

Review of 'The Cathedral Yard Fire' by Dr Todd Gray MBE 12th November 2020



Todd delivered an outstanding, fascinating, and most informative and interesting presentation to approx. 120 members from Exmouth and District U3A (a record number) at our monthly meeting via 'zoom'. During the presentation one of our members wrote in the 'chat' function: "I'm watching from Spain. Glad I didn't miss this talk."

As we discovered it was so fortunate that Todd was at home in Exeter on 28th October 2016 to be able to respond to an urgent request from BBC Spotlight to provide historical background on an emerging news story: the Royal Clarence Hotel in Exeter was on fire.

Todd's thorough, dedicated and conscientious approach to local historical research paid off and he was able to respond to questions from the media, giving more than 50 interviews. Importantly, because he knew the layout and construction of the Royal Clarence Hotel and the surrounding buildings he was able to be of significant help to the fire service and the Council. As Todd explained, he knew that whilst the two upper stories were eighteenth century and of fairly flimsy construction the lower two older floors were far more substantial being constructed of stone. His knowledge was influential in ensuring that as much of the building that could be saved was saved. Thank you Todd!



Todd was meticulous in taking photographs, making notes and undertaking further research ever curious about what lay around the next corner. Never afraid to ask permission to look round private properties Todd has been able to build up a picture of the area in which the Royal Clarence Hotel stands, so adding to our knowledge of the area.

Throughout we were shown more photographs, maps, architectural plans and other documents than we have ever seen in a presentation to our U3A. Todd captured our attention right from the start and we were spellbound by all that Todd knew; he really brought history to life.

Overall it was refreshing and inspiring to listen to and view so much material from such a great historian. By the end of the presentation we could see why Todd has an MBE and the Freedom of the City of Exeter for his services to local history.

Thank you so much for a fantastic presentation Todd and for staying on to answer so many questions from our members, ever generous with your time!

Review by Christine Chittock, Chairperson and Speakers' Coordinator,
Exmouth and District U3A.

Photos courtesy of Dr Todd Gray MBE