

# Tavistock

## SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARY

Established  
1799



# NEWSLETTER

## MAY 2021

### **A few words from the Chairman:**

The 29th March saw significant changes to our lives and allowed us to meet in groups of 6 and travel from our homes. Life finally seems to be returning towards the new-normal and we all hope that this progress continues.

Ruth, our Librarian, and I attended a zoom meeting of all libraries in the Association of Independent Libraries to see how we might be able to start working towards opening the library in a planned, safe and positive way. After another long and difficult lockdown, many libraries made plans to reopen their doors on 12<sup>th</sup> April. Others, like us in Tavistock, will be looking at a date a bit further into the future but, I'm sure, we will be grappling with some of the same questions, like 'how do we do this safely?' and 'how do we transition back to a physical service?' Hopefully Ruth and I will be able to report back on ideas after this newsletter.

On 1st April a little working group met for the first time to look at the possible future of the library and how best we can work with our heritage neighbours when the Guildhall refurbishment is completed. A variety of Ideas have been considered and we will keep you all informed through the pages of these newsletters.

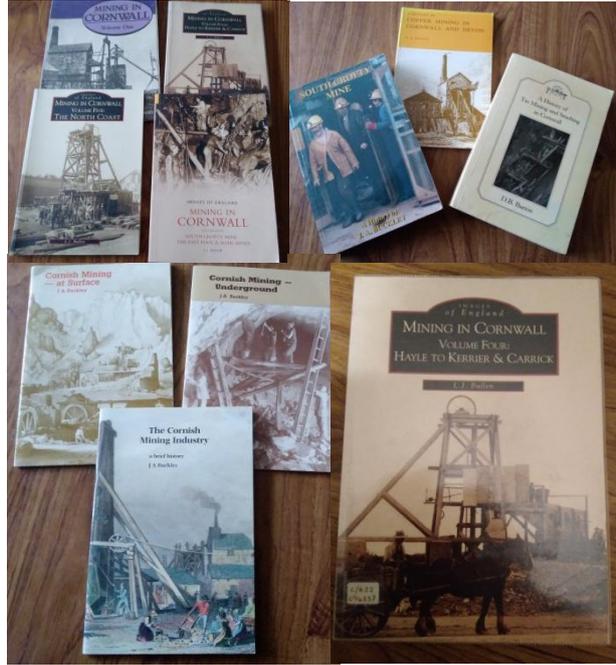
## About the Library Books:

From the Librarian, Ruth Blowey:

### **A Bad Day at the Printers**

We have had a number of books on Cornish Mining donated to the library recently; one also covers Devon Copper Mining. Ruth notes that one of the books (on the lower right of the photos) had been at Hayle library previously and was lent out almost 30 times over 8 years before it was withdrawn. Whilst reading through it she was surprised to find that the title page and pages 1 to 32 were included twice. Pages 33 to 64 were missing. Obviously, the library felt it still contained enough useful information to keep it on their shelves for such a long time, so will we unless we get another copy donated.

She wonders if any of our members have had a similar experience.



### **Mary Freeman - An Outstanding Local Historian**

Mary Freeman died on the 4th March 2018, aged 93. During her working life she was a marine scientist of international repute and in her long retirement she became an acknowledged expert on the early history of Tavistock. Mary was a member of Tavistock Subscription Library for many years and a project has been established to publish her articles and writing with the Subscription Library playing an active role in these plans.

Born Mary Whitear at Teignmouth in 1924, she attended the Maynard School in Exeter, coming in by train daily even during the 1942 bombing of the city, during which the school was damaged. Mary was academically gifted and went to University College, London where in 1947 she was appointed a lecturer, and remained there until 1989. At University College she met and later married her husband, Richard Freeman, who worked in the adjoining zoology room. They had two children, Felix and Peter.

She soon acquired an interest in the medieval abbey, foundries, and early industries of Tavistock. Mary became an active member of the Subscription Library and a long serving Secretary to the Tavistock History Society. A particular interest was the small cottage garden in the Guildhall Square, an oasis of greenery in an otherwise barren parking lot. Both here and in her own garden she redefined what a 'weed' was. She respected all creatures and believed 'all animals had a right to life', and back at home there were generations of cats and a tortoise.



Mary used her considerable research abilities to produce articles for *The Devon Historian* (Journal of the Devon History Society), specifically:  
'The first iron foundry in Tavistock' *DH* 57 (1998)  
'Two Tavistock legends re-examined' (with R.J. Glanville) *DH* 66 (April 2003)  
'A half-truth in a legend' (with R.J. Glanville) *DH* 67 (October 2003)  
'Artistic licence and historical accuracy' *DH* 69 (2004) (about remains of Tavistock Abbey)

(With thanks to Rod Martin of Tavistock Museum)

## The Tavistock Canal Poetry Project with James Crowden

The first poetry workshops along the whole length of the Tavistock Canal took place in 2003 and involved Tavistock Primary School and poet, James Crowden, as part of a much larger poetry project organised by the Tamar Valley AONB with three other schools in Cornwall: Calstock, Delaware and Gunnislake. James was involved with leading all four workshops and it was evident that the children gained enormously from being creative outdoors. The project culminated in a public performance of the poetry during the Tamar Festival held at Morwellham on 22nd June 2003.

A similar project was later proposed involving older children, and in January 2012 James was approached by the Devon Arts in School Initiative based in Exeter. Again he was to work with the Tamar Valley AONB to do a similar project, this time with Tavistock College along with Ruth Cohen, Fran Walker and Vanni Cook. As preparation, James walked the route of the canal to the tunnel entrance with Fran Walker, the AONB Interpretation Officer during which they discussed the likely locations of interpretation boards and the possibility of poems being incorporated within trail furniture etc. Fran had a clear understanding of what was possible. A second series of workshops and walks subsequently took place in February 2012 with Years 8 and 9.

Using water as a metaphor for writing is an extraordinary idea and a canal has its own quality and reflection different to that of a river. Tavistock canal is unique in that it adjoins two rivers, Tavy and Tamar, runs through a hill and down a steep pipe that has been harnessed to generate electricity. As such, it seemed

appropriate that the canal should also inspire poetry. It was a wonderful project that, it is hoped, the children will remember all their lives. Additionally, it has been fantastic to see the poetry displayed on a permanent basis and appreciated by walkers as they saunter along the Tavistock Canal route.

However, the installations have suffered the ravages of time and need replacing. Alongside James, I have been involved with Jane Miller, Paul Blowey and Hywel Edwards in restoring the installations to their full glory. The Poetry boards were reinstated along the canal during the Easter holiday period.



Simon Dell

## A Stone found in the Tavy

In March a young child was playing at the bottom of her garden in Dolvin Road, one of the gardens that have a small path leading down to the river. When the flow is low a stony beach is exposed, which is a great playground for a 'carefully supervised' and inquisitive mind. This time, the young girl, with her Mum, returned from her visit to the stony beach with a precious find - a stone from the river bed. How many of us have collected stones from rivers as children? But this little girl was clutching a carved stone of great interest. It had writing on it and the mind of a child conjured up all sorts of possibilities!

Her mother contacted the Library Chairman, who she knew was interested in local history and a safely distanced, outdoor visit took place in order to view and photograph the stone. Puzzled by this intriguing artefact the chairman emailed and sent images to archaeologists around Devon. A number of possibilities

were hypothesised and even the rare cuneiform script was thrown into the discussion's mix.

The stone also has modern day script and given the close proximity to a 19th Century monumental stone mason in the area perhaps it could have been a practice piece by an apprentice? Plymouth Box (the Museum) is also being consulted about what this little girl has found. Perhaps another great archaeologist in the making - to sit alongside the likes of Lady Radford, who excavated Tavistock Abbey and Mrs E. Marie Minter, whose work at Hound Tor mediaeval village, is well respected.



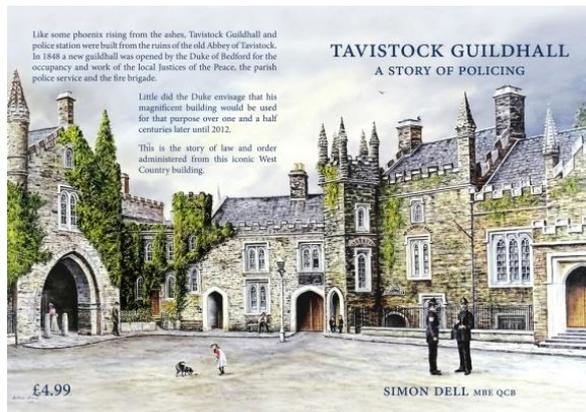
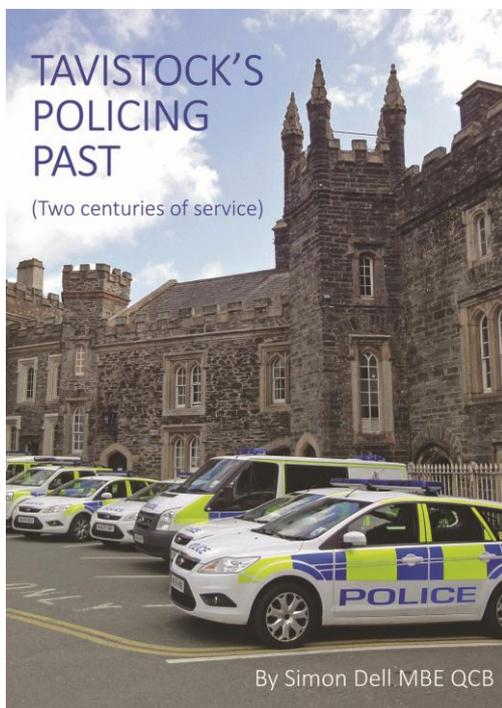
Simon Dell

## New publication by a member of the Library Simon Dell's *Tavistock's Policing Past*

This is a beautifully presented and richly illustrated book, which will be the definitive work on the history of policing in Tavistock. It is dedicated to those whose commitment to duty has created one of the finest British Institutions: the office of police constable. Many of the informative images are from Simon Dell's own personal collection, with others from Tavistock Museum, Tavistock Subscription Library and the Thorington Collection. The pictures alone are a valuable historical record of policing in Tavistock and the surrounding towns and villages. It is hardback, A4 and priced at £25

Simon has also produced a much smaller complimentary book called "Tavistock Guildhall – A Story of Policing" priced £4.99 which accompanies this larger volume.

Simon Dell MBE QCB was a policeman in Tavistock for almost forty years on and off, working first from the Guildhall police station at Bedford Square until 2012 and then at the new station at Abbey Rise. He was awarded the MBE in 1997 for services to community policing in Tavistock and Dartmoor Rescue, and the Queen's Commendation for Bravery in 2002 when he went into a burning building twice to rescue a child and then his father at Callington, for which he also received the Pride of Britain Award that year.



Simon now does much valuable work for local charities including the Dartmoor Rescue, Devon Air Ambulance and community education and he is a much-loved and respected local character.

Tavistock Guildhall and Police Station were built from the ruins and dilapidated fragments of the old abbey of Tavistock which was demolished at the instructions of Henry VIII. In 1848 at the instigation of the Duke of Bedford, and thanks to his generosity, a new Guildhall and adjoining police station was opened. The police station, specially built to house the parish police force, was one of the longest occupied in Great Britain. Simon worked from the Guildhall police station for over 30 years as a police officer and later as a special constable volunteer. The station at Bedford square was closed in 2012 and Simon transferred to the replacement at Abbey Rise.

The book also describes the many police houses and cottages coming under the jurisdiction of Tavistock, which will be of interest to students of the history of Tavistock and its surrounding towns and villages. The book contains a rich archive of the lives and experiences of the local police officers. Of particular local interest is the story of the great flood of 1890. The river Tavy burst its banks and flooded the station, which was below ground level. A prisoner had to be rescued from the cells and the dwellings of the constables and the sergeant had to be evacuated. Today the Guildhall and police station have been redeveloped as a Heritage Centre, details of which are in the book.

This delightful book is a very enjoyable read, full of fascinating stories, facts and details, and I can recommend it to everyone interested in Tavistock and its history.

Review by Dr Ann Pulsford

Jess would welcome any pictures, book reviews on recent acquisitions in the library, articles stories etc for the next newsletter so do please get in touch with her at [jessfmaslen@gmail.com](mailto:jessfmaslen@gmail.com) if you would like to submit anything or get involved

