



Dartmoor's Peatland Heritage A Bibliography

Cornwall Archaeological Unit

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Dartmoor's Peatland Heritage

A Bibliography

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Samantha Stein (Historic England Assistant Science Advisor South West) kindly read through a draft copy of the bibliography and provided feedback.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Cornwall Archaeological Unit and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Cover illustration

Detail from an illustration accompanying the chapter titled 'Peat' in Eden Phillpotts' *My Devon year* (1903). The artist is not identified.

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Abbreviations

CAU	Cornwall Archaeological Unit
HER	Dartmoor National Park Authority Historic Environment Record

1 Introduction

1.1 The project

The current project was described in a brief by the Dartmoor National Park Authority Archaeologist in May 2017, on behalf of the Dartmoor Peatlands Partnership. The project was jointly funded by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, Dartmoor Society and the Ministry of Defence on behalf of the Dartmoor Peatland Partnership.

The brief outlined the project objectives as:

- 1) To collate a comprehensive list of available references to Dartmoor's peatlands as archaeological, historical and cultural landscapes.
- 2) To present this information in an accessible form in order to create a fundamental, baseline resource for future research.

Sources to be consulted in compiling the bibliography should include:

- Historical and archaeological monographs
- Relevant papers in historical and archaeological journals
- Palaeoenvironmental and palaeoecological material
- Historical, archaeological and palaeoenvironmental postgraduate theses.
- Grey literature reports.
- Articles in newspapers and popular magazines
- Relevant material in topographical, literary, biographical, autobiographical and fictional works
- Existing bibliographies.

The compilation of a bibliography as a baseline document could be a valuable model for other Peatland Partnerships to follow.

1.2 Scope of the bibliography

In carrying out the project the scope of the brief's focus on 'Dartmoor's peatland heritage' has generally been given a 'wide' rather than 'narrow' interpretation, to provide the fullest potential dataset for future research. The criteria for inclusion of specific items within the bibliography developed on an *ad hoc* basis in the early stages of compilation but came to encompass the following broad topic areas:

- References to / descriptions of landscapes which may be described as 'peatland' (including those based around words such as 'bog', 'mire', 'fen', etc.
- References to / descriptions of peat cutting, its locations, transport, 'peat tracks' and other associated infrastructure.
- References to peat-based industrial activity and associated infrastructure.
- References to uses of peat other than as fuel (for example, in horticulture).
- References to domestic use and storage of peat (where these are more than simply mention of a 'peat fire' or similar) and of peat ash.
- Palaeoenvironmental literature and other scientific literature relevant to an understanding of the development and significance of the peat resource.
- References to archaeological features and artefacts in association with peat (for example, stratified above, below or within peat).
- Other material offering insights into human responses to peat landscapes.

1.3 Method

Existing general bibliographies and the bibliographies, references and indexes in published works of known or likely relevance were consulted at an early stage. These included the following:

Devon bibliography. (Available at: <http://devon-bibliography.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/devon-bibliography-coverage.html>)

Fox, H. (2012) *Dartmoor's alluring uplands. Transhumance and pastoral management in the Middle Ages*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Gerrard, S. (1997) *English Heritage book of Dartmoor: landscapes through time*. London: Batsford and English Heritage.

Hamilton-Leggett, P. (1992) *The Dartmoor bibliography*. Tiverton: Devon Books.

Jones, A.M. (2016) *Preserved in the peat: an extraordinary Bronze Age burial on Whitehorse Hill, Dartmoor, and its wider context*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Kelly, M. (2015) Kelly, M. (2016) *Quartz and feldspar. Dartmoor: a British landscape in modern times*. London: Vintage.

Milton, P. (2006) *The discovery of Dartmoor: a wild and wondrous region*. Chichester: Phillimore.

Newman, P. (2010) *Domestic and industrial peat cutting on north-western Dartmoor, Devonshire: an archaeological and historical investigation*. Np: Southwest Landscape Investigations.

Newman, P. (2011) *The field archaeology of Dartmoor*. Swindon: English Heritage.

Snell, K.D.M. (2002) *The bibliography of regional fiction in Britain and Ireland, 1800–2000*. London: Routledge.

The following indexes and titles lists were used to identify further potentially relevant material and authors:

Dartmoor Magazine: printed indexes to nos 1-40, 41-60, 61-80, 81-100 (PDFs).

Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries: index 1900-1995. (Available at: <http://devon-bibliography.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/devon-and-cornwall-notes-and-queries.html>)

Titles of papers published in the *Proceedings* of the Devon Archaeological Society, 1929–2014. (Available at: http://devonarchaeologicalsociety.org.uk/das/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18)

Titles of papers published in the *Transactions* of the Devonshire Association. (Available at: <http://www.devonassoc.org.uk/transactions-index.pdf>)

Prowse, A.B. (1905) 'An index of references to Dartmoor and its borders contained in the "Transactions," vols I to XXX'. *Trans Devonshire Association*, 37, pp. 482–567.

List of books set in the Dartmoor National Park. (Available at: <https://www.mappit.net/bookmap/places/1307/dartmoor-national-park-england-gb/>)

List of Eden Phillpotts' Dartmoor novels on the *Legendary Dartmoor* website. (Available at http://www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk/eden_phillpotts.htm)

The sources set out above provided an initial collection of bibliographic references but it was clear that using such lists and indexes would not identify passing references to material of interest in works which did not flag-up potential relevance in their titles. Neither would this approach identify specific page references to relevant material within

broader works, as required in the project brief. Wherever possible, therefore, works were consulted in online digital versions, on which textual searches could be carried out, or by means of 'skim-reading' potentially relevant resources in hard copy.

To pursue the latter three one-day visits were made to the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter, using the combined library resources of the former West Country Studies Library and Devon Record Office, and further time spent using material held in the Cornwall Archaeological Unit library, the Dartmoor National Park Authority and HER libraries at Parke, and the compiler's own collection.

Potentially relevant grey literature was identified via the online search facility of the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and the Devon and Dartmoor HER event record layer, plus a trawl through hard-copy reports held by the Dartmoor National Park Authority HER. (Contact was made with the Devon Historic Environment Record but they advised that all resources relating to Dartmoor would be held by the Dartmoor National Park Authority HER, and so no visit was undertaken.)

Bibliographical references to both published and unpublished palaeoenvironmental material were compiled by Dr Ralph Fyfe and the resultant list integrated with references derived from other sources.

1.3.1 Online and digital searching

Considerable effort was made to identify relevant resources accessible online, including, *inter alia*, the *Transactions* of the Devonshire Association (1862–1920), the 'Dartmoor novels' of Eden Phillpotts, John Trevena and Sabine Baring-Gould, a variety of predominantly eighteenth and nineteenth century topographical and literary material, references to industrial processing of Dartmoor peat, and archaeological features and artefacts in association with peat.

Google (and most probably other online search engines) provides an extremely powerful means of identifying a broad range of potentially relevant material. A simple search on 'dartmoor' & 'peat', for example, using the 'Books' tab to filter the results, generates a substantial number of 'hits', many of which would otherwise be obscure and difficult to locate. For works published prior to 1910-20, complete digital versions are often available. More recent works may be flagged up by a search but not be accessible for detailed searching, in which case they were added to a list of works to be located in hard copy.

The precise search terms used in digital searching within particular works will vary depending on the specific work; for example, to cite an obvious instance, the search term 'dartmoor' might be used in a work relating to, say, the south west or Devon as a whole, but not in a publication specifically concerning Dartmoor. In a 'Dartmoor novel', in order to identify all relevant references, the search terms used might include peat(s), peatworks, turf, turve(s), turbary, ties / tyes, scads, vag(g)s, coal(s), collier(s), bog, mire, fen, vain, dig, cut, fire, ash, blackwood, black 'ood, journey, packhorse, cart, track, etc.

Many digitised works are available in a variety of formats, including plain text. The vagaries of the software used to generate the text means that this is often not a reliable way of picking up relevant words; in almost all cases the preference is for a search based on the PDF version of a source.

It should be noted that in many cases, particularly for fiction, the copies of relevant works available online are US editions rather than an original UK publication. Pagination may therefore in some instances differ from that in editions available in regional libraries and other repositories. However, the fact that page references are listed will signal that a work contains relevant material.

The following websites offer access to very large ranges of digitised material:

HathiTrust Digital Library <https://www.hathitrust.org/>

Internet Archive <https://archive.org/>

The Online Books Page <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu>

Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/>

A portal to online digital copies of the *Transactions* of the Devonshire Association (1862– 1920) is at <http://www.devonassoc.org.uk/transactions.htm>

A resource list of published material on the *Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks* website offers links to sources available online in digital form). Available at: <http://www.dartmoorwalks.org.uk/resource/articles.php>.

1.4 Date range

An overall date range of 1600 to the present was adopted for bibliographic material. However, in an attempt to keep within the broad time budget established for the project a decision was taken to set a cut-off date c 1920 for fictional material, primarily because it was anticipated that 'modern' works would include less material on the historic exploitation and use of peat. It is acknowledged that this may mean that some more recent descriptions of peatland landscapes have been missed. No deliberate efforts were made to pursue more recent biographical and autobiographical material, although Firbank's *Log hut* (1954) was an obvious exception.

1.5 What is not included

After consultation with Dr Lee Bray no attempt was made to produce a comprehensive listing of works referring to archaeological and historic features in peat landscapes; that would be a considerably larger undertaking. Neither did the project cover natural history and vegetation studies (other than in terms of the palaeoenvironmental and palaeoecological record) or solid geology.

The search did not include references in printed versions of public records (for example, the Calendars of State Papers, Patent Rolls, Close Rolls, Black Prince's Register, etc) or other collections of published documentary material; Birkett (1890) is an exception. Published collections of historic photographs have not generally been included.

Neither, because of the potential scale of the task, has it been attempted to search historic newspapers in detail for peat references, although there is clearly good potential for future work to identify relevant material. An initiative in 1846 to replace coal with Dartmoor peat in Ashburton gas works, for example, appears only to have been documented in local press reports:

'Peat Gas. – A company, of which Mr. Vargo is the principal, has taken a certain portion of Dartmoor from the Duchy for the purpose of cutting peat for gas. They have made their experiment with the most complete success. The consequence has been that they have taken the Ashburton gas works from the old company for five years. They will commence lighting at Michaelmas, and they engage to supply the gas at 2s. per 1,000 feet less than the present company. The light is said to surpass that made from coal any other combustible material. It is patent, we believe; and in the manufacture of the peat, there is a mixture of coal tar, and rosin with it. The company will have in their employ 60 men, who will be engaged cutting peat during the remainder of the season. It is possible for a good turf-cutter to obtain under favourable circumstances as much as 30s a week' (*North Devon Journal*, 10 September 1846, p 3; see also *Western Times*, 8 August 1846, p 6; 23 January 1847, p 5; *Exeter Flying Post*, 29 October 1846, p 3).

2 A sample of Dartmoor peat

"A curious human be Greg Friend," commented Mr Prout. "Peat! Why, he's made of peat – body and bones – just the same as you an' me be made of earth. He thinks peat, and dreams peat, and talks peat – the wonder is he don't eat peat!"

(Eden Phillpotts, *The whirlwind* (1907, 35).

The late Harold Fox proposed the localised use of peat for heating and cooking as one of several elements which are likely to have defined a historical 'consciousness of region' for Dartmoor communities, the sense of it as a distinct geographical area or *pays* (Fox 2012, 14–16). Fox highlighted the point with a map showing the geographical concentration on and around the moor of medieval and sixteenth-century documentary references to the harvesting of peat for fuel (*ibid*, fig 1.1). Such a focus of 'consciousness' may be of long standing. In 1903 the Dartmoor antiquary Robert Burnard excavated a small cairn at the foot of a fallen standing stone at one end of a stone row near Lar (Laughter) Tor and reported finding below it 'a great quantity of charcoal and peat ashes, or what appeared to be peat ashes' (Worth 1903, 141). The Dartmoor Exploration Committee's investigations of roundhouses also sometimes identified 'peat ash' (Worth 1994, 118; Johnston 2001, 153–7). At Tavy Cleave and Grimspound, in particular, 'cooking holes' in the floors of huts were described as filled with peat ash and charcoal (Baring-Gould 1894, 198; 1900, 46, 271; Baring-Gould *et al* 1894, 106–7, 112). At Kestor Lady Fox noted from around the hearth in hut 1 a 'fine gray soil which was probably peat ash' (Fox 1954, 30).

Tristram Risdon's much-quoted comment about Dartmoor's peat, made c 1640, 'which, to save for fuel, you would wonder to see how busy the by-dwellers be at some seasons of the year' (Risdon 1811, 6), underlines its long-standing importance in the domestic economies of households on and around the moor. In this context peat is sometimes used as a symbol of domestic self-sufficiency: 'The moor-man for his winter fire / Is stacking turf in Lartor mire' (Davies 1863, 20); thus, too, the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould (1900, 206): 'We stack the peat for fuel, / We ask no better fire, / And never pay a farden / For all that we require.'

The significance of the resource for some moorland households is hinted at in a comment made by J P Jones, writing in 1819, describing a journey from Moretonhampstead onto the moor: 'for some miles observed no traces of cultivation . . . A few hovels at last appeared, – more wretched habitations can hardly be conceived, they seemed never to have been repaired since their first erection; there was generally a small garden adjoining, and a heap of turf' (Jones 1823, 58–9). The same author, in his *Guide*, however, noted

'There is on Dartmoor, a stillness, a want of life and activity, and a sombre dignity of expression in its black barren pastures, which can only be observed in similar ranges of uncultivated land; the few cottages scattered about in the valleys, surrounded by small gardens, separated from the heath by a stone wall, and a heap of turf, are likewise interesting objects, in a scene marked by such an absence of variety' (Jones nd, 7).

Peat, here, is identified both as a defining constituent of the Dartmoor landscape and, implicitly, as an essential element in domestic and economic life. Such images recur in topographical and literary descriptions of Dartmoor and as components of human perceptions of and responses to its peatland landscapes. Thomas Moore, in his *History of Devonshire*, for example, observed that the

'whole surface of Dartmoor, including the rocks, is generally of two descriptions; the one a wet, peaty moor, or vegetable mould, but affording good sheep and

bullock pasture during the summer season; the other, an inveterate swamp, absolutely inaccessible to the lightest and most active quadruped that can traverse the sounder parts of the moor' (Moore 1829, I, 479).

More practically, however, Moore added that the 'want of convenient roads to the peat-pits is attended with much loss of time to the farmer, as well as danger to the poor who subsist by digging and collecting peat fuel for the country below' (*ibid*, 481). Charles Andrews, an American prisoner of war on Dartmoor during the Napoleonic period, understandably not enthusiastic about his environs, offered a similar combination of sentiments, describing Princetown as

'surrounded on all sides, as far as the eye can see, by the gloomy features of a black moor, uncultivated and uninhabited, except by one or two miserable cottages, just discernible in an eastern view, the inhabitants of which live by cutting turf on the moor, and selling it at the prison' (Anon 1815, 19).

In these and many other topographical descriptions, peat is prominent as a primary and fundamental component of Dartmoor landscapes. Its 'huge plastic store of peat' was noted as the origin of Dartmoor rivers by the anonymous author of *A handbook for travellers in Devon and Cornwall* (1851); John Lloyd Warden Page referred to 'swelling hills of peat morass' (Page 1892, 69) and William Crossing (1905, 11) to a 'vast sea of dead peat'. An 'enormous wilderness of peat and granite' was the setting for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The hound of the Baskervilles* (Doyle 1902, 207).

The late Victorian and Edwardian 'Dartmoor novel', including works by Sabine Baring-Gould, Eden Phillpotts and John Trevena, frequently includes mood-setting descriptions of peat landscapes and references to the harvesting and domestic use of peat as elements in their efforts to achieve a distinctive and authentic 'sense of place'. In *The secret woman* (Phillpotts 1905, 311-2), for example, a conversation between characters briefly compares the relative physical skills and sense of satisfaction inherent in mowing hay against those associated with cutting peat; there is similar assertion of a worker taking pleasure from physical activity in a description of peat cutting in his *The thief of virtue* (Phillpotts 1910, 208-9). The semi-ruined Rattlebrook peat-works, described in some detail, provides a key setting in Phillpotts' *The whirlwind* (1907, 21-8, *passim*). A peatworks at Amicombe Hill (perhaps also referring to Rattlebrook) is mentioned in Phillpotts' *The mother* (1909, 336, 339, 354) and the same author has a chapter titled 'Peat' in *My Devon year* (1903, 196-200). A chapter titled 'The Peat Cutters' in his *Dance of the months* (1911) is disappointing, however, in that the conversation he reports with men working at a turf-tie centres almost entirely on their (generally murderous) attitudes to the snakes they encounter!

With their specifically 'local' Dartmoor settings, these novels make occasional passing reference to topics on which it would probably be difficult to gain information from more conventional sources. An example is the use of mixed fuels in domestic fires in socially superior homes. In, for example, John Trevena's *Furze the cruel* (1907, 69), '[I]t was time to lift the peat from the hearth and put on the coal. Chegwiddden would soon be back from Lydford and want his supper'. The same author's *Heather* (1909) includes a reference to both peats and coals on a hearth and a character in his *Arminel of the west* (1909, 93) 'liked her fire to be composed of peat and wood'; in the house of an elderly woman in reduced circumstances, however, he refers to the 'poor handful of peat and coal-dust which made the fire' (*ibid*, 118). Fires of wood and turf are referred to in Baring-Gould's *Urith* (1890, 52, 89, 259, 302) and Adye's *The queen of the moor* (1897, 62), and Beatrice Chase described a fire revived from hot ashes by adding furze, ash logs and 'fags' (Chase nd, 18). Such 'mixed' fires of peat and wood or peat and coal appear to be distinct from the use of furze with turf, probably intended to provide light as well as rapid heat (for example, Crossing 1890, 21, 27). They may represent a late phase in the use of peat, when improved transport made alternative fuels more widely available to more prosperous households.

Peat fires are widely referenced as an icon of cordiality and hospitality and a focus of domestic content. When the Reverend John Swete visited Sir Francis Buller's house at Prince Hall in 1797 he noted that he and two other gentlemen passed the evening 'before a large Peat fire' (Swete 2000, 48); visiting a smallholder's cottage nearby he noted a 'cheerfull Peat fire; of which fuel, as it rose at their door they did not seem to be sparing' (*ibid*, 64). Crossing (1890, ch 3) specifically set the recounting of folk tales and beliefs around a peat fire in a farm kitchen, contrasting domestic warmth and light with a storm outside. E W L Davies (1863, 23, 48) highlighted the conviviality which took place around peat fires after hunting on the moor and H S Stokes (Anon 1879, 126) described a walker's evening return from an excursion on Dartmoor:

'And keener yet he feels the moorland blast,
No more the lofty tors in purple glow,
Nor on the waste their lengthy shadows cast . . .
The rooks with clamours meet and wheel apart,
And in the plashing rut loud creaks the peat-piled cart.

Onward he paces, sees the turf-fires blaze
In moor-men's huts, and pleasant is the smell
The grey smoke wafts through the thick-rising haze.'

This is perhaps the significance of traditions of long-established peat fires in homes and inns. In Phillpotts' *Sons of the morning* the kitchen fire 'never wholly died by night or by day' (Phillpotts 1900, 25) and in *Orphan Dinah* 'the kitchen fire never went out at Falcon Farm' (Phillpotts 1920, 116). Baring-Gould (1900, 200) noted an elderly woman in a cottage near Sherrill 'who for sixty years never once allowed her fire to go out.' The fire at the *Ring o' Bells* pub in Phillpotts' *The river* (1902, 29) had been maintained continuously for 30 years; that at the *White Thorn* in *The three brothers* for 100 years (Phillpotts 1909, 374–5; cf Crossing 1883; 1902, 45; Anon nd, 121).

The harvesting and transportation of peat together represent one of the principal historic linkages or associations between the peatland landscapes of 'High Dartmoor' – the 'Unsettled High Upland Moorland' and 'Upland Moorland with Tors' landscape Types (Land Use Consultants 2017) – and the settlements of the moorland slopes and adjacent off-Moor areas. Together with involvement in seasonal pastoralism, turbarry was one of the key rights of households in the venville parishes around the moor (Rowe 1848, 279; Birkett 1890, 54–5). Peat for domestic use was clearly important, but there was also substantial commercial exploitation of the resource from early in the known history of Dartmoor (Crossing 1994, 81). In the later thirteenth century the abbey of Buckfast was accused of having enclosed a large part of eastern Dartmoor and 'they sell peat and pasturage from year to year whence they derive a great income' (Reichel 1913, 197). Harold Fox's researches in medieval manorial accounts identified numerous *carbonarii* making peat charcoal on the moor (Fox 1994, 162–4; 2012, 101–2) and Rowe (1848, 268, 272, 274, 275) offered documentary evidence of 'colliers' from the medieval period to the late eighteenth century. Sites at which peat charcoal was produced have been identified by Diana Woolner (1965–7) and recently by Phil Newman (2012; 2014). It has been suggested that the place-name Collard, near Wotter, *Colritte* in 1289, referred to a place where 'coal' was made (Smith *et al* 1981, 206).

Sale of fuel off the moor continued as an important element of the Dartmoor economy in the post-medieval period. In the early seventeenth century it was claimed (although probably with some exaggeration) that 100,000 horse-loads of turf were removed annually from Dartmoor Forest (Birkett 1890, 58; Burnard 1907, 200). A smallholder living near Blackabrook Head in the late eighteenth century sold turves in Tavistock, six miles away (Swete 2000, IV, 65) and three decades later Burt noted moormen 'digging and curing [*sic*] peat fuel, which is chiefly sent to the South Hams' (Burt 1826a, 152). Thornton (1907, 167) recalled the former sale of Dartmoor turf to off-moor villages,

giving the example of loads brought 19km from Teignhead to Lustleigh by a peat-cutter known as 'Brimstone Pete'.

This long-established trade declined towards the end of the nineteenth century as changes in transport made other fuels available. At Bearwalls Farm, for example, on the edge of the moor in Peter Tavy, although located only a few kilometres from the turf grounds around the Rattlebrook, by 1906 no peat was burnt, 'only coal and coke' (Greeves 2010, 26). In consequence of this move to alternative fuels, some former areas of turf production and the associated transport routes were near-abandoned, 'the quantity of peat brought in from the forest at the present time being comparatively small' (Crossing 1914, 40, 50; cf Newman 2010, 14).

Crossing identified numerous routes on the moor as 'peat-tracks' (Crossing 1912, *passim*) and they continue to be referred to in modern guides to the moor (for example, Hemery 1983; 1997). Examples survive as landscape features (Newman 2010, 36, fig 3.3; 2013, 41; Greeves 2009, 17–19). While many of these are likely to have been used by packhorses, Swete (2000, 37–8) noted the use of 'light carts' to remove turf from peat grounds near Fernworthy in the 1790s – an apparently early instance of wheeled vehicles used to transport peat on Dartmoor – and the Reverend Bray described a scene he and his wife witnessed near Merrivale Bridge in 1832:

'In the course of our journey hither, our attention had been attracted to some objects in the horizon which my companion said she could almost fancy were moving tors. They certainly appeared large objects and made but slow progress. I knew there was no road in that direction, yet they continued to follow one another in a line. At length they turned, and as they approached nearer to us I could distinguish that they were not only dark from rising in contrast with the sky, but were black in themselves; and I could almost imagine they were a funeral procession; and, of course, that of some giant who was to lay his bones beneath some mighty kairn. But, at times, their tottering, nay, oscillating motion, like that of ships in a storm, did not exactly correspond with the solemn and steady pace observed on such occasions. And at last I found they were carts piled high with peat, working their way through the rocks, now turning and rolling to the right, and now to the left, under the guidance, now in front, now in rear, and now on either side, of men who exerted almost gigantic strength in preventing them from falling.' (Bray 1836, I, 392).

Philip Mitchell gave a vivid account of a four-and-a-half-mile trip (it appears less on a modern map) from Hill Bridge, in Peter Tavy, to the farm's turf-ties near the source of the Walkham, to inspect the site at which a polished flint axe had been found under the peat. The journey was firstly by road, 'ascending nearly the whole way', and then

'through the gate, where roads cease; we entered on the moor, where the ruts are scooped out by long use, and filled up with stones but once a year. In these our wheels sank down to the axles, making it quite easy to step from the waggon on to the bank. . . .

The turf ties of the upper Walkham are of some extent, and reach as far as the eye can see, in black, purple, and brown masses, in a southerly direction.

The ground in which the implement was found has an area of about six acres, and is of a somewhat semi-circular shape, not unlike an amphitheatre, being cut from the surface in a series of steps to the depth of about ten or twelve feet.

The turf is in layers alternating with a rich black mould, much of which is brought down by the floods that dye our rivers with every shade of brown and amber. The implement, which is of polished flint, was discovered embedded in the solid peat, at the depth of six feet from the surface. I asked every kind of question that occurred to me at the time, to ascertain if it had been placed there, etc., and was assured it was simply impossible, my guide giving it me as his belief that it must have been there from the most ancient times, "nearly as

old as the world;" that he cut it out himself, and had retained possession of it from that time until I saw it, thus confirming my own opinion that it belonged to some very remote period of man's history' (Mitchell 1869–79).

The flint axe itself was bought for the Plymouth Institution the following year (Anthony and Hingston 1870–71), but the primary interest of this account lies in the unusual detail it provides of specific links between a moorland-edge farm and a block of distant turf-ties, the means of access and transport, and the method of working peat in deep deposits. These data can be set alongside documentary evidence of contemporary applications for peat cutting in this area for domestic purposes by local residents and Crossing's accounts of peat tracks around Walkham Head (Newman 2010, 17–18; Crossing 1914, 50–1).

Few published accounts give comparable detail, but there are exceptions, most notably the Reverend Swete, who visited the moor in 1795 and 1797 and observed turf-cutting near the Tavistock – Two Bridges road. He carefully described the methods of preparing the turf-tie and removing the turves, noted as each 15 inches long, six wide and two thick. (Swete 2000, IV, 65). He also commented on nearby hills, 'covered over with Peat ricks . . . they resemble an opening fir Cone. The several layers being spread hollow over one another so as to permit the air constantly to ventilate them. In this state they remain till they are perfectly dry, when as occasion serves, they are either carried away for sale or deposited under the Farmers shed for the Winters store' (*ibid*, 66). John Laskey's 'Three days excursion on Dartmoor', published in 1795–96, gave a brief description of 'black wood': 'This is dug by the poorer class of people, and dried in cakes about 12 inches in length, 6 or 7 inches in breadth, and 2 inches thick, and used by them for firing. It is also made into a kind of charcoal, which is much used by smiths for tempering edge-tools; and it is said to be far preferable to any other coal for that purpose' (Laskey 1795–6, 1080; see also Worth 1941). William Crossing (1992, 53) is one of very few observers to provide comparable detail.

One brief comment suggests preparation of turf grounds prior to cutting by burning off surface vegetation. Rachel Evans (1846, 76–7) recalled a summer night-time journey across Whitchurch Down, near Tavistock: 'The hills in the distance glowed with the conflagration of the turf cutters; whole acres were set burning to destroy the vegetation, and aid their labours in preparing peat which they cut for their winter fuel.' On the face of it this suggests beat burning or perhaps swaling carried out outside its usual season, but Tom Greeves cites parallel instances and concludes that burning vegetation on turf grounds prior to cutting was probably not unusual (Greeves 2006, 5).

Laskey referred to peat charcoal being used by blacksmiths (1795–6, 1080) and Burt indicated that most smiths around Dartmoor used peat charcoal or coke in their 'furnaces', implying that it had a wider use in metalworking: 'it is useful in manufacturing iron, to which it imparts a particular tenacity or toughness without any blisters, in constructing wires for musical instruments, there being no sulphur, in tempering edge tools, and smelting ores' (Burt 1826, 124–5). Burt also noted past experiments in producing gas from 'coked' peat and proposals for the use of gas in the prison at Princetown (*ibid*, 124, 144).

From the mid-1840s, however, Dartmoor achieved some prominence nationally and internationally for industrial uses of peat, including the production of gas for lighting and of naphtha and other chemicals (Harris 1992, 106; Newman 2010; Crabbe 2000). These ventures typically required significant investment in infrastructure – the Zeal Tor tramway, for example, was constructed to carry peat to a naphtha works at Shipley Bridge (Wade 1982, 11–13; Wakeham 2016) – and the associated costs were a significant element in the rapid failure of most of these initiatives. Nonetheless, the initial experimentation on Dartmoor appears to have prompted ventures elsewhere (Crabbe 2000) and proposals for chemical processes based on peat continued to emerge. At the Great Exhibition of 1851, for example, Robert Oxland of Plymouth

showed 'specimens of Dartmoor peat, and the products obtained by its destructive distillation in cast-iron retorts'; his exhibits included the 'top cut of peat; the under cut; peat charcoal; pyroxylic spirit; chloroform made from it; peatine; heavy oil; paraffine [*sic*]; tar; acetate of lime; sulphate of ammonia; and solution of caoutchouc in peatine' (Anon 1851, I, 143).

Dartmoor prison, re-opened in 1850, produced its own gas from peat - in the mid-1850s convicts were cutting more than 2,400 tons of turf annually, including 630 tons used in making gas (Anon 1856) – but this appears to have been the final venture based primarily on some form of chemical processing of peat. Subsequent initiatives which proceeded beyond initial proposals were predominantly aimed at producing compressed or processed peat fuel, or milled peat for use in sewage systems and horticulture (Newman 2010). The peat works at Rattlebrook, first established in the 1860s, was the focus for a succession of initiatives continuing until the early 1950s (*ibid*, 20–27). Some details of operations there in the 1880s are provided by Parfitt (1885, 369–70) and Radford (1889, 208) and the works provides an important setting in Eden Phillpotts novel *The whirlwind* (1907). The final venture on the site, an attempt at large-scale production of horticultural peat, was described by Thomas Firbank (1956, 184–94). There are also brief accounts of some of the men who formerly worked at Rattlebrook in its later phases in Gunnell (1977, 52–6), Amhof (1988), and Greeves (2000).

Industrial-scale approaches to exploiting Dartmoor peat, and particularly the succession of new peat-based ventures in the second half of the nineteenth century, eventually aroused concerns about the potential long-term consequences, not least for water supplies and groundwater retention. In a paper to the Devonshire Association in 1889 D Radford acknowledged the long historic use of peat for fuel, but added that 'it is only of recent date that it has been sought to make peat an article of merchandise far and near, and to treat the great bogs of Dartmoor as a mine, from which peat fuel could be extracted and sold, as coal is from a coal mine' (Radford 1889, 207–8). He enumerated the various recent 'Peat Fuel Companies' on Dartmoor and their failures but warned that better managed enterprises might succeed and of the potential results:

'No profit or economy obtained from turning our Dartmoor peat bogs into fuel could ever compensate for the loss of water to our fertile lowlands, and to the many towns now supplied from Dartmoor streams. It is absolutely certain that if the peat bogs were removed, our rivers running down . . . would become rapid torrents in the rainy season, and dry watercourses in the dry season' (*ibid*, 208–9).

Radford's concerns became part of a wider movement to preserve Dartmoor from harmful exploitation (including 'crazy notions of Company Promoters, for ruining their shareholders by turning the Dartmoor bogs into peat fuel': Collier 1895, 216–7), conserve the moor's 'natural' form and resources and bring it into public ownership (for example, Collier 1889; 1894; 1895; 1896; 1898, 291; Croft 1904, 60; cf Kelly 2015, 211–8). In this sense, a concern for peat resources was a factor in the long chain of shifting concerns, opinions and policies which eventually led to the creation of the National Park (Kelly 2015, *passim*).

Patricia Milton dates the opening-up of Dartmoor to the outside world to the period between c 1770 and 1805 (Milton 2006, 30; *passim*). Features such as Cranmere Pool became essential 'sights' for genteel visitors early in the process, generating accounts of direct, physical experiences of peat landscapes. John Laskey and his friends gave up their attempt to reach the pool from Lydford in the 1790s: '[W]e found, the farther we penetrated on the moor, the soil to grow bad in proportion; and the track of our return from the search after Cranmere-pool to be black and spongy, full of bare and moist channels, resembling gutters, which made it very troublesome for walking, it being neither safe nor agreeable to tread in them. . . .A singularity we also observed here, that the highest ground was the most swampy' (Laskey 1795, 1009, 1080). Sophie Dixon (1830, 25–6) recorded that her party

'ascended the hills in search of Cranmere, but came to a morass of great extent and very remarkable appearance, the ground having in one part slid off for the space of two acres or more to a depth of full ten feet. Further up the valley, this fen or bog occupies a tract upwards of a mile in length, the whole being full of springs, which on the western side unite to a regular stream, forming the source of the East Dart, which proceeds down the valley, augmenting considerably as it drains the hill on the west side, which is one immense peat bog, broken into small banks or hillocks, the intervals being entirely occupied with a swamp of black peat' (Dixon 1830, 25).

Later visitors, furnished with an increasing range of printed instructions and led by local guides, usually fared better, although potential difficulties of tourism in peat landscapes were highlighted by a story recorded by Prickman (1906) from 'an old gentleman of Princetown':

'He was asked if he had been out to visit the celebrated Cranmere Pool, situated in the heart of the bogland of Dartmoor, lately. His reply was, "No, not very lately, sir; funny thing, when I took a gentleman out there the last time I went, there was actually five or six folks there; never seed so many there in my life to wanst. There was one man there with a wooden leg, too; however he got there I don't know. There was a 'oman there w'im – his wife, I s'pose, for he was terrible cross w'her. 'Tis a wisht old place, Cranmere Pool, for a man with a wooden leg, you know sir! No wonder he was a bit tedious and maggoty." '

Tourists, entering Dartmoor from outside its margins for leisure and pleasure, the spectacular and picturesque, were only one form of inquisitive visitor. There were also 'improvers', the military, artists, geologists, naturalists, archaeologists and others, and their endeavours represent another key linkage and interaction between Dartmoor's peat landscapes and the wider 'off Moor' world. Self-evidently, much the largest element of what is known of these landscapes and their components derives from such visitors.

The process of gaining knowledge has been relatively rapid, only a little over two centuries from the first clutch of significant data gatherers and commentators in the 1780s and 1790s – John Andrews (Worth 1941), John Laskey, (1795–6), Robert Fraser (1794), John Swete (2000), William Marshall (1796), William Maton (1797), Arthur Young (1797) – to the wide range of scholarly enquiry of the present. Just before World War I R Hansford Worth estimated 2 feet of peat growth over buried stones in the Stall Moor to Greenhill stone row: '[A]long this lost length the peat is sufficiently well developed and deep to be cut for turf. And in the course of turf cutting the stones have again been uncovered.' (Worth 1913–14, 330). Worth's recent successors on the moor, at Cut Hill and Whitehorse Hill, for example, can make similar observations in the field, but now have the ability to explore the wider story, and the significance of what they encounter, considerably more fully (Fyfe and Greeves 2010; Jones 2016). Dartmoor's peat landscapes, its 'wild scenes and abundant curiosities' (Dixon 1830, 26), undoubtedly have potential for many more spectacular discoveries and will equally certainly continue to draw enquirers. Many will echo Arthur Young's sentiment after his excursion on the 'immense and dreary desert' of Dartmoor in 1796: 'Returned at night . . . after a day as interesting as any I had ever passed' (Young 1797, 561, 578).

3 Bibliography of Dartmoor's peatland heritage

Page numbers for specific peat-related references in publications, where these have been identified, are listed in square brackets – for example, [pp. 123–127, 151] – after the entry in the bibliography. Missing information in entries is indicated by \$\$.

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3.1 Oral history material

Peat-related material is included in at least two of the published CD collections resulting from the Dartmoor National Park Authority 'Moor Memories' oral history project (2001–2004):

- *Landscape, People, Places, Weather* (Track 3: 'Peat cutting');
- *Moor Memories Collection 2 - Lovely Days* (CD1 Track 3: 'Cutting turf'; CD3 includes a section on 'Moorland Grazing and Vegetation').

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