

Newsletter

August 2010

Visit to Exeter Cathedral:

On a warm and sunny morning, on Wednesday 30th June, members of the society were taken on a tour of the roof space and Dog Whippers room at Exeter Cathedral. This was an amazing trip, which I was so glad I did not miss. Our intrepid party was led by Cathedral Guide David Snell. David is a very experienced guide and has been associated with the Cathedral for many years. His knowledge of the building in terms of both its history & architecture was outstanding. He admitted that he suffered from vertigo, yet despite this, took us through a series of stone spiral staircases all over the top of the building, both inside and out. I soon lost count of the number of steps, but be assured it was hundreds! Whilst the views from the very top were fantastic, it was far more interesting inside where we could see how the roof was constructed and how much those ancient timbers and stonework had moved. We are talking metres here not centimetres!! Lead on the roof has constantly been replaced over the years, and each new piece of work is dated by the installers. In days gone by lead was purchased from as far afield as Lincolnshire, and brought to Exeter by ship. High up, near the roof, were two rooms which were actually lead smelting rooms, one had its ancient furnace still in place. The lead was cast on the floor of the smelting room, near to where it was to be used within the roof space from ashes of lead. The lead used was very thick, some 10lbs per square foot, lead used in general building work today is only some 2lbs/sg ft.

We then went to see the Dog Whippers room, again this was fairly high up within the walls of the cathedral, it had two stories - the upper was a quite spacious bedroom, and below was the living room complete with fireplace and bread oven, and windows looking down onto the nave! It was so amazing to see these rarely seen places.



The Dog Whipper was a post which began in the late 13th Century. His job was to remove dogs from the Cathedral before the services began, then clear the Close of women, and to ring the curfew bell. He would also lead the procession of the Clergy using his staff to keep the public away. In the 19th Century, the post became an honorary one, and was usually held by the youngest verger. We also saw the mechanism which rang the hour bell, part Heath - Robinson and part modern technology! We were there at twelve midday, and glad that the bell being struck was 2 floors above us!

The bell ringing chamber was huge by comparison to any others I have seen. The cathedral has 14 bells

although only 12 are rung together, the largest of which weighs 72 cwt, about 3.5 tonnes, and requires two bell ringers to ring it. Our trip lasted well over 2 hrs, and involved climbing hundreds of steps, not for the faint hearted, although David did say it was the most comprehensive tour he had ever done.

Roof tours are offered to the general public, and you can go to the Cathedral and book one, but it will not include all the parts we were very privileged to see.

Our sincere thanks go to Wendy Coombes for organising such a great visit. I heard one member say, that they thought it was the best History trip they had ever done, I wouldn't argue with that.

August: No meeting or visit this month.

July - Visit to Kelly Mine

A report on this visit will appear in the September edition of the Newsletter

Who is James Forrester?– read on!

Sacred Treason' by James Forrester, was launched on 5th August It is a conspiracy novel set in 1563. It has had some good feedback and Waterstones have chosen it to be their 'book of the month' for August (which is excellent for a first novel by an author with no following to his name).

Philippa Gregory has said of it 'I liked this novel intensely - a vivid sense of place, a growing sense of threat, James Forrester captures the sights, smells and dangers of Tudor England and tells a gripping story.'

Robert Goddard says, '*Sacred Treason* is a clever and enthralling historical thriller that not only brings the sixteenth century vividly to life through its fascinating central character, the master herald Clarenceux, but manages, praise be, to be historically accurate in the process. Many, like me, will hope to hear more of Clarenceux King of Arms'.

James Forrester- well, better known to us as our Chairman Ian Mortimer, who is using his two middle names for his first novel.

In September two other books appear: On 2nd Sept the paperback edition of ***1415: Henry V's Year of Glory*** - a day-by-day examination of the king over the course of the year that ended with the English victory at the battle of Agincourt.

A few days later- the first edition of, ***Medieval Intrigue: decoding royal conspiracies*** appears. Ian says of this book, 'this is probably the most contentious medieval history book ever published. It is a concentration of most of the difficult methodological and historical lessons I have learned over the last 15 years, presented in ten essays. Three of the essays have been published previously in scholarly journals - but the others go far further. It can be read as a scholarly companion to my biographical history of England or - if you're brave - as a study about information and how people created 'evidence' in the past. I hope it will prove revolutionary'.

He will be doing a talk about all three books at Waterstones, High Street Exeter branch, on or about 16th September.

Kelly Mine Open Day-Sunday 5th Sept:

Those that went on the History Society trip to this site will tell you that it is a very worthwhile place to visit. It is open from 1030am to 1630pm and a free car park is available nearby. With free admission to the site as well. Look for signs from the A382 near the Lustleigh turning.

September Meeting:

Our next meeting will be held on Wednesday 15th September at 7.30pm in the Stable bar of the Union Inn. The Subject will be:

Devon Water Mills

Speaker - Martin Watts

Martin Watts is a traditional millwright and corn milling specialist from Cullompton. He has carried out extensive research on historic water mills and their associated buildings and locations. He has many interesting photographs of the County's old mills.