

sid vale association



past • present • future

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The Association promotes conservation and heritage, the museum, and facilities for recreational and cultural activities in the Sid Valley

www.sidvaleassociation.org.uk





A word from the Chair...

The strange times that we have experienced since our last magazine have severely affected the SVA. At the time of writing, although some of the restrictions have been eased, it looks as though those remaining will still have a drastic effect on what we are able to do for the foreseeable future. The current restrictions on social distancing are sufficient for us not to be able to open the Museum – primarily because we cannot see how it can operate within the rules and also because the majority of our volunteers fall into the vulnerable category. It will remain closed for the rest of the

season during which we will be implementing some changes in displays. We are reviewing the situation regarding walks etc at our monthly trustees meetings – held via zoom – and we will email you of any changes and update the SVA noticeboards. Stephen has re arranged excursions for next year. Our greatest disappointment, however, is that we have had to temporarily close the Keith Owen fund due to the volatility of the financial markets and the much reduced dividend income. We have taken this step with a great deal of reluctance but intend to re-examine it in October when we hope the way forward is clearer. This is immensely disappointing; in effect we have temporarily almost closed down.

On a positive note, we are organising talks via Zoom in the Autumn and we have been able to undertake field work on our newly acquired Knapp, where we are re-laying the main path, clearing the pond and tidying up the whole area. Sidmouth Arboretum is kindly undertaking a Tree and Hedge survey, which will help us in our plan to improve the area as a nature reserve and promote Bio-diversity. (The results have just been published on their web page – see page 11). Also, the working groups are still maintaining Margaret's Meadow and the Gilchrist field as they can work within the guidelines. The History Group is also still holding their meetings but on-line.

We have been able to obtain two grants, one for £10,000 to help the Museum survive and another for £1,300 to enable us to display some Museum materials digitally when we re-open.

As you may know, the Keith Owen Fund, which we administer, cannot be used for routine SVA operating costs, so we are dependent on subscriptions, book sales and other income to keep our heads above water. As we are to all extent in shutdown, we have no income to set against the costs which we are still incurring, in maintaining and operating our assets. Consequently, we would be very grateful if you would consider making a donation, however small to help us. To pay in at the HSBC in Sidmouth or by Bank Transfer please use:

SVA Account Number 70739685 Sort code 40-42-02

Or send a cheque to **Sid Vale Association CIO** 36A Fore Street Sidmouth EX10 8AQ

Sadly, Handel Bennett died in July; his funeral was on July 16th (there will be a memorial service next year). Handel joined the SVA in 1999. He was past Chair and then President of the SVA and during his time, almost alone, kept the SVA in existence, organising the Newsletter, the Museum with Bob Symes and generally keeping the SVA afloat. He was especially active in organising excursions, (part of his past life) and the famous cream teas that were always the grand finale. Handel and Neville Staddon's hard work enabled Keith Owen's vision of a perpetual fund for the benefit of the residents of the Sid Valley to come into fruition. Everybody enjoyed working with him and we will all miss his enthusiasm and immense knowledge of SVA matters.

The Sidmouth Civic Arboretum asked the SVA earlier this year if we would produce a book of Sidmouth's worthy trees with the proceeds going to the SVA. The Trustees considered the cost in the light of our current decision to suspend all non-vital expenditure, and decided to go ahead with the publication. It is now on sale alongside our other recent publications – see centre pages.

I hope that by the time of the next magazine we will all find ourselves in a better situation. Do remember the SVA is still here and striving for improvement of the Sid Valley; we need your support and assistance!

Richard Thurlow – Chair SVA

Editor's Note

What a strange year! All our plans for the year wiped out. No opportunity to meet our members at the opening of the newly refurbished museum and proudly show off all the hard work that went into the building works and updating displays. No open day at HQ or publicity stands at the summer events that we usually attend. Instead, a summer spent appreciating what a wonderful part of the country we are fortunate to live in and listening to the sounds of the sea and birdsong without the roar of traffic and aeroplane noise. Also a time to think about those no longer here. We all appreciate different things, whether it be the wonderful floral arrangements by Sidmouth in Bloom, our own gardens which may contain reptiles, (and ticks!) the possibility of beavers on the river, or the perilous life of the peacock butterfly and how thoughtless rubbish disposal can sometimes be overcome by nature. Daphne's article about very basic but fun filled holidays on Weston beach and the excitement of the steam train journey getting there somehow seems more relevant this year. Others admire the architecture and the people who have connections to Sidmouth. We can relate to the fear of the Spanish flu epidemic – which claimed the life of Stephen Reynolds as told in Nigel Hyman's book – to our current health crisis.

Finally, I am very grateful to those who spent their time writing articles, those who have helped in its distribution and for all the hard work that John Dowell does in getting this magazine and other SVA publications into print.

Val Huntington – news@sidvaleassociation.org.uk



Remembering Handel Bennett

Throughout his 86 years Handel lived a varied and very interesting life.

He initially trained to be a shoemaker but, at the age of 23, he went to Uganda to run a large office for the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) from which the teachers from 300 schools were paid, building materials ordered and clergy supported. He was also in charge of a print store and the Teacher Training College accounts. He also organised a large book shop which sold a variety of religious and secular books.

During this time he returned briefly to England to marry Joan and they returned to Uganda together. Peter was born the following year. After five years in Uganda they came back to the UK on leave and while here had twins, Ruth and David.

For various reasons they were unable to return to Uganda so, after surviving the very cold snowy winter of 1961/2 in the UK, they were delighted to receive the offer of managing a large bookshop in Kitwe on the Copperbelt in Zambia. There was quite a large community of Europeans there and, suitable primary schools for the children.

The family returned to England when Peter was eleven. Handel became a lay reader and later was ordained as a priest. He worked for a Christian company called Raymond Cook Holidays and expanded it to include a new division for pilgrimages to the Holy Land many of which he himself led.

When we retired to Sidmouth in 1999 he wanted to join a Civic Society as his father had done before him and so threw his energy into the SVA taking various responsible duties including magazine editor and eventually becoming Chairman and President. We both enjoyed researching coach outings and these became famous because almost always they included a Cream Tea.

He went with the Treasurer to visit Keith Owen and received the legacy for the SVA. He enjoyed making awards to those who applied. We will all miss him.



Joan Bennett

Richard Thurlow, current chairman added the comment – ‘He was proud of the achievements of the SVA and worked hard to ensure they would be maintained and developed. It was during Handel’s time as chairman that Keith Owen came forward to transform the Association almost overnight with his £2.3 million endowment, which

forms the Keith Owen Fund, administered by the SVA. The income from this fund has hugely benefited the life of so many in the Valley and Handel played a very important part in bringing that fund into being. He will certainly be missed and his contribution will be an enduring one.’

Alan Darrant, SVA president added ‘His was a hard act to follow, but it was not an act, it was the real thing. He threw himself into the role with such gusto, it is hard to do him justice in words.’



Museum News

The Museum may be closed but we are still very active behind the scenes.

Our Covid-19 Risk Assessment highlighted some problem areas for visitors, in particular the Museum’s use of ‘Hands On’ displays such as the very popular Photobox, which contains 122 card panels illustrating the History of Sidmouth. These panels have to be individually handled to be viewed.

Another concern was the ‘hands on’ photo albums and files which are used to give a visitor extra insight into the ‘back story’ behind displays and individual exhibits.

The solution is ‘digitisation’ which raised another problem – ‘funding’.

In June, South West Museums Development Programme announced that they had created a Grant Scheme supported with funding from Art Fund and Arts Council England. They recognised that museums have important work to do that needs investment to support recovery and continue in the future.

Our project was ideal to meet three of the scheme’s aims to:

1. Support museums to adapt or develop new ways to connect with and engage their community
2. Purchase equipment and undertake activity to support readiness to reopen safely
3. Enhance existing or start new digital activities

This was the perfect solution to our funding difficulty. All we had to do was turn an idea into an achievable, deliverable and viable project, submit the grant application, cross our fingers and wait.

We heard on 13th August that we were successful and now we have until the 31st January 2021 to complete this whole exciting project.

There will be five months of hard work for our volunteers who are committed to delivering this unique ‘hands free’ interactive digital experience.

We look forward to opening, hopefully in March 2021, and welcome visitors to enjoy our new digitally enhanced Museum. See our changing blog by following the links on the SVA museum web page.

Ann Tanner

One thing led to another...

After moving to Sidmouth, I volunteered to help with the Museum Town Walks. I had been keen to learn about the town’s history and it concentrates the mind wonderfully to take small groups and talk about the various landmarks. It also gave me the idea for *Sidmouth: People & Places*.

It is loosely based on the walks with a route map. It was the first time I had worked with John Dowell and he got the balance exactly right between illustrations and text. The small book, with amendments, has had a second printing.

A similar approach was taken with *Sidmouth: Literary Connections*.



Admittedly some of the named connections were a little tenuous. Ian Fleming never came, as far as I know, but Kathleen Pettigrew lived in retirement in Fortfield Terrace. She had been secretary to an MI6 Director and Fleming based his character of M on her. For others, such as Tolkien, the connection was an important part of their literary lives. As we were preparing for a reprint it became evident that there were important omissions and the original list of 35 was increased to 41. I remember listening to a Radio 4 Book of the Week about an artist/poet called David Jones about whom I knew little. He was very a major 20th Century figure whose importance is now becoming more widely known. To my astonishment I learned that he spent five years in Sidmouth where he completed his iconic work, *In Parenthesis*, about his WW1 experiences.



Within days of my arrival in Sidmouth a kind neighbour advised me to read *A Poor Man's House* by Stephen Reynolds. Ever since doing so I've attempted to learn as much as possible about this very unusual man. He died of Spanish Flu in 1919 aged only 37. The biography by Christopher Scoble is astonishing but it is 817 pages long and takes some lifting. I therefore wrote a brief account of his life, *Stephen Reynolds: Author, fisherman and Home Front hero*. He both lived and worked in Hope Cottage, now Sidmouth Museum. His office was on the first floor and I sometimes sense his spirit.

I recently completed *Sidmouth's Royal Connections*. On our Tuesday Museum Walk we include, of course, The Royal Glen in which Edward Duke of Kent died exactly 200 years ago. It remains a compelling story. We also, on the walk, look at the double headed Russian eagle on Fortfield Terrace and talk about the visit of the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna in 1831. The 2015 biography by Soroka and Ruud was a reminder that we have to constantly rethink what appear established facts. The Duchess, much admired on the visit, actually behaved badly in private and loathed being here. She was young, tired and depressed. In later life she played a vital role in ridding Russia of serfdom. In all I found 13 other royal connections including the stories behind the wooden garden tongs that were made for Queen Mary in WW2 and a *Grimms Fairy Tales* given by Queen Victoria to a grandchild, both in the Museum collection.



In the news, for the wrong reason, is Sidholme. It had been the high point of the Thursday western walk and it would be a very great shame if it is no longer possible to see the Music Room and the grounds. I especially enjoyed preparing *Richmond House to Sidholme* as much of its history was either unknown or had been passed down to us incorrectly. I would love to time travel back and talk at length with Olga Lindemann providing she felt able to talk candidly about her early life.

A Guide to the Blue Plaques was written by 10 authors with collaborative editing by Julia Creeke, John McCarthy, Andrew Rugg-Gunn and myself. It was time consuming but the sales suggest that it was very worthwhile. The advantage of this editing group is that we constantly peer reviewed each other's contributions.

A slightly different batting order (Christine Hardy, Andrew Rugg-Gunn, John McCarthy,

Alastair Watson and myself) is now working on Sidmouth in WW2.

I'm sure I reflect the opinion of all the SVA authors that a magical moment is when the dry text is brought to life by the cover design, layout and illustrations put together by John Dowell.

Nigel Hyman



Not just the Radway and Manor Pavilion!

I have always been fascinated by theatre and cinema buildings from an early age. Even as a child I would build models of them, a hobby I still pursue to this day. Also, for some years I have written articles on the subject for various trade publications. Born and raised in Stourbridge in the West Midlands, I left school at sixteen and immediately attended The Birmingham Theatre School where I trained in all aspects of theatre

including acting. On leaving there I worked as an actor for thirteen years, primarily working in theatres all over the country in weekly and two weekly repertory, tours and pantomime. Seeking a more stable and secure career I moved into the management side of entertainment, firstly as a Cinema Manager working for ABC, Cannon, MGM and Odeon Cinemas in the South East and London areas. Finally, I moved back into theatres as a Front of House Manager for Worthing Theatres before retiring and moving to Sidmouth with my actress wife Judith. Devon has always been special to us, as we met playing husband and wife in repertory at The Princess Theatre, Torquay and since then have had many happy holidays with our two sons in this area.

One of the many attractions of Sidmouth for me personally is that it still has a traditional theatre, The Manor Pavilion and cinema, The Radway and while I researched their history I found more past buildings that had been places of entertainment, which hold strong memories for the locals. The remains of the old Grand Cinema, now The Chatterbox; the first ever permanent cinema, now Fat Face; the now closed Carinas nightclub, formerly The Winter Gardens; the Connaught Bandstand; the wonderful Sidholme Music Room; the old Drill Hall and of course the Arena at the Knowle previously used for the Folk Festival. Believe it or not, I even discovered that there had been a private cinema inside the Victoria Hotel.

In my new book you will find all the detailed history of these, plus many more venues which I discovered. I have also included an overview of the general history of theatre and cinema in Britain and its unique development in relation to Sidmouth. I have thoroughly enjoyed researching and writing the book and hope that people reading it will find it as fascinating as I do.

John Griffiths

Publish or be damned

On the first morning after moving to Sidmouth in January 2002, Denzil Taylor, President of the SVA, presented me with an application form, with a single word “Join!” I did, and have much enjoyed my 18½ years within the Association. Eventually, the Chairman’s exhortations at AGMs to “Volunteer” could no longer be resisted. ‘Footpaths’ and ‘Woodlands’ sounded too hard work, ‘River’ sounded too wet and, having written and edited during my working life, I opted for ‘Publications’. Julia Creeke was in charge as she had been author of the first edition (1992) of the highly successful Guide to Sidmouth’s Blue Plaques. I spent many happy hours in 2010 listening to Julia recounting, with her encyclopaedic knowledge, the history of Sidmouth. There was a need, Julia suggested, for pocket-size guides to walks around Sidmouth town. I was not the first as Vi Heathcote had written ‘See Sidmouth; three town walks’ in 1975, revised in 1978 and 1991. My pocket-size booklets of four walks around Sidmouth town were published by the SVA in 2013. These were updated (e.g. the conversion of the Ship Inn to Costa Coffee) and combined into a single booklet this year (2020). Following a request from the Tourist Office, ‘A walk in The Byes’ was published in 2014.



We were aware of the need to entertain children – resident and visitors – and Carol Griffiths and I prepared ‘Sidmouth Spotting’. It was great fun. Achieve 300 spots and you get a badge!

‘A Guide to the Blue Plaques’ is, in my view, the SVA’s most important publication. Having been sole author of the 1992 and 2013 editions, Julia Creeke sought help with further expansion and revision; Nigel Hyman, John McCarthy and myself joined the team. We spent many happy hours in Julia’s house, enjoying her cake and tea, expanding the number of blue plaques from 35 to 64, and the Guide to 175 pages.

Key to the success of the publications group has been the leadership of John Dowell. His skill at setting and publishing has resulted in the large number of high quality SVA publications during the past 10 years. Since early on within the publications group I have had a proof-reading/sub-editing role – eight years as scientific editor of a major journal and author/editor of some eight books helped. Two messages emerge: first, to convince authors that they do not write for themselves but for other people and, second, don’t be too proud to accept criticism and admit mistakes. I have enjoyed immensely being part of the friendly and productive publications group.

Andrew Rugg-Gunn



Inspiration?

Rab & Christine Barnard – authors of *The Knowle – Sidmouth, A Case of Murder, Brandy for the Parson* and *Tamsine’s Diary*.

The question “what inspires you to research and write?” had us racking our brains. It’s not something we’ve been asked before and we’re not very good at analysing ourselves; but here goes.

The inspiration probably comes from having an insatiable curiosity particularly when it comes to anything historical. We can presumably blame our parents for this as we both started very young, being dragged around castles, churches, houses etc., in the holidays. Once sparked this interest has continued and with age has diverged to fit our various skill sets. Now we are lucky enough to live in the Sid valley with its huge mine of local history and it’s a bit like being kids in a sweet shop – what to research first, there are so many choices!



Of course we were extremely privileged to serve 12 years as volunteers at Sidmouth Museum which allowed us to immerse ourselves in the many facets of the area’s history. We do like to seek out that unusual tale or uncover a previously unknown fact. This, in turn, led to us writing our various books and articles so that the fascinating stories could be shared with a wider audience. Although we’ve now retired from the Museum we are still actively interested in the local history and shall probably be chasing that elusive clue to the next story for some time to come.

Rab and Christine Barnard

Sampson’s Sidmouth and The Sampson Society

Around 2007, my husband fulfilled a dream to cross the Atlantic in our sailing boat ‘Saltire’ – a 31’ Rustler he had fitted out in our front garden. I decided to have a project while he was away, since taking into account correct times of year to complete this crossing meant that it might take up to three years there and back!



Three years earlier, we had moved to a newly-converted flat in Fortfield Chambers from our Alexandria Road home and I realised that not much was recorded about RW Sampson, Architect who had designed both properties. So I visited the Museum, finding a few display boards with text and photographs and most important of all, John Edwards without whom my booklet, exhibition and subsequently the Sampson Society would not have been formed. I first thought I would create a 3-fold leaflet and it turned into a 56 page booklet.

I then had to find someone who knew about architecture as I knew very little, so I put an advert in the Sidmouth Herald for help and Martin Mallinson responded. He wrote the chapter entitled “The Architect” and has proved a fount of knowledge ever since.

I did a huge amount of detailed research and there are two pages of acknowledgements in my book naming all those who helped.

Handel Bennett, Chairman of the SVA at the time, took a risk by backing the book financially (now repaid) and also came up with its name. Since then, many books have been published by the SVA. Julia Creeke advised that a chronological review in photographs would be worthwhile and the week-end before publication, Julia provided the text and Jan Marshall, photographer provided the photographs, literally by knocking on people’s doors.

The whole project proved fascinating and absorbing and in 2009 I decided to have an Exhibition at Kennaway House and John Edwards, knowing how to organise such



Exhibitions, helped again. It lasted about 3 weeks and I still have the Visitor's Book with fascinating remarks. On the last day, I said to one of the last visitors, "I don't want to see it all end here, shall I form a Society" and he said "yes". His name was Ian Heard and became our first Treasurer.

P.S. As for the sailing trip, I joined my husband in Nassau, helping sail 'Saltire' across the Gulf Stream into mainland USA which was my proudest sailing moment!

Sylvia Brownlee

The Trees of Sidmouth

I have been fascinated by nature since I was a little boy playing on the farmland that used to be at the top of my road. I would spend hours poking about, turning over logs to reveal the centipedes, millipedes, and woodlice scuttling for cover while the slugs extended themselves to slide away.

When it came to GCE O-Level options, Biology was an obvious choice and I was thinking I would like to work as a forester when I left school, then I found out how little they were paid and changed my mind. Perhaps it is ironic that, almost sixty years later, I spend many hours most weeks working with Sidmouth Arboretum as an unpaid volunteer.

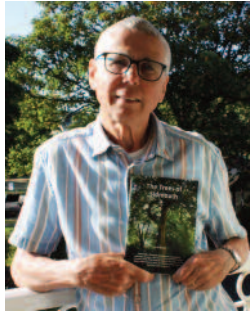
I found university boring and so dropped out and became a bingo caller, my mother was not impressed. Eventually, I chose a more positive path and became a primary school teacher and loved most of it for more than thirty years, during which I took a curriculum lead in Science and Maths.

I retired in 2007 and moved to Sidmouth in 2013, where I discovered Sidmouth Arboretum. I came across our co-founder and now President, Diana East, at a community market in the St John's Hall and asked the question that many others have asked, where is the Arboretum? The answer intrigued me, it is everywhere I was told, the whole valley is the Arboretum. Several years later, I find myself as Treasurer, photographer, and main compiler of the Arboretum's online tree database.

Sidmouth Arboretum is a Civic Arboretum, the first of its kind. The Town Council adopted the idea ten years ago, and a community group was set up to develop the concept. We promote trees with an interactive map on our website and organise events such as our Guided Tree Walks. We produce printed tree trails, work with local schools, plant trees, and label publicly accessible ones. Also, we join with other community groups to enrich our local environment and raise public awareness of wider environmental issues.

I write regular articles about trees for the Sidmouth Herald. I decided to collate and extend these into a book, and the SVA took up the idea. If you enjoy trees, I hope you buy a copy of our book, visit the Arboretum website, and join us when we restart the Museum Walks.

Ed Dolphin



Arboretum News

Jan Metcalf has been busy doing the hedge survey. Armed with OS maps, a one metre walking pole, string, scissors, tape measure, identification books, binoculars, smart phone, pencils, survey sheets and all important rain gear – the hedge survey has now been completed and can be found following the links on our web page below

The felling of ash trees is likely to be observed this coming winter.

We hope to continue our Jurassic Coast planting schemes in collaboration with East Devon District Council with SVA support. Also along with SVA volunteers we will continue to survey and improve the SVA Knapp Nature Reserve, an important site so close to the town centre, which helps bridge the wildlife gap between Knowle to the east and Bickwell Valley to the west.

On 23 October we are joining with Devon Wildlife Trust and their 'Saving Devon's Treescapes' project to increase tree cover. We need to address the significant and imminent loss of ash trees by new planting of broadleaf trees, and to increase the trees in hedgerows which are vital wildlife corridors. We will be at Kings Garden Centre from 11am on 23 October distributing FREE TREES – See you there!

For more information, see our web page
www.info@sidmoutharboretum.org.uk



Ash dieback

Diana East

Beavers for the River Sid?

As River Warden, I am often asked, "Will we ever get Beavers in the River Sid?" This is a difficult question to answer with any degree of certainty.

It was great news in early August when Rebecca Pow, Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and MP for Taunton Deane, announced that beavers can stay in their River Otter home. After 5 years of detailed work by Devon Wildlife Trust, under the shadow of uncertainty, England's first breeding population of wild Beavers in over 400 years has been granted approval to remain in our neighbouring river.

Beavers were once native to the UK but were hunted to extinction as recently as 300-400 years ago. They were hunted as vermin, for their fur and also for their meat, which was highly prized. The beaver was last seen in the wild in Britain in the 16th century after being heavily hunted for its pelt. They had all but died out across Europe by the 18th century.

The Otter beavers are a species known as the Eurasian beaver. It is a herbivore. During the winter, their diet mainly consists of woody vegetation (lignivorous) such as aspen, birch or willow trees. In the summer months, however, their diet consists of aquatic plants, bark, leaves, roots, buds, twigs, shoots (foliovorous) as well as crops in agricultural



areas – which may not go down too well with our farmers.

Peter Burgess, conservation manager for Devon Wildlife Trust states that a fully grown beaver is about the size of a cocker spaniel dog – up to 1m long, with a 50cm tail and weighs up to 30kg (over four and a half stone) but averaging about 18kg (just under three stone). It is the world's second largest rodent behind the capybara of South America.

The possibility of them travelling across country into the Sid is debatable.

There aren't many fish in the Sid but since they eat shoots, leaves, roots and stems of waterside vegetation, that will not deter them. They fell trees to get at the tender foliage at the top of the tree. So no real problem as the Sid has more than its fair share of trees.

In a recent report, a newly felled willow tree 30cm (12 in) in diameter, was found chiselled through, surrounded by fresh wood chips. It was estimated that it would take a beaver a single night to do this. (Perhaps we could commission Beavers to carry out our tree felling on our 52 acres of SVA land!!!)

Their dams are often over 1 metre high (3 feet), and are constructed using small tree branches and other vegetation to create deep pools as refuges, as well as to make it easier to get around. They also use deep water as a cold store to keep food in over the winter. They tend to build the dams in the smaller upper tributaries of the river, so that is possible on the Sid.

What are their benefits to a river system? Mark Elliott, Project Manager at the Devon Wildlife Trust, explains why we need beavers back in Britain. '1789 was a bad year for British wetlands and wildlife. That year, the last bounty ever was paid for a Eurasian beaver skull in Britain. However, this entirely vegetarian animal, native to Europe and Asia, plays a vital role in shaping our landscape. Lost from Britain once, we need it back. Our wetland species evolved alongside beavers. Ever since the last ice age our wetland plants and animals lived in wetlands created by beavers and adapted to rely on them – look at the way trees like willow, alder and aspen regenerate when cut. Beavers coppice trees to stimulate fresh growth, and so open out our river banks and wetlands for other species to thrive. They are remarkable water engineers and create an amazing mosaic of dams, ponds, and canals. Two thirds of all British wetland species are supported by ponds. Almost all ponds are now man-made – because all the beavers have gone.'

In the Devon Beaver Project site, the family of beavers have made over 10 ponds in 3 years, benefitting a wonderful array of dragonflies, birds and amphibians. The 10 clumps of frogspawn laid in 2011 increased to 370 clumps this year.

Our rivers have been drained and over-engineered to get the water off the land and out to sea as quickly as possible. We suffer floods when it rains and dry rivers during droughts, and our wetland wildlife is massively depleted. Beavers are the medicine. They reinvigorate these wetlands, and hold water back in the headwaters, reducing the risk of flooding and ensuring a more constant flow of water during drier periods – better for mayflies, dippers and fish. The rivers are cleaner as the dams filter out the sediment and other pollutants.

Natural rivers are best for fish, and almost all of the upper length of the Sid is in a natural state. Across most of Europe and North America, beavers are generally considered beneficial for fish like trout, and the science appears to support this. They create braided meandering rivers, with clean and extensive spawning gravels for fish. The evidence suggests that young fish grow faster and return to sea healthier if they live in beaver ponds. Despite this some British anglers seem concerned that re-introduced beavers will dam rivers so securely that salmon will be unable to migrate up to their spawning gravels – despite the fact that our native fish evolved alongside beavers.

In a healthy natural ecosystem, beavers can actually be beneficial because they introduce woody debris to rivers and their dams can trap silt and create new habitats. However, fewer than 25% of England and Wales' rivers are in good ecological condition and the Angling Trust's view is that it would be irresponsible even to consider reintroducing this species into the wild without first restoring our rivers to a grading of 'good'. Fortunately the River Sid has a 'good' ecological status grading, and is in good health.

So it seems that we have a river that could sustain the beaver, with food, woodland, and a natural river environment, and for most part is quite 'private' (excluding the Byes). The flow in the river can reduce in dry weather, and may not be enough to sustain a beaver family, but with the success of the River Otter families, they may well start to look elsewhere for their next home – who knows? If we could persuade them to eat Himalayan Balsam that would be great.

Peter Brookes, River Warden

I saw an Adder the other day – I said hello – It slipped away

When did you last see an Adder, if ever? This is Britain's only venomous snake and is extremely shy. They can be found in the Sidmouth area and are certainly around in the woods in Salcombe Regis. Their habitats are woodlands, heathlands and moorland.

When we first moved in to our house in Salcombe Regis they were living in a log pile left by the



previous owner in our garden. However they moved out when we started to use up the logs.

This snake is a beautiful creature and more common than you think. They will only attack if stepped on or you attempt to pick them up and prefer to slip away rather than make a fuss. They hibernate over winter in dry places such as old logs, deserted rabbit burrows or old mole runs and are best seen in Spring when they bask in sunny spots in woods or on the edge of woods. They are sensitive to vibration and can sense you coming before you arrive so count yourself lucky if you spot one.

They feed on small mammals, frogs or newts which they kill with their venom. Their bite is not fatal to humans or larger creatures but it hurts, so go to the doctor. If your dog is bitten then take it immediately to the vet, it is unlikely to be fatal but it can happen.

The Adder is best known for the zigzag pattern that runs down its back, although all black ones have been seen. The male has a more silvery appearance whereas the female is more coppery/brown. They grow to 60-80 centimetres in length.

Unlike grass snakes the Adder gives birth to young rather than laying eggs. They have a strange mating dance which takes place in the spring in which the males fight to win the approval of the female. The young are born in August.

Predators of the Adder include large birds such as Crow or Buzzard, Badgers and Foxes.

Adders are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and must not be killed, injured captured or sold.

Richard Huntington



Beware the ticks!

Many of you will have had ticks attached to you from time to time, but it is worth a reminder to check yourselves after gardening or walking. The photos help give a sense of scale & also show how they cling on. Many pet owners think that what they should watch for are the engorged adults, but the nymphs which attach to humans are much

smaller. September is the peak time for the second wave of ticks and it is not just Lyme disease that you have to worry about. A confirmed case of Babesiosis has recently been reported in Devon. Better known to farmers as a disease of cattle, Babesia infects red blood cells – giving rise to “Red Water” field names. Although most people seem to recover from a very mild disease, which may go undiagnosed, those who are immunocompromised or elderly are at risk of more severe disease. More information from www.LymeDiseaseAction.org.uk

Stella Huyshe-Shires

On which note, LDA's chairman, Stella Huyshe-Shires, who lives in Sidbury, says the charity is looking for people who may be interested in dipping into the science of ticks or diseases and helping with articles. Contact Stella via research@lymediseaseaction.org.uk



Trolley Island

I often walk along the river Otter with our dog, in the vain hope of seeing a beaver. Some time ago, I noticed a shopping trolley which had been thrown in the water, probably in Ottery but which has now made its way down to just outside Tipton St John where it has taken up residence on a bend in the river. (Of course, this wouldn't happen on the River Sid as our river warden is much more aware of any foreign bodies in the water!)

Over the last year I have photographed its gradual transformation into an island. Weed has covered it over and mud has collected on top and now it has a very colourful array of Himalayan Balsam and other weeds. In the last picture, a family of ducks were resting upon it but weren't too keen on having their photograph taken. They ducked around the back (no pun intended) when I raised the camera.

Honestly!

April 2019, the trolley is easily identified and has collected some river detritus, enough to support some plant life. The trolley seems to be firmly rooted in the river bed.



July 2019 – the plant life has thrived.

October 2019 and the plants are beginning to die back to form a base for further growth next year.



June 2020, allowed out after lockdown! The previous year's growth has collected further detritus from the river and is now supporting a variety of plants, including grasses, balsam and other water favouring plants. It has survived all the River Otter could throw at it after the huge rainfall during the winter. The trolley is no longer visible.

July 2020 and the balsam is in flower. It is annoying that it is Himalayan Balsam as it is a pest that every effort is being made to stamp out in the Otter. There are other successful water loving plants inhabiting Trolley Island which will continue to get bigger. I shall document its progress and report back in a couple of years.

Val Huntington



The Peacock Butterfly – Precious but Precarious

The Peacock butterfly belongs to the family “Vanessid”, and is one of the UK’s few hibernating butterflies. As autumn arrives, they search for nectar to stock up their energy reserves. Ivy flowers are an important source, as is late flowering buddleia. Rotting windfalls are another useful source of energy.

The butterflies are able to convert the sugars to fat, to help them survive the winter. Some of the sugars are converted to glycerol, which acts a natural anti-freeze.

The Peacock sometimes hibernates in a “commune” with “roosts” of up to 40 butterflies. This may be in a cave or tree hollow. The dull “dead leaf” appearance of the underside of their wings is perfect camouflage, as they sleep with their wings closed. When disturbed by a predator, like a bat or mouse, they can rub their wings together to create a hissing sound.

As the spring temperatures rise, the butterflies awake, and search for food. Birds, especially blue tits, will eat them, but the Peacock will sometimes escape by flicking its wings open, displaying the large “eye-spots” thus scaring the predator.

After mating in early May, eggs are laid in layers on the underside of nettle leaves. “Layering the eggs” helps prevent desiccation and protects some eggs from predators. After a couple of weeks, the eggs hatch, and the caterpillars live within a communal web. By keeping together, they collectively defend themselves against attack, aided by their silken tent. When disturbed, the larvae will twitch and jerk their bodies to put off the attacker and regurgitate a nasty tasting green nettle juice as defence. The caterpillars grow quickly, moulting their skins usually five times before reaching full size. When the caterpillars grow to a reasonable size, they leave the group, protected by their spiny coats. They have a habit of falling to the ground when disturbed.

I collected a dozen full grown caterpillars in late June. Watching them pupate was fascinating. After not eating for 24 hours, they fixed themselves with silk, hanging head down.

After a few more hours, they started to wriggle out of their skins, revealing their pupal form beneath. The twisting contortions made me think of a person removing a wetsuit without using their hands!

After two weeks, the butterflies emerged. On a warm day, it took about two hours for the wings to dry enough for them to fly away. Unfortunately, easy pickings for predators. In my caterpillar cage, I was left with four peacock pupae that failed to hatch. On the floor I found four small pupae of the parasitoid fly *Sturmia bella* from the “Tachinid” family. The female fly lays eggs on nettle leaves, close to the feeding caterpillars. The eggs are



ingested by the caterpillar, and hatch in the midgut. The fly larva feeds mainly on haemolymph (equivalent of blood in caterpillars). The caterpillar is not killed until the fly larva emerges, either just before, or just after the Peacock pupates. The *Sturmia Bella* pupae took three weeks to hatch.

The Peacock butterfly faces huge challenges throughout its life. The egg is eaten by predators, then when hatched, the caterpillar has to avoid being parasitised, or eaten by birds, which eat large numbers. After hatching into a beautiful butterfly, it then gets attacked by hornets, spiders, birds and bats before attempting to survive a freezing winter. All these natural challenges are alongside human intervention with their use of insecticides. Humans also have a habit of cutting down nettles in June and July, just when caterpillars are feeding on them and they are supporting the pupae waiting to hatch. (see photo)

Studies show that the average female Peacock butterfly lays about 100 eggs (although she is capable of laying 500 in ideal conditions). 95% eggs hatch to caterpillars, of which only 10% survive to pupation. Only 4 pupae out of the 10 manage to hatch, and of these 4 butterflies, half die before mating. The result is that 100 eggs may produce only 2 mating butterflies... and then they have to be a male and female!

It’s a tough life out there!



Simon Papworth

Editor’s note – Simon is a new SVA volunteer and is on the working party helping to re-establish the pond area in the newly acquired Knapp.

A Garden In Time Of Crisis

Gardens have long been a sanctuary and comfort in times of adversity and never more so than this year. After a terribly wet but mild winter we have had two incredibly dry and warm months – April and May.

Our garden in the Sid Valley had already enjoyed the sight of crocus blooming in early February and tulips in early March. In April buds

began forming on lavender bushes and also on the roses.

The figs suddenly decided they were living in the Mediterranean after all and put on a spurt of growth that was phenomenal. Our cancelled May holiday to Croatia seemed less sad that would normally be the case as the temperatures in Devon and the Adriatic were probably similar.

The only downside to this wonderful weather was an explosion of pests that often



accompanies dry conditions. The bird wildlife in our garden are also ingenious at trying to get into the fruit cage and under the pea netting, but we have managed to keep them out. We love seeing birds, but as any gardener or grower will say, they are the most challenging of pests! We are now enjoying the first harvest of fresh peas, one of the great delights of summer. We have also begun to harvest strawberries, tayberries, and raspberries.



The constant warmth also gave us a spectacular show of Lily of the Valley. They like a shady place and although they can ultimately be a bit invasive, they can bring both a wonderful smell and a delicate splash of delicate white blooms to any garden. At the same time but happy in a sunny spot are Irises, so beloved of Van Gogh. Their vibrant purple and canary yellow flowers are a joy to look at and someone even paused near our front garden to photograph them! One of the enduring stars are our collection of Penstemon. They are easy to grow, love a sunny site and do not seem to suffer from pests. They regularly flower from June to December in this mild valley. Their slender trumpet like blooms come in dazzling shades of pink, lilac, and various shades of red. Cuttings taken in late summer are invariably successful and can be overwintered in any greenhouse or cold frame. They have been described as the perfect hardy perennial and I cannot argue with that.

Whatever the rest of the summer and indeed the year brings we will always be grateful for superb weather in which to fully appreciate and enjoy our garden.

Sheridan Ralph



Sidmouth in Bloom 2020

SIB has had, like everyone else, a challenging year. As usual, we commenced planning, designing and ordering seeds and plugs during the winter months. We had made a visit to the Royal Parks Office, London, to arrange a 3-D swap: Elmer the elephant with Tom the Gardener whom we had in 2013 for a visit to Sidmouth.

Elmer was to feature at Chelsea in the main marquee display as part of SW in Bloom, with Royal Parks organising transport. This did not go ahead due to Covid-19, but all designs for planting Elmer were as the original design prepared by Lynette Talbot. Royal Parks paid for Elmer's plants and also for delivery (and later return) of Tom to Sidmouth as a courtesy gesture. Elmer is now at the entrance in Regent's Park. Tom arrived over winter, and was planted up late in June due to volunteers being banned from working in EDDC parks beforehand. However, SIB has been fortunate to have our polytunnel in a field where all our 3-D orders were delivered and plants, raised from seed in a heated greenhouse were transferred to grow on. Four volunteers have now been trained to



plant up all this year's 3-D marine structures done in the polytunnel where we were able to obey social distancing. We were later able to form a 'pod' which made our work easier.

Fred the Peacock flew in from India and his torso and head was also planted up in the polytunnel, His bedding scheme, done for us by EDDC Streetscene, was cancelled but not communicated to SIB. Two weeks before his instalment, SIB decided to use reclaimed perennials and this year's plants to make a design in the bed. His tail is now making a lovely display despite the odds.

Although the RHS In Bloom cancelled this year's campaign, our designs and orders were not cancelled for any of our work as SIB believed that things could ease and the well-being of the town's residents and visitors was important.

We are hoping that In Bloom continues next year as Sidmouth has been entered into the National Finals and Champion of Champions SW.

We asked for a reclaimed boat to be installed in the Triangle to continue the maritime theme. This has now been planted up with shade loving, mainly perennials with seasonal colour annuals.

The raised bed, firstly containing the 8ft rainbow for the NHS as requested by STC, boards and paint donated by Bradfords, was rehung between the bus shelters so that the 'Fairtrade' logo could be planted. The STC kindly provided all our volunteers with masks, an important factor as the group is all over 60 years in age.

We helped Carol Stanley realise her aim to improve the entrance to Sid Vale Close by installing three urns and planting. Carol will be looking after these as part of her volunteer contribution to Sidford.

SIB acquired 'Health and Safety' yellow tape to rope off our working areas and this has worked well. We thank interested people for keeping social distancing. Once we were allowed back into the parks we had to catch up on our work. We had started the revamped rockery to the right side of the main entrance in Blackmore, initially planted in autumn 2019. This planting is slowly being increased. Anne's Garden has also had a major make-over for its cottage theme and looking promising. Again seasonal annuals will complete the picture.

Connaught Gardens' sunken beds continue the Edwardian theme planting with a mix of herbs and flowers, all raised by SIB including the eight baskets.

The Sensory Garden continues its improvement with three raised beds, each to be planted with a small tree to give more shade and encourage birds, have now been installed and filled with locally sourced soil and logs. This has a permaculture approach to assist introduction of nutrients and micro-organisms over the years.

All the work we did with the Primary Schools and planning made was definitely stopped by Covid-19. SIB however planted up the School's troughs, with



the new plan for the starfish put on hold. The work with the Library children also closed, however we hope to reconnect with all groups next year.

SIB has reprinted its Heritage Floral Walks guide and has prepared and issued a new 'Welcome to Sidmouth Floral Displays'.

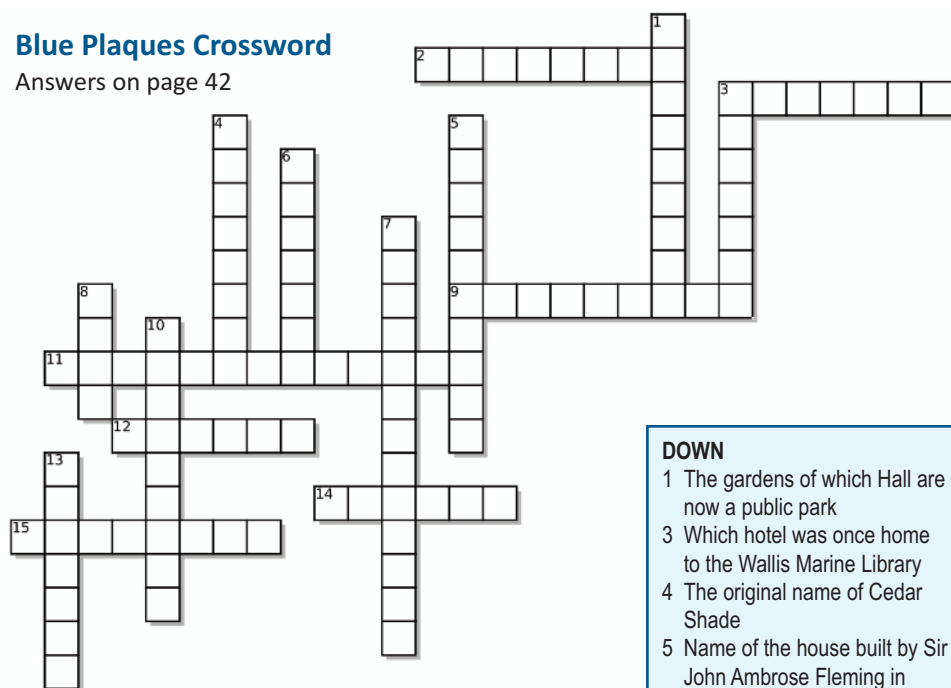
SIB pays its own tribute to Handel Bennett who, when we first started planting in 2012, stopped by in the street, welcomed and encouraged us and explained the KOF's aims and objectives.

We, in particular, thank KOF for their support which has allowed us to continue our volunteer work in these difficult times.

*Lynette Talbot & Peter Endersby
Chair & Treasurer Sidmouth in Bloom
info@sidmouthinbloom.org*

Blue Plaques Crossword

Answers on page 42



DOWN

- 1 The gardens of which Hall are now a public park
- 3 Which hotel was once home to the Wallis Marine Library
- 4 The original name of Cedar Shade
- 5 Name of the house built by Sir John Ambrose Fleming in 1926
- 6 The middle name of the man that built the Old Chancel
- 7 Who founded the Observatory
- 8 Famous Duke who died in Sidmouth
- 10 Which architect designed the Victoria Hotel
- 13 Which hotel became the

ACROSS

- 2 What was Peak House used for in WW1
- 3 Surname of the last lady to own the Lace Shop in Old Fore Street
- 9 In which hotel did the Duke of Connaught stay
- 11 Which Sidmouth property did T.L. Fish Esq buy in 1821
- 12 First name of the illustrator that lived in Downlands
- 14 Whose ladder leads to the beach
- 15 Dental Hygienist Training School in WW2

SPECIAL OFFER for SVA Members

While the Museum is closed, and its shop inaccessible, we have lost a vital source of income, so we have started a **FREE DELIVERY SERVICE FOR OUR BOOKS to SVA members in the Sid Valley.**

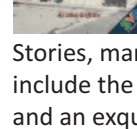
You can order by phone **01395 519278** or by email **info@sidmouthmuseum.co.uk** or complete the form and post it or pop it through the door of the Museum.

You can pay by cheque in advance, or online by bank transfer, or cashless by credit/debit card when we deliver.



NEW Sidmouth's Cinemas and Theatres – John Griffiths

Find out about the various buildings, some of them very surprising, that have been used for both stage and film. Arthur Ellis comes to life as one of the most important figures in the town's social history. 40 pp 2020 £3.00



NEW Sidmouth's Royal Connections – Nigel Hyman

Stories, many told for the first time, date from the 1790s to 2019. Legacies include the Queen's Window, the Connaught Gardens, Grimms Fairy Tales and an exquisite German doll. 40 pp 2020 £3.00



New edition Three Walks around Sidmouth town – Andrew Rugg-Gunn

This booklet contains guides to three walks around the town - Central, West, and East. Each walk takes about one to one and a half hours. While the walk around the Centre is fairly level, the West and East walks take you up hills, but none is steep. Maps indicate the routes of the three walks. 24 pp 2020 £2.50

New edition Sidmouth's Literary Connections – Nigel Hyman

The stories behind 41 authors and poets who stayed or lived in the town from the 1790s to the present. Revised 2nd edition 2020 with 6 new entries, 58 pp £4.50



A Guide to the Blue Plaques – Life and Times in

Sidmouth – 64 Blue Plaques mark key points in the town's fascinating history and this richly illustrated book brings the story together. 176 pp 2019 £9.75

Where to find Sidmouth's Blue Plaques

To accompany the Guide to Sidmouth's Blue Plaques, this is a pocket-size booklet with details and maps showing where to find the plaques. 26 pp 2019 £1.50



Sidmouth Spotting – A 'must buy' for those, whether young or old, who enjoy finding landmarks on a circular walk. Points for each successful 'spot' and claim a badge from Museum, Library or Tourist Information Centre, when you've collected 500 points. An enjoyable way to learn about the town. 33 pp 2017 £1.50





'Till the Boys Come Home – Christine Hardy

The First World War in the Sid Valley seen through the pages of the local newspapers. A profusely illustrated, fascinating account about the men and women of the Sid Valley. 152 pp 2019 £9.75

Sidmouth's Rocks – Roger Trend

An introduction to the geology. What can we learn about Sidmouth's 'deep history' by looking at the cliffs?

The text and illustrations take you on a gentle geology 'walk' to give the answers. 19 pp 2013 £2.00



Sidmouth's River – Roger Trend

Storms, floods, droughts, landslides and river blockages are not new to Sidmouth. What causes these natural events? Will they become more extreme or frequent in the future? What can we learn about them by looking at the landscape around us? 24 pp 2018 £2.00

Sidmouth's Coast – Roger Trend

The history and science causing our collapsing cliffs disappearing beaches and coastal flooding is written by a geologist. Numerous photographs and diagrams. 24 pp 2018 £2.00

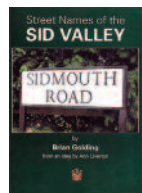


Stephen Reynolds: Author, Fisherman and Home Front Hero – Nigel Hyman

The turbulent life of this very talented but troubled man is described. He died in 1919 of Spanish flu aged only 37 but his legacy remains. 20 pp 2018 £2.00

Sidmouth Scientists – Bob Miles

The town has attracted many eminent scientists. The lives are described of four eminent Fellows of the Royal Society: Sir Norman Lockyer, Sir Ambrose Fleming, Viscount Cherwell and Sydney Brown. 20 pp 2015 £2.00

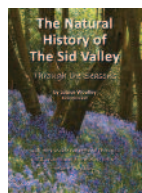


Street Names of the Sid Valley – Brian Golding

An indispensable guide to their origins. Find out why Cheese Lane is so-called. 40 pp 2011 £2.50

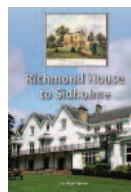
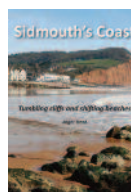
Richmond House to Sidholme – Nigel Hyman

The history of the house and gardens is told in detail for the first time including the lives of the 6th Earl of Buckinghamshire and the formidable Olga Lindemann. The extraordinary Music Room is one of the most beautiful rooms in Devon. 56 pp 2017 £3.00



The Natural History of the Sid Valley through the seasons – Louise Woolley

Our plants and natural history are described by an experienced naturalist. A walk for each season is accompanied by numerous photographs taken by the author. 58 pp 2014 £3.50



Sidmouth People and Places – Nigel Hyman – Discover Sidmouth's history of colourful personalities and fascinating buildings. Sites marked on attached map. 64 pp 2017 Revised 2nd edition £4.50

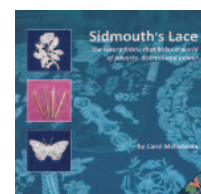


The Story of Sidmouth's Long Print – Julia Creeke

A lavishly illustrated book describing the town's iconic panoramic print. 32 pp A4 2013 £5.00

A Picture in Time – Julia Creeke

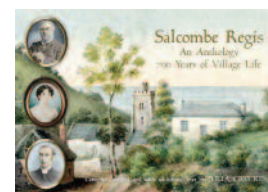
The stories of the houses, beach and landscape from Regency to early Victorian times, shown in the Long Print. 37 pp A4 2014 £5.00



Sidmouth's Lace – Carol McFadzean

The history of the local lace industry, written by a lace expert, is sometimes disturbing. Numerous illustrations. 68 pp 2016 £6.00

Sidmouth: A History – The comprehensive town history, revised and many colour illustrations. 144 pp 3rd edition 2015 £7.99



Salcombe Regis: An Anthology – Julia Creeke

Many different articles, by many different authors, on a wide variety of subjects, provide an insight into the life of the village over a period of 700 years. 164pp A4 2015 £15.50

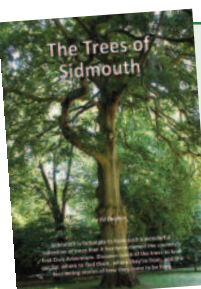
The Knowle – A House and its History – Christine & Rab Barnard
The story of one of Sidmouth's most important buildings from its early days as one of the country's first zoos, through its time as the 'Friendly Hotel' and East Devon Council's offices. 92pp A4 2013 £5.00



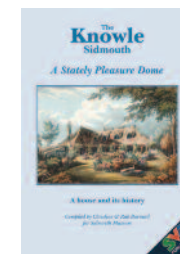
Sampson's Sidmouth – Sylvia Brownlee

Robert William Sampson, LRIBA – The man responsible for practically the whole of the architectural layout of Sidmouth in the early 20th century. 56 pp 2009 £4.99

Sidmouth Museum Tote Bag – £2.50. FREE with orders over £10.00



HOT OFF THE PRESS! The Trees of Sidmouth – Ed Dolphin
Sidmouth is fortunate to have such a wonderful collection of trees that it has been named the country's first Civic Arboretum. Discover some of the trees to look out for, where to find them, where they're from, and the fascinating stories of how they came to be here. 48pp 2020 £4.50



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	Total		

EITHER: I enclose cheque for £ **OR:** I have transferred £ to the Sid Vale Association Museum Account, Sortcode: 40-42-02 Account Number: 70739693

OR: I will pay by credit/debit card on delivery.

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Sidmouth Sisters mummers play

A brand new traditional street play was released for Midsummer. It celebrates Sidmouth Women across the ages. Local storyteller and writer, Janet Dowling, has taken the tradition of mumming which occurs in midwinter and mainly by men, and developed it to one that occurs on midsummer and done only by women. It includes noted women of Sidmouth, a dragon, a saint, a pickaxe queen and the Fatburger with underlying themes of environment, tolerance and the usual life, death and rebirth.

Mumming is a very old tradition, dating from medieval times, and most of the plays that are still done, date from the 19th century. They feature heroes like St George and Nelson with villains like the Turkish knight and dragons. Sidmouth is lucky that they have a mummers team who have a play from 200 years ago which they take out just before Christmas. I'm an avid supporter of them, but I also felt that women should have a go.

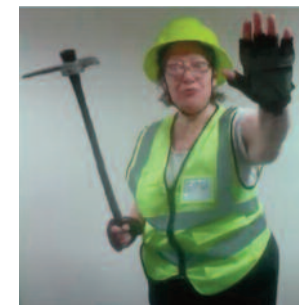
It took about two years to develop it but it wasn't until the Fatburger raised its head that the final character fell into place! Originally we hoped to do it at Sidmouth Sea Fest, on the streets for Midsummer, and then at Sidmouth FolkWeek. We called ourselves Sidmouth Sisters Guisers (an alternative name for mummers) and started rehearsals in the beginning of March. Then we were into lockdown. I thought it was never going to happen. But I was inspired by the Mayday videos that were made by Morris teams

videoing themselves individually on their phones and then stitching it together. So we practised on Zoom, and then each speech was recorded separately on our phones. Kyle Baker did his magic and stitched them into one video. We are not the RSC – and there are several bloopers – but that's all part of the fun! We were very pleased to be included in the Virtual Sidmouth Folk Week festival! So we achieved two of our three aimed performances. Next year we hope to do all three LIVE! There are several motifs from the mummer's play but most importantly the women of Sidmouth heros are real and we feel it's a real celebration!



The Sidmouth Sisters Guisers are Janet Dowling, Linda Williams, Ruth Lewis, Ann Bishop, Alexa Baker, Barbara Murphy, Sheila Pratt, Sarah Reis and Liz Harris. Music was played by Brian Lewis. The video was edited by Kyle Baker and can be found by following the link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou40jMUaUI&feature=youtu.be



Janet Dowling

**Do we have your email address?
Send it to info@sidvaleassociation.org.uk**



Volunteering for the Sid Vale Association – our new Membership Secretary

Last year I attended SeaFest. The SVA had a manned stand there and although I was born and bred in Sidmouth and obviously knew of the SVA, I didn't realise all the work that they did for the town. I picked up an application form and took it home to 'think about'.

I found on the application form, a whole raft of different areas that were looking for volunteers. I am not averse to

volunteering as I give a tremendous amount of my time to the Sidmouth Amateur Dramatics Society where I currently hold the voluntary positions of Chairman, Treasurer, Company Secretary and Wardrobe Mistress. SADS, as we are more affectionately known as, are a registered Charity and a Limited Company so I am well aware of the amount of volunteer resources that are required to keep an organisation such as the SVA afloat.

I was an Office/Business Manager for a firm in Exeter for 27 years until I was suddenly made redundant so I have a good all round office based knowledge. Being made redundant made me need more challenges, something new to focus on to occupy my mind whilst I searched for another job, so I ticked the 'Administration' box on the application form and sent it off not expecting to hear anything further.

Just as I was thinking about what I could do, an advert came out to all SVA members looking for a new Membership Secretary and Magazine Distributor. This could be done by one person or by two. I liked the idea of handling the membership and subscription side of things so put myself forward and after a discussion with Richard Thurlow and the outgoing Membership Secretary Andrew Scott, I decided I would like to give this a go as it appealed much more to my organisational side and skills. The planned take-over was to be on the 1st April but as we all know, we were locked down by then so I could not get out to collect all the paperwork and files from Andrew until we were told we could go out in our cars. So, for the last few weeks, I have been trying to get to grips with the workings of the SVA! It is never easy being an outsider and especially taking on a role such as this without being a member myself for very long but I have found it interesting and I have loved every minute of it so far. There has been great support from other SVA member volunteers, as they patiently explain everything to me and do zoom calls and telephone calls to talk me through how something works. To be a successful volunteer, you need the support of others to help with that transition.

I have found my volunteering experience with the SVA very rewarding so far. I am aware that there are many organisations out there who are all requiring volunteers and there are not always enough volunteers to go round but if you can spare any amount of time – no matter how small that may be, then do think about giving some of that to the SVA. We all need to give something back, not just to the SVA but to the wonderful town that we live in.

So before I go, can I remind everyone that if you should change your address, telephone number or email address then please let us know so that we can keep our files and databases as up to date as possible. This will help the SVA (and me) save time and money.

Heather Hodge – Membership Secretary

Volunteers are always welcome

The SVA is staffed totally by volunteers and is dependent upon them to continue our work.

Helpers are needed for 2-3 hours of field work every week in the Knapp and our other estates – no experience necessary – just enthusiasm!

Even though the Museum is closed, there is still work to do behind the scenes on stored collections and preparing exhibitions.

If you are able to spare some time for these or any other jobs, please contact one of the organisers on the inside back page.

Remembering Robin Laird

Robin was born in Co. Donegal, educated in Dublin and taught geography at a school in Pitlochry, Perthshire. He then completed a theology degree in Edinburgh and a three-year curacy in Northern Ireland. Further postings included Hong Kong, Nepal, Germany and the Falklands. He was appointed Queen's Honorary Chaplain in 1990 before retiring from the army in 1993. After a brief spell as chaplain at a school in Cumbria, he and his wife Carol retired to Sidmouth where he became involved in many local charities, including the SVA as a museum steward and delivering the magazine.

The death of Robin Laird in June was a cause of great sadness to those who knew him, and there were very many. He was a good friend of the Museum and he and Carol were hard working stewards, despite the many other calls on their time.

I have a special memory of him, several years ago, when they both volunteered to share the Devon Museums stand at the County Show at Westpoint. I had also volunteered, rather reluctantly, and my wife, Aileen, was persuaded to join us. The reluctance came from experience. Those who attend an agricultural show do so for a number of reasons but learning about a local museum is not high on the list. Furthermore, the stand was located unpromisingly at the end of an uninspiring row. Overnight rain had damaged some of the leaflets and there were puddles where we stood. It was going to be a very long morning. Almost all who passed by never even looked towards us, never mind came over. Robin decided that frontal attack was required. Armed with a few leaflets and balloons he strode into the path of the visitors. I couldn't hear what he was saying but soon people were laughing and coming over to the stand. We had a stuffed fox, courtesy of RAMM, which the children were encouraged to stroke. To my astonishment, but largely thanks to Robin, the morning passed rapidly and perhaps at least some people had been encouraged to visit our Museum.



Nigel Hyman

An American Serviceman in Sidmouth

The SVA History Group was fortunate to receive the memoir, 'Travels and Travails in World War 1' written in his 70s, by Nels Erickson. It had been sent by his grandson, Tom Kaiser, who had edited it and supplied helpful further details about his grandfather. This, in turn, is a selected summary and two aspects are of especial interest. Firstly, it is rare to read the memories of a patient who had 'Spanish Flu' so very severely and yet survived. Secondly, life in 1918 Sidmouth is vividly described.

Nels was born in 1891 in Pigeon Falls, a small town in Wisconsin. His family had emigrated from Norway in the mid-19th century and Norwegian was spoken in both the home and his Lutheran church. He learned English at school. An academic scholar, he decided on a career in teaching rather than the family farm. He trained as a High School teacher and in 1917 married Ida Knutson and within a year their first child, Nell, was born. He was totally unprepared for call-up into the US army, an event that, at a stroke, disrupted both his career and family life. Ironically, if he had worked in his father's farm he would have been protected from conscription.

In July 1918 this tall well-built young man was sent to Camp Grant, Illinois, for intense training. He recalled the supervising non-commissioned officers "whose primary

qualifications appeared to be vile and profane language usually expressed in substandard English." From there he travelled to Camp Mills on Long Island prior to embarkation from New York Harbor on the White Star Liner, 'Olympic'. She was a sister ship to *Titanic* but had been converted into a troop carrier with a capacity of up to 7,000 men. The journey to England took less than five days and her speed was such that she did not require convoy protection. The



Camp Mills 1918 Airing out tents as 'Flu prevention'

conditions below deck were sweltering and lacked both light and ventilation. The men were packed tightly together with barely space between the hammocks. Sickness spread rapidly and Nels developed a hacking cough and high fever. He attended the sick bay where an unqualified soldier swabbed his throat with iodine.

On arrival in Southampton Nels was just able to disembark unaided but was then required to march three miles to a designated camp. He felt himself stumbling and attempted to slake his thirst by grabbing berries from a bush close to their line. He thinks he spent the night on the floor of the camp and the next day a large group of sick soldiers, including Nels, was taken by truck to the railway station for transport to an American military



Olympic with 'dazzle' camouflage



Private Nels Erickson

hospital 150 miles distant in Paignton. His memory of both this journey and the next few days is poor with occasional islands of awareness breaking through. The American Red Cross Hospital was Oldway Mansion. This magnificent house had been gifted by the owner, Paris Eugene Singer, the son of Isaac Singer of sewing machine fame and fortune, and was designed in the style of the Palace of Versailles. (Sadly, the house and grounds are now in a state of significant disrepair.)

Since 1914 the patients were British wounded soldiers but latterly many were American influenza victims. (53,402 US soldiers died in combat and 63,114 died of disease, mainly the pandemic.)

Nels was initially placed in a tent in the grounds and some time afterwards he was transferred to lying in the open air. Only later did he learn that the triage system was such that only those patients thought likely to survive were nursed indoors. A tent location meant the patient was likely to die and the open air meant that death was certain. He remembers rain on his face and, later, being back in the tent where he coughed blood. He had an intense desire

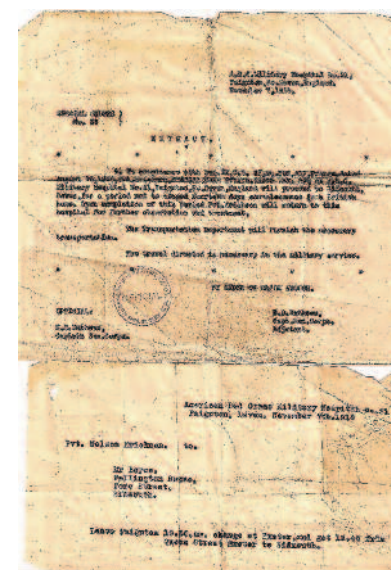


Oldway Mansion, American Red Cross Hospital



to remain alive. He was transferred into the main ward, the former ballroom in the house, and received expert nursing and medical care.

He slowly improved over the subsequent weeks but his voice was hoarse and he was very breathless. Convalescent patients were asked whether they would like a two week 'R & R' with a host family and Nels readily agreed. He was given details about the Sidmouth address which required travelling by train from Paignton to Exeter and then by the branch line to Sidmouth. The host family were Mr and Mrs AJ Boyce at Wellington House, Fore Street. (The ground floor is now part of Shauls, Bakers.) Mr Boyce was a watch maker and repairer. Their eldest son had been killed early in the war and they wanted to offer this service as a gesture of goodwill.) Nels was very well cared for and in his own words led 'The life of Riley', a popular Great War expression. He learned to enjoy pots of tea but "never had a good cup of



Instructions/Pass for leave to Sidmouth



Post Office, Fore Street

coffee". He enjoyed walking to the front and watch the waves break against the shingle; his home in Wisconsin was 1,000 miles from the ocean. He found the fishermen very friendly and they invited him to spend a night fishing with them. He wisely turned the offer down as his health remained frail.

On November 11 he was in the Post Office, further down Fore Street (now Boots Optician), sending a letter to his family when he heard a shriek from the

telegraph office – it was news of the Armistice. The coast guards fired rockets and the Parish Church bells rang but Nels was conscious of the muted reaction of the townspeople. Many of them would have lost a relative or friend in the conflict.

His return to the United States was protracted and tedious. He boarded the White Star Liner, *Celtic*, and the journey, although much more comfortable than the previous one, was marred by fighting between the white and black soldiers requiring segregation of the groups.

He was reunited with wife, daughter and family after an interval of seven months. During that time, he had never glimpsed the enemy and the only foreign soil was that of England.

His slow recovery was complicated by depression, a common symptom following severe Spanish Flu cases. Nels and Ida had a further child, a son. He returned to teaching and completed a Masters in Education and remained full time until 1960. After his death in 1971, aged 80, he was buried in the graveyard of the same Lutheran church where he had been baptised as an infant.

Nigel Hyman

Alma Bridge

This summer Sidmouth lost one of its familiar landmarks. Alma Bridge has been replaced by a new bridge 40 metres upstream.

The foundations of the bridge, which was built in 1902, had become increasingly unstable in recent years, especially due to flooding in 2012, and the Hanger path was getting closer to the edge of the cliffs due to erosion at Pennington Point.

The Alma Bridge we have been used



Photo: Andrew Rugg-Gunn



make it easier for people walking to and from Salcombe Regis and the growing number of houses on that side of the river.

They had difficulty raising the money and in 1854 the decision was made to build a more modest bridge from timbers salvaged from a ship, the *Laurel* which had run aground on the beach and broken up. It was a simple structure supported on five pairs of inverted V-shaped legs with a handrail on each side. It was 24 inches

(61cm) wide and 125 feet (38m) long and cost £26.10s (£26.50) and was named the Alma Bridge after the Battle of Alma, fought and won in 1855 in the course of the Crimean War.

However, this bridge was still not the first to cross this part of the Sid! In the 1830s there was a plan to build a harbour at the western end of Sidmouth's beach. The stone was to come from Hook Ebb to the east of Salcombe Mouth and a railway track was built, with a tunnel through the cliffs, to bring the stone to the town. A steam engine was bought and delivered by sea to Exmouth, from where it was towed by a team of horses over the hills to Sidmouth. Unfortunately the engine was too big to go through the tunnel, all the money had been spent, the harbour project failed and the tunnel has since disappeared due to erosion of the cliffs.

The original Alma Bridge was built on part of the foundations of the railway bridge. It was badly damaged by storms in 1877 and £34 had to be spent on repairs and strengthening. By 1900 it was again becoming unsafe and Sidmouth Council commissioned the well-known local architect RW Sampson, who also designed the Victoria Hotel, the Manor Pavilion, Gliddons toy shop and many houses and other buildings throughout the town, to design a new, more substantial, bridge along with a zig-zag path up the Hanger. Sampson's bridge originally had three spans, but was reduced to two when the river wall was extended.

The new bridge is built of steel, painted grey, with a stainless steel handrail. The eastern end is supported on a concrete abutment, clad in Portland stone and has an observation area with seats. The



to was not the first footbridge across the mouth of the Sid. In 1846 the Sidmouth Improvement Committee, which later became the Sid Vale Association, was formed by a group of influential residents, primarily to look after Sidmouth's network of over 70 miles of footpaths. They set up a fund to raise the cost of a metal bridge, estimated to be £70, to





historical importance of the former bridges is remembered by an information board – a joint project of the Sampson Society and the SVA.

There is further information about Alma Bridge in *A Guide to the Blue Plaques – Life & Times in Sidmouth* and *Sampson's Sidmouth* by Sylvia Brownlee. Both are published by the SVA and available from our online shop, Sidmouth Museum when it re-opens, and local bookshops. Julia Creeke's book *Salcombe Regis – an Anthology of 700 Years of Village Life* has a chapter on the Sidmouth Harbour Project.

John Dowell

Connaught (British) Restaurant

A vital part of our town's social history in World War 2 should not be forgotten. On Monday 4 October 1943 Sidmouth's British Restaurant opened. The idea of such a wartime initiative had been first discussed by Sidmouth Urban District Council on 1 March 1941. According to Arthur Chandler, who supported the idea from the onset, agreement was reached only after "...a good deal of argument and procrastination."

Communal Feeding Centres were set up by the Ministry of Food in the autumn of 1940 and initially were based in London. They were a response to victims of the Blitz and were immediately successful. Although funded centrally they were run by local government or voluntary organisations on a non-profit basis. The scheme rapidly spread throughout the country. Winston Churchill disliked the name which he thought sounded 'socialist' and advised it changed to 'British Restaurant'. This was a rather grand name for what was, in essence, a self-service cafeteria with a limited menu. An overriding consideration was that the food should be filling and healthy and provide at least a third of the daily calory requirement. Fruit availability was limited throughout all the war years and the main source of Vitamin C was cabbage which was the most used, if not always the most popular, vegetable in the restaurants. Hopefully, the vitamin was not destroyed by prolonged cooking.

The government target of 10,000 restaurants was over ambitious and the eventual tally was 2,160. They served around 600,000 meals/day, each costing no more than a shilling. London CC had 250 outlets and many of the larger towns had several locations.

Even in 1943 only 20% of the population had ever eaten in them. Those living in the countryside would not have been able to regularly visit towns due the combination of limited bus services and petrol rationing.

The location in Sidmouth was on the corner of Vicarage Road and Connaught Road, hence the choice of name. It was a simple prefabricated building and, sadly, we have not



found a wartime photograph. By chance it can be seen in the top right background of a 1952 Carnival photo.

The architect, Mr L Blanchard, had been instructed on the type and cost of the building and was congratulated on the eventual appearance. Despite this praise, he was less enthusiastic than others and said that, after the war, he was hopeful that there would be no more 'pre-fabricated' buildings.

The brightly coloured interior could seat up to 160 people. Most of the trestle tables were for four and several for eight diners. The concept of 'self-service' was new but customers were advised what to do. After entering they paid 1s 4d if they wanted a main course, pudding and a cup of tea. They received a red, yellow and black token for each of these items and then queued at the serving counter where WVS volunteers exchanged the tokens for their choices.

The restaurant was open from noon until 2pm daily except Sunday and was immediately successful. Paid staff were limited to the manageress and her three kitchen assistants. The kitchen was modern by 1940s standards and included a fridge and electric potato peeler. Meat was obtained from all the town's butchers on a rota system.



Arthur Chandler

Arthur Chandler, who was later a chairman of the Sid Vale Association and the Museum's first curator, had been an advocate for the scheme and was delighted to see it up and running at last. He had previously been with a colleague to an unnamed town to see its own Restaurant. This had convinced him that not only should Sidmouth have one but that it should be far better than the one they had visited. He was vice-chairman of the Restaurant committee and persuaded the others that the price of 1s 4d, although higher than the usual national price of 1s, reflected the fact that the people of Sidmouth would be prepared to pay a little more for a much better meal.

After the war it was converted into a meeting hall for the Catholic Church who replaced it in 1961 with St Teresa's Hall.

On our Museum's Thursday morning Town Walks we pass the site and elderly Sidmothians have readily recalled their meals in the Restaurant. As children at St Nicholas School they were provided with tokens to use for their midday meal.

Our Sid Vale Publications group is preparing a history of Sidmouth in WW2 and would very much like to hear from anybody who lived here in those years. Also, from those whose relatives were in the town and who may have photographs or letters that could be shared with us. Please could you contact nigelhyman@live.co.uk or 01395 579815.



Steam Holidays to Sidmouth

Nostalgia is not as good as it used to be, but in these days of lock-down, air bridges, and quarantines it's hard not to look back with some envy at how holidays used to be.

For most of us the choice was simple; a week or two in a B&B or modest hotel, somewhere on the coast which could be reached conveniently by train.

Holidays started on a Saturday and ended a week later. That was convenient for landladies but as most people who went away did so by train, the summer Saturdays were when the railways were at their busiest.

Take the Atlantic Coast Express; on Monday to Friday it left Waterloo at 11:00, first stop Salisbury where it dropped a coach which was attached to an all-stations service going west, while the rest of the train raced ahead to Sidmouth Junction, these days known as Feniton. Here it dropped another coach which was attached to the branch line train to Sidmouth, arriving at 2:12 pm. The rest of the train split again at Exeter with coaches ending up in Plymouth, Torrington, Ilfracombe and Padstow.

But on the summer Saturdays one train was not enough; there were three trains in each direction, all calling themselves the Atlantic Coast Express. Complete trains ran to each holiday destination. In East Devon, Lyme Regis, Seaton, Sidmouth, Budleigh and Exmouth all had through trains from London.

The photograph captures the scene. It's 11th July 1964, and the 09:00 from Waterloo is arriving at Sidmouth Junction at around mid-day. By chance, the loco hauling it is No. 34010 named Sidmouth. The back half of the train will be detached and taken to Sidmouth by the small tank engine seen on the right. The rest of the train will go on to Exeter Central where another small black engine will take it along the branch to Exmouth.

Such complicated shunting took place across the railway system until the mid-1960s when foreign holidays became the order of the day, and most branch lines disappeared.

Against the odds the locomotive Sidmouth has survived, and is slowly being restored by Southern Locomotives Ltd in Swanage. If you'd like to know more please go to www.southern-locomotives.co.uk or drop an email to me at nicksidmouth@gmail.com

Nick Thompson

**Do we have your email address?
Send it to info@sidvaleassociation.org.uk**



34010 Sidmouth runs into Sidmouth Junction station.

Photo: Neil Harvey collection.

1930s Holiday to Weston Beach

My parents first rented the cottages on Weston beach in, I think, 1930, and our Easter and Summer holidays were always spent there. My brother and I were frequently at loggerheads so my parents, wisely, allowed us a friend each to take on holiday – always for the two month summer school holiday and sometimes for Easter. We lived at Shepperton-on-Thames and holiday arrangements were complicated. My father did not drive so the “trains took the strain”. We took food for the first few days, clothes for two months, four children and at least two dogs – which were banished to the guard's van. Lunch in the restaurant car was a great treat. When we arrived at Sidmouth Junction the train for Sidmouth was always waiting patiently at a side platform and there were porters to help us across with our luggage. It was on the Sidmouth train that the excitement began. Otterysimmary and Tiptonsinjon – what difficult names for children to pronounce – then the beautiful Harpford Woods, and at last Sidmouth Station. Here were two taxis waiting for us – a tight fit with two adults, four children and dogs. Who would see Dunscombe first? Mark Newton from Branscombe with his two donkeys was waiting for us there and all our luggage was loaded onto the panniers that they carried. We raced down the hill; of course we went directly down the Glen Path, (no longer there) and left Mr Newton to follow at a sober pace to follow round the Donkey Path, where there were no steps. (It must have taken him nearly the whole day to walk from Branscombe, collect us at Dunscombe, down to Weston Beach, a stop for refreshments then back home to Branscombe – what service!)

The four cottages at Weston each consisted of two bedrooms, front and back, one living room and a kitchen. There was no water laid on and of course no electricity. There were two earth closets and a wash house with a copper for boiling clothes. We fetched water in cans from a spring just beyond the most western cottage. At the eastern end of the cottages was the Watch House where coastguards had scanned the English Channel for the French (later in WWII for the Germans). The coastguard stations were positioned along the coast so that a man could walk to the next one each day keeping an eye on the coast and reporting to his neighbour. There was a bay window in the watch house for better viewing and there were four built-in bunks. These had small sliding doors with air holes, so you could climb in and shut the door for a bit of peace and quiet, but as a child I was always worried that my brother would lock me in! We had the use of the Watch House and two of the cottages. The end two were at that time occupied by a very dignified elderly gentleman, a Professor Purvis.

It was a fairly primitive life for holidays at Weston. No water or electricity not that as children we were in the least bit concerned. Water was fetched in watering cans from a spring beyond the westernmost cottage, and for light we had oil lamps and candles. Bath





time was an “event”. A long tin bath was placed in front of a roaring fire in the Watch House and you had to take care because the rim of the bath nearest the fire became very hot indeed. I well remember the pleasure of soaking in hot water in front of the fire. I’m sure bath times were infrequent but as we were in and out of the sea all day I am quite sure we were clean enough.

Holidays were spent swimming, fishing

from our boat and playing on the rocks at either end of the beach. Not just collecting shrimps and winkles, but there were more exciting games such as racing from one end of the rocks to the other, jumping from rock to rock and not setting foot on sand, shingle or water. I can’t remember any broken or strained ankles, but can’t think why not! A much more exciting game always played on an incoming tide was “Dare”. The winner was the one who got furthest out to sea again only standing on the rocks. This was scary because if you won and stood on the very last uncovered rock and jeered at your not so brave, or more sensible friends, you then had to return to shore. The tide certainly came in quickly enough to make the retreat rather wet and most rocks were covered by slippery seaweed. I cannot think how we survived undamaged. My brother was a fanatical sportsman and always had to win. Perhaps all the games and walking at Weston helped his sporting career as he won numerous prizes at school and later, the captain’s prize for sailing at Dartmouth Royal Naval College, and played hockey for the Navy.

As very young children my father took us to the Western Rocks to play in Grendel. This was a very large rock with a pool in the middle and a protrusion at one end like a dragon’s neck. It was only when I grew up that I discovered that Grendel was a water monster killed by Beowulf. (I notice after probably 60 years that Grendel is still there but has lost most of his neck and head.)

Of course we kept fit by having to walk everywhere. Up to the farm every day for milk, and to the main road for the bus. When Dunscombe land met the A3052 there were two cottages since demolished. The one at the junction of the two roads sold fizzy drinks and sweets. After a climb of 536 feet and three quarters of a mile this was very welcome. Our favourite drink was cherryade which left us with red lips and tongues. The red Devon General bus took us to Exeter or Lyme Regis from where we had access to the wonderful undercliffe walk to Seaton, where we caught the green Southern National bus which wound its way through Beer and Branscombe to drop us off at Trow. We walked to Church at Salcombe Regis and sometimes caught the “Toastrack” which gave us a lift up Salcombe Hill. Whenever the weather was favourable we rowed the boat to Sidmouth, a great help with heavier shopping, and the Sidmouth fishermen sometimes brought coal for us. They of course had motors, we had to row everywhere. It wasn’t until after the war that we had an outboard motor.

Weston was a difficult beach to launch and land a heavy 14ft rowing boat, we had

wooden rollers and a winch. The winch was great fun with one child to each pole and jumping over the cable the boat could be pulled up the beach very easily. There were occasional shouts from the beach to stop whilst rollers were moved from the stern to the bow of the boat. This was one chore four children enjoyed, much more than fetching milk from the farm or collecting firewood from the beach.

Our favourite outing on the boat was to Ladram Bay. On one occasion it was just my brother and myself that my father rowed to Ladram. We had a good picnic but with a rapidly rising sea we decided to leave. My brother, who was inclined to be seasick, opted to walk home. Off Sidmouth my father decided it was far too rough to continue so as we were carried in on an extra large wave, eight fishermen grabbed the boat and raced us up the beach to safety. We then walked back to Weston. My brother was much later getting home than expected, he stopped at Miss Truman’s hut at the top of Peak Hill for refreshments and as there was a thick mist he turned the wrong way and found himself walking back to Otterton. This must have been in 1937 or 1938, my brother was 14 and I was 10. Today one would have a mobile phone and could call for a taxi, and certainly not let a young boy walk all that way on his own.

All the wood for fires was picked up on the beach and there was a bonus one year when a collier was wrecked on the Eastern rocks. We were not there at the time but later my brother climbed up a rope and found that there was a lot of coal in the hold. And of course we recovered a lot of valuable wreckage from the Duchess of Devonshire which was wrecked at Sidmouth, including a good solid companion ladder which we later used as stairs to the loft space in the Watch House, which we used as a bedroom. We were never short of deck chairs which frequently arrived in a south westerly gale. As they were stamped SUDC, we felt slightly guilty at using them.

Some things that were washed up were neither pleasant nor useful such as the whale. This we thought was a very amusing incident, a thought probably not shared by the council workmen. A dead whale about 30 feet long was left high and dry on the beach and as it was a bit smelly we contacted the council and they agreed to deal with it – and so they did – a group of workmen with tools and buckets with disinfectant struggled along the beach towards Lincombe. There they spent some considerable time sawing and chopping the vast creature into bits. These pieces were then all thrown back into the sea. The workmen then left with the satisfaction of a job well done. Most unfortunately a South-easterly blew up and a large proportion of the bits of whale washed up on Sidmouth beach. I never found out if they had to pick up the pieces again, probably, as by now it was very smelly.

Some years later a body was washed in. My friend and I found him and pulled him out of the sea. Again the police were informed and down the hill came the police and the council workmen and surprisingly the new shiny buckets with disinfectant. Of course, no helicopters and



it must have been very hard carrying the corpse up the hill. My friend and I were very excited about going to the inquest but it was decided that this was not suitable for two fifteen year olds, so my father went instead.

Before the war when, shall we say, Weston was fairly uncivilized, there were a lot of adders and my father liked to show them to visitors. The adders lived mostly by the spring where we collected our water and he only had to lift a stone slab and nearly always there would be an adder happily snoozing and somewhat annoyed to be disturbed. This did have repercussions one day, however – all the dogs had a dried bracken bed under the stairs in the dining room. We were having lunch when a hissing sound puzzled us. It was traced to the dog's bed and turned out to be an adder. Apart from my father, the room emptied very quickly indeed. The adder was extracted with difficulty from the bracken. My mother said the dogs weren't to blame, they obviously thought it was "the done thing" to find a snake. It is amazing that none of the dogs were bitten, although some time later my spaniel was bitten on the lip and only a very hasty trip to the vet saved his life.

Daphne Sleight

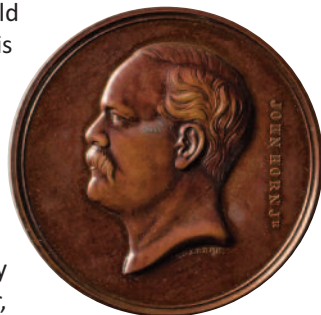
Capt. Jack – Sidmouth's very own "American Hero"

During his 2020 State of the Union Address, President Donald Trump stated "As the world bears witness tonight, America is a land of heroes. This is the place where greatness is born, where destinies are forged, and where legends come to life..." The subject of this article definitely falls into this category.

When Sarah Horn gave birth to her first born son at Western Town, Sidmouth, on 7th September 1843, there can have been no indication of the extraordinary life that lay ahead for the child. Sarah's husband John was a shoemaker, also Sidmouth born, as was his father. The baby was baptised a month later as John Lewis Horn but would always be known as John Junior; or Jack to his friends.

As the years rolled on the shoemaking trade became increasingly hard and many were forced to seek employment elsewhere. So by 1851 we find John and Sarah, with son Jack and a toddler, Louisa aged 3, living in Tiverton, where John was employed as a railway porter. Then, just four years later, the family has re-located themselves again, this time over the seas to Detroit, Michigan, America: possibly tempted by work on the American Railroads.

In the 1860s, Jack, now a teenager, was a fit and active young man, described as tall and athletic. As well as working, he was an outfielder and batter for the Detroit Baseball Club and had already embarked on the actions that would make him famous, rescuing people from drowning in the Detroit River. He carried out at least 20 rescues in a decade: but at this stage his feats were unknown in the wider world.



By 1870 John and Sarah were running a waterside tavern and boarding house near the public wharves in Detroit. The family also built and ran a number of steam boats, used for navigating the river and the connecting waterways; with their sons, including Jack, captaining these boats.

Jack also assisted his father in the tavern. By now the number of his rescues had increased. The most memorable were performed on dark, stormy nights, or when the water was full of floating ice. In 1871, when the number reached 110, the citizens of Detroit gave him a medal for his gallantry. Sadly he lost it while saving the life of a young lady in 1873.

In 1874, The Hon. Moses W Field, who represented Detroit and knew Horn, applied for national recognition. Jack was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honour bestowed by Congress, "in recognition and commemoration of his heroic and humane exploits in rescuing men, women and children from drowning in the Detroit River."

The citation dated 27 June 1874, was still hanging on the hall staircase of Jack's home in 1919. The document was signed by Matt H Carpenter; James G Blaine, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Ulysses S Grant, President of the United States.

The medal was stolen in 1901 and Jack had to request Congressional approval for a replica. At this time duplicates were only issued at the applicant's expense, upon submission of absolute proof of the loss. Such proof was missing in this case. However, on 14 March 1904, the House of Representatives voted to approve the striking of a copy; the first time Congress had replaced a Congressional Gold Medal.

In 1919, the Sidmouth Herald ran an article about Jack headed "World's Champion Life-Saver." In it they said "We cull the following particulars of a Sidmouthian's exploits from an American newspaper, thinking it will be of interest to a good many of our readers... Of 270 lives saved by four members of the Horn family in 25 years, 135 are credited to Capt. Horn."

The article described another award presented to Jack, a big gold watch... "Detroit's gift in honour of his readiness to sacrifice his life for her citizens, and the \$650 which it cost was subscribed in less than a day."

Summing up his life, Jack led the reporter to a room where an old etching of Sidmouth hung in a heavy frame. "We came to America from Sidmouth, Devonshire. Here is the place. Queen Victoria's father died here, and my grandfather, a coffin maker, placed him in the coffin. He made this frame you see here, too."

"But we're all Americans now," he continued, "I guess you know that to look at this fellow." He exhibited a picture of a young man in the uniform of the American Army. "My nephew, Edward, junior," he explained proudly. "He's in France, or was. We aren't sure where he is now."

Jack died a year later, on 12 April 1920. On the centenary of his death, it seems fitting that his exploits should once again be remembered in his home town.



By Christine & Rab Barnard

Dingles Fairground Heritage Museum and Ugbrooke House GARDENS with Cream Tea

We will travel west to Lifton, near Tavistock.

The **Dingles Fairground Heritage Centre** is home to the **National Fairground Collection and the Fairground Heritage Trust**. There are displays of Fairground Art and Memorabilia, and a large array of vintage rides, stalls and shows from the 1800s to the present day. The Fairground Heritage Centre provides an opportunity to view Fairground, Social and Industrial Heritage in a beautiful rural location.

The artwork on Rides and Shows mirrors social changes across the world with references to popular culture, fashions and commonplace trends. Fairground rides and stalls are fully operational and can be experienced through a token system at £1.00 a time. We will have a private guided tour with the Curator, time to look around as well as time to go on the rides and have a go at the stalls!

Lunch can be purchased at Dingles or bring a packed lunch.



For the afternoon we will by contrast head to the **GARDENS of Ugbrooke House** where we will take our Cream Tea in the Conservatory.

The dominant landscape at Ugbrooke has always been the Park, designed by preeminent landscape gardener, Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown. Known for somewhat drastic remodelling to

create serene, natural environments. Capability Brown created two large lakes and tree plantations to create the natural landscape, favouring English Oak, Turkey Oak, Spanish Chestnut and Holm Oak, among others.

Legacies from the 19th century are the formal lavender parterre and the Chusan palms (Trachycarpus fortune). Inside the Courtyard, wisteria climbs the ancient walls, above a clipped hornbeam hedge and espalier pears. Enclosed and peaceful, the Chapel Garden is planted with Bottlebrush (Callistemon) and Hebe. The Fernery has tree ferns, and Royal Fern (Osmunda regalis), and on into the Spanish Garden planted with Pelargoniums, hostas and grape vines.

The Greenhouse border is a restful area of plants chosen for their grey blue and silver foliage and flowers. Across the fairy-like bridge, there is a formal garden with its clipped box maze looking across a stereotypical Capability Brown grassy avenue towards the lakes.

This tour will be escorted by Stephen Pemberton. *Booking form overleaf.*

Dingles Heritage Museum and Ugbrooke House GARDENS with Cream Tea

- **Tour includes:** Dingles Heritage Fairground Museum, Private Talk and Tour. Entrance to Ugbrooke House Gardens. Cream Tea and Drivers Gratuity. Cost **£31.95** per person.
- **Booking Form:** Please send to Stephen Pemberton, 7 Glenisla Terrace, Sidmouth, EX10 8BP Tel. 07810 496566 Email: stevepemb@hotmail.com
- **Bookings:** Will be confirmed from 1st March and remain open until filled.



- **Payment:** Please make cheques payable to “SID VALE ASSOCIATION CIO.”
- **Envelope:** Please enclose s.a.e. postage paid, to receive tickets.
- **Limitation:** Tickets cannot be ‘reserved’. Tickets can be refunded if re-sold.

We regret that the Association cannot accept responsibility for any loss, damage or injury that may be suffered by anyone taking part in this event.



Excursion to Dingles Heritage Fairground Museum and Ugbrooke House GARDENS with Cream Tea. Wednesday 12th May 2021

Please supply ticket(s) at **£31.95** per person

PLEASE ✓ BOX Joining at The Triangle 8.25am ☐ Radway 8.35am* ☐
 Approx. timings Exeter X 8.38am ☐ Green Close 8.40am* ☐

1. TITLE FIRST NAME SURNAME OF EACH PERSON BOOKING
 2.
 3.

Address

*E-mail Post Code

**Will not be disclosed to third parties.*

CONTACT TEL. NO. OF PERSON BOOKING

Have you enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope? Yes/No

Remembering the Sid Vale

For 174 years, since 1846, Sidmouth and the Sid Vale have been protected and nurtured by members and volunteers who have given their time, skills and money to ensure the Vale remains a leading destination for visitors as well as a beautiful place to live.

The income from subscriptions and investments is, however, insufficient to fund those regular core activities. In addition, we are occasionally faced with exceptional circumstances for which there is no general provision. For example, the Museum is an old, listed building and has needed significant repairs and improvement in 2018.

We are very grateful, therefore, to those who, year after year, make one-off donations and remember the magical Sid Vale through their Wills. Such bequests can be general or they can be for specific purposes such as the maintenance of our green spaces or the development of the Sidmouth Museum.

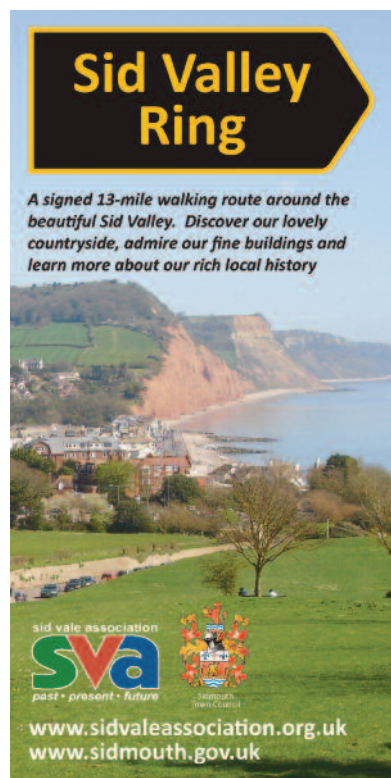
Any bequest, large or small, is valued by the Association (which is a registered charity no.1154749). We remain deeply grateful for the thoughtfulness and generosity of past supporters, and for all who make provision for our future endeavours. Please continue to remember the Sid Vale Association.

Gary Turner, Treasurer

Sid Valley Ring

Have you walked the Sid Valley Ring yet?

It starts at the Tourist Information Centre at the Ham and goes westwards along the Esplanade, up Bickwell valley, north-westward along Core Hill Road, north along White Cross Strips, east to Sidbury and Harcombe, then south to Trow and Dunscombe to meet the Coast path at Lincombe, then westward to Sidmouth. It is 13 miles long, taking about 6-7 hours, but can be split into two parts, using the Byes as a "shortcut" to get back to Sidmouth. Pick up a map from the TIC or download one from our website.



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Dates for your Diary

Whilst we make every effort to ensure dates and times are correct at the time of going to press, please check the web page for the latest details and any updates.

EXCURSIONS

The excursions planned for 2020 have been re-scheduled for 2021 as follows – see our website for further details:

Wednesday 12th May 2021 Dingles Faiground Heritage Centre and Ugbrooke House Gardens and Cream Tea. See page 40.

Wednesday 7th July 2021 Bodmin Jail and Buckfast Abbey and Cream Tea.

Wednesday 15th September 2021 Torre Abbey and Cream Tea.

FREE ZOOM TALKS

A series of talks has been arranged on Zoom for the Autumn. If you would like to attend one of the talks, please contact zoomtalks@sidvaleassociation.org.uk for the login details. The talks will also be posted on YouTube soon afterwards so they will be available to anyone not able to join on the day. Check our website for details.

Wednesday 14th October 2.30pm – **Sidmouth's Royal Connections** – Nigel Hyman

Wednesday 11th November 2.30pm – **Sidmouth's Cinemas & Theatres** – John Griffiths

Wednesday 9th December 2.30pm – **The Trees of Sidmouth** – Ed Dolphin

SVA HISTORY GROUP ZOOM MEETINGS

Monday 9th November and second Monday of every other month thereafter.

If you are interested in joining a meeting, please contact Brian Golding at history@sidvaleassociation.org.uk for the login details.

Keeping in touch

If this is the first you've heard from the SVA this year it's probably because we haven't got your email address – we've sent out three Newsletters and the Annual Report by email during lockdown because we weren't able to print and distribute our usual publications, and although lockdown has eased enough for the moment to print this magazine, we don't know how long that will last – so please send your email address to info@sidvaleassociation.org.uk so we can keep in touch.



The Sid Vale Association CIO, 36a Fore Street, Sidmouth EX10 8AQ

The Sid Vale Association CIO is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registration number 1154749. The Association promotes conservation and heritage, the museum, and facilities for recreational and cultural activities in the Sid Valley

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