



## DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

# Newsletter

March 2009

**Dear Members,**

*As you will all know, our next meeting in April will include our annual general meeting which will commence at 2 p.m. You may like to be reminded who the present members of your committee are :*

*Chairman: Bob Thompson  
Hon Secretary: Tricia Whiteaway  
Hon Treasurer: Paul de Lusignan  
Speaker Finder: Derek Wain  
Publications Secretary: Sheila Wain  
Publicity Secretary: Angela Marks  
Members: Jo de Lusignan (Newsletter distribution)  
Mavis Stuckey*

*Please make the effort to be there at 2 p.m. but above all, be there.*

*Our next book (... yes already .... Books are flowing from our pens "like the leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa") will be about education in Dawlish and if you have any reminiscences of your own school days, we will be glad to hear them.*

*Meanwhile I am ploughing a lonely furrow in preparing a publication on climate change over the years and its impact on the lives of people living in Dawlish. 'How can we help' I hear you cry. Well if you have any vivid memories of heavy snowfall, disastrous storms, floods and famine etc. I should be glad to hear from you. And if you would like to help with the research, don't hesitate to come forward.*

*Incidentally, such is the demand for our history publications, that we are having to reprint a number of our titles. This is the ultimate compliment for our efforts.*

*I regret to inform you of the recent death of Bob Stewart, one of our members.*

**Bob Thompson**

**Next Meeting: at the Manor House  
Monday 6th April**

**2.00 p.m. Annual General Meeting**

**2.30 p.m. Nick Loman will speak about**

**The History of Fishing  
at Budleigh Salterton**

From **'Devon Shires of the sea king'**

Issued by the Great Western Railway Company, **January 1924** (5th edition)

Dawlish, remarkable for its open green spaces and attractive lawns, has enlarged its borders very considerably since John Keats arrived there "over the hill" from Teignmouth and wrote depreciatively of the condition of its gingerbread nut-stalls and stall keepers at the Easter Monday fair. Some years before that, the rising watering place had welcomed another celebrated literary figure. Jane Austen came there, presumably from 'Lyme-of-the-King' and in 'Sense and Sensibility' one reads that "It seemed rather surprising that anybody could live in Devonshire without living near Dawlish". It is clear that even a century ago the 'Snug Resort' loomed large in the minds of persons comparatively little acquainted with the county.

It was indeed just about that time that a certain Dr. Downman sang its charms in verse. He grows eloquent over its "towring cliffs", "lovely strand" and babbling brook and pictures "thy pure encircling waves" embracing the "timid virgin", "the feeble matron" or

*"the child on whom*

*Thou mayest bestow a second happier birth*

*From weakness unto strength".*

It was not for nothing even then that Dawlish prided itself upon the best beach in Devon.

A far better poet, that sprightly humorist, the Rev. R.H. Barham in 'The Ingoldsby Legends' has given Dawlish a splendid testimonial as a health resort:

*"Half village, half town it is pleasant but smallish.*

*A place I suggest*

*As one of the best*

*For a man breaking down who needs absolute rest*

*Especially too if he's weak in the chest,*

*And known, where it happens to be known, as Dawlish."*

It would be difficult now to find a place where Dawlish is not known. There are, so to speak, a new town and an old town at Dawlish, and if the one is an agreeable lounge with good hotels, tempting shops and modern amusements, the other has all the air of a village in a valley with a pleasant stream running through an ornamental public garden. It is, in no small degree, to 'Dawlish Water' that this town indirectly owes its prosperity. One day in 1810 there ran into it so vast a torrent from Haldon that it overflowed disastrously, washing away bridges and houses. The reparation and improvements that followed, appear to have been so much to Dawlish's advantage that it came almost at once into a favour which it has deservedly held ever since.

On the bank of this stream stands the most rural-looking of town Parish Churches, in a setting of green with an effective backing of woodland. The ruddy cliffs of Dawlish are highly pictorial, the beach is excellent and the whole atmosphere soft and peaceful. Even those who, as a rule, care but little for the seaside, fall captive to the beauties of this romantic hinterland, the delightful views from Lea Mount, and the many charming and accessible walks from this happy-looking Town.

**Contributed by Darlene Adams**



## Stonelands House Fire

(This article should be seen as an addition to Mrs Robert's History of Stonelands published by DLHG in 2006.)

The house and grounds were purchased in 2006 by a caring young family, who were willing to keep it in tip-top condition. They have two daughters who appreciate the lovely grounds to play in and the large house, when they were home from school. Until the end of 2008 all was well and in fact a large family party was held there on New Year's Eve.

On New Year's Day 2009 the family went to Torquay for lunch and during the afternoon about 4pm they received a message to say that an alarm had gone off in the house, so they hastened back and coming down Luscombe Hill saw smoke in the direction of Stonelands. When they got back they saw smoke and a fire from the back of the buildings. They alerted the Fire Brigade and soon Fire Engines arrived from Dawlish, Teignmouth and Torquay as they realised it was a valuable property. When it was apparent that more help was needed to save the Grade II listed building more Engines came from Newton Abbott, Ashburton, Totnes, Bovey Tracey and Exeter brought an aerial ladder as well as Torquay to attack the blaze from the outside top floor and roof. Water was pumped from Dawlish Water which flows in the grounds of Stonelands. Street hydrants and a water bowser were also used. The worst of the fire was over by late evening but areas were damped down for most of the night and some of the roof tiles were removed but most had fallen off. It was shown in flames on BBC TV.



The Hall and Staircase after the fire.

The owners stayed until all was safe and then returned to Torquay briefly before returning in the morning to view the damage. They had managed to save some of their possessions in the front lower rooms but found mostly those they had left had been stolen. They were relieved to find the ground floor front and rooms were not too damaged with the lovely staircase, vaulted roof to the hall, the Ionic columns and recesses in the entrance hall were not too damaged nor was the fine Regency doorway. The later back part of the house from the kitchen had suffered the most but the shape of the house with outer walls and windows still remained though the roof had been badly damaged as were the second floor rooms. It is believed the fire started with an electrical fault in the kitchen. When I took photographs of the house the owners were busy talking to fire assessors, insurers and Teignbridge Council but they had the time to thank the Fire Brigade for the work they had done and presented one of the head firemen with a bouquet of flowers.

It was all very sad for the owners to see their home in such a state but they are prepared to return the house to its former glory with the help of the architect and builders. We hope it is done in the not too distant future so that the family can return and enjoy it once more.

**Betty Roberts**

## A Busy and multi-skilled Hotelier

“The Turf hotel was built in 1820 on the boundary of Exminster. It was intended that the Licensee should act as Lock-keeper and also rent some fields so he could feed his family. Indeed the Exeter City Fathers really wanted their money's worth as he was also expected to have ‘the ability to converse with ship captains in French, Dutch and Flemish.’”

(From the Exminster Parish Newsletter)

The canal was extended and the hotel completed in 1827.

Contributed by **Derek Wain**