



Paignton Heritage Society Newsletter June 2026

www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk

Message from our Chair

Some while ago, it was suggested that we should start a junior section of the Society. I am delighted to let you know that we have now held two meetings of the Junior Explorers Group. We have started with one local school and will invite children from other schools as we become more established.



The 'Explorers' are between 8-13 years of age and have a real interest in their local environment and heritage. In June we will be visiting Kirkham House, the Bishop's Tower and Clink and in July will be doing a heritage themed treasure trail around the seafront and harbour area. So, you may well spot a group of youngsters wearing our yellow backpacks hunting for clues!

Iris Butler, Chair

Membership

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

Kirkham House

In February, English Heritage commissioned a dendrochronology contractor from Historic England to undertake a programme of samples and tree-ring dating at Kirkham House. We have now received an interim report on the results.

Samples were taken from 16 timbers (10 from the ground floor, and 6 from the first floor). Of the samples, only 4 cross-matched each other showing a high level of similarity. These 4 samples showed the wood to have been felled during the period 1493 – 1547. These results cast doubt on the long-held belief that the original House dates from around 1390 and is medieval – in fact, it would make the House a Tudor building. Nick Holder, Historian with English Heritage, thinks it is possible the House was built between the early 1550's and early 1580's.

Our team of volunteers at Kirkham House are now hard at work on putting together a credible argument against this new evidence. The theory that Kirkham dates from about 1390 was first put forward in 1935, and we are not about to ditch 90 years of pride in our medieval building without a fight!!



Whilst on the subject of Kirkham, we are delighted to let you know that Alan Henshaw, who suffered a horrendous fall on Dartmoor last summer, is recovered, back to work looking after the House and opening it up to visitors. Good to have you back Alan!

Diary Dates

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

- 18th June – ‘Parkfield’ – John Gunson
- 10th July – Visit to Bygones Museum
- 16th July – NO TALK
- 20th August – NO TALK

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



An Audience at the Palace

The autumn programme of talks is:

- 18th June – Greenway Gardens – Past, Present and Future
- 16th July – Conservation of the Sea Grass Meadows of Torbay
- 20th August – No Talk

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

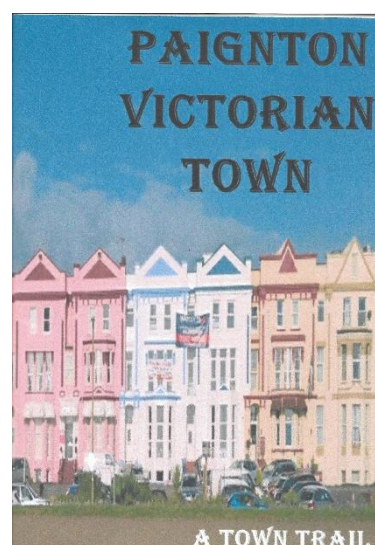
If you have anything you would like to submit for the website, contact Sarah on Paigntonheritagesocietyfunding@gmail.com which has been updated and is now looking super. We continually want to update and add to it so if you have any family photos or Paignton stories, please let us know. <https://www.paigntonheritagesociety.co.uk/> .

Victorian Trail

We are delighted to announce that we have a new Trail Booklet to add to our range. The “Paignton Victorian Town” trail leaflet replaces the 2001 “New Town” leaflet – you would be amazed at how much of the old narrative has become out of date over the past 25 years.

This 28 page trail is packed with colour pictures and information – the route begins in Palace Avenue, takes you down Victoria Street, along Garfield Road and through Victoria Park. It then continues down Lower Polsham Road, along the Seafront to Sands Road and across Dartmouth Road to Curledge Street and Fisher Street, before returning to Palace Avenue. It is just over 3 miles of easy walking on the level.

If you would like a copy of this, or of any of our trails, they are now priced at £2.00 and are available on our website, or from our Archive.



Visits to Oldway Mansion

On Friday 15th May and Thursday 21st May, several of our members were privy to a behind the scenes tour of Oldway Mansion, courtesy of Steve Willis of LTC Scaffolding. It was amazing to see how the building was being supported, both internally and externally, by scaffolding and how much care is being put into preventing any further deterioration. Seeing all this work demonstrates how Oldway has not been written off – I may not see it back to full glory, but the next generation will for sure!

Kirkham Young Explorers

On 27th June, the Young Explorers will be visiting Kirkham House, the Clink and Bishop's Tower. It will be great to show them round our prized heritage sites, but the scary part is "what questions will they ask?". You can always rely on children to find the most obscure query and come up with the most thought provoking question that is impossible to answer with any credibility.

Bygones Museum – this year's "Summer Outing"

Our summer outing this year is a visit to Bygones St Marychurch Torquay. The museum has a wealth of interesting exhibits, together with a replica of a Victorian Street.



The visit will take place on Friday 10th July, starting at 2pm. The cost of the visit is £9.50 (normal entry £13). There is a café on the upper floor where tea/coffee and cake are available at a separate cost.

This is an old building which has no lift so anyone who feels unable to go to the upper floor can visit the ground floor where there is much to see for a reduced cost of £6.50. The museum has kindly offered to provide tea and cake to the ground floor as long as there are no more than six people who require the service.

There is a nearby car park. If you are interested in joining us for the visit, please contact

Lesley Drew

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The Pelosi Family

Ice cream and the beach – they go hand in hand, don't they?



This picture from our archive is of an ice cream seller on Paignton Sands in the 1950's. He is selling H. Crispo ice cream (established 188?) and sold in cornets made locally in Flora Street, Plymouth.

Then we have a photo of another street vendor, this time from the Beechdown Dairies of Paignton, with his slogan "stop me and buy one". He is advertising "pure cream ice bricks – 6d, 1/-, 1/6d or cartons 3d".



But now we move on to the real ice cream name – Pelosi. This 1950 photo shows a bus from London pulled up outside the Pelosi shop in Torbay Road. The gentleman in the centre is probably one of the Pelosi brothers, and on the left in the background is the lovely Dellers Café.

The story of the Pelosi family begins in 1903, when Pietro (Peter) Pelosi came to Paignton from Italy with his wife, Melania. Peter and Melania had six sons and a daughter, and they started making ice

cream in the back room of Rose Cottage in Fisher Street.

Three things differentiate Italian "gelato" from American ice cream:

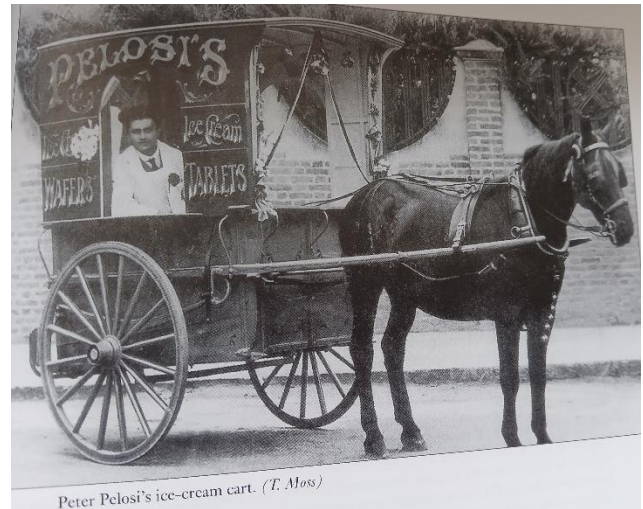
1. It is lower in fat – contains less cream and more milk
2. Serving temperature – it is served slightly warmer (minus 11C / minus 14C) which enhances texture and flavour
3. Artisanal tradition – it is made daily with fresh, high quality (often local) ingredients.

A tale told in Peggy Parnell's 'A Paignton Scrapbook' relates how:

"Peter acquired a beautiful horse, which he bought from the Army surplus stores at the end of WW1. It was an exquisite animal with a stamp on its rump, and may well have once been a racehorse, for it certainly moved very fast."

One day, Paignton was brought to a standstill. “Peter raced along Winner Street ringing his bell vigorously and shouting. Suddenly he reigned the galloping horse right into Church Street, shouting at anyone to get out of his way.

It turned out that Peter came home to find his wife bathing the children, steam and soaps everywhere, when suddenly the baby slipped out of her mother’s arms into a scalding hot bath. Grabbing his little daughter, Peter got into his cart and drove the horse as hard as he could. In those days there were no cars, no traffic lights and no halt signs, so like Ben Hur he galloped through the streets and, of course, a horse doesn’t have brakes, so it was a case of ‘Stand back everybody’. Fortunately, nobody was killed and mercifully he got his little girl to hospital in time and all was well.”



In the 1930’s the family business moved to open an ice cream parlour at 55 Torbay Road (three or four shops down from Andrews the Chemist on the corner of Garfield Road).

One son, Joe, worked alongside his brothers and sister in the family business which was part of Paignton’s youth culture for a generation.



The ice cream business was so successful that it spawned other Pelosi ice cream parlours throughout Torbay. Joe worked with his brother Louis in Torquay, and later opened a shop in Brixham.

During the war, Joe served in the army and worked in bomb disposal. At that time, some people became suspicious of anyone with a foreign sounding name. My aunt told me that Mrs Pelosi had a big sign made for the front window of the Torbay Road parlour that announced –

6 sons – and all fighting for England

One of the Pelosi boys “fighting for England” was Ernest. He was called up when he was 18 and joined the Army. Two years later he lost his leg fighting in Italy, and returned to Devon, spending many months at the Manor House in Moretonhampstead, which had been turned into a hospital where Ernest was very popular with his fellow patients, especially when tubs of ice cream were delivered from his father.



Ernest returned to the family business, working in and building up the ice cream parlour and tea room in Torbay Road. In the early 1970's he expanded the business and opened La Taverna, also in Torbay Road, one of the first licensed café bars in the town. He retired in the late 1980's.

Ernest was as busy in retirement as he was in business. Every morning he would swim, even though he suffered terribly with his artificial leg – he always saw the good side of people.

Throughout his life, Ernest volunteered and was involved with many good causes locally – the list reads like a CV

- Chair of SW Division of the Ice Cream Alliance
- President of the Catenians, an association of Catholic businessmen
- Member of the Rotary Club
- Founder member of the twinning association between Torbay and Hamelin and Honorary Life President
- Chairman of the Paignton Club and member of the Beefeaters
- President of Torbay Catering Association

Ernest died in November 2002.



Another of the brothers was John. He was the youngest of the Pelosi boys and he sold ice cream in the summer and chips in the winter from his horse and cart. By now the horse was Dolly – a much calmer horse than Peter's. John went on to run the family's ice cream parlour in Abbey Place, Torquay, for many years until it was demolished to make way for Fleet Walk. He and his wife, Sue, also ran a shop in Brixham before they retired.



John is described as 'the perfect gentleman – all the girls loved him and he was a great cuddly teddy bear of a man'. Like his brother, Ernest, John devoted much of his time to raising thousands of pounds for charities, particularly Tenovus cancer charity. John was also a keen sportsman, playing in the Paignton colts' rugby club in the late 1940's, and supporting both Torquay's cricket and rugby clubs. John died in August 2013.

None of the next generation followed into the family business, but the name "Pelosi" is fondly remembered across the Bay.

Karen Chapman – 1st May 2026

References:

Peggy Parnell – A Paignton Scrapbook

Facebook

Herald Express newspaper articles