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Historical Society announces its new season

ON Monday 10th October, the Wiveliscombe Historical Society will start its new season of monthly public meetings.

Local and national history is tied into the lives of all of us, every person, community and country. This year, the society offers another varied menu, focusing both on local people and events, and also on national history.

On 10th October, Birdie Johnson will offer a vivid portrait of Exmoor over the last century, and of the impact that events, change, and key moments in Exmoor's history, have had

on the lives of local people.

Birdie's talk will be accompanied both by photographic records and by unique lifetime audio recordings of the personal memories of members of the local community. This is compelling local history, sometimes with an important national context.

Through 2005, memories and emotions have stirred us all, 60 years after the end of the Second World War. Our November and December meetings draw us further into such reflections, based on some very personal memories.

And in 2006, there will be talks giving fascinating reminders of how commerce and industry, the arts and even crime can illustrate how human nature, skills and hard work contribute to the making of local and national history.

In May and June, outside visits will complete the season.

Details of all these events are set out below. Members of the public are encouraged to attend, and it is very much hoped that this programme will attract a good level of interest, both from within Wiveliscombe, and the surrounding areas.

Unless otherwise stated, meetings will take place at the Community Centre on the second Monday in the month (this is a change from previous years) - and will start at 7.30pm; a small entry charge will be made, and light refreshments provided.

SPEAKERS' CORNER

Gateway

EVERY workday I leave Wiveliscombe and travel through the country roads thinking how lucky I am to be able to enjoy such a pleasant journey.

Returning from work, driving through the same country roads, I slowly unwind before arriving home. I take particular pleasure in the view from the top of the hill at Croford where all of Wivey appears spread out in the tapestry of the countryside ahead.

But there, unfortunately the idyll ends. As I approach the gateway to Wivey I am greeted by a structure declaring that Wivey is twinned with what? Disneyland?

Of what relevance are three badly constructed totem poles to the townsfolk of Wivey? I thought when they were first erected that I might get used to them, might even grow to like them...

However this was a false hope, they irritate me more each time I see them. What particularly irks me is that the commission was given to a non-local artist. Why was this necessary?

The Brewery Plaque Trail and Somerset Arts Week have amply demonstrated that we have a diverse range of very talented artists living in and around Wivey.

I am sure that many of them would have been delighted to have had the opportunity to produce an artpiece that enhanced the local environment.

I wonder how many other readers have also



found it difficult to understand what possessed the selection committee to make such an unrewarding choice on behalf of the town.

Twenty years ago when I first moved to the Brendon Hills a local farmer from the Vale of Taunton Deane said to me 'You want to be careful up in them hills, that's injun country'. How prophetic he turned out to be!

Gateway 2

Surely the new Wiveliscombe town sign, funded by the Twinning Association in partnership with the Parish Council, was meant to smarten up the entrance to the town.

So why there is still a very rusty 'Wiveliscombe' sign as the first indication that one has arrived?

You may not like the marker posts, Bourbon biscuit background to the slate sign or the abandoned giant's shopping basket on the roundabout, indeed they are an aesthetic mess, but at least they show an attempt, however misguided, to make a difference.

Why can't the appropri-

ate agency get it together and remove the old sign; it can't be that difficult, surely?

Broken Window

How long does it take to replace a broken window? For ever, if the Wivey Pharmacy is anything to go by.

I can see that there might be issues regarding insurance or culpability and we all know that such things take time. However, surely it should be possible to have a less unsightly temporary, or semi-permanent as it seems now, replacement for the window.

Huge buildings undergoing renovation often have realistic or imaginative images of their front elevations on screens behind which the work goes on.

I'm not expecting anything as complex or ambitious as that, just a coat of paint will do or, even better, a philanthropic local artist who wants a central site for a new work.

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A day out

ONE hot day this summer, we left home early to drive to Buckfastleigh with the intention of visiting Riverford Organic Farm.

We had previously read an article about Riverford written by top chef Gordon Ramsay in a Sunday newspaper, extolling the benefits of visiting the farm, having lunch and buying some organic produce from the farm shop.

Having previously booked our visit by telephone (you can use e-mail, too), we arrived at the farm at 10am as requested, suitably equipped with stout shoes and sun hats. We were met by our amiable guide and joined the tour party comprising of about a dozen people of all ages.

The tour, mostly on foot, took about two hours. We were shown fruit, vegetables and herbs in all stages of growth and were encouraged to ask as many questions as we wished.

Near the end of the tour, we were taken by tractor-hauled cart (with seats!) on a bumpy, cheery ride to the farms large greenhouses to see tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and basil and we were invited to sample a tomato, a chunk of cucumber and to pick a small bunch of basil, to take home if we liked. We did!

By this time lunch had called so we returned to the newly built visitor centre to find what delights awaited us. We had expected lunch, but our guide promised us it would be a feast. He was right.

We were seated on benches at long,

scrubbed wooden tables and shared a memorable organic lunch with our fellow guests. We had previously read that the chef had worked at the River Cafe restaurant in London and her expertise showed. She was ably assisted by a superb team.

We left the farm at about 2pm and visited the shop at the end of the lane where we made a few purchases before hitting the road for the next part of our day out.

We were heading for Buckland Abbey, a 700-year old building owned by the National Trust and what a gem this turned out to be. Nestling in the picturesque setting of Tavy valley on Dartmoor, the Abbey looked its best in the warm afternoon sunshine.

As we entered the property, we were invited to watch a video about the Abbey's one-time owner, seafarer Sir Francis Drake who had also lived there as a child before embarking on the travels we all know so well.

Drake's second wife was a young Elizabeth Sydenham. This rang a bell for one of us who had been taught as a child at the original Milverton Primary School. She recalled learning about Sir Francis Drake marrying the daughter of George Sydenham, whose impressive home was Combe Sydenham Hall in Monksilver, just a few miles away.

Thereby hangs a tantalising tale which, at the time, she could not quite remember...

When we returned home, we did some research and found that the 'true' story was that Drake went away

to sea on The Pelican for years, leaving his fiancée on her own. After seven years had passed, she grew tired of waiting and planned to marry someone else.

Drake managed to hear about this by supernatural means while the wedding guests were in Stogumber Church waiting for the bride to walk down the aisle.

Drake ran to the cannon and fired a cannon ball that flew half way round the world, through the roof of the church and lodged in the church floor between the bride and groom.

Elizabeth took it as a sign from Drake that he was well and abandoned her wedding, returning home to wait for her beloved. Believe that if you will!

A short time later, Drake and Elizabeth were married in Monksilver Parish Church. Elizabeth returned to Buckland Abbey as mistress of the house.

Buckland Abbey boasts a fine tithe barn, some splendid formal and informal gardens and a quadrangle of outhouses that have been converted into workshops used by local craftspeople to make and sell their wares. The stables had also been converted into a rustic but charming tearoom. We visited all of these after our interesting, educational visit to the intriguing building.

Our journey home across the moor introduced us to further soothing delights of its wild occupants, an end to a memorable day.