

Deborah Griffiths

The Duchy Hotel

Standing here in the middle of Princetown one of the main buildings that you see is what's called the Duchy Hotel.

Yes, its got the Duchy Hotel written on one of its side walls, but in fact it was first built around about 1810 to house some of the militia [officers] that were guarding the prisoners of war in the newly created prison and when it was first built it was a much more humble building than the one that we're looking at today, essentially it was built of exposed stone granite and consisted really of a rectangular structure with two little winglets coming out at either end. And then its fortunes matched those of the Prison so when the prison of war prison closed down I think the Duchy Hotel probably went into a state of redundancy, if you like, and then in the 1850s it was taken over by a chap called James Rowe and he turned it into the Duchy Hotel and it seems to have been very popular as a hotel, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stayed here and is supposed to have written part of the Hound of the Baskervilles here and certainly we have a record of the then Prince of Wales coming and taking tea here in 1903. And then in 1908 the hotel underwent a major refurbishment and that's what's given it its colonnade and veranda on the front, but also within it was given a very extreme makeover, if you like, and there's a decorated piece of plasterwork decorated to 1908 and it really reflects the Art Nouveau type of architecture that was common at the time and its got some wonderful etched glass, fantastic tessellated floor and a little ballroom stand (bandstand) as well, so it was really quite a high class place, people would come to tea dances here I guess. And then it shut as a hotel and then became a prison officer's mess and we've finally given it its latest makeover and turned it into the High Moorland Visitor Centre.