

# NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



We had a packed agenda and a good attendance for our first meeting of the autumn on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September. One of our group, Simon Tootell, who is Volunteer and Events Co-ordinator at Poltimore House, and is also working on his Master's degree in Archaeology at Exeter University, talked to us about the current state of affairs at Poltimore House, and then Christopher Southcott told us about the excavations of the Court Barton Water Power Scheme, followed by a talk by Jean Wilkins on the information she and Mary Long have discovered about the documented history of the scheme.

The original Poltimore House dates from 1298, and the first Richard Bampfylde, and for over six centuries passed down through the family, being rebuilt in Tudor times, extended and remodelled in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, until 1923, when it was sold by the family who had other extensive estates. The twentieth century saw the house used by two schools, then as a hospital followed by a convalescent home, and finally, after the owner became insolvent and was involved in an arson attack which destroyed the ballroom, the house was left empty. It housed illegal raves, was heavily looted, water entered the structure, and the neglect became critical. A charitable trust was set up in 2000 and in 2003 it featured in the BBC Restoration series, and although it did not win, a group of Friends was set up the following year. Now a great deal of work has been done to clear the grounds and make the house sound and dry. In the future funds will be raised to slowly repair the house by using it as a venue and a base for charitable events. Visit the garden on the Open Days – the house will be closed for the clearance of asbestos during 2012, but then will reopen.

Closer to home, the work done so far on the sluice system between the Shuttern Brook and Court Barton was explained to us by Christopher Southcott. Through a series of photographs he showed us four sites which have been dug, revealing a sluice gate behind Court Orchard leading to an aqueduct crossing the Shuttern and a culvert taking the water power to a water wheel and mill pool, and then on to Court Barton, where further digging will reveal more. Jean then showed us maps which she and Mary have found at the Record Office, which clearly show the Shuttern being used in 1761 for flooding water meadows between the Beer Engine and the Creedy. Furthermore, they found reports of the building of the sluice and culverts by James Tremlett in 1840, after a disastrous fire at Court Barton. This project is a work in progress.

## Next Meeting

**Our next meeting is on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November.  
Alan Rosevear, will speak on 'Turnpike roads: A Local View'.**

**Turnpike roads were effectively the toll motorways of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The A377 was the main route into North Devon.**

## **NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP**

**Have you ever wondered just where the Exeter- Crediton road used to run and what it looked like in the days of pack horses and carriages?**

**What goods were being transported?**

**How long it took to travel from Exeter to Barnstaple by horse drawn carriage?**

**Come to**

**the Village Hall club room 7.30pm Thursday Nov. 17th  
£1.50 to include tea and biscuits**

**Further events planned are:**

**December 15<sup>th</sup> Our Christmas party when Chris Lee will read us a story and Alan Hancock will show us some of the treasures he has unearthed in the village.**

**January 19<sup>th</sup> Simon Tootel will tell us about the work and reorganisation of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter which is due to reopen after a lengthy closure.**

**February 9<sup>th</sup> Shelley Tobin from Killerton House will tell us how to date old family photographs.**