



Paignton Heritage Society Newsletter June 2025

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

I thought that last year was busy but this year is proving to be even busier! Visitors to Kirkham House continue to exceed our expectations and, by the time you read this, you may have seen our stand at the English Riviera Air Show. We are looking forward to welcoming visitors to our Heritage Centre in Paignton Library and also, later in the year, we hope you will join us at our Heritage Day in Palace Avenue Methodist Church on 4th October.

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

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

Diary Dates

Firstly, may we apologise for the very poor meeting in May. We had problems with the projector, and were only able to show very poor quality images to illustrate John Tomkins' talk. We will be using a different projector in future, and thank you for your patience and understanding.

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

- 19th June – Janet Downer – More dark deeds in Devon
- 18th July – Visit to Newton Abbot Museum – numbers limited, so please let Lesley Drew know if you would like to come – Lesley-chris.drew@sky.com We will meet at 2pm and afterwards you may like to visit Austins for a cup of tea.
- 21st August – no meeting
- 18th September – David Hinchcliffe – Bringing a water supply to Torbay

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

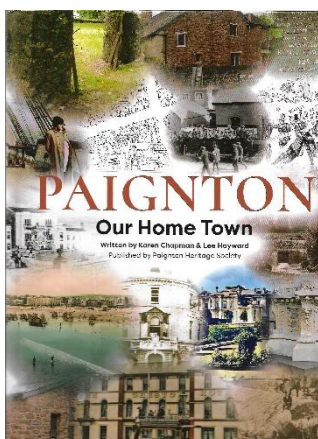
PHS website

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 is posted on the website.

Book: 'Paignton – Our Home Town'



The book has been re-printed and copies are available.

In February, we showcased the book at the Palace Theatre. Karen and Lee gave a presentation on the history of our town, and we will be showing this on 20th November at the Gerston Chapel.

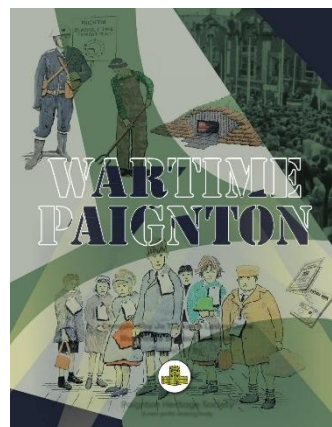


Booklet: "Wartime Paignton"

Our second publication is also now available at £5. This book, written by PHS members – Jo Tucker and Lesley Drew - is aimed at primary school children as a classroom resource. It contains illustrations by Paul Snowdon which really capture what life was like for children during the war years.

Copies of the book have been offered to every primary school in Paignton and also the libraries.

The book launch was held at Paignton Library on 10th May.



An Audience at the Palace

The summer programme of talks is:

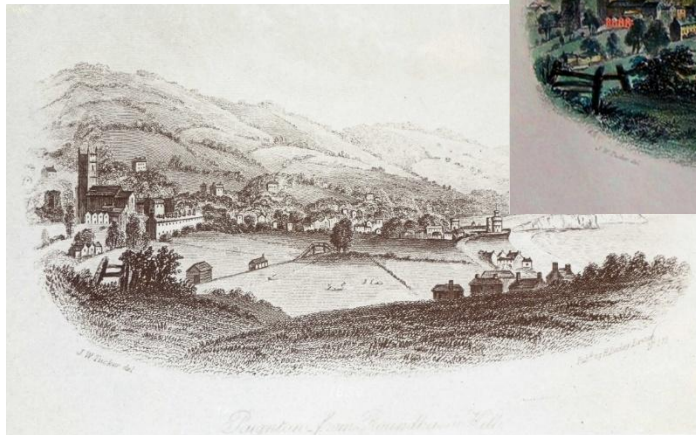
- 12th June – Alison Huntingford – author of 'Dance a Fearful Jig'
- 17th July – Natasha – 'When life gives you lemons'
- 14th August – Nick Pannell – 'A stroll through Paignton in old pictures'

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

Airshow 2025

We shall be at the Airshow on Saturday 31st May and Sunday 1st June. In addition to our display of Paignton's aviation history, we will also have a display of stories and pictures relating to Paignton on VE Day 1945.

Spot the Difference



Apart from the fact that one is colour and one is black and white, anything else you notice? We have been using this illustration from a coloured postcard for years to show how Paignton looked in the mid 1800s, after the coming of the railway, but recently I found the same image in black and white – but it's different! If you look closely, there is a train in the coloured postcard picture – but no train in the black and white picture.

Nothing is new in life - photo editing software was around over 100 years ago it seems!

Paignton Heritage Centre

This is the name of our room at Paignton Library where we shall maintain our archive of information on Paignton. We have set an official opening date for Saturday 21st June. You are, of course, all welcome to come along and spend an hour or so looking through some items in our wonderful collection.

Our opening times are 11.00 – 15.00 on Mondays (not Bank Holidays), Thursdays and Saturdays.

Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall

Did you know there was a museum dedicated to policing Devon and Cornwall at Court Gate, Tavistock? It's free to visit and opens Fridays 11.00 – 15.00 April to October.

info@dcpolicingmuseum.co.uk

PLEASE! PLEASE!

If you have any items for the tombola at our Autumn Heritage Day event, would you please let Christine Watts know – her e.mail is christinewatts20@gmail.com

Paignton Medal Winners

The George Medal

The George Medal was instituted on September 24, 1940, alongside the George Cross, to recognize acts of civilian gallantry in the face of enemy action and other acts of great bravery, not necessarily in a combat zone. The George Medal was specifically designed to be more widely distributed than the George Cross, which was reserved for acts of the highest heroism. While initially not intended for posthumous awards, the warrant was later amended to military personnel for actions not covered by purely military decorations.

On 7 June 1942, Torquay was attacked by four aircraft, causing no casualties. An air-raid on August Bank Holiday caused considerable damage and casualties, as did an early evening raid on 4 September



Two brave men, Mr Denton and Sgt. Richardson (of the Home Guard), received the George Medal for gallantry in fighting the fires following this attack.

The London Gazette was established in 1665, and still is the official public record of events. A Supplement to the London Gazette of Friday, 1st January 1943 records the actions of recipients of the George Medal, and the citation for Mr Denton and Sgt Richardson reads:

Awarded the George Medal:

John Willie Denton, Assistant Engineer and Manager, the Torquay and Paignton Gas Company

Frederick Charles Richardson, Assistant Electrician, the Torquay and Paignton Gas Company

During a daylight air raid a gas holder was attacked by enemy aircraft and fierce fires resulted. Taylor, Denton and Richardson climbed to the crown and, with total disregard of personal danger, worked hard to extinguish the flames before nightfall. Their clothes often caught fire and, while encircled in flames and at a height of some 120 feet, Denton and Richardson undoubtedly saved the life of a workman by pulling him back to safety as he was rolling off the edge of the crown. Denton fractured two ribs in this action but carried on with his duties.

Some weeks later another holder was bombed and subjected to severe cannon fire by enemy aircraft. The holder was burning fiercely on one half of its perimeter. Denton

and Richardson again set a magnificent example of courage, and devotion to duty and, as a result, the fires were extinguished, temporary repairs effected and the supply of gas in that area was uninterrupted.

Mr Taylor was in charge of the fire fighting arrangements on both occasions and his example was a great incentive and encouragement to the workers



The above picture shows Mr Denton and Sgt Richardson – we think they are the two gentlemen middle and right.



Since 1834, The Torquay and Paignton Gas Company was the historical provider of town gas in Torbay, with a gas works in Torquay, and later expanded to Paignton. The company initially operated from Torwood Gardens and Temperance Street in Torquay, then moved to Hollacombe in 1861. The gas works at Hollacombe, Paignton was a significant local feature, visible in aerial photographs and known for its wartime camouflage. The company

ceased town gas production in 1968, replaced by natural gas, and the site was later developed as a park.

The Victoria Cross

Our second medal is for bravery in the face of the enemy. It was first awarded in 1856 during the Crimean War and is named after Queen Victoria.

- The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest military decoration awarded in the UK and the British Commonwealth.
- The VC is the most prestigious military award for acts of bravery in the presence of the enemy.
- It is awarded for conspicuous gallantry, daring or pre-eminent acts of valour, self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the face of the enemy.
- The award can be given to any member of the British Armed Forces, or to civilians acting under military instructions.
- The VC is a cross-shaped medal with a lion guarding the royal crown.
- It is inscribed with the words "For Valour".
- The VC can be awarded posthumously (after the recipient's death).
- To date, there have been 1,358 Victoria Cross awards to 1,355 individuals.



The Victoria Cross was awarded to Henry Thomas Sylvester, a Surgeon Major in the 23rd Regiment (Welch Regiment). The VC was won at Sebastopol, Crimea, on 8th September 1855 and posted in the London Gazette on 20th November 1857. Sylvester was born in Devizes, Wiltshire, on 16th April 1831 and he died in Paignton on 13th March 1920. He is buried in Paignton Cemetery (Grave 2614) and his VC is held by the Museum of Military Medicine, Mytchett. During his service in the Army, Surgeon Major Sylvester worked with Florence Nightingale.

During the campaign in the trenches of Sevastopol, Sylvester was mentioned in despatches, awarded the Crimean Medal with clasp, and was created a Knight of the Legion of Honour by the French for his actions in the war.

He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions during the assault on the Redan. During the assault, Lieutenant and Adjutant Dyneley was hit and badly wounded. He was lying in the open in front of the right flank of the attack. Sylvester volunteered to go out and try to help the Lieutenant, and ran out under heavy enemy fire. He managed to reach Dyneley and was supported in the effort by Robert Shields VC. Sadly, Dyneley was mortally wounded, but Sylvester still dressed his wounds in a dangerous and exposed position.

Sylvester was then posted to India at the time of the Indian Mutiny. He served in the Relief of Lucknow and was awarded the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps. He retired from service in the Army in 1861 as a Surgeon Major.

He retired to the South West of England, and stayed in the medical profession. He died on 13th March 1920 at his home, 8 Beach Road, Paignton after a short illness – aged 88 years.

Karen Chapman, May 2025

(Source: <https://victoriacrossonline.co.uk/william-henry-thomas-sylvester-vc/>)