



## The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC - the Totnes and District Society

### President's Piece

Judy Westacott

Totnes has been described by the County Council as “probably the most outstanding town of historical importance in the County”. In addition, the Council for British Archaeology included the town in a shortlist of 40 of the most important historic towns in England. Those who have lived here realise that, among other things, it has an historic waterfront, buildings of 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century origin and a motte and bailey castle.

There are over 400 listed buildings in the town, six of the most important being St. Mary's Church, the Guildhall, the Castle, the Museum, Bogan House and the Eastgate. The architectural and historic qualities of the listed buildings add to the character of the town and go some way to offset the effect of the modern housing estates that, these days, virtually surround the town.

Totnes was founded by the Saxons as a fortified town to protect the south from invading Danes. Its strategic location – the lowest river crossing and the tidal end of the Dart – helped it develop as a trading port and market town. From the time of the Norman Conquest it was one of the richest towns in Devon and home to many rich merchants. Owning, or being responsible for, a listed building, or one in the Conservation Area, means that you have a duty to care for and maintain it. Should you want to make any changes to its structure – inside or out- then you should seek advice. The local Planning Authority will take you through the planning process and special procedures involved.

As a society we monitor planning applications, especially those that involve listed buildings or are in, or adjacent to, the Conservation Area. So if you are not a member and care, or are concerned about, the future of the town, just complete and return the membership form in this issue of Contact.

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## St Michael's Church, Blackawton

Lawrence Green



Set on a rise in the middle of the South Hams village of Blackawton St Michael's church fits snugly in with none of the aloof quality of some of the churches nearer Totnes. It is surrounded by a wonderful undulating churchyard with no less than four gates leading into it, one with a modest lych gate, another with an avenue of cherry trees.

It is obvious from the outside that this church is typical Devon Perpendicular. The grey random stone exterior and tower make one think of Cornworthy and Harberton. Inside the church it becomes obvious that it is very late Perpendicular. The large windows, set closely together, are Tudor as is the screen with the pomegranate emblem of Katherine of Aragon and the 'k' and 'h VIII' painted on the screen's lower panels. It is possible that the screen originally came from the Greyfriars' Church on the quay in Plymouth where Katherine landed to marry Henry's doomed older brother Arthur. This church, like St Michael's, was once owned by Plympton Priory.



It is the screen that holds our attention in the almost complete absence of stained glass windows. It is unusually incomplete; apart from the usual absence of rood figures and gallery it lacks one third of its length in the north aisle. The staircase leading to the gallery is present in the north aisle wall as well as the entrance to the vanished rood loft.

The whole screen was absent from the church for twenty years from 1944 until its restoration in 1964. The work of removal was undertaken by Herbert Read II with help from American soldiers to protect it from 'friendly fire' during Exercise Tiger in 1944. It was his son Herbert Read III who put back the screen and skilfully restored it in 1964. The central doors are missing but a good smaller set can be found at the entrance to the Lady Chapel in the south aisle. Traces of the original blue and vermillion paint from 1520 can be found on the original parts of the screen. There is a plain slate tablet on the wall of the north aisle commemorating the sacrifice of the people of Blackawton in giving up their farms and homes for nearly two years for the live firing exercises that claimed the lives of more US servicemen than the landings on Utah Beach.

The church is light and airy. It is used for many village events; the slightly cluttered back of the church tells us that a lot is happening there today. A meeting room and balcony, the Narthex, occupies the west arch of the



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magnificent arcade and fits in quite well, having been installed in 1989. The fine arcade leans slightly outwards and has beautifully carved capitals, one showing the arms of Torre Abbey which owned land in the parish but which had no obvious connection with the church. There are fine foliate carvings, a green man and the pillars and arches are painted to match the walls as are the window mullions.

The wagon roof contains fragments of carved work and emphasises the three parallel roofs on this church which were reslated in 2010. The pitch pine benches are placed over wooden parquet flooring and have unusual grooves in the seats to provide relief for tired backsides and some carved linenfold panels. The front few rows have been removed. The rest of the floor is slate slabbed with a fine and almost complete monumental brass half under the blue carpet runner near the screen. It commemorates Nicholas Forde who died in 1582 and his wife Margaret who died in 1588, the year of the Armada.

Parts of the church remind us that not everything dates from the reign of Henry VIII. The very fine red sandstone Norman font, similar to those in Ashprington, Cornworthy, Denbury, Paignton and Ugborough, dates from the latter half of the twelfth century. It was particularly admired by W G Hoskins. Like the other five, it has a bold honeysuckle (or acanthus leaf) and cable design. There is also a holy water stoup which predates the present building.



The dark, carved Jacobean pulpit has a slightly diminished look because one of its stages is missing. Another older feature which survives from the early fourteenth century is the sanctuary which is lower than the rest of the church and set at a slight but noticeable angle. The two north windows are blocked but the three fine sedilia and double piscina are present on the south side. Also on the south side of the sanctuary is the only stained glass window in the building, a good Victorian representation of Christ flanked by his mother and St Mary Magdalene. Unusually, the emblems of the Passion are shown above the figures: cross, crown of thorns, three nails and a hammer and tongs. It is a pity that the east window and the windows in the north aisle are of frosted rather than clear glass.

Because of the modern additions (the Narthex) at the west end of the nave the church has a slightly foreshortened appearance. The porch is unusual in that it is slightly hidden from the outside by the Tudor extension of the south aisle.

Over half the monuments on the church walls are to members of the clergy, including the fine box tomb of Richard Sparke MA, a 'minister of the Gospel' who died in 1700 leaving a bequest for bread for the poor to be distributed on Sundays. This practice continues to the present day with loaves of bread sometimes present within the iron railings which surround the tomb.



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Next to the unusual Sparke tomb, at the west end of the south aisle is a large panel with the royal arms of 1680 (Charles II) with wooden panels containing biblical inscriptions placed adjacent in 1727.

The Cholwich family, who occupied the now ruined Oldstone Manor before the Dimes family, have a monument from 1624. A later Cholwich tablet, in the south aisle, contains the words: '...William Cholwich who was drown'd on the coast of Lancasshire [sic] on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1833 aged 31.' The Dimes family succeeded the Cholwichs at Oldstone in 1837. After a suspected murder and arson in 1895 they became respectable, giving the altar to the church during the 1970s.

There is a ring of six bells in the fine, plain Devon tower but no clock. We are left with the impression of a spacious church which possibly witnessed the wedding of Sir Walter Raleigh and Elizabeth Throckmorton. Outside in the extensive churchyard there are many fine slate headstones, mainly on the south side. Among them is the stone of John and Elizabeth Luckraft who died in 1910 and 1913 probably unaware of their American relation H P Lovecraft (1890 – 1937), the influential horror and fantasy writer. On the north side of the church a number of crosses and stones have been toppled. Is this the result of vandalism or obsessive health and safety? The result diminishes this fine churchyard with its varied grave markers.

Best feature: the late Norman sandstone font in its setting.

## Beneficial Memorials

### John Keleher and Lawrence Green

In his excellent book entitled 'Lest Devon Forget' Todd Gray classified the First World War memorials of Devon into two major types: the beneficial and the ornamental. The former type of memorials were intended to be of use to the living, and to enrich the lives of those who lived in the communities from which the dead had been recruited, or had enlisted. The latter type were intended as public statements proudly memorialising the men and women who had died as a result of the conflict. There are a few examples of the former type of memorial (i.e. the beneficial) in and around Totnes; and it is on these that we focus here. In a later article we shall be looking at the ornamental memorials.

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There are instances of communities memorialising the WW1 dead by building a village hall. The only evidence we found of this happening in the locations which we studied were at Diptford (1) and at Dartington. In the Totnes Times of 23 October 1923 there is a report of the opening of the memorial hall at Diptford. This had been put up largely as a result of the efforts of a particularly dynamic rector, a fact noted by Mr E Newman who presided over the opening ceremony, and the generosity of George Northey, who donated the land. In fifteen months the money to cover the building costs had been raised by means of community effort, private donations and an interest-free eight-year loan. Since then a new village hall has been erected and it is on this that Tony Redfern's excellent piece (1) focuses.

We learn from the website (2) that at Dartington there is "[a] charming corrugated iron, single storey building was erected by the village in 1925 to commemorate the fallen of the First World War." These are the only two examples we could find, but would be very interested in learning of any others which were built in the area which we covered which was (you will no doubt recall) the area covered by the parish councils of Ashprington, Berry Pomeroy, Cornworthy, Dartington, Diptford, Halwell and Moreleigh, Harberton, Littlehempston, Marldon, Rattery, South Brent, Staverton, Stoke Gabriel plus Totnes.

Other examples of beneficial memorials in this area are to be found. At Marldon, as in several other communities in the country, a clock was added to the church tower. In Totnes there is still a surviving memorial which falls into this beneficial category; it currently stands outside the Guildhall and it was a generous gift to the town from Mr S P Adams. The major beneficiaries of this memorial, however, were the equine members of the community! As is well known, the main memorial to the Totnes men who failed to return from the war falls within the ornamental category, but as Valerie Price shows in her article entitled 'The Totnes War Memorial (2) numerous other suggestions had been floated before the ornamental stone memorial idea was finally adopted. These included a public recreation ground, a town hall, a swimming pool and a children's play area.

The most contentious of these was the last one. This had originally been the idea of Alderman Windeatt who put it to the Duke of Somerset. However, it failed to win the support of His Grace who replied that he preferred to keep the necessary piece of land in his own hands for the time-being. It was noted that other towns had already unveiled memorials and it was felt that Totnes should not lag behind. This meeting took place in February 1919; in June 1921 the

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present memorial outside St Mary's church was unveiled (3).

Now there are almost certainly other beneficial World War 1 monuments in the area (possibly the garden near the Stoke Gabriel war memorial; possibly the Landscope Victory Hall) If you know of any do please let us know by getting in touch with CONTACT. In a future CONTACT we shall be looking at some of the ornamental memorials.

#### NOTES

- 1) Tony Redfern: A History of Diptford Parish Hall (The master copy is with the parish Archive.)  
[www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk/DartingtonVillageHall](http://www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk/DartingtonVillageHall)
- 2) Valerie Price: Totnes War Memorial Totnes Review No 2.
- 3) Compare this with the time it took to complete the Diptford village hall project!

## Relaxation of Planning Rules

**Civic Voice, Paul Bennett and Sarah Wollaston**

In March 2018 Civic Voice realised a press release about the possible relaxation of planning rules when the National Planning Policy Framework is published. The press release and emails between Paul Bennett (TOTSOC Chair) and local MP Sarah Wollaston are given below.



### **PRESS RELEASE – 1 March 2018** **Civic Voice says relaxing planning rules** **will not solve housing crisis**

Ahead of the long-awaited publication of a consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework by the Government, Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice said:

“We look forward to seeing the much-awaited release of the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework. Outside of local councils, the civic movement is the largest participant in the planning system, so we have years of experience and knowledge of how the NPPF is impacting communities across the country.”



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The formal announcement of the National Planning Policy Framework has yet to be published but is expected week commencing March 5th.

Harvey added: "Civic Voice members reject the notion that good planning is a brake on the economy and housing delivery. On the contrary the best planned places are also the most economically successful."

Ahead of the publication, Civic Voice has highlighted 5 areas of concern as identified by Civic Voice members in its annual member survey, they include:

- Councils are using swathes of green belt for housing to meet housing targets.
- Developers are targeting greenfield sites stating that brownfield sites are unviable. Because there is only a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" and no dedicated brownfield land first policy, developers are interpreting the NPPF to suit their needs.
- The Duty to Co-operate is not working and we are not seeing enough strategic planning working effectively across the country.
- The changes to permitted development rights are undermining the performance of our towns and city centres.
- The planning system needs effective resources, particularly at local authority level, commensurate with the important role it plays. Planning is part of the solution not the problem.

Harvey finished by saying: "We agree with the Government that finding a solution to the housing crisis is essential, but another review of the planning system is only going to add confusion, not certainty. The barrier to house building arises from borrowing restrictions and economic uncertainty, not planning. Investors need certainty and introducing uncertainty through further consultations has negative consequences. If the Government wants to solve the housing crisis, they should look at bringing back into use the estimated 900,000+ empty homes across the UK, 330,00 of which are long term empty."

The National Planning Policy Framework is expected to be published week commencing 5th March and Civic Voice has an All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies meeting taking place on March 13th.

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**Email from Paul Bennett to Sarah Wollaston MP****4<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

Dear Sarah

I should be grateful if you would give support to Civic Voice in opposing the Minister's proposed relaxation of planning rules. Here in the South Hams the fundamental difficulty lies in providing affordable homes and not open market housing.

Historically, housing needs have only been met when public sector housing has been provided alongside the private sector. The remit of commercial developers is to maximise returns for their shareholders, consequently they will develop their landholdings at the rate which achieves this objective regardless of public need.

The relaxation of planning rules will achieve nothing of benefit for the people of South Hams but could result in irreparable harm to both its rural and urban environment.

Best wishes

Paul Bennett

Chair

Totnes and District Society (TOTSOC)

**Email from Sarah Wollaston MP to Paul Bennett****8<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

Dear Paul,


Thank you very much for taking the time to email me.

I am happy to discuss a formal submission from Totsoc with the planning Minister if you would like me to do so once you have looked at this as a group.

We could also meet in a constituency surgery to talk about this more.

Thank you for getting in touch.

Best wishes,



**Dr Sarah Wollaston MP**

## Application to join the Totnes and District Society (TotSoc)

Individual membership fee: £5.00 s/o or £8.00 cash. Joint: £8.00 s/o or £11.00 cash

Please complete the form below. Payment by standing order is much preferred, but if you wish to pay by cheque or cash this is also quite acceptable. The membership year is from 1<sup>st</sup> October.

Name..... Tel.....

Address..... Post Code.....

Email address.....

### STANDING ORDER FORM

TO: (name of your bank).....bank

Please set up the following Standing Order and debit my/our account accordingly

#### 1. Your Bank Account details

Account name..... Account Number:

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Your bank branch..... Sort Code:

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Postal address of your branch (please print)

.....Post code.....

#### 2. Payee details

Name of organisation you are paying: **Totnes & District Society**

Sort code of TOTSOC: **40-52-40**

Account number of TOTSOC: **00027393**

#### 3. About the payment

How often are the payments to be made: **YEARLY**

Amount details: **£5.00 / £8.00 (delete one)**

Date of first payment: **on or after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017**

**until further notice** (payments will be made until you cancel this instruction)

#### 4. Confirmation Customer signature(s)

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Date.....

Please return this completed form to **Jeremy Logie, Totsoc Treasurer,**  
**15 Heath Way, Totnes, TQ9 5GP** He will send the lower section to your bank.

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## TOTSOC on Facebook

TOTSOC now has a Facebook page at:

[www.facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society](http://www.facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society)

## The TOTSOC Committee

The current TOTSOC Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott President	tq9jude@gmail.com
Paul Bennett Chair	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Tom King Secretary and Minute Secretary	tom@seymourvillas.com
Sue Bennett	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
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### Image Credits:

Pages 2, 3, 4, 5

Kathi Green

A form for joining TOTSOC is on the previous page.