

# Local History News

The newsletter of the  
South Molton & District Archive  
Local History Society

The Constables Room, Town Hall, Broad Street, South Molton EX36 3AB

Charity No. 900293

March 2014

Editor – Shirley Bray

South Molton Archive & Local History Society  
Annual Slide Show



Empire Day, 24th May 1912

Friday March 14th 2014 at 7.30 p.m.  
The Methodist Hall, North Street, South Molton

Our **slide show** this year will include copies of postcards of S. Molton and area scanned from a private collection, most of which have not been seen before. We will also be showing the photographs lent to us for scanning by local people during the past year.

Sheila has produced the posters, which have been distributed around the town and villages. Please come and support this event.

## WW1

Shirley, Angela M, Veronica and Pam have formed a sub-group to co-ordinate our WW1 research. We are gathering information, not only about the men who lost their lives but also of some of the survivors. As well as putting together display material, our ultimate aim is to make up a portfolio that future generations researching family/local history will be able to access.

If anyone has postcards sent during the conflict (they don't have to be local), can we please have a scanned copy of the front + a separate copy of any message on the back - in jpeg format, please? These could then be used for display purposes.

Some of this material will be included in future editions of the Local History News. So if you find an interesting article or photograph please let us have a copy.

## Archive Room

We will be manning the Archive room after our winter break from Monday March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10a.m - 12noon. There is still a lot of work to do sorting/typing/indexing folders/files, plus updating the digital database. If there are any members interested in helping we could set up another session. It would be really good for more people to learn what collections we have and to be involved with updating etc, it's a good way of increasing your knowledge of local history.

Shirley

Angela Manning sent me this article which she found on the Newspaper on Line website.

WESTERN TIMES – Friday 12th February 1915  
SOUTH MOLTON MAN  
Writes Interesting Letter from Field of Battle

Writing 'In the Field' (North France), Corpl. T. J. Holmes, son of Mr. Heber Holmes, of The Square, South Molton, states;

"On the eve Kaiser Bill's birthday\*, we had a despatch message for three lorries to take sandbags to the trenches, and I went with a chum. It was about 9 o'clock. We went through Lilliers<sup>stet</sup> and Hazebrook<sup>stet</sup> to a small station, called Steenvorde<sup>stet</sup>. There we found we had to take up 20,000 sand-bags. With our three lorries we were able load only 16,000, so one of the lorries had to return for the other 4,000. After we passed Hazebrook<sup>stet</sup> it began to snow, and was bitterly cold. One of the lorries had no covering, and my chum and I rode on top, so as to get a good view of anything there was to see (I may say we had our loaded rifles to hand). We went past small villages, where we could see the enemy's devastation. The places were desolate and deserted the habited houses having only soldiers. \*January 27th

At a certain point we halted, and extinguished the head lights. It was now getting darker, and the roads were frightfully bad. We had to travel slowly, and with caution. There were no hedges but nasty ditches either side and many sharp corners. Presently we heard the booming of our heavy artillery on the right and left. We were passing near by where the big guns were, and could see the flame from the cannon's mouth as the shells were ejected, and see the projectiles whizz over us. We also saw the shells exploding over the German trenches. The Germans also fired hundreds of what we call 'star' shells, something after the style of a rocket, which drop among the enemy (us), and produce an intense light, illuminating the whole country. This gives the Germans an idea where to fire. These balls of light were dropping freely all the time firing was in progress. Our guns must have given the Germans a very hot time during

the early hours of the Kaiser's birthday. Between whiles we could hear our men firing rifles in the trenches. All this time we were slowly travelling as near as possible to the trenches. Then one of the lorries got stuck in a ditch – we had a job to get it out - had to unload all the bags, and then load again! This was done without lamps, just by the light of the firing. Well, within half a mile we had both lorries in the ditch - one on either side of the road. While we were stuck there a powerful German searchlight played over us several times. Whether they saw us or not I can't say.

At last we arrived at our destination - a town smaller than South Molton. Day was beginning to dawn, and the heavy firing ceased. While the lorries were being unloaded my friend and I made a survey of the town. On the previous night the Germans had laid the whole place waste. There were no civilians there, but some soldiers (Leicesters and Ghurkas), who had been in the trenches, which were less than mile away. We saw some men finish filling in a pit, where they had buried Ghurkas who had been killed during the night. Nearby were mounds and crude wooden crosses, indicating the number of soldiers interred there. We were not able to actually go into the trenches, but went as far as possible up to the road. Had it been dark it would have been possible to cross over, but in broad daylight, with the German trenches only 50 yards away, it would be very risky. Men coming from the trenches were simply plastered in mud up to their eyes; they have to stand in water up to their waists. They take a cold bath as best they can when they are out, sometimes in a ditch or stream, wherever they can find water.

Taking a walk down the streets of this devastated little town, bearing the marks of the German beasts one is free to enter any house. Nearly all the roofs have collapsed, and some have only the walls. Other houses have completely fallen. Here are indications of there once having been a Butcher's shop, there a Post Office, further on a doctor's residence - his nameplate among the debris states that he was a Professor from Paris University. There appears to have been no preparation made by the people, and they could not have taken much with them. In one house we saw a sewing machine, with some material that was being made up; and

at the other end of the room, there was copybook, a pencil-box and some paper, which a child had been painting. The church and spire had their full share of damage. The spire, church roof, the stained glass windows, and nice bits of carving were smashed to smithereens. And the churchyard, it is a sad spectacle! Massive monuments have been shattered, pieces being hurled on to the roof. Everywhere there are shattered stones, rent tombs, and open graves. Even the peaceful dead have been dismembered and strewn about. I had never seen such a state of things as exists in town or village that has been shelled by Germans."

Thomas J Holmes was born at South Molton in 1890, the son of Heber Holmes who was a saddler and harness maker who had a shop at No. 2 Broad Street, South Molton.

The 1911 census records Thomas living at Dursley Gloucestershire where he was a pupil electrical engineer.

He enlisted as a driver in the Army Service Corps and went to France on 23rd September 1914.



Mr Heber Holmes and his nephew Evan Blackwell, outside the saddlers shop at No. 2 Broad Street (next to the George Hotel). The picture was probably taken c 1922/3, it was sent to us by a descendant of Mr. Holmes after he had visited the Archive room last summer.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
HOLMES.	2/I.A.P. A.S.C.	PTE.	M.S/1914
T. J.	—	A/cpl	—
Service J	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	RASC/101B229	23539	
BRITISH	do	do	
14 STAR	ASC/12	8	
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein	23.9.14		K. 1380.

### Research Tips

- Always give sources – where the information has come from
- Always add your name and the date to the piece of research.
- Number the pages, 1 of 1, etc.....
- When researching local or family history useful information can be found via the internet; local newspapers; local record offices; and don't forget our own museum and the archive collections.

## The Molford Family

Whilst sorting through one of the Archive folders recently I came across an extract from the Devonshire Association Notes & Queries Vol. 1, 1900-1901. It describes a monument over the chancel doorway in South Molton Parish Church. It is in memory of John Molford aged 17, killed after he fell from his horse. He was the last of a family long associated with South Molton whose residence was at Garliford, Bishopsnympton.

The inscription translated reads: *“Beneath repose the mortal remains of John Molford, gentleman, a youth of seventeen years of age, whose ashes by the evident display of Divine love (for those whom the gods love die young) mingle with those of his Father, Grandfather, and Great Grandfather, too early having joined them, since by his death the only hope of the noble race of the Molfords perished. He died the 21st of June in the year of the Christian Era, 1692.”*

John Molford, a merchant and burgess of South Molton, (possibly either the father, grandfather or greatgrandfather of the above John), had the original Molford House built in South Street. The house was rebuilt c 1740 at about the same time as the Town Hall, and architectural features purchased from the demolition sale of Stowe House, Kilkhampton were incorporated into the new house.

Contributed by Shirley Bray

### **Obituary**

I was sad to learn that Hazel Skinner (nèe Hill) had died in February. Many of you will remember Hazel who was an active and valued member of the Archive for several years

## Dates for your diary

- March 14th**     **Annual Slide Show at the Methodist Church Hall**
- March 31<sup>st</sup>**     **The Museum opens to the public for the season**
- March 26<sup>th</sup>**     7.30 p.m. Filleigh History Society - Rolle (Torrington) Canal update
- April 4<sup>th</sup>**        7.30 p.m. South Molton Archive Business Meeting
- April 15<sup>th</sup>**      7.30 p.m. North Molton History Society – “Poltimore House – from Bampfylde to Trust”
- May 5<sup>th</sup>**         7 p.m. Archive Village Walk – Georgenympton – meet at S.M. car park
- May 28<sup>th</sup>**      7.30 p.m. Filleigh History Society – “Ornate & old church bench ends”, talk by Dr. Todd Gray.
- June 6<sup>th</sup>**        **7.00 p.m.** South Molton Archive walk - Pilton, Barnstaple – meet at South Molton car park

Please give your contributions to the June issue of the News to Shirley, if possible via email – [ndlink@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ndlink@tiscali.co.uk) Deadline – May 20<sup>th</sup> 2014. The more people who contribute, the more interesting the newsletter will be!