



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

March 2008

February Meeting:

Our speaker in February was Dr Todd Gray, whose talk - **'History that Hurts'** – gave us some uncomfortable facts about Devon's past. Part of Exeter's history was 'rewritten' after the Civil War to appease the restored monarchy, and Plymouth was a stronghold of fascism in the 1930s, especially amongst the farming community. Drake and Raleigh did not meet to plan an attack on the Armada in Exeter, and Drake was knighted in London, not on Plymouth Hoe or any of the hotels that claim to have hosted this event. Queen Elizabeth I never came to Devon, nor did she sleep in any of its beds. Even the Cornish Pasty was not invented in Cornwall. The recipe may well have come over from France.

We must remember, as we live in our comfortable houses and eat plentiful food, that in 1872 a man was sentenced to two months' hard labour in Moretonhampstead for stealing bread to feed his starving family, and that in Plymouth at this time one hundred and twenty families lived in one crowded courtyard with no sanitation except buckets, which were emptied daily into the public street.

When the building of a public library in Moretonhampstead was first proposed, it was not understood in some quarters why it should be necessary since 'most people cannot read'!!

The meeting was attended by well over 40 members and guests.

Wendy Coombes

March Meeting:

Our next meeting will be held on 19th March at 7.30pm **in the Stable Bar of the Union Inn**. We anticipate that our speaker will attract higher than usual numbers, hence the change of venue. The Illustrated talk will be given by our much respected, local Doctor, **Tim Dudgeon**.

Entitled:

'The History of Moretonhampstead Hospital and its connections with the Hambelton Estate'

Dr Tim Dudgeon has been a GP in this area since 1985. His talk will cover the inception of the Hospital, its dedication in 1900 to the Right Honourable WH Smith, its development, staff, and also about some of the interesting characters that have passed through its doors

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

Excerpts from The Exeter Flying Post:

This entry is dated **24th August 1870**

'This Salubrious moorland town is now quite full of visitors, attracted by its sanitary reputation and moderate charges. A rare treat is in store for all on Friday evening when W. C. Stockdale of Florence has kindly consented to read Sheridan Knowle's play 'The Hunchback' in the Smethurst Schoolroom. The Proceeds will be presented to the Cricket Club for its 'Tour of England'. Walter Thornbury says 'Moretonhampstead boasts an old cross and an elm tree at the entrance to the churchyard. The local tradition is that this tree was formerly the very centre of the old village festivities. Here, the rude forefathers of the hamlet met. On the lowly horizontal boughs of this tree a stage used to be erected for dancing, the fiddler working his elbow from a branch above. A week later, on the 31st August W C Stockdale's performance was duly reported on 'An amateur reader of great genius and originality ... for two and a half hours he riveted the attention of his audience'.

The spacious Smethurst schoolroom was brilliantly lit, and the platform appropriately draped for the performance’.

Editors notes: I wonder if there is any record of the Cricket Club ‘tour of England’ in 1870—did it go ahead?

Does anyone know where the Smethurst schoolroom was located in Moreton?

If you have any information on the above, do please let me know.

Picture Puzzle:



Can you tell me where this building can be found? It was designed and built in the 19th Century for a very specific purpose. As you can see it is now in a very poor state of repair! Can you guess what that purpose was?

My thanks go to Peter Wills, one of our members who lives in Suffolk, for sending me a photo of this building.

Membership:

At our January meeting in St. Andrews Church, we launched a membership drive.

The successful outcome of this was **16** new members!!

We extend a warm welcome the following:

Richard and Ann Prince, Carolyn Pearl, Leslie & Marion Miles, Mike and Kathy Warner, John and Barbara Lewis, Mary Townsend, Deborah Darnes, all from Moreton and its environs

William and Judith Hardiman from Docombe

Michael Thomson and Julie Tucker from Castle Drogo.

Sandra Bond from Dunsford.

Finally, we also welcome **Bob Piggot**, who joined at our February meeting.

We very much look forward to seeing you all at our meetings and hope that you will enjoy the varied programme on offer this year.

This brings our total membership to **99** of whom **66%** receive this newsletter via their email.

On the down side however—Jeanette says that there are still a number of subscriptions that have yet to be paid for this coming year. Please don't let your membership lapse, we have such a good programme this coming year! If you think you may be one of those who have not yet paid, do please check with her. She has a list!

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