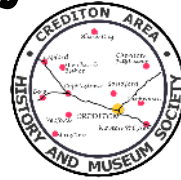


Crediton Area History & Museum Society



www.creditonhistory.org.uk



Members
and
Friends
Newsletter
January 2021

THE OPENING OF SEARLE STREET IN 1865

This article is a summary of a wordy report in Western Times, September 1865 describing the opening of “The new street in Crediton and the entrance to People’s Park.”

The enterprise was promoted by local solicitor James Searle whose offices and residence were in Silbury House where Lloyds Bank now stands. He laid out the street – demolishing two houses to gain access – and sold off building plots to local developers, and with “characteristic generosity, gave in perpetuity a right of way to Peoples Park”. The opening ceremony was a very elaborate affair and “a handsome arch, composed of evergreen flowers, and flags, and bearing the name of “Searle Street” in ornamental characters” was erected at the entrance to the high street.

After Searle entertained “a select party of friends” to luncheon in Silbury House, a procession headed by the “Crediton Subscription Band”, proceeded to People’s Park. Here a few “cheerful tunes” were played while the visitors explored the new park. James Edgell Searle, the only son of Mr. Searle then laid the foundation stone of the first house – according to the report in a “clever” style! Many prominent Crediton residents were present, including the Curate, the Head and Second Masters of the Grammar School, the bank manager and local landowners. Invited guests then made their way back to Peoples Park where a spacious marquee had been erected - “to partake of the dinner provided at the expense of Mr. Searle”, and which “did credit to the caterer, Mr. Verner, confectioner, High-street.”



Seen in the photo foreground are Edgell Searle the boy with the white hat, and James Searle in the white trousers.

After the meal a long toast list was gone through, commencing with the chairman Mr Ward of Langridge toasting James Searle. There then followed more long-winded sycophantic speeches during which many toasts were drunk and fanciful claims made about the benefits Searle Street would bring to the town! At the end of the speeches one final toast was proposed to “The Ladies” after which the company dispersed at eight p.m... So a long day for those present at the end!



Two photos of Searle Street being cut through from the High Street.

The earliest photo on the left was taken shortly after demolition because the first floor joist sockets in the thatched Oat Sheaf Inn’s wall have yet to be filled-in.

The photo on the right was taken later as the pub end wall has been made good and a new “INN” sign is in place on the newly exposed end wall. Intriguingly, a tree has been planted in the middle of what was to become Searle Street!



HAPPY NEW YEAR



CREDITON BREAD RIOTS

Report on 1854 disturbances resulting from bread price rises. Extracted from contemporary newspaper coverage, by John Heal.

In January 1854 The Western Times reported on disturbances in the normally peaceful town of Crediton. Snow was laying on the ground and there was obvious hardship among the population, and "large groups of persons (chiefly women) were parading the streets nearly the whole day begging." The townspeople were generous to these beggars, and Wentworth Buller of Downes provided relief for more than 100. The Exeter Flying Post also reported that there were a number of navvies employed on the North Devon Railway who were in town because they were unable to work due to the bad weather.

The trouble started at about six o'clock at St. Lawrence Green where a small group had assembled, and threats were issued against the local bakers for raising the price of bread. They began by shouting and throwing snowballs, but as numbers increased the situation became more violent. The shops of Mr Thomas Hodge and Mrs Herring were attacked breaking many panes of glass. The mob then moved on to Mr Simon Lee's shop in "Narrow-street" where they "partially demolished" the building "breaking every pane of glass in the front of the house and in the partition between the shop and kitchen, destroyed the gas-lights and carried away from 140 to 150 loaves of bread, of all sizes."

By the time they had moved on to "Broad-street" the locals had begun to organise themselves and the "few constables" had managed to arrest two persons. Damage here was restricted because shop fronts had been shuttered up, although Mr Nickels, a local

butcher, had suffered a cut head due to stones and missiles thrown by the mob, which then split up and caused havoc around the town. Some went into North Street and damaged the shop of Mr Gribble. Others went on into East Town where they came to Mr William Lee's shop which was already shuttered up. Unable to attack the shop the mob broke over 30 panes of glass in the front windows of his house. A further group went into Dean St. where the shops of Mr Pinson and Mr Wippell suffered damage. The paper says "the crowd then dispersed, and went to their homes, apparently satisfied with their evening's proceedings." All shops that had been attacked were bakers.

This was not quite the end of the trouble as on the following Saturday morning a large mob assembled at the market. No damage occurred, but several stall holders were sufficiently concerned to cause them not to open for business that day.

The Western Times report ended by stating that the town was now quiet again and there had been no trouble in the intervening week.

The Western Times report ended by stating that the town was now quiet again and there had **been** no trouble in the intervening week. One of the arrested men was discharged with an admonition due to lack of evidence, whilst the other was committed to the County Gaol at Exeter awaiting trial at the next sessions.

These events did lead to calls for an effective police force in the town. The Western Times, commented: "Neighbouring parishes, with less than half the number of inhabitants, have a police; but Crediton ... has none. This is a great blot on our wealthy parishioners, which, we trust, will be speedily removed."

MONTHLY HISTORY TALKS IN YOUR OWN HOME:

In the absence of our Talks at the Boniface Centre, the Society has linked in with Crediton Library, Crediton U3A and our affiliated local history groups to trial talks using ZOOM. Anyone with internet access can use ZOOM free.

The Talks are managed by staff at the library, to whom we are most grateful. Our member Mike Brett gave the first one in December and the next is by another member, Elly Babbedge, with the title 'Care of the poor in some Mid Devon Parishes'. This will be on Friday 8th January at 4pm. Places are limited to 100 and must be booked in advance. Please email nationdandm@yahoo.co.uk if you're interested and the link will be sent to you. If needed, help is available working Zoom!

THIS YEAR'S AGM.

Our constitution requires us to have our AGM in September and despite Covid restrictions we managed this with the aid of "Zoom", when we held a hybrid – in the boniface Centre for those who wanted that, and Zoom for others. Unfortunately, that still left some members unable to take part but there was nothing we could do about that.

15 people attended in person and 10 Zoomed – 25 in total – more than we often get anyway! Having completed the maximum three consecutive years John Heal retired as chairman being replaced by David Nation. David gave a vote of thanks to John and said how fortunate we are to have him as our archivist, a role in which he will continue. John also agreed to become vice chair.

Helena Sykes was re-elected to the Executive, whose remaining membership was unchanged. Helena is now formally our exhibition organiser and Cheryl Lewis becomes officially our education/schools liaison worker. Others on the Exec are Adele Cox, David Dornom, Keith Mortimer (NL editor), Gloria Petherick (treasurer), John Reeves and Tim Sedgwick (secretary),

John Heal paid tribute to members who are not on the Exec but nevertheless fulfil crucial roles: Keith Parsons who runs the Research Corner, Jon Kelsey, I.T. adviser and Tania Hayman, talks organiser. Some will know that Tania suffered serious injuries a couple of months ago when she took on an HGV when crossing the High Street. We send our best wishes to Tania. Before the accident Tania had assembled an excellent programme of talks for 2020/21 but of course, they are all now on hold. It is hoped that the speakers will all be able to attend the next year, assuming normal service resumed by then.

SAD LOSSES.

Covid 19 restrictions make this a particularly difficult time when family bereavements occur. Losses the Society has incurred since our last newsletter include Joyce Conibear, Wendy Eames and Judy Tucker and there follows a brief obituary for each of them. We send our deepest sympathies to their families.

Joyce Conibear

Joyce was a member of a well known local family and beloved partner of our own newsletter editor, Keith Mortimer. In poor health for much of her adult life, Joyce was an indomitable character who seemed to weather all the difficulties that beset her. Sadly, in April, right at the beginning of the first lockdown, she could withstand it no longer, and she passed away at her home Rocklands after another short visit to hospital.

Wendy Eames

Former teacher Wendy had suffered extremely poor health for a number of years recently. She bravely coped with a number of periods of therapy but the disease seemed never really to be in remission. Wendy regularly attended our talks but because the Covid 19 restrictions led to the suspension of this year's programme, we hadn't seen much of her recently. She died on 13 November during her last visit to the hospital.

Judy Tucker

The sudden and totally unexpected loss of Judy on 16 November was a huge shock. Judy had been heavily involved in so many worthwhile causes in the area for years. She was efficient, diligent and totally reliable and always fought her corner vigorously. She was active right to the end and so many local groups will now have a great void. In the Society we knew her particularly well as she had been on our Executive Committee and arranged our Talks programme for several years until recently. Judy will be particularly well known to those of us who attend the CAHMS Talks

WAS THERE A SKELETON ARMY IN CREDITON?

The Salvation Army was started by William Booth in 1865 and by the 1880s it was holding meetings and marches all over the country, attended by people who might otherwise have been in pubs! The "Army" was not popular with publicans because of its teetotalism, and the "Skeleton Army" of local ruffians was set up to disrupt meetings and when police intervened they arrested the Salvationists, usually for 'obstruction'!

There were moves to stop the Salvationists holding open air meetings and many were injured and some even killed. Here in Crediton in 1881 a major incident occurred when the Skeleton Army attacked the Salvationists; five Salvationists were arrested and summoned for obstruction, and Captain Susan Saville was prosecuted and fined 1s or one month's hard labour. Salvationists often chose prison and Captain Saville was handcuffed and marched from the court to Crediton Railway Station, accompanied by about 60 Salvationists, singing hymns as they went. At St. David's Station she was met by the Salvation Army band who accompanied her to the prison.

In 1882 more trouble broke out in Crediton and a crowd of over 1000 turning out to witness the clash between the Salvation Army and the Skeletons. Exeter Temple sent 78 Salvationists to support the meetings and more arrests were made. There is no record of any of the Skeleton Army being arrested!

Later in the 1880s, the Home Secretary and prominent lawyers got involved and it was eventually acknowledged that the local authorities and police had not acted in accordance with the law. It was lawful for the Salvation Army band to play in the streets as long as they were marching. An instruction was issued by the Army that they were to stand in a circle and if challenged, were to march in a circle.

They stand in this way to this day.

Summarised from an article by Peter Hinchliffe of the SW Police Heritage Trust in the Devon Family Historian, No. 170, May 2019.

RENDERING YOUR CAR PARATROOPER PROOF!

We think how awful the lock down has been but this article from the Morris Owner magazine in August 1940 gives an idea of the alarm being felt then about the possibility of an imminent invasion, not by a virus but by a foreign power. 'It is a strange commentary on the times in which we live that an owner should seek information from his motoring publication not on how to make his car go better, but on how to put it out of action. Even more than this, to put it out so completely hors de combat that no wandering parachutist - nor fifth columnist can start it and use it for his (or Hitler's) own purposes. As has been said, the best way to defeat the parachutist is to make him walk.'

The article describes several methods, short of wrecking the car! These include disconnecting the fuel supply or the electrics and removing the

distributor rotor arm.

Contrast this with a story in a post war edition in Holland about a Morris dealer who was so determined that the Nazis would not requisition his stock that he went to enormous lengths to secrete 21 of his 57 Morris cars in the first floor of his premises. Throughout the occupation the Germans used the ground floor workshop for their vehicles and never



suspected what was sitting over their heads! Those 21 cars were liberated once the war was over.

The cars being moved to the first floor.

HOW I SPENT MY LOCKDOWN

Something completely different from CAHMS's chairman.

by David Nation

The biggest change has been our inability to look after one or two grandchildren a day a week. That has been a distressing and emotional wrench but it's true that that wasn't a problem for their parents as they were available to look after the children! I've put off essential decorating for years (at least 10!) so we got most of the materials to do the job just before lockdown and I spent the first 3 weeks or so up a ladder in the stair well and lounge.

The garden received far more attention than I would normally give it too. Efforts were hampered by the initial lack of rain making it hard to remove weeds and then the rain ensuring rapid grass growth requiring more mowing. You can't win!

Restrictions on travel and inability to shop where necessary also made my other main activity more difficult. Old cars have been a major interest of mine for almost 50 years and over Xmas I started negotiations to acquire a vintage Morris. I finally travelled to the Midlands to collect the 1928 Flatnose 4 seater Morris Cowley tourer in January. A two leg journey involving my Wiltshire son-in-law's car trailer for the first leg and my Exeter brother-in-law's car trailer for the second leg, finally saw the car safely rolled into the garage. It had been laid up for the last 3 years but was frequently used rallying prior to that so only had to be recommissioned, rather than rebuilt. Now on the road again so hoping for some sunny weather when we can use it.

Our inability to open the museum in April meant that I was not needed to assist in staffing the Research Corner but, like my colleagues there, I was available for 'remote' work. I took on 3 cases, two enquiries from the USA and one from the home counties. More about those elsewhere but meanwhile, here's what the Morris Cowley looks like:



Chairman's chatter

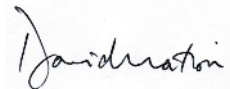
What a year! John Heal completed his chairmanship and handed me the short straw. We are so grateful to John for his leadership and thankfully he continues as vice chair and archivist. We all need for some sort of normality to resume and when it does, we must decide the path our society takes thereafter. We have now had 10 complete seasons of our museum and, frankly, when we reopen we are going to need more help if we are to continue. Partly to gauge the view of members about this we have a survey which those of you for whom we have email addresses should have seen already. If you haven't already completed one, another copy will be with this newsletter.



I am most grateful to Cheryl Lewis and Helena Sykes for all the work they did preparing our 1950s exhibition for 2020 which will hopefully happen in 2021. They have also built attractive displays for the windows during the lockdown.

It only remains for me to wish you all a happier new year when we hope to be able to meet up again properly. Incidentally, if you have an email address we don't know about, please let us have it so we can keep in touch better.

David Nation
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 other museum websites.

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



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