

## The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

### Chairman's Quiz

Judy Westacott

How well do you know Totnes and the surrounding villages? There are so many buildings of historical interest that we, as a Society, keep a watchful eye on, and lots of dates that you can find in, and around, the town. I have put together a quiz for you and, if some of the answers escape you, why not go out and track them down. Good Luck!

1. Name the 3 Leechwell Troughs
2. What is the date on the Fire Mark on Hope House, High Street?
3. What type of Castle is Totnes Castle?
4. Who designed the Old Totnes Bridge?
5. In which year did the East Gate fire occur?
6. Name the Norman overlord responsible for the building of Totnes Castle
7. Where would you find a sculpture of author Mary Wesley?
8. What initials can be found on the Guildhall Pillars?
9. Who set fire to St. John's Church in 1976?
10. Whose cider works operated on the Plains?
11. Which Playwright lived at Tingrith in Ashburton Road for 17 years?
12. How did Nicolas Ball make his money?
13. Who is reputed to have said 'Here I come and here I'll rest and this little town shall be called Totnes'?

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14. What 4 words would you find on the directional sign attached to the Bay Horse Inn?
15. Who was the first Lady Mayor of Totnes?
16. What was destroyed by fire in 1955?
17. What took place in the Guildhall between 1624 and 1974?
18. Which famous author stayed at the Royal Seven Stars in 1723?
19. Which building was designed by George Repton and built for George Stanley Cary?
20. In which century was St Mary's Church built?

Answers: see page 6

### In Memoriam Anthony Harrison

Charles Fox

I met Anthony, shortly after coming to live in Totnes in 1977. This fortunate encounter, for me at least, came about through one of the founders of TOTSOC, Michael Dower. My wife Julia and I knew Michael's younger brother Robin, when we lived in Newcastle upon Tyne. I had been active in amenity societies there and Julia first met Michael and Anthony when she was invited to join the TOTSOC Committee. After

a brief time and following Julia's Chairmanship, I became Secretary. Anthony and I then represented TOTSOC at the first major public inquiry into the District Council's plans for the redevelopment of the 'Southern Area' (later to become the focus of Save Our Space and Design Our Space - as well as the site of one of the quality contributions to the architectural development of Totnes, in the form of award winning housing, which have been

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the hallmark of the Harrison Sutton Partnership).

As a result of our efforts, SHDC's plans for the area were not allowed. Anthony and TOTSOC went on to persuade the County Council to modify their plans for a straight 'bypass' from New Walk to Kingsbridge Hill, convincing them to take the meandering route of St. Katherine's and Heath's Ways, thus preserving many of the ancient landscape features of the area (and also allowing the opportunity for the later creation of the Leechwell, Lamb and Heath's Gardens).

My involvement in TOTSOC, with Anthony, led to the development of our long-term friendship. Sadly for me, when as a young architectural graduate I arrived in London just after Anthony had departed for Nigeria (where he joined his father's architectural practice) I missed out on a further eighteen years of his stimulating and enjoyable company.

Anthony was a design leader among our architectural peers. He helped to create a built legacy from which Totnes and other places will continue to benefit. His architecture always embodied the 'human spirit' and exhibits a deep appreciation of quality craftsmanship and thoughtful design - a reflection of Anthony's own personal beliefs and consummate design and making skills. He constantly sought ways in which to acknowledge small things (and people) celebrate the dignity of the negligible, the marginal and the forgotten (exemplified by his work for the street children of India). Perhaps it was his early experiences in Africa and his cross-cultural background which raised his awareness and sensitivity to places and people.

He was highly regarded professionally, always conducting himself in a courteous and polite manner. Nevertheless, he was well able to 'fight his corner' for what he believed would be the best outcomes and in the interests of both his clients and the local community. Although he took his work seriously, whilst exhibiting tenacity, persuasiveness and persistence, his pleasant demeanour and perennially jocular and self-deprecating good humour usually meant that his ideas prevailed and that others 'went the extra mile' with him.

Our last collaboration was the creation of Heath's Garden. Largely thanks to Anthony's powers of persuasion and membership of the Wakefield Trust we managed to persuade the District Council to allow us to develop this hitherto unloved corner of the town centre. We were fortunate to gain the support of other charitable bodies (I was then Chairman of the Totnes & District Preservation Trust) and to raise the necessary funds. The legacy of our contribution is commemorated in our initials, carved into the wooden sculpture (designed by Anthony) at his insistence!

His marriage to his talented wife Ski, together with seeing his two children Ben and Becky grow up and have children of their own, gave him and them, immense pleasure and sustained him throughout his active life and career. He gave far more than he took from his wide range of friends and acquaintances and it was no surprise that over three hundred people attended his memorial event at Sharpham House, earlier this year - a mark of the esteem in which we all held him. Our thoughts are with his family whom he loved above all else.

## St Mary's Church, Totnes

Lawrence Green

The priory and parish church of St Mary is a magnificent example of perpendicular gothic that is almost hidden from the bustling High Street in Totnes. Although the magnificent tower can be seen above the jumbled roofs of the town from several miles away, the church is discovered as a surprise in a gap between ancient buildings. Once it was hidden behind the pillars of the arcade that now fronts the Guildhall, today its red sandstone tower and walls are slightly more accessible than formerly.

The high tower with its enclosed exterior staircase and crocketed finials contains a further surprise. The clock that strikes the hours and quarter hours with such authority has no face. If one wants to know the exact time one must turn and walk a few paces to look at the clock on the Eastgate.

At first glance the war memorial a few yards from the south door of the church is conventional. It has one hundred and three names of fallen Totnesians from the

Great War and thirty-eight from the Second World War. Above the names is a tall, plain granite cross with the well-known bronze sword of sacrifice mounted on it. It reminds us of hundreds of similar memorials dotted all over northern France and western Belgium.

The Totnes memorial is the prototype, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, the Crediton-born architect who designed the Menin Gate. The cross, sword and octagonal base were replicated in many Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries on or near the Western Front.

Entering the church through the ornate porch one feels both at the centre of Totnes and a little removed from it at the same time. The impression is of a wide space stretching from the wonderful 1861 'Father' Willis organ under the tower to the great stone screen and beyond to the sanctuary. The Victorian stained glass windows on the south side make the interior dark but the eye is drawn to the mainly clear glass windows on the north



which must have been moved to their present positions when the new north aisle was built. The oldest dates from 1634 and shows Christopher Blackall with his four wives united with him in death. One hopes that petty jealousies are dispensed with in heaven.

High on the south aisle wall and somewhat difficult to read is a marble monument detailing the life of Revd. John Prince, vicar of Totnes(s) from 1675 to 1681 and Berry Pomeroy from 1681 until his death in 1723. He led an eventful life, being known for his book *Worthies of Devon* and his rather unsuitable dalliance with a young(ish) lady in a house in Totnes High Street where numerous worthies of Totnes peeped through a window at his lewd but nevertheless enjoyable activities.

More accessible is the Venning memorial at the west end of the north aisle. Walter Venning (1785 – 1821) founded the Prison Society of Russia. He died in England from a fever contracted in a prison in St Petersburg during one of his numerous visits. He is buried there and his good work was carried on by his older brother John Venning (1776 – 1858) who is also commemorated on the monument at the bottom of which is written in Russian:

*'I was in prison and you found me.'*

Inscriptions in Cyrillic script are exceedingly rare in English churches.

Also present in the north aisle are fragments of the cut down and recycled Laudian altar rails that always had to be a yard high.

St Mary's church has become the central, or mother church, to a team of nine parishes reaching from Marldon to Cornworthy. It was never intended as such but, by its size and presence, comfortably holds the occasional congregation from all nine parishes.



aisle. This north aisle was added in late Victorian times when the church needed more capacity and matches well the existing mainly late fifteenth century arcades while unbalancing the whole to some extent.

The restored barrel vaulted ceiling unifies the interior space and raises our eyes from the rather worn encaustic tile floor and undistinguished pine pews. The screen is unusual, being built in stone, and is almost as light and airy as the more usual carved wooden late fifteenth century screens. Like many Devon screens it has lost its gallery. Unusually the stairs to the former gallery are found at the northern end of the altar rails. From here a gallery on top of a parclose screen once led to the rood loft.

The east window looks as if it has always been there. It comes as a surprise to learn that, for the first four hundred years of the church's existence, the east wall was blank because it abutted priory church, now demolished. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott inserted the window during the restoration of the 1880s and made an excellent job of it.

It is easy to be a little overwhelmed by the vast interior of St Mary's and not look at the details. There is much to be discovered; an unusual memorial to the seven soldiers from Totnes who died in the South African War of 1899 to 1902 is hidden behind a display at the west end of the south aisle. Beside the names of the fallen stands an accurate bas relief of a mourning soldier in khaki and solar topee with his rifle reversed and the muzzle resting on the toe of his boot. Also in the south aisle are monuments to former headmasters of King Edward VI Grammar School and a number of town benefactors.

The north aisle contains three remarkable monuments

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# Heritage Assets not Liabilities

John Keleher

*Heritage assets are assets not liabilities. They are one of the things that makes this country worthwhile*

*ASHTAV Spring 2013 (1)*

..... and among these heritage assets stand thousands of parish churches. According to Simon Jenkins (1) there are about eight thousand of them which were built before the Reformation, and about the same number which were built more recently. Their function as places of worship is certainly on the decline in this increasingly secular age, and as a result of the consequent falling off in the number of people making up the congregation. Yet thousands of people still go to them, not necessarily on Sundays; not necessarily to kneel. Like Philip Larkin, as he points out in his "Church Going", we may not know what it is that draws us there – but something does. It might be a spiritual thing, or it might be an awe of the buildings themselves and their contents. Like Larkin we may not know why we go, but go we do – and in ever-increasing numbers. But whatever our reason for visiting there can be no denying that that these buildings are a vital part of our heritage. They are assets to be saved, but they will only be saved if we appreciate and value them.

Now I gather that going to churches for reasons other than prayer is nowadays known as 'crawling'. Unfortunately, the vast majority of us crawlers, just like Larkin, don't really know what we're looking for - or at. But mercifully help is at hand in the form of a number of books, many of which have been around for some time. The older ones tend to be rather dry, academic, authoritative and sometimes on the preachy side. On the other hand the aim of the books by Simon Jenkins (2) and Todd Gray (3) is to suggest which churches we might visit, and to help us by providing us with guidelines when we visit them. (In this respect the books aim to perform a similar kind of service as the 2013 Reith lectures, namely to help us to sort out our thinking and appreciation, and to provide some kind of framework within which to help us develop confidence and knowledge.) Jenkins, Michelin-like, awards stars, one to five, to each of his thousand. He awards five stars to only twelve churches covering the whole of England – and one of those is in Devon! As you'd expect Ottery St. Mary is also on Gray's list.

An absolute must for anyone visiting or living in Devon, assuming s/he crawls, is Todd Gray's beautifully illustrated book. Both he and Jenkins are keen to point out that their selections are purely personal - despite the authoritative tone of the titles of their books, one might add. However, it's interesting to note here that of Jenkins' thousand best churches in England thirty-three

are located in Devon. And of Gray's fifty best Devon churches eighteen appear in Jenkins' Devon list of thirty-three.

For those of us who do live in Devon the chances are that there will be a few of these fine churches nearby! In fact within easy reach from, say, Totnes there are fourteen churches which are on one or other of these lists and five of them are on both (4). They all fall within an area bounded by the sea, the A38, Plymouth and Exeter. (OK. Plympton St Mary's is a couple of miles off the A38 but it's certainly worth bending the criterion for.)

These two books contain essential help and guidance for us tyro-crawlers. For example, each of these authors provides a very useful quick historical overview of the various styles of church architecture. Then they draw our attention to the main features of a particular church: it might be a font, a screen, a window, the pews, an altar, a pulpit, statue and so on.

In addition there is information on accessibility. Jenkins finds that any inaccessibility is, in many cases due to the attitude of the vicar or the churchwardens rather than to the location of the church or the value of its contents. So crawlers in Devon should make sure they follow the guidance offered by Gray with regard to the accessibility to each and every one of the churches on his list.

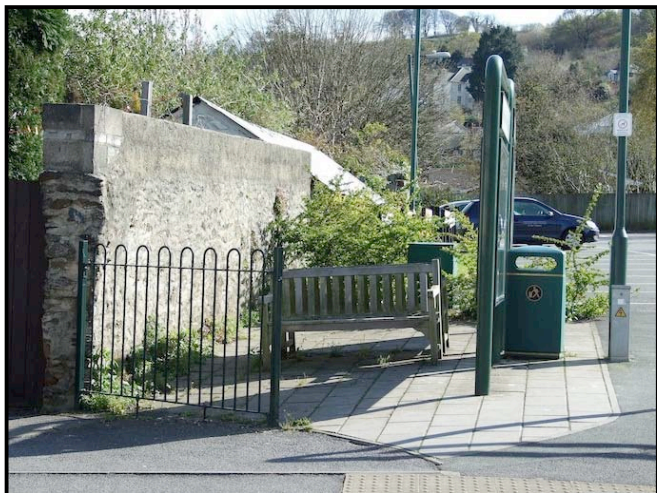
Armed with these two volumes we can crawl with more confidence, and by so-doing help, in the long run, to ensure the survival of these magnificent features of our heritage. But with falling numbers in congregations there are financial repercussions for these churches, so let's make sure that after our visits we leave behind something rather more substantial than the Irish sixpence that Larkin, in "Churchgoing", says he left on his way back to his bike.

Notes:

21. ASHTAV stands for Association of Historic Towns and Villages.
1. Simon Jenkins England's Thousand Best Churches . Penguin Group (1999.)
2. Todd Gray Devon's Fifty Best Churches Mint Press (2011.)
3. The five are Totnes St Mary, Torbryan, Paignton St John the Baptist, Hacombe, Dartmouth St Saviour. If you want the names of the other nine just drop TOTSOC an email. Better still get the books!

# Why don't we have better quality public space in Totnes?

Anne Ward



*Who would use this Totnes seat?*

First of all what do we mean when we talk about public space? Quite simply public space is everything outside our front doors, the spaces between buildings, the spaces we experience on our journeys to work. The streets, squares, parks and places we walk through or visit in our leisure time. Public space is a shared communal space which is or has the potential to be one of the community's greatest assets. It enriches our experience of the outdoors and the wider environment by providing opportunities to socialise, relax outdoors and enjoy the stimulus of high quality public art. However, very often we end up with poorly designed and neglected left over spaces, which don't feel safe or comfortable, have no clearly defined use and don't provide the informal space for us to socialise in or navigate easily.

I like to think of public space as an external room, or stage set which can fulfil the same function as the spaces in our individual homes, with the external buildings forming the walls, the pavements the floor, the street furniture the chairs, tables and furniture. The outdoor planting and lighting elements soften and highlight different areas and transform the perception of a place, especially at night by providing a safer night time environment. Perceived in this way, then well designed public spaces become an extension of our living spaces, not a luxury or an extra but vital for our health and well being. Our civic spaces say a lot about us as a community and have a value beyond the financial cost. Well-designed public spaces enrich our lives by providing us with an outdoor room which is comfortable, safe and which gives us an opportunity to relax in an interesting and stimulating outdoor environment.

The public spaces in Totnes fail to provide these opportunities at the moment mainly because we very rarely get the opportunity to have a say over the design

of our public spaces or asked what kind of environment we would like. No one agency is responsible for its design, development and maintenance. The result is that we end up with an incoherent, multi agency, piecemeal, cluttered and fragmented hotchpotch of approaches and interventions which don't hang together or make sense as a whole.

This begs the question of who owns the space we all share collectively? Who controls and makes it work for us? Many different organisations and bodies have the right to interfere, from utility companies, the police, highways departments and local authorities who are reliant on a myriad of largely uninterested contractors, who work to no plan or strategy, resulting very often in an uncoordinated and piecemeal approach which doesn't look at the space as a whole.

Well-coordinated and well-designed public space can enrich our experience and understanding of our town by enhancing its identity and reinforcing our sense of place. Good design has the potential to increase the vibrancy of a space by providing visual interest. At present, public spaces are seen as the left over spaces between buildings, which at design stage have no specific use. I would argue that design of our public spaces should be an ongoing process which looks at how people actually use space. The best public spaces often combine different nodes of activity, with busy areas complimented by quiet zones for rest and people watching. Our public spaces should provide us with a comfortable and stimulating public realm which meets the needs of different age groups, including children, the disabled and the elderly who all use spaces in different ways. Visibility is important, enabling people to have views across a space, giving them the choice of whether to sit or to move around. Orientation provides a choice between sunny well-sheltered spots and activity hot spots with seating placed in areas where people can linger and rest. Public art is a vital element in the enrichment of our public spaces. It can be permanent or temporary, an installation or a free-standing sculpture. It can include well designed street furniture, murals, signage or temporary interventions which introduce light and sound, moving images or interactive and socially engaged work which can only be fully experienced through audience interaction. Whichever approach is used high quality design and creative interventions enhance our experience of public space by reinforcing local character and local identity.

The inclusion of public art can often be controversial when the wider community is not fully involved. But it

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also raises the question of what form public art should take. Should the same kinds of judgements be made about public art as are made about art in gallery settings? What needs to be considered is not whether public art works would be successful in a gallery, but whether the projects work in the context for which they are created and for those for whom they are intended. One of the ways in which sculpture has traditionally played a public role is with the monument – a form that reminds us of our past but can also seek to address the future. However in recent times there has been a move away from the traditional monument. The Fourth Plinth project in Trafalgar Square in London is a recent example of where artists were asked to rethink the function of the monument and its historic heroic associations. The most successful public art outcomes may not be in the siting of permanent works of artwork as iconic landmarks but instead the inclusion of creative interventions which promote a 'sense of place'. The *genius loci*, defined by Matthew Frederick as 'genius of place. A term he uses to describe "places that are deeply memorable for their architectural and experiential qualities" \*'. Public space has increasingly been understood as 'social space' and the artist's role as one of 'place making' and engagement

in community-inclusive socially engaged projects which produce more tangible and more long term social, education and cultural benefits.

Totnes has, or used to have a reputation as a centre for creativity and the arts, no doubt benefiting from its closeness to Dartington and the Elmhirst legacy. But ever since the college of art moved to Falmouth, this focus seems to have gone. There are surprisingly few examples of good quality contemporary public art in Totnes. We need to grasp the opportunities to enrich the public realm and contribute to 'placemaking' through the creation of places which 'work' for people and make their lives better. The local authority has cut all arts funding and no longer sees itself as responsible for promoting the arts or indeed encouraging and financing good quality public space design. Well-designed public spaces play a key role in encouraging economic regeneration and bringing visitors into the town. Quality environments send out positive messages to both residents and visitors alike, creating places of distinction, not 'anywhere places'. Totnes has a rich natural and human history which needs to be reflected in the quality of its public realm. We deserve better.

\* Matthew Frederick, *101 Things I Learned in Architectural School*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press 2007),



Examples of seats that do get used

## Quiz Answers

11. Sean O'Casey
12. Fishing
13. Brutus of Troy
14. Totnes Castle Ancient Monument
15. Lily Ramsden
16. The Old Civic Hall
17. Magistrates Court
18. Daniel Defoe
19. Follaton House
20. 15th

1. Snake, Toad and Long Crippler
2. 1800
3. Motte and Bailey
4. Charles Fowler
5. 1990
6. Judhael
7. On a wall in the Market Square
8. RYL
9. Samuel Woodbine
10. Simmonds

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# What future for Local Government?

Paul Bennett

With more than half of the cuts in local authority services yet to come the future is grim for the needy in our community but how many of us know who provides those services?

We have three tiers of local government: Devon County Council (DCC), South Hams District Council (SHDC) and Totnes Town Council (TTC) (and other Parish Councils within the area).

**DCC is the major provider and is responsible for:**

- Education
- Care for the elderly and disabled
- Children and youth services
- Libraries
- Roads & Transport
- Recycling & Waste Disposal
- Public Health and other services.

**SHDC is responsible for:**

- Planning
- Refuse collection and collection of kerbside recycling
- Housing
- Street cleaning
- car parks
- leisure.

**TTC is responsible for:**

- Several buildings (e.g. the Guildhall and Civic Hall)
- the cemetery

From the extensive reports given to TTC activities in the local newspapers many people believe that it has responsibility for the delivery of virtually all local government services. The reverse is in fact the case with the TTC having neither the power nor the responsibility for anything of consequence. It is time this reality became widely known so that the limitations of what can be achieved through TTC are recognised. Unfortunately the TTC itself does nothing to disabuse the public of its limitations and maintains the pretence of being an important body. It would be better occupied lobbying for the return of the powers it had in its previous incarnation as a Borough Council with powers over planning, housing and other public services. Pretence would then not be needed. As it stands the question as to whether its retention is justified needs to be asked.

Local democracy has withered over the years for several reasons but principally for the following two reasons. First local authorities have been emasculated by central government extending its control over their freedom to make decisions. This has been achieved by controlling the purse strings and tighter limits on local

planning decisions. Forty years ago local authorities raised virtually all their own funding through the rates system but now some 75% of their annual expenditure is provided by central government grants. It is therefore the government piper who calls the tune not local people. Local authorities themselves are not allowed to increase Council Tax by more than 2% a year without holding a referendum. Secondly the way in which local government now operates results in most of those living within Totnes town being totally disenfranchised. SHDC (in common with other local authorities) is now governed by a small cabinet of members elected by Conservative Councillors who form the majority party; Totnes returns no Conservative councillors and has no say in the governance of the town. As for DCC our one Councillor is neither a member of the majority party nor either of the major opposition parties and again the voice of Totnes is not heard.

The much-trumpeted Localism Act has proved to be little more than a cynical means of transferring blame for the harsh consequences of central government austerity measures to local authorities struggling to provide services with ever diminishing resources. The lion's share of the cuts has been borne by local government and much more is to follow.

Britain now has the most centralised government in Europe. What is needed are two things. First the ability to control their own finances must be returned to local authorities so that they in turn can manage the services which they provide in a way that is more responsive to local need. Secondly local communities need to have a greater input into the services provided. This requires a reorganisation of the local authorities themselves. Three tiers of local government is too many and one should be abolished. There was a proposal recently that DCC should become a unitary authority with the second tier (e.g. SHDC) being removed. This might be a way forward if coupled with a delegation of powers affecting local communities being given to them. In the case of Totnes that would mean retaining the Town Council but giving back to it similar powers to those previously enjoyed by the old Borough Council. These powers would include local planning matters, the ability to raise money for social housing, local traffic management measures (e.g. the shared space proposal for Fore Street and High Street). Unless real power is returned to local communities the future for local government is truly bleak.

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# The Housing and Built Environment Forum

Kate Wilson

It has been almost a year since the Housing and Built Environment Forum (H&BEF) threw in its lot with TotSoc. Those active in the H&BEF at the time agreed it had run its course and, as the political climate which engendered its creation no longer existed, so a "merger" with TotSoc seemed right. The two organisations shared similar aims and it seemed almost an unjustifiable luxury in these times of austerity to have two groups doing similar things when resources could be pooled and interests shared. We live in a very different planning world now; the Government would like to empower us all, but in reality will only enfranchise those who have the luxury of time and money to spare.

There are many threats to our local environment: large housing developments not included in local Development Plan Documents on the edges of Totnes encroaching on neighbouring parishes; a Local Authority increasingly overstretched and facing budget cuts; no Local Plan yet. So what can we do? There is clearly value in a membership organisation which embraces planning and built environment issues, and there should be a sense of community created by bringing people with shared interests together. At the moment I feel these assets are not being used effectively. I realise that how we involve people, especially those who historically have little say

in how their built environment changes, is an increasing challenge, but enthusing those who already have made a commitment should be easy. However, I'm not sure how to do this, but I do know that TotSoc needs to grow and reach a wider audience.

Continuing two of the notable successes of the H&BEF, the website and the regular meetings open to all, has been my focus: the H&BEF website, which continues to be updated regularly, has been the more successful of the two. The open meetings have not been as frequent as I would have liked: we have held one combined meeting since the merger and almost held a second. The need to ensure that when people do participate everyone feels involved and comes away with a sense of achievement, means, I think, that meetings must be purposeful and lead to something. Thus, while future meetings are being planned, they do take time to organise, prepare and ideally there needs to be a record kept of them; this needs volunteers to take on these tasks.

So, if we are to have a voice which speaks to improve planning decisions beyond simply affirming a developer's wishes, and has an influence on service delivery as well as the quality of the environment, we need to work for it. And that does need members to be actively involved. The built and natural environment is better if we are active and involved rather than if we are passive consumers.

## The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

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Forms for joining TotSoc and for Gift Aiding your membership subscription are tucked into this edition of Contact. They can also be found online at [www.totsoc.org.uk](http://www.totsoc.org.uk)