



# Moretonhampstead History Society

## Newsletter

December 2009

### December:

There is no meeting this month instead we have our annual Dinner which will take place on **Wednesday 16th Dec** at The Ring O Bells, North Bovey at 7 for 7.30 pm. The cost is will be £17.50p per person. We look forward to seeing all those who have booked to attend this, I'm sure that we shall have a very pleasant evening together.

### January Meeting:

The Next meeting will be held on 20th January in the **Stable bar of the Union Inn**. This will be Ian Mortimer's Chairman's Address, and the topic will be:

### **'Rewriting History'**

*Non members of the Society are very welcome to join us for a donation of £2 payable at the door.*

### November Meeting: Report

The November meeting was held in the Stable Bar of the Union Inn. We had a good turn out and some 44 members & guests were present to hear renowned Devon Historian Todd Gray on the subject of Prostitution!! More precisely on the Lady Girls, Dolly Mops & Tramps working in Plymouth in the middle of the 19th Century. Todd has written over 50 books and before the main presentation, he gave a resume' of four of the latest titles, which came under the 'History that Hurts' banner. He spoke of the problems of talking about such subjects to local audiences, and sometimes finding some of his audience had close connections with the material in his books, and took a very contrary view. A view often based on perception rather than fact. His information about the main subject of this talk came largely as a result of the Contagious Diseases Act which was piloted in Plymouth in the 1860's. The plan was to control prostitution by dealing with the resulting diseases. Prostitutes were rounded up and sent to Lock Hospitals where they were kept until disease free. They were also likely to be taken back every month for re-examination. This did reduce the numbers in Plymouth from about 2000 to about 500 over the years, but there was evidence that much of this reduction was as a result of displacement. This Act, and the locking up process attracted the attention of upper class women from London, and saw the early beginnings of the Women's Suffrage movement; for the first time the girls had someone to speak up for them, and were advised that Lock Hospital attendance was voluntary, so they could leave if they wanted. In many areas prostitution was a part time occupation, but not so in Plymouth where there was enough 'business' for full time working! We saw many actual 'mug shots' of the girls from police records, most looked much older than their years, and far removed from the idealised contemporary images of the day. Todd gave us some definitions: A 'Lady Girl' was akin to the modern mistress often with a single client, and set up in her own dwelling. 'Dolly Mops' generally worked in brothels, and 'Tramps' were at the lower end of the scale, being itinerants working on the streets with no permanent place of abode.

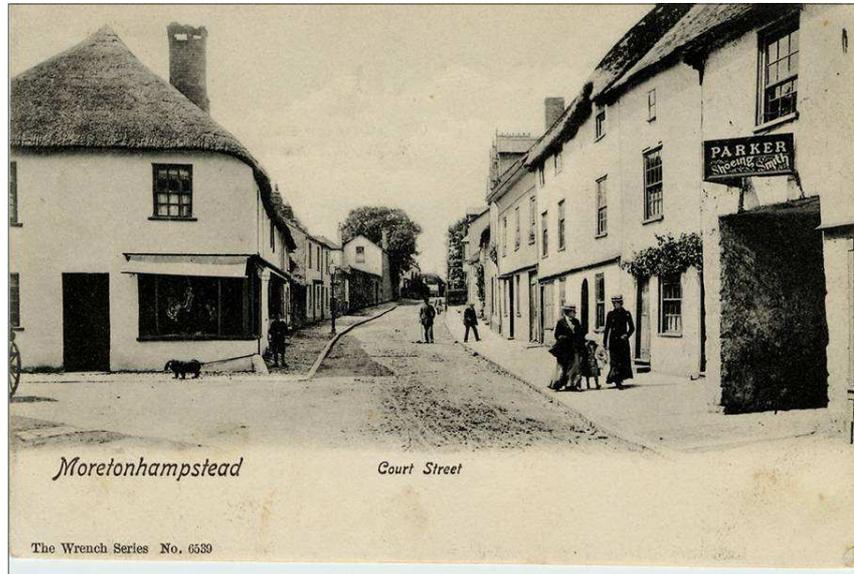
A very interesting and thought provoking talk.

### Best Seller!

I'm sure you will all be interested to know that Ian Mortimer's book 'The Time travellers Guide to Medieval England', which was published last year was recently top of Waterstones best seller (paperbacks) list.

## Some more on Butcher Dommatt and before:

I know that you all very much enjoyed Jack Bond's story about Butcher Dommatt from the considerable amount of feedback I have had from you about it. I have done a little bit of research on him and also now found out for certain where his shop was located (my thanks to Jeanette Webster). The current Newsagents shop on the corner of Court Street and Pound Street is where Butcher Dommatt ran his butchery business. It was, however, a butchers shop long before Mr Dommatt arrived in Moreton.



Above is a print I found in our photographic archive, which dates from around 1900, and meat can be seen hanging in the shop window. (Easier to see in the full sized version of this picture) You will note that there is an entrance on the Pound Street side of the shop. This, perhaps, explains why the shop is sometimes described in various records as being in Pound Street. Perhaps the dog outside is hoping for some scraps of meat to come his way? He may be out of luck if Butcher Dommatt is in there! Butcher Dommatt, or to give him his full name, John Coles Dommatt bought the shop from the Bellamy family in 1910. He lived above the shop with his wife Ella, who came from Martock in Somerset. He died on the 19th February 1940, at the age of 68. Ella died on 28th August 1944 aged 72. As far as I can find out, they had no children. Both are buried in St Andrews churchyard.

I am told we have a copy of the deeds of the Shop in the History Society Archives. I hope to be able to fill the gap to the present day as regards the history of this shop.

I can certainly go back some way to when it was owned by a Simon Ballamy. The Ballamy family were an extensive family in Moreton in the 1800's, and were involved in a variety of businesses in Morton. Simon was born in 1835 and baptised on the 22nd March of that year. It gets a bit confusing here because it would appear from our records that **two** babies called Simon Ballamy were baptised on the same day! One had parents called George & Betsy and the other, Simon & Sally! A double family christening I can understand, but to use the same names for the babies, a little unusual!! One of these Simons became a butcher. In the 1861 census he is shown as being a master butcher in Court Street, no doubt at the aforementioned premises.

Successive census information shows him as continuing as such until at least 1901. He is also recorded in the Kelly's Directory of 1902, this again shows him as a butcher in Court St. He would then have been 67. Eight years later he sold the shop to Mr Dommatt. I presume that he then retired; he died in 1923 at the age of 88 years.

A rather sad footnote to this story is that I found is that his son, George John, followed his father into the same trade, and the shop became Ballamy and son. This however was for only a relatively short time, as George John died in 1891 at the age of 31. Perhaps Simon Ballamy had hoped that his son would continue with the family business. Had George John lived, I suspect that Mr Dommatt would not have been become Butcher Dommatt of Moreton!