Dawlish Local History Group

Chronicle

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VJ Day 1945

80 years ago in Dawlish

Children's competition on the Lawn

'At Dawlish, the VJ celebrations produced the greatest crowds ever seen there. The throngs converged on the main beach where a great bonfire was lit, fireworks were let off and somehow rockets were fired from a passing train. As the bonfire on the beach began to burn out, the mass of people moved to the town and danced throughout the night on the Lawn.' [WASLEY, Gerald Devon at war 1939-45]

Barnardo's at Luscombe Castle

Luscombe served as an evacuation point for girls in the care of Barnardo's from 1938 until July 1948. There was also a boys preparatory school in the grounds. The girls, aged 4-15 lived in a separate part of the house, near the chapel whilst the Hoare family continued in the main part of the Castle. Iris Homewood has kindly sent us her reminiscences:

'One day, when my father returned from serving in the army on the North Western Front, he brought with him a young attractive woman. We were sent out into the garden whilst he asked our mother for a divorce. A row ensued. He had given my mother some money which she threw on the fire. The women ran out of the house, our father ran after her. This was the only time that I can ever remember seeing him, as he spent the whole war in the army and away. As a result, our mother found that it was all too much to cope with five children and trying to provide a home and going out to work, so with the help of the church, managed to negotiate with Dr Barnardo's to take us all into their care. However, only two of us were selected. My sister Miriam and myself. Hence Luscombe Castle became our new home.

We were taken by our mother through war torn London bomb sites to a station to catch the steam train to Dawlish – a long journey. I was fascinated by the train seemingly, to be travelling on water as we approached Dawlish. I had never seen the sea or experienced the smell of the sea before. We had quite a long walk from the station to Luscombe Castle. On arrival we were greeted by Matron Denis. Our mother kissed us goodbye and we didn't see her again until January 1955.

I cannot remember anything more until bedtime. The beds were very high off the floor (army stock I think), the window was at the far end of a seemingly big dormitory, and when the lights went out, I was petrified, my hands seemed large and the light from the window so far away. I screamed and screamed (like Edward Munch's painting of the Scream) which is the best way to describe my feelings at the time. Someone, Miss Clarke I think, came to comfort me.

The next morning, at breakfast, I could see that I was not alone. So many girls of all ages, all no longer with their families. We were all in the same boat! After ablutions in the bathroom and toilet area, we would prepare to go to school. Matron would say goodbye, and we would form a long two by two, crocodile form, with a member of staff at the rear. And off we would go, down the long driveway, past what seemed like a boy's school. The boys would be leaning over the high wall shouting:

"Bananas, what do you think of that, Upset the table and nearly killed the cat"

And we would shout back:

"If we are the bananas, you're the skins and you live in the dustbins"

Said whilst putting our splayed fingers to our noses in a so-there attitude.

Soon after arriving at the Castle, I had suspected meningitis and was confined to a small sick isolation room where Lady Hoare (Ray) came to sit on my bed and talk to me. Then afterwards, when I was better, she invited me to tea in her drawing room. There was a 3-

tiered cake-stand with cakes and sandwiches on. I believe that the American's also kindly donated, chocolate, bananas and strawberries.

One day my mother sent me a scooter which I took full advantage of, and raced from the top of the hill at the back of the castle which was our designated play area and went hurtling straight for the gate stop and fell hands outstretched to save myself, damaging my right wrist. Next morning Matron who sat at the head table (the formation, rather like a medieval banqueting hall) asked me why I wasn't eating my boiled egg (it must have been a Sunday). Then it was discovered that my wrist was the culprit. I had my arm put in a sling for quite some time, but I do not remember seeing a doctor and my wrist is still disfigured to this day.

It was lovely to be able to go for walks in the countryside and beside the little brook. We also had folk dancing lessons and won competitions in Paignton and Torquay. To be able to picnic on the beach after school was wonderful…I was so lucky to have felt the embrace of such kindness and generosity of the people of Dawlish and the Castle.

Veronica Vearncombe has also sent us her memories and some photos for which we are very grateful. Veronica, whose maiden name was Cowell, was at Luscombe from 1944 to 1948 with her sister and this is a selection of her reminiscences.

We were housed in the older part of the castle, which was quite dark and gloomy at times. One of our favourite jokes was to take the newer boarders to visit the chapel. We had found that by opening certain windows when the wind was from the right direction, we could make the pages of the bible on the lectern turn over – hence we could convince the newer children that the chapel was haunted.

The local shopkeepers were very kind and although there was rationing due to the war once a month we received a plentiful supply of sweets and chocolate. At Easter I can remember treasure hunts for chocolate bars wrapped in coloured paper being hidden in the beech hedges and all the children frantically scrabbling about to find them.

For fire drills we were taught to abseil down the castle walls from the upper rooms. This was great fun for me because I was an outdoor girl but frightening for some of the girls, and painful too due to scraped knees. Definitely much against Health & Safety regulations now in vogue.

As it was an old castle, there were also some drawbacks. Bats inhabited some of the recesses and would frighten us all when flying along the corridors, with staff vainly trying to catch them with some girl's dressing gown. A night time visit to the toilets was also scary because of the presence of cockroaches and we had to give the very small girls piggybacks to the toilet seat because when putting on the light we would be greeted with a heaving mass of cockroaches across the whole floor.

Sir Peter Hoare with one of his sons holding the pony. Veronica is sitting behind on the pony and Matron Denis is giving instructions.

Summer always seemed to be a time for outdoor fun and visits to the beach but winter was another matter. We had heavy snow falls on the moors and I can remember once trudging to school through very heavy snow, only to find we were the only pupils to have arrived as the parents had kept their children safe at home. Fortunately, one of the teachers had also arrived, and inexplicably so had the pupil's milk supply, which was warmed on the pot-bellied stove in the classroom and then we walked home to Luscombe. This was probably the very bad winter of 1947.

At Christmas I can remember the children being taken along a wide but dark corridor which was lined with suits of armour into the part of the castle occupied by the Hoare family to sing Christmas carols.

Not all my memories were happy ones. Because I was rather small for my age, I can remember many of my meals having bemax, a horrible sort of bran, sprinkled over it to help promote my growth, and I was even given blood drained from meat joints in an endeavour to build me up. However, if I did not eat all my dinner one day, I was given the same meal, cold and greasy, for dinner the next day. These culinary delights must have had some benefit because later I had lots of energy and strength and did well in all sports.

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WORTH, R.N. History of Devonshire: '*Hardly any town in Devon has so uneventful a history as Dawlish'.*

A Dawlish Winner

Tim Norman at the 1966 Grand National

By Suzanne Jones

Tim Norman (1944-2023) caused one of the Grand National's greatest upsets as jockey on the 50-1 winner Anglo in 1966.

Tim was born at Ashcombe, and he lived the first part of his life at Port Road Dawlish, where his father farmed. Tim is buried in Cofton Cemetery.

From the age of eight, he rode in the show ring, then aged 16, he was scouted by Lambourn trainer George Spann and went to work for him as a conditional but rode freelance for most of his career.

Tim rode his first winner, 'June Mary', at Fontwell on March 28, 1960, and, then after he had ridden nine winners, turned professional in 1962. Tim won twenty races in the 1964-65 season, and the same number the season before.

On Thursday March 24, 1966, Tim was travelling in the car of his friend and fellow jockey Jeff King on the road from Liverpool to Southport.

'I was sitting in the back seat' said Tim, 'when suddenly there was this enormous crash. The car turned over, the roof caved in, and we hit a telegraph pole. I climbed out the back window with cuts all the way down the left side of my face, and mild concussion.'

Less than 48 hours later, he was being legged up on Grand National outsider Anglo by trainer Fred Winter. Stable jockey Eddie Harty had been injured, and Tim had come in for the ride of a lifetime.

Tim said after the race: moment's worry. A trifle the early stages, he throughout. I knew Freddie at the Canal that I would win. I must side - to win the Grand attempt is like a dream

'He never gave me a lazy and outpaced during jumped superbly when I was tracking Turn for the last time have had luck on my National at your first come true.'

Pitman, who rode alongside Norman and became Winter's stable jockey, said: "Tim did well, riding mainly for small trainers to start with, and got the ride on Anglo, who was a very pretty chestnut with a white face. We didn't think the horse was man enough for the National even though he'd been a decent chaser, but he won and was brave and superb. Tim was a good jockey and a lovely guy. He wasn't flash or boastful and while he was so delighted to pick up the National winner, he wasn't altered by it at all. When he retired injured in 1974, the Injured Jockeys Fund bought him a JCB digger, which provided him with a livelihood as a builder in Wiltshire for the rest of his life."

His daughter Marie McClure said, "I was four when Dad stopped riding, but my earliest memories are of him riding, having horses around and being in the racing community."

Norman is survived by his wife of 57 years Veronica, his daughter and her brother Anthony, and his children Amelie and Douglas Norman.

Dawlish Warren Salt Works

If you head from the mini roundabout at Dawlish Warren by the Chinese takeaway and the pharmacy towards Cockwood you will soon come to a small bridge over the Shutterton Brook. Before the railway was built the Brook was much wider approaching the bridge but much of the land on the river side of the road up to the bridge was used for salt production. The salt ponds were eventually bisected by the railway but they stretched to the back of what is now the golf clubhouse.

According to Mr Bruton, a Warren boatman, in an interview given to the Exeter & Plymouth Gazette in 1908 his grandfather was the last person to own the saltworks which had been in his family for over 200 years. He describes how windmills were used to pump the brine into pits and allowed to evaporate in the sun. The finer details are not given but it is quite likely that the brine was pumped to several progressively shallower pits. There was still too much water so the salt was put into clay lined pans and taken to the salthouse and heated over a fire which produced the crystals ready for sale. The saltworks or saltern only operated in the summer as there was not enough sun for evaporation in the winter.

Salt was a much sought after commodity being used primarily for food preservation and making butter but it had a range of other uses including medicines, curing leather, glazing ceramics and healing wounds.

How long there had been a salt works at the Warren we do not know but there was a well-established trade route which took the salt via the Port Road, over Little Haldon to the Combe Cellars ferry and beyond.

The saltern seems to have come to an abrupt end in the 1820s once the tax on salt which had been in place since 1693 was lifted in 1825. This immediately reduced the cost of salt from 3d for one pound to 3d for 7 pounds according to Mr Bruton and the market was opened up to alternative suppliers. It seems as if the works closed in 1828 and by the time of the tithe map in 1840 the land was given over to pasture. The Bruton family lived at Warren House (aka The Welcome Inn) until 1843 when William Bruton died in some financial difficulties.

Newhay & Polehay?

The Newhay, (pronounced by local people as Newey), that field of green beside the church, means different things to different people: it can be part of the green lung of Dawlish, an extension to the path beside the Brook starting at Tucks Plot, a dog walkers paradise, a children's adventure playground or a place for quiet contemplation. All face an uncertain future.

However, our focus is not on the future but the past. This area is an integral part of the history of Dawlish. For centuries parishioners leaving the church or churchyard towards the Brook have walked past the yew tree, through the gateway and onto a meadow. If they had not been in too deep a conversation they would have noticed that they had crossed a water channel or leat which took water to the town mill nearly opposite the field in Church Street. There had been a mill here for a very long time and was integral to the life of the community. Just beyond the corner of the churchyard in the opposite direction to the mill was the original millpond, now fenced off for safety reasons.

Anyone continuing in this direction will come to the bridge across the Aller high above the goyle (a deep ravine) taking the stream to join Dawlish Water. From the 1870s when looking up the Aller from this bridge there was a wondrous sight of a series of waterfalls (see Chronicle Jan 2020), a true Victorian spectacle. Although not in its former glory if all the overhanging trees were cut back it would still be a pleasing feature today, but for now we must just enjoy the sound of cascading water.

There has been a bridge here for a very long time. Tricia Whiteaway discovered an entry in the Churchwardens Accounts for 1597/8 ‘paid for mending the bridge at the higher end of the New Haie 6d’. It has been an important means of allowing easy access to the church, and the mill from those living in the Aller valley and Luscombe Hill. Until they built the carriage drive that exits opposite Westcliff Road the Hoare family like everyone else from that area would have had to approach the church via the meadow. This is well illustrated by the funeral procession in 1851 of Charles Hoare who built Luscombe Castle. Starting at the Castle ‘the procession consisted of four and five hundred persons…..on arriving at the meadow adjoining the churchyard, through which the procession had to pass, a very heavy storm suddenly came on, and caused some little sensation among some of the multitudes, who hastily sought shelter in the church.’

As anyone who has walked on the Newhay will know if heading across the grass towards the Brook the ground suddenly falls away and becomes a wide flood plain. It was an area prone to flooding. On 19 October 1875 the water rose a reported 10 feet and backed up on this flood plain causing tremendous pressure on the old church street bridge where the central pillar eventually gave way, causing months of disruption.

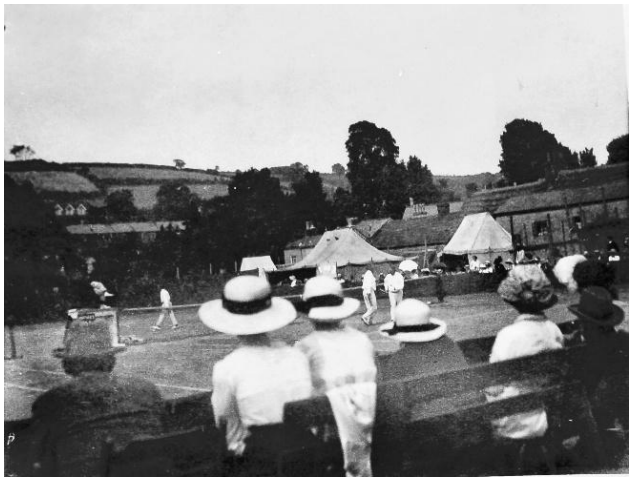
On the other side of the Brook lay the vicarage (until it was compulsorily purchased by the railway for an avoiding line in 1937). Clearly the vicar needed quick and easy access to the church which is described by John Swete about 1800 ‘The gardens of the parsonage are separated from the church by a rich meadow and the river; across which, and high elevated to guard against the sudden risings of its waters, is placed, a rustic bridge of planks’. The route can still be partly followed from the churchyard gateway to the corner of the trees.

There are not many publicly accessible documents relating to the Newhay but perhaps the most obvious is the 1840 Tithe Map and its Apportionments. It shows that the higher ground in the meadow was divided into two and the land called Newhay started as now before the main exit from the churchyard and stretched to the bridge over the Aller. This land was owned by Rev. Bull and occupied by the owner of Stonelands Farm. The Reverend Bull was probably John Bull, Prebendary of Exeter Cathedral, prebendary being ‘a clergyman entitled to the income from a particular piece of land’. The land was certainly not owned by the Vicar of Dawlish.

The other part of the upper meadow was called Mill Meadow and was unsurprisingly owned by the miller John Sweetland but occupied by John Philips. It was described in an 1839 sale notice as ‘about 2 acres of rich water meadow’. This division of the upper meadow could well date back centuries as a rental roll of 1513 shows the vicar leasing both Newhay and Polehay.

The name Newhay was probably self-explanatory to earlier generations but all we can surmise today is that it referred to a meadow that was cut for hay and then used for grazing.

Polehay was also a term that was understood better in former times as it was used elsewhere as in a document about Cockington which refers to Polehay meadow about 1680. One suggestion is that a pole was used in the storage of the hay.



The mill was bought by the Hoare family in 1852 along with Mill Meadow. In earlier times the division between the two meadows was marked by an overflow from the mill pond to the Brook but by the time of the 1896 O.S. map it was marked by a footpath running along the boundary and leading to a footbridge over the Brook, whilst in the 1930s there was a hedge and most of Mill Meadow was used to form three tennis courts. However, around 1959, this former meadow was completely taken over for the housing we see today.

The lower part of the meadow was also divided into two. The section nearest the town bridge was owned and occupied by a carpenter called Stephen Matterface who lived in a house alongside Church Street between what is now Bridge Cottage and the bridge itself and he seems to have used it as an extension to his garden. In later times his house was pulled down and nowadays the land is used as part of the garden of Bridge House

Beyond that the flood plain was used as an orchard. The land itself was owned by Rev Bull and incorporated the bridge to the vicarage but it was leased to a farmer called John Callaway.

Further along there was a copse of trees, as now, close to the banks of the rivers Aller and Daw. These were clearly not seen as of value being described as ‘waste’ but owned by Stonelands Farm.

The tithe map does leave us with an interesting question. The diocesan authorities tell us that the Newhay is glebe land i.e. ‘a portion of land assigned to a clergyman as part of his benefice’. It seems that neither in 1840 nor in 1513 was the vicar of Dawlish entitled to this land as a benefice so was the benefice granted after 1840? It seems that the answer may be given in the book The Old Vicarage where it is stated that land was purchased by Rev Fursdon (Vicar of Dawlish 1846-1864) in 1846. Whether that was just the area described on the tithe map as orchard is not clear.

After centuries of use in the time-honoured manner of a meadow the diocesan authorities offered a lease to the district council in 1972 and they held it until recently. Apparently one of the suggestions had been to put play equipment into the field but a petition from a group of children who wanted to keep the area for adventure play put paid to that idea.

What the future ideas are for the use of the Newhay we will have to wait and see.

We are seeking information – can you help?

We are keen to discover more about how Lea Mount Coastal Battery was looked after between 1943 and the war end. In addition, there has been a query about the grotto seating area halfway up the cliff path. Was It altered during the war and did it have a role to play?

Local memories suggest that there was an anti-aircraft position (protecting the coastal battery?) in a field across the main road from Lea Mount. Are there details?

It would also be good to know if the men manning the guns at Lea Mount from 1940 were drawn from the regular army or the Territorials and finally were the buildings used by the army in Marine Parade commandeered or were some civilians still living there?

The Italian Garden at Great Ambrook

Report by Frances Hutchinson

In June our talk was about Great Ambrok Garden, Ipplepen. A four-acre, grade II listed, Edwardian garden, built between 1909 and 1912. This was followed in July by a visit to see Great Ambrook with a guided tour.

June's talk was from Angela Dodd who has done extensive research into the history of the garden. The garden was built for Arthur Smith-Graham. Not much was known about him before Angela started her research. It was wrongly assumed that he was a retired recluse who left little to no papers, correspondence or photos having given instructions in his will for them all to be burnt after his death. Angela found him on the census records. In 1911 it showed Arthur living at Ambrook in his early 30s, so he wasn't an older retired man as thought. Then later, in an old barn, his desk was found full of papers and photos, showing he was far from a recluse. Arthur was born into a very wealthy family who made their money in dealing tea. They had a shop on London's Fleet Street.

The garden was well looked after until the late 1950s. Then it spent about thirty years abandoned. In 1988 Ken and Doris Rees purchased it. It was sold as woodland, but the couple soon started to discover pathways and structures hidden within. With the help of friends, they gradually uncovered the garden.

Hidden from the road, the garden has a long private drive up to it. It was kept secluded so that Arthur could lead a more private life, with some suggestions that he was homosexual.

The manor house was originally Medieval. It was extended in 1910 and given a more Edwardian look. The house actually sits separately from the garden slightly further along the road and now has different owners to the garden.

The designer of the garden was unknown for a long time. Angela spent a long time trying to find out who it was. Eventually she found clues leading her to T.H Lyon, an architect, not a garden designer, which had confused the issue, making him harder to identify. He is probably best known for his work on the chapel at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Lyons lived close to Hay Tor on Dartmoor. The garden has several structures and seating points built with views towards Hay Tor.

The garden got new owners in 2016. Two couples own it together and although they do not live on site, they visit several times a year. They are continuing the work of the previous owners to restore the garden. To fund this work as well as guided tours, they have built a holiday home on-site they rent out, when not using it themselves. Heritage Lottery funding has also been a large part of the money needed for restoration. A team of volunteers have been helping in the garden since 2020.

The garden is situated just outside of Ipplepen with countryside views all around it. With many trees and shade loving plants the garden has a woodland feel to it. The garden has wildlife friendly planting alongside bee hives, encouraging butterflies, insects and birds. Stone pathways lead you around the garden, with crazy paving style Dorset limestone. The paths were taken over by tree roots and plants, but are gradually being restored. There is a lot of stone work repair being done, not only to the paths, but to walls and various structures around the garden.

Three large stone reservoir tanks help with watering the garden. Rain water filled, they work on a gravity system, with the two higher tanks filling the lower. Channels run alongside paths to let the water flow between them. Originally this would have been the only water system for the entire garden. There are two glass houses, built for growing fruit and vegetables, alongside exotic plants. One originally housed a large grape vine.

The lower tank and one of the glass houses

A path leads up to a semicircular terrace, sixty-six feet in diameter. At the back stands the summer house. The lower floor has pillars and a now restored octagonal window. The top floor known as the observatory has unfortunately lost its bulb shaped roof, but you can still get up there and see views of the countryside beyond the high walls. The design was clearly

influenced by Montacute House in Somerset, with its pair of garden lodges with bulb shaped roofs.

The summer house

Past the summer house is the pergola walkway. The wooden structure had to be largely rebuilt due to rotten beams. Climbing plants are now starting to re-grow around it.

The Palm Walk

The palm walk crosses the middle of the pathway, leading to the dell. A former mudstone quarry, it is one hundred and one feet deep and eighty feet wide! It has four sets of steps leading to the bottom. A secluded area, you do not see it until you get quite close. It is surrounded by trees and has ferns and other greenery all over it.

Hidden behind trees is a stone swimming pool. It is unusual in design with bench seating built in the top of it. Granite pillars frame the pool, with holes in them, thought to be where a trough would have sat with plants growing out of it to form a sort of canopy.

As well as a swimming pool, there is a plunge pool set into a terrace above the tennis court. It would have made for a refreshing dip after a game. The pool is also octagonal like the summer house window. With seating built in around the edge of the terrace you could have sat in the sun to dry off.

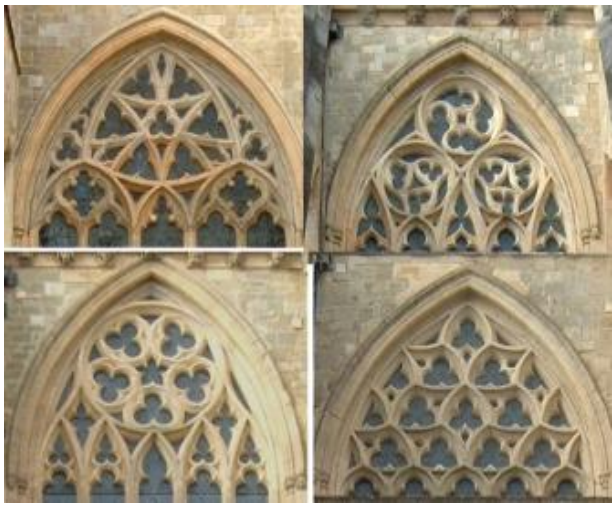
The tennis court below is now a flat lawn with a pavilion at one end, with the plunge pool terrace sitting on top. Made of Ipplepen marble, the pavilion has steps leading down and covered seating either side, giving a good view of any game on the court. The area was hidden in a thicket when rediscovered and it took extensive work to clear it. In the 1930s the lawn court was replaced with a hard court, although it is now lawn again.

The garden is somewhat unusual, but well planned for functionality and pleasure. It makes for a very interesting and enjoyable visit. With thanks to our tour guide Jan Yeates and our speaker Angela Dodd.

Building Exeter Cathedral talk part 2

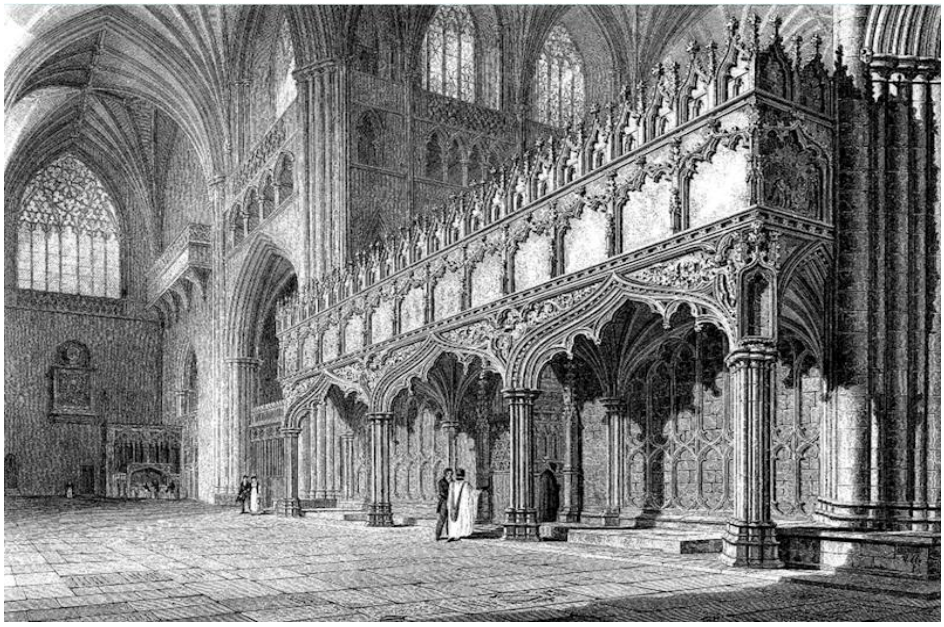
Report by Frances Hutchinson

In May we welcomed back the official archaeologist for Exeter Cathedral John Allen for part two of his cathedral talk. This followed on from his talk in June 2023. Having previously covered the Norman and Anglo Saxon periods, this time he focused on the 13th and 14th century when the building of the cathedral continued in the Mediaeval gothic style. The East end of the Cathedral was decorated with more furniture and detail in this period.



By 1300 they had developed ways to build bigger windows to let in more light. In the early gothic period more rigid carving using geometric shapes was used, gradually getting more curved and flowing designs by the 14th century. They put in the Great East Window above the high altar. It has curved "S" shapes for the arches. The architect Thomas of Witney came up with new window designs used in the cathedral. He used complex round and curved shapes with interlocking patterns in his window arches.

In the 14th century the new bishop, Walter de Stapledon put a lot of money into the cathedral. He was responsible for many of the furnishings in the cathedral. This includes the elaborate bishop's throne, which at nearly eighteen metres makes it the largest bishop's throne ever constructed. The choir fittings were completed with the sedilia, a stone structure with three seats near the high altar, the pulpitum, a very large screen between the choir and the naïve, and the reredos screen behind the alter. The organ screen (see below) and pulpitum screen show later gothic style, with stretched out curves and longer arches than previously used.



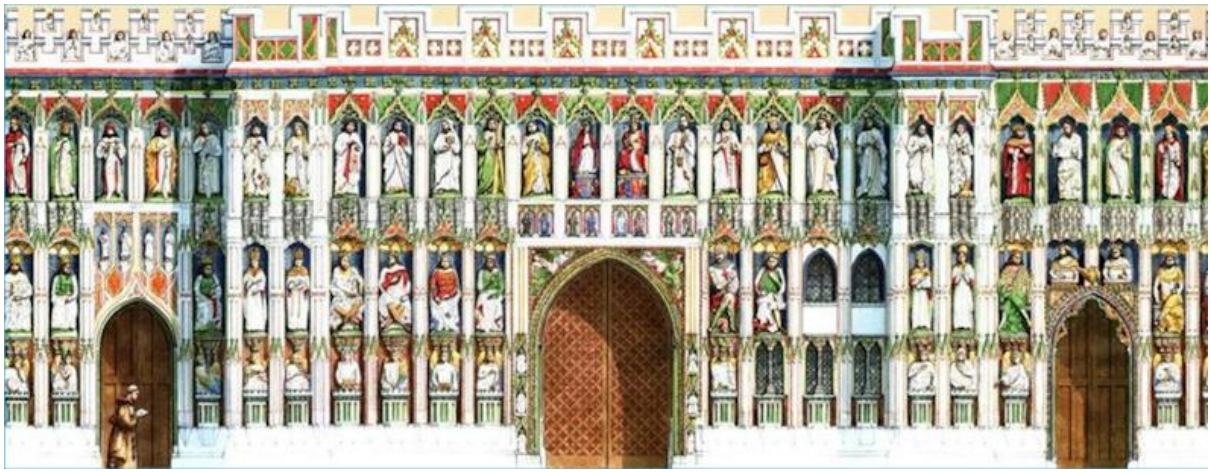
The décor of the vaulted ceilings got more complex after the 13th century, with more curved and joined up lines. Exeter Cathedral has the longest surviving gothic vault in the world. The vault has many highly decorated bosses that sit between every beam's meeting point. The bosses are huge and heavy, designed to be seen from below. Most of the bosses are intricately carved and some brightly painted. They depict various things from bible scenes, to bishop's coats of arms, to the murder of Thomas Becket, by then seen as a religious martyr.

The next bishop appointed to Exeter was John de Grandisson in 1327. Bishop Stapledon having been murdered in a dispute over money whilst in London. Grandisson was a meticulous record keeper. He kept details of all the building works, cost of labour, parts, where materials were sourced and so on. The records were kept on fabric rolls, with Exeter Cathedral having the largest collection of fabric rolls left in the country.

The east end of the cathedral continued to be added to. It was decorated with stone arches and pillars. The work was done in stages over many years, which you can see by the change in stone used. The colour changing from a yellow-brown to a creamy-white. The stone was originally Sandstone from a quarry in Salcombe Regis, later becoming chalk-limestone from Beer.

The minstrals gallery was put in place high above the nave. They put musicians up high so it seemed the heavens themselves were praising and worshipping. The gallery is carved with twelve angels playing instruments. It gives a very good record of what instruments at this time were like.

The west front of the cathedral is screened with eighty-eight figures. This includes a representation of God and the apostles and Old Testament prophets in the upper row. It has many other figures including kings and lively characters. Although now bare stone, originally the entire thing would have been brightly painted to make it seem like a vision of heaven. Only Exeter and Wells Cathedral in Somerset have sculptured fronts with figures in this style.



As sections are restored and rebuilt, archaeologists are finding out new information about the building of the cathedral. The cathedral is still being added to today. New cloisters were finished only last year.