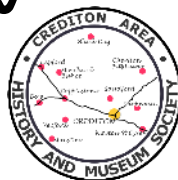


Crediton Area History & Museum Society



www.creditonhistory.org.uk



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Newsletter
Summer
2023

LEOPOLD DENYS AGAR MONTAGUE

My last memories of my grandfather, by Sue Blackler. Part One

Colonel Leopold Montague (1861-1940) retired to Penton House at the end of his army service, when he was heavily involved in the life of the town and he accumulated an impressive collection of antiquities.

It was one sunny day in the garden at Poundshill (where I was born) and my mother came to tell me that Grandpa had died. I was about 7 years old, and I remember thinking 'deep in my heart I know a person who has died!' From this you may gather he was quite a remote figure to we children. My sister Tuppy and I used to run down the hill, past the walled vegetable garden and creep up to the window of the smoking room. We would peep over the sill and if Grandpa was inside writing he could be relied upon to raise the heavy plate glass sash and find some boiled sweets for us. I think he was a little frightening to us and commanded a deep respect, which my generation naturally gave. He was tall and elegant and kind and gentle with a deep voice and the faint smell of pipe smoke and old books will stay with me always.

Penton was a magical house; the entrance hall was paved with pale Italian marble (lovely to roller-skate on!) and the walls were covered with every sort of artefact you can imagine: spears, cudgel swords, knits pistols. I remember the staircase so well, broad and carpeted with brass stair rods, the beautiful newel post carved with peaches and grapes that we could pretend to pick to eat. The long pierced bannister whose top rail had deep grooves we believed had been caused by our dead uncle's childhood trouser buttons as they slid down the bannister!

Facing the front door on the first landing a huge carved canoe, a burial gift to carry the spirit of some chief somewhere to his final place of rest. In the hall opposite the front door was a settle. The tall back twelve panels depicted various biblical scenes beautifully carved by Grandpa. The one I remember best was Satan pitch-forking sinners into a cauldron,



Col Montague in Penton House

their faces clearly those of the current politicians and the local curate too! My Grandmother used to throw a shawl over the back to hide them when the vicar visited!

To the left the dining room. These walls covered with portraits, in the window a huge display case glass topped and filled with more magic relics. I remember a little Roman glass vase which was reputed to have the ashes of a Roman child within; coins, rings, amulets and seals, the rest has faded from my memory. The large overmantel had shelves on either side with antique Buddhas and carved gods. The centre was carved by Grandpa into the Montague Coat of Arms. The mantel piece had three statutes in stone or marble of ancient Buddhas, I remember an ornamental deity painted or stained red – it was very beautiful. To the right of the fireplace was a heavily carved writing desk, each panel carved by Grandpa with Greek and Roman coins. He made a grand chair for himself with snakes twining the arm rests and Roman coins carved from the originals in his collections covering the back. He carved a large fire screen which was used to cover the fireplace in summer. It had panels carved with various dinosaurs (another of his interests). *To be continued*



THE PALACE CINEMA, EAST STREET



THE PALACE CINEMA AND THE ADJOINING GIBBINGS TEA ROOMS

The Palace Cinema in East Street was built in around 1930 by Mr. Freddie Authers on part of the site of his sweet factory (now the Crediton Dairy); it opened in 1933 and had 365 seats, with offices on the first floor in front of the auditorium.

At the start of WW2 all the Gaumont British Cinemas brought their entire financial operation to Crediton, and bought Newcombes House (which stood where the former Newcombes doctor's surgery now stands) for its headquarters. A dance hall, cinema and chalets were built in the grounds for its staff.

After WW2 the Palace became part of a small circuit of cinemas run by one Charles Scott, owned by him but then renamed the Regal.

The cinema closed in 1974 when it became Potters Snooker Club, and at that time, a false ceiling was inserted into the auditorium and plans drawn up to convert the disused space above into a flat, although this was never implemented; shops were inserted into either side of the facade and for many years the Triple C Cafe operated on the east side (now the closed East Street Cafe), whilst the west side has been a newspaper shop and is currently a barbers shop.

In 1996 Potters became the Buccaneer's Bar which was also used occasionally as a music venue, but this closed down as a result of the pandemic. The building was recently purchased for offices by the Crediton Dairy Company, so, after almost a century, the building has unfortunately been lost as a public venue.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CAHMS events commence at 7.30pm at the Boniface Centre and include refreshments, £2.00 for members; £5.00 for non-members. For more details and to keep up to date, visit "Whats On" on our website.

- to 28th October** "The Great Fire of Crediton 1743" Exhibition in Crediton Museum.
10am - 4pm Wed-Fri. 11am - 2pm Sat.
- 11 September** CAHMS AGM 7pm in the Boniface Centre (Members only) followed by talk entitled "Ancient villages on Dartmoor." By Carol Mayne.
- 25 September** "A history of Bow". A Bow and District History Society (BDHS) event.

- 9 October** "Gen Sir Redvers Buller VC in the context of his time". By Dr Robert Guyver
- 22 October** Tedburn History Society. Afternoon opening day in the former cemetery chapel.
- 23 October** Bow Manor. A BDHS event
- 13 November** "The Norden Survey" Talk by Exeter University historian Dr. Des Atkinson'
- 27 November** BDHS AGM and Social.
- 8 January '24** "The Princes in the Tower. Or were they in Coldridge?" Ongoing work by Coldridge resident Lyn Green examining Edward V's links with the village.

BDHS events in the village hall.

SOLDIER OF THE EMPIRE

A first-hand account of the Boer War



Corporal Ed Hammett

The following is a summary of an article written by David Nation's nephew Glyn Nation following his research into a handwritten diary belonging to his great grandfather Ed Hammett. Cpl Hammett served in South Africa in the Boer War and was in Ladysmith in 1900 when it was relieved by General Buller. Ed was a tanner born in Exeter in 1876 but the

Hammett family lived in Bramford Speke. He enlisted in the Devonshire regiment in 1894 and left England in 1895 to join the First Battalion on the North West Frontier of India.

In 1899 they were ordered to Natal, South Africa and were soon involved in action against the Boers. In October 1899 the Transvaal Boers advanced towards Ladysmith and took command of a position near Elandslaagte. They closed the line of retreat for the British at Glencoe and Dundee. The Devons, including the 23 year old Hammett, were amongst those ordered to regain Elandslaagte.

The advance began at 1500 hours and as the British moved across the open plain the Boer guns opened fire. With nothing but ant hills for cover, damages were sustained. Whilst the Gordon Highlanders and Manchesters were to attack the Boer left flank, the Devons were to make a frontal attack. Advancing in extended formation the Devons opened fire at around 1,250 yards from the enemy. The weather was closing in and in poor light they reached a position at the foot of the occupied hills. The Devons, with bayonets fixed, charged up and into the Boer stronghold, driving the enemy from their positions and taking possession of their guns. The Devons suffered 33 wounded but the battle had proven a victory for the British. The rejoicing was to be short-lived. Within days they had withdrawn to Ladysmith and were surrounded by the Boers – the siege of Ladysmith had begun.

Over the following months the British repeatedly defended their positions. Fighting not only the Boers but the diminishing supplies and the rising tide of disease, their hopes of freedom lay with General Sir Redvers Buller and his army. But Buller's progress was slow and erratic and the besieged troops, with their hopes dashed time

and again, were to wait until February 28 1900 before Buller finally entered the town. The delay had cost the garrison of 13,500 a high price. Sickness or injury had, at some time, hospitalised 10,500. 38 had died from shell fire and 430 from disease.

Having survived the siege, Private Hammett returned to Britain on May 31 1900 and remained until October 16 before returning for a second tour of duty, this time for nearly two years.

He had started his diary on his return to South Africa in 1900, words written in a style of hard and simple facts and bearing a true Devonian slant. With no blatant gripes, he appears to have had an almost casual acceptance of his lot – although the hardships that these men were to endure are gradually revealed. The full story is being lodged in CAHMS archive but here are a few snippets:

November 24, 1900: *"5 coys of Devons, 2 coys of Rifles and a battery of artillery went out to a kopze and attacked some Boers."*

November 30: *"Paraded for fatigues at 6.15am and at 10.30 had rifle inspection... (Waited until 2pm before rations arrived from Heidelberg, when each man received) two pints of tea, 4 biscuits and 1lb of mutton"*.

December 1: *"... 5 coys of Devons paraded at 5.50am, the mobile force on the right, the Devons on the left and a force came in from Heidelberg. Attacked in rear, we had big guns, pom poms and maxims. We fought for four hours and took the position..."*

February 8, 1901: *"In the afternoon it came on to rain and we got washed out of our tents"*.

February 17: *"It was a very wet day and we only had a big coat and a waterproof sheet and we had it like this for seven days and nights, right off"*.

May 14: (Devons escorted a wagon train) *"We had breakfast at 4am...and got out of camp about a mile, the Boers attacked our rear guard and delayed us for two hours...we had one killed and three wounded and they (Boers) followed us all the way to camp."*

March 21: (On escort duty) *"...we had 19 Boer prisoners...400 horses and 50 wagons of Boer families, altogether we had 400 wagons and we marched 14 miles. We had half a pound of biscuits and 1 tin of jam between 7 men and 1oz. of cheese..."*

We are used to reading learned accounts of conflicts and the strategies of those in command. What we have here is a fascinating account of life for the ordinary soldier. On his discharge, like many soldiers returning to civilian life, he became a postman, and in Ed's case - in his home town of Exeter.

“THE FIRE EXHIBITION”

“THE FIRE WALK”



Tony Gale and his audience at the top of North Street.

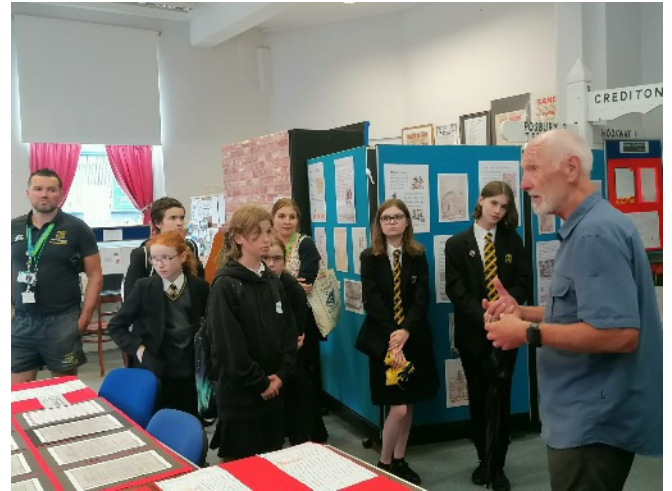
Our 1743 map of Crediton – drawn just a few months before the Great Fire – is one of the most popular exhibits in this year’s exhibition. We often see people looking at it long and hard : everyone loves maps. Our book *Crediton & the Great Fire of 1743* explores it in considerable detail, revealing many stories about the dramatic events of that year. But we know that the best way to understand what

Crediton looked like in 1743, and how those events played out, is to walk the route. So on Friday 28 July we did just that. A substantial and appreciative group of people gathered at the museum before setting off down the High St, looking at the area where market stalls ran along the middle of the street for hundreds of years. We walked across the Town Square to look at the Manor House, shown on the map as a strikingly large and imposing building; and then up North St, musing on how that had been an important route to and from the marketplace for people living north and west of Crediton. Back in the High St, we could see the easternmost extent of the Great Fire and, turning west, we could contemplate how everything in sight had been destroyed. Looking at the map here, we could see how individual buildings had been reconstructed on the foundations of the properties that stand today. As we walked west along the High St, we looked at where the fire broke out; and discussed how a bystander had been killed when a house was blown up to create a firebreak. Near the junction with St Saviours Way we retold the story of *The Man in the Barrel*, and how his desperate attempt to escape the scorching heat succeeded – partly because of the street layout here. From St Lawrence Green we could see the westernmost extent of the Great Fire and look down the greater part of the High St, trying once again to imagine the enormity of the devastation that day. A peek at the sites of the old well on the Green and the Cock Well, hidden away down a cobbled lane, reminded us how difficult it had been for the townspeople to get hold of water as they tried to douse the flames.

Everyone went away with a new understanding of the history of the town. As one person put it, “I’ll see the High St differently now every time I do my shopping”.

We’ll be doing a re-run of the “Fire Walk” in the next few weeks : look out for further details on our website www.creditonhistory.org.uk and our Facebook page.

Q.E. BARNFIELD HISTORY CLUB VISIT



Students and staff from QE school's Barnfield History Club visited the Museum on the 30 June to view their work relating to the current exhibition: *Crediton and the Great Fire of 1743*. They enjoyed a talk by Tony Gale (seen in the photo) which featured the roles played by women after the fire. The exhibition showcases work by Q.E., Haywards and Landscore schools, and the whole of the mezzanine has been given over to their remarkable work.



Examples of the children’s work displayed on the mezzanine.



A busy Saturday afternoon in the museum.

CHAPEL OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, CREDITON CEMETERY - BY KEITH MORTIMER

The Chapel of St. John the Baptist – which is listed Grade II – has an interesting history. It started off life as “No Man's Chapel”, in the countryside between Thorverton and Bramford Speke. The name No Man's Chapel is said to derive from an earlier chapel having been converted into a dwelling.

Interestingly, Donn's 1765 map of Devon (see below) depicts the chapel close to where the present-day commemorative plaque is sited; but the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows TWO chapels – a small building identified as “chapel” where Donn depicted it, and a much larger building identified as “No Man's Chapel” – on the other side of the road which now leads to the Thorverton to Shobrooke road (where the junction is today called Chapel Cross, and Chapel Farm adjoins); this may be the building that was converted, but there is no sign of it today. Instead a 20th century house now stands just south of the chapel site.

The chapel was reconsecrated in 1896 (largely paid for by Sir John Shelley, with help from the local parishioners) but fell into disuse in the early 1900s, and when Crediton Cemetery opened in the 1920s the chapel was dismantled and re-erected in the cemetery grounds in 1926, under the auspices of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society.

The listing statement records that the chapel possibly has fourteenth century origins and there is some evidence to support this, and it also records that the chapel was restored in the late nineteenth century.



The site where the chapel once stood can be seen in this photo. The plaque at the top of the bank commemorates the site where the chapel once stood and records that it was moved to Crediton Cemetery in 1926 - almost one hundred years ago.

There cannot be too many listed buildings that have been moved, and probably very few that have moved the six or so miles that the Crediton Cemetery chapel was moved all those years ago!



The Chapel as it stands today in Crediton Cemetery.



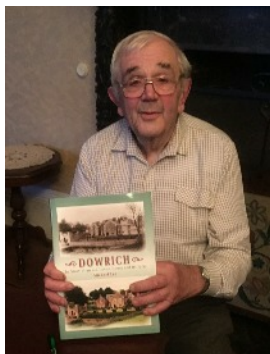
Donn's map depicts where the chapel once stood, in the Highridge Hundred; but close to where the Highridge, West Budleigh, Wonford and Crediton Hundreds came together.

“Hundreds” were administrative areas that had been in use from the time of Edmund 1 (939-946); there were thirty two hundreds in Devon in 1850, and they were abolished by the Local Government Act of 1894, when the current system of counties came into being. Crediton Hundred extended from east of Shute (“Shut” on Donn's map) west as far as Lapford Mill, north as far as Cann's Mill near Thelbridge and south almost as far as Oldridge.

MICHAEL LEE

A TRIBUTE BY DAVID NATION

Long-standing CAHMS member Michael Lee of Dowrich passed away on 16 May just short of his 91st birthday. A true countryman and very successful farmer, Michael was keenly interested in local history. His love for and fascination with the magnificent Dowrich and its history was always evident. He grew up alongside it and I remember him telling me how his ambition had been to own and live in it. The fact that he eventually did so was a source of great pride for him. His enthusiasm for the place also shines through in his two recently published books on Dowrich. Michael was also a stalwart member of Sandford Heritage Group, one of our affiliated local societies. In farming he was carrying on a tradition covering many generations, as was confirmed when Michael asked me to do some research into his family tree. That developed world wide due to the interest of Lees in the USA, where a huge study is going on because they are desperate to prove their links with 'the old country'. Indeed, they believe that their 17th century immigrant ancestors came from the west country. Michael obliged with DNA samples to add to their huge database but the link hasn't been proved - yet!



Michael holding his first Dowrich book.

I first met Michael nearly 30 years ago and we spent almost 20 years jousting as District Councillors. He didn't bear grudges and it was extremely difficult to fall out with him! An alderman of both District and County Councils, he made his mark and will be much missed.

Chairman's chatter

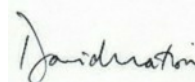


I write this as the end of the final year of my three years term as Chair approaches. Covid 19 made this time an eventful one and it's great that we were able to survive lockdown and the

ensuing restrictions. The Society does however face major financial issues in the years ahead. That the museum has proved viable now for over 12 years is down to the commitment of so many volunteers and the generosity of 'The Friends of Crediton Museum', which was established for that very reason.

It is clear that our archive at Downes is now at risk because, although rent free, the cost of electricity to protect our collection there, has increased by £1,000pa.. If the Society feels unable to cover that expense, I will suggest that we need to establish a 'Friends of Crediton Archive' group, in order to ensure the survival of our valuable collection built up over 38 years. Don't forget to see our website - creditonhistory.org.uk - for details of the collection.

David Nation
Society Chairman.



REMEMBER CAHMS IN YOUR WILL

Our supporters often ask how they can help us preserve the heritage of our area. One relatively painless way is to leave a legacy in your will. Indeed, under present rules, if you leave at least 10% of your estate to charities the rate of Inheritance Tax is reduced from 40% to 36%. Legacies are increasingly seen as a way to maintain what is important to you after you have passed.

Please therefore consider assisting the work of the Society. A typical wording to include in your will is: "I give *£ to Crediton Area History & Museum Society, registered charity number 1002713 for its general purposes and I declare that the receipt of the treasurer or other proper officer of the said Crediton Area History & Museum Society shall be a full and sufficient discharge for the said legacy."

*If you do not wish to leave money to the Society but have items you are willing to donate, describe them here.

David Nation

www.creditonhistory.org.uk

This is the address of the museum website. 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.

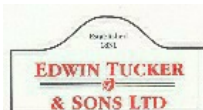
Our Corporate Friends

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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