



# HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



<b>Newsletter 80</b>	<b>Editor: Mark Benjamin</b> <b>(01434) 607746</b> <b>editor@hexhamhistorian.org</b>	<b>Spring</b> <b>2018</b>
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## Thoughts from the Chair

Peter Rodger

I'll be honest... trying to save a heritage building is no easy task. Some of you may know that, with other residents, I have been campaigning to bring the Hexham Workhouse back into use. For the last 12 or more years it has lain derelict, buddleia growing from gutters, walls and chimneys and until early last year, regularly targeted by small boys as a venue for destruction. By April 2017 there was barely a pane of glass left intact. Those of you who regularly pass by the buildings on the Corbridge road, may have noticed that since last Autumn the windows have been boarded up and hoardings have appeared in an attempt to prevent unauthorised entry. So, why is it in this state? Did you think that the property and the adjacent car park were owned by the NHS? It certainly was – until about 2005 when it constituted part of a land sale to Helen McArdle Group (HMG) a care home company based in Gateshead and since which date it has been the subject of complete neglect. It's probably worth noting that the Fairington Centre on the south elevation was in use until 2015, but that the rest of the buildings became a depository for discarded mattresses, zimmer frames, washing machines, bank statements, old NHS memos, a harmonium, television sets and large quantities of unwanted, spoiled or broken care home detritus as you can see in the photograph.

HMG appear unwilling to sell the property and equally unwilling to develop the site. In fact they may have difficulty in profitably developing the site. For a number of reasons the site will be a thorn in their side. It lies in the Hexham Conservation Area – permission to demolish the heritage buildings would be unlikely and, for private sector developers, converting old buildings is far from profitable. The site is designated for future housing and the recent Housing Needs Survey clearly demonstrated that the town is sorely in need of good quality, affordable housing.



Hexham's Workhouse is an important part of Hexham's history and a gateway to the town. To see it lying wounded and uncared for is painful, particularly to the many residents who have some family association with it.

The County Council, Hexham Civic Society, Hexham Community Partnership, Locality, Homes England and the Architectural Heritage Fund have expressed their support for retaining and converting the buildings to bring this somewhat neglected corner of Hexham back to a useful life and so recognize its historical and social importance.

I think you should be concerned too.

**New faces on  
the Committee**

We are delighted that Pete Lee and David Wilkinson have agreed to join the Society's Main Committee; Pete as Webmaster and David as Member without Portfolio (for now!). Both have a wealth of experience that will prove invaluable to the functioning of HLHS. Tim Barmby has also joined the Publications Committee as part of the Editorial Board of the Hexham Historian. Welcome all!

This would seem to be a good place to remind members that we are still looking for someone (sometwo?) to take up the roles of Treasurer and Editor as both Greg Finch and Mark Benjamin feel they have served their time and would like to step down. Full training in both roles will be given and both retiring officers will remain around to offer any support &/or advice. Anyone who might be tempted to take on either role should contact Yvonne at [secretary@hexhamhistorian.org](mailto:secretary@hexhamhistorian.org) We look forward to hearing from you!

**Data Protection  
legislation**  
Pete Lee

Legislation concerned with Data Protection is being upgraded by the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) that comes into effect on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. This regulation relates to the personal data held by the HLHS about its members, and the protection and use of that data. For example, we hold names and addresses of members, used for posting the Hexham Historian to you.

In the coming months we will have to obtain, record and manage consents to hold and process data from all of our members. We expect that we will be posting you a template form later in the year which you will have to complete and sign (and possibly read before you do that!), and return to the Society.

**Slide Viewer  
needed**

Has anyone got a slide viewer they no longer need? In compiling our digital photo archive, we occasionally come across a large number of slides and, although we have acquired a slide scanner, it would be useful to be able to view the slides individually so that we can assess their relevance before scanning.

What we are looking for is not a projector but a simple, probably battery-operated, viewer. If you have one that you no longer use and would be prepared to donate it to the Society, please contact either Mark (details above) or Peter on [peter@anick.co.uk](mailto:peter@anick.co.uk)

**The new HLHS  
website**  
Pete Lee

From the beginning of the year, Pete Lee has taken over the role of webmaster for HLHS to help with the development of the new web site. Pete is an Emeritus Professor at Newcastle University, and was the Head of the School of Computing Science before retiring and so will be an invaluable addition to the team.

Progress on the development of the new website has gathered some pace over the last few weeks. Testing of the membership functionality is the first priority, with the expectation that all of the membership details will be transferred to the new site shortly. Efforts will then focus on testing the bookshop functionality, followed by the transfer of web content from the old site(s) to the new. The new site will then replace the existing website. We will of course let you know when this has happened - watch this space!

### The Dunbar Soldiers Project

Due to a family bereavement, Dr Pam Graves was unable to present her scheduled February talk; fortunately her colleague Dr Andrew Millard was able to step into the breach and gave a fascinating insight into the history both of the Battle of Dunbar itself, and of the archaeological excavation of the soldiers' grave pits in Durham. For those members who were unable to attend the talk, or who would like to know more about the project, there is an excellent website at [www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/europe/pg-skeletons/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/europe/pg-skeletons/)



### Future talks

It has been mentioned that, although all members receive the information card detailing the year's talks this gives little information about the content of the talks themselves, making it difficult for members to assess the personal attraction of individual topics. Accordingly, here are the remainder of this year's topics – which, obviously, we hope everyone will find of interest!

#### **March 13 Dr Alastair Fraser A battalion on the learning curve: The 18th Battalion DLI & Cocken Hall Camp**

As part of our series of talks marking the centenary of WW1, Dr Fraser's subject is the 18th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, the Durham Pals, from when the first recruits arrived at a new hutted camp built near Cocken Hall in September 1914.

#### **April 10 Dr Adam Morton Dangerous laughter: the problem of laughter in early modern England**

When is a joke not simply meant to amuse? Dr Morton will talk about the power of laughter and satire in early modern British political and religious culture.

#### **TOM CORFE MEMORIAL LECTURE**

#### **May 8 Colm O'Brien A search for the Northumbrian landholdings of St Cuthbert**

Colm will describe how the Bernician Studies Group has pieced together the identification of the lost lands of the monastic community on Lindisfarne.

#### **September 11 Alison Higgs Featherstone Park POW Camp 18 - the 'Freedom Camp'**

Featherstone Park Camp successively housed American soldiers preparing for the 1944 Normandy invasions, Italian prisoners of war and, from 1945 - 1948, Nazi officers undergoing rehabilitation before their release. Alison Higgs will describe the place which became known as the 'Freedom Camp'.

#### **October 9 Dr James Gerrard Connecting small worlds: travel and transport in Roman Britain and beyond**

Was the Roman Empire one state or a group of small communities? In this talk Dr Gerrard explores the evidence for travel in Roman Britain, and the light it can shed on the social lives of people who lived in the Roman Empire.

**November 13 Dr Peter Wright Water trades on the Tyne in the 17th and 18th centuries**

Drawing on a wide range of sources, Dr Wright will reveal the sometimes unexpected breadth of commercial activity in the North East in this account of the people essential to Newcastle's trading importance in the 1600s and 1700s.

All meetings are free to members, and we welcome non-members for a small entry charge of £2

**A mysterious volume – a detective story!**

There are several well-known histories of the county; the earliest being by Wallis (1769), Hutchinson (1778), MacKenzie (1825) and Hodgson (1827-1840). A volume has come to light that we wanted to identify as it is missing both the original spine and first few pages, including the title page. It definitely post-dated Wallis and Hutchinson, as both authors are referred to in the text. The latest date that could be found in the text is 1810, which seemed to point to MacKenzie. However, the wording referring to Hexham town is completely different to the extract included in Hexham Historian 25; which came from MacKenzie's second, enlarged edition of 1825. The mysterious volume, the second of two, was considerably smaller in height than all known versions of the 1825 edition.

Following much investigation, we established that it was, indeed, a very rare copy of the original 1811 edition. So rare that it is not listed in the British Library catalogue, although copies can be found at Woodhorn and in the libraries of the Lit & Phil, Newcastle & Durham universities. It has to be said that the wording of the 1825 revised edition is a distinct improvement on the original!

**QEGS in the Great War: the first to go**

We have recently seen a copy of The Elizabethan, the journal of Hexham's Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, from December 1914. Replete with articles on various aspects of the war, the journal also includes this list of staff and former pupils who had already enlisted. Sadly, although hardly unexpectedly, many did not survive the war and we have added the date of death, where known.

<i>Name</i>	<i>At school</i>	<i>Regiment</i>	<i>Date of death</i>
Davies, G T	Staff	13 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Royal Welsh Fusiliers	
Atkinson, R J	Staff	13 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Royal Welsh Fusiliers	
Armstrong, J R	Sept 1910 - Dec 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	
Hawkins, E	Sept 1910 – Mar 1912	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	11 Feb 1918
Marshall, W E	Sept 1910 – Jul 1911	County Batt, Durham Light Infantry	3 May 1917
Parnaby, C E	Sept 1910 – Mar 1912	Royal Artillery	
Pattinson, T	Sept 1910 – Mar 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	
Shaw, T R	Sept 1910 – Jun 1913	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	27 Oct 1918
Stephenson, W L	Sept 1910 – Mar 1912	8 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Durham Light Infantry	19 Jan 1916
Suddes, S	May 1911 – July 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	
Robson, R	Sept 1910 – Dec 1910	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	18 Sept 1916
Robson, R R	Sept 1910 – Mar 1912	8 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Durham Light Infantry	24 Apr 1918
Thew, W R	Sept 1910 – Mar 1911	Northumberland Hussars	25 Oct 1916
Wilson, J S	Sept 1910 – Jul 1911	8 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Durham Light Infantry	
Woodman, R P	Sept 1910 – Mar 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> Batt, Northumberland Fusiliers	

The editor expressed a hope that the next issue of The Elizabethan would “*be able to present to our readers...a fuller list, together with the promotions which have been earned*” At this stage in the war, no-one was talking about casualties!

**4<sup>th</sup> Battalion  
Northumberland  
Fusiliers at  
Passchendaele**  
Tom Gillanders

The Battle of Passchendaele was, like most battles in the First World War, a succession of conflicts occurring over a period of months. The first battle was on 31<sup>st</sup> July with the last being on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was raised from the men of Hexham and the surrounding area. There were four Companies in the Battalion with recruiting from Hexham for "A" Company; from Bellingham to the north of the town for "B" Company; from Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle west of Hexham for "C" Company; and from Prudhoe and Newburn just east of the town for "D" Company.

In the autumn of 1917 the Northumberland Fusiliers had been ordered to advance to a point just north and east of the town of Ypres and prepare to launch an attack on the forward German defence line. There were three Battalions involved in the attack, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and their two brother Battalions the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion were on the right flank, the 5<sup>th</sup> in the centre and the 7<sup>th</sup> on the left flank. In front of the German lines the ground was in very poor condition. Incessant rain in July and August had rendered parts of it into a marsh and completely impassable. This was no surprise as it had been shelled by both sides every day for over two years.

On the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup> October the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion were ordered to prepare to attack the German forward line the next morning with "A" Company on the right; "B" Company in the centre and "D" Company on the left. "C" Company would be held in reserve. However, following a reconnaissance of the ground, and having seen the swampy conditions, it was decided at 2.00 p.m. that this attack would be reduced to a two Company movement with "A" Company being held in deep reserve. At 9 p.m. that evening "A" company left the front line and, under cover of darkness, reformed about 2 miles behind the attack line. Their job would be to supply fresh rations and ammunition to the front lines when required.

This left "B" and "D" Companies in the front line. At 3 a.m. in the morning heavy rain began to fall again making the ground even more slippery and treacherous. At 4.05 a.m. 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion reported to their Brigade Headquarters that they were in position and ready to attack. The artillery creeping barrage opened up at 5.40 a.m. and the men of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion began to move forward. This creeping barrage, of smoke in the intervening ground combined with shell fire on the enemy lines, was designed to move at a pace of 100 yards every eight minutes. Ordinarily this would have been acceptable but as the ground conditions were so bad the men struggled through the clinging mud to keep up. This meant that the smoke barrage kept getting further away from the advancing troops so that the enemy could soon see the British quite clearly. There were two German pill boxes in the front of the Battalion. One on each side, and each was equipped with machine guns which opened up as soon as they saw the Fusiliers advance. A survivor from the carnage later said that as the men struggled through the thick heavy mud many died from gun-fire, but there were also many wounded who fell into the water-filled shell holes and simply drowned.

The battle ended at about 6.00 that evening, with no gain in ground and the reserve company, Company "C" from Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle, was sent forward to hold the front line.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion within twelve hours had suffered a total of two hundred and fifty six killed, wounded or missing, more than fifty percent of those that had gone into action. Their neighbours, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, had 12 officers and 439 men either killed, wounded or missing. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion the overall figure was 11 officers and 246 men.



In terms of Hexham men killed or missing, there were three; one from the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Pte Stewart) and two from the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Ptes Hudson and Lendren). You may well ask why so few? The changes in the attack plan, because of the rain and the mud, Hexham men in "A" Company were sent to the rear to provide supporting services - and survived.

Within any Battalion there are small rivalries between the Companies but at the end of the day they are all comrades in arms. So our thoughts should go out to the men from B company in Bellingham and District and with the men from D Company from Prudhoe and Newburn, along with the other 325,000 Allied troops and 250,000 German troops who fought and died at what became known as the Second Battle of Passchendaele



#### Hanoverians in Hexham

John Metcalfe (1717-1810):  
a.k.a. Blind Jack of  
Knaresborough, although blind  
from the age of 6, was a noted  
fiddler and the first professional

road-builder to emerge in the Industrial Revolution. Although he had no part in building Northumberland's Military Road, it would seem likely that his experience accompanying the Royalist army in 1745, recounted below from *Blind Jack of Knaresborough: the life of John Metcalfe*. (1795) Pub. E & R Peck, York, impressed upon him the need for good road surfaces!

*All matters being adjusted, the company was drawn up, and amongst them Blind Jack made no small figure, being now 6ft. 2in. high, and, like his companions dressed in blue and buff, with a large gold-laced hat. Jack now played a march of the Captain's choosing, and off they moved for Boroughbridge to join General Wade's army there.*

*Arriving at Newcastle, they, by order of General Wade, were united with Pluteney's regiment, which had suffered much in some late actions abroad, and was thought the weakest. Captain Thornton gave orders for tents, for his men, and a marquee for himself, for which he paid the upholsterer eighty guineas; he pitched them on Newcastle Moor, and gave a pair of blankets to each tent. On the first night of their encampment the snow fell 6 inches deep. After stopping there for about a week the General received intelligence of the motions of the rebels, and gave orders to march by break of day for Hexham, in three columns, wishing to intercept them on the West Road, as their route seemed to be for England that way. The tents were immediately struck, but the Swiss troops having the van, and not being willing to move at so early an hour, it was half past ten before they left the ground, and the snow by that time had become extremely deep in several places. It also proved a very severe day, with hail and frost; they were often three or four hours in marching a mile, the pioneers having to lower the hills and fill up the ditches to make a passage for the artillery and baggage. About ten at night they arrived at Ovington (the place marked out for them), with straw to rest on, but the ground was frozen so hard that but few of the tent pins would enter*



*it, and in those that were pitched the men lay one upon another, greatly fatigued with their day's march, fifteen hours having elapsed from the time of striking the tents till their arrival at this place, although the distance is only seven miles. The next day they reached Hexham, where they halted. On Monday night, about ten o'clock, the army was put in motion by a false alarm, but stopping there about three days General Wade returned to Newcastle to catch the post road leading to Yorkshire*

**Reviewer  
wanted**

Would any member like to review a new book by Clive Tolley, the author of the article on the Battle of Heavenfield, or Denisesburna, carried in the last issue of the Hexham Historian? The book is *Reges Christianissimi: history and interpretation in Bede's account of the early kings of Northumbria*. The review will appear in the Summer newsletter (due out in June), so there's plenty of time of time to read what looks to be a fascinating book. As always, you get to keep the book – regardless of your opinion! Contact Mark at [editor@hexhamhistorian.org](mailto:editor@hexhamhistorian.org) or on (01434) 607746 if you'd like to have a go.

**Spring Sale**

The following titles are being offered at a special discount to members by local bookseller, Bennor Books (aka your Editor!). The normal list price is shown in normal type; the offer price in Bold

**Richardson, M A (1841) Local Historian's Table Book: 4 volume set comprising: Vols I & II, Historical Division; Vols III & IV, Historical Division; Vols V, Historical Division & VI, Legendary Division; Vols VII & VIII, Legendary Division.** Some wear to green leather boards and leather labels; some labels are separated but included. Front flyleaf of first 3 vols have been clipped, presumably to remove previous owner's mark; the rear board of vol 3 has become detached but otherwise the volumes are clean and tight with marbled page edges. £50 : **£35**

**Richardson, M A (1846) The Borderer's Table Book; or, Gatherings of the local history and romance of the English and Scottish border.** 8 volume set in 4 volumes. A later re-packaging of the author's Local Historian's Table Book (as above), presumably aimed at the Scottish market! Minor wear and markings to brown cloth covers but all hinges are intact and secure apart from the first volume where the front board has separated. £180 : **£130**

**Monthly Chronicle of North country lore and legend.** Anthology published for the Proprietors of the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle. 5 volumes covering 1887-91. All are in fair to poor condition but a fascinating collection for browsing through. Would rebind well. £125 : **£50**

**Bulmer, T F (1886) History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland (Hexham Division)** Some wear to leather spine and board but hinges are tight and text block in good condition. Original owner's mark on ffl. £60 : **£45**

**Dixon, David Dippie (1903) Upper Coquetdale, Northumberland: its history, traditions, folk-lore and scenery.** Ex-library with usual markings. Some wear and markings to red leather and green cloth boards but hinges are intact and pages clean and tight. No 32 of a limited de-luxe edition of 200. Dedication to the illustrator inside ffl. £150: **£100**

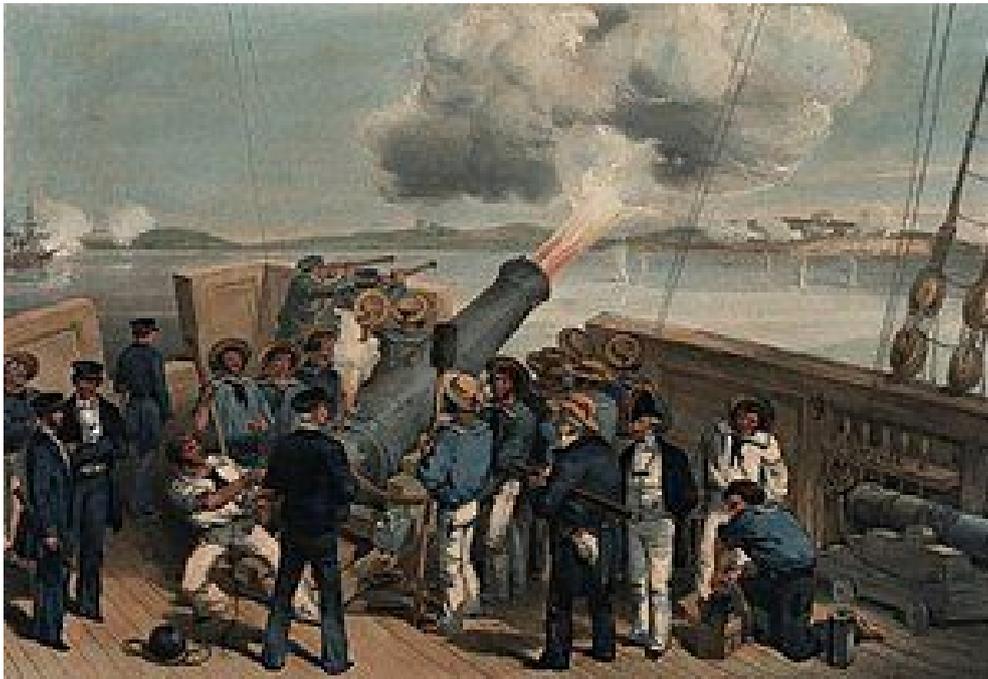
**Fordyce, T & Sykes, J (1867-1875) Local Records: or, Historical Register of Remarkable Events Which Have Occurred in Northumberland and Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Berwick-upon-Tweed.** Four volumes in good to fair condition. £85 : **£60**

**Hodgson, J A (1897) History of Northumberland, Vol.IV: Hexhamshire Pt 2 (Hexham, Whitley Chapel, Allendale, and St John Lee), The Parish of Chollerton, The Chapelry of Kirkheaton, The Parish of Thockrington.** Some wear to maroon and gilt covers and fading on spine but text tight and in good condition. 479pp, frontis., illus throughout in b&w, indexed. This book shows signs of having passed through a library at some point but has minimal markings and no stamps. £65 : **£45**

Anyone tempted should contact me at [bennorbooks@gmail.com](mailto:bennorbooks@gmail.com) or on 07879263848

**And finally... or rather, Finnish!**

I've occasionally wondered about the name of the village of Bomarsund, near Bedlington; it doesn't sound particularly Northumbrian, even given the county's Viking links! Life being what it is, I never got around to investigating, until I received an order for a booklet entitled Bomarsund & Stakeford – from Finland! Intrigued, I decided to investigate at last. It turns out that the Siege of the Fortress of Bomarsund, in what was then the Russian Empire, was a famous albeit now forgotten naval victory by a combined Anglo-French force during the Crimean War! Presumably, the news of the victory reached Northumberland just as a new pit was being sunk; the pit was named after the victory, and the village named after the pit.



**British naval bombardment of Bomarsund**

Not exactly Hexham history I know, but one can't be too parochial about these things!