



## 2021 autumn programme

Our last event at the School Hall in 2020 seems a lifetime ago. Assuming no more lockdowns we plan to get started again in September and look forward to seeing you all again then.

All meetings take place in the Combe Down Primary School Hall in Summer Lane, BA2 5JX. Doors open at 7pm for a prompt start at 7.30pm. Members £1, Non-members £3. Please wear a face mask in the hall.

### Wednesday 8 September

*A brief history of the stone mines and quarries at Combe Down*

Dr Richard Irving

The talk will begin with a look at the setting of Combe Down from a historical geographical perspective before focussing on the developments of the Ralph Allen years, the building of Bath and two early nineteenth century examples of post-Allen independent quarry masters; William Smith, the 'Father of English geology', whose business failed with resultant financial ruin and Philip Nowell of Rock Hall Quarry, who was enormously successful and supervised the rebuilding of Windsor Castle in the 1820s, among other high-profile projects.

### Wednesday 13 October

*Combe Down bats*

Roger Ransome

Roger Ransome has been involved in the welfare of the Combe Down Bats since the start of the mine stabilization project nearly 20 years ago. His talk will cover their conservation, the progress since completion of the mine in-fill, and what the future looks like for our bats.

### Wednesday 10 November

*The history of infectious diseases in Bath*

Dr Roger Rolls

We are presently suffering the effects of a world-wide pandemic and Dr Rolls will be showing how

infectious diseases such as plague, cholera and influenza have struck Bath many times over the years and how medical knowledge and vaccination have overcome some of them.

### Wednesday 8 December

Xmas celebration - details to be confirmed

## Newsletter No 1



The first CDHS newsletter

This is the 50th edition of the Newsletter since the inauguration of Combe Down Heritage Society in 2004 and is a milestone of our ongoing activities over the last 17 years, albeit more limited in the last months.

In the beginning the newsletter was only two pages then and had plans for various projects by society members which have continued over

the years. One of these has now spawned its own membership in restoring the Jewish Burial Ground with a recent successful Open Day (and another planned for September - see below)

We still have one of the original founder members, Professor Dick Irving, on the committee and some new starters with our post pandemic return to business. These are: Val Lyon, Secretary; Paul Reed, Treasurer; Simon Caldwell, Membership Secretary; Dean Keepen; Lynda Keepen

And thanks again to our leavers for their many years of service: Simon Burrows, Secretary and Events MC; Jon Wrigley, Treasurer

## Contagion at Combe Down

Bath has suffered various pandemics in the past where infectious diseases have spread widely through the population. It was recorded for the first time with the Black Death of the 14th century when Somerset was one of the first areas of the country to suffer as the contagion spread north from Weymouth. Then there were several outbreaks of bubonic plague in the 16th and 17th century transmitted from the black rat by fleas. Cholera struck Bath for the first time in 1832 having crossed from India 15 years before slowly spreading throughout the country. There were other smaller cholera outbreaks and continuing problems with smallpox until children were compulsorily vaccinated from 1853.

Our present problems with Covid-19 have been preceded on at least three occasions by viral influenza events in Bath. Those of 1782 and 1803 do not seem to have caused excessive deaths amongst the population but the effects of the infamous 'Spanish' pandemic of 1917-19 were more severe.

The medical world throughout these times was working with little knowledge of the problems. The plague fleas and cholera tainted water supplies were not recognised until the Victorian era and viruses not until the 1930s. However segregation of the population was seen as important from the very early days. Sentries were posted on the routes into town to stop the spread of plague from London in 1665 and quarantine houses set up during the cholera and influenza outbreaks.

Combe Down played its part in the story of infectious disease in Bath when an isolation hospital was provided by the local authority in 1876 in a converted building at the top of Brassknocker Hill at Claverton Down. Admission was mainly for scarlet fever and diphtheria patients but also for incidences of smallpox and tuberculosis.

In 1924 a decision was taken to demolish the collection of temporary wooden ward blocks and fever tents that were being used and establish more permanent buildings which were built by 1934. The hospital was taken over by the NHS in 1948, renamed Claverton Down Hospital and although continuing its role for infectious disease isolation, it also treated many children suffering from polio with the use of iron lung respirators. The introduction of polio vaccination in the 1950s ended this function.

By the 1970s with the declining virulence of scarlet fever and effective immunisation programmes against other epidemic diseases there was little need for an isolation hospital and the buildings were then being used only for occasional tuberculosis cases as well as some respiratory and elderly patients from other hospitals. In 1986 Wessex RHA decided to close Claverton Down Hospital and establish an isolation ward at the RUH. The site lay derelict until the late 1990s when the hospital buildings were demolished and Wessex Water built their headquarters which we see today.

Our talk by Dr Roger Rolls on 10 November will be examining this story of infectious diseases in Bath.



Claverton Down Isolation Hospital in 1934



Flatwood Camp building layout with water pipes in red

## Flatwood Camp Survey

An archaeology survey by a group of National Trust and Bath and Counties Archaeology Society (BACAS) volunteers took place in July in a field on Rainbow Wood Farm, Claverton Down near the University.

From 1892 until 1899 this was the location for the 28-day summer camp of the 4th Battalion The Prince Albert's Somerset Light Infantry Militia. The camp was tented with some permanent buildings that came from an old camping ground at Leigh Hill near Taunton. In December 1899 the 4th Battalion was embodied into the British Army and 415 officers and men embarked for South Africa to be employed during the Boer war as a garrison battalion in the Eastern Cape until 1902. In 1906 the Bath Chronicle reported that the camp buildings had been sold off.

The survey hoped to find evidence of the buildings shown in a 1902 25in Ordnance Survey map and to identify how the water supply was distributed. There was also a question whether a rifle range existed at the site. Geophysics results from resistivity and magnetometry did not show evidence of the buildings suggesting that they were wooden but there was more success finding the water supply. The remains of the wind pump metal stanchions were found in situ in the field and water pipes traced to the camp buildings and a Victorian farm reservoir in a neighbouring field. No evidence was found for a rifle range.

## Grottos and Gardens

Grottos were the height of fashion in the early eighteenth century and Ralph Allen built a grotto at Prior Park, sometimes known as Pope's Grotto,

made of tufa stone and decorated with shells and fossils from his native Cornwall.

Alexander Pope, the poet, is known to have assisted Allen in the garden design of Prior Park and he himself had a spectacular example of a grotto in his own garden in Twickenham.

Although the Grotto at Prior Park is currently closed for safety reasons, Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust and English Heritage, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, occasionally offer visits to both Alexander Pope's grotto in Cross Deep and Henrietta Howard's grotto at Marble Hill in Twickenham where you are able to explore and hear about the history that links these two gems of Georgian garden design.

Full details are available at [www.popesgrotto.org.uk](http://www.popesgrotto.org.uk) where you can sign up for their email newsletter on open days and other information.

## Weekend events

A few Combe Down events on 11 and 12 September. Keep Saturday 11 free in your diary as a Community Event will be taking place in and around The Hub, Mulberry Park 11am–4pm. All sorts of activities are planned including an outdoor BBQ, bouncy castle, face painting, craft stalls and police dog and local society displays.

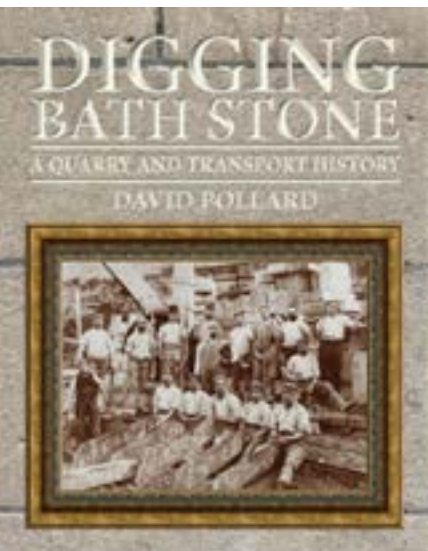
This is also the weekend of the Combe Down Art Trail with all sorts of creativity on show across the village. Full details on <http://www.cdarttrail.com/>

Finally you might like to visit the Jewish Burial Ground on Bradford Rd (by the Mulberry Park roundabout) which is holding an Open Day on Sunday 12 September 11am–4pm.

## Digging Bath Stone

David Pollard died before he could see his life's work in print but this book serves as his testament to an industry he loved. He spent the better part of a lifetime compiling and writing it, over the course of which he single-handedly opened and set up Hartham Park quarry as a commercial venture to sell the beautiful Bath stone.

A number of books have been written about the industry or facets of it but no one had attempted



such a comprehensive history, copiously illustrated with maps, plans and photographs. This is the story of an industry which once dominated this part of the country and helped to shape both the landscape and the towns, villages and communities it built.

*Digging Bath Stone* is available from the Oldfield Park bookshop on Moorland Road in

Bath or online from the Lightmoor Press [www.lightmoor.co.uk](http://www.lightmoor.co.uk). Our talk by Dr Irving on 8 September will explore this history.

## Fancy that!

Fred Pearce, a well-known Combe Down butcher, who had a shop at 2 Highbury Buildings on North Road was sued in January 1903 by Alfred Whitemore, florist and fruiterer of 11 Kingsmead Street, Bath. The complaint was that as Fred's drover was driving a group of fat heifers up Kingsmead Street, two escaped and charged into the florist's shop, causing considerable damage. Fred was fined £2 7d (£250 today).

The Pearce family were well known on the Down. Fred was born in the village and was a grazier as well as a butcher. His slaughterhouse backed onto the allotments (possibly in Combe Road?) and in December 1939 someone broke in through a rear window overlooking Mr Bray's allotment and hacked a leg joint from a whole pig carcass. As the Bath Chronicle reported at the time: 'Some say the intruders helped themselves quite generously so as to ensure a splendid Christmas dinner. None of Mr Bray's vegetables are missing!'

## CDHS online

Web: [www.combedownheritage.org.uk](http://www.combedownheritage.org.uk)



Follow us on Facebook for news, updates and meeting information: <https://www.facebook.com/CombeDownHeritageSociety>

We're also on Twitter, posting as @cdhsoc

## New member application form

If you are already a member, there is no need to fill this in - simply send or give your payment to Simon Caldwell (see below)

First name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Surname(s) \_\_\_\_\_

I/we apply to become a member of the Combe Down Heritage Society until 31 March 2022 and I/we agree to my details being held on computer for the duration of my/our membership

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Membership options - please tick as required:  
 Standard £5  Concession £3  Family £12

Total amount paid

Ages of children  
 (if family membership)

I am sending an additional £  as a donation to the society

Gift Aid declaration for this and future donations

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made by me  today  in the future

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the Charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand that the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Payments by cheque, payable to 'Combe Down Heritage Society', or cash should be made to the Membership Secretary: Simon Caldwell, Holmleigh, Williamstowe, Combe Down, BA2 5EJ. Please ask for a Standing Order form if you would rather pay direct.