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15 April 2024

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

Welcome this month to a bumper crop of articles: beginning with an account of my recent visit to the site of Newenham Abbey, a piece from Sarah Harrison in our occasional 'house history' series and another from Jacquie McCullogh on the Annual Colyton Horseracing Meeting plus details of a number of forthcoming events and announcements by other local organisations.

News

a) Visiting Newenham Abbey – Sarah Charman, Bailiff, Colyton Chamber of Feoffees

Drive along the road from Musbury to Axminster and glance to your left. Imagine for a moment a church nearly the size of Exeter Cathedral rising out of the lush green

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fields before you. 800 years ago Newenham Abbey stood there. Today there is only a cluster of farm buildings visible.

Just before you come to the Axminster Carpets sales shop there is a turning down a narrow, winding no through road which leads to Lower Abbey Farm. The farm is built on and partly from the ruins of the Abbey. Newenham Abbey was founded in 1246 by Reginald de Mohun, Earl of Somerset and his brother William. A fine religious establishment, built for the Cistercian Order, it was a wealthy and important centre before it fell victim to the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. Thereafter it was used as a quarry for dressed stones by the inhabitants of nearby Axminster, for use in their own homes.

Ever since I moved here over a decade ago I've been wanting to visit Newenham Abbey. Recently I approached the farmer Mr Lisle Burrough about visiting the site. Jacquie McCullogh came with me and we were lucky enough to be given a personal tour by Lisle. The first thing he pointed out was this small subtly carved sculpture now embedded in the farmhouse wall. If you look closely the head appears to have two faces sharing a common eye and gazing in different directions, depending on the perspective from which you look at it - but is not typically Janus*; faced. If anyone has knowledge of these type of sculptures I'd be interested to know more. (*Janus was the Roman god of doorways with one face facing forwards and the other looking backwards.)

Lisle led us round the corner of the farmhouse and pointed through a glazed door where a section of old abbey wall can still be seen, now incorporated into the house. Then he opened a barn door. Inside was a large section of abbey wall incorporating three finally arched recesses.

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Then Lisle pointed out where some years ago he had discovered the skeleton of a man whom he estimated had been six feet tall and still retained his teeth, which had been placed in an open coffin in an area around where the nave and chapter house would have been. He reburied the skeleton.

Other barns contained further sections of Abbey wall and remnants of worked stone columns lie scattered around the farm yard. Lisle said he had been advised to concrete over further interesting features which he had discovered in the farm courtyard as the most practical means of protecting them.

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Lisle also described some colourful tiles he had found decorated with various coats of arms and fleurs de lys . He also showed us copies of seals which had been found there. He said most of the tiles had been taken away to a museum in Exeter.

Lisle produced a copy of a 1981 archaeological survey report based on work done there in the period 1977- 80 which contained a site plan and illustrations of some of the patterns found on tiles unearthed at Newenham Abbey forty years ago.

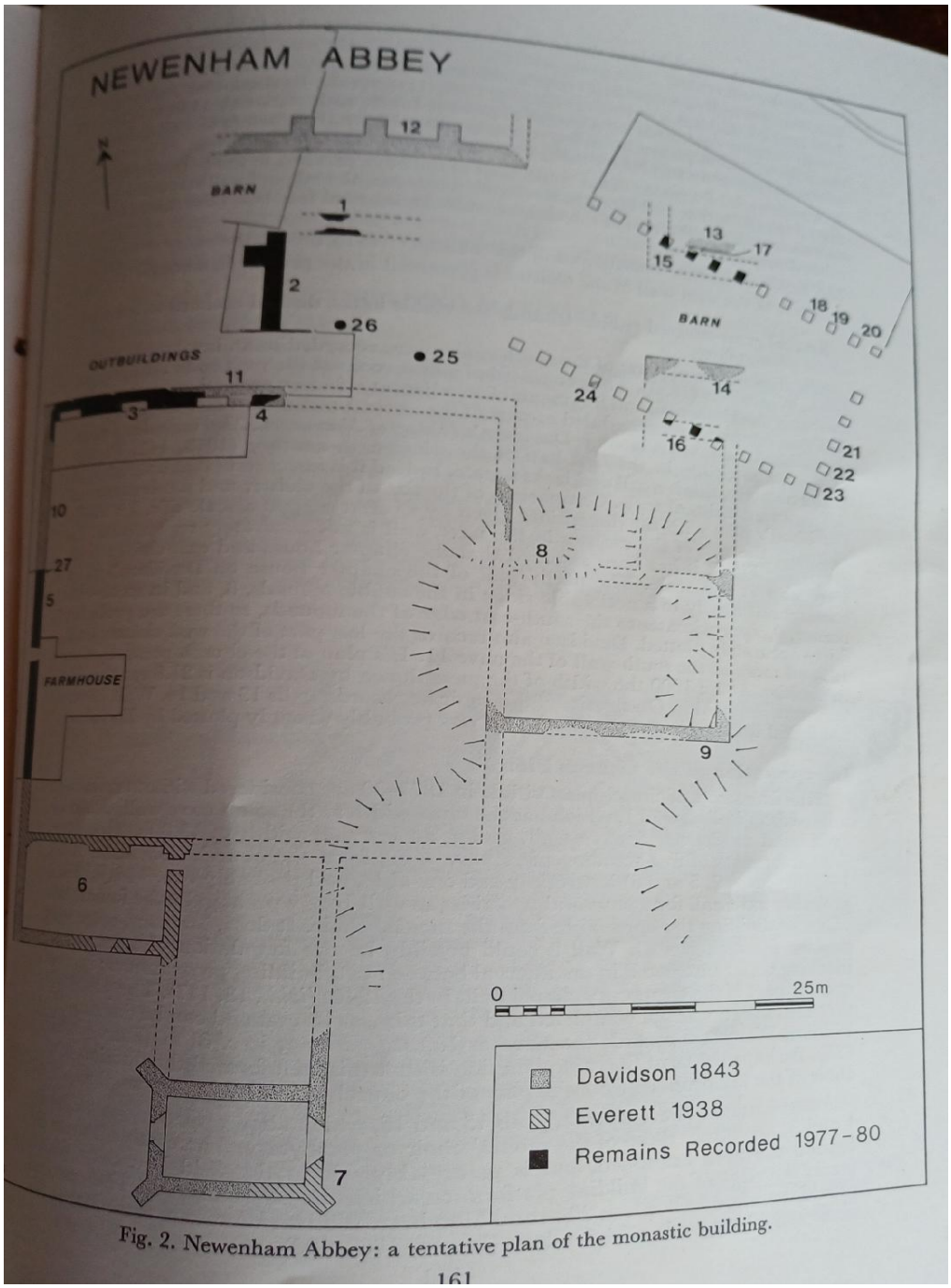

Fig. 2. Newenham Abbey: a tentative plan of the monastic building.

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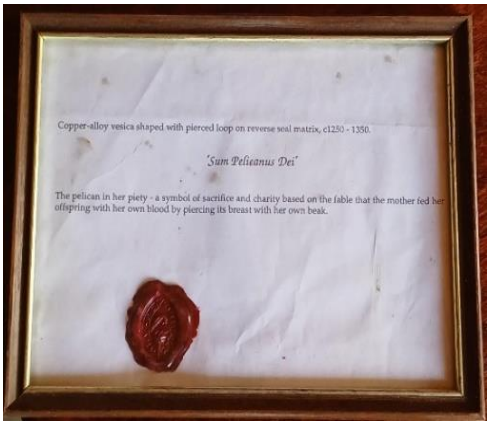
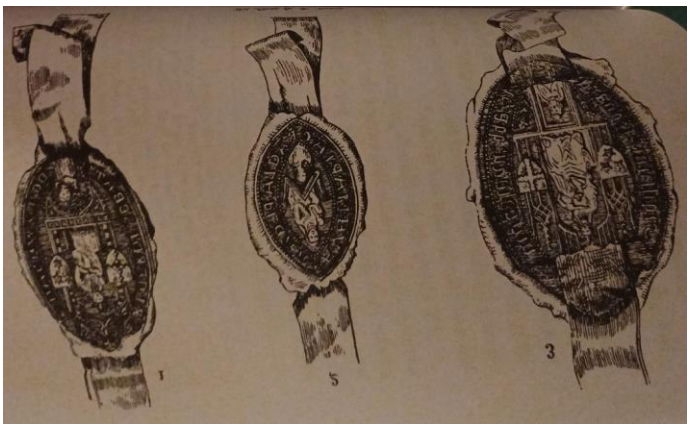
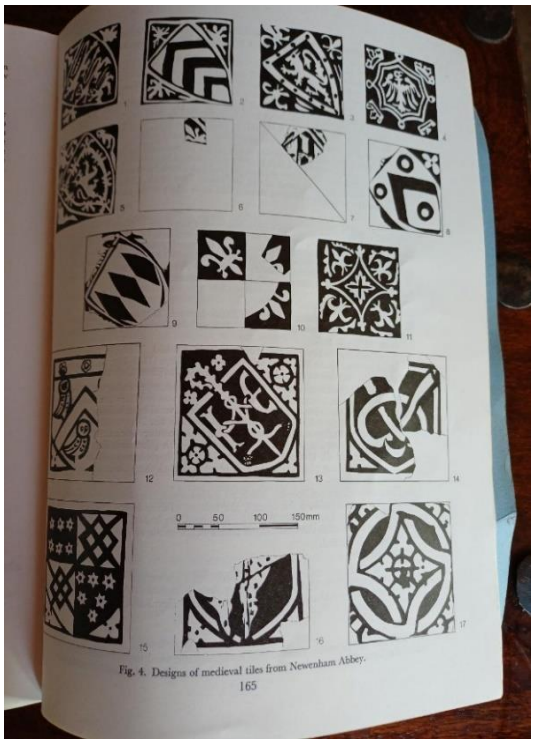
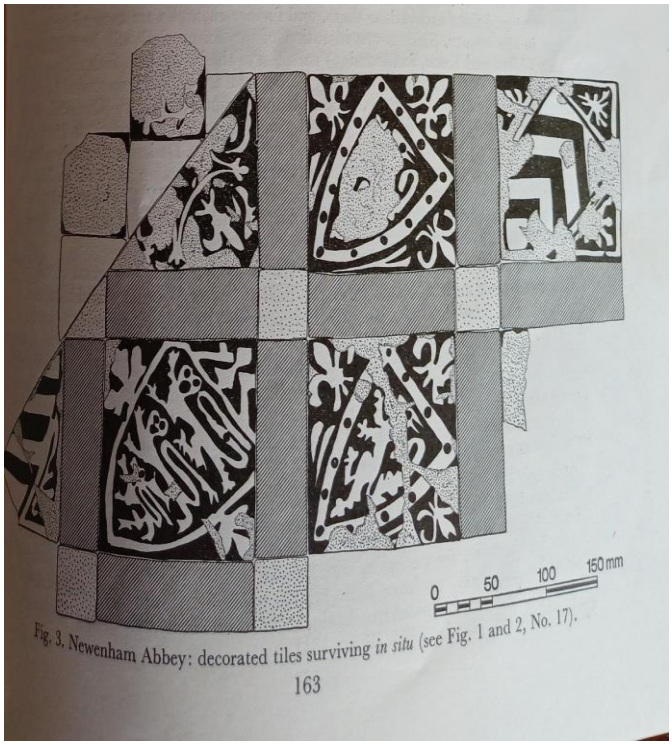




Examples of seals found at Newenham





Examples of tile fragments recorded in the 1977-80 survey

Fragments of similar tiles from Newenham are now on display at the Axminster Heritage Centre.

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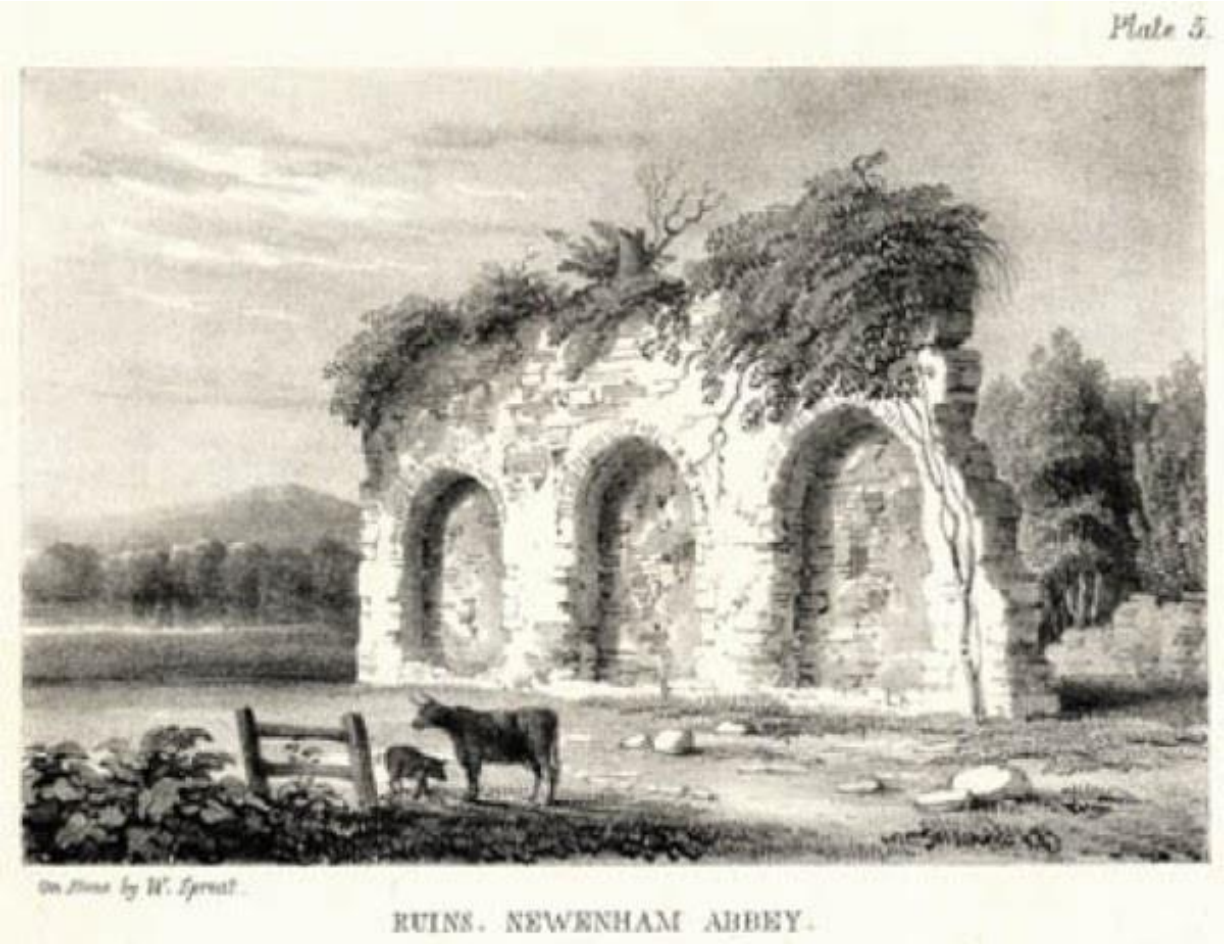
Tile fragments from Newenham in Axminster Heritage Centre

Lisle also showed us copies of various rather romanticised Victorian lithographic images of the Abbey site produced by William Spreat in 1842, including one presumably of the three arched wall now incorporated in the barn, as it appeared back then. It was a fascinating morning.



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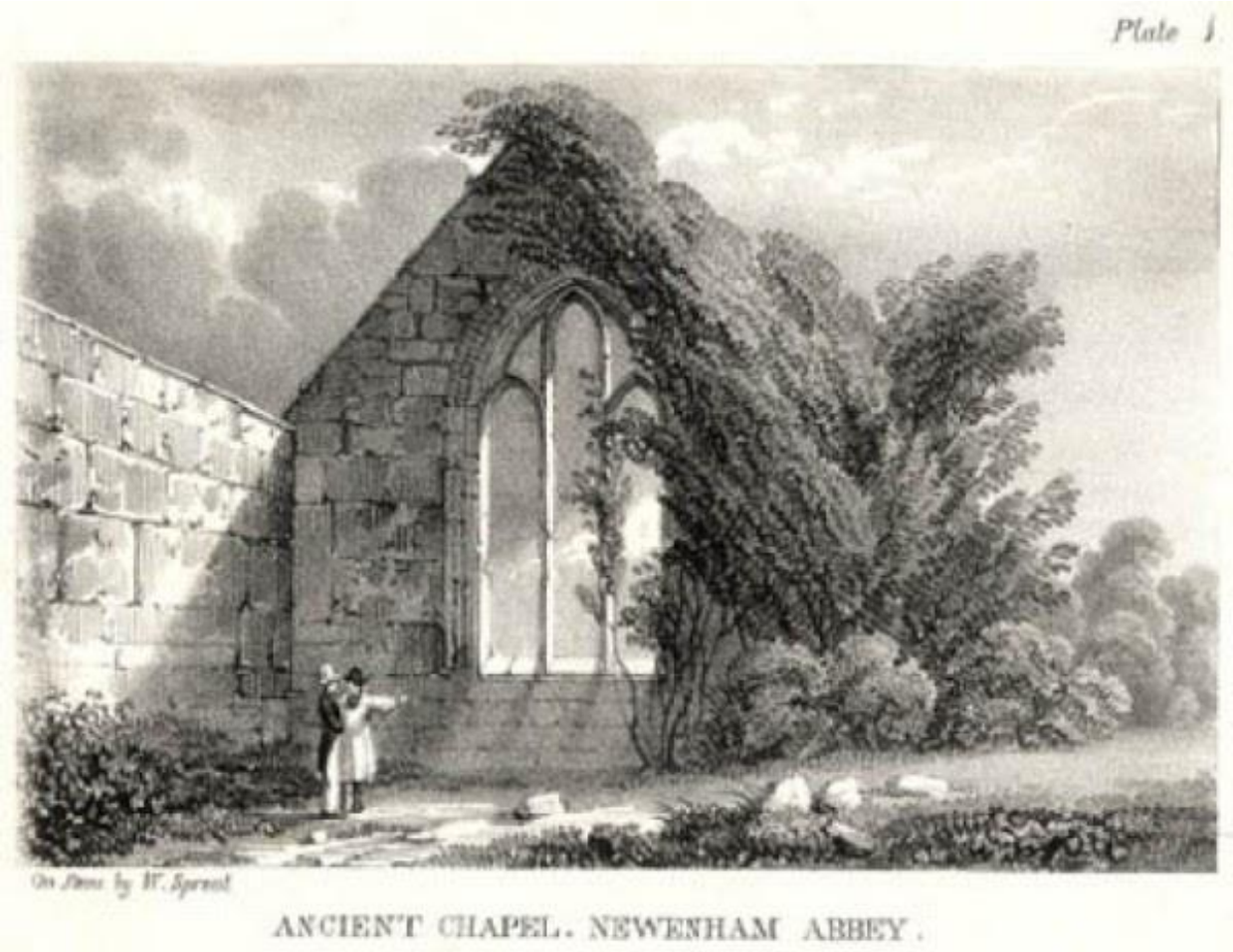

A meticulous study of historic legal documents relating to the establishment of Newenham Abbey was undertaken by an Axminster resident James Davidson in the mid nineteenth century. He subsequently wrote a book entitled *'History of Newenham Abbey in the County of Devon'* published in 1843. These included the bequests, endowments and leases which had constituted the Abbey's estate prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Sprinkled among the descriptions of bequests and farming activities there were also provisions for named persons to be buried in the nave or chancel. Davidson noted several examples. These included: Sir John de Mohun, son of Reginald who died in Gascony. His body was returned to England for burial – "*his heart was deposited with filial feeling in the choir at Newenham Abbey*" while his body was interred at Bruton with other members of his family.

Abbot de Geytyngton (who) having lost his sight departed this life 22 February 1338/9. His body was buried "*under the first arch of the cloister which he had erected*." Seventy years later in 1407, Sir William Bonville Kt of Shute "*bestowed the*

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sum of twenty marks on the abbey, and directed that his body should be buried in the choir of the church at Newenham between those of his ancestors and the high altar." Presumably from these descriptions of the locations of various burials it should theoretically be possible to determine the identity of surviving skeletons?.

Davidson also recorded stories of legal disputes arising over land. In one case from 1428 he revealed that the abbot who acted as mediator was clearly a well disposed conciliator with a sense of humour. The dispute in this instance was between Sir William Bonville and Joan the widow of Sir Thomas Brooke. Having found in favour of Sir William on all counts the abbot concluded by directing that "*the knight and the lady should ride amicably together to Newenham Abbey on a day appointed, where they should exchange a kiss in token of peace and friendship and dine together at the abbot's table."*

It is also noted in Davidson's book that King Henry VII "*on his progress from Exeter to London honoured the abbey with a visit which lasted several days*." The reason for the King's presence in Devon was Perkin Warbeck's arrival in Cornwall. The King arrived in Taunton on 4 October 1497 and Warbeck, who had been taken prisoner was brought there the next day, having surrendered himself on promise of pardon. The King then travelled to Exeter where he executed some of the rebels. Davidson says the King also "*graciously received the wife of Perkin, the beautiful lady Catherine Gordon who had been taken at St Michael's Mount. Leaving Exeter on the 3rd November the King passed the night at the college of St Mary at Ottery, and on the next day proceeded to Newenham Abbey."* The King remained there until the 10th before resuming his progress back to London via Bridport, Dorchester and Salisbury. Davidson questions why the King remained at Newenham for so long without there being any record of the entertainment afforded him or details of what he did while there and has conjectured that King Henry VII may have been engaged in establishing a commission to research whether any local "*men of consideration*" in Devon and Somerset were involved with the rebels. He further speculates that the King may also have been entertained during his stay by the "*lord marquess of Dorset at his manor and mansion at Shute.*"

Davidson quotes two further stories about the Abbey site. The first dating from the late eighteenth century tells of a man wandering among the ruins and idly throwing stones at the lofty remaining walls when "*he dislodged some money which fell down. "Procuring a ladder and mounting the wall, he discovered a sum hidden there which he carefully secured, and which was large enough to become the foundation of a very lucrative business in the town of Axminster*." The other story was the discovery of the body of a little child hidden within the walls.

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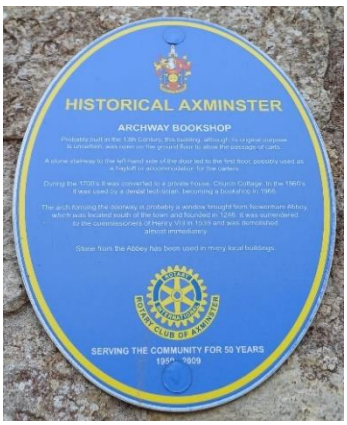
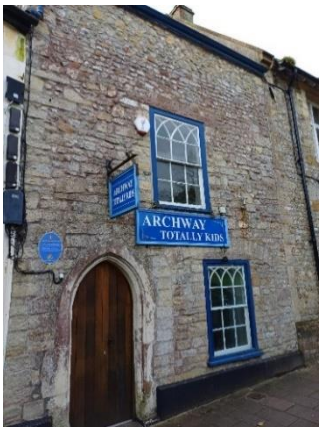
We also visited Axminster Heritage Centre to see what records and artefacts they might hold from Newenham Abbey. A link to an audio interview with Lisle recorded several years ago is listed in the sources below – courtesy of Axminster Heritage Centre.

It has become clear that no formal survey has ever been done of where sizeable chunks of dressed stone from the Abbey have ended up in buildings around the Axminster area although it is believed a significant number went to nearby Ash House and others to Sector House where Davidson once lived. A ceiling boss now on display in the Axminster Heritage Centre was for a while at Sector House. An interview with John Church about his rescue of the boss is listed in the sources below. The door of the former Archway bookshop was formally a window taken from the Abbey.





We would like to invite anyone who believes they have a chunk of Newenham Abbey in their house or garden to take a picture and email it to us with a description and location. We will pass the details on to the Axminster Heritage Centre.

I have spent some time tracking down the tiles taken from Newenham to Rougemont Museum in Exeter over forty years ago. That Museum is now closed and I contacted RAMM to ask whether they knew where they were now? I have now tracked them down thanks to RAMM and have arranged to go and see them. Watch this space!

Sources

- Lisle Burrough talking about his finds at Little Abbey Farm – with thanks to Axminster Heritage Centre: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvvvMvdzKqg
- John Church talking about a ceiling boss from Newenham Abbey – with thanks to Axminster Heritage Centre: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EX2OL5oNgRU

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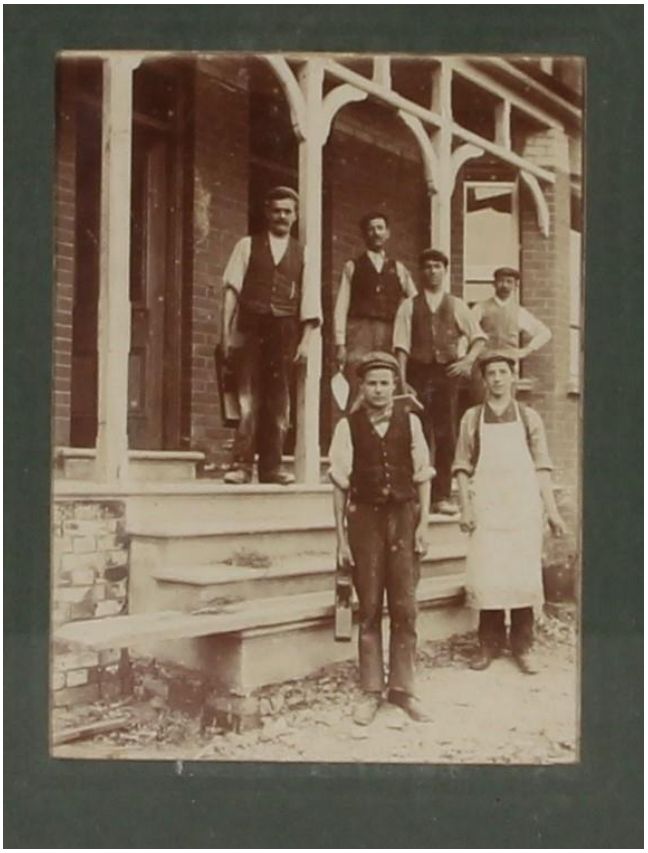
- Davidson, J. *A History of Newenham Abbey in the County of Devon,* Longman & Co., 1843 https://archive.org/stream/historyofnewenha00daviuoft/historyofnewenha00daviuoft_djvu.txt accessed on line 21.02.24
- Allan, JP and Sylvester, RJ, *Newenham Abbey, Axminster*, Devon Archaeological Society, Proceedings No 38, 1981 pgs 159 -171
- https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1011671?section=official-list-entry accessed on line 21.02.24
- https://www.devonlive.com/news/history/devons-forgotten-abbey-big-exeter-4017116 accessed on line 21,02.24
- https://etched-on-devons-memory.blogspot.com/2017/03/places-a.html accessed on line 22.02.24

b) Tales of Home - 'The Moorings' in South Street – Sarah Harrison



'Moorings' was built on land on 'the South Western side of Lyme Street or Cuckoo Street'. The site, 180ft long and 40ft wide was purchased by Frederick Rousell for £106 from Edmund Reginald Talbot de la Pole in November 1903. Fred was a builder who worked with his brother and they employed local tradesmen to complete the house by the following year. The plans show the modern amenity of an inside wc!

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The house was furnished but possibly let soon after as the family moved to Exmouth. A quote was found, pre-WW1, for painting the whole house inside and out, listing 3 bedrooms, a dressing room, servant's room and 1 attic. Messrs H Hooper and Son of East Street priced the job at £7-5s-6d. A 2020s quote was in the thousands!
In the 1920s it became a guesthouse before the family returned and lived there into the 1940s and the war years. Fred had 2 children, Winifred and Arthur, the latter inheriting the house. He was unmarried and was thought to be reclusive, living on his own, until lodging at Road Green House for 10 years. The house was left fully furnished during that time. At Arthur's death his sister inherited, but on her death shortly after the property passed to her daughter, mother of the present owner.
Joy Rousell Stone renovated the house in the mid 1970s, removing many of the original features, but not the kitchen range! She was a teacher married to a vicar in Essex so the house was used as a family holiday home, still containing the original furniture and many possessions of the previous owners. These included a Victorian ladies wheelbarrow painted in Devon colours and currently being repaired by Rowlands Wheelwrights.

When Joy died Tim her son became the new owner. He has renovated it as a home for himself and his wife Libby. The hotch potch of small rooms tacked on to the back of the house has been replaced by a kitchen/ diner and new access made for cars and a garage.

There are other houses built by the Rousell brothers in Colyton and Tim's great-great grandmother was a Restorick and believed to be descended from a Monmouth rebel. So the family have a long history in the town.
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Editor: Colyton History Society is looking to add to its file of information about local properties which our volunteer town walk guides can draw on to help them in telling the history of the town and to answer visitors questions as they lead walks around Colyton.

Do you like the idea of researching the history of your home? Who has lived there in the past? Have you discovered any amusing/sad anecdotes about your property? Or have you found any interesting items hidden away when you were redecorating or refurbishing your house? Do you have any old photos or early deeds to your property which you are happy to share?

Keen to have a go? Well our volunteers in the Heritage Centre will be happy to show you what material we may already have about your home. In return we would be very pleased to receive any information you discover to add to our files. We will take a copy of any documentation provided. This is community history in action – anyone can get involved! If you are interested in becoming involved please do let me know. (sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk)

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c) Did you know? - by Jacqueline McCullogh

The Colyton Annual Horseracing Meeting - Held from 1755 to 1870

Colyton annual steeplechases and races were held on Colyton Common for just over a century from 1755, when the principal race of the day, the Colyton Sweepstakes, was won by Pinkey, owned by Sir John Pole. A report from Pulmans Weekly News of 1849: '*Colyton races is an annual event of general interest, and the racecourse is at Colyton Common, on the level stretch between Badger's Glory and Boarsdown Hill. Mr Rapsey (landlord of the inn at Whitford) is in great request with his fiddle, and can keep pace with the most energetic dancers. A tent erected for serving tea and 1 shilling is charged for tea and dance*.'

In his '*Rambles, Roamings and Recollections'* (1870) George Pulman recalls the meeting in April 1864: '*Around me were vehicles drawn up in due order with their gaily dressed lady occupants and their hossy 'squires' and laughing children, all more or less engaged, as I was, in the business of sherry and sandwich. The booths were doing a roaring trade – the pop of corks, the rattle of cutlery, and ever and anon the smash of crockery… The sparring saloon was thriving immensely amid the oft repeated applause of an evidently delighted audience. A dense mass of people thronged against the ropes by which the course was indicated. The Colyton band was playing very prettily near the crowded stand*.'

The London and South Western Railway Company offered to convey passengers to Colyton at reduced fares. Local dignatories such as Mr J Scarborough, John

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Sampson, Capt C Dick, Sir John Pole served as stewards for the races. '*The saddling bell soon calls attention to another race. There is a rapid gathering and a settling into places, and soon the race is over. And then another comes on and ere long there begins a homeward movement – carriages begin to roll away for the sun has set and home is distant. People in vehicles forget that foot people have limbs to break, and dash furiously among them at a swinging trot. Equestrians whiz wildly by, and even donkeys are led away by the excitement…*'

A report of the day: '*The stakes had been increased and the racing was far superior to that of any former year. We regret to record two accidents, one to Mr Thomas Staple, who rode Cyclone. At the last fence but one his horse over jumped himself and the rider escaped with only a few bruises, but he was as insensible for ten minutes. The other was to the son of a local farmer who, by way of diversion, leaped over the hurdle in front of the stand, and in pitching broke his left leg. There were five races – a flat race, two steeplechases, a hurdle race and final pony race*.'

This year's Meeting will be held at Stafford Cross, on Sunday 28th April. First race at 1.30pm.

Sources: From the Archives, Colyton Heritage Centre.

2. Other CPHS Matters

a) Reopening of Heritage Centre

The Heritage Centre has now reopened for the 2024 Summer Season with a new display of exquisite Honiton lace items kindly loaned by Allhallows Museum in Honiton. Do come and see!

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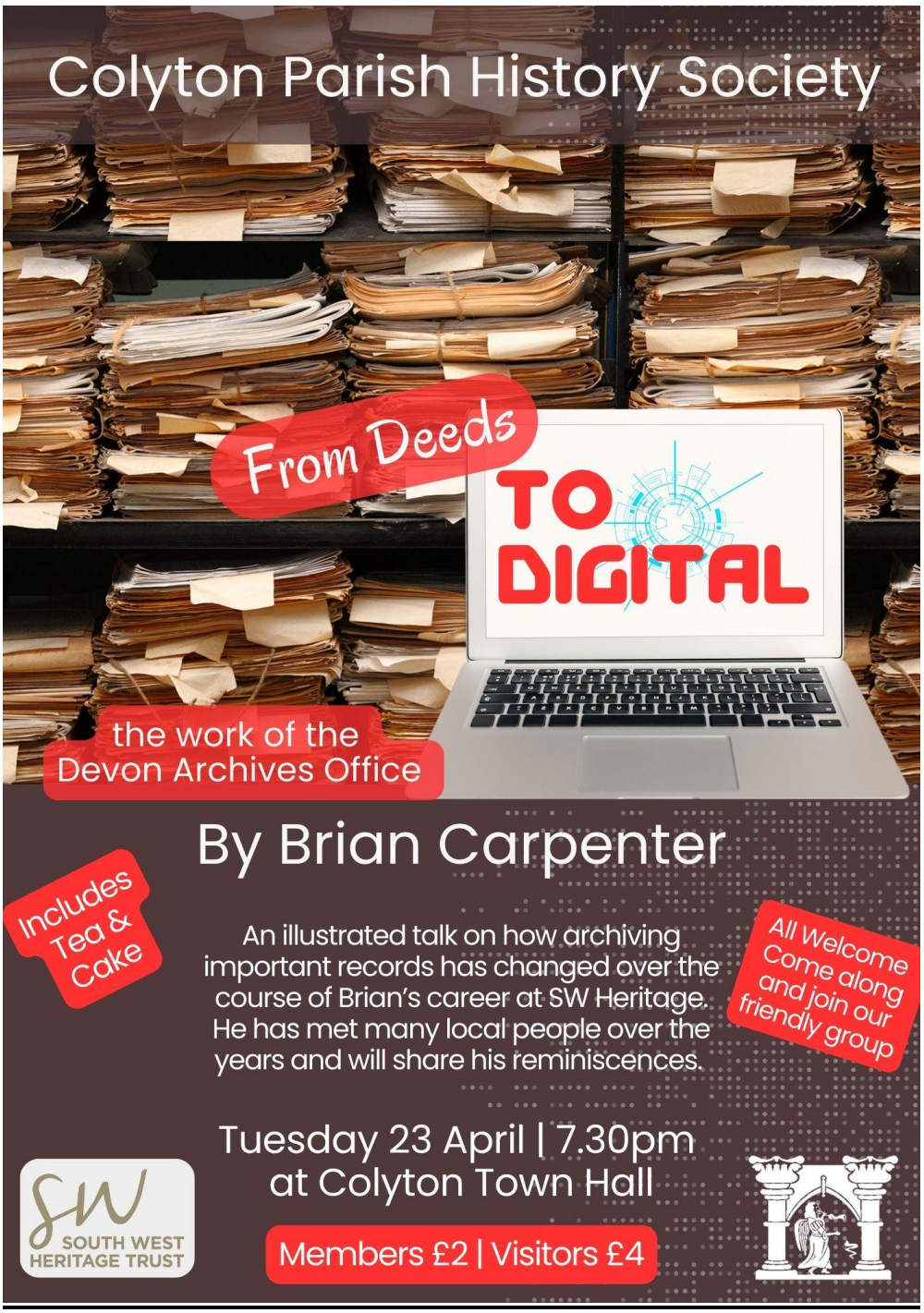
b) History Society talks

Don't forget: the next History Society talk is at **7.30 pm on Tuesday 23 April 2024** in Colyton Town Hall. All welcome.



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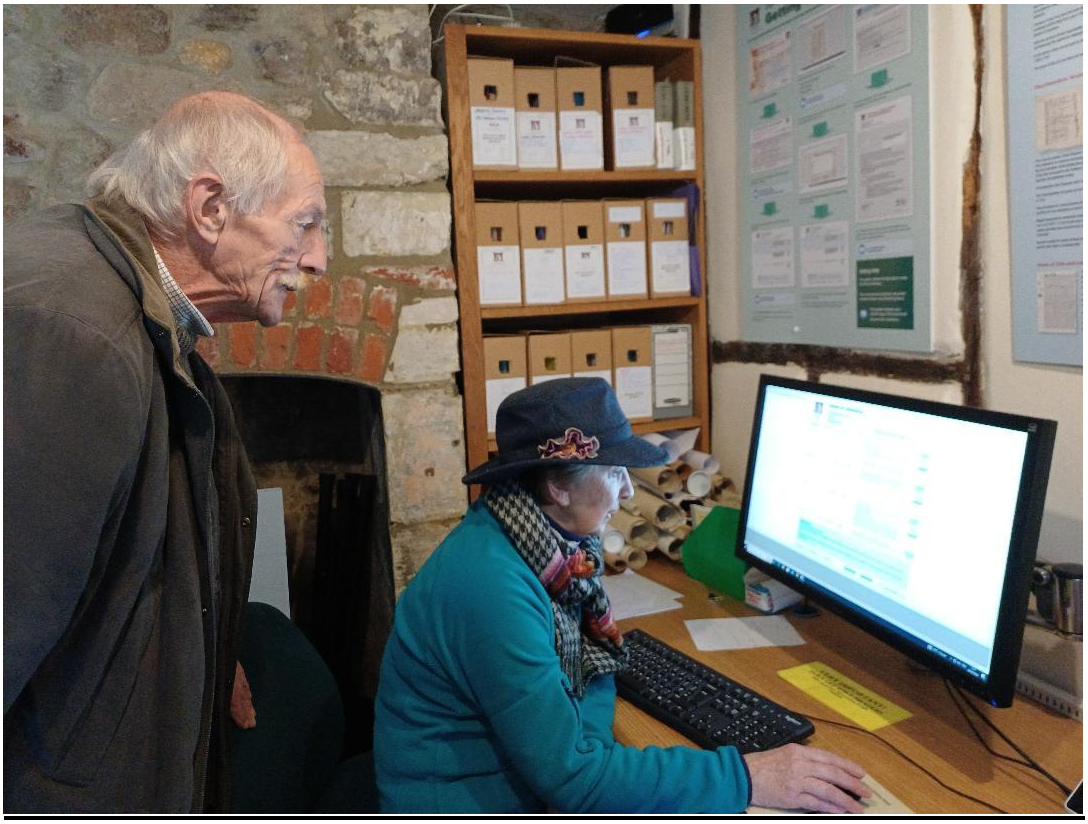
c) Family Tree Inquiries - Christopher Vye



Jacquie McCullogh showing Christopher Vye how to access information on the Heritage Centre computer

Christopher Vye visited the Heritage Centre this week to research the history of the Vye family in Colyton. In the ninety minutes he spent with us we were able to show him a couple of houses around town including the historic Colyton Cottage which was previously associated with the Vye family.

In the archives we showed him that the Vye family were among the local worthies who in 1546 helped purchase back from King Henry VIII the estates in the Parish of Colyton which he seized in 1539 when he had his cousin Henry Courtenay, Marquis of Exeter, executed for treason. It was this act which led to Henry VIII granting the town a Royal Charter and to the establishment of the Colyton Chamber of Feoffees.

Helping Christopher research the archives we discovered that some of his ancestors had been churchwardens and at least one was a Feoffee. Christopher is keen to find out as much as possible about the history of his family. If anyone has any information please let me know: sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk

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d) New offer – Bespoke Family Research Package Visits

We have also been looking at how to improve our 'offer' to visitors keen to engage in researching their family roots and heritage here in Colyton Parish. We are lucky to have Parish Registers going back to 1538. In recent years we have received an increasing number of requests – from all over the world - for help with tracking down information about a named local family, some of whose members may have migrated 200 or 300 years ago to America, Australia, or Canada and many other places. Indeed, there are towns named Colyton in Australia and New Zealand.

We have decided to offer a bespoke package for family tree researchers which will include a guided walk around Colyton led by a town guide and directed study assistance from one of our research volunteers into the records we hold in the Heritage Centre. A donation of £20 (for one person) or £25 for two people is requested and we will require 28 days notice to set this up.

For further details please contact us through the Heritage Centre website at https://colytonheritagecentre.org/contact_us/ or email me direct at sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk

e) Membership - Annual Subs due in January 2024

A reminder that annual membership fees for 2024 were due at the beginning of January. It is £8 for a single membership or £12 for a couple. Subscriptions can be paid at any Society meeting. Or they can be paid by standing order or BACS transfer using the following details: Colyton Parish History Society, Sort Code: 30-90-37, A/c no 00992240 (Lloyds Bank.)

3. Other organisations events

a) National Trust Branscombe – reopening Manor Mill – volunteers wanted

During 2024, we are reopening Manor Mill to the public. The restored property is a nineteenth century working watermill set in beautiful Branscombe, and is set to be a key component in the village's set of attractions.

We are looking for volunteer guides to bring the property to life and make a difference with their enthusiasm and warmth, showing visitors how a little water, gravity and some incredible engineering played such a big part in the story of Branscombe.

Interested? Please contact Martin at martin.jenningswrigh@nationaltrust.org.uk, or pop into the mill on **Saturday 11th May between 1.00 and 4.00 pm**, when we'll be having an open day. There are also plans to reopen the 17th Century Baptist Loughwood Meeting Hall where additional volunteers will be needed

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b) <u>Axminster Heritage Centre – talk at the Minster, 6.00 Friday 3 May 2024</u>

AXMINSTER heritage Centre

Axminster in Flames:

The English Civil War in East Devon

by Mark Stoyle

Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Southampton

Friday May 3rd 2024, 6-7pm at the Minster

Charles I
Royalists
Cavaliers

Oliver Cromwell
Parliamentarians
Roundheads

£5 - Tickets from Axminster Heritage Centre or on the door

Profits go to Axminster Heritage Centre

For more details email: info@axminsterheritage.org or telephone 01297 639884
Axminster Heritage Centre, Thomas Whitty House, Silver Street, Axminster, EX13 5AH
Charity No. 1113818

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c) East Devon National Landscapes

i) **Orchids at Dusk Walk - Bolshayne Farm**, Southleigh Road, Colyton **Wednesday 15 May - 6.30pm – 8.00pm - Free event -** East Devon National Landscape's 2024 event programme continues with a magical meander into the depths of a wonderful wetland meadow at dusk. Step back in time and immerse yourself in this traditional hay meadow ablaze in colour and abuzz with pollinating insects. This meadow supports good populations of southern marsh and common spotted orchids along with other damp loving ragged robin, yellow flag iris and corky fruited water dropwort!

All ages welcome – to include bug hunts for children – armed with sweep nets and bug pots then can get up close and personal to meet those busy and important pollinators. Many thanks to John Walker, farmer at Bolshayne, who has been farming for wildlife for over 40 years. This meadow almost became a potato field, but work stopped when a chorus of croaking frogs were heard. Shortly after, the site was then designated an SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest – being one of the best examples of a wet fen meadow in Devon.
The walks will be led by wildlife experts and at a leisurely pace giving everyone time to stop and enjoy the wildflowers and insects.

This event is part of a series organised by East Devon National Landscape (former AONB) and is also part of Saving Special Species, Nature Recovery Programme. Free event. Parking details given on booking. **Booking is essential:** click here to book online: Orchids at Dusk
For more information on future East Devon NL events, projects and news please subscribe to their e-newsletter: subscribe Or contact savingspecialspecies@gmail.com or Ruth Worsley, Nature Engagement Coordinator, 01297 489741.

Further information: Ruth Worsley, Nature Engagement Coordinator, 01297 489741 or 07765 126565 or savingspecialspecies@gmail.com

d) Items you may have missed

a) Ottery St Mary celebrates Town Council 50th anniversary
https://www.sidmouthherald.co.uk/news/24211918.ottery-st-mary-celebrates-50th-anniversary-town-council/?ref=eb&nid=2405&block=article_block_a&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=300324

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

b) Suspected arson at Poltimore House
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-68769264.amp

c) Twinning Association donates archive to Museum
https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/24195038.twinning-association-donates-entire-archive-ottery-museum/?ref=eb&nid=2397&nid=2397&block=article_block_a&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=200324

d) Josefina Gori celebrates 50th anniversary
https://www.sidmouthherald.co.uk/news/24197367.josefina-gori-ottery-st-mary-celebrates-50th-anniversary/?ref=eb&nid=2405&nid=2405&block=article_block_a&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=230324

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