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The newsletter of Tavistock Subscription Library

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From the Chair

THIS is the second of the new-style newsletter under the editorship of John Powell and in this edition we hear about the Independent Libraries Association meeting which we hosted in July and Penny Gardiner looks forward to the Heritage Open Days in September during which the library is playing a key role.

I have produced an article about Whitchurch Down and we reveal that the library plays a starring role in a film about a landmark legal case shot for the University of Plymouth.

Vanni Cook tells us about her one-day writers' workshop in October which has the theme Tavistock at War and our honorary librarian Ruth Blowey focusses on book sales and your chance to meet the author Donna Baker, aka Lillian Harry, in September.

On more mundane matters, we heard in May from the builders engaged in the work to sort out the downpipes and wall that they are hoping to set a date for the work to commence. This was over two months ago and nothing heard since, so I have sent a 'jolly up' email to our landlords, the town council, to see what is going on with this matter which was brought to their attention as long ago as March 2020.

Although Covid restrictions have now been lifted and masks etc are not required in the library, some members feel they prefer to wear one and this is completely respected. We leave the decision to individual members in view of the covid rates rising again.

Plans are now under way for a variety of events this year including a very full program for the Heritage Open Days in September – thanks to a small group for bringing all that together.

Following the meeting of the Independent Libraries Association we arranged a tour of the old library rooms now in the museum for members as well. Our thanks to Rod Martin for supporting us in that respect.

Thank you to everyone for your continued efforts and support which keeps the library going.

Many of our members have had Covid pay a visit and I hope everyone is bearing up okay.

I am sure that as the next few months draw towards autumn we will need to again review how we open and stay safe and I know that we can again rely upon your good will and generosity of spirit to keep us as safe as we can manage.

Simon Dell

Welcome to our festival of culture

WELCOME to England's largest festival of history and culture!

Every September thousands of volunteers across England organise events to celebrate our fantastic history and culture. It's your chance to see hidden places and try out new experiences – all of which are free to explore.

So run the headlines on www.heritageopendays.org.uk So much to explore; and your library is embracing the theme for this year – Astounding Inventions (and Inventors!) - with customary enthusiasm, opening from 10-4 on seven days between September 9 and 18.

We shall need plenty of help, meeting, greeting, chatting, making tea, serving cake – all you need to be is a people person.

It is hard to choose from the wealth of information we have in the library to fit the theme, but top of the list has to be John Taylor.

John was a bright young thing who transformed the fortunes of Wheal Friendship with his clever inventions. Not much stopped John when he thought something was a good idea; Tavistock Canal is testament to

his drive, so too is the Subscription Library which, along with three other young men of the town, Bray, Commins and Evans, he founded in 1799. Traditional "Open Days" on the Fridays and Saturdays will form the backbone of the festival days. On the Sundays and Tuesday, "Roots and Trees" days, we shall be chatting about what the library can offer local family history researchers, tips on how to get through those pesky brick walls, as well as displays of books, paintings and family histories of John Taylor, William Morris, William Merrifield and others.

On the Tuesday Ruth Blowey will be taking a stall at the Heritage Book Fair at the Bedford Hotel selling for funds from the stock of generously donated books of local interest being duplicates, or outside the remit, of the library collections.

Contact the library via the form on the library website www.tavistocksubscriptionlibrary.co.uk (tavisublib.slls.online) with your good ideas, offers of help, donations for the book sale and anything else you can think of, even if it is a brickbat, although we'd prefer bouquets.

Penny Gardiner

Drop the Dead Donkey actor zooms into town

TOP actor Neil Pearson, one of the stars of the hit TV series Drop the Dead Donkey, zoomed into the library recently to take part in a meeting of the Independent Libraries Association.

It was a rare honour for the library to host the meeting of the nationally-based ILA and Neil Pearson, as ILA president, was able to take part via Zoom.

He starred as Dave Charnley, the womanising deputy sub-editor and general dogsbody in Drop the Dead Donkey, but has another side to his varied career - he is a collector of rare drama scripts and in 2011 he opened an online bookshop specialising in theatrical material..

Ruth Blowey says: "Emma, our National Chairlady, arrived with her laptop and new attachments for the partly zoom meeting. Once set up we could see others across the



country and they could see us, but no sound either way. We had to hold the meeting 'blind' which was different.

"The ILA is going from strength to strength and is planning a lot that all libraries can join in with, more details in the next newsletter.

"I was delighted that the South West libraries were well represented and we have now formed a Regional Committee. Emails are flying around and whilst we are independent libraries we are not alone, advice and help is out there.

"All present enjoyed the visit to Tavistock Museum in the rooms that were once part of our library, many thanks to Rod Martin for looking after us."

Book sales given a boost

A FIRST visit to Meavy Oak Fair in June by honorary librarian Ruth Blowey resulted in more than 50 books sold and almost £100 raised for subscription library funds. Ruth set up her stall at the fair and kept going for much of the event before being driven off by heavy rain.

The library has also started selling surplus books on eBay, with a handful being snapped up so far. We also sell books through other on-line marketplaces and during our regular Friday open mornings at the library.

All books sold are either doubles of ones we already have or have been given to us specifically for sale to boost our funds. If anyone has books or publications they would like to donate they would be most welcome.



Ruth Blowey at the book stall

Library stars in legal 'blockbuster'



A still from the film shot in the library and (below) filming also took place in Tavistock Guildhall and Plymouth's Prysten House *(Images by permission of Time-Lock Productions, 2022)*

TAVISTOCK Subscription Library has a starring role in a new film created by Time-Lock Productions for the University of Plymouth.

The 200-year-old library was transformed into a solicitors' office as part of the shooting of the film 'The Strange Case of the Snail in a Bottle' - which follows a landmark legal case *Donoghue v Stevenson*.

Plymouth University spokesman Andrew Merrington said that law experts at the university are creating the first-ever dramatisation of some of the most foundational cases in the country's legal system.

"The Strange Case of the Snail in a Bottle is the second of the series of films entitled The Justice Files, each focusing on cases that have become enshrined in the law of more than 60 countries," he said.

"More than 300,000 law students study these cases every year and the first film will be made freely

available to schools, colleges and universities to assist with learning".

The scene filmed in the library is part



of a case involving the discovery of a partly decomposed snail in a ginger beer bottle being consumed in a cafe in Paisley, Scotland, by May Donoghue around 100 years ago.

The case went all the way to the House of Lords before Mrs Donoghue finally won her legal battle for damages in 1932. Mrs Donoghue was awarded £200 in compensation, the equivalent of £7,400 today.

Her win was established as a legal case study and has been used in every court action where a person suffers injury or loss. Millions of damages actions around the world now regularly begin with the ruling in the Paisley snail case.

The film is scheduled to premiere in early November at the university's Jill Craigie Cinema.

Rob Giles, founder of Time-Lock Productions, said that the subscription library provided the perfect location for the office of William Leechman, the solicitor who took up the case for Mrs Donoghue.

"We would like to express our thanks for accommodating us on the day and generously allowing us to adjust the furniture and utilise some of the books to help create such a wonderful set," he said.

"We will add a special thanks to Tavistock Subscription Library in the credits at the end of the film".



Writing historical fiction workshop is based on Tavistock at war



General Eisenhower inspecting US troops in Tavistock

TAVISTOCK at War - Writing historical fiction based around Tavistock and those who lived or were stationed in the area during the Second World War, is the theme for a one day workshop at the subscription library run by Myfanwy (Vanni) Cook on October 26.

The workshop, which runs from 9.30am to 4pm with breaks for coffee and lunch, has only six places and is a fund raiser for the library.

Tickets are £15 and booking and pre-payment is essential. To book a place use the Contact the Library form on www.tavistocksubscriptionlibrary.co.uk

Vanni is the 'New Voices' column editor for the Historical Novels Review Magazine and is currently an Associate Fellow at two UK universities.

The first series of historical fiction writing workshops that the subscription library hosted earlier this

year, was on the theme of the famous literary ladies, who lived in Tavistock but whose work and fame was both national and international.

The Tavistock at War theme will use local history creatively to dovetail with

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.historicalnovelsociety.org

www.rafharrowbeer.com

www.dartmoornews.co.uk

www.heritagegateway.org.uk

For general background information about the war

www.iwm.org.uk/

national and international events such as the D-Day landings. The overall aim is to provide those who take part with a series of structured practical, enjoyable activities and the

opportunity to experiment with historical fiction writing.

Everyone in Tavistock played their own part in the Second World War whether it was raising money through beetle drives, increasing food production or organising dances in the town hall.

One of the main events with international significance that took place in Tavistock was General Eisenhower's visit to Tavistock (www.devonmuseums.net/29th-Infantry-Division-of-the-US-Army-in-Tavistock/Latest-News/23/)

This meeting, and the billeting of American soldiers in Tavistock and the Tamar Valley had a huge impact. However, it is the stories of ordinary people that from a creative writing perspective are as important.

For example, the Dartmoor farmer's story about the American vanishing tank, the pregnant woman's craving for an apple when it was almost impossible to get an apple, the toys made by the Italian prisoners of war, life as evacuees and the local women who worked as mechanics at Harrowbeer airfield and the work of a Polish doctor at Plaster Down camp.

Whether you have had experience writing fiction or are just starting out one great advantage of experimenting with and writing historical fiction is that you already have a timeline provided for you.

Why is this an advantage? Because it provides you with a verifiable timeline, a structured framework, and potentially the inspiration to write an engaging piece of fiction.

Vanni Cook

Two centuries and counting

Of the books from the top shelf of cabinet C currently in the spotlight, it is extraordinary to find that James Northcote's Supplement to the Memoirs of the Life, Writings, Discourses, and Professional Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, KNT., was catalogued as being in the library in 1822, the year that the library moved into the Propylaeum.

Even more extraordinary to find this record of the meeting of "Monday 10th March 1816. Present Mr Rooker in the chair, Mr Crapp, Mr Flamank, Mr Thos. Windeatt, and Mr Tapson present, resolved to order ...Northcote's Supplement to the Life of Sir Jos. Reynolds".



Northcote's painting *The Wreck of the HMS Centaur, 1784*



James Northcote self portrait

Over 200 years and that same book is still on our shelves.

James Northcote was born in Plymouth, one of seven children of Samuel Northcote, a watchmaker, and his wife, whose name is unknown. Of the seven Northcote children, only three survived to adulthood.

Northcote's father intended for him to take up the family watchmaking business and did little to encourage his son's schooling or artistic education.

Northcote was determined to pursue an artistic career however, taking great inspiration from Sir Joshua Reynolds – who was brought up in nearby Plympton and had risen to become a leading artistic figure of the era.

In 1771, Northcote travelled to London with his brother hoping to gain recognition in artistic society. He approached Reynolds with letters of introduction; the older artist welcomed him warmly and invited Northcote to make copies in oils from paintings in his collection, and shortly after accepted him as a pupil in his studio.

Northcote spent the next five years working under Reynolds. Over time however, Northcote became frustrated at Reynolds' indifference to him and the lack of artistic guidance he offered.

While working under Reynolds, Northcote also enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools. He left Reynolds' service in May 1776.

Having earned enough from portrait commissions to support a trip to the continent, in 1777 North vote travelled through France to Italy, where he settled in Rome.

On his return to London in 1780, Northcote exhibited several portraits of naval officers at the academy in 1781 and 1782 and showed his first modern history painting, *The Wreck of the HMS Centaur*, in 1784.

The success of this work at the annual exhibition undoubtedly played a significant role in launching Northcote's career. He was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1786, becoming a full member in 1787.

Alongside his artistic career, Northcote was a prolific writer and essayist, and his Memoirs provide one of the most important insights into artistic London society of the period.

Northcote's personal views have been preserved in a series of 'conversations' with William Hazlitt, who published these conversations in various journals between 1826 and 1829, and who also published a compilation of Northcote's essays as a single volume in 1830 as *Conversations of James Northcote, R.A.*

Northcote died at his home in Argyll Place, London, in 1831, leaving a small fortune.

We plan a further article on Hazlitt and Hazlitt's grandson in a future issue of the newsletter.

Simon hits the right note at the golf club

I RECENTLY gave an after-dinner speech to the Tavistock Golf Club annual dinner and they wanted a bit of history, *writes Simon Dell*.

So I looked at the map of Tavistock Golf Course and decided to tell them something of the history of Whitchurch Down using each of the 18 holes and what can be found of interest on all of them.

I had been blessed to know a retired farmer, Bill Doidge of Higher Pennington Farm, aged in his 80s, back in the early 1980s when I first came to Tavistock as a young constable on the beat.

He had farmed all his life there on the Down and was of several generations so his local knowledge was wonderful. The stories told to him by his grandfather were remarkable and from the early years of Queen Victoria's reign onwards.

Whitchurch Down comprises 459 acres owned by Tavistock Town Council nowadays but was probably populated by the Dumnonii people of Celtic Wales and Ireland who arrived in about 400 BC. The Saxons arrived in the 7th Century and Tavistock Abbey was established in 974 AD.

Evidence of the route between Tavistock Abbey and Buckfast Abbey remains on the Down in the presence of the Whitchurch Down Cross at the top of Green Lane and also the larger cross known as Pixies' Cross high up on the golf course. These crosses, with others marked the packhorse track now referred to as the Abbot's Way.

On the Down there is evidence of the plough from Saxon times with cultivation marks. In 1539 Tavistock Abbey was dissolved and the Abbey lands given to Sir John Russell, who became the



Pixies Cross on Whitchurch Down

first Earl of Bedford; but Whitchurch Down stayed in the possession of the Lords of the Manor until sold to the Bedford Estates in the early 20th century.

There are numerous roads crossing the Down but the original one was the route from the Abbey over the long gone Great East Bridge, which crossed the Tavy by the modern day East Gate Café and up Green Lane to Warren's Cross thence to Horrabridge and on to Plymouth.

At the top of Green Lane by the cattle grid there is an ancient milestone showing 13 miles to Plymouth. As you drive along this route you will notice over to the right a stony rough track leading to the entrance to Holwell House, the seat of the Glanville family of Tavistock.

It was John Taylor, mining engineer and founder of Tavistock Canal, who lived at Holwell House and built that track as a short cut to the house.

The commoners of the area graze livestock including ponies here, but that was not always the case as ponies were not always grazed here. In 1909 the army had a tented camp

near today's football pitch. There are still round flat areas where the bell tents were pitched.

It was prior to the Great War that the golf club had its birth but not without difficulty. Golf was not permitted on Sundays and the landowners did not want bunkers created.

In 1912 Bill Doidge remembered, as a boy, ploughing land at the top of the road (now called Down Road) before any houses were built there. He also remembered that when the Pimple was built there was a gentleman's agreement between Tavistock Urban District Council and the water authority that the water authority would provide free water for animals with the water trough at no cost to the commoners. When SWWA took over they shut off the water because there was no formal record of the agreement!

There is an excellent little book by the Tavistock and District Local History Society about Whitchurch Down, which is on sale at the museum, which I can recommend.

This little article highlights the need to record oral history because it is important and can easily be lost otherwise.

Meet the Author event showcases Donna Baker, aka Lilian Harry

WRITER Donna Baker, also known as Lilian Harry, will be holding a Meet the Author event in the library at 2pm on September 21.

Among her works are historical novels, romances and two books

giving advice on how to write short stories and novels.

She started signing her romance novels as Donna Baker and Nicola West, now she also writes as Lilian

Harry, a pen name inspired by the first names of her grandparents.

Tickets for the event are limited and cost £10. They are available via the 'contact the library' form on the library website.