

The Twentieth Century Society South West Region

Chair's Annual Report 2019-20

Our 2019 AGM was held on 30 March at High Cross House, Dartington (William Lescaze 1931-2). The current committee was re-elected. We were given a wonderful talk by former C20 caseworker, Jon Wright, who now works for Purcell and is researching the history of High Cross House to aid the sensitive conservation and re-imagining of this Grade II*-listed building. Recent works to alleviate the damp problem caused by earlier attempts to stem it appear to have been successful. We then had two successful events over the summer firstly a tour of C20 churches around Torbay in late August and, in late September, a two-day look at postwar Plymouth and its environs.

Robert Drake was our expert guide for the August churches' tour, which included work by N.F. Cachemaille-Day and Sir Edward Maufe, important church architects, both featured in the recent Society publication '100 Churches 100 Years'. We started our day at St Luke, Newton Abbot, (Arthur Martin begun 1936 and completed 1963, listed Grade II), freshly restored and with a fascinating 'saltire' or diagonal cross plan. We then moved on to Central Church, Torquay (Narracott, Tanner and Andre 1970), a landmark in central Torquay thanks to the dramatic pierced concrete screen rising to a triple cross above the entrance. Inside it is virtually windowless but flooded with light from a series of geometric roof lights. Surely a contender for listing we thought.

After a walk around Torquay town centre taking in various buildings of our period our group moved on to what is regarded as the best inter-war church in Torbay, St Martin of Tours, by Cachemaille-Day (1938-61 Grade II listed), another example of the war years delaying completion and also reducing the scale of the original plans. After a quick look at the exterior of St Paul, Preston, also by Cachemaille-Day, but a complete contrast to St Martin, we finished our day in Goodrington. Here we looked at St George (Sir Edward Maufe 1938-9), a typical Maufe church with many of his characteristic features and with echoes of his work at Guildford cathedral.

Our big event of the year was a weekend in Plymouth, celebrating the recent designation of part of central Plymouth as a Conservation Area. This was a great success despite indifferent weather – something of a C20 SW tradition. On the Saturday Simon Hickman, Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas Historic England South West, gave us an illustrated talk before a walk around the highlights of central post-war Plymouth. On the Sunday we boarded a period coach for a tour of the suburbs of Plymouth. We finished at the Ernesettle Estate, one of seven suburban estates built as part of Plymouth's programme of reconstruction after WW2. In the Community Hall, Hilary Kolinsky and Rob Fraser from Plymouth Architectural Trust gave us a talk about these estates and the conceptual blueprint laid out in 1943 in the 'Plan for Plymouth' by town planner Patrick Abercrombie and city

engineer James Paton-Watson.

For our first event in 2020, we organised a presentation in January by local author and historian, Peter D. Thomas, on the theme of 'Exeter, let's pull it down'. Held in Exeter Library, Peter used images from the ISCA Collection, an extensive photographic archive of Exeter that he curates, to illustrate the extent of loss of buildings of our period due to redevelopment, road schemes and council initiatives. It was a very well attended meeting and made for compelling and rather alarming viewing! Very sadly, Peter died in March due to the impact of Coronavirus on an underlying condition. He will be greatly missed. He did outstanding work to preserve the heritage of Exeter.

In 2020, South West Region AGM was to have been held on the 23 May at Kresen Kernow in Redruth, a new archive and local studies centre for Cornwall. As a result of the current and on-going Coronavirus pandemic this was cancelled. We hope to re-arrange the AGM in October this year, depending on what stage of the release from the current lockdown we are at by that time.

Committee news

We are sad to be losing Sam Barnes, who was a founder member of the C20SW committee. Sam has been running the social-media pages and doing our newsletter for the last three years, but due to other commitments has decided to take a break from everyday comms. However, she will still put together the ebulletin with input from the rest of the committee, and keep an eye on social-media, as a volunteer.

In March we received the shocking news that committee member Nick Cahill had died suddenly. Nick was an expert on the history and architecture of Cornwall, working latterly as the Historic Strategy Officer for Cornwall Council. Prior to this he worked in private practice and was a very influential champion of local heritage. Nick was a leading light in the Cornish Buildings Group and very involved in the Group's work and activities.

For the Twentieth Century SW, it was Nick who led our weekend based in and around Penzance in autumn 2017. Most recently he was in the process of arranging our regional AGM in Redruth. He was a valuable member of our C20 SW team and brought enthusiasm, wit and wisdom to our committee meetings. A sad loss for us all.

Casework

At the time of writing we continue to be in a state of lockdown. The Society Director, Catherine Croft, has advised that the main office staff will concentrate on Casework. In the South West, now that many of us are being forced to stay at home, we will concentrate on

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trying to save buildings and artworks of our period in our local area that may be under threat and could be suitable cases for the Society.

TONY STOKOE

May 2020