



Newsletter - Spring 2012

David and Francoise Snell

This Newsletter is the first for some twenty years that has not been edited by David Snell, and I must begin it by putting on record the Society's heartfelt gratitude for everything that he has done to promote our interests. He and his wife Francoise have been involved with the Society for forty years, and on page 3 you will find his recollections of those times. He has entitled his piece The Dead Wood Stage, and I am only allowing this to stand because I know that no-one will begin to take it seriously: David is still an active member, generously supportive of our current activities.

At the AGM last November he was presented with a cheque in recognition of his tireless efforts, and flowers were sent to Francoise, whose health sadly keeps her at home. David and Francoise: thank you!

From Felicity Murdin - Chairman

Dates for Your Diary

Tuesday February 21st

at 2 for 2.30 pm - Miss Jean Hall will give an illustrated talk on - **"The Canals of the South West - Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset"**. Meet in the Music Room at the Central Library in Exeter. Tea and coffee available.

Tuesday March 27th

at 2 for 2.30 pm - Mrs Anne Boyce will give an illustrated talk on - **"The Development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum"**. Meet in the Music Room at the Central Library in Exeter. Tea and coffee available.

Saturday April 28th

at **2.30 sharp**. Mrs Susan Hewitt and Mrs Barbara Bligh will lead a **Walk - "The Nooks and Crannies of St David's"**. Meet outside Boots, High Street, Exeter. It is hoped that Little Silver and St Michael and All Angels will be included.

Open Mornings

10.30am to 12 noon
Music Room, Central Library
Castle Street, Exeter
10-minute speaker
New and second-hand books
Bring a friend
FREE refreshments!

Dates:

Saturday 18th February
Saturday 17th March
Saturday 21st April
Saturday 19th May
Saturday 16th June
Saturday 21st July

**VACANCY FOR
PROGRAMME SECRETARY**
A great chance to use your imagination to think of some places to go and things to do, or ask the members for ideas.

DID YOU KNOW

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) reopened in Dec 2011 and had 58,000 visitors in the first month. We wish them the very best for the future.

There are many major developments planned in Exeter and on our boundaries which will have a major impact on the City's future. As members of the Society we should be looking at them as they come forward for consultation and send comments to District and County Councils. We warmly invite members to join in a debate at the monthly Open Mornings as and when issues come forward.

The first discussion will be at the Open Morning on February 18th regarding the development south of Alphington which Teignbridge District Council is consulting on.

Future discussions could include the Exeter Bus Station site, Exeter's City Centre Vision, Exeter Central Library, and the Canal redevelopment, and who knows what else may come up for consultation. We will also be asking for your comments on these developments, through the website or by e-mail. If you want a paper copy to complete by hand please get in touch with the Secretary.

Open Mornings

a) Social

The '3rd Saturday of the month' experiment has proved enjoyable and worthwhile to date, with increasing numbers of members and visitors attending and some enrolments resulting. The ten-minute talks at 11am, the opportunity to buy recent publications by members and the introduction of a second-hand 'sell or take home' bookstall, to say nothing of the free refreshments, have drawn plenty of praise for this attempt to publicise the Society more widely. I am grateful to those who have given such interesting talks: Christine Trigger in October, on the 1937 Coronation celebrations in Exeter, Sir Denis Pereira Gray the following month, on a coup in the field of medical training achieved in Exeter decades before the founding of the Peninsula Medical School, and Julia Neville in December, on the unexpected side-benefits of undertaking research on Exeter's trams. Our January speaker Maeve Creber gave a fascinating talk about a little-known part of Exeter, 'Little Silver'.

b) Civic involvement

In 2012 we plan to make use now and again of the Music Room on these Saturday mornings by running awareness-raising discussion groups. (Social activity will continue in the main room for those who prefer this.) These discussions will centre on hot issues for which the City or County Council may be seeking public reaction – there seem to be a considerable number of these at present. Please let the Secretary know if you have a topic to suggest. Advance notice will be sent to members on our email list, and information will be posted on the website. I hope, too, that the Express and Echo will help us promote this new activity.

c) Future plans

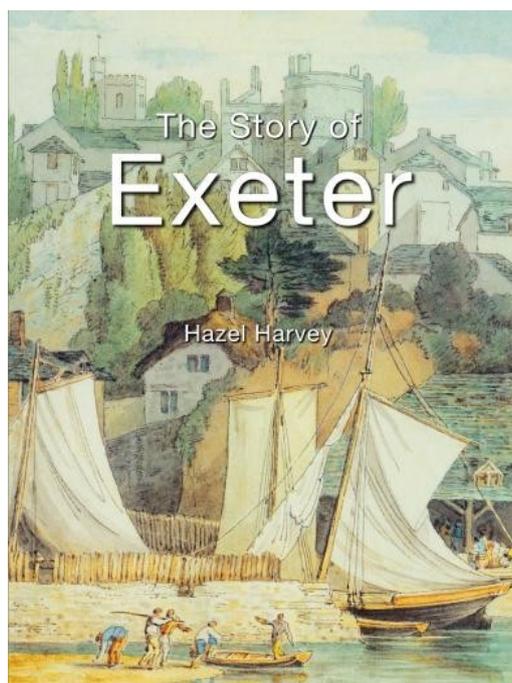
As many of you know, the Central Library will close for refurbishment at the end of this year. Pamela Wootton and I attended a focus group for all regular users of the upstairs facilities and were pleased to find that all present agreed on certain desirable improvements, as well as what must not be lost. The impression given was that the Library development team will find temporary accommodation for displaced regulars in 2013 – welcome news, as we want to keep up the Saturday habit.

Evening Meeting

At the end of October Judith Richardson-Dawes spoke on the subject of the Green Man. She had a wide range of examples from various periods and cultures to share with us, the result of serious ongoing research – she made very clear that she has no time for those who wish to see in the Green Man any sort of magical cult figure. A surprising number of examples of the Green Man are to be found in Exeter, and the talk ended with a challenge to us to identify them all by walking round the city with her quiz sheet.

The Story of Exeter by our Vice-President Hazel Harvey Published by Phillimore & Co Ltd

This new book came out just before Christmas. It is a greatly extended version of the 1996 book 'Exeter Past'. It is four times as long, with entries on Joanna Southcott and Barbara Hepworth amongst others, the origin of Penguin Book Sellers, the inauguration of the County War Memorial in the Cathedral Yard and the floods of the 1960s. The RD&E gave permission to use excerpts from 'A Better Provision', the celebration of 50 years of the NHS, published in 1998. It is good value at £20 for 230 pages, containing many interesting details not found elsewhere. It is available in Waterstone's, the Devon and Exeter Institution and at our Open Mornings.



From Julian Nowill - Treasurer

The Civic Society continues to run at a small loss but our reserves are adequate so I am not ringing alarm bells yet. However I am not able to devote adequate time to the Society so anyone who wants to volunteer for the post (full training given and no previous experience necessary) is most welcome. If there is a lack of volunteers, then I will continue in a threadbare sort of way. Since the start of the new financial year, 1 October 2011, we have received about £2,000 from subs and book sales. We have spent a little over £500 mostly on room hire and the newsletter.

The Dead Wood Stage

In the autumn we trim off the old wood to allow room for future new growth. That is why I have decided to step aside and hand over the production of the newsletter and the management of the web site to the Society's next generation. Our Chairman has kindly asked me to outline my involvement with the Society over the years, but to do this properly, I have to include Françoise, my wife.

Françoise and I met at the university. In those days she used one of those things known as a typewriter. We married in 1976 and soon after joined the Society, inspired by a calendar that I think may have been the brainchild of Harold Trump. Not long after that we joined the Committee. Françoise was the treasurer and I was minutes secretary; offices that we held for around seven years.

In 1983 I started guiding at the Cathedral, and during the 1980s another Cathedral guide and Society member, Margaret Willson, and I used to do guided tours of the city in the evenings for visitors that had arrived by coach during the day. This was done under the auspices of the Society and seemed to be much appreciated.

Some hardy perennial members may also remember the wonderful Society weekends away that were organized by Jeremy Pearson and so greatly enjoyed. Sadly, so many of our travel companions are no longer with us.

Some time in the early 1990s I suppose I must have volunteered to be newsletter editor. I can't remember how it came about. I don't think I was elected so I have undemocratically held the post for more time than is good for me or the Society. In the early days, the newsletter was a photocopied, typewritten sheet, and eventually a little booklet, often in full colour. As I had recently written some software to create web sites, it seemed a natural transition to take on the Society's web site.

I am so pleased that the Society seems to be re-inventing itself, and feel that it is time that someone new should bring fresh ideas to the scene. I have enjoyed a privileged position for too long. There are a great many members who do not come to meetings and their only contact with the Society, apart from paying their sub., is by reading the newsletter. With all good wishes to the Society and, in particular, my successor(s).

From the Civic Society Committee

AGM 2011

John Landers presided; business items were uncontroversial; a delicious buffet with wine followed for those who had ordered in advance.

Peter Wadham was elected **Vice-Chairman**, and **Keith Lewis** was elected to the **committee**. Both have useful expertise and experience, particularly in the area of planning; we are making progress in developing an effective team to take the Society forward.

However, there remain key roles to fill. In his **Treasurer's** report to the AGM Julian Nowill warned that he does not have time for more than basic Acting Treasurer duties; he hopes that we will find a replacement sooner rather than later.

We failed to find a volunteer for **Programme Secretary**, and the co-ordination of work on **blue plaques** and of **outreach to young people** remains open to offers.

We can't widen the range of our activities and influence until we have a full team of volunteers, so please encourage likely helpers to step forward.

At the AGM the proposal to raise subscriptions slightly was unanimously approved with the intention to hold at this amount for a minimum of three years if possible.

VACANCY FOR TREASURER

If you know anyone who enjoys working with figures and balancing the books he or she could be our Treasurer. Computer and Internet are essential, and ability to attend a Monday evening meeting about 6-8 times a year. A young Accountant who wants a voluntary role in society may be glad to add this to his CV.

Planning application lists often have seemed shorter than usual for the last eight weeks or so, but it still seems to take just as long studying plans in the Civic Centre and we certainly take just as long at our monthly meetings discussing those we consider important. The ways in which they may seem 'important' vary widely: one or more may be likely to affect a residential area of Exeter; one may cover a small area of shop-frontage in High Street where it will be seen by a very high percentage of the population and even be actually noticed by a large number of them; one may involve the conversion of a building to house 180 students, another to house 8 or 9; one may involve building an alien house in the grounds of an old house in an obscure location, another may create or extend a building in a prominent location involving changes in road layout.

We have probably looked at at least one example of each of these since the last Newsletter. The developers Redrow, having consulted widely, eventually submitted plans for housing on the Ibstock brickworks land just north of Pinhoe Road. The plans also include a care home near the Harrington Lane boundary of the site and continued provision for the existing employment, including a limited brick depot, in the southern corner with access from Cancel Lane. On the whole we think well of the proposals. Although one of us disapproves of the Arts and Crafts style of the houses others like the design, and the committee is now also divided on just how essential is a new road over the stream and the railway to join Exhibition Way. In the May Newsletter you will have read more detail on this. We are also concerned about the number and distribution of affordable dwellings in the plans, as we find these too few and not sufficiently distributed, being mainly in the south east corner. We are glad to find that this is a point which concerns the planning officers, and on which they are negotiating improvements before being able to recommend the application for approval.

A very recent application by Redrow is for a reason we have not met before. They need to clear the lower branches of trees towards the east side of the Ibstock area and to clear scrub beneath so that they can investigate the structure of pipe-work in the erstwhile landfill site in order to ensure that gases can be safely dealt with. This will also benefit the existing inhabitants of Cancel Lane, who will then be reassured by the eventual planting of more trees in this area behind their houses.

Starbucks' proposal that part of the few square metres of pavement in front of their coffee shop at 5 High Street should, by a 'change of use' approval,

become a seating area with two tables and four chairs is an example of an application for a very small area which will affect many people. We objected to a similar application in 2009 as it would limit space for pedestrians, particularly those with prams or walking aids, causing them to swerve outwards from the seating and then inwards from the nearby bus shelter on what is in any case not a wide pavement. We were glad that in 2009 the application was refused, and we are disappointed to find that a new application in December 2011 has been approved. We had, of course, objected this time too, especially as most members of Exeter Civic Society probably use this particular pavement.

Other objections in the last few months included two to different proposals for buildings on a garden very near to the centre of Exeter, in fact not far beyond the South Gate, but so hidden that few of us will recognise the names Acacia House and Magnolia House, two listed properties reached from Friar's Gate behind the New Theatre. In October we discussed an application for a bungalow to be built in the corner of the garden of Acacia House, in a simple design and in no way relating to the house itself, but, we considered, possibly the precursor of other developments. A second proposal in November did not mention the bungalow, but was for the conversion to apartments of both houses, Acacia and Magnolia, linking them more firmly with a small extension, dividing the garden (now bramble scrub) into five gardens and building two tall semi-detached houses at the corner nearest to Friar's Gate, where they would certainly affect the street scene. We objected to several aspects of these proposals and were glad that the Area Planning Officer and the Conservation Officer were engaged in discussions with the developers on the likelihood of refusal. Satisfactorily the developers have now withdrawn both applications, but no doubt they are planning further proposals.

Not far from Friar's Gate but in a very prominent position in Magdalen Street a conversion which has had many bulky applications and amendments in the last four or five years is at last almost complete. A hotel firm new to Exeter has worked extensively on the one-time Hotel Barcelona, itself a conversion from the Eye Hospital, to achieve an improved internal design, garden and pool. The recent submission of an application for well-designed signage makes clear its new name The Magdalen Chapter.

Planning sub-committee is less happy about a proposal for a multi-use building nearby at the rear of Dean Clark House. Approval was given a few years ago for a well-planned office building on that site which was not built. We find the new application puzzling as it includes a hotel and coffee rooms to be built first and

suites of offices to be added at an unspecified later date. Car-parking is to be beneath and the whole building seems rather solid, and extends rather too near to the Law Courts, an interesting building which deserves to be seen in clear space. Our letter to the Planning Officers expresses several concerns.

If you shop at Morrisons you will have seen that the store has achieved the increase in size it proposed and you may be aware that it has more recently applied to move its petrol station, alter its car-park and create a large roundabout at its entrance from Prince Charles Road. Although we discussed this at some length we could find no real objection once we were satisfied that access to the allotments would be safeguarded and even improved. Morrisons and Network Rail seem to have exchanged some land as part of this scheme and we are wondering what Network Rail has in mind for its new piece and for the derelict railway building and sidings.

One other application involves road-work, though on a smaller scale. The listed building in Countess Wear Road which has been the Exeter Youth Hostel since 1934 has applied for 'change of use' approval to become apartments, with removal of various accretions, widening of the entrance and with some

change in the roadway which would need to be approved by Devon County Council. We are saddened by the loss of the hostel and would welcome an application by the YHA to create a new one.

The Planning sub-committee has grown slightly in size since the Autumn. We still have Barbara Looser, Chris Watson, Peter Wadhams and myself, and following the AGM three more people were interested in becoming members. Although one has since decided to concentrate on her existing interest in her own area of Exeter we have gained one supporter, Michael Morris, who intends to read the weekly lists and occasionally communicate to the sub-committee his comments on any proposals he studies, and particularly one new member, Keith Lewis, who has become a full member of the sub-committee. We are very glad to welcome both of them and still have room for one more if your interest inspires you to devote up to several days a month to planning matters and the future of Exeter.

Meanwhile we have been encouraged by the inclination of members to chat about planning concerns at the monthly Open Mornings and we intend to ensure that at least one of us is available each time in what has become the planning corner.

From Pamela Coleman - Secretary

Website, Newsletter and Memberships

We've had a new logo and several new promotional items this year, plus a new-look newsletter, all featuring the red Wyvern logo. We will very soon be having a new website and those of you with e-mail will be notified as soon as it's up and running.

New Committee member, Keith Lewis, has been keen to participate in the setting up of the website. He put forward a couple of web designers and we met up with them to hear their proposals. After consideration the committee chose Sam Freeman to design our site and he will also be our Webmaster at a small extra cost until we are able to do this ourselves.

The newsletter will continue to be sent by post as usual for those who have no internet, but many people have suggested that to save a considerable amount on postage and printing we can send the newsletter by e-mail to those members who have internet access. It will also be made available in a Members area on the website, and details on how to log in to this area will be sent to them by e-mail.

Our membership year is 1st October to 30th September each year. Membership Renewals continued to trickle in from October to December, but the October bank statement turned up 50 members who did not increase their subscriptions as we requested and have paid the old rates by standing order. We are not too worried about chasing up the odd missing pounds this year, but amendments need to be made by these members well before they are due next year. If you are one of those members we will let you know, so don't do anything yet.

Memberships from 1st Oct 2012 to 30th Sep 2013:

£10 single yearly membership

£15 joint yearly membership

£100 single life membership

£150 joint life membership

At Jan 2012 paid-up memberships for the current year were as follows:

Life Members: 60

Yearly members: 187

Total paid-up members: 247

The number on the e-mailing list is 132 (plus 10 committee members). Some of the addresses are joint memberships.

Sheila and Gilbert Venn

Over the years the Venns made valuable contributions to the Committee of Exeter Civic Society. Gilbert was President from 1986 to 1996. Deryck Laming paid tribute to him on his election, saying he had already served for 14 years on the Committee, and during his time as Vice-Chairman he had rewritten the Society's Constitution.

Mrs Venn was a very efficient Membership Secretary from 1992 to 2003. She had been a journalist, and was Chief Sub-Editor of 'Woman's Own' between the wars. She enjoyed writing letters of welcome to new members and reminders about subscriptions. She said 'I would rather write letters, and type them, than anything'. She was also happy to type the texts for several of the 'Discovering Exeter' booklets, including Gilbert's on St Leonard's, and Gilbert supervised the layout of several of the booklets and saw them through the press.

Gilbert was a Civil Engineer and Quantity Surveyor. In 1935-1937 he helped set up and maintain the RAF air bases for the young kingdom of Iraq. This was the biggest RAF station outside Britain, training the Iraqi Air Force. He reminisced about the days when the Union Jack flew over Iraq.

Gilbert and Sheila married in 1955. In 1960 they moved from Willand to Magdalen Road in St Leonard's. Gilbert was involved in major redevelopment works in Exeter, County Hall, St Loyes College and Wonford Hospital from 1974 to 1976, and the Guildhall Shopping Centre. He was interested in building materials, the granite kerbstones and limestone walls of Exeter, the fate of Wynard's and of the Dissenters' Graveyard. For his booklet on St Leonard's he researched the origins of Baring's Bank and the life of Sabine Baring Gould.

Gilbert died in February 2005 aged 93, and Sheila in October 2011 aged 94. We will remember their lives with gratitude.

From the Civic Society Committee

Miscellaneous

Two benches have been installed in the name of the Society in Riverside Park, against the stone track that runs alongside the river, 200 yards and 400 yards from the Bridge Road entrance (map references SX 933 900 and SX 937 898 approx.). We know that they will be appreciated. At the time of writing we are awaiting application details for a grant from Exeter City Council's Community Projects fund for further benches.

Annie Purrier, a third-year geographer at the University, is researching attitudes towards weeds on the Roman walls. If you didn't collect a questionnaire at the December Open Morning and have an opinion to express, do please contact the Secretary for a copy. The more that we help young people like Annie, the more likely they are to join volunteer groups in later life.

Last but certainly not least: **congratulations to our Vice-President Hazel Harvey** on the publication of **The Story of Exeter**. Read it and enjoy it!



VACANCY FOR BLUE PLAQUE CO-ORDINATOR

Help us keep tabs on the Blue Plaques in Exeter, and on the progress being made by members who are working on new ones.

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