

## **Meeting Reports 2018-2019 Programme**

### **May 2019**

#### **AGM**

Apologies: Beverley Stuckey, Philip Stuckey, Alan McLachlan

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the AGM 2018 were approved.

#### Chairman's Annual Report

Moira Kilkenny reported a good year, with membership up at 68 and average attendance at over 50. The summer outing to Bamburgh was enjoyed by 30 members. This year's outing will be to Beamish on June 3rd. Moira thanked everyone for their support.

Thanks were also expressed to the committee members, Barry Jones, Les Purvis, Kathryn McLachlan, Christine Doe, Jill Wharton and Anne Cashmore, who will remain the same for the coming year; also to non-committee member volunteers, Roger Cashmore and Katie MacFarlane; to the Pelican, Amble Library and Ian Jolly at the Post Office; and finally to St Lawrence Church and Rev. Margaret Hobrough.

Copies of the 2019-20 programme were made available.

#### Treasurer's Report

Anne Cashmore provided details of the year's finances, which were approved, and which showed a very healthy balance. As a result, annual membership will be reduced to £12. The bus for the summer outing to Beamish will also be paid for from History Society funds.

#### Annual Outing

Details of this summer's outing to Beamish have been circulated to all members. Those wishing to go should sign the sheet and make their payment by June 3rd at latest. Non-members will be made welcome if there are any spare seats on the bus.

Following the AGM chair Moira introduced our speaker for the evening Brian Ward. On 13th November 1967 Martin Luther King visited the University of Newcastle to receive an honorary doctorate in civil law – and not many people know that! One person who does know a great deal about this remarkable occasion was this month's speaker, Brian Ward, Professor in American Studies at Northumbria University. Professor Ward has researched the details of this brief and all-but-forgotten visit and presented them to us in a fascinating talk.

He first dealt with the question of why King was invited in the first place. As many of our members will remember, 1967 was a year of much student unrest in Britain. But the then Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University considered some of his students to be rather conservative in their outlook and thought that a visit from this famous American civil rights activist might be just the thing to set them thinking. It was also a time when immigration and race relations were much under discussion in British politics.

Professor Ward's next question was why King, a very busy man, agreed to come at all, especially as he was only in the country for such a very short time, arriving at Heathrow on November 12th, travelling to Newcastle by overnight sleeper, and returning across the Atlantic later on the 13th. It seems that his popularity in the United States was, at this time, in the decline and so he was eager to go somewhere he would be revered.

The visit itself was not widely reported – compared, for example, with Mohammed Ali's much publicised visit ten years later. It was, after all, very brief. But King did make an unscheduled speech, which was recorded, although only 8 minutes of the original recording remain. In it he spoke of the importance of government regulation to end racial discrimination.

As we know, Martin Luther King was assassinated on 4th April 1968, less than five months after his visit to Newcastle. His worth as a spokesman for peace and justice was only fully recognised after his death. In his research, and in his book 'Martin Luther King in Newcastle upon Tyne: The African American Freedom Struggle and Race Relations in the North East of England' Brian Ward has done much to bring this extraordinary story to light.

## **April 2019**

For the April meeting we were fortunate to have two speakers, Baroness Joyce Quinn and our chairman Moira Kilkenny. Their talk was a snapshot of their recently published book titled 'Angels of the North, Notable Women of the North East' of which they are co-authors.

Joyce spoke first and explained how the book came to be written, essentially most books previously published are about men so it was time for a book about women! The book is about notable women of the North East in general and it's publishing date coincided with three important events, 100 years of women being given the vote, the 100-year anniversary of the end of WW1 and the Exhibition of the North East.

The authors decided to focus on notable women of the past rather than those still alive. They also had to decide what was meant by 'North East women', and for them it meant not just women born in the North East but also those who had significance to the area. The result was the profiling of 40 women, some well known and some unknown but of notable significance.

The best-known North-East woman profiled was Grace Darling, well known both nationally and in the region. Her heroism, with her father, captured the attention of Victorian women, including Queen Victoria.

Dr Margaret Phillips, MP for Sunderland, only lived in the area for 2 years, but during her time as an MP was very influential and was an outstanding women's organiser. She built up the organisation for the Labour party throughout the country but was known in the area for her persistence in the Commons for highlighting poverty in Sunderland.

Many suffragettes were local and/or active in the area including Emily Wilding Davison, Kathleen Brown Ruth Dodds, Connie Lawcock, to name but a few.

There were also many suffragists who didn't like protests and setting fire to properties. These included Josephine Butler, a social reformer, Emily Davis, pioneer of Higher Education and founder of the first college in Cambridge.

Some of the best-known early MP's were from the North East or held North East seats. Margaret Bondfield, the first female Cabinet Minister, Mabel Phillipson, the first woman to represent a Northumberland constituency, and Dame Irene Ward, given the title of 'Mother of the House' as she was in Parliament so long!

The second part of the talk, given by Moira, explained that most of the women profiled lived during the 5 centuries from the reign of Elizabeth 1 to the reign of Elizabeth 2 ie. 1580 to 2016. However, the number profiled each century was not equal, only 3 came from the first 4 centuries. This was because during this period women did not become entities in their own right until 1882 with the passing of the Women's Property Act. It was extremely difficult to find women of note prior to the 20th century because the lack of equality between men and women saw women confined to the domestic domain and viewed as inferior. It wasn't until the late 19th century that things began to change and women were given more rights, before then women's lives were hidden.

However, there were 5 women found of note such as Dorothy Lawson, born 1580. Her biography, written by her chaplain, republished in the 1800's, described a woman of exceptional courage who broke the law and risked her life by keeping a Catholic chaplain in her house during a time of savage penal laws relating to Catholicism.

Mary Austell, born 1666, researched through her own writings. Orphaned when 20, she wrote poetry which was sent to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, who encouraged her to be a writer and introduced her to a publisher. Published anonymously, she wrote a book, 100 years ahead of its time, arguing for equality between men and women. She was the first feminist writer but was lampooned and ridiculed causing her to hide and eventually die in poverty. Muriel Robb, born 1878, a sportswoman and gifted tennis player, won the Wimbledon ladies championship in 1902. Her story was tragic, dying of cancer aged 28.

There were several women profiled who were of note during WW1. Kate Maxley, a nurse, was one of the bravest and most decorated women. She served for 4 years on the Western front until badly injured by a bomb. Dr Ruth Nicholson, qualified as a doctor in Newcastle in 1909, one of only 300 in the country. She served on the Western front for 4 years, carrying out daily amputations surrounded by suffering and stench. Her achievement was exceptional in the face of obstacles put in the way of female doctors. She received several awards after the war and went on to become a founder of The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecology. Lady Sybil Gray, established the Red Cross Hospital in Petrograd in 1918 and carried on working despite shrapnel injuries to her face. She returned to the UK and then went France to work in the Ambulance Service. Ida and Louise Cook rescued at least 27 Jews from Germany and facilitated many more, using their trips to the opera as a cover rescue visit. They were honoured by the State of Israel in 1965 and in 2010 by the British Government as heroes of the Holocaust. Ida also wrote short stories, landing a contract with Mills & Boon in 1934 and writing more than 100 novels under a different name!

Moira concluded the talk by explaining that the main message of the book is that if those women profiled could achieve so much, given so many constraints during history, how much more can women today achieve?

## **March 2019**

This month saw the welcome return of Professor John Derry to talk about Wellington the 'Iron Duke'.

Born Arthur Wesley in 1761, of Anglo-Irish descent, he was described by his mother as a 'problem child'. His father died when he was 12 and, to economise, he was withdrawn from Eton and sent to Europe to the French Military Academy. By the time he joined the army as an ensign he had adopted the name Wellesley, by which he was known throughout his army career, rising through the ranks until, as lieutenant colonel, he was sent in 1796 to India, where he learned to be a true soldier.

Wellesley's reputation was further enhanced when he faced Napoleon's formidable French army in Portugal and won. Professor Derry described how he was able to do this by studying French military tactics and training his men how best to resist them. His military success, both now and later, seems to have depended on his belief in strong discipline and training, a close relationship with his troops, and ensuring they were well fed. Unlike the French army, he made sure that his men paid for their food and drink, thus winning the support and respect of the Portuguese peasantry.

After a second victory over Napoleon in Spain, Arthur Wellesley became Viscount Wellington, later Earl of Wellington, Marquis of Wellington and ultimately the Duke of Wellington, the name we remember him by today.

When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1813 his army was depleted when the Russian army retreated, drawing the French on into the bitterness of the Russian winter, where many of them perished. Taking advantage of this, Wellington marched his army from Portugal into Northern Spain and on into France where he once more defeated Napoleon who, in 1814, abdicated and retreated to Elba.

Napoleon did, however, return for a final confrontation with Wellington at the battle of Waterloo. Once again it was Wellington's constant presence among his troops which gave them heart to fight on, whilst Napoleon stayed at headquarters and delegated responsibility. Napoleon abdicated for a second time and Wellington remained in France in charge of the army of occupation.

In 1818 he returned to Britain to join the government, never having lost a battle. As a controversial Conservative Prime Minister, he stood in favour of Catholic Emancipation, whereby Roman Catholics would be admitted to Parliament and to public office, and was accused of allying himself with the Pope. This led to a duel (an interesting way to settle parliamentary disputes) which happily both parties survived! Wellington was finally laid to rest at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1852.

This was a spellbinding talk from Professor Derry, whose depth and breadth of knowledge is truly inspiring.

## **February 2019**

At the February meeting, chair Moira introduced our Speaker, author and retired journalist Ian Hall to give his talk to a packed audience entitled 'Historical Oddities and Curious Places. A Quick Ramble off the Tourist Trail'.

He started his talk by explaining that there is lots of history associated with not so grand, and very much lesser known, places off the beaten track. He then went on to talk about a random selection of unrelated places in historical chronological order.

Ian began his journey with small items that had been found from hunter/ gatherer time and then progressed to the Bronze age with examples of rock formations, stones and circles to be found in places such as the Cheviot Hills.

Next came the Iron Age with hill forts, hilltop enclosures and evidence of tracks of wooden palisades.

He then talked at some length about the Romans, and whilst Northumberland wasn't Romanized, the presence of the Romans is all around us in the shape of Roman tombs built outside of townships, Roman roads and random stones depicting burial pits and ancient carvings in churches.

The talk then headed into the 18th century when smuggling was common and evidence of whisky stills remaining in the hills and a rather unusual structure of steps carved into a cave in Berwick Hills, possibly used as a place to hide smuggled wares, although nobody is totally sure what it is!

Ian then talked about examples of history crossing the ages, such as Cheviot goats that were originally domesticized in Medieval times but were left to go feral and still live in the wild today. The Peace column erected in Alnwick in 1814 to commemorate the victory of Napoleon sits on what once was an Iron Age hill fort. The Cheviot Hills has numerous examples of tragedy depicted by stone memorials over the course of many years. The Robert Stephenson bridge in Berwick brought about the demolition of part of Berwick Castle to get the railway through.

And so to modern day. The first scout camp was held in Humhaugh evident from a carving made in 1908, and not Brownsea Island, as commonly thought. Another carving at the site is possibly thought to have been made by Baden Powell. There are trig columns from 1930's in the Cheviot Hills, a tree plantation in the shape of a cross in the middle of a field in Ashington used as an aircraft guide in the Great War, underground chambers for radar equipment in the moors now mostly flooded and used as practice areas for police divers, and plans approved in 1962/3 to demolish the centre of Alnwick to make way for a new town centre, thankfully prevented!

The sites where all the magnificent examples of historical oddities can be found are too numerous to mention but exist in abundance locally in many parts of Northumberland. For those who need some guidance as to where they are, Ian has written a book, available locally, titled 'In Search of the Authentic Northumberland'.

## **January 2019**

Chair Moira introduced our first speaker of 2019, Dr John Hobrough, to give his talk 'Bees in History', a slight change to the advertised 'History of Beekeeping'.

Most people think of bees just as an insect that produces honey and has a nasty sting to it, with little thought as to its evolution and importance to humanity. Bees have been around for a very long time with evidence of human interaction since 9000BC and our domestication of it by catching swarms since 2500BC. Our history with bees is about how we humans get involved with them.

A colony of bees is made up of a single fertile female (Queen) who lays around 2000 eggs/day, fertile males (Drones) who only fertilise the Queen in summer, and 20000-70000 sterile females (Workers), and it's the Workers who control what happens. Swarms are formed from the colony and bees will swarm just about anywhere, and it's from the capture of swarms that humans put them to work.

The bee is unique in that it is the only insect that produces food that we eat and products that we use including sweeteners, medicines, polish, candles and cosmetics. Bees pollinate  $\frac{3}{4}$  of world crops and 65% of the food we eat relies on pollinators.

Bee numbers are in decline and the loss of the bee is more problematic to humans than many other world problems. Agricultural and environmental change is now affecting bees and putting increased pressure on them. The result is that the average hive yield has dropped from just over 100lbs of honey to 20-40lbs honey in the last 60 years. To try and support and protect bees, the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) was founded in 1874 bringing about changes including annual certification and annual inspection against disease by DEFRA.

John spoke of his own experiences of beekeeping over the last 60 + years which included some amusing stories about unusual swarms, including one that got into a sweet factory and subsequently produced green peppermint flavoured and red strawberry flavoured honey!

John also spoke at some length of his concern for the future of bees over the next 60 years and beyond and how we can help to protect them. A positive move by farmers has been the planting of Phacelia which has had the positive effect of encouraging bees to produce more honey. As individuals we can help by planting bee-friendly plants in the garden, be careful with the use of pesticides, by not putting unclean honey jars outside, especially those from abroad, as they may be carrying bacterial spores, and by supporting local beekeepers. We can also help fund essential research by adopting a beehive, for further information on this go to [adoptabeehive.co.uk](http://adoptabeehive.co.uk).

The talk was extremely well received and gave a fascinating and informative insight into history and the future of bees.

## **December 2018**

At December's meeting social historian Neil Storey spoke about Northumberland in the Great War.

The Northumberland Fusiliers was the first battalion of Kitchener's Army, being founded upon a tradition of youth involvement in a variety of movements including league football, Boys' Brigade, Scouting, and the Life Brigade. Young men were keen to become involved in activities which would provide some escape from a harsh life down the mines. In the pre-war years men enthusiastically joined the Territorial and even the regular army, seeing these as an opportunity for travel and adventure, with no thought of war.

But with the outbreak of war in 1914, Kitchener wanted regulars, not territorials. Men came in droves, naively seeking glory, whilst women were enlisted to take over the jobs they left behind. This introduced a feeling of independence which would ultimately lead to great social change.

Neil Storey's excellent account was illustrated by an impressive collection of photographs of the local area during the war years and was followed by a short discussion in which members shared stories of their own families' involvement in the Great War.



Help the Wounded fundraising event in Warkworth August 26th 1915

## **November 2018**

Chair Moira welcomed our speaker Dr Liz O'Donnell to give her talk "Hens that Want to Crow" Suffragists and Suffragettes of the North East of England 1866 -1918.

Many people think of the fight for women's suffrage only in terms of the early 20th century suffragettes with their militant tactics, but much wider campaigns were in fact taking place from at least the 1860s, many interconnected with the exploitation of disadvantaged people.

A number of key roles in the early campaigns were undertaken by women with North East roots including Emily Davis, Josephine Butler, Elizabeth Spence Watson, Norah Balls, Florence Nightingale Harrison Bell, and most famously Emily Wilding Davison.

Emily Davis together with Elizabeth and Millicent Garrett began in 1866 what became known as First Wave Feminism, with the establishment of the Langham Place Circle, their primary aim being the opening up of education and the professions to women and obtaining equal rights with regard to law, divorce, national politics and morality. On the 7th June 1866 the first mass women's suffrage petition, signed by 1500 women, was taken to Parliament by Emily Davis and Elizabeth Garrett and presented by MP John Stuart Mills. Its failure marked the start of organised campaigning by women for the vote. The Second Reform Bill petition in 1867 and an amendment to the Third Reform Act in 1884 both failed. Roles in public life were slowly being opened up to women who qualified; but support continued to grow for full suffrage.

In 1912 a women's march took place from Edinburgh arriving in London 16th November. Pictures were shown of the march as it passed through Berwick, Alnwick and Newcastle. Women joined and left the march along the journey, seven however marched the whole way.

Matters started to escalate in 1913 which strained relations between the suffragists, who believed in using legal means to achieve their goal and the suffragettes who were prepared to use extremist measures. Newspaper cuttings of the day showed reports of suffragette activities in the North East including, windows being broken, telegraph wires cut, bombs planted, and arson attacks on buildings. Emily Wilding Davison was mortally wounded when she ran in front

of the king's horse, Anmer, during the 1913 Derby. Her death and the crowds as her coffin passed through London and on arrival at Morpeth, marked a culmination and turning point in the militant suffragette campaign. The First World War broke out the following year and a suffragette amnesty declared. Campaign leaders urged women to join the war effort.

The 1918 Representation of the People Act gave women aged 30 and over and met the property qualification the right to vote. Women over 21 had to wait until 1928.

Dr O'Donnell's talk showed the fight for suffrage was slow and complex, with hopes raised and dashed several times along the way before electoral equality was achieved. The right to vote was only one step in women's struggle for greater equality in all areas of life which is still on-going today.

Dr O'Donnell was thanked for her interesting, informative and thought-provoking talk.

### **October 2018**

The new session opened with a talk by Jane Gulliford Lowes about her book, 'The Horsekeeper's Daughter'. It seems that Jane, a Sunderland lawyer, is connected to Warkworth through her great, great, great, great grandmother, who was baptised and married in the Church of St. Lawrence. But the subject of her book came through a different connection.

Jane had inherited a box of memorabilia dating from the 1800s, passed down from her great grandmother, who in turn had inherited it from a friend, known to the family as 'Auntie Edie'. Jane was particularly drawn to photographs and letters relating to one Sarah Marshall, the eponymous horse keeper's daughter. Born in County Durham in 1863, her father was the keeper of pit ponies for many of the mines in the area.

Jane's meticulous research reveals a wealth of information relating to the social history of this time: the poverty and appalling working conditions leading to many terrible mining disasters, strikes and social upheaval.

When Sarah's father died the family was evicted from their miner's cottage and Sarah sought what she imagined would be a better life in Australia, under the Queensland single female migrant scheme. This turned out to be no more than a means of recruiting servants to a life of drudgery with wealthy families in Brisbane.

Jane, by this time fully engrossed in Sarah's life story, went out to Australia herself to continue her research. There she discovered that Sarah had eventually managed to escape this unfortunate situation through marriage, in 1887, to William Campbell, an Irish farmer. She was then able to trace the movements of the Campbell family until, after many difficult years, they came to own a plot of land on Tambourine Mountain, where Sarah died in 1911, aged 47. It was Sarah's son, Bill, who had sent the letters and photographs to Auntie Edie, which had been so carefully preserved and passed down through the family.

Fascinating as Sarah's story undoubtedly was in revealing so much about the life of a working class woman born into poverty in County Durham in the 1800s, and her journey to a life of almost comparable hardship in Queensland, Australia, it was Jane Gulliford Lowes' dogged determination to unravel her story which ultimately inspired her listeners, no doubt sending many of us home to search our attics for forgotten letters and photographs of our own.