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**NATIONAL
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The National Archives



archive
awareness
campaign

For immediate release

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ARCHIVE PROVIDES A RARE INSIGHT INTO CHRISTMAS PAST

A rare document at Devon Record Office reveals a telling tale of Christmas festivities over a century ago.

As part of the [Archive Awareness Campaign](#), an ongoing celebration of archives and their treasures, Devon Record Office is marking the festive season by showcasing a series of diaries (1848-1894) of prolific Sidmouth artist Peter Orlando Hutchinson. Throughout the year, local and national archives open their doors to help the public discover a piece of their own history.

In an excerpt from one of the books (1878-1894), Hutchinson gives a colourful account of events at a Christmas ball he attended on Friday 19th December 1862. He describes ridiculous dances, absurd dresses and grumbled on how difficult it was to reach the food: "Very laughable were the jams and collisions that often took place by the rapid, too rapid, twirling of the waltzers".

This amusing read provides quaint glimpses into the lives of the middle/upper classes over 100 years ago. For many readers – it will be comforting to know that the concerns of partygoers then has little changed over the century to today.

Katherine Weston, Heritage Outreach Officer, Devon County Council, said:

"It is unusual to discover detailed accounts of festivity from such a time ago. Everyone who has seen it has had a lot of fun reading it."

John Draisey, County Archivist, said:

“Peter Orlando Hutchinson took an interest in all aspects of the world around him, from rock formations to social mores. His diaries offer us a fascinating glimpse of life in Victorian Devon.”

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said:

“The Archive Awareness Campaign aims to bring history to life, showcasing the richness of archives across the country. Hutchinson’s’ depiction of the Christmas party feels so real it could almost be a column in Hello magazine today!”

– Ends –

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email

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Notes to Editors

The book is being exhibited at the Record Office exhibition case with a brief description next to it where people can view the original volumes.

- Hutchinson (1810-1897) was an amateur archaeologist, local historian and antiquary who lived in Sidmouth from the age of fifteen until his death. During his lifetime he contributed to guidebooks of Sidmouth and its area, including its natural history, writing a five-volume manuscript history of the town which is now held in the West Country Studies Library, Exeter: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/localstudies>
- He was a prolific and gifted amateur artist; the Devon Record Office in Exeter holds five volumes of his illustrated diaries and over 750 sketches. Born a year later than Darwin, Hutchinson, like many others at that time, took a great interest in the flora and fauna of his local area. The extracts form part of his diaries written during the mid 1800s.
- A display about Hutchinson can be found at Sidmouth museum, in his home town. Visit www.devonmuseums.net for further information.
- For further information about Peter Orlando Hutchinson please contact the Devon Record Office.
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- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.



