



## William Crossing (1847-1928)

### Dartmoor

William Crossing was a writer and documenter of Dartmoor and Dartmoor life. He was born in Plymouth, lived successively at South Brent, Brentor and at Mary Tavy and died at Plymouth.

From his earliest youth he was fond of Dartmoor, his early associations centring around the neighbourhood of Sheepstor, Walkhampton, Meavy, and Yannadon. He acquired a taste for antiquities from his mother. Later on, Crossing explored Tavistock, Coryton, Lydford, Okehampton, and the northern borders of the Moor, as well as South Brent, on its southern verge.

As he recalled in 1888:

"As long as I can recollect anything at all, I can remember the old moor. In my childhood, no sooner did I pass beyond its borders than I felt for it a love, and that love has increased with my years. Many months at a time have I passed upon it, and on the commons surrounding it, spending my days in becoming familiar with its rugged hills, (till at last I look upon them as old friends) and in learning what I could of its ancient stories from the dwellers in its confines."

In 1872 he married and settled down at South Brent. In the previous year he began making notes about his rambles, without, however, any systematic arrangement; after his marriage he seems to have become more methodical, and to have decided to write a book descriptive of the moorland district. In the 1890s he published numerous other works and his *Guide to Dartmoor*, illustrated by Philip Guy Stevens in 1909.

He is now considered one of the best authorities on Dartmoor and its antiquities, having made it the subject of his life's work. He was one of the earliest members of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, joining it immediately on its formation.

It is quite probable that he effectively started the popularity of the modern pursuit of letterboxing. In his book *Guide to Dartmoor* he refers to what is likely to have been the first letter box. It was placed at Cranmere Pool on northern Dartmoor by a local guide in 1854. In Crossing's memory in 1938 a plaque and letterbox were placed at Duck's Pool on the southern moor by some individuals and members of a walking club known as Dobson's Moormen.

He was buried with his wife at Mary Tavy: his house at Mary Tavy bears a commemorative tablet unveiled in 1952.

