

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



We had an excellent and crowded meeting on Thursday 17th November, about the growth of the transport system in Devon and through the village. Alan Rosevear, who has researched and written a great deal about the subject, spoke specifically on Turnpike Roads, but in doing so gave us a brief but dense over view of the developments in roads and communications from the prehistoric Ridgeways, through the well built Roman roads and the poor state of medieval times to the eighteenth century and the basis of the roads we know today.

In fact, he pointed out the many of our present roads still follow Roman and Medieval routes, but in earlier times, much more use was made of higher ground where there are still tracks and footpath along the ridges such as Raddon Hill. However, the turnpike routes were built to make wheeled transport quicker and more efficient and so tended to go along river valleys on flatter land, cutting out steep hills and sharp corners. This is true of Newton St Cyres, where the old road came steeply down to the left after the school, before crossing the ford and going up again towards Crediton. This was altered in 1831-32, when the Turnpike Trust made the cutting through at Newton House and raised the level and straightened the road coming in to the village, going north of 'Old Beams'. In the West Country the Turnpikes began in 1753, because the state of the roads was so poor that there was almost no wheeled traffic west of Exeter, pack animals being used instead. There is evidence that before 1753 the whole axis of communications was much more north/south, crossing rivers and linking villages across the county. Now the main roads run east/west, because links to Bristol and London and down to Plymouth became so important for travellers and merchandise. It is interesting that the idea of forming a turnpike trust to charge vehicles tolls for using the road is a system still used today to fund new bridges and motorways.

Mr Rosevear pointed out, using photos, that there are many toll houses and milestones, wayside crosses and boundary stones to be seen by our present roads. There were about 150 miles of Turnpike in Devon, and so there were originally 150 milestones. He also told us about the rebuilding of the bridge at Cowley in 1813/14, and the new turnpike road built from the Three Horseshoes through Newton to Crediton, in 1826.

After the talk we were able to look at reproductions of old maps of the Devon road system, brought in by Alan Rosevear, who was a most knowledgeable and interesting speaker.

Next Meetings

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