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a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
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e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

15 August 2025

Eighty years ago today **Victory over Japan day** marked the formal end of the Second World War, following the terrible nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan and some of the most brutal fighting in the Far East. Around the world people were exhausted physically and emotionally. We take a look at what was happening here in Colyton.

1. News –

a. Lest we forget – VJ Day 80 - 15 August 2025

May 1945 brought Victory in Europe. Two months later in July Britain voted for a new Labour Government, unceremoniously rejecting its wartime leader Winston Churchill. Finally on 15 August 1945 VJ Day brought the formal Japanese surrender and an end to the fighting. For many in Britain it was not a case of celebrating but of waiting for their relatives to come home from service or imprisonment overseas. A letter in the Western Morning News yesterday relates the tale of family members who were interned by the Japanese. Years later the experiences of prisoners like them were reflected in the tv series *Tenko*.

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Here in Colyton life had in someways maintained many of its normal annual rhythms throughout the War – for example the harvest still had to be gathered in – despite the disruption caused by the war effort. By 1945 the soldiers billeted here in preparation for the D Day Landings in 1944 had long since gone and the evacuees were returning home.

But dig beneath the surface and life was far from normal. There were severe labour shortages. On 13 August 1945 Feoffee Donald Baker, MD of J & FJ Baker & Co Ltd wrote a letter to the Editor of *The Times* newspaper which was published on 16 August:

"Sir, It seems to be generally agreed by Government departments, employers and the trade unions that the shortage of labour is the dominating factor in industry today and may well be so for quite another six months. Now the Japanese war is practically over would it not be possible, and in the national interest, to postpone the calling up of young men for military service from 18 until 18 ½ years of age? This additional six months would be of great benefit to production and would help tide over the difficult period in question."

The Chamber of Feoffees Minutes during the spring and early summer of 1945 reveal the ordinary everyday concerns within the town – continuing problems with the water supply, the necessity of thoroughly cleaning and redecorating the Town Hall as the oil seed cake which had been stored there to feed local animals during the War was finally removed and use of the Hall for the distribution of ration books.

There was no August Chamber meeting but in September the Feoffees agreed to make a donation of £4 12s 0d towards the expenses of holding VJ celebrations. It was also agreed to make the Town Hall kitchen available to the WVS for jam making. There were complaints about marauding chickens on the allotments. In October a donation of £250 was made by the Feoffees to the Peace Memorial Committee towards the proposal of a playing field for the inhabitants of the Parish as a war memorial. Slowly a new normality was being established.

Ref

https://www.thetimes.com/tto/archive/article/1945-08-16/5/7.html
1945: A momentous year | Imperial War Museums

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b. Cerne Abbas dig

I recently visited Cerne Abbas in Dorset to see an archaeological dig on the site of the old Benedictine Cerne Abbey first established in 987 and remodelled in the 13th century. Like Newenham Abbey it was virtually destroyed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century and then largely forgotten about.

Cerne Abbey finds

Newenham Abbey tiles

I was interested to see among the finds some fragments of medieval ceramic tiles which looked very similar to those found on the site of the 13th century Cistercian Newenham Abbey at Axminster during the archaeological survey undertaken there fifty years ago - and currently on display in Colyton Heritage Centre with the kind permission of RAMM.

One of the finds from 2025 dig

site of Cerne Abbey dig 2025

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This is the third dig on the Cerne Abbas site led by Dr Hugh Willmott from Sheffield University. In 2023 they uncovered an intact burial and in 2024 evidence of a medieval hall thought to be an abbot's lodging. As well as students engaged in the dig, volunteer members of the community in Cerne were also helping to wash the finds and welcoming visitors.

Royal Oak 1540 - Cerne Abbas – one of the lovely old buildings

Cerne Abbas is a small, historic village full of lovely old buildings, many built with dressed stone taken from the old abbey, including the Royal Oak built in 1540. The village is hidden away in the Dorset countryside with a world-renowned chalk giant dominating the landscape on the hills above.

Cerne Abbas Giant

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No one knows for sure how long the Giant has been carved into the hillside. Estimates vary from a few hundred years to thousands of years back in time. However recent research by Oxford University has indicated he was originally carved as an image of Hercules to mark a muster station for West Saxon armies - at a time when Dorset was being attacked by the Vikings. The figure was later reinterpreted by the monks of Cerne Abbey as their local Saint Eadwold.

Reference:

https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/cerne-giant

Cerne Abbey: Archaeologists unearth secrets of medieval hall - BBC News

https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/article/cerne-abbas-giant-has-the-mystery-of-the-chalk-hill-figure-been-solved

c. Hell Lane – ancient holloway

Hell Lane. Have you been there? Its one of those places whose very name intrigued me and which has been on my list to visit for a while. One end lies in North Chideock the other above Symondsbury in Dorset The full walk is 9 miles long. I went first to North Chideock where the street sign for Hell Lane was planted on a triangular grass patch at a crossroads. I couldn't help wondering if it was the site of another crossroads suicide burial? Does anyone know? Hell Lane winds down to a muddy stream – I did not venture that way but went to Symondsbury.

Hell Lane from the North Chideock end

down the lane it becomes a stream

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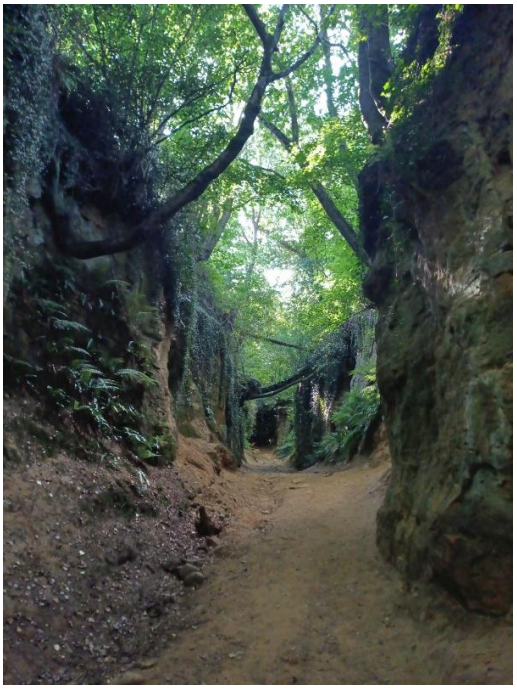
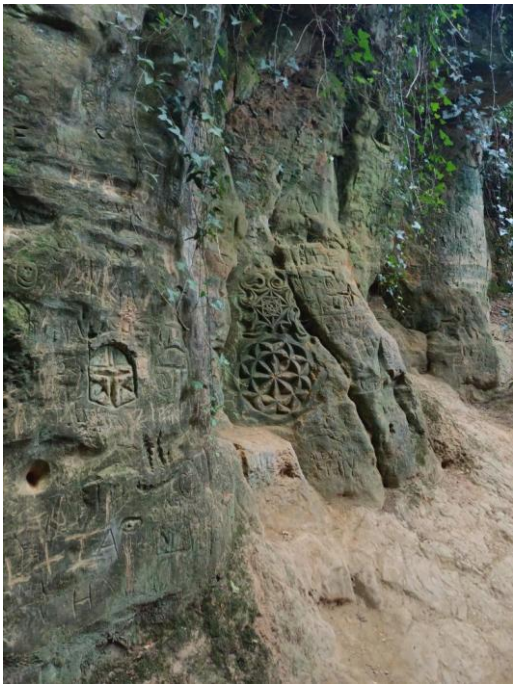
In Symondsbury, I parked and walked up the hill to where the tarmacked road becomes a sandy path. Continue up there until the path forks. Take the left hand fork and you will be on Hell Lane. It is not signposted!

The name Holloway comes from the anglo saxon 'hola weg' meaning sunken road. There are holloways in many places but they are particularly common in this part of the country. The term refers to sunken paths created by the passage of many human feet and cattle wearing down the sandy paths between fields over millennia. In some parts they can be three metres deep with towering sides of sandstone rock and trees creating an arched green canopy over the top, while their exposed roots creep eerily down the rock faces. I was shocked. The atmosphere is mysterious and timeless and there was so much more to see and experience than I had anticipated.



Hell Lane



carvings on the stone sides

There is a strong presence here. There is no sound in this ancient place save for the beating of my heart! It seems that all the travellers down the centuries who have found their way here wished to leave their mark on time. Today there are many recent names crudely scratched on the stone surfaces but amongst them there are still some exquisitely carved, mysterious symbols and faces which add resonance to the atmosphere.

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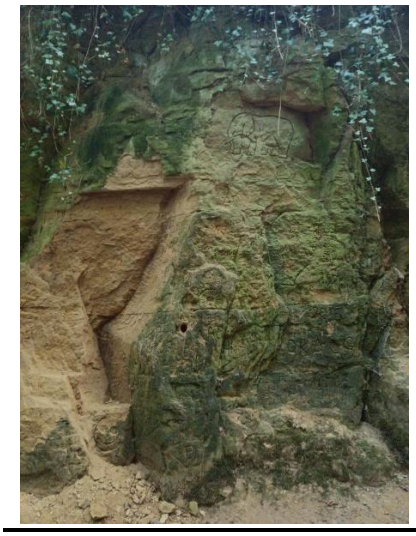

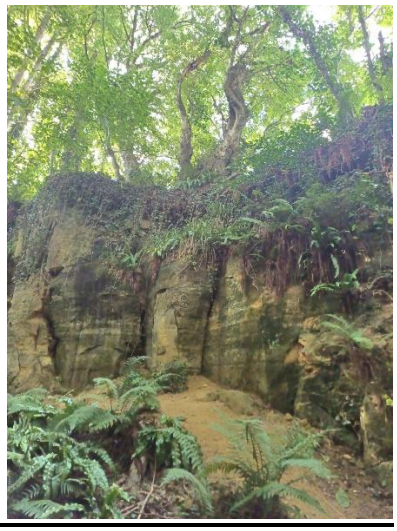

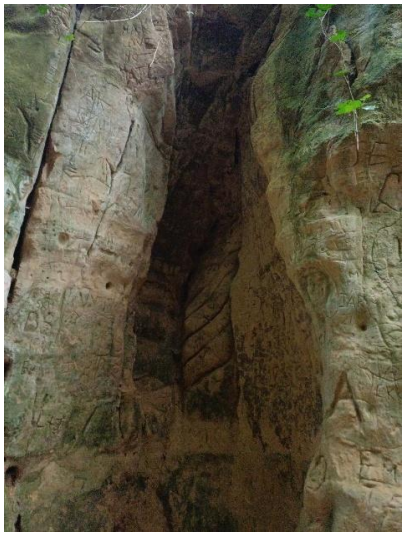

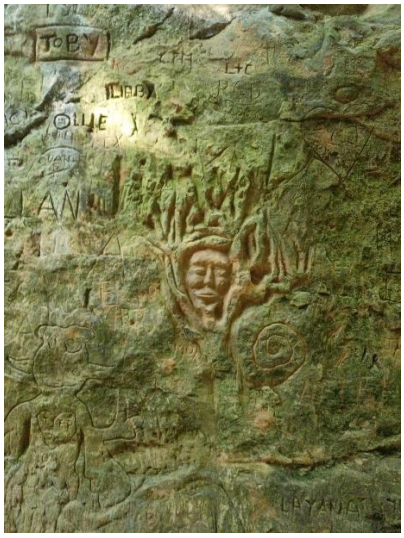

In 2023 Natural England started a project to map ancient holloways across the country and record the carvings..

References

Project to map Dorset's ancient sunken holloways - BBC News
England's mysterious sunken roads - BBC Travel
Walk the spectacular Hell Lane Dorset | 9 miles inc. Dorset holloways - The BV
Walking Hell Lane - Dorset's Famous Holloway - Visit Dorset
BBC Radio 4's Open Country explores Dorset's sunken paths | Bridport and Lyme Regis News

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d. The oldest building in Colyton?

Does anyone know which is the oldest building in Colyton? Do you live there perhaps? Or maybe it's a barn or some other structure? We are excluding the church from this query since it may well stand on the site of an even older structure - but it's a question often asked by visitors to the town.

2. Family History – new enquiries and updates

a. Roger Upright - update

Roger has kindly provided some more information about his family history which will be made available in our files in the Heritage Centre. In 1851 lace manufacturer Edmund Upright and his wife Jane (nee Perryman from the well known lace making family) were living in Branscombe. A decade later they had moved to Colyton and were living in Fore Street where Jane was also listed as a draper. They had seven children. In 1871 they were living in Market Street and Edmund was listed as postmaster in the census. Ten years later, still in Market Street, both Edmund and Jane are listed as Honiton lace manufacturers. They have two adopted boys from London. By 1891 Edmund now in his eighties is a widower living with his daughter Blanche. If anyone can add to this account please let me know.

b. Cate family

Coley Cate from the United States has been in touch trying to track down details of his ancestor Robert Ezra Cate and Robert's father William who others have claimed came from Colyton . The Parish Registers of St Andrew's Church in Chardstock show two marriages of a William Cate in 1633 and 1638/9. It's not clear if they are the same man. If anyone has

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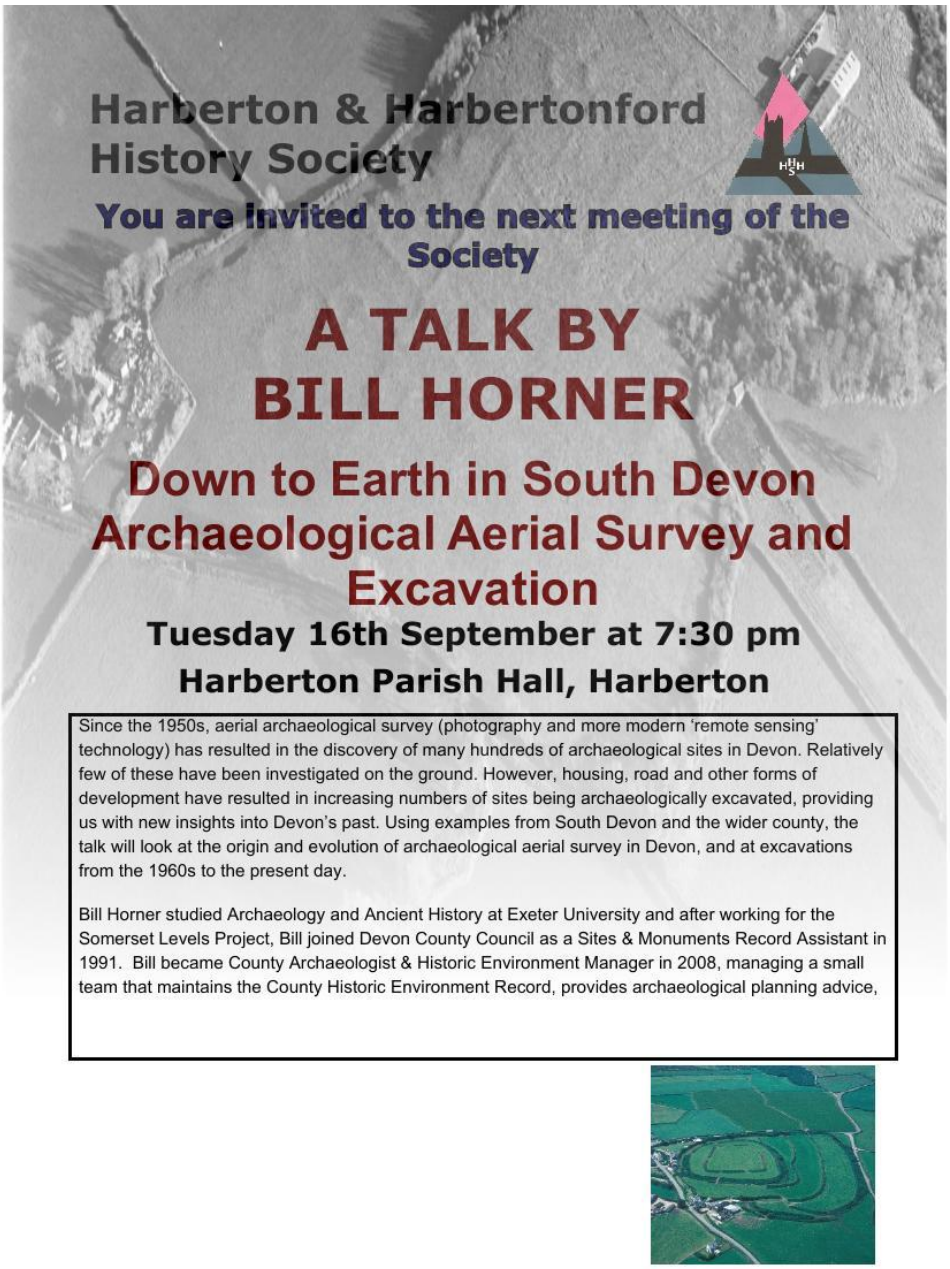
any details or knowledge in their family histories of a Robert Ezra Cate or his father William Abraham Cate(s) whom Coley believes died around 1667 please do let me know – Coley and I would be very grateful!

3. Other Organisation Events



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4. Other History Society News

a. **Can you help? Colyton History Society requires a new Treasurer**
CPHS is looking for a new Treasurer as our current Treasurer has indicated that he will not be standing for re-election at our AGM in the Autumn. Interested in this opportunity and would like to know more? Do contact me (sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk) and we will be happy to talk you through the role. The Committee are a friendly bunch and this is not an onerous task. Brian has kindly produced a job description for what is involved which I will be happy to email you.

b. **History Society talks 2025** - The autumn session of History Society talks will begin on Tuesday **September 23rd at 2.30 pm with Jane Austen in Devon** by Hazel Jones from the Jane Austen Society.

c. **Colyton Town walks -** There are guided heritage walks on **Thurs-days** throughout the summer, meeting in Dolphin Street carpark at 2.0pm, regardless of the weather. No booking required. £5.00 per person.

5. Items you may have missed

a. Lyme Regis in 1901 was an exclusive place to be
https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/25379078.lyme-regis-dorset-1901-exclusive-place/?ref=ebbn&nid=2302&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=110825

b. Pecorama celebrates 80 years
- https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/25376039.peco-model-railways-beer-celebrating-nearly-80-years/?ref=eb&nid=2397&block=article_block_a&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=110825

c. Exeter's unique vending machine that is steeped in history - Devon Live

d. Expert uncovers Exeter link to highly controversial character | Devon Live

e. https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/ronnie-reggie-kray-artefacts-auctioned-

S**arah Charman**
Editor – CPHS Newsletter
sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk

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