



Paignton Heritage Society Newsletter December 2025

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

It seems that every time I start my December message with the words “*This year has been another exciting one for the Society*” but each year it proves to be true!

During the year we published two books, “Paignton Our Home Town” and “Wartime Paignton”, which have been extremely well received by our schools, libraries and local residents. We have also opened our Heritage Centre in Paignton Library, and my thanks must go to those committee members and volunteers who are in the Centre every week working diligently to ensure that everything is catalogued and safely stored. If you haven’t yet visited the Centre, I would encourage you to do so as I am sure you will be made very welcome. I am Acting Chair of the Paignton Picture House Trust, and it is hoped that the Picture House will open in October 2026. When the opportunity arises, I will make arrangements for members of the Society to be given a guided tour. I also represent the Society on the Oldway Mansion Working Party and you will have read in the local press the work that is being undertaken on the roof.

I would like close by thanking you for your continued support of the Society and, on behalf of your committee, I would like to wish you

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

Kay Heaven is our Membership Secretary - should you wish to contact Kay, please email – phsmem47@btinternet.com

Diary Dates

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

- 18th December – The President’s Talk: Nick Pannell – The real Abbots’ Way. Festive nibbles will be served afterwards.
- 15th January – Richard Hunt – The Story of Hunt’s Devon Cider
- 19th February – Kevin Dixon – A light-hearted talk about the evolution of the lavatory

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

PHS website

Take a look at our website – things are changing. Our new Web Administrator, Sarah Hemingway, is making a few changes.

If you have anything you would like to submit for the website, contact Sarah 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:

- 11th December – Clive Simmons: Paignton Pantomime through the ages
- 15th January – Maureen Boon: Walking the Historic Templar Way
- February – no talk advertised at the moment
- 19th March – Rita Trotman: Take Three Boys' Orphans' Stories

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

Fundraising



Did you know that Paignton Heritage Society is a Torbay Lottery Good Cause?

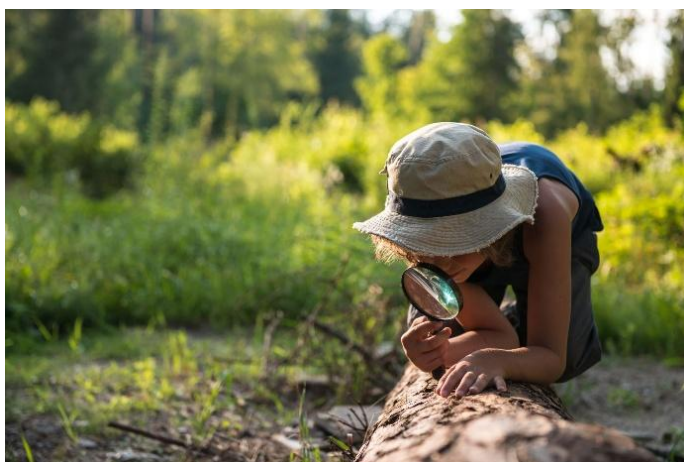
We need your help to support our fundraising efforts for our community-focused activities and initiatives including our new Heritage Centre at Paignton Library. Lottery tickets cost just £1 a week and each ticket has a **1 in 50** chance to win a prize each week, with a top prize of £25,000! Thank you for your support and good luck!

You can find out more and sign up here:

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

Junior Explorers

We are hoping to set up the group up in the New Year, and as soon as things are finalised, we will let you know so that you can pass the word on to grandchildren and friends - the more Junior Explorers, the merrier.



Heritage Day 2025

Another successful event – thank you to all of you who came along to support us. We actually were slightly down on visitors over last year, but those who did come appreciated the fact that they were able to look at the information in comfort, without having to fight for a place at the tables.

Pictured here are committee members with Steve Darling MP and his lovely assistance dog, Jenny, and Kevin Dixon.



Visitors from Hamelin

Did you know that Torbay is twinned with the German town of Hamelin? The connection began in 1973 as a youth exchange, and has continued since then. This year, Torbay welcomed a party of about 25 visitors from Hamelin, and PHS were delighted to entertain them with a guided tour of Kirkham House, followed by a visit to the Clink and Bishop's Tower before they moved on to a mayoral reception.

There is a tenuous story that links Hamelin with Torbay. A man called Percy Stow co-founded the Clarendon Film Company, and in 1907 he directed the first film ever made about the Pied Piper of Hamelin. In 1919, Percy came to Torquay to recover from illness, but sadly he died during his stay. He was buried in Victoria Cemetery in Torquay, and the two towns agreed to tend his grave and give him a proper headstone.

Part of the A380 Ring Road is named Hamelin Way in honour of the twin status – further on it becomes Hellevoetsluis Way in honour of our second twin town which is in the Western

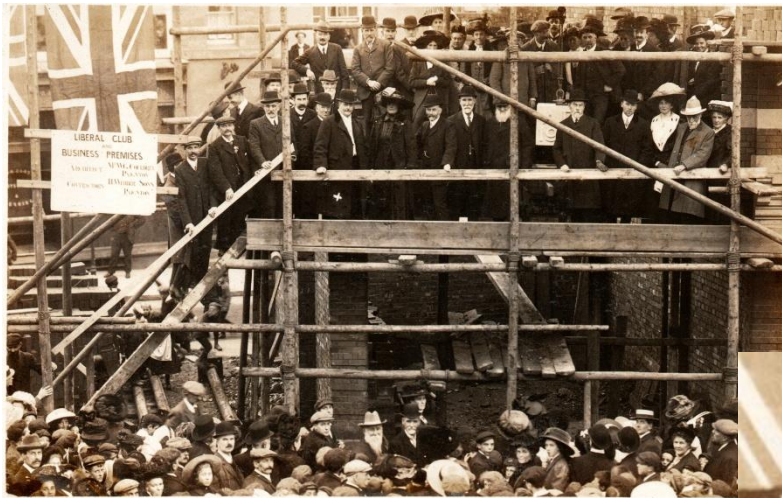
Netherlands. A Devon Live article tells that William of Orange is the reason for this twinning link. The future King of England set sail in Holland from the port of Hellevoetsluis at the invitation of Parliament and landed in England at Brixham on 5th November 1688 to claim the throne of James II through his English wife Mary.



Pictured is Adrian giving a guided tour of Kirkham House to our German visitors. Fortunately they all spoke excellent English!

THE PAIGNTON LIBERAL CLUB

The Liberal Club, also referred to as the Triangle, is located where Victoria Street, Totnes Road and Palace Avenue meet.



The Club was built in 1887 – the name survives on the front of the building. On the top is a fine cupola. This photograph shows the laying of the foundation stone.

The sign on the scaffolding reads:

LIBERAL CLUB and BUSINESS PREMISES
Architect Mr W G Couldrey
Contractors H Webber Sons, Paignton



Walter George Couldrey (1856 – 1950) was an Architect with offices at 14 Palace Avenue, Paignton. He was father to Major Walter Norman Couldrey ((1884 – 1970) who followed into his father's profession and eventually opened his own offices. Between them, they were responsible for a great many of Paignton's most impressive buildings.

Still today, the building bears its original name "Liberal Club".

The building stands out for its "cupola". In architecture, a cupola is a relatively small, usually dome-like structure on top of a building often crowning a larger roof or dome. Cupolas often serve as a roof lantern to admit light and air or as a lookout.

In 1911 The Electric Palace, or Triangle Cinedrome, was opened to the public by the proprietor, Major A.O. Ellis. Major Ellis envisaged the oncoming popularity of moving pictures. Arguably it was the first picture house to show movies in Paignton. A flag was flown over the tower to announce its opening and to entice Paigntonians to come and see the wonder of the moving magic lantern. This early postcard of the cinema shows the flag flying from the cupola.



Curious crowds soon filled the small 280 seat auditorium and were soon in roars of laughter at what they saw. Some of the first Charlie Chaplin shorts were soon favourites along with Laurel and Hardy, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. The times were hard and severe, and it was a sheer delight to share the wondrous excitement with others, to be able to forget the world outside and lose oneself in the antics of those wonderful old classics which, even today, can still make us laugh when occasionally we see them on TV. Many comedians who followed admit they were inspired by the pioneers of the moving pictures. Morecambe and Wise, Benny Hill, and Arthur Askey to name a few.



The oval archway, which marks the spot where the foyer was situated in Totnes Road, is still apparent over what is now the tax office. One can imagine the queues of excited people waiting to go in. Unfortunately the narrow pathway was to be the demise of the old cinema because in 1949, following several accidents - one fatal - outgoing patrons being slow to adjust to daylight after the darkness inside, and with increasing traffic, it was obliged to close.

In 1935 Paignton Urban District Council acquired two floors of the former Liberal Club for use as a library. It was the responsibility of the Urban District Council to find suitable premises for a library, after which Devon County Council would provide staff, books and necessary equipment. There was public demand for a library in Paignton during the 1920s and into the 1930s but the Council could not find a suitable site. There was a possibility of the use of the two upper floors of the former Liberal Club at The Triangle, Totnes Road, but this was leasehold, and there was disagreement as to whether the lease should be taken for 5 years or 10. A number of Councillors felt that to tie themselves down to 10 years might mean missing a more suitable site. However, the Council finally agreed to the 10-year lease and the Library opened to the public on 18th December 1935. The opening ceremony was

interrupted by Rev. J. T. Whitehead, a Congregational minister, loudly complaining at the closing of the Reading Room at 7:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. as these hours did not give office workers much opportunity to use the Library – he was escorted from the building. Borrowers were allowed one fiction and one non-fiction ticket and children over the age of 12 were permitted to use the Children's section. Visitors' tickets were accepted. There had clearly been a need for a library in Paignton, as evidenced by the marked decline in book issues at Torquay following Paignton's opening.



In 1961 Paignton's Library moved to purpose-built premises in Courtland Road. Demolished in 2010, the library then moved to its new premises on Western Road, opening on 13th September 2010.

The Old Paignton Conservation Area Character Appraisal includes a description of the Liberal Club building, which falls within the Conservation Area. The link to this document is given below.

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7582/old-paignton-caa.pdf>

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The narrow triangular island block of 1-11 Totnes Road, 2-4 Dartmouth Road, a commercial complex of shops below with offices above, is even more visible than the Lloyds TSB bank to its northwest. Late Edwardian, it is built in a warm red brick with yellow limestone detailing to the bay windows, sill bands and architraves. The semi-circular second floor windows interpose some limestone in the brick vousoirs [*a wedge-shaped or tapered stone used to construct an arch*] which radiate out in sunrays, prefiguring a 1920s' motif. The flat roof is hidden by a brick balustrade pierced by thin slits. A cupola is located at the apex of the hairpin on the north; the blank façade on the south was never designed to be visible: it was revealed in the 1960s when the wider southern part of the building was pulled down so that Totnes and Dartmouth Roads could be joined in a gyratory system at this point.

Karen Chapman
8th November 2025

Sources:

History of Torbay Library Services by Lorna Smith
Old Paignton Conservation Area Character Appraisal – Torbay Council