



Sutton Poyntz Society

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More information at suttonpoyntz.org.uk

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John Willows - engineer, historian, archivist, teacher and good friend to Sutton Poyntz

John Willows, the Wessex Water Museum curator, has been connected with Sutton Poyntz since 1976, but he is actually a Londoner, born at Roxeth, now South Harrow, on 16 January 1945.



He has the distinction of being the youngest person present that year at the street party to celebrate VE Day! As an apprentice with London Underground until 1965 he was given a solid grounding in mechanical matters, from design in the drawing office through to keeping large and heavy train engines in working

order. London Underground had a policy of rotating their engineers around the various railway depots in the suburbs every three years, which meant that John had many years of long commuting journeys, catching a 6 o'clock train in the morning and sometimes not getting home again until 8 at night. Married to Sue in 1968, by 1975 they had both had enough of this way of life and decided, even though John loved his job, to move out of London. Hence it was that John arrived at the Weymouth office of Wessex Water in January 1976. This meant that his commute from the office to his digs was now a stroll across the Alexandra Gardens! Sue joined him that May and they bought a house in Cattistock where they still live today. In another 40 years, says John, they might just be considered locals there. In 1975 the Turbine House and RAM Pump in Sutton Poyntz had been listed, so in June 1976 he was sent down to help Eric Aubin, then in charge at the Waterworks, to make it presentable for public visits. This sparked John's interest in industrial archaeology, which has developed over the years.

In 1979 he became responsible for managing the water pumping stations in West Dorset, Weymouth, Portland and the Purbecks, plus the two stations on the Lulworth estate, which until 1976 had its own water supply. Thereafter, internal company reorganisations saw John move offices within Dorset until the coming of privatisation in 1989. The new Water Act insisted that water authorities paid due regard to heritage. In practice this meant archiving drawings and records and generating files for, and maintaining, historic assets. In time John became secretary of the Wessex Water Industrial Archaeology Society. Three museums were planned, but only the one at Sutton Poyntz came into being, as well as it still being Weymouth's primary water supply source. The redundant Steam Room, greatly extended



over the years, was in disrepair and John oversaw its considerable refurbishment. Wessex Water was obviously committed to the project, and when, some years later, a new Chlorine Pump Room was built, the design won a civic award. In 1997, after further company reorganisation, John found himself working with the Public Relations Department from the Superintendent's house at Sutton Poyntz. This, formerly the Upper Mill, had been Eric and Coral Aubin's home for 34 years.

John's role was to oversee the Museum and to lecture on and demonstrate its contents. He points out that Sutton Poyntz has always had an educational role. As far back as the Second World War nurses in training were brought to the site as part of their introduction to vital public utilities, soldiers were shown the equipment so they knew how to restore supplies in liberated continental countries and Weymouth Grammar Schools used it to increase youngsters' knowledge of where their water came from, and machinery needed to provide it. Something, perhaps, of which many of us are unaware. For instance, did you know that a hydraulic RAM, or hydram, is a cyclic water pump powered by water power? Well, Green & Carter have been making such pumps since 1772. In fact their very first pump delivery was to an ancestor of Bill Egerton's in Cheshire! They turned to John, as an acknowledged expert water industry archivist, for advice on preserving the company archive of design and commerce documents, then kept in a cellar! Happily, thanks to John's help, this hugely valuable archive is now in a good state. After 20 years in his PR role John is now retiring - not completely for he will still, for instance, undertake some lectures - but his wife Sue will undoubtedly see a lot more of him!

He will also have more time to devote to his hobbies as Chairman of the Dorset Industrial Archaeology Society, Vice Chairman of the Dorset Postcard Club and for bell ringing. He refuses to be called a campanologist for he says they play tunes, he just pulls ropes, though I suspect he is being modest. Over the decades it is fair to say that Wessex Water has been concerned with and supportive of the village in many ways, and John has been the local face of that concern and assistance for much of that time. Since the formation of the Village Biodiversity Group, Dave Emery has worked with John on the Conservation Area behind the Water Works, and he pays tribute to the active and wholehearted support that John has given over the years, backed by the Wessex Water Environmental Group, to enhance and make accessible this valuable natural resource. It is also no exaggeration to say that the bi-annual Sutton Poyntz Fayre would not have been success it has undoubtedly become without the help that John and Wessex Water have provided. We wish him all the best in his retirement and are glad that he is not completely severing his ties with the village where he will always be welcome.

Forthcoming events

Summer Coffee Mornings : Jean and Maureen are organising charity Coffee mornings in the Mission Hall between 10.30am and noon on the first Friday in every month through the summer.

Sutton Poyntz Friday Art Group Spring Exhibition : on Saturday 22 April & Sunday 23 April at the Mission Hall from 11am to 4.30pm each day. Entry is free, refreshments will be available and you are invited to vote for your favourite picture. Following previous successful events everyone is welcome to enjoy the chat, the coffee, the cake and the brilliant art work. Don't miss it.

Better news of the Village Bus Service

You will have seen from the newsbite that from Sunday 21 May there will be three 4A buses from the village, leaving at 0932, 1227 and 1527 with possible returns from Weymouth at 1210 and 1510. These are summer times, and contingent on the service being used.

Coffee Mornings

The last of the winter coffee mornings was well attended and garnered over £50 for Society funds. More importantly it proved another thoroughly enjoyable way to spend a morning, catching up with friends old and new. John Sutherland would like to thank everyone who attended over the winter, and especially those who provided the delicious cakes we all enjoyed.

Annual Pond Clean-up

Jez Cunningham reports that "A damp and gloomy Saturday 18 March didn't deter over a dozen intrepid volunteers arriving for the annual pond cleanup. Knowing that access to the reeds and weeds out towards the middle of the pond would be inaccessible to normal folk, an enterprising Keith arrived with his inflatable, and David donned his waders to join him in the centre 'deep end'. Elsewhere, lesser folk in conventional wellies attacked the undergrowth taking hold in the 'shallow end'. Progress was rapid, more volunteers arrived with wheelbarrows, and Maureen delivered steaming cups of very welcome coffee, fresh from the Mission Hall cafeteria. Even the sun came out (briefly). John filled his Land-Rover a couple of times and disposed of loads of foliage at the tip, meanwhile it was rumoured that Bill had offered to accept the trimmings on his compost heap - let's hope we got that right and he is still talking to us! Within two hours we stepped back and decided we'd finished. Returning later in the day to admire our handiwork was a rewarding sight - I hope you all agree we did a good job - and the ducks and moorhens quickly returned to enjoy their new environs. Reminder for 2018: do it a few weeks earlier!"

The youngsters still need you!

Mike Haine has had no response to his a plea for a volunteer to become the Weymouth East Scout Group Leader. After 40 years helping our youngsters Mike has earned the right to a little rest, although he will remain an Assistant Cub Scout Leader and available to provide assistance and advice. If you would like to help, or know of someone who might, contact Mike on 832995. Please help!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Business matters

Minutes of the Society monthly committee meetings are on the web site.

Newsbites are email news updates. Contact newsletter@suttonpoyntz.org.uk to receive these. Jez also displays them on the Cartshed notice board.

Organising an event? Send the editor a reminder about a week before it takes place so that a Newsbite can be circulated.

Neighbourhood Plan - see progress at suttonpoyntz.org.uk/neighbourhood

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman Mike Blee	568135	Secretary Bill Egerton	83287
Treasurer John Sutherland	832227	Peter Dye	837139
Peter Riley	834653	Jez Cunningham	835811
Sue Wintle	834209	Hilary Davidson	834479
Jacqui Atkinson		Jill Kelsey	835605
Chris Balfe	07969 781145	Jackie Greet	

Please contact the editor with news and views, but make sure your input is with him at latest by 25 April, ready for the next issue in May.