

Deborah Griffiths

Princetowns, its location and development.

Here we are in Princetown, which was actually named for the Prince of Wales who later became George IV, and it lies right at the heart of Dartmoor and well up as well, it's sited at about 1400 feet about sea level so its one of the highest big settlements in the country probably, and one of the great things about Princetown is that its surrounded by vast tracks of open moorland and if you're in the centre of Princetown a walk of five or ten minutes and your in the middle of nowhere, and its fabulous, and then you can come back and of course there are places to eat, places to get refreshment and it's a great place for starting off your learning experience of Dartmoor.

So Princetown's a new town really isn't it?

Yes it is, it had its beginnings in the late 18th century when a number of factors came together and the coincidence made it favourable to create a settlement here. One of those was the turnpiking of the main road to Moretonhampstead and Tavistock, and that created better communications, a second factor was that the country had been undergoing a series of agricultural improvements, so our abilities to cultivate the land and produce animals was improving and the third one, I think, was a kind of philosophy that was around at the time that waste land, such as Dartmoor was regarded as, should be put to good use, should actually produce something. And the catalyst for all this was a chap called Thomas Tyrwhitt, an Essex man, but he was the secretary to the Council of the Prince of Wales, who was also the Duke of Cornwall and owned much land round here, and I think he had a zeal for this improvement and making land work, combined with getting some income for the Duchy of Cornwall. So he came down here and he created an estate of about 2300 acres, just about half a mile away from here, called Tor Royal, and his ambitions there were to grow flax, to grow root crops, to have a cattle ranch, to grow timber and make it really productive, and we all know Dartmoor is greater than all these ambitions and essentially that came to no satisfactory end. But he never gave up, so he started the settlement of Princetown by creating a few labourers cottages, but then just by happenstance the Anglo-French War broke out and we ended up with a lot of prisoners down in Plymouth on Prison ships and Tyrwhitt again saw a wonderful opportunity for making Dartmoor work.