



The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC - the Totnes and District Society

## Notice of TOTSOC AGM

Tom King

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The Annual General Meeting of the Society will take place  
on  
Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 6:30pm  
at

The REconomy Centre.  
13 Leechwell Street,  
Totnes, TQ9 5SX

This meeting is to conduct the formal business of the Society – reports from the chair, secretary and treasurer, followed by the election of officers and members of the committee.

On this occasion there will not be a speaker to follow the meeting.

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## The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Rattery

Laurence Green

This ancient and unusual church stands overlooking a deep valley that contains most of the houses of the small village of Rattery. The village symbol is an oak; Rattery being derived, apparently, from Old English 'red tree'.

The church stands slightly remote from the village beyond the ancient Church House Inn. Passing through the low lych gate two paths can be seen leading to the church behind the granite War Memorial. Ten names are recorded here 'In Gratefull (sic) Memory of Those who Gave their Lives in the Great War'. Follow the right hand path to the deep south porch, look up at the plain two-stage tower surmounted by a small spire.



**West Front and Tower**

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The whole church is rendered in grey Portland cement, a far cry from the white lime rendering that would originally have covered it.

Before entering the church pause and look at the churchyard. It is well endowed with fine trees and shrubs as well as patches of oxeye daisies. All my life I have noticed a strange but faint smell here for which I cannot account. There are two fine yew trees flanking the path to the former vicarage from the porch.

The porch has the usual seats on each side and fine red sandstone arches round the entrance and porch doors as well as an empty niche above the door which probably once contained a statue of the Virgin Mary. The former is of old oak and is closed by a lock with a massive key. There are also iron staples inside to bar the door shut.

The interior of the church is quite dark because the windows are filled with Victorian opaque glass where stained glass is not present. The church is cruciform with an arcade of three large arches before the screen and a smaller arch in the choir. These arches are unusual, with granite pillars, plain capitals, and elvan pointed arches. The arch at the crossing is almost round. The benches are standard Victorian pitch pine with attempts at poppy heads in the choir. What is truly magnificent, however, is the fine late mediaeval screen restored by the Pinwill sisters in 1911.



**Medieval Screen**

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This beautiful screen was virtually rebuilt, but faithfully and accurately so; a few fragments of the original painted wood remains. Despite the wonderful late Norman red sandstone font, one of three similar fonts in the area, and the original perpendicular windows in the south aisle, the Victorians triumphantly left their mark in this church.



**Norman Sandstone Font**

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The beautifully rebuilt barrel vaulted roofs in the nave, choir, and north and south aisles have faithfully reproduced the Devon vernacular of the fifteenth century. The floor is mainly coloured encaustic tiles with some slate inside the south door and some good old ledger stones commemorating the Pyne family in the south aisle. The windows are mainly good Victorian restorations of early Decorated thirteenth century windows. A violently ugly stained glass window is fortunately mainly hidden by the organ on the north side of the choir. A good stained glass window above the main altar is unusually large and contains scenes from the life of Christ as well as some fine angels at the top. One of the most original Victorian decorations is the scraffiti which patterns the walls of the church and the inside of the porch. It forms regular patterns and dates from 1870, representing an attempt to make the church look as bright as it did in Mediaeval times. The condition of the plaster today does it no favours.



**Scraffi Patterns**

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Rattery is outstanding in the commemoration of its war dead. Apart from the granite cross near the lych gate there is a wooden plaque near the screen with the same ten names commemorated. On a pillar opposite is the Roll of Honour which records the names of all the men and women who went from the parish to serve King and Country in the First World War. There are sixty-seven names of whom fourteen did not return home. Among the dead are two of the four nurses who served; one died, the other was killed by enemy action.

On the other side of the screen is a plain stone plaque commemorating the three RAF aircrew who were killed during World War Two. Most remarkable is Pilot Officer Ernest C J Wakeham, a Rattery farmer's son, who is credited for introducing the word 'prang' to RAF slang. A prang is a two-tined pitchfork used on all Devon farms. PO Wakeham was shot down and lost at sea at the age of nineteen.

There is an eighteenth century pulpit similar to the one at Cornworthy but without the sounding board. The interior tower arch is slightly off-centre and similar in age and style to the tower arch at Ashprington. A Victorian notice just inside the main door leaves us in no doubt about just how we should behave in church!

To sum up: the tower and body of the church date from the late thirteenth century. The screen, spire, arcade, and narrow side chapels date from the fifteenth century. The Victorian restorations are remarkable for their quality and attention to detail. I think that we can include the screen restoration as Victorian, even though it was finished at the very beginning of the reign of King George V.

Once outside the church its remoteness is apparent. Notice the little keyhole shaped window on the side of the tower. This church is well worth a visit. Check opening times on the computer and be prepared to make a phone call. While doing so it is worth checking the opening hours of the excellent Church House Inn, built on ancient foundations (1028 is claimed) to house the fifteenth century masons who enlarged and improved the church.

*Editors Note: I agree with Laurence – the food (and beer) at the Church House Inn is definitely worth sampling!*

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## Restoration of Light Switches

Kate Wilson

A chance visit one day from an electrician friend, resulted in us embarking on the huge undertaking that is rewiring a Victorian house where the wiring seemed to have been pretty much untouched since it was installed. Our friend looked up at the light fitting dangling from the brown twisted flex in the hallway and said it was ancient. He added he hadn't seen anything like it working for decades. "Is the wiring in the rest of the house this old?" he asked. I'm not sure that we answered directly, or truthfully, but his electrician's appetite was whetted, and we followed him through the rest of the house as he gasped with incredulity at the state of the wiring. In the end, he concluded that the only reason the electricity was functional and didn't constantly blow fuses in our house is because we were effectively living in the past and had no dishwasher, tumble drier, electric cooker or immersion heater. He also said soberly that apart from the obvious inconvenience, it was dangerous, and the house needed rewiring - a huge and messy job which could cost thousands. We decided we should give this some thought.

A series of happy coincidences brought us to Andy who was able to undertake the rewiring and was willing to work around us all living in the house at the same time. He explained that he hoped the lighting wires could be pulled through the lath and plaster walls but if not, he would have to chase them out which would be very dusty, but he'd cross that bridge if he came to it. He also said that some of the floorboards in every room and the hallways would need to be taken up simultaneously and that he'd need to get into the loft. All this seemed quite daunting. We've been in this house a while and have amassed quite a lot of stuff, as well as my 93-year-old father, but we started moving things out of the way in readiness. In turns out that no amount of preparation is enough and ideally you need to move out when major work is planned, but that is another story.

Many features of our house have been changed over the years, and some of these changes have not been very sympathetic. I'm thinking of the reddish-brown ceramic tiles where the cast iron fireplace used to be which we haven't changed because they speak to that part of the house's history; or the 1970s "scullery" add on at the back of the house which

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could function better but is too expensive for us to address.

The ivory white Bakelite light switches however are a lovely 1930s addition that we felt were worth keeping. Unfortunately, these switches did not comply with current safety standards. You can buy modern replacements, but they have two screws on the front which are intrusive and look so different to the lovely switches we already had. Andy couldn't see a way round it, and probably thought we were mad to be worrying about switches when our entire house was going to be turned upside down, but we had heard about the Art Deco Emporium Ltd in Wales that renovates Bakelite. Andy is good natured and humoured us. He removed all the old switches replacing them temporarily with cheap white ones and sent the old ones off to be refurbished.

For the next few weeks, the house was in chaos and under a permanent layer of dust. Fortunately, the wires pulled through the lath and plaster walls easily, but the shoddy 1970s extension was a different story and every wire needed chasing out. Then one morning Andy came in with a box of refurbished light switches. They had been cleaned and polished and almost glowed. They were beautiful. A small grub screw had been positioned at the bottom to allow the casing to be taken off with a tool (and not just unscrewed) as the regulations require.



**Refurbished 1930s Light Switch**



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Andy was delighted with them and had ordered new oak back plates to replace the rather shoddy softwood ones that had been there before.

He took photos of the refurbished fittings in situ and declared himself a convert. "I don't like to think about how many of these things I've thrown away", he said.

We haven't finished decorating after the rewire yet and the dust continues to settle, but we feel safer, the switches look great and another piece of the history of the house has been saved.

Next stop: sash windows.



**Light Switches in situ**

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## Partnership: Totnes Trust and Jamming Station



Jamming Station, through partnership with the Totnes Trust (“Custodian” of the Totnes Town Mill) has secured a permanent home at The Town Mill. *Jamming Station at the Mill* brings together an exciting amalgam of music, culture and creativity for young people within the 16<sup>th</sup> Century heritage building. It provides a safe environment to develop personal, social, and entrepreneurial and employability skills.

### **Jamming Station Empowers Young People through Music**

Jamming Station has at its core a strategy to:

- Establish a **music, culture and creativity hub for young people** at the Mill.
- Develop and deliver Totnes’ Youth Strategy and Culture and Arts Strategy alongside over 20 key partnerships in the area.
- **Jamming Station at the Mill** provides a hub for young people; somewhere “cool” to meet. A safe environment to participate in Jamming Station’s activities, including band sessions, singing, song writing, sound production, engineering, live streaming, radio master classes, etc.
- The **Jamming Station Youth Advisory Board** provides the platform and support for young people to contribute directly to the development of activities.
- Build on the strong track record in facilitating development of skills for hundreds of young people and contribute towards the town’s socio-economic development.

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The Mill provides a physical location for Jamming Station to open its doors and engage creatively with the Totnes community on how best we can support our town's next generation of business people, leaders, parents, employees and homemakers.



### **Building on a strong track record**

Jamming Station is a Totnes based Community Interest Company (CIC), a non-profit female-led organisation, that started in 2012. 50% of the advisory board are under 30 yrs old. It is driven by the needs of young people and founded on the understanding that engaging in music can be transformative and empowering, inspire social change and create a culture of respect for individuals and communities. Its projects offer a gateway to expression, a sense of belonging and improved emotional well-being for young people.



We reach all young people in town and rural communities, including those who may face barriers to their ability and full potential, including economic deprivation, trauma, anxiety and depression. Jamming Station impacts up to 1000 young people each year providing the opportunity to develop skills, build confidence and lead healthy empowered lives.

Jamming Station has up to date Safeguarding and Health and Safety protocols and our team is DBS checked and adequately experienced and trained.

Through collaboration with the Totnes Trust, the Mill provides for the first time in Jamming Station's history, a true home, and a place where it can grow and develop a more sustainable business model.

### **Support and Sponsorship Framework for Patrons**

Jamming Station will shortly launch its Support and Sponsorship framework to engage local business and people in the success of the venture. In return Patrons can benefit from concessions with use of the Mill for events, engage in programmed activities or raise further funds to support Jamming Station.

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## History of the Town Mill

The Town Mill building on Coronation Road probably dates from the 16th century although it has been much altered and enlarged since then. It is likely that there have been mills in Totnes for over 800 years and at one time a significant milling complex could be found on this site, with corn mills and fulling mills, all playing an important part in the development and prosperity of the town.



## The Town Mill today

There are many later references in the 15th century specifically mentioning the Town or See Mill. The title 'See' Mill is likely to have been a different spelling of 'sea' and indicated that this was a tidal mill. It is believed that Town Mill was powered mainly by the tidal waters of the River Dart coming up the channel from below the bridge. Usually in tidal mills, as the tide ebbed, a barrage held back the water in a mill pond to be used by the miller once the tide had receded far enough to enable the waterwheel to turn. This meant that the operation of the mill was dictated by the tides.

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In the case of Totnes Town Mill, the tidal water was likely to have been supplemented by fresh water taken off the river at a weir further upstream.

Today, after much restoration, one remaining waterwheel can be seen and, inside the building, part of the mechanism which drove the millstones has been reconstructed. There are also descriptions of the history of the town and the mill from Saxon times.

### **EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH MUSIC**

Jamming Station C.I.C, Totnes Town Mill,  
Totnes, Devon  
TQ9 5DF

[info@jammingstation.co.uk](mailto:info@jammingstation.co.uk) - [www.jammingstation.co.uk](http://www.jammingstation.co.uk)



**Artist's impression of Town Mill around 1500**

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## TOTSOC on the Web

The TOTSOC website is at:

[totsoc.org.uk](http://totsoc.org.uk)

You can access it via the QR Code below.



As well as the website TOTSOC now has a Facebook page at:

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

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## 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 the website at [totsoc.org.uk](http://totsoc.org.uk).

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

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