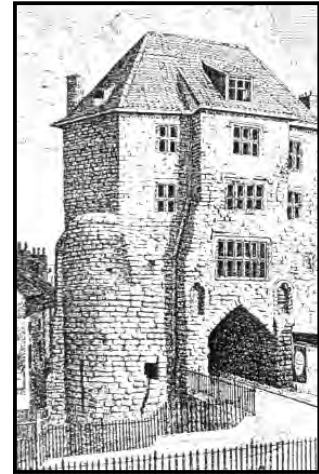


# NEWS BULLETIN

THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

No. 48: JUNE 2010



## 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](http://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](mailto:admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk)*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



*David Breeze showing off his OBE after receiving it from the Queen in November*

Since publication of the last *News Bulletin* at the end of 2009, we have been bedding in at

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the Great North Museum and working on the future of the Black Gate. Our library is one of the success stories of the GNM. Nicky Clarke, the full-time librarian, is now well settled in, and so are the users. The library is frequented by many students undertaking research at Newcastle and some, so that they can make the most use of the facilities, have joined the Society. I have used the library on several occasions over the last few months and at times have found it difficult to find a chair, surely a good sign. Denis continues to work through the books on the open shelves, moving some to the stack and bringing others into the main library.

A number of committees have been set up to aid the operation of the museum. Lindsay Allason-Jones represents the Society on the Board of Management and, together with myself as President and Grace McCombie, on the Societies Liaison Committee.

A 'snagging' list of items in the galleries has been prepared, and is now being tackled. These include: re-numbering of some of the main items and the placing of iron collars around the larger objects; new software for touch screens (to correct the location of Hadrian's Wall, for example); improvements to the display of the Anglo-Saxon objects; the re-display of the medieval case; and the addition of Roman stone sculptures.

Our leaflets are available at the front of the museum, and we have posters and space on the display screens, giving us a higher profile than we have had in the past.

The Museum was on the long list for the valuable Art Fund Prize, and we encouraged all members to vote for it to go through further, but sadly it didn't reach the shortlist.

Meanwhile Alec Coles, director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, has departed for pastures new. Alec has moved to Western Australia to manage a dispersed museum service there. He clearly relishes a challenge, and his experience in the North-East will no doubt stand him in good stead. We wish him well in his new appointment.

The other significant recent event was the retirement of *Archaeologia Aeliana* editor Richard Bailey, after editing 16 volumes in his term of office, including two in one year! He has maintained the high standard of *AA*, ensured that it has kept up with new developments in printing, publishing and

editing. *AA* is now a peer-reviewed journal, which means that every paper is considered by outside referees before acceptance. This in turn ensures its wide acceptance as a major journal within the academic world.

Richard is not forsaking publication altogether. He continues with his work on the corpus of Viking sculpture and we wish him well with that project. We had a dinner for Richard and Mary after the February Council meeting to mark the occasion, and to thank Richard for all his hard work on behalf of the Society.

Our new editor is Humphrey Welfare, who should be well known to readers of *AA*. He has published two papers on the earthworks of Hadrian's Wall in recent years. He is a senior officer with English Heritage and its director on the Board of Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd. Humphrey moved to Northumberland with his family when a teenager, so he knows the north well. He lived and worked in Newcastle when a member of the Royal Commission.

We offer Humphrey our best wishes in his new appointment.

*David Breeze,*  
*President*

## **PRESIDENT'S EVENING**

There are still tickets available for our President's Evening on June 25th. It will be held at St Nicholas Cathedral in Newcastle from 7 p.m.

In 1882 Newcastle was given city status and the medieval parish church of St Nicholas became the seat of the Bishopric when it was granted Cathedral status. Our speaker for the evening will be Barbara Harbottle, who is highly knowledgeable both about what was there before, and what changes were made afterwards.

There will be a buffet with wine and soft drinks. The cost for the evening is £12.50. Download the booking form on the website, or alternatively send a cheque for the right amount (made out to SANT) to David Hide, 24 Towers Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 3QE, with a stamped self-addressed envelope.

## COUNTRY WALKS



*The intrepid Antiquaries in front of Castle Hill House, picture Sue Ward*

A small hardy group set off from Wylam station on January 2nd, to walk round the environs of Wylam and look at wagonways. There was thick snow on the station platform, but Denis Peel took us up a private walkway to Castle Hill House – a big Victorian house built by the same architect as the Mining Institute. It was a NHS convalescent home for a long time, and is now a combination of flats and additional self-contained houses in the grounds.

We went on across several ploughed fields – more comfortable to walk on when frozen and covered with snow than on normal occasions – and via a couple of stretches of wagonway, pretty well invisible under the snow. It was sleeting or snowing much of the way, and biting cold, but exhilarating for all that after so much time indoors. We had a good pub lunch, and generous hospitality from Denis and Georgina Peel – mulled wine and mincepies – at the end. Their son and grandson also arrived, after a day skiing at Allenheads!

To fulfil the original aim, we have scheduled another Wylam Wagonways walk, led by Denis Peel, on 10 July. Meet at Holburn Dene, Ryton, 10.30 am NZ 156645.

On 5 September we have a further walk, to be led by John Griffiths, around Peterlee and the woodland of Castle Eden Dene. Meet at Peterlee Bus Station for 11.15.

Participants should bring stout footwear, warm and waterproof clothing and a packed lunch. No dogs, please. We can organise lifts for those who need them. Contact Rosie Serdiville on 0191 230 3797 or

rosie.serdiville@talktalk.net. Look on the website for further details and any last-minute changes.

### Summer evening walks

We also have a programme of evening walks during the – hopefully – warm summer, each lasting around 2 hours. On Monday 28 June, John Griffiths will lead a walk round Dan Smith's Wallsend. Meet 7pm, Wallsend Metro.

On Monday 19 July John will take us to Killingworth. Meet 7pm, Dial Cottage, Great Lime Road. More details on the website, or contact John Griffiths on 0191 285 7988, mobile 07729 827244 or email johnfrancisgriffiths@hotmail.com

## OTHER COMING EVENTS

### Hadrian's Wall Archaeology Forum

You still just have time to book for this year's Hadrian's Wall Forum on Saturday 19th June at Queen's Hall, Hexham, Northumberland. There will be seven talks, designed to appeal to anyone with an interest in 'Wall Studies' – amateurs as well as professionals.

The cost of the event is £15 and includes refreshments. Tickets can be bought through the Queen's Hall Box Office, phone 01434 652477, e-mail boxoffice@queenshall.co.uk. For more information contact David Mason at Durham County Archaeologist, The Archaeology Section, Durham County Council, The Rivergreen Centre, Aykley Heads, Durham, DH1

### British Archaeological Association

The BAA are holding their 2010 Summer Conference in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 17th to 21st July. Confirmed speakers and presenters include a number of our members – David Breeze, Rosemary Cramp, David Heslop, Grace McCombie and Humphrey Welfare among others.

The archaeologists will be scurrying round the City, visiting St Nicholas's Cathedral, Blackfriars, the City Walls, Trinity House, Guildhall and the Castle Keep. They will also be making excursions east and west along the Tyne valley, including Tynemouth Priory and St Paul's Church, Jarrow, Bywell, Hexham Abbey, Housesteads Roman Fort, Hadrian's Wall, and Aydon Castle.

Closing date for applications was officially 15 May, but you never know – if they have spaces and you don't need accommodation, they might let you in. See their website, [www.britarch.ac.uk/baa/conferences.html](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/baa/conferences.html) for details. And even if you don't want to go, the BAA publish all their conference proceedings in due course, so there's a treat in store!

## BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS FOR BRIAN SHEFTON



*Brian Shefton naming the Gallery, picture courtesy Anne Paterson*

Emeritus Professor Brian Shefton, founder of the Shefton collection of Greek and Etruscan antiquities now incorporated in the Great North Museum, reached his 90th birthday last November. A celebratory day was organised by Tyne and Wear Museums, with invited guests from the worlds of classic scholarship and of the museum. The Society's Council were invited, as joint stakeholders in the Museum. (David Breeze could not attend as he was down in London collecting his OBE from the Queen that day!)

It began with the unveiling of a plaque to go in the Shefton Gallery. For anyone who has not yet found it, it is on the first floor at the back of the GNM and well worth a visit. Professor Shefton gave a lecture about the process of building up the collection – which though it was not large, he said, was without parallel in Europe except in the museums of capital cities. He had had some luck, a discerning eye, and a broad range of contacts to help him. Conservation bodies had also been extremely generous with their time, often helping to restore items free of charge.

The final event of the day was the cutting of a cake to mark Brian's birthday.

*Sue Ward*

## R. W. RENNISON 1930–2010

Bob Rennison's death in April this year brought a great sense of loss to his many friends and fellow-members of this Society.

In his life-long pursuit of the history of engineering he had been a very important part of both the local and the national research networks. In 1979 he co-founded the north-eastern branch of the Newcomen Society, and was President from 1989 to 1991. Much of his research was published in their *Transactions*. His other principal publisher was Thomas Telford Publishing, of the Institution of Civil Engineers, for his *Civil Engineering Heritage: Northern England* (1981 and 1996). He chaired the ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works.

His first book was *Water to Tyneside: a history of the Newcastle and Gateshead Water Company*, published by that company in 1981. Many years ago I needed to know about Newcastle's sewers and water supply. I was directed to Allendale Road, Byker, and the headquarters of the Newcastle and Gateshead Water company. Bob was then New Works Engineer (later their Chief Civil Engineer) and willingly produced maps and books to show me.

He was a great scholar. For him, knowledge was based on documentary and physical evidence – the minutes of the companies, the papers of the engineers, the constructions still to be seen. And that knowledge, once acquired, was shared. His discoveries were subjects of books, and articles, especially in the *Transactions* of the Institute of Civil Engineers and in the *Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers in Great Britain and Ireland: 1500–1830*.

A service of thanksgiving for Bob's life was held in Brunswick Methodist Church. His son John spoke of Bob's life and his fine qualities, his career and his research, and recalled his warm voice – and his timeless farewell: 'Cheerio'.

*Grace McCombie*

## CONCERT FOR COLIN ROSS

On 1st May, the Northumbrian Pipers' Society held a sold-out concert at King's Hall, Newcastle University, in celebration of our Bagpipe Collection's former curator Colin Ross and his wife, the folk singer Ray Fisher.

There was a surprise presentation to Colin before the final appearance of the High Level Ranters. A member of the Manchester Pipers' Branch presented a lovely engraved salver. For the Antiquaries, Kim Bibby-Wilson had found us a fascinating charcoal drawing of the late C15 piper carving in Hexham Abbey, and arranged for it to be beautifully framed. Finally the Northumbrian Pipers' Society gave him a gold version of their badge.

The music was wonderful. It is a long time since I had been to an event like that. Music-making of the highest quality, real companionship, and such dignity and restraint. If toes were tapped it was respectfully, and only if the performers tapped the beat first.

It would not have been appropriate in my few sentences making the presentation to have mentioned the great work done by Kim and by Anne Moore; but I am very grateful to both of them for all they have done and are doing for the pipes, and to Kim for organising the Society's presentation.

*Grace McCombie*

## NEW BOOKS FROM OUR MEMBERS

***Finds From the Frontier; Material culture in the 4th–5th centuries, edited by Rob Collins and Lindsay Allason-Jones***

This book brings together papers given at a conference held at Newcastle upon Tyne in 2008. Its aim is to elucidate the life of the 4th-century *limitanei* of Britain through their material culture. The papers consider whether the excavated artefacts justify the traditional implication that the period is one of declining standards and largely come to the conclusion that, on the contrary, the period was rich in artefacts that have much to tell us about the late frontier. Available from

the Council of British Archeology  
[www.britarch.ac.uk/books](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/books), £35

***Newcastle and Gateshead Before 1700 Edited by Diana Newton and A.J. Pollard, Phillimore***

Our own Barbara Harbottle has contributed a chapter on Medieval Newcastle to this useful book on the past history of the settlements on each side of the Tyne. Topics covered include the spectacular economic growth that followed the building of the Norman castle and the halt caused by conflict with Scotland; the rise of the coal trade; the significance of religion and the influence of the bishops of Durham; the governance of the towns and the buildings to which this gave rise; the impact, time after time, of plague; the relations of local elites with wider regional society; and the financial and other networks within which both Newcastle and Gateshead operated, including London and the ports of northern Europe. Price £22.50. Look on the publisher's website, [www.phillimore.co.uk/](http://www.phillimore.co.uk/) for more details.

And (of course) both are available in our own library.

*Editor's Note:* there are other fascinating books available from Phillimore too... how about this, which caught my eye when looking for the one above;

***The Motorway Achievement; Building the Network in the North East of England***

This eminently readable and illustrated narrative recalls the setting up of Highways and Bridges Departments in the various counties and the prominent people who were involved at the time. The schemes for the improvement of Trunk Road A1 through the West Riding, North Riding, Durham and Northumberland are examined in detail, and the Newcastle Central Motorway East and the Western Bypass are included.

Gripping, eh!

## MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Membership committee are continuing to look at ways of making potential members aware of our existence and to persuade them to join us. The move to the Great North



## The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne

Encouraging the study and enjoyment of  
archaeology and history in North East  
England since 1813

### Members enjoy

- world-class collections of antiquities, coins and archives housed in local and national museums
- use of our extensive specialist library in the Great North Museum: Hancock
- a regular programme of lectures, walks, visits and social events
- a twice-yearly News Bulletin, regular mailings, email updates and a website
- a free copy each year of our internationally-respected journal *Archaeologia Aeliana*
- other publications and research on North East history and archaeology
- free entry to Newcastle Castle Keep and Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum

### Interested?

visit : [www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](http://www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk)  
or please contact us for details on how to join

The Membership Secretary  
The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne  
Great North Museum: Hancock  
Barras Bridge  
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT  
phone 0191 231 2700  
email [admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](mailto:admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk)

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*Our new poster, courtesy of Sarah and David Walter*

Museum has been very useful in this respect. The Library is particularly well used and we are picking up a steady stream of new members from the leaflets on display with our collection.

We are particularly grateful to Sarah and David Walter who have made their considerable design and media skills available to us. They have provided us with both an introductory leaflet and an eye catching poster which is being distributed widely. Do let Sarah know if you can take any of the leaflets to pass on to friends and acquaintances or if you have a prime site for poster display. There are copies of both on the website for you to look at.

We are also raising our profile by running stalls at a series of local history fairs running in the region over the next few months. Help at these events would be greatly appreciated. Nothing complex is needed – just a couple of hours manning a bookstall and talking enthusiastically about the many pleasures of being an antiquary. If you are willing to help, please contact Rosie Serdiville on [rosie.serdiville@gmail.com](mailto:rosie.serdiville@gmail.com) or ring on 0191 230 3947.

## KEEP UP TO DATE WITH WHAT THE ANTIQUARIES ARE DOING

Want to know what's going on in the Antiquaries each month? As well as the *News Bulletin* and the website, we are now sending out a monthly e-mail reminding people of forthcoming meetings and events, and giving other news. They are blind-copied, so no-one will find out your e-mail address in this way. So far we have around 75 people on the list.

If you would like to join, please send an e-mail to [admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](mailto:admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk).

## LIBRARY MATTERS

From 11 June until the start of the new academic year on September 27th, the Library will be open Monday–Friday 1pm–4pm only (so not mornings).

I am hoping that there will be cover when I take my own holidays, so that the Library doesn't have to close, but this is not yet certain. Details will be put on the Antiquaries' website when known, but please also phone to check before making a special journey (0191 222 3555).

*Nicky Clarke*

## COLLINGWOOD BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

### Tyneside 7th March 2010

Admiral Collingwood, Nelson's second-in-command at Trafalgar and one of Tyneside's great heroes, died off Menorca on 7th March



*The Collingwood Memorial 'dressed' for the occasion with a contingent of naval ratings. Picture courtesy Neil Wasp, i2i Photography*

1810. This year saw twin commemorations here and in Menorca. Here, there was a naval parade through the streets of Newcastle and a special service, with a wreath laying ceremony at the bust of the Admiral, in the Cathedral. The ceremony included extracts from letters both written by and about Collingwood, read by members of the Collingwood family.

Then in the afternoon there was a ceremony at the Collingwood Monument at Tynemouth. Promptly at 3.00pm and catching both onlookers and seabirds by surprise, pyrotechnics laid directly under the four *Royal Sovereign* cannons exploded into life. These cannons saw action at the Battle of Trafalgar, on board Collingwood's ship the *Royal Sovereign* when it led the British fleet into action. This 'firing' was the first time they had been used in more than 100 years. They weigh almost three tons each and originally fired 32-pound cannonballs. They were brought to the Tyne in July 1848 as an ornamental addition to the monument and also to form part of coastal defences.

### Menorca, 26th–31st March 2010

On the Mediterranean island of Menorca, events included a recital by Tomeu Olives in the Church of Santa Maria, on the historic organ with its links with Collingwood. The

story behind it is that it had been commissioned by a local merchant in 1809, with an impressive wooden housing due to arrive from Austria. This had been transported overland to the Italian coast, but no merchant ship could be found to take its chances with the French fleet lying in Toulon. Collingwood heard of the story and despatched a frigate to collect the housing and likewise ensured that the organ itself was escorted to the island.

A bronze bust of Collingwood, specially created by English sculptor Helen Ridehalgh, was unveiled. In its final position, it will be able to gaze on Collingwood's one-time home, now the Hotel Almirante. Finally, in a nice gesture of recognition of Collingwood's keenness to plant oaks wherever he went, three oak saplings donated by Trees Please Limited, a nursery in Corbridge, Northumberland were planted. In the names of Newcastle, North Tyneside and Morpeth.

More activities are planned this year; look at [www.collingwood2010.co.uk/](http://www.collingwood2010.co.uk/) for details.

### PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME

For those who do not know about the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), the website [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk) explains it all. I am

### 2009 NEW MEMBERS

Below is a list of all the new members who joined in 2009 – welcome to all of them. We have decided that it is tidier to record members by calendar year in the *News Bulletin*, rather than the rather awkward May–April that we have used in the past. So all the 2010 members will be noted in June 2011.

Any member, new or old, who has not yet paid their subscription for the year, please do so – you know who you are!

Miss Elizabeth Greene  
Mr James Hix  
Mr Stephen Hunneysett  
Mr Gordon Scott  
Mr Harry Chrisp  
Mrs Margaret Coombe  
Mr Gareth Davies  
Dr James Bruhn  
Mr Christopher Ferguson  
Mr Roger Owen  
Miss Hannah Flint  
Mr Robert Oakden  
Ms Jennifer Proctor  
Prof Paul Younger

Mr James Frazer  
Mrs Catherine Jarvis  
Mrs Jill Bewsher Humphries  
Mrs Pauline Douglas  
Dr Samuel Turner  
Mrs Denise Heslop  
Mr Alan Beale  
Mrs Stella Fagg  
Mrs Hilary Dixon  
Mr William Evans  
Rev Christopher Wardale  
Mrs P Green  
Mr Timothy Griffiths  
Mr Angus Graham

Mrs Shelagh Williams  
Mrs Elizabeth Galley  
Dr Mary Rack  
Mrs Barbara Blatchford  
Mr Howard Cleeve  
Mr Duncan Donaldson  
Mr Robert Hull  
Mr Darren Adams  
Dr Alisdair Sutherland  
Dr Julia Rand  
Dr Lynn Pearson  
Mr Mark Nimmins



*The recently discovered bezel ring. Picture courtesy Rob Collins*

Finds Liaison Officer for the region, and since September 2009, the Society has very generously provided me with office space. Visitors to the Society office will have witnessed much of the work that the PAS does, including supervising student volunteers. I would like to express my thanks to the Society for providing me with office space over the past months; my volunteers and I have greatly benefited. I will be moving in June to the newly available desk in the Great North Museum office.

Hundreds of artefacts found in the North East continue to be recorded by the PAS. Most of these objects are found by metal detector users. Sometimes new archaeological sites are discovered, as recently in the parish of Whittington, to the north of the Wall fort of Halton Chesters. This site has produced a coin group containing the latest Roman coin from the Wall corridor (an issue dated to AD 406–408), as well as a pair of *paterae* (copper-alloy pans used for cooking and rituals) recently acquired by the Society. It is hoped that these will be available for display at some point in the future.

Most recently, a detectorist reported a Roman finger ring, broadly datable to between the first century BC and the early second century AD. Its decoration is

distinctly British in style. The bezel is sub-circular with a sunken field, decorated with raised lines that separate cells bearing the remains of red and green/blue enamel. There is a similar fusion of Roman and British in another of the finds, a brooch whose design has evolved from the familiar Roman trumpet brooch, probably dating to the second century. This intriguing new site is likely to continue to produce interesting discoveries.

*Rob Collins*  
*Finds Liaison Officer, North East*

## THE BLACK GATE

Progress is slow in emptying the Black Gate, but the Collections Committee aims to move everything out finally by the end of 2010. Several museums have now expressed interest in borrowing some of the residual objects and loan agreements are being prepared. A decision is still to be reached as to whether the artwork currently in the Black Gate will be loaned to TWAM or will join the archives at Woodhorn. A meeting has been arranged with Iain Watson of TWAM to discuss this matter, and it should be resolved within the month.

Once homes have been found for all the collections material, the furniture and so on will be sent to a saleroom for auction. Members will be informed when and where the sale is taking place in case they wish to make any bids.

*Lindsay Allason-Jones*

## CHANGE OF NAME FOR HEART OF THE CITY

The former Heart of the City project, covering the Cathedral, Black Gate, and Castle Keep area, has changed its name to the 'Old Newcastle' Project. It's felt that this is more easy for visitors to understand, and in line with the way other towns are describing their historic cores. After the previous failure to get funding, a much revised application has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund – we now all have to keep our fingers crossed for its success!



*c. 1700 house in Rosemary Lane, in the heart of Old Newcastle; picture courtesy Grace McCombie*

The website has also had a redesign, and is looking very good, at <http://www.oldnewcastle.org.uk/news>.

## GIL GILMOUR

One of consequence of the Society's move from the Black Gate to the GNM Hancock was that Edward Albert Gilmour, universally known as Gil, reluctantly had to say goodbye to his beloved coin collection which he had cherished for more than twenty years. Gil was not born a numismatologist, but on his retirement as an engine driver he responded to my appeal for library volunteers, (familiar story?), He soon discovered that Graham Robson, the keeper of coins, required assistance as he was then unable to climb the Black Gate Stairs. A then young and active Gil, already an accomplished artist and expert on heraldry took on the challenge with relish and following the sadly premature death of Graham became keeper of coins.

Gil's enthusiasm for cataloguing the coin collection meant that he was soon to be seen in the library on most opening days, head down, producing minute illustrations of coins as he sorted out the genuine from forgeries, but never fulfilling my request for coins for the Castle Garth parking meters. Gil became the backbone of the volunteers who kept the library open from 1987 until the move in 2009.

What even library regulars may not know, however, is that Gil is also an accomplished watercolour artist, with an entry in the directory *The Artists of Northumbria*, edited by Marshall Hall and available in the Lit and Phil.

The Society wishes to record its thanks and wish you, Gil, a long and happy retirement.

*Denis Peel*

Our new Keeper of Coins is Rob Collins (see his article above about his work for the Portable Antiquities scheme). Like Gil, Rob was not born a numismatist, but he developed a keen interest after some training and a rather more rigorous practice identifying the historic coins of Britain as the Portable Antiquities officer for the region. Before this, Rob completed his PhD at the University of York on Hadrian's Wall in late Roman times. Rob hopes to carry on the excellent work of Gil and previous Keepers and to promote the Society's coin collection.

## GEARING UP FOR OUR BICENTENARY

In 2013 the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne will reach its 200th Birthday. Few societies attain this venerable age and ours has achieved much over two centuries. In order to prepare its celebratory year, Council has elected a Bicentenary Committee who are interested in any ideas members might have to mark 2013 and make it a tremendous year. Please contact Lindsay Allason-Jones (0191 2227846; [L.Allason-Jones@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:L.Allason-Jones@ncl.ac.uk)) or Colm O'Brien ([colm.o'brien@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:colm.o'brien@sunderland.ac.uk)) with your views.

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

### November public lecture

The 2009 Public Lecture was given by writer and broadcaster Michael Wood, to a packed audience at Newcastle University, on the tenth-century English king Athelstan.

Athelstan should be regarded, Mr Wood said, as the founder of the modern English state. Early historians saw him as an English Charlemagne. He attempted to impose himself as overlord north of the Humber, a first for a southern English king, produced law codes which were really treaties setting out how English and Danish populations should live side-by-side but under different laws, and

built up a wide network of alliances across Europe through diplomacy and the marriages of his sisters.

We had, in a picture of Athelstan standing at the shrine of St Cuthbert, what was probably the first royal portrait to have survived. William of Malmesbury described him vividly, as a man of around medium height, with hair twisted in golden braids, able to put off his majesty when he chose and talk to anyone.

Some things about Athelstan's character were very alienating, particularly the use of violence in the name of religion combined with piety. However, William of Malmesbury said that no-one had ruled the state more lawfully or more learnedly, and this was a common opinion until long after the Norman Conquest. He ruled a heavily militarised society, with an mounted force of perhaps more than a thousand warriors readily available to him. He was responsible for building up West Saxon towns into fortresses, with garrisons of around 27,000 men all told.

There was so far no full-length biography of him, though three studies were now in preparation. This was partly because of a lack of sources, with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for example, having only a few entries for those years. We did not even know where his decisive battle of 937, *Brunanburh*, had actually taken place. Bromborough in the Wirral had been suggested, but seemed unlikely. The Chester-le-Street annals, however, mentioned 'Wendun', which would mean the hill by the Went river – perhaps at the point in North Yorkshire where it crossed the Great North Road.

A recording of the lecture is available on Newcastle University's website, at [www.ncl.ac.uk/events/public-lectures/archive.php](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/events/public-lectures/archive.php)

### January 2010

The first speaker of the New Year was Grace McCombie, immediate past president of the Society and author of the *Newcastle and Gateshead City Guide*, in the Pevsner series, which many members had probably received in their Christmas stockings. She described the role of Nikolaus Pevsner, with his astonishing workload of county architectural guides – two a year from 1949 to the final one in 1973 – on top of all his other



*The Thomlinson Library, one of the many pictures in the new City Guide, © English Heritage (James O. Davies)*

academic and editorial work. She mentioned that Penguin was taken over by Pearson, and then succeeded by the new regime of Yale University Press; they were, she said, a most helpful organisation to work for.

It was particularly pleasing that the Guide she was responsible for should put Newcastle and Gateshead on an equal footing, since so often in the past Gateshead had been treated as an inferior partner. This was partly because until the mid-nineteenth century it was a very small settlement, though it had then grown hugely as industry and warehousing sprang up. Photos taken from the top of the Castle Keep, and included in the book, showed what a remarkable Quayside we now had, on both sides of the river. However, Grace neatly illustrated her own point about the difficulty of keeping up with the pace of change in a Guide such as hers, since the photos showed the now-disappeared *Tuxedo Princess* still moored under Tyne Bridge.

A whistle-stop tour of other parts of central Newcastle and Gateshead, illustrated with maps and plans, provided new insights even for those who thought they knew the city well.

Grace can be contacted on [grace@mccombie.org](mailto:grace@mccombie.org), and the book can be purchased at any good bookshop.

### February 2010

Tony Barrow discussed the social context of Admiral Collingwood, whose naval career lasted almost half a century although the spotlight tends to concentrate on the last 15



*Richard Brathwaite, Collingwood's cousin, with whom he first went to sea in 1761. Picture – speaker's collection*

years. He was an exceptional officer, articulate and humane, with a tremendous respect from the seamen he commanded.

Successful careers in the RN in the 18th and 19th centuries often depended on patronage and influence which, according to the late Professor Michael Lewis, 'was interwoven into the very fabric of the Navy.' A young officer would be very fortunate to get on without some contact with 'one of the great ones' especially if their career began during a period of peace. Collingwood, for example, entered the navy in 1761 towards the end of the Seven Years' War and was the first of his family to enter the service. He was only promoted to lieutenant after 14 years whereas Nelson, who began his career in 1770 and had the patronage of a close relative at the Navy Board, became a lieutenant within six years and was a post-captain at the age of 20.

Collingwood had a well-known preference for cultivating the careers of Northumberland-born officers, particularly those who had served with him. Over a period of time, particularly after his marriage to Sarah Blackett, he was able to use his interest in their favour. In some cases this meant that a sense of obligation, particularly to Admiral Roddam, led him to promote some young men who were not really up to the job.

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**March 2010**



*Rachel's view of what the roundhouse at Douglasmuir would have looked like, drawn by Alan Braby*

Dr Rachel Pope, Lecturer in Later European Prehistory at the University of Liverpool, talked about recent work on prehistoric houses and households in northern Britain, and what it could tell us about everyday life in prehistory.

An estimated 4,000 roundhouses had now been excavated in this country, she explained, and she had analysed a data-set of around 1200 ground plans. They had been the dominant form of dwelling for around 3,000 years, right into the Roman Iron Age, because they were such a well-adapted design. They solved problems of space, and were structurally sound because a ring-beam at the top of the wall transferred lateral stresses horizontally to the ground.

Average size was around 8 metres across, with contiguous timber walling usually of oak. It had been calculated that each one used around 37 trees. Probably at least the double-ring structures had loft-space, perhaps used for sleeping, with the floor resting on a ring-beam at the top of the internal post-ring, and there may have been livestock stalled below in the periphery.

Experiments with replica round houses had shown that although doors were quite low cattle, of the size they would have been in prehistoric times, could be stalled successfully and that the smell was not particularly strong as it was absorbed by the organic materials. Having cattle there also provided effective central heating in the winter.

Comparatively few artefacts had been found, but in about one-fifth of the cases there had been ritual deposition, for instance

unused saddle querns at Green Knowe, similar to those found at Flag Fen. These often seemed to mark the foundation of the house and are found at what might be called ancestral sites. In Middle Iron Age Northumberland, as elsewhere, there was a tendency for roundhouses to be found in large agglomerated lowland settlements, some with drainage problems, for instance the very wet site excavated at Pegswood. During the Late Iron Age houses are found in smaller enclosures.

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### April 2010

Professor David Graham and Dr Myra Giesen spoke about *Bridging Heritage and Science*, and more particularly about their project at Newcastle University on assessing and managing ancient stone monuments in the countryside, part of a national Science and Heritage programme that had emerged from a 2006 House of Lords report.

Dr Giesen began by showing the dramatic way in which monuments that had been stable for thousands of years could decay in modern conditions. Rock art in South Africa, clearly visible in 1907, had virtually disappeared by 1980, probably due to changes in the local micro-climate brought about by changes in agricultural practices. Ancient stone monuments in the UK could also be under threat, she explained, partly from deliberate human behaviour such as graffiti, but also as a side-effect of changes in pollution, climate, and agriculture.

Professor Graham then took over to discuss the scientific side, taking us step-by-step through the issues, and particularly that

of climate change. In the UK, rain was falling more intensively and less frequently than in the past, and the predictions were for dryer summers and much wetter winters, with the country dividing into two climate zones.

Some changes could be unintended effects of other strategies; standing stones on Dartmoor, for instance, were being smothered by bracken now that Natural England had reduced the level of livestock grazing there. Others were the result of much larger causes; the authorities were having to consider how to protect Skara Brae in Orkney against the impact of rising sea-levels, for instance.

David and Myra can be reached via  
myra.giesen@ncl.ac.uk

### ARE YOU A FILM CRITIC MANQUÉ?

The keener-eyed among our members will have noticed that not one but two films about Hadrian's Wall are doing the rounds. *Centurion* has been on at the Empire Cinemas in Newcastle and Sunderland. In the autumn, a film based on Rosemary Sutcliff's *Eagle of the Ninth* is due to be released; how many of us formed our ideas of the history of Romans in Britain from Rosemary Sutcliff's books? In addition, *Agora*, about fourth-century Alexandrian philosopher Hypatia has just had a short season at the Tyneside Cinema.

If anyone would like to give us a short (150 words maximum) review of any of these films, or indeed of any other film with historical pretensions (which probably rules out Russell Crowe's *Robin Hood!*), it will be posted on the website and included in a future *News Bulletin*.

### 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 5th Nov 2010. The mailing date will be 15th Dec. All inserts must be delivered to the Membership Secretary by Dec 8th. 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.*