

West Dartmoor U3A

Meeting Report: November 2018	Prepared by: Mike Inman
Subject: Tom Soby "Curious Cornwall"	

About 75 members of the West Dartmoor U3A gathered in the lower hall of the Methodist Church, and heard a lovely talk from Tom Soby about "Curious Cornwall". Most of us who live in Devon have been fascinated by Cornish history, myths and legends.

Tom started his talk by explaining the origins of the County Coat of Arms, depicting the fisherman and the miner, together with the Cornish Chough. Tom thought the circles on the shield represented gold which had been brought back from the Crusades. Tom then needed a sip of "Dartmoor Vodka", which was on his table (Pure water!)

He then showed us several example of stone circles, including the Hurlers, near Minions on Bodmin Moor. One more recent find, in 1837, in a cist, was the Rillaton Gold cup, dating from 1700 BC. This went to Buckingham Palace as treasure trove, and it is said that King George V, used it to keep his shirt studs in, but it is now in the British Museum, with a replica in Truro museum.

Tom talked about King Arthur, who we were assured was Cornish. He linked this with the Church at Tintagel where a Roman milestone had been used for resting the coffin at the lych-gate. Saint Piran brought Christianity to Cornwall from Ireland in the 6th Century, and became the patron Saint of Cornwall. Fishing was an important part of Cornish heritage, with huge catches of pilchards using the Seine nets, they were then put into barrels called hogs, and pressed to extract the oil for lamps.

We were shown two plaques in Falmouth, one marking the beginning of the Trafalgar Way, when in 1805 the news of the Victory at Trafalgar came ashore and was taken up to London by stage coach, changing horses at Sticklepath amongst other places. The other was to mark the trial in 1884 of Dudley and Stevens, seafarers who were accused and found guilty of cannibalism on the high seas. We were shown pictures of Jacobs Ladder in Falmouth, and of the four towers of Ince Castle, near Saltash, where it is said that one man kept his four wives in such a way that they could not see each other! Tom also talked about some of the holy wells in Cornwall, particularly Madron and Dupath, we were shown photos of the famous Minack Theatre, and the St Buryans round house, so built that neither dust nor the devil could lurk in the corners.

Zennor was mentioned twice, once for the picture of the Zennor plague stone, where money was left without people meeting during the outbreak of plague in 1832, when many died, and another sad story of the lovely Zennor mermaid, who sung beautifully, and attracted a young man who disappeared into a watery grave.

For the mathematicians amongst us we were shown the stone carving of the proof of Pythagoras theorem, that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. And finally we were told about "Put on stones" and "Take off stones"

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used by turnpike men, and the origins of the word “cockhorse”, as in Banbury Cross. Our chairman, Lady Mary Badge gave a warm thank you to Tom, for telling us something of the curiosities of our neighbours in Cornwall.