

*The report of a visit to Holy Island in June 1894 by Mrs Arthur H. Berger, and published in the Scots Magazine of Saturday 1 September 1894, page 285. Mrs Berger was born Janet St Clair Colquhoun and in 1872 married Arthur Hastings Berger, M.A., who was the vicar of Cobham in Kent. She published her impressions of people and places in various magazines, and also wrote a book 'Lux Diurna' with an introduction by the Lord Bishop of Winchester. The Mrs Hewitt referred to in the text may have been Agnes Hewitt, who, with her husband Thomas, is recorded in the 1901 census as being the proprietors of The Victoria, in Bamburgh.*

## **A JUNE DAY ON HOLY ISLAND**

**BY MRS ARTHUR H. BERGER**

During a charming little sojourn at Bamborough, and after making expeditions to the Farne Islands, Dunstanburgh Castle, Warkworth, etc., we determined to see something of Holy Island and the far-famed Priory of Lindisfarne.

We were assured that it was perfectly safe to cross at a certain part, during the low tide, so as to avoid going a long way round, and also to enjoy the beautiful drive on the sands, so noiseless, and so delightful.

We therefore engaged a comfortable little carriage, and a driver who knew the crossing well.

Unfortunately, we were a little late in starting - some letters having to be answered - so that when we arrived at the spot, the tide, alas! was flowing too strongly to attempt it. Though disappointed at the time, we were afterwards glad to have driven over those soft sandy downs, in the quiet morning sunshine, and as we had the whole day at our disposal, we were not curtailed of our time on the island.

Our driver recorded for our entertainment how a certain doctor, not many years ago, thinking he knew the crossing well, attempted it in the dusk of evening, lost the track, his dog-cart sticking fast in some soft sand, and finally he had to flounder out with his horse as best he could, leaving his cart behind him! Next

morning there was no trace of it, but a few days afterwards it was discovered some miles away, cast up on the shore. Arrived at the spot where visitors are ferried over, we quickly engaged the services of the ferrymen, and were soon landed on the island not far from the beautiful Priory. "Being somewhat like Iona and its nearness to Bamborough, the home of King Oswald, King of Northumberland, the saintly Aiden selected it as the spot whereon to found his church and form his little community of monks. The Priory was founded about 1095, the architect being a monk of Durham named Edward."

The situation was perfect, wild flowers and green grass one every side, while the grey ruins were covered with sweet yellow wallflower, and in the distance shone the bright blue sea, with the white waves breaking on the Farne Islands.

Another pleasant day left more pleasant memories, and the kindly vicar, who shows visitors over the church and Priory himself, explained it all most carefully, and told us how St Cuthbert, after being made Bishop of Lindisfarne, got weary of it in two years, and retired to the little island of the Cormorants, where he remained until called to his higher home above.

The base of the cross he put up while at Lindisfarne still remains in the old churchyard, and no bride is considered likely to have a happy married life unless she jumps over this stone, which she is always helped to do by a stalwart fisherman on each side.

We were shown some of the St Cuthbert's beads, which the vicar's little daughter collects on the shore, and which she sells to visitors for the benefit of the life-boat on Holy Island.

We carried off some to show and give to different friends whom we knew would like to see them. I insert a small account of these beads, which may be interesting to some.



St Cuthbert's beads

“On the seashore are occasionally found the iron stone called St Cuthbert’s beads, which his ghost is declared to manufacture seated on one rock, and using another as an anvil.”

“And fain St Hilda’s nuns would learn,  
If on a rock at Lindisfarne  
St Cuthbert sits, and toils to frame  
The sea-born beads that bear his name.”

*Marmion*

“When single, the beads are called Trochites, when several are united together Entrochi. They are believed to be portions of the stone lilies. On the Continent they are called St Boniface’s beads.”

We next inspected the old castle, which stands close the shore, probably built in 1539. It is rather a bare and somewhat uninteresting old place, now occupied by soldiers, and we did not feel attracted to spend much time over it, so returning to the ferry-boat with two fine lobsters in our luncheon basket, we were met by our little carriage, and taking care to be in time for the low tide, we bowled along the fine hard sands, though occasionally stopping to dart after some attractive shell, crossed at the right point, and reached Bamborough about five o’clock, with another pleasant day added to our already long list, and quite ready for the welcome “cup of tea” which Mrs Hewitt (kindest of landladies) had prepared for our return.



One word for noble Bamborough Castle, which daily looked down upon us from its lofty height, and which cannot be better described than in Sir Walter Scott’s lines in “Marmion.”

“Thy tower, proud Bamborough, mark’d they there  
King Ida’s castle, huge and square;  
From its tall rock looks grimly down  
And on the swelling ocean frown.”

We spent the last afternoon going over the keep, inspecting King Ida’s chain, the links of which were quite a foot long, and proportionally thick, noted all the fine old armour collected in hall and armoury, saw the sweet face of Dorothy Forster in several old pictures, looked down the deep well (170 feet) cut out of the living rock, walked round the battlements at the top, and finally paced up and down the long stretch of sand at the foot of the Tower, thoroughly charmed with the castle, the islands, the air, and the scenery, and only wishing it had been possible to have added another week to the expedition.

