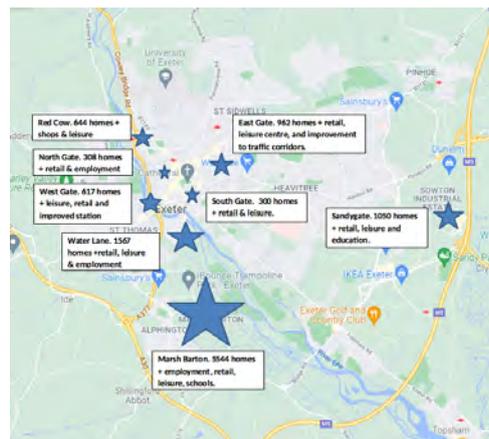


## Newsletter - Spring 2022

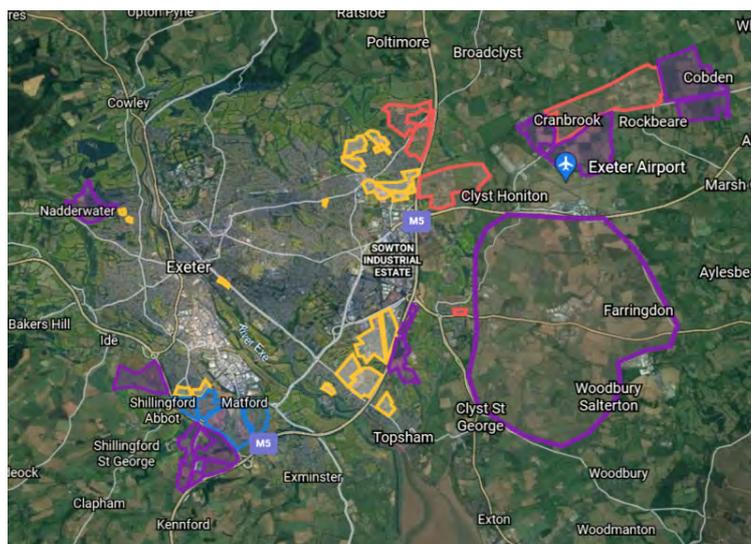
### Chairman's Report

Keith Lewis

This year will see proposals published for the development of Exeter, East Devon and Teignbridge for the period 2020 to 2040 with all three councils likely to publish draft Local Plans for consultation. Development in Exeter is clearly something that we have to monitor, and we already know that the City Council is working with other public bodies to develop land they all own, which could accommodate up to 12,000 homes. Most of this land is described as brownfield which means it is already built on or in use and to achieve the number of homes envisaged, development will need to be 3-4 storeys high. This slide from my recent Saturday talk shows where development is intended, but additional sites will be proposed by land owners and developers.



You will already know that there are homes being built to the south of the city in Teignbridge (2,000) and in East Devon to the east (1,000+) but both councils are proposing additional homes close to, or on the city's boundaries, as part of their future planning. The map below shows current development sites: In Exeter in yellow; in Teignbridge blue; in East Devon in red; and in purple the proposals for the next local plans. In Teignbridge there are proposals at Atwell's Farm to the west of Exwick for 200+ homes - this will result in more traffic on the narrow roads of the former Exwick village, including the level crossing at St David's station. 727 homes to the west of Alphington which will result in even more traffic entering Alphington village which is yet to see the impact of 2,400 homes to it's south. And then to the south west of the city at Peamore there are proposals for 933 homes as well employment land. This site seems acceptable because it has good access to the major highway network which should help mitigate the impact car travel in the city.



In East Devon development is not likely to be so close to our borders with major proposals to expand Cranbrook up to 8,000 homes, with consultation on the Cranbrook development plan concluding on the 28th February.

It is reassuring that for the four extension sites to Cranbrook all are expected to be mixed use to include employment land and other infrastructure. This should help reduce a reliance on Exeter for employment. A second new town is also proposed somewhere between the A30 and and the B3179 road to Woodbury which may see 2,500 houses built by 2040 and expand up to 8,000 houses – so similar in size to Cranbrook. The main issue here is that employment and infrastructure are provided at the start of development, and ensuring there is high quality public transport at the outset will be crucial.

The innuagural meeting of our new Strategic Planning & Highways Group took place on 22 February. There should now be sufficient members involved to monitor and respond to the development of these Local Plans.

If anyone wants to join this group please contact me by email - [keithatecs@gmail.com](mailto:keithatecs@gmail.com)

## We need your help and suggestions

We would like to update our Discovering Exeter booklets because they are looking a bit aged now, stocks are running low, and 5 of the booklets are now completely out of stock and only available as a photocopied download from our website -

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/about-us/shop/discovering-exeter>

The books were written by members and associates of the society, and the information provides an invaluable history about different parts of the city. Some research about recent changes will be needed to update the books but this allow you to put your own stamp on the publication.

Software is available which will convert a photocopied version of a booklet into editable text which will then make it easier to update and reformat each booklet, although we will need to find somebody to give a final professional touch – we will pay for the software. The five books out of print are about the areas of St David's, St Leonard's, Heavitree, Pennsylvania and Sidwell Street. The other seven books are titled: West of the River, Lost Churches, Gates of the Close, Community Mosaics, Public Incriptions, 20th Century Architecture, Street Names, and Exeter and the Trams.



If you are interested in updating one of the booklets, or writing a new one, please contact our chairman by email, [keithatecs@gmail.com](mailto:keithatecs@gmail.com) .

# Abraham Cann, the Last Champion of England in Devon Style Wrestling

Hilary Neville



*Portrait of Abraham Cann courtesy of the RAMM*

Our next blue plaque will celebrate Abraham Cann, landlord of the Champion's Arms in Bartholomew Street West, and celebrity wrestler at "Devon style" wrestling. The plaque will be unveiled on April 7th, at 16:00, at 28 Bartholomew Street West.

Devon-style wrestling is described as follows in Wikipedia:

"The Devonshire fashion of wrestling allows hardened footwear to be worn and kicking intended to disable the opponent. It has similarities to Cornish wrestling but it was reputed to focus more on foot moves and less on throwing. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century many Devon wrestlers used to wear "baked" boots when wrestling, which could cause serious injury to opponents (on rare occasions leading to death)."

Abraham Cann was born at Colebrooke, near Crediton around 1794. He and his brothers were all wrestlers, but Abraham was the most successful and soon became unbeatable. He won the title of "Champion of the West of England" in 1826, and later "Champion of England": matches could take place in London, and as far away as Yorkshire. He had a reputation for refusing the bribes that were commonplace in competitive wrestling at the time. Wrestling matches were an extremely popular, if unrefined form of entertainment during the 18th and 19th centuries, not least for their gambling potential. Champion wrestlers were famous: Cann and his group were welcomed at places like Vauxhall Gardens, rather in the way that footballers get welcomed at nightclubs nowadays.

A number of his matches took place in pubs in Exeter and Topsham. In addition, Cann was landlord of the Moreton Inn, Cowick Street, from 1824 to c1828. He then ran the Woolpack Inn in Bartholomew Yard in 1828/30, which he renamed the Champion Arms. This is where the blue plaque will be erected. The inn itself no longer exists, but the houses on the site will have been built during the time that Abraham Cann was alive, and he would undoubtedly have been aware of the fate of his former pub. The cellars of the houses there today may well date from the time of the Champion's Arms: one contains a strong stone shelf, larger than that which would be required by a single domestic house, which may well have supported beer barrels.

After 1830 Abraham ceased to be a pub landlord, but continued to take part in wrestling matches around the country. His last match took place in Exeter in 1841. He remained popular, appearing as a celebrity at fairs around Devon, and as a "trier" (referee) in wrestling contests across the country.

At the same time, family tragedy and drink appear to have led to a decline. As early as 1830 he had had to apply for poor relief. His poverty continued, but in 1860, when his plight became known, the landlord of the Bull Inn in Exeter started an appeal for funds to provide him with a pension. This met with an excellent response from his admirers around the country: £200 was raised, enough to give him a decent pension. Lord Palmerston, clearly a keen follower of the sport, directed that £10 be paid into the appeal, out of the Royal Bounty Fund.

He died in 1864 in Colebrooke, where he is buried.

## River, Canal & Quayside Group Peter Nickol

Members will have seen that Marsh Barton Station is taking shape. This will, by the time it is finished, include a new bridge over the railway for cyclists and pedestrians, supplementing the present narrow road bridge, and we hope this will form a welcome and useful gateway into Riverside Valley Park.

We continue to consider planning applications. No objection was raised to the Welcome Café's conversion to residential use, even though we regretted the loss of the café. An objection will be lodged to the screens already erected by Bar Venezia, as these seem unduly high and impact negatively the open aspect across Piazza Terracina.

We would welcome new members to our group who have an interest in the riverside areas through the city from Cowley Bridge in the north to the southern extent at Bridge Road. You can see what we are concerned about on our Society webpage:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/waterside> - where you will find my contact details.

## Talks: Cinema in Exeter – A talk by Red Coat Jon Bell on 11 December 2021. Written by Keith Lewis



Jon gave us a very entertaining talk which included song, film and impersonation; probably one of the most entertaining talks we have had in the 15 years I have been a member.

Jon's talk was based on research papers written by a Gordon Chapman and found at the Devon & Exeter Institution by the librarian 'at the back of a cupboard'. Mr Chapman's research was about the history of cinema in Devon, and his book *Devon at the Cinema* is still in print and available. Jon's first slide was of the organ at the Gaumont that was damaged in the WW2 bombings, but this was quickly replaced by bringing in a replacement.

Jon told us that the first moving film shown in Exeter was at the Victoria Hall, Queen Street in October 1896, when Mr John D Ablett showed his new moving pictures for three nights. This was the start of the conversion of many halls in the city to cinemas, including the Empire Electric (High Street); Franklin Picture House (Fore Street – now The Exonian pub); Hippodrome (London Inn Square); Kings Hall (Okehampton Road – now a Christian centre), but most of these had relatively small seating levels.

In the 1930s national cinema companies started building super cinemas with over 1000 seats as the love of going to the movies grew. The opening of the Gaumont (1932), Savoy (1936), and Odeon (1937) saw the closure of the smaller cinemas that could not compete with the financial backing of these national chains. We heard that the Odeon was criticised by Thomas Sharp for its brutal architecture, but others loved its sweeping interior lines.



The acetate film was very volatile, and easily caught fire, with Exeter's Victoria Hall being destroyed by fire in 1919 as a result of such an

incendiary incident. After this fire new laws were introduced requiring film to be stored in fireproof containers, and projection rooms were also fireproofed.

All cinemas were briefly closed at the start of WW2, but an intervention from George Bernard Shaw to the government of the day resulted in them soon re-opening to the delight of the population. And soon after the war the British film industry started to see more success with accomplished documentary makers and cinematographers combining to create high quality films that were a match for those from Hollywood.



Audience numbers peaked at about 1600 million in the years after WW2, declining to a low in the 1980s.

The Gaumont in North Street closed in 1967 and is now Mecca bingo, and in 1987 the ABC closed, leaving Exeter with just one cinema, the Odeon, until the small independent Picturehouse opened in Bartholomew Street in 1996, and the multi screened Vue opened in 2006.

## The Inland Haven - Songs and stories inspired by Exeter's Maritime History

We thought you may be interested in this event in Exeter's Custom House. Redcoat Jon Bell who talked to us about Exeter Cinema is one of the organisers and performers.

At the Custom House - 17,18,19 and 24,25,26th of March 2022

The area around Exeter Quay is now an enjoyable place to pass the time, do a bit of shopping and maybe have a drink and a bite to eat. Anyone looking at this pleasant scene might be surprised to learn that as late as the eighteenth century this was one of the most important ports in England. Every week thousands of tons of goods passed through the quay and basin then down the ship canal to the sea. The harbour was crowded with shipping and large scale warehouses and industrial concerns of all kinds surrounded the noisy, smelly and very busy waterways.

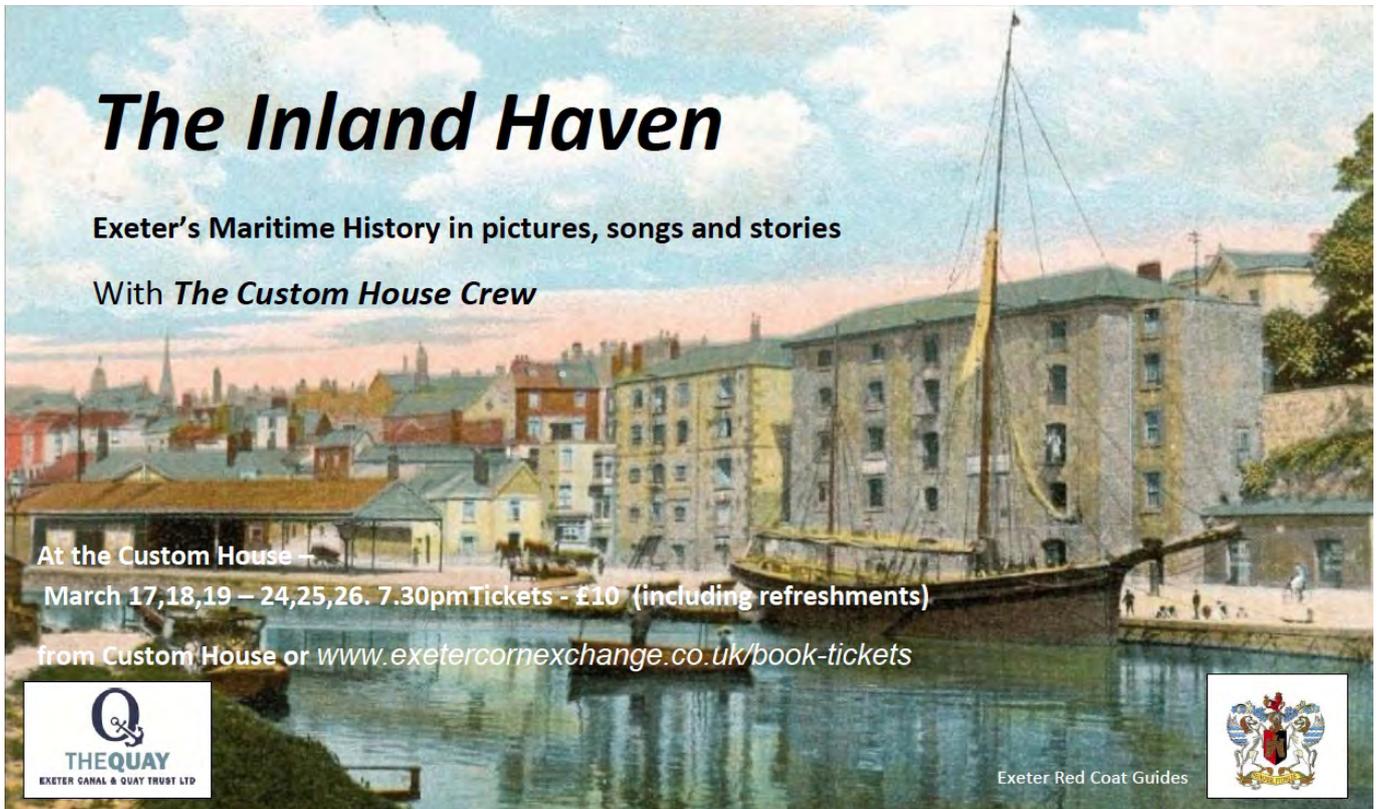


The area was the driving force for Exeter's prosperity and connected it with a global maritime based economy. So just as in other ports and harbours, Exeter people were concerned with ensuring its prosperity as well as combating (or promoting) smuggling, avoiding the press-gang and coping with the dangers of the sea. Even after its international prosperity waned, the port was still central to the coastal shipping trade until this too began its inexorable decline.

It's now 50 years since the last trading vessel visited the port, so it's time to remember and celebrate 'Exeter's lost route to the sea.' The Inland Haven will recall to life this often forgotten story, not as a dry economic history lesson, but via music, songs, stories and pictures. Traditional songs and shanties will be mixed with newly written material and even some mid

twentieth century swing! This will be an event every bit as fascinating, rousing and noisy as was the harbour itself though, hopefully, not quite so smelly!

Presenting all this will be, The Custom House Crew, a talented and experienced bunch of musicians, singers and story tellers. So come along, you're bound to be 'im-pressed!'



# The Inland Haven

Exeter's Maritime History in pictures, songs and stories  
With *The Custom House Crew*

At the Custom House –  
March 17,18,19 – 24,25,26. 7.30pm Tickets - £10 (including refreshments)  
from Custom House or [www.exetercornexchange.co.uk/book-tickets](http://www.exetercornexchange.co.uk/book-tickets)



Exeter Red Coat Guides

## We need your suggestions

At the last AGM it was suggested that we should spend some of our funds to renovate or improve a threatened artifact or feature of the city. With a bank balance of just over £5,000 we could commit about £1,000 towards towards this. The last time we did this we helped towards the renovation of the General Gordon lamp on Magdalen Road:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/exeter-history/general-gordon-lamp-post>

We also provided a grant towards the Wesley information board outside of the Mint Methodist Church where we have our meetings.

In the past we have contributed towards the renovation of Matthew Miller clock, Sidwell Methodist Church cupola, the sundial on the Devon and Exeter Institution and the Wyvern weather vane that stood on the former North Gate.



## Future Events

We do not yet feel confident enough to organise visits, and of course we still need to recruit somebody to organise our events.

Date	Event
Saturday 19th March 10:30 Mint Methodist Church	Aylwyn Bowen will speak about Making his mark in Exeter
Thursday 7th April 16:00 28 Bartholomew Street West, EX4 3BN & 1 Guinea Street, EX1 1BS	A blue plaque unveiling to commemorate Abraham Cann, the last champion of England at Devonshire wrestling. To be followed by a complimentary drink at the snooker club in Guinea Street
Saturday 23 April 10:30 Mint Methodist Church	David Taylor will talk on The Making of Bartholomew Street Cemetery (Lower Cemetery)
Saturday 21 May 10.30 Mint Methodist Church	David Radstone will give a talk entitled The Mummified, Crucified Man
Saturday 18 June 10.30 Mint Methodist Church	Mark Davies will talk about William of Orange in Exeter in 1688

## Contact Information

<b>President:</b>	Havel Harvey	Tel: 01392 254068
<b>Chairman:</b>	Keith Lewis	<a href="mailto:keithatecs@gmail.com">keithatecs@gmail.com</a> Tel: 07964 219153
<b>Secretary:</b>	Vacant	
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Jane Evans	<a href="mailto:ecs.membership@gmx.com">ecs.membership@gmx.com</a>
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Jane Evans	<a href="mailto:ecs.membership@gmx.com">ecs.membership@gmx.com</a>
<b>Events Co-ordinator:</b>	Vacant	
<b>Planning Group Chairman:</b>	Pamela Wootton	<a href="mailto:p.m.wootton@exeter.ac.uk">p.m.wootton@exeter.ac.uk</a>
<b>River &amp; Canal Group Chairman:</b>	Peter Nickol	<a href="mailto:pnickol@phonecoop.coop">pnickol@phonecoop.coop</a>
<b>Strategic Planning &amp; Highways Group Chairman:</b>	Keith Lewis	<a href="mailto:keithatecs@gmail.com">keithatecs@gmail.com</a> Tel: 07964 219153