

Tavistock

SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARY

Established
1799

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2018



Farewell to Friends

This last 12 months has seen the passing of a number of our longest serving members, and especially, friends - notably Mary Freeman, Mabyn Martin and Graham Kirkpatrick.

We were greatly saddened to hear of the death of Graham pictured below on the left with Tania Crosse and Christopher Pancheri. Graham was a great example with his enthusiasm for the heritage and history of our town. His writing and research contributed much to the knowledge of our members and a wider audience. Both Graham and Brenda had been loyal and stalwart members of the Tavistock Subscription Library for decades. Their love and enthusiasm for everything to do with the Library has been a great example to us all. Graham was organising the weekly coffee morning only the day before his passing. He was a constant source of knowledge, generosity and support through the years and we will miss him greatly. Our love and condolences are shared with Brenda and their family.



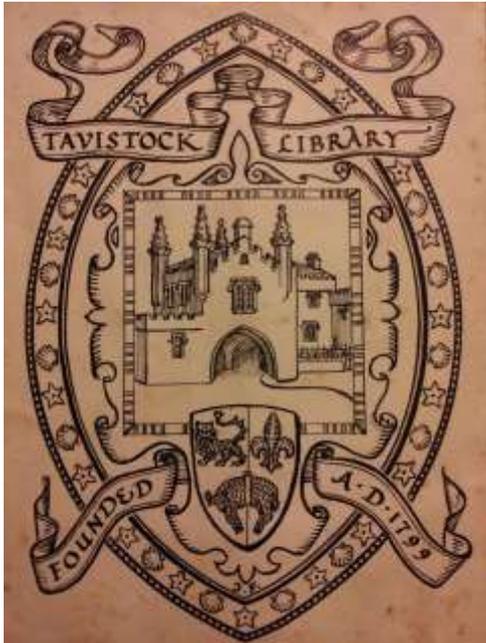
Death of Mabyn Martin

Mabyn died peacefully on 19th March 2018, aged 93, after a short illness. Mabyn had served in the Foreign Office until 1984. It was during the Second World War that she had also served at the famous code-breaking establishment at Bletchley Park, working on matters which she modestly kept very much to herself.

Death of Dr Mary Freeman

It was with sadness that we heard of the death of Dr Mary Freeman at the beginning of March from her daughter, who wished that our members were informed as soon as possible. Mary's contribution to the study of Tavistock and its heritage is well respected. Mary wrote voluminously on the history of Tavistock and the neighbourhood, submitting papers to a variety of learned journals including the Transactions of the Devonshire Association. She passed away peacefully surrounded by her family in a local nursing home after a long period of ill health. A wake was held in March at the Town Hall, attended by many, including members of the Library who reported it to have been a delightful celebration of her long and active life.





Notice of Annual General Meeting

Members might be aware that the planned AGM had to be postponed because of the bad weather on 19th March and will now be held on Monday 11th June 2018 at 7.30pm in the Reading Room.

New committee members are always welcomed and you are invited to let the Secretary Simon Dell know if you might be happy to come onto the committee.

Simon would welcome any pictures, articles stories etc for the next newsletter so do please get in touch with him if you would like to get involved at either Simondell1958@yahoo.co.uk or 07845 176870

News from the Reading Room

The coffee mornings which Graham and Brenda so diligently provide for so many years will continue on the first and third Friday of each month courtesy of John Davies and also Felicity Luckman.

The Writers Group continue to meet on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 2pm.

We have now decided to stop the daily delivery of the Western Morning News owing to expense but also the closure of the local news agent's shop in Tavistock. Tavistock Times are kindly being provided weekly by the Chairman.

The Subscription Library Committee is meeting this year to review the future of the Library in respect to the developments here in Guildhall Square and also with regard to the name of the Library and if its current title properly reflects what we do. There are a number of options for the future but underpinning all of them is the committee's desire to secure the future of the library for all to continue to enjoy.



Local author Ted Sherrell with Chairman Brian Fyfield-Shayler on the right and Hon Secretary Simon Dell on the left on the occasion of inviting Ted to view our collection of his local books which we are pleased to have on our shelves.

Ivy Beale from Tavistock and a New Zealand mystery



In the *Tavistock Times Gazette* of 30 November 2017 an article appeared requesting information regarding names and photographs which came to light in a 'shopping bag' full of old photographs, given to the Warkworth and District Museum of Auckland, New Zealand. The material was given to the museum by the town's local hospice shop which could throw no further light on the collection. Included in the collection is a photograph (taken by S W Wadge, photographers, of Tavistock) of a young lady, thought to be Miss Ivy Beale of Pentavy, Tavistock, together with an American newspaper cutting giving details of a visit by Miss Beale and her mother who were visiting a Dr and Mrs Charles R Vickery in Denver. Also in the shopping bag was a photograph of a wedding group outside a house assumed likely to be in Tavistock. The Warkworth Museum were interested in trying to establish why such a bundle had turned up in New Zealand and, more specifically, in Warkworth. It was felt that some clues could be obtained from the photograph of Ivy and the wedding picture which is clearly taken outside Rydal Mount, Tavistock, and, as I live some 4 doors away from Rydal Mount, and Pentavy is just around the corner, I was intrigued and took up correspondence with Alan Britton of the Warkworth Museum in trying to unravel what this was all about.

Further research has shown that Charles Vickery (1871-1936), a physician, was the son of John Vickery (1825-1904) of Broadwoodwidge who emigrated to the USA in 1845. Miss Ivy Rattenbury Beale (1893-1965) was the daughter of John Vickery Beale (1868-1892), of Broadwoodwidge, who moved to farm at Chaddlehanger near Tavistock from 1892 before moving into Tavistock in 1917 with his family. Ivy married Henry Cecil Hudson (1891-1975) a native of Saddleworth, Yorks, in 1931; Henry was a bank manager and the Hudsons lived their latter years in Tavistock.

Other family names appearing in the inevitable minestrone soup of names associated with these principle families are Baker (who owned Rydal Mount from 1900 to 1954), Helson, Rattenbury, Gerry, Rouncevill, Northey and Nankivell and there is a very strong connection to the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Tavistock. However, currently the most intriguing puzzle is to try and find why the Rydal Mount wedding photograph (attached) appears in the shopping bag and what and how any of this has connections with New Zealand. The wedding is most likely to have been during WW1 days and the groom has been established as being a member of the Middlesex Regiment working as an observer with the Royal Flying Corps.

Submitted by Alex Mettler

Launch of a new publication by Virginia Noonan of Australia

“From Devon to Australia – a 19th Century Narrative”



This new publication by Virginia Noonan, a decedent of William Merrifield librarian 1841–1872

How in one generation can a person, who was born at the start of the 19th century, change the course of their life forever? It was through sheer grit and determination that William Merrifield, librarian at the Tavistock Subscription Library, from 1841–1872, achieved such an outcome.

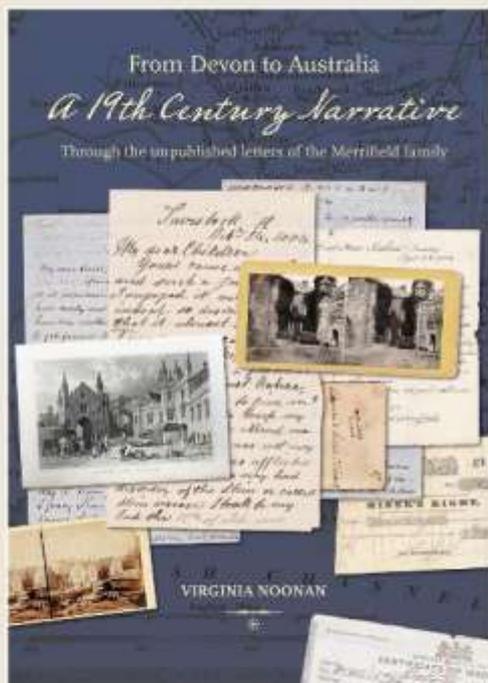
Left: William Merrified

William was destined, like his father and grandfather, to become an agricultural labourer, but fortunately for him the times were changing. William was born in 1804, during the middle of the industrial revolution. His childhood coincided with transformations occurring in the local area, which resulted in new innovative technologies being established. He also had the opportunity to attend Sunday School and with a penny in his pocket went to the first Church of England National School established in Tavistock. As a young lad, William was clearly stimulated by what he witnessed and read widely. He was keen to make something of his life and went on to become a schoolteacher and librarian. In his spare time he had a number of interests, but his love of photography left a lasting legacy. He captured some of the earliest photos of Tavistock, Dartmoor and surrounding areas.

William's eldest son Samuel was a spirited young man who was keen for adventure. He left Tavistock in 1854 and sailed to Australia to make his fortune in Britain's far-off colony. This adventure led to more than 140 unpublished personal letters being written by the family, thus giving readers a first-hand account of what life was like for them in 19th century England and Australia. William's letters to his son not only provide insight into the man himself, but also what life was like for the people of Tavistock.

The life of William, the times in which he lived, the photos he took and his family, have now been brought together in a new book – From Devon to Australia: A 19th Century Narrative. The book will be launched on 28 April, between 11-2pm, at Book Stop bookshop, Market Street Tavistock.

For further information about the book and the launch please contact the author Virginia Noonan at – a19thcenturnarrative@gmail.com



From Devon to Australia

A 19th Century Narrative

Through the unpublished letters of the Merrifield family

By Virginia Noonan

Proudly supported by

The Tavistock Museum

Tavistock Subscription Library

Tavistock Local History Society

Meet the Author

Saturday, 28 April 2018, 11 am–2pm

Book Stop/The Music Room

3 Market Street, Tavistock

From Devon to Australia: A 19th Century Narrative explores a range of historical topics in the old and new worlds. It traces the effect of the Industrial Revolution on the lives of agricultural labourers in England and outlines the subsequent introduction of education for working-class people. The book also highlights the life of gold diggers in Australia and the harsh conditions they endured.

Through the lives of the Merrifield family of Tavistock, this is a rare opportunity to appreciate history in the words of ordinary people, working life in the 19th century and the influence on today's society of momentous changes.

William Merrifield was the librarian of the Tavistock Subscription Library from 1841 to 1872, and he was also one of the earliest photographers of Devon. Samuel Merrifield, William's son, left England in 1854 in search of gold in Australia. John Merrifield, Samuel's brother, was the first Principal of the Plymouth Navigational School and received awards for the work he did to improved navigation processes for use at sea. It is mainly through the over 140 letters these men exchanged from 1856 to 1911, that provides the basis of this book.

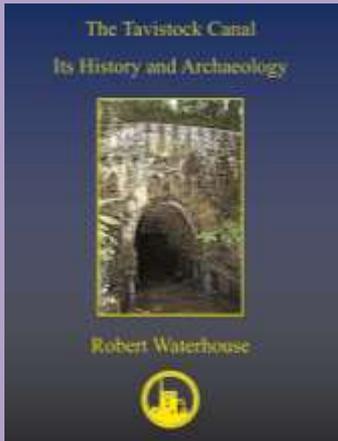
The author, Virginia Noonan, is the great-great-great granddaughter of William Merrifield. For over a decade, she has meticulously and tirelessly tracked down many historical records and family memorabilia and stories regarding the Merrifields, as well as read and transcribed the precious family letters which are now in her keeping in Australia. Virginia will be presenting a talk at the launch of her book at the Book Stop.

The book will be on sale at the Book Stop from mid April. For further information about the book, please contact Virginia Noonan – a19thcenturnarrative@gmail.com



The author and her grandchildren, the future generation.

Book Review.



The Tavistock Canal – Its History and Archaeology.

By Robert Waterhouse

What was once proposed as two slimmer volumes on the history and archaeology of the canal has become one volume covering both facets, weighing in at 5 lbs, heavy enough when reading in short bursts in an easy chair but hardly suitable in the field. It was intended that a CD should be included in the book with additional information; this has been withdrawn because of copyright infringements. However, I am assured by the publisher that there was little on the disc that was not covered in the text.

I worked under Robert's direction at Morwellham for several seasons, excavating the lime kiln incline wheel pit, the incline turntable at Incline Cottage Mill Hill canal basin, the small lime kiln beside the Ship Inn, railways on the lime kiln quay and the sample dig on the canal incline. All these excavations are discussed with archaeological surveys, reconstruction drawings, photographs and documentary evidence, putting me and my colleagues' exertions into context.

Making full use of the Bedford Estate papers, held at Exeter, and other documentary sources, Robert covers the history of the canal from its inception to its sale back to the Duke in 1873. The canal, though closed as a working waterway, was not abandoned; it still supplies the hydro-electric generating station at Morwellham.

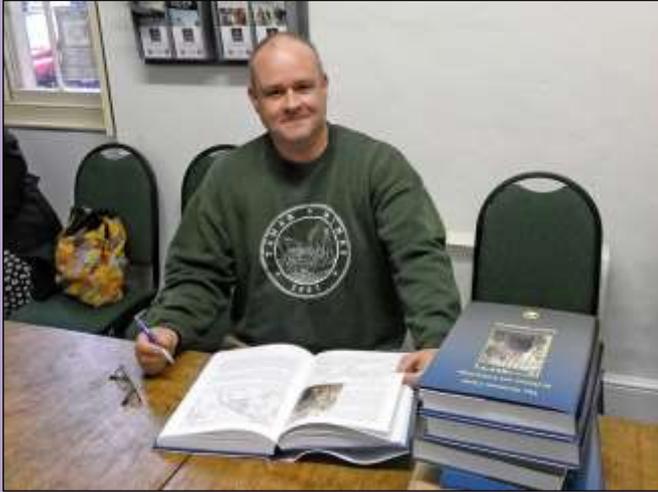
The use of the canal water as a power source is well covered, with discussion of the mines associated with the canal, leats from the southern terminus running as far north as Bedford United, and then doubling back to south Bedford and the wheel at the bottom of the Impham Valley, by Weir Head, and as far south as Gawton. Other users were lime kiln inclines at Tavistock, Morwellham and New Way, agricultural wheels at the Luke's model farms at Crowdale and Morwellham and two waterwheels pumping water for the Morwelldown Waterworks Company. There is evidence for 50 waterwheels powered by the canal.

The archaeological recording is extensive and impressive, amply illustrated with photographs, plans, sections and reconstruction drawings. There is a full discussion of what is to be seen in the Morwellham tunnel and an account of the surface remains on the line of the tunnel. A field survey, supported by Estate maps, of the estate incline on the collateral cut to Mill Hill reveals it to be at Lamburn and not, as it was long thought, at Mill Hill. A chapter on the archaeological evidence for the plateway and railway systems reveals how much remains in situ, especially at Morwellham, supported by a large number of artefacts recovered or visible as recycling.

The text is easy to read, but the book is not easy to use. For example, the accessible mine workings within the tunnel, with Robert's plans and sections, are covered in the historical chapter on the canal mines and not in the archaeology of the tunnel. Again the archaeological recording of the small kiln at Morwellham, which as a structure predates the canal, appears in the historical chapter on the canal-side and associated industries and not in the archaeological section.

Again, references to illustration in the text may require a search several pages before or after. It should be borne in mind that editing by the publisher to reduce Robert's manuscript to commercial proposition may have given rise to these problems. But attentive reading and use of the book should enable one to navigate the layout without too much difficulty.

Proof reading could have been better. For example the Delafontaine engraving is dated 1741, not 1727 as in the caption. Again, references to illustrations in the text are not necessarily, though they are generally, correct. Don't let these comments put you off. This is an important study, the result of many years' research in the field and at the desk, and is a major contribution to our knowledge of Tavistock and the Devon bank of the Tamar, Robert and the publishers are to be congratulated on finally bringing it home.



Incidentally, the development plans of Morwellham begin with No 4, and a brief aside in the text suggests that another volume on Morwellham is being contemplated, watch this space!

Reviewed by Stephen Docksey.

Museum Report – Spring 2018

By Rod Martin

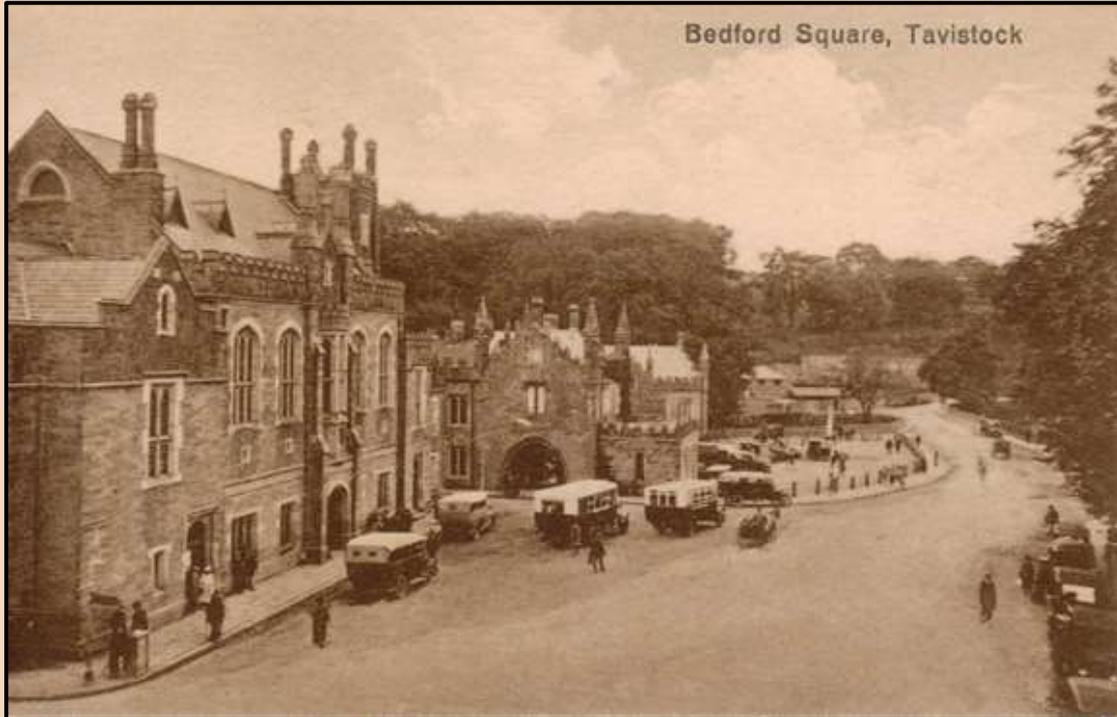
The Tavistock Museum will be open Mondays to Saturdays from the 24th March until the end of October. Our main exhibitions this year are: One Hundred Years of Motor Buses in Tavistock and Ronald Gard – A Hero of the Great Escape.

One Hundred Years of Tavistock Motor Buses



Until the end of the First World War 1914 - 1918 the Tavistock area was dependent on steam railways and horse-drawn vehicles for public transport.

The first major operator of motor bus services in the area was the Devon Motor Transport Company founded in late 1919. The following year they began a market day service from Okehampton via Lew Down and Lamerton to Tavistock, other services from Tavistock to nearby towns followed. With the merger of the Great Western Railway Road Motor services with National Omnibus Company in 1929 the newly formed Western National became the predominant provider of services around Tavistock.



During the 1920s and 1930s car ownership was the exception and the bus was an essential part of everyday life. It provided a lifeline to the towns for many rural communities. It gave housewives a wider choice of shops as well as conveying the agricultural community to market. Children were taken to and from school. There were trips to the cinema, village events and sporting events as well as sabbatical school treats. Buses not only carried people but also a wide range of goods for local markets and businesses.



Ronald Gard – A Hero of the Great Escape

Ronald (Ron) Gard was born at Devonport in 1909 and at the start of WW2 in 1939 was working at the Bedford Street branch of Lloyds Bank in Plymouth. On account of the serious German air raids on Plymouth the bank relocated its staff to Grimstone House at Horrabrige where Ronald spent his last six months before joining the Royal Air force in 1941 to train as a navigator at Torquay. His wife, Lilian, and his son, Michael, went to live at Wadebridge, Cornwall, with his parents-in-law.

By 1942 he was flying on night raids over Germany. In 1943 Flying Officer Ron Gard joined 12 Squadron which was based at RAF Binbrook near Lincoln, and later re-located to nearby RAF Wickenby. He went on 24 trips but a raid on Mannheim proved to be his last one. The Lancaster bomber he was flying in was attacked and damaged by a German night fighter. When the pilot gave the order to abandon the stricken plane Ron stumbled to the escape hatch in the extreme nose of the plane and sat for a moment with his legs dangling in space. Suddenly there was the fury of cannon shells bursting around him as another fighter attacked and the nose of the aircraft fell away with Ron still inside it. Fortunately he managed to get clear and open his parachute. The pilot and an air gunner were killed but four other crew members besides Ron escaped by parachute.

Ron landed in the middle of a German searchlight battery and was immediately made a prisoner. He was taken to Stalag Luft 111 where he was to remain for the next fifteen months. Here he became an active member of the X organisation, a highly secret organisation dedicated to planning escapes, and was involved in the Great Escape of March 1944. When the camp was closed in January 1945 he was forced to march in freezing weather to other prison camps as the Germans retreated before the Russian Army. It was his good overall physical fitness which helped him survive such an ordeal.

In May 1945 after liberation Ron returned to his family then living in Wadebridge. Like so many servicemen he found it difficult to adjust being restless, unable to sit still or sleep properly at night. He was always full of praise for his wife, his relatives, and the people of Wadebridge who helped him through this difficult time. He returned to banking and worked for many years in the Tavistock branch of Lloyds bank. Golf was his main sport in later life. He became the captain of Tavistock Golf Club and later an honorary life member.



Stalag Luft 111 Prisoner of War Camp

A hero in many eyes but not in his own. In 1978 Ronald Willis Gard died, aged 68, at Freedom Field Hospital, Plymouth.

During WW2 the German military followed a practice whereby the different branches of the military were responsible for all PoWs of equivalent Allied branches. Generally this resulted in Royal Air Force (RAF) aircrew receiving better treatment than their counterparts in the other services. Stalag Luft 111 PoW camp in Poland opened in March 1942 and was operated by the German air force (Luftwaffe) for Allied aircrews shot down and taken prisoner.

The camp was made up of several compounds each consisting of fifteen single storey huts. It eventually housed about 2,500 RAF officers and about 7,500 US Air Force officers, and about 900 Allied air force officers. A total of approximately 11,000 men. In essence this was a small community which was supported by good recreational facilities such as gymnasiums, athletic fields and volleyball courts to relieve the boredom of its inmates. There was a good library and a number of people available from within the camp to teach a wide range of subjects. Many used it as an opportunity to catch up on the education they had missed due to war service, and there was a lively theatre group from which a number of well-known people in the entertainment world, including Peter Butterworth and Rupert Davies (Maigret fame), would emerge.

The layout of the camp was designed to deter inmates from escaping having a 10 feet high double fence with numerous guard towers. The huts were raised 2 feet above ground level and were situated in an area of yellow sand soil. The bright colour of the surface dirt made it easy to detect any darker coloured spoil discarded from underground tunnelling. In addition seismograph microphones were placed around the perimeter fence to detect any sounds from possible tunnelling activity.

In January 1945 with Soviet troops only miles away the camp was closed and the 11,000 PoWs sent on a punishing forced-marched for dispersal to other camps. For many liberation did not finally come until late April 1945.

The Great Escape

The Great Escape took place from Stalag Luft 111 during the night of the 24th / 25th March 1944 and resulted in 76 prisoners escaping from the camp.

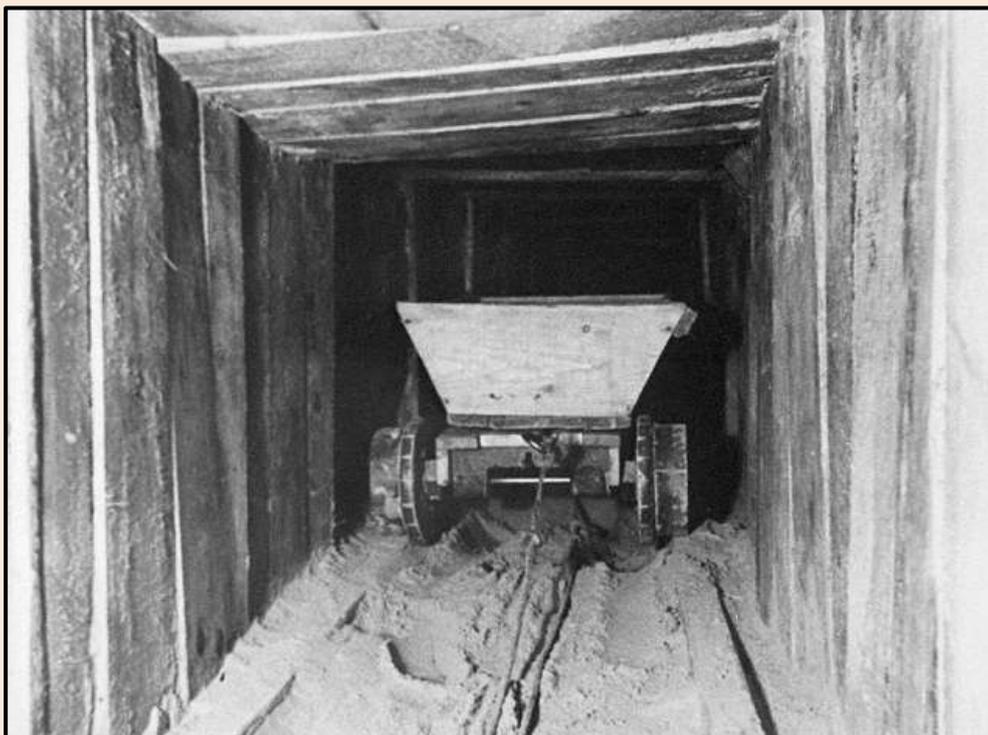
The escape plan originally proposed using three tunnels designated 'Tom', 'Dick' and 'Harry'. However 'Tom' was abandoned when the camp was extended and later used as a dump for excavated material. 'Dick' was discovered. Only 'Harry' was used for the escape. It was 350 feet long and 30 feet deep. Its entrance was a trap-door under a stove in a corner of a room, and below it a shaft dropped vertically down for 30 feet. The tunnel itself was about 2 feet square. Within this narrow opening a truck system operated by ropes was installed for removal of the spoil. As the tunnel was progressed through the sandy strata its sides and roof had to be shored-up by pieces of timber mainly taken from prison furniture.

It was planned for 200 men to escape. Ronald Gard was not among the men selected to escape but he was in the workshop area of the tunnel helping to assist the briefing and passage of a queue of men. The final exit from the tunnel was not made until immediately before the breakout. Unfortunately it was found to be in open ground just short of its intended location in a nearby group of trees. When the 77th escapee emerged the opening was discovered by a passing German sentry, and the game was up. Needless to say everyone left in the tunnel, both escapees and helpers, got out very quickly.

Only three of those who escaped reached freedom. The majority were recaptured within a few days. The German High Command was infuriated to learn of the mass escape and Hitler personally ordered that those re-captured be shot. It was later decided to shoot fifty of them. This was done by the Gestapo who shot the men individually or in pairs as they were recaptured. Only 17 prisoners were returned to the camp.



In 1963 a film was made of the Great Escape starring James Garner, Steve McQueen and Richard Attenborough but this is a fictional account loosely based on the events as there were no Americans involved in the escape, no motor bike and no mass shooting of the recaptured men.





Above: The tiles which we hold at the Library and which are going to be passed to St Eustachius Church as part of the 700th Anniversary celebrations this year.

Visit to Lanhydrock House at Bodmin Spring 2017





In the spring last year 12 members had a visit to Lanhydrock House near Bodmin to visit their library and for a tour of the house. In glorious weather all enjoyed a stroll through the grounds past fabulous views of their bluebells. After a tour of the house and lunch we were given a guided tour of their renowned library by their curator for the afternoon.

