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23 September 2024

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

Thanks to all my contributors this month – please keep items coming in. This Newsletter is for two months - September and October.

1. News

a. Pratt's Hill Aerodrome - The Colyton Aviator – Francis Stanley SYMONDSON – by Claire Ross

Francis - 1945

Francis was born in Surrey but sent to boarding school in Uppingham. The school had an Officer Training Corps (OTC) which he was clearly involved with as it is cited on his enlistment to the Territorial Army in Bromley, Kent in 1914. During WWI, he initially serves in the Glamorgan Yeomanry but transfers to the Royal Flying Corps and flies Sopwith Camels in Italy with 66 Squadron. He was awarded the Military

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Cross in September 1918 for shooting down 5 enemy planes and a kite balloon. By the end of WWI, he/his family seem to be based near Truro, Cornwall as he marries Betty Blamey there in October 1919.

By 1924, he and his wife have moved to Willhayne, Colyton as that address is given on his (re-)enlistment to the Territorial Army. In Colyton he and his wife seem to be active members of the community involved in amateur dramatics, tennis and badminton matches. In 1929 a newspaper article mentions Capt/Mr Symondson performing an acrobatic flying display in a De Haviland Moth (G-AARU) and even landing on the school playing field (presumably Colyton Grammar School)! In a 1930 article a hangar on Pratt's Hill is mentioned. However, the aerodrome only gets its licence from the Seaton Urban District Council in March 1933. Throughout the 1930s Symondson seems to be a well-known local aviator involved in air races and events and the promotion of air travel eg the instigation of commercial flights between Cardiff-Exeter-Plymouth.

In February 1938 Symondson's house at Willhayne is extensively damaged by fire such that the family has to move to Axmouth and later Seaton. He continues to fly his Moth but was also engaged in test flying a new design, a Shapley aircraft built in Torquay in Feb 1939. He clearly believes aircraft will be important in any subsequent war as he gets involved in demonstrations of such skills (reconnaissance and bombing) and becomes the aeronautical instructor to Teignmouth Grammar School Air Defence Cadet Corp, even taking 5 cadets for a flight in his two-seater Moth from Haldon aerodrome in March 1939. This is the last known newspaper article of Symondson flying in the SouthWest.

The 1939 Register gives Francis and Betty's address as Andover, Hampshire where they are both working in "Code & Cypher RAF, HQMC Andover". However, he transferred to the Air Transport Auxillary (ATA) in June 1943 when stationed in Fowey, Cornwall. He delivered 24 aircraft, mostly Spitfires and the occasional Hurricane, but the ATA did consider that his age (46) was a limiting factor!

He died in Uplyme in 1975 aged 78.

References:

Ancestry.com
Newspapers.com
Wikipedia
https://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/england/symondson.php
https://www.ata-ferry-pilots.org/index.php/category-blog-1943/822-symondson-francis-stanley
https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Francis_S._Symondson
Symondson, Francis Stanley (ata-ferry-pilots.org)

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b. Donation from the estate of Hilary Mabon – by Jacquie McCullogh

Hilary's husband was George Mabon, who was well known for his support of Colyford Goose Fayre, and as Colyford Mayor 1982-85. George died some years ago, and then more recently Hilary died. In Hilary's will, the Colyton Parish History Society were bequeathed various items in connection with the Goose Fayre: old programmes from 1991 and 1996, a script for the Colyford play "Colyford Matters" from 1983. We have also been given a delightful ornately decorated egg, embellished with gold leaf, depicting a goose set within a goose egg against a painted vista of Colyford. It was presented to George Mabon by Colyford Goose Fayre in appreciation of his role as Colyford Mayor 1982-85. The egg is encased in a specially made wood and glass presentation box, which is now on display in the Heritage Centre in a display case.

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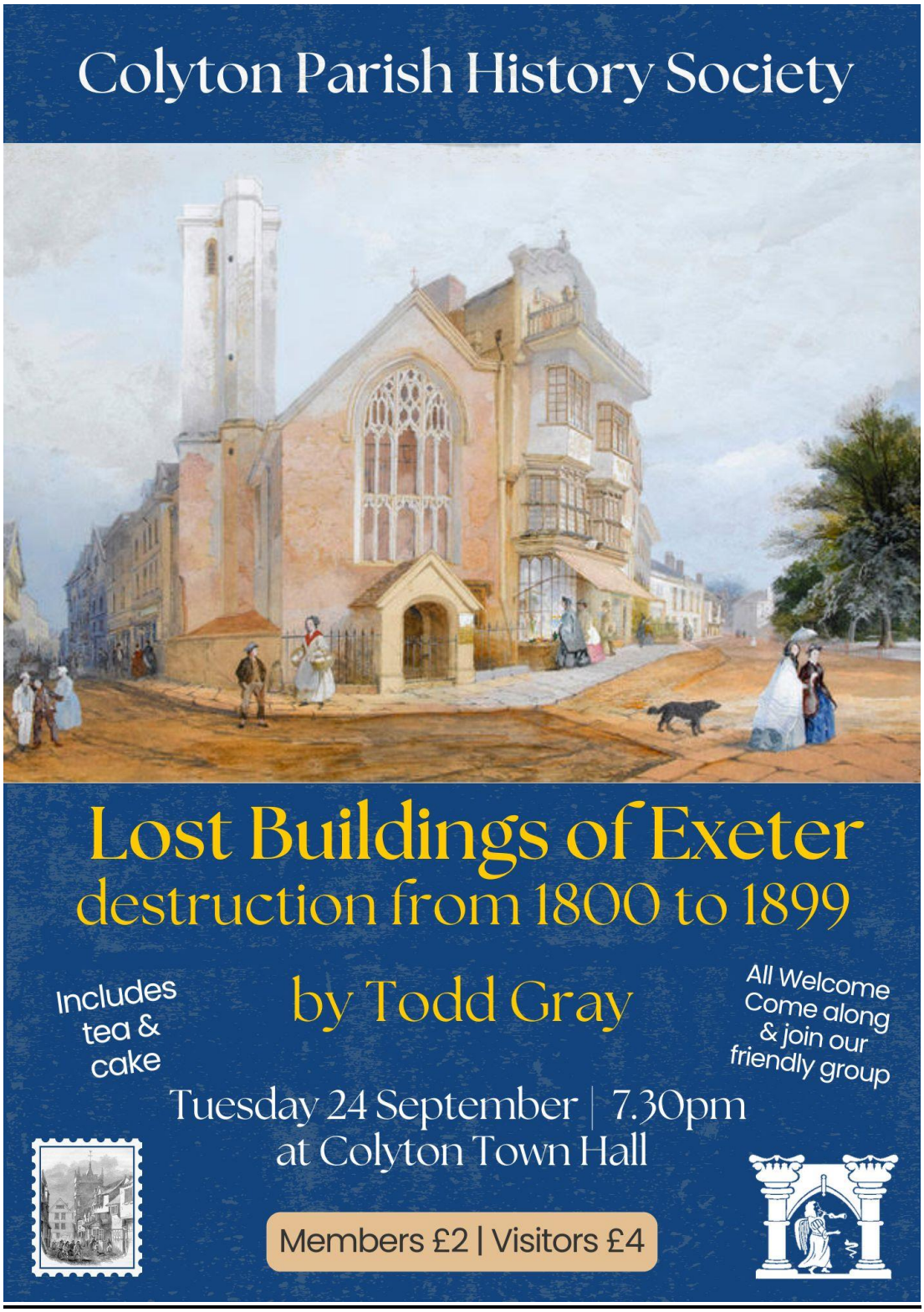
c. CPHS September talk



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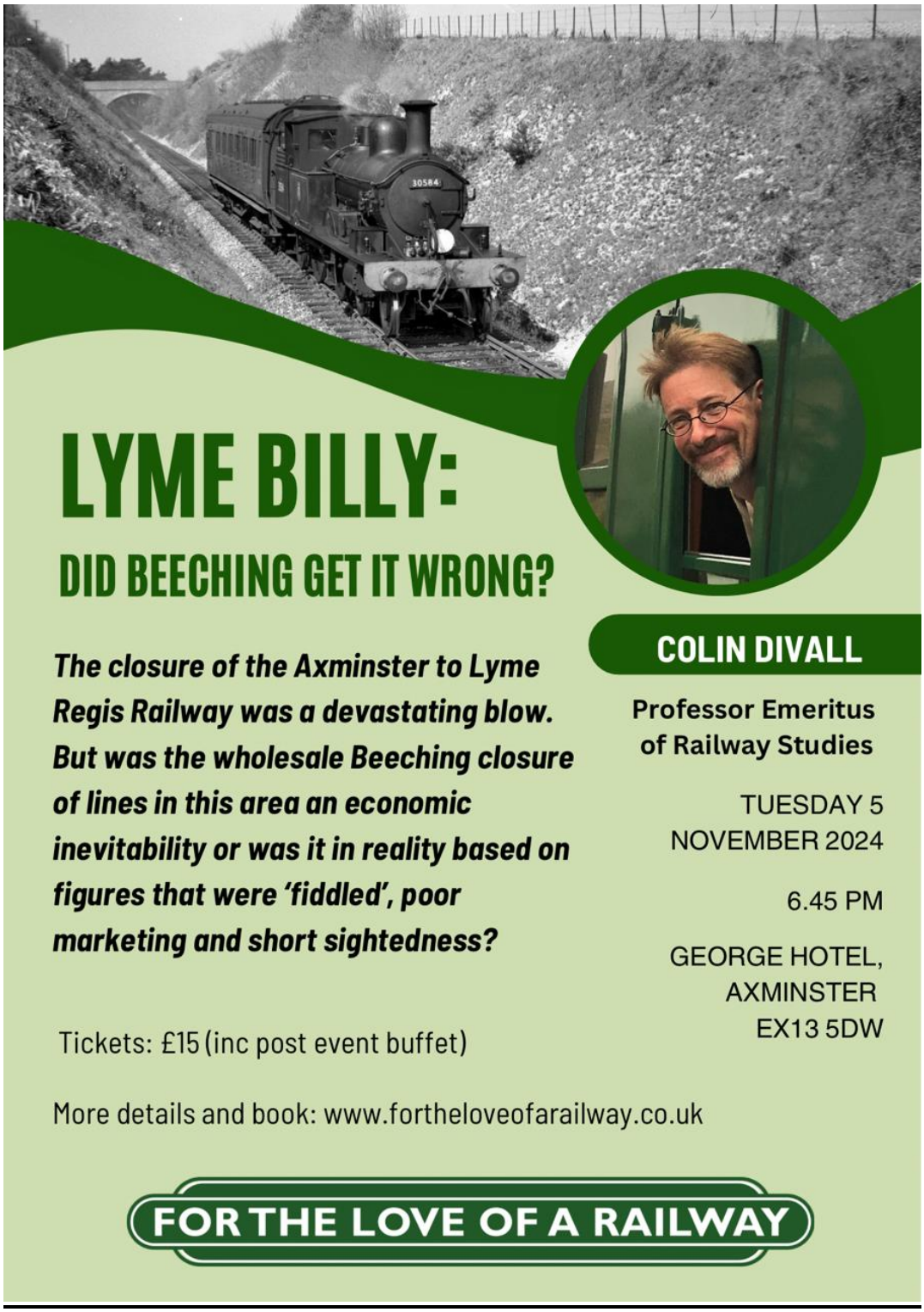
d. For the Love of a Railway – by Barrie Hedges



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Briefly, *For the Love of a Railway* is a volunteer-driven initiative set up to celebrate the legend of the famous old Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway. We are doing that by setting up a new visitor centre in an empty shop in Axminster where our centrepiece will be a working model of the line. Our wider aim is to encourage more local people to 'stay local' while also attracting visitors. You can find more details on our new website here: https://fortheloveofarailway.co.uk.

We are planning a speaking event: "*Lyme Billy - did Beeching get it wrong*?" at the George Hotel in Axminster on **Tuesday 5th November 2024 at 6.45 pm**. We are delighted to have attracted as our speaker Colin Divall, who is widely regarded as one of the UK's most authoritative rail historians. Further details are available at: https://fortheloveofarailway.co.uk/events

e. East Devon Local History Workshop

Meeting on Monday 4 November 2024 at 10.00 a.m. (coffee at 9.30)

Kennaway House, Sidmouth (cellar room)

Introductions.

Nigel Hyman

Dan Wynn, Manager of East Devon NL

Brief reports, not more than about 3 minutes please, on the chief activities of societies, museums or individuals during the year. All are welcome to send a fuller account of their activities which will be included in the circulated minutes.

Presentations

Barbara Farquharson: *The Burnt House at Weston: navigating an eighteenth century rural landscape. Moments of discovery, and of imaginative embroidery*

Laura Beckwith: *Have you visited these local archaeology sites?*

Close 12.30-1245

We are grateful for the continued support of East Devon National Landscape

RSVP: nigelhyman@live.co.uk

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2. Family History Request – from Simon Murphy by Tony Robinson

A visitor from St. Albans, Simon Murphy, recently visited the Heritage Centre to investigate his ancestors. We weren't able to help him from the archives but it's possible that somebody in the Parish can assist.

On 18th February 1839 Charles Silk, an agricultural labourer, married Sarah Gibbs in Colyton (in St. Andrews?). According to the marriage certificate, they both lived in Colyton at the time of the marriage, although otherwise there's no trace of them there. Before and after the marriage, they both lived in Axminster. Sarah's family had only recently arrived in Axminster from West Dorset, where they had worked as masons, while Charles' family had been in Axminster for a few generations.

Simon would like to know,

- why did they marry in Colyton and not in Axminster?
- why did future generations adopt the name Gibbs Silk (not hyphenated)?

If you can provide any information for Simon please let me know. (sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk)

3. Items you may have missed

a. Honiton set to host multicultural history project
Honiton set to host a multicultural history project | Midweek Herald

b. RNLI 200th Anniversary
RNLI's 200th anniversary marked with commemorative photo | Midweek Herald

c. Step back in time
Step back in time as Tiverton's photographic trail unveils hidden history (msn.com)

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