

Newsletter



May 2009

Dear Members,

In the last newsletter I included an impassioned plea for help with a publication on climate change and would like to be able to report that I was overwhelmed with memories of violent events and of long hot days on the beach But I wasn't. Not one reminiscence was forthcoming. So this is your second chance. I really do need some personal reminiscences, humorous or tragic, to breathe some life into a text which very much needs something to lift it from the boring though scholarly account which it will otherwise remain. Come on Your memory is not as bad as all that.

Incidentally does anyone remember in which year the Shutterton Brook overflowed and flooded a large part of the Warren?

Sadly I have to tell you that Graham Lewis will not be able to give his talk on Haldon Airfield on June 1st and to take his place John Wilkinson and Tricia will talk about Climate Change in Dawlish, Past, Present, and Future. In the meantime Graham has written the brief article opposite as a taster.

Betty Roberts tells me that there was an error in the last newsletter. The poem "The Monk of Haldon" was not written by R H Barham, the author of The Ingoldsby Legends but by his son Rev. R. Barham who convalesced in Dawlish in 1863. It is good to see that someone reads this newsletter ... and carefully at that.

Very few people have put their names down for the trip to Hennock on May 11th which is disappointing to Tricia who puts in a good deal of time arranging our visits. You will probably receive this newsletter too late to join up but make a note of the visit to Countess Weir village on July 6th.

Bob Thompson

Next Meeting: June 1st 2009 at 2.30 p.m. in the Manor House.

Tricia Whiteaway and John Wilkinson will speak on

Climate Change in Dawlish, Past, Present and Future



Blackburn Skua

A Short History of Haldon Airfield

Graham Lewis

In September 1929 a Teignmouth businessman formed the company, HALDON AIRPORT Ltd. At 760 feet above sea-level, it was often covered by low cloud which limited its usefulness. In April 1933 the G.W.R. used Haldon as a stop-off point for an air service which operated between Cardiff and Plymouth. In the 'thirties' a flying school was provided. Whitney Straight was taught to fly from Haldon. He took over the management of the airfield in January 1937 and later he ran Exeter airfield.

When war came the Admiralty looked for suitable landing grounds near to Lyme Bay gunnery ranges which were used by RN Air Station Yeovilton. Haldon was chosen as a suitable site for target towing aircraft. The Admiralty took over the airfield on 18 August 1941, commissioned as HMS Heron II and to be used as a satellite field for Yeovilton (HMS Heron). Blackburn Skua target tugs of 794 Squadron and Miles Masters from 761 Sqdn used the field at first.

In 1942 the landing ground was extended to the north and south taking in part of the local golf course. The field was 'land-drained' and a tarmac hard standing plus *Sommerfield* steel tracking was laid. However, flying was often disrupted due to high wind and low cloud. In May 1943 the Admiralty put Haldon on a 'care & maintenance' basis. The name 'Heron II' was transferred to Charlton Hawthorn airfield in Somerset.

In 1946 after the war, efforts were made to get civil flying started again at Haldon but this came to nothing and the field fell into disuse. Later the control hut/office was used by a Hells Angels 'chapter' for many years but one night in 1977 it was burnt down. Today, only the name on the car park gives a hint as to what went on up there.

Aircraft that used Haldon in the War years:

Fairey Swordfish
Blackburn Roc
Blackburn Skua
Miles Master
Hawker Sea Hurricane
Boulton-Paul Defiant



Fairey Swordfish

Additional note:

Son Williams recalls how early in the 1914 war, the first aeroplane to come to Dawlish had been forced to land in a field at Lady's Mile which caused some excitement locally. The plane was operated by the Royal Flying Corps, the predecessor of the RAF, and excitement mounted when it was learned that a second aircraft would soon be landing to repair the first one.

Mr Williams believes that in 1910 Bleriot, soon after crossing the channel came to Teignmouth, landing on the beach.

In the 1920s Sir Alan Cobham who was a great advocate of municipal airports came to Haldon with his Air Circus and in 1929 suggested that Haldon would be a suitable site for a commercial airport. On 31st May 1930 the Prince of Wales arrived by air from Padstow to visit the Bath and West Show at Torquay. Cobham used Haldon for Air Displays But the commercial prospects of Haldon were dimmed by the success of the new airport at Exeter.

Extracted from Son Williams, Memories of Dawlish

Things don't change much... or do they?

An interesting circular of 1828 concerns the appeal of four residents against their new Poor Law Rate assessment which, in one case, had been increased by 82%. The appellants complained that the assessments of nearly all the properties of female parishioners had been lowered considerably. The public pronouncement concluded by asking "whether it is not clear to every man of common sense that the parishioners of Dawlish are in the greatest possible need of a fair and equal rate and that they have abundant reason for thinking that they are already in possession of a fair and equal valuation."

The appellants were Messrs Chapman, Long, Powell, Litton and Vicary.

Extract from Cornelius' Guide to Dawlish c.1879

On Wednesday 23 October 1816 the boy taking the mails from Teignmouth and Dawlish to Exeter was assaulted by a robber near Alphington and plundered of the Teignmouth and Exminster mail bags. When he recovered consciousness in Exeter Hospital he said that his assailant was a young man mounted on a grey horse.

The horse was supposed afterwards to have been traced although the robber was not discovered notwithstanding that a reward of £50 was offered. A horse exactly answering the description was taken from a field near Dawlish on Wednesday night and turned back to the same place before daybreak on Thursday having evidently been ridden very fast and gored in the sides. The mail bags were afterwards recovered with but few letters missing.

Dawlish Gazette April 1933.

The Baden Powell Connection.

In 1904 a family with a daughter named Olave St.Clair Soames rented Luscombe Castle for a year from Mr Peter Hoare, the banker. She was confirmed in Dawlish Parish Church on 7th December 1904 by the Bishop of Crediton. On 3rd January 1912 the RMS Arcadian sailed from Southampton heading for New York via the West Indies, and on board was Baden Powell who must have been delighted to see that a fellow passenger was a lady he had noticed in Knightsbridge in 1910. She of course was Olave St Clair Soames. Romance blossomed and in December 1912 they were married at Parkstone in Dorset.

The Scouts had been formed in Dawlish in early 1909. The Scouts organised a penny collection to buy the happy couple a wedding present, a motor car to be driven by Ernest Court, a brother of Annie Court who was housekeeper at Luscombe Castle in 1904. In March 1910 a large gathering of Scouts at Exeter was reviewed by Lt. General Baden Powell R.C.B. and in March 1918 25 Guides were enrolled in Dawlish by Miss Loes Lipcroft, the District Commissioner.

In April, Miss Cavendish Bentinck provided the ammunition for a shooting match for the Scouts, the target being a bull at 15 yards. (No connection with the Guides of course.)

A camp was held at Ashcombe Tower thanks to the generosity of Major Ralph Rayner for 230 Welsh Scouts. Dawlish Scouts lent a hand and Lord and Lady Baden Powell visited them. Apparently the camp was funded by a Jubilee Trust and Baden Powell mentioned in a letter that there were similar camps for the Guides.

In 1941 Lord Baden Powell died on 19th January. A memorial service was held in The Hut in Dawlish. Lady Baden Powell visited Dawlish in 1943 to meet the Guides.

Compiled by Betty Roberts drawing on "The Scout Connections" by P.J.Burdett

How they used to enjoy themselves

A ball given by a gentleman of Dawlish to a select party of the gentry of the town and neighbourhood took part at the Public Rooms on Monday last. Tea and other refreshments were elegantly served up in great profusion by Mr. Gore. The Dawlish Quadrille Band led by Mr. Melhuish executed a number of fashionable pieces with spirit and judgement which gave the utmost satisfaction. Dancing was kept up with the greatest animation throughout the night, the delighted assemblage continuing their enjoyment till five o'clock the next morning.

Extract from the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette of October 9th 1836.