

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



It is always a good experience to hear someone who is an expert in their field, and on the subject of paper making Ian Maxted is very knowledgeable. At the meeting on Thursday 20th February, he took us on a journey from China to Newton St Cyres, and through nearly two thousand years. He explained how paper was invented in China and made from processing rags of fine material (paper made from wood pulp is a recent development, only about 150 years old). It is different from parchment, being cheaper and quicker to produce, and is much tougher than papyrus. Even so the technical processes involved were hard work, and the unskilled labour, such as rag sorting, was largely done by women and children, often Poor Law apprentices. Many paper makers were itinerant and moved around the country on a well travelled path looking for work. By the mid eighteenth century there were at least two paper mills in the village here, at Higher and Lower Marsh. They worked for about 80 years, but rags for paper were always scarce and were imported at Plymouth from as far afield as North Africa. There were even laws to ensure the dead were buried in woollen shrouds so that the linen could be saved for the paper industry. In common with other mills, they could also be used to grind flour as well as power the papermaking machinery, and would have provided local employment. Ian Maxted's detailed research and practical experience made for a fascinating evening, and although we now take for granted plentiful supplies of cheap paper for our printers, it is clear that until quite recently it was a precious resource, not to be wasted.

Next Meeting

Thursday 14th April 2011 Cressida Whitton
Archaeologist Environment Department
will be speaking on
'The History of Devon's Hedges'

The meeting will be held in the Village Hall club room and will start at 7.30pm. £1.50 to include tea and biscuit.