



## Newsletter

August 2011

**August:** No meeting or visit this month.

### Visit to Vitifer & Golden Dagger Tin Mines :

We met at Bennetts Cross, on a rather cold and wet and atypical day for mid July! Quite a large group were present to hear local expert Tom Greaves explain the development of tin mining in the area, which had taken place here over hundreds of years. A landscape that might appear natural to the uninitiated was in fact the result of intensive industrial activity. Tom speculated that the area, at one time, was probably one of the most heavily industrialised sites in world. Much of the tin was obtained, in the early days, by open working, by digging great holes and gullies. Miners would discover a seam and follow it until it was exhausted. All the gullies that can be seen are entirely artificial. In the 19th Century they began to explore underground for further deposits. Adits and shafts were dug. It was then that the mines at Vitifer and Golden Dagger were developed. These were not just places of work, entire communities lived there. The remains of various mine building were pointed out, as well as cottages, and a blockhouse. This blockhouse was used during the week by miners who walked from places as far afield as Oakhampton, they would then walk back for their one day off before returning again the following day to start another shift! Leats, running for miles over the moor, were created to provide the power for the giant water wheels which were used primarily to operate pumps to keep the



workings relatively dry. At one time it is estimated that some 150 men, women and children worked at the two mines. Working underground was very hard work, made worse by the wet conditions. Miners emerged soaking wet at the end of their shifts, but at least they had a 'Dry' to go to, a heated room where their clothes could be dried before the next shift.

I think we all learnt a great deal from this trip; about the amazing history of an area that we all now appreciate so much more. Our sincere thanks go to our guide, Tom Greaves, and to Judy Hardiman for organising the event.

### Council Clippings :

#### 1902 – BOWRING LIBRARY OPENS

The Bowring Library, given to the town by Sir Thomas Bowring, was opened in January 1902. Sir Thomas first  
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put the idea to the Council at a special meeting in May 1900 and by December 1901 the building was complete but the formal opening could not take place until he returned from business in America in January. It comprised a reading room and library on the ground floor- with books supplied by Sir Thomas- a technical class on the first floor and a caretaker's apartment on the second floor. Closing time for the reading room was 10.00 pm but at the April meeting the Council gave permission for the upstairs room to be kept open until 10.30 pm for playing the 'game of ping-pong'. Mr Bartholomew Parker complained to the Council that the Rector had ordered his wife and a friend from the path at the bottom of Little Sentry on grounds of trespass. Cllr Neck said the public had the right to use the Sentry for ever. In November it was resolved that Mr French's son undertake the lamp lighting at Doccombe at a fee of £1 per year.

NEXT MONTH: RECTOR AND COUNCIL AT LOGGERHEADS !!

### Newsletter Editor Required:

The October edition of the Newsletter should be my last. By this date, I have produced the monthly newsletter for exactly 5 years, and I feel it is a good time for someone else to take over. I won't disguise that fact that it involves quite a lot of time and effort. I do hope, however, that someone will step forward and carry it on, as I did in 2006 from Peter Collier. I thank all those who have taken the trouble to email me to say how much they have enjoyed the various 'bits and pieces' of information, and stories I have included over the years. I do think continuation of the newsletter is important, as it provides a regular link with the members, particularly those who for various reasons are not able to get to the monthly meetings, but through their subscriptions continue to support the Society. Chris Pilkington.

### Northmoor Service Reservoir:

Just by way of a postscript., we had a good response from members as regards the appeal for details of the retired water engineer sought by Adam Ward, I have forwarded all the information to him, including an address and telephone number. He has asked me to pass on his thanks to those who have helped him with this.

### **Visit to Plymouth Naval Dockyards in June**



### September Meeting:

This meeting will take place on **Wednesday 21st September**, as usual, in the Stable bar of the Union Inn starting at 7.30pm. The subject will be:

### **Parole Prisoners in Ashburton & Moretonhampstead**

There has always been a lot of anecdotal evidence about this fascinating topic. This illustrated talk by Barbie Thompson, draws upon our Society's archive materials as well as newly available documents in the National Archives to explore who the prisoners were and what impact they had on the towns they stayed in.

**Chris Pilkington**