

RED SPIDER COUNTRY DISAPPEARS

Part of an article by Anne Dunbar-Graham under the title: Discovering Roots at Roadford and submitted by SBGAS member Shane Wadland ,, ,archivist, historian and book collector.

As Roadford Reservoir nears completion a month ahead of schedule, an historic yet poignant visit was paid by Mrs. Helen Turrall (nee Luxmoore) of Dolton to the site of Coombe Park, her family's ancestral home. Actually this fine Queen Anne house, once the oldest brick building in West Devon, was demolished in 1987 but is immortalised in "The Red Spider", written exactly 100 years earlier by Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould - Parson and Squire of Lewtrenchard for 48 years, perhaps best remembered for his hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers".

A Roger de Comb had a dwelling here as early as 1344, while records of 1610 show that a Thomas Luxmoore of Coombe Park was baptised at Bratton Clovelly, likewise Charles Luxmoore of nearby Witherdon, unaffected by the reservoir's eventual flooding. At one time the Witherdon Luxmoores also owned North Moor House (now Okehampton's Town Hall). Thus it seems appropriate that the waterwheel from Coombe Park Farm was re-erected in March this year at the Museum of Dartmoor Life, Okehampton,

Much farm machinery survived at Coombe Park, for instance its cider press was intact and the threshing barn contained mill stones, a winnowing machine and chaff cutter. Initially, the threshing machine was powered by a horse mill in the Round House eventually being replaced by power from the waterwheel. As at the 'lost' Medieval village of Hennard Mill, linhays, cream ovens etc. have been stored for future reconstruction elsewhere.

Those from Hennard Mill, for instance, may well form the basis of a museum on Roadford's banks.

Helen Turrall's father descended from the Witherdon Luxmoores. Explorer, art collector and antiquarian, Charles Frederick Coryndon Luxmoore FRGS, FSA, was Dolton's last Squire, housing his large family at Stafford Barton. His wife, Rosalie, also owned two farms at Wolf Valley, the area destined to become Roadford Reservoir, holding some 8,120 million gallons of water: Widow of Col. Hugh Turrall, who co-founded Stafford Moor Trout Fisheries with Andrew Joynson, Mrs. Turrall was accompanied on her visit to Roadford by Honorary Archivist to Dolton's Wheelwright Museum, Shane Wadland, and myself. We were shown over the Dam area by David Evans, Site Engineer, plus County Archaeologist, Simon Timms. We later visited other excavation areas, including West Wortha where Peter Stead heads Exeter Museum's team of archaeologists.

Shane Wadland was born in Cornwall, though his roots are in North Devon, and "The Red Spider" also mentions Broadberry or Wadland Moor. His late cousin, Alice, Dolton's highly respected private school teacher, taught amongst others children of the Luxmoore and Clinton families. Mr. Wadland is a member of the Baring-Gould Appreciation Society, recently formed by David Shacklock of Surrey, and is happy to trace the roots of Devon families for those lacking time or residing abroad. Ironically, a water resources engineer from Canada, Robin Luxmoore

came here last May to trace his roots, only to discover that his ancestral pastures were about to be lost forever in SWW's largest reservoir project to date. However, he too was shown the site of Coombe Park by Mr. Timms and met two newly-discovered relations - Mrs. Turrall's niece, the daughter of her eldest sister, Honor, named after "The Red Spider"'s heroine and Frederick Luxmoore of Lapford.