



# Moretonhampstead History Society

## Newsletter

## Sept 2008

### September Meeting:

This meeting will take place in the Community Club at 7.30 PM on 17th September. The subject will be:

### **'The East Dart'**

By popular request, following his excellent talk on the West Dart, John Risdon returns to give a photographic presentation on the East Dart.

### October Meeting: AGM

Our October meeting will take place in the Stable Bar of the Union Inn, on Wednesday 15th October, and **not** in the Community Club, our usual venue. This meeting will begin with the **AGM**. Do, please, make every effort to attend this meeting, the formalities of the AGM are soon dealt with and this will be followed by an entertaining evening devised by the Chairman!

### The Murder of Jonathan May:

**Editors note:** I make no apology for including this story, which is well known to many of us, however it is a significant event in the history of Moretonhampstead, and some of our new members may not know about it. I have a copy of Heath's book about the murder (it's only a little book of just 38 pages), but well worth reading, not only to find out more about this fascinating case and it's aftermath, but also for the insight it gives to the way we were in the early 19th Century, and how things were done . I am happy to lend it to anyone.

This is the story of a murder, or we should now probably say mugging, which took place on July 16th, 1835 near Jacob's Well on the road between Moretonhampstead and Cossick Cross. Jonathan May was a farmer from Sowton Barton, near Dunsford, who was riding home after having sold cattle at Moreton's Great Fair. Two men, both known as petty criminals, were eventually arrested for the murder and tried in Exeter on July 28th, 1836. One, "Buckingham Joe", was hanged; the other, Edmund Galley or "Turpin", was eventually transported to Australia, although he continued to protest his innocence, and "Buckingham Joe" said to the end that they had got the wrong man. At the trial a map was produced which is useful as showing the town centre and the road layout in 1835. The original map hangs in the bar of the White Hart. This was an important case in legal terms, because influential people in England continued to push for further investigation of Galley's case, and eventually, forty years later, in spite of the resistance of successive Home Secretaries, after a lengthy debate in the House of Commons Galley was granted a free pardon. The full story of the Murder is told in a booklet by R. Heath which is available in the Information Centre; the purpose of this note is to highlight the Moretonhampstead people and places in the story. First, the fair itself. This was the important Summer Fair, a three-day event where livestock sales were important, but also an occasion for side-shows, wrestling matches and entertainment generally. It always attracted petty thieves from other parts who made a habit of going from one fair to another to see what they could pick up. After selling his stock, Jonathan May visited Thomas White, the tanner (living on the corner of the Square) to collect payment for oak bark for tanning, and spent some time with him. Then he went to the shoemaker, George Norrish, to pay a bill for boots and repairs, then on to the White Hart, where he had left his horse, for refreshment. He finally left the White Hart at about 10 pm and passed through the toll-gate (near Folly Cottage) where James Nosworthy, the tollkeeper, spoke to him. Nicholas and Grace Taverner, and Grace's brother John Tallamy and his wife, set out

to walk home to Harcot at about midnight, going by Shute Lane instead of the main road, but near the top they heard the sound of Jonathan May's horse in the hedge. Nicholas took it back to the town, and then realised whose it was, and road back up the main road, where he found Jonathan May unconscious and injured. He rode back to Dr Alfred Puddicombe's house in Cross Street (now the Old Rectory) to rouse the doctor, then got a horse and cart to take the injured man down to the White Hart. Dr Ponsford, who was May's doctor, was also called, but the two doctors could not save him and he died at 9 pm on the Friday. Others who visited the scene of the crime were Henry Luscombe, thatcher, and William Backwell, stonemason, who found the stick which had been used to hit Jonathan May. Woolland Harvey, a friend of May and an attorney (living in Cross Tree House), took an active part later in agitating for further investigation of the crime when the immediate suspects had been proved innocent of this particular crime.

### The Almshouses:

As you may know, No1. Almshouses was opened to the public on the afternoon of Sunday 24th August. We tried to let as many members as possible know about this. It was a rare opportunity to see inside one of these unusual buildings, which are owned by the National Trust. A little of their history is given below, from a guide to Moretonhampstead.

'Moretonhampstead has some impressive Jacobean style almshouses at the end of Cross Street, featuring mullioned windows and an unusual granite arcade. The date on the building is 1637, which is thought to be the date of some early refurbishment, with the main core of the building believed to be at least two hundred years older. During the 19th century, the building was converted from two tenements into four damaging the buildings' facade. The building had fallen into a state of complete disrepair by 1938, before being purchased for the Town in 1940 and converted back into two tenements. The National Trust purchased the property in 1952.'

### Additional Meeting in October:

On the first Thursday in October, the History Society is hosting a special talk. The speaker is Adrian Colston, who works for the National Trust and is Manager of their Dartmoor Estate. The title of his talk is:

#### **“Facing the Challenge – a National Trust perspective on climate change”**

Date      **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October**

Venue      St Andrews Church      Time      7.30 pm

Adrian Colston is an excellent speaker. His talk illustrates how the National Trust, probably the most important conservation body in the country, has “grasped the nettle”: to continue to preserve the past it has had to face the future. There is no charge and this talk is open to non-members.

Refreshments will be offered. Everyone welcome

### To All Clock Makers:

Last month's excerpt from the **Exeter Flying Post dated 30th June 1814**, was an invitation to tender for a new clock for St Andrews Church. The tender was awarded to a Mr Walter Friend of Holsworthy. The new 8 day clock was installed on 9th March 1815. It had a blue faced dial and chimes. This clock was replaced along with its dial in 1937 to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI. I wonder how the old clock was disposed of?