

The 2021 Dartmoor Society Conference – Perspectives on Dartmoor Peat Conservation (Part 1)

On Friday, 12th November, the Dartmoor Society held their annual conference at the Charter Hall in Okehampton. Over 90 members attended plus speakers and guests, to listen to a series of presentations on the highly topical subject of 'Hallowed Turf: Perspectives on the Conservation of Dartmoor's Blanket Peat' – all the more relevant given that the conference was held on the last day of the COP-26 meetings in Glasgow.

Research from the University of Exeter has indicated that much of Dartmoor's peatland has been damaged by drainage, cutting, drying and erosion, and as a result is emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that contribute to global warming, whereas healthy peat-forming bog can absorb significant quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, as well as provide other benefits such as increased wildlife, and storage and release of clean water into rivers and reduce the risk of flooding. Through funding from DEFRA, the South West Peatland Partnership plans to restore some 300Ha of Dartmoor's peatlands.

However, whilst recognising the potential benefits to wildlife and climate change, not



OVER 80 MEMBERS AND A FURTHER 20 GUESTS AND SPEAKERS ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE HELD IN OKEHAMPTON'S CHARTER HALL. PHOTOGRAPHS © MIKE REGO

everyone is supportive of peatland restoration on Dartmoor. Opinions are divided as to how and where it should be carried out, and the effect that restoration may have for grazing, access for walkers and horse riders, and potential damage to as yet unrecorded archaeological sites.

Six speakers were introduced, covering various aspects of peat conservation, explaining how and why it can be beneficial to nature, how it is currently being carried out on Dartmoor, what results may be expected, and more importantly to many, how the historic environment may be protected.

Alan Endacott, Vice Chair of the Dartmoor Society, opened the meeting, acknowledging that

peatland restoration is seen as a controversial topic to many who live and work on and around Dartmoor, particularly those who farm the land and have done so for many generations, and also to others who find Dartmoor a place of peace and tranquillity away from the pressures of modern life.

He reminded everyone that whether or not you feel that the peatlands should be restored, and the Moor allowed to recover naturally from man's past treatment of the land, there is no doubt that the peat is a very efficient carbon store, and that the blanket peat is a rare nature habitat and the source of Devon's rivers and our drinking water.

Keith Bungay, former Chief Executive of



A FINAL WRAP-UP QUESTION FORUM WAS HELD FOR THE AFTERNOON'S SPEAKERS, AGAIN HOSTED BY CHAIRMAN KEITH BUNGAY.

Exmoor National Park, introduced the topic and introduced the speakers, stressing that they were all people who have spent their lives working and researching their topics, and so well qualified to speak knowledgeably, not just on the theory of what can be done and the potential benefits but how it is being done and the results so far, from Dartmoor and other areas.

Owing to space limitations in this edition of The Moorlander, the conference presentations will be covered by Mike Rego in more detail in the next edition due out on Friday, 10th December.

Further information about the Dartmoor Society can be found on their website at www.dartmoorsociety.com/home

The Editor Reviews... *No One Must Know* by Susan Francis

No One Must Know follows the story of Joan, a young and lonely new Lady of the Manor of Chiddleigh, and her 'inappropriate' but strong friendship with her kitchen maid, Annie.

Based in 1330, young Joan marries Lord John de Chiddleigh and harbours all the hopes of romance that a young, titled girl would.

However, John is cold and often cruel in his apathy for the marriage, so Joan befriends Annie, a maid in the household. And so begins the thrilling but heart-wrenching twists and turns of this friendship, all set in the wonderful scene of Devon at the time of King Edward III.

The reader is drawn into that time easily, with the atmosphere captured beautifully in the writer's descriptions of life in the 1330s. Susan Francis has loosely based this story

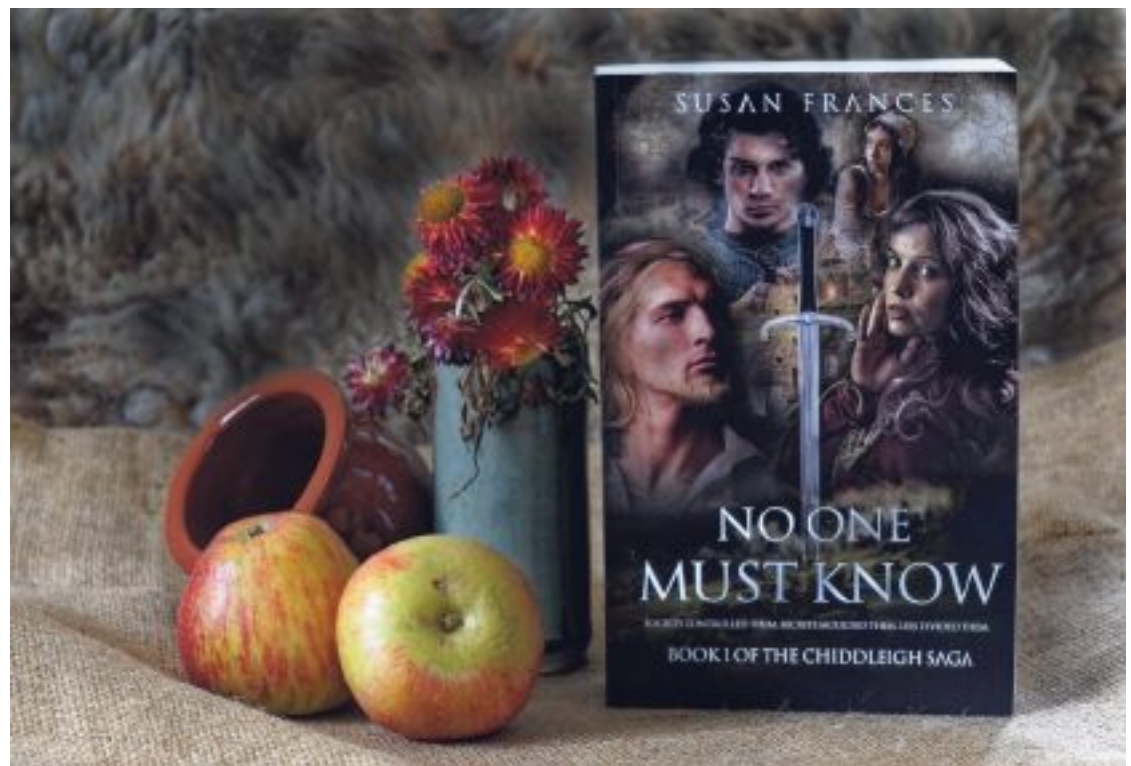
around her own family history, and it leaves me wanting to know the real tale behind this entrancing novel.

The research shines clearly through the narrative, with characters so well developed you begin to feel real emotions for them as they journey through hardship and determination, hopeless love and tentative aspiration.

Even callous Sir John had me feeling sorry for him by the end, with true depth of understanding of bitter emotions written so eloquently.

This is the first book in the trilogy of The Chiddleigh Sagas, and one of the best books I've read for a while.

Susan has captured the feel of the time almost as well as Ken Follet managed in *Pillars of the Earth* – quite a feat. I wait with eager anticipation for the next part of the story.



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