

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



Our October meeting was on Thursday 20th and was about time, or rather how we observe the passing of time – with clocks! The talk was by Christine Trigger, an experienced speaker with a huge wealth of knowledge about Exeter, much of which she has researched herself over the years. She focussed our attention on how large public clocks, which we take for granted, are actually becoming unusual. This is because over the years the use of watches and now of mobile phones, means that everyone can check the time at any moment and so do not need to look at a church tower or a public building as they used to.

Using photographs, Mrs Trigger talked about 15 clocks in Exeter, some of which are well known and some of which certainly aren't. I had no idea that the familiar clock tower near Exeter College was in fact built as a memorial to William Miles and also incorporates a drinking fountain, and also was saved from demolition when the road system was widened. In the same area, the old Hele's School clock is, amazingly, set into the floor of the College when the new buildings were erected. The famous 'Matthew the Miller' clock, with its striking figures at the bottom of St Mary's steps is very impressive, but the clock on Boots has its own story. It has the signs of the zodiac instead of numerals, which I had never noticed, and it has its own little room to houses the mechanism. It is now the only clock left on the High Street, the one outside Samuel's the Jewellers having been vandalised in 2000, and then again after repair, and so now only the brackets remain. Cathedral Close has a sundial on the top of the Devon and Exeter Institution, which certainly counts as a way of telling the time, and another sundial on the Abbot's Lodge nearby was destroyed in the air raids in 1942. Equally fascinating is an 'Act of Parliament' clock, now inside the West of England Eye Infirmary. These clocks are simple but rare, and were made in 1792 when a tax was put on the ownership of clocks and watches. As the Act was repealed only a year later, few of these clocks were made or survive.

Mrs Trigger's talk was one of those which make you look at your surroundings with new eyes, and made for a most interesting evening.

THE COURT BARTON VICTORIAN WATER POWER SCHEME

One sunny Saturday morning in November Chris Southcott took another party of us around his excavations to show us how he has progressed during the summer. He has been able to show the construction of the culvert on the far side of the Shuttern very clearly and has done a marvellous job of excavating the small wheel and showing where the main culvert left the field to go under the farm drive. Unfortunately excavation of the two way sluice in the Orchard was very hampered by a large sewage pipe. Those excavations have been infilled as they are in the centre of a permissive path.

Anthony Hughes took a smaller party of us on to see the big wheel pit in his barn. I am no longer sceptical that the big water wheel, that in the 1840's powered a threshing machine, was an overshot wheel. The pit is very deep. We also saw where the tail race ran.

We have reason to believe this was a successful scheme taking water from the Shuttern near the Crown and Sceptre to power equipment at the old Court Barton Farm. It is a tribute to Victorian surveying, engineering and hard work.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday 15th December

Our Christmas meeting. Chris Lee will read us a story and Alan Hancock will bring along some of the things he has found in the village with his metal detector. Small donations of food will be very acceptable.

Thursday January 19th

Simon Tootel will tell us about the work and reorganisation of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum which is due to reopen in December.

February 9th

Shelley Tobin from Killerton House will tell us how to date old family photographs. Bring any with you for help.

April 19th

Colin Hart will come and tell us about his experiences with a metal detector.

May 10th

Phillipe Planel will help us identify and log the sites of buildings now lost.

All meetings are on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm. Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £1.50 which includes tea and biscuits.

For further information contact Jean 851337 Isobel 851351 Christopher 851569