**Hannah Reynolds**

**Heading –‘History of Exeter Community Centre’**

1634 Land and tenements on St David’s Hill bequeathed by Thomas Flay to his wife Elizabeth as a charitable holding

1673 Land leased for 999 years to George Tuthill, merchant, by Elizabeth Flay

1838 Merchant house building given by Mrs Wilkinson to West of England School for Partially Sighted as residential school for blind and partially sighted children be educated (from age of 5) and learn a trade for employment – e.g. willow basket making, mending shoes, piano-tuning.

1840s School numbers grow. Building extended to include music room, workshops for willow and leatherwork, gymnasium and playfield.

1860s Indenture of land and buildings between St David’s Hill and Weir Cliff to John Dinham, Winslow Jones, Thomas Blackall and others – Free Cottages, St Michael and All Angels church, School and Institute with Parish (reading) Room built

1965 School for Blind sold by ‘West of England Institution for The Instruction and Employment of the Blind’ to Exeter County and City Council as Community Centre replacing St Thomas Centre, lost in 1960s floods. Long term dispute over ownership of playing field begins.

1966 Residential school for Blind is turned into a community centre by volunteers, removing bedrooms etc and turning rooms into meeting rooms, laundry, bar and a warden’s flat at the top of the building. Name change to Exeter Community Centre.

1974 Changes in local democracy. Devon County Council takes over responsibility for Exeter Community Centre building, outbuildings and St David’s Primary School (alongside Exeter Diocesan Finance Board). Warden Manager of the building, responsible to a community board of users. Houses clubs and societies such as fencing, table tennis, snooker as well as further and adult education classes

2003 Exeter College takes over responsibility for outbuildings - workshops, Episcopal Annexe buildings and Gymnasium with changes in local government administration of further education. Devon County Council disbands the community board, warden manager is made redundant and caretaker employed to oversee the Community Centre building for a playschool and WEA/Exeter College classes.

2008 Devon County Council and Exeter College sell land, gymnasium, music room and Parish Reading Room to Justin Developments for private development. Proposed land swop - Devon County Council gives Community Centre building and garden to Justin Developments for private development. In return Justin Developments will build a new primary school.

2008 St David’s community hands in petition signed by 445 local residents to Devon County to save the Community Centre.

2009 Negotiations start between newly formed Exeter Community Centre Trust and Devon County Council. Refurbishment estimated at £900,000.

2010 Trust raises £1 million from various sources including Exeter City Council. Devon County Council passes ownership of the Centre to Trust for £1, plus dowry of £200,000 to make the building wind and water-tight.

2011 Refurbishment of building starts. Major structural weakness is uncovered, work stops while the Trust raises another £500,000. Top floor has to be left derelict and ‘mothballed’ as not enough funds to complete.

2012 Exeter Community Centre re-opens, with café. 5 staff and 20 volunteers in reception and gardens, tenant organisations and sessional bookings.

2019 Trust raises a further £500,000 to refurbish the mothballed top floor.

2020 Pandemic. Centre closes in accordance with government regulations.

2021 Centre re-opens. The story continues……