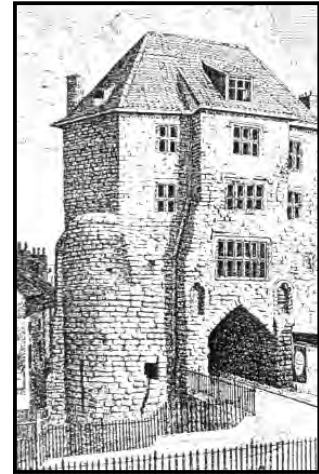


NEWS BULLETIN

THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

No. 47: DECEMBER 2009



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne is one of the country's oldest antiquarian societies, founded in 1813. We have a regular programme of lectures and events, and a learned journal. Our library, our main collection and our offices are housed in the Great North Museum at the Hancock, with further items in other museums around the region. We lease the Castle Keep and the Black Gate from the City Council.

For more information, look at our website www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk, or contact the Membership Secretary at Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Great North Museum: Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT. Phone 0191 231 2700 for administration; 0191 222 3555 for the library, e-mail admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



David Breeze receiving a Festschrift volume at the Limes conference in August

Summer 2009 was a busy time for the Society. Alongside the normal programme of monthly and country meetings, there were also two major events. In May, the Great North Museum opened its doors. Society members had the opportunity of attending previews and we were followed by the public in enormous numbers – 500,000 in the first four months. Our own collection is now displayed in more spacious surroundings, making it easier for visitors to see and appreciate. The move to the GNM has also meant a much more congenial home for our library. Cataloguing continues, but the library is now in full use. We are talking to the City about future arrangements for the management of the Black Gate and the Keep.

The second event was the Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall, organised by a committee consisting of myself as chair, Bill Griffiths as Secretary, Ian Caruana as Treasurer, Lindsay Allason-Jones, Nick Hodgson, Paul Bidwell, Rachel Newman, Jim Crow and Richard Hingley. The main guiding was undertaken by

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Tony Birley, Jim Crow, Nick Hodgson, Val Maxfield, Graeme Stobbs, Jim Summerly, Matt Symonds and Tony Wilmott, with support from Paul Bidwell, Alex Croom, Georgina Plowright and Humphrey Welfare. The thanks of the Society and all those who attended the Pilgrimage is due to this group of people.

The Pilgrimage was followed by a most successful meeting of the Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, organised by Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums and held in Newcastle for the first time since its inaugural meeting in 1949.

The attention of your Council must now focus on how best to celebrate the Bicentenary of the Society in 4 years' time. We want to use the event to raise our profile locally and encourage membership of the Society. Specific events will include a focused programme of lectures, and a special publication and an exhibition at the Great North Museum are also being considered.

David Breeze

In September 2009 our President, Professor David Breeze, retired from Historic Scotland after a distinguished career in the public service, in which he rose to become Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and masterminded the successful application to make the Antonine Wall a World Heritage Site. At the same time he pursued a parallel research career in which he has published more on the history and archaeology of the Roman frontiers and the Roman army, and other subjects, than almost anyone else of his generation. He is expected to become even more prolific in retirement.

Twenty-four of David's colleagues contributed essays to a celebratory volume, *The Army and Frontiers of Rome*, which was presented to him (to his genuine surprise) at the Congress of Roman Frontier Studies at Newcastle. The Society congratulates its President and wishes him well in retirement.

Nick Hodgson, Secretary

NEW YEAR SOCIAL EVENING

As usual, there will be a social evening after the January 2010 lecture, in the Wood Memorial Hall, on the first floor of the Mining Institute. Donations of food for the buffet will be very welcome – please contact Freda Thompson on 0191 285 5303 to say what you are bringing. We will also be requesting a small donation, around £1, from anyone who has a glass of wine.

New members who have joined in the last year will be especially welcome. Please don't hesitate to introduce yourselves to fellow members and get talking – all Antiquaries have a lot in common!

INDOOR MEETINGS

Full details of next year's speakers will be in the programme card, but here are some highlights for 2010.

We usually open with a speaker from among our own ranks and at our January meeting Grace McCombie will be reflecting on her newly-published work, the Pevsner city guide to Gateshead and Newcastle. We will continue with an architectural theme later in the year when Richard Pears talks about William Newton. 7 March 2010 is another bicentenary, that of Admiral Collingwood's death, and for our February lecture Tony Barrow will review the social context of his career. Joint meetings enable us to broaden our horizons and so I have arranged for Penny Walton of Durham University to speak on the royal tombs of Egypt's delta in a joint meeting with the North East Ancient Egypt Society.

I am keen to follow up from time to time topics which we have introduced in previous years and so, Rachel Pope will return to talk about the study of prehistoric round-houses which she has developed from her Cheviot excavations. Christopher Ferguson from Oxford will explore the coastal dimension of Bernicia. Several members of the Society are involved in community archaeology projects. The topic merits a review and Suzie Thomas, who is now working for the CBA, will do this.

Normally, we plan the lecture series a year in advance but with Society's bicentenary due in 2013, we are already thinking about events

in that year. Please let me have any suggestions.

Finally, I again offer my thanks to those who have contributed to the indoor meetings by opening discussion and giving the votes of thanks. Thanks also to all who have questioned or commented on our speakers' presentations; there were some lively discussions this year.

Colm O'Brien

NOTE ON COUNTRY MEETINGS

At the time of writing, the Country Meetings for 2010 are under consideration. We expect to have three meetings again this year. Dates will be published in the programme card, as usual, with details to follow in the March mailing. The May meeting is likely to be to Hutton-in-the-Forest and Penrith. Goole, where there is a canal museum, is a possibility for July and Kirkstall Abbey in September. There may also be a special event in June.

Colm O'Brien

ANTIQUARIES HOB-NOB WITH ROYALTY



David Breeze and others greeting the Queen; Picture, courtesy North News & Pictures and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums.

The Great North Museum was closed to the public on 6th November for its official opening by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. They were given a tour of the Museum before unveiling a plaque to commemorate the visit. The Society's Executive Committee were invited to the

ceremony and a buffet lunch, along with dignitaries from the other bodies that are partners in the project – Newcastle University, Newcastle City Council, the Natural History Society of Northumbria, and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. It was, said Society President David Breeze, “the ultimate accolade for the Great North Museum.”

Kim Bibby-Wilson, along with Northumbrian pipers and others involved with the Bagpipe Museum, met the Princess Royal when she visited Morpeth in July. She was there to mark the 21st anniversary of the Chantry's official opening by Princess Margaret. The visit had originally been planned for October 2008, but the trip had to be postponed because of the flooding. The event included a performance of *The Curlew's Return* by piper Ann Sessoms.

“It was gratifying that the efforts of those who had helped to rescue the collection were acknowledged by the volunteers being presented to the Princess,” Kim said afterwards.

By the time this News Bulletin is published, David Breeze will also have had a further meeting with the Queen, as he goes to the Palace on 27 Nov to collect his OBE!

13TH PILGRIMAGE OF HADRIAN'S WALL; OBSERVATIONS OF A PILGRIM

Editor's note; Denis's full report on the Pilgrimage is on our website. The (much-shortened) piece below gives a few of the highlights.

There were altogether 214 pilgrims this time. Senior Pilgrim was Norman McCord with seven pilgrimages from 1949 onwards under his belt. The pilgrims were divided between four coaches, with two following the route in one direction, and the other two in the opposite direction, in an intricate figure-of-eight which must have taken some serious organising.

At Moresby we coincided with a baptism at the parish church in the middle of the fort. The appearance of an extra hundred for the service must have caused the parents a momentary panic. At Senhouse Roman Museum we ran into a group of Roman



The Pilgrims en masse on the steps of South Shields Town Hall, picture courtesy Ioana Oltean

cavalry re-enactors, together with “camp following” ladies and children.

We had two lectures, one by Professor Sean O’Brien on Hadrian’s Wall in Literature, and another by Dr Ernst Kunzl on Enamelled Vessels. This talk was followed by a special evening visit to Tullie House Museum to see the three small enamelled bowls, inscribed with lists of Hadrian’s Wall forts, which have changed our understanding of the forts on the frontier. We met the lengthsman responsible for keeping the Hadrian’s Wall path in good order and reducing erosion by visitors. At the various bridge abutments and in the forts we had some splendid performances from the indefatigable tour guides, who moved around the site to show us the different features.

At the reception at the Great North Museum, Professor Paul Younger, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University and Chair of the GNM Board, sang us a poem about

“Hoo this waall wiz constructed for one
man’s enjoyment
An’ the North East wiz rescued from mass
unemployment.”

written by Geordie poet ‘Ripyard Cuddling’ and set to music by Paul himself.

We had a new view of the Tyne at Segedunum following the sad clearance of Swan Hunters. We also saw the recently discovered lines of pits or *cipia* on the wall berm. There is much speculation about these; an archaeologist reported recently in the Hexham Courant that they were the post holes for a pre-wall wooden wall!

Special mention should go to the catering. Lunches each day were provided, as on the 1999 pilgrimage, by renowned Cumbria cook Annette Gibbons, now OBE, and very good

they were too. The two hotels in Carlisle did us proud, as did Newcastle Civic Centre on the final night. Anyone looking for somewhere to take children on a wet Sunday in Cumbria should look at Walby Grange Farm, where we had dinner on the Monday night, courtesy of Hadrian’s Wall Heritage Ltd.

Our own evening reception was banned from the Keep by Health and Safety because the numbers were too great (there being no problem in 1999 nor indeed in 1199!), so it took place instead in the new Law School, a splendid modern vast building on the East campus of Northumbria University.

Denis Peel

Editor’s notes; ‘Ripyard Cuddling’ was Jack Davitt, a welder at Swan Hunters, and the poem was published by Wallsend Arts Centre in Where the Wall Ends – Recollections of a Tyneside Town in 1977. I have not been able to obtain copyright permission to reproduce his poem, but the book is available through the Internet.

Unfortunately it has not yet proved possible to set up the planned Flickr site for photographs of the Pilgrimage. We will give further news of this when there is some.

GREAT NORTH MUSEUM; THREE REVIEWS

A young person’s view

I went to the opening of the museum but there wasn’t much time to look around. In the summer holidays me and my Nan went to have a better look. The outside is original and made of sandstone, it is very impressive. When you are inside, there is a modern reception area with a little gift shop with lots of toys, but I didn’t look at these till we were going out.

When you first go in you can see life-size models and stuffed animals which go right to the top floor. The exotic butterfly wings were beautiful – iridescent colours (especially the blues and purples). The geese overhead look as if they are really flying and the stuffed wolves are very lifelike.

In the Roman section there were lots of interesting artefacts. I learned something new



Bertie Armstrong and his 5-year-old sister Betsie, courtesy Elaine Armstrong

on this visit – I never knew that the things they used to crush the grain with are called ‘rotary querns’ and it was quite hard to turn the quern around. When we looked at the tools the Romans used to build Hadrian’s Wall I was surprised to see how well preserved they were. Even the leather soles of the sandals hadn’t rotted away and were still there for us to look at. The stone tablets with Roman writing on were very interesting. I didn’t know that copper went green when it was oxidised by exposure to the air.

In the fossil section we saw fossils of tiny plant-like animals called ‘crinoids’ and they were very interesting to look at. My Nan told me you can find tiny parts of the fossil crinoids stems on Holy Island and they are called ‘St Cuthbert’s beads’. I have some fossils at home that we found at Whitby and we saw the same ones in the museum.

In the museum there is a large variation of live animals, stuffed animals and prehistoric extinct animal fossils. The huge spider crab is really cool, it was in the old museum and I’m glad they kept it. I like the way in the animal section it slots all the animals which live in the same habitat along with the plants you find in the same place.

The mummy is really fascinating and my little sister is quite scared of it. My Nan and my Dad remember it from the old Hancock museum when they were kids. In the world cultures section I liked the Samurai armour and swords which looked lethal, in fact all the weapons looked lethal and dangerous, especially the ‘bomiknockers’ (clubs) of the Zulus.

We didn’t go to the planetarium that day but I’ve been before and found it extremely interesting. I’ll be going again next time I visit the museum.

We didn’t realise there was an art exhibition of ‘wildlife photographer of the year’ awards. We both thought the pictures were stunning. Some of them were unbelievable. My favourite is ‘A polar sunrise’, winner of the ‘Creative visions of nature’ award.

This is a really good museum with lots of interesting stuff and it is so big you can’t really get round it in one day. I really recommend going there. The Hancock is my favourite museum in Newcastle.

Bertie Armstrong aged 11 years

Editor’s note; thanks to Bertie for this, and to his grandmother Elaine for organising it. Since this is his first published work, I haven’t edited it down as I usually do. Older contributors don’t get the same privilege!

An Archaeologist’s View

Stripping the Hancock Museum of the accumulation of years of detritus has left a spacious interior of two floors. These have been reorganized into three main sections on each floor with wide flanking galleries running along the sides. Items chosen from three museums, the Museum of Antiquities (prehistoric to medieval), the Hancock Museum (natural history) and the Shefton Museum (Greek antiquities), form the new display.

British Archaeology can be found on the ground floor. Prehistory, labelled *Ice Age to Iron Age*, occupies one side gallery, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval (not labelled as such) part of the other. Roman artefacts are in the centre section, much of which is taken up by a rather spindly and, it must be said, obstructive model of Hadrian’s Wall. Many of my favourite things are there; the Ewart swords,

the Tribley Shield, the altars from the River Tyne, the Capheaton Bowl (I think, but it's not labelled), and the pieces of the Rothbury Cross (but they're not labelled either). It's all a great spectacle but, for me, too much space has been devoted to rock art, and not enough thought given to establishing the provenance of the exhibits. The Wall is not the only archaeological site.

More serious is the failure to recognize Newcastle itself as a settlement worthy of consideration. Excavations during the last thirty to forty years have yielded evidence for the town's development, and for the appearance and history of some of some of its institutions, as well as a mass of display-worthy artefacts. There has never been an exhibition in which this variety of material is properly used.

There is one insoluble problem; you can't put a quart into a pint pot. But it is quite inexcusable, several months after opening, to have unlabelled objects on display.

Barbara Harbottle

A visitor's view

As someone who has always loved museums, I approached the new museum with eager anticipation.... and I wasn't disappointed. Sarah, the younger daughter of one of my neighbours, agreed to help with the "fieldwork" for this piece. She and I, and what sounded like a thousand other small children rushed into the museum at 2pm on a gloriously sunny autumn Sunday afternoon.

It is wonderful that it is so popular and I hope that all those children develop an abiding love of museums in consequence. BUT..... it was so noisy that we could not hear the audio-commentary on the Hadrian's Wall exhibit and so busy that we could not try all the interactive displays. The first floor was much quieter and so we were able to hear the commentary, press all the buttons and see everything without endangering a small child. My old friends the mummies were there, beautifully displayed with accessible explanations which helped us both to understand why the ancient Egyptians embalmed their dead. The information on funerary rites throughout the historical part of the museum was especially helpful to

Sarah as she is doing a school project on that very topic.

However, as someone who works with older people, I have some concerns about accessibility for the older museum goer. Although the first floor is at an acceptable light level, the ground floor is very dark. Could the lighting be enhanced a little, without any risk to the exhibits? The level of background noise will be a problem for an older person. Some of the labels on the display cabinets are at floor level. Many older people cannot easily bend down to read them and won't be able to see the labels from an upright position. There are very few places to sit.

All these things are easily changed. I hope that the museum authorities will make appropriate alterations so that the museum is a wonderful experience for all ages.

Sue Pearson (Society member and also Chief Executive of Age Concern Newcastle)

MOVING THE OFFICE

The move of our office from the Black Gate went without a hitch. I packed and Keith Elliott lugged the administrative records and equipment in several car trips to the new office at GNM where Derek Cutts set up the computer and phones – many thanks to the helpers for a good team effort. It has been a wonderful opportunity to have a good clear-out, but on the other hand space at GNM is very limited compared to the cavernous Black Gate.

In the near future our treasures will be moved from the BG for reasons of storage, display or loan. I have been listing the various art works in the BG. Much information was readily available from work I had done in the past, searching for clues about the relationship of our honorary member Thomas Bewick, and his pupils or associates, with the Society. Over a hundred drawings, paintings, maps, textiles, prints have been tucked away in dark corners at the Black Gate. The most exciting find for me personally was a rare watercolour by Bewick's eldest daughter Jane of the 'Mill at Jesmond Dene' (1861). This was one of a pair illustrated in an article on Jesmond by F.W. Dendy in AA 3rd ser. Vol 1



Jane Bewick's watercolour of Jesmond Dene; picture courtesy Jack Foord

1904. Its twin, of the 'Ouseburn above Jesmond Dene', seems to be lost.

Key paintings, memorabilia, maps and an important 1670s English lantern clock, possibly London, signed 'William Shaftoe Newcastle' (the probable retailer) will be displayed at the new office. It is possible that we could show other items on the website at regular intervals – it's not all archaeology!

The office move and the steady increase in the membership has increased the workload. If you are interested in ad hoc administrative work, a laugh and a coffee I'd love to hear from you. I plan to draw up a register of people to call on. Even mundane jobs can be fun if the company is right!

Sarah Walter

OUR MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY



Sarah Walter, courtesy Glyn Goodrick.

Not all of our members will have come across the person who works behind the scenes to keep the Society running smoothly, our

Membership Secretary Sarah Walter. She was appointed in 2001 to do six hours a week, but is now doing 12 'and not enough', she says.

Sarah's career has always centred around museums and galleries and issues affecting them. In 1998–9 she was a Research Fellow at Greenwich University, in London, culminating in publication of a handbook about heritage volunteer management. She has also published research on the development and training of senior arts managers, written on the involvement of volunteers in North East museums and galleries, and produced a report on the possibilities of distance learning for heritage and museum studies courses at Newcastle Uni etc. She has worked on public sculpture projects, managed a commercial art gallery, and worked in various areas of Tyne-Wear Museums as a curatorial assistant, notably researching and writing the website 'Discovering Bewick'. (To see the results, look at <http://tinyurl.com/bewick>.)

Before the opening of the GNM, she worked part-time for nearly two years as a picture researcher for the new galleries.

Sue Ward

HEART OF THE CITY: A NEW BID FOR FUNDING

Although last year's grant application by the Heart of the City Board to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) failed, there is still very strong partner support (from the Cathedral Chapter, Newcastle City Council and ourselves) for the principles of the regeneration, revitalisation and recognition of the area around the Cathedral and Castle.

A revised smaller scheme has now been prepared, and the partners are now working on a national Heritage Grant bid to the HLF for a scheme focused on the refurbishment and reuse of the Black Gate to provide a new 'gateway' to the medieval core. The work will include:

- Repairs to external historic fabric
- The conversion of the first, second and third floors to provide toilets/education space/community space/administrative space with appropriate interpretation.

- Access into and interpretation of the ground floor guard rooms.
- The provision of an external lift to the first, second and third floors.
- Conversion of the attic into a flat, possibly in partnership with a third party provider.
- Some external environmental improvement to upgrade the historic setting.

There will be information panels to describe the building and the site, focusing on the Black Gate but with links to the Cathedral, the Castle Keep and the wider area. There will also be new signage, audiovisual units, online downloadable tours and interpretation and leaflets.

The project will bring together the medieval core of the City as a single heritage/cultural asset, and improve physical and intellectual access to the Black Gate and across the whole Heart of the City area. The new bid will be submitted in February 2010 and a decision is expected in July 2010.

Grace McCombie

BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

Summer was a busy time for Society book sales, with copies of the Handbook to Hadrian's Wall going well at both the Pilgrimage and the Roman Frontiers congress at Newcastle in August, not least due to some forceful marketing by our President. We sold several copies of our special edition of *Archaeologia Aeliana* concerning the Roman fort at Newcastle published in 2002, with some suspicious-looking sellers 'underneath the arches' outside the Keep as the pilgrims passed by! The summer sales rush finished with a final flourish in September with the visit of the Glasgow Archaeological Society.

We still have copies of the Pilgrimage publication *Hadrian's Wall 1999–2009* for sale (£10 per copy, plus P&P). Compiled by our Secretary Nick Hodgson, this book summarises all the research and excavation concerning the frontier that has take place over the last ten years. A parallel volume, *The Roman Army in Northern England* by Paul Bidwell and Nick Hodgson, has been published by the Arbeia Society. The heart of

this is a complete gazetteer of the Roman military sites in northern England in the southern 'hinterland' of Hadrian's Wall – the first time that all these military sites have been studied together in a single volume in this way.

It can be obtained for £14 per copy, including p&p, by writing with a cheque to: The Secretary, Arbeia Society, Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, Baring Street, South Shields NE33 2BB.

Flyers for a publication by another leading member of the Society, *Newcastle and Gateshead* by Grace McCombie, are included in this mailing. At £9.99, this latest in the series of Pevsner Architectural Guides is extremely good value for money. The Christmas present-list beckons!

RECORD BREAKERS



The new exhibits at the Castle Keep; picture courtesy Paul McDonald

The Castle Keep has set new records this year for both visitor numbers and revenue following the addition of a new exhibit and changes to its pricing structure. Visitor numbers are 20% up on the same period of last year. In a typical week, there are around 450 adult visitors and 150 children. Most come from outside the North East, with many from overseas.

School groups have come from Estonia, France, Holland, Italy, Russia, Spain and the United States this year. More than 400 people came to the Late Show in May and more than 1,100 to the Heritage Open Day weekend. Our displays have been greatly enhanced with the installation of the *Buildings of Newcastle*

exhibit, formerly at Blackfriars. The 13 models depict the history of Newcastle through its buildings. Paranormal investigations (ghost hunts) are also at record levels. The record breaking Castle Keep team of Paul McDonald, Gary Carter, Andrew Fenwick, Tom Hogarth, Jimmy Parkins and Gabriela Petkova-Campbell continue to welcome visitors warmly and ensure that they enjoy their visit.

Tony Ball

TIME WALKS 2010

So far we have two walks planned for next year; keep an eye out for details of another in the Spring mailing, and for the usual programme of Summer Walks. The annual post-Christmas refresher will take place on Saturday 2nd January when Denis Peel will introduce us to the industrial history of Wylam. We will start at 10.20am on Wylam Station, and Denis promises us wagonways, architecture, a medieval park and leftover mince pies. We will be taking lunch together, as last year. The Falcon offers sandwiches as well as hot food, coffee and local beers.

The walk is timed to take advantage of trains from Newcastle at 9.55 and Hexham at 9.45. Return trains leave Wylam at about five minutes past the hour (Check the timetable closer to the date).

On 5th September John Griffiths will take a fresh look at Peterlee. The town, founded in 1948, was always intended to be something more than a conventional 'New Town', and was the laboratory for innovative plans by the Modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin, the artist Victor Passmore, and the political leader Dan Smith. Our walk will include urban Peterlee and the richly-wooded Castle Eden Dene.

The meeting place will be Peterlee Bus Station. There is a Go Ahead bus from Newcastle on Sundays – service 1X – departing Eldon Square 09.45, though this is, of course, subject to change. It goes via Washington, so bus-travellers will get two New Towns for the price of one.

Walks may involve steep climbs and rough paths. Please check the website for any late changes.

Rosie Serdiville

MONTHLY MEETINGS

May 2009

Ian Tyers spoke about dendrochronology, the analysis of tree ring growth patterns. Tree-rings could, he explained, identify two different things. There was the well-known fact that counting the rings identified the age of a tree when it was felled, and the rather less well-known ability to use the patterns of growth to identify the dates during which it was growing. Growth patterns could be linked over large geographical areas and long periods of time. The UK's sequence, for oak, went back just over 7,000 years.

However, dating was only the starting point for further analysis. For example, a study of many Tudor panel paintings had found that some of the planks from several of them had come from the same tree. That suggested they came from the same studio at the same time, and could perhaps help establish the identity of both sitters and painter.

Similarly, dendrochronology could reveal building techniques. We now knew that for most medieval building projects the trees were felled only as needed, often after the project was already under way. This was because oak was fairly soft and easy to work when newly felled, but rapidly hardened afterwards.

Dendrochronology was also able to establish the source of building timber. Nearly all oak building timbers used were home grown, but from the middle of the 17th century they were replaced by imported softwoods coming from northern and eastern Europe. The source of oak planks was a quite different story. Broadly speaking, up until the 13th century most of these were also home-grown, but from then on a large proportion was imported from firstly Ireland and Germany, and then subsequently the areas around the eastern Baltic. This was, Ian thought, because while Britain was still heavily wooded, they were largely more open, managed, woodlands which were less suitable

for producing straight planks, though still quite acceptable for building timbers.

Ian has been working on a project at Bessie Surtees House, on the Quayside, with results to be made available in due course. He can be contacted at ian@dendro.co.uk

June 2009

Bio-archaeologist Charlotte Roberts, Professor of Archaeology at Durham University, spoke about the analysis of skeletons in the Bowl Hole cemetery at Bamburgh Castle.

Most were adult males or females, with a few juveniles. There was an unusual variety of burial practices in the cemetery, with some in foetal positions, some laid on their backs, and some prone. There was no evidence, though that any particular practice was a punishment.

Deciding on the age at which someone had died was not easy. Data from the excavation of the graveyard at Christchurch Spitalfields, London, where plaques describing age at death remained on the coffins, suggested that past analyses could have under-estimated the age of death by as much as 30 years. It was probably a myth that everyone died young in the past, although average life expectancy would have been lower. The skeletons' heights were normal for that time-period. It was again a myth that people were on the whole shorter in the past.

In terms of their health, there were signs of osteoarthritis, fractures and infection, including some signs of violence such as swordcuts. They also had very bad teeth, with high levels of plaque and of dental caries, caused by eating or drinking sweet stuff. Since sugar had not yet been imported into England at that period, the offender was perhaps Lindisfarne mead!

Analysis of origins could be done by looking at chemicals (strontium and oxygen isotopes) present in the teeth. This showed that these were not long-distance migrants, dispelling the myth that large population displacements occurred from the continent at that time. Most came from the Northumberland area, with a few from Southern Scotland and a couple from Yorkshire, but there is more work to do on this subject.

Professor Roberts can be contacted on c.a.roberts@durham.ac.uk

July 2009

Independent consultant Peter Ryder told us about the traces of pre-Conquest building he had found in his archaeological assessments of seventy old churches in County Durham, carried out between 1991 and 2008.

There were generally held to be eleven 'Saxon' churches in the county, with two more 'possibles'. Peter's researches, however, had led him to cross several off the list, while adding some others. Churches had been much altered over the years and very often the original outside walls had been pierced by arcades opening into new aisles, so that often early walling survived above later arches.

Current thinking suggested that rather than there being a sharp 'Conquest' dividing line, there was a transitional period of 20 years or more when recognisably 'Saxon' churches were still being built. There was also a recent theory that many changes came about with the introduction of a new liturgy, which required bells and therefore a tower. Some towers seemed to have been built on top of earlier porches, or even straight on to gable ends.

One 'Saxon' church where Peter was not convinced was Staindrop, where he thought various features had been misinterpreted. It was more likely to be early Norman. He had similar doubts about Haughton-le-Skerne. On the other hand, he added Chester-le-Street to the list. We knew that it had been the cathedral before Durham, and that an originally wooden church had been rebuilt in stone in 1056; traces of Saxon walling survive in the nave. The chance to have a good examination after the disastrous fire at Brancepeth had also confirmed earlier suspicions of Saxon origins.

Peter can be contacted at pfryder@broomlee.demon.co.uk

August 2009

Alan Biggins of TimeScape Surveys talked about his geophysical survey at Risingham in Northumberland, work supported by a grant from ourselves.

Risingham Roman fort, he explained, was situated on the River Rede, with marshy ground to one side, just off the main road between Corbridge and Scotland. It has been

very little excavated, the most recent work being a brief dig in 1990, designed to test theories that supplies could have been brought up to the fort by river in Roman times. (No trace of jetties or quays was found.) There were, however, some very good aerial photographs by Professor J K St Joseph, showing clear outlines of buildings, and epigraphic evidence and pottery.

Risingham is thought to have been built after the advance into Scotland by Agricola, abandoned during the period when the Antonine Wall was in use, re-built after the retreat from Scotland, overrun in the late third century and re-built again in the fourth under Constantine. His new south gate had 7-sided projecting towers on each side, an arrangement almost unknown in the rest of the Roman empire. There appeared never to have been an east gate.

Alan's project involved taking magnetometer and resistivity surveys across the whole site. It revealed that the second-century rebuilding involved a complete re-organisation of the site, turning it round 180 degrees. To cram perhaps as many as 1,000 soldiers and large numbers of horses, a complete battle-group, within the perimeter, roadways were narrowed to mere alleys, the north gate blocked by the commanding officer's house, and the barrack-blocks and granaries built back-to-back.

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September 2009

Jonathan Shipley spoke about his research project on *Concealed Communities – marginality in the College and Upper Coquet valleys*, which he had carried out at Newcastle University jointly with the Northumberland National Park.

The purpose, he explained, was to look at the people who would not usually appear in the archaeological record, such as shepherds using the seasonal grazing or shieling grounds, at the practice of transhumance in general, and at those living on isolated farmsteads, and drovers, and to see what traces they had left in the landscape.

An initial review of the Sites and Monuments Record had revealed only a few possible sites classed as shielings in each valley. However, examination of aerial



Excavations at Harrowbog; courtesy Jonathan Shipley

photographs and documentary sources, supported by fieldwork and site visits where possible (access to some sites was not possible as they were in the Otterburn live firing range) had revealed a large number of other possible sites. In practice, very little trace was left on the ground, perhaps due to the temporary nature of the shielings, and because some may have been constructed from turf or timber.

The isolated farmsteads had generally grown up in the area only after the Union of the Crowns in 1603. With a team of others, he had excavated the farmstead of Harrowbog in the College Valley over two summers, which they knew from cartographic evidence to have been abandoned before the 1820's. Material culture recovered, including fine pottery, suggested the earliest date for the farmstead was the late seventeenth century. He had also researched drovers' roads, of which some were still obvious and followed the tracks of Roman roads.

He concluded that it was wrong to call the social groups examined marginal, although the upland landscape could be classed that way in agricultural and economic terms.

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October 2009

Cinzia Bacilieri and Chris Tolan-Smith of Archaeological Research Services Ltd discussed their recent North East Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Survey for English Heritage. This involved surveying the coastline and a kilometre inland, all the way from the centre of the river at Whitby to



The very well preserved light house at Whitburn seen in context with the modern landscape where there is threat of coastal erosion and nearby quarrying activities. NMR 20925/025 6-AUG-2009 @ English Heritage. NMR

Marshall Meadows at Berwick. The idea was to review and plot, from aerial photographs and other resources, the information available on historic sites and monuments, and to look at the threat posed to them by coastal erosion.

Cinzia, an aerial photography expert, explained that her work had been part of English Heritage's National Mapping Programme, now around 42% complete. She had gone through thousands of aerial photographs from different sources, and also made use of Google Earth.com. As a result they had increased the number of data

records by around 75%; around three-quarters of these were World War I and World War II sites. Of the others some were new finds, including medieval settlements and saltworkings.

Chris explained that the exercise would feed into a Shoreline Management Plan, under which DEFRA and other bodies could decide what to do about erosion and rising sea-levels. They could do nothing, hold the line by building sea defences – possibly the biggest threat to archaeology, since it involved major engineering works – or manage a retreat. In some cases, erosion already had taken its toll. For example, a number of WW2 pillboxes were now in pieces on different beaches, having fallen down the cliffs.

Chris pointed out other little-noticed heritage sites in the North East. The Maltings at Berwick, for example had not been previously recognised as originally a whale-oil house, one of the few relics of the whaling industry still visible. There were wrecked ships on the mudflats at Amble, and oyster beds at Alnmouth.

The full survey is available on <http://tinyurl.com/NERCZA>. Cinzia can be contacted on cinzia@archaeologicalresearchservices.com, and Chris on chris.tolansmith@btinternet.com

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I would be very glad to have readers' comments or suggestions for the content of the Bulletin. I am also happy to receive contributions from members, but pressure of space means that articles frequently have to be drastically cut, deferred, or dropped altogether. My address is 5 Goldspink Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1 NQ, phone 0191 232 2968. E-mail sue.ward@btinternet.com. Deadline for the next edition will be 7th May 2010. The mailing date will be 16th June. All inserts must be delivered to the Membership Secretary by 9th June. The Spring Mailing will be on 17th March, and inserts must be with the Membership Secretary by 10th March.

Anyone who wants an insert included in the mailing should contact the Membership Secretary in good time before these dates, for details of the requirements.