

# NEWS BULLETIN



THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

EXTRA

No.69 September 2020

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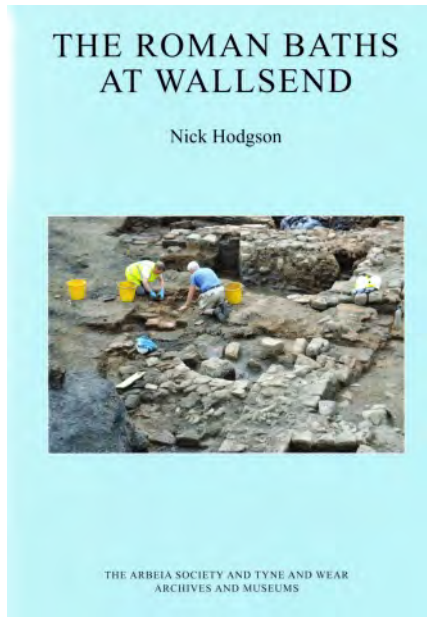
## WHY AN EXTRA NEWS BULLETIN?

*The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne exists to promote the preservation, study and enjoyment of historical and archaeological heritage in general, and of the North East of England in particular. During the Coronavirus crisis, we have been able to maintain our lectures online, and our library re-opened on 1 September on a very limited basis. We are planning an online 'round table' in November, showcasing work on the medieval and early modern period.*

*Despite the current limitations, new skills are being developed and old ones honed, research is being done and uncompleted projects finalised, and members are going down the odd highways and byways of knowledge in the way Antiquaries have always done. So welcome to this Extra edition of our News Bulletin, a miscellany of contributions from members. Sources, references and contact details have been left out for lack of space. So if you would like to contact any of the authors, please send an e-mail via [events@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](mailto:events@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk), and it will be passed on.*

*For more information about the Society, look at our website, [www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](http://www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk). We now have access to our office at the Great North Museum, and answerphone messages on 0191 231 2700 are being picked up, but if at all possible please contact us by e-mail [admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](mailto:admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk).*

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



*The forthcoming report on the Roman baths at Wallsend*

continued flow of new members since the COVID-19 crisis broke in March. Enjoy this *News Bulletin*, and stay safe.

*Nick Hodgson, President*

Like most archaeologists, I have a list of unpublished excavations to work through and get written up. I spent much of the early lockdown period seeing my report on the discovery and excavation of the Roman baths at Wallsend in 2014–15 through the press. It's now in print, and there will be information about a launch and how to obtain the book in due course. I still hope to lecture to the society on the subject before too long, as I was going to before events intervened in March. To judge by some of the other contributions to this *News Bulletin*, other members have also found that lockdown has been an opportunity as well an inconvenience. Who knows what research and publication it might have hastened to completion!

We can glimpse some light at the end of the tunnel; it's now possible to visit our collections in the GNM once again, and very soon we shall have the latest issue of *Archaeologia Aeliana* in our hands. Thanks and congratulations to Marta Alberti and the rest of the team who are bringing us a series of really excellent and well-attended lectures via Zoom.

Thanks to all our members for your continued support of the Society at a time when many will have other serious things to worry about. It's great to report that we have had a

## DINOSAUR ALERT!



*Katie's lockdown home environment – dinosaurs not to scale!*

Since the coronavirus crisis started, I have been crazily crocheting and knitting, and constantly checking the many house plants I've accumulated. I have a knitted dinosaur pattern book and can't stop making them! The stegosaurus in the photo is a present for my friend's new baby daughter, who I haven't been able to see yet as they have been shielding. I learned to knit from books and YouTube about 10 years ago now, and have recently taught myself crocheting in the same way. I like to make odd or one-off things, normally as presents and to use up scraps of yarn I find. I suppose my 'thing' is reuse and recycle anything and everything. Next project is a proggy mat!

I joined the Society a few years ago during my Archaeology MA at Newcastle University. This was the start of a big life change, and I had grand plans for this summer. I had been accepted on a month's placement on the Limes in Bulgaria, and had planned to leave my longstanding civil service job and look for more archaeology experience. With lockdown, everything was postponed or cancelled. Although disappointed, I was lucky enough to keep my usual job and work from home as part of an emergency team arranging practical driving tests for critical workers. It was useful work

to help keep the country moving, even if not what I would have ideally wanted to do. I've tried to look at it as new and possibly transferable skills for when things get back to normal.

I have recently joined the Activities Committee and volunteered to manage the Society's Facebook page along with Marta Alberti. We have run a 'meet the members' series and a 'top ten finds' from our collection, as chosen by Lindsay Allason-Jones. A lot more people have a lot more time to spend on social media, and it has been hard to stop myself constantly checking on the growing number of 'likes' on our posts!

I've also had (a bit) more time to focus on my own research, after having given my first conference talk at the Hadrian's Wall Archaeology Forum in February, on Romano-British enamelled disc brooches. Normally I would be relying on university and library material, but in no time, many resources have been made available online. Not going out anywhere has meant I have been able to save up to buy myself a fancy new laptop (and a LOT more books) to help process it all.

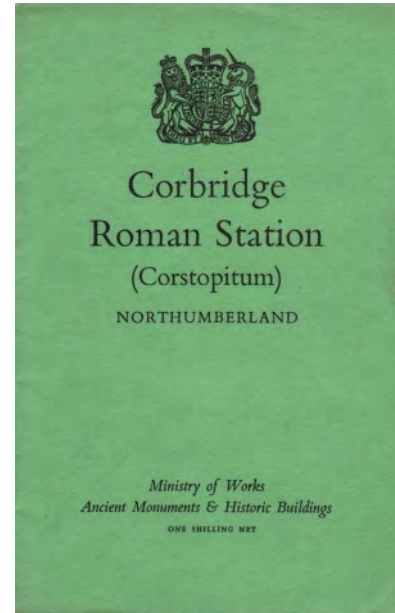
*Katie Mountain*

## GUIDING US ALONG THE ROMAN FRONTIER

For me, lockdown has meant exploring the Roman frontier through guidebooks published by the predecessors of English Heritage. Among the earliest is Eric Birley's guide for *Corbridge Roman Station* (1935). The format – a history followed by a description – was adopted by Sir Charles Peers for the first official Ministry guides in 1917 (such as St Botolph's Priory in Colchester). The history-description structure continued through the 1970s (in the form of the Department of the Environment 'Blue Guide') until the 1980s when the English Heritage white guides placed a 'tour' as the opening section.

Eric Birley prepared the National Trust guidebook for Housesteads (1936). A revised second edition appeared in 1952, the year after the fort was placed in the guardianship of the Ministry of Works, and continued to be published into the 1970s. Birley also prepared the official guide for Chesters (1960) after the fort had been placed in guardianship in 1954.

In the late 1950s the Ministry decided to venture into illustrated souvenir guides, prepared with the assistance of the Central Office of Information. Such 'popularisation' was not immediately welcomed, and the matter was even raised in Parliament. Anthony R. Birley was invited to write the 'illustrated guide' to Hadrian's Wall (1963). One feature was the transparent overlay for Alan Sorrell's reconstruction of the bath house at Chesters, allowing the reader to 'remove' the roof and see the internal structure of the building. There was a series of reconstructions of the wall by Sorrell, something that the Ministry considered unsuitable for its official guides. The Ministry of Public Buildings and Works created a foldout concertina guide to the Wall in 1970.



*The Corstopitum Green Guide, photo David Gill*

*David Gill (a member for over 40 years)*

## THE FIRST AFRICAN SETTLEMENT IN BRITAIN

As one response to the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, the BBC put its *Black and British* programme back on the iPlayer, and it will remain there for another nine months.

In 2016, a BBC researcher invited members of the North East of England African Community Association to be present at a special event in Cumbria in eleven days time. They felt it 'important for black / African / people of African descent to be present at this moment marking the first written record of an African community in Britain'. We were used to unsolicited invitations to participate in media events to add colour. Usually these were quickly disseminated and quickly forgotten but this one was special.

The first African settlement in Britain was on our doorstep and we had never heard of it! Discussions about transport and numerous emails resulted in five members setting off in a taxi on 19 July to Burgh by Sands. The lure of being in the first episode of the TV series *Black and British* with David Olusoga was secondary. We were going to connect with our history.

We explored St Michael's Church, built partially with the stones from the Roman fort of Aballava, at which a unit of Moroccan and Algerian soldiers were stationed around AD 258. We touched these stones with awe. Silenced by the momentousness of the occasion, we engaged only briefly with David Olusoga and the TV cameras. The phrase on our demonstrations 'We are



*The group on their 2018 visit to Burgh by Sands*

here because you were there' could now be supplemented by 'we have always been here'. No longer, at best, permanent guests, but part of this soil. This powerful feeling was endorsed by one of our hosts who responded to the comment on how long her family had been in this village with 'Your DNA has been here even longer'.

Humphrey Welfare, Chair of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site Partnership Board, explained the settlement that would have grown up around the fort with families of the African soldiers and local women. There was a solemn moment with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque. But the abiding memory was of connection with our history, with a piece of English soil and with our wonderful hosts.

In June 2018, as part of a Live Well project with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, twenty-nine of us had another opportunity to visit Burgh by Sands. We were met with a warm welcome, generous hospitality, and a stimulating lecture, and led the congregation in this historic church in an African hymn.

That summer we also paid homage to Victor at Arbeia in South Shields, and imbibed both knowledge and a physical connection through place with Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King. And to a renewed commitment to actively claim our place in the North East – hence our participation in 2020 in Culture Against Racism, [www.cultureagainstracism.org](http://www.cultureagainstracism.org), to actively bring about an anti-racist culture in the North East.

*Beverley Prevatt Goldstein*

*Editor's note; the Society has joined Culture against Racism and we are actively pursuing ways in which we can help with research and ensure we are accessible to all.*

## VINDOLANDA UNDER LOCKDOWN



*Marta on the job, photo Sonya Galloway*

In March, for the first time since its foundation in 1970, the Vindolanda Trust closed the doors of both its museums. The volunteer excavation season was cancelled, and celebration of the Trust's fiftieth birthday has been postponed to 2021.

However, work behind the scenes never stopped. In the Society's first ever Zoom monthly meeting on 15 July, Curator Barbara Birley shed light on the many projects that took place, or took shape, during lockdown. And in June, staff-only excavations began again in the south-eastern quadrant of Vindolanda's last stone fort, with an excavation team of just two, Andrew Birley and myself as site archaeologist (and the Society's meetings secretary). We have focused on the sub-Roman and early medieval Vindolanda, as well as one fourth-century building

immediately south of the granaries. Weather permitting, visiting antiquaries will find us in the trenches on weekdays until 20 September, trowelling stone surfaces or lifting large rocks to uncover new floors. This is a stark change from the office and home-working, but we are truly enjoying reconnecting with the archaeology of the site.

Behind the scenes, the team is working hard to make up the lost time, with new exhibitions planned for both the Vindolanda museum and the Roman Army Museum in 2021, Help is coming in from all fronts. American donor, numismatist, and Hadrian's Wall pilgrim Richard Beleson has pledged to double each donation made to the Trust's survival appeal until 11 September, the birthday of Vindolanda's most famous lady Sulpicia Lepidina.

## THE THERAPY FOR UNHAPPY OLD BOOKS

If meetings were allowed, I could go to a meeting of Collectors Anonymous and seek help. Instead, I must remain an unreformed acquirer of stuff, trawling auctions, the internet and flea markets for items of interest. A recognised weakness is the urge to rescue objects which are unloved or unlovable. I have a large collection of old books with deteriorating bindings, bought with the idea of one day restoring them.

Lockdown has come to their rescue. I've learnt to bookbind, and an early beneficiary was an 1832 copy of William Gell's two-volume *Pompeiana*, the prints from which are still being used today to illustrate modern accounts of Pompeii. Gell was well known in the early nineteenth century, a friend of Byron and a courtier of Queen Caroline. He was the man who probably did the most to present the remains of Pompeii to the British public.

As I took the books apart, I saw how simultaneously laborious and shoddy their construction had been. Each signature had to be detached and cleaned of every scrap of crumbling glue. Small illustrations had been printed separately, cut out and pasted in. The numerous full page prints were also separately printed and tipped in, each with their tissue paper. Almost every one was loose. Tipping them back in consumed much time and a surprising amount of glue. Re-stitching the now clumsy signatures took more patience than usual. I imagined the bookbinders of 1832, assembling multiple copies and understood their shoddy workmanship, probably born of frustration. Lining the spine and making a new case were easy once the text block was sound and I now have two readable volumes.

I was able to decipher the signature on the endpapers of both volumes. The owner in 1832 was either NW or WN Ridley Colbourne. Nicholas William was the son of Matthew White Ridley of Blagdon. An MP, he was important in promoting the new British Museum building and the National Gallery. William Nicholas, his son, was MP for Richmond until his death aged 32 in 1846. I suspect the books were his and wonder if he visited Pompeii in the 1830s.

*Derek Cutts*



*Derek in his bookbinding workshop*

## SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL POWER IN NORTHUMBERLAND WOODLANDS

Over the past five seasons, the Bernician Studies Group (BSG) has investigated over 50 woodlands in mid Northumberland, recording tree and ground flora species, testing for archaeological features, and observing boundary characteristics, all as part of the *Cocwudu* historic landscape study. But no chance of woodland survey days in the fine spring months this year. So what to do? There was the task of analysing the Brinkburn Priory charters, all in print courtesy of William Page and the Surtees Society. In 1892, the editor and the publisher of the charters could assume that those who would wish to read them

would and could do so in Latin; maybe not now. Translating them was an ideal lockdown task, all now complete. An English version of the relevant text, along with a summary and explanations of charters of a religious house. '*Cocwudu* Studies II: Woodland in the Brinkburn Priory Charters' is now accessible as a downloadable PDF file from [www.bernicianstudies.eu](http://www.bernicianstudies.eu).



*Surveying woodland in pre-lockdown days*

There's less of woodland interest in the Newminster Abbey charters we are now working on, but perhaps more of human interest. We can see the power relationships between lay lords and churchmen in this case;

*To all, John of Graystock, greetings. Whereas lord Ranulf de Merlay, my ancestor and founder of the abbey of Newminster, gave and granted and by his charter confirmed to the abbot and monks of the said house common of pasture of all his land; and whereas afterwards a certain heir of the said lord Ranulf de Merlay by force ejected the said religious from their common of pasture of Stobswood and also Ulgham;*

*I, John, unwilling that my soul and those of my ancestors or heirs should be in peril or danger on account of the disturbance and extortion of the said common of pasture, unjustly taken from the said religious, for the safety of my soul and those of all my ancestors and heirs, I re-give and grant to the same abbot and convent in free, pure and perpetual charity, the said common pasture for all their animals, except goats, in Stobswood and elsewhere, in woodland and open land, in Ulgham everywhere except crops and meadow, and except within the hedge, in perpetuity without hindrance from me or my heirs.*

Colm O'Brien

## DIGGING UP THE CATHEDRAL FLOOR



*Lifting a ledgerstone (pre-Covid), picture David Heslop*

As Cathedral Archaeologist at St Nicholas in Newcastle, my 'lockdown' has meant doing the archaeological research and recording that the £6m Common Ground in Sacred Space project has triggered. The pandemic saw the site closed for three weeks and re-open with a reduced team. However, apart from the site closure period my work has not been unduly affected; I am working alone and so the social-distancing restrictions don't apply.

The removal of the Victorian pews, their plinth, and the plaster floor beneath has revealed over 50 new ledgerstones (flat memorial stones). Lifting them is a major engineering operation, since the big ones can weigh two or three tons. They are all being recorded in 3-D, by photogrammetry and white-light scanning.

We have found out an enormous amount. The memorial stone to John Butler, merchant and sheriff, has been identified as an Ollund limestone from Sweden, recognisable by the crinoid fossils. Butler was a prominent member of the Eastland Company, the royal monopoly that allowed trade with Scandinavia and the Baltic, and seems to have been displaying his trading connections through his monument. We think the majority of the black limestone ledgers come from quarries in the Low Countries, with the cost of transport offset by using the stones as ballast for the returning Tyneside coal shipping.

New toilets are being constructed in the Cathedral Hall basement. This was the site of the medieval graveyard, but the burials were all removed in 1926. Unexpectedly, a stone built drain survived immediately below the concrete floor. This could be early Norman, Saxon or Romano-British. Hopefully, we will find material from bulk soil samples that is suitable for radio-carbon dating to give us some indication.

Outside, in the South Churchyard, just inside the eighteenth century boundary wall, several levels of road material were recorded, along with late medieval pottery. This suggests that the medieval Low Bridge ran close to the church, and that the graveyard expanded southwards before contracting later.

David Heslop

## THE BURIAL BOOK

While the work has been going on inside the Cathedral, I have been part of a team trying to identify the people named on the ledger stones and prepare a set of biographies. Once the stones are re-laid, these biographies will be available as an educational resource. A key source is the 'Burial Book', whose proper title is *Graves let in Church 1677 to 1831*. It had been mis-

catalogued at Woodhorn, but once found, it was digitally scanned and then transcribed. Members can look at the book and transcript, temporarily, through a link on the first page on the members' section.

The original vellum-covered book of 80 pages, half A3 size, had been rebound together with additional pages and copies of correspondence regarding the right (or otherwise) of the churchwardens to allocate burial plots inside the church. Despite the title, it is *not* a register of actual burials but a record of the letting of space under the floor of the then parish church of St. Nicholas, ahead of the death of the lessee or a member of his or her family. It sometimes records re-allocation to heirs and the transfer to others. There are some records from 1668 or possibly earlier.

The Churchwardens recorded the name of the lessee, sometimes the size of the plot and a descriptive location e.g. 'joyning to Richd Woodruff on the North & Cuthbert Freezer on the South' together with the standard fee of 6s 8d. Interestingly, for the whole of the period of the book, over 160 years, that fee never increased.

I am now trying to correlate the locations described in the book with the details recorded on Charles Hutton's plan of 1796 and other records. This is difficult as stones and bodies were moved as the church underwent various re-orderings, strengthening the tower foundations in 1832 and the installation of heating.

*Irwin Thompson*



*Two pages of the Burial Book, Photo courtesy Northumberland Archives and the Dean and Chapter of Newcastle Cathedral*

## ALDERMAN FENWICK'S PARROT

I had a passing glimpse of an exotic status symbol of the early eighteenth century during my lockdown research for a new study of the Newcastle Blacketts and their business (intended for publication in 2021). In December 1709, following his return to Newby Hall in Yorkshire from a business and family visit to Newcastle, Sir Edward Blackett burdened one of his hard-pressed Northumberland agents, James Mewburn, with a typically eccentric request.

*'I am sorry that Mr Fenwick has no mind to part with his parrott'* he wrote, *'however when you see him again you may speak to him by the by of it, tho not from my Selfe.'* Three months later he was at it again. *'I wish you could prevail with Mr Fenwick to lend me his Parrott tho it were but for six months, and I will send my Servant on purpose to bring it hither, and then shall have it safely returned again'*. The owner of the parrot was the merchant and alderman Robert Fenwick (1659–1712), who had just completed a year as mayor. He was the father of the Nicholas Fenwick associated with the fine house in Pilgrim Street which still bears his name today.

Fenwick was evidently not persuaded. By November 1710 Sir Edward had shifted his attentions to another Newcastle parrot, getting Mewburn to ask an unnamed gentleman if he would *'part with his green parrot and what he asks for it. Let me know if he speak very plaine and what the words are that he does speak'*.

Where would they have come from? There was an established trade in parrots between the Americas and Amsterdam, and perhaps they arrived in Tyneside through the town's extensive trade with the Dutch capital.

*Greg Finch*



*Not the Alderman's parrot, but Amazona finschi, source Tomasz Wagner via Wikipedia*

## THE WYLAM BLACKETT ESTATE

Lockdown gave me access to the 'Lease and Agreement' copy book from the Wylam Blackett Estate covering the 1850s to the 1920s. This book was on its way to the County Record Office where it would have been inaccessible until added to the computer listing, but for the moment it remains in the village. There are 489 handwritten foolscap pages with much legalistic jargon to summarise, so not much opportunity for mischief for me.

The estate was formed in the 1670s by John Blackett, cousin of the more famous William. The 600 acres are rich in coal, ironstone and brick clay, but are five miles from navigable water. Industry really took off in the 1750s when the post road through the village was superseded by the Military Road and thus became available as a route for a horse drawn waggonway to the staithes at Lemington.

The heyday was the first half of the nineteenth century, with the development of an iron industry, and a railway under William Hedley of 'Puffing Billy' fame. The 1835 bridge connecting Wylam to the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway was at that time the only bridge between Newcastle and Corbridge.

Industrial decline set in after 1850, with the collapse of both iron works and coal mining, leading to a damning report of 1874 in which Wylam was described as 'the worst Colliery Village we have seen'. This led to gradual housing development, all on Blackett land, and much is recorded in this book. Farming was always an important component of village life, and some of the field names in the book had been recorded in documents several hundred years previously.

*Denis Peel*

## BURN MARKS ON WOOD



*Margaret Maddison's chair with its burn mark*

I have been pursuing the question of burn marks for some time. These are the flame-shaped marks often made on timber in old buildings. Most are very visible, even when to modern eyes they disfigure the woodwork – as on the chair in the photo! In the last few years, they have also been found on furnishings and clocks not only in the UK but also in Europe. They are thought to be a form of folk magic, which explains why they were never written about. It was once assumed that they might be a way of 'fighting fire with fire' but it seems more likely that they were protective in a more general way or that their purpose differed according to place or time.

Quite recently, experiments by John Dean and Nick Hill have shown that these marks were made deliberately, most probably using rushlights or tapers. The first reported burn marks were found on structural building timber from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. But now we have examples on panelling, cupboards, a grain ark and so on, and made as early as the fifteenth century in Spain (on a church clock) and as late as the nineteenth in the UK (on furniture) and in Germany (inside a flute clock). These finds on foreign clocks were reported as a result of the publication of discoveries by the late Eric Morton who found marks inside longcase clock cases by several local makers of the eighteenth century. As these are hidden under the clock hood they are very difficult to see, so were probably made by the clockmaker who assembled the mechanism and case – an exception to their usual visibility.

I would be most interested to hear of any burn marks on your property or furnishings.

*Margaret Maddison*

## NORTHUMBERLAND ARCHIVES CHARITABLE TRUST

I have spent much time in the last few months gazing at my ruined vegetable patch and wishing a family of moles had not decided to take up residence there! Apart from that, I have been much involved with the recently-established Northumberland Archives Charitable Trust. This has been created to raise funds to assist the acquisition, preservation and maintenance of our archives,

and to improve access to them. The County Council's responsibilities for the Archives Service will continue but the Trust will help with access to new sources of funding and support.

The immediate aims include speeding up cataloguing and digitisation, and finding ways for them be used in education and communities throughout the county. Now that the legal framework is there, the Trust has started looking for volunteers to help in their work. Newcastle Antiquaries have a long record on this – think, for instance, of Archives for All, the HLF-funded project in the early 2000s – and we are hoping Society members will step up again. We particularly need someone willing to act as Secretary to the Trust. That will mean handling our correspondence, and ensuring we keep in regular touch with the Charity Commission, as well as participating in the Trust Board.

Others may be able to help with preparing grant applications for specific projects, and organising supporters and volunteers to help in the Archive Centres at Woodhorn and Berwick. We would like to see the development of a Friends Group, with an events programme and a newsletter. And of course we will need a website and a social media presence.

If you would like to know more about what's involved, please contact me.

*Sue Shaw, Trustee*



*A volunteer busy at Woodhorn, picture Northumberland Archives*

## LOCKDOWN AT THE BODLEIAN

When asked if I would write a short piece about my work during lockdown, a link between the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the north east quickly presented itself.

I have been investigating the provenances of printed books in the collection of a significant Bodleian benefactor, the antiquary Richard Rawlinson (1690–1755). Rawlinson's collection, including more than 5,000 manuscripts, nearly 2,000 printed books, and coins, engravings and copperplates, and much else, was bequeathed to the Bodleian in 1755. 'Rawlinson' is part of a wider project, detailing provenances of printed books in the Bodleian's collections. It has involved examining the books themselves to identify owners from signatures, inscriptions, etc., and adding this and other information to the catalogue entries on SOLO, the University of Oxford's online library system.

Since the end of March, checking the books has been impossible. So I have turned to using notes taken from the 1956 Oxford DPhil. thesis on Rawlinson as a collector, written by the late Brian Enright, and adding this material to SOLO. Enright (1929–1990) was a member of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and on the staff of the Bodleian. He subsequently left Oxford, and had a distinguished library career, culminating in his appointment as Librarian of Newcastle University in 1972 – and here, finally, is the north-eastern link! He remained in post until his death in 1990. There may be members of the Society today who remember him.

His thesis is a magisterial piece of work, the more so given that it was undertaken without any of the modern computer aids which we take for granted. My colleagues and I are pleased that Enright's research will now become more readily available to scholars and students.



*Richard Rawlinson, National Portrait Gallery*

*Alan Coates*

*Assistant Librarian, Rare Books, Dept. of Special Collections, Bodleian Libraries*

## TWO LIVES

Zooniverse is not Zoom, nor something from Terry Pratchett's fertile mind. It's a platform where institutions/organisations/research groups can enlist volunteers to transcribe data so that it can be available digitally to others. It's actually very easy if you follow the instructions ...

One such task is transcribing Boston Public Library's collection of letters from and to anti-slavery activists in the period 1830 to 1870. William Lloyd Garrison was a central figure in the anti-slavery movement. One letter dates from 11 May 1835, when he was 30 and writing to his wife Helen, who he had married six months earlier.

The language of the letter is intensely spiritual: it reflects the fact that he, like many anti-slavery activists, was deeply religious, and raised from his earliest years on the language of the Bible. He refers to 'the tide of holy sympathy ... rolling in like the ocean.' He rejoices in the 'well-tempered zeal' of those present at the convention he was attending, 'with..their holy courage, undissembled piety, the spirit of prayer being poured out from their inmost souls.'

He ends his letter, to his new wife: 'Professions of my love are needless.... We bear resignedly a brief separation here, if we can hope to be eternally together in bliss hereafter', That's language that has left behind the intimacy of man and wife, and entered another realm. But that's the fascination of letters; you can hear people's voices.

A second letter comes from the collection of the Natural History Society, in the Great North Museum. It's the reply from a famous naturalist, John Gould to 26-year-old Albany Hancock in 1832. Hancock had written asking for advice 'for a friend' but it's perfectly clear that he himself wanted guidance. He had suggested an expedition to remote parts of the U.S.A. to discover and bring back rare birds, shells and insects. Gould deals with it sympathetically but pointed out the practical difficulties.

In 1861 the American Civil War broke out, to which, in a significant way, Garrison's crusade on behalf of black slaves had contributed. Hancock was part of the intellectual background from which emerged, in 1859, Darwin's Origin of Species. Two letters, two young men of about the same age, two very different personalities, two different paths.

*Chris Walton*

## NORTHUMBERLAND GLOWERS O'ER THE REST



*Blawhearie/ Blow-Weary; picture Ian Whaley*

Contemplating the glories of Northumberland and its name-stock from my map-strewn desk, I have been increasingly aware that the historic county is the queen of 'verbal place-names' (Dr Simon Taylor). To date I have found nearly eighty examples (not all in use concurrently) from all parts of the county, including Blawearie/Blow-weary, Glororum/Glower o'er Him and Make Me Rich/Make 'em Rich (3 instances each), Clickemin ('Draw them in', 5 including former pubs), Lightpipe (4), Blinkbonny ('Look prettily' (a fine view), 5), Pity Me (8) and Mount Hooly ('Climb gently', 9 including variants), as

well as rarer items such as Catchpenny, Peep I See Thee (now Peepy), Skirl Naked and its onetime neighbour Switch Her Down. This number and range is seemingly unmatched in England, though Durham comes close, relative to size, and Orkney and parts of lowland Scotland are rich in the type.

Such names stand out from the general run of Newtons, Horsleys and Black Burns in their grammatical structure (containing verbs, and sometimes pronouns, adverbs or prepositions). Instead of straightforwardly communicating information about places and their owners, they tend to express the namers' emotional response to their homes and their lot in life, whether hopeful or wryly despairing.

Most refer to modest, isolated buildings, especially farmhouses and cottages in remote rural locations, though the Lightpipes are beside routeways, hence useful to passing pipe-smokers, and one Pity Me was in a dismal riverside huddle in Newcastle All Saints. Others name plantations, hills etc., while Hadyad ('hold the mare') is a perilous ford and Holdherfast a tract of sticky bog.

Twenty-seven verbal place-names appear on Armstrong's 1769 map of Northumberland,

another thirty-seven on the Ordnance Survey 1864–7 maps and some on later revisions; there will certainly be other records, possibly earlier. About half the names were either replaced by more respectable ones, for example Beggar My Neighbour by Craster West Farm or Pinch Me Near by West Fallodon, or fell into disuse along with the dwellings they named. But the others survive onto current maps (some only Explorer maps) and add a little eccentric spice to the potpourri of north-eastern names.

*Diana Whaley*

## PUZZLES AND PHOTOS AT ST JAMES' BENWELL

St James' Heritage & Environment Group started 11 years ago, when a group of people came together to map the memorials in the parish graveyard of St James' in Benwell. During the early nineteenth century when the church was built, the area was home to many of Tyneside's richest and most powerful families. The graveyard closed for burials in the 1960s, and by 2009 it had become a wilderness of weeds, rubbish and broken glass, almost completely obscuring the memorials and gravestones, most of which were damaged. Months of clearing and tidying gradually revealed its secrets.



*St James' Church, Benwell,  
picture Judith Green*

This was the start of a process of exploring and sharing history. The Group accumulated a wealth of knowledge about people and places using research methods ranging from oral history to examination of archival sources. It also developed ways of engaging local residents and other interested people in learning about this heritage through running talks and guided walks, producing heritage guides and local history booklets, mounting exhibitions, making films, and experimenting with using arts and crafts as a mechanism for involvement. The local community is both diverse and changing, and the majority of residents today are not traditional heritage learners and tend to have relatively low levels of income and educational attainment.

All this activity came to an abrupt end when the lockdown began, and the whole programme was cancelled indefinitely. Instead we began to email out twice-weekly sets of specially created crosswords, wordsearches, quizzes and short illustrated features – with a specific focus on local (especially west end) history. Topics have included the Romans on Tyneside, Blaydon Races, local coalmines, Richard Grainger's Newcastle, the now-demolished workhouse, the lost islands of the Tyne and the Benwell spy. Many recipients share the material with friends and family, or put them on social media or websites.

However, the lockdown has exacerbated the digital divide, leaving many people who have no internet access bored and isolated in their homes. So we've also been printing puzzle booklets, and leaflets, which go out by post and in local organisations' mailings, with a reach of around six hundred people.

Feedback has been enthusiastic, and in some ways this feels like a continuation of the Group's work rather than a complete break. It will be interesting to test people at a later date, and see how much heritage learning has taken place.

*Judith Green*

## COVID-19 MUTUAL AID ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Across Britain, local Mutual Aid groups sprang up in reaction to the outbreak of Covid 19 and the lockdown. No two are the same, but they all share a common objective: to help other people in their community who were suffering as a result of the pandemic. Some run online information and advice services. Others collect and distribute food. For many, the personal contact that comes with their activity will be their only human contact in a solitary day.

I am part of a group of North East historians running a pilot study to understand how these multifarious groups operate. We wanted to record the life stories and experiences of Mutual Aid responders as well as asking them how they saw future activity developing. The interviews are being undertaken by team of academic and community oral historians working with the Oral History Collective at Newcastle University.

Remarkably, given the hectic demands of their work, we have managed to find people from all over Britain who have taken time to speak to us. Remote recording has proved an invaluable tool in this process – particularly as so many of us have grown used to communicating this way in the last few months. We will be carrying out two interviews with each person, at six month intervals to give time for participants to reflect, to look back on the initial response to Covid-19 and to consider the changes they might have undergone.

We asked about backgrounds, motivations for becoming involved in mutual aid, how the groups operate, their experience and how it had impacted on their lives, and what role, if any, mutual aid could play in the future.

Why do people do talk to us? Of course, we all like to talk about ourselves. But there is a stronger motive that has emerged from our preliminary efforts. All of them seem to be enthused by the purpose of the project: to provide a body of experience that could be used to inform the research and knowledge of future generations. It's almost as though arming the future is a way of combatting the horrors of the present. It has been a humbling and moving experience. We are currently waiting to learn if funding for the full project will be made available. Please let us know if you would like to be interviewed.

*Silvie Fisch*

## PHOTOGRAPHING THE BLACK PLAQUES



Two colleagues (too modest to wish to be named) spent much of the early lockdown period wandering round Newcastle and Gateshead photographing the black plaques put up to historic figures or events in the city. They found over a hundred, including the most recent one to educationalist Anne Fisher at St John the Baptist Church. Some are to personalities barely known in the North East, like the one pictured, to nineteenth-century Portuguese writer José Maria de Eça de Queirós, in Grey Street.

Some were inaccessible at the time, including three to local Victoria Cross holders in the Discovery Museum plaza, while others needed a good clean and a lick of paint. And of course there is a plethora of different colours around our area. North Tyneside recently put up a blue plaque at the birthplace of John Dobson, featured in News Bulletin 68, while Heaton History Group uses red. In Grainger Street, there is an oblong white plaque commemorating the visit of W. Lloyd Garrison, among others, on the corner with Nelson Street, and some jokey brass ones let into the pavement.

What there is not is a complete gazetteer of all our historic plaques. If anyone feels like contributing to one, assembling a dossier and writing captions to explain more where necessary, please get in touch.

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

*The next News Bulletin will revert to the normal format, but if anyone else feels inspired to send in their own contribution on 'what I did during lockdown', they'll be gladly received. Pressure of space means that articles frequently have to be cut, deferred, or dropped altogether. My address is 5 Goldspink Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1NQ, phone 0191 232 2968, or e-mail me at [events@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk](mailto:events@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk)*

*Copy deadline is 12 November, 2020. The mailing date will be 9 December. All inserts must be delivered to the Membership Administrator by 2 December. If you want an insert included, please e-mail the Administrator on [admin@newcastle-antiquaries](mailto:admin@newcastle-antiquaries) in good time for details of the requirements. An electronic copy of any insert must also be provided (as a Word or pdf document) so that it can be included in the electronic mailing.*

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