



Paignton Heritage Society

Newsletter September 2025

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

It's not long now till we meet again as a Society for our first talk on 18th September. We have had a busy summer with the members' visit to Newton Abbot Museum and our team of volunteers have been opening Kirkham House every Sunday throughout the summer and on the Bank Holidays. Visitor numbers have been excellent and it is good to know that local people and visitors enjoy visiting Kirkham house, the Bishop's Tower and the Clink.

It is with a degree of sadness that I have to tell you that Eileen Donovan (who is one of the founding members of the Society) has decided to stand down as a Committee Member. Eileen has been a stalwart member of the Society since its inception and a source of wise counsel and support to members of the committee over many years – she will be greatly missed, but is continuing to support us as a member of the Society.

As a result of our close work with Oldway School over the last year, we have decided to start a Paignton Heritage Junior Explorers Club and have secured a grant to help with its set-up. This new group will meet for the first time in Paignton Library this month and we have high hopes of encouraging youngsters to take an interest in local history and also continue to foster a pride in the place in which we live.

I am pleased to let you know that we will be holding our Open Day in the Palace Avenue Methodist Church on Saturday, 4th October and we hope that you will come to see us.

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

Kay Heaven is our new Membership Secretary, having taken over the role from Lee Hayward. If you wish to contact Kay, please email – phsmem47@btinternet.com

Many thanks to Lee who has done a great job of organising our membership records. Lee will now concentrate on organising the Paignton Heritage Archive.

Diary Dates

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

- 18th September – David Hinchliffe – Bringing a water supply to Torbay
- 16th October – Lee Hayward and Karen Chapman – 400 million years of Paignton's history
- 20th November – Paul Hawthorne – Oldway: the lost pictures
- 18th December – Nick Pannell – The real Abbots' Way

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

PHS website

Our Web Administrator, Jim Milne, is standing down from the role and his legacy is the wonderful PHS website that he has put together. We thank Jim for all he has done.

We are fortunate indeed to have found an excellent replacement, and our new Web Administrator will be Sarah Hemingway. If you have anything you would like her to display on the website, please e.mail her on

Paigntonheritagesocietyfunding@gmail.com

and keep an eye on our website <https://www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk/> for updates.



An Audience at the Palace

The autumn programme of talks is:

- 18th September – John Risdon: Agatha Christie – Literary Daughter of South Devon
- 16th October – John Tomkins: Bringing the English Riviera to life through film
- 20th November – John Risdon: The Singers of Oldway
- 11th December – Clive Simmons: Paignton Pantomime through the ages

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

Fundraising

Torbay Lottery was created in 2017 by Torbay Council to support community projects in the local area, Torbay Lottery operates on the principle of raising money within the community for the community and empowers local good causes to raise money in a fun and effective way.

In a time of shrinking budgets and increased community need, Torbay Lottery enables people to support the causes they care most about, helping good causes to connect with their supporters.

A ticket for Torbay Lottery costs £1 a week and 60p will go directly to Paignton Heritage Society! Could you support us? For details on how you can do this, please visit:

<https://www.torbaylottery.co.uk/support/paignton-heritage-society>

Alan Henshaw

Alan, who many of you will know as Manager of Kirkham House and long term member of PHS, unfortunately had an argument with a stile whilst walking on Dartmoor, and the stile won. Alan fell and suffered serious pelvic and hip injuries, but has now been discharged from Derriford Hospital and is recovering well at Totnes Hospital. Get well soon, Alan.

Airshow 2025

Unfortunately we had mishap at this year's June Airshow. We set up the gazebo and arranged our displays of aviation history and the 80th Anniversary of VE Day, but the weather took a turn for the worse. By the afternoon, the gazebo was buckling in the wind, and for

safety we felt obliged to dismantle it and call it a day. Sorry to any of you who came to see our stand at the Airshow and were disappointed.

Donation of Tram Track

Our grateful thanks to Paul Hanley, owner of the former Tram Depot at Orient Road, Preston, who has donated a section of the old Torquay to Paignton tram track to our Society. The donation is in memory of Paul's wife, Angela, and has been placed in the garden of Colin Wood, at his home in Lower Polsham Road.



Colin will be pleased to show the track to anyone by prior arrangement.

The tram depot was built in 1911, and on 17th July 1911 the Torquay to Preston tram began operations. In 1913 the line was extended to Hyde Road, Paignton. The last tram from Paignton to Torquay ran on 14th January 1934.

The picture (left) shows Paul beside the donated section of Paignton's tram track

Junior Explorers

Following success of our books, 'Paignton: Our Home Town', and 'Wartime Paignton' (both of which can be purchased at our archive on the 1st Floor at Paignton Library) it has been agreed that a juniors section of PHS be set up. This will be led by Jo Tucker, former Headteacher, and Lesley Drew. The group will meet at Paignton Library monthly. There will be a nominal yearly membership fee of £5, and all children will be welcome and will be involved in choosing the activities of the group and the areas of local history covered. The aim is for this to be a fun group and Jo and Lesley are delighted to be taking it forward. We don't yet know how it will be run, as we need the children to tell us what they want!

Newton Abbot Town and GWR Museum

On 18th July, a group of PHS members travelled to Newton Abbot Museum for a guided tour of their displays. The Museum has a collection of over 17,000 objects, and is constantly working on new displays. Entry is free and very highly recommended.

THE HAUNTING OF PAIGNTON POLICE STATION

By Mark Rothwell

1971, an ordinary night shift in Torbay. A duty inspector, out on patrol, is summoned by radio back to Paignton Police Station. Upon dutifully reporting back to base, he is told a very strange story by a young constable who, quite literally, looked like he had seen a ghost.



Paignton Police Station was one of the new builds erected in the 1970s as part of a revitalisation of the police estate by the Devon & Cornwall Police Authority. Many of the force's police stations, red bricked and damp, were well over a hundred years old and in much need of replacement. Those that succeeded them were of the brutalist variety, many of which are still in use today. The new site at the corner of Blatchcombe and Southfield Road replaced old police digs on Palace Avenue. It was spacious, modern, and eventually became one of the divisional control room locations with a coveted Police National Computer terminal.

On that unusual night in 1971, the inspector was told by the young policeman that, as he walked along a corridor on the second floor on the approach to the police canteen, he stopped dead in his tracks at a most frightful sight. That of a woman, dressed in a grey cloak, who drifted silently across the corridor and disappeared through a wall. The paint had barely dried upon the walls of the new Paignton nick, so how could it possess the restive spirits of the dearly departed? Assuming there are rules to paranormal happenings, the only point of reference is the ground upon which the police station was built. Prior to the police authority's purchase of the land, a house stood with a high-walled, very overgrown garden. Within it resided two old ladies who lived reclusive lives. The house was quite neglected, and over time its mysterious residents became a source of superstition, particularly around the subject of a servant girl spirit. When the ladies passed away, the site was a piece of prime real estate, the house was demolished, and the land duly acquired by the constabulary. (picture courtesy of Paul Snowdon)



Some years after the 1971 incident, a police inspector working at night on the second floor, who was busying himself with paperwork, observed a stack of files lift from his desk and scatter around the room. In another instance, the station barman nipped out to his car one night via the fire exit and was impeded by the sensation of the grip of an icy hand on his arm which remained cold to the touch for quite some time after.

Later, in the 1980s when the station was the site of a divisional control room, further unusual episodes were reported. The control room was located on the second floor, exactly where the historic supernatural events of the 1970s had taken place. The first inkling something odd was going on was when the Police National Computer, accessible by only one VDU in the building, began to malfunction. Strange "snowy" characters began to appear on the screen, and despite the intervention of a Home Office technician the source of the problem could not be found.

Other electrical disturbances caused concern; control rooms were becoming increasingly computerised, and some of the equipment would turn itself on at will. A superintendent even saw an electrical switch move as if manipulated by a human hand. Convinced the problem was the fault of electrical surges, the superintendent ordered an urgent inspection of the wiring, which was found by electricians to be perfectly sound.

Paignton Police Station was vacated by Devon & Cornwall Police in the early 2010s and the site was sold for housing. Subsequently McCarthy Construction built a block of 46 flats known as Oldway Oaks.



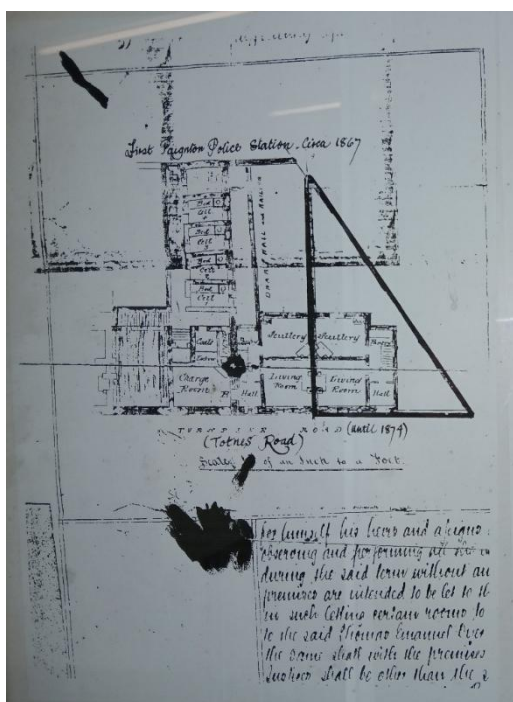
Mark Rothwell,
April 2024

So who was the ghost?? Of course, no-one knows, but I have been able to piece together a brief timeline of the site.

- 1840 The tithe map shows the land as being leased to a John Binmore. The plot was called Long Blackcombe
- 1861 The Ordnance Survey map (right) shows the site now as Southcombe House
- 1881 The House is not listed in the Census
- 1887 The House is listed in the Electoral Register
- 1934 Maud Masters, aged 14, started her first job as a housemaid at the house. (2025 - Maud's daughter, Anita Farrow, researched the house for Paignton History Group).
- 1937 Kelly's Directory lists Mrs B B Watson as living at 17 Southfield Road
- 1941 Kelly's show Southcombe House at 17 Southfield Road, and lists Cyril Alder Watson as living there.
- 1946/49 Kelly's lists Mr Philip John Porter living at 17 Southfield Road
- 1951 Kelly's lists Mr Martin Victor Woodward living at 17 Southfield Road
- 1953 Kelly's first listing of the property as 'Southcombe House Private Hotel' with proprietors BC and NE Simms. Mr and Mrs Simms ran the hotel for 16 years.



- 1960 A postcard annotated on the back '1960' shows how the house looked then.
- 1967 Work begins on demolition of the house to make way for a new Paignton Police Station.
- 1971 First report of a ghost by a young policeman on the 2nd floor of the new Police Station.
- 1972 Kelly's lists the site as Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Torbay Divisional HQ.
- 1978 Reports of a ghost appear in the Herald Express. The ghost is said to be of an old lady who once lived at Southcombe House. Nora Simms, former hotel owner, wrote to the Herald that she heard the old lady frequently and her husband often saw her. The ghost was quite friendly and had a ginger cat. A kitchen help working with Nora produced a photograph of the former owner of the house which Mr Simms thought was a good likeness of the ghost. Nothing is known of the old lady's demise, and she caused no trouble until the new Police Station was opened.
- 2013 The Police Station was demolished as it was found to have concrete cancer.
- 2020 McCarthy Contractors (South West) Ltd granted planning permission to build 36 flats.
- 2022 Flats at Oldway Oaks, Southfield Road, go on sale.



Whilst on the subject of the police, the owner of the original Paignton Police Station (which is on Dartmouth Road, just past New Street) allowed us to take a picture of a display on the wall of what is now his barber shop.

It is not easy to read but is a plan of the first Paignton Police Station, circa 1867. In 1866, a committee was appointed to obtain a site for a Town Hall and new lock up (the only place to secure prisoners at that time being the old clink in Mill Lane which was deemed a most unsatisfactory place) and to approach the Chief Constable on this matter.

In August 1867 a contract was awarded to builders Bragg and Dyer to build the Town Hall and new Police Station, with living accommodation for two constables and their families. The contract was completed in June 1870 at a cost of £1,240. Constables Hawkins and Cory were the first constables with their families to occupy the new houses.

This Police Station (or 'lock up') was used until a new combined Court House and Police Station was

commissioned at Palace Avenue in March 1899.

Karen Chapman - June 2025

Sources: Mark Rothwell, History Matters, The Devon & Cornwall Police History Magazine
Anita Farrow, Paignton History Group
Deryck Seymour, 'The Ghosts of Torbay'