

Sockburn Hall and All Saints Church



Earlier this year, a team from English Heritage led by David Went conducted a detailed survey of the earthworks in the field adjacent to the chapel at Sockburn (see Newsletters 5 and 7), and on 16th June they organised a training session for our Society. The original plan for two days of training was reduced to one, owing to torrential rain. Various earthwork survey recording techniques were demonstrated, one member helped with a detailed drawing of the stonework on the east end of the chapel, while others recorded the inscriptions in the churchyard. The English Heritage team then led a tour of the earthworks, exploring the probable sites of previous houses preceding the present Sockburn Hall (built in 1834), and of formal gardens flanking the former approach to the house via a bridge across the Tees. The full results of the survey are due to be published in an English Heritage report.

Laura Geary, a member of the family that owns Sockburn Hall, showed off the work she is conducting with a team of volunteers dedicated to reclaiming the house, its gardens and outbuildings from the depredations of time and nature. So far, the team have tamed the 100 metre long lime avenue leading to the front of the house, uncovered 1920s crazy paving in the garden and along the riverside, improved access to and around the house, and tidied and cleared inside the coach house and back yards. Laura then led us into the remains of a hidden formal garden, only recently discovered, with waterways, bridges, ponds and rills.

At the Society AGM in 2005, Niall Hammond highlighted the Hall as a building at risk in his



Sockburn Hall in June. The vegetation on the roof has since been attacked with the aid of a cherry picker

presidential address, so it was particularly heartening to see the efforts of a group of committed individuals to stem this decay. The family is aiming to find a way of securing the Hall, enabling it to be opened up to the public in a way that is financially sustainable. Laura would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in helping on the working weekends, or in other ways such as providing food for volunteers, tools, help with IT or fund-raising ideas.

Further details and photographs may be found at www.sockburnhall.co.uk, and anyone who would like to get involved should contact Laura Geary, c/o Sockburn Hall, Neasham, Darlington DL2 1PH; telephone 07814 248564; e-mail sockburn@gmail.com



far left

Marcus Jecock of English Heritage demonstrates the use of a total station theodolite



left

Recording inscriptions in the graveyard

Neptune Returns

Members may recall our splendid outing to view the restoration work at Hardwick Park, Sedgfield in the Summer of 2005. The 18th-century landscape parkland with buildings by James Paine is being restored by Durham County Council with able assistance from the Friends of Hardwick Park. During our visit and AGM, The Friends were exceptionally helpful and, in recognition of this, The Society made a donation towards their own particular project, the Statue of Neptune. Cast in lead, the original stood on an island in the Serpentine Lake from around 1750 to 1950 when it was removed by persons unknown. Despite extensive detective



work by The Friends, the original could not be tracked down and so a copy was commissioned. The replica, by Keith Maddison of Northumberland, is based on photographs of the original and study of the contemporary statue of Neptune in Durham market place. Substantially funded by the Northern Rock Foundation, Neptune was re-erected and unveiled by John Grundy on 14th June 2007, and we wish the Friends well with their continued work.

More information on the Hardwick Park restoration can be found at www.communigate.co.uk/ne/friendsofhardwick2

Fieldwork update

Just before Easter, the Society was approached by the producers of the 'Time Team' programme, appealing for volunteers to help at their excavation at Binchester. At short notice, people who had expressed an interest in fieldwork were contacted and a list of those available was drawn up. In the event, four people were contacted to take part.

Society member Louise Gosling writes: 'We went along to the first day that the Time Team were present at Binchester – excited at the thoughts of what we might learn and discover. We were privileged to be shown around by David Mason and found everyone we met involved with Time Team to be welcoming and informative. When we were asked to volunteer to help on the second day, we jumped at the chance. We didn't know what to expect, but knew it would be a fascinating experience. Feeling better informed because of our involvement with the Society, we had a thoroughly enjoyable day washing pottery – it's a privilege to handle pottery last handled nearly 2000 years ago! To see all the time involved to shoot what on TV probably only lasts

a few minutes was really interesting. Although ours was only a small contribution to the whole project, we were made to feel that it was appreciated. We're looking forward to the programme – and most importantly to all the new information they will have found out.'

Time Team programmes on Binchester and The Castles site at Hamsterley are due early next year.

We are most grateful to Penny Middleton for all the work she has put into organising fieldwork for the Society over the past three years. Regretfully, she has had to resign from the Committee owing to pressure of work, but the Society is committed to continuing and expanding its fieldwork programme, and we are hoping to recruit a new fieldwork officer as soon as possible. If any member would like to help with the organisation of fieldwork, or can suggest a specific project that the Society could become involved with, the Secretary would be delighted to hear from them. Meanwhile, English Heritage has offered the Society another training day, probably on a different site, and all those interested in fieldwork will be contacted when we receive further details.

Bill Griffiths 1948–2007

Members in the Seaham area and those with a passion for Anglo-Saxon, poetry and North-East dialect will be sad to hear of the death of Bill Griffiths. Although neither a native of the region nor a member of the Society, Bill was passionate about his adopted home town of Seaham Harbour and a great mover and supporter of local interest in history and archaeology. A published poet of international standing, he also gained a PhD in Old English from Kings College London and, following his move to Seaham, began researching the collier's language of Pitmatic on which he recently published.

My first meeting with Bill was something of a revelation. Expecting a more conventional and perhaps

stereotyped version of a Doctor of Anglo-Saxon, my own first impression, as he opened his front door, was of a serious man in a leather jacket with 'love' and 'hate' tattooed on his knuckles (from his teenage years as a biker in North London). This slightly forbidding moment was soon swept away by the company of a quietly inspiring man, his several pianos and large collection of books, all crammed into his small Seaham house. Bill's expressed love of cakes completed my reassessment of a truly exceptional man. Poetry, dialect and language studies but, above all, the people of Seaham, have lost an exceptional talent and a friend.

Niall Hammond

Society field trips 2007

Late medieval castles in the North East



The gatehouse at Lumley Castle

On 14th July, Society member and castle enthusiast Erik Matthews' trip around late medieval castles provided an interesting sequel to the tour around Barnard Castle led by David Austin. David had demonstrated how medieval castles were far more than defensive structures and Erik showed how Lumley Castle, built in the late 14th century, was designed primarily to impress, the subordination of its defensive role culminating in the early 18th-century work of Vanburgh, who re-oriented the building to face west towards the town of Chester-le-Street, replacing the imposing gatehouse towards the river gorge as the main entrance. We visited the courtyard and some of the interior rooms,

including the Garter Room with its elaborate stucco decoration and the Hall, remodelled by Vanburgh. We enjoyed a buffet lunch in the salubrious 'Northumbria Suite' before departing for Bywell, where the ruins of the castle, a 15th-century gatehouse tower, were glimpsed through the trees. The day ended at Bradley Hall, a much altered building of 15th-century origin, with earthworks indicating the location of a moat and other features.

Northern mills

On 22nd September, Duncan Hutt of the North East Mills Group led an excursion to a group of mills on the Ford and Etal estates. At Heatherslaw, essentially two mills in one building, the upper mill has been restored, and miller Kevin Herrington demonstrated the milling process. Heatherslaw also has a barley mill for making pearl barley, probably the last workable example to be found and, in the basement, there is a reconstructed roasting kiln. After exploring the site of Etal Mill, where only the weir and vestiges of the race remain, and the ruins of Barley Mill a short distance downstream, we

Yeavinger, Milfield and Roughting Lynn

In August, the Society visited Ad Gefrin in Northumberland, site of the Anglo-Saxon King Edwin's palace. Overshadowed by the great Iron Age hillfort of Yeavinger Bell, Roger Miket of the Ad Gefrin Trust described the site, as revealed in the remarkable report of Brian Hope-Taylor's excavations. The group then explored the Maelmin heritage trail at Milfield, site of the Anglo-Saxon royal township that succeeded Ad Gefrin, now with reconstructions of archaeological buildings found in the area – a Mesolithic hunter-gatherers hut based on an excavation at Howick, a wooden henge monument based on one found in the Milfield basin, and a post-Roman house from the nearby Cheviot Quarry. The day ended with a visit to the spectacular prehistoric rock art of Roughting Lynn and a walk through the woods to a secluded waterfall, doubtless a significant focus in the ancient landscape.



Visiting Ad Gefrin



The Mesolithic hut at Maelmin

The chimney at Ford Moss

visited the Ford Moss nature reserve, a raised peat bog on the site of the former Ford Moss colliery, in use from the late 17th to the early 20th century. The only obvious feature remaining is the engine house chimney, but there was also a windmill on the site, and the plots of workers' cottages still have rhubarb in the gardens.



'Acts of Perception'

The high point of this year for the Society was arguably the launch of David Austin's 'Acts of Perception: a study of Barnard Castle in Teesdale', at the AGM held in Barnard Castle in May. Those who were present will know that the author's interests extend far beyond the traditional focus of castle archaeologists, and the two volumes of the report include a detailed analysis of the social, political and economic significance of the Castle within its geographical setting, as well as a critical examination of the methodology of historical and archaeological research and an attempt to shed light on the symbolic and ritual significance of the Castle within its medieval landscape. This is an important



Professor David Austin at the launch of 'Acts of Perception: a study of Barnard Castle in Teesdale'

reference work for archaeologists and medieval historians alike, and a fascinating book for all those with an interest in the history and archaeology of Teesdale and the North.

Both volumes may be purchased from the Society for £65 (Members' price £50), plus £8 postage and packing.

Programme 2007–08

All lectures will be held at Elvet Riverside, Room 141 New Elvet, Durham, at 2.30 pm (except where noted). Everyone is welcome to attend

Saturday 10 November **'Between the brine and the high ground'** Reflections on Northumbrian roots **Emeritus Professor Brian Roberts** Durham University

Saturday 8 December **Members' Meeting**

The members meeting and reception is a joint event with the Bow Trust. Two of our members have nobly volunteered short talks for the meeting which will take place in Elvet Riverside, Room 141:

A medieval bathing suite at Whorlton Castle near Stokesley Erik Matthews
Roman jewellery Maureen Smith

After the meeting, we shall retire to St Mary-le-Bow, where there will be mulled wine and mince pies, and a last chance to look at the current exhibition, **Colourful characters Bonomi, Bouét and Boruwłaski**. Please fill in the enclosed slip to secure a place at the reception.

Bonomi, Bouét and Boruwłaski were, respectively, French, Italian and Polish gentlemen all living and working in Durham during the early to mid 19th century. They all knew each other and were possibly friends. Their period in Durham saw great changes, particularly with the work of Bonomi. The exhibition illustrates their work and, in the case of Boruwłaski, includes memorabilia such as his clothes, hat, violin and slippers

2008

Saturday 12 January **The Excavation of an Iron Age and later settlement at Streethouse, North East Yorkshire**
Stephen Sherlock Stephen Sherlock Services

Saturday 9 February **The archaeology of Thiépval Wood 1914–18** **Alastair Fraser** Durham University

Saturday 1 March **The Neolithic Long Cairns of Northumberland: architecture and interpretation** **Ben Edwards**
PhD student, Durham University

Saturday 8 March **County Durham Archaeology Day**
To be held at County Hall. Details from Durham County Council, Department of Culture and Leisure

Saturday 12 April **Destructionology** What the study of castle destruction can tell us about England's Civil War past
Dr Lila Rakoczy University of York

Saturday 10 May **Annual General Meeting** Details to follow

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