



Summer 2012 programme

May 16 The Rat Hole A talk about Combe Down railway tunnel by Tim Lunt. See page 2 on Sustran's plans to re-open this tunnel to make a cycle and foot path from Bath to Midford.

June 20 The Jews of Bath and Bristol A talk by Alex Schlesinger, Chairman of the Friends of Bath Jewish Burial Ground which is in Combe Down on the corner of Bradford Road and Greendown Place. The cemetery will be open 2-3pm on Sunday 13 May followed by the AGM of the Friends held at 3pm at 12 Greendown Place.

July 18 Bath Stone Quarries A talk by Derek Hawkins, author of his new book Bath Stone Quarries. He will be showing some of his spectacular photographs taken under Combe Down before the stabilisation of the mines.

August - no meeting

September 19 War time an evening of memories in words and pictures. See the details on page 2.

Talks are at the Combe Down Primary School, Summer Lane, 7.00pm for refreshments and a prompt start at 7.30.

Newsletter

As you know, the Heritage Society Newsletter is the prime method by which we communicate with our members, and in the case of those who never manage to get to our meetings, the only one. Therefore is very important to your Committee that every edition gets to everyone of you, and for that reason we have felt for some time that paper copies are the best way to achieve this. However, with costs rising for paper, printing, and particularly postage stamps, we would like as many of you as possible to volunteer to forgo their paper copies in future and accept the Newsletter in electronic form to be read on screen.

If you are willing to do this please email Tim Lunt (tlunt@hotmail.com) to let him know, and to ensure that he has your correct email address.

We promise to continue to produce the paper version, but would like more help in stuffing envelopes and distributing copies in future, particularly if you live in Fox Hill or Claverton Down, where we tend to post them currently. Please let Jane Briggs know if you are willing to help (Tel: 833790 or email j_briggs@tiscali.co.uk). We would welcome any other ideas to improve distribution/save money while getting your Newsletter to you on time.

Reports on meetings

February 2012 Ralph Allen's Romantic Haven in Claverton

Dr Cathryn Spence, Head of Communications and Research at The American Museum in Britain, gave us a talk on Ralph Allen, his rise to fame, fortune and fracas with William Pitt. The talk concentrated mostly on his 'second home' at Claverton Manor, the Jacobean house later replaced by the present Georgian building. In Ralph Allen's day, and after all the work he did to restore the original house and beautify the land around, it must have been a truly restful spot to escape the hurly burly of running the 'shop' at Prior Park.

Ralph Allen's generosity and goodwill to his fellow man was clear and members present were pleased to be able to contribute to the restoration of his mausoleum at Claverton Church with donations of around £90. Such a pity that the snobbery of the Georgians would not allow him a title: keeping his tomb in order seems the least we can do.

March 2012 Papermaking at De Montalt Mill

Once the business of the AGM was out of the way, Rosemary Simmons gave a talk on papermaking at De Montalt Mill during the early 19th century when it was run by Bally, Ellen and Steart. Such was the quality of the paper produced that JMW Turner (amongst others) used it for many of his 20,000 odd paintings and drawings. Rosemary's talk encompassed the history of papermaking in general with excellent illustrations of how skilled

hands turned rags into riches. Sadly, it seems, the riches did not include paper for banknotes as this was never made in Combe Down – but, I suspect Turner’s pictures have held their value rather better!

George Steart, who lived at No 5 De Montalt Place and contributed to the building of Holy Trinity Church, won a silver medal for innovative papermaking from the Royal Society of Arts.

April 2012 Combe Down bats, an update

In April we welcomed back Dr Roger Ransome, Managing Director of BatPro, to give us an update on the state of our bats. It is five years since he last spoke to us, and a great deal has happened, both to the village, and to the bat population that lived underneath it.

He told us the numbers and location of the key bat populations, particularly the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats, before the major stabilisation work commenced, and the rationale behind the various pieces of engineering that were carried out for the bats during the project. Nearly everyone was surprised by the number of locations where provision had been made for the bats to carry on living in our midst. Bat numbers are roughly where they were before the project, but Greater Horseshoes have yet to start breeding again.

The lively questions gave an indication of the great interest there is in this topic, and we were pleased that Dr Ransome has been retained by B&NES until 2019 to continue to monitor the progress of the Combe Down bats, and will look forward to future updates on these unusual neighbours.

What did you do in the war Mum, Dad, Auntie, Gran . . . ?



2012 is the 70th anniversary of the Baedeker Raids on Bath. Come prepared for the meeting on September 19 for an evening of your memories of war time in Bath in words and pictures. The

CDHS has some written memories of war time in Combe Down and extracts from these will be read out. We also have some interesting photographs. You are asked to come with your own reminiscences written on one side of an A4 sheet of paper and any photographs of the time. The CDHS archive will keep your memories with those already collected. We will scan any photographs and return them to you.

Phyllis Brown remembers what happened at school when the sirens sounded. Phil Bishop remembers going into the mines to shelter. Harry Patch describes in his autobiography the time when he was in Combe Down Auxiliary Fire Service. What do you or your family remember?

Combe Down railway tunnel

A new bridge at Monksdale Road, Oldfield Park, brings the planned Sustrans cycle route to Combe Down ever closer. During the summer, work will continue on the stretch through Devonshire Tunnel, Lyncombe Vale, Combe Down Tunnel and on to Tucking Mill Viaduct. The main element of the route should be completed by October. A talk on Combe Down Tunnel, to be re-opened after 46 years, will be given by Tim Lunt on May 16. See CDHS Summer programme, p1.



Train coming out of the tunnel near Midford

Our village shops

Village shops serve the local community with all the everyday items we need, and if we lose them Combe Down will no longer be a village but just a suburb of Bath city. Changes in shopping habits are now recognised as leading to the decline in more than just independent shops, the very social fabric of a place is changed. So we look at the history of two of our remaining shops.

Around the 1870s the Carriage Inn (built by Ralph Allen in the 1730s) became a grocers and was taken over by the Rhymes family in the 1890s and run as a



Avenue Place in about 1900

newsagent. The Rhymes family ran it as a confectioners and newsagents until 1947 when it became Akerman's Newsagent.

After several short changes of ownership Peter Oakes took over and it is now run as Combe Down News by his son Rob and Rob's wife Jac. There you will

find an astonishing variety of sweets from the old favourites to the latest novelty and Jac's clever invention of sweet bouquets for special occasions. They still deliver newspapers to Combe Down and remain the centre of village knowledge by selling CDHS books and trails.

The Co-op is in a purpose built, vaguely Art Deco design, shop opposite in Avenue Place. The Co-op started off in several nearby sites until the new shop opened in the early 1930s. It was one of several general supplies stores in the village at a time when Combe Down was self sufficient with some 60 shops selling everything you could want. Now it is the only one left and always seems full of people. Its bursting shelves and narrow aisles are where you find food, drink and essential household stuff. It is also where you bump into neighbours, learn the local news and exchange information.

We have lost the Post Office, that once epitome of village life, let's not lose any more: you know the slogan - *use it or lose it*.

For more history and memories of Combe Down shops see *Remembering Village Shops*, p4

Rare visitor

Jane Briggs has been spotting some rare wild flowers in the village.

For the last couple of years I have been keeping an eye on a mysterious plant growing on a narrow verge in Combe Down. The first year I noticed the seed head but was too late for any flowers which would have made identification possible.

Last year I saw the flower spike and realised that it was an orchid, after consulting knowledgeable friends and books the mystery flower was identified as a broad-leaved helleborine. This is a rare plant typically found in evergreen woods. On the other side of the wall next to where this small colony was growing was a copse of evergreen trees. As is often the case once one is spotted I was shown another good specimen growing in a thin strip of soil next to the large waste bins at Ralph Allen School.



Combe Down is fortunate in having areas of low fertility limestone soils which encourage more interesting plants like this orchid to flourish. We also have various types of purple orchid as well as white helleborines growing close to the village.

Wessex Water – good neighbours

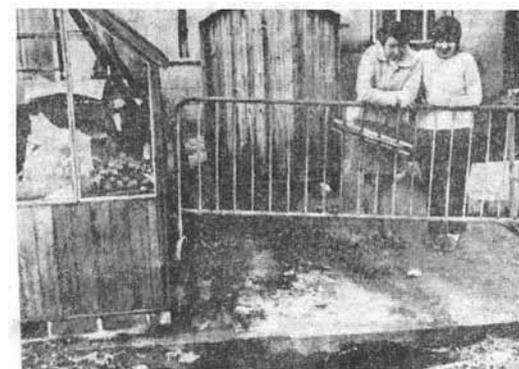
Once again we are very grateful to Marilyn Smith, Head of Public Relations and Wessex Water Community Involvement Committee, for a generous gift of £150 towards our running costs. CDHS Treasurer, Richard Read, said that such contributions are even more valuable to the community now that we have lost the B&NES grant that we used to rely upon.

Hole in North Road garden in 1972

This photograph appeared in a recent edition of the *Bath Chronicle* reviewing some memories from 1972.

Does anyone remember the six foot hole appearing in the Ward's garden in February 1972?

What number on North Road did they live at? How was it repaired? Were any other nearby properties affected? Do the Wards still live anywhere near?

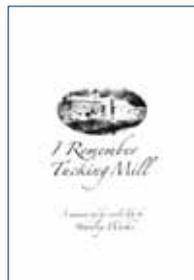


HOLE LOT OF TROUBLE: Mrs Brenda Ward and her daughter found a 60ft hole had suddenly appeared in their back garden in North Road Combe Down on February 9 1972

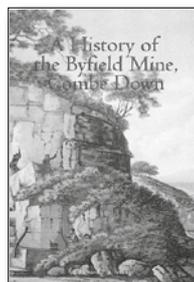
Publications



Remembering Village Shops by Richard Read, £15

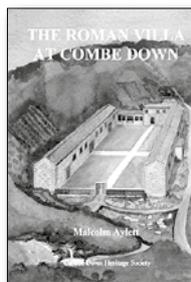


I Remember Tucking Mill by Stanley Wicks, £6.



A History of the Byfield Mine by Professor Richard Irving, £9.95.

William Smith's Venture in Stone Quarrying by Richard Irving, is now published on the Society's website www.combedownheritage.org.uk. Printed copies also available.



The Roman Villa at Combe Down by Dr Malcolm Aylett, £4.95.

Heritage Trail leaflet

by Richard Irving and Rosemary Simmons, 50p

CD of Combe Down Past and Present - available to members only, free, but a donation is expected.

All our publications are available at Society meetings and are also from Rosemary Simmons (details below)

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Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the year become due in March. If you know of members who have not received this newsletter, it might be because they have inadvertently not paid their subscription.

Membership application for new members

If you are already a member, there is no need to fill this in - simply send or give your payment to Jane Briggs (see below)

First name(s) _____

Surname(s) _____

I/we apply to become a member of the Combe Down Heritage Society until 31 March 2013 and I/we agree to my details being held on computer for the duration of my membership

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Membership options - please tick as required:

Standard £5 Concession £3 Family £12

I am sending an additional £ as a donation to the society

Total amount paid

Ages of children (if family membership)

If you pay Income tax please tick here and sign your name to authorise the society to reclaim your tax on this and future payments as Gift Aid

Signed _____

Date _____

Payments by cheque, payable to 'Combe Down Heritage Society', or cash should be made to the Membership Secretary: Jane Briggs, Longridge, Summer Lane, Combe Down, Bath BA2 7EU. Please ask for a Standing Order Form if you would rather pay direct from your Bank.