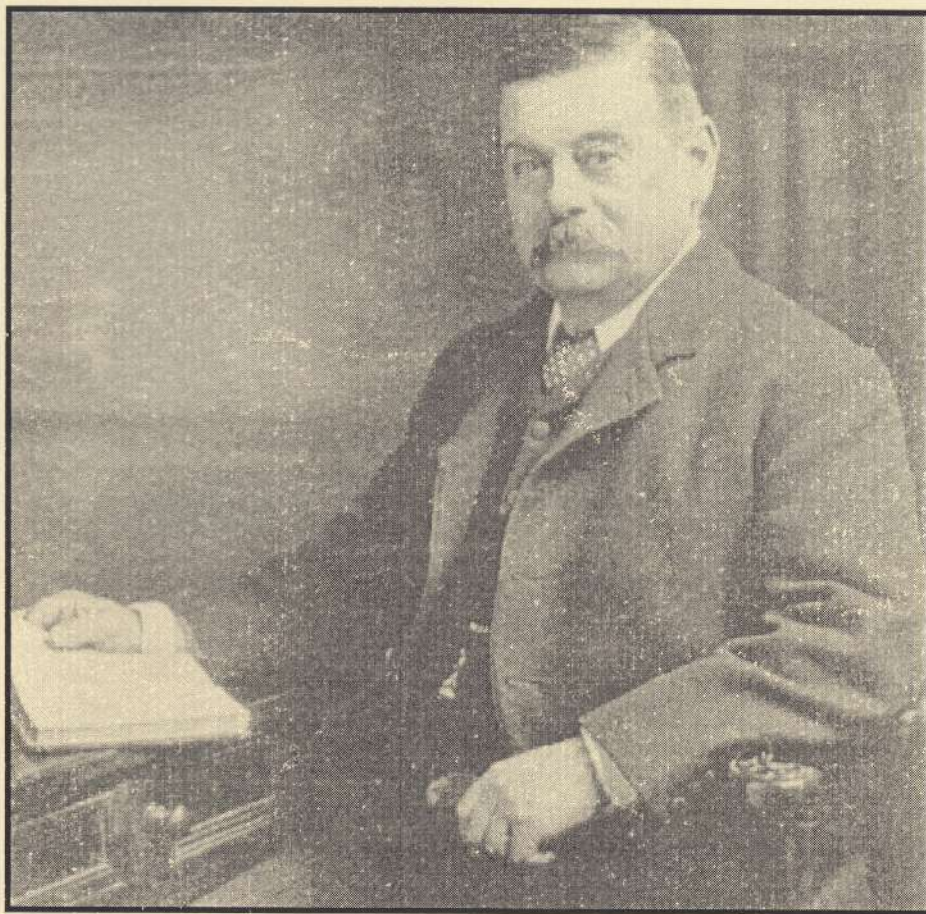


Plundered Dartmoor



Robert Burnard

1848 - 1920

PLUNDERED DARTMOOR

Dartmoor Preservation Association.

ISSUED TO MEMBERS, MARCH 16TH, 1896.

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We often congratulate ourselves on the marvels of the age in which we live, and it is doubtless true that civilization has made immense strides, and here and there we see this especially exemplified in the provision of naturally pure water for certain fortunate communities. In others, however, the unfortunate inhabitants have to put up with the consumption of dilute sewage and all the evils which follow in its train. It is simply marvellous that people continue to drink such stuff, and it is only a question of time when these unfortunates must look further afield for purer sources of supply.

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Under present conditions, Dartmoor is exposed to a serious danger by the indiscriminate removal of its peat by companies formed for the purpose of supplying fuel, &c. Fortunately these have not hitherto been financially successful, so that the mischief they have done so far has not been very great. It has been estimated that some 30,000 acres of Dartmoor are covered with peat bogs. They vary in depth from two feet to more than twenty feet, with an average depth of five to six feet. It has been found that a cubic foot of saturated dense peat contains five gallons of water, or for one square acre of peat, five feet deep, there would be over one million gallons, and the total quantity stored in the whole area of this natural reservoir amounts to between thirty and forty thousand millions of gallons of water.* The constant supply of water and the fertility of Devonshire depends on the retention of these bogs. If peat fuel companies are allowed to remove the peat beds the rivers will become rapid torrents in the winter and dry water courses in the summer, with what disastrous results we can all easily imagine. If the County becomes the purchasers of the Forest, the bogs will be protected from the ravages of the wholesale turf-cutter. It should not be forgotten, too, that the water power of Dartmoor may in the future be of great value to Devon. We import coals for producing power, and allow a force lying at our back doors to run away to waste. In the hands of the County electric power derived from Dartmoor streams may in a few years to come be a valuable and a revenue-earning asset of no mean importance.

In looking at the map which depicts Dartmoor as it is to-day, it must not be forgotten that the War Office are now leasing the whole of the north quarter, and that the area comprised within an imaginary line drawn from Belstone to Steeperton, thence to Cranmere Pool and down the West Ockment to Meldon—about fifteen square miles—is absorbed for the purpose of providing artillery ranges. With every desire that the artillery should possess efficient means of practice, some limitation of the zone of operations should be insisted on, and any extension should be strenuously resisted. Artillery practice should be confined to five days in the week, so that Saturdays may be regarded as open days; thus giving an opportunity for agistment—the cutting of turf by the cottiers—and for visits by tourists and others to the most romantic portion of Dartmoor.

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The Convict Prison at Princetown has been the cause of much encroachment and must be held in check. Hardly a more unsuitable place could have been selected for such an establishment. It is expensive to maintain, and the work performed by the convicts is as unremunerative as it well can be. By enclosing land, the prison authorities rob the inhabitants of Dartmoor of rights of access, pasture, and turbary which they have enjoyed for many centuries. These enclosures are tilled and improved, but when this is accomplished the labour bestowed on it is unprofitable. This forced labour would be much more productive of real and lasting national benefit if it were directed on harbour works around our storm-beaten shores. But there the Prison is, and whilst the powers that be are intent on reclaiming the wastes of Dartmoor—*within their present enclosures*—we must put up with it. Some curb must, however, be put on the further operations of the Prison Authorities.

With the Forest of Dartmoor, the property of the people of Devon, the public would possess the grandest park in England. Left just as it is, with some judicious tree planting, and as a recreative region it would be perfect. With swaling under proper control, fur and feather would increase, and it might be once again made the haunt of the red deer. Even now some of these noble animals occasionally stray across from Exmoor, and harbour in the woods around Buckland and Holne Chace.

The antiquities would be for ever preserved. There would be no more spoliation of pre-historic monuments by the newtake wall builder. All these would be carefully surveyed and mapped, so that the intelligent visitor could easily find them and study these remnants of a long by-gone past. A museum illustrative of Dartmoor could be established. Its geology, natural history, and antiquities would furnish a good educational medium.

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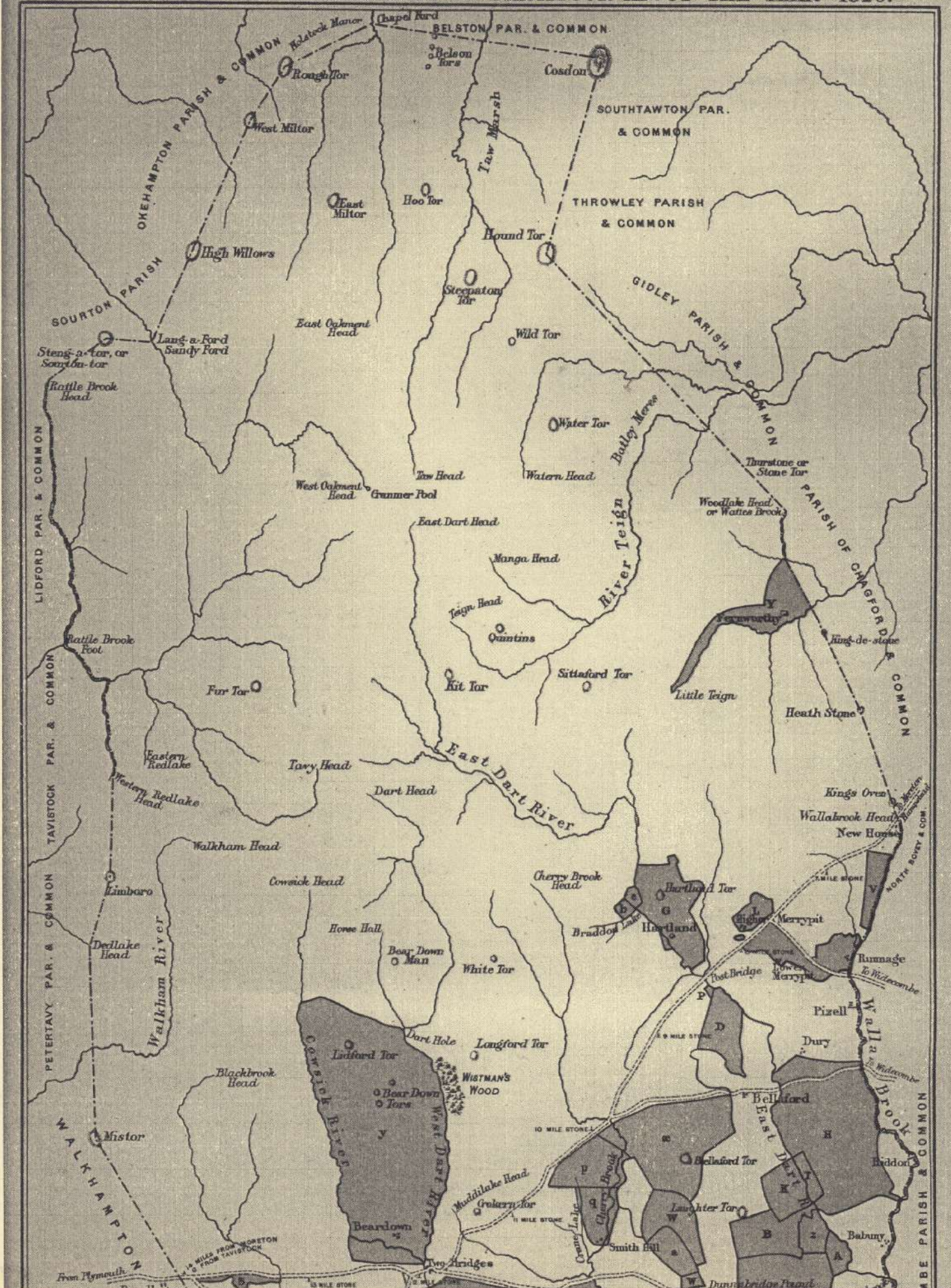
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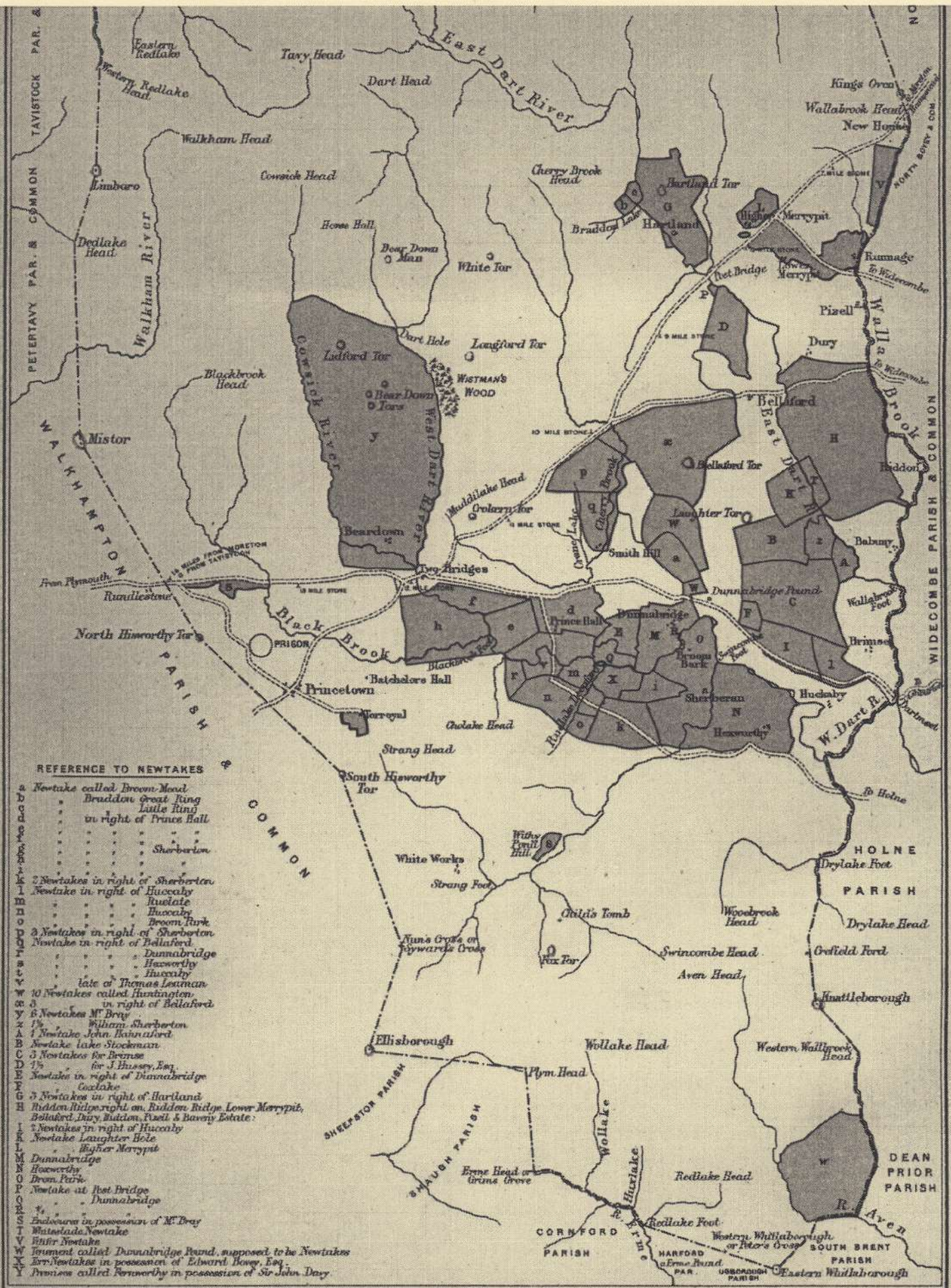
* Experiments by Mr. D. Radford—see Trans. Devon Assn., 1892.

A MAP OF THE ENCLOSURES OF DARTMOOR ABOUT THE YEAR 1820.



A MAP OF THE ENCLOSURES OF DARTMOOR IN 1895.





Scale: One Inch to One Statute Mile

Enclosures are coloured pink.
Boundary of the Forest of Dartmoor.



Reproduced from the Ordnance map by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

SCALE, One Inch to One Statute Mile

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

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London, Swindon & Co. Ltd.

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The text and maps of this print are at about 90% of the original size (to fit this page width), and have been split to provide maximum coverage, giving an overlap of about one third of the height of these pages. The enclosures were overprinted with a pink tint on the original, reproduced here as a darker shade of grey. The different tones in the background are in small part caused by the age of the original paper, and to a greater extent by the limitations in the reproduction equipment, and uneven toner distribution in the laser printer.

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