

Whimsical Buildings

At our last meeting, Lawrence Hunt, a geographer, gave a fascinating talk about follies. He prefers to describe them as 'whimsical buildings' - capricious constructions with an element of fun; the antithesis of modern, functional architecture. Follies became popular in the C17th and C18th, when rich people had more money to build entertaining buildings for fun; many still stand today, and Lawrence shared his photos and knowledge of some of his favourites:

Humphrey Sturt's Tower, Dorset: a classic folly tower, now a well disguised mobile phone base;

Brisley Tower, Northumberland: on the Alnwick Castle estate that is full of well-disguised grottos;

Paxman's Folly, Wales: built by William Paxman, who went bankrupt bribing the locals to vote for him, which didn't pay off, as they voted for his rival after enjoying his generosity!

The First Earl of Lovelace's Mansion, East Horsley: summed up by Lawrence as one of those "massive houses built by sad, single men";

Hackfall Hall, Yorkshire: a ruined folly that is now a 'wonderfully romantic retreat'. There is also a fake medieval castle. www.landmarktrust.org.uk/search-and-book/properties/ruin-10176;

Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire: an incredible, enormous house, built by the owner to outdo his neighbour's property. It even had its own private railway to bring coal to heat it;

Barwick, near Yeovil: four follies at the four points of the compass (some visible from Yeovil train station);

Lawrence Castle (Haldon Belvedere), Devon: in 1990 the big window was blown out in a storm. The floor was also lifted out so that the joists could be replaced;

Powderham Belvedere, Devon: people think it's a copy of Haldon Belvedere, but it actually predates it. There are many stories related to it, such as smuggling and spying;

A folly near Chagford, Devon: an example of a privately-owned folly that very little is known about. Used in the film 'Diana', that nobody ever remembers seeing!

Bishop Copleston's Tower, Devon: a fun lookout tower with delightful ironwork. In C19th the upper part was converted into a water tower;

Pitt House: when travelling on the A38 to Plymouth, you can glimpse the folly tower in the grounds;

Bicton, Devon: there are a couple of follies, including a rare wooden structure and a tower built simply to house his Lordship's china collection;

Manaton, Devon: there are a cluster of towers around the church area - no one knows why they were constructed;

Tawstock, Barnstaple: this folly was purchased very recently and rebuilt into a luxury house, so it's a new folly really;

Scobitor, nr Ashburton: this looks like a WW2 lookout, but is actually much older;

Membury Folly, nr Axminster: this folly was built for fun by the twelve year old son of a blacksmith in 1821;

Victoria Park Road, Exeter: an example of a C19th folly built in somebody's back garden, to enable the owners to get a good view of the cathedral.

Lawrence also showed us some examples of modern whimsical buildings. Books say that Farringdon in Oxfordshire is Britain's last folly. It was built in the 1930's and its owner was quite mad (for example he allegedly dyed doves in different colours). However Lawrence showed us newer examples of buildings with a whimsical feel, including a house in Oxford with a shark coming out of the roof. He suggested that the gnomes we have in our gardens are themselves in the spirit of whimsy.

Sadly there is virtually no protection of follies through listing. English Heritage won't fund their repair unless there is some use for them to justify it. As a result they often fall into dereliction or become overgrown. Although this can give them character and atmosphere, some wonderful whimsical buildings have disappeared completely.

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Heavitree in Crosby's Complete Pocket Gazetteer

John Clayton shared an excerpt about Heavitree from a lovely old book called 'Crosby's Complete Pocket Gazetteer of England and Wales or Traveller's Companion', published in 1815:



HEAVITREE (Devon) a vil. which is supposed to have derived its name from its having been long the commonplace of execution to the city of Exeter, from which it is dist. 1½ m. It has a church, and contains a number of genteel families. It is justly recommended by the faculty for the salubrity of its air: here is a plot of ground enclosed for the internment of the bodies that are hanged on its gallows, and a parcel of land is appropriated for the purchase of shrouds. Population 957. Heavitree is 1½ m from Exeter and 171m from London.

Heavitree Connections With Exeter's Game With Brazil

This summer sees the centenary of Brazil's first ever football match...against Exeter City. It is a remarkable story and one that will be widely celebrated over the next few weeks. There are Heavitree connections too.

On 10 February 1923 Heavitree resident Winifred Elsie Brown married Reg Loram in Heavitree Parish Church. Winifred lived at 36 St Anne's Road and was the daughter of a railway worker. Just nine years earlier Reg had played in goal for Exeter against Brazil.

Reg was the only amateur in a party of 15 players that set off to tour Argentina. On the outward journey the ship called in at Rio and the team were invited to play some games in the Brazilian city on their way home.

Reg was not expecting to feature in any matches as he was reserve goalkeeper to the legendary Dick Pym (who went on to play for Bolton and England), but Pym was injured before the Brazil matches and so Reg was called up to play in all three games played in Rio including the third - Brazil's inaugural fixture. Reg had never played for the first team before and never did again. Instead he went back to farming in Alphington and captained the city reserve team, also helping out at the Club as an assistant trainer.

The team was managed on the tour by Michael McGahey, great grandfather of Martin who runs the tobacconists in Exeter High Street. Michael was the chairman of Exeter City and sent back vivid accounts of the tour to the Express and Echo. He lived in Heavitree for periods of his life including 45 St John's Road and 'Thrustelton' in Polsloe Road.

The historic tour will be marked in July by a community play at the Northcott Theatre entitled 'The day we played Brazil'. An exhibition will accompany the play. Exeter City are also going back to Rio for a centenary game.

I am very grateful to Alison Styles for information used in this article. Alison is related to Jimmy Rigby, a team mate of Reg Loram on the tour, and has researched what happened to all the players. This will be included in a new book due out shortly called 'Have you ever played Brazil?' Well Reg Loram can say he did and one can only imagine how tales of his exotic adventure helped woo Heavitree's Winifred all those years ago.

Martin Weiler

Upcoming History Society Events

Wednesday 11th June - Rifford Room, 7:30pm
Being a Chaplain" - Paul Morrell

Wednesday 10th September - Rifford Room, 7:30pm
Annual General Meeting

Members' Evening - Date TBC

At the AGM in September it was suggested that at one of the meetings during the coming year, possibly the next AGM, instead of an outside speaker, members could talk about subjects which they thought would be of general interest. These could be areas they have been investigating or they have just happened to come across, and would be able to talk about for 10 - 15 minutes. If you have a subject that you could talk about in this way will please let Hilda Mitchelmore know (Tel. 01392 279104).

Non History Society Events

12 June 2014, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'The Exeter Woollen Industry in 17th & 18th Centuries' - Tuckers Hall, Fore Street, Exeter

19th June 2014, 6.30pm - Friends of Higher Cemetery - 'The Read Family. A talk by Hugh Harrison, about the family of ecclesiastical woodcarvers and sculptors'

15th July 2014, 6.30pm - Friends of Higher Cemetery - 'An introductory walk around the new tree trail'

4th August 2014, 6.30pm - Friends of Higher Cemetery - 'Centenary Tour of WW1 Graves'

14 August 2014, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'The recently excavated Iron Age Settlement and Roman military base at St. Loyes', Rougemont Room, Central Library, Exeter

6th September 2014, 2pm - Exeter History Society - 'Mass Graves from Exeter Churches'

9th October 2014, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'The History of post-war Exeter', Rougemont Room, Central Library, Exeter

11th December 2014, 7pm - Exeter History Society - 'The various types of stone used in the building of Exeter Cathedral', Rougemont Room, Central Library, Exeter

If you know of any events that you think members might appreciate, please email me and I will include them in this section

This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society

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