

Marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee



Wembury in the 1950s



*Based on Peter Lugar's memory books
and the Wembury Archive*

Produced by Wembury Local History Society

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Introduction

Wembury Local History Society has produced this booklet to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It has two parts. In the first we have drawn heavily on Peter Lugar's memory books to recall what Coronation Day was like here in Wembury.

In the second we have chosen themes to illustrate how, in addition to there being a new monarch, life in the parish was changing significantly. Here, too, we have drawn on Peter's memories, sometimes condensed. These condensed sections often include quotes, mainly from Peter, which have been highlighted in blue. We have also included several additional topics related to the change theme which are based on Wembury Archive material and some of my own investigations.

We are naturally very grateful to Peter for his permission to use both his written material and photographs – almost all those we have included come from his collection.

We are also very grateful to the Parish Council for their grant to part-fund the booklet. Without this support its production would not have been possible.

David Pinder

Chair, Wembury Local History Society

May 9th, 2022

Booklet © Peter Lugar and Wembury Local History Society 2022

Coronation Day: Fun and Games in Wembury

Peter Lugar

On Coronation Day, June 2nd, 1953, there was a whole day of fun and games on the field behind the hall (which is now the school playing field). There were all the usual village games like sack races, three legged races, egg and spoon races, skittles, lucky dip, skittles to win a piglet, and - much to the delight of the children - ice cream (a rare treat back then). I won one of the three-legged races with Roland Frood as my partner.



**The Lugar Family children on Coronation Day.
L to R, Nichola, Angela, Peter and Tiny. The building
behind is a wooden hut, the original village hall.**

The children of Wembury School sang “Elizabeth of England”. There was a tea for the whole village in the hall, the centrepiece of which was a huge Coronation Cake which stepped up in three tiers terminating in a crown made of marzipan. After the cake had been distributed, the crown was raffled.

A doll, which was in a ‘Coronation’ gown, had been dressed and presented by Mrs Stanley of Thorn House, and for sixpence (2½ p) a go, people had to try and guess its name in order to win it. I don’t know what the contingency plan was if two people guessed the name correctly! As it turned out the name of the doll was “Eunice” and nobody guessed correctly. The doll was auctioned, and the bids went up in sixpences, and my mother successfully outbid all others and got the doll for £1.



The Coronation Mug

The stamp on the base reads:

2nd June 1953

**Presented by Wembury
Coronation Committee**

The Wembury Coronation Committee ensured that every child in the village up to school leaving age received a Souvenir Coronation Mug. These were given out on Coronation Day at the Village Hall. Each mug had been stamped on the underside at the potteries, before firing, with a special commemorative stamp.

Meanwhile in Westminster Abbey . .

In 1953 our local Member of Parliament for the Tavistock Constituency, of which Wembury was a part, was Mr Henry Studholme of Wembury House.

In addition to his parliamentary duties, Mr Studholme was also Vice-Chamberlain to the Royal Household, and as such had a prominent seat in Westminster Abbey at the Coronation. Here is an extract from a letter to the staff at Wembury House on 3rd June 1953, the day after the Coronation.

---- It was a great privilege to take part in the ceremony in the Abbey yesterday. The beauty of the service and the dignity and majesty of the scene, with the colours of robes and uniforms and the sparkle of diamonds and decorations; but above all the superb bearing of the Queen herself throughout were things that one can never forget.

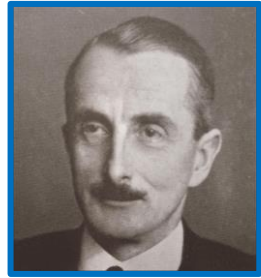
The weather was horrible and that was most unfortunate for all the people outside who were not under cover. But it did not seem to damp their spirits or enthusiasm.

Mrs Studholme looked her best and I felt proud of her. We both had excellent seats in the Abbey and saw the whole ceremony, crowning, acknowledgement, anointing, etc., and the homage. We were on the opposite side to the Royal Family and so we saw them all perfectly. Little Prince Charles behaved very well and was frightfully interested in everything.

*I hope the television was a success,
it seems to have been a
tremendous success in London.*

Best Wishes to you all

HS



In the Coronation Honours List Mr Studholme became a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (CVO), which is in the personal gift of the Sovereign, and in 1956 was promoted to Knight Commander, thus becoming Sir Henry Studholme.

The television referred to was one that Mr Studholme had temporarily installed in Wembury House so that the staff were able to see the Coronation as it was taking place.



An early TV set

This one was quite an upmarket model, with doors to hide the screen when not in use. The vast majority of TVs at the time of the Coronation were much more basic.

In those days there were only about three television sets in the whole of Wembury, and the quality of the reception was rather hit and miss as there was no transmitter at North Hessay Tor, and Caradon Hill was far into the future!

Changing times in Wembury

From army hut to War Memorial Hall

This account is based on [Peter Lugar's](#) much longer recollections of the topic.

When a celebration dance was held on Coronation night, it took place in far-from-ideal conditions. The venue was the village hall, known as 'the hut'. This was an ex-army hut which was moved after World War One to stand in Knighton, on the bank almost opposite today's post office. While it had many deficiencies, e.g. its long narrow shape was not ideal for many activities, the main issue was hygiene because, although the water main ran very close, the hall was not connected. This meant no running water for catering or washing up, no proper hand-washing facilities, and no flush toilets. Instead, ladies simply had an Elsan (chemical) toilet in a closet in the hall, while men used an outside urinal in a corrugated-iron shelter with dangerously rotten uprights.

The old village hall, originally a WWI army hut at Renney Camp near Heybrook Bay



Despite the seriousness of these drawbacks, Peter recalls that the only improvement made was to make the urinal safe. Instead, efforts concentrated on fundraising for a new hall. This had begun in 1938, and continued during and after the war:

“ . . . the job of raising the money and getting the hall built seemed to take forever. During the war large numbers of the service personnel billeted in the area were entertained in the hall, there were regular

dances, concerts, and cinema shows. Some of these carried on through the air raids . . . [and after the war,] fund-raising events were always going on, bazaars, whist drives, dances, jumble sales, etc.”

Despite all this activity, progress was slow. But in 1955 the government introduced grants for new village halls, and a successful bid was made for £1,400. Building could now go ahead, and on July 28th, 1956, the War Memorial Hall was officially opened.



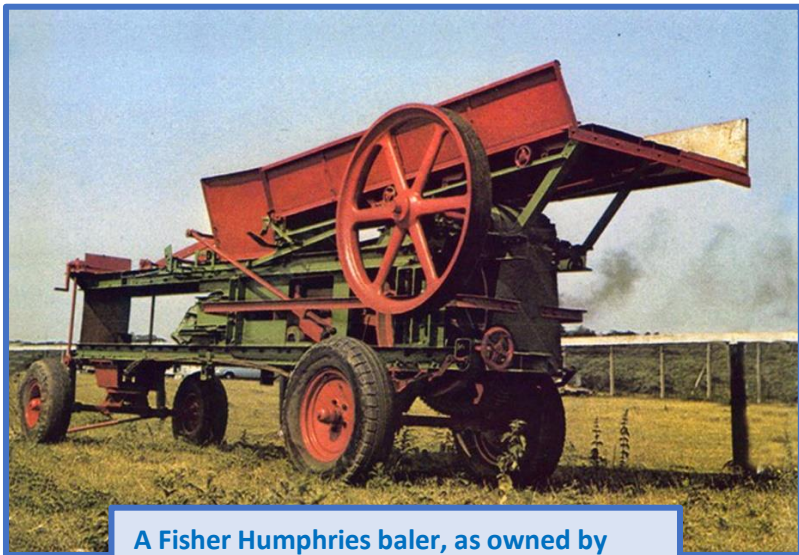
The opening
of the new
hall, July 28th,
1956

Unsurprisingly, the event was celebrated that evening with a ‘Grand Dance’, in significantly better conditions than had been possible at the Coronation dance only three years earlier. Even so, in an economic climate that was still difficult, what was achieved was only part way to what was planned. Only the central section of today’s hall could be afforded; the furniture from the old hall had to be reused; there was no heating system; and large roof vents allowed in far too much wind. In Peter’s words, **“the first winter was horrendous”**. While the hall was certainly a big step forward, it also underlined the fact that the 1950s was a time of transition.

Life on the farm

Peter Lugar remembers very clearly from his farming childhood that mechanisation was progressing rapidly in the 1950s. But his reminiscences also demonstrate that good labour supplies were still vital in those days, not least at harvest time.

In the 1950s, my Father had the threshing contract for the area and had a Ransomes threshing machine and a Fisher Humphries baler, which had to be towed behind tractors to wherever they were required. They were both quite substantial pieces of equipment and were belt driven from the tractors.



A Fisher Humphries baler, as owned by Peter Lugar's father

Overall, it was quite a manpower-intensive operation, and when it was set up and working flat out it was quite a production line. The sheaves would be brought to the thresher by tractor and trailer. There would be men there to operate the grab which hoisted them up and dropped them on top. There, two men cut the twine on the sheaves and dropped

them into the thresher's hopper. Others at the back end took away the full sacks of corn to an awaiting trailer and put new sacks on for filling. The chaff that didn't get blown away on the wind was bagged up for horse fodder. The baler had men at the front who fed the straw into it, while others removed the bales as they came out of the baler, and built the rick.



Threshing and baling were still labour-intensive activities. Sacks collecting the grain are in the bottom-right corner, with the baler on the left.

Threshing was always quite a sociable event, and provided casual work for a lot of village people. I remember that even the Coleman brothers from the forge got themselves involved. People who were home on leave from the forces helped out (National Service was still going on at that time). Many retired people helped, and also older teenagers. The work usually went on until it got too dark to do any more, so some people helped in the evenings, having worked all day at their normal jobs. A lot of people from the other farms in the area also helped, knowing that it would be reciprocated when it was their turn.

Exit the Army, enter the Navy

David Pinder

In World War II, key strategic sites around the Empire were defended by powerful coastal gun batteries manned by the army. Three were in Wembury, as part of an arc of them protecting Plymouth. Watch House Battery stood high above Fort Bovisand, while Lentney and Renney Batteries were at Renney Camp, close to Heybrook Bay. All were equipped with high-powered guns adapted from a battleship design.

After the war, these batteries naturally lost their strategic purpose and a long decline began. Watch House Battery was decommissioned as early as 1946; Lentney followed in 1957; and that year Renney also lost its heavy armaments, although some training lingered on until 1991.



Renney Battery: compact, low profile, but very powerful

In contrast, developments were completely different at Wembury Point. In 1940 this was taken over by the War Office, which initially established an anti-aircraft battery (in the process displacing a small holiday camp and blocking extensive plans for housing development). Gunnery training was introduced, and for this the army was joined by the navy. By

the end of the war, naval gunnery training was the main activity and was soon upgraded. Practice and accommodation facilities were extensively improved, and in 1956 the Point officially became HMS Cambridge (the traditional name for the Royal Navy's gunnery school).



HMS Cambridge postcard. Centre: the 'Ship's' Bell; top left, on parade; top right and bottom left, firing practice; bottom right, the accommodation blocks, which replaced wartime huts.

Throughout the 1950s, and until the navy withdrew in 2001, this shore base was a prominent feature of Wembury life. There was a significant downside: Gunnery training was noisy, and local people had to get used to the sound of gunfire, as well as that of circulating aircraft towing target drones for anti-aircraft practice. But there were open days and strong links between St Werburgh's Church and the school. There were even school visits: Peter Lugar – who later joined the Navy - vividly remembers his first sight of a radar screen!

Water supplies and quality of life

David Pinder

Before mains water began to be available, just before World War II, the parish depended on springs and wells for its supplies. For those living on farms, this was relatively satisfactory. In hilly parts, especially Knighton, farms were positioned below springs, so that spring water could be piped down to them. The water, coming from a spring substantially higher up the hill, often fed a loft tank in the house by gravity. From there it was piped to the floors below. Where hills and springs were not available, particularly in Down Thomas, the farms had wells. Although getting well water to the loft was more difficult, it could be done with hand pumps, allowing these farmhouses, too, to have running water.



**Robert Rowland today
with the farm pump,**

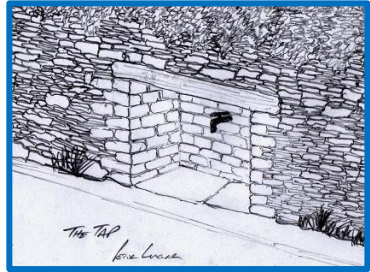
**Traine Farm used a
spring too low to
provide a good supply,
so water was pumped
from a small reservoir
just beside the
farmhouse. Mains water
made this arrangement
redundant.**

But most people lived in cottages, not farmhouses, and for them life was considerably more difficult. Springs could not supply every cottage, and it was rare for one to have a well. Rainwater was often gathered from the roof, but fresh drinking water had to come from a small number of spring-fed roadside supplies.

The Tap on Knighton Hill

This was uphill from the narrows, opposite Tap Cottage. Today there is a grass bank.

Drawing: Peter Lugar



The Down Thomas village pump recess.

This is still to be seen almost opposite the Mussel Inn and Spring Cottage.

For those who used them, all these roadside sources had one obvious drawback: the water had to be carried home. But there were several other disadvantages, all of which greatly affected quality of life. There could be no running water in kitchens, no flush toilets, and no bathrooms, whereas sale documents show that almost all farmhouses enjoyed these benefits.

So, when mains water arrived, it brought the opportunity to greatly reduce this quality-of-life gap. Yet it seems probable that this did not happen overnight, because providing new facilities, especially flush toilets and bathrooms, could be costly. As a result, for many cottage residents the late 1940s and 1950s were likely to have been a time of very welcome transition in which, at varying speeds, they could at last begin to enjoy far better housing conditions – even if, as Robert Rowland remembers, water pressure was well short of today's standard and the supply could be variable.

New residents, changing community

David Pinder

In the 1930s two new landowners began selling plots of building land in Heybrook Bay and along Church Road. Although this was stopped by World War II and the austerity that followed, during the 1950s growth restarted as the country's circumstances improved. Peter Lugar remembers that those who bought land had very varied backgrounds. Many moved from Plymouth, including during WWII, but some came from much further afield. While there were those who were still working, others were retired. And although many moved permanently to Wembury, some built weekend retreats and even places for their holidays.

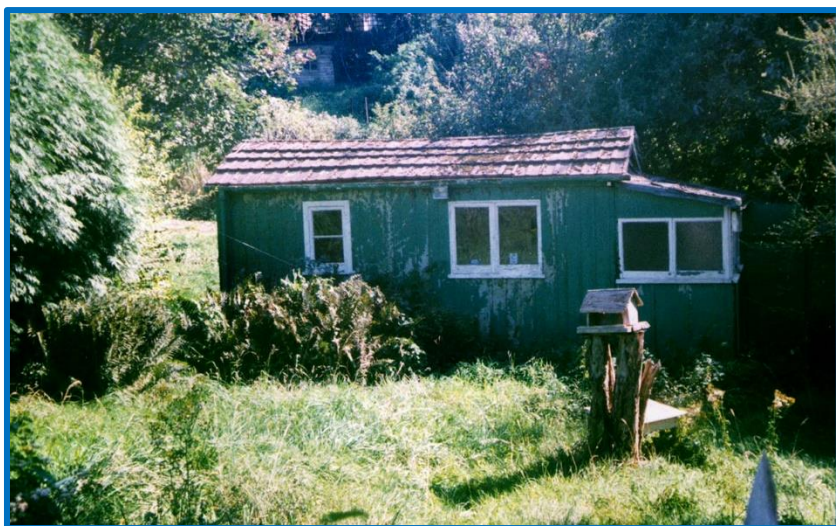
This meant that the nature of the community changed significantly, especially in the 1930s and 1950s. Whereas agriculture had dominated for centuries up to the interwar years, now the community grew to be much more diverse. However, this change was less straightforward than it might seem, because Heybrook Bay and the Church Road area, where building was concentrated, attracted quite different residents.

Peter Lugar's memories of the Church Road area again help us to explore this. While there were some large houses, most were modest bungalows, similar to thousands that were built around the country.



**A typical early
bungalow: Alta
Vista in Beach
View Crescent in
the 1940s**

But many plots were also bought by people who needed, or could only afford, much simpler properties.



Longmead, the last of the 'shacks' on Church Road, survived until the owner, Mrs Christine Rose, died in 1997

Usually these were huts, many of them wooden, but other materials such as corrugated iron and asbestos were also used for some.

Unsurprisingly, few were used as permanent homes; instead, these huts were chiefly weekend retreats or holiday homes.

Visually, Heybrook Bay provided a marked contrast. On the following postwar photograph there are no signs of the huts and small bungalows that were typical around Church Road. Instead, this was now a locality dominated by substantial properties, mostly houses, but also a hotel and a guest house (the two largest buildings in the picture). Clearly, this had become a place for residents who were quite well-to-do.



Post-war Heybrook Bay

This contrast had nothing to do with planning – both areas took off before the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, when official controls were light. Instead, the cause was the very different goals of the landowners selling the building land. The Church Road landowner was Archibald Knight, an auctioneer, estate agent and land speculator based in Somerset. Like innumerable speculators around the country, his sole objective was to profit by selling as many building plots as possible as quickly as possible. To encourage this, his sale contracts left purchasers free to build what they wanted, with the result that the area became particularly attractive to clients of modest means.

Meanwhile, Heybrook Bay was bought by Robert Stansell, who took a far less common approach. He came from Exeter, produced an estate design for the area, built himself a house, and imposed numerous conditions on clients buying plots on the estate, as these extracts from the deeds for Plot 66B make clear:

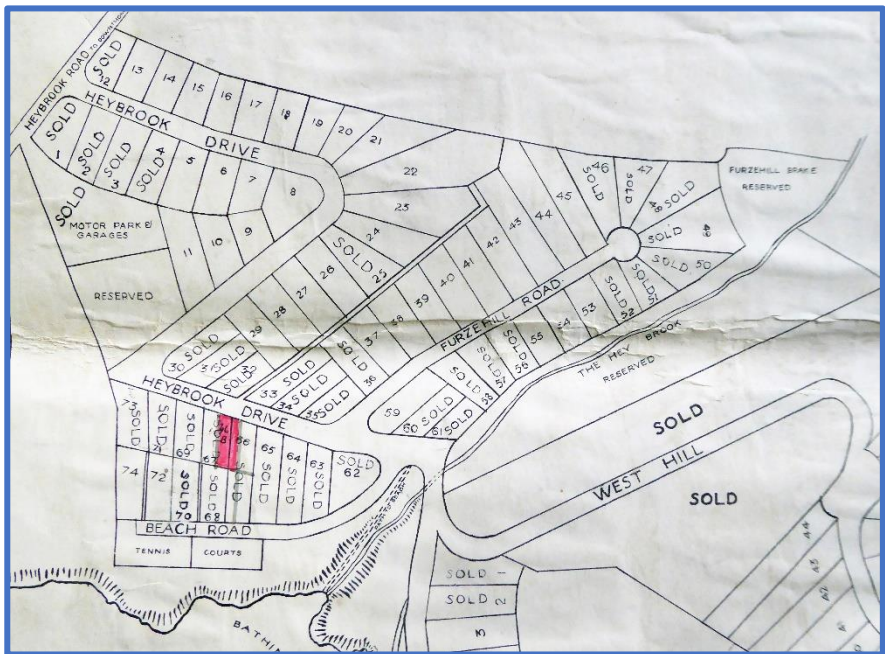
“No hut shed or caravan on wheels or other chattel . . . intended as a living and sleeping apartment or for the sale of goods [shall] be erected . . . nor shall any booths swings or roundabouts . . .

The Vendor or his successor in title may remove and dispose of any such erection . . . and may forcibly enter on the said land [to do so].

Not more than one dwellinghouse . . . shall be erected . . . at a cost of at least £300 . . .

The plans . . . shall be first submitted to and approved by the Vendor or the Surveyor . . .

From this it is very clear that Robert Stansell's aim was to attract relatively well-to-do newcomers. And to do so it was necessary to completely exclude the types of development found not just around Church Road, but in numerous other places nationwide.



An original map of Robert Stansell's Heybrook Bay Estate, taken from deeds for the plot coloured red. Here the purchaser built The Haven, which is still there in much modernised form.

Social housing for the lucky few

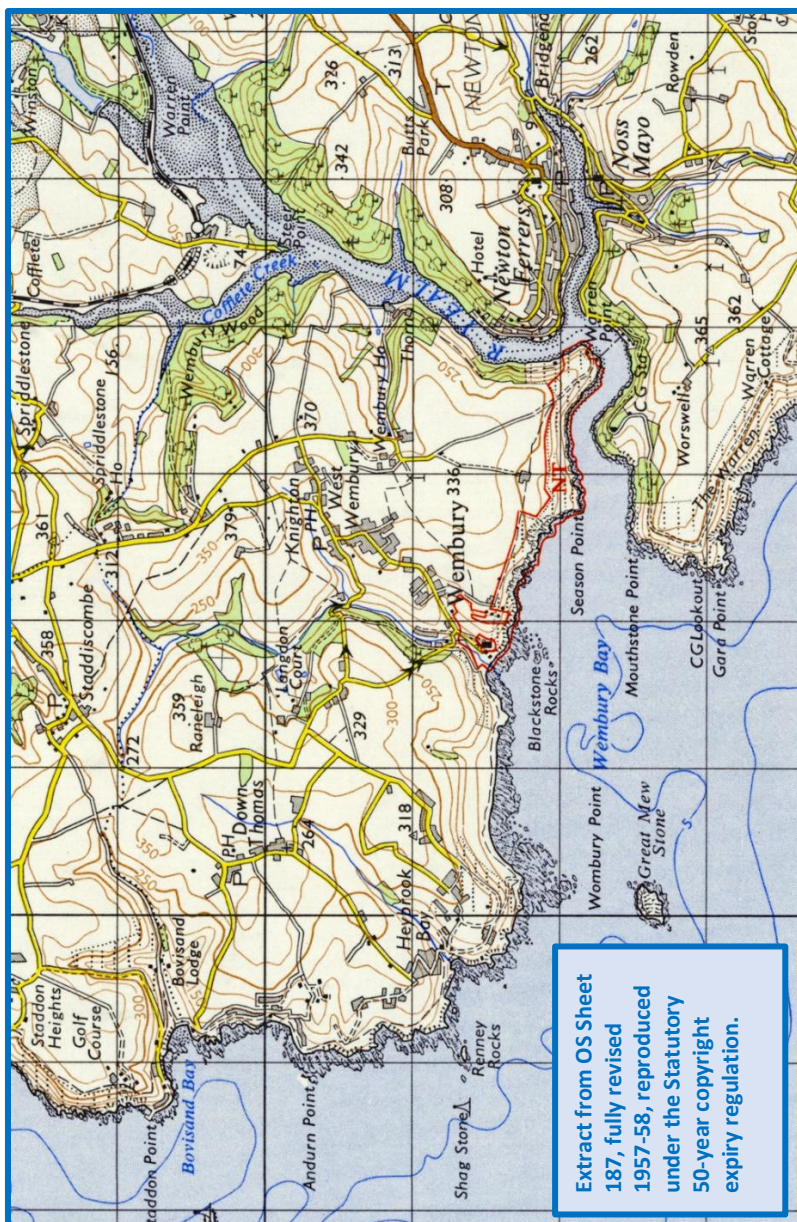
In 1950 families either owned their homes or rented them from a landlord. But in 1951 six semi-detached Council Houses were built on the blacksmith's field in Knighton, opposite the smithy. Peter recalls that they **'were amongst the first houses to be built in the village after the war. They were never the most beautiful of houses, with their depressing grey finish they never did seem to fit into the landscape all that well.'**



Despite this, they were **'a Godsend to the people who moved into them'** because most had lived in huts in various locations, and all had endured very poor sanitation. Even though the Haimes family's home was not a hut but a cottage, it had **'only one bedroom, no bathroom and an outside toilet, water had to be drawn from a tap in the other cottage, and cooking was all done on the black lead range in the living room.'**

In sharp contrast, the council houses provided all 'mod cons' **'including the 'new' 13 amp square pin plug sockets!'** As a result, when the six lucky families moved in, they immediately enjoyed a quality of life well ahead of many others living in the huts and cottages previously described.

Wembury in the late 1950s



Wembury Local History Society was founded over 50 years ago. From September to May we offer a series of monthly evening talks, plus visits in the local area in June and July. Each year we offer a diverse programme, covering a wide range of topics drawn from places and subjects of historical interest in Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall, as well as in Wembury itself. Our programme for autumn 2022 is:

September 15th *The History of the River Yealm*, Terry Calcott, author and member of the Port of Plymouth Canoeing Association

October 20th *Roman and Medieval Communities in the Teign and Tamar Valleys*, Dr Chris Smart, Department of Archaeology, Exeter University

November 17th *Reputation and Slander in Elizabethan Devon*, Dr Todd Gray, Devon historian, author and broadcaster

Why not join us? Annual membership costs £12.50 and there is a quick and secure online payment facility on the website. You can also join at one of our meetings, at which visitors are also welcome for a small fee (currently £2).

Website: wemburyhistory.org.uk



And you can follow us on facebook, where we regularly post items of local history interest.

If you have enjoyed this booklet, you can find more articles exploring Wembury's diverse history on our website. All our publications are free downloads. Just go to the site, open the publications page, and scroll down for the list.

If you are interested in family history, archive documents you may find useful include our *Churchyard Survey* and a collection of early census records for Wembury. You can also contact our family history expert, Robert Rowland, using this email address:

traine.cottages@btopenworld.com

The Wembury Archive

We have created and maintain the *Wembury Archive*, comprising thousands of documents and photographs donated to us by individuals and local societies over many years. If you are interested in a particular local topic and want to know more, please get in touch via the contact page on our website. We may well be able to help you.

You might also like to get in touch if you have documents or photographs which shed light on aspects of Wembury's past but have no good home for them. We will always consider adding to the archive. Again, please contact us via our website.

Wembury history: too good to miss!



The front cover of the Coronation Programme. The proceeds from sales to the public went to King George's Jubilee Trust 'to provide more and better facilities for the recreation and guidance of the young'.