

THE DISSENTERS' GRAVEYARD



Thank goodness the graveyard has been rescued after years of neglect and threats to its survival as a key part of Exeter's heritage.

In 1981 the dwindling congregation of Unitarians walked out of George's Meeting leaving an open hymn book on the lectern and dead pigeons on the floor. The building was sold and so was its associated burial ground.

The graveyard has changed hands at ever increasing prices as developers hoped to profit by establishing car parking or housing on it. The price was about £6,000 in 2001 when the Civic Society tried to buy it. Pledges were collected, including £2,000 from the City Council, but the Society was narrowly outbid. The price climbed steadily after that, in spite of the Council steadfastly refusing permission to develop on it.

Now an anonymous benefactor has allowed ownership to pass to a Trust which can preserve its historic nature, clear the rubble, reinstate the path, rescue broken stones and provide an interpretation board. The campaign to rescue the ground was supported by **Exeter Civic Society**, Exeter Historic Buildings Trust, Exeter Local History Society, Exeter City Council, St Leonard's Residents Association, Devon Gardens Trust, the Jewish congregation and descendants of families buried there.

Dissenters played a prominent part in Exeter's history. Notable families include Kingdoms, Barings, Bowrings, Fulfords, Merivales, Pollards, Treadwins and Kennaways. The graveyard was in use from 1748 to 1854 and holds about 7,000 burials.

Exeter Civic Society has two representatives in the Graveyard Trust, Gordon Read and myself.

Volunteers will be needed to research the history, help clear the graveyard and to contribute financially to legal costs, repair of the walls, hire of skips etc. The area outside the South Gate which contains Wynards, the



Quaker and Jewish cemeteries and the former Eye Hospital, is now assured of the survival of another valuable piece of Exeter's heritage.

Written by Hazel Harvey, Vice-President

I am very honoured to have been voted chairman of the Society at the AGM in November and it does not seem that 3 months have passed already. I hope to build on the work that has been done during Felicity Murdin's chairmanship over the past 3 years with the establishment of the Saturday morning talks and a good selection of events and activities. I hope that we can build on that success, and in Ruth McLeish we have an active Programme Co-ordinator who has been busy filling up our events calendar. But she cannot organise everything on her own, so ideas for visits, speakers and talks are welcome, as well as support at some of the larger events, please contact Ruth with your ideas, or myself. The Saturday talks have grown in success with many regular attendees, so rather than the original 10 minute proposal, talks will now last for up to 30 minutes which will give speakers time to give their subject justice.

I want planning and developmental issues in the City to be given greater prominence in the Society, perhaps a return to the days when the Society was first established, and at various times between then and now. I intend that after the Saturday morning speaker has finished there will be a period for discussion about such matters, and I would like members to raise their concerns, suggestions and views to enable as much debate as possible, and to keep members informed. However, if members want to discuss any of these issues more privately they can do so with Pamela Wootton, myself, or members of the Planning Sub-Committee. I do want issues to come from members as you see and hear what is happening in your communities and so many of you have much expertise to support those of us that are relatively new. The new sub-committees for Transport and Highways and Canal, River and Quayside will have had their inaugural meetings by the time this newsletter is published and their work will support that of the long established Planning Sub-Committee. I am sure we can look forward to reports from them in the next newsletter.

We are always keen to welcome visitors and guests at our Saturday Open Mornings, so if you see a new face please introduce yourself and have a chat about the Society and what's going on in Exeter. **Many visitors join the society before going home so it is essential they receive a warm welcome.** I look forward to meeting more of you at our events and activities, please do not hesitate to introduce yourself to me.

Visit to Recycling Plant - by Ruth McLeish

On 23rd October 2013 sixteen of us turned out for this visit to the recycling plant at Marsh Barton. We were met by our tour manager Sally Fryer who gave us an overview of the work of the plant with a short 10 minute video. This was followed by a tour of the plant which surprisingly was mainly operated manually apart from one piece of highly expensive machinery, with the whole process run by just 25 operatives!

Their work consisted of separating firstly the paper, then the plastic and finally the cans and these are then crated up ready for shipment to various parts of the country. The aluminium cans are the biggest money earner for the plant and as such also a security headache.

We were told how disruptive it was when something foreign appeared on the conveyor belt which might mean a halt to operations. In this case they try to trace the source of the contamination, though this was not always possible.

Sally was happy to take questions after the tour and the whole visit lasted 2 hours. Clearly the work of the plant is extremely important for the City and we were impressed by the dedication of the small workforce.



Last year we put up two blue plaques in Exeter. In 2014 we are hoping to make it another two, possibly even three. We would like to replace the plaque that commemorated the TV comedian **Tommy Cooper** in Ford Road, Haven Banks, where he grew up in the 1920s. This year it will be 30 years since Tommy Cooper died. Some years ago, a plaque paid for by fellow comedian Jimmy Tarbuck was broken when it was taken down during redecoration.

Two renowned actresses, **Violet and Dame Irene Vanbrugh**, daughters of the Rev Reginald Henry Barnes, Vicar of Heavitree, will be commemorated by a blue plaque in Southernhay where Violet was born in 1867. We are also researching the birthplace of a remarkable Exonian, **James Holman** (1786-1857) who, although blind, was the foremost world traveller of his time. He helped to chart Australia's outback, adventured solo to Siberia, and circumnavigated the globe, an awesome achievement.

The "Who's Missing?" nomination form for blue plaques on the Civic Society's website has brought nominations so far for **Fred Karno**, real name Frederick Westcott, theatre impresario; **Ken Smith**, poet; **F J Widgery**, painter and alderman of Exeter; **Robert Veitch**, plant collector and horticulturist; and **John Gendall**, artist and lithographer.

The number of worthy candidates for plaques far exceeds our resources! Nevertheless, we hope also to be able to start this year on a city centre trail to encourage people to seek out and enjoy Exeter's memorial plaques. So here's an idea. Would anyone like to play a part in these projects by sharing the job of Blue Plaques Co-ordinator or taking on a particular piece of research? If so, please contact me at jbmonks@btinternet.com or on 01392 493559.

Guided Tour of Exeter Mosque - by Susie Hewitt

About 25 members received a very warm welcome from the Imam, Mohammed Abrar when we visited the Mosque in November. Islam is more than a religion; it is a way of life that governs everyday events from what to wear to what to eat and drink. We were shown around and saw the very plain but beautiful prayer hall which is mainly for the men to worship in, with a



separate area upstairs for the women. The prayer hall had a sumptuous red carpet with cream patterned lines which is a guide to keeping the worshippers in straight lines. The dome was decorated in Arabic with the words "No God but Allah". The hall takes about 400 men and the woman's prayer room 150-200. The clock in the prayer room shows the five prayer times each day – the times vary according to the position of the sun. On Fridays - the Islamic holy day - there is always a sermon which can range from social, political or religious subjects and often depends on the

nature of the community. We saw the ablution area where worshippers must cleanse themselves – face, arms and feet up to the ankles three times, thus making them physically and spiritually clean. We were then invited to the conference hall where we were able to ask questions. The Mosque is very keen to raise money for charities and the week following our visit they were holding an event sharing food to raise funds for Syria. As this was a free event we made donations towards a multi-cultural play area which they are planning. The visit was all too short but gave us all a fascinating insight into another religion and way of life.

Many of you will have listened to the chairman of this group, Peter Goodwin, talk to the Society on Saturday 18th January about the work they have undertaken during the past 12 months. The desire for a large city centre theatre continues to be a regular theme in the local press, although it is clearly a large undertaking. Peter estimated it could cost about £30 million, that it is a long-term proposal, and that the group have had discussions with the City Council, the Northcott Theatre and the University. Further information is available on their website at <http://www.theatreforexeter.org.uk/index.html> where their written Case will soon be published.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This was held again at the Devon and Exeter Institution on 20th November 2013. Three members of the Executive Committee resigned, Margo Swift, Celia King and Barbara Looser, and Keith Lewis was elected as Chairman to replace Felicity Murdin. Margo and Celia were both thanked for their work and received gifts. Barbara still remains on the Planning Sub-Committee and Felicity on the Executive Committee. Pamela Wootton and Peter Caspar were re-elected to the Committee after their three-year term of service had come to an end, and new members Ann Kennedy and Wendy Daurge were also elected. There were healthy discussions about a number of issues resulting in the endorsement of a Canal, River and Quayside sub-committee. A list of committee contacts is always to be found on the last page of each newsletter and also on the website. The AGM minutes are available in the Members' area of the website.

Revealing our Cathedral's Heritage Visit - by Paul Stephenson

Two dozen of us met on Saturday 25th January to see the fruits of a £1m reorganisation of the library and archives of the Dean and Chapter, tucked away on the south side of the cathedral next to the masons' yard, in a wing of the Bishop's Palace. Our guide was Ellie Jones, Cathedral Archivist and Society member, who explained how the reading room, now open full-time, could accommodate six researchers rather than one previously. There is also an education room for school groups and a climate-controlled vault for the safe keeping of the Collection, examples of which were on display for us to view. Ellie had selected, among several, a Fabric Roll dated 1351, detailing temporary work done to block the window openings of the cathedral against the weather during construction, and a beautifully illuminated and sealed Notarial Instrument (an Agreement) of 1428 from Witheridge church.

Equally fascinating was our all-to-brief selective tour of the fabric of the cathedral; passionately revealed by Simon Timms, Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund's South-West Committee. Simon urged us to look closely and seek out details so easily overlooked, such as the toothed joint in the masonry where the screen with its many carved figures was added onto the west front. Inside he led us to St. James' Chapel, badly damaged in WW2 and rebuilt, incorporating some salvaged materials. Hence, crisp arrisses to the new masonry and fragments of medieval timber incorporated into the rebuilt screen, undertaken after the war by craftsmen of the Herbert Read workshop, an obvious hero of Simon's.

Another favourite character of his was George Down, Master Mason of the same period, a memorial to whom is laid on the floor in the corner of the chapel, in which can be found some light-hearted carvings of his.

Further evidence of the skill of Herbert Read is to be found across the aisle in the Presbytery; the Bishop's Throne, one of the earliest treasures of the cathedral was wisely dismantled in the early days of the war then reassembled by the workshop afterwards -we had to get down on our knees to find traces of original polychrome in the restored panels! So much history there is to see, and as Simon reminded us it's free admission for EX1 -EX4 residents. What are you waiting for ?

In the last few months Planning sub-committee has not only been studying, discussing, telephoning and occasionally writing about existing planning applications but has met and had discussions with several intending applicants in advance of their submission of plans to the city council; and we have even visited one building, or conglomeration of buildings, which has been up and running for several months. Andrew Davis, director of Yelverton Properties who developed 'The Printworks' student accommodation on the site once occupied by Townsend Printers between Western Way and Summerland Street, gladly showed us around the huge complex which was ready by last September and by the start of term became completely full. It houses about 490 students, some in single studios with individual small kitchens but most in cluster flats where groups of friends share kitchen-dining rooms and each student has a study-bedroom with (of course) its own shower-loo-basin pod. Facilities shared by all include several courtyards, a well-designed laundry room, several study rooms, a huge bicycle basement, a small television room, and, unusually, an extensive gym with a good range of fitness equipment. The whole complex is light and airy, very well kept and secure, with planting growing up around the internal open areas. It provides a good, even luxurious, environment to live and study for a few years but one wonders how easy it will be to return to life in the real world later.

You may be surprised to be reading about a completed development in such detail. It had occurred to me that, although we of the Planning sub-committee had, in the last few years, studied many applications for student accommodation developments, including this one, we had none of us ever seen a 'cluster flat' of which most of them are composed and had no clear idea of the standard which the eventual building reached. And, having visited 'The Printworks', I thought Civic Society members might be interested in reading about it as an example of new building within the City.

Aviva Investors who own and administer the Guildhall Shopping Centre invited us to meet them with their architects early in January in order to hear of their proposals for renewing the Guildhall Shopping Centre, making it more likely to attract residents and visitors in from both the High Street and Queen Street boundaries, providing improved facilities and areas for sitting,

and restructuring some of the really awkward internal access routes. The setting of St Pancras Church would be enhanced, as indeed it should be, and the Centre made more attractive for families and for people wishing to prolong a shopping trip by eating, either in the open air or in the variety of restaurants which Aviva hope to retain and to attract. We were slightly doubtful whether their enthusiastic hope of the centre becoming a venue for evening dining would be successful and I think we surprised them a little when all four of us wished to be reassured that they would still find room for the shop The Works. The architects demonstrated the plans as they existed and we look forward to seeing the definitive versions which they intend to submit to the Planning Officers very soon. They have of course been in pre-application discussions with the City planners for about a year and with English Heritage. The whole enterprise is imbued with Exeter's ambition [this is not intended as a pejorative word] of reaching even greater heights as a place to live and to visit.

I often write that I very rarely get comments from members of Civic Society on city development, but recent advance news of the Guildhall Centre proposals has inspired three people to make contact; two are concerned about the Queen Street entrance and one about that from High Street. These are areas on which we had closely questioned the Aviva people and which Planning sub-committee will be discussing at our March meeting, when we have seen the eventual plans. If you have concerns re the Guildhall Centre please let us know.

If you were at the January Open Morning you will know that we spoke about the newly published Draft Development Delivery Development Plan Document [yes, that really is its title] and suggested you might wish to comment. No-one has so far, but, as this is the eventual document based on the results of earlier public consultation with the addition of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) results, I was not really expecting comments except perhaps some re. housing development. Planning s-c did comment at that time (among the fewer than thirty who did) but only on a few matters, as we felt that the planners had created a sound document at that stage. The policies in this draft conform with the adopted Core Strategy and with National Planning Policy Guidance, and the eventual Development Delivery DPD will form a major part of the Local Plan providing guide lines for the spatial development of Exeter up to 2026.

The consultation period runs until late February and Pl s-c will discuss the document at our meeting on 11 February, and then submit our response.

On 22nd January Pl s-c had been invited by Exe Water Sports Association (which includes Exeter Rowing Club, Exeter Canoe Club and Exe-Calibre Dragon Boat Club) to see and discuss their plans for new premises before their public open display. We had a fine two hours at their existing club house and boat storage on the west edge of the Canal Basin hearing from their architect, Nigel Grainge, about the development of the designs and being shown on laptop screen how these would appear from all aspects, swooping by continual view from one to another with great dexterity. It may seem rather flat when we study the plans in the eventual application in March but so far those of us who saw this stage of the proposals are not inclined to object.

This month the Planning Committee of Exeter City Council needed to consider more than the usual number of applications which go before them rather than being examined by Working Parties or otherwise determined by delegated consent, and so they needed two meetings on consecutive Mondays. The second of these approved two outline applications by IKEA and the two Morrison applications for houses, Police hub and supermarket on the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary site. You may remember that we had been concerned about several aspects of this, in particular the affect on local roads and so we are glad to know that the approval is tempered by a 'direction' laid upon it by the Highway authority that will delay its implementation for six months during which satisfactory traffic arrangements must be agreed. We are also glad that the newly constituted Transport sub-committee will be able to consider these developments. We will be dealing with the proposals for the layout and design of the new housing on the Morrisons and IKEA sites which will soon appear.

As you may know the Cathedral School proposal for the replacement of Kalendar Hall was also approved but I was glad to read in the minutes of that City Planning meeting that the façade of the new building would not be of plastic, however 'high quality' as described in the application, and to which we had objected, but of glass. The actual design of the glass will probably not be the subject of a separate planning application. The Cathedral School's next application, for two early

years classrooms in the grounds of Hall House is yet to be determined but we found it acceptable and were particularly glad that it mentioned the retention of the grand magnolia tree which spreads above the wall in that part of Cathedral Close. Several years ago when there was concern about the structure of that wall an application to fell the tree was approved! The wall was made safe but the approval remained. We are glad to know that the tree is now valued and safe.

Other recent determinations we welcome include the refusal of another application to build at the corner of Midway Terrace and Ide Lane, to which we had objected as with several earlier applications in past years; and the eventual achievement of a third building at Magdalen House where the developers at last accepted that there was not room for a semi-detached pair.

We still are concerned about a few details of the Steiner School plans for Thomas Hall although of course thankfully welcoming their plans in general and particularly the great deal of restoration that they will carry out to rescue the Hall from its advanced deterioration. Our quibbles include the materials of the elevated link which joins the rear of the Hall to new teaching buildings, the utilitarian structure of the balustrade in front of the Hall replacing the elegant one which has entirely crumbled, and the position of increased car-parking and its effect on a damp corner which was once full of wild flowers. And we continue to plead that the house and grounds will revert to its own name 'Great Duryard'

Yet again the tailpiece concerns an application for rebuilding 157-159 Heavitree Road, but we may be nearing the end of this long-running saga of impossible proposals and inevitable refusals. We will study the modest design for a single office and will discuss it in February, when it is quite possible that we may not need to offer an objection; we will let you know in May.

First World War Exhibition

A week long exhibition to commemorate the 12,000 Devonians who died in World War One will be held at the Guildhall in September. Members of the public will be encouraged to bring in photographs of relatives who died, and these can be added to the commemorative website. More details will be in the next newsletter and sent by e-mail nearer the time.

Dates for Your Diary

PLEASE BOOK FOR ALL EVENTS

Saturday 1st March

**Guided Tour of St Mary Steps Church
West Street (by Stepcote Hill)
And Matthew the Miller Clock**

Starting at 11am so meet outside before that time. Only small groups can be allowed into the clock tower at once as space is limited. The stairs are steep and care should be taken. This is a free event but places are limited and booking essential. Please contact Ruth McLeish to book (see below)

Saturday 5th April

Guided Tour of Clyston Mill

Meet in **Broadclyst village car park at 10.45am** for a 5-min walk to the mill (stout footwear is advised for this). Mr Brian Kirby will lead the tour, starting at 11am and lasting approx 1 hr. There is a charge of **£3.50** for members and **£5** for non-members. Contact Ruth McLeish to book (see below)

Wednesday 14th May

Guided Tour of Exeter Freemasons Hall and Cream Tea

This is at 27 Gandy Street, so meet outside **Coolings Wine Bar at 1.55pm** which is opposite. Mr Alan Denning will lead the tour, starting at 2pm and lasting approx 2hrs followed by a cream tea. During this time questions on Freemasonry will be answered. There is a charge of **£5** which includes the tea. Numbers are limited and booking is essential. Contact Ruth McLeish to book (see below)

If any more events are organised before our next newsletter on 1st June 2014 they will appear on the website and members will be notified by e-mail.

Monthly Open Mornings 2014

Saturday 15th February

Saturday 15th March

Saturday 19th April

Saturday 17th May

Hoskins Room, Central Library

Castle Street, Exeter

10.30am to 12.00pm

Open Mornings have a speaker at 11.00am and sometimes a discussion on current issues in which you can participate. Visitors and guests are welcome and refreshments provided.

Details of monthly speakers are sent to members by e-mail and are on the website.

Highways and Transport Group

This newly established sub-committee had its inaugural meeting on 21 January with **Trevor Preist** agreeing to be chairman for the first year. We agreed that there is a huge number of issues to pursue and at the next meeting in March some of these will be debated further. But having discussed the County Council's Local Transport Plan and Implementation Plan, it was considered that there may be a lack of clear and specific policies to cope with the impact of long-term growth. With Trevor having undertaken a huge amount of research it was agreed that the committee will complete his draft assessment of future transportation needs to enable Exeter to keep moving.

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

- President:** Peter Wadham.....Tel: 07411 131773 e-mail: peterwadham77@yahoo.com
- Chairman:** Keith Lewis.....Tel: 07964 219153 e-mail: keithatecs@gmail.com
- Treasurer:** Peter Caspar.....Tel: 01392 219819 e-mail: treasurer.exetercivicsociety@yahoo.co.uk
- Secretary/Memberships:** Pamela Coleman.....Tel: 01392 421446 e-mail: pcoleman.ecs@btinternet.com
- Planning Sub-Committee:** Pamela Wootton.....Tel: 01392 275332 e-mail: p.m.wootton@exeter.ac.uk
- Programme Co-Ordinator:** Ruth McLeish.....Tel: 01392 465441 e-mail: ruthmcleish@gmail.com
- Blue Plaque Co-Ordinator:** John Monks.....Tel: 01392 493559 e-mail: jbmonks@btinternet.com
- Newsletter Editor:** Pamela Coleman