



HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Newsletter 60

Summer 2011

Editor (still) sought

No-one having come forward following my plea in the last issue, I reissue my invitation for someone to take over the editorship of this newsletter. It's ever so easy and quite fun, honest! If you'd like to have a no-obligations chat about it, please contact me on (01434) 607746.

Hexham Historian binders

We are now taking orders for the binders for your Hexham Historian back issues. Those members who have not seen the sample shown at recent meetings can get some idea from the illustration although, sadly, we cannot reproduce the very nice maroon colouring in this newsletter; the logo on the spine will be similar but not exactly as shown. Costing £6 (+p&p) each, the binders hold ten issues of HH so, if you have a complete back run, you'll need to order three binders – **available for only £16(+ p&p) if ordered together!** Although binders will always be available from our shop, it would be helpful if orders could be placed with our Publications Office, Ted Wall, by the end of June so that we have some idea of how many to order from the suppliers – and if you have any copies of HH missing, Ted will be more than happy to supply these, too! He can be contacted at tandtw@hotmail.co.uk or on (01434) 600422 after May 27th. Volume number stickers for the base of the spine of each binder will be available but we are still establishing costs for these – won't be much though!



Society Outings

Seats are still available for the following outings. Please contact Charlotte Coxon if you'd like to book a place as soon as possible on (01434) 607798 or by email at charlotte.coxon@gmail.com

1) Hotel du Vin & Half Day Visit to The Victoria Tunnel

Date: Sunday 12th June 2011
Time: 11.15am to approximately 6.00pm

2) Full Day Visit to Gunsgreen House, Eyemouth

Date: Saturday 9th July 2011
Time: 8.45am to approximately 7.00pm

Advertise in Hexham Historian 21

Do you run a small business? Hexham Historian 21 will be published in late August and, like last year, we would like to invite members running local businesses to place adverts at the special membership price of £20 for a quarter page; please enquire if you would like to book a bigger advert. Camera-ready copy is preferred but we can compile a plain text advert from information provided, if required. Adverts can be booked by contacting Mark Benjamin on (01434) 607746 or by email at thebenjamins@talktalk.net The deadline for booking space is Thursday 20th June although the artwork for the adverts can be supplied later than that if necessary.

**ACOMB MAN: A
ROMANO-BRITISH
SCULPTURE**
Stan Beckensall

Waters Meet is a particularly important area, well-documented as a prehistoric burial site, though many traces have been removed by the building of the Borders railway (now defunct) and by quarrying. Now the discovery of a fine Romano-British carving adds to the important early artefacts of the locality.



The carving was originally found along the riverbank of the North Tyne at Howford in 1970 by Cmdr Oswald, after flooding had swept away parts of the riverbank, changing the course of the river. The stone was then carried to Acomb in a pickup by Lol Mews, who worked for the Oswalds, and was placed on a corner of Acomb House. The Oswalds left Acomb in the 1990s and, after it had been in the same position for over thirty years, the stone was moved and has been kept safely for the last five years in a barn. Lol's sister Lily and John Hutchinson told Gordon Close about the discovery of the stone. He then contacted Lindsay Allason-Jones of the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle. She verified it as Romano-British and suggested it might be a voussoir¹ from a bridge and possibly represented Hercules holding a club and a bag. Lindsay arranged for Philippa Walton, the Roman finds specialist, to make a site visit in September 2005; at which the stone's authenticity was confirmed.

The stone was given by the Phellew family, the then owners of Acomb House, to Acomb Parish Council. It was decided to have it sited on the village green and Charles Enderby, of the Parish Council, asked Gordon to research the historical background and practical siting of the stone. Before the stone's relocation, Paul Bidwell was contacted at Arbeia; he agreed it was Romano-British but disagreed about it being a voussoir. He thought it to be in an unknown Roman style, very rare, and might be a Hercules with a club and a round object in his left hand that might be a purse or dish. He says that it is in a 'native style and not really

¹ A wedge-shaped element, typically a stone used in building an arch or a vault

identifiable' so it could be unique. Technical advice was given by Ken McQueen from Arbeia.

I was informed in 2010 and asked to comment, and having further verification from Andrew Birley, Director of excavations at Vindolanda, Gordon and I undertook a careful recording of the stone. Many digital photographs were taken, some when the rock was wet, a rubbing was made and I produced drawings from these, after agreeing with Gordon on the details.

Description:

The stone is light brown compact sandstone, with some natural iron colouring, 0.86m long (2'10"), quite uniform in width but 0.41m (16") at its widest, and 0.36m (14") thick. The bottom part is naturally smooth (glaciated?), and the top part is worked with a pick that has left clear marks that throw the figure into relief.

A large head has a long straight nose, his right ear more distinctly carved than the other, though both are large and protruding. The head is domed, with radiating pick marks above it, his cheeks straight, ending at a near-pointed chin. His mouth is particularly interesting as he appears to be smiling, with lines from his nostril ends emphasising this. The eyes are prominent and well-defined by oval grooves around them and eyebrows are suggested. His rounded neck is in strong relief and his shoulders are straight, then rounded down to straight arms. The area around the neck has the deepest carving. His left arm continues down the length of the carving, ending in a ball; the right arm is flexed at the elbow and his hand holds a club obliquely across his body. The rest below is smooth but on his right side is a narrow crack which suggests that there may have been an intention to continue.

**The Timeline
- Online**

The online version of the Hexham Timeline can now be viewed, by members only for now, on the website. To view it, go to the Members section of the website and follow the links to the Timeline. This is still, and will remain, very much a work in progress and if you have any suggestions for additions and/or amendments, Mark Benjamin would love to hear from you on (01434) 607746 or at thebenjamins@talktalk.net

**Hexham Abbey
Heritage Trust:
call for
volunteers**

Hexham Abbey Project Development Group are looking to recruit a small group of volunteers to assist in the Lottery-sponsored development to create a new learning and exhibition centre in its adjoining former monastic buildings. In particular, a team is starting the process of creating a new archive and artefact database in conjunction with the Woodhorn Trust County Archives.

The tasks would involve building a sustainable skill base for the Abbey in recording the wide range of historic artefacts, both inside the building and elsewhere, and securing the resultant local archive and catalogue material on a web-accessible computer database. In addition, a longer-term conservation care plan for the Abbey Heritage site needs to be created with the assistance of a Panel of experts.

A small team will start in the early summer on this task, with additional skilled assistance needed as the project gains momentum. It is foreseen that there will be a steady continuous workload up to and beyond the date that the new exhibition and heritage centre opens in 2013.

If you are interested and have experience in these fields, in the first instance, please contact Tom Kelsey at tomkelsey@btinternet.com or phone (01434) 600372

**Forthcoming
events of
interest**

BALH Local History Day

We have received an invitation to attend the annual conference of the British Association for Local History on June 4th. The day runs from 10.30 – 4 and the keynote lecture will be on *Eviscerating, embalming & Boiling: medieval funeral practices*, by Dr Rowena Archer of Brasenose College, Oxford. The downside is that it is in London, albeit very near Kings Cross, and applications for the free ticket have to be submitted by May 20th! Anyone interested in attending on behalf of the Society should contact Greg Finch on (01434) 607490



The Abyss that Abides

Part of the ongoing programme of events accompanying the major John Martin exhibition at the Laing Gallery (on till June 5th). Julie Milne, Curator of the Laing Art Gallery will speak about the influence of John Martin's work on contemporary culture. Laing Art Gallery 18th May, 12.30pm - 1.30pm. Free entry, no booking required.

(John Martin, engraving by James Thompson)

The Healey and Minsteracres Domesday Group are launching the recording of the gravestones at St. John's Church, Healey with a two-day Local History event on Saturday May 21st and Sunday May 22nd at Slaley Commemoration Hall.

Saturday 10am–4pm: Photographic displays will include photographs and press releases on Healey Grave Stone inscriptions and photographs and many other aspects of the history of the area. Bill Stokoe, author of *Coal mining west of Whittonstall, 1266-1966*, will be giving a talk at 11 am and Father Hoodland will talk on Minsteracres.

Sunday 10am–2pm: Tom Warde-Aldam will be giving a brief talk on the need to close Barley Hill hut and the options open to the trustees – local opinion is requested for interaction with this talk. Ian Hancock will be giving a talk on farming and the weather - reasons given for non attendance at Healey & Minsteracres schools before both schools closed in 1961. Further details from Patricia Wilson on (01434) 673388 or patricia.wilson28@btinternet.com

Friends of Historic Dilston. Open to non-Friends but must be booked. Admission £3.00 to include entry to Historic Dilston. Tel: (01661) 844157 Email: maryroseridley@btinternet.com

1) Jacobitism in prints Saturday 16th July – 2.00pm

Richard Sharp is author of *The engraved record of the Jacobite movement*, published in 1996. His lavishly illustrated talk follows the subject of his book, which charts the large number of engravings that were produced c.1688-1773 to include numerous images of the exiled Royal Stuarts and individuals associated with the Jacobite cause. Richard will discuss how patterns of publishing activity coincide with political and military crisis, indicating the importance of prints as propaganda.

2) The history of Alston Moor Sat 20th August – 2.00pm

“Alston Moor is home to the source of the River South Tyne; it is part of the Church of England diocese of Newcastle; it has other associations with the east rather than the west, yet Alston Moor sits uncomfortably, like a square peg in a round hole, within the County of Cumbria. At one time in the lordship of the Radcliffes, Alston Moor has a history quite distinct from the counties that surround it”. Alastair Robertson is author of *A History of Alston Moor* and Vice-Chair and Archivist of Alston Moor Historical Society.

National Family History Fair – Sat 10th September 2011

Tyne Suite, Newcastle Central Premier Inn, New Bridge Street NE1 8BS

www.nationalfamilyhistoryfair.com

**Book
Review**
Liz Sobell

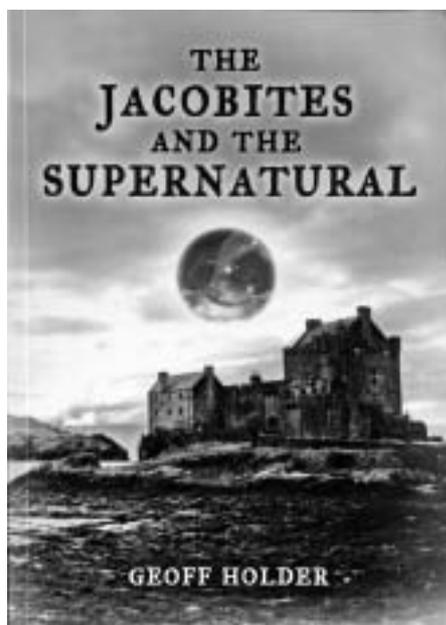
Holder, G **The Jacobites and the supernatural** (Amberley Press, 2010) ISBN 9781848685588 £12.99

Geoff Holder's latest book combines a useful guide to sites associated with the Jacobite cause with accounts of the superstitions, folklore and psychic phenomena which have become attached to it.

The historical context to the various Jacobite risings is set out in a very succinct way in the opening chapter. Part Two, 'Occult Powers' describes how the interpretation of omens, natural phenomena and prophecies were used by both sides in the conflict in support of their respective causes.

Holder devotes several pages to a description of how the disease scrofula (also known as the King's Evil) was thought to be curable by the King's touch. Therefore, when the practice was continued in exile by James II, it became a political act and a reaffirmation of his claim to the throne. William and Mary's refusal to 'touch' was used by Jacobite sympathisers as an indication of their illegitimate rule rather than a reflection of more rational times.

Whilst acknowledging that many of the stories he relates have become exaggerated over time, Holder also demonstrates that the Whig supporters of the House of Orange were skilful in portraying Tories and Jacobites as superstitious to the point of being in league with the Devil. Therefore a belief in omens and suchlike folklore which perhaps gave comfort to Jacobite sympathisers (and which was part of the common culture) was used to frighten the public at large with the prospect of a return to irrational rule and, the greatest fear of all, Catholicism.



The coronation of James II following Charles II's death in 1685 was beset by a series of small occurrences which came to be seen as omens of doom: the crown kept slipping and nearly fell off, pearls dropped off it, and the top of the sceptre fell off – all of which were (with hindsight) seen as bad omens rather than a failure to maintain the regalia properly.

Part Three, which forms the major part of the book, is the description of sites associated with Jacobites and the supernatural. For each site, details are listed under the headings *When, Where, What to See, What Happened, & Weird Tales*. Grid references and opening times are given, along with useful indications of available facilities and whether or not the site is on private land.

Sites in Scotland make up the bulk of the entries and contain most detail. Entries for Northumberland and the rest of the country seem to be treated in a rather perfunctory manner, although that might reflect an

imbalance of local knowledge as opposed to ignorance of the Scottish sites on my part.

Overall, this is an interesting compilation of historical fact and the folklore which has grown up around it, but my appreciation of the book was spoilt by the author's occasional use of jarringly colloquial language, and I was left wishing that the editor had taken a firmer line.

Was it really necessary to tell us that George II told someone to ‘naff off’, or that ‘the Stuarts were a bit miffed when they were kicked out’? These phrases don’t represent the style of the book in general, which was clearly well researched and otherwise enjoyable.

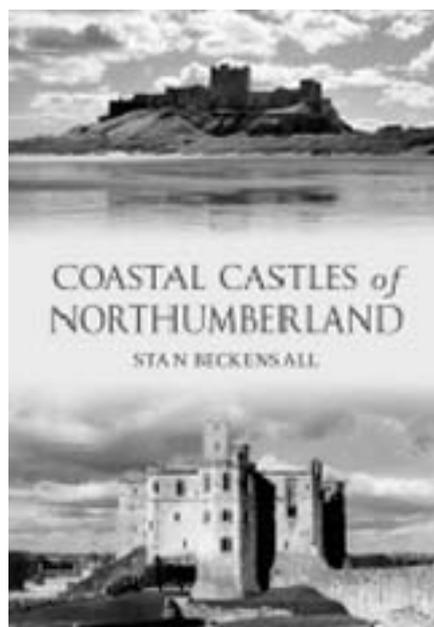
**Book
Review**
JB Jonas

Beckensall, Stan **Coastal castles of Northumberland** (Amberley Press, 2010) ISBN 9781445601960 £18.99

When I was a child we went to Holy Island for our holiday for many years. There was no causeway then, each of the many more pubs than now on the island had an old Ford car which could get through at least a foot of water to meet us off our (steam) train at Beal station and transport us to The Iron Rails, now a private house, on the way down to the harbour. So Holy Island is a special place for me. I love it, and all the other castles featured by Stan, and this book is a fitting tribute to them all.

He introduces the six; Berwick, Holy Island, Bamburgh, Dunstanburgh, Alnwick and Warkworth in short historical summaries and then deals with each, starting with a simple ground plan, pictorially, with a host of excellent photographs, mostly by Stan himself. Most of us do know these castles at least from a distance and, like me, many of his readers will have visited them, but few will have observed the hidden gems – murder holes, portcullis grooves and son on – which his detailed approach reveals.

To comment briefly on each of the six. While one has to search the railway station for much evidence of the Berwick castle of the 12th century, the great walls and bastions of the 16th and 17th centuries effectively make the town its castle and provide a wonderful circular walk. Interesting, too, to see in his photos to the south how Holy Island and Bamburgh (17 miles away) dominate the coastline. Stan has “majored” on Holy Island castle, but has not forgotten to provide interesting views of the limekilns, the harbour and the Heugh. While many have captured the magnificence of Bamburgh towering over beach and village, Stan’s internal shots are invaluable if one is properly to explore the castle and that applies especially true in the case of Dunstanburgh as the passerby would be unaware of the treasures a detailed look into the sparse remains reveal. The subject of where, exactly, the harbour was could have been made clearer – photo 66 mentions it, but is photo 22 connected too? There are splendid photos of Alnwick – in all seasons.



Although I am fondest of Holy Island, my favourite is Warkworth, especially the keep which I find easy to imagine as it was so many centuries ago.

In conclusion then, this is a book to gladden the hearts of all Northumbrians and, hopefully, to whet the appetites of visitors to come, stay and explore.

**Book
Review**
Helen Rutherford

Landells, Stephen **Rescues in the surf: the story of the Shields rowing lifeboats, 1789-1939** (Tynebridge, 2010) ISBN 9781857951493 £12.99

It is hard to imagine, when walking along the pier at Tynemouth on a sunny spring day, that the waters at the entrance to the Tyne hide some of the most treacherous rocks on the north east coast. The Black Middens are only revealed at half-tide and it is on these rocks, and the Herd Sands on the South side, that a large number of

vessels came to grief only metres from the shore. In the nineteenth century, the Tyne was an important artery for the wealth and commerce of the country but, even in calm conditions, it was difficult to navigate. Stephen Landells, a former member of the South Shields' Volunteer lifeboat, tells the story of the boats and men who worked to make the Tyne and the sea around the coast, safer for ships.

South Shields has an illustrious position in the history of life saving, because the first purpose-designed lifeboat was launched there in 1790, after the need for a permanent rescue boat was identified following the loss of the Adventure in March 1789, within almost touching distance of onlookers on shore. Landells has carried out exhaustive research, in both local archives and the RNLI archives, and pieced together this fascinating story from disparate records and snippets of information because, as he notes, most of the formal records have been lost or destroyed.

This is a comprehensive book, with over 200 high quality illustrations, including reproductions of paintings by Hedley and Carmichael, as well as maps, postcards, photographs of historic lifeboats and ephemera.



The text covers the rescues carried out by the lifeboat crews and also the men involved in designing and building the boats. The appendices include details of the lifeboats that have been stationed at North and South Shields, and a full gazetteer of wrecks and rescues from 1720 to 1937. The book is fully indexed and is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of the coast.

I recommend a visit to the seaside, to seek out the locations described and to marvel at the courage and bravery of the volunteer crews that Landells has documented so vividly.

Notes & Queries

Many of these queries are posted on our website, often anonymously. If you can help with any that do not give direct contact details, please get in touch with Mark Benjamin on (01434) 607746.

1) I am trying to get some informations on the cottages at **Warden**, I was told that there was cottages at warden in the 1750s are these the ones that are still in place now? (via web)

2) My researches have led me back to Hexham around about 1650 through various **Yarrows**, George, Thomas. They appear to have been either Hatters, breech-makers or Bellman as tradesmen probably linked to the Tanning Industry of the time. One George Yarrow is named in the History of Northumberland as the bellringer for the weekly Markets and also a scaleraker which I understand entitled him to some of the offal. Anyway, as these "trades" seemed to indicate a fairly good standard of living I was bitterly disappointed to learn when looking through the recently released Index of Wills for Durham & Northumberland that no obvious Yarrows of mine left a will!

So the questions are these. Is there any other place where Wills could have been recorded in the Hexham area? Am I right in assuming these Yarrows were of sufficient standing to warrant them leaving a Will?

Another point of interest is that I understand the Yarrows were Border Reivers, a Riding Family connected to the Robsons. This has always allowed my imagination to run rife in

thinking that the trades of breeches-maker and Hatter were the legitimate end of a reiving operation! Fanciful? Alan Y (via web)

3) Stuart Ferrol is looking for any information and/or theories concerning the **Hexham Heads** and the history of the **Rede Avenue / Bogacres Farm** area and the Celtic / Iron Age heritage of Hexham would be gratefully received. Stuart can be contacted at ferretlives@gmail.com

4) I am researching the life of **Hugh Wilson** (1833-1877 born in Nairnshire) who edited the Hexham Herald at sometime in the mid C19. He went on to be the first editor of the Manchester Evening News and then established the Edinburgh Evening News with his two brothers. He married Elizabeth Jane Scott daughter of George Scott, tobacco manufacturer, in 1870 in Hexham. I would like to find out more about his time in Hexham and the local family he married into. Any thoughts, knowledge or research suggestions would be gratefully received. (via web)

5) Valerie Lyons would like to hear from any members who may know about her ancestors the **Robsons and Lamberts**. William Robson born 1852 father James a saddler William married Mary Reay in 1875 her father was George Reay worked on the railways. John Jewitt Lambert, slater who married Jessie Robinson they had 13 children lived in Ridley Terrace as did the Robsons, any news or photos most welcome. (via web)

6) I have hit a stumbling block with my earliest ancestor identified to date: One **Edward Rowell**, a Lead Miner, believed to have been born around 1705. He married a Hannah Armstrong and they married on the 4th May 1729, in Allendale. They are recorded as being of the parish at the time of their Wedding. I can find no local Record of Edward's Birth and wonder as to whether he may have come from another Parish originally. (via web)

7) Jérôme Manise writes: I am a Belgian historian. I study local history from my region: Chimay and Couvin in the south of Belgium,.. famous for its vast forests (known as) "The Ardennes". In the XIXth century, a large part of this forest was up for sale. Two men coming from England had been keenly interested by this forest (7,500 acres). These people were **Smith Stobart**, merchant in Acomb and **Ralph Errington Ridley**, tanner at Hexham. An agreement has been concluded in 1854 with the Société Générale, the owner but finally the business broke down.

I would like to improve my knowledge about these two businessmen.... It's very interesting to know why these two business(men) coming from the north of England decided to invest their money in Belgium at 700km in the middle of the XIXth century.

If you can help, please contact Jerome on jerome.manise@gmail.com or via Yvonne Purdy on (01434) 601237

8) Jane Bowen of Belford Local History Society wonders whether any of our members can help with an enquiry concerning the **Rev. Matthew Pool(e)** who was a Presbyterian minister in Belsay in the 1780s, and left c1790 to take up a charge in Hexham. Contact Jane on boward@hotmail.co.uk or via Mark Benjamin on (01434) 607746

