



moretonhampstead
history society

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2015

WEDNESDAY 21ST OCTOBER

AGM & FILM SHOW

The Chairman's report and election of the committee will take about half an hour. We are particularly keen to hear from anyone who would like to take on the role of Treasurer - please telephone 01647 441 083 for further details

There will then be a short break followed by a 45 minute compilation of film taken in and around Moreton from the 1930s to the present day. It includes clips about the school, the old railway journey from Newton Abbot, the Tour of Britain passing through and more that you may see yourself in! All welcome - £1 on the door for non-members. Union Inn starting at 7.30 pm.

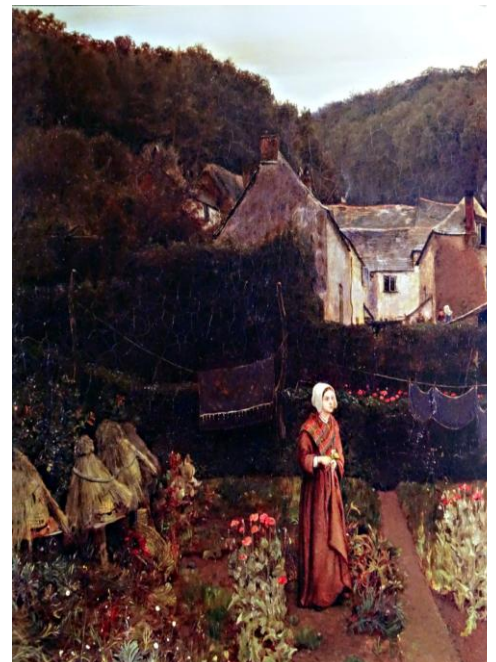
WEDNESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER

THE ART OF THE DEVON GARDEN – A HISTORICAL TOUR

Gardens are a little-considered aspect of our local history. This illustrated lecture by Dr Todd Gray, one of our most popular speakers, provides a visual history of how they have changed over the last 800 years.



Gardens great
& small in Dr
Gray's book
'*The Art of the
Devon Garden*'



Union Inn at 7.30 pm. Non-members welcome. £4 on the door.

WEDNESDAY 20th MAY

THE DARTMOOR PRISON RIOT of 1932

Simon Dell, a retired police officer, told us that his interest in the mutiny was fostered by a meeting with 90 year old John Luscombe who had been a prison warder at Dartmoor at the time of the riot. He then brandished John Luscombe's original truncheon which he used at that time, plus a pair of the prison's manacles. He discovered further information from a book of original photographs that was being thrown out by Crown Hill Police Force and was given to him by Colin Taylor. Pictures from those original photographs illustrated his talk.

The riot started over poor food. This was also the cause of the later riot in 1991 which Simon Dell had himself attended as one of the police officers sent in to restore order. In the days leading up to January 1932 the prisoners' breakfast porridge was inedible four days running. The recently appointed governor Mr Roberts had introduced new working methods and was very unpopular with both prisoners and staff, and it was never discovered if the sabotage was by disgruntled prison officers or the prisoners themselves. Mr Roberts replaced the porridge with beef and potatoes which was seen as a weak gesture by his superiors rather than humane one.

Originally built in 1806 for French prisoners of war, Dartmoor housed 440 convicts in 1932. The prisoners of post-World War I Britain were a different calibre to those at the beginning of the century. They were hard men who the war had trained to work as a team, who had learned to kill, and had then killed. The atmosphere in the prison was already tense, escape plans were being foiled daily and E block - the punishment block - was already overcrowded. It transpired that in the previous three months, chains, coshes and shives – crude knives made from toothbrush handles with two razor blades imbedded side by side at the top - were available in the prison.



The trouble started on 22nd January 1932 when the porridge was found to be cold weak and watery, and later that week Prison Officer Birch was slashed in the face by prisoner Thomas Davies. Nobody went to his aid although Davies was taken to E block and 'dealt with'. The trouble escalated and the noise of the confined prisoners banging on their cell doors could be heard in Princetown itself. Despite this the Governor allowed the prisoners to attend chapel on Saturday, a routine which allowed them to hear the football results. The illegal gambling within the prison was based on these scores the scores. The governor tried to address the prisoners and was jeered at, he retreated and although the Home Office forbade him to ask for assistance, he contacted Colonel Turner who arrived eventually having inadvertently first ended up in Moretonhampstead!

The porridge the following day was again inedible but despite the ill feeling the Governor agreed to let the men out for exercise. Each wing had its own exercise area, or parade ground. 90 prisoners from B wing were released with only Prison Officer Udey in attendance. They turned on him and stole his keys. Those prisoners who would not take part were beaten up until they did so, and those who still remained loyal were locked in the cells.

P.O Udey's keys gave them access to C wing, and then to E wing – the punishment block where the really violent men were housed. Once released the prisoners set about destroying the prison. The central administration block, a handsome stone building with a central clock tower was set on fire and gutted, as were various offices and recreation facilities. One prisoner destroyed all the musical instruments others, the prison record office which held priceless archive material relating to the original French and US prisoners of war. The churches and chapels of all denominations were also attacked.

The Devon Constabulary were contacted by Governor Roberts, who then hid with Colonel Turner in the old disused French prison, emerging only after the riot was quelled. This was achieved by 38 police men from the Plymouth City Police who arrived under the command of Archie Wilson. The Plymouth Fire Brigade also arrived – having crossed the moor in speeds in excess of 40 miles per hour, and further support came from the 8th Infantry Regiment who stationed themselves at the main gate and set up two machine guns with orders to shoot any prisoner who tried to escape!

The police assembled at the entrance to the prison and at 9.45am Officer Wilson called on the prisoners to surrender. They refused and although grossly outnumbered the 38 policemen charged them. Rather than band together the prisoners scattered. This allowed the police to overpower them, picking off the groups one by one.

In the aftermath the prisoners were striped and searched. It transpired that 23 were wounded and one shot, but not seriously. The previous prison governor arrived and was cheered by all and over the following weeks the prisoners were set to work restoring the £3,000.00 pounds worth of damage they had caused. The Home Office made a statement saying there had been a 'slight disturbance' at Dartmoor prison and the future of the prison was under review.

Four months later 34 prisoners were charged at the Tavistock Assize Court but the Town Hall had to be used as the Assize Court itself was too small. The men received additional sentences totalling over 100 years. Although some prisoners who had helped save prison officers from harm had their sentences reduced. Once such was Davies, who had hidden a warder under a pile of coke in the boiler house, thereby saving his life. Most of the prisoners involved were segregated and sent to different prisons to avoid reprisals. But the riot did produce many changes most of which were for the good. Governor Roberts was re-assigned to Cardiff Prison and sank into obscurity.

Simon Dell concluded his very informative talk with a question and answer session before we all went home to our comfortable and peaceful homes

Margaret & Brian Spittles

MORETON DISSENTERS

Following up the recent newsletter item on Exeter's Dissenters' Graveyard and two Moretonians buried there, we decided to visit it during the Heritage Open Days week-end. Consulting a database of the graves compiled by the Conservation Society, we found several other Moretonians and people with Moreton connections, including Bowrings. Perhaps not surprising in view of the town's role as one of the leading Dissenting communities in Devon in the two centuries following the civil war.

*Dissenters' Graveyard,
Exeter*

*The conical shaped
monument on the right
is one of the Bowring
graves*



But the visit led on to another 'discovery'. We toured later on part of St Nicholas Priory not normally open to the public as it is lived in by tenants and their rents help to pay for its restoration. In conversation the curator there mentioned that he had heard of Moretonhampstead in a recent talk about Sir John Bowring by his descendant, Philip Bowring. Sir John had his early education in our town (birthplace of his paternal grandmother) which he later wrote about in uncomplimentary but hilarious terms – see our website entry on him. Notwithstanding that he went on to a very successful career overseas in business and diplomacy before returning to found the Devonshire Association.

Philip Bowring, a financial journalist based in Hong Kong, has recently had published '*Free Trade's First Missionary: Sir John Bowring in Europe and Asia*'. We e-mailed him and he has agreed to give a talk to MHS if we can work around his next visit to the UK. Meanwhile he has donated a copy of his book to the Bowring library that will soon be available for loan after it has been put into the system. He has also asked to be kept up to date on the discussions about the building's future.



St Nicholas Priory

*(Above)
Tudor oak panelling in
a toilet.*

*(Right)
Tudor roof beam with
carpenter's marks and
expansion gap*



Bill & Judy Hardiman

WEDNESDAY 19th AUGUST

GREAT TORRINGTON & THE CIVIL WAR

Mistress Agnes (Dr Janet Few) and Master Christopher, appropriately dressed in seventeenth century attire, guided 33 of us around the town. They pointed out the locations of the battle of Great Torrington, one of the largest battles of the Civil War in 1646. The Royalists, led by Lord Hopton and the Puritans, led by General Thomas Fairfax, really met more by chance than design, foraging for food. 17,000 soldiers, cavalry and on foot, fought a long battle at night through the dark tiny streets of Torrington in heavy rain. The Puritans won, marking the end of the Civil war in the South West and the beginning of the end of the Civil War. At least 200 soldiers were imprisoned overnight in the Parish Church where Lord Hopton was storing 80 barrels of gunpowder at the back of the building. At some time there was a huge explosion, blowing apart the church and killing many soldiers and prisoners. On the southside of the Church is a long cobbled mound where the dead were buried in a mass grave. This effectively caused the end of the Battle.

After lunch we rejoined Master Christopher, Mistress Agnes and Mistress Mary for a presentation on life in the 17th century. This was very enlightening, educational and totally hilarious. From our group another Mistress Mary (Townsend) and Master Christopher (Pilkington) were volunteered to be dressed up in contemporary armour and every day dress with explanations of the reasoning behind the clothing. Mistress Mary gave us an insight into homemade medicines and herbal cures while Master Christopher, as a barber-surgeon, demonstrated more drastic interventions and surgery, using Bill Hardiman for his model for a very drastic invasive treatment for what would be now described as constipation. No the table didn't break as the patient shook with a mixture of fear and laughter but it almost did. The treatments for a broken arm and a headache are not to be recommended either.

Mistress Agnes and her colleagues worked very hard to give us a very interesting and unique day. It is a pity they have recently lost their funding for a permanent exhibition on the 1646 Café.

Torrington is an interesting old town, almost fully surrounded by 365 acres of common land and set on top of a steep hill overlooking the fields. Two of the fields are still narrow strips given originally to help the lepers to help grow food for themselves. The Shambles, the old buildings, the Museum, the old streets, and the pannier market are certainly worth a much longer exploration which I think a lot of us will return to do in the future. The Battle is commemorated every August bank holiday with a torchlight procession and magnificent bonfire.

Judy Hardiman



Roundhead Moretonians venture to Royalist Torrington with some painful encounters!



WEDNESDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER

**HISTORIC CHURCHES' TRIP TO TORBRYAN, WEST
OGWELL & WOLBOROUGH**

At last we had a warm sunny day for one of our trips. The sun shone through both the plain & the stained glass windows beautifully making them appear as bright as jewels. All these churches are so close to urbanisation and yet seem very isolated.

Our first church was Torbryan, a redundant church since the 1980s that we were shown around by Kim Thompson from the Churches' Conservation Trust as she did with West Ogwell. Torbryan recently hit the news with the discovery of their stolen section of the medieval rood screen. It has yet to be restored. The screen is 15th century as is the rest of the church, with the pulpit and altar all in the same medieval style of carving and colour. The painted figures of saints, apostles and angels have not been defaced and shine out brightly to us. It is thought the screen was saved during the Civil War by hiding it in local caves even though the local landowner was a close aide to Cromwell. The original medieval pews have also been saved by being encased by the Georgians within box pews - another unique feature. Most of the glass was clear except towards the pinnacles of the windows in the tracery where there is a lot of medieval glass of angels and family coats of arms. Some medieval glass in the 19th century was reassembled to make a magnificent window in the large east window. The church has always been painted white with no sign found yet of any wall painting and this is enhanced by mostly clear glass in the nave. Two rare types of bat, the Lesser and Greater Horseshoe, live in parts of the church.

After a reviving coffee and snack we drove down many a long lane to discover West Ogwell Church, another redundant church from the 1980s. Kim told us that this church had recently been their best income provider due to films being made there, the most recent one being a horror film. This church was actually built in the 13th century, is cruciform in shape which is rare and has been altered very little. It is now known that there was an Anglo Saxon church or building here due to recent archaeological finds that are now in RAMM. Pevsner apparently raved about this church and we all liked it too. It has no named dedication and was probably the private chapel of the Reynell family, one of the leading families of Devon, whose family home was adjacent before becoming the parish church. It is very plain with some carvings at the side of the windows of whimpled ladies. The pews are Georgian, the pulpit Jacobean and the cosy fireplace in the side chapel for the lord of the manor also probably Georgian. The Georgian manor house next to the church became a Convent for the Sisters of Mercy and is now Gaia House, a Buddhist Centre.

Lunch was at The Union Inn Denbury, before driving on to St Mary's Church at Wolborough, the parish church for Newton Abbot although there is no sign there of Newton Abbot at all! It is in a delightful situation overlooking rolling Devon hills facing towards Highweek church and has unbelievably a 4 ½ acre graveyard. We were lucky to be shown around by Churchwarden John Blanchard and Michael Martin, a local historian. This church is very difficult to get into as it is locked except for services as it has so many treasures. Both the north and south doors still have serious ancient locking systems that would be impossible to break. The porch is also interesting having a fireplace recently discovered, the remains of a 14th century alabaster plaque and at the base of the main church entrance two stone carved open mouthed devil faces. The church itself is still obviously well cared for and loved. The pillars are made totally of Beer stone with the original capitals all having large very ornate individually stylised foliage. One had leaves similar to curly kale with several snails close by; others had thistles, blackbirds eating berries with an owl watching wisely by, a unique one headed but two bodied animal and a green man. They are very proud of their stained glass windows, some being medieval but mostly full windows made by Kemp, a famous stained glass window maker of London whose windows bear his unique symbol of a wheat sheaf.

The church was 'beautified' with the help of the famous Newton diver, John Lethbridge, and the church feoffees in the late 18th century. The church was under the patronage of the Earls of Devon like Moreton but the manor has never been sold off. In the chancel a large alabaster monument commemorates Sir Richard Reynell from Ogwell who bought Forde House in Newton. His descendants married into the Courtenay family and King Charles 1st stayed with him and came to a service at Wolborough Church. The church has 9 bells, one being on the floor that was cast between 1390 and 1410 plus its wooden head stop and can still be manually struck. What a fine sound it still gives! The brass eagle lectern dates from 1480 and is very similar to that at Bovey Tracey and was also hidden in marshes during the Civil War but the talons had disappeared and had to be replaced with silver ones. The font is the oldest artefact in the church and is Norman of Caen stone in the palmate design with a Georgian cover with the palmate design replicated on it. However, the highlight was the 66 panelled rood screen, the largest number of painted panels in England. They too have not been defaced and show saints and apostles. One panel shows Sir John Shorn with the devil captured in his boot!

To top off our day we had a delightful homemade cream tea made by Mrs Blanchard and her band of volunteers. Thank you to these volunteers and to Kim Thompson from the Churches Conservation Trust for giving us such an excellent day.

Judy Hardiman

*Torbryan
Stolen
screen panel*



*West Ogwell
L: Box pews
R: Courtenays'
fire place*



*Wolborough
Screen, bell and
lectern*



WEDNESDAY 16th SEPTEMBER

NORTH DEVON SAVAGES

Peter Christie has been, amongst other things, a thorough researcher in the area's local newspapers. The story of the 'savages' provided rich material for the local press, and also the nationals. The time scheme of these specific events mostly fell in the mid-Victorian period, though the Dartmoor environs appeared to attract a number of families who were variously termed 'heathen' or 'brigands'.

Fuller in his book *The Worthies of England*, published in the seventeenth century, talks of a family which went by the name of Gubbins who dwelt in the area of Brent Tor. He says *'they lived in cotts, like swine having all in common multiplied, without benefit of marriage, into many hundreds.'*

The main focus of this talk, however, was on the Cheriton family, of Nymet Rowland, domiciled in the north of the county. The head was charged with trespass in 1869, but managed to escape before being cast into jail; thus setting a standard of behaviour that continued for many years. Although they owned thirty acres of land it was claimed, by neighbours, who accused them neglecting it. So too their living accommodation, which was described as a derelict house, with no windows; etchings of the time of the supposed cottage portrayed a tumble down hovel with decayed thatch and ill-fitting doors. There was no furniture, and most of the family slept in a pit in the middle of the floor; though two apparently utilised a hayrick in the warmer weather. This unconventional mode of living led into more specifically outrageous behaviour with the singing of obscene songs whenever the parson passed by. Visitors were likely to be pelted with mud, of which there seemed to be abundance, by unruly children.

Some family members, the females in particular, were known not as Cheriton, but as Bragg, the family name of the mother. In 1856, for instance, a Bragg was charged with stealing wood, a category of offence that became increasingly common as most of the family were, over the years, sentenced to short custodial terms, for petty crimes. These included poaching, damage to property and assault. A major offender was Christian, despite him being the seventh son of a seventh son, thus giving him, in theory, special healing powers.

The main combatants with the Cheritons appear to have been the Partridges who maintained pressure in making life uncomfortable for the former group. (Though their lives seemed uncomfortable enough without external interventions.) All the - many - children were illegitimate, something of a scandal in mid-Victorian England. In March 1870 there was a physical assault on the 'savages' ruined house. Later that year the influential *Pall Mall Gazette* printed an article on the beggarly state of the Cheritons' estate. In the following year the *Daily Telegraph* commented on the

'bestial' nature of some of the residents of Nymet Rowland. An observer noted that the family were bestial, filthy and sharing the house with piglets as a big black sow lived in the house. By 1873 the national interest was so engaged that the railway put on tourist trains to take passengers to view the 'savages' in their home environment. Today's equivalent of 'going viral'!

The vicar of Appledore, the Reverend Lesley, brought a different sensibility to the issues, claiming that members of the family did, irregularly, attend services and did not deserve the opprobrium heaped upon them. As a specific case of misplaced infamy, he pointed out that in traditional long houses the humans and the animals did live under the same roof.

Ultimately, it was unsure whether the Cheritons were decent people living in a culture hostile to their eccentricities, and therefore unfairly oppressed; and/or were victims of the greed of powerful neighbours who had an eye on the thirty acres the Cheritons were sitting on, strategically placed in the middle of the village. Christian died in 1881, still hanging on to his inheritance. Alternatively, were the family playing the vicar along? As in much of historical research there are more questions and answers.

Brian Spittles



Baring-Gould's imagined drawing of the home of the 'Savages'

ANTONIO VERRIO, C. 1636-1707

I suspect some people will not be familiar with the name Antonio Verrio. Until starting work on my latest book, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Restoration Britain*, I did not know anything more about him other than that he was a Baroque painter. But in the course of reading a number of late-seventeenth-century diaries, his name kept cropping up. Some writers did mention other artists – Godfrey Kneller and Peter Lely, for example – but Verrio was the one whose work everyone wanted to see. Celia Fiennes declared him '*the best hand in England*', and no less a connoisseur than John Evelyn made several special trips to see his paintings. In fact, Evelyn was so impressed that he invited the artist to dine with him and presented him with some of his home-grown oranges.

Verrio had royal or noble patrons all his life and almost all of his mature work was painted in England. So why do we not know more about him? The principal reason is that he painted frescoes. You will not see his work hanging in a gallery such as the National Gallery because it is either still *situ* or no longer exists. Charles II, James II, William III and Queen Anne all employed him – but of the twenty magnificent ceilings he painted at Windsor Castle all but three have been destroyed (by George IV). The three staircases he painted at Windsor have similarly been swept away. His work at Whitehall Palace has been lost – when the palace burnt down in 1698. Therefore, he is not widely known today because his work is not to be seen in galleries, it cannot go out on loan – you cannot have a Verrio retrospective – and it is almost entirely in England (and not familiar to people of other nations). Also, what survives is mostly in private houses (which charge the public entry fees). He probably would not appear in most people's '*top ten*' list of seventeenth-century artists.

But the work itself is astounding.

The greatest set of his paintings to survive today are the six ceilings in Burghley Hall, in Lincolnshire. One room in particular has been praised as his masterpiece: the Heaven Room. I saw pictures of this before I visited but did not quite appreciate what effect this room would have on me. The ceiling and three of the walls are entirely covered in one enormous painting of all the gods and goddesses disporting themselves (as gods and goddesses were wont to do). There is no furniture in this room – there is no point putting anything in there. The whole space simply overwhelms you. You don't look at this painting, you are surrounded by it; it looks at *you*. The games with perspective that the artist plays are phenomenal: it is very easy to forget that the columns and architectural structures that surround you are also part of the painting.



A corner of the Heaven Room, Burghley Hall

The most remarkable thing about this for me, however, is the fact that the work at Burghley was painted in the decade after 1689. It is sensual, and clearly the pride and joy of an aristocrat who shared his libertine outlook with his friends, and wanted to celebrate it. It is nothing short of a Sistine Chapel of self-indulgence: a visual temple dedicated to all the appetites and instincts. Yet this was painted just one generation after the fall of the Puritan Commonwealth, when dancing was frowned upon, Maypoles forbidden, the theatres were all closed and no singing (except the psalms) was allowed in church. Even as Verrio was painting at Windsor and Burghley there were still men and women in England who were frightened to go to a playhouse – not just because of what other people would think of them but because they thought it was sinful. This is not just a painting; it is the embodiment of a revolution.

In history writing, it is often the contradictions that are most revealing. In learning about Verrio, and in reading the diaries of both prim and proper persons and those eager to see his work, I have discovered an enormous spectrum of morality – something that defies easy encapsulation. It is at this point, when you come to

terms with the vast range of opinions and sensibilities of those living in the past, that you start to understand a period from the inside, and find you can break through the superficialities of generalisation.



The centre of the ceiling of the Heaven Room, Burghley Hall

Ian Mortimer

MORETON ARCHIVES

The manor of Doccombe has one of the fullest surviving sets of manorial records in the country. We have looked at some from various sources and they have already revealed some fascinating insights into life on a medieval manor. Most of the records, however, are kept at the archives of the former lords of the manor, Canterbury Cathedral, but unlike most archives it is not permissible to photograph them. So we have contracted with Canterbury to have them digitised for the Document Group who will transcribe them, and translate the ones in Latin and French, over the next couple of years. We hope that will provide the basis of an exhibition at Greenhill if we can secure some funding that we are currently applying for as part of the DNPA 's Parishscapes' Project.

When we help family historians to trace their Moreton roots and ancestors, it is often reciprocated with them passing on information and photos from their research to us. Last week we were delighted when the family of a former signaller at the railway station turned up with a copy of the Moretonhampstead Roll of Service (i.e. those who served and survived) for the Second World War which we had never previously seen. Apparently they obtained it in the 1990s from the Antiques' Shop located at the current 'fire site' in the Square. We will be putting it on the MHS website along with the Roll of Service for the First World War on the page that covers wars in the Glimpses of the Past section.

We are continuing our research into the history of Fingle Woods for the Woodland Trust. Many of us remember the ground-breaking projects of Dartington Hall such as their school, textile mill, glassworks, Bernard Leach's pottery, film and theatre productions etc. But less known was their 'forest venture' that transformed much of the woodland in our parish as well providing some much-sought employment there and at the saw-mill on Court St.

On Thursday November 5th at the Fingle Bridge Inn, Bill Hardiman will give an illustrated talk entitled:

'A passion for trees' - the Elmhursts of Dartington and their Fingle Woods' 'venture'.

The Elmhursts of Dartington attempted one of the greatest economic and social experiments of the last century. The talk will explain the part that Fingle Woods (and many Moretonians) played in it and assess the successes and failures of their 'forest venture'. All welcome - free entry. Please note that the talk starts at 7pm.



DARTINGTON TIMBERWORK SAWMILL, MORETONHAMPSTEAD

Photograph by Dartington Timberwork Ltd.