



Paignton Heritage Society

Newsletter September 2024

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

We receive many emails from people who are interested in finding out about their family history or the property they have moved into but, in July I was delighted to receive a message from a Paul Penfold who was born in Paignton in 1952 and with his family emigrated to Australia in 1964. Paul stated that he and his brother (Nigel) were “making a pilgrimage back to Paignton” and wondered if there was a possibility of a get together. This has been arranged for 2nd September and it will be interesting to learn about their life in Australia and also hear what they think about the Paignton of today.

I know that many of you like to come to our Heritage Day - this year it is being held on Saturday, 5th October in Palace Avenue Methodist Church.

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

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

Kirkham House

We have had an incredibly busy summer at Kirkham thanks to the publicity generated by our Publicity Officer, Lesley Drew. One Sunday we had over 90 visitors. The feedback in our visitors' book is lovely, and our volunteers deserve a huge pat on the back.

As part of the Heritage Open Days 2024, we will be opening Kirkham from 11a.m. to 3p.m. on Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th, then again on Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th. This will be the last chance to see Kirkham before we close for the winter.

In July, Kirkham House received a very special visitor, Len Harwood. Many of you may remember the historian, Len, who was a font of knowledge about medieval Paignton.

Len, now in his 90's, is being very well cared for at Cornerways Nursing Home. He is pictured here with his carer, Ez, and sends regards to all his old friends.



Diary Dates

Our monthly Thursday meetings are as follows, all commencing at 7pm at The Gerston Chapel (opposite the Post Office):

- **19th September** – John Tomkins – Bringing History to Life through Film
- **17th October** – Chris McKenzie-Thorpe – Devon's Historic Pubs and Breweries
- **21st November** – Pat Kerswell – The History and Development of Torbay Hospital
- **19th December** – Nick Pannell – The History of Paignton Harbour

Entry to our monthly talks is £4 for members, £5 for guests.



An Audience at the Palace

The autumn programme of talks is:

- **12th September** – Agatha Christie at the Palace – Bijou Theatre Productions
- **17th October** - Halloween at the Palace – Kevin Dixon
- **14th November** – Life upon the Wicked Stage – Brenda Loosemore
- **12th December** – The Paignton Quiz – Paignton Heritage Society

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

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.



Brixham Battery Visit

In July a group of us went to the Brixham Battery for a lovely early evening visit in the warm sunshine. The only drawback was it was the evening the flying ants decided to hatch out! Anyway – we were treated to a fascinating tour of the headland's tunnels and Battery Museum led by the Volunteers. If you haven't been, then do so if you can. It really is a gem of a place.

Pictured is the interior of an Anderson Shelter, used in WW2 to shelter from the bombings.

Vicarage Summer Fayre



In June, our Society was invited along to the Parish Church Vicarage to open the Coverdale Tower and tell its story. It was a lovely afternoon and we were able to give about 30 visitors a tour of the Coverdale Tower.

Whilst chatting with a visitor to our tent, I just happened to mention a photograph of Paignton Harbour that is in our collection. All I knew was that the crane belonged to Jimmy Thorpe, Scrap Dealer, and in 1966 it ended up in the Harbour. I now know the story behind the photo.

Mrs Ash told me the driver was her husband, John Ash, who worked for Jimmy Thorpe. He was operating the crane which was lifting the diving raft out of the

Harbour. The crane tipped and both crane and John went into the water. John was unable to swim, but fortunately, help was on hand to pull him out, uninjured.

John never lived this accident down! The first that his wife knew of it was when she was doing the ironing and looked up to see her rather wet husband, John, on Westward TV news!

If you have any memories of Paignton like this, send them to us – it's good to know the story behind the photo.



A History of Paignton

Earlier this year, an idea was put forward to produce a book detailing the history of Paignton, aimed at Key Stage 2 school children (aged between 7 and 11). We were successful in a bid to the Torbay Local Heritage Grant Scheme, who awarded us £7,500.

The intention is to give the children of Paignton an interest in their home town, and hopefully they may learn to love and look after Paignton in the future.

Our aim is to produce two books with this funding: one covering the history of Paignton from the Neolithic Age to the end of World War 2, and a second shorter book covering Paignton in World War 2 linked to the school curriculum.

Copies of both books will be distributed to all Paignton school libraries and to our local public libraries.

If possible, we also hope to be able to print copies of the book for sale to the public.

Here is a taste of the book we are producing with a working title “Paignton – My Home Town” -

Chapter 1

In the beginning:

Homo Sapiens. It is Latin and it means ‘wise man’. You are a homo sapiens.

How many years ago do you think homo sapiens were known to be living in Torbay? One thousand years? Ten thousand years? Wrong – the answer is over forty thousand (40,000) years ago. We know this because in 1927 a piece of a human jawbone was found in Kents Cavern, Torquay, which has been radio-carbon dated. If you would like to see it, then visit Torquay Museum.

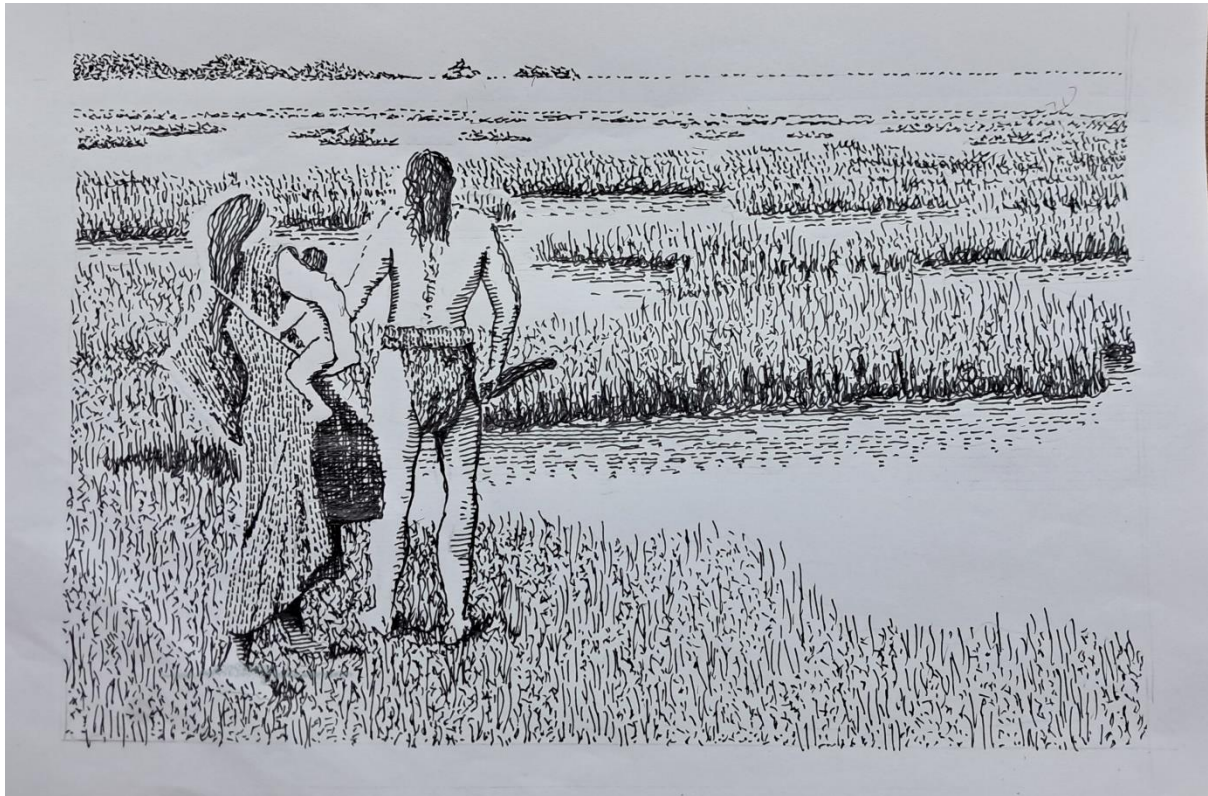
40,000 BC is known as the ‘Upper Palaeolithic’ age, and the people who were living in Torbay then would have spent much of their time as Hunters and Gatherers. This meant they would have hunted wild animals and gathered edible plants for food, but would not yet have discovered how to farm the land.

Neolithic Age

Let's fast forward to around 2,500 BC. We are now in the ‘Middle Neolithic’ age. We know there were people living at Broadsands because they left behind a monument – a chambered tomb. The round tomb was built into the hillside and was covered by a huge ‘cap stone’. It was accessed by a narrow passageway. When the tomb was excavated in 1958, it was found that the bodies of two adults and a child had been buried there.



There are about 300 chambered tombs in England, and this is the ONLY one to be found in Devon.



Imagine what life would have been like for the people who built the tomb. There were about 250,000 people living in England then. Today there are nearly 68 million (68,000,000). You would live in a small settlement and seldom meet anyone you didn't know. The site of the settlement would be chosen for its shelter from bad weather, and easy access to fresh water. If you were lucky, you might live to the age of 40, but many died much younger than this. People had learned how to farm the land, and the area around the settlement would have been cleared of trees, so farmers could plant crops in the rich red Devon soil. Animals would be kept as livestock – sheep, cattle and goats. Imagine standing on a hill overlooking Broadsands – apart from a few huts, there would be no buildings to be seen anywhere – Torquay and Brixham would just be green hills in the distance. Across the sea, there would be no boats on the horizon – you might have a dug-out canoe to fish from, but you wouldn't go far from land.

The Romans

Another big leap forward 2,550 years and it is 50 AD. The Romans have invaded England and have built a city in Exeter, but in Torbay little is known about this. A network of Roman roads has been found by Archaeologists from Exeter University, stretching from Exeter to the far west of Cornwall, but none of these roads came near Torbay. The handful of people living here were from the Dumnonii tribe that inhabited Devon and Cornwall, and they were left in peace - they probably didn't even notice that the Romans left England in 410 AD.

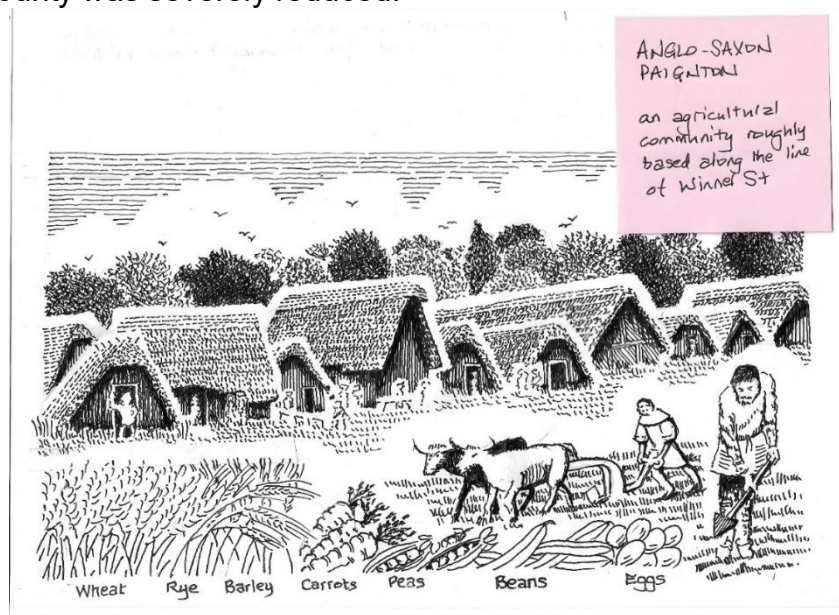
The Dumnonii Tribe

In 541 AD a terrible illness known as 'the Plague of Justinian' broke out around the Mediterranean Sea. It quickly spread across Europe as far north as Denmark and Ireland. It is estimated nearly 100 million people died. An outbreak in Devon was

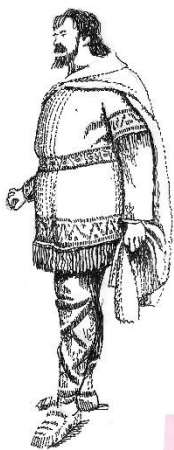
particularly severe. Many of the Dumnonii tribe fell victim to the disease and the population of the County was severely reduced.

Anglo Saxons

Around 660 AD, a new race of people began to migrate to England – the Anglo Saxons – they came from various tribes in Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. They mainly came in peace, and settled throughout the land.



and



PAEGA
How he may have looked.

It is thought that a group of these Anglo Saxons found their way to Paignton. The leader of the group was a man called Paega, and he established his settlement around the Winner Street area. The name Paignton comes from him – Paega (his name) + ing (a Saxon word meaning a group of people) + tun (another Saxon word meaning a fenced area or enclosure).

If you put them all together you get Paega-ing-tun – the enclosure of Paega's group. The location of this small settlement was ideal – there was a spring of beautiful clean water (which still rises in Well Street, but now it runs through underground pipes to the sea), there were hills all around to provide shelter from bad weather, the land was good for farming and there was a plentiful supply of wild animals to hunt in the hills, and fish to catch in the sea.

At this time, all the land between Winner Street and the sea was marshland and sand dunes. Imagine if you drew a map of Torbay then – there would be no roads to draw, a few huts but no stone buildings, the towns of Torquay and Brixham did not exist – a few Dumnonii people lived around what is now Brixham Harbour but there was no town as we know it today.