



## DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

# Newsletter

November 2013

Website: [www.dawlishhistory.org.uk](http://www.dawlishhistory.org.uk)

Dear Members,

*We are coming to the end of another year. It has been a busy and successful year for the History Group and we would like to take this opportunity to thank Tricia for all her hard work in organising our outings. We enjoyed them very much.*

*This is a plea for help, our committee members are becoming increasingly old and infirm and some younger blood is desperately needed. If you feel you could help please contact Tricia. The future of the Group will be in trouble if we do not have some volunteers.*

*We had a very successful weekend at the Manor on 18-19 of October; we sold 53 books and enrolled a new member and spoke to many more locals who showed interest in the Group and its meetings, we hope this will encourage more people to join.*

Regards,  
Derek Wain

**Our next meeting will be on  
Tuesday 3rd December, at The  
Manor House.**

**Christmas Tea & Quiz**

**at 2.30pm**

### Visit to Bradley Manor

On Tuesday 3rd September 17 members of the Local History Group met in the grounds of Bradley Manor which must be one of Newton Abbots hidden gems - the late summer sun added to the timeless attraction of the house which has stood on this site for hundreds of years having been added to and rebuilt over centuries by the same family. As well as the beauty of the house, the grounds seemed to echo bygone days - looking natural but obviously carefully managed. The stream running through the grounds presented idyllic scene with children playing with their dogs in the crystal clear water - their laughter adding to the atmosphere of the house and gardens - how many times had such a scene occurred in these surroundings so it is once again thanks to Tricia for organising the trips out and to the kind drivers who give lifts to the rest of us. It was nice to welcome some of our newer members on this last outing of 2013.

*Mavis Stuckey*

### Follow-up to the visit to Bradley Manor.

Within the dense woods on Emblett Hill close to Bradley Manor there is a hidden hollow made when the roof of an underground limestone waterway collapsed long ago. This was the secret meeting place for worship used by the Dissenting minister and his congregation from Wolborough Parish. This is the story of those times:

When King Charles II of the restored Monarchy (1660) sought to bring order to his kingdom, one of his ploys was to **enforce** the use of the newly revised Book of Common Prayer and the set forms of worship laid down there. During the Commonwealth under Cromwell, the Puritan movement had a sizeable following asking for simplicity in worship. They would not use or value the rich symbolism of the architecture and decoration of the Parish churches which, though taken over from the Roman Catholic Church, were now under the discipline of the Church of England. But the Puritan (extremists?) were not the only devout and thoughtful Christians who longed for freedom to worship in less rigid ways and to be able to explore new ideas about the Faith, and to enable lay members of the congregation to offer the Bible readings, to preach and to administer the Elements at Holy Communion. There was a growing body of *dissenters* who were already drawing up their own 'Declaration of Faith and Practice', and meeting in houses to hold services as they wished. These groups were the beginnings of our now familiar 'Free Churches'.

King Charles though, wanted to establish his authority over the Church of England and to stamp out all dissenters. The Act of Uniformity (1662) made it illegal for any dissenters and sympathising priests to hold meetings within the parish boundary. Any priest who disobeyed was 'ejected'; stripped of his status, house and income. This movement all over the country became known as 'The Great Ejectment'. The Parish priest William Yeo of Wolborough was such a victim, but he was supported by his congregation, who went together with him into exile beyond the parish boundary. The pit in the woods was a secret sanctuary for their meetings for worship; if discovered they would face harassment and ridicule or worse. Amazingly, William and his faithful people met in the pit under cover of darkness *for 27 years* until in 1689 the Act of Toleration was passed. Then William Yeo M.A. became the minister of the first non-conformist chapel inside Newton Abbot.

I searched out this hidden place during the weekend after our visit to Bradley Manor. It was so well chosen that it's like exploring a tropical forest, but there is a path of sorts which leads up a steep and slippery hillside deep in the woods. Because there have been commemorative services held in the Pit by non-conformists from all over the area, there is a helpful flight of steps at one especially difficult point. However *did*, those brave people ever manage to find it in the dark, and in all weathers? At the 300th anniversary service in 1962, the Bishop of Exeter took part and underlined the message of tolerance and better understanding among the churches of today, who can now provide opportunities for worship in ways which differ only in detail but have the same fundamental belief and desire for the well-being of everybody.

*Muriel Bradshaw*

### **Coastguards in Dawlish**

The last of the Coastguard Stations in Dawlish was still on the cliffs to the north of the town about a quarter of a mile from the viaduct. The buildings are now privately owned and the original watch house was a restaurant. The commanding officer's house is now called Hadleigh House. Nowadays the area is covered by coastguards from Brixham with assistance from the lifeboat stations in Teignmouth and Exmouth. There is a boathouse at railway level with access to beaches on both sides of the breakwater.

It was at the time of the 1809 Act that we first have record of activity in Dawlish. Old prints show the Preventive House to have been built on the far end of what is now the railway car park.

There were still problems with local opposition and corruption. In 1822 the whole service was transferred to the Board of Trade and renamed the Coast Guards. Strict rules were issued that the Guards must not serve within 12 miles of their birthplaces and were to be transferred at regular intervals so that they did not become too integrated into the local communities and be tempted to turn 'blind eyes' to any smuggling that went on. They were not to engage in trade or own or possess a share in any public house or shop or to have a boat of their own.

The new guards were housed in the town, and by the time of 1851 census they were mostly in Park Lane, now the High Street, in cottages provided by the Navy. In some other areas the coastguards were housed in old hulks as available.

In 1846 the atmospheric railway was built through Dawlish. This had the affect of cutting the old Preventive House from the sea. The builders were instructed to erect a bridge and a path along the seaward side for the coastguards to patrol along it. The Watch house was built soon afterwards as it was referred to in White's directory in 1850. Tenders were requested in the press for 9 cottages and the large officer's house. It was custom for the guards to be posted away from their home areas but by this date the need to prevent corruption was less because of the nature of the work had altered.

In 1903 the Admiralty stated that 'The Coastguard force occupies an anomalous positioning being treated as an active service force on one hand and as merely a reserve for the fleet on the other... the cost is out of all proportion at that, at which the efficient Royal Fleet reserve can now be maintained.' They said that lifesaving was the responsibility of the RNLI and anyway they did not have stations covering the whole British Isles as most were in the south and east. They then closed down 35 stations. The Dawlish station was

downgraded; it was no longer manned and the last parade was held on the lawn in 1901. The coastguard cutter was sold to the Rackley family.

In 1906 the Admiralty said they only needed 170 war Signal and Wireless stations. They thought that the other responsibilities should be taken over by another government dept. By 1911 personnel had dropped by a 1000 men. When war broke out in 1914 many men on reserve were taken back into service and there was the old problem of getting enough cover for coastguard stations. This was even more acute as coastguards now had signalling responsibilities which were an integral part of coastal defence. Two of the remaining cottages were tenanted at £18 p.a. and came under rent restriction act which probably meant that they had been let before 1914. The remaining 5 had rentals of about £30 p.a. Most relied on pumps for their water and had no inside tap...



Although in the 1925 act there was provision that the Admiralty should take over the Coastguard operation in time of war, they did not do it until 1940. Again stations were depleted as many of the guards were reservists, in some cases army personnel had to be used on the stations. In Dawlish a pillbox was built beside the lookout hut and the boathouse was reinforced inside with massive concrete blocks which can still be seen. There was also a gun emplacement on the plot of land above. It was known locally as 'Mount Maria'.

The station officer's house became known as Hadleigh House and was lived in by the Suttons, whose daughter, Eileen, married Michael Holcombe. Later the father of the Western Brothers, singers, came there and was very keen to establish his right of way by walking along the middle terrace on the seaside in front of all the cottages. Much later the gate from the house was moved to the wall and the right of way remains there to this day for all the inhabitants.

In Dawlish there have been many changes in recent years. The land the Look-out was on, was sold by the Admiralty to the owner of the watch-house, which became a restaurant again as it had been in the 30's. The look-out hut was taken down to make a bigger out-door sitting area and a later owner demolished the pill-box too. The boathouse has been sold by the council after many years of sporadic letting. Many of the cottages have had internal alterations; the dressers and coppers have gone from them all. They all have bathrooms and some have been made open plan. But all the cottages share thriving community spirit had one of the best Jubilee parties in Dawlish in 2002.

In 2013 major changes have taken place; many of the coastguard stations are to close including Portland, Brixham and Plymouth in 2014.

*Derek Wain*