

# HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 53

Spring 2009

## **Tynedale's Mills**

**Greg Finch**

### **1,400 years of the Dipton Mill.**

The fast flowing streams that run into the Tyne in our district were an important source of power in the pre-industrial age. This was due as much to the fairly steep drop in gradients within the valleys as it was to the volume of water in the streams because it meant the mill leats, costly to dig and maintain, could be fairly short. The Devil's Water, and its main tributaries, beautiful and often dramatic streams which drain Hexhamshire, have played host to over a dozen different mills, around one for each mile of water. These provided motive power to grind corn, stamp and thicken the fibres of newly woven woollen cloth to make them waterproof ('fulling' or 'waulking') and for the crushing and smelting of lead ore. They remind us that Hexhamshire, now seen as a quiet pastoral landscape, had a busy and varied industrial past. It is a history well worth further exploration. Are there Society members out there who would like to provide short accounts of mills in our area, and thereby make this just the first in a series?



### **The Dipton Mill.**

The Dipton Mill will be familiar to many readers as a welcoming traditional pub just to the south of Hexham. It's well worth a visit in its own right and also provides a good base from which to explore the valleys and lanes of the 'Shire. It was listed as 'newly built' in the Royal survey of Hexham manor carried out in September 1608 (and this provided a good enough excuse for a birthday

celebration barbecue at the pub last autumn)! Interestingly, the same survey mentioned other mills as having been built in recent decades, suggesting a greater level of prosperity in the area than is often thought. Perhaps the lawlessness of Northumberland before the Union of the Crowns has been overstated. Under the pressure of economic expansion during the later Tudor period the old manorial monopolies which insisted on farmers taking their grain to one or two mills only - Whitley Mill and Newbiggin in the case of Hexhamshire - were breaking down, leaving room in which newcomers could thrive.

The original mill at Dipton, a corn mill, was almost certainly on the site of the riding stables just upstream from the road bridge. It was fed from the stream which runs down behind the pub, the Nicholas Burn, via a leat taken from the burn higher up the valley. This flowed into a millpond to the left of the lane which leads up to Shield Green Nurseries, allowing the flow of water to the wheel to be regulated. By the 1670s there was also a fulling mill nearby, quite possibly the one slightly further up the West Dipton Burn and now almost completely ruinous in the woods. In 1699 the corn miller, George Douglas, was caught 'with his hands in the till'. Millers were entitled to 1/18<sup>th</sup> part of the oats they ground. Perhaps George just couldn't count properly, but he was charged with taking 1/10<sup>th</sup> or 1/12<sup>th</sup> instead. By the following year a new miller had been installed.

Apart from a couple of small fields just beyond the mill on the flattest part of the valley the mill sat in open moorland – Hexham Common came down to the far riverbank, and the hill that rises south up into the Shire was part of the large expanse known as Dotland Fell, which ran on up to the Hexhamshire and Allendale Commons. By 1760 this had changed dramatically with the enclosure of Hexham Common and Dotland Fell, creating pretty much the landscape we see today. Soon afterwards the buildings on the site of the pub appeared, as they did elsewhere along the newly enclosed roadsides. The mill itself underwent almost complete rebuilding in 1778-9, with flagged floors, stone walls and a steeply pitched roof thatched with ling (heather). With almost perfectly unfortunate timing it burned down just afterwards. Just a few

years later the Napoleonic Wars started which drove the price of grain to records heights and created demand for much more milling capacity. It was therefore probably around this time that the windmill on the hilltop above was built – to fill the gap. This was probably the end of milling by the Dipton bridge, but the rebuilding of that bridge and road improvements in 1822 meant the newer roadside buildings became an attractive resting place for passing traffic.

In the 1820s Betty Forster was a ‘victualler’ on this site (when the pub was sometimes referred to as the ‘Fox and Lamb’), succeeded by her tenant, William Scott, ‘publican’. Other Forsters turn up in the Census returns as publicans at the Dipton Mill with a sideline job as lead miners until the 1870s. By the 1890s the pub was owned by the Tucker family, long established brewers in Gateshead, (one of whom had died some years before of “apoplexy due to excessive drinking”). They rebuilt part of the current pub from stone taken from the then derelict farmhouse of Nicholas Hall up the hill to the south opposite Newbiggin road end. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there have been just nine licensees, a level of continuity all the more impressive for the fact that two of these were brothers, and another three members of the same family. But as for milling, both the windmill on the hill and the fulling mill in the woods were shown as disused on the 1860s Ordnance Survey map, victims of the rise of steam power in the industrial age.

**Hexham Time  
line: help  
wanted**

Work has begun on the **Timeline**, one of the Society’s Occasional Publications. Whilst the publications team have most of the dates they need, they’re stuck on a few and would welcome any help with the following that members can give.

- When were the houses in front of the Moot Hall demolished?
- When was the first Hexham Carnival? We have a date of 1928; can anyone confirm this or know of an earlier one?

- When did Fellside and Beaumont Middle Schools merge to form Hexham Middle School?
- When was Fore Street pedestrianised?
- When was the Co-Op built on the Mart site?

Answers, please, to Mark Benjamin (01434) 607746 or email [markbenjamin@hencotes.fslife.co.uk](mailto:markbenjamin@hencotes.fslife.co.uk)

### News

Nick Rossiter has deposited a copy of Anna's thesis ***Economy, Society and Government in Seventeenth Century Hexham*** in Hexham Library's Local Studies Collection. This is a major contribution to the written history of the town and well worth a look. It is for use in the library only.

**Hexham Historian Index, Issues 1-18** This is now complete and available in electronic form. A printed version covering issues 1-15, which will also include the index to David Jennings' Peoples files, will be available shortly. The electronic version is free but there will be a small charge for the printed version. Members who would like a copy in either format should email or call Mark Benjamin.

### **[www.britishlocalhistory.com](http://www.britishlocalhistory.com)**

This is a new website dedicated to local history. It is an interactive site where people can share stories and views on historical topics. Have a look and let us know what you think for a future issue.

### **St Mary's Old Church, Hexham**

**Stan Beckensall**

I hope that news items in 'The Hexham Courant' were not overlooked by too many of our members, as the late summer saw a great threat to our rights to view one of the most important remaining medieval buildings in Hexham. Fortunately some of us as individuals, and the

ever-vigilant Civic Society, took matters into their own hands and legally opposed a proposal through the Planning Department to build on the small courtyard leading from the Market Place to St Mary's Chare. Although the proposal stated that the public would still be able to view the wall through a window when the new premises were open, the whole idea was outrageous, so much so that the proposal was withdrawn.

So what is this wall? It is already documented in my 'Hexham' and in Kristensen and Dallison's 'Hexham Remembered'. Although it has not been located, Wilfrid's other church there is documented; the Augustinian canons took over the Priory and the smaller church also came in for radical building work in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this time being built on the rectangular plan that we can trace; a rectangle with seven bays, and aisled. The remains of this are what we see today.

The Scots invaded in 1296, causing widespread destruction in Hexham, and as a result of the depopulation and poverty of the area, the church became redundant, any services held being held in the Priory. It was never a parish church, but was used as a chapel. When the major upheaval of the Dissolution of the monasteries took place in 1537, the only reason that the Priory church survived was that it was the only parish church, otherwise it would have been stripped of its lead and its stone recycled. St Mary's must have been in a very bad way by then, although we cannot trace all its history.

This was at a time when the state of Hexham generally was crowded and filthy, as a result of industries such as tanning and its products occupying much of the town, so it is not difficult to visualise the old church buildings being used as shops, dwellings, minor businesses, rubbish dumps and perhaps piggeries like those clustered around the Priory. The reference to the 'causeway', which is the present alleyway from the market to Back Street/St Mary's Chare shows that this has already been pushed through the remains of the church. Whether it had a graveyard and what happened to it are not known. The reference to a bakery is interesting, as one continued to be used and its later version can be seen in Paxton's café.

However little detail we have, it is clear that the whole of the rectangular church building became absorbed in domestic and other buildings, and it can be traced in the general rectangular block that faces the Market Place today.

The main remains of the building are in the basement of Caris' shop, where the foundation of the pillars can be seen and inside the flats above and to the west of the shop, where a 13<sup>th</sup> century arch survives. These places are private, and that leaves only one feature that testifies to the history of this building: the wall at the back of Caris' shop.

Parts of the building have been seen quite recently and destroyed, and we have photographs of them: they are arcades and bays. In 1870, for example, one of the arches was exposed, having been walled up in medieval times, and this is what we now see: an arch into which a long thin lancet arch has been inserted.

The wall itself is a lovely example for scholar and layman alike to appreciate the visible evidence of change. Here we have a wall containing the remains of pillars and classic 13<sup>th</sup> century arches, with an infilling of some original stone and with an inserted lancet arch to show how there was a new use for the building in medieval times, still, however, as a chapel. There is an amazing variety of building-materials on show, including packing stone and brick, not only on the wall itself but also on the adjoining wall to the east. Skilled work by a stonemason to clean up the wall and to reveal all these features more clearly would greatly help the visual impact of this site.

The panel in the Market Place is a good visualisation of what the old church must have looked like before its decline.

As a teacher and archaeologist this is for me just the kind of real evidence of how history shows itself to be about change rather than progress. It is a place to bring people, to ask them to describe what they see and to ask 'what has happened here?'

**Information wanted**

Jim Nesbet is seeking information regarding a (shooting?) competition at Anick Grange. He has a decorated baton inscribed "The Manor of Anick Grange". There is no date stated but the decoration

includes "VR" so it is presumed to be Victorian. Family legend suggests the



baton was awarded in association with the above mentioned shooting competition. In addition a display case containing three red squirrels is again (according to legend) connected to this competition. Other information is what appears to be a manufacturer's mark on the base of the baton

"Parker Holborn 233". The spelling of "Grange" on the baton is "Grainge". Does anyone know whether this competition is reported in any documents or newspapers, possible names involved could be MAUGHAN or WATSON? Any clues or ideas of where to search for more information can be forwarded to [jrnisbet@btinternet.com](mailto:jrnisbet@btinternet.com)

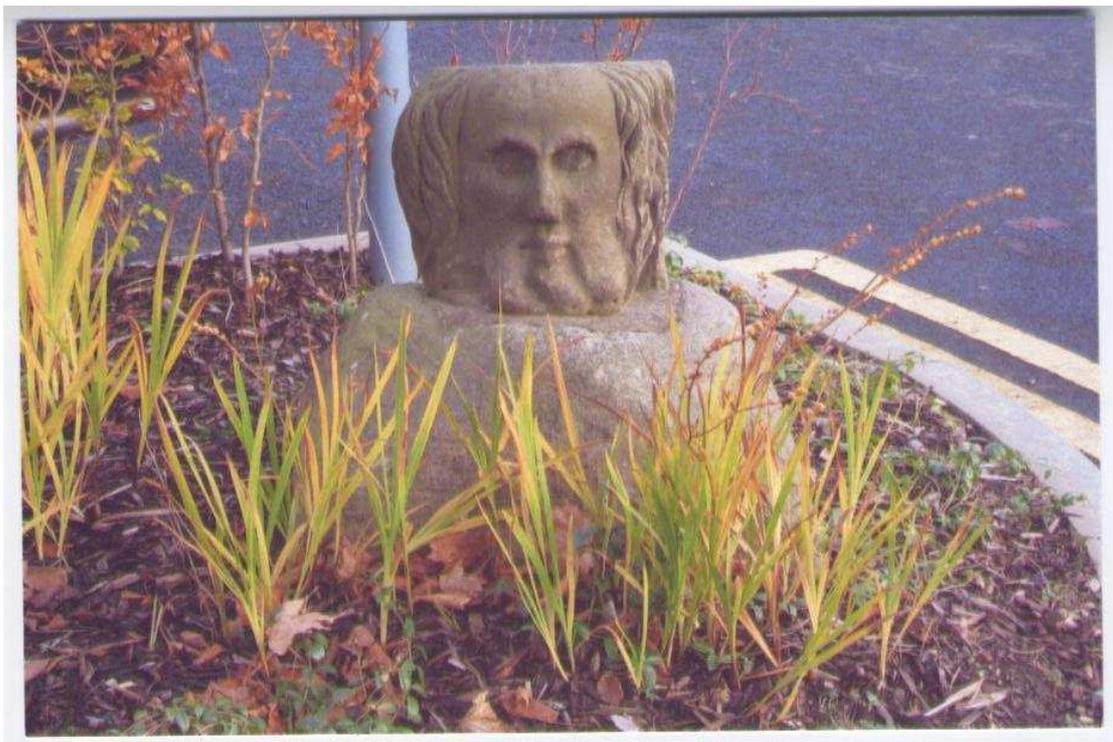
**White Cross:  
Sanctuary Cross-  
Socket**

**Colin Dallison**

In medieval times Hexham was a place of sanctuary where those who had committed an offence could seek refuge. The frith stool or seat of sanctuary is still in Hexham Abbey. Sanctuary was afforded to all those who came within a certain distance of the church, an area marked by four white crosses. The sites of two of these

sanctuary crosses are still remembered in the names White Cross and Maiden Cross.

The 1922 and 1960s O.S. maps show 'Cross (site of)' on the south side of dean Street, east of the workhouse, about opposite 48/49 Peth Head. There is no sign of a cross there today. A carved head used to sit on a large stone beside the roadway just inside the exit from Hexham Maternity Hospital to Corbridge Road; it was said to have been the base for the White Cross. In 2003 we wrote to the Healthcare Trust asking them to ensure that the cross-socket and the head were carefully preserved before the hospital buildings were demolished. I was delighted to find the two stones recently, reset just inside the roadway leading from the Corbridge Road to the new hospital. They have been put into the shrubbery, in a situation which was not too prominent, so as to draw attention and risk their removal.



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**<http://www.northumberlandlife.org/hexham-local-history-society>**