



# HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



<b>Newsletter 83</b>	<b>Editor: Mark Benjamin</b> <b>Tel: 07879263848</b> <b>editor@hexhamhistorian.org</b>	<b>Spring 2019</b>
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## **Thoughts from a Chair** Greg Finch

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2019, also my first from 'the chair'. I take over from Peter Rodger, who occupied it for seven very productive years for the Society. From this position, and before that as our webmaster, Peter was responsible for some crucial developments. He created our first website, online bookshop and members' library, thereby making available historical content which, hitherto, had no obvious home. He also took us into the world of 'printing on demand' which transformed the economics of publishing high-quality books without the financial risk of having to sell in vast numbers. Without this, none of our recent 'occasional publications' - most of which also benefit from Peter's design flair on their covers - would have seen the light of day. Many members will also have seen more recently the fruits of his design skills in the large format archive photo boards which we have on display in rotation at our monthly meetings. So, we all have good cause to thank Peter for his work on the Society's behalf over the years and to wish him well in his new role chairing the Hexham Community Partnership.

Since I know that we have some new members this year, I ought briefly to introduce myself. Although I am originally from Devon, the Northeast is now very much home, and I have lived in Hexhamshire for over twenty years. I have had a great interest in history since university days, and in recent years have enjoyed becoming more actively engaged in researching the local past. Hexham and Tynedale have always been well served with historians, and the Society itself has published a great deal of their work over the past thirty years. But there are always more questions, more stories to uncover, more changes to identify, more buildings and landscape features to explain. This is a key part of what our Society is about. Whether a new or long-standing member you're very welcome to join us in pushing forward our boundaries of knowledge, and sharing it with others.

## **Secretary wanted!**

With Yvonne's resignation we now have a vacancy for the post of Secretary. The main duties are to circulate the agenda for committee meetings which take place 3-4 times per year, to take meeting minutes and distribute them to committee members: a friendly bunch! The secretary is also responsible for producing the annual report and AGM papers for distribution to members, and to take the minutes of the AGM each Autumn. The Secretary is also the principal point of contact for outside bodies, passing on information to the committee as needed. The role need not be very time consuming but it does help to be familiar with standard word processing packages and email. If this appeals to you or if you would like more information, have a word with one of our committee members or email [chair@hexhamhistorian.org](mailto:chair@hexhamhistorian.org)

## **Summer Visits**

Enclosed with this newsletter you will find the booking forms for this year's outings. If you want to book a place, don't hesitate to fill them in and send them off to Jennifer Britton poste haste to avoid disappointment! **Please note that, in the interests of fairness, Jennifer will not accept bookings by phone or email.**

**Jim Hedley  
(1936-2018)**

We were sad to note the death of Dr Jim Hedley, a long-standing member of the Society. An engineer by profession, Jim had run the North East Innovation Centre at Pelaw for many years and in his retirement had pursued his love of gardening, travel and bookbinding. He made a number of contributions to the Society's publications and was a welcoming host for committee meetings at Quatre Bras, usually held in the conservatory, overlooking the magnificent garden, an overflowing bowl of his home-grown raspberries, freshly picked on the table.

Jim was noted for his impressive knowledge and very impressive library of local history books, many of which he had personally re-bound.

**HLHS member  
honoured**

I'm sure that, by the time this newsletter has been published, all members of HLHS will have heard that Dr Stan Beckensall has been awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to Prehistoric Rock Art and History in Britain.

Stan has been a long-time member of the HLHS, serving for many years on the committee. We extend our warmest congratulations to him.

**Britain on Film:  
a crowd-  
funding  
opportunity**  
Alex Bingham

The BFI is launching its new Britain on Film crowdsourcing platform, and we are keen to spread the word among Britain's grass roots history-lovers and film-enthusiasts.

As part of the legacy for the BFI's Britain on Film project we have created a bespoke crowdsourcing platform based on films within the Britain on Film map on BFI Player. Linking directly from the BFI Player <http://player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film> or via <http://contribute.bfi.org.uk> the crowdsourcing platform will encourage people to share their unique knowledge by 'pinning' locations to the online map.

In doing so, they will improve the accuracy and depth of the geo-tagging of films within the Britain on Film national collection, and will enhance our understanding of the films themselves, as well as charting the evolution of our towns and cities.

At this stage, we are focusing on engaging with grass roots groups such as local history societies, local museums and local archives. The platform will be populated and moderated by its users, so we are also hoping to create an online community of people who care about archive films and their local history.

**HLHS at the  
Tyne Valley  
Film Festival**  
A date for your  
diary

On the subject of local film, on Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, HLHS is sponsoring the first film to be shown in Hexham as part of the Tyne Valley Film Festival. "Keep your seats, please", a comedy from 1936 starring George Formby and Alastair Sim, was the first film to be shown at the Forum Cinema.



Led by Forum Cinema Hexham, Tyne Valley Film Festival will bring together communities in and around the Tyne Valley for a celebration of film history. With 26 screenings at 12 venues, the diverse programme features film archive material, classics from the history of cinema and under seen films by unsung filmmakers.

The showing will be preceded by a short talk by yours truly, on the history of cinema in Hexham. Tickets can be obtained from the Forum or through their website [forumhexham.com/ForumHexham.dll/WhatsOn?Film=7404803](http://forumhexham.com/ForumHexham.dll/WhatsOn?Film=7404803)

**More dates for your diary**

And, whilst you've got your diaries out, don't forget our forthcoming talks – and one at the Lit & Phil!

**12<sup>th</sup> March. Dear Mrs Pennyman: First World War widows' letters**

Dr Roisín Higgins has made a study of letters sent during the First World War to Mrs Mary Pennyman of Ormesby Hall, who was Secretary of the King's Own Scottish Borderers' Widows and Orphans Fund. Widows and mothers of the men who died at the front wrote to her of their grief, resolve and worries about the future. Dr Higgins returns to tell us what has been discovered about the women who wrote the letters.

**13<sup>th</sup> March. 6.30pm. The Crowleys in the early iron industry. Lit & Phil, Newcastle**

After almost 57 years out of print, Land of Oak & Iron is producing a new edition of *Men of Iron*, by Michael Walter Flinn, which brings to life the story of how Sir Ambrose Crowley ran his empire; how he created an enlightened welfare system for his workers and their families at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

Dr William Lancaster will give a talk on Crowley's Ironworks and their historical importance of national and international significance and will be joined by Mark Flinn, one of the author's sons.

Tickets cost £5 can be booked online at [www.123formbuilder.com/form-4557358/](http://www.123formbuilder.com/form-4557358/) or through the Lit & Phil on 0191 232 0192

**9<sup>th</sup> April. Twice more unto the breeches**

Chris Simmons will speak about the history of the Geneva "Breeches" Bible, comparing and contrasting two locally-held copies, describing their idiosyncrasies and tracing what can be discovered of their individual histories.

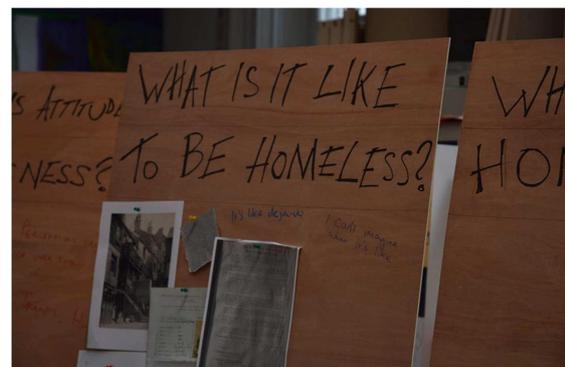
**14<sup>th</sup> May. Forgotten antiquarians?: William Greenwood and his contemporaries**

2018 marked the centenary of the death of Canon William Greenwell, an important figure in the development of archaeology in the North of England. Dr Rob Young will use an assessment of the contribution of Greenwell and three of his contemporaries to explore why the work of certain individuals achieves lasting prominence, whilst that of others, who might well have been equally gifted, does not.

**Missing Pieces**  
A new exhibition

Over the past year, Newcastle local historian, Kristopher McKie and Discovery Museum curator David Wright have worked with Crisis Skylight Newcastle and their members to research the history of homelessness within Newcastle. The exhibition raises questions on the attitudes to and experiences of homelessness within Newcastle, both in the past and in present-day.

'Missing Pieces' opens on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and runs through early 2019. The exhibition is spread across several sites in central Newcastle and can be seen at Discovery Museum, Laing Art Gallery, Bessie Surtees House, Newcastle City Library and St Nicholas Cathedral.



**New to the website**

A recent addition to the Home page of our website is a direct feed from the *Hexham Courant's* regular feature of a selection of stories carried in the paper over the past 150 years.

The report for the **Northumberland County Council's County Medical Officer of Health** for the year 1939 is now available to download. This report is of particular interest as it details the arrangements for the evacuation of expectant mothers from Tyneside to various local maternity units including Dilston Maternity Hospital – a subject about which we receive numerous enquiries!

<https://archive.org/details/b29920589/page/n1?q=Corbridge&fbclid=IwAR05pSdWFH9DYw-zhYxuteiPzMx3Kuw3BMkuMOnX3HJhC6J8n3fqJ4kB1Ik>

**Immigration records.** Research and a subsequent database has been brought to our attention - it involves immigration to England between 1330 and 1550. The database is the result of research conducted not necessarily from people entering England from the privileged classes but from the lower end of the socio-economic scale. A very useful source for many of us – and it's available free for all online! <https://www.englishimmigrants.com>

**Online Genealogical Index**

A new search tool for family historians

The OGI helps researchers avoid wasting time when looking at incomplete resources or by manually searching multiple sites to find the required records.

Enter the country, county, town and approximate year, and OGI will check its database of **385,017** online data sets and list those that hold data for the given town and year.

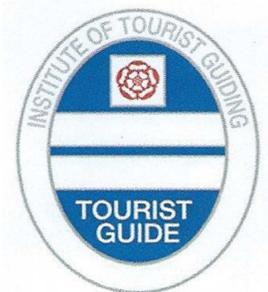
The OGI began as a spreadsheet in January 2012 and currently has over 385,000 links to vital record data (birth, baptism, marriage, death, burial) as well as school records, graveyard headstones, war memorials, family pedigrees and more.

Its creator is Tim Manners, an enthusiastic online genealogist who was frustrated with subscription sites selling access to resources which were free elsewhere. The OGI is a collection of direct links to online genealogical data (names, places and dates) sorted by place (in England and Wales) Around two thirds of these are free for the general public, the other third are free at any LDS Family History Centre (<https://familysearch.org/locations>) or to those with subscriptions to Ancestry, Findmypast, or My Heritage.

**British Guild of Guides**

Opportunities to train

Although Hexham has its very own Town Mayor's Guild of Guides, there is an opportunity to train as a guide working throughout the North East as a professional Blue Badge Tourist Guide. There are no formal academic requirements but the course is at Degree level so applicants need to be able to work hard. Training course details and application forms for the 2019-20 course, starting in May, are now available from the Course Team at [www.guidetrainingnortheast.com](http://www.guidetrainingnortheast.com) or email [guidetrainingnortheast@gmail.com](mailto:guidetrainingnortheast@gmail.com). We are still actively recruiting and will be holding an informal 'Information Evening' in Newcastle where the Course Directors will be available to have a chat and answer any particular questions prior to application.



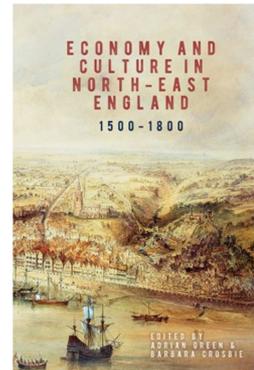
This will take place in Newcastle city centre, on Monday 25th February, between 6.30 pm and 8.30 pm

### Can you help?

Annie Moore writes: I've been trying, for over 4 years, to trace a family member (via Findmypast.com and other websites). I can find no trace of a man by the name of **Crooks ('Jack')** who, I'm informed, was **Chief Inspector of Transport in 1952**. All my searches thus far have ended with finding out I've been tracing the wrong Jack or John. I do need to find out Mr Crooks' first name. I don't know if his job was in Hexham, although I understand the family lived there. I can't find, either, what exactly this job title means: ie what type of transport. Does anyone have any ideas of where I could search next? Even better, does anyone know the answers? *Replies to Annie via Editor, please*

### Book Review Greg Finch

Green, Adrian and Crosbie, Barbara (eds), **Economy and Culture in North-East England 1500-1800** (Boydell, 2018) ISBN 978 1 78327 1832, £65



Tyneside was one of the most dynamic parts of the British economy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and its close links with the rapid growth of London thanks to the coal trade are now understood reasonably well. Because this happened in the century or so before what is seen as the classic period of the industrial revolution, the fortunes of Newcastle and its region are of more than local interest and importance. This collection of essays recognises the importance of coal, but gets beyond it to focus on other aspects of the region's economy, its interconnections, and the development of urban culture from the Tudor to the Georgian period.

The volume forms part of the North-East England History Institute's long running 'Regions and Regionalism in History' series of publications and a regional view provides the organising framework for the individual contributions. The Durham-based editors and, in his foreword, Keith Wrightson, point out that economic development happens in regions, not nations, making the early modern period in *this* region such an important object for study. The ten chapters which follow fall into three broad areas: agriculture/industry, trade & transport, ideas and power. Most of the contributions are drawn from recently completed doctoral theses undertaken in local universities, and while this makes available in succinct form some of the key findings of recent research it also means, inevitably, that their coverage is selective rather than comprehensive. However, their breadth, ranging in time from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the eve of the Napoleonic Wars, and in space from Teesdale to the Scottish Borders, illustrate well the central point that the region's development was about a great deal more than Tyneside coal.

For example, in his overview of regional agricultural change, Adrian Green makes the point that Newcastle's growth acted as a powerful focal point of demand and stimulus for change in farming, intensifying connections within the region and quite possibly extending the boundaries of its economic hinterland deeper into the country. It created the kind of opportunities for personal advancement that Alex Brown identified amongst confident tenants on the Durham cathedral estate in the century before the civil war, able to retain many of the material gains of commercial farming benefits. The Shadforths of Weardale were one such family, a name which later crops up amongst Newcastle's 17<sup>th</sup> century overseas merchants, an example of the great flows of migration to the city. Andy Burn's chapter explores this further through a summary of his exhaustive analysis of Newcastle's parish registers, probate inventories and other records to outline its 17<sup>th</sup> century population growth and the changing structure of work. That change was overwhelmingly towards the hard labour of coal transport by keel along the river from staiths to ships, relying heavily upon migrants. Is it idle to speculate that migration to Tyneside did more to reduce border lawlessness from the late Tudor period onwards than the union of the crowns?

Matthew Greenhall's work on Anglo-Scottish trade by land and sea shines light on the subtle textures and depth of other links across the border, the sophistication of which is illustrated by the astonishing level of overland trade in so fragile and low-value a commodity as eggs in the 1680s. His chapter is complemented by Peter Wright's account of the Tyne's 18<sup>th</sup> century seaborne trade, a suitable reminder that Newcastle had long-established overseas trade links with Europe, lest we be transfixed by London's demand for coal. Glass-making, another important local industry, is highlighted through Lindsay Houpt-Varner's study of the cultural and economic relationships of the Quakers in the region, which brings out both the importance of their religious network in developing business, but also –ultimately- the primacy of business when push came to shove.

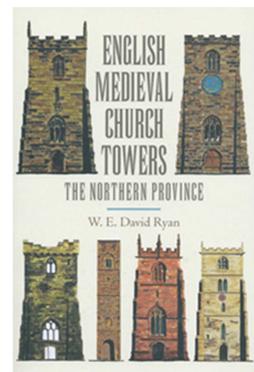
Three other chapters deal with various aspects of urban cultural development which underscore the breadth of the region's growth. Leona Skelton shows how active management of the urban environment was seen as a marker of municipal status in Tudor Berwick, which –despite the difference in location, time period and scale reads well alongside Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton's study of 18<sup>th</sup> century Sunderland, prompting thoughts about the nature of local state power. Then we have Barbara Crosbie's essay on Newcastle's expanding print trade, observing that the local published content made Newcastle far more than a distribution depot for the values and recreations of a national polite culture. Here too we see the confidence and increasing range of choices open to consumers in a growing and prospering region.

The book's overall breadth of scope has been deftly edited together through both impressively thorough chapter cross-referencing and a strong introduction which connects the dots into a compellingly contoured map. It is a valuable work. And as Keith Wrightson's typically perceptive foreword makes clear, part of its value lies in the impetus it should give to further exploration of the North-East in this fascinating period using the rich documentary resources available to us.

**Book Review**  
Hugh Dixon

Ryan, W E David. **English Medieval church towers: the Northern Province** (Boydell Press, 2018) ISBN 9781783273539 £19.99\*

This handsome publication is illustrated with five hundred watercolour drawings of church towers in the eleven dioceses of the Northern Province of the Church of England – from Stanford on Soar, Nottingham in the south, to Ancroft, just south of Berwick. A rich variety of towers were meticulously drawn and coloured, almost stone by stone, by David Ryan an architect whose retirement was 'partly prompted by the enforced introduction of computer-aided design'. Each illustration is accompanied by full location guidance and 'text extracted and adapted from the National Heritage List for England' which is not often a source for velvet prose. There is a sensible glossary of building terms and eleven pages of index.



The drawings are very architectural - each church represented by one (usually western) tower elevation with no indication of the church beyond. Without dimensions comparison is difficult. No photographs show how faithful the drawings are to their subjects or to colours of stone. This is a pity because views of local churches suggest a good measure of success.

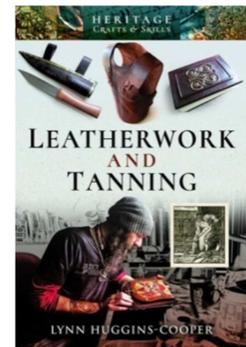
The claim to cover every medieval church tower is misleading. Cathedrals, even those which served for centuries as parish churches (St Nicholas, Newcastle) are omitted. So, too, are central towers which is disappointing for those from Hexham, Hartlepool and elsewhere. But this is also an indication of the book's fundamental strangeness. There is no introduction, no discussion of inclusions or anything else, no historical overview, no

professed purpose beyond celebrating the charm and longevity of a prominent building type. The pictures are an extraordinary achievement, a monument to Mr Ryan's perseverance after escape from CAD. The book is useful for identifying building bits and offers a blinkered addition to illustrative limitations of Pevsners. For those with a taste for western elevations of western towers, painstakingly recorded in watercolours, this is essential. Others may feel a need to look around corners.

\*Boydell have very kindly offered a 25% discount to our members. Orders may be placed online at [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com) or by telephone to their distributor, Wiley, on 01243 843 291. Enter code **BB125** in the special offer box at the checkout or mention it when ordering by phone.

**Book Review**  
Austin  
Winstanley

Huggins-Cooper, Lynn **Leatherwork and tanning** (Pen and Sword History, 2019) ISBN 9781526724489 £12.99



The book opens with a very interesting and clear introduction to, and definition of the concept of 'Heritage Crafts', and highlights the alarming decline in knowledge of traditional skills.

The following chapters trace the methods of tanning leather and its uses, beginning with the clothing, shelters and boats of Prehistoric times. Through reliance on leather in wars, agriculture and industry, the book follows the economic and social significance of the leather trade,

and charts the changes in society, up until the present day, where pop stars wear silver and orange leather costumes, and leather is a part of the 'street fashions' of today.

With passing reference to other cultures, the book mostly features eras of British history, in an enthusiastic, insightful and easy to read style. I was particularly taken with the chapter which describes the industrial-scale city tanners of the Victorian era. Places of horrific insanitary and dangerous working conditions contrast starkly with our knowledge of the comfortable and elegant furniture in drawing rooms, and the fine shoes and gloves, made of leather at that time.

Although, the author explains, many of the traditional and ancient processes remain in use in tanning and leatherwork today, intensive farming methods reduce the quality of hides produced, and there are modern developments in chemical processes which are replacing oak bark tanning. Tanning has always been a very dirty business, but environmental issues can concern us in the future of the leather industry. Likewise the use of overseas tanners for British hides which side-steps our moral and ethical responsibilities for workers' conditions and the control of serious pollution.

A small section of black and white illustrations of old factories and machinery and some leather items, leads on to the (randomly) selected handful of contemporary Artisans, who feature in the next section. Unfortunately, the book features Hexham-based Andy Bates, who is no longer trading in the town. A list of suppliers, methods, courses and further reading concludes the book.

Overall, my impression of this book is a good one, despite at first being put off by the cover design, which gives the impression that stereotypically 'hairy biker' leatherworkers only make copies of ancient weaponry and garments for historical re-enactments! A broader range of present-day leather workers could add to the spectrum of the book, but it does reveal much of interest about this heritage craft. It is certainly to be recommended, not least in the hope of keeping alive this one-time mainstream industry.

**And finally...**

As the country or, at least, the government struggles with Brexit, here's a reminder of times when the perceived threat from Europe was rather more real! From the writings of Joseph Ridley, as recorded in *The Local Historian's Table Book* for April 1798:

*The aspect of affairs at this period was peculiarly alarming, especially in maritime districts, where the utmost exertions were deemed necessary to meet impending invasion; whilst our ports were infested with press-gangs, and our coasts covered with military camps – when to our regular army and county militias, were added auxiliaries of every description – with the French daily expected to land, and with the Irish in open insurrection – at this crisis was formed the loyal corps of Hexham volunteer infantry.*

Inspired by this, local poet Jasper Potts wrote the following deathless verse:

***The loyal Hexham Volunteers***

*Britannia scarce had planted the olive on  
our isle,  
Ere French insidious policy our future  
hopes beguile;  
Regardless of their former league, bent on  
despotic sway,  
Each British subject's property they think  
to make their prey.  
But may each loyal Briton  
Now offer hand and heart,  
To frustrate their intentions,  
And humble Bonaparte.*

*Our island still was loyal when dangers  
were at hand,  
Uniting in one common cause to guard our  
native land:  
Amongst the rest, the gallant sons of  
Hexham's worth record,  
Our sea-girt isle, for to protect, and peace  
to have restor'd.  
And may each faithful subject  
Profess the same intent,  
Our lives and properties to guard  
In peace and sweet content.*

*The oath that we have taken, which some  
seem much to fear,  
Is the duty of each subject as well as  
volunteer,  
Tho' we may have no property to fall a  
prey to France,  
Yet for our friends and families our service  
should advance.  
Ye loyal lads of Hexham,*

*Since danger now appears,  
Join the arm'd association  
Call'd the Hexham Volunteers.*

*While Captain Carr commands we will  
stand firm and true,  
His knowledge as an officer will stand a  
strict review,  
In spite of party slander, our oath we will  
maintain,  
Obedient to our officers, and peace for to  
regain.  
And if an opportunity  
Of courage for to shew,  
I hope the Hexham Volunteers  
Will to their oath stand true.*

*So to conclude these lines I've made, I  
hope you'll all agree,  
And drink a health to Captain Carr, and all  
his family,  
And to our other officers, much praise to  
whom is due,  
And to the Hexham Volunteers, so loyal  
and so true.  
British courage once again  
To England peace restore,  
And plant the olive in a soil  
More lasting than before.*

