



# Moretonhampstead History Society

## Newsletter

June 2008

### May Meeting:

Our May meeting took place on the 21st, and was a trip to Exeter for a guided tour of the Cathedral Close and the Bishop's Palace Gardens. Our guide was one of the Exeter Redcoats, John Heal, who led us on a circular tour, starting from the west front of the cathedral. He explained that Exeter was founded by the Romans who built a garrison there in 55AD. This became a settlement and in 200AD a wall was built around it, using local stone. He said that some 70% of the wall still exists! although much of it amount to repairs and rebuilds over the centuries. He pointed out the various buildings in the Close, parts of which are Medieval. We looked at a section of the wall, where we were shown the different types of stone used; including one part, which was believed to be some of the original Roman wall. We then went into the Bishops Palace Gardens, by special arrangement, as these are private, and not open the general public. The Palace was originally 13th century, but had been much altered and added to, the East wing had long since been demolished. It was here that gardens had been laid out, and much developed by the wife of the previous Bishop of Exeter. The Garden was a real haven of tranquillity, yet so close to the hustle & bustle of the City literally just yards away! After a quick tour of the Cloisters, or at least where they used to be, prior to Oliver Cromwell! We finished our tour where we began, a very worthwhile and informative trip. **See photo on the next Page.**

### June Meeting:

#### **Wednesday, 18th June, 2008—Visit to Cotehele House & Symphony in Stone Tour.**

Cotehele is a National Trust property situated above the river Tamar near Saltash. The original house was Tudor and has been little changed. Outside there are terraces and a valley garden, including stew ponds and a dovecote. A quiet (but fairly steep) road leads to Cotehele Quay where a restored sailing barge, the *Shamrock*, is moored and a former inn, *The Edgcumbe Arms*, serves as a tea room. You can also visit a working mill powered by a water wheel.

This year we have decided not to hire a coach, but to try to arrange transport for everybody in cars. We shall assemble at Court Street car park at 10.00 am where passengers can meet up with their drivers. On arrival at Cotehele, we plan to use the top car park. Members are then free to visit the house and grounds at leisure, and have lunch. **Would passengers please give their drivers £5 to cover the cost of fuel?**

Our tour 'Symphony in Stone' is designed to look at the exterior of the house and grounds, and will deal with the estate's architectural and archaeological legacy. The cost of the tour is **£3.00** per person.

**The tour will begin from the Reception Area at 2.00 pm**, It will be led by a member of the estate staff. This tour has been booked for the History Society, and we shall need to notify the National Trust of the number to be expected. Booking is therefore essential. **Please make sure you are at the Reception Area by 2.00 pm.**

You may wish to allow additional time to visit the interior of the house, have lunch, walk round the gardens and visit the Quay and the Mill. National Trust members must have their cards with them, or they will be charged the full entrance fee. The cost for non-members is currently £7.50.

The National Trust wishes to draw your attention to the following points:

The house is open from 11.00 am to 4.30 pm. The last admission to the house is 4.00 pm.

If you are visiting the house, large bags, cameras or other bulky items must be left with a steward at the front door. High or sharp heels may not be worn inside the house. Because of the fragile nature of the house, visitor numbers may be restricted at any one time. There is a Film Room to the west of the house showing an 8 minute video about the estate. The gardens are open from 10.30 am until dusk. The shop is open from 11.00 to 5.00. There is a licensed restaurant in the barn open from 11.00 am, which provides morning coffee, lunch and afternoon tea. Closing times vary. The *Edgcumbe Arms* Tea Room on the quay is open from 11.00 am

and serves light refreshments. Closing times vary. The mill is open from 11.00 am. The last tour starts at 4.30 pm. Flour is available for sale. Cotehele Gallery is located in the East Wing of the house. Opening times vary. **Please return your booking form by Monday 9th June.**

### Picture Puzzle Answer:

My congratulations go to **Wendy Payne** who got both the building and its location absolutely correct. However for those who did not recognise the structure it is an **Ash House**. This particular example can be seen at Sanduck Farm close to the unclassified road from Moreton to Lustleigh. My thanks go to Jackie & James Paxman for allowing me access to this strange building; it is a very typical example.

Stone Ash Houses were a common sight on farms located on the fringes of Dartmoor. Generally they are small circular buildings with a conical roof, which would be located near the farm. Open fires were an ever present threat, when most roofs were thatched, especially at night, when embers glowed and sparked unattended. To reduce this risk it was common practice to rake out fires last thing at night and take the ash out to the ash house. This task was usually the responsibility of the children of the household! Many of the moorland farms were located beside a road and often the ash house would be built on the far side of it. If this was not possible the ash house would be sited well away from the house, in both cases the aim was to remove any risk of sparks landing in the thatch. There would be a small hatch, rather like a letter box, on the farm-side of the house through which the ashes were dumped. On the opposite side was a larger doorway through which the accumulated ashes would be removed. The hatch on the Sanduck Ash house has been blocked off on the outside, but it is clearly visible on the inside wall, directly opposite the door where one would expect to see it. There was also another style of house and that was the square version which was built in the same manner but with a single door through which the ash was tipped and removed. Accumulated ash would eventually end up on the fields. Some Ash houses had perches for chickens to roost in. It is thought that the ash house tradition could possibly date back to the Medieval period. I understand that there are some 30 or so Ash houses still in existence around Dartmoor, please let me know if you know where others can be found.

### July Site Visit:

This will take place on 2nd July, and will be to Tuckers Maltings at Jetty Marsh, Newton Abbot. We will meet there at 2pm. Further details will be circulated soon.



Members of the History Society in the Bishop's Palace Gardens.

Anyone can contribute; please send articles to: [christopher.pilkington@tesco.net](mailto:christopher.pilkington@tesco.net)