



The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC - the Totnes and District Society

Nowadays

John Keleher

Nowadays we seem to be living through a period of time in which statistics, comparisons league tables and whatnot play a big part in our lives. Anything which facilitates comparison is supposed to make our lives easier and, therefore, better. Energy companies, banks, insurance companies, the economic performance of companies and countries and - well, anything you can think of - are all subjected to statistical scrutiny, comparison and ranking. Magazines such as

Which advise us as to the 'best' electric kettle, for example, we should buy. Practically every aspect of our lives is subjected to this kind of statistical analysis and therefore help us to make decisions which are going to improve our lives. But it's not just kettles and car insurance decisions which affect our lives. Even children in our schools are affected by our decision-making guides.

First there's the emphasis on SATs, and later on in the kids' school career there's that first step towards getting a passport to prosperity - five good GCSEs. The schools which come out best in these comparisons can even influence where families live, for in order to ensure that the children gain admission to one of the highly rated schools parents have been known to sell up and buy (usually) a more expensive house in the catchment area of one of the better performing schools; in other words, one which gets the best exam results!

So how do people arrive at the advice they pass on to us? First of all there's statistical comparison which looks at past performance, which is a pretty reliable way of comparing performance! (OK. I remember the old one about lies, damned lies and statistics? But I'm afraid it's the nearest we can get to total impartiality!) This is the kind of evidence that economists use. A second way of sorting it out is to seek the

In this Issue

Nowadays	1
St John's Bridgetown	3
Budgens Development Proposal	7
Archaeology in Leechwell Gdn	9
Tribute to Barrington Weekes	12
Dartington Stones unearthed	13
2019 TOTSC AGM	14
Joining TOTSOC	15
TOTSOC Committee	16
Photo Credits	16

opinion of experts. This is the chosen, perhaps the only, method of ranking chefs, interior designers, and amateur painters who compete against each other in TV programmes

This need to compare and list in order to select the best applies even to church crawling. And here we have to rely on the opinion of the experts. For example, Simon Jenkins has written a book called *England's Thousand Best Churches*; Todd Gray's has published one called *Devon's Fifty Best Churches*; John Lane and Harland Walshaw have – slightly different one - entitled *Devon's Churches: a celebration*.

The question is: how much agreement is there between these experts as to which are the 'best' churches in Devon to visit?

Of the thousand churches which Jenkins rates as the best in England, 33 are in Devon. Each is awarded a Michelin-type star rating, from one to five. Gray does not rank the churches he has selected to include in the book – he has already made his selection and they are in the book! Lane and Walshaw do however set up a system: their top 50 go into a kind of Premier League, and in addition they have another league containing churches which are also 'worth a visit.' But for the purposes of this exercise the second tier is excluded.)

The question is: how far do these experts agree in their ratings?

The answer is: Jenkins agrees with 20 of Gray's 50, Lane and Walshaw agree with 22. In all there are 15 churches which appear on all three lists. And in case anyone is interested they are in no kind of ranking or order. The postcodes might be of help for people who use a satnav to assist them in their church-crawling.

TOTNES (St Mary)	TQ9 5RZ	TORBRYAN (Holy Trinity)	TQ12 5UR
TAWSTOCK (St Peter)	EX31 3HZ	HACCOMBE (St Blaise)	TQ12 4SJ
DARTMOUTH (St Saviour)	TQ6 9DL	ASHTON (St John the Baptist)	EX6 7QR
BERE FERRERS (St Andrew)	PL20 7JL	CREDITON (Holy Cross)	EX17 2AH
HARTLAND (St Nectan)	EX39 6DU	Ottery St Mary (Guess!)	EX11 4SJ
BRANSCOMBE (St Winifred)	EX12 3DA	PARRACOMBE (St Petrock)	EX31 4RJ
PLYMTREE (St John the Baptist)	EX15 2JU	SWIMBRIDGE (St James)	EX32 0PN
TIVERTON (St Peter)	EX16 6NW		

And they really are worth a visit! What's more, all three books contain useful pointers about the kind of thing to look out for when we visit the church.

But on the other hand we may, like Philip Larkin[†], have not a clue about what we're looking at, or

why [we] stopped to enter this accoutred frowsty barn.

Yet stop he did because, as he goes on to say,

it pleases me to stand in silence here.

Larkin was clearly no church historian or number cruncher. He went into churches and looked around simply because he liked doing it! So perhaps it is possible to have

satisfying, fulfilled lives without all the lists, targets, and comparison with other people's performance and taste.

*See 'Churchgoing' in Philip Larkin: Collected Poems (Edited by Anthony Thwaite) page 97

St Johns Bridgetown

Lawrence Green



St John's seen from the burial ground across Weston Road

St John's Church is set in the middle of a conservation area across the river from Totnes on its hill. The tower acts as a counterpoint to the red sandstone tower of St Mary's half a mile away. It is not an old church. It was built by Edward Seymour 11th Duke of Somerset in 1832 in a solid Tudor Gothic style, at the cost of £7,000, too new to be Georgian, too old to be Victorian. It was dedicated to St John the Evangelist as a chapel of ease to St Mary's Church in Berry Pomeroy, possibly replacing a small mediaeval chapel near the Albert Inn. With galleries on three sides it seated seven hundred people.

The first incumbent was Revd. James Shore, a curate known for his radical views and fiery preaching who attracted many dissenters. In 1841 the newly appointed vicar of Berry Pomeroy revoked his licence, bringing Shore into conflict with the Tractarian, or High Church, Bishop of Exeter Henry Philpott who had the church closed for five months in 1843. Seven hundred parishioners signed a petition and St John's became the first Independent Free Church in England, reopening in 1844. Shore continued as minister until 1862 whereupon the church returned to the Anglican fold in 1869.

It is on the former through road from Totnes to the coast, now fortunately eclipsed by the Brutus Bridge which was opened in the early '90s. With the traffic flow reduced the fine late Georgian terraces and seventeenth century jettied house can be properly seen.



St John's – early 20th century

The church is well built in limestone ashlar with a fine tower featuring four crocketed finials above the crenulations. The nave and chancel are in one piece with six integral buttresses on both sides in the manner of King's College, Cambridge. The main body of the church has enormous windows and somewhat dwarfs the tower. Seen from the Newton Road or the marshes downstream from the Albert Inn the view of the tower is pleasing.

There is a fine clock towards the top of the tower which, according to early photographs, was installed quite a long time after the tower was built. It has faces on three sides. Under the clock is an unusual three storey granite gothic window. Below the window is a massive Tudor carved granite doorway with a handsome red-painted double door. Just east of the tower on the north and south sides are smaller versions of the Tudor granite doorcases. The south doorway arch is joined curiously off-centre.

The interior of the church is divided, on the ground floor, between the nave and sanctuary at the east end and the kitchen, lobby and staircase at the west end. There are two war memorial plaques in the lobby; a brass plaque commemorates twenty-seven men who died in World War One and one in Ireland in 1921. The adjoining wooden plaque mercifully only contains four men lost during World War Two.

The reasons for the divisions of the interior of the church are twofold. There are no pillars or arcades in the nave and chancel and the church was gutted by fire in 1976 when a homeless man by the name of Sidney Woodbine set fire to the church either



second floor open space showing window tops

by accident or design. The rebuilding enabled a good reordering of the church to make it into a combined church, hall and committee rooms with a kitchen, lift and toilets on all three floors.

The conversion has been difficult and expensive but the result is a superb facility for the expanding area of Bridgetown. The 1970s rebuilt roof had to be renewed after a few years and the windows, which span all three storeys, rotted and were recently replaced by clear and handsome windows which give a wonderful view over Totnes to the west and Bridgetown rising on its hill to the east.

I must point out that the north and south are liturgical because the church is skewed away from true north and south, being almost perpendicular to St Mary's in Totnes. One needs to cross the road to the liturgical east of the church to the nearby cemetery and orient oneself at the recent grave of a Turkish Muslim man whose headstone faces due east towards Mecca.

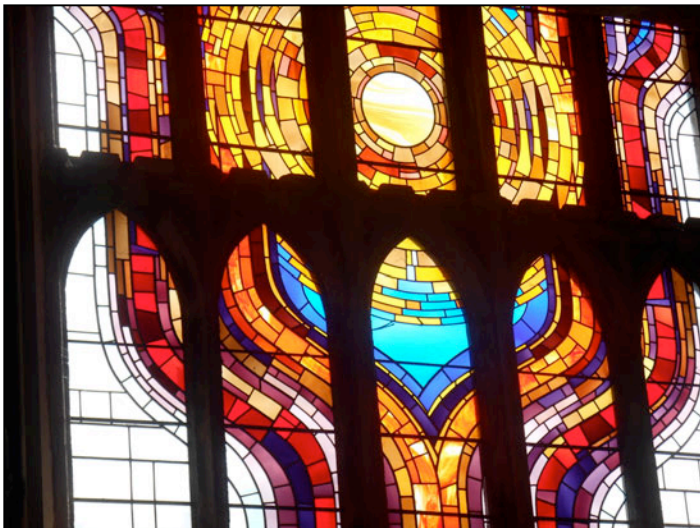
The first floor of St John's offers a good view down into the sanctuary of the church as well as open space for various activities. The second floor contains a large open space with the pointed tops of three of the five side windows and the closed top of the east window. There is also a meeting room with a fine view over Totnes to St Mary's Church.

The nave and sanctuary of the church are in one large room with a very fine modern stained glass window which is only fully visible from the fine forward facing altar.



the Nave showing the altar, organ and stained glass window

The window, designed by Peter Tysoe in 1979, represents the tree of life with a circle in the centre representing the world. To me it appears to be God's hands holding up the world, a beautiful disc which makes me think of a river flowing through a desert.



Stained Glass Window by Peter Tysoe

The fine baroque organ on the south side of the altar with its case of English oak was built by William (Bill) Drake in Buckfastleigh in 1983. The processional cross, made from nails from the ruined church, was designed and made by Phil Betts who taught for years at KEVICC. The Devon Ash altar, lecterns, priest's chairs, and font were designed by Pedro Sutton and the font bowl turned by Rendle Crang. The slate tops were made by Allwoods.

If St John's had been a mediaeval church the excellent reordering extending to three storeys could not have been done. The church is fulfilling its ancient role, that of a community centre, as well as a church in which to worship God. Numerous activities take place at St John's from *Kung Fu* to *Mother and Toddler* groups.

Initial TOTSOC Comments on the development of the Budgens site by Churchill Homes

On Wednesday 4th September Paul Bennett, Kate Wilson, Dave Mitchell and Chris Balch (Emeritus Professor of Planning Plymouth University. MRTPI. MRICS) attended a preview of the proposed development by Churchill Homes of the former Budgens site in central Totnes. Their intention is for around 45 owner-occupied retirement flats with limited parking. A small amount of public parking (10-12 spaces) will be retained. Below is our joint response to their Questionnaire.

Are you supporting/objecting/undecided?

It is not appropriate for TOTSOC to express an opinion at this stage. We welcome the opportunity to engage with the promoters of the scheme and their advisors. We are also pleased that the consultation presented outline ideas that do not appear to be set in stone and that there is a willingness to listen and work with the community. TOTSOC's aim is to help produce a scheme which is of the greatest benefit to Totnes in terms of its content, layout, detailed design and management. Depending on the extent to which the scheme as it evolves addresses the opportunities and concerns expressed below will determine TOTSOC's position on the scheme.

1. Do you support the delivery of specific accommodation for the elderly in this area?

The principal housing need in Totnes is for smaller affordable accommodation. The town has absorbed a substantial amount of new housing in recent years – including the supported accommodation development by the Guinness Trust at Steamer Quay. It is recognised that Churchill are proposing a scheme aimed at facilitating independent living by older people. Like many towns Totnes has an ageing population and the scheme could help meet the needs of local older people and at the same time free up under occupied accommodation to meet the needs of growing families. TOTSOC would not support a scheme which was dependent on

attracting more elderly people into the town with resultant additional pressures on local health and social services. We would therefore seek an approach to marketing the scheme which prioritised sales to local people with focused advertising on the TQ9 postcode. We would not support an approach which imported elderly from outside the area and would expect Churchill to come up with proposals for minimising this possibility.

2. Do you feel that the site identified is an appropriate site for retirement apartments?

In general terms yes, provided that the design and layout does not result in a 'fortress' which segregates the residents from the wider community.

3. Are there any features of the development that you like?

- Retention of pedestrian access through the site – maintaining permeability
- Retention of some public car parking
- Potential for the creation of high quality public realm improvements enabling the site to produce shared quality spaces for residents and local people.
- Limited level of resident parking (with the opportunity to provide car club/electric car)
- Opportunity (explained verbally) to use sustainable ground source heating and deliver high environmental standard in building
- Interest in reflecting local materials and design feature into the scheme to ensure that it is 'of Totnes' rather than a pattern book scheme.
- Retention of shop spaces within the scheme to ensure an element of mixed use. Consideration should be given to providing a further retail unit to support the viability of the existing shops.

4. Are there any features of the development that you do not like?

- The large L shaped block. This offends the conservation content of the site and leads to unsympathetic massing. Pictures of other Churchill Retirement Lodges available at the consultation show them to be quite 'blocky' structures. There needs to be a real effort to fit the development into the historic environment of Totnes. The starting point should not be the former supermarket building but the figure ground of the medieval town which is characterised by burgage plots running perpendicular to the High Street. If the aim is to produce a built form which can accommodate between 40 and 50 apartments the developer should explore alternative building forms which reflect the historic context and enable variability to be produced in both wallscape and roofscape. Does the building need to be all 3 storey? Could it not vary between 2 and 4 storey?

-
- Primary building access at the rear of the scheme. TOTSOC would like to see the ‘front door’ of the accommodation facing towards the High Street to encourage walking and use of the town’s facilities rather than being tucked round the back by the car park. This needs to be more of a service access rather than ‘front door’
 - Private/exclusive use of the garden space. This is a missed opportunity to provide a high quality shared space. While recognising the challenge of creating defensible space the scheme needs to avoid the ‘privatisation’ of spaces which operate as part of the public realm. There is an opportunity to work with the community to achieve something of value to both residents and the community as has been achieved at the Leechwell Garden, the Lamb, and the Shady Garden.

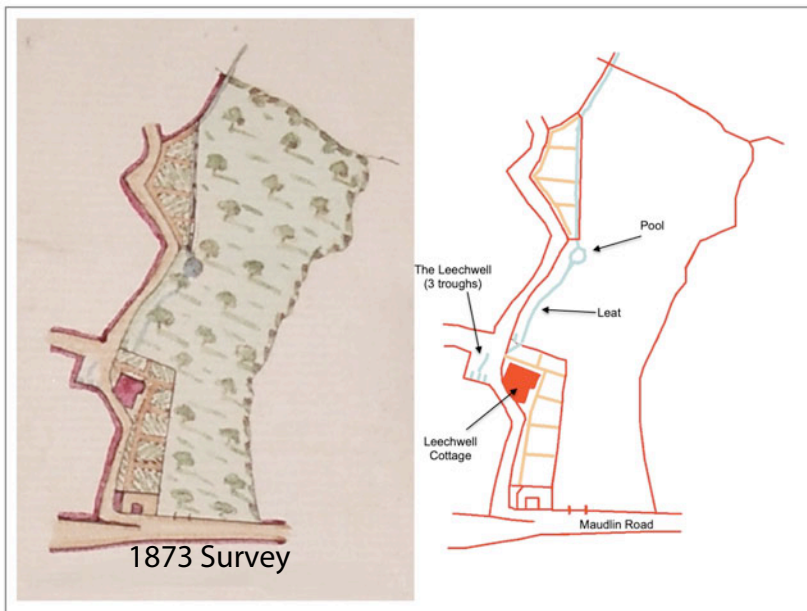
5. Have you got any other comments?

- Need to ensure that the development makes a proper contribution to affordable housing in Totnes. TOTSOC would support this being achieved through a contribution towards off site provision, particularly if this could be targeted towards younger people.
- The development is likely to add to pressure on health and social provision and a contribution should be made towards enhancing the town’s services in this area.
- The development should achieve net zero standard. New developments should not be accepted which do not reach this standard given the Climate Emergency declared in Totnes, South Hams and Devon. There is an opportunity to use renewable sources – ground heat source and solar generation.
- The site investigations will need to address potential archaeological interest.
- The site needs to deliver enhanced ecological values. Given the development of much of the site this might include green roofs and living walls perhaps fed by rainwater harvesting.

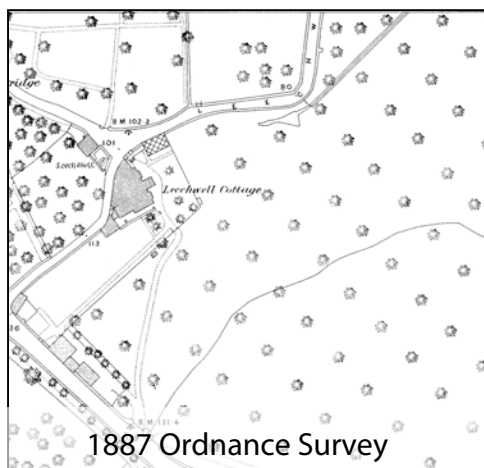
Archaeological Exploration in the Leechwell Garden

Dave Mitchell, Leechwell Garden Association

There’s a fenced off area in the Leechwell Garden in Totnes that contains the immersion pool, a scheduled ancient monument. The pool is fed by water from the Leechwell, conveyed to the pool via a pipe that runs under the footpath most of the way before going under the garden wall near the pool.



1873 Survey



1887 Ordnance Survey

But 19th century documents make it clear that this is not how it used to be. In 1864 Leechwell Cottage was sold with the claim that “a perpetual stream of the celebrated Leechwell Water runs through the premises”. The survey above dates from 1873 and clearly shows a stream running through the garden of Leechwell Cottage, with the pool where it is now. And the 1887 Ordnance Survey map on the left shows the remains of a leat leading into the pool as well as a stream leading from it.

Back in 2012 the pool was emptied and archaeologist John Clipson did a detailed survey for us that revealed that the pool needed to be repaired, and plans to do this were drawn up by Charlotte Rathbone. At the time a Japanese knotweed infestation prevented the work - this is why the water is currently carried over the pool by a plastic pipe – any knotweed spores in the pool would have found their way down to the stream that runs behind the houses in Moorashes. In any case while we could do a non-invasive emptying and survey, without permission from Historic England we were unable to do the necessary excavations to locate any sign of the old leat.

Recent discussions with Historic England have led to a plan to do the necessary archaeological work, with their help, in the near future. If the path of the original leat is located we plan to alter the supply pipe so it discharges into a reconstructed leat, supplying the pool as it did in the 19th century.

At the same time the Leechwell Garden Association has raised the necessary funds to complete phase 1 of the project to landscape and plant much of the fenced-off area and install some seating.

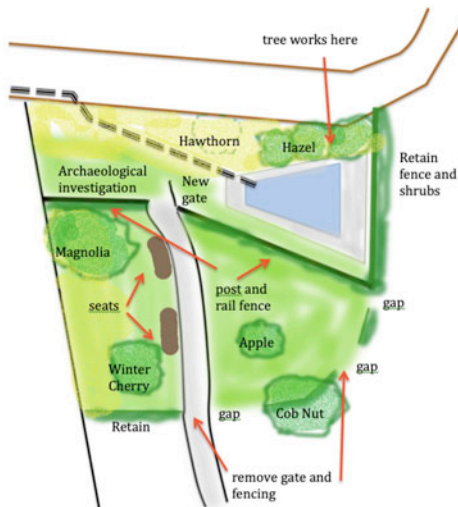
Possible new pipe outlet and spout location



As you can see from the drawing below, we plan to fence off the pool and surroundings and by opening gaps in the hedging make the rest of the area more accessible to the rest of the garden. The fencing and planting will be done this autumn.

Leechwell Garden Pool Project – Phase 1

<p>Hard Surfaces Pool Edges: stone Path and seat area: hoggin Shallow Steps to Pool: limestone scalplings Benches: Timber New water outlet: to be decided</p>
<p>Meadow Underplant: English bluebells, primroses, michaelmas daisies, etc Strim 2x per annum</p>
<p>Shrubby Cover: Buddleia, fuschia, cornus, elder etc. Underplant: bluebells, foxgloves Cut back 2x per annum</p>
<p>Dense Ground Cover Ferns, hellebore, ivy, wild strawberry etc. Underplant: cyclamen, snowdrops, fritillaries etc. Thorny wild roses along wall. Weed as needed</p>



Trees	
Existing	Magnolia Cobnut Hazel Apple
New	Crabapple (Yellow Hornet?) Winter Flowering Cherry Hawthorn (Glastonbury?) Small Birch x 3 (Betula medwedewii)
Hedge (already planted)	Native species, wildlife-friendly mixture: Green Beech, Blackthorn, Elder, Guelder Rose, Hazel, Green and Silver Holly, Field Maple, Evergreen and English Oak,

- Tasks
1. install post and rail fence and new gate
 2. tree works (safety)
 3. remove fence and create gaps in shrubs
 4. install benches
 5. establish meadow
 6. plant hedging
 7. reinstate path
 8. tree planting

A tribute to Barrington Harvey Weekes

John Keleher

Barrington (Barry) Weekes' contribution to Totnes is being acknowledged at the end of October when he will be posthumously awarded the freedom of the town by the Council. Around the same time there will be various events which further demonstrate the contribution made by this remarkable man. He was not a native of the place by any means: he was born and brought up on the outskirts of London and later he and his wife Jo lived and worked in a variety of places, including Sussex and Bristol before they came to Totnes in 1980. It was here that they put down roots and immediately began to make a mark.

Barry was a man of few words – and occasionally the ones he uttered could be pretty cutting – but you could always guarantee that they were sincere and spoken from the heart! He was, in addition, an enviably practical person, having proved himself capable of building a house; maintaining and repairing vehicles - even Land Rovers[†]; designing and building an extensive model railway system and so on. I am convinced that he was capable of tackling any problem which required vision, patience and practical ability. This is not something that we had in common – as Barry 'gently' pointed out to me one afternoon!

The Weekes settled here in 1980. Barry took a course in photography and set up a business in Bridgetown. This part of the town remained a central feature in Jo and Barry's lives. Not only were their home and the business located there, Barry was for many years, along with a number of Totnes notables, an active and vocal member of the Bridgetown 'Parliament', which was held in the back -bar of the Albert Inn a couple of times a week.

But it was pictures that were, as they say, Barry's thing; for it was with pictures that he made his mark and it was with pictures that he made his greatest contribution as far as Totnes is concerned. Over the next few years, in addition to running the business, he undertook assignments on behalf of the local Press and other organisations which required visual material. His talents in that field became increasingly recognised, both locally and beyond.

After eight years Barry retired from professional photography. As Val Price notes in her tribute to Barry - which, by the way, will appear in the Totnes Directory - it was then that he acquired the photographs of Nicholas Horne* and Eric Morison both of whom were professional photographers who had run businesses in the High Street. These

[†]Perhaps that had something to do with his preference for watching Formula One racing on television rather than the Six Nations Tournament!

^{*}Hilary Durbin, the daughter of Nicholas Horne and his wife Fay (who was herself a photographer of considerable reputation) recalls how her mother, on her death bed, handed over to her a large collection of photographs, at the same time instructing her to "Give these to Barrington Weekes. He'll know what to do with them!" Indeed he did, and it is we and successor generations who are the beneficiaries.

collections, together with the material that Barry had taken himself during the eight or so years that he had lived in Totnes, formed the basis of the collection of photographs which make up the data base of the Totnes Image Bank which Barry established in 1988.

This database is a unique collection of over 50,000 photographic images which have been taken over the last hundred years or so; it records the major events which have taken place, and it also shows us the people of Totnes - as well as in some of the surrounding areas - and their way of life. This database is a living, growing organism; a resource for schools and individuals to draw upon in the quest to find out about the past. For without an awareness and some understanding of their past, individuals and societies as a whole both lack a solid foundation for an appreciation of the world in which they find themselves. We in Totnes and the surrounding district, via the Image Bank and with the help and guidance of Val Price and the team of volunteers, have the potential for acquiring some of this awareness.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Barry for his vision in providing the town with this invaluable resource such as this – which, I guess, is why the Town Council will be bestowing the honour on him at the end of October.

I am grateful to Campbell Drysdale for sharing some of his thoughts on Barry with me. Over a period of many years Campbell was a close friend of Barry's, as well as being his regular chess opponent.

Old Dartington Primary School Stones Unearthed

Kate Wilson

The summer holidays are often an opportunity for schools to carry out work which can be difficult when students are on site, but sometimes it pays to keep an eye on what is going on. Simon McInness, a recently co-opted member of Dartington Parish Council, noticed in August that contractors were working at the Old Dartington Primary School site, now occupied by the Wave Academy. The old play area was being levelled and in the process some very large stones were unearthed. On closer inspection these were revealed to be 24 shaped and carved old building stones. Simon asked the contractors what the plan for the stones was and was told they were going to be moved to St Austell. This raised alarm bells; the site is listed, and any stones buried there probably form part of its heritage and should remain in situ. Staff at the Wave Academy agreed that the stones should be stored on site while more information was gathered.

Simon took some photos and started contacting people to find out more. Everyone was interested in the find, but not many people could shed any light. Richard Gage from SHDC, local historian James Bellchambers, and Bill Homer the Devon County Archaeologist had a look at the photos and eventually the fog began to clear. It seems that the stones are limestone, probably late 19th or 20th century, possibly coping stones from a building that was added to the school buildings, or perhaps



from a rebuild of the perimeter wall. Old OS maps seem to show different configurations of buildings on the site and an RAF aerial photograph map of 1947 clearly shows an outbuilding on the site.

What building the stones were once part of may never be clear, and why the stones were buried is also a mystery – they are large, and there are quite a few of them so it might just have been the easiest thing to do.

However, since the stones have been dug up again, a new use needs to be found for them which ensures that they are visible and will stay in Dartington. There are hopes that the very large stones could be incorporated into Village Gateways about which the Council is in discussions with DCC Highways, or even as a feature on the rather nondescript mini roundabout. The smaller stones will hopefully be used by the Wave Academy which is planning a memorial on the school grounds.

If you have more knowledge or information about the previous buildings or structures on the old primary school site these stones might have once been part of, we're interested to know more .

[2019 TOTSOC AGM](#)

The TOTSOC AGM will be held at the, Totnes Boating Association, Steamer Quay Road on Wednesday 23rd October 2019, starting at 7pm. It will be followed by:

“Wanted! Market Towns: dead or alive?”

a talk by Chris Balch, Emeritus Professor of Geography, Plymouth University.

Entry by donation (£3.00 non-members - £2.00 members)

Application to join TotSoc (The Totnes Civic Society)

Individual annual membership fee: £5.00; family membership: £8.00

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 1st 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:

20-60-88

Account number of TOTSOC:

50878642

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 1st October 2019**

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 then send the lower section it to your bank.

TOTSOC on Facebook

TOTSOC now has a Facebook page at:

www.facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society

The TOTSOC Committee

The current TOTSOC Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott President	tq9jude@gmail.com
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Sue Bennett	paulandsuebennett@gmail.com
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Kate Wilson Planning Officer	katewilsondeane@gmail.com
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A form for joining TOTSOC is on the previous page.

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