

HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 47

Spring 2007

A Mystery Solved.

Portrait of Irwin Murray 1834- 1907

Colin Dallison

If you watch the BBC1 drama series *New Tricks* you will be familiar with the concept of a team whose task is to revisit dormant files to crack previously unsolvable cases. Well, HLHS has its own version of this. Cast your mind back to 1998 (if you have kept your newsletters in a safe place, I direct you to issue 22). A portrait hanging in the council Chamber, Prospect House, Hexham, was reproduced in the November 1998 newsletter with a request to members to try to find out who was represented in the painting. The answer can now be revealed. It is Irwin Murray, who is mentioned on page 44 of the HLHS publication Number 4, *Hexham Cemetery*. Murray was born in Cumbria in 1834. He moved to Hexham, to work as a shoemaker, with his wife Ann. They had three children, John James born in 1860, Elizabeth born in 1862 and Margaret Ann born in 1864. The family lived in Fore Street and later Shaftoe Leazes. Murray took an active part in public life and was a councillor on Hexham Urban District Council from 1898 until his death on January 9th 1907 at the age of 72.

The portrait was probably painted whilst he was a councillor. It passed to a grandson and down through the family until it was gifted to Hexham UDC in the mid 1970s. The council had the picture cleaned and renovated and, appropriately, had it hung in the council chamber in Prospect House Hexham. Unfortunately the brass plaque on the frame was lost, probably during the cleaning, so his identity was temporarily unknown.

One of Murray's descendants identified the portrait and could remember it hanging in the family home. A new brass plaque was put on the frame in 2006, which gives his name and dates, as shown above.

This only goes to show that it is worth asking for information about those historical mysteries; you never know when you will be provided with the answer.

If anyone has any queries or requests for information we are happy to publish them in the newsletter. If the request leads to success please let us know.

☀Summer outings☀ Summer outings☀ Summer outings☀

J B has put together a very interesting programme with something for everyone this year. Please book early for the summer outings to Woodhorn, Hall Hutton-in-the-Forest and Finchale Priory and Crook. The optional trips at Woodhorn are likely to be very popular and places are allocated on a first come first served basis.

See the forms enclosed with this mailing for more details.

Letter to the editor

*From Professor
Iain Moffat*

It was a pleasure to read the excellent review of Alan Grint's *The*

Faith and Fire Within by Rodney Higgins which appeared in Newsletter 46.

I would, however, gently draw attention to an error in the review in its reference to 20,000 British casualties on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. The British casualty list on 1st July 1916 was an appalling 57,000 men, of whom some 19,600 were killed. The majority of these casualties were incurred in the initial 60 minutes from the first units going 'over the top' at 07.30.

Amongst the infantry formations hardest hit on that dreadful day were the eight battalions of the Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish (more correctly the 20th to 27th Battalions, Northumberland Fusiliers), who took 4,500 casualties attacking La Boisselle. The story of the fine men of these 'Kitchener's Army' volunteer battalions is one which deserves to be better known in the North East, but perhaps that is for another day.

If I may borrow from Richard Holmes, the distinguished military historian, at the conclusion of one of his recent books:

'Let us never forget that generation whose courage and endurance lift my spirits and break my heart. And let us

*do better for their great-grandchildren than we did for them'. **

Sincerely,
(Prof) Iain Moffat

(* Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918*, HarperCollins, 2004)

**Move over
Brother
Cadfael**

Mark Benjamin

Hexham now has its own medieval sleuth in the form of Lord Godwin, the hero of two novels by American novelist, Sara Conway. A

former Crusader, now Bailiff of Hexham, Godwin tussles with the townsfolk and the abbey community in a reasonably accurate depiction of 13th Century Hexham, although the purists amongst us might query the author's siting of a keep on the site of the Tap & Spile! The author, a lecturer in ancient and medieval history in Washington State, captures both the tensions between the largely Saxon townspeople and their Norman rulers and those between the church and lay authorities; one of Godwin's major trials is coping with Fulk d'Oilly, the wily agent of the absent archbishop. Sara Conway obviously knows both her subject and Hexham well and should be granted novelist's licence for the odd aberration.

Both books are available through the library and are in print.

News

The Association of Northumberland Local History Societies 'Round the County Day' 2007 is to be hosted by the Heddon on the Wall Local History Society on Saturday 16th June at the Knott Memorial Hall, Towne Gate, Heddon on the Wall. The programme starts at 10am and includes talks on Thomas Bewick by Peter Quinn, Capability Brown by John Cannon and 'Aspects of Pevsner's Northumberland' by John Grundy. In addition a buffet lunch can be booked and there is a walk around the village. Tickets are available from Mike Furlonger at The Post House 23 Hexham Road Heddon on the Wall NE15 0BG at a cost of £6.

Investigations into History: An Invitation. The ANHLS is keen to contact any members of affiliated Societies who have a particular interest in the field of local history which they are interested in exploring further, perhaps in conjunction with other members. If there is anything that stirs your curiosity then the Chair of the ANLHS would like to hear from you. Contact can be made by e-mail at dreashton@aol.com or in writing to the ANLHS c/o The Black Gate, Castle Garth, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 1RQ. The ANLHS is interested particularly in anyone who would like to work on some research to do with Victorian primary school log books.

Remembering Slavery 2007

As part of the 2007 Remembering Slavery commemorations, a project is being launched in the North East to discover more about local links with slavery and the anti slavery movement. The work involves investigating the archives in the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Northumberland Collections Service,

with one group of volunteers at each venue. Volunteers who have not previously undertaken historical and archive research will be able to learn how to use the resources and how to evaluate the material they find and record details. All volunteers will be able to develop their own special interest topic to follow through. The project, technically called 'archive mapping', is part of the Remembering Slavery 2007 joint initiative between museums, archives and libraries in the North East. The resulting research will be used to set up a print and online guide to the materials found, to be completed and launched in June. The project is to be guided by Sean Creighton, an experienced community development and heritage worker, who is active in researching, speaking and writing about aspects of UK Black and Asian heritage. Please contact Sean direct on 0191 2321092 or by e-mail at sean.creighton@btinternet.com for more details or to join the volunteers.

Digitising the Hexham Courant.

A Committee has been set up, under the Chairmanship of Mark Benjamin and involving HLHS, the Northumberland Records Office, the *Courant*, the Border Library and Northumberland Library services amongst others to look at the desirability and feasibility of digitising the back issues of the Hexham Courant so that this incredible resource would be able to be searched easily and comprehensibly at the touch of a button. The job of indexing the newspaper has been worked at for many years by a number of dedicated individuals but it is only now that there is a possibility that technology has advanced enough to make the project feasible (although whether it will be affordable is another issue). More news as the project progresses.

