

In the Land of Giants

The new season began in style with this hugely entertaining, scholarly account by Max Adams, drawing on his recently published book on walking in the footsteps of our Dark Age ancestors. To the skilled eye, landscape can be read like an ancient document informing us about life in the ancient Celtic lands of Britain. His ten journeys, on foot and by sea, retraced the routes of countless traders, missionary saints and warrior kings whose signature was manifest in various ways.

In the post-Roman period, before the arrival of the Vikings, there are few historical sources and we must turn detective to look at the archaeological evidence in order to form a picture. At Birdoswald, the Roman granary was turned into a feasting hall worthy of Beowulf. Here and elsewhere Roman buildings and infrastructure were allowed to collapse and a tribal culture took over, in which poets sang lyrically of ruined monuments which they thought must have been built by giants.

Shards of Mediterranean oil and wine amphorae have turned up in south-west England, Wales and Ireland, showing trading routes with the continent. In turn, Britain exported tin, copper, gold, silver, hunting dogs and salt. Traders plied up and down our coast from far and wide.

The contemporary historian Bede has an account of a visit to the Holy Land by a bishop from Gaul, who arrived one day on Iona and told his story to Abbot Adumnan, exemplifying the frequent movement of clergy in all directions at that time. Latin was their common language.

It cannot be an accident that the Scilly Isles, gateway to the Irish Sea from the continent, are named from Celtic saints. Connections between Ireland and Scotland are shown in similar patterns of stone-carving.

Forsaking his hiking boots, Max joined the crew of a 19th century Danish gaff cutter to sail up the Irish Sea from Falmouth to Mallaig, feeling an affinity with those long-ago

sailors for whom it was a part of everyday life. Dozens of place names including 'wick'. meaning 'market' are to be found up and down the Irish Sea coast. A busy, driving world emerged from Dark Age obscurity along those age-old routes, providing material for a fascinating talk.

Warkworth History Society - **November 2015** Report

(not yet available)

Warkworth History Society - **December 2015** Report

Our speaker, Andy Griffin, introduced us to William Davison of Alnwick (1781-1858), Printer and Apothecary, a most talented craftsman and entrepreneur. He was born in November 1781, the son of a husbandman who looked after the welfare of animals on the Duke of Northumberland's estate and was apprenticed at 14 to a Mr Hind, chemist, of Ponteland and Newcastle. Age 21, he returned to Alnwick and set up as a pharmacist. By 1834 Pigot's Dictionary were recording him, as a Binder, Printer, Chemist and Druggist living at 22 Bondgate, Alnwick. William's son John was already recorded with a surgeon's business also in Bondgate.

William Davison was highly innovative in his printing work introducing in 1790 the Intelligencer an advertising handbill which also included news. A very successful business line was advertising home cures for all manner of ailments including freckles, obesity and baldness. These could be provided, of course, by his parallel chemist and druggist business. He not only prepared and sold medication and tinctures for humans but also for all the farm and draught animals around.

He produced a Book of Common Prayer in 1817 and in 1820 a huge two volume bible. The latter was technically a triumph but a commercial disaster. Davison had to sell his house to complete it. The Bible still remains one of the 100 best Northumbrian artefacts. His printing business expanded into bookselling and stationery. For schoolchildren he produced battledores, hand held displays of the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer often with an abacus attached and Chap books, simple 8-page story books, printed on a single sheet of fullscap. The

Education Acts of 1837 and 1839 increased school attendance and the expansion of the railway system opened up a countrywide market for Davison. His printing was always of the highest quality and it was a measure of his pride in his own work that when he required an illustrator for a publication of Gray's Elegy and another on the Hermit of Warkworth, he commissioned Thomas Bewick, the premier woodcut engraver of the age. Later in life he opened a gas works on the site of the current Tanner's Arms. In 1851 and at the age of 70 he started The Alnwick Mercury newspaper and continued it until his death in 1858.

Andy was thanked for his well illustrated talk about this unsung local hero. A display dedicated to William Davison including a section of his printing press may be found at the Bailiffgate Museum in Alnwick.

Warkworth History Society - **January 2016** Report

(not yet available)

Warkworth History Society - **February 2016** Report

Our speaker, Michael Thompson gave a very detailed and informative talk on The Vikings: Religion and Mythology

The Vikings have a well-deserved fearsome reputation for their 'slash and burn' activities, which were carried out by the wild guys of Norse society, the 'yobs' of their day. They initially made trips in their longboats twice per year to search for plunder and wealth which they could trade, very often at the point of a sword.

They plundered the South of England from 787 to 792 and a year later moved on to Lindisfarne.

At the time the word Dane was used as a generic term for the Vikings. Today's meaning would be enemy.

The Danes and Angles originated from virtually the same area and shared a lot of the same myths. This was particularly

relevant in the area between the Tweed and the Tyne known as Bernicia.

The Norse Creation Myth describes worlds inhabited by Gods, Giants, Elves and Dwarves and includes Valhalla where the dead aspire to go to sit at the high table and drink mead with the Gods: and its counterpart Hel which is a very cold place where nothing happens!

Norse Gods give us the names of 6 of the days of the week, which in order of priority are: Sun - Sunday, Moon - Monday, Frigg - Friday, Thor - Thursday, Odin - Wednesday and Tyr - Tuesday. Each of the Gods has their own character, Frigg being mother earth, Thor giant and strong but a comedy character, Odin God of minstrels, also watchful and being aware, and Tyr the warrior God and God or Gods.

Norse mythology was a highly sophisticated and complex form of religion that gave life meaning and helped the Vikings make sense of their world.

A presentation was made to Dianna Webber in recognition and thanks for her many years as a dedicated and enthusiastic committee member, Secretary and Chairman of the Society. We wish Dianna and Andy a long and happy life in Derbyshire.

Warkworth History Society - **March 2016** Report

Our speaker this month was Christopher Hudson, who gave us a talk on Newminster Abbey and the Cistercians.

Christopher began by thanking for his introduction using Cistercian sign language. He explained that approximately 120 signs had been developed as a means of communication, as talking was only allowed in the Chapter House.

The Cistercian order was founded in Citeaux, France in 1098 by a group of Benedictine monks who were dissatisfied with the relaxed observance of their abbey and desired to live a solitary life under the guidance of the strictest interpretation of the Rule of St Benedict. From 1115 the order spread rapidly throughout France, Britain and Ireland. Fountains Abbey in

Yorkshire was established in 1135 and its first daughter house, Newminster in 1138, on land that was given by a Morpeth noble. However it had to be rebuilt a year later after it was burned in an attack by Scottish raiders.

All Cistercian monasteries had to observe the same rules and customs and its buildings laid out in uniform manner. They were planned and developed to be self-sufficient and more like a small town than just a church. Newminster covered a large area and had fish ponds, salt pans, metal working, coal mines, a quarry and farms. Lay brothers were used to carry out the manual work, however this system started to collapse after the Black Death when a shortage of labour made paid employment more attractive.

During the dissolution of the monasteries Newminster put up resistance but was destroyed on a second visit in 1537.

Over the years various owners have used the site as a useful source of ready stone for parks and garden features. Excavations in 1963 revealed the plan of the abbey church. At various times rebuilding work has taken place but this has badly deteriorated and the site is now considered dangerous and is not accessible to the public. Unfortunately there are no current plans by English Heritage to carry out further excavation or make this important Scheduled Monument and Grade II listed site accessible again.

Christopher ended his interesting and entertaining talk in the same manner as he began by using Cistercian sign language to indicate that he was off to ask the landlord for a pint of his best ale.

Warkworth History Society - **April 2016** Report

Our speaker this month was David Lowther, lecturer in history at Newcastle University and University of Sunderland and also part of the team who created the Gertrude Bell exhibition currently at the Great North (Hancock) Museum Newcastle.

Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell was born in 1868 in Washington, then County Durham, into one of the North East's

foremost wealthy industrialist families. They were also very prominent within the Liberal Party.

She had a stellar academic career achieving a star double first in history at Lady Margaret Hall Oxford, the first woman to achieve this. She then went on to do many more things which a woman of her class and upbringing simply didn't do. During her lifetime she was an archaeologist, diplomat, linguist, world renowned mountaineer, author, poet, photographer, cartographer and explorer.

She had a keen interest in Middle Eastern languages and cultures and in 1913 she went on a solo journey (the only European) across what is now Saudi Arabia, a very dangerous journey at the time.

At the outbreak of WW1 she worked for the Red Cross and was one of the architects in creating the Imperial War Graves Commission.

She never married but had what was described as a "love affair of middle age" with Charles Doughty-Wylie, one of the few men with whom she shared common interests. Over the four year period of their relationship they only spent 4 days together, the rest of the time communicating by letter. On his death in Gallipoli in 1915 she threw herself into intelligence work in Cairo, collaborating with TE Lawrence in trying to forge alliances with the Arab tribes. In 1917 she was appointed Oriental Secretary in Baghdad, the first woman to hold such a position and played a major role in the creation of modern Iraq. By 1920 she was an authority on the region and pioneered the idea of the National Museum of Iraq.

She died of an overdose of morphine in 1926 aged 58 and there still remains much speculation as to whether this was an accident or suicide.

David's well presented and enthusiastic talk was a fascinating insight into the many sides of Gertrude Bell and will inspire many to attend the exhibition which runs until 3rd May.

Warkworth History Society - **May 2016** Report

During this season's AGM acting Chair Moira Kilkenny reported the society has a solid membership with good attendance by members and visitors at each meeting. Treasurer Anne Cashmore reported that finances remain in good order. The following officers and committee members were elected: -

Chairperson: Moira Kilkenny

Treasurer: Anne Cashmore

Committee: Barry Jones, Richard Jackson, Les Purvis, Kathryn McLachlan

Life membership: Joan Hellowell for outstanding contribution to the Society

Next season's programme (listed above) was distributed. Following the AGM, a DVD produced by Alnwick and District WW1 Centenary Commemoration Group containing a talk given by Cliff Pettit, a local historian, on Alnwick 1915 Armed Camp was shown. The camp originated in 1914 as a training facility for The Tyneside Irish, Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Commercials Regiments. It was constructed from timber, with over 400 workers used to build the vast site. The camp was vacated in August 1915 with 10 trains used to transport the troops away. It remained empty until December 1915 when it was converted into a hospital / convalescent camp for injured soldiers. At the time the camp had a billiard hall, concert hall, plunge & steam baths and was more like a small village. After 8 months and much expense the camp changed again to become the Northern Command Depot and was used to hold troops for a matter of weeks before they were reposted back to their regiment. A number of photographs were shown of the camp how it looked at the time and the same location today. If you don't know where to look you wouldn't know that a camp which had housed 15,000 troops had existed at all.