

NEWS BULLETIN



THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

No.80 December 2025

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ABOUT US

The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne promotes the preservation, study and enjoyment of historical and archaeological heritage in general, and of North East England in particular. We have over 600 members, and always welcome new ones. We have a full programme of public events, lectures, walks and visits, and social activities. We are guardians of worldclass collections of antiquities and archives, and of a library of over 30,000 books and journals. We sponsor and publish research into North East history and archaeology of all periods. For more information, look at our website, www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk or contact us at SANT, Great North Museum: Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT, phone 0191 231 2700, email admin@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I write to present an overview of my first 6 months as president of the Society. Though I have been involved in the running of the Society since 2018 I have been continually surprised at the behind the scenes work which is undertaken by members of our committees.

The Society continues to develop as well as face challenges. It is heartening to read out the names of new members at the start of our monthly lectures, though we continue to explore new ways we can expand our membership. Developments within the Society include the commissioning of a new website, exploring new ways to steady our financial position, and supporting new research and publications. Next year will mark an important milestone with the publication of a special extra AA volume, detailing the excavations of the medieval remains around Newcastle keep (which shall be fitting considering the importance of this building in

the early history of the Society). As well as this, we continue to arrange the monthly lecture series, publish AA, and oversee the care and management of our collections.

As President of the Society I have had meetings to discuss the importance of the Morpeth Chantry and Bagpipe Museum, written letters of support for local heritage projects, and been present at the unveiling of a plaque to celebrate our former secretary and journal editor Robert Blair. These activities were a reminder that though we may be drawn to the celebration and study of the past, there are contemporary issues and pressures facing the heritage sector which we aim to be a positive advocate for.

Seeing the work of the SANT Council, Executive and numerous subcommittees is a reminder how much the Society relies on volunteers with a range of skills and experiences, though many of these roles are undertaken quietly behind the scenes. I am very grateful for the support of these members, and would encourage anyone who thinks they have something to offer the Society to get in touch with me.

Don O'Meara

TREASURER'S REPORT

Subscriptions in 2027. Members' subscriptions provide a large part of our income and are vital to the Society's ability to continue promoting and celebrating the history, archaeology, and culture of North-East England. Your next subscription payment in January 2026 will be at the same level as it has been since 2015. In 2027, however, we will need to increase subscription rates to bring our income into line with our costs. The exact rates have not yet been decided, and we are open to comments and suggestions. Our income and expenditure can be seen in our Annual Reports and Accounts which are available via the website.

As with many other groups and societies, our membership numbers fell in the wake of the Covid pandemic and no doubt also because of cost-of-living pressures. At the same time, the investment income we rely on to pay for our day-to-day activities has fallen because of political and economic circumstances. We are also facing increased printing and distribution costs for both the journal and for other mailings.

Despite these pressures we continue to expand our offer to members. Our learned journal, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, now has colour illustrations, and in 2026 a special extra volume on the archaeology and history of Newcastle Keep will be sent to members at no extra cost. Our programme of monthly lectures is now also livestreamed, and we also offer visits, walks, and other activities. Our website is currently being brought up to date, and we continue to run our library, to provide research grants, to acquire items for our collection and to make grants to the partner organisations which house our collections and archives.

We are of course making what economies we can and asking hard questions about priorities, but we do need to raise more income from you, our members, in order to protect our key charitable activities in the future.

Simon Pallett, Treasurer treasurer@newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk

DIGITISING SANT'S PROCEEDINGS

Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle was a periodical which the Society ran, alongside *Archaeologia Aeliana*, in the 1850's, and then from 1883 to 1956. It was produced as a series of unbound parts, which members (and subscribing libraries) could bind, into solid volumes. We had it scanned (to go on the Internet, at the Archaeology Data Service **ADS**, at York) a few years ago, and hope to have it properly available very soon. The set of copies of *Proceedings* that went for scanning was a ragbag of spares from different public libraries, and sets of unbound parts. Some of the unbound parts had holes punched through them, and were held together by what looked like shoe-laces! Given the nature of this set, there was a seemingly endless set of problems to sort out.

Some illustrations were missing (and some still are). Quite a lot of captions to illustrations had somehow mysteriously become blurred. There were duplicated (or missing) page-numbers. In one case, two illustrations that were marked as being between pages 202 and 203, were between pages 202 and 203, BUT... in the wrong volume. And then, we realised that the very first volume (covering 1855 to 1857) was reprinted in 1915, with different page-numbers. As it

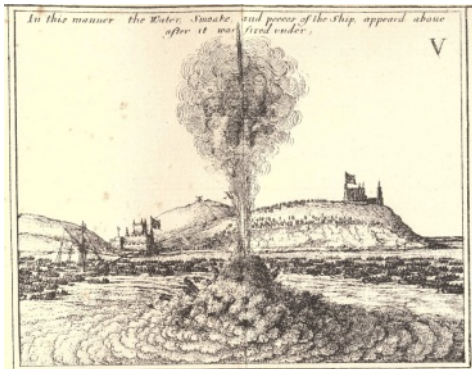
was a 1915 copy that had been sent for scanning we had to re-scan an original copy (315 pages) from scratch.

Next problem: the set in the GNM Library, which you would have expected to be full and authoritative, turned out to have quite a number of illustrations missing, as did the set in the Lit & Phil. We had to go to the set in the City Library (Local Studies) to find one item. However, because of this combination of sources, it's possible that the scanned set online may have a fuller set of contents and illustrations than most of the printed sets of Proceedings.

We hope that you find that *Proceedings* online (available through the website) is still very useful and of interest (see below). STOP PRESS NEWS: We sent the ADS the links for uploading the files on 29 October, so it's now on its way!

Roger Fern

CONTENTS OF THE *PROCEEDINGS*: AN EXAMPLE



Wenceslaus Hollar's depiction of the explosion, 1672.

The Society is extremely grateful to Roger Fern for overseeing the digitisation of the *Proceedings*. They are much more than a simple record of meetings and administrative affairs. Here is one example from *Proceedings* (1906), Third Series, Vol II., No. 19, where C.J. Spence drew attention to a remarkable event at the narrows near the mouth of the Tyne in December 1672. A version of his article was published posthumously.

A heavy snow fall was suddenly melted by warm rains and a huge volume of water flowed down the Tyne from the west, carrying away vessels moored at Newcastle and downstream. Two fully laden ships had sunk, completely blocking access to the harbour.

Despite repeated local efforts, they could not be moved, in effect closing the port for several days. At this point, the event took on national significance. Much to the chagrin of the Mayor and Corporation of Newcastle (who had control of the river), King Charles II dispatched a marine salvage expert to the Tyne, Edmund Custis who had developed a technique to clear such blockages when vessels lay beyond the normal working depth of divers and primitive 'flying fuses'. His method involved a variant of the latter, but with a rigid pipe to withstand currents and eddies feeding into a waterproof chest containing explosives.

Particularly embarrassing for the Newcastle authorities (including Trinity House) was the fact that the international artist and cartographer Wenceslas Hollar, then working in London, was asked to record the event for posterity (the attached image shows the spectacular result of Custis's action). Furthermore, Charles II, with the local support of Henry Cavendish, Earl of Ogle and Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, required them to pay Custis £900 for his expenses! Inevitably, wrangling and litigation followed, and it was not until October 1675 that a final settlement of £400 was agreed on.

Not all the contents of *Proceedings* deal with similar exciting incidents, but they do contain a record of many now forgotten but intriguing events.

Mike Barke

PILGRIMAGE OF HADRIAN'S WALL UPDATE [REPORT 2].

The second meeting of the society's committee organising the Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall was held in October. The date of the Pilgrimage was decided: Saturday 21 – Sunday 29 July 2029. The order of travel will be west to east. The coaches have already been booked. Our next task is to seek and book hotels in Carlisle and Newcastle.

The broad outline of the programme has been determined. The Pilgrimage lasts 7 days. Within that period we must visit the forts of South Shields, Wallsend, Chesters, Housesteads, Vindolanda, Birdoswald and Maryport, together with appropriate milecastles and turrets. This reduces the space for other site visits. In 2029, we have decided that we will start with an

exploration of Haltwhistle Common. This area has all the representative features of Hadrian's Wall: a Stanegate fort, temporary camps, a visible stretch of Wall with a milecastle (42) and turrets (41a), the Vallum, the Stanegate and the Military Way.

There is much work in progress on religion in the Wall area so the remains of temples will be included in our itinerary and an expedition to Bewcastle, *Fanum Cocidii*, and we are determined to examine a Roman quarry. More in my next report.

David J. Breeze, Chair of the Organising Committee for the 2029 Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall

A RESTORATION PROJECT: AN IMPRESSION OF THE SOCIETY'S SEAL AND A GENEROUS DONOR

A wax impression of the seal engraved for the society by 'Mr Wyon of the Royal Mint' is attached to the membership certificate of Bridget Atkinson (the society's first honorary member) dated 6th February 1813 and acquired by the society in 2019. The certificate and its wax seal impression had had a hard life by the time the society acquired them in 2019 and the wax was broken. Fortunately, Sir Mark Jones FRSE was preparing a book on William Wyon (now published) and became aware of the certificate and its attachment. He very generously funded the cleaning and conservation of the item and the society thanks him for doing so. The certificate and the seal impression are now, thanks to him, in good shape to play their part in telling the stories of art history, the history of this society and the history of women in Regency Britain.

Derek Cutts



An impression of the Society's seal by Wyon attached to the membership certificate of Bridget Atkinson, dated 1813.

A VARIANT OF HUTCHINSON'S HISTORY OF DURHAM (1794)

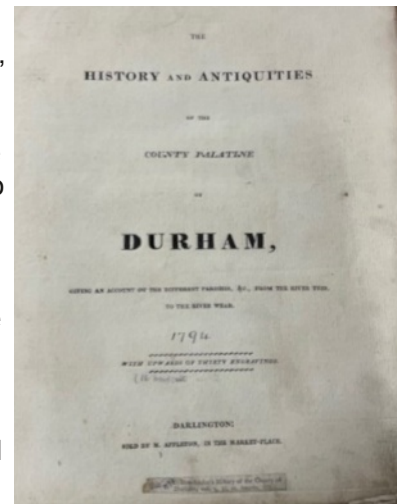
In 1784 William Hutchinson issued a prospectus offering the chance to subscribe £2 for *History and Antiquities of ... Durham*, to be published in two volumes. Things went fine with the first volume, but when the second was in progress it became clear that there was far too much material in hand, and a third volume would be needed. In 1787 Hutchinson advertised his intention to supply subscribers with a volume of about 200 pages gratis that would complete coverage of the part of the county that lies between the rivers Tyne and Tees.

When the third part did appear in 1794, a preface outlined the history of the book so far. It included the puzzling passage:

Very few of the subscribers whose names appeared in the first list, have withheld their names from the additional list; and the part which those few in number think proper to accept *gratis*, instead of being delivered in *two hundred pages*, makes up *three hundred and fifty-eight pages*, together with many costly plates.

Puzzling, because this is the only known mention of a 'first list' and 'additional list'. Also, volume three runs to 522, not 358 pages. In fact, pages 1–357 complete the coverage of the county between Tyne and Tees and 358 onwards covers the parts now in Yorkshire (Northallerton, Howden etc.) and Northumberland (Lindisfarne, Norham, etc.) plus a sizeable section on Natural History.

The answer to the puzzle has recently appeared in the form of a distinctive copy of volume three. The title page does not name the author or printer, but says it was sold by M. Appleton in the Market Place in Darlington. There is an index, then pages 1–356 that are the same as the usual copies. At the end of the text on page 357 there is a list of 31 plant species running over onto page 358. The preliminary pages are absent.



This seems to be a copy of the *gratis* volume, given to subscribers who did not want to pay a little bit extra to get the full version of volume three. Books could have been made up from the usual sheets of volume three but the last pages (357–358) would need to be overprinted with the botanical list, and a new title page and index printed. Very few of this *gratis* variant could have been issued; there seems to be no copy of it in any library in Britain, the only copy listed on the internet being in the library of the University of Sydney.

This copy has now been donated to SANT for its library.

Les Jessop

ROBERT BLAIR HONOURED WITH BLUE PLAQUE



On Thursday 30th September 2025, a Blue Plaque was unveiled at Arbeia Roman Fort in commemoration of Robert Blair (1845–1923), a dedicated antiquarian and leading figure within our Society.

Joining the Society in 1874, Blair went on to become Secretary and then Editor of *Archaeologia Aeliana*, positions he held for some forty years before his death in 1923. Blair was very influential, and helped shape the Society's scholarship and outreach, his long service and dedication posthumously earning a bronze medal from the Society. Indeed, Blair's meticulous work documenting ancient buildings and artefacts in the region contributed to establishing the Society as a major force in the

study of the history of North-East England.

Born into a family of Tyne river pilots, Blair developed an early passion for archaeology when his uncle gave him a Roman coin found at The Lawe Top, the place of his birth. This gesture instilled what became a lifelong interest in Roman heritage, with Blair perhaps best known for his support for the site of Arbeia Roman Fort in South Shields. Indeed, through the Society, Blair was instrumental in securing funding for the first excavations at Arbeia (1875–1877) and in saving the site from development, with the fort subsequently becoming the UK's first public archaeological park and part of the UNESCO Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site.

The Blue Plaque was jointly funded by the Society, local historian Jean Stokes (who nominated the plaque), and North-East Museums, highlighting the Society's continuing influence in recognising and preserving regional heritage.

This commemoration ensures that Blair's contributions to both the community of South Shields, and the heritage of North-East England more generally, are remembered for generations to come.

Charles Dodds, Secretary

BLACK PLAQUES: TALK AND WALK, OCTOBER 4TH, 2025



Black plaques event, October 4th, 2025: Presentation on Irene Ighodaro

Paul Robeson was the leading candidate in a recent vote to decide which Black person should be nominated for a plaque in Newcastle. Forty people attended the *Black Plaques-Talk and Walks* co-hosted by the *African Lives in Newcastle Project* and *Newcastle City Library* in celebration of Black History Month, 2025.

In response to competing proposals from the library staff for a talk on the plaque recently installed for Irene Ighodaro (the first plaque installed for a black woman in Newcastle) and alternatively for one of our popular walks, the project created a hybrid event. The audience learnt about the three local characters of recent African descent recognised by the plaques: Irene Ighodaro, doctor and statesperson (installed 2025); Jack London,

Olympic athlete (installed 2024) and Frederick Douglass, abolitionist and author (installed

2018); and how they met the criteria for a Newcastle City Council plaque. Following a short walk on African Lives in Newcastle, we returned to the library to debate who should be nominated for a future plaque from the characters discussed on the walk.

This combination had advantages: all the plaques were outside the city centre and likely to remain unknown without this active intervention; the nomination process for a plaque would become familiar and accessible; there was now an added incentive to learn about and understand the characters on the walk. There were risks: would the audience leave the comfort of the Bewick Hall to go on a walk? Would they leave after their walk, perhaps tempted more by the shops than the lure of the Caribbean snacks to be provided?

The event was a success. All present engaged and returned for a lively debate, chaired by Professor Donna Chambers, with Robeson chosen by a narrow majority.

For further information on the plaques and the walks please visit www.africanlivesnortheast.co.uk

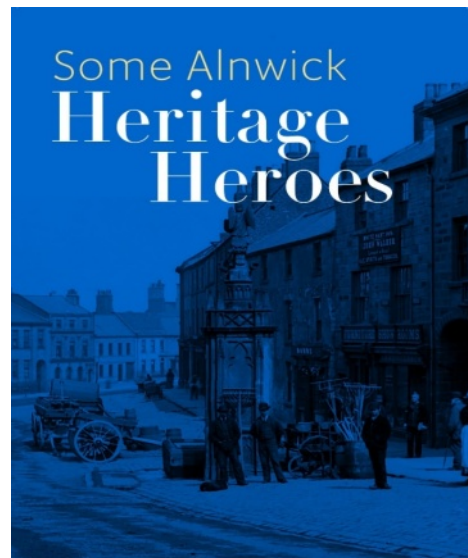
SOME ALNWICK HERITAGE HEROES

Almost a decade ago members of Alnwick Civic Society conceived the idea of celebrating Alnwick's built heritage through the eyes of those who have contributed to its conservation and our appreciation. We called them 'Some Alnwick Heritage Heroes'. George Tate (1805–1871), whose *History of Alnwick* remains an important source for local historians. Frederick Wilson (1827–1894) an architect who came to work on Alnwick Castle and left a portfolio of work across north Northumberland. Two local builders: George Armstrong (1810–1873) and Henry Hudspith (1815–1902) represent the work of all who built our heritage. M.R.G. Conzen (1907–2000), a geographer, whose work in Alnwick advanced the study of how settlements evolve. Barbara Woodhouse, a local artist, whose 'ZigZag' books drew attention to Alnwick's historic buildings with imaginative drawings and comprehensive research.

The project ran through 2017 with funding from the Heritage Lottery, Institute of Historic Building Conservation and North East Federation of Civic Societies. In the spring volunteers from Alnwick's Bailiffgate Museum, members of the Local History Society, and Family History enthusiasts brought fresh ideas and different skills. By the summer research was under way. The emphasis shifted in the autumn from writing to edit and design. Distribution followed the November launch.

The team was focussed on publication so the capacity building demanded by the Heritage Lottery felt like a distraction. But looking back it brought lasting benefits. Local heritage groups gained a higher profile, a stronger network and the confidence to tackle initiatives such as the Historical Map of Alnwick and Alnmouth and annual celebration of Heritage Open Days.

We are still asked about plans for Volume-2, but one of the lessons we learned was not to undertake these projects lightly. However, a copy of Volume 1 can be found in the SANT library.



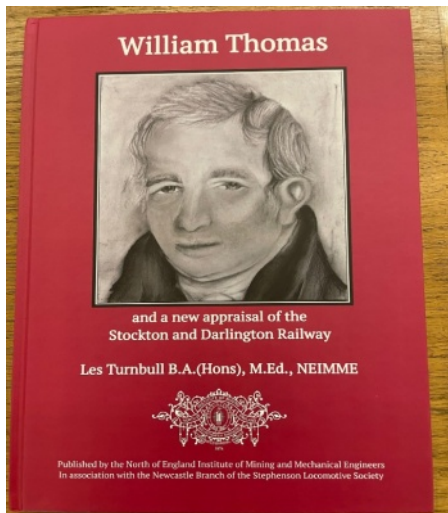
Peter Reed, Alnwick Civic Trust

BOOK REVIEW

William Thomas and a new appraisal of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, Les Turnbull, 2025

In the bicentenary year of the Stockton and Darlington Railway this new volume by Turnbull is sure to ruffle some feathers. The book consists of four linked essays detailing four individuals who played an important role in the history of the coalfields of the North East: Elizabeth Montague, William Thomas, George Stephenson, and James Stephen Jeans. A key aim is to bring greater attention to the life and work of William Thomas (see also Turnbull's paper in the 2024 volume of AA).

A central thesis of Turnbull's work is that the North Eastern Railway company of the late 19th century sought to boost its historical pedigree by emphasising the life and work of the Stephenson family. This led to the triumphal celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Stockton



and Darlington Railway in 1875. In this volume he seeks to challenge this heroic narrative.

At times Turnbull is perhaps too forthright in his efforts to celebrate the work of William Thomas at the expense of the importance of the work of George Stephenson (though considering my employer – Historic England – have invested so much in the restoration and celebration of the Stockton and Darlington 200 event I am perhaps obliged to say this!). But, he has laid down a great challenge for the reader to consider the wider history of railways in this region and to question orthodoxies. The book is thoroughly enjoyable, and a great piece of historical research, utilising the archives at the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers/ The Common Room to great effect. Turnbull had probably done more than any other individual in recent years to

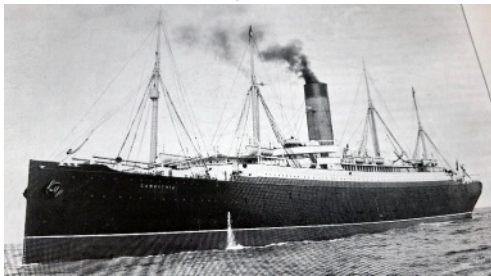
promote and research the history of early railways in the North East, and this is his 10th volume in this topic (available at North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, £20).

The volume is dedicated to Irwin Thompson, both secretary of the Mining Institute and a good friend to SANT before his sad passing earlier this year, and is a fitting tribute to him.

Don O'Meara

MONTHLY MEETINGS BY SUE WARD

MAY 2025 Meeting



The Tyneside built liner Carpathia.

Ken Smith talked about *Carpathia* – the Tyne-built ship which rescued the *Titanic* survivors. On 14 April 1912 the *Carpathia* steered at full speed into an ice-field, in the dark, after receiving a distress message from *Titanic*. Too late to directly help the liner, it picked up more than 700 survivors in lifeboats.

Launched from the Wallsend shipyard of Swan and Hunter in 1902, the *Carpathia* was a much slower and more basic vessel than the *Titanic*. It was on a routine New York to Europe trip, carrying mainly American tourists. The *Titanic* was on its maiden voyage, and at

its launch was claimed to be unsinkable.

When the distress call came, the *Carpathia*'s radio operator, Harold Cottam, was on his way to bed but had kept his earphones on. The captain, Arthur Rostron, rapidly changed course to head for the sinking *Titanic*. *Carpathia* was smaller and more maneuverable, but on reaching the ice-field had to drop to half-speed for safety. When it arrived *Titanic* had disappeared, leaving many lifeboats scattered over a wide area. 1,500 people died without rescue, partly because there were insufficient lifeboats and partly because the evacuation effort was badly managed. The casualty rate was far higher among 3rd class passengers than among those in first class. Ships sent later to the rescue site recovered over 300 bodies.

Captain Rostron commanded the *Mauretania* from 1915–26; was later knighted and commanded the whole White Star line fleet. *Carpathia* itself was torpedoed and sank in 1918. Perhaps because of the number of rich and famous people who had been travelling on the *Titanic*, it was soon made a legal requirement for ships to have radio operators on 24-hour watch, and to have enough lifeboats for all passengers and crew.

Ken can be contacted on tyneship@btinternet.com, and a recording of his talk is available on our YouTube channel.

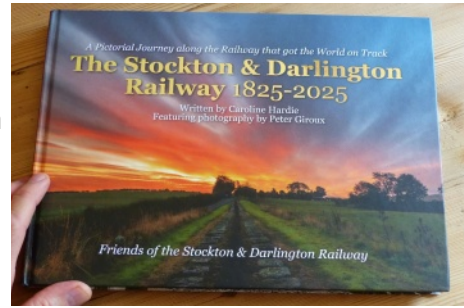
JUNE Meeting

Eric Branse-Instone (Historic England Listing Adviser) presented a guided tour of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (SDR) main line of 1825 drawing on his work reviewing Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments as part of the 2018–2023 Heritage Action Zone Project.

Eric began by asking rhetorically why there was such a fuss about the 200th anniversary of the SDR's opening. There were many earlier railways but the SDR combined many features – a

locomotive-hauled public railway, open to passengers and freight, making extensive use of wrought iron rails, and conceived as the start of a nationwide network.

Finances were shaky during construction with rising iron prices, poor weather and underestimated legal costs mainly related to providing accommodation bridges for landowners whose land was bisected by the line. However, by the 1830s the line was profitable. To ensure the supply of locomotives, Edward Pease (leading SDR shareholder) helped to finance the world's first locomotive manufactory, Robert Stephenson & Company, Newcastle. This investment probably prompted the SDR's policy of sharing information with other railway engineers and promoters, leading to the SDR becoming influential in wider railway development.



Although much of the physical evidence of coal mining (the principal driver for the construction of the line) has been lost, a remarkable amount of the 1825 line survives, much still part of the national rail network (including Shildon-Darlington) and as structures and earthworks on the disused sections. Skerne Bridge, built 1825, continues to carry passenger trains. What was arguably the world's first railway station survives at Heighington: the *Friends of the SDR* are currently fundraising to purchase and renovate it. (Hatachi have just provided funding for the purchase).

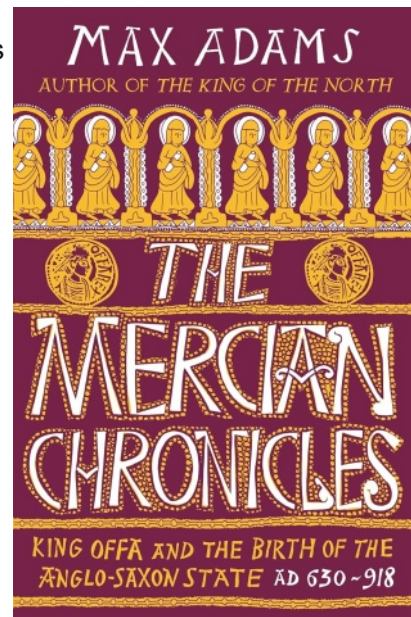
More details of the research for the Heritage Action Zone are available in a HE webinar (vimeo.com/1096891129/4d60158e04). The Friends website, at www.sdr1825.org.uk, carries links to published reports and much other material.

Eric can be contacted on Eric.Branse-Instone@historicengland

JULY Meeting

Max Adams spoke about *The Mercian Chronicles: a Southern Window on early Medieval Northumbria*. No Mercian chronicles actually survive, thus our knowledge of its history is indirect. The first Mercian king was the 'pagan' Penda, whom Bede reports killing successively Edwin and Oswald of Northumbria, before being killed himself by Oswy.

The dynasty had then lasted 150 years, during which there were a dozen Northumbrian kings but only 5 Mercian ones, with two (Aethelbald, 41 years and Offa, 39 years) reigning for an astonishing 80 years between them. Such dynastic stability created significant political capital. Their most visible monument was Offa's Dyke, which would have needed considerable planning and manpower. Other survivals are the remarkable church at Brixworth, probably also built by Offa, and the royal mausoleum of St Wystan's in Repton, now the crypt of a later church.



The territory owned by or paying tribute to Mercia gained its coherence from a network of roads and rivers. Watling Street and Fosse Way crossed it, connecting with navigable rivers, further linking with trading centres such as York and Ipswich. The key site for Mercian commerce was Droitwich, with its salt deposits, exploited on a large scale since the Iron Age. Control of these facilitated the acquisition of other goods in return, and generosity to monasteries and churches, demonstrated by early Mercian charters.

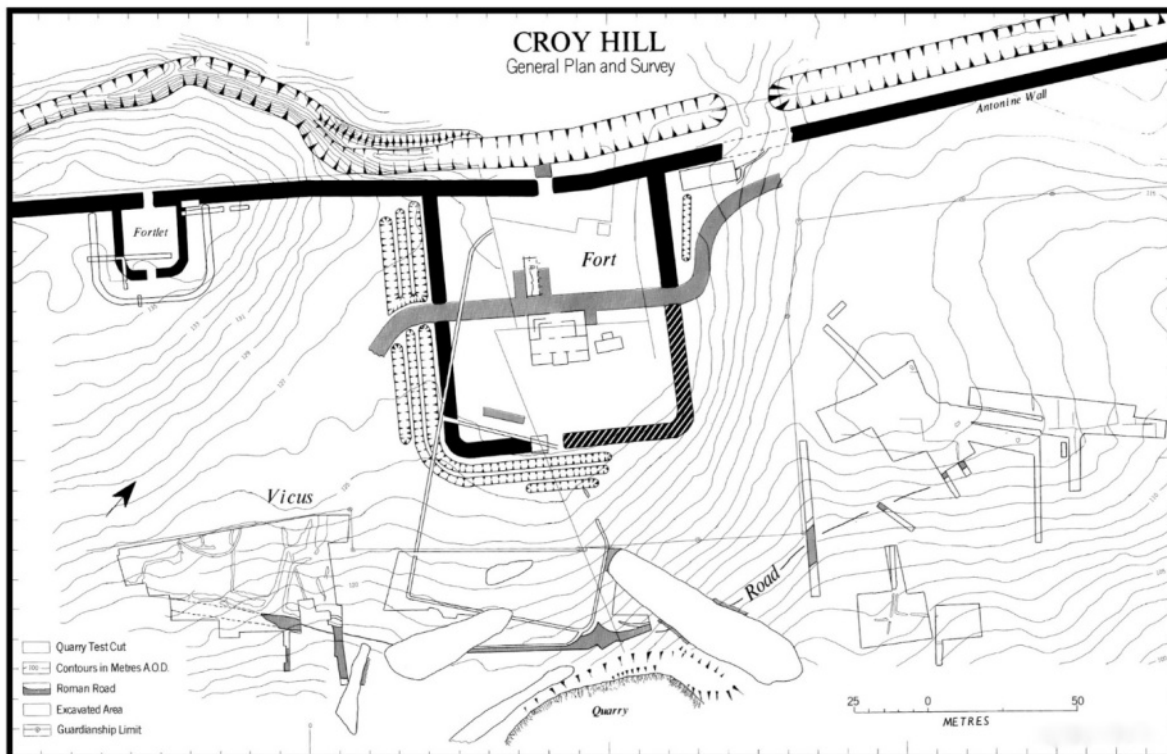
However, tensions arose because lands were given inalienably to religious foundations without corresponding duties, leading to the erosion of royal power. At the Council of Gumley, in 749, Aethelbald insisted that the 'common duties' remained – maintaining the bridges and highways, repairing fortifications, and contributing to defence in times of need.

Under Offa, Mercia maintained relationships with European kings, though Charlemagne finally regarded him as overreaching himself and snubbed him.

Max can be contacted on beatandtrack@yahoo.co.uk, and his book *The Mercian Chronicles* was published by Bloomsbury in 2025 (in the US by Pegasus Books as *The Birth of the Anglo-Saxons*).

AUGUST Meeting

Professor Bill Hanson spoke about *The design and construction of the Antonine Wall*. Early



The fort at Croy Hill

researchers considered that the Wall across the Forth-Clyde isthmus was constructed as a single unit, a linear barrier of turf on a cobble base, 40 Roman miles long, with forts every two to three miles. However, in 1975 John Gillam proposed that the design had been changed significantly during its construction. Modelled on Hadrian's Wall with fortlets every mile and only six 'primary' forts, it ended up with 11 extra or 'secondary' forts, some replacing fortlets.

This hypothesis was widely accepted, but in 2009 a study of Roman surveying techniques by John Poulter suggested that all the fort sites had been chosen in advance – making them all 'primary'. However, Prof Hanson and colleagues had identified forts and fortlets which were unlikely to be contemporary, on the basis of their relative locations or stratigraphic relationships. This research is reported in *Exploring the Antonine Wall with Terrestrial Remote Sensing*. For example, there were traces of a fortlet only 280 metres from Rough Castle fort and a fortlet beneath the fort at Castlehill. More recent analysis of the distance slabs, the unique highly decorated monumental inscriptions that recorded the building of lengths of the Wall by different legions, provided further information. Correlating the lengths on the slabs with LiDAR measurements along the Wall showed that the numbers made sense only if the northern ramparts of the 'primary' forts and fortlets were excluded from the measurements, indicating that they had already been constructed. However, the figures did not work if the 'secondary' forts were also excluded, confirming that they must have been added later.

The creation of a hard border through people's territory upset local communities leading to the addition of new closely spaced forts to reinforce the garrison, some much smaller because of pressure on available manpower.

Prof Hanson's book is published by Archaeopress, (£45 or available as a pdf on open access). A recording of his talk is available on our Zoom channel. He can be contacted on william.hanson@glasgow.ac.uk.

SEPTEMBER Meeting

Jane Harrison's title was *Weaving a Story: A North Northumberland Early-Middle Anglo-Saxon site with later links to the Viking Great Army* and concerned recent excavations at East Thirston, near Felton in Northumberland.

The site was on a headland close to the river Coquet, navigable up to that point in the past and also close to the Great North Road. It sat between two well-documented Anglo-Saxon 'heartlands', Bamburgh to the north and the lower Tyne valley to the south. Archaeologists' interest had been sparked by reports to the Portable Antiquities Scheme of finds from metal detectorists. There were no prehistoric items, but there were Roman and Anglo-Saxon ones, and links to 9th century Vikings.

Finds from the different periods were of contrasting types. For the Roman period some domestic and military items, and coins, but no in-situ archaeology or pottery. Anglo-Saxon finds included a range of pottery, and an attractive 6th century ornament for a horse's harness, re-used as a brooch. There were also many loom-weights, found in a sunken-floored building that was probably a workshop. Some were very large, perhaps used in the production of a heavy cloth – useful but also tradeable items. In the 8th century the focus of activity moved to iron smelting.

For the Viking period, there were items linked to clothing, leisure, and exchange, but no ingots, coins, hack silver or weights. It was known that part of the Viking Great Army under Halfdan had moved to the Tyne in the 870s, taking over the immediate area around the site from the Community of St Cuthbert. The traces linked to iron smelting suggest that a furnace may have still been in use at this time but with ore transported from some distance.

Jane can be contacted on jane.harrison@ncl.ac.uk.

Our condolences go to Jane, whose father Tony Harrison, the distinguished poet and playwright, died a few days after her talk.



East Thirston Finds

OCTOBER Meeting

In *Last Line of Defence?*, archaeologist Rachel Frame (Vindolanda Trust), talked about the Heritage Lottery Funded excavations at Magna fort, between Vindolanda and Birdoswald. This was built to protect the Stanegate road junction, and later incorporated into the Hadrianic wall system.

The eastern half of Milecastle 46 was in the first area to be excavated in this five-year programme. It had been heavily robbed out, with no trace of internal buildings. The Milecastle walls were 3.2 metres thick, matching the earliest construction phase of Hadrian's Wall. Building it was evidently a priority, to guard the Tirpalt-Irthing gap. A military ditch suggested an earlier marching camp. The Vallum had been diverted to the north, presumably to avoid an earlier annexe.



Excavation Site

In the next excavation area, though the fort had been robbed out, they found the northern part of the primary fort ditch. This had been recut at least 3 times and reinforced with stonework after the ditch sides had slumped. The anaerobic conditions of the fill had preserved the remains of 37 shoes, some of them extremely large. Various military items, including melon bead cavalry decorations were also found. The presence of civilians, including women and children, was suggested by artefacts such as children's shoes, spindle whorls and a cosmetic palette. There was also, uniquely, a well inside the milecastle and another at the road junction. The road had been resurfaced several times, suggesting years of heavy traffic. A key find was a delicate dual balance, suitable for weighing jewels or precious metals, or alternatively small amounts of spices and medicine. Some tentative evidence of leather tanning existed.

In addition, they had found an elderly man's cist grave, late Roman and possibly early Christian, and a number of cremation burials. Analysis of recovered bone fragments gave dates within the period of Roman occupation, and non-local origins for the individuals.

Rachel can be contacted on RachelFrame@vindolanda.com. This was our annual Public Lecture, with close on 300 attending, and a recording of the lecture is available through the Insights website, on <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/university-events/public-lectures/>

THOMAS WILLIAM YELLOWLEY, 1938–2025

The extensive tributes from a large loving family, patients, and friends on the funeral notice website are affectionate testimony of a life very well spent. Tom's enthusiasm for industrial archaeology likely developed from his father, a colliery manager; that for architecture from the lovely Georgian house they lived in at Seaton Burn.

I know little of his medical career, but one incident convinced me that he must be a particularly good Police Medical Examiner. I bumped into Tom on Gosforth High Street, and a passerby joined our conversation – one of Tom's regulars from Gateshead Police Station. He



Tom Yellowley, 1938–2025

was so keen to thank Tom for all his help and explain how he was trying hard to get back on track.

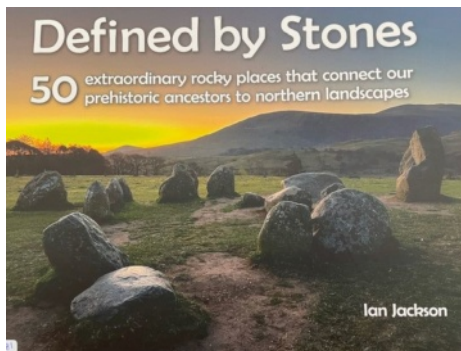
As his books on the subject testify, Tom must have visited and photographed every historic industrial site in the North-East. When my colleagues were working on the remains of the early iron furnace at Allensford no historic photographs were available from the institutional sources, so I contacted Tom, and he supplied a perfect set of his own.

Tom volunteered as a local expert on historic buildings and landscapes in Gateshead and as a lay judge for the Civic Trust Regional Awards Scheme for architecture and conservation. The copious photographs he took for Faulkner, Beacock and Jones's book *Newcastle and Gateshead: Architecture and Heritage* were of professional standard, I constantly refer to my copy of this book. He was a continually active member of the Northern Architectural History Society committee and organised enjoyable quizzes, tours, and local walks.

He was President of the Ryton and District Local Historical Society. We hear his personal collection of books, papers and photographs will 'live on' there, and at the Path Head Water Mill.

Ian Wells RIBA AABC, Events Secretary, Northern Architectural History Society

BOOK REVIEW



Ian Jackson *Defined by Stones: 50 extraordinary rocky places that connect our prehistoric ancestors to Northern landscapes*, (2025, Northern Heritage), £12, colour images throughout.

Ian Jackson continues his geological odyssey across Northern England with his fifth book in a series exploring the geological past of the region. Previous works include three books based around Northern counties (Cumbria, Northumberland, and Durham), and his thematic book last year on the geology of the Hadrian's Wall landscape (*Rocks on the Edge of Empire*). The recent volume

Defined by Stones: 50 extraordinary rocky places that connect our prehistoric ancestors to Northern landscapes explores the prehistoric past of Northern England and considers what a geological perspective can tell us about the prehistory. The book consists of 50 distinct sections dealing with different archaeological/geological sites spread across the North East, Cumbria and Yorkshire (with perhaps a slightly higher representation in the geologically diverse Cumbria). Those familiar with Jackson's other volumes will recognise the familiar format, with a text description, a location map for the site in question, and a beautiful full-page image (usually taken by Jackson himself).

I have been a fan of Jackson's work for many years, though have typically mined them for data, and treated them primarily as reference works. I took this volume at a gentler pace and for the first time appreciated his gentle prose style. His knowledge of the regions landscapes is immense, though he is always clear to express uncertainty or doubt within the limits of current understanding (either archaeological or geological). His great love of the landscapes of northern England is also evident, and one can't help reading this work and feeling the need to go out with fresh eyes to see the landscape. Ian is also a much valued member of this society, and we were happy to provide advice and support in his research for this work. Interested members can also watch out for his paper with Brian Young on the geology of the Roman period, which will shortly appear in AA2025, and he will also be speaking to the Society in March next year.

All proceeds from sales of this volume will go towards the charity Mind Tyneside and Northumberland.

NEW ACQUISITIONS IN THE SANT LIBRARY.

The Society's Library has consistently benefitted from the generosity of its members and friends in donating items to the collection. Recent experience is no different. In this *Bulletin* Les Jessop explores the intriguing history of a 'variant' of William Hutchinson's *History and Antiquities of the County Palatinate of Durham* (1794). We have a set of this three-volume history in the Library, but this specific additional volume is extremely scarce. Les has kindly given his copy to the Library.



Books reach our Library by a variety of means but one of the most unusual is our recent acquisition of an excellent 1880 edition of T.M. Richardson Senior's *Memorials of Old Newcastle*, containing 40 etchings of historic structures in the city – mostly now removed (see sketch of Barras Bridge). This is a donation from Mr. Dave Woollin of Wakefield. A neighbour's house was being cleared, and Dave noticed a box of books placed on top of a skip, including this very large one. He was intrigued to see it was a book of old prints of Newcastle. Given permission to rescue it an internet search led him to SANT and its Library and he e-mailed the Librarian. He was delighted to have simply rescued the volume and sent it to a 'good home'.

Such chance acquisitions are rare and much more common is the generosity of local authors. Two recent, contrasting publications exemplify this – Ian Jackson's *Defined by Stones* and Les Turnbull's *William Thomas and a new appraisal of the Stockton and Darlington Railway* (both reviewed in this issue). Ian's book continues his fascinating exploration of the relationship between geology, landscapes and prehistoric communities, whilst Les Turnbull further develops his argument about the contested nature of the uniqueness of the S & D railway and brings William Thomas, a totally neglected engineer, firmly centre stage.

An equally stimulating recent monograph and a reminder of the Society's close relationship to the western part of the 'North' is Peter Ryder's *Towers, Halls and Bastles: the Lesser Defensible Buildings of Cumbria*. Peter examines and analyses just under 170 of the 'lesser' defensible structures in the region and identifies different building traditions and building types.

The autumn of 2025 saw the publication of two books by distinguished SANT members. Max Adams and Colm O'Brien published the intriguingly titled *Northumbria AD367–867: Earth Hall, Ring Gift and Heaven's Field* exploring, amongst other themes, both secular and ecclesiastical powers in the management and exploitation of territory. In *Hadrian's Wall and its Trees* David Breeze has provided a timely reminder of one aspect of the wider context of our region's most celebrated historical site.

'Local' knowledge often has little significant meaning without recognition of its place in a wider perspective. Thus the Library continues to purchase texts that are not specific to the region. A recent acquisition in this context is *William Wyon* by Mark Jones. Wyon was chief engraver at the Royal Mint in the early nineteenth century. A considerable artist he was, *inter alia*, a central figure in the design of coinage which underpinned the international growth of the British economy. This is a noteworthy addition to the Library's excellent collection of texts on the history of coinage.

Mike Barke, Hon. Librarian

EDITOR'S NOTE

All relevant contributions to the *Bulletin* are welcome – 300 words plus an illustration. The deadline for the next *Bulletin* is 8th May, 2026 and my e-mail is mikebarke46@hotmail.co.uk.