



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

July 2009

June Meeting:

On Wednesday 17th June, members visited Poltimore House Alan Payne, History Society member and Chairman of the Poltimore House Trust, introduced us to our guides, (see photo below) .Caradoc Doy took us around the gardens, and Ricky Apps showed us around the house. Caradoc was very knowledgeable about all matters relating to trees, and he pointed out some very rare examples. He is an expert on the Veitch Collection, and gave many accounts of the exploits of the plant collectors who went out in the 18th & 19th Centuries. They went to incredible lengths in order to bring back seeds and seedlings for the grand gardens of the aristocracy.



Particularly impressive were the Chilean pines, which had spread in a manner akin to their natural habitat. Our tour inside the house was equally fascinating, much has been lost to theft and vandalism, but so much still remains. It was easy to imagine what a truly great house this had been in its' heyday. I was particularly taken by the fine plaster work on the walls and ceiling in the saloon. I didn't expect to see an operating theatre from the days when the house was an NHS Hospital (1963 to 1975). The evening was rounded off by a Barbecue, our thanks for that go to Wendy Payne and her son, I think Alan also lent a hand with the burgers. I was left full of admiration for all those who work on this massive project and share the dream of its eventual restoration.

1100 years of History:

On Thursday 11th June, our Chairman Ian Mortimer, gave an enthralling talk in St Andrews Church. This Talk was one of a number of events arranged to celebrate 1100 years of the foundation of the Diocese of Exeter in 909. (originally the Diocese of Crediton to be absolutely accurate).

The basic premise was to demonstrate through examination of the last eleven centuries and the greatest changes seen within those centuries, which Century had seen the most change. It is always assumed that the 20th Century has seen the most change, but Ian argued that this view was perhaps focussed too much on technology.

Ian began in the 10th Century and moved us swiftly through each century, pointing out what he felt were main events and developments, which led to the greatest changes in each. All this was done seamlessly, entirely without notes, with numerous references to specific dates and events, to support his argument.

He started, not surprisingly, with the establishment of the Diocese and how that led to the development of parishes and local churches. How England first became a Kingdom, the effect of the Vikings and the Normans. The development of the Common Law; Increase in trade and the establishment of markets. Magna Carta and the eventual curtailment of absolute power of the Monarchy. There was also the effect of disease, particularly in the 14th Century, which killed 35-40% of the population in 7 months! The emergence of the Mercantile class, and the power of the long bow were mentioned also. Improved ship building which led to wider exploration of the world and even greater trading opportunities. Church led education and schools, and the growth of literacy. Scientific development in the 16th Century, telescopes and microscopes. How medicines developed and people sought the help of doctors rather than priests when they were ill. The standardisation of time and other measurements. The growth of transport, leading to greater mobility for everyone. The development of the rights of the individual, particularly for women. All of these factors have played their part in changing our world. After a fantastic journey through the centuries in 70 minutes, Ian finally concluded that it was indeed the 20th Century that had seen the most change. But this was not expressed in terms of the many technological changes we all know about. The rationale for his view was based on the fact that it was in the 20th Century that man first realised that our planet was a finite resource, and that we could no longer keep on expanding. (graphically expressed in the famous 1968 'Earthrise' picture taken in space, which showed the earth rising over the moon). 'Well that's all we have to play with', Ian felt that this realisation represented the greatest change, and also demonstrated the need to revisit self sufficiency, so essential to our survival in the past. Here in the 21st Century we now face this challenge

[July Field Trip:](#)

On Thursday 16th July there will be an evening visit to Brixham for a sailing trip on Vigilance, a 1920's sailing trawler, one of Brixham's Heritage Fleet. . All the places have now been taken. I will report on this next month.

[August Meeting:](#)

There is no meeting this month

[Mileage Payments:](#)

We no longer hire coaches for the field trips the Society organises during the summer. They are now prohibitively expensive, and we often didn't get sufficient numbers to fill them. In recent times, Wendy Coombes has very efficiently organised car sharing for our trips out. This has worked very well, however, after a discussion the committee felt that the drivers who take other members on our field trips should be compensated in some way. It has been agreed that the civil service mileage rate should be used for this i.e. 40p per mile. It would not, of course, apply to those who choose to travel to locations independently, and are not part of the car sharing scheme organised by Wendy.

This would mean that for a round trip of say 50 miles a driver would be entitled to claim 50x 40p= £20. Claims are to be made direct to our treasurer Jeanette Webster.

This claim system will apply from now on for all field trips, including this month's trip to Brixham to sail on the Vigilance.

[RHS Rosemoor:](#)

Caradoc Doy (who took us round the grounds at Poltimore) is at RHS Rosemoor at Torrington on 24th July, and will be giving a talk in the morning entitled:

'A History of the Veitch family and their famous plants'

This will be followed by a garden walk in the afternoon led by him. The cost will be £14 (Non RHS members) and £8 (RHS members) For full details of this event go to Rosemoor's website

www.rhs.org.uk/whatson/gardens/rosemoor