



HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Newsletter 75	Editor: Mark Benjamin (01434) 607746 editor@hexhamhistorian.org	Summer 2016
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**Thoughts from
an Editor**
Mark Benjamin

As Peter is indisposed, it falls to me to share my thoughts with you in this Newsletter. Having managed to keep to my strict understanding that I would be an editor and not a writer for 28 issues, I suppose I can't complain!

Having fallen into the role of local studies specialist by a chance mention of having heard of a battle of some sort at Otterburn, when I first joined the county library service in 1980, I now seem to have acquired a role of go-to speaker for any local group in desperate need of entertainment! My hastily-assembled rampage through the history of Hexham, entitled "A history of Hexham in six controversies, and a big stink", has now had three outings – none, I'm glad to say, in front of audiences expert enough to challenge any of my statements. Members may rest assured that I will not be inflicted upon them, no matter how desperate our Speakers' Secretary may be!

On a more serious note, members visiting Hexham library may have noticed a substantial number of empty shelves appearing in the Brough Local Studies Collection. Library staff are undertaking a major stock revision, in part to allow for the reduction of space available, due to the TIC and other council agencies moving into the Queen's Hall, and partly to prepare for the planned major refurbishment of the Queen's Hall itself which will, eventually, mean that the library will be solely on the first floor.

As a Society, we have written expressing our concern to Cllr Terry Johnstone, who chairs the NCC Arts, Leisure & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and to Active Northumberland, who now manage the libraries on behalf of the County. Cllr Johnstone assures us that "Hexham library's role as a local studies centre is valued by the Council and [he is] sure these changes will be positive for you and members of the local history society", we have yet to hear from Active Northumberland although Cllr Johnstone has offered to arrange a meeting with the relevant staff. I have to say that, in my opinion and despite the councillor's assurances, the County has never really valued local studies, despite it having been a vigorous and growing subject area. With the loss over the past few years of many qualified librarian posts, there is now only one, part-time, librarian with any responsibility for local studies provision in the entire county – and she is based at Woodhorn.

Those members on email have already been invited to express their opinion on this topic, anyone learning of this only in this newsletter may wish to do the same. Should we have a meeting with Active Northumberland, we shall keep you informed of any outcome.

**150
YEARS**

BEAUMONT ST.

**ANNIVERSARY
EVENTS &
CELEBRATIONS**

**APRIL TO
SEPTEMBER**

2016 is a definite year of anniversaries for Hexham. As well as Beaumont Street, HLHS itself is clocking up its half century (see our new logo above), and the Shambles is a venerable 250 years old!

This year's *Hexham Historian* is taking shape nicely and will contain articles on the history of printing in Hexham, food rationing in the First World War and the history of our Society. Another, major, article will cover a previous attempt to link the Market Place to the turnpike roads that traversed the country in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Members may have seen the article in the *Hexham Courant*, in which I was extensively misquoted on the earlier attempt; for the full and correct story you'll have to wait for Greg Finch's article! HH26 will also include a cumulative index to issues 20-25.

Memories of the Queen's Hall

As part of a programme of events happening in the town to commemorate Beaumont Street's anniversary, the Queen's Hall, the current occupiers of the first building on the newly-cut street, is planning an exhibition to mark its own 150th birthday in September. Geof Keys, the centre's Artistic Director, would like to include local memories of the hall's time as a dance hall and cinema.

If you have, or know of someone who has, memories of activities in the Queen's Hall before it closed in the 1960s, please contact Geof at geof.keys@queenshall.co.uk or write to him at The Queen's Hall, Beaumont Street, Hexham NE46 3LS

Ushaw College visit Ian Hancock

Thirty fortunate members of the Society met on a warm and sunny May afternoon at Ushaw College to hear about its history from the excellent and

informative guides, and look round the fascinating buildings.

Ushaw played a vital role in Roman Catholicism in the north of England through the 19th and 20th centuries, but owed its establishment to the French revolution! For over 200 years Douai English College in northern France had been educating the sons of the English catholic gentry, and training English Roman Catholic priests following the Tudor protestant reformation. Douai produced many of the martyred clandestine priests who were executed during the clamp-down on catholic worship in the second half of Elizabeth I's reign. However, in 1793 the French revolutionary government suppressed the college when England declared war, and after a short period of virtual house arrest the staff and students fled back to England. The early Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782 had recently made Catholic worship and education legal in England, the Roman Catholic church was appointing bishops again, and it was therefore vital for the catholic establishment to found new seminaries in England. After a temporary stay in Crook Hall, the ancestral home of the Baker family near Lanchester, the new seminary for the North of England was opened by Bishop Gibson of Hexham in 1808 on its own private estate, with farm, kitchen gardens, private water supply and gasworks, at Ushaw. The establishment grew rapidly in size and influence during the nineteenth century, and a boarding catholic preparatory school was added. However, pupil and seminarian numbers were in severe



decline by the turn of the 20th century and in 2011 the college closed. The school was already derelict and had suffered serious vandalism (it is still derelict) but a trust was established to find alternative uses for the main college and Durham University took over the more modern parts of the premises for their business school.

Our tour of the college buildings soon revealed why it was so important to preserve it. The first building by James Taylor, in classical style surrounding a courtyard, is full of Victorian gothic revival detail and decoration. by three generations of the Pugin family and by Joseph Hansom, the noted church

architect (and designer of the Hansom Cab). The main St Cuthbert's Chapel is magnificent and highly decorated, and the same quality of decoration can be seen all over the building, from its fine stained glass windows, "gothic" stonework and carved woodwork, to the lovingly detailed brass door furniture and decorative floor tiles. Along the corridors, interspersed with rather forbidding pictures of former Masters, are some of the relics of the college – including silverware from Douai, hidden under the floor there during the flight from the French revolution and finally recovered many years later, and a curious selection of bats and rackets used to play ball games in a series of extraordinary outdoor stone-built courts in the grounds.

Perhaps what appealed most to the visitors was the visit to the library. The college library as a whole contains over 30,000 books, many of them held in the magnificent Great Library which forms the opposite front wing of the building to St Cuthbert's Chapel. This is also in gothic revival style and its shelves are packed with finely bound and rare books. The college sought to provide a broad education so, although there are many volumes relating to theology, we also saw a first edition of *The Origin of Species*, W.G. Grace's book on cricket, a presentation portfolio of engraved illustrations from Louis XIVth (one of only two complete sets in the world) and early copies of Dickens novels. The library contained two sections of shelving that were kept locked during the working life of the college. Expecting to hear some sensational revelation, instead we learned that one was for protestant theological literature, while the other contained the library's most valuable and irreplaceable early printed books.

Thanks are due to Jennifer Britton for the usual excellent organising, and to Chris Britton for the photos.

**What lies
beneath**
Yvonne Purdy

TO JOHN BELL, ANTIQUARY

Sir, - When, in a former letter, I enumerated some particulars respecting the discovery of coins, and other antiquities, in this town and neighbourhood, it was then unforeseen that a spot then referred to, and which is known to be rich in antiquarian treasures, should so very soon be further explored, thus affording us one more opportunity of getting a glimpse at bygone ages. The grave has opened its mouth again; and before received the mortal remains of a contemporary, has vomited forth some interesting fragments, belonging to a very early period of our history.

It was in making a grave in the Campey Hill, for William Errington, the well-known common carrier between this town and Newcastle, that a brass vessel was found, containing such a quantity of the Anglo-Saxon coins called Stycas, as to form an important era in Numismatics. This discovery was made on Monday, October 15th, 1832; and that interesting grave has this day been re-opened, to receive the corpse of another William Errington, nephew to the former: and truly it was a sight at once gratifying and repulsive – repulsive, inasmuch as it exposed the whole length of the coffin, which has now been more than nine years in the earth (that of W.E., sen.) all the surface and one of the sides being quite bare – nay, the mould taken in part from under it, at the depth of eight feet; and what made the sight still more affecting, was the projection of another coffin, the length of a foot or more, into the new grave, but which had been deposited about two feet nearer the surface. To come in contact again with those whom we have often looked upon and conversed with – nay, whose frailities we have pitied, and whose pleasantries we have laughed at – to get one more glance at them, after they had left us so long, is truly affecting.

The want of sufficient Burying Ground has long been a subject demanding public attention in this town; and often have I endeavoured, during fifteen years or more, to bring it under the notice of people; and of late it has obtained some serious consideration.

But there is an aspect in which the sight described was gratifying – at least to a certain set of men. The irrepressible curiosity of a virtuoso does not stop even at plundering the dead, and has been known to go the length of tanning a human hide. Where the carrion is, there will the vultures be – and there to be sure, was old Jacky Bearparke, the local historian, whose history, written as it is in his memory, must soon, I fear, fade; and there, too, was my respected friend Joseph Fairless, whose skill in Numismatics is not perhaps excelled by any of his townsmen: and whilst we looked upon the tomb which, within an hour, was to be closed, we saw the sexton and his son, who were both in the grave, pick out from the soil, which was mostly raked from beneath the coffin, a number of coins, many of which we were permitted to examine. About fifty have been enumerated – similar in appearance to

those formerly discovered. The vessel in which they had been inclosed having been broken, these not found, and probably many more, had been scattered and left in the grave.

There are now, Sir, more than ever, reasons for believing that if the superincumbent earth were removed to a depth not greater perhaps than the floor of the church, a discovery would be made casting much light upon the history of Hexham, and particularly upon an edifice which, regarded as the meeting-house of a sect, I would not be compelled to support by any means whatever, yet, viewed as a piece of antiquity, one may look upon it with wonder. The sexton declared his belief that this part of the Campey Hill is arched beneath the graves; which he thought was indicated, both by the peculiarly hollow sound produced when struck by the mattock, and by the occurrence, at a great depth, of what he supposed to be mortar. How powerful is habit! It is possible, then, for a man to be facetious with his feet upon a coffin. They are an odd set, these sextons. They have not all the wit of the gravedigger in Hamlet, but some of them have as much hilarity.

The funeral this evening was remarkable, also, for a numerous procession. The deceased having been an Odd Fellow, that fraternity, to the number of perhaps fourscore, followed him to the grave. The appearance and behaviour of the men was orderly and becoming, but the merits of Odd Fellowship must be best known by the initiated.

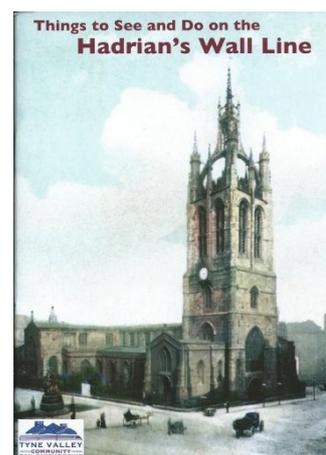
I remain, Sir, yours very truly,
Hexham, December 27th, 1841

J.R.

p.s. – The discovery this day of an amazing quantity of bones in a solid mass, deposited in a central part of the Campey Hill, will afford an important subject for No.50.
Hexham, Dec. 29, 1841

Hadrian's Wall Line booklet

The Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership has produced a fascinating free booklet entitled Things to see and do on the Hadrian's Wall Line. Despite being aimed primarily at tourists, the well-illustrated booklet provides a fine potted history of the Newcastle to Carlisle line.



Those members who did not pick up a copy at our April meeting can find one at Hexham railway station, Hexham TIC (now in the library) or by contacting Fiona Forsythe at Fiona@twcrp.org.uk or on 07810885223; although the booklet remains free there will be a charge of £2.50 to cover postage & packing in this instance.

Notes & Queries

1) Yvonne Purdy writes: I came across this baptism and burial in Hexham registers:

Baptism – Hexham Abbey

17 April 1811, Mary Chance, foundling, left at door of Mrs Fell, Hexham, on the night of 22 December 1810.

Burial – Hexham Abbey

Mary Chance, age 0, 16 March 1812

Mrs Mary Fell was the widow of Revd. Joseph Fell, and by 1822 was living at Burn Brae House. Was she there in 1810? The winters from 1810 – 1819 were severe. The surname 'Chance' is most unusual in Hexham at this time; who decided on her name?

I'm trying to discover what happened to foundling children in Hexham in this time period? Does anyone know of any records? Would she be sent to the Poor House, or did the parish try and search out her parents? Any information welcomed. Yvonne can be contacted on (01434) 601237

2) I am the owner of 1a Leazes Terrace and am hoping to find out some history about it. I understand it was built circa 1857 and was originally a school. 1 & 1a Leazes Tce were one house at

that time and they were split into 2 in the 1940s. Other than this I know very little about the history nor do I have any photographs from days gone by. All information will be gratefully received. Many thanks. C.Brass To reply, email lawbrassy@yahoo.co.uk or contact the editor.

Dates for your diary

Wednesday 1st June. 6.30pm: Scottish Soldiers Project: Exploring the mass grave of 1650 discovered in Durham City Join Durham University's archaeology team in this talk to hear the theories behind a centuries old mass grave found in Durham, and why they believe it features the remains of Scottish soldiers taken prisoner after the 1650 Battle of Dunbar. What happened to their bodies has been a mystery for almost 400 years – join Durham University researchers to hear how they have begun to solve the puzzle and discuss some of their exciting findings. Click here for more.

Speakers from Durham University's Department of Archaeology include: Professor Christopher Gerrard, Team Leader; Richard Annis, Archaeological Services; Dr Anwen Caffell, Human Bone Specialist; Dr Pam Graves, Historical Archaeologist.

Doors open at 6pm, talk starts at 6.30pm. A complimentary drink will be served on arrival.

Lecture tickets cost £6 and must be paid for in advance. If you have an Annual Pass (costing £15) lectures are free but please book your place in advance as spaces are limited. Any questions or to book a place, please email enquiries@aucklandcastle.org or call 01388 743797.

Gates to Rent

From the Newcastle Courant, Saturday 16th Feb 1828

HEXHAM TURNPIKE ROAD

Notice is hereby given, that the TOLLS arising at the several Toll Gates upon the Hexham Turnpike Road, called or known by the Names of Whitcheater Gate, Greenshaw-plain Gate, Dilston Gate, Corbridge Gate, Saint Helen's Gate, Styford Gate, and Hollinghall Gate, will be LET BY AUCTION, to the best Bidder, at the House of Mr William Burn, the White Hart Inn, in Hexham, on the 18th Day of March next, between the Hours of twelve and two, in the Manner directed by the Acts passed in the third and fourth years of the Reign of his Majesty King George the Fourth, "for regulating Turnpike Roads;" which Tolls produced the last Year the Sum of £1835 above the Expences of collecting the same.

Whoever happens to be the best Bidder must, at the same Time, pay one Month in advance (if required) of the Rent at which such Tolls may be let; and give Security, with sufficient Sureties, to the Satisfaction of the Trustees of the said Road, for Payment of the Rest of the Money monthly.

By Order of the Trustees,

NICHOLAS RUDDOCK, Clerk

Hexham, 12th February, 1828.

Book Review

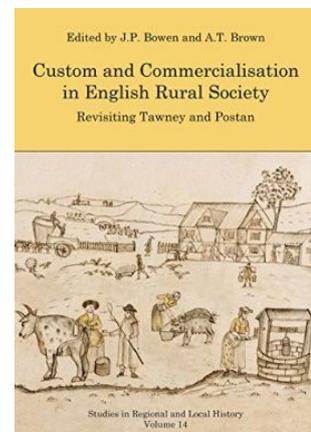
Greg Finch

Bowen, J P & Brown, A T (eds), **Custom and Commercialisation in English Rural Society, Revisiting Tawney and Postan** (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016) xv +

310pp, ISBN 978 1 909291454, £25

This is a collection of essays spanning the late medieval and early modern period in English rural history. Their central theme is to consider what has in the past been seen, at the risk of gross simplification, as a conflict between custom holding feudal society in stasis, and the emerging market forces of commercialisation ripping apart traditional social relationships, founded on the work of influential 20th century historians R.H.Tawney and Michael Postan.

Inevitably, the editors and contributors conclude that in the light of recent research it was more complicated than that. England was a more commercially developed and orientated world in the eighteenth century than in the thirteenth, but several of the case studies



brought together in this volume suggest that the roots of greater freedom of opportunity and action lay in the very customary rights of medieval 'peasants' that were supposedly in conflict with growing market forces from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many modern development studies have singled out the crucial roles of enforceable property rights and free trade. John Broad's paper highlights the way that customary land tenure, the basis for later copyhold tenancies, provided a sound basis for just such property rights for many in the lower reaches of late medieval society, a theme also picked out in, for example, the fascinating case studies of Tudor woodland management in the Furness district of Lakeland and mining in the Forest of Dean. In a similar way, the bolshiness of Hexham's self-confident tenants in the seventeenth century arguably owes much to the successful defence of copyhold rights within the manor: the Royal surveyors of Hexham in 1608 reported glumly that the tenants wouldn't show them their copyhold documents, and there wasn't much they could do about it.

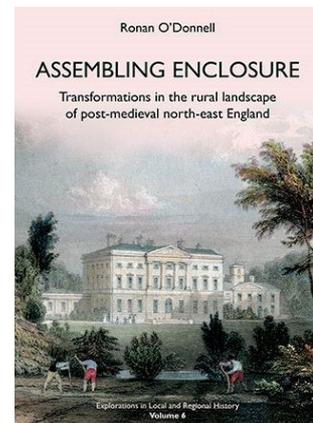
The volume contains only one local study, Alex Brown's on the impact of Durham's Priory and Cathedral estates on the county's economy either side of the dissolution of the Priory, which makes the interesting observation that its scale inhibited the growth of towns. However, despite the national spread of the material, there is much of value to historians of our region, such as Alexandra Sapoznik's thoughtful and careful consideration of the medieval iron industry, which must have been far more widespread than the sparse surviving documentation suggests.

Book Review
Liz Sobell

O'Donnell, Ronan. **Assembling enclosure: transformations in the rural landscape of post-medieval north-east England.** *Explorations in Local and Regional History, Vol*

7 (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016) 168pp, paperback ISBN 978 1 909291 43 0,

Having studied several Northumberland and Cumbrian Common Enclosures in great detail, I was very keen to read this book, even to the extent of outflanking a fellow committee member to get at it, but such cut-throat manoeuvres came back to punish me by having to review it. Just in case what follows leaves you completely bewildered, my basic conclusion is that the author has shackled himself to a completely valueless theoretical approach.



I began reading in full agreement with some of the author's claims: 'the landscape history of North-East England has not been studied as much as other parts of the country' – check; that by jumping straight to accounts of large scale social, economic or political forces, 'historians have failed to do justice to the complex realities of landscape change' – check; there is a strong regional (predominantly Midland) bias in early work on the enclosure of common lands and agricultural improvement – check.

Ronan O'Donnell suggests that a better understanding of landscape change can be offered by Actor-network theory (ANT). This offers an alternative to 'the shortcomings of strictly determinist explanations'. So far, so good. Briefly, ANT takes every conceivable influence or factor in an event, global or local, human or non-human, and designates each as an 'actor', and considers that an event can be said to emerge from the non-hierarchical assemblage of those actors. OK, I'm getting doubtful, but let's see how that works.

As an example, O'Donnell asks us to imagine a farmer trying to convince his neighbours that enclosing their common grazing land and sharing it out between themselves would be a good thing. Possible 'actors' in this scenario are listed: the farmer's personal circumstances, his desire to progress from a medieval way of working the land, his awareness of current high grain prices, the Napoleonic wars, his neighbours and their own concerns, etc. All of these factors are credible, but when we are asked also to consider as an 'actor' the chair the farmer sits on and its effect on his body language, I lose the will to read further, but I've promised to review the book.

O'Donnell then applies ANT to enclosure processes in five Northumberland townships: Learmouth, Milfield, Howick, Longhorsley and Elsdon. There is a curious lack of mention of manors or the distinction between customary, leasehold and freehold tenants, even though he is at pains to point out

that tenants could be important (but unfortunately, so could chairs). Other factors are mentioned without explanation: the existence of glebe land (i.e. land which is part of a clergyman's benefice) is cited as a complication which could prevent enclosure, yet is not defined or discussed further.

Throughout the book, the author's accounts of various changes to the landscape are punctuated by attempts to apply ANT and offer a summary of what has just been described. This leads to fatuous statements such as 'It appears then, that access to, or the lack of, capital was a major factor in determining the ability of an individual to cause landscape change'. Or, on the influence of fashion, 'as with economic forces, fashion was mediated locally by people and things. This means that some purely local factors can have a significant influence on local events.' Oh deary me.

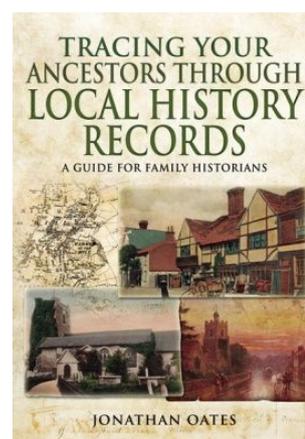
In places, O'Donnell makes some inaccurate statements, for example distinguishing Northumberland from the north-west because that region 'lacked the large landed estates of Northumberland'. Can he have been unaware of the 80-plus manors owned by the earls of Lonsdale?

In his discussion of land at Elsdon, he cites an allotment of land made in 1731 to 'one man, John Ratcliffe Lord Derwentwater', but failed to acknowledge as an 'actor' the fact that Radcliffe was a minor, had just died, and that the Derwentwater Estates were still forfeited to the Crown because of his father's part in the 1715 Jacobite rebellion.

In his concluding chapter, Ronan O'Donnell continues in his struggle to interpret actor-network theory (as well he might), and tells us that a consequence of applying ANT is that 'it is impossible to reach a satisfactory explanation of any type of event'. ANT, O'Donnell concludes, 'rejects the possibility of explanation in favour of description'. This book would have been greatly improved if the author had described more and theorised less.

Book Review
Val Robson

Oates, Jonathan **Tracing your ancestors through local history records** (Pen & Sword, 2016) ISBN 9781473838024 £14.99



On a personal level I found this a very difficult book to read as I have a vision problem, the type was grey rather than black and many of the pictures of poor quality, even those taken in the last few years were not sharp.

The author, a borough archivist and local history librarian, emphasised early in the book that unless your ancestors were of the nobility, had held high office or had criminal convictions you were unlikely to find much, if any, personal information in the local history areas he was covering. However, there were many useful suggestions for people who had already filled in names and dates for their ancestors and wanted to put flesh on the bones. Each chapter covered a particular area with some sources available in local libraries as well as those in specialist venues, archives and museums.

The local library may house books on local areas and events, also on notable people and their businesses. They may also have copies, either actual or in digital format of local newspapers, useful for the personal announcements and may even give the names of wedding guests or mourners at funerals including those of quite lowly people. Journals and yearbooks of local businesses, organisations, societies and schools if available could be useful sometimes with an unusual contributor such as a 12 year old's contribution to the school magazine or awards for a number of years' service in a business.

Maps should be available in larger libraries as well as archives; they were compiled from Tudor times although these were not to scale. Although the mapping of towns began in the seventeenth century, this did not occur with villages but tithe and enclosure maps may contain some relevant information. Maps are particularly useful for the topography in the country areas showing, for instance, why geographical features prevented roads from taking a direct route.

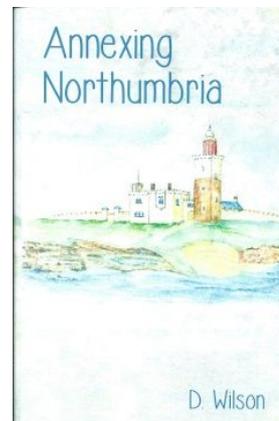
The author stressed the need to visit museums and areas local to your ancestors' homes where there may be little snippets of information about working conditions or special events. There are

frequently pictures and photos taken many years previously which show changes in the environment and on some occasions may have people named.

It was a useful book which gave me some new pointers but, sadly, the product was well below the normal standard of the Pen & Sword publishing house.

Book Review
Mark Benjamin

Wilson, D **Annexing Northumbria** (Austin Macauley, 2016) ISBN 9786127884 £5.99
According to the publisher's blurb on the back cover, Annexing Northumbria "*documents the fascinating history of the North East in vivid detail*". This is a somewhat grandiose description for 52 pages retelling a somewhat haphazardly-told series of anecdotes, from the Viking raids on Lindisfarne to the Union of the Crowns.

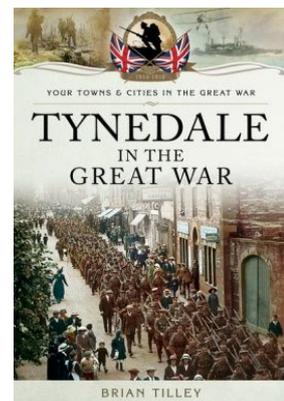


Adding nothing to the history of the county (the mis-use of the name Northumbria is telling) this book might serve as a useful present for posting to friends with no real interest in the history of the region as it's very light, but there are many better books for those who have.

Book Review
Terry Eccles

Tilley, Brian. **Tynedale in the Great War** (Pen & Sword, 2016) ISBN 9781473828018 £12.00

Tynedale in the Great War by Brian Tilley is an interesting account of the lives of ordinary people in the Tyne Valley and beyond, and of the lives of their loved ones fighting in unbelievable conditions on the Front through correspondence sent home.



His research is skilled in bringing together the diversity of many aspects of the war from home life to the horror of killing one of the enemy, from war refugees to the creation of allotments for growing food.

The reader is taken into this world through personal letters and diaries which conjure up a strong sense of everyday life in the time in which they were written over 100 years ago. It feels a privilege to read them.

The book is well illustrated with photographs of men and women at home and abroad, for example of the War Hospital staff busy making clothing for soldiers and a portrait of one "Annie Woodman who at the age of 83 knitted 22 pairs of socks for the cause". The author has used the archive of the Hexham Courant to great advantage, sourcing not only photographs but also references to contemporary events such as The Gem Cinema in Hexham giving showings free of charge to convalescing soldiers.

This is a good read which helps us to appreciate the contribution made by the people of the Tynedale area to the "fight for freedom".



And finally...

The only positive aspect of the library controversy detailed above is that many titles of local interest have become available for sale to members of the public. Wearing one of my other hats, that of bookseller, I am handling the sales on behalf of Active Northumberland. Many of the books withdrawn from Hexham, Morpeth and Woodhorn, as well as titles from South Tyneside's local collection (it's not just happening in Northumberland) are listed on the Bennor Books pages on www.abebooks.co.uk. If you are not on the Internet, contact me on 07879263848 or write to me at 9 Hencotes, Hexham NE46 2EQ and I can send you a printed list of those titles on offer.