

NOVEMBER 21st MEETING

**Dartmoor's earliest photographers
1850s-1870s**

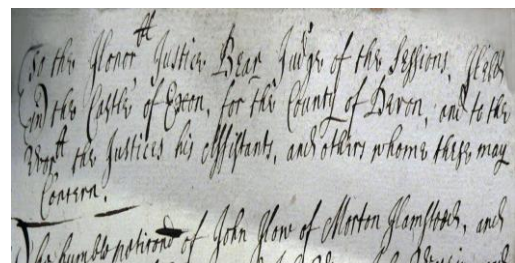
An illustrated talk by Tom Greeves, a cultural environmentalist who has written extensively about the archaeology and history of Dartmoor for over 40 years. he is currently Chairman of the Dartmoor Society. Union Inn 7.30 pm.



[Anonymous photo in the Moreton archives labelled 'T Cann, Photographer, Moretonhampstead'. Can anyone identify the subject?]

How to read old handwriting course

Six members of MHS attended a six-week palaeography course at the Devon Heritage Centre. Under the expert guidance of our tutor, Dr John Booker, we learned how to transcribe hand written documents, starting from the nineteenth century and going back to Tudor times. What began in the earlier documents as an apparent set of squiggles became legible text with a little perseverance and practice. The effort was well worth it as the documents gave fascinating insights into the past. A seventeenth-century man's will began in a routine way and then became a series of acts of revenge on those who had wronged him, especially his wife! We finished the course with a group transcription of a 1680s lease of what is now the Union Inn in Moreton by the Church feoffees to raise money for the church. Siân Colridge plans to put a copy of the original and our transcription on display in the Union.



[Extract from a newly transcribed document that gives a significant new insight into Moreton life in the 17th century. The Chairman's talk in January will reveal all!]

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Murder most foul in Devon

Simon Dell MBE, a retired policeman, presented details of eight case studies ending with an encore in response to audience enthusiasm. About two hundred years were covered, from the 1818 'Budgehill Mystery' to the 'Rolex Murder Trial' for which the culprit is still serving his prison sentence. There was a time when policing appeared to be a slightly casual affair. On one occasion when the discovery of a corpse was reported to the local policeman he apparently responded by saying 'It's my day off', and clearly wanted nothing to do with the matter. In the event the 'Winkleigh Tragedy' of 1875 involved the destruction of an old village family of farmers, going back centuries, who had been 'living in a time warp'. The tragedy was in part related to the changing agricultural conditions that were forcing them to sell the farm.

Even as recently as 1959 in the Horrabridge 'St. Valentine's Day' case the local Bobby had to 'scrounge a lift' to the scene of the crime, and ask the man eventually identified as the perpetrator for a lift back to the station in the car that had been used as the murder weapon! The local people named the lane 'murder mile', although no other murder has been committed there. In 1892 there was a double murder at Peter Tavy over a broken romantic attachment - and detachment. Two men were shot, the murderer tried to commit suicide by jumping into the river, which unfortunately for him was suffering from that year's drought. He was later hung, but there occurred a later successful suicide attempt by a man who was involved in the original circumstances which remains unexplained.

By comparison with the earlier murders the 'Rolex' case of 1996 had an international dimension, involved forged documents and false identities, and a plot more convoluted than any Morse encountered.

The Rolex Oyster Perpetual watch that helped to solve a murder mystery



Even our own tranquil Moreton had its peace broken in the summer of 1835 when Jonathan May, going home from the Moretonhampstead fair, was robbed and murdered at Jacob's Well corner. The petty criminal Edmund Galley was tried, convicted and sentenced to transportation, pleading his innocence throughout. Extremely unusually he was eventually after 40 years returned home and awarded £1000 compensation.

Brian Spittles

HISTORIC CHURCHES' SEPTEMBER 2012 TRIP

On Saturday 28 September the MHS Church discovery group visited St. Mary the Virgin, Throwleigh; Holy Trinity, Gidleigh and Chagford's St. Michael the Archangel.

At Throwleigh we were guided by Michael Paget and Dawn Hatton. The main building dates from the fifteenth century, although the first recorded rector dates from 1248. The tower and a nearby tithe barn position the present structure as firmly fifteenth century. The porch archway is carved with the initials TC, which are thought to indicate the church's patron, Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon, around 1452. The granite font dates from about the same time. The Church underwent some changes as a result of the Reformation. The rood screen was partly destroyed but Herbert Read of Exeter designed a fine 1940s replacement incorporating the salvaged parts of the original. Another important survivor is the Easter Sepulchre, at one time pushed into a corner it has now been replaced near the granite altar executed by Herbert Read. The intriguing bosses incorporate a green man and the three hare signifiers seen in other churches. The North aisle, its distinctive wagon roof and the columns supporting it are thought to be sixteenth century work, with some Reformation amendments. Our splendid visit ended with some very welcome third millennium coffee and home-made biscuits.

The owner of Gidleigh Castle, Michael Hardy, explained some of the history of Holy Trinity. A church possibly dates from the middle of the eleventh century, but the current building has occupied the site from about 1450. The name Gybba, from which the word Gidleigh is thought to derive, was that of the wife of King Canute - one of the most misunderstood men of history - perhaps confirming the possible veracity of the earlier date for the establishment of a church. In the maelstrom of the Reformation the church suffered much less change than most establishments. The magnificent rood screen (*seen below*), for example, often dismantled in other places, was here retained without harm.



Lucy Shields, the House Administrator, welcomed us to St. Michael the Archangel which is much larger and slightly older than our previous two buildings. In 2011 the church's 750th birthday was celebrated, consequently not only the Reformation brought changes but more modern pressures too. The South Door entrance, for instance, has been supplemented, and perhaps superseded (except for brides) by the creation of a narthex and moving the main entrance to the north west. These changes allow for easier access, especially for anyone with difficult mobility; and the creation of a family area for relaxed conversation. Pursuing the idea of a pre-St Michael church we learnt that the tower dates from the late fifteenth/early sixteenth centuries, but uses stonework from a thirteenth century construction. The quietly impressive oak pews are, on the other hand, twentieth century artefacts produced by the ubiquitous Herbert Read of Exeter: he also contributed the pulpit. The rood screen survived the Reformation but submitted to rot in 1865, and had to wait until 1927 for replacement. No need to ask who installed it. There is a tragic little commemoration to Mary Whiddon who was shot and killed leaving her wedding service in 1641. There are good bosses and carvings throughout containing tinnners' rabbits - three-eared hares - pelicans, snails and other images that may or may not be Christian. A debate continues. We were well served by our hosts, and thank them deeply.

Brian Spittles.

OCTOBER MEETING 2012

'Dunsford: A Century of Change'

For those of us who travel to Exeter on a bus pass - while we still have them - Dunsford is a pretty village approached by a very thin road, and with chicane parking. However, Society stalwart, Sandra Bond, soon put a tremendous amount of flesh on those bare bones in her excellent presentation. Evidence of early settlements is illustrated by hut circles, and a bronze age axe head - which was on display.

But the century of change specifically started in 1914 with the Great War. Sandra traced the nature of the changes partly through her own exemplary research on the Bond and Smallridge families. In 1914 the village and its occupants were engaged in an agricultural economy, which in the 1920s became increasingly mechanised - leading generally to a smaller work force. Changes for women were perhaps less immediately dramatic: going into service remained for several years a major form of employment. Sandra produced a photograph of Lizzie Bond who went to work in a family shop as far away as Birmingham.

Social and geographic mobility became features of Dunsford's population. One feature of the Great War was the influx of soldiers from different parts of the country, particularly Lancastrians with their strange accents and sometimes different ways of looking at the world. Sandra touched on the interesting subject of history through language with a brief history of gleaning. For Dunsfordians the word had a mainly practical application, with a secondary metaphoric one. Gradually, as gleaning declined as an occupation the metaphoric sense became the major one. The village's population was greater than now, before mechanisation almost completely took over agrarian practices. Dunsford was not a sleepy place. There were three public houses rather than the current solitary Royal Oak; and a two/three day fair/show enlivened social life. The glebe cottages opposite the church were sought after accommodation, but came with obligations to the church, and until 1932 had no windows or doors to the rear of them because the vicar had a garden which he did not want overlooked by his parishioners: that would never do. Sandra spoke to a background of fascinating photographs, and displayed a wonderful model of how to research family history and tie it in with a more public chronicle.

The project 'Dunsford: a century of change' is to be published next year. Sandra Bond concluded her talk with a plea for anyone with old pictures or memories of Dunsford to contact her by email - sandra.bond@btinternet.com or telephone 01647 252211 as she is creating an archive for Dunsford.

Brian Spittles



A still familiar view of Dunsford from a hundred years ago

HISTORIC CHURCHES' NOVEMBER TRIP TO SPREYTON, SAMPFORD COURTENAY & HONEYCHURCH

We had another excellent day of exploring Devon churches starting off at St Michael's Spreyton with its beautiful approach along a long avenue of lime trees. In the graveyard we spotted the gravestone of Thomas Cobley, an uncle or great uncle of his famous namesake. The view from the churchyard is tremendous, especially on a sunny day as we had. Apparently the tower used to be painted white so it could be seen out to sea as a navigation aid. We explored the church ourselves before being given coffee by the churchwardens Mrs Powseland and John, who answered our questions about the church. The church itself is mellow and calm with pale oak beams on a cream walls and roof. In the chancel with its barrel roof the beams have Latin writing that have been transcribed and are a beautiful poem dating back to when the church was built in the mid-1400s. There are also many intricate roof bosses including the three hares and a green man. There are two fonts; the one being still used today is Norman made of granite with primitive carvings of saints and the Tree of Life and a plain Anglo Saxon one also granite. The altar stone is of a large slab of granite that had been removed in the Reformation and refound.

At St Andrew's Sampford Courtenay we were met by Don Miles who has written a booklet on the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549. First he explained interesting parts of the church including the font made of Purbeck marble in around 1100 but we were most amazed by the intricate medieval wood carvings in the nave and chancel. The carvings include the dragon of eternity with its tail going all around until it goes back into its mouth, many beautiful roof bosses including two green men one looks very ferocious with a mouth full of tombstone like

like teeth and the three hares. Also there is a king, a queen and the symbols for the Courtenays which we Moretonians all know to be three balls.



Don then explained to us the background to the Prayer Book or Western Rebellion. The ten year old King Edward VI brought in more stringent religious changes to make England more Protestant such as introducing the first Book of Common Prayer which translated all Church services from Latin into English and making radical changes to Church ritual. On June 9th the Rector started the changes by not wearing his colourful robes and used the new form of service in English. Next day the inhabitants forced the Rector to wear his traditional robes and conduct the service in Latin. A local farmer harangued the crowd to obey the law and was set upon and killed with a bill hook. Having gone this far the men of Sampford Courtenay joined up with men from Cornwall and the Prayer Book Rebellion had started. After much grim detail of battles around Exeter, we learnt how the Rebellion eventually ended at Sampford Courtenay with the deaths of many of the rebels. The repercussions of the loss of men were very serious to the farms of the area. There was damage to the church, especially on the south side where the repairs can still be seen today. The rebellion did not halt or slow the religious changes and in 1550 church altars were abolished and replaced by “an honest table, decently covered” and to our surprise Don showed us the probable “honest” Tudor table hidden underneath the present south altar.

Lunch was at the New Inn and it is well recommended. We moved on to St Mary’s Honeychurch where we were shown around by the delightful Josie Reddaway, a cousin to the Docombe namesakes. It is an amazing gem set in a small community of five farms, most not changed since Saxon times. It was built in the middle of the twelfth century, replacing the original Hunn’s church founded by a local landowner. In the fifteenth century it was partly reconstructed and the tower was built for three bells and a south porch was added in the sixteenth century. Since then the church has not been altered. The box pews roughly carved from oak and full of woodworm just take your breath

especially when three of you try to squeeze in and stay upright! The church is full with 24 people sitting as we found. The pulpit is probably Elizabethan and the altar rail seventeenth century. On the north wall there are the remains of a large painting of the Royal Arms of Elizabeth 1st and by the door are two twelfth century corbels that look Polynesian. And to our surprise again Josie showed us another “honest table” underneath the altar cloth. There is still no electricity and it is lit by oil lamps and candles making it even more atmospheric. We certainly appreciated why Hoskins wrote that Honeychurch is ‘one of the most simplest and unsophisticated country interiors in the whole of England’.

[Judy Hardiman](#)



Honeychurch – standing room only for some of the group

GREEN HILL

To accompany the textile exhibition of Yuli Somme, we have put up some displays featuring Moreton’s woollen heritage. On the stairwell there is a framed facsimile from the archives of a petition sent to the House of Lords in 1698 and signed by 106 Moretonians. They were protesting about cheap Irish wool imports and helped to lead to their prohibition. There are also two new banners using photos from the archives and some quotes from documents such as the Moreton man put in the stocks in 1564 for selling substandard kersey. In the foyer a new set of slides on the touchscreen tells ‘Moreton’s woolly story’.

We are busy preparing for the January exhibition called ‘Moreton on wheels’. Do let me know if you have any transport related photos or artefacts that we could use. [Bill Hardiman](#)

HISTOR-IAN'S CORNER

Recently, a number of people at my talks have asked me: 'are we really all that different from our ancestors?' After all, we need to eat, drink, sleep, keep safe, make sure we don't kill each other, admire beauty, listen to music and make babies. In addition we have the same number of toes, fingers, arms and heads as our ancestors, and we are more or less the same size and we can be infected by (and cure) more or less the same diseases. Surely all those points in common means we are all more or less the same?

Anyone who has ever heard me talk about one of the *Time Traveller's Guides* knows what my view on this subject is: externally we are much the same; it is psychologically that we have changed. Profoundly. You can see this in the youth of society (today the median age is 39; before 1700 it was about 21-22), and the violence exerted in a society dominated by the young. You can see psychological differences reflected in the extraordinary sexism of the past (a man could beat his wife as much as he wanted as long as he did not intentionally kill her). Similarly, it tends to be forgotten that people before about 1790 looked at the class differences as reflecting God's order in the world, and thus to upset the social hierarchy was against God's will: it was sinful to try and make the classes equal. (Try telling that to the makers of Hollywood films.) It was *illegal* to look after homeless people from a different parish in the 16th century. Attitudes to children and animals were also surprisingly harsh by our standards: in 1600, a man was thought to be irresponsible if he did *not* beat his sons. And as for baiting animals, it was illegal to kill a bull humanely, you had to torture it with dogs first – or pay a hefty fine. Elizabeth I attended the bear-baiting in Paris Garden but never once went to the Globe theatre next door.

Normally these points get across the general fact that we have undergone a profound process of psychological 'civilising' over the last 300 or so years. At a recent colloquium, one woman did not want to accept this. What she said was very interesting. 'I think it's just a superficial difference, something we learn,' she said. 'Underneath we are the same.' This set up a good debate: it is really our psychology that has changed, so that naturally we are different at birth and thus behave in a more civilised fashion? Or is it just that we are made to conform, and educated to behave in a civilised way? Or, to put it another way, which is the more 'natural' creature: the man of 1600 or the man of today?

Whatever your take on this debate, it does raise some interesting historical thoughts. One in particular you might like to think about. If we have *not* changed, and, deep down, are just the same as our forefathers, then either all those people in the past were naturally kind and peace-loving and only became cruel through exposure to violence and fear in their childhoods. Or – and this is the frightening bit – their violent, cruel ways of life was more natural than ours, and if our society's laws were to break down, we would return to the ways of life known to our medieval antecedents, as the boys did in *Lord of the Flies*.

I like to think we *have* changed, and we are less cruel and violent by nature. But sometimes I am not so sure.

Ian Mortimer

REMINDER

**MHS subscriptions are now due. Still only £10 for an individual and £15 for a couple. Please make your cheque payable to 'Moretonhampstead History Society'. If you cannot make the next meeting please post it to:
Jeannette Webster 26 Forder Meadow Moretonhampstead TQ13 8JB**