



moretonhampstead  
history society

NEWSLETTER

August 2013

## WEDNESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER

A SPECIAL FUND-RAISING EVENT FOR MORETON ARCHIVES

**THE TIME TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO  
ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND - NEW,  
IMPROVED, WITH ADDED DISEASES!  
A TALK BY DR IAN MORTIMER**

St Andrew's Church Moretonhampstead 7.30 pm

What was it like to live in Elizabethan England? If you could travel to the past, where would you stay? What would you eat? What would you wear? How would you kiss your host? How would the supposed glory of the age sit alongside the vagrants, diseases, violence, sexism & famine of the time? Come along & be guided by the author & presenter of the best selling book & recent popular tv series.



Tickets at £7 (£5 for members) available in advance at the Tourist Information and Green Hill Arts Centres and on the door.

## Trip to Lydford July 17<sup>th</sup>

Our meeting on 17th July 2013 consisted of a field trip around Lydford admirably and enthusiastically led by Dr. Tom Greeves. We walked the layout of the original Saxon town, learning that it was an important pre-Norman settlement that eventually lost its pre-eminence by the time of the Civil War.

King Alfred fortified the town against the invading Danes in the ninth century. These earth-works are plain to see, as are the streets running off the main thoroughfare - one of which gives access to a still surviving well intriguingly situated just outside the main fortifications. Lydford might be considered the medieval capital of Dartmoor, being the administrative centre for the Royal Forest of Dartmoor, and having jurisdiction over the stannaries of Devon. It also had its own mint: part of its production of silver coins eventually being traced to Scandinavia, suggesting a Viking presence in the town. In 997 a Viking incursion could have been bought off as no physical harm came to the settlement, whilst Tavistock was severely looted.

Lydford's first castle was built in the period towards the end of the eleventh century, but soon abandoned. The outline of the second castle still exists, and we visited the site of the dungeon area. In 1208 the castle had housed French prisoners, and also was used as a stannary prison after the king confirmed its status as such in 1305. Most inmates appear to have been imprisoned because of a refusal to pay stannary fines, by which time it gained a reputation as a noisome, foul, unbearable place of utter darkness in which no natural light ever entered.

In 1512 the MP Richard Strode, was imprisoned for such non-payment, and on being released on the basis that he was a tax collector for the King, instigated the process that became the law of Parliamentary Privilege, which allowed him exemption from imprisonment in such circumstances.

During the Civil War the Royalists used the castle dungeons to hold Parliamentary prisoners, a great many of whom died in terrible circumstances. At the time of the Restoration Lydford was described as 'a mean miserable village consisting of about 20 houses'. The coming of the railways restored its prosperity.

The group was deeply grateful to Dr. Greeves for a most informative, interesting and pleasant afternoon, and to Judy for arranging it.

**Brian Spittles**



**Descending into the  
dungeon at Lydford  
castle**

*Photo Chris White*



## Historic Churches' trip July 20<sup>th</sup>

We started our tour with Hugh Gould in the churchyard of **St John the Baptist, Lustleigh**. It has a roughly oval shape, of the kind known as a lan, suggesting possible Celtic origins. No corners for the devil to hide in! A church house has survived, which served as a school for poor children following the Education Acts of the 1860/70s and now houses Lustleigh Archives.

The earliest part of the church itself is the 13th century chancel. A recumbent marble figure of Sir William Prouz is from a little later period, whilst references and memorials to the Amery family illustrate a line of continuity between the local church and affairs of state – Leo and Julian Amery held several cabinet posts. The Castilian influenced rood screen was probably created in the mid-16th century, replacing an earlier one. In 1895 it was damaged in a fall and restored by the ubiquitous Herbert Read of Exeter, who also carved the pulpit. The south wall of the chancel contains a Triple Sedilia, whilst the north wall is occupied by a rare surviving Easter Sepulchre. Within the church, at the west end of the north aisle, stands the ancient inscribed Datuidoc's Stone. Lustleigh is one of only four churches in Devon to contain such an artefact. It is thought to date from the post-Roman period of AD 550-600. Initially situated in the porch it was moved in 1979 in order to save it from further wear. A judicious decision.



*Photos – clockwise:  
Geoff Cole  
Margaret Spittles  
Chris White*

At **St Pancras at Widecombe-in-the-Moor**, the 'Cathedral of the Moor' our guide, Tony Beard, was in his usual high spirits. Renowned for its 130 feet tower, it provides a picturesque and inspiring landmark for many miles. Dating from the late 14th century, it suffered considerable damage in the great thunderstorm of 1638, an event recorded in verse on painted boards below the tower at the west end. Lightning struck the building and 4 people were killed, including one of Tony's ancestors. In 1906 the tower was repointed with concrete, in the hope that it would prevent another catastrophe. An unexpected feature inside the church is a plough. Farming, in diverse forms, remains - despite the many fundamental changes that have occurred - at the heart of rural life; and the church tries to put itself at the core of the community. A pair of apparently Jewish paintings are also enigmatic: one view is that there would originally have been three, and the meaning would have been clearer; another view is that Jewish artefacts are out of place in a Christian setting. The people of Widecombe do not appear to be worried by the paradox as there is a prominently positioned Star of David in the window above the altar.

Outside the 'Cathedral' there is a church house dating from 1608, once used for brewing ale and serving now as a visitor and community centre. A gravestone of 1954 commemorates Olive Katherine Parr, who claimed to be descended from the 16th century Katherine Parr and won some fame in her own right as the novelist Beatrice Chase. After the First World War the village was presented with a military shell to mark its contribution of spagnum moss for medical use in the war effort. It still stands proudly in place just outside the church yard. Our thanks to Revd Geoffrey Fenton who gave us a rare entry into the medieval vestry with its own fireplace and to Tony for a splendid tour.



**Tinners' hares roof boss**

*Photo Margaret Spittles*



*Jewish figures? (L) & Tony in full flow*

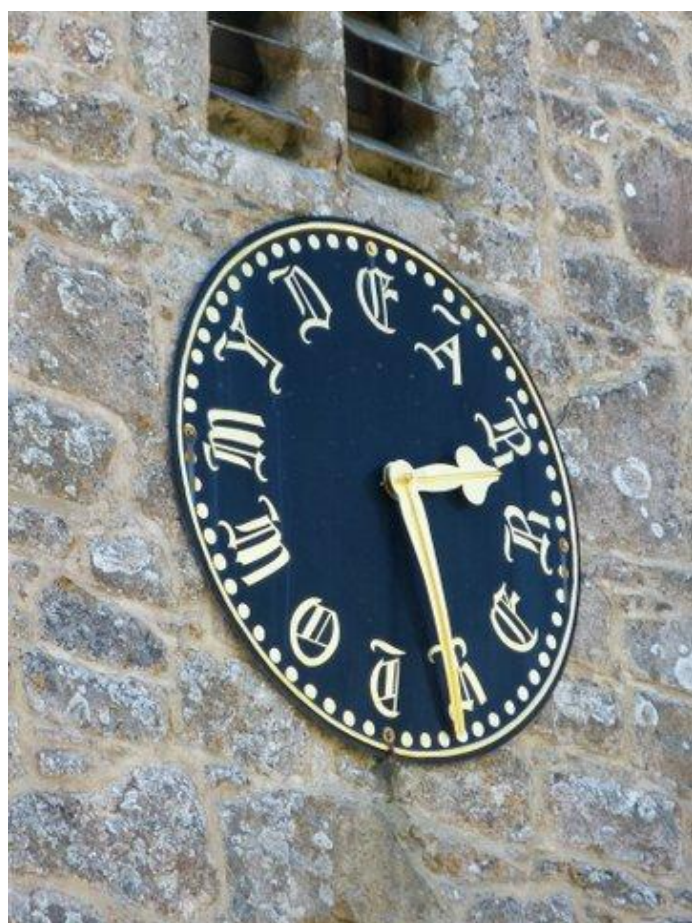
*Photos Geoff Cole*





After an enjoyable lunch at The Old Inn, we drove on to **St Peter's at Buckland-in-the-Moor**. This was quite a change from the 'Cathedral': being a church serving a parish of only just over 100 souls. It occupies a Saxon site, on which the Normans built their first church in about 1200. That was subsequently replaced by the present building about two centuries later. The thatched vestry in the hurchyard is thought to be the only such building still in use in England. While the neighbouring Church House dates from 1600 and served the usual functions of brewing and community activities; until recently a centenarian lived there all her life. The tower was added about 1500. The font is positioned just inside the south door and is made of Norman stone from Caen. It has two dents opposite one another to provide seating for locks. James 1st was a very keen student of demonology and was constantly worried that witches could get into the holy water, and therefore defile it! So all fonts were covered and locked. The rood screen contains figures of saints on one side and pairs of conflicting figures on the other. The Sultan Suleiman I of the Ottoman Empire, for example, is confronted and threatened by a Christian soldier. There are fine roof bosses, probably from a little time before the Reformation, including one curious stone boss which may, or may not, be of the king. On the floor are a number of intriguing early 13th century tiles bearing intricate patterns. These had been scattered around the floor of the chancel, but during the 1907 restoration were collected together to form an interesting feature. To add more recent history to the visit there was a First World War Roll of Honour above the door into the church. Another superb day out. Thanks again to Judy and Bill.

**Brian Spittles**



**Thatched vestry Photo Geoff Cole**



**Tower clock (above) & Turk's head on the rear of the screen  
Photos Margaret Spittles**

## NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Thanks from Oz

We have had a number of messages of gratitude for our two websites, especially from Australia where family history has become very popular. These messages often give us information in turn on Moretonians who have dispersed across the world. Here is such a recent e-mail following an inquiry about Great Doccombe Farm and the Kelly family:

*'Thank you for your response to my request. You have certainly provided me with much more than I ever dreamed. The databases are a wonderful resource and I have found lots of information about the family of John Kelly who married my great-great-aunt, Nellie Randell, in Melbourne in 1866.*

*You may like to know that her grandson was the market gardener who developed the Nellie Kelly passionfruit, named after his grandmother. It was one of the first plants to be trademarked in Australia. (I am assuming you grow this passionfruit variety in England.) The Nellie Kelly story is legendary in our family.*

*Once again a very big thank you for the superb service you are giving amateur family historians such as me.*

*Sincerely, Jenny Acopian'*

**[Editor's note: Has anyone ever grown a passionfruit in England??]**

### Elephant in the Sentry

As it is the holiday season we have also had a number of visits from former Moreton residents. David Woolley used to sit next to Judy at the old primary school and he brought in some evocative old photos and postcards which we scanned for the archives. One photo (see below) showed an elephant, according to David, in the Sentry with some bemused looking bullocks! Does anyone know the story behind it?

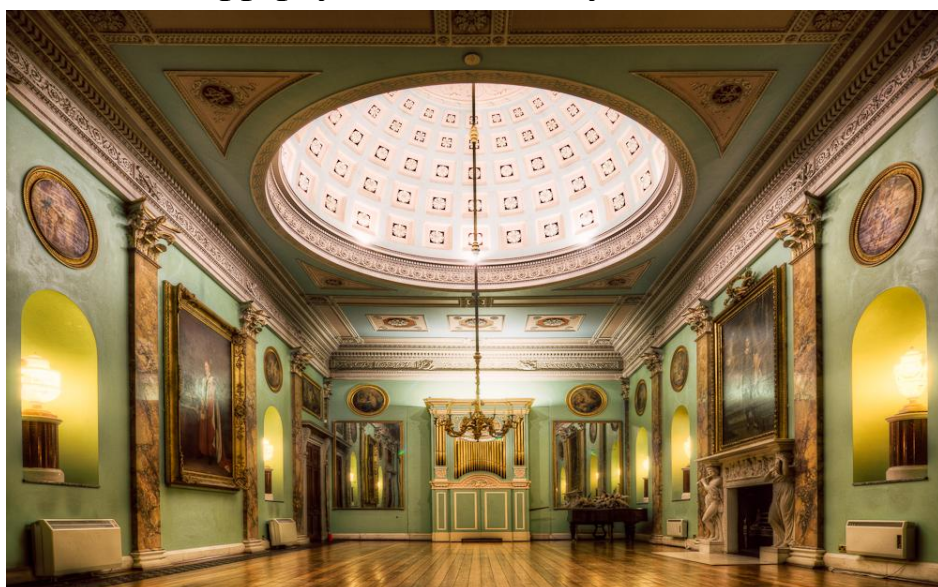




# WHAT'S NEXT ON THE MHS PROGRAMME? GUIDED TOUR OF POWDERHAM CASTLE Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> September

As a follow-up to our recent talk on our former lords of the manor, the Courtenays of Powderham, we are visiting their ancestral and current home. Meet at 2.00 pm at the Welcome Hut by the free car park. **Please let Judy know asap and at the latest by Monday August 19<sup>th</sup> if you are coming** and if you need a lift or can give one. Cost £7 pp payable on the day. Whole visit to last about 3 hours

The Music Room at Powderham Castle



## DEVON ROOF BOSSES

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 7.30 pm Union Inn

Dr Sue Andrew is a leading authority on this intriguing topic. No need to strain your neck trying to see them this time as she has a brilliant collection of close-up sides to accompany her talk.



*Roof boss showing Doccombe's lord of the manor, William de Tracy, cutting off the scalp of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170. In which Devon church is it? First person to tell Bill the correct answer wins a £10 gift voucher for any purchase(s) at Green Hill.*

## Histor-Ian's corner

### Mind your manors

Some people will already know that Sophie and I have dropped the 'manor' bit of Mearsdon Manor. We call it just 'Mearsdon'. Why? some people ask. I reply, 'because it's not a manor'.

This always gets the same response. 'Why isn't it a manor?'

The word 'manor' does not just mean a big old house. It refers to an area of land which was held by a manorial lord from the king before the abolition of feudal tenure in 1660, and administered by him or his appointee through a court. The court may or may not have been a 'court leet' (a court which could judge local misdemeanours) but it had to have been at least a 'court baron' (one that administered tenure of the lands of the manor). A house can correctly be called 'such-and-such manor' when it was the residence of the lord of the manor, or, very rarely, the place where the court baron sat. (Most medieval courts sat in the open air, under a big tree.) If the lord of the manor lived elsewhere then his principal administrative farm on the manor was called a 'barton'.

*Mearsdon, Cross St.*



The system dates back to the middle ages, as most people will be aware. Some manors saw lands granted out freehold as gifts, with the result that they lost tenants and the courts withered, and the estate ceased to be manorial. Other manors ceased to have courts for other reasons – perhaps the lord increased his flocks of sheep at the expense of his tenants, turning their fields into parkland and throwing his tenants off the land. But where a manor court survived, so too did the term 'manor', and where the title became established, its rights became enshrined in law. A manorial lordship today might still carry with it rights to minerals under the ground, or to fish in a river, or to hold a fair, or even ownership of unadopted stretches of road and kerbside greens. Although you can't add to the old rights, you can still build new 'manor houses'. A friend of mine in North Devon lives in a Victorian house which is correctly called a manor because it was built by the then lord of the manor in the 1860s.

Mearsdon was not built by a manorial lord. It dates from the fifteenth century and thus we can be sure it was never lived in by one. In fact, looking at the survey of the manor of Moretonhampstead made for the Courtenay family in about 1790, Mearsdon was not even part of the manor, let alone the manor house. For a historian to call his house a 'manor' when he knows it isn't one, is a bit pretentious, don't you think?'

**Ian Mortimer**