



HEXHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Newsletter 86	Editor: Mark Benjamin Tel: 07879263848 editor@hexhamhistorian.org	Spring 2020
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Thoughts from a Chair

Greg Finch

Welcome to our Spring 2020 newsletter. I'm delighted to be able to pass on the news that Ian Hancock, our Vice-Chair, has been awarded this year's prize by the British Association for Local History (BALH) for 'Best Long Article' from amongst the material appearing in the many history journals from the length and breadth of Britain which they review. It has been awarded to Ian for his article 'Forestry between the Tyne and the Derwent, 1770-1870', which appeared in Hexham Historian No.28 (2018). This is a great honour and is the second time Ian has won it, having previously been awarded the prize for his 'The Irish gent and his strumpet: the story of Hercules Burleigh' in Hexham Historian No.22 (2012). Both articles are well worth reading if you haven't come across them before. Many congratulations Ian! As well as a tremendous individual achievement, such recognition by the BALH –for this is our third such award in total- speaks highly of the quality of our annual journal, edited for many years by Mark Benjamin, and recently with Liz Sobell taking over the reins. Today it is one of only a very small number of history journals in the whole North-east region still appearing in print each year. Your continued support as a Society member keeps it financially viable. We're proud that this summer will see publication of the thirtieth issue.

I would also like to give my thanks on the Society's behalf to Alastair Robertson and the Alston Moor Historical Society (alstonmoorhistoricalsociety.org.uk) for passing on to us a number of books on the Hexham area left to their society by a past member. You might be aware that our publications officer Terry Eccles sold these at our meetings late last year and raised about £40 for Society funds. The Alston society has an extensive archive of local material, so if you are curious about that beautiful corner of the North Pennines you might like to know that it is open between noon and 2pm each Saturday in Alston Town Hall.

David Wilkinson

We were shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden death of member David Wilkinson. Although he and his wife Jackie were recent arrivals in Hexham, both had quickly become involved in many aspects of the community, notably with HLHS where David soon joined the Committee. As well as organising the displays at meetings, David also contributed his artistic talents to illustrating articles for the Historian, providing the cover for last year's edition, and had plans for others. Our thoughts are with Jackie and their family.

New to the website

As well as the ever-increasing number of images being added to the Photo Archive, we have also added the following items:

Neither England nor Scotland: Middle Britain, c840-1150, a PhD thesis submitted to St Andrews University in 2015 by Neil McGuigan

A link to the photo archive of **Historic England**. This has recently acquired the archive of the John Laing Construction Company, responsible for much redevelopment in the region. Fascinating though many of the Hexham images are, we do take exception to one of their captions – the one depicting what they call the Tynedale Hydropathetic Hotel – and have offered to edit several of their other captions!

Also on the website

The Hexham Timeline is a long-established part of our website, listing events in the town's history from before it existed(!) to the present day. Entries range from the visits to the town of such notables as Buffalo Bill and Oswald Mosley to the imminent closure of Robbs/Beales. Do have a look and see if there are any events or developments that you think we may have missed – particularly for recent years – and let us know.

Scottish views of Hexham As well as the well-known (and usually derogatory) references to Hexham in local folklore, we have recently discovered some cross-Border sayings concerning Hexham (definitely derogatory!) These have now been added to the *Myths & Legends* section of the *I didn't know that!* page.

Digital Photo Archive
Pete Lee

We are delighted to announce the release of the first version of the HLHS Photo Archive on the HLHS website.

Currently, the archive is primarily populated with over 500 images from the postcard collection of Colin Dallison, which he has kindly donated to the HLHS. A small number of other images have also been added.

Moreover, work is in hand to digitise over 4000 slides of historic Hexham and the surrounding areas that Colin has also donated to the Society. These will be added to the Archive in the coming months (and years!), so watch out for further announcements.

If you have any images that you'd like to submit for scanning into the archive, we'd love to hear from you. These could be of buildings where you lived or worked, street scenes, events, personalities – anything really that contributes to building a picture of Hexham through the ages, and can be either prints or slides.

Forthcoming talks & visits

March 10th. Prof Michael Green: The ghosting of Anne Armstrong

The Ghosting of Anne Armstrong calls up the lost voice of a fourteen-year-old Northumbrian girl who, between January and May 1673, made some of the most dramatic accusations in the history of English witchcraft and then disappeared, leaving behind the mystery of what drove her to insist, in the face of rejection after rejection, on telling so strange a story—ultimately at the cost of her own life. Professor Green's novel is the result of exhaustive archive research.

April 14th. Dr Richard Pears: William Newton, Tyneside architect

William Newton (1730–1798) was an architect who worked mainly in Newcastle and Northumberland. Most of his buildings are stately homes in rural Northumberland, but he also created some interesting public works in Newcastle: The Assembly Rooms, St Anne's Church, the refaced Guildhall, and elegant private housing in Charlotte Square.

May 12th. Dr Rob Collins: The sourcing and dispersal of Hadrian's Wall (Tom Corfe Memorial Lecture)

If Hadrian's Wall was such an important strategic barrier, where did it come from? And where has the rest of it gone? Dr Rob Collins addresses these questions through the work of the Hadrian's Wall Community Archaeology Project (WallCAP).

Excursions : Booking forms for the June & July trips are available now; the form for the Guild Hall trip will be included in the Summer Newsletter. **Please note that bookings can only be accepted in paper form.**

June 17th Talk & guided tour Blyth Battery (afternoon visit)

July 18th Kelso and Mellerstain House (full day visit)*

The date of the third visit, to **Newcastle's Guild Hall**, will be announced later in the year and the booking form included in the Summer Newsletter.

*Members considering the visit to Kelso may also be interested in Alastair Moffatt's book *To the Isle of Tides* – reviewed below

More dates for your diary

March 16th. Final day of Northumberland Libraries Consultation.

If you've not yet had your say on the future of the library service in the County, and in particular, the local studies provision, you can do so online at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NCCLibraryConsultation> or pick up a form at your local library.

May 16th – 17th. Blyth Battery goes to war. Beach battle, WW2 re-enactors, living history display, live entertainment, all rooms open on site. Cafe. Craft fair 10am-4pm Blyth Beach NE24 3PQ

Hexham Library
Mark Benjamin

Following the appointment of Kate St Clair-Gibson, the new County Local Studies Librarian, we have resumed the conversation stalled over two years ago following the sudden resignation of her predecessor! As a result, and with a contribution towards the cost by the Society, a new plan chest is being installed in the Brough Local Studies Collection to hold both the collection of Goad town plans and other maps and charts in the library's collection. Volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* (2nd Series) are being transferred from Woodhorn's Reserve Collection (along with some of the titles previously relocated from Hexham in preparation for the revamp). In return, the Society has undertaken to subscribe to *Archaeologia Aeliana* on behalf of the County, to maintain the run of this important journal. The county has also reinstated its subscription to HLHS and purchased all titles that it has missed over the past few years.

New abbey booklets
Chris Britton

Members will surely be aware that Hexham Abbey houses a large collection of rare and, in some cases, unique artefacts and structures. In 2018 it was decided that modern replacements for earlier leaflets by Colin Dallison and Tome Corfe were needed, taking advantage of the vast improvements in technology available within the Abbey's own resources, and incorporating the latest information gathered by the Conservation Team. A number have been produced as A5 size booklets, profusely illustrated in full colour at a mere £2 each, available from the Abbey Shop or the Welcome Desk in the Abbey itself. Those currently available are:



Painted Panels by *Chris Britton* The Abbey is home to the largest collection in any church in the country of 15th/16th century wooden painted panels, as well as some fine early 20th century examples.

Stained Glass by *Chris Britton* The Abbey has a fine range of glass from the mid-19th century through to the 21st Century, by both well-known makers and lesser known, but excellent, makers and artists

Heraldry by *Chris Simmons* A fascinating subject with examples you may never have noticed, from the 15th century onwards, contained in paintings, hatchments, memorials and stained glass.

Choirstalls and Misericords by *Chris Britton* 15th century survivals, shorn of their canopies but still rich in history and with 34 surviving carved misericords, not to mention other carvings, all fully illustrated in colour.

Flavinus by *Anneke-Susan Hackenbroich* A revised version of the booklet issued a few years back to coincide with a Roman Army event. Flavinus' huge 1st century gravestone has much to tell, ably described by a local Roman expert.

and coming very soon:

Saxon Crypt by *Richard Bailey* Only two such crypts exist, the other at Ripon, both built by St Wilfrid. This booklet is written by the foremost scholar on this subject and incorporates all the latest thinking.

Look out for further titles!

**Wilfrid Gibson
research**
Mike Tickell

I am researching the poet Wilfrid Gibson (1878-1962) who, as most of you will know, was born and lived in Hexham until his move to London in 1912. It may be that a member or members have references to Gibson and his early years in Tynedale which I have missed and I would be very grateful for any suggestions or information.

I am familiar with the Hogg and Armstrong studies, have visited Dymock and have read and reviewed all Gibson's considerable body of work. It is the part of his life in Tynedale which particularly interests me and which is alluded to in many poems throughout his life.

I first became interested (mildly) in Gibson in the 5th Form at Queen Elizabeth's in 1956 when we had his poem "*Flannan Isle*" amongst the examination set list. Over my lifetime I have picked up and memorised some of his poems, usually from the copies of his works in Hexham Library. All of Gibson's 43 publications of plays and poems have been out of print for decades, so this was my main source.

In recent years the Gibson anthologies: *Homecoming* (2003) and *November Gold* (2018) have been produced by Hexhamshire editor and publisher: Hilary Kristensen, who has done a wonderful job in promoting Gibson by making a wide-ranging selection of his work available. These volumes re-kindled my interest. Gibson is also well-represented in Bloodaxe's ground-breaking anthology, *Land of Three Rivers: The Poetry of North-East England* (2017)

The research focuses on the spirit of place in the Northumberland poems of Wilfrid Gibson. He was writing of Northumberland to the end of his career, though he never returned to live here. I would be grateful for any comments. Gibson's poem inscribed on Hexham Market Cross (1901) must have a story?

Please contact me at: m.tickell@btinternet.com or via the Editor

**A Hexham
hangman?**

Nick Wilkes writes: I am trying to find out something of the life of a man called **William Stout** who is described as "of Hexham." For 20 guineas, their clothes and personal effects he took on the job of executing 33 Jacobite prisoners who were hung, drawn and quartered at Brampton, Penrith and Carlisle in October/November 1746. Essentially this is all the literature about the 1745 Rising says about this man. I would like to know more.

If anyone does have any information about the Stout family, please contact Nick at Nicholas.wilkes@btopenworld.com, or via the Editor.

**An
"interesting"
ancestor!**
David Holmes

I suppose, like many family historians, I hoped to find someone interesting or important in my family tree. What I discovered wasn't exactly what I had bargained for. Hexham prison was just one of the ten gaols that had incarcerated my 5x Grandmother, Ann Gregg

My research took me around the world (on the internet) to Australia, America, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand as well as Scotland and England, seeking distant cousins who would provide DNA samples to prove relationships. I eventually traced more than 50 in Australia, and almost 100 in total. This amazing global cooperation finally led me to Ann Gregg, Cumberland's most notorious female criminal of her time, and her story has never been told.

Born in 1756, she was part of, and probably a leader of, the notorious "Gang of Faws". She had fourteen aliases (that I know of) She was sentenced to death in 1777 but reprieved.

She was sentenced to transportation in 1794 and 1824 but never left the country. Incarcerated in ten different gaols in the four most northerly counties of England, she escaped from Carlisle gaol three times and Cockermouth house of correction once.

Ann gave birth to thirteen children; one inside Carlisle gaol and no fewer than three inside Giltspur Street Compter a London gaol. Her husband was also sentenced to be transported but died on a prison hulk. Four of her children were sentenced to transportation; one of whom started a brothel on the journey! A grand-daughter was transported and tried to start a mutiny onboard the convict ship. The story goes on and on.

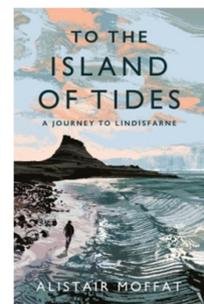
I found more and more newspaper reports about her; then, with the help of Carlisle Archives I discovered lots of historic documents naming her and her family. In an attempt to keep all the information in some logical format, so that my grand children could know about her some day, I started writing the story down. Two years later, the end result was a book, *Who was Ann Gregg?* The book follows her life until Ann's death at the ripe old age of 92. But, of course, that wasn't until after she'd been arrested by Carlisle's police officer "*Black John Kent*" (the UK's first black police officer and son of a free slave) for uttering counterfeit coins in 1839, when she was sentenced to a year's hard labour at the age of 83.

So, did I find someone interesting, important and exciting? You bet I did, and I can't wait to find more. If you'd like to know more about Ann Gregg please see the FaceBook page "Who was Ann Gregg" or read my book

Book Review
Gregg Finch

Moffat, Alastair **To the Island of Tides: a journey to Lindisfarne**, (Canongate, 2019) ISBN 978 1 786869 632 2 £20

This is an account of a recent journey, interspersed with much personal reflection and biography, but is worth reviewing for a history publication because of its treatment of the landscape and times of St. Cuthbert. Many people with an interest in Northumbria and the present-day Scottish borderlands will be familiar with Alastair Moffat's name and works, which includes histories of the Border, reivers, Hadrian's Wall, Tyneside and much else, and several TV series.



In the autumn of 2018 he set out, mostly on foot, from his home in the Borders down the Tweed and Till valleys and across the Kyloe Hills to Lindisfarne, Holy Island, the 'island of tides', where he spent a week of close observation of the land and of his own inner self. As a very personal and auto-biographical account of a journey which documents a great deal of raw self-criticism en route, it could easily have descended into claustrophobic self-indulgence. He never falls into this trap, for these episodes of introspection adorn the narrative rather than provide its centre.

His quest is to imagine St.Cuthbert's world, outlook and motivation by exploring Cuthbert's places in great detail. In seeking to 'get inside Cuthbert's head' Moffat reveals what is inside his own. It is of course impossible to know for certain what guided Cuthbert's thinking, and the author acknowledges this, but his arguments seem reasonable and are grounded in an assured grasp of the context of seventh century Northumbria. This portrays in vivid colours the life of the saint who became a cult figure, evoking the sequestered cells in 'desert places' sought out by early Christian monks, but which were in tension with the political patronage which attached to them, and gave protection in return for the blessing and legitimacy of the church. Thus did St.Cuthbert, born in present-day Scotland, become an English hero, boosted by the propaganda work of Bede in later years. In death he exercised great influence over the development of the bishopric of Durham after the Viking incursions and Norman Conquest.

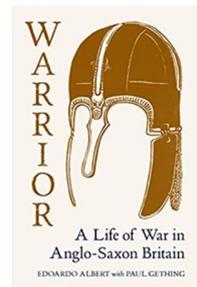
Cuthbert's story has been told before. Even those familiar with it will, however, find thoughtful insights, while those who are new to it will find here a well-written and accessible introduction to the life of a fascinating character during the English incursions into post-

Roman Britain in our region. It is also an endearing account of travel through the bewitching country between the striking Eildon Hills above Old Melrose to the cold tides of Holy Island, where the author found a measure of peace.

Book Review
Timothy Owens

Albert, Edoardo & Gething, Paul **Warrior: a life of war in Anglo-Saxon Britain** (Granta, 2019) ISBN 9781783784424 £18.99

Warrior is the second collaboration between archaeologist Paul Gething and writer Edoardo Albert, following their 2012 book *Northumbria: the Lost Kingdom*. The book comprises an unusual mixture of historical narrative, an account of an archaeology project – the Bamburgh Research Project – and a more general discussion of the history and practice of archaeology.



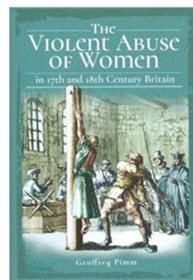
The central narrative is focused on the competition for supremacy among the diverse kingdoms of sixth and seventh-century Britain. It was a time when native British kingdoms such as Strathclyde and Gwynedd rubbed shoulders with the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata together with Pictland and the familiar roster of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – Mercia, Wessex, East Anglia, Kent and Northumbria.

The focus is on the extreme swings in fortune of the Northumbrian kingdom and this story is told alongside the history of the spread of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons. Where possible it is told through the personal story of the “warrior” of the title – and in places is told through fictionalised scenes. What we know for sure is that the warrior was a man born in the Western Isles of Scotland but who met his end at or near Bamburgh in around 635. His bones, together with those of a four-year old boy believed to be his son, were discovered by Paul Gething. The dating of the burial and the man’s geographical origins allow him to be fitted into the story of King Oswald of Northumbria whose exile in Dál Riata and subsequent return to Northumbria and famous victory at the battle of Heavenfield forms the heart of the book.

This history is complemented by insights into both the specifics of the Bamburgh Research Project as an archaeological dig and more general discussions of the emergence and development of the field of archaeology in the British Isles.. The book is elegantly written and would be accessible to readers with any level of existing knowledge about either the history or the archaeology. In the historical sections there is an engaging willingness to be frank about the difficulties of interpreting the past. The explicit admission “this book is probably wrong” was particularly refreshing. There are also areas of imaginative conjecture; I found the theorising about seventh-century battle tactics and the counterfactual discussion of Heavenfield as a victory for Gwynedd particularly compelling. Meanwhile, my almost complete ignorance about the field of archaeology made the insights here, such as details of the sword making process and descriptions of burial practices particularly fascinating. Where the book falls down somewhat is in its structure. There are regular transitions between historical narrative and archaeological discussion both within and between chapters and they interfered with the clarity of the story of the titular warrior in particular and also the more general historical narrative. The maps included in the book are useful and attractive, but it would have been helpful, given the often-complex family arrangements of seventh-century dynasties and a penchant for using very similar names, to have included genealogical tables alongside them. Overall, despite some limitations, there is a great deal to recommend in the book both as a re-telling of an exciting history and an intriguing insight into the world of archaeology.

**Two Book
Reviews**
Liz Sobell

Pimm, Geoffrey **The violent abuse of women in 17th & 18th century Britain** (Pen & Sword, 2019) ISBN 978526739544 £19.99



This well-organised book contrasts the advances in knowledge and otherwise civilised society in the 17th and 18th centuries with the enduring prevalence of barbaric treatment of women in society. The author suggests that women's participation in discussions of religious and other matters led to a backlash which did little to improve their status beyond that of medieval times. It was necessary to adapt the law in order to punish adherents of the non-conformist religions that developed in the mid-17th century. Travelling women preachers, especially Quakers, were charged as vagabonds, or punished for blasphemy or non-attendance at church.

In the domestic sphere, women suffered discipline in the form of physical and often sexual abuse from fathers, husbands and employers, and had very little recourse to the law. In Wales, some limit on the severity of punishment was attempted by allowing only three blows from a broom handle.

In the public sphere, the punishments given to women frequently consisted of hard labour combined with public whipping for which they were stripped naked to the waist, much to the enjoyment of the watching crowds.

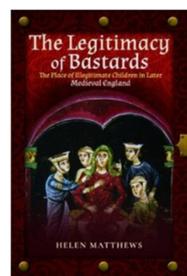
Hanging was the punishment for pickpocketing goods worth over one shilling, or stealing goods worth five shillings from a shop, or cutting down trees, or allowing fish to escape from a pond (!). The sentence was often downgraded to transportation, but there, women were in such short supply that they were subjected to a virtual slave market when they arrived.

Punishments (usually whipping) could be handed out to military wives and camp followers without the need for a criminal trial, nor was any trial needed for flogging women who had broken the rules of a workhouse.

Witchcraft trials proliferated during the 17th century, and many women were tortured and hanged in the waves of panic that swept the country and colonies. Women who were deemed to be troublemakers, "scolding and bawling women", risked death by drowning if they were punished by being put in the ducking stool, as they were often submerged for half a minute at a time. The ducking stool was considered to be a punishment solely for women.

Geoffrey Pimm includes several interesting appendices to his book, including two transcripts of trials where the standard of evidence was woefully low, and a list of 17th and 18th century slang which is surprisingly recognizable today.

Matthews, Helen **The legitimacy of Bastards: the place of illegitimate children in later Medieval England** (Pen & Sword, 2019) 216pp ISBN 9781526757623



Helen Matthews was inspired in her research by a question posed in a review of *The Derbyshire gentry in the Fifteenth century* by S M Wright. The reviewer, Colin Richmond, asked "Would my impression that virtually every Derbyshire gentleman had a mistress and bastards be substantiated?" The author's cautious answer was in the affirmative, and this book can be read as a primer on how to test Richmond's hypothesis.

Royal genealogy in respect of illegitimate offspring has been widely studied, so Helen Matthews has concentrated on the families of landed gentry and wealthy urban inhabitants.

Helen Matthews has a subtly dry sense of humour which lightens the text a little, and includes interesting facts such as the origin of the word 'bastard', which apparently comes from the Old French *bast* 'a pack-saddle' also used by muleteers as a mattress in inns. Hence a *bastard* was a child conceived in informal circumstances rather than in the marriage bed.

Illegitimate children of peasants could be considered to have had fewer problems of status and inheritance than the illegitimate offspring of the richer strata of society, because less wealth was at stake. Research into the fate of peasants and wealthier individuals has to be carried out using different records: manorial documents can demonstrate that bastards could inherit the holdings of a parent, but if the bastard was the offspring of the lord of the manor, then the researcher must rely on wills, property transactions and disputes.

Helen Matthews has made a valuable contribution to a study which could broaden knowledge which is most commonly expressed as a dotted line in a family tree. However, for the general reader, her book is more difficult to assimilate than Geoffrey Pimm's concise account of awful things done to women in the quest for law and order.

Book Review

Helen
Rutherford

Timbers, Frances **A history of magic and witchcraft: sabbats, Satan and superstitions in the West** (Pen & Sword, 2019) ISBN 9781526731814 £19.99

The blurb on the dustjacket explains that the text 'traces the development of the occult in Western society from its roots in Ancient Greece and Rome to Modern pagan incarnations'. Intriguingly, the book is dedicated to 'all my familiars': this may be a turn of phrase but perhaps the author takes more than an academic interest in her topic? If the listed names belong to cats, the stereotypical witches companion, there seem to be rather a lot of them. Timbers describes the book as 'a broad overview of the subject for the novice'.



The chapters are entitled as if an incantation: By Seed and Root...By Bud and Stem...By Branch and Leaf...etc. They contain a chronological examination of witchcraft from classical beginnings, with a discussion of Medea's prayer to Hecate, the Triple Goddess of the Underworld, to the final chapter which examines modern witchcraft. It is quite a dense book and is a serious academic examination of a very dark subject. There is no room for levity. The illustrations include a lead curse tablet and many depictions of devils and satanic goings-on. Interestingly there is a drawing of a trick Bodkin from 1584 - a similar one may have been used to 'identify' the witches who were executed on the Town Moor in Newcastle in 1650.

Timbers seeks to re-examine what has been thus far accepted about witchcraft and reappraise the evidence. She debunks the myth that witches were only women and that the pursuit of them was simply a misogynistic endeavour and suggests that the fear of witches was a broader fear of unknown forces at play in the community. She explains the differences between male and female magic - and in doing so underlines gender stereotypes.

There is lots of mythology and storytelling - from Greece the tale moves to Rome and then Israel where she explains that demonologists and theologians would differ as to the interpretation of the Old Testament story of Saul and Samuel. All of this goes at a cracking pace and by page 27 the Templars make their appearance and the book discusses heresy trials. There is a review of practical manuals of demonology, from 15th to 17th century and discussion of flying and sabbats. Timbers explains the difference between witches and 'cunning folk', who usually used magic for beneficial purposes. She also makes a distinction between the early witches and the later mere dabblers in the dark arts when she explains: 'the procedures of ritual magic were bastardised and butchered until the not-so-educated magician was merely following a fairly simple recipe for magic'.

There is a review of the law relating to the prosecution of witches both in England and in the rest of Europe and an analysis of popular culture, and gender beliefs in the Middle Ages and early modern period. It is a fascinating, if somewhat disturbing read.