



## moretonhampstead history society

### February meeting 'House Histories'

Sian Coleridge, owner of the Union Inn since 2004, estimates that it dates from the late Middle Ages. Its outline plot has the typical shape of the medieval burgage plots found along Ford(er) Street and evidence of a cruck beam and plank and munton timbering indicate that it was a two-room hall house. It became a tavern in the late 1500s with the front public hall divided into two by a panel with a back kitchen cum brewing room. Later leases (see Ian's article) and a recent archaeological dig also show its use by a blacksmith. For the most part, however, it was a local inn for farmers that by the late 1700s had expanded to a second floor with two outbuildings and glass windows. Originally called the White Swan, its name changed in 1807 to the Union Inn - probably to mark the centenary of the union with Scotland and shortly after that with Ireland. In the twentieth-century it was owned by breweries and lost its thatch roof after a beam gave way under snow in 1965.

Pound Cottage's owner, Mike Warner, showed that it was originally a two up two down cross passage house that formed part of the complex centred around the medieval pound. Here animals were kept before being sold at market or slaughtering. It was part of the Courtenay Estate and once had eight people living in two rooms. In 1890 it passed to the Hambledens and by the time they sold it in 1928 there were three bedrooms, sitting room and kitchen but still with a 'wash house' in the adjoining barn and an earth-closet toilet. The Howards did much of the modernisation in the 1980s but it remains what the 1928 sale catalogue called 'a very attractive and picturesque old-fashioned double-fronted property constructed of stone with stucco elevation and thatched roof'.

Ian Mercer began his talk with a shocking revelation. Ponsford House was built about 1740 for the mistress of Dr Ponsford who himself lived in Drewsteignton. In Napoleonic times it was the residence of a Mr Ponsford, the local surgeon, who combined this with the role of Agent responsible for the French prisoners of War and Captain of the Moretonhampstead volunteers. It was his son, another Dr Ponsford, who was called to the White Hart to help the dying Jonathan May, the victim of the Jacob's Well Murder in 1835. Although it was refashioned in the early and altered in the later

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1800s, it retains the basic shape of a Georgian town house with its Porch with Tuscan columns and central passageway. Most of its internal joinery is intact and there is a late medieval burgage plot at the rear similar to that of the Union Inn.

Many thanks to our three speakers for allowing a packed audience to see into their homes and sharing with us their well-researched, fascinating histories.

### March Meeting 'Sir Edward Pellew & the wreck of the Dutton in Plymouth Sound'

Martin Read is a trained archaeological conservator and lecturer in Maritime Archaeology at the University of Plymouth. He is the current Government Licensee for the Cattewater Protected Wreck. The Dutton was an old East Indiaman being used as a transport ship for troops. Caught for weeks in a raging Atlantic storm, by January 1796 she was forced to seek refuge in Plymouth Sound. Grounded on submerged rocks under the Citadel, over 500 troops and passengers on board looked doomed until the Naval Captain Sir Edward Pellew carried out a heroic rescue operation. For this he ended up an Admiral and a Viscount, and is buried in Christow church. CS Forester used him as one of the heroic characters in his Hornblower series of books, recently filmed for TV.

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March Union Inn 7.30 pm.**



Captain Edward Pellew  
and Midshipman Horatio Hornblower

## Inaugural historic churches' visit

For our first trip 15 members explored Dunsford, Bridford & Christow churches. We had a warm welcome at Dunsford kindly arranged by one of members, Sandra Bond, who had tea & plum cake ready for us served in their newly built kitchen by the west entrance. She had also arranged for Maurice Sharland to give us a history of the church bells & to show us around the bell tower & the workings of the clock. Maurice still manually winds the clock up weekly. We also were able to ring the bells silently.

Sandra gave us a history of the church dedicated to St Mary, built at a similar time to Moreton church but there was a church there from at least 1262. From the gallery we saw the roof bosses & the paintings around them. The gallery is held up by huge wooden beams from the Powderham estate. Another unique feature is the imposing Fulford family tomb & large Fulford box pew. There are some small fragments of medieval glass in the windows. In the graveyard Sandra showed us the grave stone of Jonathon May & also the remains of a medieval cross.

Bridford had a church there in 1259, dedicated to St Thomas Becket, with additions in the 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the roof bosses have tudor roses & pomegranates, the symbols of Katherine of Aragon, and one of three rabbits with their ears touching in the centre. The 16<sup>th</sup> century rood screen is especially striking with beautiful carvings & original paint though in parts mutilated by the Puritan soldiers. On the altar side of the screen there are several original painted large figures of men. Over the south door there is a painted board with the royal arms on dated 1661 & there were lovely examples of medieval glass. In the guide book there are some interesting anecdotes of how some of the Bridford clergy have misbehaved in the past.



Maurice Sharland and the group under the gallery at Dunsford Church

After lunch at the Bridford Inn, we explored Christow church. Christow has become the shortened version from Christenesstouwe “a place dedicated to Christ”. This had its first vicar in 1259 but has origins back to 1084 when it was dedicated to St Christina – which of the five recorded St. Christinas is not known! The present church was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century mostly of granite. The feel of the church was wealthier than Bridford & Dunsford with patrons from large religious institutions from as early as 1259 including Tavistock Abbey. In 1812 the patronage was sold to Admiral Sir Edward Pellew of Canonteign & the family are still patrons today. The chancel was extended in 1862 & there are many memorials here telling interesting military & naval facts of this famous family. A crypt was built below for them holding 12 lead lined coffins. On the north wall the royal coat of arms is dated 1682 & is made of plaster making the unicorn & lion with its red mouth & long neck look quite menacing. The pews are still all boxed with hinged doors & the most gorgeous carvings.

Our next 3 churches will be Holcombe Burnell as it has close connections to Dunsford, Doddiscombsleigh with its famous medieval windows & Dunchideock with lunch at The Nobody Inn at Doddiscombleigh. Date to be confirmed.

*Judy Hardiman*

*Histor-Ian's corner*

**The Ford House estate.**

Siân Colridge's recent find of a lease dated 1686 from the feofees of Moreton Church to the properietor of the inn that later became the Union has raised an interesting question about the Ford Estate. The glebe terrier for 1665 states that, apart from the almshouses, the only house owned by the parish at that time was one worth 25s 8d yearly, given by John Southmead in his will, dated 1648. Unless a second house was given to Moreton parish between 1665 and 1686, then the house which became the Union was originally part of John Southmead's estate, and clearly an hall house open to the roof beams when he died in 1650.



Ford Street

As so often in historical reseach, one discovery leads to another. John Southmead's will states that John also left to his grandson, another John Southmead, 'all my one-third part of the land & inheritance of the burgage or tenement called Ford house'. In the course of finding out why John Southmead only had a *third* of the Ford House estate, a document was found in Cornwall Record Office, ref: CY/692: a decree of the Court of Wards and Liveries dated 17 Nov 1624. This describes in tortuous detail how Robert Charles (d. 1571) left 'the manor of Watervale and land etc in Moretonhampstead, Chagford and Widecombe and of manor of Pillaton' to Dorothy Servington (his sister) for her lifetime, with remainder to various other family members. To cut a long story short - a three-year court case, in fact - the John Southmead who died in 1650 inherited a third of the estate through his great-grandmother, Joan Charles, who had married William Southmead in the mid-sixteenth century. His lands were therefore a residue of the original Charles family estate.

Now this is really interesting because it helps us identify the ancient estate of Ford. We know from the visitations of Devon that part of the manor of Moreton was given by William Mandeville, Earl of Essex, lord of the manor of Moreton, to Elias Ford in the early 12th century. That land continued in the Ford family for many generations, only passing to the Charles family on the marriage of Margery, daughter and heriess of Richard Ford, to John Charles, in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. But where was it? It can occasionally be glimpsed in 16<sup>th</sup> century deeds which mention adjacent lands in the hands of the Charles family; far as the field above Langhill and up past and it seems to have extended down at least as far aextended down at least as far as the the field above Langhill and up past Embleford, although not as far as Howton. That parts of Ford Street also may have fallen in this ancient manor is most interesting. And one cannot help but notice that even today there is a house adjacent to 'Forder Fields' (now the allotments) called 'Southmeads'.



Pitt House

One question now comes to the fore. Where was Ford House itself? Was it on the site of the present Forder House? This is unlikely as the Courtenay Survey of circa 1790 shows no building on that site. An alternative possibility is the original Forder Farm, which coincidentally included the site of the house where I am typing this. However, that was a part of the manor in 1790, and so this too is unlikely. But it was described as a 'burgage plot' in 1648, and so therefore - although a prestigious house - must have been not far from the town. Could 'Ford House' have been the original name of 'Pitt House' before it was remodelled in about 1700? Maybe a fragment survives in a listed building on the other side of Ford Street? Anyone who can shed any light on this, or with any pre-1571 property deeds that mention the lands of the Ford family or the Charles family, please get in touch!

Ian Mortimer

## PLACES OF HISTORIC INTEREST

We found a church in Littleham near Exmouth to be very interesting as Fanny Nesbit, Nelson's wife, is buried there (Geoff being a Nelson fan). Apparently a few wives were put "away" in the countryside when no longer required. It was some years ago that we visited there but at the time there was a large museum of country life nearby at Sandy Bay which was interesting. Also in the area, are Walter Raleigh's birthplace at Hayes Barton near East Budleigh and the old watermill at Otterton.

Geoff and Audrey Gooding

[Editor's note: As we were printing this item, it was reported in the press that DCC had mistakenly erected new information signs at Orcombe Point, near Exmouth, that claimed "the notorious Lady Hamilton, mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson" once lived there. The local history society have confirmed that Lady Nelson lived in the town for many years and, after receiving separation payments, bought a house on the Beacon in 1807. She was buried in the church yard of St Margaret and St Andrew and Littleham Churchyard in 1830. Lady Hamilton, however, never set foot in the town, fell into poverty after Nelson's death and died in Calais in 1815. DCC are 'looking into the matter'....]

Lady Hamilton



Lady Nelson

Do you have a place of historic interest to share with the other members?

## NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

The archive boxes that were Ian Mercer's loft have now been transferred to the archive room for cataloguing and storage. Our thanks to Ian and Pam for their safe custodianship for so many years!

The heritage display was featured on a recent visit to Green Hill by a BBC Spotlight crew and it has already brought in new visitors. We have had over a 1,000 since opening in mid December.

There will be an archive display at Green Hill on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March when we are expecting many visitors. Please let me know if you can help out on the day.

We will also put up a display at Devon Record Office on Saturday March 17<sup>th</sup> as part of their Open Day.

## Death of a Member

I have the sad news that John Eggington, one of our long-standing members, has passed away. We send our condolences to his family. His memorial service is at the parish church on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm. I shall attend on behalf of the society.

*Bill Hardiman*