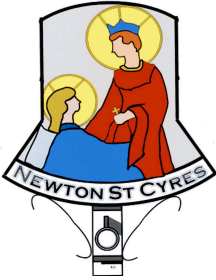


# Newton St Cyres History Group

## September Meeting



Our first meeting this Autumn was on Thursday 20th September, with John Allan, the Cathedral archaeologist. It

concerned the now vanished hamlet and chapel at Norton, Newton St Cyres, and the role it played in providing the wood for building both the cathedral and the Bishop's Throne in Exeter.

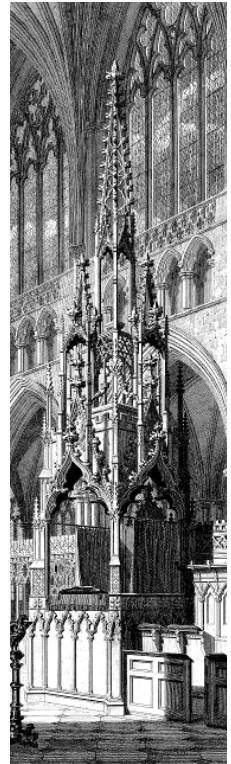
Quite a number of us were able, as a result of a late suggestion by Mr Allan, to meet him down at Norton Cross at 6.30pm. We walked the footpath and lane to see where the various landscape features were, and were able, with the information from him and the present owners, Anne and Andrew Brightwell, to imagine what the area had been like in the fourteenth century. Later in the Village Hall, the photographs and talk gave us the detailed evidence of just how important and busy an area Norton had once been.

The bishop concerned was Walter Stapledon, who held his post from 1308 – 1326, and was an ambitious and able man from remote North Devon, and wanted to glorify the cathedral. He employed the architect Thomas of Witney, who was well known at the time. The unusual thing is that there has survived, in the cathedral library, a great deal of detailed information about the work, recorded on fabric rolls, and this, together with evidence from early maps, Page 20

allows a picture to emerge.

The land at Norton belonged to the Dean and Chapter, and a small chapel existed there as well as a row of buildings. The Bishop had estates at Chudleigh, and a palace, now ruined. It seems from the records that some wood was felled at Chudleigh, carted to Norton, soaked in the millpond, and then carted back into Exeter for building. Wood felled in the Norton and Langford area was also used. Stabling was rented and hay stored in Newton, as well as shoeing carried out. The low lying meadow which used to be the millpond can still be seen, as can the old road to Norton, which is now a footpath, and also stones which may once have been part of the old Chapel or buildings there.

John Allen told us a great deal about Thomas of Witney and the work he did in the cathedral, and also about the bishop's throne, the oldest in Northern Europe. It is a remarkable piece of work, complete and intricate, and an amazing



survival. It only survived the last War because the woodworker, Herbert Read, dreamt that it was in danger and it was removed and stored, thus avoiding destruction when the bomb fell on the cathedral.

The information and local relevance of the talk made this a fascinating evening, and Mr Allan was an enthusiastic and knowledgeable speaker.

We had a second trip to the Northern side of the village on October 2nd when Chris Southcott led a field walk in an area he had previously found a beautifully formed flint arrowhead. With the farmer's permission seven of us covered a field of about 15 acres in a couple of hours. The field was ready for cultivation and the ground disturbance had brought an abundant haul of china and pot fragments to the surface. We were

reminded of the days before council waste collections when this waste often joined the family midden and ended up on the fields or in the gardens. Perhaps our prize piece of pottery was part of a pharmaceutical receptacle bearing the name of Milton an Exeter chemist.

Although we did not find any such beautifully formed arrow heads this time we found in the area known to have been settled in prehistoric times lots of flint chippings. Flint is not naturally found in this area and would probably have had to be brought in from the coast. Thus we amused ourselves by imagining prehistoric man sitting, perhaps not too far from his hut, maybe under an oak tree busy making his flint tools and arrow heads and discarding chippings which we have found thousands of years later.