



HONITON U3A STUDY DAY

A very successful Study Day organised by U3A Committee member June Brown and her husband Keith was held at the Honiton Community College on November 2nd 2019. The focus of the day was the very beautiful and mysterious area of DARTMOOR. Three expert Speakers spoke about their particular interest in and knowledge of this area.

'DARTMOOR ARCHEOLOGY' by Dr Lee Bray from Dartmoor National Trust

Dr Bray began by explaining that Dartmoor, a Granite Upland in the centre of Devon, is a very important area holding very valuable historical/ archaeological information which has been able to throw light onto the changing landscape of the area and the lives of our very ancient ancestors who peopled it. The area is rich in artefacts and has many scheduled monuments (Historical building or site with the oldest form of heritage protection - protection against unlawful change)

Little is known about the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods (pre 10,000 to 4000BC) other than Dartmoor was initially tree covered but that it has been 'managed' for at least 6000 years. The earliest inhabitants – hunter gatherer's probably felled trees to open the land to aid hunting. Between 4000 -3000 BC there is evidence of farming and settlement which began the practice of burying the dead and monuments such as White Tor is an example. From 3000 to 1500BC there is more evidence such as Stone Rows, Circles and Barrows. The Iron Age 800BC – 43AD saw the exit of people due to a change in the weather with the moor being used only for animals.

Dartmoor has little evidence of the Roman occupation, but the Anglo Saxon period saw fortified towns established to counteract the Vikings e.g. Lydford. Improved weather condition in medieval times saw the return of people to the Moor and Farmsteads and hamlets appeared. However The Black Death reduced the population and again people moved away from the area. These houses were used by both people and animals together. Rare evidence of Tin mining exists at this time but it was later that this activity was very important on the Moor and its workings such as streaming to wash out the ore altered the river courses across Devon.

'TIN WORKINGS ON DARTMOOR' by Stephen Holly - Chairman of the Tin Mining Research Group

Devon has a long history of Tin mining as has Dartmoor. Evidence of the early streaming technique used in the mining to wash out the ore remain scattered across the area and particularly on the wild untamed landscape of Dartmoor a landscape which over time has been changed by man and his activities.

Tin mining on Dartmoor is thought to have started around the early Bronze Age. Little is known of activities during the Dark ages but by 1198 tin production was again evident. The Crown at this time began to demand taxes. 1201 saw the enactment of the Charter of Liberties to the Tanners of Devon and they became free men. Stannard Courts and Stannery Parliaments were established as tin production increase. Devon had its own Stannery Parliament at Crockern Tor. In 1305 King Edward I's Stannery Charter created Stannery Towns which became very wealthy because of tin production.

The Black Death decimated the population and little tin mining occurred. However it revived only to be devastated again by the Civil War in 1642. However it revived again with the new mechanised methods of extraction – Crushing and Stamping Mills of which 60 were recorded on Dartmoor between the years 1500 – 1700. The owners of these developments and mills would often have been Aristocracy who leased them to Yeomen. 177 such sites were recorded but their advent meant the demise of individual Tanners. The 18C saw the start of deep mining with 82 mines recorded around Dartmoor (deep mines needed to reach deeper lodes) Further developments in the 19C saw the advent of improved techniques (40/60ft water wheels) and later steam engines.

'DARTMOOR PRISON HISTORY AND FUTURE' by Simon Dell retired policeman

Thousands of prisoners captured during the Napoleonic war were held on hulks of 10/11 ships in Plymouth. Appalling conditions resulted in many dying from disease. Government concern about the risk to local residents'

resulted in the decision to build a prison on land at Prince Town. It was designed by Danial Alexander and consisted of halls and blocks in a cartwheel layout, each block housing 500 prisoners as well as barracks for the guarding troops. It was finished in 1809 and prisoners from the ships were marched ruthlessly all the way to the prison. When settled, many of the prisoners who were artisans produced saleable objects which they bartered for food and money. French prisoners were repatriated at with the ending of the Napoleonic war.

Following this the prison saw the arrival of American prisoners as a result of Britain's war with the USA. Also, further conflict with France saw the return of French prisoners. Many of these French and American prisoners died and were buried in mass graves without rites, but in 1866/68 they were reburied en masse, but separately and with honour – two obelisks were raised in their memory. When both wars ended all prisoner were repatriated and the prison remained empty until 1850.

Due to the ending of transportation and fewer hangings being carried out British prisons were extremely overcrowded which resulted in Dartmoor prison being requisitioned and rebuilt to house convicts under an extremely harsh regime when the 'cat o' nine tails' and the birch were used regularly.

Today Dartmoor is a Category C prison and under review and its future is yet to be decided.