

## Warkworth History Society - **October 2014** Report

The new season began with a light-hearted look at the Thirties, Forties and Fifties. Some of us had to admit to knowing quite a bit already due to personal experience, but Andrew Clarke brought a light and knowledgeable touch to three very interesting decades, He explained that his main interest was in the human stories behind the headlines, illustrated with an amazing collection of all those objects which had little intrinsic value at the time, but which immediately evoke the past; washday Mondays with a washboard and posser, a carpet beater to remind us that housework took up most of the week, leaving Sunday for church, and back to the school playground with skipping rope, roller skates, leather football, jacks, whips and tops.

Members of the audience were encouraged to join in with their own memories. Several remembered their Coop dividend number and even more had a tale to tell about the first bananas on sale after the war! With very little prompting, people remembered the wartime parcels of sweets for schoolchildren, their favourite radio programmes, the first TV's, the local cinemas and the films they showed - South Pacific, Ben Hur, Genevieve. Milk was delivered by horse and cart and few people had a car.

The fifties brought Teddy boys and Rock 'n Roll, holidays at Cullercoats, Rothbury and Holy Island, trips organised by the Sunday School or the Club. Christmas dinner was chicken, not turkey, and you might find a new penny and some nuts at the bottom of your stocking, rather than the more sophisticated contents of today.

Andrew interspersed his talk with stories he had collected, read from his book about life in the North-East, which reminded us all of the importance of recording our precious memories before its too late.

## Warkworth History Society - **November 2014** Report

Just before Armistice Day, it was particularly poignant to hear Dr Dan Jackson's stimulating talk entitled 'The Rush to Colours'. The men of the North East joined up in greater numbers than any of the other regions at the beginning of World War 1. Dr Jackson traced the historical background for this fighting temperament, beginning with the military exploits of Roman soldiers on Hadrian's Wall, the war bands of Northumbrian kings and Border Reivers. Our whole region is studded with reminders of past conflicts. Although the Hanoverian era brought peace and

stability, the fighting spirit found an outlet in the large numbers of north-eastern sailors at Trafalgar under Admiral Collingwood. When Lord Armstrong brought profitable arms production to Newcastle, it seemed that the men exchanged the field of battle for the physical challenge of heavy industry. From being comrades in arms, they became fellow workers in the mines, where they formed close knit groups and faced danger every day. They were also very fit, compared to many southerners.

The Northumberland Fusiliers led the numbers of battalions raised in the country, followed by Liverpool, London, Manchester and Durham. By the end of the war fifty-three battalions had been recruited. The Tyneside Scottish were known as 'harder than hammers'; the three Tyneside Commercial Battalions were raised and kitted out by the business community of Tyneside. In all, 21,000 men joined up and it was not for economic reasons - there were plenty of jobs in mining and the shipyards.

Dr Jackson is involved with the Tynemouth WW1 Commemoration Project. 1700 names appear on their war memorials. The national average of men killed was one in eight, but on Tyneside it was one in seven. It was sobering to see a street map showing each death as a yellow dot, every road and square affected. Not for nothing was the biggest cemetery on the Western Front named Tyne Cot. It was both a sobering account and a source of pride for their descendants.

Warkworth History Society - **December 2014** Report - Not yet available

Warkworth History Society - **January 2015** Report

Peter Regan brought in the New Year with an artistic flourish, as he explained the development and historical background of landscape painting in the picturesque North. Beginning with a meticulous 16th century bird's eye view of Newcastle, it was possible to trace the continental and indigenous influences on W.M. Turner and his contemporaries. Years later, landscape was used in various contexts for tourist information and advertising.

In mid 18th century, towns and cities were depicted as half map and half view, creating a tension between accuracy and the aesthetic. There were three painters in particular whose work influenced English artists in the 18th and 19th centuries:

Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa all produced civilised landscapes, usually containing figures, castles or ruins and often with a single prominent tree. The work of Poussin and Claude was more structured than the more dramatic scenes of Rosa, but elements of all three find their way into English painting. Examples of this are by Gainsborough, who portrayed his clients surrounded by the landscape they owned, proclaiming their status.

Northumberland was a favourite source of inspiration for W.M. Turner and one can trace the development of his style in the several paintings of Norham Castle done at different times in his career. Peter showed a selection of Turner paintings including Alnwick Castle, Dunstanburgh, Brinkburn and Warkworth - apart from the well-known view there is also a fascinating picture of the castle from the South, with the estuary in the foreground, showing several large vessels up river. Sir Walter Scott used one of Turner's engravings of Berwick in his book *Border Antiquities*.

Opportunities to see European art had become scarcer after the French Revolution, so that instead of undertaking the Grand Tour, people visited interesting and beautiful places in Britain. The tourist industry was born in areas like the Lake District and a new generation of map-maker illustrators provided information and advice for visitors. William Gilpin, both artist and writer, toured the British Isles with such enthusiasm that he was caricatured in the press, and Peter Crosthwaite sold special maps with drawings, which were appreciated by tourists and would-be artists looking for just the right spot to set up their easel.

### Warkworth History Society - **February 2015** Report

Dr Tony Barrow gave a graphic and informative talk on Whaling in the North East, in which he described the courage and endurance of the 'Greenlanders' who sailed out of local ports up to the Arctic from 1752. They looked for right whales, the earliest to be commercially exploited, being vulnerable to hunters on their predictable migration routes close to land. Blubber would be packed into barrels to be rendered later into whale oil which was an important source of light for streets, miners' lamps and lighthouses in the 18th and 19th centuries. Whale bone also had many uses.

State subsidies encouraged ships to undertake voyages in competition with the Dutch from the mid 18th century. These boats pushed the limits of ship technology in ice conditions. They would sail first to Orkney and Shetland to take on skilled

crew, thence to the southern tip of Greenland. At the end of April migrating whales would lead them up to the High Arctic. British whalers worked seasonally from March to September, while the Americans were at sea for much longer periods, hunting for the sperm whale. These were the toughest of sailors, working in sub-zero conditions, using hand-held harpoons in small boats which needed very skillful handling. There were 5000 men from the North East employed in almost every British whaling port as shown on existing muster rolls.

We saw the work of several artists who were inspired to paint the harpooners at work in dramatic conditions, with a realism that could only have stemmed from their presence at the scene. A particularly brave and resourceful whaling captain was William Scoresby Junior of Whitby, who became the foremost Arctic scientist, collecting specimens and recording weather data, while studying whale ecology. There was a maximum of 50 ships at first, declining to 20 by 1793, and their ports ranged from Berwick to the Tyne, the Wear and the Tees as well as Whitby. The trade finished by 1849 due to declining catches, shipwreck, the increasing use of coal gas and new hunting grounds in Antarctica.

#### Warkworth History Society - **March 2015** Report

With industrial heritage in mind, we invited Michael Taylor of the Robert Stephenson Trust to talk about George and Robert Stephenson, father and son, whose works had such a dramatic impact on our landscape and communications. Strangely, Robert is not as well known as his father, although a prolific and inventive engineer, whose legacy is far reaching.

Our speaker concentrated on the 'Norhumberland Railway: Brunel in Stephenson's Backyard'. George Stephenson, despite a humble and uneducated background in Wylam, became a skilled civil engineer and entrepreneur. Through his early mining experience he developed the use of steam power and eventually founded a company on Tyneside to manufacture steam locomotives. He made sure that his son Robert received the education he himself had lacked and Robert joined the company as a design engineer.

Robert's involvement in the building of the new public railways brought him up against Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Earl Grey had retained Brunel to work on his preferred line North of Newcastle. Brunel produced a new traction system called the 'atmospheric railway', an example of which is still visible at Dawlish, but which is mainly known to those of us who are old enough to remember the cash system

used in department stores. Despite this, it was Robert Stephenson who designed the rival line which was eventually adopted as the East Coast line.

Photographs of Robert's bridges included the High Level Bridge over the Tyne and the Britannia Bridge at Anglesey. It is thought that overwork led to Robert's premature death at 54, within 6 weeks of Brunel. The presentation was done with skillful use of computer graphics, and well illustrated with contemporary paintings. In the short time available it provided an informative glimpse of an extraordinary life.

### Warkworh History Society - **April 2015** Report

Who was Anne Boleyn? What led to her downfall? Most of us think we know her from the many books and films about the Tudors. However, when Professor John Derry returned in April he gave us a masterly exposition of her life and background which separated fact from fiction. Born into an ambitious family with noble connections, Anne had a good education and from the age of 15 lived on the continent. She returned to the English court well versed in sophisticated skills and aware of the new ideas about church reform. Although not conventionally beautiful, she nevertheless charmed Henry to such an extent that he became infatuated at a time that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was failing.

The Tudor dynasty was a new one and, in spite of his high regard of his wife, Henry was anxious about the succession. He was conservative in matters of faith and became convinced that his marriage to his brother's wife was a sin. Against a complicated political background with the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope in conflict, Cardinal Wolsey was unable to procure the necessary annulment and was dismissed. Anne meanwhile held out for marriage, and Thomas Cromwell stepped into the breach to oversee the transition to an independent Church of England, which would allow this. The marriage took place and Elizabeth, the future queen, was born in 1533. No son was born, however, and Anne was not popular, largely because of her abrasive tongue and her penchant for meddling in politics. She had many of her own ideas about church reform and foreign policy. She was disliked by many factions such as the Seymour's, who had their own agenda, should this marriage prove to be as unsuccessful as the first.

In 1536 her indiscreet behaviour with one of her musicians paved the way for Thomas Cromwell to arrange a charge of adultery. Several courtiers, including her own brother, were interrogated and went to the scaffold. It is likely that the

charges were false and that Anne Boleyn went to her death for reasons of political expediency.

Professor Derry gave a lucid and entertaining account of a turbulent period and a remarkable woman.

## Warkworth History Society - **May 2015** Report

### King John at Warkworth Castle?

This was an interesting speculation of Michael Thompson's when he came to talk to Warkworth History Society in May about Magna Carta.

He pointed out that Warkworth escaped attack when King John came North in 1214 to destroy Alnwick Castle, whose baron Eustace de Vesci had conspired against him. Warkworth was then held by John FitzRobert's father Roger, who was a staunch supporter of the king. It is quite possible that the King found a friendly welcome here, although by 1215 Roger had died, and was succeeded by his son John, who chose to join the rebels in opposition to the King.

Michael analysed the significance of the document - its historical background and modern legacy. King John's rule had proved so cruelly oppressive that the Barons were driven to oppose him; by occupying the City of London, they isolated him and forced his compliance in sealing the Magna Carta at Runnymede. The bishops were sent 13 copies of which only 4 survive in Lincoln, Salisbury and 2 in The British Library. The original document sought mainly to impose the rule of law on the monarch and to preserve the liberties of the church and the City of London; most of the clauses were not relevant to the population at large.

Soon afterwards King John persuaded the Pope to repudiate it, resulting in a civil war and invasion by both Scottish and French armies, but after his sudden death in 1216, John was succeeded by his young son, Henry III. As regent, the elder statesman William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, made adjustments to the charter and re-issued it - over the years it was adjusted and re-issued 40 times, with increasing recognition of the rights of every man to justice under the law.

It became the touchstone of revolutionary movements, from the English Civil War

to the American War of Independence, and the French Revolution. It is recognised world-wide as the foundation of democratic freedom and the rights of man.

AGM - The following officers were re-elected: Diana Webber (chairperson), Moira Kilkenny (Secretary), Anne Cashmore (Treasurer). 2 new members, Les Purvis and Richard Jackson, joined Barry Jones on the committee.

Each of the following villages and towns will receive a facsimile of the 1215 edition of Magna Carta printed on parchment:

<b><u>North of England Barons</u></b>	<b><u>East of England Barons</u></b>	
Helmsley, North Yorkshire	Castle Hedingham, Essex	Pontefract, West Yorkshire
Skipton, North Yorkshire	Little Dunmow, Essex	Leicester, Leicestershire
Thirsk, North Yorkshire	Pleshey, Essex	Belvoir, Leicestershire
Topcliffe, North Yorkshire	Stanstead Mountfichet, Essex	Curry Mallet, Somerset
Alnwick, Northumberland	Framlingham, Suffolk	Trowbridge, Wiltshire
Warkworth, Northumberland	Huntingfield, Suffolk	Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire
	West Greenwich, London	Walkern, Hertfordshire

The Magna Carta Trust's 800th Anniversary Commemoration Committee is charged by the Magna Carta Trust to coordinate activities, raise the profile of the anniversary and deliver a number of key national and international aspirations.

Visit [www.magnacarta800th.com](http://www.magnacarta800th.com) for more information.

