

SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society recently held its AGM ahead of the January monthly lecture. The Chair circulated a review of the year's many and varied activities and the Treasurer presented audited accounts that showed a healthy balance. Officers of the Society were all re-elected and the general committee welcomed two new members: Sarah Whiddett and Margaret Russell-Gould.

Following the business section of the meeting an illustrated lecture was then given by David James of the Pembroke Historical Society who had kindly stepped forward at short notice. The theme of his talk was 'The Year of the Sea,' an eclectic journey through our county's maritime past. From the misericords of the choir stalls at St. David's Cathedral to the town seal of Haverfordwest, from Viking seafarers to Nelson at Neyland the sea has played a significant role in the history of Pembrokeshire. However, three unusual stories were explored.

In the late nineteenth century Japan sought urgently to modernise its navy and as part of this programme a young naval officer, Togo Heihachiro, was sent to Pembroke Dock to study shipbuilding in the Royal Navy Dockyard and to familiarise himself with the deployment of iron-clad steamships. The young officer was later to rise through the ranks, eventually becoming Marshall Admiral of the Japanese Fleet and to command in battle against the Chinese and Russian fleets. Togo had sent a Gingko tree seed to be planted in the garden of his lodgings in the town and today a mature tree can still be seen there. Such is the reputation of the admiral in his homeland that with the advice of the National Botanic Garden the possibility of sending a cutting from the tree in his memory back to Japan is being explored.

During the First World War a German U-boat, UB 91, patrolled the western approaches and often moved close in to the Pembrokeshire shore. In 1918 UB 91 sank the American coastguard cutter the Tampa off the Pembrokeshire coast with the loss of all crew. Many of the bodies were washed ashore in coastal parishes and later given appropriate burials in local churchyards. Much the same fate, and in the same year and by the agency of the same U-boat, befell the Japanese passenger liner, the Hirano Maru. Of the 329 passengers on board only some 20 survived and again local churchyards became a final resting place for the victims. In this the anniversary year both the American Coastguards and the Japanese Authorities are working with local history groups on the provision of suitable memorials to commemorate the loss of life.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Mrs. Rosemary Hayes for a wide-ranging and unusual exploration of our maritime history. The next lecture, at 7.30 on 21 February in the Regency Hall, will be given by Dr Toby Driver of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. The title of his lecture will be 'Exploring Climate Change in Pembrokeshire.' Non-members are as ever welcome to attend on the night.