

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - April 2013

The chairman, Diana Webber, began by paying tribute to Dr Jonathon West who had recently died. Jon had been a professional archivist and had given much time and effort to compiling a catalogue of our records. The catalogue, available in print and on CD, is now an indispensable tool for many of us. The Society remembered his support and expertise and gratitude and his presence at meetings would be greatly missed. Our condolences were expressed to his widow, Valerie.

'The Widdrington Family' - Karenza Storey

The speaker, Karenza Storey, gave a detailed presentation on the Widdrington family, who trace their ancestry back to the Norman Conquest. Intrigued by the history of her house at Harbottle, built by a Widdrington in the sixteenth century, she told us how she went on to uncover the extent of this prolific family, using contemporary letters and portraits as illustration. There was a history in which religious strife, the Jacobite rising and civil war took its toll. Recusancy led to incarceration in the Tower, deportation to the colonies and the sequestration of poverty. However, the Widdringtons survived uncertain times and kept the flame of Catholicism alive in North Northumberland. The splendours of Widdrington Castle were unfortunately demolished in 1826, leaving little but a bumpy field behind the Church of Holy Trinity. A connection with Warkworth was discovered, through Lady Isabella of Widdrington, who was the ill-fated lover of Sir Bertram of Bothal, the Hermit of Warkworth, according to the famous ballad. One of our members, John Howliston, recalled that her descendant, the late Captain Widdrington of Newton Hall always attended the annual service in the Hermitage chapel on the River Coquet.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - March 2013

'The Battle of Flodden' - Clive Hallam-Baker

Even after 500 years, the words strike a chord deep into the hearts of Scots and English alike. This was a momentous battle with far-reaching consequences. Just how momentous, was revealed in a lucid and knowledgeable presentation from Clive Hallam-Baker at our March meeting. Clive is an acknowledged expert on the battle, involved for many years with the Remembering Flodden project and presently much in demand, both locally and in the media, during this anniversary year.

James IV had assembled an army from all over Scotland, hoping to take advantage of the absence of King Henry VIII campaigning in France. The English were commanded by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, a 71 year-old survivor of Bosworth field, who had mustered the men of the North, during the regency of Catherine of Aragon.

Illustrating his talk with animated maps showing the movements of the opposing forces, Clive explained how the Scots were positioned on the top of Flodden Hill to face a force approaching from the south, but the English astutely marched easterly from Wooler, via Barmoor. Out-flanked, the Scots now faced an army advancing uphill towards them from the north. At this point the topography of the battlefield played a significant part. The Scots army relied on eighteen-foot pikes which were only effective in close formation. After they made the unfortunate decision to move downhill toward the enemy, an area of boggy ground proved to be their undoing and English billhooks, supported by longbow archers, prevailed. We were shown fearsome replicas of weapons, including a pike, a billhook, various arrows and a genuine cannonball.

Aided by France, the Scots were armed with all the latest weaponry including muzzle-loading heavy cannon, but they proved unweildy and inefficient in the face of the lighter, faster English breech-loading field guns. Casualties amounted

to some 10,000 Scots and 4,000 English within the space of four hours. Scotland suffered the loss of her king and the Scottish nobility was decimated.

Clive Hallam-Baker gave a masterly account of the strategy and progress of the battle and the consequent dynastic upheaval, leaving us in no doubt of its historical significance.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - February 2013

'Famous Northumbrian Folk' - Chris Kilkenny

This month we were treated to a whistle-stop biography of several famous Northumbrian folk conjured up from the capacious memory of our speaker, Chris Kilkenny. He chose to take his subjects alphabetically but in spite of proceeding with gusto, he had only reached the letter 'C' before the allotted time ran out - we consoled ourselves with the thought that he might be persuaded to come back with another instalment in due course.

Having a soft spot for our early Anglo-Saxon heritage, Chris began by describing the merging of the kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia under the violent rule of Aethelfrith, whose centre at Bamburgh formed a power base for an area stretching from the Solway to the Mersey. B was for Brown - Capability Brown, born at Kirkharle and destined for such grand estates as Stowe, Blenheim and Chatsworth. Also joining the famous 'B's' was William Beveridge, one of the founders of the welfare state, who lived at Tuggal.

Then came three generations of Blacketts, and one whose daughter married Admiral Collingwood, this brought us to letter 'C'. Excerpts from the Admiral's letters revealed a wise and perceptive character. Continuing the naval theme, our next hero was Joe Baker - Cresswell, commander of the ship which captured U110 thereby providing Bletchley Park with the key to the Enigma Code.

The cavalcade of notable folk included many who had never made headline news, such as the Cook sisters, who smuggled Jews out of Nazi Europe under cover of their passion for opera. Ida Cook was later better known under her pen-name of Mary Burchill. All in all it was an inspiring collection, presented with intelligence and humour.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - January 2013

'Droving and the Livestock Trade in Northumberland' - Dr Ian Roberts

Just imagine the chaos on the A1 today, if one were to encounter a couple of hundred cattle and their drovers, making their way to market! In earlier times it would have been one of the many drove roads used to bring fat stock and store cattle over the border to be sold at fairs and markets around the county. In his detailed talk Dr Roberts referred to the ancient grazing patterns evolving from the seasonal movement of herds, later becoming the 'infield/outfield' system, where animals were kept close by in winter and led up to the shielings in summer.

By the Middle Ages livestock was driven to local markets and large fairs. We were shown locations of tracks used by drovers, some of which have become metalled roads, while others remain as hollow ways or green lanes for walkers to explore. Old Roman roads were often used as they were engineered to avoid steep hills, which tired the cattle. Today's landscape bears witness to these centuries-old activities.

The rise in population during the Industrial Revolution led to an enormous increase in demand. Animals were brought from distant parts of Scotland and were shod at special smithies before reaching hard road surfaces. It was not unusual to see a hundred thousand cattle sold at a fair north of Corbridge. In Bridge St, Morpeth, horses were sold by the clock tower, then cattle, then sheep and finally, pigs, near the site of today's library! Meat was also required in great quantities for naval ships during Napoleonic Wars.

However by the late 19th century, coastal steamers and the railways had become the preferred method of transport as they produced a quicker return of money. Dr Roberts illustrated his talk with well-known slides and some fascinating anecdotes about the drovers' way of life, which represents an important strand in the history of agriculture.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - December 2012

Not yet available.

The best meeting I have attended (Eric Hayes), thanks to our Bailiffgate Museum guests and their 'boxes' of nostalgia, which provoked many memories and much discussion by our members.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - November 2012

'With Bewick on my knee I was then happy': Charlotte Bronte

In November, the Society settled down to hear a presentation about the work of Thomas Bewick, given by Dr Peter Quinn, the Chairman of the Bewick Society. He kindly brought along a precious copy of the Hermit of Warkworth for us to admire, giving a scholarly and well-documented talk on the long and prosperous life of a man whose work re-formulated our ideas of Natural History.

Bewick's life-span of 1753 – 1828 straddled an interesting period which included the American and French revolutions and the beginnings of technological and industrial research. He served his apprenticeship and worked from the family home at Cherryburn, taking time off to walk around Scotland and spend a year in London. At the Beilby workshop he supported his family by doing 'graphic design', producing trade cards, bank notes, silver engraving and sundry items such as ball tickets. Later, he established his own workshop in Newcastle, close to St Nicholas Cathedral,

He is chiefly remembered for his major works: 'Quadrupeds' 1790, a work for children; British Birds, Vol I, 1797 and Vol II, 1804; the Fables of Aesop, 1827; and his Memoir, published posthumously in 1862. His great appeal to the Victorians was borne out by the admiration of celebrities such as the Bronte family and the American ornithologist Audubon.

In his talk Dr Quinn illustrated the technique of box-wood engraving used by Bewick, showing the fine detail on tiny drawings, magnified many times for us on the screen, but still retaining amazing clarity and accuracy.

WARKWORTH HISTORY SOCIETY REPORT - October 2012

We celebrated the ancient Court Leet gathering in October, with a convivial meal, followed by a sea-faring entertainment by Old English, who accompanied their historical account of the notorious North-East press gangs with appropriate music.