

THE BIDLAKES AND THE YOUNG PRETENDER

The Society's September talk was entitled "The Bidlake Family and the Young Pretender" and was given by CAHMS member Ellie Babbedge. The story was about one Thomas Becklake, son of a Crediton weaver born



in 1701, who after giving up his weaver's apprenticeship with his father, became a footman. This brought him into contact with the gentry and he soon aspired to become one. Thus started his forgery career and he forged leases – some for Bidlake Manor Estate farms showing rents were due to him (!) and other legal documents, and even one from the Lord Chancellor authorising him to alter parish records to "correct" the misspelling of his name! Ellie told her audience she had examined some of the altered documents (where "Becklake" had been changed to "Bidlake") and reported that the changes were very hard to spot.

Richard then set about attempting to gain his "inheritance" by claiming to be descended from one Thomas Bidlake, and Ellie read extracts from his 1734 letter to Anne (the mother of the 3 surviving daughters) when he attempts to persuade her to give up the estate. Whilst this was going on Thomas was living in Exeter, borrowing money that would be repaid when he came into the Bidlake Estate, and he duped many Exeter residents. He then carried on this deception in London, which because it was so far away, it was even easier to dupe people

Unfortunately for Thomas, one of the Bidlake daughters was married to a solicitor and eventually it did go to court in the 1750's when he was tried for fraud, found guilty and gaoled. Amazingly however there were still gullible gentry who believed him, and they helped him escape, but he was recaptured and committed to Newgate Gaol. Richard later heard of the Combe estate in Hemel Hempstead, which had no heir. He set about claiming that estate and forged more documents and even went to court where he won! Suspicions had been aroused however and Richard didn't get a penny.

Eventually Richard went bankrupt – all the while blaming others. He willed his "estates" to his nephew Henry Tucker of Crediton and used that document and the promises of riches it made, to dupe yet more people! Richard died in 1775 having lived a life well above what a weaver could have expected, and leaving many debts.

Such goings on from a Kirtonian!

Chairman's chatter

A happy New Year to you all.

I have been very encouraged by the interest shown in the recent booklet "Life in Crediton in World War I". Thank you all of you who bought copies. This will help the museum as all profits from the sales of these booklets goes towards the museum. You will shortly be receiving the latest news letter, which in future we propose delivering by email because of increasing costs. We already have many of your email address but we would be grateful if all members will confirm their address to info@creditonhistory.org.uk. If you do not have email or want to continue to receive a printed copy, do let us know.

There are three more talks this season, "Living with the Smell", "Digging up Britain's Oldest Shipwrecks" and "The Acland family of Killerton and Holnicote", which makes for a most interesting and varied set.

John Heal
Society Chairman.

www.creditonhistory.org.uk

This is the address of the museum website. Do add it to the Favourites on your computer. It contains information about local history, an up to date diary of events and links to

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

We have an archive of more than 1000 photos in the museum. Copies of many are available to purchase. Contact us through our website.

Our Corporate Friends

Please don't forget to support the local firms whose logos appear in our literature - see below. Without them we would not have a museum. Our income is insufficient to cover the expenses.

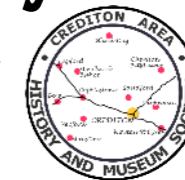
Crediton Museum & Heritage Centre



Crediton Area History & Museum Society



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Members

Newsletter

January 2019

SOUTH WEST FILM & TELEVISION ARCHIVE VISIT



On the 21st November David Nation and John Reeves drove to Plymouth to visit the South West Film and Television Archive (SWFTA) in Catherine Street close to the Theatre Royal.

Inside the building our lady guide showed us a series of rooms full of technical equipment used to convert old film footage format to digital storage. These old films are of different sizes and speeds and so the process is very complex. Films were mostly regional ITV and BBC footage, dating back to the 1950s. Increasingly, their work allows them to search for particular stories.

They have, like us, to be selective about what they store as it is impossible to keep everything. Some films need priority attention because of their fragility due to age. The life of some items is increased by storing them at low temperatures.

There are racks of huge numbers of cans of film and tapes some already edited and others awaiting treatment. Staff also have the daunting task of moving to new premises in 2020.

We also met some of the volunteer technicians who were working on different projects most of whom have worked in TV in the past and are familiar with the older equipment and formats.

Many of their techniques and challenges were illustrated in the recent Peter Jackson documentary "They Shall Not Grow Old".

An enjoyable, mind blowing trip. John Reeves

LIFE IN CREDITON IN WORLD WAR ONE



Current Society Chairman John Heal seen with immediate past Chairman and Life Member Sandra Cooper at the November 2018 coffee morning where John was signing copies of his latest book "Life in Crediton in World War One." Born and bred in Crediton, John is well known as the author of 'The Book of Crediton', published by Halsgrove in 2004 and now unfortunately out of print.

John researched how the local community was affected by and managed during the years of the Great War, also making use of his colleague Keith Parsons' research. It covers the hopes of the early months right through to the increasing worry of food shortages and rationing of the closing months. Throughout it benefits from the inclusion of many evocative period photos from the Society's photo archive.

Sandra is seen holding a copy of her last book "Crediton through the ages."

Both books are priced at £4.50 and can be obtained through our website or at Crediton Community Bookshop.



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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE - THE WOMEN (AND THE MEN!) WHO MADE HISTORY

The CAHMS October talk, by Sue Virgin was about Women's Suffrage.

Sue recounted that in the late 1700's few men had the vote – out of a population of 3 million only 7500 had the vote!

Sue discussed Mary Wollstonecraft (1559-1797), the first “feminist” who wrote “A vindication of the rights of women.” In her day women had no rights, and were looked

after by their father and brothers, and when they married, any property or possessions became their new husband's.

Sue then talked about the “Manchester Patriotic Union” which organise a meeting in 1819 attended by a crowd of 60,000, to hear speakers talk about suffrage. But the authorities sent in the militia to disperse the crowd and unfortunately about 20 people were killed in the subsequent confrontation. Eventually this led to the Great Reform Act of 1832, which resulted in about 60% of the male population being entitled to vote (but still not women).

Sue then talked about Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929) who was deeply involved in the womens' suffrage movement. She formed the



Sue Virgin

“National Union of Womens' Suffrage Societies” and by 1915 there were 50,000 card-carrying members. She died in 1929 and was forgotten after her death because the Suffragette movement took over. The Fawcett Society still exists today.

Sue then went on to talk about the best known suffragette – Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928). At the age of 19 she met and married a radical lawyer Dr. Pankhurst and their front parlour quickly became a centre where radical politics was discussed. But her husband died suddenly in 1898 leaving her penniless and she moved to Manchester, where her house is now a museum.

In October 1903 she started the “Women's Social and Political Union” whose motto was “Deeds not Words”. Women disrupted meetings and chained themselves to railings, which inevitably led to them being imprisoned. Their treatment culminated in “Black Friday” in 1910 when 350 women marched on parliament where they were brutally beaten up by the police and 2 died.

In April 1911 the Great Census took place but so many women hid, it made a nonsense of the result. The Suffragettes stepped up their civil disobedience, and in February 1913 they even burnt down Lloyd George's new house 2 days before he moved in!

During the war Suffragettes suspended their civil disobedience and supported the war effort, and in 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave voting rights to men over 21 and limited rights to women; and it was not until May 1928 that universal suffrage for all over 21's was enacted.

In October Keith Parsons gave a presentation about Crediton in World War One to those attending a Local History Day at Crediton Library. A stalwart of our Research Corner, Keith has spent many hours researching the wartime experiences and background of Crediton servicemen and women, many named on the town's War Memorial and others sadly not.

Keith focussed on some of the people and their families and, using much of the copy from John Heal's recent publication ‘Life in Crediton in World War One’ (see elsewhere in the newsletter). He was able to describe how the war affected every day life in Crediton and the surrounding villages. There were accounts of how conscription was handled, including controversial exemptions, Belgian refugees given homes in the town and the pressure on farmers to maintain a food supply despite great loss of labour.

One family Keith featured was the Montague family of Penton House. Lt. Col. Leopold Montague, though retired from the army, ran the Reserve Platoon and assumed great responsibility for general recruitment in the town. Sadly his two sons were both killed in the war. Mrs Montague was prominent in organising social events and raising money for the men and went on to be a prominent campaigner for women's suffrage.

Keith's talk was so well received that Judy Tucker has asked for it to be included in our future Talks programme.

LOCAL HISTORY DAY 10th October



David Nation and Keith Parsons

GENERAL GORDON KILLED AT KHARTOUM

The November talk about General Gordon's death at Khartoum was given by retired RAF Group Captain David Baker. David began by talking about the Khedive (Viceroy) of Egypt who, in the 1870's wanted to suppress the slave trade along the Nile, to align Egypt with Europe (where slavery was dying out), and not Africa.

Charles Gordon was a soldier who had distinguished himself in China. The Khedive was so impressed by him that he appointed him the Governor General of the whole of Sudan.

The Mahdi, the son of a preacher who became a fervent Moslem, came to prominence in 1881 when he replaced the hajj with an obligation to undertake jihad. In 1883 the Egyptian government sent British forces to destroy the Mahdi but they were slaughtered at the Battle of el Obied, whereupon the Mahdi marched on Khartoum.

In January 1884 the British government agreed that Gordon would take on a much more substantial role in the Middle East. Unarmed and with a very small escort because Gordon was convinced everything would be safe, he planned to move to Suakin – then in British hands. But the British government changed its mind and withdrew its forces to Khartoum leaving Suakin in the hands the Mahdi. Garrisons all along the Nile were also abandoned to their fate.

Gladstone then faced a tremendous popular campaign to rescue Gordon – including even Queen Victoria who was very outspoken to her prime minister. But it took four months for a decision by which time the Mahdi's forces had surrounded Khartoum, and overran it in January 1885, when Gordon was killed - by political procrastination and military obduracy.



DAVID BAKER

2018 “YOUNG AT HEART” EXHIBITION



Yeoford School with committee member Cheryl Lewis

This year's ‘Young at Heart’ exhibition proved to be a great hit with all ages especially the older generation to whom it brought back many memories. Despite the Museum having to close several times throughout the season due to the lack of volunteer stewards, the visitor numbers were higher than in previous years.

In addition to individual visits there were group visits from the Crediton Rotarians, Crediton and Morchard Bishop Brownies, Bow, Hayward's and Yeoford schools and Nursery.

The feedback we received has been excellent and all the groups have expressed a wish to visit in future years. It has been a real pleasure to see the enthusiasm of the children as they participated in the special educational activities we laid on for them.

As well as the usual adult and children's quizzes we held a mystery item competition for adults which proved to be both intriguing and very successful.

A big thank you to all who helped with the exhibition and keeping the museum open. We need to recruit more stewards next year. If you are interested in stewarding please let us know.
Helena Sykes and Cheryl Lewis

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CAHMS events at 7.30pm at the Boniface Centre unless otherwise shown. For more details and to keep up to date, visit “Whats On” on our website.

- 18 Jan “The Crediton Workhouse” by John Heal. A Newton St Cyres History Group event.
- 11 Feb “Living with Smell” by Carole Vivian. A CAHMS event.
- 20 Feb “The Beer Engine” A talk on the public house by Peter Hawksley .A NSCHG event
- 2 Mar Friends of Devon Archives seminar. Investigating medieval and early modern Devon: manorial records and the 1613 Norden survey of Devon Crown lands.
- 11 Mar “Digging up Britain's oldest shipwrecks” by Peter Marsden. A CAHMS event.

- 20 Mar “Newton St. Cyres and the Priory of Plympton” by Prof James Clark. A NSCHG event.
- 8 Apr “.The Acland Family of Killerton and Holnicote” by Denise Melhuish. A CAHMS event.
- 10 Apr “George Roberts, and unsung hero of the Great War.” by Paul Roberts. A NSCHG event.
- 13 May CAHMS annual outing.
- 16 Oct “Church Roof Bosses.” by Sue Andrew. A NSCHG event.
- 20 Nov “Food in World War II” by Dr Paul Cleave, Exeter University. A NSCHG event.

CAHMS entry 50p members, £3.50 non member
NSCHG entry £2.00. BDHG entry £3.00 non members