

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



As Newton St Cyres lies approximately half way between Crediton and Exeter, Crediton must always have been familiar to the villagers, even though Exeter is the big city. Our last meeting, on Thursday 17th March, was about Crediton in Victorian times, when it was an important local market and manufacturing town. John Heal, of the Crediton History and Museum Society, and a Red Coat Guide, is very knowledgeable and gave us an illustrated talk, based on a guided walk he took around the town last year.

He started us off with an eighteenth century map of Crediton which shows a place we would find hard to recognise. A series of markets, meat, cloth, cloam, and fish shambles ran down the middle of the High Street, which had only the present New Street branching off it, and which was an entirely separate settlement from the church town, to which it was only connected by a steep track over Jockey Hill. Only with the Crediton Improvement Act of 1836 did the town we know develop. The improvements were financed by local dignitaries, chiefly the Buller family, who were the Lords of the Manor.

Throughout the nineteenth century, that it to say the rein of Queen Victoria, Crediton saw the emergence of Dart and Francis, who became international builders and woodcarvers, and the establishment of no less than five Boot and Shoe manufacturers. These provided much local employment. Many familiar buildings were erected, although their use has now changed, including the Town Hall, later used for showing films, pantomimes and other productions, the Temperance Coffee Palace, the Conservative Club, workshops and factories. The borough of Crediton and the church town were joined when Union Road was built between 1836 and 1839, as a result of the Improvement Act, which also saw street lighting, paving, drains and water supplies provided. By 1856 Crediton was a respectable and comfortable town. Searle Street was constructed later, in the 1860s, and Crediton Market Square was built.

Nevertheless, the large April Great Cattle Market was held right down the middle of the High Street for many years, until the blocking of the main road was no longer acceptable.

The coming of the railways in 1851 marked the beginning of inexorable change, which eventually marked the end of Crediton as a market town. The last cattle market was held in March 1962, in what became the car park at the corner of the market square. Only one range of nineteenth century buildings and two towers remain of the original market, which was a square, but the new market place reflects its size and shape.

We are grateful to John Heal for an excellent talk, and recommend a visit to the Crediton Museum on the corner of Searle Street.

Next Meeting

Thursday 12th May 2011 HISTORY ON THE GROUND
with
CHRIS SOUTHCOTT

We will meet as usual in the club room at the village hall at 7.30pm but bring robust shoes or wellington boots as we intend to do some field walking nearby and return to the hall for tea and biscuits. If the weather is too wet the meeting will be inside as usual.