



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

### Totnes Secrets

Judy Westacott

What is hidden behind the doors of many of the listed buildings in Fore Street and High Street?

Over the years many 'treasures' have been unearthed and it is likely that there are still more things waiting to be discovered.

Following the Eastgate fire in 1990, a casement window, and, amongst other things wells, were revealed, photographed and then covered up again when the buildings affected by the fire were restored.

How many people walking up the hill realise that some of the buildings have ornate plaster ceilings? Ornamental plaster work, as a sign of wealth, is centuries old and the wealthy Totnes merchants were quick to adopt this fashionable trend.

Initially, plaster was made by heating lime or chalk making quick lime, and water and sand added to make a sort of putty. Before it was used, cow or goat hair was added as a binding agent. Once hardened, a finishing coat was applied - probably lime and fine sand. Some years later the putty was put into moulds before application.

There is no record of the skilled plasterers who were responsible for the Totnes ceilings, but it is thought that all the skilled work in Devon was carried out by small family businesses.

The importance of the ceilings in Totnes should not be underestimated as they are an integral part of the town's history, so, as you walk past the shops and businesses, be aware that there are treasures not only on the outside of our listed buildings, but, in some cases inside as well.

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## All Saints Church, Morleigh

Lawrence Green

Morleigh, once spelled Morley and Moreleigh, lies on a ridge a long half mile from Halwell. The village street has been enhanced by mainly affordable houses which match the existing houses in scale and design. The church lies a few hundred yards from the village down a short, narrow lane off the road to Gara Bridge.



**All Saints seen from Parsonage Lane, Morleigh**

According to legend a local landowner, Sir Peter Fitzacre or (de) Fishacre, killed the parish priest of nearby Woodley in a quarrel over tithes. The Pope ordered him to build a church as penance in his farmyard at Morleigh. In either 1239 or 1289 he did so and was eventually buried half in and half out of the church under the south transept wall.

So far, so good, except that there are traces of earlier work in the church walls and a fine Norman font from the late twelfth century stands near the south door. So wicked Sir Peter built the south transept and probably improved and enlarged the rest of the church or left money for it to be done.

From the outside the church seems to crouch in the centre of its gently sloping churchyard above the lane that leads to it and to a number of nearby farms. Enter through an elegant lych gate re-roofed in 2008. Go into the church through the south porch, built in the seventeenth century, through a late nineteenth century studded wooden door. The church is always open.

The uncluttered interior consists of an early fifteenth century nave, choir and sanctuary, an earlier thirteenth century south transept, and a narrow south aisle added in the fifteenth century.

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The nave and south aisle are separated by a magnificent three arch granite arcade with four piers with plain capitals. Both the north wall and the arcade lean slightly outwards in opposite directions.

There is no chancel arch and no screen remaining. The nave and chancel ceiling is a delicate plaster moulded wagon roof dating from the seventeenth century, with transverse crossed ribs painted red and gold in the sanctuary and plain white in the choir and nave.



**The nave and altar showing the moulded plaster wagon roof**

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Of the same age is the painted pulpit and tester that possibly covers the door to the former rood screen.



**The pulpit and tester**

Above the south aisle is the original fifteenth century carved ribbed ceiling with bosses covering the joints. In the west corner, above the door, the plaster has come down revealing the interior structure of the woodwork.



**The south aisle and below detail of the fallen plaster**



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The floor is level, consisting of Victorian red encaustic tiles and wooden parquets, with some good ledger stones from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A modern granite step leads up to the choir, a similar plinth supports the altar.

The pine Victorian benches on the north side of the nave are reputedly cut down from panelled box pews. The south side of the nave and the south aisle have suitable modern chairs of a good design.

The oldest feature of the church is the Norman font which is plain with entwined rope courses near the top. The interior and top of the font are painted the same blue as once was the door. The four stone columns which support the bowl of the font and the stone base are correct modern replacements.

There is the remains of a vaulted tomb on the north side of the sanctuary and a similar structure on the south side of the transept which is the unmarked and unusual tomb of Sir Peter Fitzacre/ (de) Fishacre who was denied burial in the church despite his atonement in rebuilding the church. It is now situated in the curtained off vestry.

On the granite step to the choir is a fragment of the late fifteenth century screen, cut down and painted in modern times, now used as a lectern or missal stand. The paint clashes slightly with the more restrained pastel hues of the pulpit.



**The lectern or missal stand**

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There is a fine painted royal coat of arms on a wooden panel on the north wall dated 1714. The tower has been separated from the nave by unobtrusive glazing. There are three small fifteenth century bells in the tower, cast, unusually, in Exeter. Apparently there were once six.

On the way out to the churchyard a wrought iron gate can be seen closing off the porch. It reads:

V E DAY 1995  
IN MEMORY OF  
FRIENDS SONS AND LOVERS  
Who never came back  
1939 – 1945  
FROM THOSE WHO DID  
MAY 1995

The irony of this memorial, heartfelt and possibly composed by someone fond of D H Lawrence, is that, as far as I know, nobody from the then parish of Morleigh was killed in either the First or Second World War. If this is proved to be the case then Morleigh will turn out to be a 'Thankful Village', the only one in South Devon.

Standing in the churchyard we can see that the tower and church building are of random stone, mainly shale with occasional quartz, which was once covered in render. The tower is plain, unbuttressed, and slightly tapered. It is fourteenth century with later crenulations on top and archaic round arched windows in pairs on three sides. There is no clock because there are few houses around to see it.

The windows in the church are nearly all original and ill matched, with two blocked gothic windows in the north walls of the sanctuary and choir between the massive exterior buttresses. They are all made of granite and Beer stone and were not replaced in Victorian times. The one Victorian window is at the east end above the altar. The fact that the various windows have round as well as pointed gothic arches indicates a lagging behind of style which is charmingly provincial.

The churchyard has two entrances and a profusion of wild flowers in the spring and summer. It is not ruthlessly shorn but sensibly managed in a more natural and sympathetic way. There are no graves earlier than the two early nineteenth century table tombs east of the church. Some of the tall gravestones are covered in orange lichen.

The church is unusually not battlemented and has a remote feel. It is well cared for and regularly used. Visitors are few; nobody had signed the visitors' book for nearly three weeks. It is a church well worth visiting and a good example of a building mostly left alone by the Victorians.

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# The Bridgetown Burial Ground Mapping Project

Dave Mitchell

At the end of 2018 I was approached by Roger Tilbury who asked if I could help with a project to map the burial ground of St John's church that lies to the south of Weston Road in Bridgetown. He knew that I took aerial photos and wondered if I could take some of the graveyard that could be used as the basis for a detailed map. The burial ground, like the church, is 19<sup>th</sup> century and has several hundred graves. However there appears to be **no map** showing who is buried where! Roger's local group hope to fix that problem.

I explained to Roger that **my** aerial photos are taken using a radio-controlled camera lofted by a kite and that there was little likelihood of me managing to fly a kite over the burial ground – there's no convenient launch site and the burial ground is home to many tall kite-consuming trees. I did say that it would be possible to take aerial photos using a quad copter drone but that to do so required an expensive licence from the CAA – it's illegal to fly drones over 'congested areas' without such a licence.



**The burial ground from Weston Road, showing some of the many trees**

These things stood until April last year when I mentioned the problem to my friend Bill Blake, in Cambridge. Like me, Bill is a keen kite aerial photographer but he is also a qualified drone pilot and more importantly an expert in surveying and documenting buildings and archaeological sites (he worked for English Heritage for many years). He offered his services in exchange for accommodation and meals, which I was happy to provide.



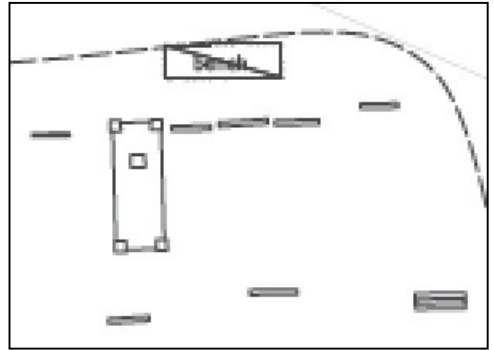
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Accordingly in August 2019 Bill stayed with me in Totnes for a couple of days and armed with the necessary flight plans and permissions took many aerial photos of the burial ground using his DJI Mavic Pro quad copter, taking not just vertical shots but also angled shots so that a 3D model could be built. With such a model it is possible to remove inconvenient objects like the upper parts of trees. Unfortunately, as anyone familiar with the graveyard will know, it has many trees with branches so close to the ground that quite a sizeable area could not be mapped properly.

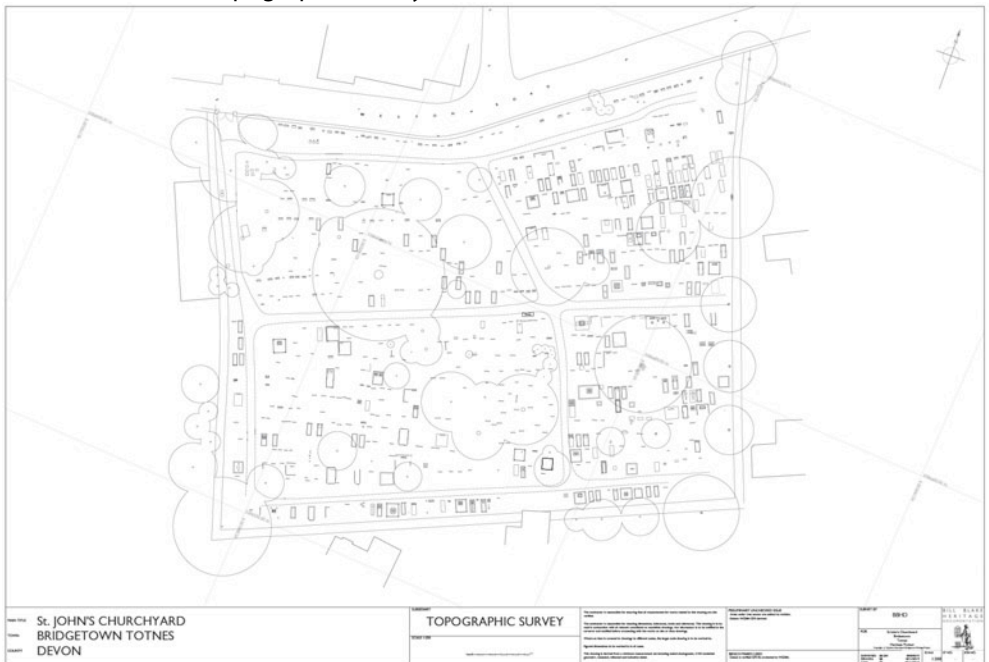


**Aerial photo of the whole burial ground with summer foliage  
(considerably reduced in size)**

As a result, Bill returned to Totnes in early December when some of the trees had lost their leaves and took more drone photos. He also brought his computerised surveying equipment so that he and I could map those graves which were still invisible from above. We were also able to properly measure key distances so that the computerised model was dimensionally accurate.



On the left is a detail from close to the centre of the summer photo – on the right the same area in the topographic survey



### Bill's topographic survey (considerably reduced in size)

After a **considerable** amount of expert computer processing Bill produced a detailed topographic survey (at a scale of 1:200) of the burial ground. The survey, roughly A1 in size, was then printed on 4 A3 sheets. So now Roger and his group can proceed to annotate Bill's plan with the details of who is buried under each gravestone!

# The Brutus Centre Retirement Units (formerly Budgens Store)

Paul Bennett



## **Churchill Retirement Living – Proposed Layout**

*Note: The planning application is available at the SHDC website – its reference number is 4198/FUL/19.*

Is this what Totnes wants or needs? Had there been a vote, the answer surely would have been “NO” (although a few of our members are delighted and have made reservations!).

The hope was that this site would provide a public/community facility to enhance the town centre and bring vibrancy to a dead area. But this was not to be.

Planning legislation in recent years has made it much easier to change existing uses and the view was taken here that it would be difficult to oppose successfully the proposal for retirement home units.

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Strong views were expressed that if the change were to be for housing then it should be to provide housing for young people. Totnes already has an above average of older people and there are outstanding planning consents for further retirement housing. However the reality is that there were no likely proposals for young persons housing coming forward. The site had been vacant for several years and overall national demand for retirement homes was considerable and increasing. Again the view was taken, albeit reluctantly, that there was little chance of opposing the principle of retirement units. Having taken this decision it remains crucial that the design and layout does not result in a 'fortress' which segregates the residents from the wider community.

Churchill has throughout shown a genuine willingness to work with the town and held two consultations last year. After the first consultation in September TOTSOC produced initial comments (circulated to members) many of which Churchill has accommodated.

Importantly we wanted the development to provide housing for local older persons which would free up under occupied accommodation elsewhere in the town to meet the needs of growing families.

In terms of design we felt that the development should be 'of Totnes' rather than a 'pattern book scheme'. There needed 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 reflect the pattern of the medieval town characterised by Burbage plots running perpendicular to the High Street.

The planning application has now been registered and is available from the SHDC website under the reference 4198/FUL/19. Churchill has emphasised that this is "a point in time" and not "set in stone" so that further changes can and almost certainly will be made during the planning process.

The present proposal has already undergone two public consultations and been subject to a Design Review Panel which is reflected in this application. The Panel made 'Sustainability' a key consideration having regard to the "Climate Change Emergency" declared by the Council. This applies both to the construction and materials, also methods of heating where Churchill is proposing the installation of ground source heat pumps. The Panel also posed the question of "less parking". This could give scope for better design but face opposition within the town. Presently 25 public spaces are provided. The private parking for residents is 14 spaces.

Many suggestions were made regarding Siting and Landscaping which will be a vital factor in determining whether in visual terms the development is to be a success. The public and private interest conflicts here with residents not unnaturally wanting the open space to be private whereas the town's interest would be better served by another 'Shady Garden'.

The development is within a conservation area and close to many listed buildings, in particular St. Mary's Church, and it must not detract from their settings. Although it is clear from the Design and Access Statement that a lot of trouble has been taken to avoid this, there may well be views that will in fact be compromised and further study needed.



**Current and Provisional Proposed View from Station Road**

The site does present problems, certainly so far as light to the apartments is concerned. The west side of the site is bordered by a very high wall which will impact severely on light reaching the units facing west except in high summer and those situated at the northern end of the site. Although the apartments facing north will have a reasonably open outlook the amount of sunlight reaching them will be small and then only in mid summer. The small number of units facing south (towards the back of Fore Street) should receive a reasonable amount of sun. The units facing east will receive plenty of natural light and the early sunshine.

Two additional retail units are planned adjacent to the existing shops and facing out towards Fore Street which should support the present units and create a viable entity.



**Public access from Fore Street showing the proposed two retail units**

Further consideration should be given to the position of the main entrance where the footway leading to it from the Fore Street side is oppressive and threatening because of the very high wall flanking the western boundary. The array of rubbish bins will make an unsavoury contribution to the already off-putting entrance. There is no easy answer but maybe the main entrance might be relocated to the east side near to the public car park.

The Design Review Panel makes the point that the general character of the area away from Fore Street is 20<sup>th</sup> century and that a more contemporary design may be acceptable.

Churchill has given a great deal of thought to the representations made to it in putting forward proposals for the site. However both we and the Design Review Panel remain unconvinced that the main entrance should be situated on the west side of the site for the reasons previously stated.

More discussions are therefore needed to resolve the outstanding issues and hopefully these can take place in the same spirit as has typified previous ones.

## 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 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: **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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020**

**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.

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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:

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Tom King Secretary and Minute Secretary	secretary.totsoc@gmail.com
Sue Bennett	paulandsuebennett@gmail.com
Jeremy Logie Treasurer and Membership Secretary	jeremy.logie@talk21.com
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Jim Carfrae	jim.carfrae@plymouth.ac.uk
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Dave Mitchell Webmaster and Contact Editor	dave@zenoshrdlu.com
Anne Ward Public Art & Design Subcommittee	irishannie1949@gmail.com

A form for joining TOTSOC is on the previous page.

### Image Credits:

Pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Kathi Green
Page 8	Dave Mitchell
Pages 9, 10	Bill Blake
Pages 11, 13, 14	planning <i>issues</i> (for Churchill Retirement Living)