

## Meeting Reports 2016 - 2017 Programme

### May 2017

This month was the Annual General Meeting of the Society, and Chair Moira Kilkenny gave her annual report which included a review of the relocation to St Lawrence Church, the 2016-17 programme and a reminder as to why Magna Carta, a facsimile copy of which is now located in the church porch, is significant to the church, to us as a village and to the governance of our country.

Treasurer Anne Cashmore reported that the Society finances remain in good order, with 55 members and meeting attendances averaging 36. The following officers were re-elected – Chair Moira Kilkenny, Treasurer Anne Cashmore: the following committee members were also re-elected, Richard Jackson, Barry Jones, Kathryn McLachlan and Les Purvis. Jill Wharton was elected to join the committee.

The programme for 2017-18 was distributed, details above.

Following the AGM Sandra Kerr gave an extremely interesting insight into the creation of the children's 1970's television programme Bagpuss, voted in 2000 the best loved children's programme of all time. Only 13 episodes were made and it was not particularly liked by the BBC as they thought it looked homemade and rough around the edges (which it was, but this actually gave it its charm). Sandra described how Oliver Postgate the creator gave her and partner John Faulkner a short brief which they then used to write the songs required to fit a particular story. Sandra sang a number of the songs while playing Autoharp, English Concertina, Guitar and spoons as accompaniment. Sandra gave a delightful performance which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

### April 2017

Forty nine members/guests attended the April meeting where Chair Moira welcomed the return of one of the Societies favourite speakers, Professor John Derry to give a talk Field Marshall Montgomery "The Mystery of Monty".

Professor Derry took us through the life of Bernard Montgomery to try to explain why he was such a difficult man becoming more so as he grew older.

He had a much disciplined upbringing particularly by his mother Maud and was a naughty and trying child. He later attended the Royal Military College Sandhurst from which he was almost expelled for being the ringleader in a serious case of bullying. He was only allowed to continue on the course after pleading from mother. Professor Derry described how he dedicated his life to the army and was a fierce critic of colleagues and superiors, an arrogance that would continue throughout his life. Montgomery married Betty Carver in 1927 at the age of 40 and was a changed man. However Betty was bitten by an insect in 1937 and died of blood poisoning. This was a great emotional blow to Montgomery and he reverted to type, once again dedicating his life to the army. Professor Derry explained how Montgomery's experiences in WW1 were used to great effect as Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in 1942, the important victory at El Alamein, and how he was fiercely critical of other Allied Commanders, particularly the Americans, throughout the rest of the War and thereafter.

Montgomery retired in 1958 and wrote his memoirs which caused uproar when they were published. He was politically insensitive and often made a fool of himself during debates in the House of Lords

When asked which three generals he admired most Montgomery replied “the other two would be Alexander the Great and Napoleon”. In his last years he was a lonely and unhappy man, keeping his distance from family and any remaining colleagues. Marshall Viscount Montgomery of Alamein KG, GCB, DSO died on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1976.

Professor Derry gave his talk in his inimitable style speaking for over an hour without the use of slides or reference to notes. We look forward to his return in March 2018

### March 2017

At a very well attended March meeting Chair Moira welcomed back our speaker for the evening Freda Thompson to give a talk on Grace Horsley Darling “The Darling of the North”.

Freda took us through the lives of Robert and William Darling, Graces grandfather and father, how Grace was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1815 at her grandparent’s small cottage in Bamburgh, her life on Brownsman Island and the move to Longstone Lighthouse in 1826.

On the night of 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> September 1838, only Grace and her parents were in the lighthouse. Unable to sleep because of a terrible storm Grace saw the paddle steamer SS Forfarshire had struck Harcar Rock. She woke her father and they took out the twenty foot coble to rescue any survivors. Despite the wind, the sea swell and the spray and with great physical effort they reached the rock on which the 9 survivors were located. Knowing they couldn’t take them all, William helped a Mrs Dawson, together with an injured man and two crew members into the coble. They arrived safely back at Longstone and William returned with the crewmen to collect the remaining survivors.

The story of the rescue soon made the local newspapers and spread very quickly throughout the country. It captured the imagination of the public who declared Grace a heroine.

Grace received presents and gifts from admirers and Queen Victoria sent her £50. Letters were received requesting her signature, pieces of her dress, or locks of her hair. She received a fine watch from the Duke of Northumberland who became Grace’s guardian and managed her affairs through 3 appointed trustees.

Fame placed a great strain on Grace and she became ill and weak. After short stays at Wooler and Alnwick she was moved to her sister’s home in Bamburgh where she died of tuberculosis on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1842.

Freda showed pictures of the prominent stone memorial to Grace Darling and the family grave in the churchyard of St Aidans Bamburgh.

Freda followed her talk with brief outlines of Lady Armstrong, Mo Molam, Josephine Butler, Ellen Wilkinson and Sarah Blackett.

### February 2017

Forty-three members/guests attended the February meeting where Chair Moira welcomed our speaker Bill Bland to give a talk on The History of Ordnance Survey. Bill began by describing his early childhood memories in Castleton Yorkshire where his fascination of Ordnance Survey maps began.

The origins of the Ordnance Survey can be traced back to the aftermath of the Jacobite rising. The army did not have a good map of the Scottish Highlands to

enable them to locate the Jacobite dissenters, therefore in 1747 a military survey of the Highlands was carried out and a map with a scale of 1 inch to 1000 yards produced.

Bill illustrated through drawings and photographs the principles of triangulation, together with the basic equipment used in early land surveys, also reminding us of our weights and measure tables relating to yards, chains, furlongs and miles!

The Principal Triangulation of Great Britain was carried out between 1783 and 1853 and led to the creation of the Ordnance Survey itself.

In 1791 the first great theodolite was developed by Jesse Ramsden and purchased at a cost of £373. 14 shillings. This enabled greater accuracy in surveying and work began mapping southern England using a 5 mile baseline on Houslow Heath (now the site of Heathrow Airport).

By 1801 the first 1 inch to the mile map of Kent was published and in 1810 a map of the Isle of Wight was published with the first recorded use of the Ordnance Survey name in its title. The last area to be surveyed and map published was Hexham and Allendale in 1872.

Maps continue to be updated and published today, however the equipment used has changed completely. Now Surveyors use electronic distance measuring equipment (EDM), auto levels, total stations and global positioning system (GPS). This equipment enables survey work to be carried out quicker and with less chance of error. Bill demonstrated how Ordnance Survey maps are now available for download onto computers and tablets, making planning a walk easier and importantly letting you know at any time your exact location, providing of course your battery doesn't run out!

Bills talk on Ordnance Survey from its origins to today was delivered in an informative and humorous manner demonstrating his passion for the subject.

### **January 2017**

The first meeting of 2017 was held in St Lawrence Church, our new regular venue. Chair Moira welcomed our speaker Andrew Griffin to give a talk on The Brontes. Andrew took us through the story starting with Patrick Brunty one of 10 children born in Ireland 1777. He changed his name to the more impressive sounding Bronte when he left his humble origins to attend St Johns College Cambridge. Patrick went through several curacies before arriving at Howarth in April 1820, with wife Maria and their 6 children Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Jane, all born between April 1814 and January 1820.

Andrew described the children's upbringing and harsh life experiences which had a profound effect on the writing of Charlotte, Emily and Anne.

After the death of Maria aged 11 and Elizabeth aged 10, the surviving children created an imaginary world and produced their own tiny books using Branwell's toy soldiers as inspiration.

In 1846 Charlotte, Emily and Anne financed the publication of their poems under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell in order to disguise that they were written by women.

Charlotte's first novel The Professor was rejected by several publishing houses. The response she received however encouraged her to submit her next work Jane Eyre which was accepted. Anne's Agnes Grey and Emily's Wuthering Heights were

published 2 months later. Only after Anne's second novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published did the authors reveal their true identities.

Barnwell died in 1848 aged 31, Emily died 3 months later aged 30. Anne died a year later in Scarborough aged 29.

Charlotte continued writing and her last novel *Villette* was published in 1853. She married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1854, his first proposal having been turned down. Her happiness didn't last however as she died less than a year later.

Patrick Bronte lived on at Howarth Parsonage until his death in 1861 at the age of 84.

Andrews talk provided a fascinating insight into the bleakness of life at the time and its effect on the Bronte family.

### **December 2016**

This month Chair Moira welcomed back our speaker Michael Thomson to give a talk on *The Battle of Otterburn "Harry Hotspurs Big Night Out"*

Michael began by telling the background story of why this battle in August 1388, which some historians believe to be relatively insignificant and merely one of many border skirmishes, was in fact one of the hardest battles ever fought.

In the time before artillery and big guns war was considered fun, an adventure and if you survived, an opportunity to get rich. The English and Scots Armies had a fearful reputation throughout Europe.

Using the chronicles of Jean Froissart a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Belgian writer, photographs of the area and drawings of the battlefield Michael brought to life the lead up to the battle, the battle itself and the characters involved, the Earl of Douglas and Henry Hotspur Percy.

The battle was fought in brutal hand to hand combat in pockets of 30 to 50 men, during which the Earl of Douglas was killed and Henry Percy captured for ransom. The Scots are generally thought to have won the battle due to Henry Hotspur being too eager to engage the Scots before his full army arrived and not using his archers. Michael considered however that all in all this "best battle ever" should be classed as a draw much to the astonishment of at least one Scot in the audience!

Chair Moira announced after this fascinating and interesting talk that in future all Society meetings will be held at the Church of St Lawrence in the Village

### **November 2016**

This month our speaker was Anthony Atkinson who gave a talk on *Mary Eleanor Bowes – "The Heiress of the North"*.

Anthony is a volunteer guide at Gibside National Trust property near Rowlands Gill, which was Mary Eleanor Bowes childhood home. He began by giving an insight into the property, including the Chapel, Orangery, Freedom Column, Crypt and the Hall which the Bowes family ruined in the 1950s by removing the floor and roof to avoid paying rates.

Anthony then went on to describe in detail the stranger than fiction life of Mary Eleanor Bowes. Born in February 1749, she became the wealthiest heiress in Britain if not Europe at the age of 11 when her father died leaving her his vast fortune. She

had however been over indulged by her father and today would have been described as “spoilt rotten”.

Her wealth enabled her to encourage the attentions of many suitors. She married John Lyon in 1762 and in accordance with her fathers will; the family name was changed to Bowes Lyon. There were 5 children from the marriage, all born between 1768 and 1773. Mary though led a licentious life and had numerous affairs. When her husband died in 1776 Mary regained her independence and her wealth. In 1777 she had the misfortune to meet Andrew Stoney who today would be described as a psychopath. Stoney duped her into marriage by staging a fake duel in defence of her honour with the editor of the Morning Post. When Stoney found out that she had made a prenuptial agreement to safeguard her wealth, he made her life a living hell through domestic, physical and mental abuse. She escaped from Stoney in 1785 and filed for divorce, a major event for a woman in those times. She was recaptured but eventually rescued and Stoney arrested. Following a very public trial which was the talk of London, Stoney was imprisoned. Mary spent the last 11 years of her life quietly with her pets and devoted housekeeper. She died in May 1800 and buried in Poets Corner Westminster Abbey.

Anthony gave a very enjoyable and fascinating talk on the great, great, great, great grandmother of our Queen.

## **October 2016**

Our first meeting of the 2016-17 programme was well attended with 38 people coming along to hear The Kings Shilling – a History of Recruitment into the Red Coat Army presented in talk and music by Peter, Alan and Pauline Giles collectively known as Old English.

Peter set the tone for the evening by playing 2 marches on the Northumbrian Pipes. We were then told Recruitment Parties used many assets to encourage men to commit to the army, including music, alcohol and false promises. They focused their attention on fairs, race meetings and public houses, places where the type of men they were looking for would attend. The Recruitment Sergeant was the key person, usually a larger than life character full of tall stories and swagger, with the ability to sell the benefits of army life. There was also the promise of a cash bounty on joining.

Once joined up recruits found that army life wasn't all as described, it was very hard life, promotion was bought rather than on merit and the regiment was run more like a private business.

A popular money making scheme was for men to desert, and then join up again to claim a new bounty.

Another force at the time was the Militia, which could be called upon to assist the regular army at times of emergency. Men were selected to serve from a list drawn up by the local Constable. The Parish List for Warkworth was shown. Persons such as Teachers and Priests were exempt but there were many ways of dodging being called up such as paying a sum of money for a substitute to take your place. Recruitment therefore fell on the very poorest people, who could least afford to be away from their job and family.

The Volunteer Corps was another military, body not unlike "Dads Army" of WW2, which was formed at the time when a French invasion was feared. Recruits were mostly middle class and bought their own uniform. An important aspect of the Volunteer Corps was that its recruits were exempt from service in the Militia. The talk was interspersed with appropriate music and songs, many with choruses which were sung heartily. Old English provided a very informative and entertaining evening.