

MEETING REPORTS 2022-2023 PROGRAMME

December 2022

5th December - The Jacobites

Dr John Sadler treated us to a whistle-stop tour of the very complex Anglo-Scottish relations in the 17th and 18th centuries.

He began with an account of the battle of Culloden, and its terrible consequences for the Jacobite cause as well as its impact on the Highland Clan system. The story however started back in 1603 when James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne, followed in 1625 by his son, Charles I, who reigned until his defeat and consequent execution by Cromwell's Parliamentarians in 1649. Britain was declared a republic and named The Commonwealth, and Cromwell took on the title of Lord Protector.

Following Cromwell's death in 1658 his son Richard briefly succeeded him, but proved unequal to the position and was forced to resign the following year. The monarchy was restored in 1660 under Charles II who was succeeded by his son James II. James, however, refused to convert from Catholicism and following the 'Glorious Revolution' in November 1688 was forced to flee abroad. He was replaced by William of Orange and his wife Mary, daughter of James II. This sparked the first short-lived and unsuccessful Jacobite rebellion of 1689. Much of the military support for the Jacobite cause was firmly rooted in the feudal clan system that then existed in the Scottish Highlands.

Fast forward to the Act of Union of 1707 and the subsequent Jacobite rising of 1715. A number of noted Northumbrian aristocratic families took part in this revolt with 60 horsemen assembling at the Masons Arms in Warkworth on the 6th October. The Northumbrian Jacobites headed to Preston, where they were unfortunately defeated. Charles Radcliffe, Earl of Derwentwater, was arrested and charged with treason and executed after refusing to renounce his Catholic faith. His extensive estate was confiscated and re-distributed by the state. Other Northumbrian aristocratic families suffered a similar fate.

A final act of rebellion took place in 1745 led by Bonnie Prince Charlie, grandson of James II. Lord George Murray played a significant part on behalf of the Jacobites and won an astounding victory at the Battle of Prestonpans. Murray went on to take Carlisle, Manchester, Preston and Derby, but became disillusioned at the lack of support for the Jacobite cause in England and retreated back to Scotland. In 1746 the Jacobite army was decisively defeated at Culloden and a period of 'ethnic cleansing' of the Jacobite Highlanders by the Royalist 'Unionist' Lowland Scots and the English Hanoverian troops then followed. 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' escaped 'over the sea to Skye' and from there to Europe where he lived in exile in Italy until his death, bringing the Jacobite cause to an end. Within 20 years many of the surviving Highland clan families were displaced from the land and forced to seek new lives abroad.

This breath-taking talk, which left many a head spinning with names, dates and battles galore, was beautifully rounded off by a haunting rendition of 'Derwentwater's Lament' by Beverley A Palin, a local historian and musician.

November 2022

November 7th 2022 Transatlantic Blues: The Civil Rights Movement & the North East Music Scene of the 60s.

This month saw the return of Professor Brian Ward with a subject which brought history right up to living memory for a large proportion of the audience filling the Memorial Hall.

In his last talk Professor Ward spoke of the largely forgotten visit to Newcastle by Martin Luther King in 1967. By then many people in the North East had become interested in the American Civil Rights movement, and this was reflected in the music of the time. Artists such as John Lee Hooker visited the Club Agogo, and there were tours by Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Chuck Berry, and later Jimi Hendrix.

One local boy who was keenly interested in both the Civil Rights Movement and blues music was Eric Burdon who went on to achieve fame with his band, The Animals. The son of a miner, Burdon felt a connection with the victims of racial prejudice in the Southern States of America, where blues music had its origins. He had been on holiday to Algeria where he witnessed first hand the treatment of Arab nationals by the French Colonialists. At his own school he saw how German Jews experienced prejudice at the hands of fellow students.

Historically Burdon was influenced by the story of Robert Charles who in 1900 was brutalised and killed by the police in New Orleans; by Ida B Wells, a pioneering journalist who publicised his story and spoke out against lynching, and who also visited Newcastle in 1894; and by Robert Johnson, a blues musician of the 1930s.

In 1956, at the age of 15, Eric Burdon saw Louis Armstrong at the Newcastle City Hall. He learned to play trumpet and started his own, all white, jazz band. Then in the early 1960s he formed The Animals who eventually found fame with their recording of House of the Rising Sun in 1964 and played alongside many of his idols such as Sonny Boy Williamson and Chuck Berry. After moving to America he became close friends with Jimi Hendrix.

This was an informed and impassioned account by Professor Ward of the way in which the music scene in the North East of England was influenced by the blues music of the Southern States of America, which in its turn arose out of the racial prejudice and discrimination experienced by the black population. He ended by suggesting that, whilst prejudice is something that cannot be legislated against, discrimination is something that can and most certainly should be dealt with by law.

October 2022

The Bondagers talk, Dinah Iredale 03/10/2022

It was gratifying to see such an excellent turnout for the first lecture of the current Warkworth History Society programme.

Dinah Iredale commenced her talk by explaining that the bondager system was unique to Northumberland and the Scottish borders area and has been reflected in literature about this area since the 1830's as well as in art and social commentary.

The bondager system itself goes back many centuries and has always been hierarchical in nature, but adapted over time as farming technology and social ideas changed.

Originally in the 17th century the 'bond' agreed between the hiring farmer and the 'hind' (a skilled ploughman) included an assistant ploughman to help guide the heavy plough, plus the labour of the hind's wife for 20 days plus casual work. As ploughs became lighter, so the need for an assistant became unnecessary, so the 'bond contract' evolved to that of the hind and a female labourer, the bondager. It was the labour of the bondager that provided for the rent of the cottage. These buildings were often little more than a single room cottage in which the hind, his wife and family, plus the bondager lived. Whilst the bondager might often be the hind's wife or a close female relative, hind's with young families were often forced to hire in strangers as their bondager to fulfil their contract with the farmer. The beds in the room would often be separated by simple box partitions to provide a degree of privacy. In addition, the Hind would have to pay the bondager with 6 months wages in advance, a significant financial outlay. Perhaps not surprisingly resentment towards the bondager system developed resulting in collective action by the hind's to break the system but more of that later.

When labouring in the fields, bondagers worked under a hierarchical system with the first woman bondager in charge of time keeping and setting the pace of the work. The second woman bondager was responsible for the smartness of the appearance of the other bondagers working in the team.

Indeed, bondagers took considerable pride in their appearance and wore a distinctive colourful costume whilst working in the fields. Their Berwickshire straw hats were renovated each year with flowers and beads, with competitions for the most attractive headpiece. Clothing was adjusted to the prevailing weather conditions, with bonnets {often referred to as 'ugly'} being worn on hot sunny days to protect pale skin from the sun. The bondager costume also included a blouse, a waistcoat {known as a swaffie}, a shawl, a skirt complete with petticoats and a wimple, a rectangular cloth covering for the head. In cold muddy conditions the skirts could be adjusted into trousers and combined with leather leggings and twisted straw ropes to protect the legs.

The work of the bondagers included most common agricultural tasks and involved hard manual work working long hours often in testing weather conditions. Most unmarried countrywomen faced the limited choice of either working as a bondager or in domestic service. Many women however apparently valued the relative independence that came with being a bondager in that once their work in the fields was finished; their free time was their own.

The bondager system involved annual hiring days at local agricultural markets throughout Northumberland and the Scottish Borders. In 1837, many Hinds took collective action to try and break the bondager system and force farmers to agree to new contracts that did away with the need for a bondager. Dissent against the system arose again in 1866 with further collective action by Hinds attempting to break the system. By then, many farmers appear to have started to become more sympathetic to the plight of Hinds, not least because increasing industrialisation and the construction of the railway system were offering alternative employment opportunities to young men. Agricultural mechanisation was also reducing the demand for labour in the fields and so the traditional bondager system declined. Increasingly female agricultural workers were hired in their own right, rather than through the bondager contract with the hind. By the late 1930's the bondage system had all but vanished, although some female agricultural workers continued to work in the fields in their traditional bondager costume.

Dinah's talk was richly illustrated throughout with many of the old photographs that she has collected in her extensive research on the bondagers, along with many personal quotes from her interviews with the last living bondagers in the 1970's.

The vote of thanks was given by Richard Booth