COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

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

20 August 2024

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

This month a visit to A La Ronde, a mystery clock, a reminder of our September talk by Dr Todd Gray, Tim White's 2025 calendars and Hugh Westacott's book.

News

a. A La Ronde Revisisted

It is years since I last visited A La Ronde. Back then, you could still go up and see the shell gallery but over time the walls had become too fragile for anyone to enter - with shells dropping off - and it is now closed. However other parts of the house and the estate have recently been refurbished by the National Trust and I was keen to see what had been done.

In 1796 two cousins Jane and Mary Parminter, both wealthy heiresses, bought 20 acres of farmland along the Exe estuary and had this unique Georgian house built to their own specifications. Later, they also had the Point in View complex built on the east side of the estate including a chapel (originally covered in shells), four alms houses for "poor spinsters…. of good character." and a school.

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Firstly, we were given a guided tour of the grounds where the NT has laid out a new walkway through the fields. Along the route an interesting array of artisanal handcrafted seats have been created for people to sit and enjoy the view.

The views out over the Exe estuary across to Kenwood and down to Berry Head are lovely but 200 years of tree growth mean that the height of the trees now obscures parts of the view– perhaps they could be lopped! We finished the tour by the monkey puzzle trees and I was amazed by the intricate exotic beauty of the ripening fruit on the female tree.

In 1784 the two independently minded cousins undertook their own Grand Tour of Europe – collecting many curios and memories along the way. They are believed to have been the first women to scale Mont Buet in the French Alps. The guide showed us a terrifying stylized image depicting one of them crossing a ladder laid horizontally across a deep ravine in the mountains – a truly nightmarish prospect!

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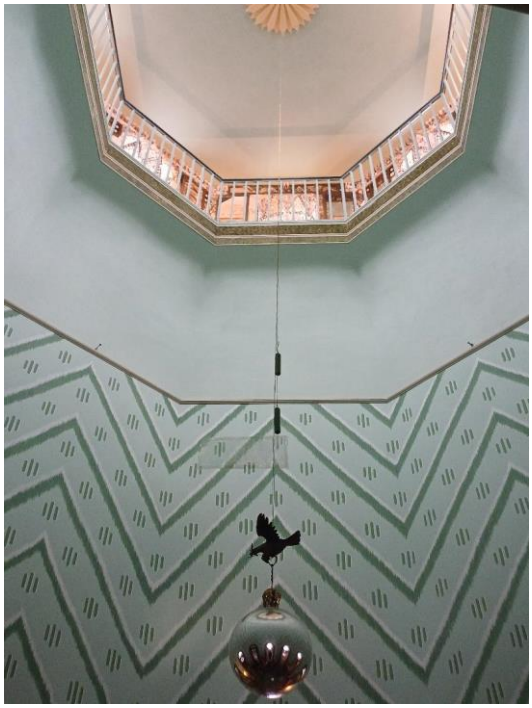
The hexadecagonal (sixteen sided) design of the house with a central octagonal room rising 11 metres high to the shell gallery above is said to have been inspired by the Basilica San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy.



The construction of the house was designed to maximise the benefit from the flow of natural light moving around the building during the course of the day. The attention to detail throughout the house is striking. I particularly liked the blinds shaped like sails and designed to fit into the idiosyncratically shaped windows.

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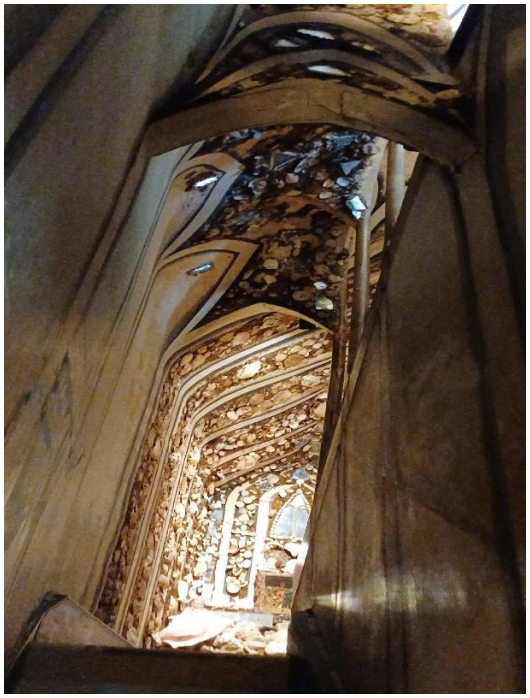
Indeed the house is a showcase of very feminine and decorative fine arts, many designed and made by the women themselves: from the intricate 200 year old wall frieze made of bird feathers to the decorated fireplace and their shell collections. You can still get a glimpse up the stairs into the exotic shell gallery. Among the other fashionable items on display is the silhouette by Francis Torond – an accomplished drawing master - in which Jane is depicted watering a plant!



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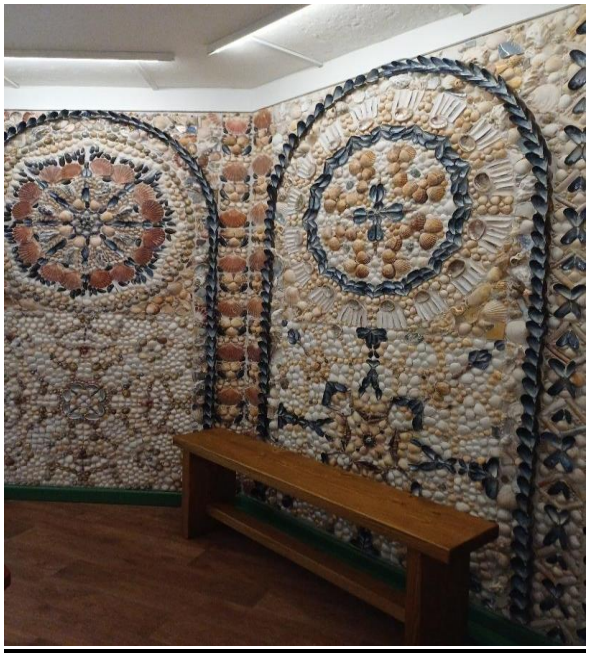
In the basement, where the kitchen used to be, the National Trust has had a new artistic 'shellery' installed showing how the shell creations are designed and constructed.



b) Clock Query – Did anyone know Miss A. Bishop?

Karl George has asked if anyone knows anything about a Miss A. Bishop whose name is inscribed on this clock which he has just acquired. If so he would love to hear from you.

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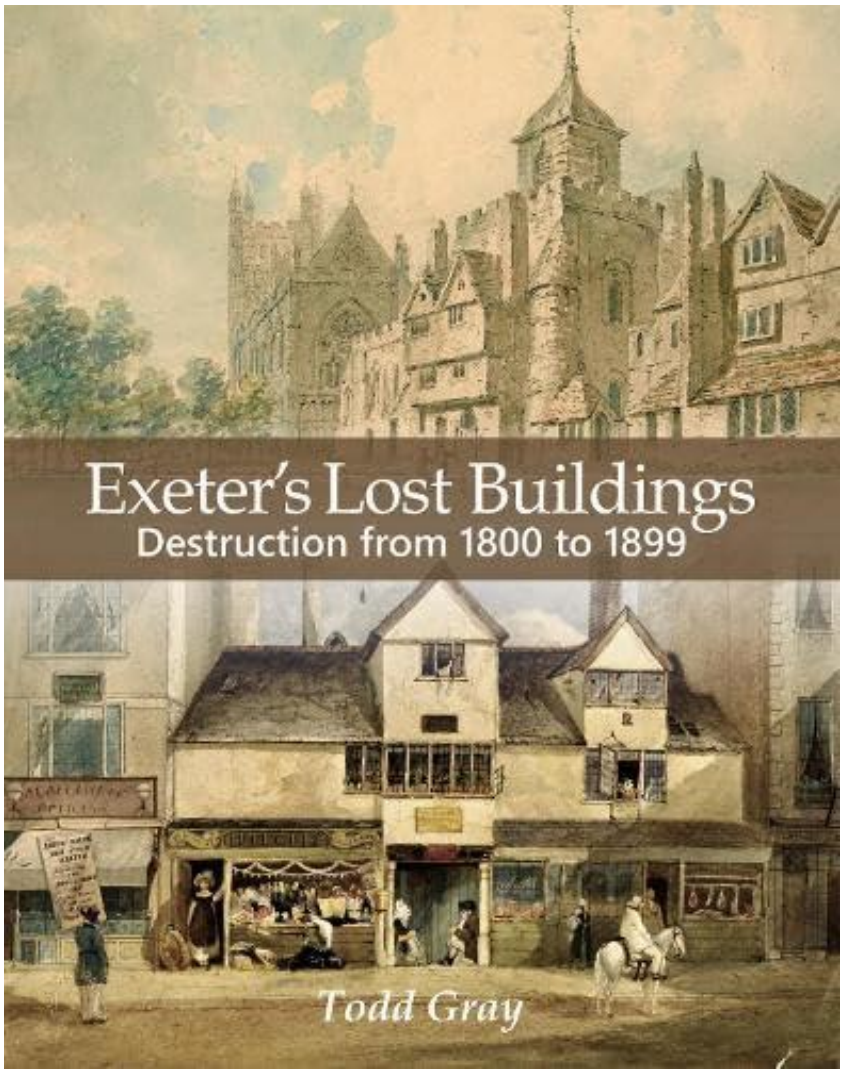
Other History Society News

a. September History Society talk

A quick reminder that the first talk of our autumn season will be given by Dr Todd Gray based on his new book: ***Lost Buildings of Exeter*** - **Destruction from 1800-1899**. Exeter was completely changed during the 19th Century, and many buildings were lost not only to fire but also commercial redevelopment and 'improvements' of the era. The talk will take place at **7.30 pm on Tuesday, 24th September at Colyton Town Hall.** A selection of Todd's books will also be available.



£2 members, £4 visitors, includes Tea & Cake
All welcome – Do come along and join our friendly group

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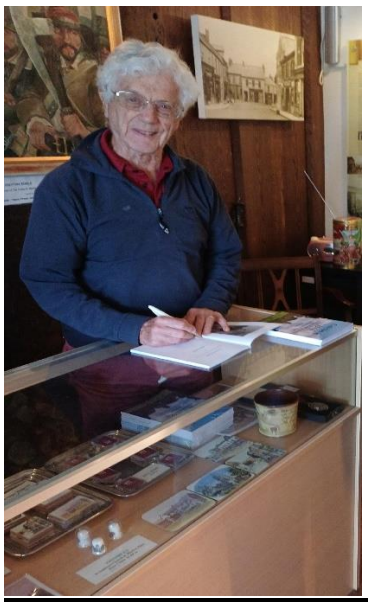
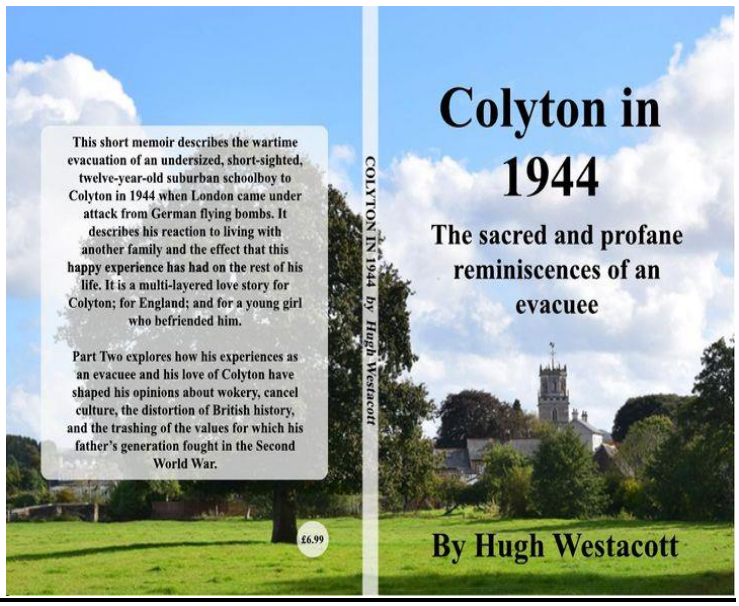
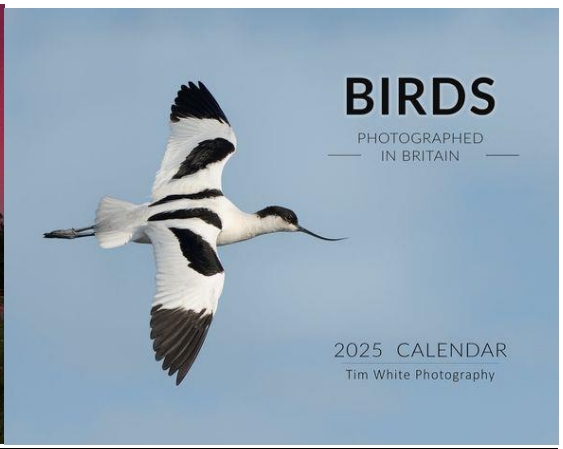
b. *Colyton in 1944* by Hugh Westacott





Reminder – Copies of Hugh Westacott's book "*Colyton in 1944*" - he first came here as a child evacuee - are available for sale in Colyton Heritage Centre price £6.99.

c. Calenders for 2025



2025 CALENDARS by local photographer Tim White. 'Dark Skies' and 'Birds of Britain' £12.00 each, available in Colyton Heritage Centre

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d. Heritage Centre Visitor Numbers

There has been a steady increase in visitor numbers to the Heritage Centre this year. From opening at Easter to the end of July we have had 710 visitors compared with 660 in the same period in 2023.

2. Items you may have missed

a. National Trust events in East Devon this autumn
What's on at East Devon National Trust sites in autumn 2024 | Sidmouth Herald

b. 'Stunning' Bronze age burial site unearthed on Dartmoor
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg5pdv6v12o#:

c. Sherborne Abbey: Church 'devastated' by £90,000 silver theft - BBC News

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