



# Friends of Berwick & District Museum and Archives Newsletter



NUMBER 112 – MAY 2022

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June  
2022

Platinum Jubilee Exhibition ; Berwick-upon-Tweed 1952 – 2022. Photographic Exhibition in the Town Hall, Berwick. See article for further details.

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Online Talk : In a Manor of Speaking : An introduction to manors and manorial documents : Beth Elliott. Starts at 7pm and booking via Eventbrite -

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/northumberland-archives-30770439808>

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>  
September

Berwick Heritage Open Days – save the dates.  
Open buildings, talks, walks. More details in  
next newsletter.

## **OTHER SOCIETIES' LECTURES**

**As most societies do not meet in the summer months, we have only listed those who will have meetings prior to September.**

### **BELFORD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Bell View Resource Centre**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Wednesday 25th May

Famous Gardens in Northumberland: Geoff  
Hughes

### **BORDER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**Venue: Parish Centre, Berwick**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Monday 6th June

Cresswell Pele Tower: from Reivers and  
Ruin to Restoration: Barry Mead.

### **NO MEETINGS IN JULY OR AUGUST**

Monday 5th September

Dave Fell (tbc) – Northern Archaeological  
Associates. Lecture about the excavations  
at Berwick Infirmary. To be held at Berwick  
Guildhall.

**COLDSTREAM & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Leet Room, Coldstream Community Centre.**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Thursday 9th June

Summer Field Trip-Longridge Towers:  
Stuart Bankier

**NORHAM AND LADYKIRK HISTORY SOCIETY**

**Venue: Norham Village Hall**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

Monday 13th June

James Hutton, the Father of Geology:  
Denise Walton

Monday 11th July

Title to be confirmed: Elizabeth Devon

**TILL VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**Venue: Crookham Village Hall**

**Time: 7.30pm**

Wednesday 1st June

History of Textiles: Mike Oliver

**NO LECTURES IN JULY AND AUGUST**

Wednesday 7th September

Beginners Guide to Orkney: John Reid

## ARCHIVE NEWS

This last quarter has been incredibly busy in the Record Office for one reason and another. We have been involved in a number of things which it is probably easier to list :

### **Bamburgh Churchyard Survey**

Work is almost finished on this project which is part of the lottery funded Accessing Aidan project. The churchyard has been resurveyed and the entries all checked . We're now indexing the completed survey and the gravestone photos which have been taken. The last bit of the project is to collate the family history research which some of the volunteers have undertaken. In mid May, I'm giving a short presentation about the project at the Accessing Aidan/Bamburgh Bones Conference in Bamburgh.

### **LEARN and Education Work**

The Photo Centre Module on our Digital Education platform is now live on the Northumberland Archives website. You can view some of the photos on - <http://www.northumberlandarchives.com/learn/photo-centre/> .

Education wise, I have been doing a lot of work recently. As part of our Jubilee Project, I have run Platinum Jubilee workshops with 7 local schools, creating a timeline for the Queen and Berwick. This has been really enjoyable. I have also run a workshop at the Grove School about Holy Island which went down very well on a Friday afternoon. Now we're running workshops in the office for Year 8 pupils at Tweedmouth Middle School on the First World War. This is part of their English project on writing letters from the Front. Finally, we're also working with Newcastle University and a student intern on creating an online Palaeography Module for volunteers and students.

### **Opening up**

As part of getting back to normal, the Record Office has now extended its opening hours and is encouraging more people to come in. You don't need to book if you just want to look at our family history resources on the shelves or ask a question. Just appear! We can also have more people in our space. Our new hours are

**Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9.30 to 12.45 and 2 to 4.45.** Please do pop in or get in touch if you want more information.

### **Outreach**

I have given a number of talks recently to various groups including the following - Belford History Society (Ford at the time of the Waterfords); Lowick Heritage Group ( Irregular Border Marriages); Friends of the Parks ( History of Berwick Parks); a Canadian Genealogical Group ( Sources for Family History on the Scottish Borders ) and Newcastle University Family History Forum ( 20<sup>th</sup> Century Photography, Social Media and Family History – How to Collect Information ).

### **Platinum Jubilee**

The Friends have been awarded a grant of £5950 from the Community Foundation and the Arts Council for a Platinum Jubilee Project. We only found out about this at the beginning of April and so it has been a challenge trying to get everything in place. So far we have run a series of 2 workshops with 7 local schools to create cyano prints and are now creating an exhibition for the Town Hall, producing an 8 page tabloid commemorative newspaper and mounting a small exhibition at the Maltings. Cameron is working with me on this. It is a tight timetable but we will get there and so, do support us over the weekend.

### **Staffing**

The Record Office now has two new members of staff who are working with us on a part time basis. For the next year, Cameron Robertson will work two days a week as a Digitisation Assistant on the Photo Centre collection. He will be digitising and cataloguing the images, posting images on social media and generally promoting the collection to a wider audience. This post is being supported by the Community Foundation, Northumberland Archives Charitable Trust and the Friends. At the moment, Cameron is digitising content for the Platinum Jubilee exhibition and is finding some wonderful pictures we didn't know we had ! Our other new member of staff is Beth Elliott. Beth is an Archivist who will be doing cataloguing and other work for me but then also running the Life in a Northumbrian Manor Project for all of Northumberland. If you want to know more about manorial records, come to her online talk at the end of June.

## **Twixt Thistle and Rose**

Work has continued on this project. Volunteers are still coming in on our public days to continue their work and we are hoping to start our volunteer sessions again in July. In the meantime, we have been editing the volunteers work and uploading more of it on CALM. An additional 950 entries have been added recently relating to 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century material. There are now over 14,250 items in the catalogue for this collection.

So, life in the Berwick Office is never dull!

*Linda Bankier*

## **HOW WAS THE QUEEN'S CORONATION CELEBRATED IN THE AREA?**

In the last newsletter, I touched briefly on the Queen's Coronation and mentioned the gift of chocolate to the Under 5's. We've now got a picture of the tin and the actual chocolate! It's very clear from the newspaper reports that everyone was definitely ready to have a big celebration and there were lots of street parties and other events in Berwick and the surrounding area. From the various newspaper articles, it's apparent that they all had great plans but unfortunately the weather was awful on the day which curtailed what they could do. However, they did still enjoy themselves. Here's a flavour of what went on in the area from the Berwick Advertiser.

### **Berwick Advertiser, 4 June 1953**

#### **GREENHAVEN**

The Old Folks at the Greenhaven spent all day indoors. They watched the TV programmes and at both lunch and tea, special treats were put on by Mr H Broadbent and the Matron, Mrs Broadbent, For lunch there was a bag presented to each of the old folks which contained a Cornish pastie, a cheese sandwich, two fancy cakes and a scone. Bottles of beer

and lemonade were also handed round and biscuits. For tea, they had chicken and tongue salad, followed by fruit salad, jelly and blancmange. At the conclusion of tea each of the old people were given 2lb tins of toffee.

### **MARRIED FAMILIES CAMP**

The strong wind at the Magdalene Fields Married Camp blew the Television aerial round and interfered with the reception, and it was feared that there would be no view of the Coronation procession, for the children and their parents. However, ingenuity prevailed. No one could climb the tall, slim pole on which the aerial was erected, but with the aid of a long line and a sparking plug spanner tied on the end, someone managed to "hook" the all important "H". In this way, they were able to adjust the aerial, and the show went on.

The spirits of the children and the adults were not dampened.

During the afternoon, the various gifts were handed out to the families. Tea was served and the children received their souvenir mugs. The under fives also received the Mayor's gift of chocolate.

The sports were cancelled on account of the weather and, in the evening, the social evening planned was also cancelled in order that the company could watch the TV.

### **THE GREENSES**

The children were the most thought of at the Greenses Coronation celebrations. The youngest were babes in arms and the eldest were in their early teens. The adults were present, of course, but the children came in for all the plums.

But the youngsters put on a good show in their fancy dress parade. Although the weather cancelled out their march down the Greenses and forced them indoors to the canteen at Lord's Mount Mill, the gaily coloured costumes of the children brightened up the usually dull works interior, and the tables were beautifully laid out with all things which children are fond of. Ice cream, fruit, lemonade and cakes by the hundred were all there in plenty. Enough to say that justice was done.

After tea the children received their Coronation souvenirs. .... The day ended with a programme of dancing and games.

### **FLANNIGANS**

Nearly 60 members of the Flannigan family and friends gathered in the Greenses, where they had tea. Music was provided by a radiogram, and each child received

paper hats, sweets and other fare to mark the occasion. Later in the day, the party held a dance, and despite the weather, the entertainment and re-union was enjoyed.

### **HIDE HILL**

Hide Hill's two committee members have between them raised approximately £10 In the last week for their Coronation celebrations. They are Mrs Williamson and Mrs A Aiston.

A special invitation was accepted by 86 year old Mrs Wakenshaw to attend the celebrations together with the 19 children. Tea opened the programme served in Mrs Williamson's house by the committee. Suitable indoor games were played by those present. Coronation souvenirs were chosen by the children from tea spoons, mugs or propelling pencils. To round off this notable day, the children were the guests of the Theatre Cinema management at the evening performance. Fruit, lemonade and cakes were all donated and were handed round during the afternoon's events.

### **BRIEF NEWS**

Her Majesty's Motor Minesweeper 1038 was open for public inspection on Sunday afternoon and again on Tuesday and many local folks took the opportunity of looking over the trim grey-painted craft. The minesweeper had docked at Tweedmouth on Saturday afternoon and she will leave again in a few hours time. The minesweeper's football team lost 6-3 in a match with Depot KOSB on the Stanks on Monday.

The opening of the new Coronation Garden in Flagstaff – it will be one of the town's showpieces shortly – was to have been staged on Tuesday evening, but because of bad weather the ceremony was postponed until Friday. The fireworks display will also take place on Friday. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion RNF were to have beat Retreat on the Stanks but this too was off and so was the football match between Berwick Select and Coldstream Hearts. The Hearts players made the journey and were entertained to tea by Charities Cup officials.

The wind and rain which tried hard to ruin Coronation Day tore flags from their positions on Borough houses and blew over a "God Save the Queen" sign at the Tweedmouth end of the Royal Tweed Bridge.



The Berwick-on-Tweed Old Age Pensioners Association have distributed 730 caddies of tea to pensioners throughout the Borough and Scremerston and Ord.... Today the pensioners leave on their annual outing, brought forward so as to make it a Coronation Treat.

*Linda Bankier*

**PLATINUM JUBILEE WEEKEND,  
4 & 5 JUNE 2022 – WHAT IS HAPPENING  
AND VOLUNTEERS WANTED**

If you are in Berwick on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> June, please do come along and support our Platinum Jubilee exhibition – Berwick-upon-Tweed 1952 – 2022. It's taking place in the Guildhall on Saturday 10 – 4 and on Sunday from 11 – 4. There will be photographs of Berwick during that period, including royal visits, as well as some artefacts and also a Berwick timeline. We also hope to show some Berwick films in the Council Chamber and have some children's activities. Refreshments will be available. Please do come and support us. Volunteers have been helping us find information for the timeline and Cameron Robertson will be using the Photo Centre collection and other archive images to create the exhibition. Copies of our free commemorative newspaper will also be available there.

We are still looking for volunteers to help us over the weekend. If you can spare a couple of hours and would like to steward, man the Welcome Desk or help with the refreshments, please contact John Spiers – [jdspiers@btinternet.com](mailto:jdspiers@btinternet.com) . Just let him know when you would be available and what you would be willing to do. John will sort out the rota and get back in touch with you.

*Linda Bankier*

## MUSEUMS NEWS

### **A new exhibit for Berwick Museum...from the time of saints.**

Friends will be delighted to hear that we have recently made an exciting new acquisition for Berwick Museum, one that has excited much comment from experts in early medieval history. After much work applying to grant giving bodies at the V & A and the Headley Archaeology Fund, added to a generous contribution from the Friends, we have raised the funds to buy an important item of treasure trove which was uncovered in Ord just before the pandemic struck ...

The item is a very rare example of an Anglo Saxon gold pendant cross; an exceptional object, it is of special importance because it has its owner's name inscribed across it in runic script. Runic inscriptions on objects are rare and even more uncommon on crosses, making this an exceptional object, with few clear parallels. This means that we are potentially looking at an object named for the earliest Northumbrian individual to be represented in the collections.



There has been much discussion about this runic inscription, which reads 'MFMRNÞ'. This can be translated as Eardwulf, or Eadruf. Intriguingly, this would be a "hitherto unknown and etymologically mysterious name" according to expert Professor John Hines (University of Cardiff) - potentially making Eadruf a new addition to recorded early medieval names.

We do not know who made the item, but its plain design suggests a local maker rather than it being an import from Scandinavia – there are no inlaid garnets or interlace patterning such as are seen in the Sutton Hoo treasure or the cross belonging to St Cuthbert, now in Durham Cathedral. Moreover, the gold content is relatively low (12 carat). However, we can suppose without a doubt that the cross was a cherished possession, much worn and treasured by its original owner as

witnessed by its worn appearance, several mends and the inscription with his name. How unhappy he must have been to have lost it one final time!

Apart from his name we know nothing about the original owner. This offers us an opportunity for an imaginative examination of who this individual was, placing a real person in the context of his time – we can speculate that if he could afford a piece of gold jewellery, he might have been a member of the Northumbrian court, a cleric, a diplomat or a distinguished visitor. We can only speculate on why he was in Ord – did he live in Ord, or was he travelling through? Why is his name written in runic on his cross? How did he lose his cross for the final time? Might he have known St Cuthbert or King Oswald?

Only one other comparable, but undecorated, cross has been found to date, in Lincolnshire in 2005. Dating is uncertain, but it has been suggested that its manufacture could be as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which would predate the sacking of Lindisfarne in 793.

The earliest remains found in Ord date to the Neolithic age. By the time our cross was made, Ord parish was ultimately part of the diocese of Lindisfarne. In this time of saints (Aidan, Cuthbert, Oswald) North Northumberland was the cradle of Christianity and Lindisfarne was its earliest Christian site. Founded by the Irish monk Aidan, the Holy Island was to become famed as a European centre of culture and learning, its artist monks responsible for producing the Lindisfarne Gospels, and the home monastery of St Cuthbert.

Later this year, the Lindisfarne Gospels will return to the north east, for exhibition at Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery. We intend to display the cross in a small, linked exhibition, together with a facsimile copy of the Gospels and other Lindisfarne related material.

*Anne Moore*

# ANDREW RONALDSON

## **The rise and fall of Andrew Ronaldson, Superintendent of Berwick Borough Police, 1864 to 1872**

Andrew Ronaldson was born at Abbey St Bathans, Berwickshire in 1826. He grew up at Abbey Mill and by 1851 was the miller, employing two labourers. He and his young wife Ann and one year old daughter Isabella lived with his widowed mother. Sometime during the late 1850s, Andrew joined the Berwickshire Constabulary, becoming a sergeant at Duns by 1861. By then he and Ann had six children. What prompted the change of career from Miller to Police Officer, were the pay and prospects better?

In 1864 Andrew applied for the position of Superintendent of Berwick Borough Police Force. The Chief Constable of Duns, GH List, wrote a letter of support on 26 February describing Andrew, his principal Sergeant, as sober, active and attentive, well up to his duties particularly in the detection of offenders and therefore well qualified to fill the post. In a further letter dated 7 March, List offered to meet the Watch Committee to make suggestions for improving Berwick Police Force. Presumably he had been asked for advice.

Andrew started at Berwick on 26 March. As far as can be seen in the records examined to date, he carried out his police duties and those of Inspector of Nuisances without complaint being made. Nothing is noted in his service record regarding his conduct, good or bad, nor was any criticism levelled by the government inspector during his annual inspection of the Force and books.

However, on 24 April 1871 the Watch Committee discussed a complaint made against Andrew. No detail is provided in the minutes but he was given a few days to prepare an explanation. His statement denying the charges was considered by the Committee on 1 May. After interviewing a Mr Darling who corroborated Andrew's statement, the Committee found the principal charge to be without foundation, but decided to reprimand and caution him to be more careful and circumspect in his conduct and to avoid going to Mr Darling's house in future. Mr Darling was the Innkeeper of the George Inn, Church Street!

In December that year, the Council agreed to discontinue the role of the Police as Inspectors of Nuisances believing that the two roles were not compatible and the work not done well, especially when extra stress was placed on the force, for example, by an outbreak of small pox. Three months' notice was given to the local

Board of Health. The Watch Committee and the Town Council were guided in their decision by the strong recommendation of the Government Inspector to increase the size of the force. During the same meeting, following a petition from the force for an increase in wages, it was agreed to increase the Superintendent's annual salary from £90 to £100 to commence in three months time.

Despite the increase, on 18 November 1872 Andrew submitted his resignation wishing to leave 24 December, the end of the present quarter. He pointed out that he had served for nine years and was now 46 years of age, therefore ineligible for many situations. His salary of £100 per annum, he believed, had not been equal to that of other Superintendents and making payments into the Superannuation Fund for the above period, had been a great sacrifice for him. He therefore hoped that they would grant some compensation at the expiration of his service. His resignation was accepted by the Committee.

Possibly to celebrate his decision to resign, he spent the evening in the George Inn staying there until the early hours of the following morning in the company of Police Constable Alexander. News of this reached the ears of the Watch Committee members who at their meeting on 26 November agreed to dismiss both officers forthwith. Police Constable Davidson was appointed temporary Superintendent.

Robert Darling and PC Samuel Alexander were brought before the Borough Petty Sessions in November where Darling was charged with harbouring Alexander on 19 November in the George Inn. Darling pleaded guilty saying that Alexander came to his house on the night in question shortly after 11pm and *asked if they were all clear. He said they were. Alexander returned about two am, and being intoxicated he took him in, he kept him for two or three hours. He hoped the magistrate would deal leniently with him.* He was fined £5, including costs and his licence endorsed. No mention was made of Superintendent Ronaldson also being present, perhaps to protect the name of the Police Force!

Andrew still expected to be paid until the end of the quarter, but the Watch Committee had other ideas, agreeing in a meeting on 30 November, to pay the salary due up to the day of dismissal, the 26<sup>th</sup> November, an annual allowance of £5 and incidental expenses bringing the total due to £16 7s 2d. Unfortunately, it was reported at the same meeting that Andrew had been unable to account for £22 16s, the moneys he had received for issuing pedlars certificates. He stated that the money had been removed from his desk in the police office. It appeared the desk had been broken open by PC Davidson under the instructions of the mayor in order to obtain the Pedlar's Certificate Book when Andrew was absent without leave. The

Committee, satisfied that the money was not there as alleged, resolved to take no further action foregoing the sum of £6 8s 10d due.

Why did Andrew decide to resign? Was it purely due to the low rate of pay? It was a brave step to take knowing his age precluded him from certain occupations. Maybe there had been other issues at work and he had been encouraged to resign.

By 1881 Andrew was a domestic groom living with his wife and two of his children at Butsfield, Lanchester and ten years later, a paper mill labourer at Shotley Bridge near Consett. He died in 1896. When his widow died at Chopwell in 1912 aged 83, she was described in the Berwickshire News and General Advertiser as Annie Edmond, widow of the late Andrew Ronaldson Police Superintendent, Berwick-upon-Tweed, forty years after his dismissal.

The need for a new Superintendent led to the members of the Town Council having a lengthy discussion concerning salary at their meeting of 20 November 1872.

Some of the Councillors, in favour of increasing the annual salary to £130, stressed that the necessities of life had greatly increased in price during the last nine years and as all the other officers' salaries had increased, so should the Superintendent's. This was necessary if they wished to attract a man of education and intelligence. An ordinary mechanic could make £100 per year and an extra £30 would place the Superintendent in a very good position.

However, the majority of the Councillors believed that there was no need for a Superintendent in Berwick. A Sergeant in a large town on less than £100 would be more than competent. Believing that the six constables did the principal part of the duty, they did not think there was sufficient work to occupy a man's time in the situation and that he would fall into idle habits if he did not take a more active role. It was also suggested that the force be divided into beats, with a book kept so that it was known where to find a policeman at any moment rather than the present system of letting them go about *like straggling sheep*. Fourteen voted against the increase in salary and six for.

How many of the above comments reflected Andrew's performance of his duties? Was it legitimate criticism or should the Watch Committee have been more involved? Oh to have the full story behind the episodes in the George Inn and the time he was absent without leave!

Sources:

Berwick Record Office: BA/P/13/2/3, 5, 14, 32, Bundle of Police Correspondence 1864 – 1872; BA/P/1/3 1866 – 1877, Berwick Borough Works and Watch Committees Meetings Minutes; NC2-3 Berwick Police Service Index 1826 Baptism Record Abbey St Bathans; 1896 Death Civil Registration Index, Lanchester  
Censuses: 1851 Abbey St Bathans; 1861 Duns; 1871 Berwick-upon-Tweed; 1881 Butsfield, Lanchester; 1891 Benfieldside, Durham; 1911 Chopwell

## WILLIAM HOPPER THOMPKINS

### Fragments of a life: or who was William Hopper Thompkins?

Margaret Escott writes in her article in History of Parliament Online that William Hopper Thompkins was a commercial traveller from Kennington, who later settled in Berwick. This statement is repeated in Mike Fraser's book "*Health and Home are Powerful Magnets*". *An Exile returns to Berwick*, and he adds that W H Thompkins moved to Berwick to become a currier in the family business. This statement should have said that he returned to Berwick after an absence of about ten years.

William Hopper Thompkins was born in 1785, and died in Berwick on 25 June 1846 living in Castlegate. We also know that he was admitted to the Freemen on 26 June 1809 after having served his apprenticeship with his father, and that his trade was currier. There is, however, some uncertainty about his early years. His father William Thompkins (1762-1813) married Elizabeth Hopper (1760-1816) and they had ten children born between 1785 and 1801, but none of these is named William. However, on 20 June 1800 William Thompkins made an affidavit saying 'Sworn by William Thompkins . . . whereby it appears that he . . . believes William Thompkins the Younger to be his natural son and that the said William Thompkins the Younger was born on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1785.' The timing of the affidavit was most likely prompted by two decisions made by the Guild on 24 March 1800. One said that 'any natural son of a burgess when he arrives at the age of sixteen may be inroled [sic] for the freedom of the Corporation provided the father of each natural son do within three months from this day make an affidavit before a justice of the peace that he believes such a son to be his.' It was also decided by the Guild that 'no natural sons of burgesses belonging to this Corporation shall after the twenty fourth day of June next be admitted to the freedom thereof unless they shall be inroled and serve a regular apprenticeship for the same in the manner of the sons of non-freemen. Provide that nothing herein shall extend to prevent the sons of burgesses so born out of wedlock from being admitted to the freedom at the age of twenty-three (but not sooner) if it shall be made to appear to the satisfaction of the Guild that the parents of such children were lawfully married together within twelve months after the birth of such children and that they are really and truly the parents of such children which proof shall be submitted at the time of inrollment which they shall be subject to as was formerly the case with the younger sons of burgesses.'

This clearly tells us that William Thompkins acknowledged William Hopper as his natural son, and it would probably be fair to assume that the name Hopper originated from Elizabeth Hopper, and we can also assume that William Thompkins and Elizabeth Hopper were married within twelve month of 6<sup>th</sup> August 1785, their son's date of birth.

We know from the Guild book that W H Thompkins had applied to be included on the list of incomers in March 1826 but was refused as he had no residence in Berwick and was struck off the list. A list of incomers was published every year at the end of March to entitle the people who were already freemen and had recently moved to Berwick to be allowed their meadow and stint at the first guild to be held for that purpose. The same thing happened the following year where he sent a letter to the Guild from his address in New Street, Kennington Road, London, dated 22 March 1827. In the letter he explained that he had been detained in consequence of the Speaker's order to tax his expenses as a witness upon the Berwick election. This explanation was not accepted as it did not comply with the order of the Guild. He must, however, have moved to Berwick that same year as he submitted a petition in November to be allowed to make a drain to carry off the water from his house in Castlegate and to run it into the drain there, and on the same day he applied to be allowed the sum of £18 for repairs to his farm at Coldmartin.

We know that Hopper Thompkins married Margaret Given on 10 June 1820 at St Leonard's Church, London. His address was given as Cambridge Place, Hackney Road, and it was mentioned that he was formerly of this town. Margaret was the only surviving child of the late Thomas Given, Esq., of Liverpool.

The following July we learn that the Guild accepted, on behalf of the trustees of his wife, to lend the Corporation the sum of £1,000 on bond at £4 and 10 percent interest. There is no information in the minutes explaining or backing up the need for this loan.

We also know that he was instrumental in securing a win for Sir Francis Blake in the 1820 parliamentary election by tipping the vote in Sir Blake's favour thus securing a sufficient number of so-called out-voters, (Freemen living outside Berwick but who still had the right to cast their vote there, a right that was lost with the Reform Act of 1832).

So what had made him leave Berwick in the first place and what had brought him back to Berwick?



William Hopper Thompkins brought a libel case against James McBurnie, gun maker, Berwick, in March 1830. James McBurnie had been a Trustee of the Workhouse from 1813 – 1819 as well as Vestryman in 1828 -1830, in both cases involved in the running and administration of the Poor Law. It was brought before Northumberland Assizes, and sheds some light on a possible answer to the question above.

The libel case was caused by a publication printed and circulated by the defendant in the town. In the publication William Hopper Thompkins is described as 'contemptible in every respect, and whose history exhibited a total disregard of truth, honour, reputation, and every other quality that is necessary to make a man useful in any station.' (Berwick Advertiser, 6 March 1830).

Mr McBurnie admitted that he was behind the address in the form of a handbill to the burgesses of Berwick published on 27 April 1829, and that he had ordered 200 copies of the handbill to be exhibited in the shop windows in the town, but he said he felt justified in expressing the opinions mentioned in the handbill due to the (in his opinion) following facts: Mr Hopper Thompkins had seduced a woman called Hannah Ogle, who gave birth to a child in 1816 while he was in prison as an insolvent debtor, and in spite of having made a host of promises to her, he abandoned both the mother and the child and paid no maintenance to the mother. The child was called William Ogle and was entered in the baptism records for Holy Trinity on 27 September 1816 as an illegitimate son of Hannah Ogle.

He was also accused of giving false estimate of some working materials used in his trade as a carrier, and of having omitted to give some of the names of his debtors in connection with benefitting from the act for the relief of insolvent debtors, which presumably ensured his release from prison. The Insolvency Debtors Act was passed in Parliament in 1813 as an attempt to reduce the steadily increasing number of people ending up in prison for debt. Finally, he was accused of wilfully lying about a question put to him by a parishioner in connection with elections of vestrymen.

About twenty witnesses were questioned, among them Hannah Ogle, who by then was married. The jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff and awarded him damages of one farthing. The amount of the damages awarded might be reflected in a comment the judge made before passing sentence. He said with a nod to the situation in Berwick 'Mr Thompkins had lately made himself peculiarly active in these squabbles, and had hence drawn down upon himself the squibs and lampoons of his opponents, who abused him for party purposes, as readily as he abused them:

until, forsooth, like the dog who had his nose pricked by mumbling\* at the hedgehog, he now cries out, after having mumbled\* at every body else, on finding his own skin a little scratched in return.'

We know from the minute books regarding the administration of the Workhouse and the poor law in general, as well as from the minute books of the Guild, that William Hopper Thompkins after his return to Berwick, threw himself whole-heartedly into the running of the Corporation and the ongoing debate regarding who had the right to elect churchwardens, which led to physical confrontations and court cases. An attempt to be elected mayor of Berwick was also unsuccessful.

Therefore, the answer to the question posed above might have been that he was encouraged by his family to absent himself from Berwick for a while, and what might have encouraged him to return a good ten years later might have been an ambition to play an active part in the running of Berwick and possibly a marriage that secured him financial means to do so.

William Hopper Thompkins died without any legitimate issue, but we know from an entry in the minute book for the Workhouse from 7 October 1830 that £4 14s had been paid by William Hopper Thompkins for money due by him to the Parish for the maintenance of his illegitimate child, and that the money had not been paid over to the Overseers as should have happened, which caused the people who had received the money to be prosecuted.

\*The meaning here is 'bite or chew with toothless gums'.

*Sources: Margaret Escott, History of Parliament online; Guild Books B1/27 and 28; Berwick Freeman's Rolls; Holy Trinity Burial Records; GBR2 – Workhouse Minute book; The Berwick Advertiser, 17 June 1820; Northumberland Assizes, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1830 (W M Thompkins v James McBurnie), published in The Berwick Advertiser 6 March 1830; Mike Fraser, "Health and Home are Powerful Magnets." An Exile returns to Berwick. 2018.*

Lars Rose

## SHOOT OUT AT THE SCOTSGATE MARCH 1946

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1946 several people in Co. Durham complained to the Police of being held up and robbed of various items by four men travelling in an American Red Cross Ambulance.

The vehicle was traced, but heading north at speed, and although attempts were made to stop the ambulance at Gateshead, Gosforth and Alnwick - at great risk to the lives of the policemen - it appeared to be heading for Berwick and Scotland. It was followed by two police cars through Northumberland at speeds of up to 60mph, but the Officer in Charge at Berwick, Superintendent J.W. Coxon, had been kept up to date by telephone (there were no radios then) and he made his plans. Fortunately, there were few pedestrians about so early in the morning.

The fleeing ambulance had to pass through the narrow Scotsgate in Berwick town (there was no Bypass then) and ropes were stretched across the roadway. Although the police at that time had no firearms, there had been, just a few weeks previously, a firearms amnesty for unlicensed weapons, and these were being held at Berwick Police Station before being disposed of. Supt. Coxon gave orders that useable guns be issued to officers able to handle the weapons and stationed them at various points around the "trap".

It was about 4am. when the alert was given that the fleeing vehicle had passed Scremerston, all was in readiness, and the vehicle crossed the Royal Tweed Bridge, where signals to stop were ignored, turned right into Marygate and accelerated towards the Scotsgate where it was brought to a halt. Some shots were fired, the front tyres burst and the four occupants climbed out of the vehicle, mainly unhurt, and were taken into custody. A search of the vehicle revealed an unsheathed bayonet.

It transpired that the occupants were two American Servicemen, Charles Leonard White (23) from Chicago and Harold Russell (22) a Virginian, and two sailors from Glasgow, Ian William Fraser (21) a Ships Steward and Robert Wallace Meiklejohn (22) a Ships Engineer. They were all taken to Durham in a van escorted by a patrol car to await justice, although the American Servicemen were not subject to British Law.

After two remands at Durham County Court to enable further enquiries to be made, Fraser and Meiklejohn appeared at a Special Court before Colonel Hugh Swinburne on 11 April to answer charges of Robbery with Violence. Both had made voluntary statements, first that they were hitch-hiking and had joined the Ambulance at Durham on 18 March, later, changing this to Doncaster. They knew they were in the company of two men who had stolen a typewriter at Ashington, but had made no

attempt to leave. There was also evidence that before 7 January Meiklejohn had been repeatedly seen at Nottingham in the company of a man identified as one of the Americans.

The first incident had occurred near Darlington when two men emerged from an army ambulance and asked a passer-by for "a light". He was then assaulted and robbed of cigarettes. Just a few miles south of Darlington a man had a similar experience when a jack-knife was produced. Later, just south of Ferryhill, two men held up and stole 15/-, another was relieved of 6/6d and yet another of cigarettes and a silver fountain pen.

The Court also heard from Thomas Edward Alderson, Secretary of the British Legion Hostel at Ashington, that two Americans and the two defendants arrived at the Hostel in an American Ambulance. They left without paying for their lodgings and it was later found that an old-fashioned typewriter was missing.

The accused were jointly found guilty of three charges of robbery with violence, one of robbery with aggravation and one of larceny. They were found not guilty of assault with intent to rob. Meiklejohn was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment and Fraser was sent to a Borstal Institution for a period not exceeding three years.

The Mayor of Berwick, Councillor Fred Stott was an eye witness of the events at Scotsgate, when he was woken to the sound of gunshots. Living above his shop in Marygate he saw policemen crowding round a "truck", one had a rifle slung over his shoulder. Car headlamps lit up the scene, and four men came out with their hands up. One bullet had passed through the window of his music shop and was later found embedded in the wall beside the cash register.

The Publican of the Angel Inn, Mr. M. Malone also watched the final episode. Hearing shots he had gone to the window and saw the ambulance standing in the street with the police armed with rifles surrounding it. Two men came from the front of the vehicle and two from the back and were immediately taken away. Other householders in the vicinity did not pay much attention, assuming that the gunshots were only vehicles backfiring, a common occurrence during the night!

The Berwick Advertiser at the time commented that "Our Police Force come in for much in the way of criticism, but when the occasion arrives they can be relied upon. Wednesday's capture was the result of a well-planned organisation which reflected

credit on Superintendant Coxon and his men.”

As would be expected such an unusual event that early morning in Berwick upon Tweed in March 1946 found its way into several newspapers in Scotland and the North East of England.

*Maureen Charlton*

## **BERWICK'S COMMUNITY SOCIAL CLUBS OF THE 1980'S**

The early days of the Social and Labour Clubs in Berwick and Tweedmouth, in the 1950s, were described in the first article on Berwick's club scene. The story then moved on to the club and music scene (including night clubs) for youngsters and holiday makers in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it was at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s that community social clubs began to be established in Berwick and Tweedmouth.

Opened in December 1978 for the Eastcliffe, Highcliffe and Spittal Hall communities, the **Jubilee Centre** served *'the largest and fastest growing (estate) in the Borough - - over 2,500 tenants now live there'* according to the Berwick Advertiser. The centre consisted of a large lounge bar and spacious concert hall and function room with a stage and dance floor. Housed at the front were facilities for pool and other games plus a juke box. It was funded by Federation Breweries Ltd. The Centre closed in 2020, converting into a pub, called Northern View

Following the example of the Jubilee, the **Tweedmouth Social Club**, (also known as the **Prior Club**) opened in December 1981 (from the former Tweedmouth Community Centre). It had a licensed club room alongside a function room and a large community room serving local residents. In February 1989, the Social Club closed and became the Braeside public house, also known as the Braesider, which itself closed in the early 1990s

1978 and 1979 saw a surge of club buildings or enlargements, funded by the Federation, such as **Berwick's Social and Labour club** which had major improvements in 1979 including a spacious concert room seating up to 220 people which in the 1984 Advertiser was described *'as the best in the town'*, The **Legion (Royal British Legion)** also had a major expansion in 1979, with a larger lounge, a concert room with a dance area plus a games room. It was reported in the Berwick

Advertiser that ' *The improvements have enhanced the British Legion Club and transformed it into one of the most modern in the Borough.*'

In addition, in November 1978, the President of Scottish Football Association opened **Black and Gold's** new clubhouse, providing social facilities for supporters of Berwick Football Club. The Club later became a facility separate from the Football Club.

A few years earlier, in 1972 a proper Clubhouse had been built for Berwick's **Rugby Club** on the existing site, with a dance floor, bar and cocktail lounge, described '*as quite magnificent and the envy of many visiting clubs*'

Following the pattern of the Jubilee, in August 1978, the Edward Ward Community Centre opened in **Newfields** for the local residents. Unlike the social clubs hitherto mentioned, it did not have a bar, but drinks could be brought in when social functions were held.

Interestingly, there was no bar on alcohol at the **Ord House Club** for residents of Ord Caravan Park. In April 1978, a license was granted to the owner, Mr Marshall, so the site could be '*a place for a quiet drink*'

In the same year, 1978, the new clubhouse for **Magdalene Fields Golf Club** was built and officially opened in August 1978, available for not only golfers but also members of the public

The church soon followed this appetite for social clubs and in 1981, **Walkergate (Catholic) Social Club** opened with a lounge bar, games room and a main hall which served as a function room. It had been granted a full drinks license in October 1980, although no drinks were to be served on a Sunday, in respect of the Methodist Church opposite.

The flourishing of Community Social Clubs of the late 1970s and 1980s (and earlier) did not survive the 21st century. Some like the Newfields Club, the Legion Club and Berwick's Social and Labour Club closed completely, mostly in the 1990s. Some like the Jubilee and the Prior Club morphed into a pub, while some like the Walkergate Social Club became, in effect a Church Hall. Some such as The Golf Club, the Rugby Club and the Black and Gold survived and did well, by opening up their facilities to a wider public, following the pattern of the club scene of the Holiday Caravan parks at Haggerston (whose club scene, initially, was restricted to the

residents of the caravan park) and Magdalene Fields, though in more recent days these have reverted to providing entertainments purely for their residents.

*Bob Steward*

## **BERWICK ADVERTISER SNIPPETS**

### **Berwick Advertiser, 6 September 1872**

#### CONJUGAL INFELICITY

Unhappy marriages are rare, and we more frequently here of connubial bliss than of domestic unhappiness, although instances of the latter are sometimes met with. Two young persons in the town entered in to the marriage state a year or two since, and shortly afterwards had a quarrel as to who was to be ruler. As both used methods of persuasion which were more forcible than eloquent it was concluded that a separation would be the best thing possible under the circumstances. They have consequently been living apart for some time, but the husband, perhaps thinking that he ought to assert his martial authority, boldly entered the domicile of his wife during her absence, and, with the assistance of a youth, succeeded in removing an article of furniture which he alleged belonged to him. So far all had gone on smoothly, and the elated husband proceeded homewards accompanied by the boy and the article alluded to. They had not gone far, however, before his spouse, who had heard of the visit, set off in pursuit, overtook them, seized the piece of furniture, and sitting down upon it, refused to let it out of her sight. The husband in the meantime, thinking that discretion was the better part of valour, took to his heels, and left his spouse mistress of the situation.

### **Berwick Advertiser, 6 September 1872**

#### BOARD OF GUARDIANS

The usual fortnightly meeting of the Guardians was held in the Board Room at the Workhouse on Monday. The members present at the meeting of the Rural Sanitary Authority, with the addition of Messrs Smith, Mitchell, and Brown, attended. The Clerk read a letter from the Local Government Board, sanctioning an increase in Mr Pinder's salary, and an alteration in the Matron's dietary. It was stated that there were now no small-pox cases in the rural parishes of the Union. Mr Mitchell moved

that the Clerk correspond with the Belford and other unions to inquire if they had any lunatic paupers, as they might on payment be admitted here, where there is plenty room. After some discussion, the matter was referred to a committee to report at the end of the quarter. The Clerk read a circular requesting returns of vaccination cases, which in future are required to be made half-yearly. This was all the business of public importance before the Board

### **Berwick Advertiser, 18 October 1872**

#### ROYAL VISIT TO CHILLINGHAM CASTLE

Northumberland has this week been honoured with a visit from their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the northern division of the county is *en fete* on the occasion of the Royal call. On Monday evening their Royal Highnesses arrived in Edinburgh from Abergeldie, the Prince's Highland shooting quarters, and after "lionising" Modern Athens on Tuesday forenoon left for Belford station on a visit extending over four days to the Earl and Countess of Tankerville at Chillingham Castle. The special train by which their Royal Highnesses travelled, steamed slowly from the Haymarket to the Edinburgh Station, which it passed at 2.52, or 12 min. behind time. The loss of time in starting was made up before the train reached Berwick-on-Tweed. The journey between Berwick and Belford was accomplished in twenty minutes, or six minutes before the specified time (4.30). The entire journey, was run in one hour and thirty-two minutes, which was a gain of eighteen minutes, allowing for the loss of time in starting, over the time set down in the official time-table. At various stations along the route the Prince and Princess were heartily cheered, but the people of our good town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, knowing that the royal train would pass outside the station without stopping, did not turn out in great numbers, and as those present could distinguish none of the occupants of the carriages, there was no cheering. Fortunately the weather was mild and clear, and summer-like in its character, so that the Prince and Princess had a capital opportunity of enjoying the scenery along the east coast.

*Carole Pringle*