

Review of 'Britain with Betjeman' by John Vigar MA FSA Scot FRSA
<https://www.johnevigar.com/> Thursday 28th January 2021

John Vigar's professional delivery allowed us to gain an insight into the world of the Poet Laureate, conservation campaigner and broadcaster Sir John Betjeman CBE via John's wonderfully clear photographs and his well-chosen words. As we discovered from John's excellent talk, Betjeman's love of historic architecture developed in childhood on his travels with his family from their home in Hampstead to Cornwall. Betjeman born in 1906 was fortunate to be the son of prosperous parents who owned a car and it was some of the places they visited on their travels that left a lasting impression on Betjeman. Castle Combe for example with buildings of honey coloured local stone which must have looked so different to the buildings Betjeman was familiar with in London.

Early on in John's talk we were presented with a date of 22nd December 1974 that had changed John's life but we left until the end to find out why with a number of clues on the way.

Living in Norfolk John had a number of treats in store for us as we viewed the attractive architecture of Norfolk churches, for example St Michael and All Angels, Barton Turf. John had adapted his talk to include places in Devon as well, such as Knighthayes designed by Betjeman's favourite architect William Burges (1827 – 1881).



Photo: Christine Chittock

It was clear that John has a passion for English churches just as Betjeman did. Fortunately we can watch Betjeman's 'A passion for English churches' first recorded in 1974 and now on BBC iplayer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkqY-MBPTR8> Betjeman was part of the founding group of 'The Friends of Friendless Churches' in 1957. As John explained here in Devon we can see the beautiful perpendicular fifteenth century Grade 1 chapel of Ayshford, Burlescombe, Tiverton. If you get the chance to visit 'remember not to shut inquisitive sheep in the church when you leave!' John with his evident dedication to the preservation of churches is a trustee

of 'The Friends of Friendless Churches' covering England and Wales

<https://friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/>

On a very wet day in May 1984 John joined mourners who had battled their way across St Enodoc golf course for the funeral of Sir John Betjeman. If you visit St Enodoc Church today you will find exquisite engraving on Betjeman's headstone made from practically impermeable Delabole slate.

So what was special for John Vigar on 22nd December 1974? Well, his Careers teacher had suggested that John should write to John Betjeman to discover how he had developed his passion for conservation. Fortunately Betjeman replied and John was invited to tea followed by a number of subsequent visits to see John Betjeman. Following those timely meetings John was set to follow his interests with a career and retirement that has encompassed his specialist subject ecclesiology – the study of church architecture and associated topics. Via John's specialist knowledge we learnt about fascinating aspects of John Betjeman's life, leaving us fired up to find out more. Thank you John.

John is booked again on **Thursday 27th January 2022** for '**Crenels and Merlons**' looking at the chronology of battlements and exploring a selection of buildings both famous and obscure to tell the story of this traditional and quirky feature.

Review by Christine Chittock, Chairperson and Speakers' Co-ordinator,