



Moretonhampstead History Society

Newsletter

Mar 2009

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

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

February Meeting:

The hall was packed (56 members & guests) on Wednesday 18th February for a talk on Haldon Belvedere and the Palks of Haldon House given by Chris Pidsley. Robert Palk was born in 1717 in a farmhouse in Ashburton. From this modest beginning, he became a powerful & wealthy man, amassing a great fortune whilst in the employ of the East India Company. He left India in 1767 and bought Haldon House and its 11000 acres. He built the Belvedere in 1788. Alas, future generations of the Palk family mismanaged the estate, and it was all eventually lost. Much of the house was demolished, what remains is now The Lord Haldon Hotel. The last of the line died in abject poverty in London in 1945.

The Belvedere was, however, beautifully restored in the 1990's. It is now used for functions such as civil weddings, but can be visited on Sundays & Bank Holidays.

This was a rather sad story of the rise & fall of a great family, skilfully narrated by Chris. A most enjoyable and informative talk, which I was glad not to have missed.

History Society Website:

A great deal of work is being undertaken to put more information on our Website. Our thanks for this go to Bill Hardiman, ably assisted by Ian Mortimer & Gary Cox. The information recently added includes the 2009 Programme in summary form with the date of each meeting and brief details of the topic & speaker. There is also now an item on the website with 2 rolls of honour from the names on Moreton's War Memorials. This is most interesting and gives lots of details about these men, who died in the service of their country. This item, Bill says, may be expanded further to include others with Moreton connections. It can be found in the 'Glimpses of the Past Wars' section. Bill & Gary are currently working on the School Records. There have also been some suggestions and offers of information for an item on WW2 evacuees in Moreton.

In addition to all this there are also plans afoot to improve the format of the website. I will keep members updated on the important progress being made in this area.

Were you at school in Moreton?

Gary Cox & I are researching a new item covering Moreton's schools from 1876 to 1940. If you have any information, photos, stories etc. about those 'best days of your life' at Greenhill & Pound St. or wish to comment on the rolls of honour, please contact me, **Bill Hardiman**

Editors note:

CEP 010309 H S Newsletter

.An article in a recent issue of Devon Family History had used the MHS website for information, and described it as 'excellent'.

[The French Invade Moretonhampstead?](#)

In last month's Newsletter, I spoke briefly about the French Prisoners of war. I wonder what it would have been like for the then residents of Moreton to have these 'foreigners' in their midst. At a time that we were at war with them, how were they received? Did the prisoners wear uniform? Speak English? Did they undertake work? We know that some did marry local girls, and stayed on after the war was over. During the 19th century a system was evolved whereby French prisoners of war that were of a certain rank were allowed to live in what were designated as 'parole towns'. This meant that most of the officers were allowed to live in these towns as virtual free men, mixing with the local population. In 1803 there were 50 such towns in Britain, 4 of which were on Dartmoor. Ashburton, Okehampton, Tavistock and Moretonhampstead.

On average there were at any one time upwards of 300 parolees living in each of these towns! The men had to abide by 8 rules:

1. To behave decently and abide by the laws of the realm.
2. Not to correspond in any way directly or indirectly with France.
3. All other correspondence had to be vetted by the Commissioners or Agents.
4. To be permitted to walk or ride not more than 1 statute mile from the designated limits of the parole towns nor go outside the parish boundaries if they were within the allotted miles, nor turn left or right.
5. To be back in their lodgings by 5 o' clock in the winter and 8 o' clock in the summer months.
6. Not to enter any field or take a turning on any crossroad.
7. Not to riot or behave in an improper manner.
8. Not to try to escape.

Any contravention of these rules could result in a return to the prison at Princetown, which was grossly overcrowded, and something parolees would want to avoid at any cost! Imagine what an effect such an influx must have had on those residents of Moreton. I understand that the government paid local people money for board and lodging, so to some extent they were, perhaps, a useful source of income!

[April Meeting:](#)

Our April meeting will take place on Wednesday April 15th at 7.30pm, as usual in the Community Club.

[From Pot Water to Hydro Power - An Appreciation of Dartmoor Leats.](#)

[Speaker: Jane Marchand](#)

Jane is a member of the Dartmoor National Park's Archaeology team, and an experienced speaker on local Archaeology.

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[New Members:](#)

We welcome yet more new members to our Society; **Alan Clarke** of Aylesbury, Bucks and **Roger & Frances Billis**, from Ford Street, Moreton, all of whom joined at our meeting in February.