

FoDA AGM 2019

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Last summer (2018) FODA Committee had still not found someone to take the Chair. From the minutes it is clear various overtures were made. Finally (in desperation!) I was approached although I had had no previous dealings with FODA. I agreed with conditions that while happy to act as an advocate I could not do anything administrative due to considerable commitments elsewhere not least this building (St Nicholas Priory). I mention this because I could not have managed this year without the considerable efficiency of the Secretary , Frances Billinge nor the web management by Ian Mortimer – to both m any thanks. I am particularly grateful to Ian for agreeing to keep up the website and membership mailing even though finally standing down from the Committee. Also standing down is Ellie Jones and thanks are due to her for compiling recent newsletters.

As new Chair I turn to our mission statement and note that:

The Friends of Devon's Archives was founded in 1998 to promote the preservation and use of historical records throughout Devon and to raise public awareness of their importance for research and education. It provides financial support for the acquisition of Devon documents, arranges a programme of lectures and volunteer projects, and liaises closely with the local record offices in Devon to improve standards of care and availability of the county's written heritage.

So what has FODA supported and promoted in this past year in fulfilment of its mission:

Last year FODA gave out its biggest grant ever of £2K for SWHT/Devon Heritage Centre to use as vital match funding for the restoration of Lord Sidmouth's papers – a collection of national significance dating to George III. Here we backed a winner! This past year has seen their conservation and hugely successful public programme guided by DHC and culminating in a special event this summer at which our president spoke.

A valuable service of FODA is that we have people searching auction catalogues and this year found and with the local society were able to support purchase of an early sixteenth-century Chagford deed dealing with a widow's estate and the tinning business.

Otherwise our support has been very much directed at access and research

We are actively working with DHC to get a complete Etched in Devon Memories layer onto Know Your Place(KYP). Etched was the previous on-line West Country Studies image bank of 3500 images now on several discs in DHC. Volunteers are needed to work at the DHC on transferring information and uploading images onto KYP. FODA needs to recruit some volunteers. Are you interested? Training for 2/3 volunteers at a time will be done by mainly by DHC with input from FODA (Ian Maxted who ran Etched.)

We made a grant of £1K to the Devon and Exeter Institution for "Our region revealed – Unlocking the treasure of the Devon and Exeter Institution illustration collection ". This showed local support which unlocked a £20K Pilgrim Trust grant . The DEI has a huge collection (thousands) of illustrations previously uncatalogued. This material; will be digitized and a web based Content Management System created. The project commenced this month.

Throughout the year first by seminar and now through seed funding we have initiated our very own FODA led project – The Norden Survey . The focus of this project is the survey of Devon Crown lands that was compiled by the cartographer and surveyor John Norden in 1613.

Norden's survey, which is held in the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), describes in detail the land and resources belonging to eight Devon manors: Bovey Tracey, Ashburton, Bradninch, Buckfastleigh, Dunkeswell, Exeter Castle, Heathfield in Aveton Gifford, and Ottery St Mary.

Each survey provides an exceptional amount of information about local people and their landscape in the early seventeenth century. The entry for each manor begins with a list of manorial resources and rights, including, mills, tin works, woods and parks, commons, and market charters, together with a precise description of the boundaries of the manor. The entries then list the names of each tenant and, for each, details the names of the fields where they held land, the size of each parcel of land, the use to which it was put, the terms on which it was held, and the identity of projected successors. The surveys are, then, a mine of information about the local economy and society of these eight manors, over two centuries before comparable information is available from the tithe maps and apportionment data of c.1840.

Although the original manuscript of the Norden survey is available online from the LMA, it is difficult to read as it is written in early seventeenth-century secretary hand in a mixture of Latin and English. This project aims to provide training for local volunteers to transcribe and translate the entire description of the Crown lands in Devon, and to publish a definitive edition of the survey. The survey for Bovey Tracey has recently been translated by two local historians (one on my left) and will act as an exemplar for the remaining manors listed above. There will be a team of local translators working together on each of these manors. The teams will be trained and overseen by Dr David Stone, a medieval social and economic historian who lives locally. The project opens up many potential areas of study for local and family historians and a further aim of the project is to help volunteers develop the skills to contextualise the information contained in the survey. As part of this, we plan to offer training in the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), under the supervision Dr Richard Sandover, to enable volunteers to map the fieldscape depicted in these surveys. The ultimate aim of the project is to publish a translation of the whole survey and accompanying maps, in a volume collated, introduced, and fully indexed by Dr Stone. The project also aims to put on a number of talks and events for members of the public, including 'beating the bounds' of the various parishes; events such as these have proved very popular in other local parishes among a wide cross-section of the population.

Whether as volunteers or through public events, a wider range of people would become involved in heritage as a result of this project. Having identified the Norden survey as an unusually important element of local heritage, a significant outcome of the project would be its wider dissemination in a readily accessible form. Manorial documents, fascinating though they are, are often the preserve of academic historians; however, the presentation, interpretation, and mapping of the Norden survey will make this document available to a large and diverse range of people, some of whom will actually be living on land described in its pages. The most important element of the project, though, is the friendship, energy, and fun that would be generated by the translating teams working together; as such, in combination with planned public events, the project would generate a significant improvement in well-being. Moreover, as volunteer training, including Latin, palaeography, the interpretation of manorial records, and the use of GIS, lies at the heart of this project, there would not only be a legacy of interest and well-being, but a legacy of skills as well.

The Friend of Devon Archives, who are committed to the exploration and wider dissemination of local documents, would be the lead applicant for this project, supported by a number of partners: the Devon Rural Archive at Shilstone, who have offered to host the whole-project seminars; the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, who have welcomed our application to publish the Norden survey; and the Dartmoor National Park Authority, who have agreed to host training in GIS. Following a seminar in March 2019, held jointly with Devon Archaeological Society, the local translating teams have been assembled and will be meeting at the end of September to outline the project and facilitate an application to NLHF. The project itself would commence in January 2020: it is estimated that it would take two years to complete, although publication may take longer.

This project will dominate what FODA will do this do this year and before I go any further I must mention two things which will strengthen our team . Firstly we welcome Abbi Gray of the Devon Rural Archive to the Committee – a link to Community Archives and a link to Devon History Society with whom we have agreed to work more closely with. Secondly the taking up of the Newsletter mantel by Sue Jackson – who is on a mission to ensure a regular and broad round-up of the Archive scene in Devon.

So the Norden project is going to be our main focus offering a wonderful community enterprise across six parishes. The Devon Rural Archive will host a joint seminar with Devon History Society in June and next years AGM and Conference will also be at Devon Rural Archive with a special presentation on the Norden Project. Personally I am delighted with this emphasis on Community Archives and look forward to participating in the Dartmoor symposium on this subject in January.

But as ever we support projects of SWHT,/DHC and particularly applaud the service they are now starting in Torbay and the maintaining of the North Devon service.

And finally an update on – The Box where FODA has lobbied to make sure archives not neglected.

Members will be aware that the Plymouth & West Devon Record Office is due to move from its premises in the Coxside commercial district of Plymouth to purpose built storage and display facilities within “The Box” on North Hill, which incorporates the old Museum and Library. “The Box” is to open next Spring as the flagship museum and cultural centre for the region and will house the archives and a dedicated Mayflower 400 exhibition.

Opening hours at the Record Office were restricted to two days a week during the summer and the Record Office is now closed to facilitate the move, to re-open when “The Box” opens next Spring, probably in early April.

All buildings have now been handed over by the building contractors Wilmot Dixon, and the exhibition fitting out is under way. The renovated ship’s figureheads which will be a feature of the entrance atrium are due to be installed this month. Also imminent is an updating of the website of “The Box” which will lead into the announcement later this year of the launch details.

So I say to say to FODA members in 2020 its largely look west!

Katharine Chant
Chair, FODA