



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

Feb 2009

February Meeting:

Our February meeting will take place on Wednesday February 18th at 7.30pm, as usual in the Community Club

Haldon Belvedere and the Palks of Haldon House.

A Talk by Christopher Pidsley

The three-sided tower, can be seen from many miles around, and was built by Sir Robert Palk in 1788 to commemorate his great friend, General Sir Stringer Lawrence. In the eighteenth century, the Palk family owned 11,000 acres of land in the Haldon area, and much of Torquay. The family name is remembered locally in 'The Palk Arms' at Hennock. The tower, which retains many of its fine eighteenth century architectural features, has been faithfully restored and is used for weddings, conferences and other functions. The view from the top extends over Exmoor, Dartmoor and the South Hams. Chris Pidsley was the Vicar of Chudleigh for many years, and is a local historian and railway enthusiast. He gives talks regularly in the local area and has recently published a book on Haldon Belvedere – 'The Tower on the Hill' – through Orchard Publications. 'Intriguing, readable and well illustrated' a quote from The Dartmoor Magazine, autumn 2008.

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

January Meeting:

Our first meeting of the New Year was held on a stormy night on the 21st January. Despite the inclement weather, 45 members and guests attended to hear our President, Ian Mercer. His address is, by tradition, a biannual event, and this time the subject was

'A Lifetime with Landscapes'

He pointed out from the outset that he was actually a geographer rather than an historian as he traced his successful career through the medium of a selection of his collection of photographic slides. You cannot look at much of the English Landscape without also seeing some aspects of its history. This was evident from many of the pictures we saw. Ian has held many senior posts, mostly in Devon, and always associated, in some way with conservation and education, in a career spanning some 50 years. He began as the warden at the Slapton Ley Nature Reserve, which he developed, running various field study courses, from which several generations of students have now benefited. Through his slide show, he then traced his progress in his chosen field (no pun intended!), showing us what a truly varied and wonderful landscape we have in this country. From the Fens to rugged Yorkshire Moors, and beyond. There were also forays as far as the Arctic Circle, in the early days, with a stunning shot of a group of Beluga whales. Many of the pictures, however, were very familiar to us, being of Devon, where our speaker has spent the most of his life. We have a most wonderful heritage in this country, and we are indebted to those such as Ian Mercer for its successful stewardship.

More New members!

We extend a warm welcome to **John & Alix Slater** who joined the Society at our last meeting.

Picture Puzzle– Answer?:

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This photograph shows the other side of the stone featured in the January issue. As you can see it has an ' M ' carved upon it, on the other side, less clear I must admit, is the number '1 '. The stone is very worn and weathered, but basically triangular in section. I presume that this is a mile stone/ boundary stone. It can be found on the unclassified road from Moretonhampstead to Lustleigh, very close to the Brinning ' T ' junction. The OS map does show it as a boundary stone i.e. ' BS '.(map reference 752845) . However does the 'M' signify 'mile', and with the 1, indicate 1 Mile from Moretonhampstead, or is it 'M' for Moretonhampstead? This stone is probably a mile from Moreton, although I have not checked the distance. How long has it been there, I must admit I have no idea, but it is clearly very old. As many of you know, Moreton was one of several towns that had French Prisoners of war billeted at houses within the town, at the beginning of the 19th Century. They were free to move about within these towns. There were, however, a number of restrictions placed upon them, including one of travel, in that they were not permitted to go further than one mile from the centre of the town. Was this stone erected around that time, to mark prisoners' limit of travel towards Lustleigh, or did this boundary stone, predate this period, some 200 years ago? There are stories that local people kept watch at such places to check whether any prisoners broke the rules, by going beyond the limits specified, perhaps a reward was paid to informants?

I would welcome your thoughts and comments on this issue please.

Next month I will be giving a little more information about the French Prisoners of War. This was a very interesting part of the social history of Moreton and many other similar towns.

March Meeting:

Our March meeting will take place on Wednesday March 18th at 7.30pm, as usual in the Community Club.

Joseph Conrad: Exile, Seafarer & Novelist

Speaker: Peter Villiers

Peter is the son of the distinguished sailor, author & photographer Alan Villiers. His book— *Joseph Conrad Master Mariner*—completes a work begun by his father which examines Conrad's career as a Merchant seaman at the turn of the 19th Century. This Talk will explore how Conrad's early maritime career informed his later writing.