

HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 48

Summer 2007

HLHS goes live!

The Society now has its own website on which members can find up-to-date details of meetings, outings, who's who and listings of all of our publications; it will even contain the latest issue of this newsletter - so no more hunting about the house to find it when you need to check something you know you read somewhere! The website address is www.northumberlandlife.org/hexham-local-history-society, or just type "Hexham Local History Society" into your Internet browser and we'll be there!

We often receive queries from near and far about various aspects of Hexham's history. If we've been unable to answer them straight away, in the past these have just appeared in the next Newsletter, sometimes some months after having been received. These will now be posted on the "Answers Please!" page of the website so, please have a look and, if you think you know the answer – get in touch!

And, whilst we're on the subject of the Internet, did you know that Hexham has its own entry in the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia? Have a look for yourself at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hexham>. The great thing about Wikipedia is that anyone can add to or amend entries; sadly, this is also the worst thing about it, too! I don't know who created the Hexham entry but I've amended a couple of facts – particularly the one that confused a researcher who has contacted the Society under the impression that there was a County of Hexhamshire! That said, it's a great way of building a history of the town, so get adding – just check your facts first!

But I can't do that – Oh yes you can!

As the new editor of the Hexham Historian, I'm always on the lookout for articles to include in forthcoming issues. Everyone reading this newsletter is interested in the history of the area and many of you have built up a fund of knowledge about particular topics. Why not share your knowledge with others? If all that's holding you back is a lack of confidence in your writing abilities – we can help. After all, the contributions from even some of our more established writers often require a certain amount of editing!

Following considerable discussion, it has been agreed to widen the scope of the Hexham Historian. Accordingly, we are interested in seeing articles concerned not only with Hexham itself but with the greater Hexham area – basically, Tynedale with occasional forays over the border into Cumbria. We shall be inviting contributions from other local history societies in the area that have no publication programme of their own.

If you have a topic you'd like to write about, have a word with any member of the Committee or contact me on markbenjamin@hencotes.fslife.co.uk or (01434) 607746. I look forward to having too many articles from which to choose!

Mark Benjamin, Editor: Hexham Historian (and this issue of the Newsletter)

Congratulations! JB Jonas, the Society's Vice-Chairman and latterly Visits Organiser, has just been elevated to the dizzy heights of power as Hexham's new Town Mayor.

Anna Rossiter

Members will have been saddened to hear of Anna's death - an obituary will appear in the next Historian.

The main hall at Hexham Middle School was packed on July 11th when pupils gave a concert as a celebration of Anna's work at the school. Anna would no doubt have cast an enthusiastic eye over the proceedings and enjoyed every moment of the concert.

Direct Courant: The digitisation of The Hexham Courant

The project to digitise the back numbers of The Hexham Courant is progressing slowly.

It has been decided to apply for funding

for the digitisation of the years 1864 to 1914 as the first phase. These 50 years tie in well to the National Curriculum which, we hope, will encourage funding bodies to look favourably on our applications.

If any member has a complete copy of the Courant from the 19th or early 20th century, it would be very helpful if the team could borrow it for a trial scan. The copy would be handled carefully by staff from the County Libraries and Collections services and returned to the owner after scanning. If anyone can help, please contact Mark Benjamin at Hexham Library (01434) 652491 or mbenjamin@northumberland.gov.uk. Also, if any member has expertise in digitisation and would like to become involved, we'd love to hear from you!

L C (Charlie) Coombes

David Coombes', the son of the late Charlie Coombes, has a box

full of Charlie's papers which he is slowly and methodically sorting out. He also has all of Charlie's books which he would like to dispose of; as Charlie was a history teacher, it seems likely that most of them will be biased towards that subject.

David would welcome a visit by any member who might be interested in them. Please contact David on (01434) 683016.

The Society hopes to be publishing Charlie's magnum opus, *The history of Langley Barony*, as an Occasional Publication sometime soon. Negotiations are underway

with Ergo Press and the new Lord of the Manor. Watch this space.

The Jennings Collection

Rodney Higgins and Michael Saxon have catalogued the 100 or so books left by David

Jennings to the Border Library. A copy of the catalogue can be obtained from Rodney on (01434) 602941. In due course, it is intended that the entire catalogue of the Border Library will be available over the Internet as part of the County Library's catalogue, available at www.geoweb.northumberland.gov.uk.

The index to David's Peoples' File will appear in a future Hexham Historian.

Forthcoming events of interest

Slavery & Abolition in the North East.

As part of the

commemoration of the abolition of slavery, John Charlton of the North East Labour History Society and the Remembering Slavery 2007 project will be giving a talk at Hexham Library, 7.30pm on Thursday 20th September.

Researching war memorials. Society member and local author/bookseller, Alan Grint, will be giving a talk on researching the individuals named on war memorials at Hexham Library on Friday 17th August. Janet Brown of NEWMP will give a short talk on the work of the Project and there will be a chance to explore the Project's comprehensive database. The talks start at 5.30pm and the session runs until 7.15pm. The library will host a display on the work of NEWMP throughout the week before the talk.

2nd Northumberland & Borders Family History Fair

The Society will be running a stall at the fair on Saturday 1st December at Hexham's Wentworth Leisure Centre. Once again, we would welcome the help of members to staff the stall, selling our publications and fielding any questions. The fair lasts from 10am to 4pm and we're asking for volunteers to commit to an hour or two - the more volunteers, the shorter the time commitment required! Please contact Fred Donnan on (01434) 604082 if you can help.

A new History of Hexham

Stan Beckensall, prolific author of this parish, will shortly be publishing a thematic history of Hexham. Rather than the usual, chronological

history, *Hexham: a history and guide* imagines the reader standing in the market place and wondering about the history of the buildings seen and how the town took shape around them. Published by Tempus, the lavishly-illustrated book should be available in local bookshops in August, priced £14.99. Stan will be giving a talk on the book at Hexham Library in September; the date has yet to be confirmed so look out for posters.

Woodhorn Museum, Archives & Country Park

Unable to go on the Society's trip to Woodhorn on July 21st, Rodney Higgins

took a sneak preview with fellow member Michael Saxon.

The museum itself is mainly pictorial and audio, illustrating the history of coal mining in the north east. One follows a meandering course, rather like a visit to IKEA (but don't let that put you off! - ed.)

Our main interest was in the archive and study area, housed in The Cutter building with its iconic seven fingered coal cutter leaping out over the entrance.

The Study Centre is on the first floor and is approached either by a long, easygoing ramp or stairs. One needs to register at Reception to obtain a Visitor's Ticket and some form of identification such as a driving licence or birth certificate is required. Once inside, I was asked the purpose of my visit – which was to report back to the Society. At once, Carol Scott came to our assistance and we were given a conducted tour of the whole unit. Carol kindly fielded our questions, showing intimate knowledge of the north east and the Northumberland Collections, despite her North American accent! We were very impressed.

The Collections are in three categories. There are the books, formerly housed in Morpeth Library, on public display and easily retrieved. The well-used material such as the birth, marriage and death indexes, the IGI etc. are on microfilm or fiche. There are

plenty of microform readers and one does not have to pre-book. Then there are the archives themselves. These are kept secure in a controlled environment and are accessed by completing a paper slip and handing it to one of the assistants who will retrieve the item from the store. This takes about 10 minutes. There are card indexes available to assist in identifying the document one needs – all very efficient.

Opening hours are 10am-4pm on Wednesdays to Sundays; they are closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Woodhorn's telephone number is (01670) 528080

Further details can be found on their website www.experiencewoodhorn.com/archive.htm

Answers Please!

These queries will also appear on the website

Turner Family

Mrs Louise Thorp of Malmesbury is hoping that someone may know something

about the Turner family of Hexham. Her grandfather, William Turner, was a butcher here in the 1930s and members of the family may have served as organists in the abbey and sung in local choirs. Mrs Thorp can be contacted at 8, The Street, Oaksey, Malmesbury, Wilts. SN16 9TG

Hadrian's Rest. David Marshall from Wantage in Oxfordshire is trying to locate a café called Hadrian's Rest, known to be in the Hexham/Haltwhistle area in 1975. (It's not the former Heddon guesthouse of the same name) If anyone can recall the café and its location, David would love to hear from you at david-marshall@tiscali.co.uk

Fossils in the Station – no, not the rolling stock! Dr Randall Miller from Canada writes: I have a question related to the history of the rail station in Hexham. I was recently in Hexham at the rail station and noticed the fossils in the mantle of the fireplace in the waiting room. We have been trying to trace the origin of a table in the summer home of Sir William Cornelius Van Horne (1843-1915) on Ministers Island, St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada and I was struck by the similarity of the stone table top to the fireplace mantle in Hexham. Van Horne was involved with the Canadian Pacific Railway and we know he visited England regularly.



Does anyone know the origin of the rock used to build the fireplace? Do you know if that rock type was used to build furniture? The table at the Van Horne estate has a round table top about four feet in diameter (more or less) on a wooden base. The polished stone top has fossils that do not originate from our region and we wondered where Van Horne might have acquired it. I have attached a photo from the table; it is pinkish and slightly lighter in colour than the fireplace mantle.

Email Randall at Randall.Miller@nbm-mnb.ca or write to him at the Natural Science Department, New Brunswick Museum, 277 Douglas Avenue, Saint John, NB Canada E2K 1E5

Corbridge. Michael Cunliffe is looking for any material towards a book he is writing on the history of Corbridge. He can be contacted on (01434) 632431 or at Westfield, Manor Cottages, Corbridge NE45 5HJ

SOCIETY OUTINGS Reports by JB Jonas

Sunday 20th May, Finchale Priory and Crook Hall

20th May turned out to be a warm, dry day; just as well, since both venues were mainly open air. We nearly didn't get to Finchale since I hadn't taken in that a 12 foot 6 inch high railway bridge might be a problem for our 12 foot 5 inch coach. Driver Ted, having appraised it from afar, sailed under with aplomb. The Priory ruins were more extensive than expected and provided a good hour's exploration. An Oriel window had,

apparently, the mystical properties of removing sterility and ensuring pregnancy. Thus reassured, the Prior got married immediately after the Dissolution!

Crook Hall was a delight – run by the Bell family, who lived there, its architecture covered five centuries. We were free to explore both house and garden on our own. Overlooking the Wear the gardens provided excellent views of the cathedral (though the unattractive modern buildings lining the river merited a different sort of overlooking). There was a fascinating variety of style and flowers throughout the gardens, with rustic seating on which to enjoy each new vista.

Sunday 17th June, Hutton-in-the-Forest and Brougham Castle

The choice of scenic route via Alston and Hartside Pass (1903 feet up in the Pennines) was not enhanced by low cloud obliterating Cross Fell and the distant view of the Lakes (though they both re-emerged on our way home). Hutton was another very much lived in house, with current family treasures side by side with the historic objects and family portraits covering several centuries. We were given guided tours by two very well informed and amusing ladies before the house opened to the general public. We then adjourned – most of us – to the tea room while the rain, which had fallen while we were indoors, eased so that by the time most of us were ready to explore the extensive woodland with many rare trees, it was dry and almost sunny. We departed from Lord and Lady Inglewood's house around 3.30 pm for the short drive to Brougham (pronounced Broom) Castle just south of Penrith. Ruined since the 18th century, this is still an imposing fortress overlooking the River Lowther. With its smaller neighbour, Brough, it had been granted to the Vieuxpont family in 1214 after whom the Cliffords became Lords of the Manor. Built partly for defence against the Scots, Brougham was a formidable presence in the Wars of the Roses, Lancastrian Cliffords vying for power with Yorkist Nevilles, and was a Royalist stronghold in the Civil War, but in practice saw little real action. Fine weather held for our exploration of Brougham, so this was another much enjoyed visit.