

# Friends of Berwick & District Museum and Archives Newsletter



NUMBER 44

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- Friday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2004      Archive Film Night in the Maltings. The Blackhill Campaign - the fight to save Scremerston Colliery. 4.00 pm and 7.30 pm. The Director of the film, Jack Parsons will be introducing the film and be available to answer questions. It will be a popular event so book your seats in advance to avoid disappointment. (see Linda's Archive News for more details)
- Friday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004      Autumn Lecture. "Berwick Shops in the 1930s – and before " by Fred Kennington. Guildhall : 7pm
- Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2005      Friends AGM followed by a Lecture by Shona Alexander. Guildhall : 7pm.

# **OTHER SOCIETIES' LECTURES**

## **AYTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Ayton Bowling Clubhouse.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Tues. 28 <sup>th</sup> September | Silences that Speak (Edinburgh's Monumental Inscriptions): Robin Sinton. |
| Tues. 26 <sup>th</sup> October   | Border Murders: Norrie McLeish.  |
| Tues. 30 <sup>th</sup> November  | The Knights Templar: Archie Shields.                                     |

## **BELFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Meeting Room, Belford Community Centre.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

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|---------------------------------|--|
| Wed. 22 <sup>nd</sup> September | AGM and Members night.                               |
| Wed. 27 <sup>th</sup> October   | War Memorials of Northumberland:<br>Janet Brown      |
| Wed. 24 <sup>th</sup> November  | Hostmen and Keelmen of Newcastle:<br>Mr W. Wheatley. |

## **BERWICK HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: The Parish Centre, Berwick.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

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|---|--|
| Wed. 27 <sup>th</sup> October<br>(Joint meeting with the Civic Society in the Kings Arms) | Mary Queen of Scots: Prof. Gordon Batho  |
| Wed. 17 <sup>th</sup> November  | Heraldry in Berwick and the Borders:<br>Roy Humphrey                                       |
| Wed. 15 <sup>th</sup> December  | Bondington Project: A Report on Phase 1:<br>Linda Bankier, Brian Chappell + Alan Williams. |

## **BORDER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**Venue: Parish Centre, Berwick upon Tweed.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Mon. 4 <sup>th</sup> October  | Round Rectangle Round: Chris Burgess                       |
| Mon. 1 <sup>st</sup> November | Recumbent Stone Circles of Aberdeenshire:<br>Adam Welfare. |

Mon. 6<sup>th</sup> December

Club Members Night: Review of Projects  
carried out during the year. Visitors fee £2.00

### **COLDSTREAM & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Eildon Centre, Coldstream.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Thurs. 7<sup>th</sup> October

17<sup>th</sup> Century Witch Hunt –Sprouston & Kelso:  
David Welsh.

Thurs. 18<sup>th</sup> November

Admiral Lord Collingwood: Dennis Malthouse.

Thurs. 2<sup>nd</sup> December

Berwickshire: A Study of Greenlaw the Old County  
Town: Rev. John Jackson.

### **DUNSE HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Duns Social Club, 41 Newton St., Duns.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Wed. 29<sup>th</sup> September

Jim Clark and the Border Reivers:  
Ian Scott-Watson.

Wed. 27<sup>th</sup> October

A History of Piping: Andrew Ainslie.

Wed. 24<sup>th</sup> November

“When We Were Young” : Fred Kennington.

### **EMBLETON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Parish Church Room, Embleton.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Wed. 20<sup>th</sup> October

The Life and Work of Gertrude Jekyll:  
Mrs Phillippa Hodkinson.

Wed. 17<sup>th</sup> November

Wartime Life in North Northumberland:  
Mr P.M. Rowett.

### **GLENDALE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Cheviot Centre, Padgepool Place, Wooler.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Wed. 13<sup>th</sup> October

Recent Archaeological Work in the Northumberland  
National Park: Paul Frodsham.

Wed. 10<sup>th</sup> November

The Smithsons and those who follow:  
Fred Dyson

Wed. 8<sup>th</sup> December

Border Ballads: Vince Kelly.

## **LOWICK HERITAGE GROUP**

**Venue: Lowick Village Hall.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Tues. 19<sup>th</sup> October

Mining in Northumberland: David Heyward

Wed. 3<sup>rd</sup> November

Chillingham Wild Cattle: Austin Widows.

Tues. 7<sup>th</sup> December

Archaeology of the Milfield Basin: Roger Miket.

## **NORHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Norham Village Hall.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Mon. 13<sup>th</sup> Octobe

Berwick Castle, a Reconstruction: Jim Herbert

Mon. 10<sup>th</sup> November

A Railway Life: Mrs C. Short.

## **NORTH SUNDERLAND & SEAHOUSES LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: St Paul's Parish Hall.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Wed. 27<sup>th</sup> October

AGM followed by  
St Cuthbert's Way: Mr R. Shaw.

Wed. 24<sup>th</sup> November

The Greys of Howick:  
Rev. J. Shewan.

## **NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY** **(North Northumberland Group)**

**Black Bull, Lowick.**

**Time: 10.00 a.m.**

Sat. 16<sup>th</sup> October

Northumberland War Memorials:  
Janet Brown

Sat. 20<sup>th</sup> November

Subject to be Arranged: John Nicholls.

Sat 11<sup>th</sup> December

Christmas Lunch in the Black Bull.

## **ARCHIVE NEWS**

The summer is always a busy time for the Record Office with visitors and other activities and this one has not been an exception.

During the summer and early autumn, visitors to the area come to the Record Office to trace their Family History. We have had lots of visitors doing that this year but it has also been encouraging to see academics using the Office for research. Recently, we have had 3 Professors use very diverse resources for their research – a Canadian looking at emigration to Canada; an American studying the town's Guild minute books in the Commonwealth period and an Australian looking at the Salmon Fisheries Act and the placing of gunboats in this area in the 1860s and 1870s. They have all said that we have great archives here which offer so much potential for research, so hopefully, they will let other people know about them.

Apart from looking after the public, my time recently seems to have been taken up with various outreach activities or helping groups. As part of their Activities week before the end of the summer term, two groups from Berwick High School came here to find out about Crime and Punishment and transporting coal from Scremerston. We have taken part in these activities for several years now and it is a way of introducing the teenagers to archives in a less formal way. Obviously I don't do any work with schools during the summer holidays but this year, Northumberland County Council in conjunction with others, organised a "Summer of Learning" in August and September which was aimed at adults. I led some sessions for them in the Record Office, as well as Wooler and Seahouses Libraries on Local and Family History.

As part of the Life on the Borderline project this year, I set up an exhibition in the Lady Waterford Hall on "Ford at the Time of the Waterfords". The exhibition remained in the Hall throughout the Summer and was visited by a couple of thousand people. I hope to set up another exhibition there next summer on the history of Ford Castle.

September is usually a busy month for the Record Office with outreach activities. This year, for the 5<sup>th</sup> time, I gave an historical talk and limited guided tour of the Council Offices as part of the Heritage "Doors Open" days. We had about 50 people around this year, a mixture of local people and visitors, including my youngest attendee yet – a 6 month old baby !. Organisations start to meet again at this time of the year and so I have given two talks this month – one to the Aln and Breamish Local History Society on Berwick and its Archives and the other to the North Northumberland Branch of the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society on sources in the Office and families I have researched.

This month I am also helping to make preparations for the Archive Film Night in the Maltings at the beginning of October (see article) which should be a very interesting evening.

That apart, my time seems to be spent trying to keep up to date with all the research and general work which needs to be done ! My days are never dull!

## **VOLUNTEERS**

If you have a couple of hours to spare on a Wednesday or Thursday and would like to do some voluntary work in the Record Office, please get in contact. There are lots of tasks to do, including transcribing church registers and other sources, indexing or computer work. If you are interested, just pop in to the Office on an "open day" and we can sort something out.

## **FILM SHOW IN THE MALTINGS – FRIDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER**

### **THE BLACKHILL CAMPAIGN**

You may recall that in the last newsletter, I mentioned that the Archives was planning a Film Show in the Maltings in conjunction with the Northern Region Film and Television Archive. Plans are now well in hand for the event which will take place on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> October. Originally we had intended to only have one showing of the film, however, now we are holding **two – at 4pm and 7.30 pm**. We thought this might be better for those who would like to see the film but were not keen to come out at night. As an added incentive to come along, Jack Parson, who directed the Film, is coming up especially from Wales where he now lives, to introduce the Film as well as to answer questions on making it and his involvement with the Campaign. I'm not sure but I think this will be the first time that Jack has been back to the area for many years – it's over 40 years since he made the film. The Film was made in the early 1960s, using the people who were involved in the campaign. The story is told in the words of those who were involved in the 1959 campaign to stop the closure of the Blackhill pit and their subsequent fight to open their own pit in the area. It is a fascinating documentary of the Coal Industry and life in a mining community in North Northumberland in the late 1950s/early 1960s. There are many video copies of the film in circulation but only one original copy of the film has survived. Jack Parsons, its owner, has kindly let the film be preserved and copied and so this is an opportunity to see the original film on a big screen.

Do come along and see the film. Tickets can be obtained from the Maltings in advance. Price : £3.50 Tel : (01289) 330999

If anyone wants any further information on the event, please contact me on (01289) 301865

### **FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE**

Sheila Pearson has a number of issues of Family Tree magazine which she no longer needs. They are going **FREE** to a good home, if anyone would like them. They can be collected from the Record Office on either Wednesdays or Thursdays.

### **BERWICK GAOL ( THE COUNCIL OFFICES)**

I mentioned in my archive news that I had recently done some tours of the Council Offices as part of the "Heritage Open Doors" Day in Berwick. Whilst researching the history of the building, I came across the following snippets about the gaol which may interest you;

### **BERWICK ADVERTISER, SATURDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 1849**

#### **THE NEW JAIL**

This new place of confinement was tenanted for the first time on Monday. The inmates of the old jail consisting of four men and two women were removed to the new one at seven o'clock in the morning; they were conveyed in an omnibus in the presence of the Sheriff, Under Sheriff

and police officers. The different construction and discipline of the new jail is sensibly felt by the prisoners; they are now locked up separately in a cell about seven feet square, without prospect beyond that space and with scarcely any furniture, or other object that might relieve the monotony.

### **BERWICK ADVERTISER, 28 JUNE 1867**

#### **GAOL ESCAPE**

Some excitement was caused in town Wednesday night when it became known that a young woman had escaped from the Borough prison. The person was Alice Anderson, who, last week was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for stealing a pair of sheets belonging to Jane Clark, widow, Tweedmouth. It appears that on Wednesday afternoon Anderson was engaged in washing some steps which lead from the prison into the yard at its northernmost side, while the Matron of the prison was similarly engaged in the passage only a few yards from her. The Matron, having gone to the steps to direct the young woman's attention to some clothes which were drying in the yard, could not find her and a search for her in the yard proved equally unsuccessful, although assistance for that purpose was obtained. Information was afterwards given to the police who from enquiries learned that Anderson had been seen by several people in the town but it was not until late at night that they succeeded in discovering her at her parent's house in Tweedmouth whither she had gone after dark and by midnight she was again lodged in prison.

It now seems that when engaged in washing the steps she had embraced the opportunity when the matron's back was turned towards her to scale the prison walls. She climbed the iron bars outside the kitchen window, thence the wall until she reached the top and this evidently with greater agility than her appearance would seem to warrant, and having traversed the top of the wall for some yards, dropped down on the other side – a height of 14 ½ feet into a garden plot. There she was seen by some people living near, but not much attention was paid to her. She then made off wearing the prison dress but without a bonnet. A woman living in one of the lanes gave her another dress and thus she passed to the outskirts of town, until favoured by the darkness she returned to her father's house. She can give no very satisfactory reason for her conduct except that she felt prompted to make an effort to regain her liberty.

Linda Bankier

### **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION TO FRIENDS**

Annual subscriptions for the Friends are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January every year. If you would like to pay your subscription by standing order, a form is enclosed with this newsletter. Single membership is £5.00 and family membership £7.00.

If you would like to pay for someone else's year membership of the "Friends" as a present at any time, this can be arranged. Please contact Linda at the Record Office for a Friends' application form.

## ASPECTS OF BERWICK'S CULTURAL HISTORY

### Ghosts in the Machine

As we move once again into that season when children mark Halloween by cheerfully dressing up as characters from gory movies that legally they should be too young to see, I am reminded how poorly off Berwick is for ghost stories. In Eyemouth recently they launched their first highly successful series of ghost tours. In York the ghost industry has been well established for nearly 30 years with half a dozen guides of various levels of competence extracting £3-£4 each from literally hundreds of people per night. But in Berwick despite having many old buildings and winding lanes there have never been, apart from Halloween events at the Barracks and Maltings, any ghost tours. This may well be because there are so few stories. The first Halloween event we staged in the Barracks included local actor Simon Crouch as a storyteller but he had a real difficulty in coming up with anything local apart from the 'Vampire of Berwick'. This tale I want to explore in more detail in a future newsletter so I will just say here that, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is much older than most standard ghost tales, and that it is not about a vampire. There is some other talk of ghostly soldiers at the Barracks but most collections of Northumberland ghost tales will only include for our area the diverse hauntings at Chillingham Castle and the 'vampire'. At the last Halloween event we staged at the Barracks a couple of years ago, we had to be a bit creative and included the spectacle of the ghost of James IV walking through a wall in the museum, on the slender grounds that as the body of the late king was embalmed in Berwick (perhaps in one of the dingy sheds that once stood on the Barracks site) then his ghost would undoubtedly haunt that spot rather than the inconveniently out-of-town battlefield.

It was with great delight therefore that browsing through the recently established database *18<sup>th</sup>.Century Books Online* I came across a *History of Witches, Ghosts and Highland Seers containing many wonderful well-attested relations of Supernatural Appearances* published in Berwick in 1775 by the town's first printer Robert Taylor. The database contains the full text of thousands of 18<sup>th</sup> Century books, fully searchable by keyword, so it took only a matter of seconds to input 'Berwick' and search the hundreds of closely printed pages of Taylor's book. At last, I thought, the lost tales of the hauntings of Berwick will be revealed. But no. Amid masses of tales from all parts of Britain, and Europe, there was just one set in Berwick. A fishwife standing at the bottom of Hide Hill was alarmed to see a black coffin on a cart going up the street. Nobody else could see the coffin. Next day at the same point the same carter fell dead from his cart. This was included by Robert Taylor among many other 'remarkable instances of second sight' from across Scotland. The overall assemblage of the book together with his interesting preface outlying how ghost stories were viewed in the 1770s will certainly repay another look, but as material for a ghost tour it is a bit thin.

Fortunately though, the electronic wizardry of the database does enable the researcher to instantly unlock the text of books that nobody would think of checking for references to Berwick. One such is the marvellously entitled *The Cries of Blood, or Juryman's Monitor: Being an Authentic And Faithful Narrative of the Lives and Melancholy Deaths of Several Unhappy Persons*. Published by J.Cooke in London in 1767 it contains three pages (pp.47-50) relating the tale of one Oliver Lamb who in 1722 became a servant to Mrs Elizabeth Ferguson, who lived in a retired manner in Tweedmouth. Oliver was a model servant, attentive and sober in his habits. He spent his leisure time reading books of religious devotion, but unfortunately "particularly those that write in a mythic style and have a tendency to excite superstition in the mind of readers. Books of this kind often have a bad effect on persons of weak intellects and strong imagination". And so it proved with Oliver, he already suffered from a "paralytic disorder" and soon his mind became troubled and he thought himself bewitched. He wandered the streets of Tweedmouth by night and became convinced that the Devil had appeared to him. He



recounted to the other amazed servants how Satan sometimes appeared as an old man with a long beard who discussed religion with him at length, on other nights old Nick was a young man and they would go wild in Berwick together, the Devil disappearing at the end of their revels with a flash of lightning. Oliver regularly lay awake in bed trembling with fear as the Devil tempted him to commit terrible crimes, and then one night he jumped out of bed shouting to raise the whole house. Everyone hurried to his room where he said the Devil had told him to murder Mrs Ferguson and he was convinced he had. Mrs Ferguson took pity on him and sent for a doctor to give him some medicine and for “a learned divine” to try to talk him out of his delusions. After a while Oliver seemed to respond to this treatment and recovered a cheerful demeanour. Then one morning Mrs Ferguson was found murdered and all her money stolen. Oliver Lamb immediately confessed to the killing saying the Devil had told him to do it. Asked where the money had gone, Oliver replied that the Devil had taken it all back to Hell with him. He was arrested, signed a full confession and pleaded guilty when brought to trial. He was sentenced to death, executed and his body hung in chains as a warning to others. The general mood in the town though was one of pity “as a persuasion prevailed...that he committed this crime owing to the disorder of his mind”. Five months later a highway robber called Robert Millar was arrested for multiple robberies and sentenced to death. Just before his execution he also confessed to the murder of Mrs Ferguson. With his innocence firmly established the remains of the poor Lamb were removed from the gibbet and replaced with the freshly hanged body of Millar. There is no murder mentioned in David Brenchley’s book on 18<sup>th</sup> Century Berwick for 1720-29 but he does note that the records are incomplete for the twenty years between 1720 and 1740. It may be therefore this is a genuine account of an unfortunate miscarriage of justice. It also gives us a tale connected to the supernatural and a suitable Halloween image of a decaying corpse swinging on a wintry gibbet. The hunt for Berwick’s ghost goes on, I’m only half way through the 18<sup>th</sup>.Century database so more may emerge, and if anyone knows a tale connected to Berwick or district from any period let them declare it. At the 2004 Museum Association Conference in Edinburgh recently we were urged to collect not just historic objects but a place’s “intangible heritage” as well, ghosts are about as intangible as it gets.

Send your tales to [museum@berwick-upon-tweed.gov.uk](mailto:museum@berwick-upon-tweed.gov.uk).

*18<sup>th</sup>.Century Books Online* is part of the Electronic Resources Network at the National Library of Scotland.

Chris Green

## **OPEN DOORS DAY - “THE LOST TOWERS”**

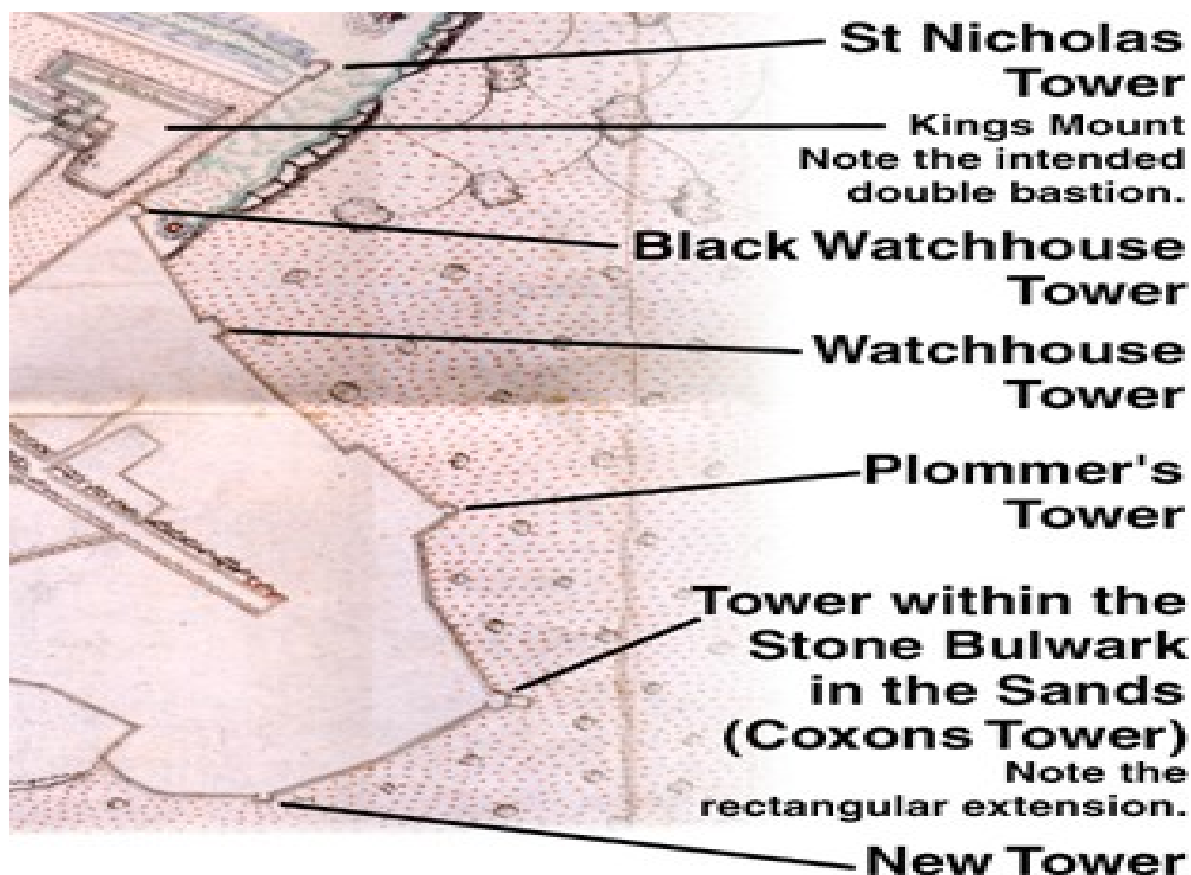
It was quite blustery when we all met on the Walls at Ness Gate. There were fifteen of us (and a dog) and we’d all signed up at the Tourist Office during the week. We waited for Jim Herbert to appear after his first conducted tour of the day. We were greeted, given a map and some notes and off we set. It wasn’t an extensive journey – just from Ness Gate to Wellington Terrace – but the journey through time was long and exciting.

Jim explained that the Border Archaeological Society was in the midst of a project investigating the Castle and Walls of Berwick. We were just going to see a small snippet of the area. We started by looking along the massive construction of King’s Mount behind Longstone View. The site of the Black Watch House Tower was pointed out and then we turned 180 degrees and went along the Walls towards Fisher’s Fort. Jim pointed out the difference in the thickness or height of the Walls indicating changes in eras.

The Watch House Tower's existence became very obvious when the clues were made known to us. We looked at the tops of the Walls and found the 'improvement' of armaments led to sloping tops to accommodate muskets being fired onto marauders. At Fisher's Fort where the double height seats stand next to cannons Jim told us about the various holes in the Walls which allowed supplies in and "other things" went out. One would possibly be a 'sally-port', a gate where soldiers would sally forth on skirmishes. These are to be investigated soon by B.A.S. We moved round to Coxon's Tower and ventured down the stairs to the lower chamber. Once our eyes became used to the darkness we could see two small apertures leading from the chamber, through the enormous thickness of the walls, to the outside. Jim also showed us other structures overlapping the centuries including lime-washing on the rib vaulted ceiling. Out of the darkness and onto the upper storey Jim showed us how the tower might have had a different shape to accommodate the line of the Walls. He showed us alterations in the brick work which indicated a staircase, and evidence that the earth on which we stood was at a much lower level in former years.

On and along the Ramparts until we reached Wellington Terrace where, at the bottom of stone steps lies a hidden door. Once through that door we stepped back several centuries into the New Tower – again a most interesting structure. A long tunnel led into a barrel-vaulted chamber with small apertures leading to the outside world. We found it a bit of a squeeze but knew that in just a few minutes we'd be outside in the fresh air. For a while we could imagine the enormous discomfiture of being a soldier, on duty, in that small dark place. We shuffled outside and noticed the signs on top, in the grass, where the tower had stood. Jim certainly made these ancient towers come alive for us. We had thoroughly enjoyed our trip back in time but felt much more comfortable with the modern world about us as we walked along the Walls to peek into the Bankhill Ice-House and make our way home.

Barbara M. Herdman.



## HOW MANY TIMES.....?

.....have you said, 'Ay, I could write a book about that!' But have you done it?

It might just be worth thinking about!

Yes, I have done it, precipitated in the first place by chance occurrences in Berwick Record Office. '*Clooty Mats and Sheep Shearing*', my wife's childhood story, came about following a conversation with Linda and Sally Bird. '*A Seahouses Saga*', the late Andrew Rutter's book, followed a recording of him for the Record Office Oral History Archive. Andrew had drafted the book; I only edited and published it, but how successful it has been.

One thinks of publishing a book yourself as some kind of mystery akin to conveyancing a house. In fact, it is very simple, the snag being that you have to finance the printing costs and hope you get your money back.

Going back to the initial thoughts of actually writing a book, the thing was to try to find a publisher – not easy! Stockport Borough has published a lot of books on local history so a visit to David Reid, the Heritage Librarian, was the next step. I know David who is quite enthusiastic. Within a couple of minutes of our discussion he produced a two-page photocopy of a family history magazine. It was a quick guide to self-publishing. It even said which printing firm they had used, Parchment Press, Oxford. It advised obtaining ISBN numbers, to be got from Whittakers, London. A block of ten numbers arrived, free of charge at that time. They needed a mathematical brain to work them out or pay £11.00 for Whittaker's computer to do it.

So far, so good. I went down to Oxford to visit Parchment Press, a family firm, very helpful so I had a rough idea of the cost. They would take hard copy or disk. At that time I only had a steam-operated word processor. A bit of careful measuring on page sizes and then transcribe the draft document on to the WP, leaving space for photos (which Parchment said they would process), acknowledgements, etc. The book needed a title. A facet of life in Cheviot winters was making clooty mats, so why not use that in the title. The book was aimed at a local clientele who knew what 'clooty' meant. Thus was born '*Clooty Mats and Sheep Shearing*'. Maybe we should have used 'Clipping' not 'Shearing' as local patois. The long two-fingered typing job being done, down we went to Oxford, taking the photos and the hard copy. They helped us design a cover. All we had to do was pay the money and the 1000 print run was delivered in about three weeks.

It doesn't finish there. How many should we order? How much should we charge, bearing in mind that you have to give discounts to sales outlets? How and to whom do we try to sell it? It helps also to have the book reviewed. The local papers, some local magazines and some trade papers will do so and have been very good to us. So, as I said earlier, publishing on your own is not difficult, but you have to do your sums.

This year, 2004, I wrote and published '*No Cheese after Dinner*', the story of the Northumberland Fusiliers from Berwick captured in France in 1940 and incarcerated in Germany/Poland until 1945. I never sat down and thought 'that might be something to write about'. No, it was another unexpected situation, in fact a phone call that started it off.

At 7.30pm on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2001 I rang 0181 658 3146. This was a normal call, I made it every Sunday. No answer. Gordon mustn't be back from Alan's, I thought, so I rang again at 8 pm. This time there was an answer, but it was Alan. 'Where's Gordon?' 'He's dead' was the horrified reply.

Gordon was my brother, widowed, and that day would have been his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Alan, his son, lived in north London and had just been called to the house across London, in Beckenham, where Gordon lived. Gordon had had a heart attack.

A time for family grief, but later I received a call from Alan Gordon was to have a Humanist cremation, something I never knew existed. 'I know nothing about my Dad's early life or his time as a prisoner of war. I have to write something for the Humanist practitioner, can you write something for me?'

Although Gordon was much older than I, I did know something about his early life and a little about his time as a prisoner of war. He had told me a little when he came on holiday with us, then promptly clammed up. Nevertheless, I did what was asked, wrote a piece, and the service at Beckenham was done with great sensitivity.

That might have been the end but in the 'deaths' in the Berwick Advertiser in February 2001, a few weeks after Gordon's death, appeared that of Stuart Brown, formerly of Horncliffe, hitherto living in Edinburgh. Now Stuart had been another of the Berwick men taken prisoner in 1940. He brought home a German girl whom he married in 1945. He had written a book, 'Forbidden Paths', about his experiences but it was now out of print. Stuart had been a POW in what is now Poland; Gordon had been at a potash mine in Thüringen, in central Germany, nowhere near Stuart, and with different experiences.

With some difficulty I found a copy of Stuart's book and I suppose it was at that point I realised I had Stuart's story and also that which I had concocted for Gordon's interment.

Like Gordon and Stuart, many Berwick men had joined the Territorials in 1939 and gone to France in 1940. Those in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the RNFs were mostly captured in Normandy. Those in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion came out of France via Dunkirk to await a worse fate in being sent to Singapore. They were captured by the Japanese. Gordon's view was that he was one of the lucky ones having been in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and therefore in Germany.

There were still likely to be other ex-POWs around Berwick. They, too, would have stories. I could remember the war. The name 'St. Valery-en-Caux' was embroidered on my mind as were the traumas facing the families then. And yet, Dunkirk was well known; the sacrifice of the 51<sup>st</sup> Division, which included the RNFs, was a forgotten story. It ought to be told, but where to begin?

Gordon's line to me was 'nobody wanted to know'. That came up time and time again and, still not infrequently, since then. But it was not that nobody wanted to know; it was more that nobody knew how to ask and – more likely – they, themselves, couldn't bring themselves to tell – it had been too traumatic.

It is difficult to recall just where I did begin – the germ of an idea was there and, yes, there was a duty to bring the facts out sixty years after it happened. Gordon had died; Stuart had died, how many were left whose memories might be jarred. I knew that Henry McCreath had been a POW in Japan and I had recorded him about the Spittal works some time before. He was a great help, suggesting I contact Willie Stoddart. Willie had been with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion and had been in Poland.

I made an appointment to see Willie and found him interested and helpful. That led to more visits to him but also provided another vital link. I'll come back to that in a moment. Going back to the problem of research, I thought that there had been published, at the end of the war, a Roll of Honour of men and women from Berwick and district. Another remarkable coincidence came about. I called at the Record Office, asking Linda, inter alia, if she had any information

about the RNFs at St.Valery, etc. 'Somebody has just been in a few minutes ago.' Using the Record Office and hearing my request, another voice popped up. The 'somebody' had been Eric Middlemiss and the 'voice' was his wife, Dorothy. I knew them both from school.

It transpired they were doing research into that very thing as Eric's father and his Uncle had both been POWs in Poland. Not only that, but his Uncle, Speedy Middlemiss, had given the 'Berwick Journal' his story after he came home in 1945.

That was a major breakthrough and I was able to get a copy of Speedy's story, the newspaper report about St.Valery when it happened in 1940, and the Roll of Honour. Speedy Middlemiss' story proved absolutely invaluable as it was fresh in his mind when it was given to the Berwick Journal. I just wonder how he managed to give it out in his likely traumatised state.

But going back now to Willie Stoddart, he told me there was to be a reunion for ex-POWs at Doxford Hall in June 2002. It would be worthwhile trying to get an invitation. This event was to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, but also part of the annual event for the disabled organised by Brian Burnie at Doxford Hall. The invitation was sought and obtained and off my wife and I went on that fine June day. It was a very large gathering; entertainment by local schools and others; fish and chips by helicopter, etc., etc., and Willie and Henry McCreath present. There was the opportunity to find ex-POWs who had been at the same 'establishment' as Gordon, Stalag 9C. We met many people there but there were three really major 'finds'.

There was a National Association for Ex-POWs of which I could, and did, become an Associate Member. That Association has made available to me a vast range of information and their quarterly newsletter is excellent. Entries in that have generated all sorts. Anyone with prisoner of war interests should consider joining. A tannoy about Stalag 9C brought me into contact with Jim Charters, a former POW from Ashington. Over succeeding months, I was in touch with Jim and we went to visit him. He had a range of artefacts and photos. Thumbing through the many groups of 'happy' POWs taken by the Germans was one. We had to look twice. In the group was none other than my brother, Gordon. Previously all we knew was Stalag 9c. Now we knew he was at the working group AK 37 at Kalischact Volkenroda, with Jim and Jim's brother, Jack. Out of 2446 prisoners held at Stalag 9C, here was Gordon – a needle in a haystack.

From either Jim, or the POW Association, I obtained Red Cross reports and other items relating to the camps. With our twin town contacts in Germany, I got in touch with the International Liaison Officer at Heilbronn, whom we know well. She tried, unsuccessfully, to get information from the German authorities dealing with Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora. However she did suggest I make contact with the tourist people at Bleicherode, the town nearest Gordon's working camp. From them I learnt there was a recent book celebrating 100 years of mining in that town and area, also a book about the mining community there. Complimentary copies arrived with a bit of information about the POWs – all in German, of course.

Jim Charters remains ever helpful and informative but how much effort did it take these men to come to terms with their experiences. Only in May 2004 did Jim say, *'An experience like that never leaves you and for a long time after the war I still used to hide from planes if I heard one going over my head. It was a very difficult experience and one that I have only recently managed to talk about.'*

Much further back in the text I said there were three particular sources found at Doxford Hall. The third was Dick Taylor and I don't even know how I encountered him. Dick was another ex-POW, ex-Territorial, and former Berwick. He had been with Stuart Brown in the early days of captivity until they were split up when Dick went into hospital. Unlike Willie Stoddart and the Middlemiss brothers who faced the near 1000-mile 'Death Marches' in January 1945, Dick was

overrun by the Russians, making his way to Odessa. At one point on the route to Odessa, Dick encountered a Russian officer. Food was short and Dick complained about it. The officer's reply, in perfect English, was, 'sorry, gentlemen, there will be no cheese after dinner today.' Dick felt able to talk and we remain in touch. It seemed the more interest I had, the more information came to me.

On one day, we had gone to Borewell Farm for a coffee. Sitting nearby were two ladies, one of whom we knew. Passing the time of day, we were introduced to the other one. It was Joan Watson, whose father, Jimmy Fuller, was a former POW. Another call to a friend at Wooler, Alan Brown, produced quite by chance letters, photos and a wartime diary from his late father-in-law, Peter Robson.

Having gleaned so much information the time came for a decision whether or not to go ahead with the book now or await more stories. Given the interest with WW2 Experiences through BBC2, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-day, etc. the decision was to go ahead with it and I took the text to Oxford for printing. Two weeks later, 'No Cheese after Dinner' was delivered and the process of getting it reviewed and sold began.

That barely done, more bits and pieces appeared and continue to this day to come.

*'As Jim and Jack Charters wended their way across northern France in June 1940, they paused in the square of the small town of Wingles. Jim quickly wrote a scrap of paper giving his and his brother's name and number, and their mother's address in Ashington. He passed it to a lady standing nearby. That lady, Madame Marcelle Grenier, wrote to Mrs. Charters telling her her sons were prisoners but in good health. It went from Wingles via Geneva and arrived in Ashington before official notification.'* Jim still has that letter.

Having had the book printed, the thought went through my mind, 'I wonder if any of the Grenier family are still in Wingles'. A letter to the local Mairie brought a reply. It came from Madame Grenier's son. He was absolutely delighted when I phoned to thank him and sent a photo of her wearing her medals. But that is another story; a story of a remarkable, brave French lady.

Those prisoners of war who made the 'Death March' from Poland in January 1945 were only a tiny part of the flood of people moving west – the German population of East Prussia and Hinter Pommern moving west into Germany as the Russians advanced. Countless thousands of those German civilians lost their lives in the process. A friend of ours met through twin town connections was one of them. She was a fifteen-year-old girl then with her little brother dying on the way. At the moment I am translating her story of her time as a 'fluchtling' in 1945 and the aftermath. Maybe I have material for yet another book.

So, next time you say, 'ay, I could write a book', then maybe you should do just that!

**Fred Kennington**

35, Corbar Road,  
Stockport.

August 2004.

Published :-

Clooty Mats and Sheep Shearing  
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## SNIPPETS FROM THE BERWICK ADVERTISER, 27 APRIL 1844

### SHIP NEWS – “THE TWEED “

A LETTER FROM Falmouth, of the 21<sup>st</sup> inst, from the Master of the “ NORHAM CASTLE “, observes that a fleet of vessels were there detained by calms; that the new brig, the TWEED, which left the Thames with them, was the only one which had been able to make way, and he had no doubt she was by that time half way across the Bay of Biscay. She was the fastest sailer the writer had ever seen.

15 February 1845

### TURNIPS TO LET

SEVEN ACRES OF WHITE TURNIPS, to be eaten by sheep. Not to be repeated.  
Delaval Arms Inn, Ford February 14<sup>th</sup> 1845.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1845

### BERWICK AND KELSO COACHES

The BORDER UNION COACH will start from Berwick and Spittal on Monday next at eight 'o'clock am, and continue to run Three Days a Week during the Bathing Season to Kelso, where it will meet the FAVOURITE COACH from Hawick and Jedburgh : and will leave Kelso on its return at Twelve 'o' clock noon, except on Fridays when it will leave at Four 'o'clock pm.

The TWEEDSIDE COACH will also start from Kelso on Tuesday next at eight 'o'clock am, and will continue to run to Berwick and Spittal on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, where it will leave, on its return, at Three 'o'clock Afternoon, except on Saturdays when it will leave at FIVE. Passengers and Parcels will be booked at the Cross Keys, Kelso, Mr.Ford's, Coldstream, Mr.Curry's Cornhill and the Kings Arms Berwick..

Coldstream 17<sup>th</sup> June 1845.

### LETTER FROM EDITOR

Thank you for the input regarding the format of the Newsletter and possible cost cutting ideas but as you can see we haven't made any changes yet! **A bigger thank you** to all those people who so kindly send us articles (particularly those who aren't in need of a sling!)

Please don't forget any **interesting stories, items, events, letters or queries** for the newsletter will be most appreciated. You may give them to Linda or send them by E-mail to [gallagher@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:gallagher@ukonline.co.uk) or by post c/o. Records Office, Wallace Green, Berwick upon Tweed.

**Yvonne Gallagher**  
Hon. Editor

