



2017 summer programme

All meetings take place in the Combe Down Primary School Hall in Summer Lane. Doors open at 7pm for a prompt start at 7.30pm. Members £1, non-members £3.

Wednesday 5 July

Bath Abbey and the Footprint Project

Charles Curnock, Footprint Project Director, gives us the inside story on how Bath Abbey's heritage is being maintained whilst made fit for the next 200 years

Talks will restart in September 2017. Details will be made available on our website: www.combedownheritage.org.uk

Reports on meetings

Routes and Roads, Turnpikes and Trusts

In February Martin Coulson showed us a new aspect of Combe Down as a landscape across which people moved over millennia. Had Iron Age settlers travelled along what is now North Road; did Romans build a road from the south at Poole to Bath over Combe Down; was the ancient Long Drung from the Cam valley part of the boundary of the medieval Prior's Park which we know today as Pope's Walk?

Much is unknown of these early times but roads were free to use until the advent of the better



Mallett's Toll, circa 1880, looking north
© Charles Swift

maintained turnpikes. Ralph Allen was an investor in the Bath Turnpike Trust that re-constructed Bradford Road and North Road in 1763-4 as part of the link from Keynsham to Trowbridge. There were toll gates by Foxhill and at the top of Brassknocker Hill, the latter known as Mallett's Toll.

As well as the roads Combe Down benefitted from trade on the Somersetshire Coal Canal in the 19th century and the Bath Electric Tramway from Bath opening in 1904 replacing a much-criticised horse bus. The trams stopped in 1939 but there are still complaints about the bus service and now the state of the roads ! However we are lucky in Combe Down to have many footpaths that all can use.

Life on Combe Down in the 1920s and 30s

John Daniels visited us from Hampshire in March to tell of the discoveries he has made while researching into the backgrounds of his ancestors who had lived as neighbours on the Firs in the inter-war years. His maternal grandfather, Frank Pine, was very committed to public service and became a leading figure in the establishment of the Bath Hospital Box Scheme which rescued the Royal United Hospital from debt. On his father's side the Daniels family included his uncle Robert who was the Combe Down blacksmith.

With these personal histories we heard how early 20th century social, political and economic history had developed in Combe Down with the first stirrings of the welfare state and the progress of technology in transport and communications. The Church Rooms were certainly busier with local functions in those days and we sadly now lack entertainment at Combe Down School 'Old Scholars Association' socials !

Foxhill – history in the making, heritage recorded

Susan Fletcher of Curo, a Bath housing association, brought us through the story of MOD Foxhill with the arrival of the Admiralty in Bath in WW2 and the construction of the MOD offices

in the 1940s which operated for about 70 years. Navy personnel at Foxhill were involved in submarine development, the Polaris and Trident nuclear programmes and latterly, procurement. As much as possible of this MOD era has been recorded by Curo and this may eventually be archived with CDHS.

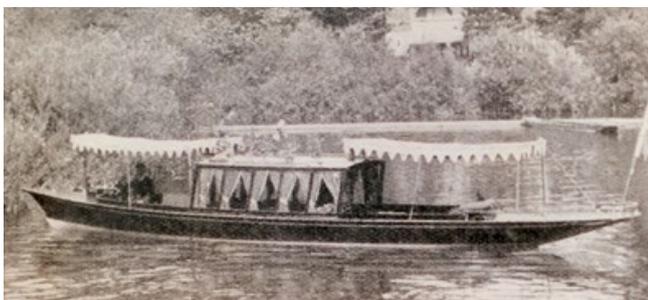
Curo bought the site from the MOD in 2013 and now have planning permission to build 750 houses and also intend to redevelop parts of the Foxhill estate where they own 70% of the property. Plans for community facilities, a new primary school and open space form important parts of the development but concerns exist over the traffic impact of the new residents. Only one vehicle access point is possible at the new roundabout on Bradford Road so other transport options are being considered. Time will tell if the cable-car proposal will solve the problem!

The restoration of a Victorian river launch

In May, Jenkyn and Helen Knill came to tell us about the restoration of their Victorian river launch Lady Lena, built in 1890 and believed to be the oldest electric launch in existence. Operating at first on the Thames and then from 1919 on the River Ouse at Bedford, Lady Lena ended up sunk in a backwater until salvaged and poorly restored in the 1940s.

It returned to the Ouse as a trip boat and then was left to rot on the river bank in 1963. Later moved to a private garden it was found by the Knills, already veterans of canal narrow boat restoration, who bought the very fragile hulk in 1980 for a £1 and transported it to Bath. Totally rebuilt it was initially refitted with a steam engine and then converted back to electricity in 2004. Lady Lena now provides cruises on the K&A canal between Bath and Bradford on Avon.

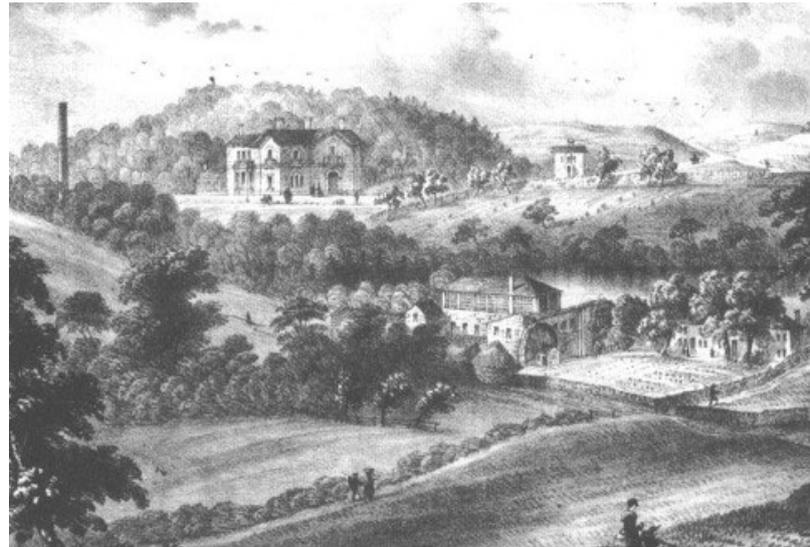
Jenkyn's father, the late Sir John Knill, was a pioneer of the canal restoration movement and played a major part in returning the K&A to navigation. He ran an early water-bus business along the K&A in Bath and this will soon be reinstated by Jenkyn with a new electric boat named after his father.



Lady Lena in 1904

The Towers of Combe Down - part 5

Our last tower in the series is the freestanding chimney on the slopes above De Montalt Mill which marks this lost industrial site built in 1805 by a partnership of Messrs Bally, Ellen & Stearn to produce specialist paper. The paper factory was sited in Combe Down to benefit from the clean air, fresh water from Whittaker's spring and the ready access to a constant supply of rags, the main raw material, discarded by the wealthy inhabitants of Bath.



Stylised C19 view of De Montalt Mill, centre, with chimney in trees to the left

Although the Mill was powered by a 56 foot diameter water wheel, at that time the largest in the country, an early Boulton & Watt steam engine was also installed in 1808 to ensure constant power. Its chimney, surviving in fine condition to this day, was built a hundred yards south-west on the ridge above the mill and connected by an underground flue. This distance away from the works ensured no coal smuts would compromise the quality of the paper which sold not only as high class stationery and for banknotes but was also used by many distinguished artists of the time including Turner and Constable.

The Mill later passed through many hands performing various roles including gutta percha production (a type of natural rubber), cabinet-making, market gardening and dry wood manufacture before finally housing cows and pigs. By the turn of the 21st century it was sliding into dereliction but rescue came in 2007 when the mill and associated buildings were developed for residential use.

The Bath Blitz and Combe Down

The 75th anniversary of the Bath Blitz this year reminds us of the weekend of 25–26 April 1942 when three raids on these two nights by the Luftwaffe killed 417 people, injured more than 800, and seriously damaged or destroyed some 2000 buildings. The attack was launched by Hitler as one of the ‘Baedeker’ raids on historic British cities in revenge for the destruction of the medieval centres of Lubeck and Rostock by the RAF.

Some bombs had fallen on the city earlier in the war but these had been associated with the almost nightly raids on Bristol in the first four months of 1942. As a result, when the sirens began to sound at around 11pm on that Saturday night, the population of Bath were not expecting to be the target. The RAF coastal stations had spotted the approach of the German bomber formations from occupied France but the fighter planes that were scrambled failed to intercept them. With that and the following night both cloudless it was easy for the Luftwaffe pilots to follow the River Avon glinting in the moonlight and find Bath exposed below them.



German bombs, left to right: 50, 250, 500, 1000, 1800kg

80 twin-engined Dornier bombers swept across the city dropping incendiaries and high-explosive to cause widespread damage, death and injury. As Bath burned and the raid continued, aircraft that had dropped their bombs strafed the streets with machine-gun fire to hamper the emergency services before returning to France to rearm and repeat the attack later that night at 4:35am. The third raid on the following night, Sunday 26th, found the defences better prepared and RAF aircraft from Colerne engaged the bombers over Bath with some success. However serious damage again resulted on the ground and over 90 fires were started, fanned by high winds.

Large numbers of people left the city after the first raid and took cover on open ground above Bath. At Combe Down use was made of the quarries as bomb shelters throughout the war and although the village was not directly

targeted by the air raids, a sprinkle of bombs did fall in the area on both nights of the blitz from navigation error or the need to jettison payload and evade fighter attack. Prior Park and grounds, together with the land around the Springfield and Fox Hill Farms north of Bradford Road (which became the Foxhill housing estate after the war) were both hit by ‘sticks’ of bombs on the 25th. The area around Foxhill was hit again on the 26th together with Shaft Road at the other end of the village.

Most of these bombs caused no building damage or injury although older residents remember that some cattle were killed in the fields at Foxhill. However, a direct hit on No. 7 Clevedale Road during the last raid on the 26th killed three people. They were Alfred Wells (age 61), his wife Minnie Wells (age 58) and Royston Stanley White (age 5 and possibly an evacuee).

The Luftwaffe used a mix of 50, 250 and 500kg high-explosive and incendiary bombs for the Bath raids amounting to a total of 130 tons. The bombs that fell around Combe Down were mainly 250kg or 500kg which resulted in craters up to 12m in diameter and 5m depth. Bomb craters across Foxhill can be seen in this 1942 aerial photo.



Bomb craters at Foxhill, April 1942

Little evidence of the Bath Blitz now remains, the most notable being the shrapnel damage to the old Employment Exchange building in James Street. The few buildings damaged on Combe Down have been repaired and the craters filled in but one 500kg bomb crater still remains in the wood opposite the gates of Prior Park Gardens. It is even now a substantial hole and a reminder of those dark days of World War 2.

Information for this article and more on the Bath Blitz at www.bathblitz.org

Fancy that!

Ginnels and snickets they may be to those who live up north but we Combe Downers know our narrow alleyways as drungs. It's a term that can be found, with a variety of vowels, as drong, dreng, dring, or drung all over the West Country.

The common element is constriction and the notion of a squeeze in passing through a tight space which may explain an etymological link with the Old English word thrang meaning a throng or crowd of people. Drungs can even be found in Newfoundland where early colonies from the south west of England settled in the 17th century and brung their drungs with them !

Life histories project

The Society is restarting its project to record memories and reminiscences of past times in Combe Down from those who can still remember them! If you, or your friends and relatives, have been born, educated or lived for a while in Combe Down and would like to contribute to this work, please contact Sophia Pandit at sophia.pandit@btinternet.com

Philip Nowell's great great great great granddaughter

On 16 April the CornerStone was delighted to open up for Diana Steely, the 4x great

granddaughter of Philip Nowell, the next famous stone entrepreneur of Combe Down after Ralph Allen. She saw his residence, Rock Hall, and Dave Bishop and Rosemary Simmons discussed material on Nowell from the CDHS archive.

CornerStone name change

The survey of opinions on the CornerStone's new name has now been closed. Thank you to all those who fed back their suggestions and comments on their visits to the CornerStone. The Trust will now deliberate on the findings and a decision on a new name will be made in the near future.

When did the Water Tower go?

The last newsletter reported that the water tower on Bradford Road was demolished in 1964. We now hear it may have survived until the early 1980s. Can you help on this? Details please to combedownheritage@hotmail.com

Facebook and Twitter: please follow us!



Web: www.combedownheritage.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook for news, updates and meeting information: <https://www.facebook.com/CombeDownHeritageSociety>

We're also on Twitter, posting as @cdhsoc

New member application form

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

First name(s) _____

Surname(s) _____

I/we apply to become a member of the Combe Down Heritage Society until 31 March 2018 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)

Gift Aid declaration for this and future donations

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made by me today in the future

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the Charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand that the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Signed _____

Date _____

Payments by cheque, payable to 'Combe Down Heritage Society', or cash should be made to the Membership Secretary: Tim Lunt, 141 Church Road, Combe Down, Bath BA2 5JL Please ask for a Standing Order Form if you would rather pay direct.