



moretonhampstead
history society

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2013

WWW.MORETONHAMPSTEAD.ORG.UK

NEXT MEETING AT THE UNION INN

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 20TH AGM 7.30 PM

FOLLOWED BY DISPLAY OF HISTORIC METAL OBJECTS

A local metal detective, John Smith, will present an amazing array of objects that he has found in the vicinity of Moreton and neighbouring parishes. They range in date from prehistoric times to the last century. You will be able to handle and examine some of them and John will be happy to answer questions about his discoveries.



An ancient Roman silver denarius of Emperor Vespasian (*Titus Flavius Caesar Vespasianus Augustus*) struck 77 - 78 A.D. at the Rome mint.

The obverse with the laureate bust of Vespasian facing right. The legend reading:

CAESAR VESPASIANVS AVG[vstvs]

The reverse with plump sow walking left, three piglets scurrying beneath her. The legend reading:

IMP[erator] XIX

THIS COIN WAS FOUND LOCALLY BY JOHN SMITH

THE RAMILLIES - A FAMOUS SOUTH DEVON WRECK

On 15th February 1760 South Devon witnessed one of the worst naval disasters to befall the Royal Navy. HMS Ramillies was violently wrecked off the harsh cliffs of Bolt Tail in a violent storm. Over 830 men died.

HMS Ramillies started out as an 84 gun second rate ship of the line that was launched in 1664 at Woolwich. Pepys witnessed the launch of the Katherine and mentioned it in his diary. Over the years the boat became renamed as the Royal Katherine and then as the Ramillies to commemorate the battle that Marlborough so successfully engaged in. By 1750 it had been rebuilt with a couple of extra guns added and for a few years was the flagship of Admiral Byng. The Ramillies took part in the ill fated conflict with the French fleet that was investing Minorca in 1756. Byng lost his life to a naval court martial as a result of not properly engaging with the enemy.



In February 1760 the British were blockading French ports and the Ramillies set sail from Plymouth to help out. A violent SW storm developed which scattered the fleet and caused the Ramillies to head back to Plymouth for repairs. The gale pushed her eastwards towards Bolt Tail and officers mistook Bolt Tail for Rame Head so that the boat was ordered to continue so as to get into Plymouth Sound. Once the mistake was realised the mariners tried to head around back into the storm but were forced to drop anchors (bow and stern anchors) to try and ride out the gale. The main mast and mizzen

mast both collapsed under the strain and the canvas was dumped. Unfortunately, the anchor cables were entangled and abrading themselves. Eventually one snapped and the other wasn't strong enough to hold the boat in the huge seas. The Ramillies leapt free and was driven forcefully into the bottom of the cliffs just past Bolt Tail. Over 830 men died in what was an appalling night of death and tragedy. Some men were just hurled against the steep cliffs by the wind and seas. Apparently, the sea ran red.

Today a small amount of wreckage can be found around the Ramillies cave just east of Bolt Tail. There are a couple of cannon and surprisingly there are

the remains of part of the wooden rudder that is part buried in the sand. Other remains have been recorded over the years – when conditions allow.

Recently, two Admiralty (ie. 18th century Longshanks) anchors have been found on the seabed in 20m some miles offshore from Bolt Tail. They appear to be the bower and stern anchors of the Ramillies that tried to hold the boat in 1760. The bower anchor is over 18 ft long and 7ft wide at the flukes. The wooden stock has long gone but the ring to which the cable was attached is still extant. To dive this anchor is quite an experience. Not only does the size of it make you realise how big the ship was that carried it - but when you emerge from the dive onto the surface above and see Bolt Tail some 3 miles or so away to the north east then you can begin to imagine what the Ramillies was experiencing that night before the cables snapped. In moments like this history is truly alive!

You can see a short video about the anchor at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLasAWgfD5M>

Richard Knights



RICHARD KNIGHTS
EXPLORING THE
WRECK OF THE
RAMILLIES

FROM THE HEARTH – A NARRATIVE WORKSHOP TO HELP YOU TO WRITE YOUR OWN
MEMOIR OR YOUR FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

AT THE VALIANT SOLDIER BUCKFASTLEIGH FRIDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2-5 PM

TICKETS £5 FROM JACKIE PAXMAN

TEL. 01364 642 638 OR E-MAIL: buckfast.library@devon.gov.uk

DEVON ROOF BOSSES

On 18th September 2013 the History Society met in the Union Inn to see and hear a presentation by Dr Sue Andrew on Devon Roof Bosses. Dr Andrew showed pictures of over twenty different roof bosses, explaining interesting facts and possible interpretations. A difference between Exeter cathedral key stone bosses and wooden parish church artefacts was outlined. Bosses in the chancel were the responsibility of the clergy, whilst the laity were responsible for those in the nave. Technical skill varied considerably, partly depending on the wealth of the congregation - which determined who could be hired to create the bosses. Little is known about individual carvers, though it is thought that bosses were generally carved on site, in the midst of the community commissioning them. Dating is difficult without documentary evidence, although dendrochronology dating through tree rings are in some cases able to provide indications of period.

Of the medieval carvings those at Milton Abbot, for example, are dated between 1388 and 1413; whilst those at Tavistock, and Spreyton, slightly later. Where coloured bosses are found they are generally more modern. Those at East Budleigh, are as recent as 1974. During the Victorian period many were covered in black or brown varnish, rather ruining the intention of the original carvers.



CAN YOU NAME THE CHURCHES WHERE THESE ROOF BOSSES WERE SEEN ON MHS CHURCH VISITS?

£10 GREEN HILL VOUCHER FOR THE FIRST PERSON TO E-MAIL BILL HARDIMAN THE ANSWER.



Sue Andrew outlined a number of recurring motifs, such as the three hares with which she began - and which has been discovered as far away in time and place as ancient China. The speaker was sceptical about possible interpretations linking these figures to the Holy Trinity, as they appeared, in context, to be ambiguous - sometimes incorporating signifiers of evil, such the owl, a creature of the night and bird of prey. Another figure taken from the natural world is that of abundant piglets, together with a foolish man linked to the moon. Sue Andrew saw this Braunton device as possibly coming from the medieval Bestiary - a system of relating lower (in the context of the time) human life with beasts.

Throughout her excellent presentation the speaker was at pains to emphasise the openness of analysis and interpretation. Also, the extent to which roof bosses have to be seen in the overall context of worship and parish church attendance. In an age prior to that of mass literacy the church's ideas were expressed through many visual and audio forms. The bosses were an aspect of this and possibly reinforced the ideas and messages also found in the paintings on the walls and rood screens.

An evening of superbly presented, and fascinating, material. During the evening the following churches, amongst others, were referred to and are all worth visiting to see their roof bosses and other medieval features:

Cheldon, North Molton, South Pool, Braunton, Milton Abbot, Spreyton, Ugborough, East Budleigh, Modbury, Buckland, Burrington, Widecombe, Ploughill, Coldridge, Holne, South Tawnton, Bridford, North Bovey and Meavy.

BRIAN SPITTLES

TEINGRACE ARE MOUNTING AN EXHIBITION IN THEIR OLD SCHOOLROOM TO CELEBRATE THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR FEOFFEES. DOCUMENTS WILL BE ON DISPLAY OF THE DUKE OF SOMERSET, THE TEMPLERS, THE OLD SCHOOL AND HAROLD ST MAUR. REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 23RD 10 AM-4 PM



OUR RECENT VISIT TO TEINGRACE CHURCH

MANORIAL COURTS

Ian Mortimer's account of the manor courts prompts me to recount the follow-up to my persuasion of the National Park Authority to purchase Holne Moor in the 1970s when I was its chief officer. We had already bought Haytor Down which came on the market because the owner had a crippling divorce settlement to meet. The traffic contrast between the road to Widecombe and the road between Holne village and Hexworthy was one of the excuses for the purchase. If the NPA couldn't manage these situations, how dare it demand that other owners elsewhere should? The purchase turned out to include the lordship of the Manor and I became its steward (as my successor still is).

The satisfying thing about that was that the Court Baron was, and still is, held at least once a year. The Steward chairs it and the Homage (the collected commoners) swears to uphold the presentments (decisions) of the Court 'until the next Court'. They swear, all holding hands and the Foreman holding the Bible, so they are all connected to it! They also all have to sign the relevant page of the book on which the Steward has entered the presentments, as each has been decided. Two very different things pleased me about that. The first was that I was writing in a book begun in 1792 as the record of the Court Baron of Sir Bouchier Wray. The second was that the great great, and the great grandparents of my tutor at University had signed it as members of the Homage in the 1890s and 1900s. He was Gilbert Butland, a Devonian, born in Dartmouth, geographer and Honorary Chilean Consul in Birmingham. He ended up as Professor of Geography at the University of New England, in Armidale, New South Wales.

While early presentments in the book, for instance, allowed the rector to have a new water supply from the town leat 'as long as it passes through a hole in a slate no bigger than the diameter of a goose quill' (how popular was he?!), later ones demanded new reflectors on the posts either side of the cattle grid across the road on to the moor. What a commentary on 220 years of history written by hand!

IAN MERCER

'Shadrach Bidder (the Scavenger of the Borough of Moretonhampstead) is for raising a Disturbance in this Court and Striking One of the Jurors, fined by the Steward Three Shillings and Four pence.'

Extract from the Moretonhampstead Manorial Court Book of 1754

AN ENTERTAINING EVENING WITH COLIN PEARSE

On 16th October 2013 the Moretonhampstead History Society was regaled by an evening of educational entertainment by local farmer and author Colin Pearse. Entitled '60 years farming on Dartmoor' Colin's presentation consisted of reminiscences, anecdotes, poetry, a wide selection of photographs - all of which were written or taken by Colin himself - and some serious and sombre thoughts on the nature and possible future of farming.

Two aspects of the evening came over very strongly: his love of nature in general - for instance in the care he took to protect and encourage the sky larks nesting on his property - and Colin's specific attachment to his flock of Whitefaced Dartmoor sheep.

He was born into a farming family, so that Colin was imbued with an empathy with the very ground itself: "the history below my feet", as he expressed it in a poem. Every piece of ground has its own history (as the Society's recent exhibition 'Down on the Farm' fortuitously illustrates). In 1808 there were about 14,000 Whitefaced Dartmoors in the area, but only around 2,000 are left today. Colin explained his own attachment to them in terms of their hardiness in the face of harsh Moor winters, their strength and bravery in, for instance, protecting lambs from foxes, and their relationship with the landscape. The breed have been around for centuries, if not longer. Their presence is part of the ground beneath our feet whenever we walk the moor.



TWO OF COLIN PEARSE'S WHITEFACED DARTMOORS

PHOTO BY MARGARET SPITTLES

A couple of factors in this decline were outlined. Bracken plays a dual role in it. It is an indicator of water, a beneficial aspect; but also it contains ticks which are of no benefit to Whitefaced Dartmoors (or anything else?). More fundamentally, the wool trade has declined since the days, centuries ago, when great churches, for example, were built on wool profit. Wealth that came from exporting this precious commodity went into the great institutional buildings of the middle ages. That was also the age of the horse, rather than today's tractor, and even more sophisticated machinery. Men were closer to their animals for hundreds of years, a factor, Colin argued, that is illustrated by the number of longhouses that existed to shelter agricultural families and their animals literally under the same roof. To illustrate the transition from the age of the horse Colin retold the anecdote of the reluctant farmer convert: "I drives the tractor but when I want it to stop I still calls 'whoa!" As evidence of the decline in livestock trading Colin quoted that in the 1827 figures 1,000 sheep and 200 bullocks were sold by weight at a nearby market. Moretonhampstead itself at one time had a thriving market sadly now converted into a car park, another illustration of the rise of the machine over the animals.

A very interesting evening was rounded off by Bill Hardiman presenting Colin Pearse with a framed photograph of two of his Whitefaced Dartmoors taken by Margaret Spittles on behalf of the Society.

BRIAN SPITTLES

DOWN ON THE FARM

The exhibition was seen by about 800 people, including groups from the pre-school and the primary school as well as many of the local farmers. Many thanks to everyone (at least 65 come to mind!) who helped to make it such a success. The accompanying booklet and other farming history books are still on sale at Green Hill Tuesday to Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm.

BILL HARDIMAN

MHS CHRISTMAS DINNER AT THE HORSE WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 11TH

REMINDER

**PLEASE LET JUDY HARDIMAN HAVE YOUR BOOKING FORM & CHEQUE
BY MONDAY DECEMBER 2ND**

WHEN DID WE GET WHEELS?

At a recent committee meeting, a discussion arose concerning the ability of wheeled vehicles to reach Moreton from other towns in 1800. It is often said that coaches could not come to our neck of the woods until after the rebuilding of the Exeter Road in 1815. Edward Pike took issue with this, and claimed that the rebuilding of the road in 1815 was to *assist* wheeled vehicles, not to allow them access for the first time. It was a point well made, and worth some careful consideration.

Why do we traditionally think wheeled vehicles *didn't* come to Moreton until 1815? One good reason is the famous account of Celia Fiennes. In 1698 she declared that the road from Ashburton to Plymouth (i.e. one of the two principal highways in the county) was 'exceeding narrow... so difficult that one could scarcely pass by one another, even single horses...'. William Marshall noted that a pair of wheels was not to be seen on a West Country farm before the 1770s. Indeed, numerous depictions of pack-saddles and crooks survive, even though few of the actual articles are now extant. With particular reference to Moretonhampstead, our best evidence is the account of Sir John Bowring who came to school here in about 1804. He later recalled 'I was sent to school at Moreton-Hampstead, then one of the rudest spots in Devonshire, the joke being that it was made out of the rubbish that was left when the rest of the world was created. There were then no roads passable by wheel-carriages of any sort, and everything was conveyed to and from Exeter on crooks, bent branches of trees which were fastened to pack-saddles, seated on one of which I departed from home'.

Was Sir John telling the truth? No. The 1772 Turnpike Act from Dunsford to Cherry Brook on the Moor was clearly intended to result in a road that would take wheeled vehicles. On our website there is a list of the prices that the Turnpike Trust supposedly charged for coaches and wagons drawn by teams of horses along this route (although where this list comes from is less certain). Of course, the passing of such an Act in Westminster does not by itself mean that the roads were rebuilt immediately or that the result was passable by carriages. However, in 1799 Silvester Treleaven noted in his diary that "Thomas Tyrwhitt Esqr. arrived at the White Hart Inn, in this town, he came from Tor Royal, Dined, and sat off for Exeter. On the Door of his Carriage was the figure of Hercules holding his Club as if going to strike...". That travelling to Exeter in a wheeled vehicle was possible in 1799 is confirmed by a second account: that of Mr. Samuel Allent alias Blanchford who drove his

cart (on which he was illegally sitting) and the single horse pulling it (which was blind) straight into a mill leat.

It would appear therefore that Edward was right and that Sir John Bowring was wrong. Between 1800 and 1804 there are several accounts of wheeled vehicles in Moreton, especially the light chaises pulled by one or two horses. Treleaven notes for January 1803 that 'Mr Rowland, with his three children satt off in a Chaise for Tavistock to see Miss Cornish...'. In May that same year the proprietor of the White Hart Inn was advertising that travellers would find at his inn 'excellent Beds, good Stabling, and the choicest Wines, with neat Post Chaises, able Horses, and careful Drivers'.

All this begs the question, when should we think of wheeled transport coming to Moreton? In 1646 General Fairfax's army could not bring their ammunition carriages nearer to here than Fulford because of the frost, so the weather would probably have beaten everyone at times. Apart from that, the bridges are our best evidence. There was no bridge at all at Steps Bridge until 1710,



GREENHILL WHEELWRIGHTS C. 1910

and Clifford Bridge was very narrow, so wheeled transport to Exeter would probably have been impractical (and probably impossible) until the eighteenth century. Indeed, it is significant that we have no reference to wheeled transport until the Turnpike Act of 1772. The bridges were all rebuilt after this – Steps Bridge in 1814-16, King's Bridge in 1819

and Clifford Bridge in 1821. It would appear therefore that the bridges were widened to accommodate the new carriages and coaches, so the absence of rebuilding before these dates date indicates a lack of much need. This view is borne out by the numbers of local wheelwrights: *Piggot's Directory* notes one wheelwright in Moreton in 1823, *Kelly's Directory* records 3 in 1850. The 1841 Census notes 4, plus a journeyman and two apprentices.

In conclusion, wheeled transport *does* predate 1815 but there is no evidence of vehicles actually journeying through here until the very end of the eighteenth century. Sir John Bowring might well have been exaggerating in his memoirs but only slightly; the story of inaccessibility he told was almost certainly true for the period before 1772. Even in the 1790s I dare say the drivers of carts and carriages felt they were taking their lives in their hands, forcing their vehicles over the old bridges.

IAN MORTIMER