

Deborah Griffiths

The origins of the gunpowder factory.

We're at a place called Powdermills, which is about a mile away from Postbridge heading towards Two Bridges and we're in an area of moorland really, in one of these enclosed newtakes and in 1844 a chap named George Freat, who was a Plymouth man, started a gunpowder manufactory here, and he erected 18 stone buildings and gunpowder was produced here from that date until 1897 when the works closed down.

So why build a gunpowder manufactory here, in the middle of the moor?

Yes, it does seem rather that we're in the middle of nowhere but there are several good reasons for putting the gunpowder factory here; firstly George Freat was a bit of a philanthropist and he really believed that, along with a lot of other people, he believed that waste land should be put to good use and actually should be put to a use that employed people, so there was an employment opportunity, if you like, here; secondly we're right in the middle of what was a very prosperous mining area, there was tin mining going on, copper mining and also stone quarrying and gunpowder that was made here was principally used in those industries, so it was actually quite a handy place from that point of view, and thirdly if you're going to manufacture gunpowder there are occasions in the process when explosions can occur and so you need a large area where you can spread your buildings out far and wide so that if there is an explosion in one building only that building suffers. And there are other reasons as well, we've got a turnpike road nearby so communication was actually quite good and water, there's a river called the Cherrybrook running through this area and water was an important source of power for the process.