



Paignton Heritage Society

Newsletter March 2025

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I am going to keep this brief, because there is a lot for you to read in this edition of our newsletter. But, I did want to say that it has been wonderful to see so many of you at our recent events when we launched and then showcased the book "Paignton - Our Home Town". I am also delighted to let you know that we finally have a "new home", and a very sincere and heartfelt thank you must go to Christine Watts, who has been the custodian of our archive for the past eight years. As a Society we have a busy year ahead and I would like to thank you all, as members, for your continued support - I look forward to seeing you at future events.

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

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

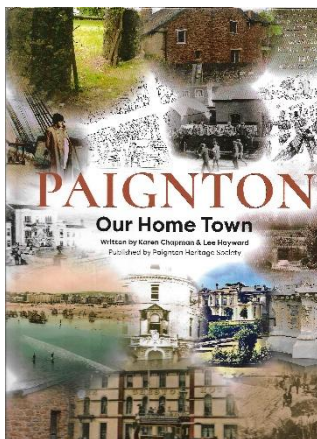
Diary Dates

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

- **20th March** – David Scott – What if Hitler had invaded South Devon
- **17th April** – Richard Farrow – Coniston House and Simla
- **15th May** – John Tomkins – Music Scene: Memories at Torquay Town Hall

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

Book: 'Paignton – Our Home Town'



None of us can believe how well the launch of our book has gone. It has been a rollercoaster of a ride. The book is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils, and is a teaching resource as well as a library resource.

On 15 January, we joined Staff and Pupils of Oldway Primary School to celebrate the launch of the book. BBC Spotlight cameras were there to record the event, and it was lovely to thank the school children who had given up their lunchtimes to help us by providing feedback on the draft book. We took their suggestions on board e.g.

- include a glossary to explain any uncommon words used in the book
- use a collage of pictures from the book for the cover
- be aware of the needs of dyslexic readers – etc.

Copies of the book have been gifted to the primary schools of Paignton, to Paignton Academy and Churston Ferrers Grammar School, to South Devon College and to Churston and Paignton Libraries.

We then showcased the book at Palace Theatre on Thursday 13th February and were delighted so many of you took up the invitation to come along and join in our celebrations. The morning started



with Nick Harman, who is History Lead at Oldway School, and who introduced the children to the audience, and then outlined the process we had gone through. Then it was on to Karen and Lee, authors of the book, to take the audience on a “galloping romp” through 400 million years of Paignton’s history. This was achieved in just under 50 minutes!

The feedback was lovely, and we are all proud to have produced a history book for the youth of Paignton which we hope will be read for many years to come.

Booklet: “World War II”

In addition to our book, we are producing a booklet on the history of Paignton in World War II. This is being written by Jo Tucker (former Head teacher of Foxhole Junior School), aided by Lesley Drew and in conjunction with Nick Harman and the focus group children at Oldway School. The booklet will be a classroom resource and distributed to all primary schools in Paignton.



An Audience at the Palace

The autumn programme of talks is:

- 13th March – Matt Newbury – Agatha Christie Country
- 17th April – David Hinchliffe – William Scoresby, whaling captain
- 15th May – Richard Hunt – Hunts Cider’s heritage

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.

Our programme of speakers for 2025 will soon be posted on the website.

Airshow 2025

This year’s Airshow is scheduled for the weekend of 3rd & 4th June, and PHS has been asked to put on a display of Paignton’s aviation history. In addition, we have been asked to include a display of stories and pictures relating to Paignton on VE Day. This year it will be the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II on 8th May. If you have any memories, photographs or anything relating to the day that we could borrow or copy for the display, please let us know.

Another thing we are looking for is a gazebo to house our display for the two days. It would be left on the Green overnight, but the organisers will be providing security for the Show. If you have one, and would be willing to lend it to us, please get in touch.

Coverdale Tower

We are delighted to let you know that after rather a long process, we have finally signed a new ten year Management Agreement with Torbay Council relating to the Coverdale Tower.

Our sincere thanks to Colin Wood who looks after the Tower and does all the horrible jobs like mopping up after heavy rain, removing dead birds from the gullies and my personal favourite – getting rid of the cobwebs!

Thanks Colin.

PHS Archive at Paignton Library

We are utterly delighted to let you know that we have signed a 5 year lease with Torbay Council for use of an upstairs room at Paignton Library to house our heritage archive. We are currently moving in and it will take a few weeks to put things in order, but we hope to open to the public by Easter. If you would like to be involved with the archive and can commit a few hours each week, then we would love to hear from you.

We hope to open initially three days a week (possibly Monday, Thursday and Saturday) from 11am to 3pm. Each day will have a Duty Officer overseeing the archive, with one or two Research Assistants who will look after the public, help them with enquiries and oversee their inspection of archive items. The archive will be for reference only by the public – we will need to ensure that nothing is removed.

The archive has been “temporarily” stored by Christine Watts over the past few years, so we are delighted to return the ground floor of her house to her. Thank you Christine – we really do appreciate your kindness and patience!

Kirkham House

In September 2020, following the fall of a boundary wall at Kirkham, archaeologists dug two test pits to ensure that repairs to the wall would not damage any archaeology. Their finds have been brought to Kirkham temporarily and include medieval pottery and glass, pieces of mortar, animal bones (mainly pig), iron nails, a clay pipe, scallop shells, worked stone and clay building materials.

Below is a picture of the clay pipe



and bottom of a green glass bottle.



I found this 1933 press cutting from Paignton News which I think is fascinating – hope you do too! When reading it, remember the quotes of Mr Rossiter are nearly 100 years old now.

Memories of the town's fine old mill Mr Rossiter tells an interesting story of the ancient watercourse

The unearthing of a section of the ancient watercourse used for augmenting the supply of water to Paignton Mill (as reported in the “Paignton News” last week) has set those whose memories can carry them back half a century thinking of the good old days when the Mill still served the purpose of its medieval founders, the Bishops of Exeter, grinding corn to provide bread for the people of Paignton.

For none did our story revive more vivid memories than for Mr H B Rossiter, whose family worked the old Mill from about 1830 to the time it was put out of commission, and who is the head of the Torbay Mill Company, the well-known firm that can claim to be direct successors in Paignton to the medieval monks in the age-old craft of grinding corn.



PAIGNTON. FROM OLD MILL. SHORTON 29

COX, PHOTOGRAPHER
PAIGNTON

And what a picture Mr Rossiter can paint of that amazing Paignton of 50 years ago!

Victorian Neighbours

The Mill still stands, it is true, but only as a dwelling house. And where is the mill pond and the mill stream? The pond has been filled in and converted into a Council store; the stream runs underground till liberated in Victoria Park. Of the Victorian neighbours of the Mill, Littlegate Farm is remembered because of the road to which it has given its name, while the old Vicarage is similarly remembered because the row of villas that now occupies its site is known as Vicarage Terrace.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar places ...". True, the Clink is still fortunately preserved, maybe haunted by the shade of the solitary village constable, complete with box-hat and cane, who was the fore-runner of Paignton's present police force. "It has always been supposed," Mr Rossiter told a 'News' representative, "that the Mill was built by monks to grind corn for the Bishop of Exeter and his suite who spent the summer at the Palace, in the grounds of which the present Vicarage stands.

"My grandfather, John Rossiter, worked Shorton windmill till it was burned down about 1830 or 1840, and then he took over Paignton Mill, which happened to be vacant. In those days the mill provided Paignton with its flour. Incidentally it ground the flour for the famous Paignton pudding made to celebrate the opening of the railway in 1859".

"When my grandfather first had it, the mill was quite small, and had water wheels on both sides, and a house for the working miller. Mr J F Belfield, Paignton's last Squire, rebuilt the mill in 1854 to his own design so that it would take more water, and he also put in a steam engine to supplement the water-power in the summer."

"My father worked the mill till 1883, when the Local Board, wanting the water for drinking purposes, bought it and in 1884 it ceased to be used as a mill probably for the first time for 500 years. They took down the water wheels and cut off a corner of the building."

Questioned about his memories of the mill when he was young, Mr Rossiter recalled seeing a man accidentally hauled up by the joist. Instead of having his limbs broken, he escaped without a scratch.

During the winters of 1870 and 1871 the pond was frozen for weeks on end, and the youths of the town skated till midnight to extract the maximum pleasure from the unusual novelty.



An old mill stone is incorporated in the kitchen floor of a cottage belonging to Mr Rossiter in Princes Street. The cottage formerly stood against the mill pond.

Left is the Mill circa 1970, just before its demolition

Littlegate Farm

The house and buildings of Littlegate Farm practically adjoined the mill and the orchard of the farm ran right down to what is now Torquay Road, but was then known as New Road. The width of the orchard must have been considerable, for Mr Rossiter says it stretched from what is now "Sansom's Corner" to Cecil Road. *[could this be the junction of Littlegate Road and Torquay Road?]*

Above the mill stood the old Vicarage, the garden of which is now the yard of Starkey, Knight and Ford, the brewers. We speak of the "old" Vicarage, but as a matter of fact Mr Rossiter remembers its beginning as well as its end. He thinks it was built in the

middle 1860's and was probably pulled down about 20 years ago [1913?]. The extensive grounds stretched from the brewery site to Torquay Road.

Mr Rossiter recalled with a chuckle the prophecy of his father that when the wind was in the north, the Vicar would find his new Vicarage invaded by smells from the farmyard and smoke from the mill. "And so it happened," declared Mr Rossiter.

The Clink stands opposite what was then the mill pond. Mr Rossiter remembers that a man who was locked in it one night committed suicide and was found hanging in his cell next morning. "We had only one Constable" he said, "and he wore a box-hat and did not hesitate to apply his cane on boys who misbehaved."

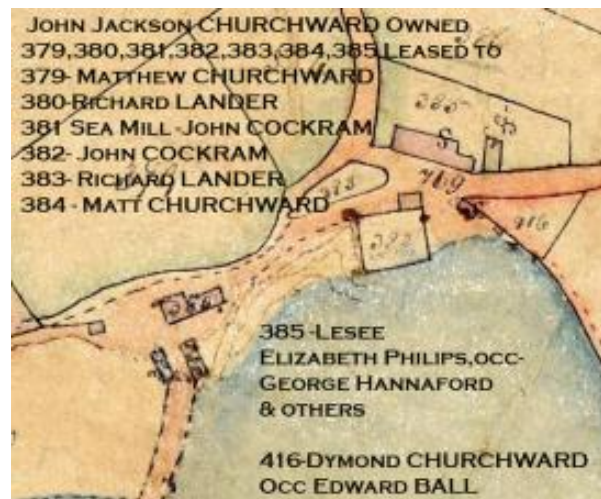
There were dozens of water mills in the district in those days, including the sea mills at Stoke Gabriel. "I remember my father taking me to see them" said Mr Rossiter. "I used to ride behind him on horse-back when I was quite a nipper".

The Sea Mills



There were two great mills, which were worked by the tide. When the sea came in the water naturally rose, and when the tide began to recede, sluice gates were opened to work the water wheels. Obviously the hours of working depended on the tides, which regularly necessitated night work. At neap tide there was insufficient water to work the mill.

Mr Rossiter recalls describing this mill to a man who stoutly maintained that there had never been any such thing at Stoke Gabriel. But one day Mr Rossiter happened to be in South Kensington Museum, and lo! There hung a painting labelled "Sea Mills, Stoke Gabriel, 1852".



Karen Chapman
February 2025