

Notes from the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2022  
Present Ian, Nigel, Ed, Liz, & Brian

Nigel started the meeting by presenting the results of his research into the Rev'd Henry Clements, 1829-1913, vicar of Sidmouth Parish Church 1865-1913, prompted by the contents of his scrap book:

### **Reverend Henry Clements 1829-1913**

Henry Clements was the Vicar of the Parish Church for 48 years.

His father was a soldier, a colonel in Ulster, and his mother was the daughter of Geoffrey Wentworth of Woolley Park Yorkshire. He was told that he nearly died of laudanum poisoning, accidentally given by his nurse, and requiring a stomach pump. In his own words he was 'frail, feeble and spoiled' as a child and remembers receiving a glass of asses milk every evening. Both his parents died before he was ten years old and trustees and a guardian were appointed. He was educated at Rugby and Oxford where he heard Thackeray speak and he watched a public hanging which revolted him. In 1850 he came of age and 'became his own master'. He took holy orders at Wells and acquired a dog, Blush, and a horse, Jessie, both of which he was very fond.

In 1854 he became curate at Sidmouth Parish Church living in Retreat Cottage (now the 1922 Club) with his dog. A year later he married his cousin Selina Clements who was 15 years older than him. In 1859 he was appointed curate first in Torquay and then in Ashfield, County Cavan in Ulster but he returned to Sidmouth in 1865 as vicar.

Sidmouth had been embroiled in an unpleasant religious dispute concerning aspects of the church restoration and Clements successfully brought it to a peaceful resolution. He was a genuinely popular man with all social groups and both Anglicans and Nonconformists. He had a dry sense of humour and was courteous and never pompous. He was tall with a deep voice and a facial likeness, many considered, to Benjamin Disraeli. Old-fashioned in his dress, he invariably wore a tall hat whilst walking in the town. He was a talented sketcher and a good scholar. His favourite fictional author was Charles Dickens. He was extremely fond of dogs and had a succession of terriers that ran round his feet 'like quicksilver'. Clements was the Sidmouth president of many organisations including the RSPCA, the Cricket Club and the Choral and Orchestral Society.

He enjoyed a happy marriage of 37 years and after becoming a widower remarried to Ada Butler. In 1904, after 50 years' service, he likened himself to '...an old thatched house (in Sidmouth) that still stands surviving amongst the brick terraces that have sprung around it.' He had a conservative outlook on life. If innovations were suggested then, according to **Tindall** who knew him, he would give a little smile and reply, "I think perhaps the old is better."

When advertising for a curate he once wrote in part of the description for the post: 'Views, if any, moderate' - which in many ways reflected the man himself.

Brian added that the church holds three books by Clements: a church history, a record of changes made during Clements' incumbency, and a history of the rebuilding of the church in 1859-61. The last of these presents a somewhat less partisan view than the better known story told by Peter Orlando Hutchinson.

Ian referred back to the indenture from 1816 shown by Brian at the May meeting. The watermark reads "O & P 1812" and he had traced it to Oxenham and Pym, who ran a printing works at Topsham mill from 1811-1818. This agrees well with the indenture date of 1816.

Ed had been given letters by George Lavendar, farmer of Wembley, sent home while serving in the First World War. George was killed on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1918. His family later moved to Sidmouth and the letters had been passed down. They contain awful spelling and punctuation, but the meaning is clear.

Liz had located three photos showing the Roxburgh flats on the site of the current Roxburgh car park, which we believe were built in the 1950s and pulled down in the 1970s:

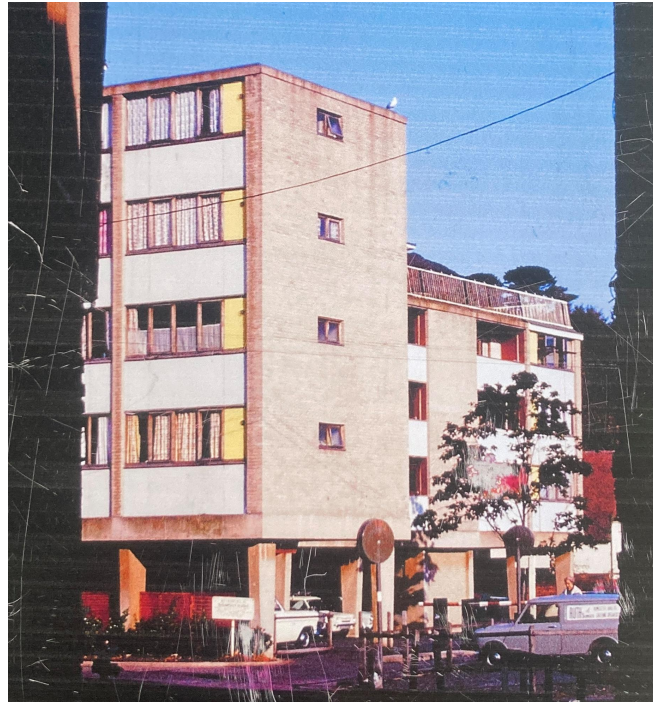


View from Ham East car park, behind the swimming pool



Closer view from York St





View from the junction of Fore Street and Russell Street



Land use map from the 1961 Town Centre redevelopment plan showing the location of the Roxburgh flats highlighted in pencil

Liz also led a discussion on access to the museum database. There was a general feeling that access would be very helpful to those undertaking research. However, there were practical difficulties to be overcome. It was agreed that we would set aside the November meeting for Liz to give a demonstration and to consider how wider access might be best managed.

Brian elaborated on his research into the Sidmouth salt works.

In Exon Domesday, Sidmouth was part of Otterton which was recorded as having 33 salt workers: far more than anywhere else in Devon, which had a total of just 50 salt workers. The entry for Ottery St Mary records that the canons of Rouen, who were landlords of Ottery, owned a salt house and garden in Sidmouth. Taking these entries together we conclude that the Otterton salt workers lived in Sidmouth and worked for the canons of Rouen manufacturing salt at the salt house.

Salt making at this time, did not consist of flooding an enclosure and then boiling off the water. An alternative method had been imported from Normandy in which salt deposited on mud flats by a spring tide was scraped off, then dissolved in water to form brine, which was then boiled off. At the time of Domesday, the "marsh" in Sidmouth extended from the present line of the Sid as far west as Old Fore Street and from the present high tide line to above the ford. There was as yet no shingle bank. If cleared of vegetation, this would have made a substantial area for collecting salt.

There were many salt houses in Devon - a total of 70 are recorded in Exon Domesday, including Seaton with 11 and Beer with 4. Yet Sidmouth had most of the salt workers. We speculate that in most places, salt workers were farm labourers making salt in their spare time, whereas in Sidmouth, salt making was organised "industrially" and the salt workers were employed for that purpose by the canons of Rouen. The canons had arrived in 1061, before the conquest, and may have brought their salt making methods with them from Normandy.

There is no subsequent surviving mention of salt working in Sidmouth, suggesting that the enterprise did not last long. By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the monks of Mont St Michel, who were Otterton's landlords, had built a church and opened a market in Sidmouth. We speculate that they bought out the canons of Rouen and repurposed or rebuilt the salt house as a market house. We further speculate that this market house was situated on the edge of the "marsh", near the sea, and subsequently became known as St Peter's Chapel. This location was open to frequent flooding both by river and sea and contrasts with the situation of the church which was built on high ground adjacent to the original "Western Town" settlement of Sidmouth. As a market house, mainly for fish, the location is perfect, and would no doubt have had some sort of chapel for use by the monks at the standard times of monastic prayer.

Apart from a reference to St Peter's Chapel in 1322 when the boundary between Sidmouth and Salcombe had to be redrawn, the earliest reference to the chapel is in 1681 and deeds indicate that it was altered little after that until demolition in 1805. Based on local memory and descriptions in deeds, POH reconstructed a substantial 2-storey building. He later identified a masonry wall near the high tide mark on the beach that appeared to have been built to protect the chapel / market house / salt house.

All that now remains is the fragment of medieval stone wall set into the side of Duke's in the modern market place.