



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

February 2008

January Meeting:

The meeting was held in St Andrews Church, instead of our usual venue. This was done because it was the Chairman's address and we expected more people. We were not disappointed!! **120** members and guests filled the Church to listen to Ian's talk entitled: 'A Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval Moretonhampstead: What to Wear, Eat and Do'. If you were not there then you missed a truly fascinating and enthralling account of Medieval life. Ian spoke with great eloquence and authority. He knows his subject so well that he was able to hold an audience spellbound for just over an hour with detailed information about those times, that brought the whole period to life for us, all without notes!! Many facts and figures were presented in a very down to earth, and sometimes amusing way. We were left in no doubt, however, that these were very brutal and violent times in which to live. Just to take one issue, The Black Death. This accounted for loss of around 30% of the then population of England of about 5 million. Losses of up to 40% were attributed to counties like Devon, where ports facilitated quicker disease spread. It took hundreds of years for the population to recover to its pre Black Death levels. Notwithstanding the above, only 50% could expect to live beyond the age of 21, and only 5% would reach 60! It was a young society, the majority of senior office holders would be under 21! I for one, cannot wait until Ian's book, on which this talk was based, comes out in October.

February Meeting:

Our next meeting will be held on 20th February at 7.30pm in the Community Hall, Court St.

'History That Hurts'

Awkward & uncomfortable areas of Devon's history brought to light by and examined by Dr Todd Gray.

Todd Gray is a former lecturer and author. A publisher of many books on both local and natural history. His talk may challenge some widely held assumptions.

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

The Whitley Brothers:

You may recall that in last month's issue, it was a man called William Whitley who was responsible for the unusual clock faces to be seen on the Church at Buckland-in-the-Moor. Our President, Ian Mercer, has kindly sent me some additional information about William and also his brother Herbert.

The Whitley brothers, William and Herbert (of the brewers Greenall Whitley, Liverpool) came to Devon in the 1900s. William bought the Buckland estate and Herbert the Primley estate in Paignton where he founded the Zoo as a private collection. In 1926 he also bought the Stokeley estate in the South Hams. Its core is Slapton Ley which he left in trust in 1957 to be used for scientific and educational purposes, and I was appointed its first warden in 1959. William had three sons, Wallace, Claude and Herbert. Between them, in 1960, they owned all the land from Hedge Barton alongside

Houndtor (Claude), south through Holwell (Wallace) to Ashburton, and the Welstor estate (Herbert), stretched from Buckland in the Moor to Bagtor under Haytor. (Incidentally Herbert also inherited the land between the top of Court Street and the North Bovey Road at the top of which the four bungalows stand). Herbert formed the Dartmoor Commoners Association in 1954 to give evidence to the Royal Commission on Common Land. The Dartmoor Commoners Association (DCA), frustrated by lack of government action, approached the National Parks Authority (NPA), when it was formed in 1974, about the need for statutory discipline of commons and commoners. That led to an 11 year partnership (NPA/DCA, but mostly Herbert and me) which achieved the Dartmoor Commons Act in 1985 - giving a public right of access in perpetuity to all the commons 15 years before the Act of 2000 gave it to the rest of the commons of England and Wales, and created a Dartmoor Commoners Council 21 years before the Commons Act of 2006 enabled them for the rest of those two countries. So, in a way, William Whitley by accident set up a dynasty that left a permanent mark on Dartmoor, and his brother set up a nature reserve that by accident brought me to Devon - and then to Dartmoor to, inter alia, join forces with his nephew to get that 1985 Act.

Parliament in its 2006 debate acknowledged the precedent of that Dartmoor legislation, and agreed a special arrangement for Dartmoor through what civil servants now call 'the Mercer amendment'. Herbert taught me most of what I know about commons and commoners, and I am proud to be the chairman of their Council now. He died in 1995, but I like to think that he would also be proud of the trail he blazed that national government finally followed 21 years later, but in truth 52 years after he first argued for such action.

Ian Mercer.

[January Picture Puzzle - Answer:](#)



The rock featured, as many of you were no doubt aware, is a **'logan'** Stone.

This particular example can be seen on Shelstone Tor. This Tor is North North West of Black-a-Tor copse Nature Reserve, close to the West Okemont river above Meldon Reservoir.

Logan Stones are found all over Dartmoor. For those that are not aware, a logan stone is formed when a joint in a granite rock is eroded, over thousands of years, by the weather. Eventually when enough weathering has occurred, the stone becomes detached and can then be rocked or 'logged'. 'Logged' is a Devon word for rocked, and it has been suggested that it is this word that has mutated to Logan, i.e. Loggin' Stone. Some of the more famous logan stones are the Hanging Stone on Hangingstone Hill, The Rugglestone at Widecombe-in-the-Moor, The Nutcrackers on Sharpitor in Lustleigh Cleave, the Nutcracker Rock on Rippon tor, and Black Tor logan, (another Black tor near Burrator). There are also numerous other smaller logans on many of the other tors. Some of these Logan stones are huge; weighing many tons, the one in the photo is quite large, probably 2 tons or so.

Sadly over the years many of the larger logans have lost their ability to rock; this, in a couple of cases has been due to acts of vandalism.

How many are there on Dartmoor? To be honest, I don't think anyone knows for sure. If you study the OS map of Dartmoor you will see many marked individually, such as some of those listed above. Logan stones can be found all over the Moor. Many you may just come across, as I did at Shelstone tor. I am sure you will all agree that logan stones are a fascinating feature of the moor.

Anyone can contribute; please send articles to: christopher.pilkington@tesco.net