

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Chairman's Chat

Judy Westacott

Whilst there is a need to build affordable housing in Totnes and the surrounding villages, for the most part these homes are being delivered as part of large-scale developments. Within our area these sites were approved by the Inspector and adopted by SHDC following the approval of the Totnes Development Plan.

In order that development achieves the best possible outcome for all involved, it is important that planners, developers and Councillors work in partnership with the community in which development is taking place.

For all major sites, SDHC has introduced a Supplementary Planning Document – "Masterplans and Development Briefs". Such a document will be prepared by the developer and should be approved by the Council before planning permission is granted. This will enable consideration to be given to the type of community that will be created. It will also ensure that a 'sense of place' and local distinctiveness can be achieved so that those who live and work there feel a part of the historic Town and not just a bit bolted on the periphery of it.

The absence of a previously approved "Masterplan Development Brief" could be one of the reasons for refusing a planning application. The document submitted for approval must include evidence of community engagement and involvement in its preparation. Should suggestions be ignored an explanation of why they have not been adopted should be included. Proof will also be required to confirm that the reasons for the decisions made have been fed back to the community.

For more information on SHDC's Masterplans & Development Briefs see the SHDC website:

<http://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/1890/Masterplans--Development-Briefs>

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Unfortunately, in the case of Riverside, this did not happen.

A masterplan was submitted, but not approved by the Council, who invited the developer to provide further information. Sadly, this was not forthcoming. As a Society, we can only hope that more weight will be given to masterplans and development briefs when applications for other prominent sites come forward.

If any credibility is to be given to public engagement, the public must have confidence that their views will be listened to, and feel that they can be actively involved in the decision-making process. This will require effective two-way communication, trust and respect, and I firmly believe that meaningful public involvement is vital if Councils are to deliver quality services, and live within the tight budget constraints forced on them by central government.

St Andrew's Church, Harberton

Lawrence Green (photos by Kim Sayer)



From its commanding position on a ridge at the edge of the village of Harberton this fine church greets the visitor as he comes down the road from Totnes. The predominant colour is grey: grey slate gravestones, grey shale and sandstone walls and a fine grey tower seventy-eight feet tall.

It is an imposing church with a slightly remote feel. The slim tapering tower is unusual for having crocketed finials in its four corners as well as a staircase in a turret on its south side with a nineteenth century clocked tacked onto it. The imposing fourteenth century porch has retained its upper room above the vaulted entrance. There is a Saxon sandstone cross decorated with palms near the porch.

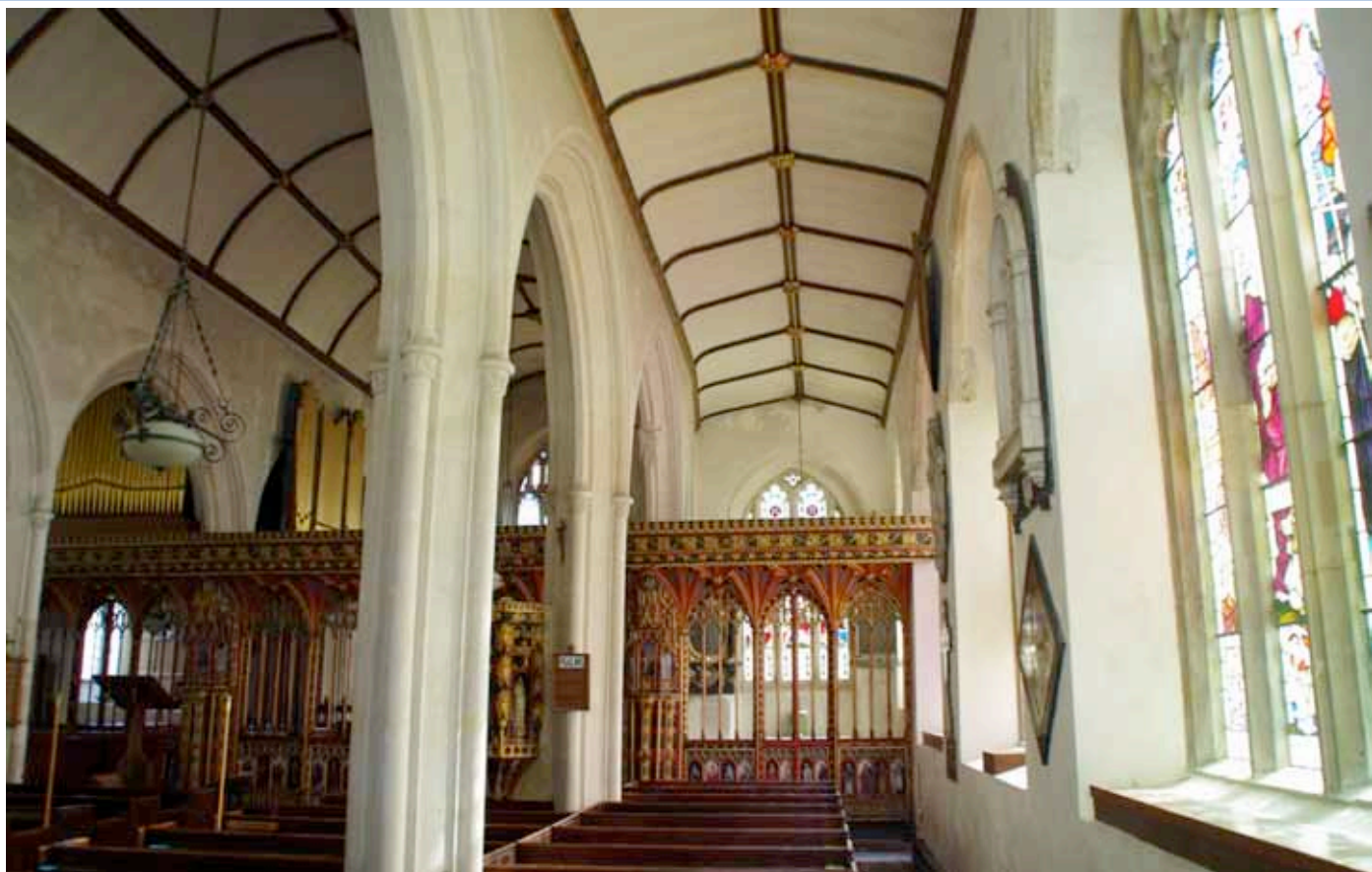
The lofty interior of the church is magnificently perpendicular, dating from 1370, with fine

barrel vaulting in the nave and choir as well as in both aisles. Two brightly coloured features dominate: the complete fifteenth century screen with its Victorian repainting and metal panels and the completely Victorian stained glass windows in the north and south aisles. For lovers of the Victorian the windows are wonderful. Simon Jenkins describes them as 'ubiquitous and pernicious'; in my opinion they do detract from the richness of the screen and brightly painted fifteenth century stone pulpit with its carved Flemish apostles which replaced the original carved figures destroyed in the Reformation.

It is a richly endowed and well cared for church. Two prominent local families competed in stained glass, monuments and restoration. The Trist family's contributions are mainly found in the south aisle. The Harvey family can be considered to have won the competition. Their stained glass windows are all along the north wall of the church and a touching monument near the screen in the north aisle is most unusual. It commemorates Robert Godfrey Harvey who died at his boarding school at the age of ten in 1895. Because his mother was from Peru and because he was born there the boy was known as 'Tito'. He can be seen in a nearby stained glass window standing with Christ's hand on his shoulder. This window is unique in Devon; it clearly shows a llama!

Having recovered from the blazing effect of colourful Victoriana we may turn our attention to the rest of the church interior. Near the south door is a Norman red sandstone screen with Byzantine ornamentation, a carved frieze of roundels enclosing six petals, a girdle of cable moulding and a frieze of scooped design. Looking up at the magnificent barrel vaulted ceiling we can see eighty carved bosses, some depicting legendary figures. These bring to mind the bosses on the porch vaulting that are reputed to be King Edward I and his Queen.

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There is a ring of six bells cast in 1762 by Thomas Bilbie of Cullompton. These bells supersede a peal of four cast in 1553. The organ was built by 'Father' Willis, moved to its present position in 1911.

Other details of interest are a small monument near the south door to one Jasper Parrott who 'expired in a violent epileptic fit' in 1815. Above the door are the royal arms of Queen Anne who was Queen from 1702 until 1714. Leaving the church, a strange carved head can be seen on the oak door.

Harberton has another obscure connection to a remote part of the world. During the nineteenth century a

Harberton farming family set out to the end of the world, finishing up at the southern tip of Argentina east of the southernmost town of Ushuaia. There they finally settled and bought a huge ranch, the 'Estancia Harberton', where they kept thousands of sheep. Today the Estancia also does bed and breakfast; to get there involves a lengthy journey through the bleak and treeless Patagonian desert to Tierra del Fuego followed by hours of travel off road. There is an article about the place to the right of the door inside the church. I don't think it will become a popular weekend destination for the villagers of Harberton.

Outside the church 'God's Acre' is extensive and sloping. On the south side many of the slate gravestones were removed from their settings and placed around the walls of the churchyard. A few yards away from the south-west corner of the church is the Harvey vault resplendent in white marble with a cross on top. A flight of steps leads down into the vault where Tito and his father repose in effigy



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on raised slabs. This type of mausoleum is most unusual in a Devon churchyard. It makes me think of an entrance to the Paris Metro.

The view from the churchyard is entirely rural and peaceful. In the spring primroses and celandines soften the bumpy graves. There are two separate entrances: one, at the bottom of the hill through a lych gate ('lych' being Old English for corpse), the other through high iron gates on the village side of the churchyard. A few yards on the other side

of the gates is the ancient Church House Inn which was once an alehouse owned and run by the church. Before that it probably housed the masons, carpenters and craftsmen who worked on the building of the church in mediaeval times. After a visit to this remarkable and sumptuously appointed church of St Andrew a pint of Jail Ale in this excellent and welcoming inn will restore the balance between the inner and outer man.

Memories of TotSoc

Michael Dower

Michael Dower was a co-founder of Totnes and District Society, and served as its Secretary and Chairman. He was made an honorary member when he left Dartington in 1985.

I have recently moved from Cheltenham, where I lived for 20 years, to Beaminster in Dorset. I confess that my lifetime's papers are still in some disorder, so my Totsoc records are buried somewhere in my garage. I write this from memory, and apologise in advance if I cause offence by any mistakes or omissions.

The proposal to create a local society came from Nic Cottis, a skilled journalist who was then editor of Dartington's Newsletter. He sought my help, knowing that I had served in the early 1960s as the Civic Trust's national contact with the growing number of amenity societies. Also in the founding group of Totsoc were Kitty Turner and three architects - Maurice Green, Douglas Mitchell and Beatrice Carfrae. We adapted a standard society constitution produced by the Civic Trust, and held a founding meeting. I recall neither the exact date (1968 or '69 ?) nor whether the creation of the society was provoked (as so often happened elsewhere) by some dread proposal for development. Maurice Green was elected chairman.

From the beginning, Totsoc took an active interest in planning. In the early 1970s, the Borough Council started work on a town plan

for Totnes, with a stated intention to identify land for further housing. We decided to take the initiative ourselves, and to set out principles and proposals to be included in the plan. In particular, we argued against the creation of a new link road on the south side of the town centre. We identified land on the surrounding hills where we would not accept new housing, but we suggested that land between the old Plymouth Road and the railway could acceptably be developed. No sooner had our plan been published than the local developer, Carl Throgmorton, bought options on that land, the proposal was accepted in the Borough Council's plan, and Throgmorton built the estate.

1975 was European Conservation Year and Totsoc decided to mark this by holding an exhibition in Birdwood House focused on the history and the buildings of the town and the villages in our district. We had splendid help from Totnes Museum, of which our then Chairman Bill Bennett was curator, with its fine collection of historic photographs, and from the photography students at Dartington College of Arts. That summer was excessively hot, and I remember sweating profusely during the week

that it took to mount the exhibition. It attracted much local interest, as long-established local residents pored over the older photographs to identify their childhood selves and the traders, firemen, police and others whom they remembered. As a sequel to the exhibition, my organisation Dartington Amenity Research Trust produced a book 'Then and now' showing the townscapes and buildings of the area as they were both previously and at that time. Subsequently, we published similar books focused on the Kingsbridge area and the Dartmouth area, and also a book 'Industrial Archaeology in Devon' which included such features as the Totnes warehouses and Tuckenhay Mill.

Another link between the Society and my organisation enabled the creation of the riverside walk, as proposed by Totsoc. The County Council, District Council and River Authority all had a stake in the issue, and they all had doubts, but we knocked their heads together and they agreed to create the walk if we could provide the labour. We at Dartington had created the Bridge agency, which used funds from the Manpower Services Commission to find jobs for unemployed people : they provided a team to create the walk.

In 1984, similar positive thinking led us on to something much more ambitious. When Reeves decided to sell the warehouses along The Plains, Totsoc Committee discussed whether the society could make a bid in order to secure a worthy new use for these historic buildings. We concluded that this was too great a risk ... but three committee members, Anthony Harrison, Kitty Turner and myself, decided to have a go.

We assembled a group of potential backers and made a bid. We were outbid by Carl Throgmorton, but decided to ask him if he would sell to us the oldest group of warehouses next to the bridge. He agreed to do this, for £150,000. We rapidly set up the Totnes and District Preservation Trust, and within six weeks assembled £350,000 in grants and loans from different sources, including generous help from Douglas Mitchell.

A highly skilled team – Peter Wheeler, developer; Anthony Harrison and Peter Sutton, architects; Charles White, surveyor; Peter Beasley, solicitor; and myself, planner – developed a project for the renovation and extension of the warehouses, in three phases, the funding from each phase to be recouped through premiums on leases. We bought a company off the shelf, renamed it Totnes Waterside, and raised equity capital and bank loans.

Just as the project was about to start, I left Dartington to become head of the Peak National Park, and had to hand over my roles in the Waterside project to others in the team, with Tony Bennett joining them as Chairman. I was delighted, and highly impressed, when the development was handsomely completed about seven years later, and my wife and I retrieved the equity capital that we had invested.

I salute the continuing good work of Totsoc, and your sustained positive thinking.

English Heritage: a view from Totnes

John Keleher

In the last couple of issues of CONTACT there were first of all some thoughts, and after that some further thoughts, on listed buildings. In this one I want to look at what's happening on a broader scale and try to view the Totnes situation within that wider context.

The body that is charged with the overall responsibility for advising Government and making recommendations regarding the listing

of buildings and other sites, as well as working with local authorities in monitoring their condition is English Heritage (EH). In addition to this EH also provides guidance and advice to owners through its publications. These are set out at

<http://www.english.heritage.org.uk>
and the email address is :
customers@english-heritage.org.uk

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Apart from technical and 'legal' advice there is also information on grants. From time to time EH publishes a register of heritage categories, including buildings, which are at risk: it has recently published such a document, and it is called Heritage at Risk Register 2012.

The Register looks at seven areas of heritage listing: Grade I and II* (star) buildings; places of worship; scheduled monuments; registered parks and gardens; registered battlefields; protected wreck sites and conservation areas. Although the Register monitors a range of heritage categories we shall only be looking at what the register has to say about three: (1) Conservation Areas (2) Grade I and II* buildings (3) Scheduled Monuments. This is because, as far as I'm aware, there are no registered parks and gardens in the Totnes area other than at Sharpham, nor are there any nearby ship wrecks; no noteworthy battles have been fought here – not even at weekends! Neither is any Totnes place of worship in this 'at risk' Register.

(1) Conservation Areas.

Throughout England there are in all 9770 Conservation Areas. EH was able to research over 80% of these and found that 6.6% of them come under the 'at risk' label. As far as the South West region as a whole is concerned the 'at risk' percentage is somewhat higher (7.4%) than the national average. The Totnes Conservation Area is not mentioned as being at risk but it is not clear if it was in fact one of the 83 in the region that formed the EH sample (incidentally, both the Dawlish and the Chudleigh Conservation Areas are listed as "very bad").

(2) Grade I and II* buildings.

The register records that throughout England 3% of these are at risk. However, there is considerable regional difference – in the South East, for example, the figure shoots up to just over 6%. The South Hams has only 7 at risk, and one of these is 39, High Street Totnes. (In percentage terms – for what it's worth when we're talking about one out of twenty nine – this puts Totnes just about on the national average.) As far as 39 is concerned, the seventeenth century plasterwork and interior are threatened

by the poor condition of the roof, and by the opening up of the floor on the second floor. Of the building's three levels only one is occupied, by a shop on the ground floor. (Actually there is another Grade II* listed 'building' in the Totnes area which is at risk according to the Register – it's a wall at Berry Pomeroy Castle. In medieval times there was a deer park there, but sadly one of the walls has collapsed in several places. However, the Estate appears to be addressing the problem.)

Now we have to bear in mind that the Register is concerned only with buildings which are Grade I and Grade II* listed. There are thousands of Grade II listed properties throughout the country which EH was unable to survey for possible inclusion in the Register -there are nearly four hundred in the Totnes Conservation Area alone! To conduct a survey on the scale of that carried out on the Grade I and II* buildings is an exercise far beyond the resources of EH, so it is for this reason that EH is appealing to civic societies, such as like TOTSOC, to come up with ideas as to how a survey of these buildings might be carried out. So if anybody, apart from Committee members, has any thoughts, ideas, flashes of inspiration, guidelines or whatever as to how this could be done just email them to Paul. The one who, in the opinion of Paul, Louis, the SHDC Senior Conservation Officers and myself, comes up with the best idea will win a bottle of wine. (I seem to recall we've been down this road before!!)

(3) Scheduled Monuments.

According to the Register it is this category of heritage which is most endangered, since nationally 16.6% of the 19,000-plus items are at risk. In Devon 444 heritage items come under this heading, most of which come under the Dartmoor National Park. Again the South Hams scores pretty well since there are only 34 scheduled monuments in its area. As for Totnes/TQ9 the figure is six. Two of these are near Dartington Hall: one is a deer park and the other is a hilltop enclosure in Chasegrove Wood. Their condition is said to be generally satisfactory at the moment, but there are significant problems and the condition of the

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latter site is deteriorating.

Also near Dartington, at Old Parsonage Farm, there is another monument which is at risk. It is a hilltop enclosure in North Wood which has extensive, significant problems and whose condition is declining.

There are two sites in the Halwell /Bickleigh area – one hilltop enclosure, a hill fort, and two sets of barrows. All the details of these can be found on pages 115-6 of the Register accessible at <http://risk.english-heritage.org.uk/register.aspx>

Finally, you'll see from Lawrence Green's piece on St Andrew's church, Harberton, that there's a medieval cross near the entrance porch. Unfortunately it's in danger of falling down one day because its condition is getting worse. (Come to think of it I guess this applies to us all!)

But, just like the cross at Harberton church, it looks as if the heritage situation for the country

as whole is deteriorating, since in 2012 there were 42 additional items on this 'at risk' Register than there had been in the previous year. Whether or not this is some kind of a blip it is difficult to assess, for the fact remains that since 2008 1150 items have been removed from the Register. The people responsible for them, presumably the owners, have taken their statutory responsibilities seriously and saved these valuable items. They have realised that it is necessary to actually spend money on preserving our heritage.

Compared with the broad picture Totnes and the South Hams don't look too bad on the heritage front. But this shouldn't be a cause for complacency. Everybody, not just conservation officers, has a responsibility to know about and to cherish and safeguard our heritage – and we in Totnes have a very rich one.

2013 TotSoc AGM

Sue Bennett



Our TOTSOC Annual General Meeting will be on **THURSDAY 3rd OCTOBER 2013** at 7 p.m. in the UNITED FREE CHURCH on Fore Street, Totnes.

It will be followed at 7.30 p.m. by a talk from Dr. Todd Gray entitled "Great War Remembrance and the Totnes Solution".

Dr. Gray is Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University, Chairman of the Friends of Devon's Archives and of the Devon & Cornwall Record Society, and author of more than 40 books on Devon, including:

"Lost Devon, Creation, Change and Destruction over 500 Years"

"Victorian News from Totnes"

The talk will contain some interesting snippets from the history of Totnes, including the erection of the town's war memorial – which was by a leading national designer – and the curious story of how the mayor tried to obtain the castle but failed.

Please come along and bring some friends too for what promises to be an extremely interesting, informative and entertaining evening.

Tickets at the door: £1.50 for members, £3 for non-members.

If anyone requires a lift to the AGM, please contact Paul or Sue Bennett on 01803 865 848 who will arrange one.

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
Lionel Harper	membership secretary	harp@prandl.plus.com
Sue Bennett	minute secretary	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
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John Keleher		john.keleher@virgin.net
Dave Mitchell	webmaster and Contact editor	dave@zenoshrdlu.com
Anne Ward	public art & design subcommittee	anneward@onetel.com

Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

Jeremy Logie OBE
15 Heath Way,
Totnes,
TQ9 5GP

For Standing Orders, TotSoc's Bank Details are:

Account Name: **TotSoc**
Sort Code: **20 60 88** Acct No. **50878642**
Barclays Bank, 14 High Street, Totnes

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