

Moretonhampstead open for business

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Alison proudly displays a pair of Green Shoes 'Dartmoor' boots



Sub postmaster Jenny Tribe in her bright and inviting shop



With over 60 vehicles in the Motor Museum there's lots to see

Like many small towns, Moretonhampstead has had its ups and downs in recent years. In 2014, it is definitely on the 'up'.

You'll find no empty shops and even some premises that have been converted back to retail use from residential. Right at the centre of the town, the wonderfully named Muzzle Patch – a triangle of old buildings – is now home to four shops, the most it has seen for decades. One of these is the stylish Rue des Fontnelles, opened in June 2013 by Caroline Mason. It sells an eclectic mix of French and European antiques and decorative objects.

'We try to stock things you won't find anywhere else in the southwest,' says Caroline who moved back to Dartmoor after 10 years in France. 'We lived at number one Rue des Fontnelles in rural France, south of Poitiers, so decided to use the name here. We thought it was quirky!' The Masons regularly return to France and bring furniture and pictures back to sell, and are expanding their business online through their website.

Just around the corner is Dartmoor Antiques, run by Reyn Lambert-Barnett.

Reyn has been in the trade for years and undertakes house clearances where he finds many of his prize items. 'We have all sorts of interesting bits and pieces in the shop, and a lot of our business is in hand-painting items – new and old – to people's specific requirements. The shop is a small part of what we do – our main workshop is in North Bovey – but it's a great way for people to see what we offer and it's worked very well.' Dartmoor Antiques opened in 2011 and the arrival of Rue des Fontnelles has been a benefit to both businesses (just round the corner you'll find regular DM contributor Andrew Gilbert's Gallery too), increasing footfall to the town.

Across the road is the White Hart Hotel. Reopened in 2012, it sits proudly at the crossroads and seems to set an up-beat tone for the town. As well as dining at the hotel, local residents ('Moretonians') can also enjoy delicious Italian-inspired food at The Horse, just two doors away. Two other pubs, The Bell and The Union Inn, ensure there's plenty of choice for residents and visitors alike.

And talking of visitors, there's a brand new tourist attraction in the town, the

Moretonhampstead Motor Museum. Situated at the top of Court Street it is close to one of two large public car parks. Owner Frank Loft opened its doors in June 2013 after a year of intensive refurbishment on the art-deco-style building that was originally the town's bus depot. The Museum currently houses a wonderful array of over 60 vehicles dating from a 1913 De Dion Charabanc to a 1990 Mini Cooper S. There are also motorbikes, small commercial vehicles, children's toy vehicles and lots of fascinating artefacts now referred to as 'petronalia'!

All but two of the cars belong to Frank, who was looking for a site for his collection after he ran out of room at home in Kingsteignton. 'I thought the old bus depot looked ideal so I decided to buy it – a real leap of faith. It's been a lot of work to get it in shape, but our first year has gone well. I have other vehicles stored at home and what with those, and others I've been offered on loan, I'll regularly change the collection so there will always be new exhibits on show.'

Almost opposite the Museum is Betton Way Industrial Estate where, alongside a



ABOVE Rue des Fontenelles TOP RIGHT Always on the look out for items of interest – Reyn Lambert RIGHT Putting the finishing touches to another hand made pair of boots at Green Shoes

tyre company, a granola-making business and an injection moulding company, you'll find the headquarters of Character Builders. The firm specialises in working on period properties using traditional methods and materials. They offer a holistic 'whole house' service, as Character Builders also encompasses Character Decorators and Character Joiners.

'We were previously based out in the sticks but it made sense for us to move into Moretonhampstead to be in the centre of things,' said Kate Diffey (wife of one of the Directors, Tom Diffey) who looks after the company's marketing. 'Fortunately for us, the harsh Dartmoor weather results in lots of rotten windows, so our joinery division has been extremely busy since we moved here!'

At the other end of town, Green Shoes, producers of beautiful handmade shoes, boots and accessories, moved into an old Wesleyan chapel at 26A Cross Street last year. Alison Hastie, owner and chief cordwainer (call them cobblers at your peril!), is delighted with their move. 'We started out in Totnes in 1981 with a high street presence, but things change and

we now sell a lot online, so buying premises in Moretonhampstead was ideal. I live nearby, our staff all live locally and we manufacture here and also have a shop on the premises.

'We have found the town immensely welcoming – it has a good "energy" about it. We run courses in shoe and boot making every month so we are bringing people into the town. They love visiting such a beautiful area and stay locally too.'

Back in the main street, the Post Office has new blood in its veins, with the arrival of sub postmaster Jenny Tribe. Jenny took over the business in February 2013 aged just 22, and says most of her friends thought she was mad. 'I'd worked here part-time and I did try other careers, office jobs and care work, but always came back to the Post Office. So, when it became available I thought it just had to be.'

Despite the Post Office removing the 'basic rate' payment and downgrading Moretonhampstead to a 'Post Office Local', Jenny has fought hard to retain a good range of services. 'It's not been easy and now I only earn money through each transaction I make, so it's really important that local people support this post office

if they want it to survive.' To boost her income, Jenny is an agent for the National Lottery and a dry cleaning service and has re-vamped the shop to sell cards, gifts, stationery, office supplies and, most recently, haberdashery items and wools. 'It may seem an odd mix, but it sells really well, and it's what people want.'

Just down the street, the newsagents has also been given a new lease of life. Larry Kuiper, who moved to the UK from South Africa nine years ago, took over the shop in November 2013. He already owns the Central Café (next to the Information Centre) with his wife Jill, so knows the town and its inhabitants well. 'I thought it was really important to keep this shop open. We sell all the conventional items but I also plan to sell a lot more of the traditional bottled sweets as these are right back in fashion. I'm still looking at what else we might offer in future. So I say to people "Watch this space"!'

Moretonhampstead also has another big plus for business – Superfast Broadband. Thanks largely to the efforts of Parish Councillor Peter Middleton and the 'Connecting Devon & Somerset' initiative, it is top of the list of rural communities lined up to receive the super service. 'Speeds of up to 80mb are possible, depending on how close you live to the exchange,' says Peter. 'The installation was due at the end of 2013, but the spell of extremely wet weather held everything up. By the time you read this, it should be up and running, helping to make Moretonhampstead a great base for all types of business and industry.' ■

Find out more

The Moretonhampstead Motor Museum is open from March to October
www.moretonmotormuseum.co.uk

Rue des Fontenelles www.ruedesfontenelles.co.uk

Dartmoor Antiques www.dartmoorantiques.com

Green Shoes www.greenshoes.co.uk

Character Builders www.characterbuilderssouthwest.co.uk

Moretonhampstead Business Association and many other useful contacts can be found on www.moretonhampstead.com