

Exeter Civic Society

Blue Plaques Report, February 2025

1. Dr Margaret Jackson

1.1. The plaque was finally fixed in place just before Christmas. The plaque project as a whole was very successful, for which many thanks are due to Simon Timms, currently Chair of the Devonshire Association, who did most of the work.

1.2. Costs of the plaque:

Income received/committed:

Local donation - £750
Elmgrant Fund - £200
MWF - £250
FSRH - £100
Sir Denis Pereira Gray - £150
Exeter Civic Society agreed - £200

Total £1650

Costs:

Plaque - £646
Barnfield Theatre room rent plus
teas for 90 people - £565.50
Fixing £91.20
Booklet - £95.69

Total £1397.89

This does mean that we don't need a contribution from the Society in order to break even. Sir Denis Pereira-Gray made his donation at the last minute when the costs seemed to be mounting, and when asked what we should do with any surplus, he thought it should be used for future blue plaques.

2. Consultation about plaques for places

We asked for members' views about whether we should consider putting blue plaques up to commemorate events as well as people e.g. the site of the Theatre Royal and its fire. Only one response was received, from Sir Denis Pereira-Gray, supporting a widening of the scheme. Since he has generously donated money for plaques on more than one occasion, his opinion should carry some weight. But since no one else replied at all, I have concluded that there's not much interest or enthusiasm. Perhaps we should just do fewer plaques?

3. Plaque nomination: Dr S H Foulkes

In August we received a nomination from Ross Stephenson of Devon Partnership NHS Trust suggesting that we commemorate Dr S H Foulkes (born Fuchs) with a blue plaque. Dr Foulkes was, if not the inventor, a very early pioneer of group analysis and group psychotherapy, and his methods are still widely used - hence the nomination from practising professionals. We have looked into his career, and he does seem to be worthy of a blue plaque. Unfortunately his stay in Exeter was brief (1940-43), he lived in the countryside near Shillingford St George, and the clinic at which he worked in Dix's Field was destroyed by bombing. However, his connection with London is a much more significant one, and I am working to submit an application to the English Heritage blue plaque scheme for a plaque there. There is a faint possibility that we may be able to identify an Exeter building if the London proposal isn't taken forward.

4. Plaque nomination: Henry Chadwick

Ian Maxted and I were approached in October about commemorating Henry Chadwick, claimed to be the “father” of baseball, with a blue plaque, see below:

I just thought I would drop you a line, to enquire about the process of getting a blue plaque for the 'Father of Baseball' who was born, and grew up in Exeter;

Chadwick, Henry I Baseball Hall of Fame and is held in the States in the same regard as William Webb-Ellis Henry Chadwick – Society for American Baseball Research (sabr.org)

Although Sue Bond from the Devon Historical society has not been able to identify the house in which he was born (see attached report) we, at the Exeter Spitfires are naming our new baseball diamond after him, which might be a good location for a plaque! Ceremony at new pitch honours Exeter's Father of Baseball - Exeter City Council News

Not sure if he fulfils your requirements to be deserving of recognition, or the lack of an actual confirmed location is a problem, but it would be great to have a chat about this.

As this email was received after the Foulkes nomination, and since there doesn't appear to be a potential site, I have not investigated as yet. I replied saying that having their “diamond” named after Chadwick was probably the best memorial in the absence of a plaque on a building.

5. Queries

Ian Maxted and I have responded to a number of queries, about, among others, the Devon “Witches”, Mary the Pigeon and John Simcoe, all of them plaques of perennial interest beyond the city.

6. Website

Dr Foulkes is one of a number of notable people with a connection to Exeter, for whom there is no site for a blue plaque. Fred Karno and Eleanor Coade are others. I'm considering writing some short biographies to put in a sub-section of the website under Blue Plaques. This will provide information for anyone with an interest in the person who carries out an internet search on them, and will explain why we haven't given them blue plaques.

Hilary Neville, February 2025