

Dawlish Local History Group

Chronicle

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Peter Richard Hoare 1803-1877



Portrait painted by Stephen Catterson Smith

By kind permission of C. Hoare & Co.

Peter Richard Hoare was the second owner of Luscombe Castle and probably made as great an impact on Dawlish as any other member of his family despite spending more of his time in his other home near Crystal Palace.

Peter took possession of Luscombe in 1854 but it only came into his possession because his uncle Charles and aunt Dorothea, the first owners of Luscombe, had no children. He was already owner of Kelsey Park, Beckenham, the former home of his father and he inherited Clayton Hall, in Lancashire from his mother.

Peter was part of a banking dynasty. By the time he took on Luscombe Castle he had worked at Messrs Hoare Bank for about 34 years and had been made a salaried partner in 1841 and a sharing partner in 1844. On 7 April 1837 he had married Sophia Marsham, the daughter of the 2nd Earl of Romney, at Canterbury. They had five children: Sophia, Isabella, Charlotte, Peter Merrick and Charles. The youngest was 6 or 7 when the couple came to Dawlish.

Peter quickly threw himself into the social life of the area and took on many responsibilities. During the cold winter of 1855 he helped distribute coals, meat and bread to the poor and almost immediately started supporting the Devon & Exeter Hospital. In May 1856 having arrived at Luscombe for the summer months it fell to him to read the proclamation of peace marking the end of the Crimean War on his horse at the town hall.

He underlined his role as the leading citizen of Dawlish by buying the title of Lord of the Manor from Mr Eales in 1857 and shortly thereafter held a Court Baron [dating from medieval times it was a manorial court held by the Lord of the Manor for his tenants] at the York Hotel.

A report of 1858 describes him in the role of JP at the Petty Sessions at the Courtney Arms, by 1860 he was High Sheriff of Devon and the following year he was Deputy Lieutenant of Devon.

It is clear that he had a close and warm relationship with his wife Sophia. She too played her part in the community but she is best remembered for her efforts in schooling local children. She had early been a supporter of the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. In July 1860 she founded a school at Luscombe and by 1861 it was reported that '42 children are taught at the commodious schools adjoining the castle, under the immediate supervision of Lady Sophia and each child [has] been presented with a new suit of clothes'.

Peter and Sophia shared strong religious beliefs, both being high Anglo-Catholics within the Church of England. This was a time of great division within the Church of England. Reform was being led by the Oxford Movement which believed in apostolic succession and not being dependent on the state. They looked to Catholic traditions by increasing the use of ceremony and ritual and ensuring that the highest place in the church was reserved for the sacraments.

The Hoare's were strong believers and were associated with some controversy as described in the Morning Advertiser 9 May 1851:

Mr Newman said he was employed to alter the episcopal chapel at Pimlico...and Lady Sophia Hoare had promised him £60 a year....Lady Hoare worked with her own hands an

elegant altar cloth and curtain in gold. The backs of the pews were cut down, the pulpit removed, the chancel raised and chorister stalls carved. The old communion table was cut to pieces and burned. ...The chapel was opened and became so popish in form that the Bishop of London interfered.

Like his uncle, Peter Hoare took a keen interest in the Dawlish parish church and had considerable influence. He was certainly influential in the decision to rebuild the church but before that he undertook to build a chapel next to his home.

'A private chapel was opened by licence from the Bishop on 10 June 1862. Designed by G.G. Scott costing £5,000. The family can enter from the house, tenantry from the courtyard. The chapel will be open twice daily and the labourers will be allowed to leave their work to attend. Mr Hoare will educate at his expense the 10 boys that form the choir'. (Royal Cornwall Gazette 13 Jun 1862)



This is the only known picture of the inside of the parish church before it was rebuilt. Note the high boxed-in pews and more especially the three-decker pulpit which completely blocked out the view of what was happening at the communion table or altar.

The changes to the parish church took time to be debated and implemented and do not seem to have caused controversy although they were a major change. Out went the central three-decker pulpit and a much smaller one to one side was installed, the chancel was greatly extended with a high table for the sacraments and the west gallery where the amateur singers and instrumentalists used to play was demolished and choir stalls built in the chancel. These were now to be filled with a trained choir under an organist/choirmaster and they would all wear robes.

Peter Hoare made a handsome financial contribution towards these changes and laid the foundation stone on 27 May 1874, the work being completed in 1875.

However, long before this Peter had suffered a major personal tragedy when his beloved wife Lady Sophia died on 4th June 1863 in London. It is significant that he chose to have the funeral and interment at Luscombe rather than his London house.

A private service was held in the parish church very early in the morning, the hearse and two mourning coaches having travelled on the night train from London to Exeter. Lady Sophia was buried in a vault in the new piece of ground in the churchyard prepared for the family mausoleum.

It is clear that Peter was overwhelmed by grief. Things were not made any easier by difficulties with his sons. In one description Peter Merrick Hoare 'was a volatile young man with a propensity to spend'. His financial affairs caused his father many troubles. His other son Charles had a passion for horses and driving coaches rather than banking although his father did eventually persuade him to join the family firm.

Peter had wanted to leave the bank after the death of his wife but the other senior partner Henry Hoare was severely injured in a train accident and Peter had to stay on. After the death of Sophia Peter is described thus:

'Peter Richard cut rather a sad figure at the bank. He worked in total seclusion in the half dark in a little back room at Fleet Street.....At home he was looked after by his unmarried daughter Isabella who accompanied him on his frequent moves between Luscombe and Kelsey Park. From there he travelled daily to London in a carriage with the blinds down....the clerks would duck under the counter to avoid catching a glimpse of the strange nervous figure, with his long silver hair straggling over his shoulders'.
(HUTCHINGS, Victoria Messrs Hoare Bankers. 2005)

He might have been grief stricken and cutting a lonely figure at the bank but he does not seem to have lost interest in Luscombe and his development of the estate and involvement in local affairs continued.

The exact date of every development is not known so they will be treated as a whole. During his time at Luscombe he almost doubled the size of the estate taking in land belonging to places like Shiverstone and Barton but he started his acquisitions almost as soon as Luscombe passed to him by buying the town mill and mill meadow in 1852. By 1857 he had the parish pound moved from Church Street to Oak Hill. Probably

around this time he built the private drive above the churchyard, over Aller bridge to his house.

He also owned land on the seaward side of Church Street/Oak Hill and wished to build a private drive to Teignmouth Hill. This caused great concern to residents who first became aware of the plans when trees were cut down along Barton Lane. The vicar, Reverend John Rashdall interceded. It is understood that the tree felling stopped but that a road was created, what we now call Westcliff Road, and that for many years it was regarded as a private road.



Fairfield House 1905

Peter created a number of new buildings. Fairfield House on Ashcombe Road was built for his mother, whether she managed to live there is not known as she died in 1865. Between 1866 and 1870 a house was built for his Land Steward near the Luscombe farm buildings. A chaplain's house was built, a school in sandstone on Luscombe Hill and three other houses in limestone on that road the top one being for the gamekeeper.

The most ambitious project though was the construction of the large fish pond situated behind the mill leat in the Newhay in the 1870s. This involved considerable engineering as the aller stream had to be re-routed to feed it. The pond altered the way that the mill leat worked and now fed directly into the leat. It is likely that these changes created the spectacular Newhay falls.

Luscombe grounds continued to be available for local fetes and a number of groups were able to make use of the facilities including the Exeter Working Men's Society, 1st Devon Militia, Rifle Volunteers and the Dawlish Horticultural & Cottage Garden Society.

Like his uncle Peter also supported a number of charities including the Bovey House of Mercy (for fallen women) and the Western Counties Idiot Asylum as well as being a trustee of the Devon & Exeter Savings Bank.

Alas, in the mid-1870s Peter's health deteriorated and he died two years later on 30 May 1877 aged 74. He was well respected in Dawlish and on the day of his funeral the shops closed and the town flag flew at half-mast. There were many people in the cortege and the church was filled for the service. He was laid to rest next to Lady Sophia in the family mausoleum.

One paper described him as 'a liberal friend to the poor and a generous contributor to many charities both local and national' and another as 'a careful man [who] added much to the store of wealth and possessions that descended to him'. In his will he was valued at about £6 million. He gave his house at Kelsey Park to his son Charles to help him with his work at the bank but Luscombe descended to his elder son Peter Merrick.

Our Historian



Tricia Whiteaway could be described as the foundation stone of our society. She has been there from the very start in 1993 and is the only member to have stayed the course. Poor health means that Tricia is rarely seen at meetings these days but her

presence is still very much felt both to help answering teasing queries, providing background material for articles or in the vast amount of information and research which she has given to the society in the form of boxes of files.

As Tricia is so important to our group it is worth telling a little of her story. It may be surprising to most that Tricia was born a cockney. That accent was knocked out of her when her home was bombed in WW2 and she had to transfer her schooling to Kent. Art was one of her favourite subjects and curiously her art teacher used to speak about history whilst the class were busy on their artistic creations and this lit a flame. Archaeology became an interest from age 10 and Tricia used to practice by digging holes in the garden for artefacts.

Leaving school at 15 she started secretarial work in the City of London. Eventually Tricia met her first husband who was a keen motor racer and indeed won his class in a race at Le Mans in 1959. They had four children but an accident cut short the motor racing career. This led to a move to a thatched cottage held by his family from 1861 in Combeinteignhead. It was an ancient house which set off a desire to research its history and from then on there was no looking back.

Not everything worked out and a separation from her husband saw Tricia running a shop and post office near Crediton and then a move to Ringmore. Circumstances changed again and she came to Dawlish in 1985 and set up home with her second husband in Church House. Inevitably this led to an investigation of the history of Church House which is seemingly never ending and also the Swan Inn which was their local.

The formation of a group to look at the local history of the area was bound to attract Tricia and she volunteered to become its first secretary, a post which she held for 19 years, followed by a short stint as Chairman.

One of the aims of the original group was to pursue any archaeological opportunities, probably inspired by Tricia. In the summer months there were field walking exercises and considerable time was spent trying to find the remains of Cockwood House alas without success.

However, the main focus of the original group was an interest in researching the history of the area and to make sure that it was recorded in the form of books. The very first was, of course, written by Tricia but was in fact an expansion of notes by Henry Morgan on the inns and taverns of old Dawlish. There followed another 13 books written solely by Tricia, such as *The Lawn and Dawlish farms* and four in conjunction with others including important works on the history of schooling and life during WW2, a feat unlikely to be repeated.

I should add that Tricia is keen to record that she has also written other books. One was a book about her husband's motor racing career as a private driver. Another was a book on the Whiteaway/Whiteway families (including the cidermakers) that covered Devon, Canada and Australia tracing back to a farm in Kingsteignton. A further book on her grandmother's family is planned which has so far taken 63 years of research.

In order to carry out her local history research Tricia spent almost every Thursday in the Record Office enjoying their late opening hours. This is where much of the material in the files was generated.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to our founder member.

Torquay pottery – a talk by Jeremy Julian

Report by Frances Hutchinson

Although it is known as Torquay pottery, it would be more correct to call it South Devon pottery, as the term is applied to pottery across the area. Some fifty to sixty potteries could be included as part of Torquay pottery, with some businesses lasting a lot longer than others. The potteries spanned a period from the 1860s to the 1990s. Most of the potteries used red clay which the local area is rich in, with a few early designs using Cornish white clay. Some craftsmen came to the area from Staffordshire, with some designers and decorators coming from Italy. The majority of the pottery was handmade and always hand painted. The biggest players were Aller Vale, Watcombe and Longpark.

Aller Vale

Aller Vale were based in Kingskerswell. Formed in 1881 by John Philips, he trained local people through evening classes held in Kingskerswell, Abbotskerswell, and Coffinwell. He provided skills and education to local young people who were often otherwise uneducated. Some of those he trained would go on to work at the pottery.



Motto ware

The arts and crafts movement had a big influence on the company, employing local people and supporting the movement's values. Princess Louise, Queen Victoria's daughter visited the pottery and became a collector of their work, loving the designs. In 1886 the company received royal patronage and became Royal Aller Vale. The pottery

became very fashionable, even being sold by Liberties of London from 1887 to 1901. John Philips died in 1897 and the pottery was taken over by another company, Hexter Humpherson and Co. The production of art pottery was gradually phased out in favour of more tourist souvenir pieces. Several potters left to take over another pottery so that they could carry on with making art pieces. Some of Aller Vale's most famous designs included motto ware, floral wear and Scandii design. In 1901 Aller Vale merged with Watcombe Pottery. Production slowed down post WW2 and they closed in 1962.

Torquay Terracotta Company

An earlier company that lasted just 30 years, Torquay Terracotta Company still made an important contribution to the Torquay pottery story. Started in 1875 by Dr Gillow at Hele Cross in Torquay, they went out of business in 1905 when their style went out of fashion. They produced terracotta wares, often unglazed, with classical subjects such as the female figure and nature. They also used geometric patterns and lines. They made vases, busts, decorative plates, plaques and figures.

Watcombe

The longest running pottery was Watcombe, which lasted from 1869 to 1962. Founded by G.J. Allen after he found red clay on his property. They started in the classical style, but moved onto more colourful pieces later on.



After Allen's death in 1894 the company was acquired by Evans & Co. Then in 1901 Hexter Humpherson bought them out and they merged with Aller Vale. They became more commercial moving into tourist ware with the motto range, including the cottage design which became one of their most popular ranges. They are also known for their daffodil pattern, often on a terracotta or green-glazed background. Other designs included sailboats, kingfishers – usually with a blue background, and the 1920s jazz range in the art-deco style. They made motto ware for lots of seaside towns, including Dawlish. They even made motto ware for export to places such as Canada, Australia and the Caribbean. Watcombe were a significant employer in the area for many years.

Longpark

Longpark formed in 1883 and were based in the never-used atmospheric railway building on the Newton Road in Torquay. They started with terracotta items. In 1903 a group of potters from Aller Vale took over Longpark. It became commercial later on with motto ware, floral designs and animals. Some of the most popular designs were the parrot vase and dragon patterns often including twisted handles making up part of the dragon. In 1957 the pottery was taken over by Watcombe after struggling financially post war.

ALSO

Babbacombe who are still going but now sell exclusively to trade customers. They started in 1921 making vases for Devon violets perfume. Now they specialise in hand painted animals.

Dartmouth Pottery operated from 1948-2002. They became famous for their gurgling gluggle jugs (fish shaped water jugs).

Bovey Tracey potteries were made up of various potteries in the area from 1750-1957. They made dinner services with transfer designs, tiles and some naïve hand painted animal sculptures.

Hart & Moist Pottery were Exeter based from 1896-1933. They were influenced by the arts and crafts movement and art nouveau.

Axe Vale Pottery formed in 1865 near Axminster, moving to Beer in the 1950s. They closed down in 1996. They made a lot of floral designs and birds.

The USA used to be a fairly big market for Torquay Pottery, even having their own collector's society, but the popularity has dwindled there over the years. Today motto ware is less popular and one of the cheapest ranges to buy. Grotesques, bizarre, often slightly monstrous creatures like cats, goblins and frogs are more popular now.



A grotesque

Minadab Cottage



In need of some TLC. Date unknown.

Robert Benjamin Young (born 1775, died 1846) was one of Nelson's captains. He had been a Lieutenant at the age of 20, and served on the *Bonne Citoyenne* at the Battle of Cape St Vincent. In 1804, he was given command of the cutter *Entreprenant*. English ships sometimes had French names, and vice versa, since a captured ship was often enlisted without being given a new name. Young's cutter's name meant 'One that will take on anything', as perhaps the English ship *Endeavour* or *Venturer*. Ships of the line carried 64-74 guns, while frigates only carried 36. They were the Admiral's scouts and means of signalling, they did not stand in the line of battle. The *Entreprenant*, a cutter, was one of a pair of small ships, (the other being *Pickle*, a schooner), that came after the battle, picking up survivors, rounding up ships that had become scattered, and carrying messages, or news of victory to the fleet. It was a boat from the *Entreprenant* that took the news of Nelson's death round the fleet in the immediate aftermath of the battle of Trafalgar.

Sailors always have nicknames for ships: the *Bellerophon*, rather tricky to pronounce, became the 'Billy Ruffian', but the *Entreprenant* wasn't easy to nickname, but she was small in size, and therefore, compared with the ships of the line, was merely a small fish, a minnow, or a dab.

Having been promoted to Commander, Young, aged 35, was put on half-pay in 1810, and being a small ship man, nostalgically harked back to his first command, rather than his later commands, and used an amalgam of Minnow and Dab for the name of his cottage. (Built about 1820 for him, like a ship: the east side being 'aft' and the west side 'fore', with only a rope ladder to get to the deck above. The cellar also has sea connections, for the floor is cobbled, and there is a blocked-up archway said to hide a passage to the beach – and there are shelves – for casks of rum perhaps?)

Sometime after 1830, another seaman, Captain John Wight, who had been living at Northcott for several years, is shown to be resident at Minadab Cottage; and in the census of 1851 was registered as Vice-Admiral, aged 74, with a wife, Ann, aged 51, and two servants.

The cottage, with its large garden, must have housed several resident families over the years, until between 1950 & 1960, it became empty and neglected. Devon County Council bought it in anticipation of road widening, but because the cottage was of historic interest, a Mr Lucas was granted permission to repair the cottage and turn it into a restaurant. The large garden now has two other dwellings within its original area.

From the 1995 Transcribed history of Holcombe by Doris Smith.

Postal services in Starcross

Our Christmas talk was given by Peter Halmkin, a keen philatelist who collects not only stamps but locally posted letters and cards. We were treated to illustrations of some of these from his collection often with a story attached. There were examples of correspondence from some of the local big-wigs such as E. Pusey Lyon of Staplake House, Richard Eales (of Easton House) and William Courtenay with a letter concerning the railway in 1842.

The Richard Eales letter showed that it had been posted in Starcross and travelled via Exeter and was received in Plymouth the same day for the cost of a penny in 1842. This contrasted with a letter for Rev. Nantes of Powderham Church who received it in 1839 before the introduction of the penny black. He was charged 8 pence for what was called an 'entire' letter where the recipient paid for the postage based on the distance the letter travelled and the number of sheets it contained.

Peter had a theory about why Ashcombe with less than 100 inhabitants warranted a post office and many larger communities didn't which concerned the relationship of the Rector of Ashcombe and his brother at Haldon Tower with Anthony Trollope who, as a post office official, re-organised the postal services in the south west.

The importance of letters in wartime was covered with an example from the Crimean conflict and another of a letter to a P.O.W. in 1916.

Brunel's Legacy: the growth of Dawlish as a holiday destination

report of the David Force talk by Frances Hutchinson

Our first meeting of the year saw the welcome return of local historian David Force. He talked to us about how Dawlish grew, mainly thanks to tourism and the railway.

About 250 years ago Dawlish was still a small village. It had one main street and some cottages near the seafront. King George III was keen on the seaside at this time. He made sea bathing fashionable amongst the upper-classes. Wealthy people with respiratory problems started visiting seaside areas to get away from the polluted cities. Travel would be by coach as far as Exeter or Chudleigh then by horseback to Dawlish. Their journey would take several days, so they often stayed for an entire summer season. They would rent out rooms or even entire houses for the whole family to stay. The first hotels were the London [by the Coop & Bet Fred] and the York [where the Strand Centre is]. Both were built as large inns with accommodation.



The London Inn

In 1807 John Edye Manning bought a large part of Dawlish. He built the Manor House around 1808. The Lawn at this time was a marshy area. Manning straightened the river and drained the Lawn, creating a public park. He helped Dawlish grow as a seaside resort, making it more attractive to fashionable Georgians.

The Assembly Rooms were built in 1812 near the seafront giving the upper-classes a place to go. It had a ballroom, billiard room and retiring rooms. It would have helped

attract more people to Dawlish but in 1860 it was demolished to make way for the Royal Hotel.

The railway opened in Dawlish in 1846. Brunel used Great Cliff House on Marine Parade as his offices whilst building the railway here. Later the house was to become a hotel. Bathing machines were in use on the beach. Often horse-drawn, they would allow sea bathers transport and privacy to and from the sea. A wooden box on wheels, it served as a changing room and shelter. When constructing the railway they had to build the viaduct high enough to allow bathing machines through to the beach. In 1880 the Ladies Bathing Pavilion was erected giving competition to the bathing machines. It had 30 changing cubicles, a laundry and a reading room.



The colonnaded bath house

In the early 1800s Dawlish got its first public bathhouse. It offered heated water and cold seawater baths. In about 1830 a new more substantial bathhouse was built on Marine Parade in a classical design with ancient Greek style columns. Wealthier people would take the waters at the bathhouse and it

helped make Dawlish a destination for sea bathing.

The railway made Dawlish a lot more accessible. Instead of four days from London, it became only five hours away. This helped improve trade as well as tourism. Before the railway trade only extended about as far as Exeter. Now goods could be taken to London in time for the markets and goods could come into Dawlish from elsewhere. More homes were being built, and instead of the traditional cob used for many homes in Devon (a mixture of subsoil, clay, water and straw), the railway brought in heavier goods and houses were built more out of stone and brick, with larger town houses for the wealthy, and smaller cottages and town houses for the workers.

More hotels opened to accommodate the growing number of visitors. The Royal Albert, later the Grand opened in 1860 near the railway station. Richmond House was known as the Royal Western Hotel between 1849 and 1860, not far from the beach and is now a block of flats. The Blenheim on Marine Parade was in operation at least as early as 1875 and is still going today.

The hotels provided employment for local people. At a time when farms were becoming more mechanised and less people were needed to work the land, hospitality and the service industries grew. Although still only the wealthy could come, as there were no legal rights to holiday until the Bank Holidays Act of 1871. Even then, the designated bank holidays were unpaid. The Holidays With Pay Act came in 1938, giving workers the right to one week's paid holiday.

St Mark's church opened in 1851 on Brunswick Place. It was supplementary to the parish church, more central than St Gregory's and nearer to the wealthier homes and hotels of the expanding population. In 1861 the Methodist church was built further down the road on Brunswick Place. More types of churches were built in the 1860s to accommodate the wider range of people now living in Dawlish

Day trippers started coming to Dawlish by rail and later by charabanc, an open topped vehicle featuring rows of bench seats, originally horse drawn, later motorised.



From the 1900s onwards Dawlish Warren became popular with day trippers from Exeter. A railway platform was built in 1905 as Warren halt. Then in 1912 a proper station was built and named Dawlish Warren.

In the 1900s holiday homes were built by Warren beach. Beach huts started to appear along the Warren promenade from about

1955.

After the first world war camping started to gain popularity. Camping fields began to open around the Dawlish area. Caravans started coming in the 1920s, leading to the development of holiday parks, especially in the Warren area.

There's a whole lot of digging going on

4th biennial survey of what is going on in Dawlish

(for the benefit of future historians)

Our green and pleasant Lawn has been anything but recently. Who would have thought that having such an impressive open space in the centre of town would have aided the water companies so much that we could benefit from an early scheme to reduce storm spills by the building of an enormous underground storage tank.

After trial bores in December 2024 the real work of creating a huge holding tank in the Lawn began and later led to the uprooting of the safari golf facilities at Tucks Plot so that the existing holding tank there could be linked in. Of course, it didn't stop there as there was another large tank being dug out in Sandy Lane carpark and associated works outside the Riverside Centre blocking Brook Street.



Road works have been something of a nightmare with Brunswick Place closed for months in connection with the water scheme and various other places affected but the biggest holdups in town have been for the new gas pipeline in Exeter Road. It has highlighted a road system not designed for the twenty first century and how few alternative approaches there are.

All the new housing being built beyond Gatehouse is enabling a new link road from Gatehouse to Sainsbury's to be created. The most significant structure on this route is the new bridge over Shutterton Brook which officially opened in 2024 and named Sweet Violets bridge, however we are still waiting for the road itself to open.

We lost a significant business in December 2024 when Whetman's nursery at Houndspool which specialised in growing pinks closed. It's history goes back to 1936. On the positive side Gay's Creamery celebrated its centenary.



Change has come not only in the form of civil engineering. Unnoticed by the wider world the local shop in Coronation Avenue closed in August 2024 after serving its immediate community for many years. It was a victim of supermarket competition together with not having enough passing trade and no parking facilities.

Another sign of the times is the way that we do most of our banking online which has led to all our local banks closing. A couple of mobile banks were tried but did not catch on but

banking services were still needed by many people and so a banking hub (offering services for a variety of banks) has been set up in temporary premises in Lawn Hill with the hope that it will soon move to more visible premises in Brunswick Place.

There have as usual been some subtle changes to the shops and facilities in the town centre. A café at the station has returned and a new one opened in the old tourist information office but two others have closed. At the year-end we have about 16 cafes and restaurants, a butchers, 2 bread shops, etc etc..... and now an art gallery.

Saving the Manor House

By David Allanach



As it was in 1900

It is not often that a community can come together and overturn the decisions of an elected local council through an organised and sustained campaign. It is therefore instructive to try to piece together how events unfolded. Many individuals were involved at various stages but they have not been named here to avoid favour or offence.

By the Council's own account, the story starts in 2007 when they first raised the idea of moving out of the Manor House as part of plans for new and improved Council offices. It was not immediately pursued though because of the economic turmoil and recession.

However, the Council issued a pamphlet in 2008 entitled 'We're moving and would you like to come with us'. The main gist is clear from the title but the actual points made are unknown as a copy has so far not been found.

Whether in the pamphlet or not there had been much talk at this time of the new building and its possible siting in Barton car park. It was realised that a new building would take time to finance and build as it would cost some millions of pounds. The plan was to sell the Manor and utilise the proceeds to seed corn an application to the Lottery for a major grant. It was proposed that the Council would need to move to a temporary base in the interim in order to save money. Thoughts turned to where a temporary base should be and fairly quickly ideas honed in on the Salvation Army Hall which was up for sale at 34 Park Road.

Nonetheless it was a surprise to most parishioners when the Finance & General Purposes Committee decided to dispose of the Manor House at its meeting on 20 October 2009 saying it would place "an unfair burden" on taxpayers as the running and maintenance costs of the Manor House were too high and the rental income from groups using the building was declining.

It was true that the building was not in good repair, suffering from badly damaged walls and worn carpets, but opponents noted that little money had been spent on maintenance for some time. Indeed, one opponent liked to quote that more money had been spent on photocopying than on maintenance.

Two days after this F&GP Committee meeting the Council's offer on the Salvation Army building was accepted.

On 4 November 2009 the Dawlish Gazette led with 'The Manor...will be put on the market, its fate a matter for discussion between planners and the new owners. Possible uses include a hotel, care home or flats'.

The news of these decisions and their implications was gradually percolating into the public consciousness and was further re-enforced in early November when organisations that rented rooms at the Manor were given notice to quit by the end of March 2010. The Council-produced Town Crier, published in December, tried to counter the negative message by stating 'Part of the regeneration plans for the town [unveiled at Shaftesbury Theatre on 11 Nov 2009] include the provision of a purpose-built town hall with community facilities'.

Opposition to these proposals was now growing and a group opposed to the sale, calling itself Save the Manor Action Group, was formed and they worked with another local group called DARE. They ran information stalls and raised funds to print leaflets. In order to encourage opposition to the sale and raise awareness of the referendum a protest march around the town was arranged led by a jazz band. It attracted over 100 people including families, dogs and one witch!

The Town Council held a parish meeting to explain the council's plans on 20 January 2010. Because of the growing controversy there was an unexpectedly large turnout of

parishioners and not everyone could get into the council chamber. It was realised that this posed a fire safety threat and the meeting had to be terminated but before the meeting was closed a member of the public called for a parish poll (often referred to as a referendum).

The official response was that if this was to be implemented 10 electors would have to sign their agreement and meet with the Town Clerk the following morning. The shortness of time was a challenge but in the end 17 signatures were collected

The Council were now obliged to call a meeting to discuss the parish poll. This was arranged to be held at St Gregory's church on 28th January when 400 people turned up. A DVD exists of this meeting which shows all councillors lined up in two rows at the front facing the audience with the Mayor, who was conducting the meeting and answering most of the questions, in the middle and below and to one side sat the Town Clerk who was often called upon to help answer the questions.

After the aborted meeting on the 20th a petition was started to Save the Manor and in a short space of time 2,000 signatures had been collected and this was presented. There seemed no public support for the council's plans at the meeting. Residents wanted to know why they hadn't been consulted and why would the council want to build on one of the few car parks in the town? The purchase of the Salvation Army building was particularly controversial. The result was that a referendum was now guaranteed.

Just 15 days later the Council exchanged contracts to buy the Salvation Army Hall for which they borrowed £165,000. It was a curious decision, for as the opponents pointed out this 'temporary' facility had no parking, no room for council meetings nor for community activities, so no income could be generated and it later transpired that no valuation and building survey had been carried out.

Before the referendum each side in the dispute was keen to make its case and both issued leaflets. The Council also placed an advert in the local paper. However, two important facts in their literature were found to be wrong and had to be amended although many leaflets had already been distributed. In their leaflet the supporters of the Manor called for a condition survey to be carried out.



The big day arrived on 4 March 2010 when the referendum was held. Parishioners were asked to vote yes or no to the following question *Should the Town Council be required to keep the Manor House as council offices and for the benefit and use of the parish of Dawlish and commit to a full programme of repairs and maintenance?*

Two polling stations were set up in the Manor House and one each in Dawlish Warren and Holcombe. It is clear that the authorities

badly underestimated the numbers of people wanting to vote and there were long queues at the Manor House, some people waiting for over an hour, on a cold March evening between 4 and 9pm. An unknown, but felt to be significant, number of people were unable to wait and could not vote.

The result of the vote was decisive 1,515 voting yes to save the Manor and 96 against. The councillors acknowledged the strength of feeling and announced that they would retain ownership of the Manor House until at least May 2011 while they waited for a feasibility study into the financial viability of the Manor House.

A new group called Friends of the Manor came together to make a report on the condition of the building and ways in which it could be used to improve income. Many discussions were held with the council but no substantive progress was made.

In May 2011 new elections for Dawlish Town Council were held which resulted in a large turnover of councillors. 10 were elected under the 'Voices for Dawlish' banner, there were only 6 others.

Among the new councillors were an architect, a facilities manager and an ex-town clerk, all retired and together with a surveyor they drove the next stage, which was to employ a firm of quantity surveyors to examine the state of the building and prepare a costed programme of work to bring the building back into a good state.

Work then got under way to make the necessary repairs and improvements to the building and in 2013 the renovation was completed at a cost of £200,000. The improvements included safety equipment and energy saving lighting and heating. Amazingly the accessibility challenges were also overcome. According to the council-produced Town Crier in 2009 'the presence of fine plaster ceilings made it impossible to improve access to the upper floors by installing a lift'. Nonetheless the problems were overcome and there is now a lift to all floors.

The Salvation Army building was sold to Teign Housing for social housing. With hindsight, and looking back over some of the paperwork, it is clear that very little information was released on what savings would be made by moving to the Salvation Army Hall. That move was always described as temporary and yet no timescale was suggested for when a new building would be complete. The future fate of the Manor House and what safeguards might be needed were also little discussed.

What lessons can be learned from all this? The council had a vision for an expensive new town hall, but before starting to put it into practice, they didn't fully explain their vision and all the steps that were necessary to make it happen, nor did they try to listen to their constituents. Furthermore, they did not take into account that they were attacking an iconic building – iconic because it was in the centre of Dawlish, with an impressive history and it was the only historic building owned by the Council.

And yet, and yet, the outcome was not a foregone conclusion, it was only won by having a strong and energetic group of individuals who could galvanise the public through their

informed arguments and publicity and use democratic procedures to force a referendum.

We are still living with the adverse effects of this drama in that we are still paying off the money that was borrowed to buy the Salvation Army Hall. Three electors made an official complaint to the auditor about the way the purchase was made and on 3rd August 2011 the newspaper headline read ‘Auditor raps council on its aborted effort at selling the Manor’.

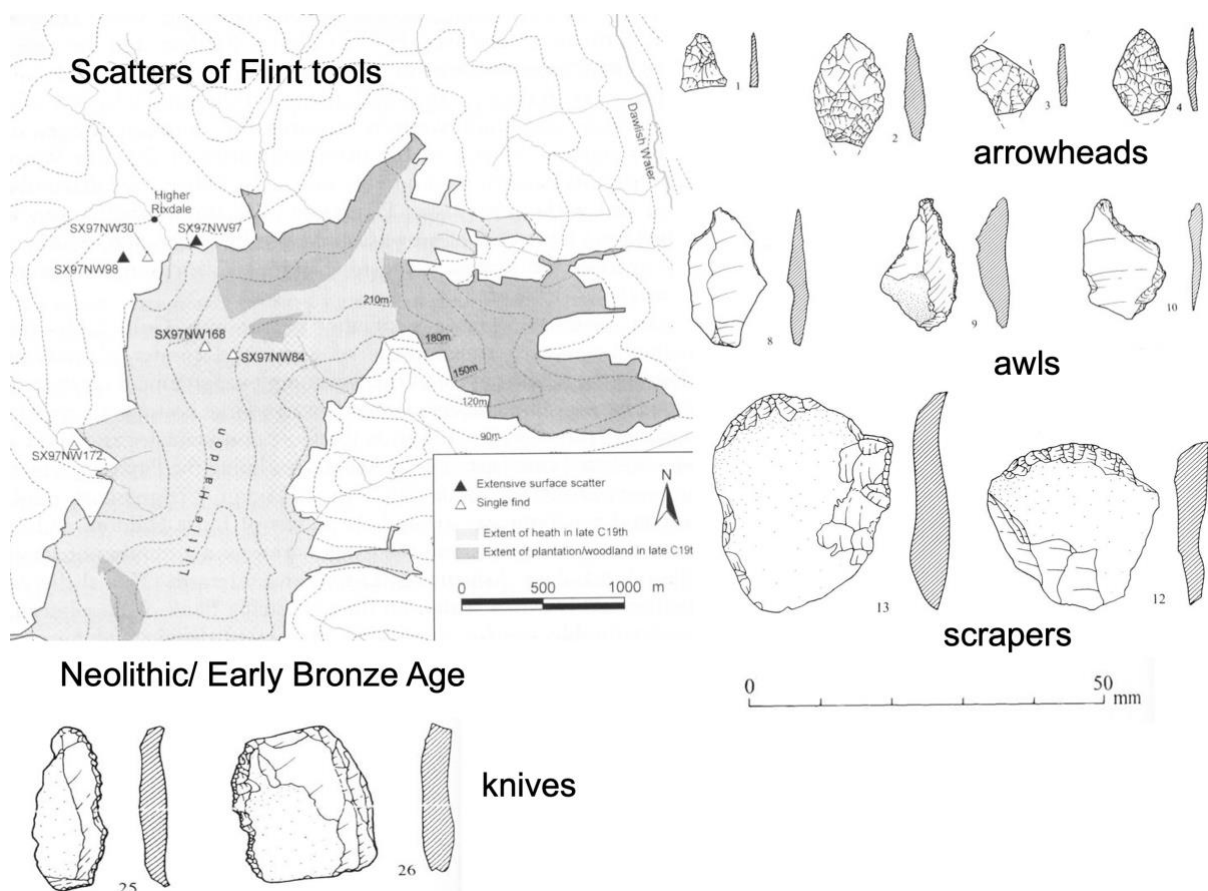
On the positive side we now have this much-loved building well used and at the heart of many community activities. Around 30 organisations regularly use the Manor House and that doesn’t count the number of weddings and one-off functions.

Note: All comments and any mistakes are the responsibility of the author alone.

Dawlish before Domesday

Report of the talk by Derek Gore

This was a joint meeting between Dawlish Local History Group and the Devonshire Association. The last time that the Devonshire Association visited and studied Dawlish was in 1881 and was a 3- day event. This time it was restricted to a single talk by our local expert Derek Gore.



Derek pointed out the importance of Little Haldon in the Neolithic (4,000BC – 2500 BC) and Bronze ages (2500 BC – 800 BC). The settlements here were probably established because of the proximity to the sea, to Dawlish Water and the red soil. The sea provided fish, salt and the ability to travel, whilst the soil enabled arable farming. One other advantage of Little Haldon is that it is flint capped which enabled tools to be made, although not of the best quality. Arrowheads, awls and scrapers have been found.

There have been a number of useful archaeological digs in the area which have produced results. Near Higher Rixdale there were non-local flints found in a bronze age cairn. Late Bronze age burial mounds were found on Teignmouth golf course. The Dawlish hoard found near Langdon Farm consists of scrap metal dating from 1000 BC – 750 BC.

The iron age (800 BC – Roman invasion) is represented by Castle Dyke. This has never had an archaeological dig so is open to interpretation but was probably a hill fort encircled by a ditch and high mud wall, which is four feet high even now.

There was a dig at Gatehouse Farm in 2015 and again in 2022/3. This was quite exciting as both neolithic and bronze age artefacts were found, though there was no evidence of settlement. However, there were signs of settlement in the early iron age and buildings from both early and late Roman period including pottery. Seeds of wheat and oats were discovered.

Roman coins have been discovered on Little Haldon and these are thought to be associated with burials and at Ashcombe tesserae from mosaics have been found suggesting that there may have been a Roman villa. Also at Shepherds Lane, Teignmouth the remains of a wooden complex farmstead were found.

Moving on, in 1001 AD there was a Viking raid up the river Teign and a silver ingot was found at Bishopsteignton. The Vikings were paid off and moved to the river Exe.

Apart from reference to the Domesday book the last date covered was 1044 when Edward the Confessor gave the Dawlish estate to Leofric who at the time was a chaplain. Derek raised the question of whether Leofric was given Dawlish manor because he was born here but it is unlikely that we will ever know. What is striking is that the manor boundaries are roughly the same as the parish boundaries today.

Some of the local roads have a long history. The B3192 to Teignmouth is likely to be pre-Roman as is the Greenway lane/Portway linking Cockwood and Coombe Cellars onwards associated with the salt trade. The line of the A380 is thought to be Roman from Exeter via Teign Bridge to Ipplepen (with its Roman remains) and on, probably to Plymouth.

History

‘All our ancient history...is no more than accepted fiction’. Voltaire

‘There is a history in all men’s lives’ Shakespeare Henry IV part 2.

