



**To offer friendship through social and educational activities**

## **EUC Exeter Branch Newsletter**

**Number 49**

<http://eucexeterbranch.org.uk>

**December 2021**

**January to March 2022**

### **Club news**

**Season's greetings to our members.** We hope you will have a pleasant festive season, despite the uncertainties caused by this new Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus.

The club has continued its activities during the last quarter. As you will see below, we have enjoyed three Zoom talks: Steffan Anderson-Thomas telling us about the excellent work of the Devon Air Ambulance; Alan Puttock talking about the reintroduction of beavers; and Paul Rendell discussing Okehampton of Yesteryear.

Our planned visit to Killerton House had to be cancelled at the last moment because of the very uncertain weather at that time as well as a threatened bus strike by staff of Stagecoach. Our other planned outing, to the Devon and Exeter Institution and to St Nicholas Priory, did take place, and was much enjoyed by those who took part.

For the first six months of next year, leading up to our Annual General Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we have six talks planned, all on Zoom, as well as one or two outings. For the time being we do not plan to hold live events, such as talks or lunches, until the situation with Covid-19 becomes clearer.

The Club Committee will meet again at 11 a.m. on Monday 14 February to plan the programme for the second half of 2022. If you have any suggestions for possible talks or outings, please don't hesitate to contact the Secretary.

Full details on all our past and future activities can be found on our club website, [www.eucexeterbranch.org.uk](http://www.eucexeterbranch.org.uk)

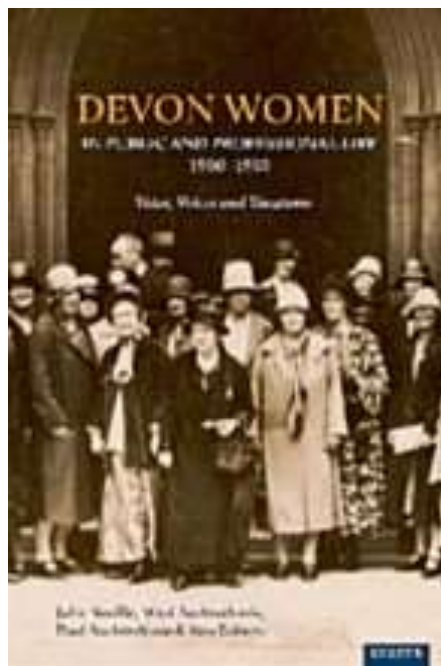
## Future events

### Tuesday 18 January 2022: Talk by Julia Neville on 'Devon Women'

In this talk Julia Neville, one of the authors of a new book (published by the University of Exeter Press) *Devon Women in Public and Professional Life, 1900-1950*, explores the lives of eight Devon women, well-known in their time but now hidden from history.

Julia notes that the grant of the first tranche of parliamentary votes for women in 1918 did not bring an end to campaigns for improvements to women's lives. Women in Devon, as elsewhere, continued to campaign for better housing, better rural services, and above all for more opportunities for the new generation of girls growing up

Details of the book can be found at:  
<https://www.exeterpress.co.uk/en/Book/2108/Devon-Women-in-Public-and-Professional-Life-19001950.html>



**Date and time:** Tuesday 18 January 2022, at 2 p.m. on Zoom

**Speaker:** Dr Julia Neville

**Topic:** Devon women in public and professional life in the early twentieth century: what happened after women got the vote?

*To book: Contact Mike Aspray, [mikeaspray@btinternet.com](mailto:mikeaspray@btinternet.com), Tel. 01884 242 606 by 11 January, and you will receive a Zoom link a day or two before the talk.*

### Tuesday 8 Feb 2022: Talk by Gwyneth Garner: 'You only live once'

We are delighted to welcome Gwyneth, one of our members, as our speaker.

Born under the sign of Pisces (two fish swimming in opposite directions!), Gwyneth will tell us about her long, varied and eventful life: nurse training at the Middlesex Hospital, secretary/translator in Sweden, six years as BOAC stewardess, personal tragedy, French degree from Exeter Uni aged 50, 10 years as a genetic counsellor ... Plenty of name dropping and anecdotes!

**Date and time:** Tuesday 8 February 2022 at 2 p.m. on Zoom

**Speaker:** Gwyneth Garner

**Title of talk:** You only live once !

**To book:** Contact George Garner by 1 February at [georgegarner@btinternet.com](mailto:georgegarner@btinternet.com) or on 01392 881330, and you will receive a Zoom link a day or two before the talk.

### Thursday 10 March 2022: A talk on the FORCE cancer charity

We shall welcome a speaker from the FORCE cancer charity, which is an independent charity, with most of its work funded by local donations, fundraising, grants, legacies and a shop.

The FORCE cancer charity provides free support and information, at their centre in Exeter and at local community hospitals, to anyone affected by cancer. They offer counselling, group sessions, complementary therapies, benefits advice, specialist physiotherapy and exercise guidance, and other health and wellbeing support. They also fund local research and buy equipment to improve patient care, and pay for a specialist nurse to deliver chemotherapy in their outreach locations.



For more information, visit: <http://www.forcecancercharity.co.uk/>

**Date:** Thursday 10 March 2022 at 2 p.m. on Zoom

**Topic:** FORCE cancer charity

**Speaker:** A speaker from the charity (TBC)

**To book:** Contact Louise Clunies-Ross at [louisecluniesross@btinternet.com](mailto:louisecluniesross@btinternet.com) or on 01884 242 606 by 3 March, and you will receive a Zoom link a day or two before the meeting.

## Event Reports

*Here is a report on our visit to Buckfast Abbey gardens in July, which failed to make it into our last newsletter – it brings back memories of summer.*

### **Visit to the Gardens at Buckfast Abbey, 26 July 2021**

A group of Exeter Branch members enjoyed our first day out together for many months. It was a joy to meet again in person and not on Zoom. The venue was Buckfast Abbey where extensive grounds and a large terrace outside the restaurant enabled us to meet and chat and enjoy lunch safely before the afternoon tour. Some members also took the opportunity to visit the beautiful Abbey Church of St. Mary, cool and peaceful on a hot summer's day and providing, as ever, a welcome to all.

After lunch we held a brief ceremony, thanking Frances Canning for her role as Chairman and welcoming Mike Aspray as Branch Chairman for 2021-22. We also thanked Secretary Peter for linking us via emails and the Newsletter during the past 15 months.



Maia Hall of the gardening team led us to see three of the specialist gardens maintained at Buckfast. Like all gardens, these are constantly evolving. First, we admired the lavender garden (which at one time comprised the National Collection, now held elsewhere) located in a sunny, south facing position with lots of grit for good drainage. The sea of azure and mauve flowers was attracting some bees, we were pleased to note.



Next, we moved on to learn about the Physic Garden, comprising four sections of planting separated by a shady low arched arbour, covered by vines, plums, quince and medlars at a height easy for picking. This garden has plants commonly used in medieval times: for example the medicinal quarter had feverfew (for headaches) lavender (an antiseptic) and self-heal (for hypertension) while the culinary quarter grew onion, garlic and borage. The household section contained rosemary and pineapple sage, used to mask unpleasant smells indoors and meadowsweet that was used for dyes. In the quarter with poisonous plants we were glad to see these on a small island surrounded by a pond and were told about monkshood (fatal if ingested) and lovage that can cause kidney damage. We did not linger here!

Our final stop was in the peaceful Millennium Garden, designed to commemorate the 1,000 years since an Abbey was founded here in 1018. This garden won Silver at the 2017 RHS Malvern Festival. Centred on a circular pond at which a white-painted wrought iron deer is drinking, the garden has a blue, white and silver theme with hostas, foxgloves, silver birch trees, hazel, ferns and other low-growing plants densely packed around the pond. A delightful and peaceful place.

Our tour concluded with an explanation from Peter Hague, Head Gardener, of the newer buildings in the grounds which include a conference centre. We thanked our guides and found shelter just as a thunderstorm broke! A dramatic end to a splendid outing. Thank you, Frances, for organising this visit.

*Louise Clunies-Ross*

## **Talk on Devon Air Ambulance, 6 October 2021**

The Club welcomed Steffan Anderson-Thomas from the Devon Air Ambulance Trust who gave us an inspirational talk on Zoom. He explained the challenges encountered operating with Covid-19, looking at the safety and solutions and working within the government guidelines. A separation screen has been installed between the front and rear sections of the aircraft, sealing-off the pilot cockpit from the patient and paramedic area. They have also introduced a newly-designed throat microphone and bracket, to allow for full-face visors on safety helmets, which will further protect crew during procedures where they are at extra risk..

The service operates from 7am to 2am and last year 590 medical missions were carried out. In all, 936 patients were assisted, and 7% of missions involved patients with children. This year they had the busiest summer ever with 572 missions over three months. Road Traffic Accidents are the third most common incident.

A new helicopter, the H145, will come into service later this year. The new aircraft was delivered on time by Airbus Helicopters UK and provides more space, full access to the patients, advanced technology and communication, as well as greater fuel capacity and endurance.



*The new helicopter*

The Charity is independent and there are many ways in which you can support their valuable work by supporting their shops, giving regular or one-off donations, or joining the weekly lottery and supporting events.

What a marvellous service the DAAT provides for us here in Devon! It was good to be able to support them.

*Susie Hewitt*

### **Talk on Beavers, 4 November 2021**

Exeter Branch members recently enjoyed an up-to-the-minute report on the environmental impact of reintroducing badgers to this country, and an overview of current plans for monitoring them at specific sites.

The presentation was given by Dr Alan Puttock, an Exeter geography graduate and Research Fellow at the University of Exeter who has specialised in hydrology and is thus well placed to explore the work of beavers and their environmental impact in the landscape.

With increasing awareness of the importance of water quality, water management and carbon capture in a warming world, issues of water pollution, flooding and soil erosion pose major challenges. Re-introducing native species can help a lot. Beavers are a keystone species that were hunted to extinction in Britain 400 years ago and today their activities are being monitored at a number of protected sites in England. Beavers, said Alan, do not adapt to their environment, they change it.



Beavers can weigh up to 20 kg and grow to over a metre in length and while somewhat ungainly on land are adept in the water. Once hunted by wolves and bears they have no natural predators in Britain today: however, in what is now a densely populated country with intensively managed rural areas, beavers have a major impact on the landscape which can bring them into conflict with some landowners and farmers. Thus monitoring their introduction and impact is vital.

Alan showed footage taken by a drone from a Devon site where beavers had built 13 dams in 11 years, transforming the hydrology and geography of the area and having a positive impact on water purity by filtering out sediment, slowing water flow by some 20 per cent, increasing carbon capture and widening the range of aquatic ecology. This in turn has provided a favourable environment for smaller mammals such as water voles to flourish. In times of drought, water continues to trickle through the dams, thus reducing the immediate impact of both floods and droughts. Alan considers beavers to be Nature's ecosystem engineers.

The beavers' activities are monitored in Devon by the Devon Wildlife Trust, and data are sent to the Environment Agency, along with data from about 30 other sites across the country, for use in flood management planning. Alan concluded his talk by highlighting the benefits of working in a collaborative way across a number of agencies, describing the activities of the River Otter beavers in East Devon which have involved farmers, landowners and the eco-tourism industry as well as scientists, the environment agency and local residents. He was also pleased to report that at national level, policy documents have started to note the work and impact of beavers on the environment. After taking questions we thanked Alan for a most informative and fascinating talk and for his generous donation of our speaker's fee to the Devon Wildlife Trust.

*Louise Clunies-Ross*

## Visit to the Devon and Exeter Institution and St Nicholas Priory, 17 November 2021

The Club was perhaps rather ambitious in organizing a visit to two of Exeter's medieval buildings on a single day. A total of 16 members attended but only a courageous few visited both the Devon and Exeter Institution in the morning and St Nicholas Priory in the afternoon, negotiating the winding stairways, low doors and passageways to discover a wealth of Exeter's heritage. Peter Wingfield-Digby, a member and tour guide of the DEI, gave us a well-informed tour of the Institution, while Redcoat Guide Barry provided an entertaining and well-researched tour round St Nicholas Priory, enlivened with many anecdotes. Both sites have their own websites and excellent guidebooks or histories.

Both buildings have medieval origins, St Nicholas as a Benedictine priory in about 1087, a dependency of Battle Abbey, while No. 7 Cathedral Close was originally a canonical house owned by the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral, its earliest recorded occupant being Canon William Browning in 1442. The priory preserves more of the medieval structure than no. 7, including the cellarium, the Norman undercroft dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the oldest intact room in Exeter.

The cellarium contains a massive stone coffin, thought to be that of Sir Hugh Courtenay. If so, it must have been transferred at some date from Cowick Priory, where he was buried in 1292. The Courtenays of Powderham also have strong but less visible links with the DEI. In 1672 they leased no. 7 from the Dean and Chapter to use it as their town house. Since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dean and Chapter had been leasing the property to non-clerical occupants: William Waller, later a general in Cromwell's army, took over no. 7 from Sir Richard Reynell of Forde House in 1634. Sir William Courtenay had married William Waller's daughter in 1643.



*St Nicholas Priory: In the parlour*

*Image: Visit Exeter*

St Nicholas Priory lost its monastic status during the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536. The church and chapter house ranges were speedily demolished and the west and north ranges divided and sold off. Among the tenants in 1602 was Nicholas Hurst and the most striking room to be seen today is the parlour, reconstructed and



repainted using contemporary panelling taken from 229 High Street, purchased at auction by RAMM in 2001 from the De Young Museum in San Francisco. Sadly the priory buildings were split into a rookery of tenements over the following three centuries until at the start of the twentieth century it was threatened with demolition.

The tale of no. 7 was more positive. The Courtenays maintained and redeveloped the building until 1813 when financial considerations forced the family to relinquish the lease, just at the time when the new DEI was looking for a place to rent. It is to the DEI that we are indebted for the present wonderful time capsule of a library, as they built the inner and outer library rooms with their galleries and cupolas. The inner room was originally intended as a lecture room but soon became filled with museum objects. Today it serves as a library for Westcountry studies while the outer room has always been a library room. The back of the building, including the Courtenay Room, resulting from reconstruction around 1600, is the only part of the early building to survive intact.



*Devon and Exeter Institution: The outer library*

Only a few of the museum objects remain, notably the globes, frequent ornaments of a scholarly library. The remainder were passed to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in 1869 to form part of their foundation collections. The Museum forms another link between the DEI and St Nicholas Priory as in 1913 the Exeter City Council purchased the decrepit buildings on behalf of the Museum. In 2018 the management of St Nicholas Priory was transferred to the Exeter Historic Buildings Trust, which had been established in 1996 to rescue the refectory range of the Priory, thus reuniting the two surviving wings of the priory.

So we were privileged to be shown the work of two charitable trusts which are flourishing to bring Exeter's historical heritage before the wider community and visitors.

*Ian Maxted*

## **Talk on 'Okehampton of Yesteryear', 7 December 2021**

Members enjoyed a very informative zoom talk by Paul Rendell, otherwise known as Dartmoor Paul. Paul took us on a guided tour of the town using old postcards and photographs. Amongst some of the businesses was Gunn's mineral water which was sold across Devon. Mr Gunn also sold coal from his coal yard up next to the railway. A very large store in town was Cecil Coles who sold everything including pianos.

With the advent of the railway in 1871 an arcade was built which became a very upmarket shopping centre. It provided the most direct route from the town centre to Okehampton Station. It was built by local builder Henry Geen on the site of the old Savile House, which he bought for the princely sum of £2,250. It featured Luggs the photographer and framer, Germans shoe shop selling Dartmoor shoes (I always knew them as Oke damp defiers!), as well as many other shops.

Sydney Simmons is probably the most well-known name in Okehampton. Born in Okehampton, he became an apprentice at a draper's shop and later went to London to work for a large carpet manufacturing company. He travelled to America and Canada and acquired the rights for a mechanical process for carpet cleaning. He became a very wealthy man. He often visited Okehampton and started to buy up land in Okehampton. In 1911 he acquired Okehampton Castle.

In around 1905, Sydney Simmons acquired the meadow and woods beside the East Okement River to prevent any house building and paid for it to be landscaped as a park with ornamental fountains and waterfalls and a beautiful Swiss style chalet for the enjoyment of the people of Okehampton. In 1906 he presented the park to the town and it was opened to the public on 8th July 1907 and named Simmons Park after the town's generous benefactor. The opening was attended by The Lord Mayor of London.

*Susie Hewitt*

## **Farewell**

### **Clive Lee**

We are sorry to report the death of Clive Lee, one of our members. He died on 2 November 2021 aged 82, after a long illness. Clive was a very active member of our club, and was chairman in 2016. He had spent almost his entire working life in the Engineering Department at the University, and achieved fame, along with Robin Ling of the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Hospital in Exeter, for the invention of the Exeter Hip. Two million hips have now been fitted worldwide.

There was a fulsome tribute to Clive on the University website. The Express and Echo also published a long article about his work, and its leading editorial was headed 'Pioneering city engineer's legacy will live on and on'. There were also tributes in the national press, including an excellent one in The Times headed 'Mechanical engineer who helped to produce a design for prosthetic hips that is still being used more than 50 years later'. We send our condolences and best wishes to Pamela and to her two children, Philip and Caroline, who are both engineers.

## **City news**

### **Okehampton railway**

The new Dartmoor Line, linking Exeter to Okehampton by rail, opened on 20 November. It is the first route reopened under the Department of Transport's 'Restoring your Railway' initiative. For the time being, the train service will run every two hours each way, seven days a week. In 2022 the train service will be increased to hourly, and more trains will be extended to Exeter Central, serving the city centre. Congratulations to one of our members, Richard Westlake, and his fellow campaigners for their success in getting this line reopened.

### **Royal Clarence Hotel**

Five years have now passed since a devastating fire destroyed the Royal Clarence Hotel in the Cathedral Yard. The owners had originally proposed in 2017 that the hotel would be restored, but they then sold the hotel site in 2020. The new owners, Southwest Lifestyle Brands, have now unveiled their plans for the building. They aim to convert the shell of the hotel and the neighbouring Well House Tavern into a restaurant and bar on the ground floor, with 23 apartments on the four storeys above.

## **The statistics of Covid-19: an update**

Since the beginning of the pandemic in Wuhan, China, in January 2020, the official figures indicate that there have been about 270 million cases of Covid worldwide, with 5 million deaths, but the true figures are likely to be considerably higher. Here in the UK, some 10 million cases have been reported, with about 146,000 deaths.

Back in April 2020, during the first wave, the number of cases reported daily in the UK was around 5,000, but at that stage nearly 20 percent of cases (approaching 1,000 a day) resulted in fatalities. Now, in contrast, daily cases in early December 2021 exceed 40,000 but, thanks to vaccinations and improved hospital treatment, only about a quarter of one percent of cases (between 100 and 150 a day) result in a fatality.

The overall death rate in the UK from Covid in the last two years is 2,129 per a million people. This is comparable to the rate in Italy (2,224), but slightly higher than the rate in Spain (1,885), Portugal (1,826) and France (also 1,826), and considerably higher than in Germany (1,231).

The experts say we shall have to learn to live with Covid for many years to come.

*Peter Wingfield-Digby*

## **Exeter University Club (Exeter Branch)**

### **Programme for the first half of 2022.**

**Tuesday 18 January: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., Julia Neville on 'Devon Women'.**  
Organiser: Mike Aspray, 01884 242606, [mikeaspray@btinternet.com](mailto:mikeaspray@btinternet.com)

**Tuesday 8 February: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., Gwyneth Garner on 'You only live once!'**  
Organiser: George Garner, 01392 881330, [georgegarner@btinternet.com](mailto:georgegarner@btinternet.com)

**Monday 14 February: EUC (Exeter Branch) Committee meeting, 11 a.m.**  
Organiser: Peter Wingfield-Digby, 01392 424781, [pwdigby@btinternet.com](mailto:pwdigby@btinternet.com)

**Thursday 10 March: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., A speaker on FORCE cancer charity**  
Organiser: Louise Clunies-Ross, 01884 242606, [louisecluniesross@btinternet.com](mailto:louisecluniesross@btinternet.com)

**Monday 4 April: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., Jon Curtis on 'Exeter Food Action'**  
Organiser: Richard Westlake, 01392 273895, [rawestlake@phonecoop.coop](mailto:rawestlake@phonecoop.coop)

**Monday 9 May: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., Dr Elisa Franco on 'What is neonatal diabetes?'**  
Organiser: Susie Hewitt, 01392 273895, [susiehewitt@gmx.com](mailto:susiehewitt@gmx.com)

**Thursday 9 June: Talk (on Zoom), 2 p.m., A speaker on 'Exeter City of Sanctuary'**  
Organiser: Frances Canning, 01392 209542, [francesandedward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:francesandedward@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Friday 1 July: Visit to Ugbrooke House and Gardens, 12 noon**  
Organiser: Frances Canning, 01392 209542, [francesandedward@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:francesandedward@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Monday 4 July: Exeter University Club (Exeter Branch) Annual General Meeting, 11 a.m. (probably on Zoom)**  
Organiser: Peter Wingfield-Digby, 01392 424781, [pwdigby@btinternet.com](mailto:pwdigby@btinternet.com)

For more detail, please see our website at [www.eucexeterbranch.org.uk](http://www.eucexeterbranch.org.uk)