



moretonhampstead  
history society

NEWSLETTER

June 2013

**Next meeting**  
**THE GREEN LANES OF DEVON**  
**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE**

**Green lanes are time tunnels into the past showing us how people lived, worked and travelled. Today some are still working lanes and all are wildlife corridors - come and 'walk' them with Valerie Belsey who has explored and written about Devon's lanes for over 30 years.**

**The Union Inn at 7.30 pm  
non-members most welcome £2 on the door.**



**OLD DOCCOMBE ROAD**  
**Photo Colin Nash**







## Historic Churches Trip May 11th

On May 11<sup>th</sup> twenty five of us ventured to North Devon to explore 3 of Devon's most interesting and unique churches. We were also hoping to find some warm weather for church visiting but of course we didn't.

No-one was able to show us around St. Mary's **High Bickington** but Bill had found out some interesting facts and showed us the highlights of this ancient church. First built at the instigation of King Athelstan c. 930, it was rebuilt c. 1100 with some features still remaining from then such as the font. Outside the church there are several metal rings for inserting poles to prevent stray animals entering the church. On entering the church through the stone carved dog toothed Norman arch what a delight seeing it full of medieval elaborately carved bench ends. All 78 of them are preserved and all different though with some recurring themes. They were probably carved between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries by local men yet showing Italian Renaissance influences. Notably there are puttis (cherubs in Renaissance style – *see photo below*) with their blown out cheeks that are just delightful. Also men and women have been carved in their medieval clothing, head dresses, shields and initials along with foliage and the tools of the Crucifixion that somehow survived the Reformation, Puritans and Victorians. The Georgian plasterwork on the wagon roof ceiling also survives, making it appear simple and calm while showing a mixture of late medieval and more recent roof bosses.





After a coffee (and cake for some) at the Golden Lion, we travelled about a mile to St. Mary's **Atherington** where Bill explained the special features and history. It was also built through a grant from King Athelstan and rebuilt around 1250 by the de Willington family. However, it is the north aisle built in 1579 for the Bassett family that now has the only enclosed rood loft in Devon. It was brought to the church in 1800 from the nearby redundant Umberleigh church but was originally made around 1530 by men from Chittlehampton and almost reaches the ceiling. It is still possible to climb the tiny twisting rood loft stairs up on to screen and walk gingerly along it seeing the paintings on the back and some of the roof bosses up close. The early Renaissance style intricate carvings mixed with traditional carvings are breath taking and need to be carefully studied to pick out the tiny details. Some carvings are similar to the bench ends at High Bickington.

The main screen across the chancel is much simpler and is dated at c. 1425. There are several effigies on the floor. The oldest one, dating from 1225 and very worn, is for Sir William Champernowne. The other tombs and effigies are for the Bassetts. The fourteenth century tomb shows their clothing and decoration very clearly and another one has charming brasses showing his twelve children and two wives. The fifteenth century bench ends of 'poppy head' style are unique in Devon. There are also numerous interesting medieval roof bosses including at least one green man, dragons, faces, bishops, sun and moon. If you plan to go the church it is kept locked but the key is obtained from the shop opposite.



**ROOD LOFT**  
**PHOTO JUDY HARDIMAN**

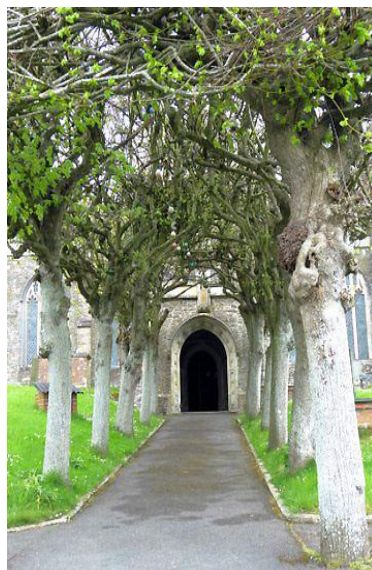


**ROOF BOSSES**  
**PHOTOS MARGARET SPITTLES**

After a very relaxing lunch at The Bell Inn in **Chittlehampton**, we were given the history of the church by Mr Cook, a church warden. Originally built in the 12th century, it was enlarged in the 15th and is the only church dedicated to St Hieritha. A local Christian convert in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, she was decapitated with a scythe at the ‘request’ of her step mother, blaming her for a local drought. On the spot where she was killed a well sprung up and scarlet pimpernels blossomed. The well is currently being restored. Because of Hieritha’s promotion to sainthood, the church was rebuilt large enough to allow it to be a pilgrimage shrine and received an unusually high income from the pilgrims (as did the 12 inns in the village) until the Reformation. Her tomb is still in the church. Coincidentally, we saw St Hieritha painted on the screen at Hennock on our last church visit – alongside St. Sidwell who was also mortally scythed. The church tower is imposing (‘the cathedral of north Devon’) with lace like carvings, ornamentation and fierce looking gargoyles. The welcoming entrance to the main south door has a canopy of pollarded lime trees with intertwined branches. Inside it seemed so warm and bright compared to the previous two churches. The font and stone carved pulpit are 16th century and there are several late medieval brasses on the floor. There are also a huge number of medieval roof bosses, especially in the side chapels, geometrically intricate and intertwined with many strange faces looking down upon us. There is also a large, imposing tomb to the Gifford family from the Tudor period in the north transept.



**ST HIERITHA’S TOMB  
PHOTO JUDY HARDIMAN**



**LIME TREES  
PHOTOS MARGARET SPITTLES**



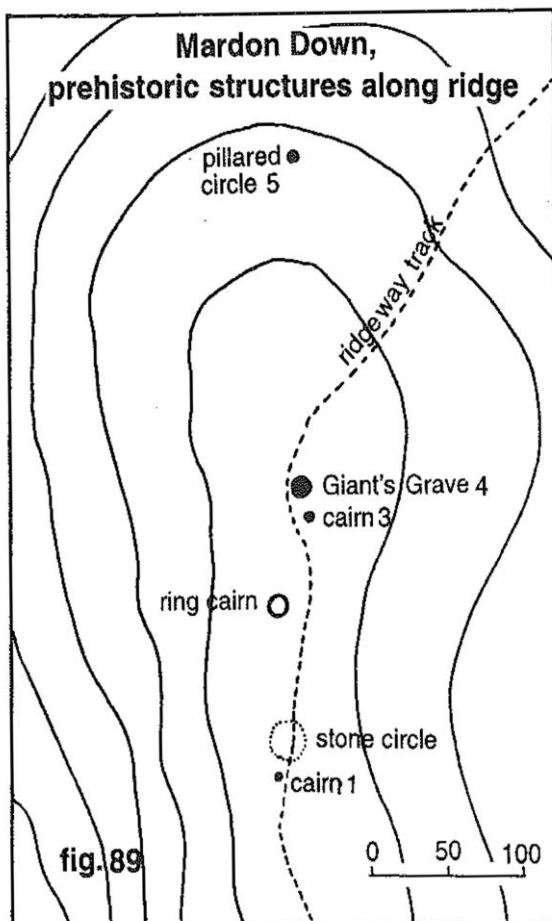
**TOWER  
PHOTOS MARGARET SPITTLES**



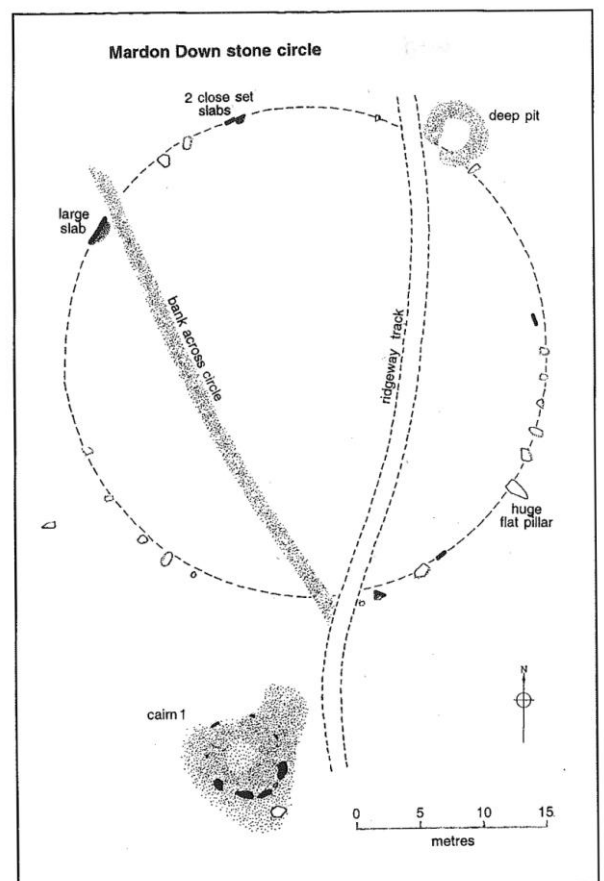
## HISTORY SOCIETY TRIP TO MARDON DOWN May 15<sup>th</sup>

Andy Crabb, an archaeologist from the Dartmoor National Park Authority, gave a group of c.60 a very in-depth and knowledgeable tour around Mardon's prehistoric sites. As we walked up the hill, Andy surprised many people straight away by showing us just off the main track a very large slit trench left by the Americans from WW2. This was the first of many surprises he had in store for us.

Mardon was the first part of Dartmoor to be excavated in the late 1700s and then in the 1800s but there is little record of what they found except for signs of burning, some bones and a spearhead (all lost). Artefacts found were either thrown away or kept privately. If the original excavated artefacts had been saved we would have a wealth of knowledge from the Bronze Age today. He explained to us that Mardon has examples of different types of stone circles dating from different times. They are all on the ridge of the hill, almost all in line with each other. The first one from the south is just on the edge of the largest stone circle on Dartmoor. This small one is a cairn where an important person could have been buried under a large pile of stones. These stones as with the other stone circles have had most of their stones removed in the past by farmers, road builders and robbers at some time.



### Diagrams from J Butler Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities Vol 5



The larger circle could have been for meetings, for fire festivals or for demonstrating ownership. We had quite a discussion also about the possible origins of the reeve type bank feature that runs across its north-west side. Then through the gorse to two ring cairns that are very well hidden but their shape could still be distinguished. The next ring cairn where the curb stones can still be clearly seen is the spot known to Moretonians as Black Pool (1910 photo in Moreton's archives showing it full of water) and was a dew pond until just after the last war when farmers must have stopped lining it with clay to prevent the water draining away. On the top of the hill at the highest point are two more burial cairns with a 360 degree view of the surrounding area for many miles. These, Andy thinks, were definitely robbed by the look of the sunken middle area and it is here that Jeremy Butler, who has written 5 volumes on Dartmoor antiquities, thinks is the Giant's Grave. However, many of us can remember the large tilted stone in the very largest stone circle as the Giant's Grave and definitely a much more romantic spot! Descending the hill a little on the northern side is a double ring of stones with an inner circle of pillars, a unique design on Dartmoor.

Bill then explained the more recent Mardon archaeology – the different earth formations left by the American soldiers when they were practising engineering techniques to facilitate transport movement following the D Day landings, such as the fox holes, the remains of the 800 yard trackway, large scrape out areas from removing the soil to produce the trackway and the site of a bailey bridge crossing the lane by the Headless Cross.

**Andy & the group discuss  
the archaeological  
significance of Dartmoor's  
largest stone circle on  
Mardon Down**

**Photo Judy Hardiman**



Andy had one last surprise. Our much loved Headless Cross is not prehistoric but probably marked the cross roads a few centuries ago or possibly a marker for early Ordnance map surveyors. Equally remarkably it is actually a DNPA 1992 replacement after being destroyed by a stolen car set alight next to it. Quite an enlightening evening, especially for those of us who have walked over Mardon for years without realising what history is there!

### **Ugbrooke House Chudleigh**

Chagford History Society has asked us if any of our members would like to join them on a guided tour of Ugbrooke House on June 28<sup>th</sup> as they have a few empty places. It will cost £15. If you would please contact Sue Price on [susan.m.price@btinternet.com](mailto:susan.m.price@btinternet.com)

### **Green Hill**

We are still very much looking for volunteers to be on reception. It is open 6 days a week in the summer months. A volunteer welcomes visitors in to the building and provides advice about the exhibitions and heritage of Moreton. It is an easy role and interesting meeting all different types of people. If you want to have a look before deciding I can show you around. Also help is needed for the preview social events when new Exhibitions open which is always enjoyable. The next Exhibition is Widdershins and so do come to see what promises to be an unusual exhibition.

### **‘Down on the Farm’ Mid September-Mid October**

Plans for the autumn exhibition featuring Moreton’s farming heritage are progressing. We are looking for small farming items, stories and photos; if you know of anyone who would lend them to us we would be more than delighted! Also we need help putting it up and cataloguing items that have been lent to us. Please let Judy know if you can help in any way.

### **NEXT HISTORIC CHURCHES’ VISIT**

#### **LUSTLEIGH, WIDECOMBE & BUCKLAND IN THE MOOR**

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July. 10 am meet at St John’s Lustleigh for a guided tour. Then Tony Beard will show us around St. Pancras Widecombe – he promises some surprises! Lunch venue tbc. Finish with a guided tour of St Peter’s Buckland in the Moor. Please let Judy know if you are coming, would like a lift or can give one. She will let you know more details.



## Histor-Ian's corner

### Taxes

Some members will already know how useful taxation records are for local history. The subsidies of 1332, 1523-7, 1543 and 1581 have all been published, revealing thousands of names of tax payers per parish. But what about the obvious gap of 1332-1523? What about the subsidies that were paid in those years?

Conventional wisdom says that there is no point in looking at the original taxation returns. After 1332, the records give no names until the returns of Henry VIII's reign. A sum was decided as reasonable for each parish and the taxation returns simply state the amount paid, which was the same amount every time. As I'm not one simply to trust conventional wisdom, I went to the National Archives and checked. I looked at a number of documents and, on this occasion, conventional wisdom was spot on. For example, E 179/95/25 (the subsidy for 1352) records that the tithing of Wray paid 12s 6d and that of Moreton paid 38s 6d. Likewise E 179/95/124 noted that exactly the same sums were paid in 1464.

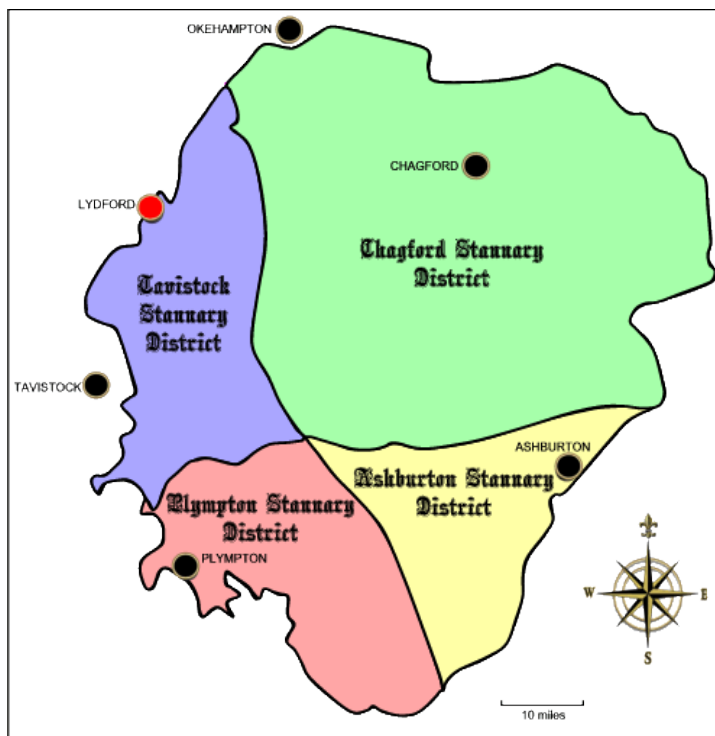
However, among the dozens of pieces of vellum bearing witness to the taxes and grumbles of our ancestors is E 179/95/33: a return for the four stannaries of Chagford, Plympton, Ashburton and Lydford for the year 1374. Tanners with lands and goods in Moreton fell under the jurisdiction of the Chagford stannary and were taxed separately from the rest of the Moreton subsidy payers. This particular document gives their names. It's not easy to read at all: the scribe used two different sorts of 'r' and spelled Throwleigh, 'Trhowlegh'; but as far as I can make out from my slightly blurred photographs, the Moreton men were as follows.

### In the hundred of Teignbridge, tithing of Wray:

Richard Buyly	12s
John [?Quoyssch]	12d
William Loterworth	10d
William Sopere	11d
Thomas Smyth	9d
Robert Beaumound	12d

### And the same hundred, tithing of Morton

John Parlebyn	12d
Richard [?Beuryng]	2s
Richard Kena	6d
Richard Bonde	6d
Thomas Smyth	12d
John Ouldward	12d
Andrew Veysi	6d
William Soper	12d
Richard Chypyn	4d
John Bon... [?illeg.]	4d
Walter atte Woda	3d
John Polyng [?]	12d
John Bo...d... [obliterated: ? Bowden]	12d
Henry Bode[n]	12d
John Herrecomb	8d
John Meacomb	3d
Adam Docomb	13d
William Pope	13d
William Stoddon	13d
Edward Stancomb	6d
Robert Corsett	7d



### DEVON STANNARY DISTRICTS

Anyone interested in this might like to consult the original – and maybe do the Society a favour by correcting my doubtful readings. At any rate, it's a great resource, apparently containing the names of all the tanners on Dartmoor for all four stannaries in 1374.

Ian Mortimer