



The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC - the Totnes and District Society

Notice of TOTSOC AGM

Tom King

The TOTSOC AGM will take place at the Totnes Boating Association on Steamer Quay Road, Totnes on Thursday 28th October 2021 at 7pm. It will be followed at 7:30pm by a talk by Rob Hopkins, the Co-founder of Transition Town Totnes and Transition Network. He is a director of Totnes Community Development Society, the group behind Atmos Totnes, an ambitious, community-led development project.

There will be an entry charge for the presentation of £3 for members and £4 for non-members payable at the door to help towards the cost of the venue.

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2018 AGM and matters arising
3. Annual Report of the Chair
4. Hon Treasurer's Report
5. Other Officer Reports
6. Election of Officers and Members to the Committee
7. Any Other Business

The present officers and committee members (listed on page 16 of this edition of CONTACT) are prepared to continue in office but should you wish to make any nominations for either officers or committee members please contact the Secretary prior to the meeting.

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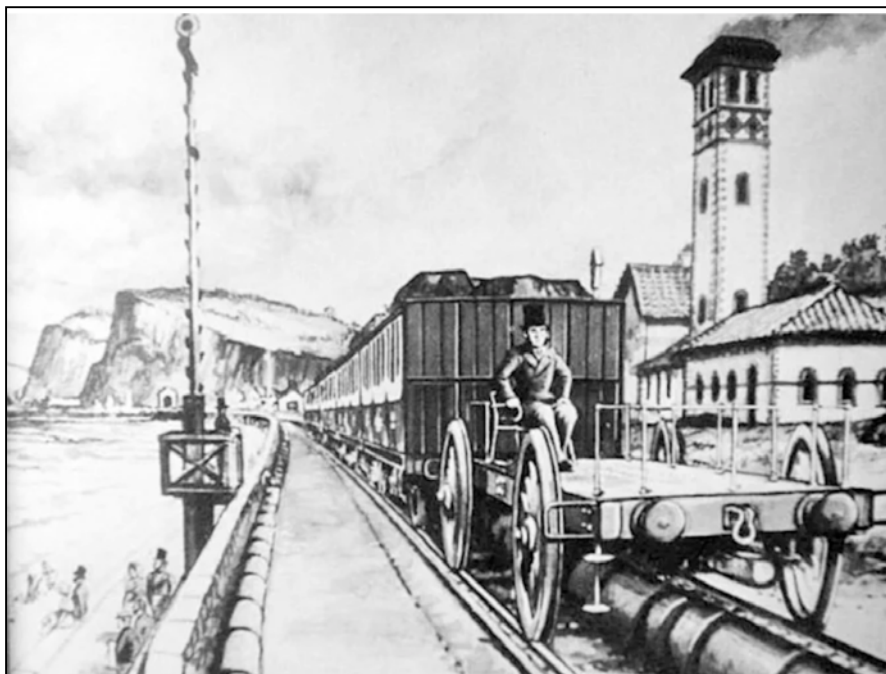
Totnes and the Impact of the Railway

Paul Bennett

(with kind help from Jill Drysdale and the Totnes Archive)

The Railway came to Totnes on 20th July 1847 but not without competition from Buckfastleigh with its established woollen mills and other industries and Ashburton a stannary and woollen town, both of whom were on the coaching road from Plymouth to Exeter. However the South Devon Railway decided to adopt a more southerly course which took it through Teignmouth, Newton Abbot and then on to Totnes.

Trains themselves did not start running until December 1847. The line was constructed as part of the "Atmospheric " railway from Exeter to Newton Abbot but problems had arisen with this particularly with the gradients between Newton and Totnes. Consequently steam engines resumed pulling the trains. The line was extended to Plymouth in 1848. What was to be the pumping house for the Atmospheric Railway remains disused next to the station.



Atmospheric Railway at Dawlish

The construction of a branch line from Totnes to Ashburton was completed in 1872 and carried significant amounts of goods traffic before the general growth of road haulage caused its decline and ultimate closure.

The coming of the railway soon had a substantial impact. Horseracing is believed to have started in the town on the site now occupied by the Industrial Estate as far back as the mid -1870s with steeplechasing thought to have arrived as early as 1846. The racing was no more than half a mile from the new Totnes station and had previously taken place partly over the area where the railway now runs.

Two day racing fixtures became popular and attracted crowds of 50,000 people the great majority of whom arrived by train from many of the stations along line from Exeter and continuing towards Plymouth. It was not only people but many of the horses taking part all arrived by train. Whether the horses and people shared the same carriages is not mentioned. Boys who had previously earned a few shillings from runners arriving from Plymouth at the Bull Inn now transferred for more lucrative rewards to the railway yard close to Broadmarsh and the Course itself.



Totnes Station in 1923

Note the signal box is on the down platform here

Sadly horse racing in Totnes came to an end with the outbreak of the Second World War and the declaration banning all outdoor sports. The Admiralty requisitioned the racecourse during the war where it was used to build minesweepers. The course was left in a poor state and notwithstanding several attempts to restore it these were to no avail and the course was finally closed in 1960.

A market was held there but subsequent to that the present Industrial Estate has been developed.

The Quay branch railway running for about three quarters of a mile was a direct consequence of the railway reaching Totnes and the opening of the line to Buckfastleigh. It opened in November 1873 and served Totnes Market, South Devon Farmers, Symond's Cyder and the quay itself. Although worked by locomotives as far as the A385 to Paignton from there trucks were horse drawn until replaced by a tractor in 1950. A substantial part of the traffic was the timber unloaded at Baltic Wharf, which as its name suggests was imported from the Baltic and transported by goods trains from Totnes station. This trade ceased finally in 1969.



Totnes Quay in 1966

Although the railway impacted upon the town in numerous ways it did not have any great bearing upon the growth of the town itself. According to White's Devonshire Directory of 1850 the Totnes parish in 1801 had "2503 souls". This increased to 3442 in 1831 and by including Bridgetown within the borough of Totnes "swelled its total population to about 4000 souls".

However the advent of the railway would have resulted in many more visiting the town. The 1850 Directory is full of kind words "The situation of Totnes is remarkably fine" and clearly would have attracted visitors coming by train. "The Seven Stars and the Seymour Hotel are large and well conducted establishments" and would have catered for those visitors. As an

aside and with the benefit of hindsight what a terrible planning mistake it was to allow the change of use of the Seymour Hotel.

Unlike most small towns Totnes with a present population of about 8 million has kept its station and services. To what do we owe this?

With the closure of all the other stations within South Hams and the closure of the Kingsbridge branch line Totnes has gradually established itself as a railhead for the area with the number of passengers using it having steadily increased over the years to a record high in 2019/20 of 725,000. Two of the principal institutions using it are the Royal Naval Dartmouth College and Dartington Hall.



Ashburton terminus circa 1950

Living in Totnes/Dartington we benefit greatly from the use by our neighbouring residents of South Hams which has resulted in virtually all express trains now stopping in Totnes in addition to local and cross country services. Recent timetable improvements mean many faster journeys.

Totnes is unique as a small town in having through train services to virtually all parts of the country except the East and South East where changes are necessary. There is even one through train a day to Aberdeen in addition to through services to the Midlands and North as well of course to London.

Global warming is upon us and Totnes prides itself on actively supporting all measures to combat this so leave your car behind and let the train take the strain and feel smug when you do. Gazing at the countryside from a train window can be a very agreeable and soothing experience in itself.

'Honeysuckle' Fonts in South Devon

Lawrence Green

In 1170 Thomas a Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and thorn in the King's side, was murdered by four knights in a side chapel of Canterbury Cathedral. In France the new Gothic style of architecture was just beginning to influence the design of churches and cathedrals in England. In South Devon the Norman, or Romanesque, style was still alive and well. The fonts at St David's in Ashprington, St Peter's in Cornworthy and St George's in Dittisham, all date from around 1170 and beautifully show two styles of late Norman craftsmanship.



Ashprington Font

Fonts are often the oldest object present in a church. Many predate the building of the church and show that an older church building was present on the site. Devon is not known for its Norman churches; only one church, St Mary Arches, exists in Devon with a complete Norman arcade.

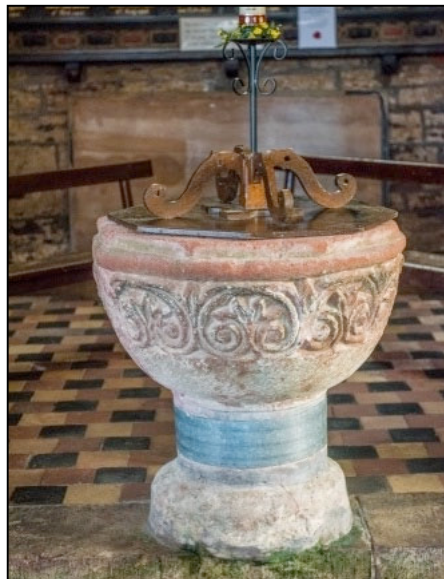
Most Devon churches were built in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and replaced much older church buildings. Many Norman fonts survive in Devon churches. Some were thrown out and used as drinking troughs to be rescued by observant Victorian restorers.



South Brent Font

The red sandstone fonts at St David's and St Peter's, along with another ten similar fonts in South Devon, were called 'Honeysuckle' fonts by the archaeologist Kate Clarke.

They all share variations on a striking honeysuckle or linked palmette motif which encircles the outside of the bowl, along with cable mouldings and, in some cases, a saw tooth frieze. Each font is unique, sharing roughly the same decorations with variations.



Dartmouth Font

The twelve fonts were all probably made by the same craftsmen close to where the red sandstone had been quarried; Goodrington is suggested by one writer. He speculates that many of them were completed and brought by sea and river to the churches in which they are situated, thus minimising the onerous journey by land.

The twelve extant 'honeysuckle' fonts are found in: Ashprington, Blackawton, Buckfastleigh (Holy Trinity), Cornworthy, Dartmouth (St Petrox), Denbury, Paignton, Plymstock, South Brent, Thurlestone, Ugborough, and Wolborough (Newton Abbot). Some, like Ashprington, have a later lead lining. The Ashprington font has apotropaic symbols carved into the lead, possibly to prevent the stealing of holy water.

They are generally in a good state of preservation, although the font at Ugborough had been painted in red gloss paint during the 1960s! It is now restored and clean. The font at Holy Trinity, Buckfastleigh, miraculously mostly survived the disastrous fire nearly thirty years ago and has been skilfully restored. It is now in the town church in Buckfastleigh.



Thurlestone Font



Buckfastleigh Font

The font at St George's, Dittisham, is one of a more diverse group of late Norman fonts carved from Beer stone as well as sandstone. It is described as an 'outlier', being similar in style to the twelve 'honeysuckle' sandstone fonts but with greater variation. These fonts were probably not made by the same craftsmen as the 'honeysuckle' fonts.

There are also a group of fonts known as 'girdled tub' fonts that are generally carved from Beer stone. They are girdled in the middle by a sort of stone gastic band. The group is more widely dispersed in Devon. Examples are found at: Bishopsteignton, Buckland-in-the-Moor, Coffinswell, Cheriton Bishop, Combeinteignhead, Farringdon, and West Anstey.

Go onto the various church websites to look at the fonts. Much better, visit the various churches to see them. Don't forget to check when they are open to avoid disappointment.

Ref:

(Dr) Woodcock, Alex. *King of Dust: Adventures in Forgotten Sculpture*. Toller Fratrum: Little Toller Books, 2019.

Totnes and District Society (registered charity No 258170)
Annual accounts for the year ended 30th June 2021

INCOME	2020-21	2019-2020
Subscriptions	£509.00	£476
AGM/Members evening	£0.00	£49
Quiz night	£0.00	£0.00
Donations	£63.00	
Bank interest	£0.64	£22.18
TOTAL Income	£572.64	£547.18

EXPENDITURE	2020-21	2019-2020
Printing, postage, stationery	£0.00	£12.20
Subscription (TCDS)	£0.00	£50.00
AGM/Members evening expenses	£0.00	£45.00
Printing CONTACT	£297.00	£274.20
Website	£63.00	£47.84
Bank charges	£30.00	£60.00
TOTAL Expenses	£390.00	£489.24

SURPLUS	£182.64	£57.94
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Representing

CAF Cash account	£0.00	£370.56
CAF Gold Account	£0.00	£14,624.01
Barclays Bank	£11,408.50	£163.69

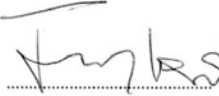
Total	£11,408.50	£15,158.26
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Comprising:	2020-21	2019-2020
TotSoc's own funds (unrestricted)	£4,405.31	£4,222.67
Restricted funds re Baltic Wharf	£733.19	£733.19
Funds held as paying agent for Baltic Wharf donors	£6,270.00	£10,202.40
Total at bank	£11,408.50	£15,158.26

Baltic Wharf

This year £3,932.40 was paid out on behalf of the Baltic Wharf donors for the design, manufacture and installation of 3 benches, including project management fees. We confirm that the Receipts and Payments for the period ended 30th June 2020 and the Balance Sheet as at 30th June 2020 are in accordance with the accounts, records and other information provided.


Nigel Keenan (independent examiner)


Jeremy Logie (Hon Treasurer)

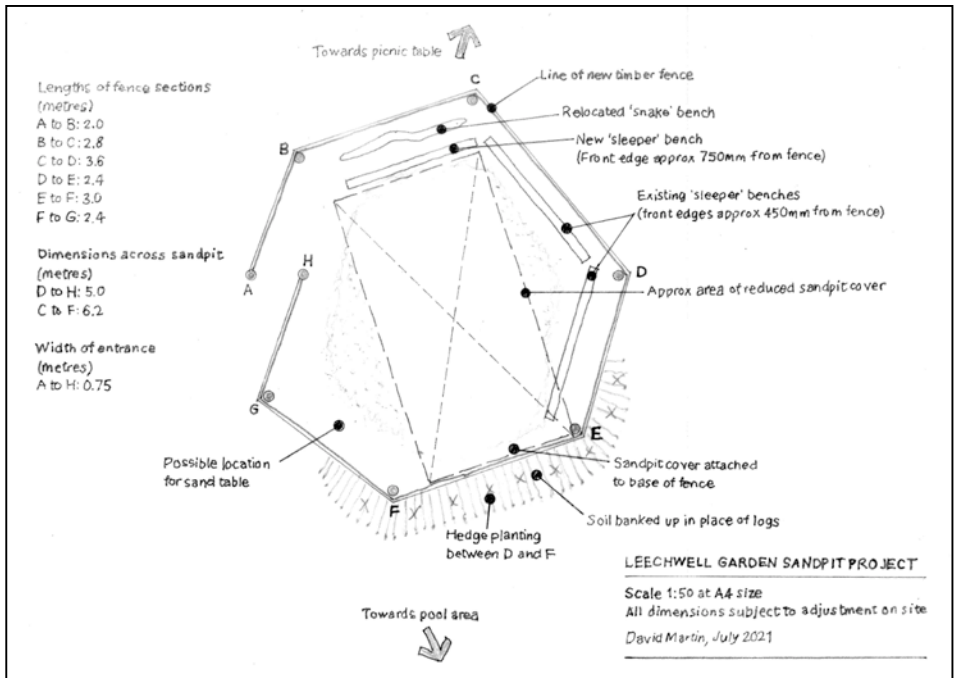
The Leechwell Garden Sandpit

David Mitchell (chair of the LGA)

In the last edition of CONTACT I outlined our plans to upgrade the sandpit in the Leechwell Garden, adding a fence to discourage toddlers carrying sand from the sandpit to the nearby pools - over the last 4 years or so we have lost over 5 tons of sand this way!

Over the last few weeks we have carried out our plans – the sandpit now has a fence – made of poles, rails and one hundred lengths of larch cladding. There's no gate, but the entrance, opposite the pools, is in the form of a short fenced path.

We were very lucky to get most of the cost in the form of grants from the Totnes Trust and SHDC Councillor Jo Sweett. Phil Licinio (who has worked in the LG before and uses it with his family) and friends Lee and Ross generously donated their time and expertise to install the main frame of the sandpit. Phil, Colin and Liam helped David Martin, Shirley and I to fix the larch cladding





setting the posts and fixing the rails



Almost complete – tops of cladding still to be shaped

Inside the fence are two fresh tons of sand as well the reformed cover, an extra sleeper and the 'snake' seat, which has been repositioned. We're hopeful that it will still be as popular with toddlers but will also keep the ponds and stream free of sand!

The CobBauge Project – Optimising Cob for the 21st century

Jim Carfrae



Cob is a traditional building material that has successfully been used in the south west of England for hundreds of years. This vernacular building technique uses a clay rich subsoil (not unusual in this area) mixed with straw and water to form the walls of a building. This picture shows a contemporary cob house built in Dartington. It is a beautiful, comfortable house, and performs well in terms of using relatively little energy to stay warm. It was built in 2005.

The problem that we have now is that you can no longer build a house like this in the UK.

Why? – because of a recent change in the building regulations that require that every element of a building has to conform to a minimum thermal performance, to have a minimum ‘U value’. Unfortunately, a traditional cob wall will not satisfy this minimum U value, and hence you cannot build a new cob house that complies with current regulation.

The CobBauge project is an EU funded research project led by the University of Plymouth, and the aim of the project is to optimise cob construction to the point that it complies with current thermal regulations.

The solution that we have found is to build a composite wall. One half of the wall is a dense ‘structural’ cob, and the other half is composed of a lightweight ‘thermal’ cob. By separating out these two jobs that a wall has to perform (support the rest of the building, and to keep heat in) the two components of the wall can be formulated separately to optimise the relevant properties. The project has looked at a wide variety of different soils and fibres to select the best performing combinations. The optimised mixtures were: Soil at 12% clay with 2.5% Flax fibre for the best structural mix and soil with 35% clay with 50% hemp shiv for the thermal mix.



CobBauge test blocks



Planned test building

Having established the performance of the optimised in the laboratory, we have built various test walls including a pair of full sized walls supporting a floor that has had the full loads of a normal building placed on them. This acts as a visual demonstration of the efficacy of the method

The final phase of this project is to construct the first building in the country to be made from this scientifically upgraded version of the centuries-old material, cob.

The single-storey building on the University of Plymouth campus will act as a classroom and laboratory with researchers monitoring the performance of the new walling material, as well as demonstrating it to future building designers, contractors, housing associations and interested stakeholders.

Cob has a low embodied energy and is viewed by many as supporting the move to a net zero future.

The project is being led by the University and its Sustainable Earth Institute, along with partners in England and France. These include Ecole Supérieure d'ingénieurs des Travaux de la Construction (ESITC), Parc naturel régional des Marais du Contentin et du Bessin (PnrMCB), Earth Building UK and Ireland (EBUKI), University of Caen and Hudson Architects.

Principal Investigator Steve Goodhew, Professor of Environmental Building, in the School of Art, Design and Architecture, said: *"This is the start of an exciting new applied research phase for CobBauge, where we have an opportunity to put into practice the exciting findings from the laboratory. We will create a living lab and demonstration site that will become the centre of attention for a wide range of people – from construction professionals to built environment students."*

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 2021**

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

As well as the website at totsoc.org.uk TOTSOC now has a Facebook page at:
facebook.com/Totnes-and-District-Society

The TOTSOC Committee

The current TOTSOC Committee Members are:

Jim Carfrae Chair	jim.carfrae@plymouth.ac.uk
Paul Bennett	paulbennett1935@gmail.com
Tom King Secretary and Minute Secretary	secretary.totsoc@gmail.com
Jeremy Logie Treasurer and Membership Secretary	jeremy.logie@talk21.com
Kate Wilson Planning Officer	katewilsondeane@gmail.com
Dave Mitchell Webmaster and Contact Editor	dave@zenoshrdlu.com

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to join TotSoc

Thank you, our loyal members for your continued support for TotSoc: it is much appreciated by the committee. Sadly, several loyal members have passed away in the last few years and we have done little to encourage others to join. Whilst our running costs are very low, we rely on subscriptions to pay our few costs, such as printing this publication.

I would be really grateful if you could do something to encourage your friends and neighbours to join. As you know, the annual fee paid by standing order is just £5 or £8 for a couple. The application form is on page 15.

We have printed some extra copies of this edition, so just let me know if you would like one or more additional copies for you to hand round to potential members. In anticipation, many thanks!

Jeremy Logie

Image Credits:

Page 3, 4, 5	Colin Maggs
Page 6, 7 8, 9	Kathi Green
Page 11	David Martin
Page 12	David Mitchell
Page 13, 14	Jim Carfrae