

Dartmoor's Industrial Heritage

Dartmoor's reputation as a pleasant holiday resort and a delightful place for retirement is of very recent origin and disguises a completely different history. Nature has a remarkable ability to reclaim its own, so that what look today like grassy bumps in an otherwise unspoilt landscape would once have been sights of intense industrial activity. Tin and copper were the key raw materials of the Bronze Age and the first smelters would have been used cassiterite pebbles (source of tin) in the streams and green malachite found in caves (source of copper). These minerals defined Dartmoor's industrial importance for three thousand years.

A more obvious raw material is granite, the very rock of which Dartmoor is made. This hard, grainy, igneous rock with a significant quartz content has been in demand for construction ever since the Dartmoor ancients raised their stone menhirs, circles and rows and is still used today for such diverse purposes as monuments and curling stones.

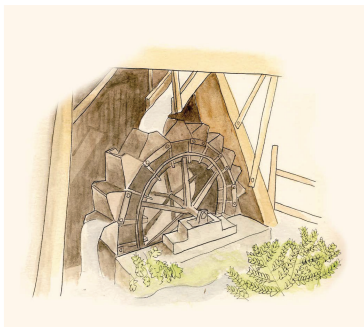
The other precious natural attribute of Dartmoor is the fast-flowing streams cascading down from the many river-heads which, until the Industrial Revolution, were the primary source of power for industry. The mighty rivers on which Plymouth, Dartmouth, Barnstaple and Bideford stand all share the same source – marshes on central Dartmoor.

With all these natural advantages, it is no surprise that until comparatively recent times Dartmoor and its immediate surroundings have been the site of industry on a significant scale.

On *The Archangel's Way*, a very typical example of this heritage is Sticklepath. The village lies on the "Sticklepath Fault", a flaw in the Earth's surface caused by tectonic movement, which probably had advantages for mineral miners by pushing valuable ores closer to the surface. Sticklepath also stands astride, and is a natural crossing place for, the River Taw, and so possesses in miniature all of the industrial benefits listed above.

In the 19th century the village was something of an industrial powerhouse. Overlooking the settlement to the west was a copper mine. The remains of the wheel pit can still be seen from the road between Sticklepath and Skaigh. Slightly closer to the village was Lady Well Quarry, started in 1875 and Finch foundry, now owned by the National Trust, at its height was producing 400 tools a day.

Probably the largest of the mills was Cleave Mill, opened in the 1820's as a producer of serge, much of it for military uniforms, by John Pearce and his two sons George and Thomas. The younger brother Tom is the man who loaned his grey mare in the famous song Widcombe Fair.



The Archangel's Way

wander and wonder



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The Three Hares

We know of seventeen parish churches in Devon which contain at least one roof boss depicting the three hares and here on The Archangel's Way can be found four examples: one in the south aisle at South Tawton, one in the north aisle at Throwleigh and two in Chagford (above the south door and in the chancel). The majority of the bosses are medieval and have been skilfully crafted in wood.

The Three Hares is widely spread throughout the county however the eastern fringe of Dartmoor has a notable concentration. Often wrongly referred to as 'The Tinnars Rabbits', there is no evidence to support any link between the three hares motif and the tin mining.

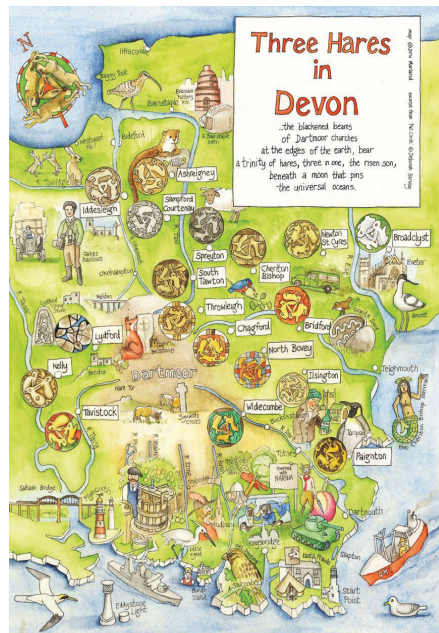
The hare is strongly represented in world mythology and from ancient times has had divine associations. Its elusiveness and unusual behaviour, particularly at night, have reinforced its reputation as a magical creature. The hare was believed to have mystical links to the female cycle and to the moon which governed it. The theory of the Ancients that the hare was hermaphroditic and could procreate without a mate led to the belief that it could give birth to young without loss of virginity.

In Christian contexts, the three hares may be therefore be associated with the Virgin Mary. The three hares boss is often juxtaposed in western European churches with a boss of the Green Man, perhaps a representation of sinful humanity.



Linking the motif with the Christian Trinity appears to be an association made long after the image was originally worked.

The motif is an ancient archetype and has leapt faiths, stretching across diverse religions and cultures over many centuries and many thousands of miles. It is part of the shared medieval heritage of Europe and Asia and appears not only in Christianity but in Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, with the earliest known examples painted onto the ceilings of the Buddhist cave temples at Mogao near Dunhuang and on the edge of the Gobi Desert in north west China. Dunhuang is situated at the western end of the Great Wall of China and was an important trading post on the Silk Road, a major conduit for the exchange of goods and ideas for many hundreds of years. Whatever the mode of transmission, the journey of the three hares is remarkable indeed.



Standing Stones and Crosses

Standing Stones

On The Archangel's Way you will pass two of the four standing stones in the area thought to be of 10th century Christian origin, although the purpose the stones served is a mystery. At Sourton, opposite on the green is a large standing stone known as the OXO stone. The face of the stone has a circle and cross carved out, with another circle underneath..

The other 10th century Christian stone stands at the foot of the Sticklepath. ('stickle' -steep). It is tempting to run your fingers gently over the moss and algae-coated surface of the Sticklepath Stone, seeking subtle "O" and "X" indentations. The other two stones are the Sourton Down Cross and The Honest Man.

The Nine Maidens Stone Circle

The legend of the Nine Maidens stone circle at Belstone is that nine maidens were turned to stone for dancing on the Sabbath and that at noon the church bells bring them to life and they dance. In fact, the stones were placed by Bronze Age man and form the outer wall of a long vanished burial chamber.

Belstone Ring Cross

The carved stone found inside St Mary's Church has been dated between the 7th and 9th centuries, suggesting that there has been active worship at Belstone since before the Norman Conquest. It was discovered during the 1861 demolition of the Church meeting room and almshouses. The stone had been used, face down, as one of the outdoor steps up to the meeting room. It then became part of a wall at the Rectory, a mile away, but was returned to the Churchyard in the 1930s and was placed in its present position in 2005.

Cosdon Triple Stone Rows

This triple stone row and nearby cairn are on the eastern side of Cosdon Hill. It is known locally as The Graveyard and is a 138 m long triple row of 118 stones gradually increasing in height towards the cairn. Many stones have been removed for wall building over the ages but what remains is still one of the finest examples in the country.

Scorhill Stone Circle

Scorhill is one of the most visually impressive stone circles on Dartmoor and formed a significant ritual area. The circle is situated on a west facing slope overlooking the North Teign valley. It is made up of 23 upright granite slabs with a further 11 stones lying nearby.



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