

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



Tithe Maps, we learned at our May 10th meeting, are a great resource for local history. 475 maps covering the whole country were made by the Victorians during the 1840s, when tithes were commuted from payments in kind to cash. Of these, 400 have now been digitised. Our speaker, Phillipe Planel, is the Heritage Project Officer for the East Devon Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership. AONBs were started in the 1950s to protect certain areas, but of course it does not mean that other places are not also beautiful and worthy of protection. However, the designation means that Mr Planel has that magical thing – funding – which means he has been able to do some interesting projects with schools and the general public. His expertise is to digitise the information on tithe maps so that it can be used in many different ways to look up information and can be easily available to the public. It is a time consuming job and it is worth mentioning here that Mary Long has done the work for our parish of Newton St Cyres, and at some point that will be made available by Devon County Council.

Mr Planel's talk illustrated what can be discovered from consulting the maps. We learned that buildings marked in red were occupied, those in black were not, being barns or similar working structures. Land use is shown, although it is not exactly known what 'meede' was. Dew ponds are often, though not always, shown and their position can often be found on the land as a depression, even if they are now filled in. Lime kilns are marked, and on some maps there is quite an artistic touch, for instance showing the style of the gates.

Mr Planel led a detailed study in Branscombe which revealed a group of lost buildings on land now reverted to wood and bog, one of which was excavated. The house foundations, the hearth complete with kettle and chain, and the name Lee carved into a stone were found. As an example of the way in which computers have enabled information to travel, he told us how his online report was read by a family in South Wales, researching their past. It turned out that their ancestors had lived in the cottage in the 1860s and 1870s as tenants, and were tailors by trade. This was a very satisfying story.

Many buildings marked on the tithe maps have now vanished, and the alternative title for Mr Planel's talk was 'Lost Buildings'. Jean Wilkins had photographed some of the lost buildings of Newton St Cyres, and at the end of the evening we looked at these and discussed what had once existed down at Bakers. A lane had run up the hill from there and several cottages, probably for miners, are clearly marked on our tithe map, although nothing now shows on the ground. She also showed the old Sherwood House, of which only one section remains. We hope to do more work on what once was here, based on the tithe map.

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NEXT MEETINGS

Sept 20th

John Allen the Cathedral archaeologist will speak on 'The Building of the Bishop's Throne and Norton, Newton St Cyres'. He will tell us how the area around Norton (a little to the north east of the Beer Engine) was important in the building of the Cathedral. This meeting will be held in the big hall and groups from other villages will also be very welcome.

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.