

HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 58

Winter 2010

EDITOR REQUIRED

After editing this newsletter for several years, Helen Rutherford is stepping down, as her work commitments have grown. We're looking for someone with a bit of time on their hands to take over. No experience needed, would suit anybody with an interest in the society, particularly with a talent for nagging/persuading others to contribute material! If you feel that you could help with this, please get in touch with Mark Benjamin (01434 607746) or email thebenjamins@talktalk.net

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

The Society's committee has granted honorary life membership to Lord Allendale and his agent, Tom Warde-Aldam, in recognition of their considerable and continuing help in sourcing vital documents for the history of the area, and to Mollie Telford in recognition of her tremendous contribution to the effective running of the Society over many years.

OUTINGS 2011

- Sunday 15th May 2011 - Half day visit to Whitley Castle, Cumbria. This will include visits to the Roman Fort and Iron Age Settlement.
- Sunday 12th June 2011 - Half day visit to the Victoria Tunnel, Newcastle. Lunch from 12noon to 2pm at the nearby Hotel du Vin prior to the visit. (£10 for a 2 course meal with complimentary glass of house red or white wine.)
- Saturday 9th July 2011 - Full day visit to Gunsgreen House, Eyemouth.

Fuller details of these and any other visits, along with booking forms, will be available later.

BORDER LIBRARY, HEXHAM OLD GAOL

The Border Library collection belongs to the Butler Trust, and has its origins in the collection made by Bill Butler during his time with Northumberland Tourism. His son Richard is now one of the trustees who oversee the activities of the Library.

The Library collection, as its name implies, has books, music and photographs that cover the culture, music and history of the Borders area. The collection has been added to in recent years, with significant donations from David Jennings, David Whiteside and Tom Corfe, which may be of particular interest to members of the Hexham Local History Society.

The Library has a small band of volunteers who staff the Library room in the Old Gaol, helping visitors explore a wide range of interests. Researchers are welcome, free of charge, to come to the Library and use the collections.

Over the winter, the volunteers and museum staff will be working to make better use of the current space, improve access to the local collections, and make room for temporary displays in the room. One of the first displays will be on The Hexham Riot, to commemorate the 250th anniversary in March 2011. If any local history society members would like to join the group of volunteers or use the collections, please contact the Honorary Librarian, Fiona Lockhart, either by email, borderlibrary@btconnect.com or by leaving a message on the Library answerphone, (01434 600910).

LIFE-LONG LEARNING IN NEWCASTLE

Provision of lifelong learning has been badly hit by funding problems in recent years and the prognosis is, if anything, even gloomier. The Centre for Lifelong Learning, with its base on the Newcastle University campus, has developed a new way of providing content which might well prove to be immune to the traumas. It now offers lifelong learning under a subscription scheme which has the name Explore. Once you have subscribed, you can attend any of the open sessions on offer and, subject to a cap on numbers for tutorial reasons, you can book for any courses, all for the cost of your subscription. They publish a programme four times per year and by about the end of November will announce the winter season (January - Easter).

If you subscribe under a continuing membership on a monthly payment, you will pay the equivalent of £5 per week (less if you are retired or in receipt of benefit) and for this you can expect a season with some 1500 contact hours in history, archaeology, natural sciences, literature, art, philosophy. You

can check the website at www.cll.sunderland.ac.uk and you can enrol directly online. Or you can ring the CLL Office on 0191 515 2800

CHURCH COURTS DATABASE

The Borthwick Institute at the University of York holds the records of the church courts in the north of England. These records have now been analysed and a searchable database created. The result is that a mass of information, from every parish in the north, can now be found very easily by local history researchers.

This searchable database is to be published online and there is to be an inaugural conference. The web site with all details of the project and the conference and an application form is at www.york.ac.uk/inst/bihr/projects/Mellon/cphome.htm

BOOK REVIEW

Greg Finch

Stan Beckensall, *Empire Halts Here. Viewing the Heart of Hadrian's Wall*, (Amberley, 2010) £16.99

For those of us on its doorstep, the stunning scale, importance and antiquity of Hadrian's Wall is sometimes overlooked through familiarity yet the briefest of glances at the bookshop shelves reveals a wide range of recent publications on the subject. Ranging from practical guides to the recently completed footpath and large format glossy hardbacks of photographs for the coffee table, through to authoritative recent work on the history and archaeology of the wall and its environment, they demonstrate its enduring appeal. To this well populated field our own one-man publications machine, Stan Beckensall, now adds his personal view in the form of a short general description of the central section of the Wall, from Heddon in the east to just west of Birdoswald, and a large number of excellent photographs from his own collection. These are introduced by a series of simple maps and overview of the landscape through which the wall passes, and are organised into a number of topics covering different aspects of the wall and its adjacent features. Each has a helpful supporting explanatory caption. Sections containing photographs from a selection of recent excavations, and examples of the re-use of material robbed from the wall and now to be seen in more recent structures provide an interesting adjunct to the comprehensive visual treatment of the central length of the wall itself. It will appeal to all those seeking a good illustrated introduction to the wall, its construction and its landscape context, either for themselves or as a gift to others yet to be drawn to our most important historical landmark.

HELP REQUIRED

(1) Hexham's Orchards

Janet Goodridge, the Museums Officer for West Northumberland, has had a couple of people ask about surviving examples of trees and plants from Hexham's market gardens and orchards. The county history also talks about the silviculture carried out 'once upon a time' in the Tyne valley. She wonders if there were any members who might be interested in exploring the town and local area to map any such survivals? There's a pear tree, and possibly an apple tree in Wentworth car park and some in Hollow Meadows, for example. Obviously this is more likely to be a spring/summer/autumn activity than a winter one, but knowing if there was any interest or identification expertise out there would be useful. If you're interested in helping Janet, please contact her on 01434 652351 or at JGoodridge@woodhorn.org.uk

(2) Hexham Tans

Andy Bates is developing a project on the Hexham Tans. The Courant of September 13th carried an article on Andy's work. He would be interested to hear if any HLHS members are either descended from tanners/skinners/glovemakers, and/or may have any surviving artefacts from the industry. Andy can be contacted at am.bates@btinternet.com or on (01434) 670700

(3) 18th Century Hexham Letters project

Last year's Winter newsletter announced our plans to transcribe and publish the 160+ letters written by the Reverends George Ritschel and Thomas Andrews to their superiors in York, commenting on many aspects of life in the early 18th century town. We now plan to get this project underway in the coming months. The vast majority of the handwriting is quite legible, especially once a reader has 'got their eye in' with some of the contemporary lettering, and in any case we would aim to provide some 'crib sheets' if needed. In response to last year's notice a number of people have expressed an interest in helping, but there is still time to join us. For practical purposes having a computer which can display digital photographs, being familiar with Open Office or MS Word, and having an email account is essential - unless you have a friend who'd be prepared to print the photos and type up your

transcriptions. But being a computer based project means that Society members who do not live in the Hexham area can be just as much a part of it as those who do. It should be a fascinating project. If you like to be part of it please send an email to gregpfinch@hotmail.com

MYSTERY MEN

We received an enquiry from someone who found these photographs in an old photograph album bought at a Bournemouth antique fair, wondered whether we could suggest who these individuals might be. They were taken by J P Gibson of Hexham and Jim Hedley was able to identify them as the supporters of the eccentric Amelia, self-proclaimed Countess of Darwentwater. Amelia claimed descent from the executed Earl of Derwentwater and squatted at Dilston for several months in 1866 before being evicted.



INFORMATION WANTED

(1) Bev Hopwood of California writes: I had the opportunity to visit Hexham this past spring and took a couple of hours in the library checking the baptisms and burials of some ancestors. I was viewing the baptism of Sylvannus Lyon 1774. Sylvannus Lyon is recorded as the bastard son of Margaret, which surprised, but did not shock me. Then as I went through more of the records I was shocked at how many "bastard" children there were. On the page for 1819 **nine** of the thirty eight entries were recorded as "bastard" and only the mother's name was entered.

I have not found this term used in other county records. What was going on in that area that there were so many bastard children? In other records there were a few illegitimate children in Parish records of the same period, but not so many. Did the priests of the area refuse to baptise children conceived before marriage or what? I would be very interested to know some thoughts on this matter and would like to hear from any researcher that might continue to do some earlier research for me of the Hexham parish. T Bev Hopwood - hopwoods@persona.ca

(2) Jim Horley of Wookey, Somerset, writes: One of my great-grandfathers, Thomas French, b. 1851, was employed as a Stud Groom by the Straker family from sometime in the 1880s to the 1910s. He lived at Low House, Stagshaw, Corbridge with his family, which included his son, William French b. 1875, who was employed first as a Gardener's Apprentice and then as a Butler presumably at Stagshaw House. My Grandmother, Violet French, his youngest daughter b. 1883, met and married James Rose, my Grandfather, who worked in the gardens at Stagshaw House, at The Parish Church of Corbridge in 1907.

My Grandmother showed me many large photographs of her father stood beside horses he had reared at Stagshaw House but unfortunately these were all destroyed. I would be grateful if you could let me know if the Straker family have any form of accessible archive.

Anyone with information on Jim's family should contact Mark Benjamin on 01434 607746

(3) Maps: Does anyone know the whereabouts of the extra large scale 1897 ordnance survey map of Hexham, based on the original survey of 1863? The scale was 10.56 feet to one mile, i.e. 1 to 500. Neither Woodhorn archives, nor the old Tynedale planning department have a copy. If anyone does, please contact Jim Hedley on 01434 605450

(4) Tom Makepeace is researching the site of the medieval spital and spa at Horsley. Please contact Tom at maughan33@yahoo.co.uk or call Mark Benjamin on 01434 607746 if you have any information on this

5) Allendale House. Someone is looking for an old photograph of this house on Hexham's Allendale Road. If anyone knows of such a photo, please contact Mark Benjamin

**WATCHING
THE FORDS
AT HEXHAM,
1552**
Greg Finch

One of the responsibilities of the Wardens of the Border Marches in the mid-Tudor period was to organise a network of watchers of the fords and bridges to help guard against the depredations of Scottish raiders. W. Nicholson's *Border Laws* (1705), one of the increasing number of old and obscure works now available to view free via Google Books, contains the order given by Lord Wharton, Deputy-General of the three English Marches in 1552. This detailed the appointment of 'setters and searchers' in each locality who were to organise rotas to watch the fords nightly from October onwards, the autumn and early winter being traditionally the peak raiding season. Cattle were then in their prime. The effectiveness of this system of deterrence in the face of determined raiders can perhaps be doubted. Those on duty in the cold nights were instructed that "if any persons come within any of the watches ... and if they be unknown the said watchers shall bring them to the bailiffs and constables to be tried." Here are the instructions regarding the Tyne near Hexham, given as spelt in the original transcription:

- The Watch at Mylne-Ford to be watched nightly by two men of the Inhabitants of East popleward; searchers and setters Raulf Erington and William Littlekill
- The Watch at Cole-Ford to be watched nightly by two men of the Inhabitants of Marketstedeward; searchers and setters William Coniers and Robert Stevenson
- The Watch at the two Warden-fords to be watched nightly by two men of the Inhabitants of Gely-yate; searchers and setters George Leyshman and Anthony Toller
- The Watch at the three fords under Cosely to be watched nightly by three Men of the Inhabitants of Hencottes-ward and Cosely, the Westwood-house and the Spittell; setters and searchers Richard Gibson, and Edward Hirst, and John Ridley of Cosely.

Many of the place-names as given are easy to match with the town wards used as the basis for dividing up the work - Priestpople, MarketStead, Gilligate and Hencotes, and most of the surnames are familiar from earlier and later records. The descendants of William Littlekill might be forgiven if they decided to change theirs. Coastley was an important manor to the west of the town from the medieval period. Can its three fords still be traced today? Mylne Ford is easy to locate at the old Town Mills, but has anyone seen Cole Ford mentioned elsewhere? Could it have been the ford between Tyne Green and Acomb later crossed by the first and short-lived bridge, and does it indicate that Acomb coal was being mined and brought into Hexham from at least the 1550s?

**IDEAS FOR
XMAS
GIFTS!**

Mark Benjamin has recently acquired a number of books of local interest for sale

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| 1) Dobson, T – Contributions to local history | £20 |
| 2) Hewitt, J – A handbook to Hexham and its antiquities | £40 |
| 2) Hodgson, J – History of Northumberland, Vol IV: Hexhamshire, Pt 2 | £90 |
| 3) Hodgson, J – History of Northumberland, Vol VI: Bywell & Slaley | £60 |
| 4) Lee, W – Historical notes of Haydon Bridge | £20 |

Mark can be contacted on 01434 607746 or email bennorbooks@gmail.com

**OR YOU COULD ALWAYS BUY SOMEONE YOU KNOW A
SUBSCRIPTION TO HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY!**