



The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Chairman's Chat

Judy Westacott

Well, here we are at the beginning of another year – 2012, the Queen's jubilee year and the arrival of the Olympic Games. With the present economic situation worldwide it is difficult to predict what the year will mean to us here in Totnes.

As a society we have started to work in partnership with other groups and organisations in order to avoid duplication of effort and competing for the same pots of money, and we are confident that this is the way forward. Sharing best practice and learning from others' mistakes is a step in the right direction, working with others enhances the skills base of our modest committee.

It is certain that our planning team will be kept busy – a detailed application for the development of Baltic Wharf is imminent, and an outline application for Riverside and Ashburton Road are expected soon. These will have a major impact on the town and on the lives of all who live and work here.

But what of smaller schemes and enhancements? They seem to be encouraging people to write to the Mayor and the local press. As money is tight and Local Authorities have to maintain statutory and local priorities and deliver essential services, local groups have taken it upon themselves to create gardens, tidy up eyesores and work towards the enhancement of the town. The Leechwell Garden, Lamb Garden, Heath's Garden and the Blind Garden are examples of what has, and can be achieved. The planters on Steamer Quay have been filled with flowers and vegetables which members of the public are invited to pick and eat. The tiny patches of earth outside the blue buildings have been tidied and replanted. Plans are in hand to tidy up the Town Council owned land on Coronation Road – the grass strip opposite Manor Close.

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In addition, the improvement – or otherwise! – of the Station Road roundabout has been completed. Bulbs and boulder, chippings and gnomes have replaced the unloved, uncared for foliage that previously greeted visitors to the town. Sponsored by China Blue – whose promotional sign has caused controversy – this has attracted more comment, been talked about endlessly and encouraged more people to write to the local press than could ever have been anticipated. Some people think that the blue gnomes are out of keeping with the town, and perhaps they are right. Others see them as a bit of fun, far enough away from the historic core of the town not to detract from it. Are such enhancements for the better, or are they a retrograde step? You must make up your own mind.

2012 TotSoc AGM

Sue Bennett

The TOTSOC 2012 AGM will be held on THURSDAY 4th OCTOBER in the UNITED FREE CHURCH at 7 P.M. The speaker will be announced nearer the time. Please do make every effort to attend.

Introducing a series of articles on local churches

John Keleher

Although we live in an increasingly secular world each year thousands of us, for one reason or another, drop in on a church. Perhaps like Philip Larkin we find ourselves

'.....Wondering what to look for, wondering too
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into....'

Like Larkin I for one find myself thinking that

'.....for though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here....'

In the next few editions of CONTACT we hope to include a series of short articles which highlight some of the features of local churches – things we might look out for if we chance to call in at one of these magnificent buildings. In the first of these articles Lawrence Green looks at St. David's, Ashprington. We hope you enjoy the series.

St David's Church, Ashprington

Lawrence Green

Parish churches dedicated to a Celtic saint are usually older in their foundation than churches dedicated to Biblical saints. The church in Ashprington on its hillside shelf is no exception. Although nothing today is older than the late red sandstone Norman font it is probable that a church of some sort existed in its commanding position.

Enclosed by 'God's acre' with burials going back to the Middle Ages St David's has a fine tower dating back to the end of the thirteenth century. It is unusual for Devon; its slender form of four truncated pyramids with no buttresses is more typical of north Cornwall. A small group of similar towers centred on Tintagel show a strikingly similar design and workmanship. The little church at Trevalga could have been built by the same early mediaeval craftsmen.

The copper clock face on the south side of the tower is considered too large for its setting and could have been intended for another, larger tower. The clock, by Wasborough Hale of Bristol dates from 1846 and is still wound by hand every Friday.

The interior of the church is light and airy, benefiting largely from absence of stained glass windows. The arcade dates from around 1450 and has some good capitals. There is a particularly fine green man, with eyes unusually closed, on a capital on the north side near the now blocked 'devil's door'.

The windows with their clear lights were rebuilt in

the 1840s in soft Beer stone which is crumbling as the iron glazing bars rust and expand. The east window above the altar is Victorian and contains scenes from the life and crucifixion of Christ.

Another of the glories of the church is its woodwork which is considered to be some of Herbert Read's best work. The pulpit is modelled on one from Kenton church dating from 1485 which was restored by Read in the early twentieth century with some of the missing pieces found by Baring-Gould. The choir pews, parclose screens and sanctuary panelling lead the eye to the magnificent reredos with its carved figures of early saints and bishops.

There is no screen separating nave from choir. It was removed in mid Victorian times having fallen into disrepair. The twin carved screen doors, unusually in their original late mediaeval paint, can be seen displayed at the Royal Albert Museum in Exeter.

There are some fine monuments on the walls of St David's, which are shown to advantage against the whitewashed walls. The Kellond or Kelland family of Painsford are well represented by a fine late seventeenth century monument on the north wall. In the sanctuary there was a slightly later Kelland monument that fell off the north wall in 1962, bounced off the altar and would have flattened the Rector had it fallen a few hours later. The

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remarkable medallion beneath it was lost or stolen during the 1970s and bought a few years ago by the Royal Albert Museum. It is on display there today for all to see again.

The royal arms, which were recently restored and placed over the south door, date from 1750 and were probably once mounted on top of the screen. When the screen was removed the royal arms were placed above the tower arch forty feet above the floor of the nave where they could hardly be seen.

Less than a year ago the tower was repointed with lime mortar, a project that took almost a year. The spaces



between the inner and outer walls were filled with lime slurry to discourage the formation of reservoirs of water, which formerly ran down the inner tower walls.

The silver gilt chalice is used on a regular basis. Dating from around 1250 it is by far the oldest chalice in use in the country and is kept securely in a secret location.

Since the first priest was inducted in 1260 the people of Ashprington have worshipped God in various ways within the walls of St David's Church. Today it has very much fallen to the churchwardens and congregation to support the restoration of the building and pass it down to future generations.

QUESTION: What do the following have in common?

78 High Street, 80 High Street, pigs?

Di Reeves

ANSWER: Gill's Nursery.

If you walk down South Street from the Narrows you'll see, on your right, just before what used be known as Poo Corner before they made it into a garden, and just opposite Rolf's and Phoebe's place, on the same side of the road as the Masonic Hall, is Gill's Nursery, the site of a few houses. These were put up during the final years of the last century, but up until the 80s it had been the site of a nursery, not the child-minding sort, but a place where fruit and veg were grown.

So what's the connection between the Nursery, the buildings out of which Sacks and Badgers operate nowadays? Well, the records show that for over a

hundred years, until 1973 when numbers 78 and 80 were sold, whoever owned the houses also owned the land where the vegetables were grown. And what about pigs? According to Ken Gill who eventually sold the Nursery in the 1985 it was they who, together with the output of the carthorse of Mr Shinner, the local coal merchant, fuelled the soil. In addition to the dozen pigs that were kept at this site Ken's father maintained similar numbers at the various plots the family worked, for example in the Priory area, up Harper's Hill and on Kingsbridge Hill. But apart from their fertilising function the pigs were ultimately destined for the Bacon Factory.

This link between market gardening and pig-

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keeping is evident way back in 1848 when James Penwill, a nurseryman, got a mention in the Parliamentary report on sanitation in Totnes: his neighbours in Cistern Street complained about the fact that the effluent from his pigs was seeping into their houses! It is with James Penwill that the link between market gardening and the two High Street properties begins. Incidentally James Penwill's son, George earned himself another Press-mention, this time in 1867 when he was hauled up before the magistrates for striking his next-door neighbour who implied that Mrs Penwill was no better than she ought to be. By this time James Penwill had died and his son George had succeeded him and they had moved to 78 and 80 High St in 1861. The man he struck was almost certainly his tenant. By the time of the 1911 census George Penwill was 75 years old, and had a new young wife; he is living at 80 High Street, and from time to time during this period there were advertisements in the Totnes Times for a shop to rent - Number 78. Throughout George Penwill variously described himself as 'market gardener, fruit grower, nurseryman and florist shopkeeper'. It's not clear when Penwill finally gave up, but for the best part of half a century he had worked as a market gardener, and had both a retail outlet and a house in the High Street in the form of numbers 78 and 80.

What is clear though is that between 1920 and 1925 a Mr and Mrs Mortley were definitely in residence and they are listed in the Totnes Directory as florists and nurserymen.

In 1925 the nursery was taken over by a Mr Bland and it is over the next few years that the Gill family come onto the scene. John and Annie Gill had a general grocery and sweet shop at 21 Leechwell Street and their son Jack was taken on as an apprentice by Mr Bland at about the time he had taken over. This market gardening was clearly an attractive business because in 1930 John and Annie Gill sold their shop in Leechwell Street and bought 78 and 80 High Street together with the nursery from Mr Bland. When their son Jack married he and his father worked the nursery and Annie, with the help of Ada, her new daughter-in-law, ran the retail side of things. In 1940 Ken was born to Ada and Jack and they lived above the shop.

The pre-war years were a busy period with the nursery growing, among other things, potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, flowers and pot-plants as well as more exotic fruit such as apricots and grapes in the greenhouses. All these were sold through the shop. However, during the war the exotic fruit line had to come to an end. It was all ripped out and the land was used to grow more

basic foodstuffs. The young men of the town went off to war, but three Land Girls helped keep the production going. In order to ensure a steady supply of food arable land was at a premium, and the Gills were able to extend the operation beyond the nursery to the sites already mentioned where, of course, pigs were to be found.

After the war Jack Gill was able to further expand the nursery. In the early 50s he bought three acres of land on Kingsbridge Hill just after the Western Bypass had been built. A few years later his son, Ken, joined the business. Ken recalls that they '.... took on the three acres of land up there with a store and expanded [their] growing which was rhubarb, raspberries, runner beans, lettuce – thousands of them. In the far end of the ground [they] put Christmas trees which were sold through the shop.'

As Ken suggests lettuce was one of the most intensively grown products in the nursery: for example, on the ground where 3 Gill's Nursery now stands they could grow 20,000 lettuces in a single summer!

In order to increase production one of the things that the Gills did during the 1950s and 60s was to increase the size of the greenhouses. They replaced the old ones with state-of-the-art 60'x20' ones, each one of which had its own coke-fuelled boiler with 4" hot pipes running through it. In cold weather these boilers had to be stoked every four hours – including throughout the night!

At the entrance to Gill's nursery, on the right hand side there is a stone building called, to this day, The Store. When it was a working nursery, this was a covered work area where according to Ken Gill '... that was where the lads would be growing and sowing seeds, potting up geraniums, tomatoes, lettuce, you name it. Everything went on in there.' Outside The Store there was a lean-to where five tons of soil each year were sterilized for use in potting up. In the greenhouses the soil was changed every five or six years, which meant that about forty tons of soil had to be dug out and be replaced by clean soil in order to reduce the risk of soil borne diseases.

But not everything the Gills sold through the shop (and, more recently, through van deliveries) was produced in the nursery and on their other plots of land. This was a busy time and Swedes, turnips, cauliflower, curly greens, sprouts were all sourced from local farmers. In addition to fruit and vegetables, flowers had always been an important feature of the business, even as far back as in the time of George Penwill, as we've seen. In addition to growing flowers for sale the business made

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bouquets for weddings, and wreaths and floral tributes for funerals. But again not all the flowers were locally grown. As Ken Gill recalls,

'We used to order direct from Covent Garden and they would come down by train. And many a night we'd be at midnight stood on the station waiting for the late train. And all the flowers we'd pick up would have to come back, be trimmed and put into water so that they were all kept fresh.'

Later, lorries from Holland coming direct to Totnes superseded the Covent Garden flowers, thus ending the midnight vigils on Totnes station.

Jack Gill's health deteriorated. In 1973 he and Ada converted a store in the nursery into a house and moved in there, and they sold 78 and 80 High Street. Now the link came to an end. Their son, Ken, carried on the nursery business, but the name had to be changed from J. Gill and Son because the shop, which also had that name, continued to trade under it even though it was, of course, under new ownership. Henceforth it was known as K. Gill, South Street Nurseries. (In fact, the site didn't become known as Gill's Nursery until it was developed in the very late 1990s.)

Throughout the 70s Ken Gill ran the nursery and delivered the produce to local shops. But this was the time when the supermarkets moved in. If growers had sufficient land they could produce on an industrial scale, knowing that refrigerated supermarket lorries could ship their produce around the country and guarantee that it would be fresh at the point of sale. In 1981 the nursery was abandoned, and four years later it was sold. At about the same time the Kingsbridge Hill and Harpers Hill sites were sold too. In 1999 houses were standing where once fruit and veg had grown. There were by then a number of supermarkets in the town doing what the Gills and their predecessors had done. The end of something, perhaps!

Footnote: In the Study Centre at the Totnes museum there is a recording on disc of the complete interview with Ken Gill, as well as the transcript of the interview. There is also much more detail on the story of Gill's Nursery, including details of its sale in August 1914 which there isn't room for here.



Aerial photo showing the boundary, in red, of Gill's Nursery

Planning Notes

Paul Bennett

40 years ago...

Totsoc Bulletin May 1973. (by Maurice Green)

"...Westonfields area of Bridgetown...[trees to be planted by the Society] will clothe it with the canopy of green which it so notably lacks".

Sadly not achieved. (PB)

"Totnes is to have, we hope in the not-too-distant future, a Northerly By-pass, crossing the Dart by Dartington Hall entrance gate and running up the Bourton Valley ...towards Torbay".

Most of us I believe are grateful that some wishes are not granted although the vexed question of traffic from the proposed Bridgetown development might the more easily be solved. (PB)

And now...

A brief update on the major sites allocated for development by the SHDC Totnes Development Document.

Bridgetown.

An outline planning application has been submitted on this Greenfield site lying between Steamer Quay and Weston Lane for up to 100 housing units, a 60 bed extra care unit plus employment land adjacent to Steamer Quay. There are major concerns over traffic generation and the position of any new access onto the A385; impact on landscape must also be of prime concern. Many regard the application as premature until Devon County Council has completed its study and prepared proposals for the A385 corridor having regard to the proposed expansion of the town. Complaints have also been made as to inadequate consultation with the community by Linden Homes (the developers).

Baltic Wharf.

Outline planning permission was granted here over

a year ago for up to 80 housing units, employment, boat storage and a retirement village (apartments and a care home). New architects have been appointed after a selection process involving community representatives and Bloor Homes chosen as the partner for TQ9 to undertake the residential element of the development. Community involvement by TQ9 and latterly Bloor Homes has been exemplary and will continue so far as many aspects of the site are concerned, particularly the area scheduled as open space available to the public at large.

Ashburton Road (fields opposite Puddavine)

Following various consultation meetings held by Millwood Homes (the Ashburton based developers who have options on the two fields) they have now prepared a draft master plan to be discussed at a further meeting later this month (March). The Totnes Development Plan provided for up to 50 new homes on the field opposite Puddavine whilst the field adjacent to Dartington Lane was allocated for employment. The field for residential use is constrained by various factors which almost certainly will reduce the number of units that can be built whilst the employment land is not likely to prove viable for that purpose except perhaps for an unacceptable use such as a supermarket; additionally local residents are opposed to that use and would prefer houses instead. A planning application will be made shortly.

Follaton Farm. (not included in the Totnes DPD)

Outline planning permission has been given for 60 dwellings of which 50% will be affordable. Millwood Homes are working in partnership with the housing association Horizon Homes and expect to submit a detailed application after Easter.

Trip to Taunton

Sue Bennett

Those of you who attended last year's AGM will remember our speaker, Ian Franklin, talking to us about the regeneration of Taunton. Ian has been the Director of the Project Taunton Partnership since 2005. This project, which extends to 50 hectares of Taunton Town Centre, is one of the largest programmes of its kind in the South West.

Ian has kindly agreed to take a group from TOTSOC around this exciting new development which is now in its final stages. We are planning to hire *Bob The Bus* which can take up to 15 members to Taunton on the morning of 18th July and Lionel Harper has volunteered to drive Bob. We will then meet up with Ian for a tour of the town centre. For those who would prefer to travel independently either by train or car we will arrange a meeting place and time in Taunton. After Ian's tour people will be free to find somewhere for lunch before returning to Totnes.

Final details and timings will be announced nearer the time but for now we need to know how many members would be interested in taking part in this visit. So could you telephone us on 01803 865848 or email paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com if you would like to come along and let us know how you intend to travel i.e. Bob, car or train. The cost of the return trip on *Bob The Bus* will be £10 per head.

Some Thoughts on Listed Buildings

John Keleher

When a building gets listed it doesn't mean that it has to stay like that for ever, that nothing can happen to it. Listed buildings can be altered, added to and so on provided the owner gets the OK from the local authority. As far as Totnesians are concerned this is the South Hams District Council (SHDC.) All a listing means is that, say, a building has certain historical or architectural features that are worth preserving. Provided these features are not destroyed, and provided the proposed changes incorporate them into the overall plan then on the whole the proposal will not necessarily be received unsympathetically. But we have to have SHDC permission before we start work.

English Heritage (EH) is the organisation which does the listing, and anyone can apply to have a building or other type of structure listed. When a building is listed it is a recognition that it is of serious architectural or historic interest. The older a building is the better chance it has of being listed: for example only 0.2% of the listed buildings in England and Wales were built after the Second World War, whereas about a third of them date back to the nineteenth century.

There are several types of listing: Grade 1, Grade 2* (2 star) and Grade 2. In addition to these comparatively well-known categories there are others, namely

- Buildings and Structures of Special Interest. These, for example, might have had certain modern replacements for the original features; or be in urgent need of repair before a historic feature is lost.
- Non-man-made features, such as trees or undeveloped areas.
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments, of which there are four in Totnes.
- Areas with archaeological potential.

As far as Totnes is concerned details of these are held by SHDC at Follaton House and are set out in five sheets which make up the Totnes Conservation Area Appraisal. They are well illustrated, clearly set out, and copies are available. It's worth getting a set.

In 1965 Totnes was recognised by the Council for British Archaeology as being one of the forty most historically important towns in England. Four years later the Totnes Conservation Area (CA) was set up by Devon County Council and over the next few years it was gradually expanded, and these CA Appraisal documents show the extent of it as a whole. It is divided into four sub-areas (Rotherfold/Plymouth Road, High Street, Fore Street/the Plains, and Bridgetown.) There is an appraisal sheet which includes a map and photographs for each of these sub-areas, and there's one for the Area as a whole. (As I've said, these five pieces of paper are a must!)

Within the CA are 412 of the 438 listed buildings which there are within the parish of Totnes; 6 are Grade 1; 28 are rated by EH as grade 2*: and 378 are Grade 2. As we can see from the following figures Totnes is well up to the national average as far as the grading of listed buildings is concerned.

<u>EH listing Grade</u>	<u>National %</u>	<u>Totnes %</u>
1	2.5	1.45
2*	5.5	6.45
2	92	91.7

Moreover, it has been said that per head of population Totnes has more listed buildings than any other town in the country, which may be why Totnes is in the Top Forty. Whether or not this is so we must acknowledge that in this respect we have here a tremendous heritage. We owe it to past and future generations to cherish it and see to it that these buildings survive.

In the next issue of CONTACT we hope to suggest what we can do. But in the meantime why not enter our little competition? There's a bottle of wine for the first TOTSOC member (apart from current and ex-Committee members) to email paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com with the correct names of the six Grade 1 listed buildings in Totnes together with the correct names of the four Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the town. The answers and the name of the winner will also be in the next CONTACT. So watch this space!

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cllr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
Paul Bennett	secretary and planning officer	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
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Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

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10 Castle Street,
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For Standing Orders, TotSoc's Bank Details are:

Account Name: **TotSoc**
Sort Code: **20 60 88** Acct No. **50878642**
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