



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

February 2010

February Meeting:

This will take place on 17th February, in the Community Club at 7.30pm. The subject will be:

'Protecting Dartmoor's Past'

By Jane Marchand

Jane is a member of The Dartmoor National Park Archaeology team—Last year she spoke to us about the Dartmoor Leats.

This evening's talk explores the care that is needed to protect the moor and preserve its integrity, and the measures that the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) takes to combat theft, vandalism, ignorance and overuse.

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

January Meeting:

This meeting took place on 20th January

A large number of members gathered in the Stable Room at the Union Inn to hear our Chairman, Dr Ian Mortimer, talk about 'Rewriting History'. Ian considered the way that historians in the distant past recorded events, usually by referring to ancient chronicles or repeating 'received wisdom', which made the accuracy of 'the history' suspect. Over the centuries, historians learned to trace many different sources of historical material and to analyse and compare them more thoroughly. Although this gave a more rounded and detailed picture of the past, there has been a tendency in recent years for historians to write very 'dry' accounts – history as a list of facts and logical deductions, without considering the readability or interest of the material for the general public. Ian believes that writing and reading about history can be an enthusiastic and engaging experience, without sacrificing historical accuracy and intellectual scholarship. The reader can be invited to understand the character and motivation of significant historical figures, and the culture in which they lived. Similarly, a major event can be viewed through the eyes of many different people – king or soldier or peasant – and the accounts will probably not coincide; a problem we certainly still suffer from today. **Wendy Coombes.**

New Members:

We extend a warm welcome to two new members of the History Society. **Anne Mackay**, who lives just a mile or two outside Moreton at Sanduck, and **Bill Appleby** who lives in Forder Meadow.

Wartime Policing—an excerpt from Simon Dell's book

'Constable Trist served at Moreton from Christmas 1942 to July 1943. Sergeant Hedley Blamey lived with wife and daughter Heather (later a Rhodesian athlete) at the Police Station on Fore Street. Trist took the place of Constables Owen Osborne (RN) & William Taylor (Army) who had been called up. There were also 2 police war reserve constables, William Johnson and Lester Trump. Attached to Moreton were the 'country stations' – Chagford (Constable Tucker, Dunsford (Constable Nunn), Tedburn St. Mary (Constable Tonkin) & Lustleigh (Constable Skinner). Trist lodged with Mr & Mrs Underhill – a retired master builder. There seemed to be no shortage of food as Mr Underhill had a garden, an allotment, a plentiful supply of rabbits & reared a pig for annual slaughter.

Duties at Moreton mainly involved enforcing the lighting & other wartime regulations, in particular ensuring that unattended vehicles were immobilised (usually by removing the rotor arm from the distributor). Crime was negligible with so many men away in the services and with road traffic much reduced there were very few accidents or offences. Transgressions did occur and Trist attended the monthly Petty Sessions held at Moreton Magistrates' Court chaired by the formidable Sir Henry Slessor, a former high court judge in India.

The more exciting action came when prisoners escaped from Dartmoor Prison, then a fairly frequent occurrence. 2 or 3 convicts would slip away from a remote working party & the lack of modern communications meant that it was at least 4 hours before the police could man checkpoints. This involved stints of 8 hours on & 8 hours off at some isolated spot but Trist experienced no violence, as the convicts were usually glad to give themselves up for a hot meal after 2 or 3 days on the moor.

Perhaps his hairiest experience at Moreton was a ride on the town's fire engine to the charcoal works in the Teign Valley woods. The normal Leyland was away for its annual service and he set off along Pound St. with Messrs Colridge, Rihll & the other local volunteers in the ancient Merryweather at a steady 4 mph. After descending Lime St. with 'weird noises emanating from the (*pre-synchromesh*) gear box', they had to get off and push it up the first part of the road to Mardon! Along the level road at the top a steady progress of 20 mph was periodically halted for the retrieval of caps blown off by a gale force wind until Fire Chief Colridge threatened: 'If anyone else's cap.....!'.
After a slow descent down from the moor, the works' owner greeted them with: 'Where the Hell have you been? The place could have burnt to the ground by this time'. In the event, however, the fire was already out and Trist had a more comfortable and speedier return journey on the Bovey engine.'

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Take Cover (The wartime memories of Devon policeman, 1938-46) by Edward Trist, compiled by Simon Dell. Published by Forest Publishing (2005)

Available from Amazon, Waterstones and elsewhere priced at £9.99p

Moretonhampstead's Merryweather Fire Engine (*photo courtesy of Dave & Sian Colridge*)



[March Meeting:](#)

This meeting will take place in the Stable bar of the Union Inn, on the 17th March 2010.

'Exeter Cathedral: a Portrait in Decorated Gothic' by Mark Cottle

Mark Cottle is an experienced lecturer in Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Tudor history. This talk looks at the Medieval architecture and construction of Exeter Cathedral.

Exeter may claim to be one of the finest examples of decorated architecture in Europe, and has been handed down to us relatively unscathed by conflict and time.

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

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