstance deprives the crew, who were exceeding active on the occasion, of their merited reward; and there is reason to fear that the ringleaders will escape justice, while those who were unfortunate enough to get ashore, though perhaps their original crimes bore no comparison are sentenced to an ignominious death.”

In the event none of the death sentences on the 24 were carried out, and they all eventually found themselves being transported to New South Wales.

The Flying Post clearly felt that the crew of The Helena had been cheated out of their bounty. Under the 1768 Transportation Act the 20/- (£1) per head reward was payable to any individual who apprehended a person while under sentence of transportation, and who was subsequently convicted of returning from transportation (without having completed their sentence). The crew had expectations of gaining this reward for the 66 mutineers they had apprehended onboard, preventing them from escaping into the Devonshire countryside (probably worth about £11,000 in today’s money).

Justice Heath, however, declined to try the 66 on the basis that they had been apprehended aboard The Mercury at sea and “could not be said to be at large within the kingdom”, which was



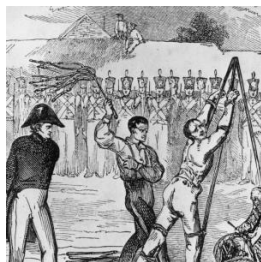
The mutineers were returned to prison hulks, awaiting transportation, and most sailed on The Friendship in May 1787, one of the so-called “First Fleet” of ships to set sail, transporting convicts to Australia.

Two of the 66 were children. John Hudson, 9, sentenced to seven years for stealing, gave his occupation at his original trial in 1783 as chimney sweep. He died in New South Wales, aged 20, in 1794. James Grace was 11 when he boarded The Mercury. At his trial for stealing he gave his occupation as a shoemaker. He died in Australia aged 28. After retrial for mutiny both boys were sent to the hulk Dunkirk off Plymouth where it took over 18 months to issue them with clothing, including shoes.

Incidentally HMS Helena, acquired – possibly from the French – in 1778, was wrecked on the coast of Holland when a storm drove it ashore in November 1796, with no survivors.

Some convicts did not change their ways very much in the face of transportation, but others went on to become members of the establishment and are viewed with a good deal of reverence by their descendents in Australia. Some potted biographies are below. Before the age of universal education names were written as people thought they had heard them, and consequently there are diverse spellings for individuals' names.

In 1789 his rations were reduced to two-thirds after he tried to defraud 34lb of meat out of stores. Later the same year he was found in a hut “having no business there” and received 50 lashes. He got another 50 lashes in October 1789 for “insolence”, and when he stole three pounds of bread in February 1790 the punishment was upped to 100 lashes.



Convicted 1783 of highway robbery, sentenced to 7 years transportation. He was executed in August 1796 for murdering an employee whom he found in bed with his wife.

She had a daughter in 1789 with Edward Garth, whom she married in 1795. They had

He was nine when he was convicted of stealing some clothing and a pistol. Aboard the prison hulk Dunkirk he was described as “very well” behaved. In 1791 he received 50 lashes for “being out of his hut after 9pm”.

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